Chapter VIII

Conclusion

From the foregoing study, it can be said that the Garos are one of the earliest inhabitants on the banks of the great Brahmaputra river. They have been variously named throughout the different periods of history by different historians and ancient text writers. After much wandering and settlements at different historical places, a vast majority of the Garos finally took up their permanent settlement on the Garo Hills while certain sections of them remained on the fertile valleys of the Brahmaputra and spread to different parts of the North Eastern States of India. Their life in the ancient period was full of rivalry and bloodshed amongst their own independent chiefs and the hunting for the human skull was taken as a mere game of earning reputation and fame. The person who could collect the largest number of human skulls was highly respected in the society. When the Moghuls extended their powers and influence upon the north eastern parts of India, their independent existence began to be threatened and the Garo people living in the areas attached to the great estates of the zamindars were subjugated by them. Thus they were oppressed and exploited by the powerful zamindars against whom the Garos could not offer united resistance because of their isolated
dwellings and lack of unity amongst themselves. With the lost of their 
independent existence, they lost their independent settlements also and they 
were subjected to harsh treatments at the hands of the neighbouring 
zamindars. On many occasions they took revenge upon them for their 
exploitations which often invited attacks and counter attacks from each of the 
warring parties leading to an unending period of struggle causing lost of life 
and property.

When the English people came into contact with the Garo people, they saw 
their miserable life and devised measures to put an end to the recurring 
troubles coming in from the frictional relationships between the Garos and the 
zamindars and to get rid of the head hunting habit and other plundering raids. 
The British were cordial in the beginning of their rule towards the Garos and 
tried to carry out measures that could save the Garo people from the evil 
designs of the neighbouring zamindars. With that purpose in view they passed 
the Act X of 1822 by which the Garo inhabited areas were separated from the 
dependency of the neighbouring zamindars. Yet, the various devices hardly 
fulfilled the desired objectives. The granting of lakhiraj lands or the revenue 
free estates by David Scott to the 18 Garo Maharies in 1831, with a view to 
put an end to the recurring troubles could not completely wiped out the 
disputes between the Garos and the Bijni Raj. Besides, the Bijni zamindars 
were also greatly responsible for the uncompromising attitude and bloody 
revenge of the Garo people upon the plain dwellers because of their harsh 
policies and treatments towards them. Their imposition of undue taxations in 
the hats on the commodities brought by the Garos to be sold in the markets 
coupled with the encroachment upon their lands became the unbearable 
sources of irritations for the Garo people. Thus there developed a strong 
feeling of hatredness for the Bijni zamindars and its servants. But the Garos
could not play a major role in resisting and driving out the neighbouring zamindars who invaded into and forcibly dispossessed of their possessions. The zamindars were much stronger than the Garos either in economic or military powers and hence the Garos easily fall prey to their exploitative and oppressive policies.

