

CHAPTER-I

INTRODUCTION

India is a vast country. It is vast in terms of its size and the total number of people inhabiting in it. In terms of its population, it is the second largest country in the world. In terms of area, it is the seventh largest country in the world. India is constituted by a cluster of villages and more than 70% of the total population of India live in the villages. The life of the people of these villages is very simple and is regulated by their traditions, religious and customary practices. These villages enjoy freedom and rule upon themselves, by themselves and for themselves through their popularly elected leaders by a consensus opinion.

India, being a country of myriad villages, the study of the life of the people, the village administration and the self governing institutions forms a fascinating chapter. There are groups of tribal people inhabiting in different regions and localities whose customs, traditions, languages, religious and cultural life, social and political institutions which have unique characteristics of their own. In spite of all these diversities, people live and share a close knitted life and have been trying to foster common social and cultural values throughout the ages.

Self-governing villages have been part and parcel of rural Indian socio-political life since ancient times. *Panchayat* system as self-governing village council, in one form or the other, existed in most part of rural India long before the British arrived in this country. Sir Charles Metcalf, the Provisional Governor General of India (1835-36) even described them as ‘little republics’; a little state independent of any external authority. His remark might be a little exaggeration; but it was certainly near the truth if we think of the village communities in the hill areas of North-east India where we see different ethnic groups of people living for centuries with their distinct socio-cultural traits and traditional political institutions.

India's North Eastern Region stretches over an area of 262,184 sq. km¹, is a homeland to a number of ethnic tribes whose aggregated population accounts for about 40 million according to 2011 census. This accounts about 3.1 percent of the total population of India (excluding Sikkim). There are about 250 different tribes living in the North-Eastern States. Most of them live in the hill areas of the Region. The socio-political life of these tribes is still greatly rooted in rural traditional ethos. Each of them have their own community based self-governing mechanisms and political institutions which are popularly known as traditional self-governing institutions. Generally speaking, all of them are village level self governing institutions which used to, and in many cases continue to regulate the life in the villages by maintaining order in the society, settling disputes and administering the village. Thus, political life of the tribal people living in the hills as a whole generally centered round the village. The villages have traditionally organized themselves into village authorities or village councils. The members of village councils were, generally, adult males led by the village headman or a chief (later by a *Gam* or a *Gaonbura*, during British period). The chief or the village headman was often assisted by a few selected members of the village. The village council was a decision making chamber and implementing body. Cases of law and order, initiation and implementation of developmental activities, settling of disputes, organizing social activities, receiving visitors, and in later years meeting government representatives etc., all involved the council in one way or the other. They functioned within the ambit of customary practices. Only adult male members of the village, generally, enjoyed the right of political participation. Traditionally women were not allowed to take active part in the political processes of the village. However, among certain tribal communities, the transition has already taken place.

The British Indian Government tried to improve and modernize the traditional village self-governing institutions in the country to some extent, (e.g, the Ripon Reforms) so that they can function as effective instruments of rural governance.

¹ Sarthak Sengupta: *Tribes of North East India*. Gyan Publishing House, New Delhi, 1994; p 21

However, they left the hill areas of North-East India alone, allowing them to function in their traditional way except introducing token changes in the form of recognizing the heads of the village councils as *Gam* or *Gaonburha*. After independence, the scenario of rural governance has undergone certain changes with the adoption of the Indian Constitution. The Constitution incorporated Article 40, directing the States to take necessary steps to establish *Panchayati Raj* system in rural areas. Most of the States have passed their *Panchayat* Acts and introduced modern *Panchayat* systems in their respective States. However, the Hill areas of North-East India were left out of this process, although with good intention, of modernization of rural governance in the country. The area was brought under the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution and the Autonomous District Councils were introduced in most part including the present States of Meghalaya. Nagaland of course did not accept such autonomous district council system. The Nagaland government has on the other hand, established Village Development Boards and gave a statutory status to their modified traditional village councils system. Arunachal Pradesh which remained a part of the Sixth Schedule till 1972, too, did not have Autonomous District Councils; but introduced a modern three tier *Panchayati Raj* system under the ‘NEFA *Panchayat Raj* Regulation, 1967.’ Since then the *Panchayats* and the traditional village councils are functioning side by side in the villages of Arunachal Pradesh. The Autonomous District Councils, established under the Sixth Schedule were empowered and expected to oversee the process of rural governance in the area. It however, overlooked the fact that in an area with great traditions of self-governing villages and village councils, it entrusted the task of rural governance to a newly established modern district level body without properly linking it with the traditional self-governing institutions at the village level, except probably giving some approving authority role.

The passage of the 73rd Constitutional (Amendment) Act in 1992 brought a revolutionary change in the scenario of rural governance in the country. The Act which gave a new status and a new orientation to rural governance prevalent in the country and infused necessary dynamism into it, raised the hopes and aspirations of

the people of these areas too, along with the rest of the country. It is said to have brought democratic decentralization to the grassroot level in real sense. With its focus on devolution of powers to grassroot institutions, the Act accorded a constitutional status to the *Panchayats* and assured funds, functions and regular term of office to it through constitutional provisions. The Eleventh Schedule of the Constitution which transferred as many as 29 subjects to the *Panchayats* included most of the developmental subjects in rural areas as they knew that the need of the modern rural governance is more development and welfare oriented than in the past. The framers of the 73rd Amendment Act felt it wise to exclude from its purview the States like Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland and certain other areas of the region. Under Article 243 (M) of the Constitution, it not only excluded these States from applying the amendment to them but went a step further and specifically mentioned that these States could extend the provisions of 73rd Amendment Act to their States only by passing a resolution in their respective Legislative Assembly by a special majority. Thereafter, an effort has been made by the Government of India to extend the Amendment to the Areas which have been excluded under Article 243 (M). With that purpose in view, the Provisions of the *Panchayats* (Extension to the Scheduled Areas) (PESA) Act, 1996 was passed by the Parliament. Even after these legislations were passed, however, the areas within the State of Meghalaya were left to work with the old provisions of the Sixth Schedule and the traditional village councils even after the 73rd Amendment Act and the Provisions of the *Panchayats* (Extension to the Scheduled Areas) Act, 1996.

India, being one of the largest countries in the world, of late, has 28 States and nine Union territories which includes the National Capital territory of Delhi. Meghalaya is one of the States, which is located in the North Eastern part of India. The State of Meghalaya was formed on 21st January 1972 by taking out the United Khasi-Jaintia Autonomous District Council and the Garo Hills Autonomous District Council from the State of Assam.

The present study is an attempt to explore into and highlight the type and the characteristics of the self-governing institutions of the Garo tribe living in the Garo Hills of Meghalaya and of the constitutional status and position of the self-governing institutions being existed therein after India attained Independence.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM:

With the inauguration of the Indian Constitution in 1950, the erstwhile Jaintia Hills, Khasi Hills and Garo Hills became part of the State of Assam, but these areas along with other hill areas of the region, were placed under the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution under Articles 244(2) and 275 (1). As a result Autonomous District councils were established in these areas while in the plain areas of Assam; a three tier *Panchayati Raj* system was established. The main objectives of the *Panchayats* were to function as statutory self-governing institutions in the rural areas while the main objectives of the Autonomous District Councils introduced in the hill areas were:

- i. Maintenance of distinct identity of the tribes inhabiting in the region and to preserve their rich customs, traditions, village polity and socio-cultural traits;
- ii. To prevent the unsophisticated hill people from various forms of exploitation by more advanced people of the plains; and
- iii. To facilitate the tribal people of the region to administer themselves with their traditional institutions evolved among themselves throughout the ages.²

These aspirations and interests of the tribal population finally found expression in the provisions of the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution. These provisions are relating specifically to the constitutional and administrative requirements of the then State of

² M.N.Karna, L.S. Gassah and C.J.Thomas (Ed): *Power to People in Meghalaya*, Regency Publications, New Delhi. 1997, p 4.

