

THE ANNEXATION OF ASSAM

(1824 - 1854)

With a Foreword

BY

DR. I. B. BANERJEE, M.A., P.R.S., PH.D.

HEAD OF THE DEPT. OF HISTORY, UNIVERSITY OF CALCUTTA.

BY

DR. REBATI MOHAN LAHIRI, M.A., B.L., D.PHIL.

SENIOR PROFESSOR OF HISTORY, ANANDACHANDRA COLLEGE, JALPAIGURI.

SOMETIME PROFESSOR OF HISTORY, DIOCESAN COLLEGE, CALCUTTA.

SOMETIME PROFESSOR OF HISTORY, RAJENDRA COLLEGE,

FARIDPUR.

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THIS BOOK IS DEDICATED

To

My Late Revered Uncle Ramani Mohan Lahiri

to whom I owe everything.

FOREWORD

I have great pleasure in introducing to the public this very illuminating and instructive work on a very obscure period in the modern history of Assam. At the end of the First Burmese War in 1826 the Burmese King renounced all claims upon the Ahom Kingdom and the petty states of Jaintia, Cachar and Manipur but this meant little as the hold of the Burmese over these tracts had never been anything more than formal. Assam had to be conquered anew before she could be annexed and the fascinating story of the resistance that was presented to the British by the Ahom aristocracy and the tribal chiefs is the theme that is unfolded in this excellent work. It undoubtedly breaks new ground and makes intelligible what had hitherto been a little known and hazy but, by no means, an unimportant chapter of the history of Assam.

Till recently, the history of Assam has not received from historians the attention that it deserves. With her multifarious peoples and races, her tribal problems and her strategic position, Assam presents to the historian a very variegated and engrossing field of study but it is a pity that even now Gait's pioneer work, a very inadequate and often superficial study of the whole history of Assam in one handy volume, has to be relied on. The need of the moment is to clear the ground by the publication of a series of monographs on different topics connected with the subject, based on an intensive study of all available records and thus prepare the way for a comprehensive history of Assam. The present work is to be regarded as, nothing more or less, than an attempt of this kind and is an important contribution to the future comprehensive "History of Assam". The point may be raised that this work, based, as it is, almost wholly on the official correspondence preserved in the archives of the Government of India, is one-sided and cannot be regarded as complete in all respects. But the historian's work is largely determined by the character and the extent of the materials available and in the present instance there was very little else to tap. During the period that is covered by this book an organised Ahom Court had practically ceased to exist and Court historians also possibly were no longer engaged. That is possibly the reason why Ahom *Buranjees* relating to this period are so scarce. The only Buranjee so far made available is "*Asamar Padya Buranjee*" by Duti Ram Hazarika. Others also may come to light but these Buranjees are, by no means, as authentic and trustworthy as some scholars seem to hold. At any

rate, so far as the present work is concerned, it cannot be said that the author has failed to tap any vital source of available information which might have materially altered his narrative or his conclusions.

Another very interesting feature of this work, which I would like to stress, is the story that it gives of the annexation of the Hill states and the policy adopted by the British in dealing with the tribes. This is a question of supreme topical interest as the problem of these tribes has now become one of the major headaches of the Government of India. In several chapters the author throws a flood of light on this intricate question and helps us to understand a good deal of the tribal problem. The present work not only fills up a gap in the modern history of Assam but opens up, at the same time, several very interesting lines of studies.

INDUBHUSAN BANERJEE

PREFACE

In the following pages, an attempt has been made, I think for the first time, to present in detail, as based on original sources, the political history of Assam from 1824 to 1854 — from the declaration of the first Anglo-Burmese War to the incorporation of Tulārām Senāpati's tract with the British dominions of Assam which practically brought to a close the era of annexation. The history of this thirty years, as the subsequent pages will reveal, forms one of the most interesting but little known chapters in the annals of Assam. The great task of conquest was practically completed during the period under review; the Post-Mutiny period simply carried on the task of consolidation the general policy of which had been laid down in the period preceding.

The history of Assam has been always a neglected subject and in the general history of India we find no scholar devoting more than a dozen lines to the treatment of the history of the north-eastern province of India. But the history of Assam, whether ancient or medieval, is as interesting and important as the history of any other part of India. But there are only a few books on this subject. Dr. Gait in his admirable book "The History of Assam", the only book of its kind, has dealt somewhat elaborately with the history of ancient and medieval Assam, but the great scholar has not done justice to the period under discussion. He has compressed in some thirty pages, events which might have legitimately claimed half the space in his volume. This period as dealt with by Sir Edward Gait has another defect. Brevity is not its only fault. As the learned author did not examine the unpublished documents bearing on the period and exclusively relied on Sir James Johnstone and Wilson*, many of his findings and recordings of events are not corroborated by the facts which are being gradually disclosed from the archives of the Government of India. "The North East Frontier of Bengal" is another valuable book on Assam written by Alexander Mackenzie who had the privilege of consulting all the official documents. But as the main purpose of his book was to describe in detail the policy pursued by the British Government towards the various states and tribes of the North-eastern part of India, the internal history of Assam as such was passed by and he dealt in part only with the tale of annexation. The learned writer has rather elaborately dealt with the Khāsi Insurrection but he had failed to realise the spirit behind the rising which appeared to him nothing but a disturbance — the

* Captain Welsh's Expedition to Assam (Johnstone). Documents illustrative of the Burmese War (Wilson).

mere outburst of a savage tribe. As such his narrative on the Khāsi Insurrection, which was a formidable rising and practically threw the whole of Assam out of gear, even though for a short while, is a one-sided account of the affairs.

Thanks to the impetus given by Dr. S. K. Sen, Director of Archives, Government of India, the attention of some scholars has been drawn to this neglected province of India and the result has been the publication of a few books and articles touching on the modern history of Assam in the course of the last few years. Dr. Sen in his book "Records in oriental languages, Vol. I. Bengali letters" while editing some important historical letters addressed to the Government of India by the kings and chiefs of North-eastern India, has given an admirable sketch of the internal condition of Assam and its neighbouring states on the eve of the British conquest and occupation. Another noteworthy publication is "The Eastern Frontier of British India" (1st Edition 1943) written by Dr. A. C. Banerjee, of the Calcutta University. His is a systematic tale of Assam from 1792 to 1826 describing in detail the policy pursued by the British Government towards Burma and Assam.

From the aforesaid review of the books it will be evident that there are no books on Assam describing the modern period in detail. But it was during this period that the Burmese were driven out, the Assam Valley was occupied, rebellions were started by the disaffected nobility, the old *paik* system was discarded and experiments were made with the "Chowdree system" with its dire consequences, a native prince was installed in Upper Assam (this last experiment also failed) and gradually the whole of the North-eastern Frontier containing a variety of races and sub-races not to be found elsewhere in India was brought within the pale of the enlightened British Administration. The growth of the British power in Assam is no less interesting, though it displayed no marvellous feats of military exploits. The administration of the land was no less complex; to retain or not to retain Upper Assam was the question that engaged the minds of the British statesmen for more than seven years.

In this treatise, the writer has described mainly * in detail how the different parts of the Brahmaputra Valley and the different hill tribes of the Surma Valley were conquered one after another by the representatives of the East India Company. His tale of annexation forming chapter V of the book has been preceded by a narrative of

* The writer has, though the matter is outside the scope of his subject, discussed incidentally the position of the Court in its relation with the Government of India (Pp 187-191) which, he hopes, would stimulate further discussions on this important topic.

the rebellions covering some 50 pages, which is altogether an original contribution to the history of Assam. Until the publication of some of the chapters of his thesis in public magazines* very few scholars knew that there occurred a series of rebellions in Assam during the period under discussion in which the dwellers of the plains as well as the dwellers of the hills—"all combined to drive the lowland strangers out of the country" and many of these plots were countenanced by the Ava Authorities, and the writer feels gratified to learn that many of the new points brought to light by him have been incorporated in some recent publications on Assam. While describing the events of the period (1824-1854) the writer has so marshalled the facts that they fall under five** clearly marked divisions—revealing the characteristics of each period. In preparing this thesis—the writer has mainly, if not exclusively, depended on the unpublished records preserved in the archives of the Government of India, New Delhi. He had no well marked tracks to follow save and except very brief and incomplete accounts of the period given by Gait and Mackenzie : he had practically to bring into existence—a new history of Assam out of the dry facts gleaned from the various records of the East India Company and as such it has been a pioneer work—containing all the defects a pioneer's work is subjected to.

For the history of the period 1769-1824 as incorporated in the prologue—the writer cannot claim much originality. The subject has been treated elaborately by many scholars. He has briefly dealt with the period which truly speaking does not fall within the range of his researches except by way of introducing the subject. But even in dealing with the history of this period he has followed original sources and supplemented it with fresh data gathered mainly from the Assam Buranjis as edited by Dr. S. K. Bhuyan, Ph.D., and has also tried to present the old theme in a new shape. The fruits of incessant labours of six years are presented before the public and he does not know how far he has succeeded.

In describing many of the events the writer has made interpretations and reached conclusions different from those made by veteran scholars in the line and as such many of his findings may appear unpalatable, but like a true student of history he has never deviated from the high ideal of historical truth and in judging men and things he has always placed truth above all things.

February, 1954.

R. M. LAHIRI.

* The Journal of the Assam Research Society, July & October, 1944.

The Modern Review, April, 1945.

** Period of Wars, Period of Interim Settlement, Period of Insurrection, Period of Appeasement and Period of Annexation.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Before this humble publication of mine is presented before the public, it is my duty to acknowledge help which I received in the course of the preparation and publication of this treatise from numerous well-wishers, friends and relations.

My reading of Martin's "Eastern India" created deep interest in the history of Assam and mainly encouraged by my revered Professors Late Dr. N. C. Banerjee, and Dr. I. B. Banerjee of the Calcutta University I repaired to New Delhi to hunt the archives of the Government of India at a time when the last Global War was stretching its tentacles wide in South-East Asia. Those were days of controls and restrictions and we had no access to a part of the archives—we were specially forbidden to utilise the documents relating to the Patkai Range through which the Burmese burst into Assam in 1816 and the Japanese were then thundering at the gates of Burma. My plan had to be re-cast and thanks to the suggestion of Sri A. C. Banerjee, Lecturer, Calcutta University, who was then working on the same lines, I selected a later period of the Assamese History.

Towards the procurement of the excerpts from the relevant records of the East India Company I had to incur a huge expenditure and mainly through the financial help of the Government of West Bengal, the materials were collected. I had to face a great difficulty again at the time of the publication of the book and I acknowledge with deep gratitude the financial help I received in this connection from the Government of West Bengal, the authorities of the Anandachandra College and the Rahut family of Jalpaiguri. But for their timely help and the interest taken by my relation Mr. A. C. Roy, this treatise of mine would not have seen the light of the day. I am also greatly indebted to Sri H. M. Lahiri M.Sc., late of the Geological Survey of India, Sri B. L. Bose M.A., former Principal, Pabna Edward College, Prof. M. L. Mukherjee M.A. of the Ashutosh College, Calcutta, Mr. A. Mukherjee B.A., and Prof. S. K. Chatterjee M.A., for reading my work and giving me valuable advice on numerous points.

Lastly I beg to submit that as the proof corrections were made mostly at places far away from Calcutta, a number of errors and misprints justly open to censure has crept into the book for which the writer can only crave the indulgence of kind readers.

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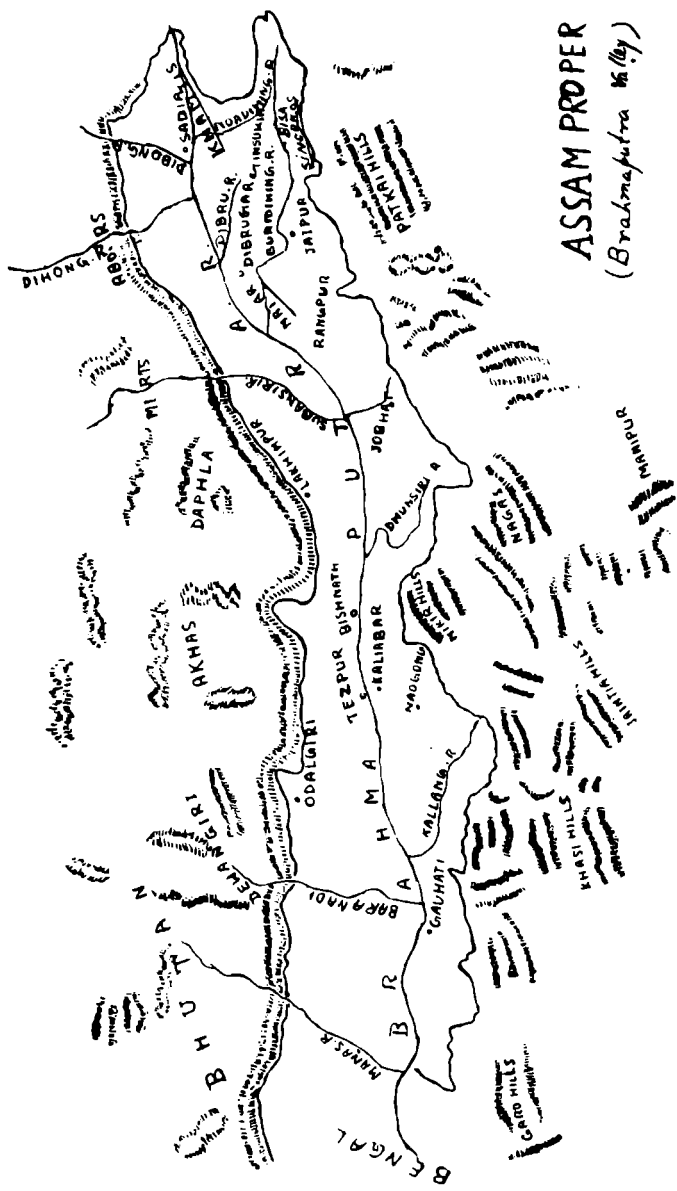
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ABBREVIATIONS

- P.C. — Political consultations.
P.P. — Political proceedings.
F.P. — Foreign proceedings.
S.C. — Secret consultations.
T. Buranjee — Tungkhungia Buranjee.
J.A.S.B. — Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal.
L. — Letter.
G.G. — Governor-General.

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ASSAM PROPER
(Brahmaputra Valley)

PROLOGUE

PERIOD OF TURMOIL

Troubles in Assam leading to the British intervention
in the affairs of the Brahmaputra Valley.
(1769—1824)

The Brahmaputra Valley or Assam proper¹ was ruled by the Āhoms—a branch of the Shān race for nearly six hundred years. The Āhoms were a hardy race fond of meat-eating and addicted to wine-drinking. They migrated from the Shān regions of Upper Burma and poured into the north-eastern extremity of the Brahmaputra Valley in the thirteenth century A.D. under their leader Sukāphā (1228-1268) and gradually established themselves as conquerors of the entire Valley. They slowly adopted the Hindu religion and customs* and also the language of the conquered. They developed a peculiar system of administration² and had a

¹ The Assam of the Āhoms was bounded on the north by the Bhutan hills, on the west by the Manās river and the Habraghat Parganas, on the south by the Naga, Khasi, Mikir and Garo hills and on the east by the Mismi, Singpho and Khamti ranges.

* In their original home in the Shan country their religion was "Furalung" or worship of "Maha-Vishnu." Their principal god was "Somedeo" whose image, it is said was given to them by Indra.

² The feudal element was clearly manifest in the Ahom Governmental system. "The Government was vested in the hands of the king styled "Surgadeo" and was strictly speaking despotic. He was assisted by a council of state composed of the Boora Gohain and Bar Patra Gohain and Bar Barua (Chief secretary). Under them were the Suddeya Khowa Gohain, Morangi Khowa and others. These officers held charge of areas of strategic importance. Independent of these were a whole host of nobles styled Phukans supposed to exercise control to the extent of 6000 men, Raj Khowas of 3000, Hazarikas of 1000, and their inferior officers Saikias over 100 and Boras over 20... The nobility had Khels or Parganas under their control with the corresponding number of inferior ranks, if such it can be called, subject to the authority of the king. No such thing as a "Land tax" as in our system was then known, each Khel furnishing its own quota of produce in kind. The population was divided into Gots, consisting of 3 paiks each and was liable to be called upon either as soldiers, labourers on the public works or any particular lands belonging to the king in return for which each Paik received 2 poorahs of land."

—from the account of Lieut. Rutherford
(Pol. Proceedings 1832, 23rd July, No. 70-71).

prosperous³ and eventful reign of nearly six centuries. They produced a considerable historical literature and carried the art of carving wood to a high-water-mark of excellence.⁴

But in the sleepy hollows of Assam, the Āhoms—the unequalled, who successfully beat back the Muhammadan invasion, gradually lost their vigorous warlike qualities and sank into the position of a soft race. The last fifty years of their rule practically coinciding with the last quarter of the eighteenth century and the first two decades of the nineteenth century were marked by insurrections and conspiracies, the worst features of the later period being the unhappy wranglings for the exercise of the supreme power of the state amongst the highest officials of the realm. The *rois fainéants* who succeeded one after another after short intervals during this period had no power to control them or to arrest the process of disruption that set in. This unhappy state of affairs was eventually responsible for the Burmese intervention and invasion which “turned the happy valley of Brahmaputra into a vale of woes and tears.” This state of lawlessness and anarchy was not confined to Assam alone; nearly the whole of the North-Eastern region comprising the small principalities of Cāchār and Manipur was given over to chronic anarchy and misrule.⁵ Jaintia was the honourable exception. She was the only petty state which enjoyed uninterrupted peace and tranquillity for more than sixty years prior to the advent of the Burmese.⁶

³ “That Assam previous to the invasion of the Moamarees in 1790 (?) and subsequently thereto until the arrival of the Burmese was in a most flourishing state there is not a doubt of.....”

(From the above account of Lt. Rutherford).

“Generally speaking, I am of opinion that the lower orders in Assam were better off than the same class in our Bengal territories; and that with reference to the lightness of the land tax, the fertility of the soil and the comparatively high price of grains in the former country the cultivators evidently enjoyed a much larger share of the produce of their agricultural labours.”

(From Scott's letter, P. C. 1828, July 25, No. 2).

⁴ “Probably nowhere else in the whole world can wooden houses be built with such decoration and figure carvings as by the people of this country. The sides of the palace have been partitioned into wooden lattices of various designs carved into relief and adorned both inside and outside with mirrors of polished brass so that when sun-beams fall on them, the eye is dazzled by the flashing, back of light”—Fathiya (IBORS Vol. I, P. 194). This testimony coming from the Muhammadan historian who has condemned the Assamese in the strongest terms but has praised their works is all the more valuable and trustworthy.

⁵ Dr. S. N. Sen's “Records in Oriental Languages,” Vol. I (Preface)

⁶ Political Proceedings 1833 Jan. 7 No. 82.

In the otherwise placid and calm waters of the Brahmaputra Valley politics, the first ripples were started by the Moāmāriās who occupied the Mātak region lying on the eastern extremity of Assam. The Moāmāriās,* the earliest proselytes to Hinduism, were worshippers of Krishna and had no regards for the orthodox tenets of Hinduism. They refused to take to the worship of Durgā which was the court religion of Assam. They were allowed to exercise their religion unmolested until the reign of Shiva Singh when an attempt was made to convert Sāktaism into the State religion. The Moāmāriās never submitted to the demand of the Āhom Court. Animated by a spirit of sectarian zeal, the Rāñī** inflicted a sore wound on their religious feelings by compelling them to worship the image of Durga and to put the distinguishing marks of the followers of that deity on their foreheads.⁷

Silently but grudgingly the Moāmāriās bore the insult for some time until they had gathered strength. Though exclusive followers of Vishnu, like other Vaishnavites, non-violence was not the first and foremost article of their faith. They rose in open rebellion under the leadership of their Gosains against the revengeful and persecuting spirit of the Āhom chief minister during the reign of Lakhmi Singh (1769-80). They obtained possession of the capital, deposed the Raja and elected a Raja and a Bar Barua of their own sect. They were suppressed no doubt and Lakhmi Singh reinstated, but they revolted again and again and their frequent insurrections brought untold misery and suffering to the common people of the realm.

During the reign of the next king, Raja Gaurināth, (1780-94) a bitter enemy of the Moāmāriās, the latter again rose in rebellion. Serious attempts were made this time to crush them. Envoys were despatched to Cācbār, Jaintiā and Manipur. Raja Jay Singh of Manipur alone came to help the troubled Svargadeva (Lord of Heaven) as the monarch of Assam was styled—with a levy of four thousand strong.⁸ In the combat that followed, a great number of 1791 A.D.

* They are also known by the generic name of Mattaks (strong) — The Moamarias according to Gāit (Vide History of Assam P. 58) “consisted mainly of persons of low social rank such as Doms, Morans, Kacharis, Haris and Chutiyas and they denied the supremacy of the Brahmans,” but according to the statement contained in the old records preserved in the Assam Research Society office, Gauhati “The Moamarias consisted not only of the Handis, Doms and other lower classes of people, but also of some Brahmans, Daivajnas, Kayesthas, Kalitas, Keots, Kochas and others.”

** The Wife of Shiva Singh.

⁷ P. C. 1839 Aug. 14, No. 105.

⁸ Assam T. Burāñji By Dr. S. K. Bhuyan. pp 127-28.

Manipurians fell and Raja Jay Singh had to beat a hasty retreat towards his mountain kingdom. All attempts to resist the tide of the Moāmāriā invasion failed this time. The capital (Rangpur) itself was occupied and the Svargadeva had to flee from Gauhati. After expelling the Svargadeva, the Moāmāriās placed two others of their own faith upon the *gadi*: One named Bhārat Singh as the Raja of Rangpur or Upper Assam, the other Sarbānanda (the father of the Bar Senāpati of whom we shall hear so much later) as the Raja of Morān or Mātak.⁹ This temporary eclipse of the royal power was a further signal for the mushroom appearance of numerous petty rajas in the various parts of the distracted country and the suffering of the people knew no bounds. Famine, Pestilence, Death and Fire “the four Horsemen of the Apocalypse” stalked and ravaged the country from end to end and a great exodus of the people began, and many, to escape fire and sword, joined the standard of the rebels.

But the suffering of the people had just begun. The tyranny and treachery of Raja Gaurīnāth were responsible for the assassination of the then Raja of Darrang, a dependency of Assam.¹⁰ To avenge his death, his son Krishna Nārāyan collected a force of mercenaries from the Company’s dominion in Bengal and re-occupied Darrang after driving away the detachment of Gaurīnāth. This opened a floodgate of fresh streams of disbanded sepoys and *Barkandazes* who poured in from Bengal and made West Assam the field of plunder and aggression and between these two steamrollers of oppression—the Moāmāriās in the east and the *Barkandazes* in the west—the people of Assam began to be pressed very hard. In utter helplessness, Raja Gaurīnāth appealed to Lord Cornwallis, the then Governor-General to expel these turbulent ruffians from the confines of Assam. The British Government had felt a moral responsibility in the matter and accordingly in September

⁹ “The Muttocks were originally a rude tribe settled in a district called ‘Murau’ who learnt the doctrines of the Hindu Religion from two Gossains named Madho (Madhav) Deo and Senkar Deo and this occurred prior to the Ahom Invasion. The Gossains were followers of Krishna. The appellation of Moamariāhs arose from its being the name of the place (Mayamara) where a Satra (Religious Headquarters) was founded and from which the doctrines emanated.”

From the account left by Captain White.

(P. C. 1839, August 14, No. 105).

¹⁰ There were six vassal chiefs under the Śwarga Deo of Assam namely the Rajas of Darrang, Dimarua, Rani, Bardwar, Nandwar and Beltola. Of these the Raja of Rani alone had the right of retaining a small standing force.

(P. P. 1833, Jan. 7, No. 82).

1792, Captain Welsh was sent to drive away the riff-raff from the western confines of Assam and to restore order.

The marauders from Bengal were driven out and the Moāmāriās also were beaten with the help of the British reinforcements. Captain Welsh not only restored order in Assam, but also brought about some administrative reforms. In the meantime, change of policy had taken place at the Calcutta Council with the change of the Governor-General and the Non-interference Policy of the next Governor-General, Sir John Shore, was responsible for the hasty recall of the Welsh Expedition. Pathetic but vain appeals were made to Sir John Shore by Raja Gaurīnāth to stay the recall of Captain Welsh who had proved so helpful for the people of Assam and the Captain himself reported that his withdrawal would lead to "confusion, devastation and massacre".¹¹ But Captain Welsh was recalled to Bengal amidst the universal lamentation of the Assamese people.

The weak but tyrannical king did not keep his promise and threw away measures of reform introduced by Captain Welsh. Many fell victims to his oppression. Misgovernment ensued again and "Assam was given over to confusion and misery". The history of the past decades began to repeat itself. The Khāmtis, who had descended from the Borkhāmti region lying in the valley of the Irrawaddy and had established themselves in the eastern tracts of Assam half a century ago with the permission of the then Ahom Raja, now forcibly took Sadiyā, the frontier post, and carved out a small principality around it, their chief usurping the title of the Sadiyā Khawā Gohain, the designation of the Assamese Governor of Sadiyā. The Moāmāriās began to show their heads again. In the midst of this welter of confusion and chaos, Raja Gaurīnāth breathed his last.

Dec. 19.
1794.

The Prime Minister, Burha Gohain assumed supreme power of the state after putting to death his rival Bar Barua and installed one Kinārām on the throne under the name of Kamaleshwar. But the reign of this puppet king (1795-1810) was marked by vigour and energy. The resistance of the Moāmāriās was crushed, order was restored and prosperity again returned to this unhappy land, thanks to the ability and administrative wisdom of the Burha Gohain who was the *de facto* ruler of the realm. Temples and buildings were again erected. The 'Lankākānda* of the Rāmāyana' was versified in elegant Assamese under the court patronage during this

¹¹ Gait's History of Assam, 2nd Ed. P. 212.

* One of the cantos of the great Hindu Epic in which is described the War between Rāma and Rāvana and the conquest of Lankā (Ceylon) by the former.

period.¹² Did it forebode the coming calamities? During this reign, it is reported that the prudent counsel of the Bara Phukan, the Āhom Viceroy of Lower Assam, conceived the idea of forming an alliance with the Company, but this idea was turned down by Purnananda, the Burha Gohain who had great confidence in his own power and wisdom. But after him came "the Great Deluge", "the Laukākānda" which eventually swept away the very structure of the Āhom Rule in the Brahmaputra Valley. The next King Chandra Kānta's reign (1810-1818) saw the intrusion of the Burmese power into Assam.

A new royal dynasty rose in the valley of the Irrawaddy in the middle of the eighteenth century whose land-hunger was but whetted by the conquest of Arakan which fell into their hands in the year 1784-85. The Burmese carried off as slaves twenty thousand Arakanese including their King after the conquest of Arakan and a reign of terror ensued.¹³ The Arakanese better known as 'Mags' who were once terror to the people of Lower Bengal, began to be paid in their own coin by their more atrocious and turbulent masters, the Burmese.

Assam was to pass through the same ordeal now. Intrigues at the Assamese Court became the order of the day and the three principal functionaries of the state began to quarrel amongst themselves again. The newly appointed Bar Phukan, Badan Chandra, proved most tyrannical and vindictive and people began to groan under his misrule. The Burha Gohain sent men to arrest him. Badan Chandra got scent of it and fled to Calcutta. Though he was unable to get the help of the British who very naturally declined to intervene on his behalf, this evil star of Assam opened negotiations with the Calcutta Agent of the Burmese Government and with his help repaired to the Court of Āvā. His supplication obtained better hearing there and the Burmese King sent an expedition to Assam to reinstate him in his former capacity.

The Assamese army could not stand before the impact of the Burmese detachment flushed with the wine of victory and gave way. The notorious Badan Chandra became all powerful but retained Chandra Kānta on the throne. The Burmese Army retired (1817) after having been paid a large indemnity to cover their troubles and expenses. After the departure of the Burmese, there ensued a triangular fight between the Bar Phukan, the Bar Barua and the

¹² Assam T. Buranjee by Dr. S. K. Bhuyan, P. 200.

¹³ The Eastern Frontier of British India—By Prof. A. C. Banerjee, M.A., P.R.S. P. 58—1st Edition.

Burha Gohain. Badan Chandra was killed at the instigation of the royal party. But the Burha Gohain instead of joining the royal party led by the Bar Barua, collected a large number of *Hindustani* mercenaries and advanced upon Jorhāt. Chandra Kānta fled and Purandar Singh, the great-grandson of Raja Rajeshwar Singh was installed as King (1818).

The Burmese were informed of the turn of events in Assam and they at once despatched a strong contingent under the command of Ala Mingyi to avenge the death of Badan Chandra. Purandar Singh fled towards Gauhati. Chandra Kānta now joined hands with the Burmese and was proclaimed King by them under their suzerainty. Practically speaking, Assam now passed under Burmese domination (1819-24) and a period of unprecedented savagery followed. The adherents of the Burha Gohain and the Bar Barua were hunted down and put to death. Even the Burha Gohain and the Bar Barua themselves were seized and put to death.¹⁴

Purandar Singh took refuge at Chilmari in the district of Rangpur (Bengal) and in September 1819, solicited the protection and assistance of the Company to reinstate him on the *masnad* of his ancestors, promising to pay the expenses of the expedition and to accept the kingdom from the British on an annual tribute of Rs. 3 lakhs. It is reported that he at first opened negotiations with the Burmese authorities under certain terms and conditions; when those negotiations failed, he turned to the Company.¹⁵ The Calcutta Council declined to interfere in the internal affairs of a foreign state.

Chandra Kānta, too, was not idle. At the instigation of the Burmese party, he requested the Governor-General in Bengal to surrender the heads of ex-Raja Purandar Singh, the Burha Gohain and his followers with their property and effects. In reply, the British Government informed Raja Chandra Kānta that it was not the practice of that Government to deny an asylum to political refugees, but at the same time they wished to cultivate friendly relations with him. Not satisfied with this reply, one of the ministers of the King of Ava addressed another letter to the Governor-General requiring him to deliver up to the Burmese military officers stationed in Assam the refugees who had disturbed the tranquillity of Assam. Not to provoke any rupture with the Burmese, His Lordship couched the reply in amicable and complimentary terms, but with regard to the subject matter of complaint, no submission however was made and the Burmese Minister was

¹⁴ Gait's History of Assam, 2nd Edition, P. 227.

¹⁵ Political despatch to Court (Para No. 131, September 12, 1823).

requested to refer to the letter which had already been addressed to Raja Chandra Kānta.

1820 A.D. But Chandra Kānta was not long to enjoy the friendship and protection of the Burmese. After having witnessed the summary disposal of the newly appointed Bar Barua at the hands of the Burmese, Chandra Kānta scented danger and fled to Gauhati and thence to Bengal. The Burmese asked him to return and held out assurances to him, but Chandra Kānta did not comply with their professed friendship. One Jogeshwar Singh was put on the throne by the Burmese.

Chandra Kānta now began to negotiate with the Company to procure muskets and gunpowder. His rival Purandar Singh was already busy in procuring arms and in raising levies from Bhutan for the purpose of invading Assam and sought permission of the British Government to be supplied with arms from Fort William.¹⁶ The British Government at first declined, but at the intervention of Mr. Scott, Civil Commissioner of Rangpur, they permitted both the fugitives to collect arms and ammunition by private purchase and Bengal became the base of operations of these two fugitive kings.¹⁷ It was pointed out by Mr. Scott that in the event of the Burmese authority being firmly and finally established in Assam, the position of the Bengal frontier would be insecure and that the interests of the British Government would be best served by permitting the refugee kings to obtain necessary means for the expulsion of the Burmese.

Was the East India Company legally right in allowing these two fugitives to use their dominion as their base of operations and was the demand of the Burmese, however haughty the tone might be, for the expulsion of these two fugitives always exacting and unreasonable? Here again was a conflict between Absolute Politic and Real Politic. And we presume that the verdict of "Not guilty" will not on every occasion be delivered by an impartial historian in favour of the East India Company.

1820 A.D. Chandra Kānta's first effort to oust the Burmese failed miserably and he was driven headlong across the Bengal frontier. In the year 1821, better fate awaited him; he defeated the Burmese in several skirmishes and advanced into the country as far as Gauhati. Earlier in the year, his troops came in collision with the army raised by Purandar Singh who had entered Assam from Bhutan. His levy was commanded by one Mr. Bruce, a European, long domiciled in

¹⁶ P. C. 1821 March 10, Nos. 3-4.

¹⁷ P. C. 1821, June 16, Nos. 69-71.

Jogighopā. His army was defeated and dispersed by a party sent by Chandra Kānta. Mr. Bruce was taken prisoner and sent down to Gauhati. These successes and the continued attempts of Purandar Singh and the Burha Gohain from the side of Bhutan and Bijni, to recover their lost dominions drew forth an highly angry protest couched in insolent language from the Burmese General Mingyi Mahā Bandulā who had arrived in the meantime to command the Burmese troops in Assam. This document which was a curious specimen of the Burmese style of official correspondence demanded that Chandra Kānta should be given up and that no assistance should be afforded to Raja Chandra Kānta, or "Chandra Ganda" as the Burmese called him, or to any refugees.¹⁸

The British Government gave the usual reply that it was not their custom to deliver up persons who might take refuge in their territories on account of political disturbances. But at the same time the Burha Gohain, who had been hanging on the frontier and had intercepted the letters coming from the Burmese quarters, was confined for sometime for this misconduct. Instructions were also issued calling upon Raja Chandra Kānta to indemnify the losses the people of the Hābrāghat *parganā* had suffered at the hands of the Burmese troops while he was on the throne of Assam.¹⁹

The Burmese forces in Assam were greatly reinforced and strengthened by the arrival of Mingyi Mahā Bandulā from the Court of Amarpura and in June 1822 Chandra Kānta sustained a severe defeat at his hand and disappeared altogether from the field of contest.

A threatening letter was sent on this occasion by the Burmese officers to Mr. Davidson, Officer Commanding at Goalpara (then within the Bengal Presidency). It stated that they wished to remain in friendship with the Company and to respect the integrity of the British territory, but should protection be given to Raja Chandra Kānta, their army consisting of 18,000 fighting men and commanded by forty Rajas would follow him wherever he would go and would take him away by force out of the Company's dominions. A similar letter addressed by Mahā Mingyi Silwa, the ex-Commander-in-Chief of the Burmese forces in Assam was also despatched to the chief British Authorities at Calcutta.

The Calcutta Council recognised force in the contention of the Burmese and accordingly it was ordered that should Chandra Kānta or any of his adherents appear within the confines of the Company's

¹⁸ P. C. 1822, Jan. 11, No. 23.

¹⁹ P. C. 1822, Jan. 11, Nos. 22, 24-25.

Dominions, they must be disarmed and sent to a safe distance from the frontier. But at the same time it was resolved that should the Burmese attempt to follow up Chandra Kānta into the British Dominions, it must be instantly repelled by force. And instructions were accordingly issued to the Officer Commanding at Dacca, to send such reinforcements as Mr. Scott might require to meet the situation. Steps were taken at the same time to acquaint the nominal ruler of Assam with the demand for the restitution of the property plundered at Hābrāghāt (in Goalpara) by his allies, the Burmese, in the year 1821.²⁰

At this time a *vakil* said to be a person of high rank was deputed by the Burmese authority in Assam and the former reached Calcutta by the end of July 1822. He delivered letters from the Burmese chief stationed in Assam requesting the surrender of Chandra Kānta and other Assamese refugees.²¹ The Governor-General, though he declined to comply with their main request, disclaimed explicitly all rights of interference in the proceedings of His Burmese Majesty in Assam and requested Burmese authorities to restrain their troops from further commission of excesses within the British boundary.²²

But the depredations of the Burmese on the border villages of Rangpur went on unchecked. The Burmese pulled down the British flag which had been erected on an island near Goalpara to distinguish it from the Assam dominion and further threatened to take forcible possession of the island in question. This fact was reported to the Calcutta Council, but the authorities there did not take any serious notice of the matter save and except by deputing an officer to settle the boundary question, the object of the dispute in their eyes "being merely a worthless sand bank".²³

At last Chandra Kānta fell into the trap of the Burmese who induced him by sweet words to return to Assam. But when he reached Jorhāt he was arrested and sent down to Rangpur (Assam) to be kept in confinement.

About this time, owing to sickness and scarcity of provisions, Mingyi Mahā Bandulā returned to Burma with the exception of

²⁰ When Assam was occupied by the British the sum of Rupees 2297/8/- was disbursed from the revenues of Lower Assam as compensation to the ryots of Hābrāghāt for damage sustained by the incursions of the Burmese prior to the year 1822 (letter to Court No. 9 of 1831).

²¹ P. C. 1822 Sept. 6, Nos. 18-21.

²² P. C. 1822 Oct. 11, Nos. 53-54.

²³ P. C. 1822 Sept. 27, No. 67.

2000 men left under the command of the Mahā Silwa.²⁴ And a new Governor was appointed for Assam. The orgies of wanton ravages and cruelties which had marked the previous period came to an end and a settled administration followed. But "History has a nemesis for every sin" and the Burmese were not long to continue their perfidious acts of barbarity. Their insolent acts and spirit of aggrandizement so deepened and complicated the issues that the British were compelled against their will to unsheathe the sword and in less than a year from the commencement of hostilities, the Burmese powers and pretensions in Assam lay in dust and the unhappy valley was at last delivered from the ordeal from which it had suffered for more than four years.

The rapidly expanded Burmese Empire met the British Indian frontier in the south on the Chittagong side when Arakan fell into their hands in 1784-85. Their misrule and tyranny drove a large number of Mags for shelter to the Company's dominions. The Burmese resented the emigration of their subjects and over the question of the Arakan refugees and other incidents, the relation between these two neighbouring states became strained often.²⁵ With the conquest of Assam by the Burmese, the matter assumed a very serious proportion. Incidents became frequent and collision with the Burmese became inevitable.

The Burmese Governor of Arakan illegally seized several of the Company's subjects engaged in hunting elephants on the frontier of Chittagong and Arakan (1821-22). When the Calcutta Council was informed of these irregularities, they piously wished that the fact need only be known to His Burmese Majesty and it would be remedied immediately.²⁶ Other acts of aggression were soon to follow and no serious notice was taken of them. But later on, when the Burmese forcibly occupied the small island of Shāhpur on the Chittagong side and gave out that on the re-occupation of that island by the British, the forces of the state of Ava would invade the British territories along the whole line of the Eastern Frontier,²⁷ the period of complacency came to an end. The British Government thought it expedient as a precautionary measure to direct the movement of the troops to Rangpur and Sylhet. But at the same time, the local authorities were instructed to abstain from any measures

²⁴ P. C. 1822, Sept. 6, No. 14-17.

²⁵ Prof. A. C. Banerjee's "Eastern Frontier of India, Chap. II."

²⁶ P. C. 1822, Oct. 11, Nos. 53-54.

²⁷ S. P. 1824, Jan. 17, No. 6

tending to precipitate hostilities and instructions were again issued not to afford any encouragement to the Assamese refugees.²⁸

Negotiations were going on all this time with the Burmese authorities at Arakan for the amicable settlement of the Shāhpuri and other incidents. Mr. Scott, Civil Commissioner of Rangpur was at this time (November 1823) appointed Agent to the Governor-General on the North Eastern Frontier on an extra allowance of Rs. 1000/- per mensem and was specially directed to report the movement and tendencies of the Burmese in Assam to the Calcutta authorities.²⁹ When called upon to tender his sentiments on the points at issue, Mr. Scott informed the Council "that even if the existing differences with the Court of Ava are adjusted by negotiations, the evacuation of Assam by the Burmese should be insisted upon as *a sine qua non*". And in this connection he proposed that to get rid of the Burmese once and for all, the Company should even be prepared "to pay to them the annual tribute they at present derive from Assam",³⁰

By the end of the year 1823, the Burmese forces were found strongly entrenched on the entire frontier line of the Company's dominions stretching from Goalpara to Cox's Bazar. The substitution of a warlike and comparatively speaking powerful Government in the place of the feeble administration that formerly ruled Assam in a situation so commanding and with such extensive means of plunder and pillage gave due cause for alarm to the British Authorities at Calcutta. The Burmese had already overrun Manipur and were threatening the integrity of the small princoipality of Cachar and the British Government not unduly feared that their next prey would be the Company's dominions.

In January 1824, the simultaneous appearance of Burmese armies from the directions of Assam and Manipur occasioned great fear and the inhabitants began to flee in great number from Cachar and Sylhet. "Under such an emergency, every resource, however trifling, was sought after" and hurried preparations were made to checkmate the designs of the Burmese.³¹ Mr. Scott, whose opinion was solicited on that occasion, suggested that a force of eight or nine hundred men supported by half a dozen field pieces and Howitzers would be sufficient to clear Assam of the Burmese and assured the Calcutta Council that the people of Assam, in case of hostilities breaking out, would afford them all the aid in their power.

²⁸ S. P. 1823, Oct. 31, No. 15.

²⁹ S. P. 1823, Nov. 14, No. 12.

³⁰ S. P. 1823, Nov. 14, No. 16.

³¹ G. G's Minute March 25, 1823, Vol. I.

Accordingly proclamations were issued in the Assamese language calling upon the inhabitants of Assam to rise in support of the British in the event of a rupture with the Burmese, under the distinct pledge that they would be released from the Burmese yoke. Emissaries were sent to the Singpho and Khamti chiefs with a view to enlisting their active co-operation. And Mr. Bruce who was acquainted with the hill tribes, was appointed to conduct such negotiations. Overtures were also made to the Manipur Prince Gambhir Singh (who had taken possession of Cachar), to the exiled Raja Govinda Chandra of Cachar and to the King of Jaintiā whose territories had been threatened by the Burmese. To forestall the contemplated invasion of Cachar by the Burmese, a timely counter move was set in motion and the Burmese were informed by the beginning of 1824 that the said principality had been taken under the British protection (though in fact negotiations with Govinda Chandra were still going on).³² And troops were moved to the frontier of Sylhet. The 'Zero hour' was approaching.

In the meantime, the Burmese were rapidly advancing towards Cachar from three directions and on a protest from the English, the Burmese Commander informed the local British Officer that they were coming at Govinda Chandra's request to reinstate him on his ancestral throne from which he had been wrongfully deposed by the Manipuriān Princes. And as they refused to turn back the war was declared.

³² S. P. 1823, December 12, No. 11.

CHAPTER I
EXPULSION OF THE BURMESE
AND
THE PERIOD OF MILITARY OCCUPATION.
(1824-1826)

On the 17th January 1824 there occurred a skirmish between the English and the Burmese near Vikrampur (Cachar) and the so-called British jackals* badly mauled the Burmese lions in the first encounter. The second battle was fought near the gorge of the Beritika Pass on the Bank of the Jatingā river in Cachar on the 10th February. The Burmese forces were defeated and they retreated in utmost confusion leaving in the hands of the British a number of standards and seven or eight golden *chattas* (umbrellas) including those belonging to the Commander-in-Chief and the Burmese Governor of Assam. They retired for a time in the direction of Assam. The number of the Burmese with the army was inconsiderable, it being mainly composed of the Assamese numbering nearly four thousand. The Manipuri Prince Gambhīr Singh who had in the meantime joined the British army with his followers, displayed on the occasion a degree of gallantry, energy and zeal that evoked strong commendation from the British General in command.

Operations in the Brahmaputra Valley commenced later on when the troops had been moved down to Gauhati and other warlike preparations made.** And within three weeks from the date of the formal declaration of war (4th March, 1824) the country of Assam nearly as far as Kālīābār was occupied by the British.†¹

The British lost no time in bringing the newly occupied tract under their administration though the entire kingdom of Svargadeva

* Maha Bandula, the Burmese Commander-in-chief in Assam compared the Burmese with lions and the English with jackals (according to Burmese chronicle Konbaungset Yazawin—Vol. II, P. 371).

** To transport the soldiers, boats plying in the Brahmaputra were forcibly seized or commandeered. It will not be out of place to mention here that this forced service continued for two years during which period the crew not only suffered great privations receiving only half rations, but also experienced great difficulty in realising compensations which were long delayed.

† For a full account of the battles the reader is referred to Prof. Banerjee's book "Eastern Frontier of British India".

¹ S. P. 1824, May 28, No. 19.

including the Eastern and Western halves of the Brahmaputra Valley formerly passed into their hands only after the conclusion of the treaty of Yandabo two years later (1826).

To Mr. Scott was entrusted the management of this newly acquired tract. A question arose at this juncture—how the newly occupied territory would be administered? Would it be administered under the civil administration or under martial law? The matter was referred to the Governor-General-in-Council and it was decided by them that the country must continue to be considered as an “enemy country” merely occupied by the British army and not subject to the ordinary rules of civil and criminal justice as administered in the British territories elsewhere in India.² Though the country was declared to be administered by martial law, great care was taken to invest Mr. Scott, Civil Officer, with a great if not greater amount of authority. So practically, a dual administration was inaugurated during the interim period (1824-28).

The respective duties of the military officer (Col. Richards) and the political agent (Mr. Scott) were clearly defined and demarcated from the very beginning to avoid any future disputes or entanglement. Mr. Scott was vested with the general management and the control of all political transactions and negotiations that were to be conducted with the friendly Assamese and other native chiefs. He was also to treat with the enemy. The political agent was forbidden from interfering with matters of purely military nature though he was asked to afford most cordial and zealous support to the officer commanding on all questions of general interest. He was also given the management and collection of the revenues and one Captain Davidson was appointed as his sole assistant.³ He was further advised to conduct the collection of revenues without the aid of the military powers and the task of the rent collection fell to the “Sihbandi Corps”, the irregular foot soldiers who had accompanied the tax gatherers in the days of the Āhom Kings.⁴ The administration of civil and criminal justice was left entirely in the hands of the officer commanding, who was instructed to act under a special warrant presented by His Excellency the Commander-in-Chief.⁵ Col. Richards was also placed in charge of the Police establishments at Gauhati.⁶

² S. P. 1824, May 28, No. 20.

³ S. P. 1824, July 2, Nos. 15-16.

⁴ S. P. 1826, April 7, No. 8.

⁵ S. P. 1824, July 2, Nos. 15-16.

⁶ S. C. 1826, March 17, Nos. 17-18.

While the preliminaries were being laid for the management of the newly occupied territory, the British arms were busy both in the Brahmaputra Valley and in the Cachar regions. Many minor and major battles had to be fought in expelling the Burmese out of the North-Eastern theatre of operation with the details of which we are not concerned here. With the surrender of the fort of Rangpur in January 1825, the Burmese menace in the Brahmaputra Valley practically came to an end and a sort of settled administration followed.

To Colonel Richards fell the great task of finally driving out the Burmese from the upper region of Assam. The task proved not so harassing as anticipated. His troops approached Rangpur, the last stronghold of the Burmese, on the 29th of January 1825 and at night tried to escalate the stockades thrown in their way. The Burmese came out in small parties and attacked the pickets stationed around, but were soon compelled to retire. About ten o'clock in the morning of the 30th, a white flag of truce was seen coming from the fort. The Burmese offer to surrender was quite unexpected.

The terms for the surrender of the fort were conducted by the Raj Guru Dharmadhar Brahmachārī, a native of Ceylon. He was at the time acting as the Chief Priest of the Burmese authorities in Assam. He had resided for many years in Bengal and held many public posts to his credit. A man of wide knowledge and conversant with occidental manners and customs, he was deputed by the Phukans in charge of the Burmese forces to act as a "mediator".

At that time faction reigned supreme in the enemy camp. The three principal chiefs, Sham Phukan, Shaikh Phukan and Nabaru Phukan including Boglœ Phukan (the last named later joined the other party and left the fort) were desirous of coming to a settlement with the British, while the other party, numerically stronger, were equally determined to offer a stiff resistance. Getting scent of the faction from the Raj Guru, the officer commanding tried to win over the peace party by offering them liberal terms on the understanding that they should come out and abandon the aggressive party to the swords of the British. This device was found to be impracticable because the latter party preponderated in strength over the former and secondly the slightest suspicion of such an inclination would not only have entailed bloodshed and destruction on the spot, but also would have extended the feud to their families. Another weighty reason which induced the British Officer to abandon this wily project was that he had no means to prevent their escape, the supply of ammunition being but very small.

It was arranged finally that the aggressive or hostile party

should be allowed to leave the fort and start for their homes provided they took the direct route, committed no ravages on the road and carried away none of the inhabitants of Assam as slaves. The peace party were required to deliver up their arms, ammunition and war-like stores. On behalf of the victors, they were guaranteed full protection and eventual settlement in Assam and it was further stipulated that they were on no account to be delivered to the King of Āvā.

These points having been agreed upon, about seven hundred captives surrendered and the rest numbering about nine thousand including women and children withdrew in the direction of the frontier and the British flag was hoisted on the top of the palace. 955 guns of all descriptions made of iron and brass together with several thousand iron balls and a considerable quantity of gunpowder were surrendered by the enemy. Had the enemy composed their differences and rallied under a common leader it would have been impossible to dislodge them so soon and so easily. With the surrender of Rangpur, the last stronghold of the Burmese in Assam, their resistance in the Brahmaputra Valley virtually collapsed and the entire land passed under the British control.⁷

The whole of the Brahmaputra Valley having now been occupied April, 1825. by the British, it became necessary again to devise some comprehensive plan for the temporary administration of its internal affairs. As a provisional arrangement, Mr. Scott and Col. Richards were appointed joint Commissioners for Assam. Mr. Scott was called upon to act as senior Commissioner and was given the privilege of overriding the junior Commissioner on all questions falling under joint deliberations. Mr. Scott became the sole authority as before for negotiating arrangements with the native princes and tribal people of Assam. The eastern part of Assam came under the jurisdiction of Mr. Scott while the western part was placed under the care of Col. Richards who was instructed to act under the instructions of the former in the transaction of all political business. A provisional police system was also introduced and arrangements were made for jail accommodation.⁸

With respect to the administration of criminal justice, a provisional tribunal was set up under the presidency of Col. Richards and the tribunal was given the power to award capital punishment in case of serious offences. The senior Commissioner was not given the power to inflict capital punishment. To speed up trials, the

⁷ S. P. 1825, April 5, No. 16.

⁸ S. P. 1825, April 5, Nos. 24 and 26.

process of commitment preparatory to trial was done away with. It is needless to say that Col. Richards continued to act as Officer Commanding. Thus we find that the revised arrangement for the provisional administration of Assam was nothing but the replica and continuation of the first arrangement introduced in the previous year except that the Military Officer commanding was endowed with certain civil and fiscal powers. The Military regime continued as before.⁹

First Revenue Settlement.

In the meantime Mr. Scott was busy in making a preliminary revenue settlement in Lower Assam. Partly on the basis of the settlements made nearly eighty years before and partly on the basis of the best available local information, Mr. Scott made a preliminary and rough survey of the districts of Kām̄rūp, Darrang, Nauduār and the tracts occupied by the vassal kings of Dimāruā, Pānbariā, Beltolā and Rāñi. The old and peculiar revenue system* of the Ahoms was little disturbed. The settlement made for the first year was simply fixed at double the amount assessed previously and the house tax first imposed by Raja Chandra Kānta was continued by Mr. Scott. The people of the higher order who had been previously exempted altogether from this new taxation on account of their

⁹. S. P. 1825, April 5, Nos. 24 and 26.

* All the free population was divided into Khels or Clans, numbering from 1000 to 5000 able-bodied men in each. The Khels were further subdivided into ghots of three or four paiks each and one paik of each ghot was bound to render personal service to the Raja or to any officer of the state to whom he might be assigned. For the services rendered to the state, each paik was allowed 2 pooras of rice land free of rent. The paik also received a piece of land for a garden and homestead, free of assessment. But for all these holdings, he had to pay one rupee annually either as house tax or poll tax. All Government Officers were paid in Paiks i.e. by the assignment of Paiks numbers varying according to the rank of the officers. The non-cultivating classes paid a higher rate of poll-tax. The wild tribes paid a hoe-tax on their cotton cultivation. In times of peace when there was no heavy demand on the labour of the paiks, the ghots only supplied one labourer to do work for the state and he was relieved every three or four months, the other remaining at home to cultivate his share of lands. In an emergency all the members of the ghots were liable to be called upon when the land was left to the care of the women and children. Those who lived in the immediate vicinity of the rivers had to furnish gold dusts to the state from the river waters. All the cash money required for the services of the state was collected by customs duties. The peasantry in Assam lived in ease because peal or assessment was made at long intervals and during this intervening period the heads of family originally polled as one had increased ten-fold. Mackenzie says "In Assam not only the soil but the dwellers thereon were treated as being the property of the state." But the cultivators of Assam were not like the serfs of England during the middle ages "bound to the land" (*glebae ascripti*).

quality of castes were now called upon to pay the tax to equalise the burden of taxation. The collections from the *Brahmottar* and *Devottar* lands were also made, such possessions having been first assessed by the Burha Gohain at the time of the Burmese invasion.¹⁰ The Brahmins of Kāmrup made a formal protest against the reimposition of the tax on the *Devottar* and *Brahmottar* lands. But their petition was turned down on the plea that the assessment was a light one.^{11*} Owing to the acute distress prevailing amongst the poorer classes of the people no rents however were collected from any portion smaller than two poorahs (equalling nearly seven Bengalee Bighas).

The first year's assessment (1824-25) fetched a revenue of nearly one lac and seventyfive thousand rupees excluding customs duties which brought another sum of twenty thousand *sicca rupees* to the exchequer. The lower parts of Assam were fertile and agriculture was in improved condition. A great portion of land was devoted to the plantation of trees for rearing Muga silk † worms and lac insects. Accordingly Mr. Scott informed the Calcutta Council that if the tract in question were retained by the British Government, its eventual revenue income would reach five or six lacs of rupees. He therefore solicited the permission of the Government to appoint Mr. Mathew, as surveyor to make a detailed and more accurate survey of the whole tract.** The Calcutta authorities were pleased with the initial survey of Mr. Scott and directed him to make a similar survey of the eastern part of Assam which had come under their occupation by this time (January, 1825).¹²

Steps were being taken at the same time to make the position of their newly founded authority secure in the Brahmaputra Valley. The War with the Burmese was not yet finally concluded and military

¹⁰ S. P. 1825, April 5, No. 27.

¹¹ P. C. 1825, September 9, No. 22-24.

* The lightness of the taxation may be gauged from the fact that under the new arrangement, a landlord of Kamrup had to pay a nominal sum of Rs. 5000/- for the holding of 45,000 bighas of Brahmottar lands.

† Muga Silk—a variety of Indian Silk.

** Statement of the land revenue of lower Assam since its occupation by the British Government in March 1824.

In the Bengal year 1231 or 1824/25 Rs. 171,824/- (exclusive of customs duties).

In the Bengal year 1232 or 1825/26 Rs. 247,683/- (exclusive of customs duties).

In the Bengal year 1233 or 1826/27 Rs. 300,383/- (exclusive of customs duties).

(S.P. 1826, March 7, No. 4).

¹² S. P. 1825, April 5, No. 27.

necessity compelled Col. Richards to remove Sham Phukan and other Burmese prisoners of war who capitulated at Rangpur (Assam) to Singmāri in Rangpur in the Bengal Presidency. Since their surrender in January, 1825, they had been behaving splendidly and Mr. Scott proposed to settle them as cultivators in the lower parts of Assam. His ultimate object was to incorporate them in the local militia to be employed against the periodical incursions of the Gāros and Dāphlās, in case of necessity. Eventually they were settled as peaceful cultivators in Singmāri under the superintendence of Lt. Macon and a sum of rupees fifteen thousand was advanced to them.

The pressing want of regular and expert marines was felt during the rainy season of 1824 when a most insignificant Burmese force, from their ability to move quickly, held in check a superior number of British forces in the Brahmaputra Valley.¹³ The hopes of Mr. Scott were not unrealised and we find from subsequent accounts that these Burmese prisoners furnished a contingent of 400 marines and were also regularly employed as musketeers against the incursions of the Gāros, Khāsis and Bhutiās in Lower Assam in the years 1830-1831.¹⁴

Simultaneously with the removal of the Burmese prisoners, another step was taken as warranted by the exigencies of the time. As great inconveniences were being experienced by the local authorities from the residence in the Rangpur quarter of the ex-Raja Chandra Kānta and the ex-Raja Jogeshwar Singh (the nominee of the Burmese), these two ex-Rajas were removed to distant places away from the scene of their former activities. No definite charges were laid against them; perhaps they were suspected of intriguing with the Burmese and Chandra Kānta was reported to have been a notorious intriguer. Chandra Kānta was removed to far off Goalpara and Jogeshwar Singh, who was less of an intriguer, was removed to his brother-in-law's estate near Gauhati.¹⁵ Chandra Kānta was given a pension of Rs. 200/- a month according to his own demand and Raja Jogeshwar Singh the sum of Rs. 100/- per month, from the date of the capitulation of the fort of Rangpur (1st Feb. 1825). For the maintenance of the family of the latter, a farm containing 660 bighas of land with cattle and *pāiles* attached was assigned in Upper Assam and a similar provision was also made for the former

1825.

¹³ S. P. 1825, May 20, Nos. 15, 18 and 19.

S. P. 1825, October 14, Nos. 17-18.

¹⁴ P. P. 1831, March 18, Nos. 36-41.

¹⁵ Ibid.

in Lower Assam. A large number of small allowances, by way of pension, were also granted to the destitute members of the Raj families.*¹⁶ The political revolution reduced many of the aristocratic families to abject poverty. The abolition of the *pāik* system, the main stay of the aristocracy, had a further deteriorating effect upon the social and economic life of the nobility of Assam who suffered most of all at the turn of events.

Even at this period, the difficulty for the proper management of Lower Assam was felt by Mr. Scott for want of adequate establishment. With the establishment of the British authority and the institution of the British mode of justice, an opinion went abroad that under the Company's Raj, a short imprisonment and a few stripes were considered sufficient atonement for serious offences which the native authorities were only able to keep down by the frequent infliction of mutilation and capital punishment. The result was that an unprecedented wave of crimes of all descriptions passed over the land and gang robberies were in many *parganās* probably five times as numerous as they had been in the worst of times.¹⁷ Mr. Scott complained that the great extent of the territory and population placed under his charge made it impossible for him to pay sufficient attention to the details of the judicial and revenue administration. The Junior Commissioner was also obliged to adopt a more summary mode of procedure than had been followed in the *Faujdarī Adālat*s of Bengal and at one session alone, Mr. Scott himself had to dispose of 104 commitments, mostly of a grievous nature.¹⁸ To cope with the increased volume of work, a second assistant was given to Mr. Scott at his suggestion in the person of Captain Adam White. But that did not improve the situation.

¹⁶ S. P. 1825, August 19, Nos. 13-14.

S. P. 1825, October 14, Nos. 16-18.

* Rs. 20/- p.m. for Sukhee Chunder uncle of Ex-Raja Chandra Kanta
(S. P. 1825, Aug. 19, Nos. 13-14).

Rs. 20/- p.m. and 30 poorahs of land for another uncle of Chandra
Kanta (S. P. 1825, Oct. 14, Nos. 16-18).

Rs. 20/- p.m. for Indrajit Singh an uncle of Ex-Raja Poorander Singh
(P. P. 1826, Nov. 4, No. 40).

Rs. 30/- p.m. for Geereedhar Kocnwar a descendant of Raja Rajeshwar
Singh (S. P. 1827, Sept. 18, No. 17).

Rs. 30/- p.m. for Chitrlekha, a daughter of Raja Rajeshwar Singh
(L. from Scott No. 20 of 1826 dated the 20th January).

Rs. 16/- p.m. for the queen of Raja Kamaleshwar Singh (P. P. 1828,
Oct. 17, No. 45-46).

¹⁷ S. P. 1825, April 5, No. 14.

¹⁸ S. P. 1826, March 17, No. 17.

At this period Lt. Col. Richards relinquished the post of Junior Commissioner and Lt. Col. Cooper was appointed to officiate in his place. It was resolved by the supreme Government to abolish the system of Joint Commissioners and Mr. Scott was asked to be ready to conduct the civil administration of the country as sole Commissioner after Lt. Col. Cooper had been relieved of his duties.¹⁰ Thus we find that from the very beginning the civil administration of the country was neglected.

Side by side with the development and execution of the plan for the internal administration of the country, military operations were being conducted to make the easternmost part of Assam secure from the inroads of the Singphos, a rude border tribe occupying the passage from Assam to Burma through which the Burmese had made their last incursions. The Singphos reaped a full advantage of the anarchical state of the country and committed outrages attended with the most revolting cruelties. They carried away a large number of the Assamese as slaves and practically laid waste the land lying to the east of Rangpur.²⁰ To make things worse Boglee Phukan and his followers, who were allowed to leave the Rangpur fort unmolested, roamed in the vicinity of Sadiya and continued their depredations.²¹

March, 1825.

Towards the second week of March, 1825 the Singphos numbering about 7500 and armed with 650 muskets attacked the countries of the Bar Senāpati, the Moāmāriā Chief and of the Sadiyā Khawā Gohain, the Khāmti Chief.²² Boglee Phukan was refused passage by the Singphos across their territories and was asked to assist them in plundering the Moāmāriās. It was a formidable raid and in despair both the chiefs appealed to the British Government for immediate help.

The Singpho menace now engaged the serious attention of the Calcutta Council and most active and efficient measures were adopted. Forces were despatched immediately under the command of Lt. Neufville to the assistance of the Bar Senāpati. Lt. Neufville was given powers to conduct negotiations with the wild tribes and Chief of Eastern Assam and he was also instructed to bring about the subjection of the Singpho Chiefs by measures partly conciliatory and partly coercive. Every inducement was offered them to settle in the plains below.²³

¹⁰ S. P. 1825, December 16, Nos. 24-27.

²⁰ S. P. 1825, May 20, No. 24.

²¹ S. P. 1825, May 20, No. 28.

²² S. P. 1825, April 15, No. 13.

²³ S. P. 1825, May 20, No. 28.

At this stage, a controversy arose between the two Commissioners regarding the *modus operandi* to be employed against the Singphos. Mr. Scott was in favour of establishing a strong advance post at Burhat about four days march from Rangpur and of pushing the operations far into the enemy country. Col. Richards, Junior Commissioner but Officer Commanding in Assam, was not in favour of establishing so advanced a post because in his opinion, in the event of a large force entering the country, it would not be possible to pursue offensive measures, difficulties of transport proving the most formidable obstacle. He feared that the entire forces stationed at that far off place would be cut down and practically forbade Lt. Neufville from entering the Singpho territories under any circumstances. The Calcutta Council, to whom the matter was referred, held that the pacification of the Singpho tribes should be accomplished as early as possible. Lt. Col. Richard's forces were heavily reinforced and a very prompt and decisive resistance was organised against any offensive to be launched by the Burmese.²⁴

In the meantime Lt. Neufville had marched into the very heart of the Singpho territory. The march of Lt. Neufville had its desired effect and overtures of an amicable nature were made by the Singpho Chiefs.²⁵ But the appearance of a Burmese force at this juncture stopped further negotiations and the Singphos began to waver. Military operations were renewed and a series of gallant raids carefully planned was conducted into the very heart of the Singpho countries. In the course of operations which lasted for more than six months, Lt. Neufville effected the liberation of a large number of Assamese slaves.²⁶ The work of "mopping up" continued and at last towards the end of August 1825, the Chiefs or Gaums of Bisa, Kassin, Mullarkoo, Peesi, Set. Neeche and Naggo finding resistance no longer effective, surrendered all their arms, ammunition and Assamese slaves thus paving the way for a general settlement and pacification of the district.²⁷

The victory of the British arms on the Irrawaddy secured in the meantime, greatly influenced the final submission of the Singphos and the Burmese acknowledging defeat retreated. In all, 6000 slaves were liberated.²⁸ Under instructions from Captain Neufville, the auxiliaries under the command of the Bar Senāpati and Sadiyā Khawā Gohain also liberated a large number of Assamese slaves for

²⁴ S. P. 1825, May 27, Nos. 62-64.

²⁵ S. C. 1825, May 20, No. 21.

²⁶ S. C. 1825, Sept. 23, Nos. 9-12.

²⁷ S. C. 1825, Sept. 30, No. 14.

