Chapter 5

PRACTICES OF FRONTIER REGIME

Even after the North-East frontier had been annexed at the end of the first Anglo-Burmese war (1824-26) the British found it difficult to bring all the inhabitants of the frontier under its administration. Connected to this was the conception of the unknown people and inaccessible terrain of the frontier. This sense of the lack of authority and the lack of knowledge about the place and the people in the frontier was connected in the colonial perception with the lack of surveys. Christoph von Furer-Haimendorf wrote, “The mountain tracts on the borders of Assam and Burma remain as one of the few unsurveyed areas of India.”

The densely wooded hills extend from the Brahmaputra to the Chindwin and reach the peaks of the Patkai range attaining heights of more than 12,000 feet. The north-west of this range is inhabited by the Nagas and consequently known as the Naga Hills. In Haimendorf’s words, “Other Naga tribes live also on the Burma side of the Patkai but little is known of them.” He gives two reasons for the inability of the British to either bring these people in the Naga Hills under political control or even have knowledge about them. First, the inhospitability of the area offers nothing to the peoples inhabiting the fertile plains of the Assam valley and has therefore never tempted them to expand in that direction. Secondly, “the warlike character of the Naga tribes allowed no stranger to penetrate their land.” In his opinion, head-hunting and frequent wars made intercourse between villages extremely difficult and cut off the people on the hills in the interior from all contact with the outside world. In such a situation, “travelling alone or even in small groups in the unadministered parts of the country is, for Nagas as for Europeans, a venture little short of suicide.” And even now, there has not been much change in this imagery of isolation and danger to depict these territories. But this chapter focuses on the early part of the twentieth century and the nineteenth century and looks at the processes of controlling the inhabitants of these areas in the frontier.

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But before we discuss those practices, there is a need to reflect on the term frontier. The term has often been used with a variety of meanings as earlier discussed in the Introduction. The chapter begins with a discussion on the historical context and the different understandings of the concept of frontier. These explorations will be followed with an examination of the concept in the specific context of the north-east frontier. One of the questions that will be addressed here is the relationship between what was called the ‘tribal raids’ and the British intrusions into the hills in the form of ‘punitive expeditions’. It will be important to see if we can look at the specificity of a frontier region, say, in the form of militaristic operation as a particular mode of control and rule. Rather than looking at the violence perpetrated by the colonial state as a response, an aberration, or solution can we see it as the problem that sustains the violence, a system on which it has based its rule? What are the modes through which colonial power tried to solve the ‘problem’ of the ‘hill tribes’ on the frontier?

Beginning of the Frontier Discourse

A new phrase called ‘scientific frontier’ was developed by General Frederick Sleigh Roberts, the Commander-in-Chief of India (1885-93) as a defensive scheme on the north-west of India towards Afghanistan keeping in mind the Russian ‘threat’. The plan was first developed by Roberts in 1877 and the phrase refers to “a frontier which could be defended at a considerably smaller cost than the boundary . . . actually possessed”. This definition gives the impression that the term frontier is already well-defined to be able to make sense of the added adjective ‘scientific’. The term frontier had been used in order to describe certain areas as colonialism expanded or while referring to mechanisms of rule in these outlying areas. But there was no real effort to explain its meanings until the last decade of the nineteenth century. The concerns of the colonial officials with regard to the question of the ‘Russian threat’

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3 By discourse it refers to not merely transparent communication of meanings but to the structures, modes of communicating to produce essentializing or universalising meanings.


towards Afghanistan, perhaps, resulted in producing the debates over the issue of frontier. This, in turn, produced a body of literature, which could be called frontier discourse—elucidating meanings, locating the contexts, and providing historical lineages.

There were various intersecting meanings of the term frontier and boundary at around the turn of the twentieth century. Though having begun rather late in the second part of the nineteenth and early twentieth century, most of the writings on frontier stressed upon its long histories. This body of literature created a genealogy but at the same time marked out the newness of the modern forms of frontier to fit into the scheme of 'scientific' theories of evolution popular at the time.

Lord Curzon, an important figure in the enterprise of frontier discourse, expressed the growing concern at the turn of the twentieth century and the lack of any systematic study of the concept of frontier.

It is a remarkable fact that, although Frontiers are the chief anxiety of nearly every Foreign Office in the civilized world, and are the subject of four out of every five political treaties or conventions that are now concluded, though as a branch of the science of government Frontier policy is of the first practical importance, and has a more profound effect upon the peace or warfare of nations than any other factor, political or economic, there is yet no work or treatise in any language which, so far as I know, affects to treat of the subject as a whole. . . A few pages are sometimes devoted to Frontiers in compilations on International Law, and

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8 Though there were different meanings being ascribed to the term in Europe and America, Frederick Jackson Turner's 'frontier thesis' also appeared around this time in 1893. For an assessment of how Turner's thesis was influenced by the social theory and myth current during his time see Robert F. Berkhofer, Jr., 'Space, Time, Culture and the New Frontier', *Agricultural History*, Vol. 38, No. 1, January 1964, pp. 21-30.
here and there a Frontier officer relates his experience before learned societies or in the pages of a magazine. But with these exceptions there is a practical void.9

According to Curzon, the British possession of its territory had transformed from being an island country to having “by far the greatest extent of territorial Frontier of any dominion in the globe.” He emphasizes his claim by asserting: “We commonly speak of Great Britain as the greatest sea-power in the Universe. Not much is heard of this astonishing development in Parliament; I suspect that even in our Universities it is but dimly apprehended.” This ‘void’ was in contrast to the practical and political necessities for these frontiers to be “settled, demarcated, and then maintained”. This was “the daily and hourly preoccupation” of the Foreign Office, the India Office, and the Colonial Office, the vital concern of the colonies and dependencies. And since “it provides laborious and incessant employment for the keenest intellects and the most virile energies of the Anglo-Saxon race”10, there was an immediate need to create a systematic study of frontier. Pre-empting Curzon’s arguments, Major E.H. Hills in a lecture addressed to the School of Geography, Cambridge on the 5th of May 1906 had said:

The importance of clearly defined boundary-lines between the territorial possessions of rival nations is too obvious to require any labouring. That ill-defined boundaries are a fruitful subject of international dispute has been proved again and again . . . It follows, therefore, that the fixing of frontier lines is one of the most important acts of the government of a country and one that should not be undertaken without a due weighing of all the conditions and a due understanding of the geographical questions involved.11

Urgent concerns of Russian ‘threat’ on the north-west of the British Indian empire were crucial in the formation of this discourse. In fact, the phrase ‘scientific frontier’ was often used particularly in the context of the north-west frontier of the British Indian empire. There

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10 Ibid, pp. 8-9. Curzon’s point of the shift of Britain’s colonial territorial possession rather than merely a powerful overseas trading country seems to be crucial in understanding the enormous efforts being put on frontier studies. After Curzon, others began to argue the difference between the ‘state of affairs on a sea frontier’ and the “border [of] a nation . . . in direct contact with only one neighbour.” Fawcett, *Frontiers*, pp. 22-4.
were various debates on the use and the specificity of the meaning of the phrase. The more militaristic roots of this phrase was aptly expressed by C.N. Fawcett, “It should not be necessary to note that the use of this term to denote a frontier which is, in a military sense, specially advantageous to one side is a perversion of the meaning of science.”\footnote{Fawcett 	extit{Frontiers}, p. 86.} He used ‘strategic frontier’ to express a similar meaning. Curzon’s definition exemplifies the obsession of the British colonial expansion on the north-west frontier. According to him a scientific frontier is a frontier that unites the natural and strategic strength, and by placing both the entrance and the exit of the passes in the hands of the British as the defending power would compel the enemy to conquer the approach before using the passage. On the importance of this understanding, he puts it, “It is this policy [of maintaining a ‘scientific’ frontier] that has carried the Indian outposts to Lundi Khana, to Quetta, and to Chaman, all of them beyond the passes, whose outer extremities they guard.”\footnote{Curzon, 	extit{Frontiers}, p. 19.}

The changing significance of the question of defining frontier was deeply implicated in the political rationales of the period. There were concerns of the frontiers on the north and the north-east of the empire also, especially in the context of the increasing problems with the Chinese. The Chinese were, in Curzon’s words, “a growing, a pushing, an advancing, even an aggressive Power.” Since this was considered to be a new phenomenon, he advised that those who were interested in the eastern possessions of the British Empire “should regard with a watchful, although certainly not with a jealous eye.”\footnote{Curzon, ‘Chinese Frontiers of India: Discussion’, 	extit{The Geographical Journal}, Vol. 39, No. 3, March 1912, p. 219. He was the President of the Royal Geographical Society at this time.} The increasing importance of the frontier with China is expressed in V.C. Bhutani’s words:

Boundary making on the north-east frontier of India was a dimension of the military strategy of the Indian general staff before the First World War. After Younghusband’s withdrawal from Lhasa in 1904 the British in India were also to ignore the Himalayan frontiers because Tibet alone did not pose a problem and beyond Tibet imperial China was a decaying power. About the same time, however, a military revival was occurring in China ... Chinese troops were in Lhasa when the Chinese revolution broke out in 1911. Later, resurgent China was able to devote attention to its far lying provinces as well as to territories which it rightly or
wrongly considered to have belonged to it historically. As a result an attempt had to be made to adjust the relationship and boundary between Tibet and China.\textsuperscript{15}

Nonetheless, there was a difference in the British attitude in their approaches to the ‘Russian threat’ on the one hand and the concerns of the Chinese on the other. The British attitude towards the north-east frontier is aptly expressed Archibald Rose, who had spent many years in the Consular Service of Great Britain and China: “Of the North-East Frontier little has been written, and for many years this boundary has remained hazy in its geographical limits, peaceful in its policies, and happy in the dullness of its annals.”\textsuperscript{16} There was no ‘threat’ perception on the north-east frontier similar to the one on the north-west frontier. Curzon, as President of the Royal Geographical Society, remarked: “I agree with the lecturer in saying there is no reason why there should be any quarrel between ourselves and the Chinese over these matters. The general temper of that people is affable. Their respect for the English is greater than that of any other foreign power.” “The surest way, however, to avoid a quarrel”, he evinced, was to “show decision and firmness in the early stages”\textsuperscript{17}, to fix the boundary and make it quite clear to the Chinese that the territory of the British would not be infringed. Inspired by these concerns of the Chinese, the second Shimla Convention was signed on July 3, 1914 between the British and Tibet.\textsuperscript{18}

Ian Heath stresses this difference in the representation of the two frontiers: “Despite the fact that it was events on the North-West Frontier which perennially awed and captivated Victorian audiences, British India’s North-East Frontier saw at least as much military activity and possibly even more – albeit on a generally smaller scale. Yet it remains a largely forgotten theatre of colonial warfare.” Heath gives many reasons for these differential attitudes. The North-East Frontier, according to him, was not a potential gateway by which Russia might gain access to India and lacked a vigorous native power comparable to Afghanistan. Apart from this geo-political consideration, there was an economy of

\textsuperscript{17} Curzon, ‘Chinese Frontiers of India: Discussion’, p. 220.
representation. As Heath puts it: “by Victorian standards the Pathan tribesmen of the North-West Frontier were considered a more noble foe than their head-hunting, slave-raiding counterparts in the north-east.”19 This lack of public awareness, however, did not mean a diminishing importance of the North-East Frontier.

There is a larger historical reason for the new vigour with which frontier studies began to be looked upon – the imperialist expansion of territories in the nineteenth century and the subsequent wars. According to Curzon, the majority of the most important wars of the nineteenth century have been frontier wars: “Wars of religion, of alliances, of rebellion, of aggrandisement, of dynastic intrigue or ambition – wars in which the personal element was often the predominant factor” have been “replaced by Frontier wars, i.e. wars arising out of the expansion of states and kingdoms, carried to a point, as the habitable globe shrinks, at which the interests or ambitions of one state come into sharp and irreconcilable collision with those of another.”20 “[The] most remarkable politico-geographical fact of the modern world” was the degree to which “in Asia, and much more in Africa, frontiers are growing together, and parts of the world which have hitherto been remote and regarded as unapproachable, are falling under the influence of this or that great Power.” As a result of the expansion of the imperialist powers, ‘no man’s lands’ were rapidly disappearing, independence giving way to ‘protectorates’ and ‘spheres of influence’, fluctuating, or traditional (in some cases non-existent) boundaries were “becoming fixed, regular, and defined.”21 Frontier as “zones where Great Power interests come together in conflict” was the “main line of structural weakness in the earth’s political crust – the main fissure where wars break through.”22 Since these powers were expanding rapidly resulting in territorial collisions, the necessity for constant work on the frontier either through peaceful arrangements or violent measures, became evident. As a result, the focus on a thorough ‘scientific’ investigation of the frontiers became very crucial.

20 Curzon, Frontiers, p. 5.
This concept of ‘scientific’ frontier was a new notion of territoriality. Till the middle of the nineteenth century the ‘naturalist’ notion of frontier was predominant. According to John Finch the limits of empires were controlled by two causes - the physical geography of the soil and the power of human beings. Out of these two the former is supposed to be durable whereas the latter is variable as a result of which, he argued, only physical geography could produce the most permanent effect. Consequently, the study of natural boundary or frontier was considered to be primary importance:

To acquire a true knowledge of the history of nations, we must first study the physical structure of the soil. This is the leading feature, on which the historical details are nearly always dependant. Mountains, seas, lakes, and deserts, form natural divisions on the surface of the earth, which serve as boundaries to the several nations, and beyond which they can seldom pass with impunity.

These natural barriers in this understanding not only separate the polities “by the amount of physical force”, but they also “have each their peculiar habits, customs, and feelings, which renders it difficult for them to coalesce with the surrounding states.” A combination of ‘theories’ of ‘naturalist determinism’ and ‘evolutionism’ would lead to conclusion such as follows: “A river is boundary to a savage; a lake still more so; the ocean is impassable. His bark canoe is not fitted for engagements on the water. He reveres the mountains, and seldom attempts to pass them. His empire is always small, and bounded by the more minute physical obstacles on the surface of the earth.” In his later writings, John Finch draws a neatly hierarchised scheme of relationship between ‘civilizational scale’ of social formations and political relations: “Half-civilized nations have some interval of peace between their combats; they do not fight more than half their time. Civilized nations seldom engage in war.” And lower down the civilizational ladder, for Finch comes the ‘savages’ who fights

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25 Ibid.
26 Ibid, pp. 110-111.
continually. The division between natural frontier and artificial frontier, with the former determining the latter, was, thus, mapped onto a schematic hierarchisation of social groups.

