CHAPTER - III

NATURE OF GOVERNMENTS AND ADMINISTRATION IN
NORTH EAST STATES

In north eastern region as elsewhere the self sufficient administrative system was determined by her natural environment, communication, geography, climate, soil and terrain of hills in which the people inhabit. There is an all pervasive community spirit among the people as is seen all over the world.

Assam- The Ahoms ruled over Assam for about six hundred years from 1228 A.D. to 1826 A.D. setting up a peculiar administrative organisation in Assam\(^1\). It is a blending of monarchy and aristocracy\(^2\). Cap. Welsh when he submitted a report to the Government of Bengal in 1794 wrote that the Ahom system of Government was monarchical and aristocratic. Its durability must have been due to its nature of a mixed government.

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1 Bhuyan S.K., A History of Assam 1881-1826 A.D. Tungkhuna gia Buranji 83, p.XVIII.

King—King was the formal head of the state. As the first executive officer, the king presided over every department of the state. The king was known as 'Swargadeo'. He was sovereign and enjoyed wide powers. He was the real owner of all lands as well as master of his subjects. All honours, titles, offices, decisions and measures emanated from him.

Earlier, Ahom succession to the throne was from father to son according to law of primogeniture, but in later times, the rule of succession was violated very often as in the case of sons of Audra Singh. The person of the king was considered very sacred and any scar or blemishes on his body also acted as a bar to succession. The practice of conferring a new name on the king at the time of coronation was prevalent. Practically, the king had to act with the advice of three hereditary Councillors of state – the Bura Gohain, the Baragohain and Barpatra Gohain. The king consulted the Gohains on all important matters of state.

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4 Acharyya N.N., The History of Medieval Assam, p.111. "Originally, there were only 2 Gohains but during the reign of Sahumang (AD,1497-1537) a new Gohain was created".
Historically, the powers of the king vis-a-vis those of his three great ministers varied according to their personalities. Sometimes, the three Gohains could select a king from among members of the existing princely families, further they could dethrone or execute a monarch according to the strength and weakness of the king. Some Ahom kings like Pratap, Gadadhar Singh and Rudra Singh were so powerful that they paid little regards for the opinion of Gohains, while king Sudapha, Kamaleswar, Chandra Kanta were puppets in the hands of their Gohains.  

THE PATRA-MANTRI (COUNCIL OF MINISTERS)

In the 17th century, the Ahom king Pratap Singh created two posts namely Barbaru and Berphukan. The first Barbaru was the uncle of the king - Nomi Tamul. Thus, Barbaru and Berphukan could always be selected from four leading families, who had accompanied Sukapha - Lahan, Duara, Dihingia and Sandikai.

These two posts with the three Gohains formed the Council of five usually known as Patra-Mantri. It

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6 Bhuyan S.K., A History of Assam 1861-1826, 83,p.XIII.
functioned like modern Cabinet. The Barbarus was the commander of the force. The Harphukan governed as Viceroy of the tract between Howong and Goalpara with headquarter at Gauhati.

The Gohains— There were a number of Gohains who were next to power to the five Councillors i.e., Sadiya-Khowa Gohain, Marangi-Khowa Gohain, Solal-Gohain, Jargiyal Gohain, Kajalimukhia Gohain. These Gohains were governors of provinces. Their functions and responsibilities were confined to the provinces of which they were the Governors.

The Phukans— Below the Gohains, there was a class of nobles known as Phukans — Naobaicha Phukan, Bhitaruel Phukan, Ditningia Phukan, Pani Phukan, Na-Phukan and Deka Phukan. All the six Phukans were under direct supervision of the Barbarus.

There were twelve Rajkhowas (subordinate Governors) in the twelve different provinces.

7 Acharyya N.N., The History of Medieval Assam, p.112.
8 Dhekiel Phukan, Assam Rusanji, pp.20-21, in Acharyya's The History of Medieval Assam, p.114.
Besides, there were some Phukans, Pravatiya Phukan, Reidangiya Phukan, Khangiya Phukan, Tamuli Phukan, Naosaliya Phukan, Choladhara Phukan, Chiring Phukan, Dwaliya Phukan, Jalbari Phukan, Kharghariya Phukan etc. 10

There were also some Barua in charge of particular departments, i.e. Berthander Barua, BezBarua, Changsa Barua, Gondhiya Barua etc.

Officials of Ahom kings were not given any fixed salaries but they were given districts or sub-divisions. They received some interests from income of the district or sub-division in their charge.

The Ahoms had a well-organised and properly equipped army. During the reigns of the Ahoms, Assam was invaded by the Turks, Mughals and Narsas. The Ahom rulers resisted most of these invasions and succeeded in maintaining Assam's independence. The king was the Supreme Commander of forces. Besides, there were important military officers i.e. Hati Barua (officer-in-charge of elephant force), Neo-Saliya Phukan (officer-in-charge of Navy) and Khargari Phukan (officer-in-charge of artillery).

10 Bhuyen S.K., Anglo Assamese Relations, 1949, pp.3-5.
Main weapons of war were swords, spears, axes, maces, daggers, slings, bows and arrows. Fire arms were used in the early part of the sixteenth century. There were military physicians and veterinary surgeons.

Khal System: There were khel system in Assam. The adult male population of Assam was divided into 'khela' to render different specific services to the state such as arrow-making, boat-building, boat plying, house-building, catching and training of elephants, road-building, fighting, writing etc. Sometimes, Khela were constituted on territorial basis. Each Khel was like a guild to which lands were allotted for cultivation by the constituent members, free of rent in return for the service they rendered to the state. The strength of a khel varied from 3000 to 100 men. Each Khel was placed in charge of a Phukan or Rajkhowa or a Barua in order of importance. The Khel system was introduced by Samsi-Tamuli Barberus in 1609 during the reign of Pratap Singh.

13 Ibid.
An adult male was registered for state service was called a Paik and four Paiks constituted a got. One man in a got had to serve the state for 3 months in a year at the end of which, his place was taken over by the second Paik from the got and so forth. During the time of emergencies, two men and even three men might be called for state service. This Khel system has some similarities with the Mansabdar system of the Moghuls and the Lallup system of Manipur.

**JUDICIAL ADMINISTRATION**

The Ahoms did not have a separate judicial branch as in a modern constitution. The king was the fountain of justice. The other judicial authorities were the three Gohains, Barbarua and Barphukan. Other Phukas, Baruas, Rajkhowas etc. also have judicial authority in their respective jurisdiction. In the early period of Ahom rule, the king was the law enforcer and arbitrator in disputes among his subjects. After Hinduisation of the Ahoms, the Hindu law seems to have been followed. Justice

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15 Ibid, p.11.
was administered according to the Vedas, Dharmasastras, Puranas etc. Before Maumere rebellions, the administration of justice was speedy, efficient and impartial.

In administration of justice, the king was assisted by high officials. There was no fixed or written laws. The accused was produced before the king who heard the prosecution and defence, and after consulting legal opinion gave his decision. Generally, the punishment awarded was severe 17.

**BRITISH PERIOD**

After the treaty of Yandabo Assam became a part of British India. In 1826, Assam was constituted into a division of the Government of Bengal under a Commissioner. David Scott was appointed civil Commissioner in Rangapur and Agent to the Governor General in North East Frontier of Bengal. David Scott tried very hard to restore law and order and bring welfare of the people who were victims of anarchical political condition and Burmese occupation.

The administration of Assam was entrusted in November 1823 to David Scott, who was appointed as Agent to the

17 Ibid.
Governor General. In 1839 Assam was incorporated into the Bengal Presidency. By 1842, the entire Assam valley has come under the British rule.

