Conclusions.

The study of the development of the political and social Institutions of the Garos indicates that they existed for centuries and will continue to exist. The Garos were an ancient people. They along with other tribes in north-eastern India were noticed by the Vedic Aryans who called them "Kiratas". In the Ramayana, they were called "Handehas", (obviously after the term "Hande" by which the Garos call themselves), and their habitat as "Manda-Saila" in the Yogini Tantra. The Mahabharata referred to them as "Garudas". Thus the Garos could be said to have already settled down in their present abode when the great Epics were being composed.

From antiquity, the Garos lived in their present habitat in splendid isolation. But this isolation was broken when the Hindu Zamindars came into existence at the base of their hills. Two reasons were mainly responsible for the frequent conflict between the Garos and the Zamindars. One was the chicanery and oppression practised by the Zamindars on the Garos at the frontier markets and their policy of annexation; and the other, was the belief among the Garos that the spirits of their headmen required the soul of others to attend them in the next world.

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3. Ibid.
4. Ibid., P. 96.
Non-interference was the keynote of the Moghul policy towards the Garos. The Zamindars under them were left free to follow any policy towards the Garos. The Moghuls were greatly satisfied after they were richly presented with the products of the hills. Therefore, the greatest advantage possible was taken by these border Zamindars to exact as much money as they could get from the Garos. The natural consequence of this kind of oppressive policy was the chronic enmity between the hill and the plain neighbours.

The British government adopted a wiser and a more magnanimous policy towards the Garos. Under David Scott, the British made every effort to win them over by the spiritual force of the principles of Christianity applied through the medium of the Schools, and it is amazing that within a short time, he was able to bring no fewer than 121 Garo independent Chiefs to enter into agreement with him. Thus, to David Scott belonged the credit of having laid the foundation of good government and influence among the Garos and other hill tribes of north-eastern India.

The kind of government he proposed to adopt for the Garos found an expression in the Regulation X of 1822. This Act was intended to promote the growth of order and civilisation among the hill people, but before the Act could be implemented, he was appointed the first Civil Commissioner of Assam in 1823. After him, his successors neglected the Garos as they were pre-occupied with the affairs of the plains and so the Garos were left to themselves once again for many years. Thus, once an attitude of love and friendship was withdrawn, the Garos returned to their old life of savagery and revengeful raids against the plains. This led Sir William Grey, the Lieutenant-Governor of Bengal, to remark on the Garos in
"They are a blood thirsty set of savages, and deserves extermination. Government is now considering that question." 5. Alas, the British government failed to produce another David Scott. They began to send a number of punitive expeditions against them and as such the history of the Garos from 1823-1866 was full of these expeditions. Yet they failed to tame them and bring them under their subjection. This has driven to the conviction that the most drastic measure of all must be resorted to. Extermination of the Garos had to be considered if the surrounding peoples of the plains were to be rescued from their cruelty. But this extreme measure could be avoided as the British wisely invited the missionaries to work among these savage people. The missionaries struck at the hearts of the people and soon their spirit of savagery and ferocity were tamed and became faithful followers of Christ, thus enabling the British to establish their rule over them for eighty years, that is, from 1867 to 1947.

Although the Garos lived comparatively peaceful during these eighty years of British rule, sporadic uprisings and raids occurred every now and then, the biggest of these being in 1872-73, when obstructions to a survey party was made and one of them murdered by some of the wild Garos of the interior hills. At this, the British resolved that the whole of the district which had hitherto been left to its independence should be brought under the same management as the rest, and in the cold weather of 1872-73, three detachments of Police, from Mymensingh on the south, from Tura on the west, and from Goalpara from the north, marched through the hills which it has been decided to annex. All resistance was easily overpowered, and headmen were appointed, the heads taken in recent raids.

were surrendered and peaceful administration was established.

However, the Garos were not completely reconciled to the foreign rule. They had a number of grievances against the British rule, some of which are:

1. Conversion of the best lands into forest reserves,
2. Imposition of forced labour,
3. Tagging of the plain lands with the zamindary lands and their claim over the Habraghat Bargana in the present Goalpara district. These issues drove the individual Nokmas to file suits against the British government in the courts. But the movement to remove the above grievances gained momentum in the beginning of the present century when Sonaram K. Sangma emerged as their leader. He turned them as the national issue of the whole Garo tribe. Huge amounts of money were collected from all parts of the Garo Hills and the suits against the British went on. Sonaram was partially successful as the British government agreed to abolish forced labour and to stop further conversion of lands to forest reserves. The other issues remained unsolved even today although the demand still continues.

