

## Chapter 4

### FIELD OF THE STUDY

Field of the present study is located in two states of Northeast India; viz., Assam and Meghalaya. From a comparative point of view, Assam is a plain state of the Northeastern region which is otherwise full of hills and hillocks. It is a multi-coloured state inhabited by diverse ethnic groups. Another interesting feature of Assam is that among all the Northeastern states, it is the only state where one finds the highest number of non-tribal people. On the other hand, Meghalaya is a hilly state where the population mostly comprises tribal people. Christianity is the main religion of Meghalaya while Assam has majority of Hindu population, followed by Muslim and tribal populations. One of the important aspects of the social system of this state is that the matrilineal system is prevalent in Meghalaya.

Assam is located just below the eastern Himalayan foothills. It is situated between  $89^{\circ} 42'$  -  $96^{\circ}$  E longitudes and  $24^{\circ} 8'$  N -  $28^{\circ} 2'$  N latitude. The state is bordered by six northeastern states and two foreign nations. Bhutan and Arunachal Pradesh on the north, Meghalaya and Tripura on the south, Manipur, Nagaland and Arunachal Pradesh on the east, Meghalaya, West Bengal and Bangladesh on the west. The state consists of two valleys; namely, Brahmaputra valley and Barak Valley and two major hills; viz., the middle Karbi and North Cachar hills. According to the census 2011, the total population of Assam is 31,169,272. Assam is known for the co-existence of diverse cultural, religious, linguistic, tribal and other ethnic groups. Some of them are tribals and others are non-tribals. Among the tribal communities, majority is living in hills and the rest are living in plains. They belong to three religions-Hinduism, Islam and Christianity. Some of them are aboriginal tribes of Assam while some others are immigrants. The state of Assam is divided into 27 districts; viz., Barpeta, Bongaigaon, Cachar, Darrang, Dhemaji, Dhubri, Dibrugarh, Goalpara, Golaghat, Hailakandi, Jorhat, Kamrup, Kamrup Metro, Karbi Anglong, Karimganj, Kokrajhar, Baksa, Udalguri, Chirang, Lakhimpur, Morigaon, Nagaon, Nalbari, North Cachar Hills, Sibsagar, Sonitpur and Tinsukia. The economy of Assam is primarily based on agriculture. Over 70% of the populations is engaged in agricultural sector. Paddy is the main crop grown in Assam while other plants and crops like tea, sugarcane, jute, oilseeds, rubber, cotton, pineapple, banana and other agricultural products are also grown in abundance. Besides these, the state economy is also based

on the natural resources like coal, petroleum, natural gas, minerals and limestone (Kondakov 2013, Saikia Medhi and Medhi 2012).

The state of Meghalaya in the Northeastern region of India is situated between latitudes  $20^{\circ} 1' - 26^{\circ} 5'$  north and longitude  $85^{\circ} 49' - 92^{\circ} 52'$  east. Earlier, the state was a part of Assam and, later, in 1972 it emerged as a full-fledged state of northeastern region of India. The state is bordered by Assam in the north and east while Bangladesh and Assam bound it on the south and west. The land of Meghalaya covers an area of 22,429 sq kms. The state of Meghalaya comprises 11 districts; viz., West Garo Hills, South-West Garo Hills, North Garo Hills, East Garo Hills, South Garo Hills, West Khasi Hills, South-West Khasi Hills, East Khasi Hills, Ri Bhoi, West Jaintia Hills and East Jaintia Hills. According to the census 2011, the total population of Meghalaya is 2,966,889. Meghalaya is a tribal majority state. Except in urban and semi-urban areas, most of the population is tribal. Christianity is a dominant religion in the state. Khasi, Garo and Jaintia are three major ethnic groups in the state. Matrilineal structure is the common feature among these ethnic groups. Very much like Assam, Meghalaya is also an agrarian land. In this region, the basic source of income is cultivation of rice, maize, pineapple, banana and other fruits and vegetables. Besides agriculture, the state is very rich in forest resources. Rubber plantation is another emerging source of income in Meghalaya (Kondakov 2013).

#### THE GOALPARA AND THE EAST GARO HILLS DISTRICT

Area of the present study is located in two nearby districts of Assam and Meghalaya. These districts are East Garo Hills district of Meghalaya and Goalpara district of Assam. A brief description of the two districts is given here.

##### **The Goalpara District**

Goalpara district is situated between latitude  $25^{\circ} 50' - 26^{\circ} 10'$  North and longitude  $90^{\circ} 07' - 91^{\circ} 05'$  East. On the south bank of the river Brahmaputra the district stretches over an area of 1,824 sq. kilometers. The four border areas of the district comprise the Kamrup district on the East, the Dhubri district on the West, the River Brahmaputra on the entire Northern side and to its south there lies the West and the East Garo Hills districts (now the northern part of the East Garo Hills district has been carved out as the North Garo Hills district) of Meghalaya. This district has mostly plains except a few forest hills such as Pancharatna, Tukreswari, Nalanga, Paglartek

and Sri Surjya Pahar. Dudhnoi, Krishnai, Jinjiram and Jinary are the rivers of the district. The district has one Sub-division- Goalpara (Sadar) Sub-division which is divided into five revenue circles; viz. Lakhipur, Balijana, Matia and Dudhnoi. Besides, there are eight development blocks; namely, Jaleswar, Lakhipur, Kharmuja, Balijan, Krishnai, Matia, and Kharijapikon, 861 revenue villages and 81 Gaon Panchayats. The district has five primary health centers, six state dispensaries, five sub-dispensaries, 15 sub-veterinaries state dispensaries, two agricultural sub-division, 12 agricultural development circles, one municipal board and one town committee.

The population of the district comprises three major religious groups- Muslim (53.71%), Hindu (38.22%) and Christian (7.87%) respectively. The ethnic groups are known as Bengali Muslim, Bengali Hindu, Rabha, Garo, Hajong, Kalita, Koch, Dimasa and Bodo. The languages spoken by the people are Assamese, Bengali, Bodo, Rabha and Garo (Saikia, Medhi and Medhi 2012; OKDISCD Guwahati: 11,16,31). Agriculture is the backbone of the economy of the district. According to the census 2011, 1,008,183 persons are inhabiting this district- 5,13,292 males and 4,94,891 females. In the census, 16.09% consists of scheduled tribe population. 90% of the total population livelihood lives on agriculture. Paddy is the main crop and 43.5 % of the total geographical area is utilized for cultivation. On the other hand, the growth of industries is poor in the area. Livestock farming is an integral part of this agrarian economy. Dairy farming is a subsidiary occupation of the farmers of the district but the production of Milk is very low because of the predominance of local cows with a poor species.

### **The East Garo Hills district**

The Garo Hills is one of the constituent districts of Meghalaya; the greater portion of the district consists of hills. It is bounded in the north and west by the districts of Goalpara district of Assam and in the east by the Khasi Hills of Meghalaya and on the south by the Mymensingh district of Bangladesh. A majority of the population of this district belongs to Garo tribe. Other inhabitants include the Rabhas, Hajongs, Koches, Rajbonsis, Dalus, Meches and the Kacharis (Sanjeeva Kumar 2005: 2942). The district was formed in 1976. In 2012 it was bifurcated and a new district, North Garo Hills district was carved out. The northern part of the East Garo Hills district where the conflict occurred in 2011 is now known as North Garo Hills district. It is bounded on the north by the Goalpara district of Assam, on the east by the West

Khasi Hills district of Meghalaya, on the south by the East Garo Hills district and on the west by the West Garo Hills district. It covers an area of 1,113 sq. kilometres. Resubelpara is the district head quarters and Mendipathar is the major market place of the district.

The East Garo Hills district is a beautiful region comprising both the plains and foothills. Garos are the major ethnic groups in the district. Besides Garos, there are other ethnic groups that are living there; namely, Hajong, Rabhas, Koches, Rajbansis, Meches, Kacharies and Dalus. The Bangali, Muslims, Marwaris and Biharis are also living in the district but they are settled mainly in urban and semi-urban areas (Gassah 1984:122-123). About 90% people are engaged in agriculture in the district. In the hilly areas, the traditional cultivation modes are being replaced by rubber plantation and it is now in great vogue in these areas. Paddy is cultivated in plain areas.

#### SOCIO-CULTURAL AND ECONOMIC LIFE IN THE STUDY AREA

The conflict-affected areas are located in the northern region of the East Garo Hills district comprises both the hilly and plain areas. The Garos and the Rabhas are the major ethnic groups which engaged in conflict in the area. The Garos are settled in both the plain and hilly areas. For a long time the Rabhas have been living peacefully with the Garos in the East and West Garo Hills districts of Meghalaya. The northern portion of the East Garo Hills district has witnessed maximum of the violence due to the ethnic conflict. The conflict affected areas are mostly inhabited by Rangdani, Dahuri and Pati Rabhas. The Garo is the dominant ethnic group comprising the sub-groups like Akawes, Chisaks and Kochus largely found in the district. Similarly, the Garos and the Rabhas of the Gaolpara district in Assam have been living peacefully with each other for a long time. These two communities have then separate villages of each other are situated adjacently.

