

APO JANI AND THE ANGAMI NAGAS

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When that thorny problem of the management of the hills between Assam and Burma was being discussed in the Foreign Department of the Government of India after the Chin-Lushai expedition of 1890-91 a small note found its way into the file citing Captain John Butler's work among the Angami Nagas as an example of what personal influence can achieve in the pacification of hill peoples. The note was Colonel R. G. Woodthorpe's, a close friend and admirer of Butler, Deputy Commissioner of the Naga Hills from 1868 until his death in early 1876. Two decades ago as a young lieutenant in the Survey he had accompanied Butler in the numerous little expeditions in the Naga Hills; and was with him when the latter was mortally wounded in an ambush by the Lhotas of Pangti village. Woodthorpe was in fact expressing a view that was then and for decades thereafter widely held by those who knew Butler and the north-east.

John Butler was born in Assam.³ His father Major John Butler, the author of those delightful "Sketch of Assam (1847)" and "Travels and Adventure (1854)" had served in Assam for many years, a good part of it in the Naga frontier. His mother was the eldest daughter of Major William Simonds, another Assam Officer, who in 1835 had raised the Assam Sebundy Corps, now the 8th Gorkha Rifles (HQ 5-8 Gorkhas, Shillong). As a child Butler was known as "Johnny" and by the name of "Johnny Sahib". He was Woodthorpe tells us, "hailed on his return to Assam by those natives, great and small, who had known him as a boy." In the Naga Hills Butler quickly become a very popular officer. To the Angamis he was "Apo Jani" (Apo = father; Jani = Johnny), to whom to quote Colonel Woodthorpe again "these savage children could carry their troubles and their differences."

Johnny Butler inherited many of his father's qualities; his flair for writing, for instance. He wrote as extensively though his writings were more informed: J.H. Hutton considered them "by far the most valuable of the printed authorities on the Tengima Angamis."⁴ The same dash and energy distinguished the younger man. But as regards government's policy towards the Angamis the two could not have been more different. In his day Major Butler wielded considerable authority. It was his views which influenced the non-interference policy towards the Naga Hills after the tenth military expedition in 1850-51⁵ and which left the Angamis in Lord Dalhousie's famous but deplorable remark "to cut each other's throats to their heart's content." Colonel Woodthorpe provides on another occasion a clue to the younger Butler's attitude:

"When Captain Butler succeeded to this appointment (Deputy Commissioner, Naga Hills) being of active and energetic habits of mind and body, and not content to know his district from hearsay only, he organised a series of expeditions commencing in the cold weather of 1870-71 and carrying them on till his death in 1876."⁶

In Captain Butler's time the Naga Hills had more than its usual share of violence. The creation of the Naga Hills district and the occupation in 1866 of Samaguting, as Chumukedima was then known, by Lieutenant John Gregory, the first Deputy Commissioner, put an end to the Angami problem so far as Assam was concerned: "Raids upon North Cachar and Nowgong are now unknown", a later report was to declare. But the writ of the Deputy Commissioner ran, or was permitted to run, along what was really the fringe of the Angami territory. Beyond it inter-tribal warfare kept the hills constantly disturbed. So long as this did not disturb the

district the British were prepared to turn a blind eye to all the bloodshed and anarchy - "within hearing distance of Samaguting," as a later Deputy Commissioner put it. In the western end of the hills the peace of the British border was often broken, not so much by the Angamis, as by the various Kuki clans who had long ago migrated into the area from the south west.

The Kukis at about this time became a thorough nuisance to the local authorities by their repeated attacks upon their Katcha Naga neighbours. The clans involved included those from the colonies in North Cachar planted by the British in 1855-56 as a buffer to the timid Mikir villages to the eastward, then frequently harried by the powerful Angamis. This was what made non-interference less justifiable in the eyes of the local government. "How are we to treat our friends and proteges when they take, as they have now taken the aggressive" lamented Sir Stewart Bayley, Bengal's Political Secretary dealing with the eastern frontier tribes (and later Chief Commissioner of Assam). Lieutenant Governor Sir George Campbell's solution was to extend Butler's jurisdiction bringing under control both the Kukis and the Katcha Nagas, but leaving out the Angamis who were to be dealt with as hitherto only politically. No difficulty was anticipated:

"Captain Butler has certainly an effective influence in the villages south of the watershed which the boundary of 1842 places within his jurisdiction ... (and indeed) Butler is confident that if he is permitted to do so and is allowed a small increase of force he can control all the tribes about him."

