

BIRENDRA CHANDRA
CHAKRAVORTY

British
relations
with the
hill tribes
of Assam
SINCE 1858



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hard to prepare his doctoral dissertation on the British relations with the virile and freedom-loving tribes that dot the hilly outskirts and inner tracts of Assam. He had felt, even before 1964, that the North-East Frontier of India would be of prime importance in her international and frontier relations and swamp the bogey of the North-West frontier. That premonition is now a bristling reality.

Besides working for about 5 years in an Assam College as a Lecturer and also his association with the Assam Regimental Centre, he became the Head of the Department of History, Charu Chandra College at Calcutta when we published the first edition of this standard work on the subject. Soon after he joined the Government of India on a very significant assignment.

The author had had opportunities to come in close contact with the hill people of Assam—Naga, Lushai, Garo, Khasi etc. He felt that there was no standard work on their relations with the British. His imagination was fired by the human panorama and the intricate machinations he could detect even then which generated the explosive situation as we witness today. Freedom movement of the Nagas was launched in 1955.

The author found that some work, however sketchy, had been done in this field over 1826-58. So he took up the next phase beginning 1858 and writing a connected account till the close of the 19th century. He has looked into many unpublished records and the materials in the Foreign Proceedings of the Government of India preserved in the National Archives and in the Assam Government Records Office at Shillong have been intensively used. The result has been a solid, authoritative and standard work on the subject and we feel proud to present a reprint at this critical juncture of our history.

**BRITISH RELATIONS WITH THE
HILL TRIBES OF ASSAM
SINCE 1858**

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SINCE 1858

BIRENDRA CHANDRA CHAKRAVORTY, M.A. D.Phil.



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To
My Parents

SRI PARESH CHANDRA CHAKRAVORTY

AND

SRI SATYABHAMA DEBI

PREFACE

A large number of virile and freedom-loving tribes dot the hilly outskirts as well as the inner tracts of Assam. From 1826 onwards the British Government had an uphill task to stop their incessant attacks. The second half of the nineteenth century witnessed the gradual establishment of British rule over these tribal belts in the teeth of stiff resistance. As there is no standard research work on the political relations between these tribes and the British Government over that period I have made an attempt to study them and show the development of British policy towards these tribal communities of Assam.

The materials of my work have been collected from published and unpublished sources, especially from the Foreign Proceedings of the Government of India preserved in the National Archives, New Delhi, and in the Assam Government Records Office, Shillong.

During the five years of my work in Assam as a lecturer in a local College and also during my pre-commission training in the Assam Regimental Centre, Shillong, I came in contact with the hill people of Assam-Naga, Lushai, Garo, Khasi, etc., and my imagination was fired by the human panorama that these tribes of Assam and the borderland present. Gradually I made up my mind to make an enquiry into their political relations with the British Government. As some work has already been done in this field over the period 1826-1858, I took up the next period, beginning with 1858, and ending with the close of the last century.

The tribes of the north-eastern frontier of India had not been of much political significance when I started the work in 1954. But of late they have acquired a great political importance with the launching of a freedom movement by the Nagas in 1955, and more so, very recently, as a result of the Chinese incursion into the Indian borderland. The problems of the North-East Frontier are now matters of current and topical interest. When I selected the subject of my research

in 1953 I had a foreboding that the North-East Frontier of independent India would be of prime importance in her international and frontier relations. Indeed, the bogey of the North-West Frontier of British India would be transferred to the North-Eastern frontier of free India. (That foreboding is now being tested by current history.) But to understand the present-day tribal problems of this frontier a study of the past relations between the British Government and the hill tribes of Assam is necessary.

This publication has been adapted from my doctoral thesis "British Relations with the Hill Tribes of Assam, 1858-1900". In order to bring the story down to the present time I have added a new chapter entitled "Postscript" and a map of NEFA. I have left 8 appendices out of my original work and made some minor alterations in the original text here and there.

I must be failing in my duty if I do not mention the names of the two learned Doctors under whom I worked. One was late Dr. Indu Bhushan Banerjee, who left this world before half of my work was complete, and the other is Dr. N. K. Sinha, Asutosh Professor of Medieval and Modern History, Calcutta University. I must also record my indebtedness to Dr. R. K. Dasgupta of Delhi University, Prof. Tripurari Chakrabarty, and Dr. A. C. Banerjee of Calcutta University for their advice and encouragement. Sincerest thanks are also due to Prof. Sushanta Banerjee, M.A., my friend and colleague, for reading the proofs and preparing the Index, to Sri K. L. Mukhopadhyay, the learned publisher, Sri J. C. Sarkhel, the printer, Sri Atul K. Roy, cartographer, for their technical assistance and advice, and to my younger brother, Sri Rabindra Chakravarty, for seeing the book through the Press. I also remember the co-operation and kindness shown to me by the staff of the National Library, Calcutta, the National Archives, New Delhi, and the Assam Govt. Records Office, Shillong, during my work at their places.

Calcutta,

1st January, 1964.

B. CHAKRAVORTY

A NOTE ON THE BIBLIOGRAPHY

There is hardly any history on British relations with the hill tribes of Assam covering the second half of the nineteenth century. Of course, some monographs and notes are available on different hill tribes of this part of India. But these are anthropological studies or memoirs and diaries of some frontier officers rather than historical writings as such. Regarding these, reference may be made to J. P. Mills' "The Lhota Nagas", T. C. Hodson's "The Naga Tribes of Manipur", J. H. Hutton's "The Sema Nagas", W. C. Smith's "The Ao Naga Tribe of Assam", and Lt. Col. Shakespear's "The Lushai Kuki Clans."

The sources of this book may be examined under five heads :

- (1) Unpublished official records preserved in the National Archives, New Delhi, (2) Unpublished Official Records preserved by the Records Office, Government of Assam, (3) Published Papers, (4) Published Historical Books, and (5) Publications of general interest.

Unpublished official records, again, may be classified as (a) Political Proceedings, (b) Secret Proceedings, (c) Minutes of the Governor-Generals, (d) Correspondence with the Chief Commissioners, Assam, (e) Judicial Proceedings, (f) Revenue Proceedings, (g) Foreign Department Consultations, and (h) 'Assam Proceedings' belonging to the Bengal Government, Government of India, and the Assam Government respectively. The abovementioned documents may be studied in the National Archives. Of these documents the Political Proceedings marked 'External A' have been liberally used for my thesis. This source has thrown sufficient light on many important things, for instance, the Anglo-Bhutanese relations in connection with Bhutanese raids on the villages of North Kamrup, gun-running in the Naga Hills, the punitive expedition against the trans-Dikhu Nagas in 1888-9, the Abor Expe-

dition of 1894 with special reference to General Brackenbury's comments, outbreak of the Eastern Lushais in 1892, the Bebejiya Mishmi Expedition of 1899, the Aka Hills Expedition of 1883-4 and the dispute between the Akas and the rubber traders of Assam.

Certain 'Foreign Proceedings', preserved by the Records Office, Government of Assam, of which no copies are found in the National Archives, are a valuable mine of information. The documents of the Assam Records Office have referred to many sporadic tribal raids besides dwelling upon certain important matters like the violation of the 'inner line' of Lakhimpore by the Singhpos, the Punitive Expedition against the Mezami Nagas in 1896, the Somra Expedition of 1897, demarcation of the boundary between Chittagong Hill Tracts and Lushai Hills, demarcation of the boundary between the Chin Hills and the Lushai Hills, the rising of the Western Lushais in 1890, South Lushai Hills Expedition of 1891, and so on.

