Before we go to the movement of Sonaram R. Sangma, it may be convenient to deal briefly on each of the grievances, which became the main subject matter of his demands and launching of a mass movement.

The claims and the grievances of the Garos consist of the four major demands. They were 1) The Nazarana claims, 2) The Habraghat case, 3) The question of forest reservation, and 4) Impressment of labour. The background of each subject matter may briefly be discussed here.

1) Habraghat: The Bijni which owned two large estates Habraghat on the south and Kuntaghat on the north side of the river Brahmaputra, was an offshoot of the famous Koch kingdom that rose to power in the early years of the sixteen century A.D.

After the downfall of the Kamrup–Kamata kingdom, there arose petty principalities and among them that of the Koches bade fair to be the most powerful state.\(^1\) It was founded by Bisu who assumed the Hindu name

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\(^1\) Promatha Nath Dutta, Glimpses into the History of Assam, p 87.
Biswa Singha. Bisu was a man of unusual enterprise and courage. He defeated the chiefs or Bhuyas of Uguri and Luki. Following his success, he subdued the chiefs of Phulguri, Bijni and other places and gradually extended his rule as far as the Karatoya in the west and the Barnadi in the east. He rose to power in about 1515 A.D. The Koch king Raghudev Narayan (1581–1603) was succeeded by his son Parikshit Narayan. It was during the time of Parikshit Narayan (1603–1616) that the kingdom suffered territorial loss and was confined between the Manas river on the east and the Sankosh river on the west. Chandra Narayan, the son of Parikshit Narayan was given the possession of the tract to rule over it as a de facto ruler under the Moghul. He lived at Bijni and was the founder of the Bijni dynasty.

As mentioned, during the time of Parikshit Narayan, the kingdom was split into two portions. An area of 1005 sq miles consisting of the Duars Bijni, Sidli, Cherung, Ripu and Guma were made khas and the remaining area of 2384 sq. miles was divided into 12 parganas viz, 1) Habraghat 2) Khuntaghat 3) Mechpara 4) Chapar 5) Parbotjoar 6) Ghuria 7) Jamira 8) Ghola Alamganj 9) Taria 10) Aurangabad 11) Kalumalupara and 12) Karaibari. Of these twelve, two parganas—Habraghat and Kuntaghat were in possession of the Bijni zamindar. These were the revenue paying estates or parganas. The Habraghat lies on the southern side while Kuntaghat was on the northern bank of the Brahmaputra. The two parganas of Habraghat and Kuntaghat covered an area of 943 sq. miles or 60,3283.20 acres and were treated as part of the permanently settled estate for an annual revenue of Rupees 2,355.

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2 Edward Gait, History of Assam, p 45.
3 Santo Bunnan, Zamindary System During British Rule, p 15.
The areas known as *Parganas* were surveyed for the first time during 1849-54 while the so called *Duars* were surveyed during 1867-69. Some of these *Parganas* and *Duars* formed part of the permanently settled estates while others fall under the temporary settled areas. According to the revenue survey of 1849-54, the total area of Habraghat and Kuntaghat was 916.03 sq. miles. As to the fictitious boundary and settlement of Habraghat *pargana* Mr. H. Le Mesurier, the officiating chief secretary to the Government of India, Department of Revenue and agriculture, said

“Although *pargana* Habraghat has been admitted to have come under the permanent settlement of 1793, there was no records to show this exactly, when it was permanently settled. But that it has been so settled has been admitted time and again and the settlement presumably took place before the passing of the Resolution of the 25th July 1822 and of Regulation X of 1822. The boundaries of *pargana* Habraghat seem to have been very ill defined and in particular, the southern boundary appears to have been simply “The Garo Hills”.

Habraghat *pargana* was bounded on the north by river Brahmaputra, on the east by the Mechpara *pargana* south by the Garo Hills and on the north east by Kamrup and Khasi Hills. According to a tradition strongly current among the Garos, after their long course of itinerary period on the banks of the Brahmaputra valley, they settled down permanently at a place known by them as *Ola Olding Te’brong Changsim*, which is now identified with Tukeswar under Goalpara district of Assam. A prosperous Garo kingdom was said to have been established there and the first reigning

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7 File No. 507 of 1907, SL No. 2, Government of India, Department of Revenue and Agriculture, Land Revenue. Calcutta, the 20th March 1908.
Garo prince was Abrasen or Habra. It is believed by the Garos that the word Habraghat has been derived from this name of the Garo chief Habrasen. The areas covered and the extent of territory under his rule was not definitely known. It seemed quite probable that the Garos were an independent people in these region during pre Moghul days during whose time, there commenced the steady encroachments upon the independent territorial settlements of the Garo people. The view opined by Francis Hamilton that most of the tributary rajas on the southern side of the Brahmaputra river are of the Garo origin, confirmed this supposition.¹⁸ One of such Garo chiefs who lived in the southern plain area of the Garo Hills appears to have been ousted from his kingdom by Padmanava, the fugitive king of the Kapilli valley in the middle of the 14th century, and he fled westwards to Mymensingh where he established the small kingdom of Susong.⁹ According to Garo version, the name of the Garo king was Ushung, who was one of the sons of Gobela Magenpa.¹⁰ Susong belonged to Sangma clan of Manda Mahari and that was why he was known as Manda Raja by the Garos.¹¹ In course of time, one religious mendicant named Someswaro Pathak or Someswaro Thakur dispossessed Baisa Raja, one of the reigning grandsons at Chuchong, through foul play and usurped possession of the A'kingland of Chuchong.¹² The last Garo king in the kingdom of Susong was thus Baisa Garo or Baisa Raja.¹³

The existence of certain Garo chiefs on the southern side of Brahmaputra, as recorded by Hamilton is supported by the writings of the renown English officers posted to these places. In his "The East India Gazetteer"

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¹ Francis Hamilton, An Account of Assam, p 86.
¹⁸ R.M. Nath, The Background of Assamese Culture, p 111.
¹⁰ S.N. Barkataki, Tribal Folk Tales of Assam (Hills), p 192.
¹¹ Mihir N. Sangma, Unpublished Documents on Garo Affairs, p 16.
¹² S.N. Barkataki, Tribal Folk Tales of Assam (Hills), p 192.
¹³ Do'kua, Bidol III, November-December 1985, Chapter VI.
Walter Hamilton stated “The most important jurisdiction is the province of Camroop, adjacent to Bengal, the greater part of which was wrested from the Moghuls early in the reign of Aurangzeb. The Rajas are the original petty chieftains of the country, paying certain tribute and several of them are Garrows and other unconverted tribes”\textsuperscript{14} E. T. Dalton also maintained the same view by saying “Several of the petty rajas of Kamrup whose estates skirt the Khasia and Garo hills are Hinduized Garos who have maintained their footing in the valley during several changes of dynasty. It is supposed that during the Koch and the Moghul governments, the Garos of Mechpara, Habraghat and other places had equally valuable possessions in the plains from which they were subsequently dispossessed by Mech and Koch zamindars”\textsuperscript{15}.

From the above views we can strongly conclude that the Garos were one of the earliest settlers in the Habraghat \textit{pargana} who established their kingdom with their own independent chiefs for some generations.

\textit{Bibhagnamapatra.}

Prior to 1831, there were continual disputes between the Garos and the Bijni Raja, who it was alleged, was trying to oust the Garos from the lands they held at the entrances to the Duars or passes into the Garo hills. Certain laskars asserted their ancestral right to have been enjoying \textit{mahadaree} interest in the lands contiguous to the Garowan Mahal and \textit{pargana} Habraghat and were in receipt of \textit{Dasturies} of various sorts from the \textit{rayats} of the said Duar. When all these payments were stopped, they brought suits in court under the Garo laws to recover what they were justly entitled to on account of their \textit{Mahari}. Raja Indra Narayan Deb,\textsuperscript{14} Walter Hamilton, \textit{The East India Gazetteer}, Vol. I, p 73.\textsuperscript{15} Edward Tuite Dalton, \textit{Descriptive Ethnology of Bengal}, p 58.
thereupon filed an *ikrar* before the Commissioner agreeing to grant some cultivated lands of *pargana* aforesaid for the purpose of a settlement of the dispute and objections of the Garo *Mahari* people. David Scott, the Special Commissioner thereupon summoned the Garos, framed the *Bibhagnamapatra* under Regulation X of 1822 under which the Bijni Raja made over 21 plots of land in the *Duars* to the 18 Garo maharies concerned through 21 named Garo *Laskars*. The lands granted were divided under a *butwara*.¹⁶ The laskars in return executed *Muchulikapatra* or recognisance bonds in which they undertook to depend the passes against any Garo inroads.¹⁷ In one of the *muchulikapatras*, it was stipulated that the lands allotted shall remain in the hands of the *Huzoor* (British government) for the maintenance of parties really entitled to their Mahari. They shall not be competent to sell or otherwise alienate it through their own authority or for their own debts. If they effect any sale, it would be void.¹⁸ The total area of the *Bibghnamapatra* as mentioned earlier was 170½ *hals*, equivalent to 2728 *bighas*. It is a narrow strip of land extending from the *Duar* Athiabari in the east to the Khokan *Duar* in the west.¹⁹ It seemed that no maps were prepared showing the extent and area of the boundaries of the plots of lands granted to the *Maharies*.

