

Garos Identity and their Transformation in Bangladesh: An Overview

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Abstract: *The central focus of this paper is to present Garos ethnic identity formation and their transformation in Bangladesh. Generally, identity is a kind of self-recognition that separates one community from others and in most cases, identity originates from primordial and circumstantial experiences. Case studies, observations, FGDs, and interview methods have been utilized to collect data from the Garos of Modhupur of Tangail District. Following the data given by the respondents, it is found that Garos have lost many of their traditional cultural characteristics and adopted some outsider cultural traits. The study also finds that Garos are suffering from marginalization and in some cases, they resist it which also represents Garo identity. On the other hand, under transformations, Garos are still practicing many of their traditional beliefs, rituals, and traits that also determine their 'Garo' identity in Bangladesh. Eventually, Garos are still intended to be identified as Adivasi Garo in Bangladesh.*

Keywords: Cultural transformation, Garo, Identity, Traditional culture

1. Introduction

Garo or Mandi is a distinguished ethnic community in Bangladesh, particularly known to the outside world for their distinct matrilineal practices. Their kinship ties, inheritance principle, marriage system, religion, festivals, ceremonies, and practices are very eminent which represent their colorful unique culture and identity as compared to other ethnic groups (Burling, 1997). It is estimated that their current population in the world is nearly half a million; most of whom live in northeastern India, particularly in the Garo Hills areas of Meghalaya state (Bal,1999). Garo settlement in India expands up to the Khasi Hills of Assam, Tripura, Shillong, Nagaland, and West Bengal. Although there is a disparity between government and private estimates of the total number of Garos in Bangladesh (Drong, 2004), Bangladesh is home to around one hundred thousand Garos (Bal,1999). However, the majority of the Garos are concentrated in the bordering Upazilas of Mymensingh, Tangail, Jamalpur, Sherpur, and Netrokona Districts. A large number of Garos have settled in Modhupur Upazila of Tangail District. However, a few Garos live in Sreepur Upazila of Gazipur District, and some Garos are also found in the bordering areas of Sylhet and Sunamgonj districts (BBS, 2011). A remarkable number of Garos are now residing in Dhaka, Chittagong, and Gazipur city, for education and employment. A small number of Bangladeshi Garos today live outside the country, mainly located in America, Canada, UK, and Australia to pursue their higher education and seek immigration (Chowdhury, 2007).

Garos mother tongue is A'chik Katha/ A'beng, which belongs to the Bodo group of Tibeto-Burman linguistic divisions. The Bodo languages are widely spoken in the northeastern border of India, along with some nearing the northern and eastern borders of Bangladesh, and within them, Garo, Kok Borak, and Kucchari are initially spoken in the hilly areas (Burling, 1997). Garo language still occupies certain aspects of the Tibetan language having certain similarities with them, and some of their views, ideas, and values are related to Bangladeshi Garos. They are currently bilingual, speaking both the Garo language A'chik Katha, and the majority language Bengali. Today, the Garo language is heavily influenced by the nearby majority Bengali language (Bal, 1999). Garos' traditional religion is known as Sangsarek, which is an animistic type of faith and believes in different spirits, Mites or Middi. Their religion is mostly concerned with worldly affairs. Nowadays, almost all the Garos have been converted to Christianity. Garos had a distinguished culture and identity which have been transforming and now they are suffering from a deteriorating socio-economic position due to several reasons. Under this transformation, Garo left many of their age-old traditional beliefs and practices and accepted different new elements from outsiders' culture. However, still today, the Garos of Bangladesh retain some distinct common socio-cultural characteristics that support recognition of their identity as 'Garo'.

2. Objectives of the Study

The main objective of this study is to examine the relationship between cultural transformation and identity challenges of the Garo in Bangladesh. In this context, the present paper explores common socio-cultural practices that represent Garo identity in general. The study highlights only those common socio-cultural practices that are essential factors in Garo identity representation. The study also focuses on Garo's identity formation in Bangladesh and their present position. To materialize the specific focuses, particularly the paper addresses the following objectives and research questions:

- a. How does Garo identify them as 'Garo' and what are the processes of Garo identity formation in Bangladesh?
- b. What are the common socio-cultural features and practices that represent distinct Garo identity in Bangladesh?
- c. What is the present identity position of the Garos and how do they maintain it?