In 1854, an Act of Parliament empowered the Governor-General-in-Council with the sanction of the Secretary of State to take any territory in British India under his immediate control and provide its administration. It was under this provision that Assam was separated from Bengal in 1894. The Governor-General-in-Council took under his immediate authority and management the following territories - the district of Kamrup, Darrang, Nowgong, Sibsagar, Lakhimpur, Garo Hills, Khasi and Jaintia Hills, Naga Hills, Cachar and Goalpara. Shillong would be head quarter of the province. The sylhet district was annexed to Assam by a proclamation No.2343 of 12th September 1874.

19 Das Amiya Kumar, Assam's Agony, 1982, p.13.
20 Imperial Gazetteer of India, Vol.IV, Chapter I, pp.32-33.
23 Gazetteer of India Part I, dated 12 September, 1874.
In 1905, Lord Curzon created a new province called Eastern Bengal and Assam. This new province came into existence on 16th October 1905.

The partition of Bengal was resented and there was a countrywide agitation. It assumed a national character under the able leadership of Lokmanya Bal Gangadhar Tilak.

Assam got a legislative Council under Government of India Act 1912. The first meeting of Assam Legislative Council was held on January 2, 1913.24

Under Government of India Act 1919, Dyarchy was introduced in Assam in 1921. The Government powers consisted of two parts, the Reserved and the Transferred. The transferred half were administered by the Governor with the help of a Council of Ministers. The Reserved half was administered by an Executive Council. According to the Act, the Governor-General-in-Council should declare any territory in British India to be a backward area. On 3 January 1921, the Governor-General-in-Council declared that the Garo Hills, the British portion of Khasi and Jaintia Hills, Mikir Hills, North Cachar Hills, Naga Hills,

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Lushai Hills, Sadiya Frontier Tract, Golconda Frontier Tract and Lakhimpur Frontier Tract as backward areas. The Government of India Act of 1935 was introduced in Assam. Accordingly, the first ministry under the new Act came into existence on 1 April 1937.

On 4 February 1938, Saadulla's 310 day ministry resigned in order to get rid of two troublesome ministers. The second Saadulla ministry came into existence on 5 February 1938. But it could not last long and Saadulla tendered his resignation on 13 September 1938. On 20 September 1938, a five member cabinet was sworn in with Gopinath Bardoloi as the Prime Minister of Assam. But after 421 days in office, Bardoloi Ministry resigned in November 1939 according to the resolution of the Congress.

25 Rao V.V., A Century of Tribal Politics in North East India, p.52.
26 Rao V.V. and Hazarika Hiru, A Century of Government and Politics in North East India 1983, p.60.
28 Bhuyan S.K., A History of Assam 1881-1826 A.D. Tungkhunague Buranji 63, p.XVIII.
29 Rao V.V. and Hazarika Hiru, Ibid, p.64.
30 Ibid, p.66.
Working Committee to withdraw Congress Ministry in provinces. The Governor requested Sandulla to form ministry. Accordingly, the third Sandulla Ministry came into existence on 17 November 1939. But on 25 December 1941, the third Sandulla Ministry came to an end because of the Guwahati incident. The Constitution was suspended. On 25 August 1942, the Constitution was revived and another Sandulla Ministry was sworn in on the same day.

In the middle of March 1945, Sandulla Ministry became unstable due to release of many Congress members from the prison. So, Sandulla tried to form a coalition ministry with the help of the Nationalist Party and the Independent Party. The Congress refused to participate in the ministry but agreed to support Sandulla Ministry. Sandulla submitted resignation of his Ministry on 22 March 1945. On 24 March 1945 a coalition ministry under the leadership of Sandulla was sworn in. The general

32 Ibid, p.69.
33 Ibid, p.75.
34 Ibid, p.82.
35 Rao V.V. and Hazarike M., A Century of Government and Politics in North East India, p.85.
36 Ibid.
election of 1946 brought Congress ministry under the leadership of Gopinath Bardoloi. On 15 August 1947, India became independent. On 26 January 1950, the Constitution of India came into force and Bardoloi submitted resignation of his ministry. On the same day, a new ministry was sworn under the Chief ministership of Gopinath Bardoloi.

Negaysi- Under the generic name of Nagas included a large number of tribes. These different Nag tribal organisations have different types of political organisations, some were governed by hereditary chiefs while others were governed by elected chiefs. They organised their village-states like ancient Greek city-states. Geographically isolated and far away from civilization they never tried to establish common sovereign state constituting village-states.

Angami Nagas- In the Angami villages, there were some sort of democracy. Among Angami Nagas, every village had a certain number of chiefs or headmen but their authority was little more than nominal. They did not collect any revenue and their orders were obeyed only

in so far as acceptable to the community. He was the religious as well as administrative head. Their rank and title were not hereditary but depended upon wealth and personal qualifications of the individual. 38

Konyaka: Among the Konyaka, there was kingship system. The king was called Ang 39. Kingship was hereditary and eldest son of properly married wife could inherit Angship of his father. The Ang used to wield power over a large number of villages. If there were quarrel between two or more villages under his control the Ang used to send one of his nobles to one of those villages to control them 40.

Migratory habits of the Sema makes their village organisation different from that of other Naga tribes. Some wealthy Sema founded new village either in the Sema area or even in the territory of other tribes. In the new village, the leader of the group became the Chief.

38 Hunter W.W., A Statistical Account of Assam, p.185.
40 Ghosh A.A., History of Nagaland, p.218.
The Kukias were strictly monarchical and their Chiefs were absolutely despotic. Monarchical system existed in the societies of the Tangkhula, Changia, Liangmei, Rongmei etc. They had hereditary kingship in each village-state.

The Aos and Lothas have a republican form of government with Council of elected headmen. This Council of elders managed the village government and Lothas have a similar organisation called nga. 42

Like the Angamis, the Rongmei have a peculiar type of democracy. They were governed by Chief but there was village Council. This village Council decided all trivial disputes and imposed fines upon the offending party. 43

THE CHIEFS

The tribal villages were usually governed by Chiefs either elected or hereditary. The Chiefs were elected by all male villagers. The qualifications for electing Chieftainship were - good physique, impressive personality, the gift of speech, courage and kindness and leadership. 44 They could be removed from Chieftainship, if they violated customary laws, if they were not honest or incapable.

41 Johnstone J., Manipur and Naga Hills, 1971, p.27.
43 Hunter W.W., A Statistical Account of Assam, p.185.
44 Rao V.V., A Century of Tribal Politics, 1976, p.117.
Whence Chieftainship had become hereditary, laws of
primogeniture were generally observed. But daughters were
not allowed to succeed their father. 45

POWERS AND FUNCTIONS

Powers and functions of village Chiefs varied from
tribe to tribe, from village to village. The Chiefs
inaugurated all social and religious functions of the
village. All sacrifices and worship must be done by the
priest in the presence of the Chief. He was in charge
of village defence. He must examine village fence
periodically and keep the village gates in good condition.
He must maintain defence force in good condition as he
was the Commander-in-Chief of the village defence force.

Another important function of the Chief was land
allotment. The Chiefs allotted lands for cultivation among
villagers after consultation with Councillors. 46

During British days, the Chief collected house taxes.
The chief in consultation with village Council decided
disputes among villagers. The Chief summoned and presided

45 Rao V.V., A Century of Tribal Politics, 1976, p.117.
46 Rao V.V., A Century of Tribal Politics, p.119.
over all meetings of clan heads of the village. He received
visitors to the village and sent friendly messages to
villages.

