CHAPTER I

EARLY CONTACT WITH THE NAGAS

Ever since the Treaty of Yandabo, the bogey of another war with the Burmese loomed large. The continued enmity of Burma and her clandestine relations with the hill tribes of the north-east frontier assumed a real threat to the security of the newly acquired territories of Assam and Manipur. Naturally, the attention of the authorities at the Fort William was particularly drawn to the question of defence and security of the north-east frontier. Top priority was accordingly given to the establishment of improved means of communication in the Manipur frontier. The opening of a direct route between Assam and Manipur, it was increasingly felt, would not only strengthen the position of Manipur, but afford greater facilities in the movement of troops and commissariat in the event of a fresh invasion by the Burmese. But Mr. David Scott, the Agent to the Governor-General was opposed to any attempt being made in that direction in view of the difficult and unhealthy nature of the tract through which the work of exploration was to be undertaken. ¹ In the mean time to gain information about the "Terra Incognita", the Government of India deputed

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¹ Pemberton, R.B.; Eastern Frontier of British India, p.61.
Captain Jenkins and Lieutenant Pemberton, to undertake a survey of Assam, Cachar and Manipur.

In January 1832, these two officers, with a force of 700 soldiers and 800 porters marched from Manipur to Assam through the country of the Angami and Kuchcha Nagas to establish a direct line of communication. The Nagas were so much opposed to the opening of their country that the British troops had to face determined resistance at every place they passed through. Strong in their mountain strongholds, the Nagas "rolled down stones, threw spears and did their utmost by yelling and intimidation". They set fire to their villages and destroyed the provisions as they were unable to remove rather than allowing them to fall into the hands of their enemy. But they could not successfully contend against the British troops who used fire-arms, of which the Nagas probably had no knowledge at the time. Another expedition undertaken in 1833 by Lieutenant Gordon, the Adjutant of the Manipur Levy met with still greater opposition from the tribes. He was accompanied by Gambhir Singh "with a force sufficient to overcome all opposition; a powerful coalition was entered into by all the hill tribes to arrest their progress, and they owed their ultimate success entirely to their fire-arms."

While Gordon was away Gambhir employed himself in subduing

3. Pemberton, R.B; Eastern Frontier of British India, p.64.
the village of Kohima which had given him troubles. Before he returned to Manipur, he erected a stone-boundary pillar in the village and got his foot-prints engraved on it in token of conquest.\textsuperscript{4}

It is rather difficult to ascertain whether or not Manipur exercised any authority over the Nagas. James Johnstone, who was Political Agent in Manipur for a considerably long period was of the definite view that the Manipuris formerly did penetrate into the Naga Hills and exacted tribute when they felt strong enough to do so. He, however, believed that whatever influence Manipur might have, had fallen into abeyance during the period of its misfortune before and during the Burmese invasions.\textsuperscript{5} The existence of Manipuri names of many villages in the Naga Hills were attributable to Manipur’s control of the Nagas. Dr. Brown, who was also Political Agent of Manipur, writing in 1872, stated that at the time of the Burmese war, the hill tribes around Manipur were almost entirely independent, and were constantly at feud amongst themselves and with Manipur; of them the Tangkhols and the Luhupas were the most troublesome. After the end of hostilities with the Burmese, Raja Gambhir Singh turned his attention towards the subjugation of the Naga tribes. With the help of the fire-arms in his possession, he reduced the Kowpois completely, and brought the Tangkhols,

\textsuperscript{4} Johnstone, J; My Experiences in Manipur and Naga Hills, P. 23.
\textsuperscript{5} Ibid.
Luhupas, and the Angami Nagas into fair order. Until his death in 1834, Gambhir mainly busied himself in regaining and extending his influence over the surrounding hill tribes. Although the British Government was not happy about the ambitious design of the Chief of Manipur, it was considered expedient not to interfere with his plans as long as he did not descend into the plains of Assam, which were now restored to Purandar Singha. On the other hand the extreme indulgence given to Gambhir fell injuriously upon Gobinda Chandra, the Chief of Cachar, into whose territory he had been already intruding upon. As the Government of India at that time had no policy towards the hill tribes beyond the protection of the lowlands of British territories from their aggressions, an indirect encouragement was given to the Manipuri chief to extend his rule over the Nagas with the object of making Manipur a strong bulwark against the former.

