CHAPTER – V
RAIDS AND TEA GARDENS IN CACHAR
In this chapter, an attempt has been made to discuss the impact of the large scale expansion of tea cultivation in colonial Cachar on the neighbouring tribes, especially the Kukis and Lushais, which affected their village territories, their social and economic conditions. This resulted the constant raids of the neighbouring tribes on the tea gardens of plains area of Cachar Valley. These raids executed by the Lushais ultimately led to the British Government to take severe measures with regards to them which ultimately brought the Lushai tribes under British regime.

After the discovery of the tea plantation in Cachar in 1855 in Mauza Barsangan, present Kathal Bagan, the English East India Company invited the European Companies and capitalists to take to its cultivation with easy leases. This led to the establishment of a large number of tea gardens in a gradual process and within a very short span of time most of the important areas of waste lands were covered with tea plantations. Thus, large number of tea gardens emerged accordingly during the last quarter of the 19th century. It is interesting to note here that, “During the days of mad mania for cultivation of tea large plots of waste land were sold in London to when the authorities came to look they found the plots were in a tract which the government acknowledged to be a part of Lushai village lands. The lessee therefore, could not be put in possession of the lands.”

The large scale expansion of tea cultivation and the granting of wasteland with easy leases by the authority for the tea cultivation, in many cases, led to the encroachment of the land belonging to the wild tribes by the tea Planters which seriously affected the economy and livelihood of the tribal people. The Lushais, on their part, reacted to this with nothing but raided on the tea plantation in plain Cachar by burning villages and killing people. Such behaviour on the part of the tribes invited British retaliations.

1 File No- 103-199 BG State Archives and Record Room, Guwahati.
2 Assam Secretariat Archives (ASA), Report on Matters Regarding the Disposal of Waste Land in Bengal, 25th July, 1871, p.2
It is to be mentioned here that, the British policy with regard to the tribes of North-East-India was one of the non-intervention in the beginning of their rule.\(^3\) Even an expansionist like Lord Dalhousie wanted to leave the hill men to themselves and followed a peaceful policy towards them. The situation, however, changed drastically with the expansion of tea cultivation and growth of other economic interest of the Government in the hills and the border areas. As a reaction to the repeated outrages by the tribes and the consequent insecurity of the entire frontier, ultimately the non-intervention policy was replaced by a policy of intervention, which is steady penetration into the hills.

The annexation of the plain Cachar by the British in 1832 and subsequent establishment of the tea plantation in 1855 disturbed the bordering between settled British territory and the territories of independent tribes, leading to conflict. Mention may be made of Dalu, Jaroiltola, Minadur, Debcha, Bagliaghan, Jalinga gardens opened by J F Sherer in 1860.\(^4\) Even after these, some other tea gardens were set up in Cachar like – Dudpatil, Ratanpur, Dhuarbond, Jafferbond etc. In the last decade of the 19\(^{th}\) century there was considerable expansion and production of tea. In 1881, total acreage under tea plant was 24,151 acres which increased to 62,179 acres in 1898.\(^5\)

The British occupation of the land for expansion of tea cultivation made the land unavailable to the tribal people. The total area of land taken by the tea planters rapidly increased within a very short period of time. From 3,71,990 acres in 1872 it increased to 16,29,524 in 1928.\(^6\) Following table gives some data in this regard.\(^7\)

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\(^3\) Goswami, Arup Kumar, *Extension of tea cultivation and its impact on the neighbouring tribes*, in journal of North East India Council for Social Science Research, p.199.

