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SOCIAL CHANGE AMONG THE GARO:

A STUDY OF A PLAINS VILLAGE IN BANGLADESH

A Thesis

Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Arts of the
Australian National University

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April 1982

Except where otherwise acknowledged
in the text, this thesis represents
my original research.

Kibriaul Khaleque
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PREFACE.

In 1974, I went for a picnic in the forest of Madhupur Garh, an area mainly inhabited by a matrilineal people known as the Garo. On this occasion I had the opportunity to meet some Garo and also to visit their houses. Several features of Garo society associated with matrilineality attracted my attention. Following this encounter I became interested to know more about these people and their social organization, so I started reading available sources on them. All the published sources I found were concerned with the Hill Garo of Assam in India. However, the difference between the Hill Garo and the Plains Garo is noted by almost all early observers of the Garo but none of them had dealt with Garo living on the plains of Bangladesh, who are related to the Hill Garo of Assam. About the plain Garo in general Playfair remarked that they "...have lost many of their tribal characteristics" (1909:v). But Playfair did not mention in his book what exactly the plains Garo had lost. This, in fact, increased my eagerness to inquire into plains Garo society. In the writings of more recent observers of the Garo I discovered other important issues which made me even more inquisitive. For instance, there is the controversy between two anthropologists - Burling (1963) and Nakane (1967) - on the impact of wet cultivation among plain Garo. Both hill and plain Garo were agricultural people and they practised shifting cultivation, known as 'Jhum', which required the cutting and burning of forest. But plains Garo adopted wet cultivation alongside Jhum

from the beginning of their settlement on the plains. Due to this adoption of wet cultivation certain social changes have taken place among plains Garo. Nakane remarks,

"Shifting cultivation of the Garo type must be closely associated with the Garo type marriage. When Garo start wet-rice cultivation, which makes private ownership of land essential, this disrupts the marriage system. Such economic change is a vital factor in the disintegration of matrilineal social network, which in consequence tend [sic] to patriliney, breaking the cross-cousin network" (Nakane, 1958:11).

But Burling challenged this view of Nakane. He writes,

"In my experience, though wet-rice-cultivation has had profound effects in many aspects of the culture, it has not yet greatly affected the marriage system. People who have had wet rice for two or three generations still appoint 'nokrom' [see below], and still maintain most of the kinship relations of hill-rice-cultivators. What wet-rice-cultivation does accomplish is to concentrate wealth into the hands of the few people who have the foresight to claim the land. This may eventually affect the kinship system profoundly, but as yet there has seldom been any disruption, and in particular, tendencies towards patrilineality are exceedingly rare" (1958a:116).

However, Nakane, in her later publication considered the nature and trends of social change in two plains village and observed:

"The problem lies not in the actual commencement of wet cultivation itself, but in the gradual results which lead to social differentiation between the jhum cultivators and the wet cultivators within a same [sic] community, because of the different types of ownership" (1967:81).

According to Nakane,

"...those who changed their vital economy to wet cultivation had to face considerable difficulties which forced them to seek an alternative solution by changing existing rules" (1967:88).

Nakane believes that the economic changes that took place

following the adoption of wet cultivation,

"...will result in an entirely different organization of the community, in which the traditional network of Garo social organization will be destroyed" (1967:90).

However, Nakane considers the degree of economic differentiation among the households within a village community to be an important factor and says:

"If every household has a similar economic activity the traditional organization can be fairly preserved, in spite of the adoption of wet cultivation" (1967:91).

Wet cultivation began twenty to thirty years before either Burling or Nakane did their fieldwork. Another fifteen years have elapsed since their fieldwork and wet cultivation has developed further. This is evident from the fact that Bangladesh Garo have changed completely over to wet cultivation. I was interested in investigating whether social changes might have been further intensified over this period. It was important for me to know whether Bangladesh Garo, all of whom today are engaged in similar economic activities had preserved their social organization, as had been predicted by Nakane. Such a study would help clear the controversy between Burling and Nakane on the effects of wet cultivation among plains Garo.

An attempt to show the changes of the Plains Garo society due to the adoption of wet cultivation will be made in the present work. However, the discussion of the present work will not be limited only to the impact of wet cultivation; the other factors responsible for social change among Plains Garo in Bangladesh will also be considered. This will be an ethnographic

account of Plains Garo, specifically those of Bangladesh, as I observed them during my fieldwork in a period between September 1979 and May 1980. I could not carry out fieldwork among hill Garo in Assam as I was not permitted by the Indian Government to enter the Garo area. So for information on hill Garo I shall depend on published sources. However, in tracing past events and practices I shall also consider what the Garo themselves related to me about their history. Instead of comparing the present-day hill Garo of Assam with their plains counterparts I shall contrast the conditions of plains Garo society before and after the adoption of wet cultivation. The impact of the various socio-economic changes on the basic social organization, kinship, marriage, and other areas of social life of the Bangladesh Garo, with special reference to a Garo village in Madhupur Garh, is the major focus of this thesis.

The present work will be more ethnographic than theoretical. However, in certain places theoretical issues will be raised in order to present more information from my own observations, to certain questions which have been the subject of controversy among earlier writers. In such cases, I shall quote from those authors' own words instead of paraphrasing their remarks in order to make their positions clear to the reader.

My grateful thanks are due to those authors whose writings acted as an incentive for me to study the plains Garo of Bangladesh. In particular I am indebted to Playfair (1909), Burling (1963), and Nakane (1967), from whose works I shall quote

extensively.

I wish to express my gratitude to the staff-members of the Department of Prehistory and Anthropology, Faculty of Arts, Australian National University, under whom I studied anthropology, and who directly or indirectly helped me to write this thesis. In particular, I owe a great deal to Professor Anthony Forge and Dr Geoffrey Benjamin, who did much to shape my thinking, and without whose help this work would not have come into existence. I am much indebted to Dr James Urry for his valuable comments and suggestions which helped me make this a better work than it might have been. I wish to thank Mrs Joan Goodrum, Departmental Illustrator, for drawing the maps.

My warmest thanks are rendered to the many Garo whose guest I was and who befriended me. I am particularly indebted to Mr Paresh Chandra Mri, a Garo friend in Chunia, who not only arranged boarding and lodging for me in his own house, but also helped make me welcome in Garo villages. It would have been very difficult, if not impossible, to carry out my fieldwork without his help and assistance.

I must acknowledge a special debt to Reverend Father Eugene E Homrich CSC of the Catholoc Mission at Jalchhatra, who kindly allowed me to use the Mission library and to copy Mission census reports on the Garo areas.

I wish to express my gratitude to the Agricultural Development Council, Inc. whose generous grant made it possible

for me to study anthropology at the Australian National University and also to carry out my field-research on which the present work is based.

My most grateful thanks are due to my wife, Sayeda, for her gentle patience, love, and for putting up with my periods of frenetic activity. I wish to take this opportunity to extend my deepest appreciation to my little daughter, Doyel, who sacrificed most in being deprived of her father's cuddles and attention in the immediate period after her birth.

K.K.

CHAPTER 1.

INTRODUCTION.

1. A General Background.

The "Garo" are people who inhabit the Garo Hills¹ district of Assam (India), and some parts of the districts of Mymensingh and Tangail² (Bangladesh). The Garo Hills district is situated between $25^{\circ}9'$ and $26^{\circ}1'$ of North Latitude, and between $89^{\circ}49'$ and $91^{\circ}2'$ of East Longitude, surrounded by Mymensingh district (Bangladesh) to the south, Khasi Hills (India and Bangladesh) to the east, the districts of Rangpur (Bangladesh) and Goalpara (India) to the north and west (see Map 1 and 2). This area covers about 3,150 square miles (Playfair, 1909:1) and the total Garo population, according to 1961 Census of India is about 237,842 (Bhattacharjee, 1978:1). The Garo areas of Bangladesh, i.e. the districts of Mymensingh and Tangail, lie between $23^{\circ}58'$ and $25^{\circ}25'$ of North Latitude, and $89^{\circ}38'$ and $91^{\circ}25'$ of East Longitude (District Census Report, Census of Pakistan, 1961). The area of these two districts is surrounded by the districts of Garo Hills and Goalpara (India) to the north, districts of Rangpur, Bogra, and Pabna (Bangladesh) to the north

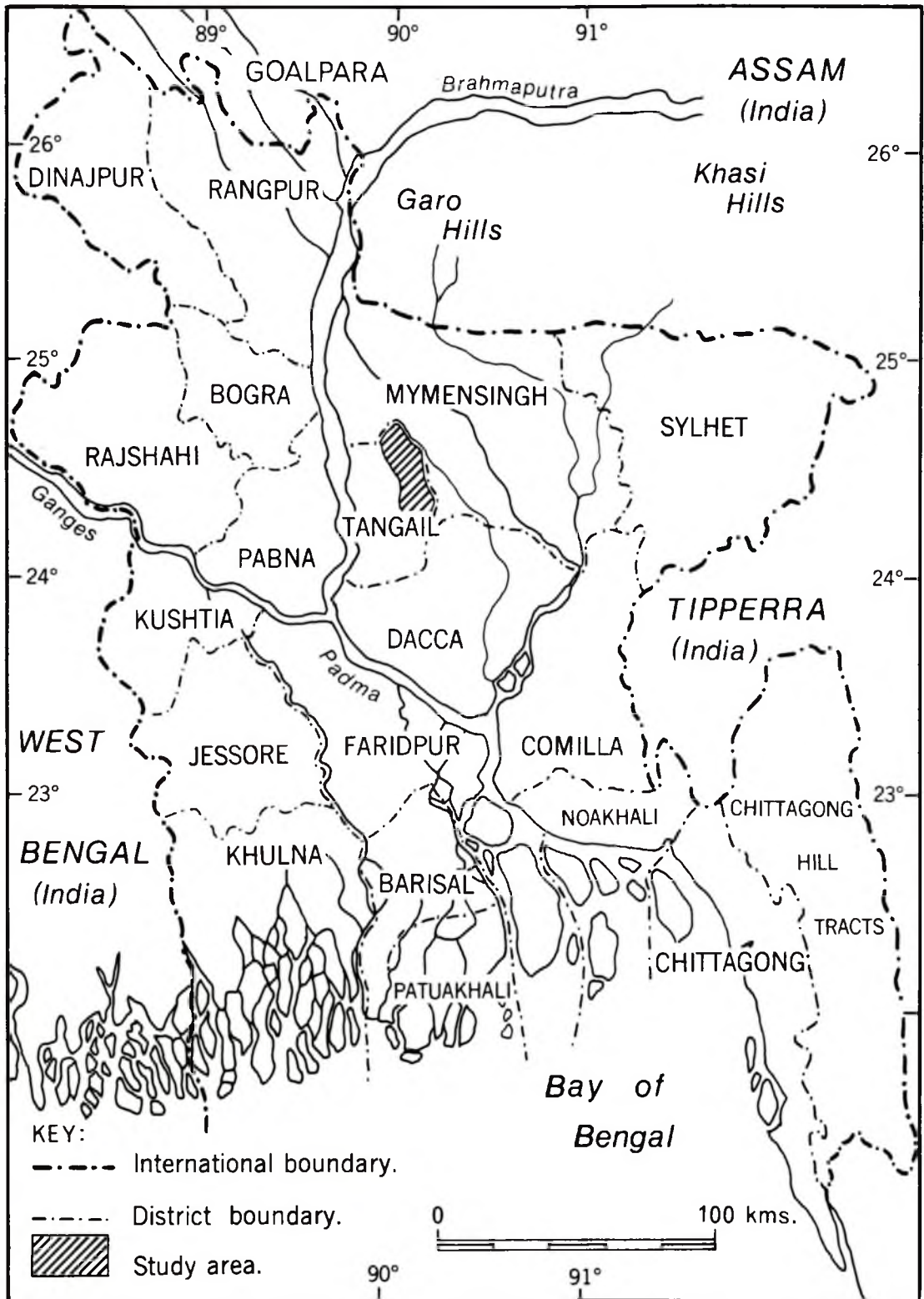
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1. The name 'Garo Hills' is derived from the name of the people, the Garo, who live there (see Bonerjee, 1929:121).
 2. Tangail was the southern sub-division of the Mymensingh district. In 1969, this sub-division was declared a separate district.

and north-east, Dacca district to the south, and the districts of Comilla and Sylhet to the east and south-east (see Map 1).

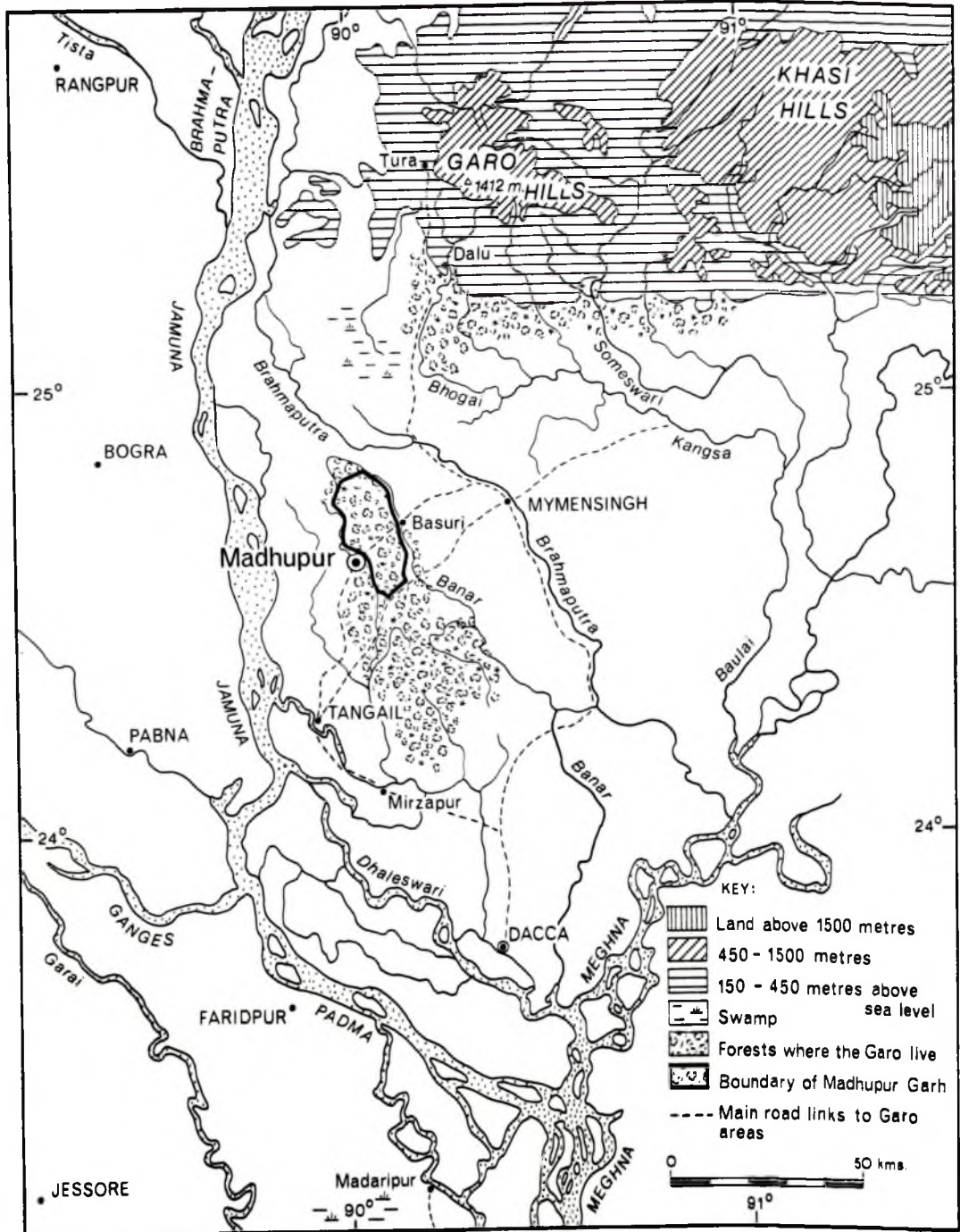
In Mymensingh district the Garo live close to the foothills along the border between India and Bangladesh (see Map 1 and 2). The whole of the northern fringe of Mymensingh district is populated mainly by Garo. The other people who live in this area are Plains Bengali and people belonging to two small tribal groups - the Koch and Hajong. The Garo population in this area is about 50,000¹. In the district of Tangail, Garo live in a jungle called "Madhupur Garh", located between the Mymensingh and Tangail districts (see Map 1). This jungle is now Reserve Forest of the Government of Bangladesh and part of this forest has been declared the National Park of Bangladesh (see Map 3). The most important tree in this forest is locally known as 'Gajari' or 'Sal' (Botanical name - *Shorea robusta*) which is mainly used for house posts, doors, and windows. The soil of the forest is formed of red clay, the land surface is a plain but it is elevated above the plains surrounding the forest (see Map 2). The forest of Madhupur Garh covers an area of 300 square miles (Census Report of Pakistan, 1961:12). The total Garo population of the forest is about 20,000². Garo living in the forest

1. This is an approximate figure, given to me by local Christian Missions and local Administrative officials. The Census Reports of the then East Pakistan, today Bangladesh, contain no separate headings for the Garo population. The population figure for the Garo areas includes Bengali, and other tribal groups, such as Koch and Hajong. So it is extremely difficult to ascertain the Garo population from the Census Reports.

2. This figure was provided by the local Catholic Mission.

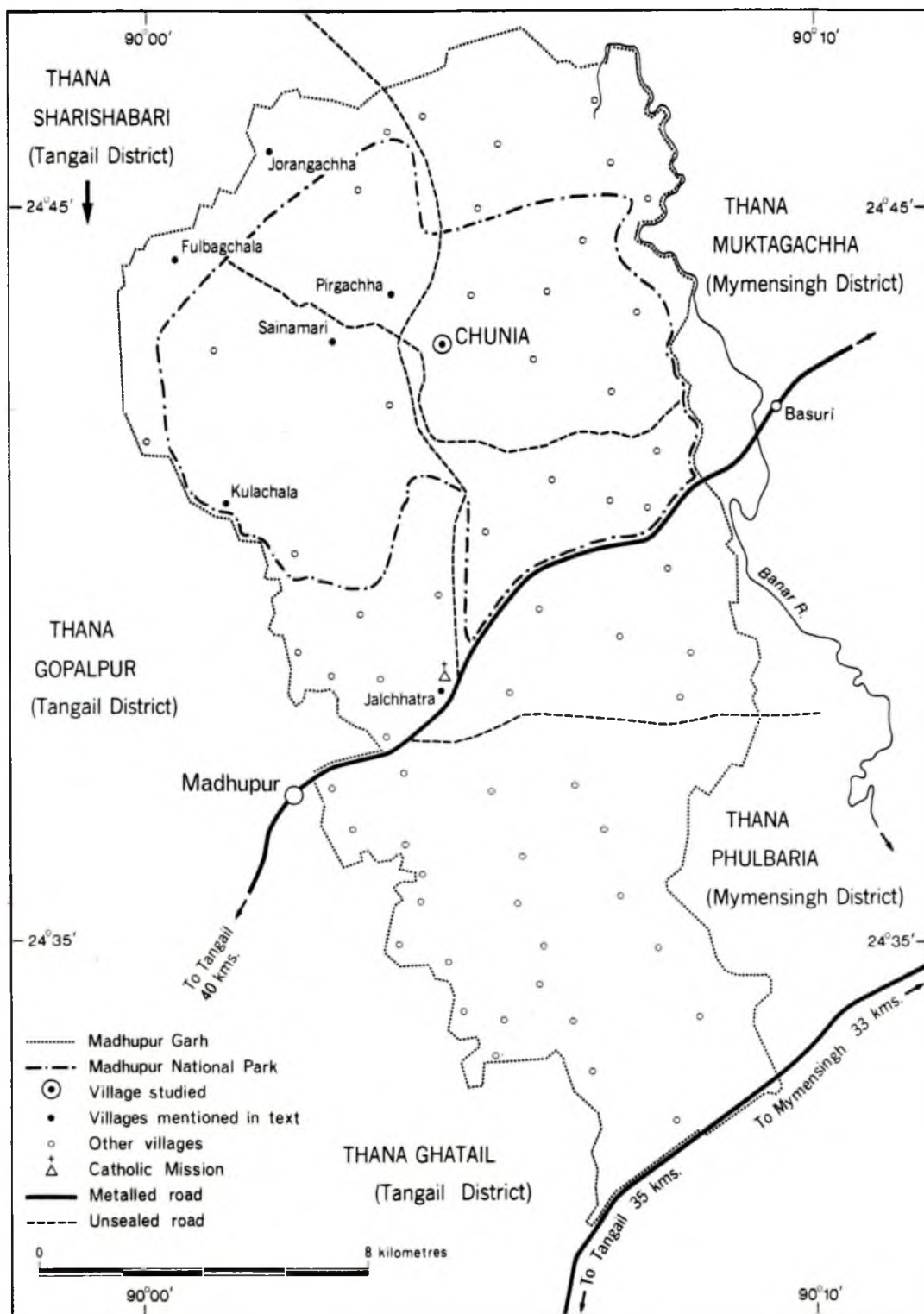


Map 1. Bangladesh: International and District boundaries.



Map 2.

The Garo areas.



MAP 3.

The study area: Madhupur Garh.

claim that they were the first people to inhabit the area. In fact, no one else lived in this forest before the Garo, and I can find no references to earlier occupation. However, in recent years some Bengali have settled in parts of the forest but this is uncommon. The Bengali came from the villages outside the jungle. But the majority (about 96%) of the population of the forest is still Garo.

At present, some Garo live in the northern areas of Dacca district, in the north-eastern border of Rangpur district, and in some tea gardens of Sylhet district (see Map 1). The total scattered Garo population of these areas may be about 10,000. Thus, the total Garo population in Bangladesh, including all areas, may be about 80,000.

Nobody knows whether the Garo are the original people of the areas they inhabit or if they came from elsewhere. There is no definite opinion in this respect among earlier writers. Col. Dalton wrote, "The Garos have no tradition of migration; they believe themselves to be autochthonous, and the only people with whom they claim alliance are the Buts and the English" (1872:59). But according to Major Playfair, "In this respect Col. Dalton appears to have been misinformed. It is probably a legend ..." (1909:8). Playfair claimed, "... there does exist among the Garos a very distinct story of their migration from Thibet [Playfair's spelling of Tibet]; of their arrival in the Plains at the foot of the Himalayas; of their wanderings eastward up the Brhamaputra valley, and of the subsequent

retracing of their steps until they came to the Plains which lie between that river and the hills they now inhabit. Here they seem to have settled for a time before making the last move into the mountainous country that now forms the home of the tribe" (1909:8). He refers to the legends and stories of migration which are found in verse and prose, and wrote, "...the only impression of any value which we can glean from the mass of detail, is that of a general movement of a people from beyond the Himalayas into the Plains to the south of them"(1909:12). Moreover, he stated, "If we compare the Garo language with Thibetan [Playfair's spelling] we shall find that though there may not be any close resemblance between them, there certainly exists a likeness which cannot be accidental"(1909:13). Besides language, he also shows that there are some Garo customs and beliefs which owe their origin to the land from which they claim to have come (i.e. Tibet). However, he concluded, "It is difficult to place any reliance on a legend which has been handed down by word of mouth from generation to generation, but the coincidence of a similar belief existing in Bhutan and on this side of the Himalayas, which is further supported by evidence of language, points to the possibility that in the bygone ages the ancestors of the Garos and of the many tribes with which they are closely allied, did cross the Himalayas and settle in the Plains at their foot" (1909:14). About the Garo and all other tribes living presently in Assam, Burling remarks, "There seems no reason to doubt that these "hill tribes" represent, in part at least, the remnants of an earlier population and culture, which

may even have covered much of the Plains region before the immigration of the distinctive Indian civilization now found there. The hill tribes actually form the last western outpost of the type of culture found in much of the mountain area of Southeast Asia. For as long as 2000 years the culture of India and the culture of these tribes have been in contact, sometimes violently and often with considerable exchange of both cultural traits and genes, but by and large the distinction between Plains man and hill man in Assam remains" (1963:16). But Nakane writes, "According to their legends, they [the Garo] migrated from Tibet through Cooch-Bihar, stayed for a time in the plain near the present Gauhati, and finally reached to the present Garo Hills" (1967:79). An Indian scholar, R.M.Nath, also holds that the Garo are probably a section of the great 'Bodo' family, who are believed to have come to this part of India from a country named "Bod' in the north of the Himalayas (later came to be known as Tibet) and west of China, which later came to be known as Mongolia (Nath,1949:15-16). Thus, it is difficult to say which view is correct. However, since there is little reliable historical information we may consider Garo legends, as they are considered by Playfair and Nakane as well as any other suggestion and say that the Garo migrated from Tibet. The question of when they migrated must remain unanswered.

The Garo who live at present on the plains of Bangladesh, have migrated from the interior of the Garo Hills. It appears from their genealogies that some still have their relatives in the Garo Hills. According to Nakane, most Garo villages of the

Southern slopes of the Garo Hills, i.e. the border areas of Assam and Bangladesh, "seem to have been established during the last hundred years" (1967:79). In Nakane's view, "The bulk of the Garo population have lived in the interior Garo Hills for centuries", but when the forests in the interior of the Garo Hills have been exploited for Jhum cultivation and the population increased so that no surplus land was available anymore to support them, some had to move towards the southern slopes of the Garo Hills (Nakane,1967:79-80). Nakane maintains that the rapid growth in population is "a serious matter for a people whose economy is based on Jhum cultivation, because this method requires an area more than ten times that of wet cultivation for the same population, and the technical arrangement is too simple to allow improvements in yield from the same amount of land. Thus the serious shortage of land, coupled with increasing population, made it imperative that the people of the interior should look for a new area in which to accomodate surplus population" (1967:80). Nakane's view appears to be correct, because some Garo, settled in the southern slopes of the Garo Hills, have again had to move further southward due to further increases in population. The land in the northern fringe of Mymensingh district where the Garo settled after moving from the interior of the Garo Hills was not as fertile as in their homeland and was insufficient to support the increasing population; people, therefore, had to move to the forest of Madhupur Garh. Thus, the ancestors of most of the people living in Madhupur Garh lived either in the interior of the Garo Hills

or on the northern fringe of Mymensingh district. For the same reason some of the Garo moved to jungle areas of Dacca and Sylhet districts. All the areas of Bangladesh where Garo settled were uninhabited, because large scale wet cultivation was impossible in these areas due to the steepness of the land (in the Mymensingh area) or the deep forest (in Madhupur Garh, and other jungle areas), and therefore, the Bengali were not interested in settling these areas (cf. also Nakane, 1967:80).

It is very interesting to note that the people who are known as Garo do not call themselves, in ordinary circumstances, by this name. Instead they prefer to call themselves either 'Achik' (Hill man) or 'Mande' (man) or use these two words together, i.e. 'Achik Mande'. However, they are forced to use the term 'Garo' in referring to themselves in the presence of outsiders as they are better known by that name. Occasionally, some Garo take exception to an outsider addressing them as 'Garo'; some people might even get angry if an outsider calls them 'Garo'. One day I saw two Garo men quarrelling with a Bengali while going to market, because the latter had addressed them as 'Garo'. Later I asked these two Garo why they were so angry with the Bengali. They simply said, "That man was calling us Garo". I asked many people why they did not like the name 'Garo', but nobody could give me any reason. However, people do not always get angry if an outsider calls them 'Garo'. It depends upon the attitude of the outsider, the mode of speech adopted, and the situation. I used the word 'Garo' quite frequently in my conversation with these people, but nobody ever became angry with me.

The origin of the term 'Garo' is unknown to the Garo themselves, and this has been a subject of conjecture among earlier writers, particularly, Dalton (1872) and Playfair (1909). In Dalton's view, the name 'Garo' was given to these people by neighbouring Hindus (see Dalton, 1872:59). Playfair suggests two probable explanations for the origin of the term: (a) from the corrupted form of the word 'Gara', which is the name of a division of the Garo found not far from Mymensingh district, from which direction the Garos were first approached by Europeans and Bengalis; and (b) during their migration from Tibet (according to legends) the name of one of their original leaders was 'Garu', who gave his name to the tribe. In Playfair's opinion, the second explanation is correct (1909:7). However, in my view, Dalton may in fact be right in thinking that the name 'Garo' was given by neighbouring Bengali, and supposedly, this is the reason why Garo do not like the term.

Many Mongoloid features may be found among Garo, e.g. a short, round and flattened face, a flat and wide nose, a small forehead which projects very little beyond the eyes, large ears, thick lips, and prominent cheek-bones, etc. Their hair is normally black, wavy, and curly, although sometimes straight hair may also be found. Men have little facial hair. The average height of both men and women is about five feet. Both men and women are very slight in build but very strong and active.

The Garo language is grouped by Grierson within the 'Bodo' or 'Bara' sub-group, which belongs to the Assam-Burma branch of

the Tibeto-Burman sub-family of Sino-Tibetan languages (Grierson, 'Linguistic Survey of India', vol.iii, as quoted in Playfair,1909:14; cf. Census Report of India,1911,p.338; cf. Burling,1961;79). The more recent name for this sub-group is 'Baric' (Burling,1961:79) and more recently Shafer has suggested that the 'Baric' languages (essentially 'Bodo' and a few obscure Naga languages mentioned in the Linguistic Survey of India) constitute a separate division within the Tibetan, Burmese, and Sinitic division of this family of languages (Shafer,1956:94-111). Burling writes, "There is little doubt that Garo along with other 'Bod' languages is related eventually to most of the other Assamese hill languages and to Tibetan and Burmese, and it is presumably eventually related to Chinese as well" (1961:79). The 'Bodo' or 'Baric' group of languages is classified by Burling and Bhattacharjee under three headings :- Garo, Koch, and Bodo proper (1956:67). So the Garo have some linguistic affinity with Bodo speaking people, such as Kachari, Mech, Lalung, Demesa, Tipura, on the one hand, and the Koch speaking people, such as Rabha, Pani Koch, Tintikia, and Wannang, on the other. All these people live in, and around the Garo Hills area (Playfair,1909:14-15; Burling,1961:79). At present most Garo can speak either Assamese or Bengali, depending on the area in which they live. The Bangladesh Garo can speak Bengali, though their pronunciation of Bengali words is not always correct. Educated Garo can read and write Bengali and English as they learn both these languages in school.

To an outsider all Garo appear the same, because they look

more or less physically similar, speak the same language (although there are different dialects in different geographical regions, all of them are equally unintelligible to an outsider) and behave more or less in the same social manner. So Garo are seldom distinguished by an outsider. But Garo themselves distinguish several groups living in different geographical regions, though their views about the number of such groups vary widely. Most of the names used for these groups are similar to those listed by Playfair (1909:59-64). Playfair mentions the existence of twelve groups in twelve different geographical areas (see Map 2).

| <u>Groups</u> | <u>Area they inhabit</u> |
|------------------------|---|
| Akawe | : Northern part of the Garo Hills. |
| Chisak | : North-eastern part of the Garo Hills. |
| Dual | : On the banks of the Someswari river. |
| Machi | : Central valley of the Someswari river. |
| Matabeng | : North of the Someswari river. |
| Kochu | : North-western part of the Garo Hills. |
| Atiagara | : South of the Kochu area. |
| Abeng | : The whole of the western, and also the areas of the south-eastern parts, of the Garo Hills. |
| Chibak | : In the upper valley of the Bhogai river. |
| Ruga | : In the low hills bordering on the Mymensingh district in the vicinity of Dalu. |
| Gara or Ganching | : Areas extending from the Nitai river nearly to the Someswari river. |
| Atong | : Someswari valley and also in the hills in its vicinity. |

As well as these twelve groups Playfair also mentions the existence of another group living in an area along the eastern border of the Garo Hills. This group is variously named Megam or Lynngam or Nunya, by their neighbours. Playfair notes that these people seem to represent "a fusion of the Garos and the Khasi, and should be looked upon as a hybrid race" (1909:62). According to Playfair, these people closely resemble the Garo in physical appearance and social behaviour (see Playfair,1909:62).

Playfair suggests that the various Garo groups might have been formed because of the occupational specialization. From Garo legends he attempts to establish that the Abeng were cotton-pickers, the Gara or Ganching used to curve pig-troughs, the Kochu prepared dried fish, and the Chiboks were engaged in collecting bamboo shoots (Playfair,1909:64). However, in no other source have I found any mention of such divisions on the basis of occupational specialization. The occupational specialization of certain groups as described by Playfair from Garo legends may have developed due to the ecological location of the groups, but these did not create any distinct class of specialists among the Garo, as these occupations were only secondary. The major occupation of all Garo was agriculture (see below).

Playfair also noted other differences among the Garo groups, such as, differences in dress, certain ornaments worn by particular groups, and differences in ritual, especially those connected with the disposal of the dead (1909:24-31 and 80-113).

The twelve groups listed by Playfair were re-arranged by Nakane into seven groups according to certain similarities and differences (Nakane, 1967:20). These are as follows:

1. Awe, Chisak, Kochu.
2. Abeng, Atiagara.
3. Machi, Matabeng.
4. Gara or Ganching.
5. Atong.
6. Chibak, Ruga.
7. Dual.

According to Nakane, "Each group exemplifies certain cultural differences..." (1967:21). The differences among these groups, as Nakane describes them, consists of some of the following: dress, certain customs, dialects, variation of certain myths, dance, songs, etc.

I am not aware of the present situation of many of these groups as I have not had an opportunity to enter the interior Garo Hills area. I also do not know whether or not all these groups still exist, since recent writing on the Garo contains little in this respect. However, I have had the chance to meet people of three of these groups, viz. Abeng, Atong, and Dual, who live in the Bangladesh area. Almost all the people of Madhupur Garh are Abeng, and they are also in the majority in the border area of Mymensingh. But there are some Atong and Dual villages also in Mymensingh district. The customs and beliefs of all these groups are more or less similar, but there are some

differences between them, e.g. a married Dual woman wears several bead necklaces, and the Dual believe that a woman should wear these at the time of her marriage and wear them until her husband's death. Thus, a Dual woman can easily be distinguished from those of the Abeng and Atong, since the Abeng and Atong women do not wear bead necklaces. However, it may be noted that married Abeng and atong women used to wear such necklaces in the past, but only one necklace, whereas Dual women wear two or three necklaces tied together. Apart from this difference, Abeng and Atong women do not have beliefs like the Dual concerning the wearing of necklaces.

Another noticeable difference is in the pattern of houses between these groups. Atong houses can easily be distinguished as they are built on a wooden platform, two or three feet high, while the people of the other two groups build theirs on the earth foundations, about one foot high.

However, the difference of dialects of these groups may be considered to be the most important difference between them. Although people of all three groups speak the Garo language, their dialects differ. My fieldwork was mainly concentrated in the Abeng area (Madhupur Garh) so I learnt to speak a little of the Abeng dialect, which was more or less sufficient for ordinary conversation. When I went to an Atong village in North Mymensingh area I could not understand the dialect of the Atong. It was difficult not only for me to understand the Atong dialect, but it is also sometimes difficult for the people of Dual and

Abeng groups. Abeng and Dual dialects are more or less mutually intelligible. The people of these three groups do not themselves recognize cultural differences except those I have described above, they put more emphasis on the differences between dialects.

Nakane considers the difference between the plain-dwellers and hill-dwellers to be more significant. She observes, "The distinct differences that exist are rather those that appear between the plain-dwellers of the first group, the Awe and others, and the hill-dwellers who constitute the remaining groups. The plain-dwellers are cultivators of wet rice fields, while most of the Garo population in the Hills practise shifting cultivation" (1967:21). Nakane also maintains that the differences between plain-dwellers and hill-dwellers may be accounted for not only by differences in cultivation but also by the varying degree of contact each group has with other people. She writes, "The Garo of the plains have become more sophisticated by closer contacts with the lowland peoples and many of them have adopted Christianity. They have seldom come into contact with the hill-dwellers and live in an entirely different ecological and cultural environment from the latter" (1967:21-22). Although the existence of various minor groups is mentioned by both Playfair and Nakane, both of them hold that the Garo roughly may be divided into two major categories - plain-dwellers and hill-dwellers (see Playfair, 1909:4; Nakane, 1967:22). However, it should be remembered that in spite of differences between Garo of the

Plains and Hills, their social organization, kinship terminology, rules of marriage, system of property ownership and inheritance, religion, etc. are basically the same. Nakane observes, "As Achik Mande (people of Garo) all are Garo-speaking people and their social structure is uniform ..." (1967:27).

Garo have always been farmers. According to Playfair, however, there were some traders among the Hill Garos who engaged in trading white beads, swords, implements, and cloths, etc. These goods were purchased from the Megams in the Khasi Hills. On the Plains, some Garos used to sell timber and bamboo to Bengali merchants of the Mymensingh district. There were also a few blacksmiths, carpenters, and weavers, who manufactured things for the Garo but not for trading. These occupations though were secondary - all the specialists practised agriculture as their major means of subsistence (Playfair, 1909:33). Today some timber and bamboo traders, as well as some manufacturers and weavers, are found in the North Mymensingh area but in Madhupur this is very rare. However, such traders and manufacturers do not form a class and their main occupation is still agriculture. Nowadays, some educated Garo serve in the Armed Forces or are employed in Garo schools. A few women work as nurses in hospitals.

Until 1955, the Bangladesh Garo cultivated their land following a shifting cultivation technique, known as 'Jhum', which required the cutting and burning of forest. The Jhum was done in several stages. First, all the trees and bushes on the plots selected for cultivation were cut down in the cold weather,

in the period from December to February, and then these were burnt where they fell and allowed to lie until March. With the first rainfall in April, seeds were sown and harvesting was done in September and October. Neither hoe nor plough was used in the preparation of fields for sowing seeds - small holes were made in the ground with a sharp pointed wooden or bamboo stake, called Gul-Mathur, and a few seeds dropped in each hole.

The main crop grown by the Bangladesh Garo is rice, and other crops include vegetables (such as, pumpkin, cucumber, beans, eggplant, chilly, etc.) and fruits (such as, banana, jackfruit, mango, liches, pawpaw, etc.). The soil of Madhupur Garh is very suitable for pineapple plantations, and in recent years they have become an important source of income. People who cannot produce sufficient rice for their own consumption, can buy rice with money earned from pineapple gardens. Except pineapple, all other fruits and vegetables are grown for personal consumption, and not for market, although a surplus may be an extra source of income.

Bangladesh Garo have had to adopt wet cultivation as land suitable for Jhum cultivation became restricted as the population increased. Finally, they had to switch completely to wet cultivation, and give up Jhum cultivation, as the cutting and burning of forests was forbidden by the central government.

When the Garo were dependent on Jhum cultivation the village common Jhum field was communally owned and there was no permanent or individual ownership by any household of Jhum

fields. But as with the adoption of wet cultivation permanent and individual ownership of wet field began to be recognized, the Garo system of property ownership and inheritance began to change. All property once belonged to the women and the mother's property was passed to one of her daughters; today men own property and often pass it to their sons.

From the time when wet cultivation first began to the complete switch over to it, some people opened up more wet fields than they required for immediate subsistence and thus became wealthier than others. People who could not open up wet fields, for various reasons, became landless. Landlessness is a new situation in this society, which resulted from the adoption of wet cultivation. Under the system of Jhum cultivation, every household received a share in the Jhum field, so landlessness was unknown in Garo society.

At present, landless people and also people belonging to households with very small quantities of land, which are insufficient to the support of their members, have to depend on share-cropping and labouring to secure a livelihood. Both share-cropping and the hiring of labour for money are new phenomena in this society, developed after the adoption of wet cultivation. The idea and methods of share-cropping are borrowed from neighbouring Bengali villagers. According to the system, the owner of the land provides the tenant-cultivator with the land and seed, and the latter has to use his own animals and implements for cultivation. The harvest is divided between the

owner and tenant-cultivator at a ratio of 2:1. When Garo were dependent only on Jhum cultivation these arrangements were unknown. At that time, people exchanged labour freely. They used to "help each other on condition of receiving the same assistance in return, but never for hire" (Hunter, 1879:166). However, some people still exchange labour. Poor people, who cannot afford to hire labour, have to depend mainly on exchange of labour if they require additional labour. Wealthy people also try to obtain such labour, but it is not always possible as most people are busy during the times of preparation of the fields, the sowing of seeds, and the harvesting of crops. As free exchange of labour is not possible people are compelled to hire labour if it is required. When people have some spare time, generally after harvesting is over, they usually help each other to construct new houses or to re-construct old houses. In such work no payment is involved - labour contributed to a particular project is later repaid with free work on similar tasks.

Traditional Garo religion is known as "Songsarek", according to which Garo believe in Supernatural beings, whom they call "Mite". The creation of the world, as well as all the creatures in it, the control of natural phenomena, such as rain, water, wind, the growing of crops, the giving of health, wealth, and happiness to mankind, etc. are all attributed to some Mite, while illness, disease, and other troubles are attributed to other Mite (see ch.2). But at present the vast majority (about 90%) of the Bangladesh Garo have given up their own religion and have been converted to Christianity. The conversion to

Christianity began with the establishment of the Baptist, and subsequently Catholic, Missions in Garo areas of Bangladesh during the last quarter of nineteenth century. In the North Mymensingh area Baptists are in the majority, perhaps due to the establishment of the Baptist Mission in this area before that of the Catholic. In the Madhupur Garh Catholics are in the majority, perhaps also for similar reasons. There are a few people in both areas belonging to the Seven-day Adventist Church. There are also some villages with a very few Muslim and Hindu Garo. The percentage of the total population converted to religions other than Christianity is very low, roughly about one or two percent.

Christian Missions brought to the Garo not only a new religion but also modern education. At present there are about fifteen primary and three secondary schools in Madhupur Garh, financed and conducted by the Catholic Mission at Jalchatra (in Madhupur Garh). In the other Garo areas of Bangladesh there is at least one primary school in every two or three villages, and some secondary schools as well. The teachers and students of schools in the Garo areas are mainly Garo. The medium of instruction in these schools is Bengali, and the English is taught as a second language. Since the Garo language has no written form it is not taught in the schools.

Every Garo village was once an independent political unit and all village affairs were controlled by hereditary village leaders, known as Nokma. New forms of leadership emerged in the

society due to various changes (the adoption of wet cultivation, permanent and individual ownership to land), and conversion to Christianity, modern education, and so on.

2. Chunia: A Garo Village in Bangladesh.

I have had occasion to visit many Garo villages in the districts of Mymensingh and Tangail, but my field-research upon which the present account is based was mainly in a village called 'Chunia' in the forest of Madhupur Garh in Tangail district (see Map 3). Including Chunia, there are sixty-six Garo villages in Madhupur Garh. Chunia is situated in the interior of the forest. It covers an area of approximately two square miles, including arable land, houses, and forest trees. According to my own census, the population of this village was 267 in 1979-80. The area of other villages in Madhupur Garh are more or less similar to Chunia and the population of other villages ranges between 100 and 400.

In Chunia houses are built near the cultivable patches of land inside the forest. The distance from one village to another is one to two miles and the boundary lines between them are arbitrary, except for the demarcation lines of cultivable land belonging to each village. Garo villages consist of several households, the number of which varies according to the size of population, usually however these are between ten and seventy households. In Chunia there were forty-two households at the

time of my fieldwork (1979-80). The average number of members in a household is about eight (see Table 1.1).

Table 1.1
Distribution of households by size.

| Number of Members | Number of Households | Percent |
|-------------------|----------------------|---------|
| 1 - 3 | 2 | 4.7 |
| 4 - 6 | 17 | 40.5 |
| 7 - 9 | 12 | 28.6 |
| 10 - 12 | 6 | 14.3 |
| 13 - 15 | 5 | 11.9 |
| Total | 42 | 100.0 |

The Garo household is generally composed of a married couple, their unmarried children and the heiress daughter together with her husband and children. The non-heiress daughters, together with their husbands and children, are included in the household, but these families are not expected to live permanently in the household. According to Garo rules of marital residence, the non-heiress daughters have to leave their parents' house after a few years of marriage to establish separate households of their own. Sons also have to leave their parents' house at marriage and join their respective wife's household. But at present some households include married sons, although in most cases only for a temporary period (see ch.5).

Out of the forty-two households of Chunia, thirty-four

possess either wet fields or pineapple gardens or both, but the other eight households have neither wet lands nor pineapple gardens. These eight households are landless. Three of these eight households have domestic animals (cows) for ploughing, and they cultivate other peoples' land on the basis of share-cropping; but the other five landless households have no domestic animals, so the members of these households earn their livelihood by hiring their labour out to other people. The distribution by the occupation of the households members (males only) is shown in Table 1.2.

Table 1.2

Distribution of households by male members' occupation.

| Occupation of male members | Number of Households | percentage |
|---|----------------------|------------|
| Cultivate own land by own labour | 16 | 38.2 |
| Cultivate own land by own and hired labour | 5 | 11.9 |
| Some plots are given for share-cropping and others are cultivated by own and hired labour | 4 | 9.5 |
| Cultivate own land and share-crop and hire out labour | 9 | 21.3 |
| Share-cropping and hiring out labour | 3 | 7.2 |
| Only hiring out labour | 5 | 11.9 |
| Total | 42 | 100% |

Agriculture is the main occupation of the people of Chunia, as well as those of other villages of this area. Even the labouring of the poor and landless people is limited to agricultural work.

Eighty-six percent of the total population of Chunia are Christian and the other fourteen percent have retained their own religion. Of the Christian Garo of Chunia, 92% are Catholic and the remaining 8% are Baptist.

Out of the total 267 people of Chunia, thirty-two (12%) have at least some education (see Table 1.3 for the distribution of the level of their education), while the other 88% are illiterate.

Table 1.3

Distribution of the 32 educated Garo by level of education.

| Level of Education | M a l e | | F e m a l e | | Total | % of Total |
|---------------------------|---------|-------|-------------|------|-------|------------|
| | No. | % | No. | % | | |
| Primary | 14 | 70.0 | 6 | 30.0 | 20 | 62.5 |
| Secondary (not completed) | 6 | 66.6 | 3 | 33.3 | 9 | 28.1 |
| Secondary (completed) | 2 | 100.0 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 6.3 |
| Bachelor's Degree | 1 | 100.0 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 3.1 |
| Total | 23 | | 9 | | 32 | 100 |

Apart from the thirty-two people shown in Table 1.3, at present there are ninety-three children of school age, between

five and fifteen years, in Chunia (see Table 1.4). It may be noted that there is no school in Chunia, so the children go to the school in an adjacent village - Pirgachha.

Table 1.4

Distribution of 93 school age children by schooling level.

| Level of Schooling | M a l e | | F e m a l e | | Total | % of Total |
|--------------------|---------|------|-------------|------|-------|------------|
| | No. | % | No. | % | | |
| Primary | 31 | 64.6 | 17 | 35.4 | 48 | 51.6 |
| Secondary | 20 | 69.0 | 9 | 31.0 | 29 | 31.2 |
| No schooling | 6 | 37.5 | 10 | 62.5 | 16 | 17.2 |
| Total | 57 | | 36 | | 93 | 100 |

Table 1.4 reveals that the percentage of boys and girls attending school is more or less the same. But the percentage of students attending secondary school is higher in case of boys than that of girls. In fact, boys go to school more than girls because, girls are usually married by the age when they can go to the secondary school (i.e. at the age of fourteen or fifteen). It may be noted that only a few Garo children complete the secondary level (up to class 10), and the number of students who continue studies at college (which is situated outside the forest area) is very low. In Chunia, three students (one girl and two boys) are at present studying at the Higher Secondary level, and two (both of them are boys) at Undergraduate level in different colleges. These five students working at post-secondary level are not shown in Table 1.4.

The situations in the other Garo villages in Madhupur Garh are more or less similar to those in Chunia. Thus, Chunia, being a typical Plains Garo village of Bangladesh, represents the Plains Garo society.

CHAPTER 2.

GARO RELIGION AND RITUAL.

1. Belief in Supernatural beings.

The Garo believe in Supernatural beings whom they call 'Mite'. The term 'Mite' may be taken to mean both 'gods' and 'spirits'. The creation of the world, as well as the creatures in it, the control of the natural phenomena, such as, rain, water, wind, the growing of crops, the giving of health, wealth, and happiness to the mankind etc. are attributed to some Mite, while illness, disease, and other trouble is attributed to other Mite. The Garo say that some Mite are good and friendly as they always attempt to help mankind, but others are neither good nor friendly as they always try to cause disease or other trouble. However, they also believe that friendly Mite may also cause disease or trouble if they become angry to the people. Thus some Mite are beneficent but others are malignant, but the people do not differentiate the two types of Mite by two different terms. The same term is used for both. Burling observes that the Garo term Mite, which is used for all Supernatural beings "...covers both beings whom we would call gods and certain lesser, quite different nuisances, which hardly deserve to be known by any term more dignified than spirits" (1963:54). However, the Garo have to propitiate all Mite, whether a Mite is god or a spirit, whether friendly or unfriendly.

The Garo believe that most Mite live in the jungle and in the hills, but a few also live in the sky. However, all Mite move around the villages where Garo live, and they help people if any help is sought to them by offering sacrifices in their honour (see below). The Mite can see or hear people but people cannot see or hear them. This is the reason why people say "We do not know what the Mite look like". The people also say, "It is not possible to know whether the Mite are like men or any other animal, because nobody has ever seen them". For the same reason the Garo do not have any exact idea whether the Mite are male or female. But when myths are narrated most of the Mite are described as male and some as female, although this is not always done consistently. The attribution of gender varies from one narrator of myth to another and also from one myth to another. So it is hard to decide from the people's view which Mite is male and which one is female. However, in my discussion I shall describe the sex of the Mite according to the description given to me by one of my informants in Chunia whom I myself found, as well as the people themselves consider, to be most knowledgeable man.

Almost every Garo I met knows the names of a few of their Mite but nobody is certain about their total number. The names and functions of some of the most commonly known, important, and powerful Mite are given below (cf. also Playfair, 1909:80-82):

Tatara - is the supreme and the most powerful of all mite. The world and all creatures in the world were created by him

(described as a male Mite), and all other Mite are believed to be his agents entrusted with different functions. He himself looks after the general welfare of the mankind, which includes, good health, good crops, wealth, and happiness. No disease or harm is caused by him, rather he helps people by curing the most serious diseases brought by any other Mite.

Saljong - is the Mite of fertility. He (described as a male Mite) is represented by the sun. No crops can be grown without the favour of Saljong as he controls the rain and water. No disease is caused by him but he makes a man blind if the man moves field boundary markers to extend his own fields. If he makes a person blind, this blindness can never be cured, even if sacrifices are offered to Saljong.

Susime - is the Mite who gives wealth. She (described as a female Mite) is represented by the moon. According to a myth she is the sister, and later wife, of Saljong. She, like Saljong, also makes people blind if she finds them stealing. However, blindness caused by Susime can be cured by the offering of sacrifices.

Chorabudi - is the protector of crops. If the firstfruits or rice is eaten before offering him a small quantity, he may cause pains in the ear, nose, throat, or mouth. Sacrifices can cure these ailments.

Goera - is the Mite of strength. Thunder and lightning are caused by him. If a tree is blasted by lightning it is thought

that Goera has done it and in such cases people belonging to nearby houses must sacrifice a pig or at least a cock to propitiate Goera in order to ensure that no further harm be caused by him. Goera does not cause disease but he is offered sacrifices by people in order to regain strength after a long illness.

Kalkame - is the Mite who controls the lives of all men and may take away life at any time. This Mite is offered sacrifices for ensuring the safety of people from death. Kalkame himself does not cause disease.

Nawang - causes stomach troubles, vomiting, and diarrhoea. He is also described as an ogre who tries to eat the soul of deceased person so that they may not reach the country of dead (see below).

There are many other lesser Mite who cause other diseases and troubles - e.g. fever is caused by either Ashi, or Gorbek; the little children are drowned in running streams by Abette; damage to crops are caused by either Bang, or Rakashi, or Chual. The Garo have ways and means by which they can determine which disease is caused by which Mite (see below).

It should be noted that some Mite are known by several names, e.g. Tatara is also known as Dakgipa, Rabuga, Belgipa, Sakira; and Saljong is also known as Salgira. Some people, especially those who do not know much about the Mite, sometimes consider the different names of the same Mite as different Mite.

Thus, identification is sometimes puzzling for an outside observer, and even for the Garo themselves. However, there are some people in every village who know the different names of the Mite and can distinguish one Mite from the other. But the reason for the existence of several names for some Mite is not known to anybody. One of my informants told me, "we use the different names for the same Mite in the hope that in one name or the other the Mite can hear our calling and help us". This may be only a rationalization, since there are other Mite who possess but one name.

2. Worldview.

There are many myths regarding the creation of the world and the creatures in it. The most common one is given below:

The supreme Mite Tatara created the world and all its creatures. When he decided to create the world there was no land, only a vast watery plain. He asked a Mite called Bagaba to create the Earth, and on his order the latter started the work of creating the Earth from the material given to her (Bagaba is said to be a female Mite). The only material given for this purpose was a handful of sand, and she found it very difficult to stick the particles of sand together. So she sought the help of Tatara and then he created a crab and this crab was sent down under the water to bring back some clay. When the crab came back with some clay Bagaba made the Earth by mixing the clay with the sand. But there was no place where Bagaba can stand and place the Earth

she made, because everything was watery. So she requested Tatara to help her again, and the latter, then, created a spider with a web and a big python. Bagaba placed the Earth she had made on the back of the python and she herself stood on the spider's web. Thus, the Earth was created and placed in position. The Garo believe that when the python moves due to pain on its back the Earth trembles in the form of Earth-quakes.

After placing the Earth, Tatara and Bagaba sent a pigeon to examine whether the surface was hard enough to stand and walk upon. The pigeon came back with wet feet (that is the reason why, the Garo believe, a pigeon's feet are red), so they thought that the Earth surface was not yet ready to step upon. Then Tatara created the sun and the wind. By the heat of the sun and drying of the wind the Earth was made dry. The sun and the wind were retained by Tatara even after the tasks of drying the Earth was completed. The sun was placed in the sky to remove the darkness from the Earth, and the wind was ordered to cool the heat of the sun so that the Earth cannot become too hot. But later Tatara found that sometimes the Earth got so hot that the wind is insufficient to cool it down, so he created rain for the purpose of cooling the Earth when wind alone fails. Thus, after the creation of the Earth, the sun, the wind, the rain were created for its maintenance.

When the watery plain was covered with Earth the water under the surface said to Tatara that it could not breathe. The water requested him to help it to breathe. So, Tatara created the

rivers to make some arrangements for the water under the surface of the Earth to move and breathe freely. The earth of the areas where rivers were made were built up in some places and those places thus turned into hills and mountains. The Earth was created in the shape of a woman, so Tatara dressed it by trees and jungles and its hair was made with the creepers; clouds were put on the head as a headdress.

The sun was alone in the sky, so he (the sun is said to be the Mite Saljong, who is a male) was feeling lonely and one day he requested Tatara to provide him with somebody to live and play with. Then, Tatara created the moon and made it the sister of the sun. The sun and moon were thus playing with each other as brother and sister, but later they were made husband and wife when Tatara decided to create man. Through the coupulation of the sun and moon Tatara created a man and a woman. The first man and woman were called Jaram and Jani respectively, and all Garo are their children. In the beginning children were produced by the sexual union of brothers and sisters as it was in case of the sun and the moon and the first man and woman. However, when a large number of men and women had been produced Tatara decided to stop the sexual union of brothers and sisters, so he separated the sun and the moon from each other in such a way that they could never see each other again. The Garo say that this is the reason why the moon cannot be seen in the sky when the sun is seen, and vice versa. However, the moon sometimes covers her face with a thick veil and by hiding herself she tries to see her lost lover, the sun, and that is why sometimes the moon is

visible in the daytime, but she cannot stay longer, because Tatara drives her away. The moon still remembers her lover and sheds her tears at night and in the morning her tears can be seen grass and leaves in the form of dew. The sun does not have that much love and feeling for the moon and never hides to see his lover.

