

**PROCEEDINGS OF
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HISTORY ASSOCIATION**

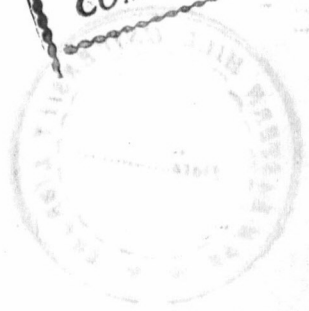


**SEVENTEENTH SESSION
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The Publication of the Proceedings volume was financially supported by the India Council of History Research and the responsibility of the facts stated, opinions expressed or conclusions reached is entirely that of authors of the articles and the Indian Council of Historical Research or the North East India History Association accepts no responsibility for them.



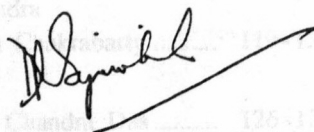
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Preface

The Seventeenth Session of the North East India History Association was held at Government Aizawl College, Aizawl between 3-5 October, 1996. This was the Association's second opportunity to meet in the Mizoram capital. By all counts the session was a success with large numbers attending the Academic Session, particularly the special session on the History of Mizoram. An added attraction of the Annual Conference was the learned lectures of Professor M.M. Sharma, Vice Chancellor of Dibrugarh University, in the second H.K. Barpujari Endowment Lectures. We wish to put on record the Association's appreciation for the hospitality and organization of the Seventeenth Session to the Principal of the College; to Professor Zochungnunga, Head Department of History and this colleagues and studies.

By now the NEIHA proceedings volumes has become a useful reference to historical research in the region. Young researchers have found in NEIHA a platform to discuss this first attempt in writing history. Other members of many years standing continue to see in our Association the need to foster, encourage and stimulate research of the region as a whole or on select themes. The publication of this Proceedings of the 17th Annual Session has been supported by the efforts of our President - Professor J.P. Singh, Professor A.K. Baruah and Dr. M. Sharma in editing and correcting proofs. To them we acknowledge our gratitude. We are thankful to the Indian Council for Historical Research for its generous financial support to the Association. We also thank the proprietor of Kamala Art Press, Shillong for his concern in publishing this volume.



Shillong
1 September, 1997

D.R. Syiemlieh
General Secretary
North East India History Association

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British Military Operations in the Jaintia uprising of 1860

Shobhan N. Lamare

The annexation of the plains portion of the Jaintia Kingdom was carried out by Captain Lister on the 15th of March 1835, when two companies of the Sylhet Light Infantry took formal possession of Jynteahpur the capital of the Jaintia Kingdom.¹ The reason given by the British for this act was the attempt made by the Raja Ram Singh and his people on the lives of the British subjects to immolate them even after the Raja was reminded of the consequences of such acts. These attempts of kidnapping was carried out in 1821, 1827 and 1832. It was finally resolved to mark the nature of the crime by taking extreme measures of dispossessing the Raja of his territory.²

Rajendra Singh who succeeded Ram Singh voluntarily gave up the hilly tracts of his dominions which were unproductive and the whole of the Jaintia Kingdom passed into the hands of the British. The ex-Raja retired to the British district of Sylhet. But it was only six months after the occupation of the Jaintia parganas that Lister marched into the hills on August 1835. The people of Jowai attacked Lister's camp and he retaliated by occupying Jowai and held out a threat of burning the village if the chiefs did not submit immediately, whereupon the Doloi of Jowai and his men submitted.³

Since the annexation of Jaintia in 1835, Captain Lister followed a policy of least interference with the people. In 1853, when A.J.M. Mills visited Cherra he was struck by the "proud and independent bearing" of the Jaintias.⁴ In his report of 1853 he stated, "the government by their orders of the 28th of July 1835 determined that Jaintia with the exception of that part which bordered of Assam, should be annexed to Cachar. The plain country was so annexed and then transferred to Sylhet but I cannot trace the orders for retaining the hill territory under Col. Lister's superintendence, and Col. Lister could afford me no information on the subject". He added "that Jaintia Hills cannot be considered a part of the Khasi Hills-the territories are distinct."⁵

