

**PROCEEDINGS OF
NORTH EAST INDIA
HISTORY ASSOCIATION**

TENTH SESSION

SHILLONG : 1989

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TENTH SESSION
SHILLONG : 1989

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The Tenth Session of the North East India History Association was held at the North-Eastern Hill University, Shillong, amidst great enthusiasm and gaiety. This was indeed a memorable occasion in the history of the Association. The Decennial Celebrations aspart, a session was being held for the second time in the same institution and in the same venue that the Association was born ten years ago and the First Session held a year later. The Association is thankful to the authorities of the North-Eastern Hill University and organising it in the befitting manner.

Shri P. G. Marbaniang, Speaker, Meghalaya Legislative Assembly, inaugurated the session which was graced by Shri P. A. Sangma, Chief Minister of Meghalaya, as guest of honour. Professor Iqbal Narain, Vice-Chancellor, and Professor J. P. Singh, Head, Department of History, North-Eastern Hill University—did the Association a great honour as the Chairman of the organising committee and Local Secretary respectively for the session. It was presided over by Professor J. N. Phukan of the Gauhati University. The release of a commemorative Publication of the Organising committee entitled NEIHA DECENNIAL by Professor H. K. Barpujari, the first President of the Association, a decennial symposium on "A Decade of Historical Research in North-East", and colourful cultural programmes of songs and dances of the seven states of the region by the students of NEHU are among the special features of the decennial Celebrations. A record number of one hundred and eighty delegates attended the session in which ninety research papers were presented and discussed in eleven panels.

The present volume is the proceedings of the tenth session of the North East India History Association held at the North-Eastern Hill University on October 12-14, 1989. I am thankful to my colleagues Dr. J. P. Singh, Dr. M. S. Sangma, Dr. Gautam Sengupta, Dr. Soumen Sen, Shri Atul Dev Sarmah and Shri Amitabha Deb for the help in selecting and editing the papers and publishing the volume. We must also thank the Indian Council of Historical Research for generous financial assistance to the Association for the session and for publication of the proceedings.

J. B. Bhattacharjee

General Secretary,

North-East India History Association.

Shillong,

The 25th August 1990.

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Last Resistance of the Garos to British Imperialism 1872.

Milton S. Sangma

The Garo Hills were created into a district and Lieutenant W. J. Williamson was appointed the first Assistant Commissioner on the 12th July, 1866 but owing to his having to officiate as Deputy Commissioner of Goalpara during 1866-67, he occupied Tura only on the 1st December, 1867 and established the headquarters there.¹

In the Administrative report of the Garo Hills for 1872, W.J. Williamson reported that from 1867 to 1872, the Garos had been a source of trouble and even right before David Scott's time, rarely a year was passed without a raid on the plains for heads when five or six or even more of the inhabitants of the plains fell victim to the cruelty of the Garos. But since he assumed charge of the administration of the district, the raids were reduced and more than a hundred villages submitted to him. Prior to his proceedings on furlough to Europe in 1870, and since then several more villages were submitted to Captain La Touche, the officiating D. C. of Garo Hills. But while much progress was being made in opening up the hills and in developmental works, the independent Garo villages in the centre of the district was a great obstacle to real progress and that the administration of the hills could never be satisfactorily carried on while there remained among Garos who denied British authority.² In 1872 more than one hundred villages in the centre of the district still remained independent and unvisited by the officers. These villages are- Mandalgiri, Marakgiri, Watregiri, Bangnakpara, Darenggiri, Chimang-Bolllonggiri, Boldamiri, Megapgiri, Majuragiri Sarenggiri, Ringugiri, Chigusakgiri, Jengjal, Chitakgii, Rongramgiri, Rongopgiri, Arwikgiri, Mengolgiri, Agalgiri, Dalbot, Dolmagiri, Tongbolgiri, Dinamanggiri, Najakgiri, Dikigiri, Mokragiri, Chemagiri, Anogiri, Gabilmandegiri, Samanda, Mandalanggiri, Dukakugiri, Terakgiri, Mokragiri, Gandugiri, Rangbalgiri, Dolunggiri, Snal, Manda, Danal, Sokadam, Baldamgiri, Kacharugiri, Bananggiri, Dingrangiri, Nongrenggiri, Sanampang, Chidokgiri,

