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**SOCIAL CHANGE AND CONTINUITY: A CASE STUDY OF PACHIM BASTI GARO  
VILLAGE IN SIVASAGAR DISTRICT OF ASSAM, INDIA**

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**ABSTRACT**

Social change is a process of modification or alterations in structural and functional pattern of a society. It is a dynamic process in all societies. In society, sometimes structures as well as institutions are inherently resistant to change. In this sense, the fact may be considered as social continuities. The present paper emphasises on Garo community, a hill tribe of North East India. The basic objective of the present paper is to focus changing scenario and continuities in social structure of Garos living in plain areas. The study has been confined as case study in the Pachim Basti Garo Village in Sivasagar district of Assam, India. The village is exclusively inhabited by the Garo people. Both primary and secondary data have been used in this study. The study revealed that after adopting Christianity, Garos started to give up their traditional culture, beliefs and practices. Christianity brought about change among the Garos. Besides, modern education and science and technology simultaneously influenced upon Garos social structure and functions. At present, as a matrilineal society, a few traditional socio-cultural norms have been continuing by the Garos living in plain area.

**KEYWORDS:** Social Change; Social Continuity; Garo People; Social Structure.

**INTRODUCTION:**

Change is the law of nature. Society is not at all a static phenomenon. It is a dynamic entity, it is an on-going process. Any alteration, difference or modification that takes place in a situation or in an object through time can be called change. The term 'Social Change' is used to indicate the changes that take place in human interactions and interrelations. Society is a "Web of social relationship" and hence 'Social Change' obviously means a change in the system of social relationships. Social relationships can be understood in terms of social processes, social interactions and social organizations. Thus, social change is used to desirable variations in social process and social organizations. It includes alternations in the structure and functions of the society. (Rao 1990, Reprint 2018: 483-484)

Social change signifies a process in which modifications or alterations occur in structural and functional patterns of a social system because of the forces of either indigenous exogenous or both (Jena et. al. 1993: 7). Kingsley Davis defines social change as "any alteration as occur in social organization, that is structure and functions of society. Social change is a process in itself. Though change brings about modification and alterations it is never a 'break point' between old and new. Rather, the process of change is the intermediary continuity between the old social order and the new social order. Through the process of change the old structure only gets transformed to suit the new condition of living (ibid).

Social continuity cannot simply be defined as the absence of social change, that is things remaining the same, because, social change is a continual process in all society. Within societies, there are structures that are inherently resistant to change, and in this sense, we may consider them as being social continuities. Individuals within societies need social continuities to a lesser or greater extent, depending on some significant factors like age, gender, education, occupation, power, wealth etc. Even universal social institutions like marriage, family, religion are subject to change, though they represent social continuity (Preston ND). Thus, continuity signifies somethings remain the same across long periods in time, some times lasting into the modern world. Continuity refers to things that stay the same, relatively unchanged over a period of time.

The Garo is a hilly tribe North East India, mainly concentrating in the Garo hills districts of Maghalaya. They are also scattered in some areas of neighbouring states, these are Assam, Nagaland, Tripura, West Bengal and some part of Bangladesh also. In Assam, they are scattered in Kamrup, Goalpara, KarbiAnglong and Sivasagar districts. Garos are recognised as scheduled tribe plain in Assam. The Garos, who call themselves A-chik Mande, A chik means 'bite soil' and Mande means 'Man', literally known as "hill people" (Wikipedia; Retive on 24<sup>th</sup> March 2020, Saha 1969). There are five exogenous clan in the Garo Society. Clan is called 'Chatchi' by the Garos. The five clan are Sangma, Marak, Momin, Areng and Shira. Garo society is matrilineal society. In Garo society, individuals take their clan titles from their mothers. Traditionally, the youngest danther (nokmechik) inherits the property from her mother. Sons leave their parents at house in the stage of puberty and are trained in the village bachelor dormitory which is known as 'Nokpanthe'. After getting married the man lives in his wife's house (Boruah 2016 : 256-257).