\(^4\) Haque, Moinul, *A Concise History of Tea Labour in Assam*, p.38


\(^6\) Goswami, Arup Kumar, *Extension of tea cultivation and its impact on the neighbouring tribes*, in journal of North East India Council for Social Science Research, p.198

\(^7\) Ibid.
Land taken for tea cultivation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Total Area taken up by tea planters</th>
<th>Area under actual tea cultivation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1872</td>
<td>331990 Acres</td>
<td>2800 Acres</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1878</td>
<td>587409 Acres</td>
<td>147840 Acres</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1885</td>
<td>921891 Acres</td>
<td>197510 Acres</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1895</td>
<td>1065268 Acres</td>
<td>276014 Acres</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1915</td>
<td>1323619 Acres</td>
<td>383821 Acres</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1928</td>
<td>1629524 Acres</td>
<td>427225 Acres</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The tea Planters considered that they had a legal right over their gardens, while the Chief of the nearest tribe claimed themselves to be free and sovereign people, who exercised authority in the plains of the foothills. They believed themselves to be the lord of the manor, because their ancestors had for generations roamed or hunted or levied dues or had been buried in that part of the countryside.  

It is also being noted here that, not only tea, even timber was being extracted from the tribal lands. For the tribal people, elephant played a major role for their livelihood, which they caught from the hills. But the Government of British India began to permit non tribals to catch elephants from the hills to plain thereby depriving the Lushais of their traditional livelihood. This annoyed the tribals very much and they expressed their anger by repeated raids upon the plains.

In addition to tea, the British invested their capital in oil, coal etc. for this they required the security for their capital. The tribal raids were therefore found harmful to their interest and a permanent solution to the problem was felt necessary.

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9 Ibid, p.47
In this way, the extension of tea cultivation affected the socio-economic life of the neighbouring tribes. The British Government was very much conscious to protect their economic interest while the tribes were also not ready to sacrifice their traditional right on land. This ultimately led to clashes between them. The advancement of the English towards the hills was seen as a threat to their very existence and they took it not only as an encroachment but also an invasion into their territory. They ultimately realized that the day was not far when the English would penetrate the hills and take away their freedom. They, therefore, started reaction against the British rulers in the form of violence, raids on the tea plantations, burning villages, killing people and committing other atrocities. The British Government, on the other side adopted a repressive policy towards the hill tribes and considered it imperative to prevent the recurrences of these outrages and in any case to bring the actual perpetrators to look.\footnote{11} The Government of India, Foreign Department accorded its approval to the forward policy on June 7\textsuperscript{th} 1866 and henceforth stern retaliatory measures were taken by the government against the tribes.\footnote{12} 

The hills lying to the south of the Cachar Valley were inhabited by various tribes known to the Bengalis by the generic name of Kuki.\footnote{13} In the initial stages, the Kukis, emerging from the Lushai Hills, now called Mizoram, created havoc in the southern portion of the region. Villages, which were growing up in the area were plundered and the plains people fled away to the northern bank of the Barak, in consequence of which, this region turned into a dense forests.\footnote{14} As a solution of this problem, Captain Fisher settled Manipuris on the southern border of Cachar with the hope that the Manipuris being vigorous and courageous would be able to resist the Kuki raids.\footnote{15} However, the Kuki raids continued till the forties when the Kuki themselves being driven out from the Lushai Hills by the Lushais who got scattered

\begin{flushleft}
\footnote{12} Ibid.  
\footnote{14} \textit{Cachar District Gazetteer}, Govt. of Assam, Gauhati, p.49  
\end{flushleft}
on the hills in the east and the north.\textsuperscript{16} With disappearance of the Kuki menace, the lace of the Kukis was taken by the Lushais, who made their first appearance on this frontier about the year 1840 with their great leader Lalal.\textsuperscript{17} It was the descendants of Lalal that lately been the cause of anxiety to the British government. The Lushais committed their first raid in 1849 and the punitive expedition which followed was so successful that they gave no further trouble until 1868.\textsuperscript{18}