The endeavours made by Jenkins and Pemberton ended in failure, because of the combined opposition of the Nagas to the opening of their country. British and Manipuri intrusion, however, embittered the feelings of the Angami Nagas,

7. Pemberton says that "it had been the intention of Raja Gambhir Singh, gradually to bring all these tribes under subjection, with the view of ultimately facilitating communication with Assam; but his death and the transfer of Upper Assam to Raja Poorindur Singh have conspired to put a stop to the progress of research among these hills, and the influence we had begun to acquire has ere this, I doubt not ceased to exist. (See Pemberton, R.B.; Eastern Frontier of British India, p.66).
which had brought their "vengeful foray, not on Manipur, where there was little to get", but on the defenceless villages of Cachar and Assam plains. In reality, in the early part of 1835, they crossed the border and began a series of inroads into North Cachar and its adjoining territories which could not be checked until 1866, when the British Government took up a position in the heart of the Angami hills to protect the lowlands from their aggressions.

ANGAMI RAIDS: CAUSES:

The Angamis had been troublesome to the villages of North Cachar from time immemorial. They made frequent raids into the villages of the peaceful Mikirs, Kacharis and Nagas "sparing neither sex nor age". Several motives were attributed by different parties to their incursions. The Commissioner of Dacca and the Superintendent of Cachar represented the Kacharis and Nagas to have been constantly at feud and they ascribed it to the spirit of retaliation and revenge. Captain Jenkins, the Agent to the Governor, General presumed that the attempt of the Kacharis to subject the Nagas, the original occupants of the country to slavery for the possession of the Salt-springs near Semkher was at the root of their hostility. 8 Captain Bigge, the Principal

8. F.P.P., 1839, Feb. 6, No. 60.
Assistant of Nowgong believed that the scarcity of provisions in their hills forced them to come down to the plains in search of them; if they were not supplied willingly, they seized them by force. Others considered that the ever-restless and predatory character of the Angamis was responsible for their raids into the plains. Whatever might be the causes, there was no doubt that the British occupation of North Cachar had emboldened the Kacharis to resist the Angami Nagas which had in consequence brought retaliatory raids on themselves. The apathy of the British authorities at the beginning and the inability of Tularam to check these aggressions brought untold sufferings on the inhabitants of North Cachar and Mikir Hills. As a result, they escaped into the adjoining territories leaving their own areas desolate and depopulated.

EARLY MEASURES AGAINST THE ANGAMIS:

News of Angami inroads into North Cachar first came to light through the Superintendent of Cachar in 1835. But at that time there was a good deal of confusion regarding the country from where these aggressions were carried out. Some regarded it to be a part of Tularam's country; others considered it to be under Manipur; while some others thought

10. Letters to the Court of Directors (J) 1837, Aug.8, No.26.
it to be distinct from both. One thing on which everybody agreed was that the country from which the aggressors came was mountainous and thickly covered with dense forests and heavy undergrowth. The fastnesses in their country were extremely strong and the nature of the country afforded such facilities of escape that the detection of the raiders was next to impossible even if they were hotly pursued after a raid. At the same time the position of the villages in the Cachar border was so much isolated and the incursions of the Nagas were so much of the nature of a stealthy surprise that their prevention was extremely difficult without the help of a permanent guard in each village. But natural difficulties and huge expense stood in the way of carrying out such defensive measures along the long line of Naga frontier.

