

## Traditions of Garo Migration

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The ancestors of the Garos inhabited a province of Tibet and are of the stock known as Tibeto-Burman which drifted gradually into Eastern India and Burma. No detail accounts could be traced on the subject of migration and origin of the Garos. According to the tradition, the place Tibet was also known as "TORUA".<sup>1</sup> The Garo people even today used to sing on the subject of migration and give different names to their original homes. Some Garo people gave the name as "A. song Tibotgiri Chiga A. piljangsani, A, song Nengabat Chiga Nengchibat," Some people called it, "A. song Nonoe Chiga Banbae" and also "A. song Naori Chiga Timbori."<sup>2</sup> So, taking into account such different names of different places, it may be observed that the Garos once occupied different places of the Country of Tibet towards its Eastern and Central parts.

It is believed by many writers that the Garos have settled there from pre-historic age. According to Garo legend, it is stated that, it was the time, "Si'na bolking kipmiting, ri'na wa'tok tek-miting" (that was the time where the women and the men still used tree barks or hand-made curved woods and finished cut bamboo culms for covering their private parts). That was also, "Wa'-ring do'pa ki'meko wal'du ra'e, ro'ong rong'machareko wal'tot tote jakkalani salsanpiti" (it was the time when the people extracted fire for their use making sparks out of the dried bamboos and crystal stones).<sup>3</sup> In course of time, Jhumming or shifting cultivation was started as the tradition of the Garos and owing to this method of cultivation, the vast and large forests have almost disappeared and that might be the reason which has not been effective for the fertility of the soil and thus produced quite inadequate food crops. Gradually the Garos thereafter spread towards south-western side, middle and the eastern parts of Tibet in search of new areas for their cultivation.<sup>4</sup>

In course of time, the Garos started off and the tribe broke up into different branches under the leadership of their respective chiefs like Jappa Jalimpa, Sukpa Bonggipa, Auk Raja, Asilik Gitel

and Raja Sirampa.

According to the Garo tradition on the subject of migration from Tibet, the Garos can be divided into three main groups :

1. A group of Garos, migrated from Tibet along the source of river Torsa and Tista towards south-westernside of Tibet under the great leadership of Jappa Jalimpa and Sukpa Bônggipa.

2. Another group of Garos who started off from Central Tibet towards south along the source of the river Brahmaputra under the leadership of Auk Raja and Asilik Gitel.

3. A group of Garos who moved towards south-eastern part of Tibet along the source of Chindwin, Salwin and Irrawady rivers under the able leadership of Raja Sirampa, Kotta Nangrepa, and Muga Dingchepa.

**Some accounts of a group of Garos who migrated from Tibet along the source of river Torsa and Tista**

According to the Garo tradition, a group of Garo ancestors originally from western and central parts of Tibet started on a voyage under the leadership of chiefs Jappa Jalimpa, Sukpa Bônggipa, Toginpa Damjangpa, Ejingpa Kusanpa, Dasengpa Asangpa, Chukangpa kumapa, Rejapa Kurengpa, Nenggilpa Nagongpa, Chongdapa Panangpa, Rekinpa Dopapa, Chisin and Kalsin.

Some of the great grand-mothers were Dipari me'chik and Nibari Tira and their daughters were Sikme and Donse, and their daughters were Hima, Dolma, Bilma, Bisolma, Ulongga and Ulonggi.<sup>5</sup>

They crossed the high mountainous regions, dense and irregular mass of hills and first entered the place of which they always made mention as, "A' song jimjim Chiga Dare Gongdingding," that is, into the Bhutan hills along the river Torsa in between the high mountains of Ghora-la and Tang-la.<sup>6</sup> At first, the Bhutanese king received them in friendly manner, but later on, being afraid of them, he would not allow them to settle down there permanently. So, they moved towards western side proceeding down the bank of the river Tista. Later on, they came to the place, known as, "Nokcholbari," (the place, Kalimpong, now under North Bengal). During the time of their stay there, the Garos jointly built a temple and worshipped together with the Bhutanese and thus lived for several years and made friendship with Bhutanese people.

