

THE GAROS

(An Account of the Garos of the present Day)

by

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CONTENTS

	PAGES
PREFACE	
I. INTRODUCTION	1
II. THE HOMELAND OF THE GAROS	3
III. MATERIAL CULTURE AND SOCIAL ORGANIZATION	6
IV. SOME IMPORTANT POINTS OF GARO LAW	16
V. OTHER PEOPLES IN THE EYE OF A GARO	18
VI. THE GARO LANGUAGE	22
VII. CHANGING LIFE OF THE GAROS	28
VIII. PROBLEM OF JHUMMING IN THE HILLS OF ASSAM	32
IX. WOMAN IN A MATRIARCHAL SOCIETY	38
X. THE GAIETY OF A WEEKLY MARKET IN GARO SOCIAL LIFE	42
XI. WHO ARE THE TRIBES?	47

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Most of my readers have certainly heard about Anthropology. Possibly they have also heard that Assam has a good field for anthropological research. But before going into the main subject matter of this book, I would like to tell a few words about Anthropology.

Once an educated young man told me, "Oh, you are an 'Anthropologist'! You write sensational accounts about tribes. You go to interior areas to take photographs of half-naked or totally naked tribes, so that you can create sensation in the 'civilized' world by showing them. You collect specimens for your museums, and want that the tribes should remain in the stage of Adam and Eve, so that you can 'study' them." This is certainly not the true description of an anthropologist. It is true that we study tribes (more properly peoples, as I shall tell later on), and like other sciences we also have a jargon of our own. We draw up genealogies and sometimes make 'calculations' like mathematicians. This is the academic side of the picture. But it will be a mistake to suppose that such details are always useless in the practical field. Suppose, you want to know the laws of succession of the British monarchs. It will be very difficult, if not impossible, to comprehend the whole thing without drawing up a genealogy. Anthropology is a highly practical subject. We have advanced far from the stage of noting the 'unusual' things only. We have begun to think of what is good and what is bad for a particular 'people'. We discuss problems of 'acculturation'—to speak more plainly, those problems which crop up from the contact of one people with another. Today a whole section of Anthropology, known

as 'Applied Anthropology', has devoted itself to such problems only.

Who are the tribes? It is the most dubious point in Anthropology. In our science some stereotyped definitions are given of this term, but truly speaking we do not exactly know whom should we call tribes. There is no actual basis for dividing humanity into tribes and non-tribes, or to speak in other words, tribes and nations. Some would say, the tribes, are 'backward'; they would say, the Nagas are 'backward'. But I would ask, "Are not the people living in the congested areas of Calcutta 'backward'?" The Nagas have enough to eat and they have enough 'room' to live, but in Calcutta I have seen people spending their whole lives in a dark, dingy room and on meagre food sufficient merely to 'live'. It is unjust to judge others by our standards. It is however true that tribes are smaller units than nations. In Anthropology we generally study tribes (at least Anthropology has established itself as such); but this is done not because they are savages, but by studying smaller communities we can make a thorough study; in larger communities such a thorough study is not always possible. However, it will be a mistake to suppose that Anthropology has confined itself to tribes only; it has nowadays begun to study larger units. A few years ago an eminent anthropologist made an attempt on this by a study of the Japanese people. Whatever may be the present scope of Anthropology, it is my personal opinion that 'people' is a better term to denote smaller as well as larger groups.