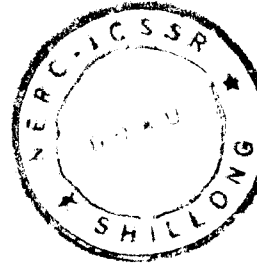


**Cachar
under
British Rule
in
North East India**



Jayanta Bhusan Bhattacharjee

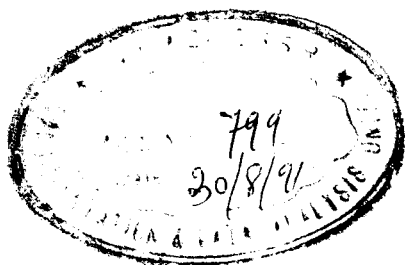
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CHAPTER I

Introduction

Cachar, now a district of Assam, is situated between Longitude 92.15" and 93.15" East and Latitude 24.8" and 25.8" North, covering an area of 6,941.2 square kilometres, and is bounded on the north by the North Cachar Hills District of Assam and Jaintia Hills District of Meghalaya, on the east by Manipur, on the south by Mizoram and on the west by Tripura and the Sylhet District of Bangladesh.¹ But on the eve of British annexation, the present North Cachar Hills District and Hojai Davaka areas of the Nowgong District of Assam and Jiri Frontier Tract of Manipur formed parts of Cachar, then known as *Heramba Rajya* ; while the modern Karimganj Sub-division was included in the Sylhet District of Bengal. To quote Hamilton²:

West from Manipur and its dependencies, on the frontier of Assam, is the territory of the Kachhar Raja, which borders with Assam from nearly opposite to Koliyabar to the river Kopili, which enters the Kolong about the middle of its course. The length of this frontier is therefore about thirty miles. At the Kopili, Kachhar reaches with a corner to the Kolong; but in general it does not descend into the plains on the bank of that river. It extends a little south of the Surma, which passes Silhet or Srihatta in Bengal, and therefore to about 24.30' of north Latitude, while its northern extremity is in about 26.20' north giving 110 geographical miles for its length.

Cachar thus consisted of two distinct divisions, *viz.* North Cachar Hills, which were a continuation of the Assam range

or Meghalaya plateau, and Cachar Plains,* that formed the eastern extremity of the alluvial valley of Surma and was "geographically; historically and ethnically an extension of Gangetic Bengal."³ But the latter division was also dotted with hills. In addition to the southern belt of the Barail range, with an average width of six or seven miles, containing peaks between three and six thousand feet in height, on the eastern frontier lay the Bhuban range, a continuation of the Lushai Hills that ran almost due north to the junction of the Jiri and Barak rivers and at places over 3,000 feet above the sea level; while on the west of the Hailakandi valley the Chatachura or Saraspur hills stretched in a continuous line to the Barak. The hills division, consisting mainly of the Barail range, from Jaintia Hills to a point little to the west of Asalu formed a continuous wall of mountains, gradually increasing in height towards the east. Kalangtam, where the range entered Cachar, was 4,336 feet above the level of the sea, the next important peak being Jentahajum (5,127 feet), while Sherfaisif, a little to the north, was 5,617 feet. To the north east of Haflong there were three peaks over 5,617 feet in height, where the chain took a sharp turn towards the north and reached its greatest elevation at Hampeopet (6,143 feet), but from this point it gradually declined in height, and at Laikek, a little before it entered Naga Hills, the altitude was only 2,628 feet.⁴

Most of these hills were rugged and precipitous into which innumerable rivers cut deep gorges as they descended upon the plains. The mountainous character of the country rendered the intercommunication extremely difficult, while most of the rivers would remain unnavigable even in the rainy seasons. Barak, the principal river, took its rise a little to the west of Maothana on the southern slopes of the lofty range which was the northern boundary of Manipur. Having a south-westerly move from its source near Tipaimukh, it turned sharply to the north and for a considerable distance formed the boundary line between Cachar and Manipur. After its junction with Jiri, the principal affluent to join it, which too for a

* Cachar Plains consisted of the Silchar and Hailakandi Sub-divisions of the modern district. This region was generally known as South Cachar.

