CUSTOMARY LAWS OF THE
GAROS OF MEGHALAYA
With Special Reference to their
Land Holding System

Directed by
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Eastern Region, Gauhati High Court

Sponsored by
NORTH EASTERN COUNCIL, SHILLONG
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INTRODUCTION

Garo Hills was formerly a district within the State of Assam, first under the British and later within independent India. The hill tribes of Assam felt a sense of ethnic separateness from the surrounding plain dwellers and became somewhat discontented. In response to this discontentment, the Indian Government created the new State of Meghalaya in 1972, consisting of the districts of the Garo, the Khasi and the Jaintia Hills.

Garo Hills, which forms the western part of Meghalaya, is lower in elevation compared to Khasi and Jaintia Hills. The greater part of the Garo Hills ranges in height from 450m to 650m and drop steeply to the Brahmaputra valley on the north. The breathtaking ranges of Garo Hills are also its bio-diversity hot spots. Garo Hills comprises of three districts, viz. East Garo Hills, West Garo Hills and South Garo Hills and comprises an area of 8167 sq.kms. The population of this area according to the census 2001 is 8,69,952.

The areas of Garo Hills is divided into three geographical regions. These are:

i) The Northern sub-mountainous region,

ii) The Central main plateau, and

iii) The Southern Hill slope

In the Garo hills region the Manda, the Damring and the Jinjiram river flow towards the north, while the Ringge river and
the Ganol river flow in a westerly direction. The principal river of Garo Hills is the Simsang Someswarl. It rises in the north of Tura town and falls into the Rangsa River in Mymensing District (Bangladesh). The highest peak, Nokrek is 1525.56 meters high. The Garo Hills are of low elevation and are densely wooded in areas where slash and burn method of agriculture has not been practised. Garo Hills has a semi-tropical climate with high summer temperatures and heavy rainfall, which at times, floods the area, especially the western parts causing dislocation to communication and transport. The Simsang is the biggest river in Garo Hills which flows to the south till it enters into Bangladesh.

Garo Hills is directly influenced by the southwest monsoon and the north-east winter winds. During March and April, the atmosphere gradually warms up with the advent of spring. From the middle of April, the temperature starts rising to the maximum in the month of June and then decreases gradually. This period may be termed as the summer (monsoon) season. The maximum temperature recorded is 34° celsius in the Garo Hills.

THE LAND AND THE PEOPLE

Location

The Garo Hills Districts in the State of Meghalaya occupies an area of 8167 sq kms of which about 7490 sq kms are hills and the rest is plain. The Garo Hills Districts lie between 25°9' – 26°1' N latitude, and between 89°49' – 91°2' E longitude.\(^1\) It is bounded on the north and west by the district of Goalpara of Assam, on the east by the West Khasi Hills District of Meghalaya and on the south by the Mymensing District of Bangladesh.

The District was separated from Assam when Meghalaya became a full-fledged state in 1972 forming a part of the State of Meghalaya. The Garo Hills have been divided into three districts namely, East Garo Hills, West Garo Hills and South Garo Hills. According to Census 2001, the East Garo Hills District with its headquarters at Williamnagar is occupying an area of 2603 sq kms with a total population of 2,50,582 persons. The West Garo Hills District with its headquarters at Tura has an area of 3715 sq kms with a total population of 5,18,390 persons. The South Garo Hills District with its headquarters at Baghmara occupying an area of 1849 sq kms with a total population of 1,00,980 persons.

The 1400mts high Tura Peak is a challenge for climbers and offers splendid views from the summit. Nokrek Peak (1420mts) is the highest peak in the Garo Hills. Its forested slopes are home to numerous species of flora, fauna and avian denizens. The surroundings of Tura is a window to the ethnic lifestyle of the Garo people. The region is known for its wangala dance. Its picturesque environs and equable climate are ideal for eco-tourism activities.

Tura is approachable via Guwahati by road which is 323 kms from Shillong. The journey from Guwahati to Tura by road takes around 6 hours. The nearest airport is Guwahati, 128 kms away from Shillong. Helicopter services are available between Guwahati, Shillong and Tura. The nearest rail station is also at Guwahati.

State Guest Houses, Circuit Houses, Tourist Lodges and good hotels are available for accommodation at Shillong and Tura.

