

FRANCIS JENKINS

REPORT ON THE
NORTH-EAST
FRONTIER OF INDIA

H.K. BARPUJARI

Administrative reports usually make for dull reading. However, Francis Jenkins report ranks at par with the Alexander Mackenzie and A.J. Moffatt Mills' Reports on Assam and the North Eastern Frontier. Forming the very basis of the Administrative and Development process of the Government, these reports need to be referred to ever so frequently. Though going back to over one and a half centuries, Francis Jenkins' report was widely demanded by research scholars. Now available for the first time in book format, this documentary study has the added benefit of a detailed introduction, notes and glossary from an eminent scholar.

H.K. Barpujari who has edited this volume, is Professor Emiritus, University of Gauhati. In connection with his academic work and research studies, he had been to the U.S.A., U.K. and U.S.S.R. He has been closely associated with Indian History Congress, Indian Historical Records Commission, Indian Council of Historical Research, Institute of Historical Studies, Calcutta and several other learned associations in India and abroad. He is President elect for the forthcoming 56th session of the Indian History Congress to be held in Calcutta in late December 1995. An outstanding scholar in Modern Indian History, he is credited with several major works. Assam: In the Days of the Company (1826-58); Political History of Assam (1826-1919)(ed); Problem of the Hill Tribes; North-East Frontier Vol.I (1822-42), Vol.II (1842-72); Vol. III (1873-1962); Comprehensive History of Assam, Vol. I-V, (Ed.) American Missionaries and North-East India (1836-1900 A.D.); An Account of Assam and her Administration (1603-1822 A.D.)

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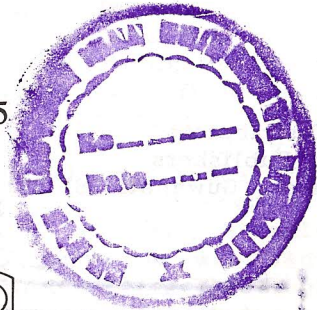
REPORT ON THE NORTH-EAST FRONTIER OF INDIA

A Documentary Study
With Introduction, Notes and Glossary

H.K. BARPUJARI, M.A., Ph.D. (Lond.)

Professor Emeritus
University of Gauhati

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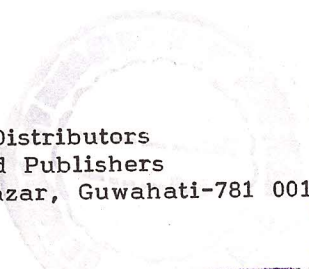
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PREFACE

Untill the early decades of the nineteenth century, Assam or North-East Frontier had remained a *terra incognita* to the East India Company. In 1792 when Raja Gaurinath (1780-94) appealed to the Company for military aid against the Moamariya rebels, Lord Cornwallis remarked : "However extraordinary appear to the people of Europe or England... we know little more of interior parts of Nepal and Assam than of the interior parts of China." Humanitarian reasons apart, "a wish to be better informed of the interior state of Assam, its commerce etc." actuated the Governor General to depute six Companies of troops to Assam under Captain Welsh. The extensive report which the latter submitted under orders of the Government of Bengal furnished a graphic account not only of the internal condition of the country, but also its administrative structure, state of commerce and resources-agricultural, mineral and forest products. The earliest *Sketch of the Geography of Assam* was compiled by John Peter Wade who had accompanied the troops under Welsh as Medical Assistant and Buchanan Hamilton published the results of his survey in 1809.

British occupation of Assam afforded the much-desired opportunity to survey and explore the North-East Frontier which was hitherto rendered difficult owing to the close-door policy of the Ahom government. This was rendered all the more difficult by the hostility of the frontier tribes and want of proper conveyance. Nonetheless the tribes of the north, and the north-east - Abors (Adis), Daflas, Miris (Mishings), Mishmis, Khamtis and Borkhamtis - were visited by surveyers who had also explored numerous rivers in that region. The results of these investigations were mostly published in the *Asiatic Researches* and H. Wilson's *Documents Illustratives of the Burmese War*. In 1832 under orders of Lord William Bentinck, Francis Jenkins and Robert Boileau Pemberton conducted the survey of the entire North-East Frontier. Pemberton's report of his survey of the Eastern Frontier - Muneepoor, Assam, Arracan, Kingdom of Pong, Kachar, Jyanteah, Cossyah Hills - was published in

1835 and reprinted by the Department of Historical and Antiquarian Studies, Assam, Guwahati in 1966.

Under direction of the Secretary, Government of Bengal, Jenkins proceeded to Cachar via Sylhet and reached the Barak Valley on 18 November 1832. Accompanied by Lieutenant T. Fisher, Superintendent of Cachar, he conducted the survey, both by land and river routes, of the district and arrived at the Raha Chokey on 8 January 1833 en route to Jorhat via Nagaon, Kaliabar, Bishwanath. No itinerary was recorded of his early tour of Upper Assam. The reports of surveys of Assam and Cachar which Jenkins forwarded to the Government of Bengal have been brought out in this volume. Based on his own observations and on reports of officials on the spot, the report is of unique importance on studies of the North-East Frontier throwing a flood of light on the strategic, military, administrative, political conditions of Assam and neighbouring hill tribes in the early days of the Company.

