INTRODUCTION

GEOGRAPHICAL BACKGROUND:

Assam lies on the north-east corner of the republic of India, between latitude twenty-second and twenty-eighth North and longitude eighty-ninth and ninety-seventh East. It is bounded on the north by Bhutan and Tibet; on the east by the border of China; on the south by Manipur and Burma; and on the west by Hill Tripura, East Pakistan and West Bengal. Geographically, Assam may be divided into two natural divisions - the hilly tracts on the north, the east and the south; and the plains. The latter is subdivided into the valley of the Brahmaputra and the Surma, named after the two principal river-systems of Assam.

The vast hill tracts consist mainly of the Assam Range, the Mikir Hills, the Lushai Hills and the ridges which run northward from Hill Tripura into the Surma Valley. The range of mountains known as the Assam Range, which separates the two valleys projects at right angles from the Burmese system, and lies almost in an east-west direction. The various portions of this range are named after the tribes who inhabit them - the Nagas, the North Cachar, the Jayantia, the Khasia and the Garo Hills. The highest elevation in the Garo Hills is 4,600 feet, in the Khasia Hills 6,450 feet, but towards Jayantia and North Cachar Hills the level falls.
In the Barail, among the hills bordering the Jatinga valley there are peaks ranging between 5000 to 6000 feet. The highest point, however, is reached further east near the boundary between the Naga Hills and Manipur, where Japvo is 9890 feet. In the Mikir-Rengma Hills lying between the districts of Sibsagar and Nowgong, the summits reach a height of 4000 feet. The hills lying south of Sibsagar and Lakhimpur districts inhabited mostly by Naga tribes consist of small broken ranges running north-east and south-west having irregular spurs to the plains, which are usually precipitous on the northern side, but with gradual slopes towards the south. The Lushai (Mizo) Hills, which divide Assam from Burma, run at right angles to the Assam Range in parallel ridges.

The Brahmaputra Valley is like a "winnowing fan", being surrounded on three sides by mountain ranges. It is an alluvial plain of about 450 miles, extending from Sadiya on the east to Dubri on the west, where the river Brahmaputra turns southward and sweeps round the western edge of the Garo Hills. The uniform breadth of the valley is interrupted at the centre by the Mikir Hills, which project northward from the Assam Range almost upto the south bank of the Brahmaputra. Similarly, the presence of some low hills near Tezpur, Gauhati and Goalpara jutting out almost to the banks of the Brahmaputra has broken the even-level of the plains. Physiographi-
cally, Brahmaputra Valley or Assam proper is divided into two parts - Upper and Lower. Both the parts are uniformly and equally wide "with low relief, easy accessibility and extreme fertility of land."¹ To the north of the lower portion of the Assam Valley lies the Eastern Duars. It is almost a flat terrain covered with dense forests and tall grass.

The Surma Valley which at present comprises of the district of Cachar, differs from the Brahmaputra Valley in extent and population. This valley is also a mountain-butressed one. Unlike its counterpart, the Brahmaputra Valley, the Surma has not been able to play any important role in the general history of Assam due to its geographical isolation.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND:

Prior to the British occupation of Assam in 1826, Assam proper or the valley of the Brahmaputra was under the rule of the Ahoms, an off-shoot of the great Tai race of South-East Asia. In or about the year 1225 A.D., they crossed the Patkai under their chief Sukapha, who after successfully fighting the Naga and other indigenous tribes carved out a principality of his own. Under his successors, expansion of this kingdom began, and by the end of the fifteenth century

"the proud conquerors" consolidated their power over the whole of the Brahmaputra valley as far as the river Manas. During the sixteenth century, the Chutia kingdom in the north-east was brought under the Ahoms, and in the west the powerful kingdom of the Kacharies was pushed back from their capital at Dimapur in the Dhansiri valley to Maibong in the North Cachar Hills.

The rise of the Ahoms as a formidable power in the east of the Mughal dominions excited the jealousy of the rulers of Delhi, who made abortive attempts to subdue it. But the Ahoms had been able to maintain the integrity of their empire till the invasion of the Burmese in the first quarter of the nineteenth century. Under Gadadhar Singha and his son Rudra Singha, the Kingdom prospered in all directions. During the reign of the latter monarch, its prestige reached the crowning point; the neighbouring kingdom of the Kacharis, the Jayantias, and the independent Naga tribes acknowledged the supremacy of the Ahoms.²

For a time everything went well and Ahom rule was 'contented and prosperous'. But from the time of Siva Singha, son and successor of Rudra Singha, the power of the Ahoms was on the decline. The downfall of the Ahoms was hastened by the revolt of the Moamarias, a socio-religious sect, who had occupied the capital and forced the reigning monarch

Gaurinath Singha to take shelter at Gauhati. Being helpless, he implored the assistance of the British authorities in Calcutta in reasserting his authority. Lord Cornwallis, the Governor-General of India, who could not remain indifferent to the prevailing confusion and anarchy in a neighbouring frontier state, despatched a detachment of British troops under Captain Welsh in 1792. With the arrival of the British soldiers, the rebels dispersed and Gaurinath recovered his kingdom. But before things were set right, the new Governor-General Sir John Shore recalled the troops from Assam in view of the policy of non-intervention adopted by the Government of India.

Consequent upon the withdrawal of British troops, the Ahom Kingdom relapsed into anarchy and confusion. The empire began to break up due to internal dissensions and the depredations of the bordering hill tribes. What was worse, in 1817 the Burmese invaded the country. Taking virtual possession of the Ahom Kingdom, they inaugurated a reign of terror, and brought the complete ruin of Assam. But their ambition did not rest with this; and they began to intervene in the affairs of Cachar, Jayantia and Manipur. Finally, they came into collision with the British power in Bengal. The insecurity of the frontier of the British territories compelled the Government of India to abandon its policy of

non-intervention and form defensive alliances with the chiefs of Cachar, Jayantia, and Manipur.

In March 1824, war was declared by the Government of India against Burma, and in course of a year, the Brahmaputra valley was cleared of the invaders. These achievements of the British troops were, however, marred by their failure to advance towards Manipur, whether the Burmese had fallen back with full force after being defeated in Cachar. It was Gambhir Singh, who with his irregulars, the Manipur Levy, had recovered the whole of Manipur as far as the Kabaw valley down to the Ningthe.  