The local authorities being unable to prevent these outrages urged the Government of Bengal to sanction bold measures for effectively dealing with this problem. They pointed out the necessity of placing a guard of some sort for the protection of the frontier villages which were lying in a state of defencelessness for some time. It may be pointed out that a detachment of the Sylhet Light Infantry was posted at Haflong for the protection of Upper Cachar immediately after its occupation, but was withdrawn due to the unhealthiness of the place which had resulted in constant
sickness to the troops. The Government of Bengal, while sanctioning expenses for an extra establishment of Burkan-dazes observed:

It is obvious, however, that no such guard, nor indeed any that could possibly be maintained without minor expense either within our own territory or in that of Tularam, could suffice to protect the inhabitants of a wild and open frontier from attacks which may be varied as to place, at the will of the marauders. The only plan by which such outrage can be effectively put down is to follow the perpetrators into their fastnesses, and there punish their aggressions.

Under these circumstances, the Government of Bengal empowered the local authorities to devise effective devices in concert with Tularam and the Raja of Manipur, who were supposed to be responsible for restraining their Naga subjects. They were accordingly called upon to establish a line of posts at such points of their respective frontiers, where their territories confine with that of Cachar. Tularam, however, denied having any control over the Angamis or any means of preventing their inroad. But Manipur Government, whose method of controlling the tribes was as inhuman as

11. Letters to the Court of Directors (J) 1837, Aug. 8, No. 26.
13. B.J.P. 1835, Dec. 15, No. 44.
that of the Nagas, stationed its forces for sometime at Sankhor and Ringyae, but withdrew them shortly afterwards. 14

AGGRESSIONS RENEWED: BOLD MEASURES PROPOSED:

As long as Manipuri troops were there no incursions of the Nagas took place, but as soon as they left the posts, the Angami Nagas renewed their attacks more vigorously than ever in retaliation of the oppression of the force during occupation. The deteriorating situation in the Naga frontier demanded bold action on the part of the British authorities. But the authorities at the Fort William who were not interested beyond the protection of the lowlands from the aggressions of the Nagas, continued to depend on the exertions of the Manipur Government, and hoped that it

14. "In bringing the Nagas to order the plan usually followed here is in the first instance to send out a large detachment which returns shortly after they have destroyed all their villages guilty of aggressions or refusing to submit and after receiving some token of subjection from those agreeing to do so; Naga Sirdars generally, people acquainted with the language of the tribe, are sometime afterwards sent either with or without guards, for the purpose of establishing a communication with those who before agreed to acknowledge the authority of Manipur and to receive the submission of such as refused to come in while the Sepoys remained in their neighbourhood. If any still hold out, a detachment is again sent out against those which do so. The Naga Sirdars again follow and in this way when all the tribes have been brought to submit, the latter pass much of their time amongst them and thus gradually succeed in establishing order without the intervention of any thanannah or posts, whatsoever. In fact both Nagas and Naga Sirdars are equally anxious to keep sepoys at a distance". (Extract from a D.O. from Political Agent, Manipur, dated Sep. 9, 1835 to Governor General's Agent as found in B.J.P., Feb. 16, 1836, No.20).
would occupy the posts in the Naga frontier permanently. Captain Burns, the Superintendent of Cachar, who wanted immediate measures against the Nagas, urged upon the Government of Bengal, either to depute one European Officer with a sufficient force to Upper Cachar for its defence, or allow Manipur to permanently annex Semkhor and Ringyae. He was convinced that "nothing but a severe example of these savages in their own country will put a stop to their murderous inroads." Burns' view was also shared by some other officers and all of them recommended that a portion of Tularam's country should be occupied by Manipuri troops and a detachment of the Sylhet Light Infantry under a European Officer should take up a position in the frontier for checking the inroads of the Angami Nagas or if made, of apprehending the offenders in concert with Manipur. The duty of this officer, however, was to be to conciliate and reclaim them from their lawless propensities. Both Jenkins and Captain Brodie (Principal Assistant of Sibsagar), were wholly opposed to the employment of Manipuri soldiers who "getting no pay and taking no more supplies" while on expeditions were accustomed to support themselves by forcible exactions and plunder. The Government of Bengal concurred in the views of the Agent as to the inexpediency of employing Manipuri troops. But, it proposed to the Government of India to send a Company of the