Amongst published papers A. Mackenzie's "Memorandum on the North-East Frontier of Bengal," 1869, Capt. J. Butler's "Report on the exploration of the Angami Naga Country," 1874, Woodthorpe's "Naga Hills Expedition," 1877, Damant's "Report on the Administration of the District of the Naga Hills" (1879), "Papers relating to the frontier tribes of North-East Frontier (Calcutta 1855)," "Selection of Papers (1825-46) regarding the hill tracts between Assam and Burma and on the upper Brahmaputra," Calcutta 1873, and "Assam since the expulsion of the Burmese," published in Calcutta Review, Vol. XIV, January to June, 1853, may be cited. Over and above these, articles like F. M. Bailey's "Journey through a portion of South-Eastern Tibet and the Mishmi Hills," published in Geographical Journal (Vol. XXXIX), G. Dunbar's "Tribes of the Brahmaputra Valley," published in the Journal of Royal Society of Arts (Vol. LXIII), H. I. Halliday's "The Abors of Assam," published in United Empire (Vol. XIX), C. H. Hesselmeier's "The Hill Tribes of the Northern Frontier of Assam," published in the Journal of Asiatic Society

of Bengal (Vol. XXXVII), H. L. Jenkins' "Notes on a Trip across the Patkoi Range from Assam to the Hookong Valley", C. H. Lepper's "Notes on the Singpho and Khampti Country, North-Eastern Frontier," published in the Proceedings of Asiatic Society of Bengal (1882), and a number of others—though shorter in length—, are quite informative as far as the land and the people of this frontier are concerned. Reports of many military and Survey expeditions have been made use of for their authenticity and vividness.

In the fourth category, there are not many books among which special mention may be made of Sir E. Gait's "History of Assam," 1926, Dr. R. Lahiri's "Annexation of Assam," 1954, Sir A. Mackenzie's "History of the Relations of the Government with the Hill Tribes of the North-East Frontier of Bengal," 1884, R. Reid's "History of the Frontier Areas Bordering on Assam—from 1883-1941," 1942, and L. W. Shakespear's "History of Upper Assam, Upper Burma, and the North East Frontier," 1914. A. Mackenzie's "History of the Relations of the Government with the Hill Tribes of the North-east Frontier of Bengal" is a very useful book. It is based on some research of a lot of official records covering the period, 1826-1884. Reid's "History of the Frontier Areas Bordering on Assam from 1883-1941" is an attempt to supplement Mackenzie's above-mentioned book. It is a compilation of notes made by a Governor of Assam in his spare time intended to be used by the members of the Administration. The book throws some light on the development of the relations between the British Indian Administration and the Hill Tribes of Assam during 1883-1941.

Different kinds of books fall in the last category, for example, J. P. Wade's "Geographical Sketch of Assam", 1805, W. Robinson's "A Descriptive Account of Assam" 1841, U. G. Bower's "Naga Path", 1950, A Hamilton's "In Abor Jungles", 1912, R. B. Pemberton's "Report on the Eastern Frontier of British India", 1835, and the like, which give one a general idea of the geography of Assam as well as some

account of the tribes therein ; J. T. Moore's "Twenty Years in Assam", 1901, A. Macleish's "The Frontier Peoples of India" 1931, J. Johnstone's "My experiences in Manipur and the Naga Hills", etc., are useful memoirs ; and J. C. Geddes' "Notes on the Frontier of the Eastern Dooars", 1865 and Capt. G. Beresford's "Notes on the North-East Frontier of Assam", 1881, are of some political interest. Besides, F. M. Bailey's "China—Tibet—Assam", 1945, C. Bell's "Tibet—Past and Present", 1924, J. C. White's "Sikkim and Bhutan", 1909, V. Elwin's "India's North-East Frontier in the Nineteenth Century", 1959 etc. have been found useful in as much as they have discussed the British relations with Tibet, Bhutan, Sikkim, and to some extent, China.

About the general policy followed by the British Government towards the hill tribes of Assam and its north-eastern frontier little has been said in the published treatises as well as in the unpublished records. Perhaps in those days nobody gave any serious thought to the tribal policy of the Government as regards our eastern frontier, and everybody was absorbed with the tribal problems of the then North-West Frontier. Indeed, the tribes of Assam and the north-eastern frontier were yet to come in the limelight of political importance or international significance. R. Reid in his "History of the Frontier Areas Bordering on Assam" has in some places dealt with the policy adopted by the Government in different periods towards different tribes individually, but he has not traced the general policy as such. J. C. White and Charles Bell in their respective works "Sikkim and Bhutan" and "Tibet—Past and Present" have occasionally made some observations on the Anglo-Tibetan, Anglo-Bhutanese, or Anglo-Chinese relations, but they too have not said anything about British policy, in general, towards the tribes of Assam. I have made my humble attempt with the help of different sources, published and unpublished, to upturn that virgin soil: besides discussing the British policy towards the tribes at different stages separately, I have tried to unfold the general texture of British policy as developed

in course of years by the local administration and the Supreme Government acting and reacting on each other's views.

It should be noted here that it is very difficult to consult maps of the hill tracts of our north-east frontier. The books on this frontier hitherto published hardly contain any detailed map of the tribal areas, and the few maps that have found place in Government records only illustrate very small regions, e.g. a border. In respect of maps relevant to my subject the most illuminating publication I have come across is C. U. Aitchison's "Treaties, Engagements and Sanads" (vol. 2, Calcutta-1909) which contains not only some elaborate maps of this region but also some important "imperial" as well as international engagements. Map No. 1 is after drawing by L. W. Shakespear, Col., 2nd Goorkhas; Map Nos. 2, 3, and 4 have been adapted from maps of External 'A' Proceedings.

A full-length bibliography is appended at the end of the text.

Supplementary	...	Suppl.
Superintendent of Police	...	S. P.
Shakespear	...	Shakespear
R. Reid's "History of the Frontier Areas	...	R. Reid
Bordering on Assam from 1883-1941"	...	
(Shillong, 1942)	...	
Royal Geographical Society, London	...	R. G. S.
L. W. Shakespear's "History of Upper	...	
Assam, Upper Burma and North-	...	
Eastern Frontier" (London, 1914)	...	
Proceeding	...	Prog.
Political	...	Pol.
Bengal, Cal. 1884	...	
Tribes of the North-East Frontier of	...	
the Government with the Hill	...	
A. Mackenzie's "History of the Relations	...	Mackenzie
Judicial	...	Jud.
London	...	
Journal of Royal Society of Arts	...	J. R. S. A.
Journal of Royal Asiatic Society	...	J. R. A. S. B.

ABBREVIATIONS

A. S. P.	...	Assistant Superintendent of Police.
Buckland	...	C. E. Buckland's "Bengal under the Lieutenant-Governors", Vol. I, Calcutta 1901.
C. C.	...	Chief Commissioner.
D. C.	...	Deputy Commissioner.
Ext.	...	External.
For.	...	Foreign.
Gait.	...	E. Gait's "A History of Assam", Cal. 1926,
J. A. I.	...	Journal of Anthropological Institute, London.
J. A. S. B.	...	Journal of Asiatic Society of Bengal, Calcutta.
J. R. A. I	...	Journal of Royal Anthropological Institute. London.
J. R. A. S. B.	...	Journal of Royal Asiatic Society of Bengal, Calcutta.
J. R. S. A.	...	Journal of Royal Society of Arts, London.
Judl.	...	Judicial.
Mackenzie	...	A. Mackenzie's "History of the Relations of the Government with the Hill Tribes of the North-East Frontier of Bengal", Cal. 1884.
Pol.	...	Political.
Prog.	...	Proceeding.
Reid.	...	R. Reid's "History of the Frontier Areas Bordering on Assam from 1883-1941" (Shillong, 1942).
R. G. S.	...	Royal Geographical Society, London.
Shakespear	...	L. W. Shakespear's "History of Upper Assam, Upper Burma and North-Eastern Frontier" (London, 1914).
Suppl.	...	Supplementary.
S. P.	...	Superintendent of Police.