Assam provided for the establishment of Autonomous District Council for each major tribe of the area. Thus although the United Khasi-Jaintia Hills Autonomous District Council was established in June, 1952, the Jaintia Hills Autonomous District Council was later separated from the United Khasi-Jaintia Autonomous District Council and formed into a separate Autonomous Council 1967. The Garo Hills Autonomous District Council was also established in 1952 along with the then United Khasi-Jaintia Hills Autonomous District Council. The traditional tribal self-governing institutions were however, not accommodated anywhere in the new arrangement. They were left to fend for themselves. At best they were pushed to a position of mere functionaries under the District Councils in the newly emerging political framework.

Thus there was a difference in the *Panchayat* and *Non-Panchayat* areas in regard to rural governance in terms of the characters, levels, interrelations among the bodies at different levels and orientation and modernizing processes of the rural self governing institutions between the *Panchayat* and *Non-Panchayat* areas of the region. The *Panchayats* were relatively modern elective bodies existing at village, group of villages and at district level while in the *Non-Panchayat* areas, there was the modern elective bodies of Autonomous District Councils at the district level and the traditional village councils of individual tribes at the village level, more or less working under the supervision and control of the Autonomous District Councils with no intermediate bodies in many areas where traditional institutions have not developed to higher levels.

It was observed that over the years, a number of problems emerged in the relationship between the traditional village institutions of the tribes and the Autonomous District Councils as well as in the functioning of District Councils as the constitutional guardians of tribal interests in the State. The Autonomous District Councils were believed to have endowed with wide range of powers to carry out their functions of rural governance, and protect and promote tribal interests in general and in rural areas in particular including developmental functions in the villages. But if we compare the powers and functions of the Autonomous District Councils under the

Sixth Schedule with those of the *Panchayat Raj* Institutions under the 73rd Amendment Act, it is found that while the former enjoys primarily a regulatory role, the latter enjoys a more advantageous position in respect of developmental functions. It is a well known fact that the developmental needs are growing as important aspects of rural governance. In this respect Autonomous District Councils are at the mercy of the State Government as it has overriding powers under article 12 A of the Sixth Schedule to legislate over matters which would otherwise fall under the jurisdiction of the District Councils.³ As against this the *Panchayats* have 29 subjects within their jurisdiction as provided in the Eleventh Schedule of the Constitution. Besides many of the flagship Schemes and Programmes of the central government are designed to ensure active participation of the *Panchayats* in their areas. In the absence of a *Panchayat* type elective and modern bodies at the grassroot level in the Non-*Panchayat* areas the implementing agencies had to innovate and evolve measures to ensure these programmes in Non-*Panchayat* areas. Thus in Meghalaya a new body called the VEC was constituted in the villages which is expected to perform the function of the *Panchayats* in the areas where they exist.

A scrutiny of the Autonomous District Council–traditional institutions relationship under the Sixth Schedule, it is found that the Schedule has conferred very limited power of self-governance to these institutions. The idea behind the devolution of power to district level was to include within its frame lower levels of institutions–the villages and group of villages wherever they exist as well. But nowhere, could this power percolates down to the lower levels.

Thus rural governance in Non - *Panchayat* areas of North - East India presented a completely different picture than the *Panchayat* areas. In Meghalaya, it appears a special significance in spite of the awareness of the people of the difference and unavailability of the advantages of the *Panchayat* system working in the plain areas of the region. It presents a significant socio - political problem in the tribal areas of the country and hence should evince interest of the social scientists and researchers.

³ Para 12A of Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India.

The present study examines the status of rural governance in the tribal and Non-*Panchayat* areas of Meghalaya. In view of difference in socio-political background of the various tribes and also in view of the present researcher, being himself belonging to the Garo tribe of the State, the study is carried out with special reference to the Garo inhabited district of East Garo Hills District (undivided).

REVIEW OF LITERATURE:

Rural governance and *Panchayati Raj* have been the much popular topics for many researchers. In spite of these facts, there are still issues and areas that have not been properly studied about the nature of rural governance in Non-*Panchayat* areas in contemporary India. No research scholar either from within the State of Meghalaya, India or from outside India, has done the micro level investigation on the influence of the 73rd Amendment Act on the traditional rural self-governing institutions in the Scheduled or Tribal Areas. The existing works on the subjects are mostly studied from anthropological, sociological and historical viewpoints only. However there are certain works which address themselves to the study of traditional village councils or the working of the Sixth Schedule.

Political Transition in the Grassroots in Tribal India (Omsons Publications, New Delhi, 1987) a book, authored by Atul Chandra Talukdar, presents a study of traditional self-governing institutions and their role in rural governance in Arunachal Pradesh. The book studies the changes that take place in the working of traditional self-governing institutions in Arunachal Pradesh in contemporary period. It discusses the impact of the introduction of the elective *Panchayati Raj* system on the traditional village council system in the State. It presents a deep understanding of the role of traditional village council system in rural governance in present times and the relationship of these institutions with the modern *Panchayats* working simultaneously with the traditional system. However the finding of the study is related to a society

where *Panchayats* and traditional institutions co-exist and work side by side in the villages. It does not relate to a Non-*Panchayat* area.

M.N. Karna, L. S. Gassah and C.J Thomas in their edited book *Power to People in Meghalaya* (Regency Publications, New Delhi, 1997) try to highlight the traditional political institutions of the three major tribes of the State of Meghalaya. The book also discusses at length on the provisions of the Sixth Schedule, The features of the Constitution, 73rd Amendment Act and about the prospect and challenges that it may have on the existing traditional socio-political institutions. The book briefly dealt with a comparative study of the *Panchayati Raj* and Traditional Khasi Institutions. But the book did not contain any reference about the role of traditional Village Councils in rural governance in the present day context.

Autonomous District Councils (Omsons Publications, New Delhi, 1997), an edited volume of repute by L.S. Gassah, is a book on the study of the working of the existing Autonomous District Councils. The studies however, focus mainly on the Sixth Schedule and its related problems. It did not have discussions relating to the applicability of the provisions of the Constitution 73rd Amendment Act, 1992 into the areas covered under the Sixth Schedule and about the pros and cons of the 73rd Constitution Amendment Act.

S. K Chattopadhyaya's edited book *Tribal Institutions of Meghalaya* (Spectrum Publications, Guwahati, 1985) contains as many as 27 papers contributed by 24 authors many of them being eminent scholars of repute in the field. The book mainly confines itself to the study of socio-religious and socio-political institutions of the tribes of Meghalaya. Though these writings are useful in the sense that they have provided as the back ground for the study of the traditional village councils found among the tribes of Meghalaya but does not throw much light on the practices of rural governance as such less so on contemporary period.

In his book *History and Culture of the Garos* (Books Today, New Delhi, 1981), Milton Sangma has given a picturesque description on the social, cultural and

political life the Garos. The book also deals briefly on the *Nokma* system and its role in village governance. The book however, did not highlight the importance of *Panchayati Raj* and its applicability in Garo Hills, as the book itself was published much earlier. Besides, lots of changes have taken in the socio-cultural life of the Garos, which have not yet been properly studied in the book.

D. Bandyopadhyay and Amitabha Mukherjee, in their edited book, *New Issues in Panchayati Raj* (Concept Publishing Company, New Delhi, 2004) includes as many as seven papers concerning *Panchayats* and issues in rural governance. The papers, *Emerging Institutions for Rural Development* and *Let the Sun Shine on the Grassroots* too authored by Yogindra K Alagh and Nirmala Buch discuss the issues and problems of rural development in India and the expectations and ground realities in respect of 73rd Amendment Act. The later paper also studies the deviations made by certain States in implementing the 73rd Amendment Act and their implications. However, none of the papers contained in the book make any reference to the system of rural governance in the Sixth Schedule areas.

Electoral Politics in Arunachal Pradesh, (unpublished Ph D thesis of Rajiv Gandhi University, submitted in 2002) authored by research scholar Nani Bath, gives a comparative analysis between the modern electoral political process and the traditional tribal socio-political practices of the tribes inhabiting in Arunachal Pradesh. The study highlighted the success of the working of the *Panchayati Raj* in the State of Arunachal Pradesh since the introduction of NEFA's *Panchayati Raj* Regulation 1967. The study was conducted well in advance before the passing of the Constitution 73rd Amendment Act, 1992.

