CHAPTER 6

SUMMARY AND OBSERVATIONS

In the foregoing study of the socio-economic life of the Caros in transition, we have observed in relation to a large representative village how the survival values that lie at the foundation of any society's economic life have been worked out at various levels of household activities and social organisations along with the changes of different economic and socio-political variables.

Although the traditional society could be idealised in terms of cohesive forces of akim and its satellite institutions, the whole social framework as well as its economic base harbour certain inherent forces of fission. It has been observed earlier how creation of new households by each of the agate marriages, settlement of sons with their wives belonging to maharis other than akhing mahari and that of the migrant households on payment of a'wil fee could lead to segmentary alignments of mahari relations (Chapter 5). Traditionally, a member of a household owes allegiance first to his/her mahari and then to the village or akhing. Every household is a centre of continuing contact and control of two maharis, and hence, sets of akim bonds are likely to increase with the increase in number of households.

Land and land-based activities act as the economic base of the traditional society. Till the time land resources can meet the subsistence of the increasing number of households with traditional technology the social balance woven with the exchange network on kinship structure, land laws and residence pattern could be retained. In the absence of any centralised political authority, the inherent tendency towards
fission is sought to be counterbalanced by rules of exogamy, a'kim and the unavoidable interest in land. But beyond the optimum point of land-population relation and in the event of any conflict of interests arising between the mahari alignments, forces of fission lend themselves to the dispersal of settlements and consolidation of landed possessions by respective mahari alignments with consequent rise in atomistic values and role-relationships.

In Darengri akhing, an earlier nokma of Bolwari origin had settled his Bolwari kins on a desolate part of the akhing and formed the present village, Bolwarigri, in his bid for supremacy in the akhing when a contest for nokmaship between him and his brother-in-law of Rangsa mahari had continued. Likewise, members of Aritok mahari of Durabanda Akhing formed Durabanda Agitokgri in a part of that akhing. To mention a few more, in Akhipara akhing members of Krong mahari and those of Agitok mahari built up two separate akhings, Akhipara-Kronggri and Akhipara-Agitokgri respectively, on their respective settlements dispersed out of the original akhing (Records and proceedings of Akhing No. II/11(443) Durabanda; II/11(444) Durabanda-Agitokgri; also of II/12(9) Akhipara-Kronggri and II/12(9a) Akhipara-Agitokgri). Such examples abound in the akhing records kept in the revenue branch of the Garo Hills District Council, and they suggest that the dichotomisation of ownership and management as a weak link in the structural relations of two maharis (a'kim) may provoke reorganisation of traditional ties under economic pressure.

The economic base of the idealised social balance is also not well arrayed at the household level. Each of the households, even if founded by the same a'kim or involved in akhing mahari, is essentially
an autonomous economic unit that pursues an individual policy of production primarily with own labour resources and occasionally with mutual labour exchange. Division of labour and production relations are confined to the household and hardly move beyond the domestic circle to bind others in inter-dependent relations till the rise of market and monetary relations among them. Integrative role of traditional reciprocity only lays across these segmentary economic entities till the traditional mode of production (shifting cultivation on common land) could provide them their culturally set subsistence. But as stated earlier, land cannot hold the growing community of households together beyond the point of optimum relations between the fixed land-supply and population growth. As such, integrative role of reciprocity loses its force when divested of its relation to the traditional economic base i.e. land. This divorce becomes complete when households are to seek livelihood elsewhere than jhuming depending on individual resources and agility, and replace reciprocal use of labour by their use with wage payments.

Along with the emerging crisis of shifting cultivation, there has also been a gradual rise of a unifying political order from the days of British power to the present date. Expanding administration, communication, money, market, western education and religion and other exogenous factors started producing their impacts on the Garos. Both the endogenous and exogenous factors providing for push and pull forces of occupational changes have helped the Garos in organising an economic order appropriate to their technical capacity, and in effecting such a change, their innovative and motivational faculties have been able not only to diversify the uses of land but also to go beyond for a shift towards non-agricultural occupations hitherto unknown to the
traditional society. There has thus been a conspicuous change in the number of occupations as well as in the variety of occupational combinations that a household can now pursue for its livelihood. Each of the households has thus developed afferent economic interests for its survival and economic stability by diversifying the risks and uncertainties that are inherent in a period of transition.