3. Methodology of the Study

This paper is part of a village-based ethnographic research focusing on the cultural transformation and identity situation of the Garo people of Modhupur Upazila in Tangail District of Bangladesh. As part of my doctoral research, the study has been conducted in two villages, which are primarily inhabited by the Garo people, with an inclusion of very few Bengali inhabitants, the villages are Chunia and Joynagacha. Here, villages are taken both as geographical and social units. In this village-based ethnographic study, I have utilized a multi-method approach to address problems during the fieldwork to understand the society holistically.

During my pre-field activities, I prepared a framework of activities and constructed detailed questionnaires for conducting extensive interviews with the Garo people. I used secondary sources of information for tracing the historical past and position of the Garo community. I have included respondents from various professions and categories, and in terms of age, preference was given to both the younger and older people.

According to Malinowski (1978) ethnographic fieldwork is to grasp the native's point of view, his relation to life, to realize his vision of his world. Following this spirit, in early September 2019, I began my ethnographic fieldwork among the Garos of Chunia and Joynagacha of Modhupur, which lasted until March 2020, as the first phase. The second phase of my fieldwork began again in July and it continued until December 2020, covering the gaps in the data and information obtained. However, my fieldwork covers a total of more than 12 months altogether among the Garos, when COVID-19 was spreading in different areas of Bangladesh including Modhupur Upazila.

According to Porsanger (2004) research on indigenous communities should be conducted using multimethod approaches to grasp the indigenous people's standpoints. Different ethnographic tools and techniques were used for collecting data and gathering information including participant observation, survey, and total enumeration of two villages with a structured questionnaire, 24 research participants were interviewed through In-depth interviews, 10 KIIs were interviewed with an open-ended questionnaire, 8 case studies have been developed from both the villages using particular guidelines, 6 Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) have been conducted from both the study villages and 3 FGDs from each village, the majority of which were attended by 10 to 12 village residents, and informal discussion has also been utilized. Visual methods such as photography and videography were also utilized in the study. Due to COVID-19, I had to maintain a social distancing method during the second phase of the field data collection activities, even though there was no single case of COVID-19 infection in the villages and most of the villagers believed that it is a disease for urban people or city dwellers and that they are immune to it.

4. Conceptual Framework and Literature of the Study

4.1 Understanding identity: Identity is a kind of self-recognition that a person may possess by living in a distinguished community in relation to its wider societal recognition. Similarly, 'identity' is a particular concept that pervades various aspects and characteristics that separate one community from others.

Scholars have discussed the definition of 'identity' from sociological, psychological, and anthropological perspectives. According to Fredrik Barth (1994), the sense of identity is a necessity generated in response to those experiences: how the group of people differs from the surrounding others, positioning, singularity of the fund of the culture of knowledge, skills, and values as represented in the group. According to Islam (2014) the term 'identity' cannot be defined just based on a group of people's socio-cultural characteristics, but must be defined based on their reactions and group integration for some common purpose.

According to Erikson (1968), identity refers to a subjective feeling of sameness and continuity that provides individuals with a consistent sense of self and acts as a guide to choosing core aspects of one's life. Identity is not something that individuals are born with, rather, it evolves over time, beginning from childhood and continuing through adulthood by a process of 'reflection and observation' that is supposed to lead to a resolution or a realized identity. Identity is linked to cultural habits and beliefs, attitudes toward one's own group, and responses to discrimination.

According to Nash (1996), the traditional beliefs and behaviors of an ethnic community provide them with a sense of authority, legitimacy, rightness, and identity. As Islam (2014) mentioned an ethnic community maintains its uniqueness and identity from other groups of people via reference to particular socio-cultural elements. Personal ties, primordial attachments, and circumstantial responses such as resistance against oppression act for representing someone's group identity. Similarly, Seol (2008) claims and shows that primordial and circumstantial perspectives work as a mediating reference point for building group identity. According to Henry (1998), identities are produced circumstantially as people engage them politically with other groups to contest and negotiate.