The Garos, at the time of migration brought along with them from original home of Tibet many of their old traditional valuable ornaments like yak tails and different kinds of agricultural

implements as they always mentioned like 'Janggil ma'rori', 'Ki'me matjanggi', "Kawa", "Silcha", 'Gaanti," "Susuak", and "Gitchi bangje," and many others.<sup>7</sup> Some of the original instruments still can be seen in the interior Garo villages specially with the Ganna Nokmas. (Ganna Nokma is a rich man who has observed Ganna Ceremony.)

The Garos then moved towards the south and occupied a place called, "A'song Patari Chiga Su'unchi", possibly the present Cooch Behar. Some writers have mentioned that the Garos settled over Cooch Behar for about four hundred years.<sup>8</sup>

The Garos gradually increased in number and it is established that later on they occupied more areas. The tribe became strong and prominent. They were quite wellknown for the use of shield, double-egged swords, bows and arrows. Before the coming of the Garos probably this land was dominated by other tribes like Koch and Kacharis and they were also probably sprung from the great Bodo stock to which the Garos belong. The Koch and Kachari kings, being afraid of the Garos drove them from the place. The Garos then moved towards Dhubri where reigned the king Dhobani or Neta Dhubini.<sup>9</sup> The king first received the Garos in friendly terms. But the Garos could not mix up with them and due to mis-understanding of traditional Garo culture, food and religious beliefs, the king would not like them to settle there permanently. Thence, these people moved towards "Rangamati", now under Rangpur district.

The land was fertile and the Garos economically became prosperous. The Garos still remember of this place and used to sing on the subject of migration and thus expressed the place Rangamati as, "Silchi Ringreram Gitol Tingtotram or Do'katchini Nangroram Mongma Dang Toram Matchu Kinma Onram" (that is the place a granary of agricultural crops and store house of wealth and property, fruit garden of most precious stones, sanctuary of wild elephants, vast cattle farm and the place which was full of rich vegetation).

The Garo areas at Rangamati were thickly populated and there after they were separated into two groups in search of a new land.<sup>10</sup> In such a way, the two great Garo grand-mothers, Nambae and Simbae were separated from each other in that place.

Simbae was elder and the younger one, Nambae started off eastwards. But, Simbae, the great grand-mother of the Garos who was still at Rangamati later on became the grand-mother of Bamon Racha Sojon Gitel or the Kacharis.<sup>11</sup> They were of Garo origin

but thereafter all were converted into Hinduism and now they are known as separate tribe of plains in the Goalpara district.

Some years after all the grand-children of the Garo chiefs, Jappa Jalimpa and Sukpa Bonggipa came with their great grandmother, Nambae upto the place, "Megongma Kolatchi Udare jakbri." (A place where thirty number of growing bauhinia malabarica trees and growing of Sterculia villosa at tender stage bearing only four leaves). This was a hill near Jogigopa now known as Chikonchola hill under Goalpara district. As per statement of Binod Basumatary of Jugigopa during my last visit on 27th May, 1983, the surrounding hills of Jugigopa like Tukrabanda, Sonamuki, Khokorpur, Chandodenga once belonged to the Garos.

The Garos occupied the place "A'song Saora Chiga Spora" (The place identified with Jugigopa on the right bank of Brahmaputra river, north-westernside, of Goalpara town). As per Garo tradition on the subject of migration, two persons, Saora was killed by a tiger and Spora was lost under water. Since then, this place was known as "A'song Saora, Chiga Spora".<sup>12</sup> Major A. Playfair further stated in his book, "The Garos" page 9, that the Chief of this place was both powerful and cruel. He was attracted by a beauty of Garo maiden, Jugesilche, the daughter of Kangre-jingro and endeavoured to carry her off by force. To defeat his end, her fellow countrymen hid her in a cave at this place. Now, "Jugesilche" is the name of a Goro maiden, "Gopa" means hide in a cave. So, from that time onward, the name of this place is known as, "Jugigopa."