TREATY OF YANDABO: ITS AFTERMATH:

By the Treaty of Yandabo, the King of Ava renounced all claims upon and agreed to abstain from all interference with the principality of Assam and its dependencies, and also with the contiguous petty states of Cachar and Jayantia. With regard to Manipur it was stipulated that, should Gambhir Singh desire to return to that country he should be recognised therein.6

After the invaders had been finally expelled from the frontiers of Assam, Manipur was given to Gambhir Singh, who played a glorious part in recapturing it from the Burmese. Ramsingh, the Jayantia chief was confirmed in his possessions. Gobindachandra was restored to his possessions of Cachar as a feudatory chief. But the problem of the Brahmaputra valley or Assam proper remained undecided.

ASSAM:

For sometime after its occupation it was doubtful, whether the Company would retain under it or not the new acquisition. However, due to exceptional political situation of Assam, it was decided to administer it as a British province, with the exception of Sadiya and Matak territories of Upper Assam. In April 1826, Mr. David Scott, the Agent to the Governor-General in the North East Frontier of Bengal and Civil Commissioner in Rangpur was entrusted with the charge of Lower Assam as Joint Commissioner with Lieutenant Colonel Richards who was placed in charge of the areas east of Bishwanath in addition to his military duties. Subsequently Scott was placed in overall charge of the country, Captain White being appointed to assist him in lower Assam and Captain Neufville in 1828 to the charge of Upper Assam. The Matak and the country round Sadiya was placed in charge.

7. Ibid.
of its own ruler the Borsenapatii. Similarly, the Khamti chief of Sadiya called Sadiyakhowa Gohain was confirmed as feudatory in possession of his district. 8

In 1833, on the strong recommendations of Scott, by a treaty Upper Assam covered by the districts of Sibsagar and Lakhimpur was placed under the rule of Purandar Singha; Sadiya and Matak remained outside his authority. However, in September, 1838, his territories were resumed by the Government of India as he had fallen into huge arrears and his subjects complained of "maladministration and extortion." 9

In 1842, the Matak country was annexed, and also in the same year, the Khamti territory in charge of the Sadiyakhowa Gohain was incorporated with the rest of the province.

**CACHAR:**

During and immediately before the Burmese invasion, Cachar became the arena of a struggle between three Manipuri brothers Marjit, Chaurjit and Gambhir Singh, who had been driven out from Manipur by the Burmese. The Manipuri invaders had dislodged Gobindachandra, the chief of Caachar; Marjit took possession of the Hailakandi valley and Gambhir Singh the rest of South Cachar. What was worse Kohi Dan, who was appointed by Gobindachandra to a position of responsibility

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8. Banerjee, A.C.; Eastern Frontier of British India, pp. 479-80
in the hills, not only revolted against his master, but set up a principality of his own. The latter got him captured and put to death, whereupon his son Tularam also in the service of the Raja continued the rebellion. In 1824, when the Burmese invaded Cachar, he joined them to avenge his father's murder. Tularam's success against the Raja deprived the latter of his northern hills, where the former was able to maintain himself against every attempt of Gobindachandra to reconquer it.

In 1828, Tularam's much-trusted cousin Gobindaram seized his principality, but he retook it with the assistance of Gambhir Singh. In 1829, Mr. Scott induced Gobindachandra to concede to Tularam the hilly portion of his territory. After his restoration to the throne, the Raja was not destined to rule for long as he fell in the hands of an assassin in 1830. Due to the absence of any legal heir to the throne of Cachar, Tularam claimed it, but he failed to establish his title. In August 1832, by means of a proclamation the Government of India annexed Cachar to the British dominions, restoring the pargana of Dharampur to Lower Assam; and divided the remaining portion into North and South Cachar. Lieutenant Fisher was placed as Superintendent for the whole of Cachar. By a treaty executed with Tularam in

1834, he was allowed to retain the tract bounded on the south by the Mahur river and the Naga Hills; on the north by the Dayang; on the east by the Dhansiri; and on the north by the Jamuna and the Dayang. The Kachari chief agreed to pay annual tribute of four pairs of elephant's tusks, and in return to receive a monthly pension of Rs. 50.  

MANIPUR:

The State of Manipur had been the victim of Burmese aggression for a long time before the Anglo-Burmese War of 1824-26. In the beginning of the nineteenth century, there followed a scramble for succession between the three brothers Marjit, Chaurjit and Gambhir. All of them ultimately were driven out by the Burmese when they took possession of Manipur. The British assisted Gambhir Singh with arms and ammunitions to recover Manipur from the Burmese. The valiant chief with his irregulars, the Manipur Levy not only expelled the Burmese from the Manipur valley, but succeeded in occupying the Kabaw valley down to Ningthi, situated to the east of the old boundaries.  

After the war with Burma had ended, in consideration of his valuable services in the campaign against the

Burmese, he was restored to the rule of Manipur as a sovereign ruler. But the primary consideration in establishing him in that supreme position was to make Manipur a strong bulwark against Burma. "The establishment of an independent government in Manipur, in alliance with us would undoubtedly prove the most powerful and effectual check upon the Burmese Government, that could well be devised by affording us at all times a ready passage into the heart of their dominions and as an ally a military power that could upon occasion prove really useful to us." With a view to make Manipur strong, the Levy with which he had reconquered his country was placed under the management of two British Officers Captains Grant and Gordon, and supplied with arms and also with pay by the British Government.

In 1833, the Government of India agreed to annex to Manipur the range of hills on the west between the eastern and western bend of the Barak as its boundary, on condition that Gambhir Singh removed all obstructions to trade between Manipur and British territory, and promised to help the Government in the event of a war with Burma, both with carriage and troops. Ever since his restoration Gambhir with the help of his fire-arms brought under his control the various tribes of independent Nagas tribes. He was also

14. Quoted by Barpajari, H.K., in "British Administration in Assam, 1826-1845" (Thesis submitted to the University of London for Ph.D. Degree in 1949).
15. See Account of the Province of Assam, 1903, p. 140. 
having covetous eyes on the territory of Govindachandra, and had been pursuing a policy of "slow but steady penetration". Consequently, the Kacharis and the Kala Nagas became the worst sufferers of his aggressions.

In January 1834, the Kabaw Valley was returned to the King of Ava; the Raja of Manipur was given a monthly stipend of Rs. 500 as compensation. Gambhir Singh died in the same year. In 1835, the assistance given to the Manipur Levy was withdrawn and a Political Agent was appointed to reside at Imphal to "act as a medium of communication between the State and the British Government."

