CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The present work is a study of the social changes that took place in Assam during the period from 1826 to 1900. The beginning of the period was marked by the end of the first Anglo-Burmese war which was officially declared on 5 March, 1824 and in course of which the English East India Company's army marched into and occupied Assam by driving out the Burmese, who had some years earlier invaded and subjugated it. The war was brought to a close by the Treaty of Yandabo signed between the representatives of the East India Company and the Burmese monarch. According to Article II of the said treaty, the Burmese monarch renounces all claims upon, and will abstain from all future
interference with the principality of Assam and its dependencies and also with the contiguous petty states of Cachar and Jaintia."¹ Inspite of the fact that the term of the treaty relating to Assam was vague, the East India Company retained the occupation of Assam and consolidated their authority over it within the next few years. In carrying out their administration, the British abolished, by degrees, the hitherto existing old systems in every sphere and introduced new systems suitable to their needs. They also enlarged the political boundary of Assam by the inclusion of the neighbouring states of Cachar, Jaintia and the hill tribes. Such political and administrative changes left great impact on the economic and social life of the land and brought a new era in the political, economic and social history of Assam.

For a long time before 1826, Assam remained synonymous with the Ahom kingdom under the rule of the

kings of the Ahom royal dynasty. This kingdom of the Ahoms or Assam, as it was known, was bounded by the hill ranges on three sides—north, east, and south, while the river Manah or Manas, as it is now called, on the north bank and the Nagarbera Hills on the south bank of the river Brahmaputra, formed the western boundary. Assam before 1826 thus embraced almost the whole of the Brahmaputra valley including the foot hill regions. The natural barriers on three sides, with a small opening on one side only, combined with several other factors helped Assam to remain practically isolated from the rest of India till the coming of the English in 1824.

In Assam the rainy season, which normally commenced in March, lasted for about eight months till the first half of October, made its climate extremely damp and humid. Even in the winter, dense fogs often covered the whole valley. This also moistened the atmosphere. The natural result was the profusion of water surface and extensive forests. The region was clothed green with
vegetation and the rate of growth of shrubs and forests was extremely rapid. The valley was intersected by a great many rivers, most of which were tributaries of the Brahmaputra, making communication by land difficult. Besides, the hills surrounding the valley were inhabited by a number of hill tribes like the Akas, Nishis, Mishings (formerly known as Miris), Adis (formerly called Abors), Mishmis, Singphos, Nagas, Garos, Khasis and Jayantipas. Although some of them, particularly those living near the plains, owed allegiance to the Ahom kings, all of them were independent in their internal matters. Moreover, the hill tribes always bore a natural feeling of suspicion towards foreigners.

In this way undulating topography, unhealthy climate, dense forests and unfriendly attitude of the hill people served as strong barriers and made the land easily inaccessible. All these factors too helped much in protecting the kingdom from the aggressions of the foreign powers and also in retaining her independence for a long time.
The policy of the Ahem rulers was an added factor in this respect. The Ahems, the ruling people of Assam before 1826, originally came from the Shan state of Meng Mao in Upper Burma and established their political control in this land in the beginning of the thirteenth century. They tried to maintain, at the initial stage of their rule, their separate identity by retaining their own culture and were therefore less interested in the neighbouring Hindu states. It was only after their Hinduisation, which was gradual and slow, and perceptible degree towards the end of the seventeenth century, they began to show interest in the religious and cultural life of India. Since then the Ahem kings encouraged, on selective basis, Brahmans, men of qualities, artisans, craftsmen, weavers, scholars to come and settle permanently in their kingdom by granting them rent-free lands. In the eighteenth

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2 A.B.S., Gauhati, 1964, p.41.
century some posts of political agents called *Bairātī* were created whose primary duty was to make tours in neighbouring states for the purpose of collection of information relating to their political systems, customs and manners, dress and food-habits, beliefs and practices. Even then the Ahom rulers were not in favour of establishing any close relations with the rest of India or to expose their land to the foreigners. Free movement of the people were not, therefore, allowed between Assam and the neighbouring countries. Persons who were cordially invited to Assam were not permitted to return and if any one attempted to do so was executed. Those who once entered Assam and settled had to cut off all connections with their mother-land and merge with the local people. Blind imitation of things foreign, however beautiful they might be, was considered unhealthy as late as the reign of

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3 A.B.H. Gauhati, 1962, pp.64,66.

Rudra Singha (1696-1714). On one occasion when that king presented to his ministers some foreign dresses, the three ministers, Laithapena-Bargahain of the Madurial family, Darab-dhara Buragohain of Kueigaon, and Kancheng Barpatra-Gohain of Kenduguri, refused to put on pleading "the fashions of the Bengal or foreigners in supersession of our own indigenous costumes" was against the tradition of the society.  

The repeated Muslim invasions from Bengal was also a contributory factor that helped its rulers in adopting a policy of protection and isolation. The Muslim encroachments on their land made the Ahom rulers anxious to preserve their independence. Consequently people from other parts of India was suspected as potential source of danger and so were not allowed to have a footing in the kingdom.

Besides, Assam being a fertile land with her abundant natural resources, her people produced almost

5 T.Bz, pp. 32-33.
everything they required for their livelihood. They had, therefore, little necessity to depend on other countries or to go out of their land by crossing these natural barriers and troubles.

All these had turned Assam into an insulate kingdom, politically as well as socially. Being alienated from the social life of other parts of India, the society of Assam assumed a character that was archaic and static and which remained so till the coming of the British.

The British occupation of Assam during and after the First Anglo-Burmese War, had for the first time exposed it by lifting the veil of age-old isolation. The British rule introduced not only new systems and institutions in place of the old one, but also caused an inflow of peoples from other parts of India in various capacities, as government employees, school teachers, religious preceptors, adventurous, traders and labourers. Within a short period Assam became the meeting place of divergent peoples of India and of other countries, causing a great increase in
her population. The population of Assam which was about 8,00,000 at the time of British occupation, rose to 61,26,343 in 1901 of which 7,75,844 were immigrants. With the advent of the English, Assam, thus, entered into a new age which had found its expression not only in her administration alone but also in her society as well.

