CHAPTER-V

BRITISH COLONIZATION
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With the commencement of the nineteenth century, British colonialism had touched the highest magnitude particularly in terms of territorial expansion and exploitation of resources. The conquest of Bengal after the Battle of Plassey (1757) had given them a great advantage in conquering the rest of India as the rich revenue could be utilized by them.\(^1\) In fact, they did it so schematically that rulers of various parts of India were gradually dislodged to add to the strength of British dominion in India.\(^2\) In the North Western region of India, British colonialism made great progress by liquidating the Sikh rule in Punjab and Kashmir in 1846, trying to establish their residency in Gilgit bordering China.\(^3\) As a matter of fact, China and Burma figure prominently in


\(^3\) The British occupation of Kashmir was desired more from the security point of view. To stop the Russian and Chinese advance the British felt the necessity of containing the Sikh Kingdom. F Drew, *The Northern Barrier of India*, London, 1877. Herbert B Edwards and M Herman, *Life of Sir Henry Lawrence*, London, 1873, p. 261.
British-Indian politics since the beginning of the nineteenth century when they made all-out efforts to promote their mercantile interests. It was this Anglo-Burmese commercial question that lifted the position of North East India very high in British maneuvers.

The North Eastern region was divided into a number of monarchies, kingdoms and village states. Assam, Cachar, Jaintia, Tripura and Manipur were monarchical states. In Khasi Hills there were a number of petty states under syiemship. In Garo Hills, Naga Hills and Arunachal Pradesh, the tribal villages were either under tribal chiefs or managed by the tribal councils. The British colonists had the advantage in many ways in annexing the North Eastern region.

6. John Butler, Travels and Adventures in the Province of Assam, Delhi, 1885.
to their empire. The monarchies were on the decline. To make matters worse, in Manipur and Assam there were rival claimants to the throne. The contesting parties sought either British or Burmese intervention. Burma was then a powerful state with political ambitions in North East India. The Burmese occupied Assam, Manipur and Cachar. Their army marched towards Jaintia and assumed a stiff attitude towards the British territory of Bengal. In spite of their policy of non-intervention, the British declared war against Burma in March 1824. The Burmese were badly defeated and the British emerged as the most dominant power by the Treaty of Yandabo (1826).

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9. This was the usual phenomenon with the decline of Ahom power. When the Manipuris drove out the ruler of Cachar, he went to seek British protection and ultimately all such moves by various chiefs and rajahs gave the British the upper hand in subjecting these areas.


10. Ibid, pp. 4-5.

13. Under the terms of this Treaty signed between the king of Ava on the Burmese side and the British, "His Majesty, the king of Ava surrendered among others his claim over Assam and the neighbouring states of Cachar, Jaintia and Manipur to the British."

The occupation of the tribal territories bordering Assam was now important to the British from various points of view. As J.B. Bhattacharjee puts it,

"Ever since their political ascendancy in Assam valley, the British aimed at using the tribes of eastern fringes as a screen between the newly acquired territories and the kingdom of Burma."14

Apart from this strategic position, it was important for commercial reasons as well -

"The discovery of tea (1823), coal and petroleum (1825), had already impressed upon the Company the prospects of promotion of its commercial interests."15

Moreover, Assam was exposed to the Naga raids and the British ultimately decided in favour of the Forward Policy.16

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15. Ibid., p. 179.

16. A Mackenzie, Op.cit., p. 129. In 1876 Col. R H Keatinge, the Chief Commissioner of Assam, with the prior permission of the Secretary of State adopted the Forward Policy 'for preventing future raids and exacting reparation for the past outrages.' Ibid., p. 130.
The first British contact with the Nagas was established in 1832 when Francis Jenkins and R B Pamberton travelled through the Angami territory in search of a route between Manipur and Assam. To quote Moffat Mills:

"The first time the Angami Naga country was ever visited by Europeans was January 18, 1832, when Captains Jenkins and Pamberton with a party of 700 soldiers and 800 coolies or porters to carry the baggage and provisions marched from Maneepore in progress to Assam. The route pursued was via Sengmae, Myungkhang, Mooran Khoohoo, Moheelong, Dhaseree river, Mohang Dejoa and Ramsah which latter place they reached about the 23rd of January, 1832."18

