CHAPTER-II

ETHNIC CONFIGURATION

AND

EVOLUTION OF BRITISH POLICY
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Military occupation of Assam from 1825 to 1828 devolved on the British Administration in India, the responsibilities to rule that province and ensure security of its frontier until a final decision is made about the future status of Assam in the post-war years. David Scott was the natural choice of the Governor General for this job as he played a key role in the pre-war and post-war years in shaping the destiny of British relations with Assam and its frontier areas. In those crucial years of transition Scott's twin responsibilities to hold on to Assam brought him close to the frontier tribes of Arunachal Pradesh in the north and east of Brahmaputra. The Singphos were the first to be dealt with on emergency footing during the war years because of their alleged nexus with the Burmese invaders. The Khamtis followed suit as they prayed for peace and recognition of their Chief's privileges as Sadiya Khowa Gohain.

The process of interaction thus took an early start in the Singpho and Khamti frontier from 1825 onwards. With other frontier tribes like Extra Bhutan Bhutias (Monpas and Sherdupkens), Daflas (Nyishis), Akas and Abors (Adis) contact was established through frontier officers (Kotokis) for the

1 Name of the tribes indicated in the bracket refers to their new found identity freed from their colonial past.
settlement of their posa claims first, commutation of posa next, and in course of the delimitation of the revenue frontier in Assam to give effect to a new regulatory system in the occupied province. The Mishmis of the Lohit frontier were also engaged from 1825 onwards in search of the course of Brahmaputra and the trans-border trade route to Tibet. Tribes of the central and northern zones remained cut off for a long time and failed to assimilate in the process as the policy of non-interference tied the hands of the British administration from reaching out to them until the driving forces of imperialism facilitated the forward thrust to their territory from 1850’s onwards.

Known to the outside world as “terra incognita”, Arunachal Pradesh was thus opened to the winds of change blowing across Assam in post-war years in a slow, cautious, but steady manner. And with the growing commercial interest of the British planters in Assam, the process started catching speed with unthinkable consequences for the people inhabiting the tribal frontier of the entire province. Although operational dynamics of imperialism was one and same in the whole tribal frontier, still distinct patterns emerged among the tribes because of their large ethnic varieties and distinct rooting in the history and culture of the past.

The British Bureaucracy in the frontier administration, the whims of the men, their temper, class attitude, and their tenure and clique formation determined the pattern of imperial policy in the tribal frontier from time to time. In the first

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2. Foreign Secret Proceedings (India), 29 April, 1825, No. 2. Lt. Bariton was the first British Officer who visited Mishmi Hills to explore the course of the Brahmaputra in 1825.

quarter of the 19th century if David Scott and Neufville were seen as true agents of imperialism in Assam–Arunachal border, in the last quarter of the same century and the following decade, dare-devil frontier officers like J.F. Needham and Noel Williamson were seen as the true agents of the Forward School in London, which often pleads for expanding British India’s frontier to the unknown heights of the Himalayas. At times terrible setback to the forward thrust, like Damant’s murder in the Naga frontier, gave the moderates a chance to prevail, and for sometime policy of non-interference was invoked throughout the tribal frontier of Assam.

Ethnic divide among the tribes was so widespread, accessibility stress so complex, and past history so closely interwoven that no broader policy framework, devised for the tribal frontier as a whole in north-east, stood the test of time in its original frame. Often changes were introduced to accommodate local conditions and compulsions.4 It is therefore necessary to undertake a background study of the land, people, history and culture of Arunachal Pradesh to draw necessary inputs for the study of the evolution of the British policy in this side of Assam’s frontier.

The objective of this chapter is to examine how ethnicity, past history and local conditions in Arunachal Pradesh interacted with the broader policy framework of the British rule in Assam in the period intervening the first and second Anglo-Burmese wars. An attempt would also be made to unravel the spill-over effects of British policy shifts in the same period in Assam and its tribal frontier.

4. Ibid.
2.1 LAND AND THE PEOPLE

Arunachal Pradesh is located in the eastern Himalayan range of the north-eastern corner of India midway between the foothills and the snowline, and approximately between 26°28' to 29°30' North Latitudes and 91°30' to 97°30' East Longitudes.\(^5\) It stretches over an area of 83,578 sq. kms, and is spread over a thinly populated sixty mile broad belt of mountainous, densely jungle country from west to east. It shares common frontier with Bhutan in the west, Tibet in north, Burma in the north-east and east and plains of Assam in the south.\(^6\) Its topography inspires awe and surprise to such an extent that Neville Maxwell commented, "Here is another no-man's land, acceptable as a frontier so long as no other strong power approach it from the north, otherwise a standing source of worry or temptation to those responsible for the defence of India".\(^7\) Its rugged and highly precipitous terrain, criss-crossed by wild rivers, is formed by the junction of the Himalayan range with the mountains of Upper Burma, the Daphabum termination of the Patkai range.\(^8\)

The entire region is a tangle of deep gorge like valleys, densely wooded mountain slopes and dissected by numerous torrents, rivers and deep river valleys. The 700 mile long crest line in the north from the tri-junction of Bhutan–Tibet and India to the Talok (Diphuk) Pass in the north–west of Burma, forming the tri-junction of India–Tibet and Burma, dissects Arunachal

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\(^5\) Census of India 1971, Series 24, Arunachal Pradesh, Part III-A, Establishment Reports, Part-III B, Establishment Tables, P.VII.

\(^6\) Ibid.

\(^7\) Neville Maxwell, *India's China War*, Bombay 1971, p. 39.

\(^8\) *North and North-Eastern Frontier Tribes of India*, Army HQ's. Publication, Delhi, 1983, p. 180.(First Published, Simla, 1907).
from the Kham province of Tibet. The average heights of the mountain ranges on the crest line from the extreme west to the eastern most corner show a great variation in altitude ranging from 21000' to 6000'. From the border of Bhutan to Longju in Subansiri, the average altitude of the peaks varies between 18000' to 21000'.

Moving further eastward up to the point where river Siang (Tsangpo in Tibet) cuts across the frontier into the Indian territory at Korbo near Gelling, the range of heights comes down, slightly varying between 16000' and 17000'. The crestline between the Dihang and the Lohit rivers in the district of Lohit shows a great variation of altitude ranging between 9000' on one hand and 19000' on the other. The 274 mile of border with Burma along the crest of Patkai hills, which forms the south-eastern boundary of Arunachal Pradesh, also presents altitude variations in the range of 15000' to an average of 6000'.

The alignment of the ridges and spurs, making up the highly dissected terrain of the state, follows an approximate north-south direction. However, exception is noticeable in the Kameng frontier bordering Bhutan along a stretch of 98 miles in the west, where the prominent ridges takes an east-west direction. Geography has been exceptionally tough for the living conditions of the people by virtue of hard climate, turbulent river system, mountainous terrain, problems of accessibility and very little flat land or fertile river valley, lucrative enough to attract permanent human settlement in the past.