ASSAM AND HER NEIGHBOURS BEFORE 1826

Assam

The territory of Assam, which was occupied by the English East India Company during 1824-26, was chiefly comprised of the valley of the Brahmaputra covering an area of 800 km. in land with an average breadth of 96 km.,

6William Robinson, A Descriptive Account of Assam, Calcutta, 1841, re-print Delhi, 1975, p. 252.

7Census Report of Assam, 1901, p. 4.
embracing an area of 76,800 sq.km.

For a very long time, prior to the British occupation Assam had been under the rule of the Ahom kings known as Swargadeo meaning 'the lord of heaven'. The Ahoms were an offshoot of the widespread Tai people of South-East Asia and came from Upper Burma's Shan region under the leadership of prince Sukapha. They entered Assam by the Patkai route in the early part of the thirteenth century and first founded a kingdom in Upper Assam between the Buri Dihing and the Dikhow. Later on the boundary of this kingdom was extended by the incorporation of the territories of the Chutiyas, Kamharis, Bhuyans, and other petty chiefs and châiefs. The Ahoms also subdued the hill tribes living close to their borders who included among other sections of Naga, Daflas, Mishingas (formerly Miris), Karbis (formerly Mikirs), Khasis and Jayantias. They also successfully resisted the powerful Mughals in their attempt

to extend their authority to this land. For a few years immediately before the coming of the English, Assam had been under the occupation of the Burmese who first came in 1817 as protectors of the Ahom king Chandrakanta Singha but soon turned into invaders. Chandrakanta Singha and Purandar Singha, another ex-ruler, fled away westward and took shelter in the British territory of Bengal. The Burmese then placed Jageswar Singha, a prince of the Ahom royal family, as their nominee on the Ahom throne and began to rule the kingdom as their masters. The Burmese army unleashed a reign of terror throughout the kingdom and perpetrated dreadful atrocities on the helpless people. In the words of Major John Butler, who was the Principal Assistant of Nowgong during 1841 to 1844, "All, who were suspected of being inimical to the reign of terror, were seized and bound by Burmese executioners, who cut off the lobes of the poor victims ears and choice portions of the body, such as the points of the shoulders, and (they) actually ate the raw flesh before the lashing sufferers; they then
inhumanly inflicted, with a sword, deep but not mortal gashes on the body, that the mutilated might die slowly, and finally closed the tragedy by disembowelling the wretched victims. "⁹ All young and old, children and women became the victim of the Burmese atrocities. As described by Maniram Dewan, an eye-witness, "⁹ It was dangerous for a woman to meet a Burmese even in the public road. Brahmans were made to carry loads of beef, pork and wine. The Gessains were robbed of all their possessions. Fathers of damsels whom the Burmese took to wives rose speedily to affluence and power."¹⁰ Shuting up a number of men, women and children in a house they did not hesitate to put fires on the house.¹¹ The Burmese invasion was the greatest catastrophe for the people of Assam. It depopulated the country, demolished agriculture, destroyed industries of the land and created

⁹ Major John Butler, Travels and Adventures in the Province of Assam, 1855, reprinted 1978, Delhi, pp. 248-49.
¹⁰ Maniram Dewan, Buranj Vivak Ratna (MSS), II, p. 188(a) and (b) see English translation, S.K. Bhuyan, Anglo-Assamese Relations, p. 509.
¹¹ Major John Butler, loc. cit., p. 248.
a situation of uncertainty and dead-lack in almost every sphere of life.

Even before the invasion of the Burmesi, Assam had been suffering from political confusion and disorder which began as early as the middle of the eighteenth century, when the Meamariga, a religious sect of the Vaisnava faith, revolted against the religious persecution of some Ahom rulers. The Meamariga were the disciples of the Mayamara Satra founded by Anirudhaddeva about the year 1601. Most of the followers of the Meamaria satra came from the non-Brahmin Hindu families and from some tribal peoples of Moran, Chutiya, Kachari. Even the Mahanta of the Satra

13 Ibid., p. 189.

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belonged to the Sudra casta of the Hindu society. 

Anirudhadeva, the founder of the Satra, himself was of Bhuyam origin. The popularity, power and position of the Mayamata Satra, which became the stronghold of the Sudra Vaishnavism in the kingdom, had created a sense of jealousy and anxiety among the Mahantas of other Satras and the supporters of the Brahminical faith, who began to poison the mind of the Ahom kings against the Meamarias. Under the influence of Brahmin priest began a period of humiliation and oppression on the Meamarias and their Mahantas from the reign of king Pratap Singha (1603-1641).

The power of the Meamaria Mahantas to give initiations to the Brahmins was challenged during the reign of Rudra Singha (1696-1714). Six Mahantas of the Meamaria Satra, who took up the challenge, failed to produce any scriptural evidence in support of their claim and were

insulted and expelled from the court. The religious dissension between the Shaktas and the Vaisnavas were brought to an open contest when Phuleswari Devi, the chief queen of Siva Singha (1714-1744) and a disciple of Krishnaram Bhattarcharjee, a Brahmin priest from Bengal, intended to bring all people to the fold of that sect. On one occasion she invited the Vaisnava Gossains including the Meamaria Mahantas to a shrine of the Durga and caused the blood of the sacrificed animals to be smeared on their foreheads against their will. This had deeply wounded the religious sentiment of the Vaisnavas. The Meamarias could never forgive the insult of their faith and Mahantas, and in the later part of the eighteenth century they stood out in open rebellion.

The flames of the Meamaria uprising which gathered as a protest against religious persecution and insult of

16 T.B., pp. 33-34.
their Mahantas broke out in 1769 as a scramble for power when the Meamaria Mahantas received insults and reprimands from Kirtichandra Barbarua during the reign of Rajeswar Singha. In 1778 the rebels occupied the capital and compelled the reigning king Gourinath Singha to flee to Gauhati. In Lower Assam, where his authority was challenged by Krishnanarayan a prince of Darrang, who established himself as the Raja of Darrang by dethroning the then Raja Hansanarayan, a nominee of the Ahom king. In his attempt Krishnanarayan obtained assistance of Bengal Burkandazus and with their help occupied parts of Kamrup.