considerable area acted as the Cachar-Manipur border, at Jiribam, it turned again to the west and flowing through the heart of Cachar reached Badarpur. From Badarpur to Haritkar it provided the boundary between Cachar and Sylhet. At Haritkar the river became divided into two branches, *viz.* Surma and Kushiara. The latter branch entered Sylhet at the junction, while the former continued to form the frontier of Cachar as far as Jalalpur and then across Sylhet confluenced with the old stream of Brahmaputra near Bhairab Bazar in Mymensing. In addition to Jiri, the Barak received numerous tributaries from the hills through which it made the way. A little to the west of Lakhipur, it was joined by Chiri that took its rise on the southern slopes of the Barial near Haffong, while Madhura, rising from the same range, joined near Silchar. Jatinga, which rises south of Haflong, debouched in the plains at Panighat and then through Barkhola, receiving Dalu on the left bank, fell into Barak beyond Jaynagar. The principal rivers in South Cachar were Sonai, Dhaleswai and Katakhal, while in the north it was Dayan. The Hajoi-Jamunamukh-Davaka area was known as Central Cachar, and Kapili was the most important river there. Most of these rivers were dried up during winters, but in summer Barak and her tributaries would rise up in high spate and, as in these days, caused inundations almost every year.⁵

The hills were clothed with dense forest, and the Valley of Barak was dotted with hollows, *beels* and swamps.⁶ The hills were rich in timber, mineral and tusked elephants, and the valley reared fertility and the *beels* abounded with palatable fish; but the climate was extremely enervating. The region was a dumping ground for malarial fever, and *kalazar*, cholera and small pox usually levied huge toll on human life. The physiography had thus imposed a formidable barrier, but the plains tract being only a continuation of Bengal was never unaccessible to the people of Sylhet. However, the frequent raids and superstitious customs of the dwellers of the neighbouring hills, the ravages caused by the wild animals, the devastating floods and unhealthy climate had hitherto acted as a serious check on the growth of population. No wonder, therefore, the Valley of Barak was known to the Bengalees as Kachhar, meaning,

according to the local dialect of Sylhet, a stretch of land on the foot of mountains.⁷

The picturesque valley of Barak is a natural continuation of the vast Bengal plains, and was included in the various kingdoms that had emerged during the pre-historic and early historic periods like Gauda, Vanga and Samatata.⁸ In ancient time Cachar Valley, Sylhet and Chittagong were colonised by the Aryans and the area was known as *Pratyanta Desha*.⁹ The *Varaha Purana* and *Vayu Purana* referred to Barak (*Barabakra*) as a Holy River,¹⁰ while *Yogini Tantra* and *Kalika Purana* mentioned about the Bhubanesar Temple.¹¹ A tradition suggests that, Kapila, the celebrated author of *Shankhya*, had his *ashram* on the bank of Barak at Siddheswer near Badarpur.¹² *Kamakshya Tantra*, a Sanskrit work, shows that Cachar was included in the *Sapta-Khanda Kamarupa*.¹³ According to an inscription of Lokenath, a *Samanta* ruler of East Bengal, issued in the seventh century A.D., he constructed the temple and image of *Ananta Narayana* at Subang, near Bikrampur. The reference in this inscription to *Jayatunga-Versa* and *Su-Vanga visaya* suggests that Jatinga Valley was a *Varsa* or feudatory state under Samatata and Subang was a *Visaya* or district.¹⁴ During seventh to the tenth centuries the region might have been included in the Harikela Kingdom which comprised Sylhet and the adjacent territories.¹⁵ In the thirteenth century, the Barak Valley was ruled by the Tipperahs, a section of the Bodos,¹⁶ whose territory, in addition to present Tripura, included a considerable portion of modern Sylhet and Comilla districts of Bangladesh, and once the capital of the kingdom was at 'Khalangsha' in Cachar.¹⁷ Khalangsha was perhaps the ancient name of Rajghat, on the bank of Rukni, where old roads, tanks and brick-built plinths are still in existence.¹⁸ But the Tipperahs gradually moved eastward and in the Cachar Valley an independent kingdom was established of which Tulashidvaj was the reigning prince in the 15th century A.D. Raja Tulashidhvaj fought several wars with Pratapgarh in the west.¹⁹ However, in the beginning of the 16th century Cachar was annexed to Tripura.²⁰

The North Cachar Hills were then included in the territory of the Dimachas, another section of the Bodos, now popularly

known as the Kacharis. They are the earliest known inhabitants of the Assam Valley²¹ and claim their descent from Ghatotkach, the son of Bhima, the hero of *Mahabharata*, through Hidimba. Although their history from Ghatotkach has not yet been reconstructed, the Dimachas "exercised their sovereignty in Assam in different names and in different places."²² In the beginning of the Christian Era, they were the ruling power of Kamarupa and were expelled from there by Pushyavarman, the founder of the Varman Dynasty, in the fourth century A.D.²³ The Dimachas then established a kingdom at Sadiya where they ruled for several centuries and gradually extended their jurisdiction over a vast territory that extended beyond the river Dishang upto Namsang in the Naga Hills and included modern North Cachar Hills, with headquarters at Dimapur on the bank of the river Dhansiri.²⁴

