CHAPTER I

INTERVENTION AND ADJUSTMENTS
Till 1874 Assam and its adjoining hill districts were administered by the Lieutenant Governor of Bengal. The Secretary of State gave Ms general assent in August 1871 to the proposal that Assam and certain eastern districts of Bengal should be constituted into a Chief Commissionership to be placed in direct subordination to the Governor-General. The Lieutenant Governor of Bengal, Sir George Campbell was convinced that the charge and responsibility imposed upon him might be lightened either by a change in the form of government or by a diminution of the territory which he governed. Having in view, therefore, the double object of relieving the administration of Bengal and of strengthening the local administration of Assam, the Governor-General, Lord Northbrook, had no hesitation in the creation of the proposed Chief Commissionership. The new administration comprised the five districts of the Brahmaputra valley, the Naga, Khasi and Santia and Garo Hills, Goalpara, Cachar and Sylhet. The transfer to Assam of Goalpara and the Garo Hills districts involved the abolition of the Commissionership of Cooch Behar.¹ With the Secretary of State's approval these districts were removed from the Government of Bengal.

¹ Extracts of Letters from India, 1873, Home Public, No.73, pp.427-432.
² Except Sylhet which was made part of Assam province on 12 September 1974.
and formed into the Chief Commissioner'ship of Assam on 7
February 1874 with Colonel R.H. Keatinge as its first Chief
Commissioner.\(^3\)

Almost immediately on assuming office Keatinge was
called upon to report on the selection of a place for the
province's headquarters with some details in justification.
The Chief Commissioner's choice was between Gauhati and
Shillong. He opted for the new station in the Khasi Hills not
so much for climatic considerations but that accommodation for
the new establishment was readily available at Shillong and that
the place was capable of indefinite extension. Moreover,
building material was cheaper at Shillong than at Gauhati which
could not readily house the Chief Commissioner's office. No
doubt Gauhati was closer by post to eight districts while
Shillong was closer to Cachar and Sylhet. Keatinge, therefore,
found no justification for setting himself at Gauhati as
communication, though not quite developed then was not a
natural problem as a proper approach road to Shillong could be
built in time. The cost of living at Shillong was higher than
at Gauhati, but improved communication with Sylhet where the
price of commodities was much less than that at Gauhati would
reduce prices at Shillong. The political vantage point that
Shillong had over Gauhati was that it was accessible from two
directions and, therefore, the chances of a break in
\(^3\) The Gazette of India, 7 February 1874.
Communication with the place was less likely than Gauhati. On 29 May 1874, Lord Northbrook approved the selection of Shillong as the headquarters of the Assam Chief Commissionership.  

**Growth of Shillong**

Shillong was constituted into a station in 1878. Its affairs was managed by a committee of five members presided over by the Deputy Commissioner, Khasi and Daintia Hills district. As the capital of the province of Assam, Shillong was destined to expand in terms of area and population. The Government took a perpetual lease from the Syiem of Mylliem the portions now known as European Ward, Police Bazar, 3ail Road and the Cantonment. Laban and Maukhar were added to the station in November 1878 and Lachumiere Hill in 1895. Shillong was made a full fledged municipality in 1910. Three years later the four villages of Malki, Laitumkhrah, Dhalupara and Mauprem were made part of the town.

As the district and provincial head-quarters the town expanded to accommodate the increase in population. The Census of 1881 recorded the numbers of non-Khasis in the

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5. Ibid.: Wo.266; A.,S.R., H.R» May 1874, No.5.
6. A.S.R., H.P., May 1874, No. 4, ^
8. Ibid.
district at 2225 persons out of a total population of 27,522. This number was almost all accounted for by the presence of a regiment, by the police force and the establishment attached to the head-quarters of Governments. A considerable number of clerks are reported to have settled in Shillong following the removal of the Chief Commissioner's officer from Gauhati to Shillong. In time Shillong became a cosmopolitan town with a mixed population of locals, Europeans (administrators, tea planters and others who settled here on retirement), an increasing element of Bengalis who staffed the offices, Nepali crofters, enterprising Marwari traders and small segments of other communities.

Two incidents affected the development of Shillong. One was the severe earthquake of 12 June 1897 that rocked the entire north-east parts of India. The earthquake struck Shillong a few minutes after 5 p.m. The Government House, the largest building in Shillong fell in five seconds. Sir Henry Cotton and his wife survived the fall as they had seconds before the quake left their residence for their usual evening drive. Hundred of other houses were razed to the ground. The Government Press, the Secretariat, churches, schools and hospitals fell into debris. The rain that followed the quake made the situation worse.

14. worse. So disastrous was the catastrophe that Government was compelled to give assistance. Temporary huts were set up at Shillong and Government servants were given an advance of a 15 months pay to enable them to meet their immediate necessities. One of the consequences of the earthquake was that the Deputy Commissioner, Khasi and Dintia Hills, C. Arbutnott, raised the question of transferring the capital of the province to a safer place. The options were Dhubri, Gaufoati, Dibrugarh, Kohima, Haflong, Mokokchung, and Uokha. Had a transfer been made Shillong would have suffered. Henry Cotton did not support any change in location as he considered it far more economic to rebuild at the old station than to set up headquarters elsewhere.

Political considerations at the turn of the century, however, brought some dissatisfaction to the administration of the province. When Dacca became the capital of the new province of Eastern Bengal and Assam in October 1905, Shillong suffered a temporary setback. The secretariat of the provincial capital was divided between Shillong and Dacca. Only in 1911-1912 was the entire establishment shifted to.

15. Report on the "Earthquake of 12 June 1897", pp.2-3. The deaths were reputed to have been Khasi and Jaintia 916, Sylhet 545 and Garo Hills 271.
17. Ibid.
to Dacca. The partition of Bengal was annulled in March 1912 and Assam comprising its former constituent districts reverted to its earlier status with Shillong as its capital. 18

**Hills Division**

The second Chief Commissioner of Assam, Sir Steuart Bayley was handicapped by having no official between himself and the Deputy Commissioners under his charge. In October 1879, he proposed to the Government of India that the Judge of the Assam Valley Districts should be vested with the functions of a Commissioner of a division, in addition to the functions he then exercised. Bayley, however, did not propose to give the Commissioner any control in political matters nor any jurisdiction over the administration of the Naga Hills or the Garo Hills but that the officer to be so appointed might usefully have appellate and revising powers over the purely judicial work of the Deputy Commissioner, Khasi Hills owing to the presence of a considerable European and trading community at Shillong. The new Commissionership was created in May 1880 by which the hill districts were excluded from the jurisdiction of the Judge and Commissioner of the Assam Valley Districts. 19

With the creation of the province of Eastern Bengal and Assam was constituted the Commissionership of the Surma Valley and Hill Districts on 16 October 1905. The new

administrative unit with head-quarters at Silchar comprised Cachar, Sylhet, Naga Hills, Garo Hills, Khasi and Daintia Hills and the Lushai Hills districts. For the Khasis, the Daintias this transfer of the direct appellate jurisdiction from the Lieutenant Governor to the Commissioner affected them directly as they had so long enjoyed easy access to appeal. Their objections to the administrative change were turned down as the head-quarters at Silchar had to be fixed to suit the requirements of not only the Khasi and Jaintia Hills, but also the other districts which comprised the Commissioner's division. The Garo Hills suffered even more than did the Khasi and Oaintia Hills from this arrangement.