Kuldeep Mathur's book *Panchayati Raj* (Oxford India Short Introductions), 2013, New Delhi, has served the purpose of knowing the basics of the institutional framework of the working of the *Panchayati Raj* system in India and the level of progress and development that many States of India achieved through implementation of the scheme. Yet, the book did not throw light on the kinds and trends of the rural

governance and administration in the hill areas of the North East India which are being administered under the Sixth Scheduled provisions of the Constitution of India.

The literature available so far, therefore lack information about the practices, nature and problems of rural governance in the *Non-Panchayat* areas following the adoption and implementation of the Constitution 73rd Amendment Act. Since the purpose of this Act is to revolutionize the existing rural settings through decentralization of powers and to enable the people in the villages to be able to take part in the government's policy making processes, the areas which continued to remain excluded from the purview of new Constitutional Amendment Act, the *Non-Panchayat* areas too, should experience the taste of this new provision. The present study is therefore, aim at throwing some light on the emerging trends that have been taking place in the Non-Panchayat Areas during post 73rd Amendment Act period.

The area chosen for the study is the undivided East Garo Hills District of Meghalaya. Presently the District is bifurcated into East Garo Hills and North Garo Hills Districts. But the present study has treated them as one District—the East Garo Hills District. The District is the home of the Garos, a tribe of the Mongoloid origin, who have been occupying the second position in terms of population from among the indigenous tribes inhabiting the hill State of Meghalaya.

The undivided District of East Garo Hills offers representative characters necessary for the study. It is a *Non-Panchayat Area* i.e the district is under the administrative provision of the Sixth Schedule; the institution of *Nokma*, the Village Council, the socio-cultural milieu etc. have been still functioning in the atmosphere of a true democracy. The Village Councils, has also acquired a formal status under the Garo Hills District (Constitution of Village Councils) Act, 1958, adopted by Garo Hills District Council. There has been a moderate change taking place over the years in the field of Transport and Communication. It is a district which has its moderate exposure to the outside to outside influences. Therefore, taking into consideration all

the aspects as mentioned, the East Garo Hills District has been selected as the area of study.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY:

The basic objectives of the study are:

1. To carry out a systematic study and analyze the role of Garo Hills Autonomous District Council in Rural Governance and Rural Development.
2. To examine the composition and working of Traditional Village Council system in the East Garo Hills District.
3. To assess the relationship between the Autonomous District Council and the *Nokma* and Village Council system in the area and the effects of the former on the later on the basis of the larger devolution of power and functions to the *Panchayat* under the 73rd Amendment Act, 1992.
4. To investigate the nature of changes and innovations that are taking place in the study area following the Government of India's National Policy of Democratic Decentralization in grassroot governance in the country; and
5. To explore, investigate and assess the possibility of extending the Provisions of the *Panchayats* (Extension to the Scheduled Areas) Act, 1996 to the Garo Hills which is presently covered and administered under the Sixth Schedule Areas.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS:

In view of not having enough literary publications on the subject, and the topic undertaken, itself being of exploratory nature, the following Research Questions have been formulated.

1. What is the role, powers and functions of the Autonomous District Councils in rural governance? How does it compare with those of *Panchayats*?

2. What is the present status and functions of traditional self governing Institutions—the *Nokmas* and the Village Councils in village governance and Village development?
3. What is the impact of the 73rd Amendment Act on the rural governance in the Non-*Panchayat* areas?
4. What are the changes that take place in the traditional institutions in response to the contemporary needs of village governance?
5. How are the traditional institutions responding to the needs and guidelines of the Central Government sponsored schemes designed for active participation of *Panchyats* at village level?
6. What are the difficulties in extending, if so desired, the *Panchayats* Extension to Scheduled Areas Act 1996 to the Non-*Panchayat* areas under the Sixth Schedule?

SOURCES OF DATA:

Necessary information and other relevant data for the present study have been searched and gathered by conducting field visit to the places and through surveys on traditional self governing institutions available in the East Garo Hills District of Meghalaya. In addition to it, government files and reports so far available have also been consulted and taken. Relevant information from the office of the Garo Hills Autonomous District Councils, Tura and of the Village Councils have also been extracted and included wherever necessary. Information so far collected have been supported by other works like published books, unpublished works, journals, souvenirs etc. All these, have served as valuable sources information and formed the bulk of secondary data in the writing. Interviews with the elderly people having knowledge on the topic and its related issues being undertaken as subject of study, have also been conducted.

METHODOLOGY:

The methodology of the study is partly empirical and partly reflective. It involved surveying the traditional institutions and observing them at work in the selected district. Besides this, interview method has also been undertaken for collecting information from the elderly and knowledgeable people. Reports, documents and gazetteers published by the State and Central Governments also have been used during composition of the present work. Thus a combination of documentary, observational, and questionnaire and interview method have been adopted for the study.

The field study was carried out in 15 villages of the East Garo Hills (the universe of the study). The villages were randomly selected from three Blocks (out of total five blocks in the district). The blocks were purposively selected on the basis of exposure to modern influences. The blocks with higher literacy rate, are comparatively more exposed to modern influences. While the blocks with low literacy rate were comparatively less exposed. Hence the block with highest literacy rate and the block with lowest literacy rate were selected. Besides block with middle level literacy rate is also selected to obtain an average level of socio economic background of the sample block. Five villages from each block were randomly selected for detail surveying. This process of selection of villages ensure proper representation of the village in the district.

The respondents for the questionnaire, included the village leadership, the concerned *Nokmas* and the members of the village council. As respondents to the questionnaire, five villagers have been randomly selected from among the last voters belonging to that particular village.

TOOLS OF THE STUDY:

As tools of conducting the study, two sets of questionnaire are prepared. (1) One set for the *Nokmas*; (2) One set for ordinary villagers. The tools have been suitably designed to elicit required information from the leaders and the villagers. The Interview schedule-cum-questionnaire was designed in English and for the sake of convenience was translated into Garo at the time of their administration to the respondents. Before their administration to the selected respondents the questionnaires were pre-tested in a nearby village and was suitably modified in the light of the experience gained in the village. In view of the educational and social background of the respondents, the researcher personally filled the interview schedule cum questionnaire by visiting the selected villages and interacting with the people.

ANALYSIS OF DATA:

The collected data was arranged with the help of a computer. In order to gain insights, data was presented in tables and graphs. For analyzing and interpreting the data, the figures presented in table format, were converted into percentage by simple mathematical calculations and statistical charts like frequency curves etc. The scenario at village level was presented through photographs as considered necessary to highlight a finding.

THE GARO HILLS: LAND AND THE PEOPLE

Garo Hills was formally a district within the State of Assam. It was transferred to Assam when it was made a province on February 6th, 1874 under a Chief Commissioner and at the same time was notified as Scheduled District, along with others under the Scheduled Districts Act, 1874. Later, the term Scheduled Districts was replaced by the term Backward District under section 52 (A) (2) of the Government of India Act, which was enacted by the British Parliament in 1919. By

passing another act, called the Government of India Act, 1955, the term 'Backward Districts' was replaced by the term Excluded and Partially Excluded Areas.