Both the communities have been living side by side, respecting each other's traditions customs and language. A temple found in each Rabha village is important for maintaining unity among the villagers. Similarly, the Garo villages have Church to maintain religious unity in their community. Youth of the villages went to the playground every afternoon and played football and cricket. Youth of both the communities participated in these games. The following table shows the period of the families stay in the conflict affected villages:

Table 4.1

Duration of settlement of the Garo and Rabha Families in the conflict affected areas (Percentage in Parentheses)

Period of staying since	No. of the Rabha Families of Assam			No. of the Rabha Families of Meghalaya									No. of the Garo Families of Assam			No. of the Garo Families of Meghalaya	Grand Total
	Belpara	Bongaon	Total	Daram	Jamgaon	Jonglapara	Mendipathar	Nokchar	Rompara	Soinang	Thapa	Total	Ginogre	Khamari	Total	Resubelpara	
Since immemorial	26 (100)	10 (100)	36 (100)	08 (80.00)	10 (90.91)	34 (97.14)	15 (68.18)	13 (92.86)	20 (86.96)	01 (9.09)	10 (22.73)	111 (65.29)	10 (47.62)	0	10 (30.30)	10 (47.62)	167 (64.23)
More than 50 years	0	0	0	02 (20.00)	01 (9.09)	01 (2.86)	07 (31.82)	01 (7.14)	03 (13.04)	10 (90.91)	15 (34.09)	40 (23.53)	11 (52.38)	12 (100)	23 (69.70)	10 (47.62)	73 (28.08)
Less than 50 years	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	19 (43.18)	19 (11.18)	0	0	0	01 (4.76)	20 (7.69)
Total	26 (100)	10 (100)	36 (100)	10 (100)	11 (100)	35 (100)	22 (100)	14 (100)	23 (100)	11 (100)	44 (100)	170 (100)	21 (100)	12 (100)	33 (100)	21 (100)	260 (100)

Source: Field Study Conducted during the Period 15<sup>th</sup> June 2014 to 20<sup>th</sup> December 2014

The data indicate that the Garo and Rabha communities have stayed together in the area for a long time. However, after the creation of Bangladesh in 1971, lots of Garos from Bangladesh came and settled in the area. In spite of this, both the communities have been living peacefully in the area since the time immemorial.

### **Structure of Family**

The Garos follow a matriarchal system whereas the Rabhas in contemporary time are mostly adhering to the norm of patriarchy. The original matrilineal structure has lost its hold on the Rabha society because of their affinity with other Assamese patriarchal communities and acceptance of Hindu religion and culture. The Rabha family consists of the parents, unmarried and married children. They marry when they consider themselves fit for independent management of households. The male member is the head of the family and in a Garo family the female is the head. But some of the Rongdani, Maitori and Dahori Rabha groups are still having matrilineal clans. The following table presents the types of family prevalent in the Garo and Rabha communities:

Table 4.2

Type of Families in the Garo and Rabha Families (Percentage in Parentheses)

Type of family	No. of the Rabha Families											No. of the Garo Families			Grand Total	
	Belpara	Bongaon	Daram	Jamgaon	Jonglapara	Mendipathar	Nokchar	Rompara	Soimang	Thapa	Total	Ginogre	Khamari	Resubelpara		Total
Nuclear	17 (65.38)	06 (60.00)	06 (60.00)	07 (63.64)	15 (42.86)	11 (50.00)	07 (50.00)	07 (30.43)	07 (63.64)	25 (56.82)	108 (52.43)	18 (85.71)	10 (83.33)	19 (90.48)	47 (87.04)	155 (59.62)
Joint	09 (34.62)	04 (40.00)	04 (40.00)	04 (36.36)	20 (57.14)	11 (50.00)	07 (50.00)	16 (69.57)	04 (36.36)	19 (43.18)	98 (47.57)	03 (14.29)	02 (16.67)	02 (9.52)	07 (12.96)	105 (40.38)
Total	26 (100)	10 (100)	10 (100)	11 (100)	35 (100)	22 (100)	14 (100)	23 (100)	11 (100)	44 (100)	206 (100)	21 (100)	12 (100)	21 (100)	54 (100)	260 (100)

Source: Field Study Conducted during the Period 15<sup>th</sup> June 2014 to 20<sup>th</sup> December 2014

The table shows some differences between the Garo and Rabha family structures. Besides the difference related to matrilineal (Garo) and patrilineal (Rabha), the Rabhas are used to prefer joint family and the Garos are used to prefer nuclear family. 47.57% joint families are found among Rabha families and only 12.96% joint families could be seen among the Garo respondents. On the other hand, 87.04% nuclear families are found among the Garos and 52.43% nuclear families are found among the Rabhas.

### **Marriage**

While the Rabhas still follow traditional customs to solemnize marriage, the Garos solely adhere to Christian norms of marriage as they have accepted Christianity and abandoned traditional religion and customary laws. The following table sheds light on the marriage types in the two communities:



Table 4.3

Types of Marriage That Have Taken Place in the Garo and Rabha Families (Percentage in Parentheses)

Type of Marriage	No. of the Rabha Families											No. of the Garo Families				Total
	Belpara	Bongaon	Daram	Jamgaon	Jonglapara	Mendipathar	Nokchar	Rompara	Soinang	Thapa	Total	Ginogre	Khamari	Resubelpara	Total	
Love marriage	02 (7.69)	02 (20.00)	01 (10.00)	0	05 (14.29)	01 (4.55)	01 (7.14)	03 (13.04)	0	01 (2.27)	16 (7.77)	21 (100)	12 (100)	20 (95.24)	53 (98.15)	69 (26.54)
Arranged marriage	24 (92.31)	08 (80.00)	09 (90.00)	11 (100)	30 (85.71)	21 (95.45)	13 (92.86)	20 (86.96)	11 (100)	43 (97.73)	190 (92.23)	0	0	01 (4.76)	01 (1.85)	191 (73.46)
Total	26 (100)	10 (100)	10 (100)	11 (100)	35 (100)	22 (100)	14 (100)	23 (100)	11 (100)	44 (100)	206 (100)	21 (100)	12 (100)	21 (100)	54 (100)	260 (100)

Source: Field Study Conducted during the Period 15<sup>th</sup> June 2014 to 20<sup>th</sup> December 2014

The table brings to the notice an important point of dissimilarity in the marriage patterns of the two tribes. That is, love marriage is preferred most in the Garo society while arranged marriage is preferred most in the Rabha society. Of the Garo families 98.15% had love marriage and only 1.85% had arranged marriage. On the other hand a completely opposite picture is seen among the Rabha families. Of the Rabha families had 92.23% arranged marriage and only 7.77% had love marriage.

Besides, the two communities differ in respect of the place where marriage is solemnized. The following table presents a comparative picture of the place of marriage performance in the two communities:

Table 4.4

Place Where Marriage Ceremony is Performed in the Garo and Rabha Families (Percentage in Parentheses)

Place of the Marriage Ceremony performed	No. of the Rabha Families											No. of the Garo Families				Grand Total
	Belpara	Bongaon	Daram	Jamgaon	Jonglapara	Mendipathar	Nokchar	Rompara	Soinang	Thapa	Total	Ginogre	Khamari	Resubelpara	Total	
Conventional (at home)	25 (96.15)	09 (90.00)	08 (80.00)	11 (100)	29 (82.86)	21 (95.45)	14 (100)	22 (95.65)	11 (100)	44 (100)	194 (94.17)	0	0	0	0	194 (74.62)
Court	0	0	0	0	01 (2.86)	0	0	0	0	0	01 (0.49)	0	0	0	0	01 (0.38)
Temple	0	01 (10.00)	02 (20.00)	0	01 (2.86)	0	0	01 (4.35)	0	0	05 (2.43)	0	0	0	0	05 (1.92)
Church	01 (3.85)	0	0	0	04 (11.43)	01 (4.55)	0	0	0	0	06 (2.91)	21 (100)	12 (100)	21 (100)	54 (100)	60 (25.38)
Total	26 (100)	10 (100)	10 (100)	11 (100)	35 (100)	22 (100)	14 (100)	23 (100)	11 (100)	44 (100)	206 (100)	21 (100)	12 (100)	21 (100)	54 (100)	260 (100)

Source: Field Study Conducted during the Period 15<sup>th</sup> June 2014 to 20<sup>th</sup> December 2014

Between the Garos and the Rabhas, the difference pertaining to the place for solemnization of marriage is also noteworthy. The table reveals that 94.17% Rabha families perform marriage rituals in their own home as per their traditional customs. Only 2.3% married in courts and temples. On the other hand, all the Garos married in Church as per Christian practices.

