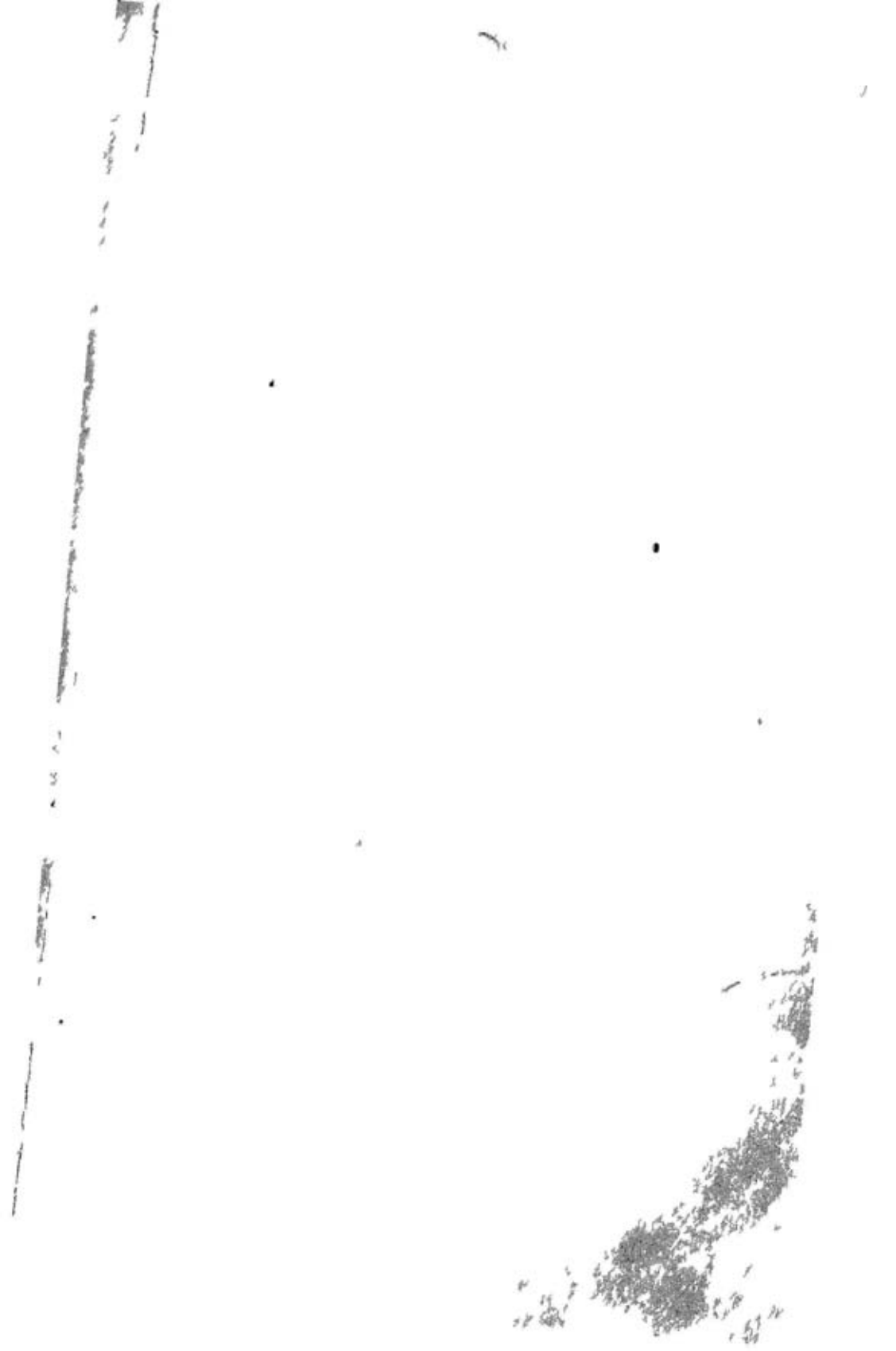


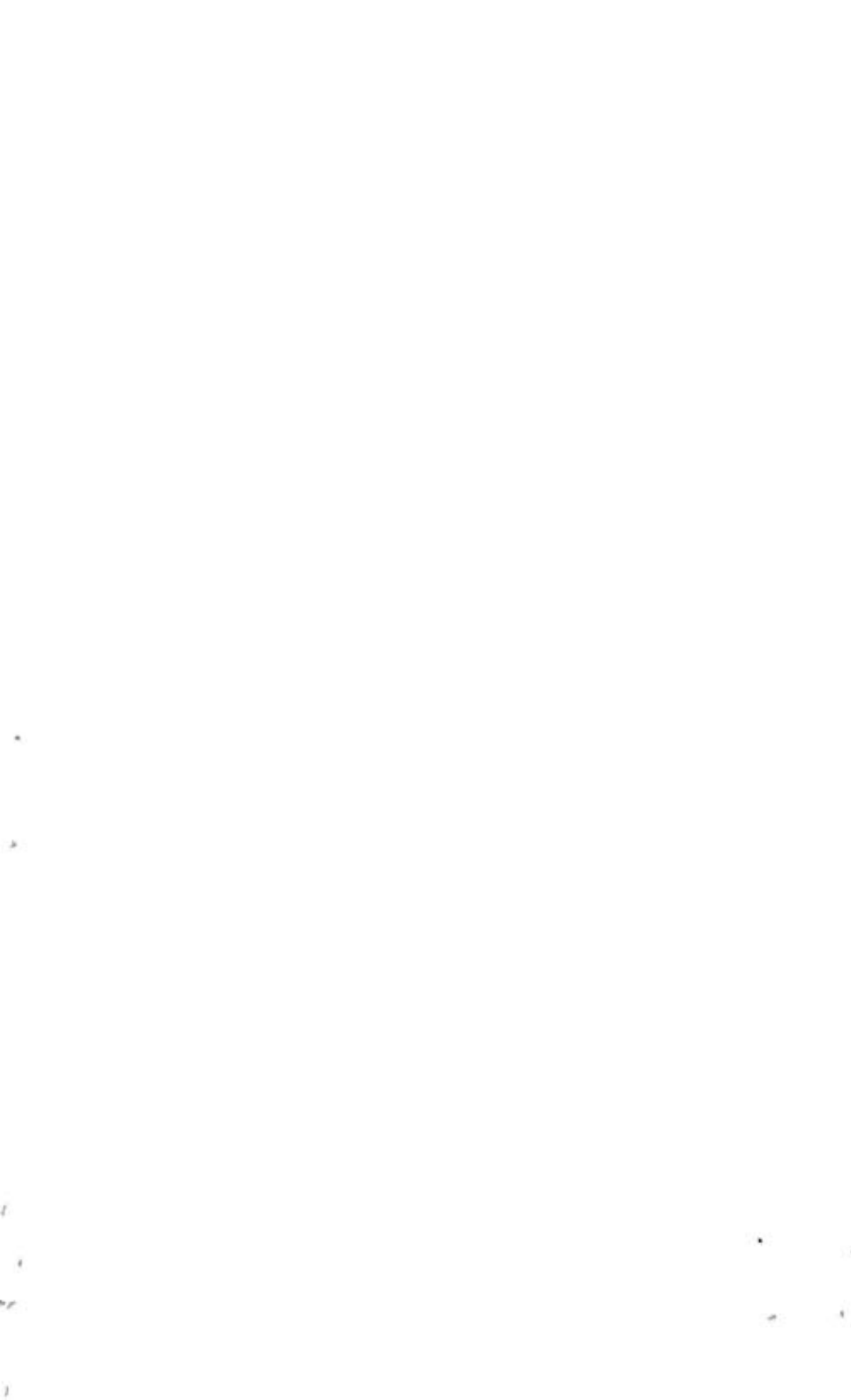
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ASSAM : IN THE DAYS OF THE COMPANY



ASSAM
IN THE DAYS OF THE COMPANY
1826—1858

A critical and comprehensive history of Assam during the rule of the East-India Company from 1826—1858, based on original Assamese and English sources, both published and unpublished.



H. K. BARPUJARI, M.A., PH. D (LOND.)
Professor and Head of the Department of History
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TO
MY UNCLE
LATE CHANDRAKANTA BARPUJARI



PREFACE

In spite of her increasing importance as the eastern sentinel of the Indian Republic, Assam or the North-East Frontier has failed to receive adequate justice in the hands of historians, Indian or foreign. There are already several historical works and monographs on the North-West Frontier, the number of similar works, even articles in learned journals, on the North-East Frontier is extremely meagre. Till recently, E. A. Gait's *History of Assam* was the only authoritative work on the subject ; but in his endeavour to cover from the Pre-historic to Modern times in a volume of about three hundred and fifty pages, Gait's treatment of the British period is rather sketchy, and it is doubtful if the learned historian had ever consulted the official records. Dr. A. C. Banerjee in his *Eastern Frontier of British India* has admirably discussed the policy of the East-India Company towards Assam from the last quarter of the eighteenth to the first quarter of the nineteenth century. Dr. S. K. Bhuyan not only covers the same ground in his *Anglo-Assamese Relations* (1771-1826), but has exhaustively described the internal history of Assam during this period and throws illuminating light on the earlier contacts of her inhabitants with the Europeans.

The period from 1826 to 1858 is a formative epoch in the history of Assam. It marked not only the end of the independent and powerful Ahom monarchy that had ruled in the valley of the Brahmaputra for over six centuries, but ushered in a new regime of foreign domination having radical changes, the effects of which can be felt even to-day. This period has been partially covered by Dr. R. M. Lahiri in his notable work *The Annexation of Assam* (1824-54). The object of the present volume is to provide in the light of available original sources, Assamese and English, a narrative not merely of the successive stages in the establishment of British paramountcy in Assam, but also the period of subsequent reaction, in its true perspective, leading to the early phase of the so-called Freedom Movement in the North-East Frontier. How the British authorities responded to the challenge of the time and evolved after repeated trials an administrative structure which, though full of imperfections, was

on the whole conducive to the well-being of the masses—these are also exhaustively analysed and critically examined in this volume. The influx of outsiders, whether from motives of gain to be derived from a virgin soil as commercial speculators and industrial pioneers or from administrative demands of the foreign rulers, apart from shattering the already worn-out patterns of society, produced economic changes of far-reaching consequences. Adequate attention, therefore, has to be paid to those forces, social and economic, which were at the root of many of the events and movements of the period, and to those enterprises, public or private, destined to change the very face of this frontier province. In addition, the work throws side-lights on the declining fortunes of the ruling families, their relations with the frontier tribes, and also to the contribution of early administrators and benefactors some of whose bones are strewn in different parts of the province, but whose very names may not be known to many of the present generations.

This work has, in fact, grown out of my thesis *The British Administration in Assam, (1825-45)*, which was submitted to and approved by the University of London for the Ph. D. degree, in July, 1949. The Problem of the Hill-tribes on the North-East Frontier is within the purview of the present author, and it will be presented in another volume which is now under preparation.

The narrative of the volume is based mainly on official documents, both published and unpublished, the details of which are appended in the bibliography. The indigenous *Buranjis* or the chronicles, which form a valuable source for the earlier period are almost scarce during the period under review. *Asamar Padya-Buranji*, consisting of two metrical works in Assamese by Dutiram Hazarika and Bisweswar Baidyadhipa, and *Sadar-Aminar Atmajivani* or an autobiography of Harakanta Sarma Baruah, a *Sadar Amin* of Gauhati, are the only contemporary works so far available which yield fragmentary details of the political administrative and social changes of the period. I have utilized, to some extent, the materials contained in *Assam Buranji*, written in Bengali in 1829, by Haliram Dhekial Phukan, and in semi-contemporary literary works like *The Life of Anandaram Dhekial Phukan* by Gunaviram Baruah, *Assam Buranji* by the same author, *Jivanadarsa* by Nilkumud Baruah, the old volumes

of *Orunudai*, the first Assamese monthly published by the American Baptist Mission Society, Sibsagar. It has been my sincere endeavour to arrive at the conclusions as honestly and as impartially as possible, it is however for the reader to judge whether I have succeeded. I cannot claim to have covered all the topics nor that mine is the final verdict on any subject; I shall consider my labour more than amply rewarded, if the present work serves the interest of scholars for further investigation of those aspects lightly passed over or neglected by me altogether.

I take this opportunity of acknowledging my debt of gratitude to my supervisors Professor C. H. Philips and Dr. D. G. E. Hall of the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, for their unfailing courtesy and ungrudging help, and to my examiner Dr. C. C. Davies of the University of Oxford for his valued criticisms. I am grateful to Dr. S. K. Bhuyan, formerly Vice-Chancellor, University of Gauhati, for his kind advice and helpful suggestions and to Sri S. C. Rajkhowa, D.P.I. Assam, for his help and encouragement. My friend and ex-colleague Prof. R. Shah read the typescript and Prof. A. Sarma saw the book through the press; I am indebted to them for their kind co-operation.

My grateful acknowledgements are due to all the authors whose works I consulted, and to the Director of National Archives, Government of India, Director of Historical and Antiquarian Studies, Government of Assam, Director of Archives, Government of West Bengal, Keeper of Records, Government of Assam, and specially to the staffs of the Library and Records department, Commonwealth Relations Office, London, for placing at my disposal the materials in their custody. I am indeed thankful to the authorities of Nabajiban Press, Calcutta, for having printed the book with due pain and patience, and to Sri B. N. Dutta Borooah, Proprietor, Lawyer's Book Stall, Gauhati, for undertaking the publication of the volume.

Finally, I would crave the indulgence of the reader for the irregularities, here and there, which have crept in in spite of my best care.



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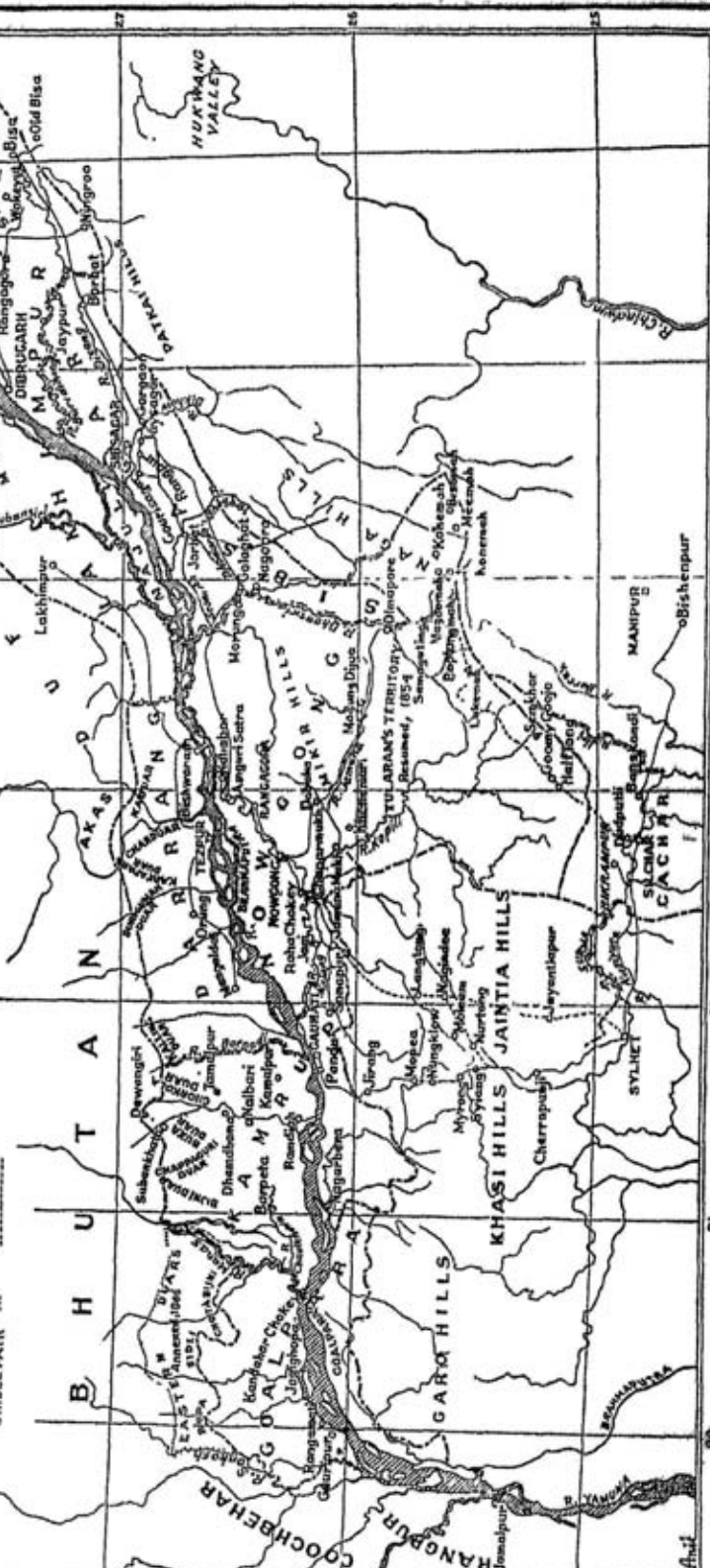
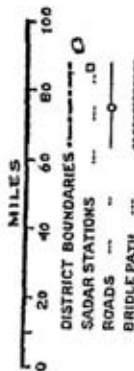
MAPS (i) ASSAM IN 1858 FRONTISPIECE

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ABBREVIATIONS USED

B. J. C. (P)	—Bengal Judicial Consultations (<i>also</i> Proceedings).
B. P. C.	—Bengal Political Consultations.
B. R. C. (P)	—Bengal Revenue Consultations (<i>also</i> Proceedings).
B. S. P. C.	—Bengal Secret and Political Consultations.
C. D.	—Despatches to India and Bengal.
C. O.	—Commissioner's Office.
I. P. C. (F. C.)	—India Political Consultations (<i>also</i> Foreign Proceedings).
I. R. C.	—India Revenue Consultations.
J. L. B.	—Judicial letters from Bengal.
J. A. S. B.	—Journal of the Asiatic Society, Bengal.
J. R. A. S.	—Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society.
P. L. A.	—Political letters from India.
P. L. I. B.	—Political letters from India and Bengal.
R. L. I.	—Revenue letters from India.
R. J. I. B.	—Revenue and Judicial letters from India and Bengal.
R. P. I. B.	—Report on the Public Instruction, Bengal.

MAP OF ASSAM 1858



INTRODUCTION

The present State of Assam lies at the north-east corner of the Republic of India. It is situated between the twenty-second and twenty-ninth degrees of north latitude and between eightyninth and ninetyseventh degrees of east longitude, comprising the two valleys of the Brahmaputra and the Barak (the Surma) together with the central and north-eastern hill tracts. The long alluvial valley of the Brahmaputra or Assam proper, with which we are mainly concerned in this volume, extended at the beginning of our period from the river Manah on the north bank of the Brahmaputra to the foot of the Himalayas close upon the frontier of China (the country of the Lamas) with an area over 30,000 square miles*. On the north it is bounded by the hills occupied by the Bhutias, the Akas, the Duflas, the Abors, and the Miris; on the north-east the Mishmi hills sweep round the head of the valley; the hills inhabited by the Khamtis and the Singphos separate Assam from China and Burma. On the south-east lie the States of Cachar and Manipur. To the south again the so-called Assam Range occupied by the Nagas,* the Jayantias, the Khasis and westward in succession the Garos. Of the hills, those in the north rise abruptly from the plains; and on the south, they consist of a succession of plateaus, most of them pierced by river channels and are clothed with dense forests. Girted, thus, almost in all sides by mountain barriers, Assam remained practically isolated. Although the river Brahmaputra formed the highway of communication, navigation along the river before the age of steam was always uncertain and at times extremely hazardous. Strangers, therefore, seldom

* Obviously, this area is exclusive of the present district of Goalpara which was, hitherto, a part of the district of Rangpur in Bengal. In 1822, it was erected as a separate district comprising the *thanas* of Goalpara, Dhubri and Karaibari; and after the British occupation of Assam (1825) Goalpara was placed under the jurisdiction of the Commissioner of Assam.

appeared on her soil, while few of her people crossed the boundary. Geography had imposed a formidable barrier on her contact with the rest of the world ; but through numerous passes and river routes she was accessible to the dwellers of the neighbouring hills ; there had been constant intercourse between the people of the plains and the hills ; and in fact, for ages past the fortunes of the two were closely related and inextricably interwoven.

The whole valley is dotted with innumerable hollows, *beels* and swamps. The Brahmaputra runs, throughout, from the east to the west with a number of affluents descending from the hills on either side. A few of the tributaries are snow-fed, but most of them, particularly those in the south, depend on the monsoons for their volume. They are dried up during winter, but along with the rains they swell up and overflow their banks and not infrequently change their courses, since they flow over sandy beds. Heavy flood and inundations are, therefore, frequent occurrences in Assam, which brought untold sufferings to the people and to their crops and cattle. The presence of this expansive water surface bordered by a forest-clad hill terrain causes excessive precipitation. Extreme humidity and heaviest rainfall are, therefore, peculiarities of the climate of Assam. It is so enervating that the saying goes, 'when a dog chases a rabbit, they both walk'. A soil covered with jungles and swamps under a sub-tropical climate is also a dumping ground for malarial germs, while small-pox, dysentery and kalazar were once endemic.¹ Pestilence in the wake of inundations usually levied huge tolls on human life. It is not too much to say that the rigours of climate not less than the sinews of her men not unoften drove away the invaders from Assam.²

¹ Even to the sepoys of Upper India, the climate was so inimical that their employment in Assam was avoided, as far as practicable, leaving the defence of the frontier mainly to local corps. Casualties among the few Europeans were also not infrequent. Hardly a year passed, during the period under review, without the absence of some officers—civil or military—invariably on sick leave which undoubtedly affected the performance of routine duties.

² Thus, the ultimate failure of Mirjumla's invasion of Assam, in 1662, has been traced to the incessant rain and the outbreak of pestilence amongst the soldiers. 'In the Mughal camp fever and flux carried off hundreds daily. Medicine had no effect and the dead could not

Nature is, however, very bountiful—she has lavished all her beauties on Assam. The landscape of this valley affords a great relief to the dreary plains so monotonous in other parts of India : 'In the foreground are to be seen fields of waving rice of vivid green during summer season, but changing to rich gold as the harvest season draws near round the edges are groves of slender palms, broad-leaved plantains and feathery bamboos while further back is often to be seen the dark green primeval forest. The view is bounded. by the bluest of the hills. At all seasons of the year the country looks fresh, cool and green.'¹ Her mountains contain mines of coal, lime-stone and iron-ore, her rivers 'abound in gold-dust and her soil so well-adapted to all kinds of agricultural purposes, that it might be converted into one continued garden of silk and cotton and coffee and sugar and tea over an extent of many hundred miles.'² In this soil under an enervating climate inhabitants are, naturally, ease-loving and not industrious or enterprising as those who have to work hard for a living. 'Any race that had been long resident there would gradually, become soft and luxurious, and so after a time, would no longer able to defend itself against the incursions of the hardy tribes behind them.'³

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This picturesque valley was ruled prior to the advent of the British by the Ahoms, an off-shot of the *Tai* or the great Shan stock of south-east Asia. In the early decades of the thirteenth century, under prince Sukapha, they penetrated into the province through the Patkai range and set up a principality of their own in the south-east corner of the present district of Sibsagar. In the course of the next three centuries, the 'proud

be given a decent burial on account of their vast number. Dilir Khan's corps was reduced from 1500 troops to about 450. The whole of Assam was infected, and two hundred and thirty thousand of its people died of disease that year'. See Sarkar, J. N.; *History of Aurangzeb*, Vol. III, pp. 186-7, 194.

¹ Allen, B. C.; *District Gazetteer of Lakhimpur*, pp. 3-4.

² M. Cosh : *Topography*, p. 133.

³ Gait, E. A.; *A History of Assam*, p. 7.

conquerors' reduced to submission the Morans, the Borahis and the Nagas, the original inhabitants of the region; annexed the territory of the Chutias in the east, and drove the Kacharis off from the valley of the Dhansiri to Maibong, in the North Cachar hills. In the sixteenth century, they had to confront the rising power of the Koches in Cooch-Behar. But the most formidable enemy which subsequently challenged the supremacy of the Ahoms in the west were the Mughals. The latter annexed the eastern division of the Koch kingdom commonly known as Koch-Hazo in 1613, and drove its ruler Balinarayan to seek refuge at the Ahom court. When the Ahom monarch gave shelter and later installed the fugitive prince as the ruler of Darrang, hostilities followed with the Mughals, which continued with occasional breaks till the close of the seventeenth century. The Mughals under Nawab Mirjumla advanced, in 1662, as far as Gorgaon, the capital of the Ahom kingdom, and compelled its ruler Chakradhaj Singha to cede Kamrup or Western Assam to the Mughal dominion. King Godadhar Singha (1681-1696), finally, expelled the Mughals in 1682 and extended the boundary of his territory as far as the river Manah. During the period of these invasions, Western Assam 'changed hands' several times, when salient features of the fiscal administration of the Mughals took deep root in its soil.¹

To expel the Muslims from Eastern India Rudra Singha (1696-1714), the son and successor of Godadhar Singha, is reported to have organised a confederacy of the neighbouring chiefs, most of them being his allies or vassals; but in the midst of preparations the valiant monarch passed away; and with him also ended the venture, for his successors had neither the determination nor the courage that was necessary to follow up the ambitious project. In fact, from the later part of the eighteenth century, the Ahom monarchy was on the decline; the throne was occupied by a number of weak and unscrupulous monarchs whose only ambition was the preservation of their own lives and power

¹ The Mughal province of Koch-Hazo was divided into four *sarkars*—Kamrup, Dhekeri, Dakhinkul and Bangal-bhumi, and these were again sub-divided into a number of *parganas*. See Martin : *Eastern India*, Vol. III, p. 417; Bhattacharjee, S. N. : *History of Mughal North-East Frontier Policy*, pp. 166-67.

regardless of the needs of the country. Of all the causes that are said¹ to have sapped the vitality of the Ahom monarchy—the repeated invasions of the Muslims, the loosely organised system of administration, the patent weakness of the military system, the enervating climate of the Brahmaputra valley, 'the assimilation of the conquerors with the conquered'—the uprising of the Moamarias² deserves some mention. The struggle, which began as a protest against their religious persecution by the Ahom rulers developed into a scramble for power; for in 1769, a Moamaria chief seized the reins of Government, dethroned the monarch, and struck coins in his own name. The usurper was soon unseated, but the cruel vengeance that later visited on the rebels made them desperate and brought the matter to a climax. In 1788, the royalists were overwhelmed by the Moamarias who reoccupied the capital and drove Gaurinath Singha, the reigning monarch, (1780-1795) to Gauhati. The Government collapsed and the rebels roamed about the country burning villages, looting property and destroying crops.

To the friendly and vassal states, Raja Gaurinath appealed for aid. In recognition of past services, Jaysingh, the Raja of Manipur, came personally at the head of an army and advanced with the Ahom forces as far as Rangpur, the then capital of the kingdom; but he was repulsed and a large number of Manipuris fell in an engagement. His relations with the vassal chiefs of Cachar and Jayantia had been far from friendly; they were rather glad 'to hear that their once dreaded neighbour was in difficulty'. Petty chiefs like the Raja of Na-duar in the north unfurled the standard of revolt and assumed independence. Suspecting a similar act of sedition, Gaurinath treacherously seized and put to death Hansanarayan, the vassal chief of Darang, and set-up one Bishnunarayan as its ruler ignoring the

¹ See Bhuyan, S. K. : *Anglo-Assamese Relations (1771-1826)* pp. 217-237, 585-587; Banerjee, A. C. : *The Eastern Frontier of British India*, pp. 13 and 25.

² The Moamarias were a socio-religious sect and according to E.A. Gait, it consisted 'mainly of persons of low social rank, such as Domes, Morans, Kacharis, Haris and Chutias, and as they denied the supremacy of the Brahmins; they had naturally the special aversion of the orthodox Hindu hierarchy.' For details see Bhuyan, S. K. : *Anglo-Assamese Relations (1771-1826)* Chap. VI. Parts I and II.

claims of Krishnanarayan, who was the rightful heir. The aggrieved prince appealed for military assistance to the Commissioner of Cooch-Behar and placed himself as a vassal chief under the East-India Company. When his prayer was refused, Krishnanarayan collected from North Bengal a band of mercenaries, known as the *Barkandazes*; and with their aid he expelled the nominee of the Ahom *Raj* and made himself the master of the whole of north Kamrup.

The authorities of the East-India Company, both in England and India, had already interested themselves in the commercial possibilities of the North-East Frontier.¹ On the representation made by some merchant adventurers, in September, 1785, the Court had expressed a desire to extend the Company's salt-trade into the neighbouring kingdom of Assam and two years, later, on their advice, the Governor-General in Council had appointed one Hugh Baillie as the Superintendent of the Assam-trade at Gowalpara. It was greatly hoped 'that broad cloth and other European commodities might be disposed of to the natives of Assam who were represented as carrying on considerable traffic with the colder countries situated to the north-west, from whence returns in silk, pepper and spices might be obtained.' Baillie's salt-trade however received a set-back on the out-break of disturbances in Assam; and in fact, it reached its lowest ebb towards the close of 1788, when the authorities in Calcutta decided to close their establishment at Gowalpara. In the meantime, disappointed in his attempts to secure aid from the neighbouring states, Gaurinath implored the assistance of Lord Cornwallis, the Governor-General of India (1786-1793). The latter could not but be perturbed over the recent happenings in a territory just on the border of Company's possession; although, he was then required under the direction of the Court to pursue the policy of non-intervention. 'From motives of humanity and from a wish 'o be better informed of the interior State of Assam, its commerce etc.' the Governor-General resolved to despatch a detachment to Assam. Under Captain Welsh, accordingly, six Companies of sepoys arrived at Goalpara towards the close of

¹ Banerjee, A. C.; *The Eastern Frontier of British India*, pp. 10-12 : Bhuyan, S. K. : *Anglo-Assamese Relations* pp. 154 ff. Auber : *Rise and Progress of the British power in India*, Vol. II. p. 53.

1792. Soon Kamrup was cleared of the *Barkandazes* and the resistance of the Moamarias almost collapsed in Upper Assam. Welsh reinstated Gaurinath on the throne and also took the opportunity to wrest from the Raja a commercial treaty¹ (February 28, 1793), establishing reciprocity and liberty of trade between the peoples of Bengal and Assam. Hardly had Welsh restored law and order in the territory and planned some measures of administrative reform, when there occurred a radical change in the policy of the Government. Sir John Shore (1793-1798), who had then succeeded Lord Cornwallis, reverted to the policy of non-intervention and in consequence the troops under Welsh had to be recalled. Despite the importunities of Raja Gaurinath and of his subjects, British forces were withdrawn from Assam in July 1794, and the province was allowed to relapse to former anarchy and misrule. Vassal chiefs and even officers of the Government assumed virtual independence and committed excesses without any let or hindrance. The *Barkandazes* reappeared and renewed their depredations in Kamrup and Darrang; the Dufas, a hill tribe in the north, advanced as far as the Brahmaputra. The Khamtis, who had already established themselves on the bank of the Tengapani, seized the *Sadiyakhowa Gohain*, the Viceroy in the eastern frontier, and usurped his power and jurisdiction. The Moamarias set-up at Bengmara, on the bank of the river Dibru, one Sarbananda as their chief and carried on their raids as far as Rangpur. Raja Gaurinath in despair removed himself with his retinue to Jorhat, where he died in December, 1794.

The Prime Minister Purnananda Buragohain then became the *defacto* ruler of the realm; under him Kamaleswar and Chandrakanta, the successors of Gaurinath, became mere puppets. With an iron hand, the Buragohain suppressed the disaffected nobles and the chiefs, subdued the Khamtis and the Dufas, and dispersed the mercenaries from Western Assam. The Moamarias were reduced to submission; Matibar, the successor of Sarbananda, was made a feudatory to the Ahom *Raj* with the title of the *Barsenapati*. The distracted country got a breathing space, but it was nothing but a lull before the storm. At Jorhat, soon a conspiracy was set-on foot against the domineering Prime

¹ Aitchison : *Treaties etc.* pp. 112-115.

Minister and amongst the accomplices were found Badan Barphukan, the Viceroy of Gauhati, and even members of the royal family including the Raja Chandrakanta. The party in opposition being foiled in their attempt never hesitated to appeal for foreign aid; the Barphukan went in person to Burma and succeeded in persuading the court of Amarapura to send a force to the aid of Chandrakanta. In early 1817, the Burmese appeared in Upper Assam; they crushed all opposition, installed Raja Chandrakanta and the Barphukan in full power and carried off, in return, a huge indemnity including an Ahom princess as present to the harem of the Burmese monarch. In the tumult, the Buragohain passed away; but his adherents seized power immediately after. The Barphukan fell at the hands of an assassin; Chandrakanta was deposed and mutilated; Purandar Singha, a scion of the royal family, was raised to the throne. The Burmese monarch became furious when he learnt that his work was undone and his protégé Chandrakanta unseated; he hastened to Rangpur Ala Mingi at the head of a huge force which entered into the frontier in February, 1819. After a feeble resistance, Purandar fled to Gauhati and thence took refuge in the Company's territory. Chandrakanta was reinstated, but he also found the Burmese to be dangerous allies, for they were now determined to rule over Assam. Helpless and in disgust, Chandrakanta, too, entered into Bengal. Assam, thus, passed under the control of the Burmese, though they placed for a while Jogeswar Singha, a puppet Ahom prince, on the throne.

Apparently, the Burmese intervention in the affairs of Assam had been occasioned by the political bankruptcy of the Ahom monarchy, but the real cause lay in the ambition of the court of Amarapura to extend its power as far as the valley of the Brahmaputra. Actually, the programme began with the reign of A-Laung-Pa-Ya (1752-60), when a portion of Manipur was annexed to Burma. From this time onwards, in the words of Pemberton, 'Manipur was doomed . . . to devastating visitations of Burmese armies which have nine or ten times swept the country from one extremity to the other.'¹ In the war of succession which broke out in 1812, amongst the Manipuri

¹ Pemberton, R. B. : *The Report on the Eastern Frontier of British India*, p. 36.

brothers—Chaurjit, Marjit and Gambhir Singh, the Burmese intervened and set-up Marjit as the ruler under the suzerainty of the King of Ava. The remaining brothers fell upon Cachar and drove its ruler Gobinda Chandra to seek protection under the British Government. Soon Marjit, like Chandrakanta, got tired of the Burmese tutelage and was forced, in 1819, to flee to Cachar; 'from this period until 1823, Cachar was the arena on which the several Muneepooree brothers. . . . contended for supremacy. . . . the inevitable result of their disputes was the most serious injury to the country. . . . cessation of the agricultural pursuits and the flight of a considerable portion of the inhabitants to the adjacent districts of Sylhet, Jynteeah and Tipparah'.¹ The Burmese, already entrenched themselves in Manipur and Assam, wistfully looked upon Cachar as their natural lines of expansion, which inevitably brought them into conflict with the British.

Notwithstanding the steady advance of the Burmese into the very border of the British territories, the attitude of the authorities in Calcutta towards the affairs of Assam, since the departure of Captain Welsh, had been that of silent observers. The two Ahom Princes, Purandar and Chandrakanta, nevertheless, received shelter in the Company's territory and were further allowed, rather indirectly encouraged, to collect therefrom arms and men with which they had been carrying on raids on the Burmese invaders. Their hostile activities provoked the wrath of Mingi Maha Tilwa, the Burmese Governor of Assam, who in insolent terms demanded of the British the extradition of the fugitive princes; failing which he threatened that the mighty force of Ava would follow them wherever they might go. Not only did the Government of Bengal ignore these remonstrances, but they remained absolutely passive to their retaliatory acts of aggression. The Burmese occupation of the island of Shahpuri in November, 1823, followed by their warlike preparations in Assam, Cachar and Arakan made it evident, that they were 'bent on invading British territory'. At this juncture, David Scott, the Joint Magistrate of Rangpur, who later laid the foundation of British rule in Assam, pointed out to the Government of Bengal the vulnerability of the whole of the eastern frontier,

¹ *Ibid*, p. 186.

suggesting that the policy of non-intervention which had been so long the watchword towards the North-East Frontier should be definitely discarded, and that it was highly expedient to support and encourage the Assamese and the frontier tribes to resist and shake off the Burmese yoke. Being alarmed at these state of affairs, on the recommendations of Scott, who had since been appointed Agent to the Governor-General, North-East Frontier, the British suzerainty was extended over Cachar lest it should afford the Burmese a base of operations. Raja Gobinda Chandra agreed to acknowledge the allegiance to the British Government paying a tribute of Rs. 10,000/- per annum. The adjacent chief of Jayantia followed suit;¹ but no contribution or any tribute was demanded of him. Early in 1824, when the Burmese converged on Cachar from three directions on the plea of restoring the rightful claimant to the throne, Lord Amherst, the Governor-General of India (1823-28), had no alternative but to resort to arms. War was formally declared against the King of Ava on March 5, 1824.

To narrate the details of the first Anglo-Burmese War which broke out in three sectors—Assam, Arakan and Rangoon—is beyond our purview. In the Brahmaputra valley the war began in early March, 1824, with the advance of the British troops from Goalpara under Lieutenant Colonel Macmorain, and in less than a month Gauhati, Raha, and Nowgong fell in rapid succession. Hostilities were suspended during the rains which enabled the enemy to regain some of their lost possessions. When operations were renewed in November next they beat a hasty retreat to Upper Assam and fell back upon the fort of Rangpur. The lack of reinforcement and division in their own ranks enfeebled the Burmese so completely that they were compelled to capitulate at the same place, on March 31, 1825.

Already laid waste by insurrections and civil wars, the ruin of Assam was complete during the repeated invasions of the Burmese; The latter inaugurated a reign of terror, during which plunder, devastation, murder and desecration were the order of the day. The dreadful atrocities perpetrated on helpless Assamese by these inhuman invaders could better be imagined

¹ Aitchison; *Treaties etc.* pp. 117-19.

than described.¹ 'Some they flayed alive, others they burnt in oil and others again they drove in crowds into village *Namghars* or prayer houses, which they then set on fire'. No consideration whatsoever was shown to age, sex or rank. 'It was dangerous for a beautiful woman to meet a Burmese even on the public road. Brahmans were made to carry loads of beef, pork and wine. Gossains were robbed of all their possessions. Fathers of damsels whom the Burmese took to wives, rose speedily to affluence and power.' Gangs of local marauders and the neighbouring hill-tribes, particularly the Khamtis and the Singphos, having identified their interests with the invaders carried on their depredations with fire and sword—plundering temples, ravaging the country and carrying off the inhabitants into slavery. In utter despair and agony the rich and the men of substance abandoned the country, while thousands left their hearths and homes even their own children and lived in jungles on roots and plants. It is impossible to estimate the number of persons who fled, were killed or were deported to Burma. There was wholesale depopulation; industry collapsed, agriculture was neglected, and trade, if there was any, was at a standstill. Consequently, this excellent valley, in the words of M. Cosh who surveyed after a few years 'though some centuries ago richly cultivated. . . . is now throughout six-eighths or seven-eighths of its extent covered with a jungle of gigantic reeds, traversed only by the wild elephant or the buffalo, where human footstep is unknown and the atmosphere even to the natives themselves is pregnant with febrile miasmata and death'.²

¹ In his *Travels and Adventures in the Province of Assam*, J. Butler narrates, 'All who were suspected of being inimical to the reign of terror were seized and bound by Burmese executioners, who cut off the lobes of the poor victims' ears and choice portions of the body, such as the points of the shoulders, and actually ate the raw flesh before the living sufferers: they then inhumanly inflicted gashes on the body, that the mutilated might die slowly, and finally closed the tragedy by disembowelling the wretched victims. For further details of the atrocities committed by the Burmese, see Hazarika, Dutiram: *Asamar Padya-Buranji*, pp. 172-180; Bhuyan, S. K.: *Anglo-Assamese Relations*, pp. 508-10; Maniram Barua: *Mss. Buranji-Viveka Ratna*, Part II pp. 188(a) (b)

² M. Cosh: *Topography*, p. 18.

At the hour of worst peril, the British had emerged as the deliverer of the people of Assam. No wonder, therefore, the latter 'hailed with unbounded joy' the advance of the British forces and offered them the most loyal co-operation. 'The *Sarkar Bahadur* having vanquished the Burmese,' in the words of Maniram Barua, an eminent Assamese of the age,¹ 'occupied the *Killa* of Rangpur, and brought the whole country of Assam under their subjection. As the reward of this pious action in rescuing the people of Assam from the sea of Burmese troubles, may God continue their uninterrupted and undiminished sovereignty till the end of *Kalpa* (i.e. 4,320,000,000 years) and make them as vigorous and powerful as the Lord of *Amaravati* (i.e. *Indra*) and ever-glorious like the *Priyavrata Raja*' (a mythical king). The fidelity of the people to their own rulers was well-nigh shaken, and there were many who might welcome a change in the Government. What the conquerors will do with this new acquisition? Will they make it over to one of the refugee princes or annex it, outright, and confer on the people the blessings of *Pax Brittanica*? The answer to these questions will be found in the subsequent pages.

¹ Maniram Barua : *Mss. Buranji-Viveka Ratna* (1681-1826) Part II p. 196(a); See also Bhuyan, S. K. : *Anglo-Assamese Relations* p. 552.

CHAPTER I.

THE NEW REGIME

'We are not led into your country by the thirst of conquest ; but are forced in our defence—to deprive our enemy of the means of annoying us. '—so ran a proclamation addressed to the people of Assam by the authorities at the Fort William just on the eve of the march of British troops into Assam. Sober students of Indo-British history may admit, that against the declared policy of the authorities in England 'to pursue schemes of conquest and extension of dominion in India are measures repugnant to the wish, honour and policy of this nation', particularly after a period of exhaustive operations against the Gurkhas, the Pindaries and the Maharattas, nothing but pressing necessities of the insecurity of eastern frontier of Bengal drove Lord Amherst, the Governor-General of India (1823-28), into another war against the Burmese aggressors in Assam. In a despatch on February 20, 1824, to David Scott, the Agent to the Governor-General, North-East Frontier, George Swinton, the Political Secretary to the Government of India, reiterated, '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.'¹ The string that followed in the aforesaid proclamation,² 'we will never depart until we exclude our foe. and reestablish. . . . a Government adapted to your wants and calculated (to) the happiness of all classes', nevertheless, raised some misgivings as to the real motives of the East-India Company. But an assurance of absolute security against the enemies without, and the establishment of an authority capable

¹ B.S.P.C., 1824; February 20, No. 15.

² *Home Miscellaneous Series.* Vol. 662, pp. 173-5; *Wilson's Documents*, No. 32.

of maintaining the law and order within, was a necessity to enlist the support and loyalty of the people recently betrayed by the withdrawal of the Company's troops under Captain Welsh. Therefore, after the retreat of the Burmese from Western Assam when it was found that the members of the former royal family were too much 'divided' and were 'obnoxious' to the people, the Governor-General in council felt it necessary, pending permanent arrangements, to hold the territory under military occupation.¹ The general management of the area was entrusted to Mr. Scott whose jurisdiction had in the meantime been extended to the whole of the North-East Frontier. He was, of course, not to interfere with Lieutenant Colonel Richards, the officer commanding the troops, 'in matters of purely military nature' but to afford him 'the most cordial and zealous support' on all questions of general interest.²

After the capitulation of Rangpur, on January 31, 1825, the valley of the Brahmaputra was practically cleared of the Burmese; although, the British troops had to follow-up the Singphos, who had carried away thousands of Assamese as captives and never ceased to carry on their depredations, 'with revolting cruelties' in Upper Assam which had left the whole country, particularly in the east of Rangpur, in an anarchical condition. As a temporary measure, a Joint Commissionership was then instituted;³ in addition to his military duties, Lieutenant Colonel Richards was to hold the civil charge of the areas east of Bishwanath, commonly known as Upper Assam; while Mr. Scott remained in-charge of the western division or the Lower Assam. As the Agent to the Governor-General, the latter was also to maintain political relations with the native states and hill-tribes of the region, and in this capacity he was vested with overriding powers. Ordinarily, each Commissioner was to exercise civil duties independently; although, they were expected to have free and constant intercourse with each other even in matters of their respective jurisdiction and endeavour to maintain, as far as practicable, a uniform system of administration.⁴

¹ B.S.P.C., 1824; February 20, No. 15; *Wilson's Documents*, No. 1.

² B.S.P.C., 1824; July 2, No. 16; Scott to Swinton.

³ B.S.P.C., 1825; April 5, No. 24.

⁴ *Ibid.*

In March 1825, alarming news reached—that the Singphos numbering 7500 strong were about to fall on the Khamtis and the Moamaras.¹ Finding himself helpless, when the *Barsengapati*, the Moamaria chief, appealed for succour, Lieutenant Neufville*, an officer of the 42nd Native Infantry, was hurriedly despatched to Sadiya. He was instructed to offer every encouragement to the chiefs as might be desirous of entering into an engagement upon the release of the captives taken since the capitulation of Rangpur and to endeavour, by conciliation or otherwise, to prevent them from their raids into the plains; and as a security for their good behaviour to demand of them a few persons of consequence as hostages.² Accompanied by Lieutenant Kerr, Neufville arrived at his destination in early April. He found no trace of the enemy in the neighbourhood of Sadiya, and what appeared to him to be most striking was that a number of messengers from some Singpho chiefs approached him with overtures for peace. But their negotiations broke down when a Burmese force arrived at the scene, which forced the officer commanding the British party to carry the hostilities into the heart of the Singpho territory. Within a few weeks, Neufville succeeded in expelling the Burmese beyond the Patkais and reduced to submission several chiefs of the Singphos who surrendered themselves with their captives, arms and ammunitions.³

In the meanwhile, after some resistance, the Burmese had abandoned their posts in Cachar and fell back upon Manipur. The difficulties of communication in a forest-clad mountainous terrain under incessant rain, during early summer of 1825, prevented the operating forces under General Shuldham from following up the enemies. It was reserved for Gambhir Singh, the Manipuri prince, who had accompanied the British troops with his irregulars, the *Manipur Levy*, to penetrate and to expel the

¹ B.S.P.C., 1825; April 15, No. 13.

* Born at Lemington, England, on January 26, 1795. Educated at Eton. A cadet in the Bengal Army in 1811, Ensign in 1815, Lieutenant in 1815 and Captain in 1827. He took part in the first Anglo-Burmese war in Arakan in 1825, and later transferred to Assam: *Vide* Hodson, Major; *Officers of the Bengal Army, Part II*, pp. 549-50.

² B.S.P.C., 1825; May 20, No. 24; Scott to Neufville, April 8, 1825.

³ B.S.P.C., 1825; September 30, No. 14.

enemy beyond the river Ningthe, on the other side of the Kabbaw Valley.¹ While in Burma, the main theatre of the war, the British troops under Sir Archibald Campbell had already occupied Rangoon, and made rapid advance towards Ava. The cities fell in succession and the resistance of the Burmese collapsed, when the latter made proposals for peace. At the treaty of Yandabo, February 26, 1826, His Majesty, the King of Ava formally renounced, amongst others, his claim upon Assam and the neighbouring States of Cachar, Jayantia and Manipur.²

How the authorities at the Fort William would dispose of these acquisitions with due regard to the security of the Eastern Frontier? Already, they had guaranteed the sovereignty of Raja Gobinda Chandra over Cachar under the protection of the British Government on condition of his paying an annual tribute of Rs. 10,000/-³ and, accordingly, he was restored to his ancestral possession. The engagement with the ruler of Jayantia was similarly respected. Although, the fidelity of Gambhir Sing, the Manipuri prince, was felt previously to be not above suspicion, he had rendered invaluable services in driving the Burmese out of Cachar and Manipur. 'The establishment of an independent government in Manipur in alliance with us would undoubtedly prove to be the most powerful and effectual check upon the Burmese Government.'⁴ Therefore, not only Gambhir Sing was vested with the status of a sovereign ruler, but was allowed to maintain an army 3000 strong, to be trained and equipped by the British Government.⁵

Of the fugitive princes of Upper Assam, after the capitulation of Rangpur, Jogeswar Singha settled himself at Jogighopa, on the north of Goalpara, where he died in 1825. Chandra Kanta Singha, on account of his intriguing nature, was later removed to Kaliabar in central Assam; he was given a pension of

¹ Banerjee, A. C. : *The Eastern Frontier of British India*, op 346-48; Wilson : *Documents*, 104(A), 104(B), 164(B) and 166(B).

² Aitchison : *Treaties, etc. Vol. II*, p. 230.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 117.

⁴ B.S.P.C., 1824; April 9, Nos. 7-8.

⁵ Pemberton : *Eastern Frontier of British India*, pp. 47-48

rupees two hundred besides 100 *pykes* and some rent-free grants.¹ Purandar Singha returned to Gauhati, but no allowance was made in his favour, for he was reported to have then considerable wealth in his possession. Pecuniary assistance and rent-free grants were made to several other members of the royal family, most of whom were then in indigent circumstances. With none of these princes of the royal family was there any negotiation on the part of the British Government on the eve or during the period of the late war. Notwithstanding this, with reference to the despatch of February 20, 1824, the Agent to the Governor-General, North-East Frontier, in his rather lengthy memorandum on April 15, 1826, proposed to the Government of Bengal the restoration of the former Ahom monarchy in Assam under the protection of the East-India Company.² The Prince so raised would have to pay an annual tribute of rupees two lakhs besides providing, if and when necessary, both men and money, for works connected with the defence of the frontier under orders of the Government. As a safeguard against misgovernment and oppression, the Agent suggested, besides other measures, the abolition of the former practice of mutilating and torturing criminals, trial of offenders before regular courts of law, and the revival, with certain modifications, of the time-honoured council of *Patra-Mantris*, without the concurrence of majority of which the king could not carry out any public measure of importance.³ If the Supreme Government, however, considered the amount of proposed tribute to be inadequate for the defence of the territory, the Agent also suggested an alternative proposal—that of retaining Lower Assam as far as Bishwanath under the British Government and of making over the remaining portion, excepting the areas occupied by the Moamaris, the Khamtis and the Singphos, to a native prince on the terms referred to above. In any case, he recommended that a small area round Sadia be earmarked as a *Jagir* for the maintenance of a body of irregulars to be supplied by the

¹ B.S.P.C., 1825; August 19, Nos. 13-14.

² B.S.P.C., 1826; July 14, No. 2.

³ *Ibid.* The *Patra-Mantris* composed of the three *Gohains*—Bura *Gohain*, Borgohain and Barpatra *Gohain*—and the two Ministers of the State—the *Barbarua* and the *Barphukan*. They were permanent and hereditary counsellors of the State, next in rank to the monarch.

neighbouring chiefs ; and to watch the conduct of these tribes, there should be a European officer permanently stationed at Sadiya.¹

The Burmese war had taxed heavily the Company's exchequer. The surplus in revenue of £1,743,139 in 1822-23, had turned into a deficit of £4,953,918 and the Company's debt mounted up during the period of war to nearly ten million pounds sterling.² The proposal submitted by Scott envisaged extension of British protectorate over a widely extensive area of doubtful value subjected to the frequent raids of the predatory tribes. The amount of revenue, too, would not be commensurate with the risks and the responsibilities involved. Influenced, perhaps, by considerations like these the Governor-General in Council could not accord their approval to Scott's proposals ; he was however asked to re-examine the whole issue and to submit fresh recommendations. Accordingly, in a subsequent despatch towards the close of 1827, with due consideration of the security as well as of economy, Scott proposed³ that ; (a) the territory as far as Bishwanath, known as Lower Assam, be annexed permanently to the British dominion, (b) the territory in the extreme east occupied by the Moamarias, the Khamtis and the Singphos, in view of their strained relations with the Assamese and with each other, be placed under the control of a European Officer stationed at Bishwanath, and that (c) the intervening territory from Bishwanath to the Buridihing, known as Upper Assam, be assigned to an Ahom Prince on the terms previously suggested.

Evidently, to satisfy the higher authorities in Calcutta Scott had altered the major part of his former scheme. He, nevertheless, emphasised the importance of conciliating the Ahom nobility who had been ruling in Upper Assam for the last six centuries. The introduction of British rule in this division, he rightly conceived, would mean the sacrifice of their permanent interests which would, naturally, provoke bitter discontent among them. From

¹ *Ibid.*

² Banerjea, P ; *Indian Finance in the days of the Company* vide Appendix A, p. 368.

³ B.S.P.C., 1828 ; March 7, No. 4.

pecuniary point of view, too, the Agent pointed out that the Government would not gain much by its annexation; the gross revenue of Upper Assam scarcely reached, until 1828, a lakh of rupees, a considerable part of which would have to be expended in providing for the members of the former royal family and grandees of the realm.¹ Lower Assam, on the other hand, yielded a revenue of upwards of three lakhs, and its annexation to the Company's possessions presented no difficulty, whatever. Acquired by right of conquest and administered, throughout, by the Viceroy (the *Barphukan*) of Gauhati almost independently, this division, he added, was never amalgamated by the Ahom rulers with the rest of their dominion; while its inhabitants, too, accustomed as they were to successive rule of foreigners, might not have the same aversion as the people of Upper Assam to the rule of the British; rather they might prefer them to their former masters who were reported to have humiliated and heaped upon them 'all sorts of indignities'.²

Scott's despatch opened the eyes of the authorities in Calcutta and produced, as it were, a definite change in their policy. Lower Assam alone would yield a revenue of more than three lakhs of rupees and its inhabitants, too, had little attachment to their former rulers! Therefore, when the subject was mooted again at the Fort William on March 7, 1828, the President-in-Council readily concurred with the views of the Agent and directed him to annex this division permanently to the British dominion.³ The strategic importance of the areas occupied by the Moamarias, the Khamtis and the Singphos, further, impressed him, as suggested by Scott, with the necessity of controlling these tribes

¹ *Ibid.*

² *Ibid.*; April 5, No. 27; See also *District Gazetteer, Kamrup*, p. 39. Mr. Allen, J. goes so far as to say, that the natives of the district were not allowed even to remain within the fort of Gauhati after nightfall. It may not be unreasonable to presume that the people of Kamrup did not receive the same cordiality as was meted out to the blue-blooded Ahoms of Upper Assam, but in the absence of positive evidence, it is difficult to believe that the Ahom *Raj* could afford to have a relationship approximating to enmity with those subjects whose loyalty and support he must have counted on throughout the protracted wars with Mughals.

³ B.S.P.C., 1828; March 7, No. 8.

through an officer permanently located in or near the spot. Apart from their mutual feuds, it was feared, that they might join at any moment an invader from the other side of the hills. Accordingly, Captain Neufville, who had already distinguished himself in the operations against the Singphos, was appointed as the Political Agent, Upper Assam, in addition to his military duties on a salary of Rs. 600/- per month with headquarters at Bishwanath. He was, of course, to visit Sadiya at least once a year.¹

The authorities in Calcutta were, however, not prepared without further examination to acquiesce in the third part of the recommendations—that of surrendering Upper Assam to an Ahom prince.² It was made clear to the Agent that 'neither does the Government pledge by any engagement or declaration, whatsoever, to restore a native prince to the throne of Assam', since none of the aspirants did afford to the British any aid during the last war which could establish 'the slightest claim to a renunciation' of any part of their right by conquest. The revenues of Upper Assam, it was argued, were fluctuating* and under better management there was every likelihood of its yielding a surplus even after making adequate provision for the royal families and the dignitaries of the realm; and in any case, it was presumed, that the British Government would be responsible for its general defence and protection against internal commotion or external aggressions.³ It was strongly felt, that the proposed monarchy in Upper Assam, 'for its extreme poverty, limited resources (and) entire dependence on the support of a foreign government', would

¹ *Ibid.*

² *Ibid.*; also May 30, 1829; No. 9; B.P.C., 1831; June 10, No. 57.

* Immediately after British occupation, the surplus figures for the years 1825-26 and 1826-27, as appear in the *Appendix A*, were far from being satisfactory; while in 1827-28, the charges exceeded those of the receipts occasioned by the total suspension of collection on account of the extensive outbreak of cholera in various parts of Upper Assam. However, a considerable amount of arrears had been realised in the following year; and as a result, the net revenue for the year 1828-29, exhibited a fairly good surplus and, thereafter, under the efficient management of Captain Neufville, while the total charge on average remained the same, the revenue was on the increase.

³ B.S.P.C., 1828; March 7, No. 8.

prove itself 'very inefficient and unable to command the respect of its subjects'. Also, there loomed large the 'perpetual hazard' of collision with the neighbouring tribal chiefs and, 'at all events, the interposition of a so feeble and probably illmanaged State between ourselves and that frontier would seem to embarrass and complicate all our arrangements and relations with the tribes in questions.'¹ Evidently, unless forced by circumstances or by a notion that its retention would, ultimately, prove to be the most uneconomic, the Supreme Government would not relinquish Upper Assam; although, on account of its political and economic uncertainties they were not inclined to annex it immediately. Therefore, to elicit further information, the Agent was directed to re-examine the different aspects mentioned above and to submit a further report on the subject.

The Supreme Council, however, felt that the time was ripe for the transfer of the general administration in Upper Assam to the civil authorities. The Agent to the Governor-General was, therefore, directed on March 7 to relieve Lieutenant Colonel Cooper, who had been officiating as the Junior Commissioner since the departure of Colonel Richards on furlough in December, 1825. The operation of the Martial law would also cease, it was added, with effect from the date on which Cooper made over charge of his civil duties.²

Much headway had already been made in the administrative arrangements. The Non-Regulated system* which had its origin

¹ *Ibid.*

² *Ibid.*

* In 1793, when the Governor-General in Council was vested with the powers of enacting laws, Lord Cornwallis promulgated a series of forty-eight regulations, commonly known as the *Bengal Regulations*, which provided a code of laws for the administration of the areas under the Presidency of Fort William. With the gradual expansion of Company's possessions, it was increasingly felt, that the system of Government established by these Regulations was 'wholly inapplicable' to the areas which were occupied by backward tribes, particularly of the North-East Frontier. To bring them into 'civilised life', a special plan adaptable to their peculiar customs and prejudices was, therefore, considered absolutely necessary. Accordingly, under *Regulation X* of 1822 the tract of the territory comprising the *thanas* of Gowalpara, Dhubri and Karaibari was separated from the district of Rangpur (*Article II*), and was placed (*Article III*) in charge of an officer appointed by the Governor.

in the neighbouring district of Rangpur imperceptibly extended into Assam. Territories were to be governed under this arrangement, 'by an executive composed partly of civilians and partly of soldiers upon a mixed system into which the spirit of the Regulations is infused in such a way as to cause it to harmonise and blend itself with all that is good in the spirit of the native institutions'. Accordingly, the Agent to the Governor-General, North-East Frontier, was to administer civil and criminal justice, to supervise the collection of revenue and the superintendence of police and all other branches of Government, 'by the principles and spirit of the existing Regulations'. To a thoroughly devastated country, where institutions were completely disorganised and the people thinned and reduced to utter destitution, the Non-Regulated system unfettered by the letter of the law might well be adopted; all the more, when owing to their imperfect knowledge of the affairs of Assam, the Supreme Government could not furnish any instruction to the man on the spot.

The task of this experiment fell on Mr. David Scott. Starting his official career, in 1807, as the Registrar of Gorukhpur, he had already served as the Magistrate, Collector and the Judge in several districts of the Presidency of Bengal. In September 1816, Scott was appointed Commissioner in Cooch Behar and Joint Magistrate of Rangpur. To meet the emergency arising out of the Burmese aggressions, his jurisdiction was further enlarged in November, 1823, when he was made the Political Agent to the Governor-General in the North-East Frontier of Bengal and Civil Commissioner in Rangpur; in the former capacity he was to exercise 'a general authority and superintendence' over political relations with Cooch Behar, Bijni, Assam, Cachar, Manipur, Jayantia and other independent states—the sphere of political jurisdiction extending to the southern

General in Council with the title of Civil Commissioner for the North-East of Rangpur who was to conduct the administration 'by the principles and the spirit of the existing Regulations', subject, of course, to the restrictions and modifications hereafter provided. A beginning was, thus, made in the so-called Non-Regulated Province which crept, gradually, into some areas of the East-India Company's dominion. For details, see Clark. R. : *Bengal Regulation*, pp. 659-63; Kaye, *Administration of the East-India Company*, p. 458, Campbell, G : *Modern India*, pp. 231-32.

extremity of Tipperah; while as Civil Commissioner, he was to perform the duties already assigned to him in Cooch Behar and Rangpur.¹ The negotiations in which Scott was subsequently employed with some of these states and the intimate knowledge which in consequence he acquired of them eminently fitted him to discharge the additional duties of this newly conquered territory.² He was not slow to realise that in Upper Assam, which was the stronghold of the Ahom nobility, the introduction of any measure affecting their interests would be strongly resented and would be treated as an intrusion upon their ancient rights. In Lower Assam, which had been under foreign domination for some years, the political and social institutions were more or less akin to those in the neighbouring districts of Bengal and were, therefore, easily amenable to the new system.³ But in either case, he was to soften, if not entirely to obliterate, the opposition of the official aristocracy. For the successful working of the administrative arrangements, naturally, Scott was fully convinced of the utmost importance of adapting the new measures as closely as practicable to the actual wants, prejudices, and conditions of the people and specially of continuing to employ the leading men of the country in the discharge of duties of the hereditary offices subject to the supervision of European officers.

From the previous government, Scott inherited the *khel* system, and on its ashes he had to lay the foundation of the British rule in Assam. Under it, the whole male (adult) population of the country—with the exception of men of rank, priests

¹ B.S.P.C., 1823., November 14, No. 8 : For further details, see Buckland : *Dictionary of Indian Biography*, pp. 378-79; White, A. : *A Memoir of David Scott*, Gait, E. A. : *A History of Assam*, pp. 290-91; *Asiatic Journal*, Vol. VI. part II, pp. 134-35.

² In nominating Mr. Scott, the Government observed : 'the zeal and intelligence displayed by Mr. Scott in the execution of the measure which we have from time to time deemed it advisable to adopt for the protection of the Rangpur Frontier and for the gradual civilization of the Garrow mountaineers, naturally, rendered us desirous of availing ourselves of the talents and local experience of that valuable officer in carrying into effect the more defined and extensive arrangement now in contemplation.'

³ B.S.P.C., 1828; March 7, No. 4.

and their slaves—were divided into *khels*¹ or guilds, according to their respective occupations, and the latter were again subdivided into units or *gots*, consisting of four, and later of three *pykes* or individuals—the *mul* (first), the *dewal* (second) and the *tewal* (third). Every *pyke* was bound to serve the king either as a private or a public servant for one third of the year or to supply a certain quantity of his produce in lieu thereof. He was entitled in return to have two *puras* of *rupit* land,² termed as *gamati* or body-land. During the period of his service, the *dewal* and the *tewal* remained at home to cultivate their respective lands and to provide the requirements of the *pyke* on duty. They relieved each other in turn, at regular intervals, so as to ensure that one of them was always in attendance. The *pykes* were supervised by the *Borahs*, the *Saikias* and the *Hazarikas* who were commanded by the higher officials, both civil and military, the *Baruas*, the *Rajkhowas* and the *Phukans*.³

The revenue of the State was realised, therefore, in personal service and articles of produce, and only a small amount in cash which was derived mainly from the following sources : A *pyke* failing to attend to his assigned duty or to supply the required quota of produce had to pay an equivalent tax of rupees three per head as *gadhan*. Surplus lands, *opar* or *katanimati*, were occasionally rented out to the *pykes*. Some *khels*, usually of non-cultivators, were taxed on account of their special profession ; thus the braziers and the gold-washers had

¹ Viz *Khargharias*, the Gunpowder makers; *Sonowals*, the gold-washers, *Kathkatias*, the wood-cutters. The *khel* system is reported to have been introduced by an Ahom officer of rank, namely Momai Tamuli Borbarua, in 1607, under King Pratap Singha (1603-41) ; For details, see Hamilton, F. : *An Account of Assam*, pp 23-4; Barua Gunaviram : *Assam Buranji*, pp. 114-19 ; Jenkins, Report on the Revenue Administration of Assam, 1849-50 ; Bhuyan, S. K. : *Anglo-Assamese Relations*, pp. 10-11, 251-52 and 530. Dhekial Phukan, Haliram : *Assam Buranji*, p. 52.

² One *pura* is equal to 3½ Bengal *beegha* or 5877 sq. yards ; *rupit* is the best cultivable land producing a kind of paddy known as *Sali dhan*.

³ Ordinarily, *Phukans* were the commanders of 6000, *Rajkhowas* 3000, *Hazarikas* 1000, *Saikias* 100 and *Borahs* of 20 ; but in practice, exact numbers were hardly to be found under each command : For details, see Ward, J. P. : *History of Assam*, pp. V-XXXV.

to pay a tax @ Rs. 5/-, oil pressers @ Rs. 3/-, fishermen @ Rs. 2/-each. The farming out of *hats* (markets) fisheries, and customs *chokis*.¹ Finally, the tribute annually paid by the vassal chiefs.

The State officials were, ordinarily, remunerated with a number of *pykes*. They were, in addition, allowed to have under certain limitations rent-free lands known as *nankar* and *manmati*: the former hereditary, and the latter during the tenure of office only. They could, of course, occupy free of rent *khats* or tracts of waste lands where they employed their attendants or the *lixos*, runaway *pykes* and slaves who were then available in abundance. From very early times, considerable areas of arable land were also assigned rent-free (*lakhiraj*) in the form of *debottar*, *dharmottar* and *brahmottar* grants for the services in the temples and *Satras*, and for the support of the persons attached thereto.²

It will be obvious from the above, that the king required little amount in money to pay his civil and military officers, to gratify the needs of his friends and favourites, and to defray the expenses of the religious and public institutions, all being remunerated either in land or labour. When the state demand in cash was thus limited, the *khel* system worked and worked satisfactorily. But the presents and heavy tributes exacted by Nawab Mirjuma (1665),³ the sack of Rangpur by the Moamaria insurgents (1787-93),⁴ the subsidies paid to the Company's detachments (1794), and the seizure of what remained in reserve at the capital by Captain Welsh in June 1794, well-nigh depleted the coffers of the Ahom Raj.⁵ Therefore, in 1795, to meet an emergent payment of the British troops then operating in Assam,

¹ Of these, the *chokey* at Kandahar alone is reported to have yielded a revenue of rupees 45,000 per annum.

² Similar to the monasteries in Europe in the Middle Ages, these *Satras* were religious and charitable institutions presided over by the spiritual head known as the *Satradhikar Gossain* to whom were also attached a number of *pykes* called the *Bhakats*.

³ Mahanta, Sukumar; *Assam Buranj*, pp. 100-1, 105-6.

⁴ Hazarika, Dutiram; *Asamar Padya-Buranji*, p. 112.

⁵ Captain Welsh is reported to have taken away 40,000 pieces of golden ornaments, an equal number of silver ornaments, 200,000,000 golden *mohurs* besides articles of great value. These figures might be exaggerated, yet the Commander of the British troops might have

Purnananda Buragohain, the Prime Minister, had to resort to the unusual expedient of levying the *barangani* or an extra-cess on the *Satras* in Upper Assam. The Viceroy of Gauhati¹ had also adopted, about the same time, a similar measure under acute financial difficulties. Later, Raja Chandrakanta is reported to have added a house-tax in Kamrup on all subjects including the holders of rent-free grants. The Burmese, during their short rule, continued to levy the *barangani* and a poll-tax under different names—*kharikatana* in Kamrup, hearth-tax in Darrang and *gadhan* in Upper Assam.²

Scott based his revenue measures entirely on the earlier system and altered the existing institutions only when it was considered absolutely necessary. In Upper Assam, for executive details, the *khel* system was retained intact. In lieu of personal service and produce revenues were demanded in cash. Janardan Barbarua, a former officer of influence and rank, who was connected with the family of late Raja Gaurinath Singha, was placed in charge of the revenue department.³ He was aided by a host of *kheldars* or heads of *khels*—the *Hazarikas*, the *Salkias* and the *Borahs*. From early revenue papers, it appears, that excepting a poll-tax of Rs. 9/- per *got* of three *pykes* or Rs. 3/- per head, no tax was levied in Upper Assam. Scott was so highly impressed with the propriety of surrendering Upper Assam to an Ahom Prince, that he considered 'the realisation of any substantial revenue' from that territory 'as a matter of secondary importance.'⁴

Captain Davidson had, in the meantime, assisted Scott in his civil duties at Gowalpara in North-East Rangpur; and to perform similar duties in Lower Assam Captain Adam White, an officer of the 49th Regiment, was appointed in December

seized and carried away all that was in the royal treasury on the eve of his departure from Assam. Bhuyan, S. K. : *Tungkhungla Buranji*, para. 244; Hazarika, Dutiram : *Asamar Padya-Buranji*, pp. 112-13.

¹ Bhuyan, S. K. : *Tungkhungla Buranji*, pp. 243 and 263.

² B.S.P.C., 1825; April 5, No. 27; Jenkins; *Report on the Revenue Administration, Assam (1849-50)*, p. 61. Bordoloi, K. : *Sadar-Aminar Atmajivani*, p. 2.

³ B.S.P.C., 1826; July 7, No. 31 : Hazarika, Dutiram : *Asamar Padya-Buranji*, p. 190.

⁴ B.P.C., 1831; June 10, No. 50.

1825, as the Assistant to the Commissioner with headquarters at Gauhati.¹ In the twenty-six *parganas*, into which Kamrup was then divided, early settlements were made with the existing *Choudhuris* on the basis of records available in the register (*perakagaz*) of a survey which was undertaken by the former government.² The data was so old, 'affording little insight into the existing state of things' that a fresh measurement of lands had to be immediately undertaken by a party of local surveyors under Mr. Matthews, while a similar work had been entrusted, about the same time, in Upper Assam to a Commission of four Assamese officers of rank.³

The *Choudhuris* were on the same footing as their counterparts in Bengal before the Decennial Settlement without having claim 'to property in the soil or to any those in produce and (were) liable to be removed at the pleasure of the Government'; although, members of the same family were, usually, appointed as their substitutes, and they were entitled 'during their tenure of office *mahmati* or rent-free grant as well as the service of a number of *pykes*. They were aided in their duties by the *Patwaris* (accountants) and the *Thakurais* (subordinate collectors)—all receiving rent-free grants as remuneration.⁴

Nowgong and Raha constituted a separate fiscal unit under the collectorate of Gauhati. In 1824-25, it was placed in charge of two farmers of revenue—Aradhan Ray and Lata Pam Phukan.⁵ A settlement was made, about the same time, with Raja Bijaynarayan of Darrang, previously a vassal of the Ahom Raja paying a tribute of Rs. 10,000. The authority of the Raja seems to have been so insecure at the hour of agreement with Scott, that to outbid his rivals he rashly committed himself to collecting an exorbitant amount of Rs. 42,000 besides supplying 1500 *pykes*.⁶ With the chiefs of Beltola, Rani, Demorua and Naduar—all, hitherto, tributary to the Assam Rajas—settlements were

¹ B.S.P.C., 1825; December 16, Nos. 25 and 27.

² The survey, which was started under king Siva Singha (1714-44), was completed in the reign of his successor Pramatta Singha (1744-55); Hazarika, *Dutiram*; *Asamar Padya-Buranji*, pp. 64 and 72.

³ B.S.P.C., 1825; August 26, Nos. 65-66; Hazarika, *Dutiram*; *Asamar Padya-Buranji*, p. 190.

⁴ B.S.P.C., 1825; April 5, No. 27.

⁵ A.S. File No C.O. 642, 1842; Matthie to Jenkins, May 28, 1840.

⁶ B.S.P.C., 1825; April 5, No. 27.

made on what they 'voluntarily offered', since their good behaviour was felt to be of more value than any pecuniary gain.¹

In Lower and Central Assam* a tax of rupees two known as *gadhan* was imposed on *pykes*, for which they were entitled three *puras* of arable land or *gamati* which was considered, according to former usage, neither hereditary nor transferable by sale, gift or bequest. The *Kharikatana* or the poll-tax introduced in Kamrup during the rule of the Burmese was revived and extended to Nowgong and Darrang with the object of equalising the burdens on all classes; in Nowgong it became a capitation tax at one rupee per head; in Darrang it was calculated on the number of *charoos* or mess-pots in each household and varied from annas eight to a rupee; while in Kamrup the *kharikatana* was levied on the number of ploughs employed at rupee one per plough. Finally, having found vast areas of rent-free grants—*debottar*, *dharmottar* and *brahmottar*—and with precedent of levying a *barangani* by the former government, Scott assessed the rent-free grants at the rate of half of the arable land.²

In both the divisions, mentioned above, professional tax on the braziers, silk-weavers, gold-washers, fisherman etc. and *Sair* duties on *hats*, *ghats* and fisheries, usually by farming, continued to be levied,³ as under the former government.