The chief of that place, Raja Thobani or Dhubini became hostile to the Garos. So, the Garos again left this place, and started off along the up bank of the river Brahmaputra and occupied the place, "Raja Dum Pattal Rori Ohom Banggal" (A place near the Bhutan hills). This place belonged to Jachingpa, Kuchokpa, Rejimpa, Bikapa, Chiokpa, Ruangpa and Chikapa and probably they belonged to the Bhutias.<sup>13</sup>

The Garos lived there for several years and made friendship with the people of that place. They jointly constructed a temple and worshiped their god Somaria together. The king of that place, Indro Jalimpa took a Garo maiden as a wife. As per tradition, they used to worship god once in a year with high sacrificial offering. One day while worshipping god, Kuchokpa Mejimpa pretended to be friends with some of the Garos and killed them by poisoning their food. For such reason, the Garos again started fighting against them. Firstly they were badly defeated by the Garos

and thus they again made friendship but lasted only for some years.

Later on, the Garos came to know that they would fight again with the help of Raja Thobani or Neta Dhubini and other neighbouring kings of Cooch Behar. So, immediately they left that place and arrived at the place of Rori Sadepa Nokma Chigatpa just opposite bank of the river Brahmaputra at the place known as Dolguma under Goalpara district.

The Garos decided to cross the Brahmaputra river so as to start their permanent settlement somewhere on the other bank. Anyhow, they could not find any solution so as to cross the big river. Lastly, they came to the agreed solution that Nokma Chigatpa would allow them to collect three hundred plantain stems provided the Garos are willing to give him a Garo maiden to be his wife. The Garos made rafts with plantain stems and crossed the river easily on them. Accordingly, the Garos handed over a Garo maiden named Dimre Me'chik to Nokma Chigatpa who was the daughter of Megam Nongal.

They crossed the Brahmaputra river on rafts of plantain stems and all crossed over to the other bank with a great struggle for consecutively seven days and seven nights. The very position at which they crossed the Brahmaputra river was near Dolguma, a little up to the joint river mouths of Dudnoi and Krishnai in Goalpara district. They made temporary structures on the other bank on a vast plain for their shelter.

The Garos at the time were taking their mid-day meal when their enemies, Raja Thobani or Dhubini and Raja Behari came upon them with their people, but though it was a surprise to them, the Garos fought with desperate courage and with grand-success, they were free to proceed on their further journey without any more obstructions. A place called "Garo Mari" or to the Garos, "Topla Banda Misal Kawa," in Goalpara district is said to be where they made their stand. This place is known by the Garos as "Nengabat Nengchibat."<sup>14</sup>

The Garos as per their tradition lived there for a short period, that is, for only seven days. After this, being afraid of the neighbouring other tribes the Garos proceeded up the left bank of the Brahmaputra river and arrived to the kingdom of Assamese king and occupied the place which was known as, "Doljikjojikjo Gongmejekmejek" or "Raitara Chaitara". A neighbouring chief, Arambit, however, started again many troubles to the Garos. So, again from this place they started off and occupied the new place known as "Saljong Patra Rongdogachol," that is present Kamakhya in

Kamrup district. This place was still important where they settled for more than one hundred years and even to-day the Garos remember their songs on the subject of their migration about the place and sing like,

"A'song Kamekhya,  
Chiga Chironggi.  
Gantini ring'ringram A'song,  
Chironggini jin'jinram Chiga."<sup>5</sup>

(Kamekhya ! a place, where ever singing of living crickets and the very accumulation of chironggi or a kind of fish under water). During their stay at Kamekhya, the Garos first started a market and the place was known as, "Gua-Ate," that may be the reason now why this place is called "Gauhati". Not long after, Assamese king, Lilasingh gradually suppressed the Garos and made them into slaves. So, the Garos left this place again and they took up their residence at "Bagh Mela Pahar", a hill about five miles south-east of Boko near Kinangaon village in Kamrup district. This place was known by the Garos as "Rongatotturi Samegaru" or "Dagal Dileng Pattal Nangrepani Dongram". This hill was unfortunately also the abode of a number of demons, that was the "Matcha Maru" or Tiger men, and for fear of their depredations, the Garos were obliged to be always under arms, and to work, as the legend puts it, "With sword and shield in one hand and the implement in the other."<sup>6</sup>