In this phase of economic dynamic, the predominant course of the households' activities—exchange, earning, expenditure, saving—has got to be involved in the use of money and markets with the indigenous non-monetary sector trailing behind. Since change is not generally sudden in an evolutionary scale, traditional practices linger on and are used by the people with suitable modifications. Mutual exchange of labour has been partially replaced by monetary use of labour on wage payments or by contract-service (thika). Whenever feasible, social obligations are met by monetary payments along with or in place of in traditional sacrifices or presentations. Villagers have made a blend of both traditional and non-traditional means of social living in a situation of transition. Forms of exchange have changed from barter to money and credit, and the types of such transactions covered not only production and consumption but also traditional cultural practices (chapter 4). Monetary exchanges have no longer been intermittently localised as were in the border-hats earlier, but extend as a regular course beyond the village into the national economy, and involve not only people of different clans including one's own but also those outside the ethnic group. The changing form, type, location and agency of exchanges have thus developed among the Garos diversified networks of relations leading to ethnic heterogeneity in socio-economic inter-
In the wake of growing land scarcities, the villagers have tried for a number of alternatives (chapter 2), and found fresh prospects of livelihood in the raising of cash-crop in relation to market proximities. Lands found suitable for production of any intensive cash-crop or larger plantations, within the existing technical skill or with its easy modifications (arecanut in Darengri, orange in Resubelpara, pine apple in Bagnara, ginger in Anugri and Zenjalgri) have acquired greater significance, beyond traditional preferences, as a source of regular income and economic security. That is why households of the concerned areas are found to run a race in consolidating their domestic economies by accentuating landed possessions taking advantage of the traditional scope of usufruct and a'tot rights in land. (Traditionally admitted principle of a'tot has been exploited by the households for their increasing control over land.) Earlier, a'tot was allowed to the youth for the development of individual initiative and skill, and not for individual ownership. As such, it was in accord with the traditional usufruct rights irrespective of whether its operation is held at individual or household level. It is the increasing needs for the alternative means of livelihood that has oriented the a'tot practice towards the institution of possessory rights in land. Garos instituted private possession of land by permanent cultivation of valley-bottom and terrace lands, continued cash-crop productions and permanent plantations. Continued possession apart, a host of monetary and credit transactions on land, garden, and cash crops have brought public recognition of private possessions of lands. Coupled with all these, certain developmental yet disintegrative measures of the State and District Council for encouraging permanent uses of land among
the Garos have sharpened the process of private ownership of land. Moreover, their increasing urge for economic security has led them to purchase wet paddy lands or to have these in mortgage for earning a perennial income as non-cultivating owners or mortgagees of lands. While this absentee ownership has already become an abiding feature of the Garo middle class of Tura (Najumdar 1977), it has also emerged no less in the rural society.

One of the objectives of organising the structural balance in the society is the provisioning of economic security. Now that it could be achieved without any dependence on kinship relations or reciprocities, it has automatically reflected on deviations from the norms of their social obligations. None of the widows or widowers has sought for replacement of their husband or wife from the latter's mañari (chapter 2, part II), nor are the nokroms always and everywhere selected from among the gritangs (own sister's sons). Education, efficiency and personal preferences of the partners generally decide the selection of a nokrom within the bounds of clan-exogamy. Mother-in-law or step daughter marriages are fast disappearing among the households with sources of perennial income like arecanut and orange gardening, cash-cropping and salaried services. Polygyny as a source of additional labour is rendered redundant in view of the rising scope for purchasing labour with wage payments. Among the Christian Garos, it is however, forbidden by their religion.

Christianity and Christian missions have also been an active agent of change among the Garos (chapter 2, Part I). During the British period, the Baptist Mission could implant, among others, the essence of modern democratic traditions into Garo society by organi-
sing associations of local churches and other allied services on western models that could cut across clan membership or regional interests (chapter 2, Part II). A parallel authority-structure with new bonds and values has thus emerged among the Garos modifying their age old socio-cultural practices (chapter 2, part II, also chapter 5).

On the other hand, the traditional authority-structure, laid out in the institutions of ak'irn and functional mahari, has also been subdued in the rise of specialised political institutions in the country. Nokma's privileged position has been eroded by the institutions of Laskar and Sardar as sponsored by the British and maintained by the National Governments. Administration of customary laws and practices have been taken out of the close preserve of the mahari elders and laid in a hierarchy of formal judicial dispensions from the Village and District Council Courts to the Supreme Court of the country. Mahari ownership of akhing lands and resources or their division and distribution, private ownership and transfer of lands either in the hills or plains are brought by the Constitution under the statutory domain of the District Council. The whole political process of living, so long left unorganised and uninfluenced by western democratic ideals, has been granted a district level autonomy under a centre biased Republican form of Government. Consequently, the Garos irrespective of clan affiliations and spatial attachments have got involved in all decision making processes right from the village Council to the country's Parliament. Such participations in a modern democracy were hitherto unknown to the traditional society. It is the election on individual merit or manipulation, and not the clan dispositions that decides one's membership of different socio-religious and political bodies, and the
rise of all these institutions along with externalisation of economic relations through monetised activities has brought the Caros to a social situation in which a'kim and its satellite institutions can scarcely decide the functions, rank and status, and opportunities of individuals and groups, or govern people's participations in any socio-political process of living.

Earlier, people used to attach either use or prestige value to all the goods acquired or produced. All ceremonial expenditures of food resources in anticipation of future returns either in material or non-material form (as in mortuary or status earning ceremony), or exchange of goods for asset formations (house construction with village labour) ultimately end in consumption for which households are to spare a part of their annual produce. Rolling of this stored up values for successive increases has hardly been the primary object of savings in a traditional village in which the use of goods could be functionally related to the production process in three possible ways: (1) goods used for agricultural and other productive purposes (ats, gitchi, gachek, kok), (2) goods for a control over the use-values in future, generally used in ceremonial exchanges, status earning distributions, construction of larger house, (3) goods as a fund for investment; a part of this stock is used for loan operations like ajakraa, duna, denu or dodon for ensuring in advance additional work-force for larger production, and a part is converted into goods for productive purposes as well as into jewellery and other fineries of outside manufacture. Brass metal gongs was the most coveted of all as it could be used as a medium of exchange in a limited scale. All these are handed down to the inheritress daughter as family heirloom. Besides acquiring infructuous assets, gongs were also exchanged for purchasing landed posse-
essions (amathe, aginap or a part of akbing). It is the consumption (material and non-material like status enjoyment) and its possible elaboration that used to guide the production activities of the traditional households. Otherwise, in a bilaterally structured society with subdued individualism and divided authorities of management, and unilineal inheritance, household production on a communal base cannot arrange for substantial accumulations, nor does the barter system in an isolated ecology offer any scope of investments. Earnings of a person as a bachelor belongs to his mother, and that as a husband to his wife, and subject to overriding guidance of latter's mahari. On the other hand, commodities are illiquid under barter system and as such, suffer from lack of qualities of investible savings. Incentives and innovations of individuals or of their respective households are, therefore, channelised towards elaboration of use-values and/or acquisition of prestige-values.

It is along with the growth of market network and money measure of values that the greater scope of exchange, increased liquidity and of relative valuations of all goods and of present and future returns of all efforts could invest the household with greater resourcefulness and relative freedom from social dictates, and paved the ways for accumulations. But at the inception of money economy in a traditional society, economic opportunities could not be so conspicuously prolific as to persuade the households in hazarding their small savings or social positions. They were rather found to project their traditional concept of investment to an extent feasible for diffusion of risks and uncertainties inherent in changing livelihood. They, therefore, developed a great variety of loan operations (badinga) in terms of money while
practising their traditional dadon principles. Their close contact with the wholesalers of urban markets also helped them in incorporating the credit deals of the neighbouring plains. They started practising the principle of share-cropping (adhi) not only on wet paddy land and orchards, but also carried it to the sphere of handloom weaving and cattle rearing, and out of such attempts emerged the concept of trading partnership at organisational level. Poorer households participate in badinga to tide over seasonal shortages whereas their richer counterparts practise it for profit.

As expected, disposal of surplus was not extended to any risky ventures but to spheres of riskless returns. Aspiration effects (Bauer and Yamey: 1956) arising out of the villagers' involvement in market centres and other external agencies of change (chapters 2 & 4) have elaborated and increased their consumption needs, responses to which enhanced their urge for permanent sources of income while transferring their effort and activity from the already shrunk subsistence to the expanding exchange sector. Surplus over subsistence as and when accumulated has been invested in reclamation of lands for gardening and cash-cropping, for acquiring wet paddy lands or mortgaging of lands and gardens as the predominating forms of capital expenditure. Part of surplus is utilised as working capital whenever jhum lands are worked out on contract-payments or labourers are engaged in terrace and arecanut orchards for wage payments. Avenues of minor investments are provided by handloom, livestock, ginning wheel and others for obtaining increments in investments.
Households are also susceptible to the 'demonstration effects' (Nurkse: 1953) of urban way of life. Houses of different makes and designs, wooden furnitures of various utilities and other prestigious items of consumptions now constitute a regular charge on household surplus. Possible expenditures on hired labour ensure a measure of leisure for the members of the household.