²⁸ S. C. 1826, July 14, No. 9.

which they were awarded a sum of rupees four thousand. Of the slaves liberated, 300 were incorporated in the regular fighting forces under Captain Neufville at his express desire.²⁹ A huge quantity of rice was found in the enemy stores and the liberated slaves were allowed to take away as much as they could and thus the British officers were relieved of the anxiety of feeding the slaves who had nothing to fall back upon during the first few months of their emancipation. Towards the end of December of the same year, a small party of the Burmese again appeared on the scene. The Rangpur Light Infantry were moved under the command of Major Macleod. The enemy was dislodged and the Burmese fled towards the Hukawng country.³⁰ A detachment of 80 men was stationed at Dāffā about twelve miles west of Bisā to inspire the people with confidence and perfect tranquillity again began to reign in the adjoining plains around.³¹

Meanwhile operations were renewed in the Surma Valley under Colonel Innes and a series of battles had to be fought in two of which the British sustained signal repulses before the Burmese were finally driven from the Cachar region.³² The Manipur Prince Gambhīr Singh who had helped to raise a contingent known as the "Manipoori Levy" paid and officered by the British was mainly instrumental in driving out the Burmese from the Valley of Manipur. Gambhīr Singh pursued them further and descending into the Kubo Valley which originally belonged to Manipur and later on became a bone of contention between Manipur and Ava, drove them finally across the Nighthi River. In their homelands also where the main operation was carried on, the Burmese were suffering severe reverses and when the British advanced as far as Yandabo with a view to marching on Āvā, overtures were made and at last peace was concluded on the 24th February 1826.

The King of Ava gave up his claims on the provinces of Assam, Manipur, Cachar and Jaintiā and ceded the provinces of Arakan and Tenasserim to the East India Company and agreed to pay one crore of rupees by way of indemnity. In this manner Assam formally passed into the hands of the British.

The Kingdom of Svargadeva once the abode of green orchards

²⁹ S. P. 1825, Sept. 2, Nos. 22-24.

³⁰ S. C. 1826, Jan. 27, Nos. 36-38.

³¹ S. C. 1826, March 17, No. 17.

³² P. C. 1830, July 30, No. 57.

and teeming millions now bleeding and devastated lay prostrate before the British.*

The condition of Assam on the eve of the British occupation was very dismal indeed as the whole country had been laid waste. The province presented a scene of utter desolation. The inhabitants of Assam were harassed and oppressed by the long civil and internal wars that had followed the accession of Raja Gourināth (1780). Famine and pestilence carried off thousands that had escaped sword and captivity. Then came the Burmese conquest and misrule. It was a period of wanton cruelty and savagery unprecedented in the annals of Assam. Virgins were deflowered before their parents and wives molested before their husbands.³³ In the year 1822 alone, they exacted a revenue of 4,47,940 rupees as against the sum of Rs. 1,90,953 formerly assessed by the Āhom Government.³⁴ The Burmese even in their retreat committed the most atrocious barbarities and carried off into slavery, according to a nominal return presented by Mr. Scott, 30,000 Assamese.³⁵ All men of rank, the heads of the great Āhom families and priestly classes retired to the district of Goalpara under the British occupation having, with few exceptions, lost the whole of their property. With the nobility and gentry retired a vast body of the lower classes.

Similar evidence regarding the condition of the country under the Burmese was recorded by Ānandarām Dakheal Phukan who saw the British administration planted in Assam during his life time. He wrote that even for several years after annexation, the province groaned as a result of the oppression and tyranny of the Burmese whose barbarous and inhuman policy depopulated the country and destroyed more than half the population which had already been thinned by intestine conflicts and repeated civil wars and "the people of Assam hailed the day with joy on which British supremacy was proclaimed in the province".³⁶

The only redeeming feature of this general holocaust was that the Burmese had some regards for the religious observances of the

* The population of Assam at the time of Rajeshwar Singh was nearly 24 lacs; on the eve of the British occupation it had dwindled down to 6 lacs. (Pemberton's report). P. 73.

³³ "ASSAM TUNGKHUNGIA BURANJI" edited by Dr. S. K. Bhuyan. P. 365.

³⁴ S. C. 7, July, 1826, No. 94.

³⁵ From Jenkin's Report to Mill No. 275 of 1853.

³⁶ From "Observations on the Administration of "Assam" by A. R. Dakheal (Vide Mill's Report).

Āhom Kings and regularly paid contributions, though at a diminished rate, towards the performance of the Pujā at the great temple of Kāmakhya. But this was nothing when thrown against the weight of their misdeeds and acts of cruelties. It may not be out of place to mention here that the East India Company also stepped into the position of the Āhom King as the Sebait of the Kāmakhya temple when they took over and it is interesting to note that to cover the expenses of the Pujā which were not fully met by small grants they made from time to time, the representatives of the East India Company empowered the priests to impose taxes upon the pilgrims offering pujās at the temple.*³⁷

The people of this unhappy Valley suffered not only from the agony of civil wars and from the misrule of the Burmese, they were also greatly harassed, specially the people living on the border land and duars, by the occasional inroads of the ferocious hill tribes occupying the surrounding hills. With the decline of the power of the Svargadeva, they began to make periodical descents into the low lands and carried off human beings to be offered for sale as slaves or to be sacrificed before their deities. The people living in the duars thus lived in a state of constant danger and these marauding practices continued even up to the early period of the British settlements. Over the duars verging on the northern skirts of the Valley the hill tribes even shared sovereignty with the later Svargadevas—a very unusual right conceded to them by the later Āhom sovereigns.

The economic condition was no better. Commerce and industry were in a depressed state and showed no signs of recovery owing to the scanty circulation of money and want of means of communication.³⁸ A great part of the country was little better than a wilderness and half of the population lived in a state of slavery owing to the peculiar fiscal system obtaining in the country. But owing to the existence in the country of institutions highly favourable to the interests of the lower orders of the people who were in all respects considered as the proprietors of the soil under the indigenous Government, the cruelties and grievous oppression of the Burmese

³⁷ S. P. 1827, Oct. 26, Nos. 17-18.

* At the time of the occupation of Assam by the English the temple was under the superintendence of a Bengalee Brahmin named Kāli Charan Bhattacharjee in whose family it was usually vested under the Āhom Government—

(From Scott's letter dated the 12th September 1827, addressed to Secret and Political department).

³⁸ P. P. 1830, May 7, Nos. 51-53.

produced much less effect upon the general prosperity of the inhabitants than could well have been anticipated.³⁹ Even at the worst period (1824-25) the revenue from the country below Kālīābār did not fall short of 2 lacs of rupees.⁴⁰ This but shows that their physical suffering was deeper than their economic exploitation.

Such was the country that came under the possession of the East India Company after the treaty of Yandabo and here, truly speaking, for the first time in their long annals of victory and conquest in the vast sub-continent of India the British seemed to step in as saviours rather than as conquerors. But Assam was a liability rather than an asset—the British Government had taken over a country with a meagre income, a scanty population and a troublesome frontier beyond which dwelt a predatory neighbour.

³⁹ S. P. 1824, May 28, No. 19,

⁴⁰ S. P. 1825, April 5, No. 27.

CHAPTER II.

THE PERIOD OF INTERIM SETTLEMENT. (1826-1828)

1820.

Now the problem arose how this precarious heritage was to be disposed of ?

Oct. 1823.

Practically speaking ever since the occupation of the Brahmaputra Valley by the Burmese, the fate of Assam had been engaging the serious attention of the Calcutta Council. With Assam and Manipur as their spring-board, the Burmese were found casting their covetous eyes all around and committing acts of aggression on the British frontier which might have led to war at any moment had not the other side been restrained by the spirit of moderation. We have seen that the Calcutta Council, though engaged in settling the Shāhpurī incident by peaceful means, nevertheless thought of check-mating the designs of Burma in other ways. The people of Assam, it was reported to them, were in a state of smothered rebellion and the council thought that a promise of the restoration of the native Government would help them in eventually dislodging the Burmese from the commanding position they had occupied in Assam and they called upon Mr. Scott, Civil Commissioner of Rangpur, as early as 1823, to express his sentiments on the point at issue.¹

Accordingly Mr. Scott informed the Calcutta Council that the interests of the British Government would not at all be advanced by any premature declaration in favour of either of the candidates contending for the throne. This measure, he feared, would only have the effect of writing off one of the factions. He further submitted that in the event of the Company's right of interference in respect of Assam being recognised as a result of the negotiations pending, the Company should form an alliance with the person having the best pretensions to the throne and should supply him with a subsidiary force. Mr. Scott also insisted on the rigid observance of the commercial treaty that was concluded with the late Raja Gourināth in the year 1793 during the time of Captain Welsh and which had never been ratified by the contracting parties.² The people of Assam depended mainly if not exclusively on the Bengal Salt, imported

¹ S. P. 1823, October 31, No. 15.

² S. P. 1823, November 14, No. 16.

through the Kāndār chauki* (Customs House). But owing to the high customs barrier erected by the Ahom Government, there was a diminishing demand for the Bengal salt to the great loss of the European merchants of Bengal. Hence Mr. Scott rightly insisted on the ratification and observance of the treaty of 1793.

Mr. Scott further opined that if the Company desired the re-establishment of the native rule in Assam on the basis of a tributary alliance, in the event of the Country passing to them by virtue of conquest, the right of interference in the internal administration of the country should be insisted on from the very beginning. And to guard against the evils of court intrigues, he suggested that the nomination of the Burha Gohain, the Prime Minister and *de facto* ruler of Assam, and his removal from office through the Raja should rest with the British Government for a period of fifteen years. The rapacity, imbecility and the barbarous cruelty practised by the later sovereigns of Assam resulting in the infliction of untold miseries on the common people of the realm induced Mr. Scott to adopt such a precaution and the dictates of justice and humanity also demanded it.³ Mr. Scott finally suggested that if the company would desire to retain Assam, only the southern bank of the Brahmaputra as far as Rāhā chauki on the confines of Cachar should be held by them.⁴

The Calcutta Council could not arrive at a final conclusion regarding the ultimate disposal of Assam in the event of its coming to their possession because their knowledge regarding the state of Assam was imperfect at that time. They however concurred with^{1823.} their Agent on the spot in the opinion that it would not be prudent to conclude any final arrangement with the princes of the country who were much divided amongst themselves and whose return to power was obnoxious to a vast majority of the people.

But when hostilities actually broke out in 1824, they called upon the inhabitants of Assam to rise in their support and declared rather prematurely that "Although by our expulsion of the Burmese from the territory of Assam the country would of right become ours by conquest, the Governor-General-in-Council does not contemplate the permanent annexation of any part of it to the British dominion" and further held that even the southern bank of the Brahmaputra as far as Rāhā Chauki which they might be compelled to hold for some time, would be retained temporarily, pending the arrangements to

* A Salt Chauki on the Brahmaputra opposite Goalpara.

³ S. P. 1823, November 14, No. 16,

⁴ S. P. 1824, February 20, No. 7,

be made with the tributary Raj proposed to be established in Assam.⁵ From this one can find how the Authorities at Calcutta from the very beginning were decidedly in favour of establishing a native dynasty in Assam after the expulsion of the Burmese. But till the Burmese had been driven out and Assam conquered this was simply speculation on their part.

But by 1826 the Burmese had been driven out and Assam had been conquered. The Calcutta Council was now faced with realities regarding the final disposal of Assam and Mr. Scott was called upon again to tender his views on this important political issue.

July, 1826.

(1) Disposal
of the
Brahma-
putra
Valley.

Mr. Scott declared in the course of a lengthy memorandum in favour of the establishment of a native dynasty in Assam under the protection of the British Government and reminded the Calcutta Council of the solemn promise they had made on the eve of the Anglo-Burmese conflict. As it was not at that time the intention of the British Government to retain possession of any part of Assam, he was of opinion that the (restored) native prince might be required to pay an annual subsidy of 2 lacs of rupees. But fearing that the above sum might be insufficient for the purposes of defence, he submitted also an alternative plan and proposed that it would be most advantageous to the British Government as well as to the reigning prince if (a) Lower Assam as far as Bishwanāth be retained by the Company and (b) the upper portion of the country (which seemed to be unremunerative) excepting a certain portion of the tract inhabited by the Khāmtis, Moāmāriās and Singphos be made over to a native prince on the condition that he was to spend one half of the net revenue and engage one half of the labouring pāiks for the future defence of the country under the advice of the Paramount power. He further recommended that a tract of land near Sadiyā should be apportioned as a *Jāgīr* for the maintenance of a body or irregular troops to be employed as auxiliaries on the frontier, part of which would be furnished by the Bar Senāpati, Chief of the Moāmāriās and part by the Sadiyā Khawā Gohain, ruler of Khāmtis and that a European officer should be permanently stationed near Sadiyā with political authority over the neighbouring chiefs. He was also to act as the inspecting officer of the native militia.⁶

The practical mind of Mr. Scott did not stop here. To guard against the abuses and corruptions the native administration of Assam was liable to, Mr. Scott suggested by way of remedies that in the event of the establishment of a native prince, the powers formerly

⁵ S. P. 1824, February 20, No. 15.

⁶ S. P. 1826, July 14, No. 2.

exercised by the Grand Council or "Pātra Mantri"* should with certain modifications be revived and that the collision between that body and the King should be prevented by the enumeration of the authority of the King and by the stipulation that the latter should not act without the concurrence of at least two members of the Pātra Mantri. He further suggested that for a time at least, this council of ministers should not be appointed or removed without the sanction of the British Government. He also proposed that the General Assembly, an ancient institution of the Assamese containing the representatives of the nobility as well as of the commonalty which was invoked from time to time in the days of Svargadevas to settle questions such as the imposition of a new tax, should be revived.⁷

As regards the selection of a worthy candidate for the proposed Rajship, Mr. Scott after making a comparative and detailed study of the claims of the rival candidates such as Chandra Kānta, Purandar Singh and a host of others, eventually held that Raja Chandra Kānta should be elevated to the throne to be succeeded by Purandar Singh and his heirs. He had also another alternative but admirable plan which suggested the free election of the sovereign from all eligible princes of full age, including Chandra Kānta and Purandra Singh, by an assembly specially invoked and composed of the nobility and the commonalty of Assam. Mr. Scott also suggested the drawing up of a constitution for Assam based on a limited monarchy by an assembly to be specially called for the purpose.⁸ These were bold and original proposals indeed and his main proposition was strictly in conformity with the earlier declaration of the Governor-General-in-Council.

The Calcutta Council however was not satisfied with the recommendations of their Agent and again called upon him to submit his views.⁹ Mr. Scott insisted as before that Lower Assam should be retained by the British Government and pointed out that its retention would not be objected to by the inhabitants because the people of Lower Assam were accustomed to be ruled by strangers and had in fact never been amalgamated with the rest of the dominions of the Svargadevas, it being their latest acquisition ** The eastern division of Assam extending from Bishwanāth to the Dihing River

Oct. 1827.

* Patra Mantri—the highest council of the realm consisting of the Bar Gohain, the Burma Gohain, the Barpatra Gohain, the Bar Barua and the Bar Phukan.

⁷ S. P. 1826, July 14, No. 2.

⁸ S. P. 1826, July 14, No. 2.

⁹ S. P. 1827, October 26.

** Lower Assam was under the Mughal domination for many years.

March, 1828.

on one side of the Brahmaputra and from Sheolāl Chauki to the Burā Dihing and Burhāth on the other side, he proposed to assign to a native prince on the lines suggested above. The expenses for the management of this tract were barely covered by the revenues realised; the population was scanty and this part of the country was inhabited by the descendants of the followers of Sukāphā, the founder of the Āhom dynasty. They, by the laws of Assam, were accustomed to hold chief offices of the realm and as such would view with discontent the diminution of their powers that would result from the introduction of British rule. Upon these considerations and also with regard to the fact that its retention would appear unfair to the neighbouring states in the face of the promise held out, Mr. Scott was definitely in favour of handing over this part to a native monarch.¹⁰

But there was much difference between Assam not conquered and Assam conquered. Within the space of two years that intervened between the proclamation of the above declaration and the final conquest and occupation of Assam, the attitude of the Calcutta Council had undergone a complete change and they distinctly told their Agent that the Government did not consider itself pledged by any engagement or declaration whatever to restore a native prince to the throne of Assam.¹¹ They accepted the first part of his recommendations and determined to retain permanently the Government of Western or Lower Assam yielding a revenue of three lacs of rupees. The wishes of the influential classes of the inhabitants of Lower Assam and the absence of any attachment on their part to the native princes induced the Governor-General-in-Council to annex Lower Assam permanently to the British possession.

But with regard to the proposal of Mr. Scott to assign the territory of Upper Assam to a native prince, they were not prepared to yield an equally ready assent. The Governor-General-in-Council deemed it desirable that the grounds for it should be further discussed before any final conclusion could be taken. The result was that for the time being practically the whole of the Brahmaputra Valley (save and except the Easternmost tract comprising the territories of the Moāmāriās, the Khāmtis and the Singphos) was incorporated in the British dominions.

In justification of the temporary annexation of Upper Assam which they carried out against the recommendations of Mr. Scott,

¹⁰ S. P. 1828, March 7, No. 4.

¹¹ S. P. 1828, March 7, No. 4.

the Calcutta Council wrote to the Directors at home that the revenue of Upper Assam varied from one lac to two lacs of rupees and that the Company would gain financially even after providing liberally for the expenses of the civil administration. As regards the apathy of hereditary Assamese nobles to the foreign rule, so wisely pointed out by Mr. Scott, the Calcutta Council pointed out that they would try to overcome it by the appointment of those disgruntled nobles to responsible posts in the judicial and revenue departments. We shall see later how mistaken they were in these calculations.

The Calcutta Council finally observed that as none of the candidates had offered to the Company any assistance during the last campaign, the British Government was under no obligation to support their pretensions.¹² As regards the unfavourable opinion which other states might entertain regarding their transactions in Assam as apprehended by Mr. Scott, they lightly brushed aside such scruples because they thought the arrangement adopted by them was just and wise.¹³

But though the Governor-General-in-Council did not at first accept the plan of Mr. Scott regarding the disposal of Upper Assam, they did not finally close the door to its eventual settlement as proposed by him. So they again called upon him to submit his opinions on the point.¹⁴ The question was not finally settled for another seven years.

To the Supreme Government, the restoration question did not appear to be a simple one and it bristled with numerous difficulties. So they asked Mr. Scott to reconsider the question of the restoration in the light of the difficulties pointed out by them. The Calcutta Council feared that the native government, if restored, would, in all probability, entirely depend on the support of a foreign power owing to its extreme poverty and want and would be driven to plunder and oppress its subject to fill its ever-exhausted exchequer. Their second apprehension was that there would be perpetual collision and dispute between the restored state and the frontier tribes surrounding it. And this, they feared, would jeopardise their interest in the frontier, the tranquillity of which was as essential to themselves as to the subjects living on the border. Their third objection was that there was a large number of claimants to the throne all with colourable claims and it would be extremely difficult to select a prince

¹² Letters to Court (Secret) Sept. 5, 1828.

¹³ S. P. 1828, March 7, No. 4.

¹⁴ S. P. 1828, March 7, No. 4.

who would be worthy of the choice. The Governor-General-in-Council finally observed that if the exercise of sovereignty in Upper Assam were vested in the hands of a native prince, the possession should be granted to him on the footing of a Jāgīr resumable at pleasure and "subject to such degree of interference with its internal management, as we may at any time judge necessary."¹⁵

June, 1828.

The Agent in reply observed as before that in the first place it would not be profitable from the pecuniary point of view to retain the possession of Upper Assam. The charge of administration of Upper Assam was no doubt low but Mr. Scott contended that it required to be increased to bring it to a state of efficiency. The high charges of administration and the sums that would be required to provide for the pension of the members of ruling families, Mr. Scott feared, would be hardly met by the people unaccustomed to money payment. Mr. Scott fully agreed with the objection raised by the Supreme Government regarding the stability and strength of the restored monarchy, but these appeared to him to be unavoidable.

As regards the apprehension entertained by the Calcutta Council that there would be perpetual feuds between the new monarch and the rude tribes surrounding him, Mr. Scott (judging from his past experiences) did not anticipate much trouble on that score. If the lines of boundary towards the districts of the Singphos, Bar Senāpati and Sadiyā Khawā Gohain were clearly defined and demarcated, there would be no trouble. Mr. Scott then deplored the growing tendency on the part of the Supreme Government to reverse the policy of giving respectable employments to the nobility as promised before and finally warned the authorities that "Unaccustomed as the Assamese have been to the payment of taxes, the lower order would probably look upon any considerable increase to the revenue as the greatest of all evils and the members of the royal families, the nobility, the public functionaries and the religious orders would view with dislike the introduction of our authority".¹⁶

The weighty argument and warning of Mr. Scott had its effect on the deliberations of the Governor-General-in Council and the Supreme Government agreed to be guided by his judgment and local knowledge. But as the further postponement of its decision was not likely to be attended with any material inconvenience, the Calcutta Council deferred the matter for the time being. The fact was that as the guardian of the Eastern Frontier, the Supreme Government could not look with favour on an arrangement which

¹⁵ S. P. 1828, March 7, No. 8.

¹⁶ S. P. 1828, June 27, No. 115.

would interpose an ill governed native state between Sadiya, the station of their frontier detachment and Bishwanāth, the headquarters of their forces in Assam. So they instructed their Agent to prepare a clear account of the past receipts and disbursements of Upper Assam since its conquest together with an estimate of the local police establishments proposed to be stationed on the frontier. At the same time they also advised him to submit a detailed arrangement for re-instating a native dynasty in Upper Assam.¹⁷

From the tenor of the above discussion, it seemed that the restoration was within sight and only a detailed arrangement was all that the Supreme Government was waiting for. But for nearly three years nothing further was done and even Mr. Scott did not submit any detailed arrangements for the restoration of the native dynasty over which he was so enthusiastic. It was only when the ex-nobility of Assam found all chances of restoration gone that they resorted to subversive activities in a spirit of frustration and exasperation. Had the recommendations of Mr. Scott been carried out in their entirety at this stage, the unhappy Valley would have been spared the troubles of rebellions.

Thus the major portion of the Brahmaputra Valley was disposed of for the time being. The British Government met with no such difficulty in dealing with the Moāmāriās, Khāmtis and Singphos inhabiting the easternmost parts of Assam.

The Sadiyā Khawā Gohain and the Bar Senāpati, the respective rulers of Sadiyā and Mātak, as we have seen earlier, lent most cordial support and material aid to the British Government in the suppression of the Singphos. They were the only persons of consequence in Assam who were of any use in maintaining tranquillity on its borders infested as they were with wild and warlike tribes. Mr. Scott wished to utilise these tribes as a screen between the Burmésé and the newly conquered dominions of the Company. So he pleaded that the territories of Sadiyā Khawā Gohain, Bar Senāpati and the Singphos should be handed over to their own control after nominal annexation. He also urged upon the authorities to bestow upon these chiefs some marks of distinction.¹⁸ His suggestions were accepted by the Calcutta authorities.

We have already referred to the Moāmāriās inhabiting the Mātak country who first caused troubles during the reign of Raja Lakshmi Singh. Their constant insurrections and lawless habits were mainly responsible for the ultimate weakening of the Āhom Royalty. Though

Settlement
of the
Matak
Country.

¹⁷ S. P. 1828, June 27, No. 116.

¹⁸ S. P. 1826, July 14, No. 9.

beaten again and again, they maintained a sort of independence upto the last days of the Āhom rule. They were ruled at the time of the Burmese invasion by a chief known as the Bar Senāpati who nominally acknowledged the supremacy of the Svargadevs and paid annual tribute in the shape of elephants' tusk, muga silk etc.* His domain on the south bank of the Brahmaputra was bounded on the south by the river Burā Dihing, on the west and north by the Brahmaputra and on the east by a line extending from the river Dihing to a point nearly opposite to the mouth of a streamlet named Kundi Nālā. Rongagorā was its capital and it covered an area of 1800 square miles. The inhabitants 96,000 strong were remarkable for superior bravery.¹⁹ They were more industrious than their neighbours, the Khāmtis and the Singphos. The subjects of Bar Senāpati living in districts adjacent to Assam, were, it is reported, taxed in money yielding a revenue of Rs. 12,000 annually. But from the subjects living on the borders adjacent to the Singpho territory he levied no money tax: they paid in grains, spice and elephants' teeth. The Bar Senāpati was a crafty and vigorous old man. He was plain in his apparel, simple in his habits and possessed great talents for business.²⁰ It is reported he was somewhat brusque in his manners.²¹

From a report submitted by Mr. Bruce while he was in charge of gun boats stationed at Sadiya, we get a very interesting account about the character of this hill chief. He described Bar Senāpati as "one always dissatisfied and always ready to enter into any secret plot."²² But this statement of Bruce with regard to the political character of the Bar Senāpati was not shared by Captain White who pronounced him "as decidedly faithful to his engagements."²³ He managed to preserve his country from the convulsions of the civil wars as well as from the inroads of the Burmese and other neighbouring predatory tribes.²⁴ At the time of the Burmese invasion, he helped the invading force with labour and provisions but not with

* "It was asserted by the Assamese at Rangpur and Jorhat at the time of Mr. White that the Burra Senapati paid a tribute of Rs. 10,000 per annum. But the Burra Senapati positively denied this to him (Mr. White). And there was no record of such a sum or part of it being paid." (P.C. 1829, August 14, No. 105).

¹⁹ P. P. 1832, October 5, No. 114-A.

²⁰ P. C. 1833, January 7, No. 82.

²¹ Foreign 1838, April 18, Nos. 56-57.

²² P. P. 1835, February 11, No. 91.

²³ Foreign 1838, April 18, Nos. 56-57.

²⁴ Geography and Population of Assam by Captain Neufville—"Asiatic Researches" Vol. XVI.

troops and maintained a Burmese envoy at his court.²⁵ His Kingdom, later on, became, without his knowing, the harbour of all those who were discontented with the British Government in Assam.

Agreeably to the suggestion of Mr. Scott, the Bar Senāpati was placed in the semi-independent possession of his country. By a *Kabuliyat* (deed of agreement) executed on May 13, 1826, he undertook to furnish an armed contingent of 300 *gotes** of *pāiks* and to supply provisions to any British expedition passing through his territories. His criminal and judicial powers were also reduced; he was only to send reports to the Agent in case of murder, dacoity and grave wounds; he was called upon to pay no revenue.²⁶ He was also held responsible for the poll-tax of British subjects emigrating into his territories; and to collect those taxes, the East India Company stationed an Officer at his capital.²⁷

A similar arrangement was made with the Khāmtis of the Sadiya region whose territories extended along the bank of the Thenga Pani river. The Khāmtis had energy and military skill superior to those possessed by any other natives of the Burmese territories.²⁸ "The Khāmtis were", in the opinion of Mr. Jenkins "the first race in Assam in spirit, intelligence and moral character." Though they possessed a fertile soil, they barely raised grain enough for their consumption. They were very fond of opium which they procured from Assam at an exorbitant rate in exchange of gold dust and tusks of elephants which they obtained without the drudgery of sustained physical labour. The Khāmtis were 4000 strong and could raise an army of 1000 if required.²⁹ In their religious worship and observances, there was no perceptible difference between them and the Burmese Shans who were all Buddhists. Images of Gautama whom they called "Kodoma" were the only idols adored by them.³⁰ They were connected with the Indo-Chinese natives by affinity of language, religion and habit[s].

Arrangement
with the
Khamtis.

It has been mentioned in the introductory chapter how the Khāmtis ousted the Āhom Viceroy during the troubled reign of Raja Gaurīnāth and usurped the title of his frontier Governor. Though defeated in the next reign, they rose again and were able to

²⁵ P. C. 1839, August 14, No. 105.

* One got consists of three paiks

²⁶ P. C. 1833, January 7, No. 82.

²⁷ Treaties and Sanads—Aitchison (Vol. II, p.p. 198-199).

²⁸ S. P. 1826, July 14, No. 9.

²⁹ P. C. 1833, January 7, No. 82.

³⁰ Geography and Population of Assam by Captain ' Neufville—Asiatic Researches—Vol. XVI.

preserve their separate political existence upto the time of the occupation of Assam by the British Government. The Singpho menace drove them to the assistance of the British and they along with the Moāmāriās helped the British in driving out the Singphos. By a treaty executed in May 1826, the Khāmtis, who were left in charge of their own ruler, were called upon to maintain a contingent of 200 men to be supplied with ammunition by the British Government and were exempted from paying any tribute to the protecting authority. But the trials of serious offences were taken from the hands of the Khāmti Chiefs and made over to the political officer stationed at Sadiyā.³¹

The ruler of the Khāmtis, the Sadiyā Khawā Gohain was a person of "character" and of some literary acquisition. Mr. Bruce described him "as a double faced smooth spoken fellow." He was a great adherent of Chandra Kānta and was ready to risk anything for him. He had great authority over the hill tribes above and below.³² We also get a vivid picture of his character and attainments from a note left by Mr. Robertson, the successor to Mr. Scott. It is reported that he acquired a tolerable knowledge of the Bengali language and gave up beef-eating and drinking, the vices of his ancestors.³³

Arrangement
with the
Singphos.

In dealing with the Singphos, the British Government had to handle a very complicated problem. The Singpho territory had been overrun and pacified no doubt, but an influential number of the Singpho chiefs was still evading the protecting hands of the British Government. And an economic problem of great importance arose when they, as a result of the successive raids by Captain Neufville, had been deprived of their main wealth, the Assamese slaves. The Singphos were mainly a predatory horde. They had neither inclination nor aptitude for any agricultural pursuits or commercial habits. They had a positive hatred for any sort of manual labour. They mainly depended on plunder and blackmail and on the sweated labour of the Assamese captives who tilled lands and grew subsistence for them. So when the slaves were taken away from them, they were reduced to great economic straits.

The Singphos occupied the level and fertile tract of the country called Nāmrup extending eastward from the Mātak border to the head of the Dihing river across the river Noā Dibing. Their

³¹ Treaties and Sanads—Aitchison (Vol. II. p.p. 131-132).

³² P. P. 1835, February 11, No. 91.

³³ P. C. 1833, January 7, No. 82.

original abode was the southern slope of the Pātakai Range extending as far as the Hukawng Valley. They made their first appearance in Assam during the reign of Gaurināth. They were nominally divided into twelve Gaums or clans and the term "the twelve chiefs" was used to express the collected body of the race. But there were in reality thirty-seven subdivisions of the tribe on the Assam side of the Pātakai hills, the nominal boundary between Assam and Burma. Of these, Bisā Gaum, Dāffā Gaum, Sātu Gaum and Lāttorā Gaum were the most influential, but had no authority or rights over others. Under Bisā Gaum lived nearly 10,000 men of whom nearly 2,500 were capable of taking the field (Bisā Gaum had to supply a contingent of 60 armed men to the Paramount Power).³⁴

Each tribe was governed by its own chief called "Gaum". The religion of the Singphos was a strange mixture of all the various idolatries and superstitions of the natives with whom they came in contact. They chiefly worshipped the idol of Gautama whose temples and priests were found in all their principal villages.³⁵ Their brethren living beyond the Pātakai range were called "Hill Singphos" and did pay a small nominal tribute in gold dust and ivory to the Burmese Governor of Maing-Khawang (Moongkhom).

After the British forces under the command of Captain Neufville had carried their victorious arms into the very heart of the Singpho territory, the Singpho chiefs were overawed and a number of them wished to come to terms with the British Raj and promised to expel the Burmese from their territories.³⁶ And some of them even sent hostages in advance.³⁷

Accordingly, an agreement was drawn up with sixteen chiefs in May, 1826, the rest of the chiefs twelve in number having absconded. By this treaty, they acknowledged the allegiance of the British Raj and gave up all connections with the Burmese or any foreign potentates. They further agreed to supply the British troops with rice and other necessaries in the event of any foreign power invading Assam. They were specially called upon to give immediate information of anything that might excite apprehension on the trans-Pātakai Range. The Chiefs were empowered to administer justice in their respective localities according to their own custom. To guard

³⁴ Foreign 1838, April 18, Nos. 56-57.

³⁵ Geography and Population of Assam by Captain Neufville-Asistic Researches, Volume XVI.

³⁶ S. P. 1826, March 17, No. 35.

³⁷ S. P. 1826, March 17, No. 34.

against any depredations to be committed in the British territories by the Singphos, the British Government called upon these chiefs either to surrender the culprits for punishment or to make good the losses to be sustained by the Company's subjects. They agreed to release all Assamese captured by them. This article was waived in case of two Gaums who were the first to submit to the terms of the British Government.

The British Government in their turn, promised to offer them every kind of protection and agreed not to exact any tribute from them. But a harsher condition was imposed upon them because they were of warlike habits and in possession of the key points to the Assam frontier. They were to deliver into the custody of the political Agent their near relations as hostages for the faithful performance of the treaty obligations. Suitable provisions were made for the education of these hostages. As regards the twelve ab-conding chiefs who were still at large, Mr. Scott issued a proclamation requiring them to appear at Sadiyā within two months and to subscribe to the agreement taken from the rest of their brethren under pain of confiscation of their property and eventual expulsion from the Assamese territory.³⁸

Of all the Singpho Chiefs, Bom, the Gaum of Bisā was a man of uncommon shrewdness and ability and was much cared for by the Burmese Government during their last campaign and they conferred upon him the title of "Sawbwa" and presented him with a gold chāttā (umbrella),—a mark of great distinction.³⁹ Mr. Bruce described the Bisā Gaum "as a sly old fox" who was always ready to please both the parties. He liked the British muskets but not their friendship. He was jealous of the Dāffā Gaum whom he prevented from coming and having any contact with the British Officers at Sadiyā. (The muskets, powder and ball which the British furnished him with to protect the frontier, he utilised in procuring the tusks of elephants which he again sold to the English. Mr. Bruce also charged him with selling runaway slaves to the Abhors but this charge had been refuted by Mr. White.⁴⁰

For the better control of the Singpho chiefs and with a view to dealing with them as a whole, the penetrating and diplomatic mind of Mr. Scott conceived the bold project of creating a sort of confederacy of the Singpho Chiefs under the overlordship of Bisā Gaum, the worthiest of all, and urged upon the authorities at Calcutta to

³⁸ S. P. 1826, July 14, Nos. 9-10.

³⁹ S. P. 1826, July 14, No. 9.

⁴⁰ P. P. 1835, February 11, No. 91.

bestow upon this chief some equivalent mark of distinction as had been done by the Burmese Government. And further to soothe his ruffled feelings for the losses he had sustained by the relinquishment of slaves under his custody, he recommended the utilisation of his services in the Intelligence Department.⁴¹ So, though Bisā Gaun did not possess any admitted control over the others, he was recognised on account of his personal influence as a medium of communications between the British Government and the petty Singpho chiefs.⁴²

Mr. Scott realised that the political settlement with the Singphos alone would lead to no pacification and permanent result as desired by the British Government. Deprived of slaves, their only means of subsistence and livelihood, the Singphos would always remain a perpetual source of danger. So with a view to opening up before them new avenues of livelihood, Mr. Scott proposed to establish a commercial link between Assam and the eastern countries so that the Singphos would naturally become the chain in the link.

There was a considerable demand at the above locality for goods of European manufacture and for a species of silk cloth supplied by the Burmese. Mr. Scott proposed that specimens of those silk goods should be sent to Murshidabad for imitation and these imitation productions should be exported to Sadiyā for sale on an experimental basis.⁴³ Another advantage which would attend the establishment of such a market according to Mr. Scott was that it would operate more powerfully than a mere treaty stipulation against the high tariff wall imposed by the Burmese to prevent a free and natural flow of the British goods passing through the lower region of Burma.

Another higher but distant motive which actuated Mr. Scott to open up a trade centre in the Singpho territory was his desire to establish a direct commercial relation between India and China, the South-Western province of the latter country being at a distance of two hundred miles only from the northern-most region of the Singpho territory.⁴⁴ At that period attempts were being made to push on the sale of British woollen goods in countries to the north east of India, there being no outlet for these goods to the Indian market. In China the imposition of high duties prevented the free transmission of these goods into the interior and the representative of the East India Company stationed at Canton found it very

⁴¹ S. P. 1826, July 14, No. 9.

⁴² P. C. 1833, January 7, No. 82.

⁴³ S. P. 1826, July 14, No. 9.

⁴⁴ P. C. 1831, June 10, No. 50.

difficult to introduce these goods there and the matter was debated in both Houses of Parliament. Mr. Scott tried to meet this difficulty by opening up a direct trade route between China and India through Assam.⁴⁵ *

Mackenzie says that "it does not appear that the idea of opening up a trade route across the Pātkaī ever came to anything or indeed that any active steps were even taken to develop it".⁴⁶ But this view of Mr. Mackenzie is erroneous to a certain extent. Active steps were taken indeed by Mr. Scott and Captain Neufville to develop this trade with a view to weaning away the Singphos from their predatory habits. As private merchants were not available to carry on trade in this remote and inhospitable region, attempts were at first made to carry on trade through the Government agency. The first consignment was looted on the way and a fresh investment of silk and other goods was again despatched to Sadiyā.⁴⁷

When Captain Jenkins and Pemberton visited these parts of the frontier in 1831, they saw prospects of good trade between Assam and Āvā and hoped that international traffic would greatly increase when the enmity and jealousy of the Burmese towards the British would die away. From all accounts it is clear that trade was in a thriving condition when the country settled down to normal activities after the period of storm and stress. Some enterprising Mārwarī merchants hailing from the far western side of India repaired to the easternmost part to carry on commercial transactions and established factories at Sadiyā and Bisā and it will not be out of place to mention here that one of them pushed on to the Hukawng Valley in Burma with a view to opening a factory there. They imported broad cloth, muslins, long cloths and coloured handkerchiefs, chintzes, salt, opium, wine, rice, glass and crockery wares, tobacco, betelnut etc., which they bartered to the different tribes occupying the surrounding hills for gold, gold dust, ivory, silver, amber, musk, Burmese clothes and Chinese boxes. A brisk trade developed and in the year 1833 cotton up to the quantity

⁴⁵ P. C. 1831, October 5, No. 114A.

* The possibilities of opening up a direct trade route between India and China through Assam were also visualized by a prominent member of the Governor-General's Council who in the course of a minute observed, as early as 1826, "We may expect to open new roads for commerce with Yuman and other south western Provinces of the Celestial Empire through Assam and Mumpore."

—S. C. May 12, 1826 (minutes on the treaty of Yandabo).

⁴⁶ Mackenzie—North Eastern Frontier of Bengal, P. 64.

⁴⁷ S. P. 1827, September 7, No. 17,

P. C. 1830, May 14, No. 29-30.

of 400 maunds was bartered to the Mārwarī merchants by the hill tribes.⁴⁸

The prospect of Sadiyā as a commercial centre even at that early period was so great that Mr. Bruce, commanding officer in charge of the gun boats at Sadiyā recommended that Sadiyā should be made a Central mart where all merchants should transact business and beyond which no one should be permitted to go. By this measure he hoped to attract more and more hill tribes to Sadiyā.⁴⁹

Captain Jenkins who was engaged in surveying Assam at that time also reported that "the Singphos of Assam now carry on trade of some consequence with the Shāns and Chinese of Yunnān through the province of Ava and the Resident of Ava should be advised to watch this rising trade and to give it all the support".⁵⁰ So we find that though the direct trade with China was not established, the vision of Mr. Scott at least partially materialised.

For the defence of the Eastern frontier, Mr. Scott proposed firstly the establishment at Sadiyā of a militia 600 strong (to be formed out of the followers of the Bar Senāpati and Sadiyā K. Gohain) to overawe and control the Singpho chiefs and secondly, the posting of a European Political Officer to watch over and settle the incongruous and conflicting interests of the surrounding chiefs and barbarous tribes. The proposed militia was to be placed under the command of this political officer.⁵¹

Hitherto temporary military officers stationed at Sadiyā had also acted as political officers. Mr. Scott observed that the objects for which this important post was created, namely, the settlement of the tribal disputes and the eradication of predatory habits of the surrounding wild tribes, could not be effected by means of a succession of temporary military officers unacquainted with local politics and language. So he proposed that Lt. Neufville, who had held this responsible position temporarily and proved himself a very capable officer, should be appointed permanently and pending the final appointment of Captain Neufville invested Lt. Bedingfield, Officer Commanding at Sadiyā with political powers.⁵²

With the fate of Assam was also linked the fate of Manipur, Jaintiā and Cachar. Their political status which was covered by the

48 PEMBERTON'S REPORT. P. 72.

49 *IBID.*

50 P. P. 1835, February 11, No. 90.

51 S. P. 1826, July 21, No. 13.

52 S. C. 1826, July 14, No. 9.

second article of the treaty of Yandabo also required adjustments.* It is worth while to trace in detail how they were involved in the Anglo-Burmese Imbroglio a passing reference to which has been made in the introductory chapter.

Cachar.

The weakness of the petty but independent principality of Cachar or Hiḍimbā of the Mahābhārata fame which intervened between the independent state of Manipur and the British district of Sylhet already attracted the attention of the Company towards the end of the eighteenth century.⁵³ The early history of Cachar like that of all nations is shrouded in mystery. It is pretended by the Cacharis that their country from its very foundation has been governed by one family—the descendants of Bhūm, second of the famous Pandava brothers. The first historical figure of the Kingdom is Timirdhwaj who reigned in the year 1388 of the Bikrama era which corresponds with 1464 A.D. The Cacharis, it is said, came down from the northern part of Kāmrup, their original home, and founded a new state in the Mybong hills of Cachar. It is stated that in their prosperous days, the Kingdom extended to Manipur on the one hand and to the Lushai hills on the other. Captain Fisher, who made a detailed study of their ancient records, has left a very interesting account which testifies to the former extent and power of their kingdom. Parts of their former elaborate state ceremonials were continued even as late as the reign of Govinda Chandra.

The King was the highest authority of the realm. Below him were four Rājputras—not necessarily princes of the blood royal—invested with high judicial authority and empowered to award any punishment short of death. Below them in ancient times were eighteen Mantris with limited authority and there were even as many as fifty four Mantris when the Kingdom was at the zenith of its power. The management of the revenue was entrusted to an official designated as “Bura Bhandaree” with a host of subordinate Officers. There were also Bhandarees for the control of the separate revenues assigned to the Rānīs, the sons and the brothers of the Raja. The office of “Bura Bhandaree” was in existense even at the time of Govinda Chandra. Within the palace four Mantris

* Treaty of peace concluded at Yandabo English version.

Article 2. His Majesty the king of Ava renounces all claims upon, and will abstain from all future interference with the principality of Assam and its dependencies, and also with the contiguous petty states of Cachar and Jaintie. With regard to Manipur, it is stipulated that, should Gambhir Singh desire to return to that country, he shall be recognised by the king a Rājah thereof.

⁵³ S. P. 1823. November 14, No. 19.

exercised offices about the person of the Raja. They were counterparts of the chamberlains of the medieval European Princes. Captain Fisher found three such dignitaries even during the last days of Govinda Chandra. But they were shorn of any power. The administration of justice was conducted with cruelty; severe punishments were awarded for slight offences. The principal source of the state income was the land revenue; customs were levied on exports. It is interesting to know that the people of Cachar had to pay taxes for music at marriages and other festivals and even for riding in a *doolie* (a covered litter) and for wearing gold ornaments.⁵⁴

It is stated that Cachar invoked the aid of the British power in 1799 when a Mughul named Aga Muhammad suddenly descended upon her plains. The British help was readily given and the depredations stopped. Again when in 1804, one Kalyān Singh, a dismissed *subedār* collected a body of *Burkundazes* and plundered Cachar, the Company came to her aid. At that time we are told that a voluntary offer of the kingdom was made to the British Government but they did not accept the offer.⁵⁵

When Govinda Chandra ascended the throne of Cachar in the year 1813 after the death of his brother Krishna Chandra, troubles began to descend on him one after another. Kohi Dās, ex-table servant of the late Raja was the first to take a slice out of the Kingdom of Cachar and installed himself as an independent chieftain in the hilly portion of the tract. He fell a victim to political stratagem and was assassinated by Govinda Chandra but the rebellion was continued by his son Tulārām. But worse and more serious troubles were in store for Govinda Chandra.⁵⁶

The lawlessness and misrule which convulsed the Brahmaputra Valley at the period was not the monopoly of Assam alone. A spirit of disorderliness pervaded the whole North Eastern region at that time and the hill state of Manipur lying to the east of Cachar was not immune from this political malady. In 1812 Marjit Singh with the aid of the Burmese drove away his brother Chaurjit Singh, the reigning monarch of Manipur and made himself king of that unhappy Valley. Fearing a general massacre, the other two brothers Chaurjit and Gambhir Singh with their followers took refuge in Cachar. After a short stay at Cachar, Chaurjit repaired to Jaintia. But Gambhir Singh stayed at Cachar and rose to be the Commander-in-Chief of the Cachar army. Gambhir Singh and Chaurjit soon combined and paid back the hospitality of Govinda Chandra by

1812.

⁵⁴ P. C., 1832, May 14, No. 100.

⁵⁵ S. P. 1823, November 14, No. 19.

⁵⁶ S. P. 1823, November 14, No. 19.

treacherously seizing his country and dividing it amongst themselves to the exclusion of its lawful monarch. The unhappy Govinda Chandra deprived of his kingdom hastened to Sylhet and offered his Raj to the British which was not then accepted. In the meantime Marjit had quarrelled with his Burmese protectors. The quarrel cost him his throne and he was driven back to Cachar. Now this Poland of the North Eastern India was partitioned for the second time and the three Manipurian princes began to reign over three different portions of Cachar as perfectly independent of one another.⁵⁷

Govinda Chandra appealed to the British Government for reinstatement and also for the restitution of the Sirishpur *parganā* which once belonged to him and which, it was alleged, had been taken away by the local British Officers. We do not know under what circumstances he was deprived of this valuable *parganā*; we find from available records that on that occasion the Company promised to give him in exchange a similar tract of ground elsewhere which he refused to accept.

Govinda Chandra even begged to be allowed to hold Sirishpur in *Zamindāri* right and again prayed that his Raj be attached to the Company's dominion for better security and protection. At this period, Govinda Chandra became so destitute that he could not even buy his daily necessaries of life and begged to be allowed to live at Sirishpur where articles of consumption were much cheaper. But Govinda Chandra was given no protection nor was the Sirishpur *parganā* restored to him.⁵⁸

1823.

Assam and Manipur had been in the meantime overrun by the Burmese. Chaurjit Singh quarrelled with Gambīr Singh and fled from Cachar and took shelter in Sylhet and proposed to make over his interests in Cachar to the Company and requested the Magistrate of Sylhet to send a responsible officer to take charge of his share.⁵⁹ At this juncture, on the strength of a report (which is open to question) from the Company's Vakil stationed at Jaintiāpur, Govinda Chandra was removed to Dacca from Sylhet. It was suspected that he had applied for help to the Burmese authority in Assam.⁶⁰ But Govinda Chandra was not long to remain in captivity. Circumstances soon compelled the British Government to take him under their protection.

⁵⁷ S. P. 1823, November 14, No. 19.

⁵⁸ S. P. 1823, December 19, No. 21.

⁵⁹ S. P. 1823, November 14, No. 19.

⁶⁰ S. P. 1824, January 17, No. 6.

Movements of the Burmese forces heading towards the frontier of Cachar reached the ears of the local British Officials at this time and centring round the small principality of Cachar, now began the intensive diplomatic activities of a very interesting nature on the political chess-board of the North Eastern frontier.⁶¹ Cachar occupied a commanding position and the British were determined from the very beginning not to allow the Burmese to use Cachar as a springboard for further conquest. The neglected principality of Cachar was at once lifted into prominence and the case of the helpless and exiled Govinda Chandra was at last taken up by the British.

Though in view of the reported movements of the Burmese forces and of the doubtful ownership of Chaurjit over his so-called interests in Cachar, the Calcutta Council did not consider it wise to accept his offer, they instructed the local officers to open negotiations with the Manipurian princes. Negotiations conducted with Chaurjit and Mārjit were strongly objected to by Gambhīr Singh who alone claimed the full sovereignty of Cachar and asked for the protection of the Company.⁶² The British opened negotiations with Gambhir Singh, but as he made evasive and unsatisfactory replies and was detected intriguing with the Burmese authorities in Manipur, he was left out of consideration at this stage.

It was finally settled by the Calcutta Council that Govinda Chandra should be re-instated on his ancestral throne and that the Manipurian brothers who had interests in the Cachar Dominion would be provided with adequate pensions chargeable from the revenue of Cachar provided they would readily consent to reside within the British territory. The case of the rebel Tularam was not forgotten and to prevent future disturbances on his part he was also assured a place in the general arrangement of the country that was to follow. Tulārām was not idle. He also tried to fish in the troubled waters of Cachar and had already called in the Burmese forces to assist him in his attempt to dispossess the Manipurian brothers. In view of this the local officials were instructed to bring to a speedy close negotiations with Cachar.⁶³ They were further advised to ask the Burmese Commander in Assam in the name of the Governor-General-in-Council to desist from invading Cachar on the ground that the state had already been taken under British protection.⁶⁴

61. S. P. 1823, November 28, No. 5. (Mr. Scott's private letter).

62. S. P. 1823, November 14, No. 19.

63. S. P. 1823, December 12, No. 11.

64. S. P. 1823, November 28, No. 6.

Agreeably to the above instructions, Mr. Scott addressed a letter to the Burmese Governor in Assam on the 1st. January, 1824, requesting him to desist from the attack on Cachar.⁶⁵ At the same time to prevent a rupture with the Burmese and to checkmate the designs of Govinda Chandra who was suspected of being in collusion with the Burmese, Mr. Scott made a new proposal of re-establishing Govinda Chandra on the throne under the Anglo-Burmese mutual guarantee.⁶⁶ This novel proposal was turned down by the Supreme Government on the plea that much practical inconvenience and embarrassment would result from such an arrangement. They rightly observed that the Burmese could have no objection to re-instating Govinda Chandra in his ancestral throne, but their acquisition of a footing in that country would be definitely hostile to the interests of the Company and should on no account be tolerated. They adhered to the line of action already laid down and agreed to lend support to the claims of Govinda Chandra.

As regards the allegation against Govinda Chandra that he had invited the Burmese to his assistance while addressing a most earnest solicitation to the British Government, the Governor-General-in-Council took a most lenient and realistic view of the matter and opined, "Even if these allegations against Govinda Chandra proved to be true, he could only have sought it when denied the assistance of the power to whom he had for so many years appealed in vain." So the proposal of the local authorities that a more drastic measure should be adopted against Govinda Chandra was turned down by the Council which regarded his detention at Dacca as enough.⁶⁷

The Burmese in reply to the protest of Mr. Scott informed the British Government that they had been sent by His Burmese Majesty to re-establish Govinda Chandra on the throne in response to his earnest appeal.⁶⁸ When all appeals and remonstrances went unheeded and the Burmese had actually advanced towards Cachar from three directions, the British, as we have noticed before, took the first offensive as a prelude to the formal declaration of war.

Meanwhile negotiations were completed with Govinda Chandra and on the 6th March, 1824, a treaty was concluded between Mr. Scott, Agent to the Governor-General and Raja Govinda Chandra Nārāyan of Cachar. The Raja placed the country under the

⁶⁵ S. P. 1824, January 2, No. 14.

⁶⁶ S. P. 1824, January 17, No. 2.

⁶⁷ S. P. 1824, January 17, No. 6.

⁶⁸ Vide letter from the Burmese Commander to Mr. Scott—Appendix—Wilson's History of the Burmese War.

Company's protection and the British Government undertook to protect him from external aggression. The internal government of the country, it was stipulated, was to be conducted by the Raja, but he was prevented from holding any communication with any foreign power. In consideration of the aid promised by the Company, the Raja agreed to pay to the British Government an annual tribute of ten thousand *sicca rupees* and the Company promised to provide for the maintenance of the Manipurián Princes. In the event of the failure of the Cachar Raj to pay tributes regularly, the 5th. article in the treaty empowered the Company to occupy and attach in perpetuity to their possession a tract of Cachar sufficient for the future realisation of the tribute.⁶⁹

This wise and diplomatic step which brought Cachar under the Company's protection and which proved so indispensable in maintaining the integrity and security of the eastern frontier of British India at that time, did not at first find favour with the Directors at home.

The motive alleged for taking Cachar under their protection seemed to them far from satisfactory. The reason submitted by the Calcutta Council that Cachar commanded a pass through which the Burmese might invade the British territory did not carry conviction with them. Rather they retorted in turn that the same might be said of any petty state lying between the British frontier and the territory of any other considerable power. They disapproved of the action of the Governor-General-in-Council with regard to Cachar and characterised it as "another instance of mistaken policy."⁷⁰ A series of correspondence followed and at last the Court of Directors were convinced of the wisdom of the Cachar proceedings perhaps in the light of the subsequent happenings and finally approved of the action of the Governor-General-in-Council.⁷¹

When the war was finally concluded, Cachar was given over to Raja Govinda Chandra. But the Governor-General-in-Council doubted whether "the imbecile Govinda Chandra" would be able to pay the annual tribute and instructed the Commissioner of Sylhet to ascertain whether the Raja was still willing to cede the sovereignty of Cachar to the Company and whether there was any member of his family who might succeed him after his death.⁷² The Commissioner informed the Calcutta Council that cultivation was making rapid

1826.

⁶⁹ S. P. 1824, April 2, No. 6.

⁷⁰ Letter from Court August 4, 1824.

⁷¹ Letter from Court August 3, 1825.

⁷² S. P. 1826. June 23, No. 18.

progress in Cachar and that the Raja would experience no difficulty in paying the tribute.⁷³

Settlement
with
Jaintia.

Jaintiā was a small and independent principality hanging on the border of Sylhet lying between the Khasi hills and the Kingdom of Cachar. It was principally inhabited by the same people who had occupied the Khasi hills. Only in the plains below lived the Bengalees—the Hindus and Muslims. It covered an area of 3453 Sq. miles and the population at the time of the Burmese invasion was estimated at nearly 40,000.⁷⁴ As regards the religion of the people, it would seem that the Khasis were never deeply influenced by Brahminism and that it was only the families of the Raja and his leading nobles that were brought within the fold of Hinduism. The Rajas belonged to the Sākta Sect and it is alleged by Gait that they kept alive the system of human sacrifice,⁷⁵ which brought them into conflict with the English.

The land tax was the principal source of the state revenue. There was no fixed rate and it was paid either in money or in kind or in services at the pleasure of the Raja. The land revenue yielded the sum of seventyfive thousand rupees and together with fines, customs and *nazars*, the total revenue at the time of the Burmese invasion amounted nearly to one lakh of rupees. The military force consisted of a small standing army of 200 Hindustani sepoy and it is reported that the King was able to raise an army of four thousand strong in time of war. It must be said to the credit of Jaintiā that she was the only kingdom on the North Eastern frontier that enjoyed uninterrupted peace for more than sixty years prior to the outbreak of the Anglo-Burmese War.⁷⁶

The British came into closer relation with Jaintia when the Burmese had threatened to invade Cachar. To prevent the entry of the Burmese forces into Jaintiā and to establish an advanced post there which might prove a powerful check upon the Burmese in Assam, the Supreme Government desired Mr. Scott to open negotiations with the reigning monarch, Raja Rām Singh without any further delay on similar terms as were offered to his neighbour Raja Govinda Chandra.⁷⁷ Mr. Scott was instructed to exact a light revenue from that country in return for British protection.⁷⁸

⁷³ S. P. 1826, September 15, No. 57.

⁷⁴ P. C. 1833, January 7, No. 82.

⁷⁵ Gait—History of Assam, 2nd Ed. P. 268.

⁷⁶ P. C. 1833, January 7, No. 82.

⁷⁷ S. P. 1824, January 30, No. 18.

⁷⁸ S. P. 1824, January 17, No. 6.

The Raja was at first unwilling to come to terms with the Company lest it should compromise the position of his kingdom.

On the second January, 1824, Mr. Scott addressed a letter to the Burmese Commander in Cachar prohibiting him from entering the dominion of Jaintiā on the ground that the Raja had sought the protection of the British Government. The Burmese advanced on the plea that the kingdom of Jaintia had become a vassal state to His Burmese Majesty by the conquest of Assam to which it formerly paid tribute and sent a force as far as the border of Jaintiā to enforce the presence of the Raja Rām Singh at the Burmese Camp. Thereon, the local British Commander sent a detachment to reinforce the Raja's troops on which the Burmese party withdrew.⁷⁹

In the meantime negotiations were completed and a treaty was concluded with the Raja of Jaintiā. The terms were similar to those of the treaty previously concluded with Govinda Chandra.⁸⁰ As the lands in Jaintiā were chiefly granted on military tenure, the cash revenue of the kingdom was but trifling. So no tribute was demanded as originally suggested. Mr. Scott was asked to take advantage of the situation and to settle an old dispute regarding the possession of a place called "Seven reaches" which was claimed by the British Government. As the land in dispute had been leased out, according to the custom of the country, to a number of individuals on *chākṛān* system (Allotment of land in lieu of wages) who were not willing to part with them on any money payment, this point was given up.⁸¹

As the subjects of Jaintiā were of a warlike disposition and were expected to render substantial aid as useful allies, a separate article was inserted in the treaty by which Raja Rām Singh engaged to assist the Company in the prosecution of the war against the king of Āvā and to attack the enemy to the east of Gauhati. The Company on their part promised to confer on the Raja, on the conquest of Assam a part of that territory proportionate to the extent of his exertion in the common cause.⁸²

On the occasion of Mr. Scott's passing through Jaintia with a body of troops in 1824, the Raja helped him with men and provisions. But when the actual warfare commenced, it is alleged, he offered no effective assistance: he even allowed the Burmese detachment

79 Pemberton's report: Sub-sections 2 & 3 of section 2. P. 212.

80 S. P. 1824, April 6, No. 8.

81 S. P. 1824, April 6, No. 6.

82 S. P. 1824, April 2, No. 8.

to remain at Nurtung in the very heart of his territory in direct violation of the terms of the treaty, though a detachment of the British Brigade was stationed in Jaintiā for the security of the country.⁸³ We do not know how far the above allegation is true.

However when the war was concluded, no action was taken by the Paramount Power against Raja Rām Singh for the alleged violation of the treaty. On the contrary he was given special rewards and was duly confirmed in the possession of Jaintiā.

Settlement
with
Manipur.

The British Government clearly perceived from the very outset that the mere possession of Cachar, circumstanced as she was with her weak ruler and depopulated state, would afford but an ineffective barrier to the inroads of the Burmese were the Valley of Manipur left in their possession.⁸⁴ So, though Gambhir Singh, the ablest of the Manipuriān princes was unwilling to enter into negotiations with the Company at the time of the Burmese invasion and (was even detected intriguing with the Burmese forces stationed at Manipur,⁸⁵ serious attempts were made after the conclusion of the treaty to enable this refractory prince to establish an independent and strong Government at Manipur which was to act as a buffer state between the British and the Burmese territories. The interposition of a race of people known to entertain a rooted antipathy to the Burmese seemed to Mr. Scott an effective barrier against the inroads of the Burmese.⁸⁶ It was pointed out by the military officers that with the assistance of the people of Manipur, a body of troops lightly equipped might at the proper season penetrate without difficulty into Burma and, might, if necessary, further advance on Āvā by a direct march of fifteen days and strike at the very heart of the Burmese empire.⁸⁷

But the King of Manipur had not enough resources to fit out such an expedition. The revenue of the country was very small as public service was provided for chiefly by personal duties and taxes were paid in kind. The only circulating medium was a small bell-metal coin which was not passable elsewhere. The local circumstances of Manipur were not favourable to the development of trade and industries; there were no outlets for its produce on three sides and the inimical character of its neighbours, the Burmese, on the fourth side, checked commercial activities of the Manipurians.

⁸³ P. C. 1833, January 7, No. 82.; PEMBERTON'S REPORT. P. 212.

⁸⁴ S. P. 1824, April 9, No. 8.

⁸⁵ S. P. 1823, November 28, No. 6.

⁸⁶ G. G's minute dated the 25th March 1833.

⁸⁷ S. P. 1826, February 17, No. 21.

With a scanty population of 50, 000 and a paltry revenue of Rs. 10,000 the state of Manipur however strategical its position might be, was not in a position to check the Burmese aggression.⁸⁸ Gambhīr Singh was described by Captain Grant "as the poorest reigning prince under British influence." So the British came to his rescue. Every assistance was afforded to Gambhīr Singh in arms and money to recover the independence of his country. A detachment was raised denominated as the "Manipur Levy" which was financed and officered by the British Government. And to placate Gambhīr Singh, it was further proposed that even if he would fail to retain the possession of Manipur, he would receive a provision in land either in Cachar or in Assam for himself and his followers.⁸⁹

Gambhīr Singh proved a most valuable ally in the Anglo-Burmese War. Not only did he help the British Government in expelling the Burmese from Cachar but he was mainly instrumental in driving out the Burmese from Manipur. He advanced as far as the Nighthee river and even drove the Burmese from the Kubo Vally which originally belonged to Manipur and which later on became a bone of contention between Manipur and Burma.

Subsequently by the treaty of Yandabo concluded in 1826. Gambhīr Singh was recognised as the Raja of Manipur. But with regard to the precise meaning of the second article of the treaty which was loose and vague* (with regard to Manipur it was stipulated that should Gambhīr Singh desire to return to that country he shall be recognised by the king of Āvā as Raja thereof) a doubt was expressed and Gambhīr Singh's status as an independent king was questioned. Was Manipur to be an independent kingdom as desired by the British Government or a mere dependency of the Burmese as she was before the commencement of the war?⁹⁰ It was resolved by the Calcutta Council that if the Burmese regarded Manipur, which they should not, as their dependency, the matter should be settled by negotiation and independent status obtained, if necessary, by some concessions on the part of the British Government. It was referred to the Court of Directors at home and Mr. Crawford resident-

⁸⁸ P. C. 1833, January 7, No. 21.

⁸⁹ S. P. 1826, February 17, No. 21.

* Burmese version.

Article 2nd. The King of Burma shall no more have dominion over, or the direction of the towns and country of Assam, the country of Ak-ka-bat (Cachar) and the country of Wa-tha-li (Jynteah). With regard to Manipur, if Gan-bee-ra-Shing desires to return to his country and remain ruler, the king of Burma shall not prevent or molest him, but let him remain.

⁹⁰ S. P. 1826, May 5, No. 19.

designate for Āvā was instructed to sound the sentiment of the Burmese Court on the point at issue without broaching the subject directly.⁹¹

The above treaty was found to be very ill defined in other respects also. It failed to fix the frontier line of demarcation between Burma and Assam. To adjust these differences and to effect a commercial treaty as proposed in the main document, the Calcutta authorities deputed Mr. Crawford as Envoy and Resident Minister at the Court of Avā. He was also empowered to discuss any other points arising out of the treaty.

On September 30, 1826, Mr. Crawford reached Āvā. Though he was well received by the central authorities "the appearance of a British Mission excited a good deal of uneasiness on the part of the Court." After a good deal of discussion, a commercial treaty which fell far short of the original demands was signed and sealed on November 24, 1826, with the provisions of which we are not concerned here. With regard to Manipur, the Burmese Ministers claimed that as according to article 2 of the treaty, Raja Gambhīr Singh had been allowed to return to Manipur, he, being an independent King, should not maintain Burmese or European Officers at his Court. The Burmese Ministers were evidently referring to the presence of Captain Grant and his men in Manipur. Mr. Crawford left the question of the presence of foreigners in Manipur for future discussion though he had been instructed to discuss any question arising out of the treaty. Here it must be mentioned that though the question of the presence of foreigners in Manipur was not solved, one of the main points of negotiations—*viz.* the independent status of Manipur, was indirectly recognised by the Court of Āvā and it was no small gain. Mr. Crawford in his turn demanded the release of Manipuri and Assamese captives according to article 2 of the treaty. This demand, though a fair one, was turned down by the Burmese deputies who contended that the subject-matter had not been covered by the main treaty.* As no further progress could be made, Mr. Crawford and his party came back to India and submitted the report to the Vice-President in Council at Calcutta (The Governor-General being away at Simla) who most severely criticised the procedure and conduct of the embassy. Happily for Mr. Crawford, his services at Āvā were appreciated by Lord William Bentinck, Governor-General, who observed, "I do not estimate lightly the value of the points virtually conceded by the

⁹¹ S. P. 1826, June 23, No. 18.

