

Kinship Words Formed due to the Marriage in the Garo and Rabha Societies: A Comparative Study

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ABSTRACT

Garo and Rabhas are two ethnic groups of Mongolian tribe that have been living in the North Eastern states of India. Garo and Rabha are two languages that these two ethnic groups used respectively. These are the two languages of Tibeto-Burman language family. Tibeto-Burman, which is a section of the Indo-European Language family, also regarded as the second largest language family of the world after Indo-European Family. Apart from Meghalaya, the people of these two tribes inhabited in the various districts of Assam. Normally the Garo people can be traced at Meghalaya (popularly known as Garo Hills) and the neighboring areas of Assam. The Rabha people generally live in Goalpara of West Assam or Lower Assam, Kochbehar of West Bengal, Garo Hills of Meghalaya and some other districts. Both of the tribes have a unique marriage system known as 'Cross Cousin Marriage System' in which a boy enjoys the liberty to marry the daughter of his aunt or uncle. Moreover the Garo society itself follows the matriarchal system. Hence, it can be said that though both of the ethnic groups use the languages of the same origin, but they own two idiosyncratic social systems. As both the societies follow the Cross Cousin Marriage System, so variety in the formation and application of the kinship words can be spotted which are formed due to the marriage.

In this proposed research paper, the kinship words which are formed as a result of marriage between the two tribes and their applications will be discussed.

Key Words- Kinship Words, Matriarchal, Customary Law, Cross Marriage System, Matrilineal, Uxorilocal residence.

1.01 Introduction

Garo and Rabhas are two ethnic groups of Mongolian tribe that have been living in the North Eastern states of India. Garo and Rabha are two languages that these two ethnic groups used respectively. These are the two languages of Tibeto-Burman language family. Tibeto-Burman, which is a section of the Indo-European Language family, also regarded as the second largest language family of the world after Indo-European Family. Apart from Meghalaya, the people of these two tribes inhabited in the various districts of Assam. Normally the Garo people can be traced at Meghalaya (popularly known as Garo Hills) and the neighboring areas of Assam. The Rabha people generally live in Goalpara of West Assam or Lower Assam, Kochbehar of West Bengal, Garo Hills of Meghalaya and some other districts. Both of the tribes have a unique marriage system known as 'Cross Cousin Marriage System' in which a boy enjoys the liberty to marry the daughter of his aunt or uncle. Moreover the Garo society itself follows the matriarchal system. Hence, it can be said that though both of the ethnic groups use the languages of the same origin, but they own two idiosyncratic social systems. As both the societies follow the Cross Cousin Marriage System, so variety in the formation and application of the kinship words can be spotted which are formed due to the marriage.

The kinship words are those words which are used in a society to denote the relation between its members. By analyzing the use of these words, the structure of any society of the customs of any tribe can be understood. For instance- idea of social control over the marriage, the separate relationships exist between the people, the cultural and ethnic norms of a society etc. can be acquired. Each and every inhabitant of a society has separate background. For example- the relationships are build on the basis of various aspects like caste, family, member, occupation, age, resident of the same place, sex etc. It means the kinship words are formed based the kinship system prevailed in a society between its dwellers. The cultural norms of society can be grasped by dissecting the kinship words used in that very society. As in this research paper, the kinship words used in the societies of Garo and rabha tribe formed due to the wedding knot will be discussed, hence the wedding system and the social structure will also come into focus.

1.02 Introduction of the Garo Tribe and the Kinship Words Used in Their Society due to the Wedding Knot :

Anthropologically, Garo, which lives in the state of Meghalaya of North Eastern region of India, is one of the tribes of Mongolian community. The language used by them is also known as Garo language. They introduce themselves as ‘A.Chik Mande’ which means ‘the people of hill’. The other Garo speakers call their own language as Garo. Though the Garo people are mainly found in the state of Meghalaya, but at present various parts of Assam are also recognized as their domicile. According to the census report of 2001, the total population of the Garo people in Assam is 1,44,767 (Asomor Bhasa,183). Garo is a language belongs to the Tibeto-Burman Language Group which is a section of the world’s second largest language family Sino Tibetan Language Family.

