CHAPTER 7

POPULAR MOVEMENTS IN THE PLAINS AND IN THE HILLS.

Popular Reactions to British Administration: The aftermath of the Rebellion of 1857 led to the transfer of power from the hands of the East India Company to the British Crown. But this did not materially affect the character of the administration. The assumption of administration by the British Crown in 1858 meant no improvement in the revenue administration. People resented it and disaffection tended to spread with amazing rapidity with the result that the entire half of the nineteenth century witnessed a good number of popular uprisings.

It will be recalled that from the very beginning of British administration there prevailed among the administrators a tendency to increase revenue by any means and on all occasions. Now this developed into a regular practice. With the change in the nomenclature of the Raj the people naturally expected some improvements in the system by way of remissions. But what came instead was enhanced revenues and no relief. Therefore, the people found out their ways of protest and there appeared a series of popular outbreaks in the Province.

The 1857 revolt imposed a severe financial strain on the Government. The budget for the year 1858-59 showed a huge deficit. The deficit exceeded "fourteen million pounds sterling and the public debts shot up over seventy millions." Thus the problem of restoring the finances to order loomed large before the financial Advisers of the Government. They suggested imposition of a number of taxes to cope with the financial stringency. In 1860 the system of payment of income tax was introduced in the country and it was extended to Assam in 1861. Since there had been little scope for providing additional grants to the Assam authorities, the Government directed
the latter to tap new sources of revenue. Stamp duties had already been introduced as early as 1858. Excise Duties were introduced in Kamrup, Darrang and Nowgong excluding the tribal areas. Gold washing was farmed out; the practice of auctioning fisheries was introduced; and the Licence duties for cutting timber and reeds were imposed; taxes on grazing were also introduced. As cultivation of poppy in the Province adversely affected Government revenue, it was prohibited in 1861 and opium-eaters of Assam were made entirely dependant on Abkari opium which had been introduced in the Province since 1851-52. Due to the tax increase the general peasants had already been badly affected and now the prohibition on poppy cultivation greatly affected the domestic economy of the tribal areas "where per capita consumption of opium was stated to be highest in the Province." As the burdens were beyond the capacity of the people to endure, they decided to fight.

**Popular Uprisings — Anti-Feudal Movements:** With the passing of time the multiplication of taxes became a serious concern to the agricultural people. The Government policy of frequently raising the rates of revenue coupled with the ill-dealings of the land-holding classes lay at the root of a number of uprisings organised through the agencies

2. ADC., p. 205.

*The aim and objects of the Britishers in introducing the Mauzadari system, also known as Ryotwari system, which was introduced in 1870, were to abolish the intermediate feudal class. But it achieved little success as the owners of Khiraj (full revenue-paying estates), Lakhiraj (full revenue free estates) and Misf-Khiraj (half revenue paying estates) used to sublet their lands to tenants. As the collection of revenue was done through Mauzadars they were allowed to exercise certain powers of the Deputy Commissioner under Assam Land Revenue Regulation I of 1886 which in majority cases had a bad influence over the Mauzadars who began to misuse such powers in extracting money from the ryots and became oppressors towards their tenants. With a very few exceptions almost all the land-holders tried to derive as much revenue and free service from their tenants as possible and subjected them into various oppressive measures, so as to squeeze money on various pretexts like Seva, Puja, Selami, Nazrana (Mukchawanti), higher local rate and cost of land revenue receipts etc. They even used false measurements also. The oppressions suffered by the tenants at the hands of the Mauzadars and other landholders were enormous.*
cies of the Raiimela. On the annexation of Assam the administration of ordinary civil and criminal duties was carried on by the council of a local gentry, called Panchayats which gradually transformed themselves into such popular assemblies. As the sufferings of the peasants were similar, they united under the common banner of the Raiimela. These roused consciousness among the peasants and gave them the necessary organisational medium to fight the injustices inflicted by the Government and the land-holding classes.

Some important popular metements may be discussed:

Phulaguri Dhawa: After the prohibition on cultivation of poppy was imposed in 1861 rumours were afloat in Howgong that the Government was thinking to impose taxes on houses, bariyas (gardens) and temul and nua (areca nuts and betel vine). By this time Licence Tax for cutting timber, reeds and on grazing came into force. These made the people believe the rumour taxation on areca nuts and betel vine would soon become a reality. Anyway, "the assessment of land revenue was increased, and Income-Tax, Stamp Duties, etc., were also imposed by the new administration. The Government carried on trade in opium and salt in the district" (Howgong) "and earned considerable profit thereby. It seemed the Government itself was engaged in exploiting common people."

The people felt much agitated due to these new exploitative measures and viewed with alarm impending taxes on betel nuts and vine. Thus the ryots of Phulaguri, a tribal area, inhabited mainly by the Lalmugs and situated about fourteen Kilometres from Howgong, strongly protested against the prohibition on poppy cultivation and the threatened taxes on areca nuts and betel vine. The people of the said areas raised their voice through their Raiimela.

4. R&H., p.73.
The people first tried to have their grievances redressed through peaceful means. In September 1861 about fifteen hundred peasants assembled in front of the office of the Deputy Commissioner of Nowgam, Mr. Herbet Sconce, to represent their grievances to the authority. They demonstrated peacefully. A few of them entered into the room of the Deputy Commissioner for the purpose of submitting the representation. In their representation they pointed out the harm that had already been done by prohibiting the cultivation of poppy and appealed that no further tax be levied on their areca nuts and betal vine gardens.