The Government of India would not hear of any involvement in inter-tribal feuds or of the extension of the red line but was prepared to go along with

the Bengal Government as far as "influencing" the Kukis and Nagas was concerned. "The Political Agent (Butler's designation since early 1872) should," Bengal was informed, "endeavour to make his influence felt for good among them in the numberless ways which cannot be precisely described, but will suggest themselves to every capable Political Officer."¹⁰ This was not what Butler had in mind when he offered to control the tribes around him. It was no secret that he did not like the Lieutenant Governor's proposal because this meant that he would get a "poor uncultivated" tract and lose the Angami hills which he had described as a "perfect garden". Sir Stewart Bayley showed greater perception when he said of Butler.

"His great ambition is to be allowed really to control the Angamese."

The seventies of the last century was an unusually turbulent period for the Angami hills. Blood feuds in the villages had not only intensified but had extended as far as the borders of Manipur. A "much greater difficulty", as Assam's Commissioner Colonel Henry Hopkinson found to his dismay was "keeping the peace between the Angamis and the Manipuris." Butler saw no hope for peace unless he was authorised to step in as arbiter between the warring clans. Throughout 1871 and 1872 and several occasions thereafter he pointed out that non-interference as a policy was misunderstood by the tribes and might lead to serious difficulties. All he asked for was an increase, to three hundred men, of his police so that awards between clans could be enforced and the refractory reduced to submission. But as an office note in the Foreign Department declared:

"Government has declined to incur any further responsibility or expense, and blood feuds are still a matter with which we do not much concern ourselves beyond the offer of advice and remonstrance."¹¹

The Government of India's policy notwithstanding, not many, least of all in the Bengal Government, doubted Butler's capacity to bring the Angamis under subjection. It was a time when personal influence counted for much in the management of hill tribes. Colonel William McCulloch more than thirty years ago had so earned undying fame in the Manipur hills.¹² "Thangliana", the Lushai's endearing name for Colonel Tom Lewin, Superintendent of the Chittagong Hill Tracts, was at this moment acquiring his reputation among those tribes. So was Cachar's highly regarded Deputy Commissioner Edgar (Later Sir John Ware) amidst the Lushai chiefs south of his district. Butler was to the Naga Hills what these two officers were to the Lushai or McCulloch to Manipur. In June 1873, when the hills south of Sibsagar became very disturbed the Bengal Government in proposing an "active political control" over the tribes referred to Butler's success with the "really troublesome and uncontrollable" Angamis over whom they said he "has now most successfully a real political control." After punishing those guilty of raids into British territory and generally reducing them to order,

"(the) Lieutenant Governor would ... appoint Captain Butler, or some officer of his stamp, Political Agent to the Nagas generally, with at first one or two assistants, and would direct him gradually to establish over them such a control as he is establishing over the Angamees and other neighbouring tribes."¹³

Sir George Campbell's Naga policy - the gradual establishment of political control without the actual assertion of government - was undoubtedly inspired by the Deputy Commissioner. His proposal to the Government of India in September following just before Assam was constituted into a Chief Commissionership to move Butler's headquarters to a

"higher, healthier and more convenient spot where he might control the Angamis, the Lhotas and any other tribes that he may bring under his influence" was its logical sequel.¹⁴

What was only imperfectly if at all understood in Calcutta was the nature of the feuds at the root of practically all the disturbances involving the Angamis. "Although the village may be regarded as the unit of the political and religious sides of Angami life" wrote Hutton in his Angami Nagas "the real unit of the social life is the clan". And, he goes on to say:

"so distinct is the clan from the village that it forms a village in itself, often fortified within the village inside its boundaries and not infrequently at variance almost amounting to war with other clans in the same village."¹⁵

Briefly told the two broad divisions into which the Angamis are divided are the Kepezoma and the Kepepfuma. The Pezoma was split into the Thevoma and the Satsuma Kelhus, the latter being confined to only a few insignificant villages. The Thevoma and the Kronoma Kelhu of the Pepepfuma division were the most significant. The thino into which the Kelhu is again divided are the clans, or Khels, which Hutton, and many contemporary writers, talk about. The position of the thino and the division to which they belonged, in the nineteenth century at least, were as follows:

Kepezoma

Kepepfuma

Khonoma Village

Thevoma

Merhuma Semoma

Jotsoma Village

Tholoma

Tsoyama

Kroma

Mezoma Village

Phetsuna

Vihutsoma

Nyisema

The feuds of the Angamis were between thinos, rather than between the Kelhus. Captain Butler seldom found the whole of one village and war with the whole of another village. Invariably clan was pitted against clan:

"I have often seen (wrote Butler) a village split up into two hostile camps, one clan at deadly feud with another, whilst a third lives between them in a state of neutrality, and at perfect peace with both."¹⁶

The point of emphasis is that feuds among these exogamous clans did not remain within the confines of their village but were carried, as a result of ties of kinship to other villages. As analysis of the feuds should make this clear. A fuller study of Angami village polity is still awaited, but it was believed that "mere petty family quarrels, generally about land or water, being taken up by their respective clansmen breakout into bitter civil wars." But rivalries of a political nature was not entirely absent. The struggle between "Zhavilie" and "Niholy" of Mezoma in early 1850s in which the British got involved and which was really the cause of the ninth and tenth military expeditions, so ably

described in Sir Alexander Mackenzie's History clearly belonged to this genre. When it is considered that the supremacy of the Tengimahs, more specifically the Khonoma group, was acknowledged, or rather was forced to acknowledge, by all smaller villages including the "Chakromas" the spillover of clan rivalries is easily accounted for. At any rate in 1869-70 Butler while visiting Kenoma, often called Paplongmai, noted in his diary that he found the village all set for defence:

"This is all owing to the Semomal Khel of Khonomah having made a raid upon this village in revenge for the Merheman Khel of Khonomah having attacked their allies in Tapiemah. Kenomah (i.e. Papolonghai) only a few months ago was one of the most prosperous of the Kutcha Naga villages, containing 282 houses; but 72 were burnt to the ground in this last raid, and these only remain now 160 houses of the Semonah Khel and 50 of the Rehoot-zoomah." 17

To these feuds British methods of control introduced the new element of what is today called external support. Angami appreciation of firearms came rapidly enough induced in a large measure by the successive military expeditions.¹⁸ By the mid sixties the gun became much sought after in the Naga Hills. Hardly had John Gregory settled in Chumukedima as the first Deputy Commissioner, than men of the Semoma clan of Khonomah waited upon him seeking arms against their Merhuma rivals. They told Gregory that Pelhu, that indomitable leader of the resistance against the British ten years later, and his men with guns obtained from Manipur had killed four of their men while they in spite of their superiority in number were so far unable to kill a single man. Gregory's hands were effectively tied

by peremptory orders against meddling in these affairs. Rather than obliging the deputationist he turned his energies to plugging gun-running from Manipur.

What was probably not fully realised by Gregory then or perhaps even by Butler later, was that the history of the attempts by feuding parties to obtain more powerful assistance was more than ten years old. It began with the Manipuris. In early 1854 men from Khonoma brought in a Manipuri force, said to be fifteen hundred strong, and sacked Mezoma. The latter with several smaller villages in tow turned towards the British. The situation as it developed saw practically every village divided into two opposing parties, one inclined towards the British and the other towards the Manipuris, "each working man alliance to get aid in crushing the opposite faction."¹⁹ This was true, in its essential features, of the Naga Hills of Captain Butler's days but with two significant differences. In the first place Meitei interference was effectively checked; in the second the alliance and groupings between the clans constantly varied.

Given this situation it is doubtful if Butler could have established control over the Angamis as easily or quickly as he said he could in his reports. Certainly he had under-estimated the force required for the purpose. Colonel Hopkinson's observation in this regard turned out to be prophetic:

"I do not think that the additional force named by Captain Butler could be safely deemed adequate to the object in view. Admitting, though it is not certain that he might overrun the whole Angamee country and extort the submission of every village in it in the first instance with no larger a party than he speaks of having with him, I observe that a first

success of the kind is not always decisive with those hillmen; they have a way of letting their adversary win the first game; their opposition might commence only after it was thought to have been put down every where, and it might then assume a complexion so severe as to require the application of a considerable military force."²⁰

The senior Butler had ruled out the occupation of the Angami hills in 1850-51, before guns had revolutionised Naga warfare, on the grounds that it would require a large force with adequate transport and commissariat arrangements. The younger men's proposal to conquer and hold the same hills with only three hundred police thus seems strange. Butler's confidence seems to have grown out of the relative ease with which he had established his relations with the various villages. It is not "influence" but military power which his successor Captain James Johnstone recognises as the real reason for his hold upon the people: "in a military point of view" said Johnstone, "Butler's survey expeditions and his bold and rather truculent manner had¹ their effect in making him greatly respected ..."²¹ Influence Butler certainly had, but it is doubtful, when the very nature of the clans and their feuds are considered, if his popularity extended throughout the Angami country or even in whole of villages. Curiously Butler is called "father", not by the Pepfuma "Apvu" but by the Pezoma "Apo".

