

Evolving Livelihood Strategies of The Garo Community: A Qualitative Case Study in Netrakona, Bangladesh

Mostakim Mia¹ Md. Golam Rabbani²

Corresponding Author Email: mustakim.du.iswr.56@gmail.com

Received 31/12/2024

Accepted 06/03/2025

Published 01/06/2025

ABSTRACT

The Garo community in Bangladesh faces significant neglect, lacking access to their basic needs which underscores the importance of understanding their situation and attitudes to accurately depict their circumstances. This study focuses principally on the evolving livelihood strategies of the Garo people, from the past to the present and seeks to identify changes in their livelihood strategies. The study was conducted among the Garo tribe residing in the two upazilas respectively Durgapur and Kolmakanda in Netrakona district, Mymensingh division in Bangladesh. Historical and empirical data were utilized; historical data primarily sourced from secondary sources such as books, journals, articles, reports, census records and local publications. Primary data were collected through in-depth interviews, observational techniques and focus group discussions. A qualitative research approach was employed, with 30 Garo individuals selected using purposive sampling. A case study method was adopted to gather in-depth insights from the Garo people. The collected data were analyzed using thematic analysis allowing for the identification of key patterns and themes. This methodological approach provided a comprehensive understanding of the research subject by focusing on detailed, context-rich narratives. The study reveals that traditional Garo lifestyle practices are at risk of disappearing, with their way of life changing primarily due to external influences, as well as internal community decisions. Several factors, both internal and external, influencing these livelihood changes were identified, including the influence of Christianity, NGOs, globalization and social development. The shift from extended to nuclear families is driven by urbanization, economic advancements and social media influences. Technology integrates into leisure experiences promoting interactive entertainment and social connection. Consequently, many aspects of Garo traditional culture, including language, food habits, dress patterns and religious practices, are facing challenges. To support the Garo people in Netrakona, policies should focus on preserving their cultural heritage while promoting socio-economic development. The community requires improved communication and transportation systems, expanded educational opportunities and increased government and non-governmental support, both material and financial. Government and NGOs should collaborate to promote sustainable livelihoods while cultural festivals and tourism initiatives can help preserve and showcase Garo traditions.

Keywords: *Garo community, livelihood, evolving, origin, Netrakona*

¹ University of Barishal, Barishal, Bangladesh.

² University of Dhaka, Dhaka, Bangladesh.

INTRODUCTION

The Garo community in Netrakona, Bangladesh, represents a vibrant indigenous culture with a deep connection to its traditional modes of livelihood, primarily based on agriculture, hunting, and forest resources. Globalization, environmental damage and changes in economic policies have led to big shifts in their lifestyle and economy. This research inquires to inspect the evolving livelihood patterns of the Garo community in Netrakona, highlighting the propeller of these changes and their implications on the community's socio-economic permanency and cultural identity.

Living in a matriarchal community, Garo customs point that property ownership lies with females, and children resort their mother's surname. Hardworking Garo women actively embrace in both household chores and outdoor activities abreast men, including agricultural deed, market transactions, and gathering firewood (Rashid et al 2022). Despite the conversion to Christianity among many Garo people, traditional beliefs in the supernatural persist, albeit to a lesser extent (Sarker et al 2008).

The Garo community celebrates various rituals and festivals characterized by communal gatherings where alcohol locally known as 'chu' plays a central role (Islam et al 2008). Agriculture is the primary livelihood using traditional farming methods for crops like jhum and hal. (Mia & Rabbani 2024). The Garos do handicrafts such as yarn making, weaving and bamboo work (Dey et al 2014). Garo cuisine rotates around rice, fish and curries with proneness given to meats such as pork, beef and poultry (Muhammad et al 2011). Despite their bilingualism in Bengali and their native Achik language, disclosure to modernization and education is changing cultural practices and language acquisition among the younger Garo generation (Kelker et al 2005)

At present, Garo tribes live in Mymensingh, Netrakona, Tangail, and Sylhet districts of Bangladesh. There are also Garos in the Shreepur and Kawraid areas of Gazipur district and Roumari upazila in Rangpur district (Islam et al 2009). The Garo tribes also live in the Indian state of Meghalaya, in almost all the districts of Assam, in the districts of Kochbihar and Jalpaiguri in West Bengal, and in the state of Tripura (Nath et al 2003). Despite their strict way of life, the Garos enjoy a happy existence, filled with dancing, singing, sports, and fun. Their lifestyle is truly exemplary, offering much to learn from them (Khan et al 2012). Almost all Garo people can speak Bengali and their language. While the Garo tribe originally followed the Sangsarek religion, many have converted to Christianity due to impoverishment and vulnerability (Jalil 2002).

Indigenous people mainly live in secluded areas, outside the mainstream of national economics and development support. They often lack basic infrastructure such as roads, markets, schools, and health facilities. Indigenous people also have fewer opportunities in education and skill development compared to their mainstream counterparts, resulting in high illiteracy rates (Kim et al 2012). The Garo tribe is one of the most neglected indigenous tribes in Bangladesh, often overlooked regarding their basic needs. This study aims to highlight the socio-economic and cultural patterns of the Garo people in Netrakona district (Ahmed et al 2010).

It is estimated that over 120,000 Garo individuals live in Bangladesh (Wikipedia). The emergence of the Garo tribes is mystical and archaic (Playfair 1909), likely predating the Hindu-Indian culture dominant in the plains of the subcontinent (Bal 2000). Linguistically, the Garo language belongs to the Tibeto-Burmese family, with influences from both Mongolian and indigenous sources (Bal 1999). Garo society is notably matrilineal, deeply rooted in family values (Goswami and Majumdar 1972). Understanding how the Garo people adapt to these challenges is crucial for formulating policies that support sustainable development while preserving their cultural heritage. This research not only contributes to the academic discourse on indigenous livelihoods in Bangladesh but also offers practical insights for policymakers, development practitioners and local stakeholders engaged in fostering resilient and inclusive rural economies.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. How does the matrilineal inheritance system within the Garo community influence family structure and social roles and how are these dynamics evolving in response to changing livelihood strategies?
2. What are the key health challenges faced by the Garo community and how are their approaches to accessing healthcare services evolving as part of their shifting livelihood practices?
3. How do traditional cultural practices such as games, festivals and music contribute to the leisure and entertainment activities of the Garo community and how are these practices adapting to the community's changing livelihood strategies?

