CHAPTER VI

CHANGING SOCIETY AND CHANGING RELIGION

I

In this section of the concluding chapter let us recapitulate what we discussed in the foregoing chapters.

In the introductory chapter we have discussed some established theories on religion. The interrelationship between society and religion as delineated by different thinkers are also discussed. There have been numerous writings on religion all over the world. We find, there are varied opinions, views and criticism in all theoretical discussion on the subject. It is recognised by one and all that no society, be it primitive or advanced, exists without religion. Religion, in man ever remains a dominating force in moulding the entire social character in every society all over the world. In fact, religion is an inner urge in man; to look up to something tangible and material, or to something which is invisible, spiritual and divine which is above him, above the physical powers and above his mental and spiritual faculties, for his inspiration, protection and guidance in life. Religion is an inner feeling in the heart of every man by which his
relationship to the original source of all life is asserted, and the path indicated for his union in consciousness with this 'One Cause' of 'being' whence he originally comes from. Besides discussing some of the theories profounded by some renowned writers of the world, some earlier studies of religion of the different groups of India are also discussed in this chapter. North Eastern India is inhabited by many different tribes belonging to different ethnic groups. Every tribe has its own religion and culture. Some scholars consider those primitive tribal religions to be animistic. Garo tribe is known to be one of the major tribes of north east India from time immemorial.

Although there are many studies of religion in other parts of India, such studies are much lacking in North Eastern India, it is more so in the study of traditional Garo religion. It is found interesting to explore some basic concept of traditional Garo religion in relation to their society. Such study is also very important in the context of present administrative, political and new social order. So far, no scholar has ever attempted to make an analytical study of the traditional Garo religion with reference to the modern society which is undergoing rapid changes. From this point of view the present study is an attempt to study the subject analytically and examine as to what degree it bears relationship with Hinduism, and its place in the modern society with a new religion.
On further examination it is also found that there have been many studies of different religions of India taken up by different writers at different times. But it is really disappointing to note that very few exhaustive studies on religion have so far been undertaken. It is more true about North East India. Whatever knowledge we get about the religion on any tribe, it is only from the monographs of the respective tribes written in the first part of the present century, these are all found to be descriptive studies based mostly on secondary information. Because the writers of the monograph were outsiders and some of whom were even Christian missionaries and some ethnocentrism has certainly entered in their description.

In tribal world, religion is interlinked with the society itself and as such, anybody entering tribal habitat would find it perplexing to draw the distinction between the two. Garo religion is a social religion. In Garo society, religion exists for society and not society for religion. Therefore, this study is aimed at exploring how far and to what extent the traditional religion of the Garos serve the society for which it exists.

In Chapter II, the present study confines to the problem of Garos in general with respect to their so-called ancient Garo country. Garos are found to be interested in
recalling their past glory. They claim that they were once living somewhere in the Tibet region and from there they migrated down to the North Eastern part of India where they are at present found. They belong to Tibeto-Burman linguistic family. The present study also deals with the problems of the Garos with regard to their homeland in the past and present. Having migrated down to the present home land, Garos started settling down in different parts of the North East India. They were found in large number in Assam, Bangladesh, Tripura and in some part of North East India.

In good old days Garos were the most dominating people in this area. They claim that, their country stretches from the foot hills of Himalaya mountain on the north down to the norther part of present Bangladesh. But gradually, their lands were encroached and occupied by different invaders from outside and in course of time they lost major part of their original land. With the British occupation of the whole Garo area, some parts of the Garo habitat were transferred to nearby Zemindaries. Garos, disliked such action taken by the British Government and time and again they became restive. It is however observed that they could not focus their demand in a most effective way and they remained helpless all through. In this chapter, therefore, all the problems relating to their territory and their occasional confrontation with the people of the outlying areas are discussed. This chapter also deals with the
gradual territorial consciousness of the tribe from certain period of time up to the creation of Meghalaya in 1971, their movement to include the northern part of Mymensingh district of the then East Pakistan and failure thereof, their attempt for merging some part of Assam with Garo Hills of Meghalaya are also touched in this chapter. It is also interesting to note that the Garos living outside the present home land are so keen in starting some sort of movement but they are not steadfast in their struggle, as a result, they lost the battle in every front in the past. Besides, many other interesting features have been included in this chapter. This chapter also includes many salient features relating to the political institutions of the tribe traditional and modern as it has been gradually transforming from old to new social order.

Under Chapter III all the important aspects of Garo society are discussed. Social structure of the Garos consisting of the most important dimensions like, family, clan organisation, marriage, divorce, inheritance, Garo view on sex and morality, incest and position of the child of the incestuous couple are also discussed. Being matrilineal and matrilocal family, the Garo social structure is quite distinct from that of the neighbouring tribes excepting the Khasis. It is interesting to study various aspects of the society for the student particularly those not belonging to the Garo society. It is also interesting to observe the unique system
of family, kinship, system of marriage, divorce, succession
their attitudes towards sex and their moral life so on and
so forth.

Garo social structure is matrilineal in descent
and matrilocal in respect of residence after marriage. Garos
are not very sure whether they had patrilineal character in
the beginning but most Garos say that in certain point of
time in the past, they gathered together at the courtyard of
one Bone-la and decided upon to keep the daughter at home
as successor to family property. But then, the heiress-
daughter should marry the son of her father's sister and then
only the daughter is eligible to inherit the property of
her parents. The inheriting daughter and her husband who is
the nephew of her father are known as nokkrom. Non-heir
son-in-law and his wife are termed as agate. The terms
Nokkrom and agate are clearly explained in this chapter. As
regards the clan organisation, it may be briefly stated that
Garo clans may be grouped under five different exogamous
divisions viz., Sangma, Marek, Momin, Snira and Areng.

In the very old days, marriage within the same
exogamous group was not permitted and such marriage, if there
be any was considered incestuous. Under each of those five
broad divisions which some writers called Chatohi several
machong are found. It is really confusing to get a clear
idea about the actual working of the kinship group in the Garo society. Garo custom of marriage and divorce is another interesting subject to be discussed. Traditional form of Garo marriage interestingly enough does not involve any expenditure whereas in other tribes we find considerable amount is spent. Garo marriage is a social bond and as such, marriage could be dissolved by the society only. Here society involves all the close kins of the husband and the wife.

With regard to the inheritance of property of the parents, the nokkrom gets the major share. Other daughters practically get no share in the traditional society, yet, there are many social problems related to right of inheritance and succession to the property. All such problems are discussed in this chapter. Besides, Garo view of sex and morality are also discussed. In Garo social situation, how the incest and incestuous life is determined remains a subject requiring close examination. Again, if parents are incestuous, then what should be the position of the child of such couple in relation to the other kins belonging to his/her clan. All these problems are also examined in this chapter.

In the traditional Garo society, the birth of a child and rituals connected with it is another interesting subject of study. While in other tribes elsewhere members of the
family take care of the pregnant woman, Garo woman takes care of herself. Right from her conception, she always takes care of her health. This is understood from the fact that she collects fuelwood, store rice in sufficient quantity and preserve rice beer for the period of her actual confinement. Even after child birth, she has to fulfil certain social obligations to the midwife attending her. Informations right from the confinement of a woman up to the child birth and subsequent social duties and obligation towards each other are elaborately discussed in this chapter.

Under chapter IV, basic concept of supernatural, its meaning and different definitions of supernatural are dealt with in detail. There are different categories of Garo deities. The first category of deity comprises all the known deities supposed to be connected with sickness and suffering of the human beings. Such deities are brought together under the head malevolent deities. All those malevolent deities, in one way or other are supposed to be the causes of all kinds of diseases. These deities, sometimes attack (bite) human beings and in order to get rid of such angry deities, the deity concerned have to be propitiated with certain offering as may be prescribed by the traditional Garo priest. The items of offering vary from one deity to another. In certain cases, the deity may be pleased even with counterfeit items of food and drink but in some cases, it involves huge
expenditure, such as sacrifice of cow or bull followed by grand community feasting.

Under the second category come all the benevolent spirits which are propitiated for the general well being of the village community. Such deities are mostly the god of wealth, prosperity of the tribe as a whole, rain god, god of honour and god of thunder and so on.

Again, under third category appear all the partially visible objects which are regarded by the Garos not as deity proper but as something unusual, deserving to be preserved and respected. They attach ominous interpretation to the presence of such strange-looking objects in some big store house or granaries. They also believe that such objects are the guardian of the grains so stored. It is very interesting to know what actually those objects are and what is the meaning behind having such faith on those rare objects and whether it exists in the modern society also. How far present-day Garos react to such idea. The more we study the nature and form of the traditional Garo religion, the more it becomes interesting.

Under chapter V, we have discussed all the important aspects of Garo social and religious life. It is really interesting to study their concept of the death. Interestingly enough, unlike birth and marriage, death is the
most important occasion for social gathering. In traditional Garo society the death of somebody is the most mournful and the most memorable occasion. When a man dies, many problems crop up. The death ceremony becomes very large not by the will and pre-arrangement made by the mourning household but by the general will of the relatives and neighbours living far and near. There are many heart rending scene from the beginning to the end. Mangrea is connected with the death of a prominent man. The subject itself deserves separate treatment. Any how, salient features of the Mangrea and its meaning have been focussed in the present study. Delang is another interesting subject of study. Its construction, maintenance and finally its disposal is meaningful and noteworthy. Again, in chapter V funeral chant is explained. Such incessant flow of words extempore from the elderly women of the traditional society seems to be marvellous. This demonstrate the high narrative quality of Garo woman of traditional society. Grap-memanga is another chant belonging to the funeral chant. While advanced societies like Hindus and Christians say certain well set verses during funeral ceremony, Garo women narrate their chant without any prior training. Grapmemanga, is a verse spoken to the spirit of the dead man as to enable the departed soul to take a journey unto the right destination at the land of the spirit with an advice to come back again to the same lineage in subsequent birth.
Description of *Urim ko'kam* is also discussed in this chapter. In Garo society, when somebody lose, someone gains. Many give and take deals are observed. Even in the mournful days, there are certain social conflict and confrontation in connection with the cows and bulls killed by other households and the return thereof. Under this, all the problems connected with the subject are discussed. Post funeral ceremony involves a number of social obligations. *Onsanga* problems if there be any, and keeping and maintenance of *Delang* and its subsequent disposal is very important.

Life after death and belief in rebirth and its similarities with the Hindu doctrine of karma and rebirth are also elaborately discussed.
Social Change

Forces of Social Change. Society is a web of social relationships. Social change is the change in society. In this context, Sharma (1973: 366) quoting MacIver and Page writes, "It is the change in these which alone we shall regard as social change". Social relationships include social progress, social patterns and relations of various parts of society. Jones says "Social change is a term used to describe variations or modifications of any aspect of social processes, social patterns, social interaction or social organisation". Thus social change is a change in the social organisation. It is in this sense that Davis says "By social change is meant only such alterations as secure social organisation - that is the structure and functions of society". Merrill and Aldredge say "Social change means that large number of persons are engaging in activities that differ from those which they or their immediate (forefathers) engaged in some time before". Society is composed of vast and complex network of patterned human relationships in which all men participate. When human behaviour is in the process of modifications, this is another way of indicating that social change is occurring.

Social change therefore refers to the modifications which take place in life pattern of a people. It occurs because
All societies are in a constant state of disequilibrium. Early sociologists viewed the cultures of primitive peoples as completely static, but this view was abandoned with the appearance of scientific studies of pre-literate cultures. Anthropologists now agree that primitive cultures have undergone changes, although, at such a slow pace as to give the impression of being stationary. Gillin and Gillin define social change as "Social changes are variations from the accepted modes of life; whether due to alterations in geographical conditions, in cultural equipment, composition of population, or ideologies and whether brought about by diffusion or invention within the group".

Defining the nature of social change, Samuel Joseph says "Change involves motion, modification, becoming, not merely a difference through time, in the object to which this is applied. A change is said to have taken place when an object or member of a system of moving things that has been personally shifted in such a way that the structural arrangement of the system is different. A causal relationship exists between two objects or entities when a change in the one has resulted in a change in the other". Further, Moss says, "Social change in society happen, others are willed. Call the former transformation the latter, reconstruction".