But the Chief did not exercise unlimited powers. The
powers of the Chief were curbed and controlled by the
village Council.

VILLAGE COUNCILS

There were village Council in Nag village-states
and it was the most important organ of village administration.
The members of village Councils were either elected or
appointed, but method of election varied from tribe to
tribe.47

Village Council consisted of representatives of
various clans. The size of the Council was not less than
nine and not more than 30.48

The term of office of village Councillors varied
from tribe to tribe. Among the Aos, Councillors were
selected for 3 or 5 years. Among the Tangkhuls, Councillors
were selected for life or as long as one is able to

48 Ibid, p.123.
command the confidence of the clan. Village Councils punished villagers who violated customary laws of the tribe. It fixed the date of village festivals and village sports. The Council also looked after village markets and village roads. Every year, the village Council collected grains from villagers and distributed the grains to villagers during famine or other national calamities.

The village Councils together with its chief was the village court. It was the highest court of justice and all disputes were decided by the village Council. Among the Rongmeas, a Council of village elders decided all disputes and imposed fines upon the offending party.

It must be appreciated that the primitive Nag tribes had a self-sufficient local administration based on customary laws.

**BRITISH PERIOD**

The Nag Hills presented toughest challenge to early British administrators. In 1864 and 1865, when the policy to be followed towards the Angami Nagas came under review, the opinion of local officers were "to reassert our

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49 Rao V.V., A Century of Tribal Politics, p.124.

50 Hunter W.W., A Statistical Account of Assam, p.185, Vol.II.
authority once the Nagas, and to bring them under a system of administration suited to their circumstances, and gradually to reclaim them from habits of lawlessness to those of order and civilization". The Government of India in 1866, agreed to the proposal and the Naga Hills formed a district in 1867 by a notification dated on 15th November 1866. The headquarter of the new district was Samaguting, which would be administered by a Deputy Commissioner under the control of the Commissioner of Assam.

In 1876, the headquarter of Naga Hills district was shifted to Wokha. In 1878, Col. Kestings, the Chief Commissioner of Assam decided to make Kohima, the headquarter of the political officer of Naga Hills District. According to his recommendation, the headquarter was shifted from Samaguting to Kohima. Phekokchung sub-division was created by a formal announcement of Assam government.

51 Administration Report for Assam 1901-2, p.39, (Sl.No.5 File No.305 Bengal 1866) extracted from North-East India by Bhattacharyya K.K., 1983, New Delhi, p.39.
52 Report on the Administration of Assam, 1901-02, p.49.
54 Ibid, p.100.
Notification No. 749-d, of 28 February 1890.55

This district came to be called as backward area. Under Government of India Act, 1919, the Governor of Assam assumed the sole administration and he was not bound to refer any matter concerning the district to the Provincial Legislature. The Deputy Commissioner used to run day to day administration in the district as the Governor's agent.

The Government of India Act, of 1919 could not appease the Indians. So Simon Commission came to India in November 1927 to study the Indian situation. As a result, the Government of India Act, of 1935 was passed. This Act kept Naga Hills outside the purview of the Constitution. Naga Hills was declared to be an "Excluded Area" under the Government of India (Excluded and Partially Excluded Areas) order, 1936 and from the 1st of April 1937 it was administered by the Governor in his discretion.56 Thus excluded areas would be administered at the Governor's discretion, while in partially excluded areas, he would be responsible for protecting the interest of the

56 Reid Robert, History of the Frontiers Areas Bordering on Assam, p.178.
aboriginals. In regard to these areas, no federal or provincial Act was applied save under notification by the Governor, who might provide for its modification or exceptions in its application. Thus, the British followed a conservative policy of exclusion which isolated backward tribal people from the people of the mainland. But it helped preservation of their cultures.

The 6th schedule of Indian Constitution deals in detail the administrative setup of all hill districts of Assam. The Constitution made the Naga Hills District autonomous with a District Council. This District Council was made autonomous in order to protect the culture, religion and economic interests of the Naga people. It was given lots of power i.e., the authority to regulate agriculture, the management of any forest not being a reserved forest, the use of any canal or water course, the establishment of village or town committees or councils and their powers. It was in charge of the welfare of the

57 Excluded and Partially Excluded Areas
Typically backward areas were to come under 'Excluded Areas', areas more developed than typically backward areas were to come under 'Partially Excluded Areas'. But it is only a formula of classification, the Act did not specify the areas which were to be termed 'Excluded and Partially Excluded Area'.
people and growth of the hill areas. Besides, it could assess and collect land revenue and impose taxes.

N.E.F.A. (NOW ARUNACHAL PRADESH)

Prior to British relations with North East Frontier Areas, the Ahom kings maintained friendly relations and political control over these frontier tribes. But, they never tried to annex these areas in their territory. The people of this region remained free, independent, unconquered and unexplored by any of the outside races. The tribes were ruled by their respective village authorities with least or no interference from Ahom rulers.

When the British took Assam, they considered this region as a part of Assam, but did not show much interest in the administration of the region for a long time. At the beginning, the whole of this region was not brought under direct administration, and extension of administration was gradual. With the tribes having been brought gradually under control, more and more administrative units were created reluctantly and placed in charge of either Political Officers or Assistant Political Officers.

In 1874, Assam was constituted into a Chief Commissioner's Province. On 6 November 1882, British
Government appointed "a suitable officer in the person" of Mr. Francis Jack Needham as the first Assistant Political Officer in Sadiya. His position was explained in the following extracts from a letter written by the Chief Commissioner to the then Deputy Commissioner of Lakhimour No. 49-Foreign Assam Secretariat, For, A, July 1894, No. 34-371 356 dated the 15th January 1894.

"Mr. Needham's position in relation to the Deputy Commissioner of Lakhimour has always hitherto been that of a special adviser on all political questions arising on your frontier. He was responsible for laying the foundation of modern N.E.F.A."

Needham was succeeded by Mr. Noel Williamson as Assistant Political Officer at Sadiya in December 1905. Williamson was murdered along with his followers at Komsing on March 31, 1911 by the Abora. This murder led on a massive expedition deep into the interior of Siang in 1911-12. This expedition is generally known

58 Reid Robert, History of the Frontier Areas Bordering on Assam, Reprint 1903, p.184.
60 Battacharjee K.K., North East India, p.98.
62 Komsing is at the present East Siang District.
as 'Abor Expedition of 1911-12'. As a consequence the Lt. Governor, Sir C.S. Dayley, suggested important changes in the administrative setup. In 1912, a Western section of the North-East Frontier Tract was created under the charge of the Deputy Commissioner of the Darrang in the plain areas.  

In 1914, the Government of India extended the Assam Frontier Tracts Regulation of 1880 to hills inhabited by Abors, Miris, Mishmis, Singphos, Nagas, Khamis, Bhutias, Akas and Dafias. As a result of a notification, hills inhabited by the above tribes, were separated from Darrang and Lakhimpur districts of Assam and constituted into 'North-Eastern Frontier Tracts'.

Thus North-East Frontier Tract came into being, as a result, the following administrative units emerged:

(i) The Central and Eastern Section.
(ii) The Lakhimpur Frontier Tract.
(iii) The Western Section.

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63 Choudhury J.N., Arunachal Through the Ages, 1980, Shillong, p.221.
64 Notification No.977 EV. dated 25th September, 1914.
The outer boundary of this tract was determined by a line which demarcated areas under actual control of Tibet and Assam as it existed in 1914. This line ran along the peaks and ranges of the Himalayas, that act as a watershed between Tibet and Assam.