The introduction of the autonomous District Council in the Garo Hills, however, diverted the attention of the Garos. The Garo Hills District Council, under the leadership of Captain Williamson Sangma took up the responsibility of administering over themselves. They set up a new colony at Tura as the headquarters of the District Council and directed the administration from there.

Though the creation of the District Council was a good measure to satisfy the aspirations of the people, it has failed to produce the desired effects in the long run. The reasons are:

1. The District Council had to work under many limitations and difficulties created by the State government.
These limitations are:-

(a) The State government invariably delayed in releasing the money sanctioned for the District Councils;
(b) All the proposed projects have to be approved by the State government;
(c) The annual Budget has to be approved by the State government.

The results were the delays and irregularities of the District Councils.

2. The other limitation of the District Council is constitutional, as all the Acts, rules and regulations passed by the District Council have to receive the assent of the Governor. This constitutional provision also delayed matters to some extent.

3. Other factors which contributed to the unsatisfactory workings of the District Council are the same elements of human weaknesses like corruption, partiality, irresponsibility and indifference to the needs of the people.

On the other hand, the creation of the District Councils produced good results. They are:-

(a) The District Councils provided opportunities for good training for the politicians;
(b) It awakened the political consciousness of the people;
(c) It has done some good to the people by the provision of some social services; and
(d) Above all, it provided employment opportunities to the people.

However, the emergence of Meghalaya as a full-fledged State makes us to think about the advisibility of retention of the District Council. If it is retained, it is quite expensive and many of its works are the duplications of the State government. But if it is abolished, it will require constitutional revision and will have to be done in the teeth of strong public oppositions. But I think that the huge amount of money spent on its establishment could be better utilised for the development of social services.
There were only two original Political Institutions in the Garo Hills, namely, the "NOKMA" and the "VILLAGE COUNCIL". But the nomenclature of these two institutions could not be correctly understood by the early British writers. The "Nokma" has been variously referred to as "Chief", "Headman", "Booneah", "Lushkor", "Locma" or "Lucma", in their accounts. Similarly, "JINGMA CHANGGA" used by Buchanan for Village Council is a misnomer. Besides, the extent of powers and authority of the Nokma were not clearly described by them. They are rather fragmentary and contradictory. The widest estimate of their authority was given by Mills, who wrote, "In former times for three or four generations past, the Chiefs of Rangtoghiri and Dolanghiri were acknowledged lords paramount in the hills, and they had considerable power in the great number of slaves they possessed and were always willing to exercise that power in aid of the government, but the last great Chief Tokul Lushkur died four or five years ago, and has been succeeded by a man deficient in ability and energy, and I believe his power has been greatly diminished by division of property, and by the escapes of his slaves, at any rate we are unable to obtain much assistance and there seems to be no other chief who has any considerable authority and is willing to use it at our direction".  

John Eliot also reported that the "Booneahs decide on all complaints except adultery, murder, and robbery, which are tried by a general assembly of the neighbouring Chiefs ......." It seems that the settlement on adultery, murder and robbery are beyond the power of the Booneahs or Nokmas.

Captain Reynolds wrote of a Chief Moonkual, "The power this man possesses over the people is astonishing, and his will is law."

But the writer does not state the occasions upon which Moonkual exercised power, or the sanctions which he might apply if he were defied. Thus, it is not possible to get a correct idea of the power and authorities which the Garo Chiefs or Nokmas exercised or possessed in the olden days. But the truth is that since there was no authority above them, the extent of their power and authority depended largely on the degree of ability, intelligence and physical strength which every individual Nokma possessed. As the head of the clan, an able Nokma could turn his whole clan into a warring people and other clans into subjection, whereas an artless and incapable Nokma could be reduced to an inferior position or might be compelled to part with some portions of his a'king lands or clan lands. However, the British government has put a stop to this kind of inter-clan wars and each and every Nokma's a'kingland has been well-demarcated. This brings us home the fact that the advent of the British has greatly diminished the authority of the Nokmas and the creation of new offices like the Laskar, Sardar, Mauzadar and the Mandal have further reduced the position of the Nokmas. As a result, the Nokmas today are no other than the nominal heads of their clan and a custodian of his a'king lands. The only economic benefit enjoyed by him is an insignificant sum which he derived out of the A'wil fees or Quit rent.

