Chapter II

The British Annexation of the Garo, Khasi and Jaintia Hills.

The destiny of any race or community is fundamentally shaped and moulded by the course of history because the past, the present and the future are intrinsically intertwined and inter-related. This is particularly true of the Hill people of the North-Eastern India. When we first discern through the mists of antiquity, the race that call itself the "Hill Tribes" of the North-Eastern India, we find them dwelling in the different hills and Plains of the North-Eastern region. They must, at some remote date have waded into this land from somewhere in Central Asia. Just as through the North-West confines came the Aryans, Greeks, Huns, Parthians and Mongols, so also through the North-East passes came successive hordes of immigrants from the cloud-capped hills of western China, the home of the Mongolian race.

The history of this Indi-Mongolian race reads like the chronicles of a displaced people. It was their misfortune to be constantly harried from one mountain to another, until the vicissitudes of life constrained them to drift permanently into the hill tracts of the North-East India. Before that, time and again, the Aryans had come in successive waves to settle down in the Brahmaputra and Surma valleys, thereby turning the plains into bones of contention between the Indo-Aryan and the Indo-Mongolian races. The people of the Mongolian stock had to settle ultimately in the hills while the plains fell under the domination of the Indo-Aryans.
Out of these racial and ethnological differences and out of the ancient struggle for supremacy over the plains grew the hostility between the Hill people and the people of the plains. The Indo-Mongolian race was probably compelled to occupy the hills as a refuge from better organised invaders, and, from mountain fortresses, the hillmen rarely ceased to harry the plains. For instance, the powerful Ahoms succeeded in disarming the Mikirs, but they failed to disarm the Nagas. The Khasis, Garos, Mizos and Nagas raided the plains systematically times without number. The Khasis of Sutnga or Nartiang State were even successful in annexing Jayantia Pargana in the plains of Sylhet to their State. None of the mighty kings or Emperors of Indian History had ever tried to conquer the hills for themselves. Thus, for centuries, the Garos, the Khasi and other Hill people have remained in the hills in splendid isolation. Their only contacts with the people of the plains were at the border markets, during the wars and during their raids on the plains.

During last quarter of the 18th century and the first quarter of the last century, North-Eastern India was passing through a period of crisis. The glorious rule of the Ahoms (1228-1826) in the Brahmaputra valley was declining, while the Burmese were expanding their territories westward. Taking advantage of this situation, the different people of different hill tracts began to ravage the plains in order to wrest back all their lost territories from the Ahoms. At this juncture, the British, who had taken possession in Bengal, lost no time in intervening. From 17th January 1824 until 1826 while the Burmese, who had overrun the Brahmaputra Valley, were at war with

the British, the latter swept the Burmese forces completely and overran the Brahmaputra Valley. The year 1826 is a turning point in the history of the North-Eastern India as it was in that year that the Treaty of Yandaboo was signed on 24th February, 1826 between the British and the Burmese. By this treaty, the British East India Company established a de facto control over the whole of the Brahmaputra Valley. David Scott was appointed Commissioner of Assam. In 1836, Purandhar Singh, an Ahom Prince was placed in charge of Upper Assam, whereas the British continued to control Lower Assam directly. But Purandhar Singh became a defaulter in making payment of tribute to the British. He was also an inefficient and incompetent administrator. Therefore, the British annexed Upper Assam for all practical purposes by pensioning Purandhar Singh off.

Annexation of Khasi Hills

The British first got acquainted with the Khasi people and their territory when the East India Company acquired Sylhet as a Dewani from the Moguls in 1765. With this acquisition, the British became close neighbours of the Khasis and it was not long before they realised the potentialities of trading with them. As in other parts of the country, the British East India Company, took keen interest in those areas where opportunity for trade existed. The Khasis were a trading people and they possessed lime quarries which could supply the whole of Bengal. In addition, they traded in iron, silk, wax, honey, ivory and other items of trade.

By this time the East India Company took possession of Sylhet, relations between the local Sylhet population and the Khasis were

not at all happy. On a number of occasions, the Khasis were victims of Sylhet traders and in exasperation they often carried away hostages to the hills and threatened their victims with starvation if they refused to refund embezzled and misappropriated money. The Khasis were by nature honest and straight-forward people. A reference to this effect was made by a British Missionary who wrote very truly in 1813: "The real Khasis possessed two characteristic virtues viz: truth and honesty. They are, however, very revengeful and seldom forget injuries".\footnote{Ibid.}

