# HISTORY OF NORTH EAST INDIA (1228 TO 1947)

**BA [History]**

**First Year**

**RAJIV GANDHI UNIVERSITY**
Arunachal Pradesh, INDIA - 791 112

# SYLLABI-BOOK MAPPING TABLE

## History of North East India (1228 to 1947)

| Syllabi | Mapping in Book |
|---|---|
| **Unit I- Early History of North East India**<br>a. Geographical Setting: River System, Mountain System, Flora, Fauna and Climate<br>b. Pre-history of North East India<br>c. Pattern of Settlement<br>d. The Varman Dynasty | **Unit 1:** Early History of North-East India **(Pages 3-27)** |
| **Unit II- Medieval North East India**<br>a. Rise of Ahom State: Sukapha and Sudangpha<br>b. Consolidation: Suhungmung, Pratap Singha and Rudra Singha<br>c. Ahom Frontier Policy<br>d. Moamaria Rebellion and Captain Welsh's Mission | **Unit 2:** Medieval North East India **(Pages 29-66)** |
| **Unit III- Modern North East India**<br>a. Anglo-Burmese War and North East India (1824-1826)<br>b. Treaty of Yandaboo and its Impact<br>c. Annexations (1828-1852): Assam, Cachar, Jaintia and Khasi Hills<br>d. Annexations (1864-1905): Garo Hills, Naga Hills and Lushai Hills | **Unit 3:** Modern North East India **(Pages 67-89)** |
| **Unit IV- British Policy in the Northern Frontier of Assam**<br>a. Posa, Duars, Kotokies, Trade and Military Expeditions<br>b. Inner Line<br>c. Outer Line<br>d. McMohan Line | **Unit 4:** British Policy in the Northern Frontier of Assam **(Pages 91-117)** |
| **Unit V- Resistance to Colonial Rule in North East India**<br>a. Impact of Colonial Rule: Society, Economy and Polity<br>b. Agrarian Revolts: Phulaguri Dhewa<br>c. Freedom Struggle in North East India: Non-Cooperation and Civil Disobedience<br>d. Quit India and India's Independence | **Unit 5:** Resistance to Colonial Rule in North East India **(Pages 119-142)** |

# CONTENTS

**INTRODUCTION** **1**

**UNIT 1 EARLY HISTORY OF NORTH EAST INDIA** **3-27**

1.0 Introduction
1.1 Unit Objectives
1.2 Geographical Features of North East India
1.3 Pre-History of North East India
1.3.1 Tripura; 1.3.2 Manipur; 1.3.3 Assam
1.4 Pattern of Settlement
1.5 The Varman Dynasty
1.6 Summary
1.7 Key Terms
1.8 Answers to 'Check Your Progress'
1.9 Questions and Exercises
1.10 Further Reading

**UNIT 2 MEDIEVAL NORTH EAST INDIA** **29-66**

2.0 Introduction
2.1 Unit Objectives
2.2 Rise of Ahom State: Sukapha and Sudangpha
2.2.1 Consolidation of the Ahom Kingdom
2.2.2 Ahom Frontier Policy
2.2.3 Policy of Ahom Rulers towards the North East Tribe
2.2.4 Policy of the Ahoms
2.2.5 Decline and Fall of the Ahom Kingdom
2.2.6 Ahom Administration
2.3 Moamaria Rebellion and Captain Welsh's Mission
2.4 Summary
2.5 Key Terms
2.6 Answers to 'Check Your Progress'
2.7 Questions and Exercises
2.8 Further Reading

**UNIT 3 MODERN NORTH EAST INDIA** **67-89**

3.0 Introduction
3.1 Unit Objectives
3.2 The British in India and South East Asia
3.2.1 Burma before the British Conquest
3.2.2 North East India
3.3 Anglo-Burmese War and North East India (1824–1826)
3.3.1 Causes of the Anglo-Burmese War
3.3.2 Series of Events of the War
3.4 Treaty of Yandabo and its Impact
3.4.1 Importance of the Treaty of Yandabo
3.4.2 Aftermath of the Treaty of Yandabo
3.5 Annexations 1828–1852
3.5.1 Annexation of Cachar
3.5.2 Annexation of Jaintias

3.5.3 Annexion of Assam and Khasi Hills
3.5.4 Administration of David Scott (1824–31)
3.5.5 Administration of T.C. Robertson (1832-34)
3.5.6 Administration of Captain Jenkins (1834)
3.5.7 Condition of the Province on the Eve of British Occupation and its Effects
3.5.8 Rise and Consolidation of British Power in Khasi Hills
3.6 Annexations (1864–1905)
3.6.1 Annexation of Garo Hills, Naga Hills and Lushai Hills
3.7 Summary
3.8 Key Terms
3.9 Answers to 'Check Your Progress'
3.10 Questions and Exercises
3.11 Further Reading

**UNIT 4 BRITISH POLICY IN THE NORTHERN FRONTIER OF ASSAM 91-117**

4.0 Introduction
4.1 Unit Objectives
4.2 Posa, Duars, Kotokies, Trade and Military Expeditions
4.3 Inner Line
4.3.1 Analysis of the Inner Line Regulation
4.3.2 Implications of the Inner Line Regulation of 1873 and Arunachal Pradesh
4.4 Outer Line
4.4.1 Analysis of the Outer Line
4.5 McMahon Line
4.5.1 The Simla Conference (1913)
4.6 Summary
4.7 Key Terms
4.8 Answers to 'Check Your Progress'
4.9 Questions and Exercises
4.10 Further Reading

**UNIT 5 RESISTANCE TO COLONIAL RULE IN NORTH EAST INDIA 119-142**

5.0 Introduction
5.1 Unit Objectives
5.2 Impact of Colonial Rule: Society, Economy and Polity
5.2.1 Hopkinson's Proposals
5.2.2 Declaration of Scheduled Districts
5.2.3 Direct Administration
5.2.4 Division of Frontier in Three Tracts
5.2.5 Government of India Act, 1919
5.2.6 Government of India Act, 1935
5.2.7 Regulation Act of 1945
5.3 Agrarian Revolts
5.3.1 Phulaguri Dhewa
5.3.2 Munda Rebellion (1899-1900)
5.3.3 Jaintia and Garo Rebellion (1860-1870s)
5.4 Freedom Struggle in North East India: Non-Cooperation Movement, Civil Disobedience, Quit India and India's Independence
5.5 Summary
5.6 Key Terms
5.7 Answers to 'Check Your Progress'
5.8 Questions and Exercises
5.9 Further Reading

# INTRODUCTION

NOTES

The North East is the eastern-most region connected to east India via a narrow corridor squeezed between Nepal and Bangladesh. It consists of the contiguous Seven Sister states—Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland and Tripura—and the Himalayan state of Sikkim. These states are grouped under the Ministry of Development of North-Eastern Region (MDONER) of the Government of India. Except for the Goalpara region of Assam, the rest were late entrants to political India—the Brahmaputra valley of Assam became a part of British India in 1824, and the hilly regions even later. Due to cultural and historical reasons, parts of North Bengal in West Bengal (districts of Darjeeling, Jalpaiguri, and Koch Bihar) are often included in North-East India. Sikkim was recognized as a part of the North-Eastern states in the 1990s. On 15th August, 1947, when India became an Independent nation, North East Frontier Agency commonly known as NEFA became an integral part of the Union of India. It was administrated by the Ministry of External Affairs with the Governor of Assam acting as agent to the President of India. The administrative head was the advisor to the governor.

The states are officially recognized under the North Eastern Council (NEC), constituted in 1971 as the acting agency for the development of the eight states. The North Eastern Development Finance Corporation Ltd (NEDFi) was incorporated on 9 August 1995 and the MDONER was set up in September 2001. In 1972, the NEFA became a Union Territory when Indira Gandhi was the Prime Minister and acquired the name of Arunachal Pradesh. After three years, in 1975, it acquired a legislature. And finally, on 20 February 1987 statehood was conferred on Arunachal Pradesh when Rajiv Gandhi was the Prime Minister and it became the 25th state of the Union of India.

This book, *History of North East India (1228-1947)*, has been divided into five units and deals with early, medieval and modern history of North East India. The book also elaborates on the British policy of Northern Frontier of Assam and the struggle of the people of North East against the British imperialism.

This book, *History of North East India (1228-1947)*, has been designed keeping in mind the self-instruction mode (SIM) format and follows a simple pattern, wherein each unit of the book begins with the *Introduction* followed by the *Unit Objectives* for the topic. The content is then presented in a simple and easy-to-understand manner, and is interspersed with *'Check Your Progress'* questions to reinforce the student's understanding of the topic. A list of *Questions and Exercises* is also provided at the end of each unit. The *Summary* and *Key Terms* further act as useful tools for students and are meant for effective recapitulation of the text.

NOTES

# UNIT 1 EARLY HISTORY OF NORTH EAST INDIA

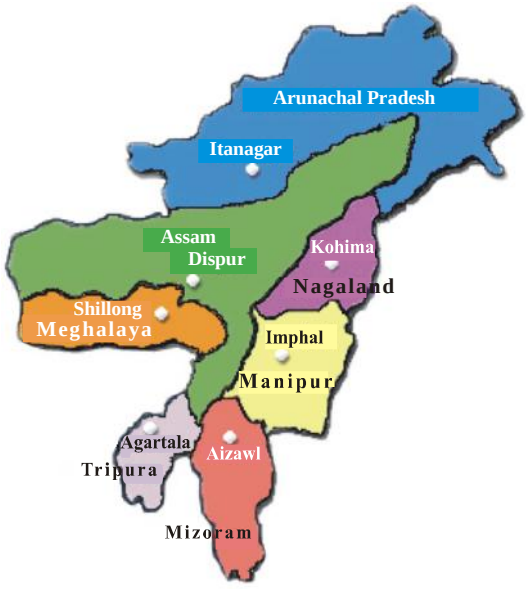
**Structure**

1.0 Introduction
1.1 Unit Objectives
1.2 Geographical Features of North East India
1.3 Pre-History of North East India
1.3.1 Tripura; 1.3.2 Manipur; 1.3.3 Assam
1.4 Pattern of Settlement
1.5 The Varman Dynasty
1.6 Summary
1.7 Key Terms
1.8 Answers to 'Check Your Progress'
1.9 Questions and Exercises
1.10 Further Reading

## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

North East India has over 2000 km of border with Bhutan, China, Myanmar and Bangladesh and is connected to the rest of India by a narrow 20 km wide corridor of land. One of the most ethically and linguistically diverse regions in Asia, each state has a distinct culture and tradition of its own.

From times immemorial, India's North East has been the meeting point of many communities, faiths and cultures. A place renowned for its magical beauty and bewildering diversity, North East India is the home for more than 166 separate tribes speaking a wide range of languages. Some groups have migrated over the centuries from places as far as South East Asia; they retain their cultural traditions and values but are beginning to adapt to contemporary lifestyles. The jungles of North East are dense, its rivers powerful and there is heavy rain in the hills, valleys and plains during the monsoons.




***States of North East India***

NOTES

North East India comprises of seven states commonly known as the 'Seven Sisters'. They are Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland and Tripura. In this unit, you will learn about the early history of North East India.

The lushness of its landscape, the range of communities and geographical and ecological diversity makes the North East quite different from other parts of the subcontinent. The festivals and celebrations in the Northeastern states of India are a colourful reflection of the people and their lives.

## 1.1 UNIT OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- State the geographical features of North East India
- Discuss the pre-history of North East states
- Analyse the history of Assam through excavated evidences
- Describe Assamese society at the time of the Varmans
- Describe the economy, religion and polity in Assam at the time of the Varmans

## 1.2 GEOGRAPHICAL FEATURES OF NORTH EAST INDIA

The state of Assam was divided into four states viz. Assam, the parent state, Nagaland, Mizoram and Meghalaya. Besides, the two princely states of Tripura and Manipur were merged in the Indian Union and came into existence as independent states. Another territory, North East Frontier states, sandwiched between Himalayas and Brahmaputra, was made into a full-fledged state of Arunachal Pradesh. Thus the seven states of North East India came into existence. Together these states have an area of 2,55,000 square kilometer.

North East India, as we know today, is very different from what it was centuries ago. The region was not part of India politically and not even administratively, till the British unified it with the rest of India in the beginning of the 18th century.

Based on political and administrative convenience, the region is divided into seven political units— Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland and Tripura. Unlike the state formation that took place in India in 1950s on linguistic basis, these states in North East India was formed on the basis of ethnic and tribal boundaries. Therefore, the basis of the creation of these seven political units is on ethnic and cultural differences. However, on the basis of some common shared problems, nature of its geographical isolation, similar tradition, the whole region was brought into a single entity, known as North East. It is also due to a particular unique geo-political strategy in the Indian polity that for all practical purposes the whole region is looked upon as a single unit.

From the geographical point of view it is known that all the major types of land forms, like Achaean massif, young folded hills and mountain of tertiary origin, and the recently built riverine plains are found in this region. Such diverse geographical features have great impact on the development of different socio-cultural groups of people.

NOTES

Therefore, it is pertinent to understand different geographical and topographical feature of the region. On the basis of the physiographic characteristics of the region, it may be broadly divided into three major divisions.

- The plateaus – Meghalaya Plateau and Karbi Plateau
- Hills and Mountains – North Eastern Himalayan Ranges of Arunachal Pradesh, Eastern Hills of Nagaland, Manipur, Assam, Mizoram, and Tripura
- The Plains – Brahmaputra and Barak Plains of Assam, Imphal Valley of Manipur Plain and plains of Tripura

On the whole, the terrain condition of the region is extremely rocky and unfavourable for human settlement. The details of this division are given below.

## The Plateau

The Plateau consists of Meghalaya state and Karbi Anglong District of Assam, combination of which is commonly known as Shillong Plateau. This portion forms a part of the Peninsular Plateau of the country. As this area is rich in natural resources like coal, uranium, limestone, and other minerals, they constitute an important economy of the region. By covering an area of 32,861 square kilometerwhich is about 12 per cent of the total area of the region, the contribution of this area in the development of the socio-economic life of the region is well known.

## Hills and Mountains

The hills and mountains of North East comprise the Northeastern Himalayan Ranges of the state of Arunachal Pradesh and Eastern Hills of the states of Nagaland, Manipur, Assam, Mizoram and Tripura. It covers a total area of 1,50,000 square kilometer which accounts for nearly 60 per cent of the total area of the region. It has extended between Orkhala range along the Bhutan-Arunachal border in the West and the Siang-Dihang River in the east. Among all the parts of this region, the hill ranges in the state of Arunachal Pradesh is the highest mountainous area of the entire North East India. Therefore, a large expanse of this area is also extremely rugged.

From the above account we can gather that the region encompasses vast fertile plains and hills. Because of its two opposite geographies and its corresponding resources, the people in the hills and plains are highly interdependent. Because of its unique geographical features, people and its culture, different people describe its uniqueness differently. Some describe it as a miniature India – an epitome of the sub-continent, some anthropologists consider it as a paradise for research – an anthropological museum, and some describe the land as the Switzerland of the East.

## Rivers of North East

The region is covered by the mighty Brahmaputra-Barak river systems and their tributaries. Geographically, apart from the Brahmaputra, Barak and Imphal valleys and some flat lands in between the hills of Meghalaya and Tripura, the remaining two-thirds of the area is hilly terrain interspersed with valleys and plains; the altitude varies from almost sea-level to over 7,000 metres (23,000 ft) above MSL. The region's high rainfall, averaging around 10,000 millimetres (390 in) and above, creates problems of ecosystem, high seismic activity, and floods. The states of Arunachal Pradesh and Sikkim have a montane climate with cold, snowy winters and mild summers.

NOTES

### Flora and Fauna of the North East

The North East region of India is best explained as the land of surging Himalayas, lush green valleys, and ecological diversity. Because of its different terrains, different ecological zones and altitude, the region is also known for its rich bio-diversity and vegetation. The region because of its topographical condition has a variety of forests in the form of tropical moist evergreen, semi-deciduous and wet temperate conifer forests which also form an important source for livelihood of many tribal communities. The region is also known for its original home of many rare species of wildlife.

The hilly terrain of the North East and its climate is best suited for the growth of rare breed of flora and fauna. The state of Arunachal Pradesh is famous for beautiful blossoms. The state is renowned for its rare species of flora and fauna. One gets to see the most amazing breed of orchids growing in the region, because of which Arunachal Pradesh is also called 'Orchid's Paradise'. The sub-tropical climate of North East India along with monsoon rains supports wilderness. This climate has attributed to the growth of different breeds of flora and fauna in this region. The region is home to a diverse range of animals and because of its rich resource of flora and fauna it is also referred to as a treasure trove of ecological diversity.

## 1.3 PRE-HISTORY OF NORTH EAST INDIA

The Neolithic culture of North East India is distinguished by the predominance of Cord-impressed pottery. It has no definite parallels within the Indian subcontinent though the shouldered tool type can be found in the adjacent states of Eastern India. As far as the Neolithic period is concerned, there appears to be no doubt about the relationship between Northeastern India and the countries of Southeast Asia. The excavated sites like Daojali Hading (Shrama, 1967), Sarutaru (Rao, 1973), Parsi-Parlo (Ashraf, 1990), sites in Garo Hills (IAR, 1966-67, 67-68), and Manipur (Singh, 1993), have yielded numerous Cord-impressed and other handmade wares. The fast moving wheel was unknown to the Khasi. The pottery technique exhibits the survival of one of the oldest traditions of hand-modelling without any decoration.

It is still not confirmed as to whether rice was first a dry land crop which later got adapted to wet conditions or vice-versa. Most of the Neolithic sites of the north east region are located near the hilly areas, which are generally away from the big rivers like Brahmaputra and its tributaries which may indirectly indicate that rice was a dry land crop during the Neolithic time. However, it does not necessarily imply that the Neolithic people of North East India did not occupy the river valleys. Due to various reasons, we have no significant archaeological data from these river basins till date.

The scant evidence of ceramics during the Neolithic culture of North East India can be explained by using ethnographic parallels. These simple communities used different types of bottle gourds and bamboo tubes as vessels and containers for storage purposes. Easily available raw materials like bamboo were used for various purposes such as for making containers to store grains and vegetables. The production of pottery might have been negligible as the Neolithic people used other materials. Cord-impressed handmade pottery tradition is seen among the present day potter communities of North East India. The Cord-marked pottery from the archaeological sites of Manipur cannot be compared with those of the modern day pottery, except in certain aspects of manufacturing technology.

**Check Your Progress**

1. Name the different states that comprise North East India.
2. Who was instrumental in unifying North East with the rest of India?

NOTES

The occurrence of the Neolithic tools on the surface of the present shifting cultivation fields in the regions of North East India, especially in the Garo hills, indicate the possible use of the associated tools. Historical as well as situational records reveal that the surface of the excavated site of Parsi-Parlo in Arunachal Pradesh has experienced slash and burn cultivation at least twice since its ancient use. The predominant use of the Neolithic axes in the primitive agricultural system of North East India can be presumed as over 300 stone tools and a large number of potsherds have been found in the site of Rangru Abri (JAR 1966-67) in Garo hills. The artefacts collected from these sites consist of Neolithic stone axes and adzes, grinding stones and pottery which were discovered on the surface of hill tops that was cleared for shifting cultivation. Thus, the formation process of the Neolithic site of North East India have undergone different kinds of activities, particularly, the cultural disturbance process.

The discovery of artefacts related to the subsistence activities at the site of Daojali Hading is very important. The artefacts include twenty two grinding stones, four querns (tools for hand-grinding), and six mullers with the Neolithic celts made of the locally available raw material. This indicates the existence of food processing techniques. These objects were probably used for grinding food grains during the Neolithic period as similar equipment are still used by the people of North East India. Though excavation has not revealed any organic remains of plants, we cannot ignore the fact that the early inhabitants of this site were involved in some kind of cultivation, most likely rice. It can be inferred that the inhabitants were practicing the primitive form of agriculture i.e. shifting cultivation.

Due to the strategic geographical location of North East India which connects the East and the South Asian regions, cultural affinities can be observed in the material cultural objects since prehistoric times. These cultural affinities during the Neolithic period in Northeast India are basically based on the Celt making tradition, Cord-impressed pottery, and rice cultivation. These are the characteristic features of the Neolithic culture which connects Northeast India with Chinese Neolithic and Southeast Asian Neolithic cultures.

For our study of the sources for reconstruction of history of North East India prior to independence, we will look at the three states that existed during that time—Tripura, Manipur and Assam.

### 1.3.1 Tripura

The origin of the name, Tripura, is still a matter of controversy among historians and researchers. The 'Rajmala' is the royal chronicle of the kings of Tripura who reigned for around 5,000 years since the pre-historic era. As per 'Rajmala' the royal house of Tripura trace their origin to the 'lunar' dynasty, following the footsteps of their royal Hindu counterparts across India who claim to have originated from the 'lunar' or 'solar' dynasty. According to the *Rajmala*, Tripura's celebrated court chronicle, an ancient king named 'Tripur' ruled over the territorial domain known as *Tripura* and the name of the kingdom was derived from his name.

Many researchers explain the name 'Tripura' from its etymological origin—the word 'Tripura' is a compound of two separate words, 'tui' (water) + 'pra' (near) which in totality means 'near water'. The geographical location of the state with its close proximity to the vast water resources of eastern Bengal coupled with the generic identity of the state's original inhabitants as 'Tipra' or 'Twipra' apparently justify this explanation of the state's name.

NOTES

***Table 1.1*** *General Information on Tripura*

| | |
|---|---|
| **Area** | **10,491.69 sqkm** |
| **Capital** | Agartala |
| **Altitude** | 12.80 meters |
| **Population** | 3,671,032 (Census-2001) |
| **Temperature** | Summer: 20 to 36 degree C.<br>Winter: 2 to 27 Degree c. |
| **Clothing** | Summer-Cotton. Winter: Woollens |
| **Rainy Season** | June to August |
| **Average rainfall** | 2500 mm per annum |
| **Official Languages** | Bengali and Kokborok |
| **Other Languages** | English, Hindi, Manipuri. Chakma |
| **International Border** | 856 **Km.** |
| **Literacy rate** | 87.75% (2011 census) |
| **Per capita income** | ₹55,004 (2012-2013) |

The state of Tripura shares common boundaries with the states of Manipur and Assam.

The Vigyan Prasara website of the Government of India says the following about the sources for reconstructing the history of Tripura.

> There is not enough tangible evidence to reconstruct the ancient history of Tripura prior to the rule of the Manikya dynasty. 'Sri Rajmala' is the only source book of the princely regimes of Tripura…. The first part of Sri Rajmala was compiled during the reign of Dharma Manikya in the 15th century. The second part was compiled during the reign of Amar Manikya in the 16th century and the third part during the reign of Govinda Manikya in the 17th century.

Table 1.2 from the site of the Archaeological Survey of India provides the history of the various archaeological excavations conducted in Tripura since 1947.

***Table 1.2*** *Excavations - Since Independence - Tripura*

| Site | Year(s) | Excavated by | Reference |
|---|---|---|---|
| Shyamsundar Tila | 1984-85 | ASI | IAR 1984-85, pp. 78-79 |
| Thakurani Tila | 1984-85 | ASI | IAR 1984-85, pp/ 79-80 |

The Khowai and Haora valleys have revealed fossil wood tools (Figure 1.1) in the Upper Paleolithic layer. More sources of the history of Tripura are ancient religious texts like the Puranas, the edicts dating from the third century BC.

It does appear that other than the *Rajmala* there is no document which is authentic enough for using as the base for reconstructing the history of Tripura, while various numismatic and archaeological evidences have been found for reconstructing the history of Tripura over the past five centuries.

***Fig. 1.1*** *Fossil Wood Tools*

**Table 1.3** *Collection of the Tripura Government Museum*

**Total No. of Collections** :- 1645 nos.

- Coins
  - i. Gold Coins – 8 nos.
  - ii. Silver Coins – 244 nos.
  - iii. Copper Coins – 522 nos.
- Sculptures : 79 nos.
- Terracotta : 141 nos.
- Copper inscriptions : 10 nos.
- Stone inscriptions : 09 nos.
- Bronze images : 39 nos.
- Textiles : 102 nos.
- Oil paintings : 58 nos.
- Sketches and drawings : 63 nos.
- Jewellery : 197 nos. and others.

**Reference Library** :- Books on art, architecture, archaeology, the anthropology, history and other aspects of the state.

**Epigraphical Collections** :- Number of manuscripts – 120 nos.

**Language** :- Sanskrit and Bengali.

**Type** :- Mythological.

**Sculpture** :- Most of the sculptures acquired and displayed so far are from Udaipur, Pilak, Jolaibari and other sites of Tripura. Out of them, the sculptures from Pilak are exquisite collections, depicting mixed culture of both, Hindu and Buddhist pantheon. They are famous for the style and variety of theme. The sculptures are mostly dated back to 9th and 13th AD. Most of the sculptures are made of sandstone and for that the formation of sculpture is very crude in nature.

Low relief Dasavatar panels collected from Radhanagar in the vicinity of Agartala, date to 18th century AD, are exquisite pieces of sculpture. From these sculptures, local influence about their formation, style and anthropomorphic details can be gathered.

**Terracotta** :- Most of the terracotta figures collected in this Museum are from Pilak and Amarpur. Some terracotta figures belonging to Bengal School have been contributed by Historian Dinesh Ch. Sen, and are prized collection. Terracottas of Pilak symbolizes a unique craftsmanship of traditions, that prevailed in Bengal and the rest have mythological themes, floral designs, animal motifs, etc. Due to poor firing and clay, the quality of the terracottas found in Pilak are not as good as those of Bengal.

**Bronze Images** :- Bronze images of Tripura are no less important in moulding technique, theme, variety and unique craftsmanship. Some of the important collections are of miniature Mukhalinga Avalokitesvara, Tara and Vishnu.

**Coins** :- The most ancient coin of the Tripura ruler so far discovered is that of Maharaja Ratna Manikya (1464 AD) the 145th King of the state.

**Characteristics of the Coins of Tripura**

(a) Mostly made of silver and copper, some gold coins are also in the collection.

**NOTES**

NOTES

(b) Coronation, pilgrimage, conquest, etc. types of commemorative coins are the general collection.

(c) The Queen's name along with the King's are inscribed on the coins, e.g. depict the legend Sivadurgapada, Srijuta Dharma Manikya Deva, Sri Dharmasila Mahadevi.

(d) Iconographic symbol is also found on the coin.

(e) The script of the coins is in Bengali and partly Assamese. The language is Sanskrit.

**Paintings** :- Paintings are mostly acquired from the Royal House of Tripura on permanent donation. The paintings mainly belong to the life-size portrait collection of the rulers of the State. There are paintings of non-Indian origin. Some sketch drawings of famous artists like Nandala Gagan Thakur and Dhiren Krishna Deb Ba the most valuable collection of this museum.

**Tribal Sculpture Gallery** :- Tripura being a land of various ethnic groups, an attempt has been made to depict the culture of the major tribes of Tripura. Some of the unique collections of ornaments, instruments and textiles used by them in different stages of life are shown through models and diorama.

**Photo Gallery**

**Bronze objects**

- Buddha : Circa 9th-10th Cent A.D.
- Siva Parvati : 9th-10th cent A.D.

**Stone objects**

- Bhairava : 12th cent, Sonamura, Tripura
- Buddha : 10th cent, Pilak, Tripura

**3** Uma-Maheswar : 11th cent, Udaipur, Tripura

**Stone plaque (Dashavatara panel)**

- **Kalki avatar** : 18th cent, Radhanagar, Tripura
- Kurmavatar : 18th cent, Radhanagar, Tripura
- Krishna : 18th cent, Radhanagar, Tripura

**Terracotta**

- Kinnar : 18th cent, Pilak, Tripura

## Monuments of Archaeological Importance in Tripura

***Table 1.4*** *Gauhati Circle, Tripura*

| Sl. no | Name of monuments/ sites | Location | District |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1. | Sculptures and rock-cut relief of Unakuti Tirtha, Unakuti Range, | Unakuti Range | North Tripura |
| 2. | Ancient Remains, Baxanagar, | Baxanagar | West Tripura |
| 3. | Gunavati Group of Temples, Radha Kishorpur, | Radha Kishorpur | South Tripura |
| 4. | Temple of Chaturdasa Devata, Radha Kishorpur, | Kishorpur | South Tripura |
| 5. | Bhubaneswari Temple, Rajnagar, | Rajnagar | South Tripura |
| 6.. | Thakurani Tilla, Paschim Pillak, | Pillak | South Tripura |
| 7. | Ancient Mound called Shyamsundar Ashram Tilla, Baikhora Jolaibari | Baikhora Jolaibari | South Tripura |
| 8. | Ancient Mound known Puja Khola, Paschim Pillak, | Paschim Pillak | South Tripura |

***Source:*** Tripura.nic.in

NOTES

## 1.3.2 Manipur

The history of the early period of the state was reconstructed from the chronicles of the Ningthouja dynasty along with some literary sources and various clan genealogies. The various annual administrative reports such as the one of 1894-95 also provide valuable information. Documents like the 1470 Agreement between King Kiyamba of Manipur and Khekhomba of Pong in upper Burma, Anglo Manipur Friendship Treaty in 1762, Anglo Manipuri Defense Protocol of 1763, and Treaty of Yandaboo, 1826, between the British government and the Burmese government after the Burmese captured Manipur from 1819 – 1826, which is still remembered as the 'Seven Year Devastation' also provide a great deal of information. The court history or the chronicle of Manipur, *Cheitharon Kumpapa*, is a stirring literary source and provides concrete evidence from 33 CE till Bodhchandra, the last king (1955). According to Saroj N. Arambam Parrat in the court chronicles of the kings of Manipur, 'The earlier part of the chronicle is problematic both as regards dating and historicity, though the information it contains is still useful in reconstructing Manipur's early history.'

*Ningthourol Lambuba* is yet another literary source for the reconstruction of the history of Manipur.

The Manipur State Archives are another source of information about the history of Manipur. The ancient treaties, such as Sakoklamlen, Chinglon Laihui, Nuglon, Kanglei, Layat and Kangla Houba also aid in the reconstruction of history, especially in the understanding of the rules for the construction of Kangla. We get information regarding the governance of Manipur during the ancient period from the written constitution 'Loyumba Shinyen'. *Mashin* is another text that provides information about the economic and social history of Manipur. Yet another text of ancient times is *Panthoibi Kongkhul* in which, besides other things, refers to the plantation of varieties of crops and paddy by Nongpok Ningthou and Panthoibi.

Manipur being one of the oldest civilizations, the evolution process of the state goes back to the pre-historic period of which evidences have been discovered. Though there have been debates over references to Manipur being there in the Mahabharata, it has been rejected by scholars, even from Manipur.

Table 1.5, from the site of the Archaeological Survey of India, provides the history of various archaeological excavations conducted in Manipur since 1947.

***Table 1.5*** *Excavations - Since Independence - Manipur*

| Site | Year(s) | Excavated by | Reference |
|---|---|---|---|
| Kanchipur | 1991-92 | Govt. of Manipur | IAR 1991-92, pp 75-76 |
| Khangkhui | 1968-69 | O. K. Singh | IAR 1968-69, p.20 |
| Sekta | 1994-95 | Manipur State Archaeology | IAR 1994-95, pp. 58-59 |

In Manipur, evidence exists of cultures of the Old Stone Age, New Stone Age, Bronze Age and Iron Age. Manipur has hills with rock shelters and caves that would have given shelters to prehistoric men. Though Old Stone Age evidence is only found in the hills, the relics of the New Stone Age can be seen in the valley too. Imphal valley could have experienced the copper-bronze age culture, a significant phase in the history of mankind. The traits of Bronze Age Culture in Manipur seem to have come from Upper Burma and Thailand. Excavations in Manipur after 1970 help to infer that Manipur sites also harboured Hoanbinhian culture. The archaeological linkage of pre-historic culture also existed in Manipur.

Information from various edicts is of prime importance, such as from the edicts of Meidingu Naophangba, which provides a short account, 115 types of crimes in ancient Manipur and their related punishments. Nangshamei Puya and the annual administrative

NOTES

reports of the political agents and the writing of British administrators in Manipur have even contributed some information regarding criminal justice system in the region.

To quote from - *History of Manipur*: An Independent Kingdom (AD 33-1949):

> 'The intellectual reservoir of manuscripts, which are in the personal custody of the "Maichous" and many of which have been published in modern Meitei enriched the knowledge of a number of human disciplines viz., Administration, Arts and Culture, Astrology, Charms and Mantras, Creation Theories, Dictionaries, Fine Arts, Geography, Geology, Health and Hygiene Genealogy. Poetry, Prediction, Prose, Religious Philosophy, Scripts Supernatural stones, Yek, Salais and miscellaneous aspects (Khelchandra quoted in Sanajaoba op.cit). Few of them in Manpuri title includes Cheitharol Kumbaba, Ningthourol Lumbaba, Numit Kappa, Leithak Leikharon, Chainarol, Panthoibi Khongul, Nungan Pombi Luwaoba, Loyumba Shinyen, Sanamahi Leikal, Mashin, chadda Laihui, Chakpa Khunda Khunthok, Naothingkhong khungthoklon, Poirenton Khunthokpa, Pakhangba Nongkarol, Laishemlon and Sakok Lamlel are some of the outstanding Meitei early scriptures which record the story of human evolution, the myths, legends, pre- and proto-history and the history of the seventy-four kings who ruled the country since AD 33 till the merger of Manipur with the Union of India in 1949 (Sanajaoba op.cit).'

## List of Monuments of National Importance in Manipur

***Table 1.6*** *Monuments and Temples of Manipur*

| SL. No. | Description | Location | District | Image |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| N-MN-1 | Temple of Vishnu | Bishenpur | Bishnupur | |
| N-MN-2 | Uttra sanglen | Imphal | Imphal West | |
| N-MN-3 | Temple at Kangla | Imphal | Imphal West | |
| N-MN-4 | Monument of Bheigyachandra Maharaj | Imphal | Imphal West | |
| N-MN-5 | Kanchi-gate | M.U.Campus, Kanchipur, Imphal | Imphal West | |
| N-MN-6 | It is the monument of 'Paona Brajabashi', one of the national heroes of Manipur. | Khongjom | Thoubal | |

NOTES

## 1.3.3 Assam

Oldest written record of the relics of Paleolithic culture of Assam is found in A.H. Dhoni's *Pre- history and Proto-history of Eastern India*. In the prehistoric antiquities found in the Garo hills, Dhoni saw a stone tool and classified it as Acheu lean hand-axe. This tool is currently housed in Pitt-Rivers Museum, Oxford. In Garo hills' Ron Gram Valley a huge number of tools from this period have been found. These sites were selected for the dig based on their having ready raw material and water needed for the early humans to fashion tools.

### Assam in Pre-Historic Age

### Mesolithic Age

In the Ron Gram Valley of Garo Hills, Mesolithic stone tools were discovered. It seems that handmade pottery was used by the people, who were food gatherers and hunters.

### Neolithic Age

Archaeological evidence of the early Neolithic culture were unearthed in the north Cachar, Naga and Garo hills. It can be found all across Assam, but is mostly concentrated in the hill districts. They employed shifting or 'jhum' cultivation of grains like millet and rice, possibly because of floods. They ate fish, goats, deer and other wild animals. They used bark to make clothes. An influence of both Southeast Asian and Indian cultures can be found in this region.

### Iron Age

No archaeological evidence of the Iron Age has been found in this region.

### Megalithic Age

A little earlier than the first millennium is fixed as the time period for the beginning of the Megalithic culture in Assam. It is seen at sites in Karbi and Kamrup hills and along the borders of Garo hills.

Table 1.7 from the website of the Archaeological Survey of India provides the history of various archaeological excavations conducted in Assam since 1947. Figure 1.2 shows the Ambari Archaeological Site, Kamrup, Assam

***Table 1.7*** *Excavations in Assam Since Independence*

| Site | Year(s) | Excavated by | Reference |
|---|---|---|---|
| Ambari | 1968-69 & 1970-71; 1987-88; 1989-90 | Guwahati University; Assam State Archaeology [1989-90] & Deccan College, Pune | IAR 1968-69, pp. 3-4 & 1970-71, p. 4; 1987-88, pp. 8-9; 1988-89, p. 6; 1989-90, pp. 8-9 |
| Dah-Parvatia | 1989-90 | ASI | IAR 1989-90, p. 10 |
| Daojali-Hading. | 1962-63 & 1963-64 | Guwahati University | IAR 1962-63, p. 3 & 1963-64, p. 4-5. |
| Deopani-Than | 1962-63 | Assam State Archaeology | IAR 1962-63, p. 3. |
| Devasthan | 1984-85 | Assam State Archaeology | IAR 1984-85, p. 8. |
| Gauhati | 1974-75 | University of Guwahati | IAR 1974-75, p. 7 |
| Jalukbari | 1967-68 | Guwahati University | IAR 1967-68, p. 8. |
| Na-nath | 1984-85 | Assam State Archaeology | IAR 1984-85, p.8. |
| Paya | 1965-66 | ASI & Local Govt. | IAR 1965-66, p. 35. |
| Selbalgiri-2 | 1967-68 | Guwahati University | IAR 1967-68, p. 8. |
| Shri Shri Suryapahar | 1992-93; 1993-94 | ASI | IAR 1992-93, pp. 4-5; 1993-94, p. 9 |

NOTES

***Fig. 1.2*** *Ambari Archaeological Site, Kamrup, Assam*
***Source:*** Archaeological Survey of India: http://www.asiGauhaticircle.gov.in

## Sources for Ancient Assam

When it comes to literary evidence, there are references to Assam in the Mahabharata. The early contact between the Aryans and Assam has found references in the Ramayana and the Mahabharata.

There is no chronicle for Assam which is reliable for reconstructing its history. From the medieval period we have the chronicles 'Buranji'. Yet, other types of sources need to be relied on, of which the epigraphic sources are of prime importance.

When we refer to ancient history, let us take a quick look at the types of sources we can use for reconstructing the history of Assam.

### 1. Literary Sources

The *Puranas* like the *Harivamsa,* and Mahabharata carry legends of the mythical kings Brajadatta, Bhagadatta and Naraka. *Kalika Purana* contained the Naraka legend's latest form of *Harshacharita* written by Bana during the reign of Harshavardhana provides important information regarding the king of Assam Bhaskarvarmana. There are accounts of Hiuen-Tsang the traveller (known to have been in Assam from AD 629—45) and inscriptions of Bhaskarvarmana in which there is mention of Assam. Various tantric works are also sources of information regarding Assam or Kamrupa, like the *Yogini Tantra*. There are also references in Greek historical works to people of Assam (primitive Kirata people). *Tabakat-E-Nasiri* written by Minhujuddin's is a work of prime importance and it refers to Kamrupa as falling on the route taken by Muhammad-I-Bakhtiyar on his expedition against Tibet. Assam is also mentioned in a few Persian and Arabic texts of approximately AD 851.

*Sankhyagrihasangraha* recounts that Surjya Pahar in Goalpara was a land that worshipped Surya and was also known as the place for 'Jyotish Sastra'.

Mention of ancient Assam can also be found in *Arthasastra* authored by Kautilya.

