THE GAROS

MAJOR A. PLAYFAIR
WITH A NEW INTRODUCTION BY
PARIMAL CHANDRA KAR

"The Garos are of the stock known as Tibeto-Burman which drifted into Eastern India and Burma across the Plateaux of Tibet. Their language still retains some similarity with Tibetan and some of their ideas, such as the sentimental value they attach to gongs, are identical with those prevailing in Tibetan villages." In 1903, Major Playfair, was entrusted the task of researching into the hill tribe known as the Garos, presently co-partners with the Khasis and Jaintias in the state of Meghalaya. Major Playfair, the then Deputy Commissioner of Garo Hills District, was well-versed in local languages and because of his close contacts with the people, acquired a deep insight into their social organisation and culture. His monograph stands out as the earliest systematic account of the Garos and any discourse on the subject can hardly proceed without reference to the abiding stock source this treatise has proved to be. The present second reprint has been further enriched with a new introduction by late Prof. P.C. Kar, a well known scholar on Garo affairs.

Illustrated

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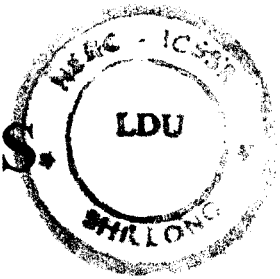

THE GAROS.

BY

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DEPUTY COMMISSIONER, EASTERN BENGAL AND ASSAM

WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY
SIR J. BAMPFYLDE FULLER, K.C.S.I., C.I.E.

AND

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WITH ILLUSTRATIONS AND A MAP

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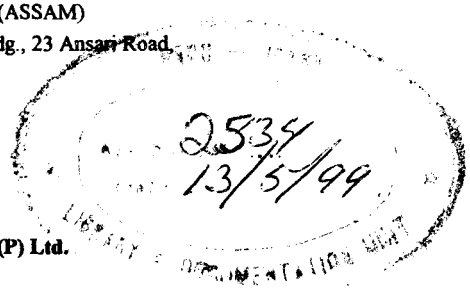

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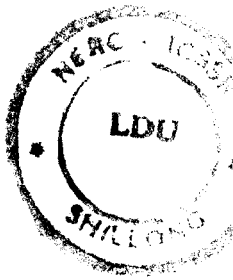

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A NEW INTRODUCTION

THE annexing of Garo Hills to the British Raj was a cheap and bloodless move over a primitive and unsophisticated tribe. It completed the subjugation of the present hill areas of Assam, of which Meghalaya was then a part, and with this, the whole of eastern India came under British dominion. Politically, it proved to be extremely valuable and significant.

In 1765 after accession of the Dewany of Bengal the British extended their authority to the border of these hill areas which were then surrounded by the estates of different Bengali Zamindars who, for all practical purposes, were more or less semi-independent under the weak Mughal regime. The boundaries of these estates were ill-defined along the hills. These zamindars established, along the foot-hills, a string of *haats* (market places) where the Garos used to sell their produce and purchase their essentials on payment of tolls or taxes. However, exactions of various forms were carried to the extreme, especially in respect of the independent Garos of the interior. These were from time to time further aggravated by the zamindars' frequent mercenary raids into the Hills.

The Garos were divided into two sections just before their contact with British authority. Many of the Garo chiefs, along with their people in the outer Hills bordering the plains, were paying tributes or taxes to the zamindars; whereas those of the interior hills were free from any kind

of outside influence or interference. Both sections were free to pursue their own laws, customs and traditions in their respective areas.

The Garo society is matrilineal and consists of five exogamous groups or clans, each again divided into many subclans, called *Maharies*, related on the mother's side. Each *Mahari* lives in a particular area of its own, called *Akhing*, under the authority of a *Nokma*, the husband of the inheriting daughter of the oldest family of the *Akhing*. He is the custodian of *Akhing* or *Mahari* land and acts as the village head as well as the spiritual head of the village. He settles all disputes in his area with the help of the leading heads of different families of the *Akhing*. Though independent of each other, the clans were in a state of internecine feud. Retaliation for murder, adultery or insult to any member or members of a *Mahari* was a clan responsibility, and it is interesting to note that in a good many cases was carried on from generation to generation till finally settled. Revenge always resulted in head-hunting which, in course of time, grew as a symbol of their chivalry. There was also the custom of burying with the dead body of any prominent man of Garo society as many heads as could be procured for the purpose. The frequent raids by the Garos into the plains in pursuit of this tradition and also in retaliation of the endless exactions and oppressions by the zamindars and their *barkandazes* in the *haats* disturbed the peace of the plains and the outer hills, and offered the British a favourable and alluring ground to turn their expansionist attention towards Garo Hills, or '*Garrowana*' as it was then called.