At the beginning, the officials of the East India Company did not realise the causes of the conflicts between the Khasis and the local people of Sylhet. They thought that the Sylhet traders were victims of Khasi raiders. Therefore, in March, 1772, the East India Company despatched a punitive expedition to Jaintiapur, the then Capital of Sutnga State, to warn the Khasis not to take resort to raids and plunders.\footnote{Bareh, Hamlets Meghalaya. p.144.} But the Khasis of that State retaliated by plundering the boats laden with merchandise on the Surma. Thereupon, the East India Company sent a troop under the command of Captain Helliker to invade Jaintiapur in 1774. The engagement was however localised in Jaintiapur, and no attempt was made by the British to penetrate the hills. Chattra Singh, Syiem of Sutnga State, was forced to agree that he should pay an indemnity of Rs.15,000. He was also forced to promise not to obstruct the free passage of boatmen in future. The outcome of this invasion is important inasmuch as it led to the survey and demarcation of the boundaries between Sylhet and Sutnga State. But this work was done entirely by the
officials of the East India Company at their own discretion, without having the courtesy of consulting the Syiem of Sutnga. Many other conflicts between the Khasis and the subjects of the British were recorded. To name only a few of them: In the winter of 1783, the Sheela people raided the plains and sacked a market place of Ishamati because their traders were ill-treated by the traders from Sylhet. About the same time, the Khasi headmen of 137 villages at the plains of Sylhet had fierce combat with their neighbour. U Buh Singh, Syiem of Mawsmai, according to local tradition, is said to have conducted many such raids. Almost all the Khasi villages on the southern slopes repeatedly raided the plains on the eve of the advent of the British.  

The importance of a friendly relationship with the Khasi was first realised by David Scott in the 1820's when the need for a postal service across the hills from Sylhet to Assam was urgently felt. Thus, apart from developing treaties with the Khasis, the British also wanted access to Assam through their territory. David Scott was also impressed with the climate of these hills and in many reports to the Council at Calcutta he suggested the building of Sanatoria and Cantonments in the "cool and salubrious climate of the Hills."

The first move made by David Scott was to open negotiations with Duwan Singh, Syiem of Sohra (Cherrapunjee) which he did. The deal struck by David Scott was for a road from Sylhet to Assam through the State of Sohra. In return, David Scott planned to make over to the Syiem of Sohra a small estate near Pandua as a Zamindary. This deal had to be postponed on account of a better

6. Ibid.
opportunity that David Scott was offered by Ram Singh, Syiem of Sutnga State.

The third Burmese invasion of the North-Eastern India posed a serious danger to the State of Sutnga. In 1824, the situation became serious that Ram Singh, Syiem of Sutnga, was compelled to seek the protection of the East India Company. The Company readily agreed to render military assistance in case the Sutnga State was attacked by its enemies. In return, the Syiem of Sutnga agreed to allow the construction of a road through the State. Thereupon, a road was constructed from Jaintiapur to Nowgong and David Scott had the good fortune of travelling along this road on one occasion.7

Although, negotiations with the Syiem of Sohra were temporarily dropped, David Scott was fully aware of the necessity of developing relationship with the Syiems and other rulers of the Khasi States and principalities by means of sub-sidiary alliance. Temporarily, David Scott was unfortunate. Immediately, after the completion of the construction of a road from Jaintiapur to Nowgong, this route ceased to operate on account of the re-occupation of Nowgong and Roha by the Burmese. David Scott had to search for a new route. The next possible route that David Scott could conceive was a road from Bardwar to Sylhet. He therefore toyed with the possibility of coming to an agreement with the Syiem of Nongkhlaw or Khadsaw-Phra State.8

In order to materialise his aim, he took resort to the policy of coercion and negotiation both. First he ordered that all markets in the border of Khasi Hills should be closed to Khasi traders. This measure brought about great hardship to Khasi traders in particular and Khasi trade in general. He also indicated that he was bent upon

annexing Bardwar in the plains which belonged to Nongkhlaw State. But, he also indicated that normal relationship in trade would be restored and Bardwar should remain parts of Nongkhlaw State provided Tirot Singh, Syiem of Nongkhlaw agreed to allow the East India Company to construct a road through the State to connect Brahmaputra valley with Surma valley.9

The second move made by David Scott was to open direct negotiations with Tirot Singh. Scott was very fortunate in his negotiations with Nongkhlaw on account of the fact that he had met Tirot Singh and his mother, Ka Ksan Syiem at the time when Tirot Singh went down to Bardwar to protest against the intention of the Company to acquire his ancestral possession at Bardwar. Scott lost no time in starting the ball rolling. He indicated the Company's desire to construct a road through Nongkhlaw State. In exchange for that, Scott promised to restore Bardwar and to normalise trade relations. But Tirot Singh Syiem replied that he could come to this type of agreement only by the sanction of the State Durbar (Parliament).10 He invited David Scott to come personally to Nongkhlaw and to start the negotiation with the State Parliament de novo. Apart from that, he promised to make all arrangement for the summoning of the State Durbar (Durbar Hima). David Scott readily agreed to this proposal. Heralds and messengers were sent to every village of the State to announce the summoning of the State Parliament. David Scott also made elaborate arrangement to proceed to Nongkhlaw. He reached Nongkhlaw on 3rd November, 1826. The Durbar which met on the following day was attended by male adults of the State. "The attendants came up the hills, armed with swords, bows and quivers. The Raja