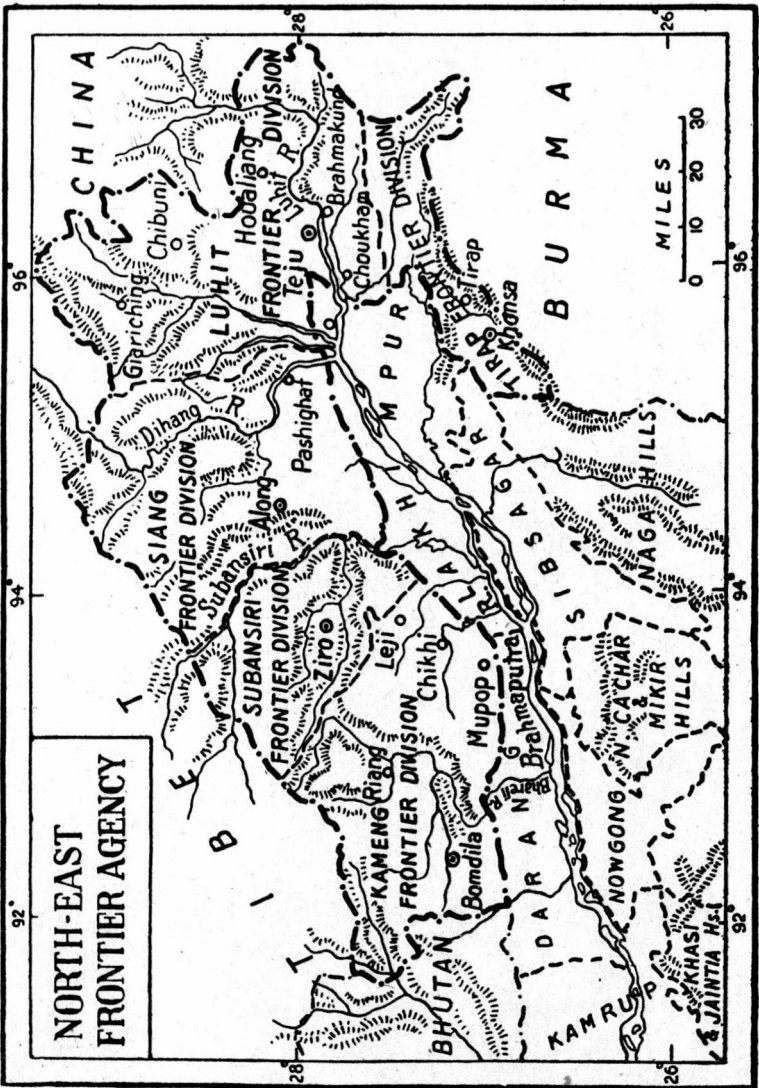
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*Taken from unpublished Official Records.



CHAPTER I

THE TRIBES AND EARLY CONTACT WITH THEM UP TO 1858

Assam, the north-east frontier State of India, is a colourful and picturesque land. It is colourful not only from natural and geographical points of view but also from the standpoint of racial patterns. The North-East and the North-West Frontiers of British India had more or less similar physical appearance. Both were characterised by rugged hills and deep gorges, and inhabited by virile, warlike and freedom-loving tribes, with this major climatic difference that the North-East frontier enjoyed a much higher rainfall than its north-western counterpart. G. Dunbar has given a fine description of the Abor-Mishmi territory in the following words: "It would be difficult to find more tremendous inhabited country than the home of the Abors and their neighbours. A close succession of thickly wooded mountains, their sides as steep as the roof or the walls of a house, rise higher and higher northwards to the main Snowy Range. Upto the furthest limits of the Indian monsoon these highlands are drenched under very nearly the most torrential rainfall in the world... One of the greatest rivers in Asia thunders in its deepest gorges on the long journey from Tibet, through a labyrinth of mountains echoing with streams, down to the wide expanse of the Assam Valley and out into the Bay of Bengal. The razor-edged foot-hills are covered with dense sub-tropical forest, where orchids grow on the branches above and the thick undergrowth is infested with leeches... Midway between the foot-hills and the main Snowy Range there is a narrow zone of open valleys, where flourishing villages are set amidst their fields. This is the heart of the tribal country. It is beyond the influence of Assam with its Indian and

western forms of Civilisation and it is too far south to be affected by the religious ideas and customs of Tibet".¹

Ethnologically, the hill tribes of the North-East frontier are primarily of the Tibeto-Mongoloid stock with a sprinkling of Austric and Dravidian blood².

Though the account of the British relations with the hill tribes of Assam has been given in this book chronologically, for the sake of an easy understanding it has been deemed proper at the outset to have a bird's eye view of these tribes in their geographical juxtaposition. It will be convenient in locating the lands of these tribes if we follow the course of the Brahmaputra towards its source up to Sadiya and turning south take up the eastern hill tracts and then move westward along the southern ranges of the Assam Valley.

Covering the southern base of the Bhutan hills there stretches from west to east a tract of fertile land ranging from ten to twenty miles in breadth, extending from the Dhansiri river in Assam, on the east, to the river Tista, or the frontier of Darjeeling district of Bengal, on the west, and sloping downwards to the plains. This tract is linked up with the hills above by a number of hill passes, called 'duars' by the local people. Of these, eleven are situated between the Tista and Monas, and the remaining on the frontier of Darrang and Kamrup districts of Assam. The possession of these slopes was always a bone of contention between the rulers of Bhutan and those of Assam, and the inhabitants of these unhealthy, malarious tracts were mostly the Bhutanese. These Bhutanese called 'Bhutias' in Assam and Bengal, are racially of the Tibetan stock³. They are brave and sturdy, and, though ordinarily peaceful, can prove their war-like qualities when necessary. The most easterly tribe of the Bhutias are the Thebengeas who live in the region near the river Gabharu. These tribes trade with our people in the annual fairs which are held during the winter months in the border areas. They sell ponies, dogs, bulls, handloom products of cotton and wool, precious stones and herbs to

the Indian traders and purchase from the latter all sorts of cheap industrial commodities.

That part of the Eastern Himalayas which lies between the $92^{\circ}40''$ and $95^{\circ}30''$ East Longitudes, or, in other words, between the eastern boundary of the land of the Tawang and the Khampa Bhutias, and the Dibang river,—having Assam on its south and Tibet on its north—constitutes the habitat of four tribes—the Aka, the Miji, the Dafla and the Abor. Three of these tribes, the Aka, the Miji and the Dafla, occupy the hills on the southern side of the backbone of the snow range of the Himalayas; the Abors alone dwell on both sides of it.

Eastward of the Bhutias, and between the Gabharu and the Bharali (or, more correctly the Desseraï) rivers live the Akas, called by themselves Hrusso. Roughly speaking, the Aka territory lies between the parallels of 27° and 28° north latitudes and between 92° and 93° east longitudes. The Akas are divided into two clans—the Hazari-Khawa Akas (or “eaters of a thousand hearths”) and the Kapachors (or “Thieves who lurk amid the cotton plants”).⁴ These two clans live apart, and at times fight with each other. They intermarry also, but in all other respects behave towards each other as separate tribes. Of late years the Akas by intermarriage have brought into existence a third clan known as the Miri Akas, but the latter are not recognised as belonging to the Aka tribe proper. They also intermarry with the Mijis to the north, but seem to have no social intercourse with the Daflas or with the Bhutias. They assert that they came originally from the south-east of the Assam Valley, and this might be true, since their language assimilates more with that of the tribes bordering Manipur than with that of their immediate neighbours, the Daflas and the Bhutias.⁵ They also claim that they are of noble origin, and every free Aka considers himself more or less a ‘Raja’. “‘Noblesse oblige’ is clearly marked in their deportment, if not in their conduct.”⁶ The Kapachors established certain control over the inhabitants of the Balipara Mouza who had to provide them with free board and lodge whenever it pleased the Akas to visit the

plains and also to pay them an annual tribute in the shape of pigs, fowls, and silk cloths.

The land of the Hazarikhawas is bounded on the north by the territories of the Bhutias and Mijis, on the south by the district of Darrang, on the east by the territory of the Kapachors, and on the west by the Tengapani river and Bhutan. The Kapachor territory is bounded on the north by the Mijis and the Digeng river, on the south by Darrang, on the east by the Phusung river and the Miris, and on the west by the Hazarikhawas. There are two passes into the Aka country from the plains, viz. the Bharali and the Balakpung. Three to four days' climbing over thickly wooded hills, nearly pathless, stumbling up the dry bed of the Bharali and other less important streams, thickly strewn with large boulders, clambering up the steep faces of rocks, holding on by cane ropes, bring the traveller to the Aka villages. But one can choose a better road, which is somewhat circuitous, through Bhutan and reach the Aka land. This road leads first to the settlement of the Sat-Rajas due north, about 4 days' march, and then to the Aka territory due east, to be reached in another two days.