Further on the recommendation of Mills who had been deputed to this district in 1853 to enquire into the judicial anomalies like lawlessness and corrupt practices of the Dolois, a military guard was established at Jowai⁶ in 1855 and a year earlier a school and a church was established by the Welsh Mission of Cherra. By this time the British government permitted the people to elect, to retain or to remove their Dolois after their own fashion, which was according to no fixed rule or practice, the result was that there was a perpetual struggle between the influential inhabitants of the Dolois in office, and to replace him by some other candidates of an opposite faction. This frequent electioneering struggles kept the country in constant turmoil and produced much ill blood among the different classes.⁷

In 1853, the proposal of taxing the Jaintias was taken up by A.J.M. Mills who brought the matter to the notice of the government "to exact some payments however trifling the amount may be from the Mountaineers of our possessions as a token of submission."⁸ In 1855, the ex-Raja Rajendra Singh made an abortive attempt to retain the settlement of the Jaintia Kingdom but the government declined to entertain his request.⁹

Meanwhile the outbreak of the uprising of 1857 created a lot of apprehension in the British camp. Though the event passed the hill without any major impact yet the aftermath and reforms that were carried out had an important impact on the Jaintias. The British had realised that "their bayonets were now the only real foundation of the Indian empire and its preservation was dependent upon those military precautions which political security dictated in a conquered and unfriendly land."¹⁰ As far as Military precaution was concerned, care was taken to see that the number of Hindustani troops did not exceed their requirements where the events of 1857 would again be repeated. In this sense the Royal Army Commission which went into the whole question of army reforms in India was to submit its report as soon as possible. Major Gen. Sir Jonathan Peel who was the chairman of this Army Commission (which came to be known after him as the Peel Commission) submitted its report of March 1859 and recommended inter-alia¹¹ i.e., an increase to the British troops and a corresponding reduction in the number of Indian troops. Care was also taken to see that the Indian troops should compose of different nationalities in order to avoid any kind of unification amongst them.

The true intention of the British in creating dissention among the Indian troops can be seen from the writings of the Secretary of States Charles Wood to the then Governor General Lord Canning. In one of these letters dated 8th April 1861, Wood wrote to Canning, "I never wish to see again a great army very much the same in its feelings and prejudices and connections, confident in its strength and so disposed to unite in rebellion together. If one regiment mutinies, I should like to have the next regiment so alien that it would be ready to fire into it.¹² But British could not do without Indian regiments. British troops experience had shown could not long survive the harsh climate of India nor undertake its arduous military duties, even if Fort William could find the resources for them.¹³ The importance of locals in this type of warfare was clearly seen in the First Anglo-Burmese war of 1824 and accordingly the Sylhet light Infantry was raised from Manipur fugitives, Gurkhas and Rabhas.¹⁴

In fact, after the Uprising of 1857, the Peel Commission gave instruction that the hill tribes and people of the frontier should be recruited into the army.¹⁵ On the other hand, and according to the other provisions of the Peel Commission the 44th Natives Infantry was reduced considerably¹⁶ and what remained of that regiment was then scattered numbers of outlying detachments.¹⁷ The abortive attempt made by the Raja, attempts for arrangement for the collection of a house tax had produced a great deal of excitement among the people already. Adding to this the reduction in the strength of the 44th native Infantry was taken by the Jaintias as a sign of weakness on the part of the British. At the same time news of the uprising poured in from the plains. The idea of A.J.M. Mills to impose taxes on the Jaintias was supported by W.J. Allen in 1858 and recommended the imposition of a house tax. The main intention of Allen was to make the people realise the power of the British and make them 'submissive to the authorities'.¹⁸ A house tax was accordingly imposed in the year 1860.¹⁹ This step taken by the government caused much of discomfort with the people. In February 1860, in a secret conference at Cherra the people decided to resist the payment of taxes²⁰ at which the feast of pork was given by U long Laloo of Jowai, a discharged agent of the Jynteah Rajah and attended by U Don Dali of Jowai and Gopinath a Bengali Mukteer of the Raja and about 400 other persons.²¹

The people of Jowai, Nongjngi, Shangpung and Sutnga presented a petition requesting that they might pay the tax to the Jynteah Raja, but as the Government Tehsildar had been appointed and no orders existed for allowing such petitions were all refused.²² Gopinath the Raja's agent also sent a petition on the 13th of February 1860 requesting the settlement of the Jaintia hill territory and at the same time stating that his present pension of Rs. 500 per year was not sufficient for his client's support²³ and fresh arrangements should be made.