Thus, the two communities also differ in respect of the marriage is permitted or prohibited with which community. The following table shows the responses of the Garo and the Rabha families of the study area:

Table 4.5

## Prohibition of Marriage with Other Communities in the Garo and Rabha Families (Percentage in Parentheses)

Response Regarding Marriage with Other Community	No. of the Rabha Families											No. of the Garo Families			Grand Total	
	Belpara	Bongaon	Daram	Jangaon	Jonglapara	Mendipathar	Nokchar	Rompara	Soinang	Thapa	Total	Ginogre	Khamari	Resubelpara		Total
Permitted	01 (3.85)	0	0	0	04 (11.43)	1 (4.55)	0	0	0	0	06 (2.91)	21 (100)	12 (100)	21 (100)	54 (100)	60 (23.08)
Prohibited	25 (96.15)	10 (100)	10 (100)	11 (100)	31 (88.57)	21 (95.45)	14 (100)	23 (100)	11 (100)	44 (100)	200 (97.09)	0	0	0	0	200 (76.92)
Total	26 (100)	10 (100)	10 (100)	11 (100)	35 (100)	22 (100)	14 (100)	23 (100)	11 (100)	44 (100)	206 (100)	21 (100)	12 (100)	21 (100)	54 (100)	260 (100)

Source: Field Study Conducted during the Period 15<sup>th</sup> June 2014 to 20<sup>th</sup> December 2014

The table shows the selection of marriage partners among the families. The Garos have no reservation in of marring in any community, caste or creed. Due to this openness an important issue comes up is that the Muslims marry Garo women and thereby settle in the Garo dominated areas. But 97.09% Rabha families reported that in their society there were restrictions on marriage with a person from other community. They prefer to marry within their own community, or at least within the Hindu community which is their religion.

Cross-cousin marriage is one of the traditional marriage systems in many tribal societies in Northeast India. This practice is found in these communities, which is shown in the following table:

Table 4.6  
Practice of Cross-Cousin Marriage in the Garo and Rabha families (Percentage in Parentheses)

Practice of Cross-cousin Marriage	No. of the Rabha Families											No. of the Garo Families				Grand Total
	Belpara	Bongaon	Daram	Jamgaon	Jonglapara	Mendipathar	Nokchar	Rompara	Soingang	Thapa	Total	Ginogre	Khamari	Resubelpara	Total	
Fully Practiced	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	00	03 (5.56)	01 (1.85)	02 (3.70)	06 (11.11)	06 (2.31)
Rarely Practiced	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	18 (33.33)	11 (20.37)	19 (35.19)	48 (88.89)	48 (18.46)
Extinction	25 (96.15)	10 (4.85)	09 (4.37)	10 (4.85)	32 (15.53)	22 (10.69)	14 (6.80)	21 (38.89)	11 (5.34)	41 (19.90)	195 (94.66)	0	0	0	0	195 (75.00)
If happens, not regarded as taboo	01 (3.85)	0	01 (0.49)	01 (0.49)	03 (1.46)	0	0	02 (0.97)	0	03 (1.46)	11 (5.34)	0	0	0	0	11 (4.23)
Total	26 (100)	10 (4.85)	10 (4.85)	11 (5.34)	35 (16.99)	22 (10.69)	14 (6.80)	23 (11.17)	11 (5.34)	44 (21.36)	206 (100)	21 (38.89)	12 (22.22)	21 (38.89)	54 (100)	260 (100)

Source: Field Study Conducted during the Period 15<sup>th</sup> June 2014 to 20<sup>th</sup> December 2014

Cross-cousin marriage was prevalent among the Rabhas in the past but it has discontinued now. Nevertheless 5.34% Rabha families opined that it is not a taboo in the Rabha society, even now. On the other hand, 88.89% Garo families have practiced cross-cousin marriage.

### **Language and Communication with Neighbouring Communities**

Among the Garos, 12 sub-clans interestingly exist on the basis of variations in the mode of language usage. The Garos of the hilly areas use the language in a rough manner. But those of the plain areas use refined language. The same language is spoken with different tones and this very fact interestingly divides the Garo community into 12 sub clans.

Among the Rabha groups, the Rangdani and Dahuri have their own dialects while the Pati Rabhas use Assamese language as their mother tongue. The Rabhas also use Assamese language to communicate with other Rabha groups. Particularly it is used in various meetings and public gatherings. The Rabhas are also fluent in Garo language. On the contrary, though the Garo language is a common language used in the area. English is the medium of instruction in schools and colleges. The following table shows the language skill of the two communities:

Table 4.7

## Language Skill in Communication with Neighbouring Communities (Percentage in Parentheses)

Type of language skill	No. of the Rabha Families knowing Garo Language											No. of the Garo Families knowing Rabha Language				Total
	Belpara	Bongaon	Daram	Jangaon	Jonglapara	Mendipathar	Nokchar	Rompara	Soinang	Thapa	Total	Ginogre	Khamari	Resu belpara	Total	
Understand Rabha Language	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	00	21 (100)	12 (100)	21 (100)	54 (100)	54 (20.77)
U/S/Reading and Writing Rabha Language	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Understand and speak Garo language	22 (84.62)	10 (100)	08 (80.00)	10 (90.91)	30 (85.71)	21 (95.45)	08 (57.14)	17 (73.91)	08 (72.73)	36 (81.82)	170 (82.52)	0	0	0	0	170 (65.38)
U/S/Reading and Writing Garo Language	04 (15.38)	0	02 (20.00)	01 (9.09)	05 (14.29)	01 (4.55)	06 (42.86)	06 (26.09)	03 (27.27)	08 (18.18)	36 (17.48)	0	0	0	0	36 (13.85)
Total	26 (100)	10 (100)	10 (100)	11 (100)	35 (100)	22 (100)	14 (100)	23 (100)	11 (100)	44 (100)	206 (100)	21 (100)	12 (100)	21 (100)	54 (100)	260 (100)

U= Understand, S= Speaking

Source: Field Study Conducted during the Period 15<sup>th</sup> June 2014 to 20<sup>th</sup> December 2014



In the study area all the Garo respondents whether situated in Assam or Meghalaya understand Rabha language but they do not speak Rabha language. On the contrary, 82.52% Rabhas can understand as well speak Garo language. 17.48% Meghalayan Rabhas can understand, speak, read and write Garo language.

### **Religion**

As mentioned earlier, the Garos follow matrilineal system and they are mostly Christians. *Songsarek*, their old religion, is very rarely practiced, now, with any great enthusiasm.

In the study area, Hinduism and Christianity are found two major religious groups. The Garos belong to Christianity while the Rabhas are mostly Hindu. The system of conversion is still going on in these areas. Many Rabha families have converted into Christianity and many earlier converted Christians have re-embraced Hinduism.

Among the Hindus the Rabhas are believers of Shaiva (Shiva) and Shakti (Kali Puja). The Rabhas are mainly Hindus. Some of them follow of the *Sankari Sangha* and *Anukul Thakur*. Besides, they worship gods and goddesses like Siva, Kali, Durga, etc. Although they have been Hinduized, yet the influence of their ancient religion also could be seen. Some Rabhas especially those who belong to Agiya and the neighbouring areas have converted into Christianity. Though the Garos in the area follow their traditional customs, they have totally converted into Christianity. The following table reports the types of religious conversion in the two communities:

Table 4.8

## Religious Conversion in the Garo and Rabha Communities (Percentage in Parentheses)

Conversion Of religion Among the Garo-Rabha communities	No. of the Rabha Families											No. of the Garo Families				Grand Total
	Belpara	Bongaon	Daram	Jamgaon	Jonglapara	Mendipathar	Nokchar	Rompara	Soinang	Thapa	Total	Ginogre	Khamari	Resubelpara	Total	
Animism to Hinduism	26 (100)	10 (100)	09 (90.00)	11 (100)	31 (88.57)	21 (95.45)	14 (100)	23 (100)	11 (100)	44 (100)	200 (97.09)	0	0	0	0	200 (76.92)
Conversion From Hinduism to Christianity	0	0	01 (10.00)	0	04 (11.43)	01 (4.55)	0	0	0	0	06 (2.91)	0	0	0	0	06 (2.31)
Conversion From Songsarek to Christianity	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	21 (100)	12 (100)	21 (100)	54 (100)	54 (20.77)
Total	26 (100)	10 (100)	10 (100)	11 (100)	35 (100)	22 (100)	14 (100)	23 (100)	11 (100)	44 (100)	206 (100)	21 (100)	12 (100)	21 (100)	54 (100)	260 (100)

Source: Field Study Conducted during the Period 15<sup>th</sup> June 2014 to 20<sup>th</sup> December 2014

As the data reveals, in the area the traditional religion of the Garos i.e, Songsarek is extinct. All the Garos have embraced Christianity. Besides, 2.91% of the Rabhas especially those who live in Meghalaya have embraced Christianity. No Garos have till now accepted Hinduism. Hinduism is prevalent only among the Rabhas. From the ancient records, it is found that Rabhas originally believed in Animism but 97.09% of the Rabha families are Hindu.

### **Festivals**

The Rabhas celebrate all the Assamese festivals like Bihu, Baikhu puja and Sankrantis collectively. The villagers collect money from all the families and thereby celebrate the festivals together. On the other hand, the Garos celebrate Christian festivals like New Year, Christmas, and Good Friday. There is only one traditional festival, Wangala, which is celebrated by the Garos, even today. Wangala is celebrated in the period from September to December.

