

ASSAM'S STRUGGLES

AGAINST BRITISH RULE



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DR. HEMESWAR DIHINGIA

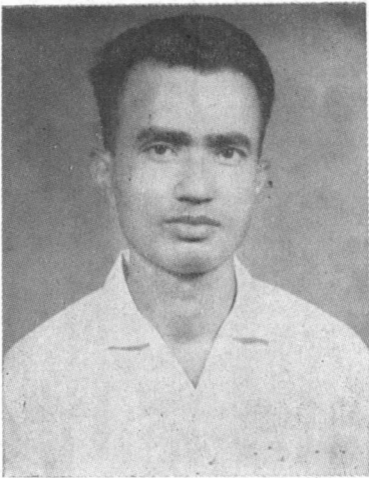
THE BOOK

The most significant aspect about Assam is the conspicuous ignorance about it on the part of people outside Assam. In spite of her growing importance as the eastern sentinel of the Indian Union, only a few historians have cared to write the history of this colourful land of multiracial stock of people having a distinctive cultural background.

Assamese people love their independence very much. They had the guts and the solidarity to repel the mighty Mughals invasion for seventeen times in the eighteenth century and later struggled against the British rulers who had apparently come to help against Burmese invaders but stayed on to rule. The Assamese people could not accept the alien rule so easily with the result that there were series of revolts and insurrections against the British Rule.

The present volume represents the author's studies of all these struggles and are based on published and unpublished sources.

THE AUTHOR



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He is a prolific writer in Assamese also and his works include, Gitanjali, (Assamese version of Gitanjali, by Rabindra Nath Tagore), Bharat Buranji (An Indian History) and a number of novels in Assamese.

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(1826—1863)**

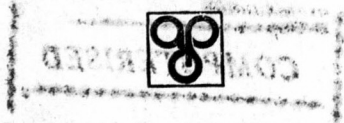
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ASSAM'S STRUGGLES AGAINST BRITISH RULE

(1826—1863)

By

HEMESWAR DIHINGIA M.A. Ph. D.



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**TO MY WIFE
BINAPANI DIHINGIA**

PREFACE

The most curious thing about Assam is the conspicuous ignorance about it on the part of the people outside Assam. In spite of her growing importance as the Eastern Sentinel of the Indian Union only a few historians have cared to write the history of this colourful land of multi-racial stock of people having a distinctive cultural background of its own. As a consequence of this scholastic apathy, the historical literature on the subject is extremely meagre.

Even to a casual observer, the most striking feature in the history of Assam is the people's love for independence. In fact, Assam enjoyed the largest spell of independence under the powerful Ahom monarchy, which ruled the valley of Brahmaputra for over six centuries. The Burmese invasion in the early part of the nineteenth century undoubtedly shattered the Ahom rule and its end came abruptly in 1826, when the expanding Imperial arms of the British established their hold over the valley after expelling the Burmese invaders from the Assamese soil.

The British in the garb of deliverers of the people of Assam from the grip of the atrocious Burmese invaders exploited the newly acquired opportunity and firmly laid their hold in the valley. With the avowed intention of impressing the people, they started building up a complicated administrative machinery so that they could solidly plant themselves on this hinterland of their eastern frontier.

But soon after the Assamese learned that the British occupation was apparently nothing more than the change of the masters from the Burmese to the British, the people unaccustomed to the foreign rule, were none too happy with their alien rulers, with the result, their discontent started brewing up to bring about a chain of reactions in the form of occasional risings motivated primarily with the spirit of freedom from the foreign

yoke. The annals of Assam history are full of these various freedom uprisings, which combining with the later national spirit, contributed immensely towards the final emancipation of the country from the British yoke.

The present volume which has grown out of my doctoral thesis 'The early phases of struggle against the British rule in Assam (1826—63)' was approved by the Meerut University for the award of the Ph.D. degree in December, 1977. The object of this modest study on the above subject is to provide in the light of the original published and unpublished sources, a comprehensive account of the early phases of the struggle of the people of Assam against the British rule during the period from 1826 to 1863, an epoch in the history of Assam.

The period has been covered by Prof. K.N. Dutt in his book 'Landmarks of the freedom struggle in Assam' and partially covered by Dr. R.M. Lahiri in 'The Annexation of Assam (1824—54)' and by Dr. H.K. Barpujari in 'Assam : in the days of Company (1826—1858)'. I have endeavoured to incorporate in my work some additional information, which have not been included in the earlier works and tried to give reasonable interpretations to the facts making the narrative as objective as possible.