Thus the territories inhabited by the Nagas, which first came into contact with the British were those of the Angami tribe. The Angamis, fearing British invasion, put up a tough resistance in the beginning and fought with whatever primitive weapons they had. But the well-organized British

17. The contact of the British with the Nagas should not be taken to imply that the British established themselves in Naga Hills in 1832, but it was the earliest reference made in our sources about the British entrance into the Naga Hills in search of a road link between Manipur and Assam. However, their political motivation cannot be ruled out.

forces with the latest and superior fighting weapons finally succeeded in penetrating through the Naga country.\(^{19}\)

Thereafter, a series of expeditions followed. In 1833, Lieut. Gordon conducted the second expedition.\(^{20}\) The series of expeditions carried out by the British demonstrate clearly that they could not register much success although they were well equipped in terms of soldiers and armoury. But their frequent attempts laid the foundation for the process of detribalization in the traditional Naga political and social organization.\(^{21}\) Some years after the expedition of 1833, the Assam Tea Company, which at the time was the most prominent one, established its foothold in areas of Upper Assam bordering the Naga Hills.\(^{22}\)

\(^{19}\) Ibid. The Nagas used bows and arrows and spears. They also rolled boulders on the advancing British troops.

\(^{20}\) Ibid.

\(^{21}\) It was with the British entrance that the new administration tried to erode the political strength of the traditional tribal institutions by running a kind of parallel system, though extremely limited in the initial phase.

The ex-rajah of Upper Assam, Purander Singha (1836), seems to have felt insecure at this increasing British penetration. He therefore granted the territories of Gabharu Hills in Upper Assam bordering Naga territory to the British. This act proved to be of great significance to the British, because it was from this permanent establishment that they could easily penetrate and make further attempts to subdue the Naga tribes. Here we can rightly say that Rajah Purander Singha opened a constant dispute between the British and the Nagas by his grant of this piece of land. From 1836 to 1879, there followed a number of expeditions under the supervision of various civil officers and military lieutenants. After repeated efforts of Mr. Grange in 1839 and 1840, Lieut. Biggs tried his best to settle the political future of the Nagas. But his efforts succeeded only in settling the border with Manipur in 1842. This was one of the important measures adopted by the British in order to limit the aggressive activities of the Naga raiders in Cachar-

24. It should be noted that Gabharu Hills were not inhabited by the Angamis but by some other Naga tribes who shared the border with Upper Assam. Ibid.
"the territory was subjected to frequent raids of the Angami Nagas which made even the neighbouring British district wholly insecure." 27

Realizing the development techniques pursued by the British, some of the prominent Angami clan elders entered into an agreement with the British and agreed to pay annual tribute to them. 28 However, a permanent solution to the problem of British interference could not be worked out.

The tribal chiefs (Peyumia) of Khonoma demonstrated an extremely indifferent attitude towards their co-tribal and clan chiefs of Mezoma in the presence of the British officers. 29 These instances of the tribal disunity among the tribal leaders of Khonoma and Mezoma were taken to be a favourable condition for the advancement of the British interests.


28. No written agreement was signed. Since there were not many resources available in Naga Hills, the British satisfied themselves with the subjugation of some Angami villages which could be ensured merely by payment of tribute. Besides, the British were interested in political subjugation for strategic purposes as already illustrated in the beginning of this chapter. A Mackenzie, Op.cit., p. 108.

29. From these indifferences it is evident that the Khonoma elders had not consulted the people of Mezoma and other Angamis before committing themselves to the British. It is possibly this attitude which offended the Mezoma clan chiefs. Ibid.
but when the British sent their officers only a year later under the supervision of Elds in 1874, with the expectation of collecting tribute, the tribals not only completely refused but even went to the extent of killing most of the sepoys posted there.30 This incident was a cause of serious concern for the British. In 1845, John Butler took over the task of conciliating the tribes. He was provided with a reasonably strong force to help him in his venture. But Butler succeeded in carrying out British policy only to a limited extent.31 Assessing the situation with great care, he adopted a friendly attitude towards the chiefs (Peyumia) which helped him in procuring some items of ivory, cloths and spears as tribute from some of the villages. To the Angamis, he was popularly known as 'Zieni Shaha', and was respected and welcomed as an ambassador representing the 'White Man's kingdom'.32 These tribal leaders stated clearly their

30. Ibid. It can be argued that when they made a commitment to the British they did not realize the economic consequences. In a society where resources were limited due to both environmental and technological handicaps, and a new tax (tribute) hitherto unknown was levied, it was but natural to result in a strong protest which could take any form.

