

## Post Annexation British Policy in Matak

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The Matak Territory was annexed by the British in November 1839. After a long time following the annexation the British Government by an order of November 29, 1841 made provisions for pensions and rent free grants to the Gohain brothers, the sons of Matibar Barsenapati, the last ruler of the Matak Territory, individually on a fixed rate. The ex-officials and men of rank were also granted remission in revenue to procure their good will for the new Government. The Territory was surveyed, assessed and settled. The Matak people gradually reconciled to the new order. Maju Gohain and his brothers, who were detained at Biswanath on charges of anti-British conspiracy, on their return therefore had to accept the happenings as a *fait accompli*. They - so tried to adjust with the situation by giving up the rebellious attitude and the plan of any more anti-British uprisings with the help of the Frontier Tribes.

Later Maju Gohain was appointed as a Sadar Amin on a salary in addition to his pension. After his death another member of his family was appointed in his place<sup>2</sup>. In order to further conciliate the Matak chiefs, efforts were made to educate their wards to make them fit for government jobs. This way the British Government hoped, "we considered it far more desirable that the descendants of the Bursenaputtee should gradually become incorporated with the body of the people than that they should retain their present distinction"<sup>3</sup>.

### Education

Capt. Vetch, political Agent placed at Dibrugarh, in his communication dated 13th October 1840 to Capt Jenkins, Agent to the Governor General, North East Frontier<sup>4</sup>, gave a very vivid picture of

the then social condition of the Matak society. Out of an estimated 5,00,00 people only three people were somehow found fit for government jobs. In the entire territory not a single person was available for the job of a teacher who was to be brought in the form of scholarship to attract students to attend school. A point to be noted here is the realisation of the British Government of political necessity of taking measures to educate the Matak people to make them fit for government jobs in their own place, thus leaving lesser scope of heartburning afterwards.

Captain Jenkins in his turn approved the idea of Capt. Vetch and rererred the matter to Calcutta for approval. He recommended that the Political Agent be allowed to expend a sum not exceeding 68 rupees a month for the establishment of a Bengalee and Assamese School at Debrooghur for the instruction of the children of the principal Muttuck in common reading and writing to qualify them for holding situations in our judicial and revenue establishments."

Thus the British Officials very correctly thought of the political expediency of starting a school for the wards of the Matak Chiefs toget them at one place as hostages for the good behaviour of the Gohain Brothers who earlier planned to overthrow the British rule with the help of the neighbouring frontier Tribal Chiefs. The proposal was eventually approved by the Governor- General in Council<sup>6</sup>.

### Roads

To serve mainly imperialist interest again, certain repair and construction works of both roads and buildings, were undertaken by the British Government in the Matak territory after its annexation. Capt Vetch had mentioned some of these works in his correspondence dated 20th August, 1840 to Capt Jenkins<sup>7</sup>.

"The greatly increased demand for labour and the high rate to which it has risen, will I fear render the construction of roads somewhat expensive, I would therefore recommend for the present, that operations should be limited to the repair of the best of the old bund road, and the shortening and rendering passable for the dry season with a view to after construction the most necessary of the lines of communication with the different parts and stations now in use.

"The most important of the former in the road from Dibrooghur to Seeksagar on which I commenced last February 1840 it has been partially cleared of jungle as the distance, at an expense of rupees 796-15 annas and 8 paisa, and I calculate it will require 1000 rupees more for the road and 500 rupees for the bridges to finish it, as far as my jurisdiction extends, on a distance of about 22 miles, when completed on both sides of the Dehing, the distance between the two stations will be about 40 miles or two long marches.

"The next important road is the Nou Allee, which runs through the centre of Muttuck from the Dibroo above Teepook (near present Doomdooma of Dibrugarh district) to Madarkhat, (about 10 miles from Dibrugarh town) at which point the Seese River (Present Sessa river) is navigable for canoes of some burden, to put this road in repair would I estimate require and expenditure of about 1000 rupees.

"The other lines of communication I beg to recommend for temporary repair are as follows:

From Dibrooghur to Rungagara at an not expense not exceeding	Rs. 4.00/-
From Dibrooghur to madarkhat to connect with the Nau Alee	Rs. 3.00/-

Rungagara to Jeypore	R s . 5 0 0 / -
Rungagara to Chykoa (present Chaikhowa)	Rs. 6 0 0 / -
Cleaning the head of the Dibroo river as far as Koojoo from fallen trees	Rs. 2 0 0 / -

Capt. Jenkins recommended the measures as proposed by Capt. Vetch, to H.Lorrens, Officiating Secretary to the Government of India, on 11th September 1840. Anticipating approval of the measures Jenkins instructed Lt. T. Brodie, Principal Assistant incharge of Zillah Seebpora in his letter dated 25th January 1840, "to lay a gang of coolies immediately on the Burburooah allee or the direct road to Choekehaut on the Booree Dehing in addition to those sanctioned by the Government for clearance of the Borhaut road, as a small portion only of the sanction remains". The Secretary to the Govt of India in his letter to Capt. Jenkins dated 2nd March 1840 approved the measure taken by Capt. Jenkins.

### *Buildings*

Capt. Vetch wrote to Major Jenkins on 14th June 1843 approving the steps taken by Capt. Mainwarring on the employment of labourers for keeping Rungagara healthy by clearing it of jungle. It was mentioned in this correspondence. "About half the money sanctioned for Rungagara has therefore been expended on works of permanent utility, the remainder has been devoted to petty repairs of buildings and to keeping down the jungle owing to the peculiar nature of Assam climate, the same ground as usually to be cleared two or three different times in a year".

### *Administrative Centre*

Capt. Vetch in his letter dated 20th December 1839 to Capt. Jenkins mentioned : "In continuation of my letter No. 126 of the 7th Instant I have the honour to report that I have found an excellent

site for a station on an extension well and firm bank of the Dibroo river near its junction with a branch of the Burhmapootra called the Meakla Sootee, three miles up from the main stream of the Burhmapootra to which point the largest boats can always approach and to the proposed site for a great portion of the year. While the Debroo is navigable for canoes at all season, as high as Rungagara and Teepok, and it is only necessary to remove the trees that have fallen across its bed to admit of the passage of large boats to the above places during the rains so that the proposed site if approved promises to become a place of considerable trade being particularly convenient for many of the Tea locations, and for the export of grain and cotton from Muttuck". Thus though Rangagara was continued as temporary headquarters for Matak, soon it was shifted to Dibrugarh<sup>12</sup>.

#### Notes & References

1. P.C. 1841, November 28, Nos. 130-133.
2. A.J. Moffatt Mills, **Report on the province of Assam**, Calcutta, 1854 Nos. 62 (Lakhimpur district).
3. Foreign Deptt. consultation, 18th April, 1842, Nos. 19.
4. Vetch to Jenkins dated 13th October, 1840
5. Jenkins to H.Lorrens, officiating Secretary to the govt, of India, Fort William, 20th October, 1840.
6. H.Lorrens to Capt. Jenkins, dated 2nd November, 1840.
7. Vetch to Jenkins dated 20th August, 1840.
8. Jenkins to Lorrens, officiating Secretary to the Govt. of India, 11th September 1840
9. Jenkins to Prinsep, Secretary to the Govt. of India,
10. Jenkins to Lt. Brodie, 25th January, 1840
11. Vetch to Jenkins, 15th July, 1843, No .99.
12. P.C.= 840, January 15th, Nos. 115-116.