Chidokgiri, Mengalgiri, Dilmagiri, Rungbokgiri, Bawegiri, Wahigiri, Banghokgiri, Rengigiri, Chidokgiri, Tonbolgiri, Monsakchekchakgiri, Najakgiri, Remsugiri, Muktagiri, Kantragiri, Rongibugiri, Darekgiri, Bansamgiri, Warugiri, Terakgiri, Mukragiri, Gandugiri, Runbolgiri, Dodulonggiri, Gerra, Dambal, Rongsepgiri, Kallak, Kaekarugiri, Suchilgiri, Maijigiri, Bunanggiri, Dinarunggiri, Gondenggiri, Bolkagiri, Hajuragiri, Rongdenggiri, Jondek-giri, Balonggiri, Jogogiri, Dimbi, Baldamgiri, Hadakgiri, Bonbrakgiri, Akigiri, Rungalgiri, Megadopgiri, Asilgiri, and Bomgiri.³

The above mentioned villages have taken up a position of active hostility, and have committed outrages upon the dependent communities. One of such outrages took place in the winter of 1870-71, when a Khalasi or Signaller of a Survey party was murdered at a dependent village of Paromgre located at the south of the Tura range. It seemed that the murder was committed in the excitement of a drunken feast when the Signaller had himself been drinking and gave enough offence by his conduct to furnish an excuse for the murder. All attempts to obtain the delivery of the guilty parties through local headmen and Laskars failed owing to a strong combination having been formed among the neighbouring villages to screen all concerned. But as soon as the winter set in, the Officiating D. C., Captain La Touche marched with a party of police to arrest the murderers, but the villagers have fled away to the jungles and have taken refuge in the independent villages. Therefore, the D. C. left a body of police there in a stockade to press on their attempts to arrest the murderers. But soon both the independent and the dependent villages combined together and attacked the police post and raided the dependent village of Damukchigiri killing 12 persons there and 3 others from the neighbouring villages. There were also reports of great uneasiness among the dependent and independent Garos and a small party of Police carrying Dak of letters had been attacked and the police had to repel them by using their firearms.⁴

In view of these hostile attitude of both the independent and dependent Garos, the Commissioner and the D. C. opined that soon after 1st October, 1872, the submission of the remaining independent villages must be demanded and measures adopted to punish those concerned in the outrage of Damukchigiri.⁵ Accordingly, the D. C. proceeded to these villages and occupied the villages of Kakwagiri and Bawegiri. But the Government had by this time come to the conclusion that

it was no longer desirable to tolerate any independent villages in the district. Therefore, the Lieutenant-Governor proposed to put an end to the independence of the Garos inhabiting the central regions of the district in the midst of the British territory and bring them under the direct control of the Deputy Commissioner and open paths through the centre of the hills along which the police force would patrol.⁶ His Excellency - Governor - in - Council agreed with the Lieut Governor of Bengal that the authority of the British Govt. must be vindicated and that the proper course to adopt is to require the submission of the remaining villages still claiming independence, to bring them under the direct control of the D. C. and to exact punishment for the outrages that have been committed and the surrender of the criminals. His Excellency-in-Council also agreed that the operations should not be of a more hostile character and should be undertaken by a moderate police force properly equipped. He authorised the Lieut-Governor of Bengal to chalk out the plan and strategies for such an expedition at an early date as practicable and promised that Orders will be issued from the Military Department to place three Companies of the 44th Regiment Native Infantry in reserve at some convenient point. He also instructed them to complete the Survey of the district and open roads through the hills.⁷

Planning of Strategies :

In the light of the orders of His Excellency-in-Council, the Lieutenant Governor in consultation with the Commissioner of Cooch Behar Colonel J. C. Haughton and the Deputy Commissioner of Garo Hills, Captain Williamson chalked out strategies for the final expedition against the independent Garo villages located at the central of the hills. According to this plan, in the first place after about 10th October, 1872, the hats namely, Damra, Jirah, Nibari, Bangal Khata, Putimari, Kakripara, Pulbari, Ghosegaon and Durgapur which located at the foothills round the hills will be temporarily closed. They will be closed for two or three weeks just to convince the people of British complete control over the Garos, and as a lever on the feelings of the dependent Garos, who are only too ready to shield the independent Garos and rarely show a road to an independent village except under compulsion. This would be a good lesson to those British Garo subjects who showed the independent Garos the way to the markets who then carried out raids against dependent villages.