The main source materials of my work are the unpublished and the published official records, the contemporary historical literatures in Assamese, the published books and the publications of general interest.

The unpublished official records constitute the Political proceedings, the Secret Proceedings, the Foreign department Consultations and the Assam Proceedings, preserved in the National Archives, New Delhi, which I have liberally used. Contemporary historical literatures in Assamese are not much but I have consulted all the relevant publications which have been appended in the bibliography.

I am greatly indebted to my Supervisor Prof. V.D. Gautam, the Head of the department of history, M.M.H. College, Ghaziabad for his scholarly guidance and advice without which my work would not have been complete.

I am grateful to Dr. P.C. Chowdhury, formerly Director of Historical and Antiquarian Studies in Assam and to Dr. J.N. Phukan, Reader in History, Gauhati University for their valued advices and suggestions and to Shri Arabinda Sarma, M.A. for going through the manuscript and making necessary suggestions.

I take the opportunity of acknowledging my indebtedness to all the authors whose work I consulted and to the staff of National Archives, New Delhi, the Library of the International Studies, New Delhi and the Assam Information Centre, New Delhi, for placing at my disposal the books and the documents under their custody.

New Delhi

April 1980

H. Dihingia

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ABBREVIATIONS

- J.P. : Judicial Proceedings
B.P.C. : Bengal Political Consultations
S.C. : Secret Consultations
F.C. : Foreign Consultations
F.P.P. : Foreign Political Proceedings
C.D. : Despatches to India and Bengal
I.P.C. : India Political Consultations
J.L.B. : Judicial Letters from Bengal
J.A.S. : Journal of the Asiatic Society

CHAPTER I

Introduction

Prior to the advent of the British rule, Assam was ruled by the Ahom Kings for nearly six centuries—a unique record of dynastic rule in India. In the beginning of the thirteenth century, the Ahoms under the leadership of prince Sukapha entered Assam through Patkai range and established their Kingdom in Upper Assam after expelling the original inhabitants of the region. They ruled the country without facing any formidable enemy until the early decade of the seventeenth century, when their supermacy was challenged by the mighty Mughals, who, in the course of their march for territorial expansion, invaded Assam in 1662 and advanced on as far as the Capital of the Ahom Kingdom. The Ahom King Chakradhar Singha could not resist the Mughals and the Western Assam was ceded to them.

After twenty years (1682), Gadadhar Singha, a powerful Ahom monarch expelled the Mughals from the Western Assam and extended the boundary of his territory as far as the river Manah. After his death, his son Rudra Singha, also a valiant ruler, organised a force with the help of some neighbouring vassal Chiefs to drive out the Mughals from beyond the river Manah but his sudden death in 1714 kept the venture incomplete.

The Ahom monarchy was on the decline after the death of Rudra Singha owing to a number of weak and unscrupulous kings ascending the throne. During the reign of Gaurinath Singha (1780-1795), the country was devastated by the rebellion of the Mayamarias—a socio religious sect who revolted against their religious persecution by the Ahom rulers. In 1788, the

rebels under their Chief Ramakanta seized power and dethroned Gaurinath Singha, who fled to Gauhati in the lower Assam, which was a part of his kingdom.

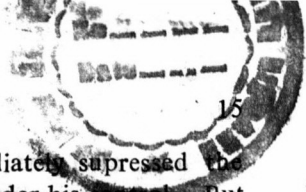
During the period when Gaurinath Singha was at Gauhati as the ruler of the lower Assam, Krishnanarayan, a vassal Chief, raided his territory with the help of a band of mercenaries known as 'Burkandaz' and brought a part of the lower Assam under his subjugation. At this time, Gaurinath Singha appealed to the East India Company for help to drive out the invaders from his territory. The East India Company, which had been interested in opening up trade relation with Assam, agreed to help and had immediately sent six companies of their troops under Capt. Welsh to Assam in 1772. The troops not only expelled the 'Burkandaz' from the lower Assam but also suppressed the Mayamarias in the Upper Assam and re-instated Gaurinath Singha on his ancestral throne. On 28th December, 1793 a Commercial Treaty was signed between Gaurinath Singha and the East India Company, which provided for a reciprocal and entire liberty of commerce between the subjects of Bengal and Assam.² The treaty also provided the Ahom King to defray the expenses incurred on the maintenance of the Company's troops to be stationed in Assam at the request of the Ahom King.