ADMINISTRATION OF THE NEW FRONTIER:

The resumption of Upper Assam and the subsequent annexations of Matak and Sadiya not only completed the establishment of direct British rule over the whole of Assam proper but brought the north-eastern frontier of its territories to the mountains of Upper Burma. Scott, who had been discharging his duties both as Commissioner and Agent to the Governor-General in the North East Frontier died in August 1832. T.C. Robertson officiated in the post till 1834. In 1833, some changes were brought about in the administration of Assam. The territories west of Dhansiri were divided into 16. Banerjee, A.C.; Eastern Frontier of British India, p. 493.
five districts; each district was placed under a Principal Assistant to the Commissioner assisted by a Junior Assistant. In 1834, however, the office of the Political Agent to the North-East Frontier of Bengal and Commissioner of Rangpur was abolished and a new office with the designation of Commissioner and Agent to the Governor-General for Assam and North-East Frontier of Rangpur was created. Captain Francis Jenkins was appointed to the post in April 1834 and he continued in it till February 1861. In 1839, to assist the Commissioner a new post of Deputy Commissioner with headquarters at Gauhati was created. Two additional posts of Junior Assistants were also sanctioned. A new office was also made for the Command of the Assam Light Infantry.

From what had been stated above, it will be evident that Assam from the very beginning was treated as an appanage of Bengal. Although, theoretically the Commissioner and the Agent to the Governor-General enjoyed wide powers, he was in practice under the direct control and orders of the Government of Bengal. Although the Commissioner was not to "bow down to the letter of the regulations" for all practical purposes he was to obtain prior sanction of the authorities in Calcutta for all acts beyond ordinary routine and all expenses above the sanctioned amount. Above all the Government of Bengal had to be regularly posted with facts relating

to acts or measures already taken or proposed to be taken through detailed correspondences.  

The inconveniences of governing the distant territories in Assam from Calcutta had long been recognised. To administer a country "away from Fort William and inhabited by a people thoroughly ruined by lengthy periods of convulsion and protracted wars" and with an extensive frontier peopled by numerous wild tribes was really formidable. No Deputy Governor and few Lieutenant Governors ever visited Assam for whose administration they were responsible. The link with Bengal, however continued till 1874, when Assam was separated from the control of the Lieutenant Governor of Bengal and formed into a Chief Commissioner under the immediate authority and orders of the Governor-General in Council.  

HILL TRIBES OF THE NORTH-EAST FRONTIER:

The beauty of Assam lies in her hills and the colourful people who inhabit them almost on all sides of its frontier. Of them, the Mishingis, the Abors, the Miris, the Dafalas and the Akas occupy the southern slopes of the Himalayas; the Khamtis, the Singphos, the Nagas, the Kukis and the Lushais occupy the Patkai and the hills bordering

20. Account of the Province of Assam, pp. 84-5.
Burma; the Garos, the Khasias and the Kacharis, the hills between the Brahmaputra and the Surma valley; and the Mikirs, the range of low hills between the districts of Sibsagar and Nowgong. The hillmen lived a hard life in their hills; their produce being insufficient they used to obtain their necessaries of life by exchanging their hill products with the men of the plains. They occasionally raided the localities between the foot-hills and the extremities of the plains to meet their shortage of supplies.

The Ahom rulers never envisaged any plan of bringing the long line of frontier under direct control. They always considered it expedient to conciliate the hill people by exchange of presents and grants of certain concessions in the plains than to overawe them by force. This policy on the whole proved a success. There were periodic incursions of the hillmen no doubt, and circumstances sometimes compelled the Ahom Government to send punitive expeditions against the offending tribes; but they were always pardoned and treated with kindness after their formal submission. As long as the Ahom Government was powerful, the border tribes were kept in check and trade and peaceful relations between the hills and the plains developed.

However, from the last quarter of the eighteenth century, the tribes went out of control. The internal disensions, the Moamaria uprising and lastly the Burmese invasion
followed by anarchy, chaos and confusion encouraged the hill tribes to throw off their allegiance to the thorns and to renew their head-hunting and plundering raids into the plains. The British who took possession of Assam in 1826 from the Ahoms inherited these legacies from the latter and found the Assam Valley "surrounded north, east and the south by numerous savages and warlike tribes whom the decaying authority of the Ahom dynasty had failed of late years to control and whom the disturbed condition of the province had incited to encroachment. Many of them advanced claims to rights more or less definite over lands lying in the plains; others claimed tributary payments from the villages below their hills, or the services of Paiks said to have been assigned them by the Assam authorities." 21

Among the hill tribes of the north-east frontier of Assam, the Nagas with which our subject is primarily concerned, occupy the hills between longitude $93^\circ$ on the West to longitude $97^\circ$ on the East - an area extending from the valley of the Kapili on the west to the interior of the Patkai Hills on the north-western border of Burma in the east. Thus the whole hilly tract bordering upon the districts of Nowgong, Sibsagar and Lakhimpur unto the northern slopes of the Patkai Range may be called the Naga Country. The tract in question is not, however, exclusively occupied by the Nagas; there are hill Kacharis, Kukis, Mikirs, Khamtis etc., but the Naga element preponderates over others. The State of Nagaland, which came into existence in 1963, consists of the districts of Kohima, Mokokchung and Tuensang. It is a narrow strip of hilly country running almost parallel to the south bank of the Brahmaputra. It is bounded on the north by the Tirap frontier Division of the North East Frontier Agency; Manipur on the south, Burma on the east; and the

* Roughly the tract comprises North Cachar, the Naga Hills District, the hill country north-west, north, and north-east of the Manipur Valley and the hills south of the Sibsagar district.