Social change has occurred in all societies and in all periods of time all over the world. But the rate of social change differs from society to society. In one society the rate is so rapid while in another it is much slower. There are various factors which determine the rate and direction of such change. There are various types of social change which can be explained by different
Social change, in the past, has been very unequal in different parts of India, and also unequal among the different classes of the population within the same area, and those who have been least subjected to the processes of adoption to a modern economy has been the scheduled tribes and the scheduled castes. Most of the problems by which India is faced today, most of the tensions to which India is also subject, can be traced largely to the inequality of social and economic change. The growth and development of Garo society as a whole may be broadly studied under three different periods, such as, the Garo society before the coming of Christianity into Garo land or before the British occupation, Garo society during the missionary period synchronising with the British rule and the society after independence.

Since the present study is confined to religious aspect of the Garos, an attempt will be made here to examine as to what extent the traditional religion of the Garos has been influenced by the impact of different forces of change within the traditional society during that long period of transition. If one compares the present Garo society with that of the pre-independence period, one would find that enormous changes have taken place in all aspects of Garo society their economic
status, political consciousness, educational situation and religious outlook and so on. It may be observed without any fear of contradiction that before independence, social change among the Garos was rather very slow but the changes have become more rapid after independence and it has become more so during the last two decades. Even during the last part of British rule, the process of change in the Garo society was still very slow and in short, it will not be wrong to say, prior to independence, no significant progress in any aspect of tribal life and culture were noticed. So, granted that, before and during British occupation, Garo society was in the lowest ebb in respect of social change. Therefore, it will be interesting to examine those different factors of social change in the Garo society particularly the impact of those different forces on the traditional religion of the Garos during the period of transition.

Contact of the Garos with their Hindu Neighbours. Describing the geography of the Garo habitat, Carey (1939 : 3) wrote "The Garo hills occupies a commanding position at the entrance to Assam. They round off a remarkable range, which like an arm thrust forward guard Burmese frontier, separates the Assam valley from the plains of Mymensingh and Sylhet. They form indeed, a rough fist laid on the edge of Eastern Bengal". What is written more than a hundred years back may not be relevant to modern times, but facts remain the same; Garo Hills, like a solitary island is enclosed on three sides by the plains and valleys
inhabited by Hindus and Mohammedans speaking languages of Indo-Aryan family. Kar (1973: 77) writes, there are several hinduised tribes like Hajong, Koch, Rabha and Dalu in and around present homeland of the Garos. Those tribes though found mostly in the low lands are the people living side by side with the Garos with distinctive social systems and cultures of their own. Thus, from time immemorial, Garos had been living in the midst of powerful influence of the Hindus and Muslims marked by a process of assimilation and synthesis.

It is therefore natural that, Garos and other tribes like Hajong, Koch, Rabha, Kachari, Dalu living in and around Garo Hills, in course of their long intercourse with the people of other cultures had to a great extent been influenced by the latter in various social and cultural fields. Thus, the Garos since the time before the coming of Christianity into Garo habitat, had already been in constant touch with their Hindu neighbours. Traditional Garo religion too had remained under great influence of Hinduism. It is, perhaps, because of this reason that, the traditional Garo religion contains some Hindu views and ideas though not very explicit - as it if found in Hinduism. But, one thing is clear, that the Garos as a community, instead of adopting the Hinduism as in the case of other tribes living in Garo Hills, brought and adopted certain ideas from the Hindus of the plains to their hills and assimilated those borrowed faith and beliefs with their own and thereby making those adopted facts integral part of their tribal
religion while other tribes those who live mostly in low lands had been partially engulfed by hinduism, putting them in between their original faith and Hinduism of the neighbouring plains.

Writing on acculturation among the Hajong of Meghalaya, Majumdar (1972 : 55-57) says, "Hajongs of Garo Hills district of Meghalaya had, in all probability, a distinctly matrilineal framework of society akin to other socio-cultural groups of the region, such as the Sabhas, the Koches and the Garos. They are in the process of transformation to a Hindu caste; lower in position than the cleaner castes but higher in position than the unclean castes. In course of their transformation, they have largely abandoned their older matrilineal organization, though still retaining some of the religious practices of their traditional religion, the proportion of which is in inverse ratio to the degree of hindulization." He also discussed in detail some of the elements of Hindu customs which the Hajongs of Meghalaya have adopted so far, such as, ceremonial defilement, abandonment of matrilineal clan organization, abstinence from eating 'unclean' meat, rules regarding commensality and connubiality and utilisation of the services of professional Brahman priest etc."

Now, to what degree, traditional religion of the Garos was influenced by Hinduism, will have to be analysed. Garos have rich epic-lore, very popular particularly among the Atong and Ganching Garos handed down orally from time immemorial. In those parts of the Garo Hills, there are some persons who really gained proficiency in narrating such lores for hours together. The story
contain plenty of diverse characters and personalities with full of imaginary episodes depicting wars, battles and chivalrous adventure and also vision of high degree of development and civilisation of humanity on earth. Most Garos are familiar with the names of dikki and bandhi, two brothers who are known to be the main heroes of the drama along with some other associated characters of both the sexes. Garos style their epic-lore as katta ring'a. Till today, katta ring'a as such, has not been reduced to writing and as such, Garos themselves are found reciting it in times of rest and relaxation in the evening when everybody could quietly participate in such imaginative stories. The two great heroes of the drama dikki and bandhi, being partly man and partly god simulate the characters of Rama and Lakshman of the great Hindu Epic Ramayana. Heroes of the Garo epic dikki and bandhi are known for their physical strength, valour and tactfulness in warfare. Garo epic is no doubt a one-man drama, the same reciter caricaturing all the characters involved in the story with varied tones, thereby, giving the listeners information about the different stages of the story in progress. Therefore, on close observation, it is found that, Garo katta ring'a (Epic-lore) sounds something like great Hindu-epic Ramayana in a typical form. Garos themselves are not aware nor they bother about such simulation but it can well be presumed that during the early period of their contact with the Hindus, certain ideas of those great Epics Ramayana and Mahabharata might have crept into their beliefs consequently giving the Garos to maintain their own typical epic-lore which now runs parallel to those great.
Hindu Epics.

Garo Lexicon contains many derivatives which are in common use throughout the length and breadth of Garo habitat. Those words and phrases are found to have come from neighbouring plain areas like Assam and Bengal through social interaction and assimilation. So, with the induction of some words and terms, Garos have enriched their own vocabulary. Adoption of words and meanings from other races has greatly helped the tribe to express all the local situation in more forceful and more appropriate term; Even in the traditional religion, it is observed that plenty of words and phrases of Sanskrit origin have crept in. It is because of this, it has to be analysed as far as practicable as to what extent, traditional religion of the Garos was influenced by the Hindus and their concepts. Considered on the basis of religion, present day Garos may be divided into two social groups viz., Christian section and songsarek section. Those Garo adherents to traditional religion are styled as songsarek. With regard to the origin of the word songsarek, many elderly persons of older generation were asked to give the idea whether the word is of Garo origin or it is borrowed from other languages, but, none could give definite information, yet, some Garos doubt about its being an original Garo word. On investigation, it reveals that the word songsarek was not very much in use in the Garo society during the pre-Christianity period as because, there was only one homogenous social group among the Garos that was a true traditional society and as such,
no other word or term was felt necessary for demarcating the two sections. Therefore, it is found that, it is only with the entry of Christianity into Garo habitat that two distinct social groups within the same tribes evolved that is traditional and the new (christian) social groups. Then it became necessary to coin or adopt suitable word or term by which the two social groups could be clearly distinguished and hence the word songsarek was brought in. In course of investigation, it could be observed that the word songsarek comes from the Sanskrit term Samsara (material and phenomenal world), which means bondage, disease, decline, death, desire and its satisfaction, recurring in a vicious cycle of birth and death (Kaul : 1957 : 170; Pahlajani 1975 : 75). So, in Garo situation, songsarek means - 'he who believes in innumerable births'. In the words of Schneider (1972 : 39) "Hindu scriptures thus teach that the soul of man does not pass into hell, heaven or purgatory, but is reborn into another existences which will end in due time and necessitate yet another birth. This repeated passing or transmigration of souls through this world is what is meant by samsara a word with great meaning in the Hindu Lexicon". The word samsaric is an English adjective of the Sanskrit samsara. The title songsarek appears to be deflection of samsaric and it must have been given to those Garos following traditional religion by the early Garo Christians who received good education through Assamese and Bengali medium thereby learning many words and phrases of Sanskrit origin, otherwise, in the olden days, Garos called themselves either mando or
Achik (man human beings or hill dwellers, highlanders), the word songsarek or Christian being not necessary within the same homogenous tribe. In Garo situation, the term songsarek is understood only in relation to the modern Christian society and hence, it is a relative term, (Christian and songsarek). Those who so remained attached to the traditional religion or to the samsara (perpetual temporalized phenomenal existence) and to transmigration (the perpetual identity of the souls through a series of lives) came to be later known as samsarie which ultimately turned out to be a popular Garo word songsarek.

The word krita (mite krita) is used to mean ceremonial invocation or prayer to the deity. The term krita is better known to the modern Garos than to those following traditional faith. Garos living in the traditional society commonly use the word amua (mite amua) to denote krita. So it is plausible that the word krita has come from the Sanskrit kritya or krityan which means incantation (Max Miller 1964: 62). Krityan may also mean hymn of praise, or devotional chant and definitely, the term kritya is assigned to take the place of local word amua by the early Christian Garos with a view to rendering more impressive meaning to it. But, even if the matter is viewed as such, the word kritya is never a proper substitute for Garo amua; because, amua bears a deeper meaning and significance in Garo situation than a mere blind, prototype and monotonous chanting or incantation of hymns. From the religious point of view, kritya or krityan might be an approximation but it
can never be at par with the *amua* both in its variety and content; *amua* is having wider application and greater significance in traditional Garo religion. For instance, in *amua*, the kamal invokes the deity, appeal to him, pray to him and argue with him with great force. Sometimes, the kamal goes to such an extent that, he challenges the deity and at times, even rebukes the deity with harsh languages. In other words, the *amua* is most like a forceful, authoritative and effective talk or argument put forward to the deity by a man.

In many Garo folk tales of classical type and also in *katta ring's* frequent mentions are found something about *noro mande* to mean the nature of human beings as being partly man and partly spirit. Here also it can be presumed that Garo idea of *noro mande* (god-man) certainly has some bearing on the hindu notion of *nara* from which 'Harayana' evolved, man into God-man (Pahlajani 1975: 104).

Now, considering the different aspects of Garo belief in rebirth, particularly those who are firmly attached to the traditional religion and hold the view that men are subject to reincarnation or trans-incarnation according to the merit or demerit of one's past deeds. Man's subsequent rebirths may pass through different stages - plants, insects, animals or man before the soul finally leaves for *ma'mang a'song* (spirit-land) to live there permanently. Fear of such repeated rebirths, helps to a great extent, in moulding a man's moral and social discipline.
Garos have their own stand points to such belief, not as a mere theory but the strength of such belief is often demonstrated through many tales and folkways. The Garo ideas of rebirth and re-incarnation seems to have some relation with the Hindu doctrine of *karma*. It is most likely that, the primitive religion of the Garos might had been further influenced by this doctrine.

Briefly speaking, *karma* is often taken to indicate a 'law of action or a principles of causality'. Hiriyana (1969 : 46) says "In the first place, the doctrine (of *karma*) extends the principles of causation to the sphere of human conduct and teaches that as every event in the physical world is determined by its antecedents, so everything that happens in the moral realm is preordained". A little further study of the subject will greatly help us to know as to how far Garo traditional faith has taken another shape. "According to the doctrine of *karma*, every-one as a *jiva* in bondage to the world - is conditioned and determined by his conduct, as this is enacted over a period of innumerable births. Every deed that one performs has its effect in world and forms within the doer a *samskara* or *vasana* (tendency) that becomes the basis of his future deeds. *Karma* is thus a 'Law' that sets forth the relation between one's action as a *jiva* and one's state of being (Ashok 1979 : 207)."
It is therefore found that, although such doctrine is not fully developed in the minds of the Garos, it has, in the early stages of development, exerted a great influence to change their outlook, and the knowledge about the consequence of one's present action this perhaps gave the tribe new vista and such belief in the fruits of one's present deeds could to a great extent help in keeping the balance of their social temperament. The Hindu doctrine of *karma* has however gone to such a depth that average Garo cannot comprehend. Garo idea of rebirth does not view it as fantastically innumerable subsequent births; the lighter view of re-incarnation or trans-incarnation of human souls held by the Garos characterise the simplicity of the tribe and, for them, few re-incarnations seem to be enough for final liberation of the human soul.