The understanding of frontiers as determined by nature gave way to looking at frontier as a socio-political product. But this does not mean a complete abandonment of the earlier notion. During the spurt of studies on the issue of frontier in the early part of the twentieth century C.N. Fawcett wrote: “The vegetation of one fertile area is ordinarily separated from that of other such areas by the intervention of less fertile land with its thinner vegetation; and thus the areas of denser vegetable population are marked off from one another. The existence of such separate areas implies the existence of frontiers between them.” The natural frontiers could vary in character and extent, “from the usually distinct and narrow border of the land vegetation at the seashore and the less definite separation between woodland and heath, to the wide and ever-changing border zone of the deserts, where the desert expands with every period of drought and contracts after every wet season.” Such an understanding of ‘natural frontier’ often resulted in the argument of the existence of frontiers as necessary since they are an outcome of the unevenly spread habitation on the surface of the earth. In fact, the concept of ‘natural frontier’ was also used as an evidence for race theories. In Fawcett’s views the zonal character of ‘natural frontiers’ could be seen equally in ‘human racial frontiers’.²⁸

The concept of ‘natural frontier’ continued to exist but by the later part of the nineteenth century attempts were made to study the relationship and the differences between natural and artificial frontier. The coming of the artificial frontier is also postulated as a more recent phenomenon: “Up till comparatively recent times . . . the essential object of a natural or national frontier has been protection of the land within it, not the land on each side of it . . . The essential object of an artificial or international frontier has been somewhat similar, but there has been some attempt to consider the land on each side”.²⁹ Artificial frontiers, according to Curzon, “meant those boundary lines which, not being dependent upon natural features of the earth’s surface for their selection, have been artificially or arbitrarily created

²⁸ Fawcett, Frontiers, pp. 10, 20-1.
by man.” He further classifies artificial frontiers into two—ancient and modern—“roughly reflecting the difference between the requirements of primitive and of civilized peoples.” In the ‘primitive’ society, “not assisted by natural features in the determination of its limits of occupation or conquest” though “desirous to protect its boundaries from external aggression”, it “commonly either erected a barrier or created a gap.” Curzon states that the frontiers of the entire ancient and medieval world would fall under this. In Curzon’s classification, there are many modern forms of artificial frontiers: (1) what may be described as the pure astronomical frontier, following a parallel of latitude or a meridian of longitude; (2) a mathematical line connecting two points, the astronomical coordinates of which are specified; and (3) a frontier defined by reference to some existing and, as a rule, artificial feature or condition. There are a few common characteristics amongst them. They are adopted for purposes of political convenience, indifferent to physical or ethnological features, and applied in new places where the rights of the communities have not been established. These, according to him, were not to be found in Europe, or even in Asia, since another type of frontier had already been established but rather in unexplored and uninhabited tracks.

The shift from natural frontier to artificial frontier could also be seen in the differentiation between frontier and boundary. As Thomas H. Holdich wrote, “Nature knows no boundary lines. Nature has her frontiers truly, but lines, especially straight lines, are abhorrent to her.” With the differentiation between natural frontier and artificial frontier, there were efforts to distinguish frontier from boundary. In Ladis K.D. Kristof’s words, “The frontier is outer-oriented.” The main attention of frontier is directed “toward the outlying areas which are both a source of danger and a coveted prize.” On the contrary, the boundary is inner-

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30 Curzon, Frontiers, p. 23.
31 Ibid, p. 34.
32 Holdich, Political Frontiers and Boundary Making, p. 2.
33 There were definitely voices which complicates the classification of natural and artificial frontiers. Against such an approach, C.N. Fawcett proposed that classifying frontier into zones of separation and zones of intercourse was a more accurate and useful representation of the facts. Fawcett concedes that separating areas such as oceans, deserts, can be called permanent frontiers since they make a distinct break between inhabited regions. But other types of frontier zone of separation like marshland could cease to be actual barrier as a consequence of population growth. In that sense, frontiers are essentially transition zones. Fawcett’s point is not a complete abandonment of the distinction between natural and artificial frontiers. He admits the necessity of establishing some artificial boundary where no natural frontier exists. See Fawcett, Frontiers, pp. 15 – 33, 62.
oriented. In his opinion, "It is created and maintained by the will of the central government. It has not life of its own, not even a material existence." Boundary in this view is the "mediated will of the people; abstracted and generalized in the national law, subjected to the tests of international law, it is far removed from the changing desires and aspirations of the inhabitants of the borderlands." 34

Though the term frontier and boundary were beginning to be differentiated, it did not mean giving up the practice of using the two terms synonymously. 35 The complex history of these usages, either synonymously or distinctly, is explained as a result of politico-cultural associations of the term. Hugh Tinker maintains that the term frontier, "to readers accustomed to think in European terms, is a sharply defined line, generally evolved in centuries past according to some ancient cleavage between nations or cultures." American readers might hesitate to endorse such a static definition, "thinking instead, perhaps, of a dynamic society stretching out to meet the challenge of physical barriers and limitations." 36 But he argues that term frontier cannot be comprehended in either of the above sets of meanings. It is true that frontier constitutes a formidable physical barrier (though not impenetrable) but its special character lies in the complex of minority communities, none of them wholeheartedly committed, politically and culturally, to either of the two separated powers.

The relationship being made between bounded territories and civilized societies produced its own complexity. As G.F. Hudson puts it, "It is much more difficult, however, to say when, historically speaking, there began to be a frontier between India and China in the NEFA territory." Even if Assam were to be considered as India and Tibet as China, there was still,

36 Hugh Tinker, 'Burma’s Northeast Borderland Problems', Pacific Affairs, Vol. 29, No. 4, December 1956, p. 324. There is a general agreement that the concept and the meanings of frontier have very different cultural and political connotations, which are specific to certain locations. For instance, Gus Deveneaux argues that the frontier, in its application to Africa has a particular connotation, which is "not only territorial, but cultural, political, and economic as well. It represents a meeting point, and area of interaction between different and sometimes conflicting concrete realities and philosophies." Gus Deveneaux, 'The Frontier in Recent African History', The International Journal of African Historical Studies, Vol. 11, No. 1, 1978, p. 68.
in his words, “until quite recently a zone of primitive peoples in between them – Bhutias, Akas, Daflas, Mishmis, Abors and others – which did not really belong to either.” After the British annexation following the first Anglo-Burmese war a large part of the area in what came to be called the north-east frontier was left “in the indistinct penumbra of the ‘unadministered’” territory. Most of the territory was geographically unexplored. In Hudson’s opinion “Primitive tribes have fared badly in modern political theory and international law” since they “lack the administrative organs through which civilised sovereign states are accustomed in time of peace to transact their business with one another.” Consequently, tracts of land occupied by ‘primitive tribes’, “even when they have enjoyed \( \textit{de facto} \) independence, have been regarded by the lawyers as \( \textit{res nullius} \)” leaving open to the governments of organised states to annex or partition such areas “just as if they were uninhabited.”

From the British point of view, the concern for the North-East frontier was both the possibility of threat from China as well as ‘cultivating’ these ‘primitive tribes’. Concerned with the frontier between China and the British Indian Empire, Archibald Rose wrote

And then there is the fringe of tribesmen from the Hunza Nagars to the Abors, the Tibetans to the Shans, sounding every note in the gamut of human development. Some can boast proud and ancient civilizations, some still remain in a state of primitive barbarism, yet all are merging into the two Empires to whom Fate has entrusted their welfare, and in whose hands lie their future government and administration; for there can be no stopping of the clock; the process of absorption is as inevitable and as unresting as the sun in its course. Perhaps it is this relentless force of Nature which has brought the question of the frontier so forcibly to our notice in the course of the past few years.\(^{38}\)


\(^{38}\) Rose, ‘Chinese Frontiers of India’, p. 217. He spent twelve years in the Consular Service of Great Britain and China. After the siege of the Peking Legations he travelled in Mongolia and then marched across China from Peking to Szechuan in 1902 spending two subsequent years there. After this he was stationed as Consul at Tengyueh, on the Burma-China frontier “at a time when the expansion of China in a westerly direction has brought her administrative border to the natural but largely undelimited line which is actually the north-eastern frontier of India.” Curzon, ‘Chinese Frontiers of India: Discussion’, p. 218.
A well-marked line in the sense of a boundary and a zone of separation from another power would seem two ways of political administrative practices, which are mutually exclusive. But the term boundary and frontier despite separate meanings could work together, especially in the colonial context. The British definitely wanted to fix definite territorial delimitation39 with China and "as a necessary corollary, not to allow those frontiers when determined to be encroached upon or impaired." However, this does not necessarily follow that if the boundary has been fixed, the administrative functions should be carried right up to it. In Curzon's words, "It follows no more in the extreme north-east than in the extreme north-west, where, as you know, our administration in some cases stops far short of the boundary which is the line of political influence." The main purpose for the fixing of boundary on the North-East frontier was that "it should be recognized and kept by the Power that is upon the other side".40 This was also executed with the anticipation that the 'tribes', which lie within the British territory, should refrain from intriguing across the border or from harrying those who are within the political boundary.

This dual approach of establishing a fix boundary yet refraining from carrying out administrative functions till the limits of the boundary drove the policy of "respect[ing] the internal independence of these tribes". The policy was, in Curzon's words, "to find in their self-interest and employment as Frontier Militia a guarantee both for the security of our inner or administrative border, and also for the tranquillity of the border zone itself." The success of such a policy in the north-west frontier was that it gave a threefold frontier: (1) the administrative border of British India, (2) the Durand Line, or Frontier of active protection, (3) the Afghan border, which is the outer or advanced strategic frontier.41 The policy and the intrigues of the British towards the frontier is succinctly expressed in Henry Ballantine's words:

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39 The terms delimitation and demarcation have different meanings. In Curzon's viewpoint, "Diplomatic agents and documents habitually confound the meaning of the two words 'delimitation' and 'demarcation', using them as if they were interchangeable terms. This is not the case. Delimitation signifies all the earlier processes for determining a boundary, down to and including its embodiment in a Treaty or Convention. But when the local Commissioners get to work, it is not delimitation but demarcation on which they are engaged." Curzon, Frontiers, p. 51. In Fawcett's words, "delimitation is the process of defining a boundary on maps and in diplomatic documents, demarcation is that of marking it out on the ground." Fawcett, Frontiers, p. 6.
41 Curzon, Frontiers, pp. 40-1.
It will be seen that the Policy of the India Government is to let the northern frontier tribes maintain their independence, continue to practice deeds of darkness and misrule, allow them to cherish any internecine course of action they like, while, as the paramount power, this Anglo-Indian ruler retains the right to interfere, as may best suit its purposes, even to the extent of taking the part of the stronger against the weaker side, and freely distributing war material to those whom it favors; - anything, in fact, that will promote its frontier policy.42

Maintaining ‘internal independence’ of the ‘tribes’ on the frontier was also a means of keeping them as a ‘neutral’ belt. “[V]ast stretches of little known, and most of it quite unknown, territory, divided up among independent tribes more or less hostile to each other . . . are furnished with arms and ammunition, in certain cases to a large extent, by the India Government, and are left to act as they please, so long as they do not meddle with British territory.”43 These policies encouraged the formulation of what were known as the ‘Buffer States’ and were used as a safeguard against any intruding power.

It has often been asserted, “In early days there were no boundaries, and men desired none. In these later days the world is full of boundaries”.44 But this well-established statement cloaks an important foundation - a social evolutionary theory of transition from a time of ‘no boundary’ to a world of concrete bounded territorialities. In Fawcett’s words, “Between the territories of two neighbouring savage or barbarous tribes there is rarely any precise boundary . . . The frontier is usually a wide empty space between the two occupied areas." In contrast to this, “Between the territories of civilized states the boundaries are everywhere carefully delimited”.45 And, more importantly, contemporary human societies are mapped onto that scale of evolution in these writings on boundary or frontier: “There are lands still free to the wanderer where the wide horizon shows no sign of the creeping innovations of civilised invention; where railways, motors, and flying machines are not; where the air is free from the abominations of commerce, and the wide, wide world, sweet as incense, is all

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42 Henry Ballantine, *On India’s Frontier; or Nepal the Gurkhas’s Mysterious land*, New York: J. Selwin Tait and Sons, 1895, p. 3. He earlier served as an American consul at Bombay.
43 Ibid, p. 2.
As Mark Cronlund Anderson argues, “The term ‘frontier’ ... is imbued with and delimited by special meanings, central among them ... a line dividing savagery ... from civilization”. And so, Fawcett could conclude:

From a study of past and present frontiers and boundaries it is possible to discover their main trends of development. Three of these stand out prominently. They are (1) a tendency towards precision of boundary lines, (2) a tendency towards the coincidence of political with linguistic and national boundaries, and (3) a tendency towards the placing of boundaries in those natural zones of separation which we have called Natural Barrier Frontiers.

In the way that these different forms of frontier regimes are understood there are two basic assumptions: first, there is a gradual transformation from one less defined territorial differentiation to a more concretised form. Second, this transformation could be put within the scale of civilizational evolution.

[I]t may be observed that the uniform tendency is for the weaker to crystallize into the harder shape. Spheres of Interest tend to become Spheres of Influence; temporary Leases to become perpetual; Spheres of Influence to develop into Protectorates; Protectorates to be the forerunners of complete incorporation.