'To assign limit to their country seems almost impossible, and even to number their numerous tribes. Scattered all over the mountainous ridge that divides Assam from Manipur, to which some of them are tributary, some to Assam and some even to the Burmese.' Mo Cosh (see J.A.S.B. 52, April, 1836).
Broad valley of the Assam plains all along the west. It has an area of 6,366 square miles and a population of 3,69,200 (1961 Census). There is a Naga population of 125,000 in Manipur State and 40,000 in the Tirap Division of NEFA.22

The tract described above is covered with ranges of hills throwing out spurs on both sides with ridges of different elevations. The main range of hills runs in a north-easterly direction almost from the southern part of the Mizo Hills with spurs on either side. The Nagas inhabit the main range and also the subsidiary ones forming a huge belt stretching diagonally from Cachar on the south-west to the eastern part of Lakhimpur on the north-east. Saramati is the highest peak in the Tuensang district being about 12,557 ft. and there are some other peaks with heights over 9500 ft. These hills are usually covered with evergreen dense forests excepting those which are cleared at one time or other for cultivation or habitation. Such clearings are covered with bamboos and long grass, but devoid of huge trees. The Kohima hills which lie west of the Naga range are dominated by the "range and valley type of topography". The highest peak in the Kohima hills is Japwo (9890 ft.) Snow is frequent on the summit of the Japwo and in places

22. Elwin, V.; Nagaland, p.3.
adjacent to it. The Barail, which possesses a "hors back structure" is extremely steep. Its spurs are chaotic and contour rugged. The greater part of it is covered with rocks and dense forests. The North Cachar Hills have gentler slopes northwards. The usual elevation here is about 1500 ft., but there are some peaks over 3000 ft. The entire topography of North Cachar is of a rugged variety.

There are many rivers and mountain streams in the Naga Hills, but no lakes. The Barail and the Japuo ranges of mountains form the natural watershed of the Naga Hills, but none of the rivers coming out from their slopes attains any importance before they enter the plains of Sibsagar and Nowgong. There are no rivers navigable by large boats throughout the year, but the Dayang, the Dhansiri and the Jamuna are navigable by small boats to certain distances within the hills. The Dayang is the largest river in the Naga country and flows through the Angami and Lhota country. The Zubza (Rengmapani), the Zalu and the Siju are important tributaries of the Dayang. The Dhansiri, which rises from the slopes of the Barail flows through a funnel-shaped valley for about 15 miles. Receiving a number of tributaries, it becomes a big river at Dimapur. The Jamuna taking its

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23. Pemberton says during the cold season, hoar frost rests on their summits throughout the day, and at night, on the 16th of January, in the village of papoolongmee, three thousand feet lower than many of the peaks, the thermometer fell two degrees below the freezing point. (See Pemberton, Eastern Frontier of British India, p. 66).
rise in the northern part of the hills and flowing through the southern portion of the Rengma hills, falls into the Kapili river. Except the Dikhow on the northern frontier of the Naga Hills, other rivers are not important as they are not navigable. But Tizu with its tributary, the Lanier which falls into the Chindwin river deserves some importance.

The higher hills are extremely cold. Frost at night and dense fog during the day are common in these hills. Rainfall in the Naga Hills is sufficient, with an average of 70" to 100" in the year. During the winter occasional, but continuous rains with accompanying winds make the weather unbearable. The higher hills have a better climate than the foot hills, but greater disadvantages like the shortage of water and absence of means of communications. Nevertheless, for security and reasons of health the Naga villages are usually established on the top of the hills.

NAGA DIVISIONS: THEIR DISTRIBUTION:

The people whom we generally designate as 'Naga' or 'Nagas' call themselves not by any common name, but by their own tribal designations as Angami, Lhota, Sema and Ao, etc. How the word has originated or come to use is still a matter of conjecture. Some derive it from Sanskrit 'Naga,' a snake, some from Hindi 'Nanga,' naked and some others from
"Naga" meaning belonging to a hill or a highlander. But the most accepted view is that of Holcombe and Peal, who suggest that the word is derived from "Nok", meaning "people" or 'folk' as is used in some tribal dialects in various parts of India. Whatever be the origin, the word was not popular among the people whom we call Nagas. The plains-men of Upper Assam pronounce the word as "Nòga", and not "Nága". The recent resurgence amongst the Nagas made the word so much popular among them, that they consider it a matter of pride to be designated as "Naga" and their newly formed State as "Nagaland".

Dalton divides the Nagas broadly into Eastern and Western Nagas, taking the river Dhansiri as the dividing line. But this division based on the geographical factor seems to be arbitrary, because it does not preclude that the Nagas of the two regions differ wildly and widely. The Nagas are actually divided into infinite divisions with many tribes and sub-tribes, living in different parts of the hills, speaking different dialects, having different manners and customs, yet having certain things in common. Mr. Damant, the Political Officer of the Naga Hills in his official

Waddel divides the Nagas into three divisions according to their geographical position, as Western, Central and Eastern. (See J. A. S. B. 1900, Vol. I (III), p. 63).
The report of 1878-79 mentioned the existence of about eighteen tribes, but in the Census Report of 1891, the names of the following nine were found—the Angami, the Ao, the Kabui, the Kuchcha, the Lhota, the Naked, Rengma, and the Sema. They are at present divided into the following major tribal groups—the Angamis, the Aos, the Chakhesangs, the Changs, the Khienmungans, the Konyaks, the Lhotas, the Phoms, the Rengmas, the Sangtams, the Samas, the Yimsungs, and the Zeliangs (Kuchchas).

Of all the Naga tribes, the Konyaks are the most numerous and next to them the Aos. The Angamis, who are by far "the most warlike and most powerful" occupy the area north of Manipur lying between the Dayang river on the north and the Barail Range and the Diphu river on the west. The Kuchcha Nagas or the group of Kabui, Zemi and Lyeng inhabit the slopes on the Barail to the south of the Angamis bordering Cachar and surrounded by Kacharis. The Rengma Nagas lie in the tract between the Kaliani and the Dhansiri rivers to the north of the Angami Nagas. The Samas the "most primitive" of the Naga tribes are located to the north-east of the Angami country. The Aos are to be found to the

27. Elwin, V.; Nagaland, p. 5.
28. Mackenzie, A.; History of the Relations etc., p. 84.
31. Hutton, J.H.; Sama Nagas, pp. 3-5.
north of the Samas upto the river Dikhow on the south-west.\(^{32}\)

To the north of the Rengmas live the Lhotas;\(^{33}\) the Konyaks spread themselves in the area between the Dikhow and the Disang rivers and to the north-east of the Patkai Range.\(^{34}\)

The Phoms live to the south of the Konyaks;\(^{35}\) to the south of them the Changs and the Sangtams;\(^{36}\) and to the south-east of the Sangtams inhabit the Yimchungas.\(^{37}\) Towards the extreme east there are the Yachumis, the Tukomis, the Naked Rengmas and the Tangkhols.\(^{38}\) To the north of the Tangkhols are the Kalyo-Kengyus.\(^{39}\) The Luhupas are one of the branches of the Tangkhols "once dreaded by the Manipuris and the Burmese" inhabit the hills to the north and east of the hills.\(^{40}\) There are Nagas farther east as far as the Patkai who are completely dependent on the Singphos.\(^{41}\) Similarly, many Nagas are within the State of Burma.