Beset with all these dangers Gourinath Singha appealed to the East India Company for help. Lord Cornwallis, the then Governor-General of Bengal, in response to such appeals sent six companies of troops under Captain Thomas Welsh to Assam in 1792. Captain Welsh after

18 Ibid., pp. 204, 208.
21 Ibid., pp. 300-308 ; T.B., pp. 128-29.
subdueing Krishnarayam and the Bengal Burkandazes restored order in Lower Assam and then proceeded to Upper Assam where he, after defeating the Memarias, reinstalled Gaurinath Singha on the throne at Rangpur. Sir John Shore, who replaced Lord Cornwallis, resorted to the policy of non-intervention in Assam affairs and accordingly recalled Captain Welsh from Assam. The coming of Captain Welsh to Assam to help the ruling king Gaurinath Singha was the first foreign intervention in the affairs of Assam.

With the return of Captain Welsh to Bengal anarchy and disorder were partially revived. The Burkandazes of Bengal reappeared and renewed their depredations in Kamrup and Darrang. The Memarias in league with the Singphos, a hill tribe, sought the help from Burma. Gaurinath Singha's death in 1795 made the situation worse. As he had no male issue, Purnananda Buragahain placed Kinaram, son of Dighaiah

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23 _Ibid._, p. 131.
Gehain, a grandson of Rudra Singha's brother Lechai Namrupia Raja on the throne. The new king assumed the name Kamaleswar Singha. But this selection of Kamaleswar Singha could not satisfy a group of people due to the reason that Lechai Namrupia Raja when revolted against his brother Rudra Singha, he and his descendants were debarred from the crown of the Ahom kingdom for ever. Besides, the supposed illegitimacy of his grandfather also made his accession unpopular. Another reason for the unpopularity of Kamaleswar Singha, as Buchanan Hamilton says, was the initiation of his fore-father's by the Sudra Mahanta of Salaguri.

Soon after the accession of Kamaleswar Singha, Haradatta Choudhury and his brother Biradatta collecting a large force of Hindusthani and Sikh revolted and occupied a portion of North Gauhati. The Ahom force, 

24 T.B. p.137.
though defeated and executed Haradatta, his Burkandaze supporters continued their act of depredation in the villages of Kamrup. In Darrang also they committed atrocities. The Ahom king appealed for help to the British Government. Sir John Shore, though refused to supply military force, adopted some measures to prevent the entrance of the Bengal Burkandazes into Assam by issuing passport for those Bengal Burkandazes who had to escort the commodities sent by the merchant of Bengal to Assam. He also stationed a detachment of sepoys at Jogighopa for checking the passport of the sepoys entering the Ahom kingdom. Sir John Shore also supplied arms and ammunitions to the Ahom Raja.

Finally the Moamarias were defeated and their king Bharat Singha was killed, and their religious leader

29 Ibid., p.432.
30 Ibid.,
31 Ibid., p.434.
Pitambar Mahajan died in prison. All these compelled the Moamaria chief at Bengmara to submit and become a vassal of the Ahom king with the title of Barsenapati. The Khamtis and the Daflas also made unsuccessful attempts against the authority of the Ahoms.

It was during the reign of Chandralcanta Singha (1811-1815) the situation worsened further. Internal strife divided the Ahom royal court into two hostile camps - on one side the king and his followers and on the other the Buragohain and his supporters. Purnananda Buragohain, an astute politician, a far-sighted statesman, and a selfless patriot, was the de-facto ruler of the country. The power and position of the Buragohain and his keen observation in every nook and corner of the administration created a sense of jealousy in the mind of some of the selfish officials who gradually poison the ears of the young king Chandralcanta Singha against the Buragohain.

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32 T.B.*, p.196.
The appointment of Badanchandra, a man of cruel nature, as the Barphukan by the king against the advice of the Buragohain led to the open conflict in between them. Disgusted with the report of the oppressive activities and exaction from the people by the Barphukan, Purnananda Buragohain, "who protected the people like a mother bird guarding the nestlings under her wings," sent a force to arrest Badanchandra. But the latter somehow managed to flee to Calcutta where he sought, without any fruit, the help of the East India Company. Failure to this, he went to Amarapura, the capital of Burma, where he tried to persuade the Burmese king Bodawpaya to send his army to help the Ahom king Chandrakanta Singha against the tyranny of Purnananda Buragohain.

The Burmese, who from the time of Alaungpaya (1752-1760) followed a policy of expedition and conquest,

34 Ibid., p. 196.
now turned their attention towards the kingdom of Manipur. This kingdom was comprised of an area of 7,000 miles (18,130 sq. km.) of which the central portion of the land measuring 650 miles (1,040 km.) constituted a valley of rich alluvial soil and the remaining portion, surrounding the valley, formed the hilly region of the kingdom.36

The boundary of Manipur as stated by Captain R. Boileau Pemberton in his Report on the Eastern Frontier of British India, are, on the west, the Jomea river, from its sources to its confluence with the Barak, and from this point, south, to the north of the chikoo or Tooyass, a nullah, which flowing from lofty ranges bordering on the Tripurah country, falls into the Barak at the southern extremity of a range of mountains, three sides of which are embraced by the tottering course of this river.37


37 Ibid.
The country was numerously inhabited by the Manipuris. Besides, other tribes like the Nagas, Kukis also resided in the hills of the country. Repeated Burmese invasions compelled the Manipuri king Jai Singh to take shelter in the Ahom kingdom. The Ahom king Rajeswar Singha, at the appeal of the Manipuri king, sent a contingent of Ahom troops against the Burmese. The Burmese during their reign of Heinbyushin led expeditions to Cachar and Javantia kingdoms. The spirit of conquest and aggrandisement was more strong in the reign of Bodawpaya (1782-1819) who conquered Arakan in 1794 and made repeated incursions into the British territories of Chittagong, Dacca and Cossimbazar.