10. Ibid.
(Syiem) proceeded to explain the object of the meeting and requested the different orators to express their sentiments on the proposition of the British Government. The leading orator, on the part of the opposition, immediately... commenced a long harangue in condemnation of the measure expressed in continuous flow of language accompanied with such animation of manner and appropriate gesticulation. This was replied to by an orator of the Raja's party; and in this way the ball was kept rolling until evening. I was struck with astonishment at the order and decorum which characterised these debates. No shouts of exultation, or indecent attempts to put down the orator of the opposite party. On the contrary every Speaker was fairly heard out. I have often witnessed the debates in St. Stephen's Chapel, but those of the Cossya Parliament appeared to be conducted with more dignity of manners". 11

According to Col. Archibald Watson and White in their "Memoir of David Scott"; 12 "Mr. Scott grew rather impatient and as had been his wont with the Garrows, ordered a dozen of bottles of rum, to be sent up the hill in the hope of putting an end to it. The liquor was returned with a message saying that they would not drink spirits until they had come to the point at issue. The next morning the debate was resumed; it was continued throughout the day, and closed at midnight in favour of the proposition of the British Government. What the literal arguments of the orators were... I cannot say. The next day, the resolution of the Assembly was embodied in a Treaty which was concluded with the British Government; and the Cossyas agreeing to aid in the construction of the road which was to pass through their territory". Thereupon a treaty was concluded between David Scott on behalf of the East India Company and Tirot Singh on behalf of the

11. Ibid. pp. 34 + 35.
12. Ibid. pp. 36 + 37.
Durbar Hima of the State of Nongkhlaw.

With this treaty, British relationship with the Khasis took a new turn and when Tirot Singh was, with the active connivance of the British invested with the Syiemship of Nongkhlaw, Khasi freedom received a major blow. Tirot Singh was required to become a British protege and to give free passage to the British troops. He also agreed to join with the British in all military activities right up to Kaliabar in Assam. He also agreed to the construction of a road and to maintaining it in constant repair. In return, the British extended to Tirot Singh their full support in case Nongkhlaw State was attacked by "any foreign enemies".

To sum up, Scott's policy began extremely auspiciously, but it was not long before Tirot Singh realised how his agreement with the British was in the nature of an alliance between a superior power and a Syiem of a petty State and not an alliance between equals.

The construction of the road was immediately started. Lieutenant Beddingfield and Lieutenant Burlton were posted at Nongkhlaw to supervise the construction work. However, the closest ally of Tirot Singh, Bormanik, Syiem of Shillong State came into conflict with the British. In March 1828, Bormanik Syiem marched down to Desh Dimarua to seize the revenue collected by the revenue officers of the East India Company. He also appointed a Chief in that area which the British claimed was theirs. The British decided that bold action was called for and it was proposed to call upon the Syiem of Sutnga and Tirot Singh, Syiem of Nongkhlaw to come to the aid of the British. Naturally, this event led to tension among the Khasi Syiems and was responsible for the realisation among them of the real motive and evil designs of the British.

In the meantime, a dispute arose between Tirot Singh and David Scott over the question of jurisdiction over Bardwar. It must be noted that David Scott did not keep his words over the question of restoring the said area to Nongkhlaw State. Tirot Singh made it known to the revenue Superintendent of the Company stationed at Bardwar thus: "Mr. Scott made friendship with me previously saying your enemy is Company's enemy and that he would relinquish the Bardwar revenue both in money and pikes. He has not done it and has the wish to give troops to my enemy". Tirot Singh found that he was betrayed by the British when they failed to come to his aid, and in fact actively opposed him in a dispute he had with the Raja of Rani probably of Nongwah area. Tirot Singh realised that the British would not keep their words for any other terms of the treaty. After this, the treatment and attitude of the British officers and their men took a different shape. Tirot Singh did not sleep. He had heard of the fate of the Rajah of the plains of Assam and he saw his own fate and the chain that yoked him. He had been subjected to the British. He could hear of the discontent of the people with the foreigners. There were frequent quarrels between the Nongkhlaw people and the Company's men. He realised that the foreigners could easily pull the wire to instigate the Nongkhlaw people to violence and thereby find a pretext to start against the sovereignty of Nongkhlaw State, to subdue and force him to acknowledge the British Sovereignty. Tirot Singh was determined to ask the foreigners to quit Nongkhlaw as peacefully and safely as they had come, in time.

But the story went the other way. Major David Scott was bent upon establishing British Sovereignty in the Hills. Quarrels increased in number, the insolent tone and aggressive conduct of

the officers and their men sowed the seed of mistrust and hostile agony in the heart of the Khasis. The soldiers were increased in the hills and the British garrison at Sylhet and Gauhati were strengthened. David Scott could not stop his men from misbehaving unpleasantly towards the Khasis and this failed to maintain the confidence of the latter. It was also thought that the British would levy taxes on the Khasis who were residing in the villages through which the road was to pass.