This evolutionary understanding of territoruality became more and more predominant in the beginning of the twentieth century. In this perspective, the necessity of boundaries is stated to be an indispensable outcome of ‘natural’ historical processes. According to this logic, since the habitable world has become more and more crowded with humanity, and the civilised nationalities and communities become concentrated with an ever-increasing population seeking not merely food “but the means for existence in higher phases of social comfort and environment”, unambiguous boundaries become more and more important in the partitioning of its economically useful areas. In Thomas H. Holdich’s words, “This is, indeed, the natural

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46 Holdich, Political Frontiers and Boundary Making, pp. 4-5.
48 Fawcett, Frontiers, p. 92.
49 Curzon, Frontiers, p. 47.
and inevitable result of the growth of population and of intellectual energy.\textsuperscript{50} This ‘natural’ growth of boundary is imbued, then, with more ‘advanced’ forms of frontier or boundary management. An integral part of that ‘advancement’ of boundary management also involves the “immense increase in the number and diversity of the Frontiers that have been adopted to protect the possessions and to control the ambitions of States.” It was argued that the ‘primitive forms’ “except where resting upon indestructible natural features”, have been replaced by boundaries, “the more scientific character of which, particularly where it rests upon treaty stipulations, and is sanctified by International Law, is undoubtedly a preventive of misunderstanding, a check to territorial cupidity, and an agency of peace.”\textsuperscript{51} A well-demarcated boundary necessitated ‘scientific’ measures like local surveys or reconnaissance to consider the geographical, topographical and ethnological evidence. This concept of boundary demarcation produced a new kind of significance to geographical knowledge. In Curzon’s words, “Geographical knowledge thus precedes or is made the foundation of the labours of statesmen . . . But the tendency is unquestionably in the direction of greater precision both of knowledge and of language. . . . The process of demarcation has in fact become one of expert labour and painstaking exactitude.” But Curzon also conceded that it would be “futile to assert that an exact Science of Frontiers has been or is ever likely to be evolved” since “no one law can possibly apply to all nations or peoples, to all Governments, all territories, or all climates.” This led him to conclude that the ‘evolution’ of frontiers is an art rather than a science “so plastic and malleable are its forms and manifestations.” At the same time, “precedence is given to scientific knowledge; ethnological and topographical considerations are fairly weighed”. And it is this meticulous approach, which was conceived to transform the frontier from being a source of war to being “the instruments and evidences of peace.”\textsuperscript{51}

\textbf{NORTH-EAST: THE AMBIGUITIES OF FRONTIER}

In fulfilment of the circular of the Medical Board calling for Statistical information, John M’Cosh, Assistant Surgeon describes the territorial extent of Assam just after it was taken

\textsuperscript{50} Holdich,\textit{ Political Frontiers and Boundary Making}, p. 1.
\textsuperscript{51} Curzon,\textit{ Frontiers}, pp. 48, 50-1, 53-4.
over by the British as follows: on the north bounded by “a cold mountainous country inhabited by Booteas, Akas, Duphas, Koppachors, Miris, Abors, and Mishmis” from east to west, the “Kangtis, Bor-Kangtis, Singphos and Muamarias separate it on the extreme east from China and Burma”, and “the Munniporis, Nagas, Mikirs, Cacharis, Kassyas and Garrows” formed the British possessions in Sylhet on the south. It was connected on the west with Bengal through Goalpara. Since many of the places, or rather the different communities enumerated above were not under direct colonialism, they were understood to form the frontier in the colonial vocabulary, at this point. However, at the same time, it gives us a sense of a well-defined limit of the territorial extent under colonialism.

Though the myth of a clear boundary line demarcating the territoriality of the British from the others was necessary to maintain, it was not actually put down on the ground. As a result of the problems faced by the British with the neighbouring ‘hill tribes’ over claims to territoriality, it was found that even in the 1870s, the boundary in different parts of the ‘frontier’ had “never yet been authoritatively laid down.” After a resolution by the colonial Government in 1868 “not to undertake the survey of any tracts which were not then free from all doubt or debate”, the demarcation of boundary was not realised. But the need for an enterprise to have a well-defined boundary was increasingly felt. In the words of A. Mackenzie, Junior Secretary to the Govt. of Bengal, “The whole history of this frontier during the last few years has... made it plain that the time has come for a definite settlement of what has so long been left indefinite. ... All that has passed... strengthens the conclusion that there must be a settlement of boundary.” A major cause for the inability of the British to lay down a clear line of demarcation originated from the claims made by the Burmese and other groups, which the British intended to put within their possession.

A letter written by H. Hankey, Officiating Commissioner of the Chittagong Division to the Officiating Secretary to the Government of Bengal, Judicial Department in 1872 makes a clear distinction between the two meanings of frontier:

53 A. Mackenzie, Junior Secretary to the Govt. of Bengal to Secretary to the Government of India, Foreign Department Political, 1873 July, No. 469, A, National Archives of India (NAI).
54 See Foreign Department Political Consultation, 1837 February 6, Nos. 17 – 19; NAI.

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Unquestionably ... I think the grand ... object in view is the security of our frontier. We do not desire annexation; we do not wish to extend our boundary line or to assume jurisdiction over one inch of country that we do not at present exercise rights of ownership over.\textsuperscript{55}

However a persistent use of the term ‘frontier line’ in the colonial discourse confuses the distinction made between the two terms frontier and boundary.\textsuperscript{56} The differential ways of colonial territorial control employed in the period was visible in the protests made by Chandra Kirti, the king of Manipur during the boundary-making between Assam and Manipur in 1872, by asserting that “the so-called boundary line of 1842 never was (and was not in fact intended to be) anything more than a political and not a territorial boundary line.”\textsuperscript{57} The distinction made between a ‘political’ and ‘territorial boundary line’, perhaps, gives us a clue to the different meanings given to the term frontier itself, though Colonel Thomson, the then officiating Political Agent in Manipur refuted such a nuanced distinction made by the king.

The different meanings associated with the term frontier have been employed since the beginning of direct British intervention. As a result of the Burmese incursions into the territories east and north-east of Bengal threatening the British occupied territories, just before the outbreak of the first Anglo-Burmese war, David Scott was appointed the Agent to the Governor General on the North–East Frontier of Bengal in November 1823 for the entire eastern frontier from Cachar and Sylhet in the south to the Sikkim country in the north.\textsuperscript{58} With this creation of a colonial administrative post, the meanings of the frontier began to be articulated not merely as a barrier between the two contending empires but both as an outpost as well as with the illusion of a well-defined demarcating line. What we see clearly, here, are the two ways in which the history of frontier was articulated – administrative history and a series of practices closely connected with geographical discourses.

\textsuperscript{55} Foreign Department Political, 1872 June, No. 126, A, NAI.
\textsuperscript{56} See Foreign Department, Political, 1873 June, Nos. 29 – 49, A, NAI.
\textsuperscript{57} ‘Memorial, dated 25\textsuperscript{th} December 1872, from Maharaja of Munnipoor to His Excellency the Viceroy and Governor-General of India in Council,’ Foreign Department Political, 1873 June, No. 31, A, NAI.
\textsuperscript{58} Adam White, \textit{A Memoir of the late David Scott}, reprint Guwahati: Department of Historical and Antiquarians Studies in Assam, 1988 [1831]. For a differentiation between administrative frontier and political borderline see Rose, ‘Chinese Frontier of India’, p. 194.
INTERROGATING FRONTIER POLICY

The progress of colonialism in the ‘hill tracts’ in general, but especially the Naga Hills, has been broadly divided into four phases: namely, the period of control from without, by a system of expeditions or ‘promenades’; the period of control from within; the period of absolute non-interference and finally the second phase of control from within that precipitated the gradual absorption of Naga areas into British territory. It is only too obvious from this arrangement of ‘phases’ that the state resorted to the military operations at the start and other considerations of control were invoked only afterwards. There were varying colonial interpretations of the real intentions regarding the occupation of the ‘Naga territory’ after the conquest of Assam. At the time of the British annexation of ‘Assam’, only a partial occupation of the country was contemplated which was “to be confined to the settled tracts adjoining the Berhampooter, and as a Military position protecting the Bengal Frontier against the Burmese”. In contradistinction, the British claimed the whole ‘Naga territory’ and the boundary on the east and south of the Brahmaputra were assumed to “extend to . . . those of Munnipore and Burmah”. Indeed, as discussed in chapter two, it was proposed in 1831 that the defence of the entire Sadiya frontier should be made over to the Manipur Raja. In the case of the Angamis and other ‘tribes’ in the hill tracts of what would later be called the Naga Hills, the need to open communication between Assam and Manipur caused the British to come into conflicts with the local inhabitants.

This forms one of the crucial moments in the history of colonialism in the north-east when complex processes of monarchical expansion and colonial control in the frontier intersected

59 Col. Hopkinson, Commissioner of Assam, to Secretary to Government of Bengal, Home Department Public, 1866 June 10, Nos. 15-16, A, NAI. By the middle of the nineteenth century it was being said that even if the Burmese Government had the desire to occupy the hill tracts, the British could not, with safety to Assam, permit to do so. For a detail discussion see Foreign Department Political, 1875 August, No. 401, A, NAI
60 The British consideration of giving away to the Manipur king Gambhir Singh to control the area till Sadiya is very intriguing if one keeps in mind that in 1834 the king dies and the large tract of Kabow valley, which was recovered from the Ava king in the First Anglo-Burmese War would be given away (restored to Burma, as the British writers would have it be written after the event) to the king of Ava in lieu of compensation paid to the Manipuri king by the British.
61 For the issue regarding communication see Foreign Department Political, 1832 March, No. 70, A, NAI; Alexander Mackenzie, The North-East Frontier of India, reprint New Delhi: Mittal Publications, 2004 [1884], p. 101.
mediated through violence. In January 1832 Captains Jenkins and Pemberton leading a troop of 700 Manipuri sepoys with 800 ‘coolies’ from the Manipur valley, marched through Popolongmai, Samaguting and the Dhunsiri to Mohung Dijooa on the Jumoona. At this time the British realised that the ‘Assam Valley’ was surrounded on the north, east, and south by numerous ‘savage and warlike tribes’. In the following cold season, in 1833, Gambhir Singh, Raja of Manipur, accompanied by the Manipur Levy under Lieutenant Gordon, again marched through to Assam by a route a few miles to the east of Jenkins’s track to subjugate a large part of the Angami inhabited areas and an annual tribute was exacted by the king of Manipur. They too had to fight almost every step of the road. Till 1846 when a permanent post was established, annual expedition was the only method through which the British claimed their authority. Every time the British retreated, they were aware that the Nagas took it for weakness on the part of the British. The boundary between the British territory and Manipur was not fixed till 1842 when a ‘vague boundary’ was laid down by Lieutenant Biggs on the British side and Captain Gordon on the part of the Manipur durbar. But since the British could not control their territory, the authority over the British-claimed territory was given to the Manipur durbar in writing in 1851. From an earlier period, without any formal acceptance, it came to be “supposed in a general kind of way that Manipur exercised some sort of authority over the southern portion of the Naga Hills. In 1835 indeed the forest between the Doyeng and Dhunsiri was declared to be the boundary between Manipur and Assam.” It was only after the British felt that the ‘ambitious’ Manipuri king would have been very dangerous for the British interest, since he was seen to be contemplating his own permanent conquest of the Naga Hills, which could have posed a threat to the fate of Purunder Singha, who the British were endeavouring to put up as a vassal, that British started feeling an uncomfortable relationship with Manipur. Though the king of Manipur was not completely stopped in his designs of subjugating the whole of the Nagas, the British checked him against any plan to ‘encroach’ on the plains of Assam.

62 For a detail description of the political events of the period see James Johnstone, My Experiences in Manipur and the Naga Hills, London: Sampson Low, Marston and Co. Ltd., 1896, pp. 34-93. I have used different spellings for the place names, as they kept fluctuating during the colonial period.
64 The relationship between the British and Manipur had become divergent by the later part of the nineteenth century. For an account on the conflict between the British and the Manipuri king over the issue of boundary line see Foreign Department Political, 1877 August, No. 147, A, NAI.
The colonial officials soon realized that in order to restrain and subjugate the 'savage hill tribes' which inhabited the frontier, "reliance cannot be placed on one particular course of policy, but there must be a ready adaptation of expedients to suit ever-changing circumstances". Employing "coercion pure and simple, sometimes blockades; very often a judicious system of subsidizing" were thought as measures to keep the people quiet for a long while. But the surest foundation on which to build the control of the people in the frontier was believed to be the fear of the British. In the colonial idiom it was not coercion that had failed but rather the failure to coerce. Thus, violence played a crucial component of colonial rule in the frontier.

Rather than trying to fit the disparate processes into the overarching rhetorical framework of a singular colonial frontier policy, I am more interested in relocating them at the level of the heterogeneous and connected practices of the colonial state. The purpose of policy was often betrayed by the operations on the ground and reshaped by various encounters. Consider, for example, how the hopes of the Government was "belied by the twenty-two raids by the Nagas ... in which 178 persons were either killed, wounded or abducted. ... Especially after the withdrawal of the armed detachment from Dimapur in 1856, the Nagas ran riot, and one outrage after another was committed." The archive is replete with similar references to such acts of 'violence'.

Between the years 1835 and 1851, there were ten 'punitive expeditions' being despatched into the Naga Hills. The policy of 'non-interference' was tried out in 1852-53 only when the colonial officials were satisfied that the Nagas had been fully pacified after the severe 'punishment' of 1851. Various forms of punishment and negotiations like encouragement of commercial relations or exclusion from neighbouring markets through the means of blockade, depending on the assessment of their behaviour vis-à-vis the British were tried even before the introduction of 'non-interference'. By the middle of the nineteenth century, the colonial officials decided that their objective was to bring the 'hill tribes' under direct control, wherever possible, instead of following the policy of annual military expeditions.

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65 Home Department, Public, 1866 July 10, Nos. 15-16, A, NAI.
From 1854 to 1865, we are told, there had been as many as nineteen ‘Angami raids’ in which two hundred thirty two British subjects were reported killed, wounded or carried off as captives. During the same period there was a plan to set up a chain of outposts from Bor Pattar to Assaloo connected by roads and patrols. However, we are told, seventy-five British subjects were murdered, thirteen wounded, and four carried into slavery, and in not a single instance did any retribution overtake the perpetrators of these ‘foul’ deeds. Subsequently, the British acknowledged that military measures as a solution was yielding no positive returns.