All other animals, except the crab, spider, and big python, were created, as the Garo believe, after the creation of man. Tatara created one pair of every animal, i.e. a male and a female, in order to produce more animals of every kind. The people cannot say why all other animals were created, although some of them tell stories regarding the creation of some animals. These stories, however, are not consistent with the commonly known creation myth.

When people were first created they had to eat the roots and fruits which were available in the jungle, but later rice was given to them when one day a man offered a pumpkin to Saljong. Being satisfied with the offering of pumpkin, Saljong rewarded the man with the seeds of rice, and also taught him how to cultivate rice in the fields by clearing and burning jungle trees. The people say that from that instance they got the idea of offering sacrifices to the Mite for good crops. However, it should be noted that they do not offer a pumpkin to Saljong but sacrifice an animal in his, as well as other Mite's, honour (see p.51-54).

Playfair describes the Garo myth of the creation of the

world and its creatures (1909:82-87). Some of the order of events and beliefs described in Playfair's book are similar to the description I have presented above, but others vary both in nature and content. The belief that the world was created by the supreme Mite, Tatara, is common, but the name of the who created the Earth on the order of Tatara is not.

3. Belief in the Soul.

Garo believe that there is a soul in every living creature, human being, animals, and trees - as well as in the material objects, such as, agricultural implements, household utensils, musical instruments, and so on. But they do not have any clear idea of the parts of the human body or thing where the soul resides. Some says that in the human body the soul is located in the head, while others say in the chest, or somewhere else inside the body. Still others think that the soul resides in the body and can move from one part to another. All the peopele, however, believe that there is only one soul in a body or a thing, but there are some men, not usually women, who possess two souls - a soul of a man and a soul of a tiger. These men are called 'tiger-men'. However, it is not possible to distinguish a 'tiger-man' from others as he looks like a normal man. Such 'tiger-men' can only change their form at night. The people of Chunia have only heard about such tiger-men, but nobody has ever seen one. I was told by my informants that men cannot attain a tiger-soul themselves but tiger-men are created by the creator himself for some reason unknown to mere mortals.

4. Death and funeral practices.

According to Garo belief death comes when the soul leaves the body. But the soul is immortal; therefore, at death it goes to a place called 'Chikmang', which is regarded as the 'country of the dead'. According to the Garo this place is situated at the peak of a hill, which is situated in the South-east of the Garo Hills, near the border of India and Bangladesh. Chikmang is thus not regarded as different world but a place in this world, like other Garo areas. The only exception is that no living being can enter into this place, only the dead can go there. The souls of all men, animals, as well as material objects go to Chikmang after death (in case of man and animal) and destruction (in case of material objects). The soul is kept in Chikmang as a reserve and sent to the village when it is necessary. This is decided by the supreme Mite, Tataara. Thus, when a child is born in a family it is believed that a soul from Chikmang is re-incarnated. They believe that at the time of re-incarnation the soul tries to come back and be born again as a baby in the family where it used to live before going to Chikmang, but the soul can succeed only if it can recognize the house where it lived before. This is the reason why a post, called 'Kima' is erected in front of the house when a person belonging to that house dies (see p.44-45). A Garo man told me, "My mother and the other people who saw my mother's father's father used to tell me that I look exactly like him. After my birth people could not recognize this, but when I grew older and reached the age of seven or eight years, everybody could recognize the similarity

and everybody thought that the soul of my deceased great grandfather had come from Chikmang and is residing in my body". Another man said, "My youngest daughter was born with a mark on her right arm which is similar to the mark my deceased mother had on her right arm".

How long a soul has to live in Chikmang is unknown. Some people say, "for one generation", some say, "for an indefinite period - may be one generation, may be one year, or may be one month, or may be one day. No body really knows. The time a soul resides in Chikmang is decided by the creator. There is no other power who can control it". However, all people have the common belief that the soul has to reside Chikmang until it is re-incarnated.

According to the people some souls cannot go to Chikmang. The souls of people who are killed by wild animal or whose death was unnatural in some way, e.g. accident, suicide etc. cannot go to Chikmang. The souls of these people become 'Memang' (ghost) and haunt the place where they died. The people of Chunia told me that the ghost of an unmarried girl who committed suicide last year by hanging herself from a tree is still haunting that location. Some people said that they have heard the voice of this girl while they were walking at night near that tree.

Even the soul of a person who dies a natural death may not reach Chikmang if it is eaten by an ogre called Nawang, who waites on the way to Chikmag and tries to consume the soul. This

ogre likes brass rings or other metal things and if the soul possesses any of these, i.e. the soul of any any of these things, it can pass by the domain of the ogre. The soul has to practise some tricks. When Nawang stands in its way the brass rings or metal things must be thrown in front of him and while he is picking them up, the soul hurriedly must escape his domain. If the soul possesses these things, because - at the time of cremation such things are given to the corpse, and if the deceased has learnt the appropriate tricks (see p.39-40), then the soul can reach Chikmang; and if not, then the soul may be eaten on the way by Nawang, and can neither reach Chikmang nor return to the village.

On reaching Chikmang the soul of a human being looks for relatives whose souls preceded it and who have not yet been re-incarnated. Then it builds a house near their houses and works with them. None of the Garo I have met know exactly whether the soul takes the form of a human being while living in Chikmang, but all believed that the soul builds a house to live in and works in the same way as the living people do in earthly villages. One very intelligent Garo man told me, "Since the soul builds a house and works like living men, it must take the form of a human being, otherwise how could they work. However, we are not sure, because, nobody has ever seen it".

During the period of soul's residence in Chikmang no punishments or rewards are given. Garo do not believe in any heaven or hell. Their Chikmang is not even an after-world. In

fact, the Garo think that they receive punishments or rewards for their deeds in this world. My informants said, "If a man can maintain a very good moral life, and can be good to others, he is praised by people, and he can achieve honour and prestige - this is his reward. If a man offers sacrifices to the Mite he is rewarded by them with good crops, health, and wealth. If a man does something which goes against the moral rules of our society he gets punished by his relatives". Thus, no man has to wait for punishment or reward in an after-world. However, some people believe that although the soul is neither punished nor rewarded in Chikmang, some kinds of punishments or rewards are given at the time of re-incarnation. Thus, people who were morally wicked in their previous existence are re-incarnated as animals, but those who were morally good are re-incarnated as human beings.

The beliefs of the people as described above are also reflected in mortuary practices and ceremonies. I have not had opportunity to observe Garo funeral practices; however, I gathered the following information from people who know these practices well.

After death, the corpse is washed with "Chu" (rice beer brewed by the Garo themselves), if the household of the deceased can afford it, or if not, with plain water. Somewhere near the house of the deceased the dead body is laid on a bamboo-floor or on some "Rangs" (brass basin used for other purposes, see p.56) if the household of the deceased possesses such items. Some cooked rice on a banana leaf and some uncooked rice and an egg in

a small basket, are placed near the head of the corpse. These are kept for the soul of the deceased to eat -- the uncooked rice is believed to be consumed by the soul upto the time of cremation of the corpse, and the cooked rice and egg are for taking with it as food for its journey to Chikmang. Garo believe that if the soul was not given food to eat for the period until it reaches Chikmang, it would become a 'Memang' (ghost) and haunt its local household, so never reach Chikmang and therefore, never re-born.

The corpse laid in the above state for two days and a night and cremation on the second night. During the lying-in-time all the relatives of the deceased are informed of the death. Sometimes the corpse is kept lying for a longer period, but the corpse is never cremated during day light. When the dead body is lying-in closely related and unrelated women watch it and mourn. Their mourning consists of them describing all the good deeds of the deceased and generally in the form of songs. The "Kamal" (the man who knows the necessary incantations and process of funeral practices - see also p.62-63) gives advice to the deceased's soul so that it may safely reach Chikmang. The advice is given in the style of incantations. A summary of this long advice, as narrated to me by the Kamal of Chunia was as follows:

"Look! You have to go to Chikmang and have to live and work there until you are re-born in your family. On the way to Chikmang there is an ogre, called Nawang, who will try to eat you, so you have to be very careful. We are giving you some brass earrings. Keep these very carefully. When Nawang stands

in your way, you throw these earrings without any delay and when he is engaged in picking them up, you run quickly by. Remember you must run very fast and pass the area where he lives. He will not follow you because, he waits there, at that particular place, for the next soul to pass. If you can pass his area you are safe. When you reach Chikmang ask somebody the whereabouts of the people of your own Mahari, and search them out, and then, live and work with them. Do not go to any Mahari other than your own".

The Kamal recites the above incantations many times and continues until the dead body is cremated.

A funeral pyre, called "Ganchi", is built in any open place of the village. It is built with four upright wooden posts and dead body is kept within these posts and logs of wood are piled on all sides, and also over the corpse. Some of the clothes, agricultural implements, household utensils, ornaments (especially, brass earrings) used by the person before death, are tied to one of the posts. The brass earrings are given for the propitiation of the ogre, Nawang, and the other things are given so that the soul may start work immediately upon reaching Chikmang. It is believed that these things themselves do not go to Chikmang, but that their souls go with the soul of the deceased. The Kamal sets fire to the funeral pyre and when the last of the body is about to be consumed by fire he slaughters an animal. It may be a cow, or a pig, or a goat, or at least a cock; this depends on the economic condition of the deceased's

household. The soul of the animal, it is said, accompanies the soul of the deceased to Chikmang. The flesh of the animal is eaten by the people who work to build the funeral pyre and also by the other people at the ceremony.

After the cremation the ashes are disposed of somewhere inside the jungle but the bones are collected and placed in an earthenware pot and then the pot is buried in the earth somewhere near the house of the deceased. A little bamboo platform, known as "Delang", is made in the place where the bones are buried. Until the post-funeral ceremony, which is observed within a period of about two months after the cremation, offering of food (rice and curry as eaten by normal people) are made at least once a day to the soul of the deceased at the Delang. The Kamal of Chunia narrated to me the following myth which shows the reason for offering food at the Delang.

"The first man, Jaram, decided one day that he would die to see what it was like and what happened after death. He asked his children to burn him and bury whatever was left of him after the cremation. The children did what their father asked. Jaram was dead, but after his death he felt very sorry and started repenting for being dead, because he saw that he had become black as he was charred, and thus he found himself different from other living people. He could see everybody, but nobody could see him. He tried to come back to the world of the living, but failed. One day he came to his house but his wife was not in. He told his children to put some food for him on the spot where his bones

were buried. The children heard the voice of their father, but they could not see him. They did not believe the voice, because they knew that they had burnt their father and buried his bones. When their mother came home they told her what had happened but she also did not believe it. On the following evening, when his wife was having her dinner, Jaram came again and told her, "I have left everything for you. I cannot come to you, because I have become so black that you cannot see me. But I can see you. You are having your dinner now, are you not? Give me some food. I am very hungry. Please give me something to eat. You do not have to come near me, just leave some food at the place where my bones are buried. I will come and eat". Jaram's wife believed in him and faithfully attended to his request. She gave food not only on that evening but also on the following days. Whenever she had her own meals she put aside some for her husband as well. But after a few days she heard the voice again saying, "You do not have to put food for me anymore. I have found a place where I can live and work, So, you can enjoy yourself by arranging a feast, and give this good news to every one that after death men can go to this place.

This is the reason why, the Kamal told me, the Garo still offer some food for the soul of the deceased. But this is continued only for the period which is necessary for the soul to reach Chikmang. Garo do not have any idea of how long the soul takes to reach Chikmang, but they offer food to the soul for a period varying from two weeks to two months. In fact, it depends on the ability of the relatives of the deceased to arrange the

post-funeral ceremony. If the deceased's relatives are very poor they need more time to manage the food and drinks necessary for the occasion but however poor they are they try to arrange the ceremony within two months of the cremation. If the deceased's relatives are rich they arrange the ceremony within a few days of the cremation, but they also allow a period of about two weeks so that the soul may reach Chikmang. In practice, the post-funeral ceremony is observed mainly to celebrate the soul's success in reaching Chikmang. The people take it for granted that the soul actually has reached Chikmang.

The post-funeral ceremony consists of a big feast, a dance and singing, which continues for two or three days. This feast is arranged by the members of the household to which the deceased belonged. No body needs to be invited to this funeral feast - any one may come, eat, drink, dance, and sing. In some big feasts people from other villages also join in. This ceremony is considered by people to be an occasion for merry-making, so they enjoy it as much as they can. The ceremony ends when all the food and drink arranged for this feast are consumed. In the evening of the final day, the Delang is set on fire and destroyed. The bones are kept buried and not dug up. The ashes produced by the burning of Delang's bamboo, are also covered with earth at the same place. Once this ceremony is over people do nothing for the soul of the deceased.

People told me that a sign indicating the form in which the soul of a deceased person would re-born in the next life can be

seen on the ground where the ashes of Delang were covered with earth. But in order to see the sign a close relative of the deceased should go alone to the site very early in the morning of the day following the Delang is burned. If these conditions are not fulfilled nothing can be seen there, and even if then only the first person who goes there can see the sign, not the others, as the sign disappears. Many people told me that they have seen the footprints of a human child, which indicates that the deceased will be born again as a human being. The people say that other probable signs may be the footprints of an animal and if that is seen the soul will be re-born as an animal. However, nobody reported to me that they have seen the footprints of any animal on the Delang of their deceased relatives.

For every dead person a wooden post, known as "Kima", is stuck into the ground somewhere near the house of the deceased. The Kima is curved with several marks in a row in the upper middle part. These carvings look like a spiral but the marks are not continuous. The deceased person's sex is represented by these marks -- upward cut marks are curved for men, and downward cut marks for women. Around the lower middle part of this post a piece of cloth, worn by the person before his or her death, is tied, and on the top of this post a bunch of cock's feathers, which were shown to the soul before the cremation, is tied. The people say that if these things are tied to the Kima the soul would face no problems in recognizing the house in which it lived before, because the soul can easily recognize the piece of cloth used by him or her before and the bunch of cock's feathers that

he or she had seen before leaving the village, i.e. before the cremation. It may be recalled here that at the time of re-incarnation the soul tries to come back to the house where it lived before. So people think that if the Kima and the things tied on it are not seen the soul might fail to recognize the house and might be re-born in a house belonging to another Mahari. Since no Mahari wants this, the members of every Mahari are very careful about the Kima. However, it should be noted that no roof or cover is made over the place where the Kima stands, so in due time they rot, and after a few years these wooden posts may fall down. In such cases the Kima is not replaced, but the old one is re-erected on the same spot.

No offerings of food are made at the place where the Kima is erected, nor are the posts or their decorations worshipped. No respect or reverence is shown to the Kima. In principle, a Kima may not be regarded as an ordinary memorial post, because it is not erected for keeping the memory of the dead alive, but merely for the purpose of helping the soul to return. However, in practice a Kima also serves as a memorial post. People remember which of the Kima was erected for their particular relatives.

Neither in principle nor in practice, is there any indication that ancestors are deified although the Garo offer food to the soul of the dead until it reaches Chikmang, arrange funeral feast, and erect Kima. All these practices only are intended to help the soul to survive and come back to the family where it lived, and therefore, they are not a form of worshipping

dead ancestors. The Garo therefore, do not practice ancestor worship (cf. also Playfair, 1909:87).

The people who believe in the traditional Garo religion, as described above, call themselves "Songsarek" and thus distinguish themselves from other people who belong to other religions. I tried to find the meaning of the term "Songsarek" from the Garo themselves, but I failed, because when I asked people the meaning of this word, almost everybody said, "It has no meaning. We call ourselves Songsarek". Some of them tried to make me understand by explaining the following: "The people who are Muslims call themselves Muslims. The people who are Hindus call themselves Hindus. The people who are Christian call themselves Christian. All people have their own religion - We have our religion too. We believe in our religion and call ourselves Songsarek".

It is difficult to know whether the Garo called themselves Songsarek before their contact with Bengali Muslims, Hindus, the British or the Christian Missionaries. All the earlier writers used the word "Songsarek" as the religion of the Garo (see for example, Playfair, 1909), but all of these accounts concern Garo society and religion as they were observed after contact. I think when the Garo came in contact with outsiders they became aware of the names of other religions and perhaps named their own religion as "Songsarek". It may even have happened the other way round, i.e. the outsiders might have given this name to Garo in order to distinguish them. The term "Songsarek" does not seem to be a Garo word, and may have been derived from the Bengali word

'Songsar', which means 'the household' or broadly 'the world'. I suppose the Bengali word 'Songsar' was used either by the Garo themselves or by the Bengali to name Garo religion as 'Songsarek', i.e. the religion which is concerned with 'Songsar', i.e. 'the world' and more clearly the people who are engaged with making a good and happy life in this world and do not wait for the after-world. In fact, Garo religion, as it is evident from the above discussion, is concerned only with earthly life, and not with any belief of rewards or punishments of the after-world.

The Skongsareks do not have any church, mosque, or temple. They worship neither any god, nor the natural phenomena, such as mountains, rains, trees, etc, nor even their dead ancestors. Although they believe in the Mite, they do not worship them. But in order to live safely and happily in this world they offer sacrifices to the Mite. However, the offerings of sacrifices, as has already been noted, are not intended to encourage a happy existence in the after-world, but to ensure health, wealth, and happiness in this world.

The Garo sacrifices may be classified into two major types:

1. Sacrifices offered to the beneficent Mite for ensuring good crops, good health, wealth, and happiness.
2. Sacrifices offered to the malignant Mite, as well as to the beneficent Mite, for the curing of disease or other trouble.

Whatever the purpose of a sacrifice may be, an animal (in

some case, more than one) is sacrificed to the Mite. The sacrificial animal may be a cock, a pig, a goat, or a bull. Which animal is sacrificed depends on the occasion at which the sacrifice is made and the seriousness of the disease. It is not necessary to sacrifice an animal of any specific colour. Whenever an animal is sacrificed its blood is smeared at the place where the sacrifice is made (see below) and depending on the animal some of its feathers or hairs are pasted on the blood. All the flesh is eaten by the people and not consumed in sacrificial practices. My informants said, "Our Mite do not eat the flesh of animal we sacrifice, they only love to see the blood. That is why we kill an animal to offer sacrifices in their honour". Regarding the feathers or hairs stuck on the blood people say, "The feathers or hairs of the sacrificed animal are kept on the blood so that the Mite can see what kind of animal was sacrificed".

Besides the animal, some other things such as a small quantity of rice (cooked or uncooked), rice-beer, some fruits, onions, gingers, an egg, a fish, etc. are also offered to the Mite on certain occasions (see below).

Although the general characters of both types of sacrifices are the same, there are some differences between the two types of sacrifices with respect to the following:

1. The person who kills the sacrificial animal and offers the other things to the Mite;
2. The necessary incantations to be uttered at the time of sacrifice; and

3. The place where the sacrifices are made. The place of sacrifice, it may be noted, varies not only from one type of sacrifice to the other, but also from one occasion to another in case of Type-1 sacrifices.

In order to show the differences let us discuss the two types of sacrifices separately.

5. Agriculture and Sacrifice.

Type-1 sacrifices which were mainly connected with agriculture and were performed during the various village festivals are no longer performed by Bangladesh Garo. However, I have collected the following informations from the people who saw the performance of these sacrifices in the past. All the sacrifices for ensuring good crops and a general welfare of the village, were offered communally by all the villagers and the Nokma, i.e. the hereditary leader of the village (see Ch.9) performed the sacrifices for, and on behalf of, all the villagers. Nobody else was allowed to perform these sacrifices. These were performed either in the Nokma's own field, or in his house, or at the bamboo-altar made for this purpose by the villagers at the Nokma's house or any public place in the village. Thus, the place for offering these sacrifices varied from one occasion to another (see below). The altars were made of bamboo, about three or four feet long. These were stuck into the ground to form an enclosure and the interior of this enclosure was filled with earth. The ground within the enclosure was made about one foot higher than the surrounding plain. The

bamboo posts were decorated with straws and banana leaves. After the sacrifice was over these altars were not given any special attention, but were not destroyed either. No roof was made over these altars, so the bamboo posts, straws, and banana leaves eventually rot and fell down after a period of time. At the time of the next offerings of sacrifices a new altar was made either on the same spot or at another one.

In all these sacrifices, the sacrificial animal was, according to custom, to be provided by the Nokma himself, because it was his duty and responsibility to ensure the health, wealth, and happiness of the villagers, and therefore, to offer sacrifices to the Mite. However, when the Nokma alone could not afford it the other villagers assisted him by contributing towards the purchase of an animal.

Besides the sacrifices performed by the Nokma for the whole community, sacrifices were also offered on certain occasions by the heads of each individual household in their respective fields. The animals or the thing for such individual sacrifices were provided individually by each household, and the sacrifice was performed by the head of each household. If the household lacked someone who knows the necessary incantations, the help of the Nokma or another specialist was sought. The ceremonial leadership of the Nokma was recognized even when people performed sacrifices in their own field. Nobody performed sacrifices until the Nokma himself had performed one in his own field.

All these sacrifices, whether performed by the Nokma for the

whole community or by the heads of each individual households for their respective household, were offered only during the various village festivals observed at the different stages of the annual agricultural cycle. The dates and times of these were fixed by the Nokma in consultation with the other villagers.

Garo festivals, and sacrifices offered at the time of each festival, and the other aspects of the festival are varied. The general pattern is described below:

1. DENBILSIA: This was the first festival of the year and was observed after the completion of the clearing of new fields for cultivation (generally in January - February). This was a one-day festival and was held at the Nokma's house. In the morning all the people gathered at the Nokma's house and built a bamboo-altar in front. At about midday the Nokma sacrificed a pig or a goat at the altar. After the sacrifice the meat of sacrificed animal and other foods such as rice, fish curry and other meat, were cooked and the Nokma gave a feast. For the whole day the people used to drink rice-beer provided by the Nokma. When the feast was over, in the afternoon, the people used to dance, sing, and play musical instruments, and these were continued until midnight. The festival was over at about midnight and the people went to their own house.

2. AGALMAKA: was observed after setting fire to the trees and bushes on the fields after they had been cut down and dried. The Nokma sacrificed a cock in his own field and afterwards the head of every household sacrificed an egg in his own field. The

actual sacrifice took only one morning but the festival lasted for several days. On the first day, the Nokma gave a feast for the villagers. After the feast the people used to play music, sing, and dance at the Nokma's house. On the following days the people visited other houses in the village. The arrangements of food, drink, dancing and singing were made in individual households.

3. ASIROKA: was observed before the sowing of seeds in fields. At this ceremony, the Nokma sacrificed a cock at a bamboo-altar made somewhere in the village. Following the sacrifice the villagers slaughtered a cow (but not as a sacrifice) which they had purchased earlier. The people all contributed towards the purchase of the cow and distributed the meat according to the amount of their contribution. After slaughtering the cow the people went to their respective houses with the meat and rest for a day. On the following day, after their rest, the head of every household sacrificed an animal in his own field. The animal for this sacrifice could be a cow, a pig, a goat, or at least a cock, - depending on the wealth of the household. The sacrifice was followed by another day of rest, and after that the people started sowing seeds in their fields. During this festival, the feasting and dancing followed the sacrifice but this was limited to the day of sacrifice only. On the days of rest, people did nothing.

4. MIAMUA: was observed when the rice is growing in the field (generally, in June - July). This ceremony lasted for one

day only. On this occasion the Nokma sacrificed a pig in his own field and gave a feast. After the feast, which was given at midday, the people used to sing and play musical instruments, all of them except the drums (see p.55-56), because beating of the drums was forbidden during this time. People believed that if the drums were beaten when rice is growing in the fields, some malignant Mite, like Bang, Rakashi, and Chual, may come to the village to enjoy the sounds of the drums and may cause damage to the growing rice. People also did not dance during this festival, because it was not considered possible to dance without the sounds of drums.

5. RONGCHUGALA: was observed before the harvesting of crops (generally, in August) The Nokma offered 'Rongchu', which means 'rice cooked until dry and crisp', to the Mite. This rice was spread on a banana leaf and kept in the Nokma's house. This offering was followed by eating, drinking, singing, and playing musical instruments. But beating of drums was forbidden on this occasion as well for the reason described above. So people did not dance on this occasion.

6. AHAIA: was observed after the harvesting was completed (generally, in September). The head of each individual households sacrificed a fish in their respective fields. The eating, drinking, playing music, dancing, continued for several days. The people visited every house.

7. WANGALA: was the last and greatest of all the festivals of the year. This was observed about a month after the Ahaia

festival. During Wangala festival the people did have no agricultural work left because the harvest had been completed before the Ahaia festival begins. Wangala lasted for several days. On the first day, people were busy salughtering cows (but not as a sacrifice), which they had purchased earlier for this purpose. Several households used to co-operate to purchase a cow and divided the meat according to their respective contributions. The meat was required for entertaining the guests who visited during this festival.

On the second day of the festival, a ceremony known as 'Churugala' was performed by the Nokma in his house. He offered some 'Chu' (rice-beer) to the Mite by pouring its liquor in a certain place in his house. Some cooked rice, an onion, a ginger-root, and a squash, were also spread on a banana leaf and kept near the place where the 'Chu' was poured. After the performance of 'Churugala' the villagers decorated the Nokma's house with a white paste prepared by mixing rice -flour with water. prints of the whole palm with this paste were made on the posts and beams of the Nokma's house. After decorating the Nokma's house the people helped each other to decorate their own houses with the same white paste and in the same way as in the Nokma's house.

The eating, drinking, and the playing of music as well as the singing and dancing continued for several days. The people visited the Nokma's house first and used to eat, drink, sing and dance there, and then on the following days the members of every

household visited each other in turn.

It is evident that besides the offering of sacrifices there were other common features to nearly every festival: - (a) Eating, drinking, and feasting; (b) Playing music and singing; and (c) Dancing.

Eating and drinking were common to all the festivals as on these occasions all the households of the village arranged food and drink for their visitors. The main feast was, however, given by the Nokma, and if he could not afford the expenses of the feasts, another wealthy man of the village could arrange it, and by giving feast to the people such a wealthy man gained prestige in society (see Ch.9).

Playing music and singing were also common except that on two occasions, Miamua and Rongchugala, the drums were not beaten. The following musical instruments were used by the Garo:

1. Dama - a long and narrow drum, made of wood - hollow inside, thickest in the centre, and tapering away at both ends. Animal skin, usually cowhide, was used for covering both ends.

2. Khram - a drum made of wood and animal skin like the Dama but the shape is different - larger at one end and tapering away to a much smaller size at the other.

3. Nathuk - a small wooden drum in the shape of a Khram, considered to be the 'child' of Khram.

4. Nagra - a large drum made of an earthen-ware pot and covered with animal skin (usually cowhide).

5. Adhuri - a flute made of a buffalo horn with a bamboo

mouthpiece.

6. Singa - a flute made of buffalo horn only - no mouthpiece is attached to it.

7. Otekra - a bamboo flute.

8. Rang - a brass basin with narrow rims and a flat bottom. This is used for purposes other than music (see p.38), but also beaten with a stick or with hands with other musical instruments.

Any villagers could possess musical instruments other than the drums, which could be possessed by the Nokma alone. Nobody dared to keep these drums because the people believed that if anyone other than the Nokma has any drum in the house it might cause bad luck, misfortune, danger, and even death in the house. No reason could be given to me for this fear. The people could not give an example of danger or death that has occurred in a house for keeping drums. But many said, "We know that the keeping of drums is bad. Our forefathers told us that they saw many cases of danger and death for keeping, or even for trying to keep, the drums. So they warned us not to keep drums". The Nokma was believed to have been authorized by the Mite to keep these drums, so he had no fear of possessing them.

The drums were beaten not only on the occasion of village festivals but also at marriage and at funeral ceremonies. Any villager could borrow the drums (except the Nagra, which was to be used by the Nokma to assemble the people at his house for the feast). They could beat them, but must return them to the Nokma

immediately after use. Whenever the drums were borrowed nobody was allowed to beat them until the Nokma himself had struck up first.

Another common feature of the festivals, except Miamua and Rongchugala, was that the feast was followed by dancing, which was performed with the music, especially the beating of drums, and the singing of songs. Generally, the men, especially, younger men, danced and women and older men used to sit around as spectators. But on the occasion of Wangala festivals, all people - men, women, old and young - participated in the dancing. Men and women might or might not dance together - sometimes they danced together and sometimes separately. There were no special rules concerning who can dance, but certain dances were performed only by dancers of a single sex.

One common dance performed by men alone at almost all occasions was known as "Grikka". This was a war dance. The participants held swords (Millam) in their right hands and shields (Sphe) in their left, and danced as if they were fighting each other. During the performance of this dance the participants uttered the name of their respective Chatchi group and shouted. Generally, men belonging to two opposite Chatchi groups performed this dance. Another common dance was performed by women alone. In this, several women danced together and imitated the picking of fruits from trees.

Besides the above special dances, there were no formal rules of the general dances. All general dances were performed by some

movements of body and hands. In almost all the general dances the participants formed a circle and moved forward raising their hands towards their shoulders and then with the rhythm of the drums lower their hands and go on repeating the same movements.

The painting of the body or the face, the wearing of special costumes, were not necessary for dance performances. Only for Grikka dances did the participants dress in war costumes, i.e. they wore a headdress made of a piece of cloth, put cock feathers on top and held a sword and shield.

The traditional village festivals are no longer observed in Chunia (or any other Garo village of Bangladesh). All these festivals have been replaced by Christian religious festivals, such as, Christmas day, Easter, etc. in which the Songsareks also participate with Christian Garo. Christian Garo, who are the majority of the population, told me, "It is not possible for us to observe both Christian and traditional festivals. So, we have given up traditional festivals. We think that we should observe Christian festivals since we have accepted Christianity". However, there are some Christian Garo who still think that their traditional festivals were better than Christian than Christian festivals as they say, "In our traditional festivals we could enjoy ourselves more than we can in Christian festivals". However, the number of such Christian who still admire their traditional festivals is very small, and most of them are very old men. The Songsarek Garo have a strong desire to observe their own festivals but their number is very small and that is

why they cannot arrange these. They said, "We want our festivals, but what can we do? Most of the villagers are Christian and they do not want traditional festivals anymore. It is not possible for only a few of us to observe the festivals".

Thus, it seems that the conversion of the majority of the population to Christianity is an obvious reason for not observing traditional festivals. But another important reason is, I think, the switch from Jhum to wet cultivation. When the Garo were dependent on Jhum cultivation the coordination of their agricultural activity was essential at each stage of the agricultural cycle, particularly, at the stage of the clearing and burning of the jungle trees. The annual village festivals in fact assisted in the coordination of agricultural activity. But such coordination is no longer essential since people have switched to wet cultivation, because labour on wet fields belongs to individual households is carried out by members of that household alone who work according to their own convenience (see Ch.4).

The sacrifices to Mite for ensuring good crops, good health, wealth, and happiness, which were performed by the Nokma for all the villagers, are no longer performed by him. As regards the reason for not performing sacrifices, most Christian Garo, especially the educated ones, say, "The offering of sacrifices is a useless expenditure of money. We have seen that we can get crops, even better crops, without offering sacrifices. So, what is the use of offering sacrifices?". However, there are some

Christian Garo, particularly, the older and illiterate people, who have overtly accepted Christianity and even go to church, but still believe that they should offer sacrifices to Mite. As one old Christian Garo of Chunia told me, "Our forefathers were rich and happy, because they used to offer sacrifices to Mite, But at present we are getting poorer day by day, because we do not offer sacrifices to Mite. How can a man be wealthy and happy without offering something to Mite? It is not possible at all".

All the Songsarek Garo believe that they should offer sacrifices to Mite. Although the Songsareks and a few Christians believe that they should offer sacrifices, in practice they do not perform sacrifices. Most of them said, "It is the duty and responsibility of the Nokma to perform these sacrifices for the whole village, but he does not perform these. So, it is not possible for us to perform these". Some others said, "These are sacrifices for the whole village and not for an individual household. Christian Garo are also living in the village, they do not offer sacrifices. So, why should we offer sacrifices for them?". When I asked the Nokma, who is a Songsarek, he said, "I cannot afford the expenses of these sacrifices". But the Nokma is a wealthy man, and he could afford to buy the animals, even if he could not afford the expenses of a feast.

However, there were not only communal sacrifices to be performed by the Nokma, but also some individual sacrifices to be performed by individual households. Even these individual sacrifices are also not performed by all the people who told me

that sacrifices ought to be offered to Mite. Only four out of the twenty-two Songsarek Garo of Chunia perform these individual sacrifices in their own field, but the other eighteen do not. None of the Christian Garo, who believe that sacrifices should be offered to Mite for good crops, perform these individual sacrifices. These people, Songsareks and Christians gave the same reason as the Nokma "we cannot afford the expenses". It is in fact difficult for most of them to arrange the food and drink for the guest who would attend at the time of offering the sacrifice, but almost all of them can afford to buy a cock, or a fish, or an egg - even if not a cow, a pig, or a goat, - to offer as a sacrifice. It seems to me that "we cannot afford the expenses" is not the real reason for not offering sacrifices. I think, people have become conscious of the fact that they can get crops without offering sacrifices. Some people have further integrated this consciousness by becoming Christian and by receiving modern education, and the others are influenced by them, while there are only a few who maintain the tradition.

6. Disease and Sacrifice.

It has already been stated earlier that the Garo believe that diseases are caused by the malignant and also by the beneficent Mite (in case of the latter, when they become angry). Although certain diseases are attributed to certain Mite, the Garo believe that any disease may be caused by any Mite. Garo have no idea of witchcraft. They do not believe that man can cause disease or any other harm to their fellow men. My

informants said, "All men are equal. No man has any ability to do any harm or cause disease to another man. Illness and other troubles are caused by the Mite and can be cured by offering sacrifices to the Mite by whom a disease is caused". They think that the supernatural powers can only be manipulated by mankind for their benefit and welfare, but not for harm. However, some people said that tiger-men, who can change themselves into tigers at night can eat other men. During the day, tiger-men cannot do harm to anyone. But it will be recalled that tiger-men are made by the creator, not by their own efforts.

The offerings of sacrifices for curing disease or other trouble were performed individually and the animal for this sacrifice was provided by the patient's relatives. Any male relative of a patient could perform sacrifices for curing disease, but in most cases the patient's relatives did not know diagnosis and also ritual practices and incantations necessary for offering sacrifices, so they called in a man who knew all these. Such a man was known as 'Kamal'. There was at least one Kamal in nearly every village. But there were some villages in which there was no Kamal, so the Kamal of another village was called upon to perform sacrifices.

Besides the sacrifices for curing disease, the Kamal also recited incantations at marriages and at funeral ceremonies. The position of a Kamal was not hereditary - any man (but not a woman) who had committed to memory the various incantations and knew the rituals of sacrifice could assume this role. A man

learnt such things from any older man of the preceding generation (not necessarily from his father or from his mother's brother) or even from a man belonging to his own generation.

The Kamal was not paid for his services. He gained no economic or social advantages; his duties were voluntary and his mission was to help the community. He was under no obligation to perform these duties. In fact, the only satisfaction he used to get was that when he could cure the diseases he felt proud that he knew something which other people did not. This pleasure, in fact, motivated a man to become a Kamal and to assist people.

Although the sacrifices performed on the occasion of village festivals are no longer performed by the Garo, except by a very few Songsareks, the offering of sacrifices for curing of disease are still performed by the Songsareks as well as by some Christians. In cases of disease or sickness the Christian Garo of Chunia (and also those of other villages) generally go to the hospital at the local Catholic Mission, where they get free treatment and medicine. Some of the Songsareks also go to the hospital and they also get the same help although they are not Christian. But most of them were very reluctant to take modern medicine. It took some time for the Christian Missionary to convince the Garo to take modern medicine. Paresh Mri, a Garo social reformer of Chunia, told me that in order to convince people he himself practised modern medicine for some time and he convinced, as he told me, many people, both Christian and Songsarek, that modern medicine can really help to cure disease

and sacrifices cannot. But it is interesting to note that he could not convince his own father, who was a Songsarek. Paresh Mri told me, "I have convinced many people but failed to convince my father. He had a strong belief in Songsarek religion and so used to say that sacrifices can cure disease and modern medicine can do nothing. Even when my father knew that he would die, he refused to take medicine. He died but did not take medicine. I did not give him any medicine as he asked me not to do so. I attended to my father's last wish". There are some Songsarek who have a partial belief in medicine and in offering sacrifices, but still there are people who do not believe at all in medicine. I know an old Songsarek man in Chunia, who has never taken modern medicine. He says, "Christian (modern?) medicine cannot cure any disease, because disease is caused by Mite and can be cured by offering sacrifices to them".

Not only Songsareks, but also Christian Garo, particularly the illiterate and older people, still believe that sacrifices to Mite can cure disease and some of these people offer sacrifices although they also go to the hospital. I know many cases, one of which is given below as an example.

Nuru Rema's three-year old daughter had fallen sick one evening. He and his wife could not understand what had happened to their daughter. She had been well all day but in the evening she started to cry. They tried all means to pacify their daughter but everything failed. This little girl did not sleep all night and did not let her parents sleep either as she cried

and cried. The following morning Nuru Rema came to the Kamal's house. I was sitting with the Kamal, so I knew what Nuru Rema told the Kamal. Nuru Rema is a Christian Garo, but he sought the help of the Kamal instead of going to the hospital. The Kamal went to Nuru Rema's house and I accompanied him. When we arrived, the girl was still crying. The Kamal did not ask Nuru Rema to bring the girl to him, instead he asked Nuru Rema to bring a bamboo slip and some cotton wool and the latter supplied these things. The Kamal then made an instrument called 'Pongsi'(which means an instrument by which it is possible to determine) with the thin slip of bamboo tied to the cotton wool in the shape of a bow. An extra thread was tied to this bow-like instrument and its end was rubbed on the patient's body. Then the Kamal lifted the Pongsi and held the extra cotton thread very lightly in his right hand and started calling the names of all the Mite one by one. When the Pongsi trembled with the calling of a Mite called 'Gorbek' the Kamal discovered that the little girl was attacked by Gorbek, who caused stomach pains. So the Kamal told that in order to appease this Mite a cock had to be sacrificed. He asked Nuru Rema to arrange for a cock and also to stick a bamboo, with all its leave, into the ground in front of the house. When everything was ready the Kamal killed the cock by tearing its head off with his hands, and then smeared the blood on the bamboo and pasted some feathers from the tail of the cock, on the blood. Before, and at the time of, killing the cock the Kamal uttered the necessary incantations for the sacrifice. At the time of sacrifice the girl was inside the house. It is

not necessary, as the Kamal told me, that the person for whom the sacrifice is offered, should be present at the place where the sacrifice is performed.

When the sacrifice was over the flesh of the cock was cooked and a lunch arranged at Nuru Rema's house. The Kamal and three other men, who were present at the time of sacrifice, were invited in by Nuru Rema. I was there with the Kamal, so Nuru Rema also invited me.

On the day following the sacrifice I went to Nuru Rema's house to know how his little girl is. Nuru Rema and his wife looked very happy and they told me that Gorbek had left the little girl after the sacrifice was offered and the girl had recovered. When I met the Kamal, he said, "Have you seen what our sacrifices can do? Our Mite are very powerful". He seemed very proud of his work. I asked the Kamal what he would do when a patient does not recover even after the offering of sacrifices and he told me that in such cases it is necessary to determine again by means of Pongsi whether the diagnosis was correct. If the Pongsi trembles at the calling of the same Mite's name it would be considered that the Mite was not satisfied, and in that case a different animal, larger than the previous one (e.g. if the previous sacrificial animal was a cock, the second one should be a pig, or a goat and so on) should be sacrificed. But if the Pongsi trembles at the calling of some other Mite's name, animal appropriate to that Mite is to be sacrificed. It may be noted that the second or subsequent sacrifice is performed by the same

Kamal in most cases, but people sometimes call in a different Kamal for this purpose.

It is interesting to note that the same man, Nuru Rema, went to the hospital two years ago when he had been suffering from dysentery. There are many Christian Garo, like Nuru Rema, in Chunia as well as in other villages, who believe both in modern medicine and the offering of sacrifices to Mite.

The Kamal, the other Songsareks, as well as some Christian Garo told me that sometimes modern medicine fails in some cases, but the same patient was cured by the Kamal by offering sacrifices to the Mite. Most often they give the example of Gopi Dalbot's case. Gopi Dalbot was attacked by fever and he went to the hospital but Gopi Dalbot himself and the other people said that modern medicine could not cure Gopi Dalbot, so he sought help from the Kamal, who, by means of a Pongsi decided that Gopi Dalbot had been attacked by Ashi and a pig had to be sacrificed. Gopi Dalbot arranged the sacrifice and the Kamal performed it. About one week after the sacrifice, Gopi Dalbot recovered completely. However, this case is disputed, because some educated Christian Garo reported to me that Gopi Dalbot was attacked by typhoid and he did not properly take the medicine given to him and that is the reason why he continued to suffer until the sacrifice.

Although the Songsarek and some Christian Garo still believe that the offering of sacrifices to the Mite can cure disease, they are also aware that sacrifices are not always equally

effective in all cases. In some cases sacrifices fail and then people think that the diagnosis was wrong, so they try again using the same Kamal or another one and offer sacrifices to the same Mite or to a different one. But sacrifices may fail again and again. People are optimistic - "may be another sacrifice will help the patient to recover" - but when several sacrifices fail, they are simply puzzled. They have no answer to the problem - "why are the Mite not kind to them even after offering sacrifices?" They cannot explain the reason for the failure of sacrifices after several attempts are made to cure a disease.

The failure of sacrifices has convinced many Garo, even the Songsareks, to accept modern medicine. I know of the case of one old Songsarek Garo living in a neighbouring village in Chunia. The right side of this man's body has been paralysed for the last three years. He offered, with the help of two different Kamals, sacrifices to several Mite. In the last three years about eight sacrifices have been performed but all have failed. One day this old man told me, "I have tried many sacrifices, but it is useless. Christian (Modern?) medicine might help me. I want to try it". It is difficult to say whether modern medicine will help this paralysed old man, but he himself as well as others, is convinced of the effectiveness of modern medicine and that sacrifices in many case may fail. There are many such cases in Chunia and in other villages.

7. Religious syncretism.

In Chunia, as well in other Garo villages of Bangladesh, Christian and Songsarek Garo live together. No village is divided into distinct areas or blocks of Christian and Non-Christian people. Even in the same family Christian and non-Christian members live together. The parents may be non-Christian but their children are Christian. The Songsarek Garos do not attempt to stop other people, even their own children, if they want to become Christians. The Christian Garo also do not force the non-Christian to convert to Christianity, although they often try to convince them of the advantages of conversion. The Christians and non-Christians tolerate each other and help each other whenever necessary. Differences of religion therefore create no animosity. However, sometimes conflict arises between the two religions due to their different rules but the conflict does not turn into a permanent discord or strife (see Ch.9 for an example).

The Garo who have converted to Christianity gave me various reasons for their conversion. Some of them told me, "We have accepted Christianity for our own benefit. Christian Churches give us the opportunity to receive modern education, which is very essential for us. We think that without education it is impossible for us to cope with the outside world". Some others said, "From the Mission we get various sorts of help such as, free treatment, free medicine, financial help in the form of loans, and so on. No outsiders except the Christian Churches

help us. So it is better to be with the people who help us". However, the majority of the people, especially illiterate ones, do not know why they converted to Christianity. They say, "our relatives are Christian, so we are also Christian. They go to Church, so do we". Thus, most of the people followed their relatives who have converted to Christianity. The illiterate Garo were influenced by the educated Christian Garo. But still there are some people who were not influenced to the same extent as others and that is why they have retained their old religion. Most of them are either the old people or the very traditional-minded younger people. Those who retained their own religion stated more or less the same reason, which is as follows: "We should not give up our forefathers' religion. If we do, our Mite would be angry with us and they might cause harm to us". Thus, the fear of the Mite or the mere persistence of tradition may be the reason why some people have not converted to Christianity.

During the early years of conversion, both Baptists and Catholics forbade converted Christian Garo to drink rice-beer (Chu), but most of the people disobeyed this prohibition. The Garo have a great liking for rice-beer (Chu) which they brew themselves and it was an established social custom to offer this drink to guests. The Catholic Church realized that for these reasons the Garo would not accept the prohibition, so it was withdrawn but the Baptist Church has not yet withdrawn the prohibition. Thus Catholics can drink, whereas Baptists cannot. However, although the latter are not expected by their Church to

drink rice-beer, they still do when they sit with the Catholics or with the Songsarek Garos.

It is important to note that although Catholics are allowed to drink rice-beer most of them do not drink it as they did in the past. At present poor and landless people cannot afford to brew rice-beer as they do not have enough rice left for this purpose after satisfying their basic needs. On the other hand, wealthy people do not brew this rice-beer for their daily consumption even though they can afford it. In wealthy households, rice-beer has been replaced by tea. People who can offer a cup of tea to a guest consider themselves to be the most modern. Other people also consider them as such. However, wealthy Catholic Garos brew rice-beer on the occasion of Christian religious festivals, such as Christmas day, and Easter, etc. All Catholics, rich and poor, try to brew this drink for entertaining their guests at marriages and at funeral ceremonies. Although Baptists drink rice-beer, they seldom brew it. They only drink it at other peoples' houses.

Most of the poor Songsarek Garos cannot afford to brew rice-beer for reasons described above. However, some of them, particularly those who still offer sacrifices to their Mite, have to brew beer as it is required for offering sacrifices. Wealthy Songsareks follow the wealthy Catholics and drink tea.

Thus, rice-beer is no longer brewed by Garo, whether Catholics or Songasareks, for daily consumption or for entertaining guests in every day life. This drink is brewed on

special occasions only.

Both the Catholic and Baptist Churches forbade the Garo to play the older Garo musical instruments, to perform traditional dances and sing traditional songs, but the people did not obey this. Whenever there was any performance of dance in any Songsarek festivals, the Christian Garo used to join the Songsareks. So, both Churches withdrew this restriction and people were told to play their instruments but only on Christian festivals. At present the Christian Garo play their traditional musical instruments and sing hymns translated into the Garo or Bengali language.

It is significant to note that although the Christian Garo play traditional instruments, they never use the drums which are possessed by the Nokma, because, the Nokma, being a Songsarek himself, thinks that the traditional drums should not be used for any purpose other than the requirements of songsarek religion. He therefore does not allow Christian Garos to use them for Christian festivals. On the other hand, Christians themselves do not dare to use the drums either, as most of them still believe that the drums are to be beaten only for the Songsarek festivals. No Christian Garo of Chunia dared to make or keep these drums for the old belief that the keeping of drums may cause bad luck, misfortune, danger, and even death persists. But they required the drums for dancing as they cannot dance without the rhythm of the drums. So, Paresh Mri, the first educated and progressive Christian (Catholic) Garo of Chunia, made a whole set of drums in

a form and shape similar to the traditional drums possessed by the Nokma (see p.55 for the shape of the traditional drums). At present Christian Garo of Chunia use the drums possessed by Paresh Mri. There is at least one Christian household in nearly every village which possesses drums, and thus Christian Garo do not have to use drums possessed by the Nokma. The traditional drums are still possessed by the Nokma but their use has diminished since the cessation of the traditional village festivals. However, at marriage and funeral ceremonies of the Songsarek Garo (and in some cases of Christian Garo) these drums are still beaten and thus the tradition is maintained on such occasions.

The Songsareks still observe the traditional funeral ceremonies. The only significant change in the funeral practices is that instead of brass earrings coins are given with the corpse for the purpose of propitiating the ogre, Nawang. It is important to note that in the past the Garo (both male and female) used to wear brass earrings as an ornament. But since most of them have converted to Christianity they have given these up. The Songsareks were also influenced by the Christians. As no brass earring is worn and as these are not available to-day, coins are used as an alternative. Generally two coins, one in each hand of the corpse, are given. The Christian Garo are expected to bury the corpse, and most of them do so. But I know some case, although very few, in which Christian Garo disposed of the dead body by cremating it. Some illiterate Christian Garo also offered food and other things to the soul of deceased

although they are not expected to do so. Even educated Christian Garo have to follow the traditional funeral practices for their deceased relatives who were Songsareks. One educated Christian Garo told me, "I do not believe in the old Mite. They are not our gods anymore. But even then I had to arrange the funeral ceremony of my deceased father according to Songsarek religion, because before his death he told me and also the other people to observe the funeral ceremony for him according to Songsarek religion".

The funeral feast is still given by the Songsareks as well as by Christians. This is in fact considered to be more a social custom than something related to any religion. Dancing and singing on such occasions is still prevalent. Although the Christian Garo are not expected by their religion to dance and sing on this occasion, they cannot help dancing when the Songsareks do.

Kima are still seen in front of every household, Christian or Songsareks. Some of these are old but others are new. Most of the old ones, particularly the very old ones, were erected for relatives who died long ago and most of these relatives were Songsareks. But the newest ones were erected for the relatives who were Christians. Thus even after the conversion to Christianity the old Kima were not destroyed by the Garo, even by educated people. Moreover, they also erect, at present, Kima for their relatives, Christian as well as Songsareks. The Christian Churches, both the Catholic and Baptist, allowed converted Garo

to keep the old Kima erected in the past, and also to erect Kima for their relatives after their death. People were advised however, by the Churches not to think of the Kima to be anything more than a memorial post. Today also, the Kima are curved in the same way and form as in the past. It is difficult to know whether the Christian Garo consider the Kima simply as memorial posts or according to the traditional Garo belief these are considered to be something more than this. The educated Christian Garo simply repeat what they were told by the Churches. But most of the illiterate Christian Garo do not distinguish between an ordinary memorial post and a Kima. They say, "Our forefathers used to erect Kima for the dead, we also do the same thing, although we are Christian". Thus it seems that to an illiterate Christian Garo a Kima is a Kima in its traditional sense.

Thus, today it is difficult to say how far the Songsareks are Songsareks, because they have been influenced so much by the Christians. It is equally difficult to say how far the Christian Garo have changed their old beliefs although they have given up many old practices.

CHAPTER 3.

GARO SOCIAL ORGANIZAION.

All Garo, in all their various geographical sub-divisions (see Ch.1), are matrilineal. Cutting across the geographical sub-divisions, however, are different degrees of matrilineal descent as reckoned by the Garo. These are known as Chatchi, Machong, and Mahari.

1. Chatchi.

This is the widest matrilineal descent group. The term 'Chatchi' literally means 'relatives' and Garo belonging to the same Chatchi consider themselves to be related matrilineally. The names of three such Chatchi groups - Momin, Sangma, and Marak - are mentioned in Playfair's book (1909:64). According to Playfair, Momin Chatchi are confined to the Akawes (who live in northern part of the Garo Hills), but the Sangma and Marak are distributed among all geographical sub-divisions, no matter how much the groups differ from one another in language and custom or whether they reside in the hills or on the plains (1909:64). Burling mentions about five Chatchi groups, but he gives the names of only three, which coincide with those mentioned by Playfair (see Burling, 1963:22). In the village where Burling's field-research was based (a village in the Garo Hills area) he found people belonging to Sangma and Marak groups. According to Burling other groups are "strictly localized", but he does not

mention the areas where these groups are localized. About the two groups he encountered, he writes, "Sangma and Marak are found wherever Garos live" (1963:22). Nakane found that the majority of the people in the villages where she did her field work were Sangma and Marak, but she also found a few Momin who constituted less than 0.5 percent in her census of three villages (in the Garo Hills area). Goswami and Majumder have mentioned the names of five Chatchi groups, including Sangma, Marak, and Momin. The other two groups they mention are - Sira and Areng - and according to them the people belonging to these two groups are limited to the area bordering Goalpara district (see Goswami and Majumder, 1972:35). I think these two groups may be the two groups noted by Burling though he failed to name them. In the Garo villages of Bangladesh I have not come across any Sira or Areng Chatchi. The Bangladesh Garo do not know where people of Sira and Areng live. The majority of Bangladesh Garo belong to Sangma and Marak groups. However, a small number of Momins are found in nearly every village. According to my census of two Garo villages in two different areas of Bangladesh, the Momins are slightly more than 2% of the total population (see Table 3.1).

Table 3.1

Percentage distribution of the Chatchi groups
in two Garo villages.

| Village | Chatchi groups | | | Total |
|-----------|----------------|-------|-------|-------|
| | Sangma | Marak | Momin | |
| Chunia | 58.1% | 39.7% | 2.2% | 100% |
| Gohalideo | 49.2% | 48.2% | 2.6% | 100% |

It is important to note that people belonging to the Momin Chatchi do not group themselves as Momin, but associate with either Sangma or Marak. I found it very difficult to ascertain the Chatchi membership of people mentioned as Momin in Table 3.1, because all those I met named their Chatchi as either Sangma or Marak. However, it was possible for me to know the Chatchi membership of all these people from reports of older people who possessed this knowledge.

Chatchi groups are exogamous. In the past, Garo maintained the rule of Chatchi exogamy very strictly, and if any marriage between members of the same Chatchi occurred the couple were punished physically. Such a couple were turned out of village if they continued to live together and they were regarded as "Bakdong", meaning literally 'they have married their own relatives who belong to the same Chatchi'. However, nowadays, such a marriage is tolerated by educated Christian Garo, because such marriages are approved of by Christianity. But this kind of marriage is still looked down upon by non-Christians as well as by illiterate Christian Garo. Cases of such marriage, although very rare, may be found in nearly every village. I have encountered one case in Chunia and two others in a village in the north Mymensingh area. In all these cases the couples are Christian Garo. The husbands and wives of all three couples are living in their villages and nobody calls them 'Bakdong'. However, some people told me that these couples were ridiculed by some villagers when they married, and also that some older non-Christian Garo still dislike them.

Garo have no ideas concerning the origin of Chatchi groups. Some people told me that "Sangma and Marak Chatchi have always existed, because a Sangma cannot marry a Sangma, so a Sangma has always needed a Marak as husband or wife". Regarding the origin of Momin Chatchi some people told me the following story: Once upon a time a Garo woman (according to the Sangmas this woman was a Marak, but according to the Marak this woman was a Sangma) married a Muslim man and therefore, she was turned out of the village. Nobody could tell me in which village or in which area the woman lived, and it is also not known when this happened. However, the descendants of this woman came to their maternal relatives and were known as Momin". I do not know how far this story is true, but this seems to be true as (a) the word 'Momin' does not seem to be a Garo word, rather it is more likely that this is a word somewhat related to Muslims. The word 'Momin' is a corrupt form of the Arabic word 'Mu'min', which means 'faithful'. 'Momin' is often used by Bangladesh Muslims to name a man. Thus, it maybe that the name of the Muslim man who married the Garo woman of this story could be Momin and therefore his children came to be known as Momin; and (b) People of Momin Chatchi are confined to the plains area where some of their neighbours are Muslim. Nakane also writes, "It is considered that the Momin have been recently created by the marriage between a Garo (Sangma or Marak) and a Mohammedan" (1967:23). But Nakane has not mentioned her source for this information. However, it is probable that Nakane was told this by her informants as I was by mine. Garo myths, as far as I could collect them, are not

connected with the origin of Chatchi groups. Whenever I asked people who knew much about their society I got the simple answer, "We do not know. Maybe our forefathers knew it". As far as I could gather from people, there is no totem associated to any of the Chatchi groups. Playfair writes in this context, "I have heard it suggested that they [Chatchi] are of totemistic origin, but I cannot support this theory, for I do not know of any tale of totemistic origin" (Playfair, 1909:64). However, Playfair has given no alternative theory. He writes, "I have made many endeavours to ascertain how these septs [Chatchi] first originated, but have not been able to form any definite opinion" (1909:64). However, he notes, "Some Garos declare that at one time they were all Momins, and the other two exogamous groups (Sangma and Marak) were formed by persons who left the parent colony and settled by themselves in distant places" (1909:64). Thus, it is really difficult to say who is right - whether Sangma and Marak were split from Momin or Momin were split from Sangma or Marak. But in my view, the later formation of Momin Chatchi seems more acceptable since people belonging to Sangma and Marak are widely distributed in all Garo areas - hills or plains, whereas Momins are confined to only the plains. Apart from this, Sangma and Marak are the predominant Chatchi groups throughout the area.