Sir Bampfylde Fuller, Eastern Bengal and Assam's first Lieutenant Governor had decided that the question of incorporating the Garo Hills into the new Commissionership should be postponed for a year or two until alternative arrangements could be made. Careful enquiries into "the position of the Garos and their relations with the plains district of Goalpara were made. Fuller's successor, Sir Lancelot Hare was of the opinion that it would be inconvenient to associate the Garos with any division than the Assam Valley Division, a view supported by both the Commissioners.

24. Ibid.
Government of India approved the proposal but before sanctioning it wanted the proposal to be published for the information of the Garos. Since no objections were received, a resolution was adopted explaining the transfer of the Garo Hills from the Surma Valley and Hill Districts Division to the Assam Valley Division. A notification to this effect was published in The India Gazette on 21 August 1909. The new arrangement took effect on 1 September 1909. The Commissioner of the Assam Valley was to administer the Garo Hills under a system similar to the jurisdiction of the Surma Valley Commissioner over the other hill districts. The change was in no way to involve a departure from the policy of Government in safeguarding the traditions and interests of the people of the hills.

Following the successful implementation of Act XXII of 1869 to the Garo Hills, the provisions of the Act were extended to the British portions of the Khasi and Jaintia Hills district on 1 November 1871. Subsequently, under Section 5 of the same Act were issued detailed rules for the administration of civil, criminal, justice and police for the district on 30 July 1872, the details of which have been

27. Ibid., Nos. 38-39.
28. Ibid., No;37.
29. The Calcutta Gazette, 1 November 1871, p.1911.
discussed in Chapter IV.  

By the 1870's the British administrators had begun to see the need to safeguard the tribal peoples of north-east India through a policy that Chaube calls "segregation". To this intention was passed the Bengal Eastern Frontier Regulation, 1873, Section 2 of which made it lawful for Government "to prescribe, and from time to time to alter by notification a line to be called the Inner Line," and to "prohibit all British subjects, or any class of British subjects, or any persons residing in or passing through such districts from going beyond such line without a pass." This Regulation extended **proprio vigore** among other districts to the Khasi and Saitia Hills districts and came into force on 1 November 1873. No notification was made formally extending the provisions of the Regulation to the two districts under study. It could not be brought into force in the Khasi and Saitia Hills district presumably because the provincial capital was located at Shillong and because the district had the largest number of persons who would be affected by the requirement of a pass were the Regulation to be brought into force. Neither was the 'Inner Line' made applicable to the Garo Hills for Keatinge showed that it was not the intention of Regulation V of 1873

to protect a country and a people wholly subject the British authority as was the Garo Hills. The Regulation protected the Nagas and other tribes who were partially under the influence of British authority or were wholly independent. The Chief Commissioner said that he should not suggest the application of the Regulation to the Garo Hills as there was a peaceful trade between the hills and the plains which would be hampered if every trader had to take out a pass. This question was all the more difficult in view of the demands of the Zamindars to portions of the Garo Hills adjoining their estates. Keatinge requested the Government of India to make arrangements for some regulation as the 'Inner Line' for the Garo Hills to enable the local administration to complete the reorganization of the district. For this he suggested that only some persons movements in the district should be restrict.

The Government of India in reply observed that the object and scope of the section of the Regulation which applied to the 'Inner Line' appeared to have been misunderstood by Keatinge. The intention of the Regulation was to prevent complications arising with tribes beyond the frontier of British India by speculators going among them and recklessly buying up land and cheating them of their forest products.

The idea was that the line to be drawn was

33. F.R.P., August 1874, No.16.
34. Ibid.
essentially a frontier line. It was not intended that a circular line should be drawn anywhere in the actual interior of British territory, so as to cut off the territory so enclosed from free communication with neighbouring districts.

As a matter of policy it appeared to the Governor-General inexpedient to fence round a section of British territory in the centre of, Assam with the restrictions of an 'Inner Line'. Tactfully using a report of Williamson of murders by Garos and their passion for human heads, Keatinge pressed for a modified version of the 'Inner Line' Regulation for the Garo Hills for a period of five years. The centre was unrelenting to, the question of applying the 'Line' to the Garo Hills but its Secretary, C.J. Aitchison suggested to Keatinge that it would be better for the Chief Commissioner to frame a fresh regulation for the Garo Hills embodying the provisions he might think suitable.

Accordingly, a draft regulation was submitted by the Chief Commissioner in June 1875. Exception was taken to this draft on the ground that although the term 'Inner Line' did not occur in it, the provisions that empowered the Chief Commissioner to declare any part of the Garo Hills to be closed and to prohibit all British subjects not residents of the district from entering the closed part of the district without a licence virtually authorised the Chief Commissioner to demarcate

35. Ibid., No.17.
36. F.R.P., October 1874, No.15; F.R.P., March 1875, No.3.
37. Ibid., F.R.P., March 1875, No.5.
an 'Inner Line' anywhere in the interior of the Garo Hills. If such an approach as advocated by Keatinge were to be permitted, the Government of India noted, it would tantamount to admitting that there was a portion of the British dominion in India which the ordinary safeguards of law and police were on the one hand insufficient to protect the lives of those who entered that portion and that on the other hand inadequate to afford civil protection to the inhabitants from outsiders. In reply to this Keatinge reminded the Government of India that he had no wish to restrict communications between the Garo Hills and the plains. Still concerned that a special law should be brought into force to protect the Garos he pointed out even the Khasis were not allowed to lease land to plainsmen without their Deputy Commissioner's permission.

After much correspondence between the centre and the province on this matter, approval was given by the former to what became Regulation 1 of 1876, also called the Garo Hills Regulation, 1876, which came into operation for a period of five years from 1 April 1876. Section 5 to 8 of the 'Inner Line' Regulation formed the basis of this Regulation. It prohibited persons not residents of the Garo Hills from engaging in working forest products, trading in arms and ammunition and practicing inoculation without a licence. Offenders were to be punished by a fine not exceeding Rs.100 for the first offence and Rs.150

or imprisonment for a term of three months for each subsequent offence. It was also made unlawful for persons not being natives of the Garo Hills to acquire any interest in land in the district. It was further laid down that killing of elephants by any person in the district was prohibited. 40

Before the expiry of this Regulation on 31 March 1881, the Assam Chief Commissioner, Sir Steuart Bayley, applied to the Government of India for its extension for a further period of one year. Major H.3. Peet, the Deputy Commissioner, Garo Hills considered that much of the Regulation could be dispensed with, its place being taken by the general laws in force in other parts of the province on the subject which it treated. The only portion of the Regulation which he proposed expressly to retain was the fifth section which concerned the prohibition of the acquisition of land within the district by persons not natives of the Garo Hills. 41 This time without any hesitation the extension was given. The Garo Hills Regulation, 1876, ceased to be in force on 31 March 1882 but provisions were made by the Garo Hills Regulation 1 of 1882 to re-enact certain provision of the earlier Regulation to restrict the exploitation of forest products and the transfer of land. 42