OBJECTIVES

1. To assess the evolving household structure and healthcare access in the Garo community as part of their changing livelihood strategies.
2. To explore how entertainment and leisure activities in the Garo community are being influenced by their shifting livelihood practices.
3. To examine the relationship between the Garo community and neighboring communities in the context of their evolving livelihood strategies.

METHODOLOGY

This research focuses on the Garo community in Durgapur and Kolmakanda upazilas of Netrakona district in the Mymensingh division, adopting a qualitative design to understand the evolving livelihood patterns through non-numerical data. Utilizing a case study methodology, it deeply explores factors influencing these changes by purposively sampling 30 cases. Primary data collection methods include in-depth interviews, observational techniques and focus group discussions, supplemented by secondary data from various published and unpublished sources. In this study, a deductive approach was used for qualitative data analysis (QDA) to align the findings with the research objectives. The analysis started with guiding the coding process. Data segments were categorized under specific themes related to the research questions. As coding progressed, patterns were

identified and grouped into broader themes, such as family structure, healthcare access and cultural practices. This approach ensured continuous alignment with the study's focus on the evolving livelihood strategies of the Garo community. The study recognizes certain limitations, including possible biases in data collection and analysis, as well as restrictions related to the sample size and scope. Despite these constraints, the qualitative methodology is deemed appropriate for capturing in-depth insights into the lived experiences and perspectives of the Garo community. This approach offers essential context for understanding the changing in their livelihoods.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Rahmat Ullah's *Garo Community: A Marginalized Population of Bangladesh* (written in Bangla) explores the challenges faced by the Garo community, highlighting their marginalization, cultural shifts and economic struggles. He divides the Garo into two groups based on habitat—Achchik, who live in forests and Lamdani, who reside in land areas—and provides an overview of their family laws, matrilineal society, marriage systems, cultural practices and the central role of women within the community. Ullah emphasizes that while agriculture is important, the primary issue lies in the marketing practices controlled by non-Garo individuals. This research directly connects to my study by shedding light on the evolving livelihood strategies of the Garo, particularly in terms of family structure, cultural identity and economic challenges, providing a context for understanding the impacts of these factors on their community's changing dynamics.

Kibriaul Khaleque discusses fundamental aspects of the ethnic circumstances in Bangladesh, highlighting the assimilation of smaller ethnic groups categorized as "external" into mainstream Bengali society, resulting in the loss of their distinct identities, cultures, and traditions. He defines an "ethnic group or community" as those whose cultural background differs from the mainstream population. Khaleque notes the preference among most sociologists and anthropologists for the terms "ethnic group or community" over "tribal group or community," although Adivasi or indigenous is sometimes used interchangeably with tribal groups. According to the 1991 census, ethnic peoples in Bangladesh constituted 1.13% of the total population, with the Garo (referred to as Mandi) numbering 64,280. The Garo primarily reside in Mymensingh, Netrakona, Tangail, and Jamalpur districts, and Khaleque suggests that the original homelands of many of these ethnic groups were outside the current boundaries of Bangladesh. He also discusses the linguistic patterns of various distinct groups. Different ethnic groups in Bangladesh particularly the Garo (referred to as Mandi), directly aligns with my research by offering insight into the challenges faced by smaller ethnic communities in terms of identity preservation and assimilation into mainstream Bengali society.

Play Fair (1998) a British administrator had conducted fieldwork among the Garo community of the Assam in India. In his work he predominantly focuses on historical background, domestic life, laws and customs, religion, language of Garo community. He found that Garo dream is very primitive. In past Garo male wears pagri and gando and female wear dokmandi now their dress pattern changes. But they have no written document about their history, language and ethnicity. He has presented in a significant contribution for

us in the sense that it is the first category documents on the Garo community. The writer went to the field and talked with Garo people, found that the existing their livelihood pattern, culture, languages and their tradition in in challenging form.

Mustafa Majid, in *Garojatisatta* (2006), edited a comprehensive book comprising 32 articles that detail various aspects of the Garo community and culture, including their history, traditions, and contemporary issues. The book discusses the origin of the Garo tribe, their development as a prominent indigenous group in Bangladesh since the 18th century, cultural and traditional practices, educational opportunities, religious changes, impacts of missionary activities, governance structures, agricultural practices, disputes, rituals, marriage and funeral customs, crime patterns within the Garo society, gender dynamics, women's empowerment, and the role of feminism in their families and community. According to the book, the Garos are primarily of Mongolian descent, and according to Haraprashad Shastri and local mythology, they are considered a Kirat caste. The book also references the Garo origin theories, suggesting connections to Assam, India, and varying claims of origins from China or Burma, though anthropologists assert a more complex history. The Garo are commonly known as Mandi among the literate, while many Garo individuals continue to identify proudly with this name.

Islam (2002) describes about Garo is one of the primary distinct tribes of Bangladesh. The social relationship of the Garo is centered round the matrilineal family patter. However, under the pressure of urbanization, industrialization, education and the Bengali culture in general and globalization the pattern of family is in the process of changing. The Garo yet maintaining separate cultural and ethnic identity which are under challenges.

Burling (1997) explained the socio-economic and cultural condition of Garo tribe in Bangladesh. The writer described all the insistent pressure of the modern world, a new form of agriculture and new religion a new kind of formal education and the need to become bilingual, more and more involvement with the other group. The writer has been described the Garo in Madhupur and Netrakona who have left man of their older tradition behind. He mentioned that most of the challenges happen in family, marriage, religion and culture.