Writings of Kalidasa and accounts of Periplus also carry important information regarding Assam (Kamrupa).

The *Periplus of the Eastern Sea* talks of Rome and Egypt trading with Assam. Almost all the historians of ancient times refer to Assam as having the best quality of silk. Yet another source of information about Assam is the *Devi Purana*, which was written at the close of the 7th century and beginning of the 8th century.

NOTES

## 2. Inscriptions

Assam's oldest epigraphic records are from 15th century AD.

As provided by the literature made available by the government of Assam, below is a chronological list of the epigraphic evidence for Assam.

- 'Umachal (Kamakhya hill, Kamrup district). Rock inscription of Maharajadhiraja Surendravarman of dynasty of Pushyavarman (Figure 1.3).
- Nagajari (Sarupather, Golaghat district). Fragmentary stone inscription assigned to the fifth century AD.
- Bargana (near Doboka, Nogaon district). Rock inscription of Paramabhattaraka Maharajadhiraj Bhutivarman of sixth century AD.
- Doobi (Barpeta district). Copper-plate originally issued to Bhutivarman and later reissued by Bhaskarvarman.
- Nidhanpur (Sylhet district, Bangladesh). Copper plate issued to Bhituvarman.
- Nalanda (Patna district, Bihar). Clay seals of Bhaskaravamana.
- Silimpur inscription

There are nearly 38 similar inscriptions.'

***Fig. 1.3*** *Rock inscription of Maharajadhiraja Surendravarman of Dynasty of Pushyavarman*

## 3. Coins

Coins with names of early kings of Assam have not been found. Pre-Ahom coins were found at Brahmaputra River's south bank. Coins of the same type have been discovered in Tripura and Bangladesh as well. Recently, in a tea estate close to Tezpur (Dhulapadung Tea Estate) some copper coins were discovered.

## 4. Archeological and Monumental Sources

Stone Age artefacts are found in Assam as also a few sculptural and architectural remains of the ancient period. One of the well-known excavation sites is Dah Parvatiya near Tezpur (Figure 1.4).

NOTES

***Fig. 1.4*** *Dah Parvatiya near Tezpur*

The excavation has revealed sculptures and statues that display a keen likeness to the style used during the Gupta period.

Gauhati's 'Nabagraha' temple of the nine grahas or planets is a living testament of the development of astrology in early times in Assam.

According to the Government of Assam's website, the sources of history of the medieval period of Assam from 13th Century AD to 18th Century AD are:

### 1. Contemporary Chronicles

The 'Ahom Buranji' is a digest of events of the reigns of the Ahom rulers from Khunlung and Khunlai to Rudra Singha. It is an almost complete and comprehensive account written in the Tai-Ahom script. The 'Purani Assam Buranji' or the 'Buranji' from the earliest times, i.e., Sukapha (1228) to Gadadhar Singa was written in Assamese prose. The 'Sat Sari Assam Buranji' is a collection of seven old Assamese Buranjis.

The 'Ahom Buranji' the 'Purani Assam Buranji', the 'Sat Sari Assam Buranji' are regional accounts comprising chronicles of religious institutions and founders of monasteries, family histories and dynastic chronicles. Religious records comprise the Tripura, Jaintia and Kacahari Buranjis.

### 2. Memories and Farmans in Persian

*Tabaquat-i-Nasiri: Tarikh-i-Firose Shah*, by Zia ud din Barani, *Tarikh-i-Feista: Gulshan-i-Ibrahimi*, by Muhammad Oasim, *Akbarnamah* of Sheikh Abdul Fazl, *Muntakhab ut Tawarikkh* by Abdul Quadir of Badaun, *Baharistan-i-Ghaibi* by Alau'ddi Ispahana

### 3. Letters in Assamese

Extremely important sources, at times diplomatic letters, were contained in the Buranjis, for example, in Cachar, Jaintia, Kamrup and Assam. They provide information regarding the period's interstate relations.

### 4. Archeological, Numismatic, Epigraphic Sources

These help to reconstruct the period's political history and to fix dates and names of rulers, the various activities (social, political, etc.) and provide information regarding the period's cultural and socio-religious milieu.

NOTES

## 5. Archaeological Evidences

For archaeological evidences, the website of Government of Assam website has the following to say:

> The Koch and Ahom rulers had to their credit numerous public works: tanks, embankments, roads, forts and temples. The Muslim conquerors also built a few mosques and roads. The most important Koch monuments are in the form of temples. The King of Koch-Hajo had the Vishnu (Haygrib-Madhava) temple built atop the Mani Hillock at Hajo. Ahom rulers like Rudra Singha built the brick city at Rangpur; Pramatta Singha built masonry gateways at Garghgaon and an amphitheatre at Rangpur. The temples tell us about their patronage of Hinduism. The conquering Sultans of Bengal constructed a few mosques during their invasion of Kamrup. The most reputed is 'Poa Mecca', built near Hajo to perpetuate the memory of a Muslim divine, Sultan Ghiyasuddin Aulia, probably in 16th century.

## 6. Geographic and Numismatic Sources

Coins aid in creating a chronology of the rulers as also fixing their status. We can obtain the date, title and name of rulers from coins. From the legends on the coins it could be possible to know the script, language, as well as the religion the rulers patronize.

Here are some of the evidences that have been affixed with the help of coins. 'The Koch coins were known as Narayani, from ending names of the rulers. Ahom coins were called 'Takka'. Jayadhwaj Singha (1648-63) was the first king to introduce coins. Gold coins were issued by Chakradhwaj Singha and Udayaditya Singha. Sir Edward Gait, the eminent historian, refers to Jaintia coins with various Saka dates. Coins of the Sultans of Bengal (from thirteen to sixteenth centuries) who invaded Kamrup have been discovered in different parts of these areas. The provenance of Muhammad bin Tughlaq's coin tends to support the solitary and 300-year late literary evidence of *Alamgimamah* about his undated Kamrup expedition. The next invasion of Kamrup was by the Ilyas Shahi Bengal Sultan; here too, coins constitute the sole evidence.'

## 7. Epigraphic Sources

Inscriptions related to matters of Koch Bihar, Kamrupa, and Assam that stress on Assam's relations with Delhi's Sultans were discovered in many areas in the country. Mostly, the Assamese and Sanskrit scripts (Figure 1.5) were used. Persian was used for Mughal inscriptions.

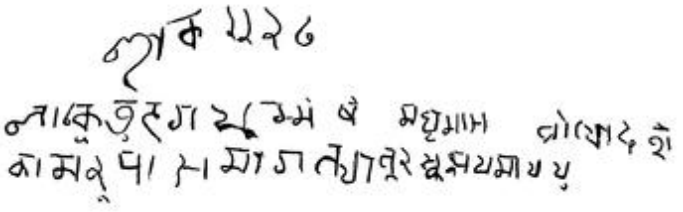


***Fig. 1.5*** *Kanai-boroxiboa rock inscription, 1207 CE, shows proto-Assamese script*

Just two Koch epigraphs of the 16th century exist; one of 1487 Saka on the Kamakhya temple, and one of 1505 Saka, regarding rebuilding of the Manikut or the Hayagrib temple on Mani hillock at Hajo. The 1362 rock inscription of Gachtal is the earliest Ahom period inscription. Clearly inscribed upon a snake-pillar, the inscription describes the reign of Suhungmung. The 1616 rock inscription of Samdhara Rampart provides information regarding the victory of Pratap Singha, the Ahom king. Two Kachari inscriptions exist, which are known. One is at Kachari on a temple which is rock-cut

NOTES

while the other provides information regarding making of a place in Khaspur. Highly valuable inscriptions have been found on the canons. These belong to both Ahom kings and Koch rulers as well as to the Mughals. The writing is either Persian or Sanskrit. Assam's oldest discovered canon is of Koches of the 16th century. Inscriptions engraved on buildings of religious importance such as mosques and Dargahs show Muslim influence in the region. Another type of historical and informative record is the copper-plate grants. They can be used to fix the chronology of the kings'.

### 8. Accounts of Foreign Travellers

Ralph Fitch, an English traveller, went from Bengal to Koch Bihar. He has described the country. Jesuit Portuguese travellers, Father John Cabral and Father Stephen Canella, in 1626, came to Dacca, Koch Bihar and Kamrup till Pandu. Through their letters we get important information, though meager, regarding relations between the Mughals and Koch.

Latter half of the 17th century has accounts of travellers such as physician Francoise Beemer and the French jeweller Jean Baptize Tavernier, regarding the battles of that period.

### 9. Reports and Records of the East India Company

The reports sent to the authorities at the Fort William by the military officers of the British regarding Assam are valuable documents for information. Records and reports of this nature range chronologically starting mid-18$^{th}$ century depicting the cultural, socioeconomic and administrative milieu of Assam. Captain Thomas Welsh in the year 1792 was sent to Assam to assist Raja Gourinath. From him there became available plenty of information regarding the commercial, economic and social bearing of Assam during that period including records of, for example roads, buildings traditions etc. Then again David Scott, who was the then Northeast frontier Governor General's Agent made available an English version of an Assamese chronicle from AD 1603 to AD 1822, containing how the Ahom monarchy degenerated and declined. There are also available writings of Sir Edward Gait who has provided earlier work which is rather imperfect but further work is authentic and extremely creditable, so much that he is considered to be 'the father of historical research in Assam'. Gait's *History of Assam* was published in 1906 and was a first of its kind – scientifically written. It was a systematic and comprehensive history of Assam from earliest times, written by performing a comparative utilization of Persian chronicles, the Buranjis and other available materials of historical value.

### Temples and Monuments of Assam

Nestled in the Brahmaputra valley this state has Tantrik Shaktism, Shivaism and later Vaishnavism flourishing in its laps. From time to time people from different races, religion and culture have migrated to this place.

The Mohammedan invasions brought Islam into the state. Sikhism flourished here, Buddhist communities have kept the flag of Buddhism flying high. The famous Gurudwara at Dhubri established by the ninth Sikh Guru Teg Bahadur is held in the high veneration by the Sikhs throughout the country.

With the advent of new faith and religion, many temples and monuments were built all over Assam. Most of these architectural grandeurs belong to the medieval period and represent the architectural style of the Koch, Kachari and Ahom royal courts.

These temples and monuments, spread almost all over Assam, bear silent witness to a glorious past.

NOTES

### *Kamakhya temple*

The Shakti temple of goddess Kamakhya situated on the top of Nilachal Hills, overlooking river Brahmaputra, is 8 km away from the Gauhati railway station.

This greatest shrine of tantric shaktism is mentioned in the inscription of the Allahabad pillar of Samudragupta. Devotees from all over India converge on this holy place during Ambubachi and Manasha puja.

### *Nabagraha temple*

This temple of nine planets is situated on Chitra Chal Hill in Gauhati. In ancient times, it was said to have been a great centre of study of astronomy and astrology. This is also one of the reasons why Gauhati is referred to as Pragjyotishpur or the city of eastern astrology.

### *Umananda temple*

The great Shiva temple, situated on the peacock island in the middle of the Brahmaputra, in Gauhati attracts devotees from all over the country during 'shivaratri'. One can visit the temple by crossing the river by country boat plying from Kachari ghat, on the northern banks of the Brahmaputra, where the third Pandava, Arjun, is believed to have watered his horse while undertaking journey during Ashwamedh Yagna.

### *Basisthashram*

Situated in the southernmost outskirts of Gauhati city on the Sandhyachal hill is a well known holy spot, called Basisthashram, named after the great Vedic Sage Bashistha, who is said to have lived here. Three rivulets named Sandhya, Lalita and Kanta meet here and flow perennially.

### *Mahabhairab temple*

It is an ancient temple where King Bana worshipped Mahabhairab; another incarnation of Lord Shiva.

### *Madan Kamdev*

Madan Kamdev is an enigma, a mystery, a marvel and in the words of Omar Khayam, 'a veil past which I could not see'. Very little is known about the origin of these magnificent archaeological ruins. Written history is almost silent on it, leaving wide room for conjectures and hypothesis.

### *Kamrupa*

The ancient name of Assam, is believed to have derived its name from the legend that love God Kama or Madan, after being turned into ashes by an angry Shiva, was reborn here. One school believes that Madan was reborn and united to Rati on this tiny hillock.

### *Poa-Mecca*

There is also a mosque built by Pir Giasuddin Aulia and is held that it has one-fourth sanctity of Mecca and so it is known as Poa-Mecca. It is believed that by offering

NOTES

prayer here, a person gains one-fourth (poa) spiritual enlightenment of what could be gained at Mecca and so is known as Poa-Mecca.

### *Da-Parbatia*

The ruins of the door frame of Da-Parbatia Temple a few kilometers. from Tezpur town, is perhaps the finest and oldest specimen of sculptural or iconoclastic art in Assam. Its carving has the characteristics of the style of early Gupta School of sculpture. The door-jambs having two goddesses, Ganga and Yamuna, standing with garlands in their hands in an artistic pose and elegance are decorated with beautiful ornamental foliage.

### *Agnigarh*

'Preserving the sweet memory of young lovers', Agnigarh or the rampart, is situated in Tezpur. According to legend, Princess Usha, the only daughter of King Bana, was kept inside the palace which was surrounded by rampart of fire.

## 1.4 PATTERN OF SETTLEMENT

M. L. Bose in his book *History of Arunachal Pradesh* (op.cit. pp.6-8) provides us the settlement pattern in brief. He is of the view that at least three major climatic zones can be recognized on the basis of temperature although temperature, pressure, precipitation and winds vary with altitude. The foothill area is hot and humid and has a sub-tropical climate, the lesser Himalayas enjoy cooler or micro-thermal climate, and finally in the higher region a Himadri type (alpine) climate is found. The flora and fauna of the province vary with the climate and soil. The forest types range from tropical evergreen in the foothills, through temperate evergreen in the middle ranges, to the coniferous in the higher elevations and the high Himalayas in the extreme north.

The altitude of these hills is comparatively lower, except in the north, than the other hills of this region of the Himalayas. The hills in the lower region are steep and inaccessible. The pass leading to Tawang along the Kameng valley and then through Bomdila and Sela lead through higher altitude. At Sela the elevation is 4680 metres but the Tawang region is relatively lower and the altitude of the Tawang itself is 3000 metres above sea level. The climate of these hills is humid upto 1200 metres, temperate upto 2100 metres and cold with heavy snowfall beyond that. Rich with evergreen deciduous forest, the hills in the upper region have pine, oak and fur trees. Carpeted with wild strawberries and a display of rhododendrons and a score of other multicolour flowers, these hills are the most picturesque of all the Arunachal hills. Much of the land in the northern region of the greater Himalayas has remained virtually empty, the middle zone is moderately populated, but the foothills and valleys have higher population.

**Check Your Progress**

3. State the three types of literary sources.
4. Name any two types of archaeological sources.
5. List some forms of sources that fall in the category of oral traditions.

Geography has influenced the cultural development of the province to a great extent. The northern region, has been greatly influenced by the Indo-Tibetan culture. For many centuries, the Tibetan traders crossed the borders and traded in the region and many of them got settled in the valleys of the greater Himalayas. This accounts for the large Buddhist settlements in the Siang districts and the Buddhist impact is visible in the way of life of the people in the higher regions. The southern belt of the foothills has had similar contact with the plains of Assam. The results are manifested in the religion, language, clothing, food habits, and mode of agriculture. But the middle zone has remained comparatively backward. Both Tibetan and Assamese influences are visible in the ways of life of the people settled in this region. The tribes living in this region had very little

contact with the outside world and even today they can be seen living in extremely primitive conditions.

As groups, even though partially, settled at a place to practise agriculture, a system of complex socio-economic relationship developed which was remarkably different from those in primitive economies. In these agricultural settlements, food stockpiling played a decisive role. This role led to an increase in the density of the group whose base was not limited to the small family. This represents the permanent aggregation of a family as its base gets wider. Some members thus, though only partially, are able to work on things which are not directly linked with the search for food. This ensures a wider division of labour as the number of members in the functional group increases. These members apply techniques that make them share the burden of the 'specialist' in techniques whose economic utility is not immediately obvious.

NOTES

Other factors also played an important role, such as the change in the pattern of settlement and periods of food production. The new economic equations such as the invention centres on methods of defence of the agrarian equipment (fortification and metallurgy), storage (basket weaving and storage pits), and the preparation of grain (grinding mills and pottery) determined the 'creative urge'.

The earliest settlers were Austro-Asiatic speakers, followed by Tibeto-Burmese and lastly by Indo-Aryans. Archaeologists believe that early settlers of North East India had domesticated several important plants due to bio- and crop diversity of the region. According to Chinese explorer, Zhang Qian, indicate an early trade route via North East India.

In the early historical period (most of first millennium), Kamarupa, one of the historical kingdoms of Assam that existed from 350 to 1140 CE and was ruled by three dynasties included most of present-day Northeast India, besides Bhutan and Sylhet in Bangladesh. Xuanzang, a Chinese Buddhist monk, visited Kamarupa in the 7th century, described the people as 'short in stature and black-looking'. For many of the tribal people, their primary identification is with subtribes and villages, which have distinct dialects and cultures.

Different ethnic groups and tribal groups inhabit the region of North East India. They all have their own culture and tribal tradition and speak their own tribal languages. This has made North East India one of the most culturally diverse regions of the world. The cuisines and attires also different among the tribes. Each tribal community have their unique way of living.

## Origin of the Tribes

Tribes of North East India have originated from the ethnic groups of Tibeto-Burmese, proto Austrioloids and some groups of Indo Mongoloids. The trend can be seen in the looks, traditions that are visibly followed by these communities. They also show a cultural bridging with the neighbouring countries. India has till now provided them with a safe haven, compared to living in neighbouring communist nations of China and Burma.

## Types of Tribes in North East

North East tribes constitute a major part of Indian tribal community. They are scattered all over the states of North East. Arunachal Pradesh consists of around 25 types of tribes. Nagaland has more than 16 major tribes. Some examples of prominent tribes are Garo, Khasi, Jaintia, Adi, Nyishi, Angami, Bhutia, Kuki, Rengma, Bodo and Deori. Some tribes are Christians and some follow Hinduism and Buddhism. The rest still have their indigenous beliefs and practice animism.

NOTES

Some major tribes of North East India are as follows:

- **Bodo Tribe:**It is a vast tribe and constitutes a considerable part of Assamese population. The tribal people have also migrated to other parts of India as well as to neighbouring countries. It is believed that Bodo tribes have introduced rice cultivation, tea plantation, poultry farming, and silkworm rearing in the North Eastern parts of India.
- **Kuki Tribe:** They can be found all over the northeastern states. The language of the tribe varies but are all similar in a way, and can broadly be termed as the Kuki language. They prefer to live on hilltops. The tribe cultivates dwarf cotton and spun yarns.
- **Adi Tribe:** This tribe has two divisions namely Bogums and Bomis. They are found in Arunachal Pradesh. This group is again divided into various small sub-tribes.
- **Nyishi or Nishi Tribe:** This tribe has originated from the Indo-Mongoloid stock. They mainly inhabit the lower region of the Subansiri district in Arunachal Pradesh and are considered a large tribe based on the area and population of Arunachal Pradesh. They speak a language that is quite different from the other tribes of the Tibeto-Burman language.
- **Angami Tribe:** This is one of the major tribal communities of Nagaland**.** Angami tribe is also found in Manipur and has a total population of 12 million. The tribal community believes in Christianity and speaks *Tenyidie*. They cultivate rice and grains on the hilly areas.
- **Rengma Tribe:** They are a Naga tribal community, and are found in both Nagaland and Assam. The community is further divided into two categories, Eastern and Western Rengmas, and are considered experts in terrace cultivation.
- **Bhutia Tribe:** This tribe **is** a prominent tribal community of Sikkim and have migrated from Tibet. They are mostly found in the Lachen and Lachung areas of North Sikkim. They speak *Bhutia* (a dialect of Tibetan language). They are considered one of the most developed tribes and earns their livelihood through agriculture, government jobs and local business.
- **Garo Tribe:** They are the second largest tribal community of Meghalaya. They constitute 1/3rd of the total state population and mainly reside in the Garo hills of Meghalaya, some districts of Assam and West Bengal. Their traditional religion was *Songserak* and later changed to Christianity.
- **Khasi Tribe** are one of the major tribal communities and occupies almost half of the total population of Meghalaya. They reside in the Khasi and Jaintia hills of Meghalaya and follow the matriarchal society. Their language is *Mon-Khmer* which belongs to the Austro-Asiatic family.

North East Indian tribes are undoubtedly one of the most colourful and culturally rich communities of India. They represent a totally unique trend and living among the Indian tribal community.

**Check Your Progress**

6. Name any three major tribe of North East India.
7. Where do the Khasi tribe reside in North East India?
8. From where have the tribes of North East India originated?

## 1.5 THE VARMAN DYNASTY

The genealogy of the Varman dynasty appears most fully in the Dubi and Nidhanpur copper plate inscriptions of the last Varman king, Bhaskar Varman (650-655), where

NOTES

Pushya Varman is named as the founder. The Dubi copper plate inscription of Bhaskar Varman asserts that Pushya Varman was born in the family of Naraka, Bhagadatta and Vajradatta (as did the other two Kamarupa dynasties) three thousand years after these mythical ancestors.

Historical documents are contradictory on the ethnicity of this dynasty, with Yuan Chwang, calling Bhaskar Varman a Brahman king who originated with Narayana Deva, while Bhaskar Varman told She-Kia-Fang-Che that his ancestors hailed from China, which according to 'Sylvain' is nothing more than an act of diplomacy. Many scholars including Kamarupa Anusandhan Samiti considers the Varman dynasty as the first Indo-Aryan dynasty in Assam, that was overthrown by Salastambha of Mongoloid origin, who then made himself the king of Kamarupa, whereas others term the dynasty as Sanskritized non-Aryan tribal rulers.

***Table 1.8*** *Varman Dynasty*

| | Reign | Name |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | 350-374 | Pushya Varman |
| 2 | 374-398 | Samudra Varman |
| 3 | 398-422 | Bala Varman |
| 4 | 422-446 | Kalyana Varman |
| 5 | 446-470 | Ganapati Varman |
| 6 | 470-494 | Mahendra Varman |
| 7 | 494-518 | Narayana Varman |
| 8 | 518-542 | Bhuti Varman |
| 9 | 542-566 | Chandramukha Varman |
| 10 | 566-590 | Sthita Varman |
| 11 | 590-595 | Susthita Varman |
| 12 | 595-600 | Supratisthita Varman |
| 13 | 600-650 | Bhaskar Varman |
| 14 | 650-655 | Avanti Varman |

## 1. Pushya Varman

Pushya Varman (AD 350–374) was the first historical ruler of Assam who established the Varman dynasty in 350 AD and the historical Kamarupa kingdom. He encouraged Vedic culture to flourish in his country. Brahminical influence was widespread during his reign. He maintained cultural, political and diplomatic relationship with other states under Gupta Empire like Samudragupta. The son of Pushya Varman was Samudra Varman who married Datta Devi. The name of the queen of his great contemporary Samudragupta was also Datta Devi, probably both married in the same family. Though related Samudragupta fought with and defeated Bala Varman, son of Samudra Varman, in connection with the performance of the Asvamedha sacrifice. This is recorded in Samudragupta's Allahabad Inscription. He had to quell internal dissidence as well as external threats. Just as Samudragupta founded an empire which included the Indian subcontinent, Samudra Varman extended his power to the Eastern Peninsula the shores of which were washed by the Pacific Ocean.

NOTES

### 2. Samudra Varman

Samudra Varman was ruler of Kamarupa kingdom from AD 374-398. He was son of Pushya Varman, the founder of Varman Dynasty of Kamarupa. Samudra Varman who was likened to the 5th ocean, in whose kingdom the weak were not oppressed by the strong, who shone like a jewel and was quick in accepting a duel. Datta-Devi was the name of his queen, she gave birth to Bala Varman whose strength (Bala) and armour (Varma) were never separated and whose soldiers were always ready to fight his enemies. Samudragupta was compelled, in spite of this relation, to fight Bala Varman according to the rules of Asvamedha sacrifice which took place in AD 350-380. So it may be admitted that Samudra Varman lived during this time. Perhaps this invasion of Samudragupta limited the power of the kings of Kamarupa for sometime.

### 3. Bala Varman

Bala Varman was successor and son of Samudra Varman who ruled Kamarupa for the period AD 398-422. He was known for his physical strength which reflects in his name and courage. The name of Bala Varman's wife was Ratnavati who gave birth to Kalyana Varman.

### 4. Kalyana Varman

Kalyana Varman ruled Kamarupa from AD 422-426. He was married to Gandharvavati and his successor to the throne was Ganapati Varman.

### 5. Ganapati Varman

Ganapati Varman ruled Kamarupa from AD 446-470. He was married to Yajiiavati and his successor to the throne was named Mahendra Varman.

### 6. Mahendra Varman

Mahendra Varman ruled Kamarupa from AD 470-494. He married Suvrata and had a successor to the throne named Narayana Varman. It is said that he mastered his self, and worked towards the stability (of the rule) of the world, who, like Janaka (or his father) was well versed in the principles of the philosophy of the (supreme) Self.

### 7. Narayana Varman

Narayana Varman ruled Kamarupa between AD 494 and 518. He married Devavati and his son was named Bhuti Varman.

### 8. Bhuti Varman

Bhuti Varman ruled Kamarupa between AD 518 and 542. He married Vijnanavati and his son was named Chandramukha Varman.

### 9. Chandramukha Varman

Chandramukha Varman ruled for the period AD 542-566. Chandramukha, who was charming, as the name suggests, possessed all the arts of the moon (by the digits), was a dispeller of (all) gloom (as the moon dispels the darkness). He married Bhogavati and had his successor to throne named Sthita Varman.

### 10. Sthita Varman

Sthita Varman ruled from AD 566-590. Sthita Varman, the supporter of the world, has innumerable (sources of) enjoyment. He married Nayanadevi and had his successor to throne named Susthita Varman.

NOTES

### 11. Susthita Varman

Susthita Varman ruled from AD 590-595. Susthita Varman held the kingdom together, and was renowned as Sri-Mriganka. His successor was named Supratisthita Varman.

### 12. Supratisthita Varman

Supratisthita Varman ruled from AD 595 to 600. His younger brother Bhaskar Varman was named his successor.

### 13. Bhaskar Varman

Kumar Bhaskar Varman (AD 600–650) was the last and most illustrious ruler of the Varman dynasty of Kamarupa. He came to power after his brother Supratisthita Varman died, a bachelor. After his death Salasthambha, who established the Mlechchha dynasty, acquired power of Kamarupa.

### 14. Avanti Varman

Avanti Varman is believed to be the last of the Varman dynasty who ruled Kamarupa briefly after Bhaskar Varman before being overthrown by Salasthambha, the founder of the Mlechchha dynasty. No direct evidence of this king exists, and the name Avanti Varma is reconstructed from the benedictory verses of a Sanskrit play *Mudrarakshasa* by Vishakhadatta. According to Bargaon grant of Ratnapal, Salasthambha took over the rule of Kamarupa from the descendants of Naraka which, according to K L Barua, occurred after a Mlechchha revolt.

Not much is known about Avanti Varman and his rule but scholars like P.C Choudhury opines that Salasthambha, the founder of Mlechchha dynasty and Avanti Varman is same person. Avanti Varman suppressed the rebellions arose after Bhaskar Varman, but ultimately fell.

## 1.6 SUMMARY

In this unit, you have learnt that:

- The state of Assam was divided into four states viz. Assam, the parent state, Nagaland, Mizoram and Meghalaya. Besides the two princely states of Tripura and Manipur were merged in the Indian Union and came into existence as independent states.
- North East India, as we know today, is very different from what it was centuries ago. The region was not part of India politically and not even administratively, till the British unified it with the rest of India in the beginning of the 18th century.
- The term 'sources' refers to a collection of proofs or evidences used to reconstruct a depiction of the past which is accurate.
- In one form, we can categorize sources into primary and secondary sources.

**Check Your Progress**

9. _____Varman was the founder of the Varman dynasty.
10. Son and successor of Samudra Varman was _____ Varman.

NOTES

- Another categorization of sources can be under the heads written, pictorial, oral, artefacts. Some types of literary sources could be: traveller accounts, treaties, reports, charters and court proceedings.
- Types of archaeological sources are: coins, cultural evidences, edicts, inscriptions, monuments and sites, tools and weapons
- Types of oral tradition sources are: Folk tales, legends, ballads, songs
- There is not enough tangible evidence to reconstruct the ancient history of Tripura prior to the rule of the Manikya dynasty. 'Sri Rajmala' is the only source book of the princely regimes of Tripura. Archaeological excavations carried out at various sites reveal a good deal of historical information.

## 1.7 KEY TERMS

- **Folk tale:** A story originating in popular culture that is typically passed on by word of mouth.
- **Legend:** A traditional story sometimes popularly regarded as historical but unauthenticated.
- **Oral tradition:** Cultural material and traditions transmitted orally across generations.

## 1.8 ANSWERS TO 'CHECK YOUR PROGRESS'

1. The states that comprise North East India are: Assam, Manipur, Mizoram, Nagaland, Arunachal Pradesh, Tripura and Meghalaya.
2. The British unified the North East with the rest of India in the beginning of the 18th century
3. The three types of literary sources are:
   - Traveller accounts
   - Treaties
   - Reports
4. Two types of archaeological sources are:
   - Coins
   - Cultural evidences
5. Some forms of oral tradition sources are:
   - Folk tales
   - Legends
   - Ballads
   - Songs
6. Bodo, Kuki and Adi are some of the major tribes of North East India.
7. The Khasi tribe reside in the Khasi and Jaintia hills of Meghalaya.
8. Tribes of North East India have originated from the ethnic groups of Tibeto-Burmese, proto Austrioloids and some groups of Indo Mongoloids.
9. Pushya
10. Bala

## 1.9 QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

NOTES

### Short-Answer Questions

1. Name the different tribes found in North East India.
2. State any three features of Neolithic culture of North East India.
3. How do literary and oral sources help in reconstruction of history.
4. How is the mode of resource utilization important for understanding the social life of Arunachal Pradesh?

### Long-Answer Questions

1. Briefly discuss the geographical features of North East India.
2. Give a detailed account on the history of Manipur and Assam.
3. Discuss the pattern of settlement of the tribes in North East.
4. Write an account on the Varman Dynasty.

## 1.10 FURTHER READING

Gait, E.A. 2010. *A History of Assam.* US: BiblioBazaar.

Choudhary, Pratap Chandra. 1966. *The History of Civilization of the People of Assam to the Twelfth Century A.D.* Assam: Department of Historical and Antiquarian Studies in Assam.

Sinha, Surajit. 1987. *Tribal Polities and State Systems in Pre-colonial Eastern and North Eastern India*. Kolkata: Centre for Studies in Social Sciences.

Chakravarty, I. N., Chakravarty, Lakshmi N. 1973. *Glimpses of the Early History of Arunachal*. Arunachal Pradesh: Research Department, Arunachal Pradesh Administration.

# UNIT 2 MEDIEVAL NORTH EAST INDIA

NOTES

**Structure**

2.0 Introduction
2.1 Unit Objectives
2.2 Rise of Ahom State: Sukapha and Sudangpha
  2.2.1 Consolidation of the Ahom Kingdom
  2.2.2 Ahom Frontier Policy
  2.2.3 Policy of Ahom Rulers towards the North East Tribe
  2.2.4 Policy of the Ahoms
  2.2.5 Decline and Fall of the Ahom Kingdom
  2.2.6 Ahom Administration
2.3 Moamaria Rebellion and Captain Welsh's Mission
2.4 Summary
2.5 Key Terms
2.6 Answers to 'Check Your Progress'
2.7 Questions and Exercises
2.8 Further Reading

## 2.0 INTRODUCTION

The Ahoms are the descendants of the Tai race, who had accompanied the Tai prince Sukapha into the Brahmaputra valley in 1228 and ruled the area for six centuries. Sukapha and his followers established the Ahom kingdom (1228–1826) and the Ahom dynasty ruled and expanded the kingdom till the British gained control of the region through the Treaty of Yandabo upon winning the First Anglo-Burmese War in 1826. The Tibeto-Burman locals near the Ahoms gave them the name 'Ahom'.

The Ahoms mostly had cordial relations with every tribe of the region, except with the Jaintias who kept defying them. Even though the Kacharis were defiant, they were not much of a trouble for the Ahoms. The overall Ahom policy towards their neighbours was based on four well-known principles of the Indian political philosophy, viz., *Sama-dana-danda-bheda*, i.e., establishment of relations of equal status, establishment of subservient suzerainty, by awarding punishments and driving wedges between neighbours.

The Moamaria rebellion during the 18th century was a conflict between the Morans, adherents of the Moamara Sattra, and Ahom kings. Gaurinath Singha, the Ahom king, appealed for help of men and materials to the East India Company. In response to this, Lord Cornwallis, the Governor General despatched Captain Thomas Welsh with sepoys to help Gaurinath.

This unit will discuss the rise and fall of the Ahom kingdom. It will also discuss the Moamaria rebellion in the 18th century and how the British helped the Ahom ruler to fight the rebels.

NOTES

## 2.1 UNIT OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- Describe the formation of the state of Ahom
- Discuss the rule of the important kings of Ahom
- Explain the causes and the outcome of the Moamaria rebellion
- Describe the phases of Moamaria rebellion from 1769 to 1806
- Interpret the reason behind Captain Welsh's mission

## 2.2 RISE OF AHOM STATE: SUKAPHA AND SUDANGPHA

The Ahom Kingdom is also known as the Kingdom of Assam. It spanned for nearly 600 years of the history of Assam from 1228 to 1826. Ahom Kingdom was situated in the Brahmaputra valley. It was a sovereign state that successfully warded off Mughal attempts of expansion. Sukapha is credited with having established the Ahom kingdom. He was a Tai prince from Mong Mao. It started with being a Mong in the upper reaches of the Brahmaputra river with its base lying in wet rice cultivation. In the 16th century, there was sudden expansion of the kingdom under Suhungmung. At this point the Ahom Kingdom turned multi-ethnic. This created a huge effect on both social and political life of the people in the Brahmaputra valley. During the phase of the Moamoria rebellion, the Ahom kingdom got weak and as a result it was plagued by Burmese invasions. In the First Anglo-Burmese War, the Burmese were defeated and had to enter into a treaty with the British. The treaty was known as the Treaty of Yandabo 1826. Under the terms of the treaty, the East India Company got control of the Ahom Kingdom.

### Early Ahom state

From the thirteenth to the fifteenth century A.D., Ahoms were busy mainly consolidating their newly acquired territory and also protecting it from neighbouring powers. However, the reign of Sukhangpha (1293-1332), the fourth Ahom king, saw the first war with the ruler of Kamata kingdom. The reason for the war is not given in the Ahom chronicals, or buranji. It was brought to a close when the Kamata ruler sued for peace by offering a princess, named Rajani. This event indicates the growing strength of the Ahom power. Tao-Kham-thi (1380-89), the seventh king led a successful expedition against the Sutiya king for murdering his brother Sutupha (1369-76) at a regatta. The reign of Sudangpha (1398-1407), better known as 'Bamuni Konwar' for his birth in the house of a Brahmin at Habung, is important in several respects. It was for the first time that Brahmanical influence had its entry into the Ahom royal palace, the capital was transferred to Charagua near the bank of river Dihing. On the report of some nobles who were dissatisfied with Sudangpha for his subordination to Hindu influence, the Tai rulers of Mong Kwang (Mogaung) sent an expedition to annex the Ahom kingdom. In the battle fought at Kuhiarbari, the invaders were forced to retreat and come to terms in a treaty concluded on the shore of the Nongjang lake in AD 1401. By this treaty the Patkai was fixed as the boundary between Assam and Mong. Sudangpha suppressed a revolt of the Tipamiyas and asserted his sovereignty over the three eastern dependencies, viz., Tipam, Aiton and Khamjang. The reigns of four successive kings—Sujangpha (1407-22), Suphokpha

(1439-88), and Supempha (1493-97), covering a period of ninety years were comparatively peaceful, barring a brief war with the Dimasa Kacharis in AD 1490. The bordering Nagas, who made some raids were kept in check.

NOTES

## 2.2.1 Consolidation of the Ahom Kingdom

The real expansion of the Ahom kingdom began with Suhummong (1497-1539), better known as Dihingiya Raja, as he belonged to the Dihingia clan of the royal family. By this time the Brahmanical influence grew considerably in the Ahom court so much so that the king is said to have received the Hindu title Swarganarayan, an equivalent of in chao-pha Tai. He transferred his capital to Dihing. A census of population was done during his reign. After a series of armed conflict caused by boundary dispute, the Sutiya king was defeated and killed and his kingdom centering Sadiya was annexed to the Ahom dominion as a province over which a governor, titled Sadiya Khowa Gohain, was placed. He also defeated the Kacharis of the Doyang-Dhansiri Valley and brought their territory under the Ahoms as a province called Marangi and placed a provincial governor titled Marangi Khowa Gohain. This was in 1526. The Kachari royal family moved to Maibong leaving Dimapur. After sometime, on an appeal, the Kachari king at Maibong was given recognition as Thapita-sanchita (established and preserved) by Suhummong. The same king also brought the Bhuyans on the north bank under Ahom control. It was during the reign of Suhummong that the first major invasion of Assam by the Pathan rulers of Bengal occurred. After an initial expedition by Bir Malik and Bar Ujir, the two Bengal generals, Turbuk was commissioned by the Sultan of Bengal. In a major encounter, the Ahom side lost several of their generals and many soldiers. However, in a renewed naval war after sometime, the Ahom side gained superiority leading to the defaat and death of Turbak. A large number of arms, cannons, horses and soldiers were captured by the Ahoms. The defeated army was pushed through Kamrup and Kamata where the people cooperated with the victors.

The ruler of Kamata, Durlabhendra, accepted Ahom protection by offering his daughter. The Ahom army marched westward as far as the Karatoya, the eastern frontier of Bengal, and built a small brick temple on its bank. Thus by 1534, the Ahom army liberated Kamrup and the Kamata king. Suhummong established relation with Manipur and Orissa; and Viswa Singha, the rising Koch chief visited his court and acknowledged his allegiance. By his great zeal and enterprise, Suhummong extended the Ahom dominion from the eastern confine of Sadiya to the Karatoya and successfully failed the invasions of Assam by the Muslim rulers of Bengal. Due to the expansion of the Ahom dominion during his reign, non-Ahom population in the Ahom kingdom greatly increased. The reign of Suklenmong (1539-52) and Sukhampha (1553-1603) were mainly important for Koch expeditions to the Ahom kingdom. The first was conducted by Viswa Singha which, however, did not materialize. The second major invasion was led by king Naranarayan, with his younger brother Sukladhwaj, popularly known as Chilarai, occupied the Ahom capital Garhgaon. However, the Koch army soon returned after a peace treaty. This was the last Koch invasion of the Ahom kingdom.