Meanwhile, the Ahoms, an off-shoot of the Tai or Shan race of Upper Burma, wandered into the eastern extremity of the Brahmaputra Valley. Obviously, they came into conflict with the Dimachas, and Sukapha, the leader of the Ahom invaders (1228 A.D.), encountered the latter at the foot of the Naga Hills.²⁵ Realising the difficulty of overcoming the defenders, Sukapha concentrated himself in subduing the Morans and the Barahis in the north and north-east of the Dimacha territory. But Suteupha, the son and successor of Sukapha, occupied the Dimacha territory upto Namdang towards the end of the thirteenth century, which came to be recognised as the boundary between the two neighbours for about two hundred years.²⁶ In 1490, the Ahom army crossed Dikhu and erected a fort which was suddenly sacked by the Dimachas who forced the invaders, chased upto Tangsu, to sue for peace offering an Ahom princess as bride to the Dimacha Raja with two elephants and two slaves as dowry.²⁷ However, in 1526, Suhungmung, the Ahom monarch, sent an expedition that immediately reclaimed the territory upto Dikhu which also for sometime came as the boundary between the two kingdoms. The Dimachas were next pushed back to Namdang, and their refusal to surrender the city of Dergaon led to several encounters ultimately resulting in the Ahom occupation, in December 1526, of the Dimacha city.²⁸ In 1531, Khunkara, the Dimacha Raja,

opposed the construction of a fort by the Ahoms at Marangi. As a result, a serious conflict broke out in which the Dimachas were completely routed. The Ahoms pursued them upto their capital at Dimapur and the river Dhansiri became the boundary.²⁹ Before long, Dersongpha, the Dimacha Raja, resented the loss of territory and the Ahoms, in 1536, sacked Dimapur and Dersongpha was put to death. Retreating further, the Dimachas put their new capital at Maibong. Madan Kumar, son of Dersongpha, was proclaimed as the Raja with the name of Nirbhoynarayan. He married an Ahom princess and promised to pay an annual tribute, while river Kalong was recognised as the Ahom-Dimacha boundary.³⁰ The new capital was adorned with built-up and rock-cut temples in which the images of *Ranachandi*, *Durga* and *Basudeva* were installed.³¹ Notwithstanding, the pressure from the other side of the Kalong continued to threaten the existence of the Dimachas, while the Jaintias in the west also began hostility with them.³²

These frontier disputes between the neighbours, however, subsided for sometime due to the imperial adventures of the Koch rulers. Naranarayan, the Raja of Koch Behar, despatched an expedition in 1562 under Sukladhvaj, popularly known as Chilarai, his brother and general, which subdued the Ahom and the Dimacha kingdoms as well as Jayantia, Khyriem, Dimarua, Manipur, Sylhet and Tripura. The defeated rulers acknowledged the Koch suzerainty and agreed to pay annual tributes, besides war indemnities and presents. Durlabhnarayan, the Dimacha Raja, made over eighty elephants and other valuable presents to Chilarai and agreed to pay an annual tribute of seventy thousand rupees, one thousand gold *mohars* and sixty elephants. A strong battle was fought between Chilarai and the Raja of Tripura at Longai in the southern border of Cachar. The Raja of Tripura was defeated and killed. The son of the vanquished king ascended the throne of Tripura and undertook to pay the Raja of Koch Behar an annual tribute of ten thousand rupees, one thousand gold *mohars* and thirty horses.³³ The authority of Tripura in Cachar came to an end, and Chilarai left a contingent of Koch soldiers at Brahmapur, later known as Khaspur, in Cachar Valley, while Longai came to be recognised as the boundary between the Koch and

Tipperah territories. Cachar was surrounded by the conquered states of Jayantia, Khyriem, Sylhet, Tripura, Manipur and the Dimacha territory. The Koch authorities, therefore, might have considered it advantageous to convert Cachar into a 'crown colony' under a Governor who would be responsible for maintaining diplomatic relations with the adjoining subsidiary states and the collection of tributes. Accordingly, Kamalnayan, popularly known as Gosain Kamal, another brother of Naranayan, whose name is associated with the construction of a 350-mile road, several tanks and other works of art in Lower Assam, was appointed as the Governor of Cachar.³⁴ Similarly, the Ahom interference in the affairs of the Dimachas was stopped, both the Ahoms and Dimachas being now tributary to Koch Behar. However, taking the advantage of the reverses that the Koches faced during their expedition in Bengal, the rulers of the north eastern states reasserted themselves. Meghanarayan, the Dimacha Raja, proclaimed himself as a sovereign ruler. But the Ahoms immediately began to demand tribute from the Dimachas, which was discontinued since the defeat of both the Ahoms and the Dimachas at the hands of the Koches. Jasanarayan, the Dimacha Raja, however, successfully resisted the Ahom pressure and evaded the payment.³⁵