Bal (2007) critically investigates into the category of ethnicity in the South Asia. While it focuses on indigenous community, the Garos of Bangladesh it studies neither Garos culture as their social organization imitated in deals with the evolution of Garo identity or ethnicity. It also leads to a more comprehensive insight into how social life in the border area of South Asia and South-east Asia organized and how it has transformed overtime.

Previous investigators shaped miscellaneous studies on the Garo tribe inclusive land contentions, old culture, wellness condition, migration etc. Here, we have endeavored to show their current socioeconomic condition of Garos who are living in Durgapur Upazila, Netrakona district area based on their education, income level, job fields, workforce and current position in society. We have also endeavored to show their cultural and religious switches in their present society. We have endeavored to examine the occupational changes of Garo tribe which was not explored before.

KNOWLEDGE GAP

From the review of related past studies, it has been observed that there is no comprehensive study to compare the present livelihood condition of the Garo people of Netrakona district with the past condition of their livelihood condition. While these studies contribute significantly to understanding the Garo community, there remains a knowledge gap in analyzing the current socio-economic conditions, educational attainment, income levels, occupational changes, and cultural shifts among Garo populations in specific regions like Durgapur Upazila, Netrakona district. This gap underscores the need for further research to explore these aspects comprehensively, providing a nuanced understanding of the contemporary challenges and opportunities facing the Garo tribe in Bangladesh today.

RESULT & DISCUSSION

Origin of Garo Community

The Garo community, principally residing in the Garo Hills of Meghalaya, India, and parts of Bangladesh, possesses a vibrant cultural heritage and historical significance. Known as Achik among themselves, the Garos were historically a nomadic tribe of the Bodo group, tracing their lineage to Mongoloid ancestry and believed to have ancestral ties with Chia (Bal 2007). Despite the variations among the many sub-groups within the Garo community, they share a strong belief in a common origin, viewing themselves as part of a single people (Ball Ellen 1999).

The Garos are believed to be of Tibeto-Burman origin, tracing their roots to Tibet. Theories suggest that they migrated to the Garo Hills through Assam and Northern Burma (now Myanmar) several centuries ago. Linguistically, the Garo language belongs to the Bodo-Garo group of the Tibeto-Burman family, supporting the idea of their migration from the north. The Garos are divided into several clans (known as 'ma'chong'), each with distinct roles and statuses. These clans are exogamous, meaning that individuals must marry outside their clan, fostering alliances with other clans and communities.

Traditionally, the Garos practiced animism, worshipping spirits of nature and ancestors. With the advent of Christian missionaries in the 19th and 20th centuries, many Garos converted to Christianity. However, traditional beliefs and practices still persist, often blending with Christian rituals (Mia & Rabbani 2024)

The Garos of Bangladesh are the largest minority (Burling 1997). They live in Haluaghat and Dhubaura of Mymensingh, Susang Durgapur of Netrakona, Srivardi of Jamalpur, Nalitabari and Jhenaigati in Sherpur, Madhupur in Tangail and Dharmapasha, Taherpur and Bishwambarpur of Sunamganj (Islam 2002). The vast border area of Mymensingh is inhabited by the Garos. The Garo tribes came to Bangladesh from the states of Tibet and Burma. The Garos call themselves Mandi (people) or Achchik (hills) (Mostafa 2006).

The Garo ethnic group belongs to the 'Tibeti Borman,' a branch of the Mongolian lineage. Scholars have traced the ancestral homeland of Mongolians to the surrounding regions of Central Asia, and ethnologists suggest that this is also the original habitat of the Garo

community. Historically, they inhabited Sinkiang province in China before migrating to the northern regions of Tibet, where they resided for several decades (Jengcham 1994).

One respondent said “*We are Bangladeshi by birth but my grandfather came from India.*”

One-third of the respondents said that, “*We came from Tibet to India and Bangladesh.*”

Most of the respondents do not know their origin, some respondents said that they came from India and some also said came from Tibet. Actually, there is no effort of preservation of their culture so they do not know their origin.

The Garo community in Bangladesh, particularly in the Netrakona district, traces its origins back to ancient times, deeply rooted in the region's indigenous heritage. Historically, the Garo people are believed to have migrated from the Tibetan plateau, eventually settling in the lush hills and valleys of present-day Bangladesh. As one of the eminent ethnic minorities in Bangladesh, the Garo community has managed to preserve its distinct cultural traditions and heritage despite external influences such as colonization and modernization. Traditionally known for their agrarian lifestyle, the Garos maintain a close connection with the land and forest that has sustained them for generations while integrating elements of modernity and engaging with the larger society. The Garo community of Netrakona continues to respect their ancestral roots. The origin of the Garo community is migrated, a tapestry of cultural evolution and adaptation. A matriarchial system marked by traditional beliefs and vibrant festivals reflecting a unique identity that thrives even in a changing socio-political landscape. Further research, especially in the fields of archaeology and anthropology, can provide deeper insights into the early history and evolution of the Garo people.

Changing Household Structures in the Garo Community

Garos houses in the hills contain a very limited amount of furniture. The bamboo floor or perhaps a raised platform of the same material is generally sufficient for all requirements. Sometimes a rough seat hewn out of a single piece of wood may be seen and a cane bottomed chair occasionally offered to a visitor of distinction (Das et al 2005). With the improvement of economic conditions among the Garo community, furniture has increasingly become a symbol of social status rather than just a means of comfort. Common items in Garo households now include wooden chairs, tables, stools, wardrobes, and steel almirahs. This evolution mirrors a wider shift in household utensils and tools, as earthenware has gradually been replaced by metal, reflecting a marker of social prestige. For example, earthen plates, once predominantly used by daily wage earners, have given way to aluminum plates as financial situations improve. Among wealthier households, aluminum utensils are further replaced by brassware and luxury items such as tea sets and chinaware, denoting a higher social position. Despite these changes, traditional tools like the pestle and mortar for husking paddy continue to be commonly used, though modern alternatives are increasingly making their way into households. There are however instances where by both type of implements was used by a few plains Garos (Bal 2010). Different sized baskets each with a different name are also used for various purposes both by plain and hill Garos. But the shape

and materials used for construction of these baskets vary in both the areas. Dhama coiled baskets of cane characteristic of the plains is used for storing household goods.

