

# “Socio-cultural changes of the Garo’s in Meghalaya”

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**Abstract:** *The Garo is known as the one of the most dominating tribes of Meghalaya. They are really very rich and well-known for their beautiful and traditional rich culture. Basically, maximum Garos accept Christianity as their religion and it has a deep impact in its social and cultural changes among the Garos. Under the rule of British everything changes in Garos like fooding, dressing, day to day life styles which is the influence at the western culture. Matrilineal system dominates in the society where daystars are the main to avail the right of the property in the families. But yet there are some major problems like early marriage, excessive drinking wine, smoking biri, cigarate which still the society have to reform for its development.*

**Keywords:** *Meghalaya, Garo, Christianity.*

## 1. Introduction:

Meghalaya, a member state of the seven sister’s state of North-Eastern region emerged as a full-fledged state on the 21<sup>st</sup> January, 1972. Consisting of seven districts like East khasi hills, Jayantia hills, Ri-bhoi, east Garo hills, South Garo hills, West khasi hills and West Garo hills it covers approximate 22, 429sq. km geographical area. It is a state having 23, 06, 69 total population. Specially, the South Garo hills is the main study point for the researchers and have enough scope and advantages, for research persons. Baghmara which is the district head-quarter of south Garo hills located on the indo-Bangladesh border created on the 18<sup>th</sup> of june 1992. The Baghmara district have total four community and rural development blocks namely Baghmara, Chockpot, Gasuapara and Rongra development block with the total geographical area of 1887sq.kms. according to 2001 census, it has merely 1,00,980 members of populations. Though there are different tribes like Benglai, Behari, Hajong, Nepali, Koch, Banai, Dalu and few Muslims only Garo dominates in this region. But it has mites to go in its development in its transportation, health care, water supply, proper educational facilities and many more.

## 2. Origin of the Garo tribe:

Though it is said that very little is known about the origin of the Garo tribe, it is also supposed that they are the part of Tibeto-Barnman race of the Tibeto-chines family. Originally, Garos are from Tibet-but because if some reasons they migrated from Tibet. As they had not permanent residence they used to travel from a place to another for their settlement. But later Garo tribe has divided into some branches. Abong Noga led a group of the Garo people is the either north-east region for their settlement. There are enough scope and privileged for the researchers to discuss the social and cultural organizations of the Garo people. Various kinds of socio-religious ceremonies are performed among the Garos. As a tribe the Garos are practically involved with cultivation which is reflected in their festivals, 1) the first religious ceremony related with the agriculture is known as Oyata Amua. In this ceremony a man used to cut the jungle of the jhum field, 2) secondly, the Den Bilsia, a festival which is generally celebrated to mark the completion of clearing jungle of a new jhum field, 3) A jhum burning ceremony known as Asiroka which is also known as Galmak Amua, 4) A scarifies ceremony known as Adal Amua which is performed after the ceremony of Asiroka is over. 5) The ceremony which is called Ajakra Sua performs before wedding, 6) mother God the Rokime is called by Amua, 7) one of the important festival of the Garo is Wangala performed after harvesting the paddy, 8) Ringsaldonga festival is performed after one day when Wangala is finished. Thus different types of religious ceremonies are performed among the Garo people. The Garo society is women centered where the women are regarded as the owner of the properties. Two kinds of marriage are celebrated in the Garo society.

## 3. History and social background of the Garos:

Normally two chiefs Jappa-Jalinpa and the Sukpa-Bongipa began their exodus from Torua in Tibet which is a part of the North-Eastern province of China. But gradually, it is decided into separate branches. Very significant named Abong-Naga led a party from place to place until he reached at Nokrekhill, the highest peak of Tura range.

The social background of the Garo hills is very backward. Though the leaders had their upper hands to use government powers for its all round development in the fields of socio-economic, culture, education, administrative and in its infrastructure. Agriculture is supposed as the main support of the people of Garo hills. But the practice of clan ownership at land system stands as a main problem among the cultivators.

Weaving and sericulture are the most important vocations to improve the economic life of the Gars. Besides, forming of poultry, piggery, duckery, goats have enough scopes in this area. But no industrial development occurs in Garo hills.

The traditional market known as ‘bazar’ in Garo hills perform well-economic benefits to the inhabitants of the Garo hills.

Absence of railroads facilities, roads communications served well transportation is the Garo hills.

#### 4. Food items:

Rice is the main food of the Garo. But they are fond of many other jungle foods. Besides they eat mild, masize, jobs tears etc. one of the favourite food item of the Garo people is Nakam. They are also fond of drinking of liquor, smoking and chewing of betel-nut which are the very common habits adopted by the majority of the Garos. But these bad habits destroyed lots of their income and properties and welcome some deadly diseases to their life.

#### 5. Dresses:

Gando is the main garments of the Garos which is a cloth about six inches wide and seven feet long. They used to wear turban on their hand. Both the men and women garments are very scanty. Women wear a cloth about 18 inches long and 14 inches broad which is known as 'Reking'. But now a day's Dakmanda become popular as a traditional dress among the Garos.

#### 6. Tradition:

The Garo is one of the most dominating tribe of the state of Meghalaya who occupied 30 percent of the total population. They have their own traditional administrative known as Nokmship which are decided into five types- the Chalang Nokma, the Gamini Nokma, the Gana Nokma, the Miteni Nokma and the Aking Nokma. Nokma is the supreme authority of the village who maintain the law and order of the society. He takes the responsibility and initiative to solve all kinds of problems of the village. In the Garo hills, the institution of Nokmship is known as one the oldest settlement. Among all the five types of Nokma, Aking is known as most important and influential in the society.

#### 7. Village areas:

There are village councils in the Garo hills, an institution which influences in the society. But no detail information is found regarding village council before the arrival of the British. The commissioner, John Elliot, mention in 1788. They used to gather in their traditional dress to settle something. They bit in circle and keep men of the families assembled with the Nokma in a council to settle their problems for the cause the gathered in this way.

#### 8. Borders:

The Garo hill is situated nearby Koch Bihar, west Bengal and kamrup district of Assam. From different sources it is known that many Garo kings rolled in the Garo hills independently. But the Mughals were very intelligent and some soft policies they adopted towards the Garos. Raja Rahunath who extended his boundary upto the north-eastern border. Raja Ram Sing being an Ahom married a Muslim noble's daughter and embraced Islam religion taking new his new name (Abd-1 Rahman). When Mir Jumla occupied Kamrupa he tried to maintain friendly relationship with the Mughal. Mughal and Garos developed matrimonial relationship during the region of Mir Jumla. Through there is a friendly relationship between Mughals and Garos, maximum of the Garo strongly opposed the presence of the Mughal is their region. There was always a conflict between the Mughals and the Garos regarding this problem.

#### 9. Conclusion:

By the influence of the Mughals and the British there had been a changes in social, cultural, political and economical factors of the Garo society. These changes are distinct in respect of the habits of living styles, dress, food habit, singing and dancing etc. though there was a conflict between the British and the Garos, finally the Garos accepted the foreign authorities in their hills.

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