See also Political Proceedings, 23rd May, 1946, Nos. 30-31, India Office Library, London.

32. It is necessary to point out that a lot of misunderstanding has crept into history due to the biased accounts of the British civil servants. Butler for his kind attitude was presented these items as a mark of friendship by a few chiefs but he misinterpreted these gifts as a political submission of the Angamis.
incapability in collecting the tribute from the tribesmen. Before Butler reappeared in 1846-47, the tribal chiefs continued to indulge in intra-tribal warfare, plunder and other activities. This was enough to give the British an excuse for the establishment of a permanent outpost in the Naga Hills. Butler wrote,

"I was much amused today at the modest request of the Mozo-mah chief to grant him a guard of twenty sipahees to be stationed in his village when he should be able to fight all his enemies, and he would first commence by taking revenge on Kono-mah."33

This was followed by the construction of a road from Mohing Dejoa to Chumukedima and the erecting of godowns for grains and the market place at Dimapur. Bhogchand, a loyal British agent tried to settle the inter-tribal rivalries by advancing the British posts in Mezoma.34 This underestimation of the strength of the Angamis led to his death at the hands of tribal warriors in Mezoma.35

35. Ibid., p. 110.
All these developments made the British more apprehensive and the Governor-General in Council ordered his officers to take strong action against the killers of Bhogchand and also against all those who disturbed the peace and who defied British authority in Naga Hills. This led to two more expeditions into the Naga Hills under the command of Col. Vincent who, commanding a strong military force, camped at Mezoma. With a fully equipped army he attacked the strongest fort in Assam at Khonoma. But immediately after the expedition was over, he suggested to the British Government to adopt a policy of non-intervention in the affairs of the Nagas. The then Governor-General of India, Lord Dalhousie, approved the policy of non-intervention as proposed by Col. Vincent but he laid down in his despatch that the British government should enter into trading so long as they corresponded peacefully. However, in case of a breach of peace, they should be ignored. To quote Dalhousie,

36. Ibid.
37. All records agree that Khonoma fort was the most important fort in the North Eastern region (Assam) in terms of fighting equipment and military men. It was not only due to military strength alone that the British took over the fort, but also because some of the Nagas supported the British interference in the Naga Hills. See illustration of Khonoma fort on page 118 of this thesis.
"For these reasons I think that the advance post should withdraw now, at the time of our success and when we have executed all we threatened. Hereafter we should continue ourselves to our own ground protected as it can and must be protected; not meddle in the feuds and fights of savages; encourage trade with them as long as they are peaceful toward us; rigidly exclude them from all communication either to sell what they have got, or buy what they want to if they should become turbulent or troublesome."39

This non-intervention policy of the British did not affect the nature and position of the Naga tribes, particularly the Angamis. In the 1860's when the Angamis were attacked by Manipuris, the British found their last opportunity of demonstrating their might and despite repeated pleas for help against the Manipuris, the British turned a deaf ear to the request of the Angamis. This attitude of the British made the Angamis more aggressive, but before the British could change their minds with regard to this policy of non-intervention they settled some Kuki tribes between their territory and the hills controlled by the Angamis.40

39. Ibid., p. 114.

40. It may be noted that the British used the Kukis as a buffer, thus making the Kukis the traditional enemies of the Nagas for many years. This enmity lasted into the 20th century until the Semoma clan of Khonoma made a peace treaty with the Thado clan of the Kukis after which relations became friendlier. In the written record on the subject there is no trace of this peace treaty, but it has been derived from oral sources by the scholar. The scholar met many members of the Thado clan in December 1985 and also examined members of the Semoma clan in Khonoma for this information.
Possibly the British felt apprehensive of the Angami raids on British possessions, because the Angami Nagas who were the most prominent tribe and were in control of a large area of Naga Hills, raided the British subjects in South Cachar. This action of the Angamis forced the British to abandon their policy of non-intervention. Besides, the British had almost exhausted all their diplomatic tactics and even their befriending policy did not help them. It is important to note that when some of the Angamis were enlisted in the British force, which was a comparatively lucrative as well as relatively respectable job, the majority of the Angamis were least attracted by such incentives and preferred to remain completely self-reliant. Mackenzie observes,

"They suggested also the enlistment in the military police. This last idea had also been tried without much success. The hillmen could not be induced to remain long under discipline; of 37 Angami recruits, the average proved to be only eight months."42

41. There is evidence to show that such raids over Cachar were a usual phenomenon even before the British. But this time the raids seem to have been more vigorously carried out due to the enmity with the British.