Materials for the early life and career of Francis Jenkins are meagre. Son of reverend Jenkins, Francis was born at Cornwall in England. In 1810 he arrived in India. After completion of military training he joined as Ensign in 1812, Lieutenant 1816, Captain 1830, Major 1849, Lieutenant Colonel 1851 and retirement in 1861. In April 1834, Captain Jenkins was appointed Agent to the Governor General, North-East Rangpur and Commissioner of Assam. With his ripe experience and intimate knowledge of the affairs of the North-East Frontier he was eminently fitted to shoulder the responsibilities of this 'problem-frontier'. In fact, the policy and programme formulated by Jenkins in course of his surveys of the frontier were implemented to a great extent by him during tenure of office for over quarter of century as the Agent to the Governor General.

The editor has provided a 23-page introduction that presents the background to the report in two parts—Assam Proper and Cachar, covered by the documents. The appendices at the end of each part apart from supplementary information as to nature and attitude of the frontier chiefs and tribes, furnish interesting side lights on the products, precious minerals, manufactures

and trade routes with the Tibetans and the Chinese Empire. Some changes have been made in order of the proceedings to arrange the documents districtwise. Despite faulty language, punctuation, mis-spelt places or proper names, no change has been made in orthography or diction. Words and expressions illegible have been indicated in *sic*, dots and note of interrogation.

Grateful thanks are due to the Director General and staff of the National Archives of India, New Delhi, for their unflinching help and courtesy in placing at my disposal the documents at their custody. Thanks are of course due to Shri Krishan Kumar, Spectrum Publications, Guwahati, for undertaking the publication of the book and no less to Shri Narayan Chandra Deba for electrotyping the manuscript before it was sent to the Press.

Chandmari, Guwahati
October, 1995

H.K. Barpujari

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INTRODUCTION

PART ONE : ASSAM

On the termination of first Anglo-Burmese war, at the treaty of Yandabo, 26 February 1826, the King of Ava surrendered amongst others his claim over Assam and the neighbouring states of Cachar, Jayantia and Manipur. By right of conquest these territories might be brought directly under the control of the British Government. Lower Assam was actually annexed in 1828 to the Presidency of Bengal. The fate of Upper Assam was however left undecided for the next eight years whether to be brought under the control of the government or to be made over to a native prince. The bogey of another war with Ava so much haunted the authorities in Calcutta that they had no alternative but to conciliate, as far as practicable, the chiefs and tribes of the NorthEast Frontier. Already David Scott, Agent to the Governor General, had entered into a treaty with Raja Govinda Chandra of Cachar; the latter undertook in return for British protection to pay a tribute of rupees ten thousand. Raja Ram Singh of Jayantia too, in his agreement acknowledged the authority of the government, but no tribute was demanded of him. Raja Gambhir Singh of Manipur was not only vested with the powers of a sovereign ruler, but allowed to maintain an army, the *Manipur Levy*, 3000 strong, trained and equipped by the British Government.

In the southeast, during the period of Burmese war the Singphos carried on their ravages with fire and sword laying waste the country as far as the capital carrying off the inhabitants into slavery. In the east the Khamtis, joining hands with the invaders carried on incursions far and wide expelling the ruling Chieftain Sadiyakhowa Gohain and reduced the subjects to dependence and slavery. To ensure security of the frontier Scott entered into agreements with several Chiefs of the Singphos and the latter bound themselves to obey the commands of the British Government not to carry on their predatory raids on British subjects nor to assist the invader on the other side of the hills. Sadiyakhowa

Gohain, the Khamti Chief, and the Matibar Barsenapati, the chief of the Moamariyas or the Muttocks, in their separate engagements undertook to furnish contingents and labour in any emergency.

Therefore, Captain Jenkins laid stress on the strategical importance of the Sadiya frontier, whether with reference to the possible recurrence of hostilities with Ava or its vicinity with the Singphos which had disturbed the peace of the frontier even after the expulsion of the Burmese invaders. In view of upward navigation of the Brahmaputra and the difficulties of communication with states below, he wanted to strengthen the military outpost at Sadiya to punish the aggression of the neighbouring tribes without support from Lower Assam. The Burmese, unless they advance in a great force, he thought, would not ever conceive of another invasion of Assam by this route. The distance from the valley of Hukwang to Sadiya was only nine days march and it would not be impracticable on the part of the Burmese governor accompanied by the Singphos on either side of the border to arrive in Upper Assam or enter into Moamariya territory before succour would reach Bishwanath. This could be averted, he strongly felt, if the garrisons at Sadiya were maintained at sufficient strength and the contingents supplied by the allies, namely the Moamariyas and the Khamtis, disposed to offer hearty cooperation against the enemy. This would depend on adequacy of the British troops and the policy towards these tribes and the degree of respect they enjoyed under British protection.

Commercially Sadiya was no less important. It carried on extensive trade with Tibet, Ava and through Shan province with China in musk, amber, ivory, gold, silver, lead, Burmese silks, drugs and cotton. Already Marwari merchants had their establishments at Beesa and were entering into the valley of Hukwang.

II

Of the tribes in the neighbourhood Jenkins reported the Khamtis were no less civilised than the Mugs of the Burmese whose written dialects they read and throu-

gh them the original Borkhamtis they kept up occasional intercourse with the Shans beyond the Irrawady. But the problem was the frequented route between the Khamtis and the Borkhamtis was through a part of the lands of the independent Singphos lying between the banks of the Noadihing and Tengapani rivers untill these were brought under British control.