4.2 Recognizing identity formation: The study utilizes primordial and circumstantial perspectives to understand and analyze the identity formation of the Garo ethnic community of Bangladesh. The primordial approach comprehends that ethnic identity formation depends on the socio-cultural phenomenon of an ethnic group. On the other hand, the circumstantial perspective explains ethnic identity generation by understanding ethnic attitudes or responses generated to a particular socio-economic setting or in response to a sort of marginalization. Most of the researchers conducted studies either using a primordial approach or circumstantial perspective but these two perspectives are not contradictory, but rather complementary in order to understand ethnic identity formation (Scott,1990), Garo ethnic identity is particular. According to Eriksen (2002), ethnic identities are formed through two directions; inside and outside directions of the group. They are the outcomes of self-determination by group definition to the group from the outside, they are also dynamic. According to George Herbert Mead and Charles Horton Cooley's (1934) looking glass theory, the sense of self comes through exterior social interactions and internal feelings about oneself. There are three stages of the looking-glass concept: imagining, interpreting, and creating self-concept.

According to Otto and Driessen (2000), most ethnic studies have utilized either the primordial or the circumstantial perspectives, but these two views are not however contradictory, rather it is complementary for understanding the formation of the ethnic identity. However, it ascertains that Garo's identity cannot be defined only based on a primordial view but must also be defined based on a circumstantial view as it is a complementary perspective. Seol (2008) also similarly mentioned that ethnic groups' traditional beliefs, and practices provide them a sense of authority, legitimacy, and rightness to define their identity, which need to be accounted for during the discussion of ethnic identity formation.

According to Henry (1989), people engaged politically with other groups to contest and negotiate, which produces ethnic identity. In this context, Garo's resistance against majority Bengali marginalization and negligence as Adivasi engaged them with international and national communities, particularly with the greater Christian community to contest, and negotiate for Garo rights which produce their identity. Barth (1994) argues that changes in livelihood can entail a change in ethnic identity, which is visible among the Garos due to various reasons Garos have to switch from Jhum cultivation to wet cultivation reproducing Garo's nomadic identity to a settled agricultural ethnic community.

With these identity formation discourses, here we focused on how the Garos in Bangladesh, as an ethnic community, also retain their group identity. How important is it for the Garos to retain their socio-cultural traits? that distinguish them from other cultural groups? To respond to those questions, the research allows us to see how the Garos formulate their own identity from a primordial point of view. On the other hand, the research also explores how the Garos formulate their identity in a circumstantial viewpoint, by accepting subordination as well as oppression or by attending in resistance against any socio-economic oppression by the majority Bengali people, which are also addressed here.

4.3 Literatures on Garo Identity: Most of the literature on the ethnic communities of Bangladesh dates back to the history of the Indian subcontinent. There are very few recently published literatures regarding Garo and their culture (Bleie, 2005). The publications, articles, books, and booklets available on Garos mainly focus on Garo land tenure system, religious conversion, violation of minority rights and forest degradation. On the other hand, most of the research papers, books, literary works and articles written on Garo issues are based on Indian Garos. The earliest article about the Garo was written in 1793 by an Englishman named John Eliot who was a British officer assigned by the authorities to explore the Garo Hill territories, and he conducted a study that was published in Asiatic Society research report as an 'observation on the inhabitants of the Garrow Hills (Bal, 1999).

Like some other researchers, Bal (2007) classified literature on Garos into four categories such as; administrative, missionary, ethnographic and academic studies. According to my personal experiences and perception with secondary sources on the Garo ethnic community situation, I want to divide literature on Garo into two broad categories; literature from the British colonial period and literature from post-British colonial period. The most notable literature that we find on the Garos during the British period is written by Buchanan (1807-14), Scott (1816-18), Reynolds (1849), Mills (1854), Dalton (1872), Mackenzie (1884), Avery (1884), Ayerst (1880), Esme (1885), Godwin (1873), and Allen (1905). During the British period, some other publications and essays on the Garos written by Major Playfair (1909), Carey (1919), Bose (1934), Baldwin (1934), are very significant. Churches and Missionaries have done some prominent work on Garos ethnic community, and are also the most important sources of the Garo identity literatures.