Increased monetisation in the wake of occupational diversification has allowed the enterprising households to take an edge over their less agile or unfortunate counterpart, bringing about unequal distribution of incomes, expenditures, asset formations, and an incipient stratification in levels of living (chapter 3: Part V). These features have partially been the result of varying degrees of inherent enterprising abilities of different households. A number of them could imbibe the benefit of a set of external forces that helped them to read the objective probabilities of future events at the sight of emerging crisis of traditional livelihood. Households lagging behind are found to be less accordant with the above forces like christianity, education, state service and migration or occupation mobility, and are less alert on needs of future provisions. As such, any temporary loss of labour power, a seasonal shortage of provisions or crop failure or any run of bad luck pushes the latter to labour market either in the village or outside with the consequent changes in production relations.

Whenever households are set to depend on money income for livelihood, production for consumption becomes 'round about' (arecanut for sale and subsequent conversion into commodities of specific consumption). Reciprocal exchange of labour gradually gets replaced by wage-labour ushering in subordinate-superordinate relations in production process.
even in the sphere of hitherto non-monetised traditional sector (jhum cultivation by thika and hazira). Earlier, owner and user and the consumer had been in the same person or household. Gradually, the extension of monetisation has developed separation between/owner and the user of labour resources, each surcharged with differing motives of work, one for livelihood and the other for exchange. Producers were not physically alienated from the production process earlier; but now, in absentia they can carry on production on their landed possessions with an amount of working capital and subordinated labour. This incipient process of social stratification thus bred 'nascent employers and a supply of depressed, if not actually dispossessed, wage labour' occasionally available for employment. Incidentally, this inceptive separation has been fed also by an increase in employment in the expanding sectors of service and trade.

During the formative period of this changing production-relations the society still holds formation and maintenance of permanent sources of perennial income and use-values as the dominant theme of economic activities. That is why land ownership offers the most preferred mode of capital accumulation, and a modern house is a much sought after object of demonstrative consumption. Their managerial ability has also undergone a change. Diversification of occupations and growing participation in monetary exchange now need higher level of control and coordination of household activities than that of minimal planning and organising of economic activities for traditional livelihood. A number of households have taken up trade and contract-works as their mainstay of economic life and are trying to develop entrepreneurial abilities in association with their erstwhile contractor-employers. But their surplus income is found to be spent on modern style houses and other
demonstrative items of consumption. Such happens to be the universal tendency among the indigenous contractors and surplus earners of agricultural sector, and demonstrative consumption becomes the dominant charge on their surplus. In our village itself, two households purchased jeeps for contract carriage as well as personal use, and another constructed as many as three houses in the urban area for rental incomes, but only after they had arranged for modern type residential houses for them. Story is not different in other hill areas of the district.

At the crisis of traditional sources of livelihood, households' socio-economic activities are oriented towards consolidation of domestic economies, and in the process whenever corporate ownership of land as the traditional base of production gradually breaks into private possessions, egalitarian set up of the society faces a disintegrative threat. Attempts at diversifying the income-sources in the growing network of monetary exchanges are found to result in the growth of atomistic tendencies in the society. They have reorganised interpersonal role-relationships; and the joint nature of household occupations has yielded place to individualistic participations in the emerging occupation complex, that raise the household fund from multifarious sources. Atomistic motives persuaded the households even to sacrifice the principle of common welfare that was once avowedly enforced by them. Thus owners of big orchards-in-the-making organised storage of livestock rearing in our village with approval of the District Council, but almost imperceptibly reintroduced the same as and when they could complete fencing of their orchards and other preventive measures. The
poorer households while obeying the common decision have lost their cattle forever and are now struggling hard to get back the position of a 'share-cropper' (adhi jelani) in respect of other's livestock.

Personalised exchange relations can now hardly withstand the forces of secular monetary exchanges. The distribution of use-values is guided not by principle of reciprocal returns but by secular laws of 'demand and supply' in a modern market beyond the control of individual households. Earlier, the primary object behind production was consumption, now exchange is the general object, and the objective of exchange is to earn as much as possible. Under such an objective and other co-related socio-political forces, people's attitude changes as cleavages develop on different interests; and as different interests emerge, people form or take part in formal organisations (social, economic or political, educational, religious or recreational) and also multiply them, being oblivious of their traditional bonds. Atomistic tendencies are thus the obvious concomitant of livelihood activities and are set across the compulsions of gregarious living; and the acquisitive competition and co-operation inhere and adore the Garo society in transition.