The social system is divided into two types based on the preference of the male and female. For example –

- a) Male dominated or patriarchal social system
- b) Female dominated or matriarchal social system

In the patriarchal social system, the male receives preferences in each and every situation and the head of the family enjoys all property rights. On the other hand, in the matriarchal society the females enjoy all kinds of preferences and all the property rights remain with them. The property rights shifts to the daughter after the death her mother. In a matriarchal society three characteristics can be identified. These are-

- a) Matrilineal interitance
- b) Matrilineal descent
- c) Uxorilocal residence (Mozumdar, 82)

These three characteristics are available in the Garo society. Only the Garo and the Khasi societies of the North Eastern India have all these three characteristics. According to these characteristics, in the Garo society the lineage is calculated from the mother’s end. It means the successors’ clan is determined by that of their mothers’. Like that the daughters receive all the property rights from their mothers. In fact, though in the Garo society women receive more preferences, but they never reign or dominate the society or their position is not that much high from their counterparts. Hence, Dr. Bimal Mazumdar has rightly mentioned that, “Garos are not matriarchal, their society is the reflection of Matrilineal system” (Mazumdar, 43). In the Garo society, a boy enjoys the liberty to marry the daughter of his aunt or uncle or vice versa (cross cousin marriage system). That is why variation can be seen in the formation of the kinship words in the Garo language comparing to other languages. Especially, peculiar characteristics are found in the formation and application of those particular kinship words, which are formed due to the wedding knot.

1.03 Kinship words used in the Garo society in relation to the marriage system, which are applicable with both male and female :

Garo	English	Address	Reference
Obithe (masculine)	Father-in-law	Father	Noksame
Niothang (Feminine)	Mother-in-law	Mother	Noksame
Jongchari (masculine)	Brother-in-law	calling out by the name	Jongchari
Nochari (feminine)	Sister-in-law	calling out by the name	Nochari

1.04 Kinship words used in the Garo society in relation to the marriage system, which are applicable with the male :

Garo	English	Address	Reference
Jik (feminine)	wife	calling out by the name/ by adding the kinship word 'Ma' with the name of the first child	Jik
Jiknokma (feminine)	Main wife	calling out by the name/ by adding the kinship word 'Ma' with the name of the first child	Jiknokma
Jikgite (feminine)	2 nd number wife	calling out by the name/ by adding the kinship word 'Ma' with the name of the first child	Jiknokma
Ondap (feminine)	3 rd number wife	calling out by the name/ by adding the kinship word 'Ma' with the name of the first child	ondap
Dokdap (feminine)	4 th number wife	calling out by the name/ by adding the kinship word 'Ma' with the name of the first child	dokdap

Onjapa (feminine)	5 th number wife	calling out by the name/ by adding the kinship word 'Ma' with the name of the first child	onjapa
Jikonkhol (feminine)	6 th number wife/ disregarded wife	calling out by the name/ by adding the kinship word 'Ma' with the name of the first child	Jiknokhol
Jiksona (feminine)	7 th number wife most lovable wife	calling out by the name/ by adding the kinship word 'Ma' with the name of the first child	Jiksona
Onsonga (feminine)	wife accepted after the death of the wife	calling out by the name/ by adding the kinship word 'Ma' with the name of the first child	Ongsonga
Boning (feminine)	the wife's elder sister/ brother-in-sister	Abi	Boning
Chadu (masculine)	the husband of wife's elder sister/ brother-in-law	Chadu	Chadu
Jongchari (masculine)	brother-in-law	Jojong/ calling out by the name	Jongchari
Nochari (feminine)	sister-in-law	Nonong/ calling out by the name	Nochari

1.05 Kinship words used in the Garo society in relation to the marriage system, which are applicable with the female :

Garó	English	Address	Reference
Che (masculine)	Husband	by adding the bound morpheme 'fa' (father) with the name of The child	Che
Gume (masculine)	elder brother of the husband	Ada (elder brother)	Gume
Jengchari (masculine)	husband's younger brother	Jojong/ calling out by the name	Jongchari
Nochari (feminine)	husband's younger sister/ Younger brother's wife	Nonong/ calling out by the name Nonong/ calling out by the name	Nochari Nochari
Gume (masculine)	husband's elder brother/ husband's elder sister's Husband	Ada/Gume	Gume
Cheburung (masculine)	illegal husband	_____	_____