But in 1794, there had been a radical change in the policy of the East India Company, which adopted the policy of 'non-interference' and accordingly, the British troops were immediately withdrawn from Assam.

The immediate effect of the withdrawal of the Company's troops from Assam was disastrous. The 'Burkandaz, re-appeared and started depredations in the lower Assam, the Mayamarias re-established in Bengmara and carried raids as far as Rangpur, the Khamtis seized some Ahom territories by force and many other vassal Chiefs assumed their virtual independence. Gaurinath Singha, who could not control the situation retired to Jorhat where he died in 1794. After his death, his successors Kamaleswar Singha and Chandrakanta Singha were the puppets of Purnananda Bura Gohain, the Prime Minister, an

1. S.K. Bhuyan : The early British relation with Assam.

2. Aitchison : Treaties and Sanad.



exceptionally capable person, who immediately suppressed the Mayamarias and brought the situation under his control. But soon a conspiracy was hatched against him by a number of nobles including the king Chandrakanta Singha. The main accomplice was Badan Chandra Bar Phukan, the Viceroy of Lower-Assam against whom the Prime Minister planned a strong disciplinary measure for his oppressive behaviour and gross exaction. Men were sent to arrest him but having been warned before hand by his daughter, who was married to the Prime Minister's son Badan Bar Phukan fled to Bengal. He went to Calcutta and approached the British authorities to send an expedition against Purnananda, who, as he alleged, was ruining the country by his misrule and oppressive administration. The British government, however, declined to help. Badan Bar Phukan then contacted the Agent of the Burmese King in Calcutta, who agreed to take him to the Burmese King. Badan Barphukan arrived at the Burmese Capital and requested the Burmese monarch to send a strong force to remove Purnananda Bura Gohain, the Prime Minister, who, as he alleged, had usurped the King's authority and doomed the country to chaos and anarchy.

The Burmese King, who had an ambition to extend his control as far as the Valley of the Brahmaputra, agreed to help Badan Bar Phukan and towards the end of 1816, despatched an army of 8000 Burmese invaders to Assam. The Burmese force was opposed and a fierce battle was fought in which the Ahom army was completely crushed. At this juncture, Purnananda Bura Gohain, passed away and his son Ruchinath Buragohain who became the Prime Minister sent another Ahom force to face the Burmese army. The Ahom force had a crushing defeat at the hands of the Burmese invaders, who continued their advance towards Jorhat, killing people and burning villages along the line of their march Ruchinath Bura Gohain fled to Gauhati and the Burmese invaders installed Chandra Kanta Singha as the king and reinstated Badan Bar Phukan in his former position. The Burmese were paid a huge indemnity for their help and they returned to their country taking with them for the Royal harem an Ahom princess as a gift from the Ahom King.

Soon after the Burmese troops returned to Burma, the supporters of the Prime Minister conspired against Chandra Kanta Singha and Badan Bar Phukan. They killed Badam Bar Phukan, mutilated Chandra Kanta Singha and raised Purandar Singha, a scion of the Royal family to the Ahom throne.

When the news of the new development reached the Burmese King, he got infuriated and despatched a huge force under Ala-Mingi, which re-appeared in Assam in 1819. The Ahom army opposed the Burmese force but was completely defeated. Purandar Singha and Ruchinath Bura Gohain fled to Gauhati and Chandra Kanta Singha, who joined the Burmese was again installed on the throne.

But no sooner had Chandrá Kanta Singha realised that he was only a tool in the hands of the Burmese Commander with whom the real power was vested than he left the country in disgust and entered the company's territory. The Burmese Commander installed Jogeswar Singha another scion of the Royal family on the throne, who became the puppet of the Commander. The Burmese hunted down all the adherents of Ruchinath Bura Gohain and put to death all the persons whom they suspected to have been implicated in the murder of Badan Bar Phukan. They sent a body of troops to Gauhati to apprehend Purandar Singha, who escaped to the British territory. The Burmese dominated and virtually ruled Assam from 1819 to 1824, during which mass killing, dreadful atrocity and widespread devastation were the order of the day. 'All who were suspected of being inimical to the reign of the terror were seized and bound by Burmese executioner, who cut off the lobes of the poor victims' ears and choice portions of the body, such as the points of the shoulders, and ate the raw flesh before the living sufferers'.³

For more than a year, Purandar Singha had been collecting a force in the Duars, which then belonged to Bhutan and harassed the Burmese troops on the border. Chandra Kanta Singha, who was also taking shelter in the British territory had been busy in similar activities, which became known to the Burmese Commander.