Population

The Garos constitute the major tribal community of Western Meghalaya region. Other communities who migrated and settled down in Garo Hills are Rabhas, Hajongs, Kochs, Kacharis, Meches, Boros or Bodos and Dalus. The Muslims and the Nepalis have come and settled in different parts of the districts in the

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recent times. A number of Bengali speaking Hindus have settled mostly in Tura, Mankachar, Dalu, Bahgmar, Phulbari and other trading centres after the partition of India. The non-Garo population is concentrated along the edges of the region, leaving most of the interior parts ethnically pure. The other recent immigrants, mainly the business community are North Indians who have settled down in Tura, but they are still very few in numbers.

Table 1 shows the area, number of households, total population and Scheduled Tribe population of West Garo Hills, East Garo Hills and South Garo Hills Districts.

### Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District</th>
<th>Area (sq. km.)</th>
<th>No. of Households</th>
<th>Total Population</th>
<th>ST Population (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>West Garo Hills</td>
<td>3,715</td>
<td>95,524</td>
<td>518,390</td>
<td>397,166 (76.6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East Garo Hills</td>
<td>2,603</td>
<td>45,062</td>
<td>250,582</td>
<td>241,916 (96.5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Garo Hills</td>
<td>1,849</td>
<td>17,900</td>
<td>100,980</td>
<td>96,616 (95.7)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Census of India, 2001, Primary Census Abstract, Series 1.

Table 1 also reflects that West Garo Hills is the largest among these three districts. The number of households and population are also highest in West Garo Hills District. But the concentration of ST population is highest in East Garo Hills District, with 96.5 per cent out of its total population.

**Literacy Status**

Table 2 presents the literacy status of the people in the districts of West Garo Hills, East Garo Hills and South Garo Hills.
Table 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District</th>
<th>Number of literates</th>
<th>Literacy Rate</th>
<th>Gender Gap in Literacy Rate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Person</td>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>Urban</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Garo Hills</td>
<td>211,499</td>
<td>50.7</td>
<td>45.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East Garo Hills</td>
<td>120,874</td>
<td>60.6</td>
<td>57.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Garo Hills</td>
<td>43,816</td>
<td>55.0</td>
<td>52.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Census of India, 2001, Primary Census Abstract, Series 1.

Table 2 also shows that the percentage of literate people is highest in East Garo Hills District followed by South Garo Hills and West Garo Hills Districts respectively. The percentage of literate people in urban areas is highest in West Garo Hills District. The table also reflects the gender gap of the literacy rate in the three districts.

Origin of the Garos

It is difficult to ascertain where the Garos originated from, but according to a Garo legend, it is believed that their ancestors once settled in the eastern part of Tibet called Torua. They left Tibet for unknown reasons and wandered off in search of new areas for their jhum cultivation and gradually came down towards the south-eastern part of Tibet. Later on, these people set out on travels under the leadership of Jappa, Jalimpa, Sukapa, Bongelpa, with other prominent Garo forefathers like Damjampa, Ejingpa, Kusanpa, Asanpa, Rejapa and Dopapa. The oral tradition traces their migration from north-eastern China to their present habitat through Burma (Myanmar).

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The above theory that the Garos originated and migrated...
from Tibet and other places in China is a matter of legend, story, concoction or conjecture without any authentic historical evidence to prove. Until the coming of the British and the occupation or annexation of Garo Hills, the Garos or Garu Mandai or Mandei or mandehas were unknown to outsiders.

Garo Hills region is the homeland of about nine lakhs Garos who prefer to call themselves A-chik. According to P.C Bhattacharya the people known as Garo, Boro and Shan belong to the Mongoloid (also called Kirata) race speaking different cognate languages of Sino-Tibetan family.

The origin of the name 'Garo' is given by the outsiders who first approached the Garos hailed from Mymensingh District (now in Bangladesh) is also a subject of controversy. In the southern region of the Meghalaya hills, very close to Mymensingh, live a division of the tribe who called themselves Gara or Ganching. The earlier writers think that the word 'Garo' is merely a corrupt form of word Gara over a period of time.

The theory that the word ‘Garo’ originates from the word Gara does not hold good. Gara or Ganching division of the Garo sub-dialectical group occupies a small portion of the South of Garo hills district only. Whereas Garos were already there in the districts of Mymensing, Cooch Behar, plain belt of Assam and present Garo Hills. The theory of origin of the word, ‘Garo’ is a corrupt form of the word, ‘Garu or Garudas’ or ‘Garuda’ holds good. However, the tribe itself is known to the outsiders only as ‘Garos’ whereas the Garos call themselves A-chik (hill men) or Mandei or A-chik Mandei and never the word ‘Garo’ except in conversation with a foreigner.

