

The Relations Between the English And the Lushais, Chiefs after 1890 : A Period of Conflicts and Co-operations

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Introduction

The annexation of the Lushai Hills in 1890 was a culmination of the forward policy adopted by the British. As a matter of fact, there was no active considerations on the part of the British to occupy the Hills until 1890 expedition. But after the annexations of Assam (1826), Khasi Hills (1833) and the Upper Burma (1885) the Lushai Hills was the only terrain left unoccupied between India and Burma. The political atmosphere thus prevailed in this region naturally favoured the English to occupy the Hills permanently. Therefore, the future administration of the Hills then became the subject matter of discussions among the authorities even while the expedition of 1889-90 was in progress.¹ Thus the Government of Assam felt that permanent occupation must be done and accordingly it made proposal to this effect to the Government of India.² The Government of Assam in its proposal suggested that each province should undertake the administration of its own tracts because the tract was too big to administer by one officer alone. The proposal was accepted by the Government of India and approved by the Secretary of State for India.³ Accordingly, the tract was divided into two administrative units vizo the North Lushai Hills and the South Lushai Hills. The former being part of the Chief Commissionership of Assam while the latter was attached to Bengal. The creation of the tract into two districts officially proclaimed in 1895 was the outcome of the operations of 1889-90 expedition. Aijal (Aizawl) was the capital headquarters of Capt. H. R. Browne who was designated as Political Officer. While Lungleh (Lunglei) was made the headquarters of Capt. J. Shakespear who was rather designated as Superintendent.⁴

Policy of Non-Intervention

The annexation of the Hills in 1890 was appeared as an accomplished fact. But it was a mere notion because the

English had to engage themselves for another five years to pacify the chiefs and consolidate their own positions among the chiefs. Right from the beginning the British administration had borne two things in mind towards the Lushai chiefs. Retaliation was not the only object of the expeditions but friendly relations of a permanent character was also aimed at.⁵ Even when the Hills was occupied, the Political officer was instructed to adopt a policy of non-interference towards the native chiefs by allowing them to settle their own affairs among themselves. He was further directed to keep moving among them with a view to establishing political influence and control over them.⁶ In spite of this appeasement policy towards the Lushais the English had to tackle with a problem of stiff resistance on the part of the Lushai chiefs. The English were thus compelled to apply strong armed policy in dealing with the Lushai chiefs. There inevitably ensued an armed conflicts between the two until the rebel chiefs were completely subjugated in 1895.

Period of Conflicts

It is interesting to note that significant events took place in the years between 1890-1895 in the relations between the English and the Lushai chiefs. During this eventful period the English made attempts to consolidate their positions in the Hills with strong armed policy which finally led to a complete suppression of the Lushai chiefs. Hence the period 1890-1895 a period of conflicts.

During this period of conflicts and consolidation the British administration was following a policy of repressive measures against the chiefs. The chiefs on their part censured the English for this strained relation because the English were too arrogant in dealing with them. As a result, an armed conflict between them seemed inevitable. A careful study of the relations between the English and the Lushai chiefs during the said period shows that tribute and impressed labour imposed upon the Lushai chiefs were responsible for an armed conflicts.

Tribute or *Taxation* was a levy payable to the English the amount of which was varied from one officer to another. In spite of repeated attempts the Government could not adopt a uniform system. However, in 1891 the Government approved Lyall's proposed rate of Re 1 as house tax and a liability to deliver 10 seers of rice from each house at the rate of Rs 2 per mound, together with free labour for six days in the year.⁷ But in 1897 a change to this system was introduced. The rate was raised to

Rs 2 per house. This system was made effective on 1 April 1898 in North Lushai Hills only.⁸ In South Lushai Hills they followed a similar system.

Impressed Labour or "Cooly" was another area of conflicts and frictions between the English and the Lushai chiefs. It was a forced labour imposed upon the latter to enable the former to demand it when need arose. Here, too, the administration could not adopt a uniform system on the rate of daily remuneration. The rate was differed from one officer to another. The general practice throughout the Lushai Hills was annas 4 per 'coolly' per day.