According to the revenue survey demarcated by Kelso and his assistant Bedford in 1849–54, the *Bibhagnamapatra* lands all lie to the north of Kelso’s line in the Goalpara district. In the year 1858 an inquiry was conducted by Babu Iswar Chandra Rai, Deputy collector incharge of the Bijni estate as to the amount of land held by the grantees’ representatives.

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¹⁷ Report on the *Bibhagnamapatra* by F.E. Jackson, dated 12th February 1903.
¹⁸ Copy of *Bibhagnamapatra* of David Scott, dated 10th May 1831.
¹⁹ Ibid.
He determined the value of 1 hal as the unit measurement in the *Bibhagnama* to be little over 17 bighas. By actual measurement, he found the holders to be in possession of considerably more than the equivalent of their grants on this scale. He accordingly resumed and assessed to revenue the balances. In several of these cases, his proceedings were confirmed by the Commissioner Col. Jenkins.  

In 1877, the Bijni Raja attempted to oust the Garos from the four holdings—Duar Amjonga, Damra and Dirma by suit Nos. 15, 16, 17 and 18 of 1877 before the Deputy Commissioner, Goalpara. The raja in his plaint alleged that the lands were Chakran or service tenures and as such, liable to extinction as the need for the services terminated with the British occupation of the Garo Hills; that the holders had sold or mortgaged their lands in defiance of the stipulation of muchulikapatras and had therefore forfeited them. The court held the view that the lands were given in settlement of disputed claims between the parties, and that the provision for the defence of the passes was only a subsidiary one. That the specific penalty provided was that the sale should be disallowed and it was nowhere agreed that the lands should be confiscated. The suits were accordingly dismissed. At the time of F.E. Jackson's inquiry in 1903 out of the 21 original plots, 13 were entirely in the possession of the heirs of the original grantees; 1 has been wholly transferred by sale, 4 have been partly transferred by sale and are partly held by the heirs of the original grantees. With regard to Duars Ambook, Chakwari and Khokul, he reported that the holdings were somewhat doubtful and appeared to have been practically abandoned.  

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20 Report on the Bibhagnama patra by F.E. Jackson, dated 12th February 1903.  
21 Ibid.
Nazarana lands.
The revenue survey map of 1849-50, surveyed and demarcated by Kelso of pargana Habraghat shows that the low hills to the south of Kelso's boundary are marked "Khas Nazarana Garrrows". These tributary Garos in recognition of the suzerainty of government before the conquest of the hills in 1866-72, paid a nominal tribute of one Garo khora or 3 rupees in each cash calculated on the number of Nokpantes or bachelor community, generally one in each village, and the headmen retrieved in return from the Goalpara treasury presents of rum and red cloth. In 1865-66, that is before the hills were taken over, all the villages under British protection and management were grouped under seven mahals. These were 1) Karaibari 2) Mechpara 3) Dasaani 4) Choiani 5) Sharapgiri 6) Duar Damra and other Duars 7) Unazhora and Dagendragiri etc. Of these, Nos. 1, 2, 3 and 4 were the so-called tributary Mahals; Nos. 5, 6, and 7 were Khas Government Mahals and are situated in parts of the district widely apart. They all three are entered as Nazarana mahals until, in fact they were assessed to a regular house tax, and they are called Nazarana Mahals evidently because they paid the British government Nazars. The nazars of Nos. 5 and 7 were entered in rupees lump sum for each village or associated group of village. The Nazarana of No. 6 was entered as a Garo Khora worth Rupees 3 for each "Nokpante" in a village or group of associated villages.

No. 6 Duar Damra and other Duars was a Khas government Mahals described in the Surbarakar's papers as a Nazarana, the nazar paid to the government until a house tax assessment was made, being a Garo Khora

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22 J.C. Arbuthnott's Inquiry Report, p 3.
23 Letter No. 727 dated Tura, the 9th August 1887, from Deputy Commissioner, Garo Hills to the Secretary to the Chief Commissioner of Assam. File No. 1887, Assam Secretariat Proceedings, 103 R.
worth Rupees 3 for each Nokpante. Capt. Peet stated that there were no less than 58 groups of villages under separate laskars, which in 1865-66 paid the nazar of one Khora per Nokpante, and these villages constituted a Mahal which stretched far into the hills and far removed from the Garo border.\(^{24}\) In 1866, the amount of Nazarana rent realised from the Garo chiefs of the hills by the government was estimated at Rupees 2,056 and the amount expended in the presents to the Garo sardars and chiefs of the Nazarana hills at Rupees 1,000. The nazar was calculated in Naraini rupees. After the annexation of the hills in 1866-72, a house tax was imposed, but it was not till 1878 that proposals were put forward for assessment of the plains lands attached to the Nazarana Mahal and included within the boundaries of the district.\(^{25}\)

As has already been mentioned that the revenue survey boundary between the Garo Hills and the Goalpara was demarcated for the first time in 1849-54 which was again demarcated by Beckett in the year 1873-74. The Nazarana lands are those lands formed as a result of the boundary demarcation by these two officers. The lands lie in between the two lines of Beckett and Kelso from pillar No. 10 to 64. They are coloured pink, stripped black and pink in the map. Upto the year 1900-1901, they have never been surveyed and it is because of that it was impossible to give their exact area or to show at all their southern boundary on the map. They are described simply as a narrow strips varying from one mile to five miles broad and about 25 miles long.\(^{26}\)

When the newly demarcated boundary of Mr. Beckett was notified on 16\(^{th}\) July 1875, the Raja of Bijni Kumud Narayan Bhoop disputed the

\(^{24}\) J.C. Arbuthnott’s Inquiry Report, pp 4-5.  
\(^{25}\) Ibid, p 3.  
correctness of Mr. Beckett's demarcation and instituted a civil suit to establish his title to and recover possession of certain lands which he alleged had been excluded thereby from his permanently settled Pargana Habraghat. The lands in dispute consists of two estates, one was called Daukhong and the other Nazarana. The former which consists of village of Khokul belongs to the Bijni Raja. The suit was however, compromised by an agreement dated the 10th June 1878 and it was stipulated that the government should collect the revenue of the disputed tract and make over 75% thereof to the Bijni raja or his heirs retaining 25% for collection charges. Government further agreed that in this tract any old rights regarding the capture of elephants should be continued, but that no new rights should be acquired. A further clause in the agreement was that government should submit regular accounts of all collections. The Bijni Raja at the same time, received a sum of Rupees 116 as his share of the collections for the years 1876-77 and 1877-78. The management of the property was vested in the government. With the exception of a small area near the western extremity, the portion of the Bijni estate included in the Garo Hills by Beckett's line was treated as Khas Nazarana till on the representation of the estate authorities for a survey was granted in 1899 with the result that the government had to refund Rupees 24,000 to the Bijni estate. These lands now constituted the Bijni A Mahal under Government management.

27 Proceedings of the Chief Commissioner of Assam, General Department, No. 3611-13J dated Shillong, the 2nd September 1899; Inquiry Report of J.C.Arbuthnott dated 11/30th May 1907, p 2.
28 Assam Secretariat Proceedings, Revenue A, September 1899, Nos. 37-54.
29 Ibid.
30 J.C.Arbuthnott's Inquiry Report, p 2.
31 Letter No. 12974 C, Shillong, the 26th November 1907; J.C.Arbuthnott's Inquiry Report.
In 1878, the Deputy Commissioner of the Garo Hills district Capt. Peet submitted proposals for the settlement and management of the tracts included within the district boundaries. He proposed to divide the district into seven mouzas. In the five hill mouzas the system of house tax was to be retained, but maximum rates of Rupees 3/- and Rupee 1 were suggested instead of the existing rates which varied from 8 annas to Rupees 5-5-5- in the zamindari tracts.

In the two plain mouzas, the introduction of the Assam Settlement Rules was advocated. The area of one plain mouza extended from the Kamrup boundary westwards as far as the Kalangkani river and included the new lands of Bijni, Aurangabad, Kalumalupara and Mechpara. The other mouza comprised the plains lands on the west and south to the extreme south east corner of the district. The rates proposed were 8 annas a bigha and rupee 1 on homestead. The new lands referred to were those which formed the subject of the agreement of 1878 with the various zamindars. The proposals for the settlement and management of the newly acquired lands of the Garo Hills district and for the demarcation of the B from the A villages in the Mechpara tract were approved by the Chief Commissioner in letter No. 3024 dated the 13th November 1878 to the Deputy Commissioner, Garo Hills.

