

Transition Of The Garo Matrilineal Society In Garo Hills Region Of Meghalaya-A Study

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Abstract

The Meghalaya Society of Matrilineal culture can be seen and discovered among the Garos, Khasi, and Jaintia tribes of Northeast India. The Garo, Khasi, and Jaintia trace their ancestry back to their mother. The mother's totem or clan is passed down to her descendants. The title of identification is also from the mother's side. In terms of property, the daughter inherits. Women do not reign or dominate in Garo Society, nor do they have more power than men. Garo women have more independence than women in patriarchal societies. In Garo society, both men and women succeed in all spheres of social and religious activity. Women in Garo society inherit property.

Keywords: Garo, Khasi, Jaintia, Transition, Matrilineal, Kinship.

INTRODUCTION

A unique sociological structure found among the Garos, a tribe of Meghalaya, a small north eastern state of India, where people rejoice when a girl is born, is found among the few sections of India that follow the matrilineal system. It is one of the rare places in India where a woman proposes marriage and where residences are named after women rather than men.

The comparison of matrilineal systems working in various cultural and ecological situations with kinship systems based on diverse principles of descent, inheritance, and succession had contributed to a better understanding of a specific form of social organization. The term 'Matrilineal Descent' refers to the family name's descent from the mother's side in a matrilineal society. This links a person to relatives of both sexes who are solely related to them through women.

The Structure of the matrilineal system and the changes that have occurred over time among the Garos of Meghalaya. There are three tribal groups in Meghalaya: Khasi, Jaintia and Garo. Their matrilineal social system predominates in the states. The nature of social organization makes it vital to make it apparent that women typically inherit property in a matrilineal system. Matrilocal living and matrilineal descent are practices among the Garos. In addition to matrilocal housing patterns and matrilineal inheritance, family wealth is primarily passed down through female lines.

Being the followers of a unique social system of matrilineal, the Garos women enjoy a special place of status and dignity. A Garo woman is the guardian and preserver of the family goods. She plays a crucial role in the affairs of the family. However, she is not the head of the family, as this is left to a male member. The father of the family has a definite role play in the household affairs. However, his role is limited to the final word of the maternal uncle.

The Garos and their matrilineal system have explained that there is a transition in the matrilineal set-up in Meghalaya due to some basic reasons. Such changes can be the result of factors such as the mixing with other nearby patriarchal communities, the arrival of missionaries, and the spread of Christianity among these tribal groups. The spread of urbanization and urban development is another reason for this transition in the matrilineal set-up.

Socio-Economic Characteristics of women in Matrilineal Society

Residential Type- The type of residence is an important element that influences that changes that occur in every society, as well as people's shifting conception of traditions. The matrilineal system lives in urban areas, while nearly half of women who have diverged from the matrilineal system dwell in rural areas. This suggests that the transformation in Garo society is a more complex event at the family level than the result of the urbanization and modernization processes.

Educational Level- Education is regarded as one of the most important sources of societal transformation. Education, whether formal or informal, is a component of socialization. It is commonly acknowledged that education has a critical role in both individual well-being and societal economic and social advancement. When compared to the transitional group, a considerable proportion of women who follow the matrilineal system are not only literate, but also have a greater degree of education. The proportion of women who are literate up to middle school or have completed high school or higher is greater in the 'traditional' group. If a female marries a

man who is more educated than she is , the natural desire is to relocate and establish one's own neolocal residence.

Occupational Status- A family's occupational structure affects the outlook and, as a result, influences the societal structure. When women join males in contributing to economic growth, social changes become more widespread. Due to their predominance in the agricultural sector, women lose their traditional roles as the economy develops. The limitations placed on women in a society affect how much engagement women have. They have greater freedom in communities that are more supportive of them, and as a result, they participate in the economy at a higher rate. While many 'traditional' women work in non-professional fields, 'transitional' women are more likely to be employed in professional fields. The husband's career path likewise reflects a similar pattern.

Women's Birth Order- Although a women's birth order has a bigger influence on her marriageable age, it also plays a positive function in the matrilineal social structure. There is a system among the Garos that requires the youngest girl to reside with her mother and do the customary duties. Daughters of other order births have the option to leave their mother's home, therefore it depends on their decision.

Mass Media Exposure-Social change is a result of both the development process and interactions with outside groups. From a development perspective, exposure to the media has a significant impact on how people think and behave.

One of the primary requirements of women in a matrilineal culture is to stay with their mother after marriage, which has changed dramatically through time. It was customary for all daughters to remain with their mother after marriage. With the increasing influence of modernization, it has been discovered that the youngest daughter mostly follows the rules, while the other daughters have the freedom to move away and stay separately, preferably after the birth one or two children, when the couple feels confident that they can move out and form a healthy family.

The concentration of women in the 'transitional' category is higher in urban regions, which suggests that urbanization may have its own influence on societal developments. The effects of mass media, which seen as a development variable, is more significant among rural women in terms of accepting change, however it has also emerged as a significant variable in the case of urban women.

Cultural Change among the Garo Matrilineal Society

Some matrilineal cultures have evolved into patriarchal societies through time, and this process is moving closer to the remaining matriarchal societies that are interacting with the outside world. The process of matrilineal society's division into several phases is the result of numerous interrelated influences. Although this transformation cannot be seen from the outside, it is important to study cultural patterns and practices by carefully studying them within one's own surroundings in order to comprehend the mechanism.

The matrilineal culture of the Garos is undergoing a process of cultural transition. Christianity entered the world with its patrilineal principles and cultural notions.