Table 4.9

Dress Patterns in the Garo and Rabha Communities during Festivals/Social Functions. (Percentage in Parentheses)

Type of Costumes used in social Functions	No. of the Families using Rabha Dress											No. of the Families using Garo Dress				Grand Total
	Belpara	Bongaon	Daram	Jamgaon	Jonglaphara	Mendipathar	Nokchar	Rompara	Soinang	Thapa	Total	Ginogre	Khamari	Resubelpara	Total	
Traditional	26 (100)	10 (100)	10 (100)	11 (100)	34 (97.14)	21 (95.45)	13 (92.86)	23 (100)	11 (100)	44 (100)	203 (98.53)	0	0	0	0	203 (78.08)
Modern	0	0	0	0	01 (2.86)	01 (4.55)	01 (7.14)	0	0	0	03 (1.47)	21 (100)	12 (100)	21 (100)	54 (100)	57 (21.92)
Total	26 (100)	10 (100)	10 (100)	11 (100)	35 (100)	22 (100)	14 (100)	23 (100)	11 (100)	44 (100)	206 (100)	21 (100)	12 (100)	21 (100)	54 (100)	260 (100)

Source: Field Study Conducted during the Period 15<sup>th</sup> June 2014 to 20<sup>th</sup> December 2014

One of the important cultural differences between the two communities is that the Rabhas still wear traditional dress (namely, Rifan, Kambung, Khodabang, Pajal, Khasne, Fali, Buksil and Passara) while the Garos use modern western outfits (T-Shirt and Jeans) after embracing Christianity. On the other hand, 96.53% Rabhas always use their ethnic dress at any festival or social activities.

## Land and Settlement Pattern

In the Assam-Meghalaya border areas, one can observe a unique feature of the geographical settlement of the Garo and Rabha villages. Unlike other areas, one finds a large area inhabited by the people of a particular tribal community, in the Assam-Meghalaya border areas small villages are alternately occupied by the people of the Garo and Rabha communities. The sequential names of these villages according to their situation from the east to the west are as follows:

Rangpathar East Garo village, Rangpathar West Rabha village, Amjunga Chuchiyapara Garo village, Amjunga Chuchiyapara Rabha village, Nidanpur Garo village, Dakpara Rabha village, Khara bagaripari Rabha village, Majipara Garo village, Upper Chilok Rabha village, Lower Chilok Garo village, Chilok Bakharapara Rabha village, Chilok Sarokpara Rabha village, Saoraghat Garo village, Khungrajani Rabha village, Khungrajani Garo village, Tengasot Garo village, Damra Patpara Rabha village, Bakhrapur Garo village, Maju Burgung Rabha village, No. 2 Hatimara Rabha village, Loskarpara Garo village, Habangiri Rabha village, Damaj Garo village, Rangchi Rabha village, Karanchakona Rabha village, Khaskona Garo village, Chitokona Rabha village, Chitokona Garo village, Thobalpara Rabha village, Niyapuli, Garo village, Deoripara Rabha village, Nolbari Garo village, Nolbari Rabha village, Miyapara upper Garo village, Miyapara lower Rabha village, Manikganj upper Garo village, Manikganj lower Rabha village, Khamari Garo village and Khamari Rabha village.

This settlement pattern of the Garo and Rabha communities indicates a difference among these two communities. It shows that the Garos are mostly settled in high lands and foothills whereas the Rabhas are mostly settled in plains and high lands to certain extent.

When the possession of land, particularly cultivable land is observed, the Rabhas occupy most of the cultivable land as compared with the Garos in the Meghalaya side and the Garos try to occupy that valuable land from the Rabhas. After conflict some of the Rabhas lost their lands. The following table gives the distribution of landholding size among the families:

Table 4.10

Measure of Cultivable Land Possessed by the Garo and Rabha families (Percentage in Parentheses)

Holding Size (in bighas)	The Rabha Land Holding in Assam			The Rabha Land Holding in Meghalaya									The Garo Land Holding in Assam			The Garo Land Holding in Meghalaya	GrandTotal
	Belpara	Bongaon	Total	Daram	Jangaon	Jonglapara	Mendipathar	Nokchar	Rompara	Soinang	Thapa	Total	Ginogre	Khamari	Total	Resubelpara	
Above 15	13 (50.00)	03 (30.00)	16 (44.44)	03 (30.00)	03 (27.27)	04 (11.43)	01 (4.55)	0	0	02 (18.18)	05 (11.36)	18 (10.59)	0	0	0	0 (0.00)	34 (13.08)
10-14	07 (26.92)	05 (50.00)	12 (33.33)	02 (20.00)	02 (18.18)	05 (14.29)	07 (31.82)	0	20 (86.96)	06 (54.55)	18 (40.91)	60 (35.29)	0	0	0	0	72 (27.69)
5-9	05 (19.23)	02 (20.00)	07 (19.44)	04 (40.00)	06 (54.55)	22 (62.86)	12 (54.55)	14 (100)	01 (4.35)	02 (18.18)	21 (47.73)	82 (48.23)	19 (90.48)	11 (91.67)	30 (90.91)	07 (33.33)	126 (48.46)
1-4	01 (3.85)	0	01 (2.78)	01 (10.00)	0	04 (11.43)	02 (9.09)	0	02 (8.70)	01 (9.09)	0	10 (5.88)	02 (9.52)	01 (8.33)	03 (9.09)	14 (66.67)	28 (10.77)
Total	26 (100)	10 (100)	36 (100)	10 (100)	11 (100)	35 (100)	22 (100)	14 (100)	23 (100)	11 (100)	44 (100)	170 (100)	21 (100)	12 (100)	33 (100)	21 (100)	260 (100)

Source: Field Study Conducted during the Period 15<sup>th</sup> June 2014 to 20<sup>th</sup> December 2014

The table depicts that in Meghalaya, 10.59% Rabha families are having more than 15 bighas of cultivable land and 35.29% have 10 to 14 bighas of land, but not a single Garo families has this much land. In Assam also, the Rabhas possessed much cultivable land: 44.44% have more than 15 bighas of land and 33.33% have 10 to 14 bighas of land. On the other hand, the Garos possessed less cultivable land as compared to Rabhas. Of the Garo families of Assam 90.91% have 5 to 9 bighas, 66.67% Garos of Meghalaya have 1 to 4 bighas of land. This fact gives rise to a sense of relative deprivation among the Garos.

### **Occupation**

Though the basic similarity between the Garos and Rabhas is that the majority of the population depends on agrarian means and animal husbandry for their livelihood, yet they differ in the system of their agricultural practices. In the area, the main crop grown is paddy, and paddy cultivation is done in the low lying areas where water stagnates. In the high land areas, Sal tree plantation is seen which is done by the villagers according to the terms set by the Forest Department. Rubber plantation is also seen in these areas. The fascination for highland cultivation is very rare in these areas. As the people of the East Garo Hills are not inclined to cultivation in the low lying areas or mud, one can see that the people of the plain areas show no interested in growing highland crops. The Rabhas have taken paddy cultivation as their main source of livelihood but the source of livelihood for the Garos is very limited. Since the Garos are not interested in paddy cultivation, those Garos who belong to the villages situated on Assam's side are compelled to earn their livelihood as daily wage labourers. The people from these neighbouring villages go to the East Garo Hills district in order to work as daily wage labourers and they also go to Krishnai, Dhupdhora, Dudhnoi and Rangjuli to sell vegetables and fruits. Among the people settled in these bordering areas of Assam, one finds very less who are doing service jobs. The following table shows the preferences of land between the two communities:

Table 4.11

Types of the Land Preferred for Cultivation among the Garo and Rabha Families (Percentage in Parentheses)

Type of Land	No. of the Rabha Families											No. of the Garo Families				Grand Total
	Belpara	Bongaon	Daram	Jamgaon	Jonglapara	Mendipathar	Nokchar	Rompara	Soingang	Thapa		Ginogre	Khamari	Resubelpara		
High/dry Land	0	0	02 (20.00)	02 (18.18)	01 (2.86)	0	0	0	0	0	05 (2.43)	15 (71.43)	04 (33.33)	10 (47.62)	29 (53.70)	34 (13.08)
Mud land	19 (73.08)	09 (90.00)	04 (40.00)	04 (36.36)	11 (31.43)	20 (90.91)	10 (71.43)	09 (39.13)	07 (63.64)	06 (13.64)	99 (48.06)	02 (9.52)	02 (16.67)	02 (9.52)	06 (11.11)	105 (40.38)
Both dry and mud land	07 (26.92)	01 (10.00)	04 (40.00)	05 (45.45)	21 (60.00)	02 (9.09)	04 (28.57)	12 (52.17)	04 (36.36)	38 (86.36)	98 (47.57)	04 (19.05)	06 (50.00)	08 (38.10)	18 (33.34)	116 (44.62)
None	0	0	0	0	02 (5.71)	0	0	02 (8.70)	0	0	04 (1.94)	0	0	01 (4.76)	01 (1.85)	05 (1.92)
Total	26 (100)	10 (100)	10 (100)	11 (100)	35 (100)	22 (100)	14 (100)	23 (100)	11 (100)	44 (100)	206 (100)	21 (100)	12 (100)	21 (100)	54 (100)	260 (100)

Source: Field Study Conducted during the Period 15<sup>th</sup> June 2014 to 20<sup>th</sup> December 2014



The data tells that in the study area 53.70% of the Garo families are fond inhabiting and cultivating dry, high lands. Only a meager portion, i.e 11.11% families like to cultivate plain mud lands but they do not like to build their residences in such places. Contrary to this, among the Rabha families only 2.43% prefer highland while 48.06% are fond of plain areas.