The heads of the *khels* and the *Choudhuris* of the *parganas*, hitherto, decided petty cases usually with the aid of *mels* or *panchayets*. Important cases, both civil and criminal, were tried by the *Barbarua*, the *Barphukan* or by the provincial governors who were competent to inflict punishment short of capital sentences, for which an order from the reigning sovereign was always necessary. In Upper Assam, for the trial of civil cases, Lambodar Barphukan, a brother-in-law of ex-Raja Chandra-kanta and a man of character and talent, was appointed in May 1825, a coadjutor with the *Barbarua* of the revenue department.⁴ Some *Surasree Panchayets* consisting of the

¹ *Ibid.*

* Darrang, Nowgong and Raha formed the division commonly known as Central Assam.

² *Ibid.* : Dhekial Phukan, Haliram : *Assam Buranji*, p. 53.

³ B.S.P.C., 1828; May 23, No. 33; see the statement of gross and nett revenue during 1824-25 and 1826-27.

⁴ B.S.P.C., 1826; July 7, No. 31; Scott to Swinton, May 25, 1825.

former *Pundits* were also instituted to decide summary suits of minor importance. Criminal cases were tried by the Junior Commissioner and, later, by the Political Agent, Upper Assam, or referred to the *Barphukan* who was empowered to pass sentences of 30 stripes, imprisonment for six months or a fine not exceeding rupees fifty.¹ Trials of heinous offences were held before the juries with the *Barphukan* as the president; although, the verdict was subjected to the revision of one of the Commissioners who might also award punishment according to his own judgment.²

In Lower Assam, the Senior Commissioner occupied the position held by the former Viceroy of Gauhati and tried civil cases without any limit and criminal offences not involving sentences of death. Having always in mind the aim 'to establish a free communication between the government and the governed', Scott felt that justice should be cheap and the judgment seat well within the reach of all. He admitted, in the words of a contemporary :³

'the most complete access to his person; his *Kutchery* was at all times crowded; indeed, to a great degree which would have rendered it impossible for persons of an ordinary strength of constitution to have transacted business at all. The most unlimited freedom of petitioning was allowed without expense to the complainants. A large box was placed in the *Kutchery* into which the petition could be thrown. To ensure despatch of business, they were limited to 25 to 30 lines, but no stamp tax or other restrictions existed.'

In spite of the best of intentions, however, the system could not work. It proved physically impossible on the part of the Commissioner and Captain White, the only assistant at Gauhati, to dispose of the civil suits of landed property involving conflicting rights and tenures with promptitude to meet the ends of speedy justice. Cases, inevitably, accumulated in their files; the machinery could not keep pace with the ever increasing business which was considerably augmented through the total suspension of administrative business during the period of prolonged confusion. Towards the close of 1826, the Commis-

¹ *Ibid*; also B.P.C., 1831; May 30, No. 50; Neufville to Scott, April 29, 1830.

² *Ibid*; Hazarika, Dutiram : *Asamar Padya-Buranji*, 191.

³ White, Adam : *A Memoir of Late David Scott*, pp. 16-17.

sioner found at the court of Gauhati 1500 petitions requiring immediate decision.¹ He was so greatly alarmed at the arrears that without awaiting for the sanction of the Supreme Government he had to set up, provisionally, three native courts; of these, the first consisting of a *Rajkhowa* and three assessors to try civil cases to the extent of rupees one hundred and fifty; the second having one *Barphukan* and three assessors to decide civil cases to the extent of rupees one thousand and to hear appeals from the lower courts, and the third similarly constituted to decide criminal cases of minor importance and appeals from the *Rajas*, the *Chaudhuris* and other revenue officials who were also allowed, as before, to exercise judicial functions in their respective jurisdictions.² To relieve congestion of judicial business at the headquarters, Scott, further, erected a number of *mufasil panchayets* in the populated areas of Nowgong, Kaliabar and Charduar in Central Assam, to which petty civil suits were referred with a right of appeal to the courts at Gauhati.³ The members of the *panchayets* were elected, generally, by the people of the locality and were remunerated, as under the former government, with a number of *pykes* and other immunities.

A tentative arrangement was, thus, made for the disposal of civil and petty criminal cases. The demand for a similar machinery to deal with capital offenders not cognizable by the Commissioner was equally urgent. In Lower Assam, after British occupation, all cases not involving capital punishment were tried by the Senior Commissioner who was empowered to pass sentences of fifty stripes, imprisonment with or without labour and transportation for life. For the trial of heinous offences requiring sentences of death, a tribunal was to be set up under Colonel Richards, who was to act under the special warrant furnished by the Commandar-in-chief of India.⁴ On technical difficulties, the tribunal could not be assembled even for one occasion and, therefore, a large number of suspected criminals had to be kept confined for their trial.⁵ In view of alarming

¹ B.S.P.C., 1827; February 16, No. 2.

² *Ibid.*

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ B.S.P.C., 1825; April 5, Nos. 24-26.

⁵ B.S.P.C., 1826; July 7, No. 25; Scott to Swinton, March 2, 1826.

mortality at the Gauhati Jail, during this period,¹ and the little abatement in the number of new entrants on account of the increase in heinous crimes, the Commissioner had to urge the Government of Bengal, as early as 1826, to extend the jurisdiction of the *Nizamut Adawlat* to Lower Assam; and in the event of delay in carrying out this measure, he solicited permission to institute a *Bar Panchayet* or a court for the trial of heinous offenders consisting of three native judges of experience to be aided by two *pundits* and six assessors.² In a subsequent despatch on March 29, 1828, the authorities in Calcutta further learnt that the provisional native courts set up by Scott had already proved a tolerably efficient and satisfactory instrument, and as such, 'the business of the criminal department, even in capital cases, does not appear to involve any difficulty which they are incapable to cope with'.³ When similar instruments were found working satisfactorily in other parts of the country, particularly in the non-regulated areas, the Supreme Government accorded their approval in May, 1828, as an experimental measure, to the machinery of civil and criminal justice already instituted and subsequently proposed by the Commissioner, subject to the supervision of the Political Agent, Upper Assam, and the Assistant to the Commissioner, Lower Assam, respectively.⁴ In criminal cases, these officers were to apprehend and convict offenders and to exercise, generally, the authority and functions of a Zilla Magistrate. A decision as to the guilt or innocence of the accused could be pronounced by the courts referred to, who were empowered to execute sentences not involving an imprisonment beyond three years, subject of course to the right of appeal in all cases to the Commissioner. In cases of 'grave and more heinous criminality', the proceedings with the opinion and findings of the court were to be transmitted to the Commissioner, who was to adjudge

¹ In his letter on December 30, 1826, Scott with reference to the alarming mortality in the Gauhati Jail reported that the number of prisoners in confinement never exceeded 400 at any period, but the number of deaths in 1825 and 1826 amounted to 266 and 221 respectively. B.S.P.C., 1827; February 16, No. 2.

² B.S.P.C., 1826; July 7, No. 25; Scott to Swinton, March 2, 1826.

³ B.S.P.C., 1828; May 2, Nos. 11-13.

⁴ *Ibid.*

proper punishment and was empowered to pass and execute sentences of death even without previous reference to the Supreme Government.¹

The Commissioner frankly admitted that after British occupation the number of violent crimes were on the increase. Apart from usual theft, cattle-lifting and elopement of girls, cases of burglary, highway and gang robberies, previously uncommon in Assam, were now of frequent occurrence. Of the 451 suspects awaiting trial at the first session court under the Commissioner held at Gauhati in 1826, as many as 119 were involved in heinous crimes of murder or dacoities attended with murder.² This multiplication in the number of violent crimes may be attributed, as Scott explained, to the continued disuse of capital and inhuman corporal punishment as under the previous government,* but partly to the absence of rural police to protect the lives and properties in the interior. 'The introduction of a perfect or even tolerably efficient police' Neufville confessed, 'in a country like Assam is altogether out of our power, . . . that for a very considerable period, at least, its effective operation must be confined to a certain distance round the Sadar Station'.³ A police establishment consisting of one *Daroga*, a *Jamadar*, and a few constables was maintained at the headquarters, but *mufasil* police was left entirely in the hands of the *Rajas*, the *Choudhuris*, the *Patgis* and other revenue officers. The maintenance of law and order was considered, in those days, to be a joint responsibility of the people, and in the event of their failure to detect and apprehend criminals requiring, thereby,

¹ B.S.P.C., 1828; May 2, No. 13.

² B.S.P.C., 1826; July 7, No. 25; Scott to Swinton, March 2; February 16, 1827, No. 2.

* Under the former government, Hamilton says: 'The capital offences are treason, murder, rape, arson and voluntary abortion. Rebels are never excused; for other offences pardon may be purchased. Capital punishment extends to the whole family of a rebel, parents, brothers, sisters, wives and children. Offenders are put to death in various manners, by cutting their throats, by impaling them, grinding them between two wooden cylinders, by sawing them asunder between two planks, by beating them with hammers, and by applying burning hoes to different parts until they die': Hamilton. F; *An Account of Assam*, pp. 49-50.

³ B.P.C., 1831; June 10, No. 50; Neufville to Scott, April 29, 1830.

the deputation of a regular force, the expense for the same was realised by a collective fine on the inhabitants of the disturbed area.¹

Until 1823, the defence of the North-East Frontier had been entrusted on the Rangpur Local Corps, which was reinforced on the eve of hostilities with Burma by seven Companies of the 23rd Bengal Native Infantry, Dinajpur Local Infantry, a wing of the Champaran Light Infantry besides several detachments of irregulars. The experience of the late war made it evident to the authorities in Calcutta that the climate of this frontier was so inhospitable to the up-country sepoys and so destructive to the commissariat cattle, that it rendered successful operations almost impossible against an enemy adept in jungle warfare and not subjected to similar difficulties. In these circumstances, when there appeared to be no danger of imminent hostilities with Ava and with only frontier forays to guard against, the Supreme Government resolved, in March 1828, to recall the Regular troops from Assam.² The defence of the province was entrusted to the Rangpur Corps which, later, augmented by two Companies of the Gurkhas, became the Assam Light Infantry Battalion (A.L.I.), with a numerical strength of 1000. A permanent cantonment was erected at Bishwanath, 200 miles east of Gauhati; while two Companies of Assam Light Infantry were quartered at Sadiya to guard the frontier with a couple of gun-boats, each carrying a twelve-pound cannonade and manned by local *Golandaz*.³

The presence of Regular troops became all the more unnecessary towards the close of 1827, when the terror inspired by the Singphos had almost disappeared and, gradually, confidence was restored in the minds of the people to repair back to their respective villages. Already, Captain Neufville had succeeded not only in restoring the tranquillity of the frontier, but in emancipating over 6000 Assamese from the captivity of the Singphos. Scott paid a visit to Sadiya and entered into an agreement on May 5, 1826, with sixteen chiefs; the latter acknowledged their allegiance to the British Government; they

¹ B.S.P.C., 1827; February 16, No. 2.

² B.S.P.C., 1828; November 7, No. 8.

³ Pemberton : *Eastern Frontier of British India*, pp. 71, 76 and 77.

also agreed not to have connection with the Burmese or any foreigner and to furnish the British authorities secret intelligence and men and provisions in the event of hostilities occurring in that frontier. By an agreement on May 13, Matibar Barsenapati was recognised as the chief of the Moamarias or the Muttocks, and the latter undertook to supply 300 *pykes* and provisions when demanded, of course, on payment. By another agreement, two days later, Salan Sadiyakhowa, the Khamti chief, was also confirmed in his possession on condition that the latter agreed to contribute a contingent of 200, to be trained and equipped by the British Government.¹

Captain Neufville, who had since acquired an intimate knowledge of the habits and character of these frontier people, wanted to guarantee the tribal leaders their cherished rights and privileges, but preserving at the same time the prerogatives of the Paramount Power. Subject to the supply of a number of contingents, as stated above, he left them free in their respective jurisdictions and exempted them entirely from taxation. They were invested with the power of enquiring into and deciding civil and criminal cases; but in the event of murder, wounding, arson and thefts above rupees fifty, after having made preliminary investigations, they were to transmit the papers and the persons concerned to a supreme court instituted for the purpose, consisting of the Political Agent, an Assamese of rank (*Gohain*), and the chief in whose territory the crime was committed. The proceedings were, of course, to be submitted to the chief and sentences to be carried out under his orders. While approving these measures, the Supreme Government considered it to be the soundest policy in the management of these backward tribes 'to vest a large share of responsibility in the hands of the national chief' and to direct the efforts of the local authorities mainly to the maintenance of peace between the various communities and 'the experiment of a few and simple conditions of such engagements indispensably necessary to impose on them'.²

In the middle of 1828, Martial law was withdrawn from Assam; whereupon, Colonel Cooper was relieved of his civil

¹ Aitchison; *Treaties etc.*, pp. 119-22.

² B.S.P.C., 1828; November 7, No. 8; Neufville to Scott, December 23, 1827.

duties by Captain Neufville, the newly-appointed Political Agent, Upper Assam; since then, the office of the Junior Commissioner was also abolished.¹ The Commissioner of Assam was not slow to point out to the Government of Bengal the necessity of an additional officer, since Captain Neufville would have to devote his wholehearted energy for some years to the revenue and judicial affairs in Upper Assam, and that there also existed the necessity of detaching a second in command to the regiment at Sadiya. The authorities in Calcutta, while appreciating fully these difficulties, expressed their inability to depute any one to the relief of the Political Agent, because several officers of the army were already away on civil duties.² Consequently, Captain Neufville had to perform all the duties—civil as well as military—almost singlehanded. Scott made no further representation for additional hands; he firmly believed that the restoration of a native prince in Upper Assam was only a question of time, and pending that event, all arrangement in that division should be purely temporary. With that end in view, he also strongly refuted³ in a letter on April 26, 1828, the fears and calculations entertained by the Supreme Council in their proceedings on March 7. Although, he shared their apprehensions as to the probable weakness and instability of the proposed monarchy, much of the evils, he felt, could be counteracted by providing the constitutional checks previously suggested by him and by stipulating for the absolute right of the Paramount Power of interference and also of demanding deposition of the ruling chief in the event of oppression or misgovernment. As to military defence, Scott ruled out,⁴ altogether, the necessity of stationing a permanent regiment in Upper Assam, 'whether, it be retained by us or restored (to a native prince)'; for police and petty frontier duties a local militia would suffice, and it might be remunerated by the chief, if raised, by assignment of land. He made it clear to the authorities in Calcutta that it would be extremely difficult on the part of the British Government to collect a substantial revenue from a people un-

¹ B.S.P.C., 1828; August 29, No. 1; December 16, 1825, No. 27.

² B.S.P.C., 1828; May 2, No. 16.

³ B.S.P.C., 1828; June 27, No. 115; Scott to Stirling, April 26, 1828.

⁴ *Ibid.*

accustomed to the payment in cash, amongst whom there prevailed a great scarcity of the circulating medium. 'I must confess', he concluded, 'that I should doubt our being able with the best (of) intentions to ensure at an expense, to which the people of Upper Assam would willingly submit, such a degree of good government in that country as might compensate to the various classes in society, for what we must in the first instances deprive them of.'¹

Even these arguments, however convincing, failed to produce the desired effect on the Supreme Council. Since the British Government would be solely responsible for the defence of the province, it was strongly felt that the erection of an weak and mismanaged government in between the headquarters of the British forces and the frontier occupied by numerous turbulent tribes would be extremely awkward and highly inconvenient.² For their final consideration, the Agent was asked again in June 1828, to submit a full statement as to the revenues of Upper Assam together with the details of the arrangement in the event of its restoration to a native prince. Three years were to elapse, before Scott could furnish the required particulars ; for he was soon engrossed in the problems connected with transitional misrule and the consequent attempts that were made to overthrow the Company's rule in Assam.

¹ *Ibid.*

² B.S.P.C., 1828 ; June 27, No. 116.

APPENDIX A

Statement showing the revenue account in Lower and Upper Assam in the early years of British occupation (B.S.P.C. 1828, May 23 No. 33 ; see the statement on May 5, also B.P.C. 1831 ; June 10, Nos. 51-57)

Year	LOWER ASSAM			Receipts	Disbursements
	Assessment	Charges of Collection (m)	Remissions (n)		
1824-25	1,71,824	17,019	X	1,18,723	29,538
1826-26	2,87,683	37,397	28,376	2,02,061	92,513
1825-27	3,00,383	51,374	33,378	1,78,686	1,25,015
	UPPER ASSAM				
	Assessment	Charges of Collection (m)	Remissions (n)		
1825-26	139,162	28,395	24,300	28,058	27,834
1826-27	145,833	32,520	26,391	46,073	40,731
1827-28	143,268	28,395	27,948	38,835	61,695
1828-29	153,835	38,572	11,250	78,452	36,166
1829-30	X	X	X	90,060	53,922
1830-31	X	X	X	89,465	54,883

(m) In Lower Assam the charges were, generally, on the gross collections ; the *Khaidars* received in Upper Assam a commission to the extent of 27% of the assessment ; but when they were replaced, in 1829-30, by the *Tahsildars* the charges were reduced to 2% of the collections.

(n) By rent-free grants or in money to the members of the royal family, ex-nobles and other notables.

CHAPTER II

TRANSITION

Mr. Scott, the Agent to the Governor-General, had cherished extravagant hopes in Lower Assam, from which he expected to derive a revenue of upwards of rupees three lakhs which would increase, according to his calculations, to one of six lakhs in course of a few years.¹ The early estimates of the demands and receipts (*vide Appendix A*) belied his expectations. He was also disappointed to find that the commutation of the services failed to produce 'either an adequate pecuniary collection to the Government or satisfaction to the people'; the latter being relieved of the necessity of labouring some months in the year for the state found themselves with difficulties which induced many of them to emigrate into adjoining areas where cultivation was subjected to trifling or no taxation.² The general survey conducted by Matthews further revealed that two-thirds of the land remained fallow; of the arable portion again, about one-fifth was held under rent-free grants. Remissions had to be granted, frequently, on account of *mufasil* collections, desertion by ryots, deficiency of assets, mistakes etc. Above all, the rates in the *parganas* of Kamrup under the former government were so low that notwithstanding the existing rates being doubled, the net revenue hardly reached Scott's figures.³

Disappointed in his calculations and convinced of the impossibility of raising the existing rates any further, the Commissioner directed his attention to tapping new sources of revenue. He found thousands acres of assessable lands undisposed of in consequence of the wholesale deaths and desertions during the period of Burmese invasions. Pykes were now given in addition to their *gamati* a further assignment of three

¹ B.S.P.C., 1824; May 28, No. 15; April 5, 1825, No. 27.

² B.S.P.C., 1828; June 27, No. 45.

³ B.S.P.C., 1827; March 9, No. 11.

puras, as *jumamati*, at a low rate of annas seven (as *jummadhan*) a *pura*; what remained after this double allotment was allocated to the *Choudhuris* to dispose of by another assessment. The tax on *brahmottar* and *nankar* grants, originally an emergency cess, was continued to be levied with the intention of 'either reducing the amount of assessment', in due course, or to appropriate the entire amount for the purpose of 'obvious public utility'.¹ The *kharikatana* was now extended to all classes of the people, including the slaves and bondsmen.² To cover the expenses of *mufasil* police and contingencies, a *barangani* was ordered to be levied from six to eight annas a rupee on the *jumma* or gross collection.³ These taxes super-added by the *barangani* formed a heavy demand on the ryots, but did not complete the catalogue of exaction. They were required in addition to pay 6½% to the *Choudhury* for *mufasil* expenses, 1% to the treasurer for profit and loss, ½% as commission for exchange on the *narayani* rupee* besides interests on the balances and fines for all dilatory

¹ *Ibid.*

² B.P.C., 1833; May 30, No. 89; Bogle to Robertson, February 10. *Kharikatana* was assessed as follows:—

Persons working with more than two ploughs	@ Rs. 3-0
" " " two ploughs	@ " 2-0
" " " one "	@ " 1-0

Freemen, Bondsmen and slaves @ 8 annas. A free-man who mortgages himself for a loan is called a *bondsman*. He receives food and clothings from the mortgagee; his family members, if any, will also get a portion of the grain for their support. He can, however, at any period, discharge the debt and obtain release.

³ B.P.C., 1830; 30 May, No. 83; *vide* also the *Rubakari* (Revenue Proceedings) of the Commissioner of Assam, May 25, 1831. The *Buranganil* was an arbitrary imposition levied to meet those expenses for which the ordinary revenue was found inadequate. It was invented as a 'panacea' for all the evils arising from the system of exaction and oppression and instead of being a remedy, it only increased the mischiefs. The general impression was, that *barangani* was imposed on the *parganas* of Kamrup, because Darrang and Raha were in arrear. Naturally, it was productive of great discontent of all the classes by the belief that they were required to pay for the deficiencies with which they had nothing to do and which occurred in a distant part of the country.

* This coin was originally introduced in Cooch-Behar by Maharaja Nara Narayan (1540-84). The rate of exchange for 100 *Sicca* rupees was Rs. 126-7-4 in *narayani* rupee.

payment.¹ The cumulative effect, it is obviously clear, fell crushingly on the ryots. 'Even persons of intelligence would be puzzled to say how much a ryot would have to pay to the Government. To the unfortunate peasantry the account must have been wholly incomprehensible.'²

The evils of extortion were aggravated by the defective organisation from the top to the bottom. Tracts of territories had been allotted to a single person by a method which was more of the nature of 'a sale by auction'. The *parganas* and its subdivision the *taluks* had been let out for a specific sum without any reference to the resources of the country and at times to individuals of questionable character.³ No effective check, whatever, was taken to protect the ryots from their unjust demands nor any accurate account taken of the collections actually made, while receipts for various payments made by ryots were wholly unknown.⁴

Uniformity was nowhere to be seen in the mode of collection. 'In but one instance' wrote a contemporary official, 'do I find that the system actually in force corresponds to that set forth in collection papers.....there has long been one assessment in the office and another in the *pargana*; each *Choudhury* has gone on a plan of his own; every domain is assessed in a different manner and the greatest confusion exists throughout the whole'.⁵ Apart from diversity and variety, it was a common feature to find *taluks* of one *pargana* in the centre of another or removed several *parganas* off. However generous and well-intentioned a *Choudhury* might be, it was vain to expect of him to do full justice to the scattered ryots under his control. 'To imagine that the native collectors would not avail themselves of the openings which such a mode of collection affords to exaction added to the confusion arising from the demand being paid in an inferior commission is to expect too much from human character.'⁶ All the more, because, the fortunes of a *Choudhury* had always been hanging in the balance. To obtain office he

¹ B.P.C., 1833; May 30. No. 89; Bogle to Robertson, February 10.

² *Ibid.*

³ B.P.C., 1833; May 30, No. 93; Bogle to Robertson, February 25.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ B.P.C., 1833; May 30, No. 89; Bogle to Robertson, February 10.

⁶ *Ibid.*

had to fill the pockets of the petty officials at the court. If installed, he was required to furnish a security and also to deposit in advance revenue for six months before he had collected any. To meet his immediate liabilities he had to borrow money at interests varying from 50 to 120 per cent, per annum.¹ Exaction had, therefore, become a necessity and complaints thereto were general. To disarm opposition, he had to gratify the persons at the helm of affairs by fair means or foul. In spite of so many odds, if a *Choudhury* could pay off his dues in time he might be reappointed; in default, he suffered prosecution and the distraint of his tangible property. Yet, 'the mere name of *Choudhury* was so valuable in the eye of the people, that there was no dearth of applicants for the office even when the field of extortion was somewhat barren.'² If one *Choudhury* were broken and another appointed, the successor followed the same path and invariably shared the same fate. Feeling their position always insecure, the revenue officials, the high and the low, had obviously no other alternative but to exploit the situation as best as they could.³ Inevitably, in the words of a contemporary :

"many of the finest parts of the country are now a decay waste; villages once the most flourishing are now deserted and in ruins; the inhabitants instead of finding the British Government a power which would protect them with enjoyment of their hearths and homes have fled by hundreds in all directions, not only to the neighbouring Zamindaris of Bengal, but what is more painful to contemplate, to the lawless regions of Bootan".⁴

¹ *Ibid.*

² The inordinate appetite for office and the pernicious influence of the *Omlah* will be seen from the following : In the *pargana* of Barbhag a *choudhury* died in 1831, leaving an arrear of Rs. 5,810-0. In his eagerness to obtain the charge, another *Choudhury* undertook to discharge the whole sum, although he had the knowledge that it was impossible for him to fulfil the engagement. Soon, he was superseded by a *sezwal*. Out of Rs. 1,711, which the former remitted, it was found, that an amount of Rs. 1,217-0 was intercepted and appropriated by the treasurer of the collector's office for the services rendered by him at the time of the *Choudhury's* appointment B.R.C., 1833 ; September 24, No. 13.

³ B.P.C., 1833 ; 30 May, No. 89 ; Bogle to Robertson, 10 February.

⁴ *Ibid.*

Was there no court of justice to redress the grievances of the people? Justice there was, but at a price not worthwhile. In criminal cases, the verdict given by the *panchayets* under the immediate eye of a European officer was, on the whole, satisfactory and met the ends of justice. But the civil business in the first instance being entirely left to the local tribunals subject to the remote supervision of a superior authority resulted in hopeless failure.¹ The number of *mufasil* courts was extremely limited and, therefore, the concentration of business at the headquarters rendered it impossible for the outlying areas to obtain speedy justice. Moreover, there existed the practice of deciding petty *dewani* cases by written pleadings and depositions which were not intelligible to the people, more than ninety per cent of whom were illiterate, and, consequently, they felt little confidence in the justice of the decision. Above all, the Sadar courts were reported to be venal to the extreme; while the *mufasil* few were mere engines of extortion. In fact, the courts and the *panchayets* at Gauhati were held by the people in such distrust and detestation that they preferred to submit to anything rather than seek redress at these courts;² 'for it was not uncommon that the presenting of a complaint was more injurious than putting up with the original case.'

The condition of Central Assam was equally deplorable. In Darrang, Raja Bijaynarayan had entered into an agreement with Scott, as already referred to, to contribute an amount of Rs. 42,000 besides the services of 1500 *pykes*. After a rough survey in 1826, by one Deep Chandra Nag, the revenue was raised to Rs. 54,000.³ The Raja united with the ryots strongly protested against the inaccuracies of the measurement which took little account of the rent-free grants, waste lands etc., and this afforded him only a relief of Rs. 3000/- of the total demand. In spite of his difficulties, Bijaynarayan cleared off his dues in 1826-27; but next year, he was in arrears of Rs. 21,000 and

¹ B.P.C., 1833; 6 June, No. 106.

² B.P.C., 1833; May 30, No. 89; Bogle to Robertson, February 10 : July 23, 1832, No. 70, Private letter White to the Agent, May 28.

³ B.P.C., 1833; May 30, No. 83; Rutherford to Robertson, January 18.

his property was, in consequence, confiscated.¹ The territory was, thereafter, placed in charge of a *tahsildar* with authority to collect *barangani* to cover the expenses of the establishment. Since then, the entire business was in a state of utter confusion. Petty farmers of revenue under the title *kuruk sezvals* were scattered over the district to collect the arrears of revenue. The police, the *sezvals* and the *tahsildars*, all being paid by the *barangani*, regularly took their monthly pay, while the actual demand accumulated in arrears.²

On the south bank, in the district of Nowgong and Raha, a *dhalla piyal* or a gross measurement was conducted, in 1826, by Aradhan Ray, the *tahsildar* of the district. The *piyal* was soon found to be erroneous, when two successive *piyals* were ordered for and the unnecessary cost of both had to be borne by the ryots. They were required, in addition, to pay for the charges of the Collector's establishment and also to make up the loss in commission incurred by the *mufasil* officers on account of the arrears in revenue.³ When the ryots found their resources drained away by repeated exactions, they had no other alternative but to flee away in hundreds and, to make matters worse, those who remained in the district had also to pay for those who ran away.⁴ In 1831, the extra-cesses, as a whole, were consolidated into a charge of six to eight annas in a rupee in the *jumma*; and to complete the ruin, eighteen farmers of revenue were distributed in the following year throughout the district and their dreadful extortion, in the words of Rutherford, the officer in-charge of the district, 'had haggard the ryot (?) and

¹ *Ibid*; The Raja is reported to have paid a tribute of Rs. 10,000 to the Ahom Government and, later, Rs. 15,000 to the Burmese during the period of their occupation in Assam. There are some discrepancies as to his settlement with the British authorities in 1824-25. According to Lieutenant Matthie, the Officer-in-charge of Central Assam, it was fixed at Rs. 32,000 in addition to the supply of 8000 maunds of rice; whereas Scott reported the amount as Rs. 42,000 besides the services of 1500 *pykes*.

² B.P.C., 1833; May 30, No. 83.

³ B.P.C., 1833; June 6, No. 106. See also A.S., Assam Commissioner, File No. 642.

⁴ B.P.C., 1833; May 30, No. 83.

rendered a large portion of the country waste (in) which, upto our conquest, such a thing as jungle was hardly to be seen.¹

Evidently, trouble arose in different parts of Central Assam out of over-assessment. Settlements were made in different areas mostly with persons unconcerned and non-resident therein without any consideration of the resources of the country or of the ryots. Innumerable extra-cesses were levied, as in Lower Assam, when even the stipulated revenue could not be realised. No remission was ever granted when lands remained uncultivated through the emigration of the ryots and, thereby, making the very basis fictitious on which assessments were previously made. Finally, the evils of the system were aggravated by an abrupt change from a demand of the revenue in kind to an exaction in cash when no trade existed by which the ryots could dispose of their commodities. Grain was their only produce, and in a purely agricultural country like Assam, it was neither in demand nor exportable under existing circumstances. The introduction of money as the medium of exchange without a substantial increase in the existing currency, inevitably, fell pressingly on the ryots who were unused to so many payments in cash. They were relieved, as it were, of the personal service only to be involved in hardships which could hardly be overcome, and which forced them to leave their hearths and homes to look for shelter even in the adjoining hills.²

The situation was equally alarming in Upper Assam. To his utter disappointment, Scott soon found that the men of rank proved themselves wholly incompetent to discharge the duties of revenue and judicial administration entrusted to them; on the other hand, 'their very presence caused great labour and trouble to the European functionaries.'³ Again there were cases of embezzlement in money and also of extortion and oppression. On

¹ *Ibid.* Early in 1833, when Lieutenant Rutherford, the Officer-in-charge of Central Assam, summoned the former fiscal officers to take charge of their respective districts, almost all of them refused declaring that their *mahals* had been so much ruined and depopulated by several years of exactions as to render realisation of revenue 'a matter of total impossibility.' B. P. C., 1833, June 6, No. 106; Rutherford to Robertson, March 7.

² B.P.C., 1833; June 6, No. 106.

³ B.P.C., 1831; June 10, No. 50.

being found guilty of defalcation of a huge amount the Barbarua had to be dismissed; his successors, too, proved equally useless and, therefore, shared the same fate.¹ During 1825-28, a considerable amount of the collection never reached the treasury; the revenue of Upper Assam for the year 1827-28 could not meet even the charges on establishment.

It must, however, be remembered that almost all these officials were placed under a system to which they had been quite strangers. Writing was, hitherto, unnecessary to most of the public functionaries. On one occasion, when ex-Raja Purandar Singha enquired of Scott about the necessity of recording depositions of witnesses in the Court, the latter humourously replied: 'Swargadeu! You are of celestial origin and can recollect every thing; we are earth-born, when we go to dinner we forget what has been said during the day, therefore we write down what we hear.'² The officials were, therefore, amazed at the mass of writings in which they saw that even the most insignificant transactions of the Government were conducted, and, naturally, they proved themselves incapable of furnishing those voluminous and minute details required of them.

Moreover, for the successful working of the *khel* system, all members of a particular *khel* should reside as closely as possible; as a matter of fact, they were located, formerly, in a given tract of territory with definite boundaries. Gradually, this had become impracticable; supposing the number of the original members of a *khel* of *Sonowal* was fifty, and in due course their children became *Sonowals*, and as such, the surplus *pykes* had to be provided elsewhere; and were consequently distributed throughout the country. In this state of affairs, the unparalleled deaths and desertions in the wake of Burmese invasions led, inevitably, to such a mixing of the *pykes* that the *khels* became misnomers and their organisation was one of confusion worse confounded. Even to a man of experience, therefore, it was well-nigh impossible to do justice to the inhabitants of the *khels* scattering from the river Dikhow to the Dhansiri and from the Lohit to the Dayang. To effect speedy collection,

¹ *Ibid*; also May 30, 1829, No. 9; Neufville to Scott, April 2, Hazarika, Dutiram; *Asamar Padya-Buranji*, p. 191.

² White: A : A Memoir of David Scott, pp. 58-59.

they had restored to a host of revenue agents of heterogeneous elements whose sole object was to amass a fortune by fleecing the ryots. A small percentage of revenue, consequently, reached the treasury; while ruthless extortion led the hapless victims, mostly on the north bank, to migrate into the territory of the Muttocks where taxation was nominal.¹

To counteract the existing evils, Neufville made in 1828, a fresh census of the *pykes*; their wholesale concealment by the interested agents, however, rendered the enumeration quite inaccurate.² Further, he attempted to impose a tribute on the chief of the Muttocks on account of the *Bhaganiyas* (immigrants) that took shelter in his territory, but inadequate supervision in the collection of revenue defeated the object in view. The *Surasuree Court* also proved unequal to deal with the rapacity of the officials. 'Owing to the indolent and incapable conduct of the nobility' and because of the 'impossibility of extracting money without the use of duress', Captain Neufville, finally, resorted to the employment of, in lieu of men of rank 'men of real ability and business,' mostly from Bengal, lest he was 'to relinquish all hope of realising Government dues.'³

Scott's policy of conciliating the official aristocracy thus proved a dismal failure. Those who had 'a vested right to office' were now elbowed out by a number of 'interlopers from below.' This radical change in the policy of the Government, inevitably, produced a sense of deep resentment amongst the vested interests which manifested itself, hereafter, in the several attempts that were made to overthrow the British Government. Towards the close of 1828, at Bassa, in the south-west corner of Jorhat, the cause of Gomdhar Kowar, a scion of the former royal family, was espoused by a group of men of rank.⁴ They

¹ B.P.C., 1835; April 13, No. 4; Scott to Neufville, January 22, 1829.

² B.P.C., 1833; May 30, No. 87.

³ B.P.C., 1831; June 10, No. 51.

⁴ B.S.P.C., 1828; December 4, No. 60; also B.P.C., March 12, 1830, No. 4B; Neufville to Scott, December 14, 1828.

The idea of kingship was awakened in the mind of the Prince, as deposed by several witnesses before the *Bar Panchayet*, by the occurrence of some mysterious phenomena; coming as they did, at the moment when the restoration of an Ahom prince was under consideration of the Government, the credulous prince ventured to place his own claims. He

had entered into correspondence with the principal functionaries at the headquarters of the Political Agent, the chiefs of Upper Assam, and particularly Dhanjoy, an ex-Borgohain, and it was hoped that all of them would be able to combine at the 'first dawn of success.' After the withdrawal of Company's troops from Assam, the rebels felt it would not be too difficult on their part to seize Rangpur, the capital of the former Government, by expelling the few war-broken soldiers that might be kept there on guard.¹

The time chosen for the enterprise was highly opportune. In the north, the Bhutias were then committing acts of aggression. The Khasis under Terrut Singh, the chief of Nungkhlow, were at this precise moment maturing plans to expel the English from their hills. The far-eastern tribes, too, though recently subdued, were bidding their time and were awaiting an opportunity to strike at their enemy. In spite of so many odds, the major part of the Regular troops had been removed from Assam, and what remained of them, it was wildly rumoured, would also depart soon leaving the defence of the frontier in the hands of the local corps.

Gomdhar was, actually, enthroned with due formality. He was invested with the white shoes and the umbrella, the insignia of royalty. The *Bailungs*, or royal priests, performed the rituals. Through pressure and persuasions, the allegiance of the neighbouring villagers was procured and a 'no-tax campaign' was launched. Brisk preparations were also set on foot for the seizure of Rangpur by recruiting men, collecting arms and levying contributions.² In the last week of November, 1828, to effect a combination with their collaborators at the headquarters the rebels advanced towards Mariani, 12 miles off from Jorhat.³ Captain Neufville, who was away on tour for some time, arrived unexpectedly in the nick of time. To

had, it appears, the ambitions of a tributary chief. While he was on his way to Jorhat, to plead his case, personally, before the authorities his collaborators persuaded and later emboldened him to take up arms against the Government.

¹ *Ibid*; vide deposition of Gauri of the *Namrupia khel*.

² B.P.C., 1830; March 12, No. 17; see deposition of Jaalak and Subedar Baidyanath.

³ B.P.C., 1828; December 4, No. 10.

frustrate their projected move he despatched hurriedly against the insurgents a party of Havildars followed by a detachment under Lieutenant Rutherford.¹ After a feeble resistance, Gomdhar fled into the Naga hills, and most of his followers including female relatives fell into the hands of the detachment. The fugitive prince, after roaming a few days in the jungles and completely abandoned by his adherents, ultimately surrendered himself to Lieutenant Rutherford. The secret documents which were discovered in his person proved the complicity of Dhanjoy, the ex-Borgohain, and his son, both of whom were immediately apprehended.²

Gomdhar strongly denied before the *Bar Panchayet* at Jorhat that he had any intention of taking up arms against the British Government. He was, nevertheless, found guilty of rebellion and sentenced to death. In consideration of his immature age and of the fact that he was a mere tool in the hands of other designing people the sentence was commuted, later, by the Agent to the Governor-General to an imprisonment without labour for a period of seven years.³ Of the other prisoners, Dhanjoy was found guilty of abetting and aiding the rebellion and was, therefore, awarded capital punishment. He had, however, contrived to escape from the jail and entered into the Naga hills.⁴

About a year later, to subvert the British Government another attempt was made by Eyang Goomendao *alias* Godadhar Singha who was supposed to be a kinsman of the ex-Raja Jogeswar Singha. To enlist sympathy and support of the sepoys the rebel appeared at Sadiya and attempted to seduce Zalim Sing, the Subedar of the regiment. The latter, instead

¹ B.P.C., 1830; March 12, Nos. 4B and 12.

² B.P.C., 1830; March 12, No. 13C.

In a letter to the Political Agent, Upper Assam, just on the eve of his arrest, the Prince expressed his ambition in the following manner; —'The substance of my desire being, that I may be allowed to collect all the revenue of the country myself. I have no wish to (engage myself in a) war with the Company, but to receive the country as (the) Raja from their hands, and I will do what the Company wish', B. P. C., 1830; March 12, No. 12, *see* letter C; also Nos. 15, 17-18, 34.

³ B.P.C., 1834; June 24, No. 84-85. *See* proceedings of the Criminal Court of the Agent, August 6, 1830.

⁴ B.S.P.C., 1830; March 5, No. 3; June 25, No. 4.

of being duped, arrested and sent him down to Gauhati.¹ The abortive attempt made by Godadhar, incidentally, suggested to the authorities that the Court of Ava still had designs on their lost possessions in Assam. The prisoner made a statement to the effect that Atan Meengh Burkuwari, the Assamese Princess whom ex-Raja Chandrakanta Singha was said to have offered as a present to the harem of the Burmese Emperor, had, later, acquired considerable influence over His Majesty; and on her constant importunities to place her own brother Dhanjoy on the throne of Assam, the Emperor was persuaded to send an advance party to Assam.² The king of Ava was, therefore, suspected as a 'privy to the plan' of Godadhar, and the latter was supposed to have been sent out on a reconnoitering mission to ascertain the disposition of British troops and also of the *Phukans* and the *Baruas* on the latest move made by the Court of Ava.³ In any case, it was found necessary to take immediate precautionary measures to repel any attack in the frontier; the existing forts of Sadiya and Borhat were strengthened and a new one was planned to be built up near at Jorhat. Gambhir Singh, the Raja of Manipur, was asked to be in readiness with troops to meet any emergency. At the same time, although 'no remonstrance was made', Major Burney, the British Resident in Burma, was directed to place cautiously before the Court of Ava the proceedings of Godadhar; as if, the Burmese authorities were given to understand that 'an improper use is made' by the rebellious subjects of the British Government of the name of His Majesty, the Emperor of Burma.⁴

Although, the Court of Ava promptly denied of having any hand in the activities of Godadhar or of the hillmen in the Eastern Frontier, yet the events in that quarter continued to cause serious anxiety in the minds of the British authorities. In early 1830, there arrived reports of hostile activities of the Singphos on either side of the Patkais under Wookum Khoomyan, a chief of Hukwang. The invaders made elaborate preparations, and as alleged, acted in concert with the Khamtis

¹ B.S.P.C., 1830; June 25, Nos. 4-6.

² *Ibid.*

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *Ibid.*

and the disaffected nobles of Upper Assam.¹ The situation, thus, appeared to be a serious one, but the timely arrival of Captain Neufville towards the close of February, 1830, at Lattora, on the Noadihing, prevented the combined move of the enemies, who being unable to resist volleys of fire from the British camp, made a hasty retreat beyond the hills.²

Towards the close of 1829, Dhanjoy, eluding the vigilance of the police authorities entered into Legge, a village in the territory of the Moamarias, and made preparations for another uprising on a 'grand-scale'.³ He was actively aided by his sons—Harakanta and Haranath, and his son-in-law Jeuram Dulia Barua. The number of conspirators soon multiplied; Peali, the son of Badan Barphukan, the ex-vice-roy of Lower Assam, Boom, a naturalized Singpho, Roopchand Kowar (?), Deuram (?) Dihingia Barua, Krishnanath and several others joined the enterprise engineered by the ex-Borgohain.⁴ Emmissaries with secret letters were sent out to the Moamarias, the Khamtis, the Singphos, the Nagas, the Khasis and the Garos, calling upon their aid in expelling the English from the North-East Frontier.⁵ The protracted engagement of the Political Agent in the neighbourhood of Sadiya and, particularly the inadequate defensive measures in Upper Assam had emboldened the rebels who were fully acquainted through a network of spies with the disposition of British troops in different quarters of the valley of the Brahmaputra.⁶ In his letter to Colonel Fugan, Adjutant General of the Army, Calcutta, Neufville wrote: 'It is remarkable, that the letters from the rebel Borgohain to the eastern chiefs contain the most accurate information of our strength and military resources, the amount of posts and detachments and of the inefficient men (?) both in Assam and Jamalpur'.

After performing the *Deo Puja*, a ritual usually observed

¹ B.S.P.C., 1830; April 30, No. 5A; March 5, No. 3; May 7, Nos. 46-48.

² B.S.P.C., 1830; May 28, Nos. 74-75.

³ B.S.P.C., 1830; April 30, No. 5A; September 24, No. 76; Neufville to Scott, June 14.

⁴ B.S.P.C., 1830; September 24; No. 76; Neufville to Scott, June 14; April 30, No. 5A.

⁵ *Ibid*; The planned and organised nature of the conspiracy can be seen from the letters in *Appendix-B*.

⁶ B.S.P.C., 1830, April 30, No. 5A; Neufville to Fugan, March 30.

on the eve of such occasions, the rebels advanced towards Rangpur, which was then held by a *Jamadar* with a party of 30 sepoy. The failure of Wookum Khoomyan and the lack of adequate response on the part of the eastern chiefs had, in the meanwhile, thwarted their plans. What proved, ultimately, most fatal to their cause was the betrayal of the *Sadiyakhwa Gohain*. On February 20, 1830, the latter apprehended and made over the rebel Haranath with the treasonable letters in his possession to the Political Agent, Upper Assam.¹ In spite of these disheartening events, on February 25, the rebels numbering about 400 made a desperate attack on the post of Rangpur. They were immediately repulsed and hotly followed by the sepoy on guard for about 10 miles, until no trace of them could be found. Captain Neufville, who had in the meantime arrived at Jorhat, rushed a detachment of the Assam Light Infantry in pursuit of the enemy, since entrenched at Galeki, near the Charaideo hills. After a small encounter, the sepoy dispersed the rebels and succeeded in seizing most of the leaders with their arms except Dhanjoy and his eldest son, both of whom penetrated again into the Naga hills.²

The rebels failed utterly in offering a united front against their common enemy, and in fact, a section of them betrayed their cause. Madhabram Borgohain, a member of the *Bar Panchayet*, co-operated with the sepoy in the seizure of the rebels and even accompanied them into the thick of the Naga hills. Maniram Barua, the revenue *Sheristadar*, and later, an arch-enemy of the British, was indifferent to the cause of the conspirators. The villagers near about Sonowal refused to acknowledge the pretensions of Gomdhar; but, later, agreed on the distinct understanding that he had obtained the *Raj* from the Company and on his taking an oath that he would not exact any revenue, grant more lands, and remove their hardships.³ With the memories of the anarchical conditions still vivid in their minds, the people in general, too, evinced rather a feeling of distrust and suspicion in the activities of the nobles. However

¹ B.S.P.C., 1830; April 30, No. 5A; September 24, No. 76.

² *Ibid.*

³ B. P. C., 1830; July 16, No. 49.

⁴ B.S.P.C., 1830; March 12, Nos. 14 and 17; July 16, No. 49, Neufville to Scott, May 25.

the attempt made by them, 'though chimerical in design and short-lived' as Neufville remarked, 'created a most pernicious effect in unsettling the minds of the natives throughout Assam and tending much to throw them back into that state of anarchy and confusion from which we have so lately relieved them'.¹

Peali, Jeuram, Haranath, Roopchand, Boom Singpho, and the Dihingia Barua were found guilty of high treason and rebellion by the *Bar Panchayet* under the Political Agent, and all of them were sentenced to death. The Agent to the Governor-General, to whom the proceeding were forwarded, confirmed the verdict on Peali and Jeuram, in spite of their being 'less guilty' and both of them were ordered to be hanged immediately, since deterrent punishment was then considered absolutely necessary to stop recrudescence of similar uprisings; for others, capital sentences were commuted to imprisonment in banishment for a period of fourteen years each with confiscation of property.²

Hardly these untoward events were over when on June 30, 1830, Captain Neufville passed away at Jorhat.³ The death of the Political Agent, who was the pioneer in shaping the administrative set-up in the North-East Frontier Agency, left a void which could not easily be filled up. It may be mentioned, in this connection, that after British occupation, there existed in Upper Assam a European Assistant with headquarters at Sadiya and some officers in command of the Regiment were also posted there; in addition, the Commandant of the Assam Light Infantry was stationed at Bishwanath. The Junior Commissioner was in overall charge of civil duties. By entrusting all these duties to the Political Agent alone, to which a reference has already been made, the Government of Bengal invited grave risks which was evident from the events narrated in the foregoing pages. With his ability, energy and intrepidity and particularly wide experience and intimate knowledge of the affairs of the frontier tribes, Captain Neufville discharged his responsibilities, on the whole, satisfactorily. The sudden death of the Political Agent, naturally, baffled Mr. Scott, on whom then devolved the problems of protect-

¹ B.P.C., 1830; March 12, No. 4.

² B.P.C., 1830; September 24, No. 76; *vide* proceedings of the criminal court of the Agent, Cherrapunji, August 6, 1830.

³ B.P.C., 1830; August 26, No. 62.

ing the British subjects nearabout Sadiya far away from his headquarters and also from the base of reinforcement. To that end he must keep the neighbouring tribes free from the intrigues of their kinsmen beyond the hills and also from the Burmese who did neither forget nor forgive the lessons they received at the hands of the British only a few years ago. What was the guarantee that these vacillating hillmen, provided as they were with British arms, might not turn against their own benefactors?

About a month and a half before this sad occurrence, Scott submitted in an exhaustive report his final recommendations as to the administrative arrangements in Upper Assam.¹ He clearly indicated, therein, the problems mentioned above and suggested the formation of a distinct political unit east of the river Buridihing with headquarters at Sadiya. It might be placed under an officer designated as the Assistant to the Political Agent, Upper Assam, who was to command the troops, to supervise the local militia and also to control the border tribes, hold criminal trials and transact any other business as might arise in that frontier. To obviate the inconveniences arising from the relief of troops from a distance of 170 miles below by upward navigation of the Brahmaputra, Scott also proposed that two Companies of troops should be permanently stationed at Sadiya, as a distinct unit, and the necessary expenses in this connection could be met by reducing the A.L.I. at Bishwanath to eight Companies of 80 men each, giving the men the option of volunteering into Sadiya corps with all existing advantages or of remaining below with the same pay as permissible to local corps. The proposed arrangement, it was hoped, would acquaint the officer with local conditions, inure the troops with the rigours of the climate and ensure, gradually, the fidelity of the militiamen supplied by the neighbouring chiefs. If the Government, however, considered it inexpedient to maintain this frontier outpost, Scott wanted to disarm the auxiliaries. He would rather run the risk of having that part of the country ravaged by the Singphos than remain in constant embarrassments resulting from leaving at the disposal of these backward predatory tribes effective means to disturb the tranquillity of the frontier.²

¹ B. P. C., 1831; June 10, No. 50.

² *Ibid.*

The territory below Bishwanath, from the river Dhansiri to the Roha chokey, was inhabited by about a lakh of people. Scott proposed¹ to form it as a separate jurisdiction under an Assistant subordinate to the Magistrate and Collector of Gauhati, since the distance from Jorhat as well as from Gauhati was too great to admit of effective supervision from the officers in-charge of those stations.

As regards Upper Assam, Scott's proposals were clear and precise.² If the Supreme Government desired, this division might be permanently annexed to the British dominion; and in that event it must be placed under an officer experienced in civil as well as military duties, and he was to be aided by another European Assistant. To make this division economic, Scott desired to have a thorough reorganisation of its revenue administration on the lines already begun by the late Political Agent. The official aristocracy, who would be victimised by these changes, would have, of course, to be compensated by absorbing them, as far as practicable, in petty judicial charges to be created for the purpose; and mainly by grants of land or in money to the extent of 10% of the gross collection. If the Supreme Council were of the opinion, that the retention of Upper Assam would not be a sound proposition, whether from the point of view of its profitability or from a notion that the proposed changes in administration might be productive of bitter discontent amongst the influential section of the people, it should be restored, as early as possible, to an Ahom prince on the lines previously suggested. Scott made it also clear,³ that it would be unreasonable to expect that the Ahom nobility and the members of a royal dynasty whose predecessors ruled the territory for several centuries, would relinquish their ancient rights 'upon the appearance amongst them a handful of strangers'. It was quite unlikely that the allowances proposed to be made in their favour would prevent them from making a bid for power. The British Government must, therefore, be prepared for years to come to meet insurrectionary movements as had already occurred. In any case, the Agent endeavoured to impress

¹ *Ibid.*

² *Ibid.*

³ *Ibid.*

on the authorities in Calcutta the urgent necessity of a change. 'An imperfect British administration', he observed;¹

'whether occasioned by a deficiency of European officers or by an adherence to customs that are incompatible with the spirit of our rule must be worse than a native one, which at least possesses a perfect knowledge of the laws, customs, and prejudices of its subjects and an intimate acquaintance with their peculiar revenue system on which, if it is to be maintained in its present shape, so much depends.'

In spite of these cogent and forceful reasonings, when the report was discussed in the next month at the Fort William, the Vice-President in Council reviewed the whole subject from the narrow angle of economy and ignored the vitally important strategical objectives of the North-East Frontier. If the resourceful and populous part of the country was to be surrendered to a native prince, it was argued,² what benefit would accrue out of the 'unprofitable and isolated tract' of Sadiya, the defence of which could also be entrusted to the native prince proposed to be restored or to a chief of the Singphos? They were inclined even to make over this part of the territory to Gambhir Singh, the Raja of Manipur. Lord William Bentinck, since succeeding Lord Amherst as the Governor-General (1828-34), to whom the recommendations were referred for his consideration, however, took a realistic view of the whole situation. He dismissed the very idea of bringing in the Manipur *Raj* or any other chief to complicate matters further, and agreed with Scott the absolute necessity of maintaining a British outpost at Sadiya lest the security of the frontier, as a whole, be jeopardised. As to Upper Assam, the sole criterion depended, according to the Governor-General, on whether annexation or retention would contribute to the greatest good of the Government and the governed. Though he deprecated the policy of appeasement so persistently advocated by Scott since the territory was conquered from the Burmese without any aid from the ruling family, he agreed on the main lines to the restoration of an Ahom Prince; for he was highly impressed with the fact that a monarchy which had lasted without any break for more than six centuries might be 'intrinsically good', and under 'the support and advice of a British officer'

¹ *Ibid.*

² B. P. C., June 10, No. 58.

might be conducive to the well-being of the people. The Agent to the Governor-General was, accordingly, advised on September 2, 1831, to submit concrete proposals to implement his much-cherished project.¹ In the mean time, to gain further information about the North-East Frontier, the Supreme Government deputed Captain Jenkins and Lieutenant Pemberton to undertake a survey of Assam, Cachar and Manipur.

APPENDIX B.

*Political Consultations, Bengal, 1830 ; September 24, No. 76 .
Neufville to the Agent, June 14, 1830.*

LETTER A.

The *Burphookan* writes to the *Suddeyakhowa Gohayan*—

To you and the *Bursenaputtee* the Surgeedco has deputed me. On the road there are many dangers for which reason having remained with the *Dangoreeya* (Pealeeya Burgohayn) I have sent his son. If you wish for a Surgeedco and the restoration (to power) of the seven noble houses, you will not neglect to send along with the young man the soldiers under your orders. We also have taken measures. If you think that this is false, send your own man to inspect (our force). I write to you, because your elder brother and uncle were always united with the seven noble houses. On this account I write. Do not fail.

Seal of the Bur Booroowa :

LETTER B.

From Peyalleeya Burphookan (Borgohain ?)

To *Suddeeyakhowa Bappa*. I write. I am well and I hope you also are so. You sent a boat and men for me, but I could

¹ B. P. C., 1831 ; September 2, No. 2.

not go, because Surgedeo has made the *Burphooken* the chief and collected the *Booroowas* and *Phookens* of the seven noble families and the *Koonwars* and musketeers. We have got the *Bursenaputtee's* second son and the *Bur Booroowa's* son; besides them Jyntea, Moghal, Munnipur, the Garrows, (the) Doplas and (the) Nagas have all conspired together. On this account, I cannot go, but I send your brother (his son Hurnath and implying, that he considered the *Suddeeyakhowa Gohayn* as his son also). Before this the Surgedeo has spoken to you, now also the seven noble houses say to you, if you wish to see us restored, give us some men secretly and.....you apparently keep terms with the *Bengalees*.* Do not fail. The Surgedeo has enrolled your name with the three (the three *Dangoreeyas* or magnates). The person sent, is inexperienced. You will teach and show him everything. Upon you we rest our hopes.

True translation

D. SCOTT

Agent to the Governor-General.

* Rather *white Bengalees*, implying the Englishmen.

CHAPTER III

REFORM AND REORGANISATION

The harrowing tales of the affairs of Assam, due to its mismanagement, never failed to move the authorities in England. 'It unfortunately appears certain, from whatever cause we have, hitherto, governed Assam extremely ill.....the country had been retrograding, its inhabitants emigrating..., its villages decaying and its revenue annually declining; although, the natural advantages of Assam is stated to be far superior to Arracan, which since it has been subject to our rule is said to have been advanced in prosperity'.¹ With these pointed remarks in their despatch of December 3, 1834, the Court of Directors expressing deep regret directed the Governor-General of India to lose no time in relieving the unfortunate ryots by framing a plan of administration providing securities for integrity and efficiency in the subordinate agents of the Government.

In the mean while, to arrest the existing evils some attempts had been made by the local authorities. Throughout the twenty-six *parganas* of Kamrup, Scott made it a rule that the *Choudhuris* should be elected by the people; in Darrang, he went so far as to introduce the system of universal suffrage and vote by ballot.² He exercised a vigorous system of espionage over the *Omlah*, and encouraged the police to receive customary bribes provided they were reported to the local Magistrates. If any one was detected of offering a bribe or receiving one without reporting it, the informer received the whole or in part according to circumstances.³ Being fully conscious of the fact that scarcity of currency was one of the main causes

¹ C.D., 1834; December 3, No. 14, para 6.

² B.P.C., 1833; May 30, No. 93; White, A. : *A Memoir of David Scott*, p. 22.

³ B.P.C., 1832; July 23, No. 70; see private letter, White to the Agent, May 28.

of the misery of the ryots, Scott repeatedly urged upon the Government of Bengal the necessity of inviting foreign capitalists into the province and of encouraging costly but exportable articles. He offered every facility for the production of silk worms, brought weavers from Rangpur to teach the people improved methods of preparing and spinning *muga* silk, and established several seri-cultural firms at Desh Darrang and Nowgong.¹ To give the Assamese a vocational bias, Scott represented to the Government of Bengal that an amount be earmarked from the revenues of the province for imparting lessons on arts and crafts. 'I am very much doubtful' he observed² :

'Whether one should not present consult the interest of the inhabitants in Assam by instructing them in those useful arts, such as carpentry, husbandry etc., which would appear to be more appropriate pursuits than literature in a country where boats continue to be made from trunks of trees, where use of saw, a wheel-carriage or even a beast of burden is unknown, where half of the surface of a rich soil capable of producing every article of tropical growth lies waste.'

Most of the laudable projects, as mentioned above, remained in cold storage on account of the unsympathetic attitude then exhibited by the Government of Bengal. The Commissioner's endeavours to relieve the distress of the ryots, in spite of the best of intentions, too, failed in their objectives. By giving the people a share in their local administration he hoped to check the undue influence of subordinate officials, but they were invariably led by demagogues who induced them to elect undesirable persons; and, usually, 'some powerful men in the district picked up some 200 or 300 free-holders until they agreed to vote for him and march them up in triumph to the place of election.'³ He allowed the officials to receive bribes if these were reported, but that did not make them 'more moral'; corruption continued to be rife, in spite of his vigilance, in the rank and file of the *Omlahs*. From the difficulty of obtaining qualified persons, it became at times, necessary as Captain White admitted 'to employ *Omlahs*

¹ B.P.C., 1831; June 10, No. 50; May 7, 1830, No. 51; also White, A. : *A Memoir of David Scott*, pp. 25-26.

² B.P.C., 1830; May 7, No. 51.

³ White, A. : *A Memoir of David Scott*, pp. 22-23.

convicted of bribery' and not infrequently 'the refuse of the other Zillas' of Bengal.¹ Too late, Scott discovered that the existing administrative arrangements, the *khel* system in particular, had become an anachronism. In absence of effective supervision, not only had the personnel become corrupt, but they were now hopelessly inefficient. To discharge the duties of civil and criminal justice, revenue settlements and multifarious activities in the extensive frontier, Scott had the assistance of only one European officer, namely Captain White, in addition to the Political Agent, Upper Assam. He was obsessed with the idea that the existing state of revenue did not justify additional hands and, therefore, he always hesitated to demand an increase in the establishment. It was after the death of Captain Neufville when he was himself bed-ridden that he made a request to the Government of Bengal to relieve him of some of his functions. 'Doubtless Scott attempted' as Robertson later remarked 'more than he was equal to perform'.²

Since September 1829, Scott had been suffering from troubles of the heart, and under heavy pressure of work his health completely broke down. Normally, he commenced hearing petitions at daybreak and continued at his desk till it was dark. 'This incessant labour' his biographer tells us, 'accelerated the progress of his malady'.³ For the last thirteen months of his life, he was practically lying prostrate at Cherrapunji, where on August 28, 1831, he breathed his last at the premature age of forty five, with a last minute request to his attendants—'I wish you Gentlemen, to bear witness to the Government, that I am no longer able to conduct the affairs of the country'.⁴

Mr. Scott was not endowed with the administrative calibre of the highest order, but he evinced a vigour and power of understanding that was unique. He had had his failures, but was resourceful and had the sagacity to learn from his mistakes. After all, he steered Assam through one of the most chaotic

¹ B.P.C., 1832; July 23, No. 70; see private letter, White to the Agent, May 28.

² B.P.C., 1832; July 23, No. 70.

³ White, A : *A Memoir of David Scott*, p. 59.

⁴ B.P.C., 1831; September 2, Nos. 125-126; White, A.; *A Memoir of David Scott*, pp. 136-7.

periods of her history and earned the gratitude of the posterity as her saviour from the domination of the Burmese. He was indeed the patriarch of the Assamese. With an unimpeachable character and unparalleled sense of public duty, he devoted all his exertions to their all-round development. His persistent representations for the restoration of the Ahom monarchy, his generosity and conciliatory manners to the distressed nobility, his keen appreciation of the sentiment and requirements of the Assamese and his sincere endeavours to employ none but the children of the soil, for all these, he is held in highest esteem and admiration. Indeed 'no Assamese could have more efficiently championed the cause of his country as did Scott.'¹ Rightly the following epitaph is inscribed in his tombstone at Cherrapunji :

'By his demise the Government has been deprived of a most zealous, able and intelligent servant whose loss it deeply laments, while his name will long be held in grateful remembrance and veneration by the native population, to whom he was justly endeared by his impartial dispensation of justice, and his kind and conciliatory manners and his constant and unwearied endeavours to promote their happiness and welfare'.

Pending permanent arrangements, Mr. Cracroft was deputed in September, 1831, to officiate as the Agent to the Governor-General, North-East Frontier and Commissioner of Rangpur. In the mean while, Captain White was directed to assume charge of the office of the Political Agent, Upper Assam, left vacant by the death of Captain Neufville, leaving Lieutenant Matthie, as the Magistrate and Collector of Gauhati.²

The officiating Agent was not slow to discover that the worst possible conditions of maladministration were manifesting themselves in Lower Assam, since its volume of business in both of the revenue and judicial departments exceeded those of other districts taken together. To relieve the duties of this extensive division Cracroft procured, in early 1832, the approval of the Government of Bengal the transfer of six *parganas* of Kamrup in the west—Bouse, Chake Bouse, Barnagar, Barpeta, Bagaribari and Nagarberra—to the jurisdiction of the officer in-charge of

¹ Bhuyan, S. K. : *Anglo-Assamese Relations*, p. 574.

² B.P.C., 1831 ; August, 5 Nos. 19-20 ; September 2, No. 126.

³ B.P.C., 1832 ; April 9, Nos. 62-65.

North-East Rangpur.³ To deal with the criminal cases of minor importance, he also procured the appointment of Haliram Dhekial Phukan, an Assamese of rank and respectability, as an Assistant Magistrate at Gauhati.¹ In the mean time, to unveil the mysteries of existing disorders the officiating Commissioner deputed Lieutenant Rutherford to Darrang and, a few months later, Lieutenant Bogle to the six *parganas* of Kamrup, since transferred to North-East Rangpur.²

After making extensive tours in their respective districts the investigating officers revealed facts which were, indeed, alarming. The existing confusions, they attributed to the paucity of European officers and the ignorance of those employed of the resources of the country and the condition of the people, demands on the part of the Government founded on no certain data and a system of irregular and undefined additional assessments, improvident acceptance of engagement by the *Choudhuris*, rapid change in the local superintendence of collection, corrupt practices and intrigues of the *Omlahs* at the Sadar station, a confused and scattered distribution of the position of *parganas*, embezzlement by all parties etc; consequently,

'there had been a direct tendency to reduce the ryots to a state of poverty and dejection of the most distressing nature, to cause a great decrease in population, to impede cultivation, to ruin those resources whence the Government might have somehow derived a handsome revenue, to create constant distrust and anxiety in the minds of the people, to eradicate every feeling of gratitude towards their rulers and to enrich a few worthless beings at the expenses of the whole population of the country'.³

In spite of huge arrears, they found 'there is no revenue due from the ryots' and that 'the people have not now the means of paying more' and, therefore, they felt convinced that the 'country requires (at the moment) fostering'. Towards rehabilitation, they suggested the remission of all irrecoverable balances. That encouragement must be held out for the return of fugitive ryots by allowing them to re-occupy their own lands or to occupy new ones rent-free for a certain period and subject them after-

¹ B.P.C., 1832; March 19, Nos. 81-82.

² B.P.C., 1832, April 9, Nos. 65-66.

³ B.P.C., 1833; May 30, No. 89; Bogle to Robertson, February

wards to a moderate assessment. They further proposed to form settlements for a period of years, to break the larger and scattered *parganas* into smaller and more convenient divisions for which engagements were to be taken separately from respectable men residing or possessing influence in the locality and the latter were to institute every enquiry practicable for the proper determination of the amount of assessment and also to endeavour to render the system more simple and certain by consolidating all separate claims upon the ryots into one single Government demand.¹

In April 1832, Mr. Cracroft was relieved of his duties by Mr. T. C. Robertson.² A man of untiring zeal, approved talents and of high moral character, Robertson began his official career in 1806, and had served under various capacities in Bihar and Bengal. He was appointed, in 1825, the Agent and Civil Commissioner of Arakan and, in the same year, he rendered valuable assistance in the peace negotiations with Burma. In the management of civil and political functions, mainly in conducting the transactions with the court of Ava, Robertson distinguished himself by his marked prudence, judgement and discretion.³

The Commissioner soon apprised himself of the whole situation. He felt that a thorough overhauling was necessary in all the departments. He directed his attention immediately to the revenue reforms and acted upon most of the remedial measures proposed by Bogle and Rutherford. The collection of arrears in several *parganas* were held in abeyance; and towards the close of 1832, the *barangani* and other imposts were abolished in Darrang and some areas of Kamrup throwing the entire burden on land and a capitation tax, as given below⁴ :

District :	Land per <i>pura</i>			Capitation tax.
	1st class.	2nd class.	3rd class.	
Kamrup	1-0	-12-0	-6-	Rs. 3/- to As. -/12/- per house.

¹ R.J.L.B., 1834; October 27, No. 12.

² B.P.C., 1832; May 7, No. 26.

³ Personal Records, Vol. 18; Buckland : *Indian Biography*, p. 362.

⁴ B.R.C., 1836; March 1, No. 40; see also A.S. File No. 298. *Report on the Judicial and Revenue Administration, Assam, 1836.*

District :	Land per <i>pura</i>			Capitation tax.
	1st class.	2nd. class.	3rd class.	
Durrang	1-8	-12-0	-4-	Re. 1/- to As. -/8/- per hearth.
Nowgong	1-0	-8-	---	Re. 1/- per head.

As a security against extortion, every revenue officer was, hereafter, required to submit returns showing (a) abstract statement regarding the total quantity of land, the number of hearths and homes, as the case might be, in the village; (b) detailed statement regarding the quality and quantity of land cultivated and the name of each ryot, and also (c) the name and the number of hearths and homes. After a thorough scrutiny, the statements formed the basis upon which settlements were made. After the revenue being ascertained, title deeds or *pattas* were issued specifying therein the amount to be paid by each ryot under the signature and seal of the Collector. Revenue officers were prohibited on pain of a heavy fine and dismissal from realising more than was noted against a ryot's name. Proclamations were also issued that payee should obtain a receipt for every payment he made to Government. Copies of all these records were to be kept at the Collectors office for reference in case of complaints of extortion or otherwise.¹

Settlements were thus made directly with the ryots. The revenue officials became, hereafter, nothing more than *Tahsildars* receiving a remuneration varying from 7 to 15 per cent of the gross collection with duties limited to aiding the assessment and collection of revenue and, occasionally, trying trifling cases either of land or of petty quarrels; but they were strictly prohibited from inflicting a fine or any other punishment without a reference to the Collector in-charge.² In consequence of the reorganisation of the *parganas*, the number of revenue units decreased, throwing thereby a large number of former officials out of employment.³ The revenues were no where uniform nor equitably distributed; taxes on account of one's caste or calling and the capitation taxes of earlier times also continued to be levied irrespective of the rich and the poor. The results of the new measures were, nevertheless, beneficial to the

¹ *Ibid.*² *Ibid.*³ A.S. File No. 637, 1839; the Assessment of the Six *paraganas* 1839-40; Jenkins to the Board of Revenue, October 8, 1839.

ryots. While touring in the Six *parganas* of Kamrup, Bogle found, in early 1834, that many ryots who had previously deserted repaired back to their villages and the country was slowly assuming its former appearance.¹ Precautionary measures were now taken to frustrate extortion, defining the demand not only upon every village or *mouza* but on every ryot. He was no longer harassed for any taxes to meet the outlay on *mufasil* police or miscellaneous imposts. The subordinate officials were also subjected, before long, to a more effective supervision, which combined with aforesaid measures provided for the security and welfare of the ryots.

Robertson felt that great injustice had already been done to this much-neglected province by reposing its responsibilities, entirely in a single solitary functionary—the Agent to the Governor-General, North-East Frontier, overburdened as he was with multifarious duties. 'It must be remembered', he observed, '(Assam) had, hitherto, been treated as a thing of little value and that in its comparison with our other provinces, it may . . . be said not to have had fair play';² From the very beginning, Robertson, however, held a poor view of the efficiency of the 'native agency' and, therefore, he felt convinced that nothing could succeed in Assam without effective supervision by European officials. To relieve the Agent to the Governor-General, he suggested the appointment of an officer next to him in rank to be aided by a number of able assistants with headquarters at Gauhati. The province was to be divided into a number of districts, and each to be placed under a permanent incumbent, an Assistant to the Commissioner vested with powers at responsibilities of the Magistrate and Collector.³ The strong terms in which Robertson commented on the attitude of the Supreme Government towards the affairs of Assam forced them to arrive at a final decision as to the administrative reorganisation of the province. The Government of Bengal approved, in early 1833, the revenue measures already given effect to by the Commissioner of Assam, and the latter was further advised to

¹ B.R.C., 1834; July 21, Nos. 6-7.

² B.P.C., 1833; May 30, No. 93.

³ *Ibid.*

extend these measures into remaining areas, abolishing, altogether, the imposts on clans or families'.¹ An irrecoverable balance to the extent of rupees seventy two thousand was at the same time ordered to be written off.² In his lengthy minute on March 27, Lord William Bentinck, the Governor-General, accorded his approval, with some modifications, to the proposal made by the local authorities. Accordingly, the territories on the west of the river Dhansiri were to be divided into five districts, as under (i)—North-East Rangpur or Gowalpara (ii) Six *Parganas*, roughly the present subdivision of Barpeta including Nagarbera. (iii) Lower Assam with twenty *parganas*, mostly on the north, and the nine *duars* on the south, (iv) Central Assam comprising Naduar, Charduar and Darrang (Desh Darrang) on the north, Nowgong and Raha on the south of the river Brahmaputra. (v) Bishwanath, from the river Bharali to Bishwanath on the north together with the territory known as Morung, extending from Kaliabor to the river Dhansiri.³

In each district, it was provided that an officer designated as the Principal Assistant to the Commissioner (P.A.) be placed, who was to be aided in his duties by a Junior Assistant; the former to draw a consolidated salary of rupees one thousand and the later rupees five hundred per month. The paucity of duly qualified officers however rendered necessary some adjustments in the arrangements. The district of Lower Assam was placed under Lieutenant Matthie; while the Six *parganas*, which were attached for a few months to the district Gowalpara, were subsequently placed under a Junior Assistant, separately, with headquarters at Barpeta. Captain Bogle was appointed as the Principal Assistant, Central Assam, with Lieutenant Rutherford as his Assistant at Nowgong. Later, in consequence of the vacancy caused by Matthie's departure on sick-leave Bogle had to be transferred to Gauhati and, consequently, Rutherford was placed in charge of Central Assam; while Lieutenant Vetch, an officer of the A. L. I., was to supervise, independently, the affairs of Nowgong and Raha, extending his jurisdiction to Jamunamukh and Dharampur which were annexed

¹ B.P.C., 1833; May 30, No. 110; P.L.I.B., 1834; January 16, No. 2.