In South Cachar, however, the Koches continued to rule for more than a century. Kamalnayan, the Koch Governor, was a pious and peaceful administrator. He had established a number of religious shrines in Cachar, of which *Kali* temple at Thaligram and *Kancha-Kanti* at Udharband have survived the stress and strain of time and circumstances. He also settled some Brahmins as priests and few Koches as *Devagrihi* or *Sabayat*. After the collapse of the Koch supremacy in North East India, the Governor of Brahmapur was deprived of his diplomatic functions. As a result, the Koch territory in Cachar emerged as a petty kingdom. Two rulers ruled in Cachar after Kamalnayan. The third ruler was an oppressive monarch. Ultimately, the nobles in the kingdom conspired against him and the Raja was assassinated. Udita, the general, was then proclaimed as the Raja by the people and his successors ruled in Cachar for seven generations. The seventh ruler, Bhim Singha,

had no son, but only one daughter named Kanchani. She was married to Laksmichandra, who belonged to the ruling Dimacha family of North Cachar. Laksmichandra was appointed by Bhim Singha as the Governor of a division of the kingdom and the headquarters of this division later came to be known as Lakhipur. However, after the death of Bhim Singha, Laksmichandra became the Raja of South Cachar and in course of time South Cachar merged with the Dimacha territory in North Cachar Hills.³⁶ Some historians wrongly believed that a Dimacha Raja from North Cachar had contracted an alliance with the Raja of Tripura by marrying the latter's daughter and the Cachar Valley was transferred to the Dimachas as part of the dowry.³⁷ As a matter of fact, the Tripura rule in Cachar had come to an end with latter's defeat, at the hands of Chilarai and a Koch state in the valley had developed under Kamalnaryan, the Koch Governor. There was a Koch colony in Cachar during both Heramba and British rule, and the Koches were known as *Dehans* after *Dewan* or the Governor. They were "reputed to be descendants of some Koches who accompanied Chilarai's army and remained in the country. They enjoyed special privileges in the days of the Kachari rule, and their chief, or Senapati, was allowed to enter the king's courtyard in his palanquin."³⁸

On the other hand, Jasanarayan, the Dimacha ruler of North Cachar Hills, had to reckon with tremendous pressure from the Ahoms and the Jaintias ever since the Koch supremacy over the region had collapsed. There was persistent demands from the Ahom monarch to renew the allegiance, while the Jaintias indulged in frontier troubles. Danamanik, the Raja of Jayantia (1580-96), refused to allow the Dimachas to trade with Sylhet through his territory. Under the instigations of the Raja, some Jaintias plundered the commodities of the Dimacha traders at Mulagul. In retaliation, the Dimachas killed some Jaintias on the bank of Kapili.³⁹ To make matters worse, Danamanik seized Prabhakar, the Chief of Dimarua, a vassal to the rulers of Maibong. Prabhakar appealed to his overlord for rescue, and Jasanarayan demanded his release from Dhanamanik who ignored the demand. Ultimately, Jasanarayan led an army into Jayantia. Dhanamanik was com-

pelled to release Prabhakar, to acknowledge the Dimacha suzerainty and undertake to pay annual tributes. He also offered two Jaintia princesses to Jasanarayan and made over Jasamanik, his nephew and heir-apparent, as hostage. To commemorate the victory, Jasanarayan assumed the title of Arimardhan.⁴⁰ This was immediately followed by the death of Dhanamanik, whereupon Jasamanik was released and installed as the vassal ruler of Jayantia.⁴¹

Meanwhile, the political dialogues continued between the Dimacha and the Ahom courts. Jasanarayan was determined to maintain his hold in the Kapili-Jamuna and Doyang-Dhansiri valleys on equal terms with the Ahom monarch, but the latter always persisted on the servitude of the Dimacha Raja.⁴² On the other hand, Jasamanik, the Jayantia Raja, resented the suzerainty of Maibong and taking advantage of the Ahom-Dimacha embroils wanted to drag the two to a war considering that the Ahom supremacy will definitely prevail. He offered a princess to the Ahom monarch, Pratap Singha, on the condition that she would be escorted to the Ahom capital through Dimacha territory. This proposal was strongly opposed by Jasanarayan who did not find any justification for the deviation from the traditional route between Assam and Jaintia through Gobha, a feudatory state under Jayantia. Failing to persuade the authorities at Maibong, Pratap Singha, in 1606, deputed one Sundar Gohain, an Ahom General, at the head of a powerful army, who succeeded in occupying several Dimacha garrisons on the way. But when the Ahoms approached Maibong, the Dimachas, under Bhimbal Kumar, the General, fell upon the invaders and assassinated the Gohain himself.⁴³ The death of Sundar Gohain was a heavy shock to the Ahom monarch, while Jasanarayan added insult to injury by sending a message that he had carefully preserved Gohain's scalp which could be taken back if needed for any ceremony in the Ahom capital. But the Ahoms were then engaged in war with the Mughals and, consequently, could not send another punitive expedition against Maibong.⁴⁴

