CHAPTER IV

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Chapter II had introduced the problem to be undertaken in this research, it has viewed the early studies on the problem of succession to Siemship in the Khasi Hills. Chapter III "Disputed Successions" has made a review of some of the more important succession disputes in the Khasi states of Cherra, Nongstown, Nongkhlaw, Mylliem, Mawiang and Nongspung. This chapter will take up the Cherra succession dispute of 1901-1902 in some detail because it was of the seriousness of this dispute and the highest levels of Government decision being involved in it that it received the attention it got. Its aftermath is Herbert's Report, "Report on succession to Siemship in the Khasi States" which will be studied in the concluding chapter.

First election:-

On the death of U Hajon Manik on 25 May, 1901, there came up three claimants to the vacant Siemship - Chandra Singh, Roba Singh and Bolo Singh, but the real struggle was between two only, Roba Singh and Chandra Singh, as the name of Bolo Singh failed to appear in any other document except on one occasion. 1 Captain D. Herbert

the Deputy Commissioner, Khasi and Jaintia Hills reported that the people of Cherra had held three durbars on the 28, 29 and 30 May and by a large majority have nominated Roba Singh of the house of Ram Sing, to be their Syiem. A minority was in favour of Chandra Singh, a nephew of the late Hajon Manik. By Cherra custom, Chandra Singh was disqualified as all the female members of his house and family had died which is considered a curse by the Khasis. He was also disqualified as he was of the house of Hajon Manik, who was "no Syiem" as Ram Sing's cremation had not as yet been performed. Convinced that if the formal selection were to be ordered by a large majority, and satisfied that the nomination of the Durbar was sound, that the proceedings were conducted with fairness, the Deputy Commissioner recommended that the nomination of Roba Singh be accepted and that he be appointed Syiem.


3. A.S.R., F.D.P.A., Nov. 1901, No.5. Ramsing embalmed body had remained in the Cherra Lingsad since 1857 and had not been cremated because of the dispute in the succession to that Syiemship.

Revision of decisions: -

The Chief Commissioner of Assam, Sir Henry Cotton doubted whether the Durbar which had nominated Roba Singh were properly convened and constituted. He believed that Chandra Singh was the heir as he was the son of the late Syiem's sister, therefore, directly related to Hajon Manik. He instructed the Deputy Commissioner to summon the State Durbar and to call them to declare whether they would consent to the succession of Chandra Singh and if Chandra Singh's claims were not consented and the Durbar wished to nominate another candidate an election by the inhabitants of Cherra should be held.\(^5\) Captain Herbert made it his first duty to ascertain who were the representatives of the twelve clans and he did it very satisfactorily and all parties agreed in the personality of the 12 Nynties, who constituted the Khadarkurs.\(^6\) Captain Herbert held a Durbar of the heads of the twelve clans of Cherra and out of 12 men composing the Durbar, 8 consented the claim of Chandra Singh and 4 opposed his succession and stated that they desired Roba Singh.\(^7\) Refering to the Chief Commissioner's order that if the succession were contested, an election should be held. Herbert, therefore,

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decided to hold an election at Cherra on 14 August by the adult male inhabitants of the state. It was observed that the majority then and there objected to Captain Herbert’s decision and that one of them went so far as to say that they would not acknowledge the man elected by the people as it was contrary to the religion and the custom of the state, that a syiem should be appointed otherwise than by the Durbar of the twelve clans.\(^8\) Herbert’s views was that election by the people was very advisable as the objection to Chandra Singh was of a religious nature due to superstitious beliefs of the people and had no personal connection with Chandra Singh himself, but being the result of the omission of Hajon Manik to perform the funeral rites of his predecessor. He urged that Allen’s remarks relating to the power of the twelve tribes(clans) to elect a syiem should be read with and need not conflict with more recent opinions to the effect that in case of contested succession, the people should elect the syiem. He further believed that if Chandra Singh be appointed on the strength of his majority in the twelve clans, the result would be unsatisfactory as the majority of the people of the state averted to the appointment of Chandra Singh.\(^9\) The Chief

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Commissioner felt that the declaration of an election by Herbert was an unfortunate step taken and that the Deputy Commissioner should have reported the proceedings for the information and further orders of the Chief Commissioner. As a matter of fact, Chandra Singh was elected by the Durbar by a majority of 8 and 4 and the Chief Commissioner was of the opinion that if the vote of the majority of the syntric was not to be accepted, it was obvious that it was worse than useless to have gone through the farce of an election by them at all.\textsuperscript{10}