With the passage of time, certain regional, linguistic and cultural variations resulted due to isolated settlements. In accordance with these linguistic-cultural variations and areas,
the Garos have divided themselves into a number of sub-dialectical groups which tend to be endogamous but have very little unity in a political sense. They are the A-kawesor A-wes, the Chisaks, the Megams, Duals, the Matchis, the Matabeng or Matjangchi, the Gara Ganchings or Ganchings, the Atongs, the Koch or Kotchu, the Rugas, the Chitok and the A-mbengs.

**Occupation**

The Garos are mainly agrarian. They practise jhum cultivation. It is the first and foremost occupation of the Garos. The soil of the Garo Hills region being rich and fertile provides better yield of cultivation.

For jhum cultivation, they first clear the forests in the month of December or January. In March, they start burning the cleared section of the forest. In the same month, after the first shower of rain, they sow their crops such as millet, rice, cotton, chilly, brinjal, pumpkin, yam, soya, maize, tapioca, long bean, ginger, indica and sorrel. The first weeding is done in the month of May. Ripened crops are harvested in the months that follow, beginning with June or July. Rice is the main crop grown by the Garos. In the northern parts, millet is an important crop often grown in preference to rice. Cotton is an important cash crop. It is sold along the borders of the districts and at Tura. Shellac is also a profitable product of the forest though it is confined to some portions of the hills. A typical jhum field comprises of a range of cereals, tubers, vegetables and rhizomes (ginger). Ginger is a cash crop. In recent years, besides jhumming, the Garos have taken horticulture in a big way and are now growing bananas, pineapples, cashewnut, rubber, oranges, tea, coffee, etc.

Like other Tibeto-Burman tribes, the Garos are also famous for their head hunting practices. Although head hunting is no longer practised today, the Garos are still good hunters. They enjoy trapping different animals. Fishing is also an important occupation and people employ innovative methods for it as a source of income.
Natural Resources

Nature has bestowed on Garo Hills a unique array of vegetations ranging from tropical, sub-tropical to temperate. This is due to diverse topography, varied and abundant rainfall and different climatic conditions of the western Meghalaya range.

Meghalaya’s saprophytio orchids can be found in the Tura peak region with its richly varied species. The common ones belong to the fascinating species of Dendrobin Densiflorus and Dendrobium Chrysanthemum known for their colourful beauty and elegance. The Baghmara Balpakram area in the South Garo Hills is a long stretch of forest where lowland orchids can be found.

The forests of Garo Hills acts as the treasure house of valuable timber and fuel wood, a range of tree species, fodder, resin, tannin, gums, shellac, fibre, edible fruits, latex, honey and a large number of medicinal plants. Garo Hills is endowed with thick forests, which produces teak, sal, tetachampa, gambari, birch, and makri-sal. These forests also produce bamboo, reed, broomstick, cane, cinnamon, medicinal plants, herbs and thatch grass.

Huge tracts of forests are now cleared to make way for cashew nut plantations which now dot the landscape of Garo Hills. These are grown largely for export. One of the important natural tree species found in Garo Hills, which also yields valuable timber, is sal tree.

Teak covers large areas in Garo Hills in artificially created forests. Bamboos are widely grown and are found in many types of forests occurring in the Garo Hills region. In the Eastern and Western districts of Garo Hills, the forests are under the control of the District Council. The tree species in these areas have been replaced by pure bamboo crop over vast areas. Bamboo is used for house construction, furniture making, basket making, mats, bridges, ladders, sticks, utensils and many items of handicrafts. Tender shoots of bamboo are used as vegetables. They are either eaten fresh or fermented and pickled.

Garo Hills is also rich in wildlife. There are two national parks, viz, Balpakram and Nokrek, and one wildlife sanctuary in Siju. Garo Hills is a paradise for its varied rich concentration of interesting and valuable flora.

Although Garo Hills has rich deposits of coal, limestone, sillimanite, fire clay, dolomite, feldspar and quartz, these are yet to be fully exploited. The streams and rivers are yet to be fully utilized, particularly its hydropower potential. Garo Hills is a horticultural paradise but the abundant variety of fruits has not been value-added and processed for income generation.