Besides agriculture, livestock is another important source of income for the Rabhas. They earn money by raising cows, goats, hen and pigs. Some of the Rabhas are also engaged at house construction sites. Participation of the Rabhas in Government and private jobs is very less. Of those Garos and the Rabhas who have service jobs most are engaged as school teachers.

In the ancient times, the main crops grown in these areas were cotton, potatoes, ginger, eri (silk product), chilli, pineapple and paddy. At that time, jhum cultivation was in great vogue but now the interest in jhum cultivation has declined. In the contemporary time, agriculture is the main source of livelihood. Paddy is mostly grown in the low lying areas of plains. Cabbage, potato, banana and other vegetables are grown on the banks of rivers while pineapples and other fruits are grown in the hills. Rubber plantation has proved to be a good source of income in contemporary time, which has gained immense popularity in the high lands or hilly areas. The Garos are not interested in paddy cultivation. They keep themselves away from any cultivation related to mud. That is why they identify themselves as hill men or “Achik Mande”- in other words, people belonging to hills. The following table shows the families engaged primarily in Paddy cultivation, rubber plantation and other agricultural activities:

Table 4.12

Distribution of Garo and Rabha Families Primarily engaged in Paddy, Rubber plantation and Other Agricultural Activities  
(Percentage in Parentheses)

Type of Cultivation	No. of the Rabha Families of Assam			No. of the Rabha Families of Meghalaya									No. of the Garo Families of Assam			No. of the Garo Families of Meghalaya	GrandTotal
	Belpara	Bongaon	Total	Daram	Jangaon	Jonglapara	Mendipathar	Nokchar	Rompara	Soingang	Thapa	Total	Ginogre	Khamari	Total	Resubelpara	
Paddy	20 (76.92)	09 (90.00)	29 (80.56)	06 (60.00)	08 (72.73)	26 (72.29)	22 (100)	13 (92.86)	19 (82.61)	08 (72.73)	35 (79.55)	137 (80.59)	11 (52.38)	06 (50.00)	17 (51.52)	08 (38.10)	191 (73.46)
Rubber	04 (15.39)	01 (10.00)	05 (13.89)	03 (30.00)	02 (18.18)	05 (14.29)	0	01 (7.14)	04 (17.39)	03 (27.27)	08 (18.18)	26 (15.29)	07 (33.33)	01 (8.33)	08 (24.24)	12 (57.14)	51 (19.62)
Vegetable	02 (7.69)	0	02 (5.56)	01 (10.00)	01 (9.09)	04 (11.43)	0	0	0	0	01 (2.27)	07 (4.12)	03 (14.29)	05 (41.67)	08 (24.24)	01 (4.76)	18 (3.08)
Total	26 (100)	10 (100)	36 (100)	10 (100)	11 (100)	35 (100)	22 (100)	14 (100)	23 (100)	11 (100)	44 (100)	170 (100)	21 (100)	12 (100)	33 (100)	21 (100)	260 (100)

Source: Field Study Conducted during the Period 15<sup>th</sup> June 2014 to 20<sup>th</sup> December 2014

The table speaks that of the families 80.56% Rabhas of Assam, 80.59% Rabhas of Meghalaya, 51.52% Garos of Assam and 38.10% Meghalayan Garos are engaged in paddy cultivation. At present rubber plantation instead of Jhum cultivation is gaining more popularity among the Rabhas. 57.14% Meghalayan Garos, 24.24% Garos of Assam, 13.89% Rabhas of Assam and 15.29% Meghalayan Rabhas have started rubber plantation.

Besides agriculture, some other occupations seen in the Rabha community include government services and daily labourers. Many of the Rabha youths are engaged in hotels and shops in Shillong and Guwahati. On the other hand, the Garos are trying to become self-dependent through government and private jobs, NGOs and governments financial schemes. The occupational distribution in the Garo and Rabha families is given in the following table:

Table 4.13  
Occupation in the Garo and Rabha families (Percentage in Parentheses)

Type of Occupation	No. of the Rabha Families of Assam			No. of the Rabha Families of Meghalaya									No. of the Garo Families of Assam			No. of the Garo Families of Meghalaya	Grand Total
	Belpara	Bongaon	Total	Daram	Jamgaon	Jonglapara	Mendipathar	Nokchar	Rompara	Soinang	Thapa	Total	Ginogre	Khamari	Total	Resubelpara	
Agriculture	22 (84.62)	07 (70.00)	29 (80.56)	07 (70.00)	08 (7.72)	29 (82.86)	17 (77.27)	11 (78.57)	18 (78.26)	07 (63.64)	41 (93.18)	138 (81.18)	19 (90.48)	09 (75.00)	28 (84.85)	14 (66.67)	209 (80.38)
Business	01 (3.85)	01 (10.00)	02 (5.56)	0	01 (9.09)	02 (5.71)	01 (4.55)	0	02 (8.70)	0	01 (2.27)	07 (4.12)	0	0	0	02 (9.52)	11 (4.23)
Labourer	01 (3.85)	01 (10.00)	02 (5.56)	02 (20.00)	02 (18.18)	01 (2.86)	01 (4.55)	02 (14.29)	01 (4.35)	02 (18.18)	01 (2.27)	12 (7.06)	01 (4.76)	03 (25.00)	04 (12.12)	01 (4.76)	19 (7.31)
Service	02 (7.70)	01 (10.00)	03 (8.33)	01 (10.00)	0	03 (8.57)	03 (13.64)	01 (7.14)	02 (8.70)	02 (18.18)	01 (2.27)	13 (7.65)	01 (4.76)	0	01 (3.03)	04 (19.05)	21 (8.08)
Total	26 (100)	10 (100)	36 (100)	10 (100)	11 (100)	35 (100)	22 (100)	14 (100)	23 (100)	11 (100)	44 (100)	170 (100)	21 (100)	12 (100)	33 (100)	21 (100)	260 (100)

Source: Field Study Conducted during the Period 15<sup>th</sup> June 2014 to 20<sup>th</sup> December 2014

The table reveals that in the families, 80.56% Rabhas and 84.85% Garos of Assam depend on agricultural and allied activities. Likewise, 81.18% Rabhas and 66.67% Garos of Meghalaya depend on agriculture. Thus, less Garos of Meghalaya are engaged in agricultural activities as compared to the Rabhas of Assam and Meghalaya.

In business, both the communities show very less interest: Only 4.23% of the Garo and Rabha respondents are engaged in business and particularly the Garos of Assam did not engage in business at all.

12.12% Garos and 5.56% Rabhas of Assam, and 7.06% Rabhas and 7.31% Garos of Meghalaya depend on labour activities.

In the service sector, the largest percentage comes from the Garos of Meghalaya – 19.09% of them have jobs in public and private sectors followed by 8.33% Rabhas of Assam, 7.65% Rabhas of Meghalaya and with 3.03% Garos of Assam.

Handloom production or engagement in weaving is one of the basic characteristic of tribal societies in Northeast India. The Garo and Rabha also carry on this tradition. But in the contemporary time it is noticed among the Rabha women but among the Garos it has become almost extinct. The table shows the handloom product status of the families in the two communities:

Table 4.14

Engagement in Weaving/Handloom Production by the Garo and Rabha families (Percentage in Parentheses)

Mode of Engaging in weaving/handloom production	No. of the Rabha Families											No. of the Garo Families				Grand Total
	Belpara	Bongaon	Daram	Jamgaon	Jonglapara	Mendipathar	Nokchar	Rompara	Soinang	Thapa	Total	Ginogre	Khamari	Resubelpara	Total	
Production for sell	02 (7.69)	01 (10.00)	0	01 (9.09)	0	01 (4.55)	0	0	0	02 (4.55)	07 (3.40)	0	0	0	0	07 (2.69)
Sell sometimes as well as use	10 (38.46)	06 (60.00)	07 (70.00)	07 (63.64)	26 (74.29)	15 (68.18)	10 (71.43)	18 (78.26)	10 (90.91)	27 (61.36)	136 (66.02)	0	0	0	00	136 (52.31)
Purchase from market and use	14 (53.85)	03 (30.00)	03 (30.00)	03 (27.27)	09 (25.71)	06 (27.27)	04 (28.57)	05 (21.74)	01 (9.09)	15 (34.09)	63 (30.58)	21 (100)	12 (100)	21 (100)	54 (100)	117 (45.00)
Total	26 (100)	10 (100)	10 (100)	11 (100)	35 (100)	22 (100)	14 (100)	23 (100)	11 (100)	44 (100)	206 (100)	21 (100)	12 (100)	21 (100)	54 (100)	260 (100)

Source: Field Study Conducted during the Period 15<sup>th</sup> June 2014 to 20<sup>th</sup> December 2014

The table points out that the Rabha women still engaged in traditional weaving and production of handloom goods. Contrary to this, after conversion to Christianity the Garos have abandoned all traditional practices including handloom production. If the Garo people sometimes need traditional dress they ask the Rabha women to weave such dresses. There are 66.02% Rabha women engaged in weaving for their own use as well as sometimes for sale and 3.40% Rabha women take the weaving as a business.

