CHAPTER III

A GLANCE AT THE SOCIETY

Social Structure

In the introductory Chapter it has been shown that religion and society have close link with each other. But the degree of this relationship is variable from society to society. That is why it is proposed here to bring the Garo social institutions into close examination to find out the religious elements in them and to find out the degree of relationship between the institutions and their religion. Since the present study is focused on religion, it will not be fare to discuss in details the social structure of the tribe, which has long been done by earlier writers. But as Garo religion exists in Garo society, it is necessary to have a preliminary knowledge about the Garo society. So, an attempt has been made here to describe the main features of the Garo society. Garos are matrilineal in descent, inheritance and succession and matrilocal in residence. The social organization is based on the exogamous clans. The kinship system is classificatory. In Garo matriliney, Descent of an individual either man or woman, is always reckoned from the mother alone and through her the genealogical tree traces its origin back to the great great common ancestress. Therefore, woman occupies a unique and honourable position in the Garo society.
It is not very clear whether the Garo tribe had the matrilineal system of society from the beginning, but, tradition says, in some point of time when the tribes were already in the region of the North-Eastern India, they gathered together at the court-yard of one Bone-pa and unanimously decided to adopt matrilineal system and to take one's nephew as a nokkrom (heir-bridegroom) to daughter (heir designate) (Karate 1982: 10-11). Any way, such resolution, if there could be any at all seemed to be an epoch-making in the history of the tribe and such sudden change-over would have been out of question at the present age. In Garo matriliney, however, both husband and the wife enjoy equal rights and privileges in all domestic matter and in social status, in fact, in certain cases, husbands are placed in more honourable and advantageous position in society. If a Garo man is asked as to why, he, being a man should leave the parental home and go to wife's house, the boy would invariably reply saying, "I am a man, and I can make my fortune anytime anywhere: It is in the fitness of social etiquette that our dear sisters must always remain under the care of our parents".

With great eulogy, Rengmuthu (1976: 57-58) writes about the Garo matriliney, "The matrilineal system of Meghalaya is an age-old answer to the universal human question: 'What do women live for?' The pith and substance of argument in the matrilineal system is the emphasis of love of mothers to their own children and love of children to their own mothers. The new
realities of a harsh world have not shed parentalism to devise a more viable alternative in the matrilineal system in Meghalaya. And the gist in the matrilineal system in Meghalaya is that the mother is the basic root of the race. The mother bears more of the burden of precreation, nurture and preservation of the race. "He further maintains that, the ancient forefathers of the benafids inhabitants of Meghalaya by which he means the Gare tribes found in different parts of the Country, had attached utmost importance to purity of blood. They had an inveterate hatred for bleed mixture and shudder at the thought of lowering racial level accompanies it". According to them, he maintains, "the powers of resistance belong alone to the purity of bleed. They firmly held that the basic condition for all freedom of social thought and social action is the security of the commonly recognized customary laws and a well-ordered community of bleed. Maintenance of such a sauresanct social fabric was their paramount concern".

In whatever high sounding words one might speak in favour of Garo Matriliny, it is observed that the system is not free from defects. There are many Garos of the present generation who are growing very critical about this age-old social system. In fact it is found that Garo matriliny exists only in name and wife remains a mere titular head, weak and helpless in many occasions. It is the husband in the Gare family, who dees the real works, earns and manages the household affairs. Rise and
fall of the family welfare lies with the proper husbanding by a man. Garo matrilineal system is therefore found to be matrilineal in descent, matrilocal in residence but patriarchal in family administration.

**Family.** Again on the basis of authority, Garo family on proper analysis, cannot be considered to be purely matriarchal since mother alone does not exercise the sole authority in the administration of the family affairs. MacIver and Page also observed that the actual administrative power is in the masculine hand even in the matrilineal societies as quoted by Vatsyayan (1974-75: 133). Hence, in their opinion the word matriarchal is rather misleading and should be replaced by the word maternal. Such observation made by MacIver and Page seems to suit the Garo family administration, because it is the voice of the ohrem (male kins) of the principal female which are the more powerful instrument than the opinions and views of the husband and the wife. No doubt, the position of the husband remains high in the Garo family, yet, in the important family issue, he has to obtain the concurrence of the brothers and maternal uncles of the wife. Normally Garo family consists of mother, father, sons and daughters, son-in-laws and grand children and hence, it is a joint family. In Garo households, agate ohawari (non heir son-in-law) may establish separate family when nekkrom (heir son-in-law) is settled. Ordinarily Garo family is monogamous from the standpoint of marriage, but in certain cases, it may turn to be polygynous but such families are few and far between at the present time.
In traditional Garo family, religion does not find any significant position. Habitually, life of domesticity is regarded as the basis of the fulfilment of routine domestic works. There is no programme for family worship nor any individual prayer is observed in the domestic circle.

In traditional Garo society, family is the centre of economic activities. Family jointly pursues an occupation which is mainly agriculture. All members of the family get up early in the morning, take their morning meal and go to the field and as such, no special provision is made for offering prayer or any kind of worship and as such, the spirit of devotion to religious rituals are linked up with the honesty and punctuality to their economic activities. Hence, Garo religion appears to have relevance to the motto 'work is worship'.

Clan organization. Garo society as it is found today, may be divided into five exogenous groups, viz., Sangma, Marak, Memin, Shira and Areng. Playfair (1909: 64) mentions only three of such divisions, viz., Memin, Marak and Sangma. He called such divisions katchias (septs or clans). Some Gares are very specific in calling such divisions katchias. Playfair (1909: 64) says Memin katchias are entirely confined to the Akawes (awes). Some outsiders try to interpret the term katchias as phratry (a clan or sub-divisions of the people or tribal divisions amongst the primitive peoples). Some understand the term as sept
which is used to mean something like an Irish clan, a branch of Highland clans or family. But, both the interpretations are unsuitable in Garo social sense; yet, in absence of other appropriate English words, the terms phratry or septa may be employed to denote these Garo katohis.