In the old Assamese Buranjis (chronicles), the Nagas are not referred to by their modern names. They are usually described by the generic name "Nāgā" or "Nāga" as

\(^{32}\) Mills, J.P.; Ao Nagas, p.4.
\(^{33}\) Mills, J.P.; Lhota Nagas, p.1.
\(^{34}\) Hutton, J.H.; Angami Nagas, pp.5-6.
\(^{35}\) Devi, L.; Ahom Tribal Relations, p.17.
\(^{36}\) Ibid.
\(^{37}\) Ibid.
\(^{38}\) Hutton, J.H.; Angami Nagas, pp.5-6.
\(^{39}\) Ibid.
\(^{40}\) Pemberton, R.B.; Eastern Frontier of British India, p.16.
\(^{41}\) Brown, R.; Statistical Account of Manipur, p.37.
pronounced by the Assamese people. Some Buranjis only mention the names of the villages against whom the Ahoms sent punitive expeditions from time to time. The Nagas with whom the Ahoms came into frequent contact, friendly or otherwise, were the inhabitants of the region between the river Dayang and the Buri Dihing. Some names of the Naga tribes originate from the names of the villages where they lived or from the passes or routes through which they come down to the plains. The Nagas living between the Dayang and the Dikhow are known as Paniphotias (Panihotias), Torphatias (Torhatias), Dayangias, Hatighorias, Assyringias, Dopdarias and Namchangias. The former two are branches of the Lhota and the rest of the Ao tribes. The Nagas inhabiting the region between the Dikhow and the Buri Dihing rivers are known as Tablungias, Jaktoongias, Mooloongs, Changnois, Jobokas, Banpheras, Mootons (or Kooloongs) Paniduarias, Borduarias, and Namchangias (different from the Namchangia already mentioned). Most of these Nagas are of Konyak division. The existence of a tribe of Nagas known as 'Lakmas' is traced by Peal in this region.

Divided into several sections and sub-sections, the Nagas have no common language or any bond of union; different villages having independent governments of their

42. Devi, L; Ahom Tribal Relations, p.18. Acharyya, N.N.; Medie Val Assam, p.245.
own and each reigning supreme over its own hill and culturable lands. They had their intermittent feuds and rivalries from time immemorial and the practice of head-hunting always prevented the growth of a common language and the formation of common alliances for offence and defence against their enemies. Notwithstanding it, Dr. Hutton observes that the Nagas have something in common which distinguishes them from many other tribes of Assam. Robinson also expressed the view that although the Nagas were constantly at war amongst themselves and talked different dialects, they conversed through a third dialect and intermarried and formed connections, which they did not do with any non-naga tribe.\textsuperscript{44} Infact, the Nagas are all descended from the great Indo-Mongoloid family, divided into more than a dozen tribes and sub-tribes having different dialects but interrelated with one another containing some elements common to most of them.

\textbf{NAGA POLITY:}

The natural barriers and clannish jealousies always stood in the way of political unity for all the Nagas. The history of the Nagas, therefore, is mainly a story of small but independent villages each fighting for its own independence and hegemony over its neighbours. Small communities are

\textsuperscript{44} Robinson, W.; Descriptive Account of Assam, p.381.
always conducive to the growth of the spirit of patriotism and independence, where each villager can vie with one another in the management of their own affairs. As a result, the Naga villages like the ancient city-states of Greece, are in a position to evolve their own political and social organizations. Infact, every form of polity right from the autocracy of the Konyaks to the democracy of the Angamis are to be found among the Nagas.

However, there is a marked difference in the political systems of the Eastern and Western Nagas. The former have powerful hereditary chiefs, while in the case of the latter the chief's authority is almost conspicuous by its absence. Hereditary chieftainship is a common feature among the Semas and the Changnois. In 1841, Captain Brodie, Principal Assistant of Sibsagar, on his visit to the Eastern tribes found the Changnoi Chief wielding great powers, whom all the Nagas between the Dikhow and Jaipur acknowledged as their head. Brodie's successor Captain Holroyd, however, remarked that "the form of Naga Government is democratic, each clan is ruled by its council and no important measures concerning the welfare of the clan is undertaken without the consent of the elders. The President is called Khombao; and the deputies Sundeekee and Khonsai all consultations are held in the Morung or hall of justice." The Sema chiefs enjoy

46. See Holroyd's memorandum in Mill's Report.
many privileges and their position seems to be superior to that of an ordinary head-man. The Konyaks also have very powerful Angs (chiefs), who are regarded as sacred and whose word is law.\textsuperscript{47}

Notwithstanding the existence of chiefs in the Angami villages, their Government is decidedly democratic; their chiefs have no absolute power over the people. Major Butler, Principal Assistant of Nowgong, says "in most of the Angami villages there are generally two chiefs, but their authority is nominal. Their orders are obeyed so far only as they accord with the wishes and convenience of the community". In the opinion of Lieutenant Vincent, Junior Assistant of Nowgong, the Angamis select their village chiefs from amongst them, but merely as their spokesman. In fact, the Angami chiefs do not collect revenue or issue orders, and in all transactions of importance "the counsel of the warriors is more frequently adopted than the sober advice of the elders and peaceably disposed. Every man is his own master, avenges his own quarrel, and from private jealousies, animosities, and injuries, innumerable murders and quarrels frequently occur."\textsuperscript{48} Each village amongst the Ao tribe is a small republic. The Luhupas have no principal chiefs, but extremely republican villages.

\textsuperscript{47} Halmendorf, V; Naked Nagas, p. 42.
\textsuperscript{48} Butler, J.; Travels and Adventures, p. 146.
Thus the Government of the Naga villages is intensely democratic and it solely rests on the decisions of the council of the chosen men of a village. Although hereditary chiefs exist in the Naga villages, their powers are usually circumscribed by the Council of the elders, which settle matters relating to war and revenge, petty disputes, property disagreements and administers fines for sundry offences. The chiefs, who enjoy some rights, usually take little or no active part in the political or social administration of a village or issue any orders with any chance of being obeyed, if the measure or act proposed is not popular. In the opinion of Captain Butler, son of Major Butler above mentioned, "the Government of every Naga tribe is a purely democratic one, and whenever anything of public importance has to be undertaken all the chiefs (both old and young) meet together in solemn conclave ..... as to any one single chief exercising absolute control over his people, the thing is unheard of." 49

THE MORUNG : TRAINING AND DISCIPLINE :

The Morungs are the nerve-centres of Naga community life. They serve the purposes of "guard-houses, recreation clubs, centres of education, art and discipline". Morungs are usually constructed at commanding positions in the villages.