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10. Ibid.
Still waves of migration and the march of civilizations from across the border criss-crossed the entire state from prehistoric times. In the demographic map of India, the area is categorized as the most sparsely populated zone of the country.\textsuperscript{12} In the arena of racial identity, the people of Arunachal Pradesh are broadly categorised as Paleo-Mongoloids, a mixed or intermediate type, made up of the Southern Sinids of China and Indo-China and Veddas of India and Indo-China. This intermediate type of a third tropical form shows the presence of the Mongoloid feature to a far lesser degree.\textsuperscript{13} In the words of Dr. B.S. Guha;

"The true Mongoloid races are seen among the Turkish speaking people living in Chinese Turkistan and in and around Taklamakan desert, such as the Khyrgiz, Kalmuk and Uzbek tribes, as yet remain outside the frontier of India excepting the plateaus, south-east of the Karakoram ranges adjoining Tibet."\textsuperscript{14}

He further states that, while the Mongoloid strain appears as the dominant element amongst the Himalayan tribes as far east as Bhutan hills, the same features noticeably disappears as one crosses over to the southern Sub-Himalayan region, north of Assam and east of Bhutan. He is also in agreement with Hermanns to the extent that the tribes living in the hills of northern and eastern frontier of Assam are a different branch of Mongoloid people.\textsuperscript{15}

\textsuperscript{12} As per 2001 census the state has a total population of 1,091,117.
\textsuperscript{15} Ibid, pp. 68-9.
The near consensus among scholars that the tribes of Arunachal Pradesh belong to the Paleo-Mongoloid group provides interesting leads about the migration of the tribes from South-East Asia. The distribution of the Paleo-Mongoloids over a wide stretch of South-East Asian countries, such as Indo-China, Indonesia, as far as the Yang-tse river in Yunnan strengthens the traditional belief among some tribes that they had a South-east Asian origin, and their migration to the present area of dispersion took place from that direction in stages and over a long period of time.

The tendency of migration of ethnic groups from the direction of South-East Asia, following the same route over the Patkai and other hill passes even till the recent times, bears ample testimony of the natural process of human migration through geographical routes favourable since time immemorial.¹⁶ On the basis of their linguistic identity (categorized as Tibeto-Burman) J.D. Anderson postulates that their migration, as having originated from north-western China and followed the beds of great rivers; down the Chindwin, the Irrawaddy, and Salween into Burma, down the Brahmaputra into Assam and up the Brahmaputra into Tibet. The first of these waves of migration involved the Mon-Khmer speaking people followed by Tibeto-Burman into the same region and Tibet.¹⁷

Inter and intra-tribal variations in physical features and language and culture among the tribes of Arunachal Pradesh, befits the aforesaid theories that the migration of the people

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¹⁶ The tribes who migrated to Arunachal Pradesh across the Patakai route in the later half of 18th century were the Khamtis and the Singphos. For details see, S. Dutta Chowdhury, ed. Gazetteer of India, Arunachal Pradesh, Lohit district, Govt.of A.P., Shillong, 1978, pp.44 ff.
¹⁷ J.N. Chowdhury, op. cit., p. 70.
took place in different stages and over a very long span of time. Their independent process of evolution out of an admixture of various racial strains is still prominently visible in their differing physical features. Dr. Guha classifies the Adis as the Dolicocephalic type.\textsuperscript{18} The features of the Mishmis are in fact of a course Mongoloid type. Haimendorf speaks of the Nyishis as less homogenous than other tribal groups. Even Apa Tanis, the next door neighbours of the Nyishis, show the deviation more pronouncedly.\textsuperscript{19} This variation continues as one proceeds from west to east and from south to north.

Thus Arunachal Pradesh presents itself as the melting pot of a heterogeneous combination of various ethnic and cultural groups, each having a different background of its past and present. Yet the commonality in their racial and geographical identity determined the general line of policy of British towards the Arunachalees in the 19\textsuperscript{th} and 20\textsuperscript{th} centuries.

Historical continuity of this racial group in their present habitat since pre-historic times till date has been preserved in a number of historical sources. In Vedic sources they were first referred to as Kiratas.\textsuperscript{20} Similar references continued in the Mahabharata and Puranas. Archaeological excavations, carried out across the state, supported by references in the Ahom Buranjis, provide plenty of materials on the march of history into this hidden land since the Stone Age. Till the excavations were carried out at Parsi Parlo in Damin circle of Subansiri frontier there were some missing links in reconstructing the

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\textsuperscript{18} B. S. Guha, "The Indian Aborigines and Who They Are", \textit{March of India}, Delhi, Vol. 6, November-December, 1953, pp. 9-13.
\textsuperscript{19} Ibid.
\end{flushright}
history of Arunachal Pradesh. But discovery of Stone Age tools from that site substantiates that human civilization too grew from this side of the Himalayan frontier. From this humble beginning, one can move ahead to trace the basic sub-stratum of Bodo culture, which dominated the early history of Assam and its neighbouring hills for a considerable time as they were the early migrants to this side of the frontier.21

According to Dr. S.K. Chatterji, the North Assam tribes of the Adis, Akas, Nyishis, Miris and the Mishmis etc. appear to have come later and established themselves in the mountains to the north of the Brahmaputra plains already in occupation of the Bodos and other Austric tribes.22 Political disunity in Assam throughout the ancient and medieval period did not facilitate the rise of any strong power in Assam till the arrival of the Ahoms in 13th century A.D. Still traces of political, cultural and economic intercourse with the hill tribes of the Arunachal’s southern frontier in this period are amply visible in the remains of forts and temples. Starting with the Bhalukpong Fort in the western sector, the list of historical remains include Ita Fort, Bhismaknagar in the Siang frontier and Rukmininagar Forts in Lohit frontier, Tamreswari Temple, Parsuramkund, a number of ponds, inscriptions etc. All these monuments support the theory that the march of Brahmaputra valley culture to the adjacent frontier zone of Arunachal Pradesh took place in the medieval times.

But the beginning and the rise of Ahom ascendancy in Assam from 13th century onwards led to a phase of active engagement with the hill tribes. Expansion of Ahom kingdom

up to the tribal frontier bordering Assam in the north and the east of river Brahmaputra led to beginning of a phase of uneasy relationship with the frontier tribes. After reducing to submission the Morans, Borahis, Nagas, Chutias and Kacharis in the course of expansion between 14th and 16th centuries, the Ahoms also confronted with the frontier tribes in the north bank of Brahmaputra for enforcing some kind of regulated system in the frontier which led to conflict over the possession of low lands near the duars (hill passes).  

But the turn in the tide of Ahom expansion was instant after the beginning of Mughal invasion of Assam in the 16th century. The period of Mohammedan wars demanded an immediate halt to the unceasing expansive policies of the Ahoms. Instead, the Ahoms were compelled by the contingencies of war to enter into peaceful engagement with several frontier tribes of Arunachal Pradesh. Raja Pratap Singh (1603-41), who was fighting the series of grim battles for his survival against the hordes of Islamic invaders, granted a series of territorial and political concessions to the bordering tribes.