The most basic exogamous groups are numerous ohatohis (clans). Everywhere, amongst the Garos, there are large number of ohatohis which can truly be considered as basic exogamous social unit, whereas, katohis stand as secondary social group. Matrimonial alliance are established strictly on the basis of such elementary exogamous clans in the present day Garo society. But, in this context, it is really distressing to observe that, with the passing of many generations, innumerable dereta-ohatohis (sub-clans) broke away from most of these original ohatohis. In course of long process, these deserting sections get established a independent ohatohis. This way, there found many minor ohatohis originally belonged to one single machong (main original onstoni or single motherhood). On investigation, as many as 196 Garo ohatohis under five different katohis and as many as 380 dereta ohatohis (break-away sub-clans) were found, there may yet be some more still lying hidden elsewhere.

Goswami and Majumdar (1967 : 250-60) consider Garo clans which have been classified under five exogamous groups, viz., Sangsa, Marak, Memin, Shira and Arengh as ohatohis which
playfair call *katohi* and identity the basic social unit such as Rangeha, Mereng, Agitek, etc. as *ma’chong* and refer to a *ohatchi* as a constellation of clans in order to distinguish it from cognate, *ma’chong*, and they paraphrase the term *ohatchi* as a 'constellation of clans'. In their view, therefore, *ma’chong* like Rangeha, Mereng ohambugeng etc. fall under Marak *ohatchi* and *ma’chong* like Mengminza, Agitek and Tagite etc. come under Sangaa *ohatchi*. They are thus silent about the word *katohi*.

Kar (1975; XXIII) mentions that the society is divided into several 'generally exogamous' clans called *ohatchis* like Sangaa, Marak, Moment, Arengh and Shira each of which is again 'sub-divided' into many 'strictly exogamous' sub-divisions called *ma’chong*. But it is observed that the Garo *katohis* (Phratri or sept) like Sangaa, Marak, Moment, Arengh and Shira cannot be logically divided into different sub-clans in strict sense of the meaning, nor Garos themselves mean like that. The real implication of the *katohi* and the *ohatchi* cannot be understood simply by division and classification but it can be explained away simply. As a matter of fact, there are some *ohatchies* (clans) appearing under different *katohis* in different areas of Garo habitat. At times, it becomes confusing to study about the actual correlation between the *katohi* and the *ohatchi*. Any Garo man would introduce himself with the title of any one of the *katohis* to which he belongs and ordinarily he is known by it to the outsiders, but, in the world of his own community, the title of his *ohatchi* (clan title) becomes more meaningful. In this
connection, many Garos of older generation were asked as to whether *katchi* is fundamental or *ohatohi* is more fundamental, none could give actual position regarding their relative priority. But it is generally thought that *katchi* like Sangma and Marak etc. existed from before. With regard to the large number of *ohatohis*, yet larger number of *dereta ohatohis* (break away sub clans) different persons give different stories amongst the Garos themselves. The importance of *katchi* and *ohatohi* are also viewed differently in different parts of Garo habitat. For instance, Assam Garos particularly those who are in Kamrup district and in upper Assam, attach more importance to *katchi* (Sangma, Marak, etc.). While the Garos of Bangla Desh prefer to use actual title of the *ohatohi* without giving much importance to their *katchi* (Sangma, Marak etc.). Garos living in Garo Hills are however found interested in giving equal importance to both *katchi* and *ohatohi* with orderliness and uniformity.

Many Garos of elder generation say that in olden days, Garos had very limited *machongs* falling under five different exogamous *katchis* (phratry) such as Sangma, Marak, Momin, Shira and Arengh, but, with the passage of time, some of the *machongs* got diffused into innumerable clans and assumed different *machong* title, thereby creating such situation rather making it more difficult for tracing out as to which particular *machong* the newly emerged *macchong* originally belonged. Thus, after many years of separation from the parent *machong* those segmented
clans conveniently forgot the original or parent clan and assumed an independent clan title. This way, Garo clans multi­fied considerably. Again some of the clans which are supposed to be the offshoots of some clans appear more than once under different principal clans which is also very confusing. For example, Boldak as sub-clan appears under three different parent chatchias vis., Manda Sangma, Rongma Marak and Simsang Sangma, thereby giving an idea that, from Manda, Manda-Boldak is born; from Rongma, Rongma-Boldak comes out and from Simsang, Simsang-Boldak is born and so on.

It is also very interesting to observe that many of the clans are no longer found and some of them are not even heard of in one compact area since Garo chatchias are widely spread in different regions wherever Garos tribe is found.

Some Garos particularly those living in plains of Mymensingh District of Sylhet and in some parts of Assam were found experimenting on taking to father's macnang in the similar manner as being done in other patrilineal societies of the country. Perhaps they were enamoured with the brighter side of their social institutions. Obviously such movements were initiated with a view to making certain reformation and modification to the existing customs and practices and to bring them up in the same line as are found in other societies following patrilineal system, but all such attempts died down in its
infancy. The problems were widely talked of and discussed among the members of the modern society during the last two decades even in the main Garo land but so far the society has not hitherto produced any soul having courage and stamina for pioneering any sorts of social reconstruction like elsewhere in the country. It is observed that such experiment has done a great injury to the regular and smooth sailing of clan organisation. In some Garo family it is found, the eldest son writes his surname as Marak after his father's surname; second son takes the surname as Sangma since the mother was Sangma, again, third child is daughter and she adopted Momin as her surname saying that she has modernised her kato. Like that, among the modern Garos, such arbitrary adoption of kato are found here and there. In the opinion of many Garos of older groups, in olden times, the kinship organisation was strictly based on those exogamous kato, viz., Sangma, Marak, Momin, Shira and Areng and marriage within the same kato were prohibited and such marriage being endogamous in nature were considered bakdong meaning marriage within the close kinship. Bakdong relations were not encouraged by the conservative sections of the society since it is endogamous in character and not in vogue then. In their words, in those old days, classification of exogamous groups on the basis of those kato were of primary importance and such practices are still current even during the early missionary period. Garo Bakdong relation cannot be treated as ma'dong marriage (incest) in the strict sense of the term, for ma'dong marriage confines to such wedlock between a man and a
woman belonging to the same ma’chong under whatever katohi their clans might come and considered as such, Garo hakdang marriage is not an incest.

Marriage and Divorce

Marriage. Actual working of the traditional form of marriage can be understood only when one is equipped with the adequate informations about the structure of kinship network prevailing among the Garos living both in the main Garo habitat and outside since the kinship and marriage systems are interrelated and one cannot be taken apart from the other. As discussed earlier, there are only five broad exogamous classes or divisions called katohi, viz., Sangma, Marak, Momin, Snira and Arengh. Those five katohis have again further segmented into a number of lineage groups called machong or chaton (clan). For instance, Agitok is one of the Garo machong or chaton coming under Sangma katohi, Arong machong comes under Marak, katohi and Gabil chaton falls within Momin katohi and so on. Again, mobility in the formation of different dereta machongs (sub clans) further continues. Thus innumerable minor onatoni (clans) have sprung up from one single original machong or chaton.

Normally marriage is contracted between any two of the exogamous groups, for instance, a Sangma boy can marry a Marak
girl and a Marak boy can marry Sangma girl. Most Garos say that, in old days, marriage between the two *chatei* (clans) falling under the same *kECH* was considered to be wrong and as such, marriage between Sangma boy and Sangma girl was looked upon as *bakdeng* (marriage within the bound of near relations).

Now, observing the different channels by which a man and a woman enter into a matrimonial alliance, it can broadly be said that, only two ways are open viz., regular form of marriage and irregular form of marriage corresponding to the form of arranged marriage and love marriage, each of the forms however having its different nature, character and mode of approaches. All types of irregular marriage might appear to be a kind of love-marriage in the beginning but such marriage can also be approved of and regularised by performing proper rituals later thereby giving to it same recognition as it is done to arranged marriage. Since the present study is limited to the religious aspects of the tribe, it will be an attempt to examine in what way religion helps in the matter of regular traditional forms of Garo marriage. Marriage is arranged when a man requires to bring his nephew, actual or classifiable as a nokkrom to be married with his nokna dongipa demehik (heiress daughter); secondly, marriage is arranged when a oshawari (son-in-law) is to be married with other agate daughter (non heiress daughter) of the house and thirdly, formal marriage is done whenever *ensonga* problem comes. In Garo society, in the event of death of either spouse the concerned kins of the deceased husband or wife has to replace another man or woman and such process is called *ensonga*. A Garo man
enjoy certain privileges of proposing and claiming at least one boy of his choice from amongst the sons of his sisters elder or younger as his nekkrom (inheritor) to be married with the man's nekkrom daughter (heiress daughter) and if such proposal comes from that man, such ideas are not usually ruled out by his sisters and is seldom denied. In certain cases, such proposal and engagement between the groom taking and the groom giving families are initiated right from the very childhood of the boy without giving any chance to the latter to get the slightest idea about such mutual deals between the two households. Such act of reservation or claims of nekkrom and ahawari is termed as nekkrom kanga or ahawari kanga as the case may be. Now, what is of interest in the process is that, under whatever circumstances it may be, whenever a bridegroom is to be brought for marriage, the bridegroom is invariably captured without any prior information to the boy. Such capture of the bridegroom is styled as ahawari sika. Physically weak or strong, willing or unwilling, the boy is caught in surprise and brought by the male relations of the girl at any time, day, evening or night on the appointed day. In this regard, several tradition adhering persons who were also married in the same manner were asked as to whether there could be no other better and more decent way of doing this so that such practices of treating the meek and gentle boy so harshly and that too, very often happens at very odd hour of day. All of them narrated their own personal experiences and explained to us justifying such seemingly rude and unkindly behaviour towards the boy and gave me certain grounds necessitating such practices. Their points of contention may be briefly given as under.
In the case of nokkrom, bothrothal or engagement is of course only in certain case, orally established between two families or between the two parents. The intention of the girl's father is not openly and publicly told to the boy in advance. The girl is however kept aware of her parents' idea. On attaining marriageable age, the male relations of the girl go to the Boy’s village or locality to bring him. The consent of the boy’s parents having been already obtained, simple information about the appointed day is conveyed to them just to help them to make the boy available on that proposed day. The boy, very young and sensitive and averse to all vices, any slight signal is enough to scare him out of the house, as a result, the bridegroom has to be hauled up without missing any opportunity. Sometimes, the boy, sensing the clues, about his impending capture remains away from home. This way, sometimes, the events may not lie simply as escorting the groom from one household to another. At times the party is compelled to catch the groom from any place wherever he is found, may be in the field, on the way or at market place or at home sleeping or eating. Further asked them why the system could not be made more smooth and healthier and to our question one of them spoke out his personal experiences thus, "I was also caught like that ... it was in the evening, I was taking food; on seeing the approaching party escaped by jumping from the open balcony and ran out of the house. That evening the party could not get me. The next week however, the same party with some more new friends went to my house and took me, I had to chance no escape then".
Another person was also interested to tell us the situation he faced: "I was also caught at midnight while I was sleeping, I could smell that something would happen to me any day and any time, so I remained all along alert. For me, I was no doubt willing to marry the proposed girl with whom I was already familiar but I did not like to submit easily, rather I was thinking of offering very strong resistance and to know how strong the party is. Truly speaking, the first man who touched me was thrown away by my left hand, the second man was also knocked down and others were pushed back nicely. I did so not because I wanted to do any harm to them but I wanted just to test the strength of my would be brothers-in-law. No doubt, I was later overpowered by their numerical strength and thereafter I was taken to my father-in-law's house and got duly married. The journey was very interesting with full of counterfeit fighting, struggling and shouting all the way. I could thus carry the whole group well engaged by my pretended reluctance and the members of the party got very tired and exhausted". This way, they told us many other instances experienced by them in the past. In some cases, it so happens that groom slips out on the way, then fresh attempts have to be made to bring him back; there are also cases, when the boy even after formal marriage runs away and in such event, he is to be caught more than once. In one Ambeng village, one village head man told us that he brought a young boy as sshawari for his daughter but he ran way after marriage and the boy was caught and brought thrice but of no avail, hence, he was thereafter let off. Then another boy was brought from other neighbouring locality but he also did not stay with the girl and that boy too ran away. In course of
investigation we have heard many problems of such events. It is found that the job is full of doubt and uncertainty. The idea underlying behind such practice, as we gathered lies in the fact that, the service is very amusing and interesting involving all along sportive activities and adventure amongst the youths; it matters little, whether the attempts meet with success or failure. At times the party misses the boy in their first visit and sometimes it involves a great deal of time and energy, sometimes of course, they enjoy a pleasant trip. One young boy told us "Men are more fearsome than wild animals, because, one has the chance to escape from the animals but not from the man". It is perhaps, because of such temporary fear complex the would be groom usually offer strong resistance. In other sense, it is also observed that, the prospective bridegroom likes to invite such action with an idea that he might get the opportunity to display his manly and masculine virility and test the same qualities of the fellow youngs on the opposite group. Very often, we hear that the boy who does not show any sign of protest and resistance is ridiculed and mocked at as timid and weakling by his friends. On several occasions, we heard many Garo youths talking of their pristine glory and speaking very highly of their physical strength, energy and virility saying - amikade bini pantemitingode mandal balchengekade pikne mana meaning, so and so, in his youth could uproot young mandal tree (erythrina suberosa erythrina strica) of first blooming age. Having thus studied the whole process of bridegroom capture, we could understand that the process can aptly be taken simply as one of the social practices. In the first category of marriage as mentioned earlier that is in respect of the marriage
of a man's own nephew to the heiress daughter another interesting point comes up which attracts everybody's interest. A Garo man never gives up hope even if his nephew run away from his house twice or thrice, rather he imposes his rightful claim over the boy under the a'khim. Marak states about a'khim "When a woman is married to a man she strictly becomes the a'khim of her husband and his manok and vice versa, the man becomes hera and her ma'noch's a'khim .... The object and purpose of a'khim is to retain the family tie and connection between wife and husband and between their respective ma'chongs (manok or clan)."