The first and third units were each placed under the charge of a political officer with headquarters at Sadiya and Charidwar respectively and second unit under a Deputy Commissioner, Lakhimpur district.

The 'Inner Line' Regulation was rigidly enforced in the North-East Frontier Tract.

Government of India Act, 1919, which emerged out of 'Mountford Report' authorised the Governor-General-in-Council under Sec.62A of the Act, to declare any territory in British India to be a backward area. In 1921, the Governor-General, acting under the Government of India Act of 1919, designated all tribal areas in Assam as 'backward tracts'. This was accompanied by an Instrument of Instructions to the Governor of Assam, which empowered him to initiate measures as he thought proper, for the

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advancement and social welfare of the tribal areas under his charge. In 1919, Western Section was renamed the Balipara Frontier Tract and the Central and Eastern Section as Sadiya Frontier Tract 67.

Under the Government of India Act of 1935, this region was declared as 'Excluded Area'. The Government of India (Excluded and Partially Excluded areas) Order, 1936, classified the Balipara, Sadiya and Lakhimpur Frontier Tracts as "Excluded Areas".

The administration of this area was vested in the Governor of Assam who administered it in his discretion through Political Officers, and Deputy Commissioner of Lakhimpur in respect of Lakhimpur Frontier Tract.

In 1937, a post of the Secretary for tribal affairs to the Governor of Assam was created.

Since 1938, the Indian (British) Government had been worried over illegal activities of Tibetan officials, who have come down to Tsangpo and Karko, south of the McMahon Line, levied taxes and exerted forced labour.

from the Abora and Membas villages. However, the Government of India (British) did not take further action to ensure security of the area except for setting up a small military outpost at Sele.

The Japanese conquest of Burma in 1942 enhanced the strategic importance of this region. So, the Indian Government decided to push up administration into frontier areas of the hills which had hitherto been under loose control. So in 1943 some reorganisation in its administrative setup was undertaken and a new administrative unit, named Tirap Frontier Tract was created with certain portions of Lakhimpur Frontier Tract and Sadiya Frontier Tract. The new administrative division was placed under a separate Political Officer with his headquarters at Kergheta. All laws then in force in Sadiya and the Lakhimpur Frontier Tract were made applicable to the Tirap Frontier Tract subject to reservation and modification with which they were in force in the Sadiya or Lakhimpur Frontier Tracts as the case would be.

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69 Regulation 1 of 1943: The North-East Frontier Tracts (Internal Administration) Regulation, 1943.
70 Section 3 of the Regulation 1 of 1943: The North-East Frontier Tracts (Internal Administration) Regulation, 1943.
In 1946, the Balipara Frontier Tract was divided into the Salu Sub-Agency and Subansiri Area, with their headquarters at Charduar and North Lakhimour respectively. In 1948, Sadiya Frontier Tract was similarly divided into two separate units, the Abor Hills District and the Mishmi Hills District. This territorial arrangement prevailed till the commencement of the Constitution of free India.

The new Constitution of free India re-enacted the provisions of the Government of India Act 1935, as they applied to excluded areas. So, the authority of the Governor of Assam acting in his discretion was restored. Another development was the appointment of the External Affairs Ministry to act as an administrative agency for the President.

On 26th January 1950, an Adviser to the Governor of Assam assumed direct charge of administration of North East Frontier Tract. He was the administrative head and his secretariat was situated in Shillong. He was assisted


72 Regulation 1 of 1948: The North East Frontier Tracts (Internal Administration), Regulation, 1948.
by a Legal Adviser, an Adviser for Tribal Affairs, a Financial Adviser and the Heads of Departments for Health Services, Engineering, Education, Agriculture and Forests, whose work was co-ordinated by a Development Commissioner. The Adviser was also responsible for the unified and co-ordinated control of the Assam Rifles to the Ministry of External Affairs through the Governor 73.

TRIBAL POLITICAL SYSTEM

The lowest unit of Political organisation in most of North-East Frontier Area is the village community. But the system of village administration is different from tribe to tribe. Authoritarian type of institutions existed among the Binhoos, Khantal, Noktas and the Wanchos, while the Republican type was found among the Monpas, the Akas, the Sherdupens, the Tangsa and the Adis 74.

Verrier Elwin noted that the Noktas and the Wanchos were ruled by chiefs, the Sherdupens and Akas of Khasi, in spite of having Village Councils, were dominated by aristocratic families 75.

74 Rao Y.W., A Century of Tribal Politics 1976, New Delhi, p.103.
THE CHIEFTAINSHIP

Every village had a chief, like the Nagas, it was an age-old institution and the chief was the pivot round which the entire village administration revolved.

But the position of the village chief varied from village to village. The Mosetos and the Wancoos had powerful chiefs but the Akas and Sherdukpenas were dominated by aristocratic families. In some villages, there were more than one chief.  

The chiefs were known by different names in different societies - Nichre - Nagga among the Akas, Gam among the Adis, Luwang among the Mosetos, Wangham among the Wancoos, Ichik Akhoo among the Sherdukpenas.

The chiefs were either elected for a fixed period or hereditary. Among the Sherdukpenas, the chiefs were chosen for life but not hereditary and he might be removed if he lost the confidence of his people.

77 Elwin Verrier, Democracy in NEFA, p.21.
78 Elwin Verrier, A Philosophy for NEGA, p.155.
The powers and functions of the chief increased after the areas have been brought under formal administration by the British and since then he had been acting on behalf of the British Government also. He acted as the head of all social, political, administrative and religious institutions. In some tribes, especially among the Wanchoos and Noetes, the powers and position of chiefs are enormous. He maintains peace and order in the area under his jurisdiction. Generally, minor disputes are settled by chief and only serious matters are referred to the Village Council.

VILLAGE COUNCIL

Village Council existed from time immemorial. It consisted of village chief, the local priest, and some selected leading members of the village. All adult male villagers had a democratic right to join and participate in its deliberation. Among the Adis, women could not participate in village Councils.79.

The village Council is known by different local names in different tribes i.e. Kebang among the Adis,

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Tsa Tung dai among the Singhos, Khaphne, Khepong, Khapa among the Tangees, Yangchu-Yangcha among the Vanchoos, Ngothun among the Nootas, Mokchup among the Khentis, Phrai among the Kamam Mishmi, Raiz among the Akes.

In matters of organisation and powers, the village Councils differed among themselves. Thus, some village Councils, of Shadupons, the Akes, the Monpas, the Tangees and the Aiti were better organised and enjoyed more powers than other village Councils. The most highly developed and effective of all tribal Councils was the Aiti Kegbang, which might become a model for the whole of NEFA. In the Aiti Kegbang, everyone had an equal vote. Laws were framed by the people, sanctioned by the Council and promulgated by the President. In spite of some differences, certain things were common to all the tribes. All village Councils derived their authority from the people and there had been both social and supernatural sanctions behind the authority of the village Councils. It was a common belief that, anyone who gave false

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60 Ibid, p.156.
evidence was visited with divine wrath and generated popular scorn.\textsuperscript{82}

Village Council enjoyed administrative and development functions as well as judicial functions. The village Council maintained peace and order in the village. It also allotted area for jhum cultivation, decided when and how village festivals would be performed and sacrifices offered. The village Council also acted as supreme court of the people. All major serious disputes were placed before it for judgement. The Councils might resort to oaths and when there was difficulty in arriving at truth. All punishments were decided according to customs followed by Tribes. They placed their custom above men and did not tolerate any violation of it.

Decisions were taken by general agreement, if discussion failed to arrive at any decision, the method of oaths or ordinances were finally resorted to. In the past, punishment imposed by the Councils were severe.\textsuperscript{83}

Savage punishment of former days has been discouraged and almost disappeared during the British rule. Imposition

\textsuperscript{82} Ibid, p.160.