The Garos of Assam felt a sense of ethnic separateness from the surrounding plain dwellers and become somewhat discontented. In response to this discontentment, they were demanding for a separate State together with other tribes of North East India including the Khasis and the Jaintias. After some years of political movement, the Indian Government agreed for a separate State. Eventually Meghalaya became a full fledged State in 1972, consisting of the three districts of the Garo, Khasi and the Jaintia Hills.⁴

Garo Hills, which forms the western part of Meghalaya, is comparatively lesser in elevation compared to that of Khasi and Jaintia Hills. The greater part of Garo Hills ranges in height from 450 meters to 650 meters and drop steeply to the Brahmaputra valley on the north. The breath-taking ranges of Garo Hills are also its bio-diversity hot spots. Presently, Garo Hills is bifurcated into five districts. They are 1) East Garo Hills District with Williamnagar as its headquarters, 2) West Garo Hills District with Tura as its headquarters, 3) South Garo Hills District with Baghmara as the headquarters, 4) North Garo Hills District with Resubelpara as its headquarters and 5) South-West Garo Hills District with Ampati as its district headquarters. The Garo Hills covers a little over 8000 sq. km area.⁵

BOUNDARY:

To its north and north west, the Garo Hills is bounded by the district of Goalpara of Assam, on the east by the West Khasi Hills District of Meghalaya and on the south by the Mymensing District of Bangladesh.⁶ The 1400 meters high Tura Peak

⁴ Jeuti Barooah: *Customary laws of the Garos of Meghalaya*, (2007) p 1.

⁵ L.S.Gassah (ed): *Garo Hills: Land and the People*, p 40.

⁶ *Ibid* p 2.

is a challenge for climbers and other splendid view from the summit. Nokrek Peak (1412 meters) is the highest peak in the Garo Hills.⁷ Its forested slopes are home to numerous species of flora, fauna and avian denizens. The surroundings of Tura is a window to the ethnic life style of the Garo people. The region is known for its Wangala dance. Its picturesque environments and equable climate are ideal for eco-tourism activities.

Tura is approachable via Guwahati by road which is 323 kms from Shillong. The journey from Guwahati to Tura by road takes around 6 hours. The nearest airport is Guwahati, 128 kms away from Shillong.⁸ Helicopter services are available between Guwahati, Shillong and Tura. The nearest railway station is at Mendipathar.

GEOGRAPHICAL REGIONS:

Garo Hills is divided into three geographical regions. These regions are:

- i) The Northern sub-mountainous region,
- ii) The Central main plateau, and
- iii) The Southern Hill slope.⁹

In the Garo Hills region, the Manda, the Damring and the Jinjiram rivers flow towards the north; while the Ringgi river and the Ganol river flow in a westerly direction. The principal river of Garo Hills is the Simsang. It rises in the north of Tura town and falls into the Kangsa river in Mymensingh District of Bangladesh. The Garo Hills are of low elevation and are densely wooded in areas where slash and burn methods of agriculture had not been practised.

⁷ Internet source https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nokrek_Peak; N:B: According to Mr. P.G.Momin, the height of Nokrek peak is 1515 meters. LS Gassah's *Garo Hills: Land and the People*, p 28.

⁸ As shown in the Google Map.

⁹ L.S.Gassah (ed): *op.cit.* p 26.

POPULATION:

According to the Census of 2011, East Garo Hills with its headquarters at Williamnagar is occupying an area of 2603 sq kms with a total population of 3, 17, 917 persons. The West Garo Hills District with its headquarters at Tura has an area of 5677 sq kms with a total population of 6,43,291 persons. The South Garo Hills District with its headquarters at Baghmara occupying an area of 1887 sq kms with a total population of 1,42,334 persons.¹⁰ The South West Garo Hills with its headquarters at Ampati which was inaugurated on August 7th 2012, with a population of about 1, 06,000 and a total area of 658 sq kms. The North Garo Hills District with its headquarters at Resubelpara was inaugurated on 27th July 2012 as a new district, with a population of about 1,04,514 persons and covers a total area of 787 sq. kms. The total population of the whole Garo Hills districts of East, West, North, South and South West stands at 11, 03, 543 persons.¹¹

CLIMATIC CONDITIONS:

Garo Hills has a semi-tropical climate with high summer temperature and heavy rainfall, which at times, floods the area, especially the western parts causing dislocation to communication and transport. Simsang is the biggest river in Garo Hills which flows to the south till it enters into Bangladesh.

Being situated in the Monsoon climatic zone, Garo Hills is directly influenced by the south-west wet summer monsoon and the north-east dry winter wind. During summer months, Garo Hills experiences heavy downpour of rain while the winter months are dry. The maximum temperature recorded in Garo Hills is 34⁰ degree Celsius.

¹⁰ Statistical Handbook Meghalaya, 2019, pp 17-18.

¹¹ Census of India 2011 series -1, India “Provisional Population of Meghalaya (part –II B (I)” Controller of Publications, Civil Lines, Delhi , 7117 – 18, 2011.

The Garo Hills Districts in the State of Meghalaya occupy an area of a little over 8000 sq kms, of which about 7490 sq kms are hills and the rest is plain. The Garo Hills lie in between 25⁰ – 26⁰1' North latitude, and between 89⁰ E longitude.¹²

NATURAL RESOURCES:

Nature has bestowed on Garo Hills a unique array of vegetation ranging from tropical, sub-tropical to temperate. This is due to diverse topography, varied and abundant rainfall and different climatic conditions of the western Meghalaya range.

Meghalaya's saprophytic orchids can be found in the Tura peak region with its richly varied species. The common ones belong to the fascinating species of *Dendrobium densiflorum* and *Dendrobium chrysanthemum* known for their colourful beauty and elegance. The Baghmara and Balpakram in the South Garo Hills is a long stretch of forest where lowland orchids can be found.

The forests of Garo Hills act as the treasure house of valuable timber and fuel wood, a range of tree species, fodder, resin, tannin, gums, shellac, fibre, edible fruits, latex, honey and a large number of medicinal plants. Garo Hills is endowed with thick forests, which produce teak, sal, tetachapa, gambari, birch, and makri-sal. These forests also produce bamboo, reed, broomstick, cane, cinnamon, medicinal plants, herbs and thatch grass.

Huge tracts of forests are now cleared to make way for cashew nut plantations which now dot the landscape of Garo Hills. These are grown largely for export. One of the important natural tree species found in Garo Hills, which also yields valuable timber, is *sal* tree.

¹² Major A. Playfair: *The Garos*, Spectrum Publications, Guwahati, 1909, p 1.

Teak covers large areas in Garo Hills in artificially created forests. Bamboos are widely grown and are found in many types of forests occurring in the Garo Hills region. In the Eastern and Western districts of Garo Hills, the forests are under the control of the District Council. The tree species in these areas have been replaced by pure bamboo crop over vast areas. Bamboo is used for house construction, furniture making, basket making, mats, bridges, ladders, sticks, utensils and many items of handicrafts. Tender shoots of bamboo are used as vegetables. They are either eaten fresh or fermented and pickled.

Garo Hills is also rich in wildlife. There are two national parks, viz. Balpakram and Nokrek, and one wildlife sanctuary in Siju. Garo Hills is a paradise for its variedly rich concentration of interesting and valuable flora.

Although Garo Hills has rich deposits of coal, limestone, silliminite, fire clay, dolomite, feldspar and quartz, these are yet to be fully exploited. The streams and rivers are yet to be fully utilized, particularly its hydropower potential. Garo Hills is a horticultural paradise but the abundant variety of fruits has not been value-added and processed for income generation.

THE PEOPLE:

The Garos constitute the major tribal community of Western Meghalaya region. Other communities who migrated and settled down in Garo Hills are Rabhas, Hajongs, Koches, Kacharis, Meches, Boros or Bodos and Dalus. The Muslims and Nepalis have come and settled in different parts of the districts in the recent times. A number of Bengali speaking Hindus have settled mostly in Tura, Dalu, Baghmara, Phulbari and other trading centres after the partition of India. The non-Garo population is concentrated along the international border with Bangladesh as well as Assam.

ORIGIN OF THE GAROS:

It is difficult to ascertain where the Garos originated from but according to a Garo legend, it is believed that their ancestors once settled in the eastern part of Tibet called Torua. They left Tibet for unknown reasons and wandered off in search of new areas for their jhum cultivation and gradually came down towards the south-eastern part of Tibet. Later on, these people set out on travels under the leadership of Jappa, Jalimpa, Sukapa, Bonggepa, with other prominent Garo forefathers like Damjangpa, Ejingpa, Kusanpa, Asanpa, Rejapa and Do'papa. The oral tradition traces their migration from north-eastern China to their present habitat through Burma (now Myanmar).