On the 21st March 1860 the Magistrate of Sylhet informed that the ex-Raja of Jaintia had arrived from Jaintiapur and stated that his people intended to rebel against the payment of the house tax. Being apprehensive that the guard at Jowai might be attacked a reinforcement of one havildar and sixteen sepoy was sent from Sylhet on the 22nd March. As news of the intended rising was pouring in from different quarters Mr. Shadwell accompanied by Lt. Buist and 153 men of the Sylhet Light Infantry left Cherra on the 23rd March. They were met by the havildar and his men who informed them that they had been attacked by a large number of men and been forced to retire to the outskirts of Jowai with the loss of part of their baggage. The attack on the British Camp at Jowai signalled the outbreak of the resistance. In one of the letters dated 28th March 1860 from Francis Jenkin to E.H. Lushington, Secretary to the Government of Bengal, Jenkin was found to have mentioned that Lt. Waterfield have brought up 100 men with him from Sylhet and Capt. Scott have moved towards Jaintiapur to occupy that place and to join Lt. Buist and Shadwell at Jowai.²⁴

Intimation of this rising was soon conveyed by the Commissioner of Dacca by telegraph to A.R. Young the Secretary to the Government of Bengal. The Military Department of the Government of India was addressed with a view to the speedy issue of orders to the officer commanding the East India Regiment to take that regiment on towards Sylhet and to the officers commanding at Dacca and to station there until further orders.²⁵

The Sylhet light infantry under the command of Lt. Buist was attacked and in the process a number of the Jaintias had been killed or wounded. The Jaintias after suffering defeat at the initial stage regrouped themselves together and resorted in cutting off the supplies

of the British troops. Jenkins on the other hand took precautions to see that the resistance did not spread to other areas. In this sense Lt. Singer and Capt. Campbell were pressed into action where Major Richardson on the other hand was unavailable because of several illness.²⁶ A proposal was also made by Jenkins to Lushington to have Capt. Rowlatt in the Khasi and Jaintia Hills as a Civil Commissioner.

After facing this initial reverse that Jaintias now decided to attack Sylhet and to carry off the Rajah. With this object they advanced during the night of 28th March 1860. But because of the stormy weather that night they were not able to reach Sylhet and being afraid to come during the day time, they abandoned their intentions and proceeded towards Jaintiapur. On the way they plundered and burned the houses and made prisoners some of the Burkandazes. These groups were challenged by Lt. Ross but before they could be arrested they had made good their escape to the hills.²⁷

Shadwell and his men reached Jowai on the 25th March 1860 and the very next day he summoned all the Dalois of the different villages "to persuade them to submit quietly and pay their taxes."²⁸ A few days later Dalois from Mynso, Rymbai, Shangpung, Nongbah met Shadwell and since they were suspected in involving themselves in the uprising, they were placed under restraint and subsequently taken to Cherra by Shadwell himself and placed in confinement.²⁹

The force at Jowai was strengthened by the arrival of Lt. Waterfield and his men. On the 28th of March 1860, Buist and Waterfield with a detachment of 1 Subehdar, 2 Jamandars, 8 Havildars, 8 Naicks, 4 Buglers and 188 Sepoys accompanied by Shadwell proceeded to visit some of the villages especially those who had showed their displeasure.³⁰ They went first to Nangbha which by this time was almost deserted. Getting together a few of the villagers, they were asked to submit quietly and to give up the leaders in order to avoid 'molestation' by the government troops.³¹

The party then proceeded to Nongngi and it was here that Shadwell observes that there were a large body of men descending the mountains and on which the village stands. The jungles at the foot of the hills was swarming with armed men and before the troops could do anything, the advanced guard of Lt. Buist was attacked. In the course of the fight a number of the 'rebels' were killed who were

trying to protect their stockade. Many of them retired to the jungle where they could not be followed.³² The troops however pushed into the village and destroyed some of the houses which were already deserted by this time.³³ This act of destroying the village was defended by Rowlatt when he said that "a portion of the rope of the tent which had been carried of from the Guard that went out... to strengthen the post at Jowai... thus clearly establishing that the people of this village were concerned in the attack on the Guard...and as U Song Kwar, the son of the ex-Raja of Jynteah resided here, I had every reason to believe that the people were very inimical to us... and I therefore deemed it proper to punish them severely."³⁴ From Nongjngi the troops went to Nartiang where they did not face any reistance. The leading people of the village presented themselves and agreed to pay the tax. The Dalois in the meantime had fled the scene and Shadwell appointed U Sing as the new Daloi for life. The new Daloi and his men agreed to hand over those who had fought against the British.³⁵

Shadwell returned back to Mairang and Jowai was now left to the charge of Rowlatt who was accompanied by Cap. Scott, 2nd in command of the Sylhet Light Infantry with a havildar's party. They started from Mairang on the 12th of April 1860 and reached Jowai on the 14th taking with them the five Dalois who were placed under confinement by Shadwell.