The Sath Rajas and other chiefs, in the east of the Bhutias, by an agreement were allowed to occupy the seven passes and half of the seven duars (hill passes) adjoining their hills. An Ahom officer of considerable rank, Mamoni Tamuli Barbaruah had also allowed the Duflas (Nyishis) the right to levy posa in specified areas, north of Darrang district. The Assamese Pykes, known as the Bohoteas of the specified areas,

24. Sath Rajas refer to the Monpa, Sherdukpen and Aka chiefs, who enjoyed Posa in the Kameng Frontier.
were bound by this agreement to serve these hill men with their requirement of personal service and produce. The Adis (Abors) and Miris inhabiting the south of Siang district also enjoyed the right to levy posa in their sector. The Noctes and Wanchooos of Tirap district, known in Ahom Buranjis and British records as eastern Nagas were also granted “Naga Khats” in their respective frontiers.\textsuperscript{26} The Mishmi frontier was free from this privilege because then the Sadiya frontier was an excluded territory of the Ahom kingdom. Thus, throughout the Assam – Arunachal frontier, the “Posa” system came into practice as early as the 16\textsuperscript{th} century A.D.

This practice of “Posa”, though varied from time to time, yet determined the very basis of Ahom tribal relations till the British stepped into the shoes of the Ahoms in the early 19\textsuperscript{th} century in the aftermath of the first Anglo-Burmese war. And in a typical stereotype the same process, “Posa” fixation, commutation and expansion was repeated with the frontier tribes of Arunachal Pradesh from 1826 onwards, leading to active engagement in the following years.\textsuperscript{27}

Continuous intercourses with the forces of the Brahmaputra valley culture for a long period notwithstanding, the Sanskritisation process failed to make any big dent among the tribes of Arunachal Pradesh. Frequent migration, hostile geography and living conditions and limitation of the Ahom rule up to the tribal frontier, prevented the cross-currents of historical forces from marching into the interior of Arunachal Pradesh in any big way. Whatever little impact of sanskritisation was left in the foot-hill zone, bordering Assam,

was effaced by the dominant strains of tribal culture with the passage of time.

However, in sharp contrast to the near total effacement of Brahmaputra valley culture from the Assam–Arunachal frontier, the Tibeto-Burman-Bhutanese frontier, bordering Arunachal Pradesh, presents even till today vivacious imprints of Buddhist culture in varying form. March of Buddhism from the neighbouring countries in the past to the west, north and eastern fringes of Arunachal Pradesh had left tremendous impact on the life and culture of a sizeable population, who proudly preserved and practise Buddhism even till today.

The Monpas of the Kameng frontier in the western extreme of the state, bordering Bhutan in the west and Tibet in the north, leads over the other tribes, both historically and numerically, as the converts to the new faith. This extensive geographical belt up to the snowline of Tibet has had the nature's bounties in the form of caravan routes and landscape conducive to settled agriculture, which facilitated in the past not only trans-Himalayan trade from Udalguri to Lasha, but also the march of Buddhist faith and culture from eastern Bhutan and Southern Tibet. According to Monpa legends, the Tawang valley came under the Buddhist influence as early as the 11th century A.D., when a monk from Bumtang district of Bhutan established several villages of the adherents of the new Buddhist faith. Therefore, the first monasteries of the area bear the marks of Kargyupa and Nyingmapa sects. But later on, when Gelugpa sect attained a dominant position in Tibet, Lodre Gyatso, a Lama from Tibetan village of Mera, set out to spread the new doctrine among the Monpas of Tawang. He succeeded in his venture with assistance from the fifth Dalai Lama (1617-
1682) A.D. It was during this period that the foundations of the great Gelugpa Monastery of Tawang were laid.28

Ever since then the Gelugpa sect, identified with Mahayanism, had its predominant sway in the west Kameng and the Tawang division of Arunachal Pradesh with the monastery of Tawang serving as the centre of new faith. This monastery had in the past deep religious connections with the Sera, Drebung, Galden and Lasha monasteries of Tibet.29 Monastic order is so central to the life and the culture of the Monpas that even today every village of the tribe is dotted with Buddhist monuments, and dedication to the Buddhist order is absolute. Apart from the Monpas, the Sherdukpons of the Kameng frontier also practise Buddhism that bears the testimony of transformation in the process of the march of Buddhism to this side of Arunachal from Bhutan.30 The Gompas at Rupa and Shergaan cater to the monastic life of this tribe. Element of “Bon” worship among the Monpas and “Khik” worship among the Sherdukpons bears ample testimony to their animist past, which is reflected in the Lamaism that reverberates in every aspect of their cultural life.31

Close to the international frontier, i.e., Mc Mahon line, the extreme northern division of the Siang frontier is the abode of two small Buddhist tribes, known as Membas and Khambas. Mahayana Buddhist doctrine from Tibet held its sway on these two tribes. Gompas and Shortens at Mechuka and Tuting and its surrounding villages reflect the cultural transformation of


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these tribes in the past. Geographical proximity with Tibet and ecclesiastical bonds with Lasha facilitated trans-border trade and cultural assimilation for centuries, which gave them a distinct cultural identity in the Siang frontier.

Interestingly, these Buddhist enclaves in Arunachal’s frontier were the bone of contention between India and China, when border dispute took an ugly turn between 1959 and 1962. Strong imprints of Tibetan culture on these tribes provided enough credence to the Chinese theory of cultural expansionism in the Arunachal sector after Tibet was forcibly taken over by the Chinese in the year 1954. Even today the Chinese do not hesitate to claim these areas as Tibetan protectorates, and hence, demands their inclusion in Tibet.

In sharp contrast to the imprints of Tibetan cultural heritage in the west and north, the eastern sector representing the Lohit and Tirap frontier bears the imprints of Buddhist faith of the Burmese variety. The Khamtis and the Singphos, who in the course of their migration from Burma in the 18th century to their present habitat, brought with them the Burmese tradition of Himalayan Buddhism to Arunachal Pradesh. Because of this cultural tag E.T. Dalton observed that, “the Khamtis were very far in advance of the other north-eastern frontier tribes in knowledge, arts and civilization”. T.T. Cooper is of the view that “the Khamtis happen to be strict followers of Burmese Buddhism, but excepting among the priests, their religion is

33. Times of India, 22 Nov., 2006, p. 6, (Disputed status of Arunachal Pradesh, raised vociferously by China’s Ambassador in New Delhi earlier, was played down by the Chinese Premier, Hu Jin Tao’s visit to India in 2007, but the undercurrent of talks between Hu and Manmohan Singh remained unchanged on the border issue per se.
little more than polytheism under the veil of Buddhist pantheism”. The Singphos of the Tirap frontier represents a group of latest converts to the new faith of Buddhism. After their migration from the Hukwang valley in Upper Burma in the last quarter of 18th century the Singphos settled down in the tract between river Tengapani and Buri Dihing. According to Singpho tradition, a monk named Dingla Charto, came from Hukwang valley and introduced for the first time Buddhism among them. Because of this recent origin of Buddhism among the Singphos, the old Shamanism of the tribe yields considerable influence in their culture and religion.

This religious and cultural links of the Khamtis and Singphos with Burma in the past provided the necessary impetus for the Burmese occupying forces in Assam from 1819-1826 to forge close alliance with them in staking their claim over Assam. Even after the surrender of Rangpore this alliance with Singphos continued for some more time and Captain Neufville had to continue swift military operations in the Singpho frontier in 1825 to break this alliance. The whole lot of the six Buddhist tribes thus constitutes the strategic population of Arunachal Pradesh. Their land, people, culture, and contact with the neighbouring countries provided the very basic inputs for territorial claims from outside. British administration in Assam was compelled to cope up with these historical realities from 1825 onwards when they first came in contact with the Khamtis and Singphos in the Assam war theatre.