² *Ibid.*

³ *Ibid.*

about this time from Cachar. Captain White, now divested of all civil duties, continued to function as the Political Agent, Upper Assam, with the Command of the Assam Light Infantry at Bishwanath.¹

The experimental division of Central Assam into two separate units, as stated above, when found to have worked satisfactorily was made permanent, in 1834, by upgrading its Junior Assistant into a Principal Assistant; on the other hand, on the failure of anticipated relief to the officer in-charge of Kamrup by the separation of the six *parganas*, requiring its Junior Assistant always to be present at Gauhati, the *parganas* were reannexed. A Junior Assistant was, later, added to the establishment of Gowalpara to maintain law and order on the Garo hill frontier. Within a few years, the conventional designations of the districts assumed popular names, which were as follows :²

<i>Old division</i>	<i>New district</i>	<i>Headquarters</i>
North-East Rangpur	Gowalpara	Gowalpara.
Lower Assam	Kamrup	Gauhati.
North Central Assam	Darrang	Mangaldai
South Central Assam.	Nowgong.	Nowgong.

The Principal Assistant was to officiate as a judge, magistrate and collector. In civil cases, he was vested with powers of deciding original suits from rupees five hundred to one thousand and to hear all appeals from the lower courts.³ All suits exceeding rupees one thousand as well as special appeals were to be referred to the Commissioner. In each district, there existed two other courts. (i) The *munsif's court* vested with the powers of trying original suits from rupees one hundred to five hundred, whether of personal or real property, and to hear appeals from the *panchayets* and (ii) the *panchayets* vested with power of investigating petty suits up to rupees one hundred. In criminal cases, the Principal Assistant exercised the same authority as a Magistrate of Bengal with the additional duties of investigating heinous offences with the aid of a *jury*. At the close of investigation, the proceedings were to be transmitted to the court

¹ *Ibid.*

² R.J.L.B., 1836; June 14, No. 1.

³ B.R.C., 1836; March 1, No. 40; Matthie to Jenkins, February 15, 1835.

of the Commissioner, to which the verdict of the *jury* and the magistrate's statements, thereon, were annexed for final orders.¹

The *mufasil panchayets* were to be abolished ; suits which had, hitherto, been tried by these tribunals and also by the revenue officials, whose judicial powers had since been abrogated, were now to be investigated under supervision and control of European officers by the civil *panchayets* at Gauhati and the *munsif's* courts set up for the purpose at Biswanath, Charduar, Na-duar (Darrang) and Nowgong.² The *Chaudhuris*, the *Patgiris* and other revenue officials were deprived of their police duties and, therefore, the *thana* establishment which had, hitherto, been confined to the headquarters had to be extended, gradually, to the thickly populated areas ; although, the aforesaid officials were required to aid the police authorities in the detection and seizure of criminals in their respective jurisdictions.³

Lord William Bentinck had agreed on principle, as already referred to, to the restoration of an Ahom Prince in Upper Assam ; but the interim arrangement following the death of Scott delayed the matter from being carried into effect. Robertson viewed the subject rather differently from that of his predecessor. When he was called upon, after his assumption of office, to express his sentiment on the project of restoration, he strongly recommended⁴ the retention of Upper Assam as an integral part of the British dominion if the Government was prepared to spare an adequate number of European officers and provide for the ruling families ; failing which, of course, he was decidedly in favour of making over the territory in question to a native prince. He remarked : 'the system hitherto pursued in Assam has been something of a middle character, in which European principle of government was brought into action without the aid of European integrity to carry into practice ; and the consequence has been the native agents relieved from the dread of prompt and fearful punishment . . . have continued in an almost undisguised excess of extortion and abuse'. 'Conceiving a middle course to be worst of any', Robertson concluded, 'I cannot hesitate to recommend

¹ *Ibid.*

² *Ibid.* ; see statement showing native establishment ; also B.P.C., 1834 ; May 30, No. 94.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ B.P.C., 1832 ; July 30, No. 92.

that it be, forthwith, abandoned and one or the other of the systems, before alluded to, be established instead.¹

In the event of Government's agreeing to restoration, Robertson proposed that the headquarters of the Political Agent, Upper Assam, and the main wing of the Assam Light Infantry be located at Jorhat, and a small area of four square miles be retained by the British authorities within Raja's territory for the purpose of the cantonment. He further agreed² with Scott to maintain a frontier post at Sadiya under a European officer, but the expense of this establishment should be borne by the *Bar-senapati*, the Moamaria chief; for this purpose, the services of the contingent supplied by him would have to be commuted for a payment of tribute to the extent of Rs. 50,000.³

The administrative confusion coupled with repeated uprisings in Upper Assam had already convinced the authorities in Calcutta, that with the best of intentions, it would not be possible on the part of the British Government to ensure such a degree of good government in that territory as would be conducive to the well-being of the different sections of the people. The unyielding attitude of the official aristocracy weighed heavily on their minds; of late, it was found extremely difficult to absorb them under the Government nor was it possible to provide pecuniary assistance for all when the revenues of the territory barely met the charges on the establishment. In these circumstances, and strengthened by the views of the Agent to the Governor-General, Lord William Bentinck confirmed his earlier decision about the restoration of an Ahom Prince in Upper Assam.³ He had also agreed to fix the headquarters of the A. L. I. at Jorhat, but the question of imposing a tribute in lieu of the contingent on the Moamaria chief was left to be decided upon, in due course, by the Political Agent, Upper Assam. On the main subject of restoration, the Vice-President in Council, too, on this occasion, concurred with the Governor-General; but as he had entertained some doubts as to the propriety of cantoning the British troops within a foreign state, it was decided that Bishwanath should be retained as the headquarters

¹ *Ibid.*

² *Ibid.*

³ B.P.C., 1832; November 5, No. 4.

of the Assam Light Infantry.¹ It was, therefore, resolved in October 1832, to assign Upper Assam 'experimentally' to a member of the Ahom royal family who might be considered fit to conduct the administration on the principles of the former government and to the satisfaction of all the classes.

The question then arose—who was to be raised to the *Raj*? There were two principal claimants—ex-Raja Chandra Kanta and Purandar Singha, besides several others of the royal family of full age and not disqualified by scars. Purandar's claim to succession had been held superior to that of Chandra Kanta in view of his descent from King Rajeswar Singha (1751-69), son of Rudra Singha (1696-1714), whereas the latter descended from a collateral line viz. Lechai, the Namrupia Raja. According to the strict law of primogeniture, which was, of course, not scrupulously followed by the former government, no one had a better claim than Giridhar, the Namrupia Raja, who was then alive; for he was the son of Rajeswar Singha's second son, whereas Purandar was the grandson of the third son.

Chandra Kanta's title to succeed his brother Kamaleswar was considered by Scott² as 'indisputable'; although, he was not favourably disposed towards him on account of his 'connections with the Burmese', 'extreme imbecility of mind' and 'aptitude to be easily misled by others'. Purandar, too, Scott believed was 'easily swayed by low favourites' and was of 'rather intractable disposition'; but he had 'more ability and general information than his rival'. In one of his later recommendations, Scott definitely discarded the claims of Chandra Kanta in favour of Purandar whom the district authorities, too, supported as 'the person best fitted to be at the head of the state to be created'³ Robertson, under advice from the Supreme Government, held several interviews with the rival candidates and finally reported his favourable opinion of Purandar's qualifications to fill the post. He felt that Chandra Kanta was not likely to be satisfied with the restoration of a portion of his former possessions, while his rival would accept the elevation 'as a boon' and accede faithfully to any terms on which the *Raj* might be bestowed on

¹ B.P.C., 1832; November 5, No. 5.

² B.S.P.C., 1826; July 14, No. 2.

³ B.P.C., 1831; June 10, No. 50.

him. Apparently, it was not legality but expediency that, ultimately, decided the issue in favour of Purandar Singha.¹ After preliminaries being completed, on March 2, 1833, on behalf of the East-India Company, Robertson entered into an agreement with Purandar Singha at Gauhati, the main provisions of which were as follows :²

(1). The Company made over to Raja Purandar Singha the portion of Assam lying on the south bank of the Brahmaputra to the east of the river Dhansiri and on the northern bank to the east of a small river near Bishwanath.

(2). The Raja promised to pay to the East-India Company an annual tribute of Rs. 50,000.

(3). The Raja bound himself in the administration of justice to abstain from the practices of the former Raja's of Assam, as to cutting off ears and noses, extracting eyes or otherwise mutilating or torturing, and that he would, generally, assimilate the administration of justice in his territory to that which prevailed in the Company's possession. Further, he would not permit the immolation of women by *Sati*.

(4). He also agreed to listen with attention to the advice of the Political Agent, Upper Assam, or to that of the Agent to the Governor-General.

(5). He further promised to surrender on demand from the British officials any fugitive from justice who might take refuge in his territory; and he was to apply to those officers for the arrest of any individuals who might flee from his territory into the Company's or of any other states.

(6). It was distinctly understood that the treaty invested the Raja with no power over the Moamarua country of the *Barsenapati*.

(7). In the event of Purandar's continuing faithful to the terms of the treaty, the British Government agreed to protect him from foreign aggression, but if he should in any way depart from a faithful adherence to the same and be guilty of oppressing the people of the country entrusted to his charge, it was reserved to the East-India Company either to transfer the said territory to another ruler, or to take it into its own immediate occupation.

In the meanwhile, the report of the surveys of Assam, Cachar and Manipur conducted by Captains Jenkins and Pemberton reached the Government of Bengal. By throwing a flood of new light on the political, economic and strategical significance of eastern Assam and reaffirming the verdict of

¹ B.P.C., 1832; July 30, No. 92; February 4, 1833; Nos. 123-124.

² B.P.C., 1833; 30, No. 91; Aitchison : *Treaties*, etc. Vol II. pp. 135-37.

Scott that the frontier nearabout Sadiya could not be abandoned in face of the doubtful fidelity of the neighbouring chiefs, the report brought about a revulsion of feeling in the mind of the Governor-General. In his minute on March 7, 1833, he expressed :¹ 'By giving over the specified portion, we surrender one third of the population of the country (and a corresponding revenue of a lakh) without being able.....to diminish in a great degree our establishment and consequent expenditure. It is not even anticipated that our military force can be reducedwhile we shall destroy all the relations at present existingbetween us and the powerful tribes around....' 'Upon the whole' he concluded, 'I rather consider this measure as one of somewhat hazardous policy whether as regards our interest or the welfare of the inhabitants of an important tract of the country.'² He was inclined even to reopen the whole issue, had it not been too late : much headway had already been made to give effect to the resolution of the Government, and as such, nothing could be done excepting some modification in the nature of the treaty by which the territory was bestowed on Purandar Singha.³

Evidently, the authorities at the Fort William displayed a lamentable indecision and vacillation in deciding the fate of Upper Assam; and even their final solution was not without some mental reservation. Purandar, too, shouldered the burdens of a country of doubtful value and at a price that was too high. The tribute was not based on the actual resources of the territory, but fixed on guesswork. In spite of it, to outbid his rivals, the crazy Prince undertook to collect the irrecoverable balances⁴ of the British Government besides paying annual *nazaranas* of considerable value. Worst of all, he agreed to surrender half of his revenues while his immediate neighbour, the Moamaria

¹ B.P.C., 1833; May 30, No. 88; Minute by Lord William Bentinck March 27.

² *Ibid.*

³ B.P.C., 1833; August 22, Nos. 70-71.

⁴ The arrears, on the eve of the restoration, amounted to Rs. 155,000/-; out of this a sum of Rs. 83,000/- was written off, and the Raja undertook to collect the balance on a commission of one anna in the rupee on such part of the amount he could recover; B.R.C., 1833; August 12, Nos. 3-4.

chief, paid practically nothing by way of tribute. The Court of Directors later remarked : 'It appears to us very doubtful whether this chief will be able to pay an annual tribute amounting to half of his gross revenue without involving himself in embarrassments.'¹

As a creature of the British Government Purandar was responsible to them alone. He was, theoretically, supreme in his own realm, unfettered by former checks, constitutional or otherwise ; but in the event of oppression or misgovernment, under the terms of the agreement, interference on the part of the Paramount Power had become an unpleasant necessity. The sword of Damocles which was thus constantly hanging over his head deprived him of his initiative, power, and even the respect of his own subjects. 'By reserving to ourselves the discretionary right of interference' observed the Court,² 'we should in fact, incur the obligation of interfering whenever the country is mismanaged, and experience justifies us in believing, that occasions for the exercise of this right would certainly occur, and at length be compelled to undo our own work.' That an arrangement of this nature could hardly succeed was felt by the Court of Directors from the very outset ; but they were confident that the measure might not be carried into effect inasmuch as Lord William Bentinck himself entertained great doubts as to the expediency of the project. No wonder, therefore, on the receipt of the subsequent despatch as to the surrender of Upper Assam, they were greatly amazed and highly dissatisfied even to the extent of censuring the action of the Governor-General. 'In carrying into effect a measure of so much importance, of such a questionable policy and of no urgency, whatever, without a previous reference to us, you have incurred our disapprobation.' 'We are only prevented from annulling the whole transaction' it was added, 'by our reluctance to do anything which might weaken your authority'.³ The restoration of the Ahom Monarchy under Raja Purandar had, in the mean time, been a *fait accompli*. Nothing was, therefore, left to the Court, but to authorize a fair trial of the 'experiment'.

¹ C. D., 1834 ; December 3, No. 14, para 39.

² *Ibid*, para 28.

³ *Ibid*, para 34.

CHAPTER IV.

AFFAIRS IN CACHAR

Eversince the treaty of Yandabo in 1826, the British Government had been haunted by the fear of another invasion from Burma, and this factor mainly governed their early relations with the native states and hill-tribes in the North-East Frontier. In the event of a war with Ava, it was greatly hoped that Manipur would form the strongest bulwark, and under this consideration Gambhir Sing was not only raised, as mentioned before, as the Sovereign ruler but was supplied with arms and means to maintain an army 3000 strong; for 'by assisting Gambhir..... we should improve the most powerful and effective check (against Ava)..... by obtaining at all times a ready passage into the heart of that country and receive as an ally a military power that would upon occasion prove really useful to us.'¹

The extreme indulgence even to the extent of indirect encouragement to commit acts of aggression, later, shown by the Government of Bengal to the ruler of Manipur fell injuriously upon Gobinda Chandra, the Raja of Cachar; for Gambhir aimed also at the acquisition of Cachar; and in fact, since early 1827, he had been following a policy of slow but steady penetration into the area west of the river Barak which formed, hitherto, the boundary between Cachar and Manipur. This region abounds in excellent timber besides valuable ivory, wax, grass and bamboos which could speedily be conveyed along the rivers that flow through it to the eager customers in the markets

¹ Because, as Scott pointed out, 'the Assamese and the Cacharees are, unfortunately, so timid and effeminate.....that the defence of these countries.....must be provided for in great measure by extraneous means; the Nagas, the Singphos, the Khamtis and other tribes to the eastward of Assam.....are perhaps too little advanced in the arts of civilization and of government to be able to make any effectual resistance against the numerous armies of the Burmese.....: Manipuris, on the otherhand,.....are imbued with all the military spirit, that distinguishes the Rajput tribes of Northern Hindustan.....' B.S.P.C., 1824; April 9, No. 8; also November 26, No. 9.

of Sylhet, Chattak and Nabiganj. The various Naga clans that occupied this tract owed but a nominal allegiance to the ruling house of Cachar and, therefore, with the threat of firearms that were in his possession the Raja of Manipur could without much difficulty bring these tribes under his authority, and subject them to the demands of *salami*, tribute and gratuitous services as labourers, wood-cutters and the like. In 1828, on the complaint lodged by Gobinda Chandra, when Mr. Tucker, the Commissioner of Sylhet, called upon Gambhir Singh to explain his conduct, the latter categorically denied the claim of the Barak as ever having formed the line of demarcation between his State and that of Cachar, and explained that he had merely brought the independent Nagas under his sphere of influence.¹ The initial successes emboldened the Manipur *Raj* to renew these acts of usurpation; for only after a few months he was found forcibly occupying the *ilaka* known as Chandrapur, wherein he had constructed houses of his own and quartered a large number of settlers from his territory.² When it was again demanded of him by the Commissioner to remove the Manipuris from Chandrapur, Gambhir made an evasive reply and, later, boldly asserted his claims to the *ilaka* as an heir to his paternal possession which his father received, as he stated, as a gift from Krishna Chandra, the former ruler of Cachar.³ Gobinda Chandra rightly argued, if Gambhir had ever such a claim, he would have preferred it when the treaty was made with him by the British Government; and in any case, his inability to produce any documentary evidence when called for, conclusively proved that he had no valid claim to the disputed possessions.⁴ At this stage, under advice from the Supreme Government, Mr. Scott, the Agent to the Governor-General, had to intervene. He summarily dismissed the claims of Gambhir Singh over the disputed *ilaka*, but to conciliate him he proposed to assign to him fifty *Kulbah** of land in the

¹ B.S.P.C., 1828; August 14, No. 8; *vide* copy of the letter from Gobinda Chandra to Mr. Tucker, 25 Bysakh, 1749. S.E.

² *Ibid.*

³ *Ibid.*; *vide* Tucker-Gobinda Chandra correspondence Nos. 6 and 7.

⁴ *Ibid.*

* The local measurement of land in Cachar was called *Kulbah* or *hal* (plough) which is equivalent to 4.82 acres.

same tract for the establishment of a magazine and to quarter, therein, some labourers for conveying the military stores to Manipur.¹ The proposal received the concurrence of the Governor-General in Council ; and Raja Govinda Chandra, reluctant as he was to grant even an inch of territory to his arch-enemy, had to acquiesce, ultimately, in the ceding of the tract in question.²

Evidently, Gambhir Singh received from the British Government a legal sanction for his usurpation, and Chandrapur became thenceforth the rendezvous of his operations. Therein, he had set up a police establishment of his own and encouraged its *thanadar*, directly and indirectly, to commit acts of aggression.³ The latter was reported to have detailed Manipuri sepoys to the Kachari villages and exacted forced labour of the Nagas of the plains who were acknowledged to have been the subjects of Cachar. Gambhir Singh encouraged the Manipuris in their habitual evasion of transit duties in the established *ghats* in Cachar, and levied unauthorized tolls at Chandrapur on the Kacharis who were accustomed to proceed up the river Barak for cutting grass, timber and bamboos. Further, he prevented the Kala Nagas and other tribes of the region from coming down into the plains, as heretofore, and compelled them to dispose of their cotton, ginger, pepper and other articles of produce at an arbitrary valuation fixed by himself or by his agents. Likewise, merchants were well-nigh stopped from having direct traffic with Manipur, and were forced to sell their commodities to him at Chandrapur, wherfrom these were conveyed across the hills. The activities of Gambhir Singh never failed to produce the wrath of the Agent to the Governor-General, who in a private letter asked him to desist from such proceedings ; otherwise, he was threatened that he would be forced to quit, altogether, the territory of Cachar.⁴ These remonstrances could hardly produce any change in the attitude of the Manipur Raj who was bent upon grabbing Cachar, if an opportunity presented itself.

The authority of the Raja Gobinda Chandra had been

¹ B.S.P.C., 1829 ; May 30, No. 1.

² B.S.P.C., 1829 ; July 31, No. 22.

³ B.S.P.C., 1832 ; July 23, Nos. 64-69 ; *vide* also the summary of the proceedings held in Cachar relative to Chandrapur.

⁴ B.S.P.C., 1830 ; February 26, Nos. 2-3.

challenged, within Cachar, by another formidable enemy, namely Tularam. Official sources trace the parentage of this Kachari chief to Ratnamala, a Manipuri slave (?) girl, and Kahi Dass (Dhur), a *khitmatgar*, in the service of Raja Krishna Chandra. Tularam supported by some Kacharis claimed his descent from Tamradhwaj, the fourth prince of the royal line.¹ Whatever may be his origin, at an early age, Tularam attracted the attention of Gobinda Chandra who on his accession invested him with the command of a wing of foot soldiers, commonly known as the *Chandy Paltan*. Soon Tularam shook off the yoke of his royal master and joined hands with his father who had since established a principality of his own in the hills of North Cachar. The period of confusion following the occupation of Cachar by the Manipuri adventurers afforded the valiant chief an opportunity to extend his sway and to enlist the support of a section of the Kacharis to make a bid for the rule of Cachar. It was not unlikely, that his ambition prompted him to ally himself with the Burmese when he found that his rival had already thrown his lot with the British. On the restoration of Gobinda Chandra, inevitably, friction arose between the two, which soon developed into hostilities. Gobinda Chandra was alleged to have treacherously murdered Kahi Dass and made several ineffectual attempts to dislodge Tularam from his hill possessions.² He treated Tularam as an usurper and ridiculed him as the son of a slave girl. In retaliation, Tularam aided by his two cousins Gobinda Ram and Durga Charan repeatedly descended on the plains of Cachar, and this caused so much alarm and panic that the ryots had to flee for their lives beyond the hills on the north.³ Being unable to repel these incursions Gobinda Chandra appealed for aid to the British Government. Mr. Scott, the Agent to the Governor-General, when he was called upon by the Supreme Government to effect a compromise between the two chiefs, personally, arrived at Sylhet in June, 1829, and succeeded

¹ B.S.P.C., 1829; May 30, No. 2; *vide* deposition of Dayaram Burman taken on March 27, 1828; B.P.C., 1832; May 14, Nos. 82, 100 and 112; *see* private letter Fisher to Jenkins March 17, 1832.

² B.S.P.C., 1829; May 30, No. 2; *vide* Tularam's *arzee* to the Commissioner of Assam, 5 *Phalgun*, 1749 S. E.

³ B.S.P.C., 1829; May 30, Nos. 4-5.

in inducing Gobinda Chandra to acknowledge Tularam as his *Senapati* or general with the formal charge of the areas which were then held under his jurisdiction. By the agreement on July 28, 1829, Gobinda Chandra undertook not to send any force to the area occupied by Tularam and his followers, in default of which he would forfeit claims of protection against aggressions from the British Government. At the same time, Tularam was confirmed in his possessions on condition that he would refrain from further encroachment on the territory of Cachar, on the violation of which he was threatened with expulsion from his possessions.¹

The persistent enmity of Gambhir Sing and Tularam made the position of Raja Gobinda Chandra wholly insecure; he was, therefore, dependent, throughout, on the British Government and for which he had to render his obligations to his liege-lord regularly. Here, too, he was confronted with immense difficulties. The territory of Cachar possessed vast resources and its plains were extremely fertile, but it was ruined and well-nigh depopulated during the period of invasions. 'Still many villages were empty', and it would be a work of years to return to their former prosperity. In spite of this, the tribute was fixed up at Rs. 10,000/- on a guess work by Lieutenant Fisher, that revenue derivable from Cachar would reach rupees three lakhs.² Mr. Scott confessed that the amount of revenue conjectured was 'greatly overrated' and the Raja could hardly pay the tribute 'without oppressing his subjects'. Actually, the Raja was in arrears³ for the first two years after his restoration; and through strong recommendations of the sympathetic Agent to the Governor-General, the amount was later remitted by the Supreme Government.⁴ The Raja knew well that such a 'boon' might not be repeated, and, therefore, he had to resort to all possible expedients

¹ B.S.P.C., 1829; August 14, Nos. 5 and 7.

² B.S.P.C., 1829; July 3, No. 6; Scott to Swinton June 19; August 14, No. 6.

³ *Ibid*; 'From all now I can learn' reported Scott, 'if the whole of southern Cachar were fully cultivated, it would not produce at ordinary rates of rent a gross revenue of above one lakh of rupees and also that such a state of things could not be brought about under the best management in a much larger period than ten or twelve years.'

⁴ B.S.P.C., 1827; November 23, Nos. 43-44.

to improve his finances. To effect economy in expenditure he had reduced the number of his Ministers from four to one. Hitherto, not less than fifty judges administered justice in different parts of the country; the whole business was now conducted by a few who were specially recruited for the purpose.¹ The administration of revenue was entrusted, as before, to the *Barbhandari*, but the services of revenue officials attached to each queen and members of the royal family were dispensed with. The immunities and the rent-free grants allotted to state officials and other dignitaries were also discontinued.² He made no change in the land tax which was generally, Rs. 5/- per *hal*; but the amount due from defaulters were recovered by distraint of property, confinement, and in cases where the land was abandoned by a collective fine on the *pargana* to which they belonged.³ Additional taxes were to be paid for cultivation of poppy, fruits and vegetables, for the manufacture of salt, and for privileges of holding titles, riding on a *dola*, wearing of gold ornaments or of having music at marriage and festivals. Above all, customs duties were levied at the river *ghats* on all articles of export, and these were invariably farmed out to the highest bidder.⁴ The Raja was also reported to have exercised a monopoly of trade in certain commodities particularly of grain, which could be sold by the merchants to him alone and at his own rate, and these were resold by the Raja with a margin.⁵

There is every reason to believe that the restrictions in trade hit the merchants hard, while much of the vexatious demands fell pressingly on the ryots which, naturally, rendered his rule highly unpopular. To their utter disappointment, the Kacharis also found that they were losing influence in their own state.⁶ In his endeavour to reorganise the revenue and judicial departments, as Fisher reported, Gobinda Chandra had to recruit a number of officials from Bengal : he felt that the Kacharis were incapa-

¹ B.P.C., 1832; May 14, Nos. 100-107.

² *Ibid.*

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ *Ibid.*; B.S.P.C., 1829; May 30, No. 2.

⁶ Hunter, Sir, W. W., *See Statistical Account of Assam*, Vol. II, pp. 394-95.

ble of following the new administrative details, for few of them could read or write their own or any other language.¹ He was also alleged to have acted in direct contravention of the established customs of the country by being a nominee of the British and particularly having married some Manipuri princess. According to the orthodox section, the Raja and his Ministers should be selected by a council known as the *Forty Sempungs*, and under no circumstances he was to marry a princess other than from the tribe called the *Hassoncha*.² In utter disgust, therefore, the disaffected Kacharis left the plains of Cachar; some joined hands with Tularam, while many migrated to Jayantia, Comilla and Tipperah.³

Backed by the moral support of his kinsmen Tularam publicly declared that Gobinda Chandra had forfeited the rule of Cachar by his tyranny and disregard of the established customs, and it was now up to the *Forty Sempungs* to elect a new ruler. A compromise between the two, however temporary, was effected, as has already been mentioned, through the mediation of Scott; but everyone knew that a scramble for power would ensue after the death of Gobinda Chandra, since the blessing of an heir was denied to him. In that event, Tularam was sure to assert his claim vigorously. Gambhir Sing, who had already taken a slice of the territory, would not let the opportunity slip to seize the whole of Cachar. What was the guarantee that the *Sempungs* or other aspirants might not be forthcoming to fish in troubled waters? Above all, there lay the interest of the Paramount Power. The territory offered no insurmountable difficulty to an invading power, while it effectively prevented operations of the British forces in the last war with Ava. Under better management Cachar 'would become the granary of the surrounding regions; and thus affording adequate supplies to the Manipurian country which is inhabited by a brave and sturdy race who

¹ B.P.C., 1832; April 9, No. 44; Fisher to Scott September 20, 1830.

² B.S.P.C., 1829; May 30, No. 4; See *arzee* of the *Forty Sempungs*, 24 Kartick, 1749 S.E. also of Tularam, 5 Phalgun; B.P.C., 1832; May 14, No. 82.

³ B.P.C., 1832; April 9, No. 44; Fisher to Scott, September 20, 1830.

have frequently offered noble resistance to the Burmese invaders, would thereby conduce to the security and tranquillity of our North-East Frontier.¹

Prompted by these fears and calculations, the authorities in Calcutta sought to effect a settlement with Raja Gobinda Chandra who was then growing old and bodily infirm. Through Mr. Tucker, the Commissioner of Sylhet, they sounded him towards the close of 1828, as to whether he was willing to make over the territory to the East-India Company after his death. Should he agree to the proposal, he was offered the bait that the Government might be disposed to relinquish the amount of tribute for the rest of his life.² Encircled, as he was, by a host of enemies, the Raja could not venture even to discuss such a proposal nor was he willing to give up the payment of tribute which he felt was the only security for the retention of power. Frankly he admitted, that if the British Government were under any circumstances to exonerate him from the payment of the tribute, he would lose the *Raj* within six months.³ Taking advantage of the opportunity the Raja expressed before the Commissioner his desire to adopt a child from amongst the royal families of Cachar with a view to continuing the line of succession. Although the Commissioner could not allow him to take such a step without a reference to the Supreme Government, he was deeply impressed with the difficulties faced by the unfortunate Raja. 'It appears', reported Tucker, 'that as long as the succession remained unsettled and in a manner open to all claimants, many turbulent character were restrained and kept quiet who might disturb the tranquillity of the country, if the door to their future hopes were finally closed against them.'⁴ The Governor-General in Council, therefore, felt it inexpedient to carry on the negotiations any further, but they desired Scott, the Agent to the Governor-General, to give his sentiments on the whole subject. Accordingly, after having an interview with the Raja,⁵ Scott reported in his letter of July 20, 1830, that the

¹ B.S.P.C., 1829; May 30, No. 6.

² B.S.P.C., 1829; May 30, No. 2.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *Ibid.*; vide copy of the translation of Tucker's letter to Gobinda Chandra.

⁵ B.S.P.C., 1829; May 30, No. 6.

British Government could not prevent the Raja from adopting a child as he had the sanction of Hindu Law in his favour, nor could they succeed to the *Raj* without having a specified agreement to that effect. However, he added : 'I am led to believe that there would not be much difficulty in obtaining from him the cession of Cachar in consideration of an adequate money payment and the assignment to him of a *Jaiger* where he might reside with security.....(on account of) the fears, that haunted him of being murdered by his enemies and competitors for the *Raj*.¹

While negotiations were in progress to enter into a new arrangement, Raja Gobinda Chandra was murdered on April 24, 1830. On the previous night, a gang of Manipuris in collusion with some attendants entered into the royal apartments, killed the Raja and several members of his family and set fire to the palace.² Terror struck into the hearts of the remaining members of the royal household, most of whom immediately fled across the river Barak. Mr. Furgund, the Magistrate of Sylhet, hurriedly posted a detachment in Cachar and reported the matter to the Government of Bengal. Pending a permanent settlement, in June 1830, the district was placed under Lieutenant Fisher, who was then on survey duties at Sylhet, with the powers of a Magistrate and Collector.³

It was strongly suspected even by Scott, the Agent to the Governor-General, who started an enquiry into the case, that the atrocity had been committed under the orders of Gambhir Sing, the Raja of Manipur.⁴ There had been, as we have already seen, repeated disputes between the two chiefs over several matters, and only about a fortnight before the occurrence, Gobinda Chandra had to solicit the Agent to the Governor-General for military aid against Gambhir Sing, who was reported to have despatched a force to seize Cachar in concert with Tularam.⁵ It was also presumed that the late Raja had taken

¹ B.S.P.C., 1829; August 14, No. 5; Scott to Swinton, July 20.

² B.P.C., 1830; May 14, No. 38.

³ B.P.C., 1830; June 18, No. 62.

⁴ *Ibid*; Scott to Swinton, June 6.

⁵ B.P.C., 1830; May 28, No. 84; Furgund to Scott, April 12, 1830.

preparatory steps for the adoption of a male child shortly before his death and that might have hastened the tragedy.¹ On the other hand, Lieutenant Fisher, since appointed as the officer-in-charge of Cachar, who was expected to have firsthand knowledge of the event, held the view that 'the existence of domestic conspiracy is more certain than was at first supposed.'² Though the murder was committed by the followers of Gambhir, and perhaps under his orders, Fisher felt that the conduct of a number of Kacharis holding positions in the court of the Raja was extremely suspicious. Gaur Shyam, a confidential agent of the Raja of Manipur, Balaram Sing, a *Havildar* under Gobinda Chandra, Bidyananda, the latter's *vakil*, Ramgovind and several others—all alleged to have been implicated in the murder, were apprehended and later tried by the officiating Magistrate.³ The latter, in agreement with the jury, passed the verdict of guilt and sentenced all of them to death; but the Supreme Government commuted the sentences to transportation of life and even acquitted some, since the evidence in most cases was found 'circumstantial and presumptive'.⁴

As already anticipated there appeared several claimants to the vacant throne of Cachar. Indraprabha, the eldest queen of the late Raja, prayed to the East-India Company to confirm her in her hereditary possessions. Tularam, the rebel chief, came down from the hills and formally claimed the rule of Cachar as a descendant from the ruling family. In an *arzee*, the *Forty Sempungs* asserted their right to elect the Raja from amongst their own rank. Doubting perhaps the strength of his own claims, Gambhir Sing, submitted also an alternative proposal—to farm-out Cachar for a period of twenty years in return for an annual revenue of rupees fifteen thousand.⁵ The case of the queen was half-heartedly supported by Mr. Scott, who recommended the authorities to grant her the territory on a *Zamindari* basis in anticipation that in no distant future the estate would escheat to the

¹ B.P.C., 1832; April 9, No. 44.

² B.P.C., 1832; Fisher to Cracroft, September 26, 1830.

³ B.P.C., 1832; April 9, Nos. 44 and 49.

⁴ B.P.C., 1832; April 9, No. 56.

⁵ B.S.P.C., 1832; November 25, No. 63.

British Government as the queen was already advanced in years.¹ Feeling, that such an arrangement would simply prolong the misrule in Cachar, Mr. Cracroft, now officiating as Agent to the Governor-General, opposed the proposal. He had also misgivings about whether the queen would be acceptable to the people, a substantial section of whom, particularly the immigrant Hindus, might question the validity of her marriage as she was once betrothed to Krishnachandra, the brother of Gobinda Chandra.² Likewise, Cracroft dismissed the pretensions of Tularam since he was looked down upon as of low origin, generally, by the people of the plains.³ After a searching enquiry into the past records, Fisher also doubted if there was any free and fair 'election' of the Raja by the *Sempungs* : 'If it ever existed, is now obsolete ; the revival of it is unlikely to be attended with any benefit ; on the contrary, likely to be the source of interminable civil war.'⁴

Two courses were now left open—either to annex the plains of Cachar to the British dominion or to make them over to Gambhir Sing who had offered to farm it. The latter received the strongest support of Major Grant, the British Commissioner at Manipur, who was under the impression that the acquisition of Cachar by the Raja of Manipur would provide him with sufficient means to build up a stable and efficient government so indispensably necessary for the security of the North-East Frontier. There also lay, the Commissioner felt, the chances of assimilation of the two peoples in Cachar and Manipur who had been warring all along with each other. If it were not possible to transfer the whole district Major Grant desired that Gambhir Sing should at least be favoured with the cession of the tract east of the river Jiri, between the two branches of the river Barak, over which he had already extended his sphere of

¹ B.P.C., 1832 · May 14, No. 99 ; See also Chakravarti, B. P. : 'Annexation of Cachar' Proceedings, Indian Historical Records Commission, 1942.

² B.P.C., 1832 ; May 14, No. 100 ; October 29, No. 142 ; Fisher to Robertson, October 1.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *Ibid.* ; The only instance of election is supposed to have happened 150 years ago, when Chandraprava, the widow of Raja Tamradhaj, in conjunction with the *Mantris* and the *Forty sempungs* was reported to have elected Raja Kirtichandra to the vacant throne.

influence.¹ Strongest arguments were urged against this proposal by the local authorities who were apprehensive of the fact that such an arrangement would place the helpless people of Cachar at the tender mercies of a cruel chieftain. Mr. Cracroft, the officiating Agent, wanted to assume the territory 'openly and immediately' instead of waiting 'till it be further reduced by letting the Raja to rack it for a paltry sum of rupees fifteen thousand per annum'. 'It would be better' he remarked, 'to make him a present of Rs. 15,000/- than to admit him (into Cachar)'.²

On the receipt of the proceedings of the murder of the late Raja, the Supreme Government had already felt it impolitic to permit Gambhir Singh to profit by a crime which was suspected to have been committed at his instigation. To examine the alternative proposal submitted by Major Grant they, nevertheless, desired to consult the views of Lieutenant Pemberton and Captain Jenkins who had recently visited this region in connection with their survey of the North-East Frontier.³ Accordingly, in an elaborate report on April 6, 1832, while deprecating the transfer of Cachar to Gambhir Singh, Pemberton strongly advocated, on political reasons, the cession of the areas east of the river Jiri. It would provide the Government, he argued, an authority sufficiently strong to keep the various Naga clans in subjection—'a task involving so much trouble with so little profit, that the attempt to take it upon ourselves, when it may so easily and advantageously be transferred to another, would be nothing (more) than a species of political quixotism.'⁴ The views held by Captain Jenkins were just the opposite. He looked upon the command over these tribes as essential to tap the valuable resources of this region. He also brought it home to the authorities in Calcutta that the Kala Nagas, the inhabitants of this area, were very much disaffected under the rule of Gambhir Singh; they were restrained from open rebellion by the feeling that they would not be surrendered over to Manipur, and that the British Government had no right to impose a rule against the 'understood wishes of the people'.⁵

¹ B.S.P.C., 1831; November 25, No. 60.

² B.P.C., 1832; May 14, No. 98.

³ B.P.C., 1832; May, 14, No. 109.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ B.P.C., 1832; May 14, No. 110.

The Government of Bengal forwarded these correspondences with their own views for the consideration of the Supreme Government. In absence of a legitimate heir to the late Raja and on the strong and almost unanimous objections of all the local authorities reinforced by the reluctance of the people to acknowledge the authority of Manipur, the former recommended that the plains of Cachar be annexed to the British dominion, making suitable provisions for the widowed queen and confirming Tularam in his hill possessions. It was further proposed that Gambhir Singh might be allowed to retain the areas east of the river Jiri, but he must retire from Chandrapur and the surrounding level country over which he had been, gradually, establishing his authority.¹ The Governor-General in Council accorded their approval, on July 9, 1832, on the main lines of the recommendations regarding the annexation of Cachar, but they entertained great doubts about the propriety of ceding Gambhir Singh a portion of Cachar in the face of objections raised by Captain Jenkins which appeared to them more weighty than the reasons assigned by Lieutenant Pemberton. Therefore, without having further details from the local authorities, the Governor-General in Council postponed their final verdict on the subject.²

Accordingly, by a proclamation on August 14, 1832, Lieutenant Fisher annexed the plains of Cachar in the south to the British dominion. Without entering into any engagement Tularam was allowed to retain the hill tracts which were then in his possession; while cash allowance and rent-free grants of the total value of Rs. 3875 were granted to the widows and the near relatives of the late ruler.³ In consideration of the distance and difficulties

¹ B.P.C., 1832; May 14, Nos. 117-119.

² B.P.C., 1832; July 9, Nos. 15-17.

³ P.L.I.B., 1832; December 27, No. 12; B.P.C., 1832; October 29, No. 142; Raja Gobinda Chandra left five widows; of these, Indraprabha the eldest one, and who was reported to have been formally married, was given a life pension of Rs. 100 per month, besides rent-free grants (*baksha*) for her establishment. Queen Chandra Kala was supposed to have been united with *Gandharva bibah*; and as such, an allowance of Rs. 30 p.m. was also sanctioned in her favour; but no consideration, whatever, was shown to the remaining queens, since none of them was married according to the Hindu or Kachari usage. Provisions were, of course, made for Parbati Singh, Mahadebi and Bhabanipriya, the brother-in-law, mother-in-law and siter-in-law of the deceased ruler.

of communication through the hills, Fisher had already proposed in his letter of August 31, 1832, that the *pargana* of Dharampur, roughly in between the rivers Kapili and Jamuna which was hitherto an integral part of Cachar, should be attached to Central Assam; but in a subsequent note he revised his recommendation and suggested that in its present undeveloped state the territory might conveniently be leased out to Gobindaram and Durgacharan, the cousins of Tularam, who had held it since the death of Raja Gobinda Chandra. In forwarding the proposal, Robertson, the newly appointed Agent to the Governor-General, doubted the fitness of the persons recommended by Fisher, while the Supreme Government ignored their claims, altogether, and directed the Agent to place the *pargana* in question under the jurisdiction of the authorities of the Assam Valley with a view to attaching South Cachar, in due course, to the district of Sylhet, with which it was intimately connected.¹ Gobindaram and Durgacharan were, later, granted life pensions of Rs. 50/- each, besides some rent-free grants.²

In view of the difficulties of the Agent to the Governor-General to supervise, effectively, the affairs of Cachar from Cherrapunji, the Supreme Government placed, in early 1833, Lieutenant Fisher, permanently, as its Superintendent on a consolidated salary of Rs. 1000/- with headquarters at Dudputli, a few miles off from the present railway station Badarpur.³ Under the supervision of the Agent to the Governor-General* he was invested with the powers of the Magistrate, Collector and of a Civil judge; and in addition, he was to exercise political authority over the hill-tribes on the frontier. It was then a problem to Fisher to evolve administrative arrangements in a district of scanty but varied population like that of Cachar; all the more because the official papers, if any existed, were burnt or otherwise destroyed at the time of the murder of the late Raja. From a few men of age and experience Fisher, however, collected some information

¹ B.P.C., 1832; November 12, No. 46; P.L.I.B., 1834; January, 16, No. 2.

² B.P.C., 1832; November 7, Nos. 127-128.

³ B.P.C., 1833; May 30, No. 100.

* In 1836, the Superintendent of Cachar was placed under the Commissioner of Dacca.

regarding its past history tradition and institutions which were, occasionally, referred to in the voluminous reports which he submitted to the Government.

The fertile valley of the Barak had attracted even before the Burmese invasions a considerable number of immigrants—both the Hindus and the Muslims—from the contiguous districts of Bengal. It was not unlikely, as has been suggested by William Hunter¹ that the new-comers were at first 'stray settlers' respecting the existing laws and paying rent to the ruling chief. They were allowed by the tolerant Kachari rulers to practise their own customs usages and institutions, and in course of time they enjoyed so much of autonomy in their respective settlements that they formed, as it were, a state within the state. Some Kacharis, including the members of the royal family, embraced Hinduism and, gradually, evinced a preference for many of the customs and institutions of the immigrants; although, the orthodox section remained aloof and totally indifferent to the innovations. Thus, on the eve of the British occupation, there existed in Cachar, side by side, two types of institutions : one following the older way with its own hierarchy of officials—the *Barbhandari* (Prime Minister), the *Patras* (Ministers), the *Senapati* (Commander-in-chief) and the *Raj Pundit* (chief priest) besides several others; but its influence was confined mostly to the *Parbattias* (the dwellers of the hills), the Kukis and the Nagas. The political and economic unit of the new settlers who were growing in numbers and importance, was, generally, the *Khel*,² whose members were, however, not united as in the *Khels* of Upper Assam by kindred ties of caste, creed or nationality. There were *Khels* in Cachar for common objectives which included, 'not only the Bengalees of any caste and creed but also the Kukis, the Nagas and the Europeans. The *Mukhtar* was the channel of communication between the Raja and the ryots, 'carrying into execution all orders in the *Khel*, taking charge of abandoned talooks and collecting the government

¹ *Vide* Hunter, W. W. : *Statistical Account of Assam*, Vol. II pp. 394-95.

² *Ibid*, pp. 395-97.

revenue',¹ in return for which they held rent-free grants, enjoyed honorary titles and were empowered to confine and punish defaulters. Groups of *Khels* were again joined together under a larger unit called the *Raj*, over each was placed an elected representative with various designations like *Choudhury*, *Majumdar*, *Laskar*, *Barabhuiya*, *Chota Bhuiya* etc.—all according to the social status and importance of the unit, of which he was the representative.²

Fisher introduced only such changes as were considered absolutely necessary, because financial difficulties stood in his way of altering the existing institutions. Not only did he retain the former functionaries in their respective jurisdictions, but restored the powers and customary privileges of which they had lately been deprived of by Raja Gobinda Chandra.³ He had had great hopes as to the revenues of Cachar⁴; but to his utter disappointment, Fisher found in the first year of occupation that the receipt could barely meet the charges on the establishment, and for the years following it the collections were far from satisfactory.⁵ He was, thus, convinced that without the influx of immigrants from Bengal, there could be no increase in the revenues of Cachar since the hillmen and the indigenous people were too few and miserably poor to develop the resources of the

¹ R.J.L.B., 1834; October 12, No. 12.

William Hunter says, that these titles were sold in the early days of the Company at the following rates; *Choudhury* at Rs. 100/-, *Majumdar* at Rs. 75/-, *Laskar* at Rs. 60/-, *Bara Bhuyan* at Rs. 50/-, *Major Bhuyan* at Rs. 25/-.

² Hunter, W.W. : *Statistical Account of Assam*, p. 397.

³ R.J.L.B., 1834; October 12, No. 12.

⁴ B.S.P.C., 1829; August 14, No. 6; He calculated 120,160 *Kulbah*, roughly 480,640 acres, assessable at the average rate of Rs. 2-8-0 per *Kulbah*, yielding a revenue of Rs. 300,400 a year.

⁵ See Pemberton : *Eastern Frontier of British India*, Table 3, pp. 202-3 : The receipt and disbursement since the management of the district under Lieutenant Fisher stood as follows :—

Year	Receipts	Charges
1830-31	30,595	28,417
1831-32	32,429	31,450
1832-33	35,245	31,655
1833-34	40,395	31,086

district.¹ To attain this object he must introduce, at the outset, a new assessment on land 'on a fair and equitable basis'. When the *Hastabood* papers containing the data of the existing settlements were not available, he felt it necessary to undertake a general measurement of the land to arrive at a proper assessment.² In the meanwhile, he abolished the river *ghats* excepting a few on the river Surmah, at which duties were levied on exportable commodities at a moderate rate, the agricultural produce being entirely exempted. The monopolies on betel-nut, timber, salt, cotton, grass etc. were done away with; of course, he had to retain the hill *ghats* since these offered the only means of raising a revenue from the dwellers of the adjoining hills.³ When some information was obtained, with the approval of the Supreme Government, Fisher imposed towards the close of 1832, the same rent as was prevalent in the adjacent districts of Sylhet, of Rs. 5-2-0 per *kulbah* of cultivable lands, but the *bari* (sites for houses, and *chara* (garden lands) were exempted. Finally, to secure settlers from the populous districts of Bengal—Dacca, Tipperah, Mymensingh—circular letters were issued through their respective district officers to the effect,⁴ 'that the country of Cachar has been permanently annexed to the British dominion, that the tax there will be fixed at the rates analogous to such as have been adopted in recent assessment, that they may get good jungle lands rent-free for 1000 days, at the end of which a settlement will be concluded for the portion brought under cultivation: to which the holder will acquire a proprietary right as a *Talookdar* or *Zamindar*, and that where an outlay was made for draining or filling marshes, clearing forests, the period during which the land will be allowed to remain rent-free would be extended to five years etc. etc.'

In determining the rate of assessment, Fisher failed to realise that the people of Cachar were then not so much resourceful as those in the district of Sylhet and, therefore, the revenue fell pressingly on them. There also occurred several years of bad harvest on account of heavy rainfall, which had resulted in

¹ B.P.C., 1832 : November 12, No. 46.

² B.P.C., 1832; November 12, Nos. 46-47.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *Ibid.*

huge arrears in revenue. Towards the close of 1836, it was reported to the Government of Bengal by the Commissioner of Dacca, that those who had gone to Cachar from Sylhet with a view to speculate on lands were obliged to return on account of high rate of taxation, that many of the collectors had tendered their resignation or were prepared to do so, while many had absconded to evade payment of arrears.¹ In these circumstances, under the direction of the Board of Revenue, in 1838, Major J. G. Burns, who had succeeded Lieutenant Fisher, effected a new settlement for a term of five years. He lowered the rate on the cultivable lands to Rs. 3/- per *hal*, but brought the *chara* lands under assessment.² The *bari*, *baksha* and *lakhiraj* holdings continued to be free from taxation. The land measurement conducted by Fisher was also found to be defective; therefore, a fresh survey was undertaken by Lieutenant Thuillier in 1841, which brought more lands under assessment. On the basis of these data, and on the expiry of the earlier term, a new settlement was made by Rai Bahadur Golak Chandra Bole(?), the Deputy Collector of Sylhet, for a period of fifteen years. The Rai Bahadur made no change in the rate on rice lands,³ but he assessed the *chara* and *bari* lands varying from Rs. 3/- to Rs. 2/- per *hal*. Moreover, he taxed the jungle lands after a rent-free period of five years at Rs. 1-8 per *hal*, and at full rates for the remaining years of the settlement. About the same time, the agency of the *Mukhtars* being found 'expensive and inefficient' was substituted by three salaried *Tahsildars* located at Silchar, Katigora and Hailakandi.⁴

Previously, four *Patras* or *Ministers* formed a court of Justice. Their findings were reported to the Raja, who on their advice pronounced in each case such a judgment or sentence as he deemed necessary. There was no fixed code of laws—the guilt or innocence of the accused was not infrequently determined by an ordeal, and punishments were given as the discretion or caprice of the judges considered adequate.⁵ After British occupa-

¹ B.R.C., 1836; December 20, Nos. 61-63.

² Hunter; *Statistical Account of Assam*. Vol. II. pp. 416.

³ B.R.C., 1844; November 13, Nos. 26-29.

⁴ B.R.C., 1844; June 6, Nos. 7-8. Hunter; *Statistical Account of Assam*. Vol. II. p. 420.

⁵ B.P.C., 1832; November 12, Nos. 46-47.

tion, in minor criminal cases, the officiating Magistrate exercised the powers of a Zilla Magistrate. He was empowered with the concurrence of jury to execute punishments not involving a sentence of three years, while offences of a heinous character, after having been tried by a jury, were referred to the court of the Agent to the Governor-General for final adjudication. In determining the character of the offence and in awarding the punishments the spirit and practices of the Regulations in force in the Company's territories were, generally, followed.¹ Fisher recommended the continuation of the existing procedure with such modifications as might be considered necessary in deciding cases regarding the original inhabitants—namely the Kacharis, the Kukis, the Manipuris and the Nagas. In addition, he suggested that the jury should be taken by lot from as large a number of intelligent men as could be assembled, and that it should include, as far as practicable, some persons of the same tribe with the prisoner to be tried and should never consist of less than five individuals. The Supreme Government however felt, that it might prove inconvenient to have the jurors constantly sitting, because the persons eligible for such services might not be numerous in Cachar, at least for some years to come, and, therefore, the Superintendent was vested with discretion to dispense with the jury, if and when necessary. He was further advised that no jury was to be summoned except in cases which might call for a severe punishment of imprisonment with labour for more than two years in the event of conviction.²

There was no sharp distinction, formerly, between the administrations of civil and criminal justice—all suits being decided in a summary way under the direction of the Raja and not unoften the losing party was punishable by a fine or a term of imprisonment. The royal prerogatives appeared to have been, gradually, relaxed, particularly in the civil disputes amongst the new-settlers. Such cases were later transferred to the *Mukhtar* concerned, who took the counsel of elders in the *Khel*, and in the event of his inability to arrive at a settlement he referred it to the representative of the larger unit the *Raj Mukhtar*; and

¹ *Ibid.*

² *Ibid.*

only in keenly contested cases an appeal lay to the Raja. The latter, ordinarily, sought the advice of the *Raj Pundit* (chief priest) if the parties were Hindus; and in cases of Mahammedans he consulted whomever was then acknowledged as the chief interpreter of the law of the *Quran*¹. Therefore, Fisher had, no other alternative than to decide such cases according to the existing practices of the country as could be ascertained from assessors chosen from amongst the former officials and notables of the territory together with such information as could be gathered from legal documents. For the future, he felt that the basic principles on the administration of justice should be analogous to that of the neighbouring district of Bengal, since a section of the people had already accepted them, and in anticipation that in no distant future the bulk of the people of Cachar would consist of settlers from that quarter. He, therefore, recommended that the administration of civil justice should be conducted in the same manner as was done in the Zilla courts. The Hindu and Mahammedan law should be the basis, but these were to be modified by such local usages and customs 'which may be found well-established and deserving of respect'. For speedy justice, he also suggested the establishment of a native court for the trial of petty cases, both civil and criminal, consisting of a few assessors of some intelligence and acquainted with local usages. In taking evidence, they were to be aided by *mohitors* having some knowledge of the Muhammedan law also and of the Bengali language in which most of the proceedings were recorded. To hear appeals from these courts, particularly in cases involving local customs, Fisher further desired to assemble a second jury of not less than three individuals.² In forwarding the proposal, Mr. Robertson, the Agent to the Governor-General, felt that it was 'very problematical' whether a jury had the competence to decide civil cases; he considered that two well-qualified *Sadar Amins* would be more useful than a court consisting of several assessors; of these, one might be a native of Cachar and the other an intelligent Muhammedan, and the people might be left to whichever court they might prefer. Despite these objections, the Vice-

¹ *Ibid.*

² *Ibid.*

President in Council by way of experiment authorised the Superintendent to carry on the measures proposed by him as he was supposed to have known more of local conditions. He was, of course, advised to exercise his discretion to do away with them in the event of their proving objectionable or impracticable.¹

On the receipt of the expected report from the local authorities the Supreme Government was able, towards the close of 1832, to arrive at a final decision as to the eastern boundary of Cachar. The Government of Bengal reiterated their decision as recommended by them earlier—to establish the river Jiri and the western branch of the Barak as the line of demarcation between Cachar and Manipur by the transfer of the tract east of the former river to the Raja of Manipur subject to such conditions as might be considered expedient.² Lieutenant Fisher in his letter on June 19, 1832, brought home to the Government of Bengal that the various Naga tribes of the region had loudly protested against the proposed measure, and many of them were then quitting their villages on mere anticipation of being transferred to the rule of a chief who was odious to them. These tribes, he added, had rendered valuable services in the last war with Ava, and the loss of them would be severely felt in the event of another conflict; while their presence on the other side of the frontier would be a source of constant embarrassment in consequence of the animosity likely to be engendered in the event of the measure being carried out. The inhabitants of the plains, too, would be no less sufferers; for, it would ruin their timber trade in that quarter which had enabled many to subsist and repair the severe losses sustained during the period of last invasions.³ Strongly corroborating these views Mr. Robertson, the Agent to the Governor-General, desired that Gambhir should be removed beyond the river Barak, for his chief motive in extension of territory on this side was a step forward to that of appropriating the whole of Cachar; therefore, 'nothing can be more objection-

¹ *Ibid.*

² B.P.C., 1832; September 17, Nos. 127-35.

³ B.P.C., 1832; July 23, No. 65; Fisher to Robertson, June 19.

able than the vicinity of a pretender whose agents would keep our subjects in a state of continued alarm'.¹

In spite of these cogent and forceful arguments and contrary to their earlier considerations the Supreme Government concurred with Pemberton that it would be better to earn the gratitude of the Raja of Manipur by granting him a tract which was 'worse than useless'.² That the Raja could not be dislodged from the tract 'without giving offence and impairing the good faith'—so they remarked; but the authorities in Calcutta were also influenced, it was not unlikely, by a feeling that Gambhir Sing might be required, in the near future, to make sacrifices in the valley of the Kabbow which was also under his occupation ever since the treaty of Yandabo, and on which a decision was still awaited. Be that as it may, it was finally resolved on November 5, 1832, to relinquish the tract in question to the Raja of Manipur on condition;—

- (1) that he should withdraw his *thana* without delay from Chandrapur.
- (2) that he should not obstruct the trade between Manipur and Cachar by exaction of exorbitant duties.
- (3) that the Nagas occupying the hills ceded to him should have free access to the plains for the purposes of barter and sale.
- (4) that he should keep the communication from the Jiri to Manipur in order for the transit of laden cattle throughout the year.
- (5) that he should be ready at all times to afford the assistance of a portion of the *Manipuri Levy* and also to furnish porters and labourers whenever their services might be required by the British Government.³

The policy of appeasement towards Manipur persistently followed by the British Government reached its highwatermark in the cession of the tract mentioned above. The only claim which could be advanced in favour of the Raja of Manipur was his uninterrupted occupation; that, too, was by sheer usurpation under the very nose of the protecting power. Gambhir could

¹ B.P.C., 1832; July 23, No. 64; Robertson to Swinton, June 26.

² B.P.C., 1832; July 23, No. 56.

³ B.P.C., 1832; July 23, No. 71; P.L.I.B., December 27, No. 12;

hardly make his rule effective over the Nagas and the Kukis who never ceased to consider themselves as belonging to Cachar. The transfer of the tract, in fact, accomplished the very object for which Raja Gobinda Chandra was alleged to have been murdered ; as the Court of Directors, later, censured ; 'the same reasons which existed against the granting to the whole of Cachar were proportionately strong against the cession of a part (thereof).'¹

Tularam Senapati was also not destined to have undisturbed possession of his estates which he held under the gurantee of the British Government. Feeling himself old and infirm when, in 1828, the hill chief entrusted the command of his followers to Gobindaram, the latter soon proved a traitor and drove his uncle out of his possessions.² In June 1829. Tularam regained his territory with the aid of his ally Gambhir Sing, who supplied him with a contingent of hillmen ; whereupon, his ungrateful cousin was forced to take shelter at Dharampur under Raja Gobinda Chandra.³ Not only did the latter condone the fugitive's past conduct, but joined hands with him to bring ruin to his arch-enemy in the hills. Emboldened thus, Gobindaram made several incursions into the territory of his uncle. Even after the death of the Raja, Gobindaram continued to receive support from the widowed queens who on the counsel of Brajaram Burman, the *Barbhandari*, and officials of the household like Dhananjoy and Kirtiram supplied him with arms and money which were then in their possession.⁴ Lieutenant Fisher perceived that unless these hostile preparations were put a stop to, law and order could not be maintained in Central Cachar. Tularam appeared to him to be the lesser evil ; the British Government had also a moral obligation to support him to retain his possessions. He, therefore, proposed⁵ to the Agent to the Governor-General in a letter on July 7, 1832 to remove Dhananjoy and other advisers from the service of the queen ; and the latter should be placed under

¹ C.D., 1834 ; No. 14.

² B.P.C., 1832 ; May 14, No. 112 ; private letter, Fisher to Jenkins, March 17, 1832 ;

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ B.P.C., 1832 ; May 14, Nos. 5 and 112 ; August 20, No. 94 ; Fisher to Robertson July 7.

⁵ *Ibid*

Parbati Singh, the brother of the queen Indraprabha; while the *Barbhandari* and Gobindaram should be kept under restraint at least till Tularam was firmly seated on his territory. To effect these, Fisher sought to employ a detachment in the ensuing cold season and in the event that the Government considered the employment of troops inexpedient Tularam may be asked, Fisher added, to undertake the operations himself, and in that case, he will have to be provided with an amount of Rs. 1000, besides the muskets and ammunitions.¹

On security reasons, but not without hesitation, Mr. Robertson, accorded his approval to the first part of the proposal, for he doubted much the propriety of interfering in the private life of the queens and persons of rank and influence.² When he referred the subject of supplying arms to Tularam to the Supreme Government for their final orders, the latter rejected it altogether.³ They held that under the terms of the agreement in July, 1829, the British Government guaranteed the protection of Tularam against the aggressions of Gobinda Chandra, and as such, he had no right of assistance against any other chief on any dispute or aggression. Fisher pursued the matter; and in a subsequent note, to get rid of the technical difficulties, he proposed to enter into a new treaty with Tularam by which he would be brought under the direct control of the British Government as a tributary chief receiving in return a force for his protection against aggressions of his immediate neighbours. The proposal received, on this occasion, the support of the Agent to the Governor-General, but was turned down again by the Governor-General in Council. The latter found no valid ground, whatever, for incurring additional expenditure for the purpose of maintaining the authority of a hill chief like Tularam; 'what he cannot keep in order by his own means' they remarked, 'he ought to relinquish'.⁴

It may be mentioned in this connection, that in their surveys of the North-East Frontier Captains Pemberton and Jenkins had, in the mean time, drawn the attention of the Government of India to the true significance of this region—as the focal point of Assam,

¹ *Ibid.*

² *Ibid.*

³ B.P.C., 1832; May 14, No. 95.

⁴ B.P.C., 1832; September 17, Nos. 136-37.

Manipur and Sylhet. Instead of leaving this strategic area to the weak rule of Tularam, it was increasingly felt that the tract should be brought under the direct control of the Government. In a subsequent tour conducted under orders of the Supreme Government, when Captain Jenkins and Lieutenant Fisher noticed that the principal inhabitants of the area were also averse to the rule of the Kachari chief, and they 'universally expressed' a desire to be brought under the British Government, the move for incorporation became irresistibly strong.¹ Captain Jenkins, therefore, lost no time in procuring from Tularam a new agreement on November 3, 1834. Accordingly, the latter was to surrender his claims to the territory between the rivers Mahur and the Dayang on the one side, the Dayang and the Kapili on the other, of which he had already been dispossessed by his cousins; retaining, of course, the remaining part of the country, formerly, in his possession. Further, he agreed to pay a yearly tribute of four pairs of elephant teeth, which was later commuted for a cash payment of Rs. 490-0, in return for which he would be guaranteed in his possessions from foreign aggressions, besides a life pension of Rs. 50/- per month. In addition, the British Government shall have the right of placing military posts in any part of his territory, and in the event of British troops marching through it, Tularam undertook to furnish them with provisions and labour, he being paid for them. Finally, Tularam undertook not to commence any military operations against the neighbouring chiefs without permission of the British Government.²

The passive acquiescence of Tularam to accept a truncated territory clearly showed the signs of his exhaustion. Worn out by age and internecine strife, he then longed for peace and security of his subjects. His hopes were, unfortunately, doomed to bitter disappointment as will be seen in a subsequent chapter.

¹ B.P.C., 1833; May 30, No. 100, Fisher to Jenkins, January, 24, 1833.

² B.P.C., 1832; October 16, Nos. 52-54; Aitchison: *Treaties etc.* (Vol. XII) pp 139-40.

APPENDIX C

Arzee of the Forty Sempungs to the Agent of the Governor-General, North-East Frontier ; 24 Kartik, 1749 S. E. (Secret and Political consultations, Bengal, 1829 ; May 30, No. 4).

After compliments. It is customary with us, that whomsoever we the *Forty Sempungs* alone to appoint Raja, that individual alone can become such. The duty of a Raja thus appointed is to protect and nourish his subjects and to conform in his proceedings to the counsel of his Ministers of State. In return for which we (according to ancient usage) submit to his authority and commands. In consequence of the violation by the Raja Gobinda Chandra of established customs, we separated ourselves from his authority and placing Gooabaree and the Jatinga rivers as a boundary between us and him, we choose an independant abode in the nothern parts of the country. We subsequently restored the Raja to his authority over us, but to our great annoyance he began to repeat his unwarrantable acts. He brought over the Muncepoorees by the advice of his Ministers, and was at length obliged to fly to Khaspur with his Ministers for refuge. The British authorities overcame the *Maun* people and reestablished the Raja in his Government upon his engaging to pay an amount of tribute of 10,000 Rupees. He has acted in opposition to long established usage, by which it is required that the Ministers of the state as well as a Raja should be chosen from amongst the *Forty Sempungs* and with whose families alone matrimonial connexions can be formed, whether by the Raja or the *Sempungs*. He has moreover sold off all the state paraphernalia and jewels of his ancestors. By such proceedings we feel ourselves disgraced. Yet the Raja wishes to lord over us and reduce to the level of his Ryots.

(A true translation)

Sd/-Tucker T. M.

CHAPTER V

EXPERIMENT WITH AHOM MONARCHY

On April 24, 1833, under a salute of nineteen guns, Sree Sree Maharaja Purandar Singha Narendra was formally installed as a ruler of Upper Assam, at Jorhat.¹ The troops paraded in front of his palace. The nobility paid their usual obeisance. Preparations were also set on foot for the time-honoured ceremony of coronation of the Ahom monarchy.* The people, however, accepted the change with mixed feelings; a section of them, in fact, stood in sullen silence. Chandra Kanta Singha raising a protest against the action of the East-India Company 'as inconsistent with the principles of justice and equity' pressed his own claim to the throne and offered to pay a higher tribute of Rs. 70,000.² To obviate chances of any collusion the ex-Raja was removed forthwith to Kaliabar, in Central Assam, where he was kept under surveillance and was silenced, later, with a pension of rupees five hundred.³

Purandar Singha was, at this hour, a fine lad of about twenty-five. With pleasing manners and a mild disposition, his views were liberal and much ahead of his countrymen, since his long sojourn in the Company's territory had enabled him to acquire a good deal of general education. But the young Prince had to confront problems bristling with difficulties which would have bewildered even a highly efficient administrator. He was to tackle the worst of the feudal abuses aggravated by the anarchy and misrule for more than half a century. The *khel* system was

¹ B.P.C., 1833; May 30, No. 112.

* This ceremony was performed in a specially built house with a timber platform known as the *Patghar*, or *Singarighar* 'The Raja and the queen first enter the *Patghar*, where some water is poured on them from a shell called *Dokhyinaborto Sonkho*, the mouth of which turned away contrary to that of the shell, which is usually sounded by the Hindus.' See Bhuyan, S. K. : *Tungkhungia Buranji*, Glossry, p. 243.

² B.P.C., 1833; May 30, Nos. 113 and 116.

³ *Ibid* : also August 8, 1836; Nos. 34-35.

in ruins. Despite incalculable depopulation not only were the former subordinate officials retained in tact, but their number considerably augmented to meet the growing needs of the conflicting *khels* now scattered throughout Upper Assam.¹ In spite of it, few *kheldars* could tell the exact figures of the *pykes* under their respective charges or of the places where they were to be found. To enquire into such details was considered to be derogatory on the part of the higher dignitaries. They scarcely resided with the people in their *khels* to look after their interest, but passed their times idling or gossiping about the court at the Sadar station.² The official aristocracy, 'abdicated their proper functions', and like the absentee landlords in France on the eve of the Revolution of 1789, they left the ryots at the mercies of a host of unscrupulous collectors whose irregular exactions reduced them to piteous misery. It is difficult to conceive that anything was ever left uncollected, yet it was difficult to prove that they had paid off their dues to the government. To administer justice there were as many as five law courts at Jorhat, but their concentration at one station rendered speedy justice impossible.³ The cry of the oppressed ryots, therefore, paled into insignificance before it reached the tribunal. Inevitably, there were constant migrations; agriculture declined, industry was neglected, trade and commerce practically collapsed.⁴

To rehabilitate the country, therefore, the Raja had to afford adequate protection to the ryots from the extortion and oppression of the *kheldars*. He was also to provide for the men of rank who were then on the verge of bankruptcy. To enlist their sympathy and support he must maintain, above all, the customs, traditions and institutions of his predecessors. With these objects in view, at the outset, Purandar revived the time-honoured Cabinet of Ministers in the person of Muhidhar of the Kuoigoya family as the *Buragohain*, Malbhog as the *Borgohain*, Dandeswar as the

¹ B.P.C., 1833; May 30, No. 87; Memorandum by White; June 19, 1834, No. 99.

² *Ibid.*

³ To deal with civil cases, there existed the *Bar Panchayet* with four members and the President; the *Barbarua's court*, two small courts and *Surasuree court*.

⁴ B.P.C., 1833; May 30, No. 87.

Barpatra Gohain, and *Radhanath* as the *Barbarua*. The Subordinate officials—the *Phukans*, *Rajkhowas*, *Hazarikas*, *Borahs*—were retained, as before, in their respective charges.¹ Under directions from the Political Agent, Upper Assam, and after due deliberation with the *Patra-Mantris* and high dignitaries of the realm, the Raja inaugurated a series of reforming measures, commonly known as the *Regulations of Purandar*,² which were as follows :

Revenue : He divided the whole population into regular *khels*, with well defined boundaries, wherein *pykes* were numbered. A capitation tax of rupees three was imposed, as before, on each *pyke*, for which he was to receive two *puras* of arable land. After ascertaining the asset, settlements were made with the *kheldars* for a period of four years, and under no circumstances a deduction allowed in the *jumma*. In addition to the remuneration in the services of the *pykes*, these officials were granted a commission on the total collection. On no account a *kheldar* was allowed to leave his charge without permission and only after the appointment of a deputy in his place.³ It was further laid down that no revenue charge would be given after a period of three years to anyone who could not read or write. If suitable candidates were not forthcoming from the nobility, the office would be thrown open to all, irrespective of high and low. When appointed a *kheldar* continued to enjoy office if the government demands were regularly paid, and he could not be dismissed without a regular trial before the court of the *Patra-Mantris*.⁴

Judicial : To break up over-centralization, *kheldars* were authorised to try criminal offences involving a penalty not exceeding imprisonment for six months and with a power to inflict punishment of fifteen stripes or a fine of rupees twenty. They further exercised jurisdiction over civil cases to the extent of rupees ten and investigated complaints of irregularities or exaction of the *Omlahs*.⁵ *Gram Adhikar* or District Judges were set up at Rangpur, Majuli, Uttarpar (North-Lakhimpur) Bassa and Dayang. They

¹ Hazarika, Dutitām : *Asamar Padya-Buranji*, p. 195.

² B.P.C., 1834; June 19, No. 99; White to Jenkins May 23.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ *Ibid.*

had appellate jurisdiction over the court of *kheldar* and were empowered to enquire into cases of extortion or oppression of those officers. They had also the power of investigating civil cases of minor importance. No written pleadings and deposition were allowed in the local or districts courts. Judges were, however, required to submit regularly abstract of the cases tried under their respective jurisdictions.

At the capital, to deal with petty cases, two *panchayets* were set up, some members of which heard also proceedings of the cases of the lower courts. The *Barbarua's court* was vested with the power of awarding sentences of imprisonment to the extent of three years and of trying civil cases upon written pleadings to the amount of rupees one thousand. At the head stood the *Supreme Court*, consisting of the Raja as the president, and three judges to decide civil cases above rupees one thousand and all heinous crimes of dacoity or homicide.¹

Moral and material : The Raja imposed a penalty of imprisonment for fourteen years if anyone enslaved a pyke—a measure which could not be enforced even by Captain White, the Political Agent, Upper Assam. To root out the evils of corruption he provided for adequate remuneration to the poorly paid *Omlahs* and appropriated to that end the amount collected from the fines and civil cases.² To train up required personnel for the revenue charges it was ordered that schools were to be set up in each *khel*, and the *kheldars* were required to patronize and supervise them. To bring the jungle lands under tillage he encouraged the revenue officers to assign them rent-free for a period of two years, after which such lands were to be assessed at a nominal rent, out of which a certain percentage was to be allowed by way of commission to the officer concerned.³ On mere request the Raja granted to the Assam Company an extensive area near Gabharu hills for cultivation of tea in anticipation that in near future his subjects would be able to reap the benefit of this new enterprise.⁴ To stimulate industry, *kheldars* were allowed to

¹ *Ibid*; also I.P.C., 1838; October 31, No. 79; White to Brodie and Vetch, September 25.

² B.P.C., 1834; June 19, No. 97; White to Jenkins, May 23.

³ *Ibid*.

⁴ B.R.C., 1836; July 11, Nos. 5 and 6.

take articles of produce in lieu of cash in areas where merchants had not penetrated; and to that end he also declared that the customs chokey on the Brahmaputra be open and that no duty be levied on boats up and down the river.¹

Raja Purandar Singha, thus, aimed not merely at the reform of the existing abuses, but also the moral and material progress of his subjects, which speaks eloquently of his enlightened views. A thorough overhauling of the whole system was highly needed, the Raja knew well; but that would mean a revolution. What he wanted was reform and not revolution. Notwithstanding this, some of his measures, which were rather premature, affected adversely the fortunes of the higher orders. The village or *mou zadari* settlement which under direction from the Political agent, Upper Assam, he had gradually introduced in the north bank and in areas to the east of the river Jhanzi reducing the number of revenue charges had thrown back hundreds of former officials out of employment.² Educational qualifications now required of the *kheldars* also closed the door upon those who could neither read nor write. The resettlements on accurate data left few acres of *katanimati* or surplus lands unassessed and, as such, surreptitious use of them by interested parties became impossible. Far from improving, the restoration of Ahom monarchy under Purandar, apparently, made worse the lot of many of the men of rank who, naturally, felt they had backed a wrong horse. In utter disappointment and disgust they attempted, throughout, to ruin him despite his earnest endeavours to conciliate and to take them into his confidence.³

The presence of Matibar Barsenapati, the Moamaria or the Muttock chief, in his neighbourhood, ruling over a highly prosperous territory constituted an additional source of embarrassment. To each of his sons the Barsenapati assigned a portion of the territory, and there existed 'a greater spirit of equality in the community' than to be found elsewhere in Assam. These chiefs

¹ B.P.C., 1834; June 19, No. 99; White to Jenkins, May 23.

² I.P.C., 1838; October 31, No. 79.