Scheduled District

More important for the whole of the province was the

40. F.J.P., March 1876, No.18.
42. Assam Administration Report 1882-83, p.76; The Gazette of India, 22 July 1882, p.277; The Assam Gazette, 5 August 1882, p.346
Scheduled District Act (Act XIV) of 1874 passed on 8 December 1874, "to provide readier means than now exist for ascertaining the enactments" in force in the various parts of British India which had not been under the general acts and regulations. Section 3 of the Act provided that the Local Governments with the previous sanction of the Governor-General-in—Council, could, by notification, declare enactments which were actually in force in any part of any such district and which were not. The whole of the Chief Commissioner\textsuperscript{\textregistered}hip of Assam was to be a Scheduled District, but the Act was declared to be in force in Assam only on 3 November 1877.\textsuperscript{43} With the enforcement of Act XIV of 1874, the Garo Hill Act XXII of 1869 and Act VI of 1835 for the Khasi and Daintia Hills were removed from the statute books.\textsuperscript{44} Under this same Act the Assam Frontier Tracts Regulation (Regulation 2 of 1880) was brought into force "to provide for the removal of certain frontier tracts in Assam inhabited or frequented by barbarous or semi-civilized tribes from the operation of enactments in force therein." The Regulation empowered the Chief Commissioner to direct any enactment in force in a Frontier Tract would cease to be so, but not affecting the criminal jurisdiction of any court over European British subjects.\textsuperscript{45}

The Garo, Khasi and Daintia Hills not being situated

43. The Assam Gazette, 10 November 1877, p.383.
44. S. Chaube, op.cit., p.15.
on the frontier but being surrounded entirely by British territory it was not considered possible to extend to these tracts—Regulation 2 of 1880. Doubts were expressed whether the Criminal Procedure Code (Act X of 1872), was applicable to the two districts as the Scheduled District Act had repealed the Gato Hills Act of 1869 but not the Code.46 The Chief Commissioner was informed by the Governor-General-in-Council that the Criminal Procedure Code had come into force in these districts when the Scheduled District Act came into force in the S.P. r^nCj6"ilrrn^ro&3T877. To prevent difficulties arising out of this matter, the Governor-General suggested that it might be desirable to bring out an amended regulation to remove the doubts.47 Consequently, Regulation III of 1884 was brought into force in all the hill districts and frontier tracts of Assam. Under its provisions, the operation of the enactments relating to civil and criminal procedure, court fees, stamps, transfer of property and registration was barred48. The Regulation was made applicable to the Garo, Khasi and Zaintia Hills districts on 5 November 1884.49

Act XXII of 1869 had authorized the Lieutenant Governor of Bengal to settle by compensation the land claimed

47. A.S.R., F.P., April 1884, No.27.
49. The Assam Gazette. 22 November 1884.
by Zamindars on the estates in Goalpara and Mymensingh bordering the Garo Hills. With this object in view a boundary was laid down between Goalpara and the Garo Hills by Thomas Beckett in 1873. For reasons which are not quite clear, Beckett did not invariably follow Kelso's boundary of 1854 which laid down the southern boundary of the Goalpara district. In places Beckett carried his line considerably further north and excluded from the district of Goalpara blocks of land, some of which covered areas six to seven square miles. The Zamindars naturally objected to the summary extinction of the rights they had formerly exercised over the lands lying to the north of Kelso's and south of Beckett's boundary and instituted civil suits against the Government. A commission comprising the Deputy Commissioners of the Garo Hills and Goalpara districts was appointed to enquire into the claims and assess damages if any. After protracted negotiations the Zamindars were induced to withdraw their suits and accept the new boundary which was sanctioned by Government. The whole of the land claimed by the Gauripur Zamindar was relinquished by him in perpetuity in consideration of the receipt of an annuity of Rs.7164 representing the average profits of the cultivated land.

52. Certain Garo mahals bordering on Kalumalupara (called Aurangabad) were purchased by the Zamindar of Gauripur in 1849. B.B. Bhattacharjee, The Garos and the English, p.186.
and also the estimated value of a proportion of the waste land. The Mechpara Zamindar relinquished his claims for a payment of Rs.14,700 which was twenty times the average rent of the land he claimed. Rs.840 and Rs.4975 extinguished the claims of the Zamindars of Bijni and Karaibari respectively. Within these arrangements the Bijni Zamindars ented to Government managing the land in dispute, Government paying to the Zamindar 75 per cent, of all rents and profits, retaining 25 per cent. as cost of management. In Clechpara the land between the two boundaries was divided into A and B mahals. The B mahals situated in the plains were to be managed by the Zamindar who would retain 85 per cent, of all rents and profits paying Government 15 per cent, for protection and general aid furnished. The A mahals were to be managed by Government on the same system as agreed with the Bijni Zamindar. The Karaibari Zamindar similarly worked out an arrangement on the 75 - 25 per cent. division of rents and profits.

Following the establishment of British authority over the entire Garo Hills, its Deputy Commissioner was called upon to suggest definite proposals for the settlement and management of the district. In September 1878 Peet proposed that the district should be divided for revenue purposes into seven maugas, five of which were to be in the hills and two in

54. Ibid.
the plains. Four of the hill mauzas which were to continue paying a house tax should have a Bengali, Garo or Koch Flauzadar whose duty would be to make an annual record of villages under his supervision, to receive revenue, to watch the timber mahals, to report periodically on the state of affairs, to give notice of any important occurrence and generally to be the channel of communication between the Deputy Commissioner and the Laskars. The Flauzadars were to have no judicial or police powers. Mauza 5 Peet suggested should be managed directly by the Deputy Commissioner as it comprised the land of the last of the Bemulua Garos "and must be worked cautiously." Finally he suggested that the plains mauzas 6 and 7 should have Bengali Mauzadars who should be literate and able to measure land. Peet also suggested that the minimum rate of house tax in the district should range from Re.1 to Rs.3. Till then the minimum was 8 annas and the maximum Rs.5.5, "the former too little and the latter very rarely if ever paid as it is too high." In the two plains mauzas where no house tax was collected he suggested that the land revenue should be fixed at 8 annas per bigha on cultivated land and Re.1 on homesteads. The plains Hauzadars should receive Rs.50 per month and the hill Mauzadars Rs.25 per month. Peet had advocated these schemes as the existing system of collecting revenue was "vicious in the extreme." He knew it had not hitherto been the intention of Government to "harass the Garos
by taking the demandable revenue to the uttermost farthing. But on the strength of this we have gone to the other extreme and have left them to pay what they chose." It was out of question that the solitary Sarbarakar, and his assistants, could effectively levy the revenue of 3000 square miles. The Sarbarakar had hitherto confined his work to look after the collection of revenue from the Zamindari lands and the timber mahals to the total neglect of the hills proper. Not to retrench the present Sarbarakar, Peet suggested that he could become Mauzadar of mauza 7.55

The Chief Commissioner sanctioned the proposals with slight changes. There were to be four hill Mauzadars and two plains Mauzadars. The office of Sarbarakar UQS dispensed with, or rather the office was absorbed into the new structure. Four Garo Christians educated by the American Baptist missionaries and a Bengali Muslim were appointed to the five other posts. Revenue was to be collected from the Laskars and Nokmas and forwarded to Tura through police constables stationed in the mauzas. These changes were definitely an improvement not only in revenue collection but also from the clearer jurisdiction of the several Laskars. It being no uncommon thing for a village to pay revenue through two or different Laskars in as many years. Moreover, villages were so often removed or had their names change that without actual inspection it was

impossible to check the revenue tendered by the **Laskars**.

