

Lushai Risings, 1898-95

Lalrimawia

Position of Lushai Country in 1890

The Lushai Hills was annexed by the British in 1890. A number of posts each garrisoned by 100 to 200 men, were established at different places. In the south there were Fort Lungleh with a garrison of Chittagong police dominating the Howlongs, and Fort Tregar with a military garrison in the centre of the Lakher and Moli-anpui country. The posts were connected with Demagiri, the end of river communication on the Chittagong side, and with a good mule road and by telegraph. Fort Aijal with a garrison of 200 Military Police, and its subsidiary stockade at Changsil with another 100 men, were in the north. A fair road connected the two posts, but there was no other means of communication with Silchar beyond that afforded by the river Dhaleswari. The telegraph line from Changsil to Jhalnacherra was only partially completed.

In the early part of 1890 Captain Browne, then Personal Assistant to the Chief Commissioner, was appointed Political officer in the North Lushai Hills. In May 1890 Browne arrived at Fort Aijal to take up his duties. The clear instructions were given to Browne at the time of his joining the new post. He was directed to employ diplomatic skill in order to induce the chiefs to submit to the administration, and to stop them from open raidings. The Govt. of India was very careful not to alienate the Lushais further realising that immediate switch over to a new system of administration by putting aside their existing practices would be too much for the tribes. Therefore the government preferred, for the time being, to adopt a policy of wait and see, and thereby slowly bring them under their full control and power. For the present, the main concern was to stop them from raiding and to protect the lives of the officials and to punish those who injured them. The inhabitants were to settle their own affairs among themselves. No attempt was made to exact revenue or tribute from these tribes.¹

Causes of the Lushai Risings

The post of a Political officer was created with an aim to let the Lushais feel and understand that they were under the British rule. Browne succeeded in making contact with the chiefs and imposed a nominal tax on them. From the very beginning he put more emphasis upon the improvement of the communication system, considering it as the precondition for a stable administration at Aijal. Since no sufficient coolies could be obtained from the plains to do road construction work, Browne introduced a system of forced labour. Certain chiefs were selected for this and were given order to supply the requisite number of 'coolies'. A sort of punishment was exacted on any of the offending chiefs. It was this arrangement that made many a freedom loving chiefs indignant for whose rage Browne had to sacrifice his life. When it was realized that revenue would be collected from them and hunting in the jungles would not be allowed freely, the Lushai chiefs, under the leadership of Kalkhama, held a meeting at his *Zawlbuk*.^{*} The important chiefs, namely Thanghula, Thanruma, Liankunga, Lalhrima, Himingthanga and Hrangkhupa were present and they plotted a revolt against the British authority. As soon as a message was received that Browne left Aijal for Changsil, a party was sent to ambush him on the way. There is no doubt that the introduction of forced labour and an imposition of revenue was the immediate cause of the Lushai revolt in 1890.

Frederick Roberts, then Commender-in-chief of Indian army, was of the view that the assaults on Changsil and Fort Aijal were the results of a "great drink on the part of the tribes and to the fact, stated in one of the late Captain Browne's diaries, that the neighbouring Lushais had been considerably excited at the prospect of some revenue being demanded from them".²

In this respect mention may be made that, the Lushais, in the past, had never done any big fighting out of great drinking. They rather considered it unjust and shameful to do acts under influence. Though drinking was practiced, yet custom forbade everyone of them to create trouble. The fact seems to be that when revenue was demanded from them, the Lushais came to realise that "Foreign Power" had occupied their land with the purpose of imposing their rule over them. They could not tolerate this and tried their level best to resist them even at the point of violence. For a great number of years they had been leading a life of their own ways without being interfered by the outside world. It is

quite natural that they should resist an alien rule.

Rising of the Western Lushais

The Lushai Expeditionary Force (1889-90)** could not bring the surrender of Lianphunga who managed to escape Skinner and Daly. Being an influential chief and the son of Suakpuilala, he had a hold over the Lushais of the western clans. It was they who had him rescued at the time of his danger. Besides impulsive Kalkhama lost his former position after the destruction of the old fortress of his most influential brother, Lianphunga and the fall of Zaroka (Zahrawka), which was followed by the establishment of Fort Aijal and Changsil out post by the English. He was greatly irritated and began to prepare for an armed resurrection.

In May 1890 Browne arrived at Fort Aijal. Information was given that the Lushais have to supply labour which was urgently required because the imported labour available being altogether insufficient. It was believed that similar action was taken about the same time on the Chittagong side. However, Browne was not in a position to enforce the demand of labour owing to the smallness of the garrisons at his disposal.

After capturing Lianphunga, Browne, to settle the matter, summoned a conference of North Lushai chiefs at Aijal on the mound on which Aijal jail now stands.³ He announced in the Darbar that Lianphunga was to be deposed for 4 years, and revenue and labour were to be paid and supplied. The western chiefs bitterly reacted against this. The punishment of Lianphunga was objected and strong voice was expressed against the imposition of labour and revenue. The conference broke up abruptly, and no mutual understanding could be made. Kalkhama organised all the western chiefs together within a short while and they decided to rise against the British. Owing to incessant rains Browne was unable to collect information. On 9 September, 1890. Browne was ambushed while he was on his way down from Aijal to Changsil with an escort party of only 4 police sepoy. He was severely wounded and died shortly after reaching Changsil. Three of his men were killed on the spot.⁴ It was followed on the same day, by simultaneous attack on the stockades at Aijal and Changsil. An attack was also made on another party consisting of sepoy and coolies between Aijal and Sairang and 11 of them were killed. Aijal and Changsil were immediately besieged by the Lushais. It was reported that the whole country side of the North Lushai Hills was in revolt.