Traditionally, the Garo community follows a matrilineal system where lineage and inheritance are traced through the mother. Property and family names are passed down from mother to daughter. The head of the household is typically the senior-most woman, usually the mother or grandmother, while the maternal uncle (mama) plays a significant role in decision-making and the upbringing of children. Traditional Garo households are often extended families, consisting of multiple generations living under one roof. This structure supports collective farming, child-rearing, and mutual support.

There is a noticeable shift from extended to nuclear family structures. Economic pressures, employment opportunities, and educational pursuits have led to younger generations moving away from the traditional joint family system. Nuclear families, typically comprising parents and their children, are becoming more common, especially in urban areas. Increased access to education and employment opportunities outside the traditional agricultural sector has led to greater mobility among the Garo youth. Many young people move to cities for better job prospects, leading to smaller family units. Women, in particular, are pursuing higher education and professional careers, which has influenced household dynamics and roles.

One respondent said, *“Recently the conventional proprietary of land are women are switched. Now in our community, the ownership of land both male and female.”*

Another respondent said, *“All of resources of our family are owner of my wife. My wife owns 3-acre land. This house is after the name of my wife.”*

One respondent said, *“we lived at a thatch home at the previous time. At present we live in a tin-shed house and we are getting ready to build a better house. The health condition of my family was unbearable and inscrutable. Now the condition has improved but this is insufficient. My family members are living in Dhaka that’s why they get good treatment now.”*

One respondent said, *“I live in a very small house which is made from mud.”*

Some respondents said, *“Now-a-days we build our house with tin and other materials because of our socio-economic conditions have changed over the period of time.”*

Another respondent said, *“We dwelled at a thatch home at the previous time but at now-a-days we dwelled in a tin-shed home. This house is not enough for my family. The health condition of my family was unbearable and inscrutable. Now the condition has improved but this is insufficient. Medical facilities for my family as well as my community was not sufficient. The medical facilities have increased but that is not enough for patient.”*

One respondent said, *“We build our house with tin, wood and others materials but ancient build house by bamboo, leaves and hays.”*

One respondent said, *“When I was born, we had a small soil house but now we have a tin-shed house. I don’t know about the past condition but present condition is enough for us.”*

Medical facilities are not enough here because our hospital is so far away our home. I think our medical facilities has improved from before. My father is a farmer and he and my brother is the earning member of my family but my father can't do heavy work because of his age so it's tough to lead a quality life."

Most of the respondents noted, *"In our culture, the mother's lineage determines inheritance and family decisions." This matrilineal system influences the dynamics within Garo households, promoting a matriarchal authority that extends to economic activities and community leadership."*

While the matrilineal system places women in central roles within the household, contemporary changes are leading to more balanced gender roles. Men are increasingly participating in domestic duties and decision-making processes. Women's involvement in external economic activities has also grown, balancing traditional household responsibilities with professional commitment.

Living arrangements in Garo households often include extended family members, contributes to childcare and economic activities. The impact of patriarchal practices has increased in recent years due to urbanization and modern influences, especially affecting the young generation living in urban areas.

In ancient times the Garos used to build their houses with leaves and straw but now the situation has changed due to modern civilization. Currently, the socio-economic and other conditions of the Garos have improved. So, Garos make houses out of tin and other materials. Garo community's family structure, education, employment opportunities, undergoing significant changes have driven by immigration and cultural influences. Although traditional matriarchal and extended family systems persist, there is a clear trend towards nuclear families and more balanced gender roles. These changes reflect broader socio-economic developments and the community's adaptation to contemporary challenges and opportunities. Further research is needed to explore the long-term implications of these changes on Garo cultural identity and social cohesion.

Changing Health Service Status and Challenges among the Garo Community

Garos enjoy a good health status at present. Most of the Garo people consider that illness result from the discontent of the God and Goddess or anathema of the sluggish souls. Thus, they immolate creature to satisfy the soul to attain salvation of their illness (Dey et al 2014).

Garos eat various foods including numerous natural plants as vegetables. Traditionally Garos are affectionate of drinking wine which is ready from boiled rice (Islam & Rafiqul 2008). Generally, Garos are less attacked by diseases. But yet, diseases are quite common in this community; the most common one is Malaria. The Garo community lacks a lot of social facilities including adequate and properly functioning healthcare facilities. They travel for a longer distance to access healthcare in the government hospitals. Most of the Mission clinics around the community do not have medical facilities which is a problem affecting more the rural areas of Bangladesh (Gain 2011).

Traditionally, the Garo community relied on indigenous health practices and traditional medicine. Herbal remedies, administered by local healers (ojhas) were commonly used for treating illness, spiritual healing and rituals were also integral to their healthcare practices, addressing both physical and spiritual well-being. The Garo diet traditionally consisted of rice, vegetables, fruits, and fish. The community practiced shifting cultivation (jhum farming), which provided a variety of crops and contributed to a balanced diet. Despite a historically diverse diet, recent shifts towards more processed and less diverse foods have led to nutritional deficiencies. Increased dependence on market-bought food has sometimes resulted in poorer dietary quality.

Malaria in the Garo Hills outbreaks of communicable diseases such as tuberculosis and waterborne diseases have been observed. Lack of clean drinking water and inadequate healthcare infrastructure contribute to the spread of these diseases which is increased due to climatic conditions and dense forests of the region. Access to healthcare facilities in the Garo Hills is limited. As a result, maternal and child mortality rates are high with limited access to skilled birth attendants, poses significant risks

Mental health issues are emerging as a significant concern, driven by socio-economic stress, unemployment, and the erosion of traditional social structures. However, mental health services are scarce, and stigma often prevents individuals from seeking help.

Traditional occupations such as farming and fishing pose occupational health risks. Use of pesticides in agriculture without proper safety measures has led to health issues among farmers. Manual labor and lack of protective equipment result in frequent injuries and chronic musculoskeletal problems.

One respondent said, *“Our health condition is well. in maximum time we are affected by malaria. When we become ill, we go to government hospital for treatment.”*

Many years ago, the Garo community doesn't know about health hygiene factors even they don't have any knowledge about treatment procedure. They were only depended on their traditional practices for treatment. But now they get training and become aware from Christian missionary and government organization.

Another respondent said, *“At present there is a hospital but the services we get insufficient. In case of emergency, we go to Netrakona Sadar Hospital for better treatment.”*

One respondent said, *“When we become ill, we go to govt. hospital for treatment. But it is a matter of great regret that in our locality there have no well hospital and community clinic.”*

The most common health issues affecting the Garo community include malaria, respiratory infections, malnutrition, and waterborne diseases. Respondents noted the challenges they face in accessing healthcare services due to geographic remoteness and limited healthcare infrastructure.

One respondent shared, *“We often have to travel long distances to reach the nearest healthcare facility, which may lack essential medicines and trained staff. This difficulty in*

access is compounded by financial constraints and inadequate transportation options. The prevalence of diseases like malaria remains a concern,

Two-thirds of the respondents mentioned, "Malaria is still a big problem here, especially during the rainy season. Traditional healers play a significant role in managing health issues, providing herbal remedies and spiritual healing practices."

Garo people are facing different types of health problems. Because they are not aware about well sanitation, hygiene and disease leading factors. They take services from government hospital.

Changing Traditional Leisure Activities and Cultural Practices of the Garo Community

Garo community known for its rich cultural heritage and traditional practices various socio-economic, technological and cultural influences have led to significant changes in their leisure and cultural activities. Traditional games like 'Dama Dokhka' (a type of wrestling), 'Nakpil Aziya' (cockfight) and various forms of archery are integral to the leisure activities of Garo communities (Sarker et al 2008). Respondents highlighted the importance of these games in enhancing community spirit and physical fitness where 'wangala' is most prominent. It is a traditional dance to honor the sun god. A harvest festival celebrated with music and rituals, popular forms of music 'Saram' and 'Adil' along with indigenous instruments like 'Babendil' and 'Nagarsingha'. Other cultural practices include storytelling, traditional arts, crafts and religious ceremonies that strengthen cultural identity.

One respondent shared, "Our festivals and music are not just entertainment; they are a way to preserve our culture and pass it on to the next generation."

These activities are not only sources of enjoyment but also serve as important cultural markers that reinforce the Garo community's identity and resilience in the face of modernization. Traditionally the Garo community enjoy their leisure time by drinking alcohol and hand maid cigarette. It is true that during the festival like wangala and Christmas day they enjoy dance and song as well as drink alcohol.

One respondent said, "*We are the followers of Christian religion. So, our norms, values, habits and choices are related to Christianity. I don't know that our community people's religious belief has changed. We can entertain in various way. We entertained ourselves by singing and dancing but now we are entertaining by watching television, using internet and everyone is using Facebook for their entertainment.*"

Another respondent said, "*I always busy with household activities. When I get some relax time, I do embroidery in cloth and sewing cloth, sometimes I also gossip with my neighbor.*"

Traditional Garo music and dance are integral to their cultural identity. Instruments like the dama (drum), adil (flute), and gongina (gong) are commonly used in their performances. Wangala, the harvest festival, is celebrated with the Wangala dance, involving rhythmic drum beats and coordinated movements. Other dances include Doroa, Ajema, and Chambil Mesara. Besides Wangala, other important festivals include Rongchu Gala, Mi Amua, and

Ahaia, each associated with agricultural cycles and religious beliefs. Rituals often involve offerings to gods and spirits, with community participation being a key aspect.

Traditional sports like archery, wrestling, and indigenous games such as "Katta" (a form of marbles) and "Sama" (a type of board game) were popular leisure activities. Hunting and fishing were not only subsistence activities but also forms of recreation and skill demonstration. The advent of television, internet, and smartphones has introduced new forms of entertainment to the Garo community. Modern music, movies, and online games are now popular, especially among the young. Traditional music and dance are still performed but are increasingly limited to festivals and special occasions rather than everyday leisure activities.

While traditional festivals are still celebrated, there are noticeable changes in how they are conducted. Modern elements such as amplified music, stage performances and formal event management are becoming common. Some traditional rituals are simplified or omitted, influenced by time constraints and modern lifestyles. Traditional sports are being complemented or replaced by modern sports like football, cricket, and volleyball. These sports are now widely played and have organized tournaments. The interest in traditional games is waning, with younger generations showing more interest in video games and other digital forms of entertainments.

Another respondent said, *“Ancient we usually passed our leisure time by drinking. But now it is changing because we follow the religion of Christian. In the rules of “Bible” drinking wine is a sin. Now I we generally pass our leisure time by travelling after harvesting. When I have enough time and money then I avail these opportunities.”*

One respondent said, *“Wangala is now become more of formality. This is not celebrated like before. Food habits are quite similar compare to past habits. Peoples are less tending to wear traditional dresses. I am comfortable with both languages. I think the method of celebrating cultural events is changing day by day in our community.”*

Urbanization and migration for education and employment have led to a blending of Garo cultural practices with those of other communities. Urban Garos often adopt new cultural practices while maintaining some traditional elements. This has resulted in a hybrid cultural identity, especially among the youth who navigate between traditional and modern lifestyle. Increased access to education and exposure to global cultures through media and travel have broadened the perspectives of the Garo people. This exposure often leads to the adoption of new cultural practices and a shift away from some traditional ones. Educational institutions often encourage cultural preservation through events and programs, but the daily practice of traditional customs is declining.

One respondent said, *“modern technology is the vital part of our present life. Modern technology has changed the general activities. It minimizes the waste of time and money. Everything has both positive and negative side so modern technology has also some negative side. My elder son wastes most of the time by using social media. They play game in the mobile phone which is very harmful for their eyes as well as their health.”*

Almost two-thirds of the respondents mentioned, *"We usually pass my leisure time by drinking. We make it at home. It is made of rice so that we call it rice bear. Now it has turned into a tradition of our community."*

In the present time, the pattern of entertainment of Garo have totally changed. Traditionally the Garo community used to their leisure time by drinking alcohol and handmade cigarette. Now-a-days they being converted to another religion which Christianity and then they started to give up some bad habit of being addicted to alcohol. Now they passed their leisure time by gossiping, doing household work, traveling.

The leisure and cultural practices of the Garo community are undergoing significant changes influenced by modern entertainment, urbanization, education, and globalization. While traditional practices are being preserved through various efforts, there is a clear shift towards integrating contemporary elements. Addressing the challenges and leveraging opportunities can ensure that the rich cultural heritage of the Garo community continues to thrive in the modern world.

Changing Relationship Pattern with Neighbors

This study examined the relationships between the Garo community and neighboring communities, focusing on social interactions, conflicts, cooperation, and integration. Social interactions between the Garo community and neighboring communities are characterized by both cooperation and conflict. Cooperation often revolves around economic activities such as trade and agriculture, where both communities benefit from mutual exchange.

One respondent noted, *"We often trade our agricultural products with neighboring communities and sometimes we collaborate on large farming projects."*

However, conflicts arise primarily due to land disputes and competition for resources.

Historically, the Garo community maintained distinct cultural and social practices with interactions with neighboring communities primarily driven by trade, intermarriage, and occasional conflicts. The Garos had well-defined territorial boundaries and a system of self-governance through village councils (nokmas). There was a considerable degree of cultural exchange with neighboring tribes such as the Khasi, Jaintia, and Bodo communities. Shared rituals, festivals and traditional knowledge were common.

One respondent mentioned, *"We face conflicts over land ownership, as the neighboring communities sometimes encroach on our ancestral lands."*

These conflicts can escalate and strain relationships, impacting social cohesion.

Integration between the Garo community and neighboring communities is influenced by cultural exchanges and government initiatives promoting unity. Some respondents highlighted positive interactions during cultural festivals and events where both communities participate together.

A respondent shared, *"During festivals like 'Wangala,' our neighbors join us to celebrate, and we also participate in their cultural events."*

Garo people are more pleasant with each other. They maintain good relationship with their neighbor and keep belief on them. They enjoy their festivals and ceremony with their neighbor. They share all happiness and sadness with their neighbors. Garo people have good relation with their neighbor. If the neighbors become non-Garo family, then they also maintain good relation and become helpful.

One respondent said, *“When I face any problem like social, economic or health. At first my neighbors eagerly come to me for doing help. I also share our sadness and happiness to our neighbor.”*

Another respondent said, *“I don’t live in close to my relatives. They always can’t take care of my family. when I face any problem, I seek help from my neighbor.”*

Economic activities have significantly affected the relationship between the Garo community and their neighbors. Increased trade and commerce have led to more frequent interactions. The introduction of markets and improved transportation infrastructure has facilitated economic interdependence among communities.

Intermarriage between Garos and neighboring communities became more common for encouraging social bonding and cultural integration. Various community-based initiatives aim to promote harmony and cooperation between Garos and neighboring community’s joint cultural festival, inter-community dialogue and cooperative development projects are examples of such efforts. NGOs and local leaders play a crucial role in mediating conflicts and promoting peace-building activities.

One respondent said, *“Our neighbors are good. Sometimes we become quarrel with our neighbor in perspective of different opinion but when the time comes to any festival or weeding ceremony, we become united by forgetting previous dispute.”*

Another respondent said, *“There are a Bengali Hindu and a Hajong family aside of our house. We take them very cordially and invite them in our festivals. They also maintain good relation with us.”*

The relationship of Garo community with their neighbors is good. They maintain good relation with their neighbors. They help their neighbor in any unwanted situation or any crisis. They also enjoy the festival or ceremony with their neighbors.

One respondent said, *“there are so many problems in our society, one of the most important is unemployment. Other’s problems are illiteracy, poor sanitation, early marriage, lack of awareness etc.”*

Another respondent said, *“We have unlimited problems which you can’t bear to hear.”*

Another respondent said, *“The communication system is not fit on our area. Most of the roads are broken. There are many social problems such as- superstition and elephant problems.”*

Most of the respondents agreed that the relationship between Garo and other community is good in terms of their different cultures, values and beliefs.

The relationships between the Garo community and their neighbors are evolving, influenced by economic activities, political dynamics, social integration, and cultural exchanges. While there are challenges related to resource conflicts and ethnic identity, various initiatives and policy interventions aim to foster harmonious relationships. The future of these relationships depends on continued efforts to balance cultural preservation with socio-economic development and conflict resolution.

Help and Cooperation from Government and Non-Government Organizations

This study evaluated the support provided to the Garo community by government and non-government organizations, including the impact of developmental programs, financial aid, and social services. The nature and effectiveness of support vary significantly, with some programs showing tangible benefits while others face challenges.

Social services such as vocational training and community development programs have also contributed to the socio-economic empowerment of the Garo community. Vocational training programs have equipped community members with skills in agriculture, handicrafts, and small-scale industries.

A respondent shared, "I attended a training program on weaving traditional Garo textiles, which helped me start a small business."

Some respondents highlighted issues such as insufficient funding for healthcare facilities and delays in receiving financial aid.

One respondent mentioned, *"While there are health centers, they often lack medicines and qualified staff."*

In Bangladesh, NGOs have emerged to play an important role in the lives of all people, whether Garos are not. Many NGOs are working in this area of Netrakona such as Grameen Bank, NSDP, CCDB, BRAC, ASA and others. Christian NGOs such as Caritas, World Vision, YMCA, WCA are active in Netrakona. NGOs run apprehension building and progression programmes for rural people and also give work for many Garo people, sponsor for children and scholarship for the students and others. Besides in Netrakona NGOs have launched many programs such as micro-credit schemes, adult literacy, family planning saving new born child lives, sanitation, immunization income generative training programs. The goals of those programmes are fetching qualitative variation in their live but although all those programs of NGOs are also dominating the variation of Garos life. On the other hand, there are many Governments organization are working in Garo community. Those organizations are given service such as health service, free education, old allowance, income generative programs, financial development, cultural development, preservation culture etc.

There are so many problems existence in Garo community. One of the most important is unemployment. Other's problems are illiteracy, poor sanitation, unethical conduct, early marriage, lack of awareness. The main problems are communication and transport system in Garo Community. Most of the roads are broken. There are many social problems too. For example, the elephant raids acute here. Elephants eat the paddy from the field. Every year the elephant come from India and destroy the paddy from field.

One respondent said, *“Most of the roads are broken and are not fit for our everyday activities. So, we sought from GOs and NGOs in developing communication system for our community development. We also expedite our overall development the progress of educational system is must need.”*

Another respondent said, *“I think if Government ensure our communication and transportation system, most of the problems are solved automatically.”*

NGOs play important role in their rural development like women education, gender equality, making awareness and sanitation. NGOs also play significant role in changing Garos culture. Many missionary NGOs work in the expansion of Christianity. NGO workers usually go to the Garo villages and make convince in the name of economic help and educational support. They also create awareness about prejudices and superstitions of Garos ancient religion Sangsarek. They successfully able to make them convince them that the Sangsarek is a backdated religion and its full of prejudices and superstition.

One respondent said, *‘There are some non-government organizations work in our communities such as World Vision, Action Aid and Proshika. These organizations provide educational equipment’s our children. non-government organization like “SARAH” service food, medicine and other necessary elements.’*

Another respondent said, *“Government conduct awareness function, giving free treatment and vaccines for good health, give mother and child welfare services and non-government organization give health services, conduct educational program, provide micro credit for economic development and run awareness building programs.”*

One respondent said, *“I am a follower of Sangsarek religion. Many NGOs offered my family members to become Christian which will help us to get reliefs from mission. But I refused them but most of the people of my community get victimized by NGOs”.*

While government and non-government organizations have made efforts to support the Garo community through developmental programs, financial aid, and social services, there is room for improvement. Enhancing the effectiveness and sustainability of these programs, addressing resource disparities, and ensuring equitable access to services are essential for further improving the socio-economic conditions of the Garo community.

RECOMMENDATION AND CONCLUSION

This study recommends several key actions to address the pressing needs of the Garo community. Firstly, it is crucial for governmental authorities to prioritize resolving land-related issues to secure the cultural heritage and livelihoods of the Garo people. Research should be done on Garo traditional culture to document and preserve their rich heritage. State recognition of the Garo community as Adivasi, it is essential to ensure their rights and representation. They need better healthcare services to improve their quality of life. Better facilities should be provided in some sectors like education and infrastructure. Particularly, an educational system and a Garo language institute and research center should be established according to the needs of the Garos. Furthermore, efforts to preserve and promote Garo traditional culture and strengthen their socio-economic and political system

are utmost important. To better support the Garo community, NGOs and government interventions should prioritize understanding the evolving livelihood strategies and tailor programs to the community's changing needs. Programs should focus on strengthening healthcare access, integrating traditional practices with modern solutions and enhancing educational opportunities that align with both cultural values and economic demands. Additionally, initiatives should promote sustainable economic development by supporting the preservation of cultural heritage while encouraging income-generating activities that are adaptable to global and local market trends. Collaborative efforts with local leaders and community members will ensure that interventions are culturally appropriate and more likely to succeed in the long term.

In conclusion, the Garo community faces complicated and pressing challenges that demand immediate and comprehensive intervention. The evolving livelihood patterns among the Garos highlight the critical need for policy reforms and community-driven initiatives that prioritize the preservation of their cultural heritage while fostering socio-economic empowerment. Addressing issues such as land tenure security and resolving land disputes is essential for sustaining their traditional livelihoods and cultural practices. Promoting sustainable land management practices can further support these efforts. Raising awareness of the Garo community's rich cultural heritage and its significance is vital for fostering pride, strengthening ethnic identity, and enhancing community cohesion. Policymakers should prioritize the socio-economic and political needs of the Garo community, crafting targeted cultural policies to address these challenges. Collaborative efforts involving government agencies, civil society organizations, and the community itself are essential for implementing these strategies effectively. By adopting these recommendations, stakeholders can ensure the preservation of the Garo community's cultural heritage and livelihoods amid ongoing changes, contributing to their empowerment, resilience and long-term revitalization.

REFERENCES

1. **Rashid, M.H., Ahmed, T., Nokrek, S., Hasan, N. and Akter, T. 2022**, 'Indigenous Garo women's role in family transformation in Bangladesh', *International Journal of Social Science Research and Review*, vol. 5, no. 9, pp. 175–191.
2. **Kim, A., Kim, S.S., Ahmad, S. and Sangma, M. 2012**, *The Garos in Bangladesh: A sociolinguistic survey*.
3. **Ahmed, K. 2009**, 'Changing patterns of marriage and cultural system of Adivasi Garo community', *Unpublished master's thesis*, Bangladesh Agricultural University, Mymensingh.
4. **Islam, M.S., Sarker, M.H. and Talukder, M.S. 2009**, 'Ethnobotanical study on the Garo tribe: Their lifestyle and livelihood development', *The Agriculturists*, vol. 7, no. 1–2, pp. 60–68.
5. **Khaleque, K. 1995**, 'Ethnic communities of Bangladesh', in P. Gain (ed.), *Bangladesh: Land, forest and forest people*, Society for Environment and Human Development (SEHD), pp. 1–25.
6. **Chowdhury, K.A.N. 2007**, *Residence, gender and power in the Garo society of Bangladesh*, University of Dhaka.

7. **Ullah, R. 2015**, *Garo community: A marginalized population of Bangladesh*, Manusher Jonno Foundation.
8. **Das, T.K. and Islam, S.M.H.Z. 2005**, 'Psycho-social dimension of ethnicity: The situation of the Garo ethnic community in Bangladesh', *Asian Affairs*, vol. 27, no. 3, pp. 45–54.
9. **Islam, M.R. 2008**, 'The changing Garo Adivasi culture of Bangladesh: A case study of marriage rituals', *Unpublished M.Phil. thesis*, Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Tromsø, Norway.
10. **Dey, S., Resurreccion, B.P. and Doneys, P. 2014**, 'Gender and environmental struggles: Voices from Adivasi Garo community in Bangladesh', *Gender, Place & Culture*, vol. 21, no. 8, pp. 945–962.
11. **Jalil, M. and Oakkas, M. 2012**, 'The family structure and cultural practices of the Garo community in Bangladesh: An overview', *Himalayan Journal of Sociology & Anthropology*, vol. 5, pp. 95–110.
12. **Ahmed, K., Ali, R.N. and Begum, F. 2010**, 'Changing marriage system of Adivasi Garo community and its impact on their socio-economic development', *Journal of Bangladesh Agricultural University*, vol. 8, no. 1, pp. 133–139.
13. **Sarker, M.M.R. and Ghani, A. 2008**, 'Cultural and health management practices of the Garo community of Bangladesh: A case study of the Garos of Greater Mymensingh District', *Stamford Journal of Pharmaceutical Sciences*, vol. 1, no. 1, pp. 29–37.
14. **Islam, M.R., Islam, M.A. and Banowary, B. 2009**, 'Antenatal and postnatal care-seeking behavior in a matrilineal society: A study on the Garo tribe of Bangladesh', *The Journal of Family Welfare*, vol. 55, no. 1, pp. 62–69.
15. **Chakma, S. 2000**, *Bangladesher Upozati o Adibashider Samaj, Sankskriti o Achar Bebohar* (Society, culture and behavior of ethnic minority and indigenous of Bangladesh), Nouroz Kitabistan, Dhaka.
16. **Muhammed, N., Chakma, S., Masum, M.H., Hossain, M.M. and Oesten, G. 2011**, 'A case study on the Garo ethnic people of the Sal (*Shorea robusta*) forests in Bangladesh', *International Journal of Social Forestry*, vol. 4, no. 2, pp. 197–211.
17. **Bal, E. 1999**, *Manderangni Jagring: Images of the Garos in Bangladesh*, University Press Limited, Dhaka.
18. **Bal, E. 2000**, *They ask if we eat frogs: Social boundaries, ethnic categorization, and the Garo people of Bangladesh*, Uitgeverij Eburon Press Limited, The Netherlands.
19. **Sattar, A. and Jalil, A. 2002**, 'Family structure and cultural pattern of Garos in Sunamgonj', *Unpublished master's thesis*, Shahjalal University of Science and Technology, Sylhet, Bangladesh.
20. **Gain, P. 2011**, *Survival on the fringe: Adivasi of Bangladesh*, SEHD, Dhaka.
21. **Playfair, A. 1909**, *The Garos: A study of the hill tribes of Meghalaya*, W. Newman & Co., Kolkata.
22. **Burling, R. 1963**, *The Garos: A study in the dynamics of culture change*, University of Delhi Press, Delhi.
23. **Babul, R. 2000**, 'Concern for Adibashis', *The Daily Star*, 12 August, Dhaka, Bangladesh.
24. **Burling, R. 1997**, *Rengsanggri: Family and kinship in a Garo village, 1963*, Tura Book Room, Tura.

25. **Gaswani, S. and Majumdar, D. 1972**, *Garos of Meghalaya: Ethnography and bibliography*, Meghalaya Historical Society, Shillong.
26. **Khaleque, K. 1982**, 'Social change among the Garos: A study of a plain village in Bangladesh', *Unpublished master's thesis*, Australian National University, Canberra.
27. **Nath, T.K., Inoue, M., Islam, M.J. and Kabir, M.A. 2003**, 'The Khasia tribe of Northeastern Bangladesh: Their socio-economic status, hill farming practices and impacts on forest conservation', *Forests, Trees and Livelihoods*, vol. 13, no. 4, pp. 297–311.
28. **Mohsin, A. 1997**, 'Garo society: Lost in the mainstream?', *Samaj Nirikhon*, vol. 64, pp. 72–75.
29. **Kelkar, G. and Nathan, D. 2005**, 'Gender, livelihoods & resources in South Asia', *Fifth South Asia Regional Ministerial Conference, Celebrating Beijing Plus Ten*, Islamabad, 3–5 May.
30. **Khan, A. and Samadder, M. 2012**, 'Weeping of the forest: Unheard voices of Garo Adivasi in Bangladesh', *International Journal on Minority and Group Rights*, vol. 19, pp. 317–326.
31. **Chakma, R. 2000**, 'Garo religion and customs', in M.Rafiuddin and H.A. Mahmud (eds.), *Banglapedia: The National Encyclopedia of Bangladesh*, available at: http://en.banglapedia.org/index.php?title=Garo_Religion_and_Customs.
32. **Bal, E. 2010**, 'Taking root in Bangladesh: States, minorities and discourses on citizenship', *IIAS Newsletter, Special Issue on Indigenous India*, available at: http://www.iias.asia/files/IIAS_NL53_2425.pdf.
33. **Sarker, J. 2002**, 'Adibashis need patronage', *The Daily Star*, 9 August.
34. **Jalil, A. 2002**, 'Family structure and cultural pattern of Garos in Sunamgonj: A study', *Unpublished master's thesis*, Department of Social Work, Shahjalal University of Science and Technology, Sylhet.
35. **Jengcham, S. 1994**, *Bangladesher Garo Samproday* (The Garo community of Bangladesh), Bangla Academy, Dhaka.
36. **Mia, M. and Rabbani, G. 2024**, 'Transitioning livelihood strategies among the Garo community: A case study in Netrakona, Bangladesh', *Journal of Population and Development*, vol. 5, no. 1, pp. 73–87.