At that time, the Garos again had a market place near Boko under Kamrup district and the people attended the market sometimes with the deities. From that place Rongtoturi, the Garos moved again towards south-western side and occupied a place called, "Matia Panchia Sangkati Wakmetom" (the place is now about six miles from the village Singera under Kamrup district). After this place, some prominent Garo leaders Sau Basanpa, Ringgat Dajepa and Kotta Nangrepa started off with their people and occupied the new place known, as "Rongmik Seram Tangka Datram" or "A'song Budalong Chiga Benagong" which is also known as "Matchuki Galdam or Metongbol A'bri" (The high hills under Garo Hills bordering the Goalpara district).<sup>7</sup>

The other Garo Chief, Muga Dingchepa with his people went to the other place and made their settlement at "A'song Jengjal Agal Chiga Dum Pattal or Botolram Bri Singsoqram A'ding." (Near the source of the river Ildek under Garo Hills district). The other three Garo chiefs, Usengpa, Daepa, Jarongpa with another

Garos came to the place known as "Sambol Medikhu, Chiga Bineng Bindeng" (the place near Dakaidol under Goalpara district). Later on, the Garos settled in a place known, as "Ola Olding Thebrong Changsim," which is now known as "Tukeswar hill" situated about three miles west of Krishnai, in Goalpara district. During their stay here, the king Behari and Raja Bijni came upon them and attacked again the Garos. But, from the other group of the Garos under the able leadership of grand-children of Raja Sirampa, Kotta Nangrepa and Muga Dingchepa, with their people helped them and fought courageously and thereby the king Behari and Raja Bijni were badly defeated and they never attacked again.

The most beautiful and intelligent Garo maidens, Ola Olding and Giting Mune and Sane Tira were born at this place. They also took part in the preparation of food and water to drink during the time of fighting with the enemies. The other girls, namely Nangre, Dinge, Bange, Bangje, Bangre and many others came and helped them to their best possible way. According to the Garos, they were the daughters of Ruga, Kotchu and Megam who were from the same link and relationship with the Garos right from the time of their migration from Tibet. Giting Mune later on took her husband named Silding and the husband of Bange was Hirasingh. The daughter of Giting Mune was Mening and daughter of Bange was Meje Rani. They were all handsome and graceful. They also took their husbands, Mening to Asra Dingsra and Meje Rani to Radopa. Their daughters were Aje Gilje and Dawe Change. Radingga Sadingga was their maternal uncle.<sup>18</sup>

The Garos at the place, Tukeswar and in the neighbouring places appear to have become rich and prosperous and economically sound. Accordingly a Garo kingdom was established where the first reigning prince was Abrasen. He had his palace and capital at "Sambol A'ding," a detached hill not far from the village of Dakaittol in the Perganah of Habraghat, to which he is said to have given his name. About this time, perhaps dissension appears to have sprung up among the Garos and some of these Garos set out their travels again and entered the hills now known as Garo Hills districts. The Garos widely spread and occupied the plains and some foot hills of Garo Hills districts. These groups of Garos are mostly known as "A'wes" and "Chisaks".<sup>19</sup>

## References

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10. Dewansing Rongmuthu, *Apasong Agana*. P.224.
11. *Ibid.*; P. 225.
12. *Ibid.*, P. 226, Vide also Playfair, *The Garos*, P.9.
13. Dewansing Rongmuthu, *Apasong Agana*, P. 225.
14. *Ibid.*, P. 227, A. Playfair, *The Garos*, P. 9.
15. *Ibid.*, P. 234.
16. A. Playfair, *The Garos*, P.10.
17. Dewansing Rongmuthu, *Apasong Agana*, P. 219.
18. *Ibid.*, Pp. 236-238.
19. A. Playfair, *The Garos*, P. 10.