The term Lushai was first mentioned by Lieutenant Colonel Lister, Political Agent of the Khasi Hills, who make a statement regarding Lushais that they appeared to be a cross between the Kukies and the Burmese.\textsuperscript{19} Lushai is a compound word consisting of two component words, Lu (meaning ‘head’) and shai (meaning ‘to cut’), meaning of which is the head cutter.\textsuperscript{20} The reasons behind the head hunting among these tribes, Dr. J B Bhattacharjee says, ‘It was an art of chivalry affording them the greatest delight and social distinction as a man’s importance was calculated by the number of skulls decorating his house and according to their custom, the funeral of the chiefs required a certain number of skulls.\textsuperscript{21} The Lushai (now called Mizos) were a sturdy tribal people living on hunting, fishing, food gathering and slash and burn cultivation called jhuming.\textsuperscript{22} Often they committed raids, plunders, kidnapping and head hunting on the people of the foothills. Because of their nature of settlement, they were mostly depended on the plains for their livelihood. The increasing difficult life of the hills, an increasing population and shortage of cultivable land made the wild tribes come down to the foothills for their natural outlets, which were not available in the hills. Some scholars mentioned that, the plains were also a happy hunting ground for the tribes for the perpetration of raids,

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{16} Cachar District Gazetteer, Govt. of Assam, Gauhati, p.49
\item \textsuperscript{17} Thorpe, G Wood, The Lushai Expedition 1871-1872, Hust and Blackett Publishers, London, 1873, p.10.
\item \textsuperscript{18} Ibid, p.15.
\item \textsuperscript{19} Meckenzie, Alexander, British Relation with the Hill Tribes of North-East-Frontier of Bengal, Kolkata, 1884, p.293.
\item \textsuperscript{20} Mohonto, Bibekanand, Unis Sataker Lushai Abhijan o Dholeswari Upatyakar Katlacherra: Ekti Parjalocharan, in a Teacher magazine, Hailakandi, 2012, p.33.
\item \textsuperscript{21} Bhattacharjee, J.B., Cachar Under British Rule in North East India, New Delhi, 1977. P.113
\item \textsuperscript{22} Chatterjee, Suhas, Mizo Chiefs and the Chiefdom, M D Publications, New Delhi, 1995, p.6.
\end{itemize}
kidnapping, head-hunting and slave procurement. Raids were committed to meet the needs of agricultural and handicraft products. Kidnapping was done to enhance the manpower for tribal economy and the kidnapping of women were specially done for the tribal Chiefs who made them their wives and servants and through these acts they proved their might. Lastly, head-hunting was necessary to obtain human heads for the funeral rites of Chiefs. Thus, the Lushais had self-assumed authority over the foothills, plains and villages where they committed regular raids. They not only considered raids as a display of their authority, but also imposed tax collection on these villages which terror stricken villagers had to pay.

The first raid is recorded in Cachar during the British period in the year 1849 when the Lushais committed a violent raid in the village Rupcherra, in which 29 persons were killed and 42 carried off captive. To put a stop to future aggression, Lieutenant Colonel Lister, Political Agent of the Khasi Hills was directed to proceed against the hill tribes and asked to take necessary steps and if possible punish them. Accordingly, in the following year i.e. 1850, Lister conducted a strong punitive expedition consisting of the Sylhet Light Infantry and 150 Armed Civil Police. He entered the Lushai country and destroyed the village of Mulla, one Lushai Chief. But when he found that the Lushais were more powerful and numerous than he expected, he then thought it better to retire. However, strong outposts were then established and every effort was maintained to keep out the Lushais from the raids. This resulted in a phase of peace and quiet and the area was stable for about 12 years.

After a period of 12 years there were again numerous other raids committed by the Lushais and at the same time the British retorted by sending expeditions to chastise them. By the 1860s, the Lushais attacked the plains of Cachar again, specially the tea gardens. On 23rd January 1862 the village of Adampore in present