In the next place, the Khasi Syiems would be made to send some of their men into the Garo Hills and create a diversion there. The Syiems would also be directed to assist the British with some coolies if necessary. The news reached the British that the independent Garos sent to the Khasis and asked them to come and assist in opposing British advance, but they declined, though they said that were it a case of one Garo village against another, they would have had no objection.

In the third place, the Government considered what force would be required to compel the submission of the independent hills. The independent Garos do not possess much power of combination, and although it is impossible to say how many men they could assemble, yet they could not collect any great number, and they have few fire-arms, but they know how to take advantage of ground and to prepare ambuscades in difficult places. The tactics of the independent Garos are likely to be like these. They will, unless they submit when they are assured of British determination to advance, very likely oppose the party proceedings to Dilmagiri village, which Captain Williamson proposed to visit first, and when beaten, they will retreat and possibly then retaliate on the villages of friendly Garos, or else make a raid on the defenceless villages in plains. Therefore, Captain Williamson's plan was to take 100 police with him to Dilmagiri via Romphagiri.

He would also try to communicate first with the village and give it a chance of submitting. He would employ his own police on this duty and would take Mr. Cawly and his own officers with him. He would also have a European officer and 50 police to patrol the villages south of the Tura range and the Shoosung and Sherpur, duar, and another European officer and 50 police in the Damrah, Jirah, and Nibari Duars, to prevent any raids by independent Garos on friendly and defenceless villages. They expedition should thus require 200 police actively employed, or rather 100 men actually to be taken against the independent Garos, the remainder being employed to prevent raids by the Garos on friendly villages. The Station of Tura should also be guarded by about 120 police under a European or good native officer. Another 20 police would be required to be posted at Damalgiri. Therefore, the expedition would require a total of 350 police for about three months, and with these, Captain Williamson hoped that he would be able to effect all that was necessary. He had at that time 150 police in the district and so he requires 200 to be drafted from other districts. Captain Williamson wanted that the Gurkhas or the

Sikh police should be sent as they were by far the most reliable when there is any real business.

Having induced or compelled the submission of Dilmagiri, Capt. Williamson would proceed and visit every independent village, and would then address himself to the task of looking up the villages which assisted in the late raids, who should be punished by fine, and in default, burnt. He would then arrest the men who have been recognised, and who have made themselves conspicuous in the late raids.

The next thing considered was the cost of such an expedition as it was proposed. If police are employed, and they are good enough for the war, much money will be saved, for less carriage will be required and the State will be put to no extra expense, as the 200 police can be raised easily by drafts from other districts.

The police will carry the artillery rifles carbine which takes Government Enfield ammunition by themselves, and they should have Pouches to carry 40 rounds ammunition. As there was the scarcity of carriers in the district, everyone should provide themselves with the lightest description of cooking pots. Therefore, besides 40 rounds of ammunition, each police will carry his bedding, cooking pot, and three days' supplies. Thus the principal items for carriage in the expedition would be the rations (food stuff) and ammunitions. 200 men would eat per day 250 seers of rice which is about $6\frac{1}{2}$ maunds, which takes about 13 coolies to carry it, and then against the food of the coolies and baggage and ammunition has to be calculated. A depot for storing these materials will have to be selected in the heart of the hills from where the expeditionary force can proceed and visit all the independent villages. It was hoped that the dependent villages would turn out and assist the party in clearing the jungles and conveying the baggage which would save much of the expenses. About 170 coolies will be required and their cost will aggregate about Rs. 1,360 calculated at Rs. 8 each and for three months Rs. 4080. Therefore,

	Rs.	P.
Coolies	4,100	00
Miscellaneous E p.	2,500	00
Total :	6,600	00

This would ever nearly all the necessary extraordinary expenditure, besides the cost of the regular establishments.