### Period of Ahom-Mughal Conflict

The history of the Ahoms during the seventeenth century was mainly the history of the Ahom-Mughal conflict which arose due to the imperial ambition of the Mughal emperors to extend their dominions to east beyond Bengal and if possible to seek routes to China and Tibet; at the same time to collect articles such as gold dust, long pepper, elephant teeth, musk, and lac, which were valued greatly by the royalty and nobility in the Mughal

NOTES

courts. The annexation of the Koch kingdom into the Mughal dominions made the Ahom kingdom coterminous. The long reign of Susengpha (1603-41), better known as Pratap Singha, was important in the history of Assam in several respects. The Mughal claim on the Koch territory to the east of Barnadi and the trading adventures of certain Mughal merchants caused conflict and tension along the border leading to the first serious battle with the Mughal army and navy at Bharali near Tezpur in which the enemy side was completely routed. This was in AD 1616. A vivid description of the plight of the Mughal soldiers is given in the *Baharistan-i-Ghayli* by Mirza Nathan, a Mughal general. About 1700 men of the enemy side were killed, double this number were wounded and 9,000 men were taken as prisoners. This was followed by a series of campaigns against the Mughals. In 1618, there was another serious battle at Hajo in which the Ahoms lost nearly 4000 boats, and an equal number of men were killed. The war, however, did not stop but continued with occasional outburst and the pendulum of victory moved from one side to another in Kamrup. Ultimately, peace was restored by a treaty concluded by Momai Tamuli Barbarua and Allah Yar Khan in 1639 where Barnadi in the North and the Asurar Ali in the south were fixed as the boundary between the Ahom and Mughal territories. It did not, however, last for a very long time.

During the early years of Pratap Singha's reign, the Kachari king, who was always considered thapita-sanchita status by the Ahom kings, was bold enough to show his defiance by declining to comply a request for passage of a Jaintia princess through his country. An Ahom army led by Sunder Gohain was badly defeated and the general himself was killed by the Kacharis led by Prince Bhimbal in 1606 AD. Soon, however, relation with the Kachari king was restored. Pratap Singha also cultivated good relations with the Jaintia king. Pratap Singha introduced certain reforms in the administration and reorganized the paik. Two very important posts that of the Barbarua and the Barphukan were created; the former was placed as the head of the secretariat and judiciary immediately under the king; the later was given the charge of lower Assam, west of Kaliabor and also head of diplomatic relations with the west. Several other new posts of lesser importance were also created. A census of population was undertaken, and the paik system was extended to newly acquired territories. All free adult population were registered as paik for state services. A squad for four paiks constituted the lowest unit. Twenty such units were commanded by a Bora, one hundred by a Saikia and one thousand by a Hazarika. Departments were usually headed by Phukan, Baruah, Rajkhowa, according to their importance. Among other notable works of Pratap Singha included construction of several important roads, bridges, excavation of tanks and ramparts. He also built several towns. The king was liberal and catholic in his religious policy. The short reigns of his two immediate successors Surampha (1641-44) and Suchingpha (1644-48) were not of much importance.

The reign of Sutamla, better known by his Sanskrit title Jayadhwaj Singha (1648-63) was marked by a major invasion of Assam by the Mughal army headed by Mir Jumla, the newly appointed Nawab of Bengal. It was apparently a retaliatory action taken against the occupation of Sarkar Kamrup by the Ahom army by taking advantage of the confusion that ensued following the removal of Shah Jahan from the throne by his sons. The large army of infantry and cavalry supported by a strong navy mostly manned by Europeans, chiefly the Portuguese and the Dutch, proceeded towards the capital of Assam by overrunning the defences put up at Hatichala-Baritala, Pancharatan-Jogighopa and Pandu-Saraighat. After the occupation of the fort at Samdhara following a stiff battle and a keenly contested naval victory near Kaliabor on the Brahmaputra, the Mughal army advanced towards the Ahom capital, Garhgaon, Jayadhwaj Singha with his family

and close associates evacuated the capital and retreated to Namrup hills close to Patkai. The Mughal army occupied Garhgaon, and established outposts at several places in Upper Assam; Mir Jumla himself made his headquarters at Mathurapur. However, when the rainy season started, these outposts got cut off by flood and became isolated while the Mughal navy with big war boat which remained at Lukhnow could not help them. The Ahom army then started to harass the Mughals by adopting guerilla method of warfare. Due to disruption of communication, the Mughal army faced great hardship; the physical as well as moral condition began to deteriorate. The health of Mir Jumla deteriorated as he had been suffering from consumption. Under these circumstances, a peace proposal initiated by the Ahom side was ultimately agreed upon.

The treaty of Ghiladharighat at Tipam on the Buri Dihing was drawn up on 9 January 1663 between Jayadhwaj and Mir Jumla. He agreed to pay a huge war indemnity, the cessation of all territory west of Bharali on the north bank of the state of 'Dimarua', Beltola west of the Kallong on the south bank of the Brahmaputra. Jaydhwaj Singha's daughter accompanied by the daughter of Tipam Raja was sent to Delhi and the sons of the ministers were sent as hostage with the Mughal till full payment was made. Mir Jumla and his army left Assam. Soon after his return to Bakotha, as Garhgaon was despoiled by the Mughals, Jayadhwaj Singha passed away in 1663. He was the first Ahom king to embrace Hinduism by receiving initiation from a Vashnava priest. He made large revenue free land grants with paiks to several Hindu satras (monasteries). One of the notable achievements of Jayadhwaj Singha's reign was the planned settlement of villages in certain tracts of the country.

However, Mir Jumla's invasion caused devastation of the economic and social condition of the kingdom. Mir Jumla was accompanied by a news reporter (waqia navis) named Mirza Mahammad Wali, poetically known as Shihabuddin Talish, who left a very valuable account of Assam, its climate, population, customs, products, and of its capital Garhgaon. A few excerpts may be of interest. 'Although most of the inhabitants of the neighbouring hills pay no tax to the Rajah of Assam, yet they accept his sovereignty and obey some of his commands.' 'From Lakhaugarh to Garhgaon, also, there are roads, houses and farms in the same style and a lofty and wide embanked road has been constructed up to Garhgaon for traffic.' The people of the country are free from certain fatal and loathsome diseases such as leprosy, white leprosy, elephantiasis, cutaneous eruptions, goitre and hydrocele, which prevail in Bengal.' 'It is not the custom here to take any land tax from the cultivators; but in every house one man out of the three has to render service to the Raja.' 'In all the past ages no (foreign) king could lay the hand of conquest on the skirt of this country, and no foreigner could treat it with the foot of invasion.' 'And all the people of his country, not placing their necks in the yoke of any faith, eat whatever they get from the hand of any man, regardless of his caste and undertake any kind of labour.' 'Their language differs entirely from that of all the people of Eastern India.' 'They cast excellent match-locks and bachadar artillery, and show a great skill in this craft. They make first rate gunpowder..' 'The common people bury their dead with some of the property of the deceased, placing the head towards the east and the feat towards the west.' Talish also left a vivid and valuable description of Garhgaon, and the royal palace. Chakradhwaj Singha (1663-70), a person of indomitable courage and firm determination, refused to put on the gown (siropa) sent by the Mughal court to him as a tributary king. 'Death is preferable to a state of subordination to Bangal' he uttered.

Preparations for war were soon complete, and Kamrup was again recovered by a strong Ahom navy and infantry under the command of Lachit Barphukan in 1667. The

NOTES

Mughal army was badly mauled. Following this, several fortifications were raised on both banks surrounding Gauhati to protect it against any further attack. Having received the news of Mughal reverse, the Mughal Emperor Aurangzeb dispatched a Rajput general Raja Ram Singh, son of Raja Jay Singh of Amber, with a large force with order to chastise the 'wicked tribe' (the Ahoms). Ram Singh advanced towards Gauhati by occupying several posts which the Ahoms evacuated for strategic reasons to concentrate on Gauhati. Ram Singh built his camp at Hajo.

The Ahom army under Lachit Barphukan and other generals including Atan Buragohain, foiled every attempt of Ram Singh to occupy Gauhati by war and diplomacy and the war dragged on for several years with loss on both sides. In the meantime, Udayaditya ascended the throne in 1669. The Battle of Saraighat fought in 1671 was the last determined attempt of Ram Singh which met ignominious defeat at the hands of the Ahom. The defeated army was pushed back beyond the Manaha river. It may be mentioned that in the war against the Mughals, many of the neighbouring hill people sent their contingents and successfully fought against the invaders. From the death of Ramdhwaj Singha, the successor of Udayaditya Singha, in 1675 to the accession of Gadadhar Singha in 1681, there ensured a period of weak and unstable government during which several weak and young kings were placed on the Ahom throne and quickly removed by ministers and high officials for their own selfish gains than for the welfare of the kingdom . By taking advantage of the situation, Laluk Barphukan, the Viceroy of Lower Assam at Gauhati treacherously handed Gauhati over to the Mughals. The first major achievement of Gadadhar Singha (1681-96), who was crowned the king at Kaliabor by the nobles and officers, was the expulsion of the Mughals from Gauhati and Kamrup by defeating them at the Battle of Itakhuli. They were pursued to Manaha, which henceforth became the Ahom-Mughal boundary till 1826. The king then suppressed all conspiracies to weaken the power of the Monarch, and reduced the tribes who created troubles in the border. He also controlled the growing power of the Hindu religious heads, but he was no bigot in his religious policy. Possessing a towering personality, Gadadhar Singha restored the authority of the king and brought peace and order to the country.

Rudra Singh's reign (1696-1714) marks a new turning point in the history of Assam. Inherited from his father a strong monarchy and a peaceful kingdom, Rudra Singha now found time and resources to build a new capital at Rangpur near the present town of Sibsagar on the Dikhow by importing artisans and masons, and know-how from Bengal. When the Rajas of Cachar, who was treated by the Ahoms as thapita-sanchita, and Jaintia, showed signs of insubordination, they were captured and brought before Rudra Singha and were compelled to acknowledge the sovereignty of the Ahoms. The king had planned to invade Bengal with the support of the rulers and the chiefs of the neighbouring states like Tripura, Koch Bihar, Burdwan and Nadia. When all preparations were complete and the vast army assembled at Gauhati for the march, Rudra Singha suddenly fell ill and died. The king is known for his liberal policy; he allowed to grow trade with Bengal, and also imported several cultural items like dress, festival, songs, etc., from that country. This resulted in a slow cultural synthesis.

### Later Ahom kings

The first half of the eighteenth century was peaceful and the reigns of two kings Siva Singha (1714-44) and Pramatta Singha (1744-51), saw the unprecedented growth of Hindu religious proclivities, and the building of Hindu temples. A great number of endowments of land and man were made for sustaining these. Siva Singha's queen

Phuleswari, who acquired great influence over him, even dared to insult Vaishnava mahantas by forcing them to bow down to the Goddess Durga . From this time onwards, the Ahom kings became more attached to Sakta faith which introduced a new element in the social and political life. The traditional Ahom religious institutions fell into negligence and the Ahoms who stuck to their own religion and customs, became a degraded class. At the same time, cultural penetration from Berigal continued unabated. The reign of Rajeswar Singha (1751-69), a younger brother of Siva Singha, saw the rise of Kirti Chandra Barbarua to power and status. One of the important events of his reign was the dispatch of the Ahom army against the Burmese in Manipur whose legal ruler Jai Singh (known as Bhagya Chandra in Manipur) was driven away by them and who came to Assam through Kachari country. Jai Singh strengthened his relation with Rajeswar Singha by giving his daughter Kuranganayani in marriage to the latter. This followed the policy of his predecessors by making endowment of land and men to religious persons and institutions.

Lakshmi Singha's reign (1769-1780) was disrupted by the revolt of the Moamarias, the followers of the Mayamara Mahanta of orthodox Vaishnava persuasion. Several causes are attributed to the revolt of which one is the physical punishment meted by Kirti Chandra Barbarua to Nahar, the chief of the Morans who came to make annual offer of elephant which was found lean and haggard. Nahar was mortified at this and was looking for support to take revenge on the Barbarua. Phuleswari's action had already inflamed the situation. It reached the climax when the Moamaria Gossain was abused by the Barbarua for being indifferent to him. The Morans were then ready to fight. They were joined by three exiled Ahom princes. The rebels advanced towards the capital Rangpur and after defeating the royal troops at several engagements they arrived at Rangpur. The king who attempted to flee was pursued and captured, and was put in confinement at the temple of Jaysagar. Ramakanta was declared king and Nahar became the Barbarua. The Morans preserved the entire structure of the Ahom government. However, after a few months, the Moran rule was overthrown and the insurgents were punished. King Lakshmi Singha was released from captivity and was restored. Like his predecessors, the king made a number of grants of rent free land with men, and built several temples.

### 2.2.2 Ahom Frontier Policy

The Ahom Kingdom was surrounded by hilly tracts all around. Various tribes with different languages and customs were inhabitants of these hilly areas. Most of these tribes were fierce and warlike. Some of the tribes were Akas, Daflas, Miris, Mikirs, Abors, Mishmis, Khamtis, Singphos, Nagas and Bhutias, etc.

Some tribes were friendly with the Ahoms as they traded with them. Some tribes like Bhutias and Miris were poor and lacked the basic necessities of life so they raided and plundered the inhabitants of the plains and carried with them the plundered goods.

Prior to Pratap Singha, no other Ahom king had any policy towards these hillmen. The Ahoms controlled these tribes by force or weapons but never tried to conquer their lands as the Ahom rulers knew that they would not easily surrender to the Ahom rulers because of their ferocious nature. To save the people of the foot hills from the raids of these tribes, Pratap Singha was the first Ahom king to evolve a sound frontier policy to deal with them. He introduced the system of paying Posa to the Bhutias, the Akas, the Daflas. Posa is a kind of payment that was made by the inhabitants of the Duars to the tribes to buy off their raids. The Ahom king selected some villages in the plains and asked them to pay the Posa to the hill tribes.

NOTES

Pratap Singha dealt with the Nagas and Mikirs differently. He granted them lands at the foot of the hills for cultivation. These lands were called Naga Khats. The Ahom government appointed some Naga Khatakis to look after the lands. Due to such policy these tribes were sincere to the Ahom rulers and paid annual tributes. A different settlement was done with the Bhutias from the north. They were allowed to be the master of the lands at the foot of the hills and the mountain passes they occupied while the Ahom kings were engaged in the battles. In return the Bhutias acknowledged the supremacy of the Ahom rulers and paid tributes to the Ahom kings.

Sometimes due to their ferocious and wild nature the tribes did raid the Ahom kingdom but were dealt with severely. Sometimes their houses were burnt to teach them a lesson.

The Ahom policy towards the frontier tribes were three fold.

- The Ahoms satisfied the hillmen by supplying them with their essential economic needs The Ahom government extended or withdrew the trading facilities on occasions for exercising some amount of control over the fierce hill men.
- Sometimes the Ahom kings sent some punitive expeditions against some hill tribes who raided the plains in violation of the agreements.
- Lastly the Ahom government neither interfered in the internal matters of the hillmen nor tried to annex the tribal lands.

From this discussion we can conclude that the policy of the Ahom rulers towards the hillmen of the North East frontier was successful and it did much to forge friendship and goodwill between the hill and people belonging to the plains.

### 2.2.3 Policy of Ahom Rulers towards the North East Tribe

The policy of friendly relation of Ahom rulers with the tribes of Arunachal Pradesh is also reflected through the measure of the grant of fertile land (*Khat*s) in the foothills to the tribes of Arunachal Pradesh especially to the Noctes (generally mentioned in the contemporary literature as the Nagas) for cultivation. The Ahom rulers also considered the tribes inhabiting the area south of Sibsagar district of Assam, such as Namchangias (Namsangias), Bardurias, Banferas, Chagnois, Tablungias, Panidurias, etc., as their subjects, and claimed its right to share with the Nagas the produce of the salt manufactured in the Lower hills. In the *Buranji*s it is mentioned that Naga chiefs used to pay tributes to the Ahoms and received grants of Khats and of *bheels* or fishing waters in the plains in lieu of the same. The Naga chiefs were also allotted paiks like the other tribes of Arunachal Pradesh and the Ahom nobility.

The Ahom king Pratap Singha (1603-1641), started the institution of Kotokis in order to regulate his relation with the tribes of Arunachal Pradesh and other neighbours. The British found this mechanism useful and continued the same. Pratap Singha highlighted the importance of the Kotokis in these words: 'Kotokis should be like shieldmen. Your words alone constitute your rice and cloth.' The Kotokis who were employed to deal with the tribal were familiar with the customs and dialects of the tribal. The Kotokis were the agents of the Ahom government who conducted political and diplomatic relations with the neighbouring powers. The role of the Kotokis in the Ahom-tribal relation as 'gobetween' or of the 'intermediaries' between the Ahom and other powers is a well-known fact. It was possible mainly because they were very intelligent and educated people and in most of cases, their capacity to argue and presentation of facts became the decisive factors. The services of the Kotokis were also utilized 'to carry and to

explain the letters, orders, and request of the Ahom monarchs to the neighbouring powers'. We have, however, enough evidence to suggest that they also played an important role in determining the terms of agreement between the tribes of Arunachal and Ahom. The Ahom government appointed a number of *Katakis (or Kotokis)* to look after and manage the Khats. Kotokis was appointed mainly to maintain a 'channel of communication between the government and the tribes.' 'They also kept a watch over the movement of the hill people' and 'were paid by a remission of the poll tax.' One important feature of the tribal-Ahom relations was the role played by the Kotokis in promoting and maintaining these relations. Gait clearly writes (p.113), 'In order to stop the acts of oppression committed by the Miris and Daflas, *Kotoki*s were appointed to watch them and keep the authorities informed of their movements. In this connection, however, it should be mentioned that in 1615, when reprisals were attempted after a raid perpetrated by these hill men, the Ahom forces were obliged to beat a retreat.' He further writes (p.114), 'Hindus were often appointed as envoys (bairagis and katakis) in preference to Ahoms….'

NOTES

Pratap Singha, through the mediation of the Kotokis, was able to normalize relation with the Miris and posa was given to them. Again in AD 1665, one Kalia Kotoki was sent to negotiate with the Miris. The Miris also utilized the services of the kotokis and sent their message through them to the Ahom officials. Likewise in the struggle between the Nishis and the Ahoms, the Katakis played an important role. The posa with the Nishis was settled with the help of these officials and they again negotiated with the Nishis during the reign of King Sutyinpha in 1648 and again in 1678 during the rule of Udayaditya Singha (1669-73). The services of the Kotokis were also used in the Ahom-Mishmi confrontation 1675. Chaodang, a Kotokis, was entrusted the duty by the Ahoms to negotiate with the Mishmis. Though the Adis never came in direct confrontation with the Ahom and as such the Kotokis did not approach them directly, we must remember that the Miris who acted as the agents of the Adis were in constant contact with Kotokis and as such were a key factor in establishing the Adi-Ahom relations.

The socio-cultural developments of the tribes of Arunachal Pradesh too made the institution of Kotokis important in the dealings with the Ahom rulers. The tribes of Arunachal, except for the Khamptis and the Monpas, did not have any written language and often communicated through dialects that varied from tribe to tribe, the Assamese as the *lingua franka*. The sole responsibility of representing the case of these tribal to the Ahoms and vice versa, therefore, rested with these Kotokis and it was here that their ability to persuade the tribal was tested. On the occasions when these Kotokis failed to persuade the people of Arunachal Pradesh, they were punished by the Ahoms, as was done by King Rudra Singha, when the Kotokis were charged with a traitorous neglect of their duties. These two Kotokis who had been sent to negotiate with the Nyishis in 1713-14, could not bring satisfactory results, were put to death by the Phukan on orders from the king. The Kotokis, therefore, certainly played a key role in determining the relation of the tribal with Ahoms.

### 1. The Akas-Ahom Relations

The Akas are a comparatively small in number, and call themselves as Hrusso. They inhibit the area between the Bharali River and the Buddhist tribes of the West Kameng and Tawang districts. The Akas, who lived in the hills north of Charduar, comprised of mainly two clans — the Hazarikhowas (means 'eaters at a thousand hearths') and the *Kapaschors* (means 'thieves who lurk amid the cotton plants). The Ahom government had granted right of *posa* to the *Hazarikhowas* to prevent their aggression. But the Kapaschors were more troublesome. According to the records of 1825, the Akas were

NOTES

entitled to receive from each house of their allotted Paiks, 'one portion of a female dress, one bundle of cotton thread and one handkerchief.'

It is worth mentioning here that only the Hazarikhowa clan of the Akas was entitled to receive posa and no such right was given to Kapaschors. It is suggested that the name Hazarikhowa came into use because a thousand *gots* or paiks or individual groups of revenue payers were set aside for the collection of posa by the Akas. The Kopaschors, on the other hand, simply extorted some articles from the cultivators in the plains. It is also suggested that the Kopaschors were not considered separate from the Hazarikhowas and the latter were supposed to share a part of their Posa with the former. This goes on to suggest, therefore, that though originally the Kopaschors were not entitled to receive Posa, they began to assert their right to collect the same and compelled the Hazarikhowas to share it with them. In addition to the Posa given to the Akas, there cannot be any doubt that like many other tribes, they also collected paddy from the paiks assigned to them. One important thing about the Aka-Ahom relation is that throughout the entire period of Ahom rule over Assam no conflict ever took place between the Akas and the Ahoms.

## 2. Ahom's Relation with the Noctes

The term 'Naga' is a generic term applied to a large number of tribes and sub-tribes living in the Tirap and Changlang districts of Arunachal Pradesh. Historically their place of habitation had been in the valley of the Dhansiri in the west to the hills of the Patkai in the east, and from the border of Nowgong, Sibsagar and Lakhimpur districts of Assam in the north to the North of Cachar and Manipur in the south. They were organized in many groups, such as the Banferas, Noctes, Wanchos, etc. In Assam they were known by their place of abode, such as the Namsangias, Bordurias, Panidurias, etc. Lakshmi Devi (op.cit. pp. 19-56) provides a comprehensive picture of the Ahom-Naga relations.

The Ahom-Naga relation in the context of the tribes of Arunachal Pradesh is mainly concerned with the Noctes. The Noctes means village people (*Noc* means village and *te* means people) and are settled in the Tirap district of Arunachal from as early as the 12th or 13th century. These Noctes came into contact with the Ahoms when the latter were wandering for permanent settlement. The Nagas did not welcome the first invaders and gave tough resistance to them. The Ahom king Sukapha terrorized them by adopting brutal method of suppression. Later, the Ahoms conciliated with them. Conflict between the Ahoms and the Nagas continued throughout the Ahom rule. The main causes of the conflict were the right to use Naga products and control over the salt wells. The Nagas of Jaypur, Namsang, Paniduria and Barduria lived mainly by manufacturing salt, which they traded in Assam. There were as many as eighty-five salt wells in the lower hills. The Ahom government imposed a nominal tax on the salt brought for sale by the Nagas. Later Ahom rulers (for example Purandar Singha) employed their own men to extract salt from the wells. The basic source of conflict between the Noctes and the Ahom were the salt-springs and wells and according to the Buranjis, the Ahom seized a salt-well in Mohang in 1536, and in due course of time enjoyed either exclusive rights on several such wells or share in the salt produced in them. There are also evidences to suggest that some of the groups of Noctes entered into friendly alliances with the Ahoms. One Bonfera chief named Karangpha extended close friendly relations with the Ahoms. King Pratap Singha (1603-1641) tried to check the Naga attacks by constructing a rampart called the Nagagarh but the Naga raids could not be prevented permanently. During the rule of King Gadadhar Singha (1681-1696) the Namsangia Nagas attacked an Ahom salt mine in 1692. They again attacked a salt mine at Barhat in 1701. King

Rudra Singha (1696-1714) subdued them. There is one instance of 1576 when the Nagas obtained a remarkable victory over the Ahoms, and it was decided that the Nagas would use the salt springs of Longpong during the daytime and the Ahoms at night.

Amrendra Kr Thakur in his article *Salt: Sources and Struggle in Arunachal Pradesh*, (*Proceedings of North East India History Association*, 30th session, Nagaon, pp. 124-136) provides a detailed account of the struggle between the Noctes and the Ahoms for the same.

The Ahoms considered the Nagas as a whole of their subjects and they were asked to pay tribute in the form of slaves, elephant teeth, spear shafts, goat's hair and above all these salt. In return, the Ahom government granted lands (*khats*) to the Nagas. The Ahoms had good relations with some of the Nagas. Sometimes the Ahom kings acted against one Naga group on the request of the other Naga group.

Thus, in 1665 on the request of the Banfera or Banpara Nagas the Ahom King Chakradhvaj Singha (1663-1670) attacked the Banchang Nagas and defeated them. Their houses were destroyed. In fact, the Ahoms had special relationship with the Banferas. In fact, the enmity among the Nagas themselves prevented a united resistance of theirs against the Ahoms. In spite of this, the Nagas could not be subdued permanently and their insurrections occurred throughout the Ahom rule. It may be mentioned here that the Nocte-Ahom relationships were not always based on friction and enmity, but friendship, commercial and cultural intercourse also existed between them. Evidences show that the Namsangia, Borduaria and Paniduaria Noctes traded with the Ahoms for the supply of salt to the plains of Assam. A nominal tax was imposed by the Ahoms on the salt brought from the hills. By the way of trade, the Noctes also developed cultural contacts with the plains of Assam. A section of them came under the influence of Vaishnavism and adopted a very elementary form of Vaishnavism which was rather a compromise between some tenets of this sect and the tribal ways. Ajay Kr Mishra in his article '*Religious Practices of the Noctes of Arunachal: Exposure and Response*' (*Proceedings of North East India History Association*, 25th (Silver Jubilee) session, Shillong, 2004, pp. 265-273) provides detailed accounts of impact of the Neo-Vaishnavism and the title given to the Nocte chief as 'Narrottam'.

(There is a story that one of the Ahom King Supimpha's wives happened to see a Banfera Naga chief who had come to pay tribute. She praised the beauty of the Naga chief. The king, being unhappy with this, gave away his wife to the Naga chief. She was pregnant that time and subsequently gave birth to a son in the Naga village. King Suhungmung, the Dihingia Raja (1497-1539) were very impressed to see the boy, named Senglung, who used to come to pay tribute. He also came to know that his mother was already pregnant before Supimpha sent her away. Suhungmung patronised Senglung by creating a new post of Barpatra Gohain for him. This post was made equal to those of the Bar Gohain and Burha Gohain).

### 3. Ahom's Relations with the Nyishis

The Ahom –Nyishi relations has also been studied in details by Lakshmi Devi (op.cit., pp. 217-234). The Nyishis are mentioned as the Daflas in the contemporary Ahom documents and consequently the British documents as well as the historians of the post-independence period used the same term for the Nyishi. This terminology is, however, not used nowadays. The Nyishis of Arunachal Pradesh are settled mostly in the hills north of Nao Duar (the nine passes) in Darrang and Che-Duar (the six passes) in Lakhimpur. Those who resided on the border of Darrang were known as '*Paschima* or

NOTES

*Western Daflas*', and those on the border of North Lakhimpur were called as the '*Tagin* or *Eastern Daflas*'. On the west, the Akas were their neighbours and on the east lived the Galo, Adis and the Hill Miris. They occupied the territory situated between the Bhorali River on the west and the upper courses of Subansiri River on the east. The Nishis were divided into two broad categories. The eastern members of the tribe living on the borders of Lakhimpur called themselves Ni-Sing or Nyising and were called Tagin Daflas by the Assamese. In the western branches, settled near the plains and foothills of Darrang, they were called Bag-ni or Bang-ni and the Assamese called them Paschima Daflas.

One important feature of the Nishi tribes was that they were not organized in one or two single groups, but were rather a collection of small clans which were independent of each other, and as such, rarely resorted to any combined action. The number of chiefs who were recognized by the British government for the grant of posa clearly shows this. The total number of such chiefs was 238. The form of government of the Nishis was oligarchical and there were 30 to 40 chiefs in a single clan. The Ahoms came in contact with the Nyishis only after the annexation of the Sutiya territories (1522-23).

We get the first reference of any contact between the Nishis and the Ahoms in the year 1614 during the reign of Pratap Singha in Assam. Provoked by the attack of the Nishis in the plains, the king ordered Lako Borpatra and Bharali Gohain to proceed against the Nishis on the frontier of Darrang. However, this expedition resulted in heavy losses for the Ahoms and a number of soldiers were killed by the Nishis, and the two Ahom officers were compelled to return. Thus, in the very first contact between the Nishis and the Ahoms, the latter realized the ferocious nature of the former. It was, therefore, thought proper to follow a policy of give and take by the Ahoms and in order to put some check to the raids of the Nishis, Pratap Singha constructed a Daflagarh (fortification) in the eastern parts of the Tezpur sub-division of Darrang division which was also known as 'Rajgarh.' The Nishis were also granted posa by the Ahoms. A number of Paiks were assigned to the Nishis in the duar area who became known as Dafla-bahatias or the serfs of the Daflas and an officer known as Dafalaparia Phukan was appointed to look after these men. In the relations with the Ahoms, the Nyishis proved to be the most formidable. The Ahom prime minister, Atan Burhagohain's acceptance that 'it was impossible to capture the Daflas' and 'the Dafla miscreants can be captured only if an elephant can enter into a rat-hole' clearly indicates the strength of the Nyishis. In 1562, the Nyishis (along with the Koches) invaded the plains. The Ahom king Sukhampha, the Khora Raja (1552-1603) adopted defensive measures by constructing forts and appointing a new officer called Salal Gohain to keep the Daflas and Akas in check. King Pratap Singha had also got constructed a fort called the *Daflagarh* in Darrang. This step was taken after an utter failure of the Ahom expedition against the Western Daflas in 1614. Pratap Singha even granted '***posa***' to the Nyishis in order to conciliate them. From an account of 13th May 1825, we know that every year from every ten houses of Dafala-bahatias, the Nishis were entitled to receive one double cloth, one single cloth, one handkerchief, one *dao*, ten heads of horned cattle and four seers of salt. In addition, die Nishis must have received some paddy which is stated by Padmeswar Singh Naobakha Pukan and also by Col. White. Because of this, the paiks were given corresponding concessions in the tax which they paid to Ahoms.

These measures could not stop the Nyishi raids into the Ahom territory. Sutyinpha's (1644-1648) expedition of 1646, and King Sunyatpha's (or Udayaditya Singha, 1670-1672) expedition, (1672) against them could not bring success to the Ahoms. The Nyishis

were supported by the Hill Miris in their fight against the Ahoms. King Gadadhar Singha (1681-1696) pacified with the Daflas by placing at their disposal a number of people (known as the Dafla-Bahatia). King Rudra Singha (1696-1714) was also successful in invoking the Nyishis to send their troops in his proposed invasion of Bengal. The Western Daflas, numbering six hundred, came down from the hills north of Darrang to join the Ahom army. But after Rudra Singha's death in 1714, their relationship again turned hostile. King Siva Singha (1714-1744) subdued the Daflas in 1717.

King Rajendra Singha (1751-1769) also tried to prevent the Dafla raids. He got forts erected and put restrictions on entrance to markets by the Daflas. The Daflas suffered badly due to the ban. At last, their delegation came for agreement. But the Ahom king was not satisfied. He got arrested the members of the delegation. The Daflas retaliated by capturing a number of people from the plains. After the event both the parties reached to an agreement and released the captives. The Daflas were allowed to levy posa on condition of their refraining from the act of aggression.

On the basis of above discussion we can say that the Nyishis always resisted the Ahom moves of expansion or restricting the Nyishis into the hills. During the initial contacts with the Nishis, the Ahoms realized the ferocious and independent nature of the former and in order to avoid any further complications, Posa was granted to them. Despite this, whenever the Nishis were in need of labourers and other necessities of life, they simply came down to the plains and collected the dues from the villages. The Assam centric history portrays the Nyishi claim as the looters or plunderers. The observation of Muhammad Kasim, a historian during the days of Aurangzeb mentions about the Nyishis is important to be mentioned here: 'The Daflas are extremely independent of the Assam Raja and whenever they find an opportunity, plunder the country contiguous to their mountains.' The introduction of the Posa system, however, was an important measure taken by the Ahom kings to regulate the Ahom-Nyishi relations.

### 4. Ahom's Relations with the Adis (Abhors) and Mishings (Miris)

The Adis were known as the Abors in the Ahom and British documents (however nowadays Adi is popularly used in place of Abor). Now the Galos have separate identity, however earlier known as the Gallongs they were part and parcel of the Adi society, culture and identity. The Adis came in contact with the Ahoms when the Sutiya Kingdom was annexed to the Ahom territory in the year 1523 during the reign of Suhungmung, or Dihingia Raja. With this annexation the Ahom territories were extended up to river Subansiri, which was the homeland of the Adis, then called Abors. The Adis lived in the East and West Siang, eastern border of the Upper Subansiri and the south western part of the Dibang Valley of present Arunachal Pradesh. Both belonged to the same origin, but in the process of migration the latter settled along the north bank of Brahmaputra (Lakhimpur district of Assam). There had been close relationship between Adis and Mishings (Miris). In fact, the Mishings of the plains were claimed by the Adis as 'their dependents and runaway slaves.' The term 'Miri' in Assamese means go-between and true to this meaning, the Miris acted as such between the Adis and the traders of Assam. The Adis also claimed that all the fish and gold found in the rivers that flowed through their territory belonged to them.

Under the Ahom government, the plain Miris played the role of intermediaries between the Abors and the traders of Assam. There were other branches of Miris who were called the Hill Miris, and settled in the hills to the north of Sisi and Dhemaji (Lakhimpur District). The Ahom government had granted them right to posa similar to

NOTES

the Nyishis, Akas, Monpas and Sherdukpens. But still the Miris raided the plains in 1655 and again in 1665. Their raid on Sadiya (1683) during the rule of Gadadhar Singha was a very violent one. They set fire to the house of the Sadiya Khowa Gohain, destroyed the villages, and killed about two hundred people. However, pressurised by the Ahom king, they had to submit. In the later period, too, the Miris created problem for the Ahom government especially during the Moamaria rebellion.

The Ahom government did not grant right to posa to the Adis, as it was granted to other tribes. The Adis had a different type of right, that is, they claimed 'absolute sovereignty over the Miris of the plains, and an inalienable right to all the fish and gold found in the Dihong River. The Ahom government had tacitly accepted such claims of the Adis. It had relieved the Miris of all revenue charges for performing services to the Abors. In this way the Ahoms had acknowledged the subjugation of Miris to the Abors.

The Adis had a peaceful relation with the Ahoms, and they were 'never known to committed an act of unprovoked ravage or outrage on the villages of the plains'. Rather, on one occasion the Abors (Padam Clan) rejected the Khampti proposal of combined attack on the Ahoms. The Padams got assistance from the Ahom government. Some of the Abors even came for help of the Ahoms during the Moamaria rebellion.

In recognition of this privilege that was given to them by the Ahoms, the Adis were supposed to pay an annual tribute to the Ahom government. Some historians have maintained that through such agreements, 'Posa' was granted to the Adis but this does not seem to be true. The concessions which were granted to the Adis by the Ahoms were not actually concessions but a mere recognition of the claims of the latter over the Miris. No direct relation worth mention ever existed between the Ahoms and the Adis and the Adis continued to trade with the outside world through the Miris. Likewise, the Ahom Buranjis do not give us any clue of Adis-Ahom conflict.

### 5. Ahom's Relations with the Mishimis

The Mishings were the immediate neighbour of the Sutiyas and so after the annexation of the Sutiya kingdom, the Ahoms came in contact with the Mishmis. To the east of the Adis across the Dibang river lived various branches of the tribes who were collectively called the Mishmis. The clan, also known as Digaru Mishmis, lived to the west of Digaru River, near the famous Brahmakunda and were constantly in touch with the plains. They also acted as guides to the Hindu pilgrims visiting Brahmakunda. The Mezho lived to the north-east of Du River and traded with Tibet; the Maros lived south of Brahmaputra and their settlements were scattered and mixed up with Khamptis and Singphos. Various groups of Mishmis (such as, the Idus or Chulikata, the Taraon or Digaru and the Kamanor Miju) lived in the hills to the east of the Adis. At present they mostly inhabit in the Lohit, Anjaw and Dibang Valley districts of Arunachal Pradesh. The Ahoms had peaceful relations with the Mishmis. They had not been granted right to posa, but they enjoyed trade facilities. In fact, the Mishmis were keen traders and their contact with the neighbouring countries and the markets in Assam proved catalyst in facilitating the same.

They used to come to Sadiya market with the hill produce. They traded mainly in musk, skins of animals, 'Mishmitita', some ivory and few other articles. The policy of non-intervention and better trade opportunities offered by the Ahoms led to the better relations between the Mishmis and the Ahoms.

There are not many references of the Mishmis in the *Buranjis* (the Ahom chronicle). King Sutyinpha (1644-48) got constructed a *Mishmigarh*' (Rampart) to resist the Mishmi raiders. The only conflict that took place between the Mishmis and the

Ahoms was during the reign of Ramdhraj Singha (1673-75), when, in the month of June in 1675, the Mishmis killed four Ahom priests in the Deoghar (temple) in Sadiya. When the Sadiyakhowa Gohain (he was an Ahom officer, who was appointed to guard the Sadiya frontier against the inroads of the tribes) informed the Ahom King of the incident and requested for assistance, the Mishmis, with the help of the Doanias, who are said to be the half-breeds of the Singphos, erected a stockade near a deep sheet of water. The combined strength of the Mishmis and Doaris compelled the Ahom forces to retreat and some Assamese villages were also burnt by the tribal near river Ziri.

The Ahom king then sent fresh reinforcements and also ordered Baraphukan to proceed against the Mishmis. A fort was erected at Tishing and the Ahom forces put up there. A few days later, Chaodang Kataki was sent to ask the Mishmis the reasons for their inroads. Chaodang brought back two hundred Mishmi men with him. Upon inquiry, it was revealed that four Mishmis who had committed the murders were Pude, Mirishang, Bajing and Phakushi. The Baraphukan and Sadiyakhowa Gohain were determined to capture and punish the offenders and the Ahom forces rather frightened the Mishmis who agreed to hand over the guilty. The culprits were subsequently handed over to the Baraphukan by the Mishmis along with some tributes. These culprits were put to death, and thereafter no major raid worth mention was carried out by the Mishmis over the Ahom territory. We have some evidence to show that the Ahoms recognized the possessions of the hills adjacent to the Dibang River by the Mishmis and the Mishmis paid four baskets of poison to the Ahoms as tribute. This fact is reflected in a stone pillar of octagonal shape found on the banks of Deopani River about 7 miles north of Sadiya.

The agreement to this effect was signed in 1687 between the Mishmis and the Dihingia

Phukan also known as 'Bargohain of Sadiya.' Thus the Ahoms followed a policy of equity and persuasion towards the Mishmis.

The *Sadiya Stone Pillar Inscription (*probably inscribed in about 1687) issued by the Dihingia Bargohain (the Ahom overlord of the Sadiya region) confirms a settlement between the Ahoms and the Mishmis. The Mishmis were asked to pay tribute to the Sadiyakhowa Gohain.