The Burmese did not consider the Ahoms as their friends who had once baffled their attempt in Manipur. At the appeal of the Barphukan Badanchandra, the Burmese found an opportunity to fulfil their imperialistic design in that region and agreed to send a force in Assam to assist Chandrakanta Singha.
In 1817 the Burmese army entered Assam by the Patkai route and reached Namrup. The army sent to resist the invaders was defeated. At this critical hour Purnananda Buragohain fell ill and died. Soon after Ruchinath, his eldest son was appointed as the new Buragohain by the king. While the Burmese and Badanchandra were proceeding towards Jorhat, the capital of the Ahom kingdom, Ruchinath Buragohain pleaded the king to retreat to Gauhati. At the refusal of the king, Ruchinath suspecting a link between Chandrakanta Singha and the Burmese, left for Gauhati with all the members of his family. Badanchandra with the Burmese army entered the capital in March 1817. Chandrakanta Singha was retained on the throne and continued his reign. Badanchandra was appointed as the prime minister. With valuable presents and an Ahom princess for their monarch,

38 S.K. Bhuyan, op. cit., p.466.
39 Ibid., p.467.
40 Ibid.
the Burmese left Assam. The Ahom nobles soon realised the treachery of Badamchandra in bringing a foreign army to Assam and making the kingdom a vassalage to the Burmese king. A plot was hatched and Badamchandra was murdered. Chandrakanta Singha then invited Ruchinath, who, however, did not respond to the offer; rather he proceeded to Jorhat with Prince Brajamath Gohain and his son Purandar, who had been living in Bengal. After deposing Chandrakanta Singha on February 20, 1817, he placed Purandar on the throne.  

The news of Chandrakanta's dethronement when reached Burma brought another Burmese army to Assam, which restored him to the throne on March 7, 1819, while Purandar Singha and Ruchinath Buraoohain fled away and took shelter in the British territory. Soon Chandrakanta felt humiliated at the high-handedness of the

42 Ibid., p. 472.
Burmese and devised schemes to shake off the yoke of the Burmese authority by adopting a series of measures. This had brought a far larger Burmese army in February 1821 under the command of Mingimaha Tilwa and Sajati Phukan. After defeating Patalang Barbarus, who was entrusted with the defence of the eastern frontier, the Burmese proceeded to Jorhat. The assurance of the Burmese failed to allay the fear in Chandrakanta's mind who fled away to Gauhati and then to the British territory. Mingimaha Tilwa then set up prince Punyadhar on the throne and the latter assumed the name Jogeswar Singha. From now onwards, it was the Burmese who were the actual masters of Assam. They started a reign of terror throughout the kingdom by committing cruel atrocities on the people. The Burmese

43 Ibid., pp. 480-484.
44 Ibid., pp. 484-485.
45 Ibid.
generals in Assam sent letters to the British government asking to surrender Chandrakanta Singha. On the other hand the British authorities who were following a policy of non-intervention towards Assam since 1794, remained non-committal to the repeated appeals of Ruchinath Buragohain, Purandar Singha and Chandrakanta Singha for assistance. From 1821, however, their policy had undergone a change. Although the British authorities refused to extend direct help, they granted the applications for the purchase of arms and ammunition in order to fight the Burmese in Assam. With arms procured in Bengal, Ruchinath Buragohain, Purandar Singha and Chandrakanta Singha made attacks on the Burmese. In 1822, Chandrakanta was even successful in proceeding as far as Mahgarh Ghat near Jorhat but was defeated and compelled to retreat to Jogighopa in the Company's territory. The establishment of the Burmese authority in Assam and the war-like posture

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46 Ibid.
47 Ibid.
of the Burmese, made the English anxious for the safety and security of the subjects and dominions in the northeastern frontier. The Burmese general Mingimaha Bandula and Mingimaha Tilwa demanded the surrender of Purandar Singha and Chandrakanta Singha, otherwise they warned that the Burmese army would enter the British territory. In August 1822 they claimed the British island of Shahpuri near Goalpara and refused to surrender to Davidson, the officer in-charge of the Assam chouki at Goalpara. In January 1823 the Burmese demanded tax from some Mugs who were the British subjects while they were sailing in their boats loaded with rice down the Naaf estuary. On their refusal, the Burmese fired on them causing the death of the steersman. This aggressive policy of the Burmese compelled the British government to declare war against them.

48 Ibid.
49 Ibid.
50 Ibid.
NEIGHBOURING PRINCIPALITIES OF ASSAM BEFORE 1826

The political situation in the neighbouring states of Kachar, Jayantia and Manipur also became critical.

Kachar: Kachar was a small principality lying on the eastern part of the Surma Valley comprising of the plains and the hills. Pemberton in his Report of 1835 states that the Kachari kingdom that was occupied by the British was "bounded on the west by Sylhet and Jaynteeah; north by Assam; east by Muneepoor; and on the south by Tripurah."\(^{51}\) It covered an area of 17558 sq.km., of which 7423 sq.km. comprised the southern Kachar and the remaining 10135 sq.km. constituted the central and northern portion of the land.

The population of southern Kachar was about 50,000


\(^{52}\) Ibid., pp.200, 203. (He referred in miles).
while that of the other portion was 14,000. The Kacharis, whose kings ruled the kingdom belonged to the Mongoloid group of the human race, formed the dominant portion of its population. The legendary origin claims that the Kacharis are the descendents of Ghototkoch, the son of Hirimba and Bhima, one of the five Pandava brothers of the famous epic, the Mahabharata. The Bengali people of both Hindu and Muslim faiths also constituted a good number of its population who settled in this kingdom mainly during the time of Lakshmichandra (1745-1780). The Hindu descendants of immigrants gradually acquired a distinguished place in political, social, religious and cultural life of the state.