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23 Nag, Sajal, Contesting Marginality – Ethnicity, Insurgence and Sub-nationalism in North-East-India, Published by Ajay Kumar Jain, New Delhi, 2002, p.41
24 Ibid, p.43
26 Bhattacharjee, J B, Cachar Under British Rule in North-East-India, New Delhi, 1977, p.98
Sylhet was attacked and burnt. In 1863 another raid took place in Chandrapur. In 1868-69 a series of outrages were made, mention may be made to the garden of Loharbond and Moniarkhal in Cachar. The garden of Loharbond was burnt, several inhabitants were killed and carried away many others pushed into slavery. Monierkhal, on the other hand, was attacked by Lushais in 15th January 1869. This garden is situated on the Sonai river, about 20 miles south of the Sudder station of Silchar, held under the ordinary Meerasdaree yearly rent paying pottah of the district. On 15th January 1869, very early in the morning, the Lushais attacked the garden in large numbers and soon the garden speedily fell into their hands. After burning the garden and taking with them everything, the Lushais departed. This attack created panic among the coolies. The loss resulting from this raid was very serious, amounting not less than Rupees 17,000 in all. Nearly Rupees 3,500 of this has fallen directly upon the coolies, who lost all their clothes, brass vessels and live stock, besides over Rupees 2,000 in cash. This attack killed nine coolies including three children and the two resident Europeans had to flee for their lives nearly naked. The remaining coolies were dispersed into the jungles.

It is found from the sources that, the tea company named Messers. Jardine, Skinner and Company communicated with the Secretary to the Government of Bengal and Secretary to the Government of India in two different letters, praying for compensation in respect of the losses sustained by the Lushai’s attack on January

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28 Nag, Sajal, *Contesting Marginality – ethnicity, insurgency and sub-nationalism in North-East-India*, Published by Ajay Kumar Jain, New Delhi, 2002, p.48
29 Home Department (Public) Proceedings, July24, 1869, NAI, Letter dated 22nd May 1869, from Messers. Jardine, Skinner and Company to the Hon’ble A Eden, Secretary to the Government of Bengal, No.11.
30 Ibid.
31 Ibid (See Annexure – L)
32 Home Department (Public) Proceedings, July24, 1869, NAI, Letter dated Simla, the 19th July 1869, from J Geoghegan, Esq, Under Secretary to the Government of India to the Hon’ble A Eden, Secretary to the Government of Bengal, Judicial Department, No.3355. (See Annexure -M)
33 Ibid.
34 Home Department (Public) Proceedings, July24, 1869, NAI, Letter dated 22nd May 1869, from Messers. Jardine, Skinner and Company to the Hon’ble A Eden, Secretary to the Government of Bengal, No.11.
18, 1869 in Monierkhal Tea Garden in Cachar. In its response to these letters, the Government was unable to uphold the claim for compensation from the public revenues for the losses in question.37

This was then followed by an expedition launched by the British which was soon dispatched into the hills, but because of the difficulties of the hilly terrain and the unfavourable weather, the expedition again returned without accomplishing anything.38 In December 1869 Mr. Edgar, the Deputy Commissioner, Cachar, made a tour into the Lushai Hills and succeeded in forming good relations with the hillmen by making a treaty with the Mizo Chief Sukpiai.39 But this treaty was short lived and within a span of a year after his return, the Lushais once again started their raid on the foothills.

In the beginning of the year 1871, the Lushais came down from their hills with great force and a series of attacks were simultaneously made on tea gardens of Cachar and Sylhet namely - Ainakhal, Alexandrapore, Katlichera, Moniarkhal, Dharmikhal and Nagdirgram. The last raid was made on Jhalanchera Garden and during these raids there was a large scale of destruction and killing.40

In Cachar, the raiders threatened the whole of the southern part of the District for several days. In January 1871, the tea village of Ainakhal in the south of the Hailakandi Valley was attacked, when 25 persons were killed and 37 taken prisoner.41 The raid of Alexandrapur tea garden was made on 27th January 1871.42 This was organized by a prominent chief called Bengkhuaia, who ruled over the villages of Serchhip, Sailam, Kawiri and Thenzawl. He had the reputation of being a good and popular chief. That day Mr. Seller, the owner of the Alexandrapore tea