The success against the Ahoms was undoubtedly a great achievement which the Dimachas had every reason to rejoice. Jasanarayan now assumed the title of Pratapnarayan, and

changed the name of Maibong into Kirtipur. With this terminated the vivasory of the Dimachas, and Jasanarayan declared himself as an independent sovereign, styled as *Herambesvara* or 'Lord of Heramba'. He claimed his descent from Hidimba of *Mahabharata*, and the Dimacha territory has since then been known as Heramba Kingdom. Jasanarayan was, therefore, the founder of a historically known independent and sovereign kingdom of the Dimachas. A silver coin issued by Jasanarayan claiming himself as *Herambesvara* and "a worshiper of Hara, Gauri, Siva and Durga" is the earliest available coin of the dynasty.⁴⁵ The term 'Heramba' had for the first time appeared in this historic coin, but since then it had frequently occurred in inscriptions, coins and other records. There is no evidence to show that the Dimachas had used it on any occasion prior to the reign of Jasanarayan. Sir Edward Gait, therefore, believed that the name was given to the Dimacha territory by the Brahmins. To quote him :⁴⁶ "...it seems more likely that Hidimba was an old name of Cachar, which the Brahmans afterwards connected with the Kachari dynasty, just as in the Brahmaputra Valley they connected successive dynasties of aboriginal potentates with the mythical Narak."

The emergence of Heramba as an independent and powerful kingdom, on the other hand, had drawn the attention of the Imperial Mughals who had made themselves the rulers of Bengal and were making repeated endeavours to conquer Assam and Tripura. Jasanarayan, however, defended the sovereignty of his kingdom by successfully repulsing the invaders.⁴⁷ Jamal Khan, the Commander of the Mughal Army, was given to believe that the Raja of Heramba was anxious for his friendship and persuaded to wait for valuable presents. The Dimachas then in a mid-night coup suddenly pounced upon the waiting Mughal soldiers and taking them quite unawares thoroughly massacred the entire contingent. Jamal Khan himself was slain.⁴⁸ However, the second Mughal invasion, in 1612, under Quasim Khan, the Governor of Bengal, gave a completely opposite verdict. The Heramba forts at Asuratikri and Pratapgarh were captured. To check further advance of the Mughals, Jasanarayan made peace by offering forty elephants and one lakh rupees for the emperor, five elephants

and rupees twenty thousand for the *Subahdar*, and two elephants and rupees twenty thousand for the *Thanadar* of Bandasal who was in immediate command of the invading contingent. The river Surma had since become the boundary between Heramba Kingdom and Bengal, and a Mughal *Thanadar* was posted at Badarpur.⁴⁹

Naranarayan, who succeeded Jasanarayan, maintained the integrity and prestige of the kingdom intact, while Bhimbalarayan, the next Raja, resolved to recover the territory upto Dimapur and encouraged the Dimachas to indulge in raids and plunders in the Ahom country. The Ahoms, who were then more concerned with defending their territory from the Mughals realised the expediency of conciliating the Heramba rulers and started negotiations for peaceful coexistence. An Ahom princess was offered to Biradarpanarayan, the Raja of Heramba (1644-1682), but the latter did not give up his hostile attitude and sacked Baghergaon in the Ahom territory. To prevent further incursions, the Ahom authorities settled a number of villages along the Heramba frontier. However, the death of Biradarpa, in 1682, offered an opportunity to the Ahoms to resume the negotiations with the Heramba Government which continued throughout the reign of Makaradhvajanarayan (1682-1695). Meanwhile, the Ahoms were relieved of the Mughal-fobia, and had no difficulty to open rupture with Heramba.⁵⁰

On the other hand, Tamradhvajnarayan, Raja of Heramba (1695 to 1707), who had strengthened his position by marrying Chandraprava, daughter of the Raja of Koch Behar, sent a letter to the Ahom monarch demanding the restoration of the territory upto Mohong. He also boldly asserted the independence of his kingdom and refused to acknowledge the Ahom hegemony. In retaliation, Rudra Singha, the Ahom monarch, determined to reduce the Herambas to submission. In 1706, he despatched two strong divisions of Ahom soldiers to Maibong. The first numbered over 37,000 men and was commanded by the *Bar Baruah* through the Dhansiri route, while the 34,000 strong second army under *Pani Phukan* proceeded by the Kapili route. The Dimachas offered gallant resistance to the advancing Ahom forces under *Bar Baruah* in the Dhansiri frontier. Although they were required to take shelter in the hills due to