Mr. Sconce did not at all attempt to remove their apprehensions. On the other hands the Deputy Commissioner detained the ryots who entered his room and fined them for their disorderly behaviour. Not only on this Mr. Sconce was used to behaving with the people always in provocative manners. He did not allow them even to enter his office-campus and used to fine them on several occasions on the allegation of making noises within the court compound. However the arrested ryots got their release in the same evening with the help and intervention of some influential men. The people again submitted their representation on 9 October 1861 but in vain. As the district authorities were not paying any heed to their representations, the people realised the futility of submitting representations, and thus they decided not to pay tax at all. The village assemblies began meeting regularly. Such assemblies were largely attended. In such meetings Panchu Raja and Satu Raja of the Lalungs played a prominent role. The former had the command over the people of Sara, Khagwa Khahigaria, Topagochia, Barapuja and Makir and had the influence over the areas like Neli, Sahari, Uttarkol and Gova. While Sato Raja exercised influence over the areas of Rayang, Kumai, Baghara, Kalabari, Ghagua, Tetelima and Gokhanagug. The masses of these areas,
influenced by their respective Rajas, largely attended the village assemblies and took the field when necessity demanded. 15 October 1861 was fixed for a big mass meeting. It was decided that the meeting would continue for six long days to enable ryots from the distant areas to have the opportunity of attending the meeting.

The Deputy Commissioner of Nowgong received information that a large number of peasants had been regularly meeting at Phulaguri. He ordered the Daroga on 14 October 1861 to disperse the assembled peasants and arrest the leaders as well as those who refused to disperse. Accordingly on the morning of 15 October a Jemadar with four Burkenesses arrived at Phulaguri. They saw a gathering of about one thousand peasants and asked them to disperse. The ryots responded by attacking them. They seized one of the police party as prisoner and drove the others away. When the Deputy Commissioner received information about the failure of the official party to disperse the peasants, he at once ordered the Daroga himself to proceed to Phulaguri for dispersing the crowd and rescuing the seized police man. But the Daroga also failed in his mission and was compelled to retire. On 16 October 1861 the Daroga reported to Mr. Sconce about his failure to disperse the ryots. He further reported that five to six hundred ryots, most of them armed, assembled there and on being asked to disperse they replied that "to go to Cutcherry to complaint, and hope to bring their grievances to the ears of the Huzoor (i.e. Deputy Commissioner Mr. Sconce) "was out of the question, for if they attempted to enter the Court-house they were thrust out by the peamah and fined; Consequently they had thus assembled in a body to look after their interests, and would remain consulting for five days till all the people, who had still to arrive from very many other villages, had reached the field."

villages, had collected also. The Daroga could recognise the peasant leaders but dared not arrest them from the midst of a large crowd of their followers numbering more than a thousand, particularly when they were armed. On the next day i.e., on 17 October the Daroga once again tried to disperse the crowd and made some arrests of peasant leaders. However, the large gathering of about four thousand people forcibly rescued their arrested leaders and drove out the Police party.

Now it became evident to Mr. Sconce that the situation was indeed grave and so he directed one European Officer, Lieutenant Singer, a Junior Assistant Commissioner, to proceed to the spot of the peasants’ meeting to disperse them. Lieutenant Singer, accompanied by a Police party, arrived at Phulaguri on 18 October 1861. He found therein a gathering of about three thousand peasants, many armed with lathis. Singer met the leaders of the ryots. They reiterated their complaints about the prohibition on the cultivation of poppy and their apprehension about the taxes on income and on areca nuts and betel vine. One Jati Kalita acted as their spokesman. They further added that as the District Magistrate (Mr. Sconce) had not given any patient hearing to their representations, they were contemplating in their meet as to the means to represent their grievances to the higher authorities. Singer was young and hot-headed and he immediately ordered the Police to disperse and disarm the crown forcibly. He himself attempted to seize personally the lathis from the ryots. Thus scuffles ensued and Singer got inadvertently killed himself inadvertently killed in the fight. It was reported that one Bahoo of Koshipur mauza dealt a blow on his head and he fell down on the ground. Singer’s body was thrown into the

11. IDLA., p.27; CI., p.231; DG(N), pp.73-74.
12. PHA., p.91.
14. For details see PHA., pp.91-92 and F.N. therein.
Kalang river. The Police force accompanied him fled away out of panic.

On the same evening the Deputy Commissioner when the news of the murder of Lieutenant Singer reached him had only twenty-five Sepoys of the Assam Light Infantry at his disposal. Moreover he got information that the peasants intended to attack the headquarters town. This compelled him to seek reinforcement from Darrang and Gauhati. He immediately despatched a small armed force under a havildar to the trouble spot. On the day on which Sconce sent the communications to the authorities of Darrang, Henry Hopkinson, the Commissioner of Assam, arrived at Tezpur in the evening on his way to Dibruagahr. Hopkinson himself took the initiative for immediate despatch of troops from Tezpur to Nowgong; and he personally proceeded to Nowgong with a strong party of the Assam Light Infantry and arrived there on the 23 October.

Earlier on 19 October the force under the havildar, whom the Deputy Commissioner had despatched immediately after receiving the news of the murder of Lieutenant Singer, arrived at Phulaguri and a skirmish ensued between them and the ryote who were armed with bows and arrows. The Police men were armed with more sophisticated weapons. The result was that the ryote could but "offer a feeble resistance to the fire of the police and several of them died and many were left wounded."

On the arrival of additional forces from Tezpur and Gauhati, the Deputy Commissioner Sconce was emboldened and dared to visit immediate-areas like Phulaguri, Neli, Naghut, Raha and other adjoining places and captured as many as forty persons including the sons of old Lalbag Rajas. The arrested persons were implicated in the murder of Lieutenant Singer. Thus with the help of the reinforcements from Tezpur and Gauhati

15. DHR, p.27.
16. DGN, p.74.
17. PHA, p.92.
18. ADM.
the rising was suppressed. Subsequently eight peasant leaders, mostly tribal and including Nursing Lalung were sentenced to either death or transportation for life.

The resistance-movement organised by the people against the increased taxes and unsympathetic attitude of the district authorities was regarded by English writers as an uprising against the ban on poppy cultivation. But in fact this was not only the cause of the people's movement. In a subsequent judicial inquiry evidences came forth to the effect that it was the tactlessness and high-handedness of the District Magistrate which was primarily responsible for the Phulaguri incident, popularly known as the Phulaguri Bhowa (war). As a result of the findings of the Judicial Enquiry Commission, some Scenes was temporarily reduced in rank and pay by denoting them to the position of an Assistant Commissioner and transferred to Gauhati.

Later Peasants' Movements Leading to Patharughat-pha: If there were a Dhowa (war) at Phulaguri, there came a Ran (war) at Patharughat as well. Suppression of the Phulaguri uprising did not mean an abatement in the activities of the Railmales. Rather those increased. The men whom hitherto dealt with people's social matters only were now gradually developing into assemblies dealing with socio-political matters and their numbers grew day by day specially in Lower Assam Districts causing alarm in official circles. The Assamese people began to resort more and more to the Railmales for resisting the enhancement of land revenue and other official measures considered repressive. There could be

19. R.C.; Vol.II. p.27.
20. For the murder of Lieutenant Singer, late Assistant Commissioner of Nongon, Laksham Deka, Ranger Deka and Nursing Lalung were awarded death sentences while Nupsing, Nursing Lalung, Bahoo Kibarta and Basamali Kibarta were awarded transportation for life. Information gathered from Shir Finist Supp. of Shillong of D.T.B.
no doubt about the oppressive nature of the ryot revenue system. In 1879 W.W. Hunter recorded that in Kamrup alone "the Land Tax had more than trebled within the past twenty-five years."

The Bengal Government bothered little about the discontent of the ryots of Assam. In spite of flare-up at Phulaguri the Commissioner of Assam ignored the reality and since 1861 had been sending repeated proposals to the Government of Bengal for raising the rates of house-holder and garden-lands as he was of opinion that the produce of this type of lands specially "betal nuts commanded a ready sale on the spot at a higher profit." By 1868 his proposals matured and the rates of revenue on "ryot" and non-"ryot" lands was doubled in almost in all the districts of the Brahmaputra valley. This created great discontent amongst the people who expressed their anger through their Rajmel, especially in Darrang and Kamrup Districts. The police had to disperse the agitated mob with force in places like Bajali in Kamrup and Patharughat in Darrang. These gatherings were obviously directed against the enhancement of revenue. Immediately after the announcement of increased rates of land revenue, a Rajmel was held in 1868 at Patharughat in the Mungali-dai Sub-Division, being the first Rajmel in the District of Darrang. Apprehending disturbances, Colonel A.C. Comber, the Deputy Commissioner of Darrang, along with the Superintendent of Police rushed to Patharughat, and on that very night the peasants "besieged the Deputy Commissioner, the Sub-Divisional Officer and the District Superintendent of Police in the rest-house; but no extreme measures were resorted to on either side."

23. PHA, p. 95.
24. PHA, p. 28.
27. PHA(A.D.), pp. 60-61.
There were rejections in Kamrup district also. The people of Gabindapur, Hadir and Bajali in North Kamrup began to meet frequently in their respective panchayats. Campbell, the Superintendent Sub-Divisional Officer of Barpeta received information that about four thousand people had gathered at Gabindapur to protest against the increase of revenue, and directed the Police Inspector of Barpeta towards the end of January 1868 to enquire about the proceedings of the panchayat and to trace out the peasant leaders by personally visiting Gabindapur. The Police Inspector could not dare face the people assembly and passed through Gabindapur in the cover of darkness and collected the names of the peasant leaders from hearsay evidence. He could collect nothing about the proceedings of the panchayat. This displeased Major Agnew, the Officiating Commissioner of Assam, who directed the said Inspector not to allow more time "to mobs of such kind of to assembled! Thus there ensued intense repressive measures. This compelled the peasants to avoid public places and hold the meetings in naalbari/mosques. The Government evidently wanted a respite which was why the revenue assessment remained unchanged till 1878. But things changed by 1893-94 when all the districts of the Province were reassessed, under the Chief Commissioner Sir William Ward who was of the opinion that the "people's capacity to pay had not been taxed to the fullest extent in the matter of revenue assessment! This time importance was not laid so much on the produce or to the quality of the soil but to the demand for land. Under the pretext that the assessment of 1873 had been lenient and the people's capacity had not been fully taxed, Sir William Ward raised the rate of the land revenue by 70 to 80 per cent and in some cases to the extent of 100 per cent. Thus...
a severe jolt to the minds of the a-severe ryots. As the Government went on enhancing the rates of land revenue payment the Raijmea were also becoming more and more active in all the districts of the Brahmaputra Valley except Goalpara where the system of Permanent Settlement prevailed. The worst sufferers of the rise in the rates of land revenue in 1893 were the people of Kamrup and Darrang. No wonder, then, that people made vigorous protests against the onerous rates. These found organised expression in places like Rangia, Lachima (Sarukhetri Manso), Pati-darrang, Nalbari, Baraara, Bajali and Patharughat and the traditional Raijmea were the vehicles of this mounting protest movement. Huge demonstrations were organised against the unjust enhancement of revenue. The Government became frankly alarmed and applied force to deal with the situation. In the eyes of the Government, popular demonstrations were nothing but 'riots'. In reality these were "agrarian uprisings of the peasantry in Assam against further exploitation of their means of subsistence by the unsympathetic and alien bureaucracy." No-Tax campaign on a vigorous scale was also launched by the ryots of Rangia and Lachima in the district of Kamrup and Patharughat in Darrang. During the month of December 1893 and January 1894 people from the places comprising the Tahsils of Pati-darrang, Nalbari, Barama, Bajali and five other moment of Upper Barbhag and Sarukhetri convened their males and resolved not to yield to the Government demand and to fine and excommunicate those who would pay revenue to the Government. Brief references to the events in different places may now be made.