2. Machong.

Each Chatchi group is divided into many smaller groups known as "Machong". The rule of exogamy is much more strict in cases

of these groups than that of Chatchi. If a man marries within his own Machong he is ridiculed as "Madong", which literally means 'he has married his own mother'. Although cases of marriage within the same Chatchi are found today, cases of marriage within the same Machong are extremely rare. In Chunia I have encountered no cases of such marriage, but I came to know about one such case from a village in the north Mymensingh area. Here a man married his own mother's sister's daughter (who is the member of the same Machong). The couple was beaten by their relatives and turned out of village. They are now living, I was informed, in a tea garden in Sylhet district, far away from their native village. This kind of marriage is not tolerated even by the educated Christian Garo. The Christian Churches also do not approve of such marriages.

Machong groups are also matrilineal but they are distinguished from Chatchi groups because the members of the same Machong consider themselves to be more closely related than simply being related as members of the same Chatchi. Playfair writes, "All the members of a Machong claim to be descended from a common mother or ancestress" (1909:65). In principle, there should be a blood relationship among the members of the same Machong. But as the number of members of a Machong is very large and as people of the same Machong are scattered over a many widely separated area, it is impossible for the members of a Machong to trace actual blood relationships. In Garo villages of Bangladesh I found many people belonging to the same Machong regard themselves as relatives, but neither could these people

trace, nor could I establish, any relationship from their genealogies, except their common Machong name. However, people consider the same Machong name to be more than sufficient for establishing a relationship, since they believe that the people with the same Machong name must be descended from a common mother.

Each Machong group has a distinct name but none appears to be named after a common ancestress. The Machong are named after either of the following:

(a) Animals - e.g. Drokgre (a hen), Gara (a kind of lizard), Dopu (an owl).

(b) Trees - e.g. Chambugong, Bolwari, etc.

(c) Geographical feature of an area - e.g. Nokrek (a hill), Wassa (a river), etc.

However, there are some names which have no significant meaning in the Garo language, e.g. Khubi, Maji, Rangsa, etc.

Playfair suggests a totemic origin for Machong groups as some are named after animals or plants. However, Playfair is cautious of this suggestion as he writes, "When I say that the origin of these Machongs is often totemistic, I must qualify the statement by adding that it is a modified form of totemism; for although a Machong may consider itself to be descended from some animals, in no case have I found that that animal was treated with respect or reverence" (1909:65). In order to ascertain whether Garo have any animal or plant which the whole tribe, or

people of any specific Machong, consider as a totem I asked many people but none could give me the name of any such animal or plant. Even members of Machong who bear the animal or plant name have no special emotional or ritual attachment to the corresponding animal or plant. They do not refrain from killing, injuring, or eating such an animal or destroying such trees. Thus, it seems to me that the origin of Machong names is not totemic. The reason for naming a Machong after an animal or a tree maybe something else. A man belonging to a Machong called 'Dopu' told me the following story about the origin of the name of his Machong. "Once upon a time a man in the Garo Hills area was returning home late at night and on his way he saw a Dopu's (an owl) round eyes dazzling like a flame and he was frightened. A few days afterwards he died. After his death the place where he saw the 'Dopu' was known to people as 'Dopugre', i.e. the village of the owls, and people of that village were known as "Dopu".

Playfair wrote in 1909 that the number of Machong groups is "infinite" (1909:65); however, he gave a list of 127 Machongs which he considered to be "best known" (1909:Appendix-A). Burling does not mention the number of these groups, but he notes that they are "several hundred" (1963:239). No Garo knows the exact number of Machong, and it was also impossible for me to enumerate all the groups. Burling notes that Machong groups are localalized in certain areas as people of the same Machong are "found in a good many villages in one section of the hills but rare or absent in other regions" (1963:239). But in Garo

villages in Bangladesh, as I observed, people of the same Machong are widely distributed in many villages and on the other hand people belonging to many different Machong groups can be found in a single village. However, in almost all villages people of one or two Machongs are always in the majority. The people of Chunia belong to seventeen different Machong groups of Sangma, Marak, and Momin Chatchi (see Table 3.2)

Table 3.2

Distribution of the people of Chunia by Chatchi and Machong membership.

| Chatchi | Machong | Number of People | Percent of total |
|---------|-------------|------------------|------------------|
| Sangma | Mri | 118 | 44.19 |
| | Chisim | 17 | 4.37 |
| | Chiran | 13 | 4.87 |
| | Dalbot | 3 | 1.12 |
| | Dangsu | 1 | 0.37 |
| | Mangsang | 1 | 0.37 |
| | Dopu | 1 | 0.37 |
| | Khoksi | 1 | 0.37 |
| Marak | Rema | 45 | 16.85 |
| | Nokrek | 42 | 15.73 |
| | Daru | 6 | 2.24 |
| | Khubi | 5 | 1.87 |
| | Richil | 5 | 1.87 |
| | Mrong | 3 | 1.12 |
| Momin | Ruga | 4 | 1.49 |
| | Hawi | 1 | 0.37 |
| | Maji | 1 | 0.37 |
| Total | 17 Machongs | 267 | 100.00 |

3. Mahari.

Within each Machong groups are smaller groups, known as Mahari. All people of the same Machong are considered to be related matrilineally, but Mahari groups include only the most closely related people within the same Machong. It is not possible for people of a Machong to trace blood relationships but people of the same Mahari can trace blood relationships up to three generations. Common residence is another characteristic of Mahari groups. In principle members of the same Mahari should live in the same village and in practice people always try to achieve this. But with increases in population some people have had to move from their original villages and form branch villages nearby. Thus, members of the same Mahari may be found in a cluster of villages, which includes two or three villages. In such cases residence in the same village cannot be maintained but members of the same Mahari always consider themselves to be closely related. Although they live in different villages, they see themselves as being descended from a common mother in the parent village. However, in Garo villages of Bangladesh it should be noted that members of the same Mahari may be found in distant villages as well.

Nakane observed that each of these smaller groups possess a distinct name (1967:25), But Bangladesh Garo use no separate name for Mahari groups, they use the same name for denoting both Machong and Mahari. For instance, Mri, Nokrek, Rima, are Machong names as well as Mahari names. However, kin-groups related by

blood are always distinguished from other members of the same Machong who live in the same locality or others.

Ideally, a village should be occupied by members of only one Mahari and the right of possession of village common land should be vested in the women of that Mahari and passed to their female descendants in every generation. On the other hand, the right to cultivate the village common land as well as the right to manage the property, should be vested in the husbands of these women. These males must belong to a Mahari of the opposite Machong and Chatchi group and must also be from a different village. Thus, in principle, a village should consist of members of only two Mahari - the women of one Mahari and their husbands from opposite Mahari. However, this ideal type of village organization is difficult to find today. I observed that the people of several Mahari groups, usually more than the ideal two, lived together in single villages.

The Mahari groups are the most important social groups among Garo because they regulate exogamous marriage relationships, the ownership and management of property, the settlement of disputes, the maintenance of law and order, in the society. The role of Mahari in various areas of social life will be discussed in the following chapters.

4. Anthropological concepts and Garo matrilineal descent groups.

Playfair referred to the Chatchi groups as "exogamous septs

or clans" (1909:64). Burling considered two of the Chatchi groups - Sangma and Marak - as 'Moieties' because he found people of only these two groups in the area where he did his fieldwork (see Burling, 1963:22). Burling ignored the Momin Chatchi simply because he did not encounter anyone of this Chatchi. The other two groups, which Burling mentioned, but gave no name for, he considered insignificant. About these two groups Burling wrote, "They are so small and so strictly localized as to have no relevance for most purposes..." (1963:22). Nakane, like Burling, considered the Sangma and Marak to be very important, and in her view, these two groups form a 'moiety structure' (1967:23). Nakane left aside the Momin Chatchi as the number of members of this Chatchi was 'very few' (1967:23). Nakane maintained: "As a whole in the phratry organization, the Momin play but a small part: in effect, empirically there is only a moiety relationship" (1967:23). However, she remarked: "The Momin may marry either a Sangma or a Marak, thus creating a dual complementary moiety system" (1967:23). According to Nakane, the Momin is an "accreted clan", which is "additional to moiety structure" (1967:23).

Both Burling and Nakane could be correct in considering Garo society to be a moiety structure on the basis of existence of two predominant Chatchi groups. There are, in fact, many reflections of a moiety structure in Garo kinship terminology and marriage rules (see below). However, if the Chatchi groups ignored by both Burling and Nakane are considered, Garo society cannot be regarded as possessing a moiety structure. Burling, in fact,

realized this and therefore, he wrote, "If all the Garo are considered this term [moiety] would hardly be appropriate" (1963:22). But Burling provides us with no suitable concept to be used for Garo Chatchi groups. Nakane may be correct to consider the Momin as 'an accreted clan', additional to moiety structure. But if the two other Chatchi, the existence of which are not mentioned by Nakane, are considered what should they be called? Should all Chatchi groups, other than the Sangma and Marak, considered to be clans additional to moiety structure? It is evident therefore, that many problems are involved in using an anthropological concepts for Garo term 'the Chatchi', especially if all Chatchi groups are considered.

The existence of several Chatchi groups (more than two), the fact that members of one of these groups (the Momin) are affiliated with either the Sangma or Marak, the insignificant number of the other two groups (Sira and Abeng) -- all these indicate that in this society there were several maximal clans (at least the five which are known today). Presumably these maximal clans were once heirarchical rather than egalitarian, and moiety formation may be a later move towards an egalitarian structure from an earlier heirarchical one. It is difficult to say when and why this move began since there are neither written sources nor Garo myths relating to this issue, but it appears from the affiliation of the Momin Chatchi with either of the two predominant Chatchi groups that the move perhaps persists even today. Moreover, some indications of an heirarchical structure are to be found in some aspects of Garo socio-cultural life (see

below). However, since I observed that people who belonged to the Momin Chatchi associated themselves with either the Sangma or Marak, and as a moiety organization prevails among Bangladesh Garo, I will consider, like earlier observers of the Garo that the society has a moiety structure.

Dalton translated the Garo word 'Machong' as 'Motherhood' (1872:). Playfair also used the word 'Motherhood' (1909). Burling used the term 'Sib' for Machong groups (1963:239). Burling distinguished between two orders of Garo sib: (a) Minimal lineage:- the people who can trace blood relationships; and (b) Village lineage:- the people of the same village (and neighbouring villages) who consider themselves to be related as members of the same matrilineal descent group (1963:176). Nakane used the Garo term 'Mahari' to mean the sub-groups of a Chatchi, i.e. for which I have used the Garo term 'Machong'. In fact, both Machong and Mahari are sometimes used by Garo to mean the sub-groups of a Chatchi (cf. also Nakane, 1967:25), but most Bangladesh Garo use these two terms with distinct meanings as I have described above.

Following Leach (1951:25), Nakane distinguished between 'descent lines' and 'local lines' and maintained that Garo Mahari (i.e. for which I have used the term Machong) are the 'descent lines' and the smaller sections (for which I have used the term Mahari) of the descent lines are 'localized lineages' (1967:25). Thus, Nakane did not use Garo terms for the smaller groups, which I have mentioned as Mahari; Nakane's 'localized lineages' and my

Mahari are the same groups. Like Nakane, I shall also follow Leach's distinction between 'descent lines' and 'local lines'. However, I shall use the original Garo term 'Machong' and 'Mahari' for descent lines and local lines, respectively.

In my discussion in the following chapters I shall use the original Garo terms in the following sense:

Chatchi: Moiety.

Machong: Matrilineal descent group - Descent lines.

Mahari: Matrilineal descent group - Local lines.

CHAPTER 4.

LAND TENURE, PROPERTY AND INHERITANCE.

1. The Land tenure system.

When Garo practised Jhum cultivation (see Ch.1) they selected a certain area of a jungle as the village common land, Aking, and this was demarcated from the Aking of other villages by stones placed at each corner of the area. The whole area of the Aking of a village was divided into several small sections, some of which were cultivated in a particular year according to the requirements of that year, while others were kept for future use. Jhum lands were cultivated for two successive years, and in each year crops were changed - in the first year a number of crops, such as, millet, rice, cotton, pumpkin, chilly, and so on were grown, and in the second year only rice. After two years the plot was abandoned and allowed to remain fallow for seven or eight years after which the same plot was cultivated again. As the crops in certain sections were changed every year a shift from one section of the Aking to another became necessary nearly every year in order to grow all the types of crops required.

The lands in the section of the Aking which was cultivated in a particular year were sub-divided into plots and these plots were allotted to all the households of the village according to household size. The responsibility for planning, organizing, sowing seeds, and harvesting the crops of the plots allotted to a

particular household rested with its members, who initiated their various tasks by themselves. But the preparation of the field for cultivation, which involved the felling of trees, the slashing of undergrowth, and then burning, was not possible for members of individual households without the help and cooperation of others. Felling trees was too heavy for members of individual households, so this was done communally by all the villagers, as was the burning of the fields. Thus, communal labour, mutual cooperation and coordination were essential in the preparation of fields. Although plots of land were allotted to each individual household before clearing and burning, the preparation was done by all the villagers, and the final demarcation of the plots was in fact made after clearing all the plots. The boundary lines of the plots were marked by natural lines, such as, streams, hills, etc. or by laying down wooden or bamboo poles at each corner. Fences and elephant traps surrounding the section under cultivation were made communally by all the villagers.

Permanent ownership of a particular plot of land by a household was not possible due to the rotation of fields every year. However, people always tried to maintain the same pattern of plot allocation when they returned to cultivate the same section after a seven or eight year cycle, because by doing so the time and energy for allocating the plots was saved. Also the members of most households preferred to cultivate the plots they had previously cultivated. But this could not be always be achieved for adjustments and re-adjustments were made to account for demographic changes (such as, increase or decrease of members

of the same household, movement of some households to other villages, formation of new households, etc.) that had taken place within the seven or eight year cycle.

Members of every household in a village had a legal right to cultivate the share of the Aking allotted to their respective households. No household however, was allowed to own plots individually, because in principle ownership of all lands within the Aking was vested in the Mahari of the wife of the founding household and this right was passed in every generation to the heiress of that household. On the other hand, the right of management of the Aking was vested in the Mahari of the husband of the founding household and this right was passed to his heir in every generation. The heir of the social position of the husband of the founding household is known as Nokma (see Ch.9). It was the responsibility of the Nokma to look after the Aking and to allocate plots to the village households. Although in principle the Nokma could allocate land to others, in practice he could not do this alone. The allocation of land was in fact decided at a meeting of all household heads. The Nokma, however, was responsible for the arrangement of such a meeting and he himself had to be present at the meeting. But he had no absolute authority to give a final decision regarding the allocation. The decision had to be arrived at from a consensus of all the people. However, the Nokma's presence was very important as it helped the others to reach a consensus very quickly (see Ch.9).

Although the Nokma's household had the right of ownership of

the Aking (by his wife) and also the right to its management (by himself), his household did not gain any additional economic advantage over other households, by virtue of its position. The share of the Aking for the Nokma's household was decided at the meeting in the same way as for other households, i.e. according to the number of household members.

It has already been noted that an ideal village with people belonging to two Mahari groups only, i.e. the females of one Mahari and the males of another Mahari of the opposite Chatchi as their husbands, is hardly found in practice. However, even in villages with people belonging to more than two Mahari groups, the right of ownership and management of the Aking, were found by Burling (1963) and Nakane (1967) to be vested in the two original Mahari groups, the male and female representatives of which formed the village. Both of the above authors note that these rights are nominal, because, the people belonging to other Mahari groups are also allowed to cultivate the plots of land within the Aking (see Burling, 1963: 224-225; Nakane, 1967:42).

The traditional Jhum cultivation is no longer practised by the Bangladesh Garo (the reasons for this will be discussed later in this chapter), so the concept of Aking is no longer maintained. Even when the Bangladesh Garo used to practise Jhum, the traditional Aking concept could not work in this area due to a number of reasons.

The people of various Mahari groups belonging to numerous Machong of the interior Garo Hills moved to, and settled in, the

Bangladesh areas more or less at the same time (see Ch.1 and 3). Therefore, no single Mahari could claim to be the first settler and founder of any village. In Chunia for example, the females of three different Mahari groups and their husbands belonging to four different Mahari groups of the opposite Chatchi group settled at the same time. However, people belonging to different Mahari groups living in this village used to distribute the sections under Jhum cultivation among themselves more or less in the same way as they used to do in their previous settlements in the Garo Hills. The rights of ownership and management of Jhum fields were vested in the females and males of all the Mahari groups who first settled in this village. As these rights could no longer be held by two Mahari only but by more than two, the Jhum fields were no longer regarded as the Aking in the traditional sense.

The development of permanent ownership of land due to the adoption of wet cultivation is the most important reason why the traditional Aking concept did not work systematically in the Garo villages of Bangladesh.

The Garo Jhum cultivation could only be done on the slopes, not on the flat lands, because the slash and burn cultivation technique of the Garo required rain water to run off the slopes. In the areas of Bangladesh where the Garo settled such slopes suitable for Jhum cultivation were insufficient for the people who moved in. At the same time, the available Jhum lands were not as fertile as those of the interior Garo Hills. Thus, it was

not possible for people to rely on Jhum lands alone but to discover some other means of subsistence. Some families therefore, adopted wet cultivation from the beginnig of their settlement in these areas. Wet cultivation was practised in the flat lands which were available near their Jhum fields (in North Mymensingh area) and within the jungle (in Madhupur area). They followed the method of wet cultivation of neighbouring Bengali, i.e. a wooden plough pulled by a pair of bullocks.

According to my informants, wet cultivation was not done communally for the following reasons:

1. All households in a village did not face the population pressure equally - some households faced the problem more than the others. Households which were not under population pressure were little interested in wet cultivation, whereas households increasing rapidly had little option but to adopt wet cultivation.
2. Many people were unaware of the techniques and technology of wet cultivation; and
3. There were many households which lacked either the labour or initiative to open up wet fields.

Due to the above reasons wet cultivation was not started by all the households in a village at the same time. Therefore, the pace of development of wet cultivation was neither uniform nor equal in all villages. However, in every village wet cultivation was practised by the members of some households, and Jhum cultivation was practised by members of all households. Thus, households with wet fields also maintained shares in the Jhum fields of the village.

The members of some of the older households of Chunia claim that they have been cultivating certain plots of wet land for three or four generations, and these wet fields were opened up by their predecessors. Regarding the households which possess no wet fields, the villagers, as well as the members of those households themselves, said that their predecessors did not open up wet fields either because the Jhum fields were sufficient for the support of their families at that time, or because they were lazy or did not think what might happen in future generations.

Thus, wet cultivation developed due to ecological pressure on the one hand, and population pressure on the other. But conversion to Christianity had some impact on its more extensive development. With their modern education and outlook the educated Christian Garos realized that if they relied on Jhum cultivation alone they would be in danger of starvation in the future, because the Jhum fields were very limited. So, they started opening up more and more wet fields even though not all these fields were necessary for the support of their families at that time. Subsequently, non-Christian Garos also followed the example of the Christian Garos and started opening up more wet fields than they required, because they too saw that households possessing and cultivating wet fields became richer than which possessed few or none at all. Moreover, both Christian and non-Christian Garos saw some advantages in wet cultivation: wet fields can be cultivated every year and there is no need to keep wet fields fallow for seven or eight years; the cultivator does not have to shift from one field to another; a smaller amount of

wet fields compared to Jhum fields is required to support a family with the same number of members, etc..

Thus, both the Christian and the non-Christian Garos who had foresight and the ambition to become rich, opened up wet fields more than they required for immediate subsistence, whereas people who had no foresight or who had lacked sufficient labour, opened up wet fields just sufficient for the support of their family at that time. But there were some people who did not, or who could not, open up any wet fields.

With the adoption of wet cultivation, permanent ownership of wet fields developed, because, wet cultivation did not require shifting anymore. The permanent ownership of wet fields was vested in individual households which had first cultivated them. Thus, the plot of land first brought under wet cultivation by members of a particular household began to be recognized as the property of that household, and they could own and cultivate that plot every year. This right of ownership was recognized by the society, because members of the household had opened up that wet field by their own initiative and labour, and not as part of a village community. Any household could establish wet fields and could possess permanent individual rights of ownership to such plots. Conversion of some plots into wet fields did not create conflict among villagers, because, only unused flat land, which was unsuitable for Jhum cultivation, was converted to wet fields and this involved no loss of Jhum fields.

The responsibility for the management and control of such

permanently and individually owned wet fields was held by the individual owner of plots and not by all the villagers. The preparation of the fields for cultivation also rested with the owner of the plots. Village authority no longer held the right of management and control over cultivation of the wet fields even though these were within the area of village common land. The rights of the village authority were limited only to the Jhum fields. Thus, the traditional Aking concept did not work in the ownership of wet fields.

During British rule the whole jungle area of Madhupur Garh was a part of the estate of the Zeminder (revenue collector of the British rulers) of Natore. Nobody knows whether the Garo clashed with the Zeminder when they first settled in this area; written documents in this respect were unavailable to me. However, from the various notices issued to the Garo by the Zeminder it is evident that the Garo had come to an agreement with the Zeminder that they would be allowed to live in the jungle and also to cultivate the jungle lands on the following conditions:

1. They will look after the jungle trees.
2. They will be responsible for planting the seedlings of the Gajari trees, at least in the areas where Jhum cultivation is done by them; and
3. They will pay an annual tax to the Zeminder for cultivating jungle lands.

The people of Chunia told me that they used to fulfil these conditions in their own interests so they could continue to live

in the jungle and cultivate jungle lands. The costs of the annual taxes for the cultivation of Jhum fields were shared by all the households, but the taxes for the wet fields were paid by individual households. Poeples said that they used to pay taxes to the Zeminder's people in due time, because they were bound by the agreement with the Zeminder. They were also threatened by the Zeminder's people that if they failed to pay their taxes they would not be allowed to live in the jungle and cultivate the lands. In Chunia the village headman always used to persuade the others to pay the taxes regularly. However, some people told me that there were times when certain households were unable to pay the taxes on their wet fields at the due time and in such cases the Zeminder's people used to confiscate their movable property, such as, domestic animals (cows, goats, pigs, etc.), agricultural implements, and so on. But households could regain right to cultivate the land by agreeing to pay their taxes regularly.

According to the conditions of their agreement with the Zeminder, the people of Chunia, as they told me, used to plant the seedlings of the Gajari trees, but it used to take at least ten years for the trees to grow to their full size. It was perhaps for this reason that the Zeminder came to think that the forest might be entirely denuded if new areas were cleared for Jhum cultivation by the Garo each year. In 1937 the people of Chunia (as well as the others of other villages in this area) were forbidden by the Zeminder to open anymore Jhum fields or to fell trees anymore. However, it is evident in the notices issued to the Garo by the Zeminder between 1937 to 1941 that under

special circumstances (e.g. if the Zeminder was convinced that the wet fields of the people of any village were insufficient for their support), people were allowed to practise Jhum cultivation. But this was possible only with the Zeminder's special permission. The people of Chunia, as well as those of most other villages in this area, could convince the Zeminder that they did not have enough wet lands for their support, and therefore, they needed the Jhum fields. Thus, with the special permission of the Zeminder, people of Chunia continued Jhum cultivation, alongside wet cultivation. Jhum cultivation was thus continued during British, and even during the early years of Pakistani rule.

British rule in the Indian Sub-continent ended with the independence of India and Pakistan in 1947. In 1951, the right of management of forest was transferred from the Zeminder to the Regional Forest Officer of the Government of Pakistan (The Dacca Gazette, 8 Nov.1951; Forest Branch Notification No.9636/For,6M-165-51,15 Sept.1951.). After taking over this right from the Zeminder the Garo were forbidden by the Government to cut the jungle trees. The fields that were used by the Garo for Jhum cultivation, and the wet fields adjacent to these Jhum fields, were declared 'Khas land', i.e. the land owned by the government. The Garo were forbidden to use these Khas lands and were asked to cultivate only the wet fields not declared as Khas land. In the initial years after the government take over of the Madhupur Garh area, the Garo were granted only a temporary right of usufruct, known as 'Temporary Patta', to wet fields they were still allowed to cultivate. In this system the holder of a

particular plot was allowed to cultivate the land and pass it to his successors but he was not allowed to sell it. The government reserved the sole right to cut trees standing on such a plot of land. Moreover, the government reserved the right to demand such plots, either in full or in part, for any public use, and if it so demanded the holder had to surrender the plot without government compensation. For the cultivation of lands under the agreement of 'Temporary Patta' the holders of plots had to pay an annual tax to the government. Subsequently, the holders of plots were granted the right of full ownership, known as 'Permanent Patta', to the plots that they cultivated continually for several years. The conditions of the agreement of Temporary Patta were maintained and after a survey of all wet fields, the lands were recorded in the holder's name. After this the holders attained the right to sell their lands and also the right to demand compensation from the government if land was taken for public use. Thus the government recognized the right of the Garo to some of the wet fields but no rights were recognized over the Jhum fields.

Although the Garo were forbidden to cut the jungle trees and to use the Jhum fields anymore, they continued to practise Jhum cultivation. It was impossible for the government to administer and enforce their regulations with regard to the Jhum lands. In 1955 the whole area of Madhupur Garh was declared a Reserve Forest (The Dacca Gazette, 12 May, 1955; Notification No. 3123/For, Dated 3-4-55). The Garo leaders were requested by officials of the Forest Department to persuade the people not to destroy national property. The government promised the Garo

leaders that the Garo would be given all possible government help and assistance if they obeyed the decision of the government. The Garo leaders were convinced and they persuaded the people not to practise Jhum cultivation, and to switch over completely to wet cultivation. Thus, in 1955 the Garo gave up their traditional Jhum cultivation.

All the suitable land for wet cultivation were already taken up when the people switched over to wet cultivation. So, the people who could not open up wet fields became poor, whereas, those who opened wet fields more than their requirements, became rich. Thus, some households owned so much land that they could not cultivate all of it with their own labour, while others had no land at all. At the time of my fieldwork in Chunia (1979-80) the total amount of recorded lands of the village was 38.5 acres (see Table 4.1).

Table 4.1

The distribution of Recorded Lands.

| Amount of Recorded Lands (in acre) | Number of Household | Percentage |
|------------------------------------|---------------------|------------|
| No Recorded Land | 10 | 23.8 |
| Less than one acre | 5 | 11.9 |
| 1 - 3 | 11 | 26.2 |
| 4 - 6 | 8 | 19.0 |
| 7 - 9 | 6 | 14.3 |
| 10 --12 | 1 | 2.4 |
| 13 - 15 | 1 | 2.4 |
| Total | 42 | 100% |

The lands owned by the people as shown in Table 4.1 are mainly wet fields. Besides these recorded wet fields the people of Chunia also cultivate some other wet fields which were declared by the government as Khas land. Although the use of these Khas land is forbidden by the government, people still cultivate them. These Khas lands are owned by the households which opened them up. The total amount of Khas lands in Chunia was about 146 acres at the time of my fieldwork. The distribution of the forty-two households of Chunia according to possession of Khas wet fields is shown in Table 4.2.

Table 4.2

The Distribution of Khas wet fields.

| Amount of Khas wet fields (in acres) | Number of Households | Percentage |
|--------------------------------------|----------------------|------------|
| No Khas wet field | 8 | 19.0 |
| Less than one acre | 6 | 14.3 |
| 1 - 3 | 10 | 23.8 |
| 4 - 6 | 7 | 16.7 |
| 7 - 9 | 4 | 9.5 |
| 10 - 12 | 4 | 9.5 |
| 13 - 15 | 2 | 4.8 |
| 15 - 20 | 1 | 2.4 |
| Total | 42 | 100% |

Besides Khas wet fields the people of Chunia also use other

Khas lands. All the houses and outbuildings of the villagers are built on Khas lands inside the jungle and not on their recorded lands. The holdings for house sites are more or less the same in every household. On average 0.5 acre of Khas land is occupied by each individual household.

The highlands within the jungle which were previously used for Jhum cultivation are also Khas lands. Some of these highlands have been used by the people of Chunia for planting pineapple since Jhum cultivation ceased. Pineapple gardens require no cutting of jungle trees, only the bushes under the trees are cleared.

It is important to note that among the Garo ideas of value, exploitation for money, the importance of financial investments, return, and profit, have developed with the adoption of wet cultivation. Educated Christian Garo learnt techniques of book-keeping and also mathematical skills to calculate returns and profits. Concepts associated with the value of labour, and the exploitation of a labour force paid by kind and cash, also developed. Wet cultivation created an incentive to invest money and exploit labour to cultivate the fields. Investments were later extended to pineapple plantations, as people realized that growing pineapples for a market economy was profitable. The educated possessed the skills needed to maximise the advantages of the new economy. Thus a market oriented economy emerged with the pineapple plantation, whereas previously Garo had existed at subsistence level.

Although pineapple plantations are on land previously used communally for Jhum cultivation, the pineapple gardens are owned individually. The development of these plantations had a similar history to the wet cultivation area - all the households in the village did not start pineapple planting at the same time. The people with foresight started plantations alongside wet cultivation, while people who did not have foresight or had a scarcity of labour or could not invest money for the initial establishment, such as, buying seedlings, and putting fences, etc., lagged behind. It was found that people who owned more wet fields and those who were already economically better-off than the others, also owned larger pineapple gardens. The reason maybe that these people were in a position to hire labour for the clearing of the bush for preparing the land for pineapple plantation, and they were also in a position to invest money for the initial establishment. The land, which was converted to pineapple gardens by members of particular households, was possessed individually by those households.

At present, pineapple plantations have become even more profitable than the cultivation of rice in wet fields. But there is no suitable land for pineapple plantations anymore, because areas of jungle which are left are thickly covered with trees, and it is impossible to convert those areas to pineapple gardens without cutting the trees. This, however, is forbidden by the government and the Garo have also promised not to cut trees anymore. Thus only about 52 acres of land within the jungle were brought under pineapple plantations. Table 4.3 shows the

distribution of the households in Chunia by their possession of pineapple gardens.

Table 4.3

The Distribution of Pineapple gardens.

| Amount of land for Pineapple gardens (in acres) | Number of Households | Percentage |
|---|-------------------------|------------|
| No Pineapple gardens | 12 | 28.6 |
| Less than one acre | 9 | 21.3 |
| 1 - 3 | 12 | 28.6 |
| 4 - 6 | 6 | 14.3 |
| 7 - 9 | 2 | 4.8 |
| 10 - 12 | 1 | 2.4 |
| Total | 42 | 100% |

With the development of permanent and individual ownership to land after the adoption of wet cultivation, the distinction between rich and poor has been intensified and this distinction has been further intensified by the growing of pineapple for a market economy. However, it is important to note that although all households once received plots of land for cultivation, the distinction between rich and poor households always existed. Households with a large labour force or who could efficiently manage their fields, became richer than households which lacked

these advantages. But the distinction between rich and poor was not as great as today, and it never became a constant distinction since wealthy people gave feasts to achieve prominence in the society. They could easily become poor again if they used all their surplus for feasting (cf. also Nakane, 1967:62). As the wealthy people no longer give feasts for achieving prominence (see Ch.9) this distinction has become more permanent and constant.

Wealthy people have achieved or are achieving prominence in society by virtue of their wealth alone (see Ch.9). But the poor and landless do not blame the rich for their poverty - they do not think that wealthy people are exploiting them, or that they are responsible for their poverty. Poor people blame the government for their poverty, as some of them stated, "The wealthy people became wealthy, because, they or their predecessors worked hard and they spent their labour, energy, and money for becoming wealthy. They are not at fault. The government is responsible for our present economic condition, because, our Jhum cultivation is forbidden by the government. If we are allowed to cultivate our Jhum field again we would be happy and rich". Although the people do not ignore the advantages of wet cultivation, and indeed some were attracted by the advantages of such cultivation before they adopted it, many still believe that Jhum cultivation is more suitable. They say, "We know the Jhum technique better than the wet cultivation as our forefathers used to cultivate lands following this Jhum technique. This technique has a great advantage as it requires

no animals and therefore, it is possible for poor people to cultivate lands".

No tax or revenue is collected by the government from the people of Chunia (or from those of the other villages in this area) for using the Khas lands for house sites, wet cultivation, and pineapple gardens, because the government is aware that if taxes are collected for the use of these Khas lands, then according to law, the rights of people to the lands would have to be recognized. According to government sources, the Garo are occupying Khas lands illegally; but the Garo claim that they have legal right to jungle land because they have possessed and cultivated these lands for several generations. Garo leaders told me, "According to the law of the country a person or a household can claim the right of ownership to land if that land is possessed by that person or that household for a period of twelve years, and if nobody claims this land during this period of twelve years. Therefore, according to law the jungle lands are ours, because these were in our possession for several twelve-year periods. Our right of possession was recognized by the Zeminder and that is why he used to collect taxes from us". I discussed this point of law with lawyers and they said that in legal terms the Garo leaders are correct. However, the government does not recognize the right of the Garo, because, according to government sources, the Garo were notified, at the time of the take over of the jungle area from the Zeminder, that they could claim the lands which were to be declared Khas lands, but nobody did so. In this respect the Garo leaders told me that

such notices were issued officially but were not given to the Garo in due time. According to Garo leaders, the government tricked them: notices were sent in such a way that they reached the Garo only after the last date for claims. Moreover, some notices were never sent to the Garo, these were kept on the government file so that the illiterate Garo could not know or claim their land in due time. Thus, according to the Garo leaders, they were unable to claim the land they possessed within the time specified, and the government thus declared these lands as Khas lands.

In 1962, a part of the Madhupur Garh was declared a National Park by the government. Chunia belongs to the area of this National Park (see Map 3). After this declaration the Forest Department complained to the National Park Commission that Garo were destroying the trees in the National park area. The Forest Department, therefore, recommended that in order to conserve the National Park area, the Garo living within the park area should be removed. The Garo leaders told me that since they promised the government that they would not cut jungle trees anymore, they kept their word and that is the reason why they no longer practise Jhum cultivation. Some people said, "We do not cut the jungle trees. We cut only the dead trees for firewood. we do not destroy the forest. We love to live inside the forest. That is our tradition. So, we maintain the environment that we like. When we were dependent on Jhum cultivation we used to cut trees, but we also did plant new trees". One of the leaders told me, "In fact, the employees of the Forest Department want to remove

us, because, we are an obstacle to their illegal incomes. The Bengali timber-merchants, who live outside the jungle area, cut the trees illegally, and the employees of the Forest Department help them in taking away the timber. They receive bribes and thus they earn money illegally. We are the people living inside the jungle, so it cannot escape our notice. We report this to higher officials in the government so that the government can not blame us for destroying the forest. This is the reason why the employees of the Forest Department do not like us, and they want to remove the obstacle to their illegal acts by removing us. The Forest Department itself is responsible for destroying the forest, we are not. They are collaborating with the Bengali timber-merchants, we are not. They are earning illegal money, we are not".

However, the National Park Commission was convinced by the official report of the Forest Department and decided that the Garo should be removed from the Park area. In 1968 notices were issued by the Divisional Forest Officer to Garo living in the National Park area asking them to shift their households within that year to an area selected by the government for their rehabilitation. This area, known as Fulbagchala, is within the Madhupur Garh area but outside the National Park. This is a Muslim area and most of the cultivable land is possessed by Muslims. There are some Khas land in this area, but only in official documents held by the government. In practice these Khas lands are possessed by local Muslims. So, the Garo leaders apprehended that if they were shifted to that area the Muslims

living there would not allow them to cultivate lands already possessed by Muslims. Therefore, the Garo appealed to the government to rehabilitate them, if it was really necessary, in some other area of Madhupur Garh, in an area exclusively in possession of the government both officially and practically. They named two such areas - Joramgacha and Kulachala - both of which are within Madhupur Garh. They demanded that if they were shifted to these areas they would certainly move their households from their present habitation, but if not, then, they would not move. Moreover, they also demanded the following:

1. Double of the amount of land that they possessed in their present habitation must be given in the area they wished to move to. All these lands had to be officially recorded in their names and all official documents must be given to them.
2. Sufficient land must be given to poor and landless people for the support of their families.
3. All costs of shifting and re-building new houses, shools, and churches, etc. had to be borne by the government.
4. Appropriate compensation for the pineapple gardens, and other fruit and vegetable gardens had to be given, and the costs of the re-establishment of such gardens in the new area also must be borne by the government; and
5. Until the new area is completely suitable for habitation and for cultivation, and pineapple gardens are ready for harvesting, they were to be allowed to live in their present homes. During this time they should be allowed to own and cultivate, as well as to sell and dispose of the lands that they already possess.

According to government sources the Garo demands were unreasonable and therefore, not fully acceptable to the government. In view of these demands, the government made the

following decisions:

1. The Garo were to be rehabilitated in the area proposed by the government, and not to the area the Garo preferred.
2. An equivalent amount of recorded lands would be given in the new area but neither land nor compensation would be given for the Khas land that they now possess, because they are in possession of these lands illegally.
3. If any land in the proposed area for rehabilitation is already occupied the government will take responsibility for removing this land. The Garo will be ensured that nobody would harass them in their new habitation.
4. An amount of five hundred Taka (Bangladesh Currency) for each household would be given for shifting and re-building houses; and
5. A lump sum of five hundred Taka would be given as compensation for, and cost of, re-establishment of pineapple, and other fruit and vegetable gardens.

But these decisions of the government were not acceptable to the Garo, because they thought that it would be difficult, if not impossible, for them to survive in the new area with only an equivalent amount of recorded land. The lands in the new area were not as fertile as those of their present area. Moreover, there was no suitable land for pineapple plantations. The Garo leaders also told me that the amount of money offered by the government for the cost of shifting and re-building houses was not sufficient for these purposes; and the lump sum fixed as the compensation for, and re-establishment of, the pineapple, and other fruit and vegetable gardens, was not at all satisfactory, as the cost of these were ten to twenty times more than the amount assessed by the government. One of the leaders told me,

"We are happy that the government is trying to maintain the National Park and we, therefore, are always ready to shift our houses from the Park area but the government authority must fulfil the conditions of our demand. If we get what we have demanded, we will certainly shift, but if not, then, we will not move. This is our land, we have legal rights to this land. So, the government must recognize our rights and pay compensation for the lands we are possessing now".

The dispute between the government and the Garo over this issue has been continuing since 1962 and it was still unsettled when I left the Garo area (1979). As far as I could understand from the opinions of the Garo leaders, as well as from other people, the Garo will not leave their present habitation until the government has agreed to their conditions. According to the government authority, the problem of shifting the Garo is a difficult one as the Garo cannot be forced to leave the area. To apply force to a minority community is against the principle of the country, which envisages that minority rights must be safeguarded. So, the government is trying to reach a solution to this problem in a peaceful manner.

However, the Garo are still living in the National Park area and they use and cultivate Khas land as if they were their own lands. The rights of possession to these Khas land are passed from one generation to another in the same way as it is followed with respect to recorded lands (see below).

2. Property, ownership and inheritance.

Garo property (Gamjin) may be classified into two main types: (1) Landed Property - which includes all arable land as well as land for house sites, and other outbuildings; and (2) Household property - which, again, may be classified into two types : (a) Hereditary property of the household - which is passed on from generation to generation. The items of such heirloom are: brass basin (Rang), sword (Millam), shield (Sphe), spear (Selu), etc.; and (b) Earned property - which is earned by members of a household during their lifetime. These may include - the house itself, the other outbuildings, pig sties, granaries, any movable items of property - such as, agricultural implements, tools, domestic animals, household utensils, clothing, as well as any item of heirloom mentioned above.

Ideally all property should be owned and inherited by women, and men can neither own nor inherit property. Thus, whatever an unmarried man may earn belongs to his mother (or to his sister, if his mother is not alive). And whatever a married man earns belongs to his wife. However, the right to manage property owned by a woman is vested in her husband. A woman, it should be noted, is not allowed to own property before her marriage. Whatever an unmarried girl earns belongs to her mother and the right to manage her mother's property is vested in her father.

All property belonging to a woman is passed to one of her daughters. That means, only one of the daughters of a household

inherits all the property of her mother. This heiress daughter is called Nokna, which means 'the foundation or base of the house'. All other daughters of a household except the Nokna are known as Agate, i.e. Non-heiress, and they cannot, in principle, inherit any of their mother's property. The Nokna and her husband, called Nokrom (which means 'the pillar of the house') are selected by the Nokna's parents (see Ch.5) and this couple is responsible for the care, protection, and support of the Nokna's parents in their old age. But the sons, the Agate daughters and their husbands, called Chawari (ordinary term for daughter's husband) are not under formal obligations like the Nokna and Nokrom. The Nokna must live, together with her husband, the Nokrom, in her parents' household. The Nokna-Nokrom couple is not allowed to form a separate household of their own. But Agate daughters and their husbands are allowed to live in their (Agate's) parents' household for a temporary period, i.e, until the couples are able to establish a separate household of their own, but not permanently. In other words, the Agate couples must form a separate household of their own. The sons of a household leave their parents' household at marriage and join the household of their respective wife's parents (see Ch.5 for marital residence).

The Nokna and Nokrom are considered to be members of the Nokna's parents' household. By marrying the Nokna, and also by becoming a member of Nokna's parents' household, the Nokrom attained the right to cultivate the land allotted to the Nokna's parents' household from the common Jhum field of the village.

The share of the common Jhum field was increased as the population of the household increased after the inclusion of the Nokna-Nokrom couple. The new couple had to work with the Nokna's parents and share meals with the latter. Whatever they earned belonged to the household and they were not allowed to take away household property, even though they may have earned such property by their own labour. After the death of the Nokna's parents the household was continued by the Nokna and Nokrom but they could claim neither the same amount, nor necessarily the same plots of land, cultivated by the Nokna's parents. The allotment of plots was decided by the village authority in the usual manner and no household was allowed to claim permanent ownership of any particular plot.

The household property is owned by individual households, and not communally by all the villagers. After the death of her mother the Nokna inherited all the property belonging to her (mother), which included all the property earned by the Nokna's parents, by the Nokna and Nokrom themselves, and by other members of the household. All the hereditary property belonging to the household was also inherited by the Nokna. On the other hand, the Nokrom attained the right to manage all the property inherited by the Nokna.

An Agate daughter and her husband were considered to be temporary members of the Agate's parents' household during the couple's period of residence in that household. No separate plot of land were allotted to an agate couple until they established

their own household. So, during their temporary residence in the household the Agate couple had to work with the Agate's parents on the plots of land allotted to the latter's household. Whatever the Agate couple earned during this temporary period belonged to the Agate's parents' household and therefore, had to be surrendered to them. They were also under a formal obligation to hand over everything that they had earned because they were fed from the kitchen of the Agate's parents' household. However, during this temporary period the Agate's parents might allow an Agate couple to cultivate some plots on their own, but this right were given only as a temporary measure, and when the couple established their own household they had to give these plots back to the Agate's parents. Whatever the Agate couple earned from the cultivation of such plots belonged, in principle, to the Agate's parents and had to be surrendered to them. The couple, however, was allowed to take with them to their new household some of the household property that they may have earned from these plots. An Agate couple was also helped by the Agate's parents by contributions of labour and money to assist in the building of their new house. They also donated some items of household property to the young couple to assist in the establishment of their new household (see below).

A Garo man attained the right of cultivation to the common Jhum field only after marriage. Separate plots were then allotted to his wife (if he married an Agate) or he was allowed to cultivate the plots of land allotted to his wife's parents' household (if he married a Nokna). A son of a household was

given no share from the plots of land allotted to his parents' household. However, before his marriage his parents could assign him some plots of land from the land allotted to their household and he could cultivate these plots on his own, i.e. without the control of his father. But he had to give the harvest of such plots, in full or at least the larger portion of it, to his parents as he was fed by them. However, the parents might allow him to own a part of the harvest as reward for his labour. By selling this he could buy his own clothes, cheap cigarettes, betel nuts, gifts for his girl friend, and also some items of household property. At the time of his marriage he had to return these plots to his parents and could claim no right of cultivation to these plots anymore. But the parents could allow him to take some of the household property which he earned from the cultivation of these plots with him. They could also donate some items of household property (see below).

It is significant that no son or Agate daughter could claim anything from their parents although they (as well as the husbands of the Agate) worked for their parents' household. The parents could or could not allow them to take anything with them to their new households. It depended upon the economic position of their parents' household and also the wishes of the parents. However, the parents, as has already been stated, could allow them to take some of the household property that they had earned from the plots of land temporarily assigned to them. In fact, these plots were assigned to them so that they can save something from the cultivation of these plots, for their future households.

The parents were under no formal obligation to give their sons and Agate daughters any donations. The donations from the parents also depended upon their economic condition and their desires. Thus the things received by the sons and Agate daughters were not regarded as 'inherited'. They were given from property earned by the labour of the sons and Agate daughters, and they received practically nothing from the property accumulated or inherited by their parents.

Although the sons and the Agate daughters may be given some items of household property, they receive no items of hereditary property. In order to keep the hereditary property of a household within that household, these were passed only from mother to Nokna daughter.

Thus, the Nokna-Nokrom couple and the Agate couple had equal access to the common Jhum field, but the former was given the advantage of entering an already established household, while the latter had to establish their own household.

In principle, the traditional right of possession of all property by women is still maintained, but at present it is difficult to say who in practice, owns the property of a household. If a man is asked he will say, "It is my property" or "the property of my household belongs to me" and thus his wife's name may not even be mentioned. However, there are some men who say, "The property of my household belongs to my wife, but I look after it". Thus some men recognize the traditional right of possession of the women. It should be noted, however, that the

right of the women is only nominal, because, it is the men who actually enjoy this right. A woman may possess some property but generally she does not know, or does not even care to know, what her husband does with her property.

However, it is clear from the documents of the 'Recorded Lands' that property is no longer owned exclusively by women; at least some of the recorded lands are officially registered in the name of the men. In Chunia, the recorded lands possessed by the thirty-two households (i.e. which possessed at least some recorded lands) were found to be registered either in the husband's name, or in the wife's name or both husband's and wife's name (see Table 4.4).

Table 4.4

The registration of recorded lands.

| Land registered in the name of | Number of Households | Percent |
|-----------------------------------|-------------------------|---------|
| Husband | 12 | 37.5 |
| Wife | 5 | 15.6 |
| Both | 15 | 46.9 |
| Total | 32 | 100% |

It can be seen from Table 4.4 that the traditional system of property ownership is undergoing a transformation. The number of cases of husbands' possessing land is more than double than that of the wives. However, in majority of cases land is registered

in both husband and wife's name and there are cases in which land is registered in the wife's name only. This indicates that the traditional system is still maintained. The possession of land (and other household property as well) by men is an outcome of the permanent and individual ownership of land which developed due to the adoption of wet cultivation. It has already been noted that plots of land cleared by members of a household used to be recognized as the property of that household and since the husband of a household pioneered the plots with his own labour he could claim the right of possession over the land. The Mahari of his wife could not object to this claim since the Mahari had no control over these plots of land. When the wet fields were officially recorded in the name of the household, the majority of the men, especially among the Christian Garos, recorded the whole, or at least the larger portion of the plots, in their own name instead of that of their wives'. These men were in fact enjoying the right of possession although, according to the traditional ownership system, these land belonged to their wives. However, with the official records of these plots in their name, their right of possession became legal. It is difficult to say why men recorded land in their own name and thus violated their own customary law. Some men said, "It is wise to have the landed property recorded in the men's name, because, men can go and face the government tax collector". Others said, "The government authority encouraged us to have our lands recorded in men's name". However, there are some men who followed the traditional law and recorded their land in their wives' names. It is again

difficult to know why these men did so.

The trend of men possessing land is still developing. At present when a man buys a plot of land, in most cases it is recorded in his own name. Lands are not only possessed by men but also passed by them to their sons, which again is a result of the adoption of wet cultivation. At the time when the wet fields were being opened up, unmarried sons helped their fathers. The sons were, therefore, given some of the plots possessed by their parents as a reward for their labour. After the complete change over to wet cultivation, unmarried sons became fully dependent on their father, because it was no longer possible, due to the very limited amount of wet fields, to allow them to cultivate separate plots independently. Thus, sons had to work with their fathers and this helped develop a desire by fathers to pass all, or at least part, of the wet fields to their sons as they had helped him in his work.

At present, fathers tend to pass their property to their sons, and not to the Nokna daughter. Out of the fifty-four married men of Chunia, twenty-nine received at least some land from their parents, while the remaining twenty-five did not. In most cases men received the land possessed by, or recorded in the name of, their father. The amount and the proportion of land received by these men from their parents varies from case to case (see below for case study). The men who did not receive any land from their parents reported that their fathers were not in a position to give them land as they had no, or very little land

themselves.

The unmarried sons must work for their parents' household as they are fed by them. However, they may work for others as labourers or as share-croppers after finishing their parents' household work. They are also generally allowed by their parents to take with them, at the time of their marriage, the property that they have earned or the money they have saved by such extra work. Moreover, the traditional custom of parents giving some household property to their sons as a donation at the time of their marriage, is still maintained. But it still depends upon the economic condition and the desires of the parents. Out of the fifty-four married men of Chunia, forty-seven men received at least some household property as a donation from their parents, but the other seven men did receive nothing because their parents could not afford to give them anything.

At present not only sons but also Agate daughter receive some land from their parents. Due to the switch to wet cultivation the economic position of the Agate daughters has become precarious, because, it has no longer been possible, due to the very limited amount of wet fields, to allow Agate daughters and their husbands plots of land belonging to the Agate's parents' household for temporary cultivation during the couple's temporary period of residence in that household. When the couple establish their own household they cannot get a share in the village common Jhum fields simply because no common Jhum fields exist anymore. On the other hand, they cannot claim,

according to the ideal principle, the land that belongs to their parents' household. Economically the position of an Agate daughter is no longer tenable. Some adjustments have been made in the case of the inheritance of an Agate daughter and the system of giving some land to the Agate daughter has been introduced. Out of the thirty-five Agate couples of Chunia, twenty-nine have already established separate households and the other six couples are still living in the Agate's parents' household. Of the twenty-nine couples who established separate households, eighteen wives (the Agate daughters of some other households) received some land from their parents, but the other eleven did not, because their parents had no or only very small amounts of land.

During their temporary residence in the Agate's parents' household the Agate couple must work with the Agate's parents. However, they may also work in other peoples' fields after finishing work at the Agate's parents' household. They are allowed to take with them to their own household the property or money that they have earned. Moreover, the custom of giving some household property to the Agate daughters when they establish separate households is still maintained. Of the twenty-nine Agate couple who established separate household only three did not receive anything from their parents, as their parents could not afford to give anything. The other twenty-six received at least some household property.

Although sons and Agate daughters inherit some land from

their parents, in most cases it is still the Nokna who inherits the larger share. In a household possessing very small quantities of land, insufficient for distribution among all the sons and daughters, all the land is passed to the Nokna. There is no specific rule as to what proportion of land should be given to the Nokna daughter or the proportion to the Agate daughters and the sons. The proportion varies from case to case, but generally it is found that at least one third of the total land of a household is reserved for the Nokna.

Let us consider a case from Chunia which will give some idea of the distribution of land to the sons and the daughters at marriage.

The household of Devendra Dopu possess twenty Pakhi (2.5 Pakhi = 1 acre) of Khas land and sixteen Pakhi of recorded land. Of the sixteen Pakhi of recorded land eleven Pakhi is recorded in Devendra Dopu's name and the other five Pakhi is in his wife's name.

Devendra Dopu has two sons and two daughters - all of whom are married. The Nokna daughter and her husband, the Nokrom, are living in his household and the Agate daughter and the sons have already formed separate households. The distribution of the landed property of this household among the married sons and daughters is shown in Table 4.5.

Table 4.5

Distribution of land among the children of a household.

| Land given to | Amount of Land | | Total |
|----------------|----------------|----------|-------|
| | Khas | Recorded | |
| Nokna daughter | 7 | 6 | 13 |
| Agate daughter | 5 | 2 | 7 |
| Two sons | 8 | 8 | 16 |
| Total | 20 | 16 | 36 |

The eight Pakhi of recorded land given to the two sons are all from the lands recorded in Devendra Dopu's own name. The other three Pakhi of recorded land in his name was given to the daughters - two Pakhi to the Nokna and one Pakhi to the Agate daughter.

Today, cases can be discovered where the traditional rules are no longer maintained. In Chunia I found one such case, which is as follows:

Raichan Nokrek had no daughter, so he divided all the property between his two sons. According to the traditional rule, the property of this household should have been possessed by his wife and passed to her Mahari since she had no daughter, i.e. this should have been inherited by one of her sister's daughters (real or classificatory) but in this case this was passed to her sons. This was possible for Raichan Nokrek because all the lands of his household were recorded in his own name and

even the Khas lands were possessed by him. These lands were opened up by his own labour and the household property also was earned by himself. His wife was an Agate and she received nothing from her parents. So, the Mahari of his wife did not have any control over the property and that is why they could not lay claim to the property.

The tradition of passing the hereditary property to the Nokna daughter is still maintained. However, it should be noted that inheritance of hereditary property by the Nokna gives her no economic advantage as most of the items of such property have no commercial value anymore. For instance, the shape of the brass basin (Rang) is no longer attractive, and sword (Millam) is nothing more than a bush-knife, so nobody wants to buy them. The ritual importance of these things has also been minimized, as majority of the people have now converted to Christianity. However, people still have some emotional attachment to their hereditary goods, because these were the property of their forefathers. In fact, this is the only reason why people still attach so much importance to these items and keep them within the household.

Thus, the traditional system of ownership and inheritance of property is still maintained in most cases, although some adjustments have been made with changes in the land tenure system.

CHAPTER 5.

GARO MARRIAGE AND RESIDENCE.

It is clear from the discussion of the previous chapters that marriage within the same group, i.e. any order of the matrilineal descent group - Mahari, Machong, and Chatchi, is forbidden. To be more specific, a man cannot marry his (a) real or classificatory mother's sister's daughter, and (b) real or classificatory father's brother's daughter. That is, parallel cousin marriage is not allowed. This ideal rule is maintained carefully, but at present cases of marriage between parallel cousins, although remotely related, can be discovered. In Chunia I have not come across a single case of such marriage, but in another Garo village I discovered one such case (see Ch.3).

According to the ideal rules of the society marriage relationships must be established between a man and a woman who belong to opposite groups. The females of the opposite group whom a man can marry should stand in either of the following relationships to him:

- (a) real or classificatory mother's brother's daughter.
- (b) real or classificatory father's sister's daughter.

Thus, in principle, both matri- and patri-lateral cross-cousin marriage are allowed. In practice as well, both

types of cross-cousins are considered potential spouses. This can be clearly seen in the kinship terminology (see Ch.8). Earlier writers on the Garo have noted the occurrence of both forms of cross-cousin marriage in this society (see for example, Burling, 1963:96; Nakane, 1967:46). Both forms of cross-cousin marriage also appear in my census of Chunia (see below).

In all the fifty-four cases of marriage of the couples living at present in Chunia the husband and wife consider each other as cross-cousins, no matter how closely or remotely they are related. However, the degree of relationship varies from one case to another, and this is determined on the basis of the closeness or remoteness of the relationship between the husband's mother and wife's father. Thus, if the husband's mother and wife's father are full sister and brother, the couple is considered to be very closely related matrilateral cross-cousins. And if the husband's father and wife's mother are full brother and sister, the couple is considered to be very closely related patrilateral cross-cousins. The closeness or remoteness of cross-cousin relationship is clear in the statements of the Garo. Thus, when a man says, "My daughter's husband is my own sister's son, so he was related to me even before his marriage", or when a man says, "I have married my own mother's brother's daughter", it clearly implies that the relationship between the two cross-cousins, who were married, is very close. The idea of closeness or remoteness can also be found in the fact that although a man considers all the women of his own generation and group as his sisters and their sons as sister's sons, he always

distinguishes his own sister's sons from the others, and therefore, he always prefers to bring his own sister's son as the husband of his daughter. However, let us call the closely related cross-cousins "real" cross-cousins.

Besides the 'real' cross-cousins the relationship between marriage partners is also considered to be of either form of cross-cousins if the husband's mother and wife's father, or vice versa, of a couple, stand in either of following relationships:

(a) Member of the same Mahari, but not full brother and sister.