But more than the Buddhist tribes it were the non-Buddhist tribes residing the Southern frontier of Arunachal

Pradesh bordering Assam, who played the most dominant role in shaping the dynamics of British imperialism from 1826 onwards. This group represents only three tribes: the Akas, Daflas (Nyishis) and Abors (Adis), who inhabit the vast stretch of Assam–Arunachal frontier from Kameng Division to Siang Division. During Ahom rule in Assam they were having the privilege of “Posa”, and hence, when the British stepped into the shoes of the Ahoms, after the first Anglo-Burmese war, they were the first to be encountered on a priority basis to restore law and order in Assam. Although each of these three tribes lived in an exclusive territory of its own, still there were striking similarities in their socio-cultural life. They practise animism in various forms, which is nature worship in purest form with a dash of legend on the mythical origin of the man and the universe.37

The social organisation among them, without any exception, is patrilineal. They are basically exogamous, and divided into smaller clans. Chieftainship of various forms guides their socio-political culture at the village level and sovereignty as a concept was confined to the authority of the village chiefs or village council. Thus their socio-political matrix represents a heterogeneous lot with which the British administration has to deal with from Assam from 1826 onwards. The entire process involved sustained negotiations, conflict, and punishment for the entire group for the folly of a solitary one or two chiefs, and very bad memory of raids, counter-strikes and compromise with the passage of time. In the process, the evolution of British policy towards the tribes of Arunachal frontier took shape. After the second Anglo-Burmese war economic and political drives of

imperialism brought the British in close touch with the Mishmis, Wanchos, Tangsas, Noctes, Apatanis and the rest, who inhabit the interior hills, and as far as the McMahon Line, leading to operation of imperial dynamics throughout Arunachal frontier in the later half of the 19th century and 1st half of the 20th century. Simla talks (1912-14) provided the imperial drive the final call to consummate on the lofty heights of the eastern Himalayas in Arunachal Pradesh.

2.2 EVOLUTION OF BRITISH POLICY

From strict non-interference before the first Anglo-Burmese war to vigorous interference during the war, and again back to non interference after the war, British policy in North-East India swung between the two extremes, depending upon the exigencies of circumstances, leadership at the level of colonial administration in India and public opinion and peer pressure at London. Until the signing of the Treaty of Yandaboo, Lord Amherst and David Scott in India had the privilege of guiding the direction of British policy up to the farthest extreme of Assam’s north and eastern frontier. In the north, while reports on the pillage and enslavement of the villagers, living in the north-bank of river Brahmaputra by the frontier tribes of Arunachal Pradesh like Akas, Nyishis, Adis etc. compelled Scott to take necessary preventive measure to ensure internal security in Assam, in the eastern frontier, the Singpho and Khamti depredations determined the basic framework of an offensive policy inside Arunachal’s frontier. Threat from the retreating Burmese forces and their alleged nexus with the Singphos gave Scott very strong points to take the policy of
interference deep inside the Singpho frontier in between 1825 and 1826.

After the surrender of Rangpore on 31st January 1825, David Scott's preoccupation with the task of restoring law and order in Assam's frontier convinced him of the paramount importance of bringing the Singphos under the sphere of British influence, by conciliation or otherwise. In order to liberate the Assamese captives and to neutralise the Singphos' nexus with the retreating Burmese forces, Scott considered it very essential that the British forces should make future advance towards the frontier, and that the strategic outposts at Borhat, Dighalaghat, and Sadiya must be well guarded; failing this he wanted to arm the contingents of the frontier chiefs. The remoteness of these posts and their distance from the base of operations dictated that the second option should be given a chance. Colonel Richards, the officer commanding the troops thus agreed to authorise Neufville, to explore the possibilities of arming the militiamen of Moamaria and Khamti Chiefs as a measure of preventive defence against Singpho depredations. But Neufville was strictly instructed not to advance into the territory of the Singphos.

The stage of cautious advance up to the Singpho frontier in March 1825 was instantly replaced in May with a policy of hot pursuit deep into the Singpho territory, when intelligence reports were received about the regrouping of the Burmese forces at Beesa for the renewal of offensive with active assistance from some Singpho Chiefs. The matter was considered a grave threat to the security of the frontier, and

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39. Ibid.
hence, despite earlier peaceful overtures from Beesa Gaum and some other Singpho Chiefs, military operation was resumed for the first time in Singpho frontier.40

On 1st of July 1825, although David Scott reported to the Secretary, Government of Bengal the final expulsion of Burmese from India’s north-east frontier, still operation against the Singphos was continued to address the security needs in this side of Assam’s turbulent frontier and to liberate the large majority of Assamese ryots, still held as slaves, by the Singpho Chiefs. In this arduous task, Neufville was joined by the allies,41 (Khamtis and Moamarias), who committed to aid and assist the British advancing army from securing their frontier from possible Singpho attacks. Combing operations was launched in a thickly populated area, stretching from Beesa to Laffabari, leading to the surrender of a large number of rebel chiefs and liberation of a large number of slaves. Even some of the friendly chiefs like the Gaum of Wakeyet were not spared because none of these chiefs wanted to liberate their slaves. A surprise attack at Lattora Gaum similarly resulted in the liberation of a large number of slaves.42

Unceasing campaign against the Singphos and their hasty retreat into the interior of the hills gave rise to the formation of a loose confederacy among the retreating Singphos to unite and fight back for securing their slaves and possession of low lands. Bessa Gaum was conferred with the status of the Chief of the chiefs (Raja) and assurance of support from Mogaung Chiefs was secured to lead the counter-offensive

41. Ibid, p.143.
against advancing British forces.43 But a swift attack from Neufville and Lt. Kerr took the enemy by surprise. The result of the operation was quite decisive. Beesa Gaum and several other chiefs made unconditional surrender of arms and slaves.44 After this operation Beesa Gaum and his associates offered to settle peacefully in the low lands bordering Assam and promised to behave as friendly chiefs in their future relationships with the British Administration. Military operation was therefore temporarily suspended in the Singpho frontier. On 5, May 1826, sixteen Singpho Chiefs entered into an agreement with David Scott, acknowledging thereby the British authority in Assam and their subservience to the necessity of restoring peace and security in their side of the frontier.45

But continued hostility of Duffa Gaum, Lattora Gaum and others in the Singpho frontier, and bleak chances of a settlement with some Khamti chiefs on the crucial issue of liberation of slaves, convinced Scott to recommend that a European Officer ought to be permanently posted at Sadiya with both civil and military powers to deal with the frontier affairs on a sole basis. Capt. Neufville, by virtue of his past experience and success in dealing with Singphos and Khamtis, was the first choice of Scott to man the Sadiya outpost on a long-term basis. He also submitted to the Government a detailed plan for the establishment at Sadiya, a Corps of Militia, six hundred strong, to be drawn from the followers of the Bar Senapati, the Moamaria chief and the Sadiya Khowa Gohain, the Khamti chief, who had allied themselves to the Company by a treaty of friendship in May 1826. Thus, out of the exigency of

43. Ibid.no.11.
44. Ibid.no.15. (1400 slaves were liberated in this single operation).
circumstances and a very strong urge to ensure the security of Assam's eastern frontier, a strong-arm policy was followed in the Singpho frontier first, followed by conciliatory gesture next, so that submission of the tribe can be consummated to peaceful co-existence in the long-run with the frontier tribes of Arunachal Pradesh.