In October 1884 the Deputy Commissioner, Garo Hills in his letter to the Secretary to the Chief Commissioner of Assam wrote—

"The amount of land belonging to the Habraghat Pargana and falling inside the Garo Hills you will find in the map now attached. Much of
this was hypothecated many years ago by the zamindars to Garo headmen or Laskars as payment for preventing raids by guarding the frontier. These lands have since become known as nazarana. The portions of the tracts marked in the map enclosed, which are not nazarana, are the lands pertaining to the A Mahal, Bijni and at present remain undemarcated.”

The Mechpara zamindars were then disputing the correctness of the southern boundary of the adjoining Mechpara A Mahal, which had been surveyed by Mr. Shaw, Assistant Surveyor, in 1879-1880 and an enquiry had been ordered. The demarcation of the Bijni A mahal was postponed till a more convenient season and only took place in 1899-1900.36

In Mr. Heath’s time the Nazarana mahal was taken to include all plains or valley lands contiguous to Habraghat between the Kamrup boundary and the Jinjiram river near Nibari from pillar No. 1 to 62 of Beckett’s boundary. In 1886-87, 27 villages were entered in the Garo hills revenue office records as comprising the nazarana mahal. The half revenue of 6 villages had been granted to the Nokmas since 1880-81, when the nazarana mahals were first assessed to land revenue.37

Forest Reservation.

35 Letter No. 831, dated the 10th October 1884, from the Deputy Commissioner, Garo Hills to the Secretary to the Chief Commissioner of Assam.
36 J.C. Arbuthnott’s Inquiry Report, p 4.
37 J.C. Arbuthnott’s Inquiry Report, p 5.
Since time immemorial the Garo hills are covered with thick jungles. The climate is malarious and being moist offers soil to produce a most luxuriant vegetation covering the hilly and its adjoining plains with variegated trees and plants which are highly ornamental, curious and valuable. Referring to the unhealthiness of the climate of the Garo Hills, David Scott remarked

"I know not of any healthy spot in the Hills. The danger from sickness I must not disguise; it is very great. I have myself been twice on the point of death from fevers contracted in these hills although I have never had even an ague fit during a residence of 25 years in any other part of the country."  

The thick forest with unhealthy climatic conditions therefore rendered the outside invaders incapable for deep penetration except the outlying spurs of foot hills bordering the Brahmaputra valleys which gradually had been usurped by the neighbouring Hindu zamindars in the course of their conquests for the expansion of their territorial possessions during Moghul days.

The Garo whose main occupation is agriculture, practice jhum and shifting cultivation in the hills and in the adjoining plains of the Garo Hills. When the jhum season starts, they fell trees indiscriminately or clear jungles for the jhum. It is believed by them that the thick jungle spot offers good and fertile ground for the crops and produce abundant output. Hence, the reason of their wanton destruction of the thick jungles and the forest areas.

Since the establishment of the administrative Headquarters at Tura in 1866 the British authority started administering the forest resources of the Garo areas which had always been traditionally regarded as the properties of different clans. On 8th March 1878, the Indian Forest Act was passed and the forests in India began to be administered under the newly enacted laws. Following it, the question of forest reservation in the Garo Hills first engaged the attention of Government in 1879. An officer was deputed in this regard. In 1881 Mr. Fisher, Assistant conservator of Forest, the special officer deputed to report on the Garo forests, submitted an elaborate note, which embodied the results of his inquiries and formed the basis of forest conservancy in the hills. On the recommendations of Mr. Fisher, 18 reserves were formed in the Garo Hills and out of these 18, 16 reserves were formed in the years between 1883-85. The two reserves... Baghmara and Angratoli situated on the southern frontier of the Garo Hills were created in 1887 and 1888. With the exception of an area of 1,940 acres added to the Angratoli Reserves in 1902, the additions to the original reserves since 1888 have been very few. In 1900, however proposals were put forwarded for the inclusion of the two large blocks in the Dhima and Chima Bangshi Reserves on the north eastern border, the total additions to reserves proposed in the year being 25,408 acres. According to the Report of J.C.Arbuthnott, the Commissioner of the Surma Valley and the Hills Districts, who had been deputed as an inquiry commissioner on the various grievances of the Garos during the years 1906-07, the total forest reserves in the Garo Hills covers 139 sq. miles which is a small proportion to the total area of the district.\textsuperscript{40} However, according to the notes recorded by the Financial

\textsuperscript{40} Inquiry Report of J.C.Arbuthnott on Forest Reservation, p 1.
Secretary to the Government and Conservator of Forest on the questions regarding the Forest Reservation in the Garo Hills, the total area of the forest reserved in the Garo Hills was 141 sq. miles against the total area of the Garo Hills which is 3,140 sq. miles.

Sections 3 and 4 of Chapter II of the Indian Forest Act 1878 states, "The local Government may from time to time constitute any forest land or waste land which is the property of Government or over which the Government has proprietary rights or to the whole or any part of the forest produce of which the Government is entitled, a reserved forest by specifying as nearly as possible the situation and limits of such lands."

Section 9 A (4) of the same Chapter states "The practice of shifting cultivation shall in all cases be deemed a privilege subject to control, restriction and abolition by the local Government."

Chapter II section 19(c) reads "The local Government may publish a notification in the local official Gazette, specifying definitely, according to boundary mark erected or otherwise, the limits of forest which it is intended to reserve and declaring the same to be reserved from a date fixed by such notification. From the date so fixed, such forest shall be deemed to be a reserved forest.

Similarly the chapter II, section 25 stated "Any person who

(a) makes any fresh clearing prohibited by section 5 or
(b) set fire to a reserved forest, or in contravention of any rules made by the local Government; kindles any fire, or leaves any fire burning in such a manner as to endanger such a forest; or who in a reserved forest;

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41 Notes recorded by the Financial Secretary to the Government and Conservator of Forests on question regarding Forest Reservation in the Garo Hills. Appendix No. III of the letter No. 12974 C, from the Hon'ble Mr. Le Mesurier, Officiating Chief Secretary to the Government of Eastern Bengal and Assam to the Secretary to the Government of India, Department of Revenue and Agriculture, Dated Shillong the 26th November 1907.
(c) kindles, keeps or carries any fire except at such seasons as the forest officer may from time to time notify in this behalf;
(d) trespasses or pastures cattle, or permits cattle to trespass;
(e) causes any damage;
(f) fell, girdles, lops, taps or burns any tree, or strips off the bark or leaves from, or otherwise damages the same.
(g) quarries stone, burns lime or charcoal or collects, subjects to any manufacturing process or removes any forest produce;
(h) clears or breaks up any land for cultivation or any other purpose; or
(i) in contravention of any rules which the local Government may from time to time prescribe, kills or catches elephants, hunts, shoots, fishes, poisons water or sets traps or snares,
shall be punished with imprisonment, a term may extend to six months or with fine not exceeding five hundred rupees or both in addition to such compensation for damage done to the forest as the convicting court may direct to be paid.42
Thus under the Indian Forest Act 1878, a vast stretches of lands and jungles have been covered and maintained under the protected forest other than the reserved forest, the entire regulations with regard to the cutting, sewing, granting of license to use, cut the trees, clearing and breaking up of land for cultivation or other purposes in such forests; cutting of grass and pasturing of cattle in such forests, killing or catching elephants, hunting, shooting, fishing, setting traps or snares etc. were vested upon the local Government.43

42 Indian Forest Act, 1878, p 18.
With the passing and subsequent implementation of the Indian Forest Act of 1878, the Garo people abruptly faced the hardships as the law totally contradicted with their traditional practice of jhuming and prohibited them either for the cultivation of jhum in the thick jungles or to fell trees for their domestic uses.

Following the act, the Government began to constitute new forest reserves for which the residents were evicted sometime on payment of meager compensation or sometimes without any payment. Thus a vast tracts of forest were made into a government reserved forest during the years following the passing of the Indian Forest Act 1878. Compensation seldom paid for the acquisition of village lands or for extinguishing rights of shifting cultivation. When compensation was paid, it was for the removal of houses or for the expropriation of permanent cultivation, as for instance, in the Angratoli Reserve, which is the only case in which a substantial sum was awarded.44

The general rate of compensation for the removal of houses was fixed at Rupees 15/- per house. To form the Chima Bangshi Reserve 20 sq. miles were reserved at a cost of Rupees 90/- paid for six houses of Chima. In the same way, the Dhima Reserve of 9 sq. miles was also acquired for Rupees 90, the price of six houses while nothing was paid for the Dilma, Ildek, Darugiri, Siju, Rewak, Emangiri and Jinari reserves.45 The Emangiri Reserves, a small area of about 5 sq. miles was formed in the year 1883. Nearly the whole of the land was taken from one village Emangiri for which no compensation was paid.46

44 Inquiry Report of J.C. Arbuthnott on Forest Reservation.
45 Ibid.
46 Ibid.
Such a sudden and indiscriminate expansion of the forest reservation without or with meager amount of compensation alarm the unsophisticated Garos and they became apprehensive of losing their respective territorial possessions known as Akhing which were treated as parts of their ancestral rights to own them without an outward interference.

