CHAPTER X

EPILOGUE

From what had been discussed in our foregoing chapters, it would be clear that the British in course of half a century found themselves in the position of the virtual conqueror of the Naga hills. But this position was gained not without a challenge from the Nagas. In fact, from the very beginning British-Naga relationship was marked by hostility and unfriendliness. The British fought and punished the Nagas, but the latter were not slow to accept the challenge; they were an equal match to the white-men. There was, however, a silver-lining amidst these challenges and counter-challenges; the British also befriended the Nagas and brought peace and order among them by their enlightened administration.

The British rulers followed different policies towards the Naga tribes at different times. These differences in policies and methods were dictated by the exigencies of the situation, character and civilisation of the tribes. It was found that the Eastern Nagas who had been in communication with the plains of Assam from earlier times were easier to be managed than the Western Nagas who had no direct contact with the plains either commercial or otherwise. The Eastern Nagas, when guilty of any misconduct could be easily kept in
order by prohibiting them from visiting the plains until reparations were made. But entirely different was the case with the Angamis, a powerful tribe of the Western Nagas whose relationship with the British was marked by unfriendliness from the very beginning. Although the Government of India sent no less than ten punitive expeditions against them for raiding the British territories, their raids did not cease until a position was occupied in their hills in 1866.

Alexander Mackenzie in his History of the Relations of the Government with the Hill Tribes of the North East Frontier of Bengal, asserts that the British policy towards the Nagas had been essentially a policy of conciliation.\(^1\) He said even after the British Officers were located in the hills, they were for a time not allowed to assert themselves to suppress inter-tribal feuds and outrages and to enforce a regime of civilisation and police.\(^2\) Their duty was declared to be the prevention, as far as possible of inroads into the British territory and cultivation of friendly relations with the Nagas. It was true that the frontier officers and commanders in-charge of expeditions sent against the Nagas were instructed again and again not to burn villages and granaries and punish the innocent with the guilty. But in practice these instructions were more often violated than observed.

The burning and destruction of Khonoma by Browne Wood (1844),

---
\(^1\) Mackenzie, A.; History of the Relations, etc. p. 300.
\(^2\) Mackenzie, A.; History of the Relations, etc. p. 369—372.
of Kekrima by Reed (1851), of Razepemah by Gregory (1867) and
of Ratami by Mc Cabe (1883) were only few examples that could
be cited in support of the fact that the British Officers
resorted to wanton acts of devastation in which the whole
community suffered for the misbehaviour of the few.

Such excesses, according to the local authorities
were demanded by pressing necessities. Major Jenkins while
approving the proceedings of Browne Wood thought "although
the resort to such means of punishment is to be regretted as
involving in one common chastisement, probably many who were
not active participators in the offence committed, yet I am
not aware how it is to be avoided ... I trust the measure
will be considered justified by the necessity ...... of
intimidating these hillmen from repeating their aggressions
upon our villages". His successor Colonel Hopkinson also
believed "to punish the innocent with the guilty is a mere
phrase rather than the subject of a predicate; punishing the
guilty must generally be made a question of circumstance
rather than of principle."  

Whatever justification the higher officials of the
Government might have given, the excesses committed and the
treatment meted out to the Nagas in most cases smack of
retaliation and revenge. Such a policy of burning down of
villages and harrying of crops by flying incursions always

4. F. P. P. (A), 1869, April, Nos. 260-1.
left a trail of bad blood resulting in worst possible re-
prisals. Widespread destruction of villages was not likely
to endear the hillmen to the administration. It merely
tended to keep the tribes isolated. The adoption of such
cruel practices by the officers of the Government lowered
the image of the Britishers whom the Nagas could consider no
better than themselves or the Manipuris, who also were
accustomed to follow a similar policy of extermination.