The British colonial period in the subcontinent lasted until 1947, and the Pakistani neocolonial phase ended in 1971. During this time, a few writers from Bangladesh contributed to this field of study. On the other hand, several Indian Anthropologists and sociologists, both Garo and non-Garo, have made significant contributions in this field. According to Islam (1986), after the British period, very few researches on the Garo people and their culture were undertaken in Garo living areas of Bangladesh, rather the majority of researches on Garos were concentrated in Hill Garos of Indian side (Mukherjee, 1955; Burling, 1963; Marak, 1997; Sinha, 1966; Chie Nakne, 1967; Goswami and Majumder, 1972; Marak, 1972, 2000; Majumder, 1966, 1972, 1978; Battacharjee, 1978; Kar, 1982; Ahmed and Naher, 1987; Sangma, 1981, 1985; Marak et al., 1982; Marak, 1972, 2002; Marak, 1997; Marak, 2000; Marak, 2005; Sangma, 1998).

If we look at the literary work on Garos and their culture, during the Bangladesh regime, it appears inadequate, although there are some detailed and extensive work on Garos' forest, land rights, marriage prestation, customary rules and social structure. Following the independence of Bangladesh, we find following studies pertinent on Garos such as Sattar (1971, 1975, 1978), Khaleque (1982,1983, 1984,1985,1992,1998), Qureshi (1984), Islam (1986, 1995), Nawaz (1984) Maloney (1984), Mey (1984), Jengcham (1988), Homrich, E. (1996), Burling (1963, 1997), Bal (1999, 2007), Bleie (1985,1987,2005) and so on. Other secondary sources on Garo situations in Bangladesh include the District Gazetteer, Census Report, Statistical Yearbook, Development Projects findings, donor comments, and others.

5. Findings and Discussions

5.1 Common socio-cultural practices that represent Garo identity: Traditional socio-cultural features of the Garos allow us to recognize the Garo identity issue from a primordial standpoint. In the village study, it is observed that different shared socio-cultural traits differentiated Garos from other groups and explicitly projected Garo's ethnic identity. Basically, Garo songs, language, Chinese resemblance, dress, food habits, chu, kima, Kamal, Dama, dance, history, women social position, unique inheritance and matrilineal dominance in their community contribute to present Garo identity situation. The ethnographic investigation has found the following socio-cultural practices that represent Garo identity in Bangladesh:

A'chek Katha /A'beng: Like some other ethnic communities of Bangladesh, Garos have their own language, which is widely spoken among the Garo community, and it distinguishes them from others. Garos' mother tongue is referred to as A'chek Katha/A'beng or Mandi which belongs to the Bodo group of Tibeto-Burma stock (Burling, 1997). Today, 'Mandi' speakers feel free to utilize thousands of Bangla words, and they are easily embedded in Mandi sentences (Bal,1999). Almost all the Garos can speak both Bangla and A'beng. The Garo elders recite their folktales and legends in A'beng. However, they do not have an alphabet and cannot speak A'beng without the help of the Bengali language. Although all Garos are bilingual, knowing that this is their ancestors' historic language means that it is significant to them in terms of their identity.

Chatchi, Ma'chong and Mahari (Matrilineal descent group): Membership of a Chatchi, Ma'chong and Mahari is a distinct and significant identity marker for the Garos. Garos are divided into five Chatchi groups such as Sangma, Marak, Momin, Sira, Areng. Ma'chong or Mahari is a group of people who are matrilineally connected and follow some unbreakable rules. According to Khaleque (1982), the traditional Garos used to take their mother's Ma'chong as a family name, where a group name is passed down from a mother to her daughter. Garo Ma'chong is also relevant to marriage processes, as the Ma'chong is strictly marriage exogamous. There are hundreds of Ma'chong among the Garos. Playfair (1909) mentioned that the number of Ma'chong groups is 'infinite' but he provided a list of 127 Ma'chongs which he considered to be 'best known' and are named after birds, fish, animals, plants, or minerals. Chowdhury (2007) also provided a list of 66 Ma'chong. These groups are considered stronger in Garo members' identifications. The Garo Ma'chong system assists them in portraying their identity.

