CHAPTER III

STRUGGLE FOR ASSERTION
CHAPTER III
STRUGGLE FOR ASSERTION

Post war years (1826-31) were years of uneasy calm in Bengal's north-east frontier. Scott's mission to build Assam as the centre of a "Fourth Presidency"\(^1\) was facing serious challenges due to revenue short fall, desertion of the natives to the hills and threat of rebellion from inside, among the disgruntled nobles of Assam, and from outside, in the tribal frontier, with active support from the military war-lords of Burma. It was around this time that the question of ultimate defence of Indian Empire came under serious study at the Colonial level. The Munro school of Paternalist, comprising of Munro, Malcolm, Metcalfe, and Elphinstone,\(^2\) was of the opinion that the tenure of the British rule in India was precarious. The fear of the British losing its Indian Empire due to defence weaknesses prompted Malcolm to observe that, "India is as quite as gun powder, waiting for explosion by the chance spark of a virulent rebellion across the country."\(^3\)

A vivid account of this security concern echoes in the observations of Major General D.J.F. Newall; "Whether providence has willed our occupation of this foreign soil to be lasting, who can say? At present we have no permanent grasp of it; and regarding our future from the standpoint of historic study, it seems possible,

---
that one day may eventually arrive...... when the
great British nation, strong and firm as it may believe
itself to be, perhaps at present is, may have to
relinquish its grand Asiatic Dependency and retire
within the limits of its ocean island home.”

“In such a contingency”, Newall concluded, “What better
source to fallback on than military colonies in Himalayan and
other mountain ranges of India from which to form a Reserve
Force.”

The security concern of the Indian establishment was
very well heard in London when British Parliament discussed
the subject of renewal of Company’s Charter of India in 1832.
The tenure of the Company in India was then compared to a
“gigantic tree, its trunk and branches of vast strength, but
resting merely by pressure of its super incumbent weight
instead of having shot its roots into the earth.”5 Echo of this
imperial concern for security was also very well heard in David
Scott’s repeated warning against any attempt to annex upper
Assam with the regulated territory of Lower Assam. Time and
again, he recommended for the restoration of Upper Assam to
an Ahom Prince so that the old order can march hand in hand
with the new order. His proposal for speedy economic
development of Assam and plan for establishing military
colonies in the Eastern Himalayas, although appeared fanciful
to his superior in the 1830’s,6 it took deep root in the following
decades under the stewardship of Robertson and Francis
Jenkins. A definite policy shift towards consolidation of British
rule in India had its ramifications in the North-East frontier,

4. H.T. Prinsep, Register of The Hon'ble East India Company's Bengal Civil Servants, 1790
1842, Calcutta, 1942, p. 332.
6. Political Constitutions, 2 July, 1830, no.3.

104
which led to the beginning of a new process called “Planters’ Raj”. In the new process, the march of imperialism witnessed gradual, but at times, aggressive forward thrust up to the tribal frontier involving the hill people in the dynamics of Colonial policy and economy in a slow, but steady manner. Lord William Bentinck viewed the evolving scenario as a challenge to his reformist spirit. The Paternalists, however, considered the reform process as a means to the end of Britain’s continued connection with India. Therefore, during Bentinck’s tenure, despite his policy of strict non-intervention, a definite go-ahead was given to Scott’s vision of Imperialism in North-East India. Thus the prerogative of imperialism - “that of determining the future of a foreign people without that people really participating in or consenting to this proposed future,” became the popularly accepted dictum of the revival of imperial sentiment in British attitude towards North-East India.

The objective of this chapter is to discuss the policy shift in the post-Scott years that led to gradual consolidation of British rule in Assam and active engagement in the tribal frontier of Arunachal Pradesh. This phase (1831-73) witnessed some of the very bold moves to change the dynamics of past relationship between the hill people and the new ruling class in Assam. The process of consolidation, warranted by security concern and material pursuits of the planters’ Raj, led to a cycle of spill-over effects that gripped the frontier tribes in a battle for survival. Reactions to the new forces of change varied in a time scale from positive acceptance to violent protest, and at times, isolation in the frontier, leading to evolution of matured dominant moves from the British on a continuous basis. The

---

8. Ibid.
net result was extension of British sphere of influence up to the foot-hill zone first, and then to the central and northern zone, bordering Tibet and Burma in a slow, but steady manner, depending on the compulsions of political developments from across the international frontier and the necessity of addressing the security needs of the directly administered territory of Assam.

3.1 MOVES TOWARDS CONSOLIDATION

Imperial sentiment revived since 1828 suffered a major blow in 1831 because of the unfortunate and untimely death of David Scott at Cherapunji (after prolonged illness) at the age of 45 on 28, August 1831. His departure created a vacuum that was very difficult to bridge up as he was single-handedly looking at the affairs of North-East India since his posting at Rangpur in 1816 \(^9\) as the Commissioner of Cooch Behar and Joint Magistrate. It took some time for the Governor General Office to find a suitable person who can rightfully step into the shoe of Scott's imperialistic vision in Bengal's North-East Frontier. However, as a temporary measure W. Cracroft was deputed in September 1831 to officiate as Agent to the Governor General, North-East Frontier and Commissioner of Rangpur. Colonel Adam White was directed to assume the charge of Political Agent, Upper Assam, lying vacant since the death of Neufville.\(^{10}\)

---

\(^9\) H.T. Princep, op. cit, pp. 332-33. David Scott was born on 14\(^{th}\) of May 1786 in Scotland and died at Cherapunji on 28\(^{th}\) of August 1831 while in office. For details see, N.K. Barooah, *David Scott in North-East India*, New Delhi, 1970, Chapter-I.

\(^{10}\) Political Consultations, 5 August 1831, Nos. 19-20. White was assigned the key job to play as the chief interlocutor with the Singphos and the Khamtis in all future negotiations.
On assuming the new charge in Assam, Cracroft carried out some administrative rearrangement to facilitate the urgent necessity of giving a fresh look to the problem of the acute shortage of European Officer in such a vast administrative unit that stretches from Bengal frontier up to the hills surrounding Assam in all its sides. Six praganas of Kamrup were transferred to the jurisdiction of an officer in civil charge of North-East Rangpur. Lieutenant Rutherford was deputed to Darrang and Lt. Bogle to the newly created six praganas to investigate the causes of poor revenue realisation and poor administration in Assam.\textsuperscript{11} The task of carrying out investigation in both the districts was indeed difficult because of administrative chaos in most places. Still both Rutherford and Bogle carried out extensive tour of their respective districts and submitted their reports for necessary follow up action.

In the meantime, T.C. Robertson, who was Bentinck’s choice to lead Assam in that critical year, took over the charge of Assam from Cracroft in April 1832.\textsuperscript{12} The new Commissioner was well experienced in the field of administration. As the Civil Commissioner of Arrakan since 1825, he was very familiar with the geography and people in the north-east frontier hills. The role that he played in the peace negotiations with Burma after the First Anglo-Burmese war earned for him a distinct status among British India’s Bengal Civil Servants. It was mainly because of this distinct status that he was picked up by Bentinck to accomplish the job left half done by the untiring zeal and dedication of David Scott.

\textsuperscript{11} Political Consultations, 9 April 1932, Nos. 65-6.
\textsuperscript{12} Political Consultations, 7 May 1832, Nos. 26.
For Robertson the first major challenge was to transform Assam from a revenue-deficit to a revenue-surplus zone. But to achieve this objective administrative reorganization was considered very urgent. Survey Reports of Bogle and Rutherford was given due diligence as it highlighted the systemic mess in the area of revenue collection and maintenance of law and order. The existing confusion was also attributed to the paucity of European Officers in the region. The ignorance of those employed of the resources of the country and poor assessment and supervision of the revenue collection had left its mark in the poor revenue realization of the last four years preceding 1832. The outstanding collection was a meagre Rs. five Lakh plus in four years with hardly any prospect of the balance being realized.\textsuperscript{13} Therefore, even before the approval of the Government of Bengal reached his office, Robertson acted on his own to introduce sweeping changes in the revenue administration of Assam. The traditional Khel system was replaced by a settlement of villages in Darrang, Cachari Mahals of Nowgang and Barnagar. Collection of arrear was kept in abeyance, and an irrecoverable balance of Rupees Seventy two thousand was written off.\textsuperscript{14}

Every effort was made to encourage the ryots to return to the land they had deserted in the past. For bringing the wasteland under cultivation, rent-free allotment was given for a period of two years. Revenue settlement was made directly with the ryots based on actual land cultivated and Revenue officials were directed to exclusively devote for revenue fixation and collection. The old revenue officialdom, consisting of

\textsuperscript{13} Political Consultations, 30 May, 1833, No.93.

\textsuperscript{14} Ibid.
Choudhuris, Patwaris, and Thakurias etc., was retained without much change. They were directed to stay and work in their area of jurisdiction, and were divested of other civil duties. The Government of Bengal was very much impressed of the initiatives taken up by Robertson, and hence, accorded its approval to the new revenue measures. He was advised further on 30, May 1833 to extend the same to the remaining areas so that the benefit of reforms can be given to the ryots throughout Assam. But the problem of the districts being different from one another it was not possible to lay down a uniform format for revenue reforms. However, the policy of direct settlement with the ryots, based on amount of land actually cultivated, soil type etc., led to considerable improvement in the realization in the following years. Bogle reported in 1834 that many ryots, who had previously deserted their land in the Six Praganas of Kamrup, actually returned back to their villages. The revenue collection from Lower Assam, which stood at Rs. 183,196 in 1832-33, went up to Rs. 227,128 in 1833-34, and to Rs. 403,968 in 1837-38.

Administrative reform measures too were taken up simultaneously along with revenue reforms to bridge the gap still posing a grave danger to the stability of British administration in Assam. Acute shortage of European Officer in the province was taken up on a priority basis with Calcutta Headquarters. To justify the urgent necessity of more European Officers Robertson cited the example of his Arrakan tenure in Burma, where six European Officers were allowed,

15. Political Consultations, 23 July 1832, No. 70.
16. Revenue Consultations, 21 July 1834, Nos. 6-7.
17. Revenue Consultations, 10 July 1836, No. 77.
19. Political Consultations, 30 May 1833, No. 93.
although the area was much smaller than the division of Lower Assam. In fact, for the administration of the whole province he was then having only three European Assistants. Since the native agency had utterly failed in delivering good administration, it was thought prudent to place the province under effective supervision of European Officers.\textsuperscript{20} Considering the strategic and political importance of the new province, approval was sought from Calcutta to the proposed measures. For Lord William Bentinck it was a challenge to put his reformist spirit into action in the north-east frontier of Bengal. Therefore, even though it was initially assessed that the revenue of the province would not meet the cost of the new measures, still with some modification he accorded his approval to the proposed reform measures\textsuperscript{21}.

The first move in this direction was to divide the territories on the west of river Dhunsiri to five districts; each district placed under the charge of a Principal Assistant (P.A) to the Commissioner with the officiating power of a Judge, Magistrate and Collector. A Junior Assistant was to aid and assist the P.A. in looking after the day-to-day affairs of the civil and criminal administration in the district. Robertson designed his civil and criminal justice delivery system on the model of the Regulation in force in Bengal.\textsuperscript{22} However, to retain the ethnic identity of the province local institution like civil panchayat at Gauhati was allowed to continue.\textsuperscript{23} In Upper Assam the Restoration Project of the Scott, which received in principle clearance from Lord William Bentinck, was however, not considered to be a viable decision that would serve the need of

\textsuperscript{20} Ibid, 94-5.
\textsuperscript{21} Ibid, 110.
\textsuperscript{22} Revenue Consultations, 1 March 1836. Nos. 1-3.
\textsuperscript{23} Political Consultations, 30 July 1832, No.92.
the hour. He strongly felt that the native ruling elite cannot be trusted in Upper Assam to give peace, prosperity and stability to the province as past record provides enough inputs to this conclusion. He therefore recommended the retention of upper Assam as an integral part of Assam. But for this challenging assignment he was looking forward to the option of having more European officers in the province and suitable compensation for the members of Ahom Royal family and other ruling elites. Maintaining a frontier post at Sadiya under the supervision of a European officer was given due importance as the security scenario in that frontier was still considered grave because of the confusing movements of the Singphos and the Khamtis. But repeated uprisings in Upper Assam in the past, revenue shortfall and the unyielding attitude of the official aristocracy weighed heavily in favour of the restoration project. It was resolved in October 1832 to restore Upper Assam to a scion of the Ahom royal family on an experimental basis.24

Search for the right successor took some time, and finally on 2nd March, 1833 Robertson, on behalf of the East India Company, entered into an agreement with Purandar Singh at Gauhati.25 By this agreement, a portion of Assam, lying on the south bank of the Brahmaputra, to the east of river Dhunsiri, and on the northern bank, to the east of a small river near Bishwanath, stretching up to the western frontier of the Moamariah country of the Barsenapatli, was given to Raja Purandar Singh for which an annual tribute of Rs. 50,000/- per annum was fixed. The new Raja promised to act as a subsidiary ruler under the direct supervision of the Agent to the Governor

---

24. Political Consultations, 5 November1832, No.4.
For being faithful to the terms of the treaty the Raja was guaranteed protection from foreign aggression, but in case, violation of the terms of the treaty is observed, the East India Company reserved the right to either transfer the said territory to another ruler, or to take it into its immediate occupation.

With the restoration deal, the much-awaited consolidation process was given definite go-ahead. Robertson had the privilege to oversee the first stage of this process, which had been best visualized, but left incomplete by his predecessor, David Scott. At this stage, decision-making process at Fort William, Calcutta, witnessed some turbulent moves. Scott's vision of imperialism and restoration project was not acceptable to the Paternalist School for quite some time, but William Bentinck agreed in principle to give clearance to the consolidation process. Financial constraints in the province also compelled Robertson to lie low on any imperialist move on the whole of Assam and consented to the restoration project in upper Assam. In the meantime, when the report of the survey of Assam, Cachar and Manipur, conducted by Captain Jenkins and Pemberton reached Calcutta, the debate on transferring Upper Assam to an Ahom Prince took a different turn instantly. Resources of Upper Assam and the fluid security scenario in the Sadiya frontier were once again given priority over the consolidation process. But the compulsion before the Colonial Government to stay away from adventurism in Assam

---

26 Ibid.
27 Political Consultations, 30 May, 1833, No.88.
28 Discovery of coal, tea and petroleum in Upper Assam influenced the revenue outlook in the positive and hence led to the restoration of that part of the territory to an Ahom prince. See Ibid.
made the restoration project viable for the time being, and hence, it was considered too late to reverse the decision.²⁹

Meanwhile, looking at the economic and strategic importance of the province sweeping administrative changes was carried out in January 1834. The office of the Political Agent to the North-east frontier of Bengal and Commissioner of Rangpur was abolished. A new office was created in its place known as the Commissioner and Agent to the Governor General for Assam and North-east of Rangpur. Francis Jenkins was nominated to be the new incumbent in that office and was directed to function under the direct supervision of the Sadar Dewani Adalat and the Sadar Board of Revenue, Calcutta. In April 1834, Jenkins replaced Robertson as the new Commissioner. His intimate knowledge of the geography, resources and native institutions made him quite indispensable for the new province in those crucial years of policy shift from compulsive interference to that of gradual consolidation and expansion.

Jenkins served as the top boss for a long time in India’s north-east frontier from 1834 –1861. He played an instrumental role in that capacity in shaping the destiny of British imperialist vision in north–east.³⁰ Since his first assignment in Assam in 1831 to undertake the survey of Assam along with Lieutenant Pemberton, Captain Jenkins’ bureaucratic career took a major swing in 1834 when he was nominated as the Commissioner of Assam. In 1849 he was promoted as Major, and then as Lt. Colonel in 1851. After having a chequered career in Assam from 1831 to 1861, he retired in February 1861. For his distinguished services in Assam, he was conferred with

²⁹ Political Consultations, 22 August 1833, No.70.
honorary Major General Rank on 31, December 1861. He even spent his post-retirement years in Gauhati and expired on 28 August, 1866.\textsuperscript{31} For undertaking some bold initiatives to complete the process of annexation of Assam and expand its frontier up to the Outer Line of the hill tribes’ frontier, the period from 1834-1861 is popularly known as the “Era of Jenkins”. It was during this period that the foundation was laid down towards the extension of British sphere of influence up to the foot-hill zones of Arunachal Pradesh in the north and east of Assam. The same process was also visible in every other side of Assam’s hill frontier, which clearly indicates to the beginning of a new process to translate the imperialist vision of David Scott into reality in Assam and beyond.

3.2 ACTIVE ENGAGEMENT IN THE TRIBAL FRONTIER

Revenue reforms undertaken by T.C. Robertson in the year 1833 in Assam led to a series of follow up moves in the tribal frontier bordering Arunachal Pradesh. The replacement of the paik and khel system\textsuperscript{32} by direct settlement of villages, which was approved for the whole province by the Government of Bengal on 30, May 1833, warranted the beginning of a new process of negotiation with the chiefs of the tribes for commutation of posa to a fixed annual payment\textsuperscript{33}. Robertson was quite positive from the very beginning, like David Scott, that these tribes possessed the historical right to levy posa on

\textsuperscript{31} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{32} This system was the nucleus of the Ahom revenue administration, and was in operation in Assam since the days of Raja Pratap Singh, (1603-41); N.K. Barooah, David Scott in North-East India, New Delhi, 1970, pp. 89-91.
\textsuperscript{33} Political Consultations, 30 May, 1833, No.110.
certain specified tracts of Assam. Therefore, he directed Captain White, the Political Agent Upper Assam, to carry on negotiations with the chiefs, under which either a certain sum of money should be annually paid to them in lieu of all demands, or a certain quantity of various articles be collected for them at fixed localities. In order to streamline the revenue administration in the frontier areas he made it clear to Captain White to restrain the movement of the border tribes within a defined line for collecting personally such contributions. If persuasion failed, Robertson contemplated even to resort to coercive means to compel the chiefs to abide by the order of the Government.\footnote{Political Consultations, 20 February 1834, No.23.}

Political standoff with Bhutan over the same issue of posa since 1828\footnote{Frontier problem with Bhutan began in 1828 when Dumpa Raja of Bureeguma duar carried out the first armed raid in the village Batakuchi in North Kamrup over the issue of Posa. This problem continued up to December 1833 when a settlement was reached on terms of surrender to the British authority. For details see, R. Pemberton, \textit{A Report on Bhutan}} had also created an impression in the mind of Captain White that persuasion alone would not succeed unless and until some amount of force is used on the tribes to accept the terms of the new package. Robertson's policy of moderation was first put to test in the Bhutan frontier with success. Punitive action against the offenders was confined to sealing of the border and deployment of military guards near the hill passes. Under no circumstances, a policy of hot pursuit was considered appropriate because of the imminent hazards of a war with China and without the slightest prospect of any compensatory result.\footnote{Pemberton, \textit{Ibid}, pp. 27-8.} The option of retaliatory attack on the lowland was kept open to pressurize the Bhutanese authority to surrender the culprit and accept the terms of peace before Bureeguma duar is restored back to them. The policy of appeasement was still ruled out to force the Government of
Bhutan accept the terms of peace dictated by the new Government of Assam. The Government of Bengal accorded their approval to these measures suggested by Robertson for effecting a settlement of the dispute.  