the superiority of the Ahom soldiers, the Dimachas ambuscaded several small parties of the Ahoms which were engaged in clearing the jungle. However, the Dimachas were defeated in heavy encounters at Lathia, Amlakhi and Tarang. The Ahom army made further advance and ultimately occupied Maibong. Tamradhvaj fled to Khaspur* which since then had become the capital of the Heramba Kingdom. A huge amount of booty, including a cannon and 700 guns had fallen into the hands of the invaders.⁵¹ Meanwhile, the army under *Pani Phukan* had reached Demera, by cutting a forty-one miles road from Raha, through dense jungle, and having sacked on the way the prosperous villages of Salgaon, Lambur and Dharmapur. The Dimachas endeavoured to repel the invasion without success, and the invaders reached Maibong without much difficulty.⁵²

The initial success took the morale of the Ahoms very high and Rudra Singha, the Ahom monarch, encamped himself at Raha to keep direct contact with the commanders in the frontier. But sickness broke out in the Ahom camp at Maibong due to the pestilential climate, while the provisions began to run short. As a result, the vigour with which the campaign was undertaken began to decline. On the other hand, the Dimachas took advantage of the situation and harrassed the invaders in several ways. Nevertheless, Rudra Singha repeatedly ordered the commanders to proceed to Khaspur. The *Pani Phukan*, according marched upto Sempani, while the *Bar Baruah*, who was seriously ill, undertook his return journey and died on the way. The death of the commander broke the morale of the Ahoms and, in March 1707, their monarch was persuaded to abandon the expedition against Khaspur. The *Pani Phukan* withdrew the troops from Sempani and Maibong, but demolished the brick fort and burned down the houses at Maibong. A strong garrison was left at Demera and fortifica-

* Some scholars, however, believe that Tamradhvaj had taken a temporary shelter elsewhere during the sack of Maibong and he and two of his successors had ruled from Maibong, and that the capital was shifted to Khaspur about 30 years after this invasion. (See Guha, n. 9, p. 82). On the other hand, Gait contended that Tamradhvaj had fled to Bikrampur in Cachar and there he was captivized by the Raja of Jayantia and taken to Jayantiapur. Ultimately, however, both the Rajas were take to the Ahom capital, and eventually Tamradhvaj proceeded to his new capital at Khaspur. (See Gait, n. 21, p. 179).

tions were constructed there. For sometime, Demera became the outpost between the two states. But with the outbreak of the rainy season, the sickness and mortality amongst the soldiers became so alarming that the Ahoms were compelled to withdraw finally from the Dimacha territory.⁵³

Tamradhvaj from his camp in South Cachar, where he fled during the occupation of Maibong, had appealed to Ram Singh, the Raja of Jayantia, for help. As a matter of fact, Jayantia was a tributary to the Raja of Cachar, as has already been mentioned, since the reign of Jasanarayan, and the rising power of the overlord had suppressed for long the spirit of the Jaintias to reassert themselves. Realising that the Raja of Heramba was in trouble, Ram Singh resolved to capitalise the situation. The Heramba army was dispersed by the Ahoms immediately after the occupation of Maibong. Ram Singh, therefore, considered that if he could seize the person of Tamradhvaj the Heramba kingdom would be annexed to Jayantia. He collected a large army, but before the commencement of the journey Tamradhvaj informed him that the Ahoms have withdrawn from North Cachar Hills and that his help was no longer necessary. Despite, Ram Singh marched to Mulagul, and pretended to make common cause with Tamradhvaj against the Ahoms. He invited Tamradhvaj to a friendly meeting at Balesvar under the pretext of concerting measures to attack Assam, but treacherously captivized the Raja of Heramba and took him to the Jaintia Capital at Jaintiapur as a prisoner. Chandraprava, the queen of Heramba, communicated the conduct of Ram Singh to the Ahom monarch and requested the latter to rescue her husband.⁵⁴ Rudra Singa, the Ahom monarch, took advantage of the situation to compel the Heramba monarch to acknowledge the suzerainty of the Ahoms, and demanded immediate release of Tamradhvaj from the Raja of Jayantia. But Ram Singh refused to comply, while the Ahoms closed the market at Gobha on which the people in Jaintia Hills depend for the supply of essential commodities. In December 1707, two Ahom forces marched against Jaintiapur, one under the *Bar Baruah* through the Kapili and Cachar valleys, while the other under *Bar Phukan* across Gobha and Jaintia Hills. The 43,000 strong column under *Bar Baruah* was cordially received