³ Captain White reported: 'He has been thwarted by a portion of the nobles, who from the first were inimical to his succession and who were now doggedly persistent in resisting the collections as much as they can'.

were, in fact, the leaders of the people ; no decision affecting the masses could be taken without the counsel of the elders.¹ Contemporaries bear eloquent testimony to the soundness of the fiscal measures under the Moamaria chief. The original inhabitants, namely the Muttocks, were practically exempted from taxation. Even the immigrants, who flocked in thousands and who had to bear almost the entire brunt of taxation, were required to pay not exceeding one-third of what they had hitherto paid to the British or to the Raja of Upper Assam. To the welfare of his subjects the Barsenapati directed his energies, throughout ; and to that end in view, he had encouraged the cultivation of various crops by lowering the taxes, granting subsidies and even by remitting taxes, altogether, in times of drought or inundation. Consequently, with luxuriant crops of rice intermixed with mustard, sugarcane, cotton and mulberries the Moamaria territory under the Barsenapati became the granary of the North-East Frontier. The security of life and property, therein, encouraged merchants to set up their *golas* or trade establishments ; no *syra* duties fettered trade and, therefore, boats laden with rice, cotton, molasses and raw silk were always to be seen plying along the Brahmaputra.²

With such inducements, emigration into Muttock was inevitable, particularly when the demands of the government in the adjacent territory of Raja Purandar fell pressingly on the ryots. With a view to removing this anomalous situation, in early 1835, during his visit to Sadiya, Captain White, the political Agent, Upper Assam, made an attempt to commute the services of the contingent furnished by the Barsenapati for payment of Rs. 10,000/- in cash, and the latter was also tempted with the title of a Raja besides being guaranteed succession to his heirs.³ The Barsenapati stood strongly opposed to the proposal, and curtly he replied : 'if the Government was prepared to tax his subjects, they must take the country into their own hands; he would rather go out of the country than raise such a tax.'⁴ The negotiations resulted however in a modified agreement by which the

¹ I.P.C., 1839 ; August 14, No. 105 ; White to Jenkins, January 26.

² B.P.C., 1835 ; April 13, No. 4.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *Ibid.*

chief yielded to the payment of Rs. 1800 in lieu of the services of the *pykes* to be furnished by him under the agreement with Scott.¹

In vain Raja Purandar repeatedly represented to the authorities in Calcutta for a remission of the tribute on account of the constant exodus referred to above. The attitude of the Supreme Government to the chief of the Muttocks was one of 'moderation'. As long as the situation in the Sadiya frontier continued to be unsatisfactory, the neutrality if not of active assistance of the Barsenapati with the sturdy Muttocks solidly behind him was essential. It was, therefore, felt impolitic to make a heavy demand on them, at all events during the life time of the present incumbent.²

Notwithstanding these overwhelming odds the first year of the reign of Raja Purandar passed off smoothly. Although, there was a little fall in revenue, he had cleared off his tribute in full and collected in addition a fairly good amount on account of the outstanding arrears when the territory was under British occupation. He had also earned the approbation of the Supreme Government by the apprehension and surrender of Dhanjoy and Harakanta, the fugitive rebels, whose heads had carried a reward of rupees five hundred each. In view of the changed circumstances and the peaceful nature of the country, the Vice-President in Council condoned their guilt and they were, accordingly, released.³ Early in 1834, Robertson observed :

'I am happy to be able to speak well of the Raja Purandar Sing. Though many of the higher order of the Assamese were discontented with his rule, yet we were sure to receive the most favourable accounts of his actions and 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 emigration having as yet taken place into our territory nor as far as we can learn into those of the Barsenapati and other independent chiefs in the remote parts of Upper Assam'.⁴

Major administrative changes took place, in the meanwhile, in the North-East Frontier. As, heretofore, mentioned, it had

¹ Aitchison : *Treaties etc.* Vol. XII, pp. 141-42.

² B.P.C., 1833 : August 22, Nos. 67-69.

³ B.P.C., 1834 : June 26, Nos. 84-85.

⁴ B.P.C., 1834 : March 25, No. 38.

become extremely difficult on the part of the Agent to the Governor-General to discharge efficiently the duties over the whole of the frontier in addition to his functions as a Commissioner of revenue and circuit. In these circumstances, in January 1834, the Supreme Government abolished the office of the Political Agent to the North-East Frontier of Bengal and Commissioner of Rangpur, and in its place created the distinct office of the Commissioner and Agent to the Governor-General for Assam and North-East of Rangpur, and at the same time, Captain Jenkins, a commissioned officer of the 1/24th Native Infantry, was nominated to hold this post. He was placed, hereafter, under the supervision and control of the *Sadar Dewani Adawlat* and of the Sadar Board of Revenue, Calcutta. For effective supervision the district of Sylhet was attached to the division of Dacca and separate arrangements were also made for the administration of Cachar, Manipur and the Khasi Hills.¹

Francis Jenkins, son of Reverend Jenkins, was born in August, 1793, at Cornwall in England.² After completion of his military training he joined as an ensign the Indian Army in 1811 and had served under various capacities including the Assistant secretary to the Military Board. In 1831, being deputed along with Lieutenant Pemberton to undertake the survey of Assam, Cachar and Manipur, Jenkins had acquired a first-hand knowledge of these regions and was, therefore, considered indispensable to hold the charge of the newly-acquired territory in the North-East Frontier. In April 1834, Captain Jenkins assumed charge of his duties; after serving for a short period as the Judge of the Sadar Court Mr. Robertson became, in 1835, a member of the Supreme Council.

The new Commissioner soon realised the difficulties of Purandar to run the government of a territory bordered, on the one hand, by a state where assessment was exceedingly low, and on the other, by British possessions where redress for grievances

¹ P.L.L.B., 1834 : January 16, No. 2.

² Arrived in India October 8, 1810; Ensign in 1811, Lieutenant in 1816, Captain in 1830, Major in 1849, Lieutenant Colonel in 1851, retired in February, 1861, honorary Major-General December 31, 1861; expired at Gauhati, on August 28, 1866 : Hodson, U.C.P. : *Officers of the Bengal Army, Part II*, pp. 549-50.

could promptly be obtained. 'The intermediary Raja's country had been saddled with an amount of tribute that made a diminution of our revenue not readily practicable : while the agent he had employed required a vigilance and an experience and a power in the head which was wanting to Raja Purandar Singh.¹' Jenkins also concurred with the Political Agent, Upper Assam, about the imperative necessity of stopping the exodus into Muttock, and this could be effected only by putting the Barsenapati on a tributary basis. In any case, he felt convinced of the responsibility of the Government to support the Raja as far as practicable.²

The uncompromising attitude of the nobility and their constant importunities changed, before long, the attitude of Captain Jenkins towards the Raja. The anonymous letters which were often addressed to him poisoned his mind and persuaded him to believe that most of the grievances complained of were genuine.³ There had also been occasional frictions between the Raja and the British officials as to the former's demand on the fugitives who found asylum in British districts. To put a check on alleged 'oppressions' and in response to the representations made by a number of aggrieved persons, the Commissioner solicited, in July 1835, the Government of Bengal for 'their permission to place a *Vakil* at Jorhat on behalf of the Political Agent, Upper Assam.⁴ At the same time, he demanded of the Raja explanations as to his action regarding certain individuals branded as 'offenders and men of bad character' and advising him, further, to treat such recalcitrants rather leniently. Naturally, the Raja became indignant, and considering this a dangerous precedent and an affront to his dignity, promptly wrote to the Commissioner through the Political Agent :

¹ B.P.C., 1834 : June 19, No. 99 : Jenkins to White, June 6.

² *Ibid*,

³ B.P.C., 1835 ; August 3, No. 8.

⁴ That Jenkins was considerably prejudiced by anonymous letters is apparent from the following extract of a letter which he addressed to the Government : 'only yesterday' he wrote, 'I received an anonymous but I believe a genuine petition in the name of the principal persons at Jorhat complaining of the oppressions they were subjected toB.P.C., 1835 ; August, 3, No. 8.

'Should you think that justice is not done to the people, remember that one cannot please both the parties. The loser will always fancy himself wronged and appeal to a higher power. But this does not prove injustice to have been done. If it be your intention to hear appeals and continue to question me on all my actions in such petty cases, you ought in the first place, instead of making me a Raja (to) have made me a Judge or a Magistrate'.¹

It was unfortunate that a rupture between the two had begun so early over the right of interference. Captain Jenkins himself had much misgivings about it; yet he remarked: 'We cannot know what would be the case if we were to withdraw this check altogether'. To get a clarification of the point at issue he referred the matter to the Supreme Government with the observation: 'Were we now free to choose whether it were better to take the Government of the country immediately into our own hands or to manage it through the intervention of a native ruler, I should have no hesitation in saying—it is my decided opinion, that it should be in every way desirable to assume the direct management of that portion of the province.'²

It may be remembered, under the agreement, Raja Purandar was invested with full powers of civil and criminal jurisdiction over his subjects and was, therefore, not liable to render any account of his actions unless occasioned by oppression or any breach of the treaty. It was further provided that if any culprit took refuge in the British territory, he should be immediately handed over to the Raja and vice-versa.³ Instead of being surrendered, such culprits had been given shelter and even encouraged to conduct themselves in a manner calculated to weaken the authority of the Raja. This fact could not be ignored by the Supreme Government and, therefore, in their reply, although the Commissioner was allowed to interfere in the affairs of the Raja, if and when necessary, he was advised to exercise this right 'with moderation and discretion'.⁴

In the meantime, the Commissioner directed the Political Agent, Upper Assam, to remove to Sadiya the military guards

¹ *Ibid.*

² *Ibid.*

³ Aitchison: *Treaties etc.* . . pp. 136-37, see clauses 3 and 9.

⁴ B.P.C., 1835: August 3, No. 8.

which had been quartered since British occupation at Jorhat. He presumed that their very presence had emboldened the Raja to intimidate the people in the event of their showing resentment against his oppressive acts.¹ Hardly had the troops been transferred, when there occurred a revolt of the Nagas who had murdered the frontier guards at Morung, in the south-west of Jorhat.² The party of sepoys that was hurriedly sent against the rebels had to return being utterly defeated. Finding himself helpless, the Raja prayed for military aid to the Commissioner, which the latter promptly refused with a mild warning to desist from such operations; although, coercive measures against the refractory Nagas had at the moment become necessary to maintain law and order in the borders.³

Evidently, the Raja was disillusioned in his expectation of getting sympathetic support of the British authorities; on the contrary, he found himself thwarted at every step even in day-to-day administration. Obviously, his position was gravely compromised and his enemies were not slow to exploit the situation as best as they could. Still he felt secure about his throne, if he could keep the terms of the agreement with the British Government. Here, too, he was greatly disappointed; there was a rapid fall in revenue and consequent arrears in tribute, as shown below⁴ :—

Year,	Collections	Tribute paid
1833-34	69,450	50,000
1834-35	70,150	50,000
1835-36	64,254	34,000
1836-37	54,449	28,000
1837-38	42,216	—

The principal sources of revenue in Upper Assam under Purandar were almost the same as was under the British during 1826-32. In addition to the tax on *pyke* lands, the Raja maintained the duties on *hats*, *ghats* and fisheries and also the taxes on

¹ B.P.C., 1835; March 30, Nos. 5 and 6; Jenkins to White, February 20.

² B.P.C., 1835; May 4, Nos. 1 and 6.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ I.P.C., 1838; May 16, No. 53; *Vide* Statements B and C.

profession and castes. It was vain to expect that things would change so materially and abruptly as to enable the Raja to derive a good revenue from Upper Assam. Though belated, Purandar realised his difficulties in meeting his obligation to the Paramount Power, and to overcome them he represented to the authorities in Calcutta, in early 1834, for an extension of his territory or at least the right of coining money within his limited jurisdiction.¹ The deficiencies of Upper Assam, according to his calculations, could be made up if he were also invested with the charge of Western Assam even on his agreeing to an additional tribute of rupees one lakh; but his prayer for additional territory was summarily rejected by the Government of Bengal.² The Political Agent, of course, strongly recommended to concede to the Raja the right of coinage, for such a measure would enable him to procure pure coin in exchange of spurious ones then in circulation. On the unfavourable report of the Superintendent of Mint, to whom the subject was referred, the Supreme Government turned down the proposal, and the Commissioner was advised to put into circulation new *Furruckkabad* rupees into Upper Assam.³ The scarcity of coin, therefore, continued and rendered impossible as Jenkins himself admitted 'even for the most willing ryot to pay off his dues to the Government.'⁴

It deserves mention, in this connection, that during the period of British occupation, with the exception of the year 1832-33, the revenue never reached a lakh of rupees, and, on average, it was Rs. 81,897.⁵ The immediate decline under Purandar was

¹ B.P.C., 1834; August 21, Nos. 86-88.

² *Ibid.*

³ B.P.C., 1833; November 28, Nos. 37A and B; April 10, 1834 Nos. 145-146. To commemorate his accession, the Raja was, however, allowed to strike for four days a limited quantities of coin.

⁴ I.P.C., 1838; March 28, Nos. 44-45; *vide Journal of Captain Jenkins*, paras 74-75.

⁵ This average, which was calculated by Lieutenant Brodie, the Principal Assistant, Sibsagar, does not tally with the figures furnished by the Commissioner in his report on April 3, 1838, and according to him collections stood as follows: 1828-29 Rs. 79,624; 1829-30 Rs. 96,079; 1830-31 Rs. 96,634; 1831-32 Rs. 76,940; 1832-33 Rs. 1,06,197 (in round figures); on average, it was Rs. 91,096: I.P.C., 1838; May 16, No. 53 *See Appendix-A. Also, A.S. File No. 638, C.O. 1840; Brodie to Jenkins, June 20.*

due partly to the transfer of Naduar, a sub-division in Darrang yielding a revenue of about Rs. 10,000, to Lower Assam and partly to the removal of civil and military establishments which had effectively checked the recirculation of a considerable amount. The Raja, nevertheless, remitted in full the tribute of the first two years and also realised on behalf of the British Government an arrear of Rs. 24,791, which was once considered as 'irrecoverable', and which had undoubtedly affected his own collections.¹ The crash came in 1835-36. Owing to the out-break of cholera and a famine following it, there were huge arcars. The Raja failed to meet his obligation, and could never recover solvency.

The financial difficulties of the Raja became all the more acute when on the recommendation of the local authorities, the Supreme Government authorised in March, 1836, the abolition of capitation, house and hearth taxes in Lower and Central Assam,² and to throw the entire burden on land. Accordingly, in the middle of the same year, these were abolished in Darrang and Nowgong; and to cover the losses the imposts on the fishermen and the artisans had to be maintained; also the inferior (*Bori*) and garden (*Bari*) lands, hitherto, exempted from taxation, were now brought under assessment. The measure could not be given effect to simultaneously in Lower Assam on some objections raised by Captain Bogle, the Principal Assistant, Kamrup; but in the following year, when these were dismissed by the Supreme Government as meaningless, the aforesaid taxes, including those on castes and callings, were entirely done away with in both the divisions.³ The abolition of these taxes, though hailed as a boon by many, adversely affected the Raja's exchequer. Inevitably, the measure encouraged the tax-ridden fishermen, braziers, weavers, gold-washers and potters of Upper Assam to emigrate into adjacent British territories.⁴ To put a stop to the exodus, promptly the Raja lowered the taxes on these communities, and drew the attention of the Supreme Government through the Political Agent to the harm done to him by their recent measures

¹ I.P.C., 1838; May 16, No. 53.

² B.R.C., 1836; March 1, Nos. 40-43.

³ B.R.C., 1836; November 1, Nos. 28-33.

⁴ I.P.C. 1836; November 14, Nos. 32-33.

requesting either a remission of the tribute or for the collection of revenues of the runaways on his account through the British officials.¹ 'The circumstances stated by the Raja' Captain White remarked in his forwarding note, 'I believe to be strictly correct and I am not aware that the *Morreas* (*braziers*) and the *Domes* (fishermen) were assessed by him at a higher rate than that prevailed under the British Government.'² Notwithstanding the sympathetic and reasonable consideration of the man on the spot Captain Jenkins conceived the demands made by the Raja as 'totally inadmissible'. According to him, the real cause of desertion of the ryots, the diminution of revenue and also of the difficulties experienced by the Raja in the payment of tribute—was the exorbitant extortion and oppressive character of his own Government.³ 'I feel confident' he observed, 'from the improvement of the rest of the country, that Upper Assam, had it continued in our own hands would now have yielded not less than one and half lakh of rupees.' He directed the Political Agent to have a personal survey of the state of affairs in the Raja's territory with a view to ascertaining if there were really valid and just grounds for allowing him a deduction in the tribute. Pending the report of Captain White, the Political Agent, Upper Assam, the authorities in Calcutta observed complete silence over the affair.⁴

Accordingly, towards the close of 1835, Captain White arrived in the territory of Raja Purandar Singha. He found, to his great satisfaction, extensive cultivation nearabout Jorhat, Jhanzi, Rangpur, Bassa, Dayang and Lakhimpur. A visit to the interior impressed him that since its transfer from British authorities, Upper Assam had steadily advanced in her resources.⁵ There was, of course, mismanagement to some extent in the judicial and revenue departments. As to the *Fouzadari* court, he reported :⁶

¹ *Ibid.*

² *Ibid.* White to Jenkins, October 21, 1836.

³ *Ibid.* Jenkins to the Secretary, Government of Bengal, October 27.

⁴ I.P.C., 1836; November 14, No. 34.

⁵ I.P.C., 1837; January 26, Nos. 59-60; White to Jenkins, 15 December, 1836.

⁶ *Ibid.*

'there were many complaints..... they principally resolved themselves into accusations of the subordinate *Omlahs* employed under the Raja, who influenced by bribes are stated to have been in the habit of protecting robbers,¹ concealing thefts and were guilty of other mal-practice common to the *Darogas* of the provinces..... complaints were likewise made of vexatious interference of the magisterial police in taking under their cognizance complaints of abuse, assaults and trifling thefts, all of which..... were to be devolved upon the heads of villages, (so that) the ryots might not be harassed by continual attendance at the court. All these, I brought to the notice of the Raja, (and) I am happy to say, that the Raja has shown every wish to correct these abuses.'

'In other respects, the police has been tolerably efficient..... I am happy to say that the punishment inflicted by the Raja to have been of very mild character.....that its connection with the British Government has relieved Upper Assam from the barbarous mutilation, cruel impalement and other outrages against humanity which its inhabitants were subjected to under the ancient rule'.

'In the revenue department, apart from the bribery amongst the *Omlahs*, irregular interference on the part of Raja's family and even of personal corruption as regards the Raja in those cases finally appealed to him..... the principal complaint was the employment of *Ameens*..... who had greatly exaggerated the number (of ryots) with a view to obtaining a reputation for zeal as regards Raja's interest. They let off the rich who could pay and saddled the loss upon the poor. I believe, there is much truth, but the same prevailed under the British.'

The Political Agent further added, that excepting the fishermen and the braziers, emigration into British possessions was negligible; there had been, of course, constant exodus into the territory of the Muttocks by the lure of tax-relief, which could not be expected in the territory of the Raja, overburdened as he

¹ The gross corruption of the *Omlahs* will be evident from the following; a robbery took place at Sadiya, which was then under the jurisdiction of the Political Agent, Upper Assam. The thief was subsequently arrested while he was committing similar offences in the Raja's territory. When Captain White demanded the culprit, he was assured that the prisoner would be made over after the trial of several cases which were then pending at Jorhat. In the meantime, without the knowledge of the Raja the Judicial Sheristadar by a confidential note to the *Daroga* released the prisoner. Apparently, by bribery, one of the most notorious offenders got off scot free. The Raja, of course, took deterrent measures by dismissing the whole gang of corrupt *Omlahs*. I.P.C., 1837; January 23, No. 59; White to Jenkins.

was, with a tribute of Rs. 50,000. On the authority of Southey's *Sketches of the relations between the British Government in India and in different Native States*, Captain White made it clear, that compared to his meagre resources Raja Purandar Singha had paid the highest amount of tribute in British India.¹ In these circumstances, he recommended under certain conditions, a reduction of the tribute which might be fixed at Rs. 35,000, to be payable with effect from May, 1836. 'It cannot be considered' he finally observed, 'that his government has had a fair trial, but making due allowance for them, I am of opinion, that *it has worked as well as could have been expected*'.²

The pressure of tribute so elaborately analysed by the Political Agent in his foregoing report failed to convince Captain Jenkins who remained intransigent, as before. In forwarding White's report, he wrote; 'my information as to the state of emigration and internal administration of the country does not tally with what had been submitted by White.'³ When the Raja took over the administration, the Commissioner presumed, he was well aware of the resources of the country; therefore, even a reduction in the tribute would not operate otherwise than 'a prolongation of the existing evils'. 'It would be of great advantage to the people of Assam and of the Government', he suggested to the Government of India, 'to accede to the proposition of resignation of the Raja in lieu of a grant even to the extent of his net revenue'.⁴

The conflicting views of the Political Agent and of the Commissioner of Assam, ultimately, broke the silence of the authorities in Calcutta; they found it, however, extremely difficult to agree to the proposal of one and dismiss that of the other outright. In these circumstances, they had no other alternative than to direct the Commissioner himself to proceed to Upper Assam, as early as possible, to have a personal knowledge of the actual state of affairs in the territory of Raja Purandar Singha. The opinion of the Government was at the same time intimated to him—that there was no objection to a reduction in the amount of

¹ I.P.C., 1837; January 26, Nos. 59-60.

² *Ibid.*

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *Ibid.*

tribute by way of experiment if the same really pressed too heavily on the Raja and also if there was any probability of its remission proving conducive to the prosperity of the country; on the other hand, if there was reason to believe that the diminution of revenue was owing to the inherent defect of the administration under the Raja, the Commissioner was instructed to suggest the means most expedient for effecting the improvement of the division.¹

Accordingly, the Commissioner left for Bishwanath on January 10, 1838; and taking a land route he visited Gohpur, Kalabari, Lakhimpur and Majuli. After crossing the Brahmaputra he arrived at Gaurisagar en route to Rangpur and thence to Gorgaon and Borhat. Later, he took a boat at Jaypur down the river Buridihing and reached Jorhat, the capital of Raja Purandar Singha, where he stayed till the middle of March, 1838.² *The Journal of Upper Assam* or the tour diary which Jenkins submitted to the Government of India, in two parts,³ is a document of unique importance on the history of Assam, particularly in the early days of the East-India Company. It offers a brilliant glimpse of the state of moribund Ahom monarchy as well as the attitude towards it of the neighbouring hill-tribes on the frontier. It also provides a picture of the decaying families, the struggling peasantry, of the rising communities and, above all, the *Journal* supplies geographical, economic and statistical information of great value.

In his final report on April 3, 1838, Jenkins narrated,⁴ that he found traces of villages throughout the fertile areas of Upper Assam, hitherto prosperous and teeming with population, now being almost deserted. He attributed this wholesale emigration mainly to the collection of revenue due from the runaways

¹ *Ibid.*

² I.P.C., 1838; March 28, Nos 44-45; April 4, No. 121. Jenkins to Prinsep, H.T., Secretary to the Government of India, Political Department, February 28 and March 14.

³ Part I—*Journal of Jenkins's proceedings from the time of leaving Bishwanath to his arrival at Gauhati.*

Part II—*A further Journal of his proceedings during his stay at Jorhat, February 21 to March 14, 1838.*

⁴ I.P.C., 1838; May 16, No. 53.

from those who remained, the oppressive character of the transit duties, the exaction of undue services, the want of military protection, wholesale corruption and inefficiency at the courts of justice and maladministration, generally, in the Raja's territory. The taxes, he added, were mainly the same as were under the British ; but the abuses in the mode of collection were 'intolerable' : the *syra* duties, which were farmed out, fell pressingly on the ryots, since these were repeatedly levied at every conceivable check-post on each article bought or sold. Although the Raja had a militia of his own of about 500 strong, at Jorhat, the frontier guards had been withdrawn, which had inevitably encouraged the predatory tribes, particularly the Duflas in the north, to fall upon helpless villagers, carrying off their cattle, property and females. 'If a force was ever sent out, it was quartered on the people.' The services of the *pykes*, though felt to be most humiliating since their abolition in British territories, were exacted most harassingly not only by the Raja and the members of his family but, generally, by those who had power or influence over the decision of the court of justice. All these resulted in an alarming depopulation and a corresponding fall in revenue which had now sunk to Rs. 42,000; although, under the British collections rose to Rs. 106,197.*

Captain Jenkins however admitted,¹ that the Raja was placed under most difficult circumstances : that emigration was also encouraged by the lower rate of taxation in Muttock and by the entire abolition in Lower and Central Assam of the services of the *pykes*, the transit duties and the poll-tax. He recognised that he was given authority over a people, of which the masses were indifferent to the frequent changes in Government, while the majority of the upper orders who were opposed to him, personally, were endeavouring to get rid of a Government they were averse to. Obviously, 'the misrule of the Raja was not entirely without excuse' and, therefore, Jenkins felt that the Raja deserved sympathetic consideration ; although by the failure to liquidate the arrears of his stipulated tribute he had forfeited his claim to the throne. He, therefore, recommended the resumption not of the whole territory, but a part of it—the whole of the

* See ante footnote p. 111.

¹ *Ibid.*

north bank, Majuli and the tract between the Buridihing and the Disang—yielding a revenue almost equal to the amount paid by the Raja as a tribute; leaving the remaining portion under certain conditions free of tribute in possession of the Raja. He was to clear off the arrears, hereafter, within a period of five years in equal instalments. Jenkins hoped, freed from all demands of tribute Purandar's government 'might be conducted more happily for his subjects and more for his own reputation and permanent benefit than it had hitherto been.'¹

Whatever may be the nature of these recommendations, the administration of Raja Purandar, according to the Commissioner, was the worst of its kind. The charge was, indeed, grossly exaggerated. He was, perhaps, right in doubting whether even with a remission in the tribute the Raja could carry out an effective re-organisation—not because of the character of the Raja as such, but because of the corruption of the *omlahs* under his employ. This was aggravated by the fact that they were now practically debarred from receiving any salary from the Government and were, therefore, encouraged to earn their livelihood by means highly irregular. It was too much to expect of the ill-paid or unpaid officials a high moral tone, which higher officials unfettered by dire necessities should naturally assume.

There was, besides, a certain amount of miscarriage of justice, but that does not mean that there was a complete denial of justice or that the court of the Raja was nothing short of an engine of oppression and extortion. It must also be remembered that it had been, until recently, a regular custom in Assam as elsewhere to propitiate the higher officials by some offerings, however insignificant they might be. Under the peculiar circumstances, it may be argued that it was neither objectionable nor did it operate so perniciously as might appear, since it was well understood that a judge was not precluded from giving a just verdict by taking a present. 'In fact, the self-denying spirit inculcated by the British regulations was the object of much astonishment to the Assamese'. 'I have not heard' reported White, 'the rectitude of the Raja's *Dewani* decisions much impugned'. 'on the contrary' he added, 'I believe they have given more satisfaction

¹ Ibid

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¹ Ibid

than those of the European predecessors, who with the best of intentions were more likely to commit errors (in) the delicate questions regarding succession, inheritance, violation of castes, marriages, contracts etc. from their comparative ignorance of the language and custom of the country, and corruption of the *Omlahs*.¹ In fact the administration of justice had never been pure and efficient even before and long after the rule of Raja Purandar in Upper Assam.²

During the period of British occupation, there had been huge arrears, every year,³ in Upper Assam, and in 1832-33, the balance amounted to Rs. 155,516-0; of which, with the exception of the amount collected by the Raja, the rest had to be left out as "irrecoverable". That the Raja failed to take notice of these arrears and in his eagerness to outbid his rivals he committed, like Raja Bijayanarayan of Darrang, the greatest blunder in accepting the charge without ascertaining the capabilities of his subjects—no one can deny. But the difficulties of Purandar considerably multiplied for reasons beyond his control. He frankly admitted about the irritation caused by the collection on account of the fugitives and also of the inequity in demanding transit duties when these were wiped out in the adjacent districts; but he had also to express his painful necessity for their retention pending a remission of tribute on this account.⁴ He could not but have that 'lust for money'; as

¹ I.P.C., 1837; January 23, No. 59, White to Jenkins.

² Towards the close of the Company's rule in Assam, in the words of a leading contemporary, 'The public courts of justice are exclusively for the benefit of the rich and powerful, that it is both imprudent and foolish for men in humble life to resort to them for relief, that cunning and deceits, falsehood and perjury beset the courts on all sides, the consequence is, the people in the interior of the country entertain the utmost dread to resort to the public tribunals for redress and are obliged in the majority of instances passively to submit to injury and oppression.' Mills : *Report on Assam*, see *Appendix (J)* p. 46. Hazarika, Dutiram : *Asamar Padya-Buranji*, pp. 205-8.

³ These were as follows; 1828-29—Rs. 54,255; 1829-30—Rs. 71,478; 1830-31—Rs. 35,788; 1831-32—Rs. 137,339; 1832-33—Rs. 155,516.

⁴ I.P.C., 1838; May 16, No. 53; Purandar to Jenkins, February 28.

without it, he would be a fish out of water; for he had surrendered about two-thirds of his revenue to the British Government, and with the rest supported himself and ran the administration. Whatever Jenkins might say, a considerable amount was required for the payment of the troops, the maintenance of police, courts of justice, religious institutions and works of public utility.¹ In his frantic effort to meet the demands of the British Government, with his rapid decline in revenue, gradually, his officials were left unpaid, favourites and partisans remained neglected, and religious rites and ceremonies were almost abandoned. Inevitably, the frontier guards had to be withdrawn and his subjects were exposed to the incursion of the neighbouring highlanders; the supervision over the *Omlahs* became less and less effective and justice could not be had without adequately paying for it; the number of enemies steadily mounted-up, and they persistently worked for the ruin of the monarch. The more the decline in revenue, the greater the demands on his collectors and heavier the pressure on the ryots, for whom there was hardly any alternative but to flee.²

The report of Captain Jenkins, nevertheless, assured the Raja of continued possession of a portion of the territory, and it was hoped that this area would yield a revenue that would be adequate to meet the demands of his government. Strangely enough the Commissioner changed his mind overnight and reversed his previous recommendations. He presumed³ that the

¹ During the administration of Purananda Buragohain (1783-1817), the disbursement had been estimated at Rs. 175,200 out of an income of Rs. 256,600 (*See Mills: Report on Assam, Appendix B, p. 77.*) From the statement of Collectors Brodie found, in 1837-38, the number of *pykes* were enumerated at 9478; of these, 2322 were allotted to different officers as their remuneration; from the remaining *pykes* the collection amounted to Rs. 61,304; and the personal expenditure incurred from it by the Raja was estimated at Rs. 27,669. I.P.C. 1838; November 21, No. 114.

² 'Under circumstances explained by Jenkins' Mr. Robertson, then a member of the Supreme Council, observed; 'so far from feeling surprised at his ultimate failure, it strikes me, that the Raja had been able to hold on so long as he had done.' I.P.C., 1838; October, 10 No. 86.

³ I.P.C., 1838; May 16, Nos. 54-55. Jenkins to Prinsep, April 4.

Raja might not be agreeable to accept the charge of a truncated territory and, as such, there was no future for this unfortunate country unless he was removed, altogether, from the administration. On the next morning in a demi-official letter addressed to Mr. Prinsep, the Secretary to the Government of India, in the Political Department, commenting strongly on the Raja as 'one of the worst characters' 'a rapacious miser' 'Bengalee by education and habits and, therefore, not acceptable to the Assamese', Jenkins recommended immediate resumption of Upper Assam, and in support of his contention he forwarded some anonymous petitions which were alleged to have been thrown into his room while at Jorhat. Incidentally, he mentioned also the existence of a well-planned and well-organised conspiracy on the part of his enemies with a view 'to getting rid of him'.¹

On receipt of this malignant report, the Vice-President in Council after consideration of all the circumstances came to the conclusion that the experiment of monarchy had miserably failed and, therefore, it would be improper to leave the territory any longer in the hands of Raja Purandar Singha.² 'The same argument which could justify and require the resumption of a part renders necessary taking the whole.....that the Raja is by character unfit to rule, and that in his hands there is no hope of providing for the country even a tolerable administration.'

Lord Auckland, the Governor-General of India, also shared these views as to the mismanagements under the Raja; he was however not inclined to take immediately so drastic a measure as dethronement but for the adverse report he received from the Agent to the Governor-General. In his minute on June 18, 1838, the Governor-General remarked:³ 'If a satisfactory Government could be established.....I should be well inclined to leaving him in the enjoyment of some portion of his present dominion.' But, 'when I see' he added 'that the Raja (is) mainly influenced by a lust for money, to have been under the control of bad advisers, to have the notion of a government hateful to the Assamese, and to be attached to the odious system of *pyke* I cannot but concur with the opinion of the President

¹ *Ibid.*

² I.P.C. 1838; May 16, Nos. 54-55; Jenkins to Prinsep, April 4.

³ I.P.C. 1838; August 22, No. 7; *vide* Minute by Lord Auckland.

that under him no really efficient re-organisation of the government can take place'. 'But for all these reasons' reluctantly the Governor-General concluded, '(and) a persuasion that milder measures would be at once impolitic and unjust, I have found myself compelled to come to the conclusion in favour of absolute resumption.' Evidently, the demi-official letter of the Commissioner of Assam, referred to above, sealed the fate of Raja Purandar Singha.

There arose, at this juncture, a constitutional hurdle. In a despatch on March 28, 1838, the Court of Directors in connection with the annexation of Jayantia, an independent territory of Assam, had enjoined upon the Governor-General of India in unambiguous terms not to annex any territory of a native prince without their previous approval.¹ The despatch reached just at the moment when the resumption of Upper Assam was under consideration of the Governor-General in Council. In face of such an injunction, Lord Auckland hesitated to implement the resolution and referred the decision to the discretion of the President-in Council.² In a subsequent meeting, on August 8, 1838, after reviewing the whole matter with reference to the directives of the Court, the Vice-President in Council came to the conclusion that the order of the Court was not applicable to the case of Raja Purandar, and since any postponement to carry the measure into effect 'would be attended with the very worst consequences', it was resolved³ with the concurrence of the Governor-General, to direct the Commissioner of Assam to take necessary action to resume the administration from Raja

¹ C.D. 1838; March 28, No. 18 Para 22.

² I.P.C., 1833; August 22, No. 11.

The case of the Raja of Jayantia might be stronger than that of Purandar Singha, yet the latter fell within the spirit of the injunctions. 'In confirming an order of a general nature' the Court observed; 'to one particular class of cases, and that class not the most frequent, the President-in Council had inadvisedly assumed the latitude of interpretation falling little short of license to depart altogether from our orders' C.D. 1839; December 4, No. 24 para 11; also Barpujari, H. K.: *Annexation of Jayantia, Proceedings Indian Historical Records Commission*, Volume XXX, part II, 1954.

³ I.P.C., 1838; August 22, No. 11; *vide* Resolution of the Government, August 8.

Purandar Singha. Accordingly, on September 16, 1838, after announcing the change by a general proclamation, Captain White, under instruction from the Commissioner, assumed the charge of the territory and placed it under two Principal Assistants Lieutenants Brodie and Vetch with headquarters at Jorhat and Lakhimpur respectively.¹ Finding his case entirely hopeless, deeply aggrieved and agitated, the Raja submitted with a mild protest that no opportunity, whatever, was given to him to answer the charges that were levelled at him.²

The experiment, thus, came to an end, and with it terminated the Ahom Rule in Assam that had lasted for more than six centuries. It clearly demonstrated that responsibility divorced from sovereignty was fraught with evil : a direct and decisive intervention would have, perhaps, saved the people from being the victims of the interim experiment. The transaction revealed, further, the apathy, vacillation and indecision, the Government of India, usually, displayed towards this frontier province. 'Formally to set up a native ruler', with feelings of deep regret Lord Auckland confessed, 'and within a few years to remove him must be measures, I need not say, of bad general effect, and the impression is produced in the province either of our want of accurate means of finding the most just and expedient plans of policies or of our irresolution and inconsistency in acting in our plans.'³ It was also unfortunate that the Commissioner of Assam, instead of taking an unbiased view of the problem, had under the influence of a group of backbiters not only vilified but acted in a doubtful manner so as to hasten the ruin of the unfortunate monarch. Whatever Jenkins might say, Purandar was elevated to the throne on the strongest recommendation of his capabilities by his predecessors and after a mature and protracted deliberation of as many as eight years by the authorities at the Fort William. He would have earned the gratitude of posterity had he afforded Purandar a 'fair trial'—the chance to reorganise his Government. Instead of applying proper remedies Jenkins killed the sick man at his bed. The nobility in Upper

¹ I.P.C., 1838 ; October 10, Nos. 83 and 85 ; November 14, Nos. 58-59 ; December 5, Nos. 137-40.

² I.P.C. 1838 ; October 10, No 85.

³ I.P.C. August 22, No. 7 ; *vide* Minute by Lord Auckland.

Assam were also too much divided by deep-rooted rivalries for the Raja to achieve success.¹ Purandar plunged headlong into their strife and could never extricate himself from it. He failed to see the sign of times—that the people had gradually been losing faith in monarchy. In his endeavours to conciliate the few stragglers Purandar had to perpetuate some of the antiquated institutions, which had deepened his breach with the people. Had he championed the cause of the masses instead of the vested interests, the restored monarchy would have, perhaps, survived a generation or more. He was indeed a victim of circumstances and no less of his own folly.

It will be seen from the original drafts of the despatches of the Home Government that the Court of Directors were sincerely desirous of giving the restored monarchy a fair trial although they were sceptical at the inception of the project.² The authorities at Leadenhall street who could view Indian affairs from afar, usually, 'pierced to the heart of matter more quickly than the man on the spot.'³ They fully appreciated the difficulties in which the Raja was placed and were keenly solicitous of affording him adequate support. Had his case not been already prejudiced by immediate resumption, the Court felt disposed to give Purandar a further lease either by reducing a portion of the tribute or by resuming a part of the territory in lieu of the tribute, for they had the conviction that frequent changes in policy would impair the prestige and affect the success of the British Government. 'We should be desirous' the Directors remarked 'to give even a questionable measure a full trial before

¹ In a representation the three grandees of the realm wrote to the Government : "There having been three different claimants of the Raj within 20 years, much party spirit divided the country and prevented the due administration of it.....during the temporary rule of the Burmese and the English, a few officials of low origin puffed up with their wealth had accustomed themselves to (look) down upon the noble and respectable of the land, but their spirit being checked under the Raja's rule, they had perfidiously combined to displace him.....and preferring false accusations had succeeded in their object'. I.P.C. 1838; October 31, No. 96.

² C.D. 1834; December 3, No. 14, para 39.

³ Philips, C.H. : *The East India Company (1784-34)*, P. 304.

it was abandoned.¹ The delays in the transaction of business and the difficulties in communication between authorities in England and India, apparently, prevented the important decision of the Court from being implemented and the Government of India was, thereby, enabled to act even in contravention of the anticipated orders from the Court ; for they knew it well that whatever might be the attitude of the authorities in England they could hardly undo what had already been carried into effect.²

¹ C.D. 1839 ; December 4, No. 24, Paras 14-15 (See original draft).

CHAPTER VI

ANNEXATION OF MUTTOCK AND THE TERRITORY UNDER TULARAM

There had been occasional disputes between the *Barsenapati* and the Khamti chief, the *Sadiyakhowa Gohain*. Towards the close of 1834, their affairs turned into actual hostilities over rival claims to the refugees who had migrated from the territory of Raja Purandar Singha and settled themselves at Saikhowa, a tract just opposite to Sadiya.¹ Notwithstanding the specific orders of Lieutenant Charlton, who had since been posted as the officer in-charge of Sadiya, to submit their disputes to the arbitration of the Political Agent, Upper Assam, the Khamti Chief took forcible possession of Saikhowa, assaulted the men sent against him by the *Barsenapati* and acted, hereafter, with a spirit of utmost contumacy to the British Government.² The local authorities who had been doubtful about the proceedings of the *Sadiyakhowa* since the incursion of the Singphos in 1930, sought to avail themselves of the opportunity of imposing rigorous terms on the Chief, at any rate, of withdrawing the arms that had emboldened him to flout the authority of the Paramount Power. The Commissioner went a step further; he dislodged the *Sadiyakhowa* from his office and brought the territory on either side of the river, Sadiya and Saikhowa, under control of the Government.⁴ The Khamtis were left undisturbed under their

¹ B.P.C., 1835; March 13, No. 1; Charlton to White, December 6, 1834.

² *Ibid*; Lieutenant Charlton went personally to the *Sadiyakhowa*, but the latter refused to meet him; at this insult, Charlton issued a *parwana* directing the Chief to leave the tract in dispute. The *Sadiyakhowa* replied by a verbal message that he was not his servant to come and to go, whenever he ordered.

³ B.P.C., 1835; March 13, No. 1; White to Jenkins December 22, 1834.

⁴ *Ibid*; Jenkins to the Secretary, Government of Bengal, January 20, 1835.

respective chiefs, but the Assamese *pykes*, who constituted about two-thirds of the whole population, were brought under assessment.¹ With their hard lot the Khamtis could hardly reconcile themselves, particularly, to their loss of Assamese slaves and bondsmen. The smouldering embers of the discontent lay dormant only to burst forth when an opportunity presented itself.

Doubts had been entertained by the local authorities as to the fidelity of the *Barsenapati* also;² it was suspected, that he was an accomplice in the previous anti-British movements in Upper Assam : that, the rebels could make a part of his territory the rendezvous of their activities and that one of his sons actively participated in their enterprise were sufficient to warrant a suspicion ; although, there is no positive evidence to prove that the *Barsenapati* ever took part in or countenanced the daring project ; on the contrary, his relation with the British was, on the whole, one of 'friendly co-operation'. Captain White rightly observed : 'Accustomed to act as an independent chief for fifty years and his territory unoccupied either by the Burmese or by the British he is, naturally, independent and somewhat (harsh ?) in his manners, which, combined with a dislike of innovations, too natural to that period of life, has occasionally given rise to impropriety of expression and acts of seeming disobedience, apt to give offence to young military men trained in the habits of rigid subordination.'³

The very presence of such a chief with exclusive spirit and independent bearing might be an affront, as viewed by the Political Agent, to some British officials. Moreover, the territory of the Muttocks constituted a standing menace encouraging, as it did, hundreds of refugees to emigrate there from the British districts. It also provided the most fertile field for the cultivation of tea, the successful operation of which had, in the meantime, attracted British entrepreneurs. To bring the territory under effective control Captain Jenkins sounded the Government of India, in early 1838, about the expediency of dividing the interests of the sons of the *Barsenapati* by making separate arrangements

¹ B.P.C., 1835 ; March 13, Nos. 2-3 ; White to Charlton, February 1, 1835.

² I.P.C., 1838 ; April 18, Nos. 56-57.

³ *Ibid.*

even during the life-time of their father. Fearing, that such an uncalled-for intervention might produce some unrest in an otherwise peaceful and prosperous country, the Governor-General in Council remained silent.¹ The Commissioner's object, however, materialised towards the close of the same year when, owing to his frequent paralytic fits and infirmities, the *Barsenapati* nominated Maju Gohain, his second son, as his successor and placed him in charge of the territory. The Government of India, although it raised no objection to the present nomination, strictly enjoined upon the Commissioner not to recognise the right of the *Barsenapati* to disinherit other sons or making any other arrangements that would take effect after his death.²

To set aside, altogether, the arrangement made by the *Barsenapati* and to impose a new one would not have been easy on the part of the local authorities had the Muttocks remained solidly behind the family of *Barsenapati* as hitherto they had. But in the meantime, disintegration had set in amongst the Muttocks, and fissiparous tendencies were to be seen even during the later part of the rule of Matibar. The dissensions, according to Captain White,³ were occasioned by religious proclivities of the two communities—the Morans, the inhabitants of Upper Muttock, and the non-Morans of Lower Muttock; the former following the *Gossain* of Tiphook, the head priest of the Brahminical faith, and the latter Bhaktanund, the head of the Moamaria sect. 'I do not agree with White' reported⁴ Vetch 'that the quarrel is founded on religious grounds, rather it has arisen from the independent feeling of the Morans who could not submit quietly to be taxed by those whom they always considered on an equality with them'. Although, during the life time of Matibar there was no open breach, it was doubtful if the Morans would brook the dominance of Maju Gohain who was alleged to have been completely under the influence of Bhaktanund.

On January 2, 1839, the *Barsenapati* breathed his last, leaving

¹ *Ibid.*

² I.P.C., 1838; October 31, Nos. 84-85.

³ I.P.C., 1839; February 20, No. 89; Hannay to Jenkins, January 6; August 14, No. 105; White to Jenkins, January 26.

⁴ *Ibid*; Vetch to Jenkins, May 11, 1839.

behind his widowed wife and four sons—Borgohain, Maju Gohain, Khood Gohain and Captain Gohain. A few days later, Captain Hannay, the Commandant of the *Second Assam Sebundy Corps*,* Jaypur, paid a visit to Rongagora, the headquarters of Muttock, and found that Maju Gohain according to the wishes of his father had already assumed charge of the territory. There was no indication yet of any commotion in Upper Muttock which was nominally held by Captain Gohain, the youngest son of the deceased.¹

The opportunity to extract better terms as the price of recognition of the new chief had just arrived, and the task of entering into a revised engagement fell on the Political Agent, Upper Assam. Endowed with a keen sense of realism, Captain White strongly felt that it would be unfair to remove Maju Gohain from the management who had already established a strong claim in his favour; and that the *status quo* was all the more desirable because the territory would yield but little revenue and most of it would be swallowed up in the management and providing for the sons and relatives of the late Senapati.² The Political Agent, however, desired to raise the tribute to Rs. 10,000/- from Rs. 1,800/-, since the existing amount operated to the disadvantage of the districts under British administration. He would further demand of the Chief to make over the waste lands for the cultivation of tea, and in the event of any disputes arising between British subjects occupying therein and the inhabitants of Muttock, the decision should be referred to an officer to be appointed for the purpose.³

With these proposals in mind, the Political Agent arrived on January 20, 1839, at Rongagora.⁴ The durbar, that was held on the following day at the residence of the *Barsenapati*, was attended by the *Borahs*, the *Saikias*, the *Hazarikas* and the leading men of the realm. To respect the wishes of the late

* In 1837, to meet the demands of the Sadiva frontier this *Irregular Corps* was raised at Jaypur, which in 1839 became the *Upper Assam Sebundy*. P.L.I.B., 1839; August 21, No. 62. See also p. 164.

¹ I.P.C., 1839; January 30, No. 63.

² I.P.C., 1839; August 14, No. 105; White to Jenkins, January 26.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *Ibid.*

Senapati, the *Kheldars* urged the Political Agent to confirm his last act. Captain White, who had in the meantime ascertained the sentiments of the Borgohain—that in deference to his father he had resigned his claim in favour of his younger brother—replied in the affirmative, provided the nominee was agreeable to certain conditions, inclusive of an enhancement of the existing tribute to Rs. 10,000/-¹. To the latter the assembly, as a whole, stood opposed. Maju Gohain politely submitted that the Muttocks were too poor to bear any heavier demand and that nothing but force would enable him to raise the assessment. He, however, assured the Political Agent that he would intimate to him after ascertaining the number of *pykes* what additional amount he could pay by way of tribute to the British Government.

Captain White also admitted : 'The people have been accustomed to a very light assessment and were placed in different circumstances from the ryots of Lower Assam.....and their Chief exercises less authority over the people than I have seen elsewhere in Assam'.² The Political Agent was also convinced that there was hardly any prospect of having a higher tribute than Rs. 2,500/-. He, therefore, suggested to the Commissioner in his letter on January 26, 1839, the expediency of recognising under existing terms the claim of the present Chief pointing out, therein, that so long as the situation in this extreme frontier continued to be unsatisfactory, it would be highly impolitic to incur the enmity of these chieftains ; because, in the event of hostilities occurring in that quarter, the British Government would have to depend on the Muttocks for the main sinews of war—the labour and provisions ; 'for money will not do in a country like this, (where) goodwill of the people will be more efficacious than the pecuniary benefit to be derived from taxation'.³

Dark clouds were already gathering fast over the Eastern horizon. The Burmese, who had considered the North-East Frontier as their sole preserve, grew jealous of the gradual penetration of the British into the valley of the Brahmaputra and, in fact, since 1837, they had assumed a definite policy of hosti-

¹ *Ibid.*

² *Ibid.*

³ *Ibid.*

lity by collecting arms, recruiting men, and strengthening the frontier.¹ Of late, wild rumours were afloat on this side of the Patkais of the formation of an anti-British confederacy of the hill-tribes which caused so much horror 'that many villagers took to passing their nights in the jungle while others sat up whole night in fear of a surprise attack'.²

Apart from these forebodings, the annexation of Upper Assam had in the meantime demanded the shifting of the headquarters of the Assam Light Infantry from Bishwanath to Sadiya, since the latter enjoyed a commanding position in relation to Ava and the disaffected tribes in the neighbourhood.³ Hardly had a portion of the troops moved and occupied the newly constructed military lines at Sadiya, when on January 29, 1839, exactly three days after the communique issued by the Political Agent to the Government of Bengal, the cantonment was attacked by the Khamtis.⁴ The insurgents numbering about 600, armed with *dahs*, spears, muskets, commenced their assault from all sides, burning the houses, cutting down everyone on the way and killing a large number of men, women and children. After a feeble resistance, Major White, the Commandant of the A.L.I., too, fell at the hands of the assassins.⁵

This was considered to be the 'boldest attempt' ever made by the hill-tribes in the North-East Frontier against the British, and it was generally believed that the court of Ava had a secret hand in instigating the insurgents.⁶ The simultaneous appearance at Muttock of a number of the Kachins, and the rumour that a Burmese force had already advanced on the Hukwang kept the people in a state of constant alarm. Captain Hannay, temporarily vested with the command of the Assam Light Infantry, raided the Khamtis, burnt the villages, destroyed their grains and adopted vigorous measures to apprehend the ring-leaders.⁷

¹ Banerjee, A.C.; *Annexation of Burma* pp. 29-31, 33, 39-40; also Desai, W.S.: *History of the British Residency in Burma*, Chapter XI.

² I.P.C., 1837; May 15, No. 12: Miller to Jenkins April 14.

³ I.P.C., 1839; Jenkins to White, December 14, 1838.

⁴ I.P.C., 1839; February 20, Nos. 105-106.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ I.P.C., 1839; March 6, No. 129.

⁷ I.P.C., 1839; February 20, Nos. 7-8; February 27, No. 162; March 2, No. 75.

Being apprised of the seriousness of the situation the Government of India hastened to despatch additional troops to the defence of the frontier.¹ The incident demonstrated the vulnerability of Sadiya; the cantonment was immediately shifted to Saikhowa on the western side of the river where it would be nearer to the sources of supplies and less exposed to the sudden raids of the refractory tribes.² The Governor-General in Council further discovered the impolicy of overburdening the officer in-charge of the Assam Light Infantry with the functions of the Political Agency and, therefore, in their despatch on April 3, 1839, Captain Hannay was placed exclusively in-charge of military duties, while Captain Vetch was posted, permanently, as the Principal Assistant, Lakhimpur, with additional duties of the Political Agent, Upper Assam, on a consolidated salary of Rs. 1,500 per month.³

Maju Gohain never failed to co-operate with the local authorities in their defensive measures; although, his *bonafides* was suspected, throughout⁴. 'If he establishes a firm authority' the Commissioner also feared, 'he would be the first to rise against us at any opportunity'. Therefore, after the arrival of reinforcements from Jamalpur, when Captain Vetch found himself sufficiently strengthened, he sought to effect the much-delayed settlement. In an interview he found the Muttock Chief as unbending as before; 'I doubt' reported Vetch, 'if we can hold to the demand of rupees ten thousand without the risk of disaffection.....the demand would further be used as a pretext for oppression or as the watchword of revolt in time of trouble..... but foregoing the demand without a fair equivalent would be attributed to weakness'.⁵ Thus, the situation became an extremely embarrassing one. In these circumstances, Vetch had to recommend that the territory should be left under Maju Gohain; and instead of imposing a fixed tribute of any assumed amount he

¹ I.P.C., 1839; June 5, No. 87.

² P.L.L.B., 1839; August 21, No. 62.

³ I.P.C., 1839; April 3, No. 118.

⁴ I.P.C., 1839; August 14, No. 105; Jenkins to the Secretary, Government of Bengal, May 29.

⁵ I.P.C., 1839; August 14, No. 105; Vetch to Jenkins, May 11, 1839.

proposed to make a new census and a new settlement on the terms of the agreement made by Scott.¹

In the meanwhile, dissensions had broken out in Muttock : the Morans made several representations to the local authorities not to place them under the rule of Maju Gohain. In the midst of such 'inflammatory materials' Major Jenkins doubted the propriety of surrendering the territory on the lines suggested by the Political Agent. In forwarding the recommendations the Commissioner remarked : 'should Maju Gohain or any of his family.....commit themselves as to oblige us to remove them of the management of the country, it would be the best event that happens for the people and the interests of the Government.'² After due deliberation the Governor-General in Council, however, concurred with the Political Agent, and resolved on August 16, 1839, to vest the management of the territory on the existing incumbent on condition that the latter entered into an agreement on the terms given below ;³

(i) The administration of the country should be vested in Maju Gohain on the same footing in respect of civil authority as it was held by the late father.

(ii) That a proportion of what might be exacted in money or service from the *pykes* and *ryots* should be claimable by the Paramount Power.

(iii) The *pykes* and the *ryots* would have the option of rendering service or commuting it at a fixed rate or at the rate in which such commutations were made in other divisions of Assam, and the Government and the Senapati would be bound by the same rate of commutation for equalising the rates of assessment in different tracts.

(iv) The unoccupied jungle lands should be placed at the disposal of Government officer ; and the authority of the Senapati was not to extend over the *tea-barees* and other establishments that might be located between the rivers which formed the area of Muttock settlement.

(v) *The above arrangement be confined for the present to*

¹ *Ibid.*

² I.P.C., 1839 ; August 14, Nos. 105 ; Jenkins to the Secretary Government of Bengal, May 29.

³ I.P.C., 1839 ; August 14, No. 106.

Lower Muttock and exclude the Morans, who were stated to be quite different from other inhabitants of Muttock.

On these terms, the Political Agent, Upper Assam, was directed to enter into an agreement with Maju Gohain or any other heirs of the late Senapati, failing which he was authorised to annex the territory to the British dominion.¹ In the event of Maju Gohain's agreeing to these terms, the British Government would have, hereafter, a permanent share in the revenues of the territory. The Chief would find his powers limited in revenue matters; and even in civil administration, although stated to have been on the same footing with that of his late father, his authority would be curtailed with reference to the occupants of the waste lands which would virtually to be handed over to the British Government. Evidently, when the most substantial element of the population was to be brought under the direct control of the British authorities, the solidarity of the Moamaria territory, so ably maintained by the late Senapati, would be completely destroyed.

Therefore, Vetch had every reason to doubt that the *Gohains* might not be agreeable to the aforesaid terms. To carry out the order of the Government, naturally, he was apprehensive of some commotion in Muttock; although, he could then count upon the support of the Morans.² To meet any emergency, under direction of the Commissioner a detachment was despatched to Dibrumukh and another party to Tiphook, in Upper Muttock. Captain Hannay was, at the same time, advised to be on guard on the lines of communications with the Singphos so that they might not lend any support in the event of an out-break.³ After taking these precautionary measures, Captain Vetch with an escort of 300 sepoy proceeded on November 12, 1839, to Rangagora. On arrival, a meeting was held at the residence of the *Barsenapati* which was attended, as usual, by the *Gohains*, the *kheldars* and innumerable villagers.⁴ A deputation of the Morans also attended. The Political Agent in his preliminary address endeavoured to impress on the Muttocks that as the

¹ I.P.C., 1839; October 16, No. 89.

² I.P.C., 1839; October 16, No. 93.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ I.P.C., 1839; October 16, No. 93; December 26, Nos. 74-75.

previous settlement was made with the late Senapati and for his life time only, it lapsed at his death ; the British Government was, however, prepared to vest the management of the territory as a mark of favour in one of the sons of the former Chief, provided the latter agreed to certain conditions.¹ When Vetch proceeded to explain the terms of the proposed agreement, one by one, there was no objection, whatever ; but the *Gohains* unanimously opposed the exclusion of the Morans from their control, without which none of them was prepared to undertake the management.²

The breach between the two communities had, in the meantime, widened into a yawning gulf. On his way to Rangagora, Captain Vetch was waited upon at Tiphook by a deputation of the Morans headed by their *Gossain* who told him, categorically, that they were prepared to serve the *Sarkar* by all means possible, but nothing short of force would compel them to come under the rule of Maju Gohain.³ Vetch could not venture, in these circumstances, to set aside the clause objected to by the *Gohains* ; he, however, assured them to reconsider the matter in the event of their coming to a compromise with the representatives of the Morans who were also present on the occasion.⁴ He allowed them three days for mutual deliberation, but the parleys ended in nothing. At the final meeting, the *Gohains* also objected to the fourth clause by which British Government wanted to exercise control over the establishment of *tea-barees* in Muttock, as this would involve, they feared, a constant clash of the authorities concerned.⁵

The chances of entering into an agreement with the *Gohains* becoming, thus, extremely remote, Captain Vetch had no alternative but to act under the orders of the Government. After issuing a general proclamation he assumed the charge of the whole territory on behalf of the East-India Company.⁶ Captain Mainwarring, who had since assumed command of the *Second*

¹ I.P.C., 1839 ; October 16, No. 93.

² *Ibid.*

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ I.P.C., 1839, December 26, No. 75.

Assam Sebundies, was directed to move to Rangagora which was temporarily made the headquarters of the new division.¹ Dibrumukh or Dibrugarh, was soon found to be more convenient and central with reference to this division as well as Lakhimpur (North), and as such, it was made in the following year the Sadar-Station of the joint district of Lakhimpur.²

Captain Vetch had to confront immediately after annexation two major problems. He was to evolve a liberal system of assessment in a land where only a few had, hitherto, paid taxes and also to provide for several sons and numerous dependents of the late Senapati. In the territory of Muttocks, consisting as it did of high and undulating lands, the inhabitants carried on cultivation mostly by *jumming*. Pending a land survey which was conducted under Mr. Thornton, Vetch imposed a capitation tax of Rs. 2/- per head on each male in return for which he was allowed to occupy and bring under tillage as much land as he could.³ In 1840-41, Sadiya, Saikhowa and Lower Muttock were brought under assessment at rates varying from annas eight to a rupee per *pura* according to the data furnished by the surveyors. The capitation tax on the Morans, the Miris, the Khamtis and the *Doaneahs** was, however, continued. For inhabitants of the North bank, who were assessed at the same rate as in Lower Muttock, a remission of annas four was allowed since they were subjected to the *posa* or black-mail of the Dufas; This was commuted, in 1850-51, to a fixed payment in cash and the assessment was, accordingly, raised to Rs. 1 1/4/- and -/12/- as, a *pura*.⁴

To provide for his numerous dependents, the late Senapati had made so much fragmentation of the *khels* that a *Hazarika* could seldom command 1000, the *Saikias* and the *Borahs*, in most cases, not even half of their allotted *pykes*. 'Every hamlet also

¹ *Ibid.*

² I.P.C., 1840; January 15, Nos. 115-116.

³ I.P.C., 1840; January 15, No. 115-116; February 5, Nos. 73-74; also Mills: *Report on Assam*: see District Lakhimpur, paras 8, 17-25.

⁴ *Ibid.*

* A tribe in Muttock, having a mixed parentage of the Singphos and the Assamese.

had its Gaonburah to assist the *Gossains* in their collections of temple and priest dues, and a *Borah* to attend and provide the service *pykes* with their food at a distance from home in addition to the vast number of men of every grade either receiving a portion of the revenue or exemption from payment of their own shares.¹ Vetch included in his assessment all those who had hitherto, performed in some way or other services to the State.² Consequently, as in Upper Assam, a fairly large number of former officials were thrown out of employment, and the men of rank, including the members of the Senapati's family, being deprived of their *pykes* were reduced to great hardship. On the suggestion of the local authorities the Governor-General in Council promptly sanctioned an assignment of one-third of the net revenue of the territory as provision to the several members of the late Senapati.³ In slight modification of the order Major Jenkins sought to provide the *Gohains* partly in money and partly in land and the latter, too, on intimation, appeared well satisfied with the measure.⁴ Trouble, however, arose at the hour of executing the order. Lieutenant Eld, who was deputed to mark out their respective estates, found the *Gohains* entirely refusing to allow any measurement done; instead, they put forth a demand to have one-third of the whole territory independent of jurisdiction, the boundaries of which, it was feared, would incorporate a portion of Upper Muttok.⁵

The demand of an independent charge of one-third of the territory in a compact area would obviously mean the establishment of a power which the British authorities did so much to prevent; and, consequently, Eld's mission terminated, abruptly. No attempt at reconciliation was, thereafter, made. Disappointed in their attempts and driven by destitution, the *Gohains* matured plans for an insurrection.⁶ About the middle of 1841, it was arranged that there should be a simultaneous attack by the

¹ I.P.C. 1840; December 28, No. 62; Vetch to Jenkins, October 17.

² *Ibid.*

³ I.P.C. 1840; April 27, Nos. 40-41.

⁴ A.S., Letter issued to Government, Vol. X; No. 212½, December 25, 1840.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ *Ibid.*

Singphos, the Khamtis and the Nagas on the British out-posts of Saikhowa, Kuju, Ningroo and Tezoo ; while Borgohain would occupy Rangagora. Maju Gohain accompanied by his younger brother would at the same time advance on Dibrugarh and seize it. Messengers with presents of opium were sent to the neighbouring hill-chiefs beseeching their aid against the British. The *Gohains* not unreasonably counted on the support of all the disaffected elements in the frontier, particularly the Singphose whose grievances were as acute as their own, since their villages had been encroached upon with the expansion of tea-cultivation into that region. The Khamtis, too, could hardly forget and forgive the severe lessons they received at the hands of Captain Hannay only a few years back. But the rebels lacked in leadership and the power of organisation indispensably necessary for the success of their enterprise. Major Jenkins, who was silent over a year about the affairs of Muttok, woke up on the report of these developments to the seriousness of the situation and lost no time in directing the Political Agent to remove the *Gohains* to Bishwanath where they were kept for sometime under surveillance.¹

The abortive attempt of the *Gohains* served one purpose—it aroused the Government of India to an awareness of their responsibilities for the removal of the causes which had occasioned their disaffection. The evidence adduced by the Political Agent to implicate the Chiefs in a criminal conspiracy against the British could not be proved conclusively as to warrant a severe punishment. As a measure of precaution they were temporarily removed ; but the Commissioner was advised² to treat these individuals with every consideration. During their absence, it was directed that their family estates should be held and cultivated for them by their dependents or managed on their account by the officers of the Government. To the members and relatives of the late Senapati provision was made with pensions and rent-free grants. The *Gossains* or the religious heads of the realm, who had exerted considerable influence over the populace, were allowed to hold their existing grants rent-free during their lives, and, thereafter, their heirs at half and quarter rates, respectively. Remission

¹ *Ibid* ; also I.P.C., 1840 ; June 8, Nos 137-138.

² I.P.C., 1841 ; June 25, Nos. 73-75.

in revenue however meagre was granted to the former officials who were thrown out of their jobs, and to the men of rank who were hit hard by the removal of their service pykes.¹ To qualify their youth for employment under the Government a school was started at Saikhowa ; and it was gradually found that the Muttocks took interest in sending their sons and wards to this institution.²

Provision under varying terms was, thus, made to conciliate those affected by the new changes in Government ; and adequate safeguards were also provided to prevent their future combination. By the order on November 29, 1841, the Government of India placed the allowance and the rent free-grants to the different members of the family of the late Chief on a fixed scale, *individually*³; by this measure the *Gohains* gained temporarily ; since their allowance was not subjected to fluctuation, but they were debarred from the fruits of increased revenue. It became a deliberate policy of the Government, hereafter, not to recognise any one as the head of the family, but to see that the descendants of the *Barsenapati* should, gradually, merge with the general body of the people. The number of adherents to the *Gohains*, naturally, dwindled when they found that instead of fighting for a lost cause it would be beneficial for them to reconcile themselves to the new order of things. On their return from internment, therefore, the Muttock Chiefs had no other alternative but to submit meekly to the inevitable.

In the meantime, freed from the intrigues of his ungrateful cousins, Tularam Senapati had to confront a new but formidable danger—the incursion of the Angami Nagas in the south-east.⁴ Captain Jenkins had traced the origin of the trouble to the age-long disputes over the salt-springs near Semkhar, which were situated within the jurisdiction of Tularam's territory.⁵ Lieutenant Bigge, the officer in-charge of Nowgong, rightly conceived that

¹ I.P.C., 1841 ; November 28, 130-33.

² *Ibid.*

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ B.P.C., 1835 ; November 24, No. 3.

⁵ I.P.C., 1839 ; February 6, No. 60.

the Angamis like other hill-tribes when hard pressed, usually, came down in hordes to collect their provisions of food, salt, dried-fish etc.; and if they could collect their requirements unopposed no harm was done to any one, otherwise, they carried off forcibly on the way whatever they could.¹ Emboldened by the prospect of British protection under the new treaty, the Kacharis resisted such demands and, therefore, they had been subjected to the frequent reprisal by their turbulent neighbours. The inability of Tularam to repel these attacks single-handed and the early indifference on the part of the British authorities engendered by a false sense of security almost ruined the Kacharis and their neighbours, namely the Mikirs; many of whom had died and others fled into the adjoining districts. When the marauding raids reached the British frontier, in January 1839, Mr. Grange, the Sub-Assistant, and later, Lieutenant Bigge, the Principal Assistant, Nowgong, conducted a series of operations against the Nagas.² True to his commitments, Tularam accompanied the commanding officers, cleared the passage for the troops, provided *rasud*, and erected sheds for their encampment.³

The later part of Senapati's life was, indeed, extremely miserable. Completely disabled by old age and infirmity, in 1844, Tularam entrusted the charge of his territory to his sons—Nakulram and Brajanath.⁴ Despite repeated expeditions, the Angamis remained unconquered, and their depredations rendered the villages so desolate, that, in 1851, the local authorities found in the territory (an area of about 2000 sq. miles) a little over 5000 souls. To restore confidence in the minds of people his sons proved utterly incompetent; and to make matters worse, relation between the brothers became far from being friendly; it is alleged, on the abduction of the wife of Nakulram by his younger brother the former attempted the life of Brajanath, and a catastrophe was averted through the timely mediation of his

¹ I.P.C., 1839; February 27, No. 164.

² I.P.C., 1839; February 6, No. 60; 1840, January 1, No. 112; December 21, Nos. 66-67: see Butler, J: *Travels and Adventures in Assam*, pp. 104-116.

³ B.J.P., 1851; March 19, No. 223.

⁴ I.F.P., 1853; October 14, No. 42.

aged father.¹ The misfortunes of Tularam, naturally, prevented him from meeting the requirements of the local authorities with as much promptitude as was demanded by the operating forces. Occasionally, there had been frictions between the managers and the officials commanding the troops, particularly when the latter made forcible seizure of men and provisions in Tularam's territory.²

Matters came to a head when, in the middle of 1850, protests were made by Nakulram against the undue exactions of some British officials. In his explanation, Captain J. Butler, who had since succeeded Bigge as the Principal Assistant, Nowgong, assured the Government of Bengal that he would be vigilant, in future, about such unauthorized and irresponsible action on the part of the officers on duty ; he also took the opportunity to urge the Government to resume the territory, since the conduct of Tularam and his sons had already amounted to a breach of the agreement.³ In support of his contention Butler complained that the Chief had concealed offenders instead of surrendering them under the provisions of the treaty ; that they were not aiding the Government with men and *rasud* ; although, to share the profits of the plundered property they had been assisting and indirectly encouraging the Nagas to continue their outrageous acts ; that under the successors of Tularam there would be no protection to the people nor any peace even in the neighbouring district under the British Government. Above all, the rule of Tularam, according to Butler, was hateful to the bulk of the people ; his complicity in the murder of Gobinda Chandra and doubtful nature of the origin of the family had made him forfeit the respect and allegiance of his subjects.⁴ Not only did Tularam refute all these charges with positive evidence, but he levelled counter charges against the Principal Assistant ; and these, naturally, embittered the relations between the two still further.⁵

There is hardly any evidence of oppression on the part of

¹ Butler, J : *Travels and Adventures in Assam*, p. 19.

² A.S., Letters issued to Government, Vol. XXXIII, 1849 ; Vincent to Butler, December 18.

³ B.J.P., 1850 ; November 6, Nos. 51 and 127 ; *vide* enclosures.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ B.J.P., 1851 ; March 19, No. 225 ; *vide* translation of a petition by Tularam.

Tularam or his successors, nor was there any protest against his rule as such. It was extremely doubtful, if Tularam ever deliberately harboured the criminals who might have easily found a shelter in a land full of jungles or encouraged the Nagas to commit acts of aggression on his own kith and kin, as alleged by Captain Butler. The failure to meet the demands of the British may be attributed to the inherent weakness of his successors and partly to the excesses of the sepoys or some irresponsible officials of the Government. 'I can well imagine' Jenkins remarked,¹ 'that the conduct of our police and other officers may have been very galling to these rude chiefs.' Rightly he felt that their repeated and not infrequently forcible exactions without any payment, whatever, scared the inhabitants away and nothing but force could, obviously, compel them to meet their demands. Not without some misgivings, therefore, the Commissioner of Assam had forwarded the report of Captain Butler for consideration of the Government of Bengal.² Considering the charges rather flimsy the Deputy Governor of Bengal, too, did not agree to the proposal; in his opinion, nothing serious had occurred to affect British relations with Tularam as to warrant such a severe measure as recommended by the local authorities.³ The death of Tularam in October, 1851, offered Captain Butler another opportunity to repeat his former recommendations. Apart from complaints of inefficiency and breach of the agreement, he now argued that as the treaty was merely personal, it lapsed along with the demise of the Senapati; and as such, the British Government had every right to resume the territory. Even an annexationist like Lord Dalhousie could not be convinced of the soundness of the reasons submitted by the Principal Assistant. In his minute on March 6, 1852, the Governor-General pointed⁴ out: 'the agreement of 1834 did not limit the tenure of the country to Tularam Senapati during his life only, nor that alleged violation on that

¹ B.J.P., 1850; November 6, No. 127; Jenkins to the Secretary Government of Bengal, July, 13.

² *Ibid.*

³ B.J.P., 1850; November 6, No. 128.

⁴ A.S., Letters received from Government, Vol. XXXIV (1852); Secretary, Government of Bengal to the Agent, North-East Frontier, March 6, 1852, No. 477.

agreement would justify the Government of India in assuming the territory.....and that something more than that consideration was necessary to justify the action.' At this rebuff, Butler had no other alternative but to confirm the sons of Tularam in the management of the territory with a warning that unless tributes were regularly paid, troops assisted in their march, heinous offenders given up and all customs exactions abolished, they would be deprived of the territory that was left in their hands.¹

Nakulram and Brajanath, thus, procured a further lease, but their worries did not terminate. They were subjected to more frequent raids of the Angamis, whose excesses had made even the adjoining British District wholly insecure. To inquire into these atrocities, the Commissioner of Assam deputed in December 1851, Lieutenant Vincent, Junior Assistant, Nowgong; and the latter learnt on arrival that since December 1847, no less than twenty four outrages had been committed; in 1851, alone, 55 persons were killed, 10 wounded and 113 carried off into captivity.² This state of affairs compelled the Government of Bengal to adopt some peremptory and energetic measures' lest the security of North Cachar should be jeopardised. On the suggestion of Vincent, the frontier outposts were strengthened and Lieutenant H. S. Bivar, was permanently posted as a Junior Assistant at a strategical position known as Goomy Goojo.³ Hardly had Bivar occupied his new post, when on April 3, 1851, there occurred the worst and most fateful disaster at Semkhar just adjacent to the British territories. A large number of Nagas of the Moozoomah clan in revenge for the murder of one of their chiefs suddenly fell upon Semkhar and the neighbouring villagers, burnt their houses, killed 86 men, and carried off 115 as slaves.⁴ Nakulram proceeded against the Nagas at the head of an army of about 300 men consisting of the Kacharis and the Nagas. When he was within a few miles of the village of the enemies, the Chief was decoyed by the Konemah clan to fight against their supposed enemy, namely the Dishomas, and in so doing, he was trapped and hacked to pieces. The Kachris made a

¹ I.F.P., 1853; October 14, No. 42.