Although some opine that it was Raja Krishna-chandra (1780-1813) who was the first to adopt Hinduism; there are instances to show that Hinduism found favour

53 Ibid. pp.204,206.
54 Upendrachandra Guha, Kacherer Itibritta, Asom Prakashan Parisad, Gauhati, re-print 1971, p.97.
among the Kachari royal family even before him. King Viradarpa, who ascended the throne in the middle of the sixteenth century, was a great devotee of Lord Vishnu. Suradarpa, who succeeded to the throne in 1708 and ruled for fifty years, used to study Hindu scriptures regularly. During the reigns of Krishnachandra and Govinda Chandra, the royal court became the centre of the development of Bengali literature.

In addition, there were other tribes such as the Manipuris, Nagas and the Kukis. The latter two tribes lived in the hills of the kingdom. The Manipuris came and settled in Kachar during the time of Krishnachandra when he gave shelter to the Manipuri king Madhuchandra and his two brothers and married a Manipuri princess named Induprabha.

56 Upendrachandra Guha, loc. cit., p. 81.
57 Ibid., p. 136.
The civil war and the Burmese interference in Manipur in 1813 disturbed the peace of Kachar. The Manipuri princes Chaurajit Singh, Gombhir Singh and Marjit Singh, being deposed from the throne, entered and took shelter in Kachar. 58 But soon the Manipuri princes involved in a conspiracy with some of the prominent officials of the land and dethroned the king Govinda Chandra. 59 Govinda Chandra fled away from the country and took shelter in the British territory. 60 He appealed to the British for help but as they did not respond, he approached the Burmese for their assistance, 61 who readily accepted the request and began to prepare for action. The news of the Burmese preparation for the interposition in Kachar made the British government alarmed and they now changed their earlier stand, and opened negotiations with

Govinda Chandra, the legitimate ruler of the throne. At the pressure of the British government three Manipuri brothers Marjit, Churajit and Gombhir accepted the pensions and discarded their claims to the throne of Kachar in favour of Govinda Chandra. While the discussion regarding the terms of the negotiation were going on with Govinda Chandra, the Burmese commander in Assam, Nund Kroden, with a force proceeded towards Kachar in 1823 in response of the appeal of the king Govinda Chandra as made previously. Two other forces were also marching towards Kachar from Manipur and Jayantia. Govinda Chandra took shelter in the British territory of Sylhet. The news of the coming of the Burmese army caused great panic among the people and many fled away and entered into the British territory. The Burmese commander wrote a letter to David Scott

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62 Ibid., p. 514.
63 Ibid.
64 Ibid., p. 515.
65 Ibid., pp. 515-16.
demanding the surrender of the three Manipuri brothers who were at that time under the British protection. 66
In reply to his letter, David Scott asked the Burmese commander to withdraw his army from Kachar which was a British protectorate, otherwise the British army would enter Assam and Kachar to repulse the Burmese force. 67
In the mean time, on 1824, 6th March the British government made a treaty with Raja Govinda Chandra. According to the terms of the treaty Govinda Chandra accepted the British authority and Kachar was brought under the British protection. He also agreed to pay an annual tribute of rupees ten thousand. 68
In return *The Honourable Company engages to protect the territories of Kachar from external enemies, and arbitrate any differences that may arise between the Rajah and other

66 Ibid., p. 515.
67 Ibid., pp. 515-16.
68 Aitchison, op. cit., pp. 118-119.
Jayantia Kingdom:

Jayantia was the next kingdom on which the covetous eyes of the Burmese government fell. It was situated between the Kachari kingdom, the Ahom kingdom and the British territory of Sylhet. The eastern boundary of this kingdom was the Keercoah and Kopili rivers, which separated it from the Kachari kingdom; the river Kolong separated it from the Ahom kingdom in the north; its western boundary was formed by the hills dominated by Khyrim Raja, and its southern border extended to the northern bank of the river Surma. The Jayantia kingdom that was occupied by the British embraced an area of about 9972 sq. km., having a population of 2,70,000 souls. The southern portion of the principality, which formed the plains area of the country and situated close to Sylhet, was numerously inhabited by the "Mussulmans and low-caste

71 Pemberton, op.cit., p.223.
72 Ibid., pp.222-223, 226, 229.
Hindoos of the Bengal origin, distinguished, however, by some peculiar local customs and usages from the same classes in the Sylhet district.73 The other portion of the kingdom was inhabited by the Khasi and Jayantia people who belonged to Mon Khmer of the Austro-Asiatics linguistic group of the human race. The Jayantia kingdom was the first principality that came in conflict with the British in this eastern region. In 1770, during the reign of Chatra Singh, the British general Major Henniker conquered it but was later on restored to its ruler on payment of a fine.74 This expedition against the Jayantia kingdom was, perhaps, undertaken to inflict penalty for the aggressive activities of the Jayantias on the British subjects of the adjacent plains of Sylhet. In 1821 the British government again warned the Jayantia king when some emissaries of this principality were caught red-

73 Ibid., p.223.
handed and punished in their attempts to take away force-
fully some British subjects from Sylhet district for the
purpose of sacrificing them before their Goddess.\(^7^5\)

In 1824, the Burmese threatened an invasion in
the Jayantia kingdom. This caused concern to the British
and as a precaution, David Scott proposed for a negotia-
tion with the Jayantia Raja to resist the possible
Burmese invasion. But the Raja showed no interest at that
moment.\(^7^6\) David Scott sent a letter to the Burmese
Commander asking him not to enter in the Jayantia kingdom.\(^7^7\)
Without paying any heed to this letter, the Burmese
Commander asked the Jayantia Raja to pay a visit to his
camp and to accept the Burmese authority on the ground that
he was a vassal of the Ahom king which was now under the
Burmese king.\(^7^8\) In the meantime a Burmese force also

\(^7^5\) Pemberton, *op.\textit{cit.}*, p.219.
\(^7^7\) Ibid.; Ibid., p.220.
\(^7^8\) Ibid.; Ibid.
reached the Jayantia frontier, but at the advance of a British force to help the Jayantia army the Burmese force withdrew. Under such a condition the Raja concluded a treaty with David Scott by which the principality became a British protectorate without, however, any obligation of paying tribute to the British government. 79

Occupation of Assam by the British:

Repeated Burmese aggressions in the British territory at Goalpara, Chittagong ultimately compelled the British government to declare war against the Burmese on March 5, 1824. 80 Following this a British army marched into Assam under the command of Lt. Col. George Macmorine. Thus the non-intervention policy followed by the British government towards the Brahmaputra Valley from 1794 to 1823 ended.