Among the Garos, a large part of the community following Christianity, where a few of them following traditional beliefs i.e. animist religious known as 'songsarek' and its practice. The Garos are at present mainly concerned with agriculture. They practice both permanent and 'shifting cultivation' which is known in the local term as 'jhum'. Jhum cultivation is the most common agricultural tradition of the Garos. Their main cultivation crops include rice, ginger, banana, vegetables, pepper, chilli etc. Rice is the staple cereal food of Garos. Garos are lovers of music and dance. They celebrate different festival of Garos. Wangala is one of the significant festival of Garos. This festival is celebrated after harvesting crops a thanks giving ceremony to their deity Salijong (Haldia Govt. College online).

However, the present scenario of Garos living in plain areas of Assam are quite change due to impact of Christianity, impact of modern education and science and technology. The literacy rate of the Garo people in Assam is gradually increased. According to census report 2011, total literate Garo people in Assam is 86844 i.e. 63.82%, where male literate is 45251 (65.97%) and female literate is 41593 i.e. 62.87%. in this context, the present paper attempts to study the changing scenario and continuity in their social structure and institutions as well, with special emphasis on a Garo village of Sivasagar district of Assam.

Mention may be made here about the population structure of the Garos in Assam. The following table shows the population structure of the Garos in Assam.

**Table 1: Population Structure of Garos of Assam**

	Total	Rural	Urban
<b>Persons</b>	136077 100%	131004 96.27%	5073 3.73%
<b>Male</b>	68594 100%	66150 96.44%	2444 3.56%
<b>Female</b>	67483 100%	64854 96.10%	2629 3.90%

Source: A-II state primary census abstract for individual Scheduled Tribe – 2011

#### **OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY:**

The basic objective of the present paper is to focus structural change and continuity of the Garos living in plain areas.

#### **METHODOLOGY:**

##### **THE FIELD:**

The present study has been conducted as case study in the Pachim Basti Garo village of Sivasagar District of Assam, India. Assam is a North Eastern state of India. The state of Assam covers an area of 78438 sq kilometres land with 3,12,05,576 population (Census Report 2011). The state is bounded by the Himalayan foot hills and bordering state of Bhutan and Tibet on the North; on the south of it, there are Mynmar (Burma) and its hills and to the west, Bangladesh. At present,

the state of Assam has 33 districts including BTAD (Bodoland Territorial Area districts) four districts and 78 subdivisions. The Sivasagar district is situated in the mid-eastern part of Assam on the south bank of the river Brahmaputra. Geographically it is located at 26.98° north and 94.63° east with 2668 sq.km. of land mass covering 2360.40 sq.km. rural areas and 3796 sq.km. Urban areas. As per Census Report 2011, the total population of Sivasagar district is 11,51,050 of which 5,89,216 are male and 5,61,834 are females. The rural population of Sivasagar district is 10,40,954 and urban population is 1,10,096, sex ratio of Sivasagar district is 928 against per 1000 male and the population density of the district is 394 per sq.km.

The Pachim Basti village is the only Garo village in Sivasagar district. The village is situated under the jurisdictions of Demow revenue circle and under Demow Development Block. The Pachim Basti Village is lies under the Parijat Gaon Panchyat of Bakata Mouza, which is 45 km. away from Sivasagar town the headquarter of the district. The village is exclusively inhabited by Garo people. There are one L.P. School (established in the year 1951) one U.P. (ME) School (established in the year 1978) and one English Medium School (2010) in the village. Besides there are five numbers of church in the Pachim Basti Village at present. There are 278 families in the village. The total population of the village is 1329. Out of 1329 populations 695 i.e. 52.29% are male and 634 population i.e. 47.71% are female (source: Field Data).

#### **COLLECTION OF DATA:**

In the present study both primary and secondary data have been used. The primary data were collected with the help of face to face interview and observation method. To collect primary data as well as information the researcher interviewed with some leading personal of the studied village i.e. Gaon Burdha (village headman), Panchayat Ward Member, Women leader of church, school teacher etc. The secondary data were collected with the consultation of various books, journals, internet and government offices concerned.