The last and immediate cause of the conflict is supposed to have resulted from an insulting remark made by a Bengalee peon.\textsuperscript{15} Although British authors attach more importance to this incident as the only cause of the conflict, yet they fail to realise that Tirot Singh had developed a long string of grievances against the British and that local incident at Nongkhlaw was only the last straw on the camel's back.

Tirot Singh felt it urgent to convene on the 1st April 1829, at night, a secret conference of the Khasi Syiems at Nongkhlaw, and there they decided, at last, to have no other way but to drive away the British from the Hills, with the sword. At day break after the secret conference, they gathered some hundred men arrayed with bows, arrows, spears, shields and double hilted swords, they marched to the British quarters to crush the Company's garrison. It was defended by Lieutenants Beddingfield and Burlton of the Bengal Artillery. The battle lasted in its heat for the whole day and Lieutenant Beddingfield and most of the Company's men were killed on the spot. Lieutenant Burlton managed to run to escape from the battlefield to Kamrup but he succumbed to deep injury the next morning. Major Scott escaped to Sohra (Cherrapunjee) at cock's crow of the same

\textsuperscript{15} Mackenzie, A. The North East Frontier p.222.
day when he got a hint from Tirot Singh's mother who had sent for him because she liked his dignified personality and fineness of manners.16 This battle was the beginning of the Khasis' fight against the British.

The British troops were immediately ordered to attack the Khasi Hills - from the Sylhet side under Captain Lister who commanded the 44th Sylhet Light Infantry, and from the Kamrup side under Lieutenant Vetch who marched with his 43rd Assam Light Infantry into the hills on 8th April, 1829. Lieutenant Vetch could not go beyond the outpost at Jirang which was commanded by Tirot Singh's maternal uncle Jidor Singh Syiem, and was forced to retreat. They could avenge only by burning some Khasi villages on their way to Gauhati. Captain Lister sprang to the rescue of David Scott who was hiding somewhere in Sohra State. From there, with Major Scott they marched to Nongkhlaw with full intention of vengeance. They were met with stern opposition from the Khasis under Tirot Singh and his best warriors. The might of the British had a severe setback. However on 1st May, 1829, Captain Lister got badly wounded; a barbed arrow having passed through his thigh. But the next day they were able to take possession of Nongkhlaw. Tirot Singh, unable to stand against them at this point fled from Nongkhlaw to hide in some safer places wherefrom he could continue the struggle.17

At the beginning, the fight was confined to Nongkhlaw and to the gateways to the hills. Bormanik Syiem guarded the passes opening to the plains of Assam and Tirot Singh himself guarded the Sylhet side. Now and then he ran hither and thither to see that his plans were worked out elaborately. The strategies he chose and the plans he devised were skilful. The war-cry sounded shriller day by day from mountain to mountain. The call to defend the motherland was

16. Ibid. p.223.
responded; men and women took to arms. Many other Syiems joined hands with Tirot Singh including Muken Singh Syiem of Mawsmai, a distant nephew of the Syiem of Sohra. It was in the Khasi Hills perhaps, that the Britishers for the first time were surprised with the secret that women in the Khasi Hills were no less bellicose than men. Many attacks were conducted by them - the mothers in defence of their sacred land. Ka Phan Nonglait and other Khadsawphra women, it was reported, killed many soldiers and surprised many strongholds by stealing the soldiers' weapons during their rest. 18

Tirot Singh called upon the people of the plains to do away with the British yoke. The plains were then under full control of the British. Even then, the people of Assam gave their moral support and one Assamese Raja, viz, Raja Chandrakanta, we were told, sent a big shield to Tirot Singh as a mark of his good-will and blessings since he could not give any material support. Amongst other Assamese supporters and secret allies of the Khasis were Peoli Phukan and Maniram Dewan.19

Tirot Singh held fast to his courage and his men swore never to give way. Lorshon Jarain, Khein Kongor and the marvellous Mon Bhut of his small number of warriors shall never be forgotten, as they have always been spoken of by the Khasis whenever the Nongkhlaw struggle is remembered. With Tirot Singh, bowmen stood against gun powder and they would not yield. They were summoned by their motherland, fresh from the fields to oppose the weapons of a better equipped and well-trained soldiers of the Company. When the open fight became more disadvantageous to the Khasis, they took resort to the guerilla type of warfare in which Mon Bhut excelled. 20

Taking advantage of disciplined soldiers, the British were on

20. Ibid pp.4 + 5.
the point of trampling down every village. Tirot Singh was then hiding safely in a cave near Diengiei mending his wounds and planning his strategy. His men fought on and Nongkhlaw alone became the spot where the pot of vengeance would be emptied. On 20th May, 1829, Dr. Beadon visited the place with the intention of vengeance only to be greeted by a Khasi arrow penetrating his nose and sticking its barb to give him rest for a week before he could go back to earth. It was at that juncture that Major David Scott offered peace, but the Khasis were determined to drive them beyond their sight and their territory.21