Economic life

Economic life largely depends on jhum cultivation on the hill slopes in which rice, maize, pepper, pumpkin, gourd, soyabean, melon, cotton, etc. are grown. Garo hills contain 88% of the State’s fallow land which may be regarded as a positive aspect for agricultural development. The State Government is encouraging adoption of horticulture which would go a long way in creating an alternative for jhum cultivation. Livestock development comes next to agriculture. The area has a high potential for development of poultry, cattle, piggery, duckery, etc. For these, there is a ready market and are very important for economic development of the people.

Weekly markets play a very important role in the economic life of the people. There are over 100 weekly markets in the region, providing marketing facilities for all the local products – both the agricultural and other raw materials. Many of these markets are now operating like semi-urban markets on daily and weekly basis.

The jhum-based cultivation of the Garo tribe is basically a subsistence economy. The average villager, dependent on jhum
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cultivation has little or no savings and cannot upscale his or her production since land is available on very short tenures. The problem is similar to that of Khasi and Jaintia Hills.

The people and the social profile

The major original inhabitants of the three districts of Garo Hills are the Garos. Besides Garos, there are other tribal groups such as the Rabhas, Hajongs, Kochs, Rajbangsis, Dalus, Meches and the Kacharis.

The Garo society is divided into certain clans or chatchis, e.g., Marak, Sangma, Momin, Shira and Areng. The chatchis are exogamous. Marriage within the same ma-chong or motherhood is forbidden and results in social ostracism. Some dialectic groups have branched off from the original and have developed into independent exogamous septs such as A-wes living in the north-eastern hills. A-মbengs who form the most numerous group live in the western side and A-tongs occupy the Simsang valley in the vicinity of Siju. Each of the chatchis or clans is further divided into lineages called ma-chongs. These ma-chongs are the basic units in Garo social structure and are named usually after animals, rivers, caves, etc. A Garo belongs to his particular ma-chong as soon as he is born.

The Garos are diligent workers when they come to felling of trees, clearing land, weeding crops, harvesting or bringing crops to the market. Rice-beer is very popular among the Garos. The Garos love singing and dancing and are generally gentle, peaceful and law-abiding people by nature.

Before British annexation in the 18th century, the areas inhabited by the Garos comprised of a number of independent clusters of villages; each cluster forms an A-king land in the name of a particular ma-chong or motherhood. Since then, the hilly areas of what now forms the three Garo Hills Districts have been divided between the sub-tribes. The sub-tribes or units were socially isolated from each other in the earlier times.

Social life

Civil and criminal offences are dealt with according to the customary laws of the Garos as dictated by tradition, usage and practice. These vary somewhat from place to place and from sub-tribe to sub-tribes. Before the advent of British into Garo Hills, the punishment imposed on the guilty was death (not for all kinds of offences). But with the coming of the British, death penalty was abolished and replaced by payment of compensation or dai in the present day society.

The customs, traditions and practices persist to a significant extent even today. Then non-Christian Garos believe in a multitude of malevolent and benevolent mitde (spirits) as in all animistic religions of the world. The anger of any mitde must be appeased by offering a sacrifice. Any person who breaks the religious customs, traditions and practices would invite the anger of the gods and are to be propitiated. Every religious ceremony must be performed without fail.

In ceremonies such as Wangala and Ganna, it is the duty of every cha-rante and mahari to contribute towards the expenses involved. Non-contribution is considered to be an offence. The Garos are very sensitive about defamation and dishonour that one may cause to another.

Today, all criminal cases are taken to the law courts for trial. Cases are no longer settled in the villages according to the provisions of the customary laws and practices of the people.

Status of Women

The Garos are noted for the distinctive status and power held by women in the society. The Garo society is matrilineal.

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woman, her husband and their children. Each married couple chooses one daughter to become the heiress to the household and the property. She is referred to as Nokkrom and her husband as the A-kim (Nokkrom's husband). They are destined to succeed as heads of the family. They are bequeathed with the bulk of the family property. The Nokkrom's sisters receive a small share of the property but are entitled to use plots of land for cultivation and other purposes. The Nokkrom and A-kim (Nokkrom's husband) reside matrilocally, while the other daughters have neolocal residence after marriage. Matrilineal cross-cousin marriage is preferred, particularly for a Nokkrom. There are, however, cases in which a Nokkrom is married to a man outside her father's clan.

Dress and Ornaments

Unlike the Khasi women who have a preference for gold ornaments, the traditional Garo women's attire Seng-ki and other ornaments made of beads, ivory and precious stones, usually varying in colour, tied around the waist. Some women put on a blouse or vest. Traditionally, men wear, in a turban in addition to a cloth tied around their waists. Well-to-do families put round their shoulders a piece of silk cloth or cotton during winter. Both men and women cover their bodies with traditional cloths manufactured by their own besides wearing a wrapper of blue cotton cloth around their shoulders. On all festive occasions, the Garos, irrespective of sex, wear head-dresses with rows of glass and stone beads stuck with cocks's feathers of hornbill. Males and females both wear bangles and earrings.

Traditional Ornaments

The following are the traditional ornaments commonly worn by the Garos.

- Brass ring worn in the lobe of the ear.
- Brass ring worn in the upper part of the ear.
- Bangles of different materials and sizes.
- Necklaces made of long barrel shaped beads of cornelian or red glass while some are made out of brass or silver, and are worn on special occasions.
- Elbow ring worn by rich men on grand ceremonies.
- Small piece of ivory, struck in the upper part of the ear projecting upwards parallel to the side of the head.
- Waistband consisting of several rows of ivory bones worn by women.
- Head ornament worn by women during the performance of traditional dance.

Village organization

The Garos live in permanent villages varying in size from ten to over a hundred people. A normal village usually has a population of three hundred or more people. There are five famous, matrilineal phratries called Chatchi. Of these, Sangma and Marak are only found throughout the region. The other three are not as numerous as the above two. The phratries are divided into many matrilineal sibs (serb) each of which is restricted to a specific locality. The sibs are divided into unnamed lineages referred to as mahari. Each village is built around one or two of these lineages. Most of the women from the lineage live in the village along with their husbands. Similarly, the men of the lineage live with their wives. One family in the A-kings is usually considered to be the senior most and the other families are
**Nadonggi or Sisa** - Brass ring worn in the lobe of the ear.

**Nadirong** - Brass ring worn in the upper part of the ear.

**Jaksan** - Bangles of different materials and sizes.

**Ripok - do-katchi** - Necklaces made of long barrel shaped beads of cornelian or red glass while some are made out of brass or silver, and are worn on special occasions.

**Jaksil** - Elbow ring worn by rich men on grand ceremonies.

**Pandra** - Small piece of ivory, struck in the upper part of the ear projecting upwards parallel to the side of the head.

**Seng-ki** - Waistband consisting of several rows of ivory bones worn by women.

**Pilne** - Head ornament worn by women during the performance of traditional dance.

**Village organization**

The Garos live in permanent villages varying in size from ten to over a hundred people. A normal village usually has a population of three hundred or more people. There are five exogamous, matrilineal phratries called Chatchi. Of these, Sangma and Marak are only found throughout the region. The other three are not as numerous as the above two. The phratries are divided into many matrilineal sibs (serb) each of which is restricted to a specific locality. The sibs are divided into unnamed lineages referred to as mahari. Each village is built around one or two of these lineages. Most of the women from the lineage live in the village along with their husbands. Similarly, the men of the lineage live with their wives. One family in the A kings is usually considered to be the senior most and the other families are
thought to have branched out from it. This family holds all the village land, and the husband of the heiress is considered to be the headman of the village. Village leadership in a political set up is weak. The headman or nokma is a leader in a motherhood and a ceremonial head in social and religious functions as well as a political head. If more than one lineage is present in the village, there will be other nokmas to look after their own motherhood's economic and social welfare. The Nokma is expected to entertain and feed the poor. If he is poor to do so by himself, then another wealthy man may take charge over these functions by performing the Ganna Nokma ceremony who will be then recognized as Ganna Nokma but not A-king Nokma. The Garos clearly distinguish the different types of Nokmas. The British administration established the office of laskar, to control and collect revenues from the A-king Nokmas. A-king Nokmas are selected by the chras and the maharis of particular ma-chongs. The village courts settle minor disputes by organising meetings of the villagers at which, the laskar presides.

Some village lineages are considered to be more closely related to one another than others. These groups of related and neighbouring villages can be referred to as village clusters. These clusters often include a few lineages, which belong to the same clan or sib.