## 6. Ahom's Relationship with the Khamptis

The Khamptis were probably the nearest kinsmen of the Ahom ruler of Assam and migrated to India from the ancient kingdom of Mung-Mau or Pong in Burma. The Khamptis entered in big numbers the borders of Sadiya in Assam in the middle of the 18th century due to constant wars and confusion in the Mogoung area. Being the close kinsmen of the Ahoms, the Khamptis were allowed to settle on the banks of Tengapani River in 1751 A.D. But the other migrants, particularly the Singhphos (of Burmese stock) ousted the Khamptis from their settlements, so they moved to the Sadiya region. South of Manbhum ranges on the bank of Buri Dihing there were four important Khamti villages. The Noa Dihing forms the west side of this rough square and on this river, were located the other nine Khamti villages. The banks of these rivers were very fertile and known for the settled rice cultivation. The Khamtis were rice cultivators, traders, warriors and good artisans. They used to come to the Sadiya market to buy and sell various articles. They had their small principality. E.R. Leach in his book *The Political System of the Highland Burma* (London, 1959) provides a detailed description of the origin, migration and settlement of the Khamptis in the areas of Arunachal Pradesh.

NOTES

Things went on peacefully and no confrontation took place between the Khamptis and the Ahoms in the beginning. This peaceful co-existence did not continue for long. The opportunity to fulfill the political ambition of the Khamptis to expand their area of influence in the territories of Assam came only when the Ahom rulers were in trouble due to the Moamaria rebellion (1779-onwards). The Khamptis crossed the river Brahmaputra in 1794, ousted the Sadiyakhowa Gohain, the Ahom Governor of Sadiya, and established their rule over Sadiya with two chiefs named Burha Raja and Deka Raja. The Ahom king was rather compelled to accept this agreement because of the overall adverse political condition. The Khamptis, however, were not contended with that and during the reign of Kamaleshwar Singha (1795-1811), came further down the plains in AD 1799. We have some evidence to suggest that the Khamptis were helped by some other Shan tribes such as Pan, Naras and Phakials and also by the Miris, Mishmis, the Muluks and the Adis. This time, however, the Khamptis were badly defeated by the Ahom army sent by the Prime Minister, Purnananda Burhagohain. The Burha Raja of the Khamptis was captured but was pardoned and re-established by the king. The Khamptis remained quiet for some time but certainly caused trouble to the Ahoms during the Burmese invasion of Assam (1816-1824), because the British found that the entire Sadiya tract was under the control of the Khamptis. Thus we see that the Khamptis took full advantage of their kinship relations when it suited them and forgot it at other times when the Ahoms became weak.

The Ahom Rule was on decline at that time. It seems that the Khamptis, at the time of the Burmese invasions of Assam, regained their hold over Sadiya.

### 7. Ahom's Relations with the Singphos

The Singphos, like the Khamptis migrated from the Upper Burma and settled in this part of Arunachal Pradesh. In the south of Manbhum ranges on the bank of Buri Dihing there were six Singpho villages. The Noa Dihing forms the west side of this rough square and on this river, were located the other eighteen Singpho villages. The banks of these rivers were very fertile and known for the settled rice cultivation. The Singphos were loosely organized under two significant chiefs of Bisa Gam and Duffa Gam across the Patkai ranges in Burma. Besides the fertile rice valley and the rich forestland, this area was rich in mineral resources such as coal, lime, iron, silver and petroleum. The indigenous tea-bushes and elephant-catching and trade in ivory tusk and elephants were other attractions of the area. The nearby forest was also abounded in the natural rubber trees, which were tapped and the juice was processed for producing rubber. The Singphos like the Khamptis were the keen traders in slaves; mostly captured from the territories of Assam and traded up to Bhamo or Yunnan province of China.

The engagement of Singphos with the Ahom ruler came during the reign of Kamaleswar Singha (1795-1811) when the Moamaria rebellion was at full swing. The Singphos entered into some understanding with the Moamaria rebels who had been defeated by the Ahoms, and attacked a number of villages in the eastern parts of Assam. They also imported some Burmese troops. When the Ahom king got this news, he sent troops under Deka Phukan. The Singphos, initially, were successful in checking the Ahom advances and also inflicted losses to them; but in a renewed attempt, the Ahoms were able to break the fort of the Singphos. An agreement was arrived at and the Ahom Prime Minister Purnananda Buragohain presented an Ahom girl named Rangili to the Singhphos chief Bichanong. Bichanong presented Rangili to the Burmese king in order to strengthen ties with him. The agreement of the Singphos with the Ahoms did not last

long and during the time of the Burmese invasion of Assam, Singhphos like the Khamptis, made a number of attacks on the villages in the plains, carried away a number of slaves, and reduced the population of the village in the eastern parts considerably. About 3000 of the Assamese subjects were recovered from the captivity of the Singphos by Captain Neufville, the first Political Agent of Upper Assam. The problem of slavery abolition and occupation of Singpho land for tea cultivation were the areas of concern between the Singpho-British relation which will be discussed in the following units. The Singphos, thus, took full advantage of the troubled times of the Ahoms, and refused to be ever loyal to them after their appearance in Assam.

### Highlights of the tribal-Ahom relations

When the Ahom rule was established in Assam, the tribal of Arunachal continued to follow their policy of trade and raids (extortion and plunder) on the plains of Assam. This policy of the tribal was the result of difficult geographical conditions of the hills, the want of the necessities of life in their areas and the traditional rights of the tribes of the hills upon the plain people of foothills of Assam to collect dues. The Ahom rulers of Assam could cross the northern bank of the Brahamputra, assumed the responsibility of protecting their subjects from the raids of these tribes. Here it would be worth mentioning that any political or socio-economic relation between the tribal and the Ahoms was, in almost all the cases, initiated by the Ahom government and not by the tribal. Most of the tribes of Arunachal were very independent in nature and never desired any outside interference in their lives unless compelled by their existence at stake.

So far as the Ahoms were concerned, their policy towards the tribal of Arunachal was based on the policy of reconciliation and persuasion; for the occupation of the hill areas of Arunachal was out of question, and the Ahoms never had any desire to interfere with the polity of the tribal. The tribal were hardly influenced by the formative changes taking place in the plains of Assam, and continued to live during the Ahom period as they used to do thousands of years ago.

In order to protect their subjects from the raids of these tribal and also to maintain peace and tranquillity in the area, the Ahoms granted the right of Posa to some of the tribes of Arunachal, and certain other concessions were given to the tribes, like the Adis, who were not granted Posa. The Ahom policy towards these tribes of the hills was of conciliation followed by the display of force whenever possible. However, in spite of the Posa and other concessions granted to them, most of the tribes often violated the friendly agreements and raided the villages in the plains. This rather compelled the Ahom government to send some punitive expedition against these tribes resulting in the loss of lives and properties. But, generally speaking, the Ahoms were able to maintain comparative peace and harmony with the tribes of Arunachal and in most of the cases these tribes accepted the Ahom sovereignty in the plains and paid tribute to them in return of the various concessions given by Ahoms.

## 2.2.4 Policy of the Ahoms

Apart from their conciliatory approaches, the Ahoms did not desist from displaying their power over the tribes. Regarding Sukapha, it is said that he adopted policies both of peace and terror. He first went with peace proposals towards local tribes. When it failed he used the most brutal methods to suppress them. But before the actual application of force, the Ahom government banned the commercial facilities given to the tribes of the hills. Sometimes only this method worked to bring them to terms.

NOTES

## 1. Policy of Subjugation

It has now been well established that the Ahoms were a section of the Tai race. Historically, these people are known for their valley-dwelling and wet-rice-growing character. The particular branch to which the Ahoms belong is known as the Tai-mao, or the Mao section of the Tai but widely known through the Burmans as the Shan. Ahom chronicles, or *buranji*, make specific mention that the Ahoms were led by Prince (Chao-lung) Sukapha who left Mong Mao-lung in 1215 AD. Sukapha's followers included several nobles (thao-mong), a number of officers of various ranks, nine thousand men, woman and children. After a westward march for thirteen years and staying at several places for periods ranging from one to three years, they arrived at the Patkai in 1228 AD. Posting a governor at the Khamjang valley, their first territorial unit, situated on the shore of the Nongjang lake, Sukapha and the rest of his party at first followed the Namrup, then the Buri Dihing (Nam-jin), thereafter the Brahmaputra, and the Dikhow before finally arriving at Charaideo, which became his permanent capital. On the way, he also organized several other *territorial* units along the bank of these rivers. In this way a small kingdom bounded by Patkai, the Buri Dihing, the Brahmaputra, the Dikhow and the Naga hills was founded in Upper Assam over which Sukapha ruled till his death in 1268 AD. This territory was peopled chiefly by the Morans and the Borahis, and a few villages of the Chutiyas and the Kacharis evidently of Bodo origin; Nagas were also included in the hilly region of the Patkai. Sukapha won over the chiefs of Morans and the Borahis, and even encouraged intermarriage with them, and appointed some of them in various capacities in the royal household.

## 2. Commercial Facility

The Ahom rulers by allowing free commercial activities further facilitated the trade relations with the tribes of Arunachal Pradesh. There were the frontier wardens known as *Datiyalia Bisayas* and *Duarias*, who looked after the interest of traders. The Ahom government established several *haat*s (small markets) near the foothills and the *duars* (mountain passes), where the tribes of the hills could come and exchange their commodities with those of the plains. The Sherdukpens could bring silver, woollen cloth, Chinese silk, ponies, gold dust and rock salt to Udalguri and Doimara. They exchanged them with items such as iron, lac, rice, Assam silk, dried fish and buffalo horns. The Noctes brought salt, cotton, and elephant teeth to the markets in and around Sibsagar. The Mishimis brought to the Sadiya market the Lama swords, spears and Mismi *tita* (a medicinal herb). The Adis and the Hill Miris exchanged copper, wax, madder (dye), and jim cloth (cotton blanket) for the products of the plains. The Singphos brought ivory, copper and silver. The mutual benefits emerging out of this transaction helped in creating good feelings between the people of the hills and plains. The participation of the tribes of Arunachal Pradesh in trade activities has been studied by A. K. Thakur in this article 'Pre-colonial Trade in Arunachal Pradesh: A Reconstruction of Economic History', *Resarun* Vol. XXVII, 2001, pp. 17-27, Journal of the Directorate of Research, Govt. of Arunachal Pradesh, special issue on Golden Jubilee of the Department of Research, Itanagar, 2002.

## 3. Payment of *Posa*

Braj Narain Jha in his article 'Politics of *Posa*: A Case Study of Pre and Post-Independence Scenario in Arunachal Pradesh and Assam' (*Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*, 57th session, Madras, 1996, pp. 446-58) analyses the background of the

origin of the *Posa*, its nature and provides the gamut of historiography related to its nomenclature. The bias in the writings of the British period and even after (especially from the Assam centric history writing) and equating the *posa* with 'blackmail' etc. have also been critically analysed by Jha. This article situates the problem of *Posa* comprehensively. The term 'Posa' literally means a collection of subscription for a common purpose. When this term is used to explain the payments made to the tribes of the hills, it represents the subscription which was collected by the villagers in order to meet the customary demands of the hill people. In the official glossary of terms of the British period the term is explained as the 'allowances paid to certain tribes of the hills inhabiting the hills on the northern frontier of Assam bordering Darrang and Lakhimpur, on account to commuted 'black mail', or in consideration of the abandonment by them of their claims with regards to certain duars.' In general, the term '*posa*' came to be applied to all payments made to the tribes of the hills by the Governments; whether it was in commutation of blackmail or compensation for customary demands of the tribal chiefs of the bordering hills of Arunachal Pradesh. It can neither be compared with 'blackmail' nor 'the *chauth* of Marathas', nor a 'barbarian cupidity'. It was the outcome of a well negotiated policy initiated by the Ahom rulers between the subjects of the plains of Assam (*paiks*), hill chiefs of Arunachal Pradesh and the Ahom rulers. A triangular relation existed among the Ahom State, the Paiks and the tribal chiefs receiving *posa*. The recipients of *posa* paid tribute to the Ahom king and in lieu of that they were granted the right to collect a fixed annual amount of *posa* from the paiks of the adjoining foothills of Assam and also provided their services, sometimes to particular chiefs. For fulfilling these obligations, certain remissions in the state demand were given to those paiks. All the payments were made in kind.

NOTES

Jha rightly concludes '… the nature of *posa* (was) based on the socio-political realities of the contemporary period of Assam and Arunachal Pradesh …. it has often been wrongly interpreted as blackmail.' Knowingly or unknowingly most of the writers of the history of Arunachal Pradesh and Assam regard the *posa* system as blackmail, to meet the need of the hills.

The observation of A. Mackenzie (*The North East Frontier of India*, reproduced 1999, Mittal, New Delhi, p.21) is relevant to be mentioned about the nature and system of *Posa*. He writes, 'It is a mistake to suppose that the *posa*, which, as we shall see, was paid to most of the tribes of the hills bordering on the plains, was an uncertain, ill-defined exaction, depending in amount upon the rapacity of the different hordes who might descend to levy it. It was really a well ascertained revenue payment, on account of which a corresponding remission was made in the state demand upon the ryot satisfying it. It may have had its origin in encroachment, or it may have been based upon customary and primeval rights asserted by the hill men, but it was a distinct feature in the revenue system of the country when the British annexed Assam.'

In this way the *posa* system originated due to certain exigencies of the time. The Ahom king pratap Singha, gave to it a formal shape. The *posa* was granted to the Bhutias, the Akas, and Daflas, and the Miris. The Ahom king Gadadhar Singha conciliated the Daflas 'by assigning to them a number of paiks in the *duars*. They were called Dafla Bahatias, or the serfs of the Daflas. Every ten houses of the Dafla Bahatias used to pay to the Daflas per year on double cloth, one napkin, one *dao*, ten heads of cattle, and four seer of salt. Similarly, each family of Bahatias assigned to the *Hazari khowa*, the Akas used to pay a portion of female dress, one bundle of cotton thread, and one napkin. They also serviced as labourers under Akas.

NOTES

Consequential to the commutation of *posa* to cash by the British, the annual receipts of the various beneficiaries were estimated as follows:

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Nyishis (Daflas) | ₹ | 1020/- |
| Bhooteahs (Sherdukpents of Rupa and Shergaon) | ₹ | 2526-7/- |
| Tagee Akas Raja and Kuppachor Akas | ₹ | 580/- |
| Hazaree Khoa Akas | ₹ | 88/- |
| Thebengia Bhooteahs (Bapus of Thembang) | ₹ | 145-13.6/- |
| Tawang Raja | ₹ | 5000/- |

### 4. Grant of Land and the Origin of the Kotokis

The policy of friendly relation of Ahom rulers with the tribes of Arunachal Pradesh is also reflected through the measure of the grant of fertile land (*Khat*s) in the foothills to the tribes of Arunachal Pradesh especially to the Noctes (generally mentioned in the contemporary literature as the Nagas) for cultivation. The Ahom rulers also considered the tribes inhabiting the area south of Sibsagar district of Assam, such as Namchangias (Namsangias), Bardurias, Banferas, Chagnois, Tablungias, Panidurias, etc., as their subjects, and claimed its right to share with the Nagas the produce of the salt manufactured in the Lower hills. In the *Buranji*s it is mentioned that Naga chiefs used to pay tributes to the Ahoms and received grants of Khats and of *bheels* or fishing waters in the plains in lieu of the same. The Naga chiefs were also allotted paiks like the other tribes of Arunachal Pradesh and the Ahom nobility. The Ahom king, Pratap Singha (1603-41), started the institution of Katakis in order to regulate his relation with the tribes of Arunachal Pradesh and other neighbours. The British found this mechanism useful and continued the same. The Ahom king Pratap Singha (1603-41) highlighted the importance of the Kotokis in these words: 'Kotokis should be like shieldmen. Your words alone constitute your rice and cloth.' The Kotokis who were employed to deal with the tribals were familiar with the customs and dialects of the tribals. The Kotokis were the agents of the Ahom government who conducted political and diplomatic relations with the neighbouring powers. The role of the Kotokis in the Ahom-tribal relation as 'go-between' or of the 'intermediaries' between the Ahom and other powers is a well-known fact. It was possible mainly because they were very intelligent and educated persons and in most of the cases, their capacity to argue and present facts was the decisive factors. The services of the Kotokis were also utilized 'to carry and to explain the letters, orders, request, etc. of the Ahom monarchs to the neighbouring powers'. We have, however, enough evidence to suggest that they also played an important role in determining the terms of agreement between the tribes of Arunachal and Ahom. The Ahom government appointed a number of *Katakis (or Kotokis)* to look after and manage the Khats. The katakis were appointed mainly to maintain a 'channel of communication between the government and the tribes.' 'They also kept a watch over the movement of the hill people' and 'were paid by a remission of the poll tax.' One important feature of the tribal-Ahom relations was the role played by the Kotokis in promoting and maintaining these relations. Gait clearly writes (p.113), 'In order to stop the acts of oppression committed by the Miris and Daflas, *Katakis* were appointed to watch them and keep the authorities informed of their movements. In this connection, however, it should be mentioned that in 1615, when reprisals were attempted after a raid perpetrated by these hill men, the Ahom forces were obliged to beat a retreat.' He further writes (p.114), 'Hindus were often appointed as envoys (bairagis and katakis) in preference to Ahoms….'

NOTES

Pratap Singha, through the mediation of the Kotokis, was able to normalize relation with the Miris and the *posa* was given to them. Again in 1665 A.D., one Kalia Kotoki was sent to negotiate with the Miris. The Miris also utilized the services of the kotokis and sent their message through them to the Ahom officials. Likewise in the struggle between the Nishis and the Ahoms, the Katakis played an important role. The *Posa* with the Nishis was settled with the help of these officials and they again negotiated with the Nishis during the reign of King Sutyinpha in 1648 and again in 1678 during the rule of Udayaditya Singha (1669-73). The services of the Katakis were also used in the Ahom-Mishimi confrontation 1675. Chaodang, a Kataki, was entrusted the duty by the Ahoms to negotiate with the Mishimis. Though the Adis never came in direct confrontation with the Ahom and as such the Kotokis did not approach them directly, we must remember that the Miris who acted as the agents of the Adis were in constant contact with Kotokis and as such were a key factor in establishing the Adi-Ahom relations.

The socio-cultural developments of the tribes of Arunachal Pradesh too made the institution of Katakis important in the dealings with the Ahom rulers. The tribes of Arunachal, except for the Khamptis and the Monpas, did not have any written language and often communicated through dialects that varied from tribe to tribe. Assamese was the *lingua franca*. The sole responsibility of representing the case of these tribal to the Ahoms and vice versa, therefore, rested with these Kotokis and it was here that their ability to persuade the tribal was tested. On the occasions when these Kotokis failed to persuade the people of Arunachal Pradesh, they were punished by the Ahoms, as was done by King Rudra Singha, when the Kotokis were charged with a traitorous neglect of their duties. These two Kotokis who had been sent to negotiate with the Nyishis in 1713-14, could not bring satisfactory results, were put to death by the Phukan on orders from the king. The Kotokis, therefore, certainly played a key role in determining the relation of the tribal with Ahoms.

The Ahom rulers had advanced war weapons (matchlocks and guns), large surplus production and the *paiks* to aggressively pursue their imperial policy. Though the tribes of Arunachal Pradesh had mostly the traditional tribal war weapons (daos, spears, bows and arrows, etc.), the Ahoms avoided straight military fight against them mainly due to the geographical reasons. The reason behind the same was also the indigenous system of defence mechanism of the villages and the guerrilla and ambuscade mode of warfare of the people of Arunachal Pradesh. On the other hand, a hill campaign was always difficult due to bad communication to the hills, narrow paths or tracks over precipices, were the only means to reach the hills. In such inhospitable conditions the policy of conciliation was the best choice. The Ahom rulers generally avoided complete subjugation of the tribes. It was very difficult for them to rule over the hill. So they were always cautious in shaping policy towards tribes of the hills. The Ahom policy can be summarized like this: 'Conciliate these tribes by promising to furnish them their necessaries as far as possible. If they indulge in wanton pillages; pursue and capture the miscreants, but never overstep the limits'. Under this policy the Ahom rulers initiated many measures which are described in the following section, in short.

## 2.2.5 Decline and Fall of the Ahom Kingdom

The Kingdom began to decline from the time of Gaurinath Singha (1780-95). In 1782, the Moamarias insurrection rose again with renewed vigour and increased violence. They advanced to Garhgaon and created panic among the people. The advance was halted and the rebels were treated with severity and many were executed. Such a step aggravated the situation. After a brief pause, the disturbances caused by the Moamarias

**Check Your Progress**

1. What kind of weapons did the Ahom rulers have?
2. How can we summarize the Ahom policy?
3. How was the term, posa generally applied?

NOTES

swept down across the north bank. After defeating the royalists, the Moamarias advanced towards the capital. Assistance was sought from Manipur, Kachari, Jaintia and the chiefs of Rani, Beltola, Luki. Before the help arrived, the rebels occupied Rangpur. Gaurinath Singha with the members of his family sailed downstream, and reached Nagaon and then Gauhati. At Rangpur, the Moamarias set up Bharath Singha as king; but the Hatisungi Morans set up Sarbananda as the king of the territory to the east of Dihing and both minted coins in their names. Krishnanarayan of Darrang had also organized a large force and occupied North Gauhati. Purnananda Buragohain shifted the centre of administration of Dichoi, later known as Jorhat, which became the new Ahom capital. Under the circumstances, Gaurinath Singha appealed for help of men and materials to the East India Company's authorities through Raush, a salt merchant and Mr. Douglas, Commissioner of Koch Bihar. In response to this, Lord Cornwallis, the Governor General dispatched Captain Thomas Welsh with sepoys who arrived at Goalpara in early November, 1792; and from there, on receiving urgent message from the king moved upstream of the Brahmaputra. The meeting between the king and Captain Welsh took place at Nagarberra on the Brahmaputra. Advancing further, Captain Welsh suppressed the rebellious elements at Gauhati and on the north bank. He also pacified Krishnanarayan, the rebellious prince at Darrang and expelled many of the Burkendazes who assisted him. Sometime later he advanced to Jorhat and then to Rangpur where he defeated the Moamarias, and restored the authority of Gaurinath Singha at Rangpur in 1794.

In the midst of this success, Capt. Welsh was recalled by Sir John Shore, the new Governor General and he left Assam. During his stay in the kingdom, he concluded a commercial treaty in 1793 by which commerce between Assam and Bengal was sought to be put on 'reciprocal basis'. The Report of Capt. Welsh which he submitted to his government in response to certain queries gives certain important information in regard to the system of Ahom government, trade and commerce, products, etc. Although Gaurinath Singha is depicted by some as cruel and vindictive, he had certain pieces of good work like the abolition of human sacrifice at the Kechaikhati temple at Sadiya. Kamaleswar Singha's reign (1795-1810) witnessed localized revolts at several places in Kamrup which was successfully suppressed, at Sadiya by the Khamtis, Pani Noras, Miris and others, fresh Moamaria insurrection in league with the Daflas. In spite of these, he connected the new capital Jorhat by constructing several new roads like the Na-ali, the Rajabahar Ali, the Mohabandha Ali, the Kamarbandha Ali, etc. and also built a copper-house at Kamakhya.

The reign of Chandra Kanta Singha (1810-18) saw the Burmese invasion. Friction between Purnananda Buragohain and Badan Chandra Barphukan and a conspiracy by Satram to overthrow the former led the latter to go to the Burmese capital Amarapura where he pleaded for assistance against the Buragohain. Bodoupaya, who had already had his eyes on Assam, seized the opportunity to send an army of about sixteen thousand men with Badan Chandra to Assam. The Burmese army after defeating the Assamese army at several engagements arrived at Jorhat. Chandra Kanta Singha was retained as king, and Badan Chandra assumed power as minister. The Burmese then retired to their country with a large booty. But soon the assassination of Badan Chandra and installation of Purandar Singha by ousting Chandra Kanta Singha, once again brought the Burmese under the command of Ata Mingi to Assam in 1819. On their advance, Purandar and his prime minister Rudinath fled to Gauhati, and Chandra Kanta Singha was once again restored to the throne despite his mutilation of person caused in the meanwhile. After the departure of the Burmese, Chandra Kanta Singha sought to raise a fort at Jaipur against further Burmese invasion. However, a Burmese force sent by their Monarch

with presents of ornaments and dress to Chandra Kanta Singha seeing such preparations killed Patalong under whose supervision the fort was raised. Thinking this hostile move on the part of the Burmese army, Chandra Kanta fled to Gauhati and did not come back in spite of Burmese assurance. This was in 1821. The Burmese then set up an Ahom prince, Jogeswar Singha. Chandra Kanta Singha crossed the border and entered Bengal where he tried to collect arms and men to fight the Burmese. At the battle of Mahgarh, Chandra Kanta's army was badly defeated, and he once again entered the British territory.

The period from 1821 to 1824 is called period of Burmese rule. During this period, the Burmese devastated the country and committed atrocities by plundering and killing. The Burmese also threatened the Goalpara frontier of Bengal by demanding the surrender of Assamese refugees including Chandra Kanta Singha, and their supporters who often gave trouble across the border. In that time, the border conflict in the East India Company's Chittagong frontier with the Burmese empire took serious turn. Anticipating a threatened invasion of Bengal, the prized possession of the Company in India, Lord Amherst, the Governor General decided to declare war on Myanmar (Burma). War was declared on the 5 March 1824. This is the First Anglo Burmese War which lasted for nearly two years. Immediately after the declaration of war, the British army entered Goalpara frontier of Assam and after defeating the small Burmese garrisons in Lower Assam, it advanced to Upper Assam. By taking advantage of a dissension among the Burmese commanders, the British occupied Rangpur in 1825 and drove the Burmese and their allies, the Singphos out of Assam. A section of the Burmese army surrendered to the British remained in Assam. Immediately on the occupation of Assam by the British, martial law was declared; David Scott was appointed as civil officer in charge of civil matters, and Col. Richards was made in charge of the army and the British started their administration. By Article II of the Treaty of Peace and Friendship, which was concluded between the British and the Burmese at Yandabo on 24 February 1826, the Burmese monarch renounced all claims and promised to refrain from interference with the principality of Assam and its dependencies. As Assam was already occupied by the British during the Anglo-Burmese War, it was kept under British occupation and introduced British administration.

## 2.2.6 Ahom Administration

The system of government was partly monarchical and partly aristocratic. The king or Swarga Maharaja as he was called, was the supreme head of the state. All honours, titles, offices, decisions and war-measures emanated from the king, but he had to act according to the advice of the five hereditary councilors of state, the Buragohain, the Bargohain, the Barpatra-gohain, the Barbaruah and the Barphukan. The state of Jaintia, Cachar, Khrim and Manipur were in friendly alliance with the Ahom government. The province of Darrang enjoyed complete autonomy in its internal administration, as well as the other vassal states. There were six establishments of princes introduced by Suhummong Dihingia Raja at Charing, Tipam, Tungkhung, Dihing, Samaguri and Namrup. Each of these princes had their own estates and dependents. All of them were entitled Raja and belonged to the royal family which started with Sukapha, the first Ahom king. Subsequently, the title of Charing Raja was reversed for the heir apparent while the title of Tipam Raja and Namrupia Raja were meant for other nearest blood relations of the reigning monarch.

Ambition for the throne nurtured by some of these families without any political and military training became the cause of the downfall of Ahom rule in Assam. The Patra-mantries occupied important position in the political administration and enjoyed

NOTES

enormous powers. The Barphukan governed as viceroy or deputy to the king, in the tract between the Brahmaputra and the Kalang in Nagaon, but after extension of the Ahom kingdom in the westward direction he was put in charge of the country from Kaliabor to Goalpara with his headquarters at Gauhati. He had conduct diplomatic relations with Bengal, Bhutan and chieftains of Assam frontiers. Other local governors such as Sadiya Khowa Gohain, Marangi Khowa Gohain, the Solal Gohain and the Kajali Mukhia Gohain, etc., were appointed for the administration of the outlying areas of the country. Besides, there were other position recruited from respectable Ahom families for high posts. Among them, the highest rank was of the Phukan, next in rank were the Baruas. There were twelve Rajkhowas, a number of Khatakis and Dolois.

Adult population of Assam was divided into Khels, Khels into Paiks and areas were constituted into Chamuas for revenue administration. It was not the usual practice in Assam to pay the revenue in cash. It was paid through services or paiks, etc. The currency of Assam consisted of gold and silver coins. The liberal and practical outlook shaped the religion of the Ahom monarchs. The image of 'Chom-Cheng' which Sukapha had brought with him from his ancestral home was the tutelary deity of the Ahom rulers till the end of their rule. The general success of the Ahoms in their dealings with the hill tribes was admitted by the Mughal chronicler Shihabuddin Talish who accompanied Mir-Jumla's expedition in 1662-63 AD. He wrote-'Although most of the inhabitants of the neighbouring hills pay no tax to the Rajah of Assam yet they accept his sovereignty and obey some of his commands.' Regarding the military system of the Ahoms, Ram Singh, the Mughal general had to admit that every Assamese soldier was an expert in rowing boats, in shooting arrows, in digging trenches and cannons and that he had not seen such specimen of versatility in any other part of India. This proves that the organization of army under the Ahom rulers was efficient and effective. Law and justice was in action during the Ahom reign. The criminal law was characterized by sternness and comparative harshness. The penalty for rebellion was various forms of capital punishment.

In 1228, the kingdom of Ahom got established with the coming of Chao Lung Siu-Ka-Pha, the first Ahom king, from Mong Mao (now part of Peoples Republic of China). He traversed the Patkai mountain range and reached the valley of the Brahmaputra. It appears that Sukaphaa faced no challenge or had not required to battle with an existing kingdom. He brought under his occupation, the area on the river's south bank, east had the Patkai Mountains, south, the Dikhau River and north, the Burhi Dihing River. Local groups like those of the Marans and Barahi were befriended by him. He set up his capital in Charaideo and set up offices of the Dangaria—Borgohain and Burhagohain. Both the offices got their separate regions of control in 1280s and what check and balance each of the three would have on the others was also clearly laid down. Wet rice cultivation technology was introduced to the people of this region by the Ahoms. Persons ready to fit in with the Ahom polity and life style were welcomed into the fold and this process is referred to as Ahomization. Due to Ahomization, to take an example, the Barahi people became totally subsumed while groups such as Maran and Nagas became Ahoms this significantly raised the number of Ahom. Right up to the 16th century, the Ahomization process remained highly significant as in this period led by Suhungmung the Ahom the kingdom was hugely expanding in territory, taking in regions at the cost of the Kachari and the Sutiya kingdoms.

With the rapid expansion adding large territories to the kingdom, the pace at which Ahomization was occurring was not good enough and in their own kingdom, the Ahoms became a minority. This caused the kingdom's character to change. It turned inclusive and multi-ethnic. The influences of the Hindus which had first been felt at the close of

the 14th century under Bamuni Konwar, now took on a significant form. The Assamese language entered the Ahom court and was used alongside the Tai language for a while during the 17th century. Then the Tai language was replaced by Assamese. With the state expanding rapidly, the Borpatrogohain which was a new high office was installed. It was at par with the two high offices installed previously. The two previous offices did have objection to the new one. Marangikowa Gohain and Sadiakhowa Gohain were two special offices, set up for overseeing those territories which had been taken from the Kachari and Sutiya kingdoms, respectively. Paik system was employed to organize the kingdom's subjects which formed the militia.

Bengal's Afghan and Turkic rulers attacked the Ahom kingdom but with no success. There was also an occasion when under Ton-Kham Borgohain the invaders were pursued by the Ahoms and they went as far as the Karatoya river, and post this the Ahoms looked upon themselves as being the rightful heir of the erstwhile Kamarupa Kingdom.

The features that are seen in the mature Ahom kingdom were adopted during the period of Pratap Singha. Let us look at some of the changes.

There was the reorganizing of the Paik system under the *khel* system which was more professional, and it replaced the *phoid* system which was kinship based. Both Borphukan and Borbarua got set up as also some more small offices. Then on, no other restructuring of a major kind of the state structure took place.

The 17th century saw repeated attacks from the Mughals on the Ahom kingdom. Garhgaon, the Ahom capital, was even occupied by Mughals in 1662, under the leadership of Mir Jumla but were not able to hold on to it. When the Battle of Saraighat came to a close, the Ahoms had come out victorious from the invasion of the Mughals and also managed to further the kingdom's boundary in the west right up to the river Manas. Post a short period that was fraught with confusion, the kingdom got itself the last set of kings, the Tungkhungia kings, established by Gadadhar Singha.

Paik system was the basis of the Ahom kingdom. It is a type of corvee labour, not Asiatic or feudal. In upper Assam, Ahoms started wet rice cultivation. This region had low population density and was mostly marshy. The superior rice cultivation technology and land reclamation by employing irrigation systems, embankments and dykes, the very initial state structure was established by the Ahoms. In the sixteenth century, Suklenmung introduced the first coins. The personal service system that was rampant under the Paik system kept continuing. It was in the 17th century that expansion of the Ahom kingdom led to the inclusion of the erstwhile Mughal and Koch areas, and with this contact the Ahoms were influenced by their revenue systems and adapted accordingly.

### 1. The King (Swargadeo)

The kingdom of Ahom was under the rule of a king who was known as *Swargadeo* (*Chao-Pha* in Ahom language). The king had to be from the line of Sukaphaa, the first Ahom king. Generally, succession was based on primogeniture, though on occasion it was possible for the great Gohains (*Dangaria*) to elect another descendant of Sukaphaa from a different line or even enthroned or depose one.

### 2. Dangaria

For support in administration, Sukaphaa had two great Gohains: Borgohain and Burhagohain. They both had independent territories in the period of the 1280s, and were made veritable sovereigns in these territories called *bilat* or *rajya*. Borgohain's territory lay to the west up to the Burai River while that if Burhagohain lay between Sadiya and

NOTES

Gerelua River on the north bank of the Brahmaputra River. Both had complete command over the *paiks* that they controlled. Generally, people from specific families were put on these two administrative positions. The Princes considered to be eligible for becoming Swargadeo would not be in the running for either of these positions and it was also true vice versa. Suhungmung, in the 16th century, had another Gohain created and named Borpatrogohain. The territory of the Borpatrogohain' lay in the middle of the other two Gohains.

### 3. Royal officers

During his reign, Pratap Singha introduced two offices to be under the king directly. These offices were Borphukan and Borbarua. Borbarua was both the judicial and military head and was in command of the territory lying to the east of Kaliabor which was not commandeered by the *Dangaria*. Unlike the Dangariyas, the Borbarua was allowed to utilize for personal use only that section of the paiks which was under his command while the remaining were at the service of the state of Ahom. The civil and military command over the territory to the west of Kaliabor lay with the Borphukan who also held the position of viceroy of *Swargadeo* in the west.

### 4. Patra mantris

The council of ministers or *patra mantris* comprised five positions. Since Supimphaa's time (1492–1497), one *patra mantri* was made the prime minister or *Rajmantri* and was given additional powers as well as 1000 additional paiks of the Jakaichuk village were placed at his service.

### 5. Other officials

Judicial as well as military responsibilities rested with both the Borphukan and Borbarua, and both got help from two separate councils (*sora*) of *Phukans*. While Gauhati was the seat of the Borphukan's *sora*, the capital was where the Borbarua's *sora* sat. *Baruas* was the name given to superintending officers. The highest amongst the officers was of the Phukans. All together, 6 Phukans, each holding a specific responsibility, comprised the council of the Borbarua. The Neog Phukan, Deka Phukan, Dihingia Phukan, Na Phukan, Bhitarual Phukan and the Naubaicha Phukan who was allotted 1000 and took care of the royal boats, all together comprised the council of Phukan. Similarly, even for the Borphukan there existed a council of six subordinate Phukans whom he was obligated to consult regarding every important issue. In this council were two Sutiya Phukans, Nek Phukan, the Dihingia Phukan, Deka Phukan commandeering 4000 *paiks and* Pani Phukan commandeering 6000 *paiks*.

There were twenty or so Baruas. Some of these were:

- Sonadar Barua: Chief jeweler and mint master
- Khanikar Barua: Chief artificer
- Hati Barua: In charge of elephants
- Ghora Barua: In charge of horses
- Duliya Barua: Royal palanquins' in charge
- Chaudang Barua: Executions' superintendent
- Bhandari Barua: Treasurer
- Bez Barua: Royal family physician

NOTES

Some other officers were 12 Rajkhowas, various Katakis, Kakatis and Dolais. A Rajkhowa was a territory's governor as well as commanded 3000 *paiks*. A Rajkhowa was a public works supervisor as also an arbitrator for local disputes. A Kataki was an envoy dealing with hill tribes and foreign nations. Kakatis wrote documents that were official while the Dolais were expounders of astrology who also ascertained the most auspicious time and date for important tasks.

## 6. Governors

Those of the royal families held rule over certain territories and were addressed as *Raja*.

- *Charing Raja, Swargadeo's* heir apparent, administered the tracts around Joypur on the right bank of river Burhidihing
- *Tipam Raja* is the second in line
- *Namrup Raja* is the third in line

Royal family members who had lower positions got regions known as *mel*s, and were addressed as *melkhowa raja* or *meldangia*. Princes who were even lower were *Meldangia gohain*s and these numbered two *Sarumelia gohain and Majumelia gohain*.

Individual *mel*s were provided to the royal ladies. There were 12 such allotments at the time of Rajeshwar Singha. Of the highest importance was the one provided to the chief queen and was known as the *Raidangia mel*.

The forward territories were administered and ruled by forward governors who also were military commanders. Such offices were given to members of families which had the eligibility for being the three great Gohains.

- *Jagiyal Gohain* served under Borbarua, administered Jagi at Nagoan and maintained relations with seven tribal chiefs, called *Sat Raja*.
- *Kajalimukhiya Gohain* served under the Borphukan, administered Kajalimukh and maintained relations with Jaintia and Dimarua.
- *Marangi khowa Gohain* administered the regions that were contiguous to the Naga groups west of the Dhansiri river.
- *Sadiya Khowa Gohain* based in Sadiya, administered the regions that were acquired after the conquest of the Sutiya kingdom in 1523.
- *Solal Gohain* administered a great part of Nagaon and a portion of Chariduar after the headquarters of the Borphukan was transferred to Gauhati.

Rajkhowas were lesser governors. Some Rajkhowas were:

- Abhaypur
- Bacha
- Darrang
- Solaguri

Vassals or dependent kings were addressed as *Raja*. Each of these Rajas gave an annual tribute with the exception of the Raja of Rani. It was required of these Rajas to provide paiks and resources as and when required, for example at war time.

- Barduar
- Beltola ruled the tracts southwest of Gauhati, and were the descendants of Gaj Narayan, a grandson of Chilarai of the Koch dynasty

NOTES

- Darrang Raja ruled over later-day Darrang district, and were the descendants of Sundar Narayan, a great-grandson of Chilarai of the Koch dynasty
- Dimarua
- Luki
- Rani
- Tapakuchi

### 7. Paik officials

The Ahom kingdom had huge dependence on the Paik system which was just a corvee labour form. All common subjects fell in the category of *paik*. A group of four *paiks* was referred to as a *got*. All through the year one paika was in the king's direct service while the remaining three paikas would take care of his fields besides their own. This Paik system was under the administration of Paik officials.