3. J. Butler : 'Travels and Adventure in the province of Assam.'

The hostile activities of both the princes carried on from the Company's territory provoked the irritation of the Burmese Commander, who sent a message in insolent terms to the British Officer in Goalpara to surrender the fugitive Ahom princes to him, failing which a Burmese army would invade the company's territory and arrest the princes wherever they might be found. The British officer replied in similar tone that any advance on the part of the Burmese troops on the British territory would be at their own risk.

Notwithstanding the British warning, the Burmese troops crossed the Goalpara frontier, plundered and burnt down several villages. In the Southern district, they advanced on Cachar, a tributary state from three directions. At this stage, the British had no alternative but to declare war against the Burmese. The war was formally declared against the King of Ava on 5th March, 1824.

The Anglo-Burmese war was fought in three fronts-Assam, Arakan and Rangoon and lasted for three years. The war came to an end with the defeat of the Burmese, who were compelled to accept the terms of peace by the Treaty of Yandabo concluded on 24th February, 1826. According to the treaty, the king of Ava was to disown his claim on Assam, Cachar, Manipur and Jaiantia hills.

After the treaty, Manipur was restored to Gambhir Singh, who was mainly responsible for driving out the Burmese from Manipur. The Jaiantia Rajah, Ram Singh was confirmed in his possession both in hills and the low lands on the north side of Surma Valley; Gobinda Chandra was reinstated as the Rajah of Cachar with a tribute of Rs. 10,000/- per annum. Sadiya and Muttock territories in the Upper Assam were confirmed to Sadiya Khowa Gohain and Tularam Bar Senapati respectively.

Of the three Ahom princes, Jogeswar Singha died in 1825, Chandra Kanta Singha was granted a pension of Rs. 200/- per month and Purandar Singha was not granted any pension owing to his already possessing a considerable wealth. These arrangements clearly indicated that the East India Company was not going to restore Assam to any native King but establish their own rule in Assam as a fulfilment of their Imperial Policy of territorial expansion, which they had been actively following in the other parts of the country.

CHAPTER 14

Conclusion

Before the advent of the British rule, Assam was ruled by the mighty Ahoms for six centuries. As a result of jealousy and intrigue among the members of the Royal family, the Burmese intervened and dominated Assam from 1816 to 1824, during which the country was plundered and ravaged by them committing dreadful atrocities on her people. At that moment, the British appeared in the Political scene of Assam and drove the Burmese out of Assamese soil defeating them in the first Burmese war (1824—26).

Before the British entered the political scene of Assam, they assured the people of Assam that they would reinstate the Ahom monarchy immediately after they expelled the Burmese from the country. But contrary to their assurance, as soon as the war was over, they established their own rule in Assam. The immediate reaction was that the people of Assam, who enjoyed the Native rule for six hundred years, found the alien rule not only humiliating but also difficult to adjust themselves in it. As a result, there was deep discontentment in the minds of the members of the Royal family for losing estates and pykes, and of the nobles and the upper class people for losing their high social status and position. So, their discontentment, joined with the tacit support of the lower orders, brought about a series of rebellions to overthrow the British government from Assam within two years of their occupation.

The rebellion of Gomdhar Konwar, a prince of the Royal blood in 1823, was the first attempt to subvert the British rule in Assam. It was a planned revolt and had the support of some erstwhile nobles of the Ahom Court serving with the British government at that time. The time of capturing the Capital

and declaring himself as the Rajah was rightly chosen as at the appointed time, the capital was protected by a handful of soldiers, who could be easily overpowered by 400 armed rebels. So, had Capt. Neufville not arrived suddenly in the Capital and taken an effective step, the town was bound to fall and the course of event would surely have taken a different turn. Thus, it was the misfortune rather than mismanagement which doomed the fate of the rebels. The rebellion, however, convinced the British authorities that the people of Upper Assam were far from being reconciled to the alien rule and that the higher class would continue to strive to establish a native rule in Assam.