Rangia: In the month of December 1893 and the month following demonstrations were organised at Rangia for several days by the crowds numbering thousands of people. At Rangia the movement started with the
incident of looting of the Ramgla bazar by the mobs. The incident occurred in the evening of 24 December 1893 while the ryots were returning from a mela held at Belagaon, a village near Rangia. They also warned a Kevri (Marwari) shopkeeper that his shop would be raided on 30 December as the ryots thought that the presence of Kervas caused enhancement of land revenue. In fact on 30 December there assembled at Rangia nearly a thousand peasants and held demonstrations throughout the night and threatened to attack the Police Station, Post Office and the residence of the Tahsildar (collector). On the failure of the Police force to disperse the demonstrators, the Deputy Commissioner of Jorhat, R.B. McCabe proceeded to Rangia from Gauhati with additional force. He arrived at Rangia from Gauhati on 6 January 1894 and caused the arrest of a number of persons alleged to have been involved in the looting incident of 24 December 1893. But the gathering could not be dispersed completely. Melas were still going on at Rangia and several other places. On the other hand, the Deputy Commissioner continued his efforts to arrange for collection of land revenue through the number of headmen specially enrolled as Special Constables under the Section 17 of Act V of 1861. But such efforts brought little success. The Rajo not only obstructed the attachment of property but also punished those who found paying enhanced revenue disregarding the directions of the Rajo, by excommunicating them. Failing to curb the movement, Government resorted to firing on the demonstrators. On 10 January 1894 several thousand peasants assembled in the field close to Rangia Police Station where several of their leaders had been kept in the lock-up. The demonstration continued all throughout the day and there was no sign of abatement even when darkness descended. When the demonstrators came closer to the
Police Station Mr. McCabe ordered them to disperse and simultaneously imposed bans on holding meetings of the male without prior permission from the authorities not only in Rangia but in other places like Patidarrang, Malbari, Tamulpur, Bani, Barasa and Rajali or in the dargah of Sarukhetri. The people replied by shouting slogans like "we won't pay the increased revenue." They not only disobeyed the official orders of the District Magistrate but made an attempt in the evening to release forcibly their leaders from the Police custody and "had actually occupied a few houses within it, whereupon the Police resorted to firing! Thus the crowd was compelled to disperse. As an author put it "McCabe's effrontery was but the symbol of tyrannical rule of the alien power.

Though there are no exact records as to the number of lives lost in this incident, there is every possibility that casualties were heavy. Further, a good number of people were arrested. With the appointment of Special Special Constables to assist the the Government in revenue collection and the suppression of demonstrations normalcy gradually returned to Rangia. The Government succeeded in realising a sum of Rs. 60,000 as land revenue out of a total demand of Rs. 90,000 within a few days.

Lachima: In spite of the dispersion of the demonstrators at Rangia, the peasants of areas like Malbari, Barasa, Rajali, Lachima, Patidarrang and Patharughat were firm in their refusal to pay the enhanced revenue. Apprehending troubles McCabe had to call for additional forces. A detachment of 44th Gurkha Rifles was requisitioned from Shillong, while military and Frontier Police were called from Tespur and Darrang Frontier. All the licensed Guns in the affected areas of Rangia, Malbari...
Barana, Bajali were ordered to be attached. The Tahsil Cutcherry at Rangia was completely stockaded and entrenched. The show of force, as McCabe arranged, could not dishearten the ryots who were still continuing to meet regularly in mels for demonstrating their opposition. On 21 January an untoward incident took place in the village Kapla near Lachima in the Sarukhetri Mauza. One Mauzadar of the locality and his Mandal were menhandled by the people when the Mauzadar tried to collect the enhanced revenue. A few days later the assaulted Mauzadar succumbed to his injuries. Following this seventyfive persons were arrested. But the arrested persons had to be released when a mob of about 3000 men surrounded the camp and threatened to burn the resthouse. The Sub-Divisional Officer took to his heels and sought reinforcement urgently from the District Magistrate.

Mr. McCabe rushed to Lachima on 24 January with a party of Sepoys of the 13th Bengal Native Infantry. On the next day of his arrival fifty-nine leading persons including a few Gossains, Doloiis and village Elders of the locality were arrested. This indiscriminate arrest caused widespread resentment and a petition signed by 6000 peasants was submitted demanding the release of the arrested persons. The petitioners also said they would not pay the enhanced revenue. The mass deputations frightened the Deputy Commissioner and he ordered the military to charge the people with fixed bayonets. Ultimately the demonstrators dispersed. It was sheer barbaric act.

Patharughat Rail: Similar demonstrations were going on in full swing at Patharughat within the Sub-Division of Mangaldai of the Darang District. Patharughat is not more than twelve miles from the border.