Starting around the middle of the 1860s there was a lot of debate amongst colonial officials about whether yearly military expedition or stationing of a military post was more effective. By this time the policy of ‘non-interference’ was heavily criticized for its ‘failures’. The basic assumption of the policy was that the Nagas would abstain from ‘molesting’ the British if the latter refrained from interfering with them. A retaliatory measure, combined with a system of subsidies, was thought by the middle of the 1860s not to be dependable for the protection of the plain country. Conciliation, on the other hand, was seen to be more of a permanent measure. But it had to be kept in mind that in providing for the defence of the Assam frontier, it was desirable to limit the cost of the operations. It was considered that no sufficient expenditure could possibly prevent the occurrence of a ‘tribal raid’. The paramount guideline to follow while dealing with the Nagas was: “Conciliate these savages if you can, be persistent in demanding surrender of murderers but endeavour so to approach the tribes that a basis may be opened for friendly intercourse in the future”. This guideline seems to be dependent on the general colonial understanding of the frontier as a source of trouble and inhabited by ‘savage, warlike’ people. As R.G. Woodthorpe wrote,

The North-Eastern frontier of India has ever been a fruitful source of trouble and expense to the Government of this Empire. . . . bordered by, or forming part of hill districts, inhabited by fierce and

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67 Foreign Department Political, 1866 June, Nos. 37-39, A, NAI
68 Home Department Public, 1866 June 10, Nos. 15-16, A, NAI
69 See letter from Right Hon’ble Viscount Cranborne, Secretary of State for India, to His Excellency the Right Hon’ble Governor General of India in Council, Home Department Judicial, 1867 March, Nos. 43-44, A, NAI.
70 Home Department Public, 1874 March, Nos. 259-261, A, NAI
71 Foreign Department External, 1840 August, Nos. 93-95, A, NAI

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predatory tribes for ever making raids on their neighbours' villages, burning and plundering them, and carrying off the inhabitants.\textsuperscript{72}

The colonial officials considered that with all the impediments, establishing political control over the 'hill tribes' had to be a gradual process. At the same time, the officials were not expected to refrain completely from interfering in the quarrels of those 'tribes' who had been brought under the colonial political control. Within the regime of 'non-interference' the role of the British was to "arbitrate between them and in the event of a clear and flagrant case of attack by one on another".\textsuperscript{73} In case of a defiance of the British arbitration, the power of the colonial state to enforce an award should be maintained.

Since the colonial officials acted with the maxim, "Influence is dependent upon respect, and respect cannot co-exist for any length of time with a policy of inactivity", they had to discharge 'effectively'. 'Non-interference' in the colonial parlance did not mean the abandonment of the strategic position and withdrawing from the territory of the 'hill tribes' nor should it be misunderstood, it was asserted, to advocate a policy of "meddling interference involving a continuance of petty quarrels and collisions."\textsuperscript{74} The situation, it was emphasised, should be "best handled by tact and good management, supported by a moderate display of physical force, to bring the portion of the hill tracts adjacent to the plains into order."\textsuperscript{75} The interference with those 'hill tribes' beyond the revenue boundary, however, "should be cautious, and should advance as slowly as possible" at the same time non-interference did not mean non-intercourse. What the officials were ready to grant was to allow the 'tribes' to manage their own affairs as they like, as long as they made no aggression on the plains. But the political officer concerned was expected to encourage intercourse with them as the best means of preserving peace.\textsuperscript{76}

\textsuperscript{73} Foreign Department Political, 1874 July, Nos. 40-45, A, NAI
\textsuperscript{74} Home Department Public, 1874 March, Nos. 259-261, NAI
\textsuperscript{75} Correspondences between the Secretary to the Government of Bengal and the Secretary to the Government of India, Foreign Department, Assam Secretariat, General Department, 1866, No. 305 Bengal, Assam State Archives (ASA).
\textsuperscript{76} Foreign Department Political, 1875 March, Nos. 660-664, A, NAI
Because of the British inability to subjugate the Nagas fully, they considered "either [to] occupy the country altogether, or abstain entirely and unreservedly from meddling with their affairs". But we are told, "[I]t has never yet been found possible to carry out this policy of perfect abstention". As Moffat Mills wrote, "We cannot have absolute non-interference without non-intercourse". It was seen that the latter option could not be established easily "along a strip of debatable land" since "it would involve – the destruction of a flourishing trade between the Nagas" and the British subjects in the plains of Assam. Yet this trade was also considered "a constant liability to disturbance though it is also one of the most humanizing instruments" commanded by the British.

Accepting house-tax was a method which was vigorously advocated when the inhabitants of the 'hill tribes' were sought to be brought under suzerainty in the 'hill districts'. At the same time, there were reasons not to encourage the colonial state's extension of its control over too vast an area. While keeping these views as to the results of extending British protection, the Chief Commissioner of Assam recorded his opinion, "we are bound by our duties as a great civilized power, by considerations of our prestige all through the Naga Hills, and even by our own interests, to accept the protectorate and its responsibilities." Within the rhetoric of colonial rule, it becomes difficult to locate the real intentions and the reasons for colonial practices and policies. Colonial policies, therefore, have to be located within specific contexts and the larger considerations which proved to be crucial in the management of colonialism. Despite the rhetoric of the colonial state, inclusion of a village to make the people British subjects was not always welcomed. As a part of establishing 'peaceful' means of control, levying house-tax was deployed with the promise of guaranteeing protection to the villagers. However, the issue of guaranteeing protection was more complex. In 1874 the inhabitants of Meziphemah, "a weak village of Angami Naga, living in the immediate vicinity of the station of Samoogooding, being in fear of their lives and liberties from the hostility of a neighbouring and more powerful clan", came to the Political Agent, and offered to pay house-tax, as it was paid in Samoogoodting, on "condition of protection from their

77 A. J. Moffatt Mills, quoted in the letter from Colonel H. Hopkinson, Commissioner of Assam to the Officiating Secretary to the Government of Bengal, Political Department, Home Department Judicial, 1872 February, Nos. 172-173, NAI
78 Foreign Department Political, 1877 August, Nos. 133-177, K. W. No. 1, A, NAI
enemies.” The payment of house-tax was understood by the British that “these rude people” agreed to the “most complete submission to the authority of a higher power.” The Political Agent, though refused to afford the applicants a police protection, “accepted their fealty as subjects of the Queen” but the only actual ‘protection’ that the Political Agent gave was a “warning to the hostile and threatening clan to discontinue their aggressions.” Though the ‘profitability’ of the amount involved in the exchange between ‘subjectification’ and security was doubted, the Chief Commissioner was fully convinced that “to the minds of the savages, British rule may come to be looked upon . . . as a blessing”, and that the colonial officials might become answerable for the safety of large numbers of villages. In his words, “We shall first become the champion of the weak; the championship of the weak will entail on us the restraint of the strong.”79 One of the criticisms against the taking in of villages as British subjects was that instead of helping in the furtherance of colonialism, it hindered and created more problems since many of the villages, which offered to become subjects were smaller and weaker villages. It was thought to be an unnecessary step to bring these villages under protection since it would antagonise the larger villages.

The officials in the Foreign Department desired “neither to accept fealty, nor to take revenue, from the independent villages; and would rather not extend their protecting obligations, unless . . . satisfied and can report that it is not necessary to uphold what has been already done.”80 According to them, though these “village feuds are much to be regretted,” the primary object of appointing a Deputy Commissioner in the Naga Hills “was not so much to check them as to prevent raids”81 on the British subjected villages. The only undertaking that the official would be expected in this regard was to see if he could do something to ‘adjust’ the disputes by ‘mediation and remonstrance’ though the Chief Commissioner contended that while it comes to dealing with the ‘independent tribes’ nothing could be done if there is no interference directly. Moreover, military operations as a means was always already available:

Our relations with these barbarous tribes will bear treating much more roughly and indefinitely. The Government of India have not hitherto objected to the establishment, over

79 Foreign Department Political, 1874 July, Nos. 40-45, A, NAI.
80 Ibid.
81 Foreign Department Political, 1871 August, Nos. 154-159, A, NAI.
the tracts bordering on British territory, of so much influence as will enable our political officers to keep order on the frontier, and to prevent raids in the British territory; and insomuch as such raids always grow out of turbulence and disorganization across the border, for that reason it is very essential to maintain peace within the scope of the Political Agent’s influence on both sides of the frontier. Now the Government are aware that this influence cannot well be established without some kind of action or exercise of material authority.  

If the policy of conciliation was followed as a mode of control, there was a rationale behind this act and it has to be located within the context in which it operated. The officials felt that any line of defence that was adopted would be comparatively inefficient if using influence in promoting friendly and commercial relations between the British and the ‘independent frontier tribes’ was neglected. For the British, it was important to establish that they were able to both attack and were willing to have a ‘friendly’ relationship.

The manifestations of the two major forms of control in the frontier – conciliation and military operations (though mixed up with other forms in its practice), was mediated through violence. In order to explore the role of violence in colonial frontier regime there is a need to begin by looking at violence is represented in the colonial writings. As Colonel Henry Hopkinson, Commissioner of Assam, puts, “the measures that ought to be, or ought to have been, taken for the restraint of the hill tribes are such as for the most part hardly possess a military character, or upon which Military authorities are competent to advise.” It is only in odd circumstances, he further admits, that the “Military authorities may have to be consulted for military expedition or occupation, but the pacification of the hill tribes is mainly a work for the Civil administration assisted at most by its police.” He puts allegorically that the need for the military in Assam is a “protection against the hill tribes, as an umbrella is against rain, but no more, or at most it exercises the moral influence of a scare crow, sure to be found out at last to be harmless.” And the only strategy to be pursued is to “cease to regard them as aliens or even as enemies but acknowledge them as subjects, seek to establish ourselves among them, to extend our influence over them, and bring them under our control and within

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82 Foreign Department, Political, 1874 July, Nos. 40-45, A, NAI
83 Home Department Public, 1874 March, Nos. 259-261, NAI
the pale of civilization."\(^\text{84}\) Such a narrative presents a picture in which military expeditions and the use of violence are measures that are employed only as an exception. It would be important, therefore, to investigate the role of violence as a mode of control over the "hill tribes".

There were military officials who felt that in India Political and Civil question were so nearly connected with military ones that it was difficult to separate them. And in a territory like the north-east frontier which was perceived to be "terra incognita to the Imperial Government, and have not received the attention\(^\text{85}\) it was better to consider that there was a state of war. Dealing with the "hill tribes" was seen as an exception from the usual "rule of law":

In ordinary times the ordinary laws and the ordinary courts are unsuited for such a country, and for such a people as are the inhabitants of our district Hills. But the present times are extraordinary as regards the condition of the Hill people and the measures we have adopted, and those we meditate in no long time to adopt, may be much compromised if they are liable to be called in question by the Judge and the Sudder.\(^\text{86}\)

There were, definitely, differences of opinion between those who supported a direct means of dealing with the "troublesome hill tribes" by subjugating, at once, the entire hill population and the others, who recommended well organised Military Expeditions to the hills for the "punishment" of "guilty tribes".\(^\text{87}\)

Though this is not an attempt to generalize that those at the local level officials were advocating military expeditions while this was opposed by the higher officials, the difference of opinion between the local officials and those at the higher posts was visible from their correspondence. For the latter officials, who did not have to face the challenges and dangers

\(^{84}\) Letter from Colonel Hopkinson to the Secretary to the Government of Bengal, Assam Secretariat, General Department, 1866, no. 305 Bengal, ASA.

\(^{85}\) Home Department Public, 1865 May 25, Nos. 34-35, A, NAI

\(^{86}\) Home Department Public, 1859 May 6, Nos. 75-77, NAI

\(^{87}\) For an argument against the stationing of an officer in the interior of the tract in the Lushai Hills but rather to be annually visited by the Deputy Commissioner of Cachar see Foreign Department Political, 1870 July, Nos. 254-270, A, NAI. Despite many failures of the military expedition, it was seen to be one mode of control that would serve better in these 'wild' areas rather than stationing of an officer, which would mean direct administering.

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physically in doing their duty, it was easier to insist on the exercise of ‘rule of law’. For those who had to deal with this directly, it was a different story. The local officials would insist on expanding the territory of direct administration because it gave them the power to deal with the communities, which troubled them. In any case, whether the communities were ‘inside’ or ‘outside’ his jurisdiction, he had to deal with them. So, it made more sense from his perspective to bring them under his jurisdiction. Whereas for the officials at a higher level, removed from the ground, any extension of an area of administration was calculated through the interests of profitability, viability, ‘justiceability’ and strategic importance. 88

Of course, there were officials who opposed military operations as a mode of control at the local level too. Captain Magrath, the Superintendent of Hill Tribes, opposed military expeditions by analyzing its advantages and disadvantages. Expedition, Magrath argues, would “no doubt impress the whole of the Tribes with an awe of our power.” Through military operations, he said, the British would “repulse those who oppose us and burn down the habitation of those who vacate them through fear of us”. But he apprehended “strongly that the innocent will suffer with the guilty, the poor unfortunates who have been carried off will not be recovered”. The reason for not pursuing military expedition is packaged as a humanitarian gesture of care for the subjugated subjects. But it is also true that “a sore population and lastly from the excited state of the people the position of the Superintendent will be very critical after the withdrawal of the troops.” 89 Magrath insists that if an Expedition had to be sent, “it should be able to do its work thoroughly, and bring all the Tribes under subjection.” 90 He felt that an unplanned expedition would not be able to do anything to punish those ‘tribes’ who were guilty, if the objective was not meant in that direction. His objection, keeping in mind the dangers of military operations in the mountainous tracts, was not a wholesale rejection against military expedition per se, but only by calculating its effectiveness.