The principal clans of the Singphos who had their habitat between the Khamtis on the north and those of Irrawady were Lattora Gaum on the Tengapani and Daffa on the Daffapani and Noa-dihing rivers. The Singphos on the Assam side carried on trade with the Shans and the Chinese of Yunnan through their kindred tribes and there seems to be no reason that this might be extended under encouragement of the government. Jenkins suggested to collect information through the resident of Ava of the state of affairs at Hukwang and Mogaung, through which the commerce passed, not only to the furtherance of the trade, but also to acquire military information without exciting jealousy of Ava. Jenkins anticipated, in case these provinces were capable of supporting a division of an army and that their population had little interest to the Burmese government in the event of war with the southern provinces, these areas would be most vulnerable to the Burmese government or the Burmese might threaten to enter the country by this route or invade it as appeared from other circumstances most expedient. In any case, he felt, there was every reason for cultivating a good understanding with those our neighbours, particularly the Singphos, whether in peace or in war. He therefore considered it essential to strengthen the post of Sadiya so as to repel any attack of the Singphos or of the neighbouring province of Ava and at the same time to improve the resources of this part of Assam to allow military operations of the British without much difficulty. By proper arrangement the countries occupied by the Khamtis and the Singphos might be greatly improved and at no distant future every articles necessary for a division of army might be supplied from these local resources.

III

In regard to the defence of the frontier, Jenkins recommended the increase in the strength of the Assam Light Infantry Battalion (ALI) to atleast three companies under a couple of European officers and the senior one to be vested with limited political powers. He saw no reason of keeping a large portion of the battalion at the headquarters. The men might be advantageously spread over the province. In view of the difficulties of upward navigation to remote station at Sadiya, he sought stores of ammunition in that station should be ample, its magazine good and well protected by timber stockades. The latter should be not only sufficient to keep the magazine, but of a capacity to admit of families of the sepoys and the merchants of the locality with their properties. Two gunners in the gun-boats under Bruce, Jenkins found, were unequal to the proper handling of the guns from the difficulty in number apart from their being too heavy 12 lb carronades for the boats. He suggested substitution of these two by four 16 lb brass guns and that the carronades be placed in battery in the stockade.

Notwithstanding misgivings of Captain White, Political Agent Upper Assam, Jenkins considered the expediency of maintaining the contingents supplied by the Khamtis and the Singphos. Closer relations with the Khamtis was extremely desirable mainly because they were decidedly the first race in Assam in spirit, intelligence and moral character and being connected by affinity of language, religion and habits to all Indo-Chinese nations which speak different varieties of dialects and language. On this proud and warlike race, Jenkins sought to erect the foundation of defensive measures at Sadiya frontier. In addition to 110 musquets already allowed, he wanted to give more so as to render them a sturdy, useful subsidiary force in the event of recurrence of hostilities with Ava and as a counterpoise to the Singphos who outnumbered them. The additional muskets, say 200, might be put into their hands as a reward for their compliance with any measure which the government

may from time to time suggest or a condition that the men to whom the musquets were to be allowed should undergo a previous training.

Jenkins was unwilling to withdraw the musquets given to the Singphos and was inclined to grant a few to those gaums and who rendered their submission or to any that cooperated with the government in the opening of road and any other matter. Jenkins was confident of fealty of these tribes as long as military measures were strong and secure as not to tempt them to overcome it by surprise and the benefit conferred upon them will gradually bind them to the government. He believed that there was hardly any reason to suspect that the Singphos would again venture to enter into Assam unless backed by an army from Ava and as long as government keeps itself prepared to repel the aggressor. They might of course, repent that they were cut off from the rich field of plunder and might repent at the necessity of ploughing their field with their hands, but they would soon become accustomed to conduct their agricultural pursuits by themselves. They would also find new sources of wealth on the progress of agriculture and commerce and their energies would be directed to the attainment of these with industry and diligence. Security and humanity therefore demanded the strengthening of the force at Sadiya so that the temptation to resort to hostilities completely recovered and the tranquillity remain undisturbed.

From the disturbed state of the country and remoteness of the headquarters, Jenkins considered it expedient that they should be constantly provided with means of moving at least a part of the force either by land or water of the shortest notice. It would be sufficient to keep with each company one elephant and two first rate canoes. The elephants would be spared from the headquarters or corps, and canoes could be purchased on the spot at about Rs 10 each. These should be kept in order and provided with full number of oars. The crews could be hired on emergency, but advisable to entertain a full crew of five or six.

Jenkins realised the importance of clearing the road to the Moamariya country on the one hand and the

territory of the Singphos as far as Beesa on the other. Initially, he suggested clearing of the jungles to enable troops with elephants to move with convenience. He also wanted the road from Sadiya to Bursenapati's territory to be made practicable since supplies for Sadiya were mostly drawn from that part of the country and a ready access to the heart of that territory would lead to confirm the good behaviour of that chief to government whose conduct had been of late was of suspect.

During Burmese wars thousands of Assamese were carried away as captives by the invaders and their followers, namely the Singphos, beyond the hills. Some of these were retained by them as slaves, some in Burmese territory and others sold out to China. Jenkins learnt from the Political Agent Upper Assam that Assamese captives succeeded in effecting their release of slavery from the Burmese following the visit of Subadar Zalim Singh to Beesa and that there were formidable obstacle through Beesa's territory and that Daffa and other gaums were also prevented from having communication to British officers at Sadiya through the jealousy of that chief. As a remedy, Jenkins suggested the posting of a Subadar's party in Beesa which would keep the line of communication with Sadiya besides enabling the government to have the knowledge of the country, the disposition of a people so necessary in the interest of the government.