- Bora had 20 *paiks* under his charge
- Saikia had 100 *paiks* under his charge
- Hazarika had 1000 *paiks* under his charge

### Land survey

While hiding in Kamrup prior to his ascent to the throne, Gadadhar Singha made himself fully acquainted with the Mughal's system of land measurement. Immediately after the end of the war with the Mughals, Gadadhar passed orders to have a system on the same lines introduced all across the kingdom. They had surveyors brought in from Bengal and Koch Behar for implementation of the system. The first implementation happened in Sibsagar from where it was moved quickly. Despite all the speedy work, the survey got completed only after the death of Gadadhar. The survey of Nowgaon was conducted next and the following settlement was done under the personal supervision of Rudra Singha.

It is said that the method of survey included:

> measuring the four sides of each field with a *nal*, or bamboo pole of 12 feet (3.7 m) length and calculating the area, the unit was the 'lucha' or 144 square feet (13.4 $m^2$) and 14,400 sq ft (1,340 $m^2$) is one 'bigha'. Four 'bighas' makes one 'pura'.

Even today in Assam, a similar system of land measurement is followed.

## *Satgharia* Ahom Aristocracy

The third Ahom king was Subinphaa (1281–1293). He is responsible for clearly defining *Satgharia Ahom* aristocracy or the Ahom of the seven houses. These are the families or *Gohains* of the *Chaophaa*, Burhagohain and Borgohain. He also had specified the 4 priestly lineages—*Deodhai*, *Mohan*, *Bailung* and *Chiring* (the *Gogois*). There existed marital relationships of an exogamous form in these lines. In the later period, there was an increase in the number of lineages probably because of incorporation of other lineages or because of division of the existing ones. While the king had to be from the first family, the Borgohain and Burhagohain came from the third and second families. Borphukans, came from the Sutiya ethnic group and the Borbaruas belonged to the Khamti Chiring Kachari and Moran groups. At a future date, to the *Bailung* group were also added the Mising, Naga and Nara (Mogaung) oracles. The composition of the extended nobility was the non-taxpaying spiritual class and landed aristocracy.

NOTES

The gentry freed from the *khels* was known as *apaikan chamua* and it paid tax in the form of money. The *paikan chamua* comprised literati, artisans, and other skilled persons who performed non-manual work and paid their taxes in the form of their service. Manual labour was performed by the *kanri paik*. At the lowest rung stood *bandi-beti*, *licchous* and other serfs and bondsmen. Some amount of inter class movement was allowed. This is evident from the fact that from the rung of bondsman Momai Tamuli Borbarua climbed up the ranks and under Pratap Singha he was made the first Borbarua.

## 2.3 MOAMARIA REBELLION AND CAPTAIN WELSH'S MISSION

The Moamaria rebellion occurred from 1769 to 1806. The conflict occurred in the 18th century between the Ahom kings and Morans who were the adherents of the Moamara Sattra. It caused general and extensive disgruntlement amongst the populace against the Ahom king and the nobles. It spanned two periods during which the Ahom kings were bereft of all control over the capital of their kingdom. When they managed to take back their capital, there was nothing but widespread slaughter of the subjects because of which huge areas were bereft of population. It had not been possible to get back the entire kingdom for the Ahom king. Bengmara which was part of the north-east region of the kingdom gained virtual independence from Ahom rule.

The rebellion had greatly weakened the kingdom of the Ahoms. It destroyed approximately half of the population and played havoc with the economy of the kingdom. Thus weakened, the Ahom kingdom became an easy target for invasion and the Burmese invasion followed. The next devastation was the colonization of the region by the British.

Crisis had been brewing in the Ahom Kingdom as the basis of the state, the Paik system was not flexible enough to change and adapt to the changes in society and economy. The leakage of manpower from the Paik system was caused in one way by the rise of the sattra. This led to tension and conflict between the Ahom kingdom and the sattras. The Moamara sattra which had Moran tribes' people as adherents followed the non-conformist Kala-samhati sect that competed against the royalist sattras belonging to other sects. As this sattra grew, the Ahom kingdom also grew more and more uncomfortable. To try to suppress them, the Ahom kingdom resorted to their repression and to insulting the sattra's followers.

As time went by, the guru of the Moamoria compromised with the Ahom rulers. Inspiration was gained by the rebels from the magico-religious cult of night worshipers, which was a mix of Tantricism and tribal fertility rites.

### Sattra–Ahom conflict

In the sixteenth century, the Mahapuruxiya Dharma was established by Srimanta Sankardeva. This was a religion which was proselytizing and was one which opened itself to everyone, even the tribesmen and the Muslims. It was a religion which made available such opportunities to the common tribesmen that would help to better them economically and socially. Also, the sattras made available to them a safe escape from the mandatory labour they had to perform under the system of Paik.

The new religion propounded by Sankardeva appeared like a huge threat to the Ahom rulers. When Suklenmung was on the throne, to escape persecution Sankardeva ran off to the Koch kingdom. Pratap Singha, destroyed both the Kuruabahi and the

**Check Your Progress**

4. Fill in the blanks:
   (a) The Ahom kingdom existed from _____ to _____.
   (b) _____ established the Ahom Kingdom.
   (c) Ahoms cultivated _____ in the marshy and less populated regions.
   (d) _____ and _____ were the two great Gohains and Sukaphaa.
   (e) The Moamoria rebellion occurred from _____ to _____.
   (f) In the sixteenth century Srimanta Sankardeva established the _____ _____.
   (g) Who was the third Ahom king?

NOTES

Kalabari sattras setting precedence for his successors who carried on a similar oppressive policy. This policy of oppression was changed by Jayadhwaj Singha and the rulers who succeeded him, till Sulikphaa Lora Roja made attempts to accept and live with the sattras. When Gadadhar Singha ascended the throne, he reversed the policy again. He started the persecution of the sattras. Rudra Singha, the son of Gadadhar Singha, made attempts to isolate those who were more of a threat to the Ahom kingdom, these would be the ones who were more liberal and were of the non-Brahmin sattras. He put in all efforts to promote the Brahmin sattras. When the failure of his policy became evident to him, he changed course and began to provide saktism with state support. Saktism was the historical and theological *bete noire* of the Mahapuruxiya dharma. He was sure that this policy would curb the influence of the sattras. His new policy caused much greater persecutions. The one which is of greatest significance is the one that occurred in the time of Siba Singha under Bor Roja Phuleshwari Kunwonri. The conflict remained unresolved and came to the front finally in the form of the 18th century Moamoria rebellion which made the Ahom kingdom weak and hollow to such an extent that with the coming of the 19th century it collapsed.

## The First Phase

Ahom officials flogged a sattra's leading disciple, Ragh Neog, on 15 September 1769. The reason for the flogging was that he had not made available the number of elephants that were required. Ragh Neog, Naharkhora Saikia and his two wives Radha and Rukmini led the Morans, assured the three Ahom princes, the king's (Lakshmi Singha's) brother Mohanmala, and two nephews of the king, that they would help to liberate the area lying to the north of river Burhidihing. And this they did. The Ahom capital was occupied by the rebels on 21st November 1769. Naharkhora's Ramananda was put on the throne. Lakshmi Singha, the defeated Ahom king, was captured and imprisoned. The defeated king's high officers were executed. Three of the common Morans were made the three great Gohains. Two common Ahoms were made the Gohains at Marangi and Sadiya, a *kanri paik* was made the Borphukan and Ragh Neog became the Borbarua.

There was lack of experience amongst the rebels as far as statecraft was concerned. Due to this missing ingredient, they were unable to bring any kind of new order and in a bid to imitate them, they ended up doing just the same as their erstwhile leaders. Many daughters and wives of noblemen were seized by Ragh Neog and added to his harem. Many of the new rebel officers started imitating and behaving just like the old nobility had done and this caused dissatisfaction to the other rebels. These rebels, under the leadership of Govinda Gaoburha, moved from the capital and entered Sagunmuri. This situation was seized by a few persons of the old nobility who lost no time in putting Ragh to death and took back their capital. This they achieved on 11 April 1770, aided by Kuranganayani who was an Ahom queen from Manipur. The following purge led to the execution of, amongst others, the Moamara sattradhikar and his son Saptabhuj, Rukmini, Radha, Astabhujdev, Naharkhora and Ramananda the rebel king.

Once the Ahoms had managed to recapture their capital, the rebels under the leadership of Govinda Gaoburha in Sagunmuri made an attempt to again dethrone the king. Even this attempt and movement were characteristic of a popular uprising. Weapons that the rebels mostly employed were clubs and bamboo staffs. The slogan that they chanted was *praja-oi joroiroa, chekani-oi sopai dhora* ('Ye oppressed subjects, hold your stave close'). The uprising under Govinda Gaoburha's leadership is referred to as chekani *kubua ron* ('The war of the slaves'). During the course of one such engagement, the Dhekial Phukan and the Borpatrogohain lost their lives while the

Borgohain had a narrow escape. Marching towards Rangpur, the rebels met forces at Thowra. The forces comprised fighters of the Burhagohain, the new Borpatrogohain, the Borgohain and a detachment cavalry sent by the king of Manipur. The rebels faced a defeat in this encounter. Their leader Govinda Gaoburha was taken captive and put to death.

Several rebels went into the deep forests and from there, with leadership from men like Lephera, Parmananda and others carried engaged in guerilla warfare. At the very start under the leadership of the Deka-Phukan and the Na-Phukan a royalist force tried to further the cause but met with defeat. A while later, another force under the leadership of the Borpatrogohain managed to get rid of Parmananda and Lephera. Then on, the Burhagohain followed a systematic obliteration of villages as also the leaders who remained. In a seize, starvation led to the death of many rebels along with their families. Those who survived were separated and settled at different places. Finally, Nomal, probably the last holdout, was captured and executed. With this, Moamoria rebellion's first phase came to a close.

### The Second Phase

Rebels who were armed attacked Garhgaon and Rangpur in April 1783. Though the rebels were driven away, what followed was a month-and-a-half-long continuous slaughter of Morans.

An army of Dafla-Bahatiyas and Moamarias was raised by Harihar Tanti in the year 1786. Auniati sattra had kept a grandson of the late Moamara sattradhikar, Pitambar, in his custody. Pitambar was freed by a contingent of the rebels. In 1788, on 19 January, Rangpur was surrounded by rebels. King Gaurinath Singha as well as the inhabitants of the capital fled. This region which was captured began to be administered locally. Brahmaputra's north bank was administered by Harihar Tanti, Majuli was under Howha and the Moran tracts from Bengmara (present-day Tinsukia) were under Sarbananda. The position of King was given to Bharat. Regular striking of coins was done in the names of Sarbananda and Bharat. The regrouping attempt made by Purnananda Burhagohain failed and he established himself in Jorhat, the vanguard of the royalist forces. Darrang is where the Ahom nobles set up camp while Nagaon was where the king stayed. The king met with dissensions due to which on 11 June 1792, he moved to Gauhati.

About 1792, counter attacks started when an attack made by the Manipuri king was warded off by Bharat. In the same year, the East India Company sent 550 fully armed well-trained troops along with Thomas Welsh to help the Ahoms. On 24 November 1792, facing no resistance they captured Gauhati. Next, on 18 March 1794, they gave Rangpur to Gaurinath Singha. Thomas Welsh was awarded prize money and on 25 May, 1794 he returned to Bengal. In 1794 itself, Gaurinath Singha passed away in Jorhat. Kamaleswar Singha succeeded him. The suffering of the rebels did not abate under his rule and they suffered further reverses. The experience that they had with the troops of Thomas Welsh and their military display inspired the Ahoms to do away with the *paik*-based militia and establish for themselves a standing army comprising mostly paid Hindustani sepoys.

The fate of the rebels was not too good. In 1796, the rebel Phopai was killed, rebel king Bharat was killed in 1799 while 1800 Sadiya fell to the royalists. In spite of many attempts through 1802 and 1806, Sarbananda held out from Bengmara. Finally, the title of Barsenapati was conferred on him and he was given the territory of Matak.

NOTES

So, Moamaria rebellion came to an end managing to nearly finish the Paik system as also create a near-independent Matak tract under the rule of Barsenapati.

The decline of the Ahom kingdom started with the rule of Gaurinath Singha (1780–95). The rebellion of the Moamarias began again in 1782, this time more violent and more vigorous. The rebels marched to Garhgaon, creating panic among the people. The rebels' advance was arrested, with the rebels being severely put down and a large number of them were executed. This just worsened the situation and after giving it a little time, the Moamarias created disturbances across the north bank. The royalists were defeated by the Moamarias and post this victory they headed towards the capital.

The king looked towards Manipur, Kachari, Jaintia and the chiefs of Rani, Beltola, and Luki for help. Before assistance could arrive Rangpur was taken over by the rebels and Gaurinath Singha along with his entire family sailed off to Nagaon, then further to Gauhati. In Rangpur, Bharath Singha was made the king by the Moamarias. Meanwhile, Hatisungi Morans made Sarbananda the king of the region lying east of Dihing. Coins were struck in the names of both the kings. North Gauhati too had been occupied, by Krishnanarayan of Darrang who had done so with the help of a large force.

The administrative centre of Dichoi (Jorhat) was moved by Purnananda Buragohain and at a later stage it was made the new capital of the Ahoms.

This was when an appeal was made by Gaurinath Singha seeking help from the East India Company through Raush, a salt merchant and Dauglas, Commissioner of Koch Bihar for both materials and troops. The Governor General, Lord Cornwallis, responded by sending Captain Thomas Welsh with a troop of trained and armed sepoys. They reached Goalpara at the beginning of November, 1792. Here, they got the king's urgent message. On the Brahmaputra at Nagarberra, a meeting was held between Thomas Welsh and the king.

From there, Captain Welsh moved further and both at Gauhati and on the river's north bank he was able to defeat the rebels. At Darrang, Welsh even succeeded in pacifying the rebelling prince Krishnanarayan, and expelling a number of the Burkendazes who were assisting the prince. After a while, Welsh marched to Jorhat, then to Rangpur, where after being victorious over the Moamarias in 1794, he reestablished Gaurinath Singha at Rangpur.

While Capt. Welsh was gaining one success after the other, the new Governor General Sir John Shore recalled him. While he had been in Assam, in 1793 itself Welsh had concluded a commercial treaty under whose terms the inter Bengal and Assam commerce was to be on a 'reciprocal basis'. In answering the queries of his government, he presented his answers in *The Report of Captain Welsh*. In it he provided vital information pertaining to the Ahom's system of Government, their products, trade and commerce, to name a few. Despite the fact that many people considered Gaurinath Singha to be vindictive and cruel, Welsh says he did a lot of good too; for example, it was he who had human sacrifice abolished at Sadiya's *Kechaikhati* temple.

Let us look at the help that Welsh provided to the Ahom King from a different angle. Towards the close of the 18th century, the East India Company was presented with a lucrative opportunity when trouble started in the Ahom kingdom due to the Moamariya rebellion. It gave them huge means of surveying and understanding the region.

When King Gaurinath Singha's call for help reached the Company, it initially dithered since it was in the middle of a war on taxation against Tipu Sultan of Mysore.

Finally after the siege of Srirangapatnam and a treaty in 1792, they were free to indulge in other issues.

That very year, they dispatched Bengal Army's Captain Thomas Welsh to aid Gaurinath Singha. He set out with six companies of sepoys, every company had 60 fighting men, and there were small medical corporations under Dr John Peter Wade. The entire unit had just 550 fighters.

At the close of November of 1792, this unit had its first military encounter with the local population. Northern Kamrup, inclusive of North Gauhati, had been occupied by Darrang Raja Krishnanarayan. He ignored the various requests the English had made to him to disband his barkandaz army. This led to a battle and post just two engagements, he put down arms, removed the barkandazes from his army, and accepted the Ahom king's vassalage.

Captain Welsh, at the start of 1794, had started to negotiate with upper Assam's Moamariyas. The negotiations were unsuccessful and the atmosphere for an armed encounter brewed. Again, the English gave battle and the militia again lost to the Bengal Army. Reinstating of Gaurinath Singha was accomplished and at the same time the English army was recalled to Bengal.

### Why was the Bengal Army invincible?

The armies of the East India Company fought in a European style on the infantry front. The Company lacked cavalry units in the true sense for quite some time. The British Army had perfect ones. The armies in India had total reliance on cavalry, and infantry for them was of scarce importance. In this regard, the army of the Ahoms was an exception, being possibly the only one with no cavalry. Assamese were brilliant foot soldiers and expert implementers of guerrilla warfare.

The unit that came to fight the Moamariyas had better leadership and training than the Moamariyas. The weapons that they used were also better. Well drilled, the unit's troops had the doggedness that had been displayed by English armies throughout the world at different theatres of war. They were trained not to flee or break up under any circumstance. They were trained to hold their ground, even in the most adverse situation. To quote Manimugdha Sharma, 'It was this superior will to prevail that probably made all the difference.'

Troops of the Company, in the 1970s itself had short-land pattern. The muskets were easy to load and were of high performance. An expert soldier could fire four rounds in approximately one minute.

On the other hand, when compared with the company units, both leadership and weapons of the Moamariyas were deficient. Moamariyas had no idea of the style of fighting employed by the Europeans. Moamariyas did not possess real firearms except for some obsolete matchlocks. Moamariyas would use anything as a weapon such as bamboo sticks, spears, pick-axes, pikes and swords. The Ahoms did not possess muskets.

When Captain Welsh and team were recalled by Sir John Shore in 1794, they were full of stories about Assam, which aided the Company to interfere in the future affairs of Assam.

In the Gazetteer of India, Assam, Vol 1, it is mentioned that, 'According to Captain Welsh's account, Gauhati was an expansive and populous town at that time. It was situated on both sides of the banks of the Brahmaputra and extended to the neighbouring hills. Along the river bank there was a rampart on which mounted 113 guns, including 3

NOTES

of European manufacture. Another fortification of the town was a large enclosure, surrounded by a brick wall. Rangpur was a largely populated town, spanning about 20 miles. The surrounding country had been very densely cultivated. The nobles held large estates of land, which were tilled by their slaves, but the products were never brought to the market. It was almost impossible to buy grain: it was easier to buy salt or opium. The price of commodities was very cheap. Buffaloes were sold for five rupees.'

## 2.4 SUMMARY

In this unit, you have learnt that:

- State formation is the process of the development of a centralized government structure in a situation where one did not exist prior to its development.
- Sukaphaa, is credited with having established the Ahom Kingdom. He was a Tai prince from Mong Mao.
- It started with being a Mong in the upper reaches of the Brahmaputra river, with its base lying in a wet rice cultivation area.
- In the 16th century, there was sudden expansion of the kingdom under Suhungmung. At this point its character changed and it turned multi-ethnic.
- In 1228 the kingdom of Ahom got established with the coming of Chao Lung Siu-Ka-Pha, the 1st Ahom king, from Mong Mao (now part of Peoples Republic of China), who traversed the Patkai mountain range and reached the valley of Brahmaputra.
- He brought took under his occupation the area on the river's south bank, the Patkai mountains in the east, the Dikhau river in the south and the Burhi Dihing river in the north.
- He set up his capital in Charaideo and set up offices of the Dangaria— Borgohain and Burhagohain.
- Persons ready to fit in with the Ahom polity and lifestyle were welcomed into the fold and this process is referred to as Ahomization.
- The Ahom government adopted a policy of conciliation, as well as a policy of force towards various tribes of the north east.
- The Ahoms did not interfere too much in the affairs of the hills. Rather, they conciliated with the tribes by providing them many types of facilities and privileges.
- The Ahoms were more or less successful in their dealings with the tribes of the hills and were able to control the tribes in the confines of the hills of Arunachal Pradesh, except the trade missions, in which they could enter beyond the foothills.
- The Ahoms also applied force against the tribes, whenever the situation demanded.
- With rapid expansion and addition of large territories to the kingdom, the pace at which Ahomization was occurring was not good enough and in their own kingdom, the Ahoms had become a minority. This caused the kingdom's character to change. It turned inclusive and multi-ethnic.
- Marangikowa Gohain and Sadiakhowa Gohain were two special offices, set up for overseeing those territories, which had been taken from the Kachari and Sutiya kingdoms, respectively.
- The Paik system was employed to organize the kingdom's subjects which formed the militia.

**Check Your Progress**

5. Under which ruler did the Ahom kingdom start declining?
6. Who abolished human sacrifice in the Sadiya's *Kechaikhati* temple?
7. The Assamese were good at guerrilla warfare. (True/False)

NOTES

- The features that are seen in the mature Ahom kingdom were adopted during the period of Pratap Singha.
- There was the reorganizing of the Paik system under the *khel* system which was more professional, and it replaced the *phoid* system which was kinship based.
- Both Borphukan and Borbarua got set up as also some more small offices.
- The kingdom of Ahom was under the rule of a king who was known as *Swargadeo* (*Chao-Pha* in the Ahom language). The king had to be from the line of Sukaphaa, the first Ahom king. Generally, succession was based on primogeniture, though on the occasion, it was possible for the great Gohains (*Dangaria*) to elect another descendant of Sukaphaa from a different line or even enthroned or depose one.
- Sukaphaa had two great Gohains to aid him in administration: Burhagohain and the Borgohain.
- During his reign, Pratap Singha introduced two offices to be directly under the king. These offices were Borphukan and Borbarua.
- Patra Mantris was the council of ministers that comprised five positions.
- Judicial and well as military responsibilities rested with both the Borphukan and Borbarua, and both got help from two separate councils (*sora*) of *Phukans*.
- There were twenty or so Baruas, some of these were:
  - Sonadar Barua: Chief jeweler and mint master
  - Khanikar Barua: Chief artificer
  - Hati Barua: In charge of elephants
  - Ghora Barua: In charge of horses
  - Duliya Barua: Royal palanquins' in charge
  - Chaudang Barua: Executions' superintendent
  - Bhandari Barua: Treasurer
  - Bez Barua: Royal family physician
- Some other officers were 12 Rajkhowas, various Katakis, Kakatis and Dolais.
- Those of the royal families held rule over certain territories and were addressed as Raja.
- Royal families' members who had lower positions got regions known as *mel*s and were addressed as *melkhowa raja* or *meldangia*.
- Princes who were even lower were *Meldangia gohain*s and were *Sarumelia gohain and Majumelia gohain*.
- Individual *mel*s were provided to the royal ladies.
- The forward territories were administered and ruled by forward governors, who also were military commanders. Such offices were given to members of families that were eligible to being the three great Gohains.
- Vassals or dependent kings were addressed as *Raja*.
- The Ahom kingdom had huge dependence on the Paik system which was just a corvee labor form.
- Gadadhar Singha made himself fully acquainted with the Mughal's system of land measurement and had it introduced all across the kingdom.
- It has been opined that the Dimasa's initial state formation took place at the region of Sadiya.

NOTES

- The Moamoria rebellion occurred from 1769 to 1806. The conflict occurred in the 18th century between the Ahom kings and Morans who were the adherents of the Moamara Sattra. It caused general and extensive disgruntlement amongst the populace against the Ahom king and the nobles. It spanned two periods during which the Ahom kings were bereft of all control over the capital of their kingdom.
- The Ahom capital was occupied by the rebels on 21 November, 1769. Naharkhora's Ramananda was put on the throne. Lakshmi Singha, the defeated Ahom king, was captured and imprisoned. The defeated king's high officers were executed.
- There was lack of experience amongst the rebels as far as statecraft was concerned. Due to this missing ingredient, they were unable to bring any kind of new order and in a bid to imitate them, they ended up doing just the same as their erstwhile leaders.
- Sukaphaa is said to have established the Ahom kingdom.
- Moamoria rebellion rebels stole away the power of the Ahoms.
- 1769 to 1806 was the period of the Moamoria rebellion. It was the conflict that occurred in the 18th century between the Ahom kings and Morans who were the adherents of the Moamara Sattra. The rebellion destroyed approximately a half of the population and played havoc with the economy of the kingdom. Thus weakened, the Ahom kingdom became an easy target for invasion and the Burmese invasion followed.
- Crisis had been brewing in the Ahom Kingdom as the basis of the state, the Paik system was not flexible enough to change and adapt to the changes in society and economy.
- The leakage of manpower from the Paik system was caused in one way by the rise of the sattra which came in conflict with the Ahom kingdom.
- In the sixteenth century the Mahapuruxiya Dharma was established by Srimanta Sankardeva. It made available such opportunities to the common tribesmen, which would help them to better them economically and socially. Also, the sattras made available to them a safe escape from the mandatory labor they had to perform under the system of Paik.
- The Moamaria Rebellion occurred in two phases.
- The decline of the Ahom Kingdom started with the rule of Gaurinath Singha (1780-95). When he was attacked and Rangpur was taken over Gaurinath Singha along with his entire family sailed off to Nagaon, then further to Gauhati.
- Gaurinath Singha sought help from the East India Company through Raush, a salt merchant and Mr. Dauglas, Commissioner of Koch Bihar for both materials and troops. The Governor General, Lord Cornwallis, responded by sending Captain Thomas Welsh with a troop of trained and armed sepoys.

## 2.5 KEY TERMS

- **Posa:** It is a system that allows you to pay for only what you sell.
- **Moamoria rebellion:** The 18th century conflict between the Morans, adherents of the Moamara Sattra, and the Ahom kings
- **Borbarua:** One of the five patra mantris (councilors) in the Ahom kingdom, a position created by the Ahom king Pratap Singha.
- **Rebel:** A person who rises in armed resistance against an established government or ruler.

## 2.6 ANSWERS TO 'CHECK YOUR PROGRESS'

NOTES

1. The Ahom rulers had advanced war weapons (matchlocks and guns), large surplus production and the *paiks* to aggressively pursue their imperial policy.
2. The Ahom policy can be summarized like this: 'Conciliate these tribes by promising to furnish them their necessaries as far as possible. If they indulge in wanton pillages; pursue and capture the miscreants, but never overstep the limits'.
3. In general, the term posa came to be applied to all payments made to the tribes of the hills by the Governments; whether it was in commutation of blackmail, compensation for customary demands of the tribal chiefs of the bordering hills of Arunachal Pradesh.
4. Fill in the blank
   (a) 1228, 1826
   (b) Sukaphaa
   (c) wet rice cultivation
   (d) Borgohain, Burhagohain
   (e) 1769 to 1806
   (f) Mahapuruxiya Dharma
   (g) Subinphaa was the third Ahom king.
5. Under Gaurinath Singha's reign the Ahom kingdom started its decline.
6. Gaurinath Singha abolished human sacrifice.
7. True

## 2.7 QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

### Short-Answer Questions

1. Who was the founder of the Ahom kingdom?
2. What do you understand by *posa*?
3. What acts reflect the policy of friendly relation of Ahom rulers with the tribes of Arunachal Pradesh?
4. What measures were used to stop the Nyishi raids into the Ahom territory?
5. Write a short note on the relationship of the Mughals and the Ahom kingdom.
6. Why was Captain Welsh able to gain such success in his mission in Assam?
7. What were the causes of the Moamaria Rebellion?

### Long-Answer Questions

1. Explain the policy of conciliation of the Ahom rulers.
2. Write a note on the relations between the Akas and the Ahoms.
3. Write a short note on the relations between the Ahoms and the Nyishis.
4. Summarize the highlights of the relations between the Ahoms and the tribals.
5. What were the reasons for the decline of the Ahom kingdom?

NOTES

6. Write in detail the frontier policy of the Ahom kings.
7. Describe the Moamaria Rebellion.
8. Discuss Captain Welsh's Mission.
9. Describe the events that led to deploying Captain Welsh's Mission.

## 2.8 FURTHER READING

Bhattacharjee, Jayanta Bhusan. 1991. *Social and Polity Formations in Pre-colonial Northeast India: The Barak Valley Experience*. Delhi: Haranand Publications in association with Vikas Publishing House.

Sinha, Surajit. 1987. *Tribal Polities and State Systems in Pre-colonial Eastern and North Eastern India*. Kolkata: Centre for Studies in Social Sciences.

Chakravarty, I. N., Chakravarty, Lakshmi N., 1973. *Glimpses of the Early History of Arunachal*. Arunachal Pradesh: Research Department, Arunachal Pradesh Administration.

# UNIT 3 MODERN NORTH EAST INDIA

**Structure**

NOTES


3.0 Introduction
3.1 Unit Objectives
3.2 The British in India and South East Asia
  3.2.1 Burma before the British Conquest
  3.2.2 North East India
3.3 Anglo-Burmese War and North East India (1824–1826)
  3.3.1 Causes of the Anglo-Burmese War
  3.3.2 Series of Events of the War
3.4 Treaty of Yandabo and its Impact
  3.4.1 Importance of the Treaty of Yandabo
  3.4.2 Aftermath of the Treaty of Yandabo
3.5 Annexations 1828–1852
  3.5.1 Annexation of Cachar
  3.5.2 Annexation of Jaintias
  3.5.3 Annexion of Assam and Khasi Hills
  3.5.4 Administration of David Scott (1824–31)
  3.5.5 Administration of T.C. Robertson (1832-34)
  3.5.6 Administration of Captain Jenkins (1834)
  3.5.7 Condition of the Province on the Eve of British Occupation and its Effects
  3.5.8 Rise and Consolidation of British Power in Khasi Hills
3.6 Annexations (1864–1905)
  3.6.1 Annexation of Garo Hills, Naga Hills and Lushai Hills
3.7 Summary
3.8 Key Terms
3.9 Answers to 'Check Your Progress'
3.10 Questions and Exercises
3.11 Further Reading


## 3.0 INTRODUCTION

The British came to India as traders and wanted to explore other regions of South East Asia as well so that they could strengthen trade links and in the process strengthen the economy of Britain. Slowly and steadily, the British however, started to interfere in the political functioning of India and gained control over the subcontinent by following the policy of annexation. With India under control, the British wanted to expand their political as well as commercial territory and focused on gaining control of other South East Asian countries. The British were able to easily control Nepal and China but Burma posed many threats to the British because of its power and the fact that the Burmese were expanding their Indian territory. This eventually led to a war between the Burmese and the British which ended in the victory of the British and they were finally able to expand their territory to Burma as well. The British waged several wars against the Burmese. These series of wars were called Anglo-Burmese Wars and were fought by the British with the help of the Indian army. After the very First Anglo-Burmese war, the Burmese empire came crumpling down. In fact, the Burmese army did not only face a humiliating defeat but also was left economically weak and crippled. The Burmese also had to cede several of their territories to the British. Though subsequent kings tried to get back their territories, but the British army was far more superior and had much better weaponry

NOTES

and all subsequent attacks of the Burmese failed. The British were finally able to consolidate their position in Burma and by 1885 had complete control over Burma. In this unit, you will study about the factors which lead to the Anglo-Burmese War, the significance of the Treaty of Yandabo, and the annexation of the North Eastern region by the British.

## 3.1 UNIT OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- Assess the British rule in India and South East Asia
- List the reasons behind the Anglo-Burmese war
- Examine the terms of the Treaty of Yandabo
- Describe the annexation of the North Eastern region by the British

## 3.2 THE BRITISH IN INDIA AND SOUTH EAST ASIA

The British ruled over India for nearly 200 years. It is interesting to note the emergence of traders as the largest political power in India and subsequently in Asia. Since early times, India had close commercial links with the European countries. In the fifteenth century the trading routes between east and west came under the Turkish control. This led the Europeans to search for new trade routes to the East. This is when Vasco da Gama, a Portuguese explorer discovered a new sea route to India using which many Europeans came to India. This is the route through which the British entered India and established commercial as well as political rule in India. The British first came to India in the form of East India Company in 1608 when the Mughal Emperor Jahangir ruled India. The East India Company was given the permission to establish factories in India. Consequently, the East India Company was able to establish factories in Madras, Bombay, Surat, Orissa, Hugli, Hyderabad and Calcutta. With the increasing trade, the British were also able to politically control the several princely states and territories in India. By this time, the British had taken advantage of the poor state of affairs and economic condition of India for which they were themselves responsible.

The British followed several policies which were inhuman and had turned mercenaries to gain complete political control over India. By 1818, the entire Indian subcontinent except Sind and Punjab was brought under the control of the British. The conquest of Sind occurred due to the growing Anglo-Russian rivalry in Asia and also because the British feared that Russia might attack India through Afghanistan or Persia. Also, river Sind opened several commercial possibilities for the British. Sind was annexed by the British by a treaty in 1932 and roads and rivers of Sind were thrown open to the British for trade. With Punjab and several small territories coming under the control of the British, by 1857, the whole of India was under the control of the British commercially as well as politically. With Britain's ever increasing power in India, it became concerned with protecting India's borders and access routes.

With India under control, the British now shifted focus on expansion in South East Asia. From its base in India, the East India Company established trade links with China. Subsequently, China and Nepal became allies of the British. The English took over Sri

Lanka from the Dutch in 1798 and it became their colony of Ceylon in 1802. The British gained monopoly over the trade of fisheries, cinnamon, salt and tobacco in Ceylon. The only South East Asian country that posed a threat and problems for the British was Burma. Burma was a powerful and confident nation and became an example of 'Mission Creep' for the British. Burma had established control over Assam and Manipur in early nineteenth century which made the boundary line of Burma touch the border of British India and so clashes became obvious and frequent between the two powers. The British were finally able to annex Burma as well and with so much under their control, the British became the most dominant power in South East Asia in the latter part of the nineteenth century.

NOTES

### 3.2.1 Burma before the British Conquest

Before the British conquest, Burma was under the rule of the Konbaung dynasty. The Konbaung dynasty was established in 1752 by a village chief. The dynasty, last to rule Burma ruled from 1752 to 1885. The second largest empire was created by this dynasty in Burma. The Konbaung dynasty under its various rulers brought about several administrative reforms in Burma that led to the foundation of the modern-day Burma. The dynasty also established Burma as a strong military nation. The Konbaung dynasty was as expansionist and waged several campaigns against Arakan, Manipur, Assam, Siamese Kingdom and the Mon Kingdom of Pegu and was thus able to establish the third Burmese empire. The Konbaung dynasty practiced a centrally controlled government. The basis of economy in Burma was agriculture. Burma was kept wealthy throughout because of its location and trade routes with China and India passing straight through it. This South East Asian country was a very strong one and the Konbaung dynasty was always on the lookout for expansion. The British felt insecure with the ever-increasing trade and territory of Burma. The conflict between the British and Burma began when the Konbaung dynasty decided to expand into Arakan in Assam, close to British territory.

### 3.2.2 North East India

The North Eastern states were always a part of India, geographically, culturally and politically. The longest ruling dynasties were established in North East states of India. The state of Assam was ruled by Ahoms for almost six centuries. In Manipur, the ruling dynasty lasted for over nineteen centuries. The long dynastic rule in North East India played a significant role in keeping the British away from the region for a long time. During the early years of the British rule, the Nagas, Mizos and other tribes raided and conquered the plains and hills of Brahmaputra and Surema valleys. The long lasting dynasties further added to the existence of powerful empires with effective control. The Cachari and Jaintia dynasties had the plains as well as the hills under control. The Mughals as well as the Delhi Sultans were never able to conquer the North Eastern states. Thus, the region of North East got partially isolated from rest of the country. This is when Burma invaded Manipur and Assam and the British feared the loss of territory. The British therefore, shifted focus to North East India to consolidate their hold on the Indian territory.

**Check Your Progress**

1. Why did the British want to take control of South East Asian countries?
2. Why was Burma a threat for the British?
3. Why was North East region isolated from the rest of India?

# 3.3 ANGLO-BURMESE WAR AND NORTH EAST INDIA (1824–1826)

NOTES

The Burmese and the British, both expansionists and powerful, were always in conflict with each other. Eventually, the British were able to annex Burma following a series of wars known as Anglo-Burmese Wars. The first Anglo-Burmese War was fought between 1824 and 1826. By the end of the first war in which the British emerged victorious, Assam, Manipur, Cachar, Jaintia, Arakan province and Tenasserim came under the control of the British.

Though the main aim of the British to get into war with Burma was to expand their territory, they had other reasons too. One reason for the British to be at war with Burma was the search for new markets for British manufactured goods. The British did not want the French to use the Burmese harbours for trade. Increased trade with France was a threat for the British as it hindered the trade relations of the British with other countries. The British were also concerned about the French influence on the Court of Ava and feared loss of territory, control and trade. A war with Burma and the annexation of Ava was the only way in which the French could be driven out by the British.

## 3.3.1 Causes of the Anglo-Burmese War

Burma was a strong nation and it always posed a threat to the British because of its invasion in the North Eastern states. In addition, Burma was strong economically because of its trade links with other countries. By 1822, long borders had been created between British India and the Burmese because of Burmese conquests of Assam and Manipur. The British at that time were based in Calcutta and had different plans for the North East region. The British also actively supported rebels in Assam, Manipur and Arakan. When the British in Calcutta unilaterally declared Cachar and Jaintia British territories and sent in troops to drive away the Burmese, the Burmese were vexed and surprised with the attacks. The then Burmese Commander-in- Chief, Maha Bandula, was convinced that a war with the British was inevitable and thus, adopted an offensive policy against the British. Maha Bandula was ready for war against the British because he believed that a decisive victory could allow Ava to consolidate its control in Arakan, Manipur, Assam, Cachar, Jaintia. Maha Bandula also wanted to take control over East Bengal and strengthen the Burmese empire in India as well. In September 1823, Chittagong which was a part of the East India Company was invaded by Burma. Burma wanted to occupy Shalpuri Islands and this gave rise to another conflict between the British and the Burmese. In January 1824, when rebels entered Cachar and Jaintia, the Burmese sent in their troops to drive the rebels away. On the other hand, the British sent their troops to meet the Burmese in Jaintia. This was what led to the first war clashes between the British and the Burmese. Following border clashes in Arakan, the war formally broke out on 5 March 1824.

### The conflict

The King of Ava had become increasingly aggressive and expansionist towards the British held territories. In 1776, the Burmese had seized Tenasserim from Siam. In 1784, Arakan was incorporated as a part of Ava and in 1813, the Burmese conquered Manipur. Though a war was inevitable, the British at that time involved in other areas, tried to delay it. The final stroke came in September 1823, when the Burmese invaded and captured Shalpuri islands near Chittagong. The preparations for the war began thereafter.

Until now, all British actions against Burma were land based. The British decided to undertake amphibious actions in order to take over the town of Rangoon (now Yangon) which lay upon the banks of river Irrawaddy. A joint naval and infantry expedition was planned at Port Cornwallis in Andaman Islands under the control of General Archibald Campbell and Commodore Grant. The 13th Regiment made up part of 11,000 infantry sector and was placed under the command of Major Robert Sale. The first role of the 13th Regiment in the conflict was to seize and occupy the island of Cheduba which lay on the Arakan coast. Three companies were detailed to carry out this attack while the rest of the soldiers were asked to march to Rangoon. The attack on Rangoon was a successful one and the town was soon seized by the British and converted to a defensive stronghold. The Burmese, however, used to fighting in the jungle terrain with their muskets, swords and spears soon surrounded Rangoon from the outskirts. In the meantime, the monsoon season arrived and converted the country into mud and also spread disease. The British decided against a defensive action and planned an attack. The British did not find it easy because of the terrain of the jungle. They had to carry artillery in hand and the soldiers were falling fast because of the disease that had spread. The Burmese army was slowly pushed back up the Irrawaddy Valley. By February 1826, the Anglo-Indian army had advanced 300 miles to the town of Yandabo. From here, the Burmese capital lay just a short distance. The advance of the Anglo- Indian army on the capital began on 9 February 1826 with the 13th Regiment leading a night attack. This caused the enemy to flee. The capital was reached just two weeks later when the King of Ava sent a peace treaty to the British and agreed to pay the expenses of the war and also surrender a considerable part of his territory.

