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Property Distribution and Ownership Pattern in the Matriarchal Garo Community: A Sociological Study of Change and Continuity in Kolmakanda Upazila, Bangladesh

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ABSTRACT

The Garo is one of the most famous matriarchal societies in Bangladesh. This study aims to find out the property ownership and distribution pattern in the matriarchal social system by focusing on the continuity and changes in the traditional practices of the Garo communities. A mixed method approach is employed with 130 surveys, both face-to-face and online, as a quantitative method, and 02 Key Information Informants (KIIs), 08 In-depth Interviews (IDIs) under case study as the qualitative method with purposive sampling, respectively at Kolmakanda Upazila in Netrokona district. About 69.20% of respondents reported that The youngest daughter (Nokna) is traditionally considered the primary heir in Garo communities where 76.20% state that when younger daughter unable or unwilling to accept the inheritance, the ownership of property become distributed among other siblings and 80% Garo people delineate that in absence of female child, mother handover the ownership of property to her sons. To transfer the ownership of property, Garo communities arranged the Nokrom-gata ceremony, where the husband of the nokna (nokrom) came to the nokna's house and the mother transferred her property to the youngest daughter in the presence of family members, relatives, the headman of the village (nokma), and a few witnesses of the village. In this study, more than one fourth of Garo people believe that inheritance practices have been changed among Garo communities because of intermarriage with non-Garo communities, whereas 27.7% believe that modern issues like education, urbanization, and industrialization, cultural acculturation, cultural assimilation, etc., influence property distribution practices in the Garo community. In recent times, male members of the Garo society have been demanding equal ownership rights in family property. Most of the parents are now distributing their property among their sons and daughters. Even many female children of Garo families don't demand full ownership of their

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parents' property. They want to share the ownership of parents' property with their brothers, but still now female children of Garo communities are getting the lion share of their parents' property. Most of the male children of Garo families take it positively because they think women are safe hands to protect and manage their families' property. These provide valuable insight into the understanding of matrilineal systems, indigenous property rights, and gender dynamics among Garo communities in Bangladesh, serving usefully for policy thinkers, academics, and development practitioners working on the issues of gender and economic empowerment of women.

JEL Classification: Z13, P14, J16, K11

Keywords: Garo Communities, Property Ownership, Matriarchal System, Nokna, Continuity and Changes in Traditional Practices

INTRODUCTION

Indigenous people and nations are those who consider themselves as apart from other social sectors. Now they are determined to preserve, develop and hand over to next generations their ancestral territories and their ethnic identity based on their current existence in accordance with their own cultural patterns, legal system, and social institutions (Cobo, 2011). At least 350 million people belong to the indigenous worldwide, including around 2 million indigenous people from 45 unique ethnic tribes in Bangladesh (Costa & Dutta, 2007; GOB, 2008). The Garo are one of Bangladesh's major indigenous communities. The Garo belong to a marginalised ethnic minority tribe in Bangladesh. They originally migrated from Tibet. For centuries, they have been coexisting with the Bengali majority in different parts of Bangladesh. The Garos have different cultural traditions and social structures from those of the majority Bengalis. According to the Population and Housing Census (2022), the total population of Garos is 76,846. The Garo is one of the most famous matriarchal societies in Bangladesh, and it is too hard for them to maintain their traditional life. Among the major indigenous groups of the north-eastern Indian subcontinent, the Garo stand out with their matrilineal social structure. The Garo, traditionally located in the Indian state of Meghalaya and parts of Bangladesh, trace a lineal pattern and social organization wherein descent, succession to property, and ownership of wealth are traced and passed through female lineage. It is thus the women, especially the youngest daughter, who ensure continuity in transmitting the right of property in a system that gives the Garo community the distinctiveness of a matrilineal culture highly exceptional in South Asia. (Islam, et al., 2008).

Among the Garo civilization, much uniqueness in respect to cultural and social structure has always been found as women bear this prime responsibility or privilege of property distribution, which is part of tradition transferred through generations, where women, notably daughters, end up as guardians of family property, land, and heritage. This approach reflects the regard for women, especially in respect to family history, social stability, and continuity of culture, so strong in this community (Sangma, 1990). With primarily matriarchal systems, women play an important role in managing household and cultural assets. This system, while matrilineal, has matriarchal elements due to the economic control provided to women, particularly in land and property management (Burling, 1997). The practice of nokna is central to Garo property distribution, in which the youngest

daughter (nokna) inherits the family's property, which includes land and the family home. This protects the integrity of the maternal lineage and the clan's economic stability (Sangma, 1990). Men, despite being barred from inheriting property, frequently contribute to the home through marriage, typically living matrilocally (Lyngdoh, 2005). A male village headman manages political and legal problems with the law, showing a gendered division of work in which women have the ownership of property and men hold positions of power (Chandra, 2010). Although land rights belong to the female lineage, the Nokma (Headman) serves as the chief responsible for managing and controlling clan lands and resources on behalf of the clan. In as much as the Nokna has the right, her husband (Nokrom) can also represent the community in some dealings, though the ownership and control of his wife's. This arrangement allows women to retain ownership and custodianship of family land, thereby sustaining clan-based territorial integrity and heritage (Bowen et.al 2015).

The famous matriarchal Garo or Mandi people of Bangladesh are changing day by day. Changes in the culture of the Garo mean they are losing many of the characteristics of their own culture and are taking on others. A study noted that Marriage is an important event in the Garos' social and cultural life, with exogamous rules requiring husbands and wives to have distinct stages and motherhood. Breaking this rule is a social sin. However, the practice of exogamy continues to change, with marriages within the same clan becoming more typical. According to the report, 95% of Garos always marry another Garo, and 81% of relationships must be from separate clans. Christian marriage customs are becoming increasingly common, with 76% of respondents in Haluaghat and 88% in Modhupur Upazilas following Christian principles and denying Bengali Muslim (Ahmed & Barua, 2021). Garo has its own language, which is known as "Achik khusuk." The Garo people do not want to recognize themselves self being Garo. They prefer representing them as Achik Mandi or Hills People. The very original religion of the Garo people is Songsarek, which is nearly abolished, but a few of the Garo people still follow it in some rare areas. Over time, most of the Garo have been converted to Christianity and a few to Islam (Ellen, 1999).

However, industrialization, legal reforms, and changing gender norms all present challenges to this old system. Globalization and integration with India's patriarchal legal systems have caused claims regarding land rights and gender roles, which might upset centuries-old practices (Parida, 2018). The aim of this research article is to present the detailed mechanisms of property distribution within the matrilineal system of the Garos. The research focuses specifically on Kolmakanda Upazila in the Netrokona district of Bangladesh, where a high concentration of Garos can be found. The research explores how property is traditionally distributed according to family patterns, traces the change in such patterns over time, and explores the implications of this system for the socio-economic empowerment of Garo women.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The general objective of the study is to find out the property distribution and ownership pattern among the Garo communities in Bangladesh. The specific objectives of the study are as follows:

1. To find out the continuity pattern of traditional practices of property distribution among the Garo communities.

2. To investigate the role of Garo women in the management of inherited property and socio-economic issues of family.
3. To explore the challenges and changes faced by the Garo matrilineal system in terms of property distribution**.**

