

**PROCEEDINGS OF
NORTH EAST INDIA
HISTORY ASSOCIATION**

TENTH SESSION

SHILLONG : 1989

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The Tenth Session of the North East India History Association was held at the North-Eastern Hill University, Shillong, amidst great enthusiasm and gaiety. This was indeed a memorable occasion in the history of the Association. The Decennial Celebrations aspart, a session was being held for the second time in the same institution and in the same venue that the Association was born ten years ago and the First Session held a year later. The Association is thankful to the authorities of the North-Eastern Hill University and organising it in the befitting manner.

Shri P. G. Marbaniang, Speaker, Meghalaya Legislative Assembly, inaugurated the session which was graced by Shri P. A. Sangma, Chief Minister of Meghalaya, as guest of honour. Professor Iqbal Narain, Vice-Chancellor, and Professor J. P. Singh, Head, Department of History, North-Eastern Hill University—did the Association a great honour as the Chairman of the organising committee and Local Secretary respectively for the session. It was presided over by Professor J. N. Phukan of the Gauhati University. The release of a commemorative Publication of the Organising committee entitled NEIHA DECENNIAL by Professor H. K. Barpujari, the first President of the Association, a decennial symposium on "A Decade of Historical Research in North-East", and colourful cultural programmes of songs and dances of the seven states of the region by the students of NEHU are among the special features of the decennial Celebrations. A record number of one hundred and eighty delegates attended the session in which ninety research papers were presented and discussed in eleven panels.

The present volume is the proceedings of the tenth session of the North East India History Association held at the North-Eastern Hill University on October 12-14, 1989. I am thankful to my colleagues Dr. J. P. Singh, Dr. M. S. Sangma, Dr. Gautam Sengupta, Dr. Soumen Sen, Shri Atul Dev Sarmah and Shri Amitabha Deb for the help in selecting and editing the papers and publishing the volume. We must also thank the Indian Council of Historical Research for generous financial assistance to the Association for the session and for publication of the proceedings.

J. B. Bhattacharjee

General Secretary,

North-East India History Association.

Shillong,

The 25th August 1990.

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Economic Contents of Decline of the Dimasa State (1773-1830)

Joya Choudhury

The assassination of Raja Govinda Chandra, the last Raja of Cachar, in 1830 followed by the British annexation marked the end of the Dimasa State which had existed as an 'early state' at least since the 15th century. The decline of the Dimasa State had however started (internal decline) long before 1830 and a large number of factors like the transfer of Capital from Maibong to Khaspur, the non-Dimasa influence in the Court, internal dissensions and revolts and the external invasions were responsible for the decline, behind all these an important unseen factor was the economic decline which had weakened the State proved to be crucial. We intend to discuss in this paper (i) how and why the State passed through an unprecedented economic crisis in the crucial years of its struggle for existence and (ii) the impact of this crisis in the final decline of the State.

Role of Economy in the State formation

The economy of the Dimasa State, interalia, played a vital role in the process of State formation. The possibility of agricultural surplus extraction and the market linkage by the State, in fact, led to the formation of the early Dimasa State. The substantial income that the State was able to derive from very many sources also helped it considerably to reach to its climax.¹ During the mid-eighteenth century (1735-45) which marked the final phase of the State formation with the occupation of the sizeable portion of Cachar Valley bordering the North Cachar Hills, the State was fairly large and prosperous and it was during this time (1745) the Koch state in Cachar Valley merged with the Dimasa State. The State Capital now shifted from Maibong to Khaspur in Cachar Plains. The North Cachar Hills and the adjoining areas were rich in forest products while the Central Cachar region was a fertile land for agriculture. The peripheral increase of the State with Cachar Plains now added to its income and prosperity as the area

was extremely fertile for agriculture. The State had already started to earn a sizeable income from external trade, agricultural surplus, the forest resources, the established *ghats* and so also from the new vistas.³ The overall position of the State income was the highest ever compared to the different stages of the State formation. The economic solvency of the State helped build up full fledged administration and military structure of the State, prerequisite for consolidating power and ability to rule over the State. Kirtichandra was assisted in the State affairs by more than fifty *Patras* or Ministers and appointed an *Uzir* for the administration of South Cachar and an *Aitya* for Central Cachar.⁴ Thus a firm and systematic control was exercised over the instruments of power through formal organisation of administration.

