CHAPTER 1

ANGLO-LUSHAI RELATIONS IN HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

The British East India Company established itself in Bengal after the Battle of Plassey, 1757 and in 1760, Mir Kasim, the Nawab of Bengal, ceded Chittagong to Lord Clive of the East India Company. The Company consolidated its rule in 1764 with the Battle of Buxar in North India and firmly established its base thereafter by defeating and conquering the Indian chiefs one after another. It then invaded Assam and the Surma Valley by driving out the Burmese who had occupied the area in 1824 during the Anglo-Burmese War of 1824-26. The districts of Cachar and Sylhet were also conquered in the name of the East India Company. The Treaty of Yandaboo became a turning point in the British dealings with the Indian tribes in the North East for their presence was gradually and increasingly felt in the interior which eventually led to the annexation of the hills one after the other.¹

The Lushais, who inhabited the bordering mountain ranges of Cachar and Sylhet began to have contacts with the new administrators after the British occupation of Cachar in 1832.² The contact with the Lushais (Mizos) actually

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¹ Vumson- _Zo History_, Aizawl, n. d., p.106.

² “We first came into direct contact with the Lushais in 1849, when Mora, or Mulla, son of Lallienvunga, made a raid…, followed by an expedition in the Lushai country by Colonel Lister…”, Davis- _Gazetteer of the North Lushai Hills, op._
started in the markets in the Cachar plains from where the Raja of Cachar supplied elephants’ tasks, ivory, musk, rubber and agar timber to the Mughals, some of which came from the neighbouring Lushai-Kuki Hills. The relations became more firmly grounded with the annexation of Cachar in 1832.

The first raid of the Lushais ever recorded in the history of the British was felt along the Chittagong foothills in 1777. The British referred to these tribes with epithets like ‘savage’ and ‘warlike’ and also referred to them as the ‘Kukis.’ As preventive measure against this raid, the British then employed a detachment of their sepoys for the first time. The first massacre that took place after the British occupation of Assam by the Lushais was in 1826. But the first effort to enter the Lushai Hills was made only in 1844 when a punitive expedition was sent to punish

cit., p. 1.


5 “From 1849 upto 1871 our relations with the Lushais were confined to raids on their part on our territory”, Davis- op. cit., p. 1.

the Paite Chief, Lalchuka, allegedly responsible for the massacre of the British subjects.\textsuperscript{7} This punitive measure did not bear positive result. It emboldened the Lushais, or the Kukis as the old records called them, that in the ensuing years, especially between 1845 and 1847, they perpetrated several depredations along the Manipur and Sylhet frontiers.\textsuperscript{8}

The British recorded series of continuous raids between the years 1845 and 1860 known as the ‘Great Kuki Invasion’.\textsuperscript{9} To counteract such raids, the first full scaled expeditionary force was sent to the Lushai Land in 1871, known as The Lushai Expedition of 1871-72. However, the real motive of the British for this operation was different.\textsuperscript{10} It was in fact, to explore the hinterlands of the region, which they had done partly way back in 1844, 1850, 1869 and 1870.\textsuperscript{11} The frontier


\textsuperscript{8} \textit{Ibid}


\textsuperscript{11} In December, 1844, the first expedition for the Lushai Hills was undertaken by Capt. Blackwood to punish a Paite chief, Lalchukla. Another expedition was carried out by Col. Lister in 1850. The next expedition was performed in 1869 under Gen. Nuthall,
officers also endeavoured to maintain frontier relations with the objectives of expanding bazaars which afforded good means of communication with the Hill people. The first attempt to provide frontier defence against the Lushai raids for the plain Bangalis and Assamese who were subjects of the British took place in 1850 by raising the ‘Kuki Levy’ from those Kukis of Cachar and Assam.

The Europeans introduced large scale plantation farming along the Cachar foothills after tea plant was discovered in Cachar in 1855. The cultivation of this plant affected the egalitarian way of lives of the Lushais and it began to disturb the prevailing peace and tranquillity in the region when the latter protested. Since its production extended towards the southern part of the district, it produced a disturbing result upon the neighbouring tribes, who considered it as forcible encroachments upon their hereditary hunting grounds. A.S. Reid, author of the Chin-Lushai Land has maintained—

and in 1870, Edgar visited Suakpaulal, a powerful Western chief. He revisited him in January, 1871.