15. F.P.P., 1838, Nov. 21, No.105.
Sylhet Light Infantry under a European Officer to Haflong or any other place which might be deemed more suitable for ascertaining the origin of the Naga atrocities and of devising proper measures for their future prevention. 17

On receipt of the sanction from the Governor-General in-Council, Jenkins was directed by the Government of Bengal to send up a Company of the S.L.I. under one Officer to the Naga frontier. The Agent, therefore, instructed Captain Lister, the Political Agent of the Khasia Hills to depute at the proper season a company under Lieutenant Lyons to North Cachar, with a view to ascertaining measures either "of defence or of conciliation". 18 Though orders were issued, owing to the threatening attitude of Ava and the consequent defensive preparations on the Manipur frontier, the plan was abandoned. However, the local authorities could not neglect the question of defence of so vital a frontier and recommended very strongly to the Government of Bengal to bring North Cachar under the management of the Commissioner of Assam. Accordingly, the hill areas of North Cachar were transferred to the District of Nowgong in the hope that the Assam authorities would be in a better position to manage the Nagas than the Commissioner of Dacca. At this time Manipur made a claim to a considerable portion of the Naga Hills on the ground that it had not only been

17. B.J.P. 1837, Apr. 25, No. 17.
18. B.J.P. 1837, Sept. 19, No. 7
encouraged, but allowed to take possession of it. In fact, the local authorities had supported the claim of Manipur on the strong conviction that the incorporation of the Nagas under the settled administration of Manipur would increase the security of the British territories from the atrocities of the Nagas. 19

The failure on the part of the Government to adopt any effective measures against the Naga aggressions, emboldened the Nagas to commit repeated acts of outrages in North Cachar. The alarming incidence of such acts in the border convinced Jenkins that "nothing sort of the despatch of an European Officer and punishing the Nagas severally in their own villages will ever put a stop to the constant recurrence of these aggressions". He also considered the maintenance of a strong detachment on the frontier indispensable for keeping the peace of the country. But the Burmese threat was still there; Lyons or the detachment of the Sylhet Light Infantry could not be spared from the frontier posts. There was great shortage of troops and about 200 men were still engaged against the Morans in the Khasia Hills. 20 Nevertheless, the worsening situation in the Naga frontier demanded immediate measures against the turbulent Angamis. Hence the expedition to the Angami hills formerly approved of by the Government of India was now authorised to be undertaken.

19. F.P.P., 1837, Nov.8, No.50.
20. F.P.P., 1838, Nov.21, No.104.
Mr. Grange, the Sub-Assistant at Nowgong, was directed to conduct the expedition. To meet the inadequacy of troops, he was allowed to raise a temporary levy of 200 Kacharis considering them to be best fitted by habits and constitution for warfare in the Naga country.21

GRANGE'S FIRST EXPEDITION:

With a detachment of the First Sobundies, fifty men of the Cachar Levy and a party of the Shan Militia, Grange left for the Angami hills in January 1839. Upto this time, nothing was known about the Ang-mis and the motives of their incursions. The object of his deputation was not only to obtain correct informations on these points, but also to take notice of their latest aggressions, with a view to punishing them. Tularam true to his commitments accompanied Grange in this expedition upto Haflong and assisted him in cutting paths and in provisioning the troops. Grange marched via Doboka to Mohang Dijua and thence to Gumaigaju in North Cachar. After collecting provisions and porters, he marched into the Angami country. His route lay via Semkhor, Beremah, Bhalookeemah, Muhya, Tireemah, Tokoijinamah and thence to Cheremah, Razapemah, Samaguting and Mohong Dijua. Grange returned to Nowgong by the middle of

21. Letter from the Court (P), 1840, April 1, No.12.
March 1839, having been exposed to considerable opposition on the way. 22

In course of his march through the Angami country, Grange for the first time found out that the powerful villages of Khonoma and Mozoma were responsible for breaking the peace of the border. Impuji the chief of Khonoma and Ikari, the chief of Mozoma, were the principal leaders of all these raids. Grange was visited by the brother of Impuji; Ikari took an oath in the Naga way before him to abstain from future aggressions upon British subjects. The Angamis were discovered to be friendly to none and even among themselves were always at daggers-drawn. Several independent chiefs, whose villages were very often the victims of aggression of the powerful villages also offered their willing submission. The inroads of the Angamis into the neighbouring territories were motivated by their desire for plunder, slaves and scalps. Grange said that the village of Oodurbund was a place of considerable importance, being the entrepot to which Cachar Nagas take down their cotton to barter it for salt, dried-fish, conch-shell, beads etc. and also for slaves who were stolen from weaker Naga villages. They were sold to the Bengali merchants who went for cotton. He further added that the "Angamis are great wanderers and make excursions into Manipur itself and carry away children who are

22. For details, see Butler, J.; Travels and Adventures, Pp. 104-05.
sold up in the hills". He met several of them who had been seized in that manner and had adopted the wild Naga customs and were unwilling to return. Semkhor was a regular centre of slave trade. Grange said that a slave could be procured for twenty packets of salt, seven of which could be had for one rupee.

From a military point of view, this expedition could not be said to be a successful one, because it failed to punish and secure the submission of the principal offenders. Nevertheless, the expedition had clearly demonstrated that a well-armed body could march through the hills at its will.

SECOND EXPEDITION:

After the receipt of Grange's report on the last expedition two simultaneous plans for the administration of North Cachar were submitted by the local authorities to the Government of India. Bigge, Officer in-charge of Nowgong proposed to make the hills a substantive district under a Sub-Assistant, while Jenkins wanted it to be administered as an appendage to Nowgong, providing an Extra Assistant to that district who would visit the hills in the cold season. Both these plans were submitted with the estimates of expenditure.

in each case, but were turned down by the Government as they were likely to involve much complications and expense in future. But the Government accepted the suggestion of the Agent that Grange should be deputed again to the hills to subdue the powerful chiefs who were still at large and to take under protection those who were favourably disposed. Another object of his proposed deputation was to select a site for a post for stationing a permanent force in the hills under a native officer and to establish a market near about the post for encouraging trade and peaceful relations.

To assist Grange in his campaign, Captain Brodie was directed to send a party of the Jorhat Militia, and Captain Gordon, now Political Agent in Manipur was instructed to advance with a party of the Manipur Levy. It was planned that while Grange would bring under submission all the Angamis north of the mountain range, Gordon would extend Manipur's authority over the southern side of the ridge. Thus a well laid plan for the thorough subjugation of the Angamis was drawn up. Accordingly, with a stronger force this time consisting of the Cachar Levy, the Jorhat Militia and fifty men of the Assam Light Infantry, Grange left for the hills reaching Samaguting on January 23, 1840. Posting therein some men of the Jorhat Militia, he marched via Razepemah towards Papolongmai for meeting the Manipuri detachment as

was previously arranged. Unavoidable difficulties in arranging provisions and transport prevented him from arriving at the appointed place as scheduled. The Manipuri detachment after waiting for a few days left the field under the impression that the expedition had either been postponed or dropped altogether. Grange could not proceed against the refractory chiefs with a handful of soldiers and was forced to return to Nowgong without punishing the principal leaders of the raids. Seeing a small force following Grange, the Nagas attacked him and a series of fighting took place all along his return march. The Nagas as usual set fire to the long grass and rolled down stones from the top of the hills to harass his troops. He burnt down papalongmai and Japamah for opposing him and finding the Nagas of Samaguting assuming a hostile attitude captured nine of them and brought them down to his headquarters as hostages. Except a detachment of the Cachar Levy which Grange left at the frontier post of Dimapur on the bank of the Dhansiri, the entire party reached the plains in March 1841.