Among the modern writers, Marak (1982: 12-13) has in his book *Ang' Oluk Ku'ening*, used the word *ba'bhra* to mean supreme being. He is the first Garo writer to employ such word. The root meaning of the word *ba'bhra* is not known. Ancient Garos, might have, no doubt, used this term to mean 'creator' or other like supernatural being of their conception. In traditional Garo religion, *tata ra'buga* is accepted as high god by most Garos. Atong Garos consider *waimong* as their high god and Ganching Garos take *duramong* as their high god. Along with high god of any name, *saljong* and *susime* are invariably attached. Thus, *tata ra'buga, saljong* and *susime* remain the most popular among all the sections of the
Garos. The nature of Garo high-god *tātara* rabuga, saljong and *gusime* could be roughly characterised with the corresponding Hindu triune - *Brahma*, *Vishnu* and *Shiva*. The term *ba'bra* employed by Marak (1982: 12-13) is no doubt, interesting and beautiful. But, from the etymological standpoint, the meaning of the word *ba'bra* may be further analysed and examined. In Garo, *ba* may be variously interpreted as *bā'a* (to beget or to carry on the back) which carries true Garo character. With regard to the second part of the word *bra*, several alternative sources are opened. It is quite probable that from time immemorial, Garos might have got it from the Sanskrit word *'brah'* which means 'to burst forth'. Thus, the root meaning of the word, *'brah'* is 'to-burst-forth'. The Brahamanda (Universe or the World and man) has burst forth out of Brahman, (Ahmad-Shah 1971: 80, 97). During the Missionary period, most Garo writers used the word *Isol* to mean God. Bible translators too employed this word in their work and thenceforth the term *'Isol'* has become very popular amongst the Garos of both the social groups, traditional and modern. The word *'Isol'* has been suitably, conveniently and appropriately borrowed from the neighbouring Bengali and Assamese word *'Iswar'* which again comes from the Sanskrit term *'Iswara'*. Those early writers, inspite of their being physically so close to their traditional culture of their own people were not perhaps aware of the availability of such term to qualify the whole attribute of God. However, from the prevailing social ethos it is observed that any title or designation good or beautiful, if falls short
of the general concept of the whole attribute of God as creator, preserver and redeemer is not likely to be accommodated by the modern society.

Besides, there are certain Garo terms which seemed to be direct adoption from Hinduism. Few of such expressions are worth mentioning here. The word bisikrom as a name of certain unknown spirit is sometimes uttered by the Garos; but, nowhere, the deity bisikrom is worshiped nor invoked and as such, only the name bisikrom is known to the people but it has no full status of a deity in the Garo pantheon. Perhaps, the name bisikrom has come from Hindu concept of Viswakarma and as such, it remained only in name and it is treated as a very minor spirit. Garos have very important household deity pokni-rishi or rishi atile and this deity is very popular among all the sections of the Garos. The word rishi appears to be a direct borrowing from the Hindu term rishi (sage), Country wide epidemic diseases like Cholera and kala-azar are called marikki by the Garos; they have of course, their own way of oblique expression to denote such epidemic, but, the word marikki appears to have come from the name of a great monster maareecha. In Hindu epic Ramayana, it is mentioned that maareecha was the son of a female monster taatake (wife of Sunda, a yaksha). Taatake was equal in strength to a score of elephants; Taatake and her son maareecha wrought havoc and changed one a well populated country into dreadful wilderness (Dandaka Forest), (Kajagopalachari 1983 : 29). So, the Garo
term mar ikkl might be a direct adoption of the name maareeoha where its demonic power caused complete annihilation of human population in the whole country exactly in the same manner as any epidemic disease could do to human beings. Among the Garos, the king of the dead is styled as Jom (jom raja). This name is also found to be a direct import from the Hindu word yama, meaning more or less the same object. In Hinduism, Yama has some relation to the Law of karma. "If the karmas (actions) are evil, the soul after death goes to the world of Yama, who punishes it in seven hells - raurava, mahaurava, vanhi, vitarani, khambipaka, darkness, blinding darkness - each more horrible than the other. The end is utter annihilation of soul when it has suffered the full consequences of its evil karmas (Ahmad Shah 1971 : 138). Adoption and borrowing of words and phrases from other communities are also well borne out by the fact that, there are many ordinary expressions which are clearly known to be of non-Garo origin and it is the resultant effect of long social interaction of the heterogeneous communities thriving in the region and is only a part of the process of acculturation.

Contact with Islam

Garos do not suffer from geographical isolation, rather it suffers badly from the over exposure to many alien communities. As it is already discussed, it is noticed that plenty of Hindu elements found an ingress into the domestic faith of the Garos in the hills without giving a slightest clue
to the Hindus themselves of such undercurrent infiltration of certain spiritual elements and this way, many Hindu concept got infused in the minds of the Garos. On the other hand, Garos too, never bother about the source and origin of any of their religious notion as being borrowed or born in their own land. Side by side, Garos had been in regular contact with the Muslim inhabitants of the valleys surrounding the main Garo habitat. So, it is quite obvious that muslim community played a vital role in shaping the destiny of the socio-economic life of the Garos. In fact, it is observed that, it was the muslim population who helped the Garos in the initial stage in respect of petty trades and commerce through barter system. When Hindus remained in their own world of reservation and orthodoxy muslim businessmen got access to the Garo habitat and rendered all necessary assistance to the tribe in various material achievements, thereby furthered their economic life. It is however quite clear that in religious field, muslims were not interested in sharing their religious ideas with the tribe and perhaps, because of this reason, Garos do not have any elements of Islam to be incorporated in their traditional faith. Garos needed some agencies through which they could procure their domestic requirements such as food, clothing and certain rare items of movable properties, and they could find such middle men amongst the muslim traders. In their socio-religious activities, Garos had to procure some rare items of valuable properties, such as, Bara-marang (special type of cloth used
In the solemn occasion), *hanga* (gongs) of different categories, viz., *singgimari*, *hangaora*, *Mongma jekly*, *Wakanta*, *Darangda* and *Assam Katta* etc., liquor jar of various capacity, *majra*, weapons like *milam* (typical Garo sword), *sela* (spear) and also many kinds of ornament both for male and female from different region of Garo habitat as well as from outside, and Muslim traders are instrumental in making those articles readily available to the Garos in the hills by transporting them from one place to another in and around Garo land. Muslim people, having no prejudice to any sort of business transaction, have remained effective media by which Garos could get regular supply of such articles. Even to this day, it is found that the traditional Garo ornaments are still being supplied and sold by the Muslim traders; any Hindu trader could not be found carrying or selling such Garo ornaments. This way, the Muslim people contributed all possible helps towards material well being of the tribe except giving out their Islam. In short it is found that, the Muslim traders in course of their business pursuit came closer to the tribe, understood their economic needs and found out the way for procuring these materials for them. Thus, Muslim communities during their long association with the Garos acted as an active agent towards developing material elements of their culture. Lack of borrowing of elements of Islam in the religion of the Garos was probably due to the fact that Islam does not recognize partial conversion (and unlike Hinduism it is a proselytizing
religion) and there is historical evidence that there were some Garos converted to Islam (Majumdar 1978) and probably they merged themselves in Muslim society or completely abandoned Islam.

Contact with the Hinduized Communities. There is a large population of Hinduized tribes permanently settled in different parts of Garo habitat and in the other adjoining districts of Assam. They are mostly found inhabiting the plain areas of Garo hills bordering Mymensingh district of Bangladesh and in the districts of Goalpara and Kamrup of Assam. Those Hinduized plain tribes are Hajong, Koch, Sabha and Kachari. Those tribes, through their long and close association with the Garos are found to have exerted certain influence upon the social and religious life of the Garos.

Now, looking at the different modes of worship and ceremonies found in Garo religion, it is observed that some of the minor gods from the Hindu pantheon have been inducted to the hills. Those deities are understood to have come to the Garo habitat from Hindu society through above mentioned plain tribes namely Hajong, Koch, Sabha and Kachari who had already adopted some elements of Hinduism in addition to their existing tribal faith and beliefs (Majumdar 1978). But, despite of the fact that Garos were living in close association with those Hinduized plain tribes from time immemorial, and some of the Hindu elements are known to have crept into the traditional faith of the tribe from the Hindu society, Garos could retain their
true tribal identity without getting themselves dissolved in the vast ocean of Hinduism, instead, those borrowed deities were termed and domesticated in their high hills adorning them with local names and character. This is amply proved by the following observations.

As discussed under Chapter IV, as many as 57 titles of Garo deities so believed to be connected in some way or other with the human sufferings were selected and, out of those 57, some are found to be migrant deities; because, it is observed that, food offering and the language used for those deities are quite different from that of the typical Garo habit. In order to know, whether the particular deity is of purely Garo origin or adopted from other neighbouring tribes, few points appear to be worth considering; for instance, the nature and items of sacrificial offering and the language familiar to the deity and restriction or permissibility of certain meat-food etc.

In traditional Garo religion, when propitiatory ceremonies are performed in honour of some deities such as, dalwa, gali-shiring, chokdepa, rangea, sangkalbala, wadot, chinkale, chura shupal, boldam-shiring and chura-gitting, the kamal invokes the deity in Jharua dialect of Assamese. So, it is very clear that these deities are not familiar with the local vernacular which means that they do not understand Garo language. Present day Garos of traditional society cannot
give any reason why kamal does not talk to these deities in Garo language. They would simply say, "It is a traditional practice". It cannot be denied that to be a true Garo deity, it should carry everything Garo, in language, food-habit and dress. On this simple ground, it can be argued that those deities having no knowledge of Garo language can easily be presumed as originally belonging to other plains-tribes if not of true hindu tradition, like Hajong, Kooch, Rabha and Koohari with whom Garos have been living for ages. The originality or otherwise of the Garo deities may also be studied from the contents of the food-offering in krita performance. Sacrificial offerings like cow, pig, goat, fowl, egg, cooked-rice and rice-beer are found to be very common and are truly typical Garo customary food and these items are readily available in the Garo homes, whereas, pigeon, tortoise and ducks must have been a copy or imitation of the practices found amongst the Hindus of the neighbouring plain areas. For instance, Hajongs of Garo Hills (Meghalaya) consider Bausto to be the major deity who is responsible for the well being of the village in general; tortoise and pigeon are sacrificed to this deity. Lokhi Thakuria, the deity of wealth to which tortoises are sacrificed (Majumdar (B) 1972 : 5). Certain Garo deities like, dalwa, put, banpang or banpang-moil require tortoise, pigeon and duck etc. Here also, it can be presumed that the deity under the name dalwa primarily belongs either to Hajong, Kooch or Rabha since on all
accounts it bears characters of them. Again, banpang or banpang-moila bears certain similarities with Hajong and Habha deity 'hudum' requiring almost similar animals for sacrifice. So, definitely, Garo udim is a modification of Hajong 'hudum'.