38 Allen, B C, Assam District Gazeteers, Vol – I, Cachar, Shillong, 1905, p.36
39 Ibid.
40 Cachar District Gazetteer, Govt. of Assam, Gauhati, p.49
41 Allen, B C, Assam District Gazeteers, Vol – I, Cachar, 1905, p.37 and also Nag, Sajal, Contesting Marginality – ethnicity, insurgence and sub-nationalism in North-East-India, Published by Ajay Kumar Jain, New Delhi, 2002, p.48
42 Chatterjee, Suhas, Mizo Chiefs and the Chiefdom, M D Publications, N. Delhi, 1995, p.7
garden and his friend Mr. James Winchester, a Scottish tea garden manager of another tea garden were taking breakfast at Mr. Seller’s Bungalow.\textsuperscript{43} Suddenly, the Lushais burst upon the tea garden and there was no choice but to fly to the jungle. Mr. Winchester, carried his daughter Mary and ran for his life, but, was killed. Mary, a girl of 6 or 7 years old was carried off by the Lushais as a hostage.\textsuperscript{44} Mr. Seller succeeded in making his escape.\textsuperscript{45} A few hours later, an attack was made on the neighbouring garden of Katlicherra.\textsuperscript{46} Though the raiders were driven off by the labourers or natives from the tea garden, yet, they succeeded in killing five coolies and wounded people in great numbers.\textsuperscript{47} The attack was renewed on the following day but the Lushais were again beaten off.\textsuperscript{48} Three days later Moniarkhal, which is situated on the Sonai near the eastern frontier of the district, was attacked. The defenders were relieved by a party of sepoys and police under the District Superintendent of Police Mr. Daly and on the second day the Lushais were driven off with a loss of 57 men.\textsuperscript{49} While the attack on Moniarkhal was going on, another party of these savages raided the gardens of Dharmikhal and Nagdergram, where 11 persons were killed in the latter estate and 3 persons were captured as prisoners.\textsuperscript{50} On the following day, a party of troops and police, who had been sent to the relief of Moniarkhal were attacked near Nagdirgram, where 6 out of 8 sepoys were killed.\textsuperscript{51} The last raid was made on the Jhalancherra Tea Garden on 23\textsuperscript{rd} February 1871.\textsuperscript{52}

According to the sources, at about 7 AM on the 23\textsuperscript{rd} February 1871, a number of Lushais crossed the river Dhullapur and entered the coolie lines of the garden.\textsuperscript{53} They seemed to have had a number of guns, usual spears and daos. Several

\textsuperscript{44} Allen, B C, Assam District Gazetteers, Vol – I, Cachar, Shillong, 1905, p.37  
\textsuperscript{46} Allen, B C, Assam District Gazetteers, Vol – I, Cachar, Shillong, 1905, p.37  
\textsuperscript{47} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{48} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{49} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{50} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{51} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{52} File No. – 267/538 (Govt. of Bengal), State Archives, Gauhati.  
\textsuperscript{53} Government of Bengal (Judicial), File no.538, May 1871, letter written from W W Daly, Esq. District Superintendent of Police, Cachar to the Personal Assistant to the Inspector-General of Police, Lower Province, dated Cachar 6\textsuperscript{th} March 1871
men wore red *pagris* and some wore a black *khesh*. The Manager of the garden calculated the number of Lushais at about 150. While the Lushais entered the coolie lines of the tea garden, one head and four constable, who were patrolling in the garden opened fire at once and as the firing was heard, soon relief came from the garden and the Lushais were driven back across the river without much success. The constables succeeded to repulse the Lushais, but not before they had killed one Bengali boatman and two coolies and wounded five others. The houses of Jamedar and Baboo, employed in the garden were plundered, but nothing of any great value seemed to have been taken. The Government of British India rewarded certain members of the police for their outstanding conduct in repelling the attack on the *Jhalencherra* Tea Garden.