Distinguished matrilineal culture and practices: In the Garo community, women's social position and contribution to their society and economy are important trademarks of their identity. In the traditional matrilineal Garo community, only women used to inherit the family property, children took their mother's Ma'chong or Mahari name, and men used to move to their father-in-law's household after marriage. Following matrilineal principles, Garo women used to lead the family and work hard in the family and economic context of the society (Sattar,1971) which are vibrant markers of Garos identity representation. According to Mrong (1999), traditional Garo women knew how to produce Chu (rice-beer) and where to gather the local ingredients, something which is unknown to Garo men that indicates Garo women's leadership position as well. Traditional Garos used to choose Nokne as the heiress daughter of the family who is responsible for watching Garo's customary rules and responsibilities, which are the significant criteria for defining 'Garo' as a distinct ethnic community.

Chu (rice-beer): Chu (rice beer) is a popular and traditional drink among the Garos. Following the ancient tradition of the Garos, drinking Chu is not only a source of recreation but is also required for the successful completion of any ceremonies and rituals. Respondents also shared that the Garos become unable to perform the marriage ceremony and rituals if they do not drink Chu. According to Mrong (1999) in a traditional marriage ceremony, Garos must entertain guests by offering Chu regardless of religious affiliations. Garos believe that both men and women must consume Chu during their festivals and marriage ceremonies. Although the use of Chu has been reduced in recent years, every Garo still respects the tradition of drinking Chu, and some of them used to drink it occasionally. Some Garo households survive by producing and selling Chu, despite the fact that drinking Chu is not seen as good by the government administration. Similarly, Christianity as well as the majority Bengali Muslims are sometimes forced to stop drinking Chu, which are mostly disobeyed by the Garos. Thus, drinking Chu is one of the remarkable markers for both the Garo men and women to represent their distinct identity.

Beliefs in Mite/Middi (Spirits): In the remote past, the Garos practiced Sangsarek religion, which is closely related to animism. Following their traditional Sangsarek religion, Garos offered amaya (worship) to the Mites/Middis (Spirits/ God/Goddess) for their satisfaction. According to Burling (1997), traditional Garo believed that rain, water, wind, crops, health, wealth and happiness to mankind, etc. are controlled by some Mites/Middis, while illness, disease, and other trouble are governed by other Mites/Middis. Sacrifices, worship, dances and offering Chu are needed to satisfy the Mites/Middis. Conversion to Christianity and living in Christian beliefs have influenced Garo's traditional way of life, but they have not abandoned their traditional beliefs, rituals and practices. Still today, Some Garos offer amaya to the Mites/Middi in their socio-cultural practices, including marriages, festivals, illness, and these practices of Garos recognize them to portray their ethnic identity.

Kamal: Among the traditional Sangsarek Garo, the priest is referred to by the word 'Kamal'. According to Khaleque (1982), the position of a Kamal is not hereditary; any male person who had committed to recall different chants and perform the rituals of worship and sacrifice could assume this position and could be related to such activities. In the traditional Garo community, the Kamal was not compensated for his services. He received no monetary or social benefits for his services; the profession was entirely voluntary, and his goal was to serve the community. In the Sangsarek Garo community, Kamal also played an important role in the recovery of any person with the illness. At the same time, as a Kamal, he was obligated to perform religious, spiritual, or cultural duties and he was also obligated to support the people. Due to religious conversion and the introduction of modern medicine, the role of Kamal and his responsibilities have been reduced in recent years; but still today, Kamal performs in the marriage rituals, act in different festivals as well as for healing the people, which allows Garos to express their ethnic identity.

Salutation (Achu/Ambi/Ansu): Garo's common addressing or salutation is Achu/Ambi/Ansu. When one Garo meets with another Garo, he or she salutes and says Achu/Ambi/Ansu as a greeting or address. When talking among themselves, Garos always use their own language and often use any of Achu/Ambi/Ansu whichever they find appropriate, such as Achu for visitors (male) older than self, Ambi for visitors (female) older than self, Ansu for visitors (irrespective of sex) younger than self. Furthermore, Garos are also accustomed to shaking hands and touching shoulders as part of their customary kinship relationships at the time of their meeting and interaction. Khaleque (1982) mentioned that Garo practices of salutation are significant for both men and women, which are sharply different from the Bengali Muslims' greetings and salutations. These addresses and salutations distinguished Garos from other ethnic groups and helped them to portray their own ethnic identity.