The second rebellion by Gadadhar Singha, inspired by the Burmese King was chimerical in design and his dependence on a native Subedar serving the British Government for active help in executing his plan was fallacious and lacked the necessary insight. The rebellion, however, served another warning to the British Government for the recurrence of the same in near future.

The third revolt organised by some representatives of the Ahom nobility headed by Peali Bar Phukan was well planned and organised better than the previous two rebellions. The revolt failed to achieve its desired goal due to the unforeseen circumstances developed at the final stage. The betrayal of Sadiya Khowa Gohain, who captured and handed over one of the Agents of the rebels to the British authorities, the sudden reinforcement of the government force after intercepting the news of the plot and the non-participation of Peali Bar Barooah, one of the leaders of the revolt at the last moment, were the main reasons which ruined the cause of the rebels. Besides that, the rebels did not get much support from the people in general, who had doubt about the success of the revolt with the experience of the previous two unsuccessful rebellions in their memory. The revolt, which was ruthlessly suppressed, however, convinced the Paramount rulers that since the Ahom monarchy lasted for six hundred years, it might be intrinsically good and besides that the descendants of the glorious Ahom dynasty would not

part with their ancient right so easily and would make every endeavour to regain it.

The discontent against the British rule was not only confined to the Brahmaputra Valley alone but also spread in the hills when slow and steady penetration of the British into the hilly region started irritating the freedom loving hill tribes inhabiting around the valley. Among the tribes who offered stubborn resistance to the expanding British rule were the Khasis, the Garos, the Kukis, the Singphos, the Khamtis, the Mishmis, the Bhutias, the Daffas and the Abors.

The insurrection of the Khasis in 1829 under the leadership of Terrut Singh was significant as it lasted for four years, during which, a number of Britishers were massacred in vengeance against the government which imposed undue control on the tribal people. In the beginning, Terrut Singh was friendly with the British but later he became an arch enemy for latter's dishonouring a Treaty agreement signed between them. This was an error on the part of the British government that actuated Terrut Singh to join hands with a number of Khasi Chiefs, who were determined to drive out the British from their soil. The Khasis in thousand fought against the British for a year and having failed to challenge the superior arms of their adversaries, all the Khasi Chiefs save Terrut Singh surrendered to them. Terrut Singh continued his fight single handed for four years and finally, being despaired of all hopes and deserted by all other Chiefs had no alternative but to submit himself to the inevitable. The fight and the stiff resistance given by the Khasis demonstrated to the English the dangerous consequences of meddling in the affairs of the hillmen. The Khasi uprising which started again after five years under the leadership of Oalar Singh and Zuber Singh was another glaring proof of how much deep hatred the Khasis had for their alien rulers, who deprived them of their freedom in the land of their birth.

The Nagas gave considerable trouble to the British government through out the period under review, during which several hundred British subjects were either killed or carried off and numerous operations were sent to punish them. During the Ahom rule, the relation between the Nagas and the Ahom rulers was cordial. The Nagas did not pay any tax to the

government but had accepted the sovereignty of the Ahom rulers and obeyed their orders. But their relation with the British government was different and they continued to be hostile throughout the period under review. The British government had conflict with the Nagas for the first time in 1832, when the former wanted to open a direct communication between Assam and Manipur through the Naga hills and directed an exploration to that effect. The first British expedition had to fight its way against a strong opposition losing some lives in the hands of the Nagas. That was the beginning of the hostilities between the Nagas and the British government, which lasted for several years later. There were frequent Naga raids on the villages in the British territory causing innumerable deaths and abduction of innocent persons. These raids were in retaliation to the military operations of the British government sent to the hills in regular intervals to punish the offenders. The Nagas were cunning, vindictive and warlike, and fought pitched battle with the British troops. They used to roll down stones from the summit of the hills, threw spears and did their most by yelling intimidation to harass the British troops, who, in spite of possessing superior arms failed to deal with the enemies effectively. When the troops failed to punish or apprehend the offenders, they would resort to the most common and easy way of punishment of completely destroying an offending village by setting fire on it, which often caused loss to the innocent as well as the guilty persons. There were instances when completely innocent Naga villages were burnt by mistake by the British soldiers. Sometime, the troops destroyed granaries and the standing crops in the field. This type of action obviously aggravated the situation as the Nagas were found to be more revengeful and ferocious immediately after such operation. In 1851 alone, there were 22 raids by the Nagas in which 55 British subjects were killed and 113 carried off. In 1853, it was decided by the British government to follow a policy of non-interference in the internal affairs of the Nagas and of establishing commercial relation with them by freely allowing them to come to the village markets and barter their commodities. But this policy also failed to

achieve its desired goal since there were 22 Naga raids during the period from 1854 to 1863 in which 232 British subjects were either killed, wounded or carried off.