88 For a specimen of those fissures other than the obvious letters see Anthony Gilchrist McCall, Lushai Chrysalis, London: Luzac and Co. Limited, 1949, pp. 41-43. The differences of opinion as to the policy to be followed could in fact be extended to a widely held division between the military officials and the civil officials.
89 Home Department Public, 1860 October 13, Nos. 68-71, A, NAI.
90 Home Department Public, 1860 November 24, Nos. 33-35, A, NAI. Emphasis original.
In fact, the Commissioner of the Chittagong Division proposed to attack all the tribes who dwelt in British territory and had not yet acknowledged the British allegiance, not merely the ones who had committed the 'raids'. The validation, that he was putting forth, was that if the British did not assert its supremacy over the different 'would-be Independent Tribes', they would have to face increased raids and forays. "To punish these Tribes separately, every cold season would witness a Force assembled in the Hills" which could lead to a chronic state of warfare, and there would be no end to it. So the only way to bring an end to this violence is to enter the Hills "once for all . . . with the determination of subduing every Tribe within our territories, hope to end a policy of coercion made necessary to us by the aggressive habits of Hill Tribes" 91, argued the Commissioner. The officials saw that there was a need to protect the subject population because they had been paying "some revenue to the British Government and have been governed hitherto theoretically under the Regulations". These measures should be performed so as to "make the British Government in any way responsible for what they do." At the same time the objective was also to strengthen the "hands of the chiefs of these subject hill men on the borders of the plains, thereby they may be able to repel all incursions of savages from behind, so as to form a barrier between those savages and the plains." 92

For the colonial officials, the use of violence as a mode of control was perceived as unambiguous. The Chief Commissioner of Assam considered that it became "plain and unavoidable duty to inflict such effective punishment on these marauders as may secure the peace both of our own subjects and of the neighbourhood generally for some time to come." 93 The officials conceded that "[w]hen conciliation fails, punitive measures will not be shrunk from." 94 The eruption of violence in the 'offences and contumacies' of the different groups amongst themselves or against the British subjects gave an opportunity to the British to visit the hills with a force and compel the contending parties to enter into agreements to

91 Home Department Public, 1860 July 27, Nos. 26-29, A, NAI. In reality, he was not the lone voice who proposed for an avowal of British sovereignty over the whole tract in the frontier, not included within Manipur and Burma in order to bring them to order. But it was known to the officials that it would be difficult and expensive.
92 Home Department Public, 1860 October 13, Nos. 69-71, A, NAI
93 Foreign Department Political, 1877 August, No.149, A, NAI
94 Letter from Secretary to the Government of India, Foreign Department to the Secretary to the Government of Bengal, Assam Secretariat, General Department, 1866, No. 305 Bengal, ASA.
abstain from ‘outrages’ and to refer to the arbitration of the colonial officials. Since the British could not fully suppress many communities who were powerful enough to thwart the colonial troops, they inferred that these groups of people were “not likely to listen to reason unless the arguments are supported by bayonets.” 95 It was the imagery of a “savage and turbulent tribe, unable to restrain its members from the commission of outrages, given up to anarchy, and existing only as the pest and nuisance to its neighbours”, which justified the “Government in the adoption of any measures for bringing it under subjection and control.” 96

However, if militaristic logic was the underlying assumption while dealing with the ‘wild and warlike savages’, it will be important to ask – why did they follow forms of colonial rule other than the militaristic? The military expeditions were not without their share of problems. The colonial officials knew the struggles that they had to face when a military operation was mobilised in order to ‘punish’ a group that inhabited the mountainous tracts. The officials complained, that the topography was

a tract to which we can hardly convey troops; a tract into which, if we did get them, we could not feed them, nor move them in any direction; a tract void of roads, covered with forest having a dense undergrowth, and in which divisions or detachments, a few miles apart, must be lost to one another; a tract in which the most perfect army would soon become disorganized by sickness; . . . the enemy to be repelled is not a military enemy, or an enemy against which the resources of military art of civilized warfare are efficacious, or can be made available 97.

The colonial officials were ready to concede that the failure of the colonial state to pacify the ‘hill tribes’ earlier had been the “absolute helplessness and incapacity to intercept, punish, pursue, or in any way efficiently hinder, the various raiding parties who have from time to

95 Foreign Department Political, 1876 March, No. 492, A, NAI
96 From Secretary to the Government of Bengal to the Secretary to the Government of India, Foreign Department, Assam Secretariat, General Department, 1866, no. 305 Bengal, ASA. The pressure of the tea lobby in Cachar to subjugate and pacify the Lushais is clearly visible in the ways that were demanded for an end to the ‘Lushai’ violence through military means. For a connection between the tea lobby and colonial policies, but particularly military expedition, see Foreign Department Political, 1871 May, Nos. 237-239, A, NAI.
97 From Secretary to the Government of Bengal to the Secretary to the Government of India, Foreign Department, Assam Secretariat, General Department, 1866, No. 305 Bengal, ASA. 261
time entered these hills.” These “gangs of savages” were not merely opposing the intrusion of British troops into the interior mountainous tracts but rather ‘invading’ the British territory traversing long distances which were “practically inaccessible [to the British], and pursuit of them, even when absolutely red-handed, was nullified by their superior jungle knowledge, their ability to travel long distances on the smallest quantities of food, and the position of our guard posts to the rear instead of in front of the attack.” 98 Moreover, the colonial officials knew that “[f]rom their thorough knowledge of the country, their acute sense of sight and hearing no roads . . . no regular Troops can hope to surprise them” and overtake them on their “retreat through such an enormous tract of jungle, mountain, and swamp”. 99 From the British standpoint, therefore, the means to ‘pacify’ them had to be organised along with different ways rather than a mere military conquest. The nature of the occupation and “coercion must be suited”, therefore, to the circumstances. As Colonel Hopkinson put it, “sometimes it will be an attack in force on a village or tribe which may or may not be followed by an occupation of the place; sometimes it will be more advisable to put a tribe or tribes under the ban of non-interference, but whatever and stringently, the ultimate object to be obtained, which is the submission of the tribe to our control, being always kept in view.” 100 The colonial officials realised that direct military offensive would not be able to subjugate the population once and for all. To assure them of the ‘good intentionality’ of the colonisers, as a general rule the official should abstain from any interference from their internal quarrels and feuds. But at the same time making it clear that, whilst willing to arbitrate at any time a disposition to abide by the official decisions, to arbitrate between them, the colonial officials would not fail to inflict prompt and signal punishment on any community which did not restrain its members from committing ‘outrages on British territory’ or who would not deliver up any of its members who had been declared guilty of offences. The price for accessing all the ‘civilised amenities’ and peace had to be only under the condition of maintaining order as dictated by the colonial officials, which cannot be separated from other larger practices of colonialism, wherein violence is the language of command.

98 Home Department Public, 1874 March, Nos. 259-261, NAI
99 Home Department Public, 1860 November 24, Nos. 33-35, A, NAI
100 Letter from Colonel Hopkinson to the Secretary to the Government of Bengal, Assam Secretariat, General Department, 1866, No. 305 Bengal, ASA.
Despite their readiness to 'accommodate' other forms of control, to bring the 'savages' under colonial rule effectually, the British had to “show firmness and decision in every measure adopted towards them, at the same time conciliate by confiding in them and continuously avoid offending their pride of superstition” since “they are an independent race and as yet do not allow of our superiority over them”\(^{101}\). To be firm meant ‘full authority’ to do whatever the officials liked and inflict injury if there was any opposition without hesitation – destroy the grain which could not be consumed, or bring away and burn down any village that screens or refuses to give up offenders and stay as long as needed to humble the ‘independent race’. After all these objectives had been achieved, the officer could return.

But this use of violence as a mode of control has to be understood within a belief, in the colonial perception, of looking at this frontier as ‘vulnerable’ and ‘troublesome’ frontier:

I suppose that if you were to examine the records of your office correspondence with this Province, month by month, for the last twenty or thirty years, you would find scarcely a month of it in which some reference to the unprotected state of the Assam borders, some report of outrage committed by the hill tribes, some proposal of punitive or repressive measures to be taken towards them, did not appear.\(^{102}\)

What followed from such a perception of real or imagined threat is a justification of the violence that the colonial state would unleash. The violence that the colonial state carried out was then seen as being forced upon itself as a means of ensuring its own protection though its policy towards the offenders had generally been one of “conciliation rather than retaliation”.\(^{103}\) The need to be heavy handedness while dealing with these people was enhanced by a perception amongst some of the military officials that Assam has been treated.

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\(^{101}\) Letter from Lt. G.F.F. Vincent, Acting Junior Assistant Commissioner, Angamese Naga Hills to Captain John Butler, Principal Assistant Commissioner, Nowgong, Assam Secretariat, 1850, No. 639, ASA.

\(^{102}\) From Colonel H. Hopkinson, Commissioner of Assam to the Officiating Secretary to the Government of Bengal, Political Department, Home Judicial, February 1872, Nos. 172-173, NAI

\(^{103}\) Woodthorpe, *The Lushai Expedition*, p. 3
too lightly. \textsuperscript{104} This would lead to a change in the enhancement of military presence while on military expeditions. In the expeditions, the escorts to be accompanied were sought from the regiments serving in Assam rather than the police attached to the Political Agent for they were better armed. It was also to demonstrate that the British had "plenty of men to protect all points." \textsuperscript{105} There was a palpable tension between the rhetoric of the rule of law and an arbitrary disposition of justice. In fact, it could be argued that this distinction is a myth. And it is by maintaining this myth that colonialism thrived in the frontier. The arbitrary forms of justice were always explained and justified as exceptions forced by circumstances, whereas it was through this 'arbitrariness' that the rhetoric of rule of law survived.

Once the full authority to do as the official thought fit for the circumstances had been enforced, it had to be countered by a rhetoric of a civilised mode of handling the 'savages': "On the annexation of a district, the rights of the Hillmen are always scrupulously respected, any losses they sustained being made good to them; and by opening up fresh avenues of trade and commerce to them, they are led to see that a peaceable attitude towards us is more profitable for themselves than one of aggression." \textsuperscript{106} Such rhetorical statements make the enterprise of colonial state not merely about monopolising violence. By demonstrating its capacity to cleanse itself from the blame of being a victimiser the power of colonial state was established.

**DISPLAYING BRITISH POWER**

The colonial officials were aware that it was a very difficult task to provide for the security of the border districts of Assam and Cachar "against the predatory attacks of the hill tribes, and that many years must necessarily elapse before complete success can be obtained." \textsuperscript{107} Since it was thought that the mission could not be accomplished by a military force, there was a need to design other means of control. If the physical conquest proved to be inadequate

\textsuperscript{104} See Home Department Public, 1865 May 25, Nos. 34-35, A, NAI. This was a continuous point raised by the tea planters that the trouble in the frontier from the 'hill tribes' was because of the leniency shown while dealing with them.

\textsuperscript{105} Foreign Department Political, 1876 December, No. 164, A, NAI

\textsuperscript{106} Woodthorpe, *The Lushai Expedition*, p. 5.

\textsuperscript{107} Home Department Public, 1866 June 10, Nos. 15-16, A, NAI
to subdue the ‘warlike’ population since it was perceived that being ‘utterly uncivilised and isolated’, they had to be conquered by impressing the symbols of ‘superiority’ in the ‘savage’ mind.

Expeditions and military operations helped the colonial officials not only in getting the required information about the terra incognita, but also in establishing power of the colonial authority by a show of strength. Those fleeting and impressionistic, theatrical encounters acted as the platform on which the colonial officials built their rule. But more than that, they also served as a means to impose ‘law and order’, to intervene in ‘internal’ feuds and exhibit the power and higher means of technological warfare wherever the colonisers went. The might of the British was shown usually through brutal assaults, burning of villages, etc.\textsuperscript{108} ‘Frightening the wild tribes’ was one of the motives of such military operations to control without direct regular administration in the frontier.\textsuperscript{109}

Since the British could not materialize fully the dream of possessing the frontier through physical subjugation, it was realized that a policy of conciliation would be ineffectual, without impressing on the ‘hill tribes’ a conviction of the colonial power to punish them if necessary. When forms of military conquests proved ineffectual, the only way in which the ‘savage hill tribes’ could be forced to submit, and to make them “recognize that they must behave properly in future, was to show them” that the British could reach them, and that the colonial troops had the power of “crushing any opposition they could make” to the British. The “principal object” of the Expedition against the Lushais in 1871-72, as Woodthorpe informs us, was to show the Lushais that “though the force had retired from that particular hill, they were by no means to conclude that it would not return to it, for that till they made

\textsuperscript{108} Burning of villages was used by both the British and the ‘hill tribes’, but the motives were interpreted as different – the British burning of villages was always justified as punishment whereas the burning of the village by the ‘hill tribes’ was seen as a way to retard the approach of the British when they had to run. See Foreign Department Political, 1875 October, Nos. 233-258, A, NAI

\textsuperscript{109} Though the colonial officials were very worried that the ‘hill tribes’ are getting more and more arms and ammunitions, they were predisposed that “[t]he savages can make no stand against fire-arms.” Foreign Department Political, 1875 June, Nos. 97-110, B, NAI. Interestingly, at this instance when H Luttman-Johnson, Secretary to the Chief Commissioner of Assam, was writing to C. U. Aitchison, Secretary to the Government of India, Foreign Department, he also noted that in spite of the fact that the escorts were stronger than usual, the parties had been attacked, in one instance with very fatal results. Therefore, he said, the only way to prevent such defeats was “by showing a force, which even to an ignorant savage would appear unassailable.”
submission they would get no peace." In this expedition, even after all the terms which could be immediately enforced had been complied with by the vanquished villagers in the Lushai Hills, and nothing more remained for the force to accomplish, yet, it was decided to halt one day longer, partly to impress the Lushais with the idea that the colonial troops were in no hurry to depart, and would have remained longer if the British had chosen. Military mobilisations and the violence inflicted were means to 'teach a lesson' of deterrence. The colonial officials in the frontier were "fully convinced that here especially the exhibition of a firm policy is imperatively needed, in rigorously prohibiting such outrages for the future". Exhibition of the British power was a way of checking the attacks by using violence "prior to making resolves to undertake raids into our territory or against villages under our protection."