Distinct physical appearance of the Garo: Although there are some disagreements among the scholars, most of the experts argued that Garos physically belong to the Mongoloid group. This group dominates in the entire region of Central Asia, north Asia, and east south Asia. In addition to their South East Asian looks, according to Khaleque (1982), Garos Chinese or Mongolian relationship is supported by legends, language and a variety of other cultural features. According to Bal (1999) Garos can easily be distinguished from the Bengalis by their appearance although they look like Southeast Asian people of Thailand and/or the Philippines. Burling (1997) also mentioned that Garos were once a nomadic tribe of the Bodo group of Mongoloid people and are said to have an ancestral relationship with China. However, their Mongoloid appearance sharply differs from Bengali appearance which is a distinguishing feature of Garo identity.

Unique inheritance system: The traditional Garo community follows customary laws of inheritance, which emphasize the matrilineal system following female lines. The inheritance rules of the Garos are very different from those of neighboring communities, where men are not allowed to own or inherit any property under any circumstances. Khaleque (1982) mentioned that following traditional inheritance rules, all property of the parents, whether movable or immovable, belongs to the women. All property inherited or acquired by the husband after the marriage becomes the property of his wife. Among the traditional Garos, male children could not receive or claim any property, even if they had earned it through their own efforts. Man had only the authority to administer the property as he was always the manager of his wife's property. Traditional inheritance systems have been transforming, but Garos try to follow their age-old inheritance pattern, which is one of the most important markers of the Garo identity.

Special Dama (Drum): 'Dama' is a special musical instrument of the Garos which is used occasionally for special events. Among the traditional Garos 'Dama' has a spiritual value and was played on some very special days under the control of the Nokne. 'Dama' is a long and thin drum made of wood with having hollow inside; thickest in the center, and narrowing away at both ends. For covering both the narrow ends, animal skin, usually cow leather, is used. This 'Dama' was not allowed for everyone to use in any ordinary event, rather, only designated people and occasions were permitted to use it, as it was a great part of the Sangsarek Garo culture. Traditional Garos' religious faiths are associated with this unique musical instrument, which is still practiced among the Garos, and is a significant marker of Garo identity.

Special marriage system: Garos establish marriages through a series of steps and ceremonies. Marriage is strictly exogamous in the matrilineal Garo community, which means marriage within the same Ma'chong/ Mahari or clan is forbidden. Following this principle of exogamy, the bride and groom must be from different clans or Mahari.

According to Chowdhury (2007) in the Garo community, a Marak cannot marry another Marak, and breaking this rule is considered a sin and could be punished by the Ma'chong people. This was regarded as Ma'dong marriage, where 'Ma' means mother and 'dong' means to live with. Before conversion to Christianity, Garos mostly practiced 'capture marriage' and Thunapp'a marriage which has now been discontinued and is negligible, but traditional marriage steps and systems still have a significant influence on the contemporary Garo marriage system. Nowadays, Garos mostly follow Christian rules, but side by side, they still practice some traditional rituals in their marriage system which are important indicators of the Garo identity.

Prime festivals: Garos perform numerous festivals throughout the year, which is an important marker of their identity. Wangala, Rangchu Galla, Denbilsia, Agal Makka, or Achirokka are the most celebrated festivals among the Garos, regardless of religious transformation. Wangala is the largest of all social festivals celebrated by agriculturalist Garos, which is observed equally by rural and urban Garos. Garos from all over the world, including Bangladesh and India, celebrated the festival as colorful as possible (Zaman, 2004). The Wangala is an identical festival of the Garo culture and is best known for its distinguished colorful features.

Garo history, songs and dresses: According to the legends, the Garos migrated from Tibet to the Indian subcontinent and first settled down in what is presently known as Kuchbihar. Later, Garos moved to the inaccessible hill of Mehgaloya. Later on, they moved downhill and dispersed to the Bangladesh region. Chowdhury (2007) and some other scholars supported these claims of how the Garo settlement came to be in Bangladesh.