RATIONALE OF THE STUDY

This study is considered a pioneering effort within the field of Sociology of Minorities, creating new ground in the field of human rights within the context of ethnic communities of Bangladesh for vulnerable populations like women. In Bangladesh, dominated by the all-pervasive and overwhelming patriarchal values in most spheres of socio-economic life, the Garo stands in a unique and interesting contrast. Property rights among the Garos take on a different aspect due to the matrilineal system in place. To obtain deep knowledge about traditional property ownership and recent changes in property ownership among Garo communities in Bangladesh, especially in Netrokona district, researchers have explored on different databases like; iPortal, Google Scholar, JSTOR, CSIRO etc. By exploring these databases, the authors of the study found that most of the previous research work was conducted by numerous scholars, focusing on the matrilineal system of the Garos, traditional property inheritance patterns of the Garos, livelihood patterns of the Garos, family and kinship in Garo villages, gender and matrilineal society, etc. Among these, limited research work about Garo communities had been conducted in Bangladesh, especially in Netrokona district. Moreover, the traditional property allocation procedures among the Garos are changing with increased modernity, migration, and other influences from mainstream legal and social systems (Marak and Thirumurugan, 2023; Parida, 2018). After reviewing literature, the authors of the study found that numerous research works like, *"Matrilineal Society in Transition: The Garo Community in Bangladesh"* by Chowdhury (2015), "The Socio-cultural Impacts of Economic Changes to Matrilineal Garo Society in Bangladesh." By Dey and Sabiha (2009) have already been conducted. But no one has yet conducted research work on "Property Distribution and Ownership Pattern in the Matriarchal Garo Community: A Sociological Study of Change and Continuity in Kolmakanda Upazila, Bangladesh"**.** So, the present study is important in understanding how different factors transform the Garo matrilineal system, as well as the implications of such transformations, have on the future of property rights and gender roles. Through a wide focus on the local, this research intends to render an in-depth understanding of matrilineal inheritance on the ground and engagement with a broader trend that affects the Garo people. These provide valuable insight into the understanding of matrilineal systems, indigenous property rights, and gender dynamics of ethnic communities in Bangladesh, serving usefully for policy thinkers, academics, and development practitioners working on gender issues and economic empowerment.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The Garo community is the strongest matrilineal ethnic community of Bangladesh, and in their society, lineage, property, and residence are succeeded from mothers to daughters, preferably the Youngest daughter or the most favoured one. Lineage among the Garos is determined by the female line. By birth, children become the member of the mother's clan

(mahari) as well as the cluster of clans (machong). They get aligned to one of the five conglomerations of machong, known as chatchi, viz., Sangma, Marak, Momin, Areng, and Shira. When a couple does not able to give birth a daughter, adoption from one's mahari or machong takes place. Garo Families having more than one daughter, the parents' choose their favourite daughter as the inheritress, called as nokna or nokna-dongipa-mechik (daughter for the house). She inherits not only the movable and immovable property, but also the responsibility towards elderly parents, younger siblings, and other needy mahari members (Marak, 2012). Burling (1963), in his cultural study of Garo family life structure, found that the youngest daughter chooses to be the family's property custodian, a tradition that supports the maternal line. He also found that the social responsibilities related to getting property, such as the inheritor's need to care for aging parents and other family members.

Sangma (1981) conducted a study on the Garo matrilineal system, which is one of the most effective sociological studies. This study finds that the youngest daughter, or "Nokna," is the primary inheritor of family property, especially immovable property like land and homesteads. This study highlights that, while females inherit family funds, the system is not completely exclusive; sons may sometimes receive property in typical situations, but succession can be limited. The Garo laws are proved in such a manner that it is exceedingly difficult for males to inherit or own properties. Usually, the females are entitled to all the properties. The properties bought by males will be entitled to their female family head or spouse. Usually, only daughters inherit properties from their mothers. If one family does not have any girl children, the sisters of the female head of that family will inherit her properties in her absence (Ferdous & Samara, 2021). These studies also analyse how this structure supports women's socioeconomic roles within the household and in the wider Garo society.

As the Garo community is a matrilineal society, the birth of a daughter brings more happiness to the family (Navile & Hossain, 2019). According to the matrilineal system, the female members become the heads of the families (Kabir, 2022). Women used to decide and lead the family among the Garo community (Navile & Hossain, 2019). So, Garo women are more empowered than any other ethnic communities in Bangladesh (Kabir, 2022). Another study highlights how the matrilineal system advantages women in terms of property inheritance, particularly the youngest daughter. It also investigates how financial success and education influence the roles of women within the family, creating flexible interpretations of traditional inheritance structures (Chowdhury, 2010).

According to the findings of a survey conducted by Dey (2015), the husbands and wives of Gachabari village jointly take land-related decisions. According to the respondents of in-depth interviews, in most households ,the husband has the final authority over property like land matters, even though he informs his wife before taking his decision. Since 84% Garo households of Gachabari are male-headed, men largely practice the actual power of land management and land related decesions. Women generally play the primary role in land management when their husbands are unwilling or away from home or have passed away, but in those cases, women are expected to consult with their maternal relatives who are known as the chra. However, a few female respondents mentioned that managing relationship with the maternal kin is also a challenging task for Garo women, as opinion of

their maternal relatives are often ignored. Especially, present generation husbands are reluctant to accept the decesions made by their wife's chra. Therefore, Garo women usually follow their husbands' decision rather than consulting with their chra (Dey, 2015). This study also reveals that, the government permitted local Garo people to register lowlands in their own names, after the annihilation of the zamindari system. Garo households of Hindu religion tended to register both highlands and lowlands in men's names. On the other hand, Sangsarek and Christian Garo households registered land in women's names by following the traditional property ownership practice. However, husband as household head retained the right to manage land and, in a generic sense, to sell it. Key informants also noted that parents sometimes pass lion share of family land to the main heir, while the other daughters receive smaller shares. In some cases, family land is not divided at all due to the rising discord among sisters about land ownership. Every daughter is allowed to use it as needed. (Dey, 2015).

The Garos and their matrilineal system have experienced transition in the matrilineal setup in Meghalaya due to some basic reasons. Such changes have taken place because of the mixing with other nearby patriarchal communities, the arrival of missionaries, as well as the spread of Christianity among them. The spread of urbanization and urban development is another reason for this transition in the matrilineal setup (Marak and Thirumurugan, 2023). Recently, property ownership or land ownership has been changing. The matrilineal system is strong in the Garo community. In the Garo community, the ownership of land is women. In modern times, the Garo have given up their traditional rule and customs. Now the majority of Garo follow Christian rules and customs. So, now the matrilineal system of the Garo is reducing (Eyemoon, 2022). Female inheritance of property has also faced many changes. Daughters are now mostly found to move out to live in neo-local families. The family property of Garo community is divided among their children. It is either given to all the daughters, or else it is given to the son who is going to live with his parents at home. Now they feel that a son can also take care of their parents equally well . So, it is not rational to restrict the son from getting anything from their parents, as even. But they also feel that women remain always under pressure. Her position will become inferior, if a daughter doesn't get anything from her mother. So still now they are getting the lion share of their parents property in matriarchal garo society. It has been also found that in most cases, the property is kept in contact by the parents. (Marak and Thirumurugan, 2023).

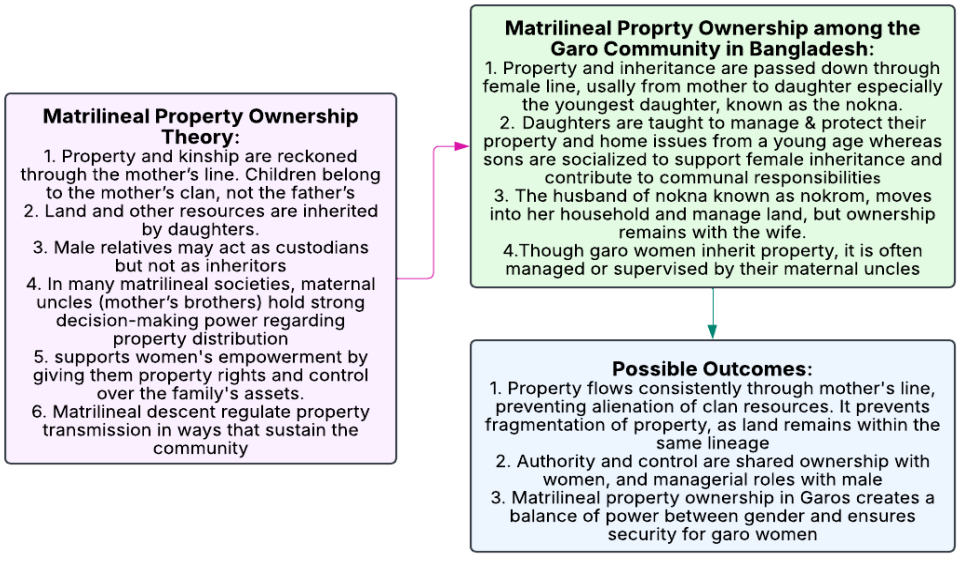
THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK OF THE STUDY

Matrilineal Property Ownership Theory

Lewis Henry Morgan is the main pioneer of matrilineal property ownership theory, who talked about the kinship system, matrilineal and patrilineal descent, and their implications for property and inheritance. In matrilineal societies, property, titles, and family names are often passed through the female line, contrasting with patrilineal systems. In such societies, women, especially daughters, inherit land, houses, and other family property (Morgan, 1871). The matrilineal theory of property ownership emphasizes inheritance and property rights traced through the female line of descent (mother's line), rather than the father's. Property is transmitted from mothers to daughters, and male members (brothers, maternal

uncles) often manage property but do not pass it on to their own sons. This theory proposes that women play a central role in transmitting lineage, inheritance, and identity (Radcliffe-Brown, 1950; Rivers, 1924). Ownership rights of women to property protect women's assets and financial stability in a society (Dey & Sultana, 2017). Women typically retain strong control over family property and household organization as well as community relationships, become improves through female lineage inheritance (Chowdhury, 2015). This theoretical framework allows an in-depth study of how the Garo matrilineal system controls property distribution, affects economic and social roles, and influences family dynamics.