IV

Mention is made in the report of the extreme fertility of the soil occupied by the Khamtis and the Singphos, the navigability of the rivers on the north and the south, and the routes from the Brahmaputra and the Irrawady. The Borkhamti country, on the other side of the ridge, between the waters of the Brahmaputra and Irrawady, is not more than forty miles. He pointed out the commercial projects with China from the Borkhamti country which is so near the Chinese province of Yunnan and Schezchwan and the Shan tribes to which the Khamtis belonged compose a large segment of the population of these provinces. Without much exertion the border

trade which was then insignificant could be enlarged and a part of Yunnan-Ava trade could also be diverted to Assam. Besides salt and opium, there was a rising demand for European piece-goods, beads, tobacco, grain, betel-nut and silks of Assam. With the opening of the Khamtis and Borkhamti country, there were possibilities of Assam-China trade through waters of Irrawady, Salwin, Yang-tse-kiang.

Besides the Khamtis and the Singphos the Mishmis, the Meerees (Misings) and the Abors (Adis) occupied the hills near Sadiya. The first occupying the banks of the Brahmaputra carried on trade with Tibet and the Borkhamtis. While the Meerees who were agriculturists claimed by the Abors as their slaves, either due to oppressions or convulsions following Burmese invasions, deserting their old settlements dispersed throughout the valley. These tribes should be brought under the jurisdiction of the officer at Sadiya instead of Raja Purandar Simha whose elevation to the throne was then under consideration of the government.

In regard to Upper Assam, Jenkins confined his report to the military establishment of the territory of the Ahom monarchy. He was strongly of opinion that the *Assam Militia*, Raja's military establishment, should not be entrusted with defence of the frontier and that it should be treated only as an armed police for the custody of the treasury, to assist collection of revenue and to enforce internal laws and order. Remunerated as they were by the remission of rent, they were useless and inefficient against the invasion of frontier tribes. Whatever may be the stipulation with the Raja, Jenkins stressed the need of locating a strong division of troops either at the mouth of the Disang or the Buridihing in between Sadiya and Bishwanath to inspire confidence in traders and no less as a check to disturbances between the subjects of the Barsenapati and Purandar Simha.

In March 1833, the Ahom monarchy was restored in Upper Assam and Raja Purandar Simha was placed on the throne at Jorhat. Jenkins saw the urgency of defining the boundary between Raja's territory and Manipur. As the tract had already been made over to the Raja, there could be no objection, he felt, in making the

forest between the Dayang and Dhansiri the boundary between Manipur and Assam. The Nagas inhabiting in the hills between the rivers in no way, Jenkins thought, connected with or dependent on Assam. To the westward of Dhansiri, the boundary should run along the parting of the waters until due north of the source of the Jeree whence it should follow the course of that river. It was hoped, Gambhir Singh would open a communication with Assam which would afford the British a line of communication without any expense to itself and to its allies in the event of any war with Ava.

V

Jenkins emphasised the need for raising fortifications for defence as well as for protection of depots of arms and ammunitions although military stores in Assam were maintained on the least possible scale. In Assam there was always the necessity of ample stock of ammunition in view of distance of the nearer magazine, namely Fort William, in Bengal wherefrom supplies could be had and the difficulties of navigation from Calcutta to Assam. This apart, extensive character of the province, want of land communication, small body of troops to which the province was entrusted and surrounded as it was by predatory tribes in which no reliance could be made, necessity of maintaining small bands of disposable troops to meet any emergency made it necessary keeping up a well filled depot.

The removal of the headquarters of the ALI from Jorhat to Bishwanath on the transfer of Upper Assam to Purandar was considered by the surveyor as highly judicious. Situated on the promontary juttings out into the Brahmaputra, it was fifteen feet above the highest level of the inundation of the river. Separated from the station by the river Burigang was a patch of elevated land encircle by the Brahmaputra and the river afforded the most suitable location of the magazine store room for erection of field work round them would be preferable to any in that quarter. He wanted the erection of a small fortification and in any case recommended that the

magazine be placed on the occupation of the land by the regiment and it should be surrounded with a small stockade having corner bastions of earth surrounded with carronades.

Jenkins considered it of paramount importance of maintaining a well furnished depot in Assam and keeping it in a secure position so that it may be perfectly free from any hazard under the charge of a small body of men. Political reasons also demanded, Jenkins believed, raising of fortification. The cession of a part of the country to a native prince, employment of small number of European officers, inefficient settlement of revenue, frequent changes of stations and temporary nature of all public buildings had confirmed the belief that at no distant future the Company would leave Assam or make over the entire country to a native prince. There was a general notion among the Assamese, particularly of Upper Assam, that the Company would soon make over Assam to a native prince, and this was confirmed by the cession of Upper Assam to Purandar Simha.

This uncertainty, inevitably, retarded nay called to a halt the development of the province. Such a eventuality, Jenkins feared, would be followed by scramble for power and ruthless oppression of those in power on the lower orders and in consequence the flight of the people to the neighbouring province of Bengal. Even if the territory was placed in charge of a native prince, it would not be possible to withdraw the right of interference and in any case military protection of the country; for that would be a signal for renewed invasions and in any case intrigues of the Burmese and incursions of the neighbouring predatory tribes - Bhutias, Akas, Daflas and Singphos carrying off people and properties leaving the valley of Brahmaputra an absolute desert. These calamities, on the face of impoverished and disorganised state of the country, Jenkins was convinced, could not be averted by a native prince even if supported by a Hindustani regiment. There would be no alternative for the government but to take up the responsibility of external defence of the country and to provide for its internal peace and security ending thereby all suspicions and remours which had long retarded the

prosperity of the province.