The nature of ailment connected with Hajong 'hudum' is general debility as observed by Majumdar (1972: 54). Again, Hajong deity 'chokdhapa' connected with fever and requiring a cock or hen for sacrifice seems to have entered Garo habitat carrying more or less identical name chokdhapa connected with similar ailments. So, this deity has also come from the Hajongs. Hajongs have another minor spirit called 'daini' as observed by Majumdar (1972: 54) which is connected with disease like general debility; it is to be propitiated with tortoise, pig and boal fish (Wallago attu) etc. Garo deity bearing the title of daini skal seems to be an adoption from the Hajong spirit 'daini' and afterward the latter got domiciled among the Garo deities as revealed by the fact that Garo daini-skals is pleased with sacrifice of cow, pig and fowl. Garo deity Chininkali demands that the officiating priest have to wash his body and dress himself like a Hindu while performing the ceremony and as such, it can well be understood to have come from the Hajong pantheon but managed to retain its food habit and its tribal costume which is further supported by the fact that, eating or carrying of beef into the house is strictly prohibited in the performing house for about a month following the ceremony.
and such restriction generally appears to be opposed to Garo diet. Garo deities such as, dalwa, pongrengma, churu-chupal and chinkali do not admit cow sacrifice nor permit eating of beef, so, those spirits cannot be considered to be original Garo deities. In his study of religious practices among the Song Koch of Garo Hills, Meghalaya, Majumdar (1968) says, "The general Song Koch term for deity or any other supernatural being is 'wai' which is suffixed to the name of particular deities or supernatural beings, for instance, 'kali wai', 'kamakhya wai', 'talai wai', etc. Majumdar (1968: 247-252). Among Garos too call their high god wai mong Majumdar (1968: 247-252), giving an account of Magico-Religious rites and Beliefs of the Gongdani Rabha (1968: 247-252) has discussed as many as 30 Rabha deities. Now, the religious practices of Hajong, Koch and Rabha living in and around present Garo home land being closely examined, it is found that practices of the Rabhas bear close resemblance to Garo rituals, because, Garos have different supernatural beings related to different human ailments and different deities demand different sacrifices and to be propitiated at different hours of the day. So also, Rabha gods numbering quite a lot behave in similar ways as are found among the Garo deities. So, in this respect, perhaps, it will not be wrong to note that some of the deities of Garos and Rabhas are common. However, one striking difference between the two pantheons is found in
that, the sacrificial offering ranges from snails and crabs to pigs for the Rabha deities, whereas, it ranges from egg to cow for the Garo deities. In certain cases, Garo deities are pleased even with the snam offering and some of the Rabha deities are also satisfied with nominally fermented rice-beer.

Among the Kachari tribe two classes of deities are naturally found, i.e., (1) household gods (na-ni madai), (2) village gods (gami-ni madae) (Endle : 1975 : 33-40). Kacharis call their god 'madai' where Garos call them mite; more or less similar word. Garos call their household gods nokni-rishi or rishi-atila. In Kachari pantheon, the most important household god is 'bathau'. In Garo pantheon, nokni-rishi or rishi-atila is considered to be the most important household deity. Inside the Kachari house, a place where a slightly raised altar is usually kept is called 'dham' and Garos have identical name for such spot as kimindam or timindam.

Kacharis have another god 'doini-madai' (river-god) which is the cause of cholera and other malignant diseases and the propitiatory ceremony performed in honour of this cholera-demon is termed as 'morong-puja'. In Garo pantheon too, one deity daini-skal is believed to be the cause of cholera and another deity suni-marang is taken to be the cause of trouble in the throat and si-marong is having hands in all rheumatic pains and other allied complaints. In all ceremonial worship of the
Kachari tribe, sacrificial offering mostly consist of goats, pigeons, fowls, flowers, eggs, chickens, pounded rice flour, mixture of pulse and rice (gazi) betel nuts (tamul), and betel leaves (pan-leaves). Among the Kachari tribe, immoderate consumption of rice-beer (zu) in all social and religious functions is observed and the same is true among the Garos also. On all accounts, therefore, original tribal religion of the Kachari tribe is found to bear close affinity with that of the traditional religion of the Garos. Most of the Kachari words and terms are found to have same root with that of the Garo words and terms, only differing slightly in spelling written according to their respective phonemics. Endle (1875: 35) observes "The Kachari pantheon is a very extensive one, though it seems probable that only a comparatively small number are strictly of tribal or national origin, many having obviously been borrowed from their Hindu neighbours". Similar observation holds good in respect of Garo pantheon also since many of the currently known deities are found to have been adopted from the neighbouring hinduized tribes.

The above study reveals that cow sacrifice is the only difference by which one could draw a distinction between the two communities of deities that is those deities or gods known to hinduized tribes and the Garo deities. Such distinction evidently characterise the fact that those tribes, viz., Hajong,
Koch, Habha and Kaenari have more or less moved towards Hinduism whereas Garos have successfully retained their original tribal faith. It is however observed that there have been mutual sharing and borrowing of gods and spirits among the different tribes in and around Garo habitat as they do in exchanging commodities; thus, the principle of give and take deal among the different tribes were found to be smoothly going on.

Now, after fully analysing different characters of all the Garo deities under discussion, it is found that at least 25 per cent of them are either borrowed or adopted from the neighbouring Hinduized tribes or in certain cases directly or indirectly influenced by Hindu residents of the adjoining plains. Thus, with the passage of time when Garos came in close contact with the nearby Hindu population, they began to experience newer and newer social situation thereby requiring them to adopt and borrow different ways to tide over the new local problems and difficulties social, economic and health and hence, they had to borrow or adopt such deities as found fit and useful for their social and religious purposes and as a result, the number of their gods increased considerably. Probably deities from Hinduized tribes were first adopted by those Garos (mostly belonging to the Ambeng Section) whose habitat is adjacent to the habitat of the Hinduized tribes. Gradually they borrowed deities along with all their paraphernalia travelled to newer and more interior areas. This process is exactly analogous to the
process of adoption of elements of material culture. All the supernaturals coming from hinduized tribes being thus eliminated, the remaining few spirits may truly be called original Garo deities and of them, tatara, rabuga, saljong susime remain as principal gods all over the Garo habitat. Ultimately, it is found interesting to note that, apparently Garo deities come in large number, but, when strictly examined they are found to shrink into very few; all other minor or smaller spirits associated to Garo pantheon are nothing but the different manifestation of the one high god tatara rabuga (waimong or duremong), saljong and susime.

It is further observed that, with the induction of certain elements of hinduism into the pure and simple way of tribal life, Hindu notion of varna has also been noticed amongst those hinduized tribes and with that concept, a mild form of caste system now exists amongst those communities. When the ideas of casteism is born, the sense of lower and higher castes grows and it is a natural corollary that when castes and sub-castes are recognised by the society, the necessity of a priestly class is inevitable. Majumdar (1972) mentions three categories of priests among all sections of Hajong: (i) Deosi, (ii) Adhikari and (iii) the professional Brahman priest. "The Deosi is selected from amongst the ordinary Hajong villagers and he is to learn the technique of worshipping the deities from his predecessor only after being selected as a
Deosi. The office of the Deosi is not inheritable. So, being an ordinary member of the village, the Deosi is not considered 'cleaner' over other villagers. The Adhikari is a 'clean' Hajong priest and above him comes the professional Brahman priest, cleaner and higher Hindu caste as observed by Majumdar. The Song Koch also term their priest deosi the office of the priest is different for different deities. No doubt, the office of the priest is not hereditary but priest of certain deities are confined to certain particular cleans only (Majumdar 1968: 330).

Among the Kacharis also, no priestly caste is found but, as Endle (1975: 39) says, "In Kamrup, however, one of the recognised sub-tribes is, or was, known as Brahmanroi, a name which seems to point to Brahmans as having a certain standing in the Bada community". This way, with the introduction of Hindu ideas into the unsophisticated tribal society vis-a-vis their pure and simple religion, a sense of high and low caste, restriction of interdining and inter-marriage within the same ethnic groups were ingrained in the minds of the tribal folks particularly among the Hajong, Koch, Rabha and Kachari communities. In the midst of strife and struggle while other tribes of the region were swayed by the strong Brahminical win, Garos could hitherto maintain their true tribal character carrying all along with them their original faith and belief free from Hindu concept of varna, priestly class and other racial
conservatism. The term 'oleao' or 'cleaner' is taken by the Garos in hygienic point of view and not in the sense of caste or varna, trades or profession as understood by the Hindus of India. To a Garo mind, all men are equal both in spiritual and mundane planes. All such give and take behaviour exhibited by different tribes clearly reveals the fact that, each community realises its own limitations in meeting the different social situation with their own resources, and hence, there has been exchange of ideas by means of social interaction. In tribal world, social interaction may be interpreted as a type of relationship between two or more communities in which the behaviour of one community is modified by the other. In this way, those tribes were found experimenting efficacy of supernaturals of the neighbouring communities when their national god failed them like a patient running from one physician to another.

**Advent of Christianity.**

The coming of christianity into home land of the Garos is more or less contemporaneous with the British occupation of Garo Hills and its neighbouring states. British Government started an operation in and around Garo habitat from the first quarter of the nineteenth century with a view to bringing the entire Garo inhabited area under its administrative control but could not complete the full annexation until the last quarter of the same century. The government applied various tactics to
subjugate and bring the savage Garo tribe to its full control with appeal to fire arms took nearly fifty years for the mighty British to bring the whole Garo habitat under its administration. Christianity, a religion of the west entered the blood of the Garo tribe with the baptism of first two Garo converts Omed Watre Momin and his nephew Hamkhe Watre Momin on 8th February, 1863 at Guhaki in Assam. Coming of the Christianity might truly be called a renascent period in the socio-religious life of the Garos and in fact, it has paved the way for great social change amongst the Garos. But, the way the Garos got their new religion, is strangely different from that of other tribes elsewhere. That was the period, while the old religion of the old society awaiting gradual and steady transformation to hinduism, the new religion brought sudden intervention to the situation to divert the spiritual destiny of the Garos in this region. Omed and his nephew Hamkhe from Watrepara Village on the north-east Garo Hills started their education as early as 1847 in the school run and managed by a Government Officer Major Jenkin at Goalpara in Assam. The whole process of development of the Christian churches in Garo habitat, as a major factor in shaping the future destiny of the tribe faithfully studied, is found to be that the basic ideas for the accommodation of this new religion was already underway as early as 1816 with the selection of David Scott, the Commissioner of Kuch Behar to deal with the trouble on the Garo frontier. As early as 1822, he was making correspondence with Serampore on the subject of
missionary to the Garos (Carey 1966 : 78). It was only in the year 1877, at the request of the government which had established the administrative headquarters of the newly formed Garo Hills district, the mission shifted its centre for Garo works from Goalpara to Tura (Downs 1971 : 54). The foundation grounds for the missionary works for the Garos were thus laid by the Government agencies and not by the missionaries. As early as 1870, when Dr. I.J. Stoddard met him for the second time, the Lieutenant Governor of Bengal, Sir William Grey expressed his happiness and showed his pleasing impression and the Lieutenant Governor also expressed his desire to induce the mission to settle at Tura and had suggested in his review of the Commissioner's Annual Report for the year 1869-1870, that encouragement be given to the American Missionaries in their efforts to educate the Garos. Colonel Haughton forwarded a copy of these suggestions with a personal letter to Mr. Stoddard who was then head of the mission at Goalpara to shift the mission centre to Tura with a sincere assurance to render all possible help and assistance in the works (Carey 1966 : 123). Finally, in the year 1877, the mission station was removed from Goalpara to Tura, the Government headquarters in the Garo Hills. 