These changes in the Garo Hills was followed by a proposal from the Chief Commissioner to increase and to reduce the house tax in the two districts. The rates had remained unchanged since they were introduced in the Daintia Hills. Of the 32 British villages in the Khasi Hills, twenty were assessed at Rs.2 and two villages at Re.1 Per house, the latter being a concession to the supposed little or no cultivation but which through the development of trade chiefly in limestone had become richer than the neighbouring villages. Those Garo villages earlier assessed at 8 annas per house were made to pay an increased tax of Re.1 per house. Other Garo villages paid taxes ranging from Rs.2.2.2 to Rs.5.5.5. Government was aware that whereas certain British subjects were taxed very lightly others were taxed a very high rate. It was therefore necessary to enhance the rate of tax on the Daintias to Rs.2 and to reduce as well as enhance the existing rate for the Garo. Captain H. St. P. Maxuell, the Deputy Commissioner Garo Hills put forward a proposal that the tax on the Garos should range from Rs.2 to Rs.3 depending on the area they resided. The house tax on the Daintias was raised to Rs.2

57. A.S.R., R.A.P., March 1885, l\b.1. The Uar area is the southern foothills of the Khasi Hills.
per house and come into force on 1 January 1886. Mindful of the reaction to the imposition of taxefi in the early 1860's the Chief Commissioner desired that the Deputy Commissioner should take every opportunity to personally explain the rise in tax to the people so that it would be made without exciting suspicion and alarm. Likewise the Government of India approved and sanctioned the house tax of Rs.2 and Rs.3 in parts of the Garo Hills in lieu of the multiplicity of rates. These rates also came into force on 1 January 1886.59

Since the house tax was levied on each house and not on households the Daintias began to evade payment in a very novel manner. They began constructing houses with connecting roofs with the intention that many families should pay the one tax. Government found in 1889-90 that the number of tax paying houses had decreased by 648 to that which were enumerated in 1884-85. Allowing an ordinary increase, the Deputy Commissioner, Major H. Maxwell believed that around a thousand householders evaded the tax. He therefore asked for the Chief Commissioner's sanction to issue an order that semi-detached houses should be taxed as two houses.50 In April 1890 Maxwell was accordingly instructed to levy the tax in the manner he had suggested.51

As there was no legal authority for the imposition

58. Ibid., Iib.12.
59. ibid., No.23.
61. Ibid., Wo.24.
of a house tax and other taxes in the hill districts of the province, the Chief Commissioner D. U. Quinton considered in November 1890 the advisability of extending the Assam and Revenue Regulation to the hill districts. But, before taking any action in the matter he wished to have the opinion of the Deputy Commissioners of the districts. G. Godfrey of the Khasi and Daintia Hills stated in reply that the legality of the house tax or any other tax had never been disputed if the district and arrears were of extremely rare occurrence. He was of the opinion that the revenue affairs of the district could be managed very well without the introduction of the Regulation referred to. U. Teunon, the Deputy Commissioner Garo Hills in the same tenor wrote that in the Garo Hills and in other hill districts executive orders were preferred in all cases to legislative enactments. Moreover, he noted that the provisions of the Regulation was generally inapplicable to the hills. It appears that the Government taking into consideration what these and other district officers expressed made no orders to legalise the levying of taxes in the hill areas under the Assam administration.

When the two plains mauzas of the Garo Hill came under settlement in 1878-79 it was found by Peet that a class calling themselves jotdars claimed, held and sublet land as

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63. Ibid., No. 13.
64. Ibid., No. 14.
forming part of lots granted to them by the Zamindar. It was decided, however, not to recognize their claims but to deal with the actual cultivators directly. In explanation of this course of action Peet wrote as follows:

It may seem at first sight that this procedure bears hardly on the jottars, but besides the fact that most of the claims are imaginary (or at least unsupported by anything but the bare assertion of the claimant), it seems from all I can gather that jots made by the zamindars could at any time be cancelled. In fact a jotdar seems to be simply a temporary farmer, removable at will. Government not being in the zamindars position, is quite legally entitled to cancel all the jots, and in the interest of the greater number, should I think do so. 65

Sir Steuart Bayley, the Chief Commissioner, approved Peet's views and leases were accordingly issued to the occupant cultivators. 66 A later Deputy Commissioner, C.G. Kennedy reported that despite Government safeguarding the cultivators, jottars had been allowed to creep in between Government and the ryot and that they were realizing from the actual cultivators rents equivalent to three to four times the revenue they paid to Government. Kennedy, therefore, proposed that they should be called upon to show cause why their leases should not be cancelled and their lands settled with the persons actually in occupation. 67 The Deputy Commissioner then proceeded to take action to give effect to this proposal in anticipation of

66. Ibid.
the Chief Commissioner's sanction. Sir U.E. Uard then Chief Commissioner, was unwilling to sanction the proposal as Kennedy had not given any information as to the areas over which the intended proposal should apply; to the proportion of land within such areas sublet by the Jotdars and as to the rents paid by the cultivating tenants.

When the matter was referred to Calcutta, Government replied that prima facie it appeared important, apart from the question of income, to keep out middlemen and to maintain the Government in direct touch with the cultivators as far as possible, especially in a new province. Before any final orders could be passed the Government of India wanted a full statement on Ward's orders to Kennedy's first letter on the subject. In a lengthy reply to the Government of India, Uard informed that from Kennedy's note it appeared to him that the Jotdars "were not middlemen on any scale worth taking into account." The average land held by them was less than 75 bighas per man and the rates of rent charged by them to their sub-tenants was very moderate, ranging from 11 annas 10 paise to Re.1.2 per bigha in the plains mauzas. The Chief Commissioner came to the conclusion that Kennedy, "an officer whose discretion in these matters cannot always be relied upon," had taken an exaggerated view of the case and that no evils had been shown to exist calling for action, such as that proposed by him. As no

68. Ibid., lbs.69-74.
70. Ibid., to.172.
further correspondence is there on the subject ue may assume that Ward had the last word in the matter.

Khasi States

(a) Constitutional Position

The constitutional position of the Khasi states, just as the position of other Indian states, was through the operation of paramountcy and political practice. The essential feature of the arrangement was that the states were not part of British India as the Daintia and Garo Hills and the British villages in the Khasi Hills were. The British Government exercised paramountcy based mainly on treaties, engagements, sanads and usages but at the same time its supremacy existed independently of them. It was the right and duty of Government while scrupulously respecting all treaties and engagements with the states to preserve peace and good order in the states. The operation of paramountcy also meant that the Khasi chiefs had at all times to be loyal to the British crown, that the recognition of any person as the chief of a state was within the exclusive discretion of the paramount power, and that where the interest of the paramount power was involved or the general welfare of the people of a state was seriously affected.