We do not also get a clear idea of the powers and working of the Village Councils. The fullest and the nearest to truth description was given by Francis Hamilton. The truth was that

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as there was no higher court than the Village Councils, it acted as the final court of adjudication. With the establishment of British administration in the Garo Hills, District Court was set up at Tura which acted as the higher court than the Village councils and heard appeals from them. Thus the village courts no longer enjoyed the supreme power in the settlements of disputes. Today, under the Garo Hills District Council, the Village Councils have been set up in the Garo Hills under Acts passed by the District Council. According to this new set up, the village councils have been given wide powers in looking after the well-being of the people, in maintaining law and order and with power to impose and collect taxes for the benefit of the public within the jurisdiction.

The Office of a Laskar owes its origin to the administrative device made by David Scott. It is, therefore, a legacy of the British rule. Yet, it has become so much a part and parcel of the Garo administrative system that the Garos have accepted it without any shadow of doubt though it was imposed on them by the British at the expense of Nokmaship. On the other hand, under the Garo Hills District Council, his position has been elevated by making him the ex-officio member of the village Council. Yet, it is a pity that the power to fine up to a limit of Rs. 50/- is still retained although the value of money has greatly fallen.

Other criticisms are:

(i) The Laskar has been empowered to try civil, criminal and police cases and fine up to Rs. 50/-. Such responsibilities should not have been given to a man of no education.

(ii) Training Centres should be opened up to train them in the art of trying cases according to customary laws.
(iii) Their emoluments are too meagre (receiving only 10% of the total amount of taxes collected by them within their jurisdiction) considering the amount of work and the risks involved.

(iv) They do not have the full power over revenue matters. He has the power to collect taxes only, assessment being done by the hill Mauzadars.

The post of a Jamadar was created at the expense of the Laskar. Police powers of the Laskars have been transferred to this new office, leaving the Laskars to try civil cases and collect the taxes only. But since it was found complicated and duplication, it has been abandoned before the year was over. Thus, this office was abolished before it was implemented.

The Office of a Sardar is another British legacy. The post was created to assist the Laskar in discharging his duties. He was to help the Laskar in the court proceedings and in carrying summons and messages. He also tried petty cases on behalf of the Laskar whenever he was asked to do so by him. Under the District Council, he continued to be an assistant to the Laskar performing the same tasks assigned by the Laskar. But now, he has all the insignia of a regular government post with uniforms of shorts, shirts and a Belt with an annual remuneration of Rs.100/-. To make Sardarship more meaningful, I suggest that, the Sardars must be men of some education; they must have a thorough knowledge of the customary laws; their remunerations must be raised higher considering the amount of work and risks they have to undertake, and above all, it must be a full-time job.

Trial by ordeals was one of the earliest modes of settling disputes amongst the Garos. The people in general being honest and simple, it acted as an effective instrument in discovering
Another effective instrument in unearthing the truth was an oath which required the accused to take. The swearing being in the nature of cursing oneself to unnatural death, impelled them to confess their guilt before the inevitable curse befalls them. Cases which can not be decided by the above methods were referred to the village courts. The whole proceeding of the court was towards finding out a solution which would be acceptable to both the parties. Once the decisions were made, they were final and binding. The British government under David Scott drew up the rules for the administration of Justice based on those ancient practices. They were later legalised by passing a series of Acts. The Garo Hills District Council passed the administration of Justice Rules in 1953 which sanctioned the functioning of three classes of Courts. But these courts tried and heard appeals only those cases in which the members of both the parties in a suit belong to Schedule Tribes.

In recent years, administration of Justice has become the subject of criticism.

First, the Judges of the District Court are non-Garos and have no knowledge of the Garo customary laws;

Second, the Laskars who are the Judges in the Village courts are not educated;

Third, dates of trials are repeatedly and unnecessarily put off, keeping the cases long pending. This entails a heavy financial burden on them.