FIGURE 01: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK OF THE STUDY



Source: Authors' Construct, 2024

In the Garo society, the Matrilineal Theory of property ownership developed by Morgan and Radcliffe-Brown gives a framework in reference to the findings of the study for understanding how property is inherited and preserved within the maternal line, hence improving women's social and economic positions. The youngest daughter, known as 'Nokna', inherits family property and takes on tasks related to caring, property administration, and maintaining family honor. In the Garo culture, female children have been taught to take control of family property (e.g., selling, renting, or other decision-making related to property) while male children become socialized to support female inheritance and contribute to communal responsibilities. Male members like the husband known as 'Nokrom', sons, as well as maternal uncle (mother's brother) play a significant role in the management of property, but none of them can take the inheritance of property. This traditional culture of Garo communities promotes women's economic empowerment and ensures the stability of family wealth over generations. In Garo society, a power balance between genders takes place because of matrilineal property ownership, which in turn ensures security for Garo women. As land, as well as other property, remains within the

same lineage, it prevents fragmentation of property. Moreover, this idea helps to explain the preservation of family resources within the maternal lineage, which is crucial for keeping property and money within the family and clan. This framework thus defines property distribution as not merely a custom, but also a critical component of the Garo community's social and economic stability.

METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

A mixed-method approach, including both quantitative and qualitative methods, has been applied in this study. In the qualitative method, the study conducted in-depth and hidden stories of the Garo community about their land ownership patterns. On the quantitative method, the study focused on the numerical data of the property distribution in the matriarchal social system and the cultural background of the Garo community in Bangladesh. The Garo people at Kolmakanda Upazila in Netrokona district have been chosen purposively as the study site. The sample size of the study is 130, which is determined by applying the Yamane sample size formula: $n=N/1+Ne^{2,}$ where n = required sample size, N = population size=6800, and e = margin of error =0.087. So, $n = 6800 / \{1 + 6800 \times (0.087)^2\} = 1000 / (1 + 6800 \times 0.007569) = 6800 / 52.4692 \approx 129.59=130$. The purposive sampling has been applied as a sampling technique to choose the respondents from the study area to collect both quantitative and qualitative data.

FIGURE 02: LOCATION OF THE STUDY



Source: BANGLAPEDIA, 2024

Every research methodology has a unique tool for gathering data. The survey method is most likely the most effective technique accessible to social scientists who want to gather first-hand information to characterize a population that is too big to study in person. Surveys using interviews are also a great way to measure the attitudes, beliefs, and orientations that are common among a broad group. To adhere the survey methodology, a structured questionnaire was employed both for face-to-face surveys and the online survey in this study. Following the sample drawing, a place-to-place visit was conducted to directly

interview the respondents as well as Google Forms was used as part of an online survey to gather information. Respondents who participated in the study through an online survey, filled up the questionnaire themselves and submitted their responses. In terms of a face-to-face survey, researchers gave the opportunity to the respondents to self-administer the questionnaire, but uneducated respondents gave their opinion based on the questions and researchers filled in the questionnaire based on the respondents' responses. After collecting empirical data, this study coded the data and completed data entry in the SPSS software for further analysis of the survey interviews with a graphical presentation. In qualitative data, this study analysed the key information informants collected from the headman (locally known as Nokma) of Garo communities in Kalmakanda Upazila, as well as analysed the eight in-depth case interviews, have collected from Garo people like parents, youngest and oldest daughters, sons, maternal aunt and uncle. Reserchers have used the authentic names of respondents with their permission in the data analysis and findings section of the study. Both analyses have made this study representable to the readers, researchers, and policymakers. Both the data collection period and analysis period, this study has tried to follow proper ethical issues. Participants of the study who are educated signed a written informed consent paper, and participants who are illiterate gave their oral consent. Researchers also maintained respondents' voluntary participation, confidentiality, and anonymity during collecting empirical data, at the time of analysing field data, as well as after completing the research work.

FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

Socio-demographic Characteristics of the Study

Socio-demographic data of respondents is very crucial to conduct the data collection. The socio-demographic profile of the respondents usually describes the background features of people who participated in a survey, research, or study.

TABLE 01: SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE OF THE RESPONDENTS (n=130)

Variables	Categories	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender of the respondents	Male	86	66.2
	Female	44	33.8
Age of the respondents	18-25	61	46.9
	26-30	48	36.9
	31-35	16	12.3
	36 and above	5	3.8
Types of family	Nuclear	68	52.3
	Extended family	12	9.2
	Joint family	50	38.5
Education level	Non-formal education	2	1.5

Primary education	4	3.1
Secondary education	23	17.7
Higher secondary education	92	70.8
Others	9	6.9

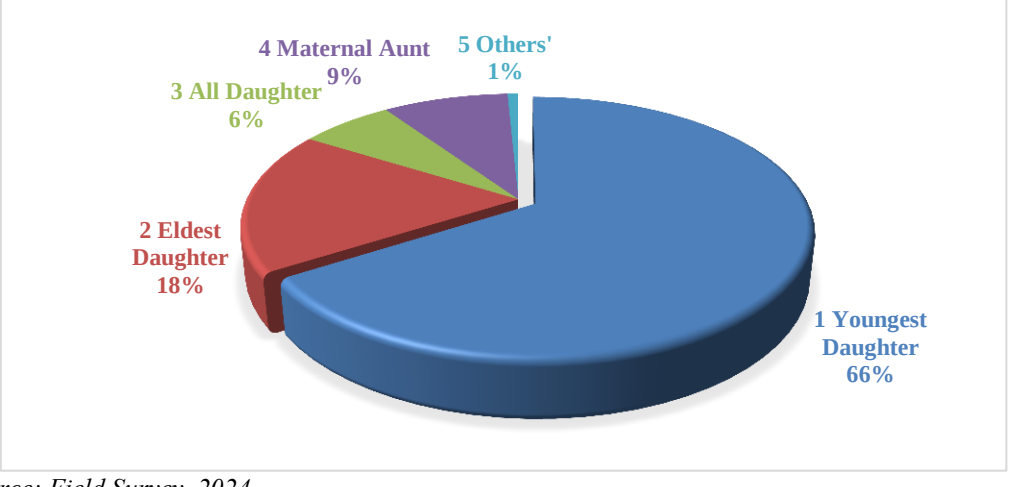
Source: Field survey, 2024

Table 01 describes the socio-demographic overview of the respondents. The above table shows that 66.2% respondents belong to the male category, while 33.8% belong to the female category. In terms of the age group, 46.9% respondents belong to the age group '18-25' years, where 36.9% belong to '26-30' years, 12.3% belong to '31-35' years, and only 3.8% respondents of the study belong to the age category '36 years and above'. Regarding family type, more than half of the respondents (52.3%) belong to nuclear families, while 38.5% come from joint families, and 9.2% from extended families. Education levels indicate that the majority (70.8%) have attained higher secondary education, whereas 17.7% have completed secondary education, and smaller proportions have primary (3.1%) or non-formal education (1.5%). Additionally, 6.9% fall into the "others" category for education, like graduation, post-graduation, MPhil degree, etc.