The concept of a'khim bond among the Garos following the traditional relation and practices are so strong that when a Garo man and woman are formally married the clan people of both the husband and wife are bound by such obligation that in the event of premature or untimely death of either sponse, the mahari of the surviving sponse have to provide may be to replace another man or woman as the lase or under the a'khim bond of the society, failing which the defaulting mahari forfits all future relationship, rights over the household properties and also the continuity of the lineage is affected, and that the boy is retained bound by such law for the period of atleast four to five years if he so desires with the concurrence of the kins. The boy being restricted as such is not free to marry any other girl unless the maternal uncle relinquishes his right over him. If the boy violates such restriction, the offending party is likely to face consequences as per a'khim regulation.
This sort of absolute right of a Garo man over his nephew appears to be very serious and wonderful; it is really like awarding heavy penalty upon the unobliging young boy particularly when the boy is kept under restrain for the period of four to five years after his desertion. In the midst of strife and uncertainty however, there exists a well balanced provision for compromise too. Supposing, for example, a bridegroom, be it nokkrom or agate shawari flees from the father-in-law's house more than once, final attempt is made to bring him back by sending the girl to the boy's house. At the sweet request and tender persuasion made by the girl, the boy is obliged to conduct her home, but, still if he actually dislikes the girl, he finds some other ways to avoid and on some pretext tries to disappear from the way before reaching their destination. In such circumstances, no further attempt is made to bring him again and the indomitable boy is let off for good. On the other hand, if the boy accompanies the girl up to her house without any sign of objection or displeasure, it is presumed that he has reconciled and made up his mind to remain permanently with the girl and it generally goes that way.

Now, the whole process of shawari sika (bridegroom capture) being full of activities, actions and repulsion it comes the final stage of actual wedding when dosia kemal (marriage priest) takes over charge and performs his job in a quick and galloping manner and thus, the actual service is completed within a few minutes. While conducting the dosia, the priest says from his memory some few sentences to suit the new couple. Under the prevailing
practices, three slightly different verses of wedding-chant to suit the three types of couple are usually recited by the kamal (priest) and the same if rendered in English roughly runs somewhat as follows:

*do'sia kamal* while doing his job usually utters few sentences in such a obscure language which are not easily intelligible to the common man. Literal translation also remains almost impossible since many words and phrases are figurative and not explicit. Chantings are however slightly different to suit the different nature of marriage under different circumstances. One of the Ambeng styles of chanting of marriage verses are roughly given here.

(a) Verses recited by the kamal (priest) while performing *do'sia* to mokkrom (heir bridegroom and bride).

"Given in his name and hers,
Divining in a manner, befitting, right and earnest;
With full grown - red and the best,
This very day and this very month;
In-law-sisters to father and in-laws new to mother,
Like a plant grown near the balcony and a fowl kept in the shed;
Like a sitiri and madagong the creepers winding,
Let them twine and cling to each other still;
Unexpected, unspeakable and the moment divine,
To adopt and get one as a true son of mine;
With full grown - red and the best,
Reading the omen through divination, as if in a closed fist given".
(b) Verses recited by the kamal while performing dosia in respect of agate ohawari (non-heir bridegroom and bride).

"Given in his name and hers,
Divining in a manner befitting, right and earnest;
With full grown - red and the best,
This very day and this very month;
Bound by law and tradition, just and proper,
My queen and my groom;
Though yet tender native in wisdom and skill,
Let them twine and cling to each other like a creeper still;
Given in his name and hers,
Son-in-law yet a true son of the nok;
Avenues born to meet new in-laws nok,
Tender and soft like a creeping cane under a common shade;
Reading tne omen through divination,
    as if in a closed fist given".

(c) Verses recited by the kamal while performing dosia in respect of adopted girls either original or under onsonga (a girl adopted and given in marriage to a widower under a'kim bond).

"Divining in a manner befitting right and earnest,
With full grown - red and the best;
Brought up for the nok and adoption made,
Like a plant grown near the balcony, and a fowl kept in a shed; 
For the well being of the progeny and to preserve seed grains, 
To mend broken oven and to replace the one so lost and gone; 
To bring honour and prestige to dear and near ones, 
To welcome the loved ones, to preserve the time honoured values, 
Divining in a manner befitting, right and earnest".

(d) Verses recited by the *kamal* while performing do'sja in 
respect of an adopted girl.