In regard to the claims of the hill Chiefs of the north, Jenkins was not agreeable to the proposal of Lieutenant Rutherford, Principal Assistant, Darrang, of dividing the parganas according to the shares of the rent collected by the government and the mountaineers. Jenkins held the view that the right to all the plains being held by the government and that any portion of land occupied by them had been usurped by them during the period of anarchy followed by the Burmese invasions. In case of any division of the districts, as proposed by Rutherford, he felt, lands made over to them would be deserted by the ryots and the wrath of the mountaineers would fall on our borders in their pursuit of deserters. Therefore, he proposed a commutation in money of all their claims on any inhabited or low land. The amount would be paid to each tribe on the border, preferably at the sadar station of the district, when they might exchange their own products and the money received by them might be expended for necessities of their own.

VI

Jenkins held a very high opinion of the *Sebundy Corps* referred by Captain Davidson in his letter on 2 April. They were called Jerrowas or the Garos whom he had opportunities to see at Guwahati and Gowalpara. He considered it expedient to employ these as a distinct corps on a permanent and liberal basis so that they might be employed with advantage in border areas. Under terms of their agreement with the government, the tributary Chiefs were required to supply their contingents to the aid of the British government. On emergency they were to be trained and commanded by the officers of the army, and in any case to be drilled and inspected by them. On the failure of this, Jenkins considered it advisable to commute their obligations for payment in money.

If the government considered it necessary to keep a detachment of Regular troops in Assam, Jenkins preferred Gowalpara and not Guwahati, as its headquarter-

ters. Besides easy communication with its headquarters at Jamalpur, it would be conspicuously located to render their presence as a reserve and know through all neighbouring hills and districts. He deprecated the policy of their employment in detached outposts which accounted largely their sickness. The growing importance of Gowalpara as a commercial mart of Assam and of the country intersected by the Manah was an additional ground for placing the regular at that state. It should be considered as a corps of reserve for unforeseen emergencies of great necessity.

On the military establishment, Jenkins held the great superiority of elephants at the gun. Efficiency and economy will be effected, he thought, by substituting elephants for the present cattle establishment attached to the field pieces of the *golundaz* as well as ammunition carriage to bullocks by elephants. The latter placed at the disposal of commanding officer might enable him to move guns, ammunition and troops on the back of these animals at times and in places when bullocks could not travel with ammunition and where they could not drag gun. Moreover, elephants were numerous and their fodder too so cheap in Assam that they could be purchased and maintained at less expense than the requisite number of bullocks and be replaced which the latter could not be in the province.

VII

Jenkins found from the reports of the district officers the condition of Lower and Central Assam one of "melancholy to the extreme" primarily due to deficiency of European supervision. Of the other causes, he attributed to the inefficiency of native officers, complicated system of taxation and commutation of payment in kind and personal service into cash payment based on measurement and valuation of lands. He saw no reason for much diversity of rates which rendered difficult for European officers to do justice to the ryots where minute valuations implying considerable agricultural knowledge and local experience needed to effect settlement of each farmer's estate who occupied not exceeding 5 or 6 acres

in extent. Jenkins therefore stressed the necessity of simplification of assessment no less for the protection of the ryots from the fraud and injustices than to save the executive officers from the minute details which they had to deal depriving them thereby the time and energy to direct their attention to mature plans for the amelioration of the condition of the ryots. He recommended a simplification of assessment not only of each district but also, as far practicable, to introduce a general rate of assessment throughout Assam.

For speedy development of the resources of the province, Jenkins found no other way than the settlement of Englishmen with capital in the vast wastes available in each district. To obtain full advantage of European settlers, in his view, grants must be free holds subject to the payment of a inalterably fixed rent and absolutely uncumbered in regard to ryots or subtenant. The creation of large landed estates and the introduction of capital, art and manufacture and trade might be followed by partial losses by the withdrawal of ryots from lands they then occupied to place themselves under European farmers. He made it clear that the loss of the government would be only the difference what was paid by the ryots and lower average paid by the colonists, but this would be compensated by larger quantities of land brought under cultivation and the other expected improvements; otherwise the very plan of settlement of Europeans would altogether be a failure. The ryots who would be induced to cultivate under them were too indigent to provide for themselves cattle, plough and other implements for which the colonists would make necessary advances and the ryots would be protected by the interests of the landlords on the one hand to retain their renters and to keep their land fully occupied and on the otherhand the power they possess to abscond.

VIII

Jenkins noticed that trade of the province greatly suffered by irregular levies made at the customs chokey at Kandahar or Assam Chokey. He considered it neces-

sary to place the chokey in the same footing as other customs chokies of the country. For no reason whatever he felt import duties levied on goods at Kandahar was extreme to those payable elsewhere on the same goods in their transit to other parts of India. He felt, this amounted to an additional restrictions upon commerce of Assam when the policy of the government need be rather to give privilege to this newly acquired frontier province. Such a measure would not only stimulate trade but latent resources to industry which the province was greatly in need of.

Dependent Chiefs, Jenkins learnt, possessed the right of coinage in their respective territories. As a result coins of depreciated and base value were circulated throughout Assam and this would continue and would be very difficult, he felt, to put a stop to unlicensed coining as long as native Chiefs were allowed the right of circulation of coins of their own. As recommended by Lieutenant Bogle, this use be substituted by *sicca* or *sanat* rupees, but such a measure would be ineffectual inasmuch as some allied Chiefs would coin *sicca* debased money, if that he not entirely prohibition.