Garos' dance and songs are significant, having a spiritual meaning, and they believe that these are the ways of pleasing Gods or spirits. They have songs for every occasion, such as death, funerals, puberty, marriage, harvesting and so on (Sattar,1975). On the other hand, Garo songs are the means of passing values and information, such as insightful songs for showing the philosophy of human life, moral songs for showing moralities, general songs are sung in different seasons of life, but Garo songs are primarily used for attending festivals and ceremonies, which distinguishes them from others (Bal,1999).

Garos' traditional clothes are brightly colored and feature religious as well as natural symbols such as leaf, flower, eye of Gods and so on. The names of their traditional clothing are Gando, Katib, Salchak, Marang, Unpon, Riking etc., (Sattar, 1975). Garo women wear a variety of jewelry in addition to their clothes. The distinguished Garo community has its own set of sports, fun and games which help in demonstrating their identity. Hence, from a primordial perspective, the above-mentioned socio-cultural characteristics and life pattern of the Garo community represent their distinct Garo ethnic identity in Bangladesh.

5.2 Marginalization and resistance which formulate Garo identity

The study found that the Garos of Bangladesh are facing different forms of marginalization and dominance by some of the majority Bengali people. This marginalization generates Garo solidarity, integrity, and consciousness among them which allow us to understand the Garo identity from circumstantial viewpoints. The study has examined Garos relationships with the surrounding Bengali population, and how these relationships generate insights into their identity construction. Garo respondents of the study villages shared that initially the local Bengali interact with a cooperative mindset, and later in some cases, they attempt to impose social, political and economic pressures on the Garos. It is also shared that if a Garo person seeks financial assistance or a loan from a well-off local Bengali Muslim, they demand a heavy interest rate or a legal bond in exchange for the expected assistance. If the local Garos become unable to repay the debt, well-off Bengali sometimes forcibly take the Garos' land and possessions. The Garos couldn't take any action against the latter since they are minorities, and the Bengalis had strong ties with the local administration and local leaders in the majority.

During the field study period, this power domination was apparent, particularly in village marketplaces. It is frequently claimed that some of the members of the neighboring Bengali community purchase goods from a Garo-owned shop and either do not pay the bill or pay it much later. Most of the trade-related functions in the locality appear to be under the control of the Bengalis, where Garos are mostly discriminated against while buying and selling their products. There are few incidents of domestic violence and physical abuse by the majority of Bengalis in the locality. One of the respondents claimed that he lost his goat and did not get it back. Later, he came to know that some of the nearby villagers captured the goat, slaughtered it, and ate it together. There are some examples of rebuke and humiliation to the Garos by the nearby Bengali peasants.

The study also finds that it is difficult for Garos to avoid contact with the majority of Bengalis in their daily lives. On the other hand, some Bengalis who live nearby have a socio-cultural perception that the ethnic Garos are not cleansed in the sense of Islamic religion. As a result, the Garos are looked down upon by the majority Bengalis. It is also said that because of this concept of religious variation, the Bengali mostly do not take food in the Garo household and try to avoid the daily features of the Garos. However, well-off Bengali Muslims mostly maintain contact with Garos peasants in order to purchase their physical labor with lower economic incentives, and they sometimes exploit the Garos in wages.

According to the elderly respondents, sometimes the Garos try to keep them away from the Bengali people and if they mix closely with the Bengalis, they live in fear of what might happen in their lives. They recall how the Bengalis forcibly and illegally grabbed their land, drove them out of the forest, and even abused them in the past. William Dazzel (55), Garo Adivasi leader mentioned that recently the case of Garo land grabbing and physical abuse have decreased but still it occurs in the area.

The study finds few other incidents where Garos were either cheated or abused by locally inhabiting Bengali. Sometimes, local Bengali youngsters bother the Garos in their homes

and force them to prepare Chu for drinking. There are incidents of attempts to abuse the female members of Garo households. During the local government election, they have to pass a very critical time under the pressure of the different Bengali candidates. Thus, ethnic Garos have to face exploitation from the local Bengalis.

They attempted to oppose exploitations at times alone and sometimes collectively; sometimes they reported to the local authority or District Commissioner (DC) office in Tangail, with the support of educated Garos, against Bengali's oppression and sought essential cooperation from the government. Sometimes the government has responded to the Garos' claim and sometimes not.