"Divining in a manner befitting, right and earnest, 
With full grown - red and the best; 
Brought up for the *nok* and adoption made, 
Like a plant grown near the balcony and a fowl kept in the shed; 
For the well being of the progeny and to preserve seed grains, 
To mend broken oven and to replace the one so lost and gone; 
To bring honour and prestige to dear and near ones, 
To welcome the loved ones, to preserve the time honoured values; 
Divining in a manner befitting, right and earnest".

Now, it can be understood from what the priest says while 
performing the do'sja, that he is heard to answer upon the new 
couple such good advice and counsel with a view to evoke in their 
minds the awareness of their duties towards each other, their duties to
the members of the family and towards the society and also making them conscious of their responsibility for the preservation and continuity of the lineage and for the general well being of the community as well. Lastly, the priest kills the third fowl and reads the indication of its entrails just to know the future of the newly wedded couple. Thus, the function is very brief, yet very meaningful since the destiny of the pair could to some degree be known from the indication in the entrails of the do'rasong (lucky chicken), the third fowl killed for the purpose of divining being termed as such.

Now, if one spares a little moment for reflection, one could notice that, in traditional Garo marriage, it is the future fate of the couple which counts much; past conduct, character and social status being immaterial, whereas in some other communities, much importance is attached to the antecedents of the contracting parties thereby, keeping the future in utter darkness except some economic provision at the moment. Garo concept of economy is not based on accumulated wealth. But, as the saying goes - 'dilligence is the mother of good luck' one could earn his livelihood by living sincere, honest and active life even with a modest beginning. Hence, mutual love and respect, backed by a proper awareness of their responsibility towards their fellow beings are considered to be the golden way to a happy, prosperous and successful married life. Traditional form of Garo marriage is aimed at maintaining lasting social bond between two lineages and for preserving the sustained continuity of the nok institution through procreation of children and family
expansion; it has very little or no religious attachment as such except a divination. So, the concept of marriage, in traditional Gare society lies in the fact that the continuous social chain should exist between the two opposite clans under the same nek title ad infinitum and as such, when a Gare marries, responsibilities for the welfare of the new couple primarily lies with the two lineage groups. As the Gare saying goes 'mande jikkode kinka, mese beningkosa kima', which means, one is married but to the brothers and maternal uncles of the wife. This sort of expression clearly reveals the idea that when a Gare marries, his future life and fate are the concern of the wife's relations and the interest of the wife is also taken care of by the husband's clan. Thus, two opposite neke are brought very close to each other through a matrimonial alliance under the new concept of nek osham, girl's parents are nek osham to boy's parents and vice versa. Literally the word nek means mouse and osham means lever and thereby metaphorically expressing such a deep love and affection that binds the two families together.

Divorce. It has been pointed out by earlier writers like Playfair (1975: 70-71, Reprint), Marak (1950: 52-53) and Costa (1975: 24-25, Reprint) that mutual consent between husband and wife, unfaithfulness towards each other, either
spouse being sterile, adultery, unchastity, improper cooking of food and incompatible temper and lack of attention to domestic affairs were shown as the grounds for divorce, but, all those details may rightly be grouped under two common classes viz adultery and mal-adjustment. From the prevailing practices it is observed that the dissolution of Garo marriage i.e. neither too easy nor it is too rigid. Ordinarily, Garos do not favour separation between the husband and the wife and it is very rare to find such separation on grounds of illness, sterility, impotence incompatibility of temper and habitual laziness etc. instead there is a popular view that if any such separation takes place on flimsy grounds it discredit the entire kinship of the divorcing partner. Even in the extreme case of unchastity and adultery, chances are given for compromise and to forgive and forget depending on the nature of the incidence. But even then, whenever situation arises demanding complete and clear separation between the spouses, the members of the two opposite lineages come into picture. Since the marriage is effected by the mutual and unanimous agreement of the two exogamous clans the desirability or otherwise of the divorce also needs to be decided by the representatives of the two clans. So whenever such problem comes up, the people of two lineages examine all the different aspects of the case and if satisfied separation is completed. In such an event, exchange of written agreement disclaiming each other between the contending partners is done if and when such document is felt necessary, otherwise everything is solved orally. So it is very clear that in every social situation, it is the lineage, which has absolute power.

Marriage is approved by the lineage and it can only be dissolved by it.
Inheritance. In Gare social situation, the concept of property is interlinked with the idea of nek. The literary meaning of nek is house, household or a family. Present day Gares might interpret it as house, building, land and so on. But, in traditional Gare society, the meaning goes beyond such visible material objects. By nek, the traditional Gares mean a continuity of the ochachi - lineage through preservation of blood relationship in a particular nekdang (family or household). In order to strictly maintain and preserve such continuity, it was once unanimously decided upon, as the tradition goes, in a nationwide convention held at the court-yard of one Bene-pa to bestow the right of inheritance to the daughters and to take nekkrem (heir-bridegroom) from amongst the one's own guritanga (nephews) for the heirers-daughter or the daughter chosen to inherit the nek. In ancient time, Gare concept of wealth does not lie in amassing valuable material articles as it is understood today. In Gare family, one may find movable properties like range (ganga), clothes, silver ornaments, compound fruit trees like jack and mango trees etc, and other mixed items of daily domestic use; the dwelling house itself also was not permanent as it is found today. In the case of a family of akhing Nekma, the Akhingland might remain in the title of the particular household. But, Akhingland too being a joint clan-land, and the Akhing-Nekma being a mere custodian of that clan-land, it cannot be considered as a part of the property of the individual Nek. So ultimately, the meaning of property or wealth is found rested in the basic
idea of *nek* and such an abstract concept of *nek* only is the meaning of wealth found current in the operation of Nekkrom system in the traditional Garo society. Garo say "mia sisì wapange, range gama biltange" (diligence is the mother of good luck).