49. Mackenzie, A.; History of the Relations, etc. p.84.
It is always "used as a sleeping place for the young men, as relique-house for the collection of skulls taken in battle and of animal skulls taken in the chase, as a dancing-place for the braves, as a council hall, in which the clan council met for consultation, and as a guard-house". Besides these, in the Morungs big wooden-drums are kept, which are beaten to raise alarm, to announce war, or on occasions of religious ceremonies and festivals. Major Butler in course of one of his expeditions into the Angami hills noticed the existence of such institutions. Writing about them in 1846, he states:

Early this morning (December, 27), the Naga chief of the village of Hosang-Hajoo, invited us to accompany him through the village. We first went to a large building called Rankee or the Daka Chang; in which all the boys of the village reside, until they were married. The building was about sixty feet long, and twenty high with gable ends. The inside of the house consisted of one large room, in the centre of which a wood-fire was burning on the ground, and wooden stools were arranged in rows for the boys to sleep upon. At one end, a small room was partitioned off for the accommodation of an elderly man, who was superintendent of the establishment.

On leaving the boys, our attention was next directed to the Hilokee (a building of similar dimensions and construction with the Rankee), devoted entirely to the use or residence of the girls of the village, who live in it all together in the same manner as the boys, until the day of their marriage. About twenty damsels presented themselves, they were all decently attired ......... An old woman superintended the establishment and the utmost order seemed to prevail in both the Rankee or the Hilokee.

51. Butler, J.; Travels and Adventures, pp. 66-68.
Mr. Damant, Political Officer of the Naga Hills in his account of North Cachar Hills in 1875 stated that "only very young children live entirely with their parents," the young unmarried boys sleep in separate houses. He added "the women have also a house of their own called the dekhi-chang, where the unmarried girls are supposed to live." 52

The Morung is an essential institution of the Nagas. It is the place where the training of the Nagas begin at a very impressionable age. The insecurity of every Naga village community demanded that every Naga youth should be made a useful member of the community. Since the Naga villages had their blood-feuds and constant enmity with one another, every village community had to remain ever prepared and vigilant against an impending attack of their enemies. Therefore, in the interest of security, it is always essential that thorough training in warfare and discipline is imparted to every Naga youth. This training begins at the Morung, where he is admitted as soon as he attains the age of puberty. Here in the Morung, he is placed along with other boys of his age-group in charge of the Superintendent. He is taught by the elders to undergo utmost physical labour, hardship, discipline and training in the art of war. In other words he is given all the schooling which go to make him fit to serve the village or the clan to the best of his ability. The grown up girls too sleep at their

52. J.R.A.I., 1897, No.26, p.179.
separate hostels (Deki Chang) at night and they remain under the charge of an elderly woman. Though it is obligatory for every young man and woman to sleep at night in their respective institutions, they assist their parents in cultivation and other domestic works during the day. On the completion of his training, the Naga youth is allowed to leave the Morung, get himself married and establish his own house and participate in the administration of his khal or village. The Naga youths and grown up girls at this time get ample opportunities to mix with one another, which serve as a period of courtship before marriage and which is not looked down upon by the elders. In fact, they have utmost liberty in choosing their partners of life. 53

WARFARE:

The dominant aim of a Naga's existence to which all other operations of life are subordinated, is to be successful in war. The Morungs turn them into disciplined and strong-willed men in addition to making them warriors par excellence according to their own standard of warfare. The Naga weapons of offence and defence consist of spear, daos, bows and

53. Major Butler says, "they choose their own wives, the damsel's consent, as well as that of her parents, being obtained by presents. The bridegroom on the day of his marriage gives a grand feast proportionate to his means to his friends, and in return they assist the new married couple in constructing a house to live in". (See Travels and Adventures, p. 148).
arrows. The spear may be regarded as the universal weapon of
the Nagas, which is used both for throwing and thrusting.
The Luhupas use long-spears, and some eastern Nagas the
cross-bows and the tomahawk. The arrow used is often
poisoned at the point-heads to make the shot fatal. Shields
made of long mat lined inside with leather or thin boards is
another defensive weapon of the Ifagas. The use of fire-arms
before they came into contact with the British was perhaps
unknown. However, they were not slow to use it once they
learnt its effectiveness as a weapon.

Since the Naga villages had always to remain in a
state of warfare with their neighbours or between different
khals of the same village, their villages are located on the
top of inaccessible hills. The sites are additionally streng-
thened with remarkable skill as a measure of security against
their enemies. The approaches which generally lead up to the
village through deep lanes are often barred by wooden gates
and stone walls; bastions and outposts command these lanes
at different points. Deep ditches and fences of thorns defend

54. Robinson, W.; Descriptive Account of Assam, p.393.
55. "We have given them muskets, and by our annual tours
have taught them the art of war" thus says Butler. He
deprecated "our giving muskets to the Nagas to use
against us". Mr. Mills concurred in the views of Butler
and added that he would not only prohibit the practice
for the future, but also the sale of arms and ammunition
by "our traders, as also the transport of articles across
the villages on their most vulnerable sites. The Panjies or bamboo-spikes are generally studded on the exposed parts to prevent the movement of the enemy. The location of the hill-top villages are always advantageous to the defenders than to the invaders. From the top, the movement of the enemy can be viewed and their advance resisted easily by rolling down huge boulders.