Hostility continued and the arena of struggle were multiplied. While the British troops were concentrating in Nongkhlaw area, Muken Singh Syiem got the opportunity to raise the battle cry in Mawmluh, Mawsmai, Laitkynsew and other adjoining areas. But it was not difficult for David Scott and Iister to suppress the struggle in these areas as they had already secured the active support of Duwan Singh, Syiem of Sohra. They were quick to capture Mawmluh and Mawsmai through the help of Duwan Singh. Sir Joseph Hooker has kept a record of reminiscence of the gallant spirits of the Khasis of Mawmluh who were at the end shot to death and their bodies were thrown down the ridge.22 After the fall of Mawsmai and Mawmluh, Muken Singh fled to the south to continue the struggle. The next scene was Sheila where the people took up arms against the British. But within a short time their posts and strongholds were besieged. The four Wahadadars were forced to sign an agreement in September 1829 and they were made to promise to pay Rs.4000 as tribute to the Company.

When the scenes of battles had spread to every nook and corner of the Khasi Hills, the Company decided to have a permanent military

headquarter in the Khasi Hills, Lister and Scott renewed the former proposal to offer to Duwan Singh a plot of land near Pandua as a zamindari. On 12th September 1829 a treaty was concluded by which Duwan Singh got possession of Pandua in exchange of Saitsohpen area which was converted into a British territory. From that time onwards, the whole military operations was conducted from Saitsohpen.  

The British, then directed their attack on the freedom loving people of Wahlong who had taken up arms against the British. Their leader and Syiem fell down heriocally in the battlefield in October, 1829 and the fight was discontinued. It was during this same period that Mawdon surrendered, after fierce fighting, but the leader of the people of Mawdon, Kaija managed to escape. The British managed also to suppress the people of Sohbar, Dwara Nongtyrmen and Warding. The British then made an attempt to negotiate with Muken Singh but was unsucessful. He refused the Company's overture to restore him to the Syiemship of Mawsmai. But at the end he was captured by the British and became a mere pensioner in Sylhet.  

After the suppression of the struggle in these areas, the British were in a better position to direct all their resources and energy against Nongkhlaw and other northern States. It was unlucky for the Khasi Hills that a great herioc leader, Bormanik, Syiem of Shillong was trapped by the British troops in May, 1830 which forced him to surrender to the British. He was detained for some time as a prisoner by the Company. But he was released soon after he had made a declaration to abdicate. Bormanik abdicated the Syiemship in favour of Singmanik. He was "obliged to flee the country in consequence of some disagreeament with the British.  

Government during the rebellion of the Khasis leaving it in charge of U Sing Kamik Rajah, who contrived to keep possession of it by remaining neutral in those troubled times. Local traditions say that Bormanik fled to Bhutan or Tibet where he began to negotiate for military assistance. He never returned again to his own State. In the meantime, there arose mutual disagreement among the electors of the Shillong State because the "Bakhraws" (Elders) of Raid Mylliem refused to accept Singmanik as their Syiem. Civil war ensued within the State which culminated in the bifurcation of Shillong State into Khyrim and Mylliem States.

The sad event that took place in the Shillong State greatly weakened the power of Khasi resistance against the British. On the other hand, the British position became more secure. But Tirot Singh did not lose hope. He continued the struggle along with other smaller States. At the height of the battles, David Scott fell ill and passed away in August, 1831.

The successor of Major David Scott, T.C. Robertson wrought a new policy of ending what he called "a wretched warfare". In 1832, the Supreme authority of the Company from Fort William directed him to adopt conciliatory measures and to declare amnesty to those who would submit. Robertson announced peace and opened negotiations. Small States like Mawsynram, Bhowal and Malaisohmat were compelled to recognise the British paramountcy by means of subsidiary alliances. T.C. Robertson openly declared that he wanted to negotiate with Tirot Singh. The latter sent words that he could meet the British only in Singmanik's residence at Nongkrem, and that they should go unarmed. On 23rd September, 1832, he met Lister, Retherford and

25. File No.306 B.G(Bengal) 1860, General Department.
Ensign Brodie who assured to restore him to the Syiemship of Nongkhlaw provided he would agree to the terms and conditions to be imposed by the British. But all Tirot Singh asked for peace was that the Company should return to him Bardwar in Kamrup which had been brought from one Don Ahom by his predecessors and which was annexed to Assam by the Company; and that the Company should abandon the line of road passing through the Hills. The meeting ended in a stalemate as the local British representatives had no power to deal with these issues. Negotiation after negotiation started and each of them failed. In these negotiations, Tirot Singh displayed audacity not normally found among his contemporaries.

At last, since nothing came out of negotiations, Robertson adopted the policy of economic blockade. After he had completed the economic blockade, some Khasis thought of surrender when cultivation nearly came to a standstill and no foodstuff could be procured from outside. However, some people on the border of Kamrup, got rice and other foodstuff secretly brought by the Assamese friends, chiefly led by Peoli Phukan and Maniram Dewan.