Following the British occupation of Garo Hills, the government itself felt the need for allowing the Garos of the hills use of fire-arms for the protection of human lives from the wild animals and accordingly, licences were issued for the purchase of fire arms, such as shot-guns and muzzleloaders etc., and with that, added another new item as a part of family property. Possession of fire-arms was considered a matter of special social standing in the traditional society. But, during the last few decades, granting of licences to Garos of interior villages remained stand-still; instead, urban dwellers, specially, government employees, office workers and officers got fascinated by such articles and started procuring the fire-arms as a fashionable domestic articles and for pleasure game. In their case, it becomes more of a luxury-good than of a necessity.

Earlier writers like Playfair and others interpreted *jik-mamung* as principal wife and *jik-mengma* as elephant wife and *jik-gite* as equivalent to concubine. It is found that those early writers were influenced by wrong interpretation of the meaning of *ma-mung* and *mengma*. Presumably Playfair's *ma-mung* meant *ma-mong*. The two terms, *ma-mong* and *mengma* mean the same one word written
only in a reverse way, meaning, chief or principal or first married wife. In another sense, 'ma' means mother and 'meng' could mean chief or head or original wife in Qaro situation. In any case, jik-mengma does not mean elephant wife. The meaning has been misconstrued by those writers. The writers perhaps inquired about the literal meaning of mengma and got the reply as elephant, and hence, the interpretation.

Mukerjee (1961: 217) writes, "Bilateral cross cousin marriages occur. A man can also marry his wife's younger sister and his elder brother's widow on condition. Polygyny occurs. An important custom is that one of the son-in-law (nekkrom) remarries the widow mother in law, who may be the widow of mother's brother or father's sister herself. Playfair (1909: 68) observes, "At the death of his father-in-law, the nekkrom marries the widow, thus anomalous position of husband to both mother and daughter". On this very strange issue, outsiders usually get puzzled. Such incident occurs as a direct consequence of the Qaro concept of nek and succession to it under the force of stringent Arkim law. The situation arises only when the obite or mamatao (father-in-law) predecease his nekkrom (heir-bridegroom) and not always. A Qaro man and his nekkrom invariably belong to another exogenous chatehi (clan). So, the nekkrom as a member of another opposite chatehi would lie within the range of permissibility of marriage with his nistang (mother-in-law) had he been a free man. But the seeming anomaly
as observed by the earlier writers lies in that the **nekkrem** has to take his own *niestang* or *manitang* (mother-in-law) who might be the widow of his own mother's brother on certain family exigency. For instance, supposing a Gare man died at an old age leaving behind his old wife and young daughter married to a young boy and who is also a **nekkrem**. The old widow then becomes helpless without a partner. Giving another man under **ensonga** custom also becomes undesirable on many consideration and it is likely to complicate the matter relating to the situation. In such event, the **nekkrem** or even the **agate** - **chawari** (non-heir-bridegroom) under certain circumstances is obliged to take his *niestang* or *manitang* in addition to his true wife. Such arrangement is usually done only when the mother-in-law had to be looked after and taken care of by the **nekkrem** which would also greatly help in keeping all the household welfare in tact. This, he would not possibly able to do as a mere **nekkrem**, having, sometimes very young wife. According to Gares, such arrangement is found to be the best and the most suitable method for throwing the entire responsibility to the **nekkrem** by eliminating all the sense of stingy relationship between the son-in-law and the mother-in-law and future problems relating to succession, inheritance and other allied matters; all the problems are solved at a single stroke and once for all. By doing so, the son-in-law is raised to the status of father-in-law besides his lower status as son-in-law. In most cases however, the **nekkrem** so married to his mother-in-law is round to remain as a mere guardian - husband
and not as a full conjugal-partner. The custom, it is observed
can never be applied to other patrilineal society and rather it
looks very unhealthy even in the other matrilineal society like
Khasi and Jaintia tribes; the system is suitable only to Gares
and to Gare tribe alone.

Sex and Morality. The attitudes of the Gares towards
sex is neither too stringent nor too liberal. In old times,
premious sexual relationship and adultery were very rare.
Traditional religion does not attach particular importance to sex,
perhaps because, sex for them is natural and it is a part of animal
nature. Every object for them has a male and a sex life. For
instance, Gares consider in plant group, a tree which bears fruits
is a bima (female) and the tree which does not bear fruits is a
bipa (male). Very often Gares are heard uttering the word pap
(sin) at random even without being a sin-conscious on the part
of man who speaks whenever some one is found doing some mischiefs
i.e. breaking certain tabes or commits other crimes like theft,
murder, assault, cheat, telling lies and other immoral acts and
at the same breath adding one's personal remarks saying 'As they
sew, so shall they reap'. By this, they mean to say that vicious
as well as the virtuous reap the fruits of their past deeds
through the process of rebirth. Amongst the Gares, sexual off-
ences are more of the nature of social offences than a religious
taboes, and as such, the offences if there be any is dealt with by
the society outside religion.
Dealing with the sexual life of the Gares, Sinha (1966: 41-45) writes, "It will be profitable to trace briefly the sexual development of the Gares from their childhood. Beginning from birth, the child lives with the mother almost constantly till it can walk about. The mother carries it on her back at home, and also when she goes out for outdoor work. At night, the child sleeps with the mother where also its father lives. Under the circumstances, it may be presumed that the child has opportunity to witness the primal scene. Moreover, the particular way in which the child is carried by the mother stimulates the frictional sensation of the body as a whole and of the genital region in particular. This suggests the possibility of addiction to the habit of masturbation from very early in life...." The observation made by Sinha is found to base on his personal inference and mere presumption. The author has never come across any person to attest the fact stated by Sinha during his long course of investigation. He seemed to justify his statement in respect of boys only and he is not clear about the girls. It is not only amongst the Gare tribe, but similar baby ears are also found amongst the tribes, like Koch, Rabha, Kachari and other hill tribes as well. What reason we would ascribe in their case is not understood. So, his statement is found to be a mere hypothetical and unfounded.