The imposition of these two systems caused frictions on the future relations between the English and the Lushai chiefs with far reaching consequences leading to the suppression of the latter with strong armed policy. In fact, there were different views on this even among the British administrators. In 1895 W.B. Oldham, in protesting against the impressed labour, wrote to Cotton, the Chief Secretary of Assam. He observed that :

*I would say that the system referred to is not acceptable by the people, and is not consonant with their customs, and that, so far from being economical and easy to work, it has, in the last four years, been the sole cause of our troubles and additional expenditure, and is going to be so again.*⁹

It seems, however, that his observation was not taken seriously. By imposing the systems the English wanted to show the chiefs that they were completely under their control. But the chiefs could not accept the superiority of the English for granted. The main complaint on the part of the chiefs was that the English demanded 'coolly' without knowing their plights. They could not supply the required number of cooly on certain occasions not because they refused to do it but sometimes circumstances compelled them. In such difficult situation it was the chiefs who had to pay for the price. Lalburha, for instance, was fined 20 guns on account of the delay in supplying 'coolly'.¹⁰ Inevitably under such circumstances the chiefs could not remain a silent spectators. Such unfriendly attitude irritated them looking for a chance to react against the English. They found an occasion to act when Capt. Browne made announcement in the Darbar that, among other things, Tribute and Labour were to be paid and supplied. They strongly objected to this.¹¹ This finally, led to the risings of the Lushai chiefs against them in 1890 which ended in 1895 with the subjugation of Kairuma and his allies.

The "Western Lushais" comprising the descendants of Suak-puilala first rose in revolt followed by the rising of the "Eastern Lushais" under the leadership of Lalburha and Kairuma in 1892. In sympathy with the "Eastern Lushais" the Haulong villages commonly known as "Southern Lushais" descendants of Bengkhuai and Savunga also rose to oppose the advance of Capt. Shakespear from Lungleh towards Aijal, and they were so far successful that he found unable to advance beyond the village of Vansanga until relieved by the Burma column. The English suppressed the "Western Lushais" and the Southern Lushais" without much difficulties. But the "Eastern Lushai" chiefs, under the leadership of Kairuma put up a strong resistance even after Lalburha's group was submitted. In December 1895 a joint expedition from Falam, Aijal and Lungleh was undertaken. The operations were successfully carried out that Kairuma and his allies were subjugated by destroying their villages and their grains and live-stock. Kairuma himself was a fugitive but he was allowed to build a new village on condition that he paid the fine of 60 guns. To this Kairuma agreed and promised the Political Officer to meet him at his new village on his second tour. Kairuma also promised the Political Officer to pay up the balance of his fine in guns gradually.¹²

*With the close of the operations against Kairuma, it may, I think, be safely prophesied that the long series of Lushai expeditions has now ended, and that no further operations on the scale, which it was thought necessary to adopt against the descendants of Vuta, can ever again be necessary. There is not in the Lushai Hills any unexplored hinter-land.....*¹³.

The results of the expedition were so significant that the power and the prestige of Kairuma was broken and that any Lushai chief could no longer safely ignore the orders of the Political Officer. The chiefs realised that they were ruled by the British. Lastly, the expedition marked the culmination of the British supremacy over the Lushai Hills.

Period of co-operations

The establishment of British supremacy was followed by a period co-operations between the English and the chiefs. The administrative development also took place. The whole administrative structure was reorganised by amalgamating, in 1898, the two administrative units of North and South Lushai Hills into Lushai Hills. The post of the Superintendent of South Lushai

Hills. was abolished and the Political Officer of North Lushai Hills was redesignated as the Superintendent of Lushai Hills.¹⁴

Politically, the relations between the chiefs and the English after 1895 were most friendly. The only case of any importance against the chiefs was one in which Kairuma was fined Rs. 500/- for looting Dosanga of his neighbour.¹⁵

Having consolidated their positions in the Lushai Hills the English were now left with two options open before them : to abolish the institution of chieftainship outright or to retain it with a reduced powers. There were two schools of view. One school was in favour of its abolition and the other was against it. When there was a strong view on the abolition, the Secretary to the Chief Commissioner of Assam who favoured its retention replied by quoting Major Shakespear who had had more than ten years' experience and wrote :