**Forced Labour.**

With the creation of the Garo Hills district as a separate administrative unit in 1866, the British Administration introduced in the Garo areas a humiliating practice known as begar that required the villagers to clear the village paths before the tour of the Government officials and to carry their luggages free of charges from one village to another. This system of forced but free use of labour had been a source of recurring insult and irritation to the Garos. They were also entrusted with repair works of the Government maintained roads and other public buildings. All these compulsions acted very harshly on the Garos.47

The practice seemed to have been evolved in this way rendering it thereby as a regular feature of employment to work without payment. Major Playfair remarked "There is no record how this system worked and until Capt. Howell's time there is little to show how much begar was demanded from the Garos" Even in his time, however, all work in Tura station and on the road was done by impressed labour and there is considerable correspondence to show that the system was rendered very unpopular by the Public Works Department owing to the delay in making payments.48

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47 P.C.Kar, Glimpses of the Garos, p 222.
48 Memorandum No. 307 G, dated Tura, the 1st February 1907, from Playfair to Special Commissioner.
The Garo people of the northern part of the Garo Hills were greatly affected by the system. On the requirement of labour, the British authorities only issued a *purwana* which required strict compliance and for the violation or unexecution of which, a punishment was awarded. Usually a *purwana* was issued to the headman or village *Nokma* or *Lasker* who, on getting it, was required to supply with the required number of labourers. As mentioned, the form of impressed labour imposed on the Garos is for the carriage of *baggage* of touring officers, the Deputy Commissioner, Civil surgeon and District Superintendent of Police and occasionally of subordinates. The rate for baggage coolies was 4 annas and occasionally 6 annas for an unusually long march.

In Capt. Howell’s time the practice was to take one coolie from every two houses and the men were brought in from all over the hills from as far as Baghmara which was five days journey to Tura by foot. For the journey to and fro and allowance was made of two *annas* per diem and the rate of payment in Tura was four *annas*. The people of the village in the northern hills, who are chiefly affected by the *begar* system, are in the habit of frequenting the frontier hats at Damra, Nibari and other places on the Goalpara border where they came in contact with the school pundits, teachers and evangelists who flourish among the more advanced Christian communities. From such persons, they came to learn that *begar* or impressment of labour was not enforced in Goalpara or the neighbouring districts and they naively explained that they saw no reason why the system should be applied to them. Moreover, the people have no interest for a *begar* as they can make a handsome profits out of lac, which sells at Rupees 40 a *maund* and upwards. A 4 *anna* wage for carrying baggage half

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a day’s journey possesses no attraction nor given desultory and irregular labour. The spread of education, greater facilities for contact with the plains people, the presence of pundits and Christian teachers, the prosperity of the producers of lac and cotton, especially lac have combined to render begar distasteful to the Garos.51

The system of forced labour continued until the visit of Tura by Sir J.B.Fuller, the Chief Commissioner on the 23rd January 1903. He then passed orders that no more impressed labour should be used in Tura. The employment of Christian labourers during Sundays was also prohibited as they believed that it was wrong to work on Sundays.52 Yet there were stray practices of the system in certain localities of the Garo Hills against which there had been much resentment amongst the Garos.

**Sonaram Becomes a Leader.**

During his service tenure as PWD Mohurer and a vaccinator, he could travel to different nook and corners of the Garo areas under Goalpara and Garo Hills districts and noticed the injustice and exploitations being inflicted upon the Garo people by the British and the Bijni people. He found that the lands indigenously owned and belonged to the Garos, were being encroached upon by the Bijni zamindars because of which there had been a constant friction between them. Besides, the Garos were forcibly engaged to carry the bag and baggage of the British authorities stationed at the interior places of the Garo Hills. They were to clear the bridle paths and work on the roads without remuneration or daily wage. They could not disobey, avoid or set aside their master’s call or wishes and were duty

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52 An extract copy of the inspection remarks made by J.B.Fuller, the Chief Commissioner of Assam on the 22nd June 1903.
bound at any cost and under any circumstances. In addition to it, the freedom that the Garos could enjoy during pre British days to practice jhum cultivation in the jungles by cutting down trees and clearing jungles was found to be restricted. Regarding the way in which he was drawn into the Garo national cause, Sonaram himself said.

"The people of Bijni came to ascertain the boundaries of Dilma and Resu. That was in 1900. On that occasion the Garos beat and drove away the persons who were putting pillars to the south of Beckett’s boundary. This was near Dilma village. The Garos came to me about this time to my village Rohumari. They came to inform me and said they had driven away the Bijni people. There was no case about this at the time. After a year Bijni made another attempt and began to put pillars in the Rohumari village, which is between Kharkutta and Rajasimla. That is my wife’s village. It is called Rohumari Salpara. Pillars were placed by Bijni. I did not see any government officials. Bijni owned the land on the north of Rohumari, but they were not satisfied and encroached on our lands. Santipur belongs to Darranggiri. It is not in Rohumari. Rajasimla has two parts. One part is in Rohumari, the other northern part. In 1901, the Garos broke some of the dhips at Konchikol village. There was no criminal case about this. A year after the dhips were broken at Dilma, there was a case and some Garos were punished by the Deputy Commissioner, Garo Hills. I was not present at this. Bijni made various attempts to encroach and obtain my village of Rohumari. They came to measure the lands, but the Salpara people beat and drove them away. We got no notice or intimation that the boundary was to be surveyed or relaid in 1899–1900. There was no
notice given when Backett surveyed the boundary in 1873-74. I have heard this from the Nokmas. There were also disturbances at that time."53

As mentioned in the last chapter, on the 17th June 1899 the Rani of Bijni presented an appeal against the order of the Deputy Commissioner, Garo Hills who had refused to allow the survey of the portions of the Habraghat Pargana originally in Goalpara, but included in the district of Garo Hills by the boundary survey laid down by Mr. Beckett in 1873-74. In a resolution dated September 2nd 1899 the facts were reviewed and a survey ordered by the Chief Commissioner of Assam.54 Following the order, a survey party was deputed at the instance of the Bijni estate to the Garo hills to ascertain the two lines laid down by Kelso and Mr. Beckett in 1849-54 and 1873-74 respectively. The survey party cut new lines and placed dhips showing the two lines. This was near Dilma and Resu villages.55

It was in the month of April 1900 when a large number of the Garos with a view to enforce their claims to the land went to the spot under the guidance of Pongpong and Jontha Laskers and threw down one of the dhips erected on Kelso's old line. Pongpong Lasker and six others submitted a memorial to the Chief Commissioner of Assam on 12th April 1900 claiming the nazaran lands.56 This was the first indication of the discontentment represented by the Garos under Pongpong and six others.57 By this time Sonaram was living with his wife at Rohumari Salpara after he had resigned from the post of vaccination inspector.

54 Inquiry Report of J.C. Arbuthnott, p 3.
55 Ibid.
56 Mihir N. Sangma, Unpublished Documents on Garo Affairs, p 36.
Pongpong and other Garo Nokmas went to him for his advice. In the meantime, certain Garos who removed the dhips from the boundary line were arrested. Although there were many who accompanied at the time of the removing of the boundary pillars, only five persons viz; Pongpong, Diring, Jontha, Rengban and Salam were accused of being the main leaders who instigated to pull down the dhips. In connection with this incident, Cumming, the Deputy Commissioner of the Garo Hills District observed.

"I am obliged to take severe notice of this because the people in this part of the district have been acting with great lawlessness lately and seem determined to defy all authority. They are the victims more or less of one or two agitators who have been collecting money and persuading these people that they can get this land for them".