In order to complete the subjugation of the Assam hills between the Brahmaputra Valley and the Bengal plains and curb the zamindars' ever increasing power and influence in the border areas, as well as to suppress the head-hunting tradition of the Garos and set them against the zamindars, the British authorities passed the "Regulation X of 1822". The aim of this Regulation was to separate all the tributary villages and the independent interior of the Hills from the clutches of the zamindars and bring them under the direct

management of the Government, and at the same time compensate the former for their claims and losses. The Regulation also exempted the tract including the thana areas of Goalpara, Dhubri and Karaibari from the operation of the General Regulations.

David Scott, the architect of British domination over the eastern frontiers of India, was appointed the Special Commissioner in charge of this area under the above Regulation with authority to extend the British administration over the wild and till then unexplored interior of the Garo Hills. He entered into agreements with 121 Garo chiefs in the outer Hills, and secured from them the promise of a payment of nominal tributes and in return offered them protection against the zamindars. Prominent Garo chiefs were appointed as *Laskars* to realise the tributes from their respective areas and preserve peace on behalf of the British in return for annual presents to them. The post of a local officer *Garo Sarbarakar*, was also created. He was stationed at Singimari to look after the peace of the area and collect tributes from the Garo *Laskars*.

All the *haats* along the foothills were removed from the control of the zamindars and brought under direct Government control. Tolls of all kinds were abolished in this area except those upon the independent Garos frequenting them. In all other Garo areas still under the zamindars, Scott introduced a different principle of revenue administration. The zamindars were forbidden to collect revenues from the Garos. The Government took over this responsibility along with that of maintaining peace on condition that 75 per cent of the actual total collections would be paid to the zamindars and of the remaining 25 per cent, 13 per cent would be paid to the *Laskars* for the collection of revenue and maintenance of peace, and 12 per cent to be credited to the Government. Revenue was also fixed by the Government at varying rates in different areas in the Hills, and no uniform rates or assessments ever prevailed in the early years of British administration. While Garos were freed from the perpetual control and oppression of the zamindars, they

were asked to pay a nominal tribute in return for 'protection' provided by the Government. Gradually, a large area thus came under British control without any use of fire arms.

The British Government, at first, maintained a loose supremacy over the outer hills and only tenuosly controlled the affairs therein. Since the first decade of the last century, a policy of indirect participation in its administration was continued from Goalpara till the sixties of that century when recurring Garo raids offered an opportunity to the Goalpara authorities to conduct a series of police actions into the Hills. In 1866, *Garrowana* was constituted as a separate administrative unit and Lieutenant W.J. Williamson set up the present head quarters at TURA in 1867 in the heart of the Hills. Since then, direct administration was introduced in the Garo Hills.

Williamson contacted all the Garo chiefs and *Laskars* who had submitted to the British authorities earlier, and collected revenue from them. He enforced throughout the Hills a system of referring all inter-clan disputes to him for settlement, and gradually extended his administration into the interior. He used to visit a village or villages when inter-clan trouble took place and demanded a mutual settlement of the dispute in his presence arrogating to himself the role of the ultimate dispenser of justice and protector of peace. He enforced British supremacy by making them pay the revenue as fixed by him and by burning all the skulls kept as trophies in the village and securing their agreement to submit all future disputes to the British appointed *Laskars* or to the district officer. He used to enforce this by threatening to burn the defaulting village by his escorting police personnel. In the raids organised by the Government, the loyal Garos were always asked to contribute manpower against the rebel Garos in order to reduce the use of police force.

Thus Williamson earned the allegiance of most of the villages of the independent interior. He traversed the Hills and helped in conducting surveys of the district by removing

the last vestiges of the rebellion during 1872-'73, when a three pronged expedition was conducted to ensure submission of the entire Hills.

When the Garo raids were on the increase along the foot hills as well as in plains, and inter-clan feuds also multiplied after a lull in the Hills, the Government introduced in 1865 a system of rural police, called *Zimmadar*, as the Authority could not ensure surrender and punishment of offenders owing to the absence of any police machinery and communication system in the inaccessible areas. The *Laskars* of the small contiguous villages were invited to select one of them or any other prominent man of the area as *Zimmadar*. They were given limited power of civil and criminal jurisdiction with annual stipends varying from Rs. 25 to Rs. 80. There were about 74 *mauzas*, (laskar jurisdictions) with about the same number of *Zimmadars*. They were given old muskets and ammunition by Williamson, "to raise them in the estimation of their fellows".

The system was, however, discontinued after several years when the practice of head-hunting and retaliatory feuds disappeared. The offices of *laskars* and *Zimmadars* were then amalgamated, under the designation of *Laskar* only, dispensing with the duplication of Garo agencies introduced earlier. A crude judicial system was introduced under the first Deputy Commissioner, Captain Williamson, in 1868. The actual police force of the district consisted of about 100 persons directly under his control, with no proper police duties to perform. The detection of crime, arrest of criminals, etc. were vested in *Zimmadars*. The police force protected head quarters, escorted the district officer during his tour and, occasionally, was posted in the interior for short durations either to meet any specific situation, or to enforce submission by the Garo villages.

But all these arrangements could not be fully effective in the southern part of the district, bordering on Mymensingh. This was a disputed area between the Susung Raja and the Goverment, with the Raja claiming a vast tract in Garo Hills (about 500 square miles). The Raja secured a verdict

in his favour from the High Court in the absence of proper provisions in the Regulation X of 1822. The Government, therefore, amended the Regulation, re-issued it in the form of Regulation XXII of 1869, and finally took over the tract on payment of compensation. It was placed in charge of the D.C., Garo Hills. Goalpara district was attached to Assam in 1826, but the common boundary between Goalpara and Garo Hills was ill-defined and uncertain till 1854.

When the act of 1869 made Garo Hills a deregulationised (non-regulated) district, the Lt. Governor, by virtue of the powers vested in him by that act, wanted to extinguish the rights of the zamindars over the tract lying between the Brahmaputra and the Hills, and ordered a new survey of the boundary. For obvious reasons, Backett, officer-in-charge of boundary demarcation, laid down a line beyond the earlier boundary and included within Garo Hills a considerable part of the land of the zamindars. They challenged such an unilateral extinction of their rights given under the Permanent settlement, and instituted civil suits in the Courts. Finding no means of eliminating zamindars from the foot hills and the adjacent plains, the Government entered into an agreement with the affected zamindars to maintain the Backett boundary. The zamindars withdrew their control from within Garo Hills as defined by the new boundary on getting compensation. The Government was to fix and collect revenue from that new portion and pay 75 per cent of it to the zamindars except in the Mechpara 'B' mahal where the zamindar of that area would collect revenue fixed by the Government and deposit 15 per cent of it to the latter. Thus, Garo Hills district was made free from intermediary control in 1878.

The Regulation X of 1822 had separated the areas of Goalpara, Dhubri and Karaibari bordering on Garo Hills, and exempted the Garos and other tribals from the operation of all General Regulations, and established a special system of governance for the tract inhabited by them or bordering on their possessions. The permanently settled area of Goalpara was, however, removed later from Rung-

pur and attached to Assam in 1826. The Act of 1869 defined the district of Garo Hills and repealed the Regulation of 1822, but like the foregoing Act, removed the district from the jurisdiction of the civil, criminal and revenue courts and offices established under the general Regulations and Acts. This district was then attached to Assam after it had been formed into a separate administrative unit under a Chief Commissioner in 1874.