As early as 1790, the British made some efforts to pacify the area, but even in the middle of the nineteenth century they were still raiding the plains, so that from 1852 onwards, punitive expeditions had to be sent against them; they were in a land of jungle-covered crags and deadly climate, standing out obstinate and defiant, a secret lair and
inaccessible foes; but in the expedition of 1872-73 they were finally reduced to submission*. So, it took nearly eighty-three years for the British to bring the whole Garo area under its administration. This way, necessary facilities having been provided by the government for making the missionary establishment easier, it took for the mission work about ten years to set up a permanent station at Tura in 1877 from the time the American Baptist Mission started their actual work among the Garos in 1867 from their centre at Goalpara. If however, it is properly recounted it is found that the idea of organising Missionary works for the Garos was first born in the mind of the good and benevolent government officer David Scott as early as 1816 and it is only about 61 years later it could be translated into action. Mr. Stoddard returned to America in 1873 but in the following year two new missionaries arrived with their families for the Garo works - E.G. Phillips and M.C. Mason with their wives and they were the real pioneer missionaries - foreign missionaries who were among the Garos (Downs 1971 : 54). The first American Baptist Missionary to translate the scripture into Garo, was T.J. Keith who first translated the Gospel of Matthew only; and subsequently, Keith's place was taken by M.C. Mason and E.G. Phillips, and they proceeded to translate the rest of the New Testament which was completed in 1895. Next, translation of the whole Old Testament was carried out by the joint efforts of M.C. Mason, Mrs. E.C. Bond and Modhunath Momin. After the death of Dr. Phillips in 1921, Mrs. Bond and Modhunath Momin in 1924,
Dr. M.C. Mason and his wife continued the works of translation and the whole Bible was published in 1924, and the same having been further revised in 1927 the whole Bible was issued in one Volume for the first time and this is substantially the next still in use (Hooper 1963 : 157-58). From that time onwards, Christianity has got its solid ground and that, it has come to stay in the heart of Garo home land. It may also be recalled here that the first General Congregation of the Garo Baptist Churches was convened by Rev. J.J. Keith on the third and fourth of April, 1874; and in that conference as many as 43 delegates from eight different churches were present. From among the missionaries, Rev. M.C. Mason, Rev. E.G. Phillips and Rev. T.J. Keith were in attendance (Momin 1982 : 3).
A'chik Baptist Delqipa Krima (Garo Baptist Convention) celebrated its centennial in the year 1974 from 3th to 10th February at Chokpot Church. Garo Baptist Churches, however, celebrated the 100th anniversary of its beginnings in 1967. Roma Catholic Mission came to Garo Hills in the year 1925 and its first missionary was Father Hocca who arrived at Tura on the 10th of January in 1933 and he started Catholic mission works among the Garos. Roman Catholic mission celebrated its 50th anniversary in the year 1984. This way, the two missions have been functioning side by side for the last 50 years in Garo Hills. By the time of the Jubilee conference of 1886, there were 875 baptized Garo christians with 5 ordained workers under the Baptist churches. A promising foothold has been secured in Garo Hills of Assam (Downs 1971 : 54).
It is remarkable to note that Christianity spread among the Garos from northern and eastern areas in the periphery of Garo Hills and in those areas Hindu influence was minimal. Garos started to become Christian in large numbers after 1941 only and Christianity spread to the remotest corners of the Garo habitat, even counteracting the gradually Hindu influence. The growth of Christianity among the Garos can be assessed from the following figures:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Total Population</th>
<th>Number of Christians in Garo Hills</th>
<th>Percentage of Christian to Total Population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1901</td>
<td>1,38,274</td>
<td>3,647</td>
<td>2.65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1911</td>
<td>1,58,936</td>
<td>N.A.</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1921</td>
<td>1,79,140</td>
<td>N.A.</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1931</td>
<td>80,911</td>
<td>1,599</td>
<td>17.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1941</td>
<td>2,23,569</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>0.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1951</td>
<td>2,42,075</td>
<td>49,292</td>
<td>16.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1961</td>
<td>3,07,228</td>
<td>87,311</td>
<td>28.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1971</td>
<td>4,06,615</td>
<td>1,65,715</td>
<td>40.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1981</td>
<td>5,05,003</td>
<td>N.A.</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The discrepancy in the figure between 1901 and 1971 was perhaps due to the readjustment of boundaries between Garo Hills and Goalpara during the period.

Now, in the present study, it will be worthwhile to focus the problems as to what degree the so called 100 years of Christian service has given to the Garos and to what extent the new religion could help in bringing about social change among the Garos particularly from the beginning of the Christian mission up to the last period of British rule. How far Christianity has helped the tribe to bring certain changes in their social, economic and religious life during the long period of missionary activities under the foreign rule.

Mohapatra and Swain (1969) write, "Most of us believe that conversion to Christianity brings an all round progress to the tribals which includes, among other things, economic and educational development. This has been taken to mean economic prosperity, educational development, wider knowledge, and participation in local as well as national politics. To this has to be added a developed material culture, with possession of improved tools and implements, as well as adoption of sanitary habits. The above criteria have been taken as the minimum to indicate all round progress, namely, educational, political, economic and material culture...". It is however observed that such remarks are found to be a too hasty
proposition considering the circumstances under which the Garos embraced Christianity. It is simply by chance that, a good and sympathetic officer like David Scott, the Commissioner of Kuch Kihar was given the high and onerous responsibility of dealing with the turbulent Garo tribe as early as 1816 and the entire region in and around Garo habitat was also quite fortunate to have an exceedingly kind and generous administrator like Captain Francis Jenkins who stationed at Goalpara and lived in Assam for long 36 years. It was the government officials who first thought of giving education to those wild tribes and to give the message of Christ well ahead before the missionaries took up the works. Captain Jenkins had already opened a school for the Garos at Goalpara in the year 1847. Gmed Watre Momin and his nephew Namkhe Watre Momin were the good and promising students in Captain Jenkins' School and that they got education in Bengali and Assamese medium. These two persons were truly learned in their age among the Garos. Downs (1971 : 14) writes, "The first American Baptist Mission stations in North East India was not established for the purpose of evangelizing the people of that area but as strategic outposts in a campaign to evangelize the Shan tribes of Northern Burma and Southern China". They thought that Northern Burma was the most fertile and virgin soil for the propagation of the Gospel. Down (1971 : 46) further observes, "American Baptists were willing to support work in places like Burma where large numbers of Karens were becoming Christians, but they were reluctant where such dramatic developments were not taking
place". When Shan mission was found to be unsuccessful, it was officially abandoned in 1341 following the death of Rhoda Bronson. While failing in their works among the Karens of Northern Burma, missionaries prayed for that 'Karens of Assam' might be found. But, as Downs observes, 25 years of work, by 22 missionaries could produce only 50 Assamese Christians; as a result, it was even proposed to abandon Assam mission in 1358. But, till that year, missionaries had not done anything to the Garo areas although the mission had known about the Garos as early as 1877, when Captain Jenkins had asked it to establish a school for the Garos at Goalpara. Of whatever calibre a missionary might be, human beings are not perfect, both in thought and in action. All the missionaries already in the field overlooked and underestimated Garo areas and the Garos. They were all after the Karens of Burma and secondly after the Karens of Assam (Mikirs or Nagas). Their eyes were directed towards extreme north-east India much beyond the land of the Garos. They were all along for the quantitative conversions and never seeking for the qualitative heart. After great and prolonged mental suffering, illusion and disappointment in their work, the Assam Mission was blessed with two great souls - the Garos Omed and Damkhe who were the first two Garos to be converted into Christianity and baptized in the waters of the Brahmaputra, one of the biggest rivers of the country at Guwahati in Assam on Sunday February 8, 1963. Thus ultimately, the real Karens of Assam had indeed been found (Down 1 : 1971).
After all, whatever man proposes, God disposes.

One point is however worth considering here. That is, whether actually, Christianity was brought to the Garos by the missionaries or it was the Garo who produced Christianity before the missionaries. It was the Garos, who provoked the missionaries with the message of Christ when missionaries were convalescing from years of agony still unaware and unexpected of such dramatic change. Omed and Hamkhe were the true typical Garos living a true customary ways of life, used to native liquor and everything traditional with them. These two lads were however of different mental make up, they were also of serious type endowed with high quality of leadership. While in school, they contacted any Hindu and Muslim friends. They knew Assamese and Bengali well. Having been in the midst of Hindus and Muslims, the boys could definitely learn many things about Hinduism and Islam. After his education Omed became a sepoy and served in that capacity for 15 years at Gauhati. Sometime in 1857, while guarding a mission bungalow at Gauhati he chanced to pick up a Bengali tract entitled 'Apatti Nashak' (The destroyer of objections) which gave him clear knowledge about the Christian religion. As for Hamkhe, he was deeply interested in religion and he wanted to find out great and good God. He used to go into the jungles by himself and pray that the true God would reveal himself. As the story goes, on one occasion, a tall, impressive looking man suddenly appeared at his side and said, "Your prayer have been heard". When it was told to a Hindu Sadhu in Goalpara, he believed that
the man Damkhe had met and who had disappeared as soon as he had spoken was Vishnu's avatar Ram. Later on, Damkhe got a copy of the same tract 'Apatti Nashak' left in Goalpara by a visiting English Baptist Missionary and since that time Damkhe lost interest in Hinduism (Downs 1971: 43). Though physically away from each other temporarily, the spirits of those two men met in complete unanimity being convinced of the message of Christ primarily revealed through the tract and their spiritual aspiration could be understood from their feeling and expression. The great Hindu Doctrine of repeated births gave Damkhe a great mental distress. On deeper study of Hinduism, a new fear was taking place of the old traditional Garo religion so, for him, in the free life of the jungle, he had a chance, even in spite of demons; it was possible to elude them by some way or other. They (demons) could at any rate be appeared, and a man is man always. With serious mind and great curiosity Damkhe had been examining and screening all his personal experiences of different religions and his thought was drawn particularly towards two religions namely Hinduism and Christianity and in a pathetic passage he says, "I got the book called 'Apatti Nashak'. This book showed many proofs that those things trusting in which the Hindus hoped to obtain heaven were all untrue. Then the trust I had in Ram was also gone, and my mind was again lost" (Carey 1966: 68).

When Omed and Hamkhe became together again at Gauhati, they talked over their separate experiences and gave
out individual opinions on the matter of choosing their future religion. Hamkhe told "We Garos have no religion, but it is certainly necessary for us to seek some way of obtaining good after death. Which of the three religions that of the Hindus, Mohammedians, or Sahibs is it best for us to receive"? To this vital query in such crucial moment, Omed's answer was characteristically shrewed, as he says, "We do not know the Mohammedian religion; the Hindus observe caste, and if we take their religion we must forsake our people; the Sahibs do not observe caste, therefore, to receive their religion is good in every respect" (Carey 1966 : 69). This way on that memen- teous hour when they were on the crossroad they were consi­ ring all the pros and cons on this cardinal issue and taken a decision to receive Christianity as their future relion of their people. Therefore, on final analysis, it is found that the Christian religion was first chosen by Garos them­ selves through these two great souls and it is not that the missionaries brought it for the Garos as generally un­ erstood. So, evidently the two Garos, Omed and Hamkhe were the real trail blazers and true messanger of not only to the land of the Garos but also to the whole of uncharted Hills of North­ East India

From the above observations, it is quite clear that, with the choise of Christianity by Omed and Hamkhe, Garos had already accepted Christianity well ahead before the permanent transfer of Mission station from Goalpara to Tura in
in 1877. The tasks before the missionaries lay simply in supervising, developing and taking care of its expansion. Had Omad and semkhe decided in favour of Hinduism, the whole Garo population might have perhaps become Hindus by now. If the entire tribe would have turned into Hinduism, naturally, caste distinction would have evolved among the Garos in some form or other. The sections of the tribe which entered first might have definitely claimed the status of higher caste and the subsequent followers would naturally be placed in the lower rung. Their position in the inter-tribal community would therefore remain in chaos and confusion. Their place in the inter-tribal continuum would have been like that of the present plains tribes namely, Hajong, Koch, Rabha and Kachari. Such possibility was well predicted by David Scott as early as 1822. While making frantic effort to open a missionary school for the Garos, he wrote to W.B. Bayley, secretary to the Government on April 27, 1825, saying "I am satisfied that nothing permanently good can be obtained by other means and that if you do not interfere on behalf of the Garos, they will soon become Hindoo or half Hindoos, retaining and acquiring many of the bad parts of their present and improved creeds".

Solid foundation having been thus laid, early missionaries as well as the local Garos who had been already Christians had to work among the unconverted Garos only who were still adhering to their old and traditional religion. The long span of 70 years from 1877-1947 may be taken as missionary
period during which Garo land got active participation of the American Baptist Missionaries in Christian services. During this period, Garo land did not witness any spectacular achievement of national level in any field, social, economic, education and politics; yet, Christianity has remained a major factor in bringing about gradual social revolution and it prepared the ways for the future advancement of the tribe. The contributions the Christian religion delivered towards shaping the destiny of the new generations of the tribe may be discussed as follows.

Domestic Life. In Christian villages, arrangement of houses became different compared to single 'all-in-one' traditional Garo house. Kitchen, cowshed, henshed and pigsty were separated from the main dwelling house making the inner parts of the house more healthy and tolerably comfortable. In the courtyard of the songgarek Garos were found simply the structures of sacrificial altar laying dotted here and there but in Christian houses, varieties of flowers started blossoming beautifully. In order to become a Christian, it was felt good for one to be able to read and understand Bible for acquiring better informations about the christian faith thereby enrich one's knowledge. So, inner urge for education arose in every Christian home and the parents felt the need for educating their children. Christian Garos discarded the use of rice beer and even consider drinking of it a sin. The old faith and belief were also vigorously condemned by Christian Garos.
Different styles of wearing varied kinds of ornaments, keeping long hair by men-folks were also discouraged as unnecessary and burdensome. Garos living particularly in the plain areas started wearing like their Hindu neighbours. In hills too, similar adaptation were going on wherever suitable. The old methods of healing sick by propitiating certain deities were replaced by therapeutic treatment wherever possible and also by herbal drugs, and for that, village 'Ojha' (medicine man) appeared as a substitute to traditional Krita Kamal. The members of the Christian families were encouraged to cultivate their faith in power of new almighty God and to pray in the name of Christ. In fine, Christian homes became more lively, cheerful and attractive. Charity and almsgiving at home and towards their neighbours and strangers were considered sacred.

