CHAPTER V

POLICY RE-EXAMINED

The withdrawal of the post of Dimapur and the acceptance of the left bank of the Dhansiri as the extreme limit of British jurisdiction was construed by the Angamis as their own victory, which they celebrated by a repetition of their raids into North Cachar. As offensive measures had been prescribed by the Government no action was taken to retaliate. It may be pointed out in this connection that since Bivar had taken charge of the Sub-Division, the eastern frontier of North Cachar was defended by a line of stockaded outposts, about 15 or 20 miles apart between which communications were kept by patrols. But these measures had the effect of only "temporising with the evils", and one raid followed another in quick succession. In fact, between 1852-1862, twenty-four raids were committed by the Angamis. During 1854-1856, when the defensive scheme was under operation seventy-five British subjects were killed, thirteen wounded and four carried into captivity, but in not a single case, the perpetrators were brought to book. Although the line of outposts was gradually contracted and everything that went outside it was disregarded, the officers posted...
in the hills proved themselves utterly incompetent to hold their own. The defensive outposts throughout the frontier held only the grounds they covered and the Nagas were able to creep by them with impunity.

CHANGE IN POLICY URGED:

The continued unhappy state of affairs in the Naga frontier, led Jenkins to urge the Government of India to abandon its policy of non-interference and take vigorous measures for bringing the Angamis under effective control. While pressing for a change in policy, he was constrained to observe that "the same feuds or outrages which first led us to be acquainted with Angamis have been repeated lately ...... ..... that no series of punishments, however severe will prevent the recurrence of similar barbarous atrocities unless the country is really and fully annexed." 2

The Governor-General in-Council was opposed to any change in the existing policy of the Government and insisted upon the Government of Bengal to demand of the frontier officers posted in Assam vigorous execution of the defensive measures to check the aggressions of the tribes in question. As a result, the usual method of coercing the tribes by blockade, subsidies, offer of rewards and other inducements to surrender

2. B.J.P. 1855, June 14, No. 186.
the guilty persons were resorted to for keeping the peace of the border, but without any success.

ABANDONMENT OF NORTH CACHAR PROPOSED:

Jenkins till the end of his tenure of office in 1861, continued to press his own views, inspite of the unchanged determination of the Government of India not to annex the hills. The Government of Bengal realised that the defence of North Cachar and Mikir hills could not be effectively carried out from its present headquarter at Asalu and a reorganisation of the district was necessary for the purpose. In 1861, immediately after Hopkinson's appointment as Commissioner, he was consulted on a proposition to reorganise the district under the First Assistant of Nowgong as contemplated by the Government of Bengal. While giving his opinion he observed:

From what I have seen of the hill tribes on this side of India, my conclusion is that there is no advantageous middle course between their thorough occupation and domination or having nothing whatever to do with them. A partially occupied and protected country is a source of annoyance, expense and discredit. Just as a stockade is not respected unless it be complete, so also I think that the Government of any territory to be legitimate must be thorough, and rather than hold North Cachar on the terms proposed by Lt. Sconce, I think it would be much better to abandon it altogether.

While suggesting withdrawal from North Cachar, Hopkinson actually suggested to the Government the retreat of its present boundary to the line of the Jamuna river, which was the Northern boundary of North Cachar and the establishment of a chain of posts along the line so as to protect the country in its rear. A broad strip of land, he added, might be declared neutral territory. It would be a sufficient measure of protection, he expected "where our settled possessions border the lands of predatory savages, not merely to leave them to themselves, but to put a belt of uninhabited country between them and us". No orders were passed by the Government of Bengal on Hopkinson's report. 4

ANGAMI RAIDS OF 1861-62:

The passive attitude of the Government of India towards the Angamis hitherto followed, emboldened them to raid at will on the British villages of North Cachar. In 1862 alone three distinct attacks had been made by these Nagas in a short period of twenty four days and two of them took place within sight of the Borpothar Guard house. As no other effective action than the usual closure of their duars to the plains were enforced, they were provoked to further aggressions. Admitting that the relations of the British Government could not possibly be on a more worse footing.