Pongpong Garo was found guilty under section 143, 434 IPC and Rengban Pandit, Diring Sardar, Jontha Sorder and Soleman Gaonbura were found guilty under section 143 IPC. Pongpong was sentenced to one month’s rigorous imprisonment under section 143 and a fine of Rupees 50/- under section 143 in default a further month’s rigorous imprisonment. Rengban Pandit, Diring Sirdar, Jontha Sirdar and Soleman Gaonbura were each sentenced to a fine of Rupees 50/- each under section 143 in default, one month’s rigorous imprisonment under section 143. Besides, each of the five accused, Rengban, Diring, Jontha, Pongpong, Salam who were convicted of an offence involving a breach of the peace each find one surety of Rupees 50/- each and themselves in a bond for Rupees 50/- to keep the peace for one year. The remaining persons Ringa Lasker, Kholta Lasker, Bosin Sorder, Gyan Lasker, Sanjing Sorder, Jadu Sorder, Usal

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58 Proceedings of the Case recorded on the Court Stamped paper by Mr. Cumming, the Deputy Commissioner of the Garo Hills, dated 6th February 1902.
sorder, Jaysing, Aimang, Baksing, Gasan, Wakhal, Alding, Kesing, Mindu, Miksal, Diding were discharged for non availability of sufficient evidence.\textsuperscript{59}

Sonaram having been without job at this time had to earn his living by doing a small business. He had also a mind to consult the learned counsels of the High Court about the possibilities to redress the grievances of the Garos. His small business also served his purpose. He collected the cow skins, took them to Calcutta and sold them to the Bengali merchants. By doing so, he often could go to Calcutta and contacted the lawyers about the cases in which the Bijni people and other zamindars had illegally been encroaching upon the lands owned by the Garos. Sonaram himself stated that he went to Calcutta in the end of the year 1901 or beginning of 1902, when he appears to have made the acquaintance of Mr. Jacob.\textsuperscript{60} Mr. Jacob, it may be mentioned was the barrister who took up the defence of the Mundas of Chota Nagpur who rose against the Government in 1899 and he apparently makes a speciality of cases in which aboriginal people are concerned.\textsuperscript{61}

Basing on the 21 plots of lands granted as Lakhiraj or rent free lands by David Scott in the year 1831 to the 18 Garo Maharies, a test case was applied to the Revenue Court by Jang Lasker on the 12\textsuperscript{th} November 1901, to have his name registered in respect of the land which is specified in the pattah under which he claims his lakhiraj land.\textsuperscript{62} Ringa Laskar of Damas along with other Laskars and Nokmas of his locality also did much obstruction when the survey party deputed to their locality went for the

\textsuperscript{59} Ibid.\textsuperscript{60} Inquiry Report of J.C.Arbuthnott: Deposition of Sonaram R.Sangma, p 7.\textsuperscript{61} Assam Secretariat Revenue Proceedings, Revenue A, June 1905, Nos. 144-175.\textsuperscript{62} Copy of Memorandum submitted by Jontha Lasker and 14 others to George Nathaniel Baron Curzon of Keddlestone, dated 27\textsuperscript{th} August 1902.
boundary demarcation under the direction of the Hon’ble Chief Commissioner of Assam and as such the survey could not be carried out and had to be stopped. Therefore a strong warning was issued to them by the assistant Commissioner of the Garo Hills District, Mr. Charles Bancroft informing them that the culprits would have to undergo rigorous imprisonment if they do so in the future.\footnote{Purwana addressed to Ringa laskar of Damash by the Assistant Commissioner, Garo Hills District, dated January 1902.}

On 3rd February 1902, Smt Rani Abhoyeswari of Bijni Estate filed an objection to the application of registration of the pattah of Jang Lasker and at the same time alleged that the lands specified in the said pattah was in her possession. The application of Jang Lasker for the registration of the said pattah was therefore, dismissed by H.C.Barnes, Esquire on the 23rd March 1902 saying

"There is no use prolonging this case. There is nothing to show that the revenue authorities recognise this estate as valid lakhiraj. It is admitted that it is not on the register of the lakhiraj estate"

The genuiness of the pattah of Jang Lasker was never questioned by H.C.Barnes.

Being encouraged by the dismissal of the application for registration, Smt Rani Abhoyeswari Debi, estate Bijni on 2nd day of April 1902, served a notice on the tenants requesting them all to discontinue paying any further rent to Jang lasker and to pay the same to her.\footnote{Copy of memorandum submitted by Jontha Laskar and 14 others to George Nathaniel Baron Curzon of Keddlestone, dated 27th August 1902.} Jontha along with 14 others, thereupon submitted a memorandum to George Nathaniel Baron Curzon of Keddlestone on 27th August 1902 requesting to call for the record of the case of Jang Lasker and to see that the revenue authorities recognise the lands specified in the said pattahs and valid lakhiraj lands. It
is also complained of the manner in which Smt. Rani Abhoyeswari Debi, estate Bijni had been encroaching on the lands being owned by the Garos. The memorandum was acknowledged by His Excellency, the Viceroy on 29th August 1902. The letter of acknowledgement contained the following words.

"In connection with the memorial to the Government of India by Jontha Lasker and others, it is for the memorialists to decide whether they should apply to the local authorities for redressal or not. If they apply, their case will no doubt, receive proper consideration"

On receipt of the acknowledgement of the memorial from His Excellency, the Viceroy and his Honour, the Chief Commissioner of Assam, the Garos residing in the Garo Hills in lower Assam, were encouraged by such acknowledgements to believe that at last some redresses would be granted to them against the encroachments of the Bijni Rani and her staff which had been taking place for many years and are notorious in the district. The Garos thereupon consulted a European counsel practising in the High court at Calcutta and their grievances were placed before him. It was finally arranged that some legal adviser should see the officials in lower Assam with the object of trying to bring about an amicable settlement if possible, between the Bijni Rani and the Garos, with regard to the encroachment of lands in dispute.

On October 1902, Jang Lasker and others again submitted a memorial to the government of India regarding the dispute and to recover the nazarana lands. They were informed by J. Donel who was at that time in charge of the officiating secretary to decide whether they should apply to the local

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65 Memorandum submitted by Sonaram R.Sangma to the Hon'ble J.B.Fuller, Chief Commissioner of Assam, dated 8th July 1904.
authorities for redress or not. If they apply, their case would no doubt, receive proper consideration. A counsel was engaged and was taken by certain Garos on November 1902 to Dhubri in Lower Assam for the purpose of seeing Mr. Jackson, the Deputy Commissioner of Dhubri and for the purpose of examining various documents connected with their titles to the lands which were then in possession of certain Garos.

On the 13th day of December 1902, the said counsel saw His Honour the Chief Commissioner of Assam and the order in the following words was passed by Mr. Jackson.

“It is necessary before a final order passed that I should see this personally as I am very much inclined to doubt whether it is within this district at all. I hope to visit the place about the middle of January. This application will be sent with me. The pleader for the application should keep himself informed as to the tour programme, and should arrange that someone representing his clients, should appear at my camp to point out the place.”

The Chief Commissioner also agreed with the counsel that the proper thing to do was to bring about an amicable settlement and that there was every chance of getting their an amicable settlement of their land disputes with the Bijni Rani. The Chief Commissioner himself promised that he would see Mr. Jackson and the Dewan of the Bijni Raj for the purpose of bringing about the said settlement.

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66 Letter to Guina Sardar from the Assam Secretariat, Shillong, dated the 20th October 1902; Memorial No. 883, Revenue 4456 R.
67 Copy of Order Sheet passed by F.E. Jackson, dated 5th December 1902.
68 Memorandum of Sonaram R.Sangma to the Hon'ble J.B.Fuller, the Chief Commissioner of Assam, dated 8th July 1904.
**Beginning of the Movement.**

About the end of December 1902 seven hundred Garos led by Sonaram R.Sangma marched across Pargana Habraghat to Dolgoma Ghat on the Brahmaputra, where they constructed an encampment of grass huts, posted some notices ordering tenants of the area not to pay rent to the Bijni zamindar and proclaimed Garo Raj (supremacy of the Garos). A Bijni forester lodged a complaint against them and the Government authorities thereupon suddenly rushed to the spot. The ring leaders including Sonaram, were arrested by Fatik Chandra, Inspector and Mr. Jackson, the Deputy Commissioner of the Goalpara and the district Superintendent of Police and Mr. Neog, Sub Divisional Officer, Goalpara. They were taken to Dhubri to be tried for rioting. Sonaram wired to Jacob, his counsel and lawyer to defend them. But Jacob did not turn up. When the cross examination of the witnesses in the Dolgoma riot case was about to be commenced, Sonaram was taken to Kharkutta by the police. Messrs Jackson and Cumming accompanied him. Sonaram once again wired to Jacob but could not get him. So he sent a man to him to Calcutta. Jacob came but he was not allowed to defend Sonaram as the place was within the Garo Hills. Sonaram was tried by Mr. Cumming, Deputy Commissioner of the Garo Hills at Kharkutta.