The above theory that the Garos originated and migrated from Tibet to other places in China is a matter of legendary story, concoction or conjecture without any authentic historical evidences to prove. Until the coming of the British and the annexation of Garo Hills, the Garos or *Garu Mandai* or *Mandei* or *Mandehas* were unknown to outsiders.

The origin of the name 'Garo' is given by the outsiders who first approached the Garos hailed from Mymensingh District (now Bangladesh) is also a subject of controversy. In the southern region of Meghalaya hills, very close to Mymensingh, live a tribe who called themselves *Gara* or *Ganching*. The earlier writers think that the word 'Garo' is merely a corrupt form of word *Gara* over a period of time.¹³

The theory that the word *Gara* does not hold good. *Gara* or *Ganching* division of the Garo sub-dialectical group occupies a small portion of the South of Garo Hills district only, whereas Garos were already there in the districts of Mymensingh, Cooch Behar, plain belt of Assam and present Garo Hills. The theory of origin of the word 'Garo' is a corrupt form of the word '*Garu* or *Garudas*' or '*Garudua*' holds good.¹⁴ However, the tribe itself is known to the outsiders only as 'Garos' whereas the Garos

¹³ Major A. Playfair: *The Garos*, p 7; B.N.Choudhury: *Some Cultural and Linguistic Aspects of the Garos*, p 7.

¹⁴ Major A. Playfair: *The Garos*, p 8.

call themselves *A'chik* (hill men) or *Mandei* or *A'chik Mandei* and never the word *Garo* except in conversation with a foreigner.¹⁵

With the passage of time, certain regional, linguistic and cultural variations resulted due to isolated settlements. In accordance with these linguistic – cultural variations and areas, the Garos have divided themselves into a number of sub-dialectical groups which tend to be endogamous but have very little unity in a political sense. They are the *A'kawes* or *A'wes*, the *Chisaks*, the *Megams*, the *Duals*, the *Matchis*, the *Matabeng* or *Matjangchi*, the *Gara Ganchings* or *Ganchings*, the *Atongs*, the *Kotchu* or the *Gitchus*, the *Rugas*, the *Chibok* and the *Am'bengs*.

SETTLEMENT IN GARO HILLS:

Now it is an accepted fact that the Garos migrated to Garo Hills many centuries ago. It is not very clear, from where and how the migration took place, as no written record is kept about their migration. However, in whichever way and in whatever manner they entered the land, they were the first ones to settle in these hills. There are so many oral traditions that speak about the migration of the tribe. Of late, some of them are collected and put in written form.

According to the traditions the Garos migrated from Tibet. It is almost accepted³⁶. Many centuries back the Garos settled in Tibet. When they faced famine there, they left their abode in search of better pasture. The group was led by Jappa Jalimpa, Sukapa, Bongappa, Asenpa, Chukangpa and others. After coming out from Tibet, they are supposed to have camped at Nokcholbari which presently is at Kalibong of Bhutan. Then they moved on to Cooch Behar which they called 'A'song Patari Chiga Suunchi'. They are supposed to have stayed here for 400 years.¹⁶ The King *Behari* of the place sensed insecurity for himself if the Garos continued to stay

¹⁵ N.N.Vasu: *Social History of Kamarupa*, p 47.

¹⁶ Dewansing Rongmithu: *Apasong Agana*, p 223.

there. So, ordered by him, the Garos left the place and came to settle at Rangamati¹⁷ which now falls in the present Bangladesh. While staying there they became rich and multiplied in number which made the local king jealous and frightened. They were thus forced to move onto another place.

After having moved out from Rangmati they settled in the territory of King Bijni. Later this king killed some of the Garo leaders by giving poisoned liquor. So the Garos collected their people and fought against King Bijni and defeated him. He fled and requested king Behari of Cooch Behar and king Dhabani of Rangmati to help him and they agreed to do so. Hearing about this the Garos crossed the Brahmaputra River by means of plantain trees. The combined forces of three kings pursued and the war took place at a place called Garomari. All the grown up Garos both male and female, took swords and spears and fought against the enemies. They lost many members in the war but they defeated the enemies. Even at Kamakhya they had to face persecutions by the inhabitants of the place.¹⁸

Thus the Garos from the time of their migration from Tibet had to face many hardships and oppositions, which forced them to move from place to place. But once they reached the thick forested hills they found a permanent abode for themselves. It was here, that they took a bite of the soil and swore to defend the land they occupy, from enemies even if it meant giving up their own lives. Thenceforth, the tribe was called '*A'chik*' (One who bites the soil) and their land '*A'chik A'song*' (Garo Hills).

The above mentioned tradition can hardly be said to be absolutely accurate, but at the same time it cannot be discarded as absurd. Many of the places mentioned in the tradition like Cooch Behar, Rangamati, Garomari, Kamakhya are still found even today. Therefore, it is agreed that the "legend cannot be brushed aside so easily."

At this juncture, it is good to remark that the migration of the Garos did not take place just by one group and at one time. They must have come out in different batches under different

¹⁷ *Ibid*, p 232.

¹⁸ Dewansing Rongmithu, *op. cit*, pp 233-234.

leaders and surely they must have taken different routes. The tradition told by Jingnang Marak, Chieftain (*Nokma*) of Rongbinggre¹⁹ is an indication to it. It mentions about the different groups of Garos that migrated through different routes. The most important of these groups was the one led by Jappa Jalimpa. Another group under the leadership of Sukapa cut across Burma and came through Naga Hills and pitched their camp near Sibsagar area. Later, they shifted to Matcha Melaram near Boko. Yet another group, led by Sirampa also cut cross Burma, came through Naga Hills and joined the group of Sukapa at Matcha Melaram. Besides these groups, there must have been many more groups that migrated from Tibet.

LANGUAGE:

The language the Garos speak called Garo or “*A`chikku*”. It has different dialects like *A`we*, *Ambeng*, *Atong*, *Dual*, *Ruga*, *Gara Ganching*, *Matchi* etc. It is difficult to distinguish the different dialects. As a result of education, different dialects of this language are slowly disappearing, as people prefer to use the written language in general conversations and public speeches. The *Am`beng* dialect is the biggest group among the Garos, but the dialect used in education is *A`we* as the Christian Missionaries started their educational activities in *A`we* speaking area. Hence the spread of education and the development of Garo literature in *A`we* dialect by the American Baptist Missionaries greatly accentuated the process of disappearance of the smaller dialects.

CULTURAL BACKGROUND:

The manner of living, mode of thinking, way of doing things and the state of managing the social and religious affairs of a tribe can be said to be the culture of that

¹⁹ *Ibid*, pp 229-240.

tribe. Yet it is not easy to define the word culture. Paulos Mae Gregorios remarks that it is “notoriously difficult to define, even to this day”. It can mean differently in different fields like sociology, archaeology and anthropology. Naturally there will be different definitions of culture. During the critical Review by the Scholars on the concept of culture, it is said that they arrived at 164 definitions. This shows the fact, that the term culture is so comprehensive that it is difficult to give a clear definition of it. Hence, when we speak of Garo culture, it is not possible to give explanation about it. Culture consists of language, ideas, beliefs, customs, taboos, codes, institutions, tools, techniques, works of arts, rituals, ceremonies and other related components.

The already established culture of the Garos did not come in just one day. As Milton says they “have been evolved in course of centuries in the Himalayan frontiers, the Brahmaputra valleys and the Garo Hills”.⁴⁷ The tragedy is that, nobody is able to say with certainty, how and when the culture evolved. Yet the fact remains that the Garos have their own culture.

OCCUPATION:

The Garos are mainly agrarian. They practice *jhum* cultivation which is considered as the foremost occupation of the Garos. The soil of the Garo Hills region being rich and fertile provides better yield of cultivation.