These instances clearly indicated that the Nagas were determined not to surrender to the British government, howsoever superior they might be. They had the strong conviction that they were superior in the mountains and no leniency would be shown to those who ventured to encroach upon their land.

The Khamti insurrection in 1839 proved beyond doubt that though the Khamti Chiefs outwardly behaved as loyal to the British government, they had been secretly awaiting the chances of taking revenge on the British for depriving them of their land and freedom.

It was suspected that the Khamti Chiefs had link with the Singphos, the Muttocks and even the ruler of Burma to paralyse the British government. So, had they been successful in their plan, it can not be denied that the hords of other insurgents would have joined them to throw Upper Assam into complete chaos and anarchy.

Normally, the Garos were the freedom loving people and during the Ahom rule, they used to carry on raids in the Estates of the Zamindars bordering their territory only in retaliation to the latter's slow and steady penetration into the hills. The Zamindars, under the British government followed the similar policy and as a result, there were frequent raids by the Garos in the British territory causing extensive damage to the innocent people. There were several expeditions sent by the British government to punish the offenders and the troops use to set fire on the villages when the real offenders could not be apprehended and punished. The Garo raids were stopped in 1861, when the government granted stipends to some of the Garo Chiefs by making them responsible for maintaining peace and tranquility in their respective jurisdictions.

Before the advent of the British rule, the tribes inhabiting the northern hills viz, the Bhutias, the Akas, the Daffas and the Abors often clashed with the Ahom rulers, who followed a policy of slow and steady penetration into their hills and asserted sovereignty on them. During the time of war with the

Mughals, the Ahom rulers followed a conciliatory policy of granting all these tribes the right of collecting 'Posa'—the blackmail from the Ahom subjects residing in the border villages in lieu of the former's refraining from committing depredatory activities in the region. After Assam passed into the British hands, the British government followed the same policy for sometime but later changed it by curtailing some of their privileges. That measure enraged the hillmen, who started committing frequent raids in the plains making the entire northern frontier unsafe and insecure. In order to stop their depredations, the government sent numerous expeditions to the interior hills and strengthened their out-posts along the border. But these measures could not completely stop the out-rages of the hillmen and finally the government had to appease them by finding solutions acceptable to them.

The reasons behind the uprisings of the hillmen against the British government differed from tribe to tribe. The most common cause was the deep hatred of the hillmen towards the out-siders for their encroachment on the land of their birth in which they considered themselves as supreme. No motive was so strong amongst the tribemen as the preservation of their land and the forests, the encroachment on which was stubbornly resisted by them. The attempt of the British to construct a road from Assam to Sylhet through Khasi hills resulted in the massacre at Nunklaw in 1829 and the subsequent widespread uprising of the Khasi people, which troubled the government for full four years. The expedition of Mr. Pemberton for the first time in 1832 to the Naga country for establishing a direct route between Assam and Manipur through the Naga hills enraged the Nagas so much that thence after there was no peace in the frontier throughout the period under review due to the innumerable raids committed by them in the British territory.

The insurrection of the Singphos and the Khamtis arose when they were deprived of their age old right of managing their affairs by themselves. Besides that, as the mainstay of Khamtis and the Singphos was agriculture, their agricultural economy was badly affected by the emancipation of hun-

dreds of Assamese slaves on whose labour their agriculture depended.

The Bhutias, who lived mainly on agriculture were also short of funds due to the poor yield and the primitive method of cultivation. Thus, their search for foodstuff and other routine requirements had a direct bearing on the frequent raids committed by them in the low land. Their relation with the British government deteriorated further when they were deprived of the right on the 'Duars'—the passes which they enjoyed during the time of the Ahom rule. The indifference of the Bhutan government having some control over the Bhutias also further encouraged these tribesmen to carry on predatory activities along the border.

The mainstay of the Akas, the Daflas, the Abors and the Mishmis was agriculture and due to the insufficiency of food, they were also in the habit of raiding the border villages for foodstuffs and other routine requirements. In order to check their predatory activities and to maintain peace and tranquility on the border, the Ahom ruler granted 'Posa' to these hillmen. This conciliatory measure gradually became a right and when the same was encroached upon by the British government, the hillmen started retaliating in the form of raids in the British territory.