The feeling of 'superiority' of the British over others was often infused with a sense of frustration, a feeling heightened by their position in an unknown country and among a people who seemed unknowable. Hence, the massive investment in displaying superiority, in spectacles of village burnings and killings. H. Luttman-Johnson, Secretary to the Chief Commissioner, Assam wrote C. U. Aitchison, Secretary to the Government of India, Foreign Department informing the 'strength and courage' of the British officials: "The savages upon this part of the frontier have been taught, almost for the first time, that outrages and murder can be amply and speedily avenged. The idea that, when injured, we content ourselves with writing dispatches, that we are only fit for riding on horses and elephants, and cannot penetrate their hills, is exploded." One of the reasons why the colonial officials at the local level were demanding for an increased presence of British troops was because they felt that the power of the British valour and strength has not been fittingly demonstrated.

110 Woodthorpe, The Lushai Expedition, p. 299.
111 Report on the Administration of the Province of Assam for the year 1876-77.
112 Report of the Administration of the District of the Naga Hills for the Year 1877-78.
113 Foreign Department Political, 1875 December, No. 91, A, NAI. There was a constant allusion being made by the officials that the hill tribes thought the British to be incapable of entering their territory. Whether this is an opinion held by the 'hill tribes' is difficult to know but what is interesting is how the British officials thought that they were not respected for their courage, fearlessness and might.
114 There was a lot of pressure from the local officials for an assumption by British officers of the administration of the Naga Hills. See Bengal Government, 1872, Nos. 121-218, ASA
exhibition of colonial power was thought necessary to impress upon the 'savages' that the British were the indisputable masters of the 'pathless, insalubrious, dangerous' jungles:

[W]ith ignorant, barbarous, bloodthirsty, and treacherous savages whose knowledge of the powers wielded by the British Government is possibly restricted to what they have learned from their intercourse with Captain Butler and his policemen (a force I believe of only 150 constables), it is of course quite possible, and indeed probable, that Munnipoor, which sends its 7 or 800 sepoys to compel obedience to her orders, may be looked on as the more powerful Government of the two, and if this is the case, it would scarcely be a matter for surprise if the tribes were some day to give trouble owing to this intrigue.\(^{115}\)

The colonial officials were particular to not concede to the 'savages' the feeling of having succeeded in their attempted 'raids' since the officials thought that one successful attempt by one 'tribe' would "tempt half a dozen more to do the same thing". The concern of an 'open frontier' was ever present. Therefore, the object of the expeditions should be to make all the 'hill tribes' within the British territory, acknowledge their allegiance to the Government, and "be made responsible for the preservation of order, and this policy of subjugating the independent tribes should be carried out in every district in which the frontier is liable to the predatory attacks of these troublesome neighbours." If the Lieutenant Governor could not agree with the idea of commencing a "chronic system of aggressive warfare against the Kookies [sic] within the hills, in order to prevent their being at leisure to make incursions into the plains\(^{116}\), he also confirmed that a great punishment should be inflicted for every offence in order to prevent its repetition.

The desire to deter the opponents was crucial for the colonial officials. A relationship with one community could serve as an example to emulate in future. The Angami village of Samaguting became a favourite example for the British. Lieutenant Gregory's object in his position in Samaguting was "by exhibiting to the other Nagas of the kindly relation subsisting between the Samagooting people and himself, gradually to win the confidence and friendship of the neighbouring villages, and so, village by village, to bring the whole Naga

115 Letter from Officiating Political Agent, Munnipoor to the Secretary to the Government of India, Foreign Department, Foreign Department Political, 1873 May, No. 63, A, NAI
116 Home Department Public, 1860 March 9, Nos. 23-30, NAI
country under control". It was by "tact and good management, supported by a moderate display of physical force, to bring that portion of the hill tract adjacent to the plains into order." The need to demonstrate the power of the British strength became necessary for colonial officials to be able to enter the hills without any molestation in the subsequent years. Moreover, since the ‘savages’ were too ignorant to have understood the power of the British, the only way to prevent them from making any attacks on the British troops was to terrorise them.

Though the British would “desire to inflict a very severe punishment on the perpetrators of [any] atrocious crime, yet the dealing out punishment for the past is only expedient so far as it may tend to secure good behaviour for the future”. It was undeniably a point of dilemma for the British to choose between the policy of ‘punishing’ for the ‘atrocities’ committed on the British or British subjects in the past and the policy of overlooking the past, and contenting with endeavours by merely defensive means to check similar fatal incursions in future. Nevertheless, the choice to be made between the two depended largely on the circumstances. If the ‘proper’ requisite arrangements for any military operations were not ready, “in the expectation that all the information necessary will be acquired in time, then the Lieutenant-Governor thinks it would be best distinctly to change the policy, and to be content without punishing the guilty tribes.” It was a dilemma for the officials to decide whether Rutton Poea, the Chief who was “supposed to have been the leader of the Tribes who

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117 Home Department Public, 1866 June 10, Nos. 15-16, A, NAI. Samaguting was important as a military position for the British. The Angami village of Samaguting was understood to be ‘always friendly’, ready to supply carriage and supplies, not disturbed by internal quarrels, at peace with its neighbours, and ‘anxious for British re-occupation’. Browne-Wood, Sub-Assistant Commissioner writes, “Summagiding is a fine high hill... the men I found to be civil and obliging, but very independent in their notions” in his letter to Captain A. Stuart, Principal Assistant Commissioner, Nowgong, dated 14 April 1844, published in Journal of Asiatic Society of Bengal, Vol. XIII, Pt. li, from Elwin, Nagas in the Nineteenth Century, p. 234.

118 Letter from Colonel Hopkinson to the Secretary to the Government of Bengal, Assam Secretariat, General Department, 1866, No. 305 Bengal, ASA.

119 Home Department Public, 1860 October 25, Nos. 108-109, A, NAI
committed the atrocities in the Plains” when he sent the Hill Superintendent an Elephant’s
tusk as a peace-offering, and wished to know if he would be punished. It was difficult to
decide if they should let “bygone be bygones”,120 and pardon Poea and his tribe as he and his
people might prove to be the real guilty party.

Rutton Poea’s deputation was informed by Magrath that it was not the custom of the British
to make terms with petty chiefs through their Agents. If Rutton Poea was “was really anxious
to obtain pardon for his misconduct towards the British Government”, Magrath instructed to
come to him personally, “accompanied by all the Women and Children carried off by him”. Only then would Magrath believe Poea’s gestures to be sincere, and would consider whether he should be pardoned. Magrath announced, “at all events I promised him and his followers
free conduct to and from my Camp.” The British officer demonstrated to impress the
deputation with “a dread of the British Power” at the same time “personally with kindness”
to make them happy with presents of looking-glass, empty bottles, tobacco, salt, spirits etc. Though, he returned the elephant’s tusk stating that he “could not receive Rutton Poea’s
‘nuzzzer’ except from his hands.”121 The insistence on proper time, personality and the
political context in order to receive and give gifts, and also what is to be given and taken
according to their understanding of who they were dealing with (though their significance
could rise and fall as in the case of Rutton Pooea) was very significant for the colonial
officials.122 The British officials’ insistence on the ‘proper’ conduct of the chiefs indicate the
new rituals of power that they wished to establish.

In the official explication, if the scale of violence and massacres was of “shocking nature and
extensive scale . . . perpetrated in the unprovoked incursion”, the Lieutenant Governor ruled
that it was “impossible to pardon the Chief or the Tribe guilty of such atrocities.” The guilty,
regardless of whichever chief he was, had to be secured and ‘signally’ punished after which

120 Home Department Public, 1860 November 24, Nos. 33-35, A, NAI
121 Home Department Public, 1860 December 14, Nos. 14-18, A, NAI
122 On some interesting incidents on how the colonial officials maintained a posture of defiance and resolution
when it comes to maintaining a strict significance on the procedures of gift-giving see Foreign Department
Political, 1875 June, Nos. 97-110, B, NAI. For a discussion on how Dutch colonialism and missionaries
exploited the traditional practice of gift giving as a political tool to restructure power and spiritual
relationships see Lorraine V. Aragon, ‘Twisting the Gift: Translating Precolonial into Colonial Exchanges
he could be “admitted into amicable relations.” Since the “shocking outrages perpetrated on this occasion, far exceeding in oldness and atrocities anything of the kind that has ever before been attempted”, argues the official reasoning, the punishment should be calculated so as to “convince the barbarians engaged in this that they cannot commit such injuries with impunity.” Given the circumstances and the nature under which the acts had been committed, the only course of action to be taken was to see “[i]f Rutton Poea can be apprehended or if he is expelled by His Tribe and another Chief appointed after the most guilty of the Tribe are punished, the admission of the Tribe to amicable relations may be a proper and it may be possible to inflict should be the first measure.” This was planned to be carried out by inflicting “summary Military punishment on the Tribes proved to be guilty – destroying their villages, unless their Chiefs will be given up to formal punishment.”

Indeed, it was a very prudent manoeuvre that the British employed in order to follow a policy wherein both ‘conciliation’ as well as ‘punishment’ could be combined together. After the ‘punitive’ military expedition of the 1871-72, which brought about devastating effects on the lives of the Lushais, the Lieutenant-Governor of Bengal authorised the “writing off to debit of the Kookee Present Allotment in the current year’s Budget of the sum of Rupees 259 advanced for the relief of the people of the Syloo Chief Liengova when suffering from the effect of the late Looshai Expedition.” The effects of the expedition were so severe that some of the communities which were British tributaries, as well as the ‘independent tribes’, had to be fed by the British. Though a negligible amount for the exchequer of the British colonial state, it proved momentous within a self-serving rhetoric of the ‘caring and protective’ state. Once the colonial officials were satisfied that the objectives of the expedition had been met, it was not only tolerable but advisable to give every encouragement

123 Home Department Public, 1860 November 24, Nos. 33-35, A, NAI
124 Home Department Public, 1860 July 27, Nos. 26-29, A, NAI
125 Home Department Public, 1860 December 14, Nos. 14-18, A, NAI. The relationship between the British and the hill tribes are so fluctuating that though Rutton Poea is treated here as an enemy, after the expedition of 1871-72 he would be considered as a very ‘dear friend’. It could perhaps be argued that even though the colonial officials wanted or talked of the good effects of putting things in to order at times keeping certain things vague and undefined helped them, for example the question of boundary, jurisdiction, who is to be a subject, who should be treated as friend, who should be independent and dependent. The vagueness allows for the possibility of multiple interpretations and flexibility to deal with circumstances rather than maintaining a strict rule of loyalty to certain commitment towards the other ‘friendly’ groups.
126 Foreign Department Political, 1873 November, Nos. 185-188, A, NAI
to the Lushais to maintain a passable road of their own to Tipaimukh. From this point, they would obtain an easy water carriage to Cachar, and where

if a mart be eventually established, they will meet the traders from British subjects. . . . to leave the tribes, as far as possible, to manage their own affairs, to cultivate trade and friendly intercourse with them, to endeavour to establish personal influence over the Chiefs, and to maintain such vigilance along the line of defence as to deter the tribes from committing raids, or to cut off the parties that may attempt them.127

Furthermore, the 'speedy and prompt relief' that was promised to the defenceless people was a means to gain their hearts. There was an endemic cholera as a result of the expedition and by providing medicines, the colonial officials attempted creating an image of benevolence and paternalism rather than colonising powers. During the 'normal' time, after the 'wild tribes' had been quietened, when the colonial officials had to carry out their duty it was a better strategy to exhibit that they were being friendly whereas their power is irresistible and supreme.

In those circumstances in which military operations were thought to be not needed, or detrimental, the British designed various means for subjugation, indirect control and surveillance. Giving *posa* or the so-called 'black mail' payment was a widespread practice. It was a means of 'buying peace' when it came to dealing with the 'hill tribes' of the frontier. By 'subsidizing' the chief of the various tribes according to their importance as the British saw, it was made to be understood “thoroughly that for every aggression and insult of our territory, or of territory under our protection, full reparation will be exacted, not only by the stoppage of the money paid to them but by a force being [sent] into their country to commit reprisals”. In case of a ‘breach of contract’ from any of these tribes the British troops would “march into theirs, and burn and destroy their villages, and kill as many of the offending tribe as possible, we shall soon inspire these barbarous with such a dread and terror of our name that they will only be too glad to receive our subsidies and let us and our subjects alone.”128

127 Home Department Public, 1873 January, Nos. 179, NAI
128 Home Department Public, 1865 May 25, Nos. 34-35, A, NAI. The 'mountain tribes' on the northern frontier, viz. Bhutias, Akhas, Dufflas, etc. were allowed to collect 'blackmail' from the 'ryots' usually in
In other words, what was intended was that the ‘tribes’ should be given no choice of whether they accept it willingly or not, but that there should be a situation created so that there would be no choice but to accept the diktats of colonial rule. It was believed that though *posa* payment was considered a universal solvent of the difficulties with the frontier tribes, “it is in our ability to coerce them where conciliation fails, and in their absolute conviction that we can coerce them if they go too far and provoke our anger, lies the most durable guarantee for their good behaviour.”