The Akas are great agriculturists, and no idlers. They grow different food crops,—tobacco, chilli, job's tears and various kinds of vegetables by means of jhum' cultivation. They also hunt wild beasts and birds. They do not, like the Angami Nagas, try for terrace cultivation, probably owing to the precipitous nature of their hills. They trade with Bhutan and Assam. From the former they purchase warm clothes, ornaments, 'daos' and swords, and to the latter they sell rubber.

The Akas are demon worshippers. They believe in the existence of various spirits—good and evil—who may harm them if not properly propitiated. In the Aka land corpses are buried and not burnt. Some years back a priest from Lhasa preached Buddhism amongst them, and set up a monastery. Though polygamists, the Akas show considerable respect to their women. They are hospitable and not

inclined to criminal acts. Besides bows and arrows the Aka carries a long sword, the blade being 4 feet long and the handle about 4 inches. The Aka stockades are strong and well-built. Macgregor thinks that the Akas do not take kindly to the warpath. The importance of the Akas lies in their geographical position between Assam and the numerous Miji clans over whom they exert a great influence by acting as middlemen in trade. As the Mijis are not in the habit of visiting Assam they purchase Assamese silk and cotton cloth from the Akas. Captain Maxwell, Political Officer with the Aka Field Force, 1894, observed: "Of all the Savage races on the Northern Frontier of the Assam Province, the Akas have been most contumacious and troublesome."⁸

Eastward of the Bharali river up to the upper courses of the Sunderi and to the north of Naoduar (the Nine Passes) in Darrang and Cheduar (the Six Passes) in Lakhimpur live the various cognate tribes called the Daflas. They are more or less a tribe of the outer hills inhabiting the southern slopes of a spur of the Himalayas which divides the Bharali from the Subansiri drainage. The spur is well defined as far as the Lollupo peak and at this point it is split into a number of minor valleys and spurs among which the Daflas have set up their villages. On the west a very distinct ridge coming down from Lollupo has separated the tribe from the Akas who inhabit the basin of the Bharali. Similarly on the east another ridge sloping down also from Lollupo has divided the Daflas from the Miris of the Khru (an affluent of the Subansiri) and the Subansiri. The interior of the triangle, called the Dafla Hills, formed by these two spurs, is drained by the Ranga or Sunderi and the Dikrang. The Dikrang has a small tributary from the west called the Borpani, and further west are the still smaller streams of the Buroi and its tributaries—the Poma and the Papum, and the Borgang. The general direction of these rivers is easterly, and the valleys lie east and west.

The Daflas are thus separated from the Akas on the west and the Miris on the east and the north. Their boundary on

the south is the 'Duphlaghur', an old road running along the frontier from south-west to north-east. No name has yet been assigned to the range dividing the Ranga valley from the Dikrang valley, but that on the southern side of the Dikrang is known as the Misr Parbat. The inhabited hills vary from 2000 to 7000 feet in height, and a great portion of them have been cleared for cultivation by cutting and burning the forest. Many of the lateral valleys on the banks of the Ranga have been terraced and irrigated, and consequently permanent rice cultivation is possible. The northern part of the Ranga valley is an open grassy land, and from here a low pass leads to the Khru valley.

The Daflas call themselves "Bangni" meaning "men".⁹ The Daflas who live on the border of Darrang are now generally known as Paschim (Western) Daflas, and those inhabiting the North Lakhimpur borders are called Tagin Daflas. Their features are decidedly Mongolian, and their language is closely allied to the Miri tongue. Their form of Government is oligarchical, there being sometimes eighty chiefs in one clan. The Daflas are, however, not so much a single homogeneous tribe as a horde of petty clans independent of each other and generally incapable of a combined action. They tattoo their faces, the reason assigned being that it will enable them to be recognised in the next world.

To the north-east of the Daflas live the Miris and Abors. The Miris and Abors belong to the same tribal stock and originally came from the same habitat. While the Abors being the later wave of immigrants into the border hills of Assam have retained more of their pristine savagery and hardihood, the Miris have been polished by their association with the plains and the sedentary habits of civilisation. The Abors and Miris are very much alike in all material respects, and the intercourse between them is constant and intimate. In Assamese the word Abor means "independent" as contrasted with Bori meaning "subject." But the Abors call themselves "Abuit" and all foreigners "Madgu" (this includes

Tibetans also). The Miris inhabit the plains and lower hills along the north banks of the Brahmaputra from the Sisi 'mouza' (a land revenue area) of Lakhimpur to the Dihang; numerous Hill Miris live in the hills west of the Dirjmoo, which separates the Hill Miris from the Abors.

Thus, the Hill Miris are bounded on the south-east by the Dirjmoo, on the north-east by a low range of hills forming the southern boundary of the Dihang valley, on the south by North Lakhimpur Sub-division; and on the south-west by the hills to the east of the Ranga river which separates them from the Daflas. The Subansiri river divides the Miri Hills into almost equal parts east and west, and its two main tributaries—the Sidan and the Kamla—divide the hills north and south. While the Sidan flows from a comparatively low range on the south-west of the Dihang, the Kamla flows from the high mountains of the north-west. The Miris inhabit the low hills overlooking these rivers, but do not appear to live in an altitude above 6000 feet. Looking due north great snow-capped mountains shut out the view; but to the north-east low passes give a view over the Abor country and the Dihang valley. Generally speaking, the Miri hills are more rugged than the neighbouring Dafla hills; passing through them is very difficult due to the existence of steep ascents and descents.

G. W. Dun has made a zonal classification of the Miris. According to him the Ghyghasi Miris inhabit the country to the west of the Dirjmoo and to the north of the Sisi 'mouza' of North Lakhimpur, the Ghasi Miris live between river Dhol and the Subansiri, the Sarak Miris live in the outer range between the Subansiri and the Ranga, the Panibotia and Tarbotia clans inhabit the hills to the west of the Subansiri, and the Anka tribe, or Tenai Miris, possess fifteen villages on a tableland to the north-west of the Miri hills, beyond the watershed of the Ranga river. The Ghyghasi and Ghasi Miris may be considered as the same clan, and they are regarded as such by other Miris. It is doubtful whether the Tenai Miris are really Miris. They may be altogether a

separate tribe. They trade with the Daflas and supply them with salt.

Mr. G. W. Dun has also referred to the Lhokaptra clan as one of the neighbours of the Miris. "The Lhokaptra or the people of Lhokhalo inhabit the country south of the Sanpo, and were formerly known as the Tacponi."¹⁰ They are believed to be a harmless and industrious people who avoid intercourse with their neighbours of Tibet and the Miri Hills.

The Abors live further east in the hills between the Dihang and the Dibang, the Bor Abors occupying the ranges of the interior. The Dobah Abors living in the hills above the Sisi call themselves Dobahs, but are called Galongs by Miris. The country of the Abors and Galongs is bounded by the Subansiri on the west, by the Sisseri and the Dibang on the east, and lies in the highlands between the Himalayas proper and the plains of Assam. G. Dunbar has found it convenient to call the people of the Dihang valley 'Abor,' the people between that watershed and the Subansiri 'Galong,' and the tribes living between the Subansiri and the 'Borheli'¹¹ 'Dafla.' Their northern neighbours are the Boris and Membas. The Minyongs (who are Abor), the Boris and the Karkas (who are Galong) meet in the Siyom valley.