It now became absolutely necessary that a vigorous effort should be made to put an end once for all to these inroads. Accordingly, a strong military and police force was stationed within the Cachar province and a line of patrol was set up. It was also decided to send an expedition against the Lushais in the cold season, the only time of the year when military operations could be conducted on the region. The details of the expedition were arranged by the Commander-in-chief and an overwhelming force was organized to subjugate the tribes. The army was composed of the 2nd and 4th Gurkha Regiments, the 22nd and 27th Punjab Infantry, the 42nd and 44th Native Infantry, two companies of Sappers and Miners and a strong detachment of the Peshwar Mountain Battery. This was divided into two groups – the first under the command of Brigadier General G. Bourchier, who was to advance from

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54 Government of Bengal (Judicial), File no. 538, March 1871, a report from Mr. Daly, District Superintendent of Cachar giving the particulars on attack made by Lushais on the Jhalancherra Tea Garden on 23rd February 1871.
55 Ibid.
56 Government of Bengal (Judicial), File no.538, May 1871, letter written from W W Daly, Esq. District Superintendent of Police, Cachar to the Personal Assistant to the Inspector-General of Police, Lower Province, dated Cachar 6th March 1871.
57 Ibid.
58 Ibid.
59 Letter from H Lepoer Wynne, Esq. Under Secretary to the Government of India, Foreign Department to the Hon’ble A Eden, Secretary to the Government of Bengal, Judicial Department, No.588P, dated Fort William, the 23rd March 1871.
Cachar and the second, commanded by Brigadier General C H Browlon, who was to enter the Haulong territory by way of Chittagong frontier.\(^{61}\)

According to the plan, the British attacked the Lushais from both sides and in this attack, the Lushais were unable to resist and there was enormous destruction and death. The expeditions were completely successful when the Lushai Chiefs – Savunga, Langura, Lalzika and Benkhuaia surrendered to the British.\(^ {62}\) As a result of their surrender there was relative peace in Anglo-Lushai relations. General Brownlow in his report briefly summed up the results of the expedition which were as follows - ‘the complete subjection of two powerful tribes inhabiting 60 villages of which 20 were attacked and destroyed, the personal submission of 15 Chiefs, the recovery of Mary Winchester including 100 Britishers who have been made captives, the total loss on the English side throughout the campaign was 12 fighting man killed and 27 wounded.’\(^ {63}\)

Since the date of this expedition, the Lushais remained quiet for a long time on the frontier and the English hoped that the punishment that was imposed on them had the desired effect. Steps were also taken to promote commercial intercourse between the hillmen and the people of the plains. But, in the subsequent year, the peace as maintained by them become short lived and it held good only for 20 years. During this period, with the death or aging of the Chiefs, the younger leaders took the charge and they realized that the only way to get back their earlier freedom was to overthrow the British. To disturb the British, they stole cattle from the British camps, destroyed vegetable gardens and cut telegraph cables – all these were done to express their resentment. Their discontent was displayed vehemently when in 4\(^{th}\) April 1892 a party of Lushais raided the garden of Barunchara.\(^ {64}\) They burnt 5 houses, killed 42 labourers and mutilated many. However, this raid was repulsed and the rising was put down without any trouble. In 1893, another tragic incident took place when the Lushai attacked the Baladhan Tea Estate, a garden more than 80

\(^{61}\) Ibid.
miles away in the North-East corner of the Cachar plains. At midnight, some people entered the Bungalow, murdered the European Manager Mr. Blyth, Chawkidar, and 16 or 17 coolies. A woman who lived in the bungalow was mortally wounded.

Seeing the brutal raiding of the Lushai tribes, the British decided to bring the Lushai tribes under their control and rule them from the heart of the Lushai Hills. As such, in 1891, with the effort made by the English, the entire Mizo Hills was annexed to British India and placed under British administration. Thus, the history of Lushai resistance which was a great threat for British-India came to an end on 27th January 1898 when the Lushai Hills was placed under the charge of a superintendent with headquarters at Aizawal and the first Superintendent of Mizo Hills was Colonel J Shakespear (1898 – 1905).

Thus, we see that the extension of tea cultivation affected the socio-economic life of the neighboring Lushai tribes. The British Government was very much conscious to protect their economic interest, while the Lushai tribes were also not ready to sacrifice their traditional right on land (plain Cachar). This ultimately led to clashes between them. The British Government therefore, adopted a repressive policy against the tribes, this ultimately led to the annexation of Lushai Hills on 27th January 1898.

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65 Ibid, p.39