RESULT OF THE EXPEDITIONS:

Grange failed in his main objective - the punishment of the Angami chiefs, but he struck terror in their minds. The repetition of expeditions and the punishments

inflicted on two of the powerful Angami villages, Papolongmai and Japamah, had convinced them that they could be taken to task for their offences against British subjects when the Government wanted to do so. As a result their atrocities on the borders of Cachar and Nowgong ceased for two years, which had enabled the ryots to extend their cultivation along the lines of the Dhansiri beyond the former limit. Two Naga chiefs of Samaguting came to Nowgong to secure the release of the nine men whom Grange had brought as hostages. They were now released by Bigge on the personal security of the two chiefs, who had entered into written treaties premising good behaviour of their men for future. They also agreed to settle in the waste lands in the plains in the vicinity of Mohong Dijua.

EASTERN NAGAS: OPPRESSIVE TAXATION:

It may be recalled that the good relations between the Eastern Naga tribes and the plains were marred during the last years of the reign of Purandar due to the imposition of heavy duties and illegal excotions of the unscrupulous officials of the Ahom Government. After the resumption of Upper Assam by the British Government it was found that the taxes levied on Naga salt were really heavy and the
manner in which they were imposed was unjust. In fact, during the last part of his reign, Purandar made several attempts to increase the taxes and also to bring under his tax-system more Nagas, who had been previously exempted. The Nagas objected to the assessment as well as to the oppressive method of collection. What was worse, the tax-collectors of the Raja not only realised the taxes on the salt itself, but also on the articles exchanged by the Nagas for salt. The extortion and oppression of the tax-collectors drove the Nagas between the Dikhow and the Disang to make retaliatory raids on the bordering districts so as to "stop all communications by the roads and to force the ryots to remove from the neighbourhood." The continuance of such an alarming situation compelled the local authorities to intervene. In the cold season of 1839, Captain Brodie, the Principal Assistant of Sibsagar deputed Mr. Strong, his Sub-Assistant to the hills to enquire into and report on all wells and suggest alteration if necessary in the duties which might lead to the restoration of peace and good will among the Nagas.

Reverend Miles Bronson, the American Baptist Missionary, who had been working among the Konyak Nagas for sometime and who knew the Nagas better than anyone else advised Captain Jenkins to retain control over half of the

salt-wells in the area to which the Government was entitled. "It is their salt", he added, "that makes them so independent and I see no likelier way to make them improve than for Government to make half themselves". Bronson wanted the Government of India to take some measures to get hold of the Nagas and to make them feel a sort of dependance upon it for livelihood and particularly the administration of their internal affairs. He reminded the Agent that the former Assam Government up to its fall had not only asserted their rights over the wells, but kept the Nagas under their authority. Purandar before his days were numbered had the Nagas much more under control than the Government now have. He made them look to him in all important matters and when they did wrong he chastised them. Bronson said, "There are now fourteen or sixteen houses among the Bor Duarias who were obliged to work every man ten days out of thirty in working the salt wells for purunder. These twenty days they cultivated their rice and worked their salt - but the remaining ten days work was all received by the Raja. There is also now one village called Khila Gong, which the Raja had made arrangements with the Nam Sangias and Bor Duarias to remove to another place when the Raja designed to form a village of his own. The Khila Gongias were to labour for the Raja in the same way. It was considered as a tribute paid by the Nagas to the Raja - and would have brought in a vast amount of salt to the Raja.
But just as the arrangement was completed the Raja was ejected. Matters came into the hands of the Company and here this village is now claimed neither by Nam Sansias or Bor Duarias nor by the Government. 30

Notwithstanding Bronson's counsel, the Government of India, after the receipt of Strong's Report in 1841, not only abolished all duties, but also made over the salt-wells to the Nagas. The abolition of the oppressive duties gave a great fillip to the extension of trade and cultivation of rice, which became the chief article of barter; but the surrender of the wells increased the insolence of the Nagas. 31

30. F.P.P. 1840, Nov. 9, No. 82.
Mackenzie, A.; History of the Relations, etc., p. 92.