* Desai's History of the British Residency in Burma, Pages 1-20.

Burmese Ministers viz—the recognition by their Government of Gambhīr Singh's perfect independence”*

From the above it is clear that the question of the independent status of Gambhīr Singh which was left unsettled by the treaty of Yandabo and which caused the supreme Government at Calcutta much anxious thought, presented no serious difficulties as had been apprehended. This was also confirmed by the fact that a letter emanating from the Burmese Governor of Tammu in the Irrawaddy Valley at the time of the settlement of the boundary question between Burma and Manipur also referred to the independence of Manipur and to the integrity of its ancient boundaries.⁹²

Manipur was not yet out of the wood. Another difficulty of a serious nature arose which well nigh compromised the independent position of Manipur. Shortly after the restoration and recognition of Gambhīr Singh as the independent sovereign of Manipur the Calcutta Council decided with rather undue haste to withdraw subsidies payable to Raja Gambhīr Singh on account of the maintenance of the Manipur Levy.⁹³ The kingdom had not settled down to normal and peaceful activities and the troops were busy in subduing the refractory hill tribes and no one was certain about the future design of the arrogant and disgruntled Āvā authorities. At that time, the withdrawal of the British help would have spelt disaster to Manipur and the security of the whole of the North Eastern frontiers would have been greatly imperilled, for Manipur to the Burmese was the key to Assam and Cachar.

A spirited and timely intervention on the part of the Commissioner of Sylhet backed by Captain Grant who was in charge of the Manipur Levy at that time decided the fate of Manipur and saved her from premature ruin. The able Commissioner pointed out that it was almost essential to the tranquillity of the North-Eastern frontier that Manipur should be held by an ally devoted to the Company's interests and finally observed, “It would not be prudent economy to risk the entire failure for the sake of a few thousand rupees (Rs. 18,000 monthly)”.⁹⁴ The subsidies and the services of European officers were allowed to be continued for another nine months beginning with August 1826.⁹⁵ This gave Gambhīr Singh much needed breathing-space to consolidate his position. It must be admitted that out of a series of worthless and impotent monarchs

* GG's minute. May 12. 1827. No. 99.

⁹² S. P. 1829, December 1, No. 39.

⁹³ S. P. 1826, January 23. No. 18.

⁹⁴ S. P. 1826. September 15. No. 37.

who filled the stage of the North Eastern frontier at that period. he was the only sovereign who showed power and valour though his hands were not always clean as we shall see later on. Thus the spoils of the war were disposed of.

The highly optimistic view of the local officers regarding the position of Manipur as the most effective barrier against the Burmese aggression was not fully shared in by the Supreme Government. The Governor-General in his minute dated 28th March, 1833, while reviewing the activities of the military establishment in Manipur questioned the utility of the policy of identifying the British interest with those of the petty state of Manipur which was separated from the Company's dominion by an extremely difficult tract of country, but from that of Ava by one of great comparative facility. The advantages of retaining connection with Manipur appeared to His Lordship very problematical, as the enquiries conducted by Pemberton and Jenkins clearly showed that the small state was still considered totally incompetent to defend itself against the Burmese invasion. But strangely speaking, to this Gambhīr Singh and his Manipuri levies the British Government turned again and again for help in times of emergency.

Plan of
Mr. Scott.

As soon as it was determined that both the halves of the Brahmaputra Valley would be retained by the Company, Mr. Scott set himself to evolve a plan for the administration of the newly acquired territories. We have seen earlier that with regard to the retention of the Eastern half of Assam, the British Government were not certain though they had formerly annexed it along with Lower Assam. They kept up correspondence with their Agent for the ultimate disposal of the above tract. This uncertainty of mind with regard to the retention of Upper Assam was also reflected in the method of its administration. Mr. Scott's principle was "to make as little alteration in the existing institution as possible" in the eastern part of the country. But in Lower Assam the changes he effected were more thoroughgoing and radical in character.

Agreeably to the above principle, the old *pāik* system obtaining in Upper Assam was practically left intact. But in consequence of great changes which had taken place in Upper Assam in the last few years, Mr. Scott ordered a fresh enumeration of the *pāiks* to be made and a new allotment of land for their maintenance called "*Peeyal*" and appointed a Committee of three Assamese of rank to perform the task. In Upper Assam the collection of the revenue was placed under the general control of the Bar Baruā to which office was appointed an Assamese of rank and connected by marriage with the ex-Raja Gaurīnāth. For the discharge of the judicial business of

the tract, the Bar Phukān was appointed co-adjutor to Mr. Scott and to this position of trust and responsibility was appointed the brother-in-law of the ex-Raja Chandra Kānta, a man of talent and considerable wealth. Civil suits were tried at the first instance by standing Committees, Panchāyets consisting of various Officers of the state and Pandits agreeably to the custom of the realm. Criminal cases of minor importance were disposed of either by the Commissioner or by the Bar Phukhan and in cases of serious nature, the trials were held before the juries with the latter Officer as the President.⁹⁶ A criminal court was set up composed of three members as Judges, two Pandits and six Assessors agreeably to the former practice of the country to deal with capital offences.⁹⁷ The guilty were punished not by the draconian law of Assam in force at the time of the Svargadevas but by the humane law as prevalent in the Company's territories. So we find that the procedure of trial was mainly based on the indigenous system whereas punishments were inflicted according to the more humane laws of the British system.⁹⁸

In Lower Assam, a radical change was introduced. Rules obtaining in the judicial and revenue departments of the Bengal Presidency were generally applied here. The *pāik* system was abolished and the revenue and judicial establishments were placed under the superintendence of the Assamese *Sheristādārs*.⁹⁹ As the tract was to be permanently retained by the Company, the Calcutta authorities, on the recommendation of Mr. Scott, commuted all the *pāik* service for an annual cash payment to the state at the rate of Rs. 3/- per man and the people of Lower Assam became free from the system of forced labour.¹⁰⁰

Theoretically, it was a great boon no doubt, but Mr. Scott committed a tactical blunder of the first magnitude. Though in abolishing the *pāik* system, he was actuated by the highest motives—to his western mind it seemed to be an odious system—the changes effected were so sudden and radical that the innovation produced a great economic revolution in the country. The Assamese gentry were reduced to poverty overnight. No class was left intermediate between the tiller of the soil and the supreme authority. The social and economic hierarchy vanished. The worst affected were the great nobility of the land who exclusively depended on this

⁹⁶ S. C. 1826, July 7, No. 31.

⁹⁷ S. C. 1826, July 7, No. 25.

⁹⁸ S. C. 1828, May 2, No. 13.

⁹⁹ S. C. 1826, July 7, No. 31.

¹⁰⁰ P. P. 1826, November 4, No. 40.

system. The high functionaries of the ancient realm were suddenly reduced to abject poverty and became pensioners of the alien Government and had to eke out their existence on small pittances sanctioned by Mr. Scott. And many members of the royal family lived on the charitable donations of the Rajas of Susang, Cachar and Tripura.¹⁰¹ Secondly in a country where money circulation was scanty, the cultivators experienced great difficulty in paying the revenue in cash. The indigenous Courts established by Mr. Scott, however, proved to be a success at first. "The native Assamese Courts proved a tolerably efficient and satisfactory instrument for dispensation of Civil justice."¹⁰²

The judicial and revenue reforms of Mr. Scott were only a fraction of the great plan he had in mind some of which he tried to enforce for the better advancement of the Brahmaputra Valley which he found in such a depressed state. He tried to encourage trade, commerce and agriculture of the land.¹⁰³ He proposed to set apart a portion of the revenue realised from the *Devottar* lands for the construction of bunds, bridges and roads and for the education of the children of the soil.¹⁰⁴ He was busy in devising an elaborate scheme for developing the resources of the country and for improving the condition of the people.

But scarcely had the echoes of the Burma war died down and the country settled down to a regular system of administration so ably planned by Mr. Scott when insurrections and rebellions broke out in quick succession "in which all combined to drive the English out of the country."¹⁰⁵ It was a united front blessed by Chandra Kānta, connived at by the Āvā authority and led by the ex-functionaries of the Āhom Government.

¹⁰¹ P. P. 1826, November 4, No. 40.

¹⁰² S. C. 1828, May 2, No. 13.

¹⁰³ P. P. 1826, October 13, No. 44-45.

¹⁰⁴ C. S. 1827, March 9, No. 18.

¹⁰⁵ P. P. 1835, February 11, No. 91.

CHAPTER III

THE PERIOD OF INSURRECTION AND REBELLION (1828—1833).

GENERAL OBSERVATION.

The Assamese nobility whose ancestors ruled the Brahmaputra Valley for nearly six hundred years and monopolised all the privileges and perquisites of the realm, did not take so quietly to the permanent occupation of their fair valley by the British. They thought and not without precedent* now that the Burmese had been expelled and law and order restored, that the forces of the Company should withdraw as before placing one of the claimants as Svargadeva on their ancestral throne. The promise of the Bengal Government made on the eve of the Anglo-Burmese war and the halting administrative measures of Mr. Scott so far as they related to the Government of Upper Assam gave no doubt a fillip to their hopes and aspirations. But the British who came as saviours and captured the imagination of the Assamese nobility by declaring on the eve of the Anglo-Burmese conflict that they had no intention of annexing any portion of the Brahmaputra Valley, preferred to stay as conquerors and did not even condescend to hand over the upper portion of the valley though repeatedly and strongly recommended to do so by Mr. Scott, the man on the spot. Mr. Scott who had his finger on the pulse of the nation apprehended troubles and proposed to soothe away the ruffled feelings of the Assamese nobility by allowing them to rule at least the upper part of the domain. The Calcutta Council decided otherwise and tried to placate them by employing them in responsible posts in the judicial and revenue departments. But the Assamese nobility most of whom† were reduced to great misery by the change of master and by the abolition of the *pāik* system, were not so easily to be reconciled. The result was the outbreak, after a short interval of two years since the expulsion of the Burmese, of a series of insurrections and rebellions in which all combined to

* Captain Welsh and his men retired after restoring law and order in Assam.

† Amongst the persons most affected were the ex-officers of state, Brahmins, learned Pandits and the spiritual teachers of the multitudes called the Gosains together with the families of the deceased men of rank and the relations of the princes who had at different times ruled the country.

drive the English out of the country. These insurrections though short-lived and futile, kept the British occupied for more than four years without interruption and from time to time reduced the country to a state of chaos and confusion the like of which had prevailed before the expulsion of the Burmese.

The first rebellion broke out towards the end of 1828 with the connivance of the Burmese authority and under the direct leadership of the ex-functionaries of Assam who set up one Gadādhār, a prince of the royal blood as their king. The first rebellion though crushed outwardly was not fully eradicated and made its appearance again in the beginning of 1830, under the standard of a new pretender named Rūpchānd, supported by the remnants of the original conspirators. The English were given no breathing-space. Trouble was also brewing in the west and the Khasis broke out in open rebellion towards the beginning of 1829. It was a most formidable and protracted rebellion. Linked up with the second rebellion and also acting in concert with the Singpho insurrection which burst out in the year 1830, it caused alarm and consternation and the whole of Assam was in a state of excitement. The Singpho incursion and the second resistance of the Assamese nobility were easily beaten off as before, but the hardy and the sturdy Khāsis kept the fight going on in their mountain homes and fastnesses and the country saw the prospect of the pacification only when their leader Tirut Singh made his submission towards the beginning of 1833.

These rebellions though unsuccessful not only throw a flood of light on the intriguing character and restless energy of the Assamese people, but also testify to the organising ability and freedomloving spirit of the Khāsis who made a determined and persevering attempt to subvert the new regime. They had no resources in men and money, they fought under the most baffling circumstances, and yet they put up a heroic fight and produced leaders who wrung praise even from their adversaries. It is said that behind all these plots were Chandra Kānt and his advisers.¹

These attempts, though futile and chimerical in design, were not made in vain. The task of consolidation and reconciliation went hand in hand and while the echoes of the last shots fired at the Khāsi rebels were dying away in the hills in the west, a native prince was restored to the throne of his ancestors in the east and at last the vision of Mr. Scott was fulfilled, though his master mind was not there to see the final consummation of his wise policy.

¹ P. P. 1835, February 11, No. 91.

SECTION I.

THE REBELLION OF GADĀDHAR (The First Rebellion)

The Assamese nobles were the first to rise against the newly founded authority. The higher orders of Upper Assam were far from being reconciled to British rule, though many of them had at first been absorbed in the judicial and revenue departments under the new administration as resolved by the Court of Directors. They were shorn of power and the new revenue system which struck at the *pāik* system reduced many of them to abject poverty. To their general aversion to British rule was added a new factor—a feeling of discontent produced by the firm and vigorous rule of Captain Newville in Upper Assam, which though it greatly advanced the interests of the Government and of the lower order by improving the general administration; did not find favour with the upper class of the society. Captain Newville again gave them further cause of trouble when he appointed to the offices of the revenue and judicial department men of inferior rank in lieu of indolent and defaulting nobles whom it was the practice of the British Government to employ at first.¹ The upper classes were engaged in a series of plots to overthrow the new regime and there always appeared a stir and restlessness amongst them whenever any scheme for the establishment of the ancient form of Government was formed—whether in the west amongst the hill tribes of the Khāsi mountains or in the east in the territories of the Singphos or of the Khāntis.²

The first rebellion was started by them under the standard of a prince of royal blood—named Gadādhār Singh who claimed to be a nephew of Raja Chandra Kānta and a relation of Jogeshwar Singh and traced his descent from Meroo—the son of Susengphā (also known as Budha Swarga Narayan) who had reigned in Assam from 1603 to 1641. Thus he was lineally descended from Sukhāphā, the founder of the Āhom Dynasty.³

About the early history of this pretender very little is known. It is stated that he along with his father named “Dhutoowa Gohain” repaired to the Court of Āvā in the year 1818 in company with

¹ P. P. 1831, June 10, No. 50.

² S. C. 1830, March 12, No. 15.

³ S. C. 1830, March 12, No. 12.

their female relative "Atan Neengh Timenese, Bur Koonweeree," who was sent down as a present to the Burmese prince by the then Raja Jogeshwar Singh.* This lady, it is reported, was subsequently married to the heir-apparent Bagyidaw who in 1819 became the Emperor of Burma. This Assamese princess** obtained great ascendancy over her husband, and incessantly urged His Majesty to place her brother "Atan Menda" on the throne of Assam. At first His Majesty, it is reported, turned a deaf ear to the unreasonable prayer of the queen, but wearied out by her constant importunities at length he consented to allow the border tribes to make an inroad into the province of Assam. He also instructed the queen's father Dhutoowa Gohain (who had been raised to high position) to depute his son Gadādhar to sound the Assamese nobles and to ascertain how far they were willing to second the views of the Court of Ava. The said Gadādhar was further charged with the task of ascertaining the number and disposition of the British forces in Assam.†

We do not know how far this version of the story gathered from the statement of the pretender is true in detail, but from all accounts it is clear that the emperor of Burma was privy to the plan—which was corroborated by subsequent events. But His Majesty chose to remain in the background—at a safe distance—ready to throw the blame on his insubordinate border tribes in the event of subsequent failure or detection.

While the plot to subvert the British regime in Assam was being hatched in Burma under the connivance of the Court of Āvā, the disaffected nobility in Assam were not idle. They were mobilising their available resources and looking about for an opportunity to strike at the root of the newly founded British Raj. That was towards the end of 1828. The time was also a most opportune one for them. The political Agent was absent from Sadiyā for a long time. Three companies of the fifty-fourth Regiment were already

* This lady is, according to one version, a sister of Jogeshwar Singh. She was presented to the Burmese King's harem by Chandra Kanta. But this account as found in Padya Buranjii edited by Dr. Bhuyan does not tally with the account given by Mr. Scott. Mr. Scott writes that this lady was sent down as a present by Jogeshwar Singh and was not related to him. She was not even a princess of the royal family though she was palmed off as such to please the Burmese King.

** Judson, an American missionary who had lived for many years in Burma described the principal Queen of Bagyidaw as haughty, avaricious, vindictive and intriguing (Wilson's documents).

† S. P. 1830, June 25, No. 4.

withdrawn from Eastern Assam and there was a rumour current that troops were soon going to quit Upper Assam. The apparently inadequately defended state of Upper Assam soon emboldened the conspirators to measure their strength.

At the psychological moment—Gadādhār Singh appeared on the soil of Assam in the guise of a Khānti Priest to sow the seeds of discontent.⁵ He first appeared as a suitor to the British authority, and addressed a letter to Captain Neufville, the political Agent in Upper Assam, praying that he might be allowed to receive the country as a Raj from the hands of the Company. He cited the precedent that as formerly Captain Welsh drove away the Moāmāriās and restored the country to Raja Gaurīnāth so the Company should now hand over the country to him, now that the Burmese had been defeated and expelled. He promised to rule the country according to the wishes of the English.⁶ This supplication was a mere ruse on his part to disarm the suspicion which his activities were likely to raise in the minds of the British officers. He at the same time incited the sepoys to kill the English and promised them better pay under his Raj.⁷ At this stage he was seized upon by the disgruntled nobles who fully exploited him to serve their own political designs.

This prince did not possess any personal weight or influence and easily allowed himself to be made a tool in their hands. The Rājguru was summoned, practised his magical charms and priestly crafts upon him and declared him to be possessed of high fortune and rare qualification. A halo of regality was cast around him and he rose high in the esteem of his followers. The principal leaders of the plot were the Daba Phukan, the Mantri Dharmadhar and the Khānti Burhā Gohain who rested their hopes upon assistance and co-operation from others of more weight and influence. The plot was well laid no doubt; Gadādhār corresponded with the Bar Baruā, the Bar Phukan and other ex-functionaries of the old court and solicited their help and co-operation. The advice he got from the ex-Burhā Gohain, called Pealiar, was very cautious and valuable. At that time the ex-Burhā Gohain was in constant touch with Colonel Cooper and Captain Neufville. At the same time he was secretly negotiating with the prince without raising the least suspicion. He doubted the prospects of the venture and advised the pretender not to act in a hurry. At the same time he wished it success with all his heart and finally promised to join when success was almost certain.

⁵ S. C. 1830, March 12, No. 12.

⁶ S. C. 1830, March 12, No. 13(1).

⁷ S. C. 1830, June 25, No. 4.

The prince had many well-wishers even in the Court of the Political Agent of Upper Assam, with many of whom he carried on a secret correspondence.⁸ In a letter addressed to the Bar Baruā the prince wrote that he had come to protect "the altars and hearths of his native country" and reminded him that from the remotest days his ancestors had been receiving the Raj from the hands of the Bar Baruās. He further warned him not to be misled by the false assurance of the British who had already taken down two Rajas to the lower country and would not restore a king of their own accord. The Bar Baruā as well as the Bar Phukan to whom he had also sent a similar letter, promised to give him their assistance on the first dawn of success.⁹ It is said that even Chandra Kāntā sent blessings to the pretender.

Gadādhār declared himself Raja of the country, assumed insignia of royalty and excited the people to rebel against the Company's Raj. He collected a small armed force. The ramifications of the plot were extensive and it had secret partisans everywhere. Though the plot was chimerical in design and shortlived in its consequences, it produced a most pernicious effect as it unsettled the minds of the Assamese throughout the province. Had the pretender succeeded in making any head way or threatened Rangpur, the immediate result would have been of a far different nature and would have thrown the country into a state of anarchy and confusion. Even Mr. Scott admitted that "very serious inconvenience and loss might have been sustained in restoring law and order."¹⁰

The insurgent nobles assembled at Mohianu about a day's march south of Jorhāt and began to commit mischief. They were led by the Khānti Burbā Gohain, the Bar Baruā, the Daka Phukan and others.¹¹ The prince fixed an auspicious day to move towards Rangpur. He fondly hoped that at Rangpur he would be joined by the sepoy and foolishly believed that Colonel Cooper, officer commanding at Rangpur would join his standard. From this illusion he was rudely awakened not a day too soon.¹²

Things were at this stage when Captain Neufville arrived at Rangpur. His arrival was so unexpected and so sudden that the well-wishers of the prince had no time to communicate with him so as to prevent him from adopting open measures of rebellion. The Bar Gohain and the Bar Phukan become nervous and they

⁸ S. C. 1830, March 12, No. 12.

⁹ S. C. 1830, March 12, No. 13B.

¹⁰ S. C. 1830, March 12, No. 12.

¹¹ S. C. 1828, December 4, No. 10.

immediately put into the hands of the Political Agent letters addressed to them by the pretender and the whole plot fizzled out.¹³

Captain Neufville lost no time in taking counter-measures. He immediately sent off under the command of Lieutenant Rutherford as large a detachment of his own as he deemed prudent to draw away from the station. He himself could not take the field lest that measure should give undue importance to the affair and increase the general panic. The party led by *Subedār Baijnāth Singh* met the insurgents at Deorapār and dispersed the prince and his followers who fled after a miserable attempt at resistance. Two of his principal followers were seized in arms. The dispositions were excellently made but the prince, owing to the mismanagement of the guide, effected his escape and with the remnants of his party retired to the Nāgā hills.¹⁴

Lt. Rutherford followed him upto Hunwal and despatched letters to the Nāgā chiefs of Bura Chowkiduar requesting them to apprehend the pretender and his followers. In the meantime the *Subedār* of the Assamese militia had succeeded in seizing the prince's family including his mother, wife and sisters. Lt. Rutherford interviewed the prince's mother and requested her to induce her son to surrender, holding out some hopes of mercy in case of voluntary and early surrender.

The pretender roamed from jungle to jungle and eluded search for some time. He was forsaken by many of his followers. He was deserted even by his principal ally, the Khāmti Burhā Gohain. At last the assurances held out to him by Lt. Rutherford had their effect and on the 10th November, 1828, the fugitive prince surrendered with his followers.¹⁵ Incriminating letters found with the prince led to a few arrests at Gauhati.¹⁶

The prince along with other nobles, the Daha Phukan supposed to be the principal leader of the move, the Dharmadhar Mantri and the Khāmti Burhā Gohain together with the ex-Bar Gohain and his son was brought to trial before a Grand Jury composed of the "Pātra Mantri" and presided over by Captain Neufville. The prince and his followers were charged with rebellion against the British Government. A large number of witnesses was summoned and their evidence taken. It was revealed that he had not only entered into correspondence with various influential chiefs of Assam

Dec. 1828.

¹³ S. C. 1830, March 12, No. 12.

¹⁴ S. C. 1830, March 12, No. 4B.

¹⁵ S. C. 1830, March 12, No. 6.

¹⁶ S. C. 1830, March 12, No. 4B.

including the principal functionaries serving under the British Government but he had also kept in detention a number of servants of the revenue department. Some of the insignia of state usually worn and used by the sovereigns of Assam, found in the house of the prince, were produced before the court.

The prince, in defence, submitted that he was proceeding to visit the Company's officers at Raugpur with a view to laying before them complaints against the Nāgās who had plundered his villagers, when suddenly he was surrounded by sepoys from all sides and took to flight. He said that he fled from hill to hill and at last when he realised that "the English were the personification of justice", he surrendered.¹⁷ This piece of self-defence, it seems, was very ingeniously drawn out. Perhaps this was conceived in anticipation by some of his designing followers.

The "Pātra Mantrī," the Grand Panchāyat, after carefully weighing and comparing the whole mass of evidence, found him guilty on all the charges and condemned him to suffer the penalty of death by the law of the country. Captain Neufville, the Presiding Officer, recommended him for mercy for a mitigated punishment, on the ground that he was rather a tool in the hands of the more designing persons. And taking into account his poor resources and the little mischief he had committed, Captain Neufville punished him with banishment from Assam for seven years, a sentence which was approved by Mr. Scott and later on confirmed by the Supreme Government.¹⁸ The other prisoners who had been accused of high treason and sentenced to death at the first instance, were all awarded a less severe punishment by the Presiding Officer.

Captain Neufville believed that the plot had been utterly overthrown and that there would be few chances of a similar disturbance.¹⁹ How false was his prediction will be seen later. The plot was not uprooted—it had only sustained a temporary check. Mr. Scott proved a better prophet and made a correct reading of the situation when he pointed out that "the inhabitants of Upper Assam were far from being reconciled to our rule and that high classes in that country will long engage in schemes for the establishment of the ancient form of Government under a native prince." And to put an end to the recurrence of such plots, he again recommended the handing over of the upper part of Assam to an Assamese prince.²⁰

¹⁷ S. C. 1830, March 12, Nos. 15, 16, 17 & 34.

¹⁸ S. C. 1830, March 12, Nos. 15, 16, 17 & 34.

¹⁹ S. C. 1830, March 12, No. 12.

²⁰ S. C. 1830, March 12, No. 15.

The imprisoned prince effected his escape from the jail and was re-arrested. But as he again was found intriguing with the guard placed over him, he was sent down to the jail of Rangpur (Bengal) for safe detention.²¹

Jan. 1830.

The subject of Prince Gadādhār's communication that the plot was hatched with the connivance of the Burmese government was duly conveyed to the court of Āvā by Major Burney, the Resident at the court of Āvā, who was instructed to broach the subject very cautiously. No formal remonstrances were made; the Burman Ministers were only given to understand that an improper use had been made by the rebels of the name of His Burmese Majesty as lending his countenance to their petty insurrection and they were simply requested to formally disown those assertions to which the British Government was said to have attached no credence.²² Though the whole proceedings were distinctly disavowed by the court of Āvā, the subsequent conduct of the Burmese Government showed that they had a hand in the matter. The preparations that were made in the beginning of 1831 towards the invasion of Assam by the border tribes, though it did not materialise eventually, showed unmistakably the hidden hand of the Burmese court in the rebellion of Gadādhār Singh.²³

June 1830.

²¹ S. C. 1830, March 12, No. 18.

²² S. C. 1830, June 25, No. 6.

²³ P. C. 1831, February 18, No. 28.

SECTION II

THE REBELLION OF KUMAR RŪPCHAND

Feb. 1880. The rebellion of Kumār Gadādhara was not fully suppressed; it had only received a temporary check. Haranāth, son of the ex-Bar Gohain who had been implicated in the first rebellion and called upon to stand his trial along with others, was acquitted for want of evidence. Later on, he helped his father and others to escape from the jail and organised the second rebellion.

These remnants of the first rebellion at first remained in hiding in the hills and jungles lying eastward of Rangpur. Then they removed to the Mātak country and induced the second son of the Bar Senāpati to harbour them notwithstanding his father's opposition. Here they were joined by the Bar Phukan and some disaffected subjects of the Bar Senāpati and were looking for a favourable opportunity to break into open rebellion again. This Bar Phukan was the son of Badan Chandra through whose agency the Burmese were first called into Assam¹.

In the meantime the Khāsis under the leadership of Tirut Singh, King of Nunklow, had risen against the authority of the English. Towards the beginning of 1830 when the English were still engaged in harassing warfare against the Khāsis, the Singphos broke out in open revolt under the leadership of a disgruntled Khāmti chief who was aided by an enterprising Singpho chief hailing from the trans-Pātkai region. The opportunities, for which the partisans of the second rebellion were looking thus presented themselves and they corresponded with the leaders of these two insurrections and planned to act in concert with them.² They set up one Kumār Rūpchānd, previously unknown, as their Raja and made elaborate arrangements to make their new plan a success.³

They sent envoys to the chiefs of the Khāmtis, Moāmāriās, Nāgās, Khāsis and Gāros calling upon them to rise against the British Government and despatched emissaries in all directions to win over the adherents of the Company Rāj to the new regime.⁴ They had many secret partisans of theirs at Sadiyā. They covered the country with a net-work of spies by which means they received

¹ P. C. 1830, September 24, No. 76.

² S. P. 1830, April 30, No. 5A.

³ P. P. 1830, July 16, No. 49.

⁴ P. C. 1830, September 24, No. 76.

the most valuable and accurate information regarding the strength of the military resources of the British. But their espionage system was not highly efficient and almost all their letters intended for delivery to the neighbouring chiefs were intercepted and transmitted to the Political Agent at Sadiyā.⁵ What was most unfortunate and proved a disastrous blow to their cause was the apprehension of Haranāth who was specially deputed to raise the Khāmtis. He delivered two letters to the Sadiyā Khawā Gohain addressed by the Bar Gohain and the Bar Phukan respectively. These letters were handed over to the Political Agent by the Sadiyā Khawā Gohain himself on the strength of which Haranāth was apprehended by the English. It is to be noticed in this connection that though the Sadiyā Khawā Gohain helped the English a great deal, he was suspected by Major White of double dealing.⁶

Feb. 20
1830.

Captain Neufville immediately adopted strong measures for the reduction of the insurgents. He despatched urgent messages to the chiefs of North and East Assam calling upon them to co-operate. In the meantime, he took some precautionary measures. The roofs of the magazine and gun shades of Sadiyā were covered with grass chopper which was susceptible to ignition. As the plan of the insurgents was to set fire to it by shooting arrows a practice in which the Assamese were peculiarly adept, he ordered the executive officer to replace them by tiles. The military strength at Rangpur was also increased.⁷

The insurgents undeterred by the capture of the son of their leader and undaunted by the failure of the Singpho insurrection upon the success of which they counted so much, collected a force of 400 men and moved towards Rangpur. They performed their usual "Dco Puja"* (?) to ascertain the fate of this venture and this being reported favourable, they set out for the attack. The Bar Phukan did not proceed with the insurgents. It is said that he had differences with the Burmā Gohain but most probably he remained behind out of personal timidity.⁸

On the 25th March, 1830, they made a night attack on the military lines.⁹ Their plan was to set fire to the huts of the line and then to fall upon their adversaries. But they were unsuccessful and

⁵ S. C. 1830, April 30, No. 5A.

⁶ P. C. 1830, September 24, No. 76.

⁷ S. C. 1830, April 30, No. 5A.

* Was it "Somedeo Puja?" (vide page 1 foot note).

⁸ P. C. 1830, September 24, No. 76.

⁹ P. C. 1830, June 18, No. 65.

were put to flight. The sepoys followed the rebels for some distance beyond Rangpur when all trace of them was lost.¹⁰

On receipt of the news, Captain Neufville immediately sent a detachment of the Assam Light Infantry to Rangpur with a part of the Assamese militia with an order to follow up the rebels. The detachment proceeded without delay to the town of Gileku near the Saradar hills, lying to the east of Rangpur where they sighted the disposition of the enemy. The rebels were defeated entirely and fled eastward to the Nāgā hills. The British forces followed them up and eventually succeeded in apprehending all the rebel leaders with their followers excepting the ex-Bar Gohain and his eldest son who fled favoured by the thickness of the jungle. The detachment was recalled to the Headquarters (Sadiyā) and the Assamese militia under the command of the Bar Senāpati were left to apprehend the remaining two insurgents who were subsequently arrested.¹¹

Several of the unemployed nobles of Assam, who had secretly aided and abetted the insurgents, were arrested and the Bar Senāpati was also instructed to apprehend some of his subjects who were actively concerned in the insurrection.¹²

The leaders of the insurrection, namely, the ex-Bar Gohain, the Bar Phukan, Haranāth, Rūpchānd and Jayrām Duly, the son-in-law of the ex-Bar Gohain were made over to the civil authorities to stand their trial. They were all tried at the first instance before a *Sadar Panchāyat* presided over by the Bar Gohain and the Bar Baruā. The *Sadar Panchāyat* found them all guilty of high treason and sentenced them to death in conformity with the custom of their country. Captain Neufville referred the case to Mr. Scott for review. The criminal court at Cherrapunji reviewed the proceedings of the *Sadar Panchāyat* under the presidency of Mr. Scott and confirmed the death sentence passed on the Bar Phukan and Jayrām, but in respect of the sentence of Rūpchānd and the rest, they commuted it to a banishment for fourteen years and ordered all their property to be confiscated.

According to usual custom, Mr. Scott was to send the orders to the supreme Government for confirmation. But at this juncture Captain Neufville died and fearing that the removal of his strong hand might encourage the nobility to bid for a fresh insurrection, he wished to make a public example of the culprits and directed immediate execution of the sentence passed on the Bar Phukan and

Aug. 6,
1830.

¹⁰ S. P. 1830. April 30. No. 5A.

¹¹ P. C. 1830. June 18. No. 65.

¹² P. P. 1830. July 16. No. 49.

Jayrām. Accordingly they were executed and the others were banished to Bengal and kept confined in the Dacca jail which was at that period regarded as the safest place for detention.¹³

Thus ended the second and last direct attempt of the ex-nobility of Assam to subvert the British regime in the Brahmaputra Valley. The repetition within the year of this ineffectual attempt at rebellion under the standard of a new prince shows the restless disposition of the people of the country. Though Mr. Scott took severe steps to put down the second rebellion because, in his opinion, the leniency shown on the occasion of Gadādhār Kumār's rebellion had no other effect than that of immediately producing another, he did not forget the lessons of the disturbances, and these repeated disturbances but confirmed his views of the need for the restoration of a native monarchy in Assam.

¹³ P. C. 1880. September 24. No. 76.

SECTION III.

THE KHĀSĪ INSURRECTION.

1829--1833.

Between the state of Jaintia and the hills on the west occupied by the Gāros, lies a mountainous terrain, 70 miles in length and 50 miles in breadth, covering an area of 3,500 square miles, inhabited by the Khāsis—a bold and warlike people.¹

The Khāsis are an honest, independent and warlike race—inheritor of a more advanced type of civilisation than is generally found amongst other hill tribes inhabiting the North Eastern region of India. When pitted against the English, they exhibited the same qualities of stubbornness, independence of character and hatred of a foreign domination which generally characterise mountaineers throughout the world and which in their case had been again greatly fostered by the nature of their government which allowed every adult person to have his say in the administration of the land.²

When Dr. Lamb visited their country in the year 1828 in quest of a site for the establishment of a sanatorium, he was struck by the general air of cheerfulness and ease prevalent amongst them. Though Hindus, they were little troubled with Hindu prejudices respecting diet. The strong physique of the people and their general health spoke powerfully in favour of the climate which was invigorating and salubrious. No lame or deformed people were seen and leprosy was unknown.³

Dr. Lamb accompanied by Mrs. Lamb and Mr. Tucker made a trip to Cherrapunji in the early spring of 1828. Both he and Captain Fisher who visited these hills later, have left a very interesting account of their sojourn. About the occupation of the people, Dr. Lamb writes that the inhabitants of Cherrapunji depended entirely on the Pānduā market for their supplies of grains. They brought down iron and cotton goods to this market and exchanged them for rice, salt and dried fish. As they were in possession of several of the most important passes leading to the plains, they practically usurped the whole of the carrying trade between the markets below and their more northerly countrymen. Dr. Lamb found near their villages traces of iron smelting. He found

¹ PEMBERTON'S REPORTS, P. 221.

² S. P. 1829, May 8, No. 11.

³ S. P. 1828, November 14, No. 9.

the people of all ages, in spite of their unclean habits, in the best of the health and noted a great air of independence among them. The hills southward of Cherra he found composed entirely of limestone, a few specimens of which he brought down to Calcutta for examination. With the exception of that range, the superficial stratum everywhere appeared to him to consist of coarse sandstone.

Speaking of the state of Cherrapunji Dr. Lamb says that the revenue of the state was inconsiderable and was mainly derived from small imposts levied in kind on exports and imports.

He saw no beasts of prey or noxious reptiles on the way. His information on this point is not valuable because he had neither leisure nor opportunity of acquiring detailed and correct information regarding the flora and fauna of the hills around.

Dr. Lamb attributed the healthy appearance of the Khāsis to the climate of their beautiful hill "where extreme fatigue seems speedily forgotten and exposure to sun and weather is followed by increase of appetite with lightness and buoyancy of spirit." The climate of these hills seemed to him to resemble that of West England and he had no doubt that "many patients now sent to the Cape or to Europe might be restored to health at much less expense of time and money" if sent to the sanatoria established on the Khāsi hills.⁴

Captain Fisher's account is no less interesting. He was charmed by the noble waterfalls of the Khāsi hills which when full appeared to him "to be most stupendous and magnificent calculated to excite mingled sensations of pleasure and awe" and many of these having a perpendicular fall of one thousand feet of unbroken descent deserved to be ranked, according to him, among the most considerable falls of the world. The soil of the hill he found rich and fit for producing European grains.* The Khāsis, however, appeared to be "idle and inactive."⁵

The constitution of the Khāsi states was democratic. There were 30 states in the Khāsi hills before the advent of the English. The chiefs of these states were in no sense territorial sovereigns with unlimited powers. They were merely elected heads of little republics. Each had a council of his own without whose sanction, no business of importance could be done by the king. The Khāsi nation as a whole presented the appearance of a congregation of little oligarchical republics subject to no common superior yet of

⁴ S. P. 1828, November 14, No. 3.

⁵ S. P. 1829, June 26, No. 9.

* He found oranges selling at the rate of one thousand per rupee.

which each member was amenable in some degree to the control of the confederating states. And according to Mr. Robertson, the successor of Mr. Scott—"it was to our oversight as to this feature of their political system that the massacre at Nunklow may perhaps be traced since Teerut Singh seems to have been merely an instrument on that occasion of executing the will of the confederates who were displeased at the treaty which he had without their sanction entered into."⁶

Each of these petty states was a little oligarchical republic. When any question or dispute arose regarding succession or some other points, the matter was discussed by their assembly where every member was entitled to speak and vote. Captain White, assistant to Mr. Scott, was present on one such occasion and he was amazed at the order, decorum and propriety with which the debate was conducted for two days and admitted that he had not seen these surpassed in any European society.⁷ This testimony coming from a contemporary European officer of note shows how advanced the **Khasis** were in the art of self-Government. Freedom was the very breath of their nostrils. Such was the country and the people with whom the British came into contact and conflict and it was no wonder that such brave people should offer a determined resistance to an invading force, however defective and primitive their means of warfare might be. And it is in the back-ground of their national character and constitution that we should trace the true genesis and causes of their insurrection which, though a failure, was tinged with the halo of martyrdom.

On the acquisition of Lower Assam in 1824, the ingenious mind of Mr. Scott conceived the bold idea of establishing a direct communication between Assam and Sylhet as the route *via* Jaintiā ceased to be available after the occupation of the country by the Burmese.⁸ The projected road from Lower Assam to Sylhet *via* the Khāsi hills was of great importance from the military point of view as it would have reduced the length of the march from three months to as many weeks. Besides the military advantages Mr. Scott had also other objects in view. By the establishment of the British influence in this quarter, Mr. Scott thought that the petty Khāsi chiefs who occasionally disturbed the peace on the Sylhet frontier, should be completely overawed. He also imagined that the facilities of easy and quick communication offered by the road

⁶ S. P. 1833, January 7, No. 82.

⁷ S. P. 1829, May 8, No. 11.

⁸ S. P. 1820, June 26, No. 2.

would tend to promote the prosperity of the country by giving the Khāsis easy access to the markets below.⁹

Mr. Tucker, Commissioner of Sylhet, was at first advised to establish a sanatorium at Mukānji in Jaintiā as recommended by Dr. Lamb. But the site at Mukānji was given up in view of the discovery of a better place on the Khāsi hills. It was proposed to build a bungalow at Nunklow (lying within the state of Tirut Singh) along with the construction of the road, for the treatment of invalids.¹⁰

As a preliminary to the construction of the road which was to start from Barduar facing Lower Assam, an application was made to Chattar Singh who then held the lowlands of Barduar in *Zamindāry rights* from the British Government and he readily consented to allow all the facilities that were required. But his authority in the hill portion was constantly opposed by Tirut Singh and even labourers were threatened with murder. • At this time Chattar Singh died and the construction was stopped, disputes having arisen respecting the succession to the estates of the deceased. There were several claimants to his property and when they failed to come to any mutual agreement, Mr. Scott was invited by them jointly to proceed to Nunklow, the capital of Tirut Singh's territory, in November 1826 to help them in settling the differences.¹¹

Mr. Scott accordingly arrived at Nunklow and an assembly of the principal persons of the tribe was held. All questions relating to the disputed succession were thoroughly discussed for two days with a degree of independence, coolness and propriety that evoked the strongest admiration from Mr. Scott who frankly admitted that the inhabitants of the most civilised countries could not have displayed better parliamentary acumen. They settled the succession question to their satisfaction. It was unanimously agreed that the claim of Rajjin Singh, a child of five years, the brother and direct heir to Chattar Singh, should be set aside on the grounds of his minority and that Tirut Singh, the next heir, should be elected to the Raj to be succeeded at his death by Rajjin Singh.¹²

But with regard to the request of Mr. Scott that the Raja should grant a passage for British troops through his territories, they declined to give a ready assent, lest their compliance with the request should offend their neighbours. But at the same time, it

⁹ S. P. 1827, March 2, No. 20.

¹⁰ S. C. 1825, March 18, No. 62.

¹¹ S. P. 1829, June 26, No. 2.

¹² S. P. 1829, June 26, No. 2.

is reported, they prayed for the protection of British Government upon the terms granted to the Raja of Jaintiā.¹³ An agreement was eventually drawn up by which Tirut Singh, the chief of Nunklow, commonly known as "Dhullah Raja" (White Raja) agreed to become subject to the Company with the advice of his relations and *sardārs* assembled in the Council, and placed his territory under their protection. Raja Tirut Singh further agreed not only to allow free passage for British troops through his territory, but also promised to supply materials. Mr. Scott on behalf of the British Government agreed to protect his country from foreign enemies and to afford the Raja every support in case of unprovoked aggression by any of the hill chiefs. Interference of the British Government in the internal administration of the country was not allowed and finally the Raja agreed to serve the Company with his followers in the event of its carrying on hostilities in the vicinity of Kālīābār.¹⁴ •

Mr. Scott was desirous of securing from the king some more active assistance towards the completion of the road, but the *sardārs* remembered the horror that was caused in 1825 by the seizure of beggars* and they declined to enter into any written agreement regarding the supply of workmen.¹⁵ We do not understand how in the face of the direct opposition of the *sardārs*, this second article relating to the construction of a road was inserted in the treaty. We learn from subsequent reports that the consent of the *sardārs* was not obtained and this led to a feeling of discontent and exasperation amongst them, which was eventually responsible for the melancholy massacre at Nunklow.¹⁶

The independent territory of Raja Tirut Singh extended from the vicinity of the lowlands of Assam to some distance beyond Langbari and as the remaining chiefs of Seyang, Maplung and Cherrapunji through whose territories the remaining parts of the road ran, previously signified their desire to be admitted under the protection of the British Government, it was anticipated that no further difficulty would arise in connection with the completion of the road.¹⁷

¹³ S. P. 1827, March 2, No. 20.

¹⁴ S. P. 1827, March 2, No. 21.

* The British Officers seized forcibly a large number of beggars in the Sylhet district in 1825 and employed them as porters to serve with the British Army.

¹⁵ S. P. 1827, March 2, No. 20.

¹⁶ S. P. 1833, January 7, No. 82.

¹⁷ S. P. 1827, March 2, No. 20.

The treaty made with Tirut Singh was ratified by the Governor-General in due course and Raja Tirut Singh was presented with an Assamese state palanquin—a high mark of honour. The road was cleared and the Bungalow as proposed by Mr. Scott was constructed at Nunklow and apparently everything went on well.¹⁸ But troubles were brewing in other directions and no one could imagine that a catastrophe of such an atrocious nature would be perpetrated on the innocent invalids recuperating their health at the sanatorium at Nunklow within eighteen months from the stipulation of the treaty.

Having obtained the possession of the lawland estates of Chattar Singh, Tirut Singh found that the profits were not so large as he had expected. Though the revenue payable to the Company was assessed at not more than half the gross proceeds realised, he experienced great difficulty in paying even that small amount and began to consider the payment itself—a grievance on the plea that under the Āhom Government no regular annual rent in money was levied from his predecessor.¹⁹

To make matters worse, about this time a dispute broke out between Tirut Singh and Balarām Singh, Raja of Rāñī* (lying in the plains adjacent to the territory of Tirut Singh). Raja Tirut Singh with a view to punishing the Raja of Rāñī invoked article 4 of the treaty and applied to the Agent for the aid of the British Government. As he had failed previously to make reparation for the murder and robberies committed on the subjects of the Raja of Rāñī, as demanded by the Agent, the aid was refused. A fresh schism appeared again when in December, 1828, Raja Tirut Singh assembled a force for the ostensible purpose of attacking the possessions of the Raja of Rāñī in the low lands of Assam. Captain White in charge of Lower Assam justly sent a few sepoys to protect that place, lying as it did within his jurisdiction. Raja Tirut Singh considered it a breach of faith and act of gross partiality.

To the above causes of discontent was added the jealousy of the Raja excited by the erection of buildings in his territory and by the display of wealth and grandeur on the part of the British Government which had tended to lower him in the eyes of his own subjects. Tirut Singh was evidently fretting at the superiority of the British power and with such a feeling rankling in his mind he was ready to join any scheme, that aimed at driving away the

¹⁸ S. C. 1827, September 13, No. 16.

¹⁹ S. P. 1829, June 26, No. 2.

* Kingdom of the Nak-kati Rani adjoining the Garo hills.

“lowland strangers” from his territory.²⁰ His sentiments were shared also by his *sardārs* and kinsmen, who had been displeased at the treaty which he had without their sanction entered into with Mr. Scott.²¹

Such a scheme was offered to Tirut Singh and his kinsmen by Bar Mānik, the chief of Molim, (one of the Khāsi States) who acting in concert with other hill chiefs, invited him to make a general inroad into Assam and to effect the expulsion of the British from the hills and from the country below. Their final aim was to restore the native dynasty in Assam and thereby they hoped to be rewarded with the possession of low lands as far as the Kallang River in lieu of the services rendered. And from these day-dreams they were only awakened by the flames of Momlu when they realised that they had been fighting against an invincible enemy.²²

Mr. Scott got scent of the impending danger on his arrival at Nunklow towards the end of March, 1829, on his way to Cherrapunji. He apprehended no danger from Tirut Singh. His immediate object of chastisement was Barmānik who was reported to have sent messengers to all the neighbouring hill Rajas inviting them to send their men to expel the British from the low lands.²³ Mr. Scott immediately hurried down to Cherrapunji with a view to carrying out the instructions of the Supreme Government in respect of Barmānik whose anti-British activities had already reached their ears. Mr. Scott had intended to overawe Barmānik with the help of the Sylhet local corps. It is said that the infliction of condign punishment on Barmānik would have put an immediate end to any hostile design that might have been entertained by Tirut Singh or any other hill chiefs. But the feeling was deep rooted and the hill chiefs, contrary to all expectation, stole a march on Mr. Scott.

On the 5th of May, 1829, a party of Khāsis aided by the Gāros perpetrated what is known as the “Nunklow massacre” in which one innocent European (Lt. Bedingfield) and a number of Bengalees living in the sanatorium at Nunklow lost their lives under the most brutal circumstances. None of the Assamese *Āmlāhs* living with the party was killed. After the execution of Bedingfield, Tirut Singh declared that he would next cut off the Agent’s head and hang it up in the market of Nunklow and then he would proceed to take Gauhati. On the next day when the *chāprāsi* of the late

²⁰ S. P. 1829, June 26, No. 2.

²¹ S. P. 1833, January E. No. 82.

²² S. P. 1829, June 26, No. 2.

²³ S. P. 1828, September 5, No. 12.

Mr. Bedingfield was being led to the place of execution to suffer his master's fate, it is reported that he warned them that "if you kill Mr. Scott, there would come a hundred Mr. Scotts to the burning and destruction of Nuncklow." The next moment he died at the hand of the executioner but his words did not die with him. His death was avenged and his prophesies were fulfilled.²⁴ The other European Lt. Burlton who stayed at the Sanatorium defended against heavy odds all through the night of that fateful occurrence and escaped with his escort at dawn only to be cut off on the way towards the plains when their ammunition failed them owing to a heavy downpour of rains.

The Khāsis then burnt down the Government Bungalow with all the property in it and released the convicts employed in the construction of the road. Then they proceeded towards Cherrapunji in search of Mr. Scott. The insurrection had begun. The news of their success spread quickly and the hill people came in thousands to join the standard of revolt. Both Gait and Mackenzie treat the massacre of Nunklow as a cold blooded murder—a mere outburst of fury by a savage tribe and trace "the whole incident" to an insolent speech purported to have been delivered by a rash Bengalee *chāprāsi* stationed at Nunklow. The massacre at Nunklow, however regrettable the incident might be, was not an incident by itself. It was a part of a general plan to drive out the "low land strangers" from the hills. It was "the signal of an almost universal rising amongst the Cossayah chiefs."²⁵ Neither the insolent speech of the Bengalee *chāprāsi*, nor the disrespectful demeanour of the subordinate native agents towards the tribesmen—though they might have hastened the conflict—were the real causes of the Khāsi insurrection; the real cause lay deeper. It was their univrsal antipathy towardse a foreign domination that caused a general flare up in the Khāsi hills.*²⁶

²⁴ S. P. 1829, April 25, No. 9.

²⁵ Letter from Court No. 14 of 1834.

²⁶ S. P. 1829, April 25, No. 9.

* The court of Directors also held that "This treacherous and inhuman act does not appear to have been the result of any immediate provocation and the most probable explanation seems to be that the jealousy of the Cossyahs had been excited by the steps which we were taking to establish a frequented road through their country and to form Sanitary establishments within it" (Letter from Court No. 14 of 1834).

"I have scarcely ever known any man of more gentle and conciliating manners than Lt. Bedingfield. And this all the more induces me to ascribe the murder to a more general cause—a dislike of our establishing

The chief persons concerned in the insurrection were Tirut Singh, Barmānik and Mukund Singh of Mosing whose predecessor Abu Singh's aggression, it may be mentioned here, had been the immediate cause of the war with the Khāsis in 1790. The war ended in their expulsion from the plains of Sylhet to the possession of which Mukund Singh was now casting covetous eyes. Their plan, which was worked out skilfully and which showed organising ability of a high order on the part of the hill chiefs, was that Tirut Singh should possess Mamlu and with the aid of Mukund Singh of Mosing should prevent supplies and reinforcement from arriving from the Sylhet side. Barmānik and Mānkumār were entrusted with the important work of guarding the passes opening to Assam. By these measures, the rebel leaders hoped to coerce the Cherrapunji people (who were friendly to the English) into submission and eventually to capture Mr. Scott and his party.* They expected every help from the Khāsi chiefs on the Sylhet side, everyone of whom had claims to the lowlands from the possession of which their predecessors had been driven out by the English in 1790. The rebel chiefs thought that it would be an easy matter to deal with the English, their own idea having been that although powerful on the plains, the English, would be no match for them in the hills.²⁷

The military forces of the hill chiefs were estimated at 10,000 strong. The whole male population was armed with bows, two-handed swords and shields. The Khāsis were expert marksmen.²⁸ Practically the entire adult population of the Khāsi hills was in arms. Their lack of fire arms and ammunition was more than compensated by the possession of an abundant number of natural defences.* The country on the Nunklow side was extremely difficult of access and covered with the densest jungles affording situations every hundred yards where a dozen men in ambush were sufficient to stop a battalion.²⁹

Their first act was to destroy the road constructed by Mr.

ourselves in the country; and not to any offence given by an individual." (S. P. 1829 April 25, No. 10—a letter from Captain White).

* Manik Singh, Raja of Cherrapunji was friendly to the British and ultimately enabled Mr. Scott to escape to Sylhet. (S. P. 1829, May 8, No. 9).

²⁷ S. P. 1829, June 26, No. 2.

²⁸ S. P. 1829, May 1, No. 42.

* They also secured a number of Mauns (Burmese) armed with muskets.

²⁹ S. P. 1829, April 25, No. 10.

Scott. And to render it impassable, they obstructed it with trees, erected palisades at places and destroyed the bridges.³⁰

They did not depend upon their own strength alone. From available records it would appear that Tirut Singh indeed made elaborate preparations to drive out the English. Tirut Singh's views and plans were of the most extended nature and involved political combinations and alliances which a ruler of his character could scarcely have been expected to form. Having selected the most intelligent prisoners from amongst the captives taken at Nunklow, he sent them off under the escort of the Gāros to Raja Chandra Kānta, to the Bhots,* and to the Singphos with suitable presents exciting them to throw off the yoke of the English.³¹ In a special message Tirut Singh exhorted Chandra Kānta to rise and assist them now that the English had been driven from the hills.³² He secretly sent another batch of Gāros to Gauhati and to other places to ascertain carefully the military strength of the English. The intelligence gathered was minute in detail and gave colour to the supposition that the informers were assisted by some Bengalee *muhuris* (clerks) and that some of the Assamese were also in league with Tirut Singh.³³ The rebellion was not confined to the Khāsis alone. It spread westward and the Gāros joined hands with the Khāsis living on the southern side of Lower Assam and threatened irruption into Assam. The district of Goalpara was also threatened and the Magistrate of Goalpara applied to Captain White for immediate reinforcements.³⁴

The situation presented a dismal picture indeed, although no political movement took place in Assam and no outward symptom of disaffection appeared on the surface. The Assamese were of course infected with the spirit of disaffection and the slightest reverses on the part of the English would have thrown the whole of Assam with the rebellion. To make matters worse, the supposed death of Mr. Scott (whose whereabouts were not known for many days following the first signal of rebellion) created in the eyes of the Assamese nobility and the eastern chiefs a temporary interregnum dissolving all ties and engagements and tended to give free hands

³⁰ S. P. 1829, May 1, No. 42.

* At this time the British were involved in petty skirmishes with the Bhots.

³¹ S. P. 1829, May 8, Nos. 9-10.

³² S. P. 1829, May 8, No. 10.

³³ S. P. 1829, May 8, No. 9.

³⁴ S. P. 1829, May 8, No. 11.

to the turbulent and the disaffected.³⁵ Tirut Singh did not calculate and contrive in vain. It would have been difficult to prevent his irruption into Assam had not the Sylhet Light Infantry under Colonel Lister displayed zeal and alacrity worthy of the occasion in stemming the first tide of the Khāsi insurrection.³⁶

The first effect of the insurrection was indeed embarrassing and annoying. When the news of the Nunklow massacre and the insurrection of the Khāsis trickled through and reached the ears of the Assamese in the plains, the collection of the revenue in many places was withheld and resisted,* porters carrying provisions were maltreated on the way and cases of highway robberies of a most daring nature became frequent.³⁷ One of the chiefs refused positively to send revenue to the Company.³⁸ The disturbing occasion became the breeding ground of many unfounded rumours. A rumour spread that the Gāros were descending in large numbers. It caused alarm in Gauhati, the seat of the Government, and the respectable portion of the population including the principal functionaries of the Government took shelter in boats ready to sail away at a moment's notice at the approach of the Gāro hordes. The Assamese nobility were found greatly dissatisfied, and such was the condition at Gauhati that Mr. White, assistant to the Agent could not count upon the loyalty of more than two Assamese of rank. The rest were either indifferent or in league with the Khāsis.³⁹

Almost all the Assamese were of opinion that the power of the English was not of a stable nature capable of standing the shock of revolutions and insurrections. And the fact that only one regiment of troops with two or three European officers, was found scattered over a province four hundred miles in length gave substance to their opinion which was again confirmed by the defenceless state of Gauhati.⁴⁰ It was feared that though the Assamese nobility would be, for want of military resources, precluded from taking any active part, they might be seducing the sepoys from their allegiance and furnishing to the insurgents much

³⁵ S. P. 1829, May 8, No. 9.

³⁶ S. P. 1829, June 26, No. 2.

* No revenue was collected from the nine Dooars in 1237. (1830-31) owing to these political disturbances and many of the ryots joined the rebellion (From the account of Capt. white) P.P. 1832, July 23, Nos. 70-71.

³⁷ S. P. 1829, May 8, No. 9.

³⁸ S. P. 1829, May 8, No. 11.

³⁹ S. P. 1829, May 8, No. 10.

⁴⁰ S. P. 1829, May 8, No. 11.

valuable military information.⁴¹ And immediate steps were taken to combat this apprehension.

To crown all, the spirit by which the Hindustani portion of the detachment in Assam was animated was anything but good. They were so discontented that Mr. White was inclined to distrust them and requested the Government to grant them at least *half bāttā* to keep them contented. At that time the Government also was involved in disputes with the Bhots and Mr. White requested it to terminate those trifling disputes amicably.⁴²

When the news of the Nunklow Catastrophe reached Gauhati Mr. White, the officer in charge, at once rushed towards Nunklow accompanied by Lt. Vetch of the Rangpur Light Infantry and reached Ramrigong on the 8th April. He left Ramrigong on the 9th and getting possession of Jirar, the first village in the Khāsi country on the way to Nunklow, burnt it down and destroyed a great quantity of rice stored therein. Here his further march towards the scene of action was stopped by the news emanating from Gauhati that the people there were in the greatest alarm and the situation required his immediate presence. He at once returned to Gauhati and found the inhabitants in a dreadful state of alarm owing to a report that the Khāsis had burst upon the plains and had already advanced as far as Bettulāh within seven miles of Gauhati. His presence at Gauhati and the timely arrival of the fifty fourth Native Infantry from Darrang restored confidence to the populace of the town. Lt. Vetch was instructed to fall back to Rāmrigong within the Company's territory as it was found impossible to proceed further owing to the difficulty of ascent.⁴³

April 8,
1829.

With order and confidence restored at the capital Mr. White found time to evolve a plan of attack against Khāsis. He contemplated that a simultaneous three-pronged attack should be made against the rebels—one from the Sylhet side via Jaintiā and two from the Assam side operating from Singmāri and Gauhati respectively.⁴⁴ The distance between Gauhati and Nunklow was nearly fifty-five miles. The first march from Gauhati to Rāmrigong covering a distance of eighteen miles principally lay over plains and presented no serious difficulty. From Rāmrigong to Nunklow, a distance of thirty-eight miles, the road was one of continuous ascent and descent over the ridges or the hills covered with the thickest of jungles and traversed by many small streams. The road from

⁴¹ S. P. 1829, May 1, No. 42.

⁴² S. P. 1829, May 8, No. 9.

⁴³ E. P. 1829, April 25, No. 10.

⁴⁴ S. P. 1829, May 1, No. 42.

Nunklow to Cherrapunji, a distance of thirty miles was easy of access and although dotted with hills, the ascents and descents were not so steep and abrupt. Cherrapunji was within one day's march from Pāndulā on the Sylhet side where two companies of the Sylhet corps were stationed. To the natural obstacles besetting the path leading to Nunklow from the Assam side were added the destructive hands of the Khāsis who pulled down the bridges and erected barricades on the way thus preventing the supplies and ammunition carried by elephants. Moreover the climate on the Nunklow side was most unhealthy. So Mr. White thought that the main attack should be made from the Jaintiā side and the assaults from the Gauhati and Goalpara sides should be only subsidiary to cause diversion in the enemy formation.

But it was reported to Mr. White that seven to eight thousand Gāros under the instruction of Tirut Singh were guarding passes leading to Assam. So to defeat them Mr. White thought of bringing up at least five companies of men and a number of mountain guns, howitzers and rockets. But as the Gāros and Khāsis threatened to pour into Goalpara and the plains below, Mr. White had to send reinforcements in these directions from his own detachment at the urgent solicitations of the Magistrate of Goalpara. With his army thus appreciably thinned he did not venture to penetrate into the Khāsi hills from the Assam side.⁴⁵

But though circumstances thus prevented him from sending any timely and active help towards Nunklow, he had recourse to what is known as "the Economic Blockade" and directed all trade and intercourse with the Khāsi hills to be stopped.⁴⁶ He took another political measure of great importance necessitated by the exigencies of the time. As the presence of the two ex-Rajas, Chandra Kānta and Purandar Singh (the former living at Kāliābār and the latter at Gauhati) served to revive the ancient recollections and tended to hold them out as rallying points of disaffection, it was thought desirable to remove them to a safer and remote place. Accordingly, Mr. White not only despatched men to Kāliābār to intercept letters meant for Chandra Kānta but also called upon both of them to repair elsewhere temporarily, thus giving the designing people little chance to abuse their names.⁴⁷

But happily for Mr. Scott and his followers, succour came almost immediately from the Sylhet side. Captain Lister advanced

⁴⁵ S. P. 1829, May 8, No. 11.

⁴⁶ S. P. 1829, April 25, No. 10.

⁴⁷ S. P. 1829, May 8, No. 9.

with all speed towards Cherrapunji on the receipt of the news and saved Mr. Scott and his followers from the fate which had befallen Captain Bedingfield and his party. Tirut Singh sent four thousand Gāros on the morrow of the Nunklow tragedy towards Cherrapunji to apprehend Mr. Scott and his followers. And just at a time when Mr. Scott was about to fall back from Cherrapunji to Mosmy—a step which might have been attended with very serious consequences—Lt. Egerton and Captain Lister arrived and gave him the much needed help. The English interests and prestige in that quarter would have sustained a great setback but for the timely arrival of Captain Lister and his men.⁴⁸

Captain Lister and his party next pushed on to Māmlu—a stronghold of considerable importance, three miles west of Cherrapunji, where Raja Tirut Singh had taken shelter with a considerable number of followers. The place was carried by storm after a slight resistance and houses were set on fire, though Tirut Singh, favoured by the thickness of the jungle, made his escape.⁴⁹ This had a very deterrent effect upon the chiefs of Murāng who deserted Tirut Singh and threw in their lot with the British. Raja Dewān Singh of Cherrapunji and Singh Mānik of Khyrim were already on the side of the British. The former not only protected Mr. Scott from the murderous design of Tirut Singh until the arrival of Captain Lister but also sent 100 men to the capture of Māmlu.⁵⁰

When the Calcutta Council was informed of the Nunklow tragedy, feelings ran very high. The members were worked up to a state of righteous indignation and empowered the Agent to adopt such measures as would overawe the petty chiefs and their savage retainers into immediate submission.⁵¹ With regard to Tirut Singh, “the principal perpetrator of the foul murder”, the Governor-General-in-Council ordained that although the treaty concluded with him did not give them any right to bring him under the rigour of their law, his acts were of such an atrocious nature as to have placed him beyond the pale of civilised warfare. They issued order not to treat him, if captured, as an enemy conquered in a battle, but as a savage and blood-thirsty murderer “deserving of the capital punishment.” But with regard to Barmānik, Raja of Molim, the principal adherent of Tirut Singh, they authorised Mr. Scott to use

⁴⁸ S. C. 1829, June 26, No. 2.

⁴⁹ S. C. 1829, May 1, No. 44.

⁵⁰ S. P. 1829, June, 26, No. 2.

⁵¹ S. P. 1829, April 25, No. 14.

his own discretion as he was an independent chief not bound by any treaty with the British Government.⁵²

The Supreme Government, in our opinion, not only underestimated the strength of "these petty chiefs" but they failed to realise the nature of the Khāsi disturbances—far less could they dream that one day the representatives of the mighty British Government would descend the steps of a mountain cave to have an interview with this seditious and half-naked savage blood-thirsty monster who, strangely speaking, appeared to many of the subordinate English officials "as a patriot of a very high order."

In the meantime operations were being conducted against Tirut Singh under the command of Captain Lister. The party moved northward in search of Tirut Singh who moved from cave to cave and from fastness to fastness, always eluding the search of the British. It was a harassing and desultory warfare. A number of Khāsi villages on the way to Nunklow was captured and burnt down and Nunklow itself was taken on the second of May. During the second week of May the party of the 54th regiment from the Assam side arrived there under the command of Captain White and effected a junction with Captain Lister's men.⁵³

The territory of Tirut Singh was occupied and martial law proclaimed. A reward of Rs. 1000 was offered for the apprehension of Tirut Singh and Lt. Vetch of the Assam Hill Infantry placed in charge of his territory.⁵⁴

The above arrangements completed, the detachment under Captain Lister moved to Molim, the country of Barmānik on the 16th of May, only to see that the bird had flown. The territory was forthwith occupied and a reward of Rs. 1,000 was also offered for the capture of this fugitive chief.⁵⁵

Tirut Singh never skulked in his mountain home when he sustained defeat; he instantly girded up his loins for another encounter. Both Tirut Singh and Barmānik moved from place to place with lightning speed gaining fresh adherents and new allies and making surprise attacks upon the British.⁵⁶ Eventually Barmānik was captured by a party of the Sylhet Local Corps towards the middle of September, Tirut Singh still eluding their

⁵² S. P. 1829, May 15, No. 11.