Like weaving, animal husbandry or rearing of domestic animals is a common practice of both the communities. The domestic animals like pigs and goats are reared to sell and hen, duck, cow etc. reared for sale as well as domestic use. The following table gives the picture of animal husbandry in the families of the two communities:

Table 4.15  
Animal Husbandry in the Garo and Rabha Families. (Percentage in Parentheses)

Purpose of Rearing domestic animals	No. of the Rabha Families											No. of the Garo Families				Grand Total
	Belpara	Bongaon	Daram	Jangaon	Jonglapara	Mendipathar	Nokchar	Rompara	Soingang	Thapa	Toal	Ginogre	Khamari	Resubelpara	Total	
For Sale	02 (7.69)	01 (10.00)	0	01 (9.09)	01 (2.86)	01 (4.55)	01 (7.14)	03 (13.04)	0	03 (6.82)	13 (6.31)	01 (4.76)	05 (41.67)	01 (4.76)	07 (12.96)	20 (7.69)
Consumption and own use	02 (7.69)	04 (40.00)	05 (50.00)	04 (36.36)	10 (28.57)	02 (9.09)	03 (21.43)	01 (4.35)	06 (54.55)	06 (13.64)	43 (20.87)	15 (71.43)	0	08 (38.10)	23 (42.59)	66 (25.38)
Sale as well as consumption	20 (76.92)	05 (50.00)	04 (40.00)	06 (54.55)	24 (68.57)	19 (86.36)	10 (71.43)	19 (82.61)	05 (45.45)	35 (79.55)	147 (71.36)	04 (19.05)	05 (41.67)	02 (9.52)	11 (20.37)	158 (60.77)
Not rearing	02 (7.69)	0	01	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	03 (1.46)	01 (4.76)	02 (16.66)	10 (47.62)	13 (24.07)	16 (6.15)
Total	26 (100)	10 (100)	10 (100)	11 (100)	35 (100)	22 (100)	14 (100)	23 (100)	11 (100)	44 (100)	206 (100)	21 (100)	12 (100)	21 (100)	54 (100)	260 (100)

Source: Field Study Conducted during the Period 15<sup>th</sup> June 2014 to 20<sup>th</sup> December 2014

The data exhibit that animal husbandry is one of the important occupations where 71.36% Rabhas rear domestic animals for the purpose of sale as well as consumption while 42.53% Garos rear animals for their own consumption. Besides, 6.31% Rabhas and 12.96% Garos rear domestic animals solely for the purpose of selling.

### **Visits to Towns/Markets**

The entire Garo hills area of Meghalaya, has small and big towns like Tura, William Nagar and others. Northern region of the East Garo Hills district is connected to the towns and markets of Assam and for marketing the people of the region visit Krishnai, Bolbola, Agiya, Dudhnoi, Darangiri, Rangjuli and Dhupdhora. Poor families go to the market places of Assam on bicycles (40 to 50 kms) to sell bananas, pineapples and other things. By now, various markets have come up in the North Garo Hills district. In order to buy electronic goods like TV, Refrigerator, Mobilephone, Bikes and others, the people of this area visit Assam. The Mendipathar area of the region has become a major market centre. Besides, the places like Damara, Damaj, Bajendoba, Dainadubi are also count worthy places in this regard. In these markets, the Rabha and Garo vendors are not found in a large number. They come to Mendipathar market areas to sell essential goods like furniture, cloths, fish, meat, dried fish, vegetables, grocery items and other things. In this market area, the vendors are mostly Bengali Hindu, Marwari and Bengali Muslim. The Garo and Rabha vendors are found in village Markets only. The towns often visited by the Garo and Rabha families are distributed in the following market:

Table 4.16

## Neighbouring Towns Frequently Visited by the Families (Percentage in Parentheses)

Name of the Town Often Visited	No. of the Rabha Families of Assam			No. of the Rabha Families of Meghalaya									No. of the Garo Families of Assam			No. of the Garo Families of Meghalaya	GrandTotal
	Belpara	Bongaon	Total	Daram	Jamgaon	Jonglapara	Mendipathar	Nokchar	Rompara	Soinang	Thapa	Total	Ginogre	Khamari	Total	Resubelpara	
Krishnai	03 (11.54)	0	03 (8.33)	0	0	02 (5.71)	0	0	0	01 (9.09)	04 (9.09)	07 (4.12)	0	0	00	0	10 (3.85)
Dudhnoi	13 (50.00)	10 (100)	23 (63.89)	04 (40.00)	04 (36.36)	30 (85.71)	20 (90.91)	13 (92.86)	20 (86.96)	09 (81.82)	31 (70.45)	131	0	0	00	0	154 (59.23)
Mendipathar	10 (38.46)	0	10 (27.78)	02 (20.00)	01 (9.09)	03 (8.57)	02 (9.09)	01 (7.14)	03 (13.04)	01 (9.09)	06 (13.64)	19 (11.18)	21 (100)	12 (100)	33 (100)	20 (95.24)	82 (31.54)
Resubelpara	0	0	0	04 (40.00)	06 (45.55)	0	0	0	0	0	03 (6.82)	13 (7.65)	0	0	00	01 (4.76)	14 (5.38)
Total	26 (100)	10 (100)	36 (100)	10 (100)	11 (100)	35 (100)	22 (100)	14 (100)	23 (100)	11 (100)	44 (100)	170 (100)	21 (100)	12 (100)	33 (100)	21 (100)	260 (100)

Source: Field Study Conducted during the Period 15<sup>th</sup> June 2014 to 20<sup>th</sup> December 2014



The table reveal that interestingly all the Garos settled in the Assam side are not affected at all as they are connected to Mendipathar (Meghalaya) only and seldom visit places of Assam while 77.06% Rabhas of Meghalaya frequently visit the Dudhnoi town (Assam) as the Dudhnoi town is the centre for all Rabha people residing in the conflict affected areas .Only 7% Rabhas of Meghalaya visit Krishnai as this town is dominated by Muslims.

On the other hand, 95.24% Garos of Meghalaya often visit Mendipathar. The Rabhas of Belpara (Assam) visit Mendipathar as the village is geographically isolated from Assam, whereas 38.46% of Rabhas come to Mendipathar.

### **Socio-Economic Status**

The region containing the study area is not much developed. As stated earlier, the inhabitants are mostly depend on agrarian means of living. The percentage of service holders is very low. This is perhaps due to the high rate of illiteracy in the region. However, now increase in awareness for education in the new generation perceptible. The following table shows the educational levels of the families from the two communities:

Table 4.17

## Literacy Levels of the Garo and Rabha Families (Percentage in Parentheses)

Literacy Level	No. of the Rabha Families of Assam			No. of the Rabha Families of Meghalaya									No. of the Garos Families of Assam			No. of the Garo Families of Meghalaya	Grand Total
	Belpara	Bongaon	Total	Daram	Jamgaon	Jonglapara	Mendipathar	Nokchar	Rompara	Soimang	Thapa	Total	Ginogre	Khamari	Total	Resubelpara	
PG	01 (0.74)	02 (2.22)	03 (1.33)	0	0	01 (0.56)	01 (0.69)	0	0	0	0	02 (0.20)	0	0	0	02 (1.60)	07 (0.44)
BA	05 (3.70)	06 (6.67)	11 (4.89)	0	0	05 (2.78)	06 (4.17)	07 (8.97)	05 (3.18)	01 (1.37)	0	24 (2.38)	0	0	0	10 (8.00)	45 (2.84)
HS Pass	07 (5.19)	11 (12.22)	18 (8.00)	04 (5.63)	03 (4.92)	04 (2.22)	11 (7.64)	05 (6.41)	08 (5.10)	07 (9.59)	17 (6.91)	59.84 (5)	01 (0.71)	0	01 (0.45)	15 (12.00)	93 (5.88)
HSLC	08 (5.93)	15 (16.67)	23 (10.22)	10 (14.08)	04 (6.56)	16 (8.89)	22 (15.28)	06 (7.69)	11 (7.00)	03 (4.11)	07 (2.85)	79 (7.82)	01 (0.71)	01 (1.23)	02 (0.90)	23 (18.40)	127 (8.03)
Class VIII to X	60 (44.44)	22 (24.44)	82 (36.44)	27 (38.03)	16 (26.23)	63 (35.00)	55 (38.19)	26 (33.33)	81 (51.59)	22 (30.14)	92 (37.40)	382 (37.82)	28 (19.86)	22 (27.16)	50 (22.52)	31 (24.80)	545 (34.45)
Class V to VII	08 (5.93)	12 (13.33)	20 (8.89)	11 (15.49)	17 (27.87)	36 (20.00)	15 (10.42)	08 (10.26)	09 (5.73)	08 (10.96)	33 (13.41)	137 (13.56)	35 (24.82)	15 (18.52)	50 (22.52)	16 (12.80)	223 (14.10)
Class I to IV	35 (25.93)	15 (16.67)	50 (22.22)	13 (18.31)	12 (19.67)	43 (23.89)	24 (16.67)	11 (14.10)	36 (22.93)	19 (26.03)	76 (30.89)	234 (23.17)	49 (34.75)	14 (17.28)	63 (28.38)	12 (9.60)	359 (22.69)
Illiterate	11 (8.15)	07 (7.78)	18 (8.00)	06 (8.45)	09 (14.75)	12 (6.67)	10 (6.94)	15 (19.23)	07 (4.46)	13 (17.81)	21 (8.54)	93 (9.21)	27 (19.15)	29 (35.81)	56 (25.23)	16 (12.80)	183 (11.57)
Grand Total	135 (100)	90 (100)	225 (100)	71 (100)	61 (100)	180 (100)	144 (100)	78 (100)	157 (100)	73 (100)	246 (100)	1010 (100)	141 (100)	81 (100)	222 (100)	125 (100)	1582 (100)

Source: Field Study Conducted during the Period 15<sup>th</sup> June 2014 to 20<sup>th</sup> December 2014

The data shows that though there are similarities of education between the two communities, yet the literacy rate of the Garos of Assam is very poor where 25.23% Garos are illiterate, followed by 12.80% Meghalayan Garos, 9.21% Meghalayan Rabha and 8% Rabha families of Assam are illiterate.