Traditional Ownership Patterns & Practices of Property Distribution among Garo Communities

Property ownership and distribution pattern of a society or of a country depend on various elements like religious rules, cultural rituals, the law of a country, etc. These issues also depend on the patriarchal as well as the matriarchal systems of a society. The following figures will represent the traditional practices of property ownership and distribution among Garo communities where the matriarchal social system is practiced.

FIGURE 03: PRIMARY HEIR TO FAMILY PROPERTY IN THE GARO TRADITION

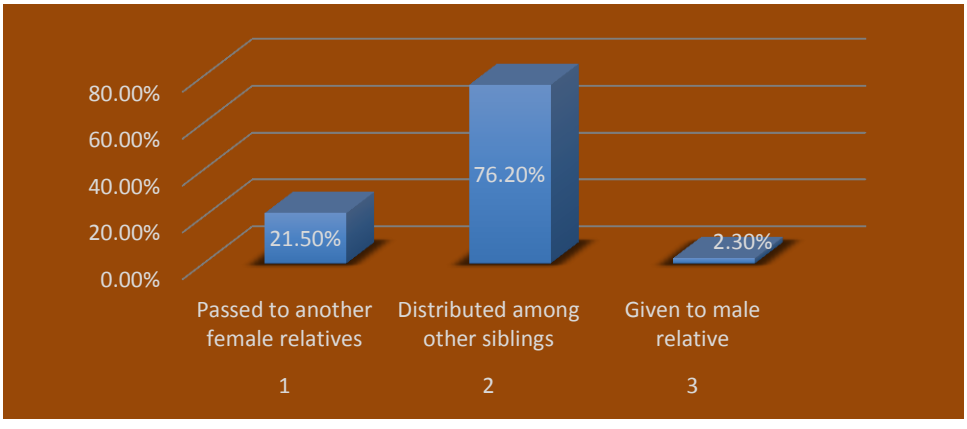


Source: Field Survey, 2024

Figure 03 represents the primary heir of family property in Garo traditions, which illustrates that about 66% respondents choose the youngest daughter, 17.10% choose the eldest daughter, 6.90% choose all daughters, and 9.20% choose the maternal aunt as the primary heir to family property in Garo communities. Whereas only 0.80% respondents argue that sons are the heirs of family property in Garo society. Qualitative findings of the study delineate that properties are passed on forward through the female line in Garo society, which has a matrilineal system of property inheritance. Traditionally, both parents select one daughter, primarily youngest daughter, called as the "nokna," to be the main heir and inherit the property that the family owns. One respondent of the qualitative part of this study claims as follows:

> *"I live in Chengini village at Kolmakanda Upazila, Netrokona district. I am the eldest daughter in my family of five children, with three daughters and two sons. My youngest sister, Nila Raksam, called the Nokna, is the heir of our family property. My family owns somewhere 15 acres of land, including small homestead, rice cultivation, and betel nut trees. Nila, as the youngest daughter, has the opportunity to take over all of the family's assets and take care of her oldest parents". (Anika Raksam,35 years old)*

FIGURE 04 PROPERTY DISTRIBUTION PATTERN IF THE PRIMARY HEIR IS UNABLE OR UNWILLING TO ACCEPT THE INHERITANCE



Source: Field Survey, 2024

Figure 04 illustrates that if the primary heir is unwilling or unable to accept the inheritance of property, the majority of the property (76.2%) is distributed among other siblings, and a significant portion (21.5%) is passed to other female relatives. These statistics show the value of holding inheritance within the close family to ensure shared obligations and economic stability, as well as underline the matrilineal culture and the importance of women as significant heirs and protectors of family property. On the other hand, the smallest amount (2.3%) goes to a male relative, which emphasizes men's second-class position in the distribution of property within the Garo society. One respondent of the qualitative part of this study claims that,

> *"I live in Fulbari village of Kolmakanda Upazilla, Netrokona district. I have six children, with two sons and four daughters. Shely Nokrek is the youngest daughter in my family, called as Nokna, who is the primary heir of the property of our family, but*

she is unwilling to accept the inheritance of my family's property. So, I have distributed my inheritance property among six children equally". (Rasong mree,45years old)

Another respondent of the qualitative part of the study also claims that,

"I have two children with one son and one daughter. Silchina Raksam is the youngest daughter called as nokna, is the primary heir of the inheritance property and is responsible for taking care of her family members in the Garo community's matrilineal system, but Silchina is unwilling to accept the inheritance of property and family responsibility in a single hand. So, I distributed the family property between my two children equally". (Ayesha Raksam,35 years old)

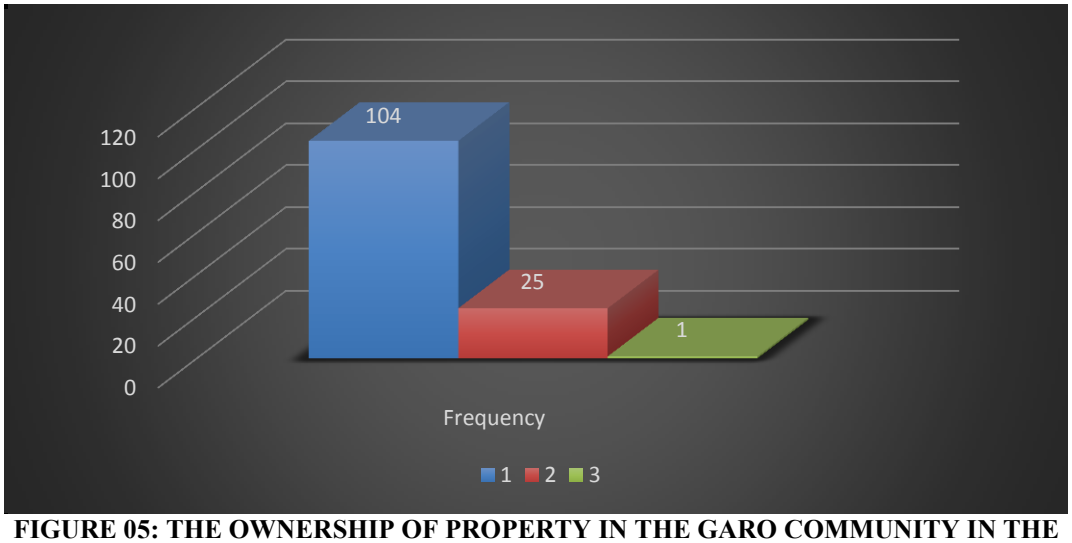


FIGURE 05: THE OWNERSHIP OF PROPERTY IN THE GARO COMMUNITY IN THE ABSENCE OF A FEMALE CHILD

Source: Field Survey, 2024

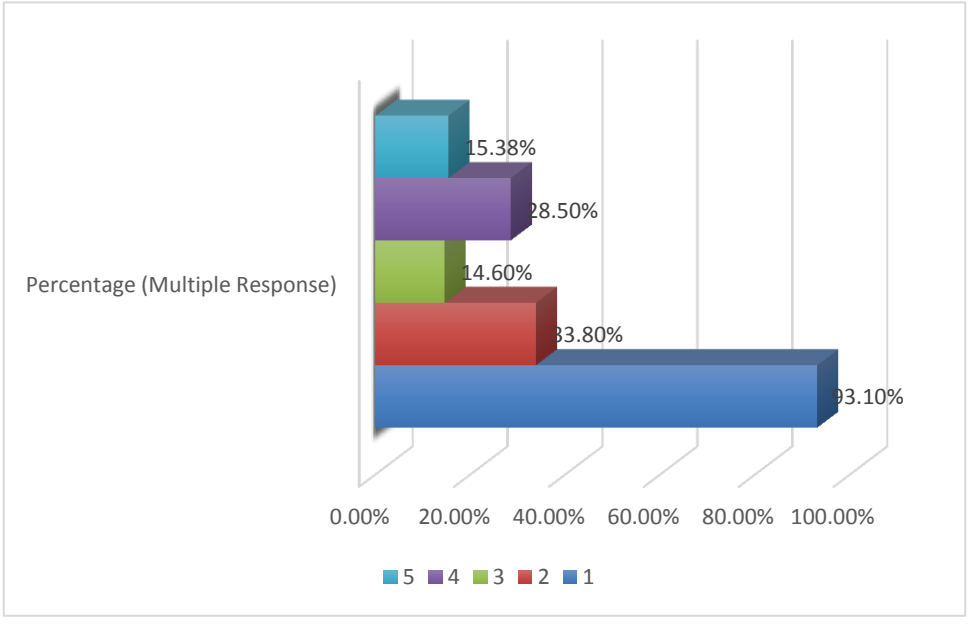
Figure 05 shows that the majority responded 104 (80%) argue that sons get inheritance of property in the absence of a female child in a Garo family. However, 25 (19.23%) argue that female relatives-nearly one-fifth of families-choose to give property to female relatives like aunts, nieces, or cousins. If they weren't physically related, the low percentage of transfer by male relatives and "others" (who could be organizations or non-relatives) confirms the traditional preference for women. One respondent of the qualitative part of this claims that,