⁵³ (A) S. P. 1829, May 22, No. 1.

(B) S. P. 1829, May 30, No. 11.

⁵⁴ S. P. 1829, June 5, No. 6.

⁵⁵ S. P. 1829, June 5, No. 6.

⁵⁶ S. P. 1829, October 2, No. 25.

pursuit.⁵⁷ Barmānik was put into irons and conveyed down to Gauhati to stand his trial. Later on he was released and reinstated in his ancestral position with diminished powers and possessions.

After a short interval of three or four months, fresh hostilities Sept., 1829. were started by Mukund Singh, an able lieutenant of Tirut Singh. At this time some of the hill chiefs, supposed to be friendly with the British, changed sides to the great bewilderment of the English official stationed at the Khāsi hills.⁵⁸ The burning of Khāsi villages went on as before, but this harassing warfare showed no signs of abatement. At this stage, the Raja of Jaintiā sent a detachment to quell the Khāsi disturbances,⁵⁹ and Mr. Scott was advised by the Bengal Government to buy his cordial support by holding out to him the prospect of additions to his territory.⁶⁰ The Jaintiā Raja's help brought no appreciable change and "this wretched warfare" dragged on into the second year without any sign of settlement.

In May, 1830, Mr. Scott disposed of some tracts of the Khāsi territories amongst the friendly chiefs with a view to giving them an additional stimulus in carrying on the war against their own countrymen.⁶¹ But every effort failed to reduce the Nunklow Khāsis to a quiet submission and Mr. Scott openly admitted that "more than ordinary difficulty will be experienced in reconciling the hitherto unsubdued race to the yoke they have in a manner forced upon themselves."⁶²

It is interesting to learn that at this time though Mr. Scott's hands were full, his fertile and constructive brain was engaged in the economic development of the Khāsi hill which seemed to be barren and unproductive. His small and experimental firm at Myrong not only produced potatoes, turnips and beetroot in great abundance, it also produced onion of a better quality at a cheaper cost. These successes and the abundance of pasture lands also led him to try whether the horses and cattle fit for the military service could not be bred at cheaper rate than elsewhere.⁶³

In the meantime the second rebellion had broken out, as

⁵⁷ S. P. 1829, October 2, No. 24.

⁵⁸ S. P. 1829, October 23, No. 14.

⁵⁹ S. P. 1829, October 23, No. 15.

* "The Jyntealh Rajah offered the services of one Subedar, 50 Sepoys and 200 Cossyas of his troops."

⁶⁰ S. P. 1829, October 23, No. 15.

⁶¹ P. P. 1830, May 7, No. 49.

⁶² P. P. 1830, June 18, No. 52.

⁶³ P. P. 1830, June 18, No. 52.

noticed earlier, in Eastern Assam under the leadership of the ex-nobility of Assam. Tirut Singh, it is reported, removed his theatre of operation to the Singpho territory and joined the party of the disaffected nobles.⁶⁴ His task in the hill was continued with unabated zeal and ferocity by one of his able lieutenants, Manbhot, formerly an ordinary valet under him. The latter adopted a novel method of warfare—"a policy of denial" and instigated the inhabitants of the chief villages to leave their homes and to take to the woods thus denying the British forces means of supplies. Mr. Scott held out promises and called upon them to return to their homes. But Manbhot started a campaign of terror and none ventured to accept the help proffered by the English.⁶⁵

Coercion and retaliatory measures proved futile, and Mr. Scott with a view to putting a stop to this desultory warfare agreed to offer an indemnity to the outlaw chiefs upon their making submission. The terms were debated in the Assembly of the hill chiefs at great length for many weeks and though the majority refused to accept the terms owing to their distrust of the English,* the offer did not go in vain; it produced a rift in the camp of the hostile chiefs one party of whom became inclined towards peace. But the other party became more aggressive and the war dragged on.⁶⁶

Towards the third week of January, 1831, the matter assumed very serious dimensions, when a large number of the Khāsis and Gāros under the leadership of their chiefs made a bid to snatch away the western portion of Lower Assam from the hands of the British. They suddenly poured into the plains below and simultaneously attacked the police and revenue stations in Lower Assam. After killing a number of officers and destroying the Government offices, they successfully routed a small detachment of the Assam Light Infantry sent against them and proceeded towards the interior. Their easy success struck terror into the hearts of the ryots of the Duars many of whom joined the invading forces. But at this stage the rebels were successfully encountered by the Sihbandi corps sent from Goalpara and they retired towards Barduār.⁶⁷

⁶⁴ P. P. 1830, May 7, No. 49.

⁶⁵ P. P. 1830, December 31, No. 22.

* "They think their lives would not be spared. Hence they become all the more determined to commit as much mischief as possible before they die."

(Letter from Mr. Scott—P. C. 1830, July 30, No. 58).

⁶⁶ P. P. 1830, December 31, No. 22.

⁶⁷ P. P. 1831, February 11, No. 26.

The Khāsis now occupied a strategic position at Barduār and looked menacingly on the plains below, and Captain Halsam, who was in charge of the Sihbandi, did not venture to measure strength with the enemy. At last Lt. Flowers was despatched to dislodge the Khāsis from their menacing position as it was apprehended that until a decisive blow was struck there appeared little probability of rescuing the ryots of Barduār from the grasp of the enemy whom the former not only supplied with provisions but also promised to help in expelling the British.⁶⁸ In the meantime reinforcements arrived and Captain Halsam, to wean away the ryots from allegiance to Tirut Singh, issued a proclamation calling upon them to return to their villages. This had some result; peace was restored and the Gāros retired from the vicinity of Barduār. But Captain Halsam and his party could not make further headway against the rebellious Khāsis.⁶⁹

Further west, in the Gāro hills overhanging the Assam Duars, where Ensign Brodie was engaged in putting down the refractory Gāro chiefs, better results attended the British arms. With a picked party of 42 men, Brodie nearly accomplished in three weeks what several companies of sepoys had been unable to attempt even in three months.⁷⁰ But the career of Ensign Brodie was cut short and this gallant, enterprising and zealous officer fell a victim to the unhealthy climate of the lower hills. He did not die in vain. He had demonstrated the inexpediency of employing a large body of irregulars to do what a handful of picked men properly commanded could easily effect. Ensign Brodie was one of that brave band of English Officers pitted against the Khāsis, who (English officers) showed courage, boldness, imagination and forgiveness worthy of the occasion.⁷¹

In the Khāsi hills, Manbhot, the able lieutenant of Tirut Singh, kept up the fight for some time more. But his followers deserted him one by one and hard pressed by the British, who were always on his heels, he surrendered to Lt. Townshend in October, 1831. He was generously treated by his adversary and given a command of a small detachment of the Khāsis.⁷² But Tirut Singh who always got new recruits and fresh supplies even from the allies of the British, till eluded the vigilance of his adversaries and kept up the petty skirmishes to the great annoyance of the British. No traveller's

⁶⁸ P. P. 1831, February 18, No. 30.

⁶⁹ P. P. 1831, February 25, No. 39.

⁷⁰ P. P. 1831, May 30, No. 34.

⁷¹ P. P. 1831, May 30, Nos. 35-36.

⁷² Pemberton's Report P. 228.

person was safe in the Khāsi hills. The Khāsis were rather developing a new technique. Their latest attacks were marked by the admirable laying of ambuscades. The superior condition of their equipment also attracted the attention of the British officials who were informed that the Khāsis had been purchasing muskets and ammunition from Mymensingh and Dacca through the *āmlās* of the Raja of Susang. It was reported too that Tirut Singh was even getting supplies from the people of Cherrapunji itself—the stronghold of the British. All these clearly indicated that Tirut Singh's party showed little inclination to be coerced into submission. "This wretched warfare" (as the next Agent Mr. Robertson styled it) thus dragged on and entered on the fourth year.⁷³ At this stage Mr. Scott died.* By his death the East India Company lost one of their most valued and trusted servants.

Let us now turn aside a while from the din and bustle of the battles that were raging around and pay our respect to one who did so much to give peace and prosperity to a much harassed and much neglected province. In all his plans for the better advancement of Assam, he was actuated by the best of the motives though the policies he enunciated and plans he handled did not always produce the desired result. He chalked out a comprehensive plan for the development of the resources of Assam and for the improvement of the condition of its people.

Assam was blessed with a fertile soil, but Mr. Scott found her "labouring under an almost helpless state of penury and ignorance." As early as 1830 in order to develop the silk industry in Assam, he established an experimental silk workshop at Darrang and requested the Supreme Government to lease out free of rent 3,000 acres of land for the cultivation of mulberry and other dry crops, and for the establishment of silk filatures to be conducted on the Italian method. Unfortunately his plans were not accepted by the higher authorities.⁷⁴ Mr. Scott had many such admirable plans in hand.

His political schemes were no less interesting and suggestive. Had his plan for the installation of an Assamese prince in Upper Assam been accepted at the very beginning, that ill-fated country would have been spared all the miseries the insurrections gave rise to. He was much ahead of his time; the system of nomination of *chowdhuris* (revenue collectors) by means of ballot, which he

⁷³ P. P. 1832, July 9, No. 89.

* Mr. Scott died in August 1831 and was succeeded by Mr. Robertson.

⁷⁴ P. P. 1830, October 29, No. 36.

introduced in Assam in 1826,⁷⁵ and in which even women could take part, though it failed to achieve its object, was nevertheless one of the boldest measures ever carried out by any servant of the East India Company. This only shows how democratic and advanced he was in his political views.

Personally he was polite and sympathetic and courteous to a degree: he would offer a chair even to the meanest of the Assamese visiting him in his office. He was a great friend of the Assamese. Tirut Singh gave him much trouble but he was magnanimous enough to appreciate the valour and heroism of this hill chieftain. With regard to political matters his views were always moderate and he was not in favour of the annexation of Cachar. His handling of the Khāsi insurrection came in for a good deal of criticism by the home authorities and we think with regard to this, his conduct was not always above criticism. He made the initial blunder of laying a road through a tract over which he had no control.

The system of administration he introduced in Assam did not produce the result he aimed at. Rather his "Chowdree system" produced dire consequences and his judicial system became an engine of corruption and tyranny. So far as the effects were concerned, the measures were failures indeed but it must be remembered that these were mistakes of omission and not of commission. Mr. Scott laboured under acute shortage of hands and practically fell a victim to excessive work. He was a very painstaking and hard-worked official. He died at the age of fortyfive. Had his career not been cut short at the prime of life, he could have bestowed lasting benefit on the people of Assam. He laboured hard but laboured in vain because the time and place were against him. Mackenzie truly says, "Had the scene of his life's labour been in North-west or Central India, where the great problem of Empire was then being worked out, instead of amidst the obscure jungles of Assam, he would occupy a place in history by the side of Malcolm, Eliphinstone and Metcalfe."⁷⁶

Mr. Robertson, taking charge of the affairs of Assam, embarked upon a new policy to put a stop to this harassing state of warfare. He tried to win over the hostile Khāsis by mild and conciliatory measures. He indulged in the hope that if the Khāsis were once persuaded to believe that the British had no mind to subjugate the whole of the Khāsi hills, they would submit readily and allow them (the British) ultimately to retain their hold over a portion of the

⁷⁵ P. P. 1832, July 23, Nos. 70-71.

⁷⁶ Mackenzie's "The North East Frontier of Bengal. P. 5 (foot note).

hills. With this end in view, he permitted Mr. Turnick to open negotiations with Mukund Singh, the ex-chief of Mosmy. The negotiation brought no satisfactory response. Gradually Mr. Robertson was convinced that while Tirut Singh lived and retained his freedom, a feeling of loyalty towards him would ever operate to keep alive the spirit of resistance amongst the Khāsis. He found that even the villagers and chiefs, who were supposed to be on friendly terms with the British, supplied him with money and the means of subsistence.⁷⁷

As there was little or no probability of the matter being amicably adjusted between the English and the fugitive Khāsis, Mr. Robertson withdrew the hand of friendship and devised a systematic plan to bring the Khāsi rebels to their knees. The services of the Goalpara Sihbandis were requisitioned and Captain Lister was immediately stationed at Nunklow with additional forces. An additional force of the Mauns (Burmese musketeers) and a small party of the Manipuri horsemen were called upon to guard the important lines of communication. A number of 'Pill Boxes' was erected at strategic points. Not content with these military preparations, Mr. Robertson resorted also to economic weapons. He tightened the cordon of the economic blockade begun by Mr. White. He closed down all the markets and occupied all the principal villages so as to cut off the line of supplies ever reaching the rebel camps. His plans were far reaching in character. His ultimate objective was to convert the Khāsi hills into a European colony and he even planned the settling of the Burmese fugitives and the bold Manipurians in the very heart of the Khāsi hills as a counterpoise against the ill disposed Khāsis.⁷⁸

When his plans were nearing completion and everything was ready to strike a serious blow at the Khāsis, Singh Mānik, chief of Kyrum, came forward and offered to act as negotiator with a view to bringing about a reconciliation between the English and the Khāsi chiefs. At his request, military operations were suspended and he was given the full opportunity to open negotiations with the rebel chiefs. Singh Mānik saw the rebel chiefs and held several consultations with them. Finally it was agreed that an official representing the British Government with a power to negotiate should meet the rebel leader and open pourparlers with him.⁷⁹

Aug. 1832. Accordingly, Captain Lister accompanied by Singh Mānik and

⁷⁷ P. C. 1832, July 9, No. 89.

⁷⁸ P. C. 1832, July 9, Nos. 89-90.

⁷⁹ P. C. 1832, October 22, No. 90.

Ensign Brodie went to meet Tirut Singh and his party at Nunkrin (in the territory of Singh Mānik) on the 18th August 1832 as arranged before. As Tirut Singh declined to meet the British representatives if they came armed, it was eventually settled that the British officers should attend unarmed. On the 23rd August the representative of the British lion met the lion of the Khāsis in his den. It was a historic interview no doubt—only there was no mighty pen of Todd or Cunningham to depict it as such before the world at large. Tirut Singh was seen in company of his ministers. The conference was opened by Captain Lister. Many alluring promises were held out and “a policy of forgive and forget” was proclaimed by the English representatives and finally they promised to spare the life of Tirut Singh and forgive the misconduct of his followers if hostilities were called off and adequate security furnished for their future conduct. Tirut Singh was not the man to be bought off by promises. He boldly demanded that the line of the road passing through his territory should be abandoned and his kingdom restored to him.⁸⁰

As the English Envoys were not authorised to deal with that point, the parley broke off without achieving anything. Tirut Singh was however told that he would be given the reply within four days after the matter had been reported to the Agent and he was also informed that if no further intimation was received from him, hostilities would be resumed. On the next day, when the British party were leaving for their headquarters a messenger came *post haste* from the followers of Tirut Singh and begged the English officials to accord them an interview. This was acceded to and a second conference was held in which Nānsingh and Jit Roy, two of Tirut Singh's principal *mantrīs*, took part. Nānsingh informed Captain Lister that they were all tired of opposing the British; only the fear of the British Government deterred them from coming in. Captain Lister told them that if they could agree to place Tirut Singh's nephew at their head who was too young to have had any share in the Nunklow massacre and give adequate security for their future conduct, their case would be placed before the Agent. To give the followers of Tirut Singh further time to examine the new proposals the truce was extended.

Though the negotiation failed to bring about the ultimate result it had in view, the preliminary conference was not altogether barren in its result. The sincerity and intention of Singh Mānik were proved and, what was more valuable, it was found that there

⁸⁰ P. C. 1832. October 22. No. 60.

existed a difference of opinion amongst the rebel chiefs. And although it was not deemed possible at that time to placate Tirut Singh into submission, it transpired that an arrangement with his followers for the peaceful adjustment of differences was not an impossibility.⁸¹

Negotiations were conducted as usual through the mediation of Singh Mānik and the 20th of September was fixed for a second conference between the English and the subordinate Khāsi chieftains. Tirut Singh was kept out of the picture and was perhaps left to fall into insignificance in the cold shade of neglect. The following conditions were formulated by the Agent to be placed before the hostile chiefs. Mr. Robertson termed these the "mildest" which were in his power to offer to the rebels and these were as follows:

1. Tirut Singh must be given up, the British undertaking to spare his life.

2. His successor may be selected by the confederate Rajas according to the custom and usage of their tribe.

3. The person, so selected, shall be recognised by the British Government and shall succeed to all the position and privileges formerly enjoyed by Tirut Singh.

4. The British Government shall have right to construct a road across the whole extent of the country lying between Cherrapunji and the plains of Assam, and

5. The British Government shall be at liberty to construct bridges and rest houses.

Captain Lister was further verbally advised to hold out to the rebel chiefs the prospect of the restitution of all the lands they formerly held in the plains of Assam.⁸²

Armed with these instructions, Captain Lister again met the rebel chiefs on the 25th of September, 1832, with Singh Mānik as mediator. Tirut Singh was supposed not to be there as Robertson instructed Captain Lister to meet the subordinate chiefs to the exclusion of Tirut Singh. But we learn from subsequent reports that Tirut Singh's illness prevented from meeting the English envoys. There was a threadbare discussion of all the points laid down in the draft agreement. The chiefs first objected to the existing alignment of the road and wanted its diversion through Singh Mānik's territory. After a long discussion they were at last convinced of the absurdity of their demands and gave up that point. In respect of the surrender of Tirut Singh, the most vital point of the agreement, they

⁸¹ P. C. 1832, October 22, No. 66.

⁸² P. C. 1832, October 22, No. 60.

put their own favourable construction on it and simply promised "to present him before the English" very soon. This was not accepted by the English Envoys and the conference broke off. Though the conference failed to achieve its object, Singh Mānik, who appeared in the role of a peacemaker, was presented with a double barrelled gun and cloths were distributed to his ministers.⁸³ Had these terms which the Directors at home characterised "as liberal and indulgent" been offered to the insurgents before, instead of after three years of successful resistance, these might probably have been accepted.⁸⁴

The extended truce came to an end and hostilities were going to be resumed when again Singh Mānik appeared on the scene and requested the Agent to hold his hand. Mr. Robertson consented to a suspension of military operations until the 21st of October by which time Singh Mānik hoped to bring about the reconciliation. As the demand for the surrender of Tirut Singh was found to be responsible for the repeated failure of the peace parleys, it was thought inadvisable to continue the warfare with the sole object of securing the person of a single chief. And Mr. Robertson had a mind to drop this much-objected point provided the other leaders gave some substantial proof of their sincere intention. But the Supreme Government did not agree to their Agent's proposal.⁸⁵

In the meantime, negotiations were going on and Singh Mānik brought with him Judār Singh, a collateral relative of Tirut Singh and one of the most influential members of his party. Judār Singh undertook to effect a settlement which, he hoped, would bring peace to the surrounding country. The truce which was due to expire on the 21st October was extended for another ten days. Judār Singh was assured of the protection of the British and promised the Raj of Momlu and its dependencies in return for an annual tribute of Rs. 1,500 if he could secure the surrender of Tirut Singh. However alluring the terms were, Judār Singh and his followers did not think it advisable to submit to the terms offered by Mr. Robertson. To them it seemed nothing short of a betrayal of their leader.⁸⁶

As Judār Singh and his party did not return to report within the prescribed period, the truce virtually came to an end and Mr. Robertson ordered Captain Vetch to resume operations. As the chance of an amicable settlement was remote, Mr. Robertson wrote to the Calcutta Council for permission to make the police cordon

Dec. 1832.

⁸³ P. P. 1832, October 22, No. 60.

⁸⁴ (Pol) Letter from Court No. 14 of 1834.

⁸⁵ P. C. 1832, October 22, No. 60.

⁸⁶ P. C. 1832, December 3, No. 100.

at the base of the hills complete by connecting Sylhet with Goalpara with a view to making the economic blockade against the rebels thorough and effective.⁸⁷ The necessary permission was obtained and the cordon round the Khāsi hills was further tightened and elaborate preparations were made to round up the rebels.

Raja Singh Mānik was all the time busy trying to convince Raja Tirut Singh of the futility of further resistance, and at last on the 9th of January, 1833, Jit Roy, one of the ministers of Tirut Singh, met Captain Inglis and opened negotiation for the surrender of his master, on the condition that his life should be spared. Captain Inglis consented and guaranteed the fulfilment of the pledge by taking an oath, according to the Khāsi custom, which consisted of eating salt from the blade of a sabre. Other preliminaries were settled and finally on the 13th January, 1833, Raja Tirut Singh surrendered to the English. Instead of coming with two armed men as agreed to by his *mantris*, he came to surrender with his retinue. Even when he surrendered, he did not forget his beloved country and requested the English officer to make proper arrangement for the administration of his state.⁸⁸

Tirut Singh was sent down to Gauhati where he was ordered to be transported to the Tenasserim province by the Agent. But the Calcutta Council revised the order of the Agent and sent him down to Dacca for detention.⁸⁹ When Tirut Singh arrived at Dacca, he had nothing with him excepting a blanket to cover his body. He was at first confined in the Dacca jail but later orders were issued not to treat him as an ordinary prisoner.⁹⁰ A suitable but strong house was found for him and he was granted a monthly allowance of Rupees sixtythree with permission to engaged two servants.⁹¹ There remained the last independent king of the Khāsis to wear away his last days in confinement and solitude till he breathed his last in 1841. Thus ended the career of one of the most heroic but little known figures in the history of India.

Tirut Singh was indeed a striking personality, but his powers and abilities were out of all proportion to the stage he was destined to play his part on. It must be admitted that he was leniently dealt with by the British Government. Had he fought against any of the kings of the North Eastern states, he would have suffered a

⁸⁷ P. C. 1832, October 22, No. 60.

⁸⁸ P. C. 1833, February 12, No. 234.

⁸⁹ Pol. Letter to Court No. 3 of 1834.

⁹⁰ P. C. 1833, March 19, Nos. 55-56.

⁹¹ P. C. 1833, April 30, Nos. 64-65.

more ignoble fate. But when all is said, it must also be remembered that he was not a rebel in the ordinary sense of the term. Even Mr. Scott, whom he antagonised most, paid glowing tributes to the patriotic impulses of this great chieftain. If the penetrating mind of Mr. Scott conceived the bold project of linking Sylhet with Assam by laying a road through the very heart of the Khāsi hills, the savage mind of Tirut Singh was not slow to realize the baneful effect of this peaceful penetration and took to the only means which was left to an independent king namely to exciting his savage countrymen to rise in arms against the usurping authority of the "lowland strangers." But the massacre at Nunklow, the cold-blooded murder of innocent Englishmen and Bengalees was an act of great perfidy on his part and no amount of excuse can take away the stigma which has tarnished his otherwise heroic character. It may be safely assumed that had there been no Nunklow massacre to blacken his career he would have been treated with more respect and consideration by his noble adversary and he might even have been given back his own territory.

The conduct of his followers was no less praiseworthy. If the British side produced men of the type of Townshend, Vetch, White and Brodie who fought against men and the elements in those untraversed and inhospitable regions in a most exemplary way, the Khāsis also had their leaders in Mānbhot, Lāl Singh, Mukund Singh and Barmānik, who showed wonderful courage, ability and power and were imbued with a burning sense of patriotism which were even appreciated by their equally brave and generous opponents.⁹² Mr. Scott feelingly referred to "the gallantry and patriotism displayed by Mānbhot and Man Singh" which in his opinion "were deserving of consideration" and he expressed sincerè regrets that "it was not found practicable to make terms with these brave men." There is no doubt that had all the Khāsi chiefs joined in the general conflagration that followed the Nunklow massacre it would have been very difficult for the British to bring them under control.

But if blame is to be apportioned, the British also had their share of responsibility for this protracted warfare. When the full facts relating to the Khāsi Disturbances reached the ears of the Directorate at home they found in the conduct of the officers of the Bengal Government "much to be regretted and something to be blamed". Not only did they condemn "the insolent tone and oppressive conduct exhibited (towards the mountaineers) on the part of inferior officers and servants belonging to their establishment

⁹² P. C. 1880, July 30, No. 68.

at that time", but every stage of their handling of the Khāsi insurrection came under the search light of their scathing criticism. In their opinion not only were Mr. Scott and all the officers under him completely misinformed as to the state of feeling prevailing amongst the Khāsis when they sent up the invalids to the sanatorium but the former also underestimated the strength of the petty Khāsi states* when the rebellion actually broke out, and, what was worse, no well concerted attempts were ever made to subjugate them.⁹³

They also condemned in the strongest terms the imposition of fines under false pretences in the name of the Government which, in the opinion of Lt. Townshend, was the cause of the hills remaining so long in a disturbed state;⁹⁴ and the Court of Directors later authorised Mr. Jenkins, the successor of Mr. Robertson, to remit the unrealised portion of the fines.

With the surrender of Tirut Singh the wretched warfare of which both the parties were tired came to an end and the pacification of the Khāsi country was within sight. The Khāsis in every direction manifested a subdued disposition and temper.⁹⁵ All the chiefs submitted one by one and entered into agreements with the British. A heavy fine of Rs. 5,000 had already been imposed on Barmānik and small fines (at the rate of Re. 1/- per house) were levied on a number of states and villages which participated in the rebellious activities. The fines to be realised were earmarked for the improvement of the roads in the Khāsi hills. But in the matter of the imposition of fines on villages, the Supreme Government intervened. The Governor-General in the course of a minute questioned the policy of levying a money tax at all on the hill tribes.⁹⁶ And the Agent (Mr. Robertson) was ordered to cancel the imposition of fines on the ground that the British Government had no right to impose a tax on the villagers belonging to independent chiefs.⁹⁷

On the 29th March, 1834, Rajan Singh was installed as Raja in succession to Tirut Singh and agreed to allow the British Government to carry the road across the whole extent of his territory and to supply labour and materials as required. An agreement to that effect was drawn up and signed by his eight *mantris*.⁹⁸

* Even the Court of Directors in their despatches often referred to them as "Small and independent principalities."

⁹³ Pl. Letter from Court No. 14 of 1834.

⁹⁴ Pol. Letter from Court No. 24 of 1836.

⁹⁵ Pol. Letter from Court No. 44 of 1835.

⁹⁶ P. P. 1833, March 25, No. 108.

⁹⁷ P. C. 1834, May 22, No. 78.

⁹⁸ P. C. 1834, May 22, No. 78.

And finally when quiet was restored in the Khāsi hills, Captain Lister, for his superior knowledge of the character of the people "who for the first time in the annals of their race were rendered tributary",⁹⁹ was appointed Political Agent with power to negotiate with the king of Jaintiā on political matters. His headquarters were fixed at Cherrapunji. His task was clearly defined. Over villages directly under the control of the British, he was empowered to exercise magisterial functions. The chiefs were allowed to retain entire jurisdiction within their own limits; only they had to submit to the general superintendence of the Political Agent. Both in the case of the restored chiefs and in the case of the independent chiefs the Political Agent was specially forbidden to interfere further than he was entitled to do politically. As the powers vested were certainly vague or deliberately kept vague, the Political Agent was specially empowered to correspond direct with the Governor-General on political matters. Thus we find that though on paper every possible care was taken to retain the general independence of the Khāsi chiefs and though originally a separate status was observed with regard to the states of Cherrā, Khyrim, Nongstain, Lyngkin and Nongspung, gradually the line of distinction was obliterated and all the Khāsi states sank into the position of dependent principalities.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁹ P. P. 1833, March 25, No. 107.

¹⁰⁰ P. C. 1835, February 11, Nos. 102-103.

Pol. Letter from Court No. 24 of 1836.

SECTION IV

THE INSURRECTION OF THE SINGPHOS

Since their subjugation by Captain Neufville in 1825, the Singhphos remained in a discontented state. Their chief wealth, the Assamese slaves, was taken away from them and they were further forbidden to seize any Assamese subjects as slaves in future. The strong arm of the British checked their predatory habits. The peaceful avocation of agriculture and commerce which they were encouraged to take to as their sole means of subsistence did not suit their predatory habits. So they remained in a sullen mood and were looking for an opportunity to set at naught the British supremacy and to recruit their exhausted finance by an incursion into the plains of Assam.¹ Opportunities soon presented themselves.

Runuā Gohain, a discontented Khāmti chief who had given the English much trouble and annoyance at the time of the Anglo-Burmese War, was kept out of office when the final arrangement was entered into with the Khāmti chief, Sadiyā Khawā Gohain. He joined the party of the discontented Singhphos and evolved a plan to drive out the English in which all the chiefs of this region took part. As their own strength was insufficient, the Singhphos invited their brethren beyond the frontier to come to their aid. The hill Singhphos to whom nothing appeared more alluring than a call to plunder, assembled under the guidance of their enterprising leader named Wackun Khoonjun, a subject of the king of Āvā and readily accepted the invitation and made a determined plan to fall upon Sadiyā.

Accordingly in 1829, Wackun Khoonjun into whose hands the initiative had now passed, paid an informal visit to Lt. Rutherford, his real intention being to know the strength and resources of the British on the frontier. At that time he saw also the chief or Gaum of Luttorā and made final arrangements for the plunder of Sadiyā and the country around. It took the Singhphos three years to fit out and perfect this "grand expedition". It was a formidable combination indeed as all the hostile and warlike border tribes combined to drive the English out of the country. They were in close touch with the leaders of the Khāsi Insurrection and organisers of the second rebellion which already kept the hands of the English full at that period. It is said that even Chandra Kānta was implicated in this

¹ S. P. 1830, March 5, No. 3.

plot. The time selected was most opportune. They raised stockades and towers at Luttora, replenished their stores with 40,000 maunds of rice and kept in readiness 20,000 hand-cuffs, hoping to capture at least 10,000 Assamese.

Arrangements for the grand assault were completed by the end of 1829 and the hill Singphos numbering above 2,000 started from their home in the Hukawng valley by the beginning of 1830. They crossed the Bar Dihing river and skirting the district of Bisā, the chief of which had not sufficient force to prevent their incursions, effected a junction with their ally, the Luttorā Gaum, at the head of the Thengā river, where their number swelled to nearly 3,000. A force of 500 Khāmtis under the leadership of Runuā Gohain was on its way to meet them. These men were armed with spears, swords and muskets. They had a contemptible opinion of the English and were fully confident of their ultimate success.²

There was a stir in the English headquarters and all sorts of rumours reached the ears of the local authorities regarding the strength, combination and avowed intention of the invaders. Under the treaty of 1826, the Singpho chiefs of the Cis-Pātkai range were specially enjoined to transmit to the Political Agent at Sadiyā any news of the hostile combination in that quarter. But the reports the different chiefs sent on this occasion were not only exaggerated but also contradictory. Each chief implicated the other. This shows that they were in sympathy with the rebels.

The Raja of Bisā, the supposed head of the Singpho confederacy, was the first to inform the Agent that the Singphos were coming at the express invitation of the Sadiyā Khawā Gohain and the Runuā Gohain. The Gaum of Duffa came with a different version and told the Political Agent that from the Hukawng valley several thousand Singpho warriors had arrived and joined hands with the Gaums of Bisā and Luttorā. According to another version all the border chiefs of importance including the Bar Senāpati and the Sadiyā Khawā Gohain were implicated. Captain Neufville did not even for a moment suspect the fidelity of these two border chiefs both of whom followed him in the campaign.³

But his views regarding the innocence of these two chiefs were not shared by Major White who suspected the Sadiyā Khawā Gohain, and both Captain Pemberton and Jenkins who had acquired a wide knowledge of frontier politics confirmed the suspicion of Major

² S. P. 1830, April 16, Nos. 7 & 9.

³ S. P. 1830, March 12, Nos. 1-35.

White.* Bruce, the Commanding Officer at Sadiyā, subsequently reported that while the Gaum of Bisā was ordered by Captain Neufville to take possession of a road that led to a pass which the Singphos were expected to take, he led the detachment under him to a very different place and remained idle in the jungle until the enemy had all escaped. Evidently Captain Neufville was deceived by this crooked chief, who, as he was situated between the English and the Singphos, had a difficult part to play and tried to please both parties, though his real sympathy lay with his kinsmen.⁴

Captain Neufville took a serious view of the hostile combination on the frontier. Frontier posts were strengthened to their original complements and instructions were issued to all the friendly chiefs of the eastern region to send in their reinforcements. He himself took the field. On the 14th February, 1830 with a sufficient force he reached Sadiyā where he was joined by the Bar Senāpati and the Sadiyā Khawā Gohain. He at once moved to Luttorā, three days' march from Sadiyā where the enemy was reported to be halting, and sent a messenger to Wackun Khoonjun, the leader of the invading force, advising him to retrace his steps. He also sent orders to the chief of Luttorā strictly prohibiting him from joining the hostile Singphos. These remonstrances had no effect and the messenger returned with the information that the Singphos were performing a sacrifice (as customary with them previous to any encounter) and that they would move downward in a day or two.⁵

1830. The information helped Captain Neufville to make his dispositions. He took up a position about ten miles up the river Brahmaputra commanding the mouth of the river Noā Dihing. On the 26th February, he received intelligence that the Singphos had come down the Noā Dihing and had reached the village of Luttorā on bamboo rafts and were trying to gain foothold on the bank of the Brahmaputra. Captain Neufville with a view to foiling their attempt to reach the bank moved out on the morning of the 27th February and fell upon the enemy at Luttu, about half-an-hour after sunset. A few minutes of firing dispersed the enemy who fled under the cover of darkness leaving behind them a considerable quantity of arms and ammunition. The chief of Luttu who was friendly to the British gave them all possible help and

* Later on Major White had to revise his opinion regarding the political character of the Bar Senapati whom he found decidedly faithful to his engagements.

(Foreign 1938, April 18, Nos. 56-57).

⁴ P. P. 1835, February 11, No. 91.

⁵ S. P. 1830, April 16, No. 7.

next day his messengers brought in valuable information regarding the disposition of the enemy. Fearing that the enemy might attack Bisā, Captain Neufville immediately despatched a force to the aid of the chief. As a precautionary measure, he also ordered the gun-boats to remain at anchor at the confluence of the river and left a part of the Moāmāriā militia to prevent the enemy from coming down on rafts. As his own force was considerably reduced, he did not deem it advisable to proceed to Luttorā and sent instructions to Jorhāt to send reinforcements at the earliest opportunity.⁶

In the meantime he received intelligence that the enemy had re-assembled at Luttorā and were engaged in erecting stockades. He made elaborate preparations to meet the enemy and called upon all the chiefs of the eastern region to assemble the whole of their disposable means. Heavily reinforced, Captain Neufville commenced his forward movement on the 11th March and took a direct route. He sent one detachment to Luttorā by a circuitous route in order to fall on the rear of the enemy. But he overestimated the strength of the enemy. The Singphos abandoned their works at the first appearance of the detachment, one volley of fire being sufficient to rout them. They were driven across the hills and fled towards the Barkhāmti country. The town of Luttorā and the stockades erected therein were destroyed and the party returned to Jorhāt leaving a strong detachment at Sadiyā.⁷ This was the last organized rebellion on a comprehensive plan to drive out the English from Assam. The Singphos remained sullen and ferocious ready to flare up again when the opportunity presented itself. They rose in revolt several times; their last formidable rising taking place in 1843 with the connivance of the Burmese Governor of Hukawng was completely crushed. But these were sporadic and local outbursts not connected with any general organized plan.

When the rising was over and peace restored Mr. Scott suggested certain measures which aimed at extirpating the Singpho menace once and for all. As the Singphos had been living in a dispersed state covering a wide and fertile area which acted as a tempting bait to the tribes lying eastward, Mr. Scott suggested that all the Singphos, residing in the upper zone of the Brahmaputra Valley, should either be required to draw closer together under the Gaum of Bisā near the neighbourhood of Burhāt, leaving the easternmost tract to run waste, or be ordered to recross the Pātkai range and to repair to their original home on the Chindwin river.⁸ But

June 1831.

⁶ S. P. 1830, April 16, No. 7.

⁷ S. P. 1830, April 16, Nos. 8-9.

⁸ P. C. 1831, June 10, No. 50.

both Captain Pemberton and Jenkins, who made an exhaustive survey of Assam and submitted a well-prepared plan of defence for the whole of Assam were definitely against this proposal. They feared that such a measure would not only neutralize Bisā Gaum's usefulness as an "avant garde," but also would check the growing friendly intercourse with the inhabitants of the Hukawng and Maing-Khwang valleys. The policy of suffering the country between Bisā and Burhāt to lie waste would in their opinion fail to cripple the enemies. "Rather this policy of denial" they observed "would tend to weaken the offensive operation of the British themselves in the event of another Burmese attack." So the suggestion of Mr. Scott was not accepted and the Singphos were left scattered as before.*

* P. C. 1832, October 5, No. 114-A.

CHAPTER IV

THE PERIOD OF APPEASEMENT

RESTORATION OF THE NATIVE MONARCHY

Mr. Scott was called upon by the Government of India to submit detailed arrangements for the restoration of the Native Monarchy in Upper Assam as early as 1828 (*vide* page 53) but for nearly three years (1828-31) nothing further was done in this direction. In the meantime rebellion after rebellion organized by the disaffected nobility of the land had burst upon the unhappy valley as Mr. Scott had predicted. These rebellions, though nipped in the bud, brought to the forefront the question of the eventual settlement of the affairs of Upper Assam and Mr. Scott was instructed to submit a detailed report regarding the future administration of this region. Accordingly, he submitted a fresh report in June, 1831. The forebodings of Mr. Scott as openly hinted by him in his last report (1828) proved unfortunately to be too true and hence he was all the more inclined towards the restoration of a native dynasty.

1831

He knew full well that according to the Supreme Government the chief obstacle that had stood in the way of the materialization of his favourite scheme was the question of the security of the eastern frontier of Assam. So he planned a new scheme to provide for the adequate security of the frontier. In the earlier years of the occupation there was an assistant to the Political Agent stationed at Sadiyā with one or more European officers in command of the troops cantoned there for the administration of Central Assam. Besides, there was an officer in command of the Assam Light Infantry stationed at Bishwanath, chief military post of the British Government in Assam. But later all these posts were combined in one and conferred upon Captain Neufville.

But this arrangement had also its drawbacks which were brought to light during the time of the last Singpho insurrection. Though Captain Neufville was a very capable man, he could not do full justice to the multifarious duties he was saddled with. There was great apprehension at the time of the last turmoil that some of the chiefs, who were provided with arms for defence against the irruption of the wild hill-tribes, would turn against the British themselves because there was none in their midst to control their activities.

Mr. Scott at that time aptly remarked, "But for the sudden appearance of Captain Neufville (in March, 1830) at Sadiyā, the whole of that part of the country would have been ravaged by the Singphos."¹

To guard against these eventualities Mr. Scott reverted to the original arrangement. He recommended that there should be stationed at Sadiyā a permanent officer in command of the military establishments. He should not only supervise the local militia, but also control the border chiefs as an assistant to the Political Agent. He further proposed that the forces stationed at that place should remain fixed permanently.² And to meet the Supreme Government's contention that the intervention of a tributary territory between the chief military post and the eastern frontier would create difficulties in the transmission of soldiers by water in the event of another Burmese war, Mr. Scott suggested that for the safe passage of soldiers, the use of the northern bank of the Brahmaputra should be retained by the Company and the southern bank be reserved for the use of the king and the nobility.³ Armed with this new plan which he regarded as effective for providing for the security of the frontier Mr. Scott, with some degree of certainty, turned to the main proposal, namely, the restoration of a native monarchy.

He reminded the Supreme Government of the promise they had made regarding the restoration of a native monarchy in Upper Assam. He submitted that with such an object in view Mr. Richards and himself, as joint commissioners, had made no substantial alterations in the administrative system of Upper Assam (1826). If the Company desired to retain that part of the country under their direct authority, they should not only immediately introduce under a European agency a better system of administration whether or not the revenues realized were sufficient to cover the expenses involved, but should also effect an important change in the revenue system. On the other hand if the Supreme Government was of opinion that the revenue from Central Assam was insufficient to justify a European establishment, and if they feared that the suggested mode of reform in the revenue affairs would produce discontent amongst the influential classes, they should immediately restore that portion of Assam to a prince of the royal blood on the lines suggested by him. In this connection, he said, "an imperfect British administration must be worse than a native

¹ P. P. 1831, June 10, No. 50.

² P. P. 1831, June 10, No. 50.

³ P. P. 1831, June 10, No. 50 (Post Script).

one, which, even if it wants in integrity, at least possesses a perfect knowledge of the laws, customs and prejudices of its subjects."

He further pointed out that by the establishment of a native prince in central Assam, an end would be put at once to the plots and intrigues that had hitherto prevailed. "It would be futile to suppose," he rightly remarked, "that members of the ruling classes, whose ancestors had reigned in the valley for more than five hundred years would at once give up all their hopes of future greatness upon the appearance amongst them of a handful of strangers." He doubted whether the British would be able to secure the submission of the Assamese during at least the existence of the generation that had seen the overthrow of their authority, and he warned the Government that conspiracies could not be bought off by liberal pensions to the ex-nobility, and they must be prepared for numerous plots and conspiracies. Mr. Scott's was the policy of appeasement based on the correct reading of the situation and confirmed by the past events. The Calcutta Council was far away from the scene of events and could not comprehend that "Assam differed from the rest of the countries conquered by the Company."⁴

With this warning, he re-submitted his plan for the restoration of a native prince in Upper Assam. He required as before that the power of deposition should be retained by an explicit declaration in the event of gross misgovernment. He further stipulated that a certain portion of the revenue should be set apart for the defence of the country under the direction of the British Government; that the old criminal law authorising the barbarous system of mutilation should be modified and that the Raja should make for the gradual emancipation of the pāiks by the substitution of money payment for personal services. He divided the Brahmaputra Valley into four parts* and suggested that the Jorhāt Division, extending from Burhāt to the Dhānshiri river covering an area of 3,500 sq. miles

⁴ P. P. 1831, June 10. 50.

* "First Division—*Station at Sudeya* extending from Namroop on the east to the mouth of the Buridihing on the west, and from the Naga hills on the south to the northern mountains on the north. Length about one hundred miles, extreme breadth sixty five, estimated population thirty thousand, revenue none.

Second Division—*Station at Jorchauth* extending from Burhauth and the mouth of the Dibru river to the Dhumsiri. Extreme length about one hundred and ten miles. Extreme breadth sixty. Estimated population two hundred and fifty thousand, revenue one hundred thousand sicca rupees.

Third Division—*Station at Kalliabar, or Bishnauth*—From the Dhumsiri to Raha Chowkee and Singree hills—length seventy five miles—breadth thirty five—estimated population one hundred thousand—revenue fifty thousand sicca rupees.

and containing a population of 2,20,000 souls, with an income of 1 lac of rupees, should be handed over to the new king.⁵

These suggestions were mainly in line with his original proposals, but when he reverted to the final selection of a worthy candidate for this restored monarchy, he questioned the propriety of his earlier selection. He doubted whether his early nominee Chandra Kānta, "would be a worthy choice after all." Chandra Kānta was, in his opinion "to all appearance an imbecile," and he feared that it would be dangerous to trust him with powers. The next candidate Purandar Singh, he considered in most respects "well qualified for the transaction of public business."⁶ But he did not make any final choice;—evidently the star of Chandra Kānta was waning.

Captain Neufville, the Political Agent in Upper Assam, and a most respectable and valued officer, also subscribed fully to the views of Mr. Scott. He expressed the opinion that "to ensure stability to our authority, the most politic step would be the restoration of a native prince under such limitations as may appear necessary." But his nominee was Chandra Kānta, though he described him as one "of insolent habits and wanting in talents". Captain Neufville informed the Supreme Government that the limitations that were to be placed upon the restored king would not be objected to by the king because the Rajahs of Assam had for several generations been content to act as "royal ciphers in the hands of their most capable and influential ministers." Lastly, as the miserable condition of the royal family had been bringing much unfavourable criticism upon the British Government, he suggested that if it was not found expedient to adopt Mr. Scott's proposals, immediate steps should be taken to increase the allowances of the ex-Raja and the royal family.⁷

When Mr. Scott's report reached the Vice-President in Council, it was passed on to the Governor-General for final consideration. In the meantime Mr. Scott was asked to clarify certain points which hindered the solution of the problem. The principal objection to restoration (as alluded to before) which Mr. Scott had tried to remove still remained and the Supreme Government raised a new point in addition.

Fourth Division—*Station at Gouchatty*—east Raha Chowkee, west boundary of Bengal, south Cossya hills, north Bhootan Dowars, length one hundred miles—extreme breadth sixty—estimated population four hundred and fifty thousand—revenue two hundred thousand sicca rupees."

⁵ P. P. 1831, June 10, No. 50.

⁶ P. P. 1831, June 10, No. 50.

⁷ P. P. 1831, June 10, No. 58.

Mr. Scott looked at the problem from a political and military point of view and the palliatives he suggested were of a politico-military character. The Supreme Government looked at the matter mainly from an economic point of view and they wondered, as the representatives of the East India Company, why the British Government should be spending so much money to protect an unprofitable and isolated piece of land around Sadiyā when the profitable and populous part of the tract (Jorhāt Division) was to be given over to a native monarch. The Burmese bogey was still as alive as ever: there were rumours that the eastern frontier was threatened with invasion by the Burmese and it seems that the Calcutta Council forgot the past lesson and ignored the military value of the tract in question.

They wished however to get rid of their unproductive territory and asked Mr. Scott to devise some workable means by which it could be disposed of. They suggested that if the defence of the eastern frontier could be left to the native Government it was proposed to establish in Upper Assam, the Government might be relieved of this unprofitable investment and would be better able to concentrate all its efforts on strategic points within its own frontier. But in view of the weakness of the proposed native Government, they called upon the Agent to inform them whether the defence of the eastern frontier could be safely left in the hands of the Singpho Chiefs. They even agreed to hand over the eastern frontier to Raja Gambhir Singh of Manipur in case neither of the two alternatives suggested by them could be adopted. Finally they concluded that they could not see how a foreign Government could be installed in the intervening tract if it was found expedient to retain the control of the eastern frontier. So the whole matter was again referred to the Agent and he was requested to state whether the transfer of Central Assam to a native Government offered "such a superior prospect of tranquillity as would outweigh the objection pointed out by them."⁸

June 1831

Meanwhile the much expected minute of the Governor-General on the point at issue was published. Lord William Bentinck observed that in the absence of a final reply from Mr. Scott, the best authority on eastern frontier matters, it would not be politic to have a final determination on this important question. He however expected that most of his findings would tally with those of Mr. Scott. Regarding the most controversial point, the retention of the Sadiyā frontier, he supported the viewpoint of Mr. Scott and

* P. P. 1831, June 10. No. 58.

was of opinion that though "the maintenance of the Suddeya station would be purely one of expense" it was nevertheless desirable. He feared that if the controlling hand were withdrawn from Sadiyā, the province would be overrun by the surrounding wild tribes. Hence he definitely laid down that Sadiyā must be maintained as a British post under a prudent and experienced officer. As regards the suggestion of the Council that the defence of the eastern frontier should be handed over to Raja Gambhir Singh, he turned down the proposal as fantastic contending that this chief and his adherents would be looked on by all parties with jealousy. His Excellency therefore did not deem it at all politic to allow Gambhir Singh to have a footing in the province of Assam.

Coming to the direct question of the erection of a native monarchy, the Governor-General held that the question should be decided by the sole consideration whether its retention or restoration would give the British and the populace of the tract the greatest good. The question was "purely one of policy." As the country had been conquered from the Burmese without the slightest assistance from the expelled Rajas or from any other party, there could not be any moral claim for service by any one. It was doubtful whether the restoration of a constitution fundamentally defective, would lead to any advancement of the country. But at the same time, the good side of the Āhom rule could not be overlooked and the continuance of an institution for a period almost without example in history (more than five hundred years) would seem to indicate that there was something intrinsically good in the original constitution. That the institution had been deeply rooted in the feelings of the people did not also fail to strike the imagination of the Governor-General. He came to the final conclusion "that the native government may be established aided by the support and advice of a British officer" and he hoped that such an arrangement would prove to be a peaceful settlement, while conducing to general satisfaction. Mr. Scott was directed to submit a further report containing a specific plan for the erection of a native monarchy answering both these purposes. Pending this, the Jorhāt Division was to be governed by a British officer.⁹

As anticipated by the Governor-General, the views of Mr. Scott coincided with his own. Mr. Scott reported that a restored native prince, would not be able to control the border tribes unless these were completely disarmed and in that case they in their turn would be again exposed to armed raiders from the trans-frontier regions. As regards the second proposal of leaving the defence problem to

⁹ P. P. 1831. September 2. No. 2.

the Singpho Gaums, Mr. Scott observed that these protectors would be turned into plunderers and with the assistance of their brethren living eastward would begin a concerted campaign of terror and pillage. He remarked further that if the frontier tracts were to be assigned to Raja Gambhir Singh, it would also be necessary to give him the productive as well as the unproductive part of the country. And he was decidedly of opinion "that the transfer of Central Assam to a native prince would offer such prospect of tranquillity as would outweigh the objection raised by the Vice-President in Council."¹⁰

From all accounts it seemed as if restoration were really within sight this time; but a melancholy event happened which deferred August. 1831 the question further. Mr. Scott died suddenly and it was settled that the final arrangement for the establishment of a native government should remain suspended until Mr. Robertson (the Agent Designate) had taken charge of his duties.¹¹ The intervening period was bridged over by Mr. Crawford and the Supreme Government did not think it prudent to carry their project into effect during this time.

.. Meanwhile let us turn to two aspiring candidates, Purandar Singh and Chandra Kānta. Purandar Singh submitted a petition towards the beginning of April, 1832 to the Governor-General paying that the Raj should be conferred upon him. He wrote that so long as he was under the impression that Mr. Scott would ultimately restore him to power, he had not pressed his claim before. But now that Mr. Scott was dead, he had come to represent his case to the British Raj. Chandra Kānta, he said, was unfit by the usage of his country to ascend the throne because his ears had been cut off by his ministers. He agreed to pay the sum of Rs. 20,000 on his elevation to the throne besides the usual *nuzarānas*.¹² Mr. Crawford forwarded this application marking it "worthy of attention." He thought him sufficiently intelligent and of a worthier character than his rival Chandra Kānta, whom he regarded "as totally unfit to be advanced to any situation of power and responsibility" being "degraded both in mind and feeling below the common run of Asiatic Princes."¹³

Mr. Crawford's recommendation in favour of Purandar Singh complicated the issue. Chandra Kānta was considered by Mr. Scott to have the best claim to the proposed Raj—though later Mr. Scott had grown sceptical about his own choice and had mentioned

¹⁰ P. P. 1831, September 2, No. 3.

¹¹ P. P. 1831, September 2, No. 4.

¹² P. C. 1832, May 14, No. 125.

¹³ P. C. 1832, May 14, No. 124.

Purandar Singh as a better candidate. Thus the issue had been left undecided. But Mr. Crawford threw Chandra Kānta over-board and declared unequivocally in favour of Purandar Singh.

When Mr. Robertson was appointed as Scott's successor he was not only called upon to submit his sentiments on the claims of the two rival candidates but was also asked for his views on the wider question of the feasibility of setting up a native government in view of the existing state of affairs in Assam. At first sight it strikes us as not a little peculiar to see a question re-opened which was already "a settled fact." The reason is not far to seek. At that time Captain Jenkins and Lt. Pemberton were busy surveying and collecting information regarding Assam and its outlying principalities and the Supreme Government thought that it would be wise to postpone the decision till full information was available. We must remember that this survey work had a great political significance. It not only coloured the settled view regarding the erection of a native government in Upper Assam, it also greatly altered the policy of the British Government towards Assam and the neighbouring principalities.¹⁴

The newly appointed Agent reviewed the whole question and brought forward fresh proposals regarding the future administration of Central Assam. He practically ignored the political issue raised by Mr. Scott. According to him "Mr. Scott's main motive for wishing to set up an independent native power in Assam was his despair of securing adequate European agency devoted to its management." So he recommended that if the government could spare a sufficient number of European officers, Upper Assam should be retained as an integral part of the British dominion. Only if it were found impracticable to provide adequate European officers should a native government be set up.

As regards the selection of a suitable candidate for the restored monarchy, Mr. Robertson observed that Chandra Kānta should not be elevated to the throne because he was more closely related to the last occupant of the throne than Purandar Singh and as such, if only given one-half of the kingdom, would regard himself unjustly excluded from the other half. He said that Purandar Singh on the other hand had no such claims and pretensions and if elevated to the throne of the eastern half, he would "accept it as a boon." He suggested that it would be better to make over the Jorhāt Division to Purandar Singh as an appendage dependent on the British Empire

¹⁴ P. C. 1832, May 14, No. 126.

and liable to be re-annexed to it in case of any failure to observe the treaty conditions. Mr. Robertson further proposed that the Political Agent with the headquarters of the Assam Light Infantry should be fixed at Jorhāt and a space of about 4 sq. miles around it should be exempted from the control of Purandar Singh and handed over to the British Government for use as a cantonment, as had been done with the Nawab of Oudh at Lucknow. This measure, he pointed out, would leave out of account the necessity of reserving the northern bank of the Brahmaputra for transportation of soldiers as suggested by Mr. Scott. As regards the maintenance of Sadiyā as a British frontier post, he agreed fully with the views of Mr. Scott, but he threw the charge of maintenance on the shoulders of the Bar Senāpati whom he proposed to tax to the extent of Rs. 50,000. The Bar Senāpati, he pointed out, used to pay to the Assam Raj the sum of Rs. 12,000 by way of tribute.¹⁵

The Governor-General in the course of an elaborate minute dealt with the recommendations of the newly appointed Agent. He did not accept the statement of Mr. Robertson that Scott's main motive in wishing to set up an independent native power in Assam had been "his despair of securing European Agency devoted to its management." He said he had carefully reconsidered the proposal of Mr. Scott in the light of the arguments advanced by Mr. Robertson and re-affirmed his views on the subject of the restoration of a native monarchy. He accepted Robertson's suggestion regarding the advisability of occupying a space of 4 sq. miles around Jorhāt as a counterpoise against the interposition of a native government between the British posts of Sadiyā and Bishwanāth. This measure, he thought, would meet the chief objection of his Council which considered the intervention of a foreign state as the most serious obstacle to the maintenance of British authority on the eastern frontier.

As to the claims of two rival candidates he observed, "Regard should be had to the superiority of qualification rather than to proximity of relationship to the last head of the state" and gave his opinion in favour of Purandar Singh. Coming to the subject-matter of the stipulations to be entered into with the new Raja, the Governor-General insisted that the right of advising and the power of deposing in the event of maladministration should be expressly reserved to the British Government and that the Raja should be asked to pay "a moderate tribute" and to modify the

¹⁵ P. P. 1832, July 30, No. 92.

criminal law in consonance with the spirit of British jurisprudence. He thought that if these preliminaries were accepted by the Raja, the internal administration should be left entirely in his hands. With regard to the proposal of Mr. Robertson that the Bar Senāpati should be required to pay a tribute in lieu of the supply of a contingent, that, he felt, was a matter to be decided by the officer commanding at Jorhāt.¹⁶

The Vice-President in Council concurred with the main findings of the Governor-General but with regard to the retention of Jorhāt as the headquarters of the Assam Corps situated as it would be within a foreign state, they doubted whether such an arrangement would be at all wise. They regarded Bishwanāth as the most desirable station for the principal post of the British forces in Assam. The main points thus settled, Mr. Robertson was called upon to interview Purandar Singh to ascertain his competency. The Agent was specially forbidden from communicating the final decision of the government to Purandar Singh at that stage.¹⁷

Feb. 1833 Accordingly, Mr. Robertson had two interviews with Purandar Singh at Gauhati. He was highly impressed with his outward appearance and manners. He reported that Purandar Singh (who was at that time a youngman of twenty five) was a person of amiable manners. His countenance was pleasing and address good. His natural abilities were respectable and his disposition mild and pacific. The Agent, however, did not find him very active and energetic. But these disqualifications he ruled out as, in his opinion, they were not required of a dependent king. Major White, Lt. Mathew and Lt. Rutherford, the local officers, were all decidedly of opinion that "Purandar Singh was the person best fitted to be at the head of the state to be created".¹⁸ On receipt of this favourable report, the Calcutta authorities authorised Robertson to take Purandar Singh into confidence and enter into negotiations with him to settle the terms of his installation.¹⁹

Mar. 1833 To return to Chandra Kānta. When the intimation that the British Government had finally decided to place Purandar Singh on the *masnad* of Central Assam reached the ears of Chandra Kānta, it came as a great shock to him. He had lived so long on hopes alleged to have been held out to him by the late Mr. Scott and when he suddenly found himself thrown over, he was deeply disappointed.

¹⁶ P. P. 1832, November 5. No. 4.

¹⁷ P. P. 1832, November 5. No. 5.

¹⁸ P. P. 1833, February 4. No. 123.

¹⁹ P. P. 1833, February 4. No. 124.

He submitted a memorial couched in pathetic language. He appealed to the British Government to reconsider his case and to issue an order directing the Raj to be restored to him. He threatened that he and his family "would put an end to their existence" if his appeal were rejected. Needless to say that it was an idle threat.²⁰

The Governor-General-in-Council informed him that they "could not believe that their accredited agent the late Mr. Scott had committed anything to Chundra Kānta on their behalf." After pointing out the circumstances which led them to intervene in the affairs of Assam they plainly told the ex-king that the princes of the of the country (evidently referring to Chandra Kānta and Purandar Singh) who were suspected to be communicating with the Burmese even in their detention while professing friendship to the English, had no claims to the throne of Assam. With a view, however, to contributing to his comforts and to saving him from the humiliation that might attend his continued residence in the kingdom of Purandar Singh they requested him to select an appropriate spot for his future residence within the Company's territories.²¹

Had Chandra Kānta any right to the throne? When the East India Company wrested the country from the hands of the Burmese who had thoroughly subdued it, none of the princes rendered them any help. Rather they were found treating with the enemy, and Chandra Kānta is said to have taken a leading part in the insurrections that were set in motion to drive the English out of the country. Hence the princes had neither legal nor moral right to claim the throne. Secondly, Mr. Scott, when recommending him, did not give any undertaking, nor did he hold out any promise. When the British Government made a general declaration on the eve of the Anglo-Burmese conflict that it would not annex any part of Assam, there was no commitment in favour of any particular prince. When at last they restored a part of the kingdom to an Assamese prince after long seven years, they chose the one whom they considered to be the fittest. Chandra Kānta was no doubt aware of these facts: if not, his case was pathetic indeed. He was a willing victim of his own illusion.

In the meantime, preliminary arrangements were made and a treaty was concluded on the 2nd March, 1833 at Gauhati between the East India Company and Purandar Singh. By this treaty the Company gave over to Raja Purandar Singh Upper Assam extending from Burhāt to the Dhānsiri river and the Raja agreed to pay

²⁰ P. P. 1833, April 30, No. 48.

²¹ P. P. 1833, April 30, No. 49.

an annual tribute of fifty thousand rupees.* Purandar Singh promised to introduce more humane system of criminal law in his territory in consonance with the spirit of British jurisprudence and also agreed to abolish "Sati" in his kingdom. He was called upon to follow the instructions of the representatives of the British Government stationed at Sadiyā and Gauhati regarding the conduct of affairs in his territories. The internal government of the country subject to the above proviso was to be conducted by the Raja, but he was prevented from holding any communications with any foreign power. Purandar Singh further agreed to adopt all possible means to check the opium evil in his territory. It was also stipulated that the Raja would surrender on demand from the Agent to the Governor-General any fugitive from justice who might take refuge in his kingdom. The British Government on their part undertook to protect his country from external aggressions, but reserved the right to transfer the said country to another ruler or to take it into their own immediate occupation in the event of maladministration on the part of Purandar Singh.²²

It will be seen from the perusal of the provisions of the treaty that over and above the conditions originally insisted on by the Supreme Government, two new conditions were inserted. To suppress the opium traffic, the British Government embarked upon the policy of regulating the cultivation and sale of opium in Assam and this condition was inserted in the treaty to secure the co-operation of Purandar Singh. Another notable feature of this agreement was that a great humanitarian measure recently introduced in the Company's dominions banning the immolation of widows on their husband's pyres was also made applicable to the dominions of Prandar Singh and at least in this respect, his territory was brought within the pale of the enlightened British administration.

It must be admitted that the revenue demanded was extraordinarily high though the Governor-General in his minute clearly stated that the Raja should be asked to pay a modest sum. It may be mentioned here that Mr. Scott, who was the author of the plan, did not suggest the imposition of any revenue. By demanding nearly half of the net revenue as their annual tribute, the

* Out of this sum it was proposed to set apart Rs. 6,000/- for the support of Raja Chunder Kanta and another thousand rupees for the support of the Maniporean wife of Raja Poorunder Singh. It was reported that the neglect and bad treatment the Maniporean princes had received from her husband had given great offence to her kinsman Gumbhir Singh. (P. P. 1833, May 30, Nos. 86-111)..

²² P. P. 1833, May, 30, No. 91.

Supreme Government was asking too much and indirectly gave Purandar Singh much scope for the extortion which they had intended to abolish altogether.* So we find that the new state was saddled with a heavy financial liability from its very inception and it is no wonder that this was the rock on which the infant state was shipwrecked.

The treaty was concluded on the 2nd March, 1833 and Raja Purandar Singh left Gauhati on the 9th March under the escort of a party of the 35th Regiment of the Native Infantry commanded by Lieutenant Moorhouse. It was arranged that he should be invested with the charge of the country from the beginning of the next Bengali year (1240).²³ He and his retinue travelled so slowly that they only reached Jorhāt on the 18th April. On the 24th April the civil and revenue administrations of Upper Assam were made over to him, the formal installation taking place on the 28th of April. The nobility and the other influential people paid due homage to him. The troops were paraded in front of the palace, a guard of honour was presented and a salute of 19 guns was fired on this ceremonious occasion.²⁴ To celebrate the occasion a present of 300 stand of arms with a suitable proportion of ammunition was made to him by the British Government.²⁵

One thing was omitted; perhaps it had escaped the ever vigilant watch of the Calcutta Council who left nothing undiscussed and had taken long seven years in coming to the final decision. It still remained to be settled what should be the proper form and superscription to be added to the name of the new Raja of Upper Assam in official correspondence. Purandar Singh objected to the use of the mere "Raja" which he felt was not suited to his recently acquired rank.²⁶ Eventually it was settled that he should be officially addressed as "Shree Maharajah Poorunder Singh Narindra."²⁷

From all accounts it is clear that Chandra Kānta had greater

* Even the Governor-General admitted afterwards that "There can be little doubt that both Poorunder Singh and the Bura Senaputtee will agree to any term which may be proposed and they will likely endeavour to indemnify themselves for their concession by the usual course of exactions."—P. P. 1833, May, 30, No. 88

²³ P. P. 1833, May 30, No. 91.

²⁴ P. P. 1833, May 30, No. 122.

²⁵ Foreign 1838, April 18, No. 56.

²⁶ P. P. 1833, May 30, No. 113.

²⁷ Letter to Court No. 2 of 1834.

influence with the populace and chiefs than his rival Purandar Singh* who had been installed as king. The Sadiyā Khawa Gohain, the chief of the Khāmtis, who was a great adherent of Chandra Kānta did not welcome the restoration of Purandar Singh.²⁸

When Chandra Kānta found his rival Purandar Singh actually installed as the Raja of Central Assam, he was overwhelmed with grief. He made another attempt to have his claim recognised by the Supreme Government and submitted a fresh memorial to the Governor-General. It was as usual full of invectives against Purandar Singh. After adducing the usual proofs in support of his rightful claim, finally he held out the "lure of gold" to the Company and offered a higher bid for the kingdom. He offered to pay Rs. 70,000 as tribute to the British Government.²⁹ But all his supplications were in vain.

In the meantime, Captain Pemberton's report threw a flood of light on the conditions of Manipur, Cachar and Assam. It produced a change in the hitherto indifferent attitude of the British Government towards their newly acquired territory and was largely responsible for the vigorous application of "the new policy"* as enunciated by the Court of Directors in 1834 (*vide*, p. 122, Foot note) the effect of which we shall describe in the following chapters.