71. The number of British villages in the Khasi Hills rose to 35 by the turn of the century. B.C.Allen, op.cit., p.10p. These were Bairong, Jirngam, Laitkrok, Laitlyngkot, Langkadieng, Maubehrarkhar, Waumluh, Maupunkyrtiang, Mausmai, Mauthang, Sohkyllum, Barbisu, Mordon, Mynteng, Wongbah, Nongiri, Nongkroh, Nonglait, Nonglang, Nonglongkien, Nongpooh, Nongriangsi, Nongriat, Mongshluit, Nongthymmai, Ramdiat, Saitsohpen, Sinai, Sinai Maushanrut, Sohbar, Tymar, Tynriang, Tynrong, Tyrna and Unuuh.
as the result of the action of a ruler, the British Government had the discretion, and authority to intervene. Subject to these conditions, the chiefs were generally left with the administration of their respective states.  

The assumption of power over India by the ivpun in 1858 brought in a more definite and formal relationship between the twenty five Khasi states and the British Government. In 1859, following W.3. Allen's report, it was decided to require the execution of a general agreement by each of the Khasi chiefs on their succession with the district's Deputy Commissioner who was also to function as Government's Political Officer in relation with the states. Periodic changes in the terms of the agreements taken from the chiefs were made between 1864 and 1875 when it was decided that appointments of chiefs should rest with the Governor-General in the case of the larger Khasi states and with the Chief Commissioner in the case of smaller states. In November 1875 the system of signing agreements was abolished altogether. Instead it was decided that recognition given by Government of a succession to the Khasi states should take the form of a sanad conferred upon them instead of an agreement taken from them. After 1877 the sanctioning authority became the Chief Commissioner in the case of Syiem, Deputy Commissioner in the case of Lyngdohs, Sirdars and Uahadadars. The system continued till 1912 when it was

73 C. U. Aitchison, op. cit., pp. 84-87.
decided that the position and status of Syiem was not such as to warrant the issue to them of sanads by the head of the province and that in future the sanads should be given by the Commissioner of the Surma Valley and Hill Districts Division. 

(b) **Intervention**

The British intervention in the Khasi states took various forms, over maladministration; over discontent of a state's subjects with their chiefs; over law and order and in most cases over disputed succession to chieftainship. Often advantage was taken of internal dissentions and inter-village disputes within a Khasi state to allow villages to secede from states and become British villages. We may here mention only some cases of such occurrence. Following the example, in 1864 of the inhabitants of Tynrong and Langkadieng, two villages of the Sheila state opting among themselves to become British villages, the elders of the village of Nongbah of the same state, in September 1870, presented a petition to allow their village to be separated from Sheila and to become subjects of the British Government. The Assistant Commissioner, D.B. Shaduell personally met the villagers who affirmed their intention. The village was accordingly made a British village under a Sirdar after the usual agreement had been taken from them. 

Marbisu village a quarrel arose in 1872-73. The Syiem claimed pertaining to his state while the villagers claimed to be an independent community. The matter was referred to arbitration and an order was later on passed that the villages be given three years time whether they would return to their allegiance to the Syiem. Well aware that should they become British subject and thereby be liable to the payment of house tax, after the three years 149 persons voted in favour of remaining under British management to 39 others who voted in favour of remaining subject to the Syiem.  

In 1872 the inhabitants of Nonglait village were refused permission to be released from dependence upon the Sirdarship of Maudon. In May 1888 the village (comprising twenty three houses) presented a petition renewing their request for separation. Although Government was not keen to see too many British villages scattered throughout the Khasi Hills it agreed in June that year to the separation of Nonglait from Maudon Sirdarship.

In the case of twenty five villages of Khyrim state wishing to become British subjects over a dispute with their Syiem in 1878, the Government did not consider it expedient to take over the villages "for it would be a bad precedent to relieve the Siem even if he wished it." The dispute originated

76. F.P.C., August 1877, Mo.295.
over the refusal on the part of these villages to a demand by the Syiem that they should pay a house tax and higher hat duties. So adamant were these people that their Syiem was raking excessive demands that they practically severed themselves from the authority of the Syiem. The dispute was for a time settled by Government appointing from among these villages four Sirdars to manage their affairs and that any serious and difficult case or dispute should be referred to and decided by the Deputy Commissioner. In 1890 several applications were filed by the people of these villages requesting that they should revert to Khyrim. The Deputy Commissioner, Godfrey enquired into the matter locally in November 1891 with the result that the authority of the Syiem was restored.

The system of administering Sheila state by four Uahadadars posed a problem for the Government. Frequent complaints were made to the district authorities of the maladministration of the Uahadadars and this was coupled with a desire to have their chiefs removed. The different Deputy Commissioners who went into these complaints came up with three alternatives for the administration of the state, that Sheila should have one Uahadadar; that the chief should

80. A.S.R., F.P., March 1874, No.13; F.P., June 1887, 1\nb.5.; F.P., May 1895, (to.10.)
be a Syiem and that the state should be taken over by the
British Government. But when these suggestions were put to
the people their reply was for an adherence to their old
custom and, therefore, _unadadarship_ was retained. If no
change came in Sheila, that of having two _Syiem_ for Fláulong
was discontinued in 1875. Shai the senior _Syiem_ was convicted
by the Deputy Commissioner, Bivar, with the unanimous approval
of the state _durbar_ of committing robbery. The Government of
India approved Bivar's suggestion that Shai should be
removed and that Maulong should henceforth have one _Syiem_.

Of the many instances of British intervention in
the Khasi states mention may also be made to the deposition of
Mudon Singh, _Syiem_ of l\bangstoin for his gross misconduct in
deliberately hushing up three serious cases of murder. All
cases were reported to the _Syiem_ who after ascertaining the
truth of the allegations held out threats against anyone who
furnished any information to Government. This threat and other
instances of oppression created a general discontent among
the people of the state against their _Syiem_. Eventually one of
his subjects made his way to Shillong by a circuitous route
and informed M.A.Gray, the Deputy Commissioner, as to what had
occurred. An enquiry was made in 1893 which resulted in the
_Syiem's deposition_.