"Traditionally, in a Garo family, if there are no female children, the maternal aunt will get the ownership of the property. If she is not alive, his daughter will get the ownership of the property. Only when parents used to bequeath their property in their sons' name, sons got the ownership of their parents' property."(Palash Mankhin, 27 years old)

Another respondent of the study claims as follows:

"I am a second-class job holder in the nursing occupation. Currently, I am staying in Mymensingh city for the purpose of job. I am 45 years old and have only one son who is studying in a renowned university. I have land property in the village, which is some part that I got from my parents, and another part that I bought. I have no daughter, that's why I discussed with my husband to document all property to my son". (Sukla Jengcham,41years old)

FIGURE 06: TYPES OF PROPERTY TRADITIONALLY PASSED DOWN THROUGH INHERITANCE



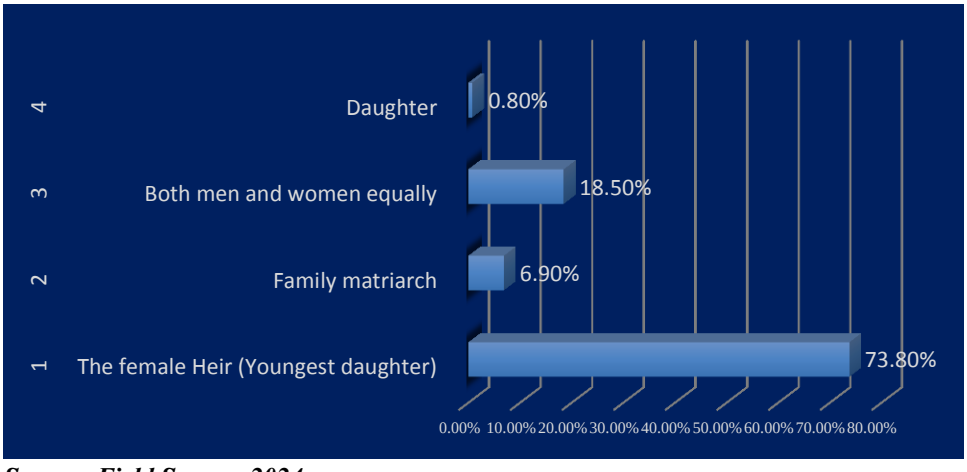
Source: Field Survey, 2024

Figure 06 shows the different types of property that are typically passed down through inheritance. Land (93.1%) is the most frequently inherited property, showing its critical role in maintaining economic stability, particularly in rural communities where it is the main source of wealth and nourishment where house (33.8%) is regarded as important physical assets that give future generations a place to live and security and Livestock (28.5%) whose practical value is regarded as a source of income and subsistence, particularly in rural or pastoral populations. Finally, jewellery and artefacts (14.6%) are deeply emotive and socially significant, sometimes suggesting continuity in family and tradition, whereas 15.38% choose the option of other property like cash money, bank savings, furniture, etc. This distribution implies that cultural traditions, economic priorities, and societal necessities all have an important place in inheritance patterns. While the small number of homes, animals, and loves shows their various benefits to maintaining families and passing down inheritances, the dominance of land highlights its continual importance.

Role of Garo Women in the Management of Inherited Property and Socio-economic Issues of the Family

Property inheritance often passes down through the maternal line, supporting women's responsibilities as the key economic and social decision-makers in society. Garo women gain economic independence by owning land and being in charge of its management and distribution. This control increases their social position by granting them authority in both the household and the larger community. Moreover, the ability to make decisions about property and wealth gives women a powerful role in family concerns, providing them with a level of autonomy that is unique in traditional nations.

FIGURE 07: RESPONSIBILITY FOR MANAGING INHERITED PROPERTY IN THE GARO FAMILY



Source: Field Survey, 2024

Figure 07 delineates that 73.8% respondents of the study argue that the youngest daughter, a chosen female heir, is mostly responsible for managing inherited property in their families. This highlights the matrilineal tradition that is important to Garo society, in which women are very active in inheritance and property control. A lower percentage (6.9%) sees the family matriarch as the manager, capturing society's focus on female authority. Notably, 18.5% feel that both men and women bear that duty, indicating a gradual shift toward gender inclusion. The small percentage (0.8%) that assigns the role to daughters in general highlights a unique cultural practice of choosing other daughters in handling property.

TABLE 02: ROLE OF GARO WOMEN IN PROPERTY MANAGEMENT AND SOCIO-ECONOMIC ISSUES OF THE FAMILY

Matrilineal Inheritance of Property and Role of Garo Women	Variable	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Women's Control in Family Property (e.g., selling, renting, or other decision-making related to property)	Yes	95	73.1
	No	35	26.9
	Total	130	100
Matrilineal inheritance influenced women's business activities, investments, or land usage in the family	Yes	19	14.6
	No	111	85.4
	Total	120	100
Traditional property inheritance for women affects the economic stability in Garo family	Significantly	90	69.3
	Somewhat	23	17.7
	Not much	15	11.5
	Not affect all	02	1.5
	Total	130	100

Source: Field Survey, 2024

Table 2 illustrates that 73.1% respondents argue, women in their family are in complete control of the decision to sell, rent off, or otherwise dispose of the inheritance property. However, the smallest (26.9%) respondent says that women in Garo communities don't manage and control the inheritance property. Both male and female members take responsibility for the management of the property. In some families, there are equal rights for both men and women to make any decision regarding family property. Table 02 also illustrates that the smallest response (14.6%) reports that matrilineal inheritance positively influences land use, investments, and business in their family. A woman makes a powerful person in her family. Where the majority (85.4%) of people believe that matrilineal inheritance does not influence business activities, investments, or land usage in the Garo community family. The above table delineates that 69.3% respondents of the study feel that property inheritance has a great deal of impact for women on the economy of Garo families. Whereas only 17.7% respondents argue that property inheritance somewhat affects the economic stability of the Garo family for women. On the other hand, 11.5% respondents think that it does not really impact much, and just a mere 1.5% think that it does not affect economic stability. The traditional property distribution system in Garo society is viewed as basically beneficial since 90% of the respondents recognized its merits, thereby reflecting the stability and continuity that have been afforded by the matrilineal system of inheritance.

Qualitative findings of the study delineate that women's empowerment has taken place in Garo societies because of gaining ownership of family property. Garo women play a vital role in decision-making about family issues, like child education issues, child and maternal health care, etc. So, Garo women can enjoy freedom and lead an easier life than

that of a patriarchal society. Because of economic support, Garo women have already started different businesses. One of the respondents of the qualitative section of the study claims that,

> *"Garo women have already established themselves as entrepreneur and have become self-dependent. Garo entrepreneur women have created numerous Facebook page names, "Matgrik Entrepreneurs", Matgrik (Mandi Udyokta o Shubhakankshider Milonmela), etc., on which they take orders from their customers and deliver their products like traditional Garo dress, t-shirt, traditional print/folklore rales, and traditional bamboo crafts."(Mahima Rangsa, 24 years old)*

It is interesting to observe that 89.2% of the respondents do not believe that matrilineal inheritance presents any problems or economic disadvantages. Only 10.8% of the respondents report that they have some problems in the family because men are deprived economically, which creates imbalance and improper association in maintaining property. Another respondent of the qualitative section of the study claims that,

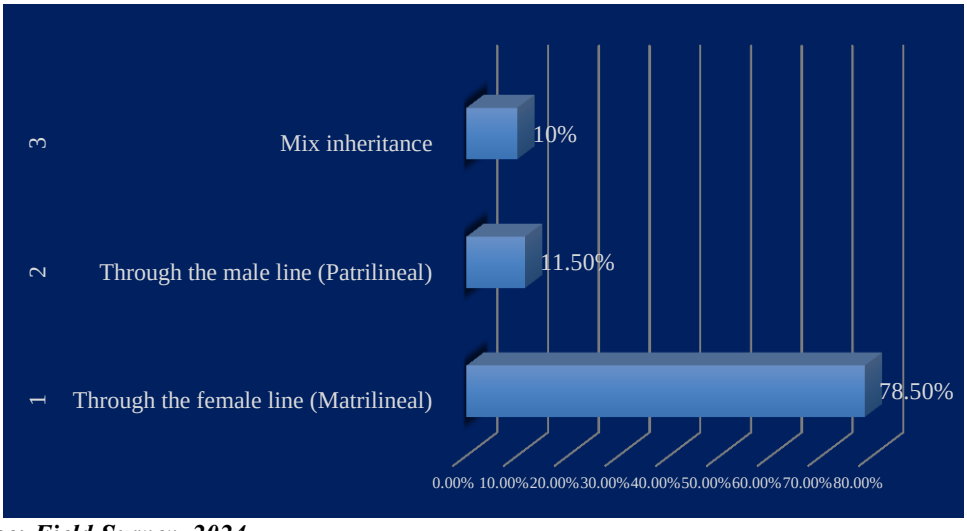
> *"Sometimes property ownership of Garo women creates an ego and don't care mentality among women. So conflict between males and females has taken place, especially conflict has taken place between siblings. Even sometimes siblings' relationship breaks because of conflicts based on the ownership of property." (Rudra Mrong, 23 years old)*

This indicates that even though the system is generally stable, some people can have problems, probably as a result of conflict or poor exploitation of resources.

Recent Changes Faced by the Garo Matrilineal System in terms of Property Distribution

The Garo matrilineal property distribution system has experienced big challenges from external forces such as legal reforms, migration, and increased interaction with non-Garo groups. Legal reforms, particularly those that promote lineal inheritance, have started to reduce traditional matrilineal traditions, resulting in tensions between family customs and government rules. Migration, both within and outside the community, has created new financial limitations and altered family relationships, sometimes devaluing land inheritance in favour of cash-based economies or external jobs. Also, engagement with non-Garo groups has resulted in cultural modifications to with some Garo families accepting lineal inheritance traditions to better mix with other cultures. These changes slowly impact traditional property distribution patterns, calling into question the matrilineal system's continuity and changing Garo women's socioeconomic roles.

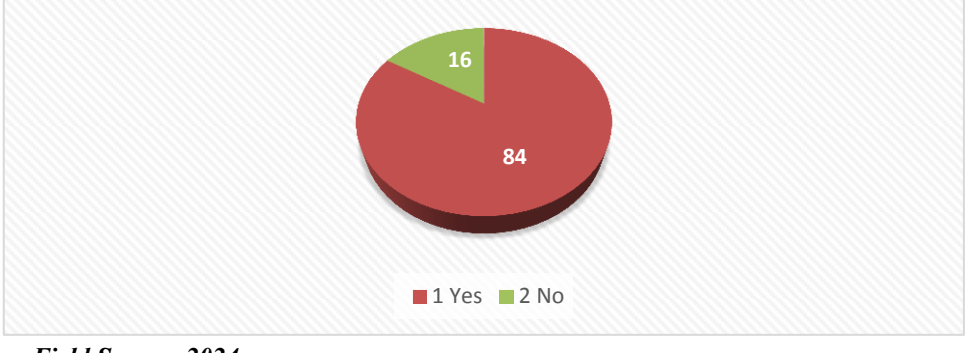
FIGURE 08: CURRENT PATTERN OF PROPERTY DISTRIBUTION TYPICALLY INHERITED IN THE GARO FAMILY



Source: Field Survey, 2024

Figure 08 shows that the Garo society mainly has a matrilineal inheritance system, with 78.5% of property passing down through the female line. This follows a historical cultural norm in which women have main control over family assets. However, 11.5% of households use a patrilineal system, showing a small but major departure from tradition, probably motivated by industrialization, intercommunity relations, or particular family choices. The above figure also shows that 10% of families use the mixed inheritance method, incorporating aspects from both systems, which may indicate a shift to more flexible property distribution practices. While matrilineal inheritance is still common, the rise of patrilineal and mixed inheritance indicates that social and economic changes may slowly affect the future of property distribution in the Garo society.

FIGURE 09: CEREMONIES OR RITUALS ASSOCIATED WITH THE TRANSFER OF PROPERTY

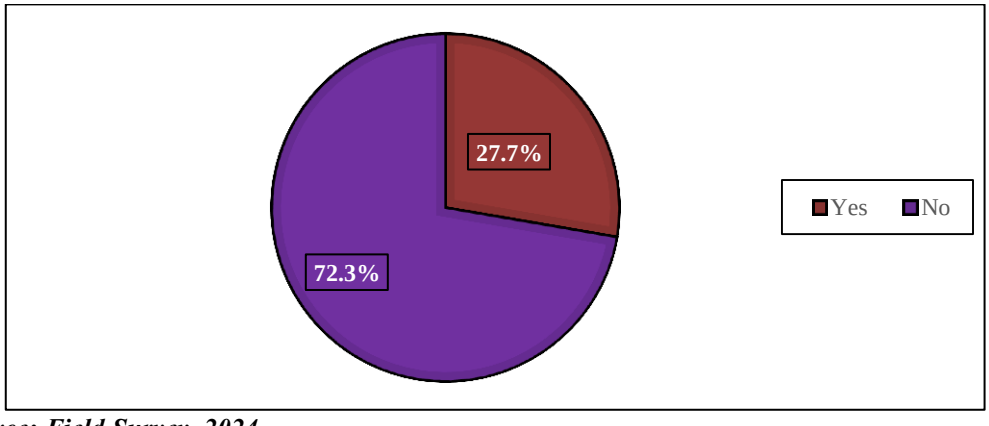


Source: Field Survey, 2024

Figure 09 shows that the majority (83.80%) of the community expresses that they arranged ceremonies during the transfer of property called "Nokrom Gata" associated with the transfer of property. After the completion marriage, the husband of Nokna (nokrom) came to Nokna's house. At that time Nokrom gata program was arranged and parents handed over their property to their youngest daughter, known as Nokna. The presence of brothers, uncles, the headman of the village (nokma) and a few witnesses of the village is necessary during the distributions of property. Everyone eats together and prayer. It's like a family gathering program. On the other hand, the smallest (16.20%) respondent says that there were no specific ceremonies or rituals with the transfer of property. But nowadays, the land distribution ceremony is not arranged like in previous times. One of the respondents of the qualitative section states that,

> *"In recent times, some close relatives remain present at the land transfer rituals program in Garo societies. If parents had died before the distribution of property, Chra (Maternal Uncles) came to his sister's house. If his sister has any debt, they try to recover it by selling the property and distributing the rest of the property among the sons and daughters of his sister". (Sukla Jengcham,41years old)*

FIGURE 10: CHANGES IN INHERITANCE PRACTICES DUE TO INTERMARRIAGE WITH NON-GARO COMMUNITIES



Source: Field Survey, 2024

Figure 10 shows that 27.7% respondents of the study believe that inheritance practices have been changed among the Garo communities because of intermarriage with non-Garo communities. Some respondents of the qualitative section state that because of cultural differences, they have noticed a big change in inheritance practices in their community due to intermarriage with non-Garo communities. Siblings are getting equal rights and opportunities. About 72.3% respondents argue that there are no changes in inheritance practices due to intermarriage with non-Garo communities. If the main heir or other female heirs of the family marry into another community, they do not get property. This shows how strong traditional inheritance systems are in Garo communities. One respondent of the qualitative part of the study claims that,

> *"I have two daughters. I have been raised in a stable and rich family with available land property and assets. The eldest daughter got married five years ago to a Garo man. She is living with his husband in Dhaka city. Then the younger daughter has a relationship who belongs to a non-Garo community, who is the primary heir of our family property. Most recently, I decided to distribute my land property and assets between my two daughters. But there has risen a problem maintaining Garo laws and custody. According to the Garo laws and custody, there is no permission to distribute land property, whose remaining relationship with a non-Garo person. That's why I have finally decided to distribute all my property to my eldest daughter". (Sailen Chambugong,42)*

Respondents of the qualitative section of the study state that in recent times, changes have taken place in the Garo marriage system. Based on the matriarchal system, the male child came to the bride's family after the completion of marriage, but now the customs are changing. Many families, especially the families of grooms, want to bring the bride to their home after the marriage, especially those who have no female children. Besides this, Garo women are becoming more educated now. They are going abroad for higher education, and sometimes they are becoming settled abroad. When the daughter of a family goes to the groom's house or abroad, she cannot control and manage her property properly. If an equal distribution of property had taken place in the Garo family, male children would have controlled and managed the property of their sisters.