\textsuperscript{83} Elwin Verrier, A Philosophy in NEFA, p.163.
of fine became the normal form of punishment. Even murder, kidnapping etc. were punished by payment of compensation. Besides fine, excommunication was another form of punishments. Thus, village Councils have been functioning as local self-governing authority at village level.

The British recognised the importance of these village Councils and did not interfere with the activities of the tribal Councils when they extended their administration in these areas. Besides, the tribal council worked within the framework of the Assam Frontier (Administration of Justice) Regulation of 1945.

Regulation 1 of 1945 dealt separately with the police duties of the village authorities and civil and criminal proceedings. The village authorities maintained law and order in villages without themselves being police officers. But in such cases like heinous crimes, the village authorities were to report to the Political Officer, Assistant Political Officer as soon as possible.

In chapter III, Section 15 of the Regulation 1 of 1945, it was said that 'Criminal justice shall be administered by the Political Officer, Assistant Political Officer and Village Authorities'.
In chapter IV, Section 36 of the Regulation, it was said that 'Civil Justice shall be administered by the Political Officer, Assistant Political Officer and the Village Authorities'.

Many complicated disputes were settled by village Councils according to tribal custom. Any party who was not satisfied with the decision of village authorities could make an appeal to the Assistant Political Officer. If he was not still satisfied with the decision of the Assistant Political Officer, he could make an appeal to the Political Officer, if the value of the suit was not less than Rupees 500 or if the suit involved a question of tribal rights or customs, or of the right to or possession of immovable property.

Under Indian Constitution, NEFA was placed directly under the Governor of Assam acting as an agent of the Central Government. The Indian Constitution virtually incorporated the provisions of the Government of India Act of 1935, as they applied to excluded areas. The authority of the Governor of Assam acting in his discretion over North East Frontier Tract as Agent to the Central Government was retained. A new significant development was appointment of External Affairs Ministry to act as
administrative agency for the President. This is done in conformity with international practices and U.N. charter of exercising full administrative responsibility of backward people.

Trippura: In the beginning of the 15th century, an efficient government came into being in Tripura during the reign of Ratna Manikya. He brought 3 Bengalis from Lakshnavati in order to improve his administration. Thus, he combined in his administration, the features of Muslim and Hindu administrative systems and introduced both Bengalee and Persian as official languages.

The king was at the apex of administration and under him there was Missif or Liaison officer. Every tribe had one headman known as Roy. Under Roy, there was a Serdar or Chief of the village. The hierarchy of the administrative system may be represented as follows:

Maharaja

Missif or Liaison Officer

Roy or Headman of the Tribe

Serdar or Chief of the Village

Individual tribal.

84 Battercharoyee Bani Kantha, Tripura, the Land and its People, New Delhi, 1980, p. 48.

85 Battercharoyee Bani Kantha, Tripura, the Land and its People, p. 49.
Afterwards, the administrative system was reformed on the British pattern.

The case of Chakta Roshnabad brought the British in contact with Tripura in 1765. Leek was appointed the resident in the court of Krishna Manekya. In 1871, a Political Agent was appointed in the Court of Birchandra Manekya for suppressing the Kukis.

On the advice of the Political Agent, Maharaja Birchandra introduced many administrative reforms on the Western pattern. Maharaja appointed a minister who was given overall charge of the Government. Earlier, the executive powers were exercised by the Vizir and the Dewan, the highest executive officials in the state. He established a Council of Ministers, in place of a single Dewan. He also introduced the features of district administration. For better administration, north and south sub-divisions were created. Municipality was introduced in Agartala.

86 Chakta Roshnabad, originally formed a part of the state of Hill Tippera which came into possession of the Muslims in 1733. The British East India Company acquired Chakta Roshnabad from Muslims. V.K. Menon, The History of Integration, 1956, pp.301-302.

87 Bhattacharya B.K., Pattern of Administrative Organisation in Tripura - Gan Choudhury, Delhi, 1979, pp.50-51.
and the first chairman was a British (Political Agent)\textsuperscript{88}.

During his reign, slavery and Sati were abolished. For the first time, Tenancy Act was compiled. With the advice of the Political Agent, Maharaja introduced reform for judicial administration of Hill Tripura. In 1872, Maharaja established the Khas Appeal Adalat (Royal Court of Appeal) for final judgement of civil and criminal cases\textsuperscript{89}. The system of examination for lawyers was introduced\textsuperscript{90}. Radhakishore Ranikya created an Amatya Sabha (Advisory Council) consisting of 5 members. Police department was separated from Revenue Department and Police Department was re-organised in 1907\textsuperscript{91}. The whole state was divided into a number of thanas or police stations. Maharaja introduced modern system of education, reformed the department of public health, agriculture and police on British pattern. The New Arms Act, the Penal Code Amendment Act were promulgated. In 1903, the first

\textsuperscript{88} Choudhury J.C., Local Government in Tripura by Goh Choudhury, p.142.
\textsuperscript{89} Ibid, p.51.
\textsuperscript{90} Kamaljit Rajkumar, Anup Magazine, 1977 Agartala, p.71.
\textsuperscript{91} Battacharya B.K., Ibid, p.51.
Tripura State Gazetteer was published.92

The last ruling Maharaja, Bikram Kishore attempted decentralization in administration. He constituted 3 bodies (i) Mantrana Sabha or Advisory Council (ii) Bybasthanak Sabha or the Legislative Council and (iii) Mantri Perisath or the Executive Council.93 The first Council had power to give final decisions on important matters placed before the Maharaja for consideration. The 2nd organ was to consider bills drafted by the executive department. The third body had administrative powers.

Maharaja reconstituted the traditional tribal organisations for self-administration by passing the Mondali Act.

Manipur: From times immemorial Manipur had a monarchical form of government. The king was the head of administration and religion. He was known by various names as Madingu, Maharaja, Leiningthou, Leikolimapu etc. He used to exercise supreme power, as head of the executive. All lands belonged to him and he was the first among his

93 Battacharya B.K., Ibid, n.52.
subjects, in all matters, concerning public life. The king was the fountain of honours and all honours were conferred by the king. Those persons who showed bravery in war, sports, catching of wild animals were honoured with gifts i.e. Khomanchesha, Lamthang Khulet, Ningthou Phi etc. 94 In ancient time, Manipur being a small state, the king had to rely solely on public support for his continuance. The most powerful Meitei king, Garebniwaz had to abdicate the throne for his oppressive and excessive zeal over religious policy in 1748. Similarly in 1844, Nara Singh was declared king of Manipur, on popular demand.

In Manipur, Kingship was not always based on law of primogeniture. From Pakhangba to Raja Loitongba (1122-1150 A.D.), the rule of succession was based on law of primogeniture. But after this, any powerful man within the Ningthouja clan could become king. 95 The British tried to re-introduce the law of primogeniture in Manipur. 96 Like the Ahoms,

94 Loina Shillon, Translated by O.Bhogeshwor, 1967, Imphal, p.7.
96 Sanad given to Raja Churuchand Singh of Manipur.
the practice of conferring a new name on the king (phambaol Minghul) at the time of coronation was prevalent.

The king maintained law and order in the state with the help of police. The Police Department was in charge of an officer called Kntuel.

**COUNCIL OF MINISTERS**

The king was assisted in his administration by a Council of Ministers. Usually, Ministers were men of skill, experience, intellect and resourcefulness. All Ministers were appointed by the king from among the sixty-four phambous. Unlike the Ahom ministers, they were not hereditary and they were individually and collectively responsible to the king.