Mainly on the strength of this report, the Governor-General submitted a fresh minute (27th March, 1833) on the advisability of the restoration of Central Assam to Purandar Singh. In it he expressed doubts concerning the correctness of his own findings (which had already been given effect to). He called the measure as "one of somewhat hazardous policy." He held that "by giving up the specified portion, we surrender the third of the population without being able to diminish in any great degree our establishment and consequent expenditure and we shall be compelled to preserve our advanced position to protect a helpless and probably ephemeral power." For this reason he expressed his willingness to reconsider the affairs of Upper Assam.³⁰ But it was "a fait accompli"; an agreement had been entered into with Purandar Singh and he had already been placed on the throne.

* Purandar Singh was more a Bengalee than an Assamese. He spent his early days in Bengal—P. P. 1838, May, 16, No. 55.

²⁸ P. P. 1835, February 11, No. 91.

²⁹ P. P. 1833, May 30, No. 113.

* The Court of Directors adopted the policy "of abandoning no just and honourable accession of territory or revenue."

³⁰ P. P. 1833, May 30, No. 88.

This minute was an after-thought and the outcome of the report of Pemberton which revealed that Upper Assam was worth having. This sudden and unexpected minute was not only a revision but also a condemnation of his previous decision and gave the Court of Directors at home an opportunity of censuring the Bengal Government. Even as late as the 25th March, the Governor-General while reviewing Pemberton's report wrote: "Mr. Robertson's report on the result of his communication with Poorunder Singh (on the matter of restorations) had been received, but I have not had leisure to consider it."³¹ This was a clear act of indecision. The Supreme Government had taken long seven years to come to a final decision with regard to Central Assam, and once the decision had been taken, it was unwise on his part to review the matter once again. The minute of the Governor-General, however, affected the transaction. To make the best of a bad bargain and to reduce further the status of Purandar Singh,* the Bengal Government insisted that it would be preferable to take from him *Ekārnāmā* (an agreement) and to confer on him the government of the Jorhāt Division of the Brahmaputra valley by a *Sanad*.

Accordingly on the 27th June, the treaty was recast in the form of an agreement and Purandar Singh was called upon to append his signature to it.³²

Thus "Sree Sree Maharaja Poorunder Singh Narindra" was practically reduced to the status of a *Jāgīrdār*. Gait says, "By a treaty entered into with him at the time of his installation, he was placed on the same footing as the other protected Princes."³³ Actually, however, the treaty was withdrawn and an agreement thrust on him which reduced his position to one far inferior to that of the protected princes of Northern India.

When the despatches embodying the earlier proposals of the Calcutta authorities regarding Upper Assam reached London, the Court of Directors agreed with Mr. Robertson regarding the retention of the above territory and observed, "Mere consideration of the expenses of the European agency ought by no means to be regarded as justifying us in delivering over a country to a native state placed in that anomalous relation to our Government." Regarding the power of interference and deposition which the Supreme Government wished to reserve to themselves in the

³¹ P. P. 1833, May 30, No. 109.

³² P. P. 1833, August 22, Nos. 70-71.

³³ Gait History of Assam P. 297, 2nd Ed.

event of maladministration, the Court of Directors observed that this would lead them to interfere on numerous occasions and apprehended that they would at length be compelled to undo their work and put an end to the Government which they had called into being. They feared that during this intervening period the people of Upper Assam would be made the victim of an unnecessary experiment. Under the circumstances, the decision of the Supreme Government that the matter would be deferred "until Mr. Robertson shall have had time to make himself more thoroughly acquainted with the state and circumstances of the country" gave them not a little relief.³⁴

But when the news of the final establishment of the native Government reached the Court of Directors along with post-restoration minute of the Governor-General in which he expressed doubts regarding the establishment of such a monarchy (which he had formerly advocated) until he had had time to examine the question *de novo*, they strongly censured the conduct of the Supreme Government describing their act as "an ill-advised measure."

The Directors were angry because in the first place the Bengal Government had made over the administration of an extensive district with a population of 2 lacs and resources adequate enough to support many times that number, without a previous reference to them when the matter was of no such urgency. They were all the more angry because the authors of the transaction themselves entertained strong doubts as to the expediency of the measure they had initiated. The Court of Directors thought of issuing an order for annulling this measure, but on second thoughts they shrank from doing so since this would have weakened the authority of the Bengal Government. But at the same time to prevent the recurrence of such a mistake they issued an express injunction that "henceforth no portion of the public revenue and still less the government of any portion of our territory be permanently alienated without a previous reference to us for our authority and sanction."

But though the Home authorities condemned the action of the men on the spot, they were liberal enough to let the matter stand and to give their blessings to the political child of the Bengal Government, expressing the hope that "it may be attended with better consequences." They were pleased to learn that the engagement had been executed in the form of an agreement and not in the form of a treaty as originally determined upon.³⁵

³⁴ Letter from Court No. 14 of 1834.

³⁵ Letter from Court No. 14 of 1834.

In our opinion though the spirit of indecision which characterised the Bengal Government's handling of the restoration question deserved censure from the Home authorities, it must be said in all fairness to them that they committed no great political blunder in handing over the tract in question to Purandar Singh. The Home authorities took rather an alarmist view of the transaction and that quite unnecessarily. They neglected the political issue involved in the transaction and moaned over the cession of a country which was still a millstone round the neck of the Bengal Government. The Bengal Government was simply creating a phantom in Purandar Singh whose *jāgīr* was resumable at pleasure by the British Government. So, the Calcutta authorities "were neither surrendering the valuable rights nor creating a formidable power antagonistic to their interests in the Eastern Frontier" as alleged by the Court of Directors.

But it must also be said that the Calcutta authorities took unnecessarily long time to come to a final decision with regard to Central Assam. They had raised hopes in the minds of the people of Assam when they had declared on the eve of the Anglo-Burmese war that they would retain no part of the Brahmaputra Valley and that "they would establish in Assam a Government adapted to their wants and calculation." But they went back on their words and turned down the recommendation of Mr. Scott and the result was a series of risings headed by the ex-nobility of the land. During the interim of seven years (1826-33) the people of Upper Assam neither got the blessings of the enlightened British administration nor could they enjoy concessions* as under the old Āhom Rule. Their condition rather deteriorated from all points of view. Had the recommendation of Mr. Scott been accepted at the very beginning the people would have been spared the miseries of the unsettled condition.

Coming to the restoration itself—it must be said that the hopes of Mr. Scott were fully justified. With the establishment of an Assamese prince on the throne in 1833 the period of intrigue and revolt came to an end. There were sporadic and local revolts and insurrections throughout the century (1833-1900) but an insurrection headed by the ex-nobility of Assam as an organised attempt to drive the English out of the country became a thing of the past. But scarcely had the restoration been given effect to, when "the policy of annexation" was set in motion by the British Government

* (Vide P. 2 foot note).

and the whole of India felt the impact of it.* Nearly all the principalities of the Brahmaputra valley and the hilly regions of Cachar and Jaintia were annexed to the Company's dominions in Assam one by one in the course of two decades. And to this tale we shall turn in the next chapter. Already the small tract of Cachar had been annexed to British territory.

* Lord William Bentinck was tied to the policy of 'Let alone' by the authorities in England when he came to India (1828). But he departed from it drastically in some cases, and his masters (the Court of Directors) formulated the policy of annexation in 1834. This expansionist policy was more clearly emphasised by them in 1841 and was applied vigorously in the time of Lord Dalhousie.

CHAPTER V

THE PERIOD OF ANNEXATION

SECTION I

ANNEXATION OF PLAINS OF CACHAR

The history of Cachar under Govinda Chandra is a sickening tale. Govinda Chandra, the Raja of Cachar, was not only the weakest of all the kings of the North East region, he was also the most hapless. After the conclusion of the treaty of Yandabo, all the potentates, with whom the British Government had entered into diplomatic relations on the eve of the Anglo-Burmese War, were reinstated in their respective Governments ungrudgingly and all their past misdeeds forgiven or ignored, but in the case of Govinda Chandra the Supreme Government maintained some mental reservation. Govinda Chandra was restored to the throne, but at the time of the restoration, the Protecting Power doubted whether "the imbecile Govinda Chandra" would be able to pay the annual tribute regularly and instructed the Commissioner of Sylhet to ascertain whether the Raja was still willing to cede the Cachar Raj to the Company.¹

So Govinda Chandra began the second term of his reign with the Protecting Power unfavourably disposed towards him and "soon found himself involved in a sea of difficulties" many of which were legacies of the past. This unfavourable attitude of the British Government towards this small state coloured all their subsequent dealings with Govinda Chandra and together with other factors was responsible for the ultimate annexation of Cachar to the British Dominion. Let us see how far the statement of Gait that "the Raja was no sooner restored to the throne than he commenced a series of unsparing exactions on his own people" is true.*

¹ S. P. 1826, June 23, No. 18.

* "The Raja, however, was no sooner restored to the throne than he commenced a series of unsparing exactions on his own people. He almost killed the trade between Manipur and Sylhet by imposing the heaviest transit dues on all articles of merchandise. He behaved most tyrannically towards the Manipuris who had settled in his territory. His tribute also fell into arrears. It would have been impossible to allow this state of things to go on indefinitely" Gait—"History of Assam" Page 304, 2nd Edition.

Financial
difficulty

As before, troubles internal as well as external were in store for the unhappy Raja. Financial troubles first stared him in the face. Though the Commissioner of Sylhet reported that cultivation was making rapid progress and that the Raja would experience no difficulty in paying the tribute regularly, progress was not so rapid as expected.² The tribute fell into arrears as the Calcutta authorities apprehended, but this was not the fault of Govinda Chandra. Cachar had been one of the theatres of operation during the late war and the prolonged stay of the Burmese soldiers in that quarter had reduced the country side to such a state of wretchedness and poverty that even Mr. Tucker, Commissioner of Sylhet, had to confess that "it would require years of peace and good management to place it in a condition capable of liquidating the tribute payable by the Raja."³ During the reign of Raja Krishna Chandra, Cachar had yielded a revenue of one lac of rupees. After his death the amount fell off and the condition of the country began to deteriorate owing to prolonged incursions made by the rebel Tulārām and the Manipurian princes. The Burmese invasion completed the ruin of the country. All the lands east of Bikrampur and Panchgām were thrown out of cultivation and a large number of cultivators were either killed or carried into captivity. After the conclusion of the peace, a few *parganās* were reoccupied, but still most of the villages were nearly empty and no revenues were forthcoming from them.⁴ So Raja Govinda Chandra applied to the British Government for remission of tribute for the years 1825-1826 and 1826-1827.⁵

Nov., 1827

Mr. Scott supported the petition of Govinda Chandra and recommended that as the Paramount Power had failed to afford adequate protection to the people of Cachar, the necessary remission should be granted.⁶ The defaulting Raja was granted his request; but in return for the concession which the Supreme Government termed a "boon", he was required to construct a good road across his country facilitating easy communications between Sylhet and Manipur. At the same time, the Supreme Government again called upon the Commissioner of Sylhet to ascertain from the Raja if he was willing to hand over his kingdom to the East India Company as "he was advanced in years, bodily infirm and had no heir to succeed him".⁷

² S. P. 1826, September 15, No. 57.

³ S. C. 1827, November 23, No. 43.

⁴ S. C. 1829, August 14, No. 6.

⁵ S. C. 1827, November 3, No. 42.

⁶ S. C. 1827, November 23, No. 43.

⁷ S. C. 1827, November 23, No. 44.

Hardly had Govinda Chandra extricated himself from the financial tangle, when he was faced with external troubles of a very serious nature. In the north he was again menaced by the rebellious Tulārām, his old enemy; in the south-west the Kukis were repeating their occasional marauding practices with impunity, and, worst of all, in the south-east the aspiring and unscrupulous Prince Gambhīr Singh of Manipur began to encroach upon his ancestral possessions.

External
dangers

This time the shrewd Tulārām, his old enemy, adopted a new weapon—a moral one—to weaken the authority of Govinda Chandra and armed with a legal injunction issued against him by the forty Sempongs⁸ of the Cachari tribe, questioned the authority of Govinda Chandra as the lawful Raja of Cachar. Tulārām was not an ignoble enemy to be easily brushed aside as some historians suggest. The entire Cachari tribe dwelling in the hills backed up the pretensions and claim of this rebel chief. It is stated that in consequence of the violation by Raja Govinda Chandra of long established custom and usages by which the ministers of State as well as Raja of Cachar should be chosen from amongst the forty Sempongs, the Cacharis separated themselves from his authority and transferred their allegiance to Tulārām. The forty Sempongs, perhaps under the influence of Tulārām, submitted a memorial to the East India Company alleging that as Govinda Chandra had violated the ancient usage of the country and had ruled tyrannically he had forfeited their confidence.⁹ Though later on it was proved that the Sempongs had no right to elect the king,¹⁰ for the time being this declaration accentuated the difficulties of Govinda Chandra to the great advantage of Tulārām who now became his rival and made preparations to seize his kingdom.

Troubles
from
Tulārām

Nov., 1828

Towards the end of 1828 Tulārām made a swift descent to Dharampur and, after committing numerous outrages and murders, retired to his mountain retreat unmolested.¹¹ At this period owing

⁸ Forty Sempongs are not so many noble families but include the whole body of the Cachar People who are divided into forty tribes (Fisher's account—P. C. 1832, May 14, No. 100).

⁹ S. C. 1829, May 30, No. 3.

¹⁰ Fisher reported that "the Sempongs had no right to elect the king. The only instance adduced was supposed to have taken place about 150 years ago when Raja Kirti Chunder was elected to the vacant throne by the forty Sempongs (Kachari people at large)".

¹¹ Tularam also entered the territory of Jaintia with a number of followers and committed violence there. The Raja of Jaintia requested Mr. Scott to expel him from his territory.

to old age he relinquished the command of his army in favour of his cousins Govinda Rām and Durgā Charan who in **March, 1829** again swooped down upon Dharampur and prevented the officers of Govinda Chandra from collecting rents from the people. Govinda Rām and his party were repulsed by the men of Govinda Chandra but again Govinda Rām came on most unexpectedly, fell on the people of Govinda Chandra and carried off many as prisoners. Thus people living in the central part of Cachar were constantly harassed by this internecine warfare. The collection of the revenue was stopped and a large number of inhabitants fled in confusion and arrived on the northern bank of the river Kapilā. Govinda Chandra in despair asked for aid from his Suzerain.¹²

Things would have been calamitous for Govinda Chandra had Govindarām continued to attack him. But just at this stage the latter turned his arms against his brother Tulārām who fled post haste to Jaintiā. A few months later, with the aid of a Manipurian detachment sent by Raja Gambhīr Singh, Tulārām recovered his lost possessions and sent Govindarām fleeing towards Dharampur for protection where he was warmly received by Raja Govinda Chandra.¹³

Things were at such a pass when Mr. Scott, to avoid further bloodshed and dispute, appeared on the scene in the role of a mediator and adjusted the differences between Govinda Chandra and Tulārām. Mr. Scott proposed to Govinda Chandra that he should appoint Tulārām as his Senāpati and give him formal charge of the hill districts he already held. He warned Govinda Chandra that in case of non-compliance he would forfeit all claims to the future interference of the protecting power on his behalf against Tulārām. To Tulārām he also made similar proposals and told him that he would be formally confirmed in his possession by the Raja of Cachar, but that he should make no further encroachment and should behave peaceably. Mr. Scott warned him that any infringement of these conditions would be punished by his expulsion from the hill portions he held. Raja Govinda Chandra at first turned down the proposal of Mr. Scott. He was not in a mood to recognise his late table servant as the chieftain of the hilly tracts of Cachar which once belonged to him. But subsequently he became more reasonable and accepted in the main the proposals of Mr. Scott.¹⁴

¹² S. C. 1829, May 30, No. 5.

Foreign Department 1829, January 9, No. 22.

¹³ P. C. 1824, July 31, No. 22B.

¹⁴ S. C. 1829, August 14, No. 5.

Accordingly an agreement was drawn up and signed by him on the 13th Sraban, 1236 B.E. By this Govinda Chandra agreed with Mr. Scott's approbation "not to send any force to fight within the limit in which Tulārām with his hill people resided."¹⁵

July, 28,
1829

Though Govinda Chandra was a man of weak character and of a pacific disposition, he was treacherous. At the time he signed the agreement with Tulārām promising "not to send any force to fight with him" in accordance with the advice of Mr. Scott whom he dared not disoblige or openly disobey, he made a 'secret alliance with Govindarām and Durgācharan, the cousins and enemies of Tulārām who were then stationed at Dharampur. He promised to forgive all the past mischiefs they had committed in conjunction with Tulārām and in return he called upon them to dispossess the traitor Tulārām who had given him so much trouble. The brothers readily agreed ; a secret agreement was drawn up in November, 1829, and Govinda Chandra supplied them with twenty one muskets and a quantity of ball and powder. To defray the expenses of these expeditions Govinda Chandra furthermore empowered Govindarām to collect and draw on the customs of Dharampur.

Though Govinda Chandra did not live long enough to see the chastisement of his mortal enemy at the hands of his cousins, Govindarām was not unmindful of the duties entrusted to him. After the death of Govinda Chandra, when Tulārām descended into the plain to present his claim to the *gadi* of Cachar, he entered his territory, plundered and took possession of it, and Mr. Fisher, who was then in charge of the Cachar affairs, had to intervene.¹⁶ Govindarām aided by the widowed Rāṇīs of Govinda Chandra continued to give Tulārām troubles to which we shall refer at length in a subsequent chapter.

After the accession of Raja Govinda Chandra when Cachar had become the hunting ground of the Manipurian princes and Govinda Chandra himself had fled to British protection, the Kukis, a savage tribe hailing from the south, took advantage of the chaotic condition of the country and ravaged the southern side of the plains. They continued their marauding practices and sudden midnight attacks even after the restitution of Cachar to Govinda Chandra. As Govinda Chandra had no sufficient police force to chastise these

Troubles
from
the Kukis

¹⁵ S. C. 1820, August 14, No. 7.

* The Semsiyagram in the east, the Kapila river in the west, the Bhatabagram in the north and the north bank of the Jatinga river in the south formed the boundary of this limit.

¹⁶ P. C. 1832, May 14, No. 104.

wandering plunderers, he invoked the relevant article of the treaty and asked the aid of the British detachment stationed at his capital.

Contrary to the expectation of the Raja, Mr. Scott informed him that the British forces were there for the military defence of his country against the possible attacks of neighbouring states, namely, those with known territory and fixed capital, and that they were not to be utilized to protect his individual subjects from the midnight attacks of the Kukī assassins and other vagrant barbarians. He advised Govinda Chandra to organize his own police establishments for the prevention of such crimes and informed him that now that Cachar was secure from foreign invasions, the British would gradually withdraw the detachment stationed there. The Supreme Government in its turn approved of this interpretation of the treaty and was of opinion that "we are bound to defend Cachar from foreign aggressions and not from plunderers and marauders."¹⁷ The result was that the Kukī menace was not suppressed and practically no protection was given to the dwellers of southern Cachar which gradually relapsed into jungle.

Troubles
from
Gambhīr
Singh

The most formidable of his external enemies was Gambhīr Singh who created a new series of troubles for Govinda Chandra after the cessation of the Burmese war. He was casting covetous eyes towards the western bank of the Barāk river which formed the natural boundary between Manipur and Cachar. During the war against the Burmese, many of the Nāgās and other hill tribes who occupied the western bank of the Barāk river and paid nominal allegiance to the Raja of Cachar, rendered great service to the British and to Gambhīr Singh as informers and volunteers. Even after the cessation of hostilities, they continued to convey military goods to the Raja of Manipur and came into direct touch with him. Taking advantage of the weakness of the Cachar Raj which only exercised nominal sovereignty over these hill tribes, the over-ambitious Gambhīr Singh began to exercise authority over these simple people and began to receive small presents from them.

Towards the end of 1827, he marched a force from Manipur and occupied the western bank of the river. Further encroachments were made and the year 1828 saw him claiming sovereignty over all the Nāgās northward as far as the village Mugwye. The lawful ruler Govinda Chandra was at last stirred to activity. He laid a complaint against the usurpation by Gambhīr Singh to Mr. Tucker, the political agent stationed at Sylhet, and the latter called for an

account from the Raja of Manipur. Gambhīr Singh denied that the river Barāk was the western boundary of his kingdom and maintained that the villages conquered by him were inhabited by independent Nāgās. This was a complete travesty of the real facts. Captain Grant, who was stationed at Manipur during this period, reported that the river Barāk was the ancient boundary between these two states.¹⁸ But save for calling for an account, no steps were taken to rectify this act of brigandage. Gambhīr Singh indeed was the pampered child of the East India Company and we shall see the protecting power condoning many oppressive acts of this ambitious man whom the company erroneously regarded as a most dependable and powerful ally against possible Burmese invasion. The Burmese bogey haunted the British mind for many years and we shall find all their dealings with Manipur coloured by this fear.

This passive acquiescence on the part of the Protecting Power only whetted the land-hunger of Gambhīr Singh and he forcibly seized the *ilākā* of Chandrapur belonging to Govinda Chandra and settled Manipurians there. The helpless Govinda Chandra begged the Commissioner of Sylhet to remove these men from his territories. The Commissioner on intervening was informed by Gambhīr Singh that the territory in question had been bequeathed to his father by the late Raja Krishna Chandra. Needless to say this was a pure invention and he was accordingly asked to produce *sanads* in support of his claims within one month. After the expiry of the aforesaid period when no answer came from Gambhīr Singh, Govinda Chandra again approached the Commissioner. Finding the matter complicated the Commissioner referred it to the Supreme Government at Calcutta.¹⁹

1828

Mr. Scott was asked to report upon the merits of the case. He gave his verdict in favour of Govinda Chandra and held that "Even should it be true, that the *ilākā* was granted to his father the conduct of Gambhīr Singh and his family in Cachar having obviously been such as to afford to Raja Govinda Chandra fair ground for resuming any grant that might have been made in favour of Gambhīr Singh." Mr. Scott, however, pleaded for the assignment of a small tract of land in Cachar to Gambhīr Singh for the purpose of settling a few Manipurians there for the transport of military stores between Cachar and Manipur.²⁰ The Governor-General-in-Council disallowed the claim of Gambhīr Singh to the *ilākā* of

1829

¹⁸ P. P. 1832, July 23, No. 65.

¹⁹ S. C. 1828, November 14, No. 8.

²⁰ S. C. 1829, May 30, No. 1.

Chandrapur,²¹ but at the same time, on the recommendation of Mr. Scott, authorized him to negotiate an arrangement with Govinda Chandra with a view to securing for Gambhīr Singh a tract of land in Cachar. Accordingly Mr. Scott prevailed upon the unwilling Govinda Chandra to assign to him a definite tract of land at Chandrapur on lease for fifteen years for the erection of a magazine. An agreement to that effect was entered into between the parties concerned on the 15th of July, 1829.²²

One might have expected that Gambhīr Singh would have refrained from further acts of hostility against Govinda Chandra, now that his legitimate aspirations had been satisfied. But scruples were not in the blood of Gambhīr Singh and his Suzerain did nothing to checkmate the spirit of aggrandisement of this unscrupulous and ambitious chief. Strangely enough, about the time Chandrapur was leased out to him by the British, he obtained by dubious means another piece of land in the eastern part of Cachar. Perhaps he secured it through the kind intervention of Captain Grant and Mr. Scott, and colonised it with the Manipurian Nāgās. The local officers of the Company approved of this questionable penetration of Gambhīr Singh because it satisfied their expansionist scheme by completing the line of communications between Cachar and Manipur. But Mr. Pemberton, later, condemned the action of his colleagues. He doubted how far it accorded with the protection the British Government were bound by the treaty to afford to Govinda Chandra to sanction the establishment of a village within his territory by a prince who was particularly obnoxious to him.²³

With this footing in the plains of Cachar thus secured by the local Agent of the Protecting Power which Fisher termed "impolitic," Gambhīr Singh now not only tried to extend his sway over the remaining portion of eastern Cachar which the English were later obliged to cede to him in perpetuity but also planned to weaken the already waning authority of Govinda Chandra in various ways and allowed Chandrapur to become a hotbed of intrigues against him. He set aside the original limit of his settlement near Chandrapur as assigned to him by Mr. Scott and encroached on the adjoining lands. He now commenced a series of unsparing exactions on the people of Cachar. He countenanced the Manipurians in their habitual evasion of the payment of transit duties at the established

²¹ S. P. 1830, February 26, No. 3.

²² S. C. 1829, July 31, No. 22.

²³ P. P. 1833, July 23, No. 66.

ghāts on the Barāk in Cachar, prevented the merchants of Cachar and Sylhet from bringing down their goods for sale into Manipur as had previously been the custom and compelled them to dispose of their merchandise to Manipurian merchants at Chandrapur at cheaper rates. He also established his own *thanas* in the territories of Govinda Chandra and his *thānādārs* levied tolls from the Cacharis and, what was worse, he began to commit acts of violence upon the Cacharis of the plains.

It is reported that some of these oppressive measures Gambhir Singh adopted by way of retaliation because the extortions practised against the Manipurian merchants by the lessees of the *ghāts* in Cachar were, nothing but "unblushing plunders on the part of the officers of Govinda Chunder". But Gambhir Singh's conduct became so injurious to the interests of the reigning monarch of Cachar that even the patience of Mr. Scott was exhausted. After an enquiry, lasting for months, he, with the approval of the Governor-General, sent a strong letter of remonstrance to Gambhir Singh warning him against these acts of violence and brigandage and threatening him with expulsion from Cachar if they continued.²⁴

We have seen how Govinda Chandra was assailed from all quarters by his enemies. He was given no breathing-space. Besides these external troubles there were other difficulties of a very different nature in store for him which also jeopardised his position. According to Tucker there were serious abuses prevalent in his territory, which called for the intervention of the Paramount Power. There were also incessant demands for the transfer of his kingdom to the custody of the East India Company. These "vexatious intrusions" caused him great uneasiness of mind. He was unhappy in other respects also. He had no issue and there were many claimants and aspirants to his throne and he lived in constant fear of being murdered by his enemies.

The system of administration in Cachar during the time of Govinda Chandra appeared to be tyrannical to Mr. Tucker (Commissioner of Sylhet). He reported that though the soil of the country was rich, the people were proverbially poor because "the man who put the seed in the ground, had no security that he would reap the profits of his labour". It was also alleged by Tucker that Raja Govinda Chandra had prohibited the exportation of rice. The merchants of Sylhet annually imported a large quantity of grain

Internal
difficulties

²⁴ S. P. 1830, February 26, Nos. 2-4.
P. P. 1833, July 23, No. 66.

from Cachar. Tucker reported that the annual flow had been stopped to the great financial loss of the cultivators of Cachar where paddy was being sold at a fabulously cheap rate*. Tucker also complained that the general trade of the country during his reign was subjected to certain restrictions. He reported that as a result of that embargo a brisk trade, that might have been kept up between Manipur and Sylhet in ivory, silk and cotton, was practically paralysed, and that Govinda Chandra compelled incoming traders to dispose of their goods at a cheaper rate. Cachar contained an almost inexhaustible supply of valuable timber. But merchants hailing from the Company's dominions were practically prohibited from buying timber because the price of that commodity had doubled owing to the imposition of heavy taxes by Govinda Chandra.²⁵

These trade restrictions were regarded by the Supreme Government as acts of an unfriendly nature towards the paramount power and Mr. Scott was specially deputed to report on the internal condition of Cachar.²⁶ We shall see presently that many of these allegations were of a trifling nature and the so-called trade restrictions were nothing but protective measures dictated by the policy of the State. Mr. Scott reported that the Raja had monopolised the rice trade at the express desire of his own subjects from apprehension of scarcity. As regards the enhanced duties on timber which formed the subject of a special complaint against Govinda Chandra, Mr. Scott admitted that these were points on which he could not with any propriety interfere. These were indeed chief sources from which the revenue of Cachar was derived and Mr. Scott openly observed, "I cannot preceive that we have any right to diminish those profits." Mr. Scott however found the Raja guilty of tyranny and cruelty and as a precautionary measure recommended the withdrawal of British troops to Badarpur. This he hoped, would render the Raja more lenient, because "the presence of the military force secured him against popular commotion." But regarding the nature of the tyranny practised by the Raja, Mr. Scott reported that it "fell more upon individuals who have by some real or alleged misdeeds furnished him with a pretext for

* Paddy was selling in Cachar for 16, 17 and 18 maunds for the rupee in 1828 whilst in our own district (Sylhet) the same description of grain sold at the rate of 3 maunds for the rupee wholesale and 2½. in the Bazars"—From Mr. Tucker's account (S. C. 1829, May 30, No. 2).

²⁵ S. C. 1829, May 30, No. 2.

²⁶ S. C. 1829, May 30, No. 6.

plundering them than upon the community at large who are probably after all better off than the men of the Sylhet district as they cultivate superior soil at a lower rate."²⁷ As for the charges of defalcation levelled against Govinda Chandra by Gait we find that, except for the Bengali years 1232 & 1233 (1826 & 1827 A.D.) the revenues of subsequent years were punctually paid and this was even admitted by Mr. Tucker.²⁸

So we find that the Protecting Power had no real and serious grievances against the Cachar Raj and that the tyranny practised by the Raja was not so abominable as Gait asserted. Even the Governor-General had to admit, "The second article of the treaty does not give us the right to insist on the abolition of the rice monopoly in Cachar as being decidedly injurious to the interest of his own subjects and subversive to the improvement of the country" and, he went on, "In the internal affairs of the country we have no right to interfere so long as his measure does not injure our subjects."²⁹ The fact is—the Raja was more weak than wicked and his administration was inefficient.

Let us now turn to the other difficulties with which he had to contend.

No sooner had Govinda Chandra been placed on the throne for the second time than the Paramount Power began to bother itself about the probable arrangement to be made for the disposal of Cachar after his death. He appeared "to be advanced in years and bodily infirm,"³⁰ though according to the report of Mr. Tucker, their local representative, "Govinda Chunder was not old in years and expected still to live a long life."³¹ What then are the reasons for this haste on the part of the Paramount Power?

The soil of Cachar was extremely rich; it contained an inexhaustible supply of valuable timber. According to Jenkins no part of the British Empire was more capable of producing a greater variety of products than the province of Cachar.³² The Supreme Government calculated too that Cachar under a better rule would become the granary of the surrounding regions and that if fully cultivated, it would yield an annual revenue of three lacs of rupees as against its present income of 20 to 25 thousand rupees. "The

²⁷ S. C. 1829, August 14, No. 5.

²⁸ S. C. 1829, May 30, No. 2.

²⁹ P. C. 1832, May 14, No. 86.

³⁰ S. C. 1828, November 14, No. 10.

³¹ S. C. 1829, May 30, No. 2.

³² P. P. 1831, February 11, No. 86.

welfare of Cachar" the Calcutta authorities openly admitted "has become with reference to the events of the late war with Ava an object of more importance to us than previously to that period" and they hoped that the future granary of the north-east frontier would not only afford adequate supplies to Manipur whose warlike people would form the best barrier against future Burmese encroachments, but would also conduce to the security and tranquillity of the north-eastern frontier.³³ It was therefore the Burmese menace that regulated British policy towards Cachar and it was the welfare of Manipur and not the welfare of Cachar that induced the East India Company to introduce a better rule into Cachar. We have already seen that the importance of Manipur had been grossly exaggerated. Its inherent weakness was correctly diagnosed by Bentinck.*

As early as November, 1827, the Commissioner of Sylhet was called upon to report on the condition of Cachar and on the probable arrangement to be made for its disposal in the event of the death of the Raja of Cachar which was supposed to be imminent. We do not know the source of this information and we cannot say whether it was wishful thinking on the part of the Paramount Power. No report came from Mr. Tucker and we find the Calcutta authorities repeating the same instructions to their agent on the north-east frontier in the following November. In the meantime, Mr. Tucker had an interview with the Raja of Cachar and sounded him on the subject of the transfer of Cachar to the British Government after his death. He even held out the tempting bait that in the event of such an arrangement, the Paramount Power would most likely relinquish the annual tribute during the remainder of his life.

Govinda Chandra was no fool and played his cards well. He was averse even to admitting the discussion of such a topic and quite naturally regarded the payment of the annual tribute as "the sheet anchor for the retention of his power" because it was only as an acknowledged tributary of the British Government that he could

³³ S. C. 1829, May 30, No. 6.

* "The advantages however to us of a connection with Manipore appear to be very problematical. The result of our late enquiries have clearly shown that after an uninterrupted tranquillity of seven years, this small state is still considered as totally incompetent to defend itself against a Burmese invasion. We could hardly place any reliance upon their undisciplined efforts".

(Extracts from a minute of Lord William Bentinck dated the 25th March, 1833).

derive respect and deference from his subjects and the neighbouring princes. He openly confessed to Mr. Tucker that if the British Government were under any circumstances to exonerate him from the payment of the tribute, he would lose his Raj in the course of six months. As regards his objection to enter into any arrangement of the kind proposed by Mr. Tucker, he very wisely pointed out that as long as the succession remained unsettled and in a manner left open to all claimants, the aspirants would be kept quiet.

After showing the weakness of the proposal of the representative of the British Government, Govinda Chandra put forward a sort of counter proposal and informed the Commissioner that he had entertained the idea of strengthening his position and continuing his line by adopting a suitable child from amongst the families of the reigning Rajas of the neighbouring states. Mr. Tucker perhaps was not prepared for this proposal and advised him that in a matter of such importance he should first consult the Paramount Power, because in the event of any future dispute it would be the duty of the British to preserve the country from external aggression. Mr. Tucker duly conveyed the report of his interview to the Calcutta authorities.*³⁴

The Tucker-Govinda negotiation was a failure. In May of the same year the Calcutta authorities wrote to their Agent to give the matter due consideration and to submit his views without delay. This time they changed their *modus operandi*. In the course of their instruction to the Agent, the Governor-General-in-Council advised him not to agitate the adoption question further. He was instructed to induce the Raja to consent to an arrangement which would put the Company in possession of it after his demise.³⁵ This diplomatic move had the desired result.

1829

Accordingly Mr. Scott arranged an interview with the Raja. The instruction regarding the adoption was hardly necessary because as a result of a further warning administered by Mr. Tucker, the Raja had desisted from taking further steps towards implementing his decision. The interview covered a series of topics and as a result Mr. Scott was in a position to inform the Calcutta authorities that there would not be much difficulty in obtaining from the Raja the

July, 1829

* On this occasion it is reported by Mr. Tucker that Raja Govinda Chunder presented the former with two small elephants for the Company and in return Mr. Tucker also presented the Rajah with a mahogany table.

³⁴ S. C. 1829, May 30, No. 2.

³⁵ S. C. 1829, May 30, No. 6.

cession of Cachar in consideration of an adequate money payment and assignment to him of a pension and *Jāgir* where he might reside in safety. He fixed the valuation of the state of Cachar at twenty times the amount of the existing revenues. On the adoption question Mr. Scott did not see eye to eye with his masters at Calcutta and he wondered how the Raja could with any propriety be advised to drop it because it was a religious duty and then rather humorously observed, "The connection between the Rajah and the British Government was not such as would give the latter any title to succeed him in the event of his dying without direct heir".³⁶ The Supreme Government was determined on the purchase of Cachar and the correspondence continued between Mr. Scott and the Calcutta authorities regarding the valuation question.

The dispute that had been going on between Govinda Chandra and Gambhīr Singh had reached its climax at this time and the latter's conduct became so reprehensible that in the month of March 1830 Mr. Scott had to administer a grave warning to Gambhīr Singh and had even threatened him with expulsion from the Chandrapur *ilākā* as noticed earlier. But it was too late. Govinda Chandra's life was fast drawing to a close and he fell a victim to the foul conspiracy of his implacable enemy Gambhīr Singh towards the end of April 1830.³⁷ Thus died the last king of Cachar amidst trouble and affliction that had tormented him throughout his life. He was indeed hapless as Gait has described him.

This foul and ghastly murder which was the outcome of a deliberate plan took place on the night of the 24th April 1830 when a band of Manipuriāns in conspiracy with the Raja's Manipuri bodyguard burst into the palace of the king, hacked him to pieces and set fire to the palace. There was great confusion. The Rāñīs fled across the river with the family deities. On receipt of the news the Magistrate of Sylhet hurriedly repaired to Cachar and took temporary possession of the country. At first, suspicion fell upon Tulārām,³⁸ and Mr. Scott was asked to institute an enquiry into the matter.³⁹ As a result of enquiry lasting for more than a year it was proved beyond all doubt that "the murder had been planned and executed with the knowledge and under the direction of Raja Gambhīr Singh to secure him the benefit of the crime."⁴⁰ Govinda

³⁶ S. C. 1829, August 14, No. 5.

³⁷ P. P. 1830, May 14, No. 38.

³⁸ P. P. 1830, May 14, No. 38.

³⁹ P. P. 1830, May 14, No. 45.

⁴⁰ P. C. 1832, April 9, No. 44.

Chandra's death gave Gambhīr Singh full license to carry on his designs against Cachar and he gradually swallowed the whole of the eastern portion between the Barāk and the Jiri rivers and even his Suzerain later on failed to make him disgorge what he had obtained by unfair means.

Enquiries revealed that towards the early part of 1830 Raja Govinda Chandra, perhaps encouraged by the revised attitude of Paramount Power towards the adoption question as disclosed in the interview Mr. Scott had with him in July of the previous year, took preparatory steps to adopt a child. Gambhīr Singh who had an eye on Cachar and who had been encroaching all these years on the territories of Govinda Chandra feared that the proposed step would foil the ambition of his life and entered into league with Bidyānand, the British Vakil at the court of Govinda Chandra, Rām Govinda, Bidyānand's Muktear, one Balarām Hāvildār an officer of Govinda Chandra, and his (Gambhīr Singh's) own Bhāndārī, Gourshyām, to put an end to the life of Govinda Chandra. As a result of the investigation, Rāmgovinda, Balarām and others were apprehended and sent for regular trial, and were sentenced to death.⁴¹

The Supreme Government reviewed their cases and the sentence of death passed on them was commuted to imprisonment and transportation for life. They were sent down to the Tenasserim coast to serve their terms of imprisonment. Gourshyām was not even apprehended, though there were direct proofs against him, because "that would have been tantamount to the public accusation of his own master Gumbhīr Singh".⁴² It was strange indeed that no verbal remonstrance was administered to Gambhīr Singh, the villain of the piece.* Had the Supreme Government adopted stern measures against their pampered ally as early as February 1830, when the Cachar-Manipur dispute was heading to a crisis, Gambhīr Singh would not have dared to take this extreme and fatal step. Gait is totally silent on this point. In his treatment of the second phase of the reign of Govinda Chandra nowhere does Gambhīr Singh come into the picture, though actually it was he who dominated the whole show.

In the meanwhile, after the assassination of Raja Govinda

April, 1830

⁴¹ P. C. 1830, April 9, No. 44.

⁴² P. C. 1830, April 9, No. 56.

* Mr. Scott tried to arrest Gambhīr Singh when the latter came to Sylhet to attend the festival of Ratha Jatra, but he was directed not to take such a step by the Supreme Government.

(P. P. 1830, June 25, Nos. 45—46).

Chandra, the British Government published a proclamation inviting the claimants to the Cachar Raj to present their cases within six weeks.⁴³ This resulted in a spate of claims to the vacant throne. The throne was claimed by Govinda Chandra's widowed Rāṇīs, by his rebellious subject Tulārām, by forty Sempongs of the Cachar tribe and even by his mortal enemy Gambhīr Singh, all of whom regarded themselves as the legitimate successors to the deceased Raja. Gambhīr Singh had an alternative proposal; he also applied to take the country on lease for a number of years. He would allow no opportunity to slip. The Supreme Government instructed the local officers to make a sifting enquiry into each of these claims and to tender their sentiments on how best Cachar could be disposed of.

Claim of
Gambhīr
Singh

Gambhīr Singh after bemoaning "how he had been passing his days overwhelmed with grief since the country of Hiḍlimbha went out of his possession" prayed that the country be given over to him on lease for a term of twenty years at least, if it be not retained by the British. He offered to pay the sum of Rs. 15,000 as revenue⁴⁴ and promised to provide his niece, the widow of the late Raja Krishna Chandra with ample means of subsistence.* His claim was strongly advocated by Captain Grant, then residing at Manipur, who welcomed the chance of uniting the Manipurians and the Cacharis, the two barbarous tribes, under a Government sufficiently powerful to keep them in order. He pointed out that the farming of Cachar to Gambhīr Singh would enable him, a man "almost destitute of revenue," to build up a stable and efficient Government at Manipur which would be conducive to the safety of the N.E. region. He thought it would neutralise the possibilities of oppression on the part of Gambhīr Singh if Cachar were given to him on lease for a number of years with the prospect of conditional renewal. And he finally proposed that if it were not possible to lease out the whole of Cachar to Gambhīr Singh, at least the eastern portion between the Jiri river and the western bank of the Barāk (which the latter had possessed by usurpation) should be formally given over to him.⁴⁵

⁴³ P. C. 1832, May 14, No. 100.

⁴⁴ P. P. 1830, July 9, No. 44.

S. C. 1832, November 25, No. 63.

* Raja Govinda Chandra married this widow of Raja Krishna Chandra, his elder brother. The Cacharis though Hinduised did not always follow the strict rites and custom of the Hindus.

⁴⁵ S. C. 1831, November 25, No. 60.

The original proposal of Captain Grant was not supported by any of the local officers. W. Crawford, who succeeded Mr. Scott as Agent on the N. E. frontier, advised the Supreme Government to reject the proposal of Captain Grant altogether, as "Gumbhīr Singh was implicated in the murder of Raja Govinda Chunder". He had other weighty objections. The plains of Cachar were mainly, if not exclusively, inhabited by the Bengali race and Mr. Crawford feared that if Cachar was given over to Gambhīr Singh "these people would be delivered over bound hand and foot to the tender mercies of a cruel chieftain" who in his opinion had wished to possess Cachar merely for the purpose of extorting from it the largest possible amount to support his extravagance. He also doubted whether Gambhīr Singh would be able to pay the sum of Rs. 15,000 punctually, the irregular payment of which, he feared, would certainly give rise to unpleasant feelings on both sides and might throw him into the arms of the court of Āvā. So he proposed that it would be better to make him a present of Rs. 15,000 per annum rather than allow him to farm Cachar. He disallowed the claims of the forty Sempongs and also that of the Rāñīs, though the latter had been backed by his predecessor Mr. Scott, and begged the Supreme Government to declare immediately their intention of directly administering the province.⁴⁶

The Supreme Government was already convinced of the guilt of Gambhīr Singh and rightly refused to entertain the original proposal of Captain Grant. Pemberton and Jenkins were again called upon to state their views on the second recommendation of Captain Grant.⁴⁷

Pemberton was against the transfer of the plain of Cachar to Gambhīr Singh and also adduced cogent reasons in support of his view. He stated that a large number of Manipurians who were averse to the system of Government prevalent in their own country and who had already settled in Cachar and had turned many wild parts of Cachar into flourishing villages, would leave the country if it were handed over to Gambhīr Singh. So he recommended that the plain of Cachar should be retained by them, as it was likely to produce in the course of a few years a revenue nearly equal to that of Sylhet and would become a granary capable of supporting any number of troops to be stationed in Cachar in case of the renewals of war with Āvā. With regard to the propriety of granting to the

⁴⁶ P. C. 1832, May 14, No. 98.

⁴⁷ P. C. 1832, May 14, No. 109.

Raja of Manipur a portion of the eastern division of Cachar, as proposed by Captain Grant, he supported Grant and saw no objection to giving it over to Gambhīr Singh. The tribes of the above tract, he observed, "strong in their mountain fastnesses, had never rendered more than a nominal submission to the Rajah of Cachar".⁴⁸ Gambhīr Singh had not remained idle since the death of Govinda Chandra and had gradually extended his sway over the whole of the region referred to above; so Pemberton's proposal purported to accord legal sanction to his unauthorised possession which he (Pemberton) himself had previously questioned.

Captain Jenkins also submitted his proposal. He held diametrically opposite views on the matter and boldly stated that the reasons which had induced the Government to refuse to entertaining Gambhīr Singh's proposition to farm out the whole principality of Cachar should hold equally good against granting him any part of Cachar. He pointed out that the Kālā Nāgās inhabiting that tract of land were highly disaffected towards the Raja of Manipur and that they had been so long restrained from breaking out into open rebellion because they were living on the hope that they would not be finally handed over to Gambhīr Singh. And he warned the Calcutta authorities that they had no right to insist upon the transfer against the express wishes of the people. As regards the evil consequences which the act of refusal would produce, Captain Jenkins assured the Supreme Government that "If the fact of owing everything to the British Government had not secured the faithful attachment of the Raja, it were vain to seek other pledges: his open disaffection or enmity would be alike of little consequences to us. The Burmese will never venture to enter Munipore as his allies until fully prepared for a general war with us."⁴⁹ From this it will be seen that he was the only official of the period who was not haunted by the Burmese bogey and that he did not attach undue importance to Manipur. He finally begged the Supreme authorities for the sake of civilization and humanity to extend their effectual protection to a people that had fallen under their administration by the extinction of the royal line.⁵⁰

Now let us turn our attention to other candidates. On behalf of the widowed queens of Govinda Chandra, Rāñī Indrapravā claimed the throne and wondered why the proclamation inviting

⁴⁸ P. C. 1832, May 14, No. 109.

⁴⁹ P. C. 1832, May 14, No. 110.

⁵⁰ P. C. 1832, May 14, No. 110.

applications for the vacant throne had been issued at all. The Rāṇī submitted, "By our husband's right, the country is ours" and questioned the need for a proclamation. She begged the Company to confirm to them the hereditary property in the same manner as it had confirmed other princes in their possessions under its protection.⁵¹ The claim of the Rāṇī was backed by Mr. Scott alone, though he did not admit her claim to possess it in sovereignty because that was contrary to the customs of the Cacharis, and recommended that Rāṇī Indraprova should be admitted as a *Zamindār* with a life tenure on the Raj subject to certain conditions. He deemed this arrangement to be more congenial to the interests of the inhabitants of Cachar.⁵²

His views were not supported by his successor Mr. Crawford who feared that the agents of the Rāṇī would utilise the uncertainty of her life (she was advanced in years) as an additional stimulus to extortion and peculation at the expense of the poor inhabitants of Cachar. He thought that the proposition of his predecessor, if adhered to, would simply delay the introduction of a better system in Cachar.⁵³ The validity of the marriage of Rāṇī Indraprovā was also questioned by Fisher because she had been the wife of Raja Krishna Chandra, brother of the deceased Raja.⁵⁴ So it was held *prima facie* that the Rāṇīs had no title to the Raj.

The hill chief Tulārām, in his application dated the 20th September 1830, formally laid claim to the vacant Cachar Raj as he claimed descent from the royal family of Cachar. Mr. Fisher reported that Tulārām had not even a shadow of title to the throne and that his claim to be a descendant of King Timiradhwas was utterly denied by the Cacharis of the plains who attributed a humble origin to him. He was reported to be the son of a Manipuri slave girl by a *Khidmutgār* in the service of the Cachar Raj. The claim of Tulārām was summarily rejected.⁵⁵

Though no application in person or otherwise was made by Govinda Rām, the cousin of Tulārām, a few of the Cacharis advocated his right to claim the throne. It was pretended that he was the natural son of the late Raja Krishna Chandra by a slave girl whom he had given in marriage to one Anandrām to save her face a few months before the birth of Govindarām. Captain Fisher put aside the claim of Govindarām even at the initial stage, because no such pretension was talked of by any one during the life time of

⁵¹ P. C. 1832, May 14, No. 100.

⁵² P. C. 1832, May 14, No. 99.

⁵³ P. C. 1832, May 14, No. 98.

⁵⁴ P. C. 1832, May 14, No. 100.

⁵⁵ P. C. 1832, May 14, No. 100.

Govinda Chandra and Govindarām himself had advanced no such claim.⁵⁶

As regards the claim of the Sempongs to elect a new Raja from amongst themselves, Captain Fisher after careful enquiry held that the right to the succession was acknowledged to belong to the sons of the reigning Rajas according to seniority and declared that he had come across no instance of a free and fair election by the Sempongs in the past history of Cachar. Even if it was the custom in ancient times to procure the confirmation to the title of Raja at an assembly of the Mantris and Sempongs, he said that practice had been long discontinued.⁵⁷

July, 1832

As there was no legitimate heir to the late Raja Govinda Chandra, and as all the local British officers, save Mr. Scott, were unanimous in recommending the annexation of the plain of Cachar to the dominion of the Company,⁵⁸ the Governor-General-in-Council accepted their opinion and the annexation was carried out.⁵⁹ It is said that the supreme Government was also influenced in their decision by the wishes of the children of the soil who wanted "to be placed under the rule and protection of the British Government in preference to being made over to Raja Gambhīr Singh".⁶⁰ Their choice of British administration in preference to the rule of Gambhīr Singh was certainly a wise one.

A suitable provision was made for the Rāñīs of the deceased Raja and they were given a sum of approximately Rs. 3,894 per annum out of the revenues of Cachar. Tulārām, the rebel chief, was confirmed in the possession of the hill portions that had been assigned to him by Govinda Chandra through the mediation of Mr. Scott. Raja Gambhīr Singh was required to retire from Chandrapur and as regards his supposed right to hold the portion eastward of the Jiri river, the Governor-General-in-Council did not pass any final opinion and postponed their decision pending the receipt of a further report from Captain Pemberton.⁶¹

Govinda Chandra's dominion was thus disposed of. The conclusion was a foregone one; and even had the Rāñīs wished to adopt a child in furtherance of the wishes of their late husband, the conclusion would not have been otherwise. The proposal of Mr. Scott was a sound and popular one and had it been adopted, it would have been "a more liberal and conciliatory course."

⁵⁶ P. C. 1832, May 14, No. 100.

⁵⁷ P. C. 1832, May 14, No. 100.

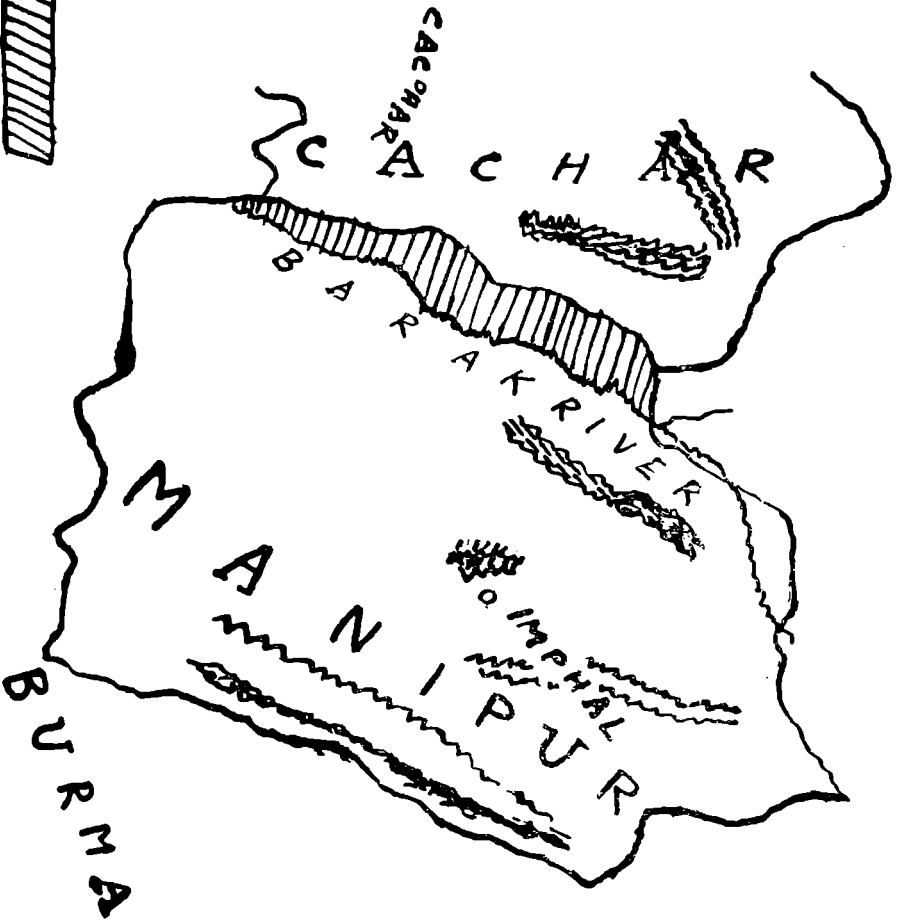
⁵⁸ P. C. 1832, May 14, No. 118.

⁵⁹ P. C. 1832, July 9, No. 15.

⁶⁰ P. C. 1832, July 9, No. 16.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

SPACE USURPED BY GAMBHIR SINGH.



A better and enlightened system of administration was introduced no doubt, resulting in the marked prosperity of the land.

After the formal annexation of the plains of Cachar, the troubled question of the disposal of the portion of the country east of the Jiri River came up for consideration. Robertson, Fisher and Pemberton were called upon by the Calcutta authorities to furnish all possible information. Enquiries made by them revealed that the portion of Cachar proposed to be given to Raja Gambhīr Singh was sixty miles in length and eight miles in breadth and not sterile as reported earlier. The soil was suitable for the growth of various kinds of grain and yielded an abundance of fine timber. It also supplied a considerable quantity of ivory, wax and coarse cloth to the plains of Cachar. The revenue realized amounted to Rs. 1000/- and the tract contained a population of 10,000.

Captain Fisher who had been placed in charge of Cachar made a detailed enquiry as a result of which he was thoroughly convinced that the tract should be retained by the Company. He reported that the proposed arrangement had been deeply resented by the Nāgās inhabiting the tract, many of whom had already fled to the plains of Cachar. The Nāgās also presented a petition strongly protesting against the proposed transfer and prayed that "they might be permitted as before to bring away timber and other articles of trade from the hills without interruptions from the Officer of Gambhīr Singh." Captain Fisher protested against this impending transfer on moral grounds. All classes of people in Cachar deeply suspected Gambhīr Singh's participation in the murder of the late Raja, and Fisher rightly apprehended that the people in general would regard the transfer as nothing but the accomplishment of the object for which the murder had been committed.⁶²

Mr. Robertson entirely agreed with the opinion expressed by Lt. Fisher and told the Calcutta authorities that as the province of Cachar was to be retained as a part of British territory, Gambhīr Singh should not be given a footing in any part of it. In his opinion nothing would be more objectionable than the vicinity of a pretender whose agents, he feared, would keep British subjects in a state of continued alarm. So he proposed that Gambhīr Singh should be required to abandon Chandrapur altogether and to retire behind the Barāk. But at the same time "to turn the mind of the Maniporean Chieftain from the pursuit of a petty and barbarous ambition to those of a more homely and useful policy." Mr. Robertson recommended that occasional presents in the shape of a number of colts

⁶² P. P. 1892. July 23, No. 65.

should be made. These he hoped, might have some effect in reviving the agriculture of the country.⁶³

Captain Pemberton who was specially deputed to interview the Raja of Manipur gave an altogether different verdict. He reiterated his old argument in favour of the disposal of the eastern portion of Cachar to Gambhīr Singh. He feared that the unqualified expulsion of Gambhīr Singh from Chandrapur "would be attended with something very like disgrace" and to counteract the effect of such a disgrace, he advocated the grant of land east of the Jiri river to him. This act of charity appeared to him to be one of mutual convenience. He observed that his removal from the plains of Cachar would on the one hand allay the fears of the people of Cachar and on the other hand the grant of a portion of a territory, "valuable to him in many accounts and worse than useless to us in every point of view," would establish an additional claim to his attachment and gratitude.⁶⁴

July, 1832

After consideration of all these divergent views the Governor-General-in-Council accepted Pemberton's recommendation and confirmed Gambhīr Singh in the possession of the tract eastward of the Jiri river; his removal from that quarter, they said, could not be insisted on "without giving offence and impairing the good feeling which it was advised to cultivate."⁶⁵ So the policy of appeasement at any price triumphed and the British Government under the mistaken fear of the Burmese invasion surrendered a valuable part of Cachar to Gambhīr Singh which he had acquired by unfair means. This injudicious act evoked the censure of the Board of Directors. They concurred with the views expressed by Robertson and Fisher regarding the disposal of the eastern portion of Cachar and strongly condemned the acts of oppression and usurpation committed by the men of Gambhīr Singh on the people of Cachar. They wondered how a tract of country unquestionably belonging to Cachar could be ceded to a prince whose rule "was regarded with aversion and terror by its people"⁶⁶ and their disapproval though justified, was ineffective.*

⁶³ P. P. 1832. July 23. No. 64.

⁶⁴ P. P. 1832. July 23. No. 66.

⁶⁵ P. P. 1832. July 23. No. 71.

⁶⁶ Letters from Court No. 14 of 1834.

* The position and powers of the Board of Directors in relation to (a) Calcutta authorities and (b) the Board of control have been discussed in Section III of this Chapter.

SECTION II

THE ANNEXATION OF JAINTIĀ

We have seen that despite his misdeeds Rām Singh, the Raja of Jaintiā, was pardoned by the Paramount Power and that he was duly confirmed in the possession of Jaintiā after the conclusion of the war. The Paramount Power's attitude towards him was in marked contrast to that shewn towards Govinda Chandra. Not only was Rām Singh's alleged misconduct in the late war condoned by the British Government but special favours were also bestowed on him "in return for the very great attention shown by him and his brother to the party that had accompanied Mr. Scott from Sylhet to Assam in April 1824". Tents and a handsome musical snuff box were presented to the Raja of Jaintiā by the Governor-General; in return Rām Singh also made a presentation of robes and two pairs of elephants to His Excellency as testimonials of his fidelity. He also promised to keep all the old roads in good condition and to lend all possible help to the construction of a road across his kingdom. In acknowledging the presents the Governor-General expressed great pleasure at the conduct of the king.¹

Sept., 1826

Thus Rām Singh began his reign as a vassal in an atmosphere of mutual good will and fidelity and cordial relations existed between these two states up to the year 1831. The British Government took particular care to cultivate friendly relations with Jaintiā during this period and a road of high strategic value connecting Sylhet and Assam via Jaintiā was also constructed at a cost of Rs. 20,000/-.² Raja Rām Singh also sent a contingent to quell the Khāsi disturbances and the offer was thankfully accepted by Mr. Scott.³

But this period of amity came to an end with the death of Mr. Scott. Circumstances soon developed which embittered relations between these two states and swiftly culminated in the extinction of this independent principality.

It was reported to the Magistrate of Sylhet that towards the end of January, 1832 two British subjects Bānu and Mādhav had been seized by a band of men from Jaintiā and dragged off towards

¹ S. C. 1827, November 30, Nos. 4—7.

² P. P. 1829, April 18, Nos. 51—54.

³ P. C. 1834, June 19, No. 97.

their frontier, ostensibly with the purpose of being sacrificed before the goddess Kālī according to an old custom of Jaintiā. Bānu was ultimately saved by some cowboys and Mādhav also somehow managed to escape from the hands of these miscreants. This occasioned a severe remonstrance to the Raja of Jaintia by Mr. Crawford, Scott's successor. Not only did he warn the king to take adequate steps to prevent the recurrence of such mal-practices but he also requested the Calcutta authorities to send a very strong letter to the king. The Calcutta authorities deemed the steps already taken by him, sufficient and declined further action.⁴

As according to Gait* the recurrence of such mal-practices was the main cause which compelled the British Government to annex the dominion of Jaintiā, it is worth while tracing their history from an earlier date (1821) with a view to obtaining a clear understanding of the situation calling for British intervention. Gait has further recorded that the Raja of Jaintiā, as votaries of the *sakti* cult, kept alive the system of human sacrifices. There is no doubt that this inhuman system prevailed in remote parts of the Jaintiā hills as we find Raja Rām Singh "expressing his willingness and determination on several occasions to abolish this abominable system".⁵ But it is doubtful whether this abominable and inhuman system was practised at the instigation of the Rajas of Jaintiā.

In the years 1821 and 1827 some Jaintiā men attempted to kidnap British subjects from Sylhet, and the local British official called upon the Raja of Jaintiā to apprehend and bring to justice the individuals accused of the crime. The Raja agreed to take all possible steps to prevent the recurrence of such crimes. Attempts were repeated in January 1832, as noticed earlier, but still without any success. But a few months later, they seized four British sub-

⁴ P. C. 1832, March 19, Nos. 79—80.

* "In 1832 the Raja of Gobha, in the west of Nowgong, one of the petty chieftains dependent on Jaintia acting under the orders of his Suzerain, seized four British Subjects, three of whom were afterwards immolated at the shrine of the goddess Kali. The fourth escaped and gave information of the occurrence. At this juncture Raja Ram Singh died, and was succeeded by his nephew, Rajendra Singh. For two years the Government endeavoured to induce him to give up the perpetrators of the outrage and reminded him of the consequences of refusal and of the solemn warnings which had been given on previous occasions when similar attempts had been made on the lives of British subjects in the district of Sylhet. The young Rajah, however, was obdurate and at last, failing to obtain satisfaction, it was resolved to dispossess him of his territory in the plains".—Gait "History of Assam". 2nd Ed. P. 306.

⁵ P. C. 1832, March 19, No. 79.

jects and it was reported that they sacrificed three of them before the goddess Kālī and that Sobhā Singh, the Raja of Gobbā was implicated in this foul crime. On receipt of the news Mr. Robertson, Agent to the Governor-General, addressed a letter on the 3rd September, 1832, to Raja Rām Singh who answered in due time, assuring a full enquiry into the matter.⁶ While the matter was under correspondence, Raja Rām Singh died and was succeeded by Rajendra Singh, his grand-nephew,* a lad of 17.⁷

Sept., 27.
1832

While reporting the accession of his grand nephew to the throne, Mr. Robertson drew the attention of the Supreme Government to the terms of the treaty concluded with the late Raja. They struck Mr. Robertson "as the most unfavourable to the British Government" as the Raja had been holding his territory entirely under the protection of the East India Company without paying anything in return. Without the Company's support the Raja, according to him, would have been unable to maintain himself even for twelve months. So he held the death of Raja Rām Singh to be a good opportunity for the revision of this unprofitable treaty and recommended that a sum of Rs. 10,000/- be exacted as an annual tribute from the new Raja. The Vice-President-in-Council upheld the decision of the Agent and treated the engagement with the late Raja as merely a personal one liable to be renewed on "such conditions as they deemed it expedient to impose in return for the benefit of their protection." Accordingly they instructed their Agent to meet the new Raja and sound him as to his wish regarding the renewal of the treaty on the new terms.⁸

Nov., 5.
1832

The meeting took place on the 25th May, 1833. Mr. Robertson after pointing out to the young Raja and his minister how entirely dependent they were on the British Government for protection and how "unfair it was to expect to obtain such invaluable protection for nothing" broached the main subject and proposed that the Raja should renew the treaty with the British Government on condition of paying to the Suzerain an annual tribute of Rs. 10,000/-. The Raja was also given the option of ceding to the British Government a tract of country known by the name of the "Seven Banks" in lieu of payment in cash.

The young Raja and his *Dewan* were not prepared for this. To them the new proposal seemed to be a departure from established

⁶ P. P. 1833, December 12, No. 70.

* Rajendra Singh is grand nephew of Ram Singh and not nephew as Gait writes.

⁷ P. C. 1832, November 5, No. 56.