After testing success in the Bhutan frontier, the same policy was extended to the other tribes living in the east of Bhutan in the Arunachal frontier. Nevertheless, the change in the policy of revenue management of the frontier areas during the tenure of Robertson, and later under Jenkins, was also accompanied by a soft feeling for the tribes. Recommendations of the Political Agent, and the Commissioner for commutation of posa was given due consideration. The Governor General-in-Council, in their letter dated 20th February, 1834 expressed clearly that they were not inclined in principle to have recourse to any measure that would be at variance with the conciliatory policy followed since the days of Scott towards these tribes.  

Reaction from the tribes to this policy change was in the negative from the very beginning. They were not prepared to accept anything that amounts to curtail free intercourse with the plains of Assam for collection of posa physically, and as per terms set out by them, free from interference from any outside power. It was their historical right to levy posa, and hence, they were prepared to defend it at any cost. Their legitimacy to such claims was well rooted in the days of Ahom rule when it was a well-ascertained revenue payment because of which a corresponding remission was made in the state demand upon the ryots. Every chief and every tribe knew the area to which

---

37. Ibid.
38. Political Consultations, 20 February 1834, No. 23.

116
they must look for their share, and scarcely was there a dispute as to their respective rights in the plains.  

A radical change, however, occurred during the period of civil wars and invasions in Assam, which had killed or carried away large number of pykes earmarked for the services of the hill tribes. In addition to this, the security of life and property in the border areas induced many to migrate into safer zones under the direct supervision of the British authority. As such, the entire burnt of the exactions inevitably fell on those left behind. Under these circumstances, the Posa system became oppressive for the ryots, forcing them to migrate further, thus leading to wholesale depopulation of the areas north of the district of Darrang and Lakhimpur. Still status quo was observed in the tribal frontier, as David Scott was busy in the still graver security aspects of the empire in India’s north-east frontier. He was not inclined to open yet another front in dealing with a group of hostile tribes in the north of Assam.

However, this status quo was set for a major change when Robertson carried out structural reforms to stabilize British administration in Assam. Meanwhile, the Charter granted to the East India Company in 1833 for the first time allowed Europeans to hold land outside the Presidency towns on a long-term lease, or with free hold rights. This paved the way for a “colonial plantation economy” in Assam. Different schemes for Wasteland Grants gained momentum in the border districts of Assam. Suitability of the sloppy lands of the foot-hill zones for tea cultivation suddenly made a desolate strip of highland in Assam-Arunachal frontier the most lucrative one for

40. Ibid.
the planters, who rushed to Assam in hordes since 1833. In order to promote tea cultivation in India Lord William Bentinck laid before the Council an elaborate plan in January 1834 for their consideration. Approval was given to the plan immediately as the scheme was considered a path-breaking one with potential to break the Chinese monopoly in global tea trade. As a first step, the Tea Committee was formed with G.I. Gordon as its Secretary. This committee, while exploring the possibilities of conducting experimental tea cultivation at the foot-hills of the Himalayas, the Nilgiris and the valley and hill slopes of North-east frontier, stumbled upon the chance discovery of tea bushes in its natural surrounding in the Sadiya frontier by Lt. Charlton in 1835. On enquiry, it was also ascertained that the tea shrub is cultivated for its leaves over a wide stretch of area, from the Sadiya frontier, through the Singpho tract, up to the Chinese frontier province of Yunan.\textsuperscript{42} Commissioner Jenkins made best use of this finding to highlight that Sadiya frontier can be converted as the centre of the tea industry boom for the Company in India. So fascinating was the finding that the Tea Committee lost no time to report the matter to William Macnaghten, Secretary Govt. of India and Revenue Department in the following words:

"We have no hesitation in declaring this discovery ... by far the most important and valuable that has ever been made on matters connected with agricultural or commercial resources of this Empire. We are perfectly confident that the tea plant which has been brought to light will be found capable under proper management of

\textsuperscript{42} Revenue Consultations, 7 January 1835, No.9.
being cultivated with complete success for commercial purposes."43

A scientific mission was deputed to Assam under N. Wallich, the Superintendent Botanical Gardens, Calcutta to examine the finding of tea bushes in their natural surroundings in the Sadiya frontier and its viability for commercial uses in future. Members of the Scientific Mission reached Sadiya towards the close of 1835, and to their satisfaction, they discovered various kinds of indigenous tea in their natural habitat. Samples of the tea plants were sent to Royal Botanical Society garden in London and services of C.A. Bruce as Superintendent of tea garden was retained on a salary of Rs.400 p.m. Bruce, in association with a batch of tea planters, brought to India by Gordon, commenced the manufacturing operation from his Jaypore headquarters in 1837. In the very first year of operation, he was able to manufacture twelve boxes of tea, which was despatched to Calcutta for onward transmission to England. In the next year 95 chest of black tea was produced. The Tea Committee was overwhelmed by the quality of the tea produced in Assam, which was at par with the Chinese tea in strength, pungency and astringency.44 Jenkins was committed to this silent revolution in Assam's economy from the very beginning. He initiated measures with the same spirit of dedication that we often find in David Scott to the cause of imperialism in north-east India.

The first round of success in tea production in Assam fired the imagination of the speculators in both Calcutta and London. In February 1838, the Bengal Tea Association was

43 Ibid.
formed comprising of a group of capitalist from both India and Europe. With a capital base of Rs.10 lakh, this professional body acted as the first capitalist lobby to pressurise the Government for facilitation of waste-land grants and development of related infrastructure for the purpose of tea cultivation in a commercial scale. The Secretary of the association, Prinsep, sought from the Government permission to carry on tea enterprise in association with the existing facilities run by Bruce under government supervision.45 At this stage of free enterprise in Assam a historic development took place in England. The Assam Tea Company was floated in England in 1839 with a capital of Pound 500,000 in 10,000 shares of Pound 50 each. The Bengal Tea Association formally amalgamated with the new company to provide the necessary boost to the mushrooming tea enterprise in Assam.

What followed next was the beginning of a frenzied move to get hold of waste-land lying in desolate state throughout the tribal frontier bordering Assam. Since Sadiya was the main theatre of action for the tea enterprise, land grant in the Arunachal sector, bordering Darrang and Lakhimpur districts, gained momentum first. Jenkins played the role of the smart facilitator in the entire process, while his predecessor, T.C. Robertson, now a senior Member of the Council, did his best to clear the apprehension of the Government on the possible negative effects of such enterprises in the tribal frontier. In the year, 1840 the Assam Tea Company started its operation from Nazira with terms and conditions to confine its operation to the Mattak country until further order.46 By 1843 the Tea Company was able to declare a dividend of three percent to their share.

45. Ibid.
46. Ibid, p. 249.
holders. With further liberalization in the new rules to the waste-land grants in 1842, more private planters rushed into Assam to try their fortune in Assam. This process bestowed on the Government the responsibility to act swiftly in the tribal frontier for guarantying security to the planters and to ensure that the free movement of the frontier tribes to Assam for collecting posa is restricted forthwith.

The entire process led to the beginning of a new phase of interaction with the tribes of Arunachal frontier, leading to collapse of status quo first, conflict and peace treaty for commutation of posa in the second stage, and finally, extension of the frontier of the regulated province up to the foot-hills of Arunachal Pradesh in a phased manner. For the convenience of study, tribes of Arunachal Pradesh have been dealt below from west to east.

3.2.1 POSA AGREEMENT WITH MONPAS AND SHERDUKPENS

In the extreme north-western frontier of Arunachal Pradesh, and to the East of Bhutan, lay the settlement of the Monpas and Sherdukpons. By virtue of a chequered career of conquest in Assam during the days of Ahom crisis, they had earned for themselves the right to levy posa in Kuriapara duar, and Char duar. In the British records, these tribes are often mentioned as Extra-Bhutan Bhutias because of their physical and cultural similarities with that of the Bhutias of Bhutan proper. They were mainly divided into three principal groups: the Sat Rajas of Kuriapara duar, the Thebenga Bhutias (Bengia)
and the Sat Rajas of Char duar.\textsuperscript{47} The Kuriapara duar, located to the east of Bureeguma duar, and in the north of Darrang district of Assam, was frequented by the Sat Rajas (seven chiefs). From the Darrang register of stipendiary chiefs and from the treaty edited by C.U. Aitchison, it appears that seven chiefs were in receipt of posa from the Kuriapara duar and Char duar.\textsuperscript{48} The subordination of the Sat Rajas to the Governor of Tawang, and the continuation of ecclesiastical control of the Dalai Lama of Lasha over Tawang, made this tract politically very sensitive since the Ahom days\textsuperscript{49}. From trade point of view, this tract was of immense importance to both the Ahoms and the Tibetans. Walter Hamilton mentioned in his report that, “at a place called Chouna, two months journey from Lasha, on the confines of two states there is a mart established, and on the Assam side, there is a similar mart at Gegunshur, distant four miles from Chouna. An annual caravan repairs from Lasha to Chouna.... conveying silver bullion to the amount of one lakh of rupees and a considerable quantity of rock salt for sale to the Assam merchants at Gegunshur.” \textsuperscript{50}

In 1809, this trade amounted in value to two lakh of rupees even though Assam was then in the midst of political turmoil. The imports from Tibet in the shape of woollens, gold dust, salt, musk, horses, cowries and Chinese silk were especially noticeable. Prolonged political turmoil in Assam since the days of Mughal invasion, and Moamaria rebellions affected this trade badly. Still in the year before the Burmese invasion, the Lasha merchants were said to have brought down gold

---
\textsuperscript{47} North and North-Eastern Frontier Tribes of India, Complied by Intelligence Branch of the Chief of Army Staff, H. Q. India, Delhi, 1983, pp.161-62.
\textsuperscript{49} A. Mackenzie, The North-East Frontier of India, Delhi, 1989, p.16.
\textsuperscript{50} Walter Hamilton’s “Report on the Kingdom of Assam, 1820,” reproduced in N.N. Acharya, Historical Documents, op. cit, p.43.
amounting in value of Rs.70,000. In recognition of the trading relationship and as a token of good neighbourliness a “peish cush,” or offering is sent annually from Assam Raja to the Grand, or Dalai Lama, but no other public intercourse, with the exception of commerce above described, appears to subsist between Tibet and Assam states. Ever since Captain Welsh’s expedition to Assam, the trans-border trade of the Monpas had caught the attention of the British. David Scott’s primary concern to restore peace and security in the tribal frontier after the First Anglo-Burmese war convinced him to continue with the status quo in the Kuriapara duar. The Monpas were allowed to collect posa from the Assamese villages earmarked for them since the Ahom times.

To the east of Kuriapara duar, in between river Rowta and Bharali, lay Char duar over which the Sat Rajas of the Sherdukpen tribe of Rupa and Shergaon area of the Kameng frontier enjoyed the right to posa since the Ahom days. David Scott recognised this posa claim over Char duar too, and as a matter of precedent prevalent since Ahom times, allowed retention of British control over the duar for four months every year, from July to November. A remission of eight anas of land tax was granted to the pykes to meet the requirement of the Sherdukpen chiefs. The Thebenga Bhutias, referring to an eastward branch of the Monpas, also enjoyed the right to posa from Char duar along with the Sherdukpons. The trading activity of the Thebengas and Sherdukpons was extremely

51 A. Mackenzie, op. cit, pp.15-6.
52 Walter Hamilton’s Report, op.cit., p. 43.
53 L. Devi, op. cit, pp. 199-201.
54 Political Consultations, 18 July, 1836, No. 76.
55 Ibid.
limited as Char duar trade had a narrow conduit to serve the needs of interior tribes like the Akas and the Bangins.

Keeping in view the strategic and commercial importance of this tract, proposal for commutation of posa was first initiated with the Monpas of Kuriapara duar in 1838 by Captain Vetch, the Collector of Darrang. The agreement, he suggested, should provide for recognition of the British authority up to the foot of the hills and the right of the British army to march through their hills, should that be necessary at any point of time. The proposal further stressed that the Monpas should not allow criminals to settle or seek asylum in their hills and should not violate the British territory.56

The terms of references of the proposal was considered too harsh for the chiefs enjoying posa rights over the Kuriapara duar, and hence, was rejected in the first sight.57 In response the District authority of Darrang tightened border vigilance and imposed restrictions on the free access of the tribe to the plains of Assam for trade and other purposes. Growing divide in the perception over commutation of posa reached a flash point in 1843-44, when the chiefs carried out raids in Kuriapara duar in a rage of anger and frustration and with the motive of taking revenge on those ryots who sought protection under the British for the purpose of seeking exemption from payment of posa. Continuing with the policy of active engagement in the frontier an economic blockade was imposed on the Monpas. The impact of this blockade was so painful for the tribe that in the same year the Tawang Deb sent three of his agents along with the local chiefs to negotiate a peaceful settlement with the British. After several round of discussion an agreement was finally

54. Foreign Political Proceedings, 12 September, 1838, Nos. 64-85.
57. Ibid, 6 June, 1838, No. 48.
signed by which the Monpas agreed to receive annually Rs. 5,000 as their commuted posa claim in Kuriapara duar. They also conceded to recognise the British frontier up to the foot hills and were bound by the agreement to desist from all sorts of criminal activities within the jurisdiction of the British administration. After the signing of this agreement friendly intercourse and commercial activities was restored, thus marking the beginning of a new phase of peaceful engagement in the Monpa frontier.

With the Sherdukpen and the Eastern Monpas, frequenting Char duar, proposal for commutation of posa for cash payment was initiated by Captain Matthie, the Collector and Magistrate for Darrang district. In his opinion, the collection of posa by the tribes was detrimental to the peace and prosperity of the duars. Moreover, with the abolition of the Khel system in Central Assam in 1834-35 the operation of the posa system became extremely difficult to maintain in its original form. Captain Matthie was also greatly concerned about the increasing number of anomalies brought to his notice by the village headmen of Char duar concerning the arbitrary collections by the tribes. He therefore initiated dialogue with the Sat Rajas which resulted in a negotiated settlement, signed by the chiefs in 1836. By this treaty the Sherdukpen agreed to receive annual compensation of Rs. 2526-7 as their commuted posa claim in Char duar and conceded to abide by the other terms and conditions of the treaty relating to peace and security in the frontier. The Thebenga Bhutias also signed the peace

---

59 Ibid, p.146.
agreement with Captain Matthie and accepted the commutation of their posa claim to Rs. 145-13-0.\textsuperscript{60}

After the signing of the posa agreement it was greatly hoped that bilateral relations with the tribes would improve for the better. But the course of events took a different turn with the deterioration of peace in the Bhutan frontier. A series of murders and plundering raids along the Bhutan frontier compelled Jenkins to order for the sealing the border for the Bhutias. However, kuriapara duar was exempted from any punitive action.\textsuperscript{61} In the meantime the murder of the Patgiri of Orung mauza on 24 April, 1839 drastically changed the perception of Jenkins towards the Bhutias of Kuriapara duar and Char duar. In order to prevent the contiguous effect of the Bhutan frontier from reaching their eastern neighbours in the Arunachal frontier punitive measures were initiated against the Monpas and the Sherdukpons. Posa payment was withheld, and the border was sealed to compel the tribe surrender the culprits, involved in the murder of the Patgiri. The stand-off was resolved when Dorjee Raja of Char duar represented to Gordon, Principal Assistant at Darrang, that the whole tribe should not be punished for the crime of a few.\textsuperscript{62} Convinced by the logic behind the argument Gordon recommended to Jenkins about the need of lifting all restrictions on Char duar. But for the frontier tribes the posa agreement of 1836 was revised and the amount of posa further reduced to Rs.1760 per annum. To promote better relations, and to put a stop to the wandering habit of the tribes in the duars a number of hats were set up at Orung, Lohabari, and Balipara. Once again an attempt was

\textsuperscript{60} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{62} Foreign Political Proceedings, 20 April, 1844, No.27.
made to revive the commercial traffic between Assam and Tibet through the Kuriapara duar and Char duar.

Prevailing peace in the Monpa frontier was disturbed once again at Kuriapara duar in 1852, when one of the Sat Rajas, known as Gelling, who had been entrusted with supervisory authority by the Tawang Deb, took advantage of his position and intercepted the posa money, paid by the British authority for the tribe. To punish the Gelling, troops were sent with sanction from authority at Tawang and Lasha which created a war-like situation in that frontier. Security concern in that frontier further worsened when the Gelling fled to the British territory seeking shelter on plea of innocence.\(^63\) The aggressive posture of the Monpas on the issue of the extradition of the Gelling, or threat of war for giving shelter to the fugitive, led to closure of Kuriapara duar for the tribe. However, resumption of negotiation in the same year led to restoration of peace and grant of immunity to the Gelling and his followers for the fraud committed in the past.\(^64\) In the following years acts of revenge continued on the Gelling and his followers until the Gelling was finally murdered in the cold-blood at Kuriapara duar by his rivals in 1864.\(^65\)

This act of violence within the British jurisdiction created a stir in the district administration at Darrang. A strong-arm policy was soon contemplated to bring the offenders to the book. But the new Commissioner in Assam, Henry Hopkinson,\(^66\) was not in favour of such a tough line of action against a frontier tribe that has so far done very little to disturb the peace

\(^{63}\) A. Mackenzie, op. cit, p.16.
\(^{64}\) Ibid, p. 17. For details see the text of the treaty signed on 28the January, 1853 in the said source.
\(^{65}\) Bengal Political Proceedings, October 1864, Nos, 18-21.
\(^{66}\) Henry Hopkinson Succeeded Jenkins in February 1861 as the Agent to the Governor General, North-Eastern Frontier.
in the frontier. Meanwhile, the involvement of the British in a series of military action in the Jayantia, Naga and the Bhutan frontier from 1860-64 created serious constraints for the deployment of troops in yet another frontier adjacent to Bhutan. However, looking at the prolonged dispute with the Monpas over the issue of protection granted to the Gelling, it was decided as a matter of policy not to allow political refugees to live near the frontier.⁶⁷ Conciliatory policy of Hopkinson was applied to Kuriapara duar with great success. Commercial traffic flourished in the Udalguri-Lasha tract once again which gave the necessary boost to the friendly intercourses with the Monpas in the following decades.