The strength of the Council of Ministers varied from time to time. Usually, it was composed of ten ministers and they were known as Mingthou Pongba Tars - i.e. Mongthonba, Pukhrema, Wengkeilakpa, Yelalkullakpa, Khunilekoe, Khurilakpa, two Shanglenlakpas, and two Shangkkubes Shangleakpas. These ten ministers existed till 1907.97

The king did not take up matters of national importance without consultation and co-operation of his ministers.

97 Khelchandra quoted from Iboibi's the Manipur Administration, p.63.
These Ministers were known as Ashuppa (all in all), Ningthoubu Ngamba Angamba (nobles who could influence the king) etc. Even Garabniuwaz sought advice and co-operation of his ministers. But it is also a fact that Garabniuwaz was also able to overrule his ministers. So, the powers and position of the Council of Ministers depended upon the personality of the king.

Among the Council of Ministers, Hongsbonba exercised great influence over other ministers and the king. According to N. Ibobi, Hongsbonba occupied the position of Prime Minister.

Like the Ahoms, the ministers were paid in kind, not in cash. They were given farming lands, salt springs, lakes, Coleis etc.

Manipur was divided into two (1) Valley and (II) Hills and headquarter of administration was in the valley.

In 1893-94, the hills were divided into five sub-divisions - Sen, Ukhrul, Tamenglong, Tengnoupal and Churachandpur. Each sub-division was under an officer called Lum Subedar. Each Lum Subedar was assisted in his

duties by seven Lumbus. In 1906, all matters related
with Hills were taken over by the Political Agent. 99

The Valley was divided into seven portions for seven
clans. Imphal area was divided into four Leikais - Khwei,
Yaishul, Khurai and Wangkhei. 100

PANAS

The people of Manipur were divided into a number of
Panes. 101 In 1074, there were six panes - Ahallup, Heparup,
Khabam, Leinhea, Otsangba and Hidakphanba. But these six
panes had subsequently been reduced to four panes. 102

Originally, Panes were created for military purposes.
But in times of peace, local festivals like Polo, boat
races and races were conducted on the basis of Panes. 103

All the people of the kingdom were to serve the king ten
days in a month, this system was known as Lallup or forced
and unpaid labour. But in 1892, it was abolished by the
British Government. 104. In place of Lallup, a House tax
of Rupees 2 per annum was levied.

99 Shyankhanhak Sah., Ibid, p.36.
101 Hudson T.C., The Meithei, p.58.
103 Ibobi N., Ibid, p.91.
104 Major Maxwell announcement at the investiture ceremony
of Raja Churachand Singh on 29th April 1892.
VILLAGE ADMINISTRATION

Village was the primary unit of administration. Several families formed a Leikai. Each Leikai was under a Leikailakpa. Several Leikais formed a village. Every village had a chief known as Khullakpa. There were three organisations in the village - Keirup, Shinglup and Leirup. The Keirup was a military organisation. Shinglup helped the bereaved family of the village with wood, money and labour. Leirup was in charge of village development functions.

REVENUE

The king was Laimenou (the owner of land). So, the whole land system of the valley started with the belief that all lands belonged to the king and he could give away or retained as he pleased. The king could levy and collect taxes from the people. The sources of revenue of the Government of Manipur were land revenue, mines, forest, duties from trade and commerce, revenue in the form of services, foreigner's tax, fines, tributes from vanquished hills and villages, and fisheries. Some

105 Dun E.U., Gazetteer of Manipur.
revenues were paid in cash and some in kind. During the British reign in Manipur, revenue from land and fishery were paid in cash and tributes and lalup were abolished. Since 1892, land revenue was paid in cash at a uniform rate of Rs.5/- per pari and house tax of Rs.2/- per house was levied. House tax was abolished in 1899-1900. 107

The land revenue was collected by Lekpas. Lekpas received a commission of ten percent on their collections. 108

**JUDICIAL SYSTEM**

Originally, the king took active part in the judicial administration of the state. From 1715 A.D. Raja Geribiavaz entrusted the judicial administration to his nobles. But he could interfere in any case if he wanted and he remained the highest appellate authority. 109

Cheirap was the only court which enjoyed both civil and criminal jurisdiction. It was a chief judicial body. 110 After the Anglo-Manipuri war of 1891, Cheirap was composed of six members and enjoyed the power of the first class

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109 Cheitharonal Kumbaba, p.64.
Magistrate in criminal side, and District judge's power in civil side.\footnote{111}

There was also a military court called Garod. All cases relating to soldiers were tried.

The third one was Pacha. It tried all cases connected with females. Garod and Pacha were abolished after the Anglo-Manipuri war of 1891.

Besides, there were also courts which dealt with religious matters. There were Pandit Loishang and Brahmi Sabha. Pandit Loishang dealt with all cases connected with Usmanglia (traditional Meitei Gods and Goddesses). The Brahmi Sabha discussed and decided all cases related with Brahmanical religion.

In villages, justice was administered by the village Court consisting of the village headman and elders. The village Court tried petty cases, civil and criminal and appeals against the decisions of the village Court could be taken to the Cherap.\footnote{112} All cases to which a European British subject was a party were tried by the Political Agent

\footnote{111} Hoodam T.C., The Meethiea, p.59.
\footnote{112} Ibobi, N., Ibid, p.195.
or his Assistant. 113 The Political Agent or his Assistant also heard all cases in which hillmen were concerned.

From 1891, Manipur entered on a new era of its history. After the Anglo-Manipuri War of 1891, Manipur was directly administered by a British Political Agent as Superintendent of the State with full powers. He should exercise those powers with due regard for customs and traditions of Manipuris and should endeavour to interfere as little as possible with existing institutions, in so far as they might be compatible with peace and good order. 114 During this period the British officers introduced many administrative and social reforms.

On the 15th May 1907, the administration of the state was made over to His Highness Churachand Singh. 115 Defence, External Affairs, Coinage, Communication, Post and Telegraph were retained by the British authorities and other powers relating to internal administration were handed over to the young Raja. In exercising these powers, the Raja should act as an agent of the British Government.

113 Allen A.C., Nagal Hilla and Manipur, 1905, Shillong, Reprint, p.125.
114 Reid Robert, Ibid, p.73.
115 Reid Robert, Ibid, p.76.
He should be in the geddi of Manipur, so long as he enjoyed the pleasure of the British Government.\textsuperscript{116} The British Government could interfere in any matter, in the internal administration of Manipur. Besides, administration of Hill areas was practically taken away from State office in 1906 and was under the Political Agent.\textsuperscript{117}

**DÖRBAR**

Maharaja was assisted in his administration by a Dörbar. Usually, Dörbar consisted of 7 members— the President, three Manipuri members and three additional members. The President was selected by Governor of Assam and was usually a member of Assam cadre of the Indian Civil Service.\textsuperscript{118} He presided over all meetings of the Dörbar and he had a casting vote in case of a tie.\textsuperscript{119} Other members were to be appointed by the Maharaja in consultation with the Political Agent and could not be removed without express consent of the Political Agent.\textsuperscript{120}

\textsuperscript{116} Senad..."You are informed that the permanence of the grant conveyed by this Senad will depend upon the ready fulfilment by you and your successors of all orders given by the British Government".

\textsuperscript{117} Shyamkanhai, p.36.

\textsuperscript{118} Reid Robert, Ibid, p.77.

\textsuperscript{119} Ibobi, N., Ibid, p.291.