The State had successively passed from the reign of Raja Kirtichandra to Gopichandra (1745-57), from Gopichandra to Harishchandra II (1757-72) and for a while to Lakshmi Chandra (1772-73), which followed the ascendancy of Raja Krishna Chandra to the Dimasa State in 1773, amidst great affluence and prosperity in the overall position of the State.⁵ An assessment of the period can be made from the annual income of the State. According to an estimate the State yielded an annual income of one lac of rupees in Raja Krishna Chandra's reign.⁶ But the ominous trend of anti-climax is not far behind to seek. The affluence and solvency of the State soon witnessed the imbecility in the reign of the last two Rajas (Krishnachandra and Govinda Chandra) who miserably failed to mastermind the economic discipline to a workable future in the years to come. When a stage reached, the State failed to generate sufficient income to sustain itself. The economy of the state in their hands suffered a worst casualty in the process. The power of the ruling authority of the State gradually started its decentralization while the State had already lost its income from the lost territory of North Cachar Hills Division and the fertile Kopili-Jamuna Valley as well as even from South Cachar which had been crucial for generating surplus not only in the formative period of the State but to reach to its climax as well.⁷

Decline of Revenue

The decline of revenue was caused by a number of circumstances during the last two Rajas of the Dimasa State. The reign of Raja Krishnachandra witnessed a serious revenue set back when in 1799 a Mughal adventurer named Aga Mohammad Reza and again in 1804, one Kalyan Singh, a retrenched Subedar of East

India Company's army trespassed into the Dimasa state from the neighbouring British territory of Sylhet alongwith their followers and committed plunders and atrocities on the people. Most of the tax payers went out of work and there was no revenue as the country was placed out of cultivation and trade.⁸

Govinda Chandra's reign was disastrous in the history of the state due to prolonged hostility of Tularam Senapati⁹ and the Manipuri¹⁰ and the Burmese invasions, besides innumerable sporadic revolts encouraged by the neighbouring states like Jaintia. ¹

The revenue mobilization of the state thus showed a very dismal trend and there appeared no further chance to revive the revenue potentiality of the state. There was deadlock in the harvesting of paddy etc. The agricultural production became scarce without any marketable surplus. The collection of revenue had fallen in the North and Central Cachar owing to the disturbances created by these rebel leaders as in the normal situation, Central Cachar including Dharampur alone could fetch a revenue worth of Rs. 30,000 a year, while the situation in South Cachar was further aggravated by the explosive social tension and disregard of Raja Govinda Chandra. To add to the situation the Kukis in the South started ravaging the southern side of the plains which turned out to be a continuous affairs of their marauding practices and resultantly the yield from this sector of the state could not reach to the state exchequer. As a matter of fact, the area gradually relapsed into jungle.¹⁴ Thus an impasse ensued in the usual method of collecting revenue from major source of agriculture. Besides, the Raja was deprived of the utilization of the very fertile area of Sirishpur *pargana* which was snatched away by the local British officers in 1813.¹⁵ To take stock of the deplorable economic situation and manner of depletion of the state exchequer, it is worth-while to mention that during this period, there were total length of 6,115 hals or 29,352 acres of land brought under settlement out of which land measuring 4,289 hals or 20,663 acres were rent free (*Baksha*) land. The revenue of rupees 5 (five) per Kulbah was collected at that time.¹⁶ But over he years the revenue fell considerably to the extent of Rs. 20,000 only in both cash and kind.¹⁷ This was the economic situation of the state when Raja Govinda Chandra was required to pay a tribute of Rs. 10,000 annually to the British under the treaty of Badarpur (1824).¹⁸

Dismal trend in trade and commerce

The Chaotic political condition of the state and the growing

British Commercial interest in the region affected the substantial loss of income from trade and commerce. The Dimasa State at that time was maintaining good trade relations with the neighbouring British district of Sylhet. This trend of flourishing trade which evoked the British interest further for expanding the company's trade with Cachar both by the British merchants and the company's officers brought about the strong competition for promoting the trade relations with Cachar.¹⁹ The growing British interest soon gained prominence and went beyond the limit of toleration. Being over zealous, the sixth British collector of Sylhet, Henry Lodge wanted a monopoly in the trade on Cachar borders and thereupon imposed heavy restriction on the trade practices of goods like cane, wax, tusk and bamboos etc, and engaged company's soldiers on he borders to assume all dealings of trade in their own hands. The price of all the artices were fixed by the collector.²⁰ This resulted in the total concentration of trade benefits in his hands.