3.2.2 POSA SETTLEMENT IN AKA FRONTIER

The Akas inhabit the hilly terrain north of Char duar and eastward of the Monpas and the Sherdulpens. With the alliance of the Mijjis, a powerful and cognate race in the interior, the Akas had long defied the authority of the Tawang Deb in the Kameng frontier. Two important clans of the Akas figure prominently in the Ahom-British records. They were: the Hazarikhowas and Kapachors. The literal meaning of the terms in Assamese makes it explicit that the first clan was in receipt of posa from over a thousand houses, and the second clan was a powerful group, who kept the Assamese ryots of Char duar in perpetual fear and enjoyed free gift of cotton from them along with other items of posa. In fact, negative perception of the Ahom ruling class about the said two groups of the Aka tribe

⁶⁷ Bengal Political Proceedings, October 1864, No. 21.
had led in the past to the origin of these epithets which finds mention in the Ahom and British records.

As a matter of policy in relation to the tribes of the north-east frontier, the British Government in Assam, after the First Anglo-Burmese war, continued with the status quo on matters of posa practice prevailing in the Aka frontier. The Hazarikhowa Akas were allowed to collect posa from Char duar, but the Kapachor Akas were prevented from carrying forward their practice of collecting forcible exactions from the Khels of Char duar. The extension of police regulation up to the foot hills of the Darrang district even made their free entry and exit to and fro in Assam for trade and other purposes extremely difficult. The reaction of the aggrieved Akas to these police measures was clear defiance of the restrictions put on them. They continued their earlier practice of forcible collections and raids on those ryots, who refused to abide, under the leadership of their chief Taghi Raja. However, in 1829 in consequence of an inter-clan feud among the Akas, Taghi Raja and his followers fled to Assam to seek refuge, but for his past offences he was held guilty and lodged in the Gauhati jail.

In 1832 as a gesture of goodwill and conciliatory policy, Taghi Raja was released from prison with the expectation that he will act as an agent in bringing his tribe into good terms with the British administration in Assam. In the following years the prime focus of the local authority was to commute the posa claim of the Hazarikhowa Akas into cash payment. Negotiations with the Hazarikhowas yielded positive result. Without much resistance they agreed in 1835 to receive an

---

68. Bengal Political Proceedings, 13 March 1835, Nos. 7-8.
69. Ibid.
70. Foreign Proceedings (Assam), March 1885, No. 40.
annual payment of Rs. 175 as their commuted posa claim at Char duar. Exclusion of the Taghi Raja in the process of negotiations prompted his clan to resort to revenge action against the ryots adjacent to their frontier.\textsuperscript{71} In a daring raid on the police outpost at Balipara, Taghi Raja and his followers killed seventeen persons, including the Havildar, the Naik, several sepoys, their women and children.\textsuperscript{72}

To take stock of the situation Lieutenant Matthie rushed along with Jenkins to Balipara. Considering the hostility of the tribe and the inaccessibility of their hills it was decided that military action would not be feasible in apprehending the culprit. Therefore, it was considered prudent to strengthen the guards at Balipara, Orung, Gorakuchi and Borgaon. Strict vigil was kept on the frontier, and Taghi Raja and his followers were declared outlaws. Reward was announced for the head of the chief or for any information leading to his apprehension. The ryots of Char duar were also warned of serious consequences for assisting the offenders in any form.\textsuperscript{73}

Despite strict vigil on the border Taghi Raja and his followers continued to collect posa at Borchapari, Mazbat and Noamati. Matthie was no doubt concerned about the impossibility of keeping surveillance on such a long and hostile frontier with an extremely limited police force, yet he had no other option at the time than to act on the defensive strategy outlined for the frontier. In the meantime, the murder of Madhu Saikia and his family, the Patgiri (an influential revenue officer) at Orung on 11 April, 1835 compelled Jenkins to review the security arrangement in that frontier. To the shock and surprise

\textsuperscript{71} Political Consultations, 13 March 1835, No. 7.
\textsuperscript{72} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{73} Political Consultations (Secret), 4 May 1835, No. 2.
of the local administration, the murder took place at a place which is barely 50 yards from the police outpost at Orung. This incident clearly revealed that the frontier guards were helplessly weak and were unable to afford protection to the Assamese ryots in the low-lands of the foot-hills. Matthie himself admitted that, "over an area of 400 sq. miles, 15 or 20 sepoys would serve no other purpose than that of keeping surveillance over tigers and jackals." 

Punitive military action was seriously considered at this stage, but onset of the rainy season and the lack of European Officers for leading the combing operation, forced Jenkins to defer military operation till the next winter. In the meantime, border guard posts were reinforced and a general blockade was imposed on Char duar, forbidding all the tribes from posa and trade benefits in that area. Intelligence report also pointed to the fact that in the murder of Madhu Saikia Tagi Raja's involvement was found to be undisputed, but no less responsible were the Hazarikhowas and some Nyishis in the execution of the whole plot. In consequence, the progress so far made in settling the posa claim of the Hazarikhowas was stalled forthwith. Total absence of any goodwill gesture from the Hazarikhowas explaining their non-involvement in the whole affair also gave good reason to believe that the Taghi Raja, by his energy and daring raids, had made him at this time the undisputed chief of both the clans of the Akas, and had also wielded influence even over the neighbouring Nyishis. For seven years since 1835 this successful rebel haunted the border

---

74 Political Consultations, 3 August 1835, No.3.
75 Ibid.
76 Foreign Proceedings (Assam), March 1885, No. 40.
Government in all its endeavours to preserve peace in the frontier.\textsuperscript{80} On 30\textsuperscript{th} March another agreement was signed by which the trade of the Akas was regulated in the established markets in Lohabari and Balipara. By this agreement three other chiefs also committed themselves to the terms of peace and agreed to receive an annual sum of Rs.120 as their commuted Posa claim.\textsuperscript{81}

The offer of negotiation was also extended to other Aka chiefs and the benefits of peaceful engagement and trade was impressed upon them through the friendly chiefs. As a result, a number of other chiefs came down to settle their claims with the Deputy Commissioner of Darrang. In February, 1844 Captain Gordon, D.C. Darrang, granted annual pension to Chengkolee, Singing kandoor, Narsoo and Sarsoo chiefs. Again in 1848 he further granted six more annual pensions to Srigi, Barsoo, Kangsoon Passoo, Dekoks and Dheno chiefs. The Hazarikhowas, who had long defied the British since 1835, came to peaceful terms in 1844 only.\textsuperscript{82} With this peace and tranquillity returned to the Aka Frontier. The total amount of pension, then fixed at Rs.360 per annum, was later on raised Rs.668 on representation by the chiefs.

However, trouble erupted once again in April 1857, when the Akas refused to accept their annual pension demanding a further increase on account of price hike. Backed by the consolidation of its gains in Assam, the British Government this time was in a strong position to dictate its terms on the Akas. Imposition of economic blockade, suspension of trade and

\textsuperscript{80} Foreign Political Proceedings,30 March, 1842, Nos. 112-16.


\textsuperscript{82} See the text of the treaty with the Hazarikhowa Aka Chiefs in Ibid, pp.138-39, also, N.N. Acharya's \textit{Historical Documents}, op. cit, pp. 214- 16.
sealing of the frontier once again pressed the tribe so hard that they came down in early 1859 and sued for pardon. By September 1860 all restrictions were lifted, and the posa, suspended so far, was paid with all arrears at the rate prevailing before the outbreak of the trouble.\textsuperscript{83} So in a good-will gesture, the Government also granted 18 puras of land to the Hazarikhowas for the reconstruction of a temple at Char duar. Volatility revisited the Aka frontier only in 1872-73, when the Boundary Commission led by Lt. Col. Graham attempted to survey the Aka frontier to draw the Inner Line for the Darrang district. This move was vehemently opposed by the tribe as it was perceived as a measure of transgression into their exclusive domain, leading to the beginning of a phase of active engagement in the immediate aftermath.

3.2.3 INTERACTION IN THE NYISHI FRONTIER

In the Subansiri frontier, the numerous, but cognate tribe of Nyishis, with extensive habitat from the hills, to the east of Bhorali river and to the mountains on the east of Ranga river, interacted with the British administration from a historical background quite distinct from their neighbouring brethrens. Throughout the Ahom days they had a career of aggressive push into the plains of Assam, which inspired awe and hatred, leading to the genesis of the epithet, the Daflas, meaning unfriendly. In the Ahom and British records they are mentioned as Daflas, a tribe although heterogeneous in composition, yet the most powerful and capable of inflicting terrible reprisals on

\textsuperscript{83} Political Proceedings(Assam), June 1880, No. 55-6.
their enemy. In the post-colonial era, the term Dafla has been replaced by the generic name of Nyishis as a measure of seeking an honourable identity for the whole tribe.

The unsavoury description of this tribe by the Assamese on the wake of the British intervention is Assam in 1824 left a preliminary impression in the mind of David Scott that the Nyishis were one of the most virile and savage tribe in Assam’s northern frontier. Their complicity with the Burmese in pillaging the low-lands of Assam incensed Scott to propose the first defensive measure against them by settling numerous Burmese Shans, held as prisoners of wars, in lower Assam. Their right to posa from Char duar in Darrang district and Noa duar and Chai duar in Lakhimpur district was recognized by Scott to prevent them from making further incursions into the plains of Assam. Although Scott was not reconciled to the continuation of this ill-regulated practice of ‘blackmail’ by the Nyishis and other tribes of Arunachal Pradesh, his immediate concern for restoring peace and order in Assam on the wake of the expulsion of the Burmese compelled him to allow the status quo (the tribal rights to posa) in the Nyishi frontier.

With the gradual consolidation of British rule in Assam and with the abolition of pyke and khel system it became a matter of political and economic necessity to regulate the collection of posa by the tribe. Lt. J. Matthie, officiating Magistrate and Collector of Darrang district, reported in early 1835 that “the mountain tribes on its (Darrang) northern

---

85. Keeping in view the tribe’s rejection to the term Daflas, the term Nyishi has been used in the thesis in spite of documentary references to the term Daflas in the British official records.
86. N.K. Barooah, op. cit, p.117.
87. Foreign Political Proceedings, 20 February, 1834, Nos. 22-4.
frontier, viz. the Bhutias, Akas and Daflas are allowed to collect blackmail from the ryots ....... If we still acknowledge their right to a portion of our revenue, it should be paid in cash for so long as the preset system remains in force. I conceive, after what I have witnessed, that the realization of the Government demand is doubtful, and the lives and property of our subjects in great jeopardy." The court of Directors had an open mind on this issue, which was reflected in their letter instructing Robertson not to stop the posa altogether, but to carry on negotiation with the hill tribes towards its regulation and commutation to cash payment.

Captain Matthie was entrusted the responsibility of opening negotiation with the Nyishis of Char duar. Initially the tribe displayed no interest to accept the new formulation, and remained adamant on their traditional right of posa collected in person from the Assamese ryots. The local administration was firmly against the assertive attitude of the tribe but coercive measure was considered unwarranted at this stage because of the absence of any form of violence in that frontier. However, in 1835 the complicity of the Nyishis of Char duar in the murder of Madhu Saikia, Patgiri of Orung, was suspected, and as a part of retributive action the border of Char duar was sealed to all the frontier tribes descending for trade and commerce. In retaliation, the Nyishis undertook a daring raid on 17 December, 1835 and carried away a number of Assamese as captives from Char duar. The Officer in charge Baliapara, on receipt of information, swept into action and prevented the Nyishis from further loot and plunder. To punish the offenders

---

88. Letters received from Bengal, F-No.298. B.G. of 1835; See also, M.L. Bose, British Policy In North-East Frontier Agency, (New Delhi, PP. 60 - 1.
89. Ibid.

136
a military operation was successfully conducted deep inside the Nyishi hill frontier, which resulted in the capture of two chiefs and release of nine captives abducted by them.\textsuperscript{90}

The strong-arm policy and the swift action of the local administration yielded positive result. To negotiate on behalf of the captured chiefs, a number of chiefs of neighbouring clans came down and approached for peace. Eight chiefs signed a revised agreement by which they agreed to resign the right of collecting posa directly from the ryots and consented to receive the articles of posa in future from the Malgoozar, or revenue officer of the villages according to the revised tariff rate.\textsuperscript{91} They undertook not to aid the enemies of the British and not to take the law into their own hand. Any outstanding grievance was to be referred to the local Magistrate and a chief was to live on the plains near the Magistrate to be a medium of communication and to represent their interest.\textsuperscript{92} The amount of posa, which was earlier fixed at one broad cloth, a coarse area sheet, one handkerchief, one gamcha, one dao, two seer of salt and one black cow from every ten house, was now reduced to one broad cloth, one gamcha, one dao and two seer of salt in view of the altered situation arising out of the migration of a number of ryots (often mentioned as Bohoteah) to safer zones. Five other chiefs of Char duar negotiated with Lt. Vetch, P.A. Darrang, and finally signed the revised treaty on 5\textsuperscript{th} April, 1837.\textsuperscript{93} The terms and conditions of the treaty remained the same. With this, Char duar was restored to peace and tranquillity in the "Dalla-Bohoteah Khels".\textsuperscript{94}

\textsuperscript{90} Political Consultations, 3 August, 1835, No. 3.
\textsuperscript{91} Foreign Political Proceedings, 18 July, 1836, Nos. 76-8.
\textsuperscript{92} See the text of the treaty in Barpujari, op. cit. Vol. I, p. 123.
\textsuperscript{93} Political Consultations, 8 May, 1837, No.62.
\textsuperscript{94} Implies the Khels / Pykes allotted to serve the Nyishis on whom a remission of the
With the Nyishis of Noa duar and Chái duar offers towards the regulation of posa claims through the local revenue officers were made by Lt. Vetch, although in his opinion, the British Government was under no treaty obligation to do so. David Scott's agreement with Nyishis regarding the payment of posa was only confined to Char duar, but the practice prevailing in Noa duar and Chái duar since the days of Ahoms decline, made it mandatory on the part of the frontier administrators to take stock of the situation on the basis of reality on the ground, just not on the basis of treaty rights signed by the Ahoms. In the assessment of Jenkins, as open enemies the Nyishis might not be very formidable, but they were inaccessible and capable of doing greater harm by devastating inroads on the plains in comparison with which the amount of blackmail payable to them was insignificant.95

Major White, political Agent, Upper Assam was directed by Jekins to proceed with the scheme of regulating posa in Noa duar and Chái duar. In 1835 when the matter was taken up with the chiefs of Noa duar and Chái duar, the response was in the negative. The Nyishis considered the acceptance of revised schemes as humiliating surrender of their traditional rights and privileges in the plains of Assam. They were also suspicious of the intention of the British Government in the areas of their sole preserve. The role of the interpreters was considered very crucial in appraising the chiefs that acceptance of the revised agreement would not amount to any loss in their privileges. Initially Vetch's task was formidable, not only because of the insinuence of the chiefs, but also partly because of the

95 Barpujari, op. cit, Vol. 1 , p.125.
misinterpretation of the terms and conditions to the tribe by the interpreters, who had a vested interest in upholding the earlier system.

Failure to convince the chiefs towards the settlement of posa claims led the political Agent to impose economic blockade on the Nyishis of Noa duar and Chai duar. Tightening of border vigilance and advance of military guard post up to the foot-hills finally yielded tangible result. On 9th April, 1837 chiefs of Noa duar agreed to abandon collection of posa from house to house, and instead, agreed to receive the revised posa amount in kind from the Kotokis. They were also bound by the other terms and conditions guaranteeing peace and security in their frontier.96 A number of chiefs inhabiting the hills north of Noa duar, who considered the Assamese pykes of their nearest duars as their hereditary slaves, remained intransigent and resorted to forcible collections in spite of warning by frontier officials. In 1838-39 their rapacity reached such terrible proportion that Vetch was forced to propose military action against them.97 In the meantime, the hard reality of the economic blockade in force brought them into terms.

The problem in the Nyishi frontier was mainly because of the heterogeneity of the tribe. Divided into numerous clans and each clan having sometimes five to six independent chiefs, the Nyishis had a common problem of lacking united action.98 The poverty in their hills also forbade them from withstanding the consequence of economic blockade for a longer period. They could not even risk antagonizing the local administration by taking resort to violence in areas under British jurisdiction. As

96 Political Consultations, 15 May, 1837, No. 10.
97 Political Proceedings, 13 May, 1839, Nos. 10-1.
such, the Nyishi frontier remained violence free throughout and the clan chiefs were amenable to little pressure exerted through economic and military blockades. This process of flexing muscles from both the sides continued as long as the amount of posa remained flexible and linked to the areas of land cultivated, and the number of ryots present in the Nyishi khels. For the tribe, the amount of posa collected was not only a matter of traditional rights and cultural ego, but also the means of their survival. Existing anomalies in the posa collection and payment was finally brought to an end when on the orders of the Court of Directors, the posa amount, so far paid in kind, was commuted to fixed cash payment in 1852.99 On the basis of the outstanding statement from the revenue mahals, duars, the list of ryots and the list of Nyishis chiefs enjoying posa privileges, prepared by Brajanath Bharali Barua in 1841, Col. Dalton and Lt. Biver prepared a modified list in 1852, excluding those who did not claim their posa in the past. A list of 238 chiefs was prepared encompassing the four revenue mahals and nine duars: the Chai duar mahals consisting of Nakrang, Boranga, and Bar duars; the Banskata mahal, comprising of Kadurahat, Dalahat, Mahalat and Ohat duars; the Lakhimpur mahal, comprising of Manomati duars and the Phulpani duars of Bordolini duars.100 In 1852 the amount of posa to these 238 chiefs stood at Rs. 2,543. In the next year the remaining chiefs of Char duar and Noa duar were also covered, bringing the total amount of posa payable in 1853-54 to Rs.4,129-15 anas and 11 paisa.101 Besides, 234 maunds of salt (in lieu of hat dues) right

of fishing and gold washing, a diet allowance of Rs.5 and 26 bottles of rum were also annually paid to them.102

With the posa claim settled amicably through a process, acceptable to the majority of the chiefs in the Nyishi frontier, lasting peace returned to the duars, thus giving enough scope to the British authority in the Darrang district to redesign their political strategy in the Nyishi hills, north of the duars, in the years ahead. However, in 1870 on account of two Nyishi raids in Darrang district frontier, the collision course commenced once again leading to the imposition of military and economic blockade and the suspension of posa for the suspected chiefs. On enquiry, it was found that the first raid occurred in consequence of an attempt to recover on absconding slave. The second raid was exclusively a case of inter-clean feud, in which the dishonesty of one chief in dishonouring the marriage of his daughter and his refusal to return the bride-money played a crucial role in contemplating a raid on the offending chief.103 This raid was carried out after all the means to get justice from the Deputy Commissioner of Darrang was exhausted. In 1872-73 yet another raid occurred in which the Nyishis of an interior hill pocket carried off some Nyishis of a plain village as captives allegedly on the belief that the later were the cause of an epidemic in their village.104 Thus the Nyishi frontier, so far quite, gradually relapsed to turbulence and continued in that state from the 70's onwards, not because of the complete collapse of security arrangement in that frontier, but mainly because of the occurrence of stray violence here and there on

104. Ibid, pp. 31-2.

141
which neither the tribe nor the Local Administration had any control.