48. PHA., p.91.
49. MFS., p.32.
50. PHA., p.96.
51. Ibid., p.99; MFS., p.32.
52. MFS., p.32; SIB., p.17.
of Kamrup. On the reassessment of the Province and enhancement of revenue, the villagers of the areas irrespective of communities declined to pay their revenue\(^53\). They held \textit{melas} since the middle of the month of January 1894 for several days for demonstrating their decision not to pay enhanced revenue and prevent others from doing so. The Deputy Commissioner of Darrang, J.D. Anderson accordingly proceeded to Patharughat with twelve soldiers and nineteen Armed Civil Police in order to lend the weight of the authority to the local revenue Officials who failed to collect land revenue from the peasants. The Deputy Commissioner Mr. Anderson along with Lieutenant Barrington arrived at Patharughat on 27 January. On 28 January a large number of peasants began to assemble since morning in the compound of the Inspection Bungalow where the Deputy Commissioner was encamping. The peasants assembled there with a view to appealing to the Deputy Commissioner to lower the rate of revenue and to express their determination not to pay the increased revenue. Earlier in the morning while Barrington, with a Police party, attempted to attach the property \& of the defaulting \textit{ryots}, they were surrounded by a mob pf about two hundred persons. But the party somehow managed to escape to the Inspection Bungalow and reported the matter to Mr. Anderson. Apprehending further troubles the \textit{ryots} assembling in the compound of the Inspection Bungalow were asked to disperse. But as the mob "obstilately declined to move they had to be ejected by the Police. About half an hour afterwards the mob returned armed with sticks and clods\(^58\). Apprehending an untoward incident Mr. Barrington, the Superintendent of Police, ordered the people to disperse and simultaneously arranged his men in a line with fixed bayonets. This excited the

\(^{53}\) PHA, p. 99.  
\(^{54}\) DG(A.D.), pp. 60-61.  
\(^{55}\) PHA, p. 99.  
\(^{56}\) DG(A.D.), pp. 60-61.  
\(^{57}\) PHA, p. 99.  
\(^{58}\) DG(A.D.), pp. 60-61.
people and they were determined not to leave the place without having their demands conceded. The people were indignant at the sight of fixed bayonets and began moving towards the Inspection Bungalow. The result was that the Police opened fire; some lost their lives and some received serious injuries. About the incident B.C. Allen said: "the Police were compelled to open fire, but even then the rioters did not give way, and Police retired slowly firing all the time with the crowd continually pressing in upon them. A final volley was then discharged and the Police charged the rioters who at last began to yield though they reformed a little distance off.... Altogether fifteen men were killed and thirty-seven wounded in this unfortunate affair." At last the mob dispersed but not before they had thrown at the Police clubs of earth, bamboo sticks and the like which some of them carried with them. Popular estimates about the casualties were higher than the official figures. According to these accounts, one hundred forty persons died and one hundred fifty sustained serious injuries due to indiscriminate Police firing. The incident of Patharughat is still remembered as the Dalipuran or the battle fought with clods of earth by the people against the armed Police. It is interesting to note that verses known as Dalipuran came to be composed by folk-poets in the style of the Purana to commemorate the incident.

Although the popular risings were suppressed with the superior weight of the Government, the agitation of the people could not be completely stopped. It continued in different forms and anti-Government demonstrations merged with anti-landlord popular movements.

60. PG(AD), pp. 60-61.
60. FQR, p. 14.
The Role of Railmels: We have noted how the Railmels played an important role in organising the people in the second half of the nineteenth century in their struggle against the increased rates of land revenue. The work of the mels was later to bear fruit when the masses were drawn to the national movement for freedom in the later period.

The origin of the Railmels may be traced since the beginning of the Company Raj in Assam. On their annexation of Assam the Company Government allowed the administration of ordinary criminal and civil duties by a Council of the local gentry, called Panchayats. These bodies gradually transformed themselves into popular assemblies known as mels or Railmels. During the early period of the Company's administration, the authorities depended on the mels for obtaining people's support to their administration. A fairly good account of the role of the mels is to be found in McCabe's Report submitted to the Government covering the activities of the mels in Kamrup in 1893-94:

"The ordinary village Panchayats, originally constituted as an authority on the social matters had developed into the mels or assembly of not only the members of a village but of whole of the inhabitants of even one or more Tahsils. These mels are governed by the leading Dolois or Gossains and by the principal landlords of the district. ... The unfortunate ryots who has to pay his land revenue is met by the Tahsildar on the one side who says "If you do not pay, your property will be attached, and on the other side by the Raij i.e., the embodiment of the mels which states, "If you do pay, you are cursed and excommunicated. He has therefore to face loss of property on the one side or social ostracism on the other."

61. Quoted from IMS, p.34.
Thus it became clear to the alien administrators that if their administration was to be preserved, the mala must be curbed effectively. The British annexed Assam in 1826 giving the impression that they would relieve the Assamese people from the oppressions of the Burmese and pave the way for the restoration of the traditional native regime. But when their intentions were found out, they were faced with popular resistance initiated first by Gomdhar Konwar and later on by Piyali Barphukan and Maniram Dewan. The rulers possibly thought that the execution of Maniram Dewan and Peoli Barua would stamp out the spirit of rebellion. But they were mistaken because, within three years of the execution of Maniram Dewan and Peoli Barua, the people of Phulaguri raised their voice through the Rainimales.

Risings in the Hills: Following the great upheaval of 1857 there were resistance movements against the British in almost all the hill areas of Assam. "These became frequent in the Naga Hills into which repeated expeditions were led by the British in the nineteenth century." The final submission of the Nagas came with the subjugation of the Angami Nagas in 1879 after a prolonged and protracted warfare. There were risings in the Garo Hills also. Risings were also in evidence in Lushai Hills, the most serious being the one in 1892 which continued till 1898 when the Lushai Hills district was created and placed under the Assam Administration. But the Jayantia uprisings, that took place immediately after the 1887 Revolt, took a more serious nature because

62. In a notification of 10 January 1894 McCabe ordered: "Whereas the assembly of the mals in the district of Kemrup has resulted in riot and criminal intimidation, it is hereby ordered that no mal shall assemble within the Tahsils of Pati-darrang, Ramgla, Balbari, Tamulpur, Hajo, Bara and Rajali or in the Mand of Sarukhetri without the permission of the Deputy Commissioner. See PHA, pp. 97-98, f.n.