- (a) The role of Christianity in bringing about cultural transformation: More than 80% of the population is currently affected by it, which was mostly spread among the Garos during British administration. In addition to existing in the urban sections of the state, this has mostly spread with the aid of Christian missionaries and is present in the majority of the rural areas as well. Compared to Meghalaya's other two tribal groups, the Khasis and Jaintias, the Garos are more likely to practise Christianity. First-generation converts who abandon traditional religion and entirely cut themselves apart from it.

The Garos culture has seen a significant transformation as a result of the work of Christian missionaries over the past century and the growth of a vibrant indigenous Christian church; as a result, the Garos have accepted 'new lives for old. 'The spread of education' is the main change that has occurred in society as a result of Christian invention

- (b) Interaction with Patriarchal Society: Increased exposure to and engagement with patriarchal cultures, Garos had previously interacted with various surrounding cultures. According to a significant informant, the Garo locality has been increasingly open to the greater society since independence. Furthermore, many Garos have left their homes for other areas of the country in search of education and jobs. As a result, when they return, they carry with them various norms and values from other cultures, primarily patriarchal ideals, which, when combined with traditional norms and values, give rise to a different culture set-up.

Changes have also occurred as a result of cross-marriage, as the children of such couples often use their father's clan name. Nowadays, children of Garos families, particularly in urban areas, use their father's clan name or both their father and mother's clan names.

- (c) Role of Urbanization in bringing changes among the Garos: Another key factor that has influenced the Garos matrilineal

system is urbanization. The spread of Urbanization has increased the chances of people from different communities mixing, resulting in the adaptation of various cultural traits among them. This practise has also influenced their perspective of matrilineal culture.

The changes of matrilineal culture, it has been found that some of the matrilineal societies have changed through the ages. Though, the above mentioned sources are the main causes of cultural change, common people consider many other factors responsible for the changes that have occurred in the society. Even there is any change in the society, the women folks of the Garo community always feel secure due to our system. Nowadays, due to modernization and a high rate of urbanization, there is a lot of change among the Garos. At the present time, when education has become an asset, even the parents consider sons and daughter education equally important, giving rise to a desire among the males to form a neo-local family rather than staying with their in-laws.

As a result of the changes, even females now favour and are willing to start neo-local families. This is so that she can spend her entire life with her husband; if he feels uneasy being with his in-laws, a change will inevitably occur. Thus, more neo-local families have developed as a result of the mutual understanding between husband and wife as well as between daughter and mother.

Even with regard to inheritance of property ownership, there is a marked change as people nowadays prefer to divide the property equally among all children, be it daughter or son. It has also been found common at the present juncture that parents wish to have at least one son, as daughters prefer to stay separately after marriage.

The real matrilineality among Garo is in process of transition due to many factors. Though it is very difficult to give any direct opinion about its quality but it is true that the changes have emerged mainly due to urbanization, level of modern value input in the society and intermingling of different communities in the process of time.

The most important change that takes place in the matrilineal society as observed is the changes in the residential system and property inheritance system. The main causes of transition in the social set-up.

Changing Pattern of Inheritance and Its Impact on the Position of Garo Women in Society

The inheritance of property by females has also faced with lots of changes. As of now daughters are mostly found to move out to form neo-local families, the family property is either divided or given to all the daughters or else it is given to the son if he is going to stay with his parents at home. They feel that it is not wise to restrict the son to get anything as even son can also take care of their parents equally well. About its impact on the position of women, they felt that it is true that if a daughter doesn't get anything from her mother, her position becomes inferior as she always under pressure. It has been found in most of the cases that the property is kept in contact by the parents and it is only the youngest daughter in most cases who enjoys all rights which has also caused a great set back in the position of women.

CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

The changes that have occurred over time are examined as the pre-requisite to show the transformation of the matrilineal society. Three important aspects of matrilineal, i.e. type of family setup after marriage, descent and the inheritance, there is a definite change in at least two of them. They are the residential system and the inheritance pattern. Over the time due to continuous mixing with members of patriarchal societies around them, having finding their mates from that society, the norms and attitudes of the minority matrilineal society is on fast transition.

The tendencies of social changes through the ages, it is observed that among Garo matrilineal society, there is a definite change over time due to many elements that exist in the society. The important factors that have brought the changes in the system are mainly the increasing rate of urbanization, modernization and also the intermingling of different communities with the Garo society.

Urbanization as an important determinant for any change in the society. It has been found that those who have transited or have gone far from the traditionalism are higher among urban population and those who follow the traditional form of matrilineality are more among the rural counterparts. The transition that had taken place among the Garos are not only due to urbanization process but it is a complex phenomenon.

Among the social characteristics, i.e., educational level of spouses, women who are closer to matrilineal set-up have higher opportunities to go for higher education and as they transit, the rate of illiteracy among them has increased. In case of husband's educational status, the level of illiteracy is most identical among both the groups. The crucial relationship that had existed in case of husband's education predicts that if the husbands are more

educated, the chances of transformation from matrilineal system among women become more.

When occupational status is concerned, women's absorption in professional fields leads to more shifts towards transitioned group. Whereas, in case of non-professional women worker and their husbands who are engaged in agricultural sector have higher probability to follow the age-old traditional system of matrilineal culture.

Among the demographic issues, age of marriage of women reveals that the study population irrespective of groups has a higher age at marriage. The overall fertility level is found to be higher among the 'traditional' group.

Among urban women, it is basically the inter play of her educational level and her engagement in professional job along with her husband's higher education and higher occupational status, which bring them to a 'transitional' category, besides the effect of birth order of women, number of children and role of media. Whereas, in case of rural women, it is mainly the interplay of her educational achievement and her husband's role which matter more.

It concludes the forces like modernization in terms of educational attainments, economic characteristics and development factors have acted in a positive way to bring change in the matrilineal system among the Garo women.

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