² *Ibid.*

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *Ibid.*

hasty retreat after the fall of their leader and many of them shared his fate.¹ On the receipt of the news of this unfortunate event, Major Jenkins directed the Principal Assistant, Nowgong, to send hurriedly a detachment to the place of occurrence and to take such measures as might be necessary to prevent the Nagas from renewing their attacks.²

The indiscreet action of Nakulram cost him his life, but it afforded the local authorities the much-desired pretext to press for annexation. His unprovoked attack on the Dishoma Nagas, an independent tribe, without authority from the Paramount Power was treated as a gross violation of the terms of the agreement recently renewed. Bivar wrote³ to Jenkins that nothing short of resumption would effectively prevent the recurrence of atrocities, since Brajanath Burman, the brother of the deceased, had neither the means nor the ability to repel the Nagas who intoxicated by their recent successes were sure to follow up their victory and lay the country waste unless strong measures were adopted to oppose them. Impressed with these arguments, the Commissioner of Assam also changed his earlier attitude and advised the authorities in Calcutta in favour of resumption. He proposed compensation to the remaining heirs of Tularam to the extent of Rs. 3,000/-, annually, with rent-free grants during their lives.⁴

The early British relations with these petty chiefs in the North-East Frontier had been determined mainly by the exigencies of the situation. Faced with the uprising of the Khasis, the Singphos and the Bhutias, on the one hand, and the disaffection of the nobility of Upper Assam, on the other, Scott could hardly afford to incur the hostility of Tularam, when the latter had already carved out a principality of his own. This redoubtable chief, it was strongly felt, might be a source of strength in the event of a war with Ava or any collision with the predatory tribes in the neighbourhood. He was, therefore, allowed to have undisturbed possession of his hill tract, the resources of which were then little known. Lieutenant Bigge's operations through these hills,

¹ I.F.P., 1853; October 14, No. 46: Bivar to Jenkins, July 1.

² I.F.P., 1853; October 14, Nos. 45-46; Jenkins to Bivar July 2.

³ I.F.P., 1853; October 14, Nos. 46.

⁴ I.F.P., 1853; October 14, No. 46, No. 46: Jenkins to Beadon July 23; also Jenkins to Mills, May 30.

in 1842, had revealed that this territory possessed immense potentialities; it abounded in coal, limestone, iron-ore, salt, besides ivory, lac, wax and *munjit*.¹ Instead of being a potential strength and a bulwark against the Nagas, it had become a source of danger and constant embarrassment to the British authorities. In his letter to Mr. A. J. Moffatt Mills, the Judge of the *Sadar Dewani Adawlat*, who was then visiting the districts of Assam, Major Jenkins pointed out² that the tract in question had separated the district of North Cachar from the valley of the Jamuna and the Dhansiri by which operations against the Nagas had to be carried on. If law and order was to be maintained in North Cachar, and if the Angamis were to be reduced to submission, the frontier outposts from Goomy Goojo to Dimapur must be brought under effective control of the Government. When the views of the Commissioner received corroboration from Mr. Mills, who was also called upon to give his sentiments on the subject, 'that the country under its present management is a serious obstacle to the settlement of the Naga territory,'³ Lord Dalhousie, the Governor-General, accorded his approval to the measure.⁴ Accordingly, in early 1854, Lieutenant Bivar formally resumed the territory as a part of the British dominion and under the direction of the Government of Bengal granted to several members of the Sehapati's family money-pensions to the aggregate of Rs. 1002/-. annually, besides rent-free grants in the village of Mohungdijua, of course, on the distinct understanding that these would be resumed upon the death of the respective holders.⁵

¹ B.R.C., 1854; August 10, No. 56; Jenkins to Grey, June 14.

² I.F.P., 1853; October 14, No. 48; Jenkins to Mills, May 30.

³ I.F.P. 1853; October 14, No. 48, see *extract from Mills's report*.

⁴ I.F.P., 1853; October 14; No. 49; Minute by Lord Dalhousie, August 27.

⁵ B.R.C., 1854; July 20, No. 8.

CHAPTER VII

LAST BID FOR SOVEREIGNTY

Major Jenkins had reasons to be elated after the resumption of Upper Assam that this territory would form in no distant future the most valuable appendage to the British dominion. 'In soil, there are few parts of India compared with Upper Assam, and its vegetable and mineral products, natural and cultivated, promise to the speculators such results as must ensure the ultimate prosperity and populousness of the tract.' But the path to that goal was strewn with too many difficulties and the local authorities had yet to confront tasks which were extremely arduous. They had to evolve order out of chaos in a territory which presented an extremely sad spectacle :

'The great roads and embankments have been neglected for years and are in a very dilapidated condition. Heavy forest and reed grass intercept one part of partially cultivated (territory) from another trade has been nearly annihilated by vexatious imposts (and above all) the country was saddled with an immensely numerous . . . aristocracy that made serf of all productive classes, and the latter weighed down by the accumulated burdens of exaction rendered idle, dissolute and timid (and) have taken to the habitual use of opium' in such vast quantities that they cannot now exist without it.'¹

Obviously, therefore, Lieutenant Brodie, the newly-appointed Principal Assistant, was faced with too many problems ; some of them demanding immediate solution. His *kutchery* at Jorhat was reported to have been crowded from the daybreak till night with hundreds of applicants. 'Crowds came with complaints against the officers late in power, an equal number came to secure a share in the management, (others) to establish and preserve the immunities they then possessed,.....and not a few came to protest against the restoration of the *Rajah* which the latter sought to effect ; and (above all), the cultivators were fearful of

¹ I.P.C., 1839 ; March 6, No. 143 ; Jenkins to the Secretary, Government of India, February 21.

the land-taxes and the land-surveys which were taught to dread by designing people.¹ Therefore, Brodie had to direct his attention, at the beginning, not to increasing the rent-roll, but to ameliorating the condition of all the classes. He had to abolish the irritating service of the *pykes*, and to replace it by a liberal assessment in land; he was also required to provide some means of livelihood, as far as practicable, to the higher classes who had since been reduced to great straits. As the greater part of the year had already passed when he assumed charge of the district, Brodie had to continue the existing system for the remaining few months; yet he abolished, forthwith, the odious duties on the *hats*, *ghats* and markets excepting a few in the Naga frontier which he retained for security reasons.² To get an exact knowledge of the quality and quantity of land in possession of each ryot, a cadastral survey was immediately undertaken under the supervision of Mr. Thornton.³ In the following year when some data were available, with the approval of the Commissioner, Brodie abolished the capitation tax, altogether, and introduced a land-tax varying from annas eight to a rupee per *pura*. To make up the losses on the *Syrat* duties he also imposed a tax of annas eight per *pura* on the *khats* and the *bari* lands which were, hitherto, exempt from taxation. The district was divided into a number of *jangonies* or fiscal units, and over each he placed either a *Phukan*, or a *Rajkhowa* or a *Barua* as supervisor. They were aided in actual collection by the subordinate officials—the *Hazarikas*, the *Saikias* and the *Borahs* on a discount 14% of the gross collection.⁴

Apparently, the early assessment in the district of Sibsagar was lower than the other districts. Brodie failed to see that this would ultimately affect the revenues in the adjoining districts by encouraging immigration into Sibsagar. As a remedy, in 1843-44, he raised the rate to rupee one and annas four on the *rupit* land and to annas twelve on the *non-rupit*.⁵ The revenue surveys

¹ I.P.C., 1838; November 21, No. 114.

² *Ibid.*

³ I.P.C., 1838; December 12, No. 115.

⁴ B.R.C., 1840; August 11, Nos. 28-30; Mills: *Report on Assam, see report on Sibsagar*, paras 8-10.

⁵ Mills: *Report on Assam; see report on Sibsagar*, paras 14-15.

conducted by Thornton had, in the meanwhile, brought under assessment all arable lands, including the *khats*, which were, hitherto, held by the nobility free of rent. The enhancement in the revenues of the *khats* to the extent of 50% without any perceptible increase in the resources of the country, naturally, hit the tax-payer hard. Consequently, even those who had some means or ability to procure *pykes* or hired labour to bring their holdings under tillage had to leave them fallow, since the yield was not worth the price paid for.¹

Every endeavour was, of course, made to afford relief to those who had suffered on account of the radical changes in the administration. It may be remembered that ex-Raja Purandar Singha was granted, immediately after the resumption, a pension of Rs. 1,000, and to the heir-apparent a stipend of Rs. 185 per month was also, later, offered. To the former executive officers, members of the royal family and their relatives, *pundits* and religious heads, allowances varying from Rs. 10 to Rs. 50, p.m. were granted;² and, further, though shorn of power they were allowed to retain their former titles and insignias which were not heritable before.³ Appeals for aid by men of rank of indigent means for the repayment of loans or of building a house, for the performance of *sradhs* or of marriages were sympathetically considered, and liberal sums occasionally granted.⁴ The gradual increase in the number of European officials in the establishment had also enabled Jenkins to reverse the earlier policy of recruitment. Men of rank, not necessarily of worth, now occupied most of the posts in the lower courts of justice and revenue administration. In 1853, 'natives of respectability' enjoyed as many as seventeen posts of *Munsifs*, seven

¹ *Ibid* : To give relief to the hard-pressed nobility, with the approval of the Commissioner, Brodie allowed those who had paid a revenue of Rs. 20 or more to pay half of the assessment, and those that paid more than Rs. 10 but less than Rs. 20 to have a deduction for the excess over Rs. 10. These tenures were known as the *Ten-Twenties of Sibsagar*.

² I.P.C., 1838; October 10, No. 87; AS File No. 299; see letter from the Agent to the Governor-General to the Secretary, Foreign Department July 18, 1845, No. 594.

³ I.P.C., 1838; December 26, No. 94-95.

⁴ Bhuyan, S.K.; *Tungkhungia Buranji*, pp. 220-21.

Sadar-Amins and one Principal *Sadar-Amin* at different stations in the Province.¹

In Kamrup, to provide employment to a larger number of *Choudhuris*, Captain Bogle had already done away with the larger fiscal units and subdivided the whole country into innumerable *parganas*.² Prompted by a similar objective, Brodie abolished, in 1840-41, the extensive *tangonies* and parcelled out the whole district of Sibsagar into a number of *mauzas*; and over each he placed a man of respectability and character who was to be aided in his duties by one *Sadhoni*, a *Kakoty* and a *Tekela*.³ In creating the new fiscal units Brodie had another motive in view—to eradicate, gradually, the official hierarchy so that the former aristocracy might be assimilated, before long, with the masses; for the invidious distinctions, it was felt, apart from becoming an anachronism, then constituted a source of irritation and constant complaint from the lower orders. In support of his proposal Brodie argued that the *Borahs*, the *Saikias*, and the *Ilazarikas* were averse to be placed under the *Baruas* and the *Phukans* who were found, generally, less fitted for office than their subordinates.⁴

The Governor-General in Council not only approved the measures adopted by Brodie, but they followed the same principles, as we have already seen, in according their sanction to the provisions for the sons of the *Barsenapati* in Muttock. The levelling tendency of the British Government, however enlightened though it might have been, was rather premature in a country where distinctions on account of one's birth or rank were too deeply ingrained to be obliterated so hurriedly. The men in rank felt it beneath their dignity to work hand in hand with those who had been till very recently their subordinates. Unless otherwise forced they were also not disposed to accept

¹ Mills : *Report on Assam*, paras 145-150.

² Out of the twenty six *parganas* into which Kamrup was formerly divided, Captain Bogle created in 1834-35, sixty *parganas*, which were further fragmented, later, into as many as eighty. A.S. File No. 637, C.O. 1839, Jenkins to the Secretary, Sadar Board of Revenue, October 8.

³ Mills : *Report on Assam*, see report on Sibsagar, paras 8-10.

⁴ A.S., File No. 638, C.O. 1849; see report of the first settlement of the Upper Assam division; Brodie to Jenkins, June 20, 1840.

petty *mouzadarship* in far-off villages when they found some fortunate few amongst them were enjoining comfortable positions under the Government. In the vain hope of securing better jobs or of a change in Government that might ultimately prove beneficial to them, they remained stationary at the headquarters. Many gathered round the ex-Raja, on whose restoration they counted much. Jorhat became the hotbed of innumerable do-nothing nobles, whose gossips at different quarters and intrigues at the Raja's residence kept the people in a state of uncertainty as to the future of the country.

Major Jenkins rightly gauged the seriousness of these developments as the portents of a dangerous outbreak. The story of a Gomdhar or Dhanjoy-Peali was sure to recur unless this unholy alliance was broken up, which could be effectively done only by shifting the headquarters itself to Sibsagar. 'The removal of the court will break-up the scene of intrigue; those who are provided with situation by us will follow to the new station..... the others.....will betake themselves to their proper homes, where alone they can now prove useful and where they will alone have a chance of getting employment from us'.¹ Though for a short period Jorhat happened to be the headquarters of Upper Assam and seat of the former Government, it was subjected to the frequent inundations of the shallow river Bhogdoi and lay several miles off from the main lines of communication. The Commissioner could, therefore, easily camouflage his ulterior motive when he directed Brodie to remove the Sadar Station to Sibsagar, enjoying a comparatively commanding position with reference to several highways and situated on the bank of the Dikhow which remained navigable throughout the year.

What the British authorities desired of the dispossessed nobility, evidently, was a radical readjustment in their mental outlook. It fell, too heavily on a class of people, long accustomed to a life of ease, to change their habits so abruptly and to take up other avocations, particularly those demanding manual labour. They possessed neither land nor much of movable property; the state provided, hitherto, all their requirements through the service of the *pykes*, while their comforts and dignities were maintained by the slaves who could also be procured in those days in abun-

¹ I.P.C., 1839; February 20, Nos. 89-90.

dance. The far-reaching changes that had taken place since British occupation, naturally, brought irritation and suffering in every home that had solely depended on the services of others. Complaints were frequently heard of the non-attendance of the *lixos* attached to the nobles and the state functionaries. As early as 1830, Captain Neufville found it extremely difficult to procure even the 100 *pykes* required for the services of ex-Raja Chandra Kanta Singha, and for the public buildings to be erected at Jorhat, he could procure the labour only at a premium of a rupee in addition to the exemption from taxation.¹ After the abolition of the *khel* system in Lower Assam, the service of the *pykes* could be retained in the other division only by force. The people then had not the means nor the inclination to pay money, but it was more loathsome for them to undergo servitude. Jenkins reported that the moment Government resumed possession of the territory of Purandar Singha the *pykes* universally deserted their masters.² The Commissioner's endeavour to assign the grantees money in lieu of *pykes* afforded but little relief, since the amount hardly set off the cost of labour, the rate of which had now shot up ten-fold.* The abolition of slavery, in 1843, made the situation worse and the men of rank were then pushed down to the dead level of ordinary ryots. "Those whose ancestors never lived by digging or ploughing and carrying burdens are now nearly reduced to such degrading employments."³ To their mortifications they found their privileges and immunities lost to them; while to meet the rising demands of the Government or even to eke out a miserable existence, many had to mortgage or sell whatever tangible property they possessed.

The utter destitution to which some of the higher families were reduced could be read in the piteous representations they

¹ B.P.C., 1831; June 10, No. 58; Neufville to Scott.

² I.P.C., 1839; March 6, No. 143.

* Formerly, labour was so cheap that the ryots made no objection to serve as *lixos* or attendants for four months in a year for exemption of Rs. 2/- as *gadhan*; after the resumption of Upper Assam they were reluctant to do so, since they could earn Rs. 15 or more during the same period. I.P.C., 1840, April 27, Nos. 140-41; also *Orunudo*, 1846, Vol I, No. 6, p. 44.

³ Mills: *Report on Assam*; see translation of a petition by Monceram, Appendix K.B.

frequently made whenever an opportunity presented itself. Even ladies of rank, some with their grown-up daughters, besought the liberality of the Company either to give their daughters in marriage or for some provision of livelihood. The mother of ex-Raja Rajeswar Singha (1751-1769), a highly respected but extremely old lady, in all her frankness expressed to Jenkins when the latter visited Upper Assam, in early 1838, that he was the first *Sahib* before whom she had appeared, and her straitened circumstances had now compelled her to do so.¹ Scions of the highest dignitaries of the State were reported to have lived on public charity. 'The generous donors of the pious and the *pundits* were now reduced to the position of beggars for a mere pittance!' No wonder, therefore, the majority of the *Baruas*, the *Phukans* and the *Gohains* could hardly reconcile themselves to the British Government. As years rolled on, after the resumption of Upper Assam, their lot became more and more unbearable. Some of them became desperate; they felt that their salvation lay in the restoration of the ancient regime, and only through such an event could they hope to retrieve their fortune. Naturally, they looked forward to find out someone to organise and lead them in a war of liberation.

The hopes of these hard-pressed nobility, initially, rested on the members of the royal family who were still acknowledged by many as the leaders of the people. Of these, after the transfer of Upper Assam to Purandar Singha, it may be remembered, Chandra Kanta was removed to Kaliabar, where he was given a pension of Rs. 500². He was allowed, in addition, to retain the lands and *pykes* which were formerly bestowed on him by Scott, and for these a remission of Rs. 408-14-0 per annum was made from the tribute of Upper Assam.³ Chandra Kanta could neither forget nor forgive the East-India Company for the grave injustice that had been done to him by elevating his rival to the rule of Upper Assam; and he always hoped that a time might come when the Company would reconsider to restore him to the rank if not to actual power. Such an opportunity, actually,

¹ I.P.C., 1838; March 28, Nos. 44-45; see the *Journal of upper Assam*, paras 119-20, 133; 144-45.

² I.P.C., 1836; August 8, Nos. 34-35.

³ *Ibid.*

presented itself in the middle of 1836, when Purandar Singha became insolvent and failed to meet his obligations to the Paramount Power. Ostensibly to proceed to Nabadwip on a pilgrimage, but really to press his claims, personally, before the authorities in Calcutta, Chandra Kanta appealed for a donation of Rs. 10,000 to the Government of Bengal, which the latter flatly refused.¹ The recommendations of the Commissioner, however, enabled him to obtain half of the amount prayed for, as a loan, to be repaid in instalments within a reasonable period from his pension, and on the distinct understanding that he would not take the opportunity to come down to Calcutta². In spite of this, after performing his rituals on the bank of the Ganges, in early 1837, Chandra Kanta arrived in Calcutta; and from there, according to his plan, he made a representation to the Government of Bengal soliciting an interview with the Governor-General and urging his claim to the rule of Upper Assam. The ex-Raja was already in sore straits; his expenditure had mounted up, and deduction from his monthly stipend to liquidate the debt had also begun. In sympathetic appreciation of these difficulties, Major Jenkins had also requested the Government of Bengal to enhance the pension of the Raja so as to enable him to make both ends meet. In reply, the Commissioner was directed to intimate to the ex-Raja that the latter had acted against the wishes of the Government, and 'that it was not the intention of the Governor-General to grant him an interview, still less could it be admitted that this was a fit opportunity to augment the stipend of that individual'.³ In utter despair and ruined in resources, Chandra Kanta returned to Gauhati, where he died in early 1839, leaving behind three widows, two sons and a daughter. A few months before his death, the distressed condition of the family softened the authorities in Calcutta to make a remission of the arrears of the loan payable by the late Raja; his pension of Rs. 500 was also, later, transferred to his son and successor Jubaraj Ghanakanta Singha.⁴

¹ I.P.C., 1836; December 5, Nos. 134-35.

² *Ibid.*

³ I.P.C., 1837; March 13 No. 61; June 5, Nos. 98-99.

⁴ I.P.C., 1838; December 12, Nos. 111-112; June 26, 1839 Nos. 85-86.

The ex-Raja Purandar Singha appeared to have been more popular and, therefore, commanded a larger number of followers. Backed by their support, he continued to pour in representations praying for the restoration of the country to his management. In vain Purandar endeavoured to impress the authorities in Calcutta that there was a growing discontent amongst the higher classes, and that the vast majority of the subjects still longed for his restoration.¹ In the hope of regaining the territory he refused to accept the pension of Rs. 1000-0 that was repeatedly offered to him. Circumstances, unfortunately, compelled him, in July 1845, to make an appeal to the Governor-General even for the zamindarship of the town of Jorhat in addition to a stipend of Rs. 1500-0, per month, with retrospective effect, so as to enable him to liquidate the debt incurred for his livelihood.² In forwarding the petition the Commissioner of Assam, though dismissing his former prayer, recommended the pension that was originally granted to him; as to the payment of arrears he expressed some doubt whether the ex-Raja was entitled to it, since there was an irrecoverable balance of about Rs. 50,000 in his account at the time of resumption.³ The Government of India, in the Foreign department, accorded their approval to the recommendation of the Commissioner. The ex-Raja's claims as to the arrears of pension could not also be brushed aside: 'as the failure of the payment of tribute was one of the reasons of resumption of the Government, the Governor-General in Council is doubtful of the justice in demanding the balance of arrears from him specially, as his perpetual exclusion from the Government has been determined upon.' Before the issue of final orders, however, the Commissioner was asked to furnish some information, particularly about the financial position of the ex-Raja and other members of his family.⁴ Purandar was not

¹ A.S., File No. 299; see the *Memorial by Babu Gopinath Mukherjee, Attorney to the Raja*, July 24, 1849, also April 27, 1841.

² *Ibid*; July 18, 1845, No. 59½; Jenkins to the Secretary Government of Bengal, vide copies of letters, 2nd Asad 1767 S.E.

³ *Ibid*.

⁴ *Ibid*: Letter from the Foreign Department, Government of India August 22, 1845, No. 2343.

destined to enjoy the pension that was, ultimately, sanctioned in his favour; for the unfortunate Raja breathed his last on the first of October, 1846.¹ He was survived by his son, an aged mother, two queens and a daughter.

About this time, to champion the cause of the nobility, there had emerged from an unexpected quarter the man of the hour—Maniram Barua, hitherto, one of the most loyal officials of the British Government. The energy, ability and intelligence of Maniram had attracted, about 1828, the attention of Captain Neufville who made him after the dismissal of the *Barbarua* the *Tahsildar* and, later, *Sheristadar* at Jorhat. Maniram revealed his administrative genius in the revenue reforms which he immediately took up; he reorganised the confused *khels*, scrapped unnecessary expenses and tapped new sources of revenue. The collection which could, hitherto, hardly meet the charges on the establishment, gradually, exhibited a surplus. In the wars against the Khasis, the Bhutias and the Garos, Maniram rendered valuable services to the Government by supplying labour and provisions,² and he showed but little sympathy with the anti-British movements of the period. By dint of his merit and unshaken fidelity Maniram rose to the zenith of power and influence. A man of his ability and experience, naturally, became indispensable to Raja Purandar to deal with the various problems that beset the latter on restoration. In addition to his earlier duties as the *Sheristadar* in the revenue department,³ the Raja vested him with the supervision of the *mouzas*, which he newly created. Maniram's resignation from these assignments, towards the close of Purandar's reign, cannot be explained except by the suggestion that he did not like the odium of being attached to an institution which had then become a by-word of reproach to the authorities.

The new regime which began under Lieutenant Brodie proved rather worse; Maniram had to forego, under the revenue reorganisation, the benefits of almost all the *mouzas*

¹ A.S., File No. 299; Letter No. 6, 1846; Brodie to Jenkins, October 10.

² Mills: *Report on Assam*, see Appendix K.B.

³ Boidoloi, K.: *Sadar-Amunar Atmajivani*, p. 11.

that were allowed to him by the ex-Raja as a personal gift.¹ In disgust, he refused to accept office under the British and joined the Assamese establishment at Nazira, the headquarters of the Assam Tea Company, as the Dewan or the chief executive,² on a salary of Rs. 200/- p.m. In his annual report of 1841-42, the Chairman of the Company summarised the achievements of the Dewan in eloquent terms : 'he opened up several gardens, increased intercourse with the people, raised profits of the Company and enhanced its prestige in the eye of the contemporaries'.³ Nazira, soon became too hot for the Dewan, wherefrom he retired and started operations in two tea-gardens of his own at Jorhat ; but his failure to obtain revenue concession for the grants, like the European planters, disappointed him in the enterprise. To aggravate the situation, Charles Holroyd, who succeeded Brodie as the Principal Assistant, Sibsagar, in 1851, deprived him even of the remaining fiscal charges which his family held for more than a generation. Without rank, without honour, without the very means of livelihood, Maniram had to face acute hardships to run a household consisting of 185 souls.⁴

Though belatedly, Maniram keenly felt that there was no future for him and his countrymen under the existing regime, and that endeavours must be made to restore the former Government. He threw his lot with Kameswar Singha, the son and successor of Purandar ; but the latter possessed neither the will nor the resolution of his father to reassert boldly his family claims, and was satisfied with the title of the *Maharaja* which the Company conferred on him. The counsel of the Dewan, it was not unlikely, persuaded the Prince to evade accepting the pension of Rs. 1000-0 that was, later, offered to him, lest it should injure his permanent interests. Leading all along a gay life, the young Prince is said to have squandered away the few pieces of silver and gold which his father had bequeathed to him, and is also reported to have quarrelled with

¹ Mills : *Report on Assam*, see Appendix, K. B.

² Bordoloi, K. : *Sadar-Aminar Atmajivani*, p. 31.

³ Bruce, C. A. : *Report on the Manufacture of Tea etc ; see Chairman's estimate of Muneeram Appendix F.*

⁴ Mills : *Report on Assam*, see Appendix K. B.

the widows of the family driving them to beseech the liberality of the British authorities.¹ Kameswar terminated his uneventful career in June 1851, leaving behind three widows and Kandarpeswar Singha *alias* the *Charing Raja*,* a boy of eleven burdened with a huge debt. The latter soon found himself unable to shoulder the responsibilities of a family that was on the verge of ruin.² The prospect of recovering his fortunes was extremely bleak, nor could he hope that the authorities in Calcutta would be so moved as to reopen the question of restoration in his favour. As a fish out of water, Kandarpeswar accepted the guardianship of the Dewan who had been harping on him 'with sanguinary hopes of getting the country to his management'.³

In the meanwhile, the Lieutenant Governor of Bengal desired to pay a visit to Assam. It was considered essential, on the occasion, that an officer should precede him 'to institute a closer and more detailed enquiry into the local state of administration', and, accordingly, Mr. A. J. Moffatt Mills, the Judge of the *Sadar Dewani Adawlat*, was deputed for the purpose.⁴ When Mills arrived at Sibsagar, in the middle of June, 1853, an unlooked-for opportunity to plead his case, personally, presented itself to Kandarpeswar Singha. Accompanied by a number of

¹ A.S., File No. 299; Letter No. 60, 1847; Agent to the Governor-General to the Secretary, Government of India, Foreign Department, June 29; also Secretary, Foreign Department to the Agent to the Governor-General, October 10, 1847, No. 913. Life pensions were granted to the queens, as follows :

(1) Bor-Rani Rai Dangia	..	Rs. 200 p. m.
(2) Purani Melia Kuwari	..	Rs. 80 p. m.
(3) Umabati, mother of the late Raja	..	Rs. 80 p. m.

* A title conferred on the nearest male relative of the reigning monarch.

² A.S., Letters received from Miscellaneous quarters; March-December, Volume XIX; see Nos. 912-13, 924, 936, 954-56.

³ A.S., File No. 299; Jenkins to the Secretary, Government of India (Foreign), March 21 1863, No. 2089; *vide petition of Kandarpeswar Singha from Calcutta*, February 27, 1863.

⁴ A.S., Letters received from the Government, Volume XXXV (1853); Secretary, Government of Bengal, to the Commissioner of Assam, March 15, 1853, No. 34.

dignitaries he waited upon Mr. Mills and urged him in a petition his right to hold the division of Upper Assam on a tributary basis, under the East-India Company.¹ He was given a patient hearing, but seeing the futility of his pretensions Mr. Mills discouraged the young Prince from entertaining any hope of restoration. At a subsequent interview, Kandarpeswar expressed his inclination even to accept the pension that was offered but refused by his predecessors; though, he dared not to do so openly for fear of his advisers, particularly, as Mills suspected, the Dewan Maniram.²

Mr. Mills was overwhelmed with petitions, wherever he went, from the hard-pressed gentry of Upper Assam—all representing their long-standing grievances, and praying for provision either by way of employment or pension or some acres of rent free-grant. The two memorials submitted, in this connection, by Dewan Maniram Barua deserve special mention.³ In one of them, referring to his continuous loyal services to the Company he prayed for some favour on his own account; in the other, the more significant one, espousing the cause of restoration of the monarchy on behalf of the prince Ghanakanta Singha, the son of ex-Raja Chandra Kanta, he presented a balance-sheet of the rule of the East-India Company in Assam for the last three decades, enumerating therein, a long list of grievances, mainly of the higher classes. 'Illustrious sir!' the Dewan lamented;

'We are as it were in the belly of a tiger, and if our misfortunes yielded any advantage to the Government, we should be content. But the fact is, there is neither gain to the people nor to the Government and so long as the present state of things continues, we see no prospect of improvement in future.'

'By the stoppage of such cruel practices as of extracting eyes, cutting off nose and ears, and the forcible abduction of virgins from their houses and by the removal of all transit duties the British Government has earned for itself inestimable praise and renown; but by the introduction into the province of new customs, innumerable courts, an unjust system of taxation, an objectionable

¹ Mills : *Report on Assam*, see report on Sibsagar, paras 63-67.

² *Ibid.*

³ Mills : *Report on Assam* : see translation of a petition by Moneeram Appendix K. B.

treatment of the hill-tribes neither the British Government nor their subjects have gained any benefit'.

'It is supposed by giving pensions to some respectable Assamese great benefit has been conferred on them; but the fact is, that those who ought to have got pensions did not get any, while those whose services had been of short duration and claims insignificant, proved most successful'.

'The upper and middle classes have seen their offices abolished, their *louguas* and *lixos* taken away, male and female slaves set free exemption and presumptive rights that had lasted for six hundred years removed, the same and honour of respectable people destroyed, and by making them pay revenue like other people they have been reduced to the greatest distress.'¹

Much of the ill-conceived measures Maniram attributed to the inexperience and indiscretion of the district officials whom he considered as wholly unsuitable to discharge the responsible duties entrusted to them. 'The bad temper of the young military officials' he alleged 'is a source of much tribulations their youth and indiscretion prevent their discriminating between good and evil or regarding with any consideration the manners and customs of the people.'² Whatever the critics may say, the Dewan had the sincere conviction that there was no salvation for the people of Assam without restoration of the Ahom Government. He, therefore, strongly urged the elevation of an Ahom prince—Ghanakanta or Kandarpeswar,* that might reintroduce, with modifications, the customs and institutions of the good old days. The prince so raised would be aided in his administration by a European functionary who would also be in-charge of the Regiment that might be detailed for the defence of the territory. After meeting the charges on the establishment under various heads there would be a surplus in revenue, the Dewan guessed, to the extent of rupees two lakhs, and in support of his contention he furnished, in the enclosure,

¹ *Ibid.*

² *Ibid.*

* Maniram had no special regard, it appears, for Prince Ghanakanta Singha or Kandarpeswar whose causes he espoused on different occasions. What he wanted was the restoration of the ancient regime. 'I do not believe' Jenkins remarked, 'that Maniram had regard for the young Raja in his intrigues, which I conceived originated in bitter enmity to the Government'. A.S., Letter issued to Government, Vol. XXII (1858); September 23, No. No. 93.

a mine of information of great statistical value of the former Government.¹

After a survey of the different districts, Mr. Mills recorded his findings in an exhaustive report which he submitted to the Government of India towards the close of 1853. This report, commonly known as the *Mills's Report on Assam*, forms the fountain-head of source materials of the administrative history of Assam in the days of the East-India Company; coming as it did from a contemporary authority of no less repute than the Sadar Judge himself, its authenticity can hardly be doubted. It has the additional worth of having incorporated in it the reports and observations of the officials and non-officials, friends and critics alike of the British Government. Mr. Mills himself made searching criticisms on different aspects of the Government; he spared no one—the high or the low, whenever he found a loophole, and offered suggestions of his own for the general improvement in the administration. His mission was, it must be remembered, not to set the clock back, as desired by Maniram or the people of his way of thinking, but to consolidate the possessions of the British and to tighten their grip over the administration. He could discern the symptoms of the growing disease, but his remedies were such as to vitalise the whole organism. The violent terms in which Maniram denounced the British Government and their supporters, therefore, served to deepen his already embittered relations with the local authorities. Mr. Mills was persuaded to believe that Maniram, 'by nature an intriguing person,' was mainly instrumental in fomenting discontent and disturbing the general tranquillity of the country, and as such, not to be relied on. The people in general, then living in comparative ease and security, Mills felt, had not the least desire to be placed under their former Rajas; although, rumours of a change systematically circulated by the interested parties not infrequently unsettled their minds. In these circumstances, he suggested to the Government of India to inform the *Charing Raja* not to entertain any hope of restoration in future.²

¹ Mills : *Report on Assam*, see translation of a petition by Moneeram, Appendix K. B.

² Mills : *Report on Assam*, see report on Sibsagar, para 67.

Disappointed in his attempts to impress on Mr. Mills the justice and propriety of his case and faced with stern realities, Kandarpeswar submitted in October, 1854, a memorial to the Government of India for a reconsideration of his case, but to no purpose. He renewed his prayer in May, 1856, for a zamindari settlement in Upper Assam besides a pension of Rs. 1,000/- p.m., with retrospective effect.¹ To make a zamindari settlement reported Jenkins, 'with the young prince, who is highly unpopular to the bulk of the people, would not only be an injustice to the people but involve a perpetual loss to the Government.....(above all) it would place all the tea-planters under him as his tenants.' Considering, that the memorialist had no further claim than other members of his family, the Commissioner suggested that a pension of Rs. 500 p.m. might be granted to him.² Even this recommendation received but a qualified support from the Lieutenant-Governor of Bengal. In concurrence with him the Governor-General in Council held the view that all right to pension had been forfeited by the applicant on the persistent refusal of the favour by his predecessors. They were also influenced, it appears, by an exaggerated notion of the hoarded wealth inherited by Kandarpeswar. Purandar was reported to have bequeathed to his successors a huge fortune through his extremely penurious habits and in the gold and silver worth several lakhs which he had unearthed from the tombs of his forefathers.³

It was, indeed, extremely unfair to impute motives of gold to the ex-Raja in the opening of the tombs which he did with a view to disinterring the remains of his forefathers and putting them on the sacred river at Banaras. He was forced into the measure, since many of the tombs had already been desecrated and plundered. Purandar refused to accept the pension, because he

¹ A. S., File No. 299, Secretary, Government of Bengal to the Secretary, Government of India (Political), September 15, No. 1320 : *see the Memorial of Kandarpeswar Singha.*

² A. S., File No. 299 ; Jenkins to the Secretary, Government of Bengal, July 19, No. 76.

³ A. S., File No. 299 ; Jenkins to the Secretary, Government of India (Foreign) June 20, 1847, No. 60.

did not acquiesce in the justice of the resumption and sincerely he believed that a proper representation might ultimately move the Governor-General in Council for a reconsideration. The amount of pension offered was also inadequate to provide for his family and numerous dependents, whose requirements could not be scaled down hurriedly without hardship. That the Ex-Raja was constrained to limit his prayer in his last petition to a subsistence allowance of Rs. 1,500/- only, clearly indicates that his family fortune, if any, had well-nigh been depleted and what remained, thereafter, was squandered by his unworthy successor who left for his minor son nothing but an accumulated debt.*

The report of Mr. Mills shattered the hopes entertained by the nobility and made Maniram an arch-enemy of the British. The Dewan was not the man to yield so easily. To plead personally before the authorities in Calcutta on behalf of Prince Kandarpeswar Singha and on his own, Maniram took boat and arrived, in early 1857, at the Presidency.¹ He made through his friends in Calcutta several attempts to represent his case before the Lieutenant-Governor of Bengal. It is doubtful, if he was ever granted an interview by the authorities in Calcutta, and his mission in consequence ended in nothing. At this juncture, awakened as it were by a new consciousness at the upsurge of the sepoys in Northern India, Maniram perceived that so far he had been pursuing the will-o' the wisp; that his was the same path that had already been chalked out by the mutineers of Hindustan. That moment his eagle-eyes discovered enough of combustible materials around the few British functionaries in the North-East Frontier, Maniram determined to kindle them into a devouring flame. What he could not achieve

* Though belatedly, the higher authorities at the Fort William were disillusioned about the hoarded wealth possessed by the *Charing Raja*. In 1853, Mr. Eden, the Secretary to the Government of Bengal, in the Foreign department, strongly commented on the previous action of the Government of India, as unfair and highly inexpedient. 'If Kandarpeswar Singha was favoured with a pension' he remarked, 'at least one of the causes which led the Dewan Maniram to conspire with others against the State would have been wanting.'

¹ Bordoloi, K : *Sadar-Aminar Atmajivani*, pp. 89 and 91.

by prayers and entreaties must now be accomplished at the point of the sword and the sword alone.

Since the withdrawal of the Regular troops in 1828, it may be recollected, the defence of the North-East Frontier was entrusted to the Assam Light Infantry Battalion and the contingents supplied by the Muttocks and the Khamtis. There was in addition, a body of *irregulars* in Lower Assam, which was organised, in 1835, into a regular Regiment the *First or Lower Assam Sebundies*.¹ In 1836, the Khamtis, like the Muttocks, voluntarily commuted the services of their military *pykes* for a payment in money. To guard the extreme frontier, therefore, Captain Hannay raised, in 1837, another levy of *irregulars* the *Doaneah Militia*, composed of recruits mostly having a mixed parentage of the Assamese and the Singphos. The growing insecurity of the whole of the North-East Frontier as revealed by the tragic event at Sadiya compelled the Government of India to augment the strength both of the A.L.I. and the *Sebundy Corps* of Lower Assam. At Jaypur, a third local corps, the *Second or Upper Assam Sebundy*, was also raised, into which the *Doaneah Militia* was absorbed.² By providing employment in the latter corps for the inhabitants of the region, it was greatly hoped, to attach to the interests of the Government warlike families of the Muttocks and the Doaneahs whose activities, hitherto, had, been 'a source of trouble and suspicion'. Military discipline, however, proved to be too irksome and extremely galling to those for whom liberty and freedom were the breath of their minds. In 1844, when it was found that most of the tribes had withdrawn from the corps, the *Upper Assam Sebundies* had to be disbanded³ after distributing its officers and some of the sepoys to the A.L.I. and the *Sebundy Regiment* of Lower Assam. At the same time, pay, pension and other amenities of the latter corps were upgraded so as to convert it into the Second Assam Light Infantry Battalion.

Of the two Regiments, mentioned above, the headquarters of the First, which was then under the command of Major

¹ B. P. C., 1832; August 6, Nos. 58-59; I. P. C., 1839; October 9, No. 92. See Minute by Mr. Robertson.

² P. L. I. B., 1839; August 21, No. 62; August 26, No. 65.

³ I. F. P., 1844; April 6, Nos. 180-184.

Hannay, was at Dibrugarh. The Second under Major Richardson was located at Gauhati. Detachments were also posted at some Sadar Stations and the strategical outposts of the frontier. Although, the harrowing tales of the massacre of the Englishmen and women by the sepoy at Merrut, Kanpur and Delhi had been disseminated from the very beginning, through the visitors, *fakirs*, personal letters and newspapers throughout the valley of the Brahmaputra,¹ the sepoy of the Assam Light Infantry, as a whole, remained until August, 1857, absolutely passive and strictly loyal. The number of Hindustances in the Regiments was, in fact, not many; their demand for higher *battas*, their caste prejudices and particularly susceptibility to the hostile climate had already led the Government of India to entrust the defence of the North-East Frontier to the local corps. The heterogeneous nature of the Regiments—consisting as they did of the Nepalees, the Manipurees, the Rabhas, the Jarowas and the Doaneahs—combined with the comparatively settled and peaceful life enjoyed by them made even the up-country sepoy rather indifferent to the occurrences in Northern India. Major Jenkins, the Commissioner of Assam, therefore, flattered himself to report,² in June 1857, that ‘despite pressing invitation of the rebels’ the two Regiments at Gauhati and Dibrugarh had not only expressed their attachment and loyalty to the Government,

¹ B.J.P., 1858; June 28, No. 624; Minute of the Governor-General: also January 14, No. 155; see the deposition of Trilochan. As to the dissemination of the news, the latter narrated: ‘I heard letters (were) read, they were in *nagree*..... to this effect, that all the country was taken by the king of Delhi and calling on them to do the likewise in Assam..... the newspapers were read by the *Sudder Ameen* and the Collector’s *peshkar*; and the *Omlahs* used to read them in the *cutcherry* and some of the sepoy used to go therein and hear..... I used to read the *Samachar Darpan*..... the *Sahib* (Mr. Mahony alias Mr. Masters) used to read to us the news in the *Friend of India*. Krishna Chandra Majumdar, *Vakeel*, used to take..... *Peshkar’s* paper to his own house; near this man’s is a house belonging to (a) *Bramasari Fakir*, where all the *Fakirs* of the place used to assemble. The *Vakeel*, above named, used to read the paper to them; all the *Deswali* sepoy, both Hindu and Mussulman, used to assemble there to talk over the affairs in India.....

² B.J.P., 1857; August 10, No. 817; Jenkins to Young, June 25.

but some of them even volunteered their services for employment against the rebels, wherever they might be.

The situation, however, changed towards the close of July, 1857. The defection of Kunwar Singh of Jagadishpur and the mutiny of the Danapur Regiment in Bihar produced a spirit of restlessness among the sepoys of the Assam Light Infantry in Upper Assam, particularly those coming from the district of Arrah. They were persuaded to believe¹ the current notion that the British rule which was to last for only one hundred years had actually come to an end; that their kinsmen had reinstated the Emperor on the throne of Delhi and that the sepoys had already occupied the greater part of Hindustan; that the English would soon quit Bengal, and Assam too !, Could they not fish in the troubled waters? At this psychological moment there arrived at the military lines of the detachment of Golaghat, in the district of Sibsagar, Nirmal Hazari and Peali alias Mahesh Chandra Barua, two confidential agents supposed to be sent by Kandarpeswar Singha with tempting baits: 'The Rajah would double the pay of the sepoys and give the native officers' pay like *Jongie Paltan*, if all the sepoys would join and get him the country?'² Shaikh Bhikan, the Subedar of the detachment readily agreed. The *Sahibs* must be killed and the Raja should be placed on the throne; the latter would have to furnish the *rasud*, the ball and powder.³ Negotiations were carried on under similar terms with the *Sardars* of the sepoys at Sibsagar, Dibrugarh and Saikhowa.

The sepoys were, evidently, spurred to activity by the intrigues at Jorhat, where prince Kandarpeswar was forging plans to unfurl the standard of revolt against the British. The guiding spirit of the whole plot was, of course, Maniram Barua,

¹ B.J.P., 1858; June 28: No. 624; Minute by the Governor-General.

² B.J.P., 1858; January 14, No. 155; see deposition of Trilochan, November 12 and 13, 1857; also September 17, No. 482, Jenkins to Young, August 29.

³ *Ibid*: The Subedar, further, assured that after killing the *Sahibs* he would place canons in the hills below Gauhati, so that no English force could enter into Assam.

then residing in Calcutta.¹ Through his numerous letters (*vide Appendix D*), couched in most seditious terms, the Dewan goaded the young prince to plunge head-long into the daring project with the aid of the local Regiment; and through his friends, mainly Madhu Mallick, a Bengalee *Muktear*, he prepared the ground for the insurrection. Maniram also sounded at Gauhati *Jubaraj* Ghanakanta Singha, a pensioner under the Company; but the latter on the counsel of some of his well-wishers dared not to take part in the enterprise.² Peali Barua, Senchoa Barua, Nowbaisha Phukan, Gandhia Barua, Saru Gohain, Ugrasen Gohain, Kamala Barua besides several others of rank and influence readily responded to the call of Maniram. Captain Holroyd, the Principal Assistant, Sibsagar, reported the proceedings of the rebels as follows :³

'At the end of the month of *Assar* or beginning of *Sawan*, Pealie was deputed to Golaghat with letters from the *Saring Rajah* finally to arrange matters with the native officers and sepoy on that command. When there he visited other people also of influence in the vicinity and arranged that the intended rising should occur about the time of the *Doorgah Poojah*, when Munniram stated he would arrive.'

'During the months of *Assar* and *Sawan* the *Saring Rajah* held frequent meetings at Joorhath, at which Pealie, Muddoo Mullick, the Hensou Booroa and the Kumla Saringia Booroa took each an active part; among others who attended were the Mahomedan Bahadoor Gaon Boora and Fumood, who exerted themselves to induce others of their persuasion in the place to unite in aid of the Rajah's designs.'

'In the month of *Sawan* Luckiedutt Surmah, brother to the *Thakoor* of the Dewargaon temple, received Rs. 5 from the Rajah for the performance of *Poojah* in the temple to ensure success. The *Poojah* was actually performed, and about this time a list was made of the several temples and *shastes* (*Satras*) to which *ghee* and oil were to be distributed for a similar purpose having a similar object in view, to accomplish which, money was paid out by order of the *Saring Rajah*.'

'In the month of *Bhadro*, Dabiedutt Surmah Mozdr. (Brother to Luckiedutta) received gold from the Rajah for the collection

¹ B.J.P., 1858; July 29, 115; Holroyd to Young, June 28, *vide the deposition*.

² Borodoloi, K : *Sadar-Aminar Atmajivani*, PP. 88-91 .

³ B.J.P., 1858; July 29, No. 115; Holroyd to Young, June 28.

of *russud* for the troops; for a similar purpose gold was also distributed to other parties.....'

The preparations made by the rebels and the resultant alarm 'gradually, spread far and wide. The European planters became terror-stricken, many left their gardens and took shelter at Gauhati. The Missionaries abandoned their churches, some of them left for America. 'The *Keyas*, the *Beparis* and the villagers buried their property in daily dread of sepoys looting the place.'¹ The Commissioner of Assam was rudely awakened about the middle of August, 1857, on the receipt of a communique from Captain Holroyd, the Principal Assistant, Sibsagar, to the effect, that 'two or three native officers, commissioned and non-commissioned, of the first Assam Light Infantry on duty with a detachment at Golaghat, proceeding on leave through Joorhath, had (on) coming and going interview with the young *Charing Rajah*, Kandarpeswar Singha, and offered the assistance of the men of both the Regiments to reinstate him on his throne and maintain the country for him.'² In a message of August 20, 1857, Major Hannay, the Commandant of the Assam Light Infantry, further reported: 'at this station (Dibrugarh) what I have all along expected has taken place..... an intended rise of the Muttocks and their intrigues also to get adherents'.³

The time was highly inopportune. To protect the lives and properties of the Englishmen there was not a single European soldier, at this juncture, in the whole of the North-East Frontier. Even if the authorities in Calcutta could spare some troops, it would be extremely difficult to push reinforcements against the rushing currents of the Brahmaputra; while transport of supplies in a territory infested with enemies during the rains was equally hazardous. A sudden and concerted move on the part of both the Regiments at Dibrugarh and Gauhati in collaboration with the rebels at Jorhat would have, doubtless, rendered the position

¹ B.J.P., 1858; January 14, No. 159a, see deposition of Keramat Ali.

² B.J.P., 1857; September 17, No. 482; Jenkins to Young, August 29.

³ B.J.P., 1857; September 17, No. 482; Hannay, S.F. to Jenkins, August 10.

of the few European officers and planters in Assam extremely precarious.

Fortunately, most of the Jarrowas and the Nepalees of the second Regiment at Gauhati remained loyal in spite of the pressure and persuasion of the Hindustanees.¹ At Dibrugarh, the headquarters of the first A.L.I., the situation was far from being satisfactory. To meet any emergency, Major Hannay, the Commandant of the Regiment, called on Captain Lowther, the second in command from Sadiya, and summoned from the outlying detachments the Rabhas, the Manipurees, the Nepalees and other non-Hindustanees whom he could rely to guard the regimental lines at the headquarters. Pickets were posted at the strategic positions, and to prevent subversive acts on the part of the mutineers, Gurkhas were mixed up in the military lines, particularly in the artillery wing which had so long been a mainstay of the Hindustanees.² In Nowgong, Mr. Morton, the Principal Assistant, destroyed the bridges over the rivers Missa and Diyu and cut off communications with Jorhat, fearing that the mutineers might enter into the district from that direction.³ Major Jenkins considered these measures rather inadequate to afford security in the event of an outbreak. While reporting these events and the general panic prevailing throughout the valley, in his despatch of August 29, 1857, the Commissioner drew the attention of the Government of Bengal to the seriousness of the situation in Assam and urged them to despatch, as hurriedly as possible, a European force 'to save the province from the (impending) revolution.'⁴ Even the appearance of a steamer from Calcutta, it was greatly hoped, 'would instill confidence in all parties, secure the allegiance of any who might be wavering and repress any hidden feeling of disaffection.'

Naturally, these developments in the North East Frontier caused some alarm to the Governor-General in Council. But

¹ B.J.P., 1857; September 17, No. 482; Jenkins to Young, August 29.

² B.J.P., 1857; September 17, No. 482; Hannay to Jenkins, August 20, *also* September 24, No. 460; Bivar to Jenkins, August 24.

³ Barua, Gunaviram: *Life of Anandaram Dhekial Phukan*, pp. 189-90.

⁴ B.J.P., 1857, September 17, No. 482; Jenkins to Young, August 29.

the paucity of troops and the simultaneous revolt of the sepoys in scattered areas of Northern India rendered it extremely difficult to send a military force into Assam. However, under Lieutenant Davis a small European force of 104 men was immediately ordered to be despatched to Dibrugarh. Half of these had some military training; but the rest were seamen, mostly raw recruits. The party left on September 11, 1857, on board the *Haroonghatta* with supplies of medicine, arms and ammunitions including two twelve-pounder guns.¹

The precautionary measures, mentioned above, filled the rebels with the notion that the English were frightfully afraid of their activities, and that they would flee at the earliest available opportunity. To attack them before their escape, they finalised their schemes and fixed the target date in early October, when it was hoped Maniram would also reach Assam with necessary arms and ammunition. The sepoys would rise, simultaneously, at several headquarters, would seize the magazines and the treasuries, kill the Europeans, burn their houses; after which they would march on Jorhat and proclaim the *Charing Raja* as the king of Assam.² It was also planned :

'that Maniram was to be the Prime Minister..... that Mudoo Mullick was to be immediately under him in rank and position, that he (Peali) was to be the *Barbhandar Barua*, Lockeenath Hensoa Barua was to be the *Nowbaisa Phukan*, that Kamala Saringia Barua was to be made *Subedar* and *Darogah* of Jorhat there would be no *khazana* (revenue) but *likso*s as in olden times,....., no revenue on *barilands* and (only) one rupee per *poorah* on the *rupit* lands as in former times; that all the *Sahibs* from Gauhati upto Dibrugarh were to be (transferred) to Jorhat and made over to the Rajah. That Roostam Singh (and) Noor Muhammad were to be Subedars..... that Budram Subedar was to be made Subedar Bahadur.....'³

On August 29, 1857, Shaikh Bhikan, the Subedar of the detachment at Golaghat, was directed to withdraw the guards from the Naga outposts of Jamuguri and Borpathar and to des-

¹ B.J.P., 1857; October 1, No. 306.

² B.J.P., 1858; July 29, No. 115, *see depositions*.

³ B.J.P., 1858; July 29, No. 115; *see deposition of Trilochan*, November 13.

patch them hurriedly to Sibsagar.¹ It was already in the air, that a steamer was on the way and that the *Sahibs* were preparing to depart. About this time, Mr. Masters, the Sub-Assistant of Golaghat, had also to leave on an urgent call to the Sadar Station. The sepoy, naturally, believed that disturbances had already broken out at the headquarters and that the *Sahibs* would escape by the steamer before they could kill them. They would be failing in their duty, some of them felt, unless they marched out immediately.² On the same day, at about 9 p.m., the sepoy thronged at the residence of Shaikh Bhikan. Keramat Ali, the native doctor, alleged to be an eye-witness of the event, narrated their proceedings as follows :³

'On arriving, I saw a number of men collected in front of Subedar's house; in the midst the Subedar Shaikh Bheekun, Chunder Singh, the *Jamadar* of Police, and Ramtohal Singh, the *kote Havildar*, were seated in *morahs*; the rest being on the ground..... Jelladar Misser, Bhola Panday and Sewsahai Singh (one after another) addressed the gathering..... Hear brothers, if you are desirous of our own good and favour with the Rajah, you will listen to what we say and do what we tell you without drawing back; and whoever draws back or reveals anything shall be killed; and if he be a Mussalman, he will eat pig and if a Hindu he will eat cow, this shall be the curse on him.....what! are we not born of man that we should desert the cause? let us sound the bugle and each man taking five *Ghullali* with him let us go this night to Jorhat; first cut Huronath Barooah's head off; it is said that Raghoobear Singh *Jamadar* is there with 20 sepoy and is loyal to the Government. We can make him join us, if not we will kill him; we will (then) go and put the Rajah on the throne..... we will go at once to Sibsagar and first set fire to Holroyd *sahib's* house.....and kill all the Europeans there; we will make the sepoy there join us and take the magazine and treasury. We can leave some men there to keep charge and go on with the rest to Debrooghur, there set fire to the houses and kill all the Europeans.....'

'I will go out at once' so saying, Jelladar stood up and several others agreed to follow him. Some wished to wait till

¹ B.J.P., 1858; January 14, No. 159a; see deposition of Keramat Ali.

² *Ibid.*

³ *Ibid.*

the morning making preparations for the remaining hours, while a few demurred and left the meeting. Shaikh Bhikan who was silent, throughout, desired to postpone the march till the arrival of the sepoys from Jamuguri.¹ The alteration amongst the sepoys and the alarm, thereof, continued till late at night.

If the mutineers had acted according to their original plan or even if the detachment at Golaghat had marched out, in a body, on that night or the day following to Sibsagar, which was then in an absolutely defenceless state, confusion would have followed and the infection was sure to have spread to the headquarters at Dibrugarh. The sepoys were divided in their opinion as to their plan of operation, and this ruined their cause and the cause so sedulously worked for by Maniram. Immediately on receipt of the secret intelligence of the proceedings of the sepoys, Major Hannay, the Commandant of the A.L.I., secured the arrest of Shaikh Bhikan and other ring-leaders of the battalion and removed them to Dibrugarh to stand trial before a court martial. Raghubir Singh, who succeeded to the command of the detachment, introduced forthwith vigorous measures of discipline, banned unauthorised gatherings and stopped outsiders from entering into the military barracks.²

The Commissioner of Assam had, in the meanwhile, directed Captain Holroyd to apprehend the *Charing Raja*; but the latter acted with circumspection lest any haste in the seizure of the Prince should precipitate a crisis.³ In early September, 1857, he had succeeded in intercepting a bundle of letters (*vide Appendix D*) supposed to have been written by Maniram or under his direction, which proved the complicity of the Raja and the Dewan in a plot against the British.⁴ When his position was thus strengthened, on the midnight of September 7, Captain Holroyd with a party of 20 men took boat and joined at

¹ *Ibid.*

² *Ibid.*

³ B.J.P., 1857, October 22, No. 278; Holroyd to Jenkins, September 12, *vide marginal note*.

⁴ B.J.P., 1857; October 29, No. 334; Holroyd to Jenkins (*confidential*), September 6; also January 14, 1858, No. 154; Holroyd to Jenkins, November 22, 1857.

Dikhowmukh a detachment under Captain Lowther. The party advanced on Jorhat via Mahghur (present Kokilamukh Ghat) and on the third day, just before day-break, effected without much alarm the apprehension of Kandarpeswar and Madhu Mallick who resided in a rented house of the Dewan at the nearby *bazar*. The Prince was conveyed on the same evening to Mahghur, wherefrom he was sent down to Calcutta and kept confined as a state prisoner at the Central Jail, Alipur.¹ This was followed by the arrest of Maniram in Calcutta and a host of officials and non-officials in Upper Assam—Peali Barua, the Marangikhowa Gohain, Mayaram Nazir, Dutiram Barua, Bahadur Gaon Burah, Shaikh Farmud and several others—all alleged to have been participants, directly or indirectly, in the plot.²

Had there been a Neil or a Taylor, perhaps, few of the rebels would have been spared from the rope of the hangman and the situation, too, would have drifted, before long, for the worse. Major Hannay and even Captain Holroyd, who was supposed to be the arch-enemy of the rebels, handled the situation so tactfully and cautiously that not a voice was raised in the Regiments nor was there much commotion among the civil population. When the arrest of the Raja was made known to the sepoys, the latter believed 'that he would be kept either (at) Dibrugarh, Tezpur, Seebsagar or Gauhati..... wherever they took him, still he would be in their hands, for every where there are sepoys (Hindustanees).'³ They vainly hoped that Jung Bahadur, the Rana of Nepal, with a force 10,000 strong would be coming soon to their succour.⁴ Their hopes were doomed to disappointment. On the evening of October 2, 1857, the Naval Brigade on board the *Haroonghatta* disembarked at Dibrugarh.⁵

¹ B.J.P., 1857; October 22, No. 278; Young to the Superintendent, Alipur Jail, September 30.

² B.J.P., 1858, January 14, No. 154; Holroyd to Jenkins, November 26, 1857.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ B.J.P., 1857; October 22, No. 325; Hannay to Jenkins, October 4.

The Commissioner of Assam then heaved a sigh of relief, and on October 9, he was happy to report¹ to the Government of Bengal that 'there is no further cause for any apprehension of any outbreak in Assam ;' although, European residents in Upper Assam, the tea-planters in particular, felt their lives and properties still insecure. With the approach of the winter they were apprehensive of a flare-up of the mutiny, now temporarily dormant, and feared that this might be simultaneous with the descent of the predatory tribes from the neighbouring hills :² 'the setting in of the dry season greatly facilitates the movement of the sepoys, and is the time always selected by the savages in the hills for carrying out their warlike expeditions.' 'Under these circumstances' represented Mr. D.C. Mackey, the Chairman of the Assam Company, 'we are entering upon a more dangerous period on that frontier than has been since the commencement of the outbreak, and it seems evident that the small force of half-trained seamen already sent up are inadequate to secure the safety of the province'.³ Suspicion developed into panic when the planters learnt towards the close of November, 1857, of the outbreak of the mutiny of the 73rd Dacca Regiment and also of the 34th Native Infantry at Chittagong. To save the province from the threat of imminent danger', the Chairman of the Assam Company in his frantic appeal on November 26, 1857, solicited the Government of India to despatch a European force 'without a moment's delay' and 'in the most expeditious way possible'.⁴

In Chittagong, three Companies of the 34th N.I. broke into open mutiny on November 18, 1857. They burnt down their own lines, plundered the treasury and released the prisoners of the jail, whom they pressed into service as coolies to carry the ammunition and the treasures. After marching through the jungles of Hill Tipperah they entered into south-east corner of the district of Sylhet with the object of joining in Cachar Narendrajit, the pretender to the Manipur *Raj*, and his followers. At a place known as Latu, they encountered a detachment of the Sylhet

¹ B.J.P., 1857 ; October 29, No. 326.

² B.J.P., 1857, November 19, No. 218a ; Mackey, D.C. to Beadon, E., Secretary, Government of India (Home) October 24.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ B.J.P., 1857 ; December 10, No. 262.

Light Infantry on December 18, and succeeded in killing its Commandant Major Byng. But they were closely followed and repeatedly attacked by Lieutenant Ross, who then assumed the command, and by some Kuki scouts, 'who had been offered a reward for every sepoy killed by them', until they were reduced to a paltry few who escaped from the jungles.¹ At Gowalpara, already, Major Jenkins had taken precautionary measures to add to the efficiency of the Police by strengthening their numbers and subjecting them to periodical drill; for he was fearful, that repercussions of the out-break of the 73rd Regiment might be felt even amongst the neighbouring frontier tribes. The Dacca fugitives in their northward march, after crossing the Brahmaputra at Chilmari, destroyed the *thana* of Karaibari in south-west of Gowalpara, plundered the market and carried off the *Jamadar* and the *Barkandazes* attached to the outpost.² Had they turned towards the east instead of the north, and in concert with the sepoys of the 34th Native Infantry succeeded in detaching a portion of the Sylhet Light Infantry, the situation would have been out of control, particularly at a moment when the authorities in Calcutta could hardly spare any troops. When the Commissioner of Assam, in his letter on December 8, reported³ the proceedings of the mutineers of Dacca and Chittagong and expressed his satisfaction that he was not apprehensive of any danger from those quarters, the Government of India was relieved of the necessity of sending further reinforcement to the frontier.⁴

Major Hannay had already effected the arrest of remaining mutinous sepoys of the Regiments and put them before a Court Martial at Dibrugarh. Balavant Singh, Ramtahal Singh, Kripa Ram, Seshwai Singh, Chandan Singh, Aly Khan, Shaikh Oogni (Gani?), Chandar Singh and Hidayat Ali—all of them were sentenced to transportation for life; some had to suffer long

¹ Buckland, C.E.: *Bengal under Lieutenant Governors*: see the Minute on September 30, 1858, by Halliday, F.J. on the *Mutinies as they affected the Lower Provinces under the Government of Bengal*.

² *Ibid.*

³ B.J.P., 1857; December 31, Nos. 735-36.

⁴ *Ibid.*

terms of rigorous imprisonment while a large number, including the sepoys of Golaghat, were discharged from duties.¹ To prevent combination in future, the Jarrawas and the Gurkhas, who remained steadfastly loyal, were drawn to the headquarters, and the Hindustances were scattered over the outlying detachments.² In spite of these measures, Major Hannay entertained great doubts about the temper of some sepoys of the First Assam Light Infantry; he was fearful of the security of those who had been loyal and given evidence against the rebels. 'To weed out' disaffected elements still lurking about, he wrote to the Commissioner of Assam to urge the Government of India to locate in Assam a European Infantry and Artillery for a year or more, as might be necessary.³ Major Jenkins, in spite of his earlier complacency, could not but recommend, since the proposal came from no less an authority than the Commandant of the A.L.I. About this time, there were, practically, no disposable troops in Calcutta on account of extensive operations against the mutineers in Upper India; and to tide over the crisis in Assam, therefore, the Governor-General in Council had to order another party of 100 seamen with three officers on board the steamer *Koladyne*.⁴ The opportunity was taken to despatch the prisoner Maniram Dewan to stand his trial at Jorhat. On December 3, 1857, the boat left Calcutta.⁵

In the meantime, Captain Holroyd succeeded in procuring a mass of evidence against Maniram and his collaborators. Haranath Parbatia Barua, the *police daroga* of the headquarters, is said to have been mainly instrumental in furnishing necessary intelligence for the purpose; strangely enough, several men of rank, who had hitherto been the close associates of the Prince and were, therefore, in the know of the whole plot, also sub-

¹ B.J.P., 1858; January 14, No. 159a; Hannay to the Deputy Adjutant of the Army, November 16, 1857; also A.S., Letter received from Micellaneous quarters, Vol. XXII (1858), Nos. 5 and 119.

² *Ibid.*

³ B.J.P., 1858; January 14; No. 159a; Hannay to Jenkins November 16, 1857.

⁴ B.J.P., 1858; January 14 No. 163.

⁵ B.J.P., 1858; January 14, Nos. 167, 171-72.

mitted depositions against the conspirators.¹ The Principal Assistant, Sibsagar, already vested with the powers of a Commissioner to try cases under Act XIV of 1857, commenced the trials towards the close of 1857. Peali Barua and the Dewan Maniram, the prime mover of the plot, who had just arrived on board the *Koladyne*, were tried on February 9 and 23 respectively; they were found guilty of conspiracy and were, sentenced to death.² Madhu Mullick, Trinayan, Kamala Barua, Dutiram Barua, the Marangikhowa Gohain, Mayaram Nazir, all of them, tried on charges of complicity in the plot or of aiding and abetting it, received sentences of transportation for life. Bahadur Gaon Burah and Shaikh Formud Ali, 'on charges of seducing the Mussalmans of Jorhat' had also to leave for the Andamans with forfeiture of their property. The Dewan and Peali Barua, both of them, were publicly hanged on the same day, February 26, 1858.³

The trial of Maniram Barua has been, of late, subjected to some amount of criticism. 'Major (?) Holroyd, the D. C. of Jorhat, was on bad terms with Maniram and the evidence on which he was convicted was insufficient, if not unsatisfactory, particularly as Holroyd acted as both Prosecutor and Judge.'⁴ When these high-handed and irregular proceedings were brought to the notice of the Government of Bengal by the Commissioner himself, it was reported,⁵ the special Commission given to Holroyd by Act XIV of 1857 was withdrawn in August, 1858. It cannot be denied that the relations between the Dewan and the Principal Assistant, Sibsagar, had been far from friendly. Most of the rebels were tried rather hurriedly on the evidence of witnesses, some of whom were not unlikely to have deposed

¹ B.J.P., 1858; January 14, No. 155; Holroyd to Jenkins, November 26, 1857. Hazarika, Dutiram; *Asamar Padya-Buranji*, p. 209. Bordoloi, K.; *Sadar-Aminar Atmajivani* p. 103.

² B.J.P., 1858; 24 June, No. 619; see statement of cases tried under Act XIV of 1857.

³ *Ibid*; also December 23, Nos. 43-50; September 27, 1862, Nos. 157-159. Hazarika, Dutiram: *Asamar Padya-Buranji*, pp. 210-11; Bordoloi, K.; *Sadar-Aminar Atmajivani* p. 104.

⁴ Sen, Dr. S. N.; Eighteen Fifty-Seven, p. 408.

⁵ See Dutt, K. N.; *Landmarks of the Freedom Struggle in Assam*, p. 19.

out of fear or of personal gain to be obtained in future at the hands of the British. Nor is there any positive evidence to show that Maniram and some of his followers had ever been given a chance of self-defence. It cannot also be ignored that the time was highly abnormal, any weakness or show of weakness on the part of the local authorities at this crucial moment would have thrown out of gear the whole machinery of Government and imperilled the position of a handful of Englishmen in the midst of a hostile territory. The prompt and deterrent measures adopted by the civil and military authorities had, in fact, prevented the smouldering ambers from developing into a mighty flame.

In Calcutta, through his solicitor Mr. Fergusson, Kandarpeswar Singha lodged a defence to the charges of complicity in the conspiracy against the East-India Company.¹ The Commissioner viewed him merely as a tool in the hands of evil counsellors who had made him an easy victim to their machinations. In consideration of his tender age, utter ignorance, and the fact that he was not a voluntary agent in the conspiracy, the *Charing Raja* was not brought to trial and was released from the jail; though, on security reasons, he was kept under restraint at Burdwan, until December, 1860.²

When a general amnesty was granted, after the Queen's Proclamation of 1858, Dutiram Barua, Shaikh Farmud, Bahadur Gaon Burah and a few others were released from their penal settlement, and were allowed to return to Assam.³ On the expiry of his term of internment, Kandarpeswar Singha stayed for a few years at Burdwan and also in Calcutta; and to defray the cost of his maintenance, a part of his personal property which was seized at Jorhat was auctioned and the sale proceeds were remitted to him.⁴ His extremely miserable condition in the

¹ A.S., Letters received from the Government; volume XXXIV (1858-59); Superintendent, Alipur Jail to the Secretary Government of Bengal No. 536.

² A.S., File No. 299; Secretary, Government of Bengal to the Secretary Government of India (Foreign), March 21, 1863, No. 2089: Bordoloi, K.; *Sadar-Aminar Atmajivani*, pp. 104-5.

³ B.J.P., 1862; July 27, Nos. 157-59; October 11, No. 238.

⁴ A.S., Letters issued from District Officers, 1859, No. 459: Holroyd to Jenkins, January 7, No.1; also March 23, No. 30; March

Presidency compelled the unfortunate Prince to appeal to the Government of Bengal in February 1863, to make a settlement of the *mouzas* of Rangpur and Gorgaon, in the district of Sibsagar, besides the pension of Rs. 1000 p.m., with the arrears, which was offered to his father.¹ Though the Lieutenant Governor of Bengal reduced his prayer to a pension of Rs. 500 only, the Government of India, in the Foreign department, was reluctant to grant even this favour on the former plea that the applicant had forfeited all claims to pension on the refusal of his predecessors.² However, on the strong and convincing argument of Mr. Eden, A., Secretary to the Government of Bengal, that 'it is not becoming in this Government to allow the representative of the former sovereigns of Assam to live in a state of destitution and without even the ordinary means of subsistence..... that the impoverished condition of the Rajah is a reproach to the British Government.....'³ the Governor-General in Council agreed on September 4, 1863, to sanction the pension, without the arrears, with effect from February, that year.⁴ Kandarpeswar's subsequent prayer to return to his ancestral home at Jorhat or Sibsagar was also negatived on political grounds; but he was allowed to settle at Gauhati, where he died in 1880.⁵

28, No. 34; March 28, No. 210. Kandarpeswar is reported to have possessed, at the time of his arrest, three elephants, one pony, several swords and guns which were sold out at Rs. 2775-4-0. Amongst his personal effects, Holroyd found gold and jewellery of the worth of rupees two lakhs. Besides, in several *mouzas* of Jorhat, he had landed property of about two hundred *puras*.

¹ A.S., File No. 299; Secretary Government of Bengal to the Secretary, Government of India (F.D.); March 21, 1863, No. 2089.

² A.S., File No. 299, Secretary, Government of India to the Secretary, Government of Bengal, April 18, 1863, No. 255.

³ A.S., File No. 299; Secretary, Government of Bengal to the Secretary, Government of India; May 27, 1863, No. 4007.

⁴ A.S., File No. 299, Secretary, Government of India to the Secretary, Government of Bengal, September 4, 1863, No. 391.

⁵ A.S., File No. 299; see *petition of Kandarpeswar Singha*, September 23, 1872, also the Resolution of the Government of India (Political), January 8, 1873.

APPENDIX D.

True copies of letters written or supposed to have been dictated by Maniram Dewan (B.J.P., 1857, December 7, Nos. 245-6 ; January 14, 1858, No. 154 A).

(Own handwriting)

No. 1.

From

Munniram Dewan (*Signed*)

To

The Saring Rajah
19, Bysack.

Extract

If by the will of the Deity anything meanwhile turns up.....you will both see and know it.....

Illustration

How can one who find it impossible himself to exist in the hand of death save another.

No. 2.

Own handwriting
unsigned

From Munniram Dewan

To

The Saring Rajah
(*undated*)

Date of receipt 16 *Assar*, 1779 (S. E.)
(Postage four annas)

Extract

At this present (moment), there is a great *goolmal* (disturbance) in Calcutta ; on which account, there is no knowing where the Council of the *Feringhees* may sit. So long as there is no sitting, I must tarry. But I am without expenses, and if *goolmal* arises in the city, then difficulty may arise. It will occur to you....what difficulties may arise at such a

time, when I have no expense.....but you must well understand, that for the interest of both (of us) to tarry more. The state of things is no good, but whatsoever matter turns up, it will be to your benefit. Do not for a moment doubt this.

No. 3.

*Own handwriting
unsigned*

From Munniram Dewan

To

The Saring Rajah
8 *Assar*, Sak 1779.

Extract

From the 24th to the 29th *Jeit*, the three successive letters and newspapers and copy of petitions, if they should have arrived, throughly comprehend what is plainly written, also what, is enigmatical. But I do not believe that you have received all these; because there is great calamity. Moreover, greater calamity attends the letters of *Rajahs*. Besides this, there is great *goolmal* on the road..... For this reason I am in doubt.

No. 4

*Own handwriting
unsigned.*

From Munniram Dewan

To

The Saring Rajah
21 *Assar*

Date of receipt, 12 *Sraban*, 1779 (S.E.)
per Bhakhat mule

Extract

As long as I remain here, existing earth thrown up by white ants, there is no such apprehension on your part. That enigmatical letter of yesterday's date, comprehend; mention it to no one. The whole body is dead, save the lower parts, where there is life. This is the condition of the Government..... on no account let it be known.

No. 5

From Munniram Dewan

To

Muddoo Mullick

23rd *Sraban*

The othed day I wrote a letter, containing what (Peali had) said. If any of the things are ready, send them quickly. If not, there is no occasion to write. From my house also, what money and things you can get, you will send down. At this present (moment), there is great *goolmal* in the *Rajdhani* (capital) Day and night the Council open and are perplexed from the anguish at the battle.....the will of the Deity, it is impossible to divine all like *Bishnoo*, *Dron*, *Corno* have been destroyed. Formerly what Peali said to you, the words spoken at a hazard, have in a twinkling come to pass. We always pray for the welfare of the *Rajah*. If it be the will of the Deity, all will be accomplished.