Active involvement in the Singpho frontier was also guided by the idea of creating a buffer zone to be inhabited by friendly tribes, between upper Assam and Burma. Therefore Neufville, stationed at Sadiya, was given strict instruction in May 1825 to give assistance to the Mattak and Sadiya chiefs only for defensive purposes, and not to advance into the tracts inhabited by the Singphos.\(^{46}\) Agreements were signed on 13, May 1825 with the chiefs of Khamtis and Moamarias to this effect.\(^{47}\) In view of the unfriendly relations of these people in the past with the rulers of Upper Assam, Scott felt it inexpedient to place them under Ahom Monarch, if restored after the termination of war with Ava. He recommend that these chiefs should be directly brought under the control of the Government through a European officer stationed in or near about Sadiya. Such an officer, he brought home to the authorities in Calcutta, was indispensable with reference to the remote position of the post, conflicting interests of the frontier chiefs and for organising and increasing the military strength in that quarter.\(^{48}\) Both the chiefs were exempted from the payment of any taxes, and interference in their internal affairs was also restricted to matters of very serious offences only. No attempt was made to introduce any portion of English Law into their


\(^{47}\) Aitchison, op. cit., pp. 121-22.

\(^{48}\) Political Consultations (India), 14 July, 1826, No. 9.
society, and they were allowed to decide upon cases of civil law and administration of justice in their respective jurisdiction according to their former usages.

To be able to effectively exercise the paramount power of the British over these tribes, certain provisions of law was incorporated as per the advice of Neufville to Scott.\textsuperscript{49} Accordingly, the chiefs were authorised to try cases and award punishment for theft to the extent of rupees fifty only and also to try all original cases not amounting to capital felony by the Assamese laws. But cases of felony punishable by death, or loss of limbs, as also all cases related to piracies, robberies and arson etc. should be referred to a higher court or panchayat at Sadiya, comprising of the Political Agent, one of the three Gohains and the chief in that territory where the crime might have been committed. Of course, the chief was vested with the power of veto, provided it was exercised under the advice of the Political Agent. However, after the trial the proceedings were to be submitted to the latter chief and sentence carried out into effect under his authority.\textsuperscript{50} A number of Singpho Chiefs, led by Beesa Gaum, were also incorporated into the category of friendly tribes after they signed treaty of friendship with David Scott in June 1826.

Of course, after the treaty of Yandaboo the threat perception from the Burmese side was dismissed for some time as unwarranted, but continued threat from the frontier tribes to

\textsuperscript{49} Political Proceedings (Bengal), 7 November, 1828, No.8.

\textsuperscript{50} Ibid.
the security of the newly acquired province of Assam posed a serious challenge to the decision making process at Calcutta on issues related to security of Bengal’s north eastern frontier.

Military reorganisation in the Sadiya frontier became mandatory as the Governor General-in-Council felt it unnecessary to have an officer permanently stationed at Sadiya. Nevertheless, they agreed to invest Captain Neufville with the command of Assam Light Infantry and the political duties of the frontier under the designation of Political Agent, Upper Assam, carrying an allowance for the additional duties of rupees six hundred per month. The Army Regulars in the Rangpur Light Infantry (RLI), which played the most active role during the Burmese war, were withdrawn from Assam to Jamalpur. However, to perform ordinary duties and for the suppression of internal disturbances the remaining contingent of the RLI was added with two companies of the Gurkhas, and renamed Assam Light Infantry (ALI). It had a numerical strength of about one thousand besides a Brigade of Artillery. The ALI was stationed at Bishwanath, 200 miles east of Gauhati, so that it can be pressed into service immediately on receipt of security alert from the frontier. Special arrangement was made to guard the Sadiya frontier on a perpetual basis. Two companies of the ALI, along with a couple of guards, were posted at Sadiya, and a proposal was set in motion to constitute a Sadiya militia, involving recruits from the Khamtis, Moamarias and the Singphos.

Past experience of Neufville in handling the regulars of the RLI in the operation against the Singphos dictated him to recommend for raising a native militia for the defence of the

51. Political Consultations (India), 14 July, 1826, No. 2.
frontier. Accordingly, Scott made it clear to the Calcutta authority that the climate of the eastern frontier of Bengal is so inhospitable to the Hindustanis and so destructive to the Commissariat cattle that it renders successful operation against the enemy extremely difficult, who are adept in jungle warfare and sturdy enough to survive in hostile conditions. He therefore, proposed the raising of a native militia in which Manipuri horsemen, and remnants of the Shans or the Burmese under Sham Phukan, settled at Singimari, were to be incorporated as irregulars. The contingents supplied by the chiefs of the Khamtis and Moamarias were to be armed and regularly trained under the officers of the regiment. This proposal found favour with the authority in Calcutta as they were not prepared to bear any further expenses on the deployment of Army Regulars in Assam in the post-war years.52

Thus, the Sadiya Militia was ultimately formed in 1827, four hundred and fifty strong, each one receiving from the Government a fixed land holding and allowances during the period of deployment. Lt. Rutherford was employed in Sadiya as Neufville's Assistant and Lt. Beddingfield was assigned the immediate task of constructing a fort and stockade at Sadiya. In the years ahead the Sadiya militia and the Sadiya stockade served as the centre of British Imperial expansion into Arunachal Pradesh.

Military compulsions in the Sadiya frontier notwithstanding, imperial drive into the Singpho tract was also dictated by commercial compulsions in the Company's trade with China around the same time. In early 1822 the Select Committee at Canton was forced to close down their trade in

52. Ibid, 10 November, 1826, No.21.
China mainland because of misunderstanding over the Topaz affair. Petitions of the Select Committee were not forwarded to the Peking Authority, thus making it extremely difficult for the British to work for a compromise. This high-handed action of the Canton Authority was considered the main handicap in the smooth passage of British trade and commerce into the Chinese mainland. Therefore, the Select Committee wrote to Calcutta in 1822 to explore the possibilities of transmitting their representations over land by way of Sylhet and the province of Yunnan at the time of crisis. But the matter could not be taken up forthwith because of the Burmese occupation of Assam during the same period and the inability of David Scott to address the concern of the Select Committee at Canton as he was obsessed with the prime task of securing Bengal’s eastern frontier bordering Assam. But the issue of exploring an alternative land route to China through Assam was raised once again by the Surveyor General, Blacker in 1824. He wrote to Lord Amherst about Assam:

“Its interesting situation between Hindoostan and China, two names with which the civilized world has been long familiar, whilst it remains nearly unknown, is a striking fact and leaves nothing to be wished but the means and opportunity to exploring it”.