by the people in North Cachar Hills as well as in South Cachar, and could easily reach Bikrampur and begin operations against Jayantia. The Jaintia outposts at Balesvar, Dalagaon and Mulagul, in Surma valley, were all sacked. The Ahom army eventually reached Jaintiapur; and Ram Singh had no alternative but to surrender. On the other hand, the advance of the contingent under *Bar Phukan* was repeatedly, hampered by the Jaintias who offered gallant resistance to the invaders and harrassed them all the way. However, the Ahom soldiers succeeded in overcoming the opposition and joined the other column at Jaintiapur.⁵⁶ Ram Singh and his *Juvaraj* as well as Tamradhvaj were taken to Bishnath and produced before the Ahom monarch. Tamradhvaj confirmed his allegiance to the Ahoms and ceded territory upto Jamuna river. Ram Singh died of illness, and the *Juvaraj*, Jaynarayan, was nominated as the Raja of Jayantia. Thus both Cachar and Jayantia became tributary to the Ahoms.⁵⁶

Ever since Khaspur had become the capital of Heramba, the kingdom was called by the people of Sylhet as 'Cachar' and the ruling Dimacha tribe as 'Kacharis.' The Bodos living in different parts of Brahmaputra Valley also came to be known by the same name and owed their moral allegiance to the Raja of Cachar. Although Sir Edward Gait contended that Cachar got its name from the Kacharis, he himself had noted that the "word Kachar is derived from a Sanskrit word meaning a broadening region."⁵⁷ As a matter of fact, not only the ruling Dimacha tribe but even the Bengalees in Cachar were known to the people of Sylhet as Kacharis. The historians with local knowledge have, therefore, strongly established that the Valley of Barak was always known to the Bengalees as Cachar and the ruling race appeared in the British records as Kacharis only after the country where the ruling family belonged to their tribe. To quote P.N. Bhattacharjee⁵⁸ :

Mr. Gait is of opinion that 'the Kacharis have given their name to the district' of Cachar. We might as well be told that the Romans gave the name Rome. The fact is that the name has been given to the district by the Bengalis of Sylhet, because it is an outlying place skirting the mountains. The word 'Kachhar' is still used in Sylhet in designating a plot of land at the foot of a mountain. It is

derived from Sanskrit 'Kachchha' which means 'a plain near mountain' or 'a place near water' whence is the name of the state of Katch in Bombay. The 'Kachharis' are naturally the natives of Kachar as Bengalees are of Bengal.†

Nevertheless, the occupation of Cachar had opened a new chapter in the history of the Heramba Kingdom. As Dr. Bhuyan observed, "it is only in Cachar that the Kacharis experimented the arduous task of state-building."⁵⁹ The kingdom now extended from the river Dhaleswai in South Cachar to Jamuna in Nowgong. Tamradhvajnarayan, Raja of Cachar, having ceded the territory upto the river Jamuna to the Ahoms, the said river came to be recognised as the boundary between the Ahom territory and the kingdom of Heramba. The Ahom outpost was at Mohong on the west bank of the river, while on the east bank was the outpost of Cachar at Dijua. This meeting place of the two states was popularly known as Mohong-Dijua* and had developed as an important market where the people from Cachar, Assam, Manipur and Naga Hills traded with each other. The prosperous village of Mohong⁺ was subsequently, recovered by the rulers of Khaspur and on the eve of the British annexation formed part of Cachar.⁶⁰ The North Cachar Hills, peopled by the Dimachas, was placed under a Deputy or *Senapati* by the Raja, while the Jamuna Valley including the slopes of the Mikir Hills, popularly known as Central Cachar, was supervised by a Governor.⁶¹

Tamradhvajnarayan died in September, 1708, and was succeeded by his son Suradarpanarayan who was only 9 years old. As a result, the actual administration was run by his mother, Chandraprava. She was a great patron of learning, and a large number of Sanskrit works were translated into Bengali under her patronage. According to *Deshavali*, a

† To quote Robinson : "The country of Kachar is bounded on the west by Sylhet and Jaintia; on the north by Assam; on the east by Manipur; on the south by Tripurah. It was originally divided into three portions; two of which lie on the northern side of the great mountain chain, which, sweeping round from the north-eastern extremity of the Manipur territory, forms the western termination of the Garo Hills; the third division is on the southern side of this lofty barrier. These divisions were severally distinguished by the names of Northern, Central, and Southern Kachar". See Robinson W., *A Descriptive Account of Assam*, 399.

* About sixteen miles to the West of Diphu Railway Station.

† Latitude 25.59 North and Longitude 90.30 East.