Gare view of morality appears to be well in line with the Gross utilitarianism of Bentham. The altruistic Hedonism
regards man as a selfish being; with him, the highest ethical ideal is the maximum good of the maximum number. In other sense, Gare Moral Law is the law of the society. Quoting Bain, Vatsayyan (1976-77: 82-83) writes, "a moral act is an act prescribed by the social authorities and rendered obligatory upon every citizen. Its morality lies in its authoritative prescription and not in fulfilling the primary ends of the social institutions." Vatsayyan (1976-77) further maintains that the laws of society are based on the sentiments of people. They change with the time and place. Considered as such, Gare ethics is found to be social ethics. In Gare society, the highest good is the general good of the society in which the individual lives. In Gare sense, society comprises all social institutions such as family, onaheki, ganari, and other close neighbours. Very often, an individual has to sacrifice his personal interest for the good of the clan-groups. Social norms and rules are regulated by the society in conformity with the social need and demand of the time. Whatever is thought right and proper by the society, the individual is obliged to go by it. The *sumnum bonum* of one's life is the achievement of the greater interest of the majority. Social attitudes and behaviour of the tribe towards one another can be known from the manner they address their fellow beings. Garees never call or speak elderly persons by his personal name. They always address the man by debimung if he or she is having any child. The term debimung means the name of child (de means child, bimung means name). For instance, a Gare couple having a first child Maljin by name, his parents may be addressed as 'Maljin-pa (Malgin's father) and Maljin-ma
Gares think that, calling elderly man or woman by his or her personal name amounts to disrespect and they think the manner to be out of etiquette. Since Gares usually avoid calling a person by his personal name, children seldom hear even the names of their parents up to certain age. Again, in the matter of taking decision of certain important issue involving family or the onrhos as a whole, the views and opinions of the majority prevails. Within the onrhos circle also onras (male matrilineal relatives) generally command maximum influence; as such, all the female relations of the family are bound to abide by the reasonable and wise counsel of the onras. The collective opinions of onras is the only final authority sought in solving all the knotty problems whenever necessary. Costa says: 'Divorce is practised extensively ..... between the marriage partners' (Costa 1978 : 23). Such mutual separations are no doubt found very common in the traditional society and there are some isolated cases of similar nature even in the modern society as well. In most of such cases, inability to adjust between the couple are found to be the main causes of separation. In traditional society, marriage were used to be performed when the boy and the girl were in very tender age when they were not mature enough to decide about the reality of life. In certain cases, it may be due to the clandestine sex relationship which result in elopment with the secret paramour. In this regard it is clear by the fact that, Gare man and woman seldom go for divorce on the ground of impotency, sickness and other physical deformities. Traditional convention fixes the amount, for
complete separation a fine of Rs. 60.00 only (Marak - p. 27; Costa 1978: 24 and Marak 1964: 37) and the fine being very negligible is often ridiculed by the outsiders; yet, if one could study the real meaning behind such a mere pittance, one could appreciate the decision as being nothing more than a symbolic compensation for separation from each other which is imposed on the offending partner and in no way it is regarded as any sort of material gain over the other. Moreover, the amount of Rs. 60.00 was something more than its present value in those olden days. It is clear that, Gare marriage is a social contract and is no case it can be considered merely as union of two reproductive elements, the woman being the procreator and presser and the man the generative element as observed by Costa (Costa 1978: 24). Sinha, while discussing about the sexual aspects of the Gares has dealt with different sexual behaviour of the Gares, but there is nothing new, information in his observation.

Incest. As has been discussed earlier, ancient Gares look upon marriage within the same chatonis falling under same kateni, Sangma or Marak as bakdeng which, in their opinion is near incest. But, with the passing of time, this was relaxed and ignored. Then another stage has come when two chatonis considered to be of same reckonable matoneng origin would not allow marriage within such close chatonis. Gares of older groups say in the early missionary period, whenever certain doubt arises with regard to the eligibility of marriage between two contracting parties belonging to such two near chatonis, Christian Missionaries were consulted by way of seeking impartial advice and guidance as to whether the proposed marriage would be permissible from the view point of blood relation.
Now, Garo marriage being strictly exogamous, the concept of bakdong and ma'dong arises only when there is perfidious behaviour on the part of a person against such exogamy. Garos consider the marriage inside the same phratry e.g. Sangma, Marak, Momin and also within the two near shatchis as incestuous, so such marriage amounts to bakdong if not ma'dong. In such circumstances, clarification and explanation being sought, the Missionaries, who were well educated and already equipped themselves with the fair knowledge about the local tribal customs and practices, would help the advice seeking people with proper interpretation regarding the propriety of such marriages.

In Garo societies both traditional and modern, ma'dong marriage is considered as the most reprehensible form of breach of the rules of exogamy which institution makes it illicit to have connection with any woman of the same shatchi and brother having such sexual relationship with the sister is regarded with the utmost horror and such are the cases which amounts to incest in Garo matrilineal system.

Marriage within the same shatchi being considered illicit usually creates some social problems in the later life of the couple, for at the death of either spouse, the mahari of the surviving partner is supposed to supply suitable substitute under the custom of onsonga. Then, the difficulty arises as the mahari concerned cannot take any from the deceased's shatchi for maintaining continuity of the nok. Therefore it is quite evident from
the fact that man'dong marriage forfeits its onsonga right and hence, short lived under the Garo matrilineal set up. Among the
songarek Garos, incest is a purely social offence and not a breach of religious sacrilege. In modern Christian society, the attitudes towards the incestuous relation have become more severe. Amongst the the Christian Garos particularly the protestants, man'dong marriage being an incest suffers heavily as the matter has been taken not only as social offence but also considered as religious offence and as a result, the couple, under church discipline, cannot be accepted into its fellowship. They are also not eligible for baptism nor they can actively serve the ministry. Again, if the christain man and woman commit incest, they are ex-communicated from the ministry and there is no chance for them for entering into the same fold again till their mistakes are rectified in some way or other. In one Christian village, one fine Sunday morning a number of young boys and girls stood ready by the side of a stream to receive baptism. All local christians collected to participate in the service. One middle aged man who is known to be living in incestuous life voluntarily came forward and offered himself to be baptised, but, he was outright denied baptism on the ground that the man has been living in incest. No doubt, we were feeling very much for that man, because in my mind, we were thinking, according to Christian principle, baptism denied means salvation denied; poor unfortunate fellow left the place disappointed and morose. Despite strong objection and universal disapproval, man'dong unions are taking place here and there in utter violation of the traditional law and convention. Such being the situation, Mahari people are unable to do anything but to tolerate
such illicit union though with chagrin. The incestuous couple is permanently branded as *ma'deng*. Even though the *ma'deng* union suffers from various social and ecclesiastical hindrances, it has one soothing word of mocking consolation decorated by the society to cover up the shameful evils of incest. With a view to raising the morale of the incestuous couple from disgrace and humiliation, society provides them with a few enlivening words which read - "*ma'deng kimeen de'e wak jelana*" meaning in incestuous family, pigs and chicken abound. This is of course illogical. The proverb sounds simply like a last word of contention to cheer them up and to give them mental reconciliation.