True translation.

Sd/- C. Holroyd.

No. 6.

*Written in own handwriting**Cover in feigned hand,**unsigned.*

From Munniram Dewan

To

Krishnakanta Adhikar Goswami

23 *Sraban*

None can fathom the will of Deity. A needle can pierce through a mountain (if it be the will of the Deity). How can I describe or define the perplexity of thoughts into which I have fallen; alive to-day, defunct tomorrow. Such is the existing state of things. The whole body being dead, the light (life) exists in the lower extremities (feet). You will understand, that such at present is the condition of the people of England. All alike *Bishnoo*, *Dron* and *Corno* are dead; as they

go, so they depart (for good). They never return. Having both seen and heard of the Europeans, I am of opinion, that the workshop of Deity is wonderful. I am oppressed with grief at the sight of all this. There will never be a Rajah in future (in whose reign) there is no fear nor apprehension of thieves and dacoits in the highway.....whatsoever is written by Deity, that will come to pass. You will not divulge to any. The *Rajah's* orders are very stringent.

Enemies stand around all sides. Their pride is daily increasing. The *Rajahs* (Europeans) have become very thoughtful. What may happen in future, none can tell.

No. 7. . *Written in Sanskrit, with feigned hand.*

Cover—Sreejooth Orbeedhar Seeksagarea Barua
neecoté poucha; Seeksagur, Assam.

Strength of the enemy is daily increasing. All forces in the beginning, middle and end have become enemies (mutinied). At present they have come to the side or edge (Bengal); and having come to the side or edge, have taken it; and the great one's are greatly troubled and the battles they fought are unprofitable. In the day all are full of thoughts and doubts; at night, they have no sleep..... there have been battles, the great number of Europeans have been slain.....the warriors in the west have become so strong, that to state what will be the result is impossible. What I do know at present is, that in the west wherever there have the great ones (English) have been killed. Those who go forth to battle enter the house of death, from which they never can return..... there have been killed 6000..... their commanders, colonels have been killed beyond calculations..... In the future, what will be the will of the Deity, the Deity alone knows.....

You will never divulge all I have written.

Signature * ॐ | ४ | ७ | ॐ
ॐ | ॐ | २ | ॐ

* Of the assamese consonants, fifth letter of the fifth line (*Ma*), fifth letter of the fourth line (*ni*), second letter of the sixth line (*ra*), and fifth letter of the fifth line (*m*).

No. 8.

Address on outer cover :

Sree Moheedhur Sarma,
 Mooktear Mohoshai, Matoool
 Assam, Joorhath

Address on inner cover :

This letter you will deliver within

(*confidentially*).

Sree Sreejooth mohema boro Prochanda

Protapachoo, Shoobasar boda neebadon medong. Your father's father having furnished me with expenses, sent me to Nuddeca to prosecute my studies. Having studied there seven years,..... I have this month of *Magh* reached Calcutta, and residing at Kalighat. But I am afflicted with the news of the case of your kingdom and your property so much so that I am unable to return to my country. But you may assure yourself, that your liabilities will now come to an end. That specially your good fortune will appear. The time has arrived. Though good fortune may be in a man's fate he must, nevertheless, prove his manhood..... Opportunities do not always occur; just as if a man neglecting to sow his '*Cottia*' (paddy seedlings) in *Jeit* and *Assar*, when there is rain, remains in poverty always. Therefore, understand well what follows and determine with energy and intellect to act.....

Devata (Lord)! the big house under which you are is very old. The posts, the beams and fastenings are all broken, and the house is very leaky. A little wind will blow it downrethatch, (and) repair it. There is neither *bet* (cane) nor grass (implies troops). For all this, it is broken awayfor it to be saved during the remaining days of the *barsat* (rainy season) will be very difficult. If this house is destroyed and a new house being erected..... In that event, it will be well for you. I have fully ascertained it from a clever astrologer and, therefore, write this to you.

At this present (moment) the growl of tiger is everywhere heard; as many as thirteen (to) fifteen (thousand) Europeans have been destroyed. There is no account of their numbers. In the west all the gardens are destroyed and the

owner of them together with (their) wives and children have been destroyed beyond calculation..... the few that escape, the mad dog devours by the way. The old hunters are extinct; if news have been sent for new hunters to come, still the tigers are so numerous, how many can the hunters kill?..... To escape the present calamity, many say, will be difficult; and the place where you reside, the owners are in great fear..... when they may decamp, there is no knowing. At the moment this occurs, you having kept your ears open, must stand up; and the forces there you must bring over to your side by means of gold and by persuasion, by any and every means in your power..... agree to augment their pay in future; without doubt good must follow.*

26, *Assar*

Rough translation.

Sd/- C. Holroyd.

* Of these letters, Nos. 1 to 4 were found on a writing table in the residence of the Raja, No. 5 at the rented house of Madhu Mallik and Nos. 6 to 8 were intercepted by C. Holroyd, P.A. Sibsagar.

CHAPTER VIII

TOWARDS CONSOLIDATION

The back eddies of the mighty revolution had reached, as discussed in the previous chapter, the furthest corner of the North-East Frontier; though, the man in the street remained, throughout, a silent spectator of the whole scene. In the event of success of the rebels, perhaps his personal safety alone would have prompted him to join hands with the victors. His utter indifference to the earlier movements¹ and to the cause of Maniram may be explained by the fact that he had lost all faith in a monarchy and its supporters that had discredited themselves by misgovernment, oppression and betrayal at the hour of worst peril. He had, in fact, no charm in politics; specially, after a period of prolonged anarchy and misrule what he wanted was peace, nothing but peace and security of life and property. Major Jenkins who had rightly gauged this feeling was, therefore, averse from the very out-set to the retention of a pocket of 'Native-rule', a plague-spot, on the very border of the British possessions. After the resolution of the Government of India to assume the responsibility of Upper Assam, wholly and directly, he, naturally, looked upon the masses as the bulwark of British administration. To enlist their support and sympathy, he must instil into their minds the beliefs that the rulers had power enough to maintain the law and order of the country; that under them the people could be prosperous and as such contented; that their rule was just, their laws were liberal, their demands moderate and their benefits open to all, irrespective of high and low.

Therefore, the task that confronted the Commissioner of Assam was extremely formidable and bristled with too many difficulties. He was to administer a country of over 30,000 sq. miles, away from the Fort William and inhabited by a people thoroughly ruined by lengthy periods of convulsion and pro-

¹ See footnote ante, p. 51.

tracted wars. He was expected to be in the know of everything; but the disproportionate length of the country compared to its breadth rendered personal supervision wholly ineffective, specially in an age when the means of locomotion was highly inconvenient, progress of travelling either by land or by water hopelessly slow, and no other transport other than human bearers was available anywhere. Theoretically, he was vested with dictatorial powers; at any rate, he was not to bow down to the letter of the Regulations. In practice, for all acts beyond ordinary routine and all expenses above the sanctioned amount, he was to obtain prior approval from the authorities in Calcutta. Delay was, inevitable, when every order however urgent had to emanate through proper channels from an authority overburdened like that of the Government of Bengal. The authorities again had to be kept constantly cognisant, at regular intervals, of all that was done or had happened through an endless variety of statements and particulars. To prepare these, Major Jenkins possessed neither a Secretariat nor even a team of capable Assistants. In face of the sermons of rigid economy that had been issued by the higher authorities from Calcutta, from time to time,¹ nothing but pressing necessities could induce him to ask for additional hands. On the other hand, the pay that was offered even to the highest executive in a district was comparatively so poor², that it was difficult to have any man of experience to serve in a frontier State like Assam. District offices had, therefore, been filled up mostly by officers of the army; and the latter through frequent transfers and their liability to be recalled to the regiment at any moment deprived them of the chance of acquiring experience and the local knowledge so indispensably necessary for civil duties. However well-intentioned they might be, their ignorance of the language, customs and usages of the people not unoften turned petty affairs into major political issues.³ The

¹ I.F.P., 1844; April 6, Nos. 173-77; July 6, Nos. 36-38.

² The P.A. in Assam drew a salary of Rs. 1000 p.m., whereas his counterpart the D. C. in the Punjab was on a grade of Rs. 1200-1800 p.m. Campbell G. : *Modern India*, p. 284.

³ Thus Lieutenant Charlton's ignorance of the customs and behaviour of the *Sadiyakhwa* opened the breach with the Government which led, ultimately, to the insurrection of the Khamtis in 1839. See

proceedings on the part of the subordinates, therefore, demanded constant vigilance which, doubtless, increased manifold the burdens of the Commissioner; 'I have been blessed with a good health, and I have never been out of the station but for short periods (yet) I have not been able to pay, at all times, that attention to all departments which I would have wished or make that supervision over the business of the subordinate courts which I should have liked.'¹ Such a frank confession on the part of the head of the State as to his own limitations is, indeed, rare. The appointment of James Matthie as the Deputy Commissioner in 1839, of course, relieved him of his duties as a Session and District Judge and Superintendent of Police.² The overall charge of the province, however rested on him alone. The varied and voluminous correspondence still extant in the archives of India and abroad bear ample testimony to the stupendous amount of work that had to be performed by Major Jenkins in this far off and problem-ridden province in the Eastern Frontier of British India.

The Commissioner had under him, in each district, a Principal Assistant (P.A.). In addition to the normal duties like those of the Collector of Bengal, he had the functions of a Civil Judge, Superintendent of Police, an Executive Engineer, an Education Officer and also of the Post-Master. 'The onerous and responsible duties of a Military Officer in civil employ in Assam can scarcely be imagined; he is expected to do everything. . . . For six months in the year, he is constantly travelling about the country, inspecting roads, causing them to be repaired, opening new ones, instituting local fiscal enquiries from village to village, enduring great fatigue, exposed to many perils from climate, wild beasts and demi-savages in the hills.'³ Every district had its problem on its border, where hostilities with frontier tribes might occur at any moment without any warning, whatsoever. The Principal Assistant had, therefore,

also Maniram's remarks and the views held by Major White on the attitude of young military officials, ante pp. 116 and 160.

¹ I.P.C. 1838; November 21, Nos. 101-103.

² B.J.P., (Criminal) 1839, May 28, Nos. 33-35.

³ See Butler, J. Major; *Travels and Adventures in Assam* (1853) p. 59.

to be ready at all times, either to proceed to the spot to prosecute police enquiries or to conduct, personally, military expeditions against refractory tribes. He was further expected to visit the neighbouring hills, from time to time, and endeavour through personal negotiations with the highlanders to remove the causes which had occasioned such hostilities. Either on peaceful missions or warlike expeditions, some of the P.A.'s had, therefore, to be away from the station, not infrequently for long periods. Ordinarily, during his absence, the Sub-Assistant remained in-charge of the treasury and carried on routine duties, but he was not competent to officiate for months together. To meet emergencies of this nature, in 1838, three Covenanted officers, designated as Junior Assistant, on a salary of Rs. 500/- p.m. each, were added to the cadre; the seniormost was to be in-charge of a district during the absence of the P.A., while the other two were to be attached to districts to prepare for similar duties.¹

In spite of the incessant and arduous nature of their duties, the P.A. had to remain stationary at his fixed emolument with little or no prospect whatever; this had, naturally, produced a feeling of dissatisfaction, affecting to a great extent the efficiency in service. For a respectable living, the salary that was offered to the Junior Assistants was also considered so meagre that even the officers of the army, usually, expressed their reluctance to accept these duties. A partial solution was found to the problem, when, in 1844, an intermediate cadre of second class Principal Assistant was introduced on a salary of Rs. 750/- p.m. by reducing the number of first class P.A.'s to four from six. This now opened up to the Junior Assistant some prospects of promotion to a higher cadre.² But the superior posts of the Company had been a monopoly of the European officials, both civil as well as military. In spite of the Charter Act of 1833

¹ I.P.C., 1838; November 21, Nos. 101-103.

² I.F.P., 1844; July 6, Nos. 36-38. In 1861, the Deputy Commissioner was converted into the Judicial Commissioner with almost all the functions of a Civil and Session Judge of Bengal. At the same time, the designations of Principal Assistant, Junior Assistant and Sub-Assistants were changed to Deputy Commissioner, Assistant Commissioner and Extra-Assistant Commissioner.

(section 87) which declared that 'no native of India was to be debarred from holding any office by reason of his religion, place of birth, descent and colour', until 1858, no Indian subject of the East-India Company was appointed to the Covenanted post.¹ No native of this province held even the office of an Uncovenanted Sub-Assistant until the close of 1850; when, however, Anandaram Dhekial Phukan, son of Haliram Dhekial Phukan, a young Assamese of excellent abilities, was made the Sub-Assistant of Nowgong² on a salary of Rs. 250/- p.m.

In 1834, the Principal Assistant was placed under the control and superintendence of the Sadar Court in civil and criminal cases; and in revenue cases, under the Board of Revenue of the Lower Province. He was guided by the spirit of the Regulations of Bengal with such variations as were necessary, from time to time, to meet local requirements. There evolved, gradually, through the endeavours of the local authorities a series of rules of practice, mainly on judicial procedure, which were codified and enforced on the approval of the Supreme Government with effect from 1837.³ These rules, commonly known as the *Assam Code*, laid down 'what courts, civil and criminal, should be established and the mode of appointing officers thereto; they declared the jurisdiction of these courts, and provided for appeals; they prescribed a period of limitation for the institution of civil suits and a procedure to be followed in mortgage cases; they provided also for the appoint-

¹ The civil servants of the East-India Company, who had to enter into Covenants with the Secretary of the State, were recruited in England through the nomination of the different members of the Court of Directors. The patronage of the members continued until 1858, when these services were thrown open to the Indians; and thenceforth, recruitment was made through competitive examination. The Uncovenanted servants were not those in regular service, but were appointed by the Government of India from among the Indians and Europeans alike. See Strachy, Sir John: *India, : Its Administration and Progress* pp. 83-84; Campbell, George : *Modern India*, Vol. II, p. 232.

² Barua Gunaviram : *Life of Anandaram Dhekial Phukan*, p. 114.

³ J.L.I., 1837, July 6, No. 74; May 15, 1838, No. 11, See on the promulgation of rules for the Civil and Criminal administration of Assam; also *An Account of the Province of Assam and its administration* (1903), p. 59.

ment of *Vakils*, the establishment and remuneration of Process Servers etc. etc.....¹

Accordingly, in civil cases, the Principal Assistant had original jurisdiction to an unlimited extent. He was empowered, when overburdened with appeals from lower courts, to transfer cases to the subordinate courts and likewise to withdraw any case from those tribunals and try them, personally, or refer them to some other courts. Appeal from the decision of the P.A.'s would lie with the Commissioner and in 'Special appeals' with the Sadar Court. In the regulated districts, appeal in cases the value of whose amount exceeded Rs. 10,000/- lay with the Privy Council; but such cases, under modified rules in Assam, were tried by the Assistant himself or forwarded to the *Sadar Dewani Adawlat*. Appeal from the decision of the P.A. in trial below Rs. 10,000/- was heard by the Commissioner of Assam.²

In 1839, the Junior and Sub-Assistants were vested with more enlarged judicial powers than envisaged under former rules.³ To relieve congestion at the *Sadar Courts*, the Sub-Assistants of some populous areas (Barpeta, Mangaldai and Golaghat) were, later, vested with full powers of Collectors to try all cases under their respective jurisdiction, whether of summary suits of arrears, exactions, over assessment or of miscellaneous character; and appeals from their decisions, hereafter, lay with the Commissioner.⁴ The volume of business transacted by the *Sadar-Amins* and *Munsifs*, the so-called 'native Judges', was also not inconsiderable; yet they had neither power nor emolument like their counterparts in Bengal. A *Munsif* drawing a personal salary of Rs. 80/- p.m. was not competent under Assam Rules to try civil cases exceeding Rs. 100/-; a *Sadar-Amin* who had jurisdiction over cases exceeding Rs. 100/- received Rs. 150/- p.m. In May, 1839, on the strong recommendation of the *Sadar Court*, although these Judges were vested under certain limitations with the powers as

¹ *Ibid.*

² B.R.C., 1836; March 1, No. 40 : *vide* Matthie's report paras 92-95, and also of Brodie, paras 33-36.

³ See an account of the Province of Assam etc. p. 60.

⁴ B.J.C., (Civil), 1845; November 26, Nos. 179-81.

laid down under Regulation V of 1834, their emoluments remained unaltered till the end of the period under review.¹

In criminal cases, persons charged with murder and other heinous crimes continued to be tried, as before, by the Principal Assistant with or without the aid of a jury; and in the event of disagreement, the presiding officer forwarded the proceedings with his own remarks to the Deputy Commissioner who was vested with the powers of a District and Session Judge. All sentences of imprisonment for life, sentences of death and punishments for offences against the State had to be confirmed by the *Sadar* Court which was the highest Court of Justice. The Junior Assistants exercised the same powers in criminal cases as the Deputy Magistrates in Bengal; but the Uncovenanted Sub-Assistant and the *Sadar-Amins* had only limited jurisdiction over cases involving petty thefts and other minor offences referred to them by the P.A., and cases in which a punishment of more than a month's imprisonment with or without labour, or a fine of more than rupees fifty was not necessary.²

Justice, however, could not be meted out properly, because the rules were respected more by violation than by observance. It was provided (under section II clause 3, Assam Code) that the P.A. should examine the witnesses himself or delegate the duty to the officer next to him, and only in cases of absolute necessity to the seniormost ministerial official.³ In criminal cases, rules required the Judges, even in petty cases, to record at least the substance of the evidence. The P.A. and some of the Sub-Assistants were overwhelmed with so many cases besides multifarious duties that it was physically impossible for them to examine the witnesses that attended the court every day. Consequently, evidence was recorded by these officials for

¹ *Ibid*; also December 27, 1838, Nos. 13-15; February 19, 1839 Nos. 6-7; May 14, 1839, Nos. 6-9. A *Munsif* in Assam received a salary of Rs. 80 p.m., i.e. Rs. 20 less than an officer of his class of the first grade in Bengal; although, some of them had to perform double the duties, since they were invested with the powers of a *Sadar-Amin*, and had also to decide minor cases, both civil and criminal.

² Mills : *Report on Assam*, p. 36, paras 123-24.

³ Mills : *Report on Assam*, see Dhekial Phukan, A.; *Observations on the Administration etc. Appendix J*.

a few days in a week, and the duty was delegated, usually, to the *omlahs*—persons not duly qualified for the purpose.¹ 'In ninety cases out of one hundred', writes a contemporary, 'the *mohurrer* (*omlah*) is paid by the party at whose instance witnesses are summoned..... In no instance has the examination of witnesses by the *mohurrer* admitted of such injury as the criminal cases. The evidence for the prosecution is, generally, taken without the presence of the defendant or before he is summoned, and there is nobody to watch the examination. The *mohurrer* puts down whatever he thinks best conducive to the interest of the party who buys him over to his side'.² Evidently, it was futile for anyone to dispute every word once recorded nor was it possible to get it corrected, afterwards, by a reference to the Judge. The *omlah* had, however, to procure a confirmation of the statements recorded, as is being done even now; but such procedure was absolutely valueless when the very language, invariably Bengali, in which the deposition was taken was not intelligible to the witness.³ The simple creature had, therefore, no alternative but to nod his head as a mark of his assent.

Not only the Judges, but even the courts of law were not readily accessible. To reach the headquarters, the usual seat of justice, an aggrieved had to travel long distances, at places for days together, carrying all the way for his subsistence the necessary quota of rice and other victuals. He could scarcely expect to have on his arrival an expeditious hearing of his case. As in the other non-regulated areas, although the rules provided that justice should be administered in the 'simplest way', parties had to undergo even in trifling cases, in this province, a course of 'vexatious and harassing procedure', and nobody knew how indefinitely one had to await a decision. Even if one was fortunate enough to obtain a decree in his favour, its execution was attended with so many obstacles, that, not unoften, the complainant had to return home leaving his case to take its own course.⁴

¹ Mills : *Réport on Assam*, see Appendix J.

² *Ibid.*

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *Ibid.*

An adequate number of *mufasil courts* under duly qualified Judges would have mitigated many of the evils mentioned above. The *mufasil* or *Munsif's Panchayets*, in spite of the thorough condemnation they received during the early years of administrative confusion, continued to exist and tried civil suits in several districts. But the grievances of the ryots could only be partially redressed by those courts, since the subordinate judicial officials, including the Sub-Assistants, were not invested, particularly in criminal cases, with the same powers as those of the officers of a similar rank in Bengal. When it was found that, even within their limited jurisdiction, these tribunals could not decide cases according to their merit, recourse to these courts became few and far between. In 1850, the number of cases decided by them in Kamrup was five, in Nowgong four and Darrang only one; while in other districts they became obsolete. In the same year, on the recommendation of the Board of Revenue, the Government of Bengal abolished all the *panchayets* except one at Saikhowa, which was retained there on political considerations.¹ In an age, when most of these functionaries were appointed on considerations other than merit, it was not unlikely that some of them were not capable of discharging their duties in a manner satisfactory to the people. The defect lay, therefore, not in the character of the Judges, but in the system of nomination itself. 'The Judicial officers, in a body' Mills remarked, 'are persons of inferior ability, and seem to have been selected some on account of their respectability of character, others from political motive, more than on account of their sagacity'.²

To protect the lives and properties in the interior, there existed, of course, a police establishment. The *thana*, the unit of the organisation, was in charge of a *Thanadar*, or the *Daroga*, who was empowered to arrest suspected persons, to detain them and even to hold preliminary trials before sending them to the headquarters. He was aided in his duties by a *Jamadar*, one or more *mohurrers* and a few constables or *Barkandazes*. There were no village watchmen or *Choukidars* as in other

¹ B.R.C., 1850; August 28, Nos. 20-22.

² Mills : *Report on Assam*; para 132.

provinces, but the *Choudhuris*, the *Patgiris* and the *Mauzadars* were expected to assist the *Daroga* in the detection and apprehension of criminals. To be effective, the jurisdiction of a *Thanadar* should be a small one; but it extended, in most cases, over forty to fifty miles. In the whole district of Nowgong with an area of about nine thousand square miles there existed only three *thanas*—Nowgong, Jagi and Hossang Hajo. The *thana* of Dhakuakhana, in the district of Lakhimpur, with a *Daroga* and six *Barkandazes*, had jurisdiction over Sisi-Dhemaji and all the villages from the river Subansiri to the mouth of the Buridihing, and from the northern hills to the Lohit.¹ In a country of jungles and marshes, where mobility was exceedingly slow, this extensive jurisdiction together with an inadequate staff rendered the police utterly inefficient. The usual emolument received by a *Daroga* hardly exceeded rupees twenty, with which he was expected to make both ends meet. This was certainly too inadequate a remuneration with which to demand of him honesty, discipline and efficiency. Far from the control of the higher authorities and vested with the powers both of a Prosecutor and the Judge, the police official of the age had become a byword of reproach for extortion and oppression. 'Their love of gain' in the words of a contemporary :²

'often leads them, actually, to sell justice for money and to lend their co-operation in the perpetration of injury and oppression on the poor and helpless..... when a poor ryot is put to duress or extortion, the wealth of the oppressor gains over the *Daroga* to his side..... when murder, homicide, robbery occurs in a village, the villagers purchase their safety by levy of a general contribution. Even the occurrence of an unnatural death in a village and the inquisition that follows afford a fruitful field of extortion on the people..... (while) the mercenary and biased proceedings in criminal cases held by them, served in various instances to convict the innocent and exculpate the guilty.'

The administration of justice in India, as a whole, presented grounds of criticisms and much scope for reform. It must also be remembered, as recorded by a leading Assamese of the age,

¹ I.F.P. 1844, July 6, Nos. 36-38.

² Mills : *Report on Assam, see Observations by Dhekial Phukan, Appendix J.*

that the higher European functionaries, 'by their justice, uprightness and impartiality had given more satisfaction to the people than the generality of the native Judges'.¹ They had had their limitations; but they could not administer justice arbitrarily or whimsically, but by a more or less uniform code of laws, which made no distinction between the high and the low, the rich and the poor. The people, who had been subjected for centuries, to severe corporal punishments, could not but look up with a sigh of relief to the Company's law courts as the most humane. This was eloquently expressed even by Maniram when he said : 'By stoppage of such cruel practices as of extracting eyes, cutting off the nose and ears..... the British Government has earned for itself inestimable praise and renown'.²

The authorities in Assam felt it necessary, particularly after the annexation of Upper Assam, to inspire the people with confidence that they were not going to be left to the mercies of their enemies, and that the British were determined to stay in in Assam. The strength of the British *Raj* could be best demonstrated by the erection of masonry structure which was considered in those days as a privilege of the royalty alone. 'Our using this right will go very far to convince the natives that we are determined to keep what we have got'.³ It was quite unlikely—since British suzerainty had extended to the foot of the hills—that there would be major political changes as to warrant the shifting of headquarters which had occasioned, hitherto, the erection of temporary structures of combustible materials always exposed to the hazard of conflagrations. Strategic reasons, further, demanded the construction of strong bastions at the frontier outposts which were to be linked up with the Sadar Stations and with one another. 'Very few provinces in India', wrote a contemporary,⁴ 'had been provided

¹ *Ibid.*

² Mills : *Report on Assam, see Appendix, K. B.*

³ I.P.C., 1840; August 3, Nos. 95-97.

⁴ Of these, the *Gohain Kamal Ali*, reported to have been constructed by and named after the brother of Koch king Nara Narayan (1534-84), extended from Koch Behar to Lakhimpur; *Bangal Ali* from North-East of Darrang to North Gauhati, *Jayantia* road from Rohachokey to Jayantiapur; *Bar Ali*, Jorhat to Rangpur, *Dhai Ali*, Rangpur to Jaypur

with such a splendid system of public roads as in Assam, and from the great highways which were carried uninterruptedly through the whole country to the great cross-roads between the principal towns and their minute ramifications which connected the villages'. For more than half a century, these roads were sadly neglected, and in consequence most of these were overgrown with jungles and became useless and impassable; floods and inundations were now of almost annual occurrence, and in their wake, there came famine and pestilence which took toll of thousands of lives.

It was, indeed, a herculean task to reopen, reconstruct and maintain these roads and other works of public utility. The mighty labour force that had alone rendered it possible for the former Government to undertake these magnificent works had now disappeared; for the execution of minor works, in and around the Sadar Station, the district officer had to depend on hired labour or the convicts; instances were, however, not rare when the ryots, though reluctant to serve as day labourers, if enthused, rendered occasionally splendid services in lieu of betel-nut or a few seers of salt.¹ The fund, that was allotted for the purpose, was limited to rupees five hundred a year which was extremely inadequate. A further handicap was imposed in 1835, when Lord William Bentinck made it a rule that public works in Assam should be conducted by the Executive Officers at Dacca under the direction of the Military Board.² The Commissioner of Assam was, however, not slow to draw the attention of the Government of India to the delays and diffi-

and *Dhodar Ali* in the south of the district of Sibsagar. For further information B. R. C., 1835; March 31, No. 2; I.P.C., 1839; February 20, No. 89; M 'Cosh : *Topography*, p. 69.

¹ Thus, in 1836, Lieutenant Matthie succeeded through the co-operation of the villagers in constructing about 100 miles of road in the district of Darrang; Similarly, he had cleared an extensive forest, built several bridges and converted an unwholesome swamp into a fine lake. In the same district, when there occurred heavy inundations in early 1838, Rutherford succeeded in procuring voluntary services for raising the embankment on the rivers by offer of salt and betel-nut : B.J.C., (criminal) 1836; October 4, Nos. 15-21; (Miscellaneous) 1838; March 27, Nos. 21-23.

² B.J.C., (Criminal); 1835; December 8, Nos. 109-110.

culties that would subject the execution of public works in Assam if the headquarters of the officer in-charge be located elsewhere; by way of solution he also suggested the employment of a European Overseer to be permanently stationed in Assam.¹ The appointment of Mr. Martin, as a Local Supervisor, in June 1836, improved matters very little; because he was still to act under the orders of the far-off Military Board; besides Martin possessed little of the technical know-how required for the job. In 1838, when these anomalies became too apparent to be ignored, the Military Board, itself, took the initiative in establishing a department of public works in Assam under a duly qualified Engineer; the proposal also received the approval of the Supreme Government, but it could not be carried out for want of suitable officers for the duty.²

In the following year, when the vulnerability of the North-East Frontier, as a whole, was revealed by the grim tragedy of Sadiya, the Governor-General in Council had to take decisive measures; they deputed Major Garstin, the Superintending Engineer, Lower Provinces, to suggest measures for the defence of the frontier and particularly for improving the lines of communications leading to the strategic outposts.³ The comprehensive scheme which Garstin submitted after a survey of the existing works envisaged the construction of a number of masonry forts, blockhouses, public buildings besides repair and reconstruction of several roads and embankments in Upper Assam. In August, 1840, the Supreme Government accorded their approval to the military constructions, and for their speedy execution appointed Lieutenant Spilta as the Executive Engineer, Upper Assam. Mr. Martin, the Local Supervisor, now designated as the Executive Officer, was to act, hereafter, under the orders of the Executive Engineer, newly appointed.⁴

As a matter of fact, soon after the annexation of Lower Assam, the attention of the Government of Bengal was drawn

¹ B.J.C., (Criminal), 1836; June 14, Nos. 46-47; July 12, Nos. 58-59.

² B.J.C., (Criminal); 1838; June 25, Nos. 52-61.

³ I.P.C., 1840; August 3, Nos. 95-97.

⁴ *Ibid.*

to those routes which were of military importance. As early as 1827, Mr. Jones surveyed the Sylhet-Gauhati road *via* Cherrapunji; and in the next year the Jayantia road, from Jayantiapur to Raha, was explored and repaired; although, the latter route was subsequently neglected, improvements were made in the former by throwing in several masonry bridges over the rivers Borpani and Bogapani that secured easy passage for military forces and commissariat cattle.¹ The Cachar-Manipur road, from Banskandy to Bishenpur, was completed under Captain Guthic towards the close of 1842, but it could not be extended on account of the extreme difficulty and heavy outlays involved in the 'project.² Since 1841, under supervision of Lieutenant Spilta the frontier outposts of Kujoo, Ningroo, Tejoo, Sadiya and Saikhowa were strengthened and connected with one another and with the headquarters of the Assam Light Infantry since shifted to Dibrugarh. The *Seoni Ali* or South Trunk Road was commenced, in 1842-43, from Gauhati to the border of the district of Nowgong, and beyond that by opening a passage from Kaliabar to the river Dhansiri; and this was gradually extended, on the one hand, to Dibrugarh *via* Jorhat and Sibsagar and, on the other, to Gowalpara.³ By 1845, the station of North Lakhimpur was linked up with Dhakuakhana, the river Lohit and Badatighat, wherefrom the road approached Naduar in Darrang.⁴ In 1853, Mr. Mills found the North Trunk Road under construction from Kuruaghat to Tezpur.⁵

It had been, indeed, a problem to the Executive Engineers to repair and maintain the aforesaid lines of communications in an alluvial soil always subjected to the floods and inundations of the hill streams that intersect every district. Unless sufficiently raised and timely repaired, these were liable to be cut off or damaged even by wild animals. Therefore, the officers in-

¹ Pemberton : *Eastern Frontier of British India*, pp. 74-76.

² P.L.I., 1844; April 13, No. 9.

³ B.J.C., 1842; August 15, Nos. 42-45; August 22, No. 27-29; September 19, Nos. 40-45.

⁴ B.J.C., 1845; October 1, No. 258-5.

⁵ Mills : *Report on Assam*, see report on the district of Darrang, para 101.

charge should not only be provided with adequate funds, but freed from dilatory official proceedings so as to enable them to avail the most favourable moment for recommencing their operations after rains, when the service of local labourers were, usually, procurable. Unfortunately, it was after the most tortuous procedure and inordinate delays that the Executive Officers could procure the sanctions in whole or in part; and not unoften political events in Afghanistan, Burma or elsewhere suspended, if not stopped, the execution of incomplete works.¹ Inevitably, operations had to be delayed, repairs hastily done before rains could hardly set before they were again washed away, embankments were left without bridges or bridges unconnected with the embankments. Most of the lines of communication remained incomplete and almost unpassable during the monsoons to the human beings not to speak of wheeled carriages which were, of course, then non-existent.

The reconstitution of the administrative units brought into prominence several new townships; but almost all of them remained undeveloped and backward. Even of Gauhati, the then capital of the province,* as reported by a contemporary in 1830, the condition was extremely deplorable :

'With an inhabitants about 6000 souls, mostly Assamese, the town occupies an irregular place, upwards of a couple of miles in length, running for the most part parallel to the Brahmaputra The houses, mostly separated by wide intervals,..... are of wooden, bamboos and reeds. The public buildings are of same description; with exception of the *Dewals*, the Magistrate's residence and the Records' Office (now in progress), no other brick building (*existed*).... The streets forming pleasant roads during winter; but heavy rains make them mires..... No care is taken to keep the adjoining ground clear or free of jungle little attention is paid to draining deep ditches (*which*) served as mere reservoirs of stagnant waters.....'²

¹ A.S.File No. 388, 1861; Jenkins to the Secretary, Board of Revenue, 1859; No.26.

* The official headquarters of the Agent to the Governor-General was, hitherto, located at Cherrapunji in the Khasi hills; it was Captain Jenkins who shifted it to Gauhati, in all probability towards the close of 1834.

² B.P.C. 1831; April 15, No. 94; Leslee, J., the Assistant Surgeon, to the Surgeon Secretary, Military Board, December 8, 1830.

Small wonder, therefore, as M'cosh¹ says, it was 'the most unhealthy station in Assam'. In 1837, a scrutiny of the records of the Civil Hospital of the town revealed him that it was surpassed in rate of mortality by few stations in India. During rains the town of Goalpara remained practically submerged under water when 'every house became an island'. Unhealthiness of climate and inundations occasioned the frequent shifting of the headquarters in the district of Darrang, Nowgong and Sibsagar. The unsettled character of the sites of these stations made it necessary to construct temporary structures with inflammable materials which not infrequently led to violent conflagrations.

The house tax, long abolished elsewhere, was retained at Gauhati by Captain Bogle, and the amount was placed at the disposal of a *Town committee* for the execution of works of public utility. In 1839, the tax was equitably distributed, the incidence falling on the rich and the highly paid Government officials.² The Government of Bengal also approved in September, 1847, a scheme to raise the revenue in and around the Sadar Stations, and to appropriate the amount under *Sadar Improvement Fund*.³ For the development of the headquarters, special grants were made, from time to time, and the Collectors were authorised to utilise the 'ferry funds', 'fines from pounds', and miscellaneous receipts for the repair of roads, bridges, *hats*, clearing of jungles, draining of marshes, construction of *pucca ghats* and filling in of hollows. Side by side, each year, police *thanas*, outposts, halting places were built or rebuilt and repaired.⁴

The doubts which had been entertained by the local authorities, at the beginning, as to the financial potentialities of the province, gradually, disappeared and replaced by a confidence

¹ M. C'osh : *Topography*, pp. 88, 76-77.

² B.R.C., 1839; June 27, Nos. 35-37; August 27, Nos. 46-47. On the abolition of the personal tax (*gadhan*), a house tax was levied according to income from Re. 1, to Rs. 3 per house; it was subsequently raised on houses occupied by Government officers, both Covenanted and Uncovenanted.

³ B.R.C., 1847; September 8, No. 23 etc.

⁴ B.J.P., 1851; September 17, No. 225-229.

in the benefits which would ultimately accrue. The radical reforms in revenue inaugurated with the assessment on land by scrapping the *khel* system contributed to a great extent to the amelioration of the condition of the ryots, and Jenkins might well boast that the abolition of the taxes on house, hearth and head and, particularly on one's caste or calling, was a great boon. In later settlements, the lessons of the past experiences were utilised, as far as practicable, and errors committed in earlier years were scrupulously avoided ; and as a result, the rent-rolls exhibited a steady increase, which stood as follows :¹

District		1832-33	1842-43	1852-53
Kamrup	...	110,181	252,991	295,993
Darrang	...	41,506	135,454	157,795
Nowgong	...	31,509	110,314	128,874
Sibsagar	...	—	80,843	114,463
Lakhimpur	...	—	34,730	46,564

'The revenue of province', Jenkins reported² in 1844, 'will now cover all the expenses of management.....and the province will no longer, under any circumstances that can be foreseen, be a burden on the finances of the old provinces.' The promptitude and ease with which the ryots met their obligations tempted, occasionally, the local authorities, including the Commissioner of Assam, to raise the revenues on land. When a proposal of this nature was forwarded, in 1838, by the Commissioner of Assam, the Board of Revenue considered the measure as far from being expedient. In their view, 'every caution should be observed in raising the rates of a land in a newly-conquered but partially cultivated province like Assam, and it would be more advantageous both as regards the Government revenue and the interest of the people to reduce the rate from the higher to the lower standard than to adopt the reverse of the proposition'.³ In 1852, some modifications, however, occurred on the alteration of the *harh*, the standard measure, from 11½" to 12", so as to make the measure uniform like that of the neighbouring districts of

¹ Mills : *Report on Assam*, para 20.

² I.P.C., 1844 ; April 6, No. 173

³ B.R.C., 1838 ; July 10, No. 77.

Bengal. Although, it was 'desired on this occasion to make the adjustment in such a way as to give no undue hardship to the ryots ; yet there was an appreciable increase in the rates in some districts which were as follows :

<i>District</i>	<i>Rupit</i>		<i>Non-Rupit</i>	
	1842-43	1852-53	1842-43	1952-53
Kamrup	1-4	1-8	... 1-0	1-0
Nowgong	1-4	1-6	... -14	1-0
Darrang	1-8	1-6	... -12	1-0
Sibsagar	1-4	1-4	... -12	0-14
Lakhimpur	1-0	1-0	... -12	0-12

In view of the differences in the development and paying capacities of the ryots, Major Jenkins felt,¹ that a uniformity in rates should not be aimed at ; 'for instance, Kamrup possesses very evident advantages over all other divisions, particularly in being so near the great marts below, and possessing the means of navigation by the large Bengali boats, (throughout the year)the reverse is the Luckimpore division which has very sparse and backward population and can hardly be said to have any communication direct with (the marts) and must depend on local consumers, in great measure, for the sale of its surplus produce.' Therefore, when towards the close of our period, the Collectors, almost all of them, advocated an enhancement in the rate of assessment in all the districts to the level of Kamrup, which was then the highest, the Commissioner opposed the measure categorically ; he was also fearful² that an increase in rate of the *rupit lands* would scare the ryots away from the cultivation of the rice crop ; and already there was a scarcity of the grain owing to the attention of the ryots being diverted to the production of crops like the mustard, the profitability of which had recently increased several times.

A ryot in Assam enjoyed, virtually, proprietary rights over his possessions ; his lands were not liable to arbitrary interference of any revenue official, nor could he be dispossessed of

¹ A. S. File No. 107 ; Jenkins to the Secretary, Board of Revenue, November 17, 1859.

² *Ibid.*

his land except by regular process of law courts by sale, mortgage or bequest either in whole or in part of his possession. His liabilities to the Government were to be ascertained after a proper assessment of the holding and these were clearly laid down in a *patta* issued under the signature and seal of the Collector. On the expiry of terms which, of course, varied from three to ten years, the lands were to be remeasured, compared and checked. The revenues of the relinquished areas were to be deducted and of those since resumed were added. After disposing of all the complaints against recent measurements, the settlement officer was required to make the final settlement with the *Choudhury*, *Patgiri* and the *Mauzadar*, as the case might be.¹

Attempts had, thus, been made to frustrate exaction and to protect the interest of the ryots. But assessments were, unfortunately, made at the headquarters on the report of petty officials, and only in cases of doubts and disputes was there a local investigation; even there, it was conducted not by the Collector or by his Assistant, but by one of the subordinates. Instances were not infrequent in which revenue officials tried to transfer the land of one ryot to the possession of another by entering in the measurement papers lands occupied by one party in the name of another. 'I am inclined to place every confidence' reported Mills, 'in the supervision of local authorities, yet I cannot but doubt the accuracy of information of the measurements conducted by persons more interested to be dishonest'.² Allegations of causing an over-assessment, of illegal imposts, of concealment of terms and even of a secret pact on their personal account, were not uncommon. Nor was it possible on the part of the ryot to get readily and easily a redress of his grievances. 'The idea of being obliged to be absent from his cultivation and to lay out money to meet the court of summary prosecution would induce him quietly to submit to exactions and injuries rather than to be harassed by vexatious litigations'.³ The check and coun-

¹ Jenkins : *Report on Revenue Administration of Assam*. (1849-50) paras 53-54.

² Mills : *Report on Assam*; para 27.

³ *Ibid*; see *Dhekhal Phukan, Observation on the Administration of the province of Assam etc. Appendix J*.

ter-checks, therefore, served merely as palliatives rather than curatives.

Although, Major Jenkins was not agreeable to any modification in the rates of the *rupit lands*, he recommended in November 1859, an increase in the assessment of other lands which were reported to have steadily increased in productivity ; accordingly, on the approval of the Government of India, in 1861, the rates of lands other than *rupit* were raised, excepting that of Kamrup, in the other districts.* Taxes on miscellaneous items, gradually, reappeared and multiplied. Washing of gold in some rivers was farmed out, and similarly right to fish or the *Jalkar* in the rivers and *beels* was offered to the highest bidder. Taxes in the form of *Gorkhati* on timber, *Bunker* on reeds, and *Khusary* on grazings became common in Lower Assam,¹ while in the districts of Lakhimpur and Sibsagar, the *Som* forests,² on which silk worms are fed, were assessed. Excise duties were introduced at the headquarters of Kamrup, Darrang and Nowgong, but not extended to Upper Assam and to the tribal areas, because 'the establishment required for the purpose would swallow up the profits'.³ Stamp duties, which could not, hitherto, been introduced owing to a prohibitory order from the Court of Directors, were introduced in 1858, on the plea of discouraging litigation.

Above all, Abkari opium now made its way into Assam. It evoked bitter criticisms, for there was a consensus of opinion, though inspired by different motives, that the use of opium must be stopped ; it had converted the Assamese 'once a hardy, industrious (and) enterprising race into an effeminate, weak, indolent and degenerate people'. The drug was derived from the juice of a plant commonly known as the poppy which was then extensively cultivated. The increase in the cultivation of poppy

* In the district of Nowgong and Darrang, the rate increased to Rs. 1-2 from annas -14-, in Sibsagar and Lakhimpur to Re. 1-0 from annas -14-, and -12-, respectively. A.S., File No. 388, 1861 ; Secretary, Board of Revenue to the Commissioner of Assam, September 20, 1861 No. 170.

¹ Mills : *Report on Assam* : see the district of Kamrup, para 20.

² Mills : *Report on Assam* : see district of Lakhimpur, para 48.

³ Mills : *Report on Assam*, para 89.

affected the revenues of the Government, since the *chapari* and the *bari* lands, in which this crop was generally cultivated, was assessed at a much lower rate than the rice lands (*rupit*). To check this, and indirectly also the excessive use of opium, Major Jenkins proposed,¹ in December 1839, to raise the rent paid for land under poppy; but the measure did not receive the approval of the Government of India on the refusal of the Board of Revenue to interfere with the cultivation of land or in any restriction on the choice of crop.² The lengthy correspondence which subsequently followed on the subject ended in nothing; on the contrary, the introduction of Government opium, in 1851-52, made it abundantly clear that the Government was not prepared to treat the case of Assam exceptionally.³ The question, hereafter, was not of total prohibition but of suppression of the indigenous poppy lest the revenue on this account should suffer; of course, it was vainly hoped, 'when the ryots will have to pay dearly for the drug, they will restrict its immoderate use,'⁴ for the inveterate consumer would seldom consider himself too poor to purchase it as long as he could procure supplies of it. Even the European planters who had, previously, raised a storm of protest against the use of the drug, welcomed the measure; the substitution of the Bihar for the Assam opium, they felt, would solve their problem of labour by inducing the opium-eaters to work in their gardens; for without it, they could not have the money to purchase the luxury.⁵ The steady increase in the

¹ B.R.C., 1840; May 12, Nos. 65-67.

² *Ibid.*

³ *Selection from Records, Government of Bengal, Volume XXXVII*, p. 37-38; Lushington, E. H., to Jenkins, January 20, 1860.

⁴ *Ibid.* 'It may be impossible to enforce prohibition' wrote Mr. Lushington, the Secretary to the Government of Bengal, to the Commissioner of Assam, 'and if possible, it might be wrong to do so; but it may nevertheless be as right in Assam, as elsewhere, upon moral grounds ... to impose such a check on consumption as an excise affords'. 'When opium cannot be got' he added, 'without paying a considerable price in money for it, there is some reason to hope that the people will cease to give it to their children, and, that those unable to afford themselves a sufficiency of food will no longer resort to it so freely as heretofore.....'

⁵ I.R.C., 1857; May 22, No. 4; see the memorial of the Directors, Assam Company, May 11.

sale of Government opium without any fall in the production of the local drug clearly indicates, that the number of consumers was on the increase ;¹ in fact, it had become 'universal' irrespective of age or sex, which must have prompted a few district officials, in 1853, to urge the authorities in Calcutta that 'something should be done to rescue at least the rising generation.'² The policy of the Government of India, however, remained unaltered during the period under review.

Finally, the half-hearted and dilatory proceedings of the Government of Bengal in regard to the settlement of the claims of the so-called *Lakhirajdars* were productive of great dissatisfaction. These claims were founded upon grants made by the former rulers of Assam and also by the Emperor of Delhi through their Viceroy who ruled in the eastern provinces. Mr. Scott assessed most of the rent-free grants at first at one-third and later half rates as a temporary measure with the intention of abandoning them, altogether, in due course.³ 'The taxation of these grants', Robertson felt, was 'a subject of considerable discontentment', but he could not do more than issue a proclamation, calling on the *Lakhirajdars* to prove the validity of their claims. The situation became one of confusion worse confounded on the commutation of services of the *pykes* for an assessment in land, when the number claiming exemption from taxation considerably increased. Similar grants being exempted from taxation in Bengal, Bihar and Orissa, the *Lakhirajdars* argued, it would be but equitable on the part of the British authorities to respect such rights in Assam. Scott's remission of the rent in their favour admitted, unquestionably, the validity of this claim, which was confirmed by a practice of as many as eight years and by the recognition of the principle by Robertson. In

¹ *Selection from Records, Government of Bengal, Volume XXXVII, p. 42* : The sale of Government opium stood as follows :

	1851-52			1858-59		
	Quantity		Proceeds	Quantity		Proceeds.
Darrang	13 Mds.	3 Srs.	5510-0	28 Mds 18 Srs.		11,380-0
Lakhimpur	38 "	22 "	15,420-0	69 " 13 "		27,730-0
Sibsagar	52 "	5 "	20,850-0	87 " 0 "		34,800-0

² Mills : *Report on Assam*, para 65.

³ See ante p. 28.

early 1834, when the subject was referred to the Supreme Government, it was intimated¹ to the Commissioner that all rights to hold free of assessment originating in grants made by the former Government must be considered to have been cancelled by the British conquest and, therefore, all claims to the restoration of any such tenures could be admitted only as an indulgence of the British Government. That under no circumstances such indulgence was to be extended to any land that was not held or possessed before the Burmese invasion nor to any land held rent-free for service which were not then performed.

Therefore, it became necessary to institute an enquiry into the claims of the *Lakhirajdars*; and Captain Bogle, the Principal Assistant at Gauhati, was employed in the duty for the districts of Kamrup, Darrang and Nowgong. He was empowered, subject to the approval of the Commissioner, to assess at full rates all the lands held in excess of what was held or possessed on *bonafide* grants before the Burmese conquest or for services still performed. On the receipt of his findings, Government would take into consideration how far it would be proper, in each case, to extend or withhold the favour of concession rates on such tenures. The Commissioner was, of course, empowered to use his discretion to suspend the order for bringing any particular lands on the full rates, if he deemed it proper to do so. Finally, pending the enquiries, Scott's general rate would be continued, as before, on all lands claimed as *lakhiraj*, until brought under assessment at full rates or until orders to the contrary to be issued by the Government.²

The enquiries remained incomplete until 1861. Major Jenkins, who continued the work after the transfer of Bogle in 1836, confirmed the cases of *debottar* tenures (i.e. those made for the services in temples) as rent-free, if he found them *bonafide* and valid; in other cases, he simply confirmed the grantee in possession subject to the payment of revenue, as laid down by Scott, pending final orders of the Government on the subject; and when the land was found without a *bonafide* and

¹ R.J.I.B., 1834; October 12, No. 12; also B.R.C., 1834; August 20, Nos. 2-4.

² *Ibid.*

valid grant, it was at once resumed and settled at full rates. The sharp distinction between the rent-free and rent-paying holdings bred ill-feeling and jealousy amongst the grantees who had hitherto been on a footing of equality. No attempt was ever made by the Commissioner to have a proper survey of these holdings nor to demarcate these by permanent marks; he merely declared the amount of land to be held by a *Lakhirajdar* and also the name of the village or villages where it was to be held. The enquiries, which were made 'in a lax manner', left everything in a state of confusion and opened up flood-gates of quarrel which remained unsettled until recent times.¹

In Upper Assam, Mr. Mills found in 1853, innumerable such cases undisposed of; although, investigation appears to have been commenced there much earlier. A large number of *Lakhirajdars* lost their *sanads*, copper-plates and other title deeds during the period of confusion; and those who had some, too, were burnt down, in 1840, by a fire that broke out in the court buildings at Sibsagar while the investigation was in progress.² A situation like this afforded opportunities to unscrupulous people to prefer claims with spurious deeds; and as such, it became extremely difficult to prove the *bonafides* of rightful holders. But justice demands as Mills says,³ 'that suits should be at once instituted and disposed of upon the evidence, documentary or oral, which can be adduced'. Worse still, the holders of the *debottar* grants in this division even if they substantiated their claims had to forgo their *pykes* when the services of the latter in general were ordered to be commuted for an assessment on land. The recommendation of the local authorities to compensate the grantees, as in Kamrup, in money was turned down by the Board of Revenue with the remarks that the priest had not any well-founded title to the perpetual service of the *pykes* in question.⁴ It cannot be denied, that such *pykes* were assigned to the grantees in perpetuity by the former Government, and to do away with their services or the allowance in lieu of

¹ *An Account of the Province of Assam* etc, pp. 102-103.

² A. S., File No. 259, 1872, regarding *Lakhiraj* holdings in Assam.

³ Mills : *Report on Assam*; Jenkins to Mills, June 13, 1853, No. 327, Appendix H; also report on the district of Sibsagar paras 26ff.

⁴ *Ibid.*

them was tantamount to cancelling the grants altogether. The injudicious action of the Board engendered bitter discontent amongst the managers of the temples in Upper Assam and no wonder, therefore, that some of them wholeheartedly joined hands with Maniram Dewan in his tirade against the British Government.¹

¹ See *ante* p. 167.

CHAPTER IX

MATERIAL PROGRESS

The devastation and the wholesale depopulation during the period of civil wars and invasions left vast tracts of waste lands throughout the province.¹ Even in the midst of dense forests traces were to be found that most of these areas were not many years ago thickly populated. Floods and inundations and in their wake epidemics, which were of frequent occurrence, accelerated the pace of deterioration. The local authorities were alive, from the very beginning, to the fact, that unless these lands were reoccupied and brought under tillage, neither the revenues of the Government nor the resources of the people could be improved. Mr. Robertson allowed the occupants of these grants to hold them rent-free for a period of three years, after which he introduced a graduated system of taxation for every three years until the tenth year, when three-fourths of the entire area was to be assessed at full rates. Should the grantee fail during the specified period to bring the land under cultivation, it was liable to be resumed.² Under these rules, lands occupied and cleared could be abandoned at the time when assessment was due to be made at full rates, since the existence of unlimited waste lands made it possible for the occupants to shift from place to place regardless of the value and capability of the soil. These terms were, moreover, too short to admit of the grantees improving their estates and erecting permanent habitations or of adopting

¹ As to the extent of waste lands, the early measurement of Mr. Matthews reveal in 1827, that in Lower Assam alone, out of 1,659,694 *puras*, 529, 735 *puras* were cultivated, rest wastes; In 1853, of the total area of 34,345 sq. miles of this province, not more than 2242 sq. miles were under cultivation. For detail's, see Appendix E.

² B.R.C., 1836; April 12, Nos. 26-28; see translation of the proceedings held by T. C. Robertson regarding the grant of waste lands, April 22, 1833.

any scheme likely to prevent them from shifting at pleasure. When Major Jenkins found that these were not sufficient inducement to entrepreneurs, in early 1836, he suggested¹ to the Government of Bengal the introduction of *Gorukhpur Rules*, with some modification, for similar grants in Assam. The proposed measure envisaged 'the necessity of registration of the extent of land cleared from the commencement of the fourth year. From the fifth year there will be two, and from the sixth year and the following year till the whole grant has been brought into cultivation three different rates of revenue'.

The Board of Revenue shared the views of the Commissioner of Assam and accorded their approval to the recommendations.² The Governor of Bengal, in his eagerness to encourage foreign capitalists, went a step further; he desired to hold out more liberal terms even at the sacrifice of public revenue. 'The primary object of the Government is the general improvement of the province with benefits—moral as well as physical—which must result to its inhabitants from the introduction..... of foreign enterprise, capital and skill.....'³ Therefore, after a reference to the Commissioner of Assam, the Board submitted a more detailed scheme on the lines of the *Sundarban Grants* which received the approval of the Government of Bengal, in August, 1836. Waste lands were classified under this modified scheme, in three categories⁴ : (i) The first class to be held rent-free for five years (ii) the second class for ten years and (iii) the third class for twenty years. After the close of these terms in regard to each grant, the land would be brought under assessment, as follows :

<i>First</i>	<i>Second</i>	<i>Third</i>	<i>Revenue.</i>
6th year	11th year	21st year	@ 8 annas per <i>pura</i> .
7th year	12th year	22nd year	@ 12 annas " "
8th year	13th year	23rd year	@ Re. 1-2-0 " "
9th year	14th year	24th year	@ Re. 1-8-0 " "

¹ B.R.C., 1836; April 22, 1833.; *vide* Jenkins to the Secretary, Sadar Board, June 3, 1835.

² R.J.L.B., 1837, March 14, No. 5.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ First, the forest and high waste lands; second, the extensive high reed and grass (*nal* and *khagri*); third, grass-lands amidst cultivated lands.

That for 21 years from the 9th, 14th and 24th years, the grant of the first, the second and the third class, respectively, the revenue would remain fixed i.e. at Re. 1-8 as per *pura* till the close of the entire period of settlement¹ when three-fourths of the whole area of each grant would be liable to reassessment. The remaining one-fourth of the grant was to be exempted from assessment in perpetuity for the site of houses, roads, tanks etc. and for contingencies of error.

It was greatly hoped that the new scheme would give great satisfaction to the ryots and also provide sufficient encouragement to entrepreneurs to occupy these grants. But the local authorities, including the Commissioner of Assam, received the measures with mixed feelings. Major Jenkins was opposed to the indiscriminate settlement of foreigners in the province; he was afraid that this would induce the zaminders of the neighbouring districts of Bengal to take up large tracts of land merely for the purpose of sub-letting them and establishing, thereby, in Assam the zamindari system like that of Bengal;² while the Collectors, several of them, stood opposed to their introduction apprehending that the ryots would abandon their existing holdings paying revenue with a view to occupying tracts which would in turn be relinquished at the end of the rent-free period.³ The Board of Revenue dismissed the fears entertained by the local authorities as 'futile and impolitic'; nevertheless, to allay their apprehensions a few clauses were, later, added. Not only the grantee was refused all exemption from paying full revenue for lands broken up without the sanction of the Collector, but no grant for agricultural purpose could be made, thereafter, of an extent less than 100 English acres. The applicant must also satisfy the Collector that he was in possession of capital and agricultural stock or implements to the extent of rupees three per acre.⁴ Obviously, it was only the rich and foreign capitalists who could occupy these grants; the indigenous people,

¹ i.e., at the end of the 30 years with respect to the grant of the first, 35 years with respect to the second and 45 years with respect to the third class.

² B.R.C., 1836, August 9, No. 47.

³ R.J.I.B., 1837; April 16, No. 7.

⁴ B.R.C., 1838; March 6, Nos. 1-7.

whether the noble or ignoble, could hardly furnish the wealth qualification; therefore, they had either to employ themselves in the service of or enter into engagements with the grantees of such lands.

In 1846, when the Commissioner found that 'immense' quantities of lands still remained as wastes and jungles, and that the upper classes of the province had not the means enough for their reclamation, he urged the Sadar Board of Revenue to consider if additional inducements could be given to the capitalists to occupy these grants for the cultivation of some articles of foreign export like the sugarcane or the indigo.¹ Some Collectors also represented that 'the most wandering and least industrious of the people', generally, applied for these grants; and with their 'indolent contentment' no improvement could be effected in the province. To remove their apathy and inaction, they suggested that there should be an admixture of people, particularly of European descent, who would produce varieties of crops under improved methods of cultivation.² Sharing these views, when Mr. Mills also opposed in his report, in 1853, the allotment of these grants to the Assamese 'except under peculiar circumstances', the Board of Revenue proposed further amendments in the existing terms, which received the approval of the Government of Bengal in September, 1854. Under these rules, no grant could be less than five hundreds acres in extent, and one-fourth of the grant was to be exempted from assessment as before; but the remaining three-fourths of it was to be granted rent-free for a period of twenty years, after which it was to be assessed at a graduated rate from one anna and half to six annas per acre, till the ninety-ninth year. One-eighth of the grant was to be cleared and rendered fit for cultivation in five years, one fourth in ten years, one half in twenty years, and three-fourths by the expiry of the thirtieth year; on the failure of which the entire grant was liable to resumption.³

Although, no invidious distinction was made by the above rules between indigenous and foreign speculators, the agricul-

¹ B.R.C., 1846; November 18, Nos. 2 and 4.

² B.R.C., 1852, August 12, No. 6; Rowlatt to Jenkins, February 18; Mills: *Report on Assam, Appendix C*, Vetch to Mills, June 22, 1853.

³ B.R.C., 1855; May 31, No. 10.

tural ryot was indirectly debarred from applying these grants under favourable terms, for he had not the means enough to improve the lands under occupation. He had, therefore, to content himself with his pittance of arable land, wherein he raised, generally, the *salidhan*, his staple food. If he was fortunate enough to possess some *bari* or garden land, he cultivated his requirement of pulses, mustard and vegetables. His mode of cultivation was of the primitive nature and the implements he used were of the most archaic type. The annual produce was for his immediate need; hardly was there any surplus for sale or provision for the rainy day. Consequently, in the event of failure of crops on account of the drought or inundations, conditions bordering on famine were of frequent occurrence.¹

To remedy the evils of a purely agricultural economy, Major Jenkins attempted to give the people a commercial and industrial bias, *firstly* by encouraging increased cultivation of such crops as were easily marketable, and *secondly* by creating a class of speculators to exploit the natural resources of Assam. While recommending the tax on the *bari*-lands, in 1836, he clearly expressed his desire to convert 'these wastes and haunts of wild beasts', into fruitful fields of sugarcane, mustard, mulberry, lac, tobacco and vegetables.² He felt that a certain amount of compulsion was necessary to rouse the dormant spirit of the people: 'when the people will find that they will have to pay for them (*bari*-land), they will consider to what advantage they can turn them'. The subsequent increase in revenue of the *bari*-lands and its acceptance by the ryots without demur clearly

¹ Thus, on account of ravages of floods and inundations there occurred, in 1851, a general scarcity throughout the province. Captain Reynolds, the Collector of Darrang, reported 'that for the last two seasons the ryots could not harvest on an average one third of the crops and in some areas not a single grain in seven-eighth of the holdings'. In 1858, there was so much scarcity of grain in the district of Nowgong that the price of rice rose to Rs. 10 per maund and the local authorities had to threaten the cultivators to seize their granaries unless they released their surplus stock in the market. B.R.C., 1851; April 16, No. 9; July 23, No. 38; Jenkins to Secretary Sadar Board of Revenue June 30, also Barua, Gunaviram: Life of Anandaram Dhekiel Phukan, p. 195.

² B.R.C., 1938; July 10, No. 84.

indicate the growing productivity of these holdings.¹ That the endeavour made by the Commissioner bore fruitful results could also be seen from the export returns for the year 1852-53 (*vide Appendix F*); it exhibits that not only commodities like mustard, silk, lac were exported in larger quantities from several districts, but new cash crops like jute, *teel* now found their way into the Presidency. Though belatedly, the Commissioner also realised the injustice that was being done to the indigenous speculators by restricting cultivation in waste lands. He drew the attention of the Government of Bengal in April, 1856, through the Board of Revenue that although on account of their poverty and 'ineptitude to the management of landed estates', the Assamese had not been able to do much in the improvement of waste lands, yet many of them evinced a desire 'to create for themselves farms' in the hope of maintaining their families by this means. On the recommendation of the Board, the Governor of Bengal approved in May 1856, the grant of waste lands in Assam, in future, to Europeans, Assamese, Bengalees and others without distinction, and the cultivation of whatever produce the grantee might think proper.²

The appointment of a Tea-Committee, in early 1834, 'for the purpose of preparing and maturing a plan for the cultivation of the tea-plant' by the Governor-General in Council came as a god-send. The Chinese had enjoyed, in those days, a monopoly of the lucrative tea-trade; but the rigid closed door policy adopted by them against the English merchants and the consequent strained relations between the two governments led the East-India Company to search for alternative sources within their possessions³ for the supply of this invaluable commodity. Exploratory missions were, accordingly, sent out to several areas of the Himalayan region during the time of Lord Hastings (1813-1823) and Lord Amherst (1823-1828); but it was left for Lord William Bentinck to take definite steps for the introduction of tea-cultivation in India. He laid before the Council, on January 24, 1834, an elaborate scheme for their consideration,

¹ See ante. p. 205.

² B.R.C., 1856; May 22, Nos. 29-30.

³ Gupta, H. L. : *An unknown factor in the Annexation of Assam, Proceedings volume, Indian History Congress, 1959*, pp. 412-418.

and, accordingly, the Tea-Committee was formed with Mr. G. T. Gordon, as its Secretary. The Committee was to conduct experiments at the foothills of the Himalayas, the Nilgiris and the valleys and hill-slopes of the North-East Frontier and to ascertain whether it would be practicable to obtain from China cuttings of the best shrub with persons skilled in its cultivation and the subsequent process of manufacture of the leaves for use. The operations were to be tried purely on an experimental basis with the ultimate object of throwing the venture open to private enterprise, should the practicability of producing tea on a commercial basis prove successful.¹

The Tea-Committee entered upon their task in right earnest. They employed themselves, at the beginning, in collecting information from the regions mentioned above and despatched, in the meanwhile, Mr. Gordon to China for procuring genuine plants as well as labourers actually employed in its cultivation and manufacture. Major Jenkins was not slow to avail himself of this opportunity. The investigations which he carried out in collaboration with Lieutenant Charlton, the officer in-charge of Sadiya, revealed in early 1835, the existence of the tea-plant 'from Suddya and Beesa to the Chinese frontier province of Yunum, where the shrub is cultivated for its leaves'.² The attention of the Tea-Committee was, naturally, drawn towards Upper Assam when they learnt from the Commissioner, that the very plant which they were taking so much pains to naturalize was already growing wild nearabout Sadiya. In a letter on December 24, 1834, to Mr. Macnaghten, the Secretary to the Government of India in the Revenue Department, the Tea-Committee wrote :

'We have no hesitation in declaring this discovery..... by far the most important and valuable that has ever been made on matters connected with agricultural or commercial resources of this Empire. We are perfectly confident that the tea-plant which has been brought to light will be found capable under proper management of being cultivated with complete success for com-

¹ R.L.I., 1835; March 13, No 2; I.R.C., 1834; February 1, Nos. 3-7.

² I.R.C., 1835; January 7, No. 9 etc; January 23, No. 13; January 28, Nos. 6-9.

mercial purposes and that consequently the object of our labours may be before long fully realised.¹

No time was to be lost in ascertaining the extent and importance of this valuable plant. For the purpose of collecting on the spot botanical, geological and other preliminary details necessary for cultivation of the tea-plant in that country, on the recommendation of the Tea-Committee, the Government of India resolved upon deputing a scientific mission to Assam under Dr. N. Wallich the Superintendent, Botanical Gardens, Calcutta. He was to be accompanied by Mr. J. McClelland and Dr. W. Griffith, the former as geologist and the latter as botanist.² To receive the plants and seeds from China, in the meantime, Major Jenkins had prepared a nursery at Sadiya under C. A. Bruce, the brother of Robert Bruce, who is, usually, credited with the discovery of the tea-plant in Assam as early as 1823.³

The mission left Calcutta on August 29, 1835. Instead of going direct to Upper Assam, on the advice of the Commissioner of Assam they started their investigations nearabout Cherrapunji in the Khasi-hills; from there proceeded overland to Gauhati, and therefrom by boat to Sadiya where they arrived towards the close of 1835. To their great satisfaction, they discovered in their several tours, the growth of indigenous tea of various kinds in different parts of Upper Assam. All that remained was to examine whether the commodity to be produced would be of a kind fit for commercial use. 'To test and experiment each variety' Dr. Wallich suggested⁴ to the Government of India, that

¹ *Ibid.*

² I.R.C., 1835; March 13, Nos. 3-7.

³ I.R.C., 1835; February 11, Nos. 3-5; Subsequent to the discovery of the tea-plant by Robert Bruce, Mr. Scott, the Agent to the Government-General, North-East Frontier, is reported to have sent some specimens of tea-leaves from Manipur. Wilcox mentions, that he saw the tea-plant in the hills east of Sadiya. In 1828, Captains Grant and Pemberton sent specimens of Manipur-tea to Calcutta: *Asiatic Journal*, Vol. XVIII, p. 207; Wilcox: *Memoir of a Survey etc. Asiatic Researches*, Vol. XVII, p. 448.

⁴ I.R.C., 1835; November 23, Nos. 7-8; I.R.C., 1836; May 23, Nos. 2-4.

the Commissioner of Assam be authorized to purchase all the patches bearing tea. These could be had, he calculated, at an amount not exceeding rupees fifteen hundred, which with an additional five hundred would suffice for clearing jungles, fencing the land, levelling and draining the plantation and all other preliminary work. He further recommended the retention of the service of C. A. Bruce, as the Superintendent, on a salary of Rs. 500/- p.m. The proposal, in its essentials, received the approval of the Tea-Committee; but the Government of India was not inclined at the moment to embark on the experiment on an extensive scale : they desired that the operations should be confined to a few contiguous plots possessing most striking peculiarities of opposite character as to the soil and quality of the plant. The Commissioner of Assam was, accordingly, advised to report on the places most suitable for the purpose and the measures he would recommend for the prosecution of the experiment.¹

Major Jenkins could hardly relish the move on the part of the authorities in Calcutta. He strongly urged for 'varied experiments', on the lines suggested by the leader of the scientific mission. The tea forests in the territory of the Singphos, Muttocks and the Gabharu hills in Upper Assam had already been placed at the disposal of the Government by their respective chiefs. The *Barsenapati*, the ruler of the Muttocks, had volunteered to supply men and guards for the purpose :² 'When the Government will have to incur no additional expenditure other than superintendence and labour' Jenkins argued, 'it would be a waste of time and loss of money' to restrict the plantations that would not remunerate the past outlays.³ Against these forceful reasonings the Government of India could raise no further objection. They accorded their approval to the entire scheme, in July 1836, together with the appointment of Bruce, as the Superintendent of the experimental gardens, on a salary of Rs. 400/- p.m.⁴ In the meanwhile, Mr. Gordon also arrived

¹ I.R.C., 1836; May 23, Nos. 2-4.

² I.R.C., 1836; June 20, Nos. 5-6; July 11, Nos. 7-8.

³ I.R.C., 1836; July 11 Nos. 7-8.

⁴ *Ibid.*

with a batch of Chinese planters and tea-makers. Some of these were immediately despatched to the new establishment in Upper Assam.

Mr. Bruce is said to have possessed little knowledge of botany or horticulture or any special qualification for the post, but his intelligence and ability supplied every deficiency and enabled him to render pioneering service to the cause of the tea-industry in Assam.¹ After taking over the duties, towards the close of 1836, he commenced a survey of the tea-tracts in Upper Assam. The Chinese tea-makers, who also accompanied Bruce, found to their astonishment that the tea-plants in this region were 'precisely the same as in China'.² To have a trial of the tea of both the hill slopes and the plains, Bruce soon moved his headquarters to Jaypur which provided also better facilities for transport of the manufactured goods down the river Buridihing.³ The operation of the first year resulted in the manufacture of twelve boxes of tea, which he despatched, in December 1837, to Calcutta for onward transmission to England. Next year's produce consisted of 95 chests of black-tea.⁴ On examination, the specimen was found 'equally as good as that produced in China'.⁵ It possessed 'great strength, pungence and astringency'. When it was known that the cost of production, too, was not very high—a little over five annas a pound—the Tea-Committee proudly announced that in no distant future Assam would be able to compete with China in so 'indispensable' an article of consumption. In any case 'whatever doubts may have existed upto a recent period in regard to the quality of the Assam tea, these doubts in great degree are removed and the information which is now given, that some very favourable specimens of green-tea have been manufactured in Assam strengthens in our opinion that a fair and mercantile article may be obtained from indigenous plant'.⁶

¹ 'Cultivation of tea in India', vide *Asiatic Journal* Vol. XXIX (1839), p. 53.

² I.R.C., 1837; March 13, No. 20 etc.

³ I.R.C., 1838; February 12, Nos. 8-11.

⁴ I.R.C., 1838; April 9, Nos. 19-20.

⁵ R.L.I., 1839; July 8, No. 9.

⁶ I.R.C., 1838; August 6, Nos. 23-27.

The encouraging report of the Tea-Committee emboldened the Government of India to carry on the experiment fully and efficiently : Dr. Lum Qua, a Chinese interpreter and tea-expert, was added to the establishment of Bruce, and the Commissioner of Assam was at the same time advised to procure from China such other workmen and artificers as would be necessary for the purpose.¹ It also stirred the speculative world. In February 1838, a body of capitalists, both Europeans and Indians, formed a private association in Calcutta under the title the Bengal Tea-Association for the culture and manufacture of tea in Assam upon a capital of rupees ten lakhs.² In furtherance of their object, Mr. W. Prinsep, the Secretary of the Association, sought through Mr. J. R. Colvin, the Private Secretary to the Governor-General, the opinion of Lord Auckland whether Government was agreeable to make over to the Company the enterprise which had already proved eminently successful. In his reply on February 16, Colvin expressed³ his Lordship's favourable views on the subject, provided 'no exclusive rights in lands nor privileges towards a monopoly were sought or asked for'. The encouraging response together with the information of the local authorities that the territory in which they were to embark on the new enterprise was 'flowing with milk and honey' emboldened the Association to commence such works as were necessary preliminary to the undertaking. On May 1, 1839, Mr. Prinsep formally represented to the Government of India, in the Revenue department, to form a settlement in Upper Assam for the production of tea and also to avail themselves for the purpose of the services of Mr. Bruce and the Chinese artisans as well as the means and appurtenances already in possession of the Government in Upper Assam.⁴ In the meanwhile, through the negotiation of Messrs. Cockrell and Co. and Messrs. Boyd and Co., the Bengal Association effected a junction⁵ with another company

¹ R.L.I., 1839 ; August 13, No. 11.

² R.L.I., 1839, July 1, No. 8 ; I.R.C., 1839 ; July 13, Nos. 10-13, Prinsep to the Secretary, Government of India (Revenue department), *vide Report of the Provincial Secretary*.

³ I.R.C., 1839 ; March 11, Nos. 2-3, Colvin to Prinsep, February 16.

⁴ I.R.C., 1839 ; May 6, Nos. 25-26 ; Prinsep to Grant, May 1. *Secretary*.

⁵ I.R.C., 1839 ; July 13, Nos. 10-13 ; *see Report of the Provincial*

floated in England with a similar objective under the common title, the Assam Tea-Company, upon a capital of £500,000, in 10,000 shares of 50 £ each.