#### **RESULT AND DISCUSSION:**

It is stated earlier that the present paper has been made an endeavour to focus structural change and continuity among the community under reference of the studied village. In this context, social structure is considered as the elements of societal construction. These elements are institution of marriage, family, religion and culture, education, economy etc.

#### **INSTITUTION OF MARRIAGE:**

Generally marriage is strictly exogamous among the Garos. Husband and wife must belong to the different sub-clans. For example, a Sangma cannot marry a Sangma, a Marak cannot marry a Marak. Marriage customs and laws of the Garos are based on matrilineal principles. In Garo society, descent is always traced from the mother's side and children invariably belong to the mother's sept or clan. The Garos practice two types of marriage i.e. 'Nokrom' marriage and Agate marriage. In Nokrom marriage, the bridegroom has to stay compulsorily in the household of his parents-in-law and becomes a part of the family. This Nokrom marriage is applicable in case of heiress daughter only. Generally, youngest daughter has to be the heiress (Nokna) in a Garo family. The Agate marriage is applicable in case of daughter other than heiress. In Agate marriage, the son in law can stay in his father-in-law's house temporarily. After staying for temporary period he has to build new and independent house for his family in his father-in-law's village or other place.

In our studied village, Nokrom system of marriage is continuing. But, Agate marriage system has gradually been decreasing in the studied village. Instead of that, there is another type of marriage, in which bride-groom has to carry bride to his own house. This type of marriage is possible in case of daughter other than heiress (Nokna) of the family. This marriage is like a social marriage prevailing in Indian society. Among the Garos, this type of marriage is possible only because of scarcity of land for housing and other properties. Besides, inter caste marriage is gradually increasing among the Garos of the studied village. In this respect, inter caste marriage means marriage between Garos and non Garos (Ahom, Kachari, Karbi etc.). there are 52 numbers inter-caste married couple

in our studied village (source : Alina Momin, Secretary, Village Organization). It is observed in the field situation that this kind of marriage is prevalence among them only because of love and affection of boys and girls. After happening of the fact, the village society socially recognized this marriage as per their village rules.

#### **FAMILY PATTERN:**

Garos Society is matrilineal society where children adopt their mother's clan. The simplest pattern of Garo family consist of the husband, wife and their children. The composition of Garo family mainly based on marriage system. As per marriage rule of Garo society, a Nokrom family is consist of a married couple, their unmarried children and married heiress daughter (Nokna) with her Nokrom husband along with their progeny. This type of family is joint in nature. The bulk of family property is bequeated upon the heiress and other sisters receive fragments of the property, but entitled to use a plot of land for cultivation and other purpose. The other daughters except heiress go away with their husband after their marriage to form a new and independent family. This aspect of family structure may be considered as nuclear family.

However, we have noticed both types of family among the Garos in our studied village. It has been observed in the field situation that prevalent of nuclear family is higher than that of joint family in studied village. Impact of modern education, attitude towards achieving economic independence, new occupational avenues due to urbanization and industrialization are the prime cause of prevailing nuclear family.

#### **RELIGION:**

The traditional religious system of Garos was songsarek generally describe as animist. Their traditional religion was a mixture of pantheism and Hinduism. Like Hinduism or Buddhism, the Garos believed in incarnation of the spirit in man. The Garos believed in the 'Supreme God', locally known as "Dakgipa Rugipa Stugipa pantugipa or Tatara Rabuga Stura Pantura" or creator. Besides, Garos believed in their deities i.e. chorabudi (Protector of Crops), Misi Salijong (God of Fertility), Goera (God of Strength), Susime (Goddess of Wealth) etc. (South West Garo Hills District online). In the latter part of 19<sup>th</sup> century, American Baptist and Catholic missionaries opened schools and hospitals in the Garo Hills with a hidden aim to spread Christianity among them. At present most of Garos are Christians.