The fictitious nature of the Garo Hills-Goalpara boundary and the negligence of the concerned authorities of the Government to lay down the inter district boundaries at the earliest with a map of its own, has greatly been responsible for the illegal encroachments upon the independent settlements of the Garo people. The zamindars took advantage of the fictitious nature of the Garo Hills Goalpara boundary and encroached considerably upon the lands that were being owned by the Garo people since time immemorial. The Government authorities too, did not strictly maintain the law and order situation in the troubled torn areas and failed to prevent such disorderly state of affairs because of which the zamindars also had the courage to repeatedly assert their claims. They also did not understand the traditional customs and practices of the Garo people. Some of the British officers especially Capt. Peet, posted to the Garo areas failed to understand the differences between certain lands such as Bibhagnamapatra and the Nazarana lands and the nature of customs and revenue affairs related to it which also added another misunderstandings into the ongoing troubles. The British officers took the matter very lightly in this respect and did not think of the later consequences. On certain occasions, their assurances made the Garo people believed to march ahead with their own purposes. Hence, The British Government too, is responsible for the Garos’ incitements to march forward with their movement to recover their lost lands.
It was while the matter had been under such circumstances, Sonaram R. Sangma came to the political scene and gave leadership to the Garo people and started a movement for getting the lost lands back to the Garo people. They had been under strong impression with their current traditional belief that Habraghat Pargana once belonged to the Garos through its first reigning king Habra and that it must be given back to them from the zamindar then possessing it. Sonaram R. Sangma had been wise enough to organise such a massive movement involving all the powerful Garo Nokmas, Laskars and the mass Garo people and stood against the injustice and exploitations of the Bijni people. Garo people had great expectations from him and believed that their aged long struggles would finally be over by winning the battle against the Bijni to whom they had an intense hatred for undue harassments and exploitations. Sonaram could not convince the British authorities due to lack of proper evidence and as such his claim for the entire Pargana of Habraghat on the alleged descent of his wife Thokje as its proprietress was not accepted by the Government. But even then, the British authorities recognised his able leadership and capability of mobilizing his people in a high degree. Even though he failed in the claim for the Habraghat Pargana, he was successful in three of the cases. The Nazarana lands could be retained for the Garo for which the Bijni zamindar had claimed; indiscriminate forest reservations could be stopped; and the system of forced labour prevalent in the Garo Hills was abolished and the work on payment was initiated.

Throughout the period of study we found that the main struggle by the Garos against the Bijni Raj was for the proprietorship of the Habraghat Pargana and the Nazarana lands situated in the district of Goalpara and in Garo Hills respectively. When the claim for the Habraghat was turned down by the British Government, the Garo people lost faith on the works of Sonaram and in
the later part of his life, he had to stay away from his people as he was no longer supported by his people. Yet he never completely gave up his aim and tried his best to represent his case before the concerned authorities. But the luck did not favour him and thus he could not fulfilled his greatest dream of uniting *Pargana* Habraghat with that of the Garo Hills. Yet he left such an indelible impressions on the minds of the Garo people that the years following his death were marked with a new sense of thought and political conciousness among the Garo people and they became aware of the need of forming an organization by which they could flock together in one platform to discuss their various needs and issues. Thus, different social organizations were formed by the Garo people during pre-independent periods which ultimately led for the emergence of one of the most popular political organizations—The Garo National Council (GNC) which spearheaded the movement for the separate state of Meghalaya in the Garo Hills as a political wing of the All Party Hill Leaders Conference (APHLC). Despite his failures and shortcomings in his struggle to achieve the claim for Habraghat during his life time, Sonaram R.Sangma has continued to be acclaimed by the Garos as their first and dedicated leader who has shown the path of national integration among his own people and to stand unitedly against any injustices that may cripple the life of the Garo community. He has been regarded as the path breaker in the political history of the Garos who had shown the path of struggle in non-violent ways. His works have widely been acclaimed and cherished by the Garo people and pay deep homage to him even if he is dead. The Garo people had a firm belief on the life and works of this great man and had the feeling that he led for the right cause of the Garo nation. Till date he has been remembered with great care and respect and want that his dream comes true one day in the life of the Garos. That is why we have already witnessed the hard struggles that the Garo people had waged during pre and
post Meghalaya period which are nothing but the continuation of the movement launched by Sonaram R. Sangma and the struggle for their identity and to unify themselves in one administrative umbrella.

The fringes of the impact that he had upon the Garo people could not be wiped out altogether and the same can still be witnessed even today in the arms struggle being led by the different Garo organizations. But it should be remembered that Sonaram R. Sangma never advocated illegal and violent revolutionary means to further and achieve his targets. He followed, led and had shown that the non violent and democratic means are the right paths through which any people or community can achieve their respective goals. It would therefore, be good if the Garo youths who are presently with their arms and in their hideouts readying themselves to fight for their land, come out first and realize that violent means shall not be a solution to the Garo problems. Besides, the concerned Government authorities also should strongly take steps to bring back those youths into the social main stream and arrange good rehabilitation schemes to them.

It is high time therefore, the concerned Government authorities look into the matters very seriously and device suitable measures that could bring permanent solution to the problems.