Military operations in Assam during the 1st Anglo-Burmese war gave Scott the first opportunity to explore Assam and its tribal frontier. Officers from the Surveyor General’s department were deployed under his supervision to carry out intensive survey of Assam. Various routes were studied within, and

beyond Assam, with an eye to their potential use as trade routes in future. Captain Neufville's operation in the Khamti and Singpho frontier was also fully exploited to study the commercial feasibility of the Singpho tract-Hukwang valley route to upper Burma. Captain Bedford, Lt. Wilcox and Lt. Burlton were directed to map the area watered by the upper branches of Brahmaputra. Following the tracts of the traditional trade routes, used by the Ahoms for carrying out trade with Hukwang Valley in Burma and Zayul Valley in Tibet, Wilcox prepared an exhaustive report of the survey work carried out in between 1825-28. 55 Much hope was attached to the trade route that passes through the country inhabited by the Khamtis and Mishmis to Zayul valley of Tibet and Yunan province of China through the country in the extreme north of Burma. But this route, Wilcox reported, could not be followed beyond the borders of the Khamtis as they feared it would rouse the jealousy and suspicion of the Burmese. Moreover, Wilcox and his team were discouraged by the Khamtis from entering the Mishmi tract as that tribe was reported to be hostile to receiving foreigners in their territory. 56

The second route which received much attention in the Wilcox report was the Hukwang valley route by which the Burmese had entered Assam in 1817 and in 1820. This was the same route by which the retreating Burmese forces also returned to Burma after the surrender of Rangpore in 1825. Since part of this route passes though the territory of the Beesa Gaum, it was considered very important by Scott to win over him by any means. Critical military engagements in the Singpho

55. See R. Wilcox, "Memoir of a Survey of Assam and the Neighbouring Countries executed in 1825-6-7-8", Asiatic Research, Vol. XVII, 1832, pp. 310, ff. 56. Ibid.
frontier till the signing the Treaty of Yandaboo also made this route a strategic one for military reasons.

On the basis of detail information supplied by Neufville, Scott realized that the Singphos, like the Garos, needed to be won over to a new way of life if their predatory raids were to be stopped and if the trade route that passes through their territory is to be reused for both military and commercial purposes. He felt the urgent need of providing them with new outlet for their energies; involving them as middlemen in the trans-borer trade that passes through their territory. This alone, he thought would give a profitable vocation to the Singphos, thus promoting them to abandon their predatory habits in due course of time. Serious effort from the very beginning to win over Beesa Gaum was guided by this objective.

With the signing of peace treaty with sixteen Singpho chiefs in 1826, the prospects of trans-border trade through the Singpho tract appeared quiet brighter. Preliminary survey on this trans-border trade route was carried out through the Beesa Gaum territory up to Hukwang valley of Burma. In April 1826 the first credible information was received that there would be considerable demand for woollen clothes and other European manufactures like glass wares, beads, potteries etc. in exchange of which silver and horses of a rare breed can be procured in good quality. But the arduous nature of the trade route and the continued hostility of the Singphos prevented Scott from taking a proactive stand to promote trade so early along this route. However, to explore the possibility of a profitable venture in Sadiya frontier traders from the China-Burma border were

58. Political consultations (Secret), 19 May, 1826, No. 9.
encouraged to return to Sadiya with their produce during November to December so that a trade fair could be organized during the same time at Sadiya to facilitate resumption of trans-border trade after a long time.\textsuperscript{59}

A proposal for border trade was accordingly sent to Calcutta, which received immediate approval. The first consignment comprising of silk goods, worth eight hundred rupees, were despatched from Calcutta, together with presents for the chiefs, but unfortunately the whole consignment was plundered on the way. This was the first setback for Scott in his commercial enterprise in the Sadiya frontier. Still he pursued the matter yet again in 1827 and was able to convince the Calcutta authorities about the need of a fresh investment towards the same venture. A small amount of two thousand rupees was granted no doubt, but the sheer want of a responsible officer with experience in the same field to supervise the trade led to the premature closure of Scott’s adventurism in this field in the following years.\textsuperscript{60}

2.3 ECONOMIC CONSOLIDATION IN ASSAM AND ITS AFTER-SHOCKS

Setback in the Sadiya frontier notwithstanding, David Scott, as the true agent of British Imperialism in India’s North-eastern frontier, undertook the arduous task of exploring revenue possibilities in Lower Assam to facilitate the process of imperial consolidation in the newly acquired province. On the basis of inspection of parts of Lower Assam and information

\textsuperscript{59} Ibid, No. 11.

\textsuperscript{60} Political consultations, 7 September, 1827, No. 17.
gathered from the Mughal and Ahom records it was estimated that annual revenue to the tune of four to six Lakhs can be collected without any difficulty. Mughal records of Rs.3, 00,000 collected from the area earlier formed the basis of this assumption. Scott was quite hopeful that the economy of Assam can be monetised soon to yield revenue that would be enough to provide for the profits of an intermediate class between the Government and peasantry. Therefore, he strongly recommended that the Government should annex the recently occupied areas of Lower Assam.\textsuperscript{61} But the Calcutta authority was then keeping its option closed on the proposal of immediate annexation of Lower Assam to the province of Bengal.

This however did not prevent Scott from moving ahead with his proposal of revenue consolidation in Assam. Proposal for the revenue survey of the area was cleared in 1825 and the service of Mr. Mathew was proposed to be hired along with a number of native surveyors to carry out revenue survey on a scientific basis. But continuation of war in Burma and trouble in Sadiya frontier prompted a provisional approach to revenue survey under the supervision of Lieutenant Beddingfield in 1825-26. The measurement survey showed that there was some 529,735 puras of cultivable land in Lower Assam, of which 112,858 puras were held under rent free grants. Since Scott was anxious to collect the military cost of holding the province, he suggested that bringing the rent free lands can considerably increase the chances of better revenue realisation in future. Taxes were also proposed on every other source, which had ever been taxed by the Mughals and the Ahoms. But all these efforts yielded very little gain for the Company's treasury. In the year

\textsuperscript{61} Political consultations (Secret), 5 April, 1825, No. 27.
1826-27 the revenue collection was Rs.2,90,457, which was not very encouraging for the Calcutta authority to continue with the governance of Lower Assam after the war was over.62

There was however, a ray of hope in the better revenue prospectus in future as the revenue of the fiscal 1826-27 showed a marginal increase of Rs. 42,774 over the previous year. Continuing with the process of fiscal consolidation Scott accepted at once that over-assessment of the revenue has been made in the past. In order to improve the balance sheet the practice of exemptions, continued since Ahom days, was discontinued. A tax of twenty rupees per pura of opium cultivated land was proposed as Assam then was having a thriving cultivation of poppy, which was consumed by the local populace. Net yield of tax from this source was estimated at Rs.25,000.63 Waste land grants (Khats) at nominal revenue were also carried out to optimize land use in lower Assam. By February, 1828, revenue assessment of Lower Assam was further revised on the basis of which Scott assured the Government that in no case would the gross revenue be less than Rs.3,00,000, and under a regular system it would be considerably increased.64 On receipt of a further assurance that the cost of regular British administration on Lower Assam would be met by internal sources of revenue, the Supreme Government finally decided in April 1828 for the permanent annexation of Lower Assam with Bengal.65 Approval was also given to Scott's plan for a comprehensive regular survey and review of the former revenue arrangement.66