2.00 Rabha tribe, society and the kinship words formed due to the marriage

2.01 A brief introduction of the Rabha tribe :

Rabha is one of the prominent tribes lives in Assam, a state of the North Eastern region of India. Rabha is the language which is used by this tribe. This language belongs to the Tibeto-Burman language group which is a leading section of the second largest language family of the world i.e. Sino-Tibetan Language Family. Rabha language includes three dialects which are Rongdani, Maytori and Kocha. The Rabha speakers generally live in Goalpara district of Assam. Like the other languages, the Rabha also has different forms in different region. For example- the Rabhhas of Goalpara district speak Rongdani dialect, the Rabhas of Jalpaiguri of West Bengal speak Kocha dialect and the Rabhas of Garo Hills of Meghalaya speak both Maytori and Kocha. In this discussion, only the Rongdani dialect will be taken into consideration. According to the census of 2001, there are 1,30,875 Rabha people who live in the state of Assam. Among them, 66,053 are males and 68,822 are females.

Like the Garo society, the Rabha society too ha cross cousin marriage system where a boy enjoys the liberty to marry the daughter of his aunt or uncle and vice versa. But Rabha does not have matrilineal social system like that of

Garó. That is why, despite having the same marriage system, the kinship words of the Rabha people formed due to the marriage are differ from that of Garó.

2.02 Kinship words used in the Rabha society in relation to the marriage system, which are applicable with both male and female :

Rbha	English	Address	Reference
Nebramusa (masculine)	father-in-law	father/uncle	nebramusa
Nebramisa (feminine)	mother-in-law	mother/aunty	nebramusa

2.03 Kinship words used in the Rabha society in relation to the marriage system, which are applicable with the male:

Rabha	English	Address	Reference
Michik (feminine)	wife	mandai/jibra	michik
Michik (feminine)	1 st wife	mandai/jibra	michik sungkayo
Michik mulokayo (feminine)	2 nd wife	mandai/jibra	michik mulokayo
Anang (masculine)	the elder brother of wife	Da	Anang
Nusibra (masculine)	younger brother of wife/brother-in-law	Mo/calling out by the name/buji	nusibra
Khusibra (feminine)	younger sister of wife/ sister-in-law	khusibratang/ calling out by the name	khusibra
Sadu (masculine)	elder brother of wife/ brother-in-law	Dada/sadu	sadu
Anang	wife's elder sister	bibi	Anang (feminine)
Biribra (feminine)	wife's elder brothers wife	bibi	biribra

Gimi/goumi (masculine)	wife's elder sister's husband	da/gimi/goumi	gimi/goumi
Chadu (masculine)	wife's younger sister's husband	chadu/ calling out by the name	chadu
Jini (feminine)	wife's younger brother's wife	jinang	747inni

2.03 Kinship words used in the Rabha society in relation to the marriage system, which are applicable with the female :

Rabha	English	Address	Reference
Imba (masculine)	husband	banday/babra	imba
Fobra (masculine)	elder brother of husband	baba/dada	fobra
Jongkhobra (masculine)	younger brother of husband	calling out by the name	jongkhobra
Nounong (feminine)	younger sister of husband	mo/ calling out by the name	nounong
Anang (feminine)	elder sister of husband	bibi	anang
Jaji (feminine)	husband's elder brother's wife	bibi	jaji
Dada	husband's elder sister's	dada	dada (masculine) husband
Boning/Fojong Sister's husband	husband's younger name	calling out by the	Boning/fojong
Bai bugila/ Bai buribra	husband's younger brother's wife	mo/namkarhi	Bai bugila, bai buribra

3.00 A comparison between the kinship words of Garo and Rabha which are used due to the wedding knot :

Both the Garo and the Rabha society follow cross cousin marriage system. Because of that reason the words that denote father-in-law or mother-in-law have never been used despite their existence. Assamese too has this characteristic. In fact, both 'father-in-law' or 'mother-in-law' are actually the indicators of relationship; separate kinship words are used while addressing. In the Garo language 'Obithe'(father-in-law) is addressed as mama/afa and 'Niothang'(mother-in-law) is addressed as mani/ama. Like that, in the Rabha language 'Nebramisa' (father-in-law) is addressed as mama/baba and 'Nebramisa' (mother-in-law) is addressed as mani or aya.

In the Garo language, by uttering the word mani, both the sisters of father and the wife of the uncle are addressed. On the other hand, the word 'mokha' is used to indicate the husband of the aunt or the elder brother or the sister of mother. In the Rabha language too same kind of relationships are meant with these kinship words.