The Chief Commissioner reaffirmed the policy of the Government regarding elections by the people for a vacant sijemship. He reminded the Deputy Commissioner that an election by the people of Cherra was improper as it had not been called for by the Durbar, as Colonel Clarke had suggested that "an election should only be held on the request of the Durbar, who should on the death of the Sijem, be summoned with the members of the Sijem's family and be called on to nominate a new Sijem; the nomination should (no reason against his appointment existing) be forthwith proclaimed Sijem". There had also been discussion for many years regarding the policy of election by the people, but since the order

\textsuperscript{10} A.S.R., P.D.P.A., Nov. 1901, No. 10.
passed by Sir Stewart Bayley in 1879, it had been the rule to discourage such elections, except as the last resort.\textsuperscript{11} Besides, there was no record of popular election in the case of the Cherra Syiemship and although it was alleged that the late Syiem Hajon Manik was so elected, it appeared from official proceedings that there was no contest on that occasion.

Hajon Manik himself reported on 15 August, 1878, that, "it was not the custom for Cherra Syiem to be appointed by election. The 12 clans and elders convened a Durbar by themselves and nominate a successor to the late Syiem. The nominee is subsequently made known throughout the whole Syiemship.\textsuperscript{12} In the face of the evidence quoted the Chief Commissioner had no hesitation in declaring that the right of nomination was vested in the Khadarkur only. The procedure of popular election, they resolved "is contrary to the custom of the state", and that 'it would be a very dangerous precedent occasion'. The order of the Deputy Commissioner for a popular election on the 14 August was set aside and Chandra Singh was appointed Syiem in succession to the late Hajon Manik.\textsuperscript{13}

\textbf{Opposition and reversal}:

Chandra Singh's appointment produced undesir-

\begin{itemize}
\item[12.] \textit{S.D.C.R.}, Vol. 5/141 Hajon Manik to the Deputy Commissioner, Khasi and Jaintia Hills, 15 August, 1878.
\item[13.] \textit{A.S.R., F.D.P.A.}, November, 1901, No. 10.
\end{itemize}
rable results. Many of the Cherra people refused to acknowledge his authority. The people of Cherra being dissatisfied with the appointment of Chandra Singh, submitted their memorials to the Government of India expressing their dissatisfaction and grievances regarding the appointment with a view to obtain redress in the matter. The memorial of 20 October, 1901, submitted by U Lu Syntiew, Hyntri, U Tibor and others may be noted. The memorialists stated that succession to Syiemship is inseparably connected with the duty of performing the rites and ceremonies of the religious institution according to established customs and usages. But the privilege of performing that sacred duty was confined to the members of the Syiem's family. Chandra Singh, being disqualified by the Cherra custom could not, therefore, perform the religious rites of the state and could not lay any claim to the Syiemship by the right of inheritance from the late Syiem Hajon Manik. They further stated that the appointment of Chandra Singh by the Chief Commissioner was a contravention of his own order and subversion of the existing constitution establishing in its stead an oligarchy rule and upholding an abuse of powers of a small number of individuals. It was also mentioned that Chandra Singh, in order to procure his election had resorted to bribery and purchased the voters.  

Henry Cotton considered that the three 

curbars of the Cherra state, which were held imme-
diately after the death of the late syiem and nominated
U Roba Singh, were informal and self-constituted and
Captain Herbert, who was not aware of the constitution
of the Khadarkur was influenced and misled by Mr. Robert,
a christian missionary stationed at Cherra. With regard
to the inability of Chandra Singh to perform the
religious rites, Cotton attached little weight to it
in face of the fact that the representatives well aware
of this did not hesitate to brush it on one side and
vote for Chandra Singh's succession. 16

Chandra Singh did not have the tact to
reconcile his opponents or the power to coerce the
opposition. While Chandra Singh complained of lawless
conduct on the part of Roba Singh and his adherents,
complaints were also received of alleged acts of
oppression by the Syiem. 17 On reports of violence in
Cherrapunji, the Deputy Commissioner led two companies
of the 43rd Gurkha Rifles to the town on 15 December,
1901. 18 The Deputy Commissioner ordered all the subjects
of the Syiem of Cherra to come and make submission to

the Syiem, failing which heavy fine would be imposed.\textsuperscript{19}

It may be assumed that the appeal of Roba Singh to the Government of India and the memorials of Tibor Myntri and others and the people of Cherra influenced the Government to review afresh the claims of Chandra Singh and Roba Singh. The Governor General-in-Council agreed with W.J. Allen that the election of the Syiem of Cherra rested with the heads of the 12 clans, but on the assumption that the 12 Myntris accurately represented the opinion of their clans. Further, there was no indication in Allen's report as to the procedure that should be followed if the Myntris were divided in opinion, and if their views were not those of the majority. As there was a strong popular feeling against the succession of Chandra Singh, many villages did not give their allegiance to the new Syiem.\textsuperscript{20}

