

Role of A•Gate in Garo Society, Meghalaya

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ABSTRACT

In the landlocked hill state of Meghalaya, one of the largest tribes is the Garos, a Tibeto Burman group. They adhere to a patriarchal and matrilineal structure. Matrilocal is the basis for the residence. After marriage, the groom live with the bride and start a family. Another important part of Garo society is the duty and responsibilities of the A•gate and Chawari towards the clan and family. Compared to the Heiress and her spouse, A•gate and Chawari have distinct roles and responsibilities. In order to establish a family, the Chawari and his spouse must move out of their in-laws' home and construct a new home on the land that has been provided to them. A Nokkrom, unlike a Chawari, will not have to leave the in-laws' home after getting married. In contrast to the Nokna, the A•gate would only receive a limited plot of land on which to construct a home, engage in agriculture, and survive. Sometimes the family does not give A•gate any movable or immovable property.

It will first attempt to determine A•gate's and Chawari's roles within the Garo Society. Second, examines into how A•gate and Nokna's responsibilities to the families and clan differ. Lastly, if at all possible, provide any suggestive measures.

Keywords: A•gate; Chawari; Responsibilities.

INTRODUCTION:

One of the ethnic groups living in the landlocked state of Meghalaya is the Garo people. These people are members of the Tibeto-Burman ethnic group, who left Tibet and settled in the current five Garo Hills Districts, as well as other areas of Bangladesh and Meghalaya. They raise livestock for food as well as engage in agricultural activities. In addition, they farmed plants and cereal foods on agricultural land, such as in rice fields, by using animals like cows and buffaloes. There are still some isolated places where farming is done using animals.

Matrilineal society is practiced in the Garo Society. Tracing a woman's or her family's history and inheritance is known as the matrilineal system. It follows that in order to start a family, the groom must move to the bride's home after the marriage and leave his parents' home. Matrilocal is the term for the process. "Chawari" is how the Garo language refers to the son-in-law. The Chawari who will take care of the home and inherited property is known as the Nokkrom. Even so, the Nokkrom will serve as the curator and carer.

THE GARO TRIBE'S ORIGIN:

Dr. Milton S. Sangma's book states that the Garos are a member of the Great Bodo family both linguistically and ethnically. The Garos used to occupy a sizable chunk of the Brahmaputra Valley. However, they were forced into the plains when the Hindu invaders from Bengal invaded." "They were a

section of the Tibeto-Burman race of Tibeto-Chinese family, whose cradle is said to have been the north-west China between the upper water of Yang-tse-kiang and Ho-ang-ho." (Momin, 2012)

As per their customs, the Garo people migrated from Tibet and established themselves in Koch Behar. Many social scientists continue to disagree on the same points. "Then they move on to Dubri whose king received them warmly, but later on, being afraid of them, did not allow them to settle down there permanently," reads the book written by Dr. Milton S. Sangma. They then proceed in the direction of Jogighopa, from whence they were once more forced to fly south. After that, they travelled to Gauhati, where the king of that nation also mistreated them. Thus, after wandering, they made their home in the Boko neighbourhood. But there was tiger-man all throughout this place. Later, the Garos relocated to the Habraghat Pargana in the Assamese district of Goalpara. Throughout their trek, the tribe split up into various branches. The Garos seem to have prospered in the area around Habraghat Pargana, and as per their common belief, a Garo kingdom was founded, with Abrasen as its first reigning prince. Sambol Ading, a detachable hill close to Dakaitdol hamlet and not far from Goalpara town, served as his capital and palace. The division among the Garos seems to have emerged around this period, and maybe that's why some of them resumed their travels and entered the hills that are now known as the Garo Hills. A group of people led by a chief called Abong Noga travelled around till they made camp on Nokrek, the highest point in the Tura range." Over time, these remote communities led to the emergence of specific regional linguistic and cultural distinctions among themselves. (Milton, 2012)

The Garo Society's Matrilineal System And Marriage:

In most societies, marriage is seen as a long-term social and legal contract between two people, based on the rights and obligations of each partner. Many marriages are built on romantic ties, though this isn't always the case. In any event, it typically denotes a sexual partnership between two people. Nonetheless, a marriage is not merely a relationship between two individuals; it is defined as a social institution in legal, economic, social, and spiritual/religious contexts. There are several important social roles that marriage plays in the communities and cultures where it is practiced. Marriage usually determines the roles that a couple plays in each other's life, in the family, and in society at large. These obligations typically require the couples to divide up the labour, with each taking on specific tasks that are necessary for the family.¹