As the *Inner Line Regulations* could not be applied successfully in a tract like Garo Hills, surrounded by settled territories, power was taken under Regulation I of 1876, to prevent the entry into Garo Hills for trading purposes of unlicenced persons and to control absolutely the acquisition of land by any outsider as it was to be governed by the tribal laws and customs. This prohibitory measure was, however, applicable only to British subjects, who were not natives of Garo Hills. Regulation II of 1880 empowered the Chief Commissioner, with the previous sanction of the Governor-General in Council, to cancel the operation of any law in force in the district. Under its provisions, the operation of enactments relating to civil and criminal procedure, court fees, stamps, transfer of property and registration was barred in 1884, and the Civil Procedure Code was never extended to the Hill districts. Later on, some of the acts relating to the above subjects were, however, extended to Garo Hills in a limited sphere.

A very simple system of administering civil and criminal justice was introduced by a set of rules framed under section 6 of the Schedule District Act, XIV of 1874. Accordingly the Chief Commissioner himself was the chief appellate authority, and the Deputy Commissioner exercised the combined powers of District and Sessions Judge and Magistrate of the District.

The judicial administration in all petty civil and criminal matters was carried on by indigenous tribal agencies as well as by *Laskars*. Their procedure of work was free from legal technicalities, and the proceedings were not to be recorded in writing. Tribal laws and customs guided these

agencies in settling disputes or dispensing justice within the frame work of those rules. In the plains belt of Garo Hills, *Gaonburas* (village headmen) took the place of *Laskars* (excluding his revenue duties) without any cash remuneration but with the benefit of a fixed area of their landed property being exempted from revenue payment.

Police administration was also under the Deputy Commissioner. A small detachment was kept at head quarters, and no thanas were established in the Hills. Only three outposts were maintained in the plains belt along the district border. *Laskars*, *Sardars* and *Nokmas* were directly held responsible for detection and prevention of crimes in the Hills, and *Mauzadars*, *Mandals* and *Gaonburas* aided the district administration in policing and other matters. *Mauzadars* were sometimes authorised to try petty cases in the plains belts.

Revenue administration, land and land revenue matters were handled by the Deputy Commissioner under the executive orders of the Government within the framework of the isolationist enactments. Plain areas were assessed for land revenue whereas house taxes were realised from the Hill areas. Outsiders had no rights on land in the Hills, that is, in *Akhing* areas, and middlemen's interest were not allowed to grow in the plains areas. Yet, such interests in lesser dimension were not totally absent and often succeeded in escaping official scrutiny. Administration in respect of forest wealth, elephants, etc. was also conducted initially under the rules framed by the first Deputy Commissioner, and later on, under the orders of the Chief Commissioner till 1882. By a new Regulation of that year power was given to the Deputy Commissioner of the district to prevent entry of any person without licence and/or the D.C.'s prior permission for purposes of exploiting forest resources or catching elephants, etc. on payment of royalty. Elaborate rules were framed for these purposes under this Regulation specifically called Garo Hills Regulation of 1882.

During the period of British rule, there existed no road system worth the name. This negligence, one may guess,

was an inherent part of their segregation policy. Hence, the transport and communication system within the district also remained totally undeveloped for a long time. Two roads provided the only outlets towards Mymensingh and Goalpara plains. The district authorities did not put much stress on road development except on clearing certain bridle-paths or hilly tracts by a system of forced labour which was in vogue till recently as *begar* system and is recalled by elderly Garos as "*British zoolum*". These tracts were not even fit for carts. An uncertain, weekly bus service was started only during the thirties under private initiative. As a result, trade and commerce hardly developed within the district though it was rich in forest resources and cash crops, especially cotton.

The British authority invited the American Baptist Mission to develop education among the Garos, and used to hand over the entire education grants to the Mission on condition that they render reports. A school came up at Damra and simultaneously churches were set up on the northern border. Initially under the protection and encouragement of the Deputy Commissioner of Goalpara, batches of faithful workers were trained for the propagation of their faith.

The Mission went on establishing some kind of composite institutions containing within their precinct a school, a church and medical facilities or means for training in hygiene and sanitation, all centering around the converted Garo teachers trained in Mission Schools. Three types of schools were developed in the district under the Missionary initiative—Tura Station School, Village Schools, and the Sunday Schools. The former trained the teacher-workers of the Mission for the village schools. The buildings of the village schools were also used as village chapels. The Sunday schools were attached to village churches or Christian *Sabhas* and organised for the teaching of the scriptures.