63. [PHA], p. 28.

64. [1]

65. [Already discussed in Chapter 5.

66. [ ]
these involved a whole tribe inhabiting the Jantia Hills where difficult terrain made subjugation of the rebellious people difficult."

Risings in Jayantia Hills: The Jayantia Hills came under British possession in 1835 following the incident of sacrifice of the English subjects by the Jayantias. The Raja of the Jayantias was suspected to be implicated in the incident and hence his territories that lay in the plains were forthwith annexed to the District of Sylhet, "and the Raja voluntarily resigned the hill portion also. He was granted a monthly pension of Rs. 500 and allowed to live in Sylhet plains."

Thereafter peace prevailed till 1861 when an uprising took place following the introduction of a house tax. This uprising was followed by another in the next year due to the introduction of Income Tax in the Jayantia Hills. The rising continued till 1863. In both the cases the British revenue policy was mainly responsible for these outbursts.

On the assumption of the Jayantia Kingdom no change was effected in the existing system of revenue which consisted simply of the payment of a he-goat once a year from each village. The Raja had derived the greater portion of his income from his possessions in the plains. However in 1860 a house tax of Re. 1/- per house was introduced following the recommendation of Mr. W.J. Allen, Member, Board of Revenue that the Syntengs, as the Jayantias, were called, should contribute at least something to the Government to make the authority of the paramount power a real one. This measure of direct taxation was very obnoxious to the Syntengs who had known no taxation before. There were other factors besides the introduction of House Tax. Establishment of Police Station

68. EMRS., Vol. II. p. 206.
69. PHA., p. 83; IMRS., p. 28; HA., p. 328.
at Jowai required the prohibition of burning the dead on the existing burning site which was near the Police Outpost. Considerable feelings were roused by the prohibition of burning the dead in the traditional place. The existence of the military outpost in the heart of the village proved to be oppressive. Cases of elopement of women by the Sepoys became frequent occurrence. Simultaneously with the establishment of the Outpost, a Missionary school came up with evangelistic spirit posing a threat to the old practices of Puja. The Stamp Duty was also introduced in 1860 and Raj (royal) lands were transferred to Government management and before long fisheries, which were, hitherto exempted, were also brought under assessment. Impost was also introduced on the right of cutting timber. The practice of auctioning such rights to the highest bidder was introduced. The introduction of the system of management of crown (raj) lands, which the Syntengs had been enjoying rent-free, deprived them of the power and privileges which they enjoyed from the early times. Thus this was also viewed with the suspicion that Raj lands would soon be assessed. Moreover, the Dolon and the Sardars found that the presence of a Daroga in their midst reduced their importance. Above all the Dolon and Sardars found that the English Administration placed them at the mercy of the officials of the Court without whose support it was impossible for them to hold their elective offices. Furthermore, there were allegations of corruption and oppression by the minor officials at the Court at Cherrapunji. With a very few exceptions, the Syntengs "did not know a word of the Court language and all, as ignorant of laws, entirely dependent on and at the mercy of the native officials, who did not

71. Ibid.
72. Ibid., p.172; SAA., pp.206-07. (Vol.II)
hesitate to grow rich at their expense." To these there added the feelings of the Syntengs that the annexation of the Jayantia Hills in 1835 was an unjust act on the part of the Government. They viewed it as an act of treachery. "It was not so much annexation as the manner of its implementation that embittered the feelings of these hillmen against the British. Major Lister, Political Agent, Khasi Hills, not only assumed charge of the territory but also seized the personal effects of the Raja—elephants, guns, apparel not sparing even his cooking pots." Thus the conduct of the local authorities since its annexation started strained the relations of the Syntengs with the British Government. On the outbreak of the Rebellion of 1857 the Ex-Raja of the Jayantias helped the Government with a contingent of 2500, and yet, he was kept under surveillance. Then, the Deputy Commissioner, Rowlatt aggravated the situation by dispossessing the people of hand-made weapons like sheilds and swords. The Syntengs attached much importance to these weapons used frequently while performing their traditional puja and ceremonies, besides using them as weapons of protection. Rowlatt added fuel to fire by ordering for the burning of the weapons in the presence of the dispossessed owners. The burning of their weapons greatly hurt the feelings of the people. According to one estimate, 588 sheilds, 475 swords, 14 guns and several spears were seiged and burnt. Be that as it might be, it was the taxation policy of the Government which was at the root of the Jayantika upheaval. As J.C.

74. The people used to say "we can do nothing, every case is lost unless we give bribes. Even Oodon, the Doloi of Jowri, complained that in order to ensure his office he had to pay Rs.350 to the mukhtear of Inglis, son-in-law of the Political Agent, a gold mohar to Solomon, the interpreter, and rupees fifteen to Rammohan, the treasurer." See Jl., April, 1973, pp.143-44.

75. Jl., April, 1973, p.145; LH., p.82.

76. At the time of annexation of Jayantia Hills in 1835 Major Lister was the Political Agent of the Khasi Hills. In 1854 it was retransferred to the charge of the Commissioner of Assam and put under the supervision of C.K.Hudson and later B.A.Rowlatt discharged the duties of the Deputy Commissioner.