Marriage is a universal phenomenon. It is the formal, legally recognised union of two people in a personal connection. In the Garo Tribe or community, marriage was traditionally performed in a culturally and socially acceptable manner; however, it is currently performed in a legally and socially acceptable manner. In today's culture, it is done to get approval from the public and the legal system. Songsarek, the tribal religion of the Garo Tribe, formerly regulated marriage. But in today's world, Christian marriage is the standard. The Garo people changed the institution of marriage in part as a result of their religious conversion. There are two varieties and multiple forms of Songsarek Marriage. A gate marriage and Nokkrom marriage is the types while forms of marriage consist Do-sia, Marriage by Capture, Cha-senga, Tunapa, Chame Jika, Seka or Elopment, On-songa and On-chapa, Mother-in-Law Marriage, and Child Marriage.

Marriage between members of the same clan (chatchi), sometimes referred to as Bakdong, is typically forbidden, while marriage between Ma•dong is completely prohibited. They will have to deal with

¹ <https://www.thoughtco.com/marriage-3026396#:~:text=In%20most%20societies%2C%20a%20marriage,is%20not%20always%20the%20case.>

severe consequences from Chras and Mahari, among other Clan members, should such a scenario emerge. A man may have more than one wife in the Garo Songsarek Society.² (Rizvi & Roy, 2006)

The matrilineal system is the norm in Garo civilization. The mother, not the father, is the source of descent. They migrated from Tibet, fighting numerous monarchs and warriors along the way, adhering to this matrilineal structure. Along the way, they got into fights, which caused the male population to decline and the female population to rise. In order to maintain the tribe's customs and traditions, they established a matrilineal society in which daughters inherit from their mothers. Additionally, the surname need to come from the female line rather than the male. The female, not the man, should be the one to receive the descent as well. The oral tradition and literature authored by Moniram R. Marak both mention that the Garos were once patriarchal. In a conference held in the courtyard of Nokma (Landlord) Jappa Jallimpa Sukpa Bongepa, the tribe decided to adopt a matrilineal system due to war and the decline in the number of male members. Despite adhering to the matrilineal system, they are not matriarchal since the father (Nokni Skotong) is always the head of the family.³ (Momin, 2018)

Even so, the inheritance is passed down from mother to child by means of multiple generations. If the ancestral property has importance to the family or clan, the Heiress and Nokkrom are not allowed to make any decisions about it without first consulting the Mahari (relatives) or Chras (male clan members who may be brothers or maternal uncles). They will suffer serious consequences if they misuse the property in any way without first consulting Mahari and Chras. Because the Mahari and Chras will decide what is best for the ancestral property. Even if the Nokkrom is entitled to manage the property, the Chras and Maharis ultimately decide what is best for it.

A•GATE

A•gate is the non-heiress daughter of the family. She can be the eldest daughter or the elder daughter of the Nokna in the family. She has freedom and flexibility in her life, unlike Nokna. In society, she is bound by the same rules as other women. On the other hand, the responsibilities, functions, and laws are softer in the case of non-heirs. However, this tenderness can occasionally be harsh due to unanticipated events and new challenges from the tribe. It is during the On-songa and Deragata procedures that these kinds of issues occur. When there is On-songa, both A•gates and Noknas alike are subject to the choices made by Chras and Maharis.

In the household, the A•gate is supposed to take care of her younger siblings, acting as a daughter. She must show the guests proper hospitality by providing food and drinks when they arrive at the house. Until she marries or until her younger siblings reach adulthood, she is required to fulfil this function and serve the guests food and drinks. She even has to assist her mother with cleaning and cooking duties around the house. Her duties include teaching her younger siblings how to prepare meals and how to interact with guests. She even needs to teach kids social graces and how to treat others with respect. In addition to her parents, she is tasked with teaching her siblings about the oral traditions and practices of the Garo community. She must impart cooking skills and proper guest service manners to her younger sisters. She imparts work ethics to her younger brothers. Instruct them to go to the Garo bachelor's dormitory, also called "Nokpante," to discover the duties of a Garo man in the community.