On the 3rd February 1903, the Deputy Commissioner of the Garo Hills district passed an order requiring Sonaram to furnish security to the amount of Rupees 10,000 with two sureties each to the same amount to be of good behaviour for a period of three years from that date. The grounds assigned were that

69 Home Department Public Proceedings, January 1903, Nos. 13-14. Part B.
71 Memorial of Sonaram R.Sangma to the Hon’ble J.B.Fuller, Chief Commissioner of Assam, dated 7th October 1904.
1. Since orders under section 107 Cr. P.C, they had been holding meetings in the Garo Hills and telling the people that money must be collected for the case;
2. That Sonaram issued a proclamation which was read at Kharkutta hat telling the Garos not to pay rent to Bijni Raj;
3. That neither of them have real interest in the case but were exciting the Garos to fight with the Bijni Raj to fill their own pockets.
4. That Sonaram was a man of bad character;
5. That Sonaram was keeping alive this agitation among the Garos and entirely responsible for it.72

Sonaram however, did not furnish the required security for which he was convicted on April 14th 1903 under section 143 IPC by Babu Nritya Gopal Chatterjee, Extra Assistant Commissioner of Dhubri District for offence of instigating and being a member of an unlawful assembly of the Garos of the Garo Hills district. By the conviction, he was sentenced to a term of imprisonment. Other five Garos including Soleman were also sentenced to term varying from two months to one year. The sentence was confirmed on appeal by the Sessions Judge of the Assam Valley district.73 Soleman and Sonaram, not being able to furnish the required sureties or recognizance, were committed to the Dhubri jail where Soleman died. Sonaram was transported to the Tezpur jail and his security amount was later on reduced to Rupees 500/- by the order of the Chief Commissioner.74

72 Memorial of Sonaram R.Sangma to the Hon'ble J.B.Fuller, Chief Commissioner of Assam, dated 7th October 1904.
73 Proceeding against Sonaram R.Sangma, Garo of Rowmari Salpara village in the District of Goalpara under Section 110 Cr. P.C by Capt. A.Playfair, Deputy Commissioner, Garo Hills, dated 14th February 1905.
74 Record of Criminal Proceedings against Sonaram R.Sangma by Playfair, the Deputy Commissioner of the Garo Hills dated 14th February 1905; Letter No. 3 dated Camp Damra, the 10th February 1904, from
The southern part of the district, however, was yet to be surcharged with such agitation. Fuller reports that in January 1903, he met “many hundreds of Garos receiving their representations in a formal durbar, made inquiries as to their grievances. No mention was made on this occasion of any claims to land..... but it was clear that the impressment of labour as practised in the past had caused considerable hardship.... the difficulties were due in the main to the arrangement under which the care of the roads and bridle paths was in the hands of the Public Works Department. Such an arrangement, when work has to be effected by tribal labour, is of course fruitful of abuse.... I have since found it desirable to exclude the Public Works Department altogether, and to hand over charge of the hill roads to the District authorities. Under this arrangement, the difficulties inseparable from a system of impressment will be reduced to minimum, as the villagers will be made responsible for maintaining certain length of roads, and within certain limits, will be allowed to take their own time for working on them” So Fuller passed an order in that year “strictly limiting the employment of forced labour in future” He also instructed the Public Works Department officials not to exact any labour in the district except through the Deputy Commissioner. Yet, he observed that “the use of impressed labour can not be dispensed with in our hill districts if communications are to be kept open. It must not be supposed that the labour is unpaid. A fair wage is offered. But wage earning has very little attractions for a Garo”78

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Agreement of 1903.

The Garos claim for certain unspecified lands continued to be unabated, the Government persuaded the Bijni Rani for a compromise who agreed to it only on the condition that the Garos should relinquish all further claims to the Nazarana lands included in the Bijni A Mahal. The Deputy Commissioner of the Garo Hills was then asked to report after an enquiry who the Garo Nokmas were who would be entitled to a share of the collections of the Nazarana lands and whether they were prepared to execute an agreement foregoing on behalf of themselves and the clans which they represent. Mr. Colquhoun, the Deputy Commissioner of the Garo Hills, thereupon visited Damra on the 27th August 1903, met and recorded the names of fourteen Garo villages’ chiefs which appear to be generally recognized as possessing the valid claims. The Garo Nokmas were 1) Olbin of Tengabari 2) Rijan of Samprak 3) Rengdon of Rongbu 4) Gyang of Thapa 5) Diseng of Depa 6) Jang of Gandim 7) Pongpong of Risu 8) Niram of Rajasimla 9) Jonta of Songma 10) Raklang of A’dokgiri 11) Rengan of Mingkrak 12) Denam of Kharkutta 13) Ringa of Damash 14) Bosin sorder of Bangshi. They asserted their confidence that their rights would be established. The Garos strongly claimed that they have documents to prove their case and intend to bring a suit shortly. They admitted having spent about Rupees 20,000 already. Deputy Commissioner of the Garo Hills district pointed out that they have so far nothing to show for this and if they do file a suit for Pargana Habraghat, the court fees alone will come to Rupees 10,000. But the only answer from them was that they would make no compromise with the Bijni. The Deputy

77 Letter No. 867 Revenue-3100 R, dated Shillong, the 8th August 1903, from the Secretary to the Chief Commissioner of Assam to the Deputy Commissioner of the Garo Hills.
commissioner finally told the Nokmas and others concerned that there were to be no collections or agitation in the Garo Hills if they could show him documents or other evidence which would justify a suit. Failing to convince or persuade the Garos, the Deputy Commissioner of the Garo Hills district remarked.

"The Nokmas' refusal was so strong that I thought it useless to suggest any further concessions. It is difficult to explain this extraordinary obstinacy on the part of the Garos. But I believe their claim has some historical basis, and that the Garos were settled in the plains before they entered the hills. Habra it is said, takes its name from a Garo Chief named Habra, the site of whose place is said to exist. According to the Garo ideas, the rights thus obtained are still in force."\(^8\)

The Deputy Commissioner of the Garo Hills Mr. Colquhoun then explained about the proposed agreement by which they were to recieve 25% of the Bijni Nazarana Mahal revenues. The Nokmas however, declined to accept this compromise. They claimed not only the Nazarana Mahal but for the whole of Pargana Habraghat and that until the claim was conceded, they would make no compromise with Bijni.\(^9\) Colquhoun met with a strong claim from Jontha Lasker, one of the 14 Nazarana Nokmas, who claimed the whole Pargana Habraghat as a descendent of a Garo Chief named Saljang, and of an eponymous monarch Habra. He showed 2 silver seals and old talwar and three daggers as his evidences of the claims, which bear the name Shri Saljang in Assamese characters. All these were said to

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\(^8\) Extract from the Diary of the Deputy Commissioner of the Garo Hills District for the month of August 1903, Assam Secretariat General Department, Revenue A, July 1904, Nos. 108-124.

\(^9\) No. 152 R. Dated Tura, the 8th September 1903, from H.A.C Colquhoun, Deputy Commissioner of the Garo Hills to the Secretary to the Chief Commissioner of Assam.
have been the property of Saljang. On seeing these evidences, Colquhoun said.

"Doubtless this person actually existed, but there is nothing to show the nature or extent of his authority." 80

In the course of his further enquiry Colquhoun came across another person named Narain Mouzadar, who claimed the area between the Dudhnoi and the Kamrup boundary on behalf of the Bangbol Mahari. The claimants produced certain receipts and purwasas that appeared to show that between 1828 and 1874, the revenue of Duar Amjonga, was collected by Garo Laskars. He said

"This of course may tell against the rights now held by Bijni. David Scott’s reports to the Bengal Government and to the Board of Revenue before and after the Garo Regulation of 1822 would probably throw light on the matter". 81

The Garos could not be convinced and the matters were put at a stand still for some time. 82 After much persuasion, eleven out of the fourteen Garo Nokmas ultimately signed an agreement in the presence of the Chief Commissioner J.B.Fuller on 2nd November 1903 at Brahmakund 83 in Goalpara by which they agreed to accept 25% of the ordinary land revenue of Nazarana lands in Bijni A Mahal. 84 The land revenue means ordinary land revenue and does not include forest, fishery and other

80 Extract from the Tour Diary of H.A.C Colquhoun, Deputy Commissioner of the Garo Hills District from 28th January to 15th February 1904. Assam Secretariat General Department, Revenue A, July 1904, Nos. 108-124.
81 Ibid.
82 Letter No. 152 R, dated Tura, the 8th September 1903, from H.A.C Colquhoun, Deputy Commissioner of the Garo Hills District to the Secretary to the Chief Commissioner of Assam.
84 Copy of the agreement dated 2nd November 1903. Assam Secretariat General Department, Home A, August 1903, Nos. 257-263.
miscellaneous revenues.\textsuperscript{85} At the same time a general desire for the release of Sonaram and other Garos was expressed and Colquhoun suggested to the secretary to the Chief Commissioner of Assam that the required security for Sonaram and Rirang might be reduced. In the case of Sonaram Rupees 3000 to be found in equal proportions by the accused in person and by two sureties, and in that of Rirang to Rupees 300 to be furnished in a similar manner.\textsuperscript{86} The orders in regard to Sonaram and Rirang to be issued separately were directed by the Secretary to the Chief Commissioner of Assam.\textsuperscript{87}