62. Ibid, 9 March 1828, No. 5.
63. Political Consultations, 9 March 1827, No. 18.
64. Political consultations-Secret), 7 March 1827, No.4.
65. Political Consultations (India), 25 April 1828, No.52.
66. Ibid.
In the aftermath of this decision Scott was at full liberty to pursue his imperial dreams in the newly acquired province and beyond. All ad-hoc revenue measures were gradually replaced by a regular system. Scientific revenue survey was carried out afresh up to the hill tribes’ frontier in the north. Since the process of consolidation was gradual and slow, hill tribes of Arunachal in the north of Assam were left undisturbed with their past practice of posa collection from the duars. However, exploratory missions were sent to the tribal frontier to assess the prospects of trans-border trade and the forest and mineral reserves available in the hills. Discovery of coal and petroleum in Upper Assam in 1825 prompted the Colonial administration to search for similar reserves in the Monpa, Sherdugpen, Aka, Nyishi and Adi frontier. On first enquiry it was found that the foot-hills in this sector were extremely rich with valuable timber, rubber, ivory etc. Most hill men carry out their brisk trade in the nearest trade mart in Assam with these items. High fertility of the land of several duars also prompted a vision to settle Assamese ryots in these frontier areas to increase the source of land revenue from Lower Assam.67

Despite all these efforts there was no significant increase in revenue realization from Lower Assam in the years following. Meanwhile, burdens of external wars proved to be the Company’s nightmare by 1829. Lord William Bentinck was compelled to undertake severe retrenchment measures in India, which severely affected David Scott’s plan to consolidate his hold over the newly acquired territory of Lower Assam. Public opinion in England was also against the renewal of the

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67. Foreign Political Proceedings (India), 12 Sept 1838, No. 8.

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monopoly of Company’s trade which was taken very seriously by the Court of Directors at London. Reformist administrators like Bentinck and Metcalfe were directed to initiate stringent fiscal measures in India. The fear of losing the profit of the China trade and tea monopoly forced the Company to insist that Indian revenues pay the cost of Indian administration entirely.68

Stringent financial measures, thus initiated in India, was so severe that even for a small boat allowance for Captain Neufville, posted at Sadiya, long correspondence had to take place between Lord Bentinck and Swinton, the Secretary to the Governor General-in-Council. Ultimately, though this proposal was cleared because of Swinton’s intervention, a second proposal from Scott for raising the salary of Captain White was rejected, and Scott was reminded to cut his coat according to his cloth.69 This kind of financial stringency did not however discourage Scott from pursuing his commercial enterprise in Assam and beyond with renewed vigour. Reporting to the Secretary Swinton in 1830, Scott made it clear that low revenue realisation from Lower Assam was on account of depressed commerce, currency deficit, collection of revenue in kind in places, and unprofitable nature of commodity export from Assam to Bengal.70 Therefore, he urged for the abolition of commercial restrictions in Assam so that capital from Bengal would flow, helping in the process growth of small capitalist enterprises and the restarting of trans-border trade to Tibet through the hills of Arunachal Pradesh.

69. Political Proceedings (Bengal), 28 May, 1830, No. 8.
70. Ibid, 7 May 1830, No. 52.

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Promotion of trade in Muga silk formed an essential part of his commercial enterprises in Assam. As early as 1826 he had sent some specimens of Assam silk pieces to Calcutta for study by the Board of Trade. In his opinion Muga silk should one day become the most important article of export for Asiatic consumption. Although his proposal for starting pilot projects for silk production in modern scientific method was not sanctioned till 1830, still this project found appreciation at Calcutta in 1826.71

Commercial exploitation of coal, found in abundance in Upper Assam, was also taken up by Scott to save Assam from economic bankruptcy. Wilcox, the Revenue Surveyor posted at Sadiya, played the key role in collecting coal specimen from a village called Teerogong, located 20 miles east of Rangagora near the Naga territory.72 Early introduction of steam navigation in Assam also formed a part of Scott’s proposal to exploit the commercial importance of Brahmaputra as a line of communication for trade. This proposal too evoked mixed response, leading to introduction of steam navigation in Brahmaputra in 1841.73

Cross-country trade, which continued since time immemorial between India and her neighbours through the hills of north-east, was proposed to be revived again. To make a humble beginning in this direction fairs were organized with official patronage at Sadiya and Udalguri.74 Posa was also

71. Political Consultations (India), 7 May 1830, No. 52.
72. R. Wilcox, op. cit., p. 55.
74. Report on the Trade Between Assam and Adjoining Countries, 1890.
distributed to some tribes of Arunachal Pradesh at these two places.

Attempt was made to revive the Udalguri-Tawang-Lasha trade route, which once witnessed brisk trans-Himalayan trade between Assam and Tibet during the Ahom days. The role of the Bhutias (Monpas and Sherdukpens) as intermediary of trade in this route prompted the local administration in Darrang district to explore the possibility of winning over them by way of goodwill gestures.\textsuperscript{75} As a first step in that direction they were allowed to hold Kuriapara Duar. Their traditional practice of collecting posa from this duar was too left untouched.\textsuperscript{76} Trade fair at Udalguri was organised with official support to lure the hill traders for restarting trans-border trade with Tibet.

Success in this venture was directly linked to the Government’s shifting stand on the status of Upper Assam for a long time. Following the model of political settlement in Deccan, successfully carried out by Elphinstone with Maratha Sardars, David Scott also granted pension to members of the Ahom Royal family and important office bearers of the Ahom administration. He believed that by this good gesture the ruling elites of Upper Assam can be convinced of the positive role of British Raj in Assam as liberator. But official annexation of Lower Assam in 1828 changed the perception of old Ahom royalty in Upper Assam. They feared that like the Burmese, who came as liberator in 1819, but later on stayed in Assam by force, the British too are intending to stay in the whole of Assam. Conspiracy theory thus started taking root in Assam in 1828. The voice of rebellion came first in Upper Assam from Gomadhar Konwar, a scion of the royal family, which was

\textsuperscript{75} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{76} L Devi, \textit{Ahom-Tribal Relations}, Gauhati, 1968, p. 199.
effectively neutralized by Neufville's armed operation in time. Another attempt was also made by Godadhar Singha in alliance with some disgruntled Khantí and Singpho chiefs to overthrow British hold over Sadiya frontier and Upper Assam. This plot too was foiled, but the shock and trauma of rebellion in Upper Assam and the Khasi hills in 1829 seriously affected Scott's imperial pursuits in the north-east frontier of Bengal.

Continued failure in the revenue management of Upper Assam was also putting pressure on the ability of Scott to hold on to Upper Assam for a long time. Therefore, he proposed to the Calcutta authority in February 1828 for the restoration of Upper Assam to a scion of the Ahom Royal Family. But the same was rejected as impracticable because of two reasons; one, the Company is not bound by any treaty or engagement to do so, and two, such a step is considered undesirable from security point of view. The Government was of the opinion that restoration, or no restoration, the responsibility of defending Upper Assam from a possible Burmese invasion in future cannot be handed over to any one else except that of a capable European officer posted at the Sadiya frontier.