80 S.K. Bhuyan, Anglo-Assamese Relations, p. 519.
Lt. Col. Macmorine moved by land and Lt. Col. Arthur Richards proceeded by water from Goalpara. They were later on joined by David Scott, Captain Davidson, Lt. Richardson and others. By 28th March, 1824 the whole of the western Assam from Goalpara to Gauhati was occupied and by the October of the same year Rahachoky, Nowgang and Kaliabar were conquered. The Burmese retreated to Moramukh in Upper Assam. But when on the death of Brigadier Macmorine on May 30, 1824 Col. Richards, who now commanded the troops, returned to Gauhati due to heavy rainfall which created great troubles in procuring supplies. Thereupon the Burmese re-captured Kaliabar and reached up to Nowgang again and started appalling atrocities on the people as a retaliation of their friendly behaviour towards the English.

81 After the end of the monsoon the British started their campaign against the Burmese towards the last part

81 Ibid., pp. 526, 536.
of October, 1824 and reconquered Rahachoky, Nowgong and Kaliabar. At the beginning of 1825 Col. Richards was able to expel the Burmese from Dergaon and Jorhat.

Advancing further the British army captured Rangpur on January 30-31, 1825. The fall of Rangpur practically completed the conquest of Assam by the British. To the east of Rangpur, the Singphos, a hill tribe, availing the anarchical situation, were making constant raids on the Assamese villages and carried off thousands as slaves. Pushed off by the British army, the Burmese now joined with the Singphos and this compelled the British government to turn their attention towards this region. Several expeditions were organised against the Singphos and the Burmese under the command of Captain Nufville. Finally the Singphos of the Assam side surrendered and the Burmese left the country. Captain Nufville released about six hundred Assamese captives from the hands of the Singphos.  

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82 E. Gait, op. cit., p. 287.
By October 30, 1824, Colonel Innis had driven away the Burmese from Cachar. In the same way Raja Gombhir Singh with the assistance of the British, finally drove out the Burmese from his country Manipur.

Disaster of the Burmese in their war with the English at Arakan, Rangoon and the valley of the Irrawady finally compelled the Burmese authority to sue for peace. The Burmese ultimately had to accept the terms of the compromise that were offered by the British and on February 24, 1826 the peace treaty was signed between the two powers, the Burmese and the English.

By Article II of the treaty of peace and friendship, concluded at Yandabo, the king of Ava "renounces all claims upon, and agreed to abstain from all interference with the principality of Assam and its dependencies, and also with the contiguous states of Cachar and Jayantia. With regard to Manipur it was stipulated that should Gombhir Singh desire to return to that country, he should
be recognised by the king of Ava as Raja thereof."\textsuperscript{83}

The Burmese king also ceded to the British the conquered provinces of Arakan, Yeh, Tavoy, Mergui and Tenassirim.

CONSOLIDATION OF THE BRITISH AUTHORITY IN THE EASTERN REGION

Although George Swinton, Secretary, Government of India, in a despatch on February, 1824 stated that "The Governor-General in Council does not contemplate the permanent annexation of any part of it (Assam) to the British dominion,"\textsuperscript{84} Assam was retained under the British occupation even after the treaty of Yandabo. They, however, restored Raja Ram Singh to the Jayantia kingdom on condition of the treaty concluded on 10th March 1824. In

\textsuperscript{83} Aitchison, op.cit., pp.230-33.

the same way Cachar too was given back to Govinda Chandra with whom a treaty was made on 6th March 1824, which stipulated the payment of an annual tribute of rupees ten thousand to the British government. At the same time, David Scott, the Agent to the Governor-General in the North-East Frontier, concluded separate treaties with Bar Senapati, the chief of the Matak country, and the Khamti, Sadiya-Khowa Gohain, the chief of Sadiya. Both of them accepted the British suzerainty and promised not to carry on any raids on the British subjects or to help other tribes in their expeditions against British government.

As regard the final disposal of the Ahom kingdom the British government could come to any decision. On 7th March 1828, after long correspondentences between David Scott, the Agent to the Governor-General, North-East Frontier and

85 Aitchison, op.cit., p.117.
86 Ibid., pp.117-119.
the authorities at Calcutta, it was decided to annex Lower Assam permanently to the British empire, but the fate of Upper Assam still remained uncertain. Finally in 1832 the government decided to restore Upper Assam, except the territories of Bar Senapati and Sadiya Khowa Gohain, to an Ahom prince. On April 24, 1833 Purandar Singha was formally installed on the throne of Upper Assam as a tributary king. But the British could not put their promise of the declaration to the effect that "the Governor-General-in-Council does not contemplate the permanent annexation of any part of it to the British dominion." Already in 1828 they had annexed Lower Assam, but in April 1833 Upper Assam was restored to Purandar Singha, who from the very beginning of his reign was confronted with too many difficulties. To avoid the payment of the tax, the ryots of

87 Ibid., pp. 137-38.
his kingdom emigrated to Matak where they were required to pay little or no revenue. This large-scale emigration caused a great loss of the revenue of the Ahom king. Besides, some of the measures like that of the policy of appointment of all sections of the society, high and low, having necessary qualifications, created dissatisfaction amongst the nobles who had high hopes in his succession on the throne of Upper Assam. These discontented section of the people did not extend their sympathetic support and help to the king, on the other hand they began to poison the mind of Francis Jenkins, who came in 1834 as the Commissioner and Agent to the Governor-General for Assam and North-East Rangpur who commented "were we now free to choose whether it were better to take the government of the country immediately into our hands or to manage it through the intervention of a native ruler..... it is my decided opinion, that it should in every way (be) desirable to assume the direct management of that portion
of the province.* On his failure to pay the tributo due to several factors, which were beyond his control, Purandar Singh's territory was annexed to the British Empire in 1838.

Annexation of Cachar and Jyantia:

The kingdom of Cachar was the next victim of the imperialistic design of the British. In 1830 Govinda Chandra was assassinated and as no legitimate successor was left, the British took possession of the plain portion of Cachar in 1832.90

Tularam Baranapati, who usurped and declared himself as independent ruler of North Cachar Hills, came to an

89 Bengal Political Consultations, 1835, 3 August, No.8, as inserted in Political History of Assam, Vol. I, p. 34.

90 C.A. Soppitt, An Historical and Descriptive Account of Kachari Tribes in the North Cachar Hills, Shillong, 1885, pp. 9-10.
understanding with the British in 1830 and in return he agreed to pay tribute of Rs.490 to the British government. In 1854 after the death of Tularam, the North Cachar Hills was also annexed to the British Empire on the ground of misrule by his two sons. Thus the whole of Cachar came under British rule.

The next kingdom which the British laid their hands was the Jayantia kingdom. After the death of Raja Ram Singh of Jayantia kingdom on 25 September, 1832 T.C. Robertson demanded from his successor Rajendra Singh that he should conclude a new treaty on condition of the payment of a tribute of Rs.10,000 as a price of the British recognition of his succession to the Jayantia throne. Rajendra Singh strongly protested against the proposal and pointed out that it would be a violation of the agreement.

91 Aitchison, op. cit., pp. 139-40.
92 Foreign Consultations, 1853, 14 October, Nos. 48-49.
93 Bengal Political Consultations, 1832, 5 November, No. 56.
that was concluded between David Scott and Raja Ram Singh. The British government declared that the agreement was personal and was valid so long Ram Singh was living, hence it became invalid with his death and until a new agreement was concluded, the British government would not recognise his succession on the Jayantia throne. Rajendra Singh finding no other way finally requested the government to reconsider the demand of the tribute. Not agreeing to this, the British government, on 23 February, 1835, declared the incorporation of the plain areas of the Jayantia kingdom on the charge of the failure of the king to arrest and surrender the criminals who immolated three British subjects before the Goddess Kali at Gohha, a district of the Jayantia kingdom in August 1832. Rajendra Singh without any protest made over the whole kingdom to the British government as it would be quite impossible for him

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94 Bengal Political Consultations, 1832, 5 November, No. 56.
to support himself and his establishment from the migr
resources collected from the hills only.

Annexation of the Mattak and Sadiya:

Two other patty chiefs till remained under the
British - Bar Senapati and Sadiya Khowa Gohain both of
whom accepted the British authority but were not required
to pay any tribute to the British government according to
the terms of the agreement concluded with David Scott. On
the question of the possession of Saikhowa, where the
emigrants from Upper Assam settled, the Mattak chief Bar
Senapati and the Khamti chief Sadiya Khowa Gohain involved
in a conflict. But the Sadiya Khowa Gohain occupied
Saikhowa forcibly defying the order of the Political Agent
not to do so by either chief. 95 For this offence the chief
was removed from office. In 1839, the Khamtis at Sadiya

95 Bengal Political Consultations, 20 April, Nos. 1-2, Charlton
to White 5 December, 1834; Jenkins to the Secretary of
Bengal, 20 January 1834, as inserted in Political
rose into revolt killing Captain Adam White and some sepoyas. As a result of this, the Khamti territory of Sadiya was finally annexed to other parts of Assam.

In 1835, the British Political Agent demanded Rs. 10,000 from the Mattak chief Matibar Bar Senapati as tribute, the latter did not accept it. The discovery of tea in that region made the British interested in the territory of the Mattak and after the death of the Bar Senapati on 2 January 1839, when Maju Gohain, the second son of the Bar Senapati assumed the charge of the territory, the Political Agent proposed to conclude a new treaty with him and demanded a tribute of Rs. 10,000 from him. Maju Gohain politely submitted that it would not be possible on the part of his poor subjects, to bear such a heavy taxation. In the meantime the outbreak of the Khamti insurrection and the assassination of Capt. White made the government anxious of their security in that frontier and they suspected on the loyalty of the Mattak chief.
In such a condition quarrel broke out among the two sects, the Morans and the Mattaks. The Political Agent interfered in the affairs and when he failed to solve the problem amicably, he resolved to separate the Morans from the Mattaks and to vest the former under their own chief. As Maju Gohain and other chiefs refused the proposal, the Mattak territory was annexed to other parts of Assam under the British and placed it under the jurisdiction of the Principal Assistant, Lakhimpur. The annexation of Mattak brought the whole of the Brahmaputra Valley under the suzerainty of the British government.

Extension of British Boundary towards the Hills

The occupation of the Brahmaputra Valley brought the British into contact with the hill tribes surrounding the plains of Assam. The tribes included the Nagas, Mikirs, 

Javantias, Mishmis, Abars, Daflas, and the Garos. They were in the habit of making raids into the adjacent place, and such incursions which continued during the British rule made the British government to send expeditions against them and to bring the foothill region under the direct rule of the British government. The government often made attempts to avoid conflict with the hill people and sent British officials on visit who were cordially received by the chiefs of the tribal villages. Major John Butler in his tour of 544 km from Nowgang into the hills inhabited by the Nagas in 1845 reported, "not a shot was fired through out the journey, or the slightest sign of a hostile feeling manifested towards the mission, which wisely was too powerful to admit opposition. We were everywhere received with a friendly spirit, and the chiefs of each village rendered cheerful submission, and presented tribute of elephant's tusks, clothes and spears, according to their means."97 Whenever the tribes opposed strong measures

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97 Major John Butler, *Travels and Adventures in the Province of Assam*, Delhi, re-print 1978, (1855), pp.73,75.
were taken leading to the destruction of villages.  