The post-graduates among the Garo and the Rabha families comprise 1.33% Rabhas of Assam, 0.02% Meghalayan Rabha, 1.66% Meghalayan Garo. The graduates (BA) are 8% Meghalayan Garo, 4.89% Rabhas of Assam and 2.38% Meghalayan Rabha. But, not a single post-graduate and graduate person found among the Garos of Assam. In the study area, at present the awareness of education is increasing among the new generation especially in Middle English and Primary standard.

### **Lack of Modern Amenities**

The Garo and Rabha people in the study area are economically backward as compared to other parts of the two states. For instance most of the people use firewood instead of LPG and most of them do not have proper sanitary latrines. The following table shows the types of fuel used for cooking:

Table 4.18

## Types of Fuel Used for Cooking (Percentage in Parentheses)

Type of Fuel	No. of the Rabhas Families of Assam			No. of the Rabhas Families of Meghalaya									No. of the Garos Families of Assam			No. of the Garos Families of Meghalaya	Grand Total
	Belpara	Bongaon	Total	Daram	Jangaon	Jonglapara	Mendipathar	Nokchar	Rompara	Soimang	Thapa	Total	Ginogre	Khamari	Total	Resu belpara	
LPG	06 (23.08)	02 (20.00)	08 (22.22)	01 (10.00)	01 (9.09)	02 (5.71)	02 (9.09)	0	0	0	02 (4.55)	08 (4.71)	0	0	0	09 (42.86)	25 (9.62)
Firewood	13 (50.00)	02 (20.00)	15 (41.67)	07 (70.00)	09 (81.82)	22 (62.86)	05 (22.73)	07 (50.00)	12 (52.17)	09 (81.82)	28 (63.64)	99 (58.23)	19 (90.48)	12 (100)	31 (93.94)	06 (28.57)	181 (69.62)
LPG as well as Firewood	07 (26.92)	06 (60.00)	13 (36.11)	02 (20.00)	01 (9.09)	11 (31.43)	15 (68.18)	07 (50.00)	11 (47.83)	02 (18.18)	14 (31.82)	63 (37.06)	02 (9.52)	0	02 (6.06)	06 (28.57)	74 (28.46)
Total	26 (100)	10 (100)	36 (100)	10 (100)	11 (100)	35 (100)	22 (100)	14 (100)	23 (100)	11 (100)	44 (100)	170 (100)	21 (100)	12 (100)	33 (100)	21 (100)	260 (100)

Source: Field Study Conducted during the Period 15<sup>th</sup> June 2014 to 20<sup>th</sup> December 2014

The data tell that most of the families use firewood: 41.67% Rabhas of Assam, 58.23% Rabhas of Meghalaya and 28.57% Garos of Meghalaya. On the other hand, the number of the families using only LPG is very small: 22.22% Rabhas of Assam, 4.71% Rabhas of Meghalaya and 42.86% Garos of Meghalaya. The Rabhas of Assam use only firewood and no LPG. On the whole 28.46% Garos and Rabhas use firewood

as well as LPG. Thus, the Garos of Meghalaya use LPG more as they get it subsidized advantage from the Government. But the Garos of Assam are deprived of such facilities and so they use only firewood. Regarding sanitation facility the following table shows the status:

Table 4.19  
Sanitation Status among the Families (Percentage in Parentheses)

Type of Sanitation Facility	No. of the Rabhas Families of Assam			No. of the Rabhas Families of Meghalaya									No. of the Garos Families of Assam			No. of the Garos Families of Meghalaya	Grand Total
	Belpara	Bongaon	Total	Daram	Jamgaon	Jonglapara	Mendipathar	Nokchar	Rompara	Soimang	Thapa	Total	Ginogre	Khamari	Total	Resubelpara	
Pacca	11 (42.31)	07 (70.00)	18 (50.00)	02 (20.00)	03 (27.27)	10 (28.57)	11 (50.00)	06 (42.86)	13 (56.52)	01 (9.09)	07 (15.91)	53 (31.18)	04 (19.05)	01 (8.33)	05 (15.15)	10 (47.62)	86 (33.08)
Semi-Pacca	14 (53.85)	01 (10.00)	15 (41.67)	07 (70.00)	07 (63.64)	14 (40.00)	11 (50.00)	07 (50.00)	09 (39.13)	09 (81.82)	35 (79.55)	99 (58.24)	10 (47.62)	01 (8.33)	11 (33.33)	09 (42.86)	134 (51.54)
Kachcha	01 (3.85)	02 (20.00)	03 (8.33)	01 (10.00)	01 (9.09)	11 (31.43)	0	01 (7.14)	01 (4.35)	01 (9.09)	01 (2.27)	17 (10.00)	06 (28.57)	08 (66.67)	14 (42.42)	02 (9.52)	36 (13.85)
Open defecation	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	01 (2.27)	01 (0.59)	01 (4.76)	02 (16.67)	03 (9.09)	0	04 (1.54)
	26 (100)	10 (100)	36 (100)	10 (100)	11 (100)	35 (100)	22 (100)	14 (100)	23 (100)	11 (100)	44 (100)	170 (100)	21 (100)	12 (100)	33 (100)	21 (100)	260 (100)

Source: Field Study Conducted during the Period 15<sup>th</sup> June 2014 to 20<sup>th</sup> December 2014

The table brings out that 50% Rabhas of Assam, 47.62% Garos of Meghalaya, 31.18% Rabhas of Meghalaya and 15.15% Garos of Assam have pacca sanitary latrines.

On the other hand, 42.2% Garos of Assam, 10% Rabhas of Meghalaya, 9.57% Garos of Meghalaya and 8.33% Rabhas of Assam do not have pacca sanitary latrines.

Moreover 9.09% Garos of Assam and 0.59% Rabhas of Meghalaya do not having any kind of sanitary system.

On the whole 51.54% Garos and Rabhas have semi pacca latrines.

### **Road Communication**

The Garos and the Rabhas in the East Garo Hills areas may be considered economically independent but in the Goalpara district the Garos are not economically independent. There is lack of proper road connectivity in the area.

In these areas **road** is the only means of transport. They travel to Guwahati, Tura, Shillong, Dudhnoi, Krishnai by bus, sumo and autorickshaw. The biggest problem is that the people in the Garo hills areas do not have proper road to visit Shillong the capital city. They are compelled to go to Shillong through Assam. The following table shows the status of road connectivity for the two communities:

Table 4.20

Road Connectivity Available to the Garo and Rabha Communities in Assam and Meghalaya (Percentage in Parentheses)

Type of Road Connectivity	No. of the Rabha Families of Assam			No. of the Rabha Families of Meghalaya									No. of the Garo Families of Assam			No. of the Garo Families of Meghalaya	Grand Total	
	Belpara	Bongaon	Total	Daram	Jamgaon	Jonglapara	Mendipathar	Nokchar	Rompara	Soingan	Thapa	Total	Ginogre	Khamari	Total	Resubelpara		
National Highway	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	00 (0.00)
State Highway	08 (30.77)	02 (20.00)	10 (27.77)	03 (30.00)	04 (36.36)	15 (42.86)	02 (9.09)	04 (28.57)	0 (0.00)	08 (72.73)	30 (68.18)	66 (38.82)	0	0	0	02 (9.52)	78 (30.00)	
PWD Road	18 (69.23)	08 (80.00)	26 (72.77)	07 (70.00)	07 (63.64)	18 (51.43)	20 (90.91)	10 (71.43)	23 (100)	03 (27.27)	04 (9.09)	92 (54.12)	0	0	0	19 (90.48)	137 (52.70)	
Village mud road	0	0	00	0	0	02 (5.71)	0	0	0	0	10 (22.73)	12 (7.06)	21 (100)	12 (100)	33 (100)	0	45 (20.00)	
Total	26 (100)	10 (100)	36 (100)	10 (100)	11 (100)	35 (100)	22 (100)	14 (100)	23 (100)	11 (100)	44 (100)	170 (100)	21 (100)	12 (100)	33 (100)	21 (100)	260 (100)	

Source: Field Study Conducted during the Period 15<sup>th</sup> June 2014 to 20<sup>th</sup> December 2014

The data reveal that in the Garo villages of Assam there exist only muddy village roads which do not connect with National Highway. Only 30% villages are connected to State Highways and 52.70% are connected to PWD roads.