than they were then, Major Agnew, the officiating Commissioner stated that "it is not creditable to our Government that such atrocities should recur annually with unvarying certainty and that we should be powerless alike to protect our subjects or to punish the aggressors and some more decisive steps must be adopted to remedy the state of things. The non-interference policy now and for sometime in force is excellent in theory, but Government will be inclined to think that it must be abandoned". 5

The Lieutenant Governor of Bengal, concurred in the views of Agnew that the Nagas could not be kept out by the police, nor coerced by a blockade of their passes, nor conciliated by subsidies. But he considered that the best way to make them amenable to reason and order was by convincing them of the advantages of trade and friendly intercourse. He was for such a course with the Nagas in the interest in tea plantation, which of late had been rapidly extending to their hills. Therefore, he desired the Commissioner to remove the prohibitions on trade, if there be any, in order to facilitate their free intercourse with Nowgong. 6 With the same end in view he supported the idea of appointing one officer in immediate communication with the Angamis either at Dimapur or at any suitable place, but under the

officer in-charge of the District of Nowgonz. The duty of this officer, would be to invite the tribes to a conference at a most convenient place with a view to convince them of the necessity of maintaining peace to refrain from raids and to refer all their disputes to him for decision and redress. He should make every chief in the border responsible for any outrage committed upon British territory and for this police duty each might be given a cash remuneration. Written or sealed agreements were to be taken from them and he should receive from them their offerings of submission, but only after making suitable presents to them in return. The officer was enjoined not to interfere in their internal affairs for the present, but decide only such disputes which might be voluntarily submitted to him.

HAUGHTON'S PLAN OF SUBJECTION OF THE NAGAS:

The above suggestions of the Lieutenant Governor of Bengal could not be implemented due to several changes among the Assam officials and the conflicting opinions of successive officers. In the meanwhile Captain Haughton, the officiating Commissioner, on being called upon to take immediate action on the above plan after a personal visit to the hill country, declared that there was no place in the Naga country which could be chosen as a station for North

Cachar. He also came to the conclusion that it would be of no advantage, even if, it were practicable to locate an officer on the frontier of the Naga country. The only policy, which appeared feasible to him, was to avow British sovereignty over the whole of the Naga tribes not included in Manipur or Burma and gradually to bring them to order. 

Haughton's proposal appeared to be sound to the Lieutenant Governor, but he was not prepared to recommend it for the present.

HOPKINSON RENEWS OLD PROPOSITION:

Notwithstanding much correspondence between the Government of Bengal and the Agent to the Governor-General, no concrete step was taken to give effect to the former plan. In the early part of 1865, recurrence of fresh raids compelled Lieutenant Gregory, the officer in-charge of North Cachar, to represent to the Agent that the security of his subdivision was at stake and unless he was authorised to adopt more stringent measures than were allowed to his predecessors he could not guarantee its safety. It may be pointed out here that in 1862-63, the officer in-charge of North Cachar was directed to carry out a plan of paying subsidies to the Nagas for keeping peace in the border as was followed in respect of the Abor and the Garos. Hopkinson, who was rather critical

of Government's policy of subsidising the frontier tribes for maintaining peace in the border advocated the policy of excluding offending villages from trade. He also urged upon the Government of Bengal the adoption of a bold policy against the Nagas, failing which to abandon North Cachar. At the same time for solving the problem of the Angami Nagas, he expressed that he would put forward a more comprehensive policy for the consideration of the Government. 9

The Lieutenant Governor of Bengal did not agree with the views of Hopkinson that the policy of subsidising the tribes was a wrong one. Asserting that the payment of subsidies had never failed with either the Abors, Garos, Kukis or with the Nagas, he insisted upon the latter to give a fair trial to it. The Commissioner was reprimanded for not giving effect to the orders of the Government of 1862 and again repeated in 1863. If the policy outlined hitherto was carried in the spirit in which it was conceived, the Lieutenant Governor maintained the outrages would not have occurred. He was not prepared to entertain the proposal of abandoning North Cachar even for a moment because "if petty outrages are to be followed by withdrawal of our frontier, we should very speedily find ourselves driven out of the province". 10 At the same time, he said, the policy of interdicting them from trade was not only of smallest use, but