⁸ P. C. 1832, November 5, Nos. 56-58.

custom and secondly they had no right to assent to it without placing it in the first instance before the *Dolois*—the heads of the tiny republics of which the state of Jaintiā was composed and of which the king of Jaintiā was merely the head. So they asked for fifteen days to reconsider the matter. But Mr. Robertson was for an immediate decision and he informed the Raja that until the treaty was signed, he could only be recognised "as a relation of the late Rajah's in temporary charge of the country" and not as the Raja of Jaintiā. As the new Raja did not consent to an immediate revision for the reasons stated above, the Agent declined to accept any *nazar* from him and what was worse, dismissed him unceremoniously without giving him the right of salute from the guards of honour in attendance.⁹

The young Raja was at this period embarrassed by disaffection among some of his chieftains whose sympathy he had alienated by an impolitic act. Immediately after his accession to the throne, he put, contrary to the usages of his country, two of the most respectable *Dolois* in irons without calling a Durbar.¹⁰ Mr. Robertson knew of this trouble and utilised it to suit his purpose. He foresaw that ere long the young Raja would concede because in the event of any unpleasant development the Raja would be compelled to seek the aid of his sūzerain. Consequently he advised the supreme authority to withhold the recognition until the young Raja had agreed to the proposed terms. But Mr. Robertson underestimated the stamina of this youngman and his advisers. The Governor-General-in-Council approved of the action of their Agent and issued orders that "Rajendra Singh be not recognised as the Rajah until he binds himself to contribute towards the general defence of the frontier."¹¹

June, 13,
1833

Though the Agent had received an evasive reply (8th May 1833) from the new Raja regarding the surrender of persons alleged to be involved in the immolation of the British subjects already alluded to, and though he regarded this offence as one calling for his deposition,¹² he did not broach the matter before the king at this period because the immolation case "had escaped his recollections amidst his various pre-occupations."

The anticipation of Mr. Robertson proved to be false and though six months had passed since the above mentioned meeting.

⁹ P. C. 1833, June 13, No. 83.

¹⁰ P. C. 1834, May 15, No. 76.

¹¹ P. C. 1833, June 13, Nos. 83—84.

Letter to Court No. 3 of 1834.

¹² P. C. 1833, December 12, No. 70.

Sept., 18.
1853

the young king did not show the least sign of agreeing to the proposed terms, nor did he take any steps to arrest the culprits. Mr. Robertson now sent reminder after reminder to Rajendra Singh asking him to apprehend the offenders and ultimately called upon him to surrender Sobhā Singh, Raja of Gobhā, a dependency of Jaintiā, within twenty days from the date of the despatch of the letter. The latter was found to be actively concerned in the seizure of the three missing individuals according to a report furnished by the Chieftain of Nurtung, who was at war at this time with the Raja of Gobhā. Obviously the source of information was not above suspicion.

As no reply was received within the stipulated period, Mr. Robertson hastily came to the conclusion that Sobhā Singh had been sheltered by the Raja of Jaintiā. He therefore requested the Supreme Government to punish Rajendra Singh for the non-delivery of Sobhā Singh. He cited as precedent the warning administered by the Government on the 14th May, 1821, when an attempt had been made to seize British subjects. The Raja had been warned that the failure to surrender the culprits for this outrage would be constituted as a confession of guilt on his part. The case contemplated in the above orders, according to Mr. Robertson, now presented itself and he recommended that the ruler of Jaintiā should be solemnly called upon in the name of the British Government to give up the Raja of Gobhā and that in the event of his non-compliance, he should be immediately removed from the Raj and one Bhāndārī, a near relation of his, be placed on the throne. Mr. Robertson further reported that Rajendra Singh was "a habitual promoter of the horrible rites of human sacrifice" and his participation in the case under consideration, according to him, was also proved beyond doubt by the best evidence.¹³ That his allegation against Rajendra Singh had not been proved by the "best evidence" will be seen from a perusal of his own report* which will appear to

¹³ P. C. 1833, December 12, No. 70.

* In the second paragraph of his Report mentioned above) Mr. Robertson admits that the deposition (No. 1) of the man (who made his escape) seems to be entitled to the fullest credit which is again (as mentioned in the 6th paragraph of the report) confirmed by the depositions Nos. 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 and 7 as made by the people of Nurtung. These depositions together with the depositions Nos. 8 and 9, made by the servants of the Rajah of Gobhā, establish, according to Mr. Robertson, that Sobhā Singh, Raja of Gobhā, was actively concerned in seizing three missing individuals and accordingly he wrote to the Rajah of Jaintiā demanding the surrender of the said Gobhā Raja. Sobhā Singh was not surrendered and Mr. Robertson suggested that as by non-complying

a disinterested reader as nothing but an unconfirmed statement so far as the latter's guilt is concerned.

Dec., 12,
1833

Happily, however, this time the Supreme Government took a more reasonable view of the affair and instructed their Agent simply to repeat the demand for the surrender of the perpetrators of the foul offences and to warn Rajendra Singh that non-compliance with this request would be visited by the severe displeasure of the British Government.¹⁴

Feb., 6,
1834

In January 1834, Rajendra Singh forwarded a petition to the Governor-General drawing his attention to the undue demand made by the Agent. After relating how Mr. Robertson had annoyed him in various ways and how he had degraded him in the estimation of his subjects by addressing him as the manager of the Jaintiā State, he pointed out that the demand of the tribute was in direct opposition to the engagements executed with his predecessor. And he finally pleaded that as his country was small and as most of his subjects rendered personal service in lieu of cash payment of revenue, he was not in a position to pay any tribute to the Company. The Supreme Government in reply informed him that the agreement executed with the late Raja Rām Singh was a personal one and as such there was no obligation on their part to afford him any protection without any return. And at the same time they called upon their Agent to state on what data the sum of Rs. 10,000/- had been fixed by him as the amount of tribute to be demanded from the State of Jaintiā.¹⁵

At this time Mr. Robertson was ordered to be relieved by Mr. Jenkins and before he had quitted his office, he addressed a letter to the Calcutta authorities in which he made a review of the administration of the province included in his agency and begged the Government "to admit that the agency had greatly improved under his general superintendence." Even while blowing his own

with the demand, the Rajah of Jaintiā had taken the guilt of the crime upon himself, he should be deprived of his Kingdom. Uptil now he had not implicated Rajendra Singh in the crime. Then he asserts in the 11th para of the above report that "the present ruler of Jaintiā, is generally reported to have been, even during the life time of his predecessor, a promoter of the horrible rites of human sacrifice" and then suddenly comes to the conclusion that "*his (Rajendra Singh's) participation in the present case, I conceive is proved by the best evidence.*" Where is the evidence? Then again in the next paragraph he says "At all events there cannot be doubt of the guilt of Gobhā Rajah" Thus Rajendra Singh's participation in the *present case* is nowhere proved.

¹⁴ P. C. 1833, December 12, No. 72.

¹⁵ P. C. 1834, February 6, Nos. 141—144.

trumpet, he could not restrain himself from giving a bit of advice to the Supreme Government regarding the course of action to be adopted towards the Raja of Jaintiā who in his opinion, was sure to surrender to the demands of the British Government provided "the Government persisted in withholding the title of Raja." At this time a letter addressed to Rajendra Singh came to his office from the Governor-General. He even declined to deliver this letter to Rajendra Singh because the latter had been addressed as Raja and returned the same with a request that "it may be directed to the Zaminder and not to the Raja of Jaintia."¹⁶ This last act of Mr. Robertson is hardly justifiable.

Feb. 28
1834

In response to the letter of the 6th February, 1834, Mr. Robertson informed the Supreme Government that the Raja of Jaintiā was in a position to pay a far heavier amount of tribute than that had been fixed by him because according to information received from Lt. Inglis and Captain Fisher, cash revenues of Jaintiā amounted to Rs. 30,000 annually in addition to what was paid in kind and that "a treasure amounting to nearly 20 lacs of rupees had accumulated in the royal vault." Though the Supreme Government agreed with their Agent in imposing tribute upon the new Raja, they regarded the amount of tribute suggested by Mr. Robertson very high in spite of the above information. They instructed the new Agent Mr. Jenkins to give his advice on the subject since Scott had been averse to the demand of any tribute and one-third of the money revenue of the state seemed to be too high an amount. The letter returned undelivered by their former overzealous Agent, they forwarded once more for delivery to the Raja without alteration, commenting that "the Chief of Jaintiā is entitled to the dignity of a Raja according to the former treaty and former usage."¹⁷

Mar., 1834

The new Agent took over in March, 1834 and immediately Rajendra Singh deputed two of his vakils to Cherrapunji to place his grievances before him. The vakils represented that the young Raja was quite willing to apprehend the persons implicated in the sacrifice of the British subjects, but he was unable to do so owing to the fact that the chief of Nurtung was resisting his authority and that the refusal on the part of the British Government to recognize him as the Raja of Jaintiā had further encouraged his subjects to defy his authority with greater impunity. We have already referred to the dispute that was going on between Rajendra

¹⁶ P. C. 1834, March 25, No. 38.

¹⁷ P. C. 1834, March 25, Nos. 40—41.

Mar., 24,
1834

Singh and his disaffected nobles. The situation had by this time greatly deteriorated. A series of aggressions attended with murderous atrocities followed. Chaotic conditions prevailed not only in Jaintiā, but the contagion spread eastward also and the neighbouring Khāsi states became restive. So the vakils of Rajendra Singh requested the new Agent to effect a reconciliation between the Raja and the disaffected *Dolois* of Nurtung. Mr. Jenkins adopted a correct and sympathetic attitude. He realized that unless internal commotion were effectively checked and the authority of the Raja restored in full, it would be futile to expect him to surrender the culprits. So, to arrest the spread of lawlessness and to terminate the hostilities between the warring *dolois*, he deputed Lt. Inglis, in whom both the parties had faith, to act as a mediator and peace-maker.¹⁸

Mr. Jenkins took a very sensible and balanced view of the dispute. According to him, the claim of Rajendra Singh to the title of Raja ought to have been acknowledged by the British Government as a matter of course because he had been recognized as such by the chiefs of the country. Moreover, he did not regard the treaty as a personal one liable to be annulled by the death of the sovereign with whom it had been originally contracted. Its terms, he thought, were really unfavourable to the Paramount Power, but the explanation was that "it was made at a time of great emergency." As none of the terms of the treaty* had been alleged to be violated, Mr. Jenkins considered that the proper course would have been to persuade the Raja to a voluntary commutation for a money tribute of the service he was bound to yield by the terms of the former treaty.

Thus Mr. Jenkins disapproved the method of his predecessor with regard to the renewal of the treaty. He also disapproved of his predecessor's suggestion that the young king should be removed from his *gadi* for his non-compliance with the demand for the surrender of the criminals because it appeared to him that the facts that the Raja was a minor, that the condition of the kingdom was chaotic and that the offence was committed during the time of Raja Rām Singh had not been sufficiently kept in mind by Mr. Robertson. He recommended the surrender of the culprits by Rajendra Singh as a condition precedent to his recognition as

¹⁸ P. C. 1834, April 10, Nos. 135—138.

* Vide Appendix "A"

Raja by the Company and finally advised the Supreme Government to suspend the conclusion of the new treaty with the Raja until he consented to pay a yearly tribute.¹⁹

Mar. 25
1834

According to Mr. Jenkins's instructions, Lt. Inglis repaired to Jaintiāpur on the 9th of April and met the contending parties in a durbar. The ruler of Jaintiā and his mantris were present along with the *Dolois* of Johy and Nurtung. The Raja restored their privileges and the refractory *dolois* of Nurtung made the customary obeisance to Rajendra Singh. Lt. Inglis also effected a reconciliation between the people of Johy and the people of Nurtung both of which parties he found at fault liable for punishment by the Raja of Jaintiā. Their misdeeds were, however, condoned by the young king at his intervention with a view to restoring quiet in the country. This act of forgiveness on the part of the king gave immense satisfaction. Peace was restored and there was rejoicing everywhere. The mission was a great success.²⁰

May 2,
1834

But when the "success of this mission" was reported to the Supreme Government, they took a different view of the situation. They did not appear to have been convinced of the wisdom of deputing such a mission. They questioned the expediency of interfering in a quarrel between a sovereign prince and his subjects in which they had no concern and regretfully informed the Agent that "the assistance had been given at a period when the terms of our future connection with Jaintiā were under discussion."²¹ It cannot be denied that the British Government were morally responsible to a certain extent for the continuance of chaos in Jaintiā at that time and "the restoration of mutual good understanding between Jaintiā Raja and his chiefs was a necessary prelude towards the accomplishment of a new treaty." The intervention of Mr. Jenkins was quite judicious.

May 15,
1834

At this time Mr. Jenkins proposed that as the chieftain of Gobhā had been implicated in the seizure of the British subjects, the Supreme authorities instead of punishing his Suzerain (the Raja of Jaintiā) as contemplated should attack the offending principality after giving a due and solemn warning. The Supreme Government questioned the propriety of his proposal and instructed him to call upon the Suzerain to punish the perpetrators of human sacrifices, because in their opinion "as long as the Jaintiā Raja pretends to be the sovereign of Gobha, he must be held responsible for the

¹⁹ P. C. 1834, April 10, No. 135.

²⁰ P. C. 1834, May 15, No. 76.

²¹ P. C. 1834, May 15, Nos. 77—78.

offences committed by the inhabitants of that place." They further called upon him to inform the Raja that should the latter allege inability to punish his vassal, the British Government would consider Gobhā as severed from his dominion and would take suitable steps for the reduction of that refractory chieftain.²²

Accordingly, on the 28th May, 1834, the Raja of Jaintiā was informed by the Agent that now that peace had been restored in his dominion, he should immediately take steps for the apprehension of the offenders. He was at the same time called upon to pay the tribute and renew the treaty with the Company. As regards the first point, the Raja of Jaintiā gave his best assurances but with regard to the demand of the tribute, he withheld his assent as before and trusting to the liberality of the British Government begged it "not to insist upon a demand to which he was unable to offer resistance otherwise than by remonstrance and representation."²³

The matters were at such a state when a fresh cause of dispute arose. And to trace back the history of this incident, we shall have to go back to the time of Scott. On the southern bank of the Kāpilā river, which formed the boundary between Jaintiā and Assam, Raja Rām Singh established a *chauki* at Chapparmukh for levying tolls on all goods passing through that *ghāt*. The British had also a *chauki* on the northern bank of the river. Goods coming from the British territory were thus doubly taxed. The gross revenue of the British customs house stood at Rs. 1,200 while the amount of the duties collected at the Jaintiā Raja's *chauki* exceeded Rs. 2,000 per annum. It was alleged that the collectors at the Raja's *chauki* practised extortion which sometimes led to violence. Mr. Scott also questioned the proprietary right of the Raja in levying such a duty and requested Rām Singh to remove the *chauki*. "Were both the sides of the river yours," he stated "you might there establish such a *ghaut*." Raja Rām Singh in reply pleaded his inability to comply with the request of Mr. Scott and begged him to waive the question. The correspondence dragged on for sometime between the successors of Mr. Scott and the late Raja Rām Singh and Rajendra Singh but nothing was settled.

As the matter continued till the time of Mr. Jenkins, he, with a view to bringing "this long and fruitless correspondence" to a close, referred the matter to the Supreme authorities. He suggested that if the Government should decide against the rights of the Raja,

²² P. C. 1834, May 15, No. 78.

²³ P. C. 1836, August 1, No. 110.

it should address him directly in the matter. In case the Government upheld the right of the Raja to levy the tax, he recommended that steps should be taken to fix a limitation to his demands because he feared that "it was in the power of the Rajah to interdict the traffic by the Kallang river altogether." He even advised the Supreme Government to purchase the rights of the Raja should they be admitted.²⁴ From these it will appear that the sole concern of Mr. Jenkins and his predecessors was more to protect the interests of trade than to establish a right of ownership of which they themselves were not very sure. Yet both Gait and Mackenzie allege* that the Raja of Jaintiā refused to remove the *chauki* he had established without authority.

June, 1834

The Supreme Government did not pass any final opinion on this long standing matter because they held "if the chowkey in question has been established since our occupation of Assam and we have no chowkey of our own on that side of the river which belongs to us, the Rajah may fairly be requested to place the thing in their former footing by abolishing the chowkey" and called upon the agent to furnish them with further information on the point.²⁵ We do not know if any fresh demands were made upon the Raja to remove the *chauki*.

At the time when this question was engaging the serious attention of Mr. Jenkins, the young Raja reminded the British Government of their promise** as embodied in the treaty of March 1824 and demanded some territories in Assam. He recalled the service rendered by his late grand uncle during the Burmese war and

²⁴ P. C. 1834, July 10, Nos. 214.

* "During the unsettled conditions which prevailed for sometime after the Burmese war, the Raja of Jaintia encroached considerably on the southern border of the Nowgong district and between 1830 and 1832 he was repeatedly called upon to remove an outpost which he had established without authority at Chappar Mukh at the confluence of the Kopili and Doyang rivers. He evaded compliance." Gait's History of Assam.

Mackenzie "North-East frontier of Bengal." p. 218.

²⁵ P. C. 1834, July 10, No. 215.

** Separate article of the treaty concluded between Hon'ble Company and Raja Ram Singh of Jynteah.

No. 9—Raja Ram Singh engages that to assist in the war commenced in Assam between the Hon'ble Company's Troops and those of the king of Ava, he will march a force and attack the enemy to the east of Gowahatty and the Hon'ble Company agrees, upon the conquest of Assam, to confer upon the Raja a part of that territory proportionate to the extent of his exertions in the common cause. (S. P. 1824, April 2, No. 8).

June, 1834 also "the aid contributed by the late Raja Ram Singh in quelling the Khāsi disturbances."²⁶ His demands were not attended to by the Agent who in view of the little assistance afforded to the British Government at the time of the Burmese war by the late Raja Rām Singh begged Rājendra Singh to regard his predecessor's restoration itself as a sufficient reward.²⁷ This move on the part of the young Raja at this stage was inopportune and undiplomatic; it rather stiffened the attitude of the British Government towards him, and as a result of this, the relations between Jaintiā and the East India Company further deteriorated.

Aug., 1834 Rājendra Singh at last apprehended four of the offenders so long demanded by the British Government and delivered them over to the British authorities. In a letter addressed to the Political Department, Captain Jenkins admitted the surrender of the miscreants.²⁸ *—a fact, strange to say, has been totally overlooked by Gait who also holds the non-delivery of the criminals to be the sole cause of the annexation of the property of "the young obdurate Rajah."

It seemed now that the Raja had complied with the main demand of the Suzerain before long a peaceful settlement would follow. Six months passed and nothing happened. Then suddenly in March 1835, the British Government sprang a most unexpected and painful surprise on Rājendra Singh when they informed him that the whole of his ancestral possessions in the plains had been confiscated.²⁹

To Rājendra Singh it was a bolt from the blue. The grounds assigned for this summary act were the non-delivery of the offenders implicated in the atrocities of Gobhā, the occurrence of a similar cause of offence in the year 1821, and the participation of the king himself in those ghastly crimes. No warning had even been

²⁶ P. C. 1834, June 19, No. 97.

²⁷ P. C. 1834, July 10, No. 214.

²⁸ P. C. 1836, September 26, No. 84.

* To C. E. Trevelyan, Deputy Secretary, Political Department, Fort William.

"With reference to your letter of the 14th ultimo I have the honour to acquaint you that individuals said to have been concerned in the sacrifice of our subjects in Ghoba, so long demanded by my predecessor from the Jynteah Raja have at length been delivered up to me at this place."

Sd./- F. JENKINS

POLITICAL AGENT'S OFFICE, Agent to the Governor-General,
22nd Sept., 1834, N. E. Frontier.

²⁹ P. C. 1836, August 1, No. 110.

administered. On the 15th March 1835, Captain Lister took formal possession of Jaintiāpur and issued a proclamation announcing the annexation of the Jaintiā *parganā* to the British Dominion. The dependency of Gobhā met the same fate a few weeks later. Deprived of his valuable possessions in the plains, Rājendra Singh gave up in disgust his unremunerative territory in the hills which also passed into the hands of the British. Though no opposition was given by the young Raja, the hill tribes of Jaintiā did not submit to the new regime so easily. They broke into open rebellion shortly afterwards, which was easily suppressed and very liberal terms were given to the insurgents by Captain Lister to weaken their opposition.³⁰ The hillmen were interfered with as little as possible; no revenue was demanded from them and the hill chiefs or *Dolois* were left in the administration of petty cases.

We think that the annexation of Jaintiā was an extreme measure* and fail to understand how in the face of a written acknowledgment testifying to the surrender of the criminals, the British Government could advance the non-surrender of the criminals as their sole plea for the annexation of the territory. Secondly it sounds rather grotesque to hold Rājendra Singh responsible for an outrage committed in 1821 while he was a mere boy.

In a memorial addressed to Lord Auckland, Rājendra Singh, the dethroned monarch of Jaintiā, placed his case before His Lordship through his wakil, one Bostom Chandra Mitra of Calcutta. It was a fearless exposition of facts. After narrating how the exaction of a tribute equivalent to nearly half the cash revenue of his territory, which the local British authorities contemplated levying on him, would have compelled him to discharge all the retainers of his family, he stated boldly, "The outrage at Gobhā was merely the ostensible ground of charge and that the real offence of your memorialist was his silence as to the demand of the tribute."* He characterised "the demand of tribute in time of profound peace, in lieu of an existing obligation to furnish temporary aid in men and supplies upon the contingency of war on the neighbouring frontier which might not occur for a century, neither usual nor equitable." He went a step further and asserted that "even the direct refusal of such a demand could scarcely be just ground for forfeiture" and

³⁰ Letter from Court No. 17 of 1837.

* The annexation policy has also been discussed from the general point of view of political wisdom (Vide Sec. VIII).

* Vide Appendix "B".

pointed out that "in case of refusal the British Government had a perfect right to renounce the treaty and withdraw its protection." After recalling how his predecessor had gained the esteem and approbation of the British authorities at the time of the Burmese war in return for the valuable services rendered by him, he respectfully submitted that "his reluctance to part with the privileges of his forefathers was not unnatural and ought not to be considered as a mark either of contumacy or of disaffection." He begged to offer a reasonable tribute and prayed for the restitution of his ancestral dominion. But his prayer was rejected.³¹

When the Jaintiā affairs reached the ears of the Board of Directors, every act of the local officers with regard to Jaintiā came under their severe condemnation. When the proposal of tribute was first referred to them, they felt a strong repugnance to the demand of the tribute and found "no propriety in imposing a condition on a successor which it was not deemed expedient to impose on the original party."³² As regards the coercive steps which the Calcutta authorities had contemplated to take against the Raja on his refusal to renew the treaty on new conditions they found nothing wrong in the conduct of the Raja and observed, "If the treaty has expired, the Rajah is in the same situation as if none had ever been concluded and our right extends no further than to discontinuing to afford him the benefit of our protection unless he will consent to give a pecuniary equivalent." And fearing that any tribute which the Raja might bind himself to pay would be probably extorted from the ryots who were lightly taxed, they informed the Calcutta authorities that "they were not anxious that any such engagement should be concluded."³³ These were just views of the authorities at home.

In the meantime Jaintiā had been annexed. When the news of the final annexation of Jaintiā reached home, the Directors were not convinced of the necessity of such an extreme step. They could not look at the matter as fully justifiable. They wrote, "it is not made out to our satisfaction that the Rajah either refused or decidedly evaded compliance with your requisition for the surrender of the culprits as to warrant his being subjected to so severe penalty on that account alone." The Home authorities were previously given to understand that if the guilty parties were not delivered up within two months, the district of Gobbā would be attached. So they

³¹ P. C. 1836, August, Nos. 110—111.

³² Letter from Court, No. 14 of 1834.

³³ Letter from Court, No. 44 of 1835.

doubted whether the Calcutta authorities had been justified without any further warning in sequestrating the whole of his districts in the plains; in their opinion the warning given in 1821 to the Raja's predecessors could not be considered equivalent to one addressed to himself.³⁴

They felt deeply for "this unfortunate chief" and asked the Bengal Government to treat him with every safe and reasonable indulgence. The confiscation of his property appeared to them "a very summary measure and one of a very doubtful propriety" and to prevent the recurrence of such an act they warned the Calcutta authorities "not to have recourse to such extreme a measure without previous reference to their authority."³⁵

The ex-Raja was given a pension and he retired to the British district of Sylhet. In December 1836 he sent a petition to the Supreme Government in Calcutta "praying to be allowed to visit Calcutta during the ensuing Bengalee month of Magh for the purpose of bathing in the Hooghly (the Ganges) on account of "Ordhoday Jog" and paying his devotion at the Shrine of Kali." His prayer was rejected.³⁶ Again in the next year in the month of May he submitted another petition to the Governor-General-in-Council through his muktēar Gorā Chand Mitra, soliciting His Lordship's gracious permission for personally presenting a memorial connected with the confiscation of his Raj and for performing ablution in the Ganges on account of Dusserah festival. This petition of his was also turned down and he was told to submit his petition in future through the Commissioner.³⁷

³⁴ Pol. Despatch from Secy. of State, April 14, No. 11 of 1836.

³⁵ Letter from Court No. 18 of 1838.

³⁶ P. C. 1836, December 19, Nos. 82—83.

³⁷ P. C. 1837, May 22, Nos. 173—174.

SECTION III

THE ANNEXATION OF PURANDAR SINGH'S DOMINION

(CENTRAL ASSAM)

The accession of Purandar Singh to the throne of Central Assam (as described in Chapter IV) was not hailed with joy by a certain section of the nobility. Though Chandra Kānta's claim to the throne was set aside by the East India Company, he had greater influence with the people at large.* Purandar Singh, though more capable as a ruler, was rather unwelcome to the people in general, because, from his long residence in Bengal, he had little common feelings with the Assamese. He was more of a Bengalee than an Assamese.¹ At once plans were set on foot to create difficulties in his way. Though Chandra Kanta did not take any direct part in fomenting disaffection towards the newly installed king, it cannot be denied that some of his followers created troubles for Purandar Singh. They were inimical to Purandar Singh from the first and created difficulties in the collection of revenues and that was one of the reasons which was primarily responsible for the diminution of the first year's revenues. The ryots of Central Assam entertained fond hopes that with the accession of one of their princes as their Swargadev, they would be exempted from paying the assessments they were called upon to do during the Company's regime, but no such concessions were granted,² and they too became disaffected towards him. But they had no real grievance against him. Purandar Singh was not the man to give way so easily. Conscious of the power that stood behind him, he took stern retaliatory measures against some of the trouble brewers, though the measures adopted by him, it is reported, were not always justifiable.³

He had also other difficulties to face. The unsettled condition of the country—the legacy of the previous regime—caused him no

* "The Raja is said to be a man of no talent, but his claims are generally acknowledged by the Assamese"—(From White's Statement—S. P. 1829, May 1, No. 42). (Post Script).

¹ P. P. 1838, May 16, No. 55.

² P. C. 1834, June 19, No. 99.

³ Ibid.

less anxiety. The nine years (1824-1833) of unsettled rule had left their indelible marks upon the country. As the Company contemplated to hand over this tract to a prince of the old royal dynasty, no serious attempts were made by the British officers to heal the wounds caused by the misrule and confusion of the preceding half-century. The interim administration set up by the British rather worsened the situation in many respects. The system adopted during these nine years was neither wholly British nor Āhom. It was an admixture of both and during this interim period the people neither got the blessings of the enlightened British administration nor the concessions of the indigenous system. Society was in a disorganised state.

Under the Āhom System of administration, as we have seen, the communities were divided into separate bodies numbering from 1000 to 5000 able bodied men denominated as *Khels* under a Phukan or Barua as *Kheldār*. The *Khels* were further sub-divided into gotts of three or four *pāiks* or freemen and one *pāik* of each got was bound to render personal service throughout the year to the *Raja* or to any officer of the state in lieu of the rice lands obtained from the state. The *pāiks* also received a piece of land for garden and homestead for which they paid poll taxes. If any *pāik* cultivated any rice land in excess of the *poorahs* obtained free of rent from the state, he paid the state one rupee annually for each *poorah* so tilled. Originally the *Khels* were located in a given tract of the territory with definite boundaries and *Kheldārs* residing at their *Khels* took personal interests in the welfare of their subjects. But later, the *pāiks* living in the *Khels* became scattered over the whole of Assam, necessitating the appointment of a host of subordinate officers to effect the collection. As a result of it, corruption became rife and a series of irregular exactions was extorted from the *pāiks* by these greedy *āmlās*. The *Kheldārs* no longer lived in the *Khels*—they passed their time as idle loungers about the court of the king, thus neglecting one of the sacred duties they were entrusted with and severing the salutary tie which connected the upper part of the community with the lower one.

Under the British Government, some attempts were made to rectify those abuses and a partial settlement upon the land was made, but as the occupation was an interim one, no exhaustive reforms were carried out. So the defects and abuses were allowed to remain as they were. Everywhere partial reforms were made. Judiciary was no less defective. Purandar Singh's task was made all the more difficult and complicated, as we shall see presently, by the compexity of the British System of administration engrafted

upon a people wholly alien. So his reign began in the midst of chaos and confusion and it must be said to his credit in all fairness that though he met with much irritation and disaffection, he was bent upon providing good government for his subjects from the very start and issued a series of regulations for the better administration of the tract under his care.⁴

Most of the reformatory measures were discussed in open *Durbar*. Purandar Singh held consultations with Mr. White, the Political Agent stationed at Bishwanath, and suggestions that were submitted by the Phukans and Baruas were duly considered. As the revenue system of the province called for speedy reform, it was tackled first of all. The original land system based on personal service was found to be more congenial to the habits and customs of the children of the soil, so the partial settlement upon the land introduced during the Company's regime was given up and the indigenous system was reverted to. At the suggestion of Mr. White, the King, however, agreed to effect some improvements in the old revenue system on the basis of the European mode of administration.⁵

Revenue
Reforms.

The territory was likewise divided into a number of *Khels* with regular and well defined boundaries. A list of *pāiks* was drawn up and a regular allowance of 2 *poorahs* of land was made over to each and a settlement was made with the *Kheldār* for a period of four years in the first instance. Mr. White was at first in favour of settlement for a period of ten years, but he eventually gave way to the Raja's wish because four years' settlement afforded opportunities for frequent revisions. In addition to the service rendered by a number of *pāiks*, the *Kheldārs* were allowed a small money commission. The *Kheldārs* were strictly enjoined to reside as before within their respective *Khels*. To encourage cultivation, the Raja allowed the ryots to break off jungle lands and to hold the same rent-free for two years. To prevent oppression on the part of the *Kheldārs*, it was ordained that no remission was to be granted to the *Kheldārs* in the case of refugee *pāiks*. This salutary check had the effect of compelling the *Kheldārs* to preserve their ryots. The *Kheldārs* were called upon to issue receipts against collections. It was further enacted that after a period of three years, no one who did not know how to read or write would be placed in charge of revenues, and to encourage learning one school was established in each *Khel*. As many of the Āhom nobility did not know the rudiments of reading or writing—the members of other classes, who were

⁴ P. C. 1894. June 19, No. 99.

⁵ Ibid.

found literate, were allowed to hold charge of *Khels*. To save the *Kheldārs* from the unjust exactions of the king, Mr. White insisted that no *Kheldārs* were to be dismissed without a regular trial before the "Pātra Mantrī" and this provision was readily accepted by Purandar Singh.⁶

The British Government established some judicial courts in Central Assam based on the European model but the people of the land got little service from them. The courts were centralised at the capital; hence the people did not obtain speedy justice. The new system of deciding cases—even trifling ones—by written pleadings and depositions scared away the litigants nine-tenths of whom could neither read nor write. They felt little confidence in the justice of the decisions. The complicated system of Western justice with its huge paraphernalia was thrust upon a people too primitive to profit by it. Hence measures were taken to remedy these evils and to make justice within easy reach of all. *Kheldārs* were invested with magisterial authority to try petty criminal cases. Offences of a graver nature were reserved for trial before the magistrate's court at the *Sadar*, the pre-cognition of the offences having been taken by the *Kheldārs* in the first instance. The *Kheldārs* were further given the power to try trifling *dewānī* cases. They were specially enjoined to investigate cases of exaction against the subordinate revenue collectors as preferred by the ryots under them.

Four district civil courts were established—one at Bisā, one at Rangpur, one at Charduār and one at Lakhimpur with a power to try *dewānī* cases upto Rs. 100 and to hear appeals against the decisions of the *Kheldārs'* Courts. It was enacted that no written pleadings or depositions were to be taken in cases fixed for hearing before the *Kheldārs* and District Courts. To make the position and tenure of the judges secure, it was laid down that no district judges were to be dismissed without a regular trial. The court of the Bar Barua or the magistrate at the *Sadar* was given the power of awarding a sentence of three years' imprisonment in criminal cases and of trying the *dewānī* cases upto Rs. 500. Here the pleading and depositions were to be in writing. A *Sadar* Court composed of three judges to be presided over by the Raja was created to act as the highest Court of Judicature. As corruption was rampant in the judicial circle the members of which received no pay under the Swargadevs, Purandar Singh, at the behest of the Political Agent, undertook to provide them with remuneration as customary under the British, out of the fees and fines realised from the litigants.

⁶ Ibid.

Strictly speaking the members of the Āhom judiciary were not honorary dignitaries because they received the service of *pāiks* in lieu of money for the works rendered. To maintain the efficiency of the lower court, it was further enacted that one member from each of the *Sadar Courts* was to proceed to the mofussil areas in rotation to review the working of the district and Kheldārs' Courts. From all accounts it seems clear that the judicial arrangements as provided by the new Raja left nothing to be desired.⁷

The reforming zeal of the new Raja did not stop here. With a view to encouraging commerce, the revival of which the decadent state badly needed, he ordered the abolition of the customs house on the Brahmaputra which facilitated free flow of goods. Henceforth no boats laden with merchandise plying in the Brahmaputra were subjected to any duty. To stimulate industry, he called upon the Kheldārs to receive produce from the ryots in payment of revenue at a fair valuation. Mr. White also made an attempt to modify the system of private slavery prevailing in Upper Assam but as public opinion was decidedly against it, he gave up the attempt. A perusal of the above regulations which Purandar Singh promulgated for the better administration of the land entrusted to his care will convince any impartial observer that these were ingeniously planned and were best suited to the habits and temperament of the people. These were forwarded for formal approval to the Agent and the king settled down to administer the land in accordance with the above regulations. He began well and the opposition of the disaffected nobility began to fall off gradually.⁸

From the very beginning the financial arrangement he had entered into with the Paramount Power was a heavy burden. He no doubt paid the first year's tribute regularly but the revenue return at the end of the first financial year (1833-34) fell much below the mark and caused alarm. Even Mr. White, who had anticipated only a reduction of Rs. 20,000/- owing to the transfer of Headquarters of the British Regiment from Jorhāt to Bishwanāth, was perturbed. The revenue realised showed a return of Rs. 60,000/- as against the collection of one lac under the Company's administration. The financial state of Upper Assam appeared very gloomy indeed. What mattered most was the apprehension about the future realisation of revenues. Owing to the inexperience of the new Raja, who was ignorant of the British system of administration followed

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

during the first year of his rule, and specially owing to the dogged persistence of the followers of Chandra Kānta who had resisted the collection of revenues by launching the "No Rent Campaign" against him, the first year brought a poor return to the royal exchequer. But these were after all temporary set-backs and might have been easily ignored, because it was expected that the sagacious and benevolent administration established by Purandar Singh would eventually remove the difficulties created by the disgruntled nobles. But there remained one inherent defect which threatened to prove an insurmountable obstacle to the future realisation of the revenue and which was clearly foreseen by Mr. White even at that stage. That was the peculiar relation in which Purandar Singh's dominion stood to that of his neighbour, the Bar Senāpati in whose territory there was no direct money taxation.

There were little differences in manners and religion between the people of these two dominions. So there was a constant temptation held out to the subjects of Purandar Singh to emigrate into the territory of the Bar Senāpati. The Company's possession (Western Assam) to the western side of his dominions offered a no less tempting show to his ryots where although the assessment was not light, the redress against over-exaction was readily obtainable. So Purandar Singh was placed in very peculiar and difficult circumstances. The very existence of his territory was at stake. Mr. White fully realised the gravity of the situation and as a remedy against this, he suggested that all subjects of Purandar Singh who would take refuge in the Bar Senāpati's dominions should be subjected to the same or a slightly lower rate of taxation than what had prevailed in Purandar Singh's dominions. He further recommended that a native officer, on behalf of the British Government, should be stationed at the Capital of the Bar Senāpati to collect taxes from these paiks. The Bar Senāpati, Mr. White conceived, would have no reason to complain about this arrangement because under the Assamese Government he was regarded as a vassal and was said to have paid a tribute of Rs. 12,000/- per annum. Mr. White planned to pay a visit to the Bar Senāpati's territory next cold weather to make a final settlement with him, provided his plan was approved by the Supreme Government.⁹

In due course the regulations which had been framed for the better administration of the Raja's territory received the approval of the Agent. "The proposed arrangement appeared to him to be well

⁹ Ibid.

calculated to restore to the people confidence"; but the financial condition of the new born state as unfolded by the revenue return so alarmed him that he remarked, "We may be either obliged to interfere actively in the management of the country or consent to give up a portion of our present tribute." Both these courses appeared to him to be unpleasant and to prevent being driven to either alternative he exhorted Mr. White to insist on the king's strict observance of his own regulations, which he thought, would place the finance of the Raja's country on an improved footing.

The Agent realised the peculiar position of the king's country in relation to that of the Bar Senāpati and strongly recommended the proposal of Mr. White to the Supreme Government. It may be mentioned in this connection that independent of this move on the part of Mr. White, the Agent had proposed earlier to levy a proportionate tribute from the Bar Senāpati's dominion.¹⁰ The Supreme Government did not accept his proposal. Had his proposal been accepted by the higher authorities, it would have put an end to one of the causes which were primarily responsible for the exodus from Purandar Singh's dominion. The proposal of Mr. White received no better hearing. The Supreme authorities summarily turned down this sound proposition of Mr. White.¹¹ But until March 1834 no emigration on a large scale had taken place and the Government of Purandar Singh had not yet felt the full impact of the financial strain caused by the exodus.

In the meantime Purandar Singh addressed a direct memorial to the Supreme Government and drew their attention to the depopulated and ruinous state of the villages of Upper Assam and begged the Company to bestow on him the remaining portion of Assam so that he would be better able to discharge his obligation towards the Paramount Power. He appointed one Rādhā Nāth Chatterjee, his mukhtear to be stationed at Calcutta for the purpose of making representation on his behalf and requested the Supreme Government to approve the said appointment.¹² But as the application did not come through the regular channel, permission was not granted.¹³ Towards the middle of 1834, Purandar Singh renewed his application for the appointment of a mukhtear which was however, granted by the Calcutta authorities.¹⁴

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ P. C. 1834, June 19, No. 110.

¹² P. C. 1834, August 21, Nos. 86-87.

¹³ P. C. 1834, August 21, No. 88.

¹⁴ P. C. 1834, August 21, Nos. 88-89.

During this period Purandar Singh also was experiencing great difficulty in securing an adequate supply of coins for the payment of his tribute. In a country where state officials were paid not in cash but in kind in terms of pāiks and where most of the ryots paid their rent in kind, there was always a scarcity of coins. The difficulty was accentuated during the reign of Purandar Singh, who was to pay tribute to the Paramount Power strictly in cash under the treaty condition. Commerce was not yet fully developed so as to attract coins from the trading countries. To add to his difficulties, many of the coins that were in circulation were spurious ones. The coins were debased to such an extent that the native troops employed in that quarter refused to accept them even at a discount. It may be mentioned in this connection that two kinds of coins "Rajmuharee rupees" and "Narayani rupees"¹ were in circulation in Assam at that time.* As there was no mint either in Western Assam or in Central Assam for the coinage of these rupees and as there was a growing demand for coins, coinage by private agencies, which prevailed in Assam and the adjacent territories to very considerable extent, led to gross abuses. The practice became so scandalous that as early as 1833, the Supreme Government thought it necessary to prohibit it and Mr. White recommended the establishment of a mint in the dominion of Purandar Singh. But the Supreme Government did not accept the proposal of Mr. White and ordered that the new "Furruckabad rupees" should be put into circulation in that quarter.¹⁵ This measure did not however ease the situation for Purandar Singh. So he solicited the permission of the Supreme Government to coin rupees to meet the growing demand. Nov. 1833.

Purandar Singh also clearly understood that the possession of one-half of Assam would not give him any financial stability. So he again begged the Supreme Government to bestow on him the Western half of Assam. Western Assam under the Company's occupation yielded a revenue of 3 lacs of rupees and the entire amount was spent in meeting the allowances of European and Native officers and of the troops cantoned there. The British Government had to draw money from the Central exchequer to cover other sundry Aug. 1834.

¹ The following was the rate of exchange as fixed by the Accountant-General of Bengall:—

126-7-4 Narani rupees per 100 Calcutta sicca and
103-11-1 Rajah Mohree rupees per 100 Calcutta sicca.
(Letter to Court No. 14, 31st December 1832).

* This coin was issued by Raja Naranarayan of Cooch Behar in 1550.

¹⁵ P. C. 1833, November 28, Nos. 97A-97B.

expenses. Purandar Singh brought all this to the notice of the authorities and prayed that the western half be handed over to him for a tribute of one lac of Narayanee rupees. The proposed arrangement appeared to him also beneficial to the interest of the British Government because under this arrangement, the East India Company would be divested of a liability which would become an asset under native management where the expenses of the administration would be much less.

Purandar Singh also brought to the notice of the Paramount Power another important question which demanded immediate solution. The boundaries of Central Assam, as earmarked by Mr. Scott and proposed to be handed over to him, were reported to have suffered a mutilation when it was actually made over to him. Further mutilation was proposed by local officers which threatened him with a loss in the neighbourhood of five thousand rupees. This was really a serious matter to a struggling state whose margin of surplus was rapidly dwindling. He prayed that the boundary fixed by the Supreme authority should be continued as he believed that "the orders of the Supreme Government were never countermanded and altered."¹⁶ Had the prayer of Purandar Singh been heard, a great disaster might have been avoided. But from the available records we find that the Calcutta authorities, to whom these solicitations were addressed, did not pay any attention to them. Only the request of Purandar Singh regarding the appointment of a mukhtear at the Presidency, merely a formal one, was complied with.

Oct. 1836. In spite of these handicaps, Purandar Singh began well as we have observed earlier. The first two years of his reign passed off smoothly. The internal tranquility of the land was not disturbed except by a commotion excited by a fanatical priest of the Moāmārīa Sect, who in 1834, attempted to head a rising. The disturbances were subdued without any bloodshed and the originator of the trouble retired to the Bar Senāpati's dominion.¹⁷ Tribute was regularly paid, justice was done and the country enjoyed peace and tranquillity. The disaffection which had manifested itself during the early part of his reign was gradually dying away. But from the third year of his reign ominous signs began to appear on the political horizon of Central Assam and threatened the very existence of this newly founded state. Two years had not elapsed since the note of warning was sounded by the Agent and the worst apprehensions of Captain White began to take shape.

¹⁶ P. C. 1834, August 21, No. 88.

¹⁷ Foreign Dept. 1838, April 18, Nos. 56.

From the middle of 1836, a great number of subjects of Purandar Singh, mostly *Domes* and the *Murryees* (the artisans in brass) began to emigrate to the adjoining British territory where they found favourable terms of settlement. When during the time of Mr. Scott, the British Government made the first settlement in Assam comprising both the Western and Eastern halves, the Murryees were taxed at Rs. 5|- per head and the Domes at the rate of Rs. 3|- per head. The same rate of settlement prevailed in Central Assam under Purandar Singh. But in the British Province, a new settlement was made towards the beginning of 1836 in Nowgong and Darrang districts adjoining the Raja's territory according to the terms of which the Murryees and the Domes were exempted from taxation unless they held land. This tempting show induced many of their kinsmen to leave the Raja's territory and emigrate into the adjoining Company's dominion in large numbers.

The eastern side of Purandar Singh's kingdom was no less vulnerable. From the easterly direction another stream was flowing into the Matak country where the Bar Senapati practically levied no taxes upon the ryots living in the districts adjoining the Raja's territory.* The people of Assam were addicted to opium and many left the Raja's territory and went over to the Bar Senapati's dominion where opium was readily available. The Matak chief also held out other inducements to the Raja's ryots. The Bar Senapati's dominions thus became a paradise for lotus-eaters. The immigration was further accelerated by the outbreak of a severe famine and the people fled in all directions. In the wake of the famine came cholera which took a heavy toll of lives. All these factors, needless to say, greatly retarded the collection of the revenue and accentuated the financial difficulty of Purandar Singh. Out of the sum of Rs. 50,000/- to be paid by way of tribute for the year 1835—1836 only two-thirds were paid leaving a balance of Rs. 17,000/- still unpaid.

Purandar Singh lost no time in bringing these facts to the notice of the Political Agent and as his treaty gave him no right to ask for the surrender of the runaway *pāiks*, he requested Mr. White to move the higher authorities either for a suitable remission in his tribute or for the collection of revenues from the fugitives through the agency of the Collectors of Nowgong and Darrang where his men had mostly settled. Mr. White, who made a *prima facie* enquiry into the matter found the circumstances "to be strictly

* They were very lightly taxed.

correct." Though he did not recommend that the officers stationed in the Company's territories should collect revenues from the run-away *pāiks* as desired by the Raja, he at the same time felt that such a huge amount of tribute (Rs. 50,000/-) as was realizable from the king could scarcely be expected from Upper Assam under the circumstances and forwarded the matter to the Agent.¹⁸

October,
1836.

The Agent, who had apprehended some such unhappy state of things at the very beginning of the new regime, when informed of the peculiar position of Purandar Singh, took quite unexpectedly a very stern and unsympathetic view of the situation. He justified the abolition of taxes on the Murryees and Domes in the British districts as taxes on landless people were extremely oppressive and considered the prayer of the Raja regarding the assessment of the revenue on the deserters totally inadmissible. In his opinion the desertion was caused, not by the higher taxes prevailing in the Raja's country, but by the great exaction and extortion practised by the Raja's *āmlās*. And in support of his contention he quoted *in extenso* from Major White's diary where it was stated that "Murryees have emigrated from the Raja's country in consequence of exaction of revenue on the part of his revenue officers" (14th October, 1836). He further held that the Raja would have been able to pay the tribute stipulated in the engagement had his Government not proved unpopular and oppressive. So he was not prepared to recommend any remission in his tribute.¹⁹

We do not know the sources of his latter information. He had as yet not visited Purandar Singh's dominion. Perhaps it emanated from his own imagination. We find from the report of his predecessor, Mr. Robertson (who had reviewed the first year of the Raja's rule) that "the Rajah had proved to the bulk of the people a mild and beneficent master and this was confirmed by the fact that no emigration had taken place into our territory or into those of the Burra Senāpati or other independent chiefs."²⁰ However, the Agent instructed the political agent of Upper Assam to visit the Raja's dominion "to make a particular enquiry into the state of the Rajah's country" and to find out whether the desertion was to be attributed to the Raja's own mismanagement or whether there were just grounds for allowing him a remission of his present tribute.²¹ The

November,
1836.

¹⁸ P. C. 1836. November 14. No. 32.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ P. C. 1834, March 25. No. 38.

²¹ P. C. 1836. November 14. No. 32.

Supreme authorities concurred in the opinion expressed by the Agent and refrained from taking any steps until they had heard the result of this particular enquiry of Mr. White.

According to the instructions of the Supreme Government, Mr. White arrived at Jorhāt, the capital of Purandar Singh, on his way to Sadiyā and stayed there for a number of days. He made a thorough enquiry into the Police, Judicial and Revenue administration.

While inspecting the working of the *Faujdāri* Courts, he detected certain drawbacks and heard a number of complaints. But these drawbacks, according to him, were of ordinary nature. The allegations he heard were chiefly directed against the subordinate *āmlās*—the *Dārogās* who, under the influence of bribes, were in the habit of protecting robbers and concealing thefts. Mr. White did not take a serious view of those malpractices because he found that the Raja had been debarred from granting fixed money salaries to his *āmlās* owing to the financial embarrassments created by the most unsatisfactory stipulations of the treaty—he freely admitted that he could not but connive at their gaining a livelihood by these irregular means. Under the circumstances, he was not surprised at the absence of a high moral tone which a magisterial officer unfettered by such necessities would naturally assume. According to the terms laid down in the regulations framed by the Raja three years before under his superintendence, cognisance of petty cases should have devolved upon the heads of the villages, but Mr. White was astonished to find the vexatious interference of the police even in these petty cases. All these irregularities he brought to the notice of Purandar Singh who promised to look into the matter. In other respects he found the police “tolerably efficient”. Punishments inflicted by the Raja were of a very mild character, unlike those practised by his ancestors. He was happy to find that as a result of British influence, the inhabitants of Upper Assam had been relieved of the barbarous mutilations, cruel impalement and other outrages against humanity which they were subjected to under their ancient rulers. It appeared to Mr. White that the *Faujdāri* administration was not so pure or efficient as it had been under British rule, but it had not fallen much short of it when due allowances were made for the pecuniary difficulties of the king. On the whole, the Raja's Government appeared to him to be mild, unstained by any of the violent cruelties and excesses which characterised the ancient regime.²²

²² P. C. 1867, January 26, No. 59.

As regards the *Devānī* administration, he heard the same complaint of bribery against the *āmlās* and of irregular interference on the part of the royal family. Even there were allegations against Purandar Singh himself. In Assam it was always customary for the suitors to propitiate the judges by presents.* As these were moves more in the nature of presents than in the nature of bribes offered to influence decisions, these did not preclude the judges from giving just decisions. Mr. White was not ignorant of this peculiar state of things prevailing in Assam. On the whole he found that the Raja's *devānī* decisions had given more satisfaction to the ryots than those of his European predecessors,** "who" according to him, "with the best intentions were more likely to commit errors in delicate questions regarding succession to inheritances, violation of caste and marriage contracts from their comparative ignorance of the language and customs of the country". With regard to this point Mr. White laid particular stress on the fact that "as an act of the justice to the Rajah, his conduct should not be measured by an abstract standard of justice drawn from a people further advanced by three or four centuries in the scale of civilisation, but that it should be judged with reference to the manners and customs of his countrymen".²³

As regards the working of the Revenue Department he found that the *āmlās*, in order to realize the maximum amount of revenue from a khel, had made many false entries, let off the rich who could pay, and saddled the loss upon the poor in many cases. He admitted that the same abuses had prevailed under British administration to as great an extent and held that there was little chance of their being entirely rectified unless a European officer was employed in the survey work. He had come across few cases of complaints of direct exaction and extortion. He found the Raja's subjects assessed at the same rate as settled by the British authorities, namely a capitation tax of Rs. 3/- per head for which 2 acres of land were given. But he heard some cases of complaint regarding the actual allotment of land. Lands were under-measured when the actual assignment took place. Secondly, he found that fresh lands brought under cultivation were subjected to immediate taxation as against the express condition laid down in the Regulations which

* Suitors in England in the 16th and 17th Centuries often used to give presents to judges.

** Re :—Revenue and Judicial Administration of Assam (1826-1833) under the British, see Epilogue. It was a period of maladministration.

²³ Ibid.

provided for an exemption during the first two years. All these abuses he did not fail to bring to the notice of the Raja who promised to rectify them.

With a view to acquiring a correct notion of the state under the Raja's administration, he toured the territory around and passed through forty to fifty miles of the Raja's dominion. He was struck with the excellent state of cultivation. He found that in the neighbourhood of the capital the cultivation had decidedly increased since the province had been transferred to the Raja. In the outlying districts of Jangi and Rangpur, he found the cultivation fully equal to that of the fertile districts of Nowgong or Tezpur in British Assam. The cultivation in the distant Bisā and Lakhimpur gave him equal satisfaction. It must be remembered that these improvements the Raja effected under most difficult conditions because these parts of his territory were more affected by civil commotion and natural calamities and the king had not sufficient force at his command to give his ryots due protection. The ryots in the Company's dominion were better protected. But the ryots of Purandar Singh, though deprived of the stimulus to cultivation, did their husbandry equally well and this reflected much credit upon the king who received unstinted praise from Mr. White. In the districts of Jangi and Rangpur Mr. White found the village settlement based on land (as against the pāik system) as recommended by him. But the capita-tion tax (which the Raja was decidedly in favour of retaining) was still maintained. The king rightly contended that if the "Pāik System" was abolished, it would be impossible for him to maintain his rank and establishments since a pāik cost him Rs. 9/- per annum as against the sum of Rs. 24/- being the ordinary wages of a servant for a year. But the Raja, according to White, was not altogether averse to its abolition provided a suitable remission was made from his tribute.²⁴

Coming to the question of emigration which had caused all this commotion, Mr. White found that this was due to the reasons already pointed out by him and he saw no reason to differ from his original conclusion.

Lastly he looked into the financial condition of the State. With a view to arriving at a correct understanding, he made a full survey of the finances from the very beginning. It was a sound and true analysis of the situation. He found that under the British Government the maximum amount that was realised stood at about one lakh of rupees and not 1 lakh and 12 thousand, as stated by the

²⁴ Ibid.

Agent, and that too was only for one year. The average realisation was about 90,000 rupees per annum. Under the Rajā's Government the highest amount realised was Rs. 75,000. Out of this amount, the Raja had to remit the sum of Rs. 50,000/- by way of tribute to the Paramount Power, leaving a small balance of Rs. 25,000/- for the support of his family and for the maintenance of Establishments of his realm. This sum appeared to Mr. White "to be quite inadequate." He found the tribute fixed at a much higher amount as compared with the gross revenue than that of any other Raja dependent upon the Company. He quoted from Sutherland's book* to show that the Native Chiefs in Rajputana paid six annas in the rupee or about 36% of their gross *jummāh* by way of tribute, whereas Purandar Singh had to pay 66% of his gross revenue as tribute—the highest ever paid by any vassal state in India. Mr. White found that even his neighbour, the Raja of Cooch Behar had been paying only Rs. 12,000 as tribute with a much larger revenue.

As according to Mr. White the real motive behind the "restoration" was to provide employment for the disgruntled nobles of the Āhom State, who would otherwise have been a burden upon the resources of the British Government, he could not realize why so much amount had been fixed by way of tribute. He himself was in favour of demanding Rs. 40,000 as a tribute as against the gross collection of one lakh. He, in the course of investigation, found out that the tribute for nearly three years had been paid and the king was in arrears to the extent of six months' tribute only. Under these circumstances he was satisfied that the Raja had exerted himself to fulfil his pecuniary obligation to the utmost. Any other impartial observer would have come to the same conclusion. Mr. White regretted that Purandar Singh's Government had not been given a fair trial and he was of opinion "that it had worked well as could have been expected".

From all accounts it seems clear that the financial condition of Central Assam was very gloomy indeed and the Raja was not responsible for it. It seemed to Mr. White that if Purandar Singh was to continue as a king, something should be done to give him a respite and he made some recommendations to make a way out of the impasse. He recommended for the reduction of the tribute and fixed it at Rs. 35,000/- to be made payable from the 1st of May.

* Sutherland's "Sketches of the relation between the British Government in India and the different Native States".

1836 and he prefixed this boon by certain conditions. These were that the Raja should be asked to give fixed salaries to his *āmlās* and that he should abolish all *sayer* duties and introduce a land settlement in his kingdom after the manner of the Company.²⁵ The recommendations were timely and judicious indeed and, if they had been given effect to, a struggling state would have given a fair trial to establish itself.

Purandar Singh in the meantime renewed his exertions and sent a petition through Mr. White to the Supreme Government explaining the causes of the irregular payment and accumulation of arrears. He frankly stated that it was impossible for him to pay the tribute regularly and to keep up the civil and military establishments, unless the district of Nauduar, originally meant for him, was transferred to him and unless the *pāiks* who had emigrated into the Bar Senāpati's dominion were either taxed or repatriated to his territory. And he finally prayed that like his brother princes, he should be also allowed a respectable maintenance—sufficient to enable him to perform all his duties, civil as well as religious. Mr. White, while endorsing the above petition, held that the Raja's claim with regard to Nauduars was quite correct, as he had been personally informed by Mr. Robertson that this district, which had originally been included in Central Assam to be handed over to the king, was eventually retained by the British Government to procure a scientific boundary for British Assam.²⁶

The Agent, as before, adopted a very uncompromising attitude even in the face of these hard facts pointed out by Mr. White. While forwarding the recommendations of Mr. White to the Supreme Government, he stated that as his information about emigration from Upper Assam and the internal administration of the country by the Raja had not tallied exactly with the report and findings submitted by Mr. White, he was unable to make any recommendations regarding the reduction in the tribute proposed by the latter. He held that the experiment had proved that both the nobility and people in general would be better satisfied with the European management of the country. In his opinion, the Raja seemed to stand in the light of a manager appointed on certain terms and as such he should be called upon to relinquish his post in the first instance on a suitable pension, as he had failed to fulfil those terms. Mr. Jenkins was not prepared to give him even the honour of a Zamindār. To him "Shree Shree Maharajah Poorunder Singh

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.

Narindra" was nothing but a manager of an estate. That was the irony of fate reserved for the last independent Swargadev of the Ahom dynasty.

But Mr. Jenkins was not all harshness. He was magnanimous enough to propose a pension to the extent of all the surplus stated to have been received by him *viz.* the sum of Rs. 25,000/- per annum though Purandar Singh, according to him, was the richest man in the whole of Assam. This arrangement seemed to him to be of the highest advantage to the British Government as well as to the people of Assam. In reply the Supreme Government directed him to take an early opportunity of proceeding to Upper Assam with a view to satisfying himself personally on the state of affairs obtaining there. The Calcutta authorities held that if the Agent was satisfied that the tribute pressed too heavily on the Raja, they would have no objection to the reduction of the tribute for a period of two or three years by way of experiment in the first instance. If on the other hand, the Agent found that there were inherent defects in the Raja's administration not liable to be removed by any reduction in the amount of the tribute, they proposed to grant him either a reduction on his surrendering to the British Government a portion of his territory equivalent to the reduction or a pension equal to that of his net revenues on his relinquishing the reins of administration.²⁷

March,
1838.

According to the instructions of the Supreme Government Mr. Jenkins paid a visit to Upper Assam in the early part of 1838. To acquire a first hand knowledge of the conditions prevailing in the Raja's dominion, Mr. Jenkins travelled by land from Bishwanāth to the Subansiri river along the northern bank of the Brahmaputra and then crossed to the south bank of the river through Majoli island. In this way he arrived at Jaipur via Rangpur, Ghergaon and Burhat. From Jaipur he sailed down the Buridihing river and at last reached Jorhāt, capital of Upper Assam. On his way to Jorhāt he received a number of petitions from the ryots of the king. He found the countryside as fertile as that of Lower Assam and saw traces of the former prosperity of the villages once densely populated but now almost deserted. He noticed a great falling-off in the population of the country which did not contain more than 2,50,000 people at the time of his visit.* He found the brass workers, fishermen, goldwashers, weavers and potters emigrating into the

²⁷ P. C. 1837, January 23, No. 60.

* The number was much higher at the time of the transfer.

adjoining lands where their fellow brethren were freed from all taxations, except for the lands they actually held. In the part of the country, east of the Subansiri river, depopulation was most alarming and according to Mr. Jenkins this was occasioned by the oppressive transit duties, incursion of the wild hill tribes and by the exactions of forced labour. He also held that the inefficiency of the Raja's civil and criminal courts, the malversations of his principal officers, the non-remission of taxes in the case of runaway pāiks, and the want of taxation in the Bar Senāpati's dominion were no less responsible for this unhappy state of affairs.²⁸ All these complaints, he brought to the notice of the Raja in due time.

Many of these charges were found to be exaggerated. With regard to the non-remission of taxes in case of runaway pāiks, the Raja contended that the pressure of the tribute demanded by the British Government would not admit of his allowing any such remission however much he might desire to do so. As regards the heaviness of the transit duties, it was found on inspection that these were nominally the same as they were during the British administration. The people complained of these exactions because by contrasting their own lot with that of their brethren in Lower Assam where these had been abolished, they found them all the more intolerable. However, the Raja acknowledged the vexatious character of these duties and expressed his readiness to abolish them altogether provided a suitable remission was allowed in his tribute.

Mr. Jenkins found the ryots belonging to the northern bank of the river complaining bitterly of the inadequacy of the military protection afforded to them. Mr. Jenkins actually found the military guards withdrawn save and except a small party consisting of one pāik and four sepoy. The consequences were that the Dāflās were daily making inroads upon the hapless and helpless villagers and carrying off their families, property and cattle. The atrocities were of such a nature that Mr. Jenkins called for guards from the Assam Light Infantry and made arrangements for the proper defence of the frontier. He found the ryots on the Nāgā frontier subjected to similar aggressions. For the withdrawal of the detachment by the Raja from the frontier, there appeared to Mr. Jenkins no good reason whatsoever because he found all his militia numbering about five hundred strong concentrated round his own person at Jorhāt. On this he remonstrated with the Raja and procured from him two guards from

²⁸ P. C. 1838, March 21, No. 158.

his own troops. Raja Purandar Singh informed Mr. Jenkins that he had on many occasions applied to the Political Agent for the services of the Company's troops. But he had been told by the latter that the British Government would not lend their troops to defend his frontier from the marauding incursions of the Dāflās and Nāgās.²⁹

To Jenkins the chief cause of complaint appeared to have resulted from the maladministration of the Raja's court. He did not study the nature of the complaint in the light of the customs and usages of the country as had been done by Mr. White, who was more familiar with the customs of the country. So he could not get at the truth and hence reported, "I fear there is too much reason to apprehend that this statement is mainly correct". He noticed that there was much irregular interference with the decisions of the courts by members of the Raja's family. He also received most frivolous complaints from the ryots against the king. The ryots complained of the Raja's having stopped the allowances for killing tigers and elephants which the British Government had always granted. These were very minor matters and might have been easily brushed aside without any detriment to his main line of enquiry.³⁰

Coming to the financial matter, Mr. Jenkins wondered why the Raja had failed to collect a much larger amount by way of revenue, as he found from the account rolls that when the country was made over to him the state demand was about one lakh and seven thousand rupees. With regard to the Raja's complaint that the tribute was very heavy, he argued that had an able and popular government been set up, the amount of the tribute would not have oppressed the country. As regards the Raja's petition for the remission of a part of his tribute, he held that the amount could readily have been discharged had his administration been equally good and strong as their own. The failure of the administration he ascribed to the personal character of the Raja. Under the circumstances, he was doubtful whether Purandar Singh would be able to institute an effectual reorganisation of his government in all its branches, even if substantial remissions were made. So he was against any such remission in favour of the Raja.

As the Raja had failed to pay tribute according to the articles of the treaty and had fallen heavily into arrears, the Agent observed

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ P. P. 1898, May 16, No. 59.

that he was liable to dethronement. But at the same time he held that the Raja was entitled to an indulgent consideration at the hands of the Supreme Government. Mr. Jenkins accepted the contention of the Raja that the lightness of taxation in the Bar Senāpati's country and the abolition of the poll tax on the landless craftsmen in the company's dominions were the causes of his losing many of his ryots. As the British Government would neither allow him to demand the surrender of runaway pāiks—a demand which they themselves had made when the country had been under their administration—nor authorise a proportionate tribute to be imposed upon the Mātak Chief, Mr. Jenkins rightly held that the Raja was entitled to some concessions in other directions. He further held that "the misrule of the Raja was not entirely without excuse". As the Government had placed him in unlimited authority over a large population the great majority of the upper class of which were opposed to him individually, he concluded that things did not work as some would have expected. That things had not worked smoothly was as much the Raja's misfortune as his fault—was his firm conviction. So he submitted that the Raja had a strong claim on the indulgence of the British Government. And to give relief to the Raja, he recommended that the Government should resume such portions of the country as would yield a revenue nearly equal to the amount paid by the Raja as a tribute. Mr. Jenkins hoped that freed from any demand upon him by the British Government, the Raja would have no excuse for not governing the remaining portion properly.³¹

He advised the Government accordingly to resume the whole of the north bank of the Brahmaputra, the great island Mājoli and the tract of the country on the south bank lying between the rivers Disūng and Buridihing—altogether an area covering nearly 3,000 sq. miles. Mr. Jenkins calculated that this portion of Upper Assam proposed to be re-transferred to the Company's administration would fetch a revenue of nearly 34,000 rupees estimated as follows:—

	Rs.
The North Bank yielding	23,000/-
The Majoli island	5,000/-
The southern tract containing Jaipur and Burhāt	6,000/-
Total	34,000/-

³¹ Ibid.