Lastly, the customary laws are too varied and they have not yet been compiled and systematised. It is high time that these customary laws are uniformly compiled and followed in these courts.
According to Garo Customary law, a man of another Nokma land or a stranger was required to pay to the Nokma when he cultivates a portion of his land or goes to settle down there. This was a small payment paid either in cash or in kind. This is known as the A'wil fees or quit rent. This was the only kind of tax that was paid in the Garo Hills in the olden days.

During the Moghul rule, the tributary Hindu Zamindars at the foot of the hills exacted all kinds of tributes from the Garos. They levied tolls and cesses on all the articles brought by the hill Garos for sale in the weekly markets at the foot of the hills. House taxes were also imposed on those Garo villages adjoining the plains. These tolls and cesses were paid either in cash or in kind.

For the purpose of assessing and collecting revenues, the British government divided the whole district into three areas, viz., the hill mauzas, the plain mauzas and the Town lands. The Garos living in the hill mauzas were to pay only the House tax and the people of the plain mauzas the land revenues. The town dwellers were required to pay the Homestead land tax. Outsiders were not allowed to exploit the natural wealth of the district without a licence. These restrictions were imposed by various enactments, rules and regulations.

Assessments of House and other taxes were done in the hill mauzas by the hill mauzadars assisted by their mandals and the revenues assessed by them were collected by the Laskars. The hill mauzadars and the mandals were government salaried officers whereas the Laskars received 10% of the gross collections. Land revenues in the plain mauzas were collected by the plain mauzadars who received 10% for the first Rs. 5000 and 5% for the remainder. The townspeople have to deposit the Homestead revenue in the Revenue office at Tura.
The Sixth Schedule of the Constitution conferred on the district Council the power to impose all kinds of taxes within the district. The Garo Hills District Council has a revenue branch with one Executive member in charge along with a Revenue Staff lent by the State government. The Garo Hills District Council has passed a series of Acts, Rules and Regulations enabling the Council to impose and collect those taxes.

The study of the revenue systems in the Garo Hills reveals to us the existence of certain peculiar characteristics:

First, House taxes are imposed in the hill mauzas whereas land revenues are levied in the plain mauzas;

Second, the functions and responsibilities of the hill and the plain mauzadars are different. The hill mauzadars have multifarious duties to perform, whereas the plain mauzadars are to collect the land revenues only;

Third, the hill mauzadars are government salaried officers, the plain mauzadars live on commissions only, and as such they can continue as long as they can perform satisfactorily. The hill mauzadars being government officers are governed by the government rules, and as such, they are more of an administrative rather than a fiscal officer;

Fourth, there is a great deal of difference between the hill and the plain mandals also. The hill mandals act as assistants to the hill mauzadars, whereas the plain mandals are trained and are not to work under the plain mauzadars;

Fifth, the functions entrusted to the hill mauzadars and the Laskars are also overlapping. The hill mauzadars assess the house taxes and the Laskars collect them. Besides, the hill mauzadars count the cattle, buffaloes, settles disputes over succession to Nokmaship and settles the Nokmas' boundaries whenever question
of such nature arises. Other civil cases are settled by the Laskars and thus powers and functions overlap each other.

In view of the overlapping nature of their functions, it may be suggested that their functions should be well-defined.

The picture of the Garo society depicted here has been mainly of the ancient times. Many changes have been taking place in the Garo society since then. The factors responsible for these changes are, the British rule, spread of Christianity and the introduction of western education and the new agricultural techniques. But the greatest impact on the Garo society was made by the spread of Christianity. As a result, two parallel Garo societies exist today, that is, the old traditional Garo society and the Christian society. Yet something of the old is still strongly followed by the members of the new society. For example, the clan and the sub-clan systems are still a part and parcel of the Garo social relationship. Thus the new Garo society can be called an admixture of the old and the modern.

The prevalence of slavery in a wide-scale as pictured in the earliest accounts of the British observers did not receive complete approval of the later British administrators. The statement of Buchanan that the slaves "formed two-fifths of the whole population" has been disapproved by Captain Jenkins when he stated that "the holding of slaves should be confined only to the tributary or independent tribes of the interior of the Garo Hills". Thus, it can be concluded that though slavery existed in the Garo Hills, it has disappeared with the advent of the British.