Sanskrit work composed in 1728 A.D., Suradarpa's territory extended from Kamrup in the north to Manthara in South and Manipur in the east to Sialkot in the west, while the important political divisions in the kingdom were Khaspur, Dharmapur, Sialkot, Tiladrinal, Phulchand, Jaynagar, Chapghat, Bandashil, Lohato, Chatsati and Baoyaganj.⁶² Suradarpa had set himself to reorganise the kingdom. A brick-built palace and several temples were constructed in Khaspur, the new capital, and the image of *Ranachandi*, the tutelary deity of the Dimachas, was installed in one of these temples. On the other hand, the rock-cave temple of *Hara-Parvati* in the Bhuban Hills, originally constructed by the Tipperahs, was regularly maintained by the Raja and kept up in good condition. Rungrang, in the eastern frontier of the kingdom, during this time had developed as a flourishing business centre where the people of Cachar, Manipur Lushai Hills and Tripura traded in cloth, brass and bell-metal utensils, paddy, cotton and vegetables.⁶³

Attempts were also made to attract more settlers from neighbouring Bengal in the fertile but thinly populated valley of the Barak. As a matter of fact, the Bengalee population in Cachar had begun to increase since the Koch rule in the valley. Some Brahmins from Sylhet were appointed as the priests in the temples of *Kancha-kanti* and *Shyama* in Udharband. Besides, a large number of Brahmins were also settled in different parts of the Kingdom. During the reign of Laksmichandra, the son-in-law and successor of the Koch ruler Bhim Singha, one Jaganath Tarkabachaspti, a great Sanskritist, was granted 50 *hals* of rent-free *Brahmattara* land in Kalain. The ancestors of this scholar belonged to the village of Kanchadia on the bank of Padma in East Bengal, but in course of time the village was washed away by the river and Ramjeeban Sharma, the grandfather of Jagannath migrated towards the east.⁶⁴ Cachar was an extension of the Gangetic Bengal and even before the Koch rule several Bengalee settlements had developed in Cachar as a result of the natural movement of the people towards the east. No wonder, therefore, the official language of the kingdom was Bengali, while the coins and inscriptions of the Heramba rulers were inscribed in Sanskrit in Bengali script. The earliest Bengalee inhabitants of the valley belonged to agrarian classes; the *Patnis*, for example.

However, during the reign of Laksmichandra the population had increased unexpectedly and the villages of Berenga, Dudpatil, Banskandi and Udharband were established during this period. *Nath*, a very populous community in Cachar, had also immigrated during the reign of Laksmichandra. With the shifting of the capital from Maibong to Khaspur, the Brahmin priests and scholars in the royal court also migrated to South Cachar and their descendants are still to be found in Jatrapur, Tarapur, Barkhola and Phulbari.⁶⁵ In the beginning of the 18th century one Bikram Roy was granted a rent-free estate which after him came to be known as Bikrampur *Pargana*. Bikram Roy came from Dacca and was granted the estate to encourage more Bengalee immigration from the west. He was followed by Ashu Thakur from Pratapgarh in Sylhet and Gulal Khan Choudhury from Tripura.⁶⁶ There was, however, a general influx during the reign of Harishchandranarayan,* son and successor of Suradarpa, who granted land to the cultivators on nominal gross revenue. The Brahmins and high caste people from Bengal also rushed to Cachar seeking employment. The development of the country enabled the Government to throw off the allegiance to the Ahoms, while the appointment of the Bengalees as *Vakeels*, ministers and to other high posts added to the efficiency of the state. By the time Kirtichandranarayan, the next Raja, ascended the throne the size of the new settlers had become considerable. As a result, in 1736, he appointed one Maniram Laskar of Barkhola as the *Uzir* to deal with the settlement of the new-comers from Bengal.⁶⁷ The immigrants also encroached upon the Tripura territory in the Dhaleswari Valley in the south, and the area† was ultimately annexed to Cachar in 1736 A.D.⁶⁸ This might have provoked the invasion from Tripura during the reign of Ramachandranarayan, the successor of Kirtichandra, who made peace by paying compensation to the Raja of Tripura.⁶⁹ Ramachandra also reiterated the sovereign status of Heramba Government in the face of the persistent demand of the Ahom

* An inscription on a rock-cut temple at Maibong suggests that it was excavated in the *Saka* year 1643 (1721 A.D.) during the reign of Harishchandranarayan who has been described in the said inscription as the 'Lord of Heramba'.

† Parts of modern Hailakandi Subdivision.

monarch to renew the allegiance. He was succeeded by Harishchandranarayan Bhupati who was, in turn, succeeded by Krishnachandra Narayan and the latter by Govindachandra Narayan* during whose reign Cachar was annexed by the British. The circumstances leading to this annexation have been discussed in the next two chapters.

* An undated coin of Govindachandra claims himself as the 'Lord of Heramba'. J.A.S.B., Vol. VI.