Besides these school under exclusive Missionary supervision, the Deputy Commissioner opened a few Bengali

medium schools in the nineties of the last century in the vast plain areas inhabited by non-Garos, where the Mission did not undertake any educational work.

The curriculum of studies included an eight-year course in the Station School in which four years each were spent in the normal and primary departments. After completion of these courses, a student was supposed to have had eight years of Garo reading, writing, spelling, arithmetic and scriptures; seven years of Bengali reading, writing, grammar, arithmetic and geography, and three years of English reading, writing and grammar. From the lowest primary class the scriptures were taught daily in every class, besides military drill and vocal music. Geometry was taught before the primary stage was passed.

Before the beginning of Missionary education, Bengali and Garo were the mediums of instruction in all schools, and the Bengali script was used for teaching the Garo language. Around 1901, Bengali was finally dropped from the lower primary course of studies and made elective in the advance stage. The script was also changed in favour of Roman. The Government gave a grant of Rs. 1000 for the printing of books in Roman script.

The withdrawal of Bengali from the lower primary course helped the Garos to devote their energies more to studies in their mother tongue and achieve greater efficiency. The growth of literature in Garo was deplorably slow. Of about 38 books published in Garo, 4 were Dictionaries by different compilers, 3 were graded grammars, 4 graded books on arithmetic, 3 sets of Sunday school lessons, 4 books on the life of Christ, besides some translations of Hymns and gospels. There was no elementary book on geography before 1900 and one on history was prepared even later. Bengali books were the only resort in schools even after many years of withdrawing Bengali from the lower primary school course. No consistent effort was made by the British administration to develop the Garo language and make it an adequate medium of instruction; nor could th Mission succeed in creating a variety in literature

except on theology because of their preoccupation with organisational work, limitation of required kind of man-power, and above all, the creation of literature not being the primary objective of the Mission.

The expenses on educational expansion were mainly borne by the Government with the Missionaries bearing a part. Government grants and the money from the Mission were never sufficient for meeting the growing demand for education. The Mission then took up a policy of raising schools only in those villages where people themselves were ready to provide accommodation, both for the school and the teacher, and admit larger number of pupils. This policy was taken up to manage the schools mostly with Government grants without spending much out of the Mission funds on the one hand, and to make the people realise the importance of education on the other. A few scholarships on the basis of tests and a few stipends were also given by the Government to enable these students to read at the station school. The remaining students maintained themselves partially by working in the Mission's technical work section or in work projects. Government grants for teachers' pay etc. were only Rs. 1824 in 1875-'78 and Rs. 1400 in 1905. Besides salaries, teachers were paid a capitation fee, at various rates per student promoted to a higher class, and on the basis of the teachers' other attainments. The total Government grants for education in the district per year hardly exceeded Rs. 3000 around 1905.

In 1905, this educational system was reviewed by Sir Bampfylde Fuller, who, for various reasons, considered it undesirable to leave matters in the hands of the Mission. Searching observations were also made by Barrow, Inspector of Schools Assam Valley and Hill districts, in 1907, and by Cunningham, D.P.I. of Assam, in 1915.

> "The curriculum is eccentric and unsuitable, and religion bulks so largely.... Courses in history and geography were irregular"
>
> "teachers in the village schools were ill equipped and

devoted much of their time to scripture teaching and in their secular capacity were distinctly inefficient and the interests of education from a secular point of view suffered miserably."

All of them were in favour of reformulating the educational policy in the district and suggested the reduction of missionary enterprise in the field of education.

Fuller decided to overshadow the Mission schools for Government schools and appointed inspecting staff to supervise the schools instead of Missionary supervision. A teachers' training school was established for the out turn of better teachers. A few years later, the syllabus was also changed, reducing the load of religious teaching. In spite of these measures, the Baptist Mission was still left in a pre-eminent position in the field of education. Village schools still remained under the active guidance of the Mission.

Upgrading of schools from the primary to the higher stages even in advantageous situations were hardly attempted either by the Mission or by the Government. Only in 1938, about 70 years after the British occupation of the district, an English High School was opened under pressure of the public and Government servants.