IX

Jenkins never failed to bring to the notice of the authorities in Calcutta that unlike the previous government, no public works, roads, ramparts, tanks, temples had been undertaken or repaired or a single building had been erected. The revenues of the province had been expended to defray the establishments, civil and military, almost all foreign, and the surplus, if any, had been deposited at the treasury. On the otherhand, the trade of the province, by and large, confined to barter of grain against salt and scarcely any money was exchanged in these transactions. He therefore suggested that a certain percentage of the revenues of the province should be set aside for local improvements, specially for the restoration of the great causeways which were necessary as embankments for the protection of the cultivators from inundation as well as commercial and military lines of communication. The money so expended

would have some effect on the improvement of the condition of the people by retaining circulation in the country and creating industrious habits of the people arising out of the benefits of extended trade.

Reports of the district officers refer to the line of communication from Rangpur to Singimari (Garo hills) and thence to Guwahati via Goalpara (Bogles report, paras 30-8). Besides movement of troops, the prosperity of the country depended on the repair and reconstruction of these roads. To begin with, Jenkins felt immediate survey of these roads by a professional party in concert with civil authorities. Government should decide in general interest of the country the expediency of early reconstruction of these roads in part or whole for which convict labour might be available, but in any case these need be executed under supervision of experienced overseers without which these would prove unserviceable or useless waste of time and labour.

He wanted the continuation of the above road on the south of the Brahmaputra connecting Goalpara to Guwahati and thence to Nagaon and therefrom to Bishwanath; for there would be much fewer stream to cross than on the northern side of the district of Kamrup and Darrang. Jenkins himself traversed by the old Rajah Ali from Raha to Kaliabar which he found in order inspite of long neglect of repairs. Its width was so great in general, it would admit of wheeled carriage or it could be made of sufficient width for them at little expense. He found the embankment extended without any break or with little interruption equally on both banks of the Kallang river, with an almost unbroken line of villages upto Nagaon which being the first district in Assam. Here, as elsewhere, the embankments were not confined to the mainlines, but branches in all directions whenever roads or bunds seemed to have been convenient and necessary.

After passing Kaliabar he crossed the Kallang leaving Rajah Ali reached Bishwanath. The old road which runs the entire country as far as Jaipur was impracticable from the deserted state of lands between Kaliabar and Dhansiri below the Mikir hills. Military reasons demanded continuation of the road from Bishwa-

nath to Dhansiri, the boundary of Lower Assam, providing British troops ready access to Purandar Simha's territory in any emergency. The distance about 35 miles and old bund to Jorhat, about 35 miles, was passable. If the government set the example of making good the old road through their territories, they might ask Raja Purandar to put the portion of the road through his possessions, Dhansiri to Buridihing, in order. Likewise, they might call upon the Senapati to open a road through his territory to Sadiya.

For repair of roads in Lower Assam, Jenkins learnt from Lieutenant Mathie's report, Scott laid down that the Rajas, Chaudhuris, *Malgoozers* should be held responsible for each division under their charge. Jenkins found during his inspection, this was neglected in absence of effective supervision of the district officers for collection even of ordinary assessment. Nor did he consider it equitable to demand of such services under new revenue arrangement when the ryots were required to pay amount in cash in lieu of *corvee* service. The obligation of repair of roads entirely annulled and could not be pressed upon except by an abatement of assessment payable by them to the government.

X

The district authorities could not furnish much materials of the minerals of the province nor could he collect much elsewhere. He was told gold dust was found in large quantities in most of the rivers particularly on the north of the Brahmaputra : Dikrong, Subansiri and Dhansiri (north). Some washers were at work at 2 or 3 days journey from Sadiya to the east of Lohit, another party sands of Jhanzi and Diroi also yielded gold. Under former government, he learnt, the inhabitants of Darrang were taxed only in gold and each got had to pay one rupee and half gold yearly. Washing of gold declined not because of the deficiency of the metal, but it became uneconomic, for they could not gain more than four annas a day.

Limited quantities of iron was worked to the north of Dergaon, south of Kacharihat, and at the source of

the river Disang. Coal was of course found at several localities. On the bank of Sufray, a branch of Disang, it was worked but ultimately abandoned on account of the difficulties of the river, on finding a settlement at a remote locations and no less in forming a depot for use of steamers than plying on the Brahmaputra. Coal was also seen by Wilcox (1826) at Supkong in the bed of Buridhing, and from the nature of geology he expected coal at many parts in the southern ranges.

Salt was procured from early times from brine-springs in the neighbourhood of Borhat by the Nagas. The mode of manufacture was crude and primitive. Quantity produced was limited and price high as that of Bengal salt and bulk of the people therefore used *khar*, potash made of plantain sheets. Salt springs existed, he added, on the west of Dhansiri, northern Cachar and as reported by Bruce, on the bank of Nambar, a stream falling into Dhansiri. Bruce also refers to the existence of lime stone in the bed of the same river which was so necessary for the erection of permanent building at Bishwanath. The lime that was used at Sadiya in fortification was obtained from pebbles brought down the Brahmaputra from the northern hills. He found salt springs near and mouth of Nambar. Jenkins conjectured from geology of the hills, limestone will be associated with salt springs and coal beds.