Garo customary laws are varied and intricate. A variety of customs exists on the same thing in different parts of the district, and it is not possible to enumerate them all. These minor local differences occurred because of their life of isolations within their own villages in the past. But all these local differences are gradually disappearing with the improvement of communications and spread of education. Of course, the conservative sections of the society in the interior are still holding on to them rigidly but the young folks do not care for them. For example, many of the customary laws included in "Asimalja" have no relevance to the young people. Similarly, the laws mentioned in "Dakmalja" are also not observed strictly. Kinds of punishments and the amount of compensation imposed are also different in different places of the district.

The Religious laws are not applicable to the Christians, but the civil, criminal and penal laws still hold good for all sections of the Garo society.

Exogamous marriage is still the usual rule of contracting marriages but even this has lost its ancient rigidity. Laws of A'kim is still the bond that connects the two married couple and their clans. Polygamy and mother-in-law marriage have been forbidden for the Christians. Divorce is also not permitted among the Christians. Laws of inheritance are still the same although there is a divergence of customs as to which daughter should be heiress. The ancient customary laws are also silent about it. Each region has its custom and every family and clan follows whatever they wish to follow. But the most prevalent practice is to select the youngest daughter as the heiress. The modern trend, however, is to select any daughter whom the parents like best.

Most of the laws mentioned under "Nima" are still observed in the villages. Thus, while Christianity, education and modern gove-
rnment brought in their train great changes in their social cus-
toms, practices and mental outlook, the basis of these customs still permeates in the present society.

The Garo tribal religion is complicated and difficult to understand. Nobody has ever attempted to make a serious study and explain its Philosophy, neither is there any man today who could explain them with authority. Under such circumstances, it is feared that the Garo tribal religion might disappear without being known of its deities, philosophy and their value by anybody. All that we know from our studies is that they believe in one supreme Being called Tatara-Rabuga, in some parts and Saljong in other parts of the hills. They also believe in many lesser spirits most of whom are malignant.

They believe that excessive rains or drought or every illness of body or mind and in fact, all kinds of unfavourable circumstances are caused by the wrath of the concerned deities. Therefore, they should be appeased by the offer of animal sacrifices. As such, their whole approach to their religion is to gain the favour of the deities through sacrifices conducted by the priest called Kamal on their behalf.

Their belief in the existence of spirit in man and transmigration of souls resemble Hinduism, whereas their story of creation of the world sounds Biblical.

Various kinds of religious festivals are celebrated by them along with the jhum cycle. But if the jhum method of cultivation is replaced by the wet cultivation as has been greatly encouraged by the modern economists and supported by the present government, all these religious festivals will go out of use and without these, the religion will be reduced to almost nothing.
Therefore, though V. Elwin strongly advocated the preservation of tribal religions in his book, "A Philosophy for NEFA", their existence will largely depend on the type of agricultural technique people will adopt. Other factors which are responsible for the fast diminution of this old religion have been caused by the spread of Christianity and western education, the greatest impact being made by Christianity.

Christianity entered into the Garo Hills as a result of attempts made by the foreign missionaries, the indigenous Christians and the Government Officials.

David Scott was the first to attempt to Christianize the Garos but failed. The next pioneers in this mission were the two Garo converts. They were greatly helped in this venture both by the American missionaries and the government officials. The Government Officers like Captain Jenkins and Captain Morton, being unable to tame the Garos by show of force, rendered all possible helps to the mission. Thus, the American Baptist missionaries, with the support of a few devoted Garo converts extended their mission works throughout the district. The British government having witnessed the good progress of the mission handed over the whole charge of the educational works to them with the whole grant-in-aid. Thus the mission got a free hand in formulating the educational policy and this enabled them to expand their missionary activities through the medium of schools.

On the other hand, the native Garo religion (animism), having no defined philosophy and no promise of better life after death, could not resist the strong force of Christianity. Thus, villages after villages surrendered to the more powerful religion.

Today, as a result of the efforts of the missionaries and the local Christians, about 45% of the Garos have become Christians.