42. Ibid., pp. 115-116.
When Sir Cecil Beadon became the Lieutenant Governor, he recommended strongly the policy of force with regard to Anglo-Naga relations. But there was a great delay in finding a solution to the problem because the British civil and military servants could not come to a common understanding. However, the major policies suggested by Sir Cecil Beadon in 1862 were as follows:

1. We might abandon North Cachar and all the hill tracts inhabited by the Nagas, and strictly enforce the Non-Intervention Policy of 1851.

2. We might advance to the hills, place special officers in charge, and maintain them by force of arms.

3. We might, while confining ourselves to the plains, cultivate political relations with the neighbouring clans and bring their chiefs into stipendiary police relations to ourselves.

Out of all these suggestions, the one relating to abandoning North Cachar and all the hill tracts inhabited by the Nagas was not welcomed at all by the British government. The reasoning here was that the abandoning of these areas in this manner would have appeared a kind of weakness on the part of the British and might encourage other tribes.

43. Ibid.
44. Ibid., p. 117.
in Assam and neighbouring areas to rally their forces and overthrow the British or at least stage a protest against the British Dominion.\textsuperscript{45} This is well attested by the argument of Mackenzie,

\textit{"The practical effect of such a measure would be that in course of a few years, Assam would be divided amongst the Bhotias, Abors, Nagas, Caros, Mishmis and other wild tribes; for exposed as Assam is on every side, if petty outrages were to be followed by withdrawal of our frontier, we should very speedily find ourselves driven out of the province."}\textsuperscript{46}

As a precautionary measure, some survey operations with regard to border settlement with Manipur were carried out. Col. Johnstone, without seeking the views of his superiors with regard to future policy, took two Angami villages of Medziphema and Sithekiema under British protection.\textsuperscript{47} The British government at the top had not directed Col. Johnstone to advance beyond the Assam territory but Johnstone did it as is obvious from his own statement:

\textit{"Before leaving Calcutta, the Foreign Secretary said to me emphatically, when I urged an extension of our sway - 'But those villages (the Angami Nagas) are not British territory and we do not want to extend the red line'."}\textsuperscript{48}

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{45} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{46} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{48} Ibid., p. 39.
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But contrary to the instruction, Col. Johnstone's own view was that the gradual process of 'civilization' of the tribes was the only means which could bring a settled advantage for the British and peace to the unprotected Naga tribes.49 However, these measures also did not register any progress. The British government at the top assessed the situation thoroughly and realized that the mission so far carried out was mainly devoted to the maintenance of their border security and not to the extension of their authority in the hills. The task of all the officials prior to 1877 had concentrated much on the interference in feuds concerning various tribes.

It was during the year 1877 that a thorough topographical examination of all the hills inhabited by the Naga tribes was made and Kohima was worked out to be the most suitable centre from the point of view of a British outpost.50 But

49. Ibid., pp.43-44. It is generally believed by the colonial historians that the British brought civilization to the tribes as is also clear from this statement of Col. Johnstone. But the gradual transformation into a detribalized structure is a process historically inevitable. However, the fact that the British helped in speeding up this process by allowing missionary activity cannot be denied.

50. A MacKenzie, Op.cit., p. 132. Before selecting Kohima, the British established their outpost in Chumukedima (Samuguting) and later shifted to Wokha. But possibly Kohima being a centrally located place made the British to shift their headquarters there.
before the British authority took over Kohima, Mezoma and Khonoma villages were considered by the British to be a dangerous threat to the proposed British establishment at Kohima. So an expedition was led by Carnegie in 1877 against Mezoma which completely destroyed Mezoma village.