For *jhum* cultivation, they first clear the forests in the month of December or January. In March, they start burning the cleared section of the forest. In the same month, after the first shower of rain, they sow their crops as millet, rice, cotton, chilly, brinjal. Pumpkin, yam, soya, maize, tapioca, long bean, ginger, indigo and sorrel. The first weeding is done in the month of May. Ripened crops are harvested in the months that follow, beginning with June or July. Rice is the main crop grown by the Garos. In the northern parts, millet is an important crop often grown in preference to rice. Cotton is an important cash crop. It is sold along the borders of the districts and at

Tura. Shellac is also a profitable product of the forest though it is confined to some of the hills. A typical *jhum* field comprises of a range of cereals, tubers, vegetables and rhizomes (ginger). Ginger is a cash crop. In recent years, besides *jhumning*, the Garos have taken horticulture in a big way and are now growing bananas, pineapples, cashew nut, rubber, oranges, tea, coffee, etc. Fishing is also another important occupation of the Garos.

THE SOCIAL PROFILE:

The major original inhabitants of the three districts of Garo Hills are the Garos. Besides the Garos, there are other tribal groups such as the Rabhas, Hajongs, Kochs, Rajbangsis, Dalus, Meches and the Kacharis.

The Garo society is divided into certain Clans or *Chatchis*, e.g, Marak, Sangma, Momin, Shira and Areng. The *Chatchis* are exogamous. Marriage within the same *Ma'chong* or motherhood is forbidden and results in social ostracism. Some dialectic groups have branched off from the original and have developed into independent exogamous septs such as A`wes living in the north-eastern hills. *Ambengs* who form the most numerous group, live in the western side while the *Atongs* occupy the Simsang valley in the vicinity of Siju. Each of the *Chatchis* or clans is further divided into lineage called *Ma'chongs*. These *Ma'chongs* are the basic units in Garo social structure and are named usually after animals, rivers, caves, etc. A Garo belongs to his particular *Ma'chong* as soon as he is born.

The Garos are diligent worker when they come to felling of trees, clearing land, weeding crops, harvesting or bringing crops to the market. Rice beer is very popular among the Garos. The Garos love singing and dancing and are generally gentle, peaceful and law-abiding people by nature.

Before the British annexation of Garo Hills in the 18th century, the areas inhabited by the Garos comprised of a number of independent clusters of villages;

each cluster forms *A'king* land in the name of a particular *Ma'chong* or motherhood. Since then the hilly areas of what now forms the three Garo Hills districts have been divided among the sub-tribes. The sub-tribes or units were socially isolated from each other in the earlier times.

Civil and criminal offences are dealt with according to the customary laws of the Garos as directed by tradition, usage and practice. These vary somewhat from place to place and from sub-tribe to sub-tribe. Before the advent of the British into Garo Hills, the punishment imposed on the guilty was death (not for all kinds of offences). But with the coming of the British, death penalty was abolished and replaced by payment of compensation or *Dai* in the present day society.

The customs, traditions and practices persist to a significant extent even today. The non-Christians believe in a multitude of malevolent and benevolent *Mitde* (spirits) as in all animistic religions of the world. The anger of any *Mitde* must be appeased by offering a sacrifice. Any person who breaks the religious customs, traditions and practices would invite the anger of the gods and are to be propitiated. Every religious ceremony must be performed without fail.

In ceremonies such as *Wangala* and *Ganna*, it is the duty of every *Chra-Pante* and *Mahari* to contribute towards the expenses involved. Non-contribution is considered to be an offence. The Garos are very sensitive about defamation and dishonour that one may cause to another.

Today, all criminal cases are taken to the law courts for trial. Cases are no longer settled in the villages according to the provisions of the customary laws and practices of the people.

BEHAVIOURAL CULTURE:

The first impression the Europeans got about the Garos, was of uncivilized and savage tribe. William Carey described the Garos as '*rude tribe*' and "most uncouth

and barbarous of all tribes.”²⁰ The fierceness of the Garos, is also affirmed by some other writers. Hamilton reported the need to keep a vigilant armed group in the markets to content the ferocity of the tribe. Because “without this coercion, the Garrows, on the least dispute between one of their parties and a merchant, would rise in arms and massacre all within their reach.”²¹ The Garos in the jungles would have really appeared wild with their scanty dress, shabby appearance and suspicious look in front of the strangers. Besides, as was reported, in the early days “a Garrow man never being seen without his sword”.²² Hence they appeared savage with their aggressive attitude. Later Carey rectified his remark by saying that their “aggressive acts have mostly been in self-defence”²³

Looking at the present situation, we can see a total change in the savagery behavior of the tribe. The prohibition of homicide, for skulls as trophy by the Garos, imposed by the British and the teaching of Christianity on love and brotherhood of all, changed their behavioral pattern. Besides, the education not only gave them knowledge but also opened a way out to have contact with others outside. This contact and familiarizing with other cultures, we may say, tamed the erstwhile seemingly wild Garos. From being hostile and war-like they were transformed into a tolerant and peace loving society.²⁴ In fact, the Garos turned out to be meek and hospitable, that they generally treat any stranger with acceptance and kindness. Of late, there is a gradual rise in the aggressiveness in the form of anti-foreigners movement to check the infiltration of other people which could endanger the tribal identity.

The Garos were illiterate. They had no schools to attend, in order to be able to read and write. “The *Nokpante* or the bachelor’s dormitory was the only traditional institution which could be regarded as the centre of learning among the Garos.”²⁵ In

²⁰ William Carey: *The Garo Jungle Book*, p. 2.

²¹ N.N.Acharya: *Assam and Neighbouring States*, 1983, Omsons Publication, New Delhi, p 144.

²² Ibid, p 146.

²³ William Carey, *op. cit*, p 3.

²⁴ J. Puthenpurakal (ed): *Impact of Christianity on North East India*, Shillong, Vendrame Institute Publication, 1996, p 260.

²⁵ M.S.Sangma: *History of Education in Garo Hills*, Guwahati, Spectrum Publications, 1985, p 126.

that institute all they learnt was about their traditions, customs, and other practices. Thus uneducated, they knew nothing about writing and reading. It is said that they did not know even how to count. They used to count but only up to twenty and they would say twenty, two times (*Kolchanggni*) or twenty, three times (*Kolchanggitam*) and so on.²⁶ But they were straight forward and simple people. Hamilton admits that “among the *Garrows* dishonesty and stealing are not frequent.²⁷ These values are kept up lest they be tormented by the spirits. The simple Garos are generally truthful in what they speak. Fr. Guilio Costa, one of the pioneering missionaries in Garo Hills says that “It is no so common for a Garo to lie”²⁸; they would not dare to give false testimony against anybody. Of course, in any case we cannot absolutise the idea. Moreover today, influence by media and outside forces, we can see these values lacking in some Garos.

STATUS OF WOMEN:

The Garos are noted for the distinctive status and authority held by women in the society. The Garo society is matrilineal. Descent, lineage and inheritance are traced through the female and inheritance of property is through woman. Residence after marriage is matrilocal. A typical Garo family consists of a woman, her husband and their children. Parents choose one daughter to become the heiress to the household and the property. She is referred to as *Nokkrom* and her husband as the *A'kim* (*Nokkrom*'s husband). They are destined to succeed as heads of the family. They are bequeathed with the bulk of the family property. The *Nokkrom*'s sister receives a small share of the property but is entitled to use plots of land for cultivation and other purposes. The *Nokkrom* and the *A'kim* resided matrilocally, while the other daughters have neolocal residence after marriage. Matrilineal cross-cousin marriage is preferred,

²⁶ D.K.Sangma: *A'chik Golporang, Bak III* (1983), p 126.

²⁷ N.N.Acharya, *op. cit*, p 146.

²⁸ Fr. Guilio Costa: *The Garo Code of Law*, 1975, p 15, Edited by P.C.Kar and Published by Tura Catholic Church.

particularly for a *Nokkrom*. There are, however, cases in which a *Nokkrom* is married to a man outside her father's clan.