The real advance party will be 100 strong, out of whom, 60 will be in readiness for attack at any moment, and the rest will guard ration, ammunition and coolies, etc.

After having induced or compelled submission of the remaining independent villages, Capt. Williamson would insist on the payment of a House Tax, to be fixed at eight annas per house, liable to increase at the pleasure of the Government. Capt. Williamson said, "We do not wish to make money out of the Garos, who are a poverty-stricken race as a rule, but to ensure obedience, order, and good government among this tribe, who, when they thoroughly understand our rules, and are well-accustomed to us, will afford excellent material for our irregular regiment and frontier police".

Capt Williamson also would insist on the cessation of all murders for sacrifices and tell them that they would not be tolerated even for a moment and they would be heavily fined and punished. He would also discountenance slavery among the independent Garos, as he had done among the tributary hills. But these changes should be brought about gradually. They should have first education and the nascent missionary efforts permeate through the people before attempting radical changes. All Nokmas or heads of clans should furnish a quota of coolies when called on to do so by the D. C. and they should keep the paths between villages open and be bound to assist the officers of Government and point out the roads from village to village. It was felt that only by this severe lesson, that is, force met by force, that the independent Garos will surrender and all troubles cease.

When the plan as proposed is carried out, and all the remaining independent villages have been visited, and induced or compelled to submit, Capt. Williamson would sound the feelings of the people, and through them appoint Laskars or heads of villages who would be held responsible to the D. C. for their villages in the manner laid down by the Government.

The Secretary to the Government of India in his letter No-1962 p dated Simla, the 17th September, 1872, to the Officiating Secretary to the Government of Bengal (foreign Deppt.) said that His Excellency in Council approves of the plan if such a measure is considered necessary for the attainment of the objects of the expedition.⁹

Having received the sanction of these proposals, the Lieutenant-Governor resolved in consultation with Col. Haughton, to collect the armed Police from other districts for the purpose of the opera-

tion to be supported by three Companies of Regular Army on the side of the Khasi Hills and Kamrup borders. The operation was to be conducted from the month of November, 1872, consisting three detachments of Police and three Companies of the 43rd Assam Light Infantry.

The Battle :

On the basis of this proposal, the expeditionary force was divided into three Columns. One Column, under Captain Davies, who entered the hills from the Goalpara district on the north by the Nibari duar, a second under Mr. Daly, entered the hills from the Mymensingh district on the south, the third or the main Column, under Captain Williamson, the D.C. marched from Tura, the headquarters of the Garo Hills district. It was arranged that each column should follow a prescribed route through the independent tracts, visiting and enforcing the submission of all villages on its way, and it was decided that all would meet at a central rendezvous at the Rongrengre area at about the same time. Lieut. M. G. Woodthorpe, Assistant Superintendent of Survey was to accompany the expedition to conduct survey operations.¹⁰

In spite of the fact that the three columns decided to meet at about the same time at Rongrengre, it was Mr. Daly who entered the hills from the Mymensingh side had first reached the Rongrengre village, and it was with his party that the remaining independent Garos gave the last combined resistance to the British power.

According to their decision, Mr. Daly left the Paromgre village on the 7th December, 1872 with a body of Nepalese and Garo coolies. But 89 of the Garo coolies deserted during the night. On the 8th December, he met some people with the Headman from Kakwagiri village, who afforded his assistance. Further, he met some people from Nengmandal, who tendered submission, and in the same march, men from Bawegiri likewise tendered submission. On the 9th December, he crossed the Someswary river by canoes. Then he passed on to Rongreng village, whom Capt. Williamson described as ill-disposed. On the 10th December, Mr. Daly camped near Rongreng, and sent back 100 Garo coolies and 95 Nepalese for provisions. At about 5 in the evening the Garos from the Samanda village appeared and burnt their old village close to the British Camp. The next day, Mr. Daly took care to protect his Camp, and received an additional supply of