Haughton, the Officiating Agent to the Governor-General, put it—"Taxation was introduced without the supervision with which such a measure should have been accompanied. It was followed up by fresh taxation and rumours of other taxes, also by fiscal and other innovations, which tended to disturb the minds of the people without any counterpoise such as might have resulted from the continued presence of the a European officer." Thus the upheavals are to be attributed to the various taxes already introduced, and to the people's undefined apprehensions of further taxation.

Thus the imposition of House Tax served as a signal to the outbreak of popular resistance. The Jaynatias expelled Soloman, the Fanziladar (collector of Taxes). The situation was saved for the authority with the arrival of the troops under Colonial Richardson, the Officer Commanding at Cherrapunji.

Even though the rising was stopped, the attitude of the Syntengs remained as before. Ignoring it, the Dolois and Sardars were made liable to dismissal for misconduct. They were further required to report all criminal cases to the Police. The Government decided to treat the Jayantia Hills in the same way as other parts of India in respect of imposing Income Tax. All together 310 persons including all leaders of the people were assessed with an aggregate Income Tax of Rs. 1259. This gave rise to suspicion among the Jayantias that the British Government was determined to fleece them. The first year's Income Tax was realised without facing any overt opposition. But apprehensions about the impen-
Dancing insurrection arose during October and November 1861. Preparations for the revolt began at the Durbar held at Tuber, Mawbakan, Shangpong, Ialong, Mynso and in other places. In the beginning of January 1862 alarming reports were pouring in from various quarters and the outbreak took place on 17 January 1862 when the Syntongs numbering not less than six hundred attacked "the military outpost at Jowai, burnt down the Christian settlement and thereafter stockaded their villages in the neighbourhood." This was occasioned by the interference of the Daruma in a religious ceremony held at Jalong. A Police party went to see the festival on 28 December 1861 and tried to seize the weapons from the performers and others present there. The principal leaders of the people asked the Police not to interfere with the festival, but the Police ignored the request. The weapons were forcibly seized and burnt. The people replied by attacking the Jowai Police Station under the leadership of Kiang Nongbah and laid siege of the military outpost which was under the Jamadar Kharaj Singh Rana. The post almost fell, and all the show of the British authority was swept away. The rebels made elaborate preparations for the war. Foodstuff and grains were stored in granaries called Kor-sung; warriors were enlisted; women and children were sheltered inside the caves and many insurrectionists camped in the stockade. U Kiang Nongbah emerged as the leader of the revolutionists. He moved from place to place recruiting warriors. Emissaries were also sent even to Burma seeking aid. The insurrectionists demanded that exemption from any taxation, restoration of their Raja and withdrawal of the Police. Thus the battle took a serious turn. For the whole of 1862 it continued. Due to the adoption of elusive tactics and guerilla warfare
by the rebels, it was not till the end of the year 1863 that the last of the rebels surrendered.

The outbreak took place on 17 January 1862. Mr. E.A. Rowlatt, the Deputy Commissioner of Khasi and Jayantia Hills succeeded in dispersing the rebels without facing much resistance and occupied the villages of Jowai, Amwai, and Nurtung. The granaries were destroyed. But even then the leaders of the insurrection remained as violent as before. The Government of India considered the situation sufficiently grave and entrusted the Civil and Military Administration of the Khasi and Jayantia Hills to the exclusive care of Brigadier-General G.D. Showers of the Eastern Command. Rowlatt was put under suspension and transferred for injudicious proceedings. By that time the insurrection extended over the whole district. The Syntengs fought bravely for their independence. Their weapons were bows and arrows and a series of strong stockades, one behind another; and the paths, leading to their villages, were thickly planted with panjias, or little bamboo sticks, stuck in the ground like caltrops. By the middle of April 1862 Showers proclaimed a general amnesty to all barring the ring-leaders and those guilty of gross acts of violence. A reward of Rs.1000/- was declared for the apprehension of U Kiang Nongbah, the chief leader of the rebels. The prompt action of Showers resulted in the surrender of several chiefs. But the hard core of the rebels, however, remained unsubdued. They showed no sign to come to terms. Thus reinforcement were arranged from Cachar and Sylhet as the battalion of Sepoys stationed in the

92. IMFS., p.28.; For details see HKP., pp.178-89.
93. II., April, 1973., p.142; PHT., Vol.II., p.78.
94. Rowlatt made himself a byword of reproach to the people by the manner in which he disarmed the people by burning the shields and other weapons in their presence and acquiring thereby the nickname "Shield-breaker."
95. PHA., pp.85-86.
96. SAA., Vol.II., p.207.
97. PHA., PHA., pp.86-87.
areas was not sufficient to quell the revolt. Two regiments of the Sikhs and the Elephant battery were moved into the operation in the hills. The command was placed under Colonel Mensford. He was accompanied by Major Haughton, the Governor-General's Agent on the North East Frontier and Captain Morton, the new Deputy Commissioner of the Khasi and Jayantia Hills. On the arrival of reinforcements the operations were renewed with greater vigour. The operations against the rebels were very tedious and harassing. It took long fifteen months to capture the rebel-chiefs and to pacify the district. It was in March 1863 that the district was declared to be finally pacified. The last of the insurgents U Myllon, Doloi of Mynso, Bukher of Raliong and U Kinag Sullah of Shungping surrendered to the authority by 9 November, 1863. The Chief leader of the rebels U Kiang Nangbah was captured by Lieutenant J.R. Sadlier on 27 December 1862 through the treachery of T Long Sutnga and U Bur, Doloi of Nartiang. On 30 December 1862 U Kiang was brought for trial to Jowai and was sentenced to death. He was publicly hanged on the same day. Kiang Nongbah succeeded in setting an worthy example of patriotism before his countrymen. The story of his gallant exertion still remains fresh in the memories of the people.