The mode of Naga warfare, their strategy, their weapons and their military organisation are dictated by requirements of fighting in a hill country full of deep ravines, strong fastnesses and heavy undergrowth. Therefore, their fighting is entirely and exclusively confined to one of surprise and ambush. Writing in 1841, Robinson says that "to surprise and destroy is the greatest merit of a commander and the highest pride of his followers". 56 The Naga system of fighting is always opposed to open warfare. They usually refrain from fighting en masse because of difficult terrain, lack of proper communication system and mainly the shortage of men. Nevertheless, when situation demands all out offensive against their enemies, they embark upon such attack with utmost courage pouring in as many warriors as their village could muster. According to the writer above named, wherever their communities are more populous and the loss of some

56. Robinson, W; Descriptive Account of Assam, p.392-393.
warriors means nothing their operations assume the nature of those of other people. 57 Nagas are expert guerillas and their fighting is always typical of a hill people possessing great endurance and courage to whom "every mountain torrent is a highway, and no forest however, dense is impassable". In the words of a modern writer, Naga warriors "manoevre like a cat, enter the forbidden territory like a poacher, come out from behind the bush like a panther, pounce on the enemy with the paws of a tiger and after hurriedly going through the raid melt into thin air". 58

HEAD HUNTING :

The Nagas consider it an act of chivalry and heroism to take the head of an enemy. A young man who has not taken a head or gone on head-hunting raids will not be looked upon with favour by the young women of the village. On the other hand, they will always consider it a matter of pride to become the partner of a man who wears the head-hunter's insignia. Authorities differ as to the origin of head-hunting among the Nagas. According to Dr. Hutton, it originates from a vague idea of the benefits derived from human sacrifice and "connected in no small degree with ordinary, every day, human vanity". 59 To him the main importance of taking a head

lies not in the glory of war, but the gain of the magical forces inherent in the head. According to Elwin, it is based on a belief in soul-matter. The Nagas believe that all the strength and force of a man lie in the head and which can be transferred. They think that the bringing in of a head from another village will not only remove the displeasure of the evil spirits but usher in prosperity and good harvest to the village.

Whatever the motive, the excursion into a neighbouring village or the way-laying of a trader or traveller for head always result in a war of revenge and retaliation which disturb the peace of the land. S.E. Peal attributes the isolation of the Naga communities to the system of head-hunting among them. He added "as a consequence of the system of head-cutting and its isolating influence, few Nagas reach the plains, but those living on the border. Infact, the existence of so complete a tribal isolation with self depending communities, with infinite sub-divisions speaking too many dialects did not allow the growth of a common language for the Nagas.

Notwithstanding its evil consequences, the practice kept the memories of the Nagas green with their heroic past, which found expression in their colourful martial dances, songs, dress, ornaments exceptional works of art and community.

60. Elwin, V.; Nagaland, pp. 11-12.
61. T. A. S.B., 1872, No. 1, p. 27.
feasts and festivals, that had brought unity and a sense of brotherhood among them. Numerous expeditions had been undertaken by the Ahom and British rulers to prevent excursions for heads into the plains. But the practice continued among themselves till the extension of British authority into the interiors of the hills. The practice has been virtually coming to an end due to the exertions of the Christian missionaries who denounce the practice as barbaric.

AGRICULTURE:

Unlike the Mikirs, the Kukis and some other hill tribes, the Nagas build permanent villages, there is a saying often heard that a "jumer of forest is migratory, and the jumer of bamboo stationary." The Nagas fall into the latter category; they have abiding affection for their village sites, which they usually never abandon. Ninety percent of Nagas depend on agriculture. Rice is their staple product; they require it for food and in the preparation of rice-beer (Madhu), which is their most favourite drink. Besides rice, they also raise millet, ginger, chillies, Gourds, pumpkins, oranges and pineapples and other fruits. Cotton is cultivated in the lower ranges, both for the purposes of local consumption and export.

The importance of Naga agriculture lies not in the different products raised in the hills, but in the methods practised by the various tribes. As in the case of most of the hills tribes of Assam, the Nagas practise the system of shifting cultivation or Jhumming. Those who adopt this method first cut the grass and the reeds, the small trees and branches of large trees and burn them when they become dry. The ashes are then raked and scattered over the ground, which is then hoed, and the seed is either sown or dibbled in. Land thus jhummed is not occupied more than three years at a time and after which it is allowed to remain uncultivated from ten to fifteen years to recover its fertility. This system requires large areas of land to be brought under cultivation and also long period of rest to those already cultivated to be reclothed with forests. Thus by a rough rotation almost all lands in the neighbourhood up to a certain distances are taken for jhumming in turn. Shortage of Jhumland is at the root of unrest among the different tribes of Nagas. It is due to such shortage that the Zemi Nagas adopt the cycle-migration system. All their quarrels with the Kuki tribes are attributed to the shortage of Jhumland in North Cachar. 63

The difference in the method of cultivation is determined partly by the character of the country and partly

63. Bomser, U.G.; Nagapath, pp. 149-151.
by the degree of civilisation of each tribe. The Angami, Rengma and the Sema Nagas follow terraced system of cultivation. The powerful villages of the Angamis located on the hill tops are surrounded by beautiful terraced rice-fields laboriously built up with stone-retaining walls at different levels and irrigated by channels led from streams. The adoption of this remarkable system of cultivation by the Angami Nagas is necessitated by their natural position and social unrest. The prevalence of warfare with their neighbours led them to keep their food supply in their immediate neighbourhood instead of keeping it at a distance in the Jhum fields like other tribes of Nagas.

TRADE AND COMMERCE:

Although agriculture is the mainstay of the Nagas, their hills do not produce food-stuff to the measure of self-sufficiency. Consequently, they are dependent on their neighbours in the plains for certain necessaries of life in which their hills are deficient. The Naga tribes bordering Lakhimpur and Sibsagar districts were in communication with the Assamese during the Ahom rule. They usually brought down cotton, chillies, ginger, kachohu, pan and hill-salt etc. and carried back large quantities of salt, dried-fish, rice, cloth, beads and such other articles in which they were in need. Among the Naga tribes in close commercial contact with
Assam, the Namchangias, the Borduarias and the Paniduarias deserve notice. They belonged to the Nocte tribe of Nagas, and were the inhabitants of Tirap. They were in possession of salt-wells and lived mostly by the manufacture of salt which they retailed in the markets of the plains. The salt that came annually from the Naga Hills amounted to about 650 maunds. The Ahom Government obtained a large amount of revenue from the imported salt of the hills; and the Nagas depended on the Assam markets for grain and other articles. This interdependence in matters of trade, said Robinson, "contributed to a mutual good understanding between the two people. The Naga Hills have in consequence been always accessible to the people of the plains; whilst the Nagas have been always permitted access to the markets on the frontier." 64