82. A.S.R., F.P., August 1876, Nos.15-17; F.P., Dune 1887, No.5.
84. A.S.R., F.P., Duly 1903, p.4. Hereinafter referred to as
D.Herbert, _Report on Successions to Siemships in the
Khasi Hills_.
The most important political matter that called for Government's attention in 1903-1904 were the gory murders by the Syiem of Mausynram, his brother and a number of other persons on two persons. In one case a woman was shot because she objected to the attachment of a certain property by the Syiem, Symburai. In the second case, which was a particularly brutal case, a man was killed in cold blood in the Syiem's house, the body being afterwards removed to the jungle where an arrow was plunged into the stomach, in order, it was supposed to make believe that the deceased had been shot in a fight by one faction opposed to the Syiem. The case was tried by a Special Commissioner who convicted the Syiem and the others involved on both counts. The Syiem and some of his adherants were sentenced to death and the others to transportation for life. On appeal all the sentences were commuted to transportation for life to the Andamans.85

When ill health made it difficult for Klur Singh, Syiem of Khym to attend to public affairs he applied in August 1902, that his two nephews be entrusted with the management of the state. The Deputy Commissioner, Captain D. Herbert, was reluctant to allow the request as the two persons would make the most of the opportunity to strengthen their

85. Assam Administration Report 1903-1904, p.5. The Syiem was released in 1926 but was not allowed to return to Mausynram and compelled to reside in Shillong under certain conditions. C.U. Aitchrson, op. cit., p.88.
position as candidates for Syiemship were the office to become vacant during the regency. He also feared that they would do anything to allay the discontent prevailing in the twenty five villages which had of late opposed the Syiem. Herbert proposed the appointment of Babu Hajotn Kissor Singh, a head clerk in the sub-divisional office of Dowai, an "intelligent, active, tactful and absolutely reliable person" as eminently fit for the office of Dewan, who should be empowered to exercise criminal, civil and administrative powers ordinarily exercised by the Syiem. Sir H.B.Fuller, the Officiating Chief Commissioner accepted the views of Herbert and gave his consent, to the temporary arrangement of Babu Hajotn Kissor Singh as Dewan. A year later when the Syiem's health showed no signs of improvement, the term of the Dewan was extended. Towards the close of 1903 Klur Singh was restored as it was not thought desirable for political reasons to further extend the stop-gap arrangement. Klur Singh's authority was short lived as he died on 26 December 1903. At a durbar held at Smit on 7 January 1904 Dakhor Singh obtained a majority of the elector's votes and was subsequently proclaimed Syiem on 28 March 1904.

(c) Succession

The most significant change in relation with the

87. Ibid., p.15.
89. Ibid., No.9.
Khasi states, however, was that succession rights in the Syiemships changed over a period of time. Bivar was of the opinion that Syiems were elected, and Keatinge relying on the Deputy Commissioner’s local knowledge and long residence in the hills accepted his views. During the early years of Keatinge’s tenure Syiemship had been awarded to the person who had received the largest number of votes from the whole adult population. Bivar’s proceedings was not, however, uniform or consistent. Towards the close of his term, Keatinge revised his views on the manner of succession to the Khasi Syiemships as the Khasis did not always subscribe to Bivar’s views and that every election which had been made on the basis of election since the formation of the Chief Commissionership had been appealed against. The Chief Commissioner, therefore, directed that full enquiries should be made for the purpose of ascertaining more explicitly what grounds existed for the adoption of the principle of election and on certain other points in connection with the custom of succession to the Syiemships. 

Exhaustive enquiries were accordingly made by Bivar’s successor U.S. Clarke. The conclusions at which he arrived at were that the office of Syiem was not elective but was hereditary going in regular succession to the Syiem’s nearest male relation from the female line; that candidates

90./A.S.R., F.P., March 1902, Mo.15.
must be blood relations of a Syiem and that on the death of a Syiem the next heir in regular line came forward and proclaimed himself Syiem with the consent of the family and the durbar. Clarke's opinion was "that election conduces towards division in the communities and to much bitter feeling." He proposed that an election

should only be held on the demand of the durbar, who should, on the death of a Siem, be summoned, with the members of the Siem's family, and be called on to nominate the new Siem. The fact of the nomination should be formally recorded, and the person nominated should, no reason against his appointment existing, be forthwith proclaimed Siem.

The Chief Commissioner, Steuart Baydeytgregorved this proposal which was then and later accepted as an authoritative rule on the subject.

These sentiments were first tested in the disputed succession in Nongstoin. On the deposition of Mudon Singh an election was held on 13 April 1894 to elect a new Syiem. Two candidates presented themselves, Rabon, cousin of the late Syiem and Indro#. The former was elected Syiem by a majority of 572 votes, against 559 and was confirmed as Syiem. Rabon died in 1897 and his brother, Mon« was appointed Syiem without an election. Souon, brother of Mudon Singh claimed that he too was eligible for Syiemship» but Arbuthnott, the Deputy Commissioner would not allow the family of Mudon to have any

influence in the state and, therefore, no elections were held. In this connection the remark of Arbuthnot is worth quoting:

I am altogether opposed to the election system. It only leads to bribery and generates party feeling, and is adverse to the interests of the people. Obviously if a Siem knows that his nearest relation will not succeed, as a matter of course, the Siem for the time being and his coterie make hay while the sun shines. I also believe that elections are an innovation consequent on our rule and contrary to Khasi custom.  

Although this succession had not been done according to the rule laid down by Clarke, the Chief Commissioner, Sir Henry Cotton upheld the succession as the Deputy Commissioner was not prepared to recommend for confirmation the appointment of the candidate who might have received the majority vote. It therefore appears that the district and provincial governments had as much or more to say regarding the changing mode of succession as did the durbar or adult population of a state.

The most interesting case of Syiemship succession was that of Cherra. On the death of Hajon Manik on 25 May 1901, Herbert reported that the people of the state had held three durbars on 26, 29 and 30 May and by a large majority had nominated Roba Singh of the house of Ram Singh to be their Syiem. A minority were in favour of Chandra Singh, a nephew.

93. D.Herbert, op.cit., p.4.
94. A.S.R., P.P., April 1898, No.35.
of Hajon Manik. By Cherra custom Chandra Singh was disqualified for the Syiemship as all the female members of his family had
died, which was considered a curse by the Khasis. He was further disqualified as he was related to Hajon Manik who had
not been considered Syiem by the people of Cherra as he was not permitted to cremate the dead body of Ram Singh. The act of cremating a deceased Syiem confirms according to Cherra custom the appointment of a Syiem. Things would not have taken a turn towards elections and re-elections and Government would have been spared the embarrassment that was to come had Sir Henry Cotton, the Chief Commissioner not doubted the manner by which Roba Singh had been nominated. He instructed Herbert to convene the Khadarkur, the representatives of the founding clans of Cherra, to give their verdict on the succession and that should Chandra Singh's claims not be consented to, there should be an election by the Cherra people.  

Eight of the twelve men of the Khadarkur consented to the election of Chandra Singh. Four others wanted Roba Singh. Herbert had interpreted Cotton's orders to mean that if the durbar of the Khadarkur was not unanimous an election by the people of Cherra should be held. When the case came before Cotton he reminded Herbert in reply that an election by the people of Cherra was improper as it was not called for by the durbar. The Deputy  

96. A.5, R., F.P., November 1901, No.3.  
97. Ibid., Nos.4-5.
Commissioner's order for an election by the people of the state was set aside and Chandra Singh was appointed Syiem. Chandra Singh was not to be Syiem for long. Reports were received by Government of alleged acts of oppression by the Syiem, and of violence at Cherra, Memorials from those supporting Roba Singh finally made Government review afresh its earlier decision. The Governor-General, Lord Curzon, played an important role in this matter. So as to familiarise himself with what had happened at Cherra he ordered Herbert to meet him at Calcutta. What transpired between them is not quite sure. We may, however, infer that Herbert was able to personally inform the Viceroy that Roba Singh had better claims for the office than did Chandra Singh for their meeting was followed by Curzon's minute on the succession case in which he stated that he was reluctantly compelled to come to the conclusion that the recognition of Chandra Singh as Syiem could not be confirmed and that an election by the inhabitants of Cherra should be held as ordered by Herbert on 9 July 1901.