\textsuperscript{120} Iboongohal Singh L, Ibid, pp.39-40.
The Darbar could make laws and rules. But all resolutions passed by the Darbar must be submitted to Maharaja for his approval and Maharaja could veto any resolutions passed by the Darbar but copies of his orders must be submitted to the Political Agent. The Political Agent could refer any matter to the Governor of Assam. 121 Iboongohal noted that Maharaja Sir Churuchand Singh used veto power twice or thrice only in his long reign. 122

The Darbar was the highest original and appellate court regarding civil and criminal cases. It sat for five days in a week as the Judicial Darbar. It could try all cases beyond hillmen and British subjects were concerned. 123 It could pass sentences up to and including death subject to confirmation by His Highness in the case of imprisonment of five years and upward, and by the Governor in case of death sentence. 124

**LUSHAI HILLS (MIZO HILLS)**

In 1849, Lushais, for the first time attacked British

121 Reid Robert, pp.77-78.
123 Ibobi M., p.201.
124 Reid Robert, Ibid, p.78.
territory. After this, a series of campaigns and expedition had to be sent to Lushai Hills in 1849, 1868 and 1871-72. In the operation against the Lushais, the British met with stiff resistance from some Lushai tribes and many officers and porters lost their lives. The Lushai Hills came under the control of the British after the expedition of 1889. After its subjugation, its control had been divided among three Administrations of Assam, Bengal and Burma. On 6th September 1895, the Government of India declared South Lushai Hills to be included in Lower Province of Bengal. North Lushai Hills also came under the jurisdiction of the Chief Commissioner of Assam.

The amalgamation of North and South Lushai Hills into Lushai Hills District had been the subject of discussion for a long time. On 29th January 1892, a Conference was held at Calcutta to examine certain questions relating to civil and military affairs connected

127 Report on Administration of Assam, 1901-02, pp. 42-44.
128 Reid Robert, History of Frontier Areas Bordering on Assam, Reprint, 1983, p.36.
with the control of Lushai and Chin Hills. The Conference was unanimous in recommending that North and South Lushai Hills with a portion of Arakan Hills Tracts should be placed under Assam at once.

After considering the recommendations of the Conference, the Government of India placed the territories known as South Lushai Hills and Tracts known as Rattan Puiyes villages including Nunagiri - which tracts were so long within lower provinces of Bengal, under the administration of the Chief Commissioner of Assam with effect from 1st April 1898.

Another proclamation of Assam Government placed Lushai Hills in charge of an officer, who would be styled as Superintendent. The first Superintendent was Major John Shakespeare, C.I.E., C.S.O.

A third proclamation published rules of administration of the Lushai Hills which, with periodical modifications, have remained in force till independence.

130 Ibid, p.38.
131 Ibid, p.43.
Thus, the protracted controversy over questions of transferring territories from Bengal to Assam came to an end.

For administrative purposes, the Lushai Hills District was divided into two sub-divisions—Ajal and Lungleh. Ajal was in charge of the Superintendent of the District. He was assisted by one Assistant Superintendent of Police. A new system known as Circle Administration was introduced. For the purposes of internal administration this district was divided into eighteen circles, twelve in the Ajal and six in the Lungleh sub-divisions. Each of these circles was placed in charge of an interpreter. Orders issued by the Superintendent were transmitted to the interpreter for communication to the chief. He was also required to submit every fortnight a report on the state of crops and general conditions of affairs within his circle. The Inner Line Regulation was brought into force.

133 Reid Robert, Ibid, p. 44.
134 Gazetteer of Bengal and North East India, Ibid, p. 40.
135 Gazetteer of Bengal and North-East India, Ibid, pp. 43-44.
Village Administration

One of the main principles of the rules for the administration of Lushai Hills was internal control of villages by their own leaders — the Chiefs. Superintendent of the District was to interfere as little as possible between the Chiefs and their people. The chief was supreme in his own village. At first, the number of chiefs was not more than sixty. In 1930, the number increased to three hundred due to the partition of the existing chieftainship and formation of new villages. 136

Any person, who had the ability to organise a force could become a chief. After Lushai Hills came under the control of the British, the Government appointed some persons as Chiefs. 137 The Superintendent of the District was authorised to create chiefs. But in 1937, the Government directed the Superintendent not to create new chiefs and further directed to abolish the existing Chieftainships and amalgamate the smaller Chieftainships wherever possible. 138

137 Ibid, p.108.
Regarding succession to Chieftainship, the rule of primogeniture was recognised.

The Chief was responsible for the administration of the village. He settled all disputes in the village according to Lushai customary laws. He tried all cases except serious ones. The serious cases were reported and tried by Superintendent. The chief could arrest a person who had committed crimes and keep him under custody till the arrival of police. The Chief determined where jhumas were to be cultivated. The chief collected house tax on behalf of the Government. The chief took certain customary taxes. He took forelage of every animal that the villager had shot or trapped. Every villager, after every harvest, must pay the chief six tins of paddy or Rs.2 per annum.

Chief was advised and assisted by a Council of elders. They were appointed by the chiefs and the chiefs could veto their decision. Thus, Lushai chiefs exercised autocratic powers. Some chiefs abused powers and privileges and they ruled the village according to their whims and fancies. The chief could expel any one from the village.

The Government of India Act of 1935 classed the

139 Rao V.V., Ibid, p.111.
Lushai Hills District as 'Excluded Areas'. Before this, under the Government of India Act of 1919, Lushai Hills was declared an backward tract.

THE KHASI AND THE JAINDIA HILLS

Constitutions of Khasi States were democratic. There were thirty states in the Khasi Hills before the advent of the British. In 1867, there were 25 states. The chiefs of these petty states were known as Sylas, Wahaders, Sirdars and Lyngdohs. Generally the office of Sylas was hereditary, but Wahaders, Sirdars and Lyngdohs were elective.

Succession to Sylasship was from female side except in Khyria. But rules of succession was slightly different from state to state. According to tradition, Sylasship remained with one family but originally, the succession was regulated by a small electoral body consisting of

140 Excluded Areas were tracts where any advanced form of government was not possible and governor administered these areas by using his discretionary powers.

141 Lahiri R.M., Annexation of Assam.

142 Mackenzie A., History of the relations of the Government with the hill tribes of the north east frontier of Bengal 1884, Calcutta, p.237.

Lyngdohs of certain priestly clan. Later on, there was a tendency to broaden the elective basis. In some cases, the Sylis were elected by the people, when the electoral body could not come to an unanimous decision. The electoral college consisted of all adult males, not females. The electoral Darbar was considered to be a divine institution and the Sylis chosen by it was known as Ki Sylis or Bial-Sylus of God.

Though Sylis were elected, methods of election were different from place to place. During British rule, whatever might be the method of election, the recognition by British Government was necessary. This was conveyed by means of sanads. Further, the British Government could remove the chiefs in case of oppression, misconduct, and dereliction of duty. Before taking such a step, the wishes of the Darbar was consulted. The chiefs were also under the control of the Deputy Commissioner of the Khasi and the Jaintia Hills. After independence, elections

144 Rao V.V., A Century of Tribal Politics, p.114.
147 Allen, B.C., Gazetteer of the Khasi and Jaintia Hills, Garo Hills, Lushai Hills 1905, Shillong, p.100.
were conducted by a returning officer of the District Council and all appointments of chiefs were subject to the approval of the District Council. 148

The Sylies exercised limited powers. They carried on administration in consultation with the darbar. Sylies had jurisdiction over all cases, civil and criminal. But during British days, their powers were limited to some extent. Sylies had jurisdiction over all cases, civil and criminal, in which their own subjects were concerned. 149 Cases of homicide and disputes involving people of different states were decided by the Deputy Commissioner. 150 The jurisdiction of the Sylies and his court was confined to cases arising within the state in which the subjects of the state were involved. Fines was usual form of punishment which a Sylies used frequently employed. The fines imposed consist of sums of money ranging from Rs.15 to Rs.1,000 plus in each case a pig. 151 Sentences of imprisonment were occasionally awarded, but the culprit was detained

150 Hunter W.W., Ibid, pp.204-205.
in the Syiem's house and compelled to work for the chief without pay. 152

The Syiem was held in very high esteem by his subjects. His powers were by no means autocratic, but were greatly limited by his darbar. He served and acted as general in times of war and performed all state religious ceremonies.