In its early stages, the British administration aimed at "reclaiming the tribe into civilisation" in a closely guarded manner. The gradual rise of the Swadeshi movement, especially following the first partition of Bengal in 1905, made the British authorities more conscious of its likely inroad into Garo society, and made them close all avenues of communication between the Garos and the people of the plains areas. Bengali was dropped from the curriculum of studies, Bengali script was changed into Roman script, and road development was consciously neglected.

The only link of the Garos with plains people were the small business and trade carried on between them in the *haats* in the foot hills and plains belts.

While the Missionaries were engaged in effecting a break with the "pagan" practices of the Garos, the British authority in its eagerness to maintain the traditional set up of Garo society against the likely influx of the land hungry people from the plains, indirectly helped preserve the Garo way of life. The development of the Garos, especially in the field of education, communication and natural resources was not given the attention it should have been.

The spread of literacy brought about a cultural gap between the literate and the illiterate. Conversion to Christianity necessitated the denial of most of the time-worn customs and traditions of the old society—a change so sudden and sweeping that the Christian section possibly could not adopt itself to the changed order of things perfectly and was found to bear all pangs of transition. The literate constituted a minor section of society and in the midst of the non-converts, they imbibed certain new values but were always pulled down to live by traditional values. This conflict only weakened the old values, *Mahari* loyalty, and generated a process of depreciation of interest in traditional culture.

A new religious faith and outlook released certain new forces to cause further changes in society. Organising public opinion for opening English high schools, prayer for modification of the educational system and abolition of *Begar* and organising district wise support for the Garo's interests under the leadership of the late Soharam Sangma, were some of the instances which accounted for the growing consciousness for a new identity among the literate Garos.

This growing awareness as well as acceptance of higher symbols drove the literate Garos, already united under British administration and in a new religious bond, to move towards a phase of subnationalism before the dawn of independence of the country.

By the time the stage was set for the literate Garos to emerge as pioneers of progress in a British made area of segregation, the country achieved independence. The bul-

wark of isolation was broken and the liberated stream of Garo life and energy turned towards the mainstream of Indian life. The Garos met for the first time waves of non-Garos as agents of Government, traders, and participants in various pursuits. The former viewed the latter as the overwhelming forces of governance while the latter looked upon the former as backward beings away from Indian tradition and living in a world of primeval practices and prejudices. Naturally, in this context, an element of mutual suspicion and distrust developed below the apparently calm surface of social behaviour.

This situation of mutual distrust, accentuated by economic disparities between the hills and plains made the literate hillmen search for new symbols to bind the community of the literate and the traditional together on the one hand, and for attaining an equal status with their fellow citizens of the plains on the other. In the process, the literate drew support of the traditional authorities—*Nokmas*, *Laskars*, etc. through the traditional *mahari* bonds, and primary school teachers through religious and educational bonds. The constitutional innovation of an autonomous District Council for the Garos (as for the other six hill tribes of the then Assam) so that they could develop according to their own tradition and genius was immediately taken up as a symbol of Garo nationalism. The District Council served as an escalator for achieving higher political status. It culminated in the formation, in 1970 of the Hill State, Meghalaya, with the Khasis Jaintias and Garos as co-partners.

In Garo Hills, the Garos are not the only aboriginal tribe. They only make the major tribe. Other tribes—*Hajongs*, *Koches*, *Rabhas*, *Dalus*, *Banais*—constitute the aboriginal minority population, besides the non-tribal Bengalees (including Muslims), Nepalis and other plains people settled in Garo Hills district since the British period.

In addition to inter-ethnic differences, there are other areas of conflict and contradiction between the tribes based on language, religion, customs, traditions and rules of inheritance etc. The Garos got the benefit of a first start in

respect of education and modernisation whereas the other native groups were neglected both by the British authorities and the Mission. They continued to remain a good deal more backward than the Garos. A literacy gap, backed by religious difference, arose between the Garos and the non-Garo tribes.

Besides the historical, social and ethnic reasons, the unrest in Garo Hills, especially in the post-independence period, has been predominantly due to disparities in economic development and the uneven distribution of material benefits between the people of the hills and the plains. Economic backwardness, though essentially the cumulative effect of the century old regressive policies of the British administration has not been remedied in two decades of national administration.