There was no actual contest in the election fixed for 3 April 1902 as Chandra Singh not only withdrew and declined to stand as a candidate by general election, but he and the eight Wyntris of the Khadarkur retired altogether.

100: Ibid., Ab.10.
from Cherra and were at Shillong at the time of the election. 747 voters were present. Herbert enquired whether the people wished to vote for Roba Singh or any other candidate and as all present were in favour of Roba Singh, he counted their number and declared the man to be duly elected, Roba Singh was confirmed as 5yiem of Cherra in a sanad of appointment. His position was made more firm when Chandra Singh was called upon to return the sanad granted to him.

Convinced that he still had a legitimate claim, Chandra Singh addressed two memorials to the Secretary of State for India for him to reconsider the election proceedings just concluded. Curzon in forwarding the memorials advised his superior to "confirm our proceedings and to reject the two memorials..." The Secretary of State, George Hamilton did just this. Chandra Singh was informed that Hamilton was not willing to interfere on his behalf. Things would have ended with this letter but the issue was taken up in the House of Commons by a Mr. Ueir who put the question to Hamilton's successor St. Donh Brodrick, on 18 February 1904, why Henry Cotton's decision was reversed by the Government of India and whether the question of succession would be reconsidered.

103. Ibid.
105. Ibid., Nos.10,18.
Brodrick replied:

The Government of India, having regard to precedents and to all the circumstance of the case, were unable to approve the recommendation of the Chief Commissioner that the decision of the majority of the Durbar, at which only the twelve heads of the clans constituting the State were present, should be accepted, and ordered a popular election to be held, at which Roba Singh was chosen unanimously. The Government of India thereon confirmed Roba Singh as chief. The case has been very fully considered both by the Government of India and the Secretary of State in Council. I see no reason for reopening the question.109

Ueir raised another question on 4 August 1904. Dakhor Singh's (of Khyrim)- election being decided by a majority of the votes of the Myntris, Ueir asked whether there was any reason why the election to the Cherra Sylemship should not be decided under similar conditions.110 To this Brodrick replied, "There is nothing in the circumstances reported to me concerning the succession in Khyrim to make me modify the opinion expressed in my Answer of the 18 February." The Cherra succession dispute finally came to a close when Roba Singh cremated the body of Ram Singh on 6 May 1908.

Petitions were made to Government by the Syiemship of Khyrim, Hnngkhla, Nongstoin and Plylliem against the principle followed in the succession to the Cherra Sylemship.

110. Hansard, Commons, 4 Series, Vol. 139, 1904, p. 967.
111. Ibid.
Cautious that more problems might arise were the system used in Cherra applied to the other Syiemships, the Government of India ordered an enquiry to be made by Herbert regarding the custom prevailing in the matter of appointments to Syiemships in the Khasi Hills. Communicating this decision to Herbert, the Chief Commissioner informed that the purpose of the report was to ensure uniformity of action on the part of Government as to the procedure it would adopt in future "since it is obvious that in the past there have been discrepancies both in theory and practice."

Herbert concluded his report on 28 January 1903. We may here make a summary of that report. Herbert considered neither Alien nor Clarke were able to go sufficiently into detail in making their enquiries and consequently the important variations of procedure which prevailed in the Khasi Syiemships were not brought to light. Both Allen and Clarke had laid down general principles for all states. Herbert's enquiries showed him that there were difficulties in principle and procedure in almost every state and that no general rule would suit the circumstances of all the Syiemships. He found the people generally adverse to popular elections and anxious for a restoration of the old customs on nomination in the first instance.

114. Ibid., Mo.14.
115. "TbTd", No.16
116. Ibid., Herbert to Secy, to Chief Commissioner, 4 February 1903, pp.1-3.
instance by certain constitutional electors. In certain states a bare majority of the electors was sufficient for the appointment of a, Syiem, in certain others the electors were to be unanimous in their decision. The number of electors varied from four in Nobosohphoh and Mausynram to seventy two electors in Maharam, while only in Langrin was the Syiem to be elected by popular elections.

Herbert recommended that the first step to be taken by the Deputy Commissioner on a vacancy occurring in a Syiemship should be to call on electors to nominate a new Syiem and that only in the event of objections to such nominations being lodged, and in certain cases if the electors were not unanimous should he proceed to the state in question and formally record the votes of the electors. In the case of Khyrim, Mylliem, Nongstoin, Myriaw and Rambrai nomination should rest with the majority of the durbar. Popular elections, and here Herbert wanted change, should be held in the case of Wongspung, Mauiong, Nobosohphoh, Bhowal, Langrin and Cherra. In the first four of these states a popular election should only be held if the electoral body failed to agree upon a nomination. For Cherra, Herbert followed the precedent that had been created by the succession of Roba Singh. Finally, for the remaining four states of Nongkhlu, Plaharam, Mausynram and

117. Ibid., Summary, pp.2-11.
118. Ibid., Herbert to Secy, to Chief Commissioner, 4 February 1903, pp.1-3.
Malaisohmat despite precedents of popular elections, Herbert 119 suggested a reversal to the custom of the state.

The Chief Commissioner, Sir.\textsuperscript{3}, B. Fuller generally accepted these suggestions but added that in all cases of dispute over succession where the electors were equally divided, Government should decide as to which candidate had the strongest claim. "Of course," he cautioned, "Government should . . . always reserve to itself a right of refusing to accept a person as Siem whose appointment would be undesirable for any serious reason." Government had exercised in the past the power of setting aside a nominee and it should retain this authority in future, though the cases in which it would be used would be of very rare occurrence.\textsuperscript{120}

The Government of India accepted Herbert's report and the changes in it made by Fuller but wanted a further enquiry into the correct constitution of the electoral body of Cherra. The sanctioned procedure, however, was not to be regarded as stereotyped for all time, but should be open to such revision as might on occasion be suggested by the legitimate evolution of tribal custom. Herbert's successor, Colonel P.R.T. Gurdon met the Cherra people on 3 February 1905 and recorded that the electoral durbar of Cherra comprised the Khadarkur and forty

\textsuperscript{119} Ibid., pp.7-48; F.Ext.P., July 1903, No.59.
\textsuperscript{120} Ibid., F.3. Iffnahan to Secy. Government of India, 22 April 1903.
\textsuperscript{121} Ibid.. U.Dane to Officiating Chief Commissioner - of Assam, 6 July 1903.
one other representative elders of the villages. He was able to cancel Herbert's note that if the Khadarkur was not unanimous an election by the adult males of the state should be held and that the electoral procedure should not be done by popular elections but by the fifty three members of state's electoral durbar. 122