In spite of the assurance given by Lord Auckland, the representation made by Mr. Prinsep could not have had a smooth sailing; for in a despatch on March 30, 1839, the Court had advised the Government of India that the experimental cultivation should be carried on by the Government until such time as it could feel assured that private enterprise would prosecute the undertaking successfully.¹ Mr. F. J. Halliday, Secretary to the Government of Bengal, under direction of the Government of India, however, called upon the Commissioner of Assam to submit a report on the subject, particularly his opinion whether the experimental cultivation under the Government sufficiently established could be safely abandoned. Major Jenkins, ever eager as he was, to encourage foreign entrepreneurs, strongly recommended² in his reply on May 22, the making over of the whole of the Government establishments subject to the reservation of one tract and a small establishment which should serve as a nursery of plants for future speculators. The experimental cultivation, the Commissioner added, had been conducted with such a degree of success that the whole of the plantations with exceptions mentioned above could be transferred to the Company without any apprehension to the successful conclusion of the experiment. The views held by the Commissioner received the corroboration of the Tea-Committee. In spite of these, the President-in Council entertained great doubts whether the experimental cultivation had reached that stage in which it could be safely abandoned;³ and under no circumstances was he inclined 'as recommended by the Commissioner' to make over to one party, 'no matter how numerous and respectfully constituted', all benefits resulting from the employment of public money; for that, he felt, would be tantamount to the grant of a monopoly of

¹ I.R.C., 1839; July 13, Nos. 10-13; see *Resolution of the Government*, June 15.

² I.R.C., 1839, July 13, Nos. 10-13; Jenkins to Halliday, F.J.; May 22, 1839.

³ I.R.C., 1839; July 13, Nos. 10-13. *Resolution of the Government*, July 15.

indefinite duration. 'The first duty of the Government' he observed, 'at the opening of the trade (is) to make monopoly impossible.....'; that 'the great national tea-trade in Assam (shoul be) open to all, as the indigo trade in Bengal'. The Governor-General in Council had, therefore, to resolve upon retaining the tea-nurseries in Assam; but the officers in-charge of the establishment were to afford without distinction all proper assistance to the speculators who might come forward to take up the enterprise. They were, of course, to be warned that no assignment or grant of land could be given to any party until a general scheme for disposal of such grants or leases could be published, and for this purpose the Government of Bengal was directed to submit proposals in consultation with the local authorities.¹

The proceedings of the Governor-General in Council, naturally, gave a rude shock to the shareholders of the Company; because, their decision was in direct contravention of the declared policy of the Government, which stated in unambiguous terms that 'in the event of the trial proving successful, the cultivation and manufacture should be left entirely to the individual enterprise.' The Court had also announced in an earlier despatch 'that the share of the Government in the results of the experiment, if successful, must consist in the article itself being subject to the duty as at present as an article of internal consumption, in the necessary addition to the land revenue and in the benefit to India from a new article of return trade.'² The quality and quantity of tea that was produced in Assam for the previous two seasons conclusively proved, that the operations had been attended with 'absolute success', and as such, there existed no reason, whatever, of the Government continuing in the enterprise. Fortunality for the Company, the resolution also produced a division amongst the members of the Council, Mr. T. C. Robertson, a senior member of the Council, while agreeing on the main lines to the recommendations of the Commissioner of Assam, as 'the very best and most suited', strongly deprecated the policy pursued by the Government. 'In our dread of monopoly' he

¹ *Ibid.*

² I.R.C., 1839; July 13, Nos. 10-13; *vide* extract from the C.D., August 23, 1837, No. 11, para 26.

observed, 'we seem to be doing our utmost to depress and discourage speculation and deprive the province for years of the benefits that may be effected from the discovery of the treasure which it possessed in the tea-plant.'¹ The rebuttal of Mr. Bird was equally emphatic; with cogent reasonings he argued: 'We alone know the difficulties and dangers..... to place European colonists in contact with native uncivilized states has always been considered unadvisable by India Government. In South Africa the most disastrous consequences have ensued and to take such a step in Assam, where the surrounding tribes are animated by anything but a friendly spirit towards us, without seeing clearly our way and endeavouring in the first instance to remove every cause of dispute would be..... to place the lives and properties of the British subjects in peril and run very serious risk of involving Government in most extensive embarrassments'.² He was, therefore, strongly of the opinion that the policy embodied in the resolution was the only right one by which 'those benefits' could be permanently secured.

The divergent views held by two prominent members of the Council induced Lord Auckland, the Governor-General of India, to adopt a middle course. In his minute on July 19, 1839, while the Governor-General shared the views held by Mr. Robertson—that any postponement in the matter might depress and discourage the spirit of enterprise which was then alive—he could not rule out the necessity of procuring information to frame the rules with the same object in view. Without detriment to the prosecution of these investigations,³ Lord Auckland therefore, desired, that one or more parties be allowed to commence operations subject to the rules and conditions which might ultimately be determined upon by the Government. Accordingly, with the concurrence of the President-in Council, the local authorities were authorised, in case of their finding the Assam Company or any other concern prepared with labour on the spot for commencing operations, to allow at their discre-

¹ I.R.C., 1839; July 13, Nos. 10-13; Minute by T. C. Robertson. June 22.

² I.R.C., 1839; July 13, Nos. 10-13; Minute by W. W. Bird, June 22.

³ I.R.C., 1839; July 13, Nos. 10-13; Minute by Lord Auckland, July 19.

tion the occupation of such lands as might be immediately required on the distinct understanding that the occupants must submit to the general rules, passed hereafter, and that the Government could not give any guarantee that particular tract applied for by the Company would be granted to them.¹

The Assam Company had in the meantime occupied a part of the Gabharu hills. Under J. W. Masters they set up an establishment of their own at Nazira on the bank of the river Dikhow, and commenced collection of stores, erection of depots, recruitment of labour and such other work necessary for their operation. In early 1840, the Directors waited on the Deputy Governor of Bengal and finalised the agreement, under which they were to confine their operations within Muttock; although, they had the option, hereafter, before other parties of grants of lands within some defined limits from their place of residence. They were permitted, therein, to collect and purchase tea-leaves and to make arrangement with the people of the locality for the purpose with due regard to the preservation of private rights. The Company also got two-thirds of the Government plantations including the services of Mr. Bruce, on condition that half of the establishment transferred to the Company would be reclaimable by the Government at any time within five years on a notice of three months.²

Apparently, against his expressed wish, the President-in-Council had to acquiesce in the surrender of the greater part of the Government plantation, mainly because the local authorities expressed their unwillingness to carry on the experiment which they felt reached that stage in which it could safely be left to private speculators. It was true that much of the time of these officers had been withdrawn from their proper function and, it was natural, that they would like to be relieved of the burden of business with which they ought to have little or no concern.

In March 1840, Bruce joined his new assignment under the Company, and was placed in charge of the Northern Division consisting of the tracts Kahung, Tippam, Nowholea, Jogundo and Ningro.³ The remaining portion of the Government plantation,

¹ I.R.C., 1839; November 18, Nos. 3-7.

² R.L.I., 1840, March 9, No. 6.

³ Bruce, C. A. : *Report on the Manufacture of Tea etc.*, p. 4.

since retained around Chabua in Muttok as an experimental station, worked for a few years satisfactorily. It was supervised by Mr. Thomas Watkins, and on the latter's resignation in 1842, by Lum Ping Young, the son of Dr. Lum Qua who had died at Jaypur, in 1840.¹ The growing competition of the Assam Company and the lack of proper supervision, gradually, deteriorated both the quality and quantity of the produce. It was increasingly felt that these operations could not be pursued by the Government so profitably and efficiently as by private entrepreneurs. In 1849, when it was found that the yield was not worth even the cost of production,² the gardens were sold out at a nominal price to a Chinese, from whom it passed two years, later, to Messrs Warren Jenkins and Co. Ltd.³

During 1840-42, the operations of the Assam Company were very promising; as early as 1843, they were able to declare a dividend of 3% to their shareholders; and the introduction of the new rules of the grant of waste lands into Upper Assam in 1842 had enabled them to extend their field of activities. These hopes soon ended in disappointment. In 1844, the Company was faced with acute financial difficulties, which have been ascribed to extravagant expenditure in connection with extension of operations, importation of Chinese labourers, and particularly in the wreckless venture on the part of their Calcutta authorities to ply on the Brahmaputra the steamer, *the Assam*, which was soon found technically defective.⁴ The affairs of the Company had sunk so low in the next two years that they had to close most of the factorics, and there was a rapid fall in the value of the shares of the Company in London. On account of mismanagement of affairs Messrs Bruce and Masters, both had to tender their resignation. The Company was rescued from this crisis towards the close of 1846, by the newly-elected Secretary Mr. Henry Burkinyoung and Mr. J. D. Campbell; 'the former from his own pocket and the latter by making a loan on part of the crop being hypothecated for him.'

¹ R.L.B., 1842; May 14, No. 10.

² B.R.C., 1848, June 28, Nos. 7-9.

³ B.R.C., 1948, February 28, Nos. 6-7.

⁴ Antrobus, H A; *A History of the Assam Company*, pp. 48-49, 69, 407-8.

Mr. Stephen Mornay, who became the Superintendent at Nazira in 1847, by his economic and energetic measures, gradually, turned the earlier deficit into a surplus. The affairs of the Company improved, further, when on Mornay's resignation in 1852, Mr. George Williamson (Junior), a veteran planter from Bihar, took the management. This change was apparent in the renewal in that very year of a moderate dividend of $2\frac{1}{2}\%$, which steadily rose to 9% in 1858.¹

In the meanwhile, several speculators entered into the field. In 1852, Colonel Hannay opened a garden near Dibrugarh, and factories were started at Mothola and Bojalani.² The following years saw the formation of the Maijan Tea-Company under Messrs Warren Jenkins and the rise of several factories at Sookdongia, Bokapara, Borbarua, Nagaghuli and Deosal in the district of Lakhimpur.³ The Assam Company expanded their activities on the north bank and opened a garden at Singri Parbat in 1855; and in the same year their first garden in Cachar was started. In 1858, in collaboration with William Robertson, an officer of the Assam Company, Williamson formed the Jorhat Tea-Company,⁴ which was incorporated in the next year. During 1858-59, out of 54,860 acres occupied, 7599 acres were under actual cultivation, of which the Assam Company alone held 3381 acres, producing a yield of 693,249 lbs of tea at eighteen factories.⁵

In carrying out their operations, the industrial pioneers had to confront immense difficulties in a land of impenetrable jungles almost devoid of lines of communications, where the only means of transport available was small country-boats on the rivers or by elephants on land.* They were to be constantly

¹ *Ibid*, see Company's statistics, p. 408.

² *Selections from the Records of the Government of Bengal*, Vol. XXXVII, pp. 13-14.

³ *Ibid*.

⁴ Antrobus : *A History of the Assam Company*, p. 102.

⁵ *Selections from the Records of the Government of Bengal* Vol. XXXVII, see tabular statement of tea-factories in Assam, pp. 30, 34-35.

* As a matter of fact, there was neither a wheeled carriage nor any beast of burden in use; human bearers, ordinarily, performed the services of the latter. For the carriage of tea, the planters utilized the elephant with a *howdah* (a wooden frame) tied up to the animal's

on guard to meet any emergency, because the territory was subjected, throughout, to the sudden raids of the predatory tribes; while against the rigours of the climate they had to fight hard, and several valuable lives were lost in their early operations.* Even in an agricultural country like Assam, at times, rice was so dear and scarce that provisions for their staff and labourers had to be procured from outside.¹ Moreover, the Government treasuries at the headquarters could seldom meet their requirement of coins; they had, therefore, to make arrangements of their own to convey the currency from Calcutta, and there was no insurance to cover the risks on the way.²

The most formidable obstacle which the planters had to face was, however, the scarcity of labour both skilled and unskilled. When Bruce took charge of the Government plantations he knew nothing of the art of tea-making, and, therefore, his immediate requirement was not so much the plants and seeds as a few tea-makers from China. This initial difficulty was tidied over by him when, towards the close of 1836, the two tea-makers whom Gordon had procured from China, reached Sadiya. In early 1838, another batch of Chinese consisting of two green tea-makers, two box-makers and one canister-maker made its way into upper Assam.³ Fearing perhaps that the Chinese artisans might not be available in adequate numbers, Bruce undertook to train up a dozen of Assamese. The latter were to receive a reward of Rs. 30 each on their being found proficient within a reasonable time in the manufacture of tea; and the recipient of the award was later to be appointed as a *Tekela* or tea-maker on a salary of Rs. 10/- p.m.⁴ At the

back. To save man power the Assam Company introduced in a few factories a four-wheeled elephant-carriage, which was, of course, out of use during the rains.

* Of these, mentioned may be made of the Chinese interpreter Dr. Lum Qua and European officials like Messrs Duffield, G. S. Murray William Paton : see Bruce : *Report on the Manufacture of Tea* etc. pp. 7-8, 18-19.

¹ I.R.C., 1857 May 22, No. 4 : see *Memorial of the Directors* May 11.

² Mills : *Report on Assam : Appendix E, Memorial of the Directors of the Assam Company to Lord Dalhousie*, June 6, 1853.

³ I.R.C., 1838, May 21, Nos. 19-20.

⁴ I.R.C., 1837, January 23, Nos. 17-18 ; March 13, Nos. 20-27.

beginning, the Assam Company had also endeavoured to import Chinese labour from their settlements in Singapur, Batavia and Penang; and through the aid of their agents they had succeeded in 1839, and 1840, in procuring several batches of artisans and labourers. A Chinese tea-maker could not be had at less than rupees forty per month, whereas, the best Assamese *Tekela* received only rupees ten. While an ordinary Chinese labourer on contract for a period of three years demanded rupees sixteen a month, his Assamese counterpart could be had even at rupees four.¹ Besides, the Chinese, occasionally, proved themselves so 'untractable and worthless'* and their recruitment became so costly and difficult on account of the existing relations with the Government of China, that the Company had to resort more and more to the indigenous artisans; and, fortunately, the latter proved, before long, as efficient as the Chinese. In the annual report of 1842, the Directors prophesised :²

'The excellent quality of tea and its improvement since it has been made by the Assamese most satisfactorily and fully justifies the expectation that the labouring population of Assam will, eventually, furnish numerous and skilled in the art labourers for the purpose of manufacture on a very extended scale.'

Of the unskilled labour, the planters had to depend, at the beginning, mostly on the Assamese, and occasionally, the Nagas and the Singphos. By offering a feast to the community or by presents of beads, cutleries and looking-glass etc to their respective chiefs, the Nagas were employed in clearing jungles. But

¹ Antrobus : *A History of the Assam Company*, p. 343. Bruce : *Report on the Manufacture of Tea etc* : see replies to the queries of Bruce, Appendix G.

* Thus in 1840, a batch of 247 Chinese arrived in Calcutta from Singapur. A quarrel broke out amongst them immediately on their disembarkation, and several of them were wounded. On their upward voyage to Assam, at a river ghat, again hand to hand fighting took place between the Chinese and the people of the locality in which the miscreants, numbering about fifty, had to be arrested and tried. After regular proceedings lasting for about four months, when all of them were acquitted, they put up one excuse after another; whereupon, the whole gang had to be dismissed, and the Company had to incur heavy losses on this account. Bruce : *Report of the Manufacture of Tea etc*. see the report of the Directors, pp. 13-14; Antrobus : *A History of the Assam Company* pp. 378-80.

² Bruce : *Report of Manufacture of Tea etc*. pp. 13-14.

the Singphos 'had no inclination of work for any so long they had enough of rice and opium for their immediate requirement and would brook no control as to whether they worked or not'.¹ The Assamese, most of them being agriculturists, could work only in off-season and, therefore, it was difficult to have the same batch 'even for two consecutive seasons'. To induce them, competitive rates had to be offered : a labourer could be had, in 1824-5, at a rupee a month ; in 1839, at Rs. 2-8, and in 1858-59, it mounted up to Rs. 4-8 : 'Instances are not infrequent of men earning from 6 to 10 rupees per month and families of four individuals over 20 rupees.'² Their *Duffadars* or the recruiting agents roamed from village to village, and not unoften they 'made the youngmen drunk and forced advances upon them away from their families and fields'.³ In spite of such expedients it was difficult to have adequate number of hands at seasons when they were greatly needed ; and the problem became all the more acute during the boom in the tea-market after 1852, when almost every planter, big or small, entered into blind competition to push on their cultivation. This dearth of labour and particularly the natural indolence of the Assamese ryots (rather aversion), had been a subject of constant complaint from the speculators. To many, it was the outcome of a low assessment and the immense profit derived from the land by the 'lightest of toil'. Backed by some district officers, the planters represented to the Government of Bengal, in 1858, to enhance the rate of assessment ; for such a measure, they hoped, would throw the ryots into their hands by compelling them to seek employment to pay off their increased demand in revenue.⁴ The Commissioner of Assam, as has already been mentioned, was unwilling to raise the revenues on land, while the Board of Revenue negatived the suggestion, altogether, 'as one of questionable efficacy'. They doubted, moreover, the propriety of fixing the rate of assessment on land

¹ Antrobus : *A History of the Assam Company*, p. 375.

² *Selections from the Records of the Government of Bengal*, Vol. XXXVII, vide *Proceedings of the meeting of the planters at Chinnamara*, p. 71.

³ *Selections from the Records of the Government of Bengal*, Vol. XXXVII ; Jenkins to Lushington, E. H. ; November 11, 1859

⁴ *Ibid.*

with reference to the habits of the people and under no circumstances 'on consideration of benefit to the European speculators'.¹

Major Jenkins firmly believed that there could be no solution to the problem unless effective measures were taken to procure labour from areas of surplus population outside the province. When he made a suggestion of this nature, as early as 1837, the Tea-Committee represented to the Government of Bengal to import the *Dhengas* from the South-West provinces². The authorities in Calcutta readily agreed: it would not only provide adequate labour to the Government plantations, but also enable the local authorities to employ them during the off-season in the repair and reconstruction of roads and public buildings. The endeavours that were subsequently made by the Government of Bengal, however, ended in failure³; because, the terms that were offered were not attractive, and rumours were also spread in those areas that of those who had gone to Assam none had returned, and all of them had died. Such fears and suspicions had to be, later, allayed by the Assam Company by sending the *Sardars* at frequent intervals to their native districts. In co-operation with the local authorities and also of the indigo planters in Bihar,⁴ the latter succeeded, from time to time, in alluring batches of the *Dhengas* at considerable expenses, and the transaction was, invariably, attended with difficulties on account of the lack of proper transport and the long distance to be covered into the tea districts of Upper Assam. Instances were not rare when a whole gang deserted before it reached the destination.⁵ In 1861, when the Indian General Steam Navigation Company Ltd. introduced regular traffic on the Brahmaputra with facilities for the carriage of labour, some of the bottlenecks referred

¹ A.S. File No. 388; Officiating Secretary. Board of Revenue to the Secretary. Government of Bengal, July 16. 1861.

² R.L.I. 1839, June 15, No. 7.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ Antrobus: *A History of the Assam Company*, p. 388.

⁵ In 1840, the Assam Company succeeded in persuading a gang of 652 *Dhengas* to proceed to Upper Assam. Hardly had they left Hazaribagh, when cholera broke out in their camp and reduced them to half, which frightened them so much that on one night the rest absconded in a body. Bruce: *Report on the Manufacture of Tea etc.* p. 6.

to were removed, which rendered the importation of labourers on a large scale possible.

The successes that attended the culture and manufacture of tea encouraged the Commissioner of Assam to undertake an experiment in the cultivation of cotton which was also widely grown in the province. On his representation the Government of India deputed, in early 1850, Mr. Price who was then in charge of a similar undertaking at Dacca.¹ The experiment was to be conducted in Upper Assam, on both foreign and indigenous cotton, so as to ascertain the capacity of this region to raise cheaper cotton for English manufacture.

Mr. Price selected Saikhowa, in the District of Lakhimpur, as his headquarters. The site was supposed to be centre of the best cotton growing area in Assam; but it was too remote with 'labour too scarce and too dear' to make the experiment a success.² During the first year, official delay in providing funds prevented Price from commencing the operations in time. When he started the clearing of forests, in the following year, incessant rain retarded the progress of his work; while long exposure in a damp climate destroyed the germinal quality of the seeds he sowed in his farm. The subsequent experiment he made of the exotic seed proved no better, but the indigenous seeds of the *Dheera Cotton* did well, 'and if fairly tried, promised to be better suited for the Home market than any that has been sent from Bengal'.³

Major Jenkins was alive to the difficulties faced by Mr. Price, and he was further convinced that an experiment of this nature could hardly succeed except under far greater out-lay of money and unless undertaken for years together.⁴ 'I do not consider,' he observed, 'that the result of the experiment in Upper Assam is at all conclusive of the aptitude of the country for cotton cultivation'. To conduct the experiment successfully, he proposed to the Government of Bengal that three to five

¹ I.R.C., 1852; August 27, Nos. 4-8.

² I.R.C., 1852; August 27, Nos. 4-8; Dalton to Jenkins, April 7, 1852.

³ I.R.C., 1852; August 27, Nos. 4-8; Price to Dalton, March 30, 1852.

⁴ I.R.C., 1852; August 27, No. 4-8; Jenkins to the Secretary, Board of Revenue, April 13, 1852.

hundred acres of land should be taken over near Tezpur, where labourers were readily available, for growing foreign and indigenous cotton; and that the trial be continued at least for a period of five years. The cotton grown at this experimental farm, he added, should be carefully prepared for foreign markets and the surplus seeds were to be distributed to the Collectors to carry on experiments, simultaneously, at other locations.¹

The Board of Revenue examined the subject from their immediate object in view. The experiment under Price, they found, had involved the Government an expenditure of rupees 9489/- and the finished product, it was estimated, could not be had at the spot at less than Rs. 19/- a maund, nearly double the price at which it was sold in Calcutta. 'The cost of superintendence is heavy, labour is extremely dear and scarcely procurable'. Above all, nothing would be known of the results unless carried on for years together. In these circumstances, when the Board was reluctant to incur any further expenditure on the project,² the Government of Bengal directed the Commissioner of Assam to dispenze with the service of Mr. Price and abandon the experiment.³

To the material well-being of the people, Mr. Scott found no other industry more suitable than sericulture; because, the soil of Assam and the genius of her people both favoured the production of the silk and silk-manufactures*. To produce quality goods on a commercial scale, in early 1830, he laid before the Government of Bengal an elaborate scheme to plant mulberries in 1000 *bighas* of land and to distribute 500 reels to the local artisans who were to be trained in improved methods of spinning and weaving by the spinners from Bengal.⁴ The expenditure for the purpose, he desired to meet from the public revenue by levying an extra cess on the areas under cultivation; and he hoped to reimburse the amount, later, from the

¹ *Ibid.*

² I.R.C., 1852, August 27, Nos. 4-8. Secretary to the Board of Revenue to the Secretary to the Government of Bengal, May 11, 1852.

³ R.L.I., 1852; August 27, No. 4.

⁴ B.P.C., 1830; May 7, No. 51; Scott to the Secretary, Government of Bengal, April 17; also *Assam Silk*; *Asiatic Journal*, Vol. VII (1832) p. 18; vide extract from *Samachar-Darpan*; Hugon Thomas: *Silk worms and Silks of Assam*; J.A.S.B. Vol. VI, 1837.

sale proceeds of the produce.¹ When the authorities in Calcutta turned down the proposal 'as a doubtful experiment', Scott commenced the plantation, in 1831, at Desh Darrang through the help of convict labour.² The premature death of the Commissioner towards the close of the same year and utter indifference exhibited by his immediate successors affected the success of the experiment. In December, 1832, when the Board of Trade expressed an unfavourable opinion of the market value of the Assam silk, Mr. Robertson brought the experiment to a close.³

In spite of the increasing import of *calico*, *muslin* and other finer fabrics *muga* and silk (*pat*) garment, continued to be the standard dress of the upper and the middle classes of both the sexes, while even the indigent ones endeavoured to wrap themselves up in winter with a piece of *erendi* cloth. The production of these stuff, therefore, was carried on as before 'in almost every village, but without capital, without division of labour by single individuals, each of whom spins, weaves, and dyes his own web'. Hamilton's information, that cotton weavers of this province were foreigners, is far from the truth. Every family in Assam had looms to meet the requirement of its members of cotton cloths.⁴ The loom was, in fact, the centre of domestic economy, the only hope of salvation in an hour of distress or despair. 'If rent is in arrears and must be paid or debt presses, it is to the product of the loom worked by the females of the family that the debtor looks to for raising the requisite funds.' The manufactures were, of course, meant mainly for domestic consumption. In absence of competition, the quality produced was comparatively poor and the export of cotton textiles was, therefore, negligible.

Blacksmiths, braziers, potters, matmakers and ivory workers,

¹ B.P.C., 1830 ; May 7, No. 51.

² B.P.C., 1832 ; November 5, Nos. 53-54.

³ B.P.C., 1832 ; December 17, No. 44.

⁴ Robinson : *A Descriptive Account of Assam*, p. 227 ; Hamilton ; *An Account of Assam* (1809). p. 62. 'It would appear', reported Dalton, P.A., Lakhimpur 'that quantity of piece goods imported would not furnish a rag to each individual in (this) district, yet the people are well-clad.'

many of them, followed their hereditary pursuit. They had to furnish, previously, their fixed quotas of produce to the *kheldar* to whom they were attached; but on the abolition of the *khels*, their products were either hawked about or collected at spot by agents of foreign traders. Customs returns reveal that brass-copper-iron wares, mats, ivory works continued to be exported from Assam, until 1835. In subsequent years, exports constituted mostly of the raw materials, while the import of foreign goods was on the increase.

The surveys and explorations conducted by a band of gallant adventurers, since the last quarter of the eighteenth century, brought to light to some extent the hidden wealth of this province. Dr. Wade,¹ in his *Geographical Sketch of Assam* (1800), mentions that gold-dust was obtained from most of the rivers which have their sources in the mountains of the north.² Hamilton's figures, that the mine of Pakerguri, about 40 miles east of Gauhati, alone yielded 15,000 *tolas** of gold, annually, might be exaggerated;³ but if 25 clans of gold-washers worked under the former government at different sites in Upper and Central Assam, as reported by Matthie, the Collector of Darrang, and each individual raising on average $2\frac{1}{2}$ *tolas*, annually, the total output must have been considerable. The early tax-collectors following the Burmese free-booters looted the *sonowals* so repeatedly, that the latter became afraid of being called as *sonowals* and many abandoned their time-honoured profession. The gradual lifting of their exclusive right and the decline of

¹ Dr. Wade, J.P. accompanied the detachment under Captain Welsh which was sent by Lord Cornwallis, in 1772, in response to the appeal for aid by Raja Gaurinath Singha. Dr. Wade availed himself of the opportunity in compiling from local sources a History of Assam and, therein, he appended a valuable section on the geography of the country.

² Particularly, the rivers Subansiri, Dikrong, Borpani, Borgang, Burigong and Manah. The gold obtained from the Burigong was considered to be the most precious, and was valued at Rs. 20/- per *tola*; Wade: *An Account of Assam, vide the Geographical Sketch of Assam*, pp. 16-23.

* A *tola* is equivalent to 11.66 grammes.

³ Hamilton, F.; *An Account of Assam*, pp. 46-47: also Barua, Maniram Dewan: *Native Account of Washing for gold in Assam*, J.A.S.B. Vol. VII-2, 1838.

former consumers hit the gold-washers so hard that most of them found it more profitable to take to agriculture. The gold-washers, as a class, dwindled and Matthie found in 1833, only a few of them carrying on their pursuits at Balipara in Darrang.¹

The innumerable salt-brines scattered along the northern slopes of the Naga hills, particularly in the south-east of the district of Sibsagar, supplied the requirement of salt in the territory besides offering employment to many.² The brines were systematically worked until the reign of Purandar Singha and an establishment, it appears, continued to exist under Brodie, P.A., Sibsager, for the management of salt springs at Borhat.³ The crude and cumbrous procedure of its manufacture* raised the cost of indigenous salt; it could, hardly compete with cheaper foreign salt and the workings at the salt-brines, inevitably, was discontinued.

Captain Wilcox discovered, in 1826, oil-springs and several coal-beds in the south-east corner of the district of Sibsagar.⁴ Jenkins also noticed while he was touring in Upper Assam, in 1838, several oil-springs in between Borhat and Jaypur.⁵ The existence of oil-springs at Bapoopong (the present site of Digboi), Makum and Namchik near the frontier was reported, in 1854, by Captain Dalton, the Principal Assistant, Lakhimpur.⁶ The search for more oil-fields or a scientific operation of the existing areas was neglected, because the demand for mineral oil was extremely limited. The little quantity that Captain Dalton required to kill the white-ants at his office could be had at Dibrugarh @ Rs. 4/- a maund; the small quantity used in the province had, generally, been collected through a petty trader at Makum, 'a Bengalee acting for or with Ramjoy

¹ B.R.C., 1836; March 1, No. 40; vide the report of Lieutenant Matthie, February 15, 1839.

² *Ibid.*

³ R.L.B., 1841; April 7, No. 7.

* For the manufacture of indigenous salt see *Journal of Upper Assam* by Major Jenkins, I.P.C., 1838, March 28, No. 46, paras 86-90.

⁴ Wilcox : *Memoir of a Survey of Assam* etc. (1825-25); *Selection of Papers regarding the Hill tracts between Assam and Burma* (1873), p. 5.

⁵ I.P.C., 1838; March 28, Nos. 45-46, paras 91-94.

⁶ B.R.C., 1854, July 27, No. 204, Dalton to Jenkins, March 2.

Majumdar at Jaypur'.¹ Mr. Wagentrieber was the first speculator to obtain from the Government of Bengal, in March, 1854, an exclusive right for a term of ten years to operate on a commercial scale the oil-springs at Makum in the district of Lakhimpur.²

Coal of an inferior quality was, later, discovered by the surveys of Mr. Bedford at the Karaibari estate in the Garo hills and by Lieutenant Watson at Cherrapunji.³ Coal-beds were also found by district officers on the bank of the rivers Namrup, Namchik and Sufrray, the valley of the Jamuna and the Dhansiri, and in the *duars* of Bijni and Koriapara. 'No province in India', Jenkins reported,⁴ 'possesses in greater abundance this most valuable mineral and it is very probable that some of the beds do contain coal of a very valuable quality'. In spite of this, few mines were properly worked. From Jaypur, limited quantities were raised by the Assam Tea-Company to meet their own requirements.⁵ Operations began, about the middle of 1832, at the Cherra Coal fields and, occasionally, boat-loads of coal were despatched to the Presidency.⁶ In 1837, under the direction of the Supreme Government Major Hannay opened the coal-beds at Jaypur and Borhat;⁷ but on his transfer to Sadiya, in early 1839, as the Commandant of the A.L.I., the 'experiment which began successfully' practically came to an end; for Mr. Landers who was placed in charge of these operations possessed neither the energy nor the technical know-how necessary for the purpose.⁸ Though the Governor-General in Council accorded their approval on March 26, 1842, to a scheme submitted by the Commissioner for the operation of the sites which could be worked satisfac-

¹ B.R.C., 1854; July 27, No. 40; Dalton to Jenkins, June 12.

² B.R.C., 1854; July 27, No. 18.

³ B.P.C., 1832; July 2, Nos. 102-3; P.L.I.B., 1841; January 14. No. 3: Jenkins, F: *Further discovery of coal-beds in Assam*, J.A.S.B. Vol. VII-2, 1838.

⁴ I.P.C., 1842: March 14, No. 98.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ B.P.C., 1832; July 2, Nos. 102-3.

⁷ I.P.C., 1842; March 14, No. 98. see letters from Mr. Mangles, the Secretary to the Government of India, Nos. 152 and 202.

⁸ *Ibid.*

torily,¹ no action seems to have been taken for its implementation nor any attempt made to encourage speculators who were shy to invest funds in an undertaking, the profitability of which was then remote on account of inadequate local demand and of the high cost of transport to the Presidency. No wonder, therefore, Mr. Mills found in 1853, only one speculator working at the coal-field of Jaypur and he, also, raised limited quantities as demanded by the few Government Steamers then plying along the Brahmaputra.²

Lime-stone quarries of 'great value' were found in the vicinity of the coal-beds at the Karaibari estate, Koriapara duar and in the valley of the river Dhansiri,³ but no one ever thought of their proper utilisation. The iron-mine along the river Dayang, Hamilton reports,⁴ provided the Ahom Government with most of their requirement. With the importation of iron-wares in superior and cheaper varieties, the melting of irons was gradually abandoned and confined to the hills tribes, particularly the Nagas who, of course, continued to manufacture their weapons and house-hold implements.

Hitherto, every family provided for itself by agriculture almost all the requirements of daily life : 'cultivated rice, pulses, fruits and vegetables to supply their table ; mustard to light their houses, silk and cotton to provide their garments'.⁵ Consequently, the trade of the province was confined to the barter of their agricultural and animal produce in exchange of, mostly, Bengal or foreign salt. In 1808-9, of the total import of Rs. 228, 300/-, Hamilton mentions⁶, an amount of Rs. 192, 500/- was expended on account of salt alone, the balance on items of luxuries of the higher classes and the few foreigners resident in the country. The repeated insurrection of the

¹ I.P.C., 1842 ; March 14, No. 100.

Freight of carrying coal from Jamalpur to Gauhati was annas four per maund, to Gowalpara annas six, to Sirajgunj annas seven ; by upstream to Dibrugarh the rate was same as to Sirajgunj.

² Mills : *Report on Assam*, vide paras 103-4.

³ Robinson : *A Descriptive Account of Assam*, p. 226 ; Pemberton *Eastern Frontier of British India*, pp. 82-83.

⁴ Hamilton, F. ; *An account of Assam*, p. 47.

⁵ Mills : *Report on Assam*, Appendix J ; see Dhekial Phukan ; *Observations on the Administration of the Province of Assam*.

⁶ Hamilton, F. ; *An account of Assam*, pp. 45-46.

Moamarias and the Burmese invasions brought down the foreign trade to its lowest ebb.* Despite his best endeavours, Scott failed to attract into Assam genuine investors and traders except a gang of money-lenders, to whom the acute scarcity of the circulating medium afforded opportunities to fish in the troubled waters. At their hands, the *Choudhuris* and *Patgirls*, many of them, were utterly ruined, while the ryots were reduced to bondsmen and the bondsmen to the position of slaves.¹

To protect the ryots from the grip of the unscrupulous usurers the district officials, who had collected articles of local produce in lieu of cash, had to undertake the trouble of disposing of them to foreign customers.² Attempts were also made to encourage local trade and, gradually, in or around the Sadar stations *hats* and markets were springing up which were resorted to by the neighbouring villagers. One would find, therein, barter of Assamese-cloth, cotton and *muga* thread, coarse rice, pulse, sweet potato, tumeric, ginger, chilli, mustard-oil, tobacco and opium.³ There arrived, before long, *Beparees* (traders) from Calcutta and Dacca with loads of foreign textiles, food-stuff and luxuries. Through hawkers, they collected articles of local produce in exchange of salt, opium, broad-cloth and iron-wares. Woollen goods, sugar, cocoanut oil,

* During 1804-14, the import of salt dwindled from 100,000 maunds to 35,000 maunds, which may be ascribed to the decrease in the number of consumers, and mainly to the repeated and oppressive demands made at the customs *chokis* within and outside the province.

¹ B.P.C., 1830; May 7, No. 51; Scott to the Secretary, Government of Bengal; April 17; B.P.C.; 1833, June 6, No. 106, Rutherford to Jenkins, March 28.

² Thus, in 1833, Mr. Robertson, the Agent to the Governor General, sent for circulation the following notification through the *Calcutta Gazette* :

'Whereas much of the revenue of the province.....may probably during the ensuing year be paid in kind, persons willing to establish *godowns* and *Gomastas* at such places as shall be indicated by the officer in-charge of that division may be supplied with the following articles at the rates specified underneath, on their paying into that officer or any other public treasury the amount B.P.C., 1833; May 30, No. 82.

³ B.P.C., 1831, April 15, No. 94.

fine rice soon made their way into these markets. In 1839, at the five Sadar stations, there were not more than twenty *Marwari* shops; in 1853, Mr. Mills found eighty four besides sixty two maintained by other traders.¹

The trade with Bengal was subjected to the customs duties which were levied at Kandahar, commonly known as *Hadira chokey*,² opposite to Gowlpara, on the Brahmaputra (26 10'N 90° 40'E). The *chokey* was entrusted by the former Government to an official, the Duaria Barua who had to pay, according to Hamilton, an annual rent of Rs. 45,000. The duties were reported to have been 10% *ad valorem*, but fluctuating from time to time. There was no law to prevent the merchants, protected as they were by a *rowana* (permit), from proceeding far into the province: yet, 'the trouble and expense on the way, the difficulties in procuring ready payment, and the delays and the vexations at the gateway itself, induced them to transact the whole traffic with the Baruas' who, thus, enjoyed an exclusive privilege to trade with Bengal. 'The high rate of duties demanded by the Duaria Baruas, the non-fulfilment of their contract, or their refusal to carry on trade with particular individuals led to constant frictions with the Bengal merchants'.³

After British occupation, the *chokey* was held by a merchant from Bengal who received a commission of 10% on the collections according to a scheduled tariff besides permission to raise contributions of rice and money to maintain the searchers, the *Majhees* and the *Choukidars*.⁴ Later, it was farmed out to an Assamese who was authorized, like his predecessor, to collect the requirements of his establishment. Mr. Robertson brought the *chokey* under direct control of the Government in 1833, when to the great relief of the merchants perquisites of all kinds were abolished. In spite of this, the duties levied at Kandahar were comparatively high. On all exports and imports

¹ Mills: *Report on Assam*, see the report on the district of Sibsagar, para 5.

² This was also known as the Kandar, Kaugar or Assam *chokey*.

³ For further information see Hamilton, F: *An Account of Assam*, pp. 42-45; Bhuyan, S. K.: *Anglo-Assamese Relations* pp. 50-52, 339-42.

⁴ B.R.C., 1835; March 7, No. 89; Bogle to Robertson.

the duty was, ordinarily 10% *ad valorem* ; but on certain commodities rates were such as to discourage even the most enterprising merchant to have commercial transaction with Assam.¹ On the import of a boat-load of salt (about 99 maunds), the duty was annas eight per boat, but on the export of every maund of lac or *munjit** the duty payable was annas eight, on pepper rupee one, on elephant-teeth rupees ten and on wax rupees five. No consideration whatever was shown to the price or quality of the article bought for foreign markets. Elephant-teeth of inferior quality valued @ Rs. 30/- per maund was taxed at the same rate as the excellent variety valued @ Rs. 120/- per maund.² The detention for search, the forfeitures, the penalties besides unauthorized exactions, common to the customs *chokis* elsewhere, was not an exception at Kandahar. What was worse, the *rowanas* granted at this gateway could not protect merchants from further levies up or down the river Brahmaputra. Inland transit duties were levied at about a dozen places beyond Kandahar ; also at the Garo *hats*, the Naga *khats* and the hill *ghats* of Cachar.³

Mr. Scott, the Agent to the Governor-General, clearly perceived, as early as 1826, that the existence of Kandahar with its attendant evils was a standing menace to commercial traffic with Assam. He strongly urged the Government of Bengal, in a letter on February 28, 1827, to abolish the tariff-walls of the North-East Frontier, altogether ; and when the representations, which he repeated in the following years, failed to rouse the authorities in Calcutta, the Agent allowed, at his own risk, in 1829, free-of-duties movement of indigenous commodities like grain, oil-seeds, cotton (?), muga silk, both raw and manufactured⁴. Mr. Robertson, subsequently, reversed the policy of Scott ; he sought to maintain the *chokey* at Kandahar from a 'political point of view' ; although, he strongly advocated that the *rowanas* granted by its collector should cover goods from

¹ B.R.C., 1835 ; March 7, No. 91 ; For details, see Barpujari, H.K. : *Tariff-walls in the North-East Frontier, Journal of Indian History*, Vol. XXXVII, Part I, pp. 75-80.

* A kind-of dye ; it is the roots and steams of *Rubea Munjisia*.

² *Ibid.*

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ B.R.C., 1835 ; March 7, No. 81.

further duties within and outside the province. Major Jenkins, who endorsed the views of his predecessor, desired that Kandahar be allowed the same privileges as the customs houses of Bengal, and suggested that the tariff duties of the Regulation XV of 1825 be adopted as the scale on which collections were to be made, lest the merchants should be subjected to illegal exactions.¹

The divergent views held by the local authorities and the half-hearted action of the Government of Bengal left the merchants in the hands of the customs officials. The delays, repeated exactions and occasional oppressions in all stages of the journey of the goods from producer to the consumer, doubtless, discouraged merchants, impeded trade and did incalculable harm to the industrial and agricultural activities in Assam. This state of affairs never failed to draw the attention of an economic reformer like Lord William Bentinck. In a minute recorded on August 6, 1833, the Governor-General fully analysed² the anomalous position in which the trade of Assam was placed in consequence of the fact that the Bengal *rawanas* had no currency in Assam, for which the imports from Bengal were separately taxed at Kandahar after Bengal transit duties were paid, while exports from Assam were subjected to duties not only at that *chokey* but also at other customs houses of the Presidency. In spite of his sympathetic consideration, the Governor-General hesitated to arrive at an immediate decision on the subject, since the problem of inland transit duties, as a whole, was then under the consideration of the Supreme Government.³ In early 1835, on the receipt of a further report from the Commissioner of Assam, however, the subject was mooted again. An examination of the customs returns, since 1824-25, made it evident to the Governor-General in Council, that the total receipt from Kandahar rarely exceeded Rs. 21,000 a year; the loss of this amount, in the event of the abolition of the

¹ B.R.C., 1835; March 7, No. 81; Robertson to the Secretary to Government of Bengal, June 7, 1833; also Jenkins to the Secretary, Government of Bengal August 15, 1834.

² B.R.C., 1835; March 7, No. 81: Minute of Lord William Bentinck, August 6, 1833.

³ B.R.C., 1835, March 7, No. 81. see extract from the Political Department.

chokey, compared with the great advantages which the province of Assam could be expected to derive from a free intercourse with Bengal appeared to them to be a matter of small account. Moreover, the detention for examination, the forfeitures, penalties and other annoyances attending the enforcement of these customs *chokis* were evils which His Lordship desired to do away with. In consideration of these facts, pending introduction of a better system of inland transit duties, the Governor-General in Council resolved in March, 1835, to abolish Kandahar and all other *chokis* in the neighbourhood of Goalpara, and to leave the trade to and from Bengal perfectly free.¹

The abolition of the customs *chokis* and the growing security of life and property steadily increased the volume and variety of trade with Bengal. A comparative study of the returns in *Appendix F* will show that lac continued to be, till the close of our period, the most important article of export. The export of oil-seeds also increased enormously; in 1852, from Gowalpara alone, as estimated by the Marwari merchants, 400,000 maunds were exported. In 1809, the export of cotton from Kandahar amounted to 7,000 maunds; in 1839, the total quantities sold by the Garos was 50,000 maunds and the Nagas bartered at Kacharihat about half of that quantity.² The increasing import of foreign textiles and the consequent decline of the cotton industry in Bengal, undoubtedly, affected the cotton growers in Assam, which is apparent in the fall of the cotton trade towards the close of our period. On the other hand, there was a steady increase in the export of silk, both raw and manufactured. Jute, tea, *teel*, pulses, wax, rhinoceros-horns found eager customers at the Presidency; but the export of *munjit*, pepper, iron-wares, bell-metal vessels, and particularly slaves, gradually, declined or stopped, altogether. Of the imports, apart from salt, foreign cloth, varieties of food-stuff and commodities used by men of average means were on the increase (*See Appendix F*).

A correct estimate of the external trade, however, cannot be made because few returns are available since the abolition of the *chokey* at Kandahar, the sole outlet of the province, and,

¹ *Ibid.*

² Robinson : *A Descriptive Account of Assam*, p. 239.

mainly because, the greater part of the traffic was carried on by barter. Captain Bogles' figures,¹ that in 1833, the entire trade with Bengal amounted to about Rs. 300,000 is merely guesswork. In 1853, the trade of Gowalpara alone, as estimated by Mills from the statistics furnished by the local merchants, was approximately Rs. 22 lakhs.² The increased traffic in goods and competition amongst the traders, gradually, lowered the prices of imports and enhanced the prices of those commodities that were in greater demand. The price of salt,* for instance, dropped down nearly to half; whereas, of Assam-Silk, in spite of its extensive cultivation, shot up several times. The competition became so keen that traders paid for it in advance not to get it at a lower rate but merely to insure their getting it.³ The facilities for communication and the distance from the Presidency, however, determined the extent of trade and the prices of commodities. Gauhati, which was easily accessible to the merchant boats from Calcutta or Dacca, handled a greater volume of trade than Sibsagar, in spite of latter's being in the vicinity of the growing tea-industry. Mustard seed could be procured by traders in the district of Lakhimpur at less than a rupee a maund, but they had to pay double at Gowalpara. It will be seen from the export and import returns appended to Mills's report on Assam (See *Appendix F*) that the balance of trade was not unfavourable in some districts. But these returns being far from exhaustive,† it will be difficult to presume

¹ B.R.C., 1836, March 1, No. 40, *vide* Bogles' report on Kamrup.

² Mills : *Report on Assam*; *vide* report on the district of Gowalpara paras 10-11.

* In 1833, the price of salt was on average rupees ten per maund; in 1853, it varied according to distance from Calcutta, as follows; per maund in Gowalpara at Rs. 3-14, Gauhati, at Rs. 4-0, Tezpur at Rs. 4-8. Sibsagar and Dibrugarh at Rs. 5/-. Mills : *Report on Assam* para, 100.

³ Robinson : *A Descriptive Account of Assam*, p. 241.

† Thus in the districts of Lakhimpur and Gowalpara, although the returns exhibit importation of foreign garments to the extent of Rs. 24,441 and Rs. 200,000 respectively, there is no entry of this item in the district of Sibsagar, which is quite improbable. In 1851-52, *Akhari* opium to the amount of Rs. 15,420 was imported into the district of Lakhimpur (See *Footnote ante*, p. 207) but this important commodity was entirely left out in the statistics referred to above.

that the balance of trade was on the whole favourable to the province. In any case, the traffic was carried on by outsiders, particularly by the *Keyas*, the merchants of Marwar. 'These enterprising men are stationed in all principal parts of Assam, and their petty agents stroll about the frontiers, wherever, there is a chance for making a rupee'¹ With the exception of the *Mudais* (traders) of Barpeta, the indigenous people, unless otherwise forced, scarcely resorted to the markets for the disposal of their surplus produce, which were usually bartered from house to house. 'The Assamese' in the words of a contemporary, 'see a set of strangers in the land getting rich before their own eyes, none ever follow their example and they appear to have no inclination to enter into competition with these foreigners.' No wonder, therefore, they had to pay the maximum of prices and received in return the barest of the minimum. Salt was imported at Rs. 3-12 a maund; the hawkers had to purchase it at Rs. 6, and they retailed the same to the consumers from rupees ten to twelve. Likewise, a seer of salt could be bartered by the ryots for three seers of wax or fifteen seers of mustard. As to the sale of their produce, Mr. Hugon, T. Officer in-charge of Darrang, reported, in 1833,² as follows :

		Price received by ryots	Price received by hawkers	Export value.
Lac	Maximum	Rs. 5-8	Rs. 7	Rs. 10
	Minimum	Rs. 3	Rs. 4-6	Rs. 8
Mustard seed	Maximum	Rs. 1	x	Rs. 1-14
	Minimum	Rs. 0-8	x	Rs. 1-6
Muga Silk	Maximum	Rs. 3-8	Rs. 4-9	Rs. 6-8
	Minimum	Rs. 2-12	Rs. 3-10	Rs. 5

Since most of the ryots were of indigent circumstances and lived from hand to mouth, they were invariably at the mercy of speculators who advanced money against crops and derived after each harvest huge profits. No crop was more profitable in such transactions than opium or *kane*. Advances as low at Rs. 2 a seer were made in October or November when the seed was sown so as to enable the ryots to pay off their first

¹ M^r Cosh : Topography of Assam, p. 63.

² B.P.C., 1833; May 30, No. 82. Muga silk in seers, others in maunds.

instalment of revenue. At the cropping season, the rate might reach rupees five ; but the price of the drug, though fluctuating, was seldom below rupees ten and in times of scarcity it went up to the extent of rupees eighty a seer.¹

There had been regular traffic between the people of the plains and those of the hills, since the hillmen had to depend always on their neighbours below for necessities of their daily life. Every winter, through the *duars*, the Bhutias descended with mule-loads of rock-salt, gold-dust, musk, woollens, yak-tails, chinese silk etc. and carried up different kinds of cloth, cotton-*muga* and *erendi*, raw silk, dried-fish and the like. The Miris and the Abors brought down wax, ginger, pepper and *munjit* in huge quantities. The Nagas in the south frequented the numerous *hats* on the borders where they bartered cotton, salt, ginger and chillies. The Mishimis, who served as the middlemen with the Kachins on the one hand and the Chinese on the other, bartered salt, woollens, ivory, copper, gold, amber, honey and *mishmi-teeta* (*Copus teeta*).²

The confusions after the Burmese invasions followed by a period of unfriendly relations between the British and the Government of Bhutan brought to a standstill the frontier trade in the north. The *duars* ceased to be the highway of commerce ; Seelpota (?) and Dumra (Daimara), hitherto, the centres of brisk trade, were now deserted.³ To revive this border trade, in 1833, Mr. Rutherford, the Principal Assistant, Central Assam, set up some fairs and built an exhibition hall where he kept attractive marchandize ; to his disappointment, the Bhutias never resorted to it ; the few that came down preferred hawking from village to village.⁴ 'To settle up the differences' with the Bhutias and 'to explore the possibilities of trafic with China', the Government of India deputed a mission in 1837 under Captain Pemberton ; but it could not achieve the object in

¹ I.F.C., 1844 ; May 4, No. 129 ; Gordon to Jenkins, October 25, 1843.

² Robinson ; *A Descriptive Account of Assam* pp. 242-44 ; Pemberton : *Eastern Frontier of British India*, pp. 78-83 ; M'Cosh *Topography of Assam*, pp. 10-12, 60.

³ B.R.C., 1836 ; March 19, No. 40 ; vide Matthie's report on central Assam, para 33.

⁴ *Ibid.*

view.¹ In the north-east, Captains Jenkins and Pemberton found² during their survey in 1831, the establishments of Marwari merchants at Sadiya and Bisa, wherein they had bartered with the neighbouring frontier tribes broad-cloth, *muslin*, coloured-handkerchief, salt, opium, glass, tobacco for gold ivory, silver, amber, Burmese-cloth and Chinesc-wares. Already in 1826, Mr. Scott had made an attempt to revive the frontier trade with the Kachins and the Chins with a view to diverting the Singphos from their predatory habits to peaceful pursuits. In that year, merchandize worth Rs. 900 was despatched; but the consignment never reached the destination, it was plundered on the way and the *Sepahi*, on guard, was killed.³ The investments which were made in the subsequent years were not so disappointing; for towards the close of 1827, some representatives of Koon Kien, a Chinese chief of Shawmo, waited upon the Agent expressing a desire to extend commercial traffic between the British province and those south of the Patkais. When a similar mission reached Captain Neufville in early 1830, the latter impressed⁴ upon the Agent the desirability of encouraging the rising spirit of commercial enterprise amongst the border chiefs; he proposed to set up a mart at Sadiya which was to be supplied with articles of Indian and foreign produce. The tribul leaders might be allowed to take the goods for the first year upon credit under engagement of repayment at the next. On the recommendation of Mr. Scott the Government of Bengal readily accorded their approval to the measure and Mr. Charles Bruce,⁵ who was then holding a temporary charge of the gun-boats at Sadiya, was made the Commercial Agent of the Government. It was greatly hoped that the experiment might 'eventually, be extended with stock and market to the Hukwang. Within a few months, unfortunately, both Scott and Neufville, the sponsors of the project, died and neither Cracroft nor Robertson had interest or much time to look after the frontier trade. Somehow, Bruce carried on the transactions; but invest-

¹ I.P.C., 1837; June 12, No. 58.

² Pemberton: *Eastern Frontier of British India*, p. 72.

³ B.S.P.C., 1827: September 7, Nos. 17-19.

⁴ B.P.C., 1830: May 14, Nos. 29-30, Neufville to Scott, January

⁵ *Ibid.*

ments were too small to make them profitable. Few speculators ventured to take risks in a region of lawlessness nor were they much encouraged lest their profiteering instinct should involve the Government in political complications. In June 1834, when Captain White, the Political Agent, Upper Assam, reported to the Commissioner that Bruce had incurred only losses year after year, and that a considerable quantity of goods remained undisposed of, Major Jenkins directed him to auction off the goods and to wind up the establishment.¹

Towards the close of 1848, when the Government of India decided to terminate the experimental tea-cultivation in Upper Assam, Lum Ping Young, the Superintendent of the Chabua establishment, with a view to obtaining a new assignment laid before the Government of Bengal, a scheme of commercial traffic with China, through Moong Kong, in Upper Burma, the markets of which the Chinese visited, annually, in large numbers. Since the English merchants then faced humiliating restrictions at the Chinese ports, the Government of India readily welcomed a proposal which opened up before them the prospects of an alternative trade route to China. Accordingly, in May 1849, the Commissioner was directed to depute Lum Ping Young, since relieved of his duties, to Moong Kong wherein he would endeavour to induce the Chinese merchants to cross over to Assam with their merchandize. Hardly had the preparations been completed, when disturbance broke out in the intervening territory of the Singphos; it held back Young from proceeding into the Hukwang valley, and, consequently, his mission, too, ended in failure.²

In the south, at the various *hats*, the imposition of oppressive duties and vexatious exactions effectively hindered the traffic with the highlanders. Under Raja Purandar, at Borhat 'of the articles brought to barter for salt, the Raja takes here one seventh or one fifth of that himself and another one fifth again is taken at the wells. Of the salt purchased, out of four lumps, he has to give the Raja one piece, and a half to the Manager (*Hatkhowa*). Articles that cannot be divided are valued.....about 50% is taken on the trade upwards' and

¹ I.P.C., 1837, June 19, No. 62.

² I.R.C., 1849; May 19, Nos. 15-17; August 24, Nos. 41-42.

nearly 40% on the trade downwards.....¹ What was unfortunate that these duties, as stated already, continued to exist even after the resumption of Upper Assam. In the west the Garos, who were invariably subjected to illegal exactions, were also forced to bring their heavy but less costly loads of cotton down to the *hats*, where to avoid harassments at the hands of customs officials, they had to undersell their commodities, though the mountaineers could dispose of their goods even at spots always accessible to customers from Bengal.²

The retention of these *hats* with their attendant evils—exactions, vexations and delays—apart from restricting mutual intercourse between the dwellers of the hills and plains always served as the perennial source of friction with the British authorities; and as such, the very object for which these check-posts were maintained was defeated. To this state of affairs, the Commissioner of Assam³ never failed to draw the attention of the authorities in Calcutta. In spite of repeated reminders and the nice sentiments, occasionally, expressed by the Supreme Government, the odious *hats* continued to exist even after the abolition of the customs *chokis* in the North-East Frontier.⁴ When the Board of Revenue, in June, 1839, took a serious view of the oppressive character of the Garo *hats* and held that the retention of these customs gates militated against the spirit of the Act XIV of 1836, the Government of Bengal, ultimately, decided to abolish the *hats*. The Commissioner of Assam was, accordingly, authorized to allow the Garos and other hill-tribes to dispose of their articles free of duties at places most convenient to them on condition that 'if disturbances should occur in consequence of the withdrawal of these restrictions, the propriety of reimposing these and other restriction will become a matter for consideration'⁵. Consequences of the removal of

¹ I.P.C., 1838; March 28, No. 46.

² R.L.B., 1839, December 4, No. 15.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ B.R.C., 1835: March 7, No. No. 91, see the Minute of Lord William Bentinck. The Governor-General expressed: 'Our object is to cultivate friendly intercourse with the Garrows, the Nagas and other hill-tribes', and, therefore, 'every facility should be offered (for the commercial traffic) amongst to the high-landers and the lowlanders'.

⁵ R.L.B., 1839: December 4, No. 15.

these restrictions soon began to be felt in the increased production and export of cotton from the Garo and Naga hills; Brodie reported in 1842: 'our intercourse with the Nagas is daily increasing and is carried on in a most satisfactory and peaceful manner. The hillmen are coming down in great numbers to Jaypur, and Assamese traders in salt are having a perfectly unrestricted access to the hills'.¹

Through the *duars*, or the numerous passes across the mountains traffic was carried on into the heart of the territory of Bhutan and thence to Tibet. The *Mombas* and the *Kampa* Bhutias, it appears, were the middlemen in the Assam Tibet trade. M'cosh, in his *Topography of Assam*, traces the existence of a route from Sadiya to Tibet across the Himalayas and parallel to the Brahmaputra.² In all probability, formerly, there had been cultural and commercial contacts between China and the valley of the Brahmaputra and that traffic was carried on through the numerous routes across the off-shoots of the eastern Himalayas.³ Of the several routes to the Kingdom of Ava, the most commonly used, known as the Patkai route, starts from Jaypur; after passing through the territory of the Singphos and the Patkai tribes, it debouches into the valley of the Hukwang and reaches Moon Koong on the bank of the river Irrawadi wherefrom travellers to Ava went down-stream and those to China proceeded upstream for about 200 miles to the frontier of China. Through this route the Mishmis carried on their barter trade with the Kachins and the Chinese, and through this route, again, the Burmese, repeatedly invaded Assam and dragged away thousands of ill-fated men and women as slaves to Ava and even to China. So vital was this route to the Burmese, whether for controlling the border tribes or for embarking on a policy of expansion to the north, that the king of Ava had to take special care for its maintenance.⁴

¹ B.R.C., 1842; July 19, No. 26; December 17, Nos. 43-47.

² M'cosh: *Topography*, pp. 10-11; for other routes to China and Tibet see Begchi, P.: *India and China* P. 18 ff.

³ Chatterjee, Dr. S. K.: *The place of Assam in the History and Civilization of India*, pp. 16, 22-24.

⁴ Peal: *Note on the Old Burma Route over Patkai*, J.A.S.B. Vol. XXXXVII, Part II pp. 69-82; Jenkins, H.L.; *Note on the Burmese Route from Assam to the Hokoong Valley*; *Proceedings, Asiatic*

M'cosh mentions three overland routes connecting Assam with Bengal; 'The first by Murshidabad, Maldah, Dinajpur, Rangpur, Bugwah and Goalpara. This is the line of the Calcutta dawk, but it is almost impassable during the rains. The second road is via Dacca, Dumary, Pacualoe, Jumalpoore, Singymary and Goalpara,—also impassable in the rains. The third passes by Sylhet, Chirra, Mophlung, Nungklow, Ranneygodown..... and Gauhati, but from its crossing over the Kassya hills, it is impracticable to any land carriage and beast of burden nor is a journey performed, at any season, without much difficulty'¹. Therefore, the traffic with Bengal was mainly water-borne. The river Brahmaputra, the main artery of commerce, was navigable from Bugwah, a few miles off from Rangpur, to Dibrugarh for about 450 miles. A voyage downstream from Goalpara to Calcutta, ordinarily, took a month and upstream about a week more. During the rains, the extreme velocity of the currents and the accumulation of the trunks of trees and boulders on the banks, occasionally, rendered navigation by ordinary boats extremely hazardous. During the dry season, the river afforded a safe passage even to country boats; but the channels near the shores are, blocked up by sand banks in such a manner that the course becomes circuitous and the voyage extremely tedious. In a voyage along the Brahmaputra Mr. Wilcox narrates² :

'Immediately below Gohati, hills confine the Brahmaputra to a breadth of one thousand two hundred yards there in the rainy season boats are necessitated to be moored till a westerly breeze springs up of force sufficient to carry them through the narrow strait; but there is often great difficulty even when the river flows in an open bed. When coming down the river, in the latter end of 1825, I saw a fleet of commissariat boats (at the time very much required with their supplies for the army) which had been twenty five days between Goalpara and Nughurpara hills, a distance of thirty miles, and there was no remarkable wind to impede their progress'.

In the face of these difficulties, the growing demand in trade and industry of the freight and passenger services made the

Society of Bengal, 1869, pp. 67-74; Pemberton : *Eastern Frontier of British India*, p. 54 ff.

¹ M'cosh : *Topography*, pp. 8-9.

² Wilcox : *Memoir of a survey of Assam* etc. (1825-28), *Asiatic Research*, Vol. XVII, 1832, p. 464, see footnote.

introduction of steamer communication with Assam urgently necessary. For the transport of their stores and labourers, under advice from the Board of Directors in London the Assam Tea-Company procured, in 1841, a steam-boat—the *Assam*—for navigation on the Brahmaputra. On the first of March, 1842, the vessel set out on her maiden voyage to Gauhati and reached there safely on the 30th; but on the return journey trouble began in her steering. With great difficulty, the boat was taken back to Calcutta. She was found defective and unsuitable for service in the Brahmaputra, and as such disposed of later at a considerable loss.¹ A proposal for the introduction of Government steamer communication with Assam was made by Mr. Scott, as early as 1831; and as experimental measure it received the concurrence of the Supreme Government²; but the project remained shelved at the Marine department, Government of Bengal, until 1847, when for the first time a steam-boat made its appearance at Gauhati. It was indeed a happy augury to the business interests in Assam; for facilities of a speedier and safer communication were in sight. Soon, their hopes ended in disappointment, because the services that were introduced were not dependable. The vessels were small, illequipped and utterly deficient in power to ply against the currents of the Brahmaputra. They could scarcely be utilised for conveying cargoes other than Government stores, since freight space was extremely limited.³ In a petition to the Governor-General, on February 1, 1854, fifty merchants of Dacca complained⁴ that they could not utilize the Government steamer on account of its uncertainty as to departures and arrivals, and whether it could take freight though it had been engaged beforehand for want of godowns or sheds in which goods might be stored to await the arrival of steamers, and no less owing to the unaccommodating spirit of the officers in-charge of the vessels which occasioned even Europeans to have little to do with them. After the disposal of their own boat, the Assam Company succeeded, after much

¹ Antrobus, H.A.; *A History of the Assam Company*, p. 360ff.

² B.S.P.C., 1831, March 18. Nos. 36-37.

³ A.S., File No. 236 of 1851: Jenkins to Rogers, May 10, 1851. *also.*

⁴ B.M.P., 1854; March 10, No. 36; see petition of J. Stephen and others to the Governor of Bengal, February 1.

negotiation, in procuring a few trips to convey their labourers from Calcutta, but since the terminus of the steamers was then located at Gauhati, the transport of labour partly by steamer and partly by country-boat proved neither economic nor practical. To remove these difficulties, in a memorial to Lord Dalhousie on June 6, 1853, the Directors urged that the existing service be extended to Dibrugarh, that the steamer plying be accompanied by cargo flats for conveyance of goods and passengers and for freight downwards, and that monthly communication be maintained with Gauhati and to Dibrugarh, at intervals not exceeding two months.¹

Already, in a letter on May 10, 1851, the Commissioner of Assam drew the attention of Mr. T. Rogers, the Superintendent, Marine Department, Government of Bengal, to the anomalies mentioned above;² and in the same letter he emphasised the necessity of extending the communication to Upper Assam, assuring him that the steamer would get a fair freight up and downwards. As to fuelling, he added, there would be no difficulty in establishing depots of coal and, occasionally, the steamer might be employed in absence of freight in carrying the coals to depots below. In spite of these guarantees, Rogers entertained great doubts whether there would be sufficient upward freight so as to make the extended communication economic; but on the advice of the Government of Bengal, next year, he had to authorize the Commissioner to despatch a steamer up from Gauhati whenever he might think proper either in the interest of Government or of the public³. Accordingly, during 1853-54, the *Thames* made a few trips to Dibrugarh; but the Commissioner found it impracticable to continue the service on account of irregular arrival of boats from Calcutta. He, therefore, suggested to the Government of Bengal to fix up the periods when steamer should proceed to Dibrugarh, alternately, or in every third trip, which should be duly notified.⁴ 'Nearly

¹ Mills : *Report on Assam, Appendix E. Memorial of the Directors of the Company to Lord Dalhousie*, June 6, 1853.

² A.S., File No. 236 of 1851, Jenkins to Rogers May 18; B.M.P., 1854; March 16, No. 38 March 7, No. 37.

³ B.M.P., 1854; June 8, No. 12.

⁴ B.M.P., 1854; July 6, No. 22. Jenkins to the Secretary, Government of Bengal, June, 12.

all the valuable trade of the province', the Commissioner pointed out, 'available for steamers is now produced in the districts above Kamrup.....there is such a deficiency of native boats in upper part of the river, that it is most difficult and expensive to bring it down here for shipment.' About this time, Mr. Mills in his report on Assam also laid great stress, on administrative reasons, on the introduction of regular steamer communication with Assam. He wrote¹ : 'at present time taken by a pinnace to go to Dibrugarh is in cold weather a month and rains much longer. If steamers plied regularly on the river, the Commissioner and Deputy Commissioner's visitations would be more frequent and more effective, while the establishment of office-boats kept up for their use might also be saved to Government.'

The recommendations of Mills together with repeated representations made by the industrial and mercantile communities dealing with Assam never failed to impress the Governor of Bengal the urgency of extending the regular communication as far as Dibrugarh. The Marine Department was, therefore, asked to re-examine the subject and to report on the probable expense and outturn of the project.²

Accordingly, after an analysis of the 65 trips that had been made since the introduction of steamer communication with Assam, in 1847, the Marine authorities discovered that the receipt always exceeded the expenses, and the average earnings per trip showed over rupees five thousand. In his reply to the Secretary, Government of Bengal, on October 17, 1854, Rogers pointed out that the traffic on Brahmaputra would be attended with no loss, probably with a small gain.³ But he was afraid that on account of the paucity in the number of boats, not more than three pairs could be transferred to the Assam line without putting the Government to great inconvenience and risk regarding the conveyance of military stores along the Ganges. Therefore, the diversion could be made for a short period only, from March to September, during which troops were seldom carried

¹ Mills : *Report on Assam*, paras 81-82.

² B.M.P., 1854; July 6, Nos. 19-20.

³ A.S., extract from File No. 279/606, 1854-56; Rogers to the Secretary, Government of Bengal, October 17, 1854.

to the N. W. Provinces. When the interest of the Government of India was, thus, involved, the Lieutenant Governor of Bengal,¹ though agreeable to the measure, could not accord his approval without a reference to the Supreme Government. In recommending the measure he wrote that the traffic on the Brahmaputra, in due course, would be as profitable as that in the other route along Ganges, and that there would be a substantial saving in the transport of troops and military stores into the province. Moreover, he added, 'private enterprise has now to so large an extent occupied the steam-traffic of the Ganges as to make it reasonable for the Government to withdraw from that field in which it successfully acted as pioneer and turn its attention to the establishment of Steam-communication with another part of the Empire'.² The arguments proved to be so forceful and convincing that the Governor-General in Council resolved, in early 1856, to move the authorities in England to increase the number of boats to such an extent as would permit to set apart, permanently, a few pairs for the navigation on the Brahmaputra and, in the meanwhile, the Government of Bengal was directed to withdraw three pairs of boats from the Ganges, during March to September, and to place them on the Brahmaputra, despatching a steamer and flat every twenty days, and during the remainder of the year to despatch the boats whenever they could be spared for the purpose.³ Accordingly, a notification was issued on March, 7, on the timings of the *Meghna*, the *Jumna* and the *Thames* on the Calcutta-Dibrugarh route⁴. In spite of these measures, the limited number of boats prevented the Government of Bengal from maintaining the services with due regularity: in an emergency, these were suspended or withdrawn altogether.⁵ The

¹ A.S., extract from File No. 279/606, 1854-56; Secretary, Government of Bengal to the Secretary, Government of India (Home), September 4, 1855.

² *Ibid.*

³ A.S., extract from File No. 279/606, 1854-56; Secretary, Government of India to the Secretary, Government of Bengal, January 4, 1856.

⁴ A.S., extract from File No. 279/606, 1854-56; Rogers to Halliday, F. J., Lieutenant Governor of Bengal, January 22, 1856.

⁵ A.S. File No. 254/601, 1858, *Suspension of Steamer Communication with Assam.*

problem of transport, therefore, continued to exist until 1861, when the Indian General Steam-Navigation Company introduced their regular services for carriage of both passengers and goods along the Brahmaputra.

The question, naturally, arises—to what extent the changes mentioned in the foregoing pages affected the well-being of the indigenous people? As discussed, already, just after their emancipation the pressure of revenue rendered the position of the *pykes* or ordinary ryots rather worse; for their individual circumstances were not the same; 'some were comparatively well-off, others were steeped in poverty; some enjoyed perfect health, others were bowed down by sickness; some had families and numerous dependents to assist them in their field work, others had none to depend upon; some had the full share of two *puras* of arable land and perhaps more, others did not have even a quarter of it.' To make matters worse, the grain, their sole produce, was not easily marketable. Assessment which were made in disregard of these factors compelled the unfortunate ones either to flee or to place themselves at the tender mercies of the money-lenders.¹ Till very late it was not uncommon to find at the Sadar station, when the revenue became due, indigent ryots placing all they possessed for sale to meet the demands of the Government. Of course, the abolition of slavery by act V of 1843 and the subsequent measures of revenue reform did much to ameliorate their distress. That they had recovered, gradually, is evident from the fact that taxes were later paid with comparative ease and regularity, and the irrecoverable balance in most of the districts was inconsiderable. There had been a growing demand amongst them for luxuries, particularly of foreign salt and imported cloth of English manufacturers. Even at a frontier *hat* one would find merchants selling commodities, the use of which had, hitherto, been confined to the nobility and gentry of the realm.

¹ Lieutenant Rutherford, the P.A. Central Assam, reported in early 1833: 'The system of slavery now existing and which is daily obtaining a greater hold in Assam it is astonishing, the number of people who from the pressure of rent have sold themselves for a trifling sum and become hondsman with their wives and families until the original sum, which they can never have the means of realising, is obtained.....' B.P.C., 1833; June 6; Rutherford to Jenkins, March 28.

That the paying capacity of the ryots also substantially increased is obvious from the fact that there was a corresponding demand for their agricultural produce even of those commodities which were previously not salable. In 1833, paddy could be had more than eight maunds for a rupee; in 1840, the price doubled and shot up to four times towards the close of our period.¹ Mustard, tobacco, sugacane, jute, *teel* etc. were not only widely grown but exported at higher rates to Bengal. Captain Dalton, Principal Assistant, Darrang, reported in 1843, that the majority of the ryots in the district of Darrang and Nowgong were able to pay their revenues in time and without difficulty from the sale of the drug derived from the poppy.² In fact, the cultivation of these crops had become so profitable that in spite of the competitive wage offered by the speculators, the latter could not induce ryots to work in the plantations.³ The goldsmiths, braziers, oilmen, artificers, already hard hit by foreign competition, took to the plough. Even increased demand of fish made the fishing trade very lucrative; the *Nadials*, who had enjoyed a monopoly of this as well as of the trade of boat-ferrying, gradually, abandoned the latter and rendered, thereby, the problem of transport increasingly difficult.⁴

Blessed with an extremely fertile soil with their simple habits, the ryots in Assam had limited wants; they were, generally, satisfied 'with the humblest of food, plainest of clothes, and smallest of habitations.' Ordinarily, their diet consisted of rice seasoned with *khar* (a kind of carbonated potash), pulses, some vegetables, a little oil, turmeric, garlic, besides fish and meat, the expense of which it was estimated at Rs. 2 per individual a year. The clothing of the poor male is stated to be of a yearly value of Rs. 1-12 to Rs. 2 consisting of a *dhuti*

¹ In 1830, paddy was offered at less than two annas a maund; in 1840, Maniram Barua estimated the price at five annas, while in 1859, according to Holroyd, P.A. Sibsagar, the price rose to eight annas. Similarly, mustard seed was available, in 1838, at 12 annas a maund and *muga* silk at Rs. 3 per seer; in 1853, the price of the former shot up to Rs. 2 and of the latter to Rs. 5.

² I.P.C., 1844: May 4, No. 129, Dalton to Jenkins, October 25, 1843.

³ See ante, p. 230.