Mr. Jenkins showed that the Raja, by the proposed arrangement, would be left a compact division very conveniently situated round his capital, the net revenue of which would be upwards of 90,000 rupees (according to his calculation) and he would have nothing to complain of. The tract to be resumed by the Government though vaster in area was sparsely populated and contained 40,000 *poorahs* of rice land as against 70,000 *poorahs* of the division to be left over to the Raja and its revenue income was only 34,000 as mentioned above.³²

At first sight the arrangement proposed by Mr. Jenkins may appear a bad bargain on the part of the British Government. But it was not really so. The tract in question, though sparsely populated, contained the richest parts of Assam and showed signs of vast possibilities. It contained salt *hāts* (markets) and salt wells. Under better arrangements it was liable to rapid improvement and Mr. Jenkins begged the Supreme Government not to object to a little expense at first to possess a property so promising. The better administration, Mr. Jenkins hoped, would invite a large emigration of people to this tract. He visualised that not only would there be a flow of emigrants from the Raja's dominion, but there would also be an accession from the Bar Senāpati's country which would in turn lead to an increase of the revenue within a few years. Mr. Jenkins foreshadowed that the political advantages that would accrue from this arrangement would be no less important. By the establishment of a strong Government in this part of the country, the Dāffās, the Miris and the Abors in the north and the Nagas in the south whose atrocities and excursions had practically turned the districts between the Disāng and the Dihing (which had once been the granary of Assam), into a wilderness, would be kept under check and a sense of tranquillity would prevail on the frontier. This, Mr. Jenkins asserted, would never be achieved under the Raja's management. He also foresaw that with peace would come security and prosperity and improved trade.

Mr. Jenkins finally proposed that as under his liberal arrangement the Raja would gain so much, the Government should insist on his abolishing all transit duties and should further call upon him to substitute a land tax for a poll tax. He suggested further that the Raja should remodel his courts on the British system and should be asked to show the books and records of his courts once a year to the Political Agent stationed at Sadiyā who should make an

³² Ibid.

annual visit to the Raja's capital. And to enable the Raja immediately to set about the reforms proposed by him, Mr. Jenkins recommended the immediate suspension of arrears of tribute and proposed that it should be liquidated in five years by equal instalments. Mr. Jenkins hoped and trusted that "under the arrangement proposed by him—the Rajah's Government freed from all demands of tribute might be conducted more happily for his subjects and more for his own reputation and permanent benefit than it had hitherto been".³³

Without taking at first the proposition whether the proposed arrangement would be of any advantage to Purandar Singh or not, let us first of all see whether his administration was of such a galling nature as to have called for the kind of reform suggested by the Agent, which aimed at the mutilation of his territory. It is difficult to take many of the findings of Mr. Jenkins at their face value. He says, "the misrule has been great and galling to the people and has originated partly in the Rajah's unpopularity and partly in his incapacity or his rapacity". And in the same breath he says, "No specific acts of oppression committed by the Rajah have been laid before me". There were many weak spots in Purandar Singh's administration no doubt.³⁴ Many of these were of trifling nature, many were exaggerated, and many again were not of his own creation. They were forced on him either as the legacy of the dreadful past or as the continuation of a system which he could not abolish altogether for want of means. He was given a vast and straggling tract to rule but he was not given resources enough to manage it properly. From all accounts it was clear that the most important cause of the desertion which had greatly, if not mainly, retarded his income was the absence or lightness of taxation in the neighbouring countries, and for this the king was not to blame at all. This was clearly perceived by Mr. White and he took a lenient view of the situation and consequently recommended a remission of the tribute, though that was not the panacea for all his troubles, as we shall see presently.

Mr. Jenkins also fully realised the embarrassing situation of Purandar Singh when he, while investigating the causes of desertion, observed, "The lightness of taxation in the Muttock country, in the consequence of the Burra Senapatty's having no tribute to pay, has certainly been the means of the Raja's losing many of his ryots. In our time the emigration was checked by the Burra Senapatty

³⁴ Ibid.

³³ Ibid.

being obliged to pay over to our Government the personal tax of the deserted pikes".³⁵ He even went to the length of criticising the policy of the Government on this point and rather angrily exclaimed, "This the (British) Government would not allow to be continued in favour of the Rajah, nor would the Government authorise a proportionate tribute to be imposed upon the Muttock chief".³⁶ These were his own findings quite in keeping with the situation he was called upon to investigate. But the remedies, he suggested were altogether of a different character. These were punitive rather than reformative. When he admitted that the lightness of taxation in the Bar Senāpati's country and the abolition of the poll tax on the landless craftsmen in the company's dominions were the causes of exodus from the Raja's country, he made a correct diagnosis of the disease which had been eating into the body politic of the nascent state, but he failed to suggest appropriate remedies which might have extirpated the root cause of the decadence.

Now coming to the proposed arrangement itself, we find that as against dethronement with which the king was threatened and which he was liable to by the terms of the agreement or *ekrārnāmā*, it was a milder punishment no doubt. But it was a punishment after all, and according to our opinion, Purandar Singh did not deserve it. But what was worse, the proposition Mr. Jenkins suggested did not touch at the root of the evil which it was his aim to eradicate. By the proposed arrangement, the king ran the risk of being shorn of a very valuable part of the kingdom which he was loath to part with; the arrangement would have also left him exactly where he was—rather at a greater disadvantage. The proposed arrangement threatened to accelerate the process of emigration (which Purandar Singh was asking the Paramount Power to stop) because the author of the contemplated move himself observed, "By this arrangement, the Rajah's division will be greatly reduced in value for only by the influx of his ryots that the other division (our division) can be much improved, and undoubtedly before the Rajah can do anything to reconcile his rule to the people, there will be an emigration of his people to our possessions," and he actually proposed to hold out encouragement to emigrants to settle at a lower rate than that imposed elsewhere.³⁷

In due course, the Agent's report on the administration of Upper

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid.

Assam was submitted to the Supreme Government for consideration. This was at first examined by the Vice-President-in-Council. The Vice-President-in-Council considered all the circumstances alluded to in the report and came to the conclusion that the Government would not be warranted in leaving the territory of Upper Assam any longer in the hands of the Raja. In their opinion the experiment had proved a failure, because the trial of five years had exhibited a continuance of the worst evils of the old system. As the system of forced labour and the *pāik* system had been sources of oppression and as the revenue realised by the Raja had dwindled under his management resulting in the accumulation of arrears, they saw no prospect of any improvement of the tract under the Raja's administration. They did not accept the recommendation of the Agent because they were of opinion that the same argument which would justify the resumption of a part of the territory would also render necessary the taking of the whole. They observed, "The Rajah is by character unfit to rule and in his hands there is no hope of providing for the country even a tolerable administration".³⁸

The Vice-President-in-Council even brushed aside the instructions of the Court of Directors who authorised them to renounce any portion of the stipulated tribute which they (Court of Directors) had considered impossible for Purandar Singh to pay without oppressing the people under him,³⁹ and recommended the resumption of the whole territory and the assignment of a moderate pension for his maintenance.⁴⁰ The decision was apparently most unexpected and it even went far beyond the measure of reform suggested by Jenkins. But Jenkins himself was responsible for this calamitous award as will be seen presently.

In a demi-official letter (dated the 4th April 1838) which was forwarded to the Supreme Government along with his main report, Mr. Jenkins described Raja Purandar Singh "as a rapacious miser, one of the worst characters we could have put over the unfortunate country". This letter sealed the fate of the king. In it he admitted the existence of a conspiracy organised by the Raja's counsellors who tried to get rid of him by creating a breach between the king and the British Government over a failure of the tribute because "these men who fattened under us saw nothing but starvation under him". Mr. Jenkins found in Raja's principal counsellors his greatest enemies. But instead of extricating the Raja from the

³⁸ P. P. 1838, May 16, No. 54.

³⁹ Letter from Court No. 17 of 1837.

⁴⁰ P. P. 1838, May 16, No. 54.

clutches of these disloyal servants, he recommended his removal from the *gadi* and adduced proofs of his rapacity from an anonymous petition reported to have been dropped in his room while he was at Jorhāt. Though the petition, alluded to, was "anonymous" Mr. Jenkins himself admits that he knew the writer of the petition.

In that so-called anonymous letter, the writer complained that Raja Purandar Singh in five years had so unsettled the country that in another year the few remaining families must be ruined unless the administration of both civil and criminal justice was taken out of his hands. And to prove the oppressiveness of his administration the writer produced a catalogue of grievances. No faults of the king serious or trivial, imaginary or real, escaped his ever-vigilant eye. He even complained of his rising late in the day.⁴¹ When Jenkins's demi-official report containing these damaging remarks against the conduct and the administration of Raja Purandar Singh based on that anonymous letter, reached the hands of the councillors at Calcutta, it irrevocably stiffened their attitude towards the king. Mr. Jenkins cut the ground from under Purandar Singh's feet when he despatched a private letter of this nature; and it afforded Purandar Singh little consolation to learn that in the main report Jenkins had pleaded for his case and advised the resumption of only a part of his territory.⁴²

The Vice-President-in-Council forwarded their decision to the Governor-General for final confirmation and the latter in an elaborate minute considered all the points mentioned in the report of Captain Jenkins. Though His Excellency found in the administration of the Raja "reckless maladministration and avarice above and consequent misery below", he held, "His faults are those chiefly of incapacity and natural disposition and no grave crime is laid to his charge".⁴³ He would have cordially accepted the earlier recommendation of Captain Jenkins (the resumption of a part of the king's territory) but for his demi-official report which stated that the Raja had been mainly influenced by a lust for money and could only be coerced into a consistent course of good government by the constant presence of a military force. At first His Excellency hesitated to deviate completely from an arrangement concluded but a short time before by the preceding Government. "Formally to set up a Native Ruler and within a very few years entirely to remove him must be a measure of bad general effect", observed His Lordship. He was

⁴¹ P. P. 1838, May 16, No. 58.

⁴² P. C. 1838, May 16, No. 55.

⁴³ P. C. 1838, August 22, No. 7.

rather inclined to leave Purandar Singh in the enjoyment of some portion of his dominions if that were possible. But "as there was no middle course" and "mild measures would be at once impolitic and unjust" Lord Auckland reluctantly found himself compelled to order absolute resumption as determined upon by the Vice-President-in-Council. His hands were thus forced by the demi-official report of Captain Jenkins and the decision of the Vice-President-in-Council.⁴⁴

The Vice-President-in-Council was duly informed of the decision of the Governor-General and arrangements were made for the resumption of the territory of Purandar Singh. But in the meantime a bewildering situation had arisen and suddenly the Governor-General called upon the Vice-President-in-Council to stop further proceedings with regard to the resumption of Central Assam. When the proceedings regarding the proposed resumption of the territory of Purandar Singh reached the ears of the Court of Directors, they reminded the Government of India of their instructions issued on the occasion of the annexation of Jaintiā which laid down clearly that in future no territory of any native prince would be annexed without their previous sanction and plainly told them that the proposed resumption of the territory of Purandar Singh would be regarded only as provisional pending the issue of their final orders.⁴⁵ The result was that all measures regarding the resumption of the territory were immediately suspended.

Though the injunctions issued by the Home Government had no permanent effect and only stayed the proceedings for the time being, they raised a constitutional question of great importance. The interim order issued by the court of Directors seemed to challenge the ultimate authority of the Government of India and evoked a strong rejoinder from the Governor-General who in an elaborate minute reviewed at length the situation created by the order of the Home authorities. In his opinion the order issued by the Court of Directors imposed a new restriction upon the free action of the Government of India. Though he regarded that in one sense all the proceedings of the Government of India were uncertain liable to be approved or disapproved by the controlling authorities in England, he could not view with pleasure that every measure passed by the Governor-General-in-Council should be merely provisional and held in suspense for distant confirmation or rejection. By this prohibition, he feared, the Government of India

June,
1838.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ P. C. 1838, August 22, Nos. 8-10.

would be placed in a condition of "avowed and universal weakness". He apprehended that his frank opinion on the point at issue might give umbrage to the Court of Directors and, therefore, earnestly requested the Home authorities to remember that these had been written in all sincerity.

Coming to the question of the resumption of the territory of Purandar Singh, His Lordship held that in view of the restriction placed upon the Government of India by the Home authorities, it was better that the whole matter be suspended because "every provisional arrangement of a territory must be bad". Under a system liable to be revised within a few months, His Lordship feared that the people would lose confidence in the British. But, at the same time, as he felt that the enquiry of Captain Jenkins must have already led people to expect early interference, he left the matter to the decision of the Vice-President-in-Council.⁴⁶

Regarding the merits and demerits of the "Prohibitory Order" issued by the Court of Directors, we are constrained to say that His Lordship rather misunderstood the spirit of the order of the Home authorities. His fears were unfounded. It was not a general embargo declaring every act of the India Government temporary pending the final order passed by them; it simply restricted the power of the India Government in one field of action, namely, the annexation of the territories of a native prince without reference to them. In our opinion the Government of India by their arbitrary use of the discretionary powers vested in them, as lamentably exemplified in the case of Jaintiã, quite justified the promulgation of the above "Prohibitory Order", however unpalatable it might have been to them.

July.
1838.
August
1838.

The Vice-President held a meeting of the Council on the 8th August 1838 to determine finally the question at issue in the light of the prohibitory order passed by the Home authorities. Accordingly they reviewed the case of Purandar Singh *de novo* and were convinced that the measure of resumption having been determined on, any delay to carry it into effect would be attended with the "very worst consequences". With regard to the order of the Court of Directors, they held that this was not applicable to the case and finally resolved to authorise Captain Jenkins "to adopt the necessary steps for resuming the administration of the territory made over to Purandar Singh in March 1833 and for placing it under the management of the British officers". The Governor-General concurred in the resolution of the Vice-President-in-Council and Purandar Singh

⁴⁶ Ibid.

was formally divested of his dominion and royalty in October 1838 and made to retire on a pension of Rs. 1,000/- per month.⁴⁷ The curtain was at last rung down upon the Central Assam episode. Thus ended the rule of the last independent king of Assam. The resumed country was formed into two divisions and placed under the management of two principal officers—Ensign Brodie and Captain Vetch whose Head Quarters were fixed respectively at Jorhāt and Lakhimpore.⁴⁸

When the proceedings containing the final orders of the Government of India reached the Court of Directors, they did not object to the measure because the creation of that state had been contrary to their direction. They simply characterised the act of resumption "as irregular" as it had been annexed without reference to them.⁴⁹ The cause of this apparent *volte-face* on the part of the Court of Directors requires some explanation.

We have noticed in the course of the Government of India's dealings with the Court of Directors during the period under review (1824-1856) that on many occasions the prohibitory orders passed by the Court as the ultimate authority were not carried out by their servants in India.*

On the occasion of the transfer of the eastern part of Cachar to Gambhir Singh, the Court of Directors strongly disapproved of the measure, but their intervention proved ineffective. When again the principality of Jaintiā was annexed by the Calcutta authorities without any reference to their masters at home, the Court not only protested against such annexation, which they condemned as "impolitic and unjustifiable", but also in their anxiety prevent such recurrences, gave a distinct ruling that in future no territory of a native prince should be annexed without their previous sanction. Their protest this time also went unheeded. The Court again, as mentioned above, on the eve of the resumption of Purandar Singh's dominions reminded their agents in India of their newly promulgated ruling and told them to regard all such annexations as provisional measures liable to revision. Their servants in India, contrary to all

⁴⁷ P. C. 1838, August 22. Nos. 11-13.

P. C. 1838, October 24. No. 2.

Letter to Court No. 24 of 1839.

⁴⁸ P. C. 1838, October 24. No. 16.

⁴⁹ Letter to Court No. 24. 1839.

Letter from Court No. 24 of 1839.

* "There are many indications of a questionable co-operation between the Company's servants abroad and their masters at home".

Roberts "History of British India", p. 225.

expectation, even carried out this measure in the teeth of the opposition of the Home authorities. No step was taken against what appeared to be a "misdemeanor" on the part of their agents in India. The Court of Directors again seemed to climb down. Such instances can be multiplied.

From the above it appears that the authorities in Leadenhall Street were helpless against the wilful disobedience on the part of their servants in India and that they had no power to prevent what they considered to be wrong or unfair. But what appears to be true is not true and an incidental discussion of the position of the Court in its relation with the Government of India will help us in understanding the real situation. A detailed discussion of the above matter is not possible here because the matter is outside the scope of our work and secondly the subject matter covers a greater period (1773-1858) than that undertaken by us.

Though the Court of Directors were supreme authorities over the affairs of the East India Company in India, they used their powers with wise restraint; certain extraneous circumstances and the nature of the functions they were entrusted with, regulated all their activities with regard to the management of Indian affairs.

As regards the general management of the Indian affairs, much was left to the discretion of the local Government because, situated as the Home authorities were at a vast distance from India, the orders transmitted by them rarely reached India in time. Events in India sometimes succeeded one another with such bewildering rapidity that even the 'men on the spot' could not foresee the course of events and they had to act on many occasions on their own responsibility as the exigencies of the time dictated.⁵⁰ And as happened in those circumstances, sometimes they had to act contrary to the wishes and directions of the Home authorities as when the Calcutta authorities had taken Cachar, an independent principality, under the Company's protection without reference to the Court of Directors (vide page. 49). But "circumstances in many cases rendered such disobedience a virtue".⁵¹

⁵⁰ Letter from Court of Directors to Board of Control, August 27 of 1829.

⁵¹ In 1811 Lord Minto won the consent of the Home Government for an attack on Java.....A formidable fleet assembled at Malacca. The Governor-General himself accompanied the expedition.....Java was occupied. The Directors had ordered that if the expedition were successful, Dutch fortifications were to be levelled and the troops withdrawn, but Minto seeing that it would be an inhuman act to abandon the Dutch Colonists to the mercies of an exasperated native population, had the courage and independance to disregard those instructions. Roberts, 'History of British India', Page 275, Second Edition.

Then again it must be remembered that "the Court of Directors was not so much an executive as a deliberative body". Its main function was not to direct the details of administration but to scrutinize and revise the past acts of their servants in India; to lay down principles and to issue general instructions for their future guidance.⁵² We have also to bear in mind that in most cases the decisions of the "men on the spot" were just and ultimately conducive to the interests of the Company. Far away from the actual scene of operation, the Court of Directors could no doubt take a detached view of things which was so essential for the fair discharge of duties, but at the same time their lack of first hand knowledge of the affairs of India justly precluded them from taking a realistic view of the situation which was equally essential for the speedy and efficient performance of duties.

The appointment of Lord Cornwallis marked the decisive preference for sending men of high social position from England to fill the office of the Governor-General. The noblemen sent from England had a wider grasp of foreign affairs and politics generally than could be expected of the servants of the Company; they had higher moral standards and their views, even their hostile criticisms,⁵³ were generally received with far more respect by the Directors than those of the former servants of the Company.⁵⁴

The Court of Directors again as the Supreme authority had certainly power of revoking the decisions of their servants in India. nay, they had the power of recalling their Governors-General as they recalled Lord Ellenborough and drove Wellesley to resign.⁵⁵ But on many occasions they shrank from taking such drastic steps because public revocation of the measures issued (vide page 120) by their servants in India or sudden removal of the

⁵² Petition from East India Company to Parliament, February 1858.

⁵³ Lord Cornwallis strongly resented the interference of Directors in the appointment of officers and even threatened to resign if so.....pernicious a system should again be revived.

(Letter to John Woodhouse, Director of the Company, August 10, 1789).

⁵⁴ A constitutional History of India—Keith, page 141.

⁵⁵ (a) "With regard to supersession of Wellesley, Pitt expressed the opinion that the G. G. had acted most imprudently and illegally and that he could not be suffered to remain in the Government. The Court of Directors voted for his condemnation by an overwhelming majority—Roberts. History of British India. Page 262.

(b) "The Court of Directors most justly disapproved of Ellenborough's policy in Sind.....and they accused him of systematically subordinating the interests of the Civil to those of the military service"—Roberts, Page 392.

highest officers from office in the midst of great public duties would have placed them in some degree of embarrassment and humiliation.⁵⁶

Lastly we must take into account another factor which is often overlooked. Though the Board of Control as constituted by the Act of 1784 (better known as Pitt's India Act) was to be strictly a Board of Control "it gradually employed powers not merely in the way of superintendence and control but also in systematic and active management", which was strongly resented by the Court of Directors.⁵⁷ During the latter part of the Company's administration the evergrowing conflict between the Court of Directors and the Board of Control and the waning power of the former body⁵⁸ (so ably discussed in Phillips' "East India Company") had their unhappy repercussion on their servants in India. Even some of the Governors-General were adroit enough to play off one against the other⁵⁹ and were thus less inclined to respect the orders of the Home Government. Lord Ellenborough regarded the Court of Directors as nothing more than a channel of communication between the Governor-General and the Board of Control and openly said, "Supreme authority does not reside in the Court itself".⁶⁰ Lord Dalhousie had a poor opinion of the despatches sent by the Home Government and alleged, "These were penned for the most part by head clerks and signed by many without being read".⁶¹

All the above factors and circumstances "unavoidably regulated but did not exclude the controlling authority of the Court of Directors"⁶² and during the period under review the Company through its Court of Directors still remained an important factor in the system of Indian administration.⁶³

Had all the prohibitory orders and judgments passed by the Court been accepted in toto by their servants in India and had they regulated their conduct accordingly, strict discipline would have

⁵⁶ (a) Bentinck's minute, September 14, 1831.

(b) Lord Ellenborough's letter to Secret Committee, January 18, 1844.

⁵⁷ C. H. Philips—The East India Company, Chapter VII.

Roberts—History of British India, P. 386.

⁵⁸ "The strength, influence and independence of the Court of Directors as against the Board of Control varied in proportion to the strength of the East India interest in Parliament. In 1834 there were 45 East India members as against 106 in 1806"—Phillips' "East India Company" 1784-1834, Page 297.

⁵⁹ Roberts—History of British India; P. 386.

⁶⁰ Letter to Secret Committee; Jany. 18, 1844.

⁶¹ Dalhousie's Private letter to Sir George Couper; December 8, 1851.

⁶² Letter from Court to Board, August 27, 1829.

⁶³ Keith—Constitutional History of India, Page 140.

been maintained no doubt, but "An empire more magnificent than that of Rome" would not have arisen. Wellesley and Lord Hastings were bold or rash enough to ignore the principles of Indian policy laid down by the Home authorities and it was they who had most extended the Company's possessions in India. Nevertheless these judgments and prohibitory orders had had their value. These orders by serving ultimately as rules for the future guidance of their servants in India and "by acting as a brake on the speed of the Company's expansion, benefited its power in India which was thereby afforded periodic intervals of peace in which to consolidate and organise its resources".⁶⁴

Now let us resume the thread of our discourse. After Purandar Singh had been deposed, he addressed several petitions to the Governor-General praying for the restoration of the kingdom. As he was not favoured with any reply, he sent one Kāsi Prasād Bose as his muktear to Calcutta to represent his case before the Government of India.* The embassy was a failure. Purandar Singh was informed that he must not expect to be restored to the management of any part of the territory of Assam.⁶⁵ Several petitions were presented to Mr. White also by the people of Upper Assam praying for the restoration of the kingdom to their ex-Swargadeva. These petitions according to Mr. White correctly expressed the feelings of the upper and middle classes of the community but Mr. Jenkins thought otherwise. These petitions and the subsequent prayer of Purandar Singh that he should be assigned a portion of the territory in lieu of the money stipend sanctioned to him made no change in the sentiments of the higher authorities as to the expediency of the course adopted.⁶⁶

April.
1839.

Was therefore the deposition of Purandar Singh justified? From all accounts it is clear that he was not a blood-thirsty tyrant, nor even a man of detestable habits. Even Lord Auckland admitted that no grave crime was laid to his charge. Though His Lordship concurred in the judgment passed by the Vice-President-in-Council, it must be said that His Lordship's observation with regard to Purandar Singh's conduct and administration was characterised by a spirit of moderation and sympathy not found elsewhere. He admitted that he would have had recourse to other measures had

⁶⁴ Philips—"East India Company", Page 301.

* It is interesting to note that on this occasion Purandar Singh sent some valuable presents to the Governor-General including one ivory chair and one young male rhinoceros.

⁶⁵ P. C. 1839, May 1, Nos. 139-140.

⁶⁶ Letter to Court No. 24. of 1839.

there been some redeeming features in the administration of Purandar Singh.⁶⁷ There were many such features as reported by Mr. White but those were lost sight of by His Lordship. There were charges of corruption and oppression no doubt, but these were not of such a flagrant nature as would have called for such a drastic step.

It strikes us very peculiar that every one, even Captain Jenkins himself, admitted that one of the main causes of the exodus was the absence or lightness of taxation in the adjoining countries, but no one cared to suggest the abolition of this inequitable system which placed Purandar Singh under such embarrassing conditions. That he began well is proved by the wise and benevolent regulations he issued for the better administration of his kingdom and is further confirmed by the report of a very strict official like Mr. Robertson who had nothing but unstinted praise for his administration, as will be evident from the following lines taken from his report where he stated, "I am happy to be able to speak well of the administration of Raja Poorunder Singh. Though many of the higher order of the Assamese are discontented with his rule, and we are sure to receive the least favourable accounts of his actions, yet all agree in admitting that he has hitherto proved to the bulk of the people a mild and beneficent master and this is confirmed by the fact of no emigrations having as yet taken place into our territory nor into those of the Burra Senaputty and other independent chiefs in the remote parts of Upper Assam." And what is more, in proof of Raja Purandar Singh's activities, he gave some striking illustrations.⁶⁸ And yet Gait says, "His subjects were oppressed and misgoverned and his rule was very distasteful to the bulk of the people".* It is strange indeed that the man, who was chosen by Mr. Scott and his successor after a thorough enquiry and earned reputation as a benevolent administrator in 1834, suddenly degenerated into a man of rapacious character and that too of the worst type in 1837 when Jenkins visited Upper Assam! Taking into account all circumstances, we are of opinion, and every impartial observer will agree with us, that Purandar Singh's administration admittedly had no fair trial. And "to remove every plea which can be justly urged by Poorunder Singh in excuse of his exactions, he ought to have been granted the remission he asked for" and given a chance to administer his country under fair conditions as advocated by Mr. White and decided upon

⁶⁷ P. C. 1838, August 22, No. 10 (G. G's. minute).

⁶⁸ Letter from Court No. 44 of 1838.

* Gait's "History of Assam".

by the Court of Directors.⁶⁹ The tribute of Rs. 50,000 demanded from Purandar Singh was regarded as "too high" even by the Court of Directors.⁷⁰ It is a pity that the Calcutta authorities who took long seven years to restore Central Assam to an Assamese Prince did not take more than twelve months to reverse their decision.

⁶⁹ Letter from Court No. 17 of 1837.

⁷⁰ Letter from Court No. 18 of 1838.

SECTION IV

THE ANNEXATION OF CENTRAL CACHAR (*Western part of Tulārām's Dominion*)

We have seen how Govindarām, aided by the Rānīs of the late Govinda Chandra, continued to give troubles to Tulārām even after the death of Govinda Chandra in obedience to a secret understanding arrived at between him and the late Raja. With Dharampur as his base of operation Govindarām made a second irruption into Tulārām's country in the summer of 1830 immediately after the death of Govinda Chandra. His third attack was launched in October 1831. Tulārām was practically deprived of the western part of his kingdom by his "rascally cousin". The people of Central Cachar knew no peace. They were ground down alternately by the contending chiefs, Tulārām and Govindarām. The latter, drawing supplies of arms and ammunition from the Rānīs, began to erect stockades at strategic points on the hills of Central Cachar. Govindarām had under his command four hundred men, fifty of whom were armed with muskets.¹ Central Cachar was on the verge of complete ruin.

July, 1832.

At this juncture, Captain Fisher, who was in charge of the Cachar plains, intervened on behalf of Tulārām, who according to him appeared to be on the defensive and as such was entitled to be restored to his lost possessions according to the terms of the treaty of August 1829.² Tulārām and Govindarām were much alike in their personal character. Both were tyrannical, oppressive and treacherous. Both were products of a palace revolution. But of the two, Tulārām appeared to Captain Fisher somewhat better because he was more tractable, and was prepared to acquiesce in any arrangement that would give him a respectable settlement.³

Captain Fisher suggested a number of remedies to bring about a complete cessation of hostilities. His first suggestion was that Govindarām, Durgācharan and others, who had acted in the first instance without any provocation from Tulārām, should be immediately removed from the service of the widowed Rānīs and detained at some place far away from Cachar. He suggested secondly, that

¹ P. C. 1832, August 20, No. 94.

² Ibid.

³ P. C. 1832, June 18, No. 4.

the Rānīs should be persuaded to reside near him (Fisher) under the guardianship of Pārbatī Singh, brother of the senior Rānī. His further suggestion was that Tulārām should at the same time be provided with fifty muskets and a sum of one thousand rupees to enable him to retain the possession of the western half of his kingdom from foreign aggression. He also suggested a number of measures for the better administration of the revenues of hill Cachar. "By these advantageous arrangements" Captain Fisher aimed at rendering Tulārām a useful ally in the event of any future war and suggested that in place of tribute, he should be bound to supply coolies and pioneers.

Mr. Robertson, who was Agent on the north east frontier at that time, had no objection to placing the Rānīs under the supervision of their own relative. But with great hesitation he approved of the first suggestion of Captain Fisher, because depriving those persons of considerable rank and influence of their liberty merely upon suspicion of their having acted in a hostile manner towards a dependent chief appeared to him not very fair⁴.

July 27,
1832.

When the suggestions of Captain Fisher were forwarded to the Supreme Government, they no doubt approved of the measures adopted with regard to Govindarām, Durgācharan and the Rānīs, because as successor to the late Raja Govinda Chandra they were pledged not to allow its subjects to molest Tulārām in his hill possessions, but they questioned Fisher's right of interference on behalf of Tulārām. They pointed out that by the treaty of 1829, the British Government had guaranteed to Tulārām nothing further than that he should not be molested by the late Raja Govinda Chandra in his hill territory. The Calcutta authorities held that he had no claim on the British Government for protection and support against any other individual who might dispute with him the right to that tract. Under such circumstances the Supreme Government instructed him not to interfere on grounds of expediency in the intestine dissensions which might prevail in that tract.⁵

August 1832

Under the terms of the old treaty Tulārām was strictly speaking not a dependent of the British Government entitled to the protection of the latter in case of aggressions by a third power. By the arrangement of 1829, the Company was only bound to protect him from any attack made by Raja Govinda Chandra.

So Captain Fisher proposed the conclusion of a new treaty with Tulārām by which the latter was to become a direct tribu-

Aug 14,
1832

⁴ P. C. 1832, August 20, No. 94.

⁵ P. C. 1832, August 20, No. 95.

Aug 21,
1832

tary of the British Government and also recommended assignment of a small force to him for the protection of himself and his country against aggressions by independent powers such as the Nāgās.⁶ This proposal of Captain Fisher was strongly supported by the Agent.⁷ But the Supreme Government turned it down as it appeared unnecessary to them to enter into any fresh engagement with Tulārām. The earlier proposal of Captain Fisher regarding the supply of arms and money to Tulārām or posting of a small force in any part of Tulārām's country was also negatived by the Supreme Government. The Supreme Authorities stated, "No reason exists for burdening ourselves with any expense whatsoever for the purpose of maintaining the authority of Toolārām", and aptly remarked, "what he cannot keep in order by his own means he ought to relinquish".⁸

Sept 17,
1832

We find from the records that though Tulārām had no direct help from the British Government as desired by his well-wisher Captain Fisher, the local officers adopted all possible means they were capable of taking under the old treaty provision, to save his territory from further molestations and he was firmly seated in his government. But Tulārām deserved no such help. Just at this stage when things were brightening up for him, he committed acts of treachery and brutality which not only cost him the good will of the Paramount Power but also deprived him of a good part of his kingdom.

Sept 20,
1832

Tulārām made a swift descent towards the end of September 1832 upon the district of Dharampur, which was under the management of a native officer appointed by the British Government, and after burning four or five villages, carried away several individuals, two of whom, namely Sonārām and Mathur, were murdered in the jungles. These diabolical murders were committed by agents of Tulārām and under his own immediate personal direction and order. The murdered men who were British subjects, were reported to have given Tulārām great offence.

When this ghastly news was conveyed to the Agent he issued immediate orders for the apprehension of Tulārām, whom he declared to be the leader of a gang of lawless marauders liable to the severest punishment. On the 3rd October, Tulārām was arrested by Captain Fisher and sent down to the Magistrate of Sylhet to stand his trial.⁹ As Tulārām was an independent hill

⁶ P. C. 1832, September 17, No. 136.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ P. C. 1832, September, 17, No. 137.

⁹ P. C. 1832, October 20, No. 132.

chieftain, not liable to be tried by a British magistrate, the Supreme Government disapproved of the decision and instructed the Agent to withdraw all proceedings against him. Tulārām's name was accordingly withdrawn from the calendar of criminals. The Calcutta authorities further instructed him to hold an enquiry into the matter as the Agent to the Governor-General in his political capacity.¹⁰ The action of Mr. Robertson with regard to the arrest of Tulārām was also severely criticised by the Court of Directors who held, "it was ill-judged in Mr. Robertson to send Tulārām to be tried for murder at Gowhatty. He is not amenable to any laws administered by us".¹¹

The enquiry conducted by the Agent revealed that the men who were put to death did actually belong to villages within Tulārām's jurisdiction and that the spot on which they were done to death was also in his undisputed possession. It was also found that the murdered men committed gross and unprovoked outrages against Tulārām and the Agent was fully convinced that the latter did not contemplate committing any offence against the British Government. So Tulārām was set at liberty on the murder charge,¹² but as the aggression was committed in violation of the condition of the treaty of 1829, it was punishable by forfeiture of his possessions.¹³ The British Government, however, had no mind to resume the whole of his territory. They resolved to occupy only the Central portion of Cachar i.e. the western part of his dominion, including Dharampur, which had been the bone of contention between Tulārām and Govindarām during the previous two years. This division of Cachar was also of value to the British. It was the meeting ground of four principalities, namely, Assam, Sylhet, the Khāsi hills and Manipur.¹⁴

With a view to ascertaining the wishes of the inhabitants of the tract in question regarding its proposed transfer, the Agent despatched Captain Fisher and Jenkins on tour. They found the hillmen decidedly averse to the rule of Tulārām and they all expressed their desire to come under British administration.¹⁵ Accordingly Central Cachar was annexed by the British Government and a new treaty was concluded with Tulārām by which he

Janu 5,
1833

¹⁰ P. C. 1832, October 29, No. 133.

¹¹ Letters from the Court of Directors No. 14 of 1834.

¹² P. C. 1834, July 31, No. 22A.

¹³ Letters from the Court of Directors No. 14 of 1834.

¹⁴ G. G's Minute on Cachar dated the 29th March 1833.

¹⁵ P. C. 1833, May 30, No. 100.

Nov 3.
1834

was allowed to retain only the eastern portion of hill Cachar. He agreed to pay a nominal tribute of four pairs of elephant's tusks each weighing 70 lbs in token of subjection which later on was commuted to a cash payment of Rs. 490/-. On the other hand he was given a pension of Rs. 50/- per month. He was not given the title of Raja. His other powers were also greatly reduced.¹⁶ Thus Central Cachar came under British administration and peace at last dawned on the unhappy tract. Govindarām and Durgācharan were also awarded pensions. But they were directed to live in south Cachar i.e. in the Cachar plains.

Gait does not mention this important treaty of 1834 which divested Tulārām of the western half of his hilly kingdom. Gait writes "Toolārām laid claim to the vacant Raj, alleging that he was the descendant of the ancient line of princes, but his pretensions were summarily rejected. He was, however, confirmed in the possession of the greater part of the tract assigned to him by Govinda Chunder. He agreed to pay a tribute of four elephants tusks".* We have seen that after the death of Govinda Chandra, when the Cachar plains were annexed by the British Government in 1832, a settlement was made with Tulārām by which he was simply confirmed in the possession of the tract assigned to him by Govinda Chandra by the treaty of 1829. No part of his kingdom was taken away at that time. He had to surrender the western half of his kingdom in 1834 under the circumstances mentioned above. Gait mentions the treaty conditions of 1834 as binding on Tulārām in 1832, when actually no such treaty was concluded and no mutilation of his territory took place.

¹⁶ Letter from Court No. 24, 1836.

* Gait "History of Assam," Page 306.

SECTION V.

THE ANNEXATION OF MĀTAK.

The Bar Senāpati, the chief of the Mātaks, entered into an engagement with Mr. Scott in May 1826 as mentioned earlier, whereby he acknowledged the supremacy of the British Government and agreed to furnish the Paramount Power with a contingent of 300 pāiks in time of war as well as in time of peace. No tribute was however demanded from him. To check the flow of emigrants into the kingdom of the Bar Senāpati from Upper Assam, an officer was maintained at his capital who was empowered to collect poll taxes from the absconding pāiks on behalf of the British Government. Everything passed off smoothly and nothing marred the friendly relation that existed between the Vassal and the Paramount Power. At the time of the Singpho Insurrection, however, the fidelity of the Bar Senāpati was doubted by the local officers, but his repeated offer of help to the British Government proved beyond doubt that the old chieftain was decidedly faithful to his engagements and finally convinced Mr. White of the sincerity of his purpose.¹

The old arrangement continued until the year 1833 when Upper Assam was transferred to Purandar Singh. The post of the British official stationed at Rongagorā was abolished later. We have seen before that the request of Purandar Singh to retain that officer to collect poll taxes on his behalf was not acceded to by the British Government,² neither did they accept the proposal of Mr. White to demand a proportionate assessment from the Bar Senāpati to stop the emigration of pāiks from the Raja's territory. But in the year 1835 an innovation was introduced and the Bar Senāpati was asked to make a payment of Rs. 1800/- per annum in lieu of the service of pāiks³ who consequently ceased to perform duties for the Paramount Power.

From the time of Mr. Robertson, however, attempts were being made to levy a general tribute from the Bar Senāpati. But the Supreme Government was averse to levying any tribute from his kingdom, as they prized the friendship of these wild chiefs and 1834.

¹ Foreign 1838, April 18, Nos. 56-57.

² Letter to Court No. 14 of 1835.

³ Foreign Department 1833, April 18, No. 56

in their opinion nothing was more calculated to alienate their affection than the imposition of a tax which might press heavily on them.⁴ So the matter was dropped until the question was reopened by Mr. Jenkins in 1835. At first Mr. Jenkin's proposal received no better hearing than that of his predecessor. But he never abandoned the idea of assessing the Bar Senāpati's country and always kept the matter in view. In the year 1838, with the ulterior motive of imposing a tribute, Mr. Jenkins deputed Mr. White to the Bar Senāpati's dominion to study the internal condition obtaining there. The Bar Senāpati was at that time far advanced in years. His seven grown up sons had been assigned one district each to rule and the old man exercised a sort of general superintendence over them.⁵

Mr. White found Mātak well cultivated and prosperous. He did not deem it prudent to attempt an assessment during the lifetime of the Bar Senāpati. He recommended to the Supreme
 March 1838. Government that in the event of the decease of this chieftain, his sons should be retained in the management of the respective divisions allotted to them on agreeing to pay to the British Government one half of the revenue realised by them.⁶ This suggestion of Mr. White, which seemed to be quite fair and equitable to the Agent (Mr. Jenkins), was not accepted by the Calcutta authorities who were not prepared to decide during the lifetime of the Bar Senāpati what arrangements should be made for the territory of
 April 1838. the Mātak chief in the event of his death. They were quite satisfied to learn that "the Burra Senapattee had by his liberal administration contributed so essentially to promote the prosperity of the country under his management".⁷

Towards the end of 1838, the Bar Senapati, whose health was rapidly declining, made a new arrangement regarding the administration of his territory. He appointed his third son, Maju Gohain whom he found to be the most capable manager of state affairs. This arrangement was agreed to by his eldest and other sons and also by the *kheldars* and other prominent men of the realm. When the matter was referred to the British Government by the Bar Senāpati for approval, they sanctioned it as a provisional measure during the life time of the aged chieftain. The Government was

4. Letter to Court No. 2 of 1838, January 10, P. C. 1838, December 10, Nos. 85 & 93.

5. Foreign 1833, April 18, Nos. 56-57.

6. Foreign Department 1838, Nos. 56-57.

7. Ibid.

not prepared to recognise in the Bar Senāpati a right of disinheriting his other sons or of making any permanent assignment without reference to them.⁸

In the early part of January 1859, the Bar Senāpati breathed his last. On the receipt of this information, Major White moved into his territory and arrived at Rongagorā, the capital, on the 20th January. He was well received by the Bar Gohain and Maju Gohain, nominated head of the State. He found the country quite tranquil and the nomination of the third son by the deceased chief as the head of the territory recognised by all. Even the Bar Gohain who was most affected by the decision of his father expressed in an open Durbar his entire resignation to the will of the deceased chief. Even in the course of a long private conversation with him the eldest brother expressed the same sentiment of devotion to his father's will. So Major White had no other alternative than to attend to the wish of the deceased and of his family.

He approved of the nomination of the Māju Gohain as the head of the kingdom with the title of the Bar Senāpati and with the same powers as those of his father though he felt that the direct introduction of British rule would have been the most advantageous to the interests of the British Government and to that of the country, as thereby one uniform law and one system of administration would have been introduced throughout Assam. But as the territory was not likely to cover the expenses of the costly British administration and as the Moāmāriās, an independent tribe, accustomed to a very light assessment, were not to submit to a heavier rate of taxation such as British occupation would have entailed, he shrank from announcing so drastic a step at that time. The political considerations influenced his decision not a little. Though the fear of Burmese invasion had been receding into the background, the dread of a Shan incursion was still troubling the British Government, and in the event of a possible incursion, the aid or even the neutrality of the warlike tribes on the frontier was a prize not to be easily set aside. So Mr. White thought it inexpedient to adopt any step which might drive the Mātak chief to the enemy camp; he accepted the Māju Gohain as head of the state in deference to the wishes of the people as referred to above.⁹

But when he announced to the assembly of the Mātak chiefs the price of his approval i.e. that Maju Gohain should pay an

⁸ P. C. 1838, October 31, Nos. 84-85,

⁹ P. C. 1839, August 14, No. 105.

annual sum of Rs. 10,000 as tribute the proposal was most strenuously opposed not only by the Māju Gohain but also by the eldest son of the deceased chief and other notables of the realm. The principal grounds of objection as advanced by them appeared to be quite judicious to Mr. White. They pointed out that the people were accustomed to light assessment and there existed a spirit of equality in the community and as such, the assembled chiefs apprehended that their countrymen would not brook the employment of a force which would be necessary to realise the heavy exaction from them. The other two propositions of Mr. White regarding the setting aside of the waste lands for the cultivation of tea and the appointment of a British officer for the adjudication of disputes arising between the Moāmāriās and the European tea planters the Maju Gohain was perfectly willing to agree to. The princes however finally informed Major White that after performing the Sradh Ceremony of their father, they would ascertain the number of *pāiks* and would let him know the amount of contribution they would be in a position to pay.

Under the circumstances, Major White told them that he would not be in a position to recommend the arrangement made by the late Bar Senāpati but would simply leave the matter to the discretion of the Supreme Government and then he left for his headquarters. But though he told them to their face that he would not approve of the arrangement made by their father, Major White, while forwarding the report of his enquiry to the Supreme Government, recommended the retention of the existing arrangement. He thought it expedient to recognize the claim of the Māju Gohain, "for, if a rupture takes place with Burma, and Assam is invaded, we shall in great measure depend upon Muttock for the two main sinews of war-provisions and coolies".¹⁰

Janu, 1839

May, 1839

Sometime after this Major White fell a victim to the Khāmti Insurrection and Captain Vetch was appointed Political Officer of Upper Assam. During the time of the Khāmti Insurrection, a great service was rendered to the British Government by the eldest son of the late Bar Senāpati. His timely arrival with a number of soldiers greatly eased the situation. Mr. Jenkins called upon Captain Vetch to express his sentiments on the point at issue. Captain Vetch informed the Agent that the imposition of the sum of Rs. 10,000 as tribute would lead to disaffection among the Mātak chiefs which had already been manifested by the refusal on

¹⁰. Ibid.

the part of the Maju Gohain to supply coolies as demanded by Mr. Hanna, the officiating Political Agent.

In truth the alliance of May 1826 was wearing thin and there was growing coldness on the part of the Mātak chiefs. So Captain Vetch proposed that in fairness to all parties, a fresh census should be taken and on the basis of the principle previously adopted by Scott, the *Māju* Gohain should bind himself to supply two-thirds of the *pāiks*, who would either supply labour to the Paramount Power or commute their personal service into a money payment. In other respects he found himself in full agreement with what White had recommended. Captain Vetch communicated these proposals to *Māju* Gohain who had been invited to meet him. He accepted the main proposal of Captain Vetch, but with regard to the suggestion that the survey party should be accompanied by a few companies of sepoy to overawe all attempts at opposition at the time of the census, the *Māju* Gohain begged that the survey work should be carried through quietly, without the presence of a strong military force.¹¹

Mr. Jenkins found the suggestions of Captain Vetch quite judicious and equitable though he feared that under the proposed arrangement "the resources of a large portion of the country would be lost to us and Maju Gohain would be the first to rise against us if he can establish a firm authority".¹² The Supreme Government approved of the suggestions put forward by Captain Vetch and instructed the Agent to enter into an arrangement with the *Māju* Gohain on the lines laid down by the Political Agent. It seemed that the vexed *Moāmāriā* tangle was on the way to settlement but the Supreme Government at this stage added two seemingly innocent corollaries which prevented the solution of the *Moāmāriā* problem.

The upper part of the Bar *Senāpati*'s dominion known as "Moran" was exclusively inhabited by the *Moāmāriās* who, it was reported to the Calcutta Council, were averse to the rule of the Bar *Senāpeti*'s family because their religious tenets and practices differed from those practised by the members of the ruling family. The inhabitants of lower Mātak were mainly composed of the refugee Assamese *pāiks*. So the Supreme Government insisted on the separation of the former tract from the rest of the Mātak country to be administered by the *Māju* Gohain, and further made a fresh demand that all jungle tracts of the country along with waste

¹¹. Ibid.

¹². Ibid.

lands should be placed at the disposal of the East India Company.¹³

Captain Jenkins instructed Captain Vetch to proceed to Rungagorā and effect a settlement of the district with the Māju Gohain on the basis of the terms fixed by the Calcutta authorities and, in case of a breakdown of the negotiations, Captain Vetch was also authorised to take possession of the country. Captain Vetch feared that the Māju Gohain and his other brothers would not accept any arrangement that would not include Upper Morān. So he requested Captain Jenkins to make arrangement for the posting of soldiers along the frontier posts of the Mātak district with a view to securing a peaceable occupation of the country in case of refusal.¹⁴

Nov, 1839

Precautionary measures were taken and on the 12th November 1839, Captain Vetch escorted by 300 men of the Assam Light Infantry and 150 recruits of Upper Assam *Sihbandi* left for the capital of Mātak through upper Morān. He found the country side well cultivated. The cultivation of cotton, sugarcane and Mugā he found in abundance. The men who grew these crops interested him no less. Their physical features impressed him and Captain Vetch found in them the making of admirable soldiers and thought of forming a company out of them for warfare on the frontier. The sides of the Dibru river he passed through, appeared to him well adapted for the cultivation of tea. In due time he reached the head quarters of Upper Morān where he was waited upon by the Gohain and other respectable men and heads of the villages. It is reported that all expressed their desire not to be placed under the control of the Bar Senāpati's family. Their grievances appeared to Captain Vetch of little importance. They did not complain of any maltreatment at the hands of the Bar Senāpati or his sons. Their main grievance was that as they were the followers of Vishnu they desired not to be ruled by men holding different religious tenets. It is evident that the sectarian spirit manifested by their forefathers in the early seventies of the 18th century had not died down. Captain Vetch, however, did not acquaint them with the views of the Supreme Government but told them to send a deputation to Rangagorā where they would be informed what terms would be offered to the Māju Gohain and then left for his destination.¹⁵

He arrived at Rangagorā and before an assemblage composed of the heads of villages and Khels, announced the new

¹³. P. C. 1839, August 14, No. 106.

¹⁴. P. C. 1839, October 16, No. 89.

¹⁵ P. C. 1839, December 26, No. 74.

terms to the Gohain brothers. The proposal for the separation of Morān was strongly opposed by the parties present and they all declared with one voice that if Upper Morān was excluded, they would not undertake the management of the country. The conference was postponed until the following day when the Gohain brothers met Captain Vetch again and voiced their protest against the demand for the handing over of unoccupied jungles to the British Government and requested him to modify his demands. Captain Vetch was adamant. He made the offer next to the sons of the late Bar Senāpati individually. They all declined the offer and finding that there was no other chance of coming to terms Captain Vetch issued a proclamation announcing the assumption of the direct management of the country by the East India Company. It was annexed to the Lakhimpur district.¹⁶ The country accepted the decision with apparent calmness.¹⁷

Nov, 1839

It is needless to say that the Supreme Government approved of the arrangement made by Captain Vetch and instructed Captain Jenkins to make suitable provision for the maintenance of the Bar Senāpati's family. The Bar Senāpati had left no less than 10 sons, 5 daughters, 3 widows, a brother and a number of dependants and it was proposed to give away one-third of the revenue (estimated at Rs. 15,000/-) of the country by way of pension. But nothing was done towards the settlement of these pensions as not only the Gohain brothers objected to the payment in cash, but the sum to be allotted was even regarded as inadequate by the local officers and they suggested a number of alternative pension schemes.¹⁸

Dec, 1839

April, 1840

In the meantime reports were pouring in to the effect that the people of Mātak had been intriguing with the frontier tribes and preparing to rise in revolt against the British Government under the leadership of their disgruntled chiefs. As a precautionary measure, two companies of the 36th Regiment were recalled from Upper Assam and three most influential sons of the late chief were brought down to Gauhati as hostages for the good behaviour of the family.¹⁹

May, 1840

As it was found impolitic to delay further the settlement of the pension question, steps were taken for its early settlement. The Bar Senāpati's family consisted of a large number of members, so Captain Jenkins proposed that out of one-third of the land revenue, each of his sons should be paid partly in cash and partly in lands, and

¹⁶ P. C. 1839, December 26, No. 75.

¹⁷ P. C. 1840, January 8, No. 60.

¹⁸ P. C. 1840, April 24, No. 140.

¹⁹ P. C. 1840, June, No. 137.

Dec, 1840

further suggested that they should be given from 1000 to 1500 acres of land so that each might be provided with ample estates. With these arrangements, the three Gohain brothers detained at Gauhati seemed to be satisfied.²⁰ But when they returned home for consultation, they demanded as before that one-third of the country should be handed over to them in one compact division in lieu of the proposed pensions. As this, the Agent feared, would only strengthen their position and interfere with the administration of the rest of the country, he did not comply with their demand. Thereon the Gohain brothers tried to stir up rebellion and began to incite the neighbouring chiefs to join them. Captain Jenkins, with a view to putting a stop to these rebellious activities of the sons of the Bar Senāpati once and for all, removed them to Bishwanath in lower Assam along with some of their principal advisers. They were allotted a settlement near the British cantonment and they were given pensions wholly in cash as originally proposed.²¹ Thus ended the domination of the Bar Senāpati's family over the Mātak territory.

Was the resumption of the Matak country at all justifiable in the light of the facts brought to our notice? In this case at least there was no charge of mis-government, exactions or incapacity. Rather the liberal and efficient administration of the country by the Bar Senāpati and his family, which bestowed peace and prosperity on the land under their management, had been approved by the Supreme Government, and they were averse to the imposition of any tribute on the Bar Senāpati from the very beginning. But we have seen that the local officers were equally bent on levying taxes upon this district and they proceeded on the assumption that the arrangement arrived at by Scott with the Bar Senāpati was a provisional one to last during the lifetime of the Senāpati only, and that the latter, as a vassal, paid the substantial sum of Rs. 12,000/- by way of tribute to the Āhom Raias.

The last assumption had no basis in fact. It was denied by the Bar Senāpati himself who only paid to his Paramount Power a nominal tax consisting of ivory and Mūgā Silk,²² and secondly, a country which had been so lightly taxed since its inception could not bear the burden of such a huge sum of money by way of tribute. Coming to the first assumption that the *Kabuliatnāmā* referred to above was but a provisional one, liable to revision after the death of

²⁰ P. C. 1840, June 8, No. 138.

²¹ P. C. 1841, January 25, No. 73.

²² P. C. 1839, August 14, No. 105.

the first lessee, we find no such condition attached to it. In fact after the treaty of Yandabo, a series of engagements was entered into by Scott with the Eastern Chiefs on behalf of the East India Company and none of them was deemed to be provisional.* On the basis of Scott's assessment the Company had a right to insist on a fresh census and valuation but they had no moral or legal right to affix any new conditions calculated to affect the very existence of the state. When the attempt was made by Mr. Robertson for the first time to impose a tribute on the Bar Senāpati, the move was also disapproved by the Court of Directors who rightly remarked, "The advantage of having a well affected power however insignificant in itself is too great to be put in peril for the mere pecuniary gain".²³ And when again a second attempt was made by Captain Jenkins, the next Agent to assess the Mātak country, the attempt was not approved of by them and the Court of Directors again observed, "The utmost amount of tribute which the Burra Senaputtee could be expected to pay would not exceed Rs. 1,000/- per annum". His country was reported to them "to be under light assessment at present and to be in consequence well cultivated and prosperous". So they thought that it would be very improper for the sake of so trifling an amount to end this state of affairs.²⁴ Unfortunately an end was put to this state of things by their subordinates for which there was no strong justification.

* Even the Governor-General Lord Dalhousie admitted in the course of his minute dated the 6th March, 1853 that these were not provisional arrangements.

²³ Letter from Court No. 44 of 1835.

²⁴ Letter from Court No. 17 of 1837.

SECTION VI.

THE ANNEXATION OF SADIYĀ

It has been mentioned earlier that Scott entered into an arrangement with the Sadiyā Khawā Gohain in 1826 similar to that made with the Bar Senāpati. The intercourse with the Khāmtis was carried on by the British Government through a native officer stationed at the headquarters of the Khāmti Chief. The Khāmtis proved valuable allies to the British in the year 1830 when the Singphos aided by their brethren beyond made a determined attack on the eastern part of Assam. Everything went on smoothly until the death of the Sadiyā Khawā Gohain which took place early in 1835. His eldest son who succeeded him as Sadiyā Khawā Gohain was a man of great intellectual powers. Though a Buddhist, he was well acquainted with Bengali and the doctrines of the Hindu religion. But he was reported to be a notorious intriguer¹ and he entered into a dispute with the Mātak chief over a piece of land over which both of them asserted claims. Captain White, Political Agent stationed at Sadiyā, called upon the quarrelling chieftains to refer the matter to him.

But the Sadiyā Khawā Gohain defied the instructions of the political Officer and took forcible possession of the land under dispute. The matter was referred to the Agent (Mr. Jenkins) who agreeing with the line of action as recommended by Mr. White, at first suspended the recalcitrant chief and finally removed him from office and brought the whole tract under direct British occupation.² Though, as regards the internal arrangement, the Khāmtis were left as before under their own chiefs, the Assamese who formed two-thirds of the population of this region and had been reduced to a state of slavery by the Khāmtis were declared free. And for revenue and judicial purposes they were placed under the direct control of a British officer. The Assamese were taxed at the rate of Re. 1/- per head in lieu of their personal service. This measure was approved of by the Court of Directors who simply remarked that the local officials in assessing the Khāmtis ought to have proceeded with more caution and consideration.³

These innovations produced a marked change in the attitude of

¹ Foreign Dept. 1834, April 18, No. 56.

² Gait—"History of Assam" 2nd Ed., P. 309.
Foreign Dept. 1838, April 18, No. 56.

³ Letter from Court, No. 17 of 1837.

the Khāmti Chiefs, Khawā Gohain, Taosa Gohain, Runu Gohain and Captain Gohain who could not tolerate the loss of the Assamese slaves - their only source of wealth. Apprehension of further taxation began to haunt their minds and they began to show signs of growing disaffection towards the Paramount Power and this was particularly manifested on the occasion of the latter's conflict with the Dāffā Gaum (one of the Singpho chiefs) when these disgruntled Khāmti Chiefs prevented him from coming to terms with the British Government.⁴ Fearing further troubles, the Agent removed the Khawā Gohain to a station out of reach of intrigues.⁵ And with the intention of creating a division of interest, an attempt was made to appoint Captain Gohain to the Intelligence Department, but as he was shallow in intellect and did not possess requisite energy, the attempt was given up. 1835

All of a sudden the Khāmti chiefs began to indicate a disposition to reconcile themselves to their new lot. Taosa Gohain began to learn English and even the ex-Khawā Gohain sent his son to an English School⁶ What was more important, some of these chiefs rendered a valuable service to the British Government by helping them against the formidable Singpho outbreak which took place in 1835. The service rendered was so valuable that the British Government reciprocated the offer not only by rewarding the chiefs with handsome presents but also by permitting the ex-Khawā Gohain to return to Sadiyā and live amongst his brethren as before.⁷ 1835

The Khāmti Chiefs seemed satisfied. But they were not really pacified. Their apparent calmness was a lull before the storm. The first indication of the approaching storm was heard as early as 1837. In April 1837, serious apprehensions of a revolt were entertained by the European officers stationed at Sadiyā. Rumours were afloat that the Khāmti Chiefs had been engaged in a traitorous correspondence with the Burmese and with the Dāffā Gaum.⁸ The military establishments at Sadiyā were strengthened and measures were kept ready to remove Taosa Gohain and the ex-Khawā Gohain to Bishwanāth. But the rumours of the intended insurrection died away, though the bogey of a Burmese invasion haunted the minds of the local British officials for some months more.⁹

⁴ Foreign Dept. 1838, April 18, No. 56.

⁵ Mackenzie "North Eastern Frontier of Bengal," Page 58.

⁶ Foreign Dept. 1838, April 18, No. 56.

⁷ P. P. 1835, November 24, No. 11.

⁸ Foreign Dept. 1838, April 18, No. 56.

⁹ P. C. 1839, August 14, No. 105.

But suddenly in 1839 when everything seemed to be calm and quiet, the storm most unexpectedly burst out—the Khāmtis had struck. On the 28th January 1839, the Khāmtis, led by their chiefs, made a sudden and swift descent upon Sadiyā. The whole regiment was wiped out. Major White himself fell in the action. The whole of the barracks, including the military shed which contained guns and ammunition was burnt to the ground. Medical stores were also destroyed. The attack was conducted in a very systematic manner. The Assamese nobles residing at Sadiyā were privy to it. The whole town lay at their mercy. Then contrary to all expectations, they suddenly retired. It was the boldest attempt yet made by the hill tribes. Had they combined with the Mātak chiefs or with Singphos, the whole of Upper Assam would have been lost to the British and turned into a desert. The inhabitants were greatly alarmed and they became further terror-stricken by the rumour that the Burmese had been coming in the rear of the Khāmtis.¹⁰ Immediate succour came from the eldest son of the late Bar Senāpati whose timely arrival with a body of men tended much to restore the public confidence.¹¹

After order had been restored at Sadiyā, reinforcements were despatched to different directions to trace the movements of the Khāmti rebels. They found all the Khāmti villages and settlements deserted—men, women and children all had retired in the direction of the Mīsmi hills. The exodus of the Khāmtis give the English no doubt a great relief. All the deserted Khāmti villages were burnt down and the soldiers returned to Sadiyā without effecting a single arrest.¹² Captain Vetch, who was placed in charge of Sadiyā, was bent upon retaliatory measures and insisted on issuing a general proclamation of outlawry against the Khāmti insurgents in arms. But he was prevented from taking so drastic a step by the Supreme Government¹³ who simply approved of his measures for announcing rewards for the apprehension of the rebel chiefs. Handsome rewards were offered for the arrest of the insurgent leaders, but this produced no desired result.¹⁴ At last there occurred a cleavage in the enemy camp and one of the Khāmti Chiefs surrendered to the British Government. He was welcomed to the British camp but no appreciable result

¹⁰ P. P. 1839, February 20, Nos. 105-108.

¹¹ P. P. 1839, February 27, No. 162

¹² P. P. 1839, February 20, No. 109.

¹³ Letter to Court No. 49 of 1840.

¹⁴ P. C. 1839, February 27, No. 162.

followed.¹⁵ It took the British Government five years to put down the rising. Several expeditions were sent to the Mishmi hills and the insurgents surrendered in batches, the last batch submitting in December 1843. "The Khāmtis were settled above Suddeya to form a screen between the Assamese and the Mismi", and they were so dispersed that they ceased from that time to be of any political importance.¹⁶

¹⁵ P. C. 1839, May 8, Nos. 81-82.

¹⁶ P. C. 1839, December 26, No. 67.

P. C. 1844, January 20, No. 61.

SECTION VII.

THE ANNEXATION OF TULĀRĀM SENĀPATI'S DOMINION.

Oct. 19,
1844

Tulārām Senāpati was allowed to retain the eastern half of his dominion by a treaty concluded with him on the 3rd November 1834. He ruled as Overlord of that small hilly possession till the year 1844. In that year he relinquished the charge of the Government on account of old age and infirmity to his two sons, Nakul Rūm Barman and Brajanāth Barman with the sanction of the British Government. Tulārām died in 1851 a worn out old man.¹ We get the following picture of Tulārām as left by Captain Butler who writes, "I found Toolaram and his men living in a wretched hut situated on the edge of a tank choked with grass in the middle of an extensive plain little cultivated. A few straggling huts inhabited by the Kacharees and dependants of Toolaram were all that could be called a village. There were no signs of comforts about the huts, no gardens, no enclosures and the people appeared poverty-stricken, here as in all other villages. The chief Toolaram, an infirm old man was clothed in woollen garb and looked more like a skeleton than like a living mortal". This was the man who once defied Govinda Chandra and made a pact with the Burmese and the princes of Manipur.²

• Even while Tulārām was living, grave charges were brought against him and his two sons who, it was alleged by the local officers, had repeatedly violated the conditions of the treaty of November 1834. It was pointed out that they had not only opposed the quartering of the British troops in their principality and refused the supply of coolies and provisions as specified in article 4 of the treaty, but had turned down their request for making over to the Paramount Power dangerous offenders for trial agreeable to article 5 of the said treaty. What was worse, they were also charged with oppressing their subjects and making exactions from the people contrary to article 9. The sons of Tulārām, when called upon to explain their conduct, not only defended some of their actions the validity of which was in some degrees admitted by the Agent, but also brought counter charges

1851

¹ Foreign Department 1853, October 14, No. 42.

² Foreign Department 1853, October 14, No. 48.

against the local officers, which the higher authorities dismissed as groundless. Proposals were made to stop the pension of the old chief, but during his lifetime no action was taken.³

As soon as Tulārām Senāpati, breathed his last, Captain Butler, who was in charge of Cachar, advised the resumption of the territory on the ground that the arrangement entered into with Tulārām was a life tenure only.⁴ It may be mentioned in this connection that the same argument was applied by the local officer to the case of the Bar Senāpati. His view-point, which was evidently erroneous, was upheld neither by the Agent nor by Lord Dalhousie, the Governor-General, who in the course of an elaborate minute justly observed that the term of the treaty or agreement of 1834 had not limited the tenure of the country to Tulārām Senāpati during his lifetime only. Even the violation of the agreement, as alleged by the local officers, did not seem to his Lordship to justify the annexation of the country. His Lordship further held that the possession of the tract would doubtless be convenient from the British point of view as pointed out by the local officers but His Lordship held, "Something more than that consideration is necessary to justify our resuming it". And finally His Lordship instructed the local officers to confirm the sons of Tulārām Senāpati in their possessions subject to the conditions that the tribute should be regularly paid and that the British troops should be assisted in their marches through their kingdom.⁵

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Accordingly they were confirmed in their hereditary possessions, but at the same time they were warned that the violation of any of these regulations in future would deprive them of the territory. The decision of the Supreme Government was approved of by the Court of Directors, who also observed in this connection that Butler was evidently wrong in supposing that Tulārām's territory had lapsed to the British Government by his death.⁶ The Barman brothers' authority over their father's dominion was given a new lease of life no doubt, but soon circumstances happened which deprived them of their father's territory.