Society with New Religion. Christian members developed the sense of oneness and unity, fellow feeling and mutual help with better altruistic gesture grew. While developing their churches, united efforts through thanks-giving and collective social services were maintained. Everywhere there were attempts to spread the message of the gospel to the songsarek brothers and many souls were won for Christ. Great social revolution was taking place in every corner of the hills. All traditional customs, habits and usages of old traditional society, that means, all social evils were being severely attacked and condemned by the new Christian society. Slaughtering
of animals and felling of valuable fruit trees on the death of a man were taken to be unwise, meaningless and wasteful. Continuation of life in the land of the spirits after death and the ideas of re-incarnation or rebirths were thought to be untrue. All deities (tribal gods) worshipped and feared by the ancestors are openly condemned by Christian Garos as being mere mumbo-jumbo. Christian society does not attach importance to all ancestral properties like, dang, Kram, Jram, Nagra, Ail, etc. Old classical types of Garo chants, such as Ajea, Doroo, Kabi ringa and Urap memanga were also forgotten and in their place, many new melodies appeared in the form of songs of praise, hymns and romantic songs and so on. Social temperament became more smooth and cool. With wider outlook, their world view stretched beyond the limit of their own country; they gained new horizon of spiritual vision. They looked forward to the few missionaries for guidance and advice in times of need. In this way, with the coming of Christianity, the older tribal characters such as, savagery, rudeness and wildness as known by the British disappeared, instead, the people came out to be gentle, smooth, meek and mild and law abiding. Sincere, honest and frank as they were, the whole human nature underwent complete change, and as a substitute, new social order evolved like a day quite different from the night. Initially by the British troops and the nature of their weapons and later by the message of Christ, the whole Garo tribe became perfectly tamed, well disciplined, loyal to the government and above all Gospel-abiding.
Educational Development. In the field of education during the long period of British rule no significant progress is noticed. From the first school opened by David Scott in the year 1826 at Singimari in the western Garo Hills, where Mr. Valentine William Hurley was the first teacher to educate the first batch of 40 Garo boys it was only in 1847 a school for the Garos was established at Goalpara by Captain Jenkins. Again, the third school purely meant for the Garos came into existence when Damkhe opened a school at Damra in July, 1864 where Damkhe himself was the teacher and that school could truly be called a school for the Garos in the Garo habitat. During the first 43 years of active missionary participation in the educational programme only one Middle School for both boys and girls was available at Tura. It was in the year 1920, the boys' section was taken over by the government leaving the Girls' M.E. School under the management of the mission, as a result, all the promising Garo students and who ever could afford to bear the expenses had to go to Calcutta, Shillong, Jorhat and Goalpara for High School Education. It may again be recalled here that, as early as 1871 when Captain W.J. Williamson (1869-1875) was appointed as the first Deputy Commissioner for Garo Hills, first group of missionaries consisting 6 members namely, Dr. Miles Bronson, Dr. I.J. Stoddard, Rev. M.E. Comfort, one Garo School teacher and two students came to Tura and initiated educational project among the Garos. But, it is not known in what way they
started the first school and to what extent they were successful in the beginning. Reviewing the whole course of educational development amongst the Garos from the beginning of the British rule and from the inception of the missionary organisation up to the time of India's independence in 1947, it is clear that, in the beginning of the British occupation, the government agencies in the persons of David Scott and some years later Captain Jenkins took keen interest in giving education to Garos, but with the passage of time, when missionaries grew more active in their effort to spread Christianity, the government seemed to lose its incentive and remained adamant to all cries and calls of the people. As early as 1914, the missionaries with the active cooperation of the interested leading citizens of Tura made an honest attempt to have a High School at Tura and accordingly apprised the government of the problems connected with the proposed plan, yet, the prospect of having an High School was still very bleak. Their dream, however, became a reality in March 23, 1934 when a private organization took up the project. The High School was not the product of governmental support but it was the outcome of persistent efforts made by the Garo Baptist Convention through a long chain of conferences and meetings despite financial and many other difficulties. It took several years for the Convention to take a final decision upon the project and somehow, the High School was born atleast. It was towards the close of the same decade that the full fledged High School was available for the Garos at Tura. So, although the British has ruled over
the whole of the Garo inhabited areas for more than a century
from the time of David Scott, only 9 graduates and 1 post
graduate could be produced from amongst the Garos by the year
1944, what an extremely sorry state of affairs. The state of
unprogressiveness in the sphere of education in Garo Hills is
attributed by many to the deliberate negligence of the
missionaries particularly the American Baptist Foreign Mission
Society, but, such allegation is not so serious against the
Catholic Mission since they came much later. The administrative
agency did not extend its helping hand in this direction,
presumably because of the fact that it expected that the entire
responsibility of educating the tribes should lie with the
mission and with that objective government initially invited
the missionaries to the place. On the part of the missionaries,
their venial faults deserve sympatetic scrutiny. The American
Baptist Mission then in Garo Hills was financially very weak.
Those missionaries were strongly writing to the American Baptist
Foreign Mission Society (A&BMS) as early as 1928 for financial
assistance for opening a High School at Tura but to no effect.
All the working missionaries were sincerely willing to start
a H.B. School but, for lack of financial resources, as the
saying goes 'the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak',
the scheme came to a stand still. Therefore, it is observed
that the Government once very eagerly and enthusiastically
patronized the educational project remained quite cool and
indifferent in the subsequent decades as a result, the entire
Garo area was kept in the lowest ebb of literacy. Since all the different departments are interdependent for the all round development of the region, governmental apathy, lack of encouragement and material support towards education, evangelistic activities were also badly affected particularly in the inner hills and as a consequence, even in the church organisation no significant improvement could be made. The ineffectiveness in the Christian action during missionary period which is coextensive with the British period is well attested by the fact that, even by the year 1950, three years after independence the Garo Baptist Convention had only 21,908 baptized members in 26 churches. The figure is a very poor show when compared to the present statistic of about a lakh of baptized members in 82 churches under Baptist Church alone. Similar figure stands in the Catholic churches too. It is really unhappy to note that during that period, the response from the government with regard to the development of Garo Hills as a whole, is rather very depressing. Even towards the close of the foreign rule in the country, the position of the Government Schools was very poor having only one H.E. School in the whole district, few M.E. Schools and little over 200 L.P. Schools. Garo Baptist convention, its associations (Krima) and different mother churches were then running several Schools in different important centres with salaries of mere pittance to the teachers.
Therefore, on sincere survey, it is found that, if the Mission could have equipped itself with sound financial resources and the district administration could give priority towards educational advancement in the area, the face of Garo Habitat would have completely changed for the better even before independence.

\* Economic Growth. \* Although there has been no remarkable change in the Garo economy within the period under discussion, the Garos both Christian and non-Christian became a bit enlightened about the necessity for exploring new area of economic activities and gradually started taking to wet cultivation wherever possible. The so-called educated people began to be absorbed in petty government jobs like vaccinators and school teachers. Even then, there were innumerable difficulties to improve their economic life. The so-called enlightened section of the society composing half-educated people particularly during the early missionary period were the product of the missionary or church sponsored schools and as such, their social status did not go beyond teaching and preaching in a small circle. Moreover, their environment and spiritual background also greatly influenced their domestic and economic life and that they lived quietly and well contented with whatever they earn in an usual way without endeavouring to explore any other easier means of livelihood. Besides spiritual reasons, there are many other drawbacks too. Since the entire region remained undeveloped,
Garos could not get better avenues for improving their lot in any way. But, whatever negative approach their spiritual concept might lead them towards amassing wealth and property, the Christian religion had opened up the eyes of the Garos and showed them the way of improvement for the saner and healthier life of the tribe and their posterity.

However, there are certain social phenomena where we find no change. It is rather surprising to note that, during the long period of foreign domination and missionary service in the land, the social system remained completely outside the influence of Christianity, quite unchanged and undisturbed. Garo social pattern is purely matrilineal. The woman is believed to be the prime ancestor of the family. Ancestral tradition and inheritance are affected through the mother. The sole rights of inheritance is enjoyed by the heiress-daughter married to the nephew of the father. The whole tribe has been faithfully following the old social order without a slightest venture for its improvement, modification or alteration whatsoever. Neither government nor the missionaries were interested in interfering in the matter nor there were any attempt for giving suggestion or advice for any sort of change in the existing social structure. Instead, those foreign agencies too approved, strengthened and confirmed and status quo was maintained. The custom of slaughtering domestic animals, feeling of fruit-trees and
feasting on the death of a person still remained unchecked in many interior villages. The mournful practice of giving away 'Urim Ko'kam' and 'Debra Chikitra' at the death of a prominent person has been going on without strict social injunction although some Christian Garos view it to be a heathen custom. Providing substitute wife to a man after the death of the first wife has also been strictly adhered to down to the present day. Kinship pattern and marriage practices also remains the same. Many tribal taboos, superstitions and other social thought are still in the minds of the Garos Christians and non-Christians.

Therefore, in substance, it may be observed that, Christianity has given nothing new to the Garos except 'The Bible'. Whosoever dwells in it, he is a new man; whosoever does not, he still remains as he was. Although there has been no remarkable change in the society as a whole, during the long British rule and missionary activities, Christian action has produced many sincere and devoted church workers, social leaders of high caliber and many other dynamic personalities from amongst the Garos. Whatever, their academic achievement might be, they seemed to get true education and made best use of their scholarship for the benefit of their land and the people. Many of the intellectuals, individually or jointly contributed in whatever way they could towards enrichment of their literary wealth. The first Garo journal 'Aohikni Ripeng' started in
1879 by Rev. M.C. Mason and Rev. E.G. Phillips in Bengali character later published in Garo was followed by many other tracts, journals, magazines and books written and published both by missionaries and the local intelligentsia. Until the completion of the translation of Holy Bible in 1927, Garo students had to offer Sanskrit as one of the subjects of study in their Matric-course, but, after the publication of the whole Bible in one volume in Garo, the Calcutta University gave the final approval for introducing Garo language as one of the major Indian languages upto Matriculation under Calcutta University and this gave a greater fillip in furtherance of the Garo literature. Most of the earlier writings were no doubt religion based, yet, those early literary works helped the Garos in many ways to express themselves by exchanging news and views amongst themselves and thereby to expand their ideas and social outlook. Present development in the field of education, literature and other sphere of social activities are the outcome of the untiring works and services rendered by the older generation and present day society is deeply indebted to those literary pioneers for the legacy left by them. Then by mutual exchange of informations and knowledge, they worked with missionary zeal and true Christian spirit among their people teaching and preaching about the Christian love and charity, fellow feeling, love for the neighbour, strangers and for the enemies as well; true, the message of the Gospel reached all corners of the land. While the British ruled the land less and
had given to its people very little and the missionary organi­
sation handicapped by many problems, Christianity in its
entirety has transformed the entire social character of the
tribe once known to the British as savage, wild and turbulent
and head hunting they came out to be a good sociable and
teachable people. In fact, here lies the true spirit of
conversion, a conversion of heart with the complete change in
their moral world - a real conversion quite distinct from the
mere outward physical change over.