Petroleum was found in parts of the province most of which are now under operation by the Oil and Natural Gas Commission of India. Captain Wilcox noticed (1826) small quantities on the bank of Buridhing. Silver found in Assam, Jenkins was sanguine, imported from Borkhamti-Khoonoong country or from Ava, Jenkins saw fragments of schist brought from Dayang, eastern branch of Dhansiri, which was highly alluminous and had the usual traces of sulphur. Of the rocks, he observed old temples and stairs around Guwahati were mostly constructed on the gneiss and granite of the neighbouring rocks, but he doubted much whether anybody could then work in this field.

In conclusion Jenkins remarks that in natural resources, climate and means of communication, Assam was no way inferior to the best provinces of India.

From the history, tradition and remain of former rulers, it was evident, that it had supported hitherto a dense population which testifies that the people were well governed. That the wealth of this kingdom and ambition of its rulers appears to have subjected the inhabitants to foreign invasions, factions and dissensions and ended in reducing the flourishing and populous people to utmost wretchedness and degradation. In spite of restoration of tranquility and peace for over eight years since British occupation, he regretted the number of people had not increased nor their material condition been improved. Some of the circumstances leading to these unfortunate results had been focussed in reports in the *Appendices* and these will afford the government, Jenkins hoped, suggestions to adopt measures to the restoration of the prosperity of the people.

PART TWO : CACHAR

In early 1830, on the assassination of Govinda Chandra of Cachar, a scramble for power ensued, for the blessings of a son was denied to the Raja. Dismissing the claims of rival candidates as invalid, by a proclamation on 14 August 1832, Cachar was annexed to the British dominion. Lieutenant T. Fisher, who was in charge of the district, was made its Superintendent. Accompanied by Fisher; Jenkins started his survey of the district towards the close of 1832. The report on the present condition and future prospects which Jenkins submitted to the Government on 1 June 1833, was based on his own findings and replies to his queries by the Superintendent enclosed in his report (*Appendix A-C*).

It was found that vast areas of Cachar continued to be wastes of reeds and timber jungles. The former, located more or less on the banks and vicinity of rivers, were occupied by the poor immigrants from Sylhet driven of the oppression of the zamindars or by those who sought to establish there as landlords. The more remote and less profitable areas would be occupied, he anticipated, slowly with the extension of cultivation and increase in population unless liberal terms granted to entrepreneurs to employ their skill, enter-

prise and capital. Every encouragement need be given, he felt, to Europeans and Indians, for it was too much to expect of poverty-stricken immigrants to undertake expensive cultivation or improvements. With their subsistence economy, their objective would be to cultivate only that much as necessary for life from which the government would not derive anything more than necessary for maintenance of law and order in the district.

Jenkins conceived that there could scarcely be in India nay British empire a country more capable of producing varied products than the tract of Cachar. To the development of its natural resources, he thought, required fostering care of the government - construction of roads, improvement of navigation and even inducement of advanced races for their settlement in the district some further steps than had been taken hitherto to encourage the influx of colonists and to render Cachar at an early period of that value to the rest of the province with its position, extent, fertility and natural capability.

Lieutenant Fisher recommended in 8th para of his letter (5 April, 1832) location of the Kukies and the Nagas on the proposed road from Cachar to Dharampur. This received the strongest support of Jenkins for the protection of passengers and portorage of traffic and repair of this road. The Kukies on the Gograpar hills already prove very useful as porters and wood-cutters and in assisting ryots in their cultivation.

In regard to military force, Jenkins wanted to have less than a detachment of 150 men for duties in Cachar. The transfer of civil station, as lately done, itself would give confidence to the inhabitants of their part of Cachar, but the presence of the rude tribes in its neighbourhood made it necessary to have always at hand the means of punishing their aggressors. He considered it essential that the government would exercise control over the Kukies either directly or through the Raja of Tripura. He considered it not at all difficult to manage them, for those settled in Cachar had already shown themselves valuable addition to its population as agriculturists and there was no reason to doubt that they could be turned to good account as an armed police

for their habits were decidedly warlike.

II

Of the principal articles of export to Bengal, Jenkins mentioned cotton, grain, timber and other forest produce: bamboos, canes, reeds, mats and grass. Scarcely any part of Bengal, Jenkins held the view, could compete in its production of rice with Cachar and the export of this article was on the increase. Cotton will be next as soon as the communication across the hills to Dharampur would improve. The Mikirs (Karbis) and the Kacharis in the hills raised cotton extensively, but hardly any of this commodity found its way to Cachar and the district of Sylhet was supplied at a dearer cost from Chittagong and Arakan.

Another important produce of Cachar was salt, which Jenkins thought could be turned to incalculable advantage under proper management. He noticed three brine-springs, each producing inconsiderable quantities of salt under a small range of hills near Katigora, at Tilya and under the hills at Gograpar. The process of manufacturing continued to be crude and consequently expensive. Under proper management the produce would be considerably increased augmenting thereby the revenues of the government. The sale of the Bengal salt would not be materially affected by increase in Cachar salt, for the Bengal salt, besides being unpalatable to the hills of the frontier from its bitterness, was so costly that the poor could not afford its use and had resorted to impure potash prepared from ashes of reeds. Salt was almost the sole medium of exchange with the hillmen with ivory, wax and cotton and with it also purchase their services as wood-cutters. The high price of this commodity consequently adversely affected commerce and fetters industry.