The people use vehicles like autorickshaw, bus and personal vehicle to visit towns. These are shown by the distribution of the families in the following table:

Table 4.21

Types of Vehicles Used to Visit Towns in the Neighbouring Areas in Assam and Meghalaya (Percentage in Parentheses)

Type of vehicles used to visit town	No. of the Rabha Families of Assam			No. of the Rabha Families of Meghalaya									No. of the Garo Families of Assam			No. of the Garo Families of Meghalaya	GrandTotal
	Belpara	Bongaon	Total	Daram	Jamgaon	Jonglapara	Mendipathar	Nokchar	Rompara	Soimang	Thapa	Total	Ginogre	Khamari	Total	Resubelpara	
Auto	21 (80.77)	05 (50.00)	26 (72.22)	08 (80.00)	07 (63.64)	25 (71.43)	18 (81.82)	11 (78.57)	20 (86.96)	10 (90.91)	40 (90.91)	139 (81.76)	15 (71.43)	04 (33.33)	19 (57.58)	15 (71.43)	199 (76.54)
Bus	0	0	0	0	0	0	01 (4.55)	0	0	0	04 (9.09)	05 (2.94)	0	00	00	02 (9.52)	07 (2.69)
Personal vehicle	05 (19.23)	05 (50.00)	10 (27.78)	02 (20.00)	04 (36.36)	10 (28.57)	03 (13.64)	03 (21.43)	03 (13.04)	01 (9.09)	0	26 (15.29)	06 (28.57)	08 (66.67)	14 (42.42)	04 (19.05)	54 (20.77)
Total	26 (100)	10 (100)	36 (100)	10 (100)	11 (100)	35 (100)	22 (100)	14 (100)	23 (100)	11 (100)	44 (100)	170 (100)	21 (100)	12 (100)	5433 (100)	21 (100)	260 (100)

Source: Field Study Conducted during the Period 15<sup>th</sup> June 2014 to 20<sup>th</sup> December 2014



The table reveals that autorickshaw is the most commonly used vehicle for transportation. There are 76.54% people who use autorickshaw to travel from one place to the other. 20.77% people use personal vehicles like car, bike and bicycle. Only 2.69% people use bus. So, the road connectivity and transport in the conflict affected areas is very poor.

### **Political Life**

In the East Garo Hills district, the political units of the Garo villages consist of the village headman or Nokma and the village council. Nokma is the village landlord and so his permission is required to cultivate a piece of land in the village. In the modern political system power of the traditional authority has declined. Now, there are four major political parties in the study areas: United Democratic Party (UDP), Nationalist Congress Party (NCP), National People's Party (NPP) and Indian National Congress (INC). Of these two each are regional and national political parties. In the present time national political parties (NCP and INC) are more active in the region.

From the political perspective, the scenario of entire Goalpara district is not peaceful. Indian National Congress (INC) and Assam Gana Parishad (AGP) are the dominant political parties in the Goalpara district, but recently the Rabha Hasong Autonomous District Council has developed its political activities. The Rabhas have formed Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council covering the entire areas of the Goalpara district and some portion of the Kamrup district.

On the other hand, the Garo villages situated in the border areas of the Goalpara district are raising demand for autonomous status. Similarly the non-Rabha communities of the Goalpara district are raising voice against the inclusion of their land into the Rabha Hasong Autonomous Council. As a result, two opponent groups have formed; namely, Rabhas and non-Rabhas.

### **The Garo and Rabhas Identity Groups**

The basic division of the Garos are based on geographical location such the hills and the plains. The Akawes, Chiboks and Kochus are inhabitants of plain or closer to plain areas, and the hill dwellers constitute the groups like Chisaks, Duals, Matchis, Matabengs, Atiagas, Abengs, Rugas, Ganchings or Garas and Atongs (Marak 2004:519). Majority of the population of the East district belongs to the Garo

tribe. Other inhabitants are Rabhas, Hajongs, Koches, Rajbonsis, Dalus, Meches and the Kacharis (Sanjeeva Kumar 2005: 2942).

Rabhas are one of the plain tribes mostly inhabiting Assam especially in the Goalpara district and the North Garo Hills district of Meghalaya. On the other hand, the Garos are mostly highland lovers. The Garo is basically a hill tribe and even though some Garos are also found in the Goalpara district of Assam, they are mostly settled in the lofty places.

The Garos follow the Matrilineal pattern in which daughter inherits property and as such female is the head of the family. The Rabhas on the other hand are mostly patriarchal, although some clans are still adhering to matrilineal norm. The Rabhas have abandoned the matrilineal structure mainly because of their proximity to other Assamese communities and acceptance of Hinduism. But the Garos mostly lead a cocooned life in their own community and are also mostly surrounded by the Khasis who are also matrilineal. The Garo families are mostly nuclear whereas majority of Rabha families are joint.

The Garos are fond of Jhum cultivation as an unsettled agricultural process whereas the Rabhas are mostly engaged in settled cultivation of mud land crops like paddy. Moreover, the Rabhas have more cultivable land and the Garos have less cultivable land.

In marriage pattern also they differ. The Garos mostly prefer love marriage (98.15%) whereas arranged marriage is mostly seen among the Rabhas (92.23%). The Rabhas marry according to their traditional customs at home whereas the Garos marry in the Church as per the Christian norms. The Garos mostly practice cross-cousin marriage (88.89%), but among the Rabhas it is now extinct.

The terms language and border suggest that linguistic differences signify categories of person defined by ethnic or national origin and that these categories are opposed to each other. People act in ways that are taken as “having” a language which is equated to “belonging” to an origin group. Borders emerge in specific contexts as a metonymy of person, language and origin. This metonymy can be fleeting or quite rigid and in varying degrees politicalized (Bonnie Urciuoli 1995:525).

The Meghalayan population mostly belongs to the Indo-Chinese linguistic group of which two important sub-families are (i) Monkhmer and (ii) Tibeto-Burman. The Khasis belongs to Monkhmer and the Garos belong to Tibeto-Burman (Sarma 2003:5). Language is also another major factor for the alienation of the tribals. By an Act of 1960 Assamese was made the official language and it was imposed on all the people of erstwhile Assam. The ethno-linguistic evidences suggest that the Garos belonged to the great Bodo stock that occupied a large portion of the Brahmaputra Valley. They belong to the Mongoloid origin, a section of the Tibeto Burman race of the Tibeto Chinese family. The Garos are a matrilineal tribe. The family descends from the mother and the property passes to the daughter from the mother and the husband of the daughter who inherits the property is called Nokma (Deb Roy 2002:168).

The language of the Garo and Rabha communities originate from the same language family – the Bodo. The generic term Bodo was first used by Hodgson for this group of languages. The Bodo group includes Kachari/Bodo, Lalungn (Tiwa), Dimasa, Garo, Rabha, Tripuri, Koch, Chutiya (Deuri) and Moran (Basumatary 2010:01). All these groups belong to the Tibeto-Burman linguistic group but all these groups have their own languages and dialects. Again, within the Rabha community there is found language variation and it includes Pati, Hana and Totla. Now, Rangdani, Maitory and Kocha, three Rabha groups also maintain their languages and cultures. The Rangdani claims for higher status among the Rabhas. In the present time the Rabha writers are trying to write in their own language but the rest of the Rabha groups, particularly the Pati, Totla and Hana Rabhas have lost their own language and have adopted Assamese language as their *lingua franca* like Ahoms, Chutiyas and several other communities (Basumatary 2010:03). On the other hand, the Garo people speak their own Garo language. Different groups of the Garos use the same language but pronunciation accent differentiates their various groups.

The Garos mostly follow Christianity. Along with the intrusion of the Britishers, Christianity enters the domain of the hill tribes and the Garos are one of such hill tribes which converted to Christianity. They have totally abandoned their original religion, Songsarek and customary laws. The Rabhas, on the other hand, are mostly Hindu and they always adhered to their tradition and customs. The Garos wear modern dress and not traditional at the time of festivals. But the Rabhas wear

traditional dress. The Rabha women are still practicing their traditional modes of weaving whereas the Garo women now seldom engage in such works and if they require handloom products, they buy these from the Rabha women.

In both the Rabha and Garo societies, the customary laws play a significant role. But, still there are many differences between these two societies. In Rabha society, socio-cultural practices are performed as per customary laws and most importantly they have a hierarchical structure of social system which has been discussed earlier. To preserve customary laws, the Rabhas are even compiling books. On the other hand, the Garo society is running with a blend of Christianity and Songsarek system. An important thing is that most of the Garo customary laws are related to shifting cultivation. But in contemporary era the Garos are completely Christianized and as such have abandoned customary laws. This also contributes to the widening gap between the two communities. Earlier, there was commonness of customs between the Garos and Rabhas.

Thus, alongwith various change these two communities have emerged as two discrete communities, struggling for their separate ethnic homelands. Though cultural difference between the two have widened, physically they are near to each other. According to the cultural pluralist approach in a culturally plural society, or culturally divergent situation, the structural requisites of a political order lead to the subordination of one group by the other. In the process these societies are characterized by domination, separation and instability and they always incline towards conflict. Although the Garos and Rabhas live together, they are conscious of their discrete ethnic identities and the conflict was the outcome of the discontentment between the two communities which has been going on for a long time. Discussion on the genesis of the Garo-Rabha conflict follows in the next chapter.