Sometimes, the tribes on whom the British government had partial control, were enraged by the prohibitory orders of the Government affecting their age old beliefs and traditions e.g., the right of head-hunting among the Nagas, the Garos and the Kiukis. The Nagas failed to understand why the British government did not permit a Naga youth to acquire as many heads of his foes as he could. The Garos were greatly offended for not permitting them to kill a man for acquiring his skull to be buried along with their dead relative without which the soul of the dead would not rest in peace.

Sometimes, the tribesmen were enraged by the introduction of a small tax on them as a mark of their allegiance which looked strange and unnecessary burden imposed on them.

The revolt in Assam (1857-58) coincided with the revolt in the other parts of India and was the last bid for regaining native monarchy in Assam. It was engineered by Maniram Dutta

Barooah, a distinguished Assamese personality with the support of a number of patriotic persons who had deep hatred for the British rule. The rebels were emboldened by the support with the arms and ammunitions assured by the sepoys of the Assam Light Infantry stationed at Upper Assam. These sepoys were greatly inspired by the news of the rebellion by their fellow servicemen in the other parts of the country.

The plot failed as the sepoys the real executioners of the plots were divided among themselves in choosing the time at the last moment. This ruined the cause which Maniram so sedulously worked for. In fact, the indecision of the rebel force to make the final assault and the tact and the alertness of their adversaries brought the rebels to their doom. Had the rebels acted according to their original plan and were not divided at the last moment, the plot engineered by Maniram would have been faultlessly executed. Thus, the revolt in Assam also failed like the revolts taken place at that time in different parts of the country not only for the indecision but also for some glaring shortcomings on the part of the rebels, who had to fight against a superior enemy. Although the Britishers were the common enemies of the people of the plains as well as of the hills, they failed to give a concerted opposition to the former, which was most vital for their success. In fact, there was neither proper link nor any co-ordination between the rebels, who fought with the common enemy. It is sad to note that the instructions of the Khasis, the Garos, the Nagas and the Singphos that gave serious trouble to the British had hardly any co-ordination with the various rebellions that broke out in the Upper Assam at that time. Peali Barooah, the rebel leader of the two important uprisings addressed letters to the Chiefs of the Nagas, the Khasis, the Garos and the Khamtis for help but there was no response from them although they had been agitating against the British at that time. This absence of co-ordination and mutual help and co-operation among the reactionary forces was very advantageous to their common enemies.

The British not only possessed the superior arms but were also far advanced in war strategy and technique than those of the rebels. There were instances when a handful of the British

troops overcame a large number of armed tribesmen, who had out-dated and out-moded weapons to fight. It is seen that the use of the firearms by the British troops, which was unknown to the tribesmen was one of the main factors responsible for their submission to the British. The revolt in 1857-58 failed because the British were in much advantageous position than the rebels. The revolt in Assam was actually mis-timed since it started at a time when the same was suppressed in the other parts of India. This gave ample chances to the British Commanders in Assam to take necessary measures against the revolt. At that time, two Regiments were stationed in Assam and when the revolt started in the Northern India, the authorities transferred the Hindustani sepoys of those Regiments, suspected to be in favour of the revolt leaving behind in the Regiments the Gurkhas, the Jarrows, the Doaneas and the others, who were opposed to the rebellion.

Maniram Dewan, who was the prime mover of the revolt was not readily available on the spot to guide his followers, who did need his physical presence very much at that crucial moment. It was basically wrong that such a risky and dangerous enterprise like that could be successfully accomplished by instructions given through letters written from a place several hundred miles away from the scene of action. On the other hand, the British Commanders, their adversaries were present at all time to take decisions on the spot.

Although the people of all classes in Assam participated in the up-rising, all the people in fact, did not join. There was no cohesion among them as their interests differed. Actually, the four rebellions which broke out in the Upper Assam were engineered mostly by the nobility and the upper class in order to regain their lost position enjoyed by them during the Ahom monarchy. This was not the case with most of the people of the lower class, who suffered untold miseries at the hands of the Burmese invaders for several years and as such, were in no mood to involve themselves actively in any commotion that might risk their cherished holdings. This popular apathy for various rebellions, thus, may be accounted as one of the weaknesses in the early revolts in Assam during the period under review.

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