3.2.4 SETTLEMENT WITH THE ADIS, MIRIS AND HILL MIRIS

In the Siang frontier interactions with the frontier tribes started late, but assumed vigorous proportion once the dimensions of their interest was known to either side. The numerous, but cognate tribe of the Adis, with their extensive habitat in the lofty hills between river Subansiri and Siang, were first visited by Bedford and Wilcox in 1825-26. The impressions left in the memoir of Wilcox outlines the Adis as a very hospitable and a social race.\textsuperscript{105} J. M’ Cosh’s report on Assam (1837), also reiterates the aforesaid impression.\textsuperscript{106} South of the Adis, in the foot-hills and low-lands near the Siang frontier lay the scattered habitat of the Miris, who had since long been enslaved by their northern neighbours; the Adis. With the restoration of peace and order in Assam (after 1826) the Miris had offered themselves to live within British jurisdiction as British subjects. To the west of the Adis, and north of the cultivable tracts of Bordoloni, Sisi and Dhemaji moujas of Lakhimpur district, lay the settlements of the Hill Miris. They had a right to posa since Ahom days, but the British political relations with them had been so satisfactory that there had

\textsuperscript{105} R. Wilcox, “Memoir of a Survey of Assam and the Neighbouring Countries, (executed in 1825-6-7-8),” \textit{Asiatic Researches}, 1832, Vol. XVII, Relevant extract reproduced in V. Elwin (ed.), \textit{India’s North-East Frontier}, op. cit., pp.219-221.

been no adverse comment against them in the administrative reports of the past years.\textsuperscript{107}

From 1825 onwards the basic pattern of British relationship with these tribes in the Siang frontier was guided by the historical background prevailing in that frontier since the Ahom days. Two prominent groups of the Adis; the Padams and Minyongs, divided among themselves into a number of clans, had the distinct advantage in the past of wielding considerable influence on the Miris of the low-lands and the Beeha (gold washers) settlements on the banks of river Dibang and Siang. They had, however, no direct approach to the plains of Assam in the Lakhimpur district. As such, they had no direct claim of posa on the Assamese pykes of that frontier. However, they had claim of absolute sovereignty over the Miris of the plains and on inalienable right to all the fish and gold found in the river Siang. The Miris on their part had also acknowledged the Adis as their masters, and had quite readily accepted their position as intermediaries between the hill-men and the Assamese traders.\textsuperscript{108} It was on the whole a profitable profession, and more so, while the unsettled state of Assam under its native government had made simple agriculture a somewhat precarious pursuit. The Assamese Government also, anxious to conciliate their highland neighbours, had long since relieved these Miris of all revenue charges, acknowledging thereby the subjection of that tribe to the Adis, whose interpreters they were officially recognized to be.\textsuperscript{109}

The frequency of hostile interaction during the Ahom days and its typical pattern, marked by the persistence of political

\textsuperscript{107} Michell, op. cit., pp. 246-47.
\textsuperscript{108} Mackenzie, Op. cit., p. 34.
\textsuperscript{109} Ibid, p. 35.
problem in that frontier, had led to the origin of the appellation 'Abor' in the past, and it was by this name that the tribe was known to the outside world till the end of British era. In fact, the appellation was so popular during Ahom days that many other powerful interior hill tribes were also branded as 'Abor Daflas', 'Abor Nagas' etc. In the post-Raj period, this appellation, considered derogatory by the tribe, has been rejected, and suitably replaced by the generic name of Adis, meaning Hill men.

Since direct collection of posa from Assamese ryots was not prevalent in the Adi frontier, the tribe was kept outside the purview of initial posa engagement which was taken up with priority by David Scott to achieve the immediate objective of peace and security in Assam's tribal frontier. The hill Miris, on the other hand, agreed to the initial overtures of the local administration and signed posa engagements by which their claim was commuted to annual payments of Rs.2, 244-12 anas and 8 paisa. A number of chiefs from prominent groups like; Ghesi Miris, Sarak Miris, Panibotia and Tarbatia Miris, were also in the habit of coming down regularly to collect posa from the Collector, Lakhimpur district. They had also been exceptionally hospitable to the visit of Captain Maxwell and Col. Dalton to their villages in 1845. When the survey of Subansiri river was undertaken, there was considerable doubt on its feasibility, but colonel Woodthorpe received in contrast a very

111. Despite the occurrence of the term 'Abor' in the Ahom and British records, I prefer to use the term 'Adi' in my thesis because the term Abor is fast becoming a misnomer at present.
warm and cordial reception from the Hill Miris. In recognition of their consistent good neighbourliness the 1928 publication of the Balipara and Sadiya frontier Tract Gazetteer affirms that: they are well-behaved and have never given us any trouble. We have always been on most friendly terms with them. The posa ......... , which we pay to them is more perhaps of a charity ... we pay on the North-East frontier.\textsuperscript{114}

The years of turmoil in Brahmaputra valley in the 1820’s, unleashed waves of political change, which swept away in its wake the last legacy of the defunct Ahom government. In the Adi frontier, the status quo in bilateral relations existing between the Adis and Miris, also underwent tremendous change in the same period whereby large number of Miris preferred to migrate to the safer zones in Assam in order to escape the burden of posa payment to the Adis. The adverse economic impact of the Miris’ migration prompted a number of Adi chiefs to intensify their movements in the plains of Assam in search of their subordinates. In February 1830 captain Neufville took precautionary note of the movement of this tribes, and as a measure of security, proposed to the Government the urgency of setting up 8 military guard post for the protection of the plains people. Neufville’s pre-occupation in the Singpho frontier of Upper Assam prompted this security initiative. The government, however, was not convinced about the necessity of taking up security measures in the Adi frontier as the Adis had the track record of peaceful co-existence with the British ever since 1825.\textsuperscript{115} Neufville was instructed to take up such measures,

\textsuperscript{114} B.C. Allen, op.cit.
\textsuperscript{115} Bengal Political Proceedings, 7 May 1830, No. 48.
including pecuniary benefits to the Miris, which may induce them to settle in places to the satisfaction of the Adis.\textsuperscript{116}

The district administration in Lakhimpur was forced to take stock of the situation, when in 1836 a group of Adis came down and offered to settle in the plains of Assam. It was then a matter of policy on the part of the Government not to allow any of the hill tribes to settle in the plains of Assam for reasons of safety for the Assamese ryots. However, the submission of the Adis, willing to settle in the plains, to the criminal jurisdiction of the British administration and their past record of peaceful co-existence with the new administration, helped them to win the confidences of the Agent to the Governor General. The first Adi settlement of 200 persons was allowed by the Agent in sharp deviation of the general line of policy followed in the tribal frontier.\textsuperscript{117} In the broader perspective, the promotion and cultivation of friendly relations with the Adis was considered as a clear cut strategy to achieve twin objectives: (1), to isolate the Adis from any involvement in the turmoil gripping the Singpho and Khamti frontier and (2), to use them as a counterpoise against possible Singpho, Khamti and Mishmi insurrection.\textsuperscript{118}

On the wake of the Khamti insurrection in January 1839, the Political Agent suggested to the Government the necessity of deputing a special officer to conciliate the Adis and Miris. In the Naga frontier too, similar suggestion was mooted to arm the Nagas as a counterpoise against Singphos and Khamtis. However, both the proposals were turned down on the ground of uncertainty about the success of such measures, and instead direct military action was taken up to prevent trouble in the

\textsuperscript{116} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{117} Bengal Political Proceedings, 9 May 1836, No. 7.
\textsuperscript{118} Political Consultations, 8 May 1837, No. 64.

146
Sadiya frontier. Friendly intercourses with the Adis continued for some time to the advantage of the British, not only in preserving peace in the Adi frontier, but also in obtaining their support at the time of crisis in the Sadiya frontier in 1840.

Strains in the relations developed in the late 1840's, when the Beehas (gold-washers and fishermen) were brought under the protection of the British administration. The profession of gold-washing from the sand of river Dibang, Dihang (Siang) and other tributaries of Brahmaputra, flowing from the snowlines of Arunachal Pradesh, was continued as a lucrative profession since the Ahom days. In the past, successive Ahom government had encouraged large settlement of Cachari gold washers (Beehas), and had provided them enough protection against the hill tribes to realize their share of gold dust from them. With the decline of Ahom power, the royal protection, hitherto available to them, perished thus exposing the Beehas to the exactions of the Adis. Under the new administration the dimension of Beehas' relations with the Adis underwent tremendous change mainly because of the availability of Government protection to them. In the 1840's the process of consolidation of the British in Assam gave the Beehas enough opportunity to pursue the lucrative gains from gold washing.120

The new air of confidence emerging out of the changed political scenario prompted the Beehas to become their own masters, defying the authority and restrictions imposed upon them by the Adis. The loss of pecuniary benefits on this account to the Adis forced them to take punitive action against Beehas. In 1847 Captain Vetch reported the ongoing tension in the Adi frontier and sought permission from the Government towards a

119. Ibid.
120. Bengal Political Proceedings, 24 May 1848, No. 200.
friendly mission to some Adi villages in order to rescue some Beehas who had been taken hostage by the Adis for their defiance to pay tribute. On grant of permission a friendly mission was undertaken to the villages of Pashi, Mebo, and other neighbouring Padam clans which resulted in the release of all the Beehas captives. To compensate the loss to the Adis on this account, Captain Vetch sympathetically proposed to open a trade mart near their frontier under government protection. The matter was resolved in a friendly conference, which further affirmed the hospitality of the Adis towards the British administration in spite of their genuine reservations against the defiant operations of the Beehas, and the protection they enjoyed from the British in the plains of Assam.

Smouldering discontentment against the new political and economic development in their frontier took a violent turn, when the Adi clan to the west of river Dihang, carried off a number of Cachari gold washers as hostage in April 1848. In order to seek the release of the Beehas, and to warn the offending clans of future punitive action for the repeat of such violent acts, Captain Vetch went to the Adi hills with a small detachment of force. The show of strength on the part of Vetch led to the release of the captives, but at night his camp was attacked by the aggrieved chiefs. Although there was no loss of life on the British side still the attack was beaten off only after hard fighting. In retaliation Captain Vetch burnt their villages, leading to the submission of the offending tribe. Conciliatory measures followed no doubt to keep the Adis in good humour, but relations with the Adis entered into a new

121 Political Proceedings, 28 April 1848, No. 104.
122 Ibid, Nos. 105-06.
123 Mackenzie, op. cit, p.36.
phase in which despite the remonstrance offered by the British officials, outrages on the Beehas became more and more frequent from the clans west of Dibang. On the other hand, some interior Adi clans came down and settled at Dirjimo. In continuation of its former policy of conciliation and friendly disposition, the local administration not only allowed them to settle but also encouraged them with incentives to pursue more civilized means of livelihood like agriculture and animal husbandry. Effort was also made to establish an annual trade fair for the conciliation and profit of the Adis in general. Along with these measures, to sustain the existing goodwill in that frontier, the Miris were gradually freed from the tax burden, and the Adis were allowed to visit the plains either for trade or for the unofficial procurement of their share of posa from the Miris and Beehas. As a safe practice military guard post was kept at a distance from the actual field of operation of the Beehas to avoid further confrontation with the Adis.\textsuperscript{124} In the meantime upward revision of tax on the Beehas (per individual) for the right of gold-washing to a sum of Rs. 80 per annum made it mandatory on the part of the Government to provide police protection to them against the forcible collections from the Adis. Vetch was quick to propose to the Agent the necessity of sending police escorts with the gold-washers in his letter dated 19th March 1851.\textsuperscript{125} He also stressed the need of friendly visit by officers to the Adi villages so as to alleviate the brewing tension and to cultivate good-neighbourly relations with them. Jenkins, while concurring to the proposal of Vetch, wrote to the Bengal Government that the visit of officers accompanied by

\textsuperscript{124} Bengal Judicial Proceedings. 4 April 1851, No. 166.
\textsuperscript{125} Ibid.
neighbouring traders would increase the traffic and thereby
greater command over this tribe.126

But resource crunch due to the II\textsuperscript{nd} Anglo-Burmese war in
1852 and the diversion of security establishment to meet that
end rendered the Adi frontier almost a forgotten one. Vetch no
doubt, was sincere in implementing his proposal, but in the
absence of clear cut directives from the Bengal Government,
follow-up actions could not be taken up. In 1851 Captain Vetch,
accompanied with a party of gold washers and with an escort of
Assam Light Infantry, arrived on a good-will mission at
Kamjungeo, on the west bank of Dibang, about twenty miles
from its mouth. After distribution of gifts and transaction of
some trade, the growing discontentment and suspicion of the
tribe was relaxed to a considerable extent.127 But, the assertion
of British suzerainty over lands up to the foot-hills and the
denial of the tribes’ rights over Miris and Beehas failed to
conciliate the Adis in the long run. Dalton’s visit to the village of
Mebo in 1855 against this backdrop still vindicated that the
scope of peaceful engagement in the Adi frontier can still be
explored with a touch of pragmatism and care to address the
genuine grievances of the tribes.

However, the worst happened in 1858, when on 31\textsuperscript{st} January
the Adis of Kebang committed an atrocious attack on the
Beehas village at Sengajan, only six miles away from the civil
station at Dibrugarh, killing 21 persons and six wounded. The
attack was undoubtedly an outburst of the tribe’s grievance
against the Beehas, who had long defied the payment of tribute

\begin{footnotesize}
127. Ibid, No. 127.
\end{footnotesize}

150
to the Adis by migrating to safer zones under British protection. An attempt was made to follow up the raiders to the hills but owing to the extremely inaccessible character of their hills, the troops did not succeed in overtaking the raiders. Captain Biver, Principal Assistant at Dibrugarh, urged the Government to despatch a military expedition in order to prevent the state of chronic outrages along the border and to ensure safety for the Miris and the Beehas.\textsuperscript{128}

The Government, in the meantime, had already recovered itself from the shock of the revolt of 1857, and was in a better position to concentrate on addressing frontier affairs with priority. A year ago in 1857, after the Mishmi raid, Jenkins had no other option but to direct captain Biver to concentrate on measures like organizing a Khamti police for the protection of the British subject.\textsuperscript{129} But the outbreak of violence in the Adi frontier alarmed Jenkins to sanction a military expedition at any cost to send the Adi hills the message that they were not far from the firing range of British Howitzers (mountain guns). The mediation offered by the Adis of Mebo village failed to pacify the matter as the Government demanded nothing sort of unconditional surrender and the Kebang people were not prepared for that. Captain Biver, with 104 fighting men and rank and file of the Assam Light Infantry, under the command of Captain W.H. Lowther, began his advance on the morning on 20\textsuperscript{th} March 1858; the target was to reach Kebang, a distance of four and half days march from the plains.\textsuperscript{130}

The progress of the advancing army up to Ruttomighat was without any resistance. But on 24\textsuperscript{th} morning, when the last

\textsuperscript{128} Bengal Judicial Proceedings, 19 August 1858, Nos. 262-84.
\textsuperscript{129} Bengal Judicial Proceedings, 10 September 1857, Nos. 120-21.
\textsuperscript{130} For the details of the operation see J.F. Michell, op. cit. pp. 66-8.
leg of the advance was made from Ruttomighat to Kebang, the advancing army was caught in an inhospitable terrain with fierce resistance from the defending tribe. Disruption of communication line and short supply of provisions forced the advancing army to retreat before reaching Kebang. The entire operation was thus a failure as the raiders managed to escape taking advantage of the prevailing confusion in the retreating force. The relation between the Civil Officer and the Officer in Command of the troops had unfortunately, from the outset, not been cordial, and the return of the expedition under such condition was the beginning of the much recrimination, fruitless correspondence and departmental bickering in the Colonial establishment.131

The failure of the expedition emboldened the Adis of kebang and neighbouring villages to take up still more advance position towards the plains. In view of this threatening advance of the tribe, it was immediately proposed by Biver to set up a line of military guard post from Sisi to Pabamukh as a defensive measure. Jenkins was, however, at this stage contemplating on a second offensive to give a clear message to the tribe that military consequences can be hazardous for the tribe if they continue to harbour evil designs against the British in their frontier. He therefore, gave clearance to the second offensive despite the order of the Secretary of the State questioning the viability of any further military operation in that frontier.132

In February 1859 the second expedition was launched in an elaborate scale under the command of Col. Hannay, Commandant of the Assam Light Infantry, aided by Major Reid of the local Artillery. The Naval Brigade under Lt. Lewis and

---

131 Mackenzie, op. cit.

153
Davies assisted the expedition for logistic support in the riverine tract of Brahmaputra. On 28th February the troops stormed the stockades at Pasighat, and under the barrel of gunfire drove the entrenched tribe from their offensive position. This was followed by torching of their villages and granaries. The punishment inflicted was so severe that several clans made overture for peace. But the Adis of Kebang still remained unpunished and defiant to the core. The area of operation was confined to the foot-hills to send the powerful message to the Adis that any offensive action on their part will not go unpunished. Later in the same year, a string of reconnoitring mission passed along the whole Adi frontier between river Sisi and Lalleh Sool, but no attempt at hostile demonstration was made by the tribes this time. The show of strong-arm policy worked for some time no doubt, but, continued hostility with the Beehas reached a flash point once again in 1861 when H.S. Biver reported the deadly attack carried out against the Beehas settlement at Bordun Bhuyan, 15 miles south of Dibrugarh. After the Sengajan massacre of 1858, this Beeha village, for fear of revenge had migrated since then to the south bank of Brahmaputra. Preliminary enquiry brought into notice the involvement of the Adis in the attack and the assistance given to them by some Miris in the neighbourhood. Revenge against the defaulting Beehas and for the assistance rendered by them to the troops in the campaign of 1859 was the main reason behind the attack. The occurrence of such ghastly incidents in the neighbourhood of a military guard post brought this lesson to the

134. Assam Records, Letters received from and issued to District Officers (Darrang and Lakhimpur), 2 November 1865, Vol. 49.
135. Mackenzie, op. cit, p. 41.
Administration that the Beehas were not safe under the British protection.