After the suppression of the revolt the district was brought under effective control; all taxes were realised. A victorious Government chose to appear to be moderate in that police interference was reduced to the minimum, people were granted right to elect their Doloi and to form their Panchavats for the purpose of trying civil and criminal cases; and it was made imperative that the European officer,
stationed at Jowai, was required to qualify in the Khasi language; and he was to visit every village in his jurisdiction at least once a year. The suppression of the rebellion led to the loss of the martial mind of the people, as it were.

Rebellion in Manipur: It may be recalled following the Treaty of Yandaboo, 1826, Manipur was restored to Gambheer Singh who was declared to be an independent king. He was getting assistance from the British in men and materials for maintaining a levy. Gambheer Singh died on 9 January 1834. In 1835 the Government appointed a Political Agent who was to reside at Manipur. Gambheer Singh's son and successor Chandrakirti ruled till 1886 excepting for the years from 1844 to 1850 when Nara Singh was the king at Manipur. In 1886 Chandrakirti was succeeded by his son Surachandra. He was dethroned by his collateral brother Kulachandra in 1890 following a palace revolt. This necessitated the active intervention of the British leading to strained relations with the Manipuris. Manipur had become a tributary state to the British but not before the nationalists killed Mr. Grimwood, the Political Agent, Mr. Quinton, the Chief Commissioner of Assam and a few other Europeans. "The British retaliated with vengeance by bringing in a large military force and Tikentrajit Singh, the popular hero of the Rebellion, suffered the gallows like Maniram Dewan in Assam."

The active intervention of the British gave rise among the Manipuris strong resentment which eventually burst out as an armed revolt against the British. Since the succession of Surachandra there

104. HA., p.329.
105. HKP., p.189.
106. SMNH., p.87.
107. HA., p.348.
108. HP., p.29.
109. Ibid.
developed among the sons of Chandrakirti two rival groups. The first group consisted of four sons of the chief Queen while the second group consisted of Kulachandra, Tikendrajit, Angousana and Zila Ngamba. On Surachandra’s succession Kulachandra became the Jubarak and Tikendrajit became the Senapati. Among the princes Tikendrajit was most powerful and popular. The first group became more jealous on the growing strength of the second group as two them became the Jubarak and Senapati. Due to the craftiness of Pakasana of the first group king Surachandra debarred Zila Ngamba of the second group to sit in the Durbar and deprived him of some offices. This led to a night attack off Surachandra’s apartment by the early part of September 1890. Surachandra somehow managed his escape to British territory. Surachandra’s absence was availed by Kulachandra by assuming the full power of a king. On his arrival in the British territory Surachandra sought British aid. It was decided by the Government of India that Kulachandra was to be confirmed as the king while it was decided that Tikendrajit was to be removed from Manipur who was alleged for instigating Palace-intrigues.

The Chief Commissioner of Assam Mr. Quinton accordingly proceeded to Manipur with strong force for removing Tikendrajit and recognising Kulachandra under the instruction of Governor-General Lord Landsdown. He arrived at Manipur on 21 March 1891.

When Kulachandra was informed about the decision of the Government, he thanked for the decision of recognising him but he expressed his inability to handover Tikendrajit. At this Quinton decided to arrest Tikendrajit forcibly. Accordingly the English force made a night attack on 24 March 1891 to the residence of Tikendrajit but in vain.
They could not arrest him. This gave rise an open armed revolt against the British in which Mr. Grimwood, Mr. Quinton and a few English officers and a good number of their soldiers lost their lives. The fighting continued till 27 April 1891 when the English columns from Silchar, Kohima and Tamu occupied the Palace signalling the suppression of the insurrection.

On the occupation of Manipur King Kulachandra, Tikendrajit, Angousana and Thongal General were tried for offences of causing murder of British officials. Kulachandra, Tikendrajit and Thongal were awarded death sentences while Angousana was awarded transportation. On appeal Kulachandra's sentence was commuted to transportation of life. Tikendrajit and Thongal were executed publicly on 13 August 1891. There was no authentic proof against Tikendrajit that he was an accomplice in the beheading Mr. Quinton and others. Even Queen Victoria was of opinion that conduct of the British officer gave Tikendrajit an excuse to resist. However she was definite that Thongal should be hanged. There were severe criticism also in the newspapers advocating that Tikendrajit should not be tried without proper enquiry about his involvement in the beheading Quinton and others. In the British Parliament also there was heated debate on Mr. Quinton's rash handling of the matter. Many spoke against the annexation of Manipur. However, the decision was taken that Manipur had become liable to the penalty of annexation. Accordingly the Queen issued a Proclamation to this effect. Thus Lord Landsdown's Government avenged the murder of Mr. Quinton and others by...
annexing Manipur and reconstituting its native Government under the
guidance of a British Political Agent. A scion of collateral line — a
boy of 5 years named Churachand, a descendant of Nara Singh, was rai-
sed to the throne. "Since this time a large measure of control has been
vested in the Resident British Officer, who was newly designated as
Political Agent and Superintendent of the State." 121

The Manipuri Uprising of 1890-91 was a heroic chapter in
the annals of Manipur. It is rare to find cases of desertion
on the battlefields by any Manipuri soldiers. In the battle of
Khamjong where the British force faced strongest resistance from
the Manipuris each Manipuri soldier fought bravely till he was
killed. This was evidence enough of a burning sense of patrio-
tism. A new kind ballad called Khamjong Parva, such as Dalipuran
on Patharughatar Ran, came into existence. "In it the
Manipuris sang of the circumstance leading to the war,
the Durbar in the Residency, of the battles and their
heroes and of the crafty 'mlechbas' and the wily sarkar" i.e.
( the then Government of India ). 122

121. IG p.40.
122. HM p.291.