DRESS AND ORNAMENTS:

Unlike the Khasi women who have a preference for gold ornaments, the traditional Garo women's attire *Sengki* and to her ornaments made of beads, ivory and precious stones, usually varying in colour, tied around the waist. Some women put on a blouse or vest. Traditionally, men wear, in a turban in addition to a cloth tied around their waists. Well to do families put round their shoulders a piece of silk cloth or cotton during winter. Both men and women cover their bodies with traditional cloths manufactured by their own besides wearing a wrapper of blue cotton cloth around their shoulders. On all festive occasions, the Garos, irrespective of sex, wear head-dresses with rows of glass and stone beads stuck with cock's feathers of hornbill. Males and females both wear bangles and earrings.

TRADITIONAL ORNAMENTS:

The following are the traditional ornaments commonly worn by the Garos.

<i>Nadongsi or Sisa</i>	Brass ring worn in the lobe of the ear.
<i>Nadirong</i>	Brass ring worn in the upper part of the ear.
<i>Jaksan</i>	Bangles of different materials and sizes.
<i>Ripok Do'katchi</i>	Necklaces made of long barrel shaped beads of cornelian or red glass while some are made out of brass or silver, and worn on special occasions
<i>Jaksil</i>	Elbow ring worn by rich men on grand ceremonies.

<i>Pandra</i>	Small piece of ivory, struck in the upper part of the ear projecting upwards parallel to the side of the head.
<i>Sengki</i>	Waistband consisting of several rows of ivory bones worn by women.
<i>Pilne</i>	Head ornament worn by women during the performance of traditional dance.

The Garos as an ethnic group mostly in the state of Meghalaya, especially in the three districts of Garo Hills. A good number of Garos can be found in the state of Assam and Tripura and in Kooch Behar area of West Bengal as well. Across the international border, a sizeable Garo population is found in the Mymensing district of Bangladesh.

DIET:

The food habit of the Garos is simple. Rice constitutes the staple food of the tribe they cultivate in their *jhum* fields. In the same field they also cultivate millet, Indian corn, tapioca and so on. But these do not constitute their main food habit, though they eat them. Again varieties of vegetables like yam, brinjal and *garu* (a special leave to be boiled or cooked) are grown in the same field. They also use bamboo shoots, jungle yams and other leaves widely grown in the jungle as vegetables. Even rice powder is generally used to make curry.

The Garos are fond of meat. Those who can afford, try to get of one kind or other for every meal. In fact they cannot think of any celebration without meat. Whenever a guest comes to a family, they consider it unfortunate if they can not serve their guest with the meat curry. Acharya writes, "For their own eating the *Garrows* rear cattle, goats, swine, dogs, cats, fowls and ducks and purchases from the inhabitations of the low countries all these animals, besides tortoises and fish fresh

and dried”²⁹ It is true that the Garos rear domestic animals for the purpose of meat. However, as far as Garos are concerned, the dogs and cats are reared for the meat purpose. They kept more as pets in the house. Of course isolated cases of using them as meat cannot be denied, but it is wrong to apply it to the whole tribe. The generally used for purposes of meat are cows, pigs, goats, fowls and ducks.

The way of cooking their curry is typical of the Garos. There was a time, when they never made use of any oil or ghee to make their curry. Then, they did not know how to cook with oil. It was one of the difficulties of early missionaries. They had to take their own trained cooks when they visited the village. Now the situation has changed. The Garos also have learnt to use in the curry and also to make different dishes. Yet, they still prefer for the dry-fish curry which is “the favorite article of their food. To make this curry they use locally made potash obtained by burning stems of plants, plantains stems, young bamboos, mustard plants etc. and dipping the ash in water which is strained by a strainer made of bamboo strips. In its place now-a-days people go for easier method of buying soda from the market. Thus locally made kind of potash or soda replaces the use of oil in the curry and this makes a special Garo dish which the Garos generally enjoy.

PROFILE OF THE AREA UNDER STUDY:

As the study aims at making a close, subject specific, micro level field investigation and thorough analysis of the nature and functioning of the village level administrative functionaries; and the type of rural governing institutions being in existence since time immemorial among the Garo tribe living in the Garo Hills, and of their role in bringing about changes and developments among themselves, the undivided district of East Garo Hills, which is one of the Districts under the state of Meghalaya, has been selected and research undertaken.

²⁹ N.N.Acharya, *op. cit.*, p.144.

LOCATION AND GEOGRAPHICAL AREA:

The East Garo Hills is the second administrative district in the Garo Hills of the state of Meghalaya in India. With Williamnagar is the administrative headquarter, the district had been created on 22nd October 1976 and it occupies an area of 2603 Km² .

The district is bounded by West Khasi Hills on the east, West Garo Hills on the west, Assam on the north, South Garo Hills on the south

TOPOGRAPHY:

The East Garo Hills region forms a sort of undulating plateau with plenty of flat lands and valleys with altitudes varying from 100-1400 m above sea level. As is evident from the name, the district of East Garo Hills is a hilly terrain. The hills are highly dissected and one major formation is the Arbella Range, which cuts through the south-central part of the district. The range consists of peaks with an average height of 700 metres above sea level. Another important geographic feature is the Simsang Valley which runs through the southern part of the district. Simsang is the largest river in Garo Hills, which originates in the West Garo Hills District and flows through East Garo Hills and thence to South Garo Hills. The topography of the rest of the district is of undulating low hills, with altitude ranging from 150 to 600 metres above sea level, with plain fringes in the northern areas neighbouring Assam. Besides the Simsang (Someshwari), the district is also drained by the rivers Manda (Dudhnoi), Ildek, Didram and Damring (Krishnai). Other than the Simsang which drains southeastwards, the others all runs north or northwest towards the Brahmaputra.

Garo Hills was created a separate District under the erstwhile State of Assam in the year 1866 with Captain W. J. Williamson as its first Deputy Commissioner. In course of time, being driven by the political and administrative exigencies of the time, and above all for better governance of the people and to bring administrative mechanisms more closer to the people inhabiting in the region, the once single

administrative unit of the Garo Hills District that remained undivided for over a century, went for bifurcation. When the full fledged State of Meghalaya formed in 1972, the political leaders, the administrative officers and a section of tribal educated people of the region, strongly felt the need of partitioning the existing Garo Hills District into two. As a result, the East Garo Hills, as a separate District was formed in the year 1976 with Simsanggre (Old name of Williamnagar) as its district headquarters. According to Census 2001, East Garo Hills with its headquarters at Williamnagar is occupying an area of 2603 sq kms with a total population of 3,17,917 persons. Its density of population is 95 persons per km. square. Out of this, another new District, the North Garo Hills District with its headquarters at Resubelpara has also been carved out, created and officially inaugurated on 27th July 2012. This newly created district has a population of about 1,04,514 persons and a total area of 787 sq kms. The undivided East Garo Hills District has the highest concentration of ST with 96.5 per cent out of its total population.³⁰ The present study however, covers the undivided East Garo Hills District.

The Undivided East Garo Hills District was a Sub-Division before it was upgraded into a district. Earlier, the present district headquarter Williamnagar was named Simsanggre. On 27th October 1976, a new district was bifurcated which was named East Garo Hills District with Simsanggre as its headquarter. The place was then rechristened as Williamnagar after the name of Captain Williamson Ampang Sangma, the first Chief Minister of the State of Meghalaya. Williamnagar is a tableland located on the vast plainlands along the bank of the Simsang river at Simsanggre. These plain lands are in a sense historical as it was here that the Garos made their last major resistance to the British intrusion into Garo Hills in the cold month of December 1872. The legendary Garo warrior Pa Togan Nengminza Sangma, who led the team of the

³⁰ Census of India, 2001, Primary Census Abstract, Series.

Garo warriors, was felled to the British bullets in a skirmish that took place at Chisobibra, quite close to Williamnagar on December 12, 1872.³¹

The Undivided East Garo Hills District has been, for administration purposes, been divided into the following Community and Rural Development Blocks. They are 1. Dambo Rongjeng 2. Kharkutta 3. Resubelpara 4. Samanda 5. Songsak.

The literacy rate of the people of the district is 53%. It has a total number of 7 Legislative Assembly Seats and was a part of the Tura Parliamentary seat which is presently being represented by Ms Agatha Kongkal Sangma, the youngest daughter of former Lok Sabha Speaker Purno A'gitok Sangma.