In order to neutralize this threat perception in the Adi frontier Biver was prompt to suggest military occupation of the rebel villages at least for one season. He also sought to build a fort between Lalimukh and Pabamukh, and to link it up with Demoh and Sisi, so that it might be patrolled by military guards throughout the year. This proposal, with an undertone of British forward policy in the Adi frontier, found quick support in the Office of the Agent to the Governor General.\(^{137}\) Henry Hopkinson, the new Agent, who had succeeded Jenkins since February 1861, while concurring on a strong defence of the frontier, advocated a forward policy with military advance into the hills. The entire exercise, he admitted, would involve considerable expenditure, but this was considered inevitable in consequence of the occupation of Lakhimpur, Sadiya and Mattak. Defence measure in the Adi frontier, thus assumed great importance because of the concern of the Colonial Government on the security of the tea gardens located in the north bank of Brahmaputra. In fact, Civil and Military Officers in Assam had repeatedly pointed out that the military force, hitherto allotted to Assam, was entirely inadequate. Jhon Peter Grant, the Lt. Governor of Bengal, considered it useless to discuss the question of protecting Upper Assam from the raids of the tribes like the Adis, Nagas and the Lushais etc. unless an adequate standing force is deployed in the province for security duty even in the peace time.\(^{138}\)

Under these circumstances the only course that was practically left open was to further strengthen defence in the

\(^{137}\) Ibid, Nos. 307-08.

\(^{138}\) Ibid.
frontier. Accordingly, the local public works department was ordered to complete the forts at the earliest, if necessary, by convict labour. The road along the frontier to Pabamukh was to be opened and maintained; and a scheme was laid before the Supreme Government for “retaining by means of troops, forts and roads effective military command of the whole Abor marches”. The bustle of all this preparation and defensive strategy did not fail to attract the notice of the Adis, who doubtless, interpreting matters in the light of their own fears, made overtures for general conciliation.

Bivar reported on 23rd December, 1862 the arrival of several representatives of different Adi clans, at Dibrugarh with appeal for peace. They were unanimous in their appeal that, if they were granted amnesty for past offences, they assured to behave peacefully in future. Biver on his part was not satisfied with the bona fide of such offerings, and therefore, demanded complete surrender of the chiefs involved in the massacre at Bordhun Bhuyan. Grilled in the Naga frontier in a bitter inescapable military commitment, the Colonial Government was not prepared to commit itself to similar irreversible hard-hitting steps in the Adi frontier. Therefore, Cecil Beadon advised Biver to soften his stand as regards the unconditional surrender of the offenders and make best use of the opportunities to cultivate friendly relations with the Adis. At this crucial juncture, the main stress was on written engagement with the tribe, and to achieve that the Government was ready to pay some compensation, either in kind or in cash for the loss of the tribe’s rights on the foot-hills. An annual meeting between

---

139 Mackenzie, op. cit, p. 42.
140 Bengal Judicial Proceedings, December 1862, No.191.
141 Bengal Judicial Proceedings, October 1861, No.176.
the civil officers of Lakhimpur and the aggrieved clan was suggested to find an early settlement through negotiations.

Accordingly, at Lalimukh a meeting was organized between Biver, D.C. Lakhimpur and the chiefs of several Adi clans in November 1862. It was impressed upon the tribe that even after the renunciation of all their claims on the foot-hills, they will gain from a friendly relations with British. Despite the best disposition of Biver, the Adis argued for a long time in the true spirit of their Kebang (village council), and after long deliberations signed an agreement, which was drawn up on the lines laid down by the Lt. Governor of Bengal.\textsuperscript{142} By this treaty a general amnesty was granted to the tribe for all their past offences. The Adis, on their part, undertook to honour British jurisdiction up to the foot-hills, renouncing all their past claims on the low-lands, Miris and Beehas. They were also bound by the treaty terms to refer all disputes to the D.C. Lakhimpur in future and to keep the communication line free, assisting thereby in the maintenance of friendly and free intercourses between both the sides. They also undertook not to cultivate opium in the British territory or to import it in any form.\textsuperscript{143} The Deputy Commissioner, on behalf of the British Government, agreed that the communities referred to shall receive yearly the following articles: 100 iron hoes, 30 maunds of salt, 2 maunds of tobacco, 80 bottles of rum and 2 seers of opium as a gesture of good will and towards the cultivation of good relations with the tribe in the Siang frontier.\textsuperscript{144} This agreement with the Adis prompted the remaining clans to follow suit. In the following year the chiefs of Kebang came down and signed similar

\textsuperscript{142} See the text of the treaty in M.L. Bose, (ed.), \textit{Historical and Constitutional Documents of North-East India}, Delhi, 1979, pp. 140-43.
\textsuperscript{143} Ibid, pp. 140-41.
\textsuperscript{144} Ibid, p. 141.
engagement wit Captain Comber, D. C. Lakhimpur. The interior clans of the upper hills, known as Bor Abors, took time to compromise with the new development on the frontier, but once they realized the futility of carrying forward the depredations against a strong power like the British, they decided to shun violence and signed peaceful engagements with Captain Comber in 1866.

The continued negotiation process brought in its wake peace and tranquillity in the Adi frontier after the lapse of considerable time span. But before the quite engagements are concretised on the ground rupture developed in the terms and conditions of the peace treaties. The Adis could not compromise for long the loss of their sovereignty over the foot-hills and their subjects: the Miris and Beehas. Since decades past it was these rights which provided to the hill tribes not only the basic means of sustenance, but also pride and comfort to their cultural ego. Therefore, the loss of the same right was perceived as much an economic issue as it was an emotional and cultural issue. Every annual visit of the chiefs to the D. C. office from 1865 onwards was marked by the repeat of the same arguments about the restoration of their traditional rights in the plains of Assam. On every occasion, to keep them in good humour, the articles specified to be distributed to the tribe was increased considerably. In every deal Captain Comber was so much frustrated with their audacity and unbending attitude that he remarked in utter disgust: "I despair of any satisfactory dealings with the Abors. They will continue year after year to claim more,

---

144. C.U. Aitchison, op. cit, p.299. See also M.L. Bose, op. cit, pp.149-50.
and I do not think, they will long remain content with the present arrangement.\textsuperscript{147}

The aversion of the Colonial Government to further open the Adi frontier to military operation dictated the continuation of the former policy of conciliation already in force. The Lt. Governor of Bengal directed the Agent to be more generous in dealing with these tribes. In case of good behaviour, the chiefs should be given in excess of their stipulated allowance of salt, clothes and even money, for the object of the Government was to bring home to them that- "they will gain more by friendly and good-neighbouring conduct than by lawlessness.\textsuperscript{148} This policy, however, did not find favour with Hopkinson, who considered its operation as a total failure. To him, "the policy of subsidizing the Adis might be a mere staving off the evil day, certainly not a permanent solution of the problem of the defence of the frontier."\textsuperscript{149} Therefore, he stressed on the defence preparedness on the Adi frontier and cautioned the D. C. Lakhimpur to continue with the present policy as long as it can hold good. Thus, a policy of wait and watch, evolved under the exigencies of circumstances, was allowed to continue in the Adi frontier throughout the seventies and until it was replaced by a policy of active engagement in the 80's and onwards.

3.2.5 OPERATION IN THE MISHMI FRONTIER

The Mishmi tribe of the Lohit frontier figured prominently in the British records from the earliest recorded year of 1825, when the victorious British army was busy in the cleansing

\textsuperscript{147} Bengal Judicial Proceedings, May 1865, No. 121.
\textsuperscript{148} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{149} Bengal Judicial Proceedings, June 1865, No.71.
and I do not think, they will long remain content with the present arrangement.\textsuperscript{147}

The aversion of the Colonial Government to further open the Adi frontier to military operation dictated the continuation of the former policy of conciliation already in force. The Lt. Governor of Bengal directed the Agent to be more generous in dealing with these tribes. In case of good behaviour, the chiefs should be given in excess of their stipulated allowance of salt, clothes and even money, for the object of the Government was to bring home to them that- "they will gain more by friendly and good-neighbouring conduct than by lawlessness."\textsuperscript{148} This policy, however, did not find favour with Hopkinson, who considered its operation as a total failure. To him, "the policy of subsidizing the Adis might be a mere staving off the evil day, certainly not a permanent solution of the problem of the defence of the frontier."\textsuperscript{149} Therefore, he stressed on the defence preparedness on the Adi frontier and cautioned the D. C. Lakhimpur to continue with the present policy as long as it can hold good. Thus, a policy of wait and watch, evolved under the exigencies of circumstances, was allowed to continue in the Adi frontier throughout the seventies and until it was replaced by a policy of active engagement in the 80's and onwards.

3.2.5 \hspace{1cm} \textbf{OPERATION IN THE MISHMI FRONTIER}

The Mishmi tribe of the Lohit frontier figured prominently in the British records from the earliest recorded year of 1825, when the victorious British army was busy in the cleansing

\textsuperscript{147} Bengal Judicial Proceedings, May 1865, No. 121.
\textsuperscript{148} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{149} Bengal Judicial Proceedings, June 1865, No.71.
operation of Upper Assam to flush out the remaining Burmese marauders and their feelers.\textsuperscript{150} Lt. Burlton, while exploring the upper course of Brahmaputra beyond the Noa Dihing, first reported about the thick settlement of the Mishmis in the hill ranges between river Dibang and Digaru. His very first observation about the Mishmis was that, "the tribe was very averse to receive the strangers".\textsuperscript{151} Wilcox, in the course of his itinerary in Assam and neighbouring states, succeeded in venturing into the villages of the Taraon Mishmis, and with the assistance of the Taraons he also ventured into the Miju areas, but because of the pressing hostility of the Miju chiefs, he had to retreat over-night only to find friends among the Taraons.\textsuperscript{152}

In October 1836 Dr. Griffith paid similar visit to the villages of Taraon Mishmis, but failed to penetrate further into the Miju villages. The inter-tribal feud existing among the different clans prevented his safe passage to the interior hills. Lt. Rowalatt in 1845 penetrated up to the Du, and up that river in a northerly direction to the village of Tupang near the Tibetan border.\textsuperscript{153}

In the absence of the operation of posa practice in the Mishmi frontier peace prevailed for a long time, thus facilitating in the process of exploratory adventures from the dare-devil British explorers on a sustained basis since 1826. The historical background, prevailing in this tranquil frontier since the Ahom days, prevented any form of hot-pursuit either for the sake of liberating the slaves or for settling posa claim of the tribe to buy peace in the frontier. Therefore, engagement in the Mishmi frontier was dictated by the unilateral drive of the British from

\textsuperscript{150} Political Consultations (Secret). 29 April 1925, No. 2.

\textsuperscript{151} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{152} R. Wilcox, cited in, Verrier Elwin, ed. \textit{India's North-East Frontier}..., pp. 302-11.

\textsuperscript{153} Mackenzie, op. cit, p. 48.
time to time on the basis of policy change towards the tribal frontier in Assam since the end of first Anglo-Burmese war.

The location and population pattern of the Mishmi habitat in the whole of the hill ranges, which is close to the north-east corner of Assam valley, and their historical intercourses with Tibet and Assam in the past, dictated the micro-level variations in the British relationship with the different groups and clans of the Mishmis. They are principally divided into three main groups: the Taraons and the Kamans: also popularly known in Ahom records as Chulikattas, Digarus and Mijus respectively. The Idus inhabit the hill ranges located to the north of Sadiya in between river Dibang and Digaru. From Digaru River, westward and on both sides of river Brahmaputra, reaching up to the frontier of Tibet on the north, and as far as the Nemlang River on the south, lay the habitat of the Taraons (Digaru Mishmis) and Kamans (Miju Mishmis). The Digaru Mishmis, inhabiting the foot-hills to the west of Du river above the Bramhakund, were most easily accessible by their frequent trade and commerce with Assam, but the Mijus occupying the interior hills, north-east of Du river as far as Zayul valley of Tibet, despite their bustling trade with Tibet; were averse to interact directly with their plain neighbours. The Idus, on the other hand, described by Mackenzie as the most dangerous of all Mishmis, frequented the Sadiya frontier in the past as savage traders.

The continuation of a strong Ahom administrative centre at Sadiya in the north bank of Brahmaputra, till its usurpation by the Khamtis in the late 18th century, successfully checkmated the advance of the Mishmi traders in staking their

---

154 P.T. Nair, Tribes of Arunachal Pradesh, Delhi, 1985, p. 64.
155 Mackenzie, op. cit, p. 47.
claim to the adjacent cultivable plains in Assam. When the British stepped into the shoes of Ahoms in 1826, they surprisingly discovered an altogether different condition prevailing in the Mishmi frontier in Assam. Neither the Mishmi had any claim of posa, nor was their adjacent frontier in Assam ravaged by plundering raids during the year of Ahom decline and Anglo-Burmese wars. The trans-border trade between Zayul valley of Tibet and Assam through the Mishmi route, after a temporary setback during the war years, was again in its vivacious form by the time the British took over the administration of Assam.

Therefore, the immediate task before David Scott in the Mishmi frontier was to gain intimate knowledge about the terrain and population as far as the Zayul valley in Tibet. It was with this avowed objective, a number of explorative missions visited the Mishmi hills. Starting with Burlton and Neufville in 1825, Willcox, Dr. Griffith, Rowalatt, Dalton and Woodthorpe’s missions\(^{156}\) in the following years added considerably to the imperial urge for opening Mishmi hill route for trade with Tibet. The Taraon Mishmi interacted with friendly dispositions right from the very beginning. To every successive mission they gave assistance in men and materials and necessary information about the interior tribes. The Kamans, however, free from the payment of tribute to the Ahom rulers ever since the latter's collapse, had developed an intimate relationship with the Tibetan authorities at Zayul. It was with the strength of this alliance they had not only displayed hostility to the British in Assam, but also were engaged in stray plundering raids on the

\(^{156}\) See J.F. Michell, op. cit, pp. 86-98.
travellers to their territories, and also, on the plains of Assam.\textsuperscript{157}

A short while before Wilcox visit, a Kaman chief had led a party into the plains to plunder a Khamti village. Lt. Wilcox reported that the only object of the Kamans in attacking a traveller would be plunders, and that if they had to fight for it, the traveller would probably not be interfered with. He suggested that 20 sepoys would render a journey through the country tolerably safe.\textsuperscript{158} Captain Bedford, with the object to explore Idu Mishmi areas, went up the river Dibang with the help of the Padams (Adis), but before making any advance to the Idu villages, he was turned back in a friendly manner by the Idus. The initial friendly relations of the British with the Taraons, and the latter's hostility with the Idus and Kamans was primarily responsible for the mistrust displayed towards British. Apart from this, the extremely difficult condition of their terrain had rendered agriculture a precarious pursuit, leading to extreme poverty in the hills. The individualistic pattern of their society prevented larger groups of Mishmis from united action, which leaves ample scope for stray and mostly isolated reaction against the new order. The combination of all these factors determined the basis of Anglo-Mishmi relations in the second quarter of the 19\textsuperscript{th} century without much hue and cry from either side.