"The village was accordingly attacked and carried by assault and the whole of it with the exception of three or four houses was burnt to the ground .... Mozemah Nagas, being without food and shelter, and village and all stores of grain having been destroyed, made overtures for peace."51

Here it appears that after the Mezoma expedition, the British authorities became more alert and began to understand the structural analysis of the tribals in the hills. It was for the first time that they began to identify the various areas of the different tribes. Our argument is fully attested by the fact that immediately after the Mezoma expedition, Kohima was subjugated by the British without any serious opposition. This encouraged the British to increase the frequency of their visits to other areas of Naga Hills. Kohima was made the Headquarters of Naga Hills with a sub-centre at Wokha; a strong police force was posted in the interior; and a house tax of Rs.2 was taken.52

51. Ibid., p. 131.
fact, until the British occupation of Kohima, the Nagas seem to have been completely unaware of the nature of colonial culture that the British possessed everywhere they went. Even the villages which surrendered during the occupation of Kohima did not know that the occupation of Kohima would make it a permanent British seat. But gradually when the British officials assumed their real colonial character and laid out their future schemes for collecting taxes from the tribes, they realized how seriously it was going to affect the tribal social organization which was fully managed and controlled by tribal chiefs, clan elders, and village councils. This brings into focus what Johnstone implied by "civilizing tribes".

53. The colonial ambition of the British did not permit them to recognize men as human beings but rather as merely the objects of labour. Even in the nineteenth century the Bida State of South African tribes was ruthlessly exploited in the same manner as the Nagas in the North East of India. Michael Mason, "Production, Penetration and Political Formation - the Bida State 1859-1901" in Modes of Production in Agrica, Op.cit., pp. 205-224.

54. It is a pity that even after taking over most of Asia as their colonies, the British continued to indulge in the exaction of taxes in such areas where the tribes had to spend all their energies for eking out the barest sustenance. It was not the insignia of their political continuity but a means to maintain themselves, sometimes even without the legal sanctions of the state.
However, the Angamis from Kohima also tried to work out some strategies to protect their tribal organizational pattern. But the British, ambitious in their scheme of collecting levies, extended their net beyond Kohima to other villages. When the people of Khonoma came to know of this, they immediately thought of strongly resisting the British. It is interesting to observe how some Angamis followed their tribal tactics in order to annihilate the British from the occupied hills. But apart from being too late for such offences, it was also impossible for the Angamis to hold out very long against the superior might of the British. 55

But one cannot dismiss so easily the account of Angami tribal resistance. The study of almost half a century from 1832 to 1880 shows how the Angamis, so small in manpower and materials, did not permit the British to gain a permanent foothold in the Naga Hills. Despite the best efforts of the British, the tribes could not be so easily defeated. What then was the exceptional quality

55. Even at such a critical hour, we find some cases of the killing of British civil servants by the Angamis. Such incidents were isolated and cannot serve much purpose except to illustrate that the Angamis were not ready to surrender to the British until the end.
possessed by this tribe that proved so tough for the British to subdue?

We find that the Angamis were basically courageous, firmly determined and well-organized. From the beginning of the encounters with the Angamis, the British were apprehensive of the tribe. Damant's impression of Angami Nagas reads,

"This tribe, i.e., the Angami Nagas, the most war-like and probably the most numerous of all the Naga tribes with which we are acquainted occupies the centre of the great range of hills which divide Assam and Manipur... They are a fine set of men, very war-like and enterprising, taking freely to trade, and possessing in themselves the material for forming a fine nation; but they are bloodthirsty to a great degree, village fighting against village, clan against clan, and in fiercer quarrels sparing neither age nor sex."

They would draw strength and inspiration from their ritualistic past as well on such occasions. Here the incident that precipitated the famous Battle of Khonoma (1879) is significant to record. By now the clans of Khonoma were well aware of the defeat of their neighbouring villages. The people Khonoma had been planning to send back the 'White Man' to his own country but they were also aware

of the strength of the British. At this critical hour, Thepfuchasa of Khonoma killed a tiger.\textsuperscript{57} This was followed by an elaborate ritual involving all the village warriors in a war dance exhibiting their weapons including firearms. Interestingly enough, to their own surprise, they found out that the village was in the possession of 95 muskets.\textsuperscript{58} The discovery of this fact and the realization of their strength gave them much courage. It was soon after that the people of Khonoma decided that they would send the 'White Men' back to where they belonged once and for all.\textsuperscript{59} The people of Khonoma were determined to defend their land.

This patriotism is reflected in the songs and ballads composed during this period. A song composed by Yani -u during the Anglo-Angami war clearly indicates the love the people had for their land. A loose translation of the song is as follows:

\begin{quote}

57. According to Angami mythology, the tiger, God and man were brothers having the same mother. Therefore killing a tiger was like killing a man. The killing of a tiger was celebrated by elaborate dances and rituals. Petenihu Chase (50), of Khonoma village provided the details of the legends.