Traditional Religion in the Modern Society

Garo society has taken a different shape during the
post independence period, in fact, there has been dramatic
change in the whole social set-up. Towards the close of the
British rule, the mission works as well as progress of Christia­
nity was rather slow and steady and the progress was much
disturbed during the period of second world war and everything
was in doldrum; Garo had to pass a doleful span of 10 to 15
long years. India attained independence, new Constitution framed.
Under Articles 244 (2) and 275 (1) of the Constitution, Sixth
Schedule with a necessary provision for the Administration of
Tribal Areas of Assam has been provided. In accordance with the
Sub-paragraph (6) of paragraph 2 of the Sixth Schedule to the
Constitution of India, the Governor of Assam made the rules
The Assam Autonomous Districts (Constitution of District Councils) Rules, 1951 for the first constitution of the District Councils for the Autonomous Districts comprising the Tribal areas specified in Part 'A' of the table appended to paragraph 20 of the Sixth Schedule and the said rules was published in the official Gazette vide Notification No. TAD/R/23/51 dated the, the 15th October, 1951 and accordingly, Garo Hills District Council was constituted in the year 1952. The first general election to the Garo Hills District Council was held on 18th January, 1952 in respect of 18 constituencies with a provision for nomination of 6 members by the Governor of Assam. Captain Williamson A. Sangma became the first Chief Executive Member of the first Garo Hills District Council and Harrison W. Momin and Modi K. Marak were taken in as the Executive members. Thus way, the first District Council started functioning. The Chief Minister of Assam, giving a salient feature of the Sixth Schedule to the Constitution of India, in his inaugural speech on May 3, 1952 says "The powers vested in your District Council are large. They embrace practically the entire field of Judicial administration civil and criminal. The District Council is competent to administer and make Laws pertaining to the allotment, occupation and use of land, the management of unclassed and village forests, the regulation and practice of Jhumming, the use of canals and water courses for the purpose of agriculture, primary education, establishment of village and town committees,
appointment and succession of Chiefs and Headmen, inheritance of property, regulation of trade and the licensing of trades, etc. The District Council is empowered to assess and collect land revenue and impose taxes such as octroi, employment and profession tax, taxes on animals and vehicles, taxes for the maintenance of schools, dispensaries and roads. A share of the royalties of mines and minerals from your area will also go to the District Council. The delegation of such wide powers of administration and taxation to elected tribal councils is a special feature of our constitution...." By then, there were four seats in the Assam Legislative Assembly for the whole Garo Hills. Thus, a new machinery suitable for the genius and needs of the tribe and designed in accordance with their desires and aspirations was set in motion. The year of the establishment of District Council might truly be called a dawn of new era in the history of the Garo Hills. The country's political independence has thus, brought about many changes in the political, social and religious life of the tribe. So, speaking in true Garo sense, the advent of the new pattern of administration, has given greatest scope and opportunity for the people for actively participating with the government in all developmental activities in the area. District Council and the self-rule under the new constitution has really awakened the tribal people of the area and helped them to feel that, they have their own government at their easy reach. Briefly speaking, it might be said that with the beginning of the Garo Hills District Council,
certain degrees of economic revolutions were taking place here and there. Garo Hills District Council remained a very strong local-self government and it could well safeguard the interest of the tribal people in many ways. The first District Council comprises many selective representatives from all communities and perhaps the choice was carefully and tactfully done; really they were the cream of Garo Hills of their time. The Council could bring the best available men, if not the best, at least the second best for piloting its plan and programme. Previous to the independence, Garo intellectuals got no favourable occasion to serve their people to the fullest benefit as a consequence, their activities remained confined within the bound of limited circle. With the constitution of District Council, however, they could get the best and the most effective media by which they could fulfil their cherished objectives. Right from its inception, District Council has been rendering valuable service in guiding the society in every sphere of tribal life and culture. Captain Williamson A. Sangma, an army officer appeared in the scene just in the nick of time when a leader like him was most needed; he took up the highest responsibility of the Council as its Chief Executive Member. Captain Sangma bel esprit, boldly and courageously took up the task. A man of discipline with a balanced personality and gifted with an high quality of dynamic leadership, he, with the active cooperation of his executive colleagues organised
the administration of the District Council in right earnest and thenceforth, the District Council agencies remained always in forefront in facing the challenge of the times. The nature and functions of the District Council is such that it stands like a 'Large Cooperative Concern' where maximum cooperation by the greatest number is necessary for sustaining balanced administration. The functions of Chief and other Executive Members are three-fold, viz., Judiciary, Executive and Legislature. As a legislator, he is to make rules, as Executive Officer he has to implement the rules and as an Judiciary head, he is to administer justice in respect of cases of customary nature. The powers and functions of the District Council being minutely studied, it is found interesting to note that as long as the Council enjoys the sincere and active cooperation of the people for whom it exists and the continued help and support of the government, it prospers, but, once it loses its power of arresting the minds of the people and fails to convince the masses of its allowed mission and suffers the step-motherly treatment of the government, it is bound to face administrative crisis.

On the whole, District Council Administration has given maximum opportunity for the rural masses for actively participating in all developmental programme. While implementing its own schemes through its own agencies, District Council opened up Bus Services on a number of important routes; it established
many Primary Schools, constructed minor roads and bridle paths in many areas, helped the people in improving Agriculture, encouraged cottage industries, advanced grants and aids to the local Bodies, maintained unclassed forests in the whole district, provided ring-wells and rural water supply at places. It also set up Health Centres at various rural areas to help the people of the interior villages. It also rendered invaluable services in relief works. Administration of Town Committees also remain under District Council. Village functionaries were also properly organised. District Council also set up a number of model-villages at suitable areas. Over and above, District Council also awarded stipends for the local students going for higher education and also kept necessary provision for helping the students in the form of Book-Grants etc. District Council also rendered substantial financial assistance for the growth of a College at Tura at the initial stage. Thus, in every field of National Development, in Garo Hills, Garo Hills District Council became the forerunner. By setting up village courts and constituting village councils all over the district, District Council has exhibited highest order of decentralisation of powers in a democratic set-up. The whole tribe acclaimed District Council with great jubilation. On its part, state government too, was not simply a sleeping partner in matters of administration of the area. Besides helping and financing District Council for various schemes and projects, it also deployed its own departments throughout the length and breadth
Garo Hills. Construction of major roads started and a number of Multi-purpose Community Development Blocks were installed all over the district. That way, development works both under State Government and the District Council were going on in full swing. The new pattern of administration under the self-rule has brought manifold changes in the social and cultural life of the Garos. It is therefore interesting to study certain areas of their social activities where such changes have taken place and to what degree the new changes have influenced the old and the new religion in Garo land.

New Administration and Traditional Religion. Before independence, there was no well organised political parties in any part of Garo habitat; the two members of the Assam Legislative Assembly from Garo Hills were functioning independently without any party affiliation, whatsoever. On the southern Garo Hills, along the border of Mymensingh district of the erstwhile East Bengal and also on the northern plains workers of Indian National Congress were activism their movement but the inner hills remained unaffected by the agitational waves. On the actual achievement of independence, the tempo of the agitation particularly in the southern Garo Hills subsided and the organisation lost its momentum. Garo intellectuals had already formed certain ideas in their minds for bringing out some sorts of social and cultural organisation involving entire
tribe and accordingly, in 1946, one social and cultural organisation with the title 'Garo National Council' was first formed officially and after independence it came out as a strong Political Party of the Garos. Thenceforth, Garo National Council (G.N.C.) grew and developed into a full fledged regional political party of the Garos christians and non-christians all over the Garo inhabited areas. The party leaders and workers propagated in clear term the principles and objectives of the organisation and educated the people of its aims and objects. The entire tribe got attracted by it and the party mobilised its agencies all over the Garo habitats. The party tried its strength by setting up its candidates in the first general election to the Garo Hills District Council in January, 1952 and captured 15 out of 18 seats. Garo National Council dominated council politics for about 25 years. With the emergence of the All Party Hill Leaders' Conference (APHLC) in 1960, the Garo National Council (GNC) remained affiliated to APHLC and continued to function as a part of the APHLC thereafter.

Captain Williamson A. Sangma served the G.N.C. as its chief for many years and then as President of the APHLC till 1975. Undoubtedly, Garo National Council and later the All Party Hill Leaders' Conference from the very inception became an interesting and progressive parties not only for the
people of Garo Hills and Meghalaya, but for the nation as a whole. It may also be recalled here that prior to Emergence of APHLC, the movement for a separate state under the banner of the 'Eastern India Tribal Union' (EITU) gained momentum and got the support of the people as was clearly demonstrated in the polls of 1957 to Assam Legislative Assembly. With the formation of APHLC in 1960, the struggle for a separate hills state assumed a new dimension and a full state 'Meghalaya' was created on the January 21, 1972. In the general election to the Meghalaya Legislative Assembly, APHLC returned 32 members, Hill State Peoples' Democratic Party (HSPDP) a newly formed party returned 9, congress voted 9 and the rest were independent candidates thereby, APHLC was installed in power. From the very inception, Captain Williamson A. Sangma was the President of APHLC and he remained in that capacity till 1976 when the party broke up into two, one section joining the Indian National Congress and another sticking to the principle of keeping the APHLC intact. Captain Sangma was again elected as the President of the newly organised Congress party and since then, three major political parties viz., APHLC, HSPDP and Congress were out in the Meghalaya State politics.

New Economic System. Consequent on the vigorous steps taken both by the District Council and the state government for raising the economic condition of the region, there has been a marked change in the economy of the tribe. In many
area., all available arable lands were reclaimed and the traditional practice of jhom-cultivating being substituted by settled cultivation wherever possible. Many important areas having been linked up by all-weather and fair-weather roads, markets and hats could be brought nearer to the rural people, and as a result, it has become easier for the people living in the interior villages to dispose of their jhum and other forest produces. In many areas, permanent gardens of various cash crops, orchards and adoption of terraced cultivation have been coming up. The tribal people started entering into smaller trades and business undertakings. People living in the inner hills are found approaching various development agencies for financial help and assistance either in the form of subsidy or as loan for the business and agriculture. Many credit facilities were made available to the rural masses. The older tribal concept of wealth and property as is found in the traditional society has changed. Among the present-day Garos, the meaning of wealth and property gained a new dimension, having included in it many items of material possession, ancestral or self-acquired such as paddy-land, plots of permanent homestead, garden and houses etc. which are taken to be the immovable properties. Besides, there are many other valuable articles of daily use coming under the definition of moveable properties. Everywhere village folks realised the need for holding permanent title over the land under their possession, and in this regard, many people all
over the district are often found approaching District Council administration with petitions for the issue of 'pattas'. Everywhere in the district, Garos are seen entering into contract works under different executive agencies and there are some who are really prospering in their enterprise. Movement of goods and transport of essential commodities within and outside the district became easier. There appeared greater scope for the local entrepreneurs in every field of economic activity. Well-to-do families in town as well as in country side are constructing tolerably comfortable and lasting type of houses with modern workmanship. In a nutshell, economy of the Garo land in general, has taken a new shape within three decades after independence.

**Education and Employment.** Within the period of 30 years following independence, education amongst the Garos recorded a marked achievement compared to the position obtaining in the pre-independence. The number of institutions as available upto 1984 shows a notable landmark in the field of education in Garo Hills. As the statistics reveals, there are one Government College, 3 private colleges, 109 High Schools, 236 M.E.Schools, 1583 L.P. Schools and 195 Nursery Schools in the two districts of Garo Hills East and West. There were about 700 Graduates and Post-Graduates among the Garos in the year 1980, and the number has gone up much higher during the subsequent years. Large number of Garos are now
employed in various state departments, District Council, Schools, Colleges and in many other Government and private undertakings, and as a matter of fact, under-matric un-employment is now on the increase which is a clear sign of imminent un-employment among the local youths having higher education like elsewhere in the country. That education is a direct result of spread of Christianity can be assumed from the fact that spread of education is coterminal with christianity can be judged from the following figures:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Percentage of Literacy in Garo Hills</th>
<th>Percentage of Christians in Garo Hills</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1931</td>
<td>2.05</td>
<td>17.59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1941</td>
<td>N.A.</td>
<td>0.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1951</td>
<td>7.31</td>
<td>16.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1961</td>
<td>19.96</td>
<td>28.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1971</td>
<td>23.57</td>
<td>40.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1981</td>
<td>28.86</td>
<td>N.A.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Census of India 1961.

It is very important to note here that there is hardly any Songsarek literate among the Garos because, due to long association between Christianity and education Garos have come to equate education with Christianity.
The new process of social, economic and political evolution as a whole, has given a death blow to the old tribal religion. Village youths, when educated often break away from their parental homes and got converted to Christianity at their own will. New method of cultivation, wider social outlook, newer national policies with the government agencies remaining as the chief consultants in times of need and many other allied factors have greatly disturbed the old tribal faith and belief and made the Songserek Garos feel that the old deities worshiped by their ancestors were no longer helpful to them in the modern civilization. Songserek families are finding it very snaky having failed to get right and sincere adherents to succeed them in continuing the old tribal customs, practises and usages.