*We have now entirely gained the confidence not only of the chiefs, but of the people. I trust that I may be allowed to carry on the policy hitherto pursued in all hill districts of Assam... so that the Lushais may cease to have any wish to be rid of our presence.*¹⁶

Major Shakespear strongly believed that there could not be a middle course on this question. He firmly believed that the Government should retain the institution for the smooth and effective running of the administration in future. He wrote :

*...we cannot do without them. We cannot get our revenue paid, nor our demands for labour complied with, except through the chiefs, and therefore, surely, it is wiser to maintain them and strengthen their hands, at the same time trying to educate them into using their power well...*¹⁷

The opinions expressed by Shakespear and based on practical experience led the English to opt for the retention of the chieftainship. The administration of the Hills was now entrusted to the hands of the chiefs and their mentor the English.

It appears that the English took a right decision on this score because they could control the chiefs with a minimum of force. The Government stationed a small number of Police force at Aijal, Lungleh and Demagri. Even with this small number of force the Government found no difficulty in administering the whole tract.

That there was a cordial relationship and excellent co-operations between the English and the chiefs was vividly revealed by Khamliana, chief of Lungleng village. In his keynote address, on behalf of the Lushai chiefs, to Her Majesty, Queen Victoria,

on the occasion of the Diamond Jubilee Celebration of her reign in 1897, Khamliana wrote :

*Now we hear that you have reigned 60 years. You are the greatest ruler in the world, we Lushais are not fit to be called man before you, yet you have been most kind to us.... We are more devoted to the work of Government than our own business.... Although when compared with you, we are but ants, yet we will follow your orders as far as it lies in us.*¹⁸

During the two World Wars the British and the chiefs also joined hands in fighting against the enemies. In response to the requests extended by the British the Lushai youth took part in the first World War. The Government recruited over 2100 young men and formed a 'Lushai Labour Corps'. They were sent to France to work there. They also took part in the second World War. The chiefs declared war against Japan on 3 April 1942. They promised the British to offer total resistance to an enemy. From North Lushai Hills alone more than 300 chiefs took part, and recruited more than 3000 young men who worked along with the British soldiers. They also set up a "Village Protecting Force" whose duty was to defend the villages. This force was set up in every village. The Government supplied them with guns.

Conclusion

The political development which took place after 1890 on the relations of the English with the Lushai chiefs is a significant event in the political history of Mizos. During this period, the process of colonisation of Lushai Hills was complete and this in turn severely affected an age-old institution of chieftainship with a shaky foundation. It was reduced into a mere agent of the British Government. In colonising the Lushai Hills the English adopted two contradictory methods—strong armed policy to those who opposed and resisted them and secondary in importance, to establish friendly relation with friendly chiefs. Throughout the course of their expeditions, even after 1890, the English applied the former method in dealing with the chiefs whom they considered as foe. During their campaigns for five years in order to consolidate their positions the English were convinced that this method was effective and instrumental. Also, during this period they used tribute and impressed labour as a pretext to act against the chiefs in spite of knowing the fact that the chiefs in all circumstances could not meet their expectations.

After having been subdued the chiefs at the same time became an important tool of the English in the administrative set up. They acted as a link between the English and the people whom they governed. The English collected revenue, administered justice, transacted day-to-day affairs and collected "cooly" through the chiefs. By doing this the English saved money and time in running the administration in the Lushai Hills. The chiefs also acted as loyal and faithful soldiers of the British and as a result, the English could maintain law and order in the Lushai Hills with a minimum of force. The chiefs showed loyalty to the British not only in time of peace, but even in time of wars they demonstrated solidarity with the British. All this could happen only because the English took a right decision in upholding the institution of chieftainship but of course with a limited powers. The retention of chieftainship was beneficial not only to the English but also remarkably significant to the Lushais. It is a view of the majority of the people that should the chieftainship be allowed to continue even today in Mizoram as a constitutional entity the position of the common people and the state would be far better off. In the past the chiefs were greatly concerned with the welfare of their subjects. This was vividly seen and witnessed when they ruled before and after the English.

Notes & References

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18. AR. Letter No. 252 dated Aijal the 22.6.1897. An "Address" prepared by Khamliana, translated by J. Shakespear was forwarded by the Secretary to the Chief Commissioner of Assam.