The long narrow strips of hills running more or less parallel to the south or left bank of the Brahmaputra, extending up to the border of Manipur on the south and Burma to the east, the Tirap district of the Arunachal Pradesh to the north, were inhabited by the people called the Nagas, who were divided into several tribes without having any political bond. Their frequent raids on the people of the plains compelled the British government to send a number of expeditions against them. The Nagas living on the border of Nowgang, Sibsagar and Lakhimpur, who used to come down in the plains to trade, easily amenable than those who were living in the interior area. Jenkins and Pemberton with a party of 700 soldiers and 800 coolies or porters, to carry their baggage and provisions, first entered the area of the less amenable

98 Ibid., p. 103.
Angami Nagas in 1832. In their tour they faced strong opposition. In 1835 the responsibility to resist the Naga raids was given to the Manipuri king and Tularam. But as they failed the government assumed the responsibility and from 1835 to 1851 ten military expeditions were led against the Angami Nagas. But inspite of these in 1851, 22 raids were made by them causing the death of about 22 persons, 10 wounded and 113 were taken as captives. In 1854 to resist the Nagas, one officer was posted at Asla by establishing a line of frontier out-post. But this also proved a fruitless and from 1854 to 1865, 19 raids were made by them, as a result of which 232 persons were either killed, wounded or carried off. Finally in 1866 the government decided to take possession of the area inhabited by the Angami Nagas and a out-post was established at Sanaguting.

99 Ibid., pp. 102-03.
100 Verer Elwin, Nagaland, Shillong, 1961, p. 20.
102 Ibid. ; Verer Elwin, loc. cit., p. 21.
103 E. Gait, loc. cit., p. 315.
104 Verer Elwin, loc. cit., p. 21.
At the same time a school and a dispensary was also opened. In 1878 Kahima was declared as the chief administrative centre of the area with a sub-centre at Wokha. This was the beginning of the administration in the Naga hills which was formed a separate district in 1881. In 1888 a new sub-division was opened at Mokokchang.

The hills situated on the west of Khasi and Jayantia hills was inhabited by another tribe known as the Garos, who also had the habit of making predatory incursions upon the frontier villages in the plains.

To conciliate them David Scott invited the Christian Missionaries to the Garo hills. At the beginning, the Garo Hills were treated by the British as a part of Goalpara.

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106 Ibid.
107 Ibid.
108 Ibid.
109 Aitchison, *op. cit.*, 185-86.
But due to constant raids and failure of the local authority to control the situation compelled the British government to change their policy as regard the administration of Garo hills. In 1869 a separate district was created with headquarters at Tura. By 1872 the whole area inhabited by the Garos covering an area of 8780 sq. km. having a population of 8,000 was brought within the British administration.\(^{110}\)

The first Lushai raid took place in the British territory in 1849 which compelled the government to send an expedition against them.\(^{111}\) After this till 1868 they no troubles in that frontier. But from 1868 they reappeared causing a series of outrages.\(^{112}\) After some British expeditions they remained silent till 1889. In 1889 when the Lushais made a raid on the Chittagong border, the British

\(^{110}\) Aitchison, \textit{op.cit.}, pp. 185-86.

\(^{111}\) E. Gait, \textit{op.cit.}, p. 318.

\(^{112}\) Ibid.
government finally decided to subjugate the territory and established a military out-post at Aijal and another at Lunglei under the charge of Political Officers. The Lushais suddenly attacking Aijal killed the officer Capt. Browne. In 1892 another Lushai insurrection took place which was suppressed. In April 1894 the whole area was brought under the British administration. 113

The British policy of annexation was also manifested from their policy towards Bhutan. The strip of plain areas at the foot of Himalayas that extended from Darrang to North Bengal were called Duar. There existed eighteen such Duars of which seven were in Kamrup and Darrang. These seven Duars were given to the Bhutias by the Ahoms in return of an annual tribute of Rs. 4,785. 114 After the British occupation of Assam, the Bhutias stopped the payment of the tribute and began to make frequent outrages in the British territory. This compelled the British government in 1841 to take over

113 Ibid.
114 Ibid., p. 312.
all the seven Duaars from the Bhutias and an annual payment of Rs. 10,000 was made to the Bhutian chiefs. In 1861 the repeated Bhutian raids compelled the British government to declare war and force them to cede all the Duaars to the British government in return of Rs. 25,000 annually. 115 Kariapara Duar, held by some independent Bhutia chiefs called Sat Rajas, was situated in the east of the Bhutia Duaars of Darrang. In 1843 the British government annexed it and paid to the chiefs an annual amount of Rs. 5,000 or one third of the supposed revenue of this place. 116

To stop the repeated tribal raids within their territory, the Ahom rulers introduced the pose system. By this system the tribes like Charduar Bhutias, the Aka Dafles and the Miris were allowed to come down to the plains of certain areas on the border granted to them annually and to collect the pose from the villagers fixed

115 Gait, A. History of Assam, p. 312.
116 Ibid.
by the Ahom rulers. The British government considered the annual descent of the tribes into the plains as dangerous to peace. So they, instead of allowing the tribes to come down the plains, made arrangement to pay a fixed amount to them. Accordingly the Charduar Bhutias received Rs. 1,740, the Tibetan Bhutias Rs. 1,461, the Akas Rs. 700, the Daflas Rs. 4,130 and the Miris Rs. 1,118.117

Due to repeated robberies and murders committed by the Aka chief Tangi or Taqi Raja in the plains, he was imprisoned in 1829 at Guwahati and finally in 1888 all their chiefs tendered their submission.118

The Daflas, who also accepted the money payment in 1852, again started their raids in the British territory in 1870 which finally compelled the British government to send punitive expedition in the Dafla villages in 1896.119

117 Ibid., p. 313.
118 Ibid., p. 321.
119 Ibid., pp. 321-22.
The British first sent an expedition against the Abors in 1848 to rescue some Kachar gold washers carried off by the Abors. Several other raids made by the Abors in 1858, 1859 and 1860 compelled the British government to establish a number of out-posts by constructing roads on the Abor border. In 1889 when the Abors killed four Miris, the British government imposed a fine of 20 bisons, but as they failed to pay the fine, the border was ceased. Finally in 1900 the Abors submitted to the British government. 120

The Mishmis of the north-eastern frontier also made frequent raids in British territories which compelled the government to send expeditions against them. 121

120 Ibid., p. 322
121 Ibid., pp. 323-24.