### 3.3.2 Series of Events of the War

The first Anglo-Burmese War was not an easy win for the British. There were several encounters between the Burmese and the British and after the loss of many soldiers and after incurring a lot of expenses on the war, the British were finally able to win and make Burmese cede a lot of its territories. The Burmese were also left in debt and consequantly the Empire crippled and lay defeated.

#### 1. War with the British on the outskirts of Burma

The Commander-in-Chief, Maha Bandula, of the Burmese army was supported by twelve best divisions of Burma. Burma had an army of 10,000 men and 500 horses. With the support of the best soldiers and men, Maha Bandula planned to attack the British from two sides Chittagong from Arakan in the South East and Sylhet from Cachar and Jaintia in the North. While Maha Bandula handled the war from Arakan, Uzana was given the command of Cachar and Jaintia. When the war began, the Burmese were able to push back the British. This was because the Burmese soldiers who had fought in the jungles of Assam and Manipur were more familiar with the terrain as opposed to the British. The British had already been defeated in January 1824 in Cachar and Jaintia. In May, the Burmese led by Myawaddy U Sa, entered Bengal and defeated the British at the Battle of Ramu. The units led by Bandula and Myawaddy then united forces and marched on to capture Cox's Bazar. The Burmese invasion led to extreme panic in Chittagong and Calcutta. However, Bandula did not want to overdo this victory and stopped the army from proceeding to Chittagong. This was one of the major factors that led Burma to lose the war. Had Bandula marched onto Chittagong, which was lightly held by the British, the Burmese would have got easy access to Calcutta. This would not have led to

Burmese victory but would have helped the Burmese to negotiate more strongly on the terms of the Treaty of Yandabo.

## 2. Wars inside Burma

NOTES

Some of the wars fought inside Burma has been discussed in this section.

### Battle of Yangon, May–December 1824

The British were having trouble fighting on the hard terrain and so they decided to take the war to the Burmese mainland. The British took the Burmese by surprise when a British naval force of 10,000 men entered the harbour of Yangon. The Burmese chose to fortify the positions outside the city, leaving the city of Yangon empty for the British to capture. The British took positions inside a fortified Shwedagon Pagoda and attacked the Burmese from there. By July 1824, the British were able to drive away the Burmese to Kamayut and the Burmese were unable to gain Shwedagon back. The Burmese army including the units at Arakan and Cachar and Jaintia were called to fight the British in Yangon. By November 1824, Bandula was able to command a force outside Yangon. Bandula believed that he and his army could meet the British head on and win the battle. However, Bandula was unaware of the fact that the British weapons were far more superior to that of Burmese. On 30 November 1824, Bandula ordered a frontal attack on the British positions, making possibly the biggest mistake of his career. The British army with a large number of soldiers and superior weaponry was able to withstand several attacks made by the Burmese and reduced the Burmese army by thousands. The British troops within a few days started to gain an upper hand in the battle. On 15 December 1824, the Burmese were driven away from Kokine.

### Battle of Danubyu, March–April 1825

After his defeat in Yangon, Bandula went back to his base Danubyu, a small town not far from Yangon. The Burmese army was left with few men with mixed capabilities. In March 1825, the British army consisting of not more than 4000 soldiers and gun boats attacked Danubyu. The first British attack failed here. Bandula tried to fight with foot soldiers, cavalry and elephants. The British had rockets that stopped the elephants from marching ahead. The cavalry could not move even a bit because of the continuous artillery fire from the British army. On 1 April 1825, the British launched a major attack on Danubyu supported with heavy guns and rockets that were fired on all Burmese lines. In the attack, Bandula was killed and with his death, the Burmese evacuated Danubyu leaving it for the British.

### Arakan Campaign, February–April 1825

After Bandula left Arakan, Myawaddy U Sa was left to command the troops in Arakan. Once Bandula was defeated and Yangon was under the British control, the focus turned to Arakan. On 1 February 1825, a force of 11,000 soldiers led by general Morrison attacked the Burmese positions in Arakan. The British army was supported by a flotilla of gun boats and armed cruisers. Though the British were more in number and had superior weapons, they were given a tough fight by the Burmese for almost two months after which the British were able to reach the main Burmese garrison in the capital of Arakan, Mrauk U. Once there, the British launched an attack on Mrauk U. On 1 April 1825, the Burmese were defeated at Mrauk U and U Sa and the remaining Burmese forces evacuated Arakan. The British then proceeded to occupy the rest of Arakan region, in which they succeeded easily.

### Battle of Prome, November–December 1825

In November, the Burmese who did not want to give up their territories easily, decided to put in one last effort to try and overpower the British. In mid-November, the Burmese army consisting mainly of the soldiers of the Shan regiment threatened Prome in a circular movement that enabled the Burmese to surround the entire town and cut off communication lines to Yangon. However, the British had better soldiers as well as better guns and missiles. On 1 December, General Campbell led an army of around 4000 soldiers supported by a flotilla of gun boats attacked the Burmese positions outside Prome. On 2 December 1825, Maha Ne Myo was killed and the Burmese army was dislodged by 5 December. The defeat left the Burmese army in disarray. The Burmese army went into a retreat mode after their defeat in Prome. The Burmese army, now totally defeated sent a flag of truce on 26 December 1825 to the British camp. With this, negotiations were started between Burma and the British but the Burmese had no choice but to agree to all the terms that were laid by the British. To put an end to the war, the Treaty of Yandabo was signed in February 1826.

### Consequent Anglo-Burmese Wars

The loss in the First Anglo-Burmese War did not change the attitude of the Burmese towards the British. Burmese kings tried to gain their territory back and even tried to revoke the Treaty of Yandabo. These kings even looked upon the British representatives with contempt. King Tharrawaddy was able to put down rebellions in lower Burma and in 1841 he staged a military demonstration on his visit to Rangoon. This alarmed the British in Arakan as well as in Tenasserim. King Pagan, successor of king Tharrawaddy was more bent upon religious interests and left the day-to-day function of the ministers. This meant that the administration in Rangoon was unbending and there were profit hungry British traders which led to a volatile atmosphere in Rangoon. In 1851, a minor incident between two British traders and the governor of Rangoon led to a battle between the two armies. The battle ended in the British emerging victorious.

The British traders were increasingly becoming interested in trade of rubies, teak and oil from northern Burma. The Burmese Crown, during their declining years tried to develop friendly relations with European rivals including France and Italy. In 1878, after the death of King Mindon, his son Thibaw came to the throne. After a commercial dispute in 1885 and the fear of growing French influence in Burma, Lord Randolph Churchill decided to invade upper Burma and dethrone Thibaw. The war soon ended and the British were able to take full control of Burma.

## 3.4 TREATY OF YANDABO AND ITS IMPACT

The Treaty of Yandabo is the peace treaty that put an end to the First Anglo-Burmese war with the British emerging victorious. The treaty was signed on 24 February 1826, almost two years after the war broke out on 5 March 1824. The treaty was signed by General Sir Archibald Campbell on the British side and on the Burmese side by the Governor of Legaing Maha Min Hla Kyaw Htin. The British army had reached Yandabo village which was just eighty kilometres from the then capital Ava. This was one of the main reasons why the Burmese agreed to sign the treaty without any discussion.

NOTES

**Check Your Progress**

4. Which territories were ceded to the British after the end of the First Anglo-Burmese War?
5. Who was the Commander-in-chief of the Burmese army during the First Anglo-Burmese War?
6. From which areas did Maha Bandula plan to attack the British?
7. What items of trade were the British interested in from North Burma?

NOTES

### Terms of the Treaty of Yandabo

The terms of the Treaty of Yandabo are as follows:

- The Burmese agreed to cede Assam, Manipur, Arakan, Tanesserim coast to the British completely without any type of control over these territories.
- The Burmese were to stop all interference in Cachar and Jaintia hills.
- The Burmese had to pay an indemnity of one million pound sterling in four instalments to the British with the first instalment being paid immediately. The second instalment was to be paid within the next 100 days. The last two instalments were to be paid within two years. The British also made it clear that they would not leave Yandabo till the second instalment was paid.
- The treaty forced the Burmese to allow exchange of diplomatic representatives between Calcutta and Ava.
- The Burmese were also asked to sign a commercial treaty with the British in due course of time. This simply meant that the British were to have more control over trade practices in and with Burma.

### Initial Negotiations

The initial peace negotiations began in September 1825 when the British were already in full control and had an upper hand. After their victory in the battle of Danubyu, the British consolidated their control in Lower Burma, Rakhine, Taninthayi coast, Assam and Manipur. The British wanted the Burmese to recognize the independence of Manipur. The British also wanted the Burmese to stop all intervention in Assam and Cachar. The British also wanted the Burmese to cede Rakhine along with all its dependent territories. The British further demanded the Burmese to pay an indemnity of two million sterling pounds and that the Burmese receive a British resident in the Court of Ava. The British also made clear that the territories of Taninthayi and Yangon would be held by the British until the indemnity was paid by the Burmese. The Court of Ava had not expected so much penalty. The Burmese were also unwilling to cede the various western territories. The Burmese envoy, Lord of Kawlin replied to the initial negotiations that the Burmese would give up claim of Assam and Manipur. The Burmese also objected to the choice of the British of the future ruler of Manipur. The Burmese agreed to cede Taninthayi coast but not Rakhine. The British, however, were unimpressed and did not agree to the terms laid down by the Burmese. The initial negotiations between the British and the Burmese broke down and the Burmese army decided to fight on to gain back control of their territories. In November 1825, the Burmese made an effort to recapture Pyay and succeeded. However, by early December, the British with superior men and weaponry were able to defeat the Burmese altogether. The final negotiations of the Treaty of Yandabo were not negotiations but the demands of the British that the Burmese had no option but to agree. The terms of the treaty were laid down keeping in mind the loss that the British had incurred in the war.

## 3.4.1 Importance of the Treaty of Yandabo

The Treaty of Yandabo finally enabled the British to annex Burma and consolidate their position in South East Asia. The treaty put an end to the most expensive and the largest war in the British Indian history. The battle cost the British between five million sterling pounds to thirteen million sterling pounds, thus leading to severe economic crisis in British India in 1833. About 15,000 European and Indian soldiers lost their lives with even a

higher number on the Burmese side. The Treaty marked the beginning of the end of Burmese independence. The powerful Burmese empire that always posed a threat for the British was finally conquered and crippled. The British were able to secure the Eastern Frontier. The War and the Treaty left Burma weak economically and politically and enabled the British to engulf the entire country by 1885.

NOTES

### 3.4.2 Aftermath of the Treaty of Yandabo

The Treaty of Yandabo brought humiliation and long lasting financial burden on the Burmese. During the battle, a whole generation of Burmese men had been wiped out. The Court of Ava could not come to terms with the severe loss of men and their territories. It made several failed attempts to get the territories back. An uninvited British representative in the Court of Ava was a constant reminder of the humiliation and defeat that the Burmese suffered. The indemnity of one million sterling pounds was a considerable amount even in Europe those days. The indemnity left the Burmese economy and treasury crippled and thus the Treaty of Yandabo was able to achieve its basic objective. The War and the Treaty also affected the British. For the British, the cost of the war left the British economy in crisis and also bankrupted the Bengal Agency Houses in 1833. The East India Company had to give up its privileges and the British also lost their monopoly of trade to China.

## 3.5 ANNEXATIONS 1828–1852

Once the British were able to take over Burma, they made it clear that they had no intention of ruling the country. However, the British started following the policy of annexing the various territories so that they had more territory as a part of British India.

### 3.5.1 Annexation of Cachar

Cachar was one of the first kingdoms to have fallen into the hands of the British, followed by Jaintia.

The kingdom of Cachar was inhabited by the Kachari tribe. Cachar was located between Naga Hills on the east and Khasi and Jaintia Hills on the west. It is believed that Cachar first came in contact with the British in the year AD 1726 when Verelst arrived in the capital city Khaspur with five companies of infantry and stayed in Khaspur for a period of one year. In 1819, the British prevented Burma from capturing Cachar. In South Cachar or Cachar proper, the British placed Govinda Chandra on the throne as the king in 1824. This was done by the British as per a treaty made at Badurpur. North Cachar was then ruled by a powerful man Tularam Senapati. Tularam had many times tried to dethrone Govinda Chandra and establish his rule over South Cachar but had failed in his attempts to do so. The British government was not able to protect Govinda Chandra from the troubles that Tularam gave him but instead forced Govinda Chandra to appoint Tularam as the commander of his forces and also Governor of North Cachar. An agreement was signed to this effect in July 1829. Govinda Chandra was also forced by the British to assign a piece of territory as lease for fifteen years to Gambhir Singha. Gambhir Singha on the other hand, made efforts and encroached on a lot of territory of Govinda Chandra. Govinda Chandra also imposed various taxes on his subjects. He also forced them to pay yearly tributes to the British which only increased the dissatisfaction of the subjects against Govinda Chandra. Govinda Chandra was also facing several attacks from the Kuki Nagas who wanted to overthrow him. When Govinda Chandra

**Check Your Progress**

8. When and by whom was the Treaty of Yandabo signed?
9. What was the indemnity that the Burmese had to pay according to the Treaty of Yandabo?
10. What did the First Anglo- Burmese War cost the British?
11. What was the main aim of the Treaty of Yandabo?

NOTES

died leaving no heir to the throne, the British annexed South Cachar. On the other hand, in North Cachar, Tularam's powers as governor was reduced by the British with a treaty. The Angami Nagas also posed several problems for Tularam by raiding his territory repeatedly. The main problem behind the conflict between the Angami Nagas and Tularam was the possession of salt springs near Semkhar. Tularam was unable to counter the Naga attacks. In 1839, during their raids, the Nagas were able to reach the British territory. The British army with Tularam's help was able to drive out the Nagas from the territory and peace was restored in North Cachar. By 1844, Tularam was too old to run the administration and his sons were unfit to run the administration. When Tularam died in October 1851, the British tried to annex his territory and were finally able to do so in 1853. Thus, Cachar was annexed by the British dominion completely.

### 3.5.2 Annexation of Jaintias

The contact of Jaintias and English can be traced back to the eighteenth century when the navigable rivers were used to reach Calcutta for trade and commerce. The early interest of the company in Jaintia was purely commercial. Before 1765, the British acquired only a small share of limestone trade from the Nawab of Bengal. In 1765, the British received Diwani (right over revenue) of the region. The British appointed W.M. Thackeray as the Collector of Sylhet in 1722. With direct administration over the region, the British also took the responsibility of defence of the district. However, the British territory had extensive and undefined frontiers which led several mountain tribes to raid their territory. In fact, the Raja of Jaintia was one of the worst offenders who would raid the British frontiers. Also the Jaintias resented the fact that the British had trade links with the local merchants which was once their monopoly. The Jaintia kingdom also included some portion of the river Surma and levied toll tax on all boats that crossed the river. The Jainta Rajas often obstructed the boats of the East India Company that would pass to Dacca. The Jaintia Rajas also looted the boats apart from levying toll tax on the boats causing delay much to the annoyance of the East India Company.

The Jaintia Raja also raided the British territory many times which affected the revenue collection of the British. With the ever increasing troubles that Raja of Jaintia put forth for the British, Thackeray urged Barwell, the chief of Dacca Council to take strong military action against the Jaintias. The British government sent force under Captain Elleker in 1774 against Jaintia. As a result, a war like engagement between the British and Jaintias under Raja Chatra Singh in Jaintiapur completely routed the Jaintia soldiers and Jaintiapur came under the British control on 29 March 1774.

Thackeray then recommended the annexation of Jaintia Pargana. A treaty was signed on 12 June 1774 between the Raja and the East India Company which provided that the Raja would pay ₹ 15,000 as compensation and would never interfere in any matters that the company undertook. In addition, the Raja was to give free navigation of the Surma river. Hence, the trade income of Jaintias was cut considerably. The Jaintias, however, continued to raid and encroach upon the British territory during the next few years. In 1821, some agents of Raja were held for attempting to sacrifice some British people before the Jainteswar Kali. The Company issued a warning to the Jaintia Raja that any such offence would lead to the confiscation of his territory. On 10 March 1824, a treaty was signed by virtue of which the Raja acknowledged allegiance to the British and placed Jaintia under the Company's protection. The Raja was, however, given freedom to rule his country according to ancient customs.

The main reason for annexation of Jaintia, however, was the attempt to human sacrifice. The Jaintias made two abortive attempts of human sacrifice in 1827 and February 1832. It was in August 1832 that a real sacrifice was done. Robertson, the agent of North East Frontier took the matter to the Governor General. The king was asked to hand over the chief and other offenders and if the king failed to do so, his territory was to be confiscated as per the warnings issued earlier. In 1834, when Jenkins assumed the charge of the agency, he instructed the king to punish those involved in human sacrifice. In September 1834, those involved in the human sacrifice of British subjects surrendered but an investigation found them innocent and so they were released. The Governor General was convinced of the guilt of the Raja and on 23 February 1835, he decided to confiscate the king's possessions in the lowlands and leave the king in possession of the hills.

The plain areas of Jaintia were annexed on 15 March 1835 under the directions of the government by Captain Lister. During the annexation lots of gold, precious ornaments and treasure was looted and caves and underground tunnels were filled up. The British also destroyed many sacred places. The Raja did not offer any opposition to the British on their annexation of Jaintia and also resigned his other plain territories as well as Jaintia hills to the British. Thus, the entire Jaintia region came under the control of the British.

### 3.5.3 Annexion of Assam and Khasi Hills

After occupying Assam, the British divided it into two provinces: Upper Assam and Lower Assam. Kamrup, Nowgang and parts of Darrang, with Gauhati (now Guwahati) as its headquarters, constituted lower Assam. Upper Assam comprised the other parts of Darrang, from Biswanath to the river Buridihing with its headquarters at Rangpur.

The Ahom rule in Assam was terminated after the Treaty of Yandabo came into effect. Lower Assam was brought directly under the British dominion because it bore high revenue income. Upper Assam suffered a lot under the Burmese invasion. People lost their confidence in the government and the administration collapsed. It became essential for Upper Assam to be under the governance of the military. Appointed Senior Commissioner of Lower Assam was David Scott and Colonel Richard was appointed as the Junior Commissioner of Upper Assam. The people of Assam were very happy with the British administration in the beginning. Common people now hoped for peace and prosperity, after suffering a lot during the Burmese invasion. Ruling classes thought that their power and privileges would be secured under the British rule. But this was not to happen. The British cared for their own prosperity and their own business. People could now see that the British administration was different. Soon people were unhappy with the administration.

#### Revolt of Gomdhar Konwar

The Ahom nobility were dissatisfied with the British as they understood that their rights and privileges were not secure under the administration of the British. Soon, Gomdhar Konwar, the prince of Ahom and a scion of the royal family, organized a revolt against the British. Time turned out to be favourable, with the Khasis and Singphos also preparing a revolt against the British. Gomdhar was formally enthroned at Bassa. Revolutionary forces advanced towards Mariani, but the British won the battle led by Lieutenant Rutherford. Gomdhar was arrested and imprisoned.

NOTES

### 3.5.4 Administration of David Scott (1824–31)

With improvements in conditions in Upper Assam, martial law was also lifted in 1828. Now, the entire valley of Brahmaputra came under civil administration. Civil and criminal justice was under David Scott who was appointed as commissioner. He was the chief of police and also presided over collection of revenue. In simple words, David Scott was given all the charges of the entire valley as a commissioner. He used all his power in revenue collection, judicial and police administration in the valley. Scott was against the implementation of new rules and tried to retain the old system as much as possible. The 'Paik' and 'Khel' systems were retained in Upper Assam. Barbarua was appointed for collecting tax. The 'Pargana' land system of land division was retained in Lower Assam. A Choudhury was made incharge of each Pargana to collect taxes. Payments in cash were accepted. Various taxes were imposed on the people of Lower Assam, some of which were: rent tax, professional tax, and stamp duties. The British police system was followed to maintain law and order. The police system comprised a Daroga, one Jamadar and a number of constables. The post of Barphukan was retained for judicial administration. He took up civil cases. Some panchayat courts were also present to solve petty civil cases. Scott had put a lot of effort towards the welfare of Assam. David Scott steered the administration of Assam through the most crucial times of its history.

David Scott did not annex Upper Assam on the basis of economic as well as social viewpoints. He thought that it would become a liability for the British. People were devastated and lost faith in government administration after the Burmese invasion. Scott noticed the hostile mood of Ahom nobles. Gomdhar Konwar's revolt followed by Dhanjay Pealia Bargohain's conspiracy expressed anger against the British. Therefore, Scott recommended restoring monarchy in upper Assam rather than annexing the British dominion. Accordingly, the prince of Ahom, Purandar Singha, was crowned as the Raja of upper Assam. The British signed an agreement with the king that: (i) the Raja would pay a sum of ₹50,000 annually as tribute, (ii) the Raja would act according to the advice of the British political agent; and (iii) the Raja would be protected against any foreign aggression. The British very tactfully served its purpose to satisfy the nobles momentarily, and then annex Upper Assam in due time because the conditions of the agreement would be impossible to fulfil for Purandar Singha.

Purandar Singha was a young man of about twenty-five years of age. He readily accepted the treaty being imposed on him but was unaware of the difficulties of his new position. There were a lot of political difficulties and his administration was financially crippled from the beginning. Purandar Singha had spent his earlier days in Bengal. Though he was approved by the British, people of Assam and the nobles wanted Chandrakanta Singha as the king instead. Common people were unhappy with the new rules introduced by the British government after taking possession of Assam. Hence, Purandar Singha could not keep up the agreement with the British. Purandar Singha failed to pay the regular yearly revenue to the British starting from the year 1835 because of a rapid fall in revenue. This violation of agreement gave the British ample and legitimate reasons to support their annexation of Assam. Finally, Upper Assam was formally annexed to the British dominion in India in 1838. In other words, the foundation of British rule in Assam was laid.

## 3.5.5 Administration of T.C. Robertson (1832-34)

NOTES

T.C. Robertson was appointed as the agent to the Governor General and Commissioner of Assam after Crack Fort, in 1832. He was soon appraised as a man of tact, prudence and sound judgment of the province. With his prejudice against the 'native agency', he realized that the supervision of British officers was a must in Assam. Robertson divided lower Assam into four districts. An officer called the Principal Assistant led each province. The Principal Assistant acted as a judge, magistrate and collector and was paid a salary of ₹ 1,000. He had the authority to decide original civil cases from ₹ 500–1,000; he could also hear appeals from lower courts. He had the same authority as the Magistrate of Bengal to deal with criminal cases. There were two courts in each district, the munsifs and the panchayat. Original cases from ₹ 100–500 were tried in the munsif's court and appeals were heard from the panchayat court. The panchayat court tried minor cases of up to ₹ 100. Robertson brought about radical changes in the revenue system. He abolished additional imposts in1832. But tax on land at various rates was imposed on the peasants. Robertson also introduced measures to safeguard and protect the peasants from extortions. Patgiris, Bishayas and Choudhuries were appointed as revenue officers.

## 3.5.6 Administration of Captain Jenkins (1834)

After T.C. Robertson, Captain Jenkins became the Commissioner. Upper Assam was the last dominion of the Ahom rule in Assam and was annexed to the British territory under his administration in 1838. He created the post of Deputy Commissioner, who was vested with judicial powers, besides his civil duties. He was to act as district and session judge. The principal assistant was given new powers to transfer cases to subordinate courts. The munsifs and the panchayat courts continued to function and decide civil cases as before. The number of thanas was increased to maintain law and order, and protect the lives and property of people. Darogas was given the charge, who was aided by a Jamadar and a few constables. The khel system was abolished in matters of revenue. New taxes like tax on 'barimati' were introduced. Non-rupit land rates were increased. Professional tax on various professions was the same as in Ahom rule. Meanwhile the discovery and success of tea plantation made it the most important cash crop in Assam. Tea industry was followed by coal and oil industries. Agriculture sector and local economy were no way linked with industrialization in Assam. There was drastic improvement in communication with the other states. Medical care and health facilities were also introduced. One of the most important benefits was modern education introduced under the British rule. A new awakening started in the Brahmaputra valley from the end of the nineteenth century.

At the time of Burmese expulsion, the condition of Brahmaputra valley was most deplorable. The civil administration of Assam was entrusted to David Scott during the period of transition. He was given the title of 'Agent of the Governor General for the entire Eastern Frontier' from Cachar and Sylhet of the south to Sikkim in the north. He was also the Special Civil Commissioner of North East Rongpur, that is, Goalpara and the Garo hills. Mr Robinson says, 'Hitherto the affairs of the province were conducted on much the same system that prevailed before the conquest. The officer in charge exercised general superintendence and devoted their attention to fiscal business while the criminal and civil duties were conducted by councils of the Assamese nobility under the name of Panchayat. Each division had two to three such Panchayats of the province.

NOTES

Appeals lay from the court of one Panchayat to the next superior court and ultimately to the court of the Commissioners.'

The executive officers in judicial cases were magistrates as well as judges trying to deal with the accused with the help of the panchayat but referring all horrendous offences appended with their options to Mr Scott for his ultimate judgement. The revenue administration was carried out in the same manner as it had existed during the conquest. An improved method of assessing land revenue was introduced by David Scott, but he died in August 1831 before implementing it. Thus, the history of the state under the British rule started after appointing David Scott. On the eve of the Anglo-Burmese war, that they had no plan of annexing any portion of the Brahmaputra valley and favoured to stay only as conquerors. As a result, the first rebellion broke out. It was started by Assamese nobles against the newly established authority with demand to eliminate the new administrative system of revenue, which diminished many of them to abject poverty.

Occupation of Lower Assam by the British was not viewed as a serious concern by the Khasi Chiefs who held the low hands, generally known as nine-*duars* north of their hills. The ruler of Khyrim, Barmanik took the initiative in August 1828 down the plains of Dimarua, a few kilometres from Gauhati, seized collections of revenue officers and publicly demanded his independence on the *duars*. The second revolt broke out in Eastern Assam under the administration of the ex-nobility of Assam. The British government somehow succeeded to put off their joint rebellion. Nearly all the territories of Brahmaputra valley and the hilly regions of Jaintia and Cachar were annexed to the Company's administration in Assam in the course of two years. Accordingly, David Scott, North East Frontier agent to the Governor General, spread British suzerainty over Cachar under an agreement with Raja Govinda Chandra in March 1834. In his agreement with Scott, Raja Ram Singha of Jaintia acknowledged the authority of the British government. Thus, the extension of British dominion into Assam or the North East Frontier started. People submitted to the inevitable; in actuality, they 'hailed with unbounded joy' their deliverers who rescued them from the cruelty of the Burmese and granted them the most loyal cooperation. Even an arch-enemy of the British, Maniram Dewan, heavily welcomed the arrival of the English. Scott's policy of satisfying the former official aristocracy proved a miserable failure. Also, towards the end of 1828, the Ahom, the Khasis, the Singphos as well as the Bhutias in the north were binding on the British subjects.

British administration was imperfect. People demanded a change from the repeated uprising and the administrative confusion of the period. T.C. Robertson was the successor of Scott as the agent of the Governor in 1832. Nevertheless, in 1832, upper Assam except for the territories of Sadiya and Mattak, was made over to the Ahom prince Purandar Singha, who was a vassal king. In October 1838, the territory of Purandar Singha was taken over by the British on the advice of Mr Jenkin, agent of East India Company, and Assam became a 'nonregulated' province as a whole of the Indian empire. This was done on the contrary to their earlier assurances with a purely commercial motive. Purandar Singha was humiliated unnecessarily, and it could have been done only with the tacit consent of the rival group of Purandar Singha. The British followed the same tactics in finally annexing Cachar in 1830, and they also annexed Sadiya to British India in 1842. Likewise, Jaintia, which was under the rule of a vassal king, was annexed in 1835 and Manipur was restored to its ruling dynasty. There were eighteen mountain passes along the southern frontier of Bhutan, called Bhutan *duars*. Highlanders of Bhutan held their sway over this border by means of these passes and established their de facto right over the whole border territory. As a result of incessant indignities committed by

the Bhutias on the British subjects, the British government appended all the Assam *duars* in 1841 as the only means of security and peace in this part of the frontier. These *duars* were the main channels of trade between Tibet and Assam.

Hostilities with the Mishimis originated from a simple incident. In 1854, when French missionary M. Kich crossed the Mishimi country into Tibet accompanied by his friend N. Bourri; they were murdered by the Mishimis. The Mishimis were crushed in a series of attacks, and the rebels made their submission to the British in 1843. The Lushais committed their first sweep in 1849 and the punitory expedition that followed was so encouraging that they gave no further difficulty till AD 1858. Meanwhile, T.C. Robertson had felt that mixed activities of a far flung frontier to the provinces was not justified. He realized that for good supervision, there was a necessity of European officers in Assam and on his recommendation, the supreme government granted its approval for dividing the province into four districts: Kamrup, Goalpara, Darrang and Nagaon. In March, 1833, each was assigned a principal assistant vested with the authorities of a collector, judge and magistrate. Guwahati remained the headquarters of the province for many years after British occupation of Assam. But the headquarters of the new administration shifted to Shillong after Assam emerged as a separate province under a chief commissioner. After the formation of separate districts, boundaries underwent changes in 1833. The Dhansiri river basically formed the boundary in the east, and the district of Sibsagar covered some areas of the existing Karbi Anglong district, North Cachar hills and also the Naga hills. In 1853, North Cachar was segregated from a subdivision, and in the next year the region of Tularam was added to the North Cachar subdivision. The Naga hills and a large part of Karbi Anglong were combined into a separate district during 1867, and the subdivision of North Cachar was abolished, and a considerable area of North Cachar subdivision was assigned to the deputy commissioner of Cachar.

The province of Assam was created with a view of relieving Lieutenant Governor of Bengal from a part of his huge administrative responsibility in 1874. The head of this newly created province was titled as the 'Chief Commissioner'. In 1905, Lord Curzon merged the eastern district of Bengal with Assam, but it was reversed in 1912 and Assam was refurbished to its previous territorial position. In 1921, in accordance with the prerequisites of the Government of India Act, 1919, Assam was granted the status of a governor's province.

### 3.5.7 Condition of the Province on the Eve of British Occupation and its Effects

The disputed succession of the British disturbed the peace and tranquility of the province. Anarchy predominated in the later Ahom period resulting in mismanagement in the state. The situation was further intensified by the successive rebellions, the population of Assam dropped down to half of its actual number. The peasants had to give up cultivation and depended mostly on wild roots and plants. They had to face a lot of stress of protracted wars and oppression. The land was stalked by famine and pestilence. Mills's report on Assam stated that it was not to set back the clock as desired by Maniram or the people of the same dreams, but to strengthen the possession of the British and to strengthen their hold over the administration. David Scott had organized the administration to his greatest capacity and introduced British system in widespread outline and spirit with adaptation for indigenous system prevailing at that time. With regard to the general administration of Assam, even justice was vested in the Commissioner of Assam whose headquarters were at Gauhati. To relieve the commissioner of the civil and sessions court, a deputy commissioner was posted there in 1939. A principal assistant was given

NOTES

the charge of each district. This senior (principal) assistant was assisted by a junior assistant and a sub-assistant. A deputy commissioner was redesignated as judicial commissioner in 1861; principal assistant as deputy commissioner; junior assistant as assistant commissioner and sub-assistant as extra assistant commissioner.

There was a separate civil judicial establishment which consisted of one chief Sadar Amin, six Sadar Amins and seventeenth munsifs. In 1872, separate establishment of Sadar Amin and munsifs was abolished. The credits for the working of the administration in both upper and lower Assam goes to David Scott. The British administration in lower Assam actually began in 1824–1825. There was an increase in revenue collection in each succeeding year and this must have humiliated the people.

New methods were introduced by the British for revenue administration. Paraganas were placed under Choudhuries in the new system. Choudhuries were given the responsibility for the collection of revenue and administration of justice in small criminal cases in their particular paraganas. The Choudhury had to pay the government revenue for six months in advance before collecting any revenue from the people and therefore, we can say that he acted as a revenue collecting contractor. Revenue was estimated as per the classification of the cultivated area. Besides revenue, people were subjected to pay ₹ 2 as a capita poll tax. Property of the defaulting tenants was confiscated if they failed to pay. As a result, peasants at times could not save their hearth and home. Hence, resentment grew among the Assamese peasants who were in great need of regular rehabilitation for a considerable period of time. The introduction of a new judiciary system by the foreigners also added to the suffering of the people.

A thana (police station), thanedhar (police) or daroga were in charge of protecting lives and properties of the people in the interiors. Thanedhar was given the authority to arrest people whom he suspected, to detain them and even to hold preparatory trial before entrusting them to Sadar Station. Special lease grants and simple lease grants were introduced under the Charter Act of 1833. They were to administer revenue administration to encourage tea plantation and the British established a company named 'Assam company'. By 1858, almost the whole erstwhile Lakhimpur and Sibsagar were included with this company for tea plantation and consequently expanded its operation to Cachar. Extension of the tea industry compelled import of labour from outside the state. According to Mill, the number of such immigrants in Assam in 1881 was 3,00,000 which reached over 6,00,000 by 1901.

Gaurinath Singha's commercial treaty with Captain Welsh in 1793 opened the gates for the merchants of Bengal to enter the province. Avenues of employment in both office and trade caused a steady inflow of the population from the districts of Sylhet, Mymensingh, Dacca and Rangpur to Assam. After it came under the administration of the British, they adopted the same policy in other parts of India. In order to supplement the Charter Act of 1833, the British encouraged the establishment of English schools in Assam as they needed people with the knowledge of English to help run the administration. The people of Assam enjoyed respite after a bitter struggle with the Burmese invaders. Besides, there were very few educated people with the knowledge of English in Assam. In April 1831, the Government of Bengal made Bengali instead of Persian the language of court. The introduction of Bengali not only made the judicial and revenue departments their only preserve, but their services became equally essential to the recently started government schools for death of regional teachers especially to grant instructions in Bengali which had since then been made the medium of instruction in Assam. Eventually, Assamese was prohibited from the courts and schools of Assam in 1839. An English-

educated Assamese, Anandaram Dhekial Phukan, was appointed as Assistant Commissioner. He saw that peasantry could not be improved to a great extent without the understanding of modern scientific applications. He also believed that a better mode of living cannot be achieved without western education. He laid stress on the requirement of increasing the standard of education. He was the first person to raise his voice against the imposition of Bengali as the medium of instruction, and appealed for replacing it with Assamese. However, concrete steps were taken by the Christian missionaries who not only carried on propaganda through Arunodoi (the first Assamese-language magazine) but also established a few schools for girls. Rev. Nathan Brown started the first missionary school at Sibsagar in 1840 followed by schools set-up by Bronson at Nagaon in 1843 and by Mrs Barkes at Gauhati in 1850. The need for the formation of political association including organization to vent the grievances of people started gradually. The Charter Act of 1833 was a convenient instrument of the British colonialists who now began using their financial resources to serve the interest of the empire including colonialism. Assam began to suffer from the shortcomings of foreign domination as other parts of India did.

### 3.5.8 Rise and Consolidation of British Power in Khasi Hills

Garos is a tract of mountain territory inhabited by the Khasis. It is situated between the state of Jaintia and the hills on the west. There were thirty states in the Khasi hills before the advent of the British. Each state had an elected chief who had a council, without whose sanction no important business could be performed. The British first got acquainted with the Khasis in the year 1765 when the company needed the Dewani of Sylhets from the Mughals. The British became a close neighbour of the Khasis after this takeover, and they soon realized the possibilities of trading with them. Consequently, the British started business with the Khasis in items like lime, silk, wax, iron, ivory and honey. Shortly, the British came to monopolize trade in limestone and after the discovery of coal, they started to monopolize trade in coal too. However, this trade had to face disturbances as well. The Khasis often attacked the plains due to the ill treatment rendered out to the Khasi traders by the traders from the plains.

David Scott was appointed as an agent to the Governor General in November 1823, and he was given the responsibility of developing and consolidating companies and also the administration in the North East frontier. The view displayed by Scott marked the introduction of a new British policy referring to the North East. At the same time, the British were following a policy of non -intervention with regard to the state of the Khasis. Scott's view was that for a robust solution to the dispute of trade, the British government had to establish a strong control over all the Khasi chiefs. The Government of Bengal endorsed Scott's views thus heralding a change of policy. Scott realized the needs for maintaining good relations with the Khasis when the need for a postal service from Sylhet to Gauhati was urgently felt. Scott was also interested in building roads in the region. Militarily, the proposed road would reduce the length of the march from lower Assam to Sylhet. It would also enable the British to keep the Khasi chiefs under control and attracted trade and commerce by giving the Khasis easy access to the markets in the plains.

Scott first contracted with Duwan Singh, Syiem of Sohra. He agreed to permit the British to build a road through his territory combining Assam with Sylhet and in return he demanded to get a zamindari near Pandua. However, Scott got permission from Raja Ram Singh to construct a road through his region which connected Jaintiapur

NOTES

with Naogaon and Raha by the Burmese. Scott had now looked for a new route; all he could think of at that time was a road from Bardwar to Sylhet.

Scott resorted to a policy of coercion and negotiation to achieve his objective. He ordered the Khasi traders to close down the markets in plains and declared that he would annex Bardwar which belonged to the Syiem (chief) of Nongkhlaw, in the plains. At the same time, he also stated that a normal trade relationship would be supported, and Bardwar would continue to be a part of Hima Nongkhlaw provided the Syiem Tirot Singh allowed the East India Company to construct his territory connecting the Surma valley and the Brahmaputra valley.

Further, Scott asked Tirot Singh to get the approval of all the Khasi chiefs to give the Company the authority of passage as the road would additionally affect areas beyond the jurisdiction of Nongkhlaw syiem. Consequently, Tirot Singh conveyed an assemblage at Nongkhlaw and all the Khasi chiefs were asked to attend the meeting. Scott and his men arrived at Nongkhlaw on 3 November 1826, Scott was highly pleased by the method of Khasi sitting-at-council by the strict consideration of rules that controlled and governed such sessions. Tirot Singh explained the objective of the meeting and requested the different declaimers to express their viewpoints on the proposition of the British government. The debate lasted for two days and ended in favour of the proposition. The decision of the assembly was represented in a treaty which was resolved with the British government. Subsequently, as per this treaty the Khasis accepted to assist the British government in the development of the road, provide men and materials and donate lands for constructing residential quarters.

Dimarua which is a few miles from Gauhati was upheld by Khyrim as an appendix from the Ahoms, but a subordinate chief held the actual management responsibilities. David Scott took over Dimarua after the retreat of Burmese and forbade the Syiem of Khyrim from consolidating tribute for the chief. These aroused Syiem Bormanick and developed down to Dimarua to capture the revenue collected by the officer of the East India Company in 1828. He also elected a Basan in that area and vowed to return again the following year to receive the tribute. Scott decided to take action against Khyrim, and he called upon the Jaintia Raja, and other Khasi Syiems to aid the British against Khyrim. This led to tension among the Khasi Syiems as they realized the imperialist design of the British.