Besides, the internal disorder of the state and successive foreign invasions during the reign of the last two Rajas seriously affected the trade and commerce.

Upon his reinstatement to the throne of Cachar in 1826, Govinda Chandra found a completely worned out economy. Trade and Commerce was increasably affected, the reorientation of the trade system got further aggravated with the expansionist design of Gambhir Singh, the Manipuri prince. The trading of important articles like timber, ivory, wax, brass, bamboo in the markets of Bengal like Sylhet, Chatak and Nabiganj had to face an embargo as the west of the river Barak where the articles grown was occupied by Gambhir Singh entailing a heavy loss of income of the state. Moreover, the hillmen residing in this area were prevented from coming to the plains with their merchandise like cotton, ginger, pepper and other products. There had been no direct trafficking of goods to Manipur because of the restriction imposed upon the merchants from Cachar and Sylhet for sales at Chandrapur from where this articles were sent to Manipur. The British Government of Bengal also considered monopoly of the Raja detrimental to their own interest. They emerged as the champion of uninterrupted frontier trade to ensure regular flow of goods and profits on the part of the company's traders. The collectors and other District officials in Sylhet had been indulging in private trade for a long time. They could even utilise their official position to put pressure on the Raja to do away with such

private trade. Being the protege of the British, the Raja was compelled to abandon the monopoly in trade which resulted in immediate loss of revenue and income.²¹

Increase in Expenditure

The expenditure of the state increased tremendously during the reign of the last two Rajas. The most important item of expenditure for them was the expensive rituals and occasional pilgrimages. The "*Hiranya Garva* ceremony during the reign of Krishna Chandra in particular proved to be too costly for the state. It may be mentioned here that Govinda Chandra had also to pay the priests generously to obtain their approval of his marriage with Rani Indraprova, the widow of Krishna Chandra, and to retain his kingship against persistent opposition of a section of the population of the state. The pomp and grandeur with which the last two Rajas maintained their household also drained away huge expenses for their personal comforts. Raja Krishna chandra held a big harem comprising of thirteen wives and so also his successor Govinda Chandra had a number of wives.²³ The state exchequer also incurred a great loss when Krishna Chandra implicated himself in the Moa-Maria problem to create disturbances in the Ahom state.²⁴

During the last years of the state both the Rajas failed to maintain a standing army due to economic insolvency and on the contrary, failed to protect the state with a group of seasonal army recruited from the peasantry. During the disturbances created by Tuluram Senapati, Govinda Chandra had to employ the Manipuri and British soldiers for the protection of the state. He also employed Gambhir Singh with a monthly salary of rupees fifty.²⁵ The expenditure involved for drafting the British contingent as well as the Manipurees during the period of external and internal troubles, no doubt heavily aggravated the overall position of the state. Raja Govinda Chandra also drained the exchequer without any wisdom by helping Govindaram and Durga Charan with financial assistance, maskets, ball and gun powder to subdue Tularam in North Cachar. He also allowed them to collect and draw custom duties from Dharampur to defrey their expenses.²⁶ Above all the most telling effect on the economy came in the form of a tribute of rupees ten thousand annually to the British protecting power by the last Dimasa Raja Govinda Chandra on his reinstatement to the throne of Cachar in 1826,²⁷ which became a chronic burden on the state exchequer till the end.

Summing up

The decline of the Dimasa State during about last fifty years of its existence was due to a number of factors, both endogamous and exogamous. The loss of income from various sources resulting in the economic bankruptcy of the State was an important cause of decline. In fact, the role of surplus was the most crucial factor in the formation of the Dimasa State as it is in case of any early State. Whether surplus is an equally crucial factor in the decline of a State also is to be established by further researches. What we have noticed in the Dimasa case is that the internal and external revolts and aggressions had hastened the decline of the State. But there was also a parallel decline in the income of the State in the form of tax collection and so was the duty and profit from the external trade. The state had faced some such problems in earlier phases as well but on those occasions the rulers were able to tackle them by strengthening the administrative apparatus and reinforcing the army. But in the last phase when these problems came up they were rather helpless as they had lost their money power. At a time when the State was passing through serious crisis, the rulers instead of facing these of their own, asked the East India Company for military support. Had the State been financially sound, it might have been possible for the rulers to take timely appropriate measures to arrest the process of decline. In this connection, it is also important that the people lost their confidence in the competence of the Raja when the financial bankruptcy and inability to control the situation became clear.

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