The volume of this trade was, however, small and was confined to the Nagas who pass by the name of "Bori" or dependent Nagas as against "Abors" or independent Nagas inhabiting the higher ranges. The chief reason according to S.K. Peal is that "the tribes are too poor to be able to trade, and the constant state of warfare renders commerce impossible." 65 The Abors were not allowed to have direct access to the markets of the plains of Assam by the Boris,

64. Robinson, W.; Descriptive Account of Assam, pp.384-386.
who wanted to keep this trade exclusively in their hands. It was the cause of constant warfare between the two. Peal says "on concluding a peace, some dhoas and Abor cloths change hands, or a mitton; but as a rule the border tribes act as a most effectual barrier to all attempts at commercial transactions with those beyond." Assam, therefore, remained to the latter tribes "a goal, always in sight, but never to be reached". "The spirit of jealousy" said Robinson, "prevails throughout these hills and while the Abors are debarred from access to the markets of Assam, the Nagas of the northern hills are prevented from trading with Ava or Manipur." The Lhota and the Ao Nagas had considerable trade with the plains of Assam before British occupation. They brought down large quantities of cotton, chillies, ginger and yams. They maintained friendly relations with the Ahom rulers, and several villages of theirs received grants of land in the plains on condition of their promise to maintain peace. The Lhota Nagas frequented the markets of "Jorhat, Kacharihat and the hats of Dhansiri."

Of the Western Nagas, although the Angamis were a very powerful and adventurous people, they seemed to have had no direct communications with the markets in Assam and Cachar. Whatever little trade they had, was carried through intermediaries with Assam, Cachar and Manipur. They carried on a

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profitable trade in slaves with the Bengali merchants of Sylhet. 67 Although producing nothing of commercial importance to themselves, they exported little quantities of cloth made from the bark of a tree and wax; importing iron, salt and thread. The Tangkhols and the Luhupas carried on a restricted trade with Manipur. They exchanged their daos, spears and cloth for salt etc. in the markets of Manipur. 68 The Rangmas were poor traders; their villages were small and they bartered rice, cotton etc., for salt, hand-bills, beads and hoes. The Kuchcha Nagas used to cultivate rice and cotton. They killed elephants for the sake of their tusks, and collected bee-wax, which abounded in large quantities on the rocky ridges in the neighbourhood of their hills. Ivory and bee-wax thus obtained formed their staple commodities of trade, which they carried to the marts in Cachar to be exchanged for salt, conch-shells and beads. 69

AHOM-NAGA RELATIONS:

The Nagas were in occupation of the tract of hilly country from the Patkai Hills to North Cachar long before the conquest of Assam by the Ahoms. The Eastern Nagas inhabiting the Tirap frontier were the first tribal people to oppose

69. B.J.P., 1858, Nov. 18, No. 183.
Sukapha, when he overran their hills. Sukapha not only defeated them, but destroyed their villages and forced them to submit to his authority. It was said in order to terrify them, he got some of the Naga prisoners killed and roasted, and then compelled a "younger brother eat the cooked flesh of his elder brother and a father of his son's". The victorious chief subdued the recalcitrant Nagas; but his brutality embittered his relations with them. The Nagas could not reconcile themselves to the loss of independence and the surrender of their territories. They continued their hostility towards the conquerers and sporadic clashes between the Ahoms and the Nagas "appear to have been one of the chief events of history" during the entire period of the former's rule of Assam. The Naga tribes with whom the Ahoms first came into hostile contact were mostly belonging to the Konyak division; with the gradual extension of their kingdom towards the south and the west they came into clashes with the Ao and the Lhota tribes.

The continued hostility between the Ahoms and the Nagas had also been aggravated by the economic factor. It has already been stated that the region inhabited by the Eastern Nagas contained salt-wells. The reports of both McCosh and Wilcox revealed the existence of such salt-wells in

71. Acharyya, N.N.; Medieval Assam, p. 245.
the region washed by the river Disang. Mr Cosh says "at Burhath, on the river Disung, there are about twenty of these brine springs, from most of which Nagas are in the habit of making salt." An official report of 1840, however, stated that the Nagas living near Jaipur, Namchang, Paniduar and Borduar, lived chiefly by the manufacture of salt, which they retailed to the people of the plains. There were in the lower hills eighty-five salt-wells in all, of which the Government was allowed to be absolute owner of only three, enjoying merely a right to a certain number of flues and fire-places at each of the others. These rights Purandar Singha had regularly asserted and a certain portion of his paiks were engaged to work in the salt-wells. The loss of these salt-wells hit the Nagas so hard that they continued to raid the salt-well areas within the jurisdiction of the Ahoms. The latter sent troops to punish the offending tribes from time to time; but Ahom policy being a "curious blend of hostility and friendliness", the Nagas were treated with kindness as soon as they submitted.

It may be recalled that the Ahom rulers always considered it expedient to conciliate the Nagas by granting to their chiefs lands and retainers in the plains as well as fishing-waters, which was reciprocated by them in the payment of tributes in kind. King Suhumung created the most exalted

72. Mackenzie, A.; History of the Relations, etc. p.92.
King Gadadhar Singha accepted two Naga damsels as his consorts. The Nagas were recruited to the Ahom army for their valour and loyalty. It is recorded that Gadadhar during his exile found shelter in the Naga Hills and like him most of the runaway princes from time to time. 73

However, such relations were sometimes interrupted by periodic incursions of the Nagas into the Ahom kingdom. During the rule of kings like Gadadhar and Rudra Singha, the different Naga tribes remained submissive and kept themselves to their agreements. But from the last part of the eighteenth century, things took an unhappy turn. During the reign of Purandar, the Lhota Nagas went out of control and they started raiding the territories in the plains. The Raja promptly sent a punitive expedition against them, but to no purpose. The last part of his rule saw the renewal of an old feud between the Namchang and Bordnar Nagas, which had also its repercussions in the plains. He tried to bring the hostilities to an end; his officers instead of quelling the feuds, by imposing fines on both the parties not only aggravated it, but made a "fruitful source of gain to themselves." 74 Dissatisfaction against the Ahom Government mounted up also due to the levying of heavy duties in the salt-wells and the illegal

74. Robinson, W.; Descriptive Account of Assam, p. 386.
extortions made by the officers of Purandar. Inevitably, law and order in the border areas continued to be disturbed, agriculture was at a standstill and trade and commerce declined. The resumption of Upper Assam in October 1838, and the consequent extension of British influence over the Eastern Nagas, however, introduced a new chapter in the history of north-eastern India.