Adjustments in Garo Hills

At about the same time that Government was involved in the Cherra's succession dispute arose a very different issue in the Garo Hills. Though arrangements had been made in 1878-79 with the Bijni Zamindar who controlled the Habraghat estate to a division of the revenue receipts, no attempt was made to survey or demarcate those lands that had been transferred from Habraghat to the Garo Hills. The revenue of a portion of the estate was entirely appropriated by Government in 1880-81 onwards, while in another portion half the revenue was credited to Government and half to certain Garo Laskars between 1880-81 and 1886-87. In 1887 the Government absorbed the whole of the revenue as it did not consider the Laskars entitled to any portion of the revenue. The managers of the Bijni estate were, however, dissatisfied with the small pittance which had from time to time been paid to them. They pointed out that the profits of the land which had been excluded from Habraghat by Beckett's line exceeded the trifling sums they had at long

intervals received, and applied for a survey. Their request was granted in 1899. The survey disclosed that land which had for years been treated as **Khas** was in reality part of the Bijni estate, with the result that Government had to refund some Rs,24,000 to the **Zamindar**. This then led to a demand that Beckett's boundary should be properly laid so that they might know the southern boundary of the Habraghat Khas lands. Henry Cotton sanctioned the survey. O'Donel, a subordinate officer of the Survey of India appears to have run his line without taking the views of the Garos or to anybody in general* and to have left the **Zamindar's** agents to set up their own marks after he had gone away. This action excited the Garo who formed the impression that the Bijni **Zamindar** was intending to take over the land in their hills.

By 1901 the general body of the Garos were excited enough to put themselves in agitation in what was the first and last organised attempt on their part to resist the **Zamindars**. Sonaram Sangma, a dismissed Public Works Department **mohurrir** took the lead in the agitation. He worked up three claims by the Garos, first to the whole of the **Citarazana** lands as **U** proprietors, and further to the whole of the Habraghat **pargana** up to the Brahmaputra. In order to increase the sphere of his operations Sonaram appealed to the hill Garos in the territory south of the **Citarazana** mahal and offered to secure the restoration

to them of the reserved forests, and a complete abolition of all begar or forced labour.

In December 1902 the Dolgoma disturbances took place. About seven hundred Garos marched from the hills across Habraghat to Dolgoma ghat on the Brahmaputra, and notices were posted by their leaders ordering tenants not to pay rent to the Bijni Zamindar. The leaders were arrested and prosecuted. Six men were convicted and sentenced to terms varying from two months to one year. Sonaram was sentenced to one year imprisonment and called on to furnish heavy security and in default committed to jail where he remained till April 1904. Meanwhile, an abortive compromise was made in November 1903 by which fourteen Nokroas agreed to accept 25 per cent, of the ordinary land revenue of the Mazarana lands included in the Bijni mahal on consideration that they abandon for ever all claims of any description to these lands. They subsequently declined the offer when Sonaram put forward claims to the whole of Habraghat as belonging to his wife whose ancestors had allegedly been the chief of all the northern Garos in the first half of the nineteenth century.

Sonaram renewed the agitation on his release.

Further proceedings were taken against him. The convictions

125. Ibid., 3.C.Arbuthnott to H.Le Mesurier, May 1907, pp.7-8.
126. Ibid., p.8; H.Le Mesurier to R.U.Carlyle, 26 November 1907, p.4.
were eventually set aside on appeal by the High Court on 9 day 1905 on the ground of want of jurisdiction, the trials having been held by the Deputy Commissioner Garo Hills, by error at Damra, which though on the Garo Hills - Goalpara border, was actually within the district of Goalpara. \(^{127}\) By then the agitation had taken "dangerous proportions." The Government of India ordered an enquiry be made into the Garo demands. D.C. Arbuthnott, Commissioner of the Surma Valley and Hill (Districts Division was entrusted with the charge of the enquiry. During a tour of three months he visited the Garo Hills and recorded evidence publicly in the presence of all parties concerned after giving full notice to the claimants on both sides. His enquiry was thorough and painstaking and his recommendations were set forth in an exhaustive report submitted in May 1907. Arbuthnott recommended that Beckett's line be retained but that a settlement be made with the Garo villages in Habraghat through their Nokmas on the Flauzadari system, that Government should consider the propriety of the lands purchased from the Bijni lamindar and that should Government consider the grant of any concessions in respect of Nazarana lands, a settlement with the Nazarana Nokmas should be made as was contemplated by the compromise of 1903. \(^{128}\) Concerning the second demand of the Garos, the Commissioner suggested that though "it is to be

\(^{127}\) Ibid., p.8.  
\(^{128}\) Ibid., pp. 1, 24.
regretted that all attempts at further reservation must be abandoned," total disforestation was impracticable and would be a retrograde step. Nevertheless the exclusion of some "worthless areas" from some of the existing reserves was feasible and advisable and that inaccessible and unworkable reserves might be constituted protected forests. 129 To settle the third demand Arbuthnott recommended that the minimum rate for baggage coolies be raised from 4 annas to 6 annas a stage and that for the up-keep of the roads a contract system through local Garo contractors be substituted for the existing arrangements which depended on forced labour. 130

The Government of India approved generally of the proposals made by Arbuthnott. As the Garo's main complaint was against the Bijni Zamindar and not against Government it was impossible fully to meet their claims. Government, therefore, instructed the Lieutenant Governor of Eastern Bengal and Assam to decide whether the circumstances were such as to make it desirable to take steps to dissociate Government formally from any claims regarding Habraghat that might have been brought to the courts. Despite the fact that Government did not recognize the first claim of the Garos, considering the importance of doing all that was reasonably possible to conciliate the leaders of the agitation, it was prepared to agree to any reasonable

129. Ibid., Note on Forest Reservation, p. 5.
130. Ibid., Note on Impressment of Labour, p. 4.
concession that the local Government might consider it advisable to make in respect of this matter. As regards the restoration of reserved forests the Government of India accepted the recommendation of Arbuthnott as "the political reasons in favour of liberality are strong" that no "technical objections should be allowed to stand in the way of giving fair compensation."

Concerning the last grievance Government agreed that the time had come to abolish impressment of labour, replacing it by a contract system, and that the change should be given effect to at once.

Government had yielded to pressure and changes were made on all three counts. As regards the alleged encroachments of the Bijni Zamindar, the Government accepted that the Garos had suffered a loss of some territory under British rule, "but that if any injustice had been done it was impossible to rectify it, since whatever rights the Garos might have originally possessed over the areas now forming part of the Bijni Zamindari, the title of the Zamindar was now good, and the Garos have no legal claim."

Sonaram had everything to lose if he ceased his agitation. He continued his movement but fought a losing issue. He still had sufficient influence to enable him to collect funds from the Garos but the manner in which it was spent was questioned. By 1910-1911 Sonaram lost influence among the Garos generally and the movement slowly petered out.

132. Ibid., p. i.
133. Eastern Bengal and Assam Administration Reports, 1906-1907, p.6; 1908-1909, p. 5.