In the Garo society, the clan plays a significant role during marriage and marriage between the ideal clan is prohibited. This norms is strictly obeyed in the Garo society. As the Garo society is matriarchal, so after marriage the groom has to live rest of his life in the bride's residence. Because of this, after marriage the groom has to sacrifice his relationship with the members his clan. He usually forms a close relationship with the members of his wife's clan. The bride too has maintaining a feeble relationship with the members of her husband's clan and the groom has to maintain a close bond with his wife's clan. Hence, it can be said that in the Garo society, some kinship words, formed due to the marriage, do not have any existence.

The married girl does not have any special word to indicate some relationships like jongchari(brother-in-law), nochari(sister-in-law), abi(the wife of the husband's elder brother), nono(the wife of the husband's younger brother). However, kinship words like jongchari-nochari(brother-in-law/sister-in-law) are used in case of groom. In the Garo language jongchari and nochari words are formed by adding the suffix '-chari' with 'jong' (brother) and 'no'(sister). Here the suffix '-chari' indicates the relationship that takes place between different clans. But these kinship words are the indicators of relationship. During the time of addressing, they reach them by using their names.

On the other hand, in Rabha society also the clan plays a vital role during marriage. Though, like the Garos, the Rabhas do not have matrilineal social system and the Groom does not have to live with his wife's residence, hence, the husband and the wife both maintain a close relationship with the members of the opposite clans. Because of this reason, kinship words like nuchibra (brother in law), khuchibra (sister-in-law), jinni (wife's younger brother's wife), jonkhobra (younger brother of husband), nounong (younger sister of husband) etc. are used by the groom. Nuchibra(reference)-nuchibrang(address), jinni(reference), jinang(reference), jonkhobra(calling out by the name), nounong (calling out by the name) etc. are being used.

In the Rabha society, the parents of the bride and the groom address each other as 'bioi' and 'bioini'. However, in their society no specific word exists through which they can address each other. The reason behind this is the tradition of their society, which demands the groom to live rest of his life in the bride's residence. That is why, the intimacy between the families of the bride and groom weakens after the marriage. Hence, uses of such kinship words are rare or sometimes it is hard to find any.

In the Garo society, male can legally marry more than one girl. According to the various norms of the marriage, a male or boy can also accept more than one girl as his wife at the same time. Even he can marry his mother-in-law after the death of his father-in-law. He can also legally accepts his mother, daughter, elder and younger sister or other girls of the ideal clan as his wife. Because of this reason, separate kinship words are used in the Garo society in order to denote seven different wives. For example-

Jik(wife) + Mongma(chief) = Jikmongma (1st or main wife)

Jik(wife) + Gite < Gital (new one) = Jikgite (2nd wife)

On Dap (3rd wife)

Dok Dap (4th wife)

Onsapa(5th wife)

Jik(wife) + Nokol (copy) = Jiknokol (6th wife)

Jik (wife) + Jona (youngest) = Jiksona (7th wife)

On the other hand, Rabha society too follows polygamy system. Though Rabha society is not a matrilineal society and the norms and the customs are not as diverse as the Garo society, therefore, unlike the Garo, Rabha has only a few kinship words to indicate two wives. For example-

Michik (wife)

Michik sungkay (1st wife)

MIchik mulkay (2nd wife)

Conclusion :

In the conclusion we can say that anthropologically the Garos and the Rabhas are mongoloid. Both of these tribes have cross cousin relationship system. As the Garo society has diversities in the marriage system than the Rabha society, so the Garo society owns more varied kinship words than their counterpart. Like Assamese, in the Rabha society also has the use of kinship words like 'bioi' and 'bioini' to indicate the parents of the bride and the groom each other. Garo language does not have the use of such kinship words. In both languages the words 'mani' and 'mama' are used to address the sister of father/the brothers of mother and the husband of father's sister/brothers of mother respectively. These words are also used to address the father-in-laws and mother in laws in both languages. Moreover, these words are also used to address and in reference. By evaluating the kinship words of the both aforesaid languages formed due to the marriage system, we can draw the conclusion that comparatively the Garo language owns more such kind of kinship words than Rabha. Whereas on one hand, Garo language has more reference kinship words, on the other hand the number of address kinship words that Rabha language possesses is higher.

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