In Garo homes belonging to both Christianity and traditional religion, children born of an incestuous parents are not treated as illegitimate since the child has regular parents but the child born out of illicit connection or of clandestine relationship without formal union, the child becomes illegitimate.

In the matter of succession to the parental property, the incestuous daughter does not suffer any social prejudice since there is no customary bar to revoke her right with regard to the inheritance on the ground of her being an incestuous child. Since incestuous parents produce children of mother's *chatchi* only, matrilineal descent is in no way disturbed by the incestuous family. But, difficulty lies in that the heir daughter of the incestuous couple cannot marry her father's nephew.

**Birth and Death**

**Birth.** Traditionally Garos have their own indigenous way of handling the birth of a child. In the interior hills, where no medical facilities were available. They are found handling the situation calmly, efficiently and successfully. Even these days, except in the town and developed villages, Garo women are found to depend on such local talents in delivering a child. *Sopa-sarek* Garos
know how to take care of their expectant mother during the period of conception.

The pregnant woman is advised to observe certain taboos, such as she is not to stand or sit on the threshold or against the window. She is not to carry a pitcher or water jar in a basket of improper size (Garos living in the hills carry their water jar in bamboo baskets). She should not carry fire woods in a basket loading the woods crosswise; she is also forbidden from eating fatty and oily substances like, honey, molasses, pineapples and she is also advised not to take salt too much. The pregnant woman while burning fire woods should not turn inside out; she is not to mend her fire place even if it is damaged; not to repair the leakage in her water jar. She should not keep long cloth or any long garment around her neck; she is not to wind the threads around her waist while weaving. Women in general are not allowed to eat the twin - fruits for fear of bearing twin - babies. Besides, there are many more don'ts to the women in general and expectant mothers in particular. This kind of guidelines given by the Garos to their women are the result of their traditional beliefs which have been handed down by their forefathers and such restriction and prohibition are not completely hollow since such beliefs are based on long experiences. Briefly speaking such taboos are maintained in order to avoid difficult delivery as a result of enlarged placenta, abnormal size of the baby, and birth of twin babies and so on. The family concerned remains alert by collecting pig, fowl and rice beer etc. to meet any emergent needs connected with the expectant mother. On the sixth month of pregnancy, the woman herself
prepares or makes *shujangdi* (rice beer specially prepared and properly preserved in connection with the life of a particular person) and collect enough quantity of rice to meet the most emergent situation and pressing needs connected with her impending confinement. Propitiation to certain relevant deities are made from time to time during pregnancy as a precautionary measure.

As and when the pregnant woman experiences labour pain, the delivery *kamal* (midwife) is summoned and that *kamal* is assisted by two or three experienced elderly ladies in attending the patient. The pregnant woman having been asked few questions with regard to the maturity of time and nature of pain etc. The attending *kamal* could say whether the pain is primary or pre-natal. If the symptoms indicate that the delivery is near, the husband of the patient is asked to remove his turban if he is putting on any. If the pain is severe and has reached a labour stage, the conducting *kamal* directs all the beer jars and rice pots hitherto kept properly closed to be uncovered immediately. If the delivery is still delayed, all the male members are asked to go out of the house and also to take out one *damben* (sloat) and a *qitekipong* (handle of a small typical jhum implement) is hung on the bar either of a door or of a window. If the coming of the baby is sure, the *kamal* and her attendants directs the menfolks to prepare *gindalen* (bamboo knife), to break *dikileng* (break the old cooking earthen pot) and to perform *domagipa r Infect*, a practice found particularly in the Ambeng habitat. At the moment of delivery, Ambeng Garos place two sheets of banana leaves on the floor and they give the meaning behind
such action as one sheet is meant for the owner that means for the life of the child and the other sheet meant for themselves meaning thereby the enemies or evil spirits. The child being out, the second sheet is first thrown away. As soon as the baby is delivered it is given a name by the attending kamals before any evil spirits overtakes it and thereafter, cooked food and curry are offered in honour of the new born baby and this offering is called *bisana rugala* (libation in honour of the baby). By such ceremony, tatara rebuga deity is propitiated. In some cases however, marang deity is propitiated at this moment by offering eggs for the protection of attending kamals from probable aftereffects.

**domagipa ringa**: It means prayer for new born child. Such prayer or invocation to the deity is done just close to the front wall of the house by the male members present outside the house during the delivery.

Before this ceremony, none is allowed to touch any food or drink prepared in connection with the child birth. Everything being over, the attending kamal and her assistants are served with food and drinks and the food and curry cooked for the attending kamals is called *mijakal songa* by the Garos. After three or four days of delivery or as and when the woman regains her health, she cooks rice and curry and carry them herself to the house of the head kamal for offering to her as a mark of respect and appreciation to her service. Food and curry cooked for this purpose is called *mipanehu songa*. According to traditional belief, one should be given a name right at
birth because unless it is done, the life of the person is likely to fall a victim to certain hostile forces. Gares believe that, right from birth man's future is determined. Gares maintain the views that the spirits of all the objects of nature, animate or inanimate, visible or invisible appear at the birth of a child to try their luck which the Gares term as resu ana as to whom the new born child would fall. If the fate of the baby falls over the resu ana of a tiger, the man at any age would fall a victim to a tiger. If the man's fortune goes in favour of a tree, the man would meet his end by falling from a tree top, and if the man is born for his own self (his own luck), the man would enjoy ripe old age and die a natural death. So, convinced as such, Gares believe that, one's future is fixed right at birth for better or for worse; and they have also ample tales and experiences to prove their own beliefs.