

Sukpial's Sunad : An Interesting Event in the History of Anglo-Lushai Relationship

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Since 1826 (the Treaty of Yandabo), the English sovereignty was extended to the plains of Cachar. The Burmese aggression badly disturbed the plains of Cachar. But the Company's rule restored the confidence of the people as the law and order improved. With the extension of the tea estates in the south of Cachar, the English wanted to have cordial relationship with the tribal chiefs of the Lushai Country.

The most powerful Lushai chief in the West Lushai had been Sukpial. He was clever and tactful. He wanted British protection because his Territories were frequently raided by the other Lushai Chiefs. During the Lister's expedition the Kuki Chief Barmolin helped the British expeditionary force. Many Kuki chiefs including Barmolin demanded British protection against their enemy, the Pois. Sukpial was a poi chief. Captain Verner, the Superintendent Cachar, informed the Government of Bengal on February 6, 1855 that the 'mantress' of Sukpial had come to him and asked for British protection against the other Lushai Chiefs who had leagued together and had attacked his villages. Sukpial's deligation came with the subsidy of elephant tusks which was the traditional mode of paying the tribute.

Verner told the delegation that Sukpial and other Lushai chiefs were independent and not the subjects of the Company, so the Government could not comply with their request. But the Superintendent assured the delegation that he would inform the authorities in Calcutta of the matter. Verner kept his promise and informed the matter to the authorities at Fort William. In this connection he pointed out to the Government of Bengal that when the delegation was returning to Lushai Hills they were attacked by the Government's people under Major Smith. They seized the

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from the delegation. He further pointed out that the molesting of the Lushais by the 'Kheda' people would produce a bad effect upon the simple tribal chiefs and they would be discouraged to come to Cachar. Verner stressed that the prosperity of the southern portion of the Cachar district was dependent upon the friendly inter course with the Lushai tribes.

The Government of Bengal approved of the measures taken by Verner for not giving protection to Sukpial. Bengal Government also informed the Government of India (Secretary, Military Department) of the matter relating to Major Smith.

Soon after the Sukpial's delegation, a Lushai deputation from the Moorat Raja and his brother Leung Mung Raja met the Superintendent of Cachar in his office. The delegation expressed its intention of establishing amicable relationship with the English and said that they were anxious to trade with the inhabitants of the plains. Verner told Leung Mung Raja, the head of the Lushai delegation, that the English were willing to be on friendly terms with the Lushai tribes so long as they did not molest any of the inhabitants of the plains. In order to test the intention of the Lushai chiefs he requested Leung Mung to return the young Thado prince whom they had kidnapped during their Cachar raid in 1849-50. Leung Mung agreed to the proposal and released Tangpung lang, the Thado prince.

According to the suggestions of Mc.Clluch the Lushai Kukis were allowed to settle both in Cachar and Manipur. There had been floating colonies of the tribes in the frontier of Cachar but thenceforward the Government of Bengal encouraged them to settle within the British Territory. Muskets were also supplied to them. These kukis became loyal subjects of the Company.

Lister's Expedition opened up the Lushai Country. The Kukis of Cachar frontier began to think that the powerful 'Sahibs' had become the sovereign of Cachar in place of the old native Kings and the Lushais would not dare to offend the Kukis if the English protected them. The Kukis being the British citizen had the right of protection.

Mc.Clluch, the Political Agent of Manipur, took vigorous steps during the Sepoy Mutiny to keep peace in Manipur border. He maintained a friendly relationship with the Lushai Chiefs of Vonolel's family—a dominant clan of the Eastern Lushais near Manipur border. Because of the liberal attitude

of Mc. Clluch the Lushais respected him as the great 'white chief' and his word was a law to them. Munjihow*, a kuki chief, residing south of Manipur, assisted the English in capturing the mutineers. He became a great friend of the English and assisted the Lushai Expedition of 1871-72. He was a great force in establishing an amicable relationship with the tribals. Another important Lushai chief, Mulla, in the Cachar-Manipur border also played a vital role in the Anglo-Lushai relationship. Mulla and Vagnoilen had close contacts with the British authorities at Silchar.¹

Captain Stewart, the Deputy Commissioner of Cachar, who succeeded Captain Verner was a very intelligent frontier officer. He had more faith in diplomacy than in demonstration of force. He attempted to study the grievances of the Lushai chiefs including Sukpial. A large number of British interpreters were sent to each and every chief of the Lushai Hills. The Chiefs responded to the goodwill of the Deputy Commissioner.

Sukpial, the Lalue chief was not very happy with the English. Because many of the Lushai chiefs who were friends of the Company were the enemies of Sukpial. Sukpial committed raids in the Adampur of Sylhet. He killed many British citizens and also brought many tribals (British citizens) as captives. But Sukpial was very clever and kept his complicity in the raid very secret. Before 1864 the English could not know the real culprit of Adampur massacre. They came to know of the facts from Mulla, the friendly chief.

Hardly the Mullah party had crossed the Cachar borders, Sukpial's delegates headed by his 'Mantry' reached Silchar (24 December 1866) to meet Stewart. The delegation tried to evade the question of Adampur Captives detained by Sukpial. Finally, they disclosed that their master was a bit afraid that the English might hold him responsible for the death, marriage, missing or sale of the captives. But Stewart assured that Sukpial need not be afraid and the Government would duly consider the case of dead and married captives. In case the married captives declined to come back, they would be allowed to stay with their husbands. The evasion and duplicity of the crafty minister of Sukpial made Stewart angry and he refused to accept the presents of Sukpial and informed the leader of the delegation that the government was displeased with their master. Unlike Mulla party this party was not rewarded. Although Stewart was very firm in his dealings with the delegations he entertained a hope

that Sukpial would soon be prevailed upon by the embassy of Munjihow and he informed the Government of Bengal to that effect. Sukpial was a very important Sylo chief of the Lalul dynasty and show of force would frustrate the policy of conciliation. He considered it better to win him over through diplomacy.

The affairs in Tripura were less troublesome and the English received the fullest cooperation of the Raja of Tripura. The authorities of Chittagong under the leadership of Lewin controlled the South Lushai chiefs². But the Cachar border was troublesome. The local authorities tried their best to have friendly relationship with the Lushai. Some Chiefs responded but not all; the most notable among them was Sukpial. The sad memory of Lal Chukla haunted him and he could not fully trust the English. He began his political bargain. The Embassy of Munjihow failed miserably. The situation at Cachar frontier became explosive because of the troublesome succession of Manipur throne. Kanai Singha, a fugitive Manipuri prince, attempted to seize the throne of Manipur by force. The hideouts of Kanai Singha had been the tribal villages of Cachar. British government suspected that Sukpial had been aiding Kanai Singha. During the cold season of 1869 a series of raids were committed on the borders of Cachar and Sylhet. It was believed by the British Officers that Sukpial had a hand in those raids. He was an accomplice of Kanai Singh's gang and attempted to divert the attention of British Government from Manipur to Sylhet frontier³. When the situation was thus surcharged with suspicion and fear Sukpial and Kanai Singh's men jointly raided the tea estates of Monierkhal at Cachar in January 1869. Kanai Singha decamped with money and Sukpial with the captives.

The authorities of Fort William got alarmed. The raids affected badly the economy of Cachar. The Tea Planters made representations to the Government of India. The English news papers also sided with the tea merchants. The Government gave up the policy of conciliation and adopted a forward policy.

Mr. Edgar, the Deputy Commissioner, Cachar, with the help of a contingent advanced to capture Kanai Singha but failed. He was also unsuccessful in striking terror into the minds of the Lushais. Edgar learnt the lesson. He realized that without a thorough knowledge of the topography of the Lushai country and the Lushai organization a large scale

expedition would not achieve the desired result. Edgar was an enterprising young officer, a brilliant product of Cambridge. He learnt Lushai language and customs. Unlike Lewin, Edgar was practical and dispassionate and had the rare ability to convince the higher authorities. Thus this young I. C. S. Officer largely influenced the Lushai policy.

Edgar made an extensive tour of the Lushai Country in the cold season of 1870-71 and submitted an elaborate report to the Government of Bengal. He personally met many chiefs. He was assisted by Hari Charan Sarma, the E. A. C.. Sukpial was tamed and he realized the futility of fighting against the English. He expressed remorse for his past conduct and agreed to obey the orders of the Government. Moreover, he agreed to assist the English in the coming expedition in the Lushai country. Edgar convinced Sukpial the utility of a well defined boundary of Southern Cachar and his dominion. A 'Sunad' was given to him for that purpose.

Edgar was camping at Punchang Kai Village, a village down Sonai Valley. On January 24, 1871 Sukpial assisted by his officers met Edgar in the Camp. Edgar explained the terms of the Sunad. Sukpial agreed to take Bhairabi Chura as the point where the boundary should cross Dhaleswari. He also agreed to observe the sanctity of the boundary. In the 'Sunad' it was expressly stated that Sukpial and his people should not attack Cachar or Sylhet. In case of any attack from the Cachar side, they should immediately report it to the Deputy Commissioner, Cachar for redress. Should there be any dispute of Sukpial with the Rajas of Manipur and Tripura, the Deputy Commissioner, Cachar should be informed. When any British Officer would come to his country Sukpial should meet him. Sukpial was to send delegation to the Deputy Commissioner, Cachar at his Silchar residence if no government officer visited the Lushai Country any year⁴.

Notes & References

- * "Manjihow.... was the kuki Raja who in 1857 rendered us much assistance when the Chittagong mutiners entered the district (Cachar). He acted against them with his own followers in concert with us, succeeded in taking a great number of prisoners, and recovering a large sum of money, part of the plundered treasury of Chittagong and was

rewarded by the presents amounting to Rs. 5000 in all, and Mutiny medal." Bengal Judicial Proceedings (B.J.P), January 1867, No 79 ; Deputy Commissioner, Cachar, to be Commissioner, Dacca.

1. B. J. P., 5 July, 1855, No. 245, Superintendent of Cachar to the Secretary, Government of Bengal.
2. India Foreign and Political Department (I. F. P.), Political A, March 1869, No. 99 ; Edgar to the Secretary, Government of Bengal (vide Raban's Memorandum, 13 March, No. 319).
3. B. J. P., May 1870, No. 217 ; Edgar to the Commissioner, Dacca.
4. I. F. P., Political A, August 1874, No 24