There has also appeared a growing economic gap between the greater mass of the illiterate hillmen (of the traditional society) and a very small middle class of the literate hillmen in the post-independence period. The benefits of development expenditure go largely to the latter. In a comparatively free political atmosphere under the national administration mostly manned by non-hillmen, outside contractors and traders by virtue of their ability and wealth, have been able to control the economic benefits, many a time avoiding local tensions through a partnership with literate hillmen. A majority of the tribal population is still in abject poverty, practicing Jhum cultivation and maintaining a bare subsistence level of living.

These disparities will assume greater proportions, and the skill in social engineering of the statesmen and the educationists of the new state of Meghalaya will be put to a great test in the not too distant future. Any peaceful process towards the removal of problems of society as a whole to be pursued by them, will invariably involve a lot of undoing of the past practices because the formation of the Hill state is both a result of and an opportunity to cure the faults and fallacies of the past administration and its legacies on Independent India.

British Indian officers like John Eliot (1788-'89), Francis Hamilton (1807-'14), Thomas Sisson (1815), David Scott (1816-'18), C.S. Reynolds (1849), Moffat Mills (1854), Ramnath Chakraborty (1867), W J. Williamson (1866-'75), E.T. Dalton (1872), and Alexander Mackenzie (1884) compiled reports on Garo society and affairs mainly for administrative purposes. Their attempts were motivated by occasional needs and exigencies of the Government. Besides them, John Avery (1884), Ayerst (1880), Esme (1885-'87), Austen Godwin (1873), B.C. Allen (1905-'06) and others also contributed to the studies on the Garos in different journals and reports. However all information about this tribe was scattered and by no means a systematic account. In 1903, Sir Bampfylde Fuller, the then Commissioner of Assam, initiated a project of preparing a series of monographs on the important tribes and castes of Assam according to a uniform scheme of treatment.

Major A Playfair, the then Deputy Commissioner of Garo Hills district was accordingly entrusted with the task of writing a monograph on the Garos. He had been associated with Garo affairs even before he became D.C. of the district, and had investigated into the Garo customary rights in respect of forest and other land resources when the Garo chiefs protested against the Authorities for alleged usurpation of Garo rights while creating Forest reserves in Garo Hills. Well versed in local languages and because of his close contacts with the people, Major Playfair acquired a deep insight into their social organisations and material culture. He examined the fruits of all previous investigators, procured and added his own, and constructed the first ever systematic account of the Garos, their organisations and institutions, religion and language, and other aspects of their society.

This monograph, "The Garos", was published in 1909. Since then, many writers, foreign and Indian, have written about the Garos. While Rev. William Carey wrote on "the Mission to the Garos", Guilio Costa on their customary laws, and Bars and Robbins Burling on their language,

Indian writers, mostly anthropologists, like B. Mukherjee, J.K. Bose, T.C. Sinha and others focussed mainly on different social institutions and aspects of the Garos. Dr. Robbins Burling and Miss Chie Nakane made in-depth studies of the family and kinship relations whereas Prof. M.C. Goswami and Dr. D.N. Majumdar (junior) dealt with the changes in their social organisations and institutions. Studies on the culture-change were also made by Messers Bose, Burling, Goswami and Majumdar. Garo writers like Rev. Baldwin, Jobang Marak, Karnes Marak, Jangsan Sangma worked on compilation of customary laws.

Besides the official reports and publications, Garo-British relations were discussed by Dr. H.K. Barpujari, Dr N.K. Barua, Dr. J.B. Bhattacharjee, to name a few. The undersigned, besides covering the above, pioneered studies in certain aspects of the Garo land and people like "British occupation of Garo Hills', 'pattern of administration in pre-British, British, and post-independence periods', 'local self-government institutions of Garo Hills', 'growth of Missionary activities among the Garos', 'beginning of education in Garo Hills', 'development of Garo literature and journals' etc.

Major Playfair's monograph stands out as the earliest systematic account of the Garos and any discourse on the subject can hardly proceed without reference to the abiding stock source this treatise has proved to be. Its absence from the market for a long time was, therefore, keenly felt by researchers and general readers alike. The present reprint will fill in that void, and thanks are due to the publishers for this undertaking.

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