Notes & References

1. F(oreign) E(xternal) A(P)roceedings, National Archives of India New Delhi); September 1892: Nos. 9-62, KW 3, "Note on our dealings with savage tribes and the necessity of having them under our rule", RWG, 1 October 1891.

2. **General Report of the Topographical Surveys 1875-76**, Woodthorpe to Badgely, 15 June 1876, pp. 56ff.
3. For short notices of the Butlers, CE Buckland, **Dictionary of Indian Biography** (London, 1906); VCP Hodson, **List of Officers of the Bengal Army 1758-1834**, vii (London, 1927-47).
4. J. H. Hutton, **The Angami Nagas** (2nd Ed., London 1968) April 1, p. 333. Verrier Elwin, **The Nagas in the Nineteenth Century** (London 1969), p. 282, spoke of Butler's tour diaries as a model of that kind of writing.
5. See Major Butler's own account in his **Travels and Adventures**, p. 200ff.
6. R.G. Woodthorpe, "Notes on the Wild Tribes inhabiting the so called Naga Hills, on our North-East Frontier of India", **Journal of the Anthropological Institute**, v xi, pt.1, 1881, pp.52ff; Verrier Elwin, **Op.cit.**, p.48.
7. For a fuller account see Major John Butler, **Op.cit.**, Ch.vi, pp. 79-101; R. Stewart, "Notes on North Cachar", **Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal**, v xxiv, 1855; John Shakespeare, **The Lushai-Kuki Clans**, Pt. II, Ch. iii; and William Shaw, **Notes on the Thadon Kukis** (1929).
8. F P (olitical) P March 1872, Nos. 79-118; Bengal to Foreign Department, 4 September 1871.
9. **Ibid.** By this arrangement British territory would march upon that of the Angamis on at least two sides and "we should have too, the means of raising at any time a strong force of Kookies and Kutchas to act against the Angamis when necessary."
10. **Ibid;** FPP July 1872: Nos. 306-310; Foreign Department to Bengal, 17 July.
11. FPP August 1877: Nos. 120-132; see office precis (1875).
12. When Colonel Henry Godwin-Austen was surveying these hills during 1874-75 the Kukis "on becoming aware that he was an intimate friend of Colonel McCulloch, they have him every assistance that lay in their power. The old men asked after him, and they called him still their father ..." George Watt, "The Aboriginal Tribes, of Manipur", **Journal of the Anthropological Institute**, v xvi, 1887; p. 70. See McCulloch's account of these

- tribes in his **Account of the Valley of Munnipore** (Calcutta 1859). Also Lewin's **A Fly on the Wheel** (London, 1912). For Edgars work, Alexander Mackenzie, **History of the Relations of the Government with the Hill Tribes of the North East Frontier of Bengal** (Calcutta 1884), Ch xxi; App K. **Passim**.
13. FPA July 1873: Nos. 469-507; Bengal to Foreign Department, 14 June 1873.
 14. For a fuller discussion see H. K. Barpujari, **Problem of the Hill Tribes: North East Frontier**, viii (Gauhati 1981), Chs. ii-iv.
 15. J.H. Hutton, **Op.cit.**, Part II, pp. 109-117; Hutton provides greater details of the Sub-division among the Angamis than any other writer.
 16. John Butler "Rough Notes on the Angamis Nagas", **Journal of the Asiatic Society**, 1875, v xliv, No.4.
 17. FPP January 1874: Nos. 69-77. **Brief memorandum on the Naga Country**. Butler continues: "Thus it would appear that in the short space of 38 years this village has been actually reduced to less than three-fourths of its original size, and I have little doubt that many other villages shared a similar fate".
 17. B(engal) J(udicial) P(roceedings, West Bengal State Archives, Calcutta) July 1868: No.159. Gregory to Hopkinson, 17 June, who further writes, "Nothing can exceed the eagerness with which they try to possess themselves of weapons of this kind, and they have hitherto been kept in check by the advantage we have over them in weapons: man for man the Tengeemahs of the Upper range are equal in courage and strength to any races of India, and armed with fire arms, would prove as formidable enemies as the tribes on our North West Frontier."
 19. H.K. Barpujari, **Op.cit.**, vii (Gauhati 1978), p. 40f.
 20. FPP March 1872: Nos. 79-118; Hopkinson to Bengal, 10 May 1871.