The villagers also reported that on March 18, 2007, Chalesh Richhil, a leader of the anti-Eco Park movement at Modhupur was killed brutally, while he was in the custody of law enforcement agencies. Members of Garos community in Bangladesh protested against the murder and created an international movement against this killing. Like this one, for the last many years, the Garos have shown huge demonstrations against the government and the majority Bengali population to stop the Eco-Park project.

This description supports us in understanding the minority Garos relationships with the local majority Bengali people. Following Scott (1990), Garos socio-political and economic deprivation by local Bengalis, results in marginalization. Garos sometimes resist marginalization, which creates unity and integration among them and presents their identity as a minority group from a circumstantial perspective. Indeed, these forms of oppression have developed a sense of unity, sameness, and solidarity among the Garos, which sometimes promotes them to protest against the exploitation of local Bengalis. This form of Garo ethnic group attitude and sentiments, which arose as a result of Bengali dominance, has been exacerbated by their socio-economic alienation. Finally, from circumstantial standpoints, collective struggle and resistance against these forms of exploitation and domination assist Garos in defining their ethnic identity explicitly in Bangladesh.

6. Conclusion

This discussion briefly contextualizes Garos recent identity as an ethnic community in Bangladesh. Although Garos have gone through massive cultural transformation, they are still having some common shared socio-cultural practices. Garos are still identifiable by their tradition, language, matrilineal kinship structure, inheritance system, marriage system, livelihoods, songs, dress, food habits and other cultural practices. However, in addition to these basic links of socio-cultural practices/ features as primordial ties; their ingroup solidarity, struggle, resistance, origin, and history give us an important criterion from circumstantial viewpoints to represent their ethnic identity when engaging with the majority Bengali community.

It is well understood that the Garo sentiment, unity, sameness, and identity are built on socio-cultural practices, as well as through marginalization or oppression by the majority Bengalis people and the government. In Bangladesh, Garos are not recognized as an Adivasi ethnic group which they want, rather they are to some extent ignored by the

Bangladesh government in different ways. As a result of this ignorance, Garo organizes and connects themselves at local, national, and even international levels to safeguard their necessary rights and recognition. Garos' exclusion distinguished them from the mainstream Bengali community which also helped to formulate and represent their unity, solidarity, sentiment and distinct Garo ethnic identity.

In response to my question 'how Garo identity be promoted?' some of the respondents answered that Garo requires Bangladesh government patronization as well as they need to have their own interest and willingness to uphold our traditional culture and identity. Apart from these, respondents also shared that Garos should have control over their natural and forested resources, must have their self-determination, stronger political organization, separate ministry or development authority, constitutional recognition, appropriate social support services, written form of their traditional language, education in their own Garo language, research on Garo situation and support from different civil society groups are important to safeguard Garo identity and recognition in future. Garo identity appears to be unaffected but if these transformations continue, what will happen in the future is unresolved. More ethnographic research is required in the future to dig deeper and comprehend the issue.

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Appendex

Glossary of Local Terms and Dialects

A'chik Katha-Garo language/hill people language

A'chik- hill people/Indian Garo preferred to be called this name

Adivasi - indigenous/tribal/ethnic people

Chatchi- Garo matrilineal descent group

Chikmang-place of the dead where the departed souls take rest

Cheera- dry and crispy rice

Chu- rice beer/ Garos' traditional drink

Drama -drum

Jhum-shifting cultivation or slush and burn method of cultivation

Jungle-Forest

Kamiz- Skirt

Kamal- priest/head man

Kima-a post erected in front of the house when a person dies

Kamal- priest/ person who conduct worship

Lungi- men wearing/traditional Bengali dress

lati khela- most popular sports of the Garo

Ma'chong- matrilineal kin group/ a group of people descending from one common mother,

Mandi- human being or hilly people

Marak- matrilineal kinship group
Ma'dong- marrying own mother
Mahari- motherhood/sub-group of ma'chong
Middi- spirit/God or Goddess
Mite-spirit/God/Goddess
Nokne -Garo chief or head
Nokrom- husband of (Nokma) heiress daughter
Sangsarek-Garos traditional religious belief
Shari- women wearing/traditional Bengali dress
Upazila-sub-district
Zila- District