Syiem led a very simple life. His main source of income was tolls, imposed on market within his territory and he was also entitled to receive income from state lands but he had no power to levy taxes on land.

DARBAR

Each state had a darbar. It was an executive Council. It was also the highest administrative and judicial body in the state and it was presided over by the Syiem. The Khsei darbar was known for their freedom of speech and majority decision. Captain White, Assistant to David Scott, attended one such Darbar and he was amazed at the decorum with which the debate was conducted for two days. 153

The composition of Darbar varied from state to state. For instance, in Myllian, five mantries were in

the Darbar, in Khayritum, the Darbar consisted of thirty-one members, in China, twelve members consisted the Darbar. 154

The functions of a Darbar were management of the forests, markets, arrangement for festivals and collection of revenues.

**VILLAGE ADMINISTRATION**

Village Headman was at the head of village administration. Headman was elected in accordance with the existing custom of the place.

There was a darbar to assist the village headman in the administration of the village. The meeting of the Darbar was presided over by the Headman. The functions of the Headman were maintenance of peace in the village, improvement of roads, markets, collection of market revenues, arrangement of festivals and he sent offerings to the Syila for state ceremonies. 155 The village Darbar headed by its Headman enjoyed some judicial power. It acted like village court and tried cases in accordance with customary laws of the village.

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The Headman alone could not decide any issue or any matter. Decisions were made by village Darbar with the headman presiding over it. A democratic tradition of arriving at consensus based on collective wisdom was preferred to arbitrary decision of the Headman.

For a long time, the Jaintia Hills was ruled by Rajas. Although Jaintia rajas were Hindunized, they retained many features of Khasi administrative system. Like Khasi Syles, they were also matrilineal in their succession, the kingship passing to the sister's son. The king of Jaintia was not an arbitrary ruler, he always consulted with his chief officers and subordinate chiefs on all important matters.  

The Jaintia Hills came into British possession in 1835, and constituted the Jowai sub-division.

The Jaintia Hills were divided into 23 petty districts, 19 of which were in charge of Headmen chosen by the people. They were called Dolois and the remaining four were under hereditary Sardars.  

158 Ghattacheryya K.K., North East India, 1983, p.35.
Each Serdar had jurisdiction over a number of villages and exercised jurisdiction over minor cases, both civil and criminal. The sub-divisional officer was the principal judicial authority subject of course to the usual right of appeal to the Deputy Commissioner. Fatty cases were however settled in the village. Capital sentences and sentences for a term of seven years' imprisonment and upwards, required confirmation of chief commissioner. 159

RELATION BETWEEN THE KHASI HILLS AND THE BRITISH

The British established their Agency on 11th February 1835 and Colonel Lister was appointed Political Agent of the Khasi Hills with headquarter at Hongklaon. 160 He was given power to negotiate with the king of Jaintia on political matters. The command of Sylhet Light Infantry Battalion was placed at his disposal. In 1854, Mr. Hudson was deputed to Cherrapunji, the then administrative headquarter. The headquarter was shifted to Shillong in 1866. 161

159 Allen B.C., Gazetteer of the Khasi and Jaintie Hills, Garo Hills, Lushai Hills, 1905, Shillong, p.106.


161 Report on Administration of East Bengal and Assam 1905-6 part II, p.29.
The Political Agent did not interfere in the internal administration of the Khasi States. Apparently, the British Government tried to retain general independence of the Khasi chiefs. Originally, a separate status was observed with regard to states of Cherra, Khymie, Moneatn, Lyngkin and Mongapung but in course of time, all Khasi states were reduced to the status of dependent principalities. Originally, the relation between the Khasis and the British Government were determined by agreements executed by chiefs. In 1859, side by side with agreements, sanads also were issued. In 1877, the agreements were abolished and sanads were retained. In the case of Lyngdohs and Sardars, relationship between the Khasi chiefs and the British Government were regulated by Perwass. In theory, the Khasi states were semi-independent states in subsidiary alliance with the British Government, but in practice, they were reduced to the status of messenger boys, by systematic erosion of their authority by the British Government. The powers of the British

162 Lahiri, Annexion of Assam, p.99.
163 Rao V.V., A Century of Tribal Politics, p.33.
164 Ibid, p.33.
Government over Khasi States were so wide that they might be regarded as parts of the British India. The chiefs were placed under the control of Deputy Commissioner and trial of murder cases of their own subjects was banned.

This position continued till the Constitution of free India came into force. After the Constitution came into force, the governance of these states was thenceforth carried on according to provisions of the sixth schedule.

CONCLUSION

In the above chapter, we have delineated the evolution of administration and government in the North-East region from medieval period upto the commencement of the present constitution.

Before the advent of the British, there were many indigenous political institutions with extremely diverse characteristics. In the plain areas, i.e., the Brahmaputra valley, Manipur valley, Tripura plain areas, and Surma valley, kingship was the normal pattern of administrative organisation.

165 Ibid, p.35.
But in the hilly areas, specially, in interior areas, there were village states. One noteworthy feature of tribal polity was self government. Tribals were looking after their affairs. The Singphos, the Khemis, the Mootes, the Wanchos, the Kukis, the Lushais and the Anas had authoritarian village authorities, whereas the Monpas, the Akas, the Sherdukpans, the Tansas, the Adis, the Angamis, the Rangmas etc. developed Republican type. But the Deflas had no centralised village authority. Except the Deflas, all other tribes were closely knit and knew only their respective village authorities. There was no political party system in the modern sense, in the whole north east due to lack of political awareness.

The British penetrated in this region apparently to protect their frontiers. Later on, the British made up its mind to widen the zone of administration. But the major difficulties which they faced at the start were inadequate knowledge of this area, topography of the region and hostilities of some tribes. They therefore, refrained from extending direct political control over all tribal areas all at once and adopted a non-interference, persuasive and lastly coercive policy in their efforts to bring this region under their control. In the Brahmaputra
and the Surma valley, the British adopted general administrative system which they followed in the Gangetic valley, while kingship was allowed to remain in Manipur and Tripura. But regarding tribal areas, the British adopted a different policy. They classified tribal areas from time to time into partly and fully excluded areas. Usually, the British Government did not interfere with the functioning of the indigenous governmental institutions.

Besides, they followed policy of isolation of tribal areas from the plain people. Segregation was their initial policy. Section 2 of the Bengal Eastern Frontier Regulation, 1873 made it lawful for government "to prescribe and from time to time after by notification .. . . . . . a line to be called the Inner Line and to prohibit any subject living outside the area from living or moving therein." Their policy was to shut the hill areas from any flow of political ideas from outside, and thus to keep the people far away from national awakening. The tribes, inhabiting in this region were left behind in the movement of Indian independence. Thus, they have no conception of royalty to the nation. The result is separatist tendencies have taken a virulent form in this region culminating in the absurd demand for independence.

166 The Bengal Eastern Frontier Regulation 1873.