It was also a common practice of the British
officers in those days to brand the frontier tribes as savages
and to treat them as such. Even in the official correspon-
dences the tribes were referred to as "these savages". Major
Butler, Principal Assistant of Nowgong, in one of his official
communications to the Agent to the Governor-General compared
the Nagas to wild beasts. He referred "probably it will be
necessary to prohibit trade and intercourse of the Angami and
Lhota Nagas with our people on the plains west of Dhamahi
and to treat all Nagas crossing into our territory after such
a proclamation as wild beasts of the forest, either to be
captured and imprisoned or shot if they attempt to escape
from our guards. They do not spare our people and we cannot
let their savage acts pass with impunity." 5

Fortunately, the latter-day British administrators
not only realised the folly of a policy of repression, but

5, B.J.P. 1855, April 12, No.154.
also the necessity of changing their attitude and temper towards the Nagas. It was considered expedient to treat them through friendly intercourse and remove the causes of irritation whatever there might be instead of resorting to brute force. Citing instances of the successful administration of some officers of Naga Hills of the past and the present Robert Reid writes;

We have been fortunate in the past and in the present, in the type of men who have served in these hills. McCabe made a name for himself in the latter part of the nineteenth century and has had even greater successors. I think, with all due respect to the great men of the past, that that is because latter-day administrators have perhaps imported more of sympathy and understanding into their attitude. Of the moderns, men like Butten, Mills and Pawsey have all left their mark on these hills, and their names are still household words in the villages. It is due to them that the hill tribes have stood the test of war, war on their doorstep, so successfully.

British rule for the first time brought unity among the warring Nagas, living in tribes and clans scattered over the hills and isolated from one another. American Baptist Mission worked closely with British administration in the Naga Hills in civilising and reclaiming them from their primitive life. As a result of their co-operative venture head-hunting within the district boundary quickly disappeared, inter-village feuds came to an end and the Nagas settled down to a peaceful living devoting themselves to agriculture.

and trade. Formerly "a great difference existed between the wealthy owners of the terraced cultivation and those who had to eke out an existence by jhooming or working on the fields of their more opulent neighbours. Wealth was power; and might was right, no poor man could rest secure even in the possession of his property. The slightest pretext was sufficient, and the weaker party found himself deprived of his land and reduced to the condition little superior to that of a slave". But such a state of affairs was now relegated to the past, and no one now "hesitates to lodge a complaint at Kohima."

Dr. Hutton remarks "far from being of immediate benefit to the primitive tribes, the establishment of British rule in India did most of them much more harm than good." Agreed with this view, Verrier Elwin observed that although many British Officers regarded the tribes with great sympathy, they could do little to protect or help them from the alienation of tribal land, the rapacity of money lenders and merchants, and from the extortions of the police. He believed that the Santhal rebellion of 1855, the Koya rebellion of 1879 and the revolts of Ho, Munda, etc. were either due to the economic loss from the deprivation of tribal land or from the extortions or corruption of the police sent from time to time to punish the tribesmen for their misbehaviour.

8. Quoted by Elwin in his Nagaland, p.70
Happily the Nagas did not suffer from such wrongs as had been suffered by the aboriginals of some other parts of India. On the contrary, "with their land closed to traders, money-lenders and land-hungry settlers from the plains, the Nagas have been saved from the exploitation which has caused the ruin of so many aboriginal tribes in other parts of India". The British had given the Nagas security, peace and order and the benefits of a settled administration. The Nagas have got effective justice within the spirit of tribal law, hospitals and dispensaries, schools and improved means of communications. Probably for these reasons Nagas entertained an attitude of confidence and good will towards the British rulers. Had the Nagas nourished any suspicion about the good intentions of the British or they suffered from wrongs as some of the tribals in other parts of the British Indian territories, there would have been revolts in the Naga areas as well. The absence of any trouble of a serious nature in the Naga administered areas and the loyalty shown by the Nagas immediately at the end of our period during the Manipur rebellion of 1891 and later in the two World Wars were clear manifestations of their contentment and acquiescence to British rule.