On the day when the agreement was signed three Nokmas were absent. They were Ringa of Damas, Rijan of Samprak and Raklang of A'dokgiri. However, they also agreed to abide by the agreement executed by the eleven Nokmas.\textsuperscript{88} Following the agreement, the Deputy Commissioner of the Goalpara District was directed to have the agreement executed on behalf of the Rani of Bijni and the money which was in deposit on account of the Rani’s share of previous years collections of the Nazarana lands was directed to be paid to her.\textsuperscript{89} As per the order, an agreement was drawn up on the 7\textsuperscript{th} day of July 1903 by the Deputy Commissioner of Goalpara Mr A.H.Cumming on behalf of the Secretary of State in Council for India and Rani Abhoyeswari Debi, zamindar of Pargana Habraghat and Khuntaghat.\textsuperscript{90}

\begin{paracol}{12}
\textsuperscript{85} Copy of the agreement between Mr. Cumming, Deputy Commissioner of Goalpara District and Rani Abhoyeswari Debi of Bijni, dated 7\textsuperscript{th} July 1903.
\textsuperscript{86} Letter No. 3 dated camp Damra, the 10\textsuperscript{th} February 1904, from H.A.C Colquhoun, Deputy Commissioner of the Garo Hills to the Chief Commissioner of Assam.
\textsuperscript{87} No. 150 Revenue-1215, dated Shillong, the 9\textsuperscript{th} March 1904, from the Secretary to the Chief Commissioner of Assam to the Deputy Commissioner, Garo Hills District.
\textsuperscript{88} Letter No. 3 dated Camp Damra, the 10\textsuperscript{th} February 1904, from H.A.C Colquhoun, Deputy Commissioner of the Garo Hills to the Secretary to the Chief Commissioner of Assam.
\textsuperscript{89} No. 4 T dated November 1903, from the Secretary to the Chief Commissioner of Assam to the Deputy Commissioner of the Garo Hills District.
\textsuperscript{90} Letter No. 2434 G, XXVI-5 dated the 10\textsuperscript{th} November 1903, from A.H.Cumming, Deputy Commissioner, Goalpara District to the Commissioner of the Assam Valley Districts.
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As already referred earlier that the agreement of 1878 stipulated that the revenue to be received by the Bijni Rani from the Bijni A Mahal was 75% of the collections. 25% to be deducted by the government as collection charges. Now the new agreement which was rather a modified version of the 1878 agreement stipulated that the Rani would receive 50% of the collections from the Bijni A Mahal in the future, while 25% which was previously of her own share be paid to the Garo Nokmas. As per the modified agreement, out of the total collections, the share of the Nokmas was Rupees 850 per annum.91

As regards the distribution of the sums under the settlement, the 14 Nokmas were unanimous to divide their shares in equal proportion as they see that any other system of distribution would probably cause jealousy and disputes. Colquhoun also recommended this proposal or arrangement. The Nokmas further requested that the respective shares be remitted to them by money order through the Damra post office, the cost of remittance being deducted from the shares.92 The Chief Commissioner of Assam accordingly approved the arrangement as proposed by the Deputy commissioner of the Garo Hills.93

The shares of the Garo Nokmas were duly sent by the money order through the Damra post office, but the orders were returned marked “Refused”. Sonaram informed the Garo Nokmas not to accept the money delivered to them. But, some of them expressed willingness to take the money. But Capt. Playfair, the Deputy Commissioner of the Garo Hills did

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91 Letter No. 1231 Revenue-5285 R dated Shillong, the 23rd December 1903, from the Secretary to the Commissioner of Assam to the Deputy Commissioner of the Garo Hills.
92 Letter No. 3, dated Camp Damra, the 10th February 1904, from H.A.C Colquhoun, Deputy Commissioner, Garo Hills to the Secretary to the Chief Commissioner of Assam.
93 Letter No. 150, Revenue 1215, dated Shillong, the 9th March 1904, from the Secretary to the Chief Commissioner of Assam to the Deputy Commissioner, Garo Hills.
not send it to them. He waited for the Chief Commissioner's order. The Nokmas instead of accepting the money claimed the whole of the Habraghat pargana. It has been considered therefore, to call upon Sonaram to show cause why he should not give security for good behaviour as the security to be furnished by him was still binding upon him following his arrest and subsequent release in connection with the Dolgoma riot case in December 1902. In the meantime, the Rani of Bijni was informed that the agreement into which she entered was at an end and that she would in the future receive 75% of the revenue derived from the Nazarana lands in the Bijni A Mahal, including the amounts for the past years which the Nokmas have refused to accept.

On 13th August 1904, Playfair, the Deputy Commissioner of the Garo Hills issued a purwana by which Sonaram was directed to be present immediately before him at Tura. The purwana did not mention the nature of duty which called for his immediate presence. Having been released from jail in April 1904 under the orders of the Chief Commissioner, Sonaram had by that time been residing at Alipore in Calcutta since May 1904. He submitted a memorial to the Chief Commissioner of Assam Mr. J.B.Fuller on 8th July 1904 requesting him for an amicable settlement with the Bijni estate and to enquire into the circumstances under which he was sent to jail without having a fair trial by Mr. Cumming, the Deputy Commissioner of the Garo Hills in 1903. He further requested to cancel

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94 Letter No. 585 R, dated Tura the 31st January 1905, from Capt. A. Playfair, Deputy Commissioner of the Garo Hills to the Secretary to the Chief Commissioner of Assam.
95 Assam Secretariat Proceedings, Revenue A, June 1905, Nos. 144-175.
96 Ibid.
98 Copy of the Memorandum of Sonaram R. Sangma to His Excellency, the Viceroy and Governor General of India, dated 13th day of December 1905.
the order passed to find two sureties of Rupees 500 each. Besides, in a representation which he forwarded to the Deputy Commissioner of the Garo Hills on 1st September 1904, Sonaram informed of his being inability to comply with the Deputy Commissioner's wishes and prayed for the suspension of his attendance till he settled his affairs at Calcutta.

On the 6th September 1904 a letter was despatched by post to Sonaram by the Deputy Commissioner, Garo Hills which was received by him on the 11th September 1904. The letter informed that "it was not open to Sonaram to arouse discontentment by pretending that there was the faintest shadow of right on his side and should he not abstain from renewing that agitation he would be bound over again for three years in sureties to the amount of rupees 10,000 fixed by Mr. Cumming in 1903.

A second purwana under the seal and signature of Captain Playfair, Deputy Commissioner of the Garo Hills was despatched by a registered letter on 28th September 1904 addressed to the vakil of Sonaram wherein he was asked to show why he should not be bound down under section 110 of the Cr. P.C for good behaviour by personal recognisance for Rupees 10,000 each, upon the ground that he had been collecting money from the Garos for conducting the same case, as the one for which he had been arrested formerly and sent to jail.

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99 Memorial of Sonaram R. Sangma to J.B. Fuller, the Chief Commissioner of Assam, dated 8th July 1904.
100 Letter of Sonaram R. Sangma to A. Playfair, Deputy Commissioner, Garo Hills, dated 1st September 1904; Copy of Sonaram's petition to the Hon'ble Sir Francis William Maclean, Chief Justice and His Companion Justices of the High Court of Judicature at Fort William in Bengal in the matter of an application under Section 15 of the Charter Act and under Section 439 Cr. P.C.
101 Copy of Sonaram's petition to J.B. Fuller, Chief Commissioner of Assam, dated 7th October 1904; Copy of the proceeding of the Criminal Revisional Jurisdiction in the matter of Criminal Revision No. 290 of 1905.
102 Appeal petition of Sonaram R. Sangma under Section 15 of the Charter Act and under Section 349 Cr. P.C, Sonaram Versus King Emperor, submitted to the Hon'ble Sir Francis William Maclean, Chief Justice and His Companion Justices of the High Court of Judicature at Fort William in Bengal.
103 A copy of Sonaram's petition to J.B. Fuller, Chief Commissioner of Assam, dated 7th October 1904. Copy of the Criminal Revisional Jurisdiction in the matter of Criminal Revision No. 290 of 1905.
Sonaram replied in a letter dated 29th September 1904 wherein he informed his inability to comply with the Deputy commissioner’s wishes for being in such a long distance from Assam. He begged for a proper inquiry and stated

“I hate agitation and desire to follow the submissive policy and I want therefore, redress from the Government in a legal, equitable and peaceful way. Mine is always a representation and never an agitation.”