The Viceroy taking very careful consideration of the Chief Commissioner's minutes on the Cherra case was reluctantly compelled to come to the "conclusion that the recognition of U Chandra Singh as Syiem of Cherra cannot be confirmed, and that an election by the inhabitants of Cherra State should be held as was ordered by the Deputy Commissioner on July, 1901."\textsuperscript{21}

The election was fixed for 3 April, 1902. Cotton convinced that he justified his action and that the course he took was in all respect a right and proper one, sent another representation to the Government of India with the hope for reconsideration of the orders passed. He stated that it was dangerous to weaken the hands of the controlling authority and to afford such a people “rude and uncivilised” any inducement to believe that an order of the Chief Commissioner can be set aside by persistent intrigue backed by a display of force. He was also doubtful if an election could be held without a risk of breaking the public peace. But the Governor General was firm in his decision.

Chandra Singh was ordered on 17 March to hand over charge of the State to the Myntri. He regretted he could not do so, neither could he be present in Cherrapunji as he was then in Shillong.

The election was held on the date notified. There was no actual contest as Chandra Singh not only withdrew and declined to stand as a candidate, but he and 8 Myntris retired altogether from Cherra and were in Shillong. Serious disturbances broke out in Cherra. It

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was alleged by the Deputy Commissioner that the adherents
of Chandra Singh fired on people going to the election
and thus intimidated the majority of the voters from
attending it. One of Roba Singh's men was shot dead
and three of Chandra Singh's men also received gunshot
wounds. It appeared that 747 voters were present, but
apparently there was no record of voters. All the voters
were in favour of Roba Singh, the Deputy Commissioner
counted their number and declared Roba Singh to be duly
elected.\(^{24}\)

After the confirmation by the Government of
India of this election,\(^ {25}\) a Sanad was issued to him by the
Chief Commissioner. His position was made more firm when
Chandra Singh was called upon to return the Sanad earlier
granted to him.

Final Words :-

Convinced that he still had legitimate
claims, Chandra Singh addressed two memorials to the
Secretary of State for India for a reconsideration of
the election proceedings just concluded. Curzon in for-
warding the memorials advised his superior to reject the
two memorials and confirm the proceedings. The Secretary
of State had accepted the decision of the Government of

\(^{24}\) Ibid.

India and was not willing to interfere on his behalf. 

Things would have ended with this letter, but the issue was taken up in the House of Commons by Mr. Weir, who put up questions to St. John Brodrick on 18 February, 1904, and 4 August as to why Henry Cotton's decision was reversed by the Government of India and whether the question of succession would be reconsidered. 

Brodrick's reply to the first question was: 

"The Government of India having regard to precedents and to all the circumstances of the case, were unable to approve the recommendation of the Chief Commissioner that the decision of the majority of the Durbar .... at which only the twelve heads of the clans constituting the state were present, should be accepted and ordered a popular election to be held, at which Roba Singh was chosen unanimously. The Government of India, thereon confirmed Roba Singh as Chief. The case has been very fully considered both by the Government of India and the Secretary of State-in-Council. I see no reason for reopening the question.

The Cherra succession dispute finally came to a close when Roba Singh cremated the body of Ram Singh on 6 March, 1908." 

27. Syiemlieh, D.R. British Administration in Meghalaya: Policy and Pattern, p.161 
28. Ibid. 
29. Ibid. 

p.162
The Cherra Syiemişhip succession case 1901–1902 reveals that with the best of intentions the various levels of government had to review the succession three times over.° The change of policy is clearly explained by Secretary to the Chief Commissioner in a letter to the Government of India, Foreign Department in which he explained, "In the present case, it has undoubtedly served to prevent the succession of a man whose authority could on religious grounds never have been recognized by the great majority of the people." The one fact that emerges from the succession to Sviemişhip in Cherra, is that it was never sufficiently and clearly defined to be indisputable and that the accepted method varied from time to time.° The Cherra Sviemişhip succession case of 1901–1902 reveals government mishandling of the situation, the divergent views of the British officials and the effect it had on Cherra population.


31. A.S.R., F.D.P.A., September 1902, 9 June, 1902

32. A.S.R., F.D.P.A., September 1902, No.20, 9 June, 1902