Scott did not keep his promise of reviving Bardwar to Tirot Singh. Tirot Singh was also displeased with the denial of the Company to provide him military support against the Syiem of Rani, Balram Singh, against whom Tirot Singh together with Bormanick, Syiem of Khyrim had made a collective stand. He told the Company's revenue superintendent at Bardwar, 'Mr. Scott made friends with me stating your enemy is the Company's enemy and that he would relinquish the revenue of Bardwar in both money and in paiks. He has not done it and wished to give troops to my enemy.' Tirot Singh was now conscious of the danger of the agreement he made with the Company for the road construction. Realizing that it would appear obvious, if he suddenly stopped the construction, he waited for a better opportunity to oppose it without actually breaking the treaty.

Again there was high domination of the military at Nongkhlaw. Here, the military harassed the poor inhabitants, and other misdeeds finally led to mistrust and hostility among the Khasis. Most people were unaware of the construction of road, and a few headmen complained to Tirot Singh that their opinion was being overlooked in certain important matters. They also understood that the British was trying to ascertain its grip over the hills and a rumour spread that the British imposed taxes on the Khasis. All these

aspects together created an environment of general discontentment between the Khasis and the British. Early in 1829, Tirot Singh made plans to expel foreigners from the country. He did not consider himself bounded by the treaty any longer and pitched his lot with Bormanick and other chiefs against the British. A conference of Khasi Syiems was held at Nongkhlaw, and a decision to drive away the British was taken. The plan was general massacre of all immigrants at Nongkhlaw and the abolition of the Company's post. The plan was put into action the following day, the Company was attacked at Nongkhlaw and Burlton, and Lieutenant Beddingfield of the Bengal Artillery along with many of the Company's men were killed. However, Scott who was in Nongkhlaw at the time of the conference managed to escape to Sohra and then to Cherra. From Cherra, Scott conveyed information to the authorities at Sylhet and Guwahati and Captain Lister immediately started out for the hills.

NOTES

## 3.6 ANNEXATIONS (1864–1905)

Most of Burma was under the control of the British except for a few hill regions occupied by the tribes like Garos, Nagas, Khasis and Lushais.

### 3.6.1 Annexation of Garo Hills, Naga Hills and Lushai Hills

The Garos have been said to have immigrated to Garo Hills from Tibet. The Garos settled in the Garo Hills as they found providence as well as security in this territory and claimed it to be their own. The Garos were head-hunters and a fierce and powerful tribe. Goalpara and Sylhet including a part of Garo hills that formed a part of Bengal were transferred to the East India Company in 1765. Thus, eighteenth century Assam was already a part of the British territory much before the annexation of the Ahom Kingdom. All estates bordering Garo Hills were brought under the control of the British who did not want to control the region. The zamindars were still in control of the Garo hills which the tribe did not like and a conflict between the Garos and the zamindars remained unabated for a long time, till the British noticed it and took advantage of the political unrest. In December 1872, the British sent battalions to Garo hills to establish their control on the Garo hills. The British attacked the Garo hills from three sides—south, east and west. The Garos confronted the British at Rongrenngre with their spears, swords and shields. However, the Garos were no match to the British army who had superior weaponry and guns to fight. The Garos were defeated by the British. When the British had occupied Brahmaputra, they focused on connecting the two valleys of Brahmaputra and Surma by an all-weather road. The Garos and the Jaintias opposed the construction of this road which was of strategic importance to the British for the movement of their troops. When the Garos and Jaintias went forth to stop the construction work, the British were alarmed and burnt several Goras and Jaintias villages. The hostilities increased when the British introduced house tax and income tax in 1860s. The Garos under the leadership of Pa Togan Sangma gave a tough fight to the British but they were defeated by the British and the Garo hills were annexed to the British in 1873.

The Nagas were a tribe that inhabited North Eastern regions of India and North Western Burma. The Nagas were a tribe that practiced head-hunting and preserved the heads of their enemies as trophies through the nineteenth century. Initially, the Nagas did not have any contact with the outside world except for cultural contacts with the Ahoms. The British first came in contact with the Nagas in 1832 when Captain Jenkins, Captain Pemberton and Captain Gordon were sent to the region to find a route to establish direct

**Check Your Progress**

12. What was the main reason for annexation of Jaintia?
13. Who were the rulers of North and South Cachar when the region was annexed by the British?

NOTES

communication link between Assam and Manipur. The expedition of Captain Pemberton and Captain Jenkins was opposed in almost all Naga villages by the Nagas. The Nagas were so bitter in their opposition that they even burnt their own villages. All attempts of the British to annex the region were met with effective guerrilla resistance from the Naga tribes. The British were able to build a military post in 1851. The main opposition to the British came from the Angamis in southern part of Naga hills around Kohima. The Angamis attacked the British post in 1878. There were several encounters between the British and Nagas. Eventually, the Nagas were defeated and accepted the authority of the British in 1880. Naga hills were finally annexed to the British in 1881.

From early times, the Lushai Hills were inhabited by the Kukis, a tribe of the North East region. The Lushais were not heard of until 1940 when they invaded the district from the North. In 1826, the Lushais who were powerful raided the British territory. The Lushais proved to be the most troublesome tribes in the North East frontier. After this first attempt, the Lushais launched several raids and the British finally retaliated in 1844. A British expedition also visited the Lushai hills. This expedition, however, in 1888 was captured and Lt. J.F. Stewart was killed by the tribes. The British got alarmed at the killing of their general and they retaliated. The British launched several expeditions during the years 1889 to 1890 and were finally able to set a permanent post on the Aijal Range. Several operations were launched and the Lushai hills were occupied in 1890 by the British. After occupying Lushai hills, the British divided the region into North Lushai and South Lushai. North Lushai became a part of Assam while South Lushai was attached to Bengal. However, there were several revolts against the British administration in both regions of the Lushai hills. These revolts were suppressed by the British. In 1890, the northern Lushai villages were completely controlled by the British and the eastern Lushais were taken control in 1892. The management of South Lushai was transferred from Bengal to Assam. To ensure efficient control over the area, it was divided into eighteen circles. Later, North Lushai and South Lushai were united. In 1895, the Lushai hills were finally annexed to the British.

## 3.7 SUMMARY

In this unit, you have learnt that:

- The British came to India as traders and wanted to explore other regions of South East Asia as well so that they could strengthen trade links and thus the economy of Britain.
- The British ruled over India for nearly 200 years. It is interesting to note the emergence of traders as the largest political power in India and subsequently in Asia.
- The British followed several policies which were inhuman and had turned mercenaries to gain complete political control over India. By 1818, the entire Indian subcontinent except Sind and Punjab was brought under the control of the British.
- Burma was a powerful and confident nation and became an example of 'Mission Creep' for the British.
- Before the British conquest, Burma was under the rule of the Konbaung dynasty. The Konbaung dynasty was established in 1752 by a village chief.

**Check Your Progress**

14. What was the main reason of conflict between the British and the Garos?
15. When were Naga Hills and Lushai Hills annexed by the British?

- The North Eastern states were always a part of India, geographically, culturally and politically. The longest ruling dynasties were established in North East states of India. The state of Assam was ruled by Ahoms for almost six centuries.
- Burma and British, both expansionists and powerful, were always in conflict with each other. Eventually, the British were able to annex Burma following a series of wars known as Anglo-Burmese Wars.
- Burma was a strong nation and it always posed a threat to the British because of its invasion in the North Eastern states. In addition, Burma was strong economically because of its trade links with other countries.
- The Treaty of Yandabo is the peace treaty that put an end to the First Anglo-Burmese war with the British emerging victorious. The treaty was signed on 24 February 1826, almost two years after the war broke out on 5 March 1824.
- The Treaty of Yandabo finally enabled the British to annex Burma and consolidate their position in South East Asia. The treaty put an end to the most expensive and the largest war in the British Indian history.
- Once the British were able to take over Burma, they made it clear that they had no intention of ruling the country. However, the British started following the policy of annexing the various territories so that they had more territory as a part of British India.
- The Garos have been said to have immigrated to Garo Hills from Tibet. The Garos settled in the Garo Hills as they found providence as well as security in this territory and claimed it to be their own.

## 3.8 KEY TERMS

- **Indemnity:** It refers to a sum of money paid as compensation, especially one paid by a country defeated in war as a condition of peace.
- **Imposts:** It refers to a tax or similar compulsory payment.
- **Vassal:** It a person who held land from a feudal lord and received protection in return for homage and allegiance.
- **The Charter Act of 1833:** It marked the beginning of a system of government for all India. It also tried to separate and decentralize executive and legislative functions.
- **Pargana:** It refers to a group of villages or a subdivision of a district in India.

## 3.9 ANSWERS TO 'CHECK YOUR PROGRESS'

1. The British wanted to take control of South East Asian countries as it wanted to secure the borders and access routes of India.
2. Burma posed a threat for the British as the former was a strong, powerful and an expansionist nation. Burma had already occupied Assam and Manipur and the British feared loss of territory to the Burma.

NOTES

3. The North East region became isolated from the rest of India as it was ruled by powerful tribes who were in complete control of the region. The Mughals and the Delhi Sultans were not able to attack and occupy the North Eastern region.
4. After the end of the First Anglo-Burmese War, the territories that were ceded to the British were Assam, Manipur, Cachar, Jaintia, Arakan province and Tenasserim.
5. Maha Bandula was the Commander-in-Chief of the Burmese army during the First Anglo-Burmese War.
6. Maha Bandula planned to attack the British from two fronts: Chittagong from Arakan in the south-east and Sylhet from Cachar and Jaintia in the north.
7. The British were interested in the trade of rubies, oil and teak from North Burma.
8. The Treaty of Yandabo was signed on 24 February 1826. The treaty was signed by General Sir Archibald Campbell on the British side and by the governor of Legaing Maha Min Hia Kyaw Htin on the Burmese side.
9. The Burmese had to pay an indemnity of one million sterling pounds to the British as per the terms of the Treaty of Yandabo.
10. The First Anglo-Burmese war cost the British between five million sterling pounds and thirteen million sterling pounds. This cost of the war led to an economic crisis in British India.
11. The main aim of the Treaty of Yandabo was to leave the Burmese empire crippled. The treaty not only asked the Burmese to pay a huge sum as indemnity but also forced Burma to cede several of its territories. This left the Burmese defeated and humiliated.
12. The main reason for annexation of Jaintia was human sacrifice. The Jaintia kings carried out human sacrifices of British subjects and after the first instance, the Jaintia kings were warned against human sacrifices and if they were found doing so, their territory was to be confiscated by the British.
13. During the annexation of Cachar Hills, the northern Cachar region was under the rule of Govinda Chandra while South Cachar was under the control of Tularam.
14. When the British occupied Brahmaputra, they wanted to connect the valleys of Brahmaputra and Surma with an all-weather road. The Garos were against the construction of the road and protested against it. This was the main reason behind the conflict between Garos and the British.
15. The Naga Hills were annexed to the British in 1881 while the Lushai Hills were annexed in 1895.

## 3.10 QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

### Short-Answer Questions

1. Why was Burma able to invade Assam and Manipur?
2. Why did the British want a war with the Burmese?

3. Briefly describe the battle of Danubyu.
4. How were the British able to annex Garo Hills?
5. When and how were the British able to annex Naga Hills?

**Long-Answer Questions**

1. What were the causes of the First Anglo- Burmese War?
2. Describe the war between the Burmese and the British on the outskirts of Burma.
3. Describe the battle of Yangon.
4. What were the terms of the Treaty of Yandabo? Analyse the significance of this Treaty.
5. Give a detailed description of the annexation of Jaintia Hills.
6. Explain in detail the annexation of Cachar Hills.

## 3.11 FURTHER READING

Gait, E.A. 2010. *A History of Assam.* US: BiblioBazaar.

Choudhary, Pratap Chandra. 1966. *The History of Civilisation of the People of Assam to the Twelfth Century A.D.* Assam: Department of Historical and Antiquarian Studies in Assam.

Sinha, Surajit. 1987. *Tribal Polities and State Systems in Pre-colonial Eastern and North Eastern India*. Kolkata: Centre for Studies in Social Sciences.

Chakravarty, I. N., Chakravarty, Lakshmi N. 1973. *Glimpses of the Early History of Arunachal*. Arunachal Pradesh: Research Department, Arunachal Pradesh Administration.

NOTES

# UNIT 4 BRITISH POLICY IN THE NORTHERN FRONTIER OF ASSAM

**Structure**

4.0 Introduction
4.1 Unit Objectives
4.2 Posa, Duars, Kotokies, Trade and Military Expeditions
4.3 Inner Line
  4.3.1 Analysis of the Inner Line Regulation
  4.3.2 Implications of the Inner Line Regulation of 1873 and Arunachal Pradesh
4.4 Outer Line
  4.4.1 Analysis of the Outer Line
4.5 McMahon Line
  4.5.1 The Simla Conference (1913)
4.6 Summary
4.7 Key Terms
4.8 Answers to 'Check Your Progress'
4.9 Questions and Exercises
4.10 Further Reading

## 4.0 INTRODUCTION

The establishment of British rule in Assam, as a consequence of the treaty of Yandaboo in 1826, brought the colonial forces closer to the tribes of Arunachal Pradesh. The colonial masters adopted the policy of peace and cooperation as well as the policy of armed intervention and other coercive means whenever and wherever required. And finally they drew the line 'Inner Line' between Assam and Arunachal Pradesh to monitor or regulate the movement of people between the hills of Arunachal Pradesh and the plains of Assam. The British policy in the hills of Arunachal Pradesh has been the subject of study by many scholars as a part of the whole of North East India or Assam.

British colonial interests (political, economic, commercial and strategic keeping in view also the areas beyond Arunachal Pradesh) shaped the British policy in Arunachal Pradesh. The growing colonial economy in the Brahmaputra valley in the form of tea, petroleum, coal, rubber and increased revenue from improved agriculture on the foothills of the border area greatly depended on the capacity of the colonial administration to maintain law and order in the border areas.

The British authorities exploited the opportunity to settle the Indo-Tibetan boundary on the north. Enough work had already been done after the Abor Expedition of 1911 and the various surveys and explorations, which had been summarized in a 'confidential note' by the Chief of General Staff in June 1912. The military authorities had suggested that the proposed boundary line should follow some prominent geographical features, preferably the main watershed of the mountain system; and the border thus demarcated should be easily approachable. The frontier, as suggested in the notes, was divided according to the tribes and river basin into Khamti Long, Mishmi, Abor and Miri or Subansiri sections.

NOTES

The Tibetans expected that the British would help them defend their territory and secure their rightful place. The Chinese government, however, was not at all satisfied with the boundary agreement and disapproved the action taken by its representatives. China completely disapproved the action of these representatives. China wanted the whole of Tibet as an integral part of it. Sir Henry McMahon, Foreign Secretary of the British run Government of India, informed the Peking government on 23 June 1914, that if by the end of June, China refused to rectify the agreement, the British government would begin agreement with the Tibetan government and China would lose all the benefits of the Simla Conference.

Commenting on the boundary line along the whole of the North-East Frontier, that became famous as the McMahon Line, McMahon pointed out: 'The frontier work of the past three years and the negotiations of Tibet Conference at Simla have served to make clear the mutual rights and responsibilities of Great Britain, China and Tibet and it may be hoped that the North East Frontier will now be removed from the anxiety which beset the Indian government during the last few years.'

The McMahon Line runs over a distance of 820 miles or 1320 kms of which 640 miles (998 kms) is between India and Tibet from the tri-junction of Bhutan, Tibet and Kameng district of present day Arunachal Pradesh, through the crest of the Himalayas to the Diphuk Pass to northwest Burma where India, Burma and Tibet meet. Commencing from a point to the east of Bhutan at 92°40" E, 27° 48" N, it crosses the Namjang River and follows the eastern range of the Great Himalayas, then proceeds east and northeast and crosses the Subansiri River and then the Tsari River just south of Migyitun. From this point, it takes a northeastern direction, crossing the Tunga Pass, continues eastward again, crosses the Siang River and ascends the watershed between Rangta Chu in Tibet and Dihang (Siang) and its tributaries in India. Thereafter, it runs south to a point, just below latitude 28° 30" and just west of longitude 96°30", crosses Lohit a few miles to the north of Kahas and joins the tri-junction of Indian, Burmese and Tibetan boundaries near the Diphuk or Talik Pass.

## 4.1 UNIT OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- Discuss the *posa* system
- Describe the relationship of the British with the Khamtis and Singphos
- Recognize the role of the *Katokies*
- Discuss the market scenario in Arunachal Pradesh
- Explain the Inner Line Regulation of 1873 and the formation of Outer Line
- Discuss the incidents that led to the recognition of the McMahon line

## 4.2 POSA, DUARS, KOTOKIES, TRADE AND MILITARY EXPEDITIONS

The article by Braj Narain Jha, 'Politics of *Posa*: *A Case Study of Pre and Post Independence Scenario in Arunachal Pradesh and Assam,*' in *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress* (57th Session, December, 1996, pp. 446–458) is important in this context because it discusses the *posa* system comprehensively. Jha also provides

NOTES

thorough discussion on the *posa* system in his Ph.D Thesis 'British Colonial Intervention and Tribal Responses in the North East Frontier of Assam (1825–1947),' unpublished Ph.D Thesis, Department of History, Arunachal University, Itanagar, 2002. Though Mackenzie's views are very clear and true to the nature of the *posa* rights of the tribal chiefs, the official writings of the British period distorted the facts in this regard. In general, the term *posa* came to be applied to all payments made to the hill tribes by the governments; whether these were in commutation of black mail, compensation for customary demands of the tribal chiefs of the bordering hills of Arunachal Pradesh, it was often confused with 'blackmail' in the official jargon of the British period.

The British administrators neither had the intention to understand the true nature of *posa* nor could they make their doubt clear as to what it was. They cared little to ascertain 'whether these claims had their basis in primeval rights or whether they were merely the definite expression of barbarian cupidity.' Till the third quarter of the nineteenth century they often expressed their grudge that, '… we are met to this day by difficulties arising from the indefinite nature of the connection subsisting between the Assam sovereigns and their savage neighbours.' It is because of this apathetic attitude towards ascertaining the true nature of *posa* that we see the conflicting visions of the British administrators on *posa*. Sometimes it was called 'blackmail', and at other times it was understood as 'a well-ascertained revenue payment, on account of which a corresponding remission was made in the state demand upon the ryot and was compared even with 'the chouth of the Marattas and blackmail of the ancient highlanders.' The situation becomes gloomier when one finds the same comparison of *posa* with 'blackmail' in recent publications.

Thus, we see that proper and objective analysis of the nature of *posa* based on the socio-political realities of the contemporary period of Assam and Arunachal Pradesh has hardly been made in any serious studies or in the administrative historiography. That is why it has often been wrongly interpreted as blackmail. Actually, the blackmail had originated in Bengal in a different context. The system of payment of blackmail was, in fact, a British polity stated to buy the raids of the aborigines of the Rajmahal hills in Bengal presidency.

The British continued the *posa* system even after the occupation of Assam as it was under the Ahoms. It was the initial policy of the local British officers especially under David Scott the agent to the Governor General, North East Frontier (1824-31) 'to maintain intact the arrangements of their native predecessors, and to avoid the appearance of anything like radical or unexpected change.' However, demands within the British establishment were to either change the system or altogether abolish the system as the direct collection of *posa* was viewed as inconvenient and as the rights of the tribal over the ryots of Assam who considered the British as their subjects. Robertson the agent to the Governor General and Commissioner of Assam (1832-34), directed Captain White in early 1834 to carry on negotiations with the chiefs of the hills under which either a certain sum of money should be annually paid to them in lieu of all demands or a certain quantity of various articles be collected for them at fixed localities. Under no circumstance were they allowed to proceed beyond a defined line to collect their contributions personally. In this connection, the Government of India held the view that stopping of *posa* might lead to troubles and since it did not affect its interests immediately, the conciliatory policy regarding the *posa* collection should continue. Accordingly, Captain White recommended payment of *posa* in cash than in kind directly from the ryots. It was thought by the local officers that a humane policy displayed towards the tribes would effectually secure the peace of the outlying areas and lead to beneficial results.

NOTES

Commutation to cash payments from the treasury proved useful for the British and by 1852 the *posa* of the Akas, the Sherdukpens, the Thembang Monpas, the Dzongpens of Talungdzong and the Nyishis were commuted to cash. In the case of the Adis all dues in kind were commuted to money payments in 1877. Subsequently, various unsuccessful moves were made towards bringing changes to the system or altogether stopping it.

During the British period though the payment of *posa* continued, we also witness that the payment was stopped to some as a punitive measure against the tribe. The payment of *posa* to the Adis was stopped after the Abor expedition of 1894 and consequent blockade of the Ahor hill and it was never resumed thereafter. Commenting upon the violations of the terms by the Adis, Lancelet Hare (the last Lieutenant Governor of the newly created Province of Eastern Bengal and Assam from 1906 to 1911) had earlier argued, 'By their exaction from the Miris, their obstruction of the survey and their assertion of territorial rights the Abors have undoubtedly forfeited all claims to such a subsidy.'

Accordingly, *posa* began to be paid from the respective treasuries of the Darrang and Lakhimpur districts. In 1860, the right of collection of *posa* extended to some of the Adi chiefs under treaty obligations, but the *posa* to the Adis was stopped once and forever in AD 1900. However, the *posa* of the first kind continued. The debate over 'continuance vs abolition' of *posa* continued from the beginning of British rule in Assam to the end and surprisingly enough during the post-Independence period, but the system of *posa* still continues. It is also to be observed that no change has been made regarding the existing practice of the British period.

Cash payment in lieu of all *posa* claims were given with a view to popularizing British products in the hills and for revamping the transborder trade. *Posa* payment made to the different tribal chiefs in the annual fairs was spent by them then and there and the gifts given to them on the occasion gradually induced them to use cheaper factory-made British goods. These measures also served the process of emergence of differentiation within the tribal societies and the power of state was indirectly used to strengthen an economic nexus between the imperial state and the chiefs monopolizing the payment of *posa*. Kingship and kinship combined into the institution of traditional chiefs was gradually made to serve the interest of the state. However, the amount of payments remained the same throughout the British period which has scope for further investigation.

After the immense growth of plantation economy and other economically lucrative ventures, the debate of 'abolition vs continuance' gained momentum since the closing years of the nineteenth century, but to serve the strategic interests and because of lack of sufficient knowledge of the socio-political and cultural affiliations of the tribes of western Arunachal Pradesh and incomplete consolidation of administration in the hills of Arunachal Pradesh the system of *posa*, except for the Adis, was kept intact.

B. N. Jha in his Ph. D Thesis (cited earlier) and S. Dutta in his article 'The *Posa* System: A Historical Analysis' in S. Dutta and B. Tripathy (eds.), *Sources of the History of Arunachal Pradesh*, provides the details of the *posa* paid to various tribes of Arunachal Pradesh during the British period. The details given below are from the two sources.

### *Posa* to the Hrusso (Aka) chiefs

David Scott succeeded in concluding an agreement with the Hrussos (Akas) by which they agreed to forego their right of direct collection of *posa* from individual ryots for an

annual payment of ₹ 175 by the British government. An agreement was made with Taghi Raja wherein he agreed not to attack the ryots in the plains for a monthly pension of ₹ 20. Suitable stipends amounting ₹ 360 per annum were also granted to other chiefs of the Akas with further extension of six more pensions in 1848 to another six chiefs. Captain J.T. Gordon concluded agreements with Hrussos (Akas) chiefs in February 1844 for commutation of their *posa* to cash on prevailing market prices of goods. Monetary payments to the Aka chiefs were finally fixed at ₹ 668 in aggregate in 1848. The relations of the British with the tribe began to improve after the grant of *posa* in cash to the chiefs. Though later on the chiefs demanded an increase in the amount and troubled the British, the latter as a punitive measure withdrew and stopped the *posa*, the chiefs finally surrendered in 1888 and their *posa* was restored from 1890.

### *Posa* to the Nyishi chiefs

On 17 April 1836, after much persuasion, eight Nyishi chiefs of Charduar area agreed to receive the *posa* articles in future from the *Malgoozari* (local revenue officer) who would collect the articles from the ryots of their respective villages as per revised rates. In accordance with the direction from the Governor General-in-Council, that appreciated Captain Methie's agreement with the eight Nyishi chiefs, his successor Lt. Vetch, carried on negotiations with the remaining five Nyishi chiefs of Charduar who made similar agreements on 5 April, 1837. The Nyishis of Naoduar also agreed to receive the *posa* through the village revenue officer by 1838–39. Finally, ₹ 2494-0-1 was annually paid to the Nyishi chiefs of Charduar and Naoduar commuting their rights to raise *posa* in the Duars.

The presence of petty clans, independent of each other, suggests that intertribal subdivisions existed in Nyishi society. There were 30 to 40 chiefs in the same clan or village representing an oligarchic form of government. The chiefs were called *gams.* Dalton, therefore, noted that 238 Nyishi *gams* of chiefs were in receipt of ₹ 2543 as *posa*. In 1853, the total amount of *posa* to the Nyishi chiefs was ₹ 4129-15-0 with 24 maunds of salt to the Nyishis of Bankotta in lieu of certain *hat* (weekly market) dues. It is evident from the official records that it was only by 1852 that the *posa* paid to the Nyishis along with other tribes like the Sherdukpens and Akas were finally commuted for money payments. After about a year of the commutation of *posa* into money payments, Gordon mentioned, 'No adverse effects on peace has been felt due to commutation of *posa* to money payments ''as stipends to the chiefs.'' Great numbers of these clans have left the hills and settled in the plains since the commutation was effected.'

### *Posa* to the Sherdukpen chiefs

On 28 February 1836 Captain Mathie entered into an agreement with the Sat Rajas of the Sherdukpens commuting the *posa* to an amount of ₹ 2526-7-0 annually. The *Sat rajas* received this amount regularly up to 1839, when their payment was stopped in consequence of their having allegedly murdered Madhu Saikia, the revenue officer of Orung in Panbari village. In 1884, however, the Sherdukpens came to terms and on recommendation of Capt. J.T. Gordon the payment of *posa* was resumed. The amount of *posa*, however, was reduced to ₹ 1740 annually. Since then, the Sherdukpens seemed to be reconciled to the change and behaved peacefully in general.

### *Posa* to the Monpa chiefs

In early 1844, Captain Gordon a entered into an agreement with the Sat Rajas of the Kuriapara Duars along with the *Galong* of Talung Dzong Gompa and Nyetsang as the

NOTES

representative of the Tawang Deo, binding the chiefs formally to relinquish all their claims to the lands of the Kuriapara *Duar* in consideration of an annual payment of ₹ 5000. The relation of the British with these Sat Rajas remained peaceful till 1852 when a misunderstanding developed because of interception of the amount of *posa* by one of the *Galongs* who had supervisory authority over the chiefs. But peace was restored through a treaty signed on 28 January 1853 at Kuriapara by three representatives of the *Tawang Deo* ratifying the earlier agreements of commutation of *posa* to cash amounting to ₹ 5000.

### *Posa* to the Monpa chiefs of Thembang

The Monpa chiefs of Thembang collected *posa* from the Mazbat area in Charduar. In 1844, they were allowed an annual sum of ₹ 145-13-6 as commutation of their *posa* to cash.

### *Posa* to the Hill Miris

From Mills' *Report on the Province of Assam, 1854* it is known that Hill Miris were also allowed by the British to draw *posa* in cash and kind annually. The Hill Miris got ₹ 851-3-9 and 12 maunds of salt annually. From a resolution of the chief commissioner of Assam of 1884 it seems that the different clans of the Hill Miris were in receipt of annual *posa* of ₹ 281-7-5, ₹ 930-4-9 and ₹ 25 in lieu of their rights of collection in the Sisi, Dhemaji and Bordoloni Mouzas of the present Dhemaji district of Assam.

### *Posa* to the Adis

While discussing about the *posa* in the case of the Adis Mackenzie writes, 'So far as can be gathered, the Abors, though much more powerful than any of these tribes, had no such rights. This was, owing no doubt to their comparatively remote situation, cut off as they were by the great river Dihang from the cultivated country along the Brahmaputra valley.' But some *Buranjjis* written in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries mention that *posa* to the Adis had been granted along the *paiks* of some villages. These *paiks* cultivated paddy for their lords and fishermen of their allotted *khels* supplied them with fish. These cultivators and fishermen allotted to the Adis were exempted from paying revenue to the Ahom government.

Initially the different sections of the Adis were paid *posa* in kind such as, iron ore, salt, rum, abkaree opium and tobacco. But the *posa* payment was commuted to annual payment of allowances in cash and also in terms of salt and rum as early as 1854. In the case of Padam-Miniyong section of the Adis, the *posa* payments in kind were commuted to cash payment in 1877 and began to be paid from 1878. It is noteworthy to mention here that the right to *posa* as police payments to maintain law and order in the border had been extended to the Padam-Miniyong Adis through different agreements between the years 1862 and 1866. After that, we see that annual monetary payment to different tribal chiefs and *gams* continued till the end of the British rule in India except for the Padam-Miniyong section of the Adis, whose payments were stopped in 1894 and was never resumed. The amount granted to the different clans/villages of the Adis was ₹ 3312 per annum and was distributed as follows:

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Bor Adis (Padams) | – | ₹ 1096-0-0 |
| Adis of Mebo | – | ₹ 562-0-0 |
| Adis of Padu | – | ₹ 264-0-0 |

NOTES

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Adis of Duku and Silli | – | ₹ | 425-0-0 |
| Pasi-Miniyong Adis | – | ₹ | 465-0-0 |
| Adis of Kebang | – | ₹ | 393-0-0 |
| Adis of Mankong | – | ₹ | 55-8-0 |
| Adis of Retung | – | ₹ | 51-8-0 |

### *Posa* to the Noctes

Even after the occupation of Assam by the British, the Nocte chiefs continued to retain their *khat* managed by their respective *katokies*. The British decided to continue the system. In 1841–42 Captain Brodie entered into an agreement with these chiefs by which they were allowed to use those *khats* in lieu of payment of a trifling tribute. In addition, he abolished tools and cesses collected from the Noctes on brine spring held in their possessions. In 1873–74, the government resumed some of the *khats* of the Namsangia and Borduria Nocte chiefs, which had already been connected with tea gardens, for annual payments in cash. By 1920–21, however, all their *khats* were resumed by the government and annual payments in cash were allowed to the concerned chiefs.

During the Ahom period, the relationship among the state (Ahom state), *posa* holders (tribal chiefs and people) and the allotted *paiks* (*Bahatias*) were interwoven in a system. But after the annexation of Assam by the British, the *paik* factor was eliminated from the *posa* system. Now it became an agreement between two contracting parties, that is, the colonial state and the *posa* holders in which the state took the responsibility initially in kind and subsequently in cash to pay them. Also, no remission was made in the revenue to be taken from the erstwhile *paiks*.

As described earlier, the *katokies* played an important role in promoting and maintaining relations between the Ahom and tribal chiefs and leaders of the tribes of Arunachal Pradesh. The institution and its importance was also appreciated by the British and they, therefore, continued the offices of the *katokies*. The *katokies* were appointed to deal with the Akas, Nyishis, Adis and Hill Miris of the bordering hills. The services of these *katokies* were also utilized for trade regulations between the Monpas and Sherdukpens.

The British issued them a letter of appointment known as parwana and a register was maintained in the headquarters in which details regarding the *katokies* were mentioned. The main duties of these *katokies* were to go into the hills as and when required and to provide information about the tribal affairs to the authorities. These *katokies* also accompanied the deputy commissioners when the latter went into the hills on tours. They were in close contact with various tribes and accompanied the tribal when they came down to the plains during fairs and other occasions. *Katokies* were given revenue-free lands and a nominal salary was also at times paid to them. On certain occasions, they were also rewarded by the tribals whom they assisted. Generally speaking, no formal education was required for appointment as *katokies*, the only requirement being the knowledge of the tribal dialect and capacity of carrying transactions with the tribal. The importance of these 'go-betweens' gradually declined after the creation of the post of assistant political officer at Sadiya in 1882.

The British power did not adopt the policy of annexation in the areas of Arunachal Pradesh. Neither did they have a uniform policy towards the tribes of Arunachal Pradesh. Force was used as and when required, otherwise the policy of peace and non-intervention was followed.

NOTES

The British government had the first encounter with Taghi raja (Aka chief). He continued collecting dues from the *Duar* forcefully and also murdered an official posted at Charduar. For this reason, they had been declared as outlawed. In 1829, Taghi raja fought with the Hazari Khowas, and then fled to Assam, where he was captured by the British and sent to the Gauhati (now Guwahati ) jail. In 1832, he was released. He again mustered his people and started outrages in the *Duar*. In 1835, he burnt the Assam Light Infantry outpost at Balipara and killed seventeen people. Taghi raja committed several raids in the foothills. The British government stopped the annual payment to the Hazari Khowas. It was unable to capture the culprits. The British decided to send a punitive expedition to the Aka Hills, but in 1842 Taghi raja surrendered. He was released on an oath of good behaviour, and was given a small stipend of ₹ 20. Following him, many other Aka chiefs also accepted stipends in 1844 and in 1848. However, the Aka chiefs always demanded an increase in the amount of *posa* and to maintain control over forest and forest produce they too pressurized the government. Consequently, the relation was not always peaceful with the British.

A controversy appeared on the question of rights in the forest. In 1900, the Akas demanded a sum of ₹ 3000 from a merchant of Balipara for tapping rubber in their hills. The deputy commissioner of Darrang interfered in this matter. It was decided that in future all agreements regarding rubber tapping and the payment between the merchants and the hill men would be done in the presence of the deputy commissioner.

The change in the mode of collection of *posa* during the British period was unacceptable to the Nyishis as a whole and remained a matter of dispute between the two forces. Their policy of raid was also a point of constant dispute between them. The Nyishis wanted to collect the *posa* directly from the people of Assam. In 1835, the Nyishis raided the plains. They took away several British subjects with them. The British government sent a small military force into the hills and rescued the captives. After this event, several Nyishi clans of the north of Charduar submitted. They left their right of collecting *posa* from the *paiks*, and agreed to receive the articles of *posa* from the revenue officer of the villages. They also undertook a policy not to assist the enemies of the British. Their new *posa* was fixed at one coarse *arkut* sheet, one long cotton handkerchief, two seers of salt, one dao, and one goat for every ten houses. Many other Nyishi clans also accepted it. The British government always took seriously any raid by the Nyishis on the plains of Assam. To stop the same economic blockade, withholding of the payment of *posa* and finally the armed intervention was followed. We see all these measures in the British intervention in the incidents of the raid of the village Amtolla (in Darrang in 1872–73). The beginning of the twentieth century marked a change in the British policy towards the Nyishis. To establish direct contact with them in 1911, a survey party (known as the Miri Mission) visited many villages of the Nyishi hills and collected important information. This resulted in the inclusion of the Nyishi hills in the Western section of the North-east Frontier.

The British occupation of Assam brought about a change in the *posa* rights of the Adis. The gold washers and fishermen, who had now become the British subjects, refused to pay to the Adis. The Adis in revenge carried off many of them to their hills. In this way, the British–Adi conflict began. So far, the Adis were not so hostile to the British and even helped the British in various ways in the rebellion of the Singphos and Khamptis. The British government tried to conciliate with the Adis on the matter of gold washers and fishermen. In 1847, Captain Vetch, the political agent, met Pashi, Mebo, and other Padams (Adis) and got the captives released. But the Adis were not ready to renounce their claims over the gold washers and fishermen. The Deba Adis of the

NOTES

Dihang carried off some gold washers in 1847. Captain Vetch got them released in 1848, but not without a small struggle which was the first one between the British and the Adis. While some of the Adis were going to settle in the plains, the others started attacking the gold washers. The British government then took the responsibility of the protection of the gold washers. This step only aggravated the relation between the British and the Adis. This problem continued between the various Adi groups and the British. The problem in their relationship continued in the coming years over the issue of Beheeas, Sonowals and the slaves under the Adi masters. The British moves in the Adi hills were also the result of the geo-political situation of the Adis and the moves of China from the other side of the border. Of various missions in the Adi hills by the British government, the murder of Neol Williamson proved a turning point in the history of the relation of the British and the Adis and the Anglo-Adi war took place in 1911–12.

During the initial years of British rule in Assam, the relation of the British with Khamptis was peaceful. However, over land dispute with the Mataks the British intervention was not acceptable to the Khamptis and the latter occupied the land. Taking it as an offence the British removed the chief from Sadiya and his post was abolished. Although the other privileges of the Khamptis were retained, they were very angry at the loss of their right to rule as the Sadiya Khowa Gohain. The result was that on 19 January 1839, about 500 Khamptis attacked the British at Sadiya. In this event, Colonel White, the political agent, and a large number of British soldiers were killed. The British government took it very seriously and immediately sent a punitive force. The Khampti insurgents fled to the Mishmi hills. The British vigorously pursued them, but they could not be submitted before December 1843. After this event, Sadiya and Matak were directly brought under the British rule. This development proved decisive in the history of British–tribal relation and an evidence of the use of force by the British. The Khampti unity was broken by the British and the former remained peaceful in the relationship. The superiority of arms of the British played an important role in the same.

During the period of the Burmese occupation of Assam the relationship between the Singhphos and Khamptis became an open confrontation and the Khamptis lost. The Singphos carried off a large number of people from Assam as slaves and kept them as their slaves to work on their lands and others were sold as slaves as far as to the Yunnan province of China. The Khamptis asked for British help in this situation. In the beginning, the Singphos were not ready for any agreement, but later on the British compelled them to come to terms and to release all the captives. While the British wanted to utilize the Singphos against the Burmese, the Singphos were in need of British protection against the same. But the Singphos made a common cause with the Burmese when they appeared on the Patkai in June 1825. The British expelled the Burmese from the Singphos villages of Bisa and Duffa Gams. The Singphos chiefs also surrendered. About 6000 captives were released and measures were being initiated for the release of the rest. The Singpho land was also useful for the tea plantation of the region. Also, the British were eyeing upon the same. The Singphos, in fact, did not like interference by the British in their old privileges. The British also used to protect the loyal Singpho chiefs (Bisa Gam) against other chiefs (Duffa Gam). Consequently, Singphos revolted against the British. The British took prompt action and suppressed the revolt. In the end, all the chiefs surrendered.

This was the last Singpho uprising, after which they remained peaceful throughout the British rule. The Singphos assisted the British officers when they visited their country. In 1914, the Singpho tract was included in the Eastern section of the North-East Frontier. The British collected poll tax from them. The policy of acquiring land for plantation and other colonial use and liberating the slaves of the masters of Arunachal Pradesh and

NOTES

encouraging them to settle in the British territory of Assam and use the same for colonial use were the cause of confrontation between the tribes of Arunachal Pradesh and the British government of Assam.

The markets on the borders of Assam and Arunachal Pradesh underwent tremendous change during the British period from that of the Ahom period. The Ahom rulers were promoting free exchange of goods; and trade was a popular economic exercise. However, with the development of colonial economy and administration the system changed subsequently. The aspects of trade and markets have been studied in the past by some scholars working on the history and culture of Arunachal Pradesh.