(b) Member of the same Machong.

(c) Member of the same Chatchi.

The Garo do not use any separate terms for such distant relatives, but the distinction of distant and close cross-cousin relationship between marriage partners can be discovered in the statements of people. Thus, when a man says, "My daughter's husband is, you may call, my sister's son, because his mother is like my sister since she belongs to our Mahari [or Machong, or Chatchi]", it clearly implies the remoteness of the relationships. However, in order to distinguish these types of distant cross-cousins from 'real' cross-cousins, let us call them 'classificatory' cross-cousins. Apparently, three different levels are involved in the above three relationships. These may be said to be:

(1) Classificatory cross-cousins at Mahari level.

(2) Classificatory cross-cousins at Machong level.

(3) Classificatory cross-cousins at Chatchi level.

People determine the degree of cross-cousin relationship according to the following principle:

Real cross-cousins are the closest, classificatory cross-cousins at the Mahari level are close, classificatory cross-cousins at Machong level are not so close not so distant, classificatory cross-cousin at Chatchi level are distant. The distribution of the fifty-four married couples presently living in Chunia according to the nature, level, and degree of cross-cousin relationships between the husband and wife, is shown in Table 5.1.

Table 5.1

Nature and Level of Cross-cousin Relationships.

| Nature and Level of Relationships | Degree of Relationships | Number of cases | Percent |
|-----------------------------------|----------------------------|-----------------|---------|
| Real | Very close | 6 | 11.1 |
| Classificatory at Mahari level | Close | 14 | 25.9 |
| Classificatory at Machong level | Neither close, nor distant | 22 | 40.8 |
| Classificatory at Chatchi level | Distant | 12 | 22.2 |
| Total | | 54 | 100 |

It matters little to a Garo man whether he marries his matri- or patri-lateral cross-cousin. Before the marriage of a

man, all female cross-cousins, matri- or patri-lateral, stand in the same position to him, i.e. all are potential wives to him. After marriage a wife is a wife, no matter whether she was once related to a man as a real or classificatory cross-cousin. However, the father of a girl always prefers his full sister's son as the husband of his daughter. Thus, the closeness or remoteness of relationship is of importance to the father of a girl, but not to the man she marries. The reasons for such preference will be discussed below.

In Table 5.1, the nature, level, and degree, of cross-cousin relationship were shown but I have not mentioned what form of cross-cousin relationships these are. In fact, it is difficult to ascertain the form of cross-cousin relationship without considering the level and degree of relationships I have outlined here, because in many cases of marriage it is difficult to establish any exact genealogical relationship between the husband's and the wife's parents. In the twelve cases of marriage at Chatchi level, it is really puzzling to determine what form of cross-cousins the husbands and wives of these couples are, because in each of these twelve cases the husband's father and wife's mother, or vice versa, are only related at Chatchi level. As a result, the cross-cousin relationship of such a couple may be regarded as patrilateral if considered one way, and again the same relationship may be regarded as matrilateral if considered another way. Let me give an example.

A man, Shahin Mri, married Jepri Rema. Shahin Mri's mother

belongs to the Machong called Mri and his father to the Machong called Nokrek; on the other hand, Jepri Rema's father is a member of Dangsus Machong and her mother is a member of Rema Machong. Of these four Machong groups - Mri and Dangsus belongs to Sangma Chatchi, and Nokrek and Rema belongs to Marak Chatchi. This may be presented diagrammatically as follows:

Diagram 1.

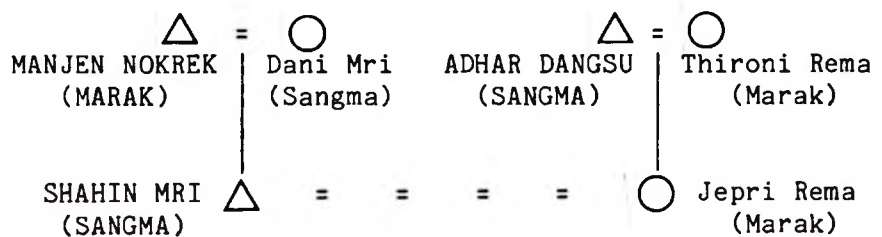


Diagram 1 reveals that neither of Shahin Mri's parents are related to either of Jepri Rema's parents at Mahari or even at Machong level, since the Mahari or even the Machong groups of neither of Shahin Mri's parents is common to those of either of Jepri Rema's parents. But if Chatchi membership is considered it can be seen that the Machong groups of Shahin's mother and that of Jepri's father, i.e. Mri and Sangma, respectively, belong to the same Chatchi - Sangma. Thus, being members of the same Chatchi Shahin's mother and Jepri's father are related as classificatory sister and brother. In this society the males and females of the same Chatchi belonging to the same generation are classificatory brothers and sisters to each other (see Ch.8). Thus, Shahin and Jepri's marriage may be considered as

'classificatory' matrilateral cross-cousin marriage at Chatchi level. But their marriage may also be regarded as 'classificatory' patrilateral cross-cousin at Chatchi level, since the Machong groups of Shahin's father and that of Jepri's mother belong to the same Chatchi, Marak, and therefore, Shahin's father and Jepri's mother are classificatory brother and sister, respectively. Thus, Shahin and Jepri's marriage may be considered both as matri- and patri-lateral cross-cousin at Chatchi level, depending on the way in which the relationship is considered. Almost all the men I asked - How was your wife related to you before your marriage? - gave me the simple answer, "My wife was my Jik" or "My wife was the daughter of my Mama". The term Jik is used for both matri- and patri-lateral female cross-cousins, and the term Mama is used for both real or classificatory mother's brothers and real or classificatory father's sister's husbands (see Ch.8). Thus, it is difficult to ascertain from peoples' statement what form of cross-cousin marriage they practise. The only way to determine the relationship is to establish specific relationships from their genealogies, which, as has already been noted, is difficult in many cases. However, it should be noted that sometimes some people say that they have married their mother's brother's daughter although such a mother's brother is not real or even classificatory at Mahari level. Out of the twelve cases, mentioned under cross-cousin marriage at Chatchi level, three men were completely unknown, before their marriage, to their wives or to their wives' fathers, but they still said that they had

married their mother's brother's daughters. In fact, cross-cousin relationships do not exist in many cases of marriage, particularly in cases like these twelve marriage, but once a man and a woman are married they consider each other to be related as cross-cousins. This is evident even in those cases where the husband and wife were completely unknown to each other before their marriage.

Except in these twelve cases of marriage, a real or classificatory cross-cousin relationship, either matri- or patri-lateral, may be established between the husband and wife in the other forty-two cases although an exact genealogical relationship cannot be found in all of them. Thus, in six out of these forty-two cases, a relationship of brother and sister between the wife's father and husband's mother, respectively, can be established from their genealogies, so these six cases may be regarded as 'real' matrilateral cross-cousin marriage. In thirty-six out of the forty-two cases exact genealogical relationships cannot be established, but a brother and sister relationship between the wife's father and husband's mother, or vice versa, can be found either at Mahari, or at least at Machong, level. Therefore, these cases may be regarded as either matri- or patri-lateral cross-cousin marriage, depending on their relationships. Table 5.2 shows the number of matri- and patri-lateral cross-cousin marriages with the degree and level of relationships.

Table 5.2
Forms of Cross-cousin Marriages.

| Forms of Cross-cousin Marriage | Nature and level Relationship | | | Total | Percent |
|--------------------------------|-------------------------------|----------------|---------------|-------|---------|
| | Real | Classificatory | | | |
| | | Mahari level | Machong level | | |
| Matrilateral | 6 | 14 | 17 | 37 | 68.5 |
| Patrilateral | -- | -- | 5 | 5 | 9.3 |
| Ambiguous | | | | 12 | 22.2 |
| Total | 6 | 14 | 22 | 54 | 100 |

Table 5.2 reveals that the number of matrilateral cross-cousin marriages is much higher than that of patrilateral cross-cousin marriage. Therefore, it appears, at least statistically, that the Garo practise matrilateral cross-cousin marriage. They say, "In our society a man marries his mother's brother's daughter" or "A man should marry his mother's brother's daughter". However, it is also clear from Table 5.2 that although they say they should marry their mother's brother's daughters, they also marry their father's sister's daughter, and it is not against their marriage rules. All the anthropologists, who have worked with Garo (e.g. Burling, 1963; Nakane, 1967) or who have mentioned the Garo in their writings (such as, Leach, 1951; Homans and Schneider, 1955), regard Garo marriage as matrilateral cross-cousin marriage. In fact, if we consider the general practice Garo marriage may legitimately be regarded as

matrilateral cross-cousin.

Garó marriage is closely connected with the Garó system of property inheritance. Nokna inherits the right to own the property that belonged to her mother, and her husband, the Nokrom, inherits from her father the right to manage the property of this household (see Ch.4). Therefore, Garó marriage rules require the Nokrom should be the Nokna's father's sister's son (real or classificatory). In other words, the Nokna should be the Nokrom's matrilateral cross-cousin, real or at least classificatory at Mahari level. But this rule is not strictly adhered to in the case of the marriage of an Agate daughter. That means, the rule should strictly be followed in case of Nokna-Nokrom marriage. The reasons for the existence of such a rule will be discussed in the next chapter. Let us discuss Nokna and Agate marriages separately.

1. Marriage of a Nokna (heiress) daughter.

The marriage of the Nokna daughter of a household involves the following two processes of selection:

(a) The selection of Nokna from among the daughters of a household.

(b) The selection of the Nokrom, i.e. the husband for the Nokna, from among the Nokna's father's sister's sons.

Let us discuss the process of selection of the Nokna and Nokrom.

2. The Selection of a Nokna.

There is no specific rule regarding the selection of a Nokna - anyone of the daughters of a household may be selected by her parents as the Nokna. Garo say that the daughter whom the parents consider to be the most suitable for their protection and support in old age is usually selected as Nokna. In principle, there is no preference for the eldest over the youngest or vice versa, but it is generally observed that the youngest daughter is selected by the parents as the Nokna. Out of the fifty-four married couple presently living in Chunia, nineteen are Nokna-Nokrom couple, and the other thirty-five are Agate couples. Table 5.3 shows the distribution of the nineteen Nokna of Chunia according to their position amongst their respective sisters.

Table 5.3

The Position of Nokna among other daughters.

| Position of Nokna daughter | Number of Households | Percent |
|----------------------------|----------------------|---------|
| Youngest daughter | 15 | 78.9 |
| Second daughter | 2 | 10.5 |
| Eldest daughter | 1 | 5.3 |
| Only daughter | 1 | 5.3 |
| Total | 19 | 100 |

It can be seen from Table 5.3 that in most cases the youngest daughter was selected as the Nokna. Some people

explained to me that all the elder daughters of a household are generally married away when their parents are still young, but when the youngest one reaches the age of marriage (usually fourteen or fifteen years) the parents generally are old and therefore, they select the youngest daughter as the Nokna, who, together with her husband, the Nokrom, remains in her parents' household and both look after them in their old age. It is worth noting in this context that according to Garo marriage rules a Nokna must be selected before her marriage. So the elder daughters of a household who were already married away as Agate get no chance, under ordinary circumstances, of being selected as Nokna. Therefore, the youngest daughter generally gets this privilege. But if the parents consider it to be necessary to select the Nokna before their youngest daughter reaches the age of marriage, they may do so. However, in ordinary circumstances, the parents usually do not do so. But in special circumstances, especially when the father is unable to work, a Nokna is selected in order to bring a Nokrom, who could work for the household in place of the Nokna's father. In one of the two cases, where the second daughter was selected as Nokna (see Table 5.3) the girl's father could not work for the household as he had lost his eyesight, so he required a man to help him with household works. The eldest daughter of this household was already married out as an Agate, so the man and his wife selected their second daughter. There are two other daughters, younger than the one who was selected as Nokna, but none of them have reached the age of marriage, so the parents could not wait for the youngest daughter

to grow. They badly required a man for household works, so they selected their second daughter mainly to bring a man, i.e. the husband of this daughter, who could help with household works. In the other case, where the second daughter was selected as Nokna, the reason was quite different from the one I have just described. In this case, the husband of the household liked one of his own sister's sons, and he wanted to bring this sister's son of him as the Nokrom son-in-law. This man said to me, "I considered this sister's son of mine to be the most suitable man to become the Nokrom of our household". But when this sister's son reached the age of marriage the eldest daughter of this man was already married away as an Agate, and his youngest daughter was too young for this sister's son. So in order not to lose this sister's son the man and his wife selected their second daughter as Nokna and brought this sister's son as the Nokrom. In one household the eldest daughter was selected as the Nokna. In this household, there was a Nokna already selected by the first wife, but the second wife of this household removed this Nokna for certain reasons after the death of the first wife, and selected her eldest daughter instead (see Ch.9 for this case). As the other daughters of the second wife of this household were too young she had to select her eldest daughter for the same reason as described above in the other cases, i.e. to bring a Nokrom who could look after her and her younger children. A man was essential for this household as the second wife is a widow.

According to my informants, in certain other circumstances, the eldest daughter is selected as the Nokna, e.g. when both

husband and wife of a household die living behind very young children, then the members of the deceased wife's Mahari select a female guardian for the children until they grow up. When the eldest daughter grows up she is appointed as the Nokna by members of her Mahari and she and her husband take responsibility for looking after her younger siblings. However, I have not come across any such case.

Should there be no daughters born to a woman or if all her daughters have died, she must adopt a girl and appoint her as Nokna. It is always preferred to adopt a full sister's daughter, but if a full sister's daughter is unavailable any other classificatory sister's daughter, either at Mahari or at least at Machong level, should be adopted. Under no circumstances is a woman allowed to adopt a girl from a Machong other than her own. Among the present population of Chunia no case of an adopted Nokna was found. However, from the genealogy of a man of Chunia I have discovered one such case. The mother of this man was adopted by her mother's sister who had no daughter of her own.

Although the selection of Nokna for a household is made both by the husband and wife, the wife's opinion should, at least in principle, carry greater weight as the Nokna is her heiress. Thus, if there is any disagreement between the husband and wife as to the selection of a Nokna, the wife may insist upon her decision and if she does, her decision must be accepted. However, I have come across no such case of disagreement between husband and wife in the selection of Nokna. All of the nineteen

Nokna of Chunia were selected, as I was told by them, by both their parents.

It is important to note that neither husband nor wife nor both together have any final authority to select a Nokna without the consent and formal approval of the male members of the wife's Mahari. The male members of the Mahari reserve the right to select a Nokna. If the husband and wife select one of their daughters as Nokna without the approval of the male members of wife's Mahari, the selection is invalid. The decision of the Mahari thus is final and supreme. However, in almost every case the Mahari people approve the selection of a Nokna by the husband and wife of a household.

Even after the selection of a Nokna the Mahari members may cancel her rights of Noknaship if she fails to fulfil her duties and obligation towards her parents' household. I have encountered one such case in Chunia, (will be described later). A Nokna, who is formally selected by the members of the Mahari, may also be removed by them on certain other grounds as well. I have not found any case of removal except the one I have just mentioned, however, my informants told me that the Noknaship may be cancelled on the following grounds:

(a) When a Nokna is already selected but found to be unfit physically, mentally, or otherwise.

(b) When a Nokna is already selected but she refuses to marry the Nokrom chosen for her. In such cases, as my informants said,

she is given two alternative choices and she must choose one or the other, but if she fails to do so, she is removed.

People told me that generally they do not have to remove a Nokna as she in most cases does not refuse to marry the Nokrom chosen for her, since the members of the Nokrom's Mahari, especially the Nokna's father, make all possible attempts to choose the most suitable man. However, even if a Nokna refuses, it is possible for her to choose one from the alternative choices given to her.

In any of the above situations and also in cases of the death of an already selected Nokna, it usually becomes difficult for the Mahari members to replace the Nokna by a new one. If the youngest daughter has been selected as Nokna, no other unmarried daughter of the household may be expected to replace her. I have already noted that a daughter already married out may not be selected as Nokna since the Nokna must be selected before her marriage. However, in the above circumstances, the Mahari members may appoint one of the married daughters as Nokna. This is their discretionary power. Generally a problem arises in such a case, because none of the married daughter's husband may belong to the Mahari of the daughter's father, but according to the customary law, the husband of the Nokna must belong to the Mahari or at least to the Machong of Nokna's father (see below). However, if an already married daughter has a husband belonging to the same Mahari or at least to the same Machong as that of her father, then this daughter is appointed as the Nokna. But if

there is no daughter of the household with the correct requirements, the wife of the household must adopt one of her real or classificatory sister's daughter and appoint her as Nokna.

None of the daughters of a household can claim the right of Noknaship - this must be decided by the parents and the Mahari of the wife of the household. Even if a daughter claims this position her claim may be rejected by her parents. In fact, there is hardly any scope for dispute among the sisters, because the parents, as has already been noted, generally select the Nokna when they become unable to work and the other daughters cannot wait until that time. Daughters are married as soon as they reach marriageable age, and once they are married as Agate they lose the chance of being selected as Nokna except in the special situations described above. Thus, there is hardly any competition among the daughters of a household over the right of Noknaship. I have not come across a single case of dispute among full sisters of a household. However, disputes over the right of Noknaship between daughters of two wives of the same household do occur.

It may be noted in this connection that the existence of more than one wife in a household is possible among the Garo because of the following reasons:

(1) Serial Monogamy : This is very frequent as a man is provided with a replacement wife when his wife dies (see Ch.7). Also, a man marries again after divorce.

(2) Polygyny : Some Garo, especially the wealthy people, practise polygyny. However, nowadays the Christian Garo do not practise polygyny as they say that Christianity does not approve of it, but non-Christian Garo still practise it.

In case of serial monogamy the new wife must be of the same Mahari or at least of the same Machong as the deceased wife. In case of polygynous marriage the secondary wife, however, may be of any Mahari or Machong, although a woman belonging to the same Mahari or Machong as that of the first wife is always preferred as a secondary wife. However, when there are more than one wife, whether at the same time or one after another, in a household the Nokna must be selected from amongst the daughters of the first wife. No secondary wife is allowed to select Nokna (the position of the first and secondary wives will be discussed in ch.). If the secondary wife belongs to the same Mahari as the first wife she may be allowed to select one of her daughters as Nokna in certain special circumstances: if the first wife has no daughter born to her or all her daughters have died; if the Nokna selected by the first wife is removed by the members of the Mahari for whatever reason; also, if there are no other unmarried daughters of the first wife available to replace the previous Nokna. Except in these special circumstances, no secondary wife is allowed to select Nokna from among her daughters.

Out of the nineteen households, in which the present nineteen Nokna of Chunia were born, sixteen were composed of one

wife only and in the other three households there were more than one wife (one of these three was a case of serial monogamy, and the other two were cases of polygyny). In all these three households, the Nokna were selected from among the daughters of the first wife. However, in one case, the Nokna selected by the first wife was removed by the second wife after the death of the first wife. As a result a dispute arose between the old Nokna and the new Nokna. For a description of this disputes, see ch.

3. The Selection of a husband (Nokrom) for the Nokna.

A husband for the Nokna daughter, Nokrom, is selected, as has already been noted, from among the sister's sons of the Nokna's father. The Nokna's father always tries to select one of his full sister's son, but a full sister's son may not be available for various reasons such as,

(a) A man may have no full sister at all.

(b) A man may have one or more full sisters, but none of his sister's sons may be of the right age to become the husband of his Nokna daughter.

(c) None of the full sister's sons of a man may agree to marry his daughter.

In any of the above situations, a man has to look for his classificatory sister's son at Mahari level, but even if such a classificatory sister's son is unavailable, he has to select the Nokrom from his classificatory sister's son at Machong level. Under no circumstances, may a man select the Nokrom from any

Machong other than that of his own.

In the selection of a Nokrom the decision of the husband of a household is more important than that of the wife, since the Nokrom is the heir to his social status and rights after his death. However, a man may consult his wife before the selection of a Nokrom, although he is not obliged to do so. The final authority in the selection rests, as in the case of Nokna, with his Mahari members. No selection may be valid without the formal approval of his Mahari members.

In all the nineteen cases of Nokna-Nokrom marriages in Chunia, the Nokroms were related to the Noknas' fathers either as real or at least as classificatory sister's son. Table 5.4 shows these relationships.

Table 5.4
Relationships between Nokna's father and Nokrom.

| Nokna's father's relationship to Nokrom | Number of cases | Percent |
|--|-----------------|---------|
| Real sister's son | 5 | 26.3 |
| Classificatory sister's son (at Mahari level) | 11 | 57.9 |
| Classificatory sister's son (at Machong level) | 3 | 15.8 |
| Total | 19 | 100 |

If the relationships shown in Table 5.4 are considered the other way round it would appear that the Nokrom marries his real

or classificatory mother's brother's daughter. Table 5.4 reveals that the ideal rule of marriage, i.e. matrilateral cross-cousin marriage, is still maintained in spite of the extensive changes in other areas of society.

When the Nokna and Nokrom are selected and approved by their respective Mahari the members of both Mahari sit together and formally finalize the selection. Then, the marriage between a Nokna and Nokrom is arranged. Thus, in the marriage of the Nokna and Nokrom the Mahari members are involved. The final authority to select the Nokna and Nokrom is vested in their respective Mahari, because both Mahari are very careful to hold their respective rights. The Nokna's Mahari holds the right to own property and the Nokrom's Mahari holds the right to manage this property (see Ch.4). Both Mahari also take great care to select the Nokna and Nokrom in such a way so that after the Nokna's parents' death the Nokna and Nokrom may replace them and the household may be continued. The continuation of a household is given much importance in order to maintain the relationship between two Mahari which was established through previous marriages, i.e. the marriage of the Nokna's parents (see also Ch.7).

4. Marriage of an Agate (non-heiress) daughter.

In the marriage of an Agate daughter there is no hard-and-fast rule that an Agate's husband must belong to the same Mahari or Machong as that of her father. A husband for an

Agate may be chosen from any Mahari or Machong of the opposite Chatchi. Thus, group exogamy, at all levels of descent group - Mahari, Machong, and Chatchi - is also maintained even in the marriage of an Agate. Although it is not required by Garo marriage rules, matrilateral cross-cousin marriage is practised even in case of an Agate's marriage. Table 5.5 shows the relationships between the Agate's husband and her parents in the thirty-five Agate marriages in Chunia.

Table 5.5

Relationship between Agate's parents' and her husband.

| Relationship of Agate's husband to her father or mother | Number of cases | Percent |
|--|-----------------|---------|
| Agate's father is real mother's brother | 1 | 2.8 |
| Agate's father is classificatory mother's brother (at Mahari level) | 3 | 8.6 |
| Agate's father is classificatory mother's brother (at Machong level) | 14 | 40.0 |
| Agate's mother is classificatory father's sister (at Machong level) | 5 | 14.3 |
| Ambiguous | 12 | 34.3 |
| Total | 35 | 100 |

In the marriage of the Agate daughters also their father may choose husbands for them and if an Agate likes the young man chosen as her husband her father arranges the marriage. In this

case however, neither the father nor any one else of Agate's Mahari persuades her to marry the husband selected by her father. In an Agate fancies a certain young man and wants to marry him, she is allowed to do so. But even in such cases she tells her father to arrange her marriage to the man whom she loves, and her father arranges her marriage without any fuss. Out of the thirty-five Agate couples of Chunia, only in two cases I have found evidence from the villagers that the wives, before their marriage, fancied the men who are now their husbands. These two marriages were arranged by the women's fathers according to the wish of these two women. Thus, it is clear that the proportion of Agate marriages in which the father selected husbands for his daughters is higher than that of the cases in which the Agate themselves chose their husbands. In the past however, it is clear from a number of sources, that the situation was very different and agate daughters chose their own husbands more frequently than today (see Burling,1963; Nakane,1967).

Even in the past the marriage of an Agate was arranged by her father, but the father used to be less eager to choose a husband for his Agate daughters. He was very eager to choose the husband for his Nokna daughter. So the Agate daughters had to choose their own husbands in most cases. The Agate daughters were not supposed to rely on their father to choose a husband for them, although the father would choose husbands for them in some cases. In the past it should be noted, there were ample opportunities for young girls to meet young boys and to make friendship or even in some cases, engaging in sexual relations

with them. It was possible for girls to meet young boys of their own village and also of other villages on the occasion of their own village festivals and of neighbouring villages. In these festivals, the young boys and girls of a village participated in dances and there were possibilities for young girls to come in contact with some boys and to strike up friendships with particular young boys. Moreover, young girls used to go to the village market, where they could meet young boys of neighbouring villages (cf. Burling, 1963:82-83).

However, unmarried boys and girls never associated freely like married men and women as it was not allowed by their parents. Parents thought that free mixing of unmarried boys and girls would lead to sexual relations between them, which was not desirable according to custom. Garo custom permits sexual relations only between married partners. However, once an unmarried boy and girl established a friendly relationship they could manage to speak, although briefly, to each other in the village or on their way to market, and certainly during village festivals. If a boy and girl had some understanding between themselves they could arrange to have sexual intercourse. Boys and girls could easily escape the supervision of their parents by claiming to be going to work. Besides this, unmarried boys did not sleep in their parents' house. From the age of five or six years all boys of a Mahari used to sleep at the Nokpante ('Bachelor's house'; Nok = house, pante = Bachelor), which was a building generally located at the centre of the village and used as a sleeping place for bachelor boys only. Women were not

allowed to enter the Nokpante, but unmarried girls entered the Nokpante through the back door (never through the front door, as it was forbidden) and call to their fiance. During village festivals unmarried girls brought foodstuffs for their lovers and pass them to them through the back door of the Nokpante (cf. Burling, 1963:115; Nakane, 1967:67-68). Sometimes some unmarried girls who continued sexual relations with their boy friends would get pregnant. In such cases, the parents of the girl and that of her lover would arrange their marriage. Such a marriage was not considered to be disgraceful, although sexual relations between unmarried boys and girls was not permitted. In such cases, the girls father would think that it was his fault, he should have arranged the marriage for his daughter earlier. However, neither the girl nor the boy who were engaging in a premarital sexual relations were punished. In fact, it was not considered by the Garo that either of them had committed an offence, since both the boy and girl were unmarried neither of them has infringed upon the rights of anybody. Thus, sexual relations between an unmarried boy and a girl was tolerated by the society, and the marriages arranged in such cases was quite legal and acceptable. Such a marriage, however, was known as 'Tunapa' (which means, 'entering to sleep') and thus distinguished from normal marriage, but it was never looked down. However, such cases of marriage was very rare, because in most cases where an unmarried boy and girl had sexual relations the girl would suggest to her father that she wished to marry the boy whom she likes and her father arranged the marriage. Thus, in most cases, marriage were

arranged before the girl's getting pregnant.

Nowadays, young girls rarely go to the village market. Village festivals are also no longer observed (see Ch.2). However young boys and girls can still meet each other or even develop friendships during Christmas and at other Christian festivals. But they cannot continue such relationships by meeting regularly, because in most cases, the young girls do not work in the fields as they used to in the past, so they do not get that much opportunity to escape from the supervision of their parents. On the other hand, Bangladesh Garo no longer build Nokpante, so boys have to sleep with their parents and it is difficult to get out of the house at night and escape the parents' supervision. However, the educated Christian boys and girls continue their friendships by writing letters to each other. Sometimes, illiterate boys and girls also write letters to each other with the help of friends who can read and write. Thus, a girl sometimes proposes that her lover marry her and if the boy agrees she suggests to her father that he arranges her marriage to that boy (cf. also Nakane, 1967:70-73). However, in most cases the father chooses the husband for his daughters, so they do not have to take the responsibility as they did in the past.

5. The Arrangement of Marriages.

The arrangement of marriages for both the Nokna as well as Agate daughters are made by their father. In both cases the

father proposes to his would-be-son-in-law as well as his parents and if they agree to the marriage he formally arrange the marriage of his daughter, whether the daughter is a Nokna or an Agate. According to custom, the proposal of marriage should always come from the girl herself or from her parents. Neither the boy himself, nor his father, nor even any one of his relatives, proposes marriage even if the boy loves the girl. This custom existed in the past and is still maintained. Nowadays, although some educated Christian boys propose to the girl's relatives, cases of such proposals from a boy are very rare even today. I have found only one case in Chunia where an educated boy proposed his own marriage. People do not think that he has done something wrong, but they think this was unusual in their society. My informants said, "According to our custom, a man or his parents, or any one of his relatives, should not propose his marriage, it is the woman or her parents, or other relatives who should propose first". Nobody could give me any reason for this custom. However, I think, a boy's father is not that eager to arrange his son's marriage as he knows that after marriage his sons will move to their wives households, and he will loose the help that he received from his sons. Burling considers that as an unmarried girl may get pregnant, her parents always think that it is better to get her established before it is too late. Thus, in Burling's view, as the girl's parents have such a fear they are eager to arrange her marriage, whereas the boy's parents have no such fear and therefore are less eager to propose marriage (see Burling, 1963:76).

According to Garo custom, when a man is proposed by a girl's father to marry his daughter the man always replies in the negative even if he loves the girl or he had sexual relations with her. My informants said, "We think that a man should not show that he wants to marry a certain girl, even if a man loves a girl he should not say to the girl's father or any one else of her relatives that he will marry that girl. If anybody does so, other people laugh at him. Everybody will say that the man possesses no shame". Nakane considers that "refusals of marriage help to establish the boys in a more powerful position after their marriage" (1967:73). She writes, "Most Garo men have to go alone to a new village at marriage, leaving familiar kinsmen and the fields of their native village. A newcomer, a newly-wed bridegroom, is in a weak position as a result of uxorilocal marriage; in order to combat this situation, he endeavours to discover the girl's weakness during his courtship. Then finally he decides to marry if he likes the girl, but pretends to do so unwillingly and only at the strong request of both her and her kinsmen" (Nakane, 1967:73-74).

In the past, Garo practised the custom of bridegroom capture. After the negotiation of a marriage between the parents of a boy and a girl, the girl's father used to ask some of the unmarried young boys of his wife's Mahari (generally, the boys who belonged to the same generation as the girl) to capture and bring the selected bridegroom to the bride. These young boys would go with enthusiasm to the bridegroom's village without letting him or other people know it, and they captured him

wherever he was found. No permission was required from the bridegroom's parents and in fact, they were not even informed. When the bridegroom was surrounded by the young captors he would try his best to flee, but his captors would surround him and he had to surrender. None of the bridegroom's relatives would attempt to protect him, rather every one enjoyed the scene. Thus, no fight would ensue between the captors and the bridegroom's relatives. Only the bridegroom would attempt to resist but not for long. The captors escorted him to the bride's parents' house, gripping his arm so he cannot escape. After reaching the bride's parents' house the captors made the bridegroom visit every house in the village, surrounded all the time so he cannot flee. In the evening all the villagers gathered at the bride's parents' house and where they eat and drink. At night the captors brought the bridegroom to the bride's room and made him sleep in the same bed with her. The captors lied down all around this bed in such a way that he cannot escape, but if the captors would fall asleep the bridegroom could manage to escape. If he succeeded the captors again captured him and again he was forced to sleep with the bride. But the bridegroom would attempt to escape again if he could get the chance. Thus, a bridegroom would make several escape attempts. However, if the bridegroom was willing to marry the bride he would not try to escape after the third attempt, and if he would not want to marry the bride he would request his captors not to attempt to capture him again as he is not willing to marry this girl. In such cases the girl's parents would let

this bridegroom go and looked for another man. The Garo did not arrange a marriage of a boy and girl unless both of them are willing to marry each other, as they knew that the arrangement of such marriages would create many problems in the future.

The most interesting aspect of this custom is that even boys who were willing to marry also would try to escape and somehow or rather they managed to do so at least three times. Sometimes, a bridegroom behaved as if he settled down, so the captors did not guard him anymore, but after a few days he ran away (cf. Burling, 1963:83-90; Nakane, 1967:69-70. for other details).

Due to the changes in the other aspects of the society the custom of bridegroom capture is no longer practised. At present, the educated Christian Garo do not like the idea of capturing a bridegroom, but Non-Christian Garo sometimes discuss it and they are willing to observe the custom. However, they are unable to arrange the party of young boys to capture the bridegroom, because most of the young boys are Christian and most of them are educated, so they do not want to participate anymore. The old men of Chunia, who did capture bridegroom for the females of their own group and who themselves were captured by their wives' group, told me, "It was a good fun for all the villagers and we really used to enjoy the scene. We miss it". I asked these old men - why they practised the custom of bridegroom capture, whether it was only for making a good fun or it had any purpose? - and all of them said, "This was our custom. We do not know why we practised it. Our forefathers practised this custom and so

did we".

There is a significant difference between the residence at marriage of the Nokna-Nokrom couple and that of the Agate couple. In order to show this difference they will be discussed separately.

6. Nokna-Nokrom Residence at Marriage.

After marriage, the Nokna and Nokrom must live in the household of the Nokna's parents. Although a separate house is built for them near the main house of the Nokna's parents, the Nokna and Nokrom are always considered to be the members of the main household. The new couple must work for this household and must have their meals from the common kitchen of the household. Whatever this new couple earn belongs to the Nokna's parents household and they (Nokna and Nokrom) are not allowed to accumulate wealth separately. The rule of residence is so strict that if the Nokna-Nokrom leave the Nokna's parents' household they lose their rights.

As the Nokrom must live in the household of his wife's parents, which ultimately becomes his wife's household after the death of his wife's parents, the residence of the Nokrom may be regarded as 'Uxorilocal'. This may also be regarded as 'Avunculocal', since the Nokrom's wife's father is, in fact, his mother's brother (real or classificatory) as well. Thus, the residence of the Nokna-Nokrom may be said to be 'Uxori-Avunculocal' (cf. also Burling, 1963:212;

Nakane,1967:47). As the essence of selecting the Nokna and Nokrom is mainly to replace the old couple by the new couple after the death of the old couple, and since the Nokna and Nokrom inherits the Nokna's parents social status after their death, this residence pattern should, in principle, be maintained in all cases. In practice as well, this is maintained even today. In all the nineteen cases of Nokna-Nokrom couples of Chunia, the Nokroms were found living in the households of their respective wife's parents.

7. Agate Residence at marriage.

Ideally no man is allowed to bring his wife to his parents' household, so at marriage the husband of an Agate moves, like the Nokrom, to his wife's parents' household. But an Agate's husband is not allowed to live permanently in the Agate's parents' household. An Agate couple is allowed to live in the Agate's parents' household for only a temporary period and afterwards the couple must leave and establish a separate and economically independent household of their own. This temporary period varies from months to years (generally not more than three years) depending on the Agate couple's economic ability to establish a separate household. In the initial establishment of their new household, however, the couples are given help and assistance by the Agate's parents (see Ch.4). Thus, the Agate couple's temporary residence in the Agate's parents' household may be regarded either as (a) Uxori-Avunculocal - in those cases where the men marry their mother's brother's daughter (real or

classificatory) or (b) Uxorilocal only - in those cases where the men marry their father's sister's daughters (real or classificatory). But as this is only a temporary arrangement, we should consider the permanent arrangement of residence for an Agate couple. An agate couple may establish their separate household in the natal village of the Agate, or that of her husband, or even in a village which is neither's natal village. Thus, the residence pattern in case of an Agate couple is not as uniform as it is in case of the Nokna-Nokrom couple.

Burling considers the residence of the Agate couples as both 'uxorilocal' and 'neolocal'. he distinguishes between two levels - the household and the village - and maintains that the residence in case of an Agate couple is "uxorilocal with respect to the village and neolocal with respect to the household" (1963:213). Burling argues that the residence is 'neolocal' as the couple establish new household, and this is again 'uxorilocal', since the husband generally moves at marriage to his wife's village, where the couple establish their new household. However, he also notes that some men bring their wives to their own village instead of going to their wives' villages (see Burling,1963:223). That means, these men practise 'virilocal' residence. Nakane refers to the residence of the Agate couples either as 'uxorilocal' or as 'virilocal' at the village level as the couples establish their households either in the husbands' village or in the wife's village (see Nakane,1967:55). I think, if we consider the residence of the Agate couple at the village level it may involve four different

categories including those mentioned by Burling and Nakane.

Thus,

1. Uxori-Avunculocal - Those cases where the couples establish their households in the wife's village, which is at the same time the husband's mother's brother's village. This is true especially in those cases where the men marry their mother's brother's daughters (real or classificatory).
2. Uxorilocal only - Those cases where the couples establish their households in the wife's village but which is not the husband's mother's brother's village. This is true particularly in those cases where the men marry their father's sister's daughters (real or classificatory).
3. Virilocal - Those cases where the couples establish their households in the husband's village.
4. Neolocal - Those cases where the couples establish their households in a village which is neither the husband's nor the wife's natal village.

According to the above categories the distribution of the residence of the thirty-five Agate couple in Chunia is given in Table 5.6.

Table 5.6

Residence at marriage of Agate couples.

| Pattern of Residence (at village level) | Number of cases | Percent |
|--|--------------------|---------|
| Uxori-Avunculocal | 18 | 51.4 |
| Uxorilocal only | 9 | 25.7 |
| Virilocal | 7 | 20.0 |
| Neolocal | 1 | 2.9 |
| Total | 35 | 100 |

Out of these thirty-five Agate couples shown in Table 5.6, four are still living in the households of Agate's parents. Three of these four couples may be said to belong to the category 'Uxori-Avunculocal' and one to that of 'Uxorilocal only'. The husbands of each of these four couples told me that they will move out from their wives' parents' households and form their own households in their wives' village. So assuming their future residence, I have included these four couples in Table 5.6.

If a Garo is asked - where should an Agate couple live? - he or she will give the simple answer "In the wife's village". This is, in fact, the general practice of this society. A husband should live either in his wife's parents' household (in case of the Nokna-Nokrom couple) or in a separate household but in the wife's natal village (in case of the Agate couples). Thus, the Garo consider uxorilocal residence, at least at the village level, to be the ideal. In practice, this is maintained in all cases of Nokna-Nokrom couples. Although the ideal pattern of residence is also maintained in the case of an Agate couple, it varies in some cases (see Table 5.6).

Now, a question obviously concerns us - "why some men practise virilocal residence instead of practising the ideal uxorilocal residence?" In fact, this has been a disputed issue between two earlier observers - Burling and Nakane. Nakane considers the virilocal residence, which is practised by a minority of men, as the "variation" from the general arrangement of uxorilocal residence (1958:10; 1967:55). She holds that the

"variation" is the result of the personal attachment of some men to their natal village which encourages them to remain and bring their wives in their own village instead of going to their wives' village. Nakane gives an example from the village where she did her fieldwork (see Nakane,1967:56). But Burling is reluctant to treat virilocal residence as a variation from the general pattern. He maintains that this is an "absolutely essential arrangement for a minority of the couples in this society: some men must bring their wives to live in their village, though never in to their own mothers' house" (Burling,1958a:116). He argues that if all the sons and brothers of the women of a village move out as husbands to other villages, then all the adult married men of the village would certainly be from other lineages than that of the women. Such a situation is undesirable, because the women need the assistance of the male adult members of their lineage for various reasons (see Burling,1958a:116). In his later work Burling writes, "men hold the position of authority and make most of the important decisions. Since the lineage is an organization within which authority is exercised, it would be difficult or impossible to have a residence group built around the lineage without having some male members of that lineage actually in residence" (Burling,1963:167).

Nakane commenting on Burling's views notes, "These views are obviously based on a concept such as the strong cohesion and interdependence of brothers and sisters, which Schneider presents as one of the distinguishing features common to matrilineal people [see Schneider,1961,Introduction]. Though I do not deny

their view to be true to a certain extent in the Garo case, I am reluctant to take it as the only factor or the primarily decisive one in this particular situation. For I take the view that the Garo exemplify a quite different structure from other matrilineal systems such as appear in Schneider's just mentioned work; among the Garo solidarity of the descent group is minimized ... " (Nakane, 1967:56, Footnote). However, although Nakane maintains that 'solidarity of descent group is minimized, she does not ignore the bonds of matrilineal descent group among Garo as she writes in another place of her book, "No doubt, the Garo also have bonds of the descent group as do other matrilineal people ... " (Nakane, 1967:78). In fact, what Nakane wants to say is that the function of such descent group bonds is limited. She writes, "In the Garo system, the ownership of the property group and the authority of its controlling power can never be found in the same descent group, which certainly weakens the solidarity of the matrilineal descent groups" (Nakane, 1967:78).

Nakane is correct in saying that the solidarity of descent group is "minimized" or so to speak, "limited" among the Garo. Her arguments in this respect are quite logical. However, even if we accept Nakane's view, we cannot ignore the role of Garo males towards the females of their own group, more specifically, the role of the mother's brothers towards their nieces and that of brothers towards their sisters. The males of a Mahari group, which includes the mother's mother's brothers, mother's brothers, and brothers of the females of the same group are regarded as 'Chra' by the females (see also Ch.8). These Chra relatives have

certain rights, duties, and obligation towards the females who regard them as Chra. The women seek the help of their Chra relatives in the following situations:

- (a) If the husband of a woman does not behave properly to her;
- (b) If the husband does not work for the household;
- (c) If the husband spends money extravagantly or destroy the property;
- (d) If there is any serious dispute between a husband and a wife; and
- (e) If a woman cannot control her children.

In any of these first four situations the Chra relatives come and urge the husband to do his duty towards his wife as well as to maintain the household properly. If the husband does not respond, the Chra relatives of the women arrange a meeting in which the husband's relatives are called in and he is compelled by his relatives to do his duty according to the general customs of the society. In the fifth situation the Chra relatives of a woman come and threat and even beat the children of the woman and tell them to behave in future.

The role of the Chra as described above perhaps convinced Burling that women want some males of their own group to be resident in their villages, and some male members therefore reside in the village where the females of their own group live. But such a coresidnece of the male members for the purpose of fulfilling such responsibilities is not as necessary as Burling thinks it to be. The women do not need the help of their Chra relatives in their everyday life; when they need help they can

easily call upon their Chra who, in fact, live in villages not far from their own villages. In practice, Chra relatives are seldom called upon by a woman. Most family-quarrels between husbands and wives are settled by themselves, and in almost every household parents generally can control their children. Chra relatives are called upon only in cases of serious dispute between husbands and wives, or in cases of gross misconduct by children, where their parents cannot solve their problems themselves. It is also important to note that the Chra relatives usually do not interfere in family affairs unless their help is sought. However, in cases of serious dispute in which a female of the Mahari group is involved the Chra relatives intervene whether or not they are asked to. In such cases they always support the female of their own group. Thus, whenever a female member of the Mahari needs the assistance of male relatives they can always come to help her, and for this they do not need to live in the same village. In practice, not only the resident members of the Chra, but also the other non-resident members come forward with help if it is required.

Burling simply says, "some men must bring their wives to live in their village", but he has not provide us with any information regarding: (a) who are these "some men", i.e. who among the males should bring their wives to live in their own village? (b) By whom it is decided? (c) How many, or what proportion, of males should be resident in the village where the women of their Mahari live? Of course, he writes, "All or even a majority of the men cannot be required to live in the village

of their lineage, since this would require their sisters to move elsewhere and defeat the purpose of keeping some men at home; but it must somehow be arranged that a certain proportion of them stays" (Burling,1963:167). But he has not given us any idea of how this "certain proportion" is decided, and by whom it is decided, what are the criteria for the selection of this "certain proportion". He simply says, "it must be arranged somehow", which is extremely vague. In fact, all males are equally responsible; so nobody feels it a duty to reside in the village where the women of their group live, and nobody can compel anyone to do so. There is no set rule in this respect. Those who live in their own village do so for some other reasons (see below for some cases) and not exclusively for the reasons suggested by Burling.

Ideally, the coresidence of the males and females of the same Mahari group does not fit with Garo social structure due to the Garo system of property inheritance. In principle, men cannot own or inherit property, all property belongs to women (see Ch.4). However, when the Garo used to have village common land, Aking, a man could attain the right to cultivate land belonging to a woman through marriage. In order to enjoy this right a man had to move to his wife's village, where his wife would receive a share of the Aking of her village. No married man could gain the right to cultivate the Aking of his own village, even if he resided there for looking after the females of his own Mahari. Thus, all males had to move at marriage to their wives' village at least to enjoy the right to cultivate land belonging to their

wives, and also to make room for the males of other Mahari to come as husbands of their female relatives and to enjoy the similar rights which they enjoyed in their wives' vilages.

Due to socio-economic changes it became possible for some men to accumulate property (see Ch.4) and this individual property enabled them to live in their own villages instead of going to their wives' villages. This change was already occurring when Burling and Nakane did their fieldwork, and the trend has developed further, particularly among the Plains Garo of Bangladesh. The trend has affected the patterns of residence and this is evident from the fact that at present virilocal residence may be found not only at the village level but also at the household level in some cases. Both Burling and Nakane have noted the practice of virilocal residence only at the village level. Burling has clearly mentioned that some men bring their wives to their own village, but never in to their own mother's house (see Burling,1958a:116). But in Chunia, I have found two cases, out of the seven cases of virilocal residence, where the men brought their wives not only in their own village but also to their parents' household. It has been possible for them because of the changing socio-economic conditions.

One of these two men, Paresh Mri, told me, "I did not move to my wife's village because I wanted to serve the people of my own village. If I would have moved to my wife's village it would not have been possible to do something for the people of Chunia". When I asked him whether the villagers wanted him for this

purpose, he said, "No. Nobody urged me to reside in my village. I myself decided to do so". It may be noted that Paresh Mri is an educated Christian Garo. After receiving his education, he wanted to educate other Garo and thereby help them to cope with the larger society. His main objective, of course, was to achieve prominence and leadership in his own village by attracting the villagers through his service. However, he did not tell me anything about this, but I could guess this from his other activities (see Ch.9). Another important reason for Paresh Mri's living in his own village instead of going to his wife's village, as he himself told me, was to look after the property he received from his father (see Ch.4). Having had the advantage of inheriting both property and an established household it was possible for Paresh Mri to live in his own village, without which perhaps it would have not been possible for him even if he wished to serve the villagers by residing in his own village. It may also be mentioned that Paresh Mri's wife is an Agate daughter of another village, where she received no property from her parents (this, again, is the result of change - see Ch.4), so Paresh Mri had little incentive to settle in his wife's village. Thus, the reasons for Paresh Mri's practising virilocal residence may be either

(a) self-motivated for the service of his villagers, which includes not only the females of his own Mahari, but the other people of other groups as well, who live in Chunia. It is important to note that the service for which Paresh Mri did not move to his wife's village is not the kind of service suggested

by Burling.

(b) to look after the property that he received from his father.

Thus, the marital residence of Paresh Mri may be said to be virilocal residence at the village level as well as at the household level.

Another man, Sukumar Nokrek, brought his wife to his parents' house and presently lives there sharing his meals with his parents. Sukumar Nokrek is an eldest son, the other two brothers and three sisters of him are very young and cannot help their parents with the household work, so Sukumar has to do this with his father. This is the reason why his parents had allowed him to bring his wife to their house. However, if Sukumar's sisters reach maturity and if his father brings a Nokrom to the house, Sukumar might have to leave and establish a separate household. Thus, Sukumar's residence is virilocal at the household level, but it differs from that of Paresh Mri, since it is a temporary arrangement, whereas Paresh Mri's case is a permanent one. It is worth noting that even temporary virilocal residence at the household level was never practised in the past. But such temporary arrangement, as in Sukumar's case, may frequently be observed at present.

Except in the above two cases (i.e. the cases of Paresh Mri and Sukumar Nokrek), the other five of the seven cases of virilocal residence (see Table 5.6) are virilocal only at the village level. Let us also consider the reasons for practising

virilocal residence in case of these men.

Gajen Mri (the elder brother of Paresh Mri) established his household near his parents' house. He married an Agate daughter of another village where his wife received some land from her parents. Gajen Mri cultivates the land that his wife received in her village as well as the land he himself inherited from his father (see Ch.4). He did not move to his wife's village because, he likes to live in his own village. He told me, "I do not like to live in my wife's village. I prefer to live in my own village". He did not, of course, give me any reason why he does not like his wife's village, but with regard to his living in his own village he said, "This is my own village. I was born and brought up here. I know all the people of my village. So I feel more comfortable to live here than to live in another village".

In another case, a man, Robin Chisim, accumulated some property through his own labour when he was unmarried and also received some land from his parents; on the other hand, his wife, although she is an Agate daughter, also received some land from her parents in her natal village. After marriage, Robin Chisim moved to his wife's village, but after about a year he returned to his own village. In this case, Robin Chisim could have settled, as he told me, in his own village immediately after his marriage, but he had to go to his wife's village to obtain the land that his wife had received from her parents. When he could manage to sell that land and purchase some land near his

own village he changed his residence from his wife's village to his own village.

The other three men established their households near their parents' households instead of moving to their wives' parents' households. In these three cases, the husbands and wives, in fact, belong to Chunia. So neither the husband nor the wife had to move from their own village. However, the husbands moved from their parents' households.

It is very significant to note that nowadays in a large number of cases neither the husband nor the wife has to move out of their natal village (as in the cases of the three men mentioned above), because suitable marriage partners for a man or a woman can easily be found in their natal village (cf. also Burling, 1963:210; Nakane, 1967:55-60). This is a result of a number of factors:

(a) The practice of virilocal residence by some men. Matrilineal, and not patrilineal, descent is reckoned even for children born to those couples who practise virilocal residence. So the children of such couples may easily find their spouses in the village where they were born, i.e. their father's village, because unmarried children belonging to their father's Mahari, which is the opposite Mahari to these children, are in the same village.

(b) Due to the residence of the people of different Mahari groups within the same community, suitable marriage partners are

available within the the same village.

Both Burling and Nakane have noted the occurrence of marriages within the same village (see Burling, 1963:210-20; Nakane, 1967:55-60). Nakane refers to this type of marriage as "village endogamy". Cases of such marriages, which I would also call, like Nakane, village endogamy, were found in Chunia, three of which I have already mentioned above. The total number of marriages within the same village can be found in Table 5.7, which shows the distribution of spouse's natal village.

Table 5.7

Spouse's Natal Village.

| Spouse's Natal Village | No. of cases | Percent |
|---|--------------|---------|
| Both husband and wife were born in Chunia | 17 | 31.5 |
| Husband was born in a different village | 32 | 59.2 |
| Wife was born in a different village | 5 | 7.4 |
| Both husband and wife were born in different villages | 1 | 1.9 |
| Total | 54 | 100 |

The majority of the people of Chunia who married within the village gave me the following as the reason: "If we find suitable marriage partners within the village why should we go to other village", and "Marriage within the same village has a great

advantage as neither the husband nor the wife have to move from their own village, and they can live with their own relatives".

Due to such marriages it has become even more puzzling to ascertain the pattern of residence involved in these marriages. If we consider the residence at the village level it is difficult to say whether the residence of these couples is virilocal or uxori-local, because the natal village of both the husband and wife of such couples is the same. However, even in such marriages the men have to move at marriage from their parents' households; and similarly, the Agate daughters also have to move from their parents' households after a temporary residence. Only the Nokna daughter remains in her parents' household. The man who is selected as the Nokrom for a Nokna of the same village moves from his parents' household to his wife's parents' household, and in this case the residence is still Uxori-Avunculocal, even though the Nokna and Nokrom belong to the same village. But in the case of Agate daughters it is difficult to say whether the residence is virilocal or uxori-local. However, a consideration of the exact location of the Agate couples' separate household, i.e. whereabouts in the village they establish their households may serve as an indication of the residence pattern in these cases. Out of the seventeen couples in which both the husband and wife belong to Chunia, five are Nokna-Nokrom couples, so their residence is Uxori-Avunculocal as I have stated above. The other twelve are Agate couples. Of these twelve, three couples have established their households near the husband's parents' house, and the remaining nine couples

near the wife's parents' house. Thus, the residence of the couples who live near the husband's parents' house may be regarded as virilocal and that of the couples who live near the wife's parents' house may be regarded as uxorilocal, because in these cases the tendency of either virilocal or uxorilocal residence is clear. In fact, in either case the husband or the wife thinks as if they have moved out of their own village.

It is evident that the ideal pattern of 'Uxori-Avunculocal' and 'Uxorilocal only' is still maintained in a large number of cases, even in those cases of marriage within the same village. However, due to socio-economic changes the ideal pattern of residence has also changed and in some cases virilocal residence is practised. Burling is probably not quite right to consider the virilocal residence on the part of some men as an "absolutely essential arrangement". On the other hand, Nakane is right to treat this as a variation to the general pattern of residence. As regards the reason for this variation Nakane is correct in saying that this is due to the emotional attachment of some men to their natal village. However, from my own observation I would say that it could have only been possible for the men to live in their villages due to the socio-economic changes what have occurred in society.

CHAPTER 6.

GARO MATRILATERAL CROSS-COUSIN MARRIAGE.

If a Garo man, who is married to his mother's brother's daughter, is asked why he married her he will simply say that "My mother's brother has chosen me as the husband of his daughter". It has already been noted that a man does not propose marriage, the proposal of marriage comes from the woman's side and is generally made by the father of the girl (see Ch.5). Obviously a question arises - why does a man choose his sister's son as the husband of his daughter, particularly for the Nokna daughter? I asked many people and the reasons they gave were as follows:

"A sister's son is the most suitable man to be selected as Nokrom, because he would take care of his mother's brother, if the latter becomes his father-in-law. He is more dutiful than any other unrelated man".

"A sister's son is always preferred as the husband of the Nokna as well as Agate daughters, because we believe that if a sister's son becomes a son-in-law he will obey his father-in-law who is also his mother's brother. A sister's son and his mother's brother are the junior and senior male members of the same Mahari, so the former is expected to obey the latter".

If a man, other than a sister's son, is selected as the Nokrom he may not be responsible enough to look after the property of the Nokna's parents' household. If an unrelated man becomes the

Nokrom he might destroy the property of the household after his father-in-law's death but a sister's son is reliable and he will not do so".

"We have seen from the past experience that a sister's son makes the best possible Nokrom".

"We simply follow what our forefathers used to do".

Burling notes more or less similar statements as I have indicated (see Burling, 1958:747; 1963:174), and he maintains that the practice of matrilateral cross-cousin marriage among the Garo may be analysed on the basis of Homans and Schneider's theory if that theory is modified as he suggests. Before discussing Burling's modification of Homans and Schneider's theory, i.e. his addition of a new variable to their theory, and how far this is fruitful in an understanding of Garo matrilateral cross-cousin marriage it is essential to examine how far Homans and Schneider's original theory is applicable in the Garo case. Homans and Schneider themselves also include Garo society in their list of societies for testing and re-testing their "special hypothesis" and also to prove the validity of their "general theory" on the practice of unilateral cross-cousin marriage.

According to Homans and Schneider's "general theory", as they call it, "The form of unilateral cross-cousin marriage will be determined by the system of interpersonal relations precipitated by a social structure, especially by the locus of jural authority over ego" (1955:28-29). In order to develop this theory the authors first formulated the following hypothesis:

"Societies in which marriage is allowed or preferred with mother's brother's daughter but forbidden or disapproved with father's sister's daughter will be societies possessing patrilineal kin-groups and societies in which marriage is allowed or preferred with father's sister's daughter but forbidden or disapproved with mother's brother's daughter will be societies possessing matrilineal kin-groups" (1955:28).

This hypothesis is regarded by them as "special hypothesis" and they maintain that this "is a deduction from the theory rather than the theory itself" (1955:28). Both the "special hypothesis" and "general theory" have resulted from their question - "May not the type of uniteral cross-cousin marriage adopted by a society be associated with the type of linearity of its kin-groups?" (1955:21). As to the reason for suspecting such an association they hold that in patrilineal societies "jural authority over ego is vested in his father, and more remotely in his other patrilineal kinsmen of older generations" (1955:21) and "... a relationship somewhat different from father-son tie grows up between ego and his mother, who meets his compelling needs in infancy, and who is herself at least jurally subordinate to the father. She is much more warm and nurturant figure" (1955:22). So they argue, "Apparently as a result of the identification of the mother with her brother, who is her protector, and the status of the latter as an older male without jural authority over ego, ego's behaviour towards his mother's brother differs sharply from his behaviour towards his father. The relationship varies somewhat from one patrilineal society to another. Ego may show

great respect for mother's brother, but he also may think of him as intimate older friend, helper, and adviser. As Radcliffe-Brown pointed out, a mother's brother in the patrilineal complex tends to become a kind of male mother, and in some societies is called by a word that means just this" (1955:22).

On the above grounds they write, "We suspect that mother's brother's daughter marriage may be peculiarly common in patrilineal societies because of the close nature of the ties between ego and mother's brother in these societies" (1955:23). They demonstrate that mother's brother's daughter marriage in patrilineal societies is "sentimentally appropriate for the mother's brother, his daughter, and his sister's son" (1955:23-25). On the other hand, "father's sister's daughter marriage in patrilineal societies is not sentimentally appropriate because, the father's sister in these societies tends to become for ego a kind of 'female father', so she is treated with distance and respect" (1955:23).

They hold that in the matrilineal societies "...the relationship between ego and mother's brother much resembles that between ego and father in patrilineal complex, and vice versa, for ego and his father are close friends" (1955:26). Therefore, they suggest "The same kind of motivation that make matrilineal cross-cousin marriage peculiarly appropriate in patrilineal society make patrilineal cross-cousin marriage peculiarly appropriate in matrilineal society" (1955:27). They argue that

father's sister in matrilineal societies plays a different role from that which she has in a patrilineal society. She is friendly to ego and therefore marriage of father's sister's daughter is sentimentally appropriate in matrilineal societies. However, they note that so long as women are, in general and de jure, subordinate to men, matrilineal society can never be the mirror opposite of patrilineal (1955:28). Even though they stress that "We believe, nevertheless, that forces at work will be strong enough in some matrilineal societies to create a preference for father's sister's daughter marriage" (1955:28).

According to Homans and Schneider's theory the patrilateral form of cross-cousin marriage is expected in the Garo case but it is clear from the previous discussion that the Garo practise both patri- and matri-lateral cross-cousin marriage. Homans and Schneider are quite aware of this fact, so they have treated the Garo and three other matrilineal societies, viz. Kaonde, Kaska, and siriono, in which matrilateral cross-cousin is practised, to be exceptions to their special hypothesis. But they maintain that these and other exceptions, i.e. the preference of patrilateral form of cross-cousin marriage in two patrilineal societies, Kandyu and Sherente, are due to the fact that they derived their special hypothesis from the general theory "on the assumption that in matrilineal societies jural authority over ego would always be vested in mother's brother, and this is not the case" (1955:47). At this point they distinguish between two types of matrilineal complex, which are: (a) Trobriand-Haida complex - in which "ego typically goes to live with his mother's

brother before marriage and brings his wife to stay with him there: marriage is virilocal. From an early age jural authority is vested in mother's brother, and interpersonal relations are very different from what they are in the patrilineal complex; and (b) Kaska-Garo complex - in which ego continues to live with his father until he marries, when he goes to stay at his wife's place: marriage is uxorilocal. At least until ego marries, jural authority over him is vested in his father, and this is made all the more possible by the fact that the adult males of the mother's - and ego's - matrilineage have moved out. Interpersonal relations much resemble those of patrilineal complex (1955:47-48).

On the basis of the above distinction of matrilineal complex they claim that although "matrilineal societies are clear exceptions to our special hypothesis they turn out to conform to our general theory. That is, the locus of jural authority (in the father) and the system of interpersonal relations among kinsfolk are what we should expect, according to our general theory, to find associated with mother's brother's daughter marriage" (1955:47). So they modified their special hypothesis as follows:

"Societies in which marriage is allowed or preferred with mother's brother's daughter but forbidden or disapproved with father's sister's daughter will be societies in which jural authority over ego male, before marriage, is vested in his father or father's lineage, and societies in which marriage is allowed or preferred with father's sister's daughter but forbidden or

disapproved with mother's brother's daughter will be societies in which jural authority over ego male, before marriage, is vested in his mother's brother or mother's brother's lineage" (1955:51).

Let us examine how far this modified hypothesis of Homans and Schneider is applicable to the Garo case.

In this society authority within a Mahari group is vested in the male members and this is exercised according to the seniority of age. Thus, all the senior male members of a Mahari have authority over all the junior male as well as female members. The senior should play the role of disciplinarian over the juniors, whatever the degree of relationships between them may be, but it is generally the responsibility of the more closely related senior males to look after the behaviour of their younger ones. The mother's brother, being the senior man of a Mahari has to take the responsibility of disciplining his sister's children. As the mother's brother has jural authority over his sister's children he can, and in practice does, punish them when they are found guilty of any misbehaviour, or any offence, such as stealing, getting involved in illicit sexual relations, and any other activities which go against the formal rules of society. In cases of minor offences the punishment may take the form of shouting or threatening and telling them to behave in future. In cases of gross misconduct and serious offences, however, the offenders may be physically beaten (see Ch.9).

Although the mother's brother should, in principle, act as the disciplinarian for his sister's children, in practice, he

does not perform this role when the sister's children are very young. The father, in fact, looks after his children when they are very young. It is not possible for the mother's brother to look after his sister's children in everyday affairs, because he and his sister's children are not expected, at least in principle, to be co-resident in the same village (see Ch.5). So when the children are very young their father is the disciplinarian which, in principle, should be the role of their mother's brother. But it should be noted that although the father exercises some authority in day to day life he does not have any jural authority over his children, because he does not belong to the same Mahari as his children. The father may punish his children when they are very young and the punishment may take the form of shouting or even beating. But in case of serious offences which needs the offender to be physically punished in public, the father of the offender is not allowed to punish them, it is the mother's brother who punishes his sister's children. In such cases the mother's brother has to pay the compensation for the injury caused by his sister's children to any person or group, so it is he who is legally entitled to punish them (see Ch.9).

In simple case of misbehaviour the father generally can control his children but in order to do so he has to threaten them by saying that "If you do not listen to what I say, I shall call your mother's brother". Every Garo boy and girl, from early childhood, is aware of mother's brother's authority and so they behave properly. In cases of serious offence of his children,

when the father thinks that he cannot control them anymore or cannot handle the problem he has to seek the help of their mother's brother, who comes and punishes the offender or settles the dispute.

Although the mother's brother does not look after his sister's children in their day to day life, he frequently visits the village where his sister's children live and keeps an eye on them, especially on the behaviour of his sister's sons, as they grow older. When the sister's sons reach the age of ten or twelve their mother's brother takes great interest in them, because he knows that he will have to select one of them as the Nokrom for his Nokna daughter. Thus, as the children, especially the boys, grow up, their father's authority decreases and it ceases altogether when they get married. So, it may be said that the father's authority, if we consider this to be authority at all, is limited to the early years of his children's development or at best up to the time of their marriage. The mother's brother's authority over his sister's children, in contrast, is permanent. Although the mother's brother's authority is not always manifest he is a potential threat to his sister's children and they learn this when their father threatens them by using the name of their mother's brother.

With the changes in the other aspects of this society the authority structure has also changed to some extent but the mother's brother's authority is still recognized (see Ch.9). Thus, it is clear that neither the general theory nor the

modified version of the special hypothesis of Homans and Schneider is applicable to the Garo case.

In his paper "Garo Avuncular authority and Matrilateral cross-cousin marriage (1958b) Burling discusses the authority of the mother's brother as well as the father and concludes, "The Garo, then, do have authority located within the status of mother's brother" (1958b:746). He also notes that in spite of the mother's brother's authority "the Garo have a high proportion of matrilineal cross-cousin marriage" (1958b:744). So he writes, "The Garo must be admitted formally to be an exception to the Homans and Schneider theory ..." (1958b:748). But he believes that the Garo structure can "serve to clarify and ultimately strengthen the theory [Homans and Schneider's theory] rather than to weaken it" (1958b:748). He suggests that "... the locus of initiative in arranging marriages may be an important variable to add to those of residence, locus of jural authority, and type of cross-cousin marriage in attempting to ferret out the rules by which these phenomena are related to one another in the various societies of the world" (1958b:749). He writes, "Unless one is immediately willing to abandon a most appealing theory, [Homans and Schneider's theory], it is then necessary to discover what special factors among the Garo could serve to differentiate them from the apparently more typical matrilineal, avuncupotestal societies which prohibit matrilineal cross-cousin marriage. All theoretical discussions from that of Levi-Strauss to that of Homans and Schneider have made the not explicitly stated assumption that the boys and men of a society

were 'competing for women' (in the terms of Levi-Strauss) or at least that the boy has considerable freedom in his choice of a wife. In the case of an avuncupotestal society, if the boy could choose for himself he would not be likely to reduplicate the authority of his mother's brother by making him his father-in-law as well" (1958b:748). Thus, Burling distinguishes the Garo from all other matrilineal and avuncupotestal societies since among the Garo a man does not propose marriage and the initiative in arranging marriages comes from the girl's father. He holds, "To judge by the statements of Garo boys it seems unlikely that they would on their own initiative undertake many marriages with their mother's brother's daughter. Most boys state clearly the disadvantages associated with caring for their wife's parents and of living with relatives who will have strict expectations and demand certain behaviour" (1958b:748). It is true that the Nokrom has so many disadvantages and has to fulfil so much obligations and responsibilities, e.g.

1. has to live with his wife's parents where he cannot move freely because he has to avoid his mother-in-law, he cannot talk freely because he has to show respect to his parents-in-law.
2. has no freedom to take decisions until his father-in-law's death.
3. has to work under the direction and control of his father-in-law.
4. has to look after his wife's parents when they become old and unable to work.
5. has to take the responsibility of looking after, and even has to marry, his widowed mother-in-law.
6. has to help the other sisters, and even brothers, of his wife if anyone of them faces economic problems. In such cases he has to lend them money or rice, and even

to support them in certain circumstances, e.g. when a brother or sister of his wife get divorced he has to give them temporary shelter and food.

The above disadvantages are associated with Nokromship as the Nokroms of Chunia told me. One of them stated, "I am fed up with the responsibilities. I had to look after my old father-in-law and mother-in-law until their death, and now I have to provide food and clothing to one of the younger brothers of my wife who is lame and I will have to carry this burden till my death. If I were not a Nokrom I would not have to take all these responsibilities - I could be free like my wife's other sisters' husbands".

But the Nokromship, it should be noted, has certain advantages as the Nokrom gets the opportunity of entering an already established household, and he inherits the right to manage all the property belong to his wife's parents' household, whereas the non-Nokrom sons-in-law have no such advantage (see Ch.5). The advantages of Nokromship are sometimes admitted by the Nokroms themselves, but it is more clearly evident from the views of the non-Nokrom sons-in-law. One such non-Nokrom man of Chunia said, "You have been in our village for several months, but I am so sorry that I could not invite you for dinner. I am a poor man, I have no property. If I were a Nokrom I could be a rich man, but I am unfortunate that I am not". However, it should be noted that not all Nokroms are rich, there are many poor Nokroms in Chunia. The economic condition of a Nokrom depends upon the property received by his wife from her parents

and also the on the proper management of that property by the Nokrom himself. But in any case, the Nokrom always gets certain economic advantages over the non-Nokroms, at least the established household, which are highly valued in this society. So I think that the economic advantages of Nokromship balances the disadvantages and in fact in almost all the cases the men come forward to become Nokroms for these advantages and quite knowingly they take on the responsibilities associated with the position. Burling also notes that "compensating economic advantages" is one of the reasons for taking the burden of Nokromship by some men (see Burling, 1958b:748).

Thus, the compensating advantages encourage, instead of discouraging, a man to take the responsibility of Nokromship, but it should be noted that a man cannot compete for the status of Nokrom since it is decided by his mother's brother. There are many non-Nokroms in Chunia who wished to become Nokroms but their mother's brothers did not select them as Nokrom, so they had to, as they told me, accept their fate. Although a man does not undertake the initiative of arranging his own marriage as the customary rule does not allow him to do so, in most cases he does not refuse if his mother's brother wants him to become the Nokrom. Undoubtedly, the economic advantages are the major incentive for such an acceptance.

Burling thinks that "the uncle's [mother's brother] authority over his younger lineage mates, both his 'sister' (the mother of his prospective 'heir') and the 'nephew' [sister's son]

himself makes it somewhat difficult to give him as outright refusal" (1963:81-82). But none of the men I met told me that he married his mother's brother's daughter for the fear of his mother's brother's authority. Some men told me, "It is not good to refuse the mother's brother, because he is the senior man of the Mahari and therefore all the juniors should respect him. When he wants his sister's son to marry his daughter, the latter should not dishonour him". Some other people said, "Every Garo man has the moral obligation to look after male members of his Mahari when they become very old and are unable to work, so if a mother's brother, who is the senior man of one's own Mahari, wants him to become the Nokrom, he (the sister's son) being the junior man of the same Mahari, does not refuse him (the mother's brother)".

One may find, if one wishes, some indication of fear of mother's brother's authority in the statements of people regarding why a man marries his mother's brother's daughter. Burling in fact attempts to find such an indication since he believes that a man marries his mother's brother's daughter because it is difficult to refuse the mother's brother as he possesses such authority. But I want to point out that what people mean in this regard is not fear of the mother's brother's authority but respect towards him as he is the senior male member of the same Mahari. Moreover, a man may marry his mother's brother's daughter as he has a sense of moral duty to look after his mother's brother in the latter's old age. This is a moral and not a legal duty as the mother's brother cannot force his

sister's son to marry his daughter, although the mother's brother possesses authority over his sister's son. If a sister's son, who is selected as the Nokrom, is not willing to marry his mother's brother's daughter the mother's brother tries to persuade him by saying, "Look! if you do not marry my Nokna daughter somebody else from some other Mahari will become the Nokrom, and our Mahari will lose the right to manage the property belong to this household. So you should think it over". The other members of the Mahari also try to persuade the man by saying the same thing. Thus, even if a sister's son is not willing to marry his mother's brother's daughter he finally agrees after such persuasion. However, this is merely persuasion and does not involve any threat that the mother's brother or the other members of the Mahari will withdraw their support if a man does not marry his mother's brother's daughter. Sometimes other people do not even try to persuade a man if he exhibits any unwillingness to marry his mother's brother's daughter. The Garo consider that marriage is for the happiness of both partners and therefore no marriage relationship should be established if either partner thinks that he or she would not be happy with the other. In this society no marriage can be arranged unless a man and a woman, their respective parents, and the members of their respective Mahari - all are agreed to the match. The people generally avoid the arrangement of a marriage in those cases where either the man or the woman is not willing to marry the other, because they say that in such marriages many problems might arise which may even result in divorce.

Although a sister's son generally does not refuse his mother's brother when the latter wants him to marry his daughter, cases of refusal may be found. I know a man whose mother's brother wanted him to marry his Nokna daughter but this man did not like his mother's brother's daughter, because he himself was educated but his mother's brother's daughter was illiterate. So this man requested his mother and some other people to persuade his mother's brother not to ask him to marry her. But his mother's brother one day came to the village where the man lives in the hope that he might be able to persuade his sister's son. When this man saw his mother's brother coming he fled to the neighbouring village and did not meet him. The other people of his Mahari tried to persuade him on behalf of his mother's brother but all attempts failed. This man, in this case, did not give his mother's brother any opportunity to persuade him, but even if his mother's brother would get the chance the man would still, as he told me, have refused his mother's brother, because he did not like the girl. Burling himself also mentions such a case of refusal (see Burling, 1963:82).

Burling argues that "the personal relationship in a family with two adult couples [the Nokna-Nokrom and the Nokna's parents] require a degree of cooperation and subordination of personal interests not found in a single nuclear family" (1958b:747). So he maintains, "If the authority inherent in the relationship between uncle and nephew applies also to father-in-law and son-in-law, the older man will be more willing to exercise the amount of authority necessary for the direction of such a

household, and the younger man will be more willing to subordinate his own interests to the general good" (1958b:747). On this ground he arrives at the conclusion, "The authority that the nephew dislikes is precisely what makes the relationship attractive to his uncle. While the nephew may fear being under the jurisdiction of his uncle, the latter may be delighted to have a son-in-law whom he can control by virtue of their lineage relationship" (1958b:748-749). He also writes, "the importance of Garo data is that it is precisely the authority of the uncle over his nephew which encourages this type of marriage rather than discourages it, as is expected by the Homans and Schneider's theory" (1958b:748).

It is true that the interpersonal relationships between the Nokrom and his father-in-law is maintained by their previous relationship, i.e. as the sister's son and mother's brother, which is in fact a relationship of authority and subordination. So Burling's view that the mother's brother selects his sister's son as the Nokrom so that he can control the latter by virtue of the lineage relationships may be correct to some extent. But even if we accept this view it is still difficult to explain all the matrilateral cross-cousin marriages in this society. It has already been stated that matrilateral cross-cousin marriage is practised not only in marriages of the Nokna but also in marriages of Agate daughters. Although an Agate daughter is free to choose her own husband, it has been observed that generally her father chooses his sister's son as her husband. The exercise of authority by the father-in-law and the subordination of the

son-in-law to his father-in-law does not apply in such a marriage, because an Agate daughter and her husband form their separate and independent household. The husband of an Agate does not have to work and live permanently with his father-in-law and obviously the control and direction of the father-in-law is neither expected nor it is necessary in this case.

Burling's ideas are based on Homans and Schneider's theory since he, like them, he also considers that jural authority is an important factor. However, there is a difference in their approaches - Homans and Schneider consider the interpersonal relationships from the point of view of the sister's son, but Burling looks at the same thing from the point of view of the mother's brother. This difference has resulted from Burling's addition of the new variable, i.e. the locus of initiative in arranging marriages, to the original theory of Homans and Schneider. In spite of this difference the analysis of Homans and Schneider and that of Burling are similar, i.e. the social phenomena are analysed by psychological factors. It is essential at this point to examine the validity of such an analysis. Burling supports, modifies, and follows the Homans and Schneider theory, so if we examine how far this theory is acceptable it will eventually tell us how far Burling's views are acceptable.

Homans and Schneider's theory has been vehemently criticized by Needham (1962). Needham remarks, "Since Homans and Schneider's theory derives, as they tell us, from Radcliffe-Brown's paper on Mother's Brother, it must to some

extent at least stand or fall with it" (1962:32). He shows by reference to the criticism of Radcliffe-Brown's paper by Evans-Pritchard, Levi-Strauss, Goody, and Murdock that "Radcliffe-Brown's delineation of the situation [extension of sentiment] is invalid, or at least undemonstrated" (1962:32). From the arguments of others as well as those from his own against Radcliffe-Brown, Needham remarks, "...there is no simple, universal, or necessary patrilineal complex such as Radcliffe-Brown delineates, and which Homans and Schneider adopt as the very foundation of their argument; and that Radcliffe-Brown's theory of extension to explain the differential attribution of sentiment and jural status in a patrilineal society is fallacious. To the extent, then, that Homans and Schneider's theory rests on these notions, it must be mistaken" (1962:40).

As one of the serious defects of 'extension theory' Needham writes, "We have no evidential grounds for supposing in a matrilineal society a mother is less indulgent than in a patrilineal society. Authority is indeed vested in her side of the family, but in her brother, not in herself. What happens to the extension theory? According to Radcliffe-Brown the attitude to the mother should be generalized and extended to the mother's brother, but here it is not: the relationships are of opposite character. The case is not so clear on the other side, but while ethnography suggests that the father in matrilineal society is commonly an indulgent figure, the father's sister in a number of such societies (e.g. Ashanti, Kaguru, Mota, Siuai) is treated

with marked respect" (1962:47).

Regarding Homans and Schneider's distinction between two types of matrilineal complex, Needham says, "These, of course, are important differences, particularly with respect to the exercise and influence of jural authority before marriage; for in the latter case, "interpersonal relations resemble those of the patrilineal complex". However, Homans and Schneider deal at this point only with the relationships with the father and the mother's brother - but they have not mentioned the crucial figure of the father's sister, the sentimental ties with whom are supposed to induce a man to marry her daughter. Yet it is precisely her position which cannot be taken for granted" (1962:48). In this context he also adds, "...we cannot simply infer from the jural character of the mother's brother, or from the attitude to the father, what the relationship with the father's sister will be, either in the former complex [Homans and Schneider's Trobriand-Haida complex] or in the latter [Homans and Schneider's Kaska-Garo complex]" (1962:48).

Citing ethnographic evidence from the Siuai, which Homans and Schneider could not consult as it was published in the same year as their book, Needham shows that the matrilineal Siuai do not fit either of Homans and Schneider's matrilineal complex if the marital residence and configuration of attitude are considered. He demonstrated that the Siuai system constitutes "quite another kind of matrilineal complex than the two at which they eventually arrive", because this system "controverts the

extension theory" and "the preferred marriage is contrary to Homans and Schneider's general theory in that it is with the side where jural authority lies" (see Needham, 1962:49). He also shows that the matrilineal Belu of Central Timor "controverts the special hypothesis, the general theory, and the final formulation" (1962:67). According to Needham, "...matrilineal societies exhibit very considerable variation one from another, in regard to domicile, marital residence, jural authority, and configuration of attitudes" (1962:49). So he says, "Far from being able to argue on the basis of the "matrilineal complex" initially postulated by Homans and Schneider and resorted to throughout the greater part of their argument, we must in fact be prepared to recognize a fair number of distinct types, to only one of which may their central arguments usefully apply" (1962:49).

In order to criticize Homans and Schneider's analysis on the basis of psychological factors, Needham quotes the following lines from Durkheim's work:

"The pshchological factor is too general to predetermine the course of social phenomena. Since it does not imply one social form rather than another, it cannot explain nothing" (Durkheim, 1901: *Les Regles de la metholde socilogique*, Paris.).

And then he writes, "it should be noted especially that this criticism relates particularly to Homans and Schneider's general theory, which holds that "the form of unilateral cross-cousin marriage will be determined by certain personal relations, and

especially by locus of authority" (Needham, 1962:50).

In Needham's view, "...even if we made the maximum concession to Homans and Schneider's argument, it could at very most indicate that certain sentiments may be the grounds of the marriage regulations. Logically, they are not and cannot be efficient causes of either preference or prescription, matrilineal rule or patrilineal" (1962:52).

On the basis of ethnographic evidence, Needham comments, "...Homans and Schneider have radically misconceived the constitution and operation of a society with matrilineal prescriptive marriage system, the values by which it is inspired, and the principles by which it is governed" (1962:72-73). He suggests, "The way to acquire such an understanding is by a total structural analysis of all the recorded facts on one society. This means surveying every facet of social life, not merely the allocation of authority within a narrow circle of domestic relatives, or even the conventional institutions of "kinship" and marriage. Such an examination involves a systematic comprehension of the life of a society in terms of the classification employed by the people themselves, and an analysis in terms of relations of widest generality. It is not until such an investigation has been completed that it is possible to frame any useful questions about the type of system to which that society belongs, let alone to ask it is what it is and not something different" (1962:73).

Needham is quite justified in his criticism of Homans and

Schneider. His arguments are more logical and substantial than those of Homans and Schneider, and I fully agree with him. I have nothing more to add to Needham's arguments to show any more defects of Homans and Schneider's theory; there is hardly any point left by Needham. The Garo case, as I have described here, certainly strengthens Needham's arguments as it adds one more point to show that Homans and Schneider's arguments and theoretical expectations are invalid. On the same score, then, Burling's modifications of Homans and Schneider's theory are also invalid.

Needham wrote his book in order to defend Levi-Strauss's approach against Homans and Schneider's criticism (see Needham, 1962: Introduction). It would, therefore, be worthwhile to see, in this context, how far Levi-Strauss's theory is applicable to the Garo case.

According to Levi-Strauss, "Marriage is regarded everywhere as a particularly favourable occasion for the initiation or development of a cycle of exchange" (1949:63); and matrilateral cross-cousin marriage has, in his view, a correlation with "generalized exchange" or "indirect exchange". By "generalized exchange" he means the exchange of women for women, and since such an exchange is made indirectly he calls this an "indirect exchange" as well. The marriage rule in a matrilateral system, "presupposes", he writes, "a whole chain of cessions and acquisition of women", and the system insures that a woman ceded in one group is always replaced as they acquire another woman

from another group (1949:444). The exchange of women among different lineages produces a cycle of exchange since the women are exchanged in the same direction, i.e. an A man marries a B woman, a B man marries a C woman, and so on. Thus, the system results in what Levi-Strauss calls an "open structure" and it enhances a "continuous form of reciprocity" (1949:444). He argues that matrilateral cross-cousin marriage "not only permits but favours a better integration of the group" (1949:448) as in this system, "...the overall cycle of reciprocity is co-extensive with the group itself both in time and space, subsisting and developing with it" (1949:450). Therefore, he envisages, "A human group needs only proclaim the law of marriage with the mother's brother's daughter for a vast cycle of reciprocity between all generations and lineages to be organized, as harmonious and ineluctable as any physical or biological law,..." (1949:450).

Levi-Strauss considers matrilateral cross-cousin marriage in patrilineal as well as in matrilineal societies, and he postulates, "...the structure of generalized exchange does not depend at all on descent, but solely on the harmonic character of the regime considered" (1949:273). By "harmonic regime" he means a society "in which the rule of residence is similar to rule of descent" (1949:215). That means, either a patrilineal-patrilocal or a matrilineal-matrilocal society is harmonic. Thus, in his view, the matrilateral cross-cousin marriage may be found in both matri- and patri- lineal societies. However, he notes that "the number of matrilineal systems which are also matrilocal is

extremely small" (1949:117).

Garos society fulfils the requirements of Levi-Strauss's "harmonic regime" since it is matrilineal and matrilocal, so "generalized exchange" and matrilateral cross-cousin marriage both are expected in this society. In fact, Levi-Strauss considers the Garos in connection with his discussion on "generalized exchange" and he says that among the Garos "preferential union, such as among the Mikir and the Kachin, results from a relationship between lineages rather than from a prescribed degree between certain individuals..." (1949:273). That means, an alliance between lineages is established through marriage. The basis of this alliance is generalized exchange and matrilateral cross-cousin marriage.

Levi-Strauss is right to consider the Garos system as a structure of generalized exchange, but it should be noted that this system differs from that of patrilineal and patrilocal societies in the following respects:

In the patrilineal and patrilocal societies where generalized exchange and matrilateral cross-cousin marriage are found, women are exchanged but among the Garos men, and not women, are exchanged. Levi-Strauss says, "...it is men who exchange women, and not vice versa" (1949:115). However, he notes very carefully that some societies may "almost provide a picture of the inverse situation", but "this would not be to say that in such societies it is the women who exchange the men, but rather that men exchange other men by means of women" (1949:115;

footnote). Thus, I think, although men are exchanged in Garo society the Garo system may still be regarded as a structure of generalized exchange, because in this society a man selects his heir, the Nokrom, and brings him in by arranging his Nokna daughter's marriage with him. It is not the Nokna herself, but her father who arranges her marriage. That means, among the Garo, it is not the women who exchange men, but it is the men who exchange men by means of their women.

Another point of difference is that the Garo do not marry in cycles like some patrilineal and patrilocal societies, so exchange among the Garo does not produce cycles. However, in spite of this the generalized exchange in this society is continuous, since the men are indirectly exchanged in the same direction in every generation and a long-term relationship between the husband-giving and husband-receiving groups is established and maintained (see Ch.7).

Levi-Strauss maintains that a kind of instability may be found in matrilineal and matrilocal systems but he does not elaborate this point (see Needham,1962:71). Needham considers this point and holds, "It has an immediate structural plausibility, and there is also revealing factual evidence ..." (Needham,1962:71). He examines the matrilineal system of the matrilineal-matrilocal Belu and shows that due to the rift of marriage relationship the solidary arrangement of this society is hindered. He argues, "...the solidary characteristics of a matrilineal system must depend on the strength of the particular

links which compose the alliance between groups ..." (Needham,1962:71). Since the weaknesses and instabilities of a matrilineal-matrilocal system, in his view, "entail a lesser degree of organic solidarity he arrives at the conclusion, "...a matrilineal- matrilocal system is subject to structural weakness and works less well than a patrilineal-patrilocal system: i.e, it is a less solidary arrangement" (Needham,1962:71). In order to see how far the above view of Needham, which is based on a point hinted at by Levi-Strauss, it is essential to know what Levi-Strauss means by "organic solidarity". The concept of "organic solidarity" is derived from Durkheim but Levi-Strauss uses this in a sense developed by himself. Levi-Strauss considers the relations between brothers as "mechanical solidarity" and that between brothers-in-law as "organic solidarity" (1949:484). When he talks about the solidary consequences of the matrilateral cross-cousin marriage he refers to "organic solidarity", since in his view, mechanical solidarity "adds nothing, unite nothing; it is based upon a cultural limit, satisfied by the reproduction of a type of connexion of the model for which is provided by nature", and organic solidarity "brings about an integration of the group on a new plane" (1949:484). If the concept of "organic solidarity" is considered in the sense developed by Levi-Strauss, then, an organic type of solidarity may easily be discovered among the Garo. In this society, the matrilateral cross-cousin marriage of the Nokna and Nokrom ensures an integration creating an organic solidarity between brothers-in-law. The alliance between lineages, established

through marriage, is very rarely broken (see Ch.7).

The most important difference of the Garo system from all other systems is that in this society the rule of matrilineal cross-cousin marriage is very strict in case of the Nokna daughter, whereas this is not so in case of the Agate daughters (see Ch.5).

However, in spite of the above distinctiveness of Garo society, the Garo system works quite smoothly. Nakane provides us with a structural analysis of the Garo system.

According to Nakane the succession of Garo 'Nok' is the underlying reason for the practice of matrilineal cross-cousin marriage in this society. The Garo word 'Nok' means 'a house' or 'the members of a household which form a domestic unit', but Nakane conceives, "...above all it has the meaning of a combination of local lines; the women who stay in the village where the Nok exists and their husbands who come from a village in the opposite moiety" (Nakane,1967:46). She observes, "The Nok is maintained through regular succession of two offices, the headship of Nok (husband) and the ownership of Nok (wife), through cross-cousin marriage" (Nakane,1967:46). In her view, Garo arrange their marriage relationships in such a way that the husband and wife of a particular Nok may represent their respective line in each generation, and that is the reason why the wife of a Nok selects one of her daughters as the Nokna. This daughter may then represent her line. On the other hand, the husband of a Nok selects one of his sister's sons (real or

classificatory) as the Nokrom so that this Nokrom may represent his line. In Nakane's own words, "The Nok is maintained by the constant succession of the combination of two lines - the male line from the mother's brother to the sister's son and the female line from mother to daughter established through an actual or classificatory relationship - linked by marriage ties" (Nakane,1967:48).

Following Leach's distinction between 'local lines' and 'descent lines' Nakane distinguishes Garo local lines from descent lines (Nakane,1958:8;footnote-4; 1967:48) and says, "The succession of a Nok is dependent upon the legal status of husband-wife as well as of two matrilineal lines, which are, strictly speaking, local lines rather than descent lines" (1967:48). In Nakane's view, the Nok institution is the local line and matrilateral cross-cousin marriage works on the basis of this institution. She, however, notes that the formation of a Nok is dependent upon the functioning of descent lines, since descent lines play an important role in the selection of the Nokna and Nokrom and in the perpetuation of a marriage alliance. Thus, she arrives at the conclusion, "It should be understood that descent lines are not the fundamental lines of succession through cross-cousin marriage, though descent defines the categories. The institutionalized pair of succession lines, the Nok, are local lines, not descent lines" (1967:49).

Nakane maintains that if a man from a lineage other than that of the Nokna's father is selected as the Nokrom, it

obviously results in a cutting of the husband's line of a Nok and this certainly affects the social network. A man therefore always tries to bring his sister's son (real or classificatory) in as the Nokrom. The real essence of the succession of Nok is to maintain right to property in the wife's line and right of its management in the husband's line. This assists in the maintenance of the integration of the two lines.

Nakane's arguments in this respect are very useful as they can provide a clue to the reason for the practice of matrilateral cross-cousin marriage in case of Agate daughters. In her view, the conception of Nok plays an important role in the marriage of an Agate daughter. She observes, "...as a rule a man (Nokrom) marries his mother's brother's daughter (Nokna), the siblings of the Nokrom and Nokna avoid patrilateral cross-cousin marriage (real, not classificatory). As a result, the orientation of matrilateral cross-cousin marriage dominates over that of patrilateral cross-cousin marriage" (1967:52-53).

It is worth noting in this connection that the view of Nakane mentioned in the above paragraph was challenged by Burling when it came out in an earlier paper of Nakane (1958), in which Nakane wrote that among the Garo, "A man marries his mother's brother's daughter; his sister is forbidden to marry his wife's brother; further his brother is also forbidden to marry his wife's sister. The reciprocal first cousin marriage is thus excluded ..." (1958:8). In his criticism of Nakane's paper Burling says, "Miss Nakane mentions several times that a man may

not marry his sister's husband's sister. I knew of several cases where this has in fact happened, i.e. two men had married each other's sisters. I could elicit no expression of disapproval about this situation, although I inquired extensively" (Burling, 1958a:115-116). In a later publication Burling describes such a case in which two men married each other's classificatory sisters (see Burling, 1963:159-160). However, Nakane later clarified this point when she wrote, "One cannot marry members of a Nok into which one's sister or brother has married" (1967:52). She also writes, "...the avoidance of brother exchange applies to only the case between two sets of real siblings" (1967:52;footnote). In her opinion, the marriage case mentioned by Burling is a quite different matter and certainly acceptable, since in such cases the classificatory brothers and sisters "are not the members of the same Nok" (1967:52;footnote).

Burling's objection and arguments against Nakane is, I think, based on Nakane's expression "forbidden to marry" (1958:8), so Burling is correct to argue that reciprocal brother exchange is not forbidden, because in this society it is, indeed, not forbidden. Nakane herself also writes, "Certainly the avoidance of brother exchange is not a strict rule comparable to that of exogamy" (1967:52;footnote). From her own observations she reports, "The people of Rombagiri observe this avoidance strictly insisting that they should not have such relations, and in fact, I did not find even a single case of brother exchange between two Nok. However, I found two cases in a colonial

village, Rinsibara" (1967:52; footnote). Thus, brother exchange is not forbidden, but people avoid this, because they think, marriage of a pair of Nokna and Nokrom is sufficient to establish a relationship between two Nok. Burling also writes, "Most people, in fact, seem to feel that it [brother exchange] is a mildly awkward arrangement" (1963:160). The word 'forbidden' is not used in Nakane's later publication (1967) but instead the expression "one cannot marry" is used (1967:52), which is still a bit problematic with her expression "avoid". I think, instead of using the expression "one cannot marry" Nakane should have used "one does not marry" or simply "one avoids" in order to make this consistent with her expression "avoid" as she uses in other places of her book. The word "avoid" is, I think, more justified and appropriate. However, Nakane's view is quite clear when she says, "The Garo avoid having more than one conjugal relation between members (real siblings) of two Nok" (1967:52).

Burling mentions two cases of marriage (including the one already mentioned above) in which he found a classificatory brother exchange and he says, "a number of other pairs turned up in the genealogies of former generations or of other villages" (1963:160). So he claims that this type of brother exchange "was, as it might be expected, a good deal more common" (1963:160). I have described earlier that among the Garo "classificatory" is considered at three different levels - Mahari, Machong, and Chatchi and accordingly degrees of relationship vary (see Ch.5). Burling mentions classificatory brother exchange but he says nothing about the level and degree

of classificatory relationship in these cases. If "classificatory" is considered at the higher level there may be many cases of such marriage, but if it is considered at the lowest level, i.e. at the Mahari level, which the people themselves consider most important for all practical purposes, Burling's view may not be fully correct. My own observation in Chunia, confirms Nakane's view, and not Burling's since I found neither a case of brother exchange between two sets of real sibblings nor even a case of classificatory brother exchange at Mahari level among the people living at present in Chunia. However, from their genealogies I found two cases of classificatory brother exchange at Mahari level.

Nakane herself also mentions of cases of brother exchange, but she says, "Mere existence of brother exchange itself, which is rather rare, does not affect the basic scheme of the working of Garo social organization, which I am presenting" (1967:52;footnote). That means, the succession of Nok through matrilateral cross-cousin marriage is possible, even though there may be cases of brother exchange.

However, Nakane's answer to Burling's criticism may help us to reach at a conclusion. She writes, "The difference of my discussion from that of Burling's on Garo kinship, is mostly attributed to the analysis in which I distinguish Nok as an important institution, while Burling seems to fail in differentiating local lines (Nok) from descent groups" (1967:52;footnote). In my view, Nakane's analysis is more

logical and useful, and therefore more acceptable than that of Burling's. In fact, Burling himself admits the merit of Nakane's argument as he writes, "When Miss Nakane considers the Nok, the contrast between the Nokna (heiress) and other daughters, the actual working of Garo cross-cousin marriage and in particular the realities of classificatory versus first cross-cousin marriage, she is on firmer ground. Here her discussion is accurate and clear" (Burling, 1958b:116).

The statements of the Garo themselves as to why a man prefers his sister's son as the Nokrom also show that the people consider the perpetuation of the two lines to be very important and that is the reason why a man persuades his sister's son to become the Nokrom. Thus, the people's own views are more or less similar to the scheme of social organization as presented by Nakane. Finally, it may be said that Nakane's analysis helps us to understand Garo social organization more clearly than that of Burling's. I fully agree with Nakane.

CHAPTER 7.

GARO MARRIAGE ALLINACES.

With every Garo marriage a relationship is established between husband-givers and the wife-givers. At the lowest level, i.e. at the level of Nok (household), this relationship is called "Nok-chame", which literally means, a relationship between two Nok established through marriage. Every Garo Nok has two kinds of Nok-chame relationship: (a) with the Nok to which a son is given as Nokrom, and (b) with the Nok from which a son is brought in as Nokrom (cf. Nakane, 1967:51). In the last chapter it was seen that after marriage the Nokna remains in her natal Nok and a husband, i.e. the Nokrom, is brought from amongst her father's sister's sons (real or classificatory). So, the Nokrom leaves his natal Nok and joins his wife's parents' Nok. Thus a Nok-chame relationship is established between the Nok of the Nokna's parents and that of the Nokrom's parents. At a higher level, i.e. at the level of Mahari, the same relationship is called "Akim", which literally means, 'a relationship between two Mahari established through marriage'.

The Agate daughter of a Nok is not expected, after her marriage, to remain permanently in her parents' Nok. Every Agate couple has to form a separate Nok. Thus the marriage of an Agate does not tie the Nok of the Agate's parents to that of her husband's parents. However, the marriage of an Agate daughter

establishes an Akim relationship between her Mahari and her husband's Mahari.

Thus, with the marriage of Nokna and Nokrom a relationship is established both at the Nok level and at the Mahari level, but with the marriage of an Agate and her husband a relationship is established only at the Mahari level. However, it should be noted that every Agate couple selects Nokna and Nokrom in their children's generation, and thereby establishes both kinds of Nok-chame relationship with another Nok. Thus every Nok, whether it is the Nok of a Nokna-Nokrom or that of an Agate couple, has Nok-chame relationship with other Nok and therefore, Akim relationship with some Mahari.

When the Garo had common Jhum fields, the marriage relationship was more important than today because, every Nok was formed with the representative of two Mahari of the two opposite Chatchi. The rights of property ownership and of its management were vested, in principle, in the two allied Mahari. Therefore, the Mahari of both husband and wife of a Nok were very careful to keep these rights within the Mahari. The marriage of Nokna and Nokrom was arranged by both Mahari in order to ensure the continuation of an already established Nok and thereby to perpetuate a previously established Akim relationship, i.e. the relationship which was established between the Mahari of Nokna's father and that of her mother. In fact, this is the reason why Nokna and Nokrom are selected in a manner so that they might represent the Mahari of Nokna's both parents. This is also the

reason why the selection of Nokna and Nokrom was controlled by the Mahari of both the husband and wife of a household (see Ch.5).

An Agate daughter was not allowed to inherit the property of her mother's Nok, but she (Agate) was allotted plots of land from the common Jhum and her husband was given the right to cultivate these plots. So the father of an Agate always tried to obtain her a husband from his own Mahari in order to maintain the right to cultivate the plots allotted to his daughter in the hands of his Mahari. In fact, this is one of the reasons for the practice of matrilateral cross-cousin marriage even in the case of an Agate (see also Ch.6). Thus the Garo tried to maintain a previously established Akim relationship not only through the marriage of Nokna and Nokrom but also through the marriage of Agate daughters. However, it may be recalled that an Agate daughter was free to marry a man from any Mahari and she was not formally expected to marry a man from her father's Mahari. In cases of an Agate's marriage with a man belonging to a Mahari other than her father's, a new Akim relationship was established with that Mahari.

The marriage alliance was given so much importance that at the death of one of the marriage partners the surviving partner was always provided with a replacement spouse from the Mahari of the deceased partner. Thus, death of one partner to a marriage did not mean the an end of the Akim relationship. The custom of replacing the deceased spouse is known as "Mesokani". It was the

duty and responsibility of the deceased spouse's Mahari to find a suitable person from amongst its members to replace the deceased, and on the other hand, it was considered to be obligatory on the part of the surviving spouse to accept the person given in replacement. In case of the unavailability of a suitable person within the Mahari of the deceased, a person was selected from another Mahari belonging to the same Machong group, but not from beyond. If the surviving spouse refused to marry the person given as a replacement he or she were given alternative choices from the members of the same Mahari, or at best the same Machong, as the deceased, and he or she had to choose a partner from these alternatives. If they married any person from a Mahari other than that of the deceased's, they were held responsible for breaking the Akim relationship. The breaking of an Akim relationship was considered a serious offence, and the offender had to pay monetary compensation, known as "Akim Dai". However, people told me that in most cases the surviving spouse used to accept the replacement, as Mahari members always persuaded them to do so.

It could easily happen, as my informants told me, that the surviving spouse did not refuse the replacement person, but the replacement refused to accept the arrangement. In such cases no Akim Dai could be imposed, since such a person was not tied through a previous marriage. In these circumstances the Mahari of the replacement person used to persuade him or her to marry the other for the sake of maintaining the Akim relationship. Thus, due to the persuasion of both Mahari, the persons concerned

in the Mesokani generally accepted each other. By such means two allied Mahari always tried to maintain their relationship.

Since the switch over to wet cultivation it has no longer been possible for the Mahari to control the rights of property ownership and management due to the development of permanent and individual ownership to land (see Ch.4). The Akim relationship has, therefore, lost its importance. But the people still try to maintain established Akim relationships. This is particularly evident in the marriages of Nokna and Nokrom. However, it was observed that in most cases of Agate marriage in Chunia, the Mahari of the Agate and that of her husband were not previously related (see Ch.5).

In spite of changes in society people still retained their old custom of replacing the deceased spouse, and try to maintain the relationship once it is established. But it is not always possible to do this as consistently or as smoothly as it was in past. Let us consider the different ways of Mesokani and their changes with the changes in the other aspects of society.

1. Mesokani (Replacement) of a deceased husband.

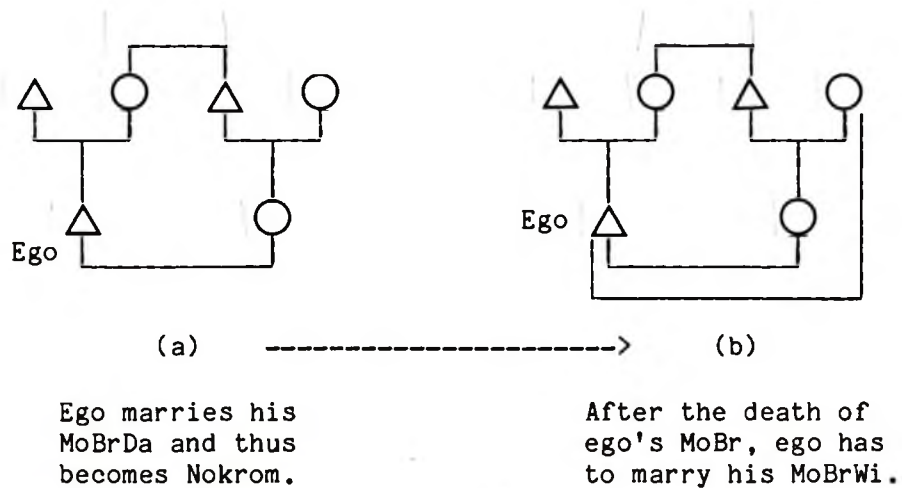
In the past, two different ways, suited to two different situations, were followed in the Mesokani of a deceased husband. Let us discuss them separately:

1a. After the selection of the Nokna and Nokrom.

The Nokna and Nokrom were selected mainly for the continuation of a Nok after the death of the old couple, i.e. Nokna's parents. So when Nokna's father died the Nokrom, being his heir, had to replace him. The two allied Mahari simply arranged the Mesokani of Nokna's deceased father with Nokrom. In fact, with the selection of a Nokrom, the later replacement of his deceased father-in-law was virtually decided in advance. This was another reason for a man's selection of a Nokrom. Thus the Mahari made no additional effort to replace the husband when the Nokrom for that Nok has already been selected.

Thus, after the death of his father-in-law Nokrom had to marry his mother-in-law, and to become the husband of both his wife, the Nokna, as well as her mother (see Diagram 7.1).

Diagram 7.1



The Garo do not have any special name for marriages between widowed mother-in-law and son-in-law. However, for the sake of discussion, let us call this "Mother-in-law marriage".

No marriage ceremony was performed in mother-in-law marriage. It was simply arranged by both Mahari that after the death of Nokrom's father-in-law Nokrom should cohabit with his widowed mother-in-law, and also look after her. At the time of the marriage of Nokna and Nokrom, the groom virtually had to undertake the initial responsibility of looking after his wife, as well as the ultimate responsibility of looking after his widowed mother-in-law, inherited from his deceased father-in-law. So, Garo say that no additional marriage was required in this type of relationship. It may be noted that the non-Nokrom sons-in-law, i.e. husbands of Agate daughter, of a Nok were not under any obligation to marry the widowed mother-in-law, because none of them was allowed to inherit her.

After the death of his father-in-law Nokrom not only inherited his mother-in-law but also the rights to manage the property of the household. He thus inherited the social position of his deceased father-in-law. This is clearly evident in the change of certain Kinship terms after his father-in-law's death. The changes are shown in Table 7.1 and 7.2.

Table 7.1

Terms for Nokrom before and after his father-in-law's death.

| Relatives | T e r m s | |
|---------------|--------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| | Before | After |
| By his WiMo | Gri (Term for son-in-law) | Se (Term for Husband) |
| By his WiSb | Boning/Gume (Term for SiHu) | Awang (Term for Step-father) |
| By his WiSiHu | Sadu (Term for WiSiHu) | Mama/Obite (Term for WiFa) |

Reciprocally the Nokrom uses the following terms for relatives mentioned in Table 7.1.

Table 7.2

Terms used by Nokrom before and after his father-in-law's death.

| Relatives | T e r m s | |
|--------------|---|----------------------------------|
| | Before | After |
| For his WiMo | Mani/Nio (Term for WiMo) | Jik (Term for Wife) |
| For his WiSb | Niocheksari/Nosari Boning/Gume etc. (Term for WiSb) | Bisa (Term for own Children) |
| For WiSiHu | Sadu (Term for WiSiHu) | Chawari (Term for son-in-law) |

With the change of Nokrom's status in his wife's family after his father-in-law's death, not only were certain kinship terms appropriate for his deceased father-in-law changed but also his role in the family altered. He had to fulfill certain duties and obligations towards his wife's relatives, especially his wife's siblings. That is, he had to take on all the responsibilities which were previously fulfilled by his father-in-law.

The refusal of either the Nokrom or his widowed mother-in-law to marry the other would easily upset the whole arrangement as in such an event, it was impossible for the Mahari to take the Nokrom away from his marriage bond with the Nokna, i.e. to compel him to leave the Nokna. For the same reason, it was impossible to select another husband for the Nokna. So the only alternative was to select another girl as Nokna and her husband as Nokrom, but if that was done, the Nokna who had been selected previously had first to be removed. This was considered unfair, because, the Nokna was not at fault if her husband refused to marry her widowed mother or vice versa. Thus in order to avoid such complications people of both Mahari persuaded both the Nokrom and his widowed mother-in-law to accept each other as husband and wife. For her own interest the Nokna also attempted to persuade her husband or her mother to marry. There was another reason, however, why the Nokrom and his mother-in-law generally accepted each other as husband and wife - the mother-in-law knew that if she refused to marry the Nokrom the Mahari would not provide her with a replacement husband; and on

the other hand, the Nokrom knew that if he refused to marry his widowed mother-in-law he would lose the right to hold the title of Nokrom and so also the right to manage the property of the Nok, which belonged to his widowed mother-in-law.

The custom of mother-in-law marriage is no longer practised by the Bangladesh Garo, because most are Christian and such a marriage is not approved of by Christians. However, even among Christian Garo, the Nokrom still takes responsibility for the care of his widowed mother-in-law although he does not marry her. Out of the nineteen Nokrom living at present in Chunia, eleven took this responsibility. In nine of these eleven cases, both the Nokrom and mother-in-law, or at least the Nokrom, are Christian. These nine men gave me more or less the same reason for not marrying their widowed mother-in-law, which is as follows: "The question of marrying my mother-in-law does not arise, because, Christianity does not allow it". In the other two cases, the Nokrom are Songsareks and their mothers-in-law, who are dead, were also Songsareks. These men told that they were not married to their mothers-in-law, but they used to take care of their widowed mothers-in-law.

Thus, at present it is difficult to get information, even from Songsarek, regarding whether they were married to their mothers-in-law. Most Songsareks are influenced by Christian Garo, and they therefore hesitate to admit to such marriage relationships. It may be added that it is difficult to prove such a marriage relationship even if a Nokrom really married his

widowed mother-in-law, as no marriage ceremony was observed in such marriages. If there were examples of widow's bearing a child from her sexual union with the Nokrom, the marriage relationship between the widow and Nokrom could easily have been ascertained. But there is no such evidence in the genealogical histories of Chunia, or of other neighbouring villages. In fact, in mother-in-law marriage the widow generally did not get pregnant even if she had sexual relations with Nokrom as in most cases she had reached menopause. It should be recalled here that generally the youngest daughter was selected as the Nokna and she was married to the Nokrom when her parents had become elderly and unable to work (see Ch.5). Thus, when the Nokna's father died, usually several years after the Nokna's marriage, her mother generally was very old, beyond menopause, and therefore, unable to bear more children. The begetting of children from Nokrom by a widow was quite acceptable to Garo, although it generally did not occur. However, in certain other circumstances, as it will be seen in later, both mother and daughter did bear children from the same husband. In such cases the relationship between the children of the women was decided according to Garo relationship systems (see Diagram 7.2b).

Today it is also difficult to find examples of change in kinship terms for the Nokrom after his father-in-law's death as Christian Garo, in such cases, use neither the term appropriate for the Nokrom before his father-in-law's death nor even those which are appropriate for him after his father-in-law's death. The Nokrom also uses no kinship terms. In most of these cases,

people use teknonymy or other indirect ways of addressing, or referring. For example, after the death of his father-in-law the Nokrom uses neither the term 'Mani', nor the term 'Jik' for his widowed mother-in-law, but refers to her instead as the mother of his wife. Similarly, his mother-in-law uses neither the term 'Gri', nor the term 'Se' for the Nokrom, but refers to him as the father of his eldest child, or simply as "our Nokrom". Both Christian and Songsarek Garo told me, "according to our traditional rules, the terms for the Nokrom should be changed". But Christian Garo said, "We do not marry our mother-in-law since we converted to Christianity. Now, we think that we should not change the terms for the Nokrom after the death of Nokrom's father-in-law". It is interesting to note that Christian Garo think that they should not change the terms for the Nokrom, but they do not use any terms for the Nokrom, even those that were used before the death of the Nokrom's father-in-law. The Songsarek also use teknonymy or an indirect means of reference like Christians, but some of them use some of the changed terms. In one such case in Chunia, - a Songsarek Nokrom was addressed by one of his wife's younger brothers, who is also a Songsarek, as 'Awang'. This means, he has changed the term for the Nokrom after his father's death, however, that the Nokrom in this case does not use any term for his wife's brother. The Nokrom has neither changed nor retained the term he previously used for this man. He calls, or refers, to this man as the younger brother of his (Nokrom) wife.

Sometimes conflicting situations arise because of the

residence of Christian and Songsarek Garo in the same community as the rules and customs of these two religions are different from each other. I encountered two such cases which arose due to the persistence of traditional customs by Songsarek on the one hand, Christian rules, on the other. In both of these cases, the widowed mothers-in-law are Songsarek but the Nokna and Nokrom are Christian Garo.

One of these cases was related by people of Gohalideo, a village in the North Mymensingh area. A widowed mother-in-law complained to the people of her Mahari that the Nokrom was not good to her, he did not buy her clothes and other things when she required them. The people of the widow's Mahari took the matter to the Nokrom's Mahari, and they both called for the Nokrom. When the people questioned him, he disclosed that his widowed mother-in-law wanted to have sexual relations with him, but that he was unable to do so as he was a Christian. The people then, asked the widow if she wanted sexual relations with the Nokrom, but she denied it. The people of both Mahari faced a difficult situation, because everybody knew that the Nokrom was a poor man and could not manage to buy more than one set of clothes a year for every member of the house, and that he never neglected to buy clothes for his widowed mother-in-law. So people reached the conclusion that the widow did demand sexual relations, as she was a Songsarek. However, she did not want to express her desires in front of the others as to do so was indecent. In order to solve the problem, the people of both Mahari advised the Nokrom, in front of the widow, to take good care of her, and the widow was

persuaded privately by some Christian Garo not to demand sexual relations from her son-in-law as he was a Christian. I do not know how far this solved the real problem or whether a permanent solution was found, but when I left the village the widow and the Nokrom were still living in the same house.

In the other case, told by some Christian Garo of Chunia, the Nokna suspected that her husband, the Nokrom, was having sexual relations with her widowed mother. One day the Nokna saw her mother and the Nokrom in the same bed and she disclosed the matter to some Garo. These Christian Garo did not say anything to the widow, because she is a Songsarek and therefore not at fault, even if she had sexual relations with the Nokrom. But they persuaded the Nokrom to refrain from sexual acts with his widowed mother-in-law. They advised him that he was a Christian he should not practice the old custom anymore, even if his mother-in-law wants him to do so. Nobody knows whether this Nokrom and his mother-in-law are still having sexual relations or not, but most people think they are not.

It should be noted that in both the above cases the people described the facts to me in order to show how sincerely they have accepted Christianity. They said, "We do not like the Christian Garo to practice old Garo customs, which are unacceptable in a modern world. We want to be true Christians".

However, in spite of the above cases and various other complications, the responsibility of looking after the widowed mother-in-law is still given to the Nokrom. In no cases did I

find that a widow took another man other than the Nokrom. It should be noted that if all the people were not converted to Christianity, the type of situation as described above would be inevitable and this may ultimately necessitate the replacement of deceased husband with a man other than the Nokrom.

1b. Before the selection of the Nokna and Nokrom.

A man used to select his heir (the Nokrom) before his death so that no problems would arise in finding his replacement after his death, but if he failed to this, however, his replacement after his death other arrangements were made.

The widow, in such cases, selected one of her daughters, even if she were a small baby, as the Nokna of her household. If the widow had no daughter, or if all her daughters were married as Agate, then she had to adopt a girl from amongst the daughters of her own Mahari who were closely related (preferably, her own sister's daughter) and this girl was appointed Nokna. girl as the Nokna. On the other hand, the Mahari of the widow's deceased husband could select a man from their Mahari (preferably the deceased's own sister's son) to replace the deceased. Then, the marriage of this man to the widow together with her Nokna daughter (own or adopted) was arranged by the two allied Mahari. Thus, the man who was selected as the replacement of the widow's deceased husband, married both the widow and her Nokna daughter. Like in mother-in-law marriage, the widow and her daughter were regarded as wives of the same man. But the arrangement in this

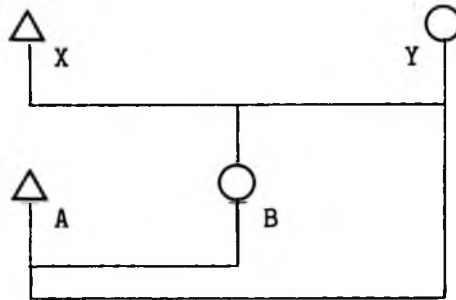
type of Mesokani was different from that of mother-in-law marriage as the widow was not the man's mother-in-law, but one of his wives, regarded as 'Jik Mamung', which means, 'the principal wife'. Although the widow's daughter was regarded as the Nokna, she was never called Nokna, but 'Jik Gite', which means 'secondary wife'. However, it should be noted that although the widow's daughter was not called Nokna, she eventually assumed the status of Nokna after her mother's death. Similarly, the man was the husband of the widow's Nokna daughter, even though he was not called Nokrom. However, he also ultimately assumed the status of Nokrom, as he attained the right to manage the property of the Nok which had previously been enjoyed by the man whom he replaced.

In this type of marriage, a ceremony was observed for the marriage of the widow and the man who replaced her husband, but not for the marriage of the widow's daughter. It was simply assumed that since the man was married to the widow he was also married to her Nokna daughter.

Since the secondary wife of the man in such a case was his principal wife's daughter (even in case of adoption this was assumed as such) the former should have been considered as his step-daughter, as it was considered in ordinary circumstances. But in this case he never considered her as a step-daughter, but as a wife. The Garo have no special name for this type of marriage. However, for the sake of our discussion, and especially to distinguish it from mother-in-law marriage, let us

call this type of marriage 'a step-daughter marriage'. The situation involved in this type of Mesokani is shown in Diagram 7.2a.

Diagram 7.2a



Here, X and Y were married. After X's death Y, together with her daughter B, marries A.

It is important to note that when a man was selected for the purpose of Mesokani he usually claimed the widow's Nokna daughter as a co-wife with the widow. If the widow's Mahari failed to arrange this, in most cases he refused just to marry the widow. It is also interesting to note that even if the man did not claim the daughter, the widow's Mahari itself made such an arrangement. Regarding the question - why the man claimed the widow's Nokna daughter or why such an arrangement was made by the widow's Mahari even if it was not claimed? - Burling suggests, "It is unfair to expect a young man to marry a widow unless he is also given a younger wife who has never been married ..." (1963:148). He also remarks that every Garo man deserves one "new wife", and therefore, "a widow is not enough" (1963:148). Burling may be right in considering the psychological aspect of the situation.

It may be true that the man wanted a virgin, but it may reasonably be argued that if a virgin, (a "new wife", according in Burling's language) was claimed and therefore, had to be given. Any young girl could serve the purpose, - why the widow's Nokna daughter? I think, Burling has failed to consider the fact that the young man who used to come forward to replace the deceased husband, was in fact given the advantage of becoming the heir, the Nokrom, of the deceased by taking the widow's Nokna daughter as his wife. And this is what men used to claim. Thus, in my view, what the man was given, or so to speak what he claimed, was not a "new wife" as Burling thinks, but the status of Nokrom. There were reasons for such a claim - the man used to think that if he married the widow alone, and not her Nokna daughter, and if subsequently another man was selected as the Nokrom for the widow's household, then, his position would be precarious and he might cease to be the Nokrom. But if he himself can become the Nokrom, his position would be secured as nobody could take away his right to manage the property of the widow's household. By marrying the widow and her daughter he could enjoy this right during the widow's lifetime, and even after her death. Thus, in order to secure his position, mainly his future position, the man claimed the widow's Nokna daughter together with the widow herself. On the other hand, the members of the widow's Mahari were equally interested in ensuring the protection and support of the widow in her old age, by appointing her new husband the future Nokrom of her Nok. So, they arranged to marry the widow and her Nokna daughter to the same man.

Burling, it would seem, ignores the most important structural reason for this type of marriage.

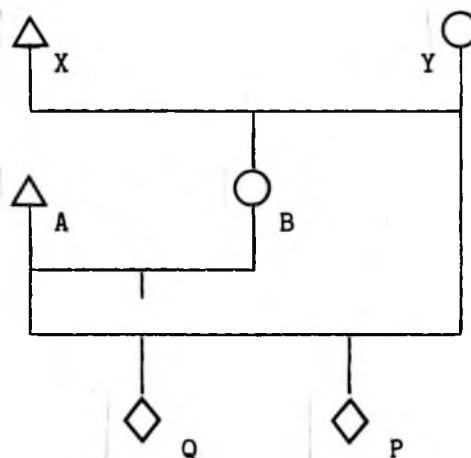
When a widow and her daughter were married to the same man it was generally the case that the widow was very young and her daughter only a little girl, or at least much younger than the widow. The man would therefore first have sexual relations with the senior wife, and when her daughter had grown older he had sexual relations with her as well. In most cases both women had sexual relations with the same man and at some stage both of them could bear children by him (sometimes even in the same year). Before starting to have sexual relations with the junior wife, the husband had to seek the permission of the senior wife. This was not difficult, as the widow wanted her to maintain sexual gratification as she grew older, so she (the widow) allowed her daughter and the husband to have sexual relations. When the widow became old and sexually inactive she allowed her husband to have sex with her daughter exclusively. Cases of conflict due to sexual jealousy between mother and daughter are difficult to find. Nobody could cite a single example of such a conflict, rather, people told me that mother and daughter made very good and friendly co-wives.

In step-daughter marriage the man who married the widow and her daughter did not possess a mother-in-law, since both women were his wives. On the other hand, the widow did not have a son-in-law, as the husband of Nokna daughter was also her husband.. Thus kinship terms for mother-in-law and Nokrom could

never be used by the man and the widow for each other. Kinship terms used by the mother and her daughter for each other were not changed even though they were co-wives. The children of both women addressed the husband of their respective mother, i.e. the same man, as Apa (term for father), but address the women by the term which was appropriate according to the relationship of these two women (see Diagram 7.2b).

In Chunia there are no cases of step-daughter marriage contracted during the last twenty-five years. However, cases of such marriage contracted more than twenty-five years ago are to be found in the genealogical histories of this village. I discovered five cases of step-daughter marriage where both women had children from the same man. In four out these five cases, the mother, her daughter, and their common husband, had already died, but in the other case all concerned are still alive.

Diagram 7.2b



Here, P and Q are the offsprings of Y and B (mother and daughter, respectively) from their common husband A.

The kinship terms used by the persons shown in Diagram 7.2b are as follows:

B is addressed as Demechik (term for daughter) by Y, and Y is addressed as Ama (term for mother) by B.

A is regarded as Se (term for husband) by both Y and B, and both Y and B are regarded as Jik (term for wife) by A.

A is addressed as Apa (term for father) by both P and Q, and both P and Q are addressed by A as Depante/Demetchik (term for son/daughter).

Y is addressed as Ama (term for mother) by P, and as Ambi (term for mother's mother) by Q.

B is addressed as Abi (term for elder sister) by P, and as Ama (term for mother) by Q.

X is referred to as Awang (term for step-father) by P, and as Achu (term for mother's father) by Q.

Note that although P and Q are the children of the same father, they will never use the sibling terms for each other since their mothers are different. But P and B will always address each other by sibling terms as they are the children of the same mother, although their fathers are different.

Christian Garo no longer practise this type of marriage, as they say that such marriages, like the mother-in-law marriage, are not approved of by Christianity. The Songsarek Garo are also influenced by Christians, but there are still some Songsarek, particularly the old people, who think that there is no harm in such marriages being arranged. But they cannot arrange such marriages anymore, as the majority of the population are Christian. If a Songsarek attempted to arrange such a marriage Christian Garo would object to it. The arrangement of such a marriage inevitably results in conflict between Christian and Songsarek Garo. I know of one such case, which shall be

described in chapter 9.

Mesokani of deceased husband for a woman is still made by the Christian as well as Songsarek Garo although step-daughter marriage is no longer practised. Today, the man who replaces the deceased husband is given the advantage of remaining the head of the Nok even if a Nokrom is selected for the widow's Nokna daughter, and until his death the man can enjoy this right. At present, even if a man is discarded by the Nokrom, he has nothing to fear, because he can own both land and other property, which has become possible through changes in the system of property ownership (see Ch.4).

In Chunia I did not discover any cases of marriage of a widow and an unmarried man, but in Gohalideo I found a case where an unmarried man married a widow in order to replace her husband. This man did not marry the widow's Nokna daughter. I asked this man what would happen if, in the future, a Nokrom is selected for the widow's Nokna daughter. He said, "I do not care. I have my own property. I shall be able to survive".

2. Sexual Relation, Disputes and the Problems of Mesokani.

It is evident that the Mesokani of a deceased husband essentially resulted in either mother-in-law or step-daughter marriage. The arrangement of these marriages differed due to the situation in which the Mesokani was made. However, the end result of both of these arrangements was that the same man had

become the husband of both women, i.e. the widow and her daughter, at the same time although in mother-in-law marriage the man married his wife, the Nokna, first, and then her widowed mother and in the case of step-daughter marriage, the man married the widow and daughter at the same time.

Since the man married, in both situations, the widow and her daughter and as both women were regarded as his wives, the simple logic suggests that he, being their husband, could have sexual relations with both. The Garo also say that the man was allowed to have sexual relations with both women, and this was a social custom. Examples of both women bearing children by the same husband in the case of step-daughter marriage certainly confirms that sexual relations with the same man by the widow and her daughter were not only permissible but also practised. Earlier observers on the Garo have also given examples (see Burling, 1963:149-50) or at least noted the existence of such relationships (see Nakane, 1967:48).

But the existence of sexual relations with the same man by both mother and daughter in the case of mother-in-law marriage has been a matter of dispute between two earlier observers, Burling (1963) and Nakane (1967). Burling argued that since the Garo observe very strict sex taboos between mother-in-law and son-in-law, and as they also practise mother-in-law avoidance, it is most unlikely that after the death of father-in-law, sexual relations between a son-in-law and his mother-in-law would develop. In his own words, "To change from the hesitation and

avoidance that govern the behaviour of Garo men towards their mothers-in-law to the intimacy of sexual relation would seem to defy the stability which we expect to find in human relationships, and the Garo do not attempt (Burling,1963:143). But Nakane strongly disagreed. She writes, "...I am reluctant to agree with Burling's view that sexual relations between the Nokrom and his mother-in-law after his father-in-law's death seem extremely unlikely For the taboo (avoidance of intimate relations) between the Nokrom and his mother-in-law is radically abandoned by his father-in-law's death, which marks the change of the man's status from being the Nokrom to the head of the Nok ...".(Nakane,1967:47; Footnote). I think, Nakane is justified in emphasizing the change of Nokrom's status, which in her view, entitles the Nokrom to have sexual relations with his widowed mother-in-law. My informants also said that such changes did occur and after the Nokrom's father-in-law's death his widowed mother-in-law was no longer regarded as a mother-in-law but as a wife. The change of status is quite clearly evident in the change of kinship terms after the Nokrom's father-in-law's death (see Table 7.1 and 7.2). Burling himself notes the change of status of, as well as kinship terms for, the Nokrom after his father-in-law's death (see Burling,1963:158), but he provides us with no explanation for this change. Moreover, he fails to consider that the Nokrom not only inherits the social position of his deceased father-in-law but also the latter's wife, and the Nokrom's right to have sexual relations with his widowed mother-in-law is therefore, implied.

Burling thinks that the practice of mother-in-law avoidance indicates that sexual relations between the mother-in-law and the Nokrom was impossible. If we consider the reasons for this practice among the Garo, however, the indications of sexual relations between the Nokrom and his widowed mother-in-law may clearly be evident. In this society, the Nokrom and his mother-in-law do not go anywhere alone together, do not sit together in the same house and do not even talk to each other if they can avoid it. But this restrained relationship is observed only when the Nokrom's father-in-law is alive, not after his death. Nakane observes that after the death of Nokrom's father-in-law, "the situation is entirely reversed - son-in-law and mother-in-law are virtually forced to live in the same house" (1967:66). As regards the reasons for the avoidance of mother-in-laws, the Garo say, "We do not like to let ourselves the object of joking by others. If a son-in-law, particularly, the Nokrom, mixes freely with his mother-in-law, talks to her in private, if they sit together in a place where nobody else is present, other people tease the son-in-law as well as his mother-in-law by saying, 'Let the old man die and then you two can enjoy each other' or 'you do not have any patience, you have already started enjoying yourselves, you should remember that the poor old man is still alive'. So, in order to avoid such teasing the son-in-law and his mother-in-law always try to avoid each other". I think, this type of joking or teasing indicates that sexual relations are possible between these two persons after the Nokrom's father-in-law's death.

Some people give another reason why the Nokrom should avoid his mother-in-law. If he indulges in any intimate relationships with her, his father-in-law may become angry. On the other hand the mother-in-law also should avoid her Nokrom son-in-law for the same reason, i.e. not to make her husband angry. The Garo can give no reason for why the Nokrom's father-in-law may get angry if the son-in-law develops an intimate relationship with his mother-in-law. Some people, of course, said, "Nokrom's mother-in-law is not his wife until his father-in-law's death, so Nokrom should not talk to her in private as she is his father-in-law's wife". I think that Nokrom's father-in-law may suspect that sexual relations between his wife and the Nokrom may exist; what is possible after his death may already have developed before his demise, and this suspicion may easily arouse his sexual jealousy towards the Nokrom and this, in turn, may be the cause of his anger. Thus, in my view, the custom of mother-in-law avoidance was practised by the Garo presumably to avoid conflict between the father-in-law and the Nokrom. The practice of mother-in-law avoidance among the Garo should be understood in the context of this society. Burling fails to see that what may be true in other societies may not be true in case of Garo society.

Burling wrote, "... I would be most surprised to find a man who actually engaged in sexual relations with a woman who was the mother of his first wife" (1963:142). In fact, it is difficult, as I have already stated, to give an example of this. Nakane says that sexual relations between these persons is permissible

but she could not provide an example. However, the two cases of conflict that I have mentioned in connection with my discussion on mother-in-law marriage clearly indicate that sexual relations between the Nokrom and his mother-in-law were not only permissible but also existed in the past (before people were converted to Christianity). However, it was always difficult for an outside observer to know of the existence of such relations as it was a delicate question to ask of those concerned; on the other hand, the person involved in this relationship would never admit their relations even when asked. It was also difficult to collect information from other people as it was not possible for them to know whether or not sexual relations between the Nokrom and his widowed mother-in-law had occurred. Even if they knew it would not be disclosed to an outsider. It was only possible for me to collect the information I could because of changes in society. I did not have to ask questions about this subject as people themselves disclosed things to me. I have mentioned earlier that people themselves knew the facts because of conflicts between Christian and Songsarek Garo. If there had not been such conflicts it would have been impossible to collect this information.

The lack of examples of widowed mother-in-law's bearing children from sexual unions with Nokrom is the most important reason why neither earlier observers, nor Garo themselves, nor even myself, can say for certain that the widowed mother-in-laws and Nokrom were engaged in sexual relations. I have already stated that it was not possible for the widow in most cases to

bear children after her marriage to the Nokrom because of her age. It would appear that sexual relations between the two persons in question were permissible, possible and did occur, although it is not always possible to prove it.

Finally, it may be argued that if sexual relations of both the widow and her daughter with the same husband were possible in cases of step-daughter marriage, then, it should equally have been possible in cases of mother-in-law marriage, since the purpose of both of these marriages were the same. The marriages were arranged for the continuation of the already established Nok by the representative of the deceased man's Mahari and thereby attempted to maintain the Akim relationship between two allied Mahari. Burling himself admits this when he writes, "If the rules of Akim were to be carried out with complete consistency, however, it would indeed be appropriate for the son-in-law to marry his mother-in-law. This would be a neat way of maintaining the tie between the two lineages upon which so much emphasis is placed" (1963:143). But he arrives at a different conclusion on the question of sexual relations between mother-in-laws and son-in-laws. writes, "Logic impels the Garos to speak as if an heir married his mother-in-law when her husband dies. The difficulty of so radically altering the roles of the people concerned prevents this far from ever actually happening" (ibid.). But like Nakane I would argue that the change of Nokrom's status after the death of his father-in-law would easily make it possible for both the Nokrom as well as his mother-in-law to overcome the psychological barriers of their previous

relationship as son-in-law and mother-in-law, and eventually could have led to sexual relations between them.

3. Mesokani of a deceased wife.

When the wife of a man died a woman from her Mahari was given in replacement. But this woman was given neither the right of ownership to the property of the Nok nor even to the social status of the deceased wife if the Nokna of the deceased had already been selected or even if the deceased wife left behind an unmarried daughter who could be selected as her Nokna. In such cases the deceased woman's Nokna daughter (whether already selected or yet to be selected) inherited the rights as well as the social status of her mother. It is very interesting to note that although the Nokna assumed the social status of her mother after the latter's death, she did not have to marry her deceased mother's husband. An important question arises here - if the Nokrom son-in-law had to marry his widowed mother-in-law in order to inherit the rights and social status of his deceased father-in-law, why then was not the Nokna required to marry her deceased mother's husband in order to inherit the rights and social status of her mother? But the Garo do not practise marriage between father and his own daughter. They say, "A father cannot marry his own daughter as it is forbidden in our society". The marriage of father and daughter was forbidden because of the incest taboo on sexual relations between father and daughter. But another question arises - if the incest taboo

on the sexual relations between the mother-in-law and the Nokrom son-in-law could be ignored after the Nokrom's father-in-law's death, then, why could not the incest taboo on the sexual relations between father and daughter be ignored after the Nokna's mother's death? I think, the Garo perhaps considered the point that there is no blood relationship between mother-in-law and Nokrom son-in-law, but there is a direct blood relationship between father and daughter, so the incest taboo could not be ignored. Nakane maintains that for structural reasons the Nokna does not have to marry her father in order to inherit her deceased mother's rights and social status. She writes, "The Nokrom married the widowed mother-in-law in order to acquire the headship of the Nok. On the other hand, the ownership was automatically handed over to the Nokna when her mother died. This ownership is not based on the headship in the same way as the headship is based on the ownership; the relation is not that of the chicken and the egg. In relation to the headship, the ownership is logically but not functionally, the primarily important factor. The Nokna does not need to marry her father in order to acquire the ownership: the ownership is already in her hands, and through it her husband is the head of the Nok; thus the father theoretically loses the headship and retires from office on his wife's death if the Nokna and Nokrom have already been chosen. In such cases, the Nokrom has rights to the headship before the father-in-law. Thus, the Garo structure avoids the marriage of the father and the daughter". (Nakane, 1967:51; Footnote). Here I have quoted Nakane at

length, because I have nothing to add to her analysis. Her argument in this respect is so powerful and logical that I have accepted it without qualification. I think, every observer of Garo should consider her analysis if a real and meaningful analysis of Garo social structure is intended. It should be noted in this context that although in principle the Nokrom's father-in-law retired from office after the Nokrom's mother-in-law's death, in practice he continued to hold rights until his death. The Nokrom discussed problems of the management of household affairs with the father-in-law and accept his decisions and advice until his death.

Although the Nokna assumed her mother's social status after the latter's death, kinship terms used for the Nokna by her father and the siblings were not changed, as as they were in case of the Nokrom after his father-in-law's death. But the terms used by Nokna and her sisters' husbands and brothers' wives for each other were changed after th Nokna's mother's death. Thus, these relatives addressed the Nokna by the terms for sister-in-law before her mother's death, but after her mother's death they used the term for mother-in-law (Mani or Nio) which they once used for Nokna's deceased mother (i.e. their deceased mother-in-law) as she was the heiress of her deceased mother's social status. However, in most cases they used teknonymy instead using the actual term.

If a man married both a widow and her daughter at the same time (in case of step-daughter marriage), and if his principal

wife died her daughter, who was his secondary wife, replaced her (as Principal wife). In such cases, the secondary wife inherited the rights and social position of the deceased principal wife as the former was not only one of his two wives but also the Nokna of the latter. However, if the secondary wife also died the man did not marry her daughter because of the incest taboo on sexual relations between father and daughter as mentioned above. In such cases the man was provided with another woman from his deceased wife's Mahari.

Generally the deceased woman's full younger sister was chosen as her replacement, but if such a sister was not available, or if the deceased's own sister or deceased's husband refused to accept the other as his spouse, then one of the sister's daughter or another girl from her Mahari (or even from the same Machong) was given. The girl chosen had to be younger than the deceased woman as Garo custom did not allow a man to marry a woman from his previous wife's Mahari who was older than his previous wife (mother-in-law and step-daughter marriages were, of course, exceptions).

Out of the fifty-four married women presently living in Chunia, five were married as replacements for deceased wives. The relationship of these women to those whom they replaced is shown in the Table 7.3.

Table 7.3

Relationship of replacing women to deceased women.

| Relationship to deceased woman | Number of cases | Percentage |
|---|--------------------|------------|
| Classificatory younger sister (at Mahari level) | 3 | |
| Classificatory younger sister (at Machong level) | 1 | |
| classificatory sister's daughter (at Mahari level) | 1 | |
| Total | 5 | |

The Mesokani of a deceased wife could also be made by providing the widower with a widow from his deceased wife's Mahari, but this was possible only if a widow who happened to be the secondary wife of her husband was available when a Mesokani was required. The widow, who happened to be the principal wife, could not be given as the replacement for a deceased wife of another Nok as she was the owner of her own Nok, and her deceased husband was therefore, to be replaced by his heir, the Nokrom (see Mesokani of a deceased husband). A divorced woman could also be given as a replacement. But in all cases where a widowed or divorced woman was selected she had to be younger than the deceased for the reason given above. A widowed, or a divorced woman, who fulfilled these conditions was rarely available when the Mesokani was required, so in most cases an unmarried young girl was chosen. Out of the five women shown in the above Table, only one was a widow but the other four were previously

unmarried.

The arrangement of Mesokani seems to be very simple - the deceased spouse was replaced, both the surviving spouse and the new woman simply accepted each other. But in practice, as the people told me, it was not so simple. The people of both Mahari spent much time choosing a suitable woman. Moreover, they had to persuade those concerned if either initially refused to marry. Even after such persuasion either party could refuse to marry, so members of the Mahari had to choose an alternative woman. As far as I could gather, in one of the five cases of Mesokani mentioned above, the widower refused to marry the woman selected so an alternative was selected from the Machong of the deceased, because none else was available in the Mahari. In another case, the woman selected for the Mesokani refused to marry the widower, so one of the sister's daughter of the deceased woman, was given to the widower. In the remaining three cases, the widower and the replacing woman married each other without any major difficulty. However, in two of these cases, the widowers initially refused to marry the replacing women, but they were persuaded to accept the women given to them. Cases of total refusal were very rare as there were always alternative choices available.

A marriage ceremony was observed when a replacement wife was given to a widower. Once the persons involved in the Mesokani accepted each other and after the marriage ceremony, they generally lived together without serious problems. But many

problems could arise in cases where there was a big difference of age between two partners. According to Garo customary law every man or woman, whatever his or her age, could claim a replacement spouse and thus even an old man was given a replacement wife if he made a claim. In such cases it was very difficult to find a woman of the same age as the old man, because all the women of his age were either married and their husbands were still living, or even if the women were widowed, they were already married to their husbands' Nokrom. Sometimes they were simply unavailable when the Mesokani was required. In such circumstances the Mahari members were compelled to provide an old man with a young unmarried girl. This young wife of the old man was sometimes even the same age as his grand-daughter (see below for such a case). Due to the big age differences the young girl could face problems of adjustments and often complained that her husband could not satisfy her sexual desires. Although a young girl might initially accept the old man as her husband because of persuasion by members of her Mahari she might at some later stage run away if she could not adjust to living with the old man. I know a man of about sixty-five years old, living in Chunia, who was given a replacement wife when he was about fifty-five years old, and the new wife was a young girl of about seventeen or eighteen. This young girl initially accepted the old man as her husband and started living with him although she did not like him. After three years she ran away with a man of the neighbouring village. The old man placed this matter before the members of the woman's Mahari and claimed another woman in her

stead, but these Mahari members as well as those of of the old man, persuaded him against taking a young girl as a wife as he might face the same problem once more. I talked to this old man. He said, "I am not quite happy without a wife, but what can I do? Kokila (his young wife's name) ran away and her Mahari did not give me a new wife. So I am living alone". This old man is now living in one of his daughter's house and she looks after him.

Although the Mahari people were bound to provide an old man with a replacement if he claimed one people did not like fulfilling the claims of old men. Sometimes people used to joke about an old man's hopes of gaining a replacement wife. In most cases an elderly man was persuaded to remain an old widower in order to avoid later problems. If an old man could be so persuaded he lived in the house of his Nokna daughter until his death.

In spite of social changes the Mesokani of a deceased wife is still practised by the Garo. People try to maintain the old rules, but at present they encounter more problems than in the past. Refusal by either partner to accept the other as spouse occurs frequently. In Chunia I found two cases of refusal. In both these cases the husbands left the village after the death of their wives and married women belonging to another Mahari which did not belong to their deceased wives' Machong. In both these cases the Mahari of their deceased wives selected replacement wives for the men, but they refused to marry them and did not wait for alternative selections. It may be noted that the Mahari

of these two men were not previously alligned with their deceased wive's Mahari, even though an Akim relationship was, in principle, established between their Mahari and their wives's Mahari, through their marriage. So these two men were expected to marry the replacement wives provided by their wives' Mahari, but did not obey this rule. According to the rules of Akim these two men had to pay monetary compensation of 400 Taka (about \$20) each for breaking the Akim relationship, but they did not pay the money. The people of their wives' Mahari could not collect the money as the men's Mahari had not been related previously. The people of Chunia, particularly the Mahari members of these two men's deceased wives, still talk much about these two cases and they think that the two men should have paid the compensation. Unfortunately, I was not able to contact the two men, who today live in distant villages, so I do not know why they refused to marry the replacement wives provided for them. However, it is possible that this is the result of the men contracting individual marriages, i.e. marriage between persons whose Mahari was not previously related. To-day, such marriages are found quite frequently (see Ch.5). In such marriages it is quite possible for the surviving partner to marry elsewhere, as happened in these cases, because, the person is not bound by Akim obligation in the same way as a person in case of marriage in a Mahari which is related by previous Akim relationship.

When a young unmarried girl is selected as the replacement for a deceased woman, in most cases she refuses to accept the widower, and even if she marries the widower after the persuasion

of her Mahari she may run away after several years. Therefore, people attempt to find a widowed or a divorced woman from the deceased woman's Mahari for the purpose of Mesokani. Although it was hardly possible in the past to find a widow to replace a deceased woman, nowadays it is not so difficult. Because, the widow, whose husband failed to select the Nokrom before his death, cannot be provided with a young unmarried man as the custom of step-daughter marriage is no longer practised. Thus, a widower can be provided with such a widow. However, in Chunia, I have not found such a case, but in Gohalideo I found two cases out of the six cases of Mesokani, in both of which the Mesokani was made with a widow. Nowadays, an old widower is generally persuaded not to take a replacement wife and to remain single. In Chunia, there are three old widowers, including the one whose young wife ran away.

4. Mesokani and the gift of 'Ma-gual'.

The Mesokani of a deceased spouse was not made by the deceased's Mahari if the surviving partner's Mahari did not make a gift after the death. This gift is known as 'Ma-gual', which literally means, 'a gift for the mother', and this, in fact, was given by the surviving partner himself or herself to the deceased partner's mother's Nok. If the deceased's mother was alive, she received the gift, but if she was not, her heiress daughter, the Nokna, received it. The Ma-gual was a gift of a single item and it varied from case to case - it could be a piece of equipment,

or a utensil used by the deceased person. Generally a brass basin (Rang), which was used for holding water, as a musical instrument and also a ritual object (see Ch.2) were preferred, but if the surviving partner was very poor and did not have, nor could afford to buy a Rang, the base of a gourd was given as a substitute.

Once this Ma-gual was given to the deceased person's mother's Nok, it became a legal obligation for that Mahari to provide a replacement for the dead person, and if they failed to do so, they had to pay monetary compensation to the surviving partner's Mahari. However, it was always possible for the Mahari to find a person for the purpose of Mesokani, at least from the same Machong, if not from the same Mahari. Thus, cases of Mahari paying monetary compensation for the failure to supply a replacement are hard to find. I have not encountered such a case.

Most of the earlier observers have not dealt with the gift of Ma-gual; Nakane does not mentioned this gift. However, Burling, in his book, variously refers to the Ma-gual gift as a "payment for service", "A ceremonial gift", the nearest equivalent to bride-price" etc. (1963:155-57). He suggests that since the Ma-gual comes from the household where the deceased person worked during his or her life time, it symbolizes a "payment for service". But Garo do not consider this to be an obligation to pay something in return for the services that the person gave to that household. One old Garo man told me, "The

widower or the widow does not have to pay anything to the mother of his or her deceased spouse. We show the Ma-gual to the soul of the deceased person and guide the soul to his or her mother's house so that the deceased person may be born again in that house". Burling himself also mentions the existence of such a belief among the Garo (1963:155). It could be argued that if there were a custom of making a payment for services, the Garo could do so when the person was alive but they do not. If the payment for services is applicable only after the death of a person, as Burling presumably thinks, the property earned by the deceased person during his or her life time could have been given to his or her mother's household. But no property, not even a part of it, is divided between the surviving and deceased partner, because the property belongs to the Nok and must be enjoyed by the person who replaces the deceased person or by the Nokna and Nokrom. Burling himself writes, "Property is never divided at death" (1963:157). I do not think that the Ma-gual is a payment for service.

Burling asserts that "the Ma-gual, though formally given in return for one man, becomes a prerequisite for obtaining the next man" (1963:156). This is true, because without receiving this gift the deceased's Mahari would not be obliged to replace the deceased man. However, even if we accept Burling's assertion, it should be remembered that this gift was given not only to obtain a man, but also to obtain a woman. Moreover, it should also be remembered that Garo do not have to pay either bride-price or dowry for a marriage at the time of marriage. A son of a household is allowed, at the time of his marriage, to take with

him only his personal clothings from his mother's household, and so also an Agate daughter. However, the parents may give their sons and Agate daughters a donation of some agricultural equipment, household utensils, baskets, and even domestic animals etc. for the initial establishment of their new households. But parents are not under any obligation to donate these things (see Ch.4). Thus the donations given at the time of marriage are not to be confused with bride-price or dowry. Burling has also considered the Ma-gual as a "ceremonial gift". I think, he is justified to consider this as such, since the Ma-gual is given ceremonially after the death of a person. The recipient of this gift, i.e. the deceased' mother's Nok, kill a cow or a pig on receipt of the gift, and arrange a feast in which people of both the giving and receiving Mahari are invited. However, the killing of a cow and the arrangement of the feast is not obligatory. It depends on the economic condition of the Nok which receives the gift. No return gift is given by the recipient of the Ma-gual. However, this gift is the expression of a wish for continuous links between two allied Mahari as it serves as an indication of the deceased' Nok, as well as of the Mahari, interest to continue the previously established relationship with the deceased's Mahari.

5. Divorce: The disturbing element.

Although the two Nok as well as the two Mahari tied through marriage relationships try their best to maintain the relationship, they cannot manage this in cases of divorce. A

divorce was always considered by the Garo to be a disturbing element as it upset settled arrangements. If the divorce of a Nokna-Nokrom couple took place before the Nokna's parents' death, another Nokrom for the Nokna, or a new pair of Nokna-Nokrom was selected. But in such a case the new Nokrom might or might not be from the same Nok with which the Nokna's parents' Nok had the Nok-chame relationship, i.e. the Nok to which the previous Nokrom belonged. Generally, it happened that the Nok did not contain any unmarried sons who could become the Nokrom, or even if an unmarried son, i.e. the younger brother of the previous Nokrom, was available, his parents might not wish him to marry the Nokna if she was responsible for the divorce. The same situation could be reversed, i.e. if the former Nokrom was responsible for the divorce, the Nokna's parents might avoid re-marrying her to the younger brother. Thus at the divorce of a Nokna-Nokrom couple the Nok-chame relationship, in most cases, came to an end. However, the Akim relationship between two Mahari was retained as the Nokna's father selected the new Nokrom from his own Mahari. If the divorce of a Nokna-Nokrom took place after the Nokna's parents' death, the two Mahari selected Nokna and Nokrom for that Nok and the one who was responsible for the divorce was removed. Neither in Chunia nor in Gohalideo have I found a case of divorce between a Nokna and Nokrom. However, the people told me that the above arrangements were made in cases of Nokna-Nokrom divorce.

As no Nok-chame relationship is involved in the marriage of an Agate daughter the complications arising out of a divorce are

not as serious as they are in cases of of Nokna-Nokrom divorce. However, even in case of a divorce of an Agate couple the Akim relationship was disturbed and could even come to an end if a new Akim was established through the marriage of only one couple and if a divorce took place between between the husband and wife of that couple. In such cases, the divorced wife's Mahari were unwilling in future to supply a wife to the divorced husband's Mahari and vice versa. It may be noted that in cases of Agate couple divorce, neither the Mahari of the husband nor that of the wife were under any obligation to replace the divorced partner to the marriage.

In this society a marriage was expected to be permanent, and in most cases, it lasted until the death of one of the partners. The stability of a marriage, in fact, was created and assured by the Garo economic system. The wife was the owner of the Nok and all the property of the Nok belonged to her; on the other hand, the husband was the manager of the Nok. So the husband and wife were dependent on each other for their livelihood, and neither was complete without the other. Thus, in the interest of holding their respective rights and for their joint concern for the Nok, they tried to adjust to each other and to establish a permanent relationship (cf. also Nakane, 1967:74-78). However, a Garo man and a woman did not like to live together as husband and wife if they really found themselves incompatible. In such a situation either of them could demand a divorce. No matter who took the initiative, the Mahari of both the husband and the wife ultimately became involved, as in every case of a divorce a

dispute was sure to arise and in such cases the husband and wife were supported by their respective Mahari. The settlement of such disputes became the concern of both Mahari.

When either the husband or the wife wanted a divorce the members of both Mahari arranged a meeting and tried to settle the family dispute without resorting to divorce. But if the partner who took the initiative for divorce, remained adamant and refused to live with the other partner, it was difficult to persuade them otherwise. In some cases, to persuade him or her. So in such cases, the members of both Mahari formally arranged the divorce. No divorce was legally valid unless it was approved by both Mahari.

According to Akim law, the partner who took the initiative in a divorce had to pay monetary compensation for breaking the marriage. It is very interesting to note that this partner had to pay this money even if he or she could prove that the other party was at fault. Besides this monetary compensation, the partner who initiated a divorce was also physically beaten and scolded by the senior male members of his or her Mahari (see Ch.9 for the nature of punishment). Thus, it was not the spouse responsible for the breakdown of the marriage, but the spouse who took the initiative for the divorce who was considered to be guilty as his or her act was taken to be the cause of a dispute between the two Mahari.

The money for compensation for breaking a marriage was generally paid not only by that person, but also by other members

of his or her Mahari. On the other hand this money, although received by the other partner, was generally divided among the members of his or her Mahari (see Ch.9). However, when a divorce was mutually desired by both husband and wife, and also approved by their respective Mahari, the two Mahari settled the dispute without imposing any fine on either partner and without inflicting any punishment.

In order to avoid disputes between two allied Mahari and also to maintain previously settled arrangements, a divorce was always discouraged by members of both Mahari. Individual partners to a marriage were also very careful - neither of them wanted to take the first initiative in a divorce as he or she knew that it is difficult to recruit a support group from his or her Mahari since everybody would discourage divorce. Moreover, there was the fear of monetary compensation as well as physical punishment. Due to above reasons divorce rate among the Garo was very low.

In spite of changes in society divorce is still discouraged. The strictness of rules in this regard, however, have not been maintained. The rate of divorce, however, is still very low. I found only two cases of divorce among the present population of Chunia. In both cases the husbands divorced their wives and in both cases this involved Agate couples. In one case the husband deserted his wife and left the village. The dispute between the Mahari of the man and his wife could not be settled as his Mahari did not come forward to settle it. The man who ran away has, as I came to learn, already married another woman from his own

village and the divorced woman has not yet re-married. According to Akim law, this man should have paid 400 Taka as the compensation for breaking the marriage and he also should have received physical punishment, but no action could be taken against him. In this case, the two Mahari were not related by any previous Akim relationship. This man's marriage was the first marriage between his Mahari and his wife's. This is another example of modern individual marriage which, as I have already stated, can seldom be governed by traditional Akim regulations. In the other case, the wife was mentally ill, so the husband, as well as his Mahari, initiated the divorce. Both Mahari settled the matter amicably, without imposing any compensation or punishment on the husband.

6. Mahari and the status-difference.

It is evident from the earlier chapter that Garo practise asymmetrical cross-cousin marriage, and it is clear from the discussion of the present chapter that the relationship between two Nok or so to speak between two Mahari established through marriage, is also asymmetrical. Leach suggests that societies in which there is an asymmetrical relationship between two local descent groups, as among the Kachin, a differentiation of status between the two groups is "more likely than not" (Leach, 1951:52). He demonstrates that among the Kachin of the Assam-Burma-Yunnan Frontier area the wife-giving group (Mayu) is considered to be of higher rank than the wife-receiving group (Dama); similarly,

among the Batak of Lake Toba in the North Central Sumatra the wife-giving group (Hulahula) is ranked higher than the wife-receiving group (Anak-Boru); and a reverse situation is found among a Southern Bantu Tribe - the Lovedu, where a higher rank is assigned to the wife-receiving group (Vaduhulu) and not to the wife-giving group (Vamakhulu). Thus he suggests that a status-difference may be found in one way or the other (Leach,1951:23-25). He also postulates that "the social relations between wife givers and wife receivers must conform to the status relations implicit in other (non-kinship) institutions: e.g., where wife givers are socially superior to wife receivers, one can predict that the political and territorial rights of wife givers will be superior to those of wife receivers, etc.-- and vice versa" (Leach,1951:52).

Although Garo Nok-chame or Akim relationships were assymetrical, the wife-givers and wife-receivers or, to phrase it more appropriately in the Garo case, the husband-givers and the husband-receivers were equal in social, political, and economic status. Neither group was ranked higher or lower than the other.

Burling observes, "The Garo Akim relationship is in some ways remarkably similar to the relationship of lineages among the Kachin of Burma, as analysed by E.R.Leach" (Burling,1963:161). In Burling's opinion the long-term relationships between two matrilineal lineages in Garo society established through marriage are similar to relationships established between two patrilineal lineages in Kachin society, as in both societies relationships

imply classificatory cross-cousin marriage (1963:161). But I think that the differences between these two societies are also significant. Among the Kachin the marriage of father's sister's daughter is forbidden, but among the Garo it is not. Besides this, marriage is circular among the Kachin but among the Garo it is not (cf. also Nakane, 1958:10). The most important difference is, however, that the structural implications of matrilineal cross-cousin marriage in these two societies are dissimilar. In Kachin society the allied lineages are ranked, whereas in Garo society they are not. The earlier observers have also noted this significant difference (see for example, Burling, 1963:162; Nakane, 1958:10 and 1967:53-54).

As an explanation for the absence of any status-difference between the two Mahari groups in Garo society, in spite of some similarities between Garo and Kachin systems, Burling writes, "It is easy to specify the point at which the system described by Leach (Kachin type marriage) breaks down for the Garos. Only one of a group of sisters need undertake the particular type of marriage which is governed by the lineage principles, and no rule requires all the women of a single lineage to marry into one or a restricted number of other lineages" (1963:162). In my view, this is undoubtedly a significant difference between the cross-cousin marriage rules of Kachin and those of the Garo, and may be one of the reasons, but certainly not the only reason, for the absence of status-differences in Garo society. Even if we take into consideration this "group of sisters" (in Burling's words), i.e. the Nokna, whose marriage "is governed by the

lineage principles", the higher-lower status may still be expected between the Mahari of the Nokna and that of her husband if Leach's suggestion is accepted; the relationship established through the marriage of Nokna and Nokrom is still asymmetrical. Thus, Burling's explanation for the absence of status-difference, i.e. the distinctiveness of Garo society on the grounds that only the Nokna-Nokrom couples are required to practise matrilineal cross-cousin marriage, seems unsatisfactory.

However, this may be explained in terms of Leach's idea. He maintains, "The absence of either work payment, bride-price or dowry suggests a break up of the Kachin type marriage institution"(Leach,1951:52). It is evident from the discussion in this chapter that neither bride-price nor dowry nor work payments are part of Garo marriages. This is one of the points at which the Kachin type marriage system breaks down for the Garo. Leach also suggests that the higher-lower status differentiation can be avoided in a society with asymmetrical marriage relationship "if a small number of neighbouring local descent group marry in a circle, or if there is a system of balancing rights and obligations - as with the Murngin;..." (Leach,1951:52). It is already noted that the Garo do not marry in a circle, but the absence of status-difference among the Garo may be analysed by considering the fact that in this society an equilibrium is maintained by balancing the rights and obligations of the two groups involved in the relationship. The wife's Mahari possess the right of ownership of the village

common land, Aking, and the husband's Mahari possesses the right of cultivation of this Aking, as well as the right to manage the property of the wife's Mahari, which is vested in their respective wives in individual Nok. These rights are enjoyed not only by the Nokna and Nokrom couple, but also by the Agate couples (see Ch.4). The husband-giving group and the husband-receiving group have not only these balancing rights, but also both groups are under certain obligations to each other as has been discussed earlier in this chapter. Thus, since neither group is less important than the other in their economic relationships, neither of them is superior to the other economically, socially or politically.

It should be noted that the ceremonial leadership of the village is vested in the husband-giving group but such a ceremonial leader is neither superior, nor has he any formal authority, nor even economic advantage, over the other members of the group (see Ch.9).

Nakane holds that among the Garo matrilineal cross-cousin marriage is practised at the level of Nok and the formation and continuation of Nok depends on a whole network of local lineage which form a moiety group. Thus, "...the whole network of the organization does not confer any independent social status on the Nok. Hence, the matrilineal cross-cousin marriage arrangements on the level of Nok do not cause any status differences between the husband-giving Nok and the husband-receiving Nok" (Nakane,1967:53-54). She also writes, "The economic loss or gain

derived from the matrilateral cross-cousin marriage inside an individual Nok is compensated by the moiety arrangements which interprets this mechanism as the exchange of men between two localized lineages, the economic basis of which lies in the village land" (Nakane,1967:54).

CHAPTER 8.

GARO KINSHIP TERMINOLOGY.

Garos have kinship terms for all Garos living in their own village or in neighbouring Garo villages with whom they have social contact. No matter how closely or remotely a person is related a certain kinship position is assigned to every person. The terms used for a person may be broad and very general, or very specific and particular. Kinship terms are considered by Garos narrowly at the level of Mahari, and broadly at the level of Machong, and even more broadly at the level of Chatchi group (see Ch.4 for definitions of Mahari, Machong, Chatchi). An individual's Chatchi membership is sufficient for assigning a kinship position to that individual. Even persons between whom there are no exact genealogical relationships feel very much like relatives if they know each other's Chatchi association. However, closeness or remoteness of relationship is defined according to the identification with narrow or broad groups, i.e. members of the same Mahari are considered to be related most closely, while members of the same Machong or Chatchi, although considered to be related, are not as closely linked as members of the same Mahari (see Ch.5).

In this chapter I shall explain Garo kinship terminology following the methods and analyses applied by Leach to "Jingphaw Kinship Terminology" (1945:59-72). It should, however, be noted

that the Jingphaw Kachin are patrilineal-patrilocal, whereas Garo are matrilineal-uxorilocal. Even so, I think that Garo kinship terminology can be explained, like Jingphaw, on the basis of the ideal rules of marriage, because marriage rules constitute the ideal pattern of Garo society, as they do for the Jingphaw.

Without dealing with any teleological argument as to whether marriage rule is determined by the form of society, or vice versa, Leach has demonstrated that the rule of preferred marriage among Jingphaw Kachin has a functional significance for their society. I shall attempt to show a similar functional significance of Garo marriage rules for Garo society although the marriage rules of Jingphaw Kachin are not similar to those of the Garo.

Ideally, Garo society is organized in accordance with the following structural principles:

1. Descent is matrilineal (see Ch.3).
2. Marriage is uxori-avunculocal, i.e. a woman always continues to live in the village (and in case of the heiress daughter, in the house) of her mother, while a man leaves his mother's house at marriage and goes to his wife's house, which is also his mother's brother's house (see Ch.5).
3. All male members of a group marry upon reaching puberty; therefore, a matrilineal group at no time contains adult males who have been born into that

group (see Ch.5).

4. After marriage a man becomes assimilated to his wife's matrilineal group, but his membership in his own matrilineal group is retained. Thus, even though a man leaves his mother's house at marriage he is always considered to be a member of his mother's group (see Ch.5).
5. Each matrilineal group is exogamous (see Ch.3).
6. Marriage relationships should be established at Mahari level, i.e. the males of one Mahari and females of the opposite Mahari. The relationship between two Mahari, once established through marriage, should be perpetuated in each succeeding generation (see Ch.7).
7. Polygyny is permissible; polyandry is not.
8. Levirate and sororate marriages are both practised.

According to structural principles 1 - 5, the relationship in a particular community is defined by:

1. The matrilineal group into which an individual is born.

2. The matrilineal group into which an individual marries and in which he subsequently resides; and
3. The permissibility of sex relations.

It has already been noted that a village organized on the basis of ideal Garo pattern, i.e. one in which adult female members of only one particular Mahari group live, and the adult males of only one Mahari group belonging to the opposite Chatchi reside as their husbands, is not found in practice (see Ch.3). However, for the sake of our analysis of Garo kinship terminology let us consider a hypothetical Garo village organized according to the ideal principles as stated above. Let us consider that this hypothetical village is the seat of a Mahari group 'A' belonging to a Machong of the Sangma Chatchi, and think that group 'A' has a permanent marriage relationship with Mahari group 'B', which belongs to a Machong of the Marak Chatchi. Let 'A' be the husband-receiving group and 'B' be the husband-giving group. At any time, the residents of this hypothetical village will, according to structural principles, consist of:

1. All the females who were born in to group 'A'.
2. The husbands of all A females, who belong to group 'B'.
3. All unmarried children, of both sex, of 'A' females and 'B' males. There should be no married males of group 'A' resident in the village; they should

marry out and be resident in their wives' villages.

Before beginning an analysis of the kinship terms let us consider some broad kin-categories which have resulted from the structural principles of the society.

1. Chra.

All males of an exogamous group, belonging to the same generation as ego and also to generations above ego's generation, are regarded by a female ego of the same group as Chra. Thus, for instance, the Chra of a woman of Group 'A' will be her real or classificatory mother's mother's brother, mother's brother, and brothers. The relatives regarded as Chra are not resident in the village where the women, who consider them as Chra, reside (structural principle 2 and 3). The Chra relatives of a female ego maintain authority over her and it is both their duty and responsibility to control the conduct of the females of their own group and to safeguard their (females) rights.

The relatives who are classed as Chra by a woman will also be regarded as such by her husband. Thus, the Chra of 'A' females are also the Chra of 'B' males. All the husbands of 'A' females are under the control of the Chra of group 'A'.

2. Gachi.

All males who come as husbands to a group are regarded as

"Gachi" by all males of that group. Thus, the men of group 'B' who come as husbands to 'A' women will be regarded as Gachi by all males of group 'A'. In other words, a man's Gachi relatives include his real or classificatory sisters' husbands (in his own generation), father and the real or classificatory mother's sisters' husbands (in the first ascending generation), real or classificatory mother's fathers (in the second ascending generation), and real or classificatory daughters' husbands (in the first descending generation) and so on. Although the relatives regarded as Gachi belong to the opposite group, they become assimilated in to ego's group (structural principle 4).

The terms Chra and Gachi are, therefore, reciprocals to each other, since the relatives who are regarded as Chra by a man will consider him as Gachi. It is interesting to note that a man is both a Chra as well as a Gachi - he is Chra in his own group, and Gachi in his wife's group (structural principle 4). These two terms are not used for addressing relatives nor for referring to them, but they are only used for grouping relatives in broad kin-categories. However, a reciprocal term, "Mosa", is used by the following relatives, who stand in the relationship of Chra and Gachi to each other.

1. Wife's mother's brother and sister's daughter's husband address each other in the same way by the term 'Mosa'.

2. Wife's elder brother and younger sister's husband address each other by the same term, Mosa. However, there is an alternative term, Boning, which is also used by these two relatives towards each other (see below).

In all other cases of Chra and Gachi relationships there are specific terms for relatives belonging to either of these kin-categories, and in no cases are the same terms used reciprocally as they are in the above cases (see Table 1).

3. Sadu.

All men married to women of a particular group use this term between each other. Thus, males of group 'B' who married into and are resident in group 'A' will use this term reciprocally. The Sadu of a man, therefore, may be his real or classificatory wife's sisters' husband (in his own generation), real or classificatory wife's mother's sisters' husband (in the first ascending generation), real or classificatory wife's sister's daughter's husband (in the first descending generation) and so on. This term is used as a means of address and as to refer to a relative belonging to this kin-category.

Thus, Chra, Gachi, and Sadu are broad kin-categories irrespective of generation status. Besides the above broad kin-categories, some general kinship terms are used by Garo. These are as follows:

(a) Achu.

All male members, irrespective of their group affiliation and belonging to all the generations above ego's parents' generation, are addressed as Achu. Thus, relatives addressed by this term include, real and classificatory father's father, father's father's father, father's father's father's father, and so on, and on the other hand, real or classificatory mother's father, mother's father's father, mother's father's father's father and so on.

(b) Ambi.

All female members, irrespective of their group affiliation and belonging to all generations above ego's parents' generation, are addressed by ego as Ambi. Thus, this term is used for ego's real or classificatory father's mother, father's mother's mother and so on, and on the other hand, for real or classificatory mother's mother, mother's mother's mother and so on. In other words, the wives of all males addressed by ego as Achu are addressed by ego as Ambi.

(c) Angsu.

All children, irrespective of their group affiliation, and sex, belonging to all the generation below ego's own children's generation, are addressed by ego as Angsu. Thus, this term is used for ego's real or classificatory son's children, daughter's children, brother's children's children, sister's children's

children, and so on.

Following Murdock's criteria for the classification of kinship terms, Burling classifies Garo kinship terms into nine different criteria, and one of his criteria is 'Chatchi Membership, under which Burling states that a distinction between members of own Chatchi and those of the opposite one is carefully maintained in Garo terminology, but "...it may be ignored only in grandparental and grandchildren generations ..." (Burling,1956:212). However, he notes that mother's parents and others in the same Chatchi on the one hand, and father's parents and the others of the same Chatchi on the other, are specified by adding the particles "Chongka" (meaning, 'true') for the former, and "Jakasi" (meaning, 'left hand') for the latter. A similar distinction is also made in the second descending generation (see Burling,1956:212). But among Bangladesh Garo, I have neither observed nor heard of distinctions based upon the terms Chongka or Jakasi for relatives belonging to either second ascending or second descending generation. The only male relative belonging to the second ascending generation distinguished by ego from all other male relatives of the same generation is ego's mother's mother's brother. Ego addresses his mother's mother's brother as Mama-Achu (which literally means, 'mother's brother-Achu', since the term Mama is used for mother's brother - see Table 1). The use of this term distinguishes a man from all other Achu belonging to his generation, i.e. ego's mother's father and father's father. The man whom ego addresses as Mama-Achu will address a male ego as Gri-Angsu (which literally means, 'sister's

son-Angsu', since the term Gri is used for sister's son - see Table 1), and a female ego as Namchik-Angsu (which literally means, 'sister's daughter-Angsu, since the term Namchik is used for sister's daughter - see Table 1). Thus, Gri-Angsu and Namchik-Angsu are distinguished from all other Angsu, i.e. from all other males and females belonging to the second descending generation. But these two terms are only the reciprocals of the term Mama-Achu. Burling also notes the distinctive terms Mama-Achu and its reciprocals Gri-Angsu and Namchik-Angsu (see Burling, 1956:211). Now a question arises - why is only one male relative of the second ascending generation distinguished from all other males of that generation and why is no separate term used for any other relative of the same generation? It is difficult to get any answer to this question from the people themselves, since they simply say, "Our mother's mother and father's mother are both equal to us - both our Ambi, and their husbands are also equal to us - both are our Achu". Burling provides us with no answer to the above question. He simply writes, "it [the distinction] may be ignored", but gives no reason why it may be ignored. However, I think the male relatives belonging to the second ascending generation are less important to ego than ego's mother's mother's brother, as they hold no formal authority over ego. Ego can see that ego's mother's mother's brother has a significant position in ego's group - he is respected by all the members of ego's group, even by ego's mother's brother, since he is the most senior male member of ego's own group; while ego's father's father and

mother's father do not have such a significant position in ego's own group. Therefore, ego distinguishes his mother's mother's brother from all other males of his generation by using the term Mama-Achu. This term indicates that the mother's mother's brother is also ego's Achu, but he has a different status. However, ego does not distinguish between female relatives belonging to the second ascending generation, not even ego's mother's mother, since none of these women holds any authority over him. All are equal to ego. In this society, authority at the Mahari level is vested in male members - no woman can hold any authority. Thus, I think, authority-status may be the criterion by which ego distinguishes between ego's relatives of the second ascending generation. Although the same criterion does not work in the case of all Garo kinship terms, this factor is evident in the case of some other terms (see below).

According to Leach, two types of 'unification' may be found in kinship terminologies. He writes, "On the one hand, individuals are classed together, because, individually and as a group, they stand in a significant and important relationship to the speaker; but on the other hand, they may be classed together because they are unimportant and remote" (Leach, 1945:71). Leach's view is applicable in Garo kinship terminology, in the case of the broad kin-categories like, Chra, Gachi, and Sadu on the one hand, and the general terms like, Achu, Ambi, and Angsu on the other. While Chra, Gachi, and Sadu, are classed for their importance in marriage relationships, Achu, Ambi, and Angsu, are classed for their lack of importance in such relationships.

It may be noted in this connection that the general terms Achu, Ambi, and Angsu, are also used by Garo for strangers, i.e., for people whose Chatchi membership is unknown, in the following manner:

Achu: For strangers (male) older than ego.

Ambi: For strangers (female) older than ego.

Angsu: For strangers (irrespective of sex) younger than ego.

But if strangers are nearly the same age as ego the terms Achu or Ambi are used reciprocally, depending on the respective sex of the participants. In such cases the term Angsu is used by neither speaker. However, once the Chatchi membership of both the speaker and the person spoken to are known, they no longer consider each other to be unrelated. A relationship is established and kinship positions for both persons are assigned by considering their generational status, though only roughly. Thus, for instance, if it seems to ego that the person he is speaking to is old enough to be considered as a member of ego's parents generation, and if the person belongs to the same Chatchi as ego, then ego will use the term for mother's siblings to address that person (see Table 1 for the terms for mother's siblings). A person with whom ego has no genealogical tie, even though ego might address the person as ego's mother's sibling, will address ego by the term for sister's children. If two persons belonging to the same generation and same group meet each other and establish their Chatchi membership, they will address

each other by terms they use for their own siblings. Nowadays, Garo sometimes address neighbouring Bengali with whom they have regular social contacts, by terms such as Achu or Ambi, depending on the sex of the person who is spoken to. The age-status of a Bengali in relation to a Garo speaker is not considered in such cases. A Bengali whom a Garo addresses as Achu or Ambi, addresses the latter by the following Bengali terms:

Dada: For a man, whatever his age may be.

Didi: For a woman, whatever her age may be.

These two terms, Dada and Didi, are used by neighbouring Bengali (particularly, by Hindus) for their elder brothers and elder sisters, respectively. There are no reciprocals for these terms - among Bengali, younger siblings are addressed by their personal names, and are referred to by stating the relationship, i.e. younger brother or younger sister, not by kinship terms. Among Bengali these terms are also used by strangers to address each other and the consideration of the age of those involved is unimportant for either speaker; the terms are used simply to indicate respect, whatever the person's age-status may be. Nowadays, Garo also use these terms for Bengali instead of using their own terms, Achu and Ambi.

Kinship terms used by Garo are given in Table 1 below.

Table 1.

Garo Kinship Terms (for reference and address).

| Terms of Reference | Relatives for whom the terms are used | Terms of Address |
|--------------------|--|-------------------|
| AMBI | MoMo, FaMo, and all the females above their generation | AMBI |
| ACHU | MoFa, FaFa, and all the males above their generation | ACHU |
| AMA | Mother | AMA/MA |
| AMA/MAJONG | Mother's elder sister | MAJONG |
| AMA/MADE | Mother's younger sister | MADE |
| APA | Father | APA/PA |
| APA/PAJONG | Father's elder brother | PAJONG |
| APA/AWANG | Father's younger brother | PAJONG |
| MAMA | MoBr, FaSiHu, WiFa, HuFa | MAMA |
| MANI | MoBrWi, FaSi, WiMo, HuMo | MANI |
| OBITE | WiFa, HuFa | MAMA |
| NIO | WiMo, HuMo | MANI |
| ABI | ElSi, MoSiDa (e), FaBrDa (e) | ABI |
| NO | YoSi, MoSiDa (y), FaBrDa (y) | NO |
| ADA | ElBr, MoSiSo (e), FaBrSo (y) | ADA |
| JONG | YoBr, MoSiSo (e), FaBrSo (y) | JONG |
| JIK (m.s.) | MoBrDa, FaSiDa, Wife, WiSi | * |
| SE (w.s.) | MoBrSo, FaSiSo, Husband, HuBr | * |
| SARI (w.s.) | MoBrDa, FaSiDa, HuSi | SARI |
| NIOCHEKSARI (m.s) | Wife's elder sister | NIOCHE- -KSARI |
| NOSARI (m.s.) | Wife's younger sister | NOSARI |

Table 1 (continued).

| Terms of Reference | Relatives for whom the terms are used | Terms of Address |
|--------------------|--|------------------|
| BONING (m.s.) | MoBrSo, FaSiSo, YoSiHu, WiElBr | BONING |
| BONING (w.s.) | Yonger sister's husband | BONING |
| GUME | Elder sister's husband | GUME |
| JONGSARI (m.s.) | Wife's younger brother | JONGSARI |
| BISA (m.s.) | Own Child, BrCh | BISA |
| BISA (w.s.) | Own child, SiCh | BISA |
| DEPANTE (m.s.) | Own son, BrSo | DEPANTE |
| DEPANTE (w.s.) | Own son, SiSo | DEPANTE |
| DEMECHIK (m.s.) | Own daughter, BrDa | DEMECHIK |
| DEPANTE (w.s.) | Own daughter, BrDa | DEPANTE |
| NAMCHIK (m.s.) | Sister's Daughter, Son's wife | NAMCHIK |
| NAMCHIK (w.s.) | Brother's Daughter, Son's wife | NAMCHIK |
| GRI (m.s.) | SiSo, DaHu | GRI |
| GRI (w.s.) | BrSo, DaHu | GRI |
| CHAWARI | Daughter's Husband | GRI |
| NOKROM | Heiress daughter's husband | GRI |
| ANGSU | All relatives belonging to the generations below ego's children's generation | ANGSU |

Note.

Except where it is indicated otherwise, the same term is used by both male and female ego.

The following signs and abbreviations used:

* = Teknonymy or any other indirect way is used.

/ = equivalent term.

(e) = elder than ego.

(y) = younger than ego.

(m.s.) = man speaking.

(w.s.) = woman speaking.

Excepting the broad kin-categories and the general kinship terms discussed above, all other kinship terms used by Garo for their relatives belonging to ego's own, first ascending, and first descending, generations, are classified according to certain uniformities (see Table 1), which are a result of the structural principles of the society. Following Leach (1945:72), we may formulate the following rules for Garo society:

1. Two distinct terms are never used where one will suffice. Ego will only differentiate terminologically between two individuals if failure to do so would imply a situation either contrary to the structural principles or contrary to the universal law of incest (the ban on sexual relations between parent and child, and between brother and sister).
2. Ego first learns terms for the relatives whom ego encounters first in his or her life, i.e. mother, father, sisters, and brothers. Then ego is taught by these relatives to discriminate between members of ego's own Mahari on the basis of age and sex.
3. The terms applied by ego to members of ego's own Mahari are not extended to persons belonging to Mahari opposite to ego.

4. A term applied to a member of the opposite group also will apply to all other persons of similar sex and generation status in that group.
5. Ego must distinguish between persons of the opposite sex with whom marriage is permitted, and those with whom it is forbidden.
6. Except where it is contrary to structural principles, an adult man will address any child by the same term as does his wife.

Let us consider how a child, born in our hypothetical group 'A', (as described in p.265) learns to distinguish between relatives on the basis of the above rules.

According to rule 2, ego learns the following four terms:

Mother - Ama

Father - Apa

Sister - Abi

Brother - Ada

And according to rule 1 and 2, these terms will be extended to persons in group 'A', in the following manner:

Definition 1 : 'Ama'. Ego's real mother, and all other women of ego's mother's generation and group will be addressed by ego as Ama.

Definition 2 : 'Apa'. Ego's real father, who belongs to group 'B', and all other males of his group and generation,

resident in ego's mother's group, will be addressed by ego as Apa.

Definition 3 : 'Abi'. All females of ego's own generation, belonging to ego's own group, will be addressed by ego as Abi.

Definition 4 : 'Ada'. All males of ego's own generation and group will be addressed by ego as Ada.

Reciprocals of the above four terms:

Definition 5 : 'Bisa'. Ego's Ama and Apa will address ego, irrespective of ego's sex, as Bisa. Parents also differentiate between their male and female children by using the terms 'Depante' and 'Demechik. However, in practice parents use neither the term Bisa nor Depante/Demechik in addressing their children, instead personal names are used.

As regards the reciprocals for the terms Abi and Ada, it should be noted that although the relatives for whom these terms are used by ego belong to the same generation as ego, they are necessarily older than the latter, since it may be presumed that the child ego, when first learning to talk, is younger than any one else in a reciprocal speech relationship. Thus, the reciprocals of the terms Abi and Ada will be:

Definition 6 : 'Jong'. Abi and Ada will address a male ego as Jong.

Definition 7 : 'No'. Abi and Ada will address a female ego

as No.

Although all the females of ego's mother's group and generation are regarded by ego as Ama (see Definition 1), and while all males of ego's father's group and generation are regarded as Apa (see Definition 2), in practice ego's real mother and father are distinguished by ego from all other females and males of their respective sex, generation, and group. Thus, the terms Ama and Apa are, in practice, used by ego for ego's real mother and father respectively, while the following terms are used by ego for relatives of ego's parents' generation older or younger than ego's real parents:

'Majong'. All females of ego's mother's group and generation, older than ego's real mother, are addressed by ego as Majong.

'Made'. All females of ego's mother's group and generation, younger than ego's real mother, are addressed by ego as Made.

'Pajong'. All males of ego's father's group and generation, older than ego's real father, are addressed by ego as pajong.

'Awang'. All males of ego's father's group and generation, younger than ego's real father, are addressed by ego as Awang.

The above four terms may be considered in another way:

1. 'Majong' and 'Made' - are wives of males whom ego addresses as 'Pajong' and 'Awang', respectively.

2. 'Pajong' and 'Awnag' - are husbands of the females whom ego addresses as 'Majong' and 'Made'.

The simple rules for ego are:

1. If a man is addressed as Pajong, his wife must be addressed as Majong, or vice versa.
2. If a man is addressed as Awang, his wife must be addressed as Made, or vice versa.

Ego learns the distinction between ego's mother's sisters (real or classificatory), on the one hand and father's brothers (real or classificatory) on the other, according to the relative age of ego's mother and father, respectively. The reasons for such a distinction may be:

1. Ego himself (or herself) distinguishes between the relatives of ego's own generation according to their relative age with respect to ego himself (or herself).
2. Ego sees that ego's parents distinguish their relatives belonging to their own generation according to the relative age of those persons with respect to themselves (ego's parents).

However, although ego distinguishes between ego's mother's

sisters (real or classificatory) and father's brother (real or classificatory) according to their relative age with respect to ego's parents, ego considers all the mother's sisters to be more or less like ego's own mother. Similarly, all father's brothers are considered by ego to be more or less like ego's own father. These relatives also consider ego more or less like their own children and they use the term 'Bisa' when addressing ego, i.e. the term which is used for ego by ego's own parents.

Although a distinction on the basis of relative age is made by ego in case of ego's parents' siblings of the same sex, no distinction is made in the case of their children. Thus children of all Majong-Pajong and Made-Awang couples will be addressed by ego by the same term ego uses to address ego's own siblings, since they belong to the same group as ego (see rule 2 and 3). Ego also learns that no matter whether the women of ego's mother's generation and group are older or younger than ego's mother (i.e. whether a woman is addressed as Majong or as Made), their children cannot be married by ego, since they are addressed by the same term as ego's own siblings (see rule 5). Thus, the distinction between relatives belonging to the parents' generation according to their relative age with respect to ego's parents, has no significance for ego. This distinction, however, may be significant for ego's parents themselves, because such a distinction is essential at least in determining seniority and juniority of members of the same generation.

During ego's early childhood ego realizes that ego's father

and elder brothers both exercise some authority over ego - they teach ego how to behave towards others, what should be and what should not be done, what is right and what is wrong. They scold, and even beat ego if ego does something wrong or misbehaves. But as ego grows older it becomes clear to ego that males of ego's mother's group, belonging to ego's mother's generation, particularly ego's mother's own brothers, have a much stronger authority over ego than ego's father or elder brothers. Ego sees that ego's mother's brothers have authority over ego's elder brothers as well. Ego also realizes that ego's mother's brothers (real or classificatory) are very important to ego as they are ego's potential spouse's father (particularly for a male ego); ego distinguishes this class of relatives from others. Therefore, a distinct term is required for addressing the relatives belonging to this class. Thus,

Definition 8 : 'Mama'. All males of ego's mother's group and generation, are addressed by ego as Mama.

As a relative who is addressed by ego as Mama is ego's potential spouse's father, his wife is ego's potential spouse's mother. Such a woman must belong to the group opposite to her husband's group, i.e. to the opposite group to ego's mother's brother. Ego and ego's mother's brother belong to the same group, so ego's mother's brother's wife's group is the opposite group to ego also. Therefore, ego will not use any term ego uses for the males of ego's own group in addressing such women who belong to the opposite group (see rule 3). Thus,

Definition 9 : 'Mani'. All the wives of the males of ego's mother's generation and group (i.e the males whom ego addresses as Mama) are addressed by ego as Mani.

In Garo society females of ego's father's generation and belonging to his group, i.e. father's real or classificatory sisters, are also considered by ego as ego's potential spouse's mother, simply because these women belong to the opposite group to ego and therefore their children are potential spouses for ego. Thus, the term 'Mani' is used also in the following manner:

Definition 9, Extension : 'Mani'. All females of ego's father's generation and group, are addressed as Mani.

Husbands of these women must belong to the group opposite to their own group. That means their husbands must belong at least to the same Chatchi, if not the Mahari, as ego, and therefore, ego must address the husbands of these women as Mama, i.e. the term used by ego for males of ego's own group belonging to the first ascending generation. Thus,

Definition 8, Extension : 'Mama'. The husbands of all the women of ego's father's group and generation are addressed by ego as Mama.

It may be considered that relatives addressed as Mama and Mani always stand in the following relationship:

"If a man is addressed as Mama, his wife must be addressed as Mani, or vice versa".

Females addressed by ego as Mani will not address ego by the term they use for their own children as ego belong to the opposite group to these women (see rule 3). Although the husbands of these women belong to the same group as ego they will address ego by the same term that these women use towards ego (see rule 6). Thus, the reciprocals of the terms 'Mama' and 'Mani' are:

Definition 10 : 'Gri'. All the relatives addressed by ego as Mama and Mani address a male ego as Gri.

Definition 11 : 'Namchik'. Mama and Mani address a female ego as Namchik.

The children of Mama and Mani belong to ego's generation, but they are not the members of the same group as ego. Therefore, ego will address them by terms quite distinct from those ego uses for the relatives of ego's own group and generation (see rule 3 and 4). Thus,

Definition 12 : 'Jik'. A male ego addresses all the females of the opposite group belonging to his own generation as Jik.

Definition 13 : 'Se'. A female ego addresses all the males of the opposite group belonging to her own generation as Se.

Definition 14 : 'Boning'. A male ego addresses all the males of the opposite group belonging to his own generation, (i.e. all the men whom his sisters address as Se) as Boning. This is a reciprocal term, and therefore, all the men a male ego addresses

as Boning will address him by the same term.

Definition 15 : 'Sari'. A female ego addresses all the females of the opposite group belonging to her own generation (i.e. all the women whom her brothers address as Jik) as Sari. This is a reciprocal term, so all the women a female ego addresses as Sari will address her by the same term.

The females addressed as Jik by a male ego, and the males addressed as Se by a female ego, are marriageable to the male and female ego, respectively, since such males and females belong to the opposite group to ego. Thus, marriage relationships are always established, according to ideal rule, between males and females who stand in the relationship of Se and Jik to each other.

After the actual marriage of a Se and a Jik these terms are used for 'husband' and 'wife' respectively. The term Se is also used by a female ego for all males of her husband's group and generation. Likewise, the term 'Jik' is used by a male ego to his wife as well as for females of her group and generation. It may be noted, however, that the terms Se and Jik are not used by ego for addressing ego's spouse. Even before ego's marriage these terms are not used to address relatives who stand in the relationships of Se and Jik to each other. In these cases either teknonymy or other indirect terms are used. For instance, a man refers to his wife as the mother of her eldest child, e.g. Parul Ama (Parul's mother); similarly, his wife may refer to him as Parul Apa (Parul's father). Even if no baby has yet been born

husbands and wives refer to each other in indirect ways, e.g. the husband may refer to his wife as elder sister of one of her younger sibling, e.g. Malati Abi (Malati's elder sister). The wife may also do the same thing.

After marriage the terms 'Boning' (see Definition 14) is used by the husband for all males of his wife's group and generation. These relatives also use the same term for a male ego. After a woman's marriage, she uses the term 'Sari' (see Definition 15) for all females of her husband's group and generation. These relatives also use the same term for a female ego.

Both male and female ego address their respective spouse's father and mother by the terms 'Mama' and 'Mani', respectively (see Definition 8 and 9), and the latter will address ego as Gri or Namchik, depending on ego's sex (see Definition 10 and 11).

It is evident that the affinal terms are not different from those used by ego before ego's marriage for the following persons:

1. The members of ego's own generation, but belonging to the opposite group, i.e. Jik, Se, Boning, Sari.
2. The female members of the opposite group belonging to ego's parents' generation, i.e. Mani

3. The male members of ego's mother's group and generation, i.e. Mama.

Although in principle the spouse's real parents are classed together with all other males and females of their respective group, sex, and generation, in practice a distinction of spouse's real father and mother is made in order to set them apart from other people classed as Mama and Mani. The following terms are used for spouse's real father and mother:

Obite. - spouse's real father; and

Nio. - spouse's real mother.

As a reciprocal of these terms, a man's wife's parents use the following terms to distinguish him from all other males they class together under the term Gri.

Chawari. - is used for the real husbands of daughters.

Nokrom. - is used for the husband of the heiress daughter in order to distinguish him from the husband of all other daughters. However, it should be noted that 'Nokrom' is not a kinship term, rather it is a title given to the husband of the heiress daughter (Nokna) of a household (see Ch.5). The Nokrom is also a Chawari, but his status is different from all other Chawari; all Nokroms are Chawaris, but all Chawaris are not Nokroms.

However, the terms 'Obite' and 'Nio' and their reciprocals Chawari or Nokrom, are used only for reference. A male ego

addresses his wife's father and mother by the terms 'Mama' and 'Mani' respectively, and his parents-in-law address him as Gri. This means the terms used before ego's marriage are retained in these cases as terms of address.

A similar distinction of the husband's real parents from all other Mama and Mani is made by a female ego by using the same terms 'Obite' and 'Nio' for husband's father and mother, respectively, in a similar way as they are used by a male ego for his wife's parents. However, like a male ego, a female ego also uses these terms only for reference - for addressing husband's father and mother she uses the usual terms 'Mama' and 'Mani, respectively. It is important to note that although a female ego distinguishes her parents-in-law from all other Mama and Mani, they do not use separate term to distinguish her from all the other females they address as Namchik. Thus, a son's wife is addressed by her parents-in-law as Namchik, i.e. the term which is used for a female ego before her marriage by the relatives whom she addresses as Mama and Mani (see Definition 11). Thus, in case of a female ego neither the term of reference nor the term of address are changed after her marriage.

In principle, husbands of all females of ego's own generation and group, are classed together by a female ego as Se (i.e. the same term she uses for her own husband) and by a male ego as Boning. In practice, however, a distinction is made by both male and female ego between husbands of females older than ego and those who are younger than ego. This distinction is made

on the basis of the relative age of females of ego's own group and generation with respect to ego. The relative age of the husbands of these females is not considered. Thus,

Gume. - is used for ego's real or classificatory elder sister's husband.

Boning. - is used by a male ego for his real or classificatory sister's husband.

Bonug. - is used by a female ego for her real or classificatory younger sister's husband.

The reciprocals of the above terms are as follows:

Nosari. - The relatives whom a female ego addresses as Gume address her as Nosari.

Jongsari. - The men whom a male ego addresses as Gume address him as Jongsari.

Niocheksari. - The men whom a female ego addresses as Bonug address her as Niocheksari.

Boning (or Mosa). - The men whom a male ego addresses as Boning address him by the same term, since this is a reciprocal term (see also Definition 14). An alternative term, 'Mosa' is also used by these two relatives reciprocally for each other.

It is significant to note that a female ego makes no distinction between her husband's real or classificatory brothers according to the relative age of her husband and his 'brothers'. All males of ego's husband's group and generation, whether older or younger than ego's real husband, are addressed by a female ego

as Se.

Ideally, for the marriage relationship between two opposite groups, the fifteen terms defined here under Definitions 1 - 15, are sufficient to identify the kinship positions of any two individuals in group 'A' and 'B', belonging to ego's own, first ascending, and first descending, generations. All needs are met by considering the relationship of individuals to the members of their own as well as those of the opposite group. However, although there are certain terms used to denote certain classes of relatives, and ideally, no distinction between those relatives is necessary for the institution of the marriage rules, e.g. the distinction between ego's mother's elder and younger sisters, in practice, a distinction is made in certain cases on the basis of either or both of the following criteria:

1. A distinction according to the relative age with respect to any connecting individual;
2. A distinction between real and classificatory.

However, the distinction is not uniform in all generations; even in the same generation and the same group, some relatives are distinguished while others are not. Thus, in the first ascending generation ego distinguishes between ego's real mother and all other women of ego's mother's generation and group on the basis of both of the above criteria, whereas ego makes no distinction between the males of ego's mother's generation and group. Likewise, ego distinguishes between ego's real father and

the other males of ego's father's generation and group, but ego does not distinguish between the females of ego's father's generation and group. After marriage, a male speaker distinguishes between his wife's elder and younger sisters on the basis of criterion 1, but no distinction is made by a female ego between her husband's brother's or their wives. The spouse's parents distinguish their daughter's real husband, but they do not distinguish between their son's real wife.

I think a distinction according to either or both of the above criteria is made by considering another factor - the relatives who are resident within the group in which ego resides. A distinction is evident in the case of relatives who are co-resident with ego, and it is absent in case of relatives who are not co-resident with ego. For instance, during childhood ego distinguishes females of ego's mother's generation and also their husbands according to their relative age with respect to ego's mother and father, respectively. Note that these relatives are resident in the group where ego was born and brought up. After marriage a male ego resides in his wife's group and there he distinguishes between elder and younger sisters of his wife. Note again, that ego's wife's elder and younger sisters also live in the same group where ego lives. Therefore, it could be said that the distinctions which are made in such cases where there are terms for denoting a class of relatives, are also structurally significant; these distinctions also seem to have resulted from one of the structural principles of the society, viz. the ideal pattern of Uxori-Avunculocal residence at

marriage.

A distinction between real and classificatory relatives is also made by prefixing the term 'Ang' or suffixing the term 'Gipa'. When ego says "Ang-Jong", it means ego's own brother, since 'Ang-Jong' means 'my brother'; when one says "Manik Abi-Gipa", it means Manik's elder sister. However, the suffix or prefix with the core terms are not always used.

Leach suggests, "The kinship terminology bears specific relationship to an idealized form of the social order ..." (1945:70). I think Garo kinship terminology may be understandable in terms of the idealization that the marriage relationship between two opposite groups is a permanent relationship. In principle the relationship should persist through generations, and in practice, it used to be so in the past. At present, however, single isolated marriages are frequently found which do not continue nor establish continuing relationships. I have encountered such cases of marriage between the members of two opposite groups which were not previously not related (see Ch.5). However, even in such cases individuals involved in the marriage relationship address their relatives by terms which were ideally appropriate for those particular relatives. It is assumed by the individuals that they once had such relationships although none in fact existed. For instance, the man who marries into a Mahari group with which his own Mahari has had no previous marriage relationships, will address his wife's father as Mama, i.e. the term for mother's brother, even

though the latter is not actually related as the former's mother's brother. However, according to the Garo, the individuals' Chatchi membership is considered in such cases and, at the level of Chatchi, a man can address his wife's father as Mama, even if he does not have any exact genealogical relationship with his wife's father.

It is impracticable for the Garo, particularly today, to live in a village only with their closely related kinsmen, because people belonging to many Mahari groups related through marriage relationships with other Mahari groups, live in the same village. Also, people belonging to one's own Mahari group are dispersed in widely separated areas and are related, through marriage, with other Mahari groups (see Ch.3). However, this situation cannot affect the suitability of kinship terminology, since kinship terms are adapted primarily for the use of the members of elementary biological family, and their immediate relatives, and secondarily these terms are extended on the basis of marriage relationships and this relationship could be considered at any level - Mahari, Machong, and Chatchi.

A distinction of generation is evident in Garo kinship terminology. This distinction is ideally maintained, particularly with regard to the establishment of marriage relationships, but in practice it is not always maintained. Marriage relationships between distant relatives across generational level are frequently found. In some special circumstances, marriage between close relatives are arranged in

which distinctions of generation may be ignored (see Ch.7). Due to marriages across generational lines, the generational membership of some relatives becomes unclear. Thus, a person may be related to another in many ways. I know a man in Chunia who married his deceased wife's classificatory sister's daughter. His second wife, and her siblings, used to address him as Awang (term for father's real or classificatory younger brother) since he belongs to their father's Mahari, but after his marriage his wife's siblings started addressing him as Gume and Boning (terms for elder and younger sister's husband, respectively). In most cases such as this, preference is always given to the nearest route for determining a kinship position for people who are connected through multiple relations.

A great divergence of 'ideal' and 'practice' may be found in cases of marriage within the same Chatchi. Such marriages, though rare, do occur nowadays (see Ch.3). Obviously, inconsistency results from such marriages, but in most cases the marriage partners are either turned out of the village by their relatives, or they themselves leave the village to avoid other's rebuke. The partners of such marriages usually settle in a remote village and there they introduce themselves as if they are members of two opposite groups. Such a couple, therefore, generally live in the new area under a false identity. An example of such a marriage has been mentioned earlier: the couple are now living in a village which is neither partner's natal village. The husband introduced himself as a member of Marak Chatchi, which is in fact, his real Chatchi group; the

wife's real Chatchi group is Marak but she introduced herself as member of Sangma Chatchi in order to adapt to that village. This fact is known to other people in the village, but nobody cares about it as the partners are affiliated with opposite Chatchi groups. However, people of the village where the partners to this marriage were born and brought up, from whom I have collected this information, do not like this couple as they have violated the established rules of marriage (see also Ch.3). If, in future, the number of marriages within the same Chatchi group increases basic inconsistencies in kinship terminology would be inevitable. But at present the few cases of such marriages have not upset kinship terminology in any major way.

The residence of members of the minor Chatchi group, Momin, with the two predominant Chatchi groups, Sangma and Marak, in the same village, has not created any confusion in the use of kinship terminology, because the people belonging to the minority Chatchi, Momin, are in practice, affiliated with either of the predominant Chatchi (see Ch.3), and they follow the kinship terminology appropriate for the group with which they are affiliated. For instance, a man originally belong to Momin Chatchi, but affiliated with Marak Chatchi, use the same terms as people of Marak Chatchi; he will marry a Sangma woman and use the appropriate terms for people belonging to Sangma Chatchi. But it must be remembered that if, in future, the Momins become established as another dominant Chatchi group, kinship terminology would have to be reconstructed.

In either of the above two situations a new ideal pattern might emerge, but at present Garo kinship terminology is still based upon the older ideal pattern of Garo society, even though in reality it does not always conform with this idealization.

CHAPTER 9.

LEADERSHIP AND DISPUTE SETTLEMENT.

1. Changing pattern of leadership.

Every Garo village was once an autonomous political unit. All village affairs, i.e. the distribution of village common land, settlement of disputes, maintenance of law and order, and all other economic, political, social, and religious activities, were controlled and managed by the villagers themselves. People of every village used to regard one of the villagers as "Nokma" (this term may be translated as 'Village Headman' or 'Village Leader'), whose duties were to manage and distribute village common land (Aking), to lead villagers in social, economic, and religious activities, as well as to take the initiative in settling disputes. The Nokma's role in all these activities was very important but he was not like a 'chief' with clear political authority or any actual economic advantage over other people. Instead he was rather the social and economic representative of the village. In this chapter I shall discuss the role of Nokma in Bangladesh Garo villages, more specifically, the role of Nokma in Chunia, and attempt to show how it has changed with the emergence of new forms of leadership along with changes in other aspects of Garo society.

The term 'Nokma' literally means 'big house' or 'mother of the houses'. But by this term Garo refer not to the 'big house'

or 'mother of the houses' but to the man, i.e. the husband, of that house. The household which first founded a particular village, and to which the other villagers are related either as the descendants of that house or through marriage relations, was considered by Garo to be the 'big house' or 'mother of houses', or sometimes as 'most senior house', or 'ancient house'. In principle, and also in practice, the Nokma of a village, in every generation, was the man, i.e. the husband of the founding household. Thus, the founding father of a village was always regarded as the first Nokma, and in every successive generation the Nokrom son-in-law of that household inherited the status of Nokma from his father-in-law. Since the Nokma was succeeded by his legal heir, the Nokrom, the office of the Nokma was hereditary. It has already been noted that a man's Nokrom son-in-law used to be his real or classificatory sister's son (see Ch.5), so the succession to office was from mother's brother to sister's son (real or classificatory).

As the office of the Nokma was hereditary, the villagers had no direct voice in the selection of a Nokma. Whichever sister's son of the Nokma was selected as the Nokrom son-in-law eventually inherited this position after his father-in-law's death. It was the duty and responsibility of the Nokma to choose one of his sister's sons as the Nokrom son-in-law, and he could choose any of his sister's sons whom he liked. However, it should be noted that every Garo man used to consult, even though it was not obligatory, his relatives at the time of selecting the Nokrom for his household, and kinsmen usually assisted in this regard.

Generally relatives looked for a sister's son of a man who seemed very intelligent, responsible, and who could work hard for the maintenance and prosperity of the household. Thus, in cases of the selection of the Nokrom for a household the Nokma consulted other villagers, and they selected a sister's son who seemed to them to be best suited to the future position. The villagers were thus involved, although indirectly, in the selection of a Nokrom for every household of the village, and especially for the Nokma's household. They used to take special care and interest in the selection of a Nokrom for the Nokma's household as this Nokrom would become the future Nokma. Thus, villagers could influence the Nokma of the actual selection of a Nokrom for his household although they had no direct control of the actual selection.

It has already been stated that ideally a village should have consisted of people belonging to only two Mahari groups - the female descendants of the woman of the founding household, belonging to a certain Mahari of one of the Chatchi groups, and husbands of these women, belonging to a Mahari group of the opposite Chatchi group. But such an ideal village with only two Mahari never existed in Garo areas of Bangladesh (see Ch.3). Burling notes the existence of more than one Nokma in Garo villages in Assam which consisted of people belonging to more than two lineages (Mahari). But in Chunia, villagers always regarded, as they told me, one man as the Nokma although four households with women of three different Mahari groups, and their husbands belonging to four different Mahari groups of the

opposite Chatchi, were the founding households. The people presently living in Chunia told me that their forefathers used to regard one household belonging to Nokrek Mahari to be the founding household of Chunia, and the Nokrom of that household was regarded as the Nokma in each generation. People of Chunia do not know why and how the office of the Nokma was vested in that household. Nobody could give me any reason why one of the four founding households achieved the office of the Nokma, and why others did not. However, as far as I can guess, the reason may be one of the following:

1. The majority of the villagers belonged to the Nokrek Mahari.
2. This particular household was wealthier than the others.
3. The man of this household had more leadership qualities than the others.

However, once the tradition of regarding the Nokrom of that household as the Nokma was established, for whatever reason, it was maintained in successive generations. The present Nokma of Chunia, Naren Nokrek, belongs to the same /Mahari as the first Nokma. The villagers, and even the Nokma himself, do not know the name of the first Nokma of the village. Their genealogical knowledge only extends four generations beyond the present generation.

The Nokma was like other Nokrom of the other village households, with the exception that he was the representative of the original founding household, and thus he was regarded as the social and ritual leader of the village. There was no symbol of office, he wore no special clothes, and there was little which

would distinguish him from other villagers. However, the present Nokma of Chunia, as well as some other people told me that in the past the Nokma's house used to be decorated with specially carved posts, little straw animals on the roof, and so on, and one could easily say which house was the Nokma's by simply looking at the village houses. But nowadays no special decorations can be seen in Garo villages of Bangladesh; the house of the present Nokma of Chunia is the same as other village houses.

The traditional drums were owned by the Nokma's household. The other villagers could borrow the drums and beat them, but they could only be stored in the Nokma's house. A distinctive right of the Nokma is evident in the fact that nobody was allowed to beat these drums until he has first struck them. This important characteristic of the Nokma's office is still unchanged (see Ch.2).

The office of Nokma was closely connected with the Aking (village common land). Ideally, the Aking belonged to the Mahari of the woman of the founding household and this right of ownership was passed on to the Nokma daughter of that household in every generation. On the other hand, the right to manage the Aking, and also to distribute the plots of land among villagers, was vested in the Mahari of the man of the founding household, i.e. in the Nokma of the village, and this right was passed to the Nokrom son-in-law of that household in every generation. However, the Aking concept did not develop in Chunia, as has been already stated, due to the settlement of members of various

Mahari groups at the same time, as well as because of the development of permanent and individual ownership of land, resulting from the adoption of wet cultivation. However, when people of Chunia used to practise Jhum cultivation they had common Jhum fields and the rights to ownership and management of these fields was shared by the females and males of the Mahari groups living at that time in Chunia. More specifically, such rights were possessed by people belonging to all the Mahari groups the representative of which were the founders of the village (see Ch.4). Thus, the Nokma alone did not enjoy the right to distribute the common Jhum field. People told me, though, that the Nokma used to take the initiative in arranging a meeting of all villagers in which the distribution of plots to different households was decided.

Some older people of Chunia consider that the most important role of the Nokma was his leadership in village festivals. When people were dependent on Jhum cultivation it was the duty and responsibility of the Nokma to mark the different stages of the annual agricultural cycle such as, clearing the jungle felling trees, burning trees and bushes, planting, harvesting, etc. At each stage, a village festival was held, the date and time of which were fixed by the Nokma; and he played the role of ceremonial leader in all these festivals. It was his duty and responsibility to perform sacrifices to ensure good crops, and the good health, wealth, and happiness of the villagers. But these festivals are no longer observed and the sacrifices are no longer performed in Chunia (see Ch.2). Consequently, the role of the

Nokma as ceremonial leader of the village is no longer essential for the villagers.

The people of Chunia also told me that it was the duty and responsibility of the Nokma to settle disputes between persons or groups, and also to maintain law and order in the village. But as far as I could gather from the villagers in general, and what I established from the present procedure followed in settling the disputes, it seems that the Nokma alone could not adjudicate any case of dispute (see below). In fact, the Nokma had no formal authority to adjudicate cases in dispute - his duty in this regard was to arrange a meeting of the wealthy, old, and wise men of the village. The accuser and the accused, and the older male members of their respective Mahari, were also called to such a meeting. All those assembled in such a meeting used to settle disputes by negotiation between the two Mahari groups. Although the Nokma had no formal authority over other people, his presence in any settlement meeting was always given importance as it helped others to arrive at a reasonable solution, quickly and without too much argument. Moreover, his presence helped to enforce the decision of the meeting, because the disputants accepted the decision arrived at in the presence of the Nokma as all villagers respected him as the representative of the founding household. The present Nokma of Chunia, as well as some other people, told me that the decision arrived at after long discussion and argument between the parties, was finally announced by the Nokma. However, I was also told by other people that there was no hard-and-fast rule in this respect as any of

the other wealthy or wise men could announce the decision of the meeting even if the Nokma was present. The functions of the Nokma, particularly in the settlement of disputes, are still considered to be important by villagers. But due to the emergence of new forms of leadership and the imposition of external political control, the role of new leaders is also considered to be important.

Let us consider who these new leaders are and how they achieved leadership or at least prominence in society.

Provisions for the achievement of leadership other than the hereditary leadership of the Nokma, have always existed in Garo society. Nakane notes that in the Garo Hills area wealthy people, other than the Nokma, could gain prestige as well as the title of Nokma-ganna by giving feasts. These people who achieved the title of Nokma-ganna were however, distinguished from real Nokma by calling the real Nokma 'Aking-Nokma' (see Nakane, 1967:62). While these Nokma-ganna could achieve prominence, they could not achieve the ritual leadership of the Aking-Nokma. In the Garo villages in Bangladesh, the giving of feasts and the gaining of prestige and prominence was known to villagers but no title such as Nokma-ganna was given to wealthy feast-givers.

In the course of time a new avenue for gaining prestige and prominence developed in Garo villages in Bangladesh. Instead of giving feasts the wealthy people gained prestige and influence by providing the landless and poor people with work. Disparity of

income has resulted from the development of permanent and individual ownership of land, which followed the adoption of wet cultivation. As a result, some people became landless (see Ch.4) and they were in need of regular work for their survival. The wealthy patrons realized that they could gain prestige and influence by giving work to landless and poor people, which costs them nothing, whereas to gain prestige by giving feasts costs money. So they began to adopt this new way of achieving prestige. These wealthy people, however, are not given any title but sometimes they are referred to as "Modol". The term "Modol" is a borrowed Bengali term, which means 'village leader'. The same term is also used by neighbouring Bengali villagers for their village leaders. In Bengali villages the Modols have no formal authority, but in practice they dominate the villagers both politically and economically. The Bengali Modols are also wealthy people; they perform certain roles for their respective villages, settling disputes etc. The Garo Modols also play a similar role in their villages (see below).

Education is another means of achieving prominence in Garo villages. Most Christian Garos have received some education (usually to primary level) and among them are people more educated who are given importance by less educated and illiterate people. However, it should be noted that people with education but no wealth, are not regarded as Modol. However, the illiterate and less educated go to them for advice and suggestions as to their problems. Even the Modols themselves seek their advice. Ananga Mrong and Devendra Dopu, two educated

Christian Garo, are regarded as wise men and respected by all the villagers of Chunia. In any village affair, especially in the settlement of disputes, their opinion is highly valued, but neither of these men is regarded as Modol, because they are not wealthy. As some illiterate Garo told me, educated men can give them not only good advice, but they can also communicate better with outsiders, especially with government officials. Thus, if an outsider goes to a Garo village and asks questions of illiterate Garo, they will send the outsider to one of the educated Garos. Many people told me, " I do not know, I cannot tell you anything. Go to so and so (name of any one of the educated men), he will tell you everything. He knows what you want".

It is evident that in order to achieve prominence in a village one has to have either wealth, or education, or preferably both; to be considered a Modol one must be a wealthy man. In Chunia there are, at present, two men - Paresh Mri and Ranil Mangsang - who are regarded as Modol by villagers. Both of them are wealthy, and provide a few landless and poor people with work in their fields and pineapple gardens. These two men are regarded as Modol by the people to whom they provide work. It may be noted carefully that the same people may, and in practice do, work for any of the wealthy households at different times, and therefore there is no permanent dominance over any particular person by any a Modol. The people who do not need work, i.e. those who are more or less self-sufficient, also regard these two men as Modol. I think, the educational status of these two

Modols, coupled with their wealth, are the criteria by which they are considered Modol by all the villagers. Both Paresh Mri and Ranil Mangsang have a certain level of education. Paresh Mri was the first man in the whole Madhupur area to obtain his Matriculation. Except for the people belonging to younger generations, who are studying at present, the level of education attained by him is the highest in the village. Ranil Mangsang did not complete his secondary level education but read up to class ix. The level of Ranil Mangsang and that of the other two educated men I have mentioned earlier (Ananga Mrong and Devendra Dopu) is more or less the same.

It must be noted that wealth and education, though essential for a man to be considered a Modol, are not the only criteria for leadership. There are people with both wealth and education, but who are still not considered Modol. Gajen Mri, an educated Christian Garo, has both education (almost the same as Ranil Mangsang) and wealth (although he is not as wealthy as Paresh Mri and Ranil Mangsang). Some poor and landless people get work in his household, but nobody refers to him as Modol. Therefore, what is essential for becoming a Modol is the leadership quality of a person as well as wealth and education. Moreover, the man who wishes to be considered as a Modol has to have a desire for leadership and must work with skill in order to achieve it. Let us consider how Paresh Mri and Ranil Mangsang achieved leadership.

Paresh Mri was born in Chunia. His father was a

non-Christian Garo but Paresh Mri himself was converted to Christianity when he was fourteen or fifteen years old. Then, with the help and assistance of the local Catholic Mission he went to Calcutta (India) to study, and having obtained his Matriculation came back to his own village to serve his own people. After receiving a modern education he realized that without education the Garo would lag behind and therefore would not be able to compete with neighbouring Bengali. So Paresh Mri started a campaign for better education and received the support and encouragement of the Catholic Mission. He joined the local primary school (which has already been established and conducted by the Catholic Mission) as a teacher and taught for several years Garo students of his own village and those of other villages who studied in that school. When he was a teacher he realized that the Garo did not go to doctors, or take modern medicine although free treatment and medicine was available at the Catholic Mission hospital. So, he started another campaign to convince the Garo that modern medicine can cure diseases, and that people should not rely on sacrifices to the old Mite to cure disease. In order to make the people understood that modern medicine was better than sacrifices, he started to go to people's houses and give medicine in cases of illness. He was not a professional physician but he learnt some basic methods to treat coughs, colds, fevers, diarrhoea, and other minor ailments. In the beginning he faced some opposition from conservative elements, but when people saw that modern medicines cured diseases which were unaffected by sacrifices, they started to

believe in the new ways. At the same time the community became convinced that Paresh Mri was trying to help them without promoting his self interest.

Paresh Mri married a woman from another village but instead of going to his wife's village he brought her to his own village. He told me that he did not go to his wife's village because he thought that if he moved he could not serve his own relatives. His father was a hard-working and intelligent man who had opened many wet fields which he had registered in his own name. After the death of his father, the wet fields were distributed between Paresh Mri and his brother. He was lucky that he had no sister and people belonging to his mother's Mahari could not claim the property of his father as this property had been earned by his (Paresh Mri's father) own labour (see also Ch.4). By inheriting the property of his father and later by expanding this through his own skill and effort, Paresh Mri became a wealthy man. He was the first man in Chunia to introduce pineapple plantations on a large scale. This helped him to become the richest man in Chunia. As a wealthy man he is now providing the landless and poor with work. Moreover, he assists them with loans of money and rice in times of hardship.

Besides his education and wealth, Paresh Mri has the ability to go to government officials and talk to them about the problems of the Garo. These qualities have impressed the Garo. Thus, he has become an undisputed leader of not only his own village but also of neighbouring villages. People from his own village, as

well as those from other villages, come to him for suggestions and advice on many of their problems.

Ranil Mangsang came to Chunia from another village by marrying a woman of Nokrek Mahari (Paresh Mri's father's Mahari). He is the Nokrom son-in-law of the household into which he married, and therefore, has the rights to manage the property of this household which belongs to his wife. This household was a wealthy household and the wealth has been further expanded through his efficient management. Many poor and landless people are provided with work in this household. Ranil Mangsang is also an educated man. However, he is less educated, less wealthy, and younger than Paresh Mri. He has not yet learnt how to talk effectively to government officials as Paresh Mri has done. So villagers consider him to be the junior leader and Paresh Mri the senior leader. Ranil Mangsang himself also considers Paresh Mri as the senior leader and goes to him for advice on many matters.

Paresh Mri is recognized as a leader not only by the Garo but also by the government. He was the official link between the District government and the people of Chunia as he was the 'Member' of the 'Union Council' up to 1977. In this context the organization of 'Village Local Government' in Bangladesh should be described as Garo villages are encapsulated into wider Bangladesh society. In order to set up local government the area of a district is divided into several 'Sub-divisions'. Each 'Sub-division' is divided into several 'Thanas'(Police Station), each 'Thana' is divided into several 'Union Councils', and each

'Union Council' is divided into several 'Wards'; each Ward consists of several villages (generally not more than four). Every five years a Member of the Union Council for each Ward is elected for each Ward by people of that Ward. Generally, two to four candidates stand for the election, and the election is held by secret ballot. On the day of election people of the Ward go to the election booth (which is a temporary structure, generally at the premises of the village school) and vote for the candidate of their choice. Several days after the election of Members, one Member of the Wards is elected as 'Chairman' of a Union council by the secret vote of all the other Members (see below).

A link between people of a Union Council and the District Government is maintained by the Union Council through the Thana and Sub-division. The Wards of a Union Council are, in fact, a division of the Union Council for the purpose of elections. But these divisions are considered, after election, to be the secondary organizations under the Union Council and thus the link between the people of villages under each Ward and the Union Council is maintained through the Member for each Ward.

The tenure of office of a Member and Chairman is five years. A man who is once elected as Member or Chairman may again stand for the post in subsequent elections, and there is no restriction on the number of terms he can serve. The position of Member and Chairman are honorary. Neither of the holders gets any remuneration, or other economic advantage, but they get some political power by virtue of their position. In principle,

however, the holder of neither of these positions can have any absolute authority over the other people. The Member for each Ward and the Chairman of Union Council are called by the people as 'Member' and 'Chairman', respectably, and not as 'Modol' although they are generally the Modols of the village they represent. In the following discussion I shall use the word 'Member' and 'Chairman' as the village people themselves use them.

As the official local representative of the government the Member is responsible for reporting to the government, through the Union Council, the needs of the people of his Ward and also to ask for any help that may be necessary. The requirements for village developmental projects such as, irrigation systems, the construction of new village roads, repairs of old roads, health and sanitation, schemes for the development of education, and so on, are discussed by the Members of each Ward in the occasional meetings of the Union Council. Such meetings are presided over by the Chairman. The schemes for projects and the funds necessary for the work are discussed at the meeting and if approved by all the Members and the Chairman the scheme and budget are sent to the district government through the intermediary authority in the Thana and Sub-division. The district government then allocates funds for projects through the Sub-division and Thana authority, and this fund comes to the Chairman, and he allocates the money to each each Ward and finally the money comes to the Member. The Member is responsible for the proper utilization of funds.

A house-tax is collected by the government from every household in the village. A tax collector (maybe two or three in big Union Councils) is appointed by the Chairman to collect the house-tax. The Member of every Ward has the formal duty to help the tax collector to determine the level of house-tax, which is fixed according to the income level of households. In Chunia, for example, this house-tax ranges from 1 to 25 Taka. The Member is expected to help the tax collector in the collection of the house-tax. The money collected as house-tax, it should be noted, is utilized by the government through the Union Council mainly for the maintenance of the Union Council office, and for the payment of salaries to the village night watchman (called 'Chowkider'), appointed in every village by the Chairman. It may be noted that the land-tax is not collected in the same way as the house-tax. There is one Revenue Circle Officer in every Thana for the collection of revenue for land; the Member and Chairman have nothing to do with land taxes.

The Member is also expected to settle petty matters of dispute among villagers, and it is his duty to report to the government, through the Union Council and Thana, any major crimes such as murder or violence, or any complex problems which he cannot handle. However, the Member has no formal authority to adjudicate dispute cases his main duty and responsibility in this respect is to take the initiative in arranging a meeting of all older, wise, and wealthy men of the village and to settle the dispute at the meeting by arriving at a reasonable solution through a general consensus. The disputants may or may not be

satisfied with the decision of the meeting and if they are not satisfied they may go to the Sub-divisional or District Court (see below).

The whole of the forest of Madhupur, where the Garo of Tangail district live, is in Madhupur Thana of Tangail district. The whole area of Madhupur Thana is divided into nine Union Councils. The forest area covers parts of two of these Union Councils, viz. Ausnara and Arankhola. These two Union Councils are inhabited by Garo and Bengali. The Garo live inside the forest area and the Bengali live outside. The other seven Union Council are populated exclusively by Bengalis. Chunia belongs to Arankhola Union Council. There are twelve Wards in this Union Council, of which five are comprised of Bengali villages, and seven Garo villages. In Garo Wards there are a very few Bengali households, but in most of them the majority of the population are Garo.

It is significant to note that although the number of Garo Wards of Arankhola Union Council is larger than that of Bengali Wards, the Chairman of this Union Council has always been, and still is, a Bengali. In the election of the Chairman for this Union Council Garo Members do not put up a Garo candidate even though they outnumber the Bengali Members. Some Garo Members told me that they do not stand for this position, because they think that if a Bengali is elected Chairman he would be more capable than a Garo in approaching the government for development aid. Union Council. I think, this is the argument the Bengalis

use to convince the Garo of the need for a Bengali Chairman. However, recently there has developed a feeling among the Garo, as Paresh Mri told me, that the Chairman of this Union Council ought to be a Garo because they are in the majority. He also told me that some of the Garo Members, if not all, are no less capable than the Bengali Members who are elected Chairmen. So in the future a Garo may achieve this position.

Garo are not very conscious of the politics of the wider society; they are concerned mainly with their own village affairs. Until 1961, Garo did not even elect a Member. Unofficially, the Nokma of each village used to represent his village externally and village affairs were managed by him with the help of other rich, old, and wise men of the village. However, when educated Garos, as for example Paresh Mri of Chunia, realized that the illiterate Nokmas were incapable of dealing with the outside society, they started acting as representatives of their villages to the outside society. From 1961, Paresh Mri became the official representative of Chunia to the government. He held the post of Member until 1977 but there was no election held in Chunia as nobody else contested the position with Paresh Mri (see below). Not only in Chunia but also in other Garo villages educated Garo played a similar role as that of Paresh Mri. Every Garo Ward used to be represented by a wealthy and educated Christian Garo in place of the unofficial representative of the illiterate Nokma. However, there was hardly any competition among educated Garo for the positions. The villagers used to select the one who seemed to them to be the

best suitable for the position.

Chunia is one of three villages in one of the Wards of the Arankhola Union Council. The other two villages are Pirgachha and Sainamari. Paresh Mri became the first Member of this Ward in 1961, and up to 1977 had been re-elected to this post for each term, nobody else from any of the three villages came forward to contest with him. The Modols of these villages told me, "We consider Paresh Mri to be the most suitable man for this position as he has the ability to deal with the outsiders, and with the government officials, more than anybody else has". But the underlying reason may be that the other Modols realized that if they contested with Paresh Mri they might not win, because Paresh Mri was so influential in the area. However, in the election of 1977, Paresh Mri himself did not want to hold the position anymore and encouraged other Modols of the three villages to come forward. I asked Paresh Mri the reasons for his reluctance to hold the position, and he said, "I am tired. Moreover, I like to see new people to hold the position. I think, new people should come forward and learn how to deal with the government and the outside society. I will not live for ever to help the people, so somebody else should be trained now". Thus, when Paresh Mri did not stand for election, two Modols - Mathindra Nokrek of Pirgachha and Ranil Mangsang of Chunia - told Paresh Mri that they would like to contest the position and he encouraged both of them to enter the election. Later, Paresh Mri learnt from other people that Michael Simsang of Sainamari was also interested in the position and that he had already started an election

campaign. Michael Simsang had not consulted Paresh Mri. For this reason Paresh Mri was not pleased with him. However, when Michael realized that Paresh Mri was not happy about his candidature he came to Paresh Mri and told him that since Paresh Mri was not interested he wanted the position, had Paresh Mri been interested he would never have entered himself. Paresh Mri showed no sign of anger, rather he encouraged Michael Simsang to compete with the other candidates. Although Paresh Mri encouraged Michael Simsang, he did not want him to be elected as Member, so he started to think how Michael Simsang could be defeated. He counted the number of voters of the three villages and decided that if one candidate, instead of two, from Chunia and Pirgachha was put up against Michael the voters of these two villages would vote for the candidate who would be sure to win, and that that would be the simplest way to defeat Michael Simsang. Paresh Mri then advised Ranil Mangsang to withdraw which he did. Both Paresh Mri and Ranil Mangsang now campaigned for Mathindra Nokrek. As it was known that Mathindra was supported by Paresh Mri the majority of people, even those of Michael Simsang's village, voted for Mathindra Nokrek and he was elected the Member of this Ward.

I gathered the information on this election from Paresh Mri, Ranil Mangsang, Mathindra Nokrek, as well as from some other people of Chunia. I also talked to Michael Simsang, who told me that Mathindra Nokrek bribed the voters in order to win the election, otherwise he could not have won. But this is unlikely, because the position of Member has not yet become so lucrative in

Garo villages that a man would spend money to bribe voters. Mathindra Nokrek, in fact, won the election because of the support of Paresh Mri, who influenced the voters. Moreover, Mathindra Nokrek is wealthier than Michael Simsang, so he has more supporters than the latter.

However, although as I have said the position of Member has not yet become lucrative in Garo villages, it has certainly become attractive which is evident from the competition for this position in the last election. In fact, this position can give a man a certain amount of prestige, though no political authority or economic advantages over others. It is true that a man can gain prestige simply by becoming a Modol, but if he can become a Member he can gain additional prestige as he is officially recognized by the government as the local representative of the government, whereas other Modols are not. I think, this is the reason why attempts to gain this position have become so competitive.

Although in principle, any villager can contest an election, it has generally been observed that in most villages wealthy people, more specifically the Modols, are the main contestants. In fact, it is seldom possible for a man to get support from people if he is not wealthy, because he has to give his supporters work, food, and loans of money and rice.

The Nokma of some villages are wealthy, but they hardly ever try to become Members. For instance the present Nokma of Chunia is a wealthy man but he has not made any attempt to become the

Member. He told me, "I am alright. The people still regard me as Nokma. That is enough for me. I do not need anything else". I have not had the chance to talk to many Nokmas but I believe most of them hold similar views. In fact, the hereditary leadership of the Nokma is still recognized as important by villagers, though not by the government. Thus, the Nokma of a village is not much interested in the position of Member. Another reason may be that most of the Nokmas are still non-Christians and so they are illiterate (because, non-Christians do not go to the school for education), and therefore, they themselves do not feel capable of being the Member nor do people consider them suitable.

The above discussion reveals that education and the adoption of wet cultivation and the resultant development of permanent and individual ownership to land are the main factors responsible for the emergence of new forms of political and economic dominance. Some of the new leaders have achieved further influence through the imposition of external political control. The new leaders are getting more and more powerful, while the traditional leader's spheres of influence are becoming more limited because of the socio-economic and religious changes taking place. However, the hereditary leadership of the Nokma is still recognized as important in certain matters, e.g. the settlement of disputes, but the people need the Member as well in dealings with the wider society and especially with the government. Thus, both a traditional leader and a modern leader exist side by side. The role of both types of leaders in the settling of disputes in the community will be discussed in the next section.

2. Dispute settlement.

Among the Garo disputes generally arise out of the breaking of Akim-law, which includes all rules relating to marriage relationships, divorce, property inheritance, etc. Disputes also arise when a person's prestige, honour, or reputation, is damaged by another; or when a person is wronged in any way by another. Damage to crops by straying animals is also a source of dispute. In addition, disputes arise from a range of sexual offences, including adultery, which is considered as an infringement of the rights of the innocent party. Thus, there are many possible sources of dispute and there are procedures for the settlement of all of them, whatever their nature, type or extent (see below). I have not had much opportunity to observe many cases disputes during my sojourn in Garo areas of Bangladesh. I was fortunate enough, however, to observe two cases of dispute settlement - one in Chunia and the other in Gohalideo - during my fieldwork. I also discussed with informants several cases of dispute in Chunia and how these were settled in the past. The following discussion of two cases will, I hope, shed some light on the present situation of Garo dispute-settlement.

Case 1 (from Chunia).

Ranil Mangsang married Jimali Nokrek, the Nokna daughter of Wansi Nokrek and Rahin Mangsang. By marrying the Nokna Ranil Mangsang became the Nokrom son-in-law of Rahin Mangsang. When Rahin Mangsang died he left behind his two widows - Wansi Nokrek (principal wife), the mother of Jimali Nokrek, and Namri Nokrel

(secondary wife). According to Garo custom, Ranil Mangsang, being the Nokrom son-in-law of Rahim Mangsang, was expected to marry these two widows of his father-in-law (see Ch.7), but as he is a Christian Garo he did not. However, he accepted the responsibility of looking after these widows. Even though Ranil Mangsang did not marry the two widows, they considered him, according to Garo custom, as their 'Se' (husband) after Rahin Mangsang's death. Both widows are Songsareks and therefore did not share his Christian views.

In 1978, Ranil's wife, Jimali, died; so he claimed a replacement wife from his deceased wife's Mahari. He also told them his choice - he wanted to marry Rebeka Nokrek, a young daughter of Namri Nokrek (the secondary wife of his deceased father-in-law). The Songsarek people of Ranil's wife's Mahari agreed and arranged the marriage of Rebeka Nokrek to Ranil Mangsang. But Rebeka refused to marry Ranil. She said that, being a Christian Garo, she could not marry a man regarded by her mother as her husband.

The marriage ceremony was performed according to old Garo custom although both Ranil and Rebeka are Christian. The Songsarek Garo did not consult the Christian Garos about the arrangement of this marriage. The day following the marriage Rebeka fled and took shelter in the local Catholic Mission. The matter became a major scandal. The people of Chunia were divided into two blocks - the Christians on the one hand, and the Songsareks on the other. The Christian Garos supported Rebeka

and were against the marriage, while the Songsareks claimed that the marriage was totally legitimate and justified.

Neither the Nokma of Chunia, nor the Member of the Union Council, nor anybody else took the initiative for settling this dispute. Ranil Mangsang himself is one of the Modols of Chunia, but since he himself was involved in the dispute he kept silent. Paresh Mri went to the priest of the local Catholic Mission who advised him to arrange a meeting. Accordingly, Paresh Mri arranged a meeting at his own house. The priest (who is an American, but has been living in the area for twenty years) was present at the meeting with Rebeka Nokrek. Ranil Mangsang, the Songsarek Garos who arranged this marriage, the Christian Garos who supported Rebeka, the Nokma of Chunia, Naren Nokrek, the Member, Mathindra Nokrek, Paresh Mri himself, and many other people were all present. Nobody raised any objection to my presence at the meeting, although I was an outsider.

On the basis of the evidence of Rebeka herself and her brother Bishnu, the Christian Garos argued that after the death of his wife, Jimali, Ranil Mangsang had started cohabiting with Namri Nokrek (the mother of Rebeka Nokrek). Therefore, Ranil Mangsang, being a Christian, could not marry Rebeka. When Ranil Mangsang was asked about this by the priest of the Mission, he denied the accusation. He said, "I did not marry the widow, Namri, after the death of my father-in-law, and never cohabited with her. Therefore, I am justified in marrying Rebeka". Namri was privately asked by some women about the matter, but she also

denied cohabiting with Ranil Mangsang. She, however, said that she considered Ranil Mangsang to be her husband as he is the Nokrom of her deceased husband. It may be recalled that it is difficult to prove whether or not a man is married to the widows of his father-in-law as no ceremony is observed in such marriages. The custom is simply that the widow(s) of a deceased father-in-law are inherited by the Nokrom (see Ch.7).

However, the Songsarek Garo who arranged this marriage argued that even if Ranil Mangsang had married Namri Nokrek and had sexual relations with her, he could still marry Rebeka, because the marriage of mother and daughter to the same man is an established custom of this society. The Christian Garos argued that the marriage of a mother and daughter to the same man could only be allowed in special circumstances, and in such cases a man has to marry both women at the same time. Ranil Mangsang's case did not fall under the rules of such special circumstances as he did not marry both women at the same time (see Ch.7). Thus, the Christians argued that the situation in which Ranil Mangsang married Rebeka was quite different from the situation in which the marriage of both mother and daughter to the same man had been allowed in the past.

The Nokma of Chunia, Naren Nokrek, is a Songsarek Garo, so he sided with other Songsareks. The Member, Mathindra Nokrek, and Paresh Mri are Christian Garo, so they sided with the Christians. Arguments from both sides continued for about an hour, and it seemed to me there could be no solution. Both

parties had perfectly reasonable grounds for their respective positions. However, the priest intervened; he gave a short speech in which he said, "Perhaps the Songsareks are right in arranging this marriage, but since Rebeka has refused to accept Ranil Mangsang, whatever the reason may be, the people should not force her to do so. Even according to old Garo customs they cannot force her if she does not wish to marry him. On the other hand, both Rebeka and Ranil are Christians, so the marriage ceremony which was performed according to old customs is invalid according to Christianity. Therefore, this marriage should be dissolved". Then, Paresh Mri urged the people to do what the priest said. The people of both parties agreed and the marriage was dissolved.

When Ranil Mangsang failed to get Rebeka for his wife, he claimed another young girl as replacement. The people of Rebeka's Mahari provided him with another previously unmarried girl, Herita, who is a classificatory sister's daughter of Ranil's deceased wife, Jimali. This young girl did not raise any objections. The Songsarek Garos said, "Rebeka is a fool. She could lead a very good life as Ranil Mangsang is a wealthy man. What can we do? We had given her a good chance, which she did not accept. Herita is lucky. She knows that she would not get another wealthy husband like Ranil Mangsang, so she has accepted this marriage. She is clever". I was very friendly with Ranil Mangsang. One day while we were drinking rice-beer I asked him whether he was happy with his new wife. He said, "I have got a young wife, but I am altogether happy. I wanted Rebeka. But

what can I do? She did not like me".

This dispute, as is evident, was not between two kinship groups, but between Christian and Songsarek Garos. Neither of the parties was in wrong, so neither party was punished and the dispute was settled amicably. Disputes, such as this one, sometimes arise due to the residence of Christian and Songsareks in the same village, with rules and customs so different from each other. However, this kind of dispute should not, in the Garo view, create permanent strife between people belonging to the two different religions. Whatever their religion, all the people are closely related or at least residents in the same village. Therefore, they cannot maintain any feelings of animosity among themselves. Even at the time of argument and counter-argument at the meeting they did not show any aggressive attitude. The meeting I attended had a very friendly atmosphere.

In all such disputes between Christians and Songsareks, the local Christian Mission has some role to play. The people, of course, do not seek the help of the priest if they can settle the dispute by themselves, but if they fail, the Christian Garos go to the priest, who may come to their village and help settle the dispute. It should be noted that the priest does not intervene until the Christian Garos go to him for help. In the case just described the priest came with Rebeka to the meeting because Paresh Mri went to him and requested him to come.

Case 2 (from Gohalideo)

A man, P, about twenty-five years old, worked with a timber merchant and had to go with him to many places. So, P sometimes had to remain away from home for two or three days, and even for a week. His wife, Q, about twenty-two years old, lived in Gohalideo with one child, about two years old. A young unmarried boy, about eighteen years old, of the same village came frequently to visit Q when her husband P was away. This boy, X, is neither related to P nor to Q, so his frequent visits to Q were regarded suspiciously by neighbours. They reported this to P who then asked his wife, but she said that X came to visit her but there were no illicit relations between them. However, P's younger sister and another woman, who were neighbours of P, told him that one day they saw X and Q lying in bed and hugging each other. Although P realized that there could be illicit relations between Q and X, he did not punish his wife, rather he took the matter to Q's relatives and one of the Modols of the village. A meeting was then arranged by this Modol and it was held at the house of P and Q. The Nokma of the village, the Member of Union Council, two Modols (including the one who arranged the meeting), were present at the meeting. P, Q, X, as well as the following close relatives of theirs were also present.

Table 9.1

The Relatives of P, Q, and X, present at the meeting.

P's relatives:- One mother's mother's brother, two mother's brothers, one mother's sister's husband, father, mother, and the younger sister who was the witness of the alleged offence.

Q's relatives:- Father, mother, and one elder brother. It should be noted that none of Q's mother's brothers or any other close relatives of her Mahari lives in Bangladesh. All of them live in Assam (India), so they could not be contacted by the villagers.

X's relatives:- One mother's brother, Father, and one elder brother.

Besides the above relatives of P, Q, X, many other villagers were also present at the meeting. Among these were members of the same Machong, if not Mahari, of P, Q, and X. The Nokma belonged to the same Mahari as P, the Member of the Union Council belonged to the same Mahari as X and the Modol, who arranged the meeting, belonged to the same Machong as Q. However, none of them were closely related to the disputants. All the people, including the Nokma, the Member, and the Modols, sided with either P or Q or X according to their respective Machong (or Mahari) group affiliation. There was no neutral body or judge at

the meeting.

The meeting started with P's charge against Q and X. He stated everything that he knew about the affair which he had learnt from his neighbours, including his younger sister. Then the Nokma and the Modol who had arranged the meeting, asked Q and X about the affair, but both denied the charge against them. Then, the Nokma asked X - "Why did you visit Q so frequently?" and X replied, "Sometimes to ask her whether she needed any grocery shopping and if she gave me money I did the grocery shopping for her and on my way back from the market I delivered the things to her place. And sometimes I visited her just to see how she was". Then one of the Modols asked him - "Why did you go to Q's house when her husband was not present?" and X could give no reasonable answer to this question, he just said, "I did not intentionally go when P was away from home". However, X's elder brother and the Modol who arranged the meeting, argued that X had not acted intentionally, but it might be a coincidence that whenever X would go to Q's house, P was not there. P, it had to be admitted, was often away from home. But the Nokma, P's mother's mother's brother and mother's brother, argued that there were many people in the village who could do grocery shopping for Q, why did Q rely on X alone, and why was X always going to Q to ask whether she needed anything? X must have had some interest in Q and intentions other than just helping her out. There had to be something wrong. The supporters of both X and Q attempted to argue that there was no illicit relations between X and Q, but on the basis of the evidence produced at the meeting, especially

by the eye-witnesses (the younger sister and another woman), the relatives of P established that there had been illicit relations between X and Q. The arguments and counter-arguments, continued for less than an hour. In fact, the evidence was so strong that there was virtually no defence for the supporters of X and Q. The relatives of both X and Q were bound to agree with the others that X and Q were guilty. Thus, all those present at the meeting came to a consensus that X and Q were guilty and therefore should be punished. The Nokma announced the decision of the meeting: both X and Q would be beaten in public, and X's relatives had to pay a "Gro" (monetary compensation for the infringement of another's rights) of sixty Taka (about \$3) to P's relatives. X's mother's brother agreed to pay this Gro, but asked for a week's grace. The relatives of P agreed. Then X's mother's brother stood up and started beating X and abusing him by saying, "You filthy boy! Can you see what you have done? You have incurred shame on our Mahari. All of us are ashamed of your act. We hate you. I wish I could kill you. You nasty boy! You have violated the rules of our society. Did not you know that infringing upon someone's rights is an offence? Then why did you do this? You are characterless! Never commit any offence in future". Q was also scolded and beaten by her elder brother. In beating them only hands were used, not whips or sticks. Beating and verbal denunciation continued for about five minutes. It was not very severe. Both X and Q kept silent while they were beaten. When Q was beaten she handed her two-year old child to one of the women present. The child cried when he saw

his mother was being beaten. The meeting came to an end after the beating had ended. P and Q went home together. P did not utter any word of denunciation to his wife in the meeting and I do not whether he did anything to her after returning home.

It is interesting to note that although Q was as responsible as X for the adultery, no Gro was imposed upon her. After the meeting I asked one of the Modols as well as the Nokma why they did not impose Gro upon Q. They told me, "The reason is very simple. Q has not infringed upon anybody's right as the boy X is unmarried". The Nokma explained to me that if X had been married Q would have been considered to have infringed upon the right of X's wife, and in such a case Q would have had to pay a similar amount of Gro (sixty Taka).

Five days after the meeting, X's mother's brother gave the full amount of Gro to the Nokma, and the latter handed the whole amount to P's mother's mother's brother as he is the most senior man in P's Mahari. According to P's mother's mother's brother, this money was then distributed among P's relatives as shown in Table 9.3

I asked the relatives of P, as well as P himself, why the money received by P as Gro was so distributed. All told me that according to Garo custom the money received as Gro by an individual should be distributed among all members of that individual's Mahari, or at least among those who supported the individual during the dispute.

Table 9.2

Persons among whom the money of the Gro was distributed.

| Persons who received | Amount of money | % of Total money |
|--|-----------------|------------------|
| P | 10 | 16.7 |
| P's MoMoBr | 10 | 16.7 |
| P's two MoBr [10 each] | 20 | 33.3 |
| P's mother | 5 | 8.3 |
| One man of P's Mahari | 5 | 8.3 |
| Five men of P's Machong [2 each] | 10 | 16.7 |
| Total | 60 | 100 |

On the other hand, the money for the payment of Gro was collected by X's mother's brother, as the most senior member of X's Mahari present from his relatives. He was the person who promised at the meeting, on behalf of X's relatives, to arrange the payment of Gro to P's Mahari. When I asked X's mother's brother whether he alone paid the full amount of sixty Taka, he said that some other relatives had contributed towards the cost. The relatives of X who contributed, and the amount of their contribution, is shown Table 9.3 below.

Table 9.3

Persons who contributed the money for the Gro.

| Persons who contributed | Amount of money | % of Total money |
|-----------------------------------|-----------------|------------------|
| X's MoBr | 35 | 58.3 |
| X's father | 10 | 16.7 |
| Three men of X's Mahari [3+3+4] | 10 | 16.7 |
| Four men of X's Machong [1+1+1+2] | 5 | 8.3 |
| Total | 60 | 100 |

I asked X's mother's brother whether the amount of contribution paid by each relative mentioned above, was fixed by him or anybody else. He said that nobody fixed this, but he requested all the relatives of X, close as well as distant, to contribute. They contributed according to their ability, while others did not contribute as they could not afford it. He also told me that after receiving contributions from the relatives he amount was less than half that needed, so he himself added the rest. Thus, he had to pay the largest amount. He said, "It was difficult for me to contribute more than half of the total amount, but what can I do? X is my sister's son, and therefore, it is my responsibility to provide this money".

P could have divorced his wife Q on grounds of her adultery. Divorce on such grounds is legal, and in some cases a spouse who is found guilty of adultery is divorced by the other. But P did

not do so and he is still living with Q. As far as I could understand the situation after talking to P, he loves his wife, child, and family and that is the reason why he did not divorce Q. He told me, "I am happy that the real culprit X has been punished". It seemed to me that P's wife had perhaps convinced him somehow that it was not her fault, but X's. However, P's example of living with his wife after she has been found guilty of adultery, is not unusual. The people of this, as well as other villages, told me of similar cases.

About two weeks after the settlement of the dispute between P and X, I was chatting one evening with some people at the house of the Member (who lives in the same village as P and Q). The Member himself and three other men were also present. Later P joined us. About half-an-hour later X also came and grabbed a seat without a word to anybody and later joined in the gossip. Neither P nor X hesitated to talk to each other, and at one stage P offered X a cigarette nearly half of which he already smoked, and X took it without hesitation. After two or three long puffs X returned the remaining part of the cigarette to P. There was no apparent feeling of animosity between them. Nobody could guess from the behaviour manifested by P and X in the atmosphere of the evening discussion that there had been a dispute between them only two weeks ago. I talked to both P and X separately on different occasions, and both of them told me that they have forgotten about the dispute since it was settled. I do not know how far they really had forgotten, but from their behaviour it seemed to me that they had indeed forgotten what had happened

between them.

The evidence of these two cases, and whatever I could learn from discussions with the Nokma, the Modols, the Member, as well as other people, will be discussed in the following pages.

Whenever any two Garo are involved in a dispute, their respective Mahari, or even Machong groups, inevitably become involved as well. Any individual who enters into a dispute attempts to gather the support of the other members of his matrilineal group and anyone else to form a group. The number of supporters, and the form of kinship organization through which the support group is recruited, varies from case to case. Generally, in minor disputes the support group is formed from members of the same Mahari group, living in the same village or in neighbouring villages. In major disputes, however it is formed not only by members of the same Mahari but also by including members of the same Machong, living in the same village or in neighbouring villages, or even distant villages. Ideally, closely related members of the same Mahari, especially an individual's own mother's brothers and brothers are under obligation to support the individual in an event of disputes, but other members of the same Mahari, and even those of the same Machong, although they may not be closely related, are under similar obligations to extend their support to any person of their Mahari (or Machong). The disputants expect to be able to call on the support of their relatives whom they supported in the past, and in turn, they assume that these people will support

them in any disputes in the future. Thus, whatever the form of kinship organization through which a support group is recruited, and however far their support may be extended, in all cases other members of the same Mahari (or Machong) are drawn in on the basis of kinship obligation¹.

Whatever the nature, type, and extent, of a dispute the two people involved generally do not make any attempt to talk directly to each other in order to negotiate or find solution of their problems. Many people told me that they deliberately avoided this, because they know that it is difficult for the people involved in a dispute to come to a conclusion themselves, since each thinks themselves to be right and justified. Moreover, in almost all cases of dispute, both parties involved, as well as their support groups, are likely to be angry with each other, so any attempt to end the dispute by the two principals themselves, may well worsen the dispute and a risk of further violence. This is particularly true in cases where one party has been seriously wronged. Thus, even in minor disputes, in which people could easily resolve the problem themselves, the disputants do not try to arrive at a direct compromise. Instead each approaches a representative of their own supporters who they think will be able to end the problem. The representative generally comes from the immediate support group but may belong to another group. The

1. A reciprocal obligation of support arising out of kinship ties is reported from a wide range of societies, e.g. The Nuer of Southern Sudan (see Evans-Pritchard:1940), and the Arusha of Northern Tanzania (see Gulliver:1963). However, in these two societies, the support group is organized on the basis of patrilineal descent groups, but among the Garo it is organized on the basis of matrilineal descent groups.

following classes of men are most frequently chosen as representatives:

1. The Modols who belong to the same Mahari (or even the same Machong). Such a Modol is always preferred because he, as the member of the same group, is under an obligation to support, and also to join the side of, the person who approaches him. Moreover, it is likely that the prestige and influence of such a Modol would ensure that his views would be listened to by others.
2. The Nokma of the village, who may or may not belong to the same Mahari (or Machong) as the person who approaches him, but in almost all cases he is approached because it is believed that he is the correct man to deal with problems. His views are considered acceptable to both parties because of his unambiguous role as ceremonial leader for the whole community, irrespective of groups.
3. Any other Modol, or an educated man, or an older man - who may or may not belong to the same Mahari (or Machong) but who is renowned as someone who is skilled in dealing with problems, and who can resolve the dispute by virtue of his powerful arguments on the basis of Garo customary law.

4. The Member of Union Council, who is the representative of the government. He may or may not belong to the same group as the disputants, but if it is expected that being the local representative of the government, he would settle the dispute in an even-handed way and from a neutral standpoint. However, it should be noted that although the Member is expected to take a neutral position, he generally supports the disputants who belongs to his own Mahari (or even Machong). The Member is, of course, not an outsider, but one of the Modols of the village.

5. The priest of local Christian Mission is sometimes approached by the disputants who are Christians. It is expected that the priest would settle any dispute by making the disputants aware of their obligations as Christians.

In cases of dispute one or more of the above men will intervene if they are approached by one of the disputants. But it should be noted that any of these men may intervene even if he is not approached by either of the disputants. Thus, in the past, the Nokma generally intervened whether or not he was approached by the disputants. His intervention was essential when the Garo were dependent on Jhum cultivation. Their technique of cultivation required communal labour (see Ch.4), so in the event of any dispute between two persons, which tended to

become a dispute between two groups, the organization of communal labour could easily be disrupted. Therefore, the Nokma, as leader of the village, was compelled to intervene to end the dispute as quickly as possible in order to avoid delay in vital agricultural work. The Nokma was expected to intervene in disputes and resolve them, and he himself felt this to be his duty and responsibility as the hereditary leader of the village and organizer of communal labour¹.

Besides the organization of communal labour for agricultural activity, the security of the village, the maintenance of peace and order in the community, etc. were also reasons why the Nokma used to intervene in disputes. Even with minor disputes, the community could easily be divided into two antagonistic groups which could threaten the security of the community and disrupt peace and order. Therefore the Nokma, whose duty and responsibility was to maintain peace and order in the village, had to intervene².

Although communal labour is no longer essential for the Garo as they have adopted wet cultivation, the Nokma, as the

1. This intervention of the Nokma was more or less similar to that of a mediator in the event of a dispute among the Ndendeuli of Southern Tanzania. Among the Ndendeuli, a mediator is prompted to intervene in order to enable people to return to cooperative agricultural activities (see Gulliver:1971).

2. The Nokma's role in this respect, was more or less like the role of the 'Leopard skin chief' among the Nuer, who acts as the mediator in case of dispute which could be possible threat to the security of the Nuer society (see Evans-Pritchard:1940).

hereditary leader of the village, still intervenes in disputes, because his leadership is still recognized by the people. Moreover, he himself thinks it is his duty to maintain peace and order in the community. However, these duties have been officially handed over by the government to the Member of the Union Council. Therefore, the Member is under an obligation to the government to come forward and assist in settling disputes in his Ward. Thus, either the Nokma as the traditional leader, or the Member, as the local representative of the government, or both of them, may intervene in disputes even if neither has been approached by the disputants.

The Modols, who are neither Nokma nor the Member, may also be prompted to resolve a dispute, because if any Modol can successfully end a dispute he will achieve more influence in the society. Success in settling disputes is an important source of influence and prestige for a Modol, and this has become a strong incentive for Modols to intervene in disputes¹.

Paresh Mri of Chunia, it may be recalled, has become influential in his own as well as in neighbouring villages, because in addition to his other qualities of leadership, he had earned a reputation for ending disputes successfully. This reputation is, in fact, the main incentive for Paresh Mri's intervention in disputes, even if he has not been approached by

1. Among the Ndendeuli of Southern Tanzania, successful mediation is considered to be a source of prestige and influence, so the ambitious men in that society are eager to adopt this role (see Gulliver:1971). A similar eagerness is evident among the Garo 'Modols'.

the disputants.

The priest of the Christian Church sometimes comes to settle disputes -- those between two Christian Garo, as well as those between Christian and non-Christian Garo, but he generally does not intervene in disputes unless the Christian disputants appeal to him for assistance (see Case 1).

The settlement of any dispute between persons belonging to the same Mahari (or even the same Machong) is fairly simple. The older members of the group, who have formal authority over the other members, generally make a decision and that decision is generally accepted by the disputants. If they fail to comply with the decision of the older members it may result in the withdrawal of the help, cooperation, and support of the group as a whole. Neither disputants wants to lose such support, so they are compelled to act according to the decision of the older members (see below). Thus, within the same group older members can force younger members to accept their decision, but they cannot do so with the members of other groups simply because they have no authority over the members of other groups. Therefore, the settlement of disputes between people belonging to different groups (Mahari or Machong) involves more elaborate processes, such as has been described.

Whoever is a convenor of the meeting to resolve a dispute has the responsibility of fixing the day, time, and place for the meeting, and also to inform both parties. There is no fixed rule as to the place of the meeting - this may be held at the house of

the Nokma, or the Member of Union Council, or one of the Modols, or either of the disputants. In Chunia, the meeting for settling any dispute used to be held at the house of the Nokrom in the past, but at present, they are held at the house of either the Nokma or Paresh Mri. The Modols of both groups, the Member, the wiser, older and educated men of the village -- are all invited and generally most of them come. In fact, almost all of these people are generally members of one of the groups of the disputants, although they may not always be closely related to either of them. Both the accuser and the accused themselves, and their close relatives acting as their representatives, are asked to be present at the meeting and generally they turn. There is no specific rule as to who among the relatives should be present, all relatives close or distant, may come and sit at the meeting; but generally it is considered to be the duty and responsibility of closely related male members of the same Mahari, especially, the mother's brother and brothers to come forward. Other relatives, who are under a reciprocal obligation to support the disputants, also come to the meeting. The fathers of both the accuser and the accused also sit in the meeting. In principle, the presence of the fathers of the disputants is not essential, and I was told by people that in the past they did not always come to meetings as they did not have any financial responsibility or any role to play. The responsibility for taking the initiative in settling disputes used to be shared by members of the disputants' Mahari, especially their respective mother's brothers, and brothers. There was no formal rule that the

convenor of the meeting had to invite the fathers of the disputants, but in most cases, they did so. But sometimes they did not turn up at the meeting even if they had been invited. Even in cases where they came, they were said to have been silent spectators. At present, they generally participate in the meeting and support their respective offsprings. Nowadays a father extends his support to his children even though they do not belong to his own Mahari. The support given by a father to his children, especially his sons, has resulted from the development of a father's obligation towards his children, which is a recent development owing to the economic importance of his children, especially the sons. Today, sons work with their father in his wet fields (see Ch.4), so he feels obligated to support and help his children in any matter, particularly in cases of dispute. In fact, a father thinks that if he does not support his children, especially his unmarried sons who work with him, he might lose their cooperation at work. However, even the children who have married and already formed separate households, also get his support today, maybe because he feels it to be an obligation to support them as they worked with him before their marriage. But it should be noted that no child can claim his father's help. It depends upon the father contributing his support.

In meeting for settling disputes, people of both parties sit in a circle, drink from the same glass, and share their same cigarettes. Thus, apparently there is no expression of animosity between the two parties, and the atmosphere of the meeting

appears to be friendly. However, there may be aggressiveness between people of the two opposing parties, at least between the injured person and his or her opponent, but in the meeting they are not supposed to show any antagonism. According to Garo customs, the people concerned should be courteous and should not violate the rules of behaviour, which demand courtisey and respect towards older relatives. In order to show respect towards older relatives of their respective group, the disputants should keep silent and rely only on their relatives to argue their case. If either disputant violates these rules of behaviour he or she may lose the support of his or her relatives. Thus, both in principle as well as in practice, animosity or any expression of aggressiveness is not generally found in meetings for the settlement of disputes, however serious a dispute may be.

After the formal hearing of the statements of both accuser and accused, the supporters of both parties present arguments on the basis of the evidence produced at the meeting and according to Garo customary law. The arguments may be loud and vigorous, but the Nokma, or the Member, or any of the Modols calm the people down. The leaders generally first take the side of either of the disputants according to their respective group affiliations. But later one of them guide the arguments and help the people to arrive at a conclusion. However, there may not be a leader who can play a neutral role. There is no judge, nor is any neutral third party at the meeting, nor the meeting presided over by any sort of chairman or president. However, as I have already noted, the Nokma's presence, although he may side with

either party, was always of important in the past, because his presence could help the others to arrive at a reasonable solution very quickly. Once a consensus was arrived at in his presence the people of both parties had to accept it and act accordingly as the hereditary leadership of the Nokma was respected by all villagers, irrespective of their group. The Nokma is still invited in all meetings and his presence is given importance, but nowadays, the presence of the Modols, or the Member, or the priest of the Christian Church, is sometimes given even more importance. In Chunia, for instance, the presence of Paresh Mri is considered by the villagers to be more important than the presence of the Nokma, or the Member, or any other Modol. The people of Chunia think that Paresh Mri is the most influential man and he is also the most suitable person to deal with disputes. Therefore, if he is present at the meeting he can help people to arrive at a conclusion very quickly, because he knows Garo customary better than the Nokma or anybody else, and his arguments are therefore weighty. In addition, a decision arrived at in his presence would be more effective, since many people, including the Nokma himself, respect him. However, the presence of the Nokma in the meeting has not yet been undermined (see Case 2, for example).

In the absence of any neutral body it is not difficult for people to arrive at a decision as the leaders, even though they may side with either party, usually lead the attempt to find a formula that will satisfy both parties. In order to do so the leaders of both parties propose a solution based on Garo customary law. Supporters of both parties are then urged by the

leaders to agree to the proposed solution of the problem. In proposing a solution the resolution of similar cases in the past is taken into account, and if no precedent can be found, leaders generally make an attempt to frame a decision on the basis of established and all-accepted social norms and values. The value of maintaining social bonds, peace, and order in the community are stressed. The decision of the meeting may finally be formulated by any of the leaders and the dispute is settled by a general consensus of the supporters of both parties. It should be noted that although leaders propose and urge a particular as amula for compromise or solution, none can dictate terms to others. Their main function is to assist people of their respective groups to reach a consensus. Until, and unless, supporters of both parties come to an agreement, the dispute remains unsettled and none of the leaders can pass final judgement or force others to accept a decision. A person's guilt must be proved on reasonable ground and sufficient evidence, and it has to be confirmed by a general consensus of both parties. The punishment of the offender must also be decided, and agreed upon, by both parties at the meeting.

The most common form of punishment is the payment of money as a compensation to the injured party. This monetary compensation is known as 'Gro' or 'Dai', which literally means 'debt'. It is usually considered that the guilty party has incurred a 'debt' to the wronged party. The amount of money for Gro may vary from five to five hundred Taka (Bangladesh Currency) depending on the nature and extent of the offence committed. The

amount is generally decided upon by the leaders on the basis of precedent.

Besides the Gro, the offender may also be beaten and scolded in public. These punishments are sometimes decided upon in the meeting and sometimes not. In all cases, whether the punishment is decided or not, the offender is beaten and denounced by one of the senior members of his or her Mahari. Generally, the offender's mother's brother, or in his absence, the offender's own elder brother or any other older man of the same Mahari hands out such punishment, (see Case 2). The beating should not be too severe and usually only the hand is used, not sticks or whips. The same man who beats the offender at the same time also abuses him or her. Generally, the offender is held responsible for creating disputes and disrupting the relationship with the other groups and is therefore scolded and warned not to commit any offence in future. (see Case 2). By such beatings and denunciations, the offender's Mahari members show other parties that they condemned the offender and the offence, and that is why the offender is punished in public. In this they also indicate that they support the larger community. In the past, the offender's father generally did not take part in the beating and denunciation, but nowadays he sometimes joins in with the offender's mother's brother or elder brother, in denouncing the offender. But a father generally does not, even today, take a part in beating his convicted child in public because, in principle, he is not allowed to do so, as he is not a member of the same Mahari as his children.

In the past, it was the responsibility of members of the offender's Mahari to pay the Gro, and close as well as distant relatives contributed towards it. The money was never paid by the offender alone. The offender's father was under no obligation to contribute to the Gro, since he was not a member of the same Mahari. But nowadays, a father often contributes towards the Gro for his children's offence, especially a son's offence. It may be noted that a father is not, even today, under any formal obligation to do so. In most cases, however, he does so, because he feels obliged towards his children. This is a recent development due to economic changes in society (see case 2).

Generally people contribute according to their ability, and arrange to pay Gro as soon as possible. They do not show any reluctance to contribute to Gro, and do not deliberately delay it, because the dispute remains unsettled until and unless the Gro is paid. I have asked many people whether they know of any case where the offender's relatives failed to pay the Gro and the dispute therefore continued, but nobody could cite a single example. The people in fact pay Gro in order to restore the honour of their own Mahari and also to maintain peaceful relationships with people in the group. In most cases, the amount of money for Gro is very small, and in some cases it is only nominal. So people generally can afford it and the cost is not usually borne by a single person, but money is contributed by many people.

The payment of Gro is not the real punishment for the

offence. It is the shame which is considered as the real punishment. The payment of Gro, or even the agreement to pay it at the meeting, means an acknowledgement of guilt and therefore being shamed in public. The shame of the offending party satisfies the offended party and redresses their damaged honour and prestige. The same sense of shame is shared by all members of the offender's Mahari. This is another reason why the offender is beaten and scolded by his or her relatives. The real punishment for the offenders themselves is this physical beating and abuse in public but not the Gro, which is not paid only by themselves.

The injured person who receives the Gro, cannot take the whole amount received. The money must be distributed among relatives belonging to the same Mahari (and Machong) who supported him or her (see Case 2). The relatives who took the initiative in settling the dispute and also who gave their support, are considered to have a legitimate claim to a share of the money in recognition of their support and help.

There are certain disputes which concern only the disputants themselves. For example of this are disputes arising out of damage to crops by animals. In such disputes, the person whose crops are damaged goes to any one of the leaders and then that leader calculates the damage and fixes the approximate compensation in the form of money or crops. He asks the owner of the animals to pay this compensation. Generally, the sum is paid without an elaborate meeting. But if the person does not pay or

thinks that the amount is excessive, a meeting is arranged and if the amount is justified then the relatives of the person compel him to pay the sum. However, this compensation is considered to be different from Gro, since this is a material compensation for the material damage, whereas Gro is a monetary compensation for the damage of abstract things like honour and prestige. Moreover, the money paid in compensation for damaged crops is not contributed by relatives of the person whose animals have damaged the crops, nor is this money distributed among the relatives of the person who receives it. The payment and receipt of the money is restricted to the persons concerned and their respective households. No punishment is involved in such disputes.

Neither Gro nor punishments are concerned with disputes over property. Whenever, one land or items of household property is claimed, the claim is either accepted or rejected on the basis of its legitimacy according to Garo customary law. An example of a dispute over property rights is given below.

Sarinath Nokrek had two wives - Nalja Mri, the principal wife (Jik Mamung), and Banmi Mri, the secondary wife (Jik Gite). According to Garo laws of property inheritance, Nalja Mri, being the principal wife, had the right to select one of her daughters as the Nokna (heiress) for all property in her household (see Ch.4). Accordingly, Nalja Mri had selected her only daughter, Anita, as the Nokna. Sarinath Nokrek's sister's son, Janik Nokrek, married Anita and became the Nokrom. All the property of the household was, according to law, to be inherited by Anita from

her mother, and the right to manage the property was to be inherited by Janik Nokrek from his mother's brother, Sarinath Nokrek. According to ideal rules, Banmi Mri, the secondary wife, and her children had no right to own or inherit any of the property of this household.

Both Nalja Mri and Sarinath Nokrek died two or three years after the selection of the Nokna and Nokrom. Banmi Mri, the widowed secondary wife of Sarinath Nokrek, continued to live with her children in the household of Anita Mri and Janik Nokrek. According to custom, Jnaik Nokrek, being the Nokrom son-in-law of deceased Sarinath Nokrek, was expected to marry this widow but, according to Banmi Mri, he did not do so. Moreover, he and his wife, Anita Mri, failed to perform their duties and responsibilities towards Banmi Mri and her children, i.e. to look after them properly. Therefore, about two years after the death of Sarinath Nokrek and Nalja Mri, Banmi Mri complained to the members of her own Mahari (which is the same Mahari as that of Anita and her mother) as well as the Mahari of Janik Nokrek (which is the same Mahari as that of Sarinath Nokrek). The members of these two Mahari met and proposed to cancel the rights of Anita and Janik as Nokna and Nokrom. They also proposed to allow the widow to choose one of her daughters as the Nokna and bring another sister's son of Sarinath Nokrek as the Nokrom. But Anita and Janik challenged this decision on the grounds that Banmi Mri, being the second wife of Sarinath Nokrek, had no legal right to appoint her own daughter as Nokna. Anita claimed that she, being the only daughter of the principal wife of Sarinath

Nokrek, was the legal Nokna, and also that she had been formally selected as such before her mother's death, so she would continue to hold the status of Nokna. On the other hand, Janik claimed that he had been formally selected as Nokrom by his deceased mother's brother, so he was the legal Nokrom of the household and would continue to hold this position. But Banmi Mri's supporters proposed to cancel the rights of Anita and Janik on the grounds that they had failed to perform their duties and responsibilities as Nokna and Nokrom. According to Garo customary law, the rights of a Nokna and Nokrom may be cancelled on such grounds.

However, it was finally decided by the members of both Mahari that since it was true that Anita and Janik had failed to perform their duties as Nokna and Nokrom, a new paie would be selected for the household. According to the decision of the meeting, Banmi Mri selected her own daughter, Binika Mri, as Nokna, and Thomas Nokrek, a classificatory sister's son (at the Mahari level) was brought in as the Nokrom son-in-law. Under this social pressure Anita and Janik had to leave the household but they still have not yet transferred the land which is registered in Anita's name. So, the dispute is still unsettled. Members of the two Mahari concerned failed to solve the problem, as Anita and Janik did not accept the decision of the meeting, and they filed a suit at the district court of Tangail in 1978. The dispute was still unsettled when I left Chunia in June 1979.

Traditionally, the Garo used to settle disputes by themselves. This tradition is still maintained in nearly all

cases of dispute, but for complex cases, especially those arising out of the disputes over property, such as the one described above, people nowadays go to the court. However, the number of cases which Garo bring to court is very small. Apart from the disputes just described, I have not heard of any case in Chunia being referred to the court. People generally avoid going to the court. Some people told me, "Going to the court for the settlement of a dispute involves a lot of money, and it is not worth it since the decision in the court is made according to Garo law, which we can decide ourselves". The court decision in any dispute over property rights among Garo it should be noted, is made by a Bengali magistrate according to Garo customary law, not according to the law of Bangladesh. As there are no written codes of Garo law, the Bengali magistrate has to take advice from a Garo adviser who is well-versed in Garo laws. Generally, these advisers are drawn from the ranks of the educated Garo.

However, "Going to the court involves lot of money" or "the decision in the court is made according to Garo law", are not the only reasons why people avoid going to court. They in fact avoid this for fear of losing the support of their relatives. Some people told me, "If we go to the court after a decision is made by our relatives it would certainly be considered by them that we have violated their decision, and they may not support us anymore in the future". Most people do not want to lose the support of their relatives, and therefore, they refrain from going to court even if they are not fully satisfied with the decision of their relatives.

In the past, there was no alternative for disputants but to comply with the decision made by their relatives. When the Garo were dependent on Jhum cultivation only, communal labour was essential, and nobody could make his living without the help of relatives, close and distant, living in the same village. At that time, people were aware of the fact that if they failed to comply with the decision of their relatives, they would lose the cooperation of their relatives. Thus, the fear of losing economic cooperation as well as support in any future dispute, compelled Garo to accept the decision of their relatives¹.

Although at present communal labour is no longer essential, relationships with relatives, their help and assistance in everyday life, their support in cases of dispute, etc. are still given high value. Thus, even to-day, the fear of losing the support of relatives is the main reason why disputants comply with the decision. The fact that the decision is generally taken in the presence of all the leaders of the society also makes violation practically impossible, since the Modols are the men on whose patronage the disputants depend, and the Nokma is the unambiguous leader of the village. Moreover, the leaders generally appeal to the disputants to come to a compromise for the sake of peaceful co-existence. Thus, although one of the

1. A similar kind of compliance with the decision of relatives may be found among the Ndendeuli. The Ndendeuli depend on shifting cultivation and they require the cooperation of each other for agricultural activities, so the disputants act according to the decision of their relatives because failure to do so may be fatal to them as the relatives would not extend their cooperation (see Gulliver:1971).

disputants may well not be happy with the decision of the meeting, he or she is constrained to comply with it.

I asked the Modols, the Nokma, and some other men of Chunia about their feeling of the appeal against their decision made by Janik and Anita. All these people told me, more or less the same thing - "They have violated the decision we made. They have no respect for us". When I asked people whether they would help Janik and Anita if they are involved in any dispute in the future, they said, "They do not care for our help. Janik has money and also he has the court. In future, they will go to the court again". It seemed clear to me that the villagers were not at all happy with Janik and Anita. In fact, villagers do not like people who go to the court, because it means that these people have no respect for either their relatives or for the village leaders.

In principle, any dispute should be terminated by the decision of the meeting, or more specifically, with the payment of Gro or compensation for material damages. People said that they do not maintain animosity after the settlement of a dispute. This seems to be true from the instances I have described. But although there is no manifest animosity between disputants after settlement of a dispute, there may be latent animosity, or even aggressiveness. This is very difficult to prove, but it may be that the person who is beaten and scolded in public does not feel very friendly towards his opponent. However, the person must not show any unfriendliness in his behaviour, because in doing so his

relatives would consider his behaviour as a violation of the decision of the meeting. If a further dispute arises he would not be supported by his relatives. Thus, under strong social pressure the disputants must forget their differences and behave in a friendly way, at least superficially.

Thus, the procedure for the settlement of disputes to-day is much the same as it was in the past. The dispute is still settled through negotiation between the disputants. In most cases of dispute a compromise is generally reached, and the decision is generally complied with, even though there is no authority in a position to impose or enforce it.

CHAPTER 10.

CONCLUSION.

The Garo who live in the Mymensingh and Tangail districts, and in some other areas of Bangladesh, are related to the Hill Garo of Assam (India). Due to an increase in their population and a shortage of sufficient land for Jhum cultivation in the interior of the Garo Hills, the ancestors of the present-day Bangladesh Garo were forced to migrate to the plains of Bangladesh. Since their migration, certain social changes have taken place in plains Garo society. Several factors are responsible for these social changes including the adoption of wet cultivation, contact with neighbouring Bengali villagers, conversion to Christianity, exposure to modern education, and the imposition of central political control. In this thesis I have dealt with these changes which have taken place among the plains Garo of Bangladesh, with special reference to a village in the Madhupur Garh.

The basic social organization of the plains Garo of Bangladesh is similar to that of their hill dwelling counterparts in Assam. There are five large exogamous matrilineal descent groups, known as Chatchi, among the Garo. Each Chatchi is divided into many smaller groups, called Machong, and within each Machong closely related kin-groups resident in a certain locality are again distinguished as Mahari. Most earlier observers have noted the existence of three Chatchi groups, viz. Sangma, Marak, and Momin. Observers who encountered people of only two Chatchi

groups in their research area and a moiety relationship prevailing between the two Chatchi, described Garo society as possessing a moiety structure. In Bangladesh Garo areas I encountered people of these three Chatchi groups, but I observed that people belonging to Momin Chatchi associated themselves with either Sangma or Momin Chatchi, which are predominant. A moiety relationship prevailed between the Sangma and Marak Chatchi. Therefore, like earlier observers, particularly Burling (1963) and Nakane (1967), I too consider that Garo possess a moiety structure. In fact, there are many reflections of this moiety structure in the Garo kinship terminology, marriage relationships, and many other aspects of the society.

The ideal type of Garo village organization, which requires the residence of only two Mahari groups - the females of one Mahari of a Chatchi and the males of another Mahari of the opposite Chatchi as their husbands - is not found in Garo areas in Bangladesh, as people of different Mahari groups settled in single villages more or less at the same time. For the same reason the concept of Aking (village common land), the right of ownership of which is vested in the Mahari of the wife of the founding family of a village and that of its management in the Mahari of the founding man, did not work in Garo villages of Bangladesh. However, the Jhum fields in every village were held communally and plots of land were distributed according to number of members of each individual household among members of all Mahari groups living in a village. Thus, in spite of the absence of Aking in its traditional sense, Bangladesh Garo managed to

keep their tradition of communal ownership of Jhum fields. No household was allowed to own a plot of land permanently. But the adoption of wet cultivation helped to develop permanent ownership as shifting of plots was no longer necessary in wet cultivation. The plots of wet land first brought under cultivation by members of a particular household began to be recognized as the property of that household alone and not owned or controlled by the larger community.

Although in principle the traditional rights of possession of all property by women is still maintained, in practice wet fields are owned by men as well. The trend is for land to be owned by men rather than women and this is an outcome of permanent and individual household ownership to land which developed in response to wet cultivation. Not only the system of property ownership but also that of property inheritance has undergone change following the adoption of wet cultivation. Certain adjustments became necessary in response to economic changes resulting from wet cultivation. Nowadays property in a household is not passed only to the heiress daughter (Nokna), but is distributed among all children. However, the traditional system of inheritance is still maintained to some extent as the heiress daughter (Nokna) is given a larger proportion of land and she inherits all the hereditary property. There has been a growing tendency for men to pass land registered in their name to their sons instead of passing to the heiress daughter alone. This tendency among men is also an outcome of the adoption of wet cultivation.

Wet cultivation developed among the plains Garo of Bangladesh mainly because of ecological pressure on the one hand, and population pressure on the other. The advent of Christianity also had its impact on the more extensive development of wet cultivation. Modern, western education was brought to the Garo by Christian Missions and with their modern outlook educated Christian Garo realized that if they continued to rely on Jhum cultivation alone they would have to face the danger of starvation in the future as the availability of Jhum fields was extremely limited. So Christian Garo in particular started wet cultivation alongside their Jhum; non-Christian Garo also followed them. Thus, both Christian and non-Christian Garo with foresight and an ambition to become rich, opened up areas of wet cultivation often in area more than they required for immediate subsistence. People who lacked such foresight, or sufficient labour for cultivation, opened up wet fields just sufficient for the support of their families at the time. But there were some people who did neither, either because they failed to take advantage of the new situation or because they lacked the resources to do so. Later, when the government banned Jhum cultivation to preserve the forests, all the suitable land for wet cultivation was already taken by other Garo or Bengali farmers. So people who had opened more wet fields than their immediate requirements became rich, and those without wet fields became poor and landless. Landlessness was unknown in Garo society in earlier times as every household was allotted plots of land from the village common Jhum. Distinctions between rich and

poor households existed even when the Garo practised Jhum cultivation, but such distinctions never became a constant feature of the society as wealthy people spent their surplus production in giving feasts to gain status in society. Today, this distinction between rich and poor has become permanent as wealthy people no longer give feasts and thus dissipate their accumulated wealth. However, the distinction between rich and poor has not resulted in the formation of social classes. All Garo, rich and poor, still consider themselves to be social equals and members of a single community.

As the majority of Bangladesh Garo have converted to Christianity, they no longer offer sacrifices to their old Mite to ensure good crops and the general welfare of the village. The Songsarek, or non-Christian Garo, also no longer offer these sacrifices. However, sacrifices for curing disease and illness are still performed by Songsareks and most Christian Garo. Traditional village festivals have been replaced by Christian festivals and Songsareks join Christians in these festivals. The Songsareks have been influenced by Christianity although they have not changed their religion. On the other hand, most Christians, particularly illiterate ones, still share certain common beliefs with Songsareks, even though they have been converted to Christianity. However, a modern outlook has developed among the people as Christian Missions impart education. As a result people have given up many customs which are unacceptable, or at least those which are not considered nice by the majority of the population.

Since the adoption of wet cultivation, the advent of Christianity and modern education economic attitudes have altered. Ideas of value, exploitation for money, the importance of financial investment, return, and profit have developed among Bangladesh Garo where before there were no such ideas. Educated Christian Garo learnt techniques of book-keeping and also acquired mathematical skills to calculate returns and profits. Concepts associated with the value of labour, and the exploitation of a labour force paid by kind and cash, also developed. Wet cultivation created an incentive to invest money and exploit labour to cultivate the fields. Investments were later extended to pineapple plantations, as people realized that growing pineapples for a market economy was profitable. The educated possessed the skills needed to maximise the advantages of the new economy. People who owned large wet fields were those who were already economically better-off; such people came to possess larger pineapple gardens than others as they were in a position to invest money for their initial establishment. A market oriented economy therefore emerged with the pineapple plantations, whereas previously Garo had existed at a subsistence level.

Traditionally, Garo practised exogamy at all levels of the matrilineal descent groups. Thus, marriage within any order of the matrilineal descent groups - Mahari, Machong, and Chatchi, was forbidden. But nowadays marriage within the same Chatchi occurs and such marriages are tolerated by educated Christian Garo. But these are looked down upon by both non-Christian and

illiterate Christian Garo. Today cases of marriage within the same Machong, although very rare, can also be discovered; such marriages, however, are not tolerated even by educated Christian Garo.

According to traditional rules, Bangladesh Garo still practise both patri- and matri-lateral cross-cousin marriage. But in most cases the husband and wife consider themselves to be related as cross-cousin only after their marriage; often they are not genealogically related before their marriage. In such cases, a classificatory cross-cousin relationship is constructed, the level and degree of which varies from case to case.

Garo marriage is closely connected with the Garo system of property inheritance. Only one daughter of a household inherits the right to own the property that belonged to her mother. The heiress (Nokna) daughter's husband (Nokrom) inherits from her father the right to manage the property of the household. Therefore, Garo marriage rules require that the heiress daughter's husband should be a sister's son (real or classificatory) of her father. In other words, the Nokna should be the Nokrom's matrilateral cross-cousin. But this rule is not strictly adhered to in the case of non-heiress (Agate) daughters, although matrilateral cross-cousin marriage is practised in their case as well. As to the reason for the practice of matrilateral cross-cousin marriage my findings agree with those of Nakane (1967) who maintains that the Garo arrange their marriage relationships in such a way that the husband and wife of a

particular household (Nok) may represent their respective line in each generation. Nakane argues that this is the reason why the wife of a household selects one of her daughters as the Nokna. This daughter can then represent her line. On the other hand, the husband selects one of his sister's son (real or classificatory) as Nokrom in order that the Nokrom can represent his line. Garo matrilateral cross-cousin marriage is practised at the level of the household, and the households are formed by two Mahari of opposing Chatchi groups. At the level of the household matrilateral cross-cousin marriage is asymmetrical, since people avoid more than one marriage relationship between real siblings of two particular households. As a result, reciprocal brother exchange at the level of the household, or even at the level of the Mahari, are unusual. However, classificatory brother exchanges at the level of Machong can frequently be discovered. Although today not all the property of a household is passed on to the Nokna daughter, the basic rules of marriage, i.e. the selection of a Nokna and Nokrom for every household, are still practised. Still in most cases, the Nokna is related to the Nokrom as the matrilateral cross-cousin, either real or classificatory at the Mahari level.

Although the ideal pattern of residence at marriage is uxori-avunculocal or simply uxorilocal, and this is still maintained in many cases, there has recently been a trend towards virilocal residence. Due to the socio-economic changes which have occurred it has become possible for some men to accumulate property in their own village and this individual property has

enabled them to live in their natal village instead of moving to their wives' villages. Burling (1958 and 1963) considers the practice of virilocal residence by some men to be an 'essential arrangement' in Garo society in order that some male members of a lineage (Mahari) can remain in residence in their village to look after the females of their group. but Nakane (1958 and 1967) considers this to be a 'variation' from ideal patterns of residence, caused by changes in society. My observations in Garo villages in Bangladesh confirm Nakane's opinion. Both Burling and Nakane have noted the practice of virilocal residence only at the village level but I discovered cases of virilocal residence not only at the village level but also at the household level. This clearly indicates that there is a trend towards more virilocal residence and that this trend has intensified since Burling and Nakane did their fieldwork.

As a result of the practice of virilocal residence by some men, and also because of the residence of members of several Mahari groups in the same community, suitable spouses for a man and woman are now available within the village. Thus, marriages within the same village are frequently to be encountered and 'village endogamy' is common among Bangladesh Garo.

Garo marriage establishes a permanent relationship between husband-givers and husband-receivers. When Garo possessed common Jhum lands, this marriage relationship was very important. Every household was formed with male and female representatives of two Mahari of opposing Chatchi. As rights to property and of its

management were vested in two allied Mahari, members of the husband's and wife's Mahari were very careful to keep these rights within their respective Mahari. The marriage alliance was considered at two levels - that of the household and of the Mahari. The marriage of a Nokna and a Nokrom was arranged by both Mahari in order to continue the alliance between the two household, i.e. the households of the Nokna's parents and that of the Nokrom's parents, which were previously related through the marriage of the Nokna's parents. The relationship between two Mahari was thus established at the household level, but it was considered also at the wider level of Mahari. In the case of the marriage of non-heiress (Agate) daughters the relationship was considered only at the Mahari level as in such cases the households of the husband's and wife's parents were not related through previous marriage relationships. The marriage alliance between two Mahari was thus perpetuated in every generation. But since the development of permanent and individual ownership of land marriage relationships have lost much of their importance. Nowadays cases of marriage can frequently be discovered in which the Mahari of a husband and wife were not related through any previous marriage relationship. However, people today still attempt to maintain established marriage relationships, particularly in the case of marriages of Nokna and Nokrom.

The two allied Mahari groups were equal in social, political, and economic status; neither group was higher or lower than the other. In spite of the practice of assymetrical cross-cousin marriage and the existence of an assymetrical

marriage relationship, it was possible for Garo to maintain an equal status of both groups because, in this society, an equilibrium was maintained by balancing the rights and obligations of the two allied groups. This system is still retained, even in the face of social change.

In order to maintain an established marriage alliance even after the death of one of the partners to a marriage, the surviving partner was always provided with a replacement spouse from the deceased spouse's Mahari. It was considered to be obligatory on the part of the surviving spouse to accept the person given in replacement. Although these marriage alliances have lost their importance today, the custom of replacing the deceased spouse is still practised. But it is not always possible to do so as consistently or as smoothly as it was in the past. In the cases where the Mahari groups of the husband and wife were not related through any previous marriage alliance the replacement for a deceased partner is not always provided by Mahari. Even if a replacement is selected the surviving partner, in most cases, refuse to marry the person selected. Cases of refusal are increasing and Mahari cannot control the situation anymore.

In the past, the replacement of a deceased husband essentially resulted in a situation in which a man became the husband of the widow and her daughter. The arrangements of such marriages varied according to the situation in which a replacement was chosen. When the Nokrom of a household was

selected before the husband's death, the Nokrom had to marry his widowed mother-in-law. I have termed this situation, 'mother-in-law marriage'. But when the Nokrom was not selected before the husband's death, the widow, and her Nokna daughter, were married to the same man, a situation which I have termed 'step-daughter marriage'. Today, neither of these forms of marriage are practised as most people are Christian and they disapprove of such practices.

The existence of sexual relations of a man with both the widow and her daughter in cases of step-daughter marriage are clear from the genealogical histories of people where I discovered examples of both women bearing children by the same husband. Earlier observers have also noted the existence of sexual relations in such cases. But the question of sexual relations with the same man by both mother and daughter in cases of mother-in-law marriage has been a matter of dispute among earlier observers (e.g. Burling, 1963 and Nakane, 1967). According to Burling, sexual relations could not possibly occur in such cases since Garo observe sex taboos between mother-in-laws and son-in-laws, and because mother-in-law avoidance was practised. Nakane disagreed with Burling and maintained that sexual relations were possible in such cases, as the Nokrom's status changed after his father-in-law's death. Like Nakane, I would argue that the change in the Nokrom's status after his father-in-law's death would easily make it possible for both the Nokrom and his widowed mother-in-law to overcome the psychological barriers of their previous relationship as

son-in-law and mother-in-law, and eventually they could practise sexual relations. I have not found any example where children have been conceived by the widow in such situations, but I have encountered cases in which there are clear indications of sexual relations having occurred. It appears to me that in the past such relations were not only possible but also practised, although not in every case.

Among Garo marriage is expected to be permanent and in most cases it lasts until the death of one of the partners. In the past, the stability of marriage was created and assured by the economic system. In the interest of holding their respective rights husbands and wives tried to adjust to each other and to establish permanent relationships. Divorce was always discouraged by the members of both Mahari as it caused numerous problems, particularly in respect to the long standing relationships established between two groups. The marriage partner who initiated a divorce was punished and compelled to pay a compensation to the other partner. In spite of social change, divorce is still discouraged but it is no longer possible to maintain the strictness of the rule in this respect, particularly in those cases where the Mahari of the husband and wife were not related through previous marriage relationships. However, the rate of divorce is still very low.

The Bangladesh Garo still use the same kinship terminologies as their forefathers in the Garo Hills. But due to the discontinuation of certain marriage customs, e.g. mother-in-law

and step-daughter marriage, the use of teknonymy and other indirect ways of addressing or referring to certain relatives has increased and therefore, the use of some kin terms has decreased.

Every Garo village was once an autonomous political unit. All village affairs, the distribution of village common Jhum fields, the settlement of disputes, the maintenance of law and order, and all other social, political, and religious activities were controlled and managed by the villagers themselves. But every village was represented by a hereditary leader, called 'Nokma', whose duty and responsibility was to look after village affairs. The Nokma also played the role of ceremonial leader in village festivals and he performed sacrifices on behalf of the villagers. The hereditary leader had no political authority or economic advantage over other people. In the past, wealthy people who could give feasts to the villagers could also achieve prominence in society, and they too were regarded as leaders, although they were always distinguished from the Nokma.

New forms of political and economic dominance have emerged in Garo society with the adoption of wet cultivation and spread of modern education. Wealthy people have found new avenues to gain prestige and influence in society; instead of giving feasts they gained prestige by providing landless and poor people with work. Some wealthy patrons who have been educated and who possess leadership qualities, are regarded as 'Modol': village leaders. Today, there is at least one Modol in nearly every village. Some Modols have achieved further influence since the

imposition of external political control through being elected as Members of the village local government. By such means a Modol can gain additional prestige and influence.

As traditional village festivals are no longer observed, and sacrifices are no longer performed, the Nokma's role as ritual leader is no longer important. However, the hereditary leadership of the Nokma is still recognized in the settlement of disputes. Thus, both a traditional leader and a modern leader exist side by side. Due to the socio-economic and religious changes the new leaders are becoming more and more powerful, while traditional leader's spheres of influence are becoming more restricted.

Traditionally, Garo settled all disputes among themselves. A compromise was reached in every case and the decision of the settlement-oriented meeting was complied with, even though there was no authority which could impose or enforce decisions. In the past, there was no other alternative for disputants but to comply with decisions made by their relatives. When Garo were dependent on Jhum cultivation alone, communal labour was essential, and nobody could make his living without the help of relatives. People were therefore aware of the fact that if they failed to comply with the decisions of their relatives, they would lose their cooperation in agricultural work and support in future in future disputes. The procedures for the settlement of disputes is the same as in the past. Although at present communal labour is no longer essential, relationships with relatives, their help

and assistance in everyday life, and their support in cases of dispute, are still given great value. So, people still comply with the decisions of their relatives, but nowadays, some people go to the courts to settle complex disputes, especially those arising out of access to and ownership of property. But the number of cases which people bring before the courts is still very small.

Considering the social changes among the plains Garo of Assam, which are more or less similar to those among the plains Garo of Bangladesh, Nakane (1958 and 1967) remarked that the Garo matrilineal system is disintegrating and the tendency is towards a patrilineal system. But Burling (1958 and 1963) rejected this view. It is evident from the present thesis that Nakane's remark is applicable to plains Garo in Bangladesh and that a tendency towards patrilineality is evident among them. This is particularly clear in changes in the system of property ownership and inheritance, and changes in marital residence. This tendency towards patrilineality is, however, not copied from neighbouring Bengali nor even from western Missionary influences, rather this has emerged within Garo society itself from the changes resulting from the development of permanent and individual ownership of land, which developed with the adoption of wet cultivation. The degree of change, as it is evident in this work, has not been equal in all areas of Garo society; some aspects have changed rapidly as change became inevitable due to the adoption of wet cultivation. Other changes have occurred slowly. The changes which have started to take place about one hundred years ago are

still continuing. Bangladesh Garo society is thus in a state of transition from matrilineal to patrilineal.

Although Bangladesh Garo society is encapsulated within the wider Bangladesh society and Garo have learnt the Bengali language, adopted techniques of wet cultivation similar to Bengali farmers, and have been influenced by Bengali practices, they still tend to identify themselves as a distinct group. Even their conversion to Christianity has not changed all aspects of Garo worldview. The Garo are still a distinct people undergoing a process of massive social change; further investigation by anthropologists in the future would reveal interesting information about the influence of change on Garo society and inform general anthropological understanding of social change.

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