TABLE: I

BLOCKWISE POPULATION OF EAST GARO HILLS DISTRICT, 2011 CENSUS

Name of the Block	Area in sq. km	Person	Male	Female
Resubelpara	468	104514	52769	51745
Dambo-Rongjeng	885	52584	26634	25950
Kharkutta	N.A	51477	26055	25422
Songsak	703	53107	26862	26245
Samanda	547	56235	28903	27332
TOTAL	2603	317917	161223	156694

Source: Statistical Handbook Meghalaya, 2019: Directorate of Economics & Statistics, Government of Meghalaya, Shillong.

THE INHABITANTS:

The East Garo Hills District is largely inhabited by the Garos and other Non-Garo tribal communities. According to 2011 census, the total population of the district is 3,17,917 and the total number of inhabited villages is 1058.³² The percentage of the tribal population of the district is 96.54 % of the total population. The majority of the tribal population are the Garos, The other inhabitants in the district of Garo Hills

³¹ Retrieved from the Official website of the Government of Meghalaya.

³² Statistical Handbook of Meghalaya 2019, p 1.

include tribal communities like the Rabhas, Koches, Hajongs, Kacharis, and non-tribal communities such as Dalus, Rajbansis etc. and. The small non-tribal population, including the Scheduled Castes is mostly concentrated in the urban settlements of Williamnagar and Resubelpara and the northern plain fringes of the district. The distribution of population in the district is uneven and is mostly governed by topography. The population of the district is mainly concentrated on the northern fringe plain area. Since the economy of the district is primarily agricultural, the topography and soil type have a great influence on the population distribution. Also the uneven topography which also influences factors such as accessibility to the areas, causes the low density of population in the interiors of the district.

TABLE: I

**BLOCKWISE NUMBER OF INHABITED VILLAGES AS PER 2011 CENSUS
EAST GARO HILLS DISTRICT**

Name of the Block	Total number of inhabited villages
Resubelpara	326
Dambo-Rongjeng	189
Kharkutta	221
Songsak	148
Samand	174
TOTAL	1058

Source: *Statistical Handbook Meghalaya, 2019: Directorate of Economics & Statistics, Government of Meghalaya, Shillong.*

FLORA :

The district is rich in forest resources. The important timbers available in the district are *sal, teak, gamari, khokon, champa* etc. The other major forest produces are bamboo, cane, firewood, broomstick, thatching grass along with rubber.

INDUSTRIES:

The Garos have a tradition of self-sufficiency in many of the articles of everyday use, which have in time become part of their material culture. Among these may be mentioned their textile, their pottery, their basketry and the products of a large number of other crafts.

Their environment has been a generous provider. The forests provide an almost limitless quantity of timber, bamboo and cane, which are so necessary for their dwellings or for household articles. Their fields yield cotton for their yarn.

A brief account of the industries that flourish in the district is given below:

WEAVING :

Weaving is one of the most important vocations in the economic life of the Garos. The Garo Hills have for long produced short-stapled cotton and the weavers of Garo Hills are known for their exquisite skill in weaving various types of fabrics.

The principal products still are the *Dakmanda* and *Daksaria*. These are famous for their texture and their variegated colourful designs. Besides these, the artisans also produce other articles like *gamchas*, *bed covers* etc. Training centers for artisan, weavers are located at Tura, Resubelpara, Baghmara, Williamnagar and Shyamnagar (Phulbari) in all the three districts of Garo Hills.

SERICULTURE:

Sericulture can be a very important source of subsidiary income for those families which are engaged in shifting cultivation, provided they can be persuaded to take up settled agriculture. Mulberry and other plants suitable for rearing *Eri* and *Muga* Silkworms grow well in the Garo Hills though most of the plantations are in the interior hills and forests. The *Eri* silk-growing centers are located at Samanda and the *Muga* silk-growing centers at A'dokgre. Like the cotton industry, this industry also

faces problems as dearth of trained technical personnel, inadequate landholdings and dearth of rearing accommodation for individual silk-worm rearers and absence of research facilities.

Garo handicrafts are well known in north-east India for their handicrafts and textiles, specially for handloom industries. However, they produce only for local consumption and not in large scale. Most of the Garo handicrafts are *Am* (Mat), *Kera* or *Kok* (Conical basket), *Ruan* (winnowing fan), *Gitchera* (winnowing net), *Chokki* (chair), and domestic items such as Bamboo-spoon, rice stick, bamboo mug etc. The household furniture are made out of cane, bamboo and wood.

COTTAGE INDUSTRY:

Some other types of industries in which people in the districts engage themselves are described below:

Carpentry, Bee-Keeping, Cane and Bamboo Work, Pottery, Pulse Processing, Black smithy etc. Bamboo is used by Garo farmers in making *borangs*, watchtowers from which they guard their crops from wild animals and thieves.

INDUSTRIAL CO-OPERATIVES:

At present there are 20 Industrial Cooperative Societies and 6 Handloom Weavers' Cooperative Societies in Garo Hills Districts. The industrial cooperative societies as voluntary organizations of artisans and craftsmen seek to promote and develop the economic and cultural interest of their members. The main objectives of these societies are to provide for members economic facilities for obtaining raw materials, equipment and other requirements for the smooth running of their industries, to organize the industrial activities of members so that the maximum output is obtained with the minimum of effort, to give technical advice and assistance and to provide training facilities, to maintain the highest possible standard of work and

design, to arrange disposal of finished product in most profitable manner as well as to provide finance.³³

AVAILABILITY OF MINERALS:

The district is rich in vast deposit of mineral resources like Coal, Limestone and clay. But hilly and undulating terrain, inaccessibility, lack of good transport facilities, etc .have stood in the way of their meaningful exploration and exploitation.

Coal:

The coal available in East Garo Hills can be utilized for usage in domestic purpose and fertilizer project.

Limestone:

Limestone is the main raw material required for production of cement. Rich limestone deposits occur in a narrow but continuous belt in the Garo Hill from Athabeng in the East through Siju to Dapri Garure, west of Tura. But the largest deposit of limestone lies near Siju Arteka and Siju Songmong in the Simsang valley. In addition, a few isolated deposits are to be near Rongrenggre, Jarkhare, Rongtek and Darrang-Era-A'ning in the West Darranggre coal field

Lithomargic Clay and Fireclay:

Important clay deposit are concentrated in the central parts of Garo Hills. Of the inferred reserves of clay in the State which are over 80 million tonnes, the major

³³ Government of India, Ministry of Micro, Small & Medium Enterprises: Brief Industrial Profile of East Garo Hills District, Carried out by MSME-Development Institute, (Ministry of MSME, Govt. of India) Bamunimaidan, Guwahati-781021, Assam.

occurrence is in the Garo Hills. Recent detailed investigations and ceramic tests on this clay have shown that most of the samples range from high- heat duty to super heat duty refractory clay suitable for making refractory bricks. This clay can be fruitfully utilised for producing crockery, sanitary ware, insulator, stoneware, pipes, tiles, white-ware, etc. This clay can be used even in the manufacture of Aluminium Sulphate. The huge amount of Lithomargic fireclay which is likely to be mined along with the coal in the Simsang Colliery Project in the Garo Hills should favour the setting up of a refractory brick industry in the area.

Kaolin Clay:

Kaolin or China clay can be extracted by washing Kaolinized rocks. The deposits of Kaolinized rocks in the state yield 20% of Kaolin the quality of which may be compared with best Kaolin deposits anywhere else in the world. The Kaolin thus obtained is found suitable in the manufacture of high quality chinaware and porcelain ware. Kaolin can also be used in the paper and rubber industries. Important Kaolin deposits are found in Darugre.³⁴

³⁴ Government of India, Ministry of Micro, Small & Medium Enterprises: Brief Industrial Profile of East Garo Hills District, Carried out by MSME-Development Institute, (Ministry of MSME, Govt. of India) Bamunimaidan, Guwahati-781021, Assam.