10. B.J.P. 1866, April, No. 139.
also unsound and impracticable. As a compromise between these conflicting views the Governor-General in Council in consideration of the worsening situation in North Cachar directed the Government of Bengal to arrange effectively for defending the territory in question or to consider the expediency of withdrawing from it altogether. While expressing the above opinion, the Governor-General in Council desired that the Commissioner of Assam should be called upon "to go carefully and fully into the subject, and to state what is the comprehensive policy which he would propose, and to show the grounds for what he may recommend."

REPORT OF HOPKINSON:

Accordingly Hopkinson submitted an elaborate report to the Government of India in his letters dated October 30, and November 4, 1866, having commented therein the various measures hitherto adopted by the local authorities and approved by the Government. While submitting his report he proposed a comprehensive plan for the subjugation of the refractory Nagas.

11. F.P.P. (A) 1865; July, No. 53.
(a) MILITARY MEASURES:

Hopkinson considered it unjust to assume that the British had any other frontier in Assam than the Bhutan frontier, the Burmese frontier, and the Manipur frontier and in his opinion the Nagas were included within British jurisdiction in the treaties with Burma. There was, therefore, no frontier with the Nagas except "the interval at which the savages chose to keep away from our settlements or to approach them". Such a nominal frontier, he believed was utterly indefensible militaristically, because the Nagas were not "a military enemy against whom the military warfare could prove to be efficacious". While stating so he made the following observation:

Military organisation is concerned with masses not units. A French army might hold the Pyrenees against a Spanish army, but it would certainly fail in dealing with parties of contrabandists; and stopping contraband along the Spanish frontier. The Italian army is efficient enough but the brigands of the Abruzzi are said to set its detachments at defiance. Though the United States might be able to overwhelm Canada with its armies, it cannot prevent smuggling along the Canadian frontier - I might add, even raids. But the case of our troops in the Assam terrai against parties of Nagas, or Abors, or Garos, is beyond all comparison, a more hopeless one.  

Hopkinson firmly believed that pacification of the hill tribes was mainly a work for the civil administra-

12. B.J.P. 1866, April, No. 140.
13. B.J.P. 1866, April, No. 140.
tion assisted atmost by its police. He expected little from military authorities, after what had been already said by Haughton, Showers, Bruce and himself. Military officers, in his opinion had nothing better to propose than the establishment of military posts and their distribution. Thus Major General Tytler's remedy against the Abor was, a regiment at Sadiya, and a steam gun-boat, and for the defence of North Cachar, a cantonment on the right bank of the Dhansiri.

"A military outpost in Assam is a protection against the hill tribes as an umbrella is against rain but no more, or at most it exercise the moral influence of a scare-crow, sure to be found out atleast to be harmless." Hopkinson doubted the ability of military posts to effectively cut off the Nagas from their communication with North Cachar.

Military posts would just protect the ground they stood on, and not always that; and ... ... ... their maintenance would simply constitute an aggravation of the miseries of the people of the villages near which they were located, while it would be enormously expensive to the state. 14

(b) SUBSIDIES:

Hopkinson had great doubts as to the success of the policy of subsidising the hill tribes for the defence of a frontier. Though he was not opposed to the payment of "Black Mail" in certain cases, he would not admit it as an "univer-

sal solvent" of removing all difficulties with hill people. With people having "bare gift of speech, but no alphabet", he said, it was always difficult to maintain peace on the frontier under written agreements. He maintained that the policy hitherto followed in subsidising the friendly Nagas on the frontier was of little success. None of the officers posted in North Cachar were in favour of this scheme. Neither Gregory, nor his predecessor Captain Clarke gave the Commissioner any encouragement to try the scheme of subsidising the friendly Nagas. The former officer stated the difficulty of subsidising the Nagas thus:

No payment or subsidies of any kind have been ever made to the Nagas. Under existing circumstances any expenditure of the kind would fail in purchasing the peace of the frontier. At present our communication with even the few villages we are in correspondence with is conducted through the chief or headman. There is no guarantee that any engagement made by them would be ratified by the clans ever which they have as little social or political power as a captain of volunteers over his company of parrade. Even if ratified by the majority for every individual of the clan is independent and responsible only to himself for his actions. They would undoubtedly promise for the present gain anything we might ask them, but as heretofore, they would as easily break their promises. Under such circumstances any expenditure in this quarter would be money thrown away.

16. B.J.P. 1866, April, No. 139.
(c) BLOCKADES:

Notwithstanding the present discouragement of blockades as an effective weapon of controlling the wild tribes of the frontier, Hopkinson still believed it to be of greatest use. He maintained that the attempt to exclude the Angami Nagas from trade had not been always unsuccessful, nor was he acquainted with any instance in which it had been employed with the worst results. He cited the instances of Captain Holroyd, the Principal Assistant of Sibsagar, using it effectively against the Nagas under his jurisdiction. It was also of great use in bringing the Jayantiyas under complete submission. "The policy of excluding the whole tribes from friendly intercourse and trade with our villages on account of the misconduct of a few individuals is one which has been condemned on very strong grounds as defeating its own purpose." But he asserted that there might be situations in which a blockade could be made complete, and that when complete, it would be a potent instrument of control. He, therefore, recommended the enforcement of blockades against the Nagas in bringing them to order.

(d) COERCIVE MEASURES:

Hopkinson doubted the applicability of a merely conciliatory policy towards the Nagas as expressed by subse-

17. F.F.P. (A) 1865, June 1, No. 136.
dies. He was equally indisposed to rely exclusively on a policy of coercion. "Our army administration, our military organisation, the quality of our troops, the conditions of their enlistment, their drill, their discipline are all ... ... ... inappropriate to the exigencies of hill warfare on our Assam frontier". He was of the view that of the military expeditions hitherto undertaken against the Nagas only a few might be considered successful in commensurate with the expense and the efforts. Some were definite failures. Hopkinson had no hesitation in saying that the raids of the Nagas, Garos and Abors were the necessary consequences of their mode of life and the state of the country in which they live or of their victims. He stated:

'The savage can do whatever the wild animal does, he is as active and as wary; the most impenetrable jungle is not impenetrable to him; he makes his lair where the wild animal makes his; he finds his food more easily, for he is omnivorous; he draws health and vigor from an atmosphere, which is a swift, subtle, and deadly poison to all other human beings'.

No plan, he said, could be so devised which would prove effective in checking the depredations of the hill tribes as long as the country remained congenial to their existence. Nevertheless, he was convinced, the outrages could be reduced to a minimum and their extension to the plains prevented by the application of coercive tactics.  

18. B.J.P., April, No. 139.  
19. Ibid.
Hopkinson's Comprehensive Policy:

Hopkinson like his predecessor General Jenkins, had all along been advocating a "forward policy". His proposal to retire the boundary of North Cachar at a particular point should not be construed to mean that he supported a retreat from the hills. In fact, such a suggestion came from him immediately after his assumption of Office as Commissioner of Assam in 1861. He then proposed it, because he felt that the maintenance of a mere nominal hold over North Cachar would afford little protection, but saddle the Government with immense responsibilities. At the same time, he did not support Haughton's policy of avowing sovereignty over the whole of the Naga Hills and of gradually bringing them to order, because such a policy was one, if undertaken once by the Government, it would not be able to retrace its steps before subjugating all the wild tribes up to the confines of Manipur and Burma. Besides its implementation would not be possible without incurring huge expenditure by the Government. 20

Hopkinson found it difficult to propose any measure for securing the peace in the Naga frontier in the absence of a settled policy of the Government. The plan of paying subsidies to the hill tribes for keeping peace of the

20. B.J.P. 1866, April, No. 139.
frontier, was to him only a temporary and provisional expedient, which could not be applied to the Nagas as in the cases of the Garos or Abors. At the same time, he was unable to recommend any single policy to deal with them, because in dealing with frontier tribes one could never depend on one particular course, but there must be a ready adoption of expedients to suit ever varying circumstances. He added, "sometimes we must employ coercion, pure and simple, sometimes blockades; very often a judicious system of subsiding will keep tribes quiet for a long while, but still the surest foundation on which to build our control over them will be their fear of us". He, therefore, proposed to the Government of India a policy to the hill tribes in general and the Nagas in particular by which "we must cease to regard them as aliens or even as enemies, but acknowledge them as subjects, seek to establish ourselves among them under our control and within the pale of civilisation." 21

Hopkinson admitted that there were difficulties of managing hill tribes either by coercion or conciliation. But these difficulties could be overcome by little exertion and tact on the part of officers engaged on such duty. At the same time, he admitted that he was not sure as to whether the measures recommended by him could be implemented all at once. Sometimes, he felt it might be necessary to employ

21. B.J.P. 1866, April, No. 140.
coercion or sometimes an economic blockade before they were brought under actual occupation. He was, of course, sure of one thing that whatever method was decided upon, must be carried out very thoroughly. The general outline of his policy was "to recognise no frontiers save Bhutan, Burmah and Munnipore; we are to undertake the duties such an acknowledgement entails." Hopkinson did not think that his plan would prove expensive in the long run and even if it be so, he considered that the Government should not abandon it. He foresaw one important item of expenditure, which the Government could not dispense with was of road-construction. Roads were necessary, not only for opening the world external to them, but for getting at them as and when required. Similarly, another important thing to which the Government's attention should be given was education and civilisation of the tribe. But these obligations could be better performed by the Christian Missionaries, and the Government should encourage and assist them to undertake these responsibilities by promising liberal grants and other facilities.

HOPKINSON'S PLAN OF FRONTIER MANAGEMENT:

Hopkinson proposed to bring the Angami Nagas under British control not by repeating the policy of sending annual military expeditions, but by deputing an European officer.
to effect a permanent lodgement in a most convenient point in the hills. The officer would be assisted by a moderate force of two hundred men. After his arrival, he would invite the Naga chiefs to submit themselves to the Government. Those who agreed, would as a mark of submission, pay an annual tribute and would receive in return the aid and protection of the British; while those who refused would be told that they would be left to themselves so long as they kept "the peace towards us and these who submitted themselves to us". To be more explicit, Hopkinson proposed to instruct Lieutenant Gregory, the officer in-charge of North Cachar to occupy Samaguting, which was only one march from Dimapur where he would immediately erect a stockade to overawe the villages. From the beginning Gregory would be independent of the Angamis in respect of carriage and supplies and would not accept anything unless voluntarily offered. After ascertaining the feeling of the villages, he would gradually try to win them by offering subsidies, not by annual payments in money or articles but by a judicious expenditure of money and presents in return for services rendered, or tangible expressions of good will. He would also endeavour to open trade with the plains by establishing a market either at Samaguting or Dimapur, and at the same time make available to the villagers the services

23. B.J.P. 1866, October, No. 56.
of the medical officer who would accompany him with full supply of medical stores.

The plan so far as the Nagas were concerned was not a new one. Such a plan was advocated by Colonel Haughton who also proposed to depute a specially qualified officer, backed by a force of two hundred men to establish a permanent station in the hills. That officer after establishing himself would invite the chiefs of the nearby villages to a conference, where they would be asked to submit to the Government. Those who agreed would be required to pay an annual tribute and those who refused would be left to themselves so long they kept the peace. Hokinson's plan was an improvement on that of Haughton. How the new plan would be translated into practice was stated by Gregory himself, who had originally drafted it in the following words:

I am totally averse to any attempt to subdue the country; it could be only done at great expense, and would require a strong force to hold it. It would be further embarking on an unknown sea, for as we know nothing of the tribes beyond the Angamis, except that they are fierce and warlike; so that it would be well our acquaintance with them should be made gradually and peacefully, which it is most certain would not be the case if we began by annexing the Angami country with arms.

I would advance step by step yearly opening out a good road as I went, never getting in advance of the ground I was not sure of, until I reached the very centre of the most thickly populated part of the country.

24. B.J.P. 1866, April, Nos. 139-40; B.J.P. 1866, Oct., Nos. 56-57
There, clear of any village, but that of my own hewers of wood and drawers of water, on the slopes of what it described as a most beautiful country, fertile to a degree, finely wooded with oak and beach and fir, and well-watered, I would build the permanent station.

SUBJUGATION OF THE NAGAS: BENGAL GOVERNMENT'S PLAN:

Hopkinson's report on the raids into North Cachar brought about a revulsion of feeling in the minds of the Lieutenant Governor of Bengal and he was constrained to remark that the abandonment of the position, which the Government occupied before 1854 and the withdrawal of the line of posts to the left bank of the Dhansiri was a great mistake. "The only course left to us", he considered, "consistently with the duty we owe to the inhabitants of the adjoining frontier districts, as well as to the Angami Nagas themselves, who are torn by intestine feuds for want of a government, and unable to exercise any general self-control, or to restrain independent action on the part of any village, or even of a section of any of the numerous villages inhabited by the tribe, is to reassert our authority over them under a system of administration suited to their circumstances and gradually to reclaim them from habits of lawlessness to those of order and civilisation." Being fully convinced of the futility of purely defensive measures as the only means of establishing peace in

27. B.J.P. 1866, April, No. 140.
the Naga frontier, the Lieutenant Governor of Bengal proposed to remove Gregory from Asalu to Samaguting abolishing North Cachar as a Sub-Division. He would administer from Samaguting the new district, which would be formed by that part of Nowgong which was located on the right bank of the Dhansiri, the Naga Hills, and the country on both banks of the river Dayang as Deputy Commissioner. In forwarding this proposal to the Government of India, the Lieutenant Governor pointed out that "all the northern slopes of the Patkai and Barail hills were British territory and that the Angami Nagas inhabiting these slopes had no political independence. It was, therefore, clearly open in point of right, as it was incumbent on good policy to exercise its sovereign power by giving them the benefit of a settled administration". Moreover, he pointed out "the existence on the borders of the British territory of a wild and turbulent tribe disturbing the peace of the settled population would justify the adoption of any measure by the Government for bringing them under subjection and control." 28

BENGAL GOVERNMENT'S PLAN DISAPPROVED:

The altered policy advocated by the Government of Bengal was a surprise to the Government of India, all the more, because, such a policy was more than what the local

28. Ibid.
officials recommended. In fact, neither Hopkinson nor Gregory envisaged anything of the kind that the Bengal Government was advocating. The Government of India did not approve of the occupation of the hills because of its inability to incur heavy expenses of such a project. It was, therefore, happy that an attempt was being made to conciliate the Nagas on the lines proposed by Lt. Gregory. Accordingly, the Government of India sanctioned the establishment of a strong central station in the hills. On receipt of this sanction, the Government of Bengal ordered Gregory to take up his position at Samaguting and "do his best by tact and good management, supported by a moderate display of force, to bring that portion of the hill tract adjacent to the plains into order."

The main object of the Government having been to protect the lowlands from the incursions of the Angami Nagas, he was desired that "instead of exerting himself to extend his rule into the interior, he will refrain from such a course". Though everything was left to Gregory's discretion and good judgement, the following directives given to him by the Government of India might be considered the basis of the new system of frontier management:

A conciliatory demeanour will of course be indispensable, and perhaps the expenditure of a little money to leading men will be useful. When conciliation fails punitive measures will not be shrunken from. In some instances a blockade of the passes, so as to exclude the offending tribe or village
from our bazar, may be attended with good results. But in all cases the great point will be to select a penalty suitable to the circumstance of the particular affair. Where roads are necessary, they must be constructed in a simple and inexpensive manner, just sufficient for the opening of the country to the extent actually required.

The Home Government accordingly approved the action of the Government of India and assured its sanction to any reasonable expenditure that might be incurred in conciliating the Nagas. The Secretary of State for India, while communicating this approval expressed the hope that "a policy, which had been crowned with signal success in other parts of India, will prove in the end no less of service on the frontiers of Assam... ...".

30. B.J.P., 1867, April, No. 110.