The Kaman Mishmi's allegiance to the Singphos and Khamtis, and the type of active assistance rendered to them at the time of Khamti and Singpho rebellion, was no doubt a source of concern to the D.C Lakhimpur, but the absence of any direct collision in the past with them, prevented the local

\textsuperscript{157} Ibid, p. 97.
\textsuperscript{158} Ibid, p. 98.
administration from taking up any police action in the Mishmi frontier. Therefore, every care was taken to revive the Sadiya trade fair and explore the trade route without causing direct hostility with the tribe.\textsuperscript{159} When official explorations failed to penetrate beyond the hills of the Taraons in a friendly manner, an attempt was made to explore the riddle of river Tsangpo and the Tibetan trade route by sending an Indian fakir, (hermit) Permanand Acharjya; who claimed to have considerable knowledge on the frontier of Upper Assam. Early in 1848, D.C. Lakhimpur, received the intelligence report that the hermit on his way from Assam to Tibet was murdered by the Kaman Mishmis belonging to Jingsha’s and other villages.\textsuperscript{160} To apprehend the offenders, a reward was announced soon among the neighbouring tribes. Later on it was unofficially reported that the offenders were punished by the Tibetan authorities of Zayul. In the absence of official confirmation it is difficult to believe on the report, but continued allegiance of the Kamans to the Tibetan authority at Zayul valley does leave some scope about the authenticity of the report.\textsuperscript{161}

The scramble to open the doors of the closed Himalayan Table land (Tibet), led the French Missionary, Father Krick, to cross the Mishmi hills in 1851 under the guidance of the Khamti chief of Sadiya, the Choukeng Gohain. Avoiding Jingsha’s village, he reached in safety the border settlement of Oualong (Walong) near Tibet, where he was well received. His heart was thrilled to discover there extensive cultivation and a well-peopled tract along the open valley of the Lohit river.\textsuperscript{162}

\textsuperscript{159} Political Consultations, 6 March 1837, Nos. 67-8.
\textsuperscript{160} Bengal Judicial Proceedings, 18 February 1848, Nos. 124-25.
\textsuperscript{161} Assam Records, Letters Issued to Government of Bengal, Vol.13, 20 January 1848.
\textsuperscript{162} River Lohit was then still known in British records as Upper Brahmaputra. The riddle of the Tsangpo thus continued as before.
1854, Father Krick repeated his adventure in the Mishmi hills, accompanied by his colleague Mr. Bourri and escorted by the Taraon chief, Khosa. Crossing the Mishmi hills with ease, he reached the Tibetan outpost of Rima, opposite of Walong, where he was well treated by the Rima officials. But unfortunately on his return visit, he was followed across the border by a Kaman chief of the Menong clan, named Kai-ee-sha, who murdered both the missionaries and carried off their property and servants.163

The incident roused the local authority to contemplate on military action as a retributive measure against the offenders. However, the extreme remoteness of the offending village, almost close to the Tibetan border, ruled out the possibility of any major military involvement in the Mishmi frontier. Nevertheless, Jenkins suggested to Grey that given the inter-clan rivalry among the Kamans and the uninterrupted friendship the British had with the Taraons it is quite probable to reach the Kai-ee-Sha’s village with just a small detachment of our force without involving much, either in military, or in financial term.164 The Colonial Government under Lord Dalhousie was then in pursuit of a vigorous policy of active involvement in the north-east frontier, which can be seen from the strong-arm policy of the British in the Naga frontier. In the Mishmi frontier, the same thrust was applied when Lt. Eden was asked to command an expedition against the offending Mishmis in 1855.165 Accordingly, in the end of February a small party of twenty Assam Light Infantry men, with forty Khamti volunteers and porters, marched from Sadiya. After eight days

163 Assam Records, Letters Issued to Govt. of Bengal, Vol.19, 29 November 1854.
164 Ibid.
of arduous march through the friendly territory of the Taraon and Kaman villages, the little band under Eden surprised Kai-ee-Sha and captured him after silencing the resistance from his sons and followers. He was brought down, lodged in prison and was finally hanged at Dibrugarh.\textsuperscript{166}

The impact of Eden's expedition was terribly felt among the Taraons and the Kamans. The resistance of the tribe, which had hitherto prevented direct traffic between Sadiya and Assam, was broken and the Mishmi hill route was opened to more direct officially sponsored surveys in an unprecedented manner. But long before any progress is made in that direction, the Idu Mishmis played havoc in that frontier. The Idus took for granted the conspiracy theory that was blowing hot in the Mishmi frontier caused by the frequency of operation of the British explorers in association with their rival clans like the Taraons and the Kamans. The military operation deep inside the hills to punish the Killers of Father Krick was viewed with concern, and was often interpreted as interference into their sovereignty in the hills. Their predominance over the neighbouring clans was threatened as the Sadiya mart, which was once their sole reserve passed into the control of the British and their allies like the Khamtis. To avenge the loss the Idus resorted to a series of raids on the British subjects in Sadiya.

In April 1855 the Apelong clan of the Idu Mishmis carried away three servants of Lt. Eden in a surprising move.\textsuperscript{167} In retaliation a general blockade was imposed on the tribe to press demand for the release of the captives. The impact of the blockade was quite harsh on the Taraons, who were dependent on the plains of Assam for sourcing the means of their daily

\textsuperscript{166} J.F. Michell, op. cit, pp. 99-100.
\textsuperscript{167} Bengal Judicial Proceedings, 10 January 1856, No. 244.
livelelihood. Therefore, they pressed for a settlement with the explanation that for the folly of a few the whole tribes should not be punished. The Apelongs also realized the futility of intransigence as their policy of carrying fire and sword to the British territory did not find support with the neighbouring clans, thus compelling them to set free the captives.  

Thereupon, the blockade was lifted and the Mishmis were allowed to visit Sadiya for trade. But the tranquillity in the frontier was short-lived. By October 1857 three consecutive raids in Sadiya took place in which the involvement of the Apelong clan of the Idu Mishmis in two raids, and Menong clan of the Kaman Mishmis in one raid was discovered by the British officials in the Sadiya frontier. To the utter surprise of the frontier officials, the raids took place without any act of immediate provocation in that tranquil frontier.

To bring the offending tribes to the book, once again punitive measures like economic blockade and advance of military guards up to the borderline was contemplated. But marauding raids from the tribe continued in an unceasing manner. In January the Idus raided a village at Sadiya, murdering eight persons at mid-day within 300 yards of a military guard post. Taking stock of the situation H.S. Biver reported to Jenkins that the present security arrangement is highly inadequate to guard the scattered population of the Sadiya frontier. In fact, such guards were considered useless unless supported by a system of organized patrolling, or a class of people capable of providing for their security. Biver's calculation was to settle the Khamtis in advance vulnerable

---

168 Ibid, No. 246.
170 Ibid, 31 December 1857, No.182.
171 Bengal Judicial Proceedings, 10 September1857, No.120.
positions along the Mishmi frontier as a counter-measure to save the ryots of Sadiya from the depredations of the Mishmis. Along with these preventive police measures, he also pressed upon the Government to sanction a punitive expedition to impress upon the tribe that they can not escape retribution for their marauding raids.\textsuperscript{172}

In the meantime, the emergency arising out of the Revolt of 1857 stalled for the time being any move to divert the military resources of the Colonial Government for purpose other than the struggle against the revolutionaries. But after the revolt, the Government was in a commanding position to pursue vigorously the policy of active engagement in the Mishmi frontier. However, pre-occupation of the Government in the Adi and Naga frontier pushed the Mishmi frontier down to secondary level for the time being. Biver was advised to proceed with defensive police measures in the Mishmi frontier.\textsuperscript{173} Since the victims of the Mishmi raids were mostly the ryots of Sadiya, who were subjects of Khamti chief, Choukeng Gohain, it was decided as a matter of policy to leave the task of defending the ryots of Sadiya to the Khamti chief. The Khamtis were armed by the British and were settled in vulnerable positions in order to act as a safety-ring against future Mishmi raids.

In spite of this arrangement, in between 1861 to 1866 a number of Mishmi raids took place in the Sadiya frontier. However, the loss and damage in these raids was the least because each Mishmi raid was beaten off by the alert Khamti bands.\textsuperscript{174} Partial success of these defensive measures promoted the local authority to review the police measures already in

\textsuperscript{172} Ibid, No. 121.
\textsuperscript{173} Ibid, No. 121.
\textsuperscript{174} Bengal Judicial Proceedings, 25 February 1858, Nos. 351-54.
operation in the Sadiya frontier. Recurrence of the raids from the Idu Mishmis, threatening Sadiya and its trade prospectus, roused the Government to take up appropriate action in the Mishmi frontier.\textsuperscript{175} The colony of the Khamtis was further extended to strengthen the pockets found vulnerable to Mishmi raids. The local authorities, with permission from Commissioner of Assam, Hopkinson, took up the initiative to form a Khamti police force with supply of arms and ammunition to act as a frontier militia against the Mishmi raiders.

The impact of these measures was soon felt among the Mishmis, who came down to sue for peace. In March 1865, Kalood, an Idu Mishmi chief, came down to Sadiya and expressed his intention to sue for peace with D.C. Lakhimpur. Tired of the inter-clan rivalry, he explicitly made his intention clear to settle down at Sadiya under British supervision.\textsuperscript{176} After some discussion he was allowed sites for his people at Habba in Koondali valley. The policy of the Government was then to allow immigration and settlement of the friendly tribes in the frontier areas as a defensive measure against the lesser known interior tribes. The precedent set by Kalood was soon followed by other chiefs, and the trans-border trade and commerce, carried from Sadiya to Tibet through Mishmi hills, once again flourished after nearly two decades of interruption since the fifties. With this the Mishmi frontier was opened to more direct traffic from dare-devil explorers and frontier officers, who were determined to enrich their classified information on the prospects of trade with Tibet through the Mishmi frontier.

\textsuperscript{175} Ibid, Nos.14- 5.

\textsuperscript{176} Bengal Judicial Proceedings, May 1868, Nos. 56-7.
Peaceful engagement in the Khamti frontier was crucial to the preservation of peace and security in Sadiya and territory beyond that corridor which extends as far as the Hukwang valley of Burma.\textsuperscript{177} Therefore, throughout the tenure of David Scott, priority was always given to cultivate the loyalty of the Khamtis towards the British authority in Assam into a lasting relationship.\textsuperscript{178} The objective of this strategy in the Khamti frontier was to make use of this friendly tribe to guard and extend, if possible, British imperial interest in Arunachal Pradesh.\textsuperscript{179} The very first impression of Scott about the Khamtis, that “they are a fine muscular and active race of men, hardy and laborious, and much superior in military habits to the rest of the Burmese,”\textsuperscript{180} guided the spirit of the first phase of friendly intercourse in the Khamti frontier.\textsuperscript{181} A subsidiary treaty of alliance, signed with the Khamti chiefs on 15 May 1826, provided the basis for the beginning of the first imperial thrust in the Arunachal frontier.\textsuperscript{182}

As a mark of this imperial thrust English dare-devils like Captain Bedford, Lt. Wilcox and Burlton had the privilege to survey for the first time the route watered by the upper branches of Brahmaputra, and those routes connecting Assam to Tibet and Yunan through the country in the extreme north of

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{177} Political Consultations, 31 May 1817, Nos. 91-2. Hukwang is also mentioned as Hukong in certain official documents.
  \item \textsuperscript{178} N.K. Barooah, \textit{David Scott in North-East India}, New Delhi, 1970, pp. 115-17.
  \item \textsuperscript{179} Bengal Secret Political Consultations 15 April 1825, No.13; cited in N.K. Barooah. op. cit, p. 117; also cited in H.K. Barpujari, \textit{Assam in the Days of the Company}, op. cit, p.15.
  \item \textsuperscript{180} Ibid.
  \item \textsuperscript{181} See the text of the treaty in M.L. Bose, (ed.), \textit{Historical and Constitutional Documents of N.E. India}, op. cit, p. 150.
  \item \textsuperscript{182} Bengal Secret Political Consultations, 14 July 1826, No. 9, cited in N.K. Barooah, op. cit, p. 121.
\end{itemize}
Burma, inhabited by the Khamtis and the Mishmis.\textsuperscript{183} Chowsalan Khowa Gohain and his subjects, with trust and loyalty assisted the British administration in every matter the Company was interested in that frontier. They acted as the go-between in the initial phase of British operation in the Sadiya frontier. Despite these positive moves from the very beginning, the past political and cultural connection of the Khamtis with the Bor khamti country of Upper Burma, and the latter's connection with the Singphos in waging rebellious activities against the British in Assam, was a constant source of worry and concern for David Scott.

In 1830, a body of Singphos and Bor-Khamtis invaded the tract south of the Brahmaputra, but were beaten off by troops under Captain Neufville. Reports received from different sources alluded to the alliance of Khamti chief with the invaders, but after enquiry Neufville discredited the report as baseless.\textsuperscript{184} Still the suspicion of the frontier officials remained for quite sometime because of the ongoing debate in the higher echelons that, although it is in the interest of the Khamti chief to cultivate friendship with the British, it is impossible to trust absolutely to a priori argument of that kind where semi-savages were concerned. In addition to this, the exigencies of the situations arising out of the Khasi rebellion and trouble in the Bhutan and Singpho frontier demanded that the policy towards these frontier chiefs should be one of moderation and non-interference, instead of the policy of slow but steady penetration so far followed by the local authorities. In conformity with the recommendations made by Scott in this regard, the Governor

\textsuperscript{183} See R. Wilcox, "Memoir of a Survey of Assam and the Neighbouring Countries executed in 1825-6-7-8", \textit{ Asiatic Researches}, Vol. XVII, 1832, pp. 314-453.

\textsuperscript{184} Bengal Judicial Proceedings, 7 May 1830, No. 7.
General-in-Council decided on 30th May 1833 that the tract in between the river Buri Dihing and Dibang occupied by the Moamarias, Khamtis and the Singphos should be placed under an officer permanently posted at Sadiya.¹⁸⁵

Accordingly, Lieutenant Charlton was posted at Sadiya in 1834. In that capacity as the officer-in-charge of Sadiya he was asked to take cognizance of all offences in the Khamti, Singpho and Moran tract, and to cultivate friendly relations with them. Another object of this arrangement was the advancement of commerce of the frontier in the promotion of which the officer-in-charge was to endeavour in removing any obstruction to a free trade.¹⁸⁶

A close look at the duties assigned to the officer-in-charge at Sadiya marks a clear deviation from the past policy laid down by Neufville, who wanted to avoid at all cost any infringement of the rights and privileges of the frontier chiefs. The Government of Bengal, too had doubts on the suggestions that the officer-in-charge of Sadiya should take cognizance of all disputes between the chiefs and also of cases of murder dacoity etc. committed within their respective jurisdiction, because assumption of such powers would amount to shouldering of judicial responsibility in the Khamti area, hitherto managed by the Khamti chief. Jenkins tried to clarify the doubt by stating that, Charlton would not undertake any judicial responsibility in the Sadiya frontier.¹⁸⁷ In the midst of these policy making exercises, Charlton assumed the charge of Officer-in-charge at Sadiya and undertook the first task of constituting Panchayats of native rank in the Khamti villages. Acting on the principle of equity

¹⁸⁵. Political Consultations, 24 July 1834, No. 73.
¹⁸⁶. Ibid, 4 September 1834, No. 61.
¹⁸⁷. Ibid, No. 60.
and justice, Charlton gave equal representation to the Assamese ryots of Sadiya, who were considered the subjects of the Khamti chief, and as such, socially inferior to them. Large concentration of these ryots in Sadiya naturally gave them the majority in most village panchayats, as a result of which the Khamti chiefs lost the privilege of dictating their terms on the Assamese ryots. The elevation of these Assamese ryots, who were enslaved since the last few generations by the Khamtis, to terms of equity in the present set up, became a sensitive issue, which was interpreted by the Khamtis as encroachment on their traditional rights and privileges. In fact, a system of slavery and partial slavery, subsisting so far in the Khamti society by the forced enslavement of the ryots, was threatened of its continuation by the present arrangement.

Lt. Charlton's tenure and activities at Sadiya was at the cost of the powers and privileges of the Khamti chief, Chowsalan Khowa Gohain. As a result, question marks were raised on the continuity of Anglo-Khamti relations along positive track and as per the terms of the British in the Khamti frontier. This process led to the beginning of a rupture in relations that was very difficult to bridge in future despite the best efforts made towards the same from both the sides. The collision course began towards the close of 1834, when the Moamarias and the Khamtis were involved in a long-standing dispute over Saikhowa, a tract situated just opposite of Sadiya. Lt. Charlton, to prevent hostilities on the disputed tract, attached the land to his direct supervision and ordered both parties to refer their claims for his consideration. In violation of this order, the Khamti chief acted unilaterally on his

---

military strength and took forcible possession of the Saikhowa tract by ejecting the people who claimed to be the subjects of Bar Senapati. Enraged at this unruly act of the Khamti chief, Major White, the Political Agent, wrote to Jenkins suggesting the urgent necessity to take up firm action against the offending chief as a measure of vindication of the paramount power of the British over the Khamtis. In clear terms he even suggested Jenkins, the suspension of the Sadiya Khowa Gohain, and the follow-up action leading to the signing of a fresh agreement with his successor, reserving thereby for the Government the right of taxation and also the right to disband the local militia.  

Jenkins, while concurring with the views of White, went a step ahead and wrote to the Bengal Government: “it would be highly inexpedient to reinvest with high authority the chief, whose conduct since the invasion of the Singphos, in 1830, was not above board; the only alternative was to restore an Assamese chief or allow Charlton to exercise direct authorities over them, leaving in either case the remaining Khamti chiefs in the management of their respective affairs”. The Court of Directors approved the measures proposed by Jenkins in the Khamti frontier. Immediately thereafter, the Sadiya Khowa was removed from his post. In quick succession, the post was also abolished and Lt Charlton took over the direct responsibility of the Khamti tract. As regards internal management, the Khamtis were left to their own chiefs. No change was made in the Khamti’s relations existing so far with the British Government. As usual, they were allowed to enjoy the tax holiday. Charlton’s jurisdiction was confined to the collection of capitation tax from those cultivators who paid it in the past, to administer justice to

190. Ibid, No. 2.
191. Ibid.
the Assamese ryots, either directly or by a panchayat and to mediate only in serious cases or where more than one tribe were parties to the dispute.\textsuperscript{192}

The new arrangement initially worked well. The minor Khamti chiefs responded with welcome gestures to the change of guards in their territory. In May 1835 a fresh immigration of a group of Moonglary Khamtis took place from the Bor Khamti country, who expressed their intention to settle in Sadiya in a tax free regime. The Government, interested as it was to raise a cheap and effective barrier against future invasion from Burma, allowed these immigrants to settle in colonies on the land lying waste and desolate in the frontier areas.\textsuperscript{193} The Khamtis also aided Charlton considerably in his operation against the Singphos in October 1835. In fact, the Political Agent, Major White, was so much convinced of the good dispositions of the Khamtis that he allowed, on request of the minor Khamti chiefs, the return of the ex-Khowa Gohain to Sadiya in a private capacity to live among them.

In the next year, the proposal of Lt. Charlton to bring the Khamtis under taxation,\textsuperscript{194} for efficient management of the Sadiya frontier, roused them from the state of slumbering discontentment to one of open hostility. The proposal was later shelved because of the increasing importance attached to the security in the Sadiya frontier, but the net impact of such proposal on Khamtis was in the negative. In spite of the apparent coolness in the surface, frustration among the Khamtis took the shape of a silent rebellion. They had already lost their chief and their traditional privileges over the Assamese

\textsuperscript{192} Mackenzie, op. cit, pp. 58-9.
\textsuperscript{193} Political Consultations, 1 June 1835, No. 4.
\textsuperscript{194} Ibid, 9 February 1836, Nos. 2-3.
the Assamese ryots, either directly or by a panchayat and to mediate only in serious cases or where more than one tribe were parties to the dispute.¹⁹²

The new arrangement initially worked well. The minor Khamti chiefs responded with welcome gestures to the change of guards in their territory. In May 1835 a fresh immigration of a group of Moonglary Khamtis took place from the Bor Khamti country, who expressed their intention to settle in Sadiya in a tax free regime. The Government, interested as it was to raise a cheap and effective barrier against future invasion from Burma, allowed these immigrants to settle in colonies on the land lying waste and desolate in the frontier areas.¹⁹³ The Khamtis also aided Charlton considerably in his operation against the Singphos in October 1835. In fact, the Political Agent, Major White, was so much convinced of the good dispositions of the Khamtis that he allowed, on request of the minor Khamti chiefs, the return of the ex-Khowa Gohain to Sadiya in a private capacity to live among them.