58. Sievizo Seyie (75), of Socunoma village gave this information.

59. In the meetings of the clans, fiery and patriotic speeches were made to arouse the feelings of the people. They shouted, "Shall we be ruled by strangers who dress like women?"

\textit{Ibid.}
\end{quote}
They came unnumbered and fearless
We knew them not but they wanted our land
Across strange fields and alien waters they came
Looking more like ghosts than man
Weilding their man-made weapons
And toyed at war, at war.

Lol my homeland, my own
The Great God alone comes before thee
Thy neighbours lie crushed and captive
Oh send thy bravest, thy choicest warriors
And early turn the White Man back.

Lay down thy dead and mourn no more
For we are proud and we are mighty
And our harvest turns gold beneath the skies
May we never know plague and hunger
May we vanquish those who would bleed our land
May our people then rise up in glory
And return to where life is good.

It was at this juncture that the British Political
agent, G H Damant, who sought to impose British authority
by forcing collection of taxes, became the victim of Khonoma.

60. Translated by Babuno Iralu. See appendix for the original
text.

61. Some historians, particularly the ones who wrote from
the colonial point of view, have referred to Damant's
death as 'murder' and have demonstrated Damant's
visit to Khonoma as a friendly gesture, emphasizing
that the visit had no ulterior intentions. But historically
it is difficult to view Damant as a man ignoring his
loyalty to his government. Damant himself wrote,
"I would demand revenue from Khonoma and Jotsoma
in the coming cold weather and in case of refusal
realize it by force of arms; I believe the struggle
must come sooner or later and it is to the interest
of the whole district that the matter should not be
deferred."
See also Foreign Political Proceedings, March, 1880,
2, para 21.
Even the regiment escorting Damant comprising of 80 persons including military and police suffered a toll of 35 killed on the spot and 19 wounded. The ones who survived faced great difficulty but managed to escape secretly to Kohima and deliver the news of Damant's death. This created a great sensation among all the British outposts located in the entire North Eastern region. They sent out messages to Shillong, Dibrugarh, Sibsagar and other places for mustering their forces and decided to launch a final attack on Khonoma. But the killing of Damant and his men had encouraged the Angamis to a great extent and they had decided to immediately attack the British stockade at Kohima. However, it took almost a fortnight's time from Damant's death for both the hostile parties to have an open confrontation. "Khonoma, being sure of their early victory over the garrison, busied themselves on the 15th in burying their dead, feasting and rejoicing, and dividing their spoils, they delayed their attack."

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64. Ibid.

It was only on the 23rd October 1879 that the Khonoma warriors along with those from many other villages reached Kohima and surrounded the British stockade in an exceedingly planned manner, and were able to cut the British forces down to size. As recorded by Cawley,

"The Nagas advanced slowly and surely, trenching as they advanced. They did this so cleverly, erecting barricades from the trenches, that they never exposed themselves in the least. It was like an invisible, but by no means noiseless, enemy creeping on step by step. The howls and war cries of thousands of Nagas who surrounded the stockade were truly awful and were not without their effect on the enfeebled garrison."66

Looking into all the available literature on Naga warriorship, one could well assume the success of the Angamis at this juncture. Even the derogatory shouting of a Naga to the British just outside the stockade in Kohima makes it clear to what extent the Angamis had succeeded in their mission before the arrival of fresh troops from Manipur. Cawley has recorded the words shouted in derision by the Angamis to the British,

"We (English) had come here and occupied lands, we had cut their trees, bamboos and grass. We wanted revenue from them and made them coolies ... what will happen now."67

The Assistant Political Officer, also recorded that "at that time there were at least 4000 men surrounding us and of that about 300 had guns ... the whole country was rising to annihilate us."\(^6^8\) It was not the people from Khonoma alone, but Viswema, Ciedema, Jakhama, Jotsoma and Tsutsuonoma khel of Kohima who joined hands to overthrow the British.\(^6^9\) As Barpujari wrote,

"To the Nagas it was a war of liberation against the English who had advanced into the heart of their territory, meddled into their inter-tribal feuds, subjected them to taxation and forced labour so hateful to them."\(^7^0\)

It was the siege of Kohima that united many Naga villages against a common enemy. But at the eleventh hour the British troops, 2000 in number, under the command of Col. Johnstone arrived from Manipur and altered the whole situation. "The Nagas dispersed and the garrison was relieved."\(^7^1\)


\(^{70}\) Ibid.