12 Elly- op. cit., p. 12.

13 Ibid., pp. 10-11.


15 Reid, op. cit., p. 8.
“...on the present occasion, the alleged grievance of the Lushais was that the tea planters cleared forests on the Cachar frontier, under the promised protection of the civil authorities, in tracts which were claimed by the former as their rightful hunting grounds, although regarded by us as well within the newly defined line.”16

The grievances of the Lushais were seen in the form of raids upon the tea gardens of Loharbung and Monierkhal in the beginning of 1869.17 Retaliations were in the form of military exercises, but on this occasion, writes A.S. Reid, “owing to delay in the despatch of the force, lateness of the season and other causes, the troops employed were obliged to retire with the object in view unattained, and, as a result, our prestige with the wild tribes on our frontier considerably diminished.”18

The subsequent sixteen years of peaceful co-existence after the expedition of 1871-72 was broken by the British in 1889 on the pretext of avenging J.F. Stewart’s death and to prevent frequent raids within their territory, like the one on December 13, 1889.19 Steward and three of his men were killed in an ambuscade

16 Ibid. p. 11.

17 Ibid., p. 9. See also Mackenzie- op. cit., p. 306.

18 Ibid., p. 9.

19 Foreign Department, External A, March 1891, No. 152, National Archives of India, New Delhi.
while on a survey expedition in the Lushai territory on the 3rd February, 1888, allegedly by band of a Lushai chief, Hausata.  

As the operation of 1889 was not a success and could not achieve its main objectives, another expedition, which would be greater than the earlier one was chalked out. The proposed expedition was fulfilled in the form of the ‘Chin-Lushai Expedition of 1889-90’. Having occupied the whole of Burma (Myanmar) by this time, the British had been dealing with the Chins and thought of penetrating and conquering the Hills between and beyond the Myittha and Chindwin valleys, as they thought, they were frequently disturbed by these tribes. Elly has noted that the Lushais not only fought among themselves but also constantly raided the British territories, leaving the Colonial master in continual anxiety. As such, the British administrators felt necessary to undertake another military expedition by pushing through the deep interior as far as south of the Lushai Hills. The time for the expedition was fortuitous because the British had established Fort White in Burma and Fort Lunglei in Lushai Hills and kept them well stockaded.

The British initially came as traders of the British East India Company to the sub-continent. But soon their prospective and ambition changed to establish

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20 Elly- op. cit., p.16.


22 A.S. Reid- op. cit., p. 60.

23 Elly- op. cit., p. 3.
dominion over the country, and to use its resources to strengthen trade and industry in Britain. Though they appeared to be quite concern with stopping raids and plunders, their real motive was more than stopping raids or restoring order.\textsuperscript{24} As a result, they started to adopt a policy of conquest, annexation and consolidation since the time of Warren Hastings and much more so during Dalhousie’s Governor-Generalship.\textsuperscript{25} With conquest and colonisation, they mobilised every resources to attain their hidden object. In Assam, their real purpose was that of commerce. When they penetrated the hills, their main concern was trade and profit from forest products such as rubber, cotton, timber, etc. In fact, tea plantations in Cachar and the Surma valley along the frontier bordering the hills had become a profitable commerce and a newly discovered item for the Europeans.\textsuperscript{26} This profit motive ultimately led the British to penetrate in the Northeast region.

Another aim of the British administration was the complete exploration of the land and construction of a road reaching to Haka in Burma.\textsuperscript{27} They had already

\textsuperscript{24} Reid-\textit{ op. cit.}, p. 93.

\textsuperscript{25} Annexation and colonization were done in different parts of India and the North East without the consent of the conquered. “They were not brought under British rule in their own interest; in fact, whether they liked being taken over and whether it was in their interest to be taken over or not were never considered at all.” Parry-\textit{The Lakhers, op. cit.}, p. 15.

\textsuperscript{26} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 8.

\textsuperscript{27} \textit{Ibid.}, p.93, 39; Foreign Dept., External-A, Aug., 1890, Nos. 240.
been in possession of the markets in the plains of Cachar and Sylhet since the annexation of Cachar in 1832.\textsuperscript{28} J.B. Bhattacharjee has stated that the British had commercially penetrated in Assam much before the actual annexation in 1826 or the Burmese invasion of Assam in 1822, which created conditions for the Anglo-Burmese War (1824-26) and the resultant British annexation of the state.\textsuperscript{29} Since then, the eye of the British frequently fell on the Lushai country which eventually led to its occupation in the last decade of the nineteenth century.

\textsuperscript{28} Bhattacharjee- \textit{op. cit.}, p. 69.

\textsuperscript{29} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 41.