At last, Tirot Singh was baffled. He had been conducting his sacred campaign for nearly four years. He found that none of the Syiemus of big States were willing to support him. His people were mostly occupied with war and after the economic blockade, food ran short. He thought of his people who would perhaps starve if the war would go on. The strength of his men decreased. His own health was also failing. Tirot Singh could no longer bear these circumstances. He decided to open negotiations with the British. On 9th January 1833 he deputed Jit Roy, one of the Myntris, to treat with Inglis who

26. Pemberton, R.B; The Eastern Frontier of British India p.238.
commanded the post at Shiliang-um. The subsequent account of what transpired is best described by Alexander Mackenzie, the Secretary to the Government of India in the Home Department in the following words: 27 "The only condition required was, that the life of his master should be spared, and this having been promised, and ratified by the Khasi oath, of eating salt from the blade of a Sabre, the 13th was the day finally determined upon for his surrender, the place to be named two hours before meeting, and Teerut Sing and Mr. Inglis to be each attended by only two un-armed servants". "On the day appointed, the Rajah Teerut Sing met Mr. Inglis at Nursingare, a mile each of Oomchillung (Umshyllong); but instead of the unarmed attendants which by the terms of the agreement were the only persons who should have accompanied him, he was escorted by a party of 30 bow and spearmen, with 11 musqueteers. This was complained of by Mr. Inglis as a breach of the agreement, but he was assured by Teerut Sing's witty counsellor, that it would not have been respectful to his master to come attended by a smaller retinue, and was necessary to convince the people that he had not been made captive but had voluntarily surrendered. Mr. Inglis, to allay the suspicions of the Rajah at his request, repeated the ceremonial form of oath he had before taken, and Teerut Sing was conveyed to Myrung (Mairang) from whence he was taken to Gowhattee (Gauhati) in Assam, and eventually confined in the jail of Dacca where he remains a State prisoner for life". 28

This account left by a British Officer seems to be onesided. According to local accounts, the story is different. Inglis understood

that Tirot Singh was economically beaten, there was an opportunity to capture him. When Inglis ate salt from the blade of his own sabre, the Khasis took it as "his sincerity" in all honesty. Tirot Singh met Inglis at Shilliang-um which perhaps may be indentified with Comchillung of Pemberton. Tirot Singh met Inglis to talk for peace. But Inglis had made careful plan to capture Tirot Singh. At the beginning of the talk, Tirot Singh was offered reinstallation to his former position if only he would acknowledge the British Supremacy. But he boldly replied: "Better the death of a free commoner than the life of a Chief who is a slave". No grandeur except freedom allured him. He was immediately captured and was taken prisoner and confined him to a dungeon at Dacca. This local account is more true if we take into consideration the real design of the British imperialists during those days. Tirot Singh died in captivity a year after. His successor, Rajon Singh accepted the British paramountcy on 29th March, 1834. 29

From Khadsawphra, the scene of British action was turned to be eastern State - the State of Sutnga. It must be noted that Rajendra Singh, Syiem of Sutnga did not keep any of the promises that his maternal uncle, Ram Singh had made to the British. After he took over charge of the State in 1832 things took a different turn. First, Rajendra Singh refused to pay a tribute of Rs.10,000 to the British in return for the protection of the State given by the Company. Secondly, he challenged the right of a new ghat at Chuppermukh in Nowgong. Lastly, the immediate cause of the new conflict was the failure on the part of Rajendra Singh to surrender

the culprits who kidnapped and killed three British subjects. In 1832, Chuttur Singh, the Chief of Ghoba (Gobha) a vassal of the Syiem of Sutnga captured four British subjects. His main intention was to offer them as sacrifice at the altar of goddess Kali. But one of the four managed to escape to report about the fate of his fellow companions. After getting the full report of the incident, the British demanded Ram Singh, Syiem of Sutnga to surrender the culprits. In the meantime, Ram Singh died, and his successor, Rajendra Singh refused to surrender the culprits. Negotiations with Rajendra Singh dragged on for about two years but he remained adamant. As a result of all these events, the British deprived the Syiem of his territory in the plains. It was on the 15th March, 1835 that Captain Lister took formal possession of Jaintiapur, the then Capital of Sutnga State, and the determination of the Government to annex the plains of Jaintia Parganas was made known by proclamation. It was on 30th March 1835 that the British permanently occupied the Jaintia Parganas. But the ancient domain of the Sutnga State in the hills known as "Pnar" or Synteng area was not occupied. Unfortunately, however, when Rajendra Singh Syiem found himself deprived of his possessions on the plains, he preferred to give up entirely the tract in the hills, which was nominally subject to him, and to become a pensioner of the British Government. Thus the Pnar area or the whole State of Sutnga was annexed by the British.

Jaintiapur and Jaintia Parganas were integrated into Sylhet District, the territory belonging to the Chief of Gobha was added to Nowgong and the Pnar area was constituted into a Sub-division

31. Revenue Proceedings, 14th April 1835, No.11.
which the British wrongly called the "Jaintia Hills" instead of "East Khasi Hills". In the true spirit of their policy of "divide and rule", the British succeeded in dividing the ancient sacred land of the Khasis by giving a new name to the area, so that in course of time, the name came to be accepted as a fact of history.