\(^{71}\) Ibid., p.58.

Among the various groups employed in the British army, we find the Nepalis taking a serious interest in all their efforts to help the British. Apart from joining the British army, they worked as coolies and servants from early times. In fact, for getting help from Manipur, it was the Nepalis who hurriedly carried the message from Hinde to Johnstone. The others who joined the British army were Manipuris, Kukis, Kacharis, Assamese and Garos.
Before we proceed further to give a detailed account of the most historic and final battle—"the severest fighting ever known on these hills", it becomes pertinent to enquire into the root causes which added a unique importance to the Angami village of Khonoma before the entire colonial schemes. The British colonial masters extended their colonial net in Africa, Pacific Islands and Asia. The scrutiny of all the available literature on the nature of subjugation of tribal and non-tribal areas makes it sufficiently clear that it was these "savage tribes" of the North East Frontier whom the British found to be one of the toughest combatants up to the last moment of their surrender. It is true that on the North Western Frontier, the Afghans proved no less significant in exhausting British might, though sometimes with Russian help. It is also true that the British had a very tough time fighting against the Zulus in South Africa, but then the Zulus were a much larger force to contend with in terms of number. But the case of the Angamis

74. The Zulu tribe were the most powerful in Africa. In 1879, the Zulus attacked a British camp and slaughtered 1600 men, half of them British. But ultimately, in the final analysis, they were not able to hold out against the superior might of the British. A W Palmer, A Penguin Dictionary of Modern History, Middlesex, 1962, p. 363.
retains its own specificity and uniqueness in the history of British colonialism. J P Mills, the former Deputy Commissioner of Naga Hills (1935-37) wrote,

"The rising of 1879 was the last effort by the Angami Nagas to drive from the hills the hated British invader. Of this tribe, the men of Khonoma, a big village of some five hundred houses, are second to none in their physique and intelligence. When we first came into touch with them they had long been irresistible in war and from time immemorial had claimed the right to take tribute and heads from the feeble Kacha Naga villages of the North Cachar Hills. So stiff was the resistance put up that it took more than forty years to finally bring the Angamis into subjection. Between 1835 and 1850 ten military expeditions had to be made into the hills. In the later year Khonoma was taken by assault of troops supported by artillery. The policy of non-interference was then tried with the result that twenty two raids were reported within the next years. A string of frontier posts in the North Cachar Hills was then tried but this, in turn, proved equally ineffective."

Another piece of evidence to this effect is provided by Col. Johnstone, who actually participated in the war.

"It was the misfortune of those in the Naga Hills expedition, that they were overshadowed, and their gallant deeds almost ignored by the Afghan War then in progress. Some of the English papers imagined that the operations in the Naga Hills were included in it, and Government of India, which has only eyes for the North West Frontier showed little desire to recognise the hard work amidst difficulties far greater than those which beset our troops in Afghanistan. The force engaged, hoped that the capture of Khonoma which was achieved after such hard fighting and at so great a loss, would have been at least recognised by some special decoration, but this hope was disappointed, apparently for no other reason, than that the troops engaged fought in the east and not in the west of India. Kaye, the historian, once said that 'the countries to the east of the Bay of Bengal were graves of fame.' Well did the Naga Hills campaign, prove the truth of his words. A bronze star was the reward of a bloodless march from Kabul to Kandahar, but not even a clasp could be spared to commemorate the capture of Khonoma, and those who never saw a shot fired, shared the medal awarded equally with those who fought and bled in the bloody fight. 76

It was perhaps the only time in the entire colonial history that an army general was involved in fighting against a single village. 77 Not only a general but a number of other officers with 3000 soldiers were involved in that

77. Brig. General Nation was incharge of the Khonoma campaign.
"bloody fight" in order to capture a village with 500 houses. The Khonoma warriors definitely fought with the greatest determination to defend their land. J B Bhattacharjee writes,

"The prolonged war of the resistance that the little known village of Khonoma in Nagaland offered to the military might of the arch imperialist of the west has earned its people an enviable position to all freedom loving peoples ... the blood, sweat and tears of the people of Khonoma, the martyrdom of those who laid their lives, their sacrifice and suffering will continue to inspire our present and future generations with the spirit of patriotism and love for freedom." 78

An understanding of the colonial history in the global context makes it clear that it was the advancement of China and Burma which added strategic significance to the Naga Hills apart from the importance in the British economy. 79 With all this in view, the killing of Damant seems to have served what Archduke Ferdinand's assassination proved for World War I. From the early 1930's, the British had begun to pursue their policy in the Naga Hills with firm determination, but Damant's death just gave one excuse for the total destruction of the rising Angami influence in the Naga Hills.