The difference in the basic approach to the problems of restoration in Upper Assam was mainly due to these compulsive factors that guided British policy in Bengal's North-eastern frontier from 1828-31. While for Scott the compulsion after the annexation of Lower Assam was to consolidate his governance in the newly acquired province, for the Calcutta authority the challenge was to ensure the security of the frontier of the whole of Assam, so that any future threat from Burma can be

78. Political proceedings (Bengal), 7 March 1828, No. 8.
79. Ibid, 10 June, 1831, No.50.
contained at the frontier of Sadiya itself. The wealth of Assam, identified in the meantime in the discovery of tea, petroleum and coal etc. also prompted the Calcutta authority to hold on to the whole of Assam and stabilise the process of consolidation on a gradual basis.\textsuperscript{80} Trans-border trade routes through Arunachal Pradesh with Tibet and Burma added a new dimension to the imperial drives of the Company in North-East India.

But the man who was to be relied upon for translating the imperial vision of the Company in North-east India to reality was no other than David Scott. Therefore, it was thought very much essential at Calcutta to give necessary direction to Scott for implementing the scheme of governing Upper Assam in the same manner as Lower Assam, which has been witnessing gradual consolidation of British route since the days of annexation. Scott's apprehension that neighbouring countries like Burma and Tibet would oppose any such move was played down as unwarranted.\textsuperscript{81} Captain J.B. Neufville was sent to Assam in 1828 to aid and assist Scott in handling the affairs of Upper Assam. Reorganisation of security at Sadiya was his main assignment, but he too played a very important role in reorganising the administration of Upper Assam.\textsuperscript{82}

In 1830 Neufville took up the idea again of reviving border trade with Burma through the Singpho territory. Merchant adventurer Bruce was his first choice to supervise the whole business as he had the past expertise of dealing with the tribes in the Sadiya frontier. Fresh consignment of English goods,

\textsuperscript{80} Discovery of Tea Bushes in the Singpho Frontier was crucial to the plan for developing plantation economy in the Assam-Arunachal Frontier. For details see A Guha, \textit{Planters Raj...}, Op. cit., pp. 12-4. (Tea committee was formed in the year 1834)
\textsuperscript{81} Political Consultations (Secret), 7 March 1828, No. 8.
\textsuperscript{82} Political proceedings (Bengal), 10 June 1831, No. 58.
comprising mainly of broad cloth, caps, handkerchiefs, blanket etc. worth Rs.5000 was transacted in exchange of ivory, amber, musk, manjit, copper, spears etc. at the Sadiya fair. Neufville even proposed to allow the principal Singpho Chiefs to take the merchandise for the first year on credit under agreement of payment at the ensuing fair. To make the real beginning in this venture Neufville lent out rupees four hundred to the Beesa Gaum in 1830 so that he can lead the rest of the chiefs as the trusted carrier of trade and commerce among the Singphos in Arunachal Pradesh. This way Neufville was trying to extend the trading activities in the Sadiya frontier up to the Hukwang Valley, and through the Singphos ultimately to Mogaung province in the Upper Irrawaddy region of Burma.83

Neufville’s vigorous involvement in the Sadiya frontier notwithstanding, Scott was not in principle convinced to shelve his restoration project altogether. To address the problem of security effectively he argued that Ahom restoration in Upper Assam would not be allowed to act as a territorial barrier between the two directly administrated territory of Lower Assam and Sadiya frontier. He proposed to retain direct British control over the territory in the North bank of Brahmaputra from Tezpur up to Sadiya, so that in case of hostility with Burma and non-cooperation from the Ahoms, troops can be swiftly moved from Lower Assam to the Sadiya frontier along this track. This proposal found acceptance at Calcutta, but the problem of finding a suitable person to head the Ahom government in Upper Assam delayed the process of restoration.84

83. Ibid, 14 May 1830, Nos. 29-30.
84. Political Consultations (Secret), 7 March 1828, No. 8.
Like Malcolm in Central India, Scott too sensed that the British rule would always be extraneous to the life of the people of Upper Assam.\textsuperscript{85} He deeply deplored the systematic overthrow of the local Indian officers in all the provinces and warned that such a policy would only result in frustration and rebellious activities among the local elites. True to his fear, a series of rebellions took place in Assam from 1829 onwards with devastating repercussions in the Khasi hills, Khamti and Singpho frontier in quick succession. Under the impact of these rebellions a very ambitious commercial project of Neufville in the Singpho frontier failed to take off. But for this vision of the most able frontier officer of the time (Neufville) Major S.F. Hannay remarked that, “had Neufville lived longer, he would surely have succeeded in opening up a trade route from Upper Assam, via the Shan Districts of Upper Chindwin, to the Chinese markets of the Yunnan frontier”.\textsuperscript{86}

Neufville’s untimely death in 1830 and growing rebellions in Upper Assam and the hill frontier brought a temporary halt to the British imperial pursuits in north-east India. The debate for restoration was once again picked up at the highest level at Calcutta. Sir Charles Metcalfe, known for his imperial pursuits in the Indian provinces, was against the proposal of restoration per se, because he considered that good governance would never be possible in Upper Assam under the Ahoms. But ultimately the Munro School of Paternalist, ably supported by Scott and Malcolm, prevailed in the final count, leading to the final restoration of Upper Assam to the Ahom royal family in

\textsuperscript{86}. N K Barooah, op. cit., pp. 128-29.
1833, headed by Purandar Singha. Unfortunately, Scott was not alive up to this time to see this most ambitious project of his lifetime in Assam from being translated into a reality, but before he died, the restoration was clearly within his sight.

Evolution of British Policy towards Assam and its hill tracts, especially Arunachal Pradesh, in those formative years from 1826-1831 was thus greatly shaped by the vision of David Scott and Neufville. Both these officers represented a crucial layer of British bureaucracy that acted as the flag-bearer of British imperialism in India. Remoteness of the province of Assam and accessibility stress of the Sadiya frontier was resolutely overtaken by the sheer zeal of these two frontier officers. Three distinct projects: consolidation of British rule in Lower Assam, restoration of Ahom rule in Upper Assam, and defence of the Sadiya frontier against any possible Burmese threat in future, dictated the basic parameters of forward policy in north-east India. Vision of trans-border trade beyond the Himalayas with China and Burma added romanticism to that zeal of imperialism in a hostile frontier.

Tribes of Arunachal Pradesh, inhabiting the foot hill zones from west to east in the north bank of Brahmaputra, and the Singphos and Khamtis of the Sadiya frontier, were also brought within the close range of imperial pursuits depending upon their historical attachment to any of the three projects mentioned above. Vigorous imperial pursuits in the Khamti and Singpho frontier in that period gave rise to the first series of protest movements in both the tribes in Arunachal Pradesh in the 1830's, but the other tribes living close to Assam border in

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87. Ibid, pp. 154-56.
88. David Scott died on 28 August, 1831 after 13 months of prolonged illness at Cherapunjee at the age of 45.
the north bank of Brahmaputra, were allowed to live in peace with the new dispensation in Assam with the same privilege of Posa, which they had been enjoying before. Vigorous pursuits in this frontier were carried out from 1834 onwards after the restoration project of Scott was given the final go-ahead in 1833.