In the hills at Semkhar, not far from the source of the Dhansiri, brine-springs existed, but now totally neglected for want of protection of the manufacturers against the incursions of the Nagas. The establishment of these salt works and improvement of those at plains would be a measure of economy of the first important

production of the article which would provide the readiest means together with improvement of communication which would lessen the time and cost of conveyance to boost up industrial activities of the inhabitants.

The cotton, the most important source of wealth of the north of the hills was then conveyed to Bengal by circuitous and inconvenient navigation along the Dayang, Kapili and Brahmaputra. This route had to be followed partly because of feuds between the late Kachari Raja and the hill chiefs and partly by the difficulties of transport by mountain paths down the plains of Cachar. The construction of a tolerable road to the first navigable point of Jatinga or the line of communication with Bengal would be far more convenient to the greater part of cotton cultivators. The barter of these cotton would be carried on direct with Bengal traders and reach them in less in half of the time. To crown all, the salt, medium of exchange - was available in Cachar at little more than half its price if it was in Dharampur. The price of salt varies in Cachar from Rs 5 to Rs 6 and in the Dharampur Rs 8 per maund and much adulterated.

With respect to internal trade, salt was the principal article in demand, but betel-nut, pan-leaves, dried fish and tobacco were luxuries seldom procurable in hills, but of which, Jenkins expected, consumption would be extended as the means of transport were rendered less difficult. The production of the hillmen had to be exchanged, besides cotton and timber, eri-muga, silk, lac, wax, horns and ivory may be augmented.

It was felt by the surveyor that these newly acquired districts could slowly emerge from existing state of wastes and useless by active measures on the part of the government increasing expenditure beyond their annual receipts of revenue and whatever arrangements made to stimulate the progress of the country, these could be possible under European superintendence. He suggested that a European officer be placed on separate charge, for neither the officer in charge of plains of Cachar nor of Assam burdened with civil charges, could provide effective supervision of the hills.

III

Jenkins emphasised the need for encouragement of immigrants particularly of the Gorkhas at certain location in the hills as a preparatory to further colonization by invalids of the Sylhet and Assam Local Corps. Such a measure, he thought, would bring superior energy, arts and industry as well as perfect tranquility to the country and confidence to future colonists. The fidelity, the bravery, intelligence and labourious habits of the Gurkhas would prepare ground for European settlers in this vast tract where a fine climate continued with extreme fertility and proximity of markets. The Gurkha colonists would also serve as a militia on necessity with no burden to the state than the cost of arms and moderate supply of ammunition.

For the protection of the hills, Jenkins thought, a small detachment of Sylhet Light Infantry (SLI) should be stationed of a non-commissioned officer who should serve as a medium of communication between civil officer and village headmen. As a part of the detachment might occasionally be sent from the post on escort or other duty, it would be unwise to send less than 20 sepoys so far as means of relief.

IV

With regards to boundaries, Jenkins learnt from the Kacharis and the Assamese that the river Kallang formed the western boundary of Cachar and therefore areas then occupied by the Khasis below the hills opposite to Raha had been usurped from Cachar. Jayantias claimed the country east as far as Barpani where Jayantia Raja's jurisdiction well established, but the country between Barpani and Kapili was then in dispute. The Kacharis maintained their right and possession of the territory. As the lowlands mentioned above was of great importance to Jayantia Raja as producing grain, Jenkins was not prepared to yield any right to the stripe of land between Killing on the west, Barpani east and Kallang on the north. He thought the Khasis had not the slightest right whatever to the land between

Barpani on the east and Kallang on the north. This contained the largest population, having finest cultivation and the inhabitant were wholly Kacharis and those who were not Kacharis were Assamese. There was not a single Khasi in the tract which could scarcely have occurred had this tract belonged to Jayantia Raja.

The tract on the west of Kapili would pass under the control of the government and it would be of not much value to the Jayantias since they collected only small tribute from the Mikirs who had raised cotton on either side of the river. This boundary would also secure for the government the right to navigation of the Kapili and prevent the Khasis from affecting the prosperity of cotton trade. The tract west of Kapili intervening between British possessions on the north and south would afford existing direct communication without having passed through the territory of the Khasi chiefs. The boundary between Cachar and Assam to be determined with regard to adjoining district while with Manipur already discussed.

Another question demanded immediate attention was settlement of right of the Jayantia Raja to levy duties on cotton and other produce by the Kapili and Kallang rivers. The boundaries proposed to be given to the Raja would give the Raja a river front at the point at which the Kapili divides into two branches, by the branch that falls into Kallang at Raha and by the Kallang to a little below Jagee where the southern branch of the Kapili unites with the Kallang. While admitting the right of the Raja, Jenkins wanted the Raja in lieu of a fair compensation to abandon the claim, as it was considered the most expedient to encourage this branch of trade by taking of all duties whatever at least above Goalpara. He thought existing impositions of Raja's *Mukhtears* at Chaparmukh were quite arbitrary, exorbitant and attended with vexation, search and detention.

Cachar was estimated to contain 9000 sq. miles, of which a portion of the hills beyond the Jeeree had been ceded to Gambhir Singh, approximately 1500 sq. miles. Jenkins noticed the population and revenue of this territory bear no comparison to its area. He was however hopeful by improvement of its communication by

land and water, by introduction of settlers of civilized races and by placing the administration under Europeans supported by as adequate military force, the condition of Cachar would very soon not only reimburse to government the outlay that might be required to effect necessary measures, but assist towards general expenses on the state and in the event of war on this strategic frontier greatly facilitate by its improved resources the progress of military movement whether towards Manipur or Assam.