**Statement of the Problem**

The customary laws of the Garos are not the creation of any authority. Their customs are as old as their society and as indigenous as the flora and fauna of their hills. These have served their purpose in the traditional societies but are facing the stresses and strains of modernity.

The customary laws, practices, traditions and usages of the Garos existed from time immemorial which continues to practice and govern the community till date. Customary laws, practices, traditions and usages do not need to be created by any authority. As once it is created by any legal authority it is no longer a custom or tradition; but statutory customs, tradition, practices of the Garos need recognition and improvement.

**RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

The overall objective of the study is compilation of Garo customary laws, usages and practices with special reference to the land holding system. The study aimed at collecting data on the principles of land tenure, problems of ownership and customary rules of transmission of landed property to succeeding generations. It also aims to understand institutions like family, marriage, kinship, practice of adoption, divorce, inheritance and their role in the land holding pattern.

The data collected for the study was mainly from primary sources in the field through first hand information from the informants by way of interview using interview schedules, questionnaire and participatory discussions. Efforts were made to substantiate the data from documentary sources such as books and journals from various libraries, official and non-official records, administrative reports, etc. available at the Government offices, District Councils, census publications, etc. A district level workshop and a state level seminar was organized as a part of the methodology to involve the knowledgeable persons within the tribe and other scholars, government officials, legal personnel and non-governmental organizations, in order to make the study authentic before finalisation of the report. The data collected are mainly related to the customary laws and on the patterns of land holding system.

For the study, a list of the villages with their population was made to draw a representative sample of the tribe and to make the methodology scientific and transparent. Three villages were selected for field study based on their population since it has a
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For the study, a list of the villages with their population was made to draw a representative sample of the tribe and to make the methodology scientific and transparent. Three villages were selected for field study based on their population since it has a
prominent impact on the land holding pattern. The villages were:

i) Chibra Agal village, representing the largely populated village inhabited by the Garos. It is situated at about 22 kms from Tura, the district headquarters. It has a total population of 2,095\(^3\) and falls under the Rongram C.D Block of the West Garo Hills District.

ii) Gokolgre village, representing mediately populated village with a total population of 1005. It is situated at about 55 km from Tura. It is under the jurisdiction of the Resubelpara CD Block of the East Garo Hills District.

iii) Bajengdoba is a village situated at about 60 km from Goalpara having a total population of 905 with 167 households. It falls under the Bajengdoba CD Block of the East Garo Hills District.

The selection of these villages was made on the basis of demographic profile and variations of customary laws which these villages represent.

After preparation of the draft report a state level workshop was also held at Tura on 25th March, 2004, as a part of the methodology. For verification and authentication of the report, the local people were invited having knowledge and experience on customary laws. The list of participants in the said workshop is at Appendix iv.

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3 Population according to Census of India 1991: Meghalaya Series 16. Part II – A&B. (Census 2001 was not approved at the time of village selection)

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2

SOCIAL INSTITUTIONS OF THE GAROS

FAMILY

The matrilineal Garos follow clan exogamy. The clan members are believed to be related to each other by blood. Thus, marriage within a clan is traditionally prohibited. The more prominent clans of the Garos are **sangma**, **marak**, **momin**, **shira** and **areng**. These are the larger groups and they are referred to as the **chatchi**. These larger groups, in turn, consist of smaller divisions or motherhood referred to as **ma-chong**. Thus, **sangma chatchi** consists of a **gitok**, **koksi**, etc. The **momin** clan is said to have come out from the union of a Garo girl with a Muslim from Bihar during Mir Jumla’s invasion of Assam in 1661. The **areng** clan is said to have come out of **sangma** clan i.e. **rongbak** (Motherhood) whereas the **shira** clan has come out of the **sangma** clan (**dalbot**) and formed themselves into independent clans\(^4\). The last three clans also have sub-clans or motherhood.

Traditionally the Garos do not allow marriage within the **chatchi**, but in course of time inter-marriages within the **chatchi** was allowed. Marriage within the same **ma-chong** is still strictly prohibited. Thus, an **a-gitok sangma** could marry a **koksi sangma**, but never an **a-gitok sangma**. The Garos who have converted to Christianity still adhere to this rule. Violation of this rule is severely punished by banishment or excommunication from the **maikey** according to customary laws.

\(^4\) Gassah, LS, 1984, Garo Hills-Land and the People, Omsos Publications. New Delhi:133