The annexation of the eastern Khasi Hills by the British caused great alarm and restlessness among the people of the hills. The Pnar highlanders were not silent at this sudden turn of event. The Pnars resented that their State was not allowed to enter into Subsidiary alliance with the British as it was the case with many other Khasi States. They understood that their State was not given equal chance and equal status with all other Khasi States. Immediately, prominent leaders organised a freedom struggle against the British. But the whole show was so badly organised that it took the Company's troops only a few months to suppress the Pnar struggle for independence.

When the freedom struggle flared up in the east, many battles were fought in the western part of Khasi Hills, especially in Maharam State where Sngap Syiem fought so gallantly that he could prolong the struggle till 1838. Thereafter, the British succeeded in entering into an agreement with the Syiems and other rulers belonging to other States by which the native rulers surrendered some of the powers, but were left free insofar as the internal administration of their States is concerned subject to the general supervision and control of the British.

Apart from entering into an agreement with the Syiems, Lyngdohs, Wahadadars and such other functionaries, the British adopted also another policy by which they could enforce an overall control over the hills. Some of the independent villages which had
waged a struggle against the British were converted into British territories such as Mawsmai, Nongpoh and others. In some cases, they divided the State which had struggled against them into a number of British villages as in the case of Muliang State which was divided into Nonglang, Jyrngam and Nongriang British Sirdarships. Some other villages were forcibly taken from the Khasi States to be converted into British territories such as Laitlyngkot, Laitkroh, Umniuh-Tmar and others. Above all, most of the territories of the Khasi States in the plains were forcibly taken and annexed them to the plain districts of their territories such as Jaintia Parganas, Desh-Dimarua, the territories of the Raja of Gobha and the like. In their definition of the boundary of the Khasi States, the words "up to the foothill" is universally found. Thus, the advent of the British into the Khasi hills had brought about great changes in the extent of the territories and the Status of the Khasi States.

The last attempt made by the Khasis of the ancient Sutnga State to fight for independence was immediately after the great Revolt of 1857 which spread all over the country. In 1857-58, the British Government imposed a house tax in the Jaintia Hills. This and other oppressive measures adopted by the British caused great concern in the minds of the people. Insurrection flared up in different parts of Jaintia Hills in 1861. Many able leaders came to the fore-front of whom Kiang Nongbah was the ablest. It took the British two long years to suppress the freedom fighters. It may be said that for all practical purposes, the insurrection came to a close on 30th December, 1862 when Kiang Nongbah was hanged at a market place of Jowai.33

33. Pemberton's Accounts of Jaintias quoted by Mackenzie.
In order to have a more effective control over the Khasi States and their own territories, the British decided in 1862 to shift their capital from Sohra to a more central place. In 1866, their capital was shifted to Shillong.

Annexation of the Garo Hills: The Garos came into contact with British immediately after the East India Company took formal possession of Gosalpara (Goalpara) in 1765 after the Mughul emperor had renounced his right over this territory to the British by means of an agreement. Thus, the Garos came into contact with the British more or less during the same period that the Khasis came into contact with them. It must be noted that during the Mogul period, the Choudhuri Zamindars had secured the right from the Mogul emperor to protect their domain in Goalpara. These Choudhuri Zamindars used to impose high levies upon the Garo traders in the border markets. Troubles and conflicts arose between them. On a number of occasions, the Garos organised raids into these markets. Out of the antagonism between the Garos and the Choudhuri Zamindars came the conflict between the Garos and the British. The Garos repeated their raids. In one of those raids, they nearly involved themselves in a war with the Raja of Bijn. But that eventuality was avoided due to the timely intervention of the British troops stationed at Jagighopa. The Garos retaliated by suspending their cotton trade with the plains. At the same time, they increased the tempo of their raids from 1795 to 1807.34

From 1807 onwards, the Garos ravaged a number of villages in Goalpara. The British Government appointed a Commission to study into the causes of these conflicts. The Commission recommended the 34. Mackenzie, A: The North-East Frontier p.245.
abolition of levies imposed upon the Garos in the border markets. But the Choudhuri Zamindars rejected the recommendation. The Raja of Karaibari, in particular challenged the measures till 1815. In the meantime, the Garos became more active. They chopped off the heads of their victims during their raids and carried away the skulls as trophies. In 1815, the British Government deputed Thomas Sisson, Joint Magistrate of Rangpur to study the situation. After a careful study, Sisson submitted a report to the Government and recommended the appointment of a Commissioner who would take overall charge to deal with the situation.  

Acting upon this recommendation, David Scott was appointed Special Commissioner in 1816. Scott, who was then Commissioner of Cooch Bihar proceeded to Goalpara to reassess the situation. After a thorough examination and assessment of the situation, David Scott submitted an elaborate report in which he pointed out that the main cause of the conflict was the oppression of the Choudhuri Zamindars. He also suggested that the Garo Hills should be separated from the Rangpur District and that the Garo territory should be brought under the direct control of the British. In 1822, the British Government promulgated the order which created the new district to comprise Goalpara, Dhubri and Karaibari out of the former district of Rangpur. The Garo territory was included in the new district.  