The exhibition of the British might and authority, as we have already noted, was crucially linked to the project of letting the people know about it. However, knowledge was a tight ropewalk for the officials, always prone to misconceptions and rumours. Captain Magrath, the Superintendent Hill Tribes, for example, wanted to bend the rules to enable him to “gain an ascendancy over the numerous wild tribes scattered through”, and demanded that he should have more power than a Magistrate in a “civilized part of India”. At the same time, he was also careful that the news of his amplified power should not reach the ‘hill tribes’. He felt that the “exaggerated rumours” regarding his powers and intentions might result in a “great state of trepidation.” From such a ‘misperception’ by the ‘wild savages’, he elucidated, some might tender their allegiance but others would fight him first and submit if beaten. But at the same time it was also through the demonstration of power that colonialism sought to rule at the frontier. The expedition of 1871-72 was planned with the aspiration that it would bring about much greater effect than that of 1849, inasmuch it covered a far greater extent of country, inflicted very much severe punishment, remained in the hills for more weeks (or

\[\text{the month of February, March and April. In the beginning of the colonial period in the north-east frontier the colonial officials were of the opinion that it was ‘detrimental’ since it gave them an opportunity of practising treachery if they were inclined to make any aggressions. David Scott after the conquest of Assam recognised the right of the tribes to collect these ‘blackmail’ money. And it was predicted that because of the ‘disastrous’ consequences, it would be stopped. Though practised for a very long time afterwards, one character was changed; instead of the collections in kind in the early period in the form of agricultural produce, rice, sugar cloths from each house, cash was introduced and the Government started giving out for the subject population. Assam Secretariat, General Department, No. 298 Bengal, 1835, ASA}\]

\[\text{129 Home Department Public, 1866 June 10, Nos. 15-16, A, NAI. It is an intriguing aspect as to why *posa* was used as a means to ‘purchase peace’ in some communities and not in others. In the case of the Nagas it was hardly tried, the assumption being that since the correspondence between the British and the villages in the Naga Hills was being done with Chiefs or Head-men, there was no guarantee that any engagement with them would be ratified by their clans, over whom they were supposed to have little social or political power. With an understanding that the Nagas are an ‘independent race’ every individual in the clan is supposed to be independent and responsible only to himself for his actions.}\]

\[\text{130 Home Department Public, 1860 October 13, Nos. 68-71, A, NAI}\]
rather months) than Colonel Lister did.\textsuperscript{131} It was the need for the colonial officials to show to the ‘wild tribes’ that British officers and troops “can live throughout the whole year in the very heart of their mountain fastnesses, and totally destroyed the formerly-received opinion that we could only remain in their Hills for a few days in the cold season.”\textsuperscript{132} Expeditions, along with consideration of important strategic reasons as well as mobilising as a ‘punitive’ measure served various ends.

A display of British power was believed to be not only effective but the definitive method of establishing “tranquillity on a permanent footing . . . with races and tribes circumstanced like those who inhabit these impenetrable jungles.”\textsuperscript{133} But at the same time, it was believed that “real influence amongst savage tribes is a delicate plant, it wants continual succour and support”.\textsuperscript{134} Expedition acted as the means to control the different communities according to how the colonial officials understood them. But more than that, they also served as a means to intervene in ‘internal’ feuds and show the power and the higher means of technological warfare wherever the team went, the modalities of which were framed through their understanding of the group they were dealing with.\textsuperscript{135}

\textbf{One against another}

The idea of using one social group against another was an old practice of colonialism. In the same manner, they also instigated one ‘hill tribe’ against another.\textsuperscript{136} But, this mobilisation

\textsuperscript{131} It was expected just after the expedition of 1871-2 that in all probability, no raids would be committed, either in the direction of Cachar or Chittagong for many years to come since the recollection of the heavy punishment that had been inflicted would deter the ‘wild tribes’. But it did not come out to be true. In fact, the expedition did not serve as a deterrent but on the contrary, the frequency with which ‘raids’ happened increased, which led to a series of subsequent expeditions.

\textsuperscript{132} Letter from Lt. G.F.F. Vincent, Acting Junior Assistant Commissioner, Angamese Naga Hills to Captain John Butler, Principal Assistant Commissioner, Nowgong, Assam Secretariat, 1850, No. 639, ASA.

\textsuperscript{133} Home Department Public, 1861 September 27, Nos. 157-159, A, NAI

\textsuperscript{134} Home Department Public, 1874 March, Nos. 259-261, NAI

\textsuperscript{135} Foreign Department Political, 1875 December, No. 91, A, NAI. The colonizers perceived that it was in the tradition of these ‘savages’ to accept colonial rule without the actual presence of direct administration.

\textsuperscript{136} For instance, four large ‘Kuki tribes’ defeated in a war with the Lushais fled into Cachar, where the British had a major interest because of the capital invested in tea plantation. They were allowed to settle there by the colonial state and from amongst the fugitives a body of two hundred men were selected and equipped and disciplined under their own chiefs as a border force in order to make them fight against any incursion. See Edward Tuite Dalton, \textit{Descriptive Ethnology of Bengal}, Calcutta: Office of the Superintendent of Government Printing, 1872, p. 45.
was at times extended to rule a vast territory depending on their distinction between the plains and the hills. The colonial officials were very insistent in classifying and making distinctions between friendly and unfriendly, independent and dependent 'hill tribes'. One of the reasons for this enterprise was impelled by the practical political necessity of making a distinction between a subject of the British from those who were independent. The British were mobilising their energy in the name of protecting their subjects but at the same time if an ‘independent tribe’ “promises amity and peaceful relations, and abstinence from raids and violence in the Territory protected by us, such promises will of course be accepted, no interference is to be exercised, and the responsibility of administration and protection are not in any sense to be undertaken.”

Once the British had set apart the potential, would-be allies from the prospective enemies, playing a group of people against another was a usual means to create a buffer population. For instance, Colonel Jenkins planned to settle a colony of Kukis on the ‘deserted land’ to the east of the Lungteng River, on a direction about 30 miles north-east of Assaloo (a subdivision of Cachar, included within the Naga Hills District subsequently) in the middle of the 1860s. The objective of the plan was to hold the Angamis in check. However, settling one group to be used against another had its own pitfalls. It was reported that the above measure did not have great success, since the villages of the “Kookies themselves are, no doubt, respected by the Nagas, but the villages of other tribes are as much exposed to Naga depredations as before the Kookies came.” Furthermore, the Kukis were perceived by the British as ‘restless and migratory’ being “wretched agriculturalists even for savages much worse than the Nagas” and their permanent settlement in a particular area could not be guaranteed.

In their desperate attempt to ‘pacify’ the ‘warlike’ people, the Bengal Government considered if some of the nearer Lushais who were pressed by different groups from the rear

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137 Home Department Public, 1860 November 24, Nos. 33-35, A, NAI
138 Home Department Public, 1866 June 10, Nos. 15-16, A, NAI. Settling and establishing of colonies was a much larger project undertaken by the colonial state. Here, I am looking more from the perspectives of strategy and political relations between the colonial state and the ‘hill tribes’.

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could be settled close to the British frontier.\textsuperscript{139} The condition was that they would not be in any way subject to British jurisdiction, and no “attempt will be made to interfere with them in any way so long as they are peaceful and good neighbours, though an officer may be stationed amongst them, or even beyond them, to exercise political functions.” In order to create a buffer, the British distributed muskets as well – cheap percussion guns in exchange for the old matchlocks and flint-locks and to supply them with limited quantities of ammunition. But the Commissioner of the Dacca Division doubted whether the “wandering habits of the Loosais could so quickly changed that the \textit{first} settlers could be trusted with arms.” Furthermore, he pointed out that the possession of those arms could be “a bait for attack by other tribes and that they would not prove a certain means of defence in the usual case of surprises at daybreak”.\textsuperscript{140} However, the plan to arm these settlers was not merely for using them as a tool to fight the more distant groups. It was also a means to tie them down within the British power. The British were intolerant of the reported trade in arms and ammunition amongst the ‘hill tribes’ as a part of the policy of pacification.\textsuperscript{141} But at the same time, they supplied arms to those ‘hill tribes’ who they felt did not directly challenge the British rule. As one colonial official visualised the objective of the plan as a measure to “strengthen them against enemies amongst the hill tribes, but not against us, for they would always be dependent on us for ammunition. At the same time, if the percussion weapons were taken by hostile clans, they would be of less use to them than the flint-locks which they replaced would have been.”\textsuperscript{142} Though the British were giving the percussion guns, a better weapon, it was a better bet since the ammunition of that gun was not easily available, whereas the ammunition of the flint-locks was locally made.

\textsuperscript{139} Robert Brown, who was the Political Agent in Manipur disagreed with the views of those who he called theorists, especially targeting Mr. Edgar, that there was a ‘tribe’ which was behind the Lushais pushing them from the rear towards the British frontier. The tribe being referred to is the ‘Pooees’. For more on this issue see Foreign Department Political, 1870 September, Nos. 165-170, A, NAI

\textsuperscript{140} For almost a panicky and obsessive discussion on the supply of arms and ammunition, allegedly by the Manipuris see Foreign Political, January 1873, nos. 140-143, A, NAI; Foreign Political A, nos. 215-216, January 1873; Foreign Political, May 1873, nos. 63-64, A, NAI

\textsuperscript{141} Foreign Department Political, 1870 February, Nos. 212-213, A, NAI, Italics original.

\textsuperscript{142} Foreign Political, February 1870, nos. 212-213, A, NAI. The policy laid down in the instructions of the 18th September, No. 1338, 1869, was endowed with furnishing the villages with arms and ammunition and training them to their use.
This policy of arming one group against the other was already being in practice by 1847.\(^{143}\) The Commissioner of Chittagong proposed that as a mode of defence against the ‘increase’ in the ‘outrages’ and the destructions that the ‘wild tribes’ brought to life and property, the Government should supply the ‘friendly Hill Chiefs’ with arms and ammunition. By this agreement the whole tract of the country “[s]outh of the Kurnullee or Chittagong River, as far as the Arracan border” was placed under the management of the Poangs, and a portion of the revenue was remitted, on the condition that they should “undertake to defend the Frontier against all marauders.”\(^{144}\) Following on the same tradition, in 1858 after the Commissioner had personally distributed the arms among the people residing on the Poang Rajah’s possessions, he testified that it “had the effect of inspiring great confidence in the minds of those simple people.” But since it was also pointed out that merely arming would not give a sense of “perfect security in the Hill villages,” new strong forts, each placed with well-armed bodies of men for their defence, was also included as a strategy. In order to support the forts, the Rajah was given a yearly allowance of Rupees 1,000 from the beginning of 1859.\(^{145}\) Though it did not bring about permanent security to the border areas, it proved to be efficient as a temporary measure.

The colonial state was arming one group in order to fight another in the name of pacifying the troubled frontier. It is important to remember that the colonial state assumed the power to be the sole means of controlling the supply of arms. But it does not seem to be that easy. It was reported by Captain Magrath how “[o]ne of the prime movers and chief causes of this chronic disturbed state of the Frontier is the Poang! Supplied with money, and armed and supported by Government, he is strong enough to make raids upon any of the other Hill Tribes, from whom he carries off their women and children.” The report continues that he, the Pooang Rajah, would keep only the children appropriated as the personal slaves for

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\(^{143}\) The policy to use the local people in order to fight another group was practiced in different forms. Beginning with the formation of the Manipur Levy during the first Anglo-Burmese War, various militias were formed in the course of the century – Lakhimpur Militia, Assam Militia, Sibsagar Militia, etc. However, the militias seem to be different, though the distinction is not very clear, from the Levy formation like the Kuki Levy. More than anything else they were employed for scout duty. Since they were recruited from the locality, they were used in order to get information and the routes that might help in the speedy movement of British troops.

\(^{144}\) Home Department Public, 1860 July 27, Nos. 26-29, A, NAI

\(^{145}\) Home Department Public, 1859 May 6, Nos. 75-77, A, NAI
himself and his family from these ‘raids’ whereas he distributed the grown-up women amongst his followers, fearing that they might bring trouble and the British authorities might come to know of his activities. The men, Magrath informed, were invariably murdered. It is further remarked, “to strengthen the hands of such a man will, instead of quieting, add to the disturbances on the Frontier.”146 This practice worked for the British irrespective of the conduct of these chiefs to whom arms had been supplied. They could choose to ignore the many implications of arming them.

Moreover, maintaining a ‘friendly’ relationship with one group against another would certainly mean trouble and more violence once the British forces retreated. Rutton Pooea, who declared his favour for the British at the commencement of the operations undertaken against the Lushais, in the beginning of the 1870s, especially the Lushai Expedition of 1871-72, and taken an active and personal share in subsequent hostilities, created a very strong feeling against him among the ‘independent tribes’. In order to ‘save’ his clan from destruction and dismemberment, the British had to leave forces for his ‘protection’.147 The ‘protective force’ came in the form of an advanced post, on the grounds that he was in danger of an attack from the neighbouring Syloos, as a result of his having rendered assistance to the British.148 In the name of pacification, what colonialism introduced along with its other missions was also an increase in violence and hostilities between different groups. It was more practical and necessary for the colonial officials to work with and accompanied by the ‘friendly’ Chiefs along with their people and followers when they were going for expeditions. In this expedition, Rutton Poeea and Sookpilal were selected as such. Though the use of one group against another was composed within different justifications, it was

146 Home Department Public, 1860 November 24, nos. 33-35, A, NAI. Emphasis original. It was asserted by the Lieutenant Governor that before taking any measures to break amicable relations between the Government and the Rajah “care must be taken that nothing is accepted and acted upon which is not or cannot be fully proved.” It could, perhaps, be argued that this anxiety of proving was reflected in other productions of knowledge about the subject population, in their apprehension to be able to have the final, totalitarian truth without any uncertainty.

147 Home Department Public, 1874 March, Nos. 259-261, A, NAI

148 Home Department Public, 1873 January, No. 179, A, NAI. It could, perhaps, be argued that the ‘hill tribes’ were playing their own game by using a more powerful force in the form of British. Rutton Poea threatened that in case he was given no protection, he would abandon his friendly attitude, and move nearer to the country of Howlongs, with whom the British had a hostile relationship at that moment, since they were supposedly accused of being the perpetrators of the violence that resulted in the declaration of the Expedition.
clear to the British that unless some individuals, expectantly a Chief or a Rajah, provide information and "open the necessary routes through the Jungle, no operations of a military kind can be prosecuted with good hope of success." The use of one clan or village against another inflamed the enmity between the groups instead of solving them.

The statements of the officials that they had to be careful of not injuring the innocent were strongly related with the desire not to offend the 'friendly tribes'. Since some of the clans/villages/tribes could be used against another, it was more practical for the British not to attack the whole group, but rather to pick up a few and demonstrate that it was ready to conciliate if the others 'behaved well'. Moreover, they also felt that some of the communities had been too weakened to be punished. The expedition and other forms of violent interventions were not meant to "exterminate these frontier tribes", but, in Woodthorpe's words,

by converting them into our allies to raise a barrier between our frontier districts and other more distant races. Supposing a tribe to be utterly crushed or exterminated, we should find ourselves no better off than before – probably much worse, having merely removed obstacles to the assaults of a fiercer and more formidable foe, whose very remoteness would render it difficult for us to conciliate or punish him.