Today, in the Pachim Basti Garo village all people are Christian by religion. It is known from Narayan Das, the village head man that probably in the year 1914-15 two men namely Aomet Momin and Romkhe W. Momin came from Garo hills to their village for spreading Christianity. After that Garo hills Christian society sent khinjit Momin and his wife Regina Marak for spreading Christianity. At that time, Dhaniram Changma and Lilaram Changma were the first in adopting Christianity of the village. Since then, the villagers under studied have been adopted Christianity. After adopting Christianity they gave up their traditional religions beliefs and practices. The first church was established in the village on 17<sup>th</sup> April, 1917. At present, there are three Baptist church and two A G Church (Assembly of God) in the village.

#### **CULTURE:**

Culture is the arts, ideas, customs and social behaviour of a particular community or society. The Garos have a specific dialect, traditional dress and festivals. They use various traditional musical instruments like stringed instruments, wind instruments and self-sounding instruments in their festivals. The Garos celebrate different festivals. The common and regular festivals of Garos are those connected with agricultural activities. The 'Mangguna' festival is usually celebrate before starting their agricultural works. The biggest and significant among the Garos festivals is the 'Wangala', which is celebrate after harvesting as thanks giving to Misi-Salijong (God of Fertility). The Nokma (chief of the village) takes all responsibilities, so that all arrangements are in order. A large quantity of food and rice-beer must be prepared well ahead of the festival. Both men and

women takes part in the Wangala dance. Lines are formed by males and females separately and dance to the rhythmic beat of drums and gongs and blowing horns by the males.

It is fact that the culture of the modern Garo community has been greatly influenced by Christianity. It has been found in our studied village that because of adopting Christianity and impact of western culture, they have given up their traditional culture, they have given up their cultural values and practices. Of course, they have still been celebrating 'Wangala' festival in the month of November. On that particular day the people of the village unitedly organize a feast of new rice and pray together in the name of Jesus Christ for peace and prosperity of the village and society as well. They collect rice and pork etc. and distribute equally among all the people of each households of the village. They do not use rice-beer as used in earlier days.

On the day of 'Wangala', men and women wear traditional dress for performing Wangala dance. The women were Darkshree and Dakmande (women dress), Rigitok (Necklace), Nathapchi (wear in ear), Sengkhi (waist band) and Jakotok in hand. In the same way, men were 'Gandamakhal' (Men dress), Khotup (cap), done (a kind of flower made of birds' wings), Rigitok and MillamSephe (like a weapon of warriors) in hand. Garos are expert in weaving their traditional dress but, the women of the studied village are not interested to weave these. They purchase their traditional dress from Meghalaya and Karbi Anglong. The remarkable fact is that except 'Wangala' all other traditional customs and beliefs are given up by the people of the studied village. The institution of 'Nokpanthe' is totally declined by the Garos under studied. Traditionally, which served as the dormitory for adolescent youngmen. At present, besides using their own dialect they know Assamese and English as formal language.

#### **FOOD HABITS:**

Garos are liberal in their food habits. The staple food of Garos is rice. They eat millet, maize etc. the rear cows, goats, pigs, fowls, duck etc. and relish their meat too. Fish, prawn, crabs, eels and dry fish are also part of their food habits. Bamboo shoots is a delicious and esteemed food for them. The Garos make their liquor by fermenting a special type of rice and the finished product is called "Mini Bichi".

But, it is known from our field situation that preparing rice-beer is strictly prohibited among the villagers. The village chief of the studied village state that after adopting Christianity they had given up their liquor making custom. Only, dry fish is still prevailing among them as a traditional food. After catching or buying fishes, they dry it on a hanging plate form over a fire. After few days, they pulverise the dry fishes and put it into a bamboo tube for eating long time. Other foods are common as mentioned here.