In the meantime Lt. Ross with a party of the Sylhet Light Infantry who were instrumental in driving back the Jaintias who tried to sneak into Sylhet to kidnap the Raja landed up at Shangpung. He reached Jowai on the 17th and reported that the country he had passed through was quiet and that the people were giving up their arms.³⁶ Since the condition of the country on the whole was peaceful Lt. Ross returned back to the plains on the 18th of April 1860.

One of the principal leaders of the movement U Bakhir Pator of Rallieng surrendered to Captain Rowlatt on the 19th April 1860. By the 22nd of April most of the leaders had either surrendered or were captured. As the country was settling down, in consultation with Captain Scott the authorities decided to send back all the men of the Sylhet Light Infantry to Cherra, except for a strength of 60 men to guard the stockade at Jowai and fifty to accompany Rowlatt on a tour to those villages which had not been visited by Lt. Ross. The party

that returned to Cherra took along with them 12 prisoners, and the revenue and arms that was collected and seized.³⁷

While the detachment left for Cherra, Rowlatt and his men left for Shangpung on the 24th April 1860 and reached there in the afternoon around 2.30 p.m. The people were coerced but refused to give their arms in the process four of their leaders were arrested and taken to Ralliang which place they reached some hours later. It was only when the people of Ralliang and Shangpung gave up their arms that the four hostages were released and some revenues collected.³⁸ The exact amount of the revenue collected was not known as it did not receive any mention in the correspondence that was carried out by Rowlatt to Jenkins.

On the 25th Rowlatt and his men marched towards Mynso and by evening the people of this village and that of the neighbouring one Shilliang Myntang gave up their arms. Next day the British troops marched for Nartiang through Nanbah. On the 27th they halted at Nartiang Hill. All the villagers including 'the notorious one Nungjoongee (Nongjngi) delivered their arms.³⁹

By this time most of the principal villages had been visited by the British troops and were disarmed and revenues was insisted for collection. The British troops under Rowlatt left Nartiang on the 28th crossed the Umngot river which separates Jaintia from the Khyrim hima and returned to Cherrapunjee on the 1st May.

In their raids, shields, spears, swords were confiscated by Rowlatt "and finding some of them worthless and heavy articles to carry, I had them all burnt".⁴⁰ A number of prisoners was taken with him to Cherra. They were either Dalois or Pators who were involved in the attacks on British troops and the Thannahs in the Sylhet district or men who had been actively engaged in causing the outbreak⁴¹ The Dalois who were suspected to have involved in the outbreak were dismissed from their offices and new ones were appointed in their places.

By the month of May, peace was restored. The British had proved that a handfull of discipline soldiers could take charge of hundreds of indiscipline men. After the supression of the resistance the British decided to take under it the direct management of the province and not to leave it entirely into the hands of the Dalois⁴²

They felt that if this idea was abandoned then there will be little prospect of its improvement under the management of the Rajah.⁴³ It was further argued that since the Raja never resisted him the hills and being a Hindu "he cannot be expected to have any sympathy with hill tribes who have not adopted Hinduism as their religion."⁴⁴ Jenkins was also of the opinion that by handing the territory back to the Rajah it would create problems for the development of its resources and at the same time retard the improvement of the neighbouring districts which were immediately under the British control.⁴⁵

The authorities were also of the opinion that if their supremacy was thoroughly established the revenue realised from the country even in its present state would be sufficient to cover all the expenses of the necessary establishment to run the administration.⁴⁶

The trial of strength between the Jaintias and the British ended just like it had started - abruptly. This was however a silence before another more serious storm which broke out in 1862 and lasted till 1864. The events of 1862 inaugurated the second phase of the resistance, where in this little war it had created a lot of apprehension to the British particularly when the Jaintias decided to rally themselves under the leadership of U Kiang Nongbah who enjoyed the confidence and support of his people.

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