When the British were ready to allow some of the 'atrocities' or 'crimes' by the neighbouring groups, it has to be pointed out that those acts were conceived to be a lesser threat than those which would be committed by the far-flung powerful groups.

This leads us to re-examine some of the pacifying measures of the British. The reasons for the 'appeasement' of one group could be various. In 1873 three Kuki chiefs were presented with a gun a piece, for supplying coolies 'so readily' for survey work; it was a prized commitment for the British in the hills where labour was always very dear to get for the officials. However, the granting of the 'gifts' was not merely for the service that they had rendered. It was seen as a means to please the Chiefs and pave the way for an intimate and

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149 Home Department Public, 1861 November 27, Nos. 157-159, A, NAI
satisfactory relationship in the future. Similarly, the colonial officials wished to cultivate friendly relations with the Mishmis since they were said to hold the direct route to China, and it was thought that if communication overland could be established with China in the future, it was only with the aid of the Mishmis that the British would be able to undertake the journey.

Within the grid of colonial understanding, bringing ‘weaker villages’ under British protection was always seen as a civilized nation’s responsible response to the ‘violent’ acts of invasion by ‘stronger villages’. However, it was only on the promise of increased revenue area and political jurisdiction that such a coding of ‘violence’ drew heavily. And the benevolent masters could always count on extracting information through the ‘friendly tribes’ as well. But the question of who is a subject of the British is determined more by the political calculation rather than physical inhabitation of the people in one territory or the other. When a group of people invaded the British territories and that of the Tipperah Rajah in 1869 it was noted that “it is politic to regard [the raiders] as neither our subjects nor his; they are a common enemy against whom common cause should be made.” From such an evaluation it was easy to deduce that the “Kookies [who invaded] were but the hired Agents of some party, who, by a slaughter of our subjects, hoped to get the Rajah into a scrape with Government.”

Before I close the discussion, it is critical to suggest that it would be more productive to see the numerous expeditions and military operations – and their necessary use of violence – as an indispensable mode of control employed in the frontier tracts rather than looking at them as temporary aberrations in ‘the policy’. Colonel Hopkinson, Commissioner of Assam demanding for assumption by British officers of the administration of the Naga Hills, argues,

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\text{[It is the only one likely to prove efficacious, and that sooner or later we shall be compelled to adopt it, or else we must go on as we have hitherto gone on, neither shutting the door nor}
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151 Annual Report of the Naga Hills for the year 1872-73.
152 Bengal Government, 1873, Nos. 68a-107, ASA
Military expedition was advised as a means to “chastise the tribes” who did the British “so much mischief.” But it was not always followed on the “ground of the danger attending military expeditions into the interior of such a country”. In order to “preserve the Hill population” from “getting more and more terrified”, C. Steer, Commissioner of the Chittagong Division proposed three courses as a solution to the crisis: first, to send every cold season, military expeditions into the hills to ‘punish’ by ‘fire and sword’ the ‘tribes’ that were held guilty by the British; second, to establish combined military and police outposts on the frontier; and third, to distribute arms and ammunition to the chief, and give him the permission to exact his own retribution for every wrong done to his subjects by the ‘hill tribes’. The instrumental deployment of a more dominant group to combat other powers was highly emphasised, and in such situations the atrocities, which are otherwise so ‘visible’ to the ‘civilised eyes’, could be normalized and glossed over.

While dealing with the ‘wild savages’ on the north-east frontier coercion certainly overshadowed hegemony as a tool of power. The brutality and violence was direct and physical for the majority of the local population. In such a situation, spectacle occupies the central stage of colonial theatre. A display of power, in the form of ‘superior’ and more efficient techniques of warfare, was a tool of dominance without governance. “The establishment of Political control and influence without any assertion of actual government” was a mode of control which the colonial power would have wanted if it worked. Granted that the mobilisation of military forces against the ‘hill tribes, was not merely to execute, to fire off their guns and kill people, to burn the villages but also to display might and ingrain this might in the popular memory. However, while ruling the ‘wild savages’ on the north-east frontier, there was clear policy of using violence in its more

154 Bengal Government, 1872, Nos. 121-218, ASA
155 Home Department Public, 1859 May 6, Nos. 75-77, NAI
156 However, the superior techniques of warfare do not apply throughout the whole of the colonial period. In the beginning period other forms of warfare like spears, and bows, which would become ‘primitive’ forms of warfare later, could overpower the guns that the British used. The early form of guns that the British had did not work during rainfall. For instances see White, A Memoir of the Late David Scott.
157 Bengal Government, 1873, Nos. 26-30, ASA
explicit and overt display of brutality, which determined the history of colonialism. Despite the rhetoric of a bourgeois ideology for justifying their project, colonialism in this ‘savage’ frontier unfailingly resorted to an older and more physical motif of power.

Colonial rule, over the ‘warlike savages’ on the north-east frontier, was informed by an acceptance of difference (since the primitives live outside of civilisation in the European conception). The primitives lived in a different time and order in colonial understanding, therefore, allowed to be flexible while subjugating them to colonial rule by a different norm ‘peculiar’ to ‘their custom and tradition’ as the colonial power understood, within a permissible limit. Even if these practices meant a departure from the myth of a rule of law the colonial officials were all set to hold these ‘aberrations’. It is in fact through these ‘aberrations’ that the myth of a rule of law was enforced on those which were outside of civilisation. However, it is important to find out the limits of this acceptance of difference. Until a point when any act was challenging the colonial authority, these acts could be accommodated through non-intervention/non-interference or displaced regulation. Once the legitimacy of colonial power was challenged, these acts became a threat, a problem which needed the deployment of force. In the instances of colonial control in the frontier discussed in this chapter, there is nothing called non-intervention. There could be only controlled intervention and aggressive intervention, without attempting to a suggestion that the two were distinctly marked out. Every intervention was violent, in varying degrees. At those moments when the colonial state seems removed from the activities of daily regulation and control, it stays as the dominating force to dictate, or at least with the desire to dictate, and enforce a structure of power which is craving for possession.

CONCLUSION

Robert L. Solomon argues that “where reasonably suitable ‘natural’ frontiers existed, the required level of boundary definition was not as great as in other places where there was immediate danger of costly confrontation with a rival.” This is, perhaps, the reason why the “British could afford to be vague in their attitude toward the frontier regions on the southern fringe of the Himalayas, which were not the object of colonial competition”. They had to
reach better-defined boundaries where they met a powerful adversary. In the case of the Kabaw valley (discussed in Chapter three) we saw this being played out with the Burmese. Solomon sees the colonial maintenance of a ‘vague frontier’ as a failure to realise the projected goal. He bases this argument with the expectation that “all frontiers will, sooner or later, be resolved into boundaries. Boundaries must be drawn so as to include all of the territory of the sovereign state.” However, as argued above, keeping a territory as a frontier may in fact be the very goal rather than establishing a systematic administration in these areas. The logic of frontier regime could defy the neat transition from fuzzy frontier to neatly drawn boundary in the exercise of modern sovereign state. Politically the Naga Hills were divided into three parts: the Naga Hills District, fully and directly British administered territory; in the Control Area the Deputy Commissioner of the Naga Hills exerted his political influence in cases of village feuds; and the unadministered territory was the geographically unknown.

In the postcolonial histories that deal with the relationship between the British Indian state and the so-called hill tribes on the north-east frontier, the basic colonial logic has been sustained and shored up. The focus in these histories is usually on the policy shifts of the colonial state, in spite of historians remarkably disagreeing on the exact time spans of particular policy phases. It is important to recognize the problems that attend such a


159 Furer-Haimendorf, ‘Through the Unexplored Mountains of the Assam-Burma Border’, p. 14. Interestingly, such a division finds its resonance in an observation made by David A. Bello following from Thongchai Winichakul’s conceptualization of Siam’s pre-national space. Bello divides Qing state space into three zones: “a sovereign zone of sustained, direct authority; an inner frontier zone where state power was intermittently projected, mainly at strategic garrisoned access points; and an outer frontier zone where no state authority whatsoever existed, and so constituted a vacuum of authority between neighboring states.”

David A. Bello, ‘To Go Where No Han Could Go for Long: Malaria and the Qing Construction of EthnicAdministrative Space in Frontier Yunnan’, *Modern China*, Vol. 31, No. 3, July 2005, p. 287. The interesting point to be noted, here, is that existence of ‘inner frontier zone’ challenges the notion of how political authority is concentrated at a centralised location and then waning as one goes further from the centre to the periphery, finally culminating with the dissolution into frontier.

classification. First, the obsession with the high events of 'state policy' posits the question of historical change exclusively at the level of state initiatives which decisively underplays the question of colonial practices. Secondly, most of these narratives follow a model in which the colonial violence is little more than a necessity made possible by the barbaric 'tribal raids'. It was the repeated 'tribal raids', according to this logic, which compelled the colonial state to adopt a more violent policy against the 'tribes'. Such a line of argument, while uncritically repeating the colonial rationale, chooses to see colonialism as a liberating force on the whole and violence only as its inevitable by-product. In 1872 Dalton presaged this understanding when he observed, "[o]n our assuming the government of Upper Asam, attention was soon directed to the cold blooded murders committed by the Nagas on British subjects, and several expeditions to their hills were undertaken with the view of putting a stop to the practice."\textsuperscript{161}

B.C. Allen wrote after three decades in a very similar tone:

> It should first be premised that for the annexation of their territory the Nagas are themselves responsible. The cost of the administration of the district is out of all proportion to the revenue that is obtained, and we only occupied the hills after a bitter experience extending over many years, which clearly showed that annexation was the only way of preventing raids upon our villages. Had the Angami Nagas consented to respect our frontiers, they might have remained as independent as the tribes inhabiting the hills to the south of Sibsagar and Lakhimpur; but it was impossible for any civilized power to acquiesce in the perpetual harrying of its border folk.\textsuperscript{162}

These are representative of the rationale given for the military operations against the Nagas or any other 'hill tribe' in the frontier. Such a representation not only blames the indigenous inhabitants for the military conquest but also portrays the British occupation as a burden both politically and economically. Through the power of representation the colonizer turns the 'origin' and responsibility of the attack on to the colonized. Within this logic it is only because of the faults and the 'bloodthirsty' nature of the violent Nagas that the British were compelled to intervene and save the 'savages' from further degradation. Colonial violence was deployed only in the name of humanity. Similarly, the story of defeat and inability of the

\textsuperscript{161} Dalton, \textit{Descriptive Ethnology of Bengal}, p. 39.

state to conquer the entirety of the Naga Hills has now been turned into a story of benevolence.

A statement made by Captain J. R. Magrath, Superintendent Hill Tribes, best exemplifies the mode of control in the frontier. According to him, "It cannot be denied that to gain influence over savages the great element necessary is power. Power tempered with justice much soon bring savages under subjection... I will not abuse the power given me but will use it to the best of my ability for the furtherance of the desired object – the quieting and civilizing of the Wild Tribes."\(^{163}\) Monopolising violence is a defining characteristic of the modern state in its overlapping capacities of a system of absolute control, "a form of social relations, a form of organisation"\(^{164}\), and a concentrated structure of capitalist power. The colonial state, as Frantz Fanon indicated, is necessarily crueller.\(^{165}\) But when confronted with the ‘wild and warlike’ people that colonialism considers to inhabit the subhuman ‘outside’ of civilisation, the colonial state’s brutality is most intensified. This chapter has attempted to engage the complex career of colonialism on the north-east frontier of British Indian empire by relocating colonialism as an ‘introduction’ of violence against the ‘hill tribes’. Sensitized to the great diversities of responses from different communities, this chapter has not focused on a particular community in the area. Rather, it is more concerned with suggesting the range of actions perpetrated against various groups of people (frequently clubbed together as ‘hill tribes’) by the dominant power.

The objectives to be considered in determining the issue of relationship with the ‘hill tribes’ regarding the colonial frontier could be manifold: defence and protection of the territory situated within the boundary from the ‘raids’, the means of supply, the relative ‘healthiness’ of the locality, availability of labour, consideration of expense and so on. An unceasing

\(^{163}\) Captain J. R. Magrath, Superintendent Hill Tribes, Home Department Public, 1860 October 13, Nos. 68-71, A, National Archives of India (NAI)

\(^{164}\) John Holloway, ‘Can we change the world without taking power? A debate between John Holloway and Alex Callinicos World Social Forum, 27 January 2005’ International Socialism, No. 106, 2005, p. 113

\(^{165}\) As Frantz Fanon wrote, “In the capitalist countries a multitude of moral teachers, counsellors and ‘bewilders’ separate the exploited from those in power. In the colonial countries, on the contrary, the policeman and the soldier, by their immediate presence and their frequent and direct control maintain contact with the native and advise him by means of rifle butts and napalm not to budge. It is obvious here that the agents of government speak the language of pure force.” The Wretched of the Earth, trans. Constance Farrington, New York: Grove, 1968, p. 38.

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interplay of these concerns defined the matrix of the frontier policy, which was determined at the last instance by one or the other overriding interest in a particular case. Whether the policy was to be strictly defensive or comparatively flexible, “personal influence as a material ingredient, and involving therefore the exercise of a certain amount of discretion and responsibility on the part of the local officers”\textsuperscript{166} has to be seen within the context in which one policy is preferred over another.

Colonialism operated in the north-east frontier with an understanding that there was a characteristic linkage between the hierarchy of civilisation and the cultural practices, a correlation between barbarity and fighting: “The experience . . . shows the Naga tribes to be so barbarously ignorant that fighting may at any time occur, unless the survey parties are protected by such a military force as must convince even their ignorance that any opposition is quite hopeless.”\textsuperscript{167} The use of military means to subjugate the ‘hill tracts’ and the continued portrayal of the area lying on the north-east of Bengal as an economically backward ‘mountainous natural frontier’ was rooted in a particular understanding of this area.

\textsuperscript{166} H. Hankey, Officiating Commissioner of the Chittagong Division to Secretary to the Government of Bengal, Political Department, Home Department Public, March 1874, Nos. 259-261, A, NAI.

\textsuperscript{167} Foreign Department Political, 1875 August, No. 401, A, NAI