

Approximately 1,000 people belonging to the Gara ethnic group live in the Leh and Kargil districts of the north Indian state of Jammu and Kashmir. An unknown (probably very small) number also live in the Lahul and Spitti districts of Himachal Pradesh.¹ The exact population here is uncertain as they were only recognized as a Scheduled Tribe in India in 1989—too late to be counted separately in the last census taken in India in 1981. Ethnologist Sachchindran Prasad estimated a 1998 population of 1,000 Gara people.²

Few sources have ever mentioned the Gara as a distinct ethnicity—making it even more surprising that the Indian authorities have granted them official status. Those few sources that do mention the Gara usually list them as a sub-group of the Ladakhi. While it is true that much of their culture mirrors Ladakhi culture, there are significant social differences between the two peoples. The main difference is a linguistic one. The Gara speak an Indo-European language, totally distinct from the Tibeto-Burman Ladakhi.

The Gara serve the Ladakhi as blacksmiths. Traditionally there was a clear distinction between the Ladakhi and smaller servant groups in the area. K S Singh notes, 'The Ladakhis traditionally did not participate in the marriage and death rituals of the Gara, Mon and Beda. Secular attitudes have brought neighbouring communities closer to each other socially.'³ Today, even though the Gara live in ethnically mixed communities, the Ladakhi consider the Gara the lowest social class. The Gara are still not allowed to hold any position in the village or monastery administration. They supply the Ladakhi with iron implements. In return, they usually receive a fixed amount

of grain as payment.

Ceremonies are organized throughout the year in which Gara youth are afforded the opportunity to search for a spouse. Young women wear their best traditional clothing to these ceremonies, as a display of their needlework goes a long way to attracting a prospective suitor. Marriages are arranged 'through negotiation, elopement, exchange, courtship, etc. . . . Bride price is paid both in cash and kind. The reasons for seeking divorce are adultery, barrenness, maladjustment, impotency, cruelty and inability to meet the wife's expenses, and remarriage is permissible.'⁴

Most Gara families follow Tibetan Buddhism, while a few are Hindus, especially among the Gara in Himachal Pradesh. One source notes, 'They observe all the Buddhist festivals and celebrate *Losae* and *Budh-Purnima*.'⁵

Influences from Bon, the pre-Buddhism religion, can still be seen in the rituals and ceremonies of the Gara. Bon is basically a belief in spirit worship and demonism. Powerful demonic spirits are called upon for assistance and protection. Gruesome masks are worn, and occasionally the lamas go into a demonic trance during which they predict the future and give guidance to the community.

Although more than 200 Ladakhi people believe in Christ today, and the gospel has been established in the area for 150 years, there are no known Christians among the Gara. The social divisions between the different groups create barriers for the gospel.



Population:

1,000 (2000)
1,150 (2010)
1,360 (2020)

Countries: India

Buddhism: Tibetan

Christians: none known

Overview of the Gara

Other Names: Garba, Garra

Population Sources:

1,000 in India (1998, S R R Prasad)

Language: Indo-European, Indo-Iranian, Indo-Aryan, Northwestern Zone, Dardic, Shina

Dialects: 0

Professing Buddhists: 100%

Practising Buddhists: 85%

Christians: 0%

Scripture: Portions 1904 (Ladakhi)

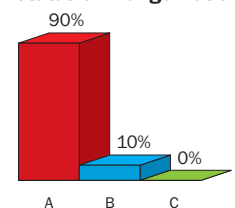
Jesus film: available (Ladakhi)

Gospel Recordings: Ladakhi

Christian Broadcasting: none

ROPAL code: none

Status of Evangelization



A = Have never heard the gospel
B = Have heard the gospel but have not become Christians
C = Are adherents to some form of Christianity