He expressed his willingness to obey the summon.\textsuperscript{104}

On the 13\textsuperscript{th} December 1904, Sonaram R. Sangma and 33 others submitted a memorial to His Excellency, the Viceroy and Governor General of India claiming that the Garos possessed by collection of rent certain Mahal called the Nazarana Mahal and of certain tract called Habraghat which respectively lie within the Garo Hills and Goalpara districts in lower Assam. In paragraph 18 of the memorial, it was mentioned that the villages Amjonga, Rowmari, Darrangiri, Khara Amjonga, Rongjuli, Moskhuli, Damra, Jira, Dilma, Paikan Habraghat, Salpara, Molandubi, Kukira, Garomari, Matia Patpara, Amguri, Athiabari, Ambook, Madang, Sumbeswar Zuli Dakaitdor and north boundaries of Mr. Hudson’s report belong to Habraghat were in possession of the Garos, who were tributary to the ruling power and were independent of the zamindars. The claim of the Garos was based on the fact that neither the collectorate Register nor the old sanads from the Moghuls do give the said zamindars any shadow of title or possession by way of a grant over these Garo villages. The memorialists therefore prayed to free those villages lying within Habraghat and other tracts

\textsuperscript{104} Letter of Sonaram R. Sangma to Capt. Playfair, the Officiating Deputy Commissioner of the Garo Hills, dated 29th September 1904.
known as *Khas Nazarana Mahals* away from any dependence on the Bijni zamindar.\textsuperscript{105}

**Sonaram rearrested for the second time.**

Towards the end of January 1905 Sonaram was summoned to his house at Salpara in the district of Goalpara by a message which informed him of the illness of his wife and a child. He proceeded there accordingly. On his way back to Calcutta, while halting at the town of Goalpara, Sonaram was suddenly arrested on the 4\textsuperscript{th} February 1905 by a warrant under section 110 of the Criminal Procedural Code and taken custody from Goalpara to Damra where he was examined by Sir Bamfylde Fuller. Sonaram pleaded bravely for the recovery of the whole of Habraghat Pargana.\textsuperscript{106} Fuller did not want this dangerous leader of the ‘excitable people’ to be left at large,\textsuperscript{107} and was ordered on the 15\textsuperscript{th} February 1905\textsuperscript{108} to execute a bail bond for Rupees 10,000 to be of good behaviour for three years or in the alternative to suffer rigorous imprisonment for the same period. On being unable to furnish the said recognisance, Sonaram was taken to the district jail at Goalpara and had to undergo rigorous imprisonment there under section 174 IPC for a period of six months.\textsuperscript{109} A military Police Outpost, earlier withdrawn, was again established at Dhepa near Damra to meet the likely insurgency of the Garos.\textsuperscript{110}

On 28\textsuperscript{th} March, 1905, Chief Commissioner of Assam wrote confidentially to Captain Playfair, Deputy Commissioner of the Garo Hills District, instructing him to reply to the High Court in the following lines.

\textsuperscript{105} Memorial of Sonaram R.Sangma and 33 others to His Excellency, the Viceroy and Governor General of India, dated the 13\textsuperscript{th} December 1904.
\textsuperscript{107} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{108} Mihir N.Sangma, *Unpublished Documents on Garo Affairs*, p 214, para 15.
\textsuperscript{109} Order sheet on the Case of Sonaram R.Sangma dated 14\textsuperscript{th} February 1905.
\textsuperscript{110} P.C.Kar, op. cit, p 231.
1) That large portion of Goalpara district, Habraghat Pargana, have not been held by the Garos for several generations, and had been in the ownership of the Bijni zamindar since the commencement of British rule.

2) That the Garos have never brought a civil suit but made an inroad into the Pargana two years ago creating a great panic for which the ring leader Sonaram had been convicted.

3) Certain concessions granted by the Bijni zamindar were accepted by the concerned Garo headmen executing an agreement and hence, Sonaram was pardoned.

4) Yet he recommenced his intrigues and induced the Garo headmen to repudiate the agreement.

5) He collected large sums from all parts of Garo Hills while taking steps whatsoever to bring his claims to the test of a civil court.

6) Damra is just beyond the district border but is closely connected with the Garo Hills as it is the headquarters of the Garo Hills Forest Department.

Apprehending that Sonaram would be released by the High Court, Fuller again wrote to Major Playfair informing him “you should issue a warrant for him (Sonaram) at once and have him brought to Tura reporting the case to me officially and sending me a copy of the High Court’s order. I will then consider whether we need have a fresh trial. But he should not be allowed to get at large out of jail until a decision on this point has been arrived at”\textsuperscript{111}

\textsuperscript{111} Demi official letter from J.B. Fuller to Major Playfair dated 14th May 1905.
An appeal petition thereupon made and Mr. Jackson and Surendranath Ghosal represented the case in favour of Sonaram. A rule was issued on the Deputy Commissioner, Garo Hills to show cause why the order by which Sonaram was arrested and put into jail should not be set aside. No one appeared to show cause against the rule and after hearing, the learned counsel for the applicant set aside the order of the Deputy Commissioner, Garo Hills on two grounds. First, the Deputy Commissioner conducted the inquiry under section 110 at Damra which was outside the local limits of Deputy Commissioner's jurisdiction. When proceedings were taken against him under that section, he had been in Calcutta and he was arrested at Goalpara. On these grounds, the order was set aside saying that the Deputy Commissioner, Garo Hills had no jurisdiction in these circumstances to conduct proceedings under section 110 Cr. P.C.\(^\text{112}\)

Meanwhile, the agitation continued unabated. The Garo people often violated the Government rules and contracts. Certain Garo Nokmas withheld their revenue dues and instead paid to Sonaram's emissaries. Bridle paths and Government bungalows were not repaired at impressed labour at several places. One of the active disseminators of the words of agitation was a native worker of the Baptist Mission. The Deputy Commissioner of Garo Hills had to confiscate the guns of several Nokmas for defiance of order of officials in respect of clearing roads. The authorities tried to rope Sonaram R.Sangma into legal strictures but he could escape several times. This made the native people believe in the ultimate victory of Sonaram. Many Nokmas sold their properties to

\(^{112}\text{Copy of the Criminal Revision Case No. 290 of 1905.}\)
provide Sonaram with more funds as otherwise they would be deprived of lands. Such had been the confidence of the people in their leader.\textsuperscript{113}

As the Garos combined together and started a joint fund in order to test the legality of their grievances in a court of law or elsewhere as they may be advised, these combination and the raising of a joint fund for the expenditure that may involve in the prosecution of the case, met with the strongest opposition from the Assam Government officials and the Bijni zamindar. For the reasons stated the Garos were compelled to withdraw their subscriptions and to abandon the movement. The arrest and the subsequent legal prosecution against Sonaram, greatly dampened the movement and the morale of the Garo people.\textsuperscript{114}

**Release of Sonaram.**

Under instructions from the Chief Commissioner, Sonaram was taken out of the district of Garo Hills under police escort and set him free on the 15\textsuperscript{th} July 1905 with due notice that should he ever enter the district of Garo Hills, he would be arrested and proceedings under section 110 Cr. P.C revived.\textsuperscript{115} Following the release, on 23\textsuperscript{rd} August 1905, Sonaram submitted another memorial to the Hon'ble Joseph Bampylde Fuller, the Chief Commissioner of Assam regarding the questions of begar, forest reservation, Bibhagnamapatra and Nazarana lands.\textsuperscript{116} Again on 3\textsuperscript{rd} October and 23\textsuperscript{rd} November 1905, he submitted two separate memorials to the Government. The memorial submitted on the 3\textsuperscript{rd} October 1905 stated that

\textsuperscript{113} P.C.Kar, op. cit, p 233.
\textsuperscript{114} Memorial submitted to His Excellency the Right Hon'ble Sir Gilbert John Elliot Murray Kynynmound Earl of Minto, Viceroy and Governor General of India by Sonaram R.Sangma and thousand others, dated 23rd November 1905.
\textsuperscript{115} Judicial Proceedings, Judicial A, January 1909, Nos. 2-17.
\textsuperscript{116} Copy of Sonaram R.Sangma’s memorial to J.B.Fuller, Chief Commissioner of Assam, dated 23\textsuperscript{rd} August 1905.
the 11 Nokmas who executed an agreement on 2nd November 1903 before the Chief Commissioner J.B.Fuller to receive the 25% *malikana* of the *Nazarana* lands in Bijni A Mahal, were illiterate and had not understood the effect of such agreement. The memorial prayed that the order might be explained to them in writing, so that they might find out which was the land, the revenue of which they were going to get, who were to be paid and at what rate was the revenue assessed, and whether it was a permanent arrangement or not. They further prayed that other details in connection therewith might also be communicated to them so that the precise effect of the agreement might be clear to them.\(^{117}\) The memorial dated 23rd November 1905 prayed for the deputation of an independent inquiry Commissioner to settle all the disputes arising out of the claims for the ownership of certain lands in the Goalpara and the Garo Hills districts by the Bijni Rani and the Garos. The memorial prayed for the abolition of forced labour and dereervation of forest.\(^{118}\) Two separate memorials were also submitted on the 9th February 1906 by certain Garos including Sonaram, to His Excellency the Right Hon’ble Sir Gilbert John Elliot Murray Kynynmound, Earl of Minto, Viceroy and Governor General of India, in the matter of reserved forest and forced labour and prayed for the permanent compensation for being deprived of their ancestral rights and other privileges over the forests and to do away with the system of forced labour in Garo Hills.\(^{119}\)

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\(^{117}\) Memorial of Sonaram R.Sangma and others to the Hon’ble J.B.Fuller, the Chief Commissioner of Assam, dated the 23rd October 1905.

\(^{118}\) Memorial of Sonaram R.Sangma and thousand others to His Excellency the Right Hon’ble Sir Gilbert John Elliot Murray Kynynmound, Earl of Minto, Viceroy and Governor General of India, dated 23rd November 1905.

\(^{119}\) Memorials submitted to His Excellency the Right Hon’ble Sir Gilbert John Elliot Murray Kynynmound, Earl of Minto, Viceroy and Governor General of India by the two separate group of the Garos, dated 9th February 1906.