There is no doubt that the spirit of oneness and nationalism had its birth due to the presence of the British. Tajenba Ao aptly puts it,

"The spirit of self rule was gaining momentum among the people of Khonoma by designing to overthrow the British administrators; the 'Chakka Fort' was the bed of patriotism that never could be assailed by any force. The influence of Khonoma diplomacy increased among Angami villages into a front of common alliance that the British could not overcome."

Evidently, the Angami villages of Khonoma and Kohima figured prominently in the Anglo-Naga relations leading to the British colonization of the Naga Hills. The Angamis demonstrated their might particularly in preserving their tribal socio-economic and politico-cultural system. It also focuses on the British design in taking over the Naga Hills—the process which took half a century.

By this time the French contact with China had also considerably improved. So there was no time but to muster whatever support and strength was available to the British from various areas for a final attack on Khonoma.

The charge of affairs was under Brigadier-General Nation. He commanded the forces brought from Assam, Manipur and other areas of the North Eastern region. Finally, Khonoma was defeated and its

"wonderful terraced cultivation confiscated and its clan dispersed among other villages. The result was that the dispossessed villagers found themselves not only deprived of their homes, but confiscated of their settled cultivation. They were during a whole year reduced to the condition of homeless wanderers, dependant to a great extent on the charity of their neighbours and living in temporary huts in the jungles. The result was widespread sickness and mortality." 81

But in spite of the defeat and the ghastly treatment by the British which followed, Khonoma survived, and the true heritage of Khonoma was well expressed by J P Mills,

"Severe punishment was meted out and Khonoma was razed to the ground and its inhabitants dispersed. It now flourishes as old, however. The sword has been exchanged for the pen and parties now go forth to seek rupees instead of heads. From Khonoma has come the first Naga magistrate, and its enterprising black-kilted traders travel as far as Bombay and Rangoon. But old customs are still kept

and old songs sung and tales told. The best of her old spirit remains and Khonoma, mindful of her generations of unquestioned power, shows no signs of becoming a decadent, pseudo-civilized remnancy, ashamed of its past and uncertain of its future.  

It is of great interest and importance to note that a hundred years after the war, on the 22nd November, 1979, the people of Khonoma celebrated the 'Centennial Commemoration of our Heroes' with the same spirit of patriotism and freedom. On that day they wrote of their warriors who died in the battle -

"It is one hundred years now since they fell. But they are not forgotten. Their names are still remembered and cherished, and their deeds talked about and sung in ballads. They died but they did not die in vain. Their courage, their patriotism and their sense of honour have always been a source of inspiration to our people and will continue to be for generations yet to come ... this is also an occasion where we should honour our heroes by trying to imbibe their spirit - the spirit of the heroes who made the supreme sacrifice in the defending our fatherland and our honour, the heroes who died so that we might be free."  

Looking into the resources of the Naga Hills, one feels convinced that the subjection of Naga Hills was more

83. Quoted from the booklet, Centennial Commemoration of Our Heroes, Khonoma, 22nd November, 1979.
important to the British from the strategic point of view, than the dominant interest in British Indian colonialism of extracting revenue, draining away the raw materials and marketing the goods, although it is true that a number of tea gardens were transferred from Naga Hills to Assam. Peace with the Angamis was well seen by the British long before the final occupation as a major solution to the problems of this region. From the post-occupation phase of Kohima and Khonoma, it is obvious that the British felt that their authority could be well maintained in the Naga Hills by controlling the 'turbulent Angamis'. However, the whole epoch of colonization did not pass without bloodshed on both sides. Though the Angamis fought with all possible courage and means, it was historically impossible for them to resist the British colonization which had by then enveloped the whole Asia, with the result that by the 1880's, the British had firmly extended and entrenched their colonial domination into the Naga Hills.