Many church leaders, ordained and lay workers express that, these days, active evangelism is no longer necessary as it was in the old days. People are coming to christ in large number at their own sweet will even without any conventional media of preaching and counselling, and as a result, powerful evangelistic weapons are no longer required for bringing the people to the Christian fold. It is quite evident that the people at large have developed an implicit faith in the Gospel message and perhaps, certain spiritual forces are at work underneath everywhere amongst the Garo
tribe and such inner spiritual urge are the real impelling power motivating the minds of the countrymen and not the external paraphernalia of conversion. The statement is amply attested by the prevailing events in the Christiandom in Garo Hills and its adjoining areas. The spirit of competition among different unit churches are observable everywhere in consequence of which, there has been a rapid growth in the ministry. Jubilee Reports of Baptist Work in North-East India (1836-1961 : 57) indicates that in 1961 there were 6 organised associations (Krimas), the baptized members totalled little over 33,000. There were 36 churches within the jurisdiction of Garo Baptist Convention with 685 branches and 476 Sunday Schools with 650 teachers and 15,987 students. The figure has now gone up higher. By 1984, Garo Baptist Convention earned nearly a Lakh of baptized members in 9 associations (Krimas) and 2 Centres. It has 82 churches. In Catholic Churches also, more or less equal number of baptized members are recorded upto 1984.

Now, because of such ever expanding Christian service, the traditional society is facing a critical situation in maintaining their old faith. They are desperately struggling for existence and survival and thereby to retain the traditional religion along with all ancient tribal mores but they are losing ground in every front. In short, they are fighting a losing battle now. It is also true that the
traditional religion of the Garos faced the heavy attack first from the Christian camp. In the early period, Christianity tried to totally wipe out the old religion from the surface of the Garo habitat since in the opinions of the Christian Garos, the so-called traditional faith and belief is not a religion at all and with that objectives Christian Garos had been working all through the missionary period. It is for this reason that two distinct groups of Garo societies, Christian and the songsarek were thriving in Garo Hills. But, with the advent of new era after independence, and with the adoption of new pattern of administration in the country, it was felt necessary for the social and political leaders, who were mostly Christians, to consolidate, coordinate and unify those two sections under the same banner. Thus, both the camps came closer to each other, recognised the importance of united effort and ultimately reorganised themselves into a well knit racial force and thereby sense of unity and oneness is regained among the different sections of the tribe. Immediately after, the question of tribal culture came up. Every tribe has its own culture in their own sphere. What could be the different aspects of the Garo culture, Christian Garos failed to give a satisfactory answer. Hence, modern Christian society had to dig out the old treasure of the traditional Garo culture. From the age long conservatism, came out many Christian Garos with secular views and wider
outlook. They thought and are thinking still as to in what best way, the old social values could be properly retained.

So long Christianity had been trying to do away with the old paganism and its idiosyncrasy but it is observed that many educated Garos, mostly Christians are now greatly interested to resuscitate the near-dead traditional religion by way of keeping all the traditional elements alive. Garo intellectuals are so expressing sympathy to the agonizing struggle of the old paganism. Any way, such feeling in one's mind is not out of pure love and admiration to the old ways of life as such, but it is simply because of the fact that those enlightened persons feel that preservation of one's own culture at national level is desirable at the present civilization. Those primitive cultures are interwoven with the traditional religion of the tribe and therefore, revival of the old cultures will amount to going back to the old traditional religion especially in the eye of the true Christians. It is because of such trouble, leading Christian Garos do not bother much about the problem. But then, pressed by the urgency of the times and also in conformity with the spirit of the age, secular minded people are hinting certain fascination and charm towards the old tribal customs and practices and they are now very much inclined for reviving and revitalising those decaying cultural elements of the tribes.
The present administration, whether at the state or at the district level, always keeps itself abreast of times and it always looks forward to serve the nation in whatever way it could. The government itself, feeling the pulse of the nation, has initiated some sorts of Annual Cultural Gathering with a title 'Hundred-drums Festival', a paradigm of the post harvest 'Wangala Festival' of the Garos. The celebration being an imitation of the biggest Annual 'Wangala' Festival of the Garos, is usually held during the autumn months sometime in October-November. It is no doubt an sincere attempt on the part of the administration for encouraging preservation of the important indigenous songs and dances, and with that objective, government has been organizing such function on experimental basis. It will however depend on how far the sponsor of the programme successfully conduct the affairs and the magnitude of the response and cooperation of the general populace. The 'Hundred-drums' contains only few items of 'wangala' festival and the celebration is filled with dances of few different styles, and as such, it lacks originality, purity and sanctity of the true 'wangala'. The present picture of the 'Hundred drums' festival looks like a brief presentation of 'One-Act-Play' in the stage. It is, therefore, yet to be awaited and watched how far such pseudo-ceremony with very important parts like 'ruga la' and 'chachat so'a' rather, the sanctum sanctorum of the 'Wangala Festival' could be made more convincing and appealing to the attending masses.
With whatever might and main, the modern society may try to revitalise the ancient culture with all its religious contents it is doubtful whether the attempts will be fruitful. It may be true that certain phases of traditional culture such as, folk-songs, dances and adage might be easily retained in some form or other but its originality, freshness and simplicity cannot be fully recovered and its purity and charm are likely to get lost on the way. The reasons are not far to seek. The main causes of decay of the Traditional religion vis-à-vis the ancient culture inter alia are that, the old religion itself is devoid of spiritualism and it cannot withstand the waves of new environments brought about by new religious ideals, growing political consciousness, new social pattern and improved economic system. In traditional society, the religious instructions and social ideals are orally handed down to be picked up by any interested man or woman and the tribes do not have priestly class to cultivate those old social and religious values; so those ancient social values have been suffering in silence for want of proper care and supervision. The resultant effect of all these new development is that the future of the traditional religion is now doomed.

The present generation is the product of active, sincere and honest christian action in the past, as a result, not a single educated Garo is found retaining the old religion
and as such, there is no gain saying it that such edification in the spirit of old traditional faith to be affectively by the present christian society is beyond comprehension. It can also be easily observed that, even the Songsarek Garos themselves are now finding it a burden to keep and maintain the old traditional properties like 

Garo Society in Transition. Garo society is now undergoing a great transition. It can no longer remain isolated in its primitive tribal world. It is true that old tribal religious conviction is now on the wane but the problem is not the less with the Christian section too. Large number of non-Garo outsiders have already swarmed into Garo Hills for business, trades and service, as a result, Garos are now in an amalgam of numerous patrilineal societies. It is a natural
corollary that when such heterogeneous communities draw together, social assimilation and interaction takes place. Those plains people are now getting the privilege of looking the Garo social pattern from a close range and to study the nature and character of the tribe; and many non-tribal outsiders particularly the Hindus and Muslims are found to be prepossessed in favour of the tribe. It is now observed that with the dawn of new civilization, old class prejudice, mutual distrust and misconception amongst the different communities are diminishing instead all those different communities are cultivating the sense of social integrity through intercommunication and reciprocal admiration and appreciation towards the social values of one another. It is perhaps, because of this, that marriages are being contracted between the Garos and the non-Garos outsiders. In general, however, it is observed that outsiders belonging mostly Hindus of lower caste marrying Garo women are numerically higher than the marriages between Muslim outsiders and Garo women; and Garo boys taking Hindu or Muslim girls are very rare. How far and to what extent the couple could adjust to each other in such inter-community or mixed marriage could be known only by the persons involved. At the present, of course, such wedlocks appear to be simply the case of marriage-de-convenance and time only can tell the merits and demerits of such nuptial union.
Now, the crux of the matter is that by such intermarriages between the Garos and non-Garos coming from patrifocal and patrilineal societies, certain social customs and practices of the Garos are likely to be jeopardized especially in such vital social customs like, Law of inheritance, system of clan recognition, possibility of incest and such other Constitutional privileges given to tribal people and so on.

New Social Situation Before the Christian Church.

Christian churches today are finding it difficult to keep pace with the times. Christian churches solemnise marriage under 'The Indian Christian Marriage Act of 1872' if both the contracting parties are Christian. But, difficulties lie in that, if the contract is made between the baptised Garo Christian and the Hindu or Muslim, the marriage is considered unholy. Again, baptised member taking Sognaresk Garo also amounts to adultery. In both the cases, the persons involved are supposed to be suspended from the church till they could mend their affairs. Incest committed after baptism are also taken to be unchristian and the persons living in incest are also suspended and for them there is practically no chance to get their original place. Pre-baptism incestuous couple are also not accepted for baptism, so they ever remain in the same position for life. The above observations mostly apply to
Baptist (protestant) churches in Meghalaya and Assam. Early Christians successfully abstained from taking *chu* (rice beer) as the drinking was thought to be heathen customs. So, anybody found guilty of taking intoxicating liquor was the object of contempt and subjected to suspension from the church; but, present day Garo Christians lost control over such use of wine or spirits as a fashion of the times.

Among the Songsarek Garos, *chu* is found to be the most indispensable item in all socio-religious functions. Early Christian could well realize the fact that constant use of rice beer is detrimental to their socio-economic life, and this is supported by the fact that while making *chu* a substantial quantity of rice is wasted and while enjoying it, lots of their time is lost and lastly they use it immoderately. So, those wise people well understood that the prohibition of *chu* ought to be the foremost pre-requisite condition for conversion and accordingly, Garos were delivered from their inveterate habit of drinking liquor; and such liberation had subsequently exerted a great impact upon the moral and spiritual life of the tribe. The prohibition of intoxicating drinks greatly contributed towards spiritual, moral and economic well being of the tribe.
Interdenominational Tangle. Among the Christian churches, every denomination has its own convention, manual and directives as a guiding principle to conduct its own affairs. Although the faith is the same, certain rules and procedures are slightly different from one another, and it is because of such variation, conflict of principles very often arises particularly in the matter of marriage and baptism. In this pertinent issue, observation is focused on the interdenominational matrimony. It is very interesting to note that, marriage between Christian Garo and non-Garo Hindu or Muslim and also the marriage between Songsarek Garo and Christian Garo could be made easier provided the non-Christian spouse is willing to be converted to Christianity by baptism before wedding. But, marriage between Protestant member and Catholic member often brings confusion and misunderstanding, when neither party is willing to sacrifice one's own mother-church. Such incident generally occurs among the educated section of the urban population. Garo Land can now be called a Christian Land, quantitatively, no doubt, Christianity has achieved its goal of its mission but in qualitative aspect, of course, there is still a big question mark.

During these days, when more and more people are turning to Christianity, churches are facing more serious problems day by day in maintaining integrity of church-discipline and moral principle. Christian churches...
are now confronted with many insurmountable obstacles in
dealing with various cross-section of the people. The
churches can now clearly see various segments of the tribes
are passing their lives in different social environments.
There are still sizeable sections of the old-fashioned tribes
men who are sincerely and persistently clinging to their
traditional faith and beliefs with all their original customs
and practices. There found another group of people who are
very much weakened in following their traditional faith and
they are no longer capable or observing their primitive
religion and other accompanying ceremonies there of for want
of company of their own group, but these people, being unable
to sever themselves from the old habit of drinking which has
rather become a second nature in their person are having no
courage to come nearer to Christianity and are now standing
on the cross-roads quite undecided and bewildered. There is
another class of social group who were once the active members
of the Christian churches but wandered away from half-way from
the Christian fold following their violation of certain
ecclesiastical norms or moral injunctions of the church and
certain social stigmas also undermine their prestige, honour
and reputation which ultimately affect their spiritual life.
In some cases, it so happens that, people had totally abandoned
their old ways of life and had gone very far from their original
faith and at the same time, they are also still to go a very
long way to the Christian camp, roving and wandering about with purely self-love and self-complacency. Besides, there are many priceless souls going astray from the Christian fold, rather gone very far from the shepherd's care.

The sum total of observation of the current problems being faced both by Christian and Songsarek Garos is that those members of Songsarek groups are steadily moving towards Christianity, whereas, many present-day Christians are again looking back to the old religion and culture; and it is not yet known, when the two will get their meeting point.

Truly, the future destiny of the Garo tribe largely depends on the true and dynamic leadership of the Christian section of the society who are well-armed with spiritual training and a secular education in the present civilization.

However, there is one great consolation to the modern-man in that, there are now many Christian Churches in the region with good number of dedicated leaders with true missionary zeal; there are many sincere and honest workers with a large number of followers behind them. Therefore, heavy task now lies with the Christian Community of the land to bring back those wandering shepherdless sheep to the flock and restore all those afflicted prodigal sons to their affectionate parents.