In the next year, the proposal of Lt. Charlton to bring the Khamtis under taxation,¹⁹⁴ for efficient management of the Sadiya frontier, roused them from the state of slumbering discontentment to one of open hostility. The proposal was later shelved because of the increasing importance attached to the security in the Sadiya frontier, but the net impact of such proposal on Khamtis was in the negative. In spite of the apparent coolness in the surface, frustration among the Khamtis took the shape of a silent rebellion. They had already lost their chief and their traditional privileges over the Assamese

¹⁹³ Political Consultations, 1 June 1835, No. 4.
¹⁹⁴ Ibid, 9 February 1836, Nos. 2-3.
ryots. Enforcement of British legislation in the liberation of slaves had also adversely affected their socio-cultural life. Apart from the injury to their cultural ego and pride, the Khamtis had also suffered badly on economic front. Their thriving agricultural economy, which was considerably dependent on the slaves and the forced labour of the Assamese ryots, had been pressed in the last one decade to the state of a mere subsistence economy. The natural reaction of the Khamtis against this background was undeniably rebellious.

In 1837 intelligence reports reached Charlton that the ex-Khowa Gohain, in consort with the Singphos, was planning to attack Sadiya. On inquiry, the report was found to be baseless, and therefore, disregarded. But, the exercise to enquire the machination against the British rule in Assam brought into light alarming details about the threat to security in Upper Assam. Apart from the disturbances in the tribal frontiers of Lower Assam, the suspicious movement of the Khamtis and Singphos, and the flexing of muscle by the Mattak chief, convinced the Commissioner of Asam the necessity of a stronger and more constant manifestation of power from a position in advance of the head quarters of Assam Light Infantry stationed at Biswanath. "Sadiya seems to me", Jenkins pointed out in a letter to the Government of India on 12 January 1838, "in the most commanding position with reference not only to Ava but also with Singpho districts and it entirely commands the Mattock country containing the bulk of population of the Sadiya district, from whose cooperation or hostility we have most to hope or fear".

195 Political Consultations (Secret), 15 May 1837, Nos. 12-3.
After the departure of Lt. Miller from Sadiya, the civil duties of the district fell on White. In this capacity he was to exercise the function of a Collector, Magistrate and Judge in an extensive district, at a place, Biswanath, which was 250 miles in distance from his new area of operation. Therefore, he was directed to remove the head quarters of Assam Light Infantry as well as Political Agency to Sadiya, which was then gaining considerable importance because of the growing security concern in that frontier. Colonel White's noisy movement, along with the men and provision of Assam Light Infantry to Sadiya, sent the necessary alam to the Khamtis that the new administration is determined to stay in Sadiya. Brewing suspicion of the Khamtis, about the intention of the British in Sadiya after the removal of their chief, was emboldened by these moves. Their fear of the imposition of taxes on them and the loss of their privileges on their own territory galvanised them to open rebellion before Colonel White consolidates his position in Sadiya.

On the evening of the 19th January, 1839 Colonel White had held a durbar attended by all the Khamti chiefs in a friendly and trust-worthy manner, leaving no room for doubt on the loyalty of the tribe. But on the same night, in a pre-planned move, the Khamtis, numbering to about six hundred, under the command of their chief, launched a surprise attack on the sepoy line at Sadiya from four different directions. Colonel White, while hastening from his bungalow to the military lines, was cut into pieces. The surprise was so complete that return

---

fire was made only after everything was over. Colonel White and one Subedar Major of Gurkha Regiment were killed. Eight other soldiers were killed or wounded and all the sepoy lines but two were burnt to the ground.

Amidst chaos and confusion all around, Lt. Marshall pursued the rebels into their hills and succeeded in the course of operation in killing Ranua Gohain, the principal instigator and one hundred twenty five others on the spot. The remaining chiefs and their followers retreated instantly to the hills for refuge, deserting their villages overnight. Captain Hannay, who had been vested with the command of Assam Light infantry after the death of White, undertook the operation deep into the hill side of Sadiya and burnt to ground the villages of the offenders. Rewards were announced for the apprehension of the two other leaders, Tao Gohain and Captain Gohain, who had taken refuge in the Mishmi hills. Assistance of other loyal and friendly tribes like, Beesa Gaum of Singpho tribe, the hospitable Adis and the Moamarias of Mattak was also sought in encircling the offenders from all sides.

Among the rank and files of the leaders and their followers differences developed regarding their future strategy against the British, who had not only overtaken Sadiya militarily, but also were in commanding position throughout the frontier, making the refugee’s survival in the Mishmi hills difficult. Chouking Gohain was the first to surrender to the British. He gave some key information about the remaining rebels, which led to the release of 200 Mooluck Khamtis, who had been forcibly taken to the hills for their refusal to join the

---

198 Political Consultations (Secret), 20 February 1839, Nos. 105-10.
199 Political Consultations, 3 April 1839, Nos. 116-18.
insurrection. Afterwards 900 Khamtis laid down their arms, and as a punishment for their participation in the rebellion they were removed from Sadiya to Lakhimpur district. A second and third expedition in the cold weather of the same year drove the remaining rebels to surrender. This process continued till December 1843, when the remaining rebels, tired of desertion, surrendered to captain Vetch. With this the Khamti rebellion was ruthlessly terminated, but the shock waves it released on its wake remained for a long time an eye-opener for the Colonial masters of Brahmaputra valley.

Jenkins remarked, 'the attack of the Khamtis was the boldest attempt yet made in the eastern frontier'. He was inclined to believe that although the Khamti chiefs were directly involved, the Singphos, the Mattaks and even the court of Ava had a secret hand in it. Frontier reports following this episode led Hannay to believe that it was part of a deep laid plot to subvert the British Government in Assam. In the event of their success, 'they would have been joined by countless host of plunderers; and before assistance would have arrived, Upper Assam would have been in worse state than in 1825'.

It was this perception of the Colonial masters on the Khamti rebellion which convinced them to devise measures that can effectively prevent recurrence of such episode in the Sadiya frontier. Jenkins was of firm conviction that the strength of the Khamtis lays in their inherent unity under one powerful chief, which was a distinct advantage for the tribe in action. To break this unity it was considered appropriate to settle the Khamtis in small pockets in a vast and wide region. Captain Gohain,
KHAMTI AND SINGPHO FRONTIER, 1939
cousin of late Khowa Gohain, and his followers were settled at Choonpura, above Sadiya. A second group under the chief Chowtang Gohain was settled at Dhemaji, and sill a third group under the son of the late chief was sent to Bhodia, located to the west of Lakhimpur. The Moonglary Khamtis, who were formerly allowed to settle on the Tengapani, were shifted to Saikhowa in the south bank of Brahmaputra.\textsuperscript{203} The Bhodia and Dhemaji settlements were consequently brought under regular taxation, but the Choonpura and Saikhowa settlements were still allowed to enjoy the benefit of tax exemption. This policy of divide and rule in the Khamti frontier worked well. Under the supervision of the British officials they settled down to agricultural pursuits, and continued to coexist with their British master in peace and harmony. In the administrative report of 1871 the Khamtis are mentioned as “a well disposed race amenable to the directives of the Administration from time to time”,\textsuperscript{204}

3.2.7 ENGAGEMENT IN THE SINGPHO FRONTIER

Active engagement in the Sadiya frontier, warranted by the security concern of the Empire in North-east India, made the Singpho tract a tract of true strategic importance for the Colonial rulers since the days of first Anglo-Burmese war. After the war, peace treaty signed with sixteen Singpho chiefs by David Scott in May 1826 formed the basis of temporary peace in that hostile frontier. The remaining twelve chiefs led by Duffa Gaum still remained rebellious to the core, and their continued contact with the Burmese garrison at Mogauung was the
potential source of security concern for Scott and his successors as well. However, as long as Neufville remained in charge of the security of Sadiya frontier, containment of the rebel faction was managed in an effective manner. Formation of the Sadiya militia, exclusively carved out to take charge of the security duty of that sensitive frontier, provided the necessary security apparatus even after the withdrawal of Army Regulars from Assam in 1827. Trans-border trade was also promoted in an attempt to convince the recalcitrant chiefs of their futility in staying rebellious in the long run and to impress upon them the benefit of border trade, which can substantially change their material condition even after the loss of slaves and low lands in Assam. But these bold initiatives by Scott, too was botched for the lack of an efficient officer to oversee the trans-border trade project in that hostile frontier.

Meanwhile death of Captain Neufville on 30 June 1830 at Jorhat created an administrative gap that was extremely difficult to bridge up in the immediate aftermath. Scott was so saddened by Neufville’s death that he remarked the losses in the Sadiya frontier in the following manner:

"With an officer in charge possessed of Captain Neufville’s experience and talents the state of things was not of such material consequence, since complete reliance might be placed upon his local knowledge and discretion....... The whole of these valuable qualities cannot however be looked for in his successors, some of them being unattainable for at least a considerable time after appointment...."\(^{205}\)

The vulnerability of the Sadiya frontier haunted Scott so much that he emphatically pleaded for the formation of a new

\(^{205}\) Political Consultations, 10 June 1831, No. 50.
political unit in eastern Assam with headquarters at Sadiya. But the Governor General-in-Council was of the opinion that there was material objection to the establishment of the proposed frontier agency as the objective attended to would not justify the measure. Two years later Jenkins’ forward policy struck deep-root at Fort William, Calcutta, and the Governor General-in-Council decided on 30 May 1833 that the tract between Buri Dihing and Dibang should be placed under a European Officer permanently posted at Sadiya. Lieutenant Charlton was the first officer appointed with duties in 1834 to act as the official Channel with the Khamtis and Singphos from his Sadiya office. At this point of transition the policy of the Government was still guided by the fundamental principle—“that of guaranteeing the chief their time-honoured rights and privileges without relieving them at the same time, of the homage and subservience to the paramount power”.  

Continuation of this policy worked well with the sixteen Singpho chiefs with whom peace agreement was signed in 1826. But, there was still a powerful rebel group led by Duffa Gaum, who refused to accept the terms of peace because of old internecine rivalry with Beesa Gaum, who had tactfully managed to take the side of the British administration for the sake of garnering the benefit of peaceful engagement on a sole basis. Public recognition of Beesa as the paramount chief of the Singphos by the British administration was a tactical policy blunder, which spoiled every serious attempt to bring Duffa Gaum to the peace table. Rivalry between the two chiefs reached a flashpoint, when in July 1835 Duffa Gaum, to avenge
his past defeat, launched a surprise attack on Beesa Gaum and his followers, indiscriminately massacring even the family members of the Beesa. After this raid Duffa Gaum and his associates retired to their hill pocket leaving a message for Charlton that they had no intention to fight against the English, but were forced to carry out this raid to settle their past score with their rivals settled in the British territory.209

In the aftermath of this gruesome massacre the decision to grant continued protection to Beesa Gaum was reviewed at Calcutta, but Captain White, the Political Agent, Upper Assam held the view that since the crime took place inside the British territory, the offenders must be punished, lest the formidable Singphos will remain hostile to the British in that sensitive tract, which connects Burma directly in the eastern frontier. Moreover, since Beesa Gaum had been recognized by the treaty as the official channel of connection since 1826, it was felt mandatory to protect him against his rivals. Captain White also proposed that the attention of the Court of Ava must be drawn to the incident so that a diplomatic solution can be found to prevent the recurrence of such raids in future.210 Taking cognizance of the intra-tribal feud in that frontier since long past the Governor General-in-Council expressed reservations about the proposed hot-pursuit of the offenders up to the Hukwang valley, but sanctioned protective measures and diplomatic engagement with Burma.211 Limited military operations were carried out in August 1835 by Lt. Charlton and Lt. Miller. They were joined by Mr. Bruce, the Commandant of the gun-boats, who inflicted heavy losses on the enemy, but

209. Political Consultations, 13 August 1835, No. 10.
211. Ibid, No. 2.
while overtaking the second stockades Lt. Charlton was mortally wounded. Duffa Gaum, along with his associates, fled to Hukwang to find shelter with their sponsors in Burma.

Trouble in the Singpho frontier took a serious turn, when it was found that Duffa's popularity was growing stronger in the hills for his dare-devil acts. This scenario prompted loyalty switch-over for some chiefs to the Duffa side, who were once allies of the British since 1826.\footnote{212} Absence of any response from the Court of Ava to the communication made by the Government of India created a tense situation in the frontier. To deal with the problems from a firm footing Captain Jenkins vested Captain White with discretionary powers to pursue the offenders as far as Hukwang if necessary. Soon Captain White moved to the frontier with a party of 250 sepoys, but to give diplomacy a chance, before the commencement of the military operation, he granted a truce for four days inviting Duffa to the peace table. A loyal band of Khamti chiefs played the role of honest brokers in the peace talks. From the very beginning Duffa was quite candid in his argument that for the present state of affairs in the Singpho frontier the responsibility should be fixed on the Beesa as he deprived him of the opportunity to settle in peace with the British. Past treachery and revenge was cited as the main reason for the continued blood-shed among them. Captain White sympathized with the genuine arguments of Duffa and agreed with the aggrieved chief that he will be restored with his territory in the low-lands and recognized as a friendly chief under British protection only after signing peace agreement with the British.\footnote{213} But the talks broke down

\footnote{212} Bengal Political Proceedings, 25 September 1835, Nos. 1-48.
\footnote{213} Political Consultations, 8 December 1835, No. 13.
of river Irrawaddy above the check point at Isampaynago, which is situated 70 miles north of Ava, the mission team led by Hannay reached Mogaung on 5 January, 1836. From there the team further proceeded to Mainkhwon, the capital of Hukwang, where the meeting was arranged with Duffa, brokered by the good offices of the Myowoon or Governor of Mogaung. Throughout the journey Hannay made every attempt to gather intimate knowledge of that hidden land in the Upper Irrawaddy region, but the accompanying Burmese team always tried to maintain secrecy on the topography and people of that frontier. Any advance beyond Hukwang was prevented on one plea or other, which reflected the hesitation of the Burmese authority to allow a British officer deep inside the Singpho tract through the Burmese territory.

Against this backdrop the only option left for Hannay is to invite Duffa for talks at Mainkhwon. Diplomatic pressure from Burney at Ava finally yielded result. The mediation of Mogaung Governor was best used to bring Duffa to the negotiating table on 22nd March, 1836. The cordial manner in which Duffa was received at Mainkhwon by the Mogaung official convinced Hannay beyond doubt that the Burmese authority considers Duffa as their trusted Lieutenant in the Singpho frontier. Despite this misgiving from the beginning, talks were held in a friendly manner to convince Duffa to return back to his paternal estate in Assam and settle sown peacefully under British protection. Hannay too was impressed by the plain-speak of Duffa that great injustice had been done to him because of the spoil-shots played by his rival Beesa. He was promised fair trial and recommended for the same to Commissioner, Jenkins in

217. For details of the Journey see the Report of Hannay on the Topic: Narrative of a journey from the city of Ava to the Amber mines in the frontiers of Assam in ibid.
Assam. The Resident in Burma too agreed with Hannay that
it would be advantageous to the British Government to appease
and gain control over Duffa and his followers than to exasperate
them and drive them to despair. But neither Captain White
nor Jenkins was in favour of a soft policy towards Duffa
because of his continued rebellious behaviour in the Sadiya
frontier. Moreover, grant of any special favour to Duffa was
calculated to be a risky move as it would endanger the existing
arrangement with Beesa and other chiefs in the Singpho
frontier. Jenkins’ tough stand that the only way to solve the
ongoing problem is to demand unconditional surrender from
Duffa spoiled the chance of a compromise and release of
Assamese ryots, still held as captive in the Singpho tract.

Failure of Hannay’s first mission in containing the
Singpho menace through diplomatic means prompted
Government of India to put the blame squarely on the Burmese
Government. Continued support of the Burmese Government to
the Duufa Gaum and his associates, in fact, led to a serious
diplomatic spat between the two countries. Burney was
directed to demand from the Court of Ava peaceable behaviour
from the Singphos in future. But the Burmese authority was
not in a position to make any future commitment on this issue
because of the unsettled state of the Burmese frontier in the
north-west bordering Assam. Moreover, from the Burmese side
every move was in the defensive mode because after testing
defeat in the 1st Anglo-Burmese war, they were not in a position
to take the chance of a second war with the British on a petty
issue like the Singpho raid in Assam. At the same time they

218 Foreign Political Proceedings (India), 20 June 1836, No.114.
219 Ibid. 26 September 1836, No. 45.
were not also ready to accommodate every imperialistic move from the British side on their soil on the plea of containing the Singpho menace. Burney was quite confident from the very beginning that the response from the Court of Ava is not along positive line on the Singpho issue. Even after losing Assam to the British, the Burmese Government had not yet reconciled to giving up its last territorial claim on the Singpho tract, where its command was still operative through a trusted band of Singpho chiefs. Burney, therefore, suggested that the line of communication, opened by the 1st mission of Hannay, must be revisited from time to time, so that the diplomatic hesitation on the part of Burma to open that hidden tract in the Upper Irrawaddy region for politico-military and commercial intercourses in future can be smoothened over the passage of time.221

At this point of time British imperial interest was not alone confined to the Singpho tract. It was definitely centred on the Amber and Serpentine mines of Upper Burma located mostly in the Hukwang valley. For centuries the Chinese had a monopoly trade over these two minerals in Upper Burma. Imperial strategist in Calcutta and London were quite serious to make an entry into the Amber mines of Hukwang valley. The British Resident at Burma was, therefore, directed to act as facilitator in that process.222 Hannay’s first mission was thus tactically used to gather information on the topography, climate, people and culture of the route traversed from Ava to Mogaung, so that in future this can be used to extend British strategic push to Upper Burma through the Singpho tract in Assam.