The news of the outbreak was sent to Jhalnacheria by means of boat, but re-inforcement reached Changsil only after 15 days. From Silchar, a relief force of 200 men of the Surma Valley Military Police was sent at once. Accompanied by Lt. R. R. Swinton, Lt. Tytter commanded the force. Unfortunately Swinton was killed on 26 September in a fight which took place on their way up the Dhaleswari river towards Changsil. Several men were wounded but the detachment got through and advanced to its destination. On 28th Changsil was relieved, and on 4 October Aijal was reached and relieved.⁵

McCake as second Political Officer

After the death of Browne, McCake, being considered the best officer in view of his previous excellent services in the Naga Hills, was appointed the second Political Officer. On 5 October he and Capt Williamson arrived at Changsil. Under the direction of McCake, active operations were undertaken to subdue the country and in less than three months, all offending villages were destroyed and their chiefs including Kalkhama surrendered. Kalkhama, Lianphunga and Thangula were ordered to be detained for ten years. They were deported to Hazaribag jail where Kalkhama and Lianphunga hanged themselves.⁶

Rising of the Eastern Lushais

The Eastern Lushai chiefs did not come to the aid of the Western Lushais. They were rather happy to see them being destroyed. The short-sighted Eastern chiefs took it for granted that the English would never attempt to collect any tribute from them. Information was also received that the Eastern Lushais had decided to make one bold bid for independence. The intention of McCake was to collect revenue from the Eastern chiefs at the rate of one rupee per house in the next cold season of 1891-92.

The Eastern Lushais consisted of two separate groups of villages which were antagonistic to each other. The first group consisted of the Poiboi, Lalbura, Buangtheuya and Langkhama, and the second were the descendants of Vuta. It was believed that no combination between the two groups would be possible. Since, Liankhama and Buangtheuya were dead, Lalbura was the only powerful chief of the first group. McCake, at first, decided to set up a camp at Lalbura's village and use it as a base from which he would collect revenue. But he abandoned the idea for reason of insecurity. On January 20, 1892, McCake, marching at the head

of an expeditionary force, met Shakespear at Kairuma's village. On the following day, a Darbar was held where the future policy of the British government was explained to the assembled chiefs. With regard to the payment of house-tax and the supply of coolies no hostile attitude was maintained by the Eastern Lushais excepting those of Buangtheuva and Lalbura.

In February 1892, McCake ordered Lalbura to supply 100 coolies, but the latter refused.⁷ To enforce his demand, McCake, at the head of a garrison, advanced forward to Lalbura's village. The village was reached on 29 February. Before proper position against attack was taken, some 300 Lushais started to fire them. Severe fighting followed, but McCake and his party could repulse the assailants, and established themselves in the village. Lalbura, joined by Pawibawi, Buangtheuva and Liankhama made repeated attacks on McCake's position between 1 March and 10 April, but was repulsed. With the object to divert the attention of McCake's forces, a party of Lushais from Maite, Pawibawi and Lalbura raided Baruncherra on 4 April. But the object failed.

The re-inforcement party, under the command of Capt Loch, Commandant of the Military Police, arrived at Lalbura's village. Loch's forces consisted of 225 men of the Surma Valley Military Police, and 75 men of 18 Bengal Infantry. Before the end of May, all resistance came to an end. Lalbura became a fugitive, Pawibawi and Buangtheuva were captured. The expeditionary forces returned to Aijal on 18 June.

While the Western Lushais behaved well throughout the period, the Howlong, in sympathy with the Eastern Lushais, also took up arms against the British. They succeeded in preventing Shakespear from joining hands with McCake at Buangtheuva's village until relieved by a column from Burma under Mr Carey and Captain Rose. Being reinforced, Shakespear took retaliatory measures by destroying the villages of Lalhrima, Lalkanglova, Tlangbuta, and Rochungnunga.⁸

In view of the Western Lushais behaving so well during the period, the chief Tanghula, deported in 1891, was allowed to return in July 1895. Lalbura submitted in the same year, and the Howlongs gave no trouble. But the Eastern Lushai chiefs Kairuma, Zadenga and Kaphleia (descendants of Vuta), and relatives of Zakapa, were determined to maintain their independent position. They refused to supply coolies. In December 1895, a joint expedition from Falam, Aijal and Lungleh was undertaken. The operations were successfully carried out, and there was no resistance.

Results

The long series of Lushai expeditions ended with the close of operations against Kairuma. Kairuma's power and prestige was completely broken. It effectually dispelled the idea that any Lushai chief, by reason of his supposed inaccessibility from Aijal, could safely ignore the orders of the Political Officer. It successfully demonstrated the practicability of emergency co-operation between the forces from Falam and Lungleh with the force from Aijal. The idea that the assistance of the Toshan chief from Falam might be counted upon by a Lushai chief was dissipated.

The Lushai country was thoroughly explored. There is no unexplored 'Hinterland, to give possible future trouble. But the Lushai chiefs, who are so implicitly obeyed and so complacently looked up to by their subjects, would demand a display of force for some years. Even this could be reduced to a minimum force in a few years' time.

References

1. Assam sectt., Foreign A, Progs. June 1894, No.5-9.
* Bachelor's dormitory.
2. Assam Sectt, Pol. and Judl A, Foreign Progs, Oct. 1890, Nos. 1-35.
** The Chin-Lushai Expedition sent three columns-Chittagong, Cachar and Burma-which successfully carried out the main objects of the campaign, subjugation of the Lushais.
3. McCall, *Lushai Chrysalis* (Reprint 1977), p. 58.
4. Assam Sectt., Pol and Judl A, Forgn Progs, Oct. 1890, Nos. 1-35
5. Ibid.
6. Assam Sectt., Forgn A, May 1892, Nos. 3-110.
7. Assam Sectt., Forgn A, Dec. 1892, Nos. 14-141.
8. Ibid.