The Abors living on the left or east bank of the Dihang up to the Dibang are called Bor Abors, or "Great" Abors, and are said to be the origin of the whole tribe, especially of the Pasi and the Meyong Abors. Those occupying the right bank of the Dihang are called Pasi-Meyong. The real habitat of the Abors is the lofty mountain ranges, from 8,000 to 12,000 feet high, between Assam and Tibet, whence their super-abundant population, for the want of room and land, have overflowed into the valley of Assam through the gorge of the Dihang, and spread east and west to the lower ranges of hills on the outskirts of the plains. The Abors are agriculturists who keep 'mithan' and other cattle. Though their villages are reported to be open and undefended, their sites are chosen on inaccessible spots. The Abors arm them-

selves with bows, poisoned arrows, and cross bows, and are said to be good shots. They also carry spears, heavy short swords, and long knives.

The Abors claimed an absolute overlordship on the Plain Miris and an inalienable right to all the fish and gold in the Dihang river, while the Hill Miris acquired an acknowledged right of Posa¹² on the people inhabiting the cultivated tracts of Bordoloni, Sisi and Demaji. "They (the Abors) are in a manner insolent and rude beyond all other tribes of this frontier."¹³ There is little doubt that the Abors, all Miri clans and the Daflas are one great tribe, quite different from their neighbours on their east and west namely the Bhutias and the Mishmis, but bearing a strong resemblance to the Nagas. The Abors extend northwards upto the frontier of Tibet, with which land they trade and communicate. Large numbers of trade marts are scattered along the Indo-Tibetan border. Trade routes between the Yamne and the Subansiri may be summarised as follows: North of Latitude 28°15' trade flows into the country from the north; below this there is a zone into which trade percolates both north and south; further below goods are either purchased directly from the Kayah's¹⁴ shops scattered along the Assam frontier or are brought in on the strong tide of trade that, coming south from Tibet through the Mishmi country, sweeps along the lower Abor hills to the Subansiri. As most Abors wear dark red woollen coats and other articles of clothing and ornaments obtained from Tibet these distinguish them from the Mishmis, whom they otherwise very much resemble in appearance, dress, manners, and customs.

Beyond the Abors eastward live the various tribes of Mishmis. It may be said on a rough estimate that all the hills bordering the north-east corner of Assam are inhabited by these hillmen. From the Dibang to the Digaru river in the hills to the north of Sadiya, are to be found the Chulikata Mishmis, the most dangerous of all the Mishmi clans, who derive their epithet—Chulikata (meaning "Cropped hair")—from their fashion of cutting the hair square cross the fore-

head. From the Digaru westward and on both sides of the Brahmaputra, reaching the Tibetan frontier on the north and the Nemlang river on the south, live various other Mishmi tribes.—the Tain, the Mezho and the Maro clans. "The Mishmis to the west of the Du river, an affluent of the Brahmaputra above Brahmakund, trade with the British possessions, and are in the habit of constant intercourse with us".¹⁵ These are the Tain or the Digaru tribe¹⁶. The tribes which live to the north-east of the Du and trade with Tibet are the Mezho Mishmis. The Maro are found to the south of the Brahmaputra in scattered settlements mixed up with Khamti and Singpho villages. The men of the interior and higher ranges are of good physique, and some of them are very fair, with a strong Mongolian cast of features. All Mishmis, men and women, are habitual smokers, and they smoke bamboo pipes very similar to those of the Lhota Nagas. Like most hill tribes they are very dirty in habits. Slavery is not an institution with them, nor do they lay claim to 'Posa', and so there is little difficulty in dealing with them, as compared with the Abors.

The Digarus unlike the Chulikatas wear their hair very long and tied in a knot on the top of their heads, and most of them wear caps, made of the skins of martens, hill-foxes, etc, and also a kind of waistcoat made from the skin of the 'takin', an animal resembling a cross between domestic cattle and a goat, and found only on high snowy ranges. They are wilder looking than the Chulikatas, and are supposed to inhabit the highest ranges just below the snowline. The furthest tribes that visit Sadiya take a month or more in making the journey. That the Digarus have direct or indirect intercourse with Chinese provinces is evident from the Chinese coins, metal tobacco-pipes and other Chinese goods they possess. Like the Chulikatas they too are averse to allowing strangers to pass through their territory. The Mishmis cultivate Mishmi 'teeta' and take it to Tibet, where it is said to be in great demand. They likewise take musk-deer pods, dyed cloths and skins of tigers, bears, deer, leopards, otters, etc,

and these together with the Mishmi teeta, they barter for Sikra 'daos',* cattle, guns, pistols, powder and caps¹⁷. Towards the close of the 19th century the Abors ousted the Mishmis from certain areas between the Sisseri and the Dibang, and established settlements at Bomjur.

To the north of Sadiya and to the south-east of the Mishmis live the Khamtis who were originally from Bor Khamti, the mountainous region interposing between Assam and the valley of Irrawaddy. They are of Shan descent and follow Buddhism¹⁸. After the cessation of hostilities between the Khamtis and the British Indian Government in 1843 many of them were settled above Sadiya as a buffer between the Assamese and the Mishmis. A small force of 24 Khamti volunteers was formerly employed for the protection of the villages around Sadiya. They used to receive a small pay from the government yearly, and were supplied with arms and ammunition. In 1886 they were disbanded by the Chief Commissioner and pensioned off as their service was no longer required. The Phakials, who are chiefly settled on the Buri Dihing, are almost indistinguishable in dress, manners and language from the Khamtis. They are thought to be a separate batch of immigrants from the Shan country.¹⁹

The Singhpos are racially identical with the Kakus or Kachins of Burma. Originally they were all one people but afterwards they were split up into two main divisions—the Eastern and the Western—called the Kakus and Ts' Sans. The most important clan of the Ts' San group is the Ga King, called Ka Kyungs in Burma. The Kaku division is found chiefly in the trans-Namkin country, while the Ts' San division on this side of the Nam Kin, in the Hukong valley and between the Irrawaddy and the Kandywen.²⁰ The Singhpos are divided into 12 principal tribes of which the one called Beesa, whose chieftain resides at the village of that name at the gorge of the Patkai pass, appears to be the head. They maintain a constant communication with their kinsmen

* 'dao' means a kind of broad sword usually with a wooden handle.

occupying the hills on the southern side of the Patkai Pass as far as the Hukong valley.

During the Moamariah rebellion in the reign of Gourinath Singh (1780-94) the Singhpos drove away the Khamtis from the lands below the Patkai hills and settled themselves on the Tengapani river, east of Sadiya, and on the Upper Buri Dihing in Namrup. According to W. Robinson²¹ the Singhpos are the most powerful and most numerous tribe bordering on the Assam valley. On the north they are bounded by the Lohit, on the east by the Langtang range, which separates them from the Bor-Khamtis, on the south by the Patkai range which divides them from the Burmese Singhpos, from whom they have descended, and on the west by an imaginary line drawn south from Sadiya to the Patkai.

The Duantias, or Singhpo-Assamese half-breeds, are the offspring of the intercourse between the Singhpo captors and their Assamese slaves. These peaceful people are chiefly settled along the Buri Dihing. Their chiefs, like the Mishmi and Abor chiefs, exchange presents annually with the Political Officer at Sadiya. They pay no revenue except where settled within the Inner Line.

The Singhpos paid tribute to none—neither to Burma nor to China, thus forming a neutral ground between British India and China. Their tracts, specially those towards the south and the south-west, and those in the further west of Sadiya, are extremely rich in precious metals, and the amber mines of Hukong, only a few days' march from the Indian frontier, are famous. Serpentine, jade, salt and other valuable minerals, as well as precious stones, are found in these areas in a considerable quantity. The Chinese come a long way towards our frontier for trading purposes. The extreme point of British India's further line was at about 70 miles east of Sadiya, and ten miles further east, Chinese influence was supposed to commence. The system of slavery was an important institution in the Singhpo society.

To the south-west of the Singhpos are scattered the various Naga²² tribes over the hills, in between 93° and 97°

longitudes and extending from the Buri Dihing river and Singhpo country of Lakhimpur in the east to the Kopili river in Nowgong in the west, and to the confines of Manipur and Cachar in the south. "The hills rise in successive and parallel ranges from the plains to the Burmese watershed, and the rivers naturally flowing between them take the same north-east or south-west direction, breaking out through the ranges to empty themselves after crossing the plain into the Brahmaputra, the only exception of any note being the southern branch of the Dikhu, which drains a long valley between high ranges of hills as yet unsurveyed and runs directly northwards."²³ The toughest and most warlike of all the tribes of the north-east frontier, the Nagas are widely known even today as head-hunters. These tribes differ from each other in many ways, chiefly in their mutually unintelligible dialects. The Patkai Nagas inhabit the northern slopes of the Patkai mountains and the Sibsagar Nagas have their habitat in the low hills to the south of Sibsagar District. Across the Doyang westward is the territory of the Angami Naga tribe. Other important branches of the Nagas are the Kacha Nagas, the Lhota Nagas, the Semas, the Hatigorias, the Rengmas, the Lengta Nagas, and so on. From the Dikhu to the Tirap the Naga tribes known as Namsangia, Joboka, Tablangia, Assiringia, etc., are called 'eastern Nagas' or trans-Dikhu Nagas. Behind them are other Naga tribes of whom the Government had little knowledge in the second half of the nineteenth century, except that some of them used to come down to work on the tea gardens in the winter. Further east, as far as the Patkai, there are sundry Naga tribes who are in subjection to the Singhpos, and seem to be harmless. The characteristic feature of the Nagas was their inter-tribal feuds and fights. All Nagas were head-hunters, their women being the chief incentive to this pursuit as girls would not favour men who had not taken heads or been in raids.²⁴

West of the Angami territories and surrounded by Nowgong District on the north, the Khasi and Jaintia Hills on the west, and Cachar on the south stand the North Cachar

Hills inhabited by six different hill tribes—Hill Cacharis, Hozai Cacharis, Mikirs, Aroong Nagas, Old Kukis and New Kukis.

Bordering upon the plains of Nowgong district, and actually within the bounds of that District, are two hill tracts, one inhabited by the Mikirs and the other by Rengma Nagas. The Mikir Hills extend from the Jamuna to the Dhansiri and are separated from the Naga hills by low, undulating hillocks and valleys. In 1838, the total number of Mikirs was probably twenty thousand. They sacrifice to the sun, the moon, rivers, large stones and trees in order to avert sickness or procure good harvests. Polygamy is unknown to them and they are not given to any sort of crime. They burn their dead and afterwards bury the ashes. They are much addicted to drinking home-made spirits.

Proceeding westward from the Naga Hills we come across the Khasi and Jaintia Hills. The Khasis and Jaintas belong to the same tribal community. They are amiable and jolly, peaceful and social. Their society is matriarchal. Though the Jaintas had a Raja of their own, the Khasis developed some sort of a confederation of small oligarchical republics, subject to no common superior, yet of which each member was amenable, in some degree or other, to the control of the confederates.

West of the Khasi Hills stand the Garo Hills inhabited by the Garos.²⁵ In the south of the Garo hills lies the Myensingh District of Bengal and to its north stretches the Goalpara District of Assam.

The south-east corner of Assam is the abode of the Lushai or Kuki tribes sandwiched between Tripura state and Burma. The Kukis reside not only in the Lushai Hills but also in south-western Manipur and the eastern part of Tripura. Originally of savage nature and marauding spirit they indulged in incessant raids into Cachar and Sylhet.

Besides these tribes some other tribes will have to be dealt with casually from time to time. These are the Tipperahs inhabiting the hills of (Hill) Tripura, the tribes of

the Chittagong Hill tracts, the Shindus and the Sooties on the border-land between the Lushai country and the Burmese territory.

Much credit goes to the Christian missionaries who civilised most of these tribes by their heroic efforts. But while the general rule is that missionaries are followed by the armies and administrators, in case of these hills the reverse is true.

II

Most of the hill tribes on the North-East frontier of India live either inside or on the borders of the State of Assam, and it will not be unfair to say that in pursuing the course of history of these tribes during British rule one should keep a constant watch on the political development of Assam. For studying the political relations between the British Indian Government and the hill tribes of Assam during 1858-1900 a brief survey of the history of Assam since 1774 with special reference to its hill tribes will, perhaps, be of some help. The Jaintas were the first hill people of the North-East frontier to come into direct contact with the British when their territory was overrun by the latter in 1774, but it was not permanently annexed by them. Cachar came into contact with the Bengal Government during the closing years of the 18th century and Arakan after its absorption in the Burmese Empire in 1784.

The first direct intervention by the British in the territory of the Ahoms²⁶ was the result of the Ahom King Gaurinath Singh's fervent appeal to the British Government to help him in putting down the Moamaria²⁷ rebels and expelling the lawless robbers who had entered Assam from Bengal. Consequently, Lord Cornwallis sent Captain Welsh in 1792 as the leader of an expedition to set the things right in Assam. Welsh performed his task ably, but before long he was recalled by Sir John Shore whose aim was to follow the path of non-interference. As a result Assam was again relegated to chaos and internecine wars.

Taking advantage of the weakness of the central authority in Assam the Burmese conquered the land in 1819. As the dominions of the British and the Burmese now came to be contiguous there readily appeared causes for the first Anglo-Burmese War (1824-'26). By the Treaty of Yandabo (February 24, 1826) the Burmese renounced all claims upon Assam and her dependencies and the border states of Cachar and Jaintia. David Scott was appointed Agent to the Governor-General over the whole of Assam except the Sadiya and Mattak districts. However, in 1832 Upper Assam except Sadiya and Mattak was made over to the Ahom prince, Purandar Singh, who was set up as a vassal king. In 1833, David Scott became the Commissioner of Assam. In 1838 Purandar Singh's territory was taken over by the British, and Assam as a whole became a 'non-regulated' Province of the Indian Empire. Mattak and Sadiya were annexed to British India in 1842. Cachar had been placed under the rule of its old king ; but as he died without any heir, it was annexed in 1832. Likewise, Jaintia, which was kept under the rule of a vassal king for some years, was annexed in 1835, and Manipur was restored to its ruling dynasty.

The Province of Assam was created in 1874 with a view to relieving the Lieutenant-Governor of Bengal of a part of his huge administrative responsibility. The head of the newly created province was given the title of 'Chief Commissioner'. In 1905, Lord Curzon combined the eastern district of Bengal with Assam and constituted a new province under the name of Eastern Bengal and Assam, but this was reversed in 1912 and Assam was restored to its former territorial position. In 1921, in accordance with the provisions of the Government of India Act, 1919, Assam was given the status of a Governor's province.

III

Before we start with the history of British relations with these hill men since 1858 let us take stock of their relationship up till that memorable year. When in 1826 by the

Treaty of Yandabo (February 24, 1826) the King of Burma renounced all claims upon, and agreed to abstain from all future interference with Assam and its dependencies and the neighbouring states of Cachar and Jaintia, the British Indian Government filled the vacuum created by this Burmese renunciation. Consequent upon the British conquest of Assam the British rulers now stepped into the shoes of the Ahoms and inherited from the latter a legacy of hostile relationship with many a hill tribe on the new borders.

Along the southern frontier of Bhutan there are eighteen mountain passes, called Bhutan *duars*, leading from the hills and intersecting the *terai*.—eleven on the frontier of Bengal (including Goalpara and Cooch Behar), and seven on that of Assam. By means of these passes the Bhutia highlanders held their sway over this border and established their *de facto* right on this whole belt of border territory. Each of the eighteen passes was under the authority of a 'Jongpen' (local Bhutanese magistrate) who had the customary right of administering a portion of tract lying below the pass and bearing its name. As a result of incessant outrages committed by the Bhutias on the British subjects, the more important of which took place in 1828 and 1836, the British Government attached all of the Assam Duars²⁸ in 1841 as the only means of securing peace in this part of the frontier, a sum of ten thousand rupees being thereafter annually paid to the Bhutan Government as compensation. But though the situation improved in this part of the frontier belt, outrages never ceased in the Bengal Section of the Duars.²⁹

To the east of the Buriguma Duar lies the Kuriapara Duar* formerly held by the extra—Bhutan Bhutias in more or less direct subjugation to Tibet. This Duar was the main channel of trade between Tibet and Assam. Between 1830 and 1840 these Bhutias gave much trouble to the British, and consequently the British Government attached the Duar. In 1844, their chiefs³⁰ formally renounced their claims to this

*vide Map No. 1

Duar in return for an annual payment of five thousand rupees. Eastward of the Kuriapara Duar lie the Char Duar (or the four passes) on the borders of which live the Rooprai Ganw and the Sher Ganw Bhutias who paid allegiance to none. The Char Duar Bhutias annually collected a tribute from the plains. In 1826, by a mutual agreement the authorities of Darrang District assumed the right of direct collection and of payment to the Bhutias as a compensation. As a result of an outrage committed by some Bhutias in 1839, this annual payment was reduced to one thousand seven hundred and forty rupees.

The Hazarikhawa Akas collected an annual 'Posa' from the plains bordering upon their hills. But the inconvenience of permitting a horde of savages to descend annually upon the cultivated lands for the purpose of collecting petty dues from each household was felt by the British Government to be unbearable. Quarrels and outrages were the natural concomitants of such a custom, and consequently the Assam Government invited these hillmen to surrender their right of direct collection for an annual lump payment in its stead. The claims of the Hazarikhawas were settled at a yearly payment of Rs. 175/- The Kapachors under their leader, the Taghi Raja, gave much trouble to the Government. In 1835, they burnt an Assam Light Infantry outpost at Bali-para, killing 17 persons. When in 1841 the Government was contemplating an expedition against the Taghi Raja, the latter suddenly surrendered. The Raja was afterwards released on an oath taken by him to stop his wild outrages, and a small stipend was granted to him. Through his influence the other Aka chiefs also entered into agreements with the Government and accepted stipends.

In 1835, the Daflas of Char Duar, probably under the instigation of the Taghi Raja, made a raid upon the plains, and as a punishment they were forbidden to enter the plains to collect their 'posa'. In November following, a few months after the Taghi Raja's Balipara raid, they attacked that place and abducted some British subjects. Consequently, an ex-

petition was sent against them and they were punished. Many of the Daffa tribes north of Char Duar and Nao Duar³¹ made terms with the Government according to which they renounced their right of posa in exchange of an annual stipend. Till 1852, these people were a source of constant anxiety, but from 1852 they settled down quietly, and many of them devoted their attention to agriculture. About Rs. 41,320 was paid annually to the Daffas of Char Duar and Nao Duar.

The Abors³² were at first friendly with the British Government. During the British hostilities with the Khamtis and Mishmis the Abors actually helped the Government. Though they had once carried off to the hills some Beeah fishermen³³ who refused to pay them any conciliatory offering, up till 1847 they maintained their friendly attitude towards the Government. But when in 1848, Captain Vetch went to the Hills with a small party of troops to demand the release of a number of Cachari gold-washers, carried off by the Abors, he was treacherously attacked. In retaliation Vetch burnt their village. Though open hostilities did not break out till then, the Abors continued their sporadic depredations on the gold-washers.³⁴

Hostilities with the Mishmis started from a simple incident. In 1854, a French Missionary, M. Krick, and his friend M. Bourri crossed the Mishmi country into Tibet, but in the following year during their journey back they were murdered by the Mishmis. A small expedition under Lieutenant Eden, after forced marches for eight days in succession, captured the offending chief and his village. But, in spite of this, the following years witnessed frequent raids. In January and October 1857, the Mishmis sacked a village and an outlying homestead respectively, and in November massacred the women and children of a village belonging to the Khamti Chief, Choukeng Gohain, on the flimsy ground that some of their tribe had died of cholera when visiting

the Gohain.* The Khamti villages were consequently armed, and soon afterwards they drove back a body of Chulikatas whom they detected stealing down upon their settlements.

As the Government deprived the Khamtis of their jurisdiction over the local Assamese and set free their slaves, they suspected the Government of a design to tax them in the near future and lower their status to that of an Assamese ryot. Although they, shortly afterwards, assisted the Government's operations against the Singhpos, they were actually simmering with discontent. This discontent burst into a treacherous attack on the British garrison at Sadiya in January 1839, during which Col. White, the Political Agent, was killed and eighty others were either massacred or wounded. A punitive expedition was at once sent against those who sought refuge amongst the Mishmis. But they were defeated in a series of attacks, and by December, 1843³⁵ the last of the rebels made his submission. Some of the rebels were transplanted to the western part of the district, and others were settled above the town of Sadiya in order to form a screen between the Mishmis and the Assamese.

The British policy of emancipating the slaves held by the hill tribes, residing within the jurisdiction of the Assam Government, led to a series of Singhpo risings, the last of which took place in 1843. All the Singhpos living either on Indian or Burmese borderland, and a certain number of Shans and Burmese joined in these. The risings were promptly put down, and the Singhpos submitted. Captain Jenkins, the Agent of the Governor-General, in his final report observed that the main cause of the Singhpo rebellion was the loss of their slaves.³⁶ But still the institution of slavery could not in any way be countenanced. A school was started at Saikwah for educating these tribesmen into the habits of civilisation. The Singhpos in later periods gave no trouble and they proved to be of great help to the Government in

*Choukeng Gohain. The term 'Gohain' means 'preceptor' in Assamese. Here it means 'chief'.

restraining and keeping in order the Nagas of the Patkai Hills.³⁷ Like some other tribes of the frontier they also settled down to agriculture.

The Chittagong Frontier tribes, Tipperahs, Mikirs and Sooties created no trouble for the Government up till 1858. The Garos started their raids in 1857 and repeated them up till 1859. The hilly tract inhabited by the various Naga tribes had never been subjugated by the Ahoms, and it was no part of the British policy up till 1858 to absorb it. The principle of punishing these raiders was adopted as a policy in 1835.³⁸

The Angami Nagas were hostile from the beginning. Between the years 1835 and 1851, ten punitive expeditions were despatched into the Naga Hills. The expedition of 1851 severely punished the offending hillmen. It was then decided to try the combined effect of non-interference in their internal quarrels, of encouraging commercial relations when they behaved well, and of shutting them out from the neighbouring markets when they did any mischief.³⁹ But the hopes of the Government were belied by the twenty-two raids by the Nagas in the year following, in which 178 persons were either killed, wounded or abducted. In 1854, an officer was posted at Asalu and a line of frontier outposts was established, but they proved of little use, and raids continued to be of frequent occurrence. Especially after the withdrawal of the armed detachment from Dimapur in 1856, the Nagas ran riot, and one outrage after another was committed.

Like the Nagas, the hillmen living in the Khasi and Jaintia Hills caused trouble from the beginning of British rule in Assam. In 1827, David Scott⁴⁰ planned the construction of a road through the Khasi Hills, joining the Assam Valley with the Surma Valley. For that he met the local Khasi Chiefs and took their consent. But in 1829 the Khasis, alarmed by the foolish boast of a peon, who in a personal and private quarrel, taunted them with the threat of subjugation and taxation as soon as the road should be completed, made a sudden attack on a small party killing two British officers and their followers.⁴¹ Troops were rushed into

the area and the hillmen were punished. The Chiefs, called Siems, were allowed to retain a large measure of independence, but they had to submit to the supervising control of the Political Agent who was thenceforward stationed in the hills and who dealt with all serious cases of a criminal nature. They also agreed to the construction of such roads, bridges and road-side bungalows as might be needed by the Government.

In 1832, the Raja of Gobha, who was a tributary Chief under the ruler of Jaintia, seized four British subjects and immolated three of them at the shrine of the goddess Kali.⁴² As the culprits were not surrendered British troops under Captain Lister overran the Jaintia Hills, and annexed the Jaintia Pargana and Gobha to the British territory. As the Raja of Jaintia professed his unwillingness to retain his territory in the hills this was placed under the Political Officer of the Khasi Hills, the Raja being pensioned off. Like the Siems,⁴³ the Syntengs⁴⁴ also were neither taxed nor interfered with in their internal affairs, only heinous offences were henceforth to be tried by the Political Agent or his Assistant.

The Lushais committed their first raid in 1849 and the punitive expedition that followed was so successful that they gave no further trouble until 1858.

IV

✓ Since the famous Queen's Proclamation of November 1, 1858, the British Government in India adopted a political 'Laissez faire' policy towards the Native States. The same policy was also followed with regard to the hill tribes of Assam. As the Government's north-western frontier policy was very much influenced by the fear of a Russian advance in Afghanistan, in the north-eastern frontier of India too, the fear of Burmese aggression persisted in the minds of the Government for many years after the British conquest of Assam. But despite the Government's peaceful attitude to the hill tribes of Assam and the North-East Frontier, open clashes could not be staved off for long, and in the long run

the Government's policy of non-interference had to be replaced by a 'forward' policy. Though the immense publicity given to the Afghan wars and the great concern felt over the North-West Frontier eclipsed the important problems of its north-eastern counterpart, the excellent work, political and military, performed by the officers and men in this frontier can hardly be over-estimated.

FOOTNOTES

- 1 G. Dunbar's "Other Men's Lives", London 1938, pp. 230-231.
- 2 E. Gait's 'A history of Assam', Calcutta 1926, Introduction to First Edition, p. 25, and the Census of India, 1891, Assam, Vol. 1 Report, pp. 221-290.
- 3 L. W. Shakespear's "History of Upper Assam, Upper Burma, and the North-East Frontier", London 1914, p. 91.
- 4 Asiatic Society's Journal, Vol. XXXVII, Calcutta 1868, p. 194.
- 5 "Our ancestors, they say, lived in Partabgor on the banks of the Giladhari river, north of Bishnath, but were driven out from thence by Krishna and Boloram".—C. H. Hesselmeier's "The Hill tribes of the northern frontier of Assam", J.A.S.B., Vol. XXXVII. Nos. 1-4, 1868, pp. 192-202.
- 6 Maj. C. R. Macgregor's "Notes on Akas and Akaland"—Proceedings of the A.S.B., 1884, p. 198.
- 7 Also spelt as joom. "The hill tribes generally cultivate on the jhum system, i.e., they burn down part of the forest, the ashes of which make a valuable manure, and then dibble in various kinds of seeds all mixed together. After one or two years, cultivation becomes impossible on account of the choking weeds that spring up; the villagers then move on to a new clearance and the deserted fields remain unfit for cultivation until after the lapse of some years, fresh forest growth has killed out the weeds".—E. Gait's "A History of Assam", Calcutta 1926, p. 345.
- 8 Maxwell's Report, For. Deptt., Ext. A Progs., October, 1894, Nos. 41-116.
- 9 According to G. W. Dun the Daflas call themselves Nyising, and assert that they are descended from Nyia, the son of Abotani, whose father was Dhangi, the sun, by his wife Chinne, the daughter of Chatachi, the earth. Nyia has a number of sons, and the children of the latter were the founders of the existing clans like Bod, Nirik, Tan, Noling, Sakpha, Phering, Opurtak, Rapo, Pai, Opurta, Namta, Chana, Opur Tabung, etc.—V. Elwin's "India's North-East Frontier in the 19th Century", Bombay 1959, pp. 185-188.

10 V. Elwin's "India's North East Frontier in the 19th Century", Bombay 1959, p. 161.

11 Also spelt Bharali

12 Posa was to most of the hill tribes bordering on the plains an uncertain, undefined exaction, depending in amount upon the capacity of the savage hordes who might descend to levy it. (Revenue Proceedings, 11th August 1834, No. 5).

13 Judicial Prog., November 1863, No. 166.

14 Up-country merchants doing business in Assam are called "Kayah" by the local people.

15 Vol. XXII of the published Selections from the Bengal Records and Vol. XVII of the Bengal Asiatic Societies Researches.

16 Also called Eastern Mishmis.—G. W. Beresford's "Notes on the North-Eastern Frontier of Assam", Shillong 1881, p. 28f.

17 J. F. Needham's "Report on the Bebejiya Mishmi Expedition", 1899-1900, p. 15f.

18 Pemberton's "Report on the Eastern Frontier of British India", Calcutta 1835, p. 70.

19 Aitchison's "Treaties, Engagements and Sanads", Calcutta 1909, Vol. 2, p. 240.

20 C. H. Lepper's "Notes on the Singpho and Kampti Country, North-Eastern Frontier": Progs. of Asiatic Society of Bengal, 1882, p. 64.

21 W. Robinson's "A Descriptive Account of Assam", London 1841, p. 373 ff.

22 The word 'Naga' "seems to be derived, as suggested by Holcombe and Peal, from 'nok' which means "folk" in some of the tribal dialects".—E. Gait's "A History of Assam", Calcutta 1926, p. 314.

"The name by which they are now usually known, namely, Naga, has nothing whatever to do with snakes as something, but is a corruption of the word 'Naga'—Naked."—Shakespear's "History of Upper Assam, Upper Burma, and the North-East Frontier", London 1914, p. 194.

23 Narrative Report of W. F. Badgley, in General Report on the Topographical Surveys of India, 1874-5, Shillong 1876, pp. 50 ff.

24 L. W. Shakespear's "History of Upper Assam, Upper Burma and the North-East Frontier", London 1914, pp. 198-199.

25 The Garos call themselves "ackik" (hill men), or "mande" (Men) with implied contempt for the "Ajongs" and the "Roris" meaning the plains men "who can do nothing", the helpless victims of their bloody raids. (Pianazzi's "In Garo land", Calcutta 1935, p. 2).

26 "Assam is commonly supposed to be derived from 'A-Sam-a', the 'peerless', the 'unequaled', and Ahom is said to be equivalent to Assam" (A. Mackenzie's "History of the Relations of the Government with the

Hill Tribes of the North-East Frontier of Bengal", Calcutta 1884, p. 2.)

The Ahoms are Shans, who according to M. Terrien de la Couperie, are the outcome of an intermingling of Mons, Negritos and Chinese.

27 "The MOAMARIAHS of Muttuck (in Luckimpore), or Moram, or Morah tribes, were originally a rude tribe who settled before the Ahom invasion on the Upper Debroo, in the district of Moram. They professed themselves sectaries of the Vishna-Vishnu caste". (Political Prog. No. 89, 6th October 1839).

28 The Assam Duars were:—

Five in Kamrup — Bijni, Chappakhamar, Chappaguri, Banska & Ghankolla

Two in Darrang — Buriguma & Kalling.

29 The Bengal Duars were: Daling Kote, Zumer Kote, Chamurchi, Suckee, Buxa, Bhulka, Bara, Goomar, Kupo, Cherrung, and Bagh.

30 Called the "Sath Rajas" (Seven Princes).

31 'Char Duar' means four passes and 'Nao Duar' means nine passes.

32 They called themselves "Padam".—A. Mackenzie's "History of the Relations of the Government with the Hill Tribes of the North-East Frontier of Bengal", Calcutta 1884, p. 33.

33 They are Hindu gold-washers and fishermen who had, perhaps, themselves originally been driven from the hills by the Abor-Miri advance—A. Mackenzie's "History of the Relations of the Government with the Hill Tribes of the North-East Frontier of Bengal", Calcutta 1884, p. 36.

34 Political Proceedings, 24th March 1848, Nos. 199-201.

35 Political Prog., dated 26th December 1839, No. 67.

36 Political Prog., 9th March, 1844, No. 142.

37 The Patkai range is in between Burma and Assam.

38 Political Prog., 24th Nov. 1835, Nos. 32 & 33.

39 Pol. Progs., 7th July, 1849, Nos. 30 & 31.

40 The then Governor-General's Agent for Assam.

41 R. B. Pemberton's "Report on the Eastern Frontier of British India", Calcutta 1835,—Account of the Khasi Hills, Subsections 2 & 3 of Sec. 2.

42 Ibid.

43 This native title of the Khasi chiefs was first officially recognised in 1867. Pol. Prog., March 1867. No. 14.

44 The Jaintas were known as Syntengs, also spelt as Sinteng.

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