Tulārām Senāpati's territory was bounded on the east by the Nāgā Country and as such eastern Cachar with the adjoining British territory was subjected to constant raids and pillages by

³ Political Despatch No. 7 of February 18, 1852.

⁴ Foreign Department October 14, 1853, No. 42.

⁵ The Minute of Lord Dalhousie dated the 6th March 1853

⁶ Pol. Letter from Court No. 5 of 1854 dated the 1st March.

the barbarous Nāgā tribes. The situation became so alarming that Mr. Vincent, Junior assistant at Nowgong, was specially deputed by the Commissioner of Assam to enquire into these outrages and to offer suggestions for their suppression. As a result of these investigations, the office of the Junior assistant of Nowgong was transferred to North Cachar and the said officer was specially called upon to protect the British subjects from the Nāgā outrages.⁷

In April 1853, a very serious outrage occurred within Eastern Cachar, the territory of Tulārām. A considerable number of armed Nāgās attacked the village of Semkur in Tulārām's territory adjoining the British district of Northern Cachar. The marauders killed 86 persons, wounded many and carried off about 115 persons as slaves after burning and plundering four or five villages in their retreat. To avenge this outrage, Nakulrām, the eldest son of Tulārām invaded the country of the Nāgās at the head of 300 armed followers. But unfortunately on the way he espoused the cause of some of the Nāgās in their private feuds and, instead of retaliating on the villages the inhabitants of which had committed the outrage alluded to, he attacked another village the people of which had given him no offence. A bloody encounter took place; Nakulrām was seized by them and cruelly hacked to pieces. His followers after sustaining a great loss retired in confusion in the direction of Cachar.

But the matter did not end there. The worst passions of the savage hill tribes all round — their propensity to plunder and rapine — were inflamed and it was apprehended that a series of reprisals and counter reprisals would follow entailing heavy bloodshed.⁸ This consideration, coupled with the fact that the counter-attack launched by Nakulrām was a gross violation of article 7 of the treaty whereby he was bound not to make war without the consent of the British Government, again thrust upon the local officers the question of the resumption of Eastern Cachar.⁹

July 1853 The local officers proposed to grant Nakulrām's family a pension of Rs. 3000/- a year, and further suggested that Tulārām's sons should not be allowed to remain in the country, as they would be likely to impede arrangements for its settlement. The Agent also supported the local officers as he clearly observed "It is out of our power to afford the protection, which we are bound to the hill tract

⁷ Foreign Dept. 1853 October 14, No. 42.

⁸ Foreign Dept. 1853. October 14, Nos. 45-46.

⁹ Foreign Dept. 1853. October 14, No. 46.

of Toolaram without assuming the management of the country". The estimated revenue of the territory was only Rs. 1208/- a year. So Mr. Mill, who had been touring Assam at this time, preliminary to the Governor-General's tour, was specially called upon to make his recommendation in this connection. He concurred in the proposal for resumption and recommended the sum of Rs. 1,560/- to be bestowed as pensions to the three prominent members of the Senāpati family.¹⁰ The Government of Bengal was not in favour of taking the country at a loss* and advocated the grant of rent-free lands to any extent as approved of by the local officers and referred the matter to the Government of India; and the matter was placed before the Governor-General.¹¹

And at last the Governor-General, who had endeavoured to avoid the proposed measure as long as it could by any means be avoided and "who at first did not like to possess these jungles" recommended the resumption of Tulārām's country because "the occupation of the country" seemed to his Lordship "a less objectionable alternative than letting it alone".¹² Accordingly the country was formally annexed to the British Dominion in Assam in 1854 and the people therein heaved a sigh of relief, being assured of protection against frequent Nāgā outrages. The members of Tulārām's family were awarded pensions not exceeding the gross revenue of the country.¹³ Thus gradually the whole of Cachar came under British dominion.

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¹⁰ Foreign Dept. 1853, October 14, No. 46.

(Extract from Mill's report on Assam, Para 117)

*The gross rental of the tract stood at Rs. 1208/- as stated by Captain Butler.

¹¹ Foreign Dept. 1853, October 14, No. 51. Letter from Court No. 36 of 1853.

¹² Foreign Dept. 1853, October 14, No. 49.

(Minute dated the 17th August, 1853).

¹³ Foreign Dept. 1853, October 14, No. 42.

SECTION VIII.

THE ANNEXATION OF THE DUARS.

Along the base of the Bhutan hills and sloping downwards to the plains of Assam there stretches from west to east, from the Manās to the Deoshān river, a narrow tract of fertile land roughly measured at 990 sq. miles.¹ This belt of land known as the Terai is intersected by a number of passes or duars leading from the hills to the plain. There are seven such duars on the frontier of Assam proper*. There are five in Kām̄rūp, namely, Bijni, Chappa Khamar, Chappaguri, Bansika and Gaukolla, and two in Darrang namely Kalling and Booreguma.

These passes were an intergral part of Assam and held in subjection by the Swargadevs of Assam.² But during the declining stages of the Āhom rule, the Bhutiās occupied these lands. Unable to offer resistance, the declining Assam Raj entered into a sort of compromise with the Bhutan authorities by which the possessions of these duars were conceded to the Dharma Raja of Bhutan “to enable him to carry on the services of his deities” in lieu of some annual tributes.³ The Bhutan Government agreed to pay 24 tolas of gold dust, 36 ponies, 24 pieces of musk, 24 cowtails, 24 daggers, 24 blankets and 2400 rupees in cash having an estimated value of 4785 Narayanee rupees.⁴

The duars bordering on Kām̄rūp were under this arrangement occupied and administered by the Bhutiās all the year round. But by a curious arrangement, not to be found elsewhere, a sort of dual sovereignty was enjoyed by the Assam and Bhutia Governments in turn over the inhabitants of the two duars near Darrang. From July to November, these duars were administered by the Āhom Government, the Bhutan Durbar administering it for the rest of the year. It is needless to say that this dual sovereignty, so advantageous to the high contracting powers, pressed very heavily upon the unfortunate inhabitants who were rackrented, pillaged and assaulted

¹ P. C. 1841, July 26, No. 81 (P.S.)

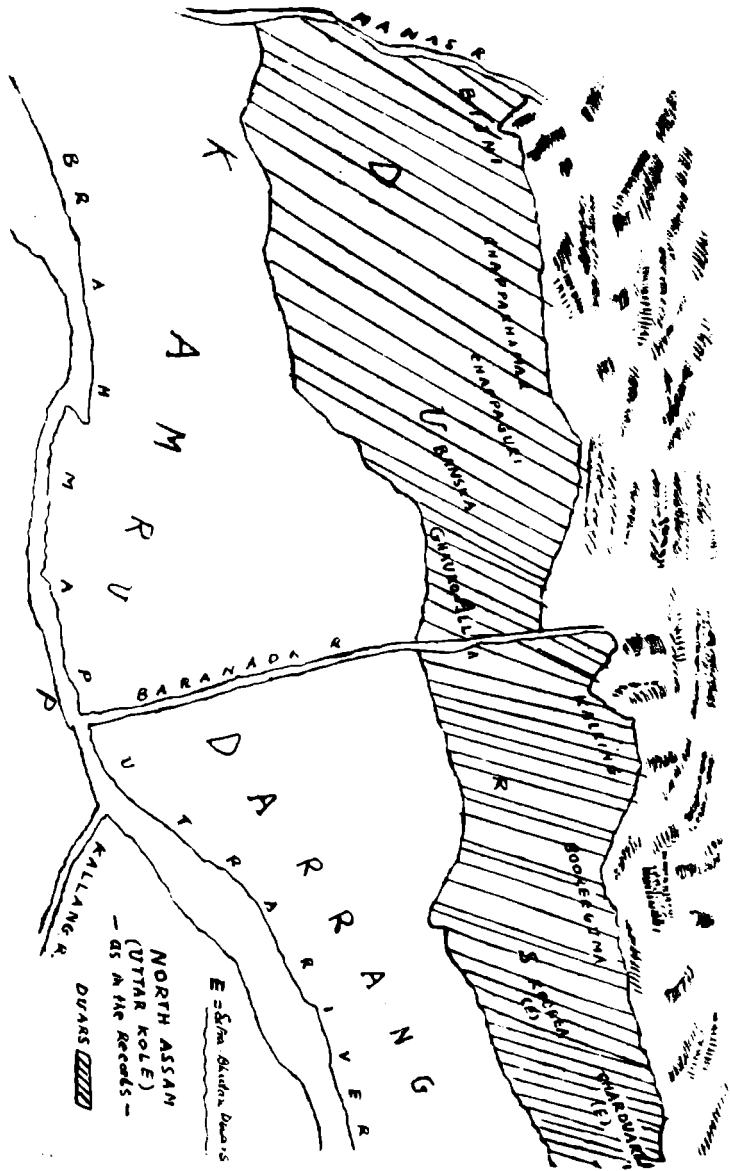
*There are eleven such duars on the frontier of Bengal and Cooch-Bihar.



² Letter from Court No. 17 of 1837.

³ P. C. 1841, June 14, No. 84.

(Letter from Dhurmo Rajah of Bhutan).

⁴ P. C. 1833, January 7, No. 82.



NORTH ASSAM
 (UTTAR KOLE)
 — as in the Records —
 DWARAS 
 S/S/m. British Dwaras 

by the equally oppressive and merciless Assamese and Bhutan officers in turn. During the seven months they were under the Bhutan Government, the officers were at perfect liberty to do as they liked—to kill as many of the ryots as they liked, without the other Government being able in any way to interfere. The duars moreover became the favourite resort of dacoits and absconders. The inhabitants were subjected to periodical plunder by the Bhutiās who carried away their womenfolk and children and sold them as slaves.⁵ This state of lawlessness continued also during the early part of British rule.

But a new complication arose with the advent of the British. The payment of tribute in kind had formerly led to endless troubles. The Assam Government had been too weak to enforce punctual or full payment. In their declining stage, full money value of the tribute had never been realised from the Bhutan Durbar. With the occupation of the Assam valley in 1826, these duars also had come under the formal subjection of the British Government which as the successor of the Āhom Raj had simply acquiesced in the old arrangement. But in the British, the Bhutan officers found tenacious masters conscious of their rights. The tributes in kind were put up to public auction by the new masters and if the stipulated amount (Rs. 4785/-) was not realised, the differences between the prices fetched and the amount due were reckoned as arrears. The arrears thus mounted up, which the Bhutan Government never cared to clear off. It was complained by the local authorities that commodities of inferior quality were sent by the Bhutia officials as tribute and hence they did not fetch the full value. But these complaints fell on deaf ears and the Bhutan Government took no step to rectify these abuses.

Evasion or non-payment of tribute was the mildest part of their misdemeanour. The old game of plunder and the kidnapping of Assamese boys and women went on as before. Redress was seldom obtained. By way of retaliatory measures, Scott proposed in 1829 to arrest and detain in custody an equal number of Bhutiā subjects 1829 for the Assamese subjects captured. But the seizure of innocent Bhutiā subjects by way of reprisals was not sanctioned by the Calcutta authorities.⁶ For non-payment of tribute some duars were attached occassionally, and as these duars were the chief sources of subsistence of the Bhutan Government, withheld tributes were paid, but this economic blockade led to no appreciable result. Fresh

⁵ Letter to Court No. 25 of 1840 dated the 15th April.

⁶ S. P. 1829, December 19, Nos. 17-18.

outrages followed and remonstrance and attachment had no decisive effect.

With a view "to effect such adjustment of tributes payable for the duars as might diminish the chances of misunderstanding arising from that source" the Supreme Government, who fondly believed, as they had once believed in the case of the Burmese outrages that once the central authority in Bhutan could be approached all their grievances would be redressed immediately, finally decided to send Captain Pemberton on a special mission* to the Dharma Raja and the Dev Raja — the spiritual head and the temporal lord of the State respectively. He was also specially instructed to settle terms of commercial intercourse between British India and Bhutan.

Captain Pemberton accordingly went to Bhutan in 1837. He found the country hopelessly distracted. A revolution was actually in progress while Captain Pemberton was on his way to the capital of Bhutan. The Dev Raja, the temporal head of the state, had succeeded in expelling his rival by the time Captain Pemberton reached the capital. And what was worse it was reported to him that the two nobles, Paso Pilo and Tango Pilo, the Governors of Western Bhutan and Eastern Bhutan respectively, had set at naught the authority of the Dev Raja. To crown all, whilst the struggle was going on in the hills for the Deva Rajaship, there were two parties fighting in the plains for the possession of the Bengal duars — on one side was Durga Deb Raikat, a Zamindār of Baikunthapur and on the other side was his formidable rival Hara Govinda Kutamh. Their respective claims, it was alleged, were supported by the Bhutia officers of the rival Deb Rajas. The inhabitants of the duars knew no peace and many of them began to leave the place; cultivation was at a stand still and some of the duars became deserted.

The authority of Paso Pilo extended over western Bhutan to which were attached the Bengal duars while that of Tango Pilo extended over Eastern Bhutan which included the Assam duars. The latter was a person of great influence and held in high esteem by the people of Bhutan because he happened to be the father of the Dharma Raja of Bhutan. The last named official was the person with whom the British Government had had to deal. But he, as mentioned above, hoisted the flag of rebellion and there was

*The first Mission was sent under Mr. Bogle and Captain Turner during the second half of the 18th Century (1783).

no organised Government in the country capable of enforcing its will.

Captain Pemberton on his arrival at Punākḥā found the Government in a most unsettled state. The authorities were not only disinclined to agree to any of the more important propositions made to them by the representative of the Company but they felt their tenure of power so insecure that they even did not venture to accede to any of the minor arrangements. What was worse, he had to conduct the negotiations under circumstances of peculiar difficulty and delicacy. He had to conciliate the good will of the deposed Deb Raja without at the same time giving umbrage to the reigning chief. He had also to meet the "various intrigues, stratagems and devices that were put in the way of the settlement of the outstanding questions." Consequently, Captain Pemberton failed to secure any settlement of the question connected with the duars. Nevertheless, as he conducted negotiations "in an eminently judicious manner and displayed a more than ordinary degree of ability, discernment and discretion" under circumstances of peculiar difficulty, his work was appreciated by the Court of Directors who thought that although in such a state of affairs "entire success was obviously unattainable, a foundation had been laid for their partial, if not complete accomplishment at some future time".

Though politically his mission was a failure, it was a great success in other respects. He and his associates, Lt. Blake and Dr. Griffith, collected a vast mass of rich information regarding the commerce, industry, geography and natural history of the country, which proved highly valuable to the East India Company and for this labour, Captain Pemberton and his party received special commendation at the hand of the Court of Directors.⁷ It may be mentioned here that an envoy of the Bhutan Durbar who had accompanied Captain Pemberton to Calcutta to carry on negotiations was dismissed by the Calcutta authorities in consequence of the treatment experienced by Captain Pemberton from the Court of Bhutan.⁸ It was alleged by the Bhutan authorities that they could not accede to the terms of the treaty proposed by Captain Pemberton because one of the terms stipulated that the tribute due to the British Government should be paid in Company's rupees*

⁷ P. C. 1839. March 27. No. 81.

Letter from Court No. 13. of 1839.

⁸ Letter to Court No. 25 of 1840.

*The Debmuhuree rupees were received at the discount of 50%. The value of 100 Debmuhuree rupees was Rs. 51-5-5 pies in terms of Company's coins— (Letter to Court No. 56A of 1838).

instead of in Debmuhuree rupees circulating in the hills. The Company's rupees, they alleged, were not procurable in hills. The India Government regarded the pretext offered by the Bhutan Government as unworthy of attention.⁹

Bhutan continued to be racked by intestine convulsions. At this stage "with an offer to farm Deb Rajah's right in the Dooars" Captain Jenkins, on his own initiative, sent an ordinary native officer to the Dev Raja.¹⁰ The messenger deputed was detained by the Bhutan Durbar. His release was forthwith demanded by the India Government and the action of the Agent was criticised by them as it was hardly judicious to send any messenger at that time.¹¹ The local Bhutiā authorities in charge of the duars also at this time stopped payment of tribute altogether. The collector, of Kāmrup reported to the Agent that he would not in the slightest degree be held responsible for the non-realisation of the Government demands unless he was allowed to proceed against the defaulters.¹² Three of the duars had already been attached and the Government of India, to whom the seriousness of the matter was presented, finding all other methods ineffective, instructed the Agent to make arrangements for the temporary resumption of the duars pending the establishment of a stable government at Punākḥā (the seat of the Bhutan Government) and further advised him to send in the first instance, preliminary to resumption, a proclamation to that effect to the Bhutan Government.¹³

Robertson, who was once Agent to the Government-General on the North East Frontier and who was at that time acting as a member of the Governor-General's Council, did not advocate the military occupation of the Duars. In the course of an elaborate minute, he held, "Insignificant as the immediate power of Bhootan is, it would, if seriously menaced or straitened, be supported by China with which it can never be for our interest to come in collision". Some of the eastern-most duars, which were held in subjection by the Bhutia chiefs subordinate to the Lhasa authorities, were actually garrisoned by the Chinese to whom the Lhasa Government was tributary. Robertson feared that the Chinese Government, who exercised a sort of overlordship over the Himalayan States, if appealed to, might support the cause of the Bhutiā

⁹ Letter to Court No. 25 of 1840.

¹⁰ P. C. 1841, June 14, No. 86.

¹¹ P. C. 1839, March 27, No. 81.

¹² P. C. 1839, March 27, No. 80.

¹³ P. C. 1839, March 27, No. 82.

Government.¹⁴ His fear of intervention by the Chinese Government was also shared by the Governor-General-in-Council. While still insisting on resumption, they at the same time instructed the Agent to acquaint the Lhasa authorities as well as the Chinese Government with the circumstances of the case with a view to disarming their suspicion and dispelling the cause of provocation.¹⁵

The attachment of three valuable duars had had some effect. In 1841 two letters arrived from the Deb Raja and Dharma Raja respectively. The Dev Raja in his letter expressed surprise at the poor quality of articles reported to have been sent by his officers as tribute. He could not understand "why these were not rejected and returned if these were so shamefully bad". However, he assured the British Government that he had given strict orders to his agents in the duars to be more careful in future in the selection of the articles of tribute. In this letter, the Dev Raja also promised to May 1841 pay the arrears by instalments and requested the India Government "to send one gentleman in the following cold season by Baksha Dwar route". The Dev Raja also brought to the notice of the British Government the devastation caused in their duars on the Bengal frontier by the factions of two rival Bengali *zamindars* and complained that these two rival *zamindars* had been recruiting their fighting bands from the Company's subjects. The Dharma Raja also wrote in the same strain and requested the British Government to release the attached duars. The Dev Raja also sent two *zinkāffs* (messengers) at this time, who were instructed by him not only to pay the arrears accumulated but also to settle the pending boundary dispute. In his letter he regretted that owing to the confusion prevailing in the hills, it had not been possible for His Highness to send the messengers earlier as requested by the British Government.¹⁶

These letters passed through the Agent's hands and on the strength of these two letters, the Agent recommended "the pursuance in the first instance of a temporizing course of policy" towards the Bhutan *Durbar* and requested the Government of India to send another mission to Bhutan with a view to an amicable settlement. The deputation, he hoped, would obtain by negotiation all that could be expected by the military occupation of the country for which the Government of India, in his opinion, were not well prepared. He feared "the occupation might involve us in

¹⁴ P. C. 1839, March 27, No. 81.

¹⁵ P. C. 1839, March 27, No. 82.

¹⁶ P. C. 1841, June 14, No. 84.

subsequent engagement that might be embarrassing” and held out that “the timely deputation of an officer at that moment to Bhootan might be attended with a more successful result than was obtained by the late mission”.¹⁷

June 1841 The Governor-General-in-Council did not accept the recommendation of the Agent regarding the sending of another mission to Bhutan as the condition of the country was unsettled. In their opinion, “such missions are not creditable to the British Government” and would only aggravate their embarrassment.¹⁸ Lord Auckland under the circumstances also entertained great doubts about the utility of sending any reply at all to the Dev and Dharma Rajas. However in answer to the letters of the Bhutan authorities, His Lordship “enclosed a few lines of admonition and warning qualified by friendly terms” and finally informed the Dev Raja that if this state of anarchy would continue in his country much longer “so that duties which one state owes to that of its neighbour be neglected and the Hon’ble Company’s frontier districts become the sufferer from this lamentable state of things” the British Government would be compelled by an imperative sense of duty to occupy the whole of the Duars without any reference to His Highness’s wishes.¹⁹

Sept. 6, 1841 As things did not improve in spite of these solemn warnings, the Supreme Government authorised the Agent to attach the Kām̄rūp and Darrang duars permanently. It was feared that the Bhutiās would resent the attachment and attempt to prevent it. So one additional *thana* and one additional police outpost supported by small military guards were established permanently on the border. The strength of First Assam Sihabandi Regiment was raised to 800 and as a measure of special precaution, a party of 100 sepoy of the Sylhet Light Infantry was moved to Assam.²⁰ These precautionary arrangements having been completed, the duars were permanently annexed. Nothing untoward however happened. The British Government agreed to pay to the *Punākhā Durbār* a sum of Rs. 10,000/- annually as a compensation for the loss of revenue. The immediate effect of this measure was that it put a stop to the outrages committed on the frontier and the change was hailed as a blessing by the poor ryots.

To the east of Booreguma, there were two other duars namely

¹⁷ P. C. 1841, June 14, No. 42.

¹⁸ P. C. 1841, June 14, No. 86.

¹⁹ P. C. 1841, June 14, No. 85.

²⁰ P. C. 1841, September 6, Nos. 69-70.

Kuriāpārā and Charduar covering an area of 700 sq. miles which were held by the hillmen of Bhutia stock who paid no allegiance to the Bhutan *Dwbar* and were under the indirect rule of the Lhasa government. The Kuriāpārā duar was officered and garrisoned by the Chinese. The Bhutiā of Kuriāpārā were under the direct administration of a body of chiefs called Sāth Raja (not necessarily seven in number) who themselves were subordinate to the Twang Raja, a tributary of Lhasa. These Bhutiā were as oppressive and atrocious as their neighbour in the west, and their expulsion from that tract was the only course left open to the British Government. At first the British Government shrank from taking a direct possession of this duar because "with the Chinese Empire, the British Government has been for sometime past unwilling to come in contact". But outrages multiplied and the British Government was at last compelled to resume that duar, and the Bhutiās ceded that duar to the East India Company on an annual payment of Rs. 5,000/- by way of compensation.²¹ 1844

The charduar lying to the east of Kuriāpārā duar was administered by a body of chiefs called Sāth Raja who were independent of Twang Raja. These chiefs along with the Thebangee Bhutiās collected tribute from Charduar. The Charduar tract was the first duar resumed by the British Government. In 1826 the tract was resumed by the British Government and an annual sum of Rs. 2,672/- was paid to the Sāth Raja and Thebangee Bhutias. Thus one by one these duars which had once been an integral part of Assam proper, were reannexed to Assam and peace and prosperity at last dawned on this vast tract of land.²²

²¹ Mackenzie P. P. 13-20.

²² Mackenzie P. P. 13-20.

The Duars in lower Assam, eight in number, were all held by tributary Rajas who paid an aggregate revenue of Rs. 14,000/- to the British Government. (P. C. 1833, January 7, No. 82.)

Observation on the Annexation Policy

Thus we find that in the course of three decades (1824-1854) the different parts of the Brahmaputra and Surma Valley were annexed to the British dominions. In tracing the history of these annexations, it may be noticed that on some occasions, the method of annexation as pursued by the East India Company has not been justified by us. Even the Home authorities could not see eye to eye with their Agents in India on the annexation of Mātak and Jaintiā; on strictly moral grounds indeed the annexation of Mātak cannot be justified. But if we discuss the annexation policy as a whole from the general point of view of political wisdom, we find that there was no other alternative left open to the East India Company.

When the Moāmāriās struck at the authority of the Swargadev Lakshmi Singh towards the middle of the eighteenth century, Āhom civilization had become a spent force; its potency for good was gone. The country's administration had become hopelessly inefficient. The successive rebellions organised by the disaffected Moāmāriā sect and factions engendered by a small* and selfish ruling class hastened the process of disruption and the final *coup de grace* was given by the Burmese whose victory brought into Assam a reign of terror. When the British appeared finally on the soil of Assam in 1824 and reconquered it, they found the mass of the people reduced to the deepest poverty and ignorance and the vanquished enemy at the gates of Assam still in bellicose attitude. Had the British forces retired from that unhappy valley at that stage as did Welsh half a century ago not only the eastern frontier of the British Empire would have been imperilled, Assam would not have recovered from the blight of mediæval theocratic rule.

A hopelessly decadent society and disorganised state badly felt the necessity of a reform and an efficient government. That was supplied by the Agents of the East India Company. Reactionary forces were suppressed; law and order was quickly restored and gradually one uniform law and one uniform system of administration was introduced throughout Assam and the province was brought within the pale of enlightened British administration. British conquest opened for Assam a new era of peace and prosperity. These were the fruits, the truly glorious fruits of British peace. But prosperity was slow to come; the immediate effect of conquest on Assam proper was rather depressing as will be evident from the following pages.

*The high Councillors of the Āhom government numbering five were recruited from twelve chosen families.

EPILOGUE

THE EFFECTS OF THE ANNEXATION OF THE BRAHMAPUTRA VALLEY

We have seen that soon after the treaty of Yandabo (1826) both portions of the Brahmaputra valley i.e. Assam proper were formally annexed by the East India Company. The advent of British rule in Assam was hailed with joy by the inhabitants, and peace at last dawned on Assam after half a century of internecine struggles and devastating warfare. But prosperity did not return to this land as was expected. For many years following the introduction of British rule the country remained in a very deplorable state—rather in many respects, its condition deteriorated. It was a period of maladministration. Abject misery and confusion reigned everywhere and many of the inhabitants left the country driven out by hunger and extortion.

Captain Jenkins writing as late as 1833 pointed out, “since the full occupation of Assam (1825) by us upwards of eight years have elapsed in uninterrupted peace and there seems to be but too good reason to suppose that the number of the people has at last not increased, nor their condition been improved;”¹ when Mr. Robertson assumed the charge of Assam in 1832, he found “the country retrograding, its inhabitants emigrating, its villages decaying and its revenue annually declining”. And this state of things struck him as very peculiar because the province of Arakan, which was acquired by the East India Company at the same time as Assam, was reported to him to be advancing annually with its population increasing and its resources improving. These differences appeared to him to be all the more extraordinary because the province of Assam possessed natural advantages far superior in many respects to those of Arakan and “would have” according to him “kept pace or outstripped that province in the career of improvement under equal management”.² But reverse was the case. When this sad picture of Assam was brought to the notice of the Court of Directors they felt that “we have hitherto governed Assam extremely ill” and called upon the Calcutta authorities to take immediate steps to terminate this deplorable state of affairs.³

So it is admitted on all hands that the first effect of British

¹ P. P. 1835, February 11, No. 90.

² P. P. 1832, July 23, No. 70.

³ Letter from Court No. 14 of 1834.

rule in Assam was disastrous indeed and in tracing the causes of this decadence and failure we find that while Arakan was administered upon principles which experience had proved to be sound, Assam was subjected to experimental schemes during the early period of British administration. The revenue system as introduced by Scott, however sound on principle, failed in practice and brought untold misery upon the people at large. But before we describe in detail the defects of his system, we must, first of all, have a clear insight into the working of the indigenous land system that was in vogue in Assam prior to the advent of the British Raj. This requires some repetition, but repetition is unavoidable.

There was no "land tax" as in British India, under the Āhoms. The nobility had *khels* or *parganās* under their control in which they administered justice and collected the revenue in kind, subject to the authority of the Swargadevs. Each *Khel* furnished its quota of produce in kind through its own immediate superior. Under this system the population of the land was divided into *Gots* consisting of 3 or 4 *pāiks* each and they were liable to be called upon either as soldiers, labourers or cultivators to work for the king, in return for which each *pāik* received 2 *poorāhs* of land free of rent. The *pāiks* were under a regular gradation of officers from commanders of twenty to six thousand. In time of peace or when little remained to be done, the *Gots* only furnished one individual from each *Got* who was relieved every three or four months, the others remaining at home to cultivate the lands for him. The labour of the *pāiks* was utilised with reference to the manifold needs of the state — some being set apart for the purpose of furnishing gold and others again for furnishing silk and other commodities the state required. Those, who lived on the banks of the rivers, were specially engaged in procuring gold dust from the waters of the river. Articles not produced in the state were procured by barter from the neighbouring countries and hill tribes. All the ready money required for the service of the state was collected by customs duties levied at different *chaukies*.⁴ This was the revenue system obtaining in Assam under the Swargadevs.

Prof. Bhattacharjee says "This system of enforced labour was obviously unpopular though it contributed to the military resources of the state and facilitated the undertaking of great works of public utility such as roads, tanks and embankments".⁵ But we are told that under this system, the peasantry lived in a state of ease because

⁴ P. P. 1832, July 23, Nos. 70-71. (Copy of a memorandum regarding Revenue System of Assam drawn up by Lt. Rutherford).

⁵ Prof. S. N. Bhattacharjee's "Mogul North-East Frontier Policy" Page 30.

as re-assessment took place at great intervals, heads of families originally polled as one, increased tenfold during the intervening period and thus the burden of enforced labour fell lightly upon the members of the family.⁶ It is evident from history, tradition and remains of the works of the former dynasty that Assam, previous to the invasion of the Moāmāriās and even until the arrival of the Burmese, was in a highly flourishing state.⁷ Lt. Rutherford says, "There is not a doubt that Assam until the arrival of the Burmese was in a most flourishing state and we could not afford the same system".⁸ The same note of high tribute is also struck by Captain Jenkins who was on special survey duty in Assam in 1832-33. We find from his observation that "It (Assam) has supported a very dense population on the whole happily governed. The wealth of the kingdom and the ambition of its princes appear to have subjected the inhabitants to faction, dissensions and foreign invasions and ended in reducing a flourishing and populous state to the utmost degree of wretchedness and degeneracy."⁹

Under British administration, the indigenous system was replaced by a new system based on direct money taxation. Under this new arrangement, the *parganās* were farmed to the Assamese under the denomination of *Choudhuries* on very moderate assessment varying from 7 annas to one rupee per *poorāh*. The revenues were collected by the *Choudhuries*; they had no proprietary right in the soil. They were mere collectors receiving 10% of the collections as their remuneration. The *Choudhuries* were again called upon to act as magistrates in petty criminal cases.¹⁰ To secure the best men as *Choudhuries* Mr. Scott, who was the father of the "*Choudree* system" adopted a bold plan not attempted anywhere in India even in these days. He introduced the practice of electing *Choudhuries* by the direct vote of the ryots. Tickets (Ballot papers) were given to them upon which they inscribed the names of the person they wished to return and the majority carried the day. Thus votes were taken by ballot and even females participated in the election.¹¹ The *Choudhuries* were elected at first for a term of one year.*

⁶ P. P. 1832, July 23, Nos. 70-71.

⁷ P. P. 1835, February 11, No. 90.

⁸ P. P. 1832, July 23, Nos. 70-71.

⁹ P. P. 1835, February 11, No. 90.

¹⁰ P. P. 1832, July 23, Nos. 70-71.

¹¹ Extract from a private letter of Major A. White dated the 28th May 1834 (P. P. 1832, July 23, Nos. 70-71).

* Later on they were elected for a term of three years.

This system coupled with the method of direct election seemed to be an excellent one on paper. But neither the republican character of the election nor the moderate assessment as fixed by the British Government was of any avail. This new system did not work well in practice. No adequate measures in practice appeared to have been adopted to secure the ryots from extortion. It is true that in theory the election of the *Choudhuries* was vested in the hands of the ryots who elected him by ballot, but in practice, this system broke down and brought untold misery upon the ryots. Scott did not take into consideration the nature of the human agencies that were to be employed to work out his otherwise excellent system nor did he foresee the numerous loop-holes for extortion and malpractice which his system offered to an unscrupulous man. Again the system itself proved to be a vicious one hedged in by numerous conditions. Now let us see how the system worked out in practice.

Before a *Choudhury* could obtain a *parganā*, he had to pay large sums to the officers of the Gauhati court as bribes. If installed, he was required to furnish security for the collections to be made by him on which he had to pay a commission of 10%, a sum equal to his legitimate remuneration. And lastly he had to advance to the treasury half a year's revenue before he had collected anything and it is reported that this sum he had to procure by borrowing at a ruinous rate of interest sometimes even running to 120%. Further it appeared that in some instances when unoccupied lands were thrown into the hands of the *Choudhuries* at an arbitrary valuation and there was no one to settle in that land at that rate, they made good the loss by realising the rent of unoccupied land from other ryots. So it is quite evident that the system itself was erroneous and "its tendency must have been to convert even a well disposed man into an extortioner." Sometimes the *Choudhuries* bribed the ryots by promises and even by money to secure re-election.¹² Even where the field of extortion was somewhat barren, there was no dearth of applicants for *Choudhuriship*. The mere name of *Choudhury* was valuable in the eyes of the Assamese. A *choudhury* when installed began to extort on all sides. Foreseeing the possibility of his not being re-elected, he squeezed to the utmost extent practicable.

The mode of assessment was another source of evil. It was so radically vicious that it gave the *choudhuries* ample loopholes for extortion. Under the new revenue system a *choudhury* could demand from the ryots the following taxes such as a house tax, a poll tax of

¹² Letter to Court No. 2 of 1834.

Rs. 2/- per paik, a *Jummamuttee* of -/7/- as per poorāh and *Maltane* at the rate of -/8/- as. per cent. Besides these a ryot had to pay under the heading commission and profit and loss account. The list is not yet complete. He had also to pay extra cesses—*Burgonee*—varying from 12½ p.c. to 37½ p.c. over and above the usual taxes. From this formidable and complex list it will be found that even a person of intelligence would be puzzled to say how much a ryot would have to pay to the Government. To the ignorant and illiterate Assamese peasant, the account was wholly incomprehensible and the result was that the unfortunate ryot was rackrented and had to pay as much as five or six times his legitimate rent.¹³

The system of cash payment created another difficulty for a people unaccustomed to taxation in cash. An adequate supply of coins was not available and the markets were flooded with spurious ones. Payments were made in many instances in inferior coins; the collectors availed themselves of the opportunity created by the confusion of the period and accepted the inferior coins at a much greater discount to the great pecuniary loss of the ryots. As the *choudhuries* were both rent-collectors and magistrates, they extorted with greater impunity. Again when there were heavy arrears of rent due from the ryots, the *choudhuries* submitted the list of defaulters to the higher authorities who despatched greedy *choudhuries* in the shape of *Koruk sezuals* (officers with power to seize goods) to realise the rent and the defaulting ryots abandoned their home in hundreds to save what little they possessed from the hands of these greedy vultures. Another great misfortune was that the *choudhuries* generally resided at the *Sadar* station. The collections were made by their deputies or *āmlās*, who, it is needless to say, shared the booty, and the centralisation of the *choudhuries* round the court weakened the tie "which ought to have existed between the manager and the ryot."¹⁴

This state of things went on for a number of years to the great impoverishment of the people and ruin of the countryside without having been brought to the notice of the higher authorities. At first sight, it may appear extraordinary that such a state of things could exist without detection. But if we consider it in the background of the character of the Assamese peasantry, their ignorance, the feudal state of bondage they lived under, the influence of the

¹³ Letter from Court No; 14 of 1834 (based on the account furnished by Captain Bogle).

¹⁴ P. P. 1832, July 23, Nos. 70-71.

choudhuries at the Sadar Court and lastly inadequacy of the European establishment, we shall find that it was not so much to be wondered at.

In this manner *choudhury* after *choudhury* was elected. To meet the expenses of securing office the *choudhuries* readily resorted to exaction. This again brought forth complaints and to prevent dismissal, further bribes were paid as "hush-money" and to secure hush-money they had to squeeze the peasantry again. Thus the process went on. The fate of a *choudhury* hang by a thread. His position was so uncertain that he had no inducement to improve his estate and being placed between two fires, a *choudhury* had really no alternative but to carry on his vicious game. But this process could not go on for an indefinite period. A *choudhury* was dismissed and his tangible property was destrained. But this was nothing compared with the misery and ruin he had inflicted upon the ryots under his control. The ryots were practically bled white and many fled to Bhutan and Bijni (then within the Presidency of Bengal) and many of the *parganās* turned waste. Lt. Rutherford himself saw such a *parganā* in 1830. *Bureegām* was formerly a flourishing *parganā*, but when he re-visited it, he found it deserted. There were many such places. The chutgari thana once contained as many as 785 tenanted houses, but by the year 1832, the number had dwindled to 68 and many of the villages became totally deserted.

Extortion was so universal that all the ryots would have deserted Lower Assam. But one thing contributed to retaining many of the inhabitants in the country. It was the lure of waste lands which were rented on very favourable terms, there being no rent for the first three years. Many Assamese moved to waste lands, cleared them and cultivated a patch of land for three years, then evacuated it and proceeded to another *pargana* in search of new pastures; there the old process was continued to the great financial loss of the state. Thus the Assamese moved from place to place. "The Assamese did not adopt this method from choice, as although an idle set, they were sincerely attached to their homes". It was the prevailing revenue system which forced them to take to this unprofitable itineracy. It was the *choudhury* system again which drove them across their frontier and compelled them to seek shelter in inhospitable regions. The Assamese had a natural aversion to the Bhutias because the latter ill treated them and used them as "beasts of burden" and yet they left Assam in thousands and fled to regions where they were unwelcome guests. Lt. Rutherford says, "This is no idle fiction, no work of imagination". He himself found in 1830 a large number of them congregated along the frontier of the Goalpara district — some

in the act of leaving, others already settled in Bhutan — driven there by the extortion of the *choudhuries*.¹⁵

Such was the pernicious effect of the "chowdree system". Lt. Rutherford compared it "to a steam engine with the flywheel alone exposed so that when anything goes wrong the rest of the machinery cannot be got at to correct it".¹⁶ The same picture of desolation and wretchedness of the countryside we gather from the narrative left by Captain Bogle who was in charge of a few *parganās* in Lower Assam at that time. Captain Bogle's picture of the six *parganās* under his management is melancholy in the extreme. Captain Bogle says, "The system hitherto adopted has been hurtful in the extreme and that its direct tendency has been to reduce the ryots to a state of poverty and dejection of the most distressing nature and to enrich a few worthless beings at the expense of the whole population of the country". He asserts, "To a few chowdrees alone has the present system been advantageous" and while dwelling on the pernicious effects of this system, he records that as a result of the continuation of this oppressive system, "many of the finest parts of the country are now a dreary waste. Villages once most pleasing to the eye are now deserted and in ruins". Most regretfully the same officer observes, "The inhabitants instead of finding in the British Government a power which would protect them in the enjoyment of their hearths and homes, have fled by hundreds in all direction not only to the neighbouring zemindaries of Bengal but what is much more painful to contemplate, to the lawless regions of Bhutan".¹⁷

Writing of Upper Assam, Lt. Rutherford discloses the same tale of oppression and wretchedness and says, "The same oppressive method is practised and the ryots run into Burra Senaputtee's country or in to Lower Assam and those that remain are forced to make up the rent due from their deserted brethren". It appears therefore that an error was committed in not allowing the old system to continue after the long period of misrule. Instead, taxes were levied at once on imperfect data and a system was introduced by which collection fell into the hands of the unprincipled and impoverished Assamese. It is reported that among the *choudhuries* there were many greedy Bengalee adventurers who took full advantage of the situation.¹⁸

It is not however to the *choudhury* alone that the wretched state which Assam was subjected to during the early part of British

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Letter from Court No. 14 of 1834.

¹⁸ P. P. 1832, July 23, No. 70-71.

administration is to attributed. The new judicial system which was generally run by the "native machinery" was no less responsible for this unhappy state of things. In Upper Assam, as we have seen earlier, the judicial business was placed under the superintendence of the Bar Phukan. For the decision of civil suits, standing committees were constituted consisting of pundits and various officers of state. The criminal court was composed of three judges, two pundits and six assessors. In Lower Assam the same procedure was followed; only a native *sheristākhār* was appointed as head of the judicial establishment instead of the Bar Phukan.¹⁹ Thus the entire judicial machinery was left to be managed by the Native agency.

In criminal matters, where the native judges sat and deliberated under the eye of a European officer, verdict appeared to be very satisfactory, but with regard to civil cases, where the only control they were subject to was that of a remote revision by a superior officer in the person of the Governor-General's Agent overwhelmed with other duties, the same could not be said. Mr. Robertson says, "Even the sudder panchayets are generally reported to be venal in the extreme while the Muffasil Panchayets are mere engines of abuse and extortion". The most striking feature in the criminal business of the period was the great prevalence of crime in Lower Assam. A surprisingly great number of people were implicated and convicted of criminal offences such as gang robberies. This was due not only to the mildness of the penal system* as introduced by the new government but also to demoralisation and poverty arising from a bad revenue settlement. It is reported that Scott allowed the police officers to take bribes that were offered to them provided they were instantly reported. From the difficulty of obtaining qualified persons it was necessary, during the early days of British administration to employ *āmlās* convicted of bribery and the result was that "with some exceptions only the refuse of the other Zillah came there" and these villains maltreated the people at their pleasure.²⁰

According to Mr. Robertson, it was to the scanty European Agency employed in Assam that the misery of the people and the defalcation of the revenue were directly traceable and this statement is true to a great extent. We have seen how Scott himself advocated an adequate establishment for the proper management of the country. And for the scanty establishment he himself was no less responsible.

¹⁹ S. C. 1826, July 7, No. 31.

* The old cruel and barbarous method of punishment was done away with.

²⁰ P. P. 1832, July 23, Nos. 70-71.

"He allowed the desire of sparing expenses to become so paramount in his mind as to deter him from pressing for the assistance which he himself considered to be absolutely necessary". Practically speaking for many years following the introduction of British rule, "the Governor-General's Agent had been virtually the judge, magistrate and collector of Lower Assam with a single assistant to help him" while during the same period the province of Arakan which does not equal in extent the province of Lower Assam, was manned by six European officers.

The territory of Assam nearly 400 miles in length and 50 miles in breadth on an average, having an estimated population of 8,30,000 and an annual revenue of 3,50,000 rupees, was administered in all its branches under the direction of a single functionary overburdened with other business. The result was a foregone conclusion. "The greater part of the revenue and judicial administration was entrusted to native functionaries without any adequate provision for repressing the abuse of their powers" and maladministration followed in every branch of the administration. And in the opinion of Mr. Robertson "The experiment of substituting native for European agency in the administration of Assam ended in a decided failure", because "Mr. Scott sought to extract an honest result out of the conflicting agency of dishonest instrument".²¹

As a result of this maladministration, the situation towards the end of 1832 became really alarming. Captain Bogle reported that "many of the poor class were found subsisting upon the seeds of bamboos". Their number was again greatly thinned by deaths and desertions. Mr. Robertson, who was then acting as Agent to the Governor-General, also reported that the revenue of Assam seemed to be daily falling into a more deplorable state and that the outstanding balance had amounted to upwards of 5 lacs of rupees and he apprehended that unless some steps were taken immediately to arrest the falling of the revenue, the balance would become irrecoverable and the future collection would dwindle away to nothing.²² The whole system appeared to him to be radically vicious. Such was the deplorable picture of the state of Assam during the early years of British rule (1825-1833).

The local officers did not remain content with sending these disquieting reports alone. The whole system appeared to them to be radically vicious and deserving of radical reform. They therefore suggested immediate reforms. Lt. Rutherford advocated the esta-

²¹ Ibid.

²² Letter from Court No. 14 of 1834.

ishment of a *Ryotwari* System in place of the hated *Choudhury* system, and to afford adequate protection to ryots, he planned the division of the land into *Tālaks* consisting of 4 *māuzas* each with a native writer (*Khagatee*) to keep the accounts. He also provided a *mondal* for each *Tāluk* to be assisted by a "*Gram Burrah*" (village headman) from each village all of whom, under his scheme, was to receive remuneration either in cash or in kind. There would be a *Nāib Tashildār* in each *parganā* to whom these subordinate officers were to submit accounts and the former again would be under the charge of a senior *Tashildār* (one for 4 *parganās*). The author of the scheme hoped that this system by its development and practical application would create an interest in the soil and would moreover secure for the ryots a readier means of redressing complaints by tracing it through different hands, because under his scheme it would be impossible to stop the mouth of so many investigators.²³ Lt. Rutherford and Captain Bogle also urged for the immediate abolition of "*Burgonne*" and other irregular impositions.

Robertson to whom these reports were submitted in the first instance immediately acted upon several of the suggestions. To him the most indispensable thing that Assam needed at that period was an efficient machinery to carry out the administration and all other considerations appeared to him of secondary importance. And acting on this principle he proposed that a sub-commissioner with a salary of Rs. 2,000/- per mensem with one or two assistants attached to his office should be appointed immediately at the centre to give relief to the overworked Agent and Commissioner, and for the districts he recommended the appointment of three assistants, each in charge of three separate divisions of Assam, with powers of magistrate and collector. The cost of European establishment he calculated at Rs. 50,000/- per annum and begged the Supreme Government to remember that they should not look askance at the costly measure which, he assured them, would really make the revenue of Assam a real and not a nominal source of supply, as it had been hitherto.²⁴

1834 The Supreme Government to which all these proposals were submitted immediately authorised the Agent to write off the sum of Rs. 72,000/- out of the defaulting revenues. As the numerous items of extra assessment were reported to be "a fruitful source of confusion, litigation and oppression" they ordered their abolition or consolidation as far as possible on the expiry of the existing leases.

²³ P. P. 1832, July 23, Nos. 70-71.

²⁴ Ibid.

They were in favour of the establishment of village settlement and impressed upon Mr. Robertson the necessity of abolishing the *choudhury* system altogether. The proposal for the future establishment of Assam, as submitted by the Agent, they found to be judicious and economical and they forwarded a detailed description of the revenue and judicial system of Assam to the Court of Directors at home.²⁵

When the Court of Directors were apprised of the situation prevailing in Assam, they could not contemplate those deplorable pictures of misgovernment without feelings of deep regret. They were grieved to learn that "a dreadful extortion had beggared the ryots and rendered a large portion of Assam waste in which up to our conquest such a thing as jungle was hardly to be seen". To them it appeared that the arrangement made for the Government of Assam demonstrated a want of foresight on the part of the Company's servants in India which they were not ready to excuse because of the insufficient knowledge of the the country and of its inhabitants as displayed by the latter. According to them, the Calcutta authorities erred "in placing unlimited confidence in Mr. Scott's power of management and in allowing him to govern the country in his own way without satisfying yourselves with respect to the mode in which he governed". They however instructed the Government of India to immediately "frame a plan of administration comprising all the securities for integrity and efficiency in the subordinate agents of the government which experience has suggested."²⁶

But before we pass on to the suggestions tendered by the Court of Directors in this connection, let us pause a while and try to apportion the blame for the mismanagement of Assam during the early part of British administration. We have seen that the mode of administration as enunciated by Scott had come in for a good deal of criticism. But to be fair to Scott it must be admitted that though "his chowdree system" was mainly responsible for all the evils Assam had suffered from during the early part of British rule, he realised the defect of the system and tried to mitigate the suffering of the people in other ways and suggested a number of remedies. But unfortunately his suggestion was never accepted by the Supreme Government. He realised that unless means were immediately adopted by the Government to encourage the production of more costly articles of export it would soon become necessary either to reduce materially the amount of the revenue

²⁵ Letter to Court No. 2 of 1834.

²⁶ Letter from Court No. 14 of 1834.

derived from Assam or to revert to the former system of compulsory labour. And with a view to increasing the value of the land and general prosperity of the country, he chalked out an ambitious plan for the acceptance of the Government. But his scheme was turned down by the supreme authorities.²⁷

There was a great prevalence of crime during the early part of the new regime. The frequency of murder and offence of the most heinous description loudly called for prompt and rigorous execution of the law. Scott was quite alive to the seriousness of the situation and recommended that the authority of the *Nizāmat Ādālat* should be extended to Lower Assam. But the Governor-General-in-Council not only thought that it was premature and inexpedient to introduce regulation X of 1822 into Lower Assam but also expressed the following opinion: "the object of establishing an efficient system for the dispensation of criminal justice will be best provided for by those local tribunals and institutions which Mr. Scott had very judiciously revised and put into action"²⁸ So it is not fair to put blame at the door of Scott for all the evils of the period. The truth is that from the very beginning of its career, Assam became a neglected province because it seemed to be unproductive and unremunerative, and hence it had to suffer the fate of a neglected province. For this the Supreme Government at Calcutta was morally responsible. That the representatives of the East India Company, during the earlier stages of their occupation of Assam failed to discharge their duties to a million souls whom Providence placed under their charge after half a century of misrule and suffering, cannot be denied.

To the Court of Directors, the essentials of a good revenue system consisted of a moderate demand, single assessment and quick means of redress, and they found to their mortification that, save and except the first principle, all other principles had been entirely lost sight of in the administration of Assam by their servants in India. So in the course of their directives issued to the Government of India regarding the future administration of Assam, they insisted that the demand on each individual ryot should be fixed and distinctly ascertained and that means of redress against extortion and oppression should be readily accessible to every ryot. As the *Panchāyat* administering civil justice seemed to them to be a complete failure, they called upon their subordinates to abolish it and introduce the system of European control and inspection. Regarding the inadequacy of European agency, they were strongly of opinion

²⁷ P. P. 1830, May 7 Nos. 51-53.

²⁸ S. P. 1828, May 2, Nos. 11-13.

that whatever amount of European agency was necessary must be afforded. In this connection they planned for Assam an adequate European establishment—one Commissioner with the necessary number of assistants and advised the supreme Government in India to look upto “the Saugar and Nerbudda Agency as an appropriate model for the details of such a system of administration”.²⁹

The Government of India lost no time in adopting remedial measures. The irrecoverable balances were remitted and encouragement was held out to the runaway ryots to come back by allowing them to reoccupy their old land free of rent for a number of years. This had the desirable result; not only did a large number of fugitives who had left their country in disgust return but, what was more encouraging, in place of emigration which had been previously taking place into Bhutan from Assam, a colony of Bhutias migrated to Assam and received a grant of waste lands. Not only were all extra cesses abolished, but all separate claims upon the ryots were consolidated into one single demand. But what gave the ryots the much needed relief was the immediate abolition of the judicial and police authority of the *chowdhury*. The Muffasil *Panchāyets* were abolished and, after the expiration of the existing leases (*Chowdhuries* were appointed later on for a term of three years), village settlements were formed at a reduced *jummā* under the guarantee of *pattās* (title deed) countersigned by the Collector and a great number of Europeans was appointed to run the administration.³⁰

Two years had scarcely elapsed when the measures which were adopted “to reclaim the province from the unprosperous condition 1836 into which it had fallen” were attended with much success. “From the increased means of European surveillance, by the total abolition of all irregular cesses and by the exact measurement of lands, we have now the power of preventing every concealment, and of giving to each ryot in the country a written statement of what he has to pay”, thus reported Captain Jenkins. These results were regarded as highly satisfactory by the Court of Directors.³¹ The material condition of the people really improved and having experienced the dire and unrelieved anarchy of the latter Āhom period and the mal-

²⁹ Letter from Court No. 14 of 1834.

³⁰ Letter from Court No. 24 of 1836.

³¹ Ibid.

administration of the early British days which followed it, the people of the Brahmaputra Valley were at last placed on the high-road to security and prosperity. The dark age of trouble and violence was over and an era of peace and prosperity dawned.*

* The inhabitants of the principalities conquered after this period (1825-1833) had not the misfortune of going through the sufferings which their less fortunate brethren of the Brahmaputra Valley had experienced during the early stages of British rule. The Brahmaputra Valley had been subjected to experimental schemes with the attendant evils, whereas the tracts acquired subsequently were administered upon those principles which experience had proved to be the most beneficent.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX "A"

Treaty concluded between David Scott, Agent to the Governor General on the part of the Hon'ble East India Company and Raja Ram Sing, Ruler of Jynteepoor or Jynteah.

Article 1st: Rajah Ram Sing acknowledges allegiance to the Hon'ble Company and places his country of Jynteah under their protection; mutual friendship and amity shall always be maintained between the Hon'ble Company and the Rajah.

Article 2nd: The internal Government of the Country shall be conducted by the Rajah and the jurisdiction of the British Courts of Justice shall not extend there. The Rajah will always attend to the welfare of his subjects and observe the ancient customs of Government but should any unforeseen abuse arise in the administration of affairs he agrees to rectify the same agreeably to the advice of the Governor-General in Council.

Article 3rd: The Hon'ble Company engages to protect the territory of Jynteah from external enemies and to arbitrate any differences that may arise between the Rajah and other states. The Rajah agrees to abide by such arbitration and to hold no political correspondence or communication with foreign powers except with the consent of the British Government.

Article 4th: In the event of the Hon'ble Company being engaged in war to the Eastward of the Burrumapooter the Rajah engages to assist with all forces and to afford every other facility in his power in furtherance of such military operatives.

Article 5th: The Rajah agrees in concert with the British local authorities to adopt all measures that may be necessary for the maintenance in the district of Sylhet of the arrangement in force in the Judicial, Opium and Salt departments. Executed this 10th March 1824.

Corresponding with the 28th of Phagon 1230 at Rajahgunge.

Sd/- D. Scott.

Agent to the Governor General.

Separate article of the Treaty concluded between the Hon'ble Company and Rajah Ram Sing of Jynteah.

Rajah Ram Sing engages that to assist in the war commenced in Assam between the Hon'ble the Company's troops and those of the King of Ava, he will march a force and attack the enemy of the East of Gowahatty and the Hon'ble Company agrees upon the conquest of Assam to confer upon the Rajah a part of that territory proportionate to the extent of his exertions in the common cause.

APPENDIX "B"

The Memorial of Rajundar Sing, Rajah of Joyntiapore respectfully sheweth.

That your Memorialist is the descendant and successor of a race of independant Chiefs, who for a long course of ages have ruled over a territory, situate on the north Eastern frontier of Bengal and known by the name of Joyntiapore.

That the first connexion between the Rajah of Joyntiapore and the British Government was in the Saka year 1695 or English year 1773/4 when Captain Oligar

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That the first connexion between the Rajah of Joyntiapore and the British Government was in the Saka year 1695 or English year 1773/4 when Captain Oligar

entered it in command of a Military force and took hostile possession on the part of the British Government. This occupation was however of no long duration. In the same year, the British force was withdrawn and the Rajah reinstated on the same footing as before. Since that time hitherto the Raj of Joyntiapore has acknowledged the supremacy of the British Authority and has continued under its shelter and protection in the undisturbed possession of its ancient race of rulers, without claim or payment of tribute of any kind.

That on the 10th March of the Christian year 1824 the British Government being then engaged in warfare with the kingdom of Ava, the Right Hon'ble the Lord Amherst then Governor-General of India was pleased to enter into a formal treaty with Rajah Ram Sing then the ruling Prince of Joyntiapore. The terms and articles of that treaty were not only fully complied with by the Rajah but he was so fortunate as by his faithful attachment and zealous exertions in the supply of men and provisions to the military forces in Assam to obtain the esteem and approbation of the British Authorities.

That Rajah Ram Sing died on the 11th Ashwin of the Bengali year 1239 (25th September A.D. 1832) leaving no male issue, and your Memorialist, as the nearest male collateral heir in due course according to the laws and usages of the Raj became his Successor in the principality and assumed the dignities of its chief in which he was recognized by the British Government notwithstanding the open and secret intrigues and machinations of the Rajah of Poonjee and other neighbouring Chieftains who hoped to supplant him in his rights, and even entered into a league to depose him and to possess themselves of the territory and used every exertion to obtain the sanction of the British Government to such aggression. In this however they found themselves balked by its wisdom and justice and by that sacred regard to treaties and respect for the rights of others, which has gained it the confidence of the neighbouring powers.

That being thus foiled in their unjust designs the enemies of your memorialist tried to injure and calumniate him with the British Government by every means in their power and for that purpose availed themselves of an unfortunate occurrence which had taken place in the life time of your memorialist's predecessor Ram Sing and which was as follows:—on the 21st Assar of the Bengali year 1239 (7th July 1832) it was reported to Mr. Robertson then Political Agent in Assam that two subjects of the Company's territory were on their road to Assam, kidnapped by some miscreants set on by one Chutter Sing and carried off to the hills in the neighbourhood of Gobha in the Raj of Joyntiapore, and there together with two others supposed to have been seized in a similar manner, decked out for sacrifice at the Shrine of Kali; that one of them had escaped who told that tale but the other three were presumed to have been immolated.

This statement, made by a man who represented himself as the fugitive being corroborated by enquiry and information from other sources was accredited by the Agent, and laid before the Governor General and was shortly before the death of Rajah Ram Sing the subject of a remonstrance addressed to Rajah Ram Sing together with a demand for the surrender of the perpetrators, which he was in the very act of complying with, by the delivery of Chutter Sing and others, when his own sudden death set the accused at liberty.

The demand of their surrender was renewed and your memorialist exerted himself to comply with the demand. But difficulties and confusion incident to his recent succession and a variety of other impediments made it impossible to trace or retake Chutter Sing himself or indeed any of the other offenders till a considerable time had elapsed. Your memorialist however after repeated attempts did at length

succeed in laying hold of four of them whom he delivered up to the British Authorities, as will appear by the original written acknowledgment of Captain Jenkins, the British Officer then in charge, dated the 21st September 1834 and now in your memorialist's hands, and of which a copy with translation is annexed marked (B). Meantime British Government wishing to vary terms of the treaty and demand tribute in lieu of the obligation to furnish a Military contingent in case of War on the south eastern frontier, availed itself of the opportunity offered by the demise of Rajah Ram Sing to require a revision of the treaty; and T. C. Robertson Esqr. then Political Agent for Assam, in pursuance of instructions from the Governor-General-in-Council, on the 21st May 1833 made a formal demand in writing upon your memorialist to enter in a new engagement, in which the payment of a fixed annual tribute of Sicca Rupees 10,000 should be substituted in place of Article 4 of the former treaty; it was natural that your memorialist should feel surprized at this demand. It was the first time that any thing like tribute had been required by the British Government, and the compliance with such a demand was certain to alter the position and estimation of the Rajah in the eyes of the neighbouring chiefs. Surely therefore it was not unreasonable that your memorialist should at the moment solicit a space of no more than fifteen days time for deliberation, or that, in his reply of the 23rd Joystya of the Bengal year 1240, he should have respectfully urged his objections to the variation demanded. The Political Agent, however, without waiting for further communication was proceeding to take immediate steps for enforcing his demand and was only induced to pause by a request on the part of your Memorialist's Agent of seven days further delay. Your memorialist immediately dispatched Gopaulmony Duloojee and two others to the Resident, with a letter again urging his objections, and representing the fidelity with which the former treaty had been observed on the part of the Raj and the services of Rajah Ram Sing his predecessor but the Resident paid little attention to the communication and made no other reply, than by requiring your memorialist's agents to give in a definite answer respecting the tribute demanded within twenty five days. No further communication having been made from your memorialist the matter stood over until the 16th of Joystya 1241 (28th May 1834) when your Memorialist received a letter from Captain Jenkins, the Political Agent renewing the demand of tribute and repeating the requisition for delivery of the offenders in the affair at Gobha. The latter was complied with as above stated to the utmost of your memorialist's ability; but your memorialist withheld the signification of his assent to the payment of tribute trusting to the liberality of the British Government not to insist upon a demand, to which your Memorialist was unable to offer resistance otherwise than by remonstrance and representation.

That this hesitation of your memorialist appears to have brought down upon him the heavy displeasure of his Lordship the Governor-General-in-Council for in the month of March 1835 he was both grieved and surprized by receiving a letter from His Lordship in Council intimating that the whole of your memorialist's ancestral possessions in the plains has been confiscated by the British Government, and that orders had been issued for taking possession of them on its behalf.

The only ground assigned for this summary act was the non-delivery of the offenders in the atrocity of Gobha and the occurrence of a similar cause of offence in the English year 1821 together with an insinuation of your memorialist's participation either in the outrage itself or in the protection of the perpetrators. These orders were immediately carried into effect and your memorialist has thereby

been stript of the whole of the possessions in the plains which had been the patrimony of his ancestors for many generations.

He begs leave respectfully to represent that the avowed reason for this severe and summary treatment of the heir of an old and faithful vassal was not only insufficient in itself but was wholly untrue in fact, your memorialist having, as above stated, already complied, as far as it was possible for him to do so, with the requisition to deliver up the offender in the affair of Gobha and having obtained the written acknowledgment of their surrender. Your Memorialist cannot believe that this fact could have been known to his Lordship in Council when the orders complained of were given. If it had it must have been noticed in the letter of his Lordship. Moreover he begs to submit that it would be strange indeed to hold him responsible for an outrage committed three years before and in the time of his predecessor; still less for one that had occurred fifteen years ago upon which no measures had then been taken or insisted upon. As successor to the Raj, your memorialist was doubtless bound to follow up the offenders whom Rajah Ram Sing had seized but was prevented by his death from surrendering; and so he did. Nor is it to be wondered at that delay should have occurred in a matter of so much embarrassment and amongst tribes so wild and impatient of all rule. Your Memorialist on receiving the acknowledgement from the British Officer, without comment or further demand naturally concluded that his compliance with the requisition had been accepted. Had any thing more been called for, it would surely have been intimated to him in the interval between September 1834 and March 1835 and had any such intimation been made, it would appear on the records of the proceedings of the British Authorities. But none such has ever been made or pretended.

Your memorialist scarcely knows how to advert to the charge against himself of participation in the atrocity of Gobha or at least of harbouring the perpetrators; for the charge is rather insinuated than brought forward in the letter from His Lordship in Council and it was new to the ears of your Memorialist, who can impute it to nothing else but the secret malevolence of his enemies and calumniators. Had there been any foundation for such a charge it would have been an effectual bar to the recognition by the British Government of your memorialist as successor to Rajah Ram Sing. The best reputation is the bare fact of your memorialist having in the interim traced out and delivered up four of the offenders, before the charge was even insinuated—His Lordship's knowledge of that fact alone would have effectually silenced the calumniator by whom the suggestion must have been made.

It will however naturally occur to your Lordship that the outrage at Gobha was merely the ostensible ground of charge, and that the real offence of your memorialist, which has been thus heavily visited was the silence of your memorialist as to the demand of tribute. Indeed the total omission of this topic in the communication of the ground of offence can be no otherwise accounted for than by the consciousness that it was untenable. In time of war or other emergency, the demand of a subsidy or money payment by the paramount state from its vassal is usual and just. But the demand of a permanent tribute in time of profound peace in lieu of an existing obligation to furnish temporary aid in men and supplies upon the contingency of war on the neighbouring frontier which might not occur for a century, seems neither usual nor equitable, and could appear to the vassal in no better light than an alarming innovation. But even the direct refusal of such a demand could scarcely be a just ground of forfeiture. Your memorialist however never did refuse compliance. He was sensible of his position and of the impossibility of refusal. Had that course been taken towards memorialist, however

reluctant to part with the shadow of independence his exemption from tribute appeared to leave to him, or grieved at the necessity of discharging those retainers of his family which the exaction of a tribute equivalent to nearly half of the rent of the territory taken from him must render him unable longer to entertain, he must needs have yielded to the demand. If the interests of the British Government require that the tribute in question should be insisted upon as the condition of renewed treaty with the Rajah Joyntiapore, your memorialist was and is ready to subscribe to those terms. But he respectfully submits that his reluctance to part with the privileges of his forefathers was not unnatural and ought not to be construed as a mark either of contumacy or of disaffection.

In conclusion your petitioner confidently hopes, that, on full consideration of the ease, it will be found by your Lordship that the forfeiture and degradation he has been subjected to have been inflicted upon him under misapprehension of the facts—and without regard to the actual circumstances of the Raj of Joyntiapore and of your Memorialist himself. And he earnestly solicits that he may be restored to the possession of the small territory of which he has been deprived and that the treaty of the British Government with the Raj of Jyontiapore may be renewed on such terms either of tribute or otherwise, as your wisdom and justice shall dictate.

Calcutta, 18th July 1836.

Signed (In Bengali)

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22	34	chief	chiefs
31	2 (foot note)	Burma Gohain	Burha Gohain
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