David Scott was made the Civil Commissioner of the new district. He was empowered fully by the Governor-General-in-Council to negotiate and conclude terms with the Garo Nokmas and other Chiefs. Scott  

36. Ibid. p.247.
lost no time in starting the negotiations with the Garo Chiefs. He declared that the new policy of the British was to protect the interest of the Garos provided they would submit to the British administration and abandon their practice of head hunting. Apart from British protection, Scott also promised that the Garos would be allowed to carry on with their trade in the border market, free of levies. But the Garos of the interior highlands must pay duties if they wanted free passage.  

Scott brought a new arrangement in the administration of the Garo territory. He divided the entire area into two divisions: the Zamindari mahals in the low-lying hills and plains and the Nazarana mahals comprising of the highland area. The former area returned revenues to the Government. Out of the deposit the Government was to pay compensation to the erstwhile Zamindars. But the Garos of the highland area were not actually the subject of the British, although David Scott claimed that this area also was right within the jurisdiction of the British authority. Thus the British followed the same 'divide and rule' policy in Garo Hills as in the case of the Khasi Hills. Within a short time Scott was successful. Between 100 and 200 Nokmas, west of the Simsangiri river began to open negotiation with Scott and settlement was arrived at. "But the extra-ordinary custom of burning human skulls with the bodies of their deceased still prevails and is the cause of committing frequent murders on the people of the plains". 

During the Burmese war, David Scott was appointed Agent to the Governor-General for the North-Eastern frontier in November, 1823. It was at his instance that Goalpara district which included Garo Hills was attached to Assam in 1826.

The Garos very soon realised that they had been yoked by the British. A number of uprising broke out. The most important was the uprising of the Garos against their landlord of Sherpore. Since most of these troubles were in the nature of internal conflicts, the British preferred to follow the policy of non-interference. The only action taken by the Government was the occasional closure of the border markets to the Garos to prevent them from repeating their raids. But after the death of David Scott in 1831, his successor, T.C. Robertson adopted a new policy. He adopted many types of punitive measures. In 1833, he despatched an expedition to Charangiri where a fierce encounter took place between the British forces and the Garos. The expedition was successful and many Nokmas were forced to accept conditions. Many other expeditions were despatched to other areas to realise from the Garos some of the revenues, tributes or fines due to them.\(^\text{39}\)

An interesting incident took place when a Nokma of Kissogiri, who was loyal to the British was murdered. An expedition was sent in 1847 which was repulsed by the Garos. The second expedition commanded by Capt Reynold was sent. In a number of fierce combats, the Garos were defeated and a number of Garo villages were burnt by the British troops. A number of raids were organised by the Garos, that the British had to adopt the policy of economic blockade, but it did not produce the desired result. The Garos managed to live on jungle roots. It was the British subjects in the plains who had to suffer during the period.\(^\text{40}\)

Lord Dalhousie who had for so long advocated the policy of non-intervention as the most effective means to tackle with the

\(^{39}\) Ibid pp.129-130.
\(^{40}\) Ibid p.130.
tribes had to reverse the policy. In 1858 he declared "I have already said that I adopted these extreme measures, while anything else remained untried. As these savages will neither treat, submit, nor rest, it is due to our own subjects, whose lives and property are in jeopardy, that we should have to take recourse to punishment, which though severe, is the only thing that they comprehend or feel." 41

Relations came to a climax when the Sushong Raja sought to exert his claims upon the hills and started collecting revenue in the interior highlands. Revolt broke out which immediately called upon an immediate action on the part of the British. An expedition was sent to suppress the revolt and it was completed within a short time. Government had to finally abandon the policy of non-intervention. A new "forward policy" was adopted. Thus the process of consolidation started from July 1866, when Lieutenant W.G.Williamson was appointed Deputy Commissioner for the Garo Hills. It was he who was responsible to penetrate into the hills and it was he who selected Tura as the headquarter of the Garo Hills. It was under him that the whole of the Garo Hills was brought under the British for all practical purposes although the struggle continued till 1879 when the last uprising was suppressed.

In conclusion, the policy adopted by the British so far as the annexation of the Garo, Khasi and Jaintia Hills is concerned, it varied from time to time and from one area to another. Although these hills were subjugated by the British before 1872, yet the policy of the British towards these tribes was more or less similar to the policy that they followed towards some other tribes in North-Eastern India which has been summed up by Alexander Mackenzie in the following words: "on its North East Frontier has, I again assert, 41. Mackenzie : The North-East Frontier. p.257.
been a policy of conciliation and not a policy of repression or devastation. It was indeed, for many years far too conciliatory, even after annexation. It was in 1872 that measures were taken for the complete subjugation of the territory of the tribes."^{42}.

---