⁴ A.S., File No. 402 of 1859-64, C.O., Bevar to Jenkins, July 4, 1860; Holroyd to Jenkins, October 19, 1860.

at annas four, a *chaddar* (shawl) annas eight and a wrapper from annas twelve to a rupee¹. Unless driven by circumstances, therefore, they were not prepared to work hard in an enervating climate, at any rate as a day labourer. 'Except the Cacharees', reported Jenkins,² 'very few indeed (of) the Assamese are ever induced to labour for hire; there are not probably five Assamese coolies in Gowahatty amongst many hundreds of daily labourers'. In the new openings as school masters, writers, masons, carpenters, tailors, and tradesmen, too, the number of indigenous people were not many; though, the pay and profit of some had lately drawn the attention of the younger generation. Of these, the enlightened few together with the officers of the middle and upper grades viz *Choudhuris*, *Patgiris*, *Mauzadars*, *Sheristadars*, *Munsifs*, *Sadar-Amins*, had already given birth to a middle class, as the connecting link between the Government and the governed.

Since the avenues of employment were then extremely limited, Major Jenkins fondly hoped³ that the upper classes, who had formerly depended entirely on the Government for their means of livelihood, should form a class of landed-proprietors and take the lead in the agricultural and industrial undertakings that lay open to them; but he was oblivious of the fact that the gentry in Assam had never been landed-proprietors like the zamindars of Bengal. A liberal policy in the grant of waste lands would have, perhaps, encouraged a few to embark on speculative activities; but under earlier rules, even a man of zeal and enterprise like the Dewan Maniram had to fight without success in obtaining a few acres of land at concessional rate. Besides, the loss of *pykes* and their utter destitution made almost all of them unable to cultivate even the ancestral farms, if they possessed any; these were either given up or allowed to be sold for arrears of revenue or of accumulated debt. Even at the hour of worst misfortune, one could not procure a petty amount on loan: 'If he wishes to borrow rupees ten from a *Kyah*, he should have to deposit as security

¹ B.S.P.C., 1831; April 15, No. 94; Assistant Surgeon Leslee, J. to Surgeon Secretary, Military Board, December 8, 1830.

² Jenkins: *Report on the Revenue Administration on Assam* (1849-50) para 55.

³ *Ibid.*

jewels worth rupees twenty and then he is obliged to pay an interest @ Rs. 5 per month ; yet with all these it is difficult to get credit'.¹ Without financial aid, private or public, it was too much to expect of the men of rank to be the captains of industry. They remained, therefore, in their miserable plight, always sullen and despondent.

It will be evident from what has been discussed above that Major Jenkins was the prime mover of all the measures connected with the material progress of this province, and he is rightly acclaimed by the contemporaries as the greatest benefactor of the people of Assam. This farsighted statesman realised that the foundation of British rule must be strengthened by keeping the masses contented. He, therefore, persistently opposed the local authorities in their move to enhance the revenues on lands, as this would fall heavily on them, and encouraged the people by all possible inducements in the production of such commodities, both agricultural and industrial, as would steadily improve their resources. His name will ever be remembered for the stimulus he had given to the tea-industry in Assam, and in ensuring its future in the hands of the private entrepreneurs. He had also demonstrated to the speculative world the vast potentialities of this province in the surveys and operations that had been conducted under his guidance in coal, oil-springs, besides others. The introduction of steamships on the Brahmaputra and the net-work of communications that had been restored or commenced under his direction gave a fillip to industry and trade, and contributed in no small degree to bringing the Assamese nearer to the enlightened ideas of the West. To focus the attention of the outside world on this frontier province, in the midst of his arduous duties, he wrote a series of articles in the *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal* on Assam and her history and antiquities, and inspired William Robinson and several others to devote themselves to similar activities.² Above all, Major Jenkins was the pioneer in the diffusion of western education amongst the Assamese, for whose mental, physical

¹ Mills : *Report on Assam, Appendix K. B.*

² Robinson is said to have written his *Descriptive Account of Assam*, in 1841, at the instance of Major Jenkins to whom out of gratitude the author dedicated the work. For further details, see Bhuyan, S. K. ; *Early British Relations with Assam*, pp. 31-33.

and moral uplift he was always solicitous. To welcome Assamese pupils, a contemporary writes, the Commissioner's gate was always kept open. He mixed freely with them, and, occasionally, took them out in an excursion on his own boat or on an elephant back. On festive occasions, like the Assamese *Bihus* and the *Pujas*, sports were organised for them where the officials, including the Commissioner himself, took part and prizes were awarded to the competitors.¹ This hardheaded frontier official could, therefore, endear himself to the Assamese who held him in the highest admiration and recollect his rule as 'the age of General Jenkins'. Rightly Dr. S. K. Bhuyan remarks :² 'His philanthropy and magnificence combined with his intimate knowledge of the history, habits and feelings of the governed as well as his zealous watchfulness of their interest made him, in the imagination of the people, a worthy successor of the Assamese *Swargodeos* and *Barphukans*.....'

¹ Barua, Gunaviram : Life of Anandaram Dhekial Phukan, pp. 42-43.

² Bhuyan, S. K. : *Early British Relations with Assam*, p. 31.

CHAPTER X

IMPACT OF FOREIGN IDEAS

The economic changes discussed in the previous chapter brought in their train a substantial increase in population which had far reaching consequences in the social and cultural life of the people, and to some extent, in their political outlook. In the absence of any reliable data, it is not possible to give an accurate idea as to the number of inhabitants in Assam on the eve of the Moamaria rebellion¹; the majority of them, doubtless, perished or deserted their hearths and homes during the period of civil war and Burmese invasions; of the survivors, many were taken away as captives by the Singphos who reduced them to slavery or sold them beyond their hills. Captain Neufville, thanks to his exertions, had succeeded in emancipating, as mentioned before, several thousands of Assamese from the clutches of the Singphos.² On the restoration of law and order, after British occupation, most of the refugees had returned to their original abodes, and this was further encouraged by the exemption from payment of revenue for a period of three years from the date of resettlement.³ In spite of such endeavours, the population of the valley of the Brahmaputra at the beginning of our period never reached even a million souls. A contemporary writer, on the authority of an official census, refers, that in 1826, the population of Upper Assam was a little over two lakhs, in Muttok another lakh, while in Lower Assam it was about four lakhs.⁴ On account of the prevail-

¹ In 1769-70, the population was estimated at about two million and a half. Barua, Gunaviram: *Assam Bandhu*, Calcutta, 1885, Vol. I, No. 1, p. 3.

² 'From the first date of our occupying Suddya to this date' (1837) reported Major Jenkins, 'I estimate that upwards of 10,000 slaves have been released from the Singphos and the Khampüs': C.D. 1837; August 9, No. 17, para 17, see marginal notes.

³ Dhekiel Phukan, Haliram: *Assam Buranji*, pp. 74-75.

⁴ *Ibid.*

ing confusion, exactions and oppressions, although, the increase in population during the early years of Company's administration was exceedingly slow yet the estimate made by Pemberton in his *Report on the Eastern Frontier of British India*, that in 1835, the inhabitants of Assam dwindled to less than seven lakhs cannot be accepted as correct;¹ for in 1853, according to the figures supplied by the district officials to Mr. Mills, the population of the province, including the district of Gowalpara, exceeded twelve lakhs.²

The steady increase in population, towards the close of the period under review, was due partly to the natural growth of indigenous people under settled conditions and partly to the influx of outsiders in appreciable numbers, mostly from the neighbouring districts of Bengal. Like the ancient Greeks who called all non-Greeks *Barbarians*, the Assamese had termed all foreigners as *Bangals*, whether Europeans or the inhabitants of Bengal proper. The repeated invasions of the Muslims of Bengal from the thirteenth to the seventeenth century, it has been rightly suggested,³ made the former rulers of Assam suspicious and fearful of foreigners, who were considered 'a source of potential danger' to the state; and, therefore, the entry of foreigners into Assam was strictly regulated. Encouragements were, of course, given to such outsiders to settle in Assam as would contribute to the cultural and material prosperity of the people. Of the latter, the *Keyas* or the merchants of Marwar, had trading establishments at Jogighopa, Goalpara and Gauhati, wherefrom they had been carrying on their business with the *Mudais* (merchants) of Western Assam, and within a few years of British occupation not only did they set up their *golahs* at

¹ Pemberton : *Eastern Frontier of British India*, pp. 66-7.

In their despatch on December 3, 1834, the Court of Directors estimated the population of the province at 830,000. C.D., 1834; December 3, No 4., para 1.

² Mills : *Report on Assam*, see Appendix A.

³ 'The licensed foreigners', writes S. K. Bhuyan, 'after having come to Assam, had to cut off all connections with their mother country, and to become subjects of the Assam Government like the older inhabitants. The Assamese objected to the admission of foreigners who owed allegiance to other rulers and proposed, to reside in Assam as a 'temporary measure'. Bhuyan, S. K.; *Anglo-Assamese Relations*, pp. 56-57.

the headquarters, but extended their activities even beyond the frontier.¹ They had the monopoly of external trade; besides, they served as bankers, speculators, *Mauzadars* and farmers of Government revenue. During his visit to the district of Darrang, in early 1838, Major Jenkins found at Gamiri a *Marwari* merchant not only carrying on his own trade but performing the duties of the Government as a *Mauzadar* and a manager of the *hatts* of Charduar². The very fact, that a handful of foreigners penetrated and carried on their transactions with the villagers of the most interior areas without any let or hindrance, clearly shows that their relation with the latter was quite friendly; although, socially they remained aloof, having very little or no connection with the indigenous people. As a set of practical businessmen, they never failed to take advantage of any circumstances in order to make money, but it must also be remembered that they rescued many from impending ruin by providing funds at a time when money could not be had from any other source. Moreover, they gave an impetus to a few Assamese by opening their eyes to the profit that could be earned through agricultural and industrial activities.

Already, some Sikhs, who had presumably accompanied the Mughal invaders, settled themselves in certain localities of the province. The Burmese or the *Sham* soldiers, who had expressed to Mr. Scott after the treaty of Yandabo their intention of remaining in Assam, were located at Singimari in the district of Gowalpara; subsequently some of them, forming the *Sham Militia*, were employed in guarding the frontier outposts. The imported Chinese artisans and labourers had their settlements in and around their factories in Upper Assam where their descendants are living till our own times. But the early European adventurers, tea-garden and other labourers, the Nepali, the Manipuri and the Hindustanee sepoys continued to constitute a floating population, following their respective customs, usages and traditions.

The new-comers from the neighbouring districts of Bengal were not only the most numerous, but they exerted, ultimately,

¹ Pemberton : *Eastern Frontier of British India*, p. 48, M'Cosh : *Topography*, pp. 63, 66-67.

² I.P.C., 1838; March 28, Nos 44-45, paras 10-12

considerable influence on the social, economic and cultural life of the Assamese. Of these, Muslim settlements may be said to have commenced in western Assam long before the Ahom-Mughal conflict of the sixteenth century, but their infiltration into the upper part of the valley cannot be traced prior to the invasion of Nawab Mirjumla, in 1662.¹ When Major Jenkins enquired the Muslims of Jorhat, in early 1838, how they came to that place, the latter replied that they were the remnants of those who accompanied the fourteen *Omrals* under Nawab Mirjumla. A number of Muslims, there is every reason to believe, continued to hold their hereditary offices in Lower Assam even under the viceroy (*Burphukan*) of Gauhati; but there is little evidence to show that they were given any higher charge at the Ahom royal court. They were employed, of course, in 'deciphering and interpreting of Persian documents, carving inscriptions on copper plates and other metals, minting of coins, embroidery work, painting with fast colours, carpentry, sword and gun making and the manufacture of gun powder.'² Since they formed a very useful community also as tailors, braziers, silk weavers and other artisans they were recognized as citizens, although of a lower status,³ by the Ahom Kings who not only allowed them to follow their own faith, but favoured some of their religious preachers and institutions with rent-free grants (*pirpals*). The number of Muslims augmented after British occupation, when they came not as invaders, but as *Omlahs*, shopkeepers, speculators and skilled labourers; they continued, as before, a distinct minority community and were called* the '*gariahs*' the use of which term was forbidden by Major Jenkins in official papers.⁴ There is hardly any evidence of communal outburst or ill-feeling between the Muslims and the Hindus of Assam, as was the case elsewhere, and their relationship was, on the whole, amicable. This fact, combined with their association and prolonged residence as neighbours reacted to some extent on each other's customs, manners and

¹ I.P.C., 1838; April 4, No. 121, para 138.

² Bhuyan, S. K.; *Tungkhungia Buranji*, see introduction p. xxx.

³ I.P.C., 1838, April 4, No. 121, paras 131 and 138.

⁴ *Ibid.*

* Since they came from Gaur or of the fact that they buried their dead bodies.

institutions. Under the Ahoms, Mughal works of art, their dress, music, food and delicacies found favour amongst the members of the royal family and gentry of the royal court;¹ and the salient features of the revenue and judicial administration of the Mughals continued to survive in Lower Assam even under the British. Islamic liberalism reflected itself in the *Zikir* and *Jari* songs or the so-called *Azan Fakirar Git* which occupy an eminent place in Assamese literature.² The vocabulary of the Assamese language was enriched by Persian and Arabic. Some knowledge of these and also of Urdu was cultivated by some of the enlightened Hindus, as in Bengal, during the period under review. In 1849-50, of the 75 pupils of the Islamic department of the Gauhati school, seven were Hindus.³ On the other hand, Assamese Muslims not only practised some of the local customs and usages, but respected local saints and heroes, believed in local myths and superstition, observed local festivals and some religious ceremonies.⁴ Shihabuddin Talish, who had accompanied Nawab Mirjumla, found already amongst the Assamese Muslims 'nothing of Islam except the name; their hearts are inclined far more towards mixing with the Assamese than towards association with the Muslims'.⁵

Since a considerable part of north-eastern Bengal formed an integral part of the ancient Kingdom of Kamarupa and later Kamata, naturally, there had been frequent contacts amongst the peoples of these regions which is apparent from their linguistic and cultural affinities.⁶ The cultural impact of Bengal

¹ Bhuyan, S. K.: *Annals of the Delhi Badshahat*, see introduction, pp. 1-27; Barua B. K.; *Asamiya Bhasa aru Sanskriti*, pp. 153-64.

² Malik, S. A.; *Asamiya Zikir Aru Jari*, pp. 38-55.

³ Barua, Gunaviram: *Life of Ananandaram Dhekial Phukan*, pp. 93-94; R.P.I.B., 1849-50, p. 244-45.

⁴ *Pujas* like *Bishahari*, *Barmani*, *Subhachandi* were said to have been performed by the Assamese Muslims. Dhekial Phukan, Haliram; *Assam Buranjil*, p. 90; Barua, Gunaviram: *Assam Buranjil*, p. 260; Malik, S. A.; *Asamiya Zikir Aru Jari*, pp. 9-19.

⁵ Sarkar, J. N.; *Translation of Fathiya-i-Ibriya*, J.B.O.R.S. (1915) p. 193.

⁶ Early literary works in Bengali like *Sunya Purana*, *Srikrishna Kirtan*, *Gopicanadar* gan possess striking similarities with the Assamese language of the period. Some post-fifteenth century poets like Sanjaya, Kavindra Parameswara, Ananata Kandali, Narayandeva, the celebrated author of *Padmapurana*, are being claimed by the peoples of

also did not reach Upper Assam until Siva Singha, the son and successor of Rudra Singha, made Hinduism the state religion and had himself initiated by Krishnaram Bhattacharjee, a *sakta mohunt* of Nabadwip. Not only did the neophyte King make the priest the chief of the Kamakhya temple, the centre of *tantric* worship, but endowed it with extensive rent-free grants, which the priest's successors have been enjoying till our own times. The commercial treaty concluded by Raja Gaurinath in February, 1793, gave an impetus, though temporarily, to the merchants of Bengal to proceed with their merchandise far into the interior of the province. The Duaria Baruas at Kandahar were reported to have had transactions with some of the eminent bankers and business magnates like Jagat Seth of Murshidabad. Some of the latter never failed to offer asylum to the Assamese refugees at the hour of their worst peril during the period of Burmese invasions.¹ It was, however, not until the restoration of normal life after British occupation when there also opened up avenues of employment in office or in trade, the influx of population from the neighbouring districts of Bengal viz. Sylhet, Dacca, Mymensing, Rangpur, may be said to have actually begun. Already trained in the art of the administration of the Company, the *Omtahs* of Bengal replaced the earlier official aristocracy, when the latter proved themselves incapable of properly discharging the duties that were entrusted to them.² Few of the new recruits knew English or Persian which was then the court language of the Presidency. In April, 1831, the Government of Bengal made Bengali in place of Persian the court language of Assam on the ground that it was very difficult and too costly to have replacements when a Persian scribe was on leave or left the service.³ When the new-comers were thus enabled to make the revenue and judicial departments more or less their sole preserve, it became easier on their part to oust the local officials whenever there occurred cases of default or defalcation. Their

both the states as their own : see Sharma, S. N.; *Asamiya Sahityar Itibritta* pp. 46-51; Neog, D.; *New Light on History of Asamiya Literature* p. 92 ff.

¹ Bhuyan, S. K.; *Anglo-Assamese Relations*, pp. 101-2; Barua, Gunaviram; *Life of Anandaram Dhekial Phukan*, pp. 22-23.

² See ante p. 46.

³ B.P.C., 1830, April 30 Nos. 65-66.

services became indispensable in almost all the Government schools, whether Anglo-Vernacular or Vernacular, since local teachers were not available in adequate numbers, in any case, to impart lessons in Bengali, which had since become the medium of instruction.

The virtual monopoly of office in almost all the departments by the new-comers from Bengal, naturally, generated an ill-feeling and deep resentment amongst those for whom, hitherto, there was no other means of livelihood than Government service. Their feelings were, to a great extent, shared by their sympathisers and followers, and must have been accentuated during the years of administrative confusion when it was generally held that the *Omlahs* were at the root of all the evils. Robinson writes :¹ 'All that the Assamese knew of the Bengalee character from observations of the life led by the Bengali *Omlah* employed in the country (is that he was) by no means a favourable specimen.....thus they have a very low opinion of the virtue of the Bengalee.' Lieutenant Matthie, the Principal Assistant, Nowgong, on the other hand, once reported : 'On British conquest of Assam, numerous..... Bengalees..... came to Assam, and under our system the Assamese were obliged to patronize them. They became the penmen of their petitions, accountants, often spokesmen at the councils; and to answer their own purpose instil into them a spirit for litigation..... Assamese are also now no less corrupt or less given to accepting bribes, although they do not take the same precaution to avoid its detection.'² Not merely the *Omlahs* of Bengal, almost all the officials, high and low, Assamese and non-Assamese, never failed to exploit the situation as best as they could, as has already been described, whenever an opportunity presented itself whether under early British rule or during the short regime of Raja Purandar in Upper Assam. It must also be clearly understood that the *Omlahs* were not the true representatives of the people of Bengal.* It will be, of

¹ A. S., File No, C.O. 507; 1862; Robinson to Jenkins, October 4, No. 760.

² B.R.C., 1836; March 1, No. 40, Matthie to Jenkins, February 15, 1835.

* In this connection, the following observations made by Raja Rammohan Roy deserve notice. 'From a careful survey and observa-

course, not far from the truth to say that, at the beginning, most of the new-comers were, mere fortune-seekers, and in due course, many of them settled down permanently and linked themselves with the people of the soil. Better facilities of transport and communication, in the meantime, encouraged a few of the Assamese to proceed to the Presidency in pursuit of trade or higher education, which enabled them to have a correct picture of the Bengalees. Contacts like these, though slowly, not only removed much of their mutual prejudices and ill-feelings but tended towards a process of assimilation which made itself apparent, particularly amongst the high caste Hindus, in the observance of their common festivals and religious ceremonies, in their dresses, customs and usages. The worship of the deities like *Durga*, *Kali*, *Chandi*, *Annapura*, some of which were introduced even during the later part of the Ahom rule, became common not only in the public but also in private

tion of the people and inhabitants of various parts of the country, and in every condition of life, I am of opinion that the peasants and villagers who reside at a distance from large towns and head stations and courts of law, are as innocent, temperate and moral in their conduct as the people of any other country whatever; Secondly, the inhabitants of the cities, towns or stations who have much intercourse with persons employed about the courts of Law, by Zamindars etc., and with foreigners and others in a different state of civilization, generally, imbibe their habits and opinions. Hence their religious opinions are shaken without any other principles being implanted to supply their place. Consequently, a great proportion of these are far inferior in point of character to the former class, and are very often even made tools of in the nefarious work of perjury and forgery; Thirdly, a third class consists of persons who are in the employ of Land-holders (Zamindars) or dependent for subsistence on the courts of law, as attorney's clerks, and who must rely for a livelihood on their shrewdness; not having generally sufficient means to enter into commerce or business. These are for the most part still worse than the second class, more specially, when they have no prospect of bettering their condition by savings of honest industry, and no hope is held out to them of rising to honour or appointment by superior merit. But I must confess that I have met a great number of the second class engaged in a respectable line of trade who were men of real merit, worth and character. Even among the third class I have known many who had every disposition to act uprightly and some actually honest in their conduct.' See Majumdar, R.C.; *Glimpses of Bengal in the Nineteenth Century*, pp. 9-10.

residences,¹ occasionally in accompaniment of *Jatras* or dance drama parties from Bengal. Musicians, drummers (of *dhak* and *dhol*) and dancers from Bengal began to add attraction and grandeur to the festivals and marriage ceremonies of well-to-do families.² Assamese gentry evinced a liking for the *punjabi* (long shirt), *shawl* and *santipuri dhuti* of the Bengalees³ and perhaps for their food and delicacies. Bengali newspapers and periodicals like the *Samachar-Darpan* and the *Samachar-Chandrika* had Assamese subscribers, some of whom even supplied local news and contributed articles.⁴

The Cross not unoften followed British armies, but in the North-East Frontier the progress of evangelization was rather slow. Krishna Pal, Dr. Carey's first convert, is said to have arrived in the Khasi hills as early as 1813, though the number of converts did not exceed, until 1830, even a dozen.⁵ On the representation of Mr. Scott, a branch of Serampur Missionary was set up at Gauhati in 1829, under James Rae, a native of Dumfries, and seven years later, William Robinson joined him;⁶ they also could not make much headway in their mission. Major Jenkins thought that the task of pacifying the rude tribes of the North-East Frontier, particularly the Singphos and the Khamtis, could be effectively done by the spread of the Gospel amongst them, and when an invitation was accordingly sent, in early 1835, the American Baptist Mission Foreign Society took the matter in right earnest.⁷ Soon they sent a mission under Reverends Nathan Brown and Oliver Cutter, with a printing press, which reached Sadiya on March 23, 1836.⁸ The Baptists

¹ Dhekial Phukan, Haliram : *Assam Buranjī* p. 58.

² Barua, Gunaviram : *Life of Anandaram Dhekial Phukan* pp. 67, 82 and 83.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ Of the early contributors mention may be made of Haliram Dhekial Phukan, who wrote an article on commercial interest in the *Samachar-Darpan*, June 4, 1831; in the same paper Jaduram Deka Barua made some remarks on the history of Assam, on October 15, 1831; and Jognooram Phukan contributed a poem in Bengali on July 30, 1831.

⁵ Sword, V. K. ; *Baptists in Assam*, p. 37.

⁶ *Calcutta Christian Observer*, Vol. IV (1835), p. 408.

⁷ Gammell William : *History of the American Baptist Mission* (1850), pp. 212-13.

⁸ *Ibid.*

hoped that not only the frontier tribes would be converted to Christianity but an entrance would also be opened up at no distant future even to the heart of China.¹ In April 1837, Dr. Miles Bronson, another Missionary, accompanied by Mr. Thomas proceeded up the Brahmaputra; but near about Sadiya the latter was killed when the trunk of a tree fell on him on the bank. Bronson commenced his work amongst the Nagas at Namsang, a village near Jaypur.² Sadiya soon proved to be 'a barred door rather than an open gate-way to the Celestial Empire,' and their hope of redeeming the Khamtis and the Shans, too, received a rude shock in March 1839, at the unfortunate tragedy of Sadiya, where the British party was nearly annihilated. Brown moved to Jaypur and thence to Sibsagar. Soon Bronson also left the Nagas on grounds of ill-health and settled himself at Nowgong; he baptised in May 1841, the first Assamese convert Nidhiram,³ later known as Nidhi Levi Farwell. At Gauhati, the first Baptist church was established in December 1845, and branches were also organised in the same year at Nowgong and Sibsagar.⁴ Backed by the moral and material support of the small European community of the valley, the Christian Fathers carried on their activities ceaselessly amongst the people of the plains, but their spiritual harvest continued to be unsatisfactory. 'The Assamese for whom the mission had yielded Sadiya and Jaypur had failed to accept Christianity.'⁵

Though inspired by their proselytising spirit, the Missionaries founded an orphanage at Nowgong, opened hospitals and started schools, literary and vocational, for the boys as well as girls, which were uncommon, in those days, in Assam.⁶ They openly taught the Bible in their schools, but espoused the cause

¹ *Ibid.* 'It was hoped that beneath the protection afforded by the East-India Company, missionaries might join the caravans that yearly traded to the interior of China and thus while the jealous mandarins were excluding foreigners from the ports, they might plant Christianity in the heart of the Empire.'

² Papers and Resolutions; *Of the American Baptist Missionary Union, Jubilee conference, Nowgong, December, 1886.* pp. 20-22.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ Bordoloi, K.; *Sadar-Aminar Atmajivani*, p. 45.

⁵ Sword V. K.; *Baptists in Assam* p. 119.

⁶ Butler, J.; *Travels and Adventures in Assam*, pp. 250-51.

of the vernacular of the people and made invaluable contributions to the Assamese language and literature. Brown, Bronson and Farwell, the trio, laid the foundation of the *Christian-Assamese* literature.¹ Bronson's monumental work is an Assamese English dictionary, the earliest of its kind until 1900. Brown translated the New Testament into Assamese, wrote a grammar of the Assamese language, and collected a fairly good number of Assamese manuscripts. Nidhi Levi is credited with a historical work, a number of story books and the rendering into Assamese of the Indian Penal Code. To crown all, the Missionaries published in January, 1846, the *Orunudai*, the first Assamese monthly, 'devoted to religion, science and general intelligence.*' Disseminating western thought and learning the *Orunudai* inspired the younger generation and paved the way for an intellectual awakening.

The impact of the new ideas, during a period of expanding economy, had their repercussions on the social life of the Assamese, *firstly* in mollifying the rigidity of the caste system and *secondly* in removing, though slowly, some of their traditional beliefs and prejudices. The sentiment of the orthodox section had been echoed by Maniram Dewan when he bewailed² : 'By the reduction of all castes to the same level, the people are labouring under the deepest grief and mortification'. The Muslims who had to undergo, formerly, too many social disabilities had, gradually, come into prominence. Jenkins found them during his visit of Upper Assam, in early 1838, in affluent circumstances on account of their business skill and industrious habits, though they had lost much of their earlier martial vigour through incessant use of opium.³ Amongst the *Omlahs* and native officials, many were Muslims, and they were not slow to take advantage of the schools that were set up to train up the Assamese pupils. Of the backward communities, the *Nadials*

¹ Neog, D; *New Light on History of Asamiya Literature*, pp. 337-46; Neog, M; *Asamiya Sahityar Ruparekha* pp. 284-291. Sharma, S. N.; *Asamiya Sahityar Itibritta*, pp. 171-76.

* Published by O. T. Cutter, at the American Baptist's Mission Press, Sibsagar, and under his successors continued its publication till 1880.

² Mills : *Report on Assam (1854)*, see Appendix K.B.

³ I.P.C., 1838; April 4, No. 121, para 138.

(or the *Domes* as they were formerly called) were seen gaining in resources and also in importance through their business in fish and of the carrying trade, in both of which they had a monopoly. Sincerely religious in habits, they were regular in the recitation of the sacred books like the *Ramayana* and the *Bhagawata* and, occasionally, they performed the *Bhawona* or the dance-drama festival.¹ The growing urbanization demanded the services of a number of useful communities like those of the washermen, the barbers and the cobblers whose contact was once considered highly objectionable by the orthodox Hindus. Hitherto, some of the so-called untouchables were required, according to some contemporary writers,² to put distinguishing marks on their person; such evil practices, if they existed, now came into disuse. None but the highest dignitaries could move about, formerly, on an elephant's back or on a *dola*; and even men of rank, except the cabinet ministers, could not occupy raised seats in the public assembly. Although, the common people hesitated even in the early days of the Company to ride on the elephant in the Sadar stations,³ Assamese Judges listened to petitions reclining on high pillows over platforms made of wood. Stools, chairs and tables, gradually, came into use not only in the Government offices but also in private residences.⁴ The use of shoes which was previously interdicted, became general amongst the *Omlahs* and higher officials.⁵ The learning of a foreign language and of going abroad were formerly social taboos.⁶ Assamese students of the orthodox Brahmins were seen in the thirties of the nineteenth century studying English side by side with pupils of other communities; and some of them, though few, proceeded to the Presidency for higher courses in English education.

¹ I.P.C., 1838, April 4, No. 121 para 142, Dhekial Phukan, Haliram : *Assam Buranji*, pp. 88-89.

² Dhekial Phukan, Haliram : *Assam Buranji*, p. 89; Butler, J.; *Travels and Adventures in Assam*, pp. 224-26; also Gait, E. A.; *A History of Assam*, p. 242.

³ Butler, J.; *Travels and Adventures in Assam* p. 223.; Dhekial Phukan, Haliram; *Assam Buranji*, p. 58.

⁴ Bordoloi, K; *Sadar-Aminar Atmajivani*, p. 66; Barua, Gunaviram: *Life of Anandaram Dhekial Phukan*, p. 84.

⁵ Mills : Report on Assam, para 137.

⁶ Dhekial Phukan, Haliram : *Assam Buranji*, p. 100.

It must also be remembered that the western influences, including those of the province of Bengal, percolated into the newly developed middle classes of the urban areas, but the masses in the interior remained almost unaffected. The *Saktist mohunt*, commonly known as the *Parbatia Gossain* on account of his permanent residence at the Nilachal hills, of course, succeeded in exerting some influence amongst a limited number of the high caste Hindus both of Upper and Lower Assam.¹ The Christian Fathers miserably failed in their mission. 'The Assamese had shown themselves a stubborn class of people unyielding and self-righteous.'² Circumstances might compel them to transfer their allegiance to foreign rulers; their veneration to their family priests or spiritual *Gurus*, however, remained unshaken. Major Jenkins mentions in his *Journal of Upper Assam*, that the *Satradhikars* or the religious heads of *Auniati*, *Dakhinpat*, *Garamur* and *Dihingia* were 'really most respected'; although, a number of minor *Gossains* had undermined their own position by indulging in worldly pursuits and particularly through their mutual rivalries and litigations³ over their *Sisyas* or disciples; however, even the latter continued to exercise considerable spiritual authority not only in initiation but also in inflicting punishments to the extent of excommunication in cases of anti-social and immoral acts.⁴

Prejudices die hard not only amongst the unsophisticated masses, but even amongst the enlightened section of the urban areas; for orthodoxy was the prevailing order of the day. Religious scruples forbade Haliram Dhekial Phukan, the Assistant Magistrate of Gauhati, a man otherwise of liberal outlook, to prosecute the study of English. When his son Anandaram proceeded to Calcutta for higher education, his biographer says, he took with him not only his family deity (*Salaagram sila*) but also Brahmin cooks to prepare his meals in a foreign territory.⁵ Nothing auspicious or important could be undertaken without

¹ Bordoloi, K.; *Sadar-Aminar Atmajivani*, p. 66.

² Sword, V. K.; *Baptists in Assam*, p. 119.

³ I.P.C., 1838, April 4, No. 121, para 118. Dhekial Phukan, Haliram: *Assam Buranji*, p. 94.

⁴ Butler, J.; *Travels and Adventures in Assam*, p. 241.

⁵ Barua, Gunaviram: *Life of Anandaram Dhekial Phukan*, pp. 18, 49-50, 59.

propitiating the deities by offerings of some sort. *Deo puja* was arranged, it may be remembered, by the followers of Peali Barphukan before they advanced to the fort of Rangpur.¹ For the success of the conspiracy, the *Charing Raja* is reported to have sent offerings of ghee and oil to several temples and *Satras*, and a payment of rupees five was made to the *Thakur* of Dergaon to defray the cost of the *Pujas* to the deities.² To restore their *debottar pykes* after the abolition of slavery, in 1843, the Brahmins and *Gossains* made a representation to the Commissioner of Assam, but it was preceded by offerings to God *Siva* to the extent of 10,000 times. Divination and incantations were more often resorted to than the application of proper medicine in curing diseases. Indigenous physicians (*Kaviraj*) practised in some localities the *Ayurvedic* system and, occasionally, prescribed medicines; there was a general abhorrence however of allopathy and of foreign doctors.³ For the fear of losing caste, few students of the orthodox Hindus proceeded to Calcutta in pursuit of medical studies.

Contemporary writers speak highly of the position of women in Assam. They were scarcely subjected to such cruel rites as of female infanticide or of the *Sati*, i.e. the burning of the widows on the funeral pyre of their husbands. Neither the worst evils of Bengali *Kulinism* nor their dowry system had pervaded the social life of the Assamese. Nevertheless, the idea of education of women had yet to cross men's minds. The cultured families had evinced a little desire to impart some instructions in the rudiments of education to their daughters and wives. Greater emphasis was, however, given to inculcate such virtues as would make them hospitable, religious-minded and dutiful house-wives.⁴ To conceive of remarriage of the widows or of inter-caste marriage amongst the orthodox Hindus would be highly offensive. There was no bar to the inter-caste marriage amongst the lower classes, but marriages between the Brahmins and non-Brahmins were prohibited by social laws and age-long customs. Even amongst the Brahmins, as recorded by a contem-

¹ See ante p. 50.

² See ante p. 167.

³ Bordoloi, K.; *Sadar-Aminar Atmajivani*, pp. 40-41. 46 and 114. Barua, Gunaviram : *Life of Anandaram Dhokial Phukan*, p. 189.

⁴ Barua, Gunaviram : *Life of Anandaram Dhokial Phukan*, p. 77.

porary, it was objectionable to have matrimonial relations between the families of Upper Assam with those of Lower Assam ; in Kamrup, between those living in the north with those of the south bank of the Brahmaputra.¹

To remove the curtain of ignorance and superstitious beliefs which had pervaded almost all the classes—the progress of education was too distressingly slow ; in fact, no serious attempt was made at any level to introduce a system of liberal education. The indigenous system of education, however, continued to exist even after the period of Burmese invasions in some *Satras* and in a number of scattered *pathsalas* and *tols* ; the courses of study in those institutions were of the stereotyped nature—calculated to impart lessons for leading a pious and religious life and not so much for any useful purpose or widening the mental horizon. Even in Bengal, until 1835, the Government of India was indifferent to the introduction of English education. Although, they set up, in 1823, the General Committee of Public Instruction for the promotion of education of the natives and a sum of rupees one lakh was earmarked for the purpose, the amount was to be expended in awarding stipends to scholars studying classical learning i.e. Sanskrit, Arabic and Persian, and in printing books for their use. There was, however, a growing demand in Bengal for the spread of western education even from the early years of the nineteenth century, and the ground for it was prepared by the activities of institutions like the *Calcutta Book Society*, the Missionaries of Serampur and by a number of liberal-minded individuals, both Indian and European. It was far-sighted Jenkins who had realised² for the first time the urgent necessity of imparting English education amongst the Assamese. Of course, he was then actuated by no other motive than that of training the indigenous people to take up positions of trust and responsibility under the Government. Within a few months of his assumption of office, being alarmed at the sight of foreigners in every field, particularly in Government offices, Jenkins wrote to the Government of India :

‘These few (Assamese) in their present uneducated state do not suffice to carry on duties of our courts..... the old families of Assam are still losing influence in their own native province

¹ Dhekial Phukan, Haliram : History of Assam, p. 86.

² B.P.C., 1834 ; July 10, No. 211.

being elbowed (out from) those situations which lead to power and decent maintenance. This state of things appear to me pregnant with evil (consequences) and I know no other method by which it would be remedied than by the Government taking some active measure to provide instruction for the Assamese youths.¹

For the promotion of indigenous education Scott procured, in 1826, the sanction of the Government of Bengal to establish a number of schools in both Upper and Lower Assam.² Each teacher was to teach 30 pupils in return for which he was to receive 30 *puras* of rent-free land. In these institutions, ordinarily, the 'only language taught is sanskrit and the matter *shastar*'; but in some institutions, the curriculum consisted of the study of arithmetic, medicine and astronomy.³ In 1831, Captain White, Assistant to the Commissioner of Assam, in collaboration with Mr. Rae, the Christian Missionary, established another school at Gauhati where Bengali translation from English works on elementary science also formed a part of the curriculum.

Jenkins found that the lessons taught in these schools served no useful purpose, and most of the institutions were then in a languishing state. He, therefore, recommended to the Government of India the resumption of the rent-free grants on the death of the existing incumbents and to set up under the supervision of European functionaries English schools in each Sadar station.⁴ The school buildings could be constructed at a little expense with the assistance of the convicts of the local Jails. Instructors capable of teaching English and Bengali would have to be recruited, temporarily, from outside at a salary not exceeding Rs. 30 each per month. The entire scheme was estimated to cost Rs. 12,000 per annum. Such a beginning, the

¹ *Ibid.*

² These were at Gauhati, Nilachal, Na-Duar, Patee Darrang, Hajo, Bajali, Seela, Bishwanath, Nowgong, and Desh Darrang (Mangaldai) B.P.C., 1826; October 25, Nos. 21-22.

³ Thus, in 1833, Lieutenant Matthie, the Collector of Central Assam, found at a school in Desh Darrang the curriculum consisting of the *Ratnamala* (grammar) *Kubhee* (poetry), *Sreety*, *Bhagavat*, *Silabati* (*Lilabati*?) and *Batis* (*Medicine*?) B.R.C., 1840, March 1, No. 40.

⁴ B.P.C., 1834; July 10, No. 211.

Commissioner felt, would not only enable the Government, before long, to fill the vacancies in the Government offices with the people of the land, but also provide the necessary stimulus for education. 'When the Upper Classes perceive there is no other road to distinction than through the attainment of superior information and the means of procuring it for their children is put within their reach, they will not allow them to be surpassed by those of the inferior ranks'.¹

There had raged, about this time, the controversy amongst the members of the General Committee of Public Instruction or between the *Anglicists* and the *Orientalists*, which is so familiar to the students of Indo-British History, as to the nature of instruction to be imparted to the Indians. In early March, 1835, the Governor-General in Council, finally, resolved upon the promotion of European literature and science amongst the natives of India through the medium of the English language. The proposal of the Commissioner of Assam which had reached the authorities in Calcutta at this precise moment, therefore, readily received the approval of the General Committee of Public Instruction. To begin with, the latter recommended, in June 1835, the establishment of an English school at Gauhati and deputed as its Headmaster Mr. Singer on a salary of Rs. 150 p.m.² In 1841, another English school had its start at Sibsagar with Mr. D. S'ouza as its Headmaster.³

When the portals of public service were opened to those educated, the higher classes were not slow to take advantage of the English education. To cater to their growing demand, a few branch schools had also to be started in the neighbourhood of Gauhati, and their enrolment, at the close of 1841, exceeded six hundred. In the meantime, William Robinson who had been working under the Serampur Mission replaced Mr. Singer as the Headmaster of the Gauhati School, and two teachers were added to it to teach Sanskrit and Persian.⁴

Although, on account of their general poverty and ignorance, the people in the rural areas were unwilling to spare their children from their agricultural labour and were 'content to live

¹ *Ibid.*

² B.P.C., 1935; June 22, Nos. 2-5.

³ R.P.I.B., 1840-41, pp. 220-22.

⁴ *Ibid.*

and die as their forefathers did', there grew up amongst some villagers of Kamrup, however, a desire for education, should opportunities be available near their homes; because with the introduction of the new revenue measures in 1833, some minor jobs of local officials were thrown open to them; they were now receiving frequent communications, particularly the *pattas*, which also aroused curiosity and created, gradually, a desire to have some rudimentary knowledge of the three R's, lest they should be deceived by the *Omlahs*. On the representation of the headmen of some of the villages, James Matthie, the Collector of Gauhati, laid before the Government, in August 1838, a scheme of village education. His plan envisaged¹ (a) the establishment of an Anglo-vernacular school at a central site in the district of Kamrup where a perfect knowledge of the vernacular would be imparted besides elements of English with a view to admitting pupils at a particular stage to the Gauhati school for the completion of higher education (b) to impart elementary education in reading, writing and arithmetic, the indigenous schools started by Scott were to remodelled and their number to be raised from eleven to twenty two. Instructors for these institutions were to be recruited by a Board of well-informed individuals at the Sadar School and their management was to be entrusted to a Local Committee consisting of the *Choudhary* and two respectable inhabitants of the *pargana* concerned.² As these institutions were to be maintained by the assignment of lands, the financial implication for the entire scheme was not very heavy. In spite of it, the General Committee of Public Instruction could not agree to the proposal since they strictly followed the so-called '*Filtration Theory*'—that education should spread gradually from the higher to the lower classes. They desired that the Gauhati School should produce a class of local instructors expert in English literature and science, by whose agency the benefits of similar instructions might be disseminated.³ Fortunately, on the strong recommendation of Mr. Ross, the President of the Council, the Supreme

¹ B.R.C., 1838; August 14, No. 65, Matthie to Jenkins, February, 13.

² *Ibid.*

³ B.R.C., 1838; August 14, No. 65: Secretary, General Committee of Public Instruction to Jenkins, April 11, 1838.

Government accorded their approval to the scheme as an 'experimental measure'. The first part of it, regarding the establishment of an Anglo-vernacular school was, however, dropped. When these institutions proved, before long, very useful in providing local revenue officials, similar schools were set up¹ in the other districts. In 1857-58, the number of Government village schools stood at seventy eight with a total enrolment of about three thousand.

Major Jenkins felt that in a backward province like Assam, education should be a state responsibility. 'To entrust the diffusion of knowledge to the natives, who are universally poor, would be parental neglect to children'.² From the outset, however, the enlightened public took a keen interest in the educational institutions. This is evident from the fact that the Commissioner succeeded, at the very inception, in raising a substantial amount of subscription for the Gauhati school from the inhabitants of the town.³ Contributions of Rs. 1000 each, had also been made by the Raja of Cooch-Behar, Dayaram Baruah, the *Choudhury* of Dharampur, and Jognoram Phukan, the *Sadar-Amin* of Gauhati;⁴ a donation of Rs. 500 was made by the *Dihingia Gossain* of Kurua, a village on the north of the Brahmaputra.⁵ Had the scheme initiated by Raja Purandar Singha, that every *kheldar* must set up a school in his own jurisdiction, been worked out, there would have been a village school, according to the Political Agent, to every 200 inhabitants in Upper Assam.⁶ In the interior, not only did the villagers erect the school buildings and maintain them by regular repairs, but they co-operated with the local authorities in the management of these institutions. We learn from the Report of Public Instruction, Bengal, for the year 1857-58⁷ that a number of indigenous schools were started in some districts entirely at

¹ B.P.C., 1838; August 14, No. 66, R.P.I.B., 1857-58, see the report of the Inspector of schools, North-East Bengal and Assam, p. 171.

² B.P.C., 1834; July 10 No. 211.

³ B.P.C., 1835; March 30, No. 3; Bogle to Jenkins.

⁴ R.P.I.B., 1838; pp. 68-69.

⁵ R.L.B., 1839; September 3, No. 10.

⁶ B.P.C., 1834; June 19, No. 99.

⁷ B.P.C. 1835; March 30, No. 3: Bogle to Jenkins; R.P.I.B. 1857-58 p. 172.

public expense, and that to encourage such institutions, on the advice of the local educational authorities, the Government of Bengal had introduced, in the same year, the *Subsidy System*, under which a grant of Re 1 p.m. was made for every ten boys under instruction. In 1857-58, the number of pupils receiving instruction in such schools was 750 in Sibsagar and 600 in Kamrup.¹

Among the unofficial enterprises, the contribution made by the Christian Missionaries to the vernacular schools in Assam, and in the tribal areas in particular, though inspired by the zeal of spreading the Gospel, was indeed unparalleled. By 1844, the American Baptist Missionaries under Rev. O. T. Cutter set up as many as fourteen schools in the district of Sibsagar.² The Welsh Missionaries, who had commenced their activities in the Khasi Jayantia hills, had also about half a dozen schools to their credit. Similar institutions were opened for pupils of both the sexes in Nowgong, Garo hills and in the Kachari mahals of the district of Darrang. In addition to religious lessons, Christian teachers imparted instructions in Assamese on the three R's and on some industrial arts. In 1840, Bronson taught the Nagas at Namsang, the Bible as well as improved methods of manufacturing tea and salt.³

With the exception of the Missionary institutions and the few indigenous schools sponsored by the public where teachers were mostly Assamese, both Hindus and Muslims, instruction was imparted in all Government village schools in Bengali on elementary reading, writing and arithmetic. In the Government schools at Sibsagar and Gauhati, there existed two independent departments, English and Bengali, having several classes in each. Sanskrit and, subsequently, Urdu and Persian were also taught under private arrangement.⁴ Every emphasis was given, at the beginning, to the study of English, and the chances of getting

¹ In other districts the number of pupils was as follows; Lakhimpur-125, Nowgong-126, Darrang-86, Goalpara-165, see R.P.I.B., 1855-56 p. 90.

² R.P.I.B., 1845, see Appendix No. 4, Robinson to Jenkins March 31, 1845.

³ I.P.C., 1840; May 11, Nos. 128-29; Sword, V. K.; *Baptists in Assam*, pp. 61-63.

⁴ R.P.I.B., 1838, pp. 71-72; 1839, pp. 68-69; 1851, pp. 180-81.

jobs, actually, attracted most of the pupils to the English department. When it proved difficult on the part of the young pupils to learn English both as a subject and also as the medium of instruction, there was a fall in enrolment of the English classes;¹ and it dwindled to such an extent that in April, 1844, the Government of Bengal thought it desirable to confine the teaching of English to the first class alone. On public demand, however, in December 1855, the Gauhati school was reorganised and upgraded to the footing of a zilla school in Bengal.²

In April 1844, with a view to effecting, 'a vigilant control', and introducing 'a uniform system of instruction' William Robinson, the Headmaster of the Gauhati school, was made the Inspector of Schools under the Commissioner of Assam.³ The distance of the stations, inordinate delays of travelling and the inaccessibility of most of the village schools rendered it impracticable for the Inspector residing at Gauhati to do anything more than cursorily examine the schools once a year and in some cases once in two years.⁴ To assist him in his duties, in 1855, five Sub-Inspectors of schools were placed in different zones;⁵ but in the meantime, the jurisdiction of the Inspector had also been extended over a few districts of North-East Bengal, and the management and control of the schools, actually, fell on the Principal Assistants who were also required to conduct the annual examination.⁶ The latter had little time and less competence to go through the details of a subject requiring specialised knowledge. In the absence of effective supervision, the

¹ R.P.I.B., 1844, see *Appendix V*, Beadon to Jenkins, April 29.

² R.P.I.B., 1855-56; see report of the first quarter *Appendix A*, p. 81.

³ R.P.I.B., 1844; see *Appendix V*. Beadon to Jenkins, April 29.

⁴ Mills goes so far as to say that the service of the Inspector of Schools, as existed in 1853, was useless, and the expense incurred in his tours might have been with more benefit applied to some other cause of education.

⁵ One in Lakhimpur and Sibsagar, one in Darrang and Nowgong, and one in each of the district of Kamrup and Goalpara. R.P.I.B., 1855-56, see report of the second quarter pp. 38-39.

⁶ The Jurisdiction of the Inspector of schools extending over as many as fifteen districts of Assam and North-East Bengal in an area over 67,000 sq. miles, was larger than of England and Wales; R.P.I.B., 1857-58 pp. 161.

schools were, conducted according to no system or each had a system of its own. In most of the *mufasil* schools masters kept no registers of daily attendance nor even had they a list of pupils. The book of instruction was issued, but it was seldom opened. Neither was there a fixed curriculum nor any list of text books; in fact, scarcity of text-books compelled the teachers to devote much of their time to the teaching of writing letters, petitions, keeping accounts or of engaging them in religious studies.¹ But the most formidable obstacle which the pupils were faced with was the foreign medium, namely Bengali, which was not the mother-tongue of the people. Mr. Mills did not fail to make a pointed reference to this anomaly in his historic report of 1854, wherein he strongly recommended² to the Council of Education for immediate substitution of Bengali by Assamese with the remark 'that an English youth is not taught Latin until he is well founded in English and in the same manner the Assamese should not be taught a foreign language until he knows his own.' In spite of it, the attitude of the Government Bengal to the glaring defects was one of total indifference; while the amount of money they provided for education of the districts of Assam was extremely meagre. In transmitting the annual report of the year 1849-50, the Commissioner remarked: 'The

¹ Thus, in 1842, at the Government school at Mangaldai, as reported by Mr. Kelner, the Sub-Assistant, 'there is not a single Bengali book for the use of the scholars and the little they learn is taught orally. The few books that the school-master possesses are in Sanskrit, and these the scholars are taught to repeat but without comprehending anything of their content'. When the same officer inquired a guardian why he did not send his wards to school, the latter replied: 'near my house there is a Brahmin who teaches my sons to read and write the *dhekri* (Assamese). What could they learn from the school master at Mangaldai, that I should send them so far from home'. I.R.C., 1842; September 16, No. 16: Kelner to Scott, June 22: R.P.I.B., 1845, *vide Appendix*, No. 4.

² 'I think', Mills frankly confessed, 'we made a great mistake in directing that all business should be transacted in Bengali and that the Assamese must acquire it It is too late to retrieve our steps, but I would strongly recommend to the favour of the Council of Education *viz.* substitution of the vernacular (*namely Assamese*) in lieu of Bengali, publication of a series of works in Assamese that a youth will under this system learn more in two than he now acquires in four years': Mills: *Report on Assam*, para 92.

whole cost of educating each pupil in the schools within Kamrup (then most advanced) amounts to an average of rupee one and annas four per annum..... the yearly expenditure for education of the pupils in the vernacular schools of Bengal comes up to seven rupees six annas and eight pies per head'.¹ No wonder, therefore, until 1857-58, 'only one in 500 attends school' and 'not a single has been able to acquire even the standard laid down for Junior Scholarships in the Government schools or colleges'.²

Thus, while the younger generation of Bengal were receiving liberal education at the Hindu College, Calcutta, in advanced courses in political, social and economic studies, Assamese pupils were learning a smattering of the three R's with no other aim than that of securing a few petty jobs under the Government.* With the exception of the *Orunudai* which was devoted, generally, to religious matters, there was no newspaper or journal worth the name to awaken the public mind and to inspire them with lofty ideals of patriotism and nationalism. Nevertheless, the impact of the foreign ideas had already produced amongst a few liberal-minded Assamese a rationalistic spirit which made itself apparent in their political thought and social outlook. Haliram Dhekial Phukan stands at the dawn of this new era. A much-travelled man as he was, Haliram keenly appreciated the true significance of promoting commercial and cultural contacts between the peoples of Bengal and Assam; and for the furtherance of that he contributed a number of articles to the leading Bengali periodicals of that age, and also wrote a history of Assam, the *Assam Buranji* in Bengali, which he distributed gratis. From an anonymous letter, which is supposed to have been written by him, in the *Samachar-Darpan* (August 25, 1832, p. 203), it appears, that even in that age of extreme conservatism Haliram advocated the cause of women's education. Worthy son of his worthy father, Anandaram

¹ R.P.I.B., 1949-50, p. 244.

² R.P.I.B., 1857-58, pp. 161-77, Mills': *Report on Assam*, see Dhekial Phukan, Anandaram: *Observations on the Administration etc. Appendix J*.

* Of copyists, clerks, accountants, and mostly of village school pundits, *Mouzadars*, tea-garden mohurrers and minor revenue officers.

Dhekial Phukan,[†] the Sub-Assistant, Nowgong, was the true representative of this new awakening. Having had the privilege of studying a few years at the Hindu College, he came in direct touch with the liberal and advanced ideas of the day. He had intimate relationship with some of the contemporary celebrities of Bengal like Prasanna Kumar Tagore, Matilal Sil, Sitanath Ghose, Ram Chandra Mitra and had acquaintance with Maharshi Devendra Nath Tagore, Raja Radhakanta Deb, Sibanath Dutta, Dr. Mowat and David Hare.[‡] Like the older generation of politicians of Bengal, Anandaram had an unflinching faith in the British rule, and his practical insight must have felt, that at that time there could be no better substitute for it. He was certainly not a revolutionary like Maniram, but that does not mean that he was less patriotic. His noble idealism and love for his country and countrymen found eloquent expression in the following passage which he wrote in the *Orunudai* :

'When Assam will be converted from a forest into a flower-garden, the canoes of the rivers will be converted into ships, bamboo cottages will be replaced by buildings of stone and bricks; when there will be thousands and thousands of schools, educational gatherings, dispensaries, hospitals for the poor and destitute; and when people, instead of entertaining jealousy, will cherish love for one another, none will give false evidence for two *tolas* of opium and will rather throw aside lacs of rupees in such cases; when no one will do mischief to others being offered bribes of crores of rupees, prostitution, opium and wine will be unknown in the country, that time, O God, the Almighty Father, bring about in no time'.²

While Maniram and his followers felt that the British rule was an evil which must be done away with, Anandaram wanted to improve it by effecting liberal reforms. In the *Observations on the Administration of Province of Assam*,³ which he submitted

[†] Born at Gauhati, September 24, 1829; educated at the English School, Gauhati, and Hindu College, Calcutta; *Munsiff* in 1847, Sub-Assistant in 1852, officiated Junior Assistant in 1854; expired on June 18, 1859.

¹ Barua, Gunaviram : *Life of Annandaram Dhekial Phukan*, p. 52.

² Dhekial Phukan, Anandaram : *An account of Enland*, see *Orunudai*, April 1847, Vol. II, No. 4, P. 31.

³ Mills : *Report on Assam*, see Appendix J. *Observations on the Administration of the Province etc.*

to Mills during his visit in 1853, couched in most polite but forceful language, Dhekial Phukan not only brought home to the authorities the existing evils of the various departments, but strongly urged reforming measures like the lowering of the taxes, increase in number of the *mufasil* court, and the native Judges and investment of the latter with enlarged powers, the revision of the complicated procedure in the law courts, the introduction of Assamese in place of Bengali in the schools and courts, the publication of a series of popular works in Assamese on different branches of knowledge, the supervision of the religious and charitable institutions by the Government, and the stoppage of the importation of *Abkari* opium. He was the first amongst the Assamese to raise a voice of protest against the introduction of Bengali in place of Assamese in the schools and courts in Assam, and he is said to have effectively refuted in 1855, in an anonymous pamphlet entitled '*A few Remarks on the Assamese Language* etc., the prevailing notion of that age that Assamese was only a dialect of the Bengali and had no literature of its own.¹ An orthodox Brahmin till his end Anandaram had no malice or prejudice against any one, whether a native of Hindustan, Bengali Hindu, Christian or Mussalman. Like his father he was in favour of female education and even advocated the emancipation of women, provided they were duly qualified. Influenced by the reforming activities of Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar in Bengal, Gunaviram Barua, a near relative of Anandaram, fought against the disabilities of women. To popularise the remarriage of widows, he wrote in 1858, a dramatical work *Ramnavami*, and later set the example himself by marrying a widow and giving his own widowed daughter in marriage. Hemchandra Barua, commonly known as the Assamese Johnson for his monumental Assamese dictionary, the *Hem Kosa*, was also a great exponent of the cause of the widows.² He exposed in his *Kaniar Kirtan*

¹ An abstract of the pamphlet may be seen in the *Indian Antiquary*, 1896, p. 57.

² As to the re-marriage of the widows, in his autobiographical sketch Barua remarks: 'Not to speak of its sanction in the scriptures, one can see that there is no harm in widow marriage even when one comes to reason. . . The revered Vidyasagar did not keep quiet by simply proving that widow marriage is sanctioned by religious works of the Hindus, but he got his son married to a widow. He has drifted

(Glories of Opium-eater) the evils of the opium eating, and ridiculed the vices of the Assamese society, particularly the pretensions of the priestly classes, in a satirical work in Assamese *Bahire Rang Chang Bhutare Kua Bhaturi* which literally means 'externally pure, internally rotten.'¹ The task of these few social reformers had been made easier by William Robinson, who was instrumental not only in enlightening the common people through a number of indigenous schools, but also in paving the way for upgrading the Gauhati school, as the nucleus of liberal education in Assam.² The contributions of these and a few others, both Assamese and non-Assamese, backed by the untiring efforts of the benevolent Commissioner Major Jenkins prepared the ground and sowed the seeds which germinated and bore fruit early in the next century.

away in the currents of age, but the foot-prints which he has left on the sands of time will remain forever and never be lost. When will there be such men in our country who will follow his foot-steps? The echo resounds-when?' Goswami, H. C.; *Asamiya Sahityar Chaneki*, Vol. III, part 1, p. 177; For English translation see Neog, D.; *New Light on History of Asamiya Literature*, p. 374;

¹ Goswami, Hemchandra : *Asamiya Sahityar Chaneki*, Vol. III, part I, pp. 161-68.

² Of the 71 institutions recorded in Mills's report only two schools at Gauhati and Sibsagar provided facilities for higher education. The former was affiliated, in 1858, to the Entrance standard of the University of Calcutta, and three years later two students successfully passed the examination. Thanks are due to Mr. Robinson, the Inspector of schools, whose repeated representations, ultimately, impressed the Government of Bengal with the necessity of having a school or college for higher education in Assam, and, accordingly, in May 1866, the Gauhati school was upgraded to the F.A. course of the Calcutta University. For further details, see Barpujari, H. K.; *A short History of Higher education in Assam*, Golden Jubilee volume, Cotton College, Gauhati, (1952), pp. 1-26.

APPENDIX E

Statement showing land under cultivation and population of Assam in 1853.
(*Vide* Mills : *Report on Assam, Appendix A*)

District	Total area (sq. miles)	Land under cultivation (sq. miles)	Population	The number of inhabitants per sq. mile.
Goalpara	4,104	677	141,638	34
Kamrup	3,345	562	387,775	116
Nowgong	8,712	276	241,300	28
Darrang	2,844	346½	185,569	66
Sibsagar	5,440	256½	159,573	30
Lakhimpur	9,900	134	85,296	9
Total	34,345	2,252½	1,201,151	36

APPENDIX F

Comparative statement showing Foreign Trade of Assam

EXPORTS

	K A N D A H A R (1809)		G O A L P A R A (1852)		L A K H I M P U R (1852)		S I B S A G A R (1852)	
Commodities	Quantity	Value	Quantity	Value	Quantity	Value	Quantity	Value
Lac (raw)	10,000 mds	Rs. 35,000	7,000 mds	Rs. 36,750	385 mds	Rs. 51,850	315 mds	Rs. 50,400
Silk <i>Muga</i> (raw)	65 "	" 11,350	600 " (?)	" 2,622 (?)	1,050 pieces	" 1,050		
" cloth		" 17,500	4000 pieces	" 16,000	3,000 "	" 6,000		
" <i>Eria</i>		" 500	2500 mds	" 9,375	500 mds	" 8,000		
<i>Manjit</i>		" 500						
Pepper (black)		" 300	400 "	" 4,200				
" (long)		" 35,000	50,000 "	" 175,000	600 "	" 1800	12,609 "	" 36,500
Cotton	7,000 "	" 16,500	100 "	" 18,750	25 "	" 3750	17 "	" 2,550
Ivory		" 1,500						
Bell-metal vessel		" 20,000	400,000 "	" 824,000	7,000 "	" 6,000	17,000 "	" 17,000
Mustard seed	15,000 "	" 2,000						
Iron-hoes		" 600						
<i>Thaikot</i> -fruit (?)		" 2,000						
Slaves								

Rhino-horns	7 "	"	1,680	4½ "	"	2000	1½ "	"	600
Other horns							1160	"	360
Wax	3,00 "	"	8,250	100 "	"	2500	12 "	"	240
<i>Chagpra-jak</i> (?)		"	4,000						
<i>Kala teel</i>	2,000 "	"	2,500						
Rice				4250 "	"	3378			
Jute	20,000 "	"	20,000						
Pulses (<i>Kalai</i>)				2000 "	"	2475			
Indigenous opium				135 "	"	29,500			
<i>Gur</i> (molasses)				135 "	"	1,080			
Tea							3337½ "	"	200,250
Coal							2500 "	"	625
Gold (dust)				7strs	"	8,000	250 <i>talas</i>	"	3,125
Silver							1500 "	"	750
Silver (old coins)							Rs. 7000	"	6125
Total			Rs. 1,30,900			Rs. 11,97,377		Rs. 1,37,583	Rs. 3,18,525

IMPORTS

K A N D A H A R (1809)	G O A L P A R A (1852)	L A K H I M P U R (1852)	S I B S A G A R (1852)
Commodities	Quantity Value	Quantity Value	Quantity Value
Salt	35,000 mds Rs. 1,92,500	7,910 mds Rs. 35,000	25,000 mds Rs. 1,12,000
Pulses	" " 800 (?)	" " "	2,295 " " 3,874
Ghee	100 " 1,600	" " "	391 " " 8,266
Sugar	" " 1,000	" " "	267 " " 2,136
Jewels and pearls	" " 5,000	" " "	" " "
Stone and coral beads	" " 3,000	" " "	1,150 <i>tolas</i> " 2,875
Cutlery etc.	" " 500	" " "	" " "
Spices	" " 1,000	" " "	163½ mds " 2,141
Paints	" " 500	" " "	" " "
Copper	" " 4,800	" " "	" " "
Red lead	" " 1,000	" " "	" " "
Cloths of all kinds	" " "	" " "	" " "
English Woollens	" " 2,000	" " "	" " "
Tafetas	" " 2,000	" " "	" " "
Muslin	" " 10,000	" " "	" " "
Knightcap	" " 500	" " "	" " "
Satin	" " 1,000	" " "	" " "
Gold and Silver clothes	" " 1,000	" " "	" " "
Shells	" " 100	" " "	" " "
Rubies	" " "	" " "	" " "
Iron and Steel goods	" " "	" " "	" " "
	4,000 " 12,000	4,395 " 1,378	2,650 " 1,250
			1,650 " 5,736

Rice (fine)	100,000	"	100,000	"	10,000	800	"	1,400
Mustard oil	4,000	"	32,000	"	6,467	1,640	"	11,480
Tobacco	4,000	"	16,000	"		870	"	4,350
Wheat	2,000	"	2,500	"		750	"	1,125
Molasses	4,000	"	10,000	"		650	"	1,300
Opium (<i>Abkari</i>)					(?)	60	"	24,000
Dried fruits						35½	"	327
<i>Supari</i>						55	"	385
Gram						2,295	"	3,874
Sugar Candy						55	"	1,100
Jute						165	"	412
" goods						2,000 Nos	"	150
Brass vessels etc.						250 mds	"	10,000
Vermillion							"	210
Wax-Candles						5	"	400
Guns							"	160
Amber ear-ornaments						350 pieces	"	1,400
Printed Calico, silk and miscellaneous clothes								
Medicine (English)							"	6,113
Brushes							"	100
English Stores							"	100
Salt-petre, sulphur, camphor etc.							"	1,917
Dye wood							"	556
						2 mds	"	168

K A N D A H A R (1809)	G O A L P A R A (1852)	L A K H I M P U R (1852)	S I B S A G A R (1852)	
Commodities	Quantity	Value	Quantity	Value
Glass beads				1,700
Gold and Silver wires and gold <i>Mohars</i>				1,025
Iron-pots and spoons				950
Cocoanuts				550
Stationary				1,180
Umbrella				1,650
Sandals			120 pieces	20
Shoes			2500 pairs	1,000
Looking-glass, glass, earthenware and cutlery				625
Soap			80 mds	400
Hubble-Bubble and small <i>Hookahs</i>				680
Mats			5200 Nos	150
Chairs			150 "	200
Powder, shot and Lead			100 "	500
Books				120
Tools etc.				630
		Rs. 2,28,300		Rs. 1,18,525
		Rs. 10,22,500		Rs. 2,34,985*

* Compiled from Hamilton ; *An Account of Assam*, p. 46 ; Mills : *Report on Assam*, consult report on Goalpara, paras 10-11, Lakhimpur, para 33, Sibsagar, Appendix B.

GLOSSARY

- Annapurna*, a form of goddess *Durga* in which she is supposed to be the supplier of food.
- Assar* or *Ahar*, the third month of the Hindu calendar.
- Bailung*, an Ahom priest.
- Barbhandari*, head of the civil establishment in Cachar, also used in the sense of the Prime Minister.
- Barabhuyan*, feudal chieftains, who were supposed to be twelve in number; a head of revenue division.
- Barbarua*, an Ahom officer of rank, having control and supervision, ordinarily, over civil and revenue affairs.
- Barkandaz*, an armed retainer or policeman.
- Barkuwari*, the chief queen.
- Bar Panchayet*, a tribunal for the trial of heinous offences.
- Barpatra Gohain*, one of the three cabinet ministers of the Ahom court.
- Barphukan*, the viceroy of Gauhati under Ahom Government.
- Barsenapati*, literally the Commander-in-chief, the title conferred on the ruler of the Moamaria or Muttock territory.
- Barua*, an officer of rank having superintendence over a department or a *khel*.
- Bazar*, a daily market.
- Beel*, a small lake.
- Bhawona*, an Assamese theatrical performance.
- Bihu*, the national festival of the Assamese, usually held on the last day of the Hindu months of *Aswin*, *Paush* and *Chaitra*.
- Borah*, a supervisor over twenty *pykes*.
- Borgohain*, the second minister of the Ahom cabinet.
- Bori*, waste land.
- Brahmottar*, rent-free tenure given to the support of the Brahmins.
- Bunker*, a tax on cutting of reeds.
- Buragohain*, the chief of the three ministers of the Ahom cabinet.
- Chokey*, a frontier out-post.

Chandy, a form of goddess *Durga*.

Paltan, a company of foot-soldiers raised by Raja Gobinda Chandra in Cachar.

Chaudhury, a revenue officer in charge of a *pargana*.

Cutchery or *Kutchery*, a court of justice.

Dangorreea, a grandee, a title applied to the three cabinet ministers of the Ahom court.

Daroga, superintendent of police.

Debottar, rent-free tenures for the support of the temples.

Deopuja, worship of an evil spirit.

Dewan, chief executive.

Dharmottar, rent-free tenure to a *Satra* or a religious preceptor.

Dheera cotton, a kind of indigenous cotton.

Dhenga, a labourer from the South-West Provinces.

Dhak, a kind of musical instrument indigenous to Bengal.

Dhol, a drum.

Dhuti, loin cloth of a man.

Dola, an Assamese litter or palanquin.

Duar, a mountain pass, a region adjoining to a hill or a mountain.

Duffadar, a recruiting agent.

Durga, wife of god *Siva* or *Mahadev*, a ten-handed goddess.

Erendi or *eria*, warm cloth made from *eri* silk.

Fakir, a Muslim mendicant or a Hindu ascetic.

Fauzdari, criminal.

Feringhee, a European.

Gadhan, a poll tax.

Gamati, land allotted to a labourer or *pyke* by the Ahom Government.

Gandharva Bibah, a marriage by mutual consent.

Gaonburah, a village headman.

Ghat, a landing place on the bank of a river.

Ghullali, a catapult.

Gohain, a title usually given to the descendants of the Ahom kings.

Golah, a shop.

Golmal, disturbance.

Gorkhati, a tax on timber.

Gossain, a spiritual guide.

Guru, a spiritual preceptor.

Hat, a periodical market.

Hal, see *Kulbah*

Hatkhowa, a lessee or collector of tolls in a *hat*.

Havildar, a non-commissioned officer, corresponding to a sergeant.

Hazarika, an officer entrusted with the supervision over thousand *pykes*.

Howdah, a seat fixed on an elephant's back.

Ilaka, a jurisdiction.

Jagir or *Jaigir*, an assignment.

Jalkar, a tax on fisheries.

Jangi Paltan, a platoon of Europeans.

Jeit or *Jeth*, the second Hindu month.

Jubara, the heir-apparent.

Jumma, total revenue assessment.

Kakoty, a writer, a scribe or an accountant under the Ahom Government.

Kanee, opium.

Kathkatia, a wood-cutter.

Katani mati, surplus land.

Kyah or *Keyah*, a merchant from Marwar.

Khar, a kind of carbonated potash.

Khargharia Phukan, officer in charge of a magazine.

Khat, an estate.

Khel, a unit or division of the Assamese people according to one's profession.

Kheldar, officer in charge of a *khel*.

Khitmatgar, a servant.

Khusery, a tax on grazing.

Kulbah, a measurement of land in Cachar equivalent to 4.82 acres.

Kulinism, a type of extreme puritanism under which a *Kulin* had the sanction of society in plural marriages.

Lagua, a personal attendant.

Lakhiraj, a rent-free grant.

Laskar, a soldier, a civil officer in Cachar.

Lixow, a labourer granted to an officer as remuneration.

Majumdar, a fiscal officer of rank.

Manmati, rent-free tenures granted as remuneration for one's service.

Mauza, a fiscal unit.

- Mauzadar*, a fiscal officer in charge of a *mauza*.
Mel, a tribunal, an assembly.
Mohunt, a religious preceptor.
Mohurrer, a clerk.
Mudai, a trader.
Mufti, a Muslim officer who expounds the *quaranic* law.
Murah, a cane-made stool.
Mukhtar, a revenue officer of rank in Cachar.
Muktear, an agent, a spokesman.
Nankar, a rent-free grant.
Nawbaisha Phukan, head of the Navy.
Nazaranah, a present.
Omlah or *Amlah*, an agent or officer.
Pargana, a revenue division.
Pat, white silk of the mulberry-fed silk worms.
Patgiri, a minor revenue officer.
Pathsala, a primary school.
Patra, a minister.
Patta, a lease deed.
Patwari, a village accountant.
Perakagaz, a register of survey.
Phukan, superintendent of a *khal* whose jurisdiction extends up to 6000.
Pirpal, rent-free grant to the support of Muslim saints or Mosques.
Piyal, a census.
Pundit, a learned man.
Pyke, an Assamese ryot under the Ahom kings whose duty was to render service to the king and State at fixed periods of the year.
Raj, a country.
Rajkhowa, an officer of the Ahom Government having supervision over 3000 *pykes* or over a prescribed area.
Rasud, provisions.
Rowana, a pass or permit.
Rupit, cultivable land.
Sadar Dewani Adawlat, chief civil court.
—Nizamat Adawlat, chief criminal court.
Sadhani, a tax collector.
Sadiyakhowa, a frontier viceroy located at Sadiya.

- Saikia*, a supervisor over 100 *pykes*.
Sair or *sayrat*, customs, tolls and other variable duties.
Salagram, a black stone collected from the locality known as Sala gramma on the bank of the Gandak, a tributary of the river Ganges. This stone is sacred to the Hindus, particularly to the vaishnavas.
Salami, gratuitous offerings, presents.
Saster, scripture.
Satra, a vaisnavite monastery.
Satradhikar, religious head of a *Satra*.
Sawan, the fourth month of the Hindu Calendar.
Sempung, a grandee of the Kachari tribe.
Sezwal, an officer employed for the collection of revenue.
Seristadar, a keeper of records.
Sisya, a disciple.
Sradh or *Sraddha*, offerings and prayer made by the Hindus at fixed intervals to the deceased ancestors.
Surasuree Panchayet, a tribunal for summary disposal of minor offences.
Swargadeo, the God of heaven, a title ordinarily applied to the Ahom kings in Assam.
Tahsildar, a revenue officer.
Tangoni, a revenue unit.
Tantra, a religious scripture written in the form of a dialogue between *Siva* and *Parbati* prescribing the worship of various gods and goddesses.
Teel, the sesamum and its seed ; *Sesamum indicum*.
Tekela, a messenger, a tea-maker.
Thakur, a priest.
Thakuria, a minor fiscal officer to collect temple and other dues.
Thana, a police station.
Thanadar, an officer in charge of a police station.
Tol, an institution where emphasis is laid on the teaching of Sanskrit.

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