---

221 Foreign Political Proceedings, (India), 18 July 1836, No. 42.
222 Ibid.

189
The Chinese, however, could smell the rot of this strategic move on the part of the British in Upper Irrawaddy region. They were quite sceptical from the very beginning that, if allowed to operate, the British would soon eat into the Chinese monopoly trade in Amber and Serpentine in that region. Therefore, the first mission of Hannay created a stir in the Sino-Burmese relations. The matter was raised by the Chinese authority in the Court of Ava when Hannay was first granted the permission to visit Mogaung in the north of Ava in 1836. At a point of time it was perceived by Hannay that even after the grant of permission, the mission may not succeed in moving out of Ava because of the Chinese protest. But the British Resident exerted pressure on the Ministers at Ava to override the Chinese protest on the ground that Hannay’s mission is an exploratory one from Burma to Assam via the Mogaung province and the Hukwang valley route.223

Yet another objective of Hannay’s first mission was to get first-hand knowledge of the terrain and its connecting routes with Assam, so that in future border talks, the issue of demarcation can be argued from a sound footing.224 Given the resistance of the Burmese to loosen their string of control on the Singphos it was even discussed to annex the whole of north-west Burma to the British-Indian Empire as a future strategy to silence every possible threat to security in India’s eastern frontier.225 From this platform the grand strategy was to enter China from the west for establishing British monopoly trade in

---

223. Ibid.
224. For details see Captain S.F. Hannay, *The Journal of a route from the Capital of Ava to the Amber Mines of Hukwang Valley on the South-East Frontier of Assam.*
225. Foreign Political Proceedings, 8 May 1837, No. 64. To Neutralize the extravagant territorial claims of Burma over Assam as far as Jayapore the Resident was directed to communicate the matter to the court of Ava that it is determined to make Patkai range the boundary between the two countries.
the western province of Yunan, where French interest was seen as a threat. True to this calculation, after the second Anglo-Burmese war the advantage of victory over Burma was fully exploited by annexing Upper Burma to the British Empire in 1851.

To give the strategic planning in the Singpho frontier a definite boost, as per Burney's suggestion a second mission was planned to explore the Singpho tract from both the Burmese side and the Assam frontier. The Resident was asked to seek permission from the Court of Ava for this mission. The objective of the mission was three fold; one, release of Assamese ryots still held as captives in Burma by the Singphos, two, explore the possibility of better inland trade intercourse with Burma through the route of Sadiya-Mainkhwon-Mogaung-Baman (Bhamo) and Ava,226 and three, boundary settlement along the Patkai. Every care was taken in the diplomatic communication to ensure that the suspicion of the Burmese is not roused on the strategic advance of British sphere of interest up to Upper Burma. It was planned that Major White would proceed from Sadiya along with Hannay through the Singpho tract to Hukwang, where he would meet G.E. Bayfield, Assistant to the Resident, proceeding from Ava through the province of Bhamo and Mogaung to the same place escorted by Burmese officials. The mission control exercise was monitored by Secretary, Government of India, Macnaghten. Initial Burmese suspicion of Chinese protest was cleared, when it was pointed out that the left-out Burmese Shans (of the retreating Burmese Army of the first Anglo-Burmese war) in Assam can return back to Burma in lieu of similar safe passage for around 25000 Assamese ryots,

226. Political Proceedings (India), 27 June 1836, No. 49.
still held as captive in places like Mainkhwon, Mogaung and Bhamo.\textsuperscript{227} The Ministers in Burma also found merit in the second mission as they were interested to raise the border demarcation in Burma’s north-west frontier, which was left unsolved in the Treaty of Yandaboo.

Dr. W. Griffith, a scientific officer, was added to the mission to get intimate knowledge of the natural history of the inner Singpho tract. The mission teams left Ava and Namrup as per schedule in January 1837 and reached Mogaung on 9\textsuperscript{th} March after experiencing hardship on the way because of the internecine feud between the Kakhyens and the eastern Nagas. At Mogaung Bayfield and Hannay entered into talks with the Governor of the province. Tranquillity in the Singpho frontier was demanded unconditionally from Burma. Release of the Assamese slaves too was raised in exchange of the Shans, still left in Assam since the first Anglo-Burmese war. The Mogaung chief was mainly interested on the issue of border demarcation of his province in the Assam frontier.\textsuperscript{228} To substantiate his claim over the whole of Singpho frontier as far as Jaypore, he presented before Bayfield and Hannay the historical record dating back to the days of First Ahom ruler, Sukapha (1224), which was rejected out rightly as outrageous and baseless. The Patkai range was pointed out by the British Resident to be the natural and historical divide-line in that frontier. Unilateralism on the part of the British in border talks compelled the Burmese authority to go slow on the proposed security and commercial projects in the Singpho frontier.\textsuperscript{229} Although the Governor of Mogaung promised to cooperate in maintaining tranquillity in

\textsuperscript{227} The First Hannay Mission gathered this information about Assamese slaves in Burma. For details see, Journal of the Route from Ava..., op. cit., n. 224.

\textsuperscript{228} Foreign Political Proceedings (India), 17 April 1837, No. 48.

\textsuperscript{229} Ibid, 20 March 1837, Nos. 82-83.
the Singpho frontier, the issue of containing Duffa Gaum and his associates was simply dismissed as unnecessary. Even the proposal to set up a British military post at Hukwang for operation at the time of emergency was not taken seriously by the Burmese side.

Stalemate in the informal border talks further deepened the suspicion of the Court of Ava on the British imperial strategy in the Upper Burma, and from there to Kunming of Yunan province of China, which forms the tri-junction of trade and commerce with Vietnam, Cambodia and Thailand. Therefore, Hannay’s request for permission to return to Calcutta from Mainkhwon via Ava, criss-crossing the whole of Upper Irrawaddy region, was turned down on one plea or the other. China’s silent diplomacy to keep the British out of Upper Burma cannot be ruled out as the main factor behind the reactionary move on the part of Burma this time. Moreover, since the Singphos led by Duffa, was considered trustworthy by the Moguung chief, to keep alive his territorial agenda beyond the Patkai in the hill sections bordering Assam, no positive step was taken since the second failed mission to restore tranquillity in the volatile Singpho frontier.

From November 1837 onwards the Singpho frontier once again witnessed turbulence due to internecine feud and raids on the bordering Nagas. But since the problem was still confined to various groups of the tribe and their deemed vassals in the Tirap frontier, the development was watched with concern. Any proactive action to contain the raids was tactically avoided. However, as a preventive measure Jenkins suggested the need of establishing a military outpost on the Buri Dihing

219. Ibid, 8 May 1837, No. 57.
near Jaypore. To enable the militia fight effectively against future Singpho raid, a proposal was mooted by Major White to arm the Nagas instantly, which was later on reviewed on the basis of suggestion from Hannay to tread cautiously in the Singpho frontier. As the proposal to set up a military post deep inside the tribal frontier was considered inexpedient at the moment, still strong argument from Jenkins about the need of a show of military force in the tribal frontier to achieve peace and tranquillity by force convinced the Calcutta authority to sanction the project. Captain Hannay was deputed to implement this security project by recruiting Khamtis and Doaneas to form the core of the militia. For some time debate continued on the reliability of the Khamtis and Doaneas as an effective buffer against future Burmese invasion and the strategic advantage and disadvantages of having a military base on an isolated and forward position in the Singpho frontier. But Jenkins’ firm conviction on the need of a military showdown with the rebels led to the effective implementation of forward thrust in a war-footing.

The immediate effect of this forward thrust was quite positive towards the liberation of Assamese slaves, so far held captive by the Singphos. But for the Singphos the loss was quite substantial. Loss of low-lands, compounded with loss of slaves, severely impacted the tribal economy in the Singpho frontier. To avenge the losses internal conflict among the chiefs was at its high once again as Beesa Gaum and his associates were blamed for still remaining loyal to the British and enjoying the benefit of official protection and patronage at the cost of the

---

231 A. Mackenzie, The North-East Frontier of India, Delhi, 1989 (Reprint), p. 68.
232 Political Proceedings, 19 June 1837, No. 57.
233 Ibid. 25 September 1837, No. 112.
deprived chiefs, headed by Duffa Gaum. Growing discontentment among the chiefs was reflected in the complicity of a few rebels in the Khamti rebellion of 1839 to settle their score against the British. To quell the Khamti rebellion with a strong-arm policy a detachment of the advancing troop was sent to the Singpho frontier. Villages, suspected to be a party to the rebellion, were burnt and a stern message was given to carry-forward military operation if rebels fail to surrender. Ruthless suppression of the Khamti rebellion and the brute show of the fire power of the British arms compelled the rebel Singpho chief, Ningroola, an associate of Duffa Gaum to surrender. Others followed suit soon, leading to peace and tranquillity in the Singpho frontier in the following years.

Prevailing peace in the Singpho tract, reported by Captain Vetch in 1842, impressed Jenkins to recommend to the Calcutta authority for transfer of the management of the tract from Political Department to the Revenue and Judicial Department of Bengal Government. Assessing the success of Jenkins’ forward policy in that tract, approval was given to the proposal soon and the policy governing the liberation of slaves was given a final touch henceforward. But to the shock and surprise of Jenkins the prevailing peace in the Singpho frontier was a temporary peace at the surface only. The Singphos in general were utterly frustrated with the consolidation of British power in their frontier, and the economic losses and consequent financial hardship due to the loss of slaves and loss of low-lands to them in the last one decade had made their life
miserable. They were ready to avenge their losses with a resolve to regain their freedom in their jealously guarded tract.

Unable to unite on their own to stand up against the might of British military force in their frontier, they were just looking for the right trigger to wage the armed rebellion against the British. Coincidentally the trigger was set off by Tipam Rajah in 1843, whose political ambition to reign over Hukwang and its outlaying territory in Upper Assam, was approved by the Court of Ava in that eventful year. For a long time Tipam Rajah, alias Biswanath Singha, had been waiting in Burma to get legitimacy of his political adventure in Mogaung. His sister, Hemo Aideo, whom Raja Chandrakanta offered as a gift to the king of Ava, played an instrumental role in this adventurous project, which rocked the Singpho frontier with a virulent rebellion. The feeling of insecurity and threat of yet another war with Burma was brought to the door step of Major Jenkins in 1843. Confidence of Jenkins that the Eastern frontier is quite after years of turbulence was shaken once again, when the Singphos launched a massive attack on the frontier guards at Ningroo and Beesa on 10 January, 1843. To the surprise of the Political Agent, Upper Assam, who rushed to the scene to defend the frontier, all the chiefs, including loyalist like Beesa Gaum and Ningrooola, were also involved in the attack. So deadly was the attack at Beesa that for want of reinforcement from the rear the post fell into the hands of the attackers. But a retaliatory charge from Lt. Lockett at Kojoo and Lt. D. Reid at Ningroo saved the day for the British.

238 Ibid, 1 February 1843, Nos. 162-63.
239 Ibid, 1 February 1843, Nos. 97-9.
Intelligence report about Saikhowa being threatened by a combination of Khamti and Singpho rebels prompted Jenkins to order launching of a massive combing operation in the Singpho frontier with support from Major Hannay of Assam Light Infantry at Jayapore and Captain Lister of Sylhet Light Infantry at Cherapunji. The impact of the operation was felt immediately when Ningroola surrendered first, followed by Beesa and others in quick succession. The remaining fourteen chiefs led by Serrola retreated to the interior, but made their intention clear in a letter that they too would like to live in peace if they are restored with their low-lands and slaves. The complicity of Tipam Rajah in the rebellion as a conspirator from outside was established beyond doubt, and accusing fingers were once again raised towards Burma for attempting to destabilise the frontier.

The rebellion was no doubt crushed by the show of brute force, but accusation of treaty violation by the Political Agent with regard to land grabbing, and seizure and confinement of the Singphos, allegedly by the retreating chiefs, although denied by Jenkins, was taken seriously by the Government of India. An enquiry was ordered to know the truth behind the accusation, and Jenkins was called upon to enquire whether any encroachment has taken place on the Singpho land since 1826. The enquiry report submitted by Jenkins in February 1844 dealt exhaustively on the accounts of the chiefs he visited in the Singpho frontier after the rebellion. Although local authorities in Assam defended their strong-arm policy in the Singpho frontier, the sufferings of the Singpho due to that was

---

Ibid, 31 May 1843, Nos. 76-7.
Ibid, 12 August 1843, No. 102.
Ibid, 31 May 1843, No. 106.
evident in the deposition of the chiefs recorded in the report. Therefore, the Singpho rebellion, which had the potential of trans-border ramifications in the Burmese and Chinese political circle, was reviewed in England. It was very well recognised that the rebellion was the outcome of accumulated grievances of the tribe for which the local authorities were held responsible to certain extent. The Governor General, Lord Ellenborough was therefore advised not only to redress all genuine grievances of the tribe, but also to show reasonable consideration for all their expectations. After this a soft approach was adopted towards the Singphos, thus replacing the policy of hot-pursuit pursued so far, which resulted in the beginning of a new phase of peace and tranquillity in that frontier.

However, the advance military guard posts were maintained at Saikhowa, Ningroo and Jaypore to guard the interest of the tea-planters in that sensitive frontier and to keep a vigil on the passes of the Patkai that provide the natural outlet for trans-border movement of the tribe to Burma. Since hostility with Burma was at a passive stage, it was considered a tactical move to maintain forces close to the Patkai, so that in case of outbreak of hostilities in future rapid movement of forces could be carried out without much hardship. Thus, a combination of soft approach and vigilance against future conspiracy from the Burmese side resulted in the restoration of peace and tranquillity in the Singpho frontier from 1844 onwards. In the aftermath of the Second Anglo-Burmese war (1852) Upper Burma was annexed to the British Empire. With this the possibility of any strategic game-plan of the Burmese authority in north-east India through the Singpho corridor was

\[\text{\footnotesize 244 H.K. Barpujari, Problem of the Hill Tribes... Vol. II, Gauhati, 1978, Reprint, pp. 8-9.}\]
terminated for ever. The Singphos too settled down to agriculture and accepted the new order prevailing in their frontier. J.F. Michell’s report substantiates the prevailing peace in the Singpho frontier in the following decades. During his tour of the tract in 1887 and 1891, he reported the co-operation extended by the Singphos to the visiting team. In 1917-18 Dundas, the Political Officer of the Eastern Section, recorded in his annual report that the Singphos had been brought under the direct administration of the British with poll tax being paid by them as a mark of allegiance to the British administration. Thus, the imperial game-plan of the British in the Singpho tract and Upper Burma, carefully nurtured since the days of Scott and Jenkins, was consummated after years of careful planning, arduous struggle and tactical diplomacy carried beyond the frontier.

3.2.8 FORWARD MOVES IN THE TIRAP FRONTIER

To the east of the Singphos lay the settlement of the Tangsas in the northern spurs and slopes of the Daphabhum and Patkai range. Along the main Patkai range and middle spurs, the Wanchoo settlements are located close to the Tangsas. The Noctes, known as Namsangias, live next to the Wanchos along the Tuensang district of Nagaland. In the British records, they are all mentioned as Eastern Nagas because of their geographical contiguity with the Nagas of the Nagaland. Geography facilitated in the past their cultural contacts with Burma, but trade and commerce was extremely

245 Assam Secretariat Files, Nos. 547J, 1887 and 613J, 1888.
limited because of the sparse population in the region and the formidable barrier posed by the Patkai range. Only the Pangasau pass provides the connecting link in this sector with Burma, but for the hazards involved in venturing through this pass, located at 1238 metre above the sea level, it was very rarely frequented in the past. Absence of the practice of posa in this frontier prevented the British from having early interactions with these tribes, but turbulence in the Singpho frontier and Captain Hannay's forward march through the spurs and valleys of Patkai in pursuit of the Singpho rebels brought into light the recurrence of Singpho depredations on these tribes in the 1830's. The very report that Easter Nagas were taken into captivity in hordes by the Singphos reveals that inter-tribal feud continued to exist in the Tirap frontier, where the Singphos played the dominant role for quite a long time. On enquiry, it was found that loss of Assamese slaves had compelled the Singphos to find alternative sources from among the tribes of the Tirap frontier.

Since restoring tranquillity in the Singpho frontier was the top priority of Hannay's mission in 1837, a proposal was also mooted to bring the tribes of Tirap frontier under the regulation of a European officer. Such a move was felt necessary to prevent the Singphos from reducing their eastern neighbours into subservience. Regulating the tract was also considered very sensitive on account of its strategic passes with direct links to the Patkai range. Nevertheless, vacillating approach to a policy in the Singpho frontier dictated that protection cannot be extended to the tribes of Tirap frontier.

250 Political Proceedings (Bengal), 10 April 1837, Nos. 120-123.
booming plantation economy of the British Empire. The visionary dream of Scott was fulfilled during this period and Assam soon became the focal point of imperial moves in the East. An early roadblock on the way, like Ahom restoration project, was terminated by the master-stroke of Jenkins. Upper Assam was annexed and establishment of British paramount authority as far as the tribal frontier was achieved by successfully carrying out Posa settlement with the frontier tribes. Every voice of rebellion among the disgruntled nobles of the Ahom monarchy, and in the hills, among the Khasis, Khamptis, Singphos etc. was crushed by the use of brute force. Threat to security from the Burmese side was effectively neutralised after achieving imposing victory over Burma in the Second and Third Anglo-Burmese wars.

Tea planter's economy blossomed in the mean time that gave enough options to Jenkins and Hopkinson to bargain with Fort William for more exclusive military and political power to deal with any contingency with force. Although care was taken to stay away from avoidable conflicts in the tribal frontier, still show of military strength was vindicated time and again to bring the tribes under loose political control, whenever and wherever necessary. Echo of these calculated moves was very well heard in the Arunachal frontier from West to East. Posa settlement was effectively carried across the board, even by the use of force, where peaceful negotiations failed. Rebellions in the Singpho and Khamti frontier were crushed militarily and diplomatically by engaging Burmese authority in the check-mating process. Nevertheless, the spirit of the Arunachal tribes to continue defending their freedom within their tribal frontier, even at the cost of devastating raids and consequent punitive military action, compelled the Commissioner of Assam to stay
away, as far as possible, from the day to day affairs of the
Arunachal tribes, inhabiting the foot-hills bordering Assam.
Although trans-border imperial vision beyond Arunachal in
Tibet and Burma prompted some exploratory moves from the
British side from time to time, still as a matter of policy care
was taken to leave the tribes to fend for themselves in matters
of day to day concern. J.M. Graham’s Boundary Commission
(1872) was duly followed up in every other sector to keep the
tribes beyond the confines of Inner Line (the line of actual
control), but very much within the Outer Line to give
Imperialism a chance to consolidate in future in Arunachal
Pradesh.