coolies from Badri and Nengmandal. Some of Mr. Daly's people met some of the independent Garos, who declared their intention of not submitting, and of revenging themselves on those who had done so. On the 12th December, Mr. Daly who had by then had with him only about 30 men fit for fighting, heard around his camp voices of men during the previous night. At 1 in the afternoon, the Garos made a surprise attack but were driven off without loss on the British side, losing two of their own men killed, and another wounded. They were reported to have belonged to Rongreng and Samanda and Dalbot villages. On the 13th December, Captain Williamson marched to Megadop and Saramphang village where he encamped. Here he received information of Mr. Daly's movements and the attack upon him by the Garos.¹¹

According to Garo tradition, the Garos of the independent villages heard of the coming of the British army to their villages. Therefore, there had been exciting meetings on the previous nights. After long deliberations, it was finally decided to oppose the advancing troops. The people were still ignorant of the manner of the British troops and the nature of their weapons. However, rumour had reached them that the English had hollow spears that could spit fire from a great distance, and the fire struck where it hit and had great power to kill. It was ordered that each Garo warrior should protect himself from so terrible a weapon by binding large pieces of succulent banana trunks over his bamboo shields. This, it was hoped would effectually quench the fiery darts of the enemy.

When morning dawned, the warriors manned their stockade, two edged swords, Spears, and plaintain covered shields, all in readiness to await the attack. It was long in coming, and the sun had climbed to its zenith when the invading column emerged from the leafy gorge into the sort of amphitheatre with the village in front. The trees all around were thick with the independent Garos crouching, still invisible among the leaves. Their quick eyes watched intently every movement of the troops, as with flashing weapons and determined faces, they formed for the attack.¹²

Suddenly the Commanders gave signal for attack, and so they yelled and made a wild rush, but before they could reach the Camp, a fire was shot at them. Deafened and disconcerted by the sound of the gun, they halted and wavered. A second volley was thundered at them and there lay dead on the ground two of their bravest, and a third was seriously wounded. Tradition still prevails among the people that their leaders were Togan N. Sangma and Gilsang

D. Sangma. It was Togan Sangma who died on the spot, while Gilsang received bullet which pierced through his right ear and passed on his right eye. As a result, he became deaf and blind in one eye, and survived for three years more only. After these tragic reverses, the Garos gave up their fight and surrendered to the British. As a result, the whole Garo Hills came under the direct rule of the British.¹³

Notes & References :

1. Govt. of Bengal, Paper 6, File No. 1/10, March 17, 1873.
2. Annual Administration Report for 1872, No 74, May, 12, 1873.
3. Register maintained by Lieut. W. J. Williamson for 1868-1873.
4. Foreign Deppt. Political A. September, 1872, No. 276.
5. Foreign Deptt. Political A. September, 1872, No. 276-86.
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7. Foreign Deptt, Political A. September, 1872, No 278, From Aitchision, Secretary to the Govt of India to the Secretary to the Govt of Bengal.
8. Foreign, Political A. September, 1872, No. 282, Extract from a letter from D. C. Garo Hills to the Commissioner of the Cooch Behar Division, No. CC, dated 24th July, 1872.
9. Foreign, Political A. September, 1872, No. 284, Letter from the Secretary to the Govt. of India to the offg. Secretary to the Govt. of Bengal, dated Simla, the 17th Sept., 1872.
10. Government of Bengal, File No. 15/18 of 1873 (Judicial).
11. Foreign, Political A. April, 1873, No. 530, dated 26th. Dec., 1872. From Col. J. C. Haughton, Commissioner of Cooch Behar Division to the offg. Secretary to the Govt. of Bengal (Judicial).
12. Tradition current among the people around Rongrenggre areas : Vide also William Garey, The Mission to the Garos, pp. 48-49.
13. Tradition prevalent among the people. Vide also Father Pianazzi, in Garoland, Ccutta, 1935, pp. 4-5.