The A•gate or A•gates have significant control over the administration of the parents' self-acquired, moveable, and immovable properties as well as the ancestral property. A portion of the property shared

² Rizvi, S.H.M & Shibani Roy (2006). GARO (ACHIK) TRIBE OF MEGHALAYA, B.R.Publishing Corporation, p 44

³ Momin, K.M. (2018), A-CHIKNI CHANCHIBEWALE SEANIRANG, Tura Book Room, p 106

by the parents is also inherited by A·gate. Despite living apart, she retains her voice in family matters and the administration and distribution of inherited assets. No ancestral property, whether it be movable or immovable, may be sold or mortgaged without the approval of all of the family's daughters.⁴

CHAWARI:

Chawari is the son-in-law of the Garo Society. Because he complies with the rules, the Chawari is well regarded. He can adjust to a role, responsibilities, and obligations more easily than the Nokkrom because he has greater freedom. He is able to make independent decisions for himself and his family. The A·gate's parents' house is acceptable for the A·gate and her spouse to temporarily dwell in after marriage. But ultimately, they'll have to move out and build a house. They would receive a plot of land and a few movable and immovable items so they could begin a family.

The bride's home served as the venue for the wedding ceremony in certain instances. It also happened in the groom's home occasionally, and in other instances, it happened in the freshly built home for the newlyweds during the ancestral era. As long as the bride's house is unfinished, it is customary for married couples to reside there. This is a Garo tradition that applies in most circumstances. But in order to support his wife or make a life, he must labour alongside his in-laws or assist them in their agricultural endeavours.

The complexity of the Garo Society is remarkable. The Matrilineal System and the process of bringing the Chawari into a matrilineal dwelling are said to have started under Jappa Jallimpa Sukpa Bonepa. Oral tradition holds that Garo men are stronger than Garo women in every aspect. Males can provide for the family by practicing or engaging in agricultural activities because they are physically stronger than females.

The non-Heiress Chawari can belong to any clan, unlike the Nokkrom. He is not required to join his father-in-law's clan, register, or enrol. To some extent, he is free from what the Nokkrom cannot be free from. After being married, he will only be allowed to join his own clan and his wife's clan.

If the Chawari is not given a plot of land, he must get property and other material goods on his own. The Chawari never receive any property, as is the case in many cases, unlike Nokkrom. In comparison to numbers with the Nokkrom, the Chawari used to receive comparatively less property. Thus, the Chawari must use his own money to buy the property, if he wants to increase his assets. And he decides how to spend his life to the utmost of his satisfaction, regardless of wealth or poverty.

RESPONSIBILITIES:

- Greater responsibility for A·gate within the family, Clan, and community accompanies increased freedom and flexibility.
- In order for her siblings to become responsible members of society, A·gate must take care of them and teach them their responsibilities.
- A·gate must impart to her siblings the gender roles that have been prevalent since their ancestral period.
- A·gate is responsible for taking care of the home and assisting her mother with chores.
- A·gate is more responsible for moulding and instructing her younger sister in household chores and folktales that need to be passed down through the centuries than she is for her younger brothers..

⁴ Marak, Dr. Julius L. R. Marak. (2015) "Garo Customary Laws Traditions And Practices", DJ Publication, Ringrey Tura, p 55.

- The A·gate, Chra, and Mahari must be consulted when the Nokna and Nokkrom make decisions about the ancestral property.
- When it comes to the ancestral property, the A·gate have their own say.
- In affairs of the family, the Agates also have a say.
- Clans and Mahari also look upon A·gate to take up the responsibilities if her A·gate sister or Nokna sister dies. Such as On·songa.
- A·gate has the responsibility when there comes a time for On·songa and Deragata.
- Even though Agate forms her family apart, she still needs to live up to the expectations of her family and clan and maintain communication with them.

CONCLUSION:

This study highlights the important role that agates have in Traditional Garo society. Even if she creates her own family, she still has obligations to her family and clan as their daughter and must live up to their expectations. Only a little percentage of the ancestors' moveable and immovable possessions is given to her. Her spouse and she must start their own lives. In order to be respected and elevated in the clan and society, they must fight for these things via their actions and acts. In traditional Garo society, A·gate has a greater sense of duty and role than in modern or contemporary society because in the latter, these positions and responsibilities are absent.

The gender roles are likewise absent from contemporary culture. Nowadays, in the current era, gender roles are reversed. In today's world, girls can do many of the male-dominated roles in the workplace, on the road, in politics, in leadership roles within their communities, etc. The most fascinating thing, though, is how many women in modern times work out at the gym to keep up their physical fitness.

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