#### **EDUCATIONAL ENVIRONMENT:**

Education is a backbone of modern civilization without educational development a community or a society cannot uplift their socio-economic status. Hence, in this study, it is pertinent to examine educational environment of the studied village. In olden days there was no any permanent educational institution in the village. According to an elderly person of the village, Khinjing G. Momin was the first, who came from Garo hills as missionary, spreading primary education and side by side Christianity too. After Khinjing, Nirmal Pandey (he belongs to Bihari Community) came and was spreading the ray of primary education, but he had not succeeded. He himself attracted with Christianity and adopted the same, then back to other place for extending the views of Christianity. In such a situation, the children of this village had to go 2 to 3 kilo-meter away for primary education. Even for secondary level education they had to go another village centre i.e. Patsaku (14-15 kilo-meter from the village) and Sibsagar town the head quarter of the district. At that time, roads and transportation was not conducive for communication. Despite various hurdles, Ms. Narun K. Changma was passed matriculation examination firstly with name and fame and Albert D. Shira was first post graduate of the village. They villagers recognized them as two ideal pillars of education for inspiring their children.

We have already stated that at present there are three schools in village under studied. These are 744 No. Pachim Basti Janajati L.P. School (1951), Pachim Basti Janajati M.E. School (1978) and

Salam English School (2010) under control of Sakachang Baptist Missionary. Also, there is a High School i.e. Hologuri Janajati High School near by the studied village. Now, most of the parents of the village are aware of their children education, where a few parents are lagging behind in this state of being because of their poor economic condition. Of course, the central and state Government provided various facilities like free uniforms, free text books, mead day meal etc. for universalization of education. All the children as well as parents avail these facilities. It has now been observed that the children of the village are able to pass with fame in the 10<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> standard examinations. Besides, some youths are graduate in general and technical education and a few are post graduate holder in the village. Hence, it may be stated that overall environment of education in the village as a tribal society is quite well.

#### **OCCUPATIONAL STRUCTURE:**

Economy is a major social institution. Economic profile of a community basically based on occupational structure. Hence it is felt necessary to reflect occupational structure of the community and the village under studied. The Garo people basically concerned with agriculture. The Garos of hill area still practice their traditional shifting hill cultivation. The Garos living in plain areas practice permanent wet cultivation in the same land. They mainly cultivate paddy and various types of sessional vegetables.

In our studied village, it is found that most of the villagers are cultivator by occupation. They mainly cultivate rice, maize, pineapple and other vegetables. They sell their producing surplus goods in nearest market place and there by earn money. It is also known that most of them have small tea garden' in their bari land, which provide them a regular income support. Besides, some villagers of the studied village possess cows, goats, ducks and hen etc. from which they earn good income. The livestock possession plays a significant role in economic life of the villagers. There are a few daily wagers also in the village. They goes to work as daily wager in nearest centre area. Of course, some individuals of the village are Govt. service holder also. This section of individuals are employed in various Govt. departments. Basically, they are employed in professions like – school teacher, police constable, defence personal, Railways, ONGC and Oil India Ltd. employee.

Another remarkable fact is that there are 11 numbers of SHGs in the village. The SHGs have undertaken variety of activities like livestocks, modern knitting-cutting etc. not only for the development of women segment but also for the development of their village as a whole.

#### **CONCLUSION:**

On the basis of foregoing discussion, it may be concluded that though the Garos are hill tribe of North Eastern India, they are recognized as scheduled tribe (Plain) in Assam. Now, lots of change have been noticed in social structure of Garos living in plain areas. After adopting Christianity Garos started to give up their traditional culture, traditional dress and ornaments, pattern of house and other traditional customs, beliefs and practices. They gave up their institution of 'Nokpanthe', the traditional type of young men dormitories. Now, they perform their 'Wangala' festival in a modified manner. They occasionally wear their traditional dress and ornaments, particularly in the 'Wangala' festival. At present, modern education, Christianity and science and technology greatly influence upon Garo's social life. Due to impact of these factors, inter caste marriage is possible among them. These factors also change the economic structure of Garo people. These determinants open their eyes of mind for new occupational avenues in the present competitive world. Of late, the population structure of Garos is highly significant in terms of socio-economic and cultural potentialities particularly in North East India and Indian nation in general.

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