TABLE 03: CHANGES FACED BY THE GARO MATRILINEAL SYSTEM IN PROPERTY DISTRIBUTION **(n=130)**

Changes faced by the Garo matrilineal system in Property Distribution	**Variable**	**Frequency**	**Percentage (%)**
Modern influences, such as education, urbanization, cultural acculturation and assimilation, etc., influence property distribution practices in the Garo family or community	Not influence	94	72.3
	Yes, Moderately	20	15.4
	Yes, Significantly	16	12.3
Now male members of your family claim to inheritance rights	Yes	23	17.7
	No	107	82.3
Property distribution practice in the Garo society will also change in the future	Yes	84	64.6
	No	32	24.6
	Not sure	14	10.6
Do you still feel the importance of cultural traditions in determining property inheritance in the Garo family.	Very important	86	66.2
	Moderately important	39	30
	Not very important	04	3.1
	Not important at all	01	0.8

Source: Field Survey, 2024

There is some mobility or existence between matrilineal and lineal customs. Although 82.3% respondents show a stronger commitment to matrilineal customs, 17.7% of respondents feel that men have the right to use titles to property within their families. Some people say that men and women have equal rights in some Garo families. If a family has no daughter or if the daughters are unwilling to accept or manage the property, then sons become the rightful 'of the family property. One of the respondents of the study claims that,

> *"In previous times, the Garo couple who had no female child adopted a female child from another family, and the Garo mother gave her title to her adopted daughter. She took care of and reared the adopted daughter as her own daughter. He even provided the ownership of her property to her adopted daughter. But nowadays this type of custom almost perishes in the Garo society. Now, they register their property to their sons if they do not have female children. Even now, educated parents are equally distributing their property among their sons and daughters." (Sailen Chambugong,42)*

Another respondent of the study states as follows:

> *"According to the traditional matriarchal system, Garo female children have the right to take ownership of the whole property of their family. But, in recent times, numerous female children in the Garo society don't want to take the full inheritance of their parents' property. They want to keep a good relationship with their brothers. That's why they want equal distribution of the parent property among them."(Mahima Rangsa, 24 years old)*

Table 03 also shows that 72.3% of respondents believe that modern issues like education, urbanization, cultural acculturation, and assimilation have no effect on how property is being distributed, showing that ancient traditions are strongly held in society. However, 12.3% see significant effects and 15.4% report a moderate impact, showing that modernization is progressively altering behaviour in some contexts. One of the respondents of the study claims that,

> *"The traditional property inheritance and distribution system in Garo societies is changing with the passage of time. In recent times, most of the children, both male and female, of the Garo communities are educated. They are conscious of their human rights, especially the concept of equal rights. They have a significant number of Bengali friends both offline and online. So they are becoming introduced to the patriarchal social system of the Bengali people. As a result, their traditional matriarchal culture is becoming assimilated with Bengali culture. So gradually, male members of the Garo family are demanding ownership of property. They have even organized different associations to obtain their property rights. Even though they launched an online platform, like a Facebook group named 'GARO EQUAL RIGHTS AGENCY OF BANGLADESH (GERAB) to obtain equal inheritance of property". (Rudra Mrong, 23 years old)*

Another respondent of the study stated as follows:

> *"In recent times, where there are no children in a Garo family, their relatives demand the ownership of the property. As the traditional custom of property distribution in Garo society is oral instead of written form, they don't want to obey the traditional customs of property distribution. By using political power and applying physical force,*

relatives of those families take control of the property. Sometimes close relative engaged in conflict to take ownership of the property."(Palash Mankhin, 27 years old)

For the future, 64.6% respondents perceive that property distribution practices are going to be changed, showing perhaps a shift in perspective that modernization, economic pressures, and external cultural influences may bring forth. While 24.6% do not see changes in property distribution, 10.6% remained uncertain, showing mixed opinions within the community. One of the respondents of the study claims that,

"In previous times, Garo parents transformed their property orally. So, Garo communities cannot sell their property. But now they can sell their property, if they want. Because now the ownership of property is handed to others in written form in the Garo society." (Sailen Chambugong,42)

These findings imply that although the traditional pattern of inheritance is valued, changing social and economic factors may, over time, merely influence gradual modifications to this set distribution of property.

Although the majority of respondents of the study think that property distribution practices are going to be changed in the future among Garo communities, 66.2% respondents regard the traditional distribution of property in Garo society as "very important," emphasizing their role in determining inheritance patterns. Also, 30% describe them as "moderately important," indicating that, while customs are valued, some flexibility may exist. One of the respondents of the qualitative section of the study claims that,

"Most of the male members of Garo communities demand that the female child should get the inheritance of the parents' property. We think that women are safe guardians of property to preserve their families' property rather than boys. Besides that, we consider the matrilineal property inheritance system as a sacred and significant custom of our ancestors. That's why we don't want to violate our traditional culture." (Rudra Mrong, 23 years old)

Only a small percentage consider traditions "not very important" (3.1%) or "not important at all" (0.8%), showing little divergence from cultural norms. This shows the continued importance of cultural traditions in Garo family inheritance systems.

DISCUSSION OF THE STUDY

The people of Bangladesh's ethnic groups are known as "Adivasi" because of their unique social and cultural traditions, dialects, and customs. One of the most significant indigenous groups in Bangladesh with unique ethnic characteristics is the Garo. This study reveals the traditional and recent practice of property distribution in the matriarchal system of the Garo people with regard to their livelihoods. The Garo community has a rich cultural heritage, including traditions, customs, and practices. This study found that the primary heir of property in family 69.20% for the youngest daughter, known as the "nokna," usually receives the family property and takes on the burden of handling home affairs and caring for elderly parents. If the primary heir is unwilling to take the responsibility of the property, the majority of the property (76.2%) is distributed among other siblings, where female relatives receive 21.5% and the smallest amount, 2.3% goes to male relatives. This practice is more than just an economic arrangement; it is firmly founded in cultural traditions and spiritual

beliefs that highlight the value of maternal lineage. Traditional inheritance methods conform to accepted cultural and familial norms. The Garos, just like the Khasis, have a matriarchal social system. The children become introduced by mother title and they take their mother's given name as their surname. The daughters become the primary heir of maternal property and wealth. The two ethnic communities differ in the way that "while the Khasis ascribe to the youngest daughter the bulk of family inheritance, the Garos, on the other hand, by ascription recognize an heiress to family property from any of the daughters at the household, in which case, she is married to one of her father's nephews. Usually, the girl loved most, obedient, and well-behaved succeeds in that title. She is called Nokna, and her husband is Nokrom". However, in certain places in Garo society, they follow the rule and appoint the youngest daughter as their heir (Das & Mohanty, 2016).

According to the findings of the study, land is the most often inherited asset, accounting for 93.1% of all inheritances, emphasizing its importance in wealth transfer and economic stability. Livestock is inherited by 28.8% of people and serves as both a financial asset and a source of income, especially in agrarian communities. Houses, inherited by 33.8%, provide families with security and continuity, but jewelry, inherited by 14.6%, is a smaller but substantial item that is frequently associated with cultural and historical importance. The majority (83.80%) of the community expresses the opinion that there were rituals associated with the transfer of property, such as Nokrom-Gata, together with a praying family member and a mahari gathering. The majority (73.1%) of respondents agreed that women have primary influence over family property decisions; however, 26.9% reported shared decision-making, showing authority variability and possible cultural or social limitations on full female ownership. Despite the matrilineal framework, economic issues related to inheritance were low, with just 10% expressing disadvantages, indicating that the system is generally secure.

Exceptions to matrilineal norms took place, with 17.7% acknowledging men's inheritance rights, often in circumstances where daughters were unavailable or unwilling—a compromise between tradition and practicalities. Modern influences such as education and urbanization were viewed as mainly ineffective (72.3%), yet 27.7% reported moderate to considerable effects, indicating incremental shifts amid persisting traditions. While 90% recognized the system's advantages, such as stability, 80% also identified problems, most likely connected to economic limitations or inflexible gender roles. Looking ahead, 64.6% projected future changes in property practices, reflecting expectations of modernization's influence, while 24.6% projected continuity. Subverting the matriarchal family structure, some Christian Garos are now distributing land ownership and family resources between both girls and boys (Kabir, 2022). The Garo community has changed its expectations of the sex of the child. A study noted that the Garo community in Bangladesh focused on how legal and financial changes affected their matrilineal structure (Chowdhury, 2015). This study also shows that 27.7% of respondents believe that intermarriage with non-Garo communities has changed inheritance practices. No property gets a woman when intermarrying with non-Garo communities. If the main heir or other female heirs of the family marry into another community, they do not get property.

Findings of the study delineate that in modern times, Garo people, especially male children, build up friendships with Bengali people at educational institutions, workplaces, and on many occasions. So they become introduced to Bengali culture. This is totally opposite to their community culture. Because the patriarchal system exists in Bengali culture, the matriarchal system exists in the Garo communities. So, Garo male children are being introduced to the patriarchal land ownership system of the Bengali people. So they want to practice such culture among their communities. In the age of social media, most of the Garo people are connected with the people of mainstream society on Facebook. They build up friendship and interact with each other, so the Garo people are introduced to the land distribution system of other communities, especially of patriarchal societies. So, they also get information about the property distribution system of other communities on Facebook walls, online news portals, YouTube channels, and on other social networking sites. So, nowadays they demand inheritance of their parents' property.

This study finds that in a traditional system, female children will get their inheritance of their parents' property. But in recent times, most of the parents, especially those who are educated and conscious about their children's future, have distributed their property among their children before their death. But still now, parents give the lion's share of property to their female children. Most of the male children in the Garo family take it easily. They believe that female children are safe hands to preserve the property of their family. Male children can't preserve the property properly; they sell the property without any valid reason. But A significant number of Garo males are demanding reformation in the traditional distribution of property. They want equal distribution of property, not as a child but as a human being. A male child demands the inheritance of their parents' property as a symbol of their ancestors. Besides this, their parents' property will work as a safeguard in their future life. When they face any crisis in the future, they can utilize this property. So, many associations of Garo communities demand equal distribution of parents' property among their children. They arrange numerous meetings and seminars with the headman of the villages and present their demand about the inheritance of the parents' property. They talked with the headman of their village, who distributed the property of a family about their demand.

This study also finds that male children of the Garo society have launched a Facebook group named 'GARO EQUAL RIGHTS AGENCY OF BANGLADESH (GERAB) and propagate their demand on this Facebook group. This organization aims to remove gender discrimination and establish equal distribution of property among children by lineage. To establish equal rights, they offer seven point demands to the government of Bangladesh as follows: complete inheritance rights in family property; equal rights for men and women/sons and daughter both in all moveable and immoveable property of parents; responsibility of husband for the care, upbringing and maintenance of the children, If the wife dies; the right of children to inherit responsibilities and duties within society and family, including property management through the father's lineage instead of only the mother's lineage; full rights of father/husband over all movable and immovable property of the wife, if a women become died or a woman's children dies or a women unable to have children; equal rights in marriage as well as formation of a land commission. Due to the lack of a natural female heir, this suggests a departure from traditional Garo matrilineal standards. This pattern implies that the Garo community has occasionally been pushed into a patrilineal

paradigm by outside forces such as modernization, legal systems, social pressures, the concept of equal rights, education, digitalization, and patriarchal dominance.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The Garo is one of Bangladesh's most prominent indigenous communities, with distinctive ethnic traits. By applying a mixed-method approach, this study has tried to find out the property distribution pattern among the Garo communities. The study has also explored the rights of women, particularly the nokna, in the management and distribution of family property. Findings of the study delineate that in the matriarchal system of Garo communities, property is passed down through the maternal line in a family, with the nokna in charge of protecting and dispersing assets. Findings of the study also delineate that the youngest daughter is the primary heir, but sometimes the eldest daughter, as well as other daughters, get the inheritance of property based on some exceptional cases. This system makes sure women, particularly the nokna, have significant control over family property, such as land, homes, and different assets. The transfer of property can be followed by specific rituals, such as the Nokrom-gata ceremony, in which family members meet for celebration and pray together. This tradition shows the cultural importance of property inheritance in the Garo society. Findings of the study elucidate that the nokna holds control over the family property, guaranteeing its preservation and proper distribution based on family needs. This system is inextricably linked to the traditional belief in matrilineal, in which the mother's side wields great authority and control over possessions. In the Garo community, land inheritance has a major effect on women's economic status. Women, particularly the nokna, hold significant power over land and other family assets because property inheritance is matrilineal in nature. Women gain economic independence by owning land and being in charge of its management and distribution. This control increases their social position by granting them authority in both the household and the larger community. Moreover, the ability to make decisions about property and wealth gives women a powerful role in family concerns, providing them with a level of autonomy that is unique in traditional nations. Land inheritance often passes down through the maternal line, supporting women's responsibilities as the key economic and social decision-makers in society. The study has provided that into traditional practices of property inheritance, with a focus on the role of the nokna (likely referring to the youngest daughter) in controlling family assets and land. Matrilineal land ownership influences Garo women's socioeconomic power, showing that access to property improves their decision-making independence, social status, and financial security, despite continued gaps in larger political representation.

Findings of the study delineate that the matriarchal property ownership system in Garo society has experienced numerous changes. Now, Garo communities are pursuing higher education in different public universities of Bangladesh, as well as they are going abroad for higher education. In the age of modernization and globalization, they are more connected to digital technology and digital literacy. On this platform, they are becoming connected with a diverse population of diverse cultures. So cultural assimilation is taking place among the Garo communities of Bangladesh. They are introduced with different ownership patterns of different societies. Generation Z (Gen Z) of Garo communities is much more updated in all sectors than their ancestors. They are much more connected with Bengali communities than

their ancestors. So they are much more familiar with the patriarchal social system of Bengali society, where men practice more property ownership rights than women. So gradually, men of the Garo communities are demanding equal rights in property ownership. Now, most of the parents of the Garo communities, especially educated parents, are distributing their property among their sons and daughters. Nowadays, even female children of Garo families want to share the ownership of their parents' property with their brothers. The study also highlights several challenges to the traditional practice system. Intermarriage with non-Garo cultures has resulted in changes in distribution practices, with many women losing their rights to property if they marry outside the community. Education, urbanization, and changes in law that promote patrilineal inheritance have begun to challenge norms historically. But still now majority of Garo communities believe that modern influences have had no substantial impact on property distribution. According to the study's findings, the following recommendations have been provided to help the Garo community preserve their matrilineal tradition practice while tackling the problems given by industrialization and foreign influences: Governments need to acknowledge and legally preserve matriarchal inheritance systems, ensuring that they are not replaced by male laws that impose male-dominated inheritance rules. Policies should encourage community land ownership plans in order to minimize property dispersion and preserve traditional land governance institutions. Governments and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) should work with matriarchal communities to create policies that combine development with the preservation of traditional property distribution methods. Long-term study is needed to track how matrilineal inheritance changes through generations in response to modernity. Future research should look into the cost implications of switching from exclusively matrilineal to mixed or patrilineal systems. By responding to these research gaps and applying the recommended policies, the Garo community may preserve its cultural legacy while adjusting to modern societal transformations in a sustainable manner.

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