During the pre-colonial period, the cold weather annual fairs were held at Udalguri and Doimara in the foothills of Assam which practically lasted from November to March. Udalguri fair was mainly attended by the Monpas of Tawang and Kalaktang and in less number by the Thembang Monpas. The Doimara fair was visited principally by the Shertukpens and also by the Thembang Monpas. At the Udalguri fair main items of import from the Monpa areas were horse and ponies, gold, blankets, salt, musk, wax, spices, yak-tails and rubber. On the other hand, the main items of export to the hills were cotton pieces, silk manufactures, brass and copper manufactures, iron, cotton twist and yarn, woollen goods, tobacco and betelnut. Common items of import from Shertukpen and Thembang Monpa areas at the Doimara fair were spices, wax, musk, chilli, salt, sheep and blankets. However, export items of this fair were almost the same as those at Udalguri. The Sadiya fair, held in the Lakhimpur district of Assam catered to the needs of Adis, Mishmis, Duariah, Singphos and Khamptis. These tribes used a number of passes from the hill territories to the Assam plains.

Restoration of administration (after the Burmese intrusions) had created a political environment, which boosted trade within and outside Assam. Restoring the frontier *haat*s, the centres of trade, revived frontier trade with the neighbouring hill tribes became the priorities of the British administration. These *haat*s in course of time became centres for collection of raw materials for export of primarily forest products, and also distribution centres for British machine-made goods. Revenue was extracted from these foothill markets. These *haat*s – which the tribes frequented to exchange their produce for salt – came to be used as an instrument to exert political power. This measure of economic blockade helped in keeping the tribes under control and maintaining British paramountcy. Frontier trade in the province of Assam under changed political conditions became an exclusive domain of the Marwaris, Bengalis and settlers from outside. They came in as a class seeking avenues for trade, and in the absence of a local trading class, soon gained foothold over the entire gamut of trading activities.

Revival of trade fairs was in line with the broad framework of the mercantile motive of the East India Company reflected in its Report of 1797 which gave emphasis on 'creating a demand for articles, the products of Europe and Bengal' and supplying with a valuable return in bullion. The motive is also evident from the *Notes by David Scott on Welsh's Report on Assam:* 'The quality of goods of European manufacture has of late increased, and it is probable that there may hereafter be a considerable outset for woollens at a sort of annual fair held on the confines of Durrung, to which merchants from Tibet and the intermediate country resort.'

The nature of import and export proves beyond doubt that the policy of the British colonial government was to popularize European goods. This conclusion is further strengthened from the trade statistics that the export of British cotton piece had been valued at ₹ 76 only in 1877 while it increased manifold in a single year and touched the

NOTES

figure of ₹ 11,751 in 1878. To add further, the 'Report on Trade between Assam and Adjoining Foreign Countries and Tribes' for the year 1889–90 clearly mentioned that the tendency in trade indicated a steady increase in the demand for European cotton piece – goods, cotton twist and yarn, brass and copper, salt and silk manufactures.

Till 1853, the annual trade at Udalguri was in a flourishing condition which gradually showed a downward trend. This was mainly due to the reduction in the market price of salt owing to the introduction of cheap manufactured salt. With the beginning of tea plantation in the Brahmaputra valley, local markets established themselves at all centres where the villagers were encouraged to bring their produce for sale. As the gardens increased in number, Marwari and Dacca traders increased and the demand for local produced grains increased. The development in railways, coal mines, the strengthening of staff in district offices, the introduction of troops increased the consumer of local produce more than the producers. Consequently, the prices of all articles, in particular, foodgrains increased.

In fact, taste for finished goods was already there to a limited extent, since the customary dues to the hillmen of the Darrang frontier were paid in terms of *gamocha* (handkerchief), *khania kapor, cheleng, mekhela-chaddar,* cotton twist and yarn, *dao,* and others. from the Ahom period. When the British commuted these customary dues to cash, they began commerce like Tezpur (in the case of the Shertukpen, Thembang Monpa and Aka chiefs) or at fairs (as in the case of the Sat Rajas of Karipara *Durar*, who were paid at the Udalguri fair). Evidently, this mode of payment was directed at diverting the taste from finished Assamese goods towards cheaper European finished goods. This intention is corroborated further by the fact that along with the payment of the amount of *posa* the British used to present these chief articles of British manufacture like broad cloths, bottles of rum and knives. Once the people became used to these articles, they began to purchase them either from Tezpur or from the Udalguri and Doimara fairs. This colonial culture of exchanges culminated in making the chiefs addicted to those goods. The following official assertion about the importance of fairs gives a fair indication of the politico-economic motives behind the organization of fairs: '.....the fairs served some purposes of commercial and political utility.' To take the discussion on the Udalguri and Doimara fair further, we find that statistics regarding the volume of trade in Doimara fair have not been shown separately after 1885 and the Udalguri fair also lost importance from the closing years of the nineteenth century. In 1902, the import and export figures at Udalguri fairs stood at a low level of ₹ 8220 and ₹ 8598, respectively. However, the Udalguri and Doimara fairs contributed throughout the British period. While assigning the reasons for decline in brisk trade of these fairs, the following factors draw our attention:

- The Darranga fair which began to be organized in 1883 onwards gained importance at the cost of these fairs.
- These cold weather fairs failed to serve the increasing and regular demand of the rising population in the Darrang district due to enormous expansion of the tea industry and the consequent increase of population. Hence, alternative sources of commerce in the form of weekly markets and permanent centres situated at Orang, Amratola, Mazbat, Lahabari, Balipara and Tezpur became the regular channel of commercial transactions.
- Lastly, we also notice a firm determination on the part of the British colonial government for direct entry into foreign trade with Tibet which is evident

NOTES

from the Anglo-Chinese Convention of 1894, Anglo-Tibetan Convention of 1904 and the commercial treaty concluded with Tibet in 1914.

- Enactment of the Inner Line Regulation of 1873 on the Darrang frontier in 1875 and its consequent amendment in 1892 and 1898 along with the Forest Regulation of 1878 further amended in 1891 need special mention in this regard.

With the gradual consolidation of British rule in upper Assam, the Marwari traders who by this period had monopolized the internal trade of Assam (as an agent of the British trading houses of Calcutta) were encouraged to open their trading agencies at the frontier areas and trade with the hill people. These Marwari traders had their headquarters at Goalpara and Guwahati in Assam. As early as 1833, the Governor General-in Council decided that the tract between the rivers Buridihing and Dibang, part of which was occupied by Khampti and Singphos, should be placed under an officer at Sadiya and in defining the powers and functions of the officer, the agent to the Governor General North East Frontier categorically stated,

Another great object will be the advancement of the commerce in the frontier and any obstruction to a free trade that the agent of the Marwaris may bring to your notice either on our side or on the side of the Ava you will endeavour to remove and report to me as you deem necessary.

In 1834, Lieutenant Charlton was appointed in charge of Sadiya. In a letter written to David Scott, agent to the North East Frontier, Captain Neufville expressed the urgency of encouraging the rising spirit of commercial extension and enterprise amongst the border tribes. He suggested to give them a good market at the frontier with such articles of English and Indian produce as were in demand at a reasonable price receiving in exchange for the native products. The former should, Neufville suggested, consist of coarse med broadcloth, med bailze, *chintze*, white cotton cloth, black muslin, cotton coloured handkerchief, velvet, salt, opium and med blanket of Bhutan and eri cloth of Assam and the latter would be chiefly ivory, gold, amber, musk, *munjee*, *Mishmiteeta* and Khampti *dao* and spear. David Scott also entertained the idea that the trade with the hill tribes to the north as well as the Singphos would naturally increase. For this, he proposed to establish a mart at Sadiya. This he hoped would also appease the Singphos who were suffering from loss of their slaves. An attempt in this line was already undertaken by Scott in 1827, when silk goods of the value of ₹ 800 were despatched from Calcutta together with the present for the chiefs. Unfortunately, the whole consignment was plundered on the way. Though Scott once applied for a fresh investment of goods, the smallness of sum guaranteed, mere ₹ 2000 and the requirement of an officer to supervise the business led to the failure of the venture. Neufville recommended that the merchant adventurer Charles Alexander Bruce, in charge of the gun boats at Sadiya, should be vested with the charge of the whole business at a salary of ₹ 100 a month with a share in profit. Neufville hoped that eventually this trade would extend through the Hukong valley to Mogaung on the upper Irrawady. Moreover, it would gain some profitable occupation to the Singphos in return for their faithful abandonment of their predatory habits and prevent their falling into distress from the loss of slaves and disinclination to agricultural labour. In 1834, first four Marwari traders opened their shops at Sadiya. Jenkins was confident that Sadiya which had been a place of considerable trade during the Ahom period, the condition of things would be slowly get restored and would become better with judicious measures adopted by the British to encouraged trade.

By mid-nineteenth century, different *haats* and shops grew in and beyond the frontier areas. The Nyishis, Miris, Adis, and Mishmis all gradually started settling down

NOTES

peacefully and traded all along the frontier. The Mishmis came as far as Dibrugarh for trading purpose. Several of the Singphos were employed as blacksmith at Dimapur by the European entrepreneurs and all were also engaged in agricultural.

The rapid expansion of the tea industry in Upper Assam necessitated a greater market for its consumption. Serious thoughts were given to official circles to popularize British Indian tea among the hill tribes of the Eastern Himalaya and capture the markets of Central Asia, particularly Tibet through them. In 1868, Lieutenant Johnson, Superintendent of Keddha Department reported to the officiating Secretary to the Government of Bengal, that an inconsiderable trade was carried on with Tibet through the medium of Digaru Mishmis and Adis and with northern Burma through Singphos and under proper management this trade might be greatly developed. There had always been demand for the produce of Tibet and northern Burma but the distance from Sadiya often prevented men from taking their goods to the best market and since sufficient encouragement was not given to the traders, few Marwaris at Sadiya did not find it profitable to lay in a large stock of things for which they had no sale on the spot. It was pointed out that whatever money was needed by the hill tribes was immediately reinvested so that increase of trade on one side would cause a corresponding increase on other sides and one means of increasing this trade was to establish an annual fair at Sadiya. That the British government was more interested in opening up Tibetan trade through the intermediary hill tribes rather than establishing direct intercourse with Tibet is evident from C.U. Aitchinson; Secretary to the Government of India's instruction to C. Bernard, officiating Secretary to the Government of Bengal:

> ...the appointment of a special officer for Tibet is neither necessary nor expedient. It will be quite sufficient for Colonel Haughton to continue to collect all the interpretation in his power as to the goods most in demand, the restrictions placed on trade and to encourage trade by the establishment of fairs in our territories on the border. Our frontier officers may be told generally that any opening for friendly relations should be most of and at once reported to Government whenever it appears available.

Hence, to accelerate the process, official patronage was given not only to the already existing trade fairs but attempts were also made to increase the number of fairs as an auxiliary to regular trade.

Marwari traders and Assamese from the plains attended the fair in large numbers. The European planters attended Sadiya and Udalguri fairs and the latter was also the resort of the Cacharese, the inhabitants of *Duar*. There were several roads connecting the fairs with the other places of Assam such as the Orang-Udalguri, a fourteen-and-half-mile road which carried much of the traffic during the days when the fair was held. Sadiya was connected by Assam Trunk Road linking Brahmaputra at Saikhowaghat. Ferries were mostly used to cross the Brahmaputra at Saikhowaghat. The Sadiya fair was attended by the European traders from Tezpur and Mongoldoi and traders from Dibrugarh and Lakhimpur. The construction of Dibrugarh-Sadiya Railway between 1885 and 1903 which linked Saikhowa further added convenience to traders of plains. A daily service of passenger steamers and a fine fleet of cargo boats owned and managed by the Indian General Steam Navigation Company plied on the Brahmaputra between Goalundo and Dibrugarh.

The hill people were accommodated in long sheds constructed by the British government, providing shelter for about 100 at a time. To each family on arrival was allotted a small space in the shed which members again partitioned and formed residence

NOTES

while in plains. In the same cases, such accommodation was also provided to the merchants of plains. The importance of Sadiya fair to the hill tribes also diminished to some extent because of the establishment of numerous shops by the Marwaris at the outskirts of the Lakhimpur district. The tendency since the late nineteenth century for the hill tribes was to visit permanent shops and markets that grew both in and beyond the Inner Line and the inevitable result was the decline of trade in the fairs.

Sadiya developed into a market town with as many as twenty-five permanent shops. It was a market of wax, ivory, rubber, timber, *Mishmi teeta* and limestone brought by the Adis, Mishmis, Singphos and Khamptis. Besides the Marwaris' shops there were general stores under European management and a number of shops owned by the Muslim traders both at Dibrugarh and North Lakhimpur. At Margherita, the Khamptis brought down amber from Hukong valley.

The markets frequented by the hill tribes were located in the Brahmaputra Valley. Though it was comparatively easy for the hill people to come down to the plains, it was not easy for the people of the plain to have access to the mountainous terrain of the hill territory. Notwithstanding these difficulties, enterprising Marwari merchants established permanent shops beyond the Inner Line too.

Rubber and opium were the main articles of exchange. In 1886, there were three licensed shops beyond the Inner Line in Lakhimpur district and their number gradually increased. The import of opium of the hill people was discouraged by the British government, but encouraged the sale of high-priced government opium to them, to maximize their profit.

## 4.3 INNER LINE

After the occupation of Assam in 1826 the British followed almost the same policy towards the tribes of Arunachal Pradesh. The Ahoms followed the policy of reconciliation towards the tribes and at no time considered the extension of their rule into the hills. David Scott, who is considered to be the architect of the British administration in the North East, favoured status quo in their relations with the tribes of Arunachal as well as others. Gradually, for administrative convenience and needs of the expanding colonial economy the need for boundary demarcation (in any form) between Assam and Arunachal Pradesh was realized. Hence, the whole exercise of demarcation started.

**Check Your Progress**

1. State the kind of agreement which David Scott concluded with the Hrussos (Akas) chiefs.
2. What were the main duties of the Katokies?
3. Mention the areas of conflict between the British rulers and the Nyishis.
4. Why did the annual trade at Udalguri fair show a downward trend?

Regulation I of 1873, called 'Regulation for the Peace and Good Government of Certain Districts on the Eastern Frontier' came into operation on 1 November 1873. This became popular as the Inner Line Regulations because of the name given to the line of control by the author of the Act, Sir Arthur Hobhouse, a member of the Viceroy's Council. This regulation is also called 'The Bengal Eastern Frontier Regulation I of 1873.' According to this Act, which was to be applicable to the districts of Kamrup, Darrang, Nowgong, Sibsagar, Lakhimpur, Garo Hills, Khasi and Jayantiya Hills, Naga Hills, Cachar and Chittagong Hills, a restriction line was laid down to regulate intercourse between the tribesmen and the British subjects in the plains; bordering the hills. This line was called the Inner Line and beyond this no British subject was allowed to enter without a formal pass from the concerned authority. The Regulation laid down that 'any British subject or other person ... who goes beyond the Inner Line ....without a pass, shall be liable on conviction before a magistrate to a fine not exceeding ₹ 100 for the first offence and to a fine of not exceeding ₹ 500 or to simple or rigorous imprisonment for a term not exceeding three months, or to both for each subsequent offences.'

The Regulation further laid down that, 'any wood, wax, ivory, rubber or any other jungle products found in the possession of any person without permit, may be confiscated to the government.' The Act also prohibited the killing or catching of the wild elephants without a license, and laid restrictions on the possession of land beyond this line, by saying that, 'it shall not be lawful for any British subject, not being native of the district, to acquire any interest in the land or the product of land beyond the Inner Line without sanction of the local government.' The local government, however, was empowered to suspend or alter these restrictions from time to time. It was also made clear that the Government of India was not to be held responsible for the loss of life or property beyond the Inner Line, of those persons who went there without a permit.

The Inner Line was notified for Lakhimpur district on 3 September 1875, in accordance with the Regulation of 1873. This Line was initially proposed by Major W. S. Clarke, Commissioner of Lakhimpur district, on 22 May 1875. Later some changes were made on the suggestions of the chief commissioner of Assam. The Government of India, while passing the Regulation of 1873, had suggested to the Government of Bengal that while prescribing the Inner Line, they should see that the line corresponded to the natural features of the country and if there were no such features, it was to coincide with the obligatory points like crossing of a road. The place where a road crossed the line was to be clearly shown on the map and if the area through which it ran had not been mapped, arrangements were to be made for topographical survey as well. If any tea garden was there in the frontier, it was to be brought within the Inner Line if it was possible to avoid any complications.

In accordance with these suggestions, the Inner Line which was finally drawn up in Lakhimpur was to take the course of the Buri Dihing in the south-eastern sector, as it was a good natural boundary though it kept outside the Inner Line, the coal fields of Tirap and Nandang. The tea gardens of Namsang, Hukanjuri and Taurack, however, were brought within the Inner Line after an agreement with the Namsangia chief. The tea gardens of Joyhing and Harmoti were also brought within the Inner Line. This Inner Line starting from Desang was to go along Desang river, Namsang river, Boori Dihing, Kherampani, Noa Dihing and up to river Brahmaputra. From the north of Brahmaputra, starting from the boundary of Darrang, it was to go along the Rajgarh Ali, Dihing, Rangnadi, Joyhing tea garden, the Sisi river upto the Dimu guard. From there it was to go to the Puba guard, Lalimukh, Debongmukh upto Debong and Dikrang guard. It terminated on Noa Dihing Mukh in the east.

### 4.3.1 Analysis of the Inner Line Regulation

The Inner Line Regulation was the outcome of lengthy correspondence between the Government of India and the Government of Bengal on the subject of frontier policy. Alexander Mackenzie in his book *The North East Frontier of India* provides some details of the same. The motives behind the extension of the regulation into Darrang and Lakhimpur frontier were not so much political as economic and commercial and they can be summed up as follows:

- To regulate the trade in Indian rubber between the hills and the British traders.
- To regulate the transfer of lands in these areas.
- To control the extension as well as to protect the tea plantations in the foothills.

The implicit policy of non-interference into the affairs of the hill tribes was thus made official and the act sought to keep outside the British boundary all tracts over which 'semi-savage tribes wandered or in which they lived.'

NOTES

The British government thus specified the area upto which it would exercise its authority and uphold law and order. It would decline any responsibility beyond that and the tribes living there would be left to themselves. The Inner Line further imposes restrictions on the movement of the people from outside and ascertained that their isolation maintained for it suited the economic and commercial interests of the empire.

It may be pointed out here that the Inner Line Regulation did not impose any restriction on the movement of the tribal into the plains, they were allowed to fish, hunt and trade on both sides of the Line. The British rather organized fairs on the border villages of the administered areas and encouraged the hill men to come to these fairs with their forest products for exchange. This Inner Line was not a static line for all times and purpose. It was rather a flexible and elastic demarcation that could be altered so as to include any area when it suited the British purpose.

As far as the positive aspects of the Inner Line are concerned, there cannot be any doubt that this regulation was a well-thought out measure and was not objected to by either the tribal or the plains' people. Its efficiency and effectiveness can be judged from the very fact that it has remained in existence for the last 140 years without any alternations worth mentioning. From the ethnic point of view, this Inner Line greatly helped in the preservation of tribal culture. The policy of Verrier Elwin, an English self-trained anthropologist, ethnologist and tribal activist also helped in the continuance of their traditional institutions.

However, the Inner Line Regulation saw to it that the economic relations between the outside world and the tribal would remain only one-sided. That is to say, the goods of the tribal could be sold in the outside markets and they could also purchase goods from the plains, the real profit was earned by the British. No doubt some surplus money was generated in the tribal economy, but the British always induced the tribal to spend it on useless and sometimes even harmful products like opium. There were no new openings for the investment of this surplus money for economic growth. V Elwin has pointed out that in one year at the trade fair at Sadiya, the value of the opium sold to the tribal of the hills amounted to as much as ₹ 30,300. The Marwari people regularly traded opium for local products of hill men. Further, this Inner Line Regulation accelerated the process of economic drain from the hills. The natural growth of commerce was checked and the hill economy became tributary to the imperial economy. The grand British designs of developing trade with Tibet and China through Arunachal Pradesh could never materialize and the pre-colonial economy began to disintegrate.

Economic aspect aside, the Inner Line saw to it that the tribal remained in primitive conditions and did not allow any social, economic or administrative developments in the region. It served as the hinterland to the colonial economy. The process of modernization was postponed, with the result that till very recently, except for the district headquarters, the people of the state lived as they had been doing for centuries. The process of bringing modern institutions and elements of civilization was thus deliberately delayed by the imposition of this Inner Line. Since no outsider was allowed to cross the Inner Line and settle in the hills and as no effort was undertaken by the government, education could not be spread to the hills which proved to be a great obstacle in the path of progress. As early as 1886, Colonel Hopkinson had clearly stated to the government that the British government had undertaken an obligation to administer and civilize the tribes of Arunachal Pradesh after the annexation of Assam, but the issue was scrupulously avoided as it was to prove very expensive without any economic profit.

NOTES

### 4.3.2 Implications of the Inner Line Regulation of 1873 and Arunachal Pradesh

In spatial terms, the demarcation of the southern Inner Line was to be in accordance with the plan of Colonel Graham and Colonel Macdonald formulated on the Bhutan frontier in the early nineteenth century. Interestingly, this demarcation was not to be a 'boundary line' but marked the end of civil jurisdiction beyond which the British subjects were excluded. The natural contours of the landscape or in its absence the remnant of a road, path or river was to be followed. Wherever the survey operations had been completed the Line was to be drawn according to the map. Areas lying outside a mapped region were to be surveyed immediately.

It was here that William Lambton's new mode of mapping of triangulation, or trigonometrical survey introduced in the 1820s, and expanded by his successor George Everest into the 'Great Trigonometrical Survey' in the 1840s, was brought into play. This survey sought to connect the southern tip of the peninsula to the foothills of the Himalayas. The production of a map was not just for political and military purposes but 'also a way of constructing India as a domain of British cultural and political sovereignty'. As concrete factual information was gathered, it helped to do away with the 'uncertainties' of both cultural and physical difference making India more comprehensible. Colonial cartography therefore not only created new landscapes, but continuously denied the early spatial configurations.

A natural corollary of insistence in the document of the mapping exercise is a part of this great project to be taken up in Arunachal Pradesh. In the regulation there is a vague reference to the existence of an 'outer line' within which their loose jurisdiction exists. The trigonometrical survey was sent in as an imperative of having a defined knowledge of the territory between the Inner and Outer Line. Resistance from the communities in the northern frontier of Assam led to an incomplete mapping of the area, rendering truncated knowledge of the space. Attempts of missionaries to seek alternate access into China through Tibet were abandoned following the murder of a French Missionary. In 1854, Father M. Krick and his associate were murdered as they entered Mishmi hills.

This nuanced form of political control over the northern and eastern frontier of Assam in terms of 'loose political control' was marked by an absence of direct annexation. Though in the Naga Hills and the Lushai Hills where the demarcation of the Inner Line too occurred, the policy of 'indirect control' of the early nineteenth century was replaced by a 'forward policy' in the 1880s and 1890s, respectively. The exercise of mapping did crucially impinge upon the levels of definition of the territory and the policies thereupon. The Inner Line therefore, remained more of a jurisdictional definition rather than a fixed boundary.

In the case of Lakhimpur, it was construed unnecessary to lay down a definite boundary of the British civil jurisdiction. It was to follow the natural contours of the landform where Rajgarh Ali (a well-defined embankment along the foot of the hills) formed an important landmark. Despite the insistence on following the pattern of the Bhutan boundary which clearly defined the hills and the plains, the Inner Line in Lakhimpur within British territory did not follow a well-defined boundary between hills and plains. Here, it was to be defined by references to 'geographical features and habitats of particular tribes'. Towards Sibsagar, however, it was decided to clearly lay down a line between civil and political jurisdiction as soon as the regulation was put in place.

NOTES

In 1895, a proposal was mooted that Rajgarh Ali between the rivers Dikrang and Subansiri were uninhabited by tribes and that portion of the Ali had been washed away by the Ranganadi; hence, it was proposed to push the Inner Line northwards. This was to accommodate the extension of the Dejoo garden invoking Section 2 of Regulation V of 1873 under which the powers of the Lt. Governor to alter the line from time to time was delegated to the chief commissioner. The proposal was notified to alter the jurisdiction in 1898. Along another section of the Inner Line in Lakhimpur district a precise mapping led to the proposal for adopting a line further north of the river Tirap and Dirak. These modifications were made to accommodate the demands of the planters in the neighbourhood and also enable the Assam railways and trading company to secure its timber, mining and petroleum leases outside the line.

The fluidity of the demarcations as permitted in the regulation allowed the 'government to prescribe, and from time to time alter by notification, a line to be called the Inner Line and to prohibit any subject living outside the area from living or moving'. This fluidity of the demarcation along various sectors in the northern and eastern frontier of present day Arunachal Pradesh helped to extend control over resources, particularly forests in the schema of colonial forestry. A conspicuous projection of the tours taken up by the first political officer, Needham from 1881 and by Noel Williamson were 'not just to cultivate friendly relationship with the tribes in the tract within the Inner and Outer Lines'. In fact, they were accompanied by a Surveyor for mapping the territory travelled as well as a forest officer to 'inspect the forest where timber is now being cut and advise us upon them'.

The flexible frontier got transformed into a fixed boundary only in 1914 when the North East Frontier Tracts (henceforth as NEFT) got demarcated into two sections. The sections were initially named as central and eastern, and western sections by two distinct notifications. In 1919, the western section was renamed into the 'Balipara Frontier Tract' and the central and eastern sections into 'Sadiya Frontier Tract'. The mapping exercise which followed the Miri Mission, Mishmi Mission and Aka Promenade did create a sense of certainty about the territory between the 'Inner Line' and the 'Outer Line'.

In the aftermath of Government of India Act, correspondences of the colonial government reveal the necessity of demarcating a well-defined boundary between the Balipara Frontier and North Lakhimpur Subdivision was envisaged including transfer of 32 square miles of a section of the frontier to the plains section. It is interesting to note that in the early years of colonial contact the jurisdiction was largely defined by Rajgarh Ali. This was based on the reports that there were no 'hill villages within a day's march of the plains' and hence the pushing back of Rajgarh Ali would not result in raids of the hill tribes. In the fringes of the Inner Line a number of 'forest reserves' had been created and the earlier ill-defined boundary was construed as problematic and hence the southern limits of the reserves would define 'new boundary'. As fixed territoriality grew after 1935 the contours of the boundary were decided by the extent of the state-controlled forests that infringed on to large chunks of the foothills. The southern limit of the Balipara Frontier tract was marked by Kalingduar reserve, Rowta reserve, Behali reserve and Gohpur reserve.

**Check Your Progress**

5. What was Regulation I of 1873 called?
6. What were the motives behind the extension of the Inner Line Regulation into Darrang and Lakhimpur frontier?

## 4.4 OUTER LINE

NOTES

There seems to be a lot of confusion and misunderstanding with regard to the meaning of the Outer Line. Unlike the Inner Line Regulation, we do not get any Regulation that would precisely define the Outer Line, nor do we know with certainty the origin of this term. 'Resistance Movement' of the tribes of Arunachal Pradesh against colonial penetration clearly demonstrates that the British were unable to occupy the hills. Geographically difficult, economically unprofitable, futility of the military expeditions in the scattered settlement pattern of the tribes of Arunachal Pradesh and strong and unique defence mechanism of the village and the houses of the chiefs necessitated the British to search for an alternative policy in the areas of Arunachal Pradesh. It was also difficult because of the fact that in the event of direct possession of these lands the British would carry their international border to that of the Chinese. They had no desire of doing it since it could lead to jeopardizing their investment in Assam.

Despite these problems, the colonial authorities never wanted to keep themselves away from the hills of Arunachal Pradesh because of the economic prospects in the hills which rested in forests and other resources. There was also a bright and broad prospect of frontier and trans-Himalayan transborder trade with Tibet and Central Asia. Therefore, the British wanted to exercise indirect control over these areas and their natural resources. Hence, the originally undefined and ambiguous territory was to be kept with them through some line, even imaginary. It was this imaginary line that became known as the Outer Line.

We have seen in detail the Inner Line as it was drawn after the Regulation of 1873. This Inner Line was the boundary of the ordinary and political jurisdiction of the district officers. The Outer Line was the originally accepted boundary of Assam.

### 4.4.1 Analysis of the Outer Line

The Outer Line, to some extent like the Inner Line, was a clever administrative tool that could absolve the British of any responsibility while at the same time granting them all the rights and privileges. Lord Hardinge summed up the whole issue of the Outer Line in 1910:

> 'We only now claim suzerainty upto the foot of the hills. We have an Inner Line and an Outer Line. Upto the Inner Line we administer in the ordinary way. Between the Inner Line and Outer Line we only administer politically. That is our political officers exercise very loose jurisdiction, and to prevent troubles with the frontier tribes, passes are required for our subjects who want to cross the Inner Line. The country between the two lines is very sparsely inhabited and is mostly dense jungle.'

In the absence of any well-defined international border, this line served as the exterior extent of the British Indian empire. This Outer Line was not a fixed line and was deliberately undefined for at least two reasons:

(i) The British could extend the Outer Line upto any limit as and when necessary so as to bring any tract of territory within the jurisdiction of their officers.

(ii) The undefined Outer Line would also make the task of extending the Inner Line to any extent into the hills to suit their colonial interests.

It must be made very clear here that the Inner Line was the jurisdictional and not the territorial limit of the British. As was pointed out by the Deputy Commissioner of

NOTES

Lakhimpur, Godfrey, 'The Chief Commissionership of Assam extends upto the borders of China and Tibet and Burma.'

Needless to say again, between the Inner Line and the Outer Line the British only administered in theory. Their political officers exercised very loose jurisdiction over these sparsely populated regions, and even this rested sometimes upon force. The line of executive actions of the British officers in these areas was bound to be ill-defined in the absence of a specific limit of the authority of the chief commissioner of Assam. The relations of the British government with the tribes of the hills clearly bring out the reality of the whole situation. On many occasions the British pursued the Aka, Nyishis, Adi, Mishmi, Khampti and Singpho tribes as and when necessary. On different occasions, British troops were also sent beyond the Outer Line and the government collected fines, arrested criminals, and so on; and was always free to deal with the tribal. Their officers conducted extensive tours and survey teams attempted to explore and map the area.

The issue of the Outer Line became more alive after the Chinese activities increased on the other side of the border after 1907. As early as 1908, it had been reported that there had been some activities of the Chinese beyond the Abor Hills. Noel Williamson had also reported the concentration of Chinese in Rima in the same year. Then a fresh Chinese force appeared beyond the Mishmi Hills in 1910. On the earlier occasions, the government had remained a passive spectator to the situation in the tribal hills and was not willing to interfere there, but now the Chinese interest in the hills rather compelled the British to give a serious thought to the problem. The reason for this was very simple. If the Chinese could bring the tribal hills under their influence, the plains of Assam would become vulnerable to the Chinese attack threatening the heavy British investment in the tea gardens, oil fields and so on. Therefore, it was advisable to prevent the Chinese from influencing and extending their control over the hills. The unspecified and undemarcated international frontiers were also threatening to be a point of dispute between the British and the Chinese.

The situation was, however, saved due to the internal troubles in China, that is the Chinese Revolution of 1911. Tibet declared Independence and the issue of the Outer Line was once again buried under the files. Lord Hardinge, the Viceroy of India was strictly opposed to running the risks or spending money on attempts to create a strategic frontier beyond the Outer Line. Lord Minto Governor General from 1807-13, also held the view that the best means of safeguarding the frontier from the Chinese aggression would be to push forward the Outer Line so as to obtain, 'a good strategic boundary agreements being taken at the same from the tribes within and beyond the line binding them to have no relation with foreign power, other than the British.' Thus, till the demarcation of the McMahon Line in 1914, the British maintained the 'loose' political jurisdiction over the tribal hills with the help of the 'Outer Line', though it was indefinite and undefined. This Line served the British aims very well but kept the tribal in darkness and cut away from the rest of the world as was done by the Inner Line.

**Check Your Progress**

7. Why was the Outer Line not fixed and kept undefined by the British rulers?
8. When did the issue of Outer Line become more prominent?

## 4.5 McMAHON LINE

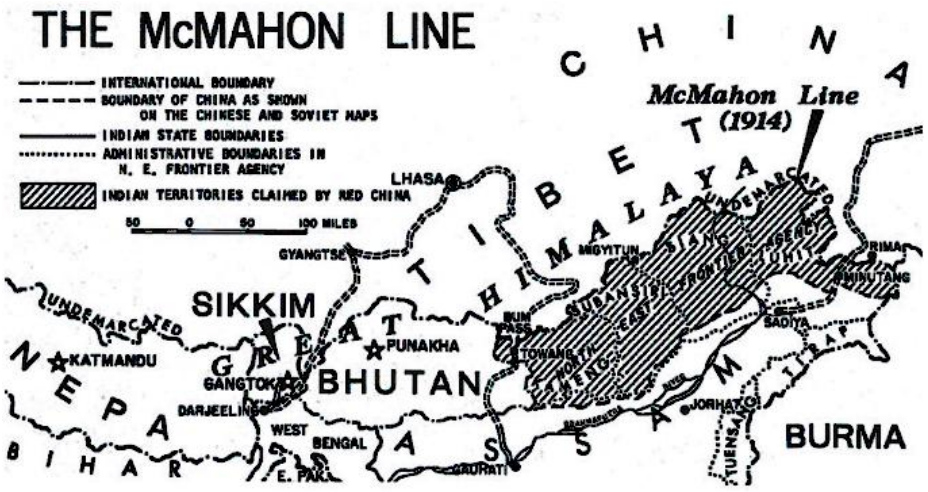
Colonialism, as we are aware, was not just a narrative of military conquest but manifests itself in a variety of ways, which according to Bernard Cohn anthropologist and scholor of British Colonialism in India, lay in the 'production of the forms of knowledge'. Mapping has been one of the key exercises in the 'production of knowledge' in colonial India. In the 1780s, James Renell, the Surveyor General of Bengal, produced maps using

NOTES

geographical information compiled during military incursions and was later instrumental in the cartographic 'framing' of India as a sub-continental territory. What is notable is that just like different parts of India came under British rule through various instruments of either direct control or indirect control, marking territoriality immediately followed it. In the mountainous and hilly regions of North East India we find that the modalities of mapping took different trajectories.

The main aim of the British government in Assam, as in other parts of India and the world, was promotion of their imperialistic designs and profit maximization out of the rule. In order to achieve this, certain rules and regulations were made operational. In the case of Arunachal Pradesh, some of these rules and regulations left a deep mark on the history of the state in the politico-administrative as well as economic, social and cultural fields.

The new rulers of Assam, the British, however, faced a unique problem in this area due to the absence of a political boundary between the tribes of Arunachal Pradesh and Assam on the one hand and the boundaries among the tribes of Arunachal Pradesh on the other. It was so because the Ahom kings neither possessed any documentary records describing frontiers nor were the boundaries fixed and mutually accepted. After the establishment of British rule in Assam and, especially with the capital investments in the plantation economy and other areas, these boundaries needed to be settled permanently. Lt. Col. Graham had made a boundary line in some areas but the question of 'effective jurisdiction' of the British government could not be decided. This problem of 'jurisdiction' did not pose any serious problem for some time but the discovery of the teat plant in Assam and the discovery of coal, oil and other precious minerals changed the entire picture and Assam began to attract British capital investment. Rubber, wood and ivory from the hills also brought prosperity. To promote the economic interests of the Empire, it was necessary for peace to be maintained. To achieve the same strict administrative control over the province as well as on the borders peace was to be established. Most of the troubles on the borders of Assam were caused due to the unrestricted and undefined intercourse between the tribesmen and the people of the plains who frequently visited each other's area mostly for commerce. Hill people also had some other political rights and they visited plains to collect the same (*posa*). Many times, the disputes arising out of the intercourse took very serious dimensions often leading to violence.



It was not only the Company and the Company officials who were engaged in trade in Assam and neighbouring areas but many private European traders also came to this region and started private trade. The economic profitability of Assam and the policies of the British government certainly attracted them. These private traders did not spare the hills and began exploiting them. The independent nature of most of the hill tribes and the frequent visits of these European traders led to suspicion in the minds of the tribal and on many occasions the Europeans were murdered in the hills. This was true not only in the case of Arunachal but also with all the hill states bordering Assam.

The establishment and development of the tea industry in Assam added fresh dimensions to the British relations with the tribal. In some cases, the tea gardens were intended to be established on the hills. This required the occupation of the traditional tribal areas. The extension of the tea gardens and the cutting down of trees for tea chests and construction of houses and sheds were resisted by the tribal. The direct participation of tribes in the foothill markets with the resources of the hills also adversely affected the British interests. Thus, it was required to regulate the commercial relations of the tribal with the outsiders – both officials and non-officials – on the boundary of Assam valley and bring the same under the ambit of the colonial control. All these factors compelled the British to pass the Inner Line Regulation first.

### 4.5.1 The Simla Conference (1913)

The Tripartite Conference, better known as the Simla Conference, was formally opened on 6 October 1913 at the summer capital of British India, under the chairmanship of Sir Arthur Henry McMahon, Foreign Secretary, Government of India. McMahon had been the spirit in the formation of the North East Frontier policy since he was made Foreign Secretary in 1911. He was assisted by Charles Bell, the political officer of Sikkim who had an intimate knowledge of the affairs of Tibet, Bhutan and Sikkim. China was represented by Ivan Chen and Lonchen Shatra, and a leading minister of Dalai Lama represented Tibet.

At the conference, the Tibetan sought acknowledgment of its Independence, repudiation of the Anglo-Chinese Convention of 1906, and the revision of the trade regulations. They wanted to have a frontier with China which would include all Tibetan people. The Chinese, on the other hand, wanted that their sovereignty over Tibet should be recognized and their right to control foreign and military affairs of the country should be accepted. The British who were more interested in the Indo-Tibetan border rather than in the internal problems of Tibet wanted to restore the position as it existed prior to 1904 so as to ensure a stable government free from outside influence but with closer ties with Tibet. The discussions continued for about six months both in Simla and in Delhi, and finally on 27 April 1914 a convention was signed under which Tibet was divided into two zones namely, 'Outer Tibet' and 'Inner Tibet'. Chinese suzerainty over the whole of Tibet was recognized; Outer Tibet was declared as autonomous and the Chinese agreed to abstain from any interference in its administration. In place of the earlier trade regulations the convention agreed to a fresh treaty to govern commercial relations between India and Outer Tibet.

Great Britain gained the most from the Simla Conference and the agreement signed with Tibet. Her policy of making Tibet a 'buffer' between India and China was immensely successful. For the first time, a proper frontier was defined and all the confusion prevailing due to the ill-defined 'Outer Line' was over. However, the demarcation of the frontier did not, in any case, change the position of the British vis-a-vis the tribal to any

remarkable degree. McMahon himself commented that the acceptance of a clearly defined frontier by Tibet would enable the Assam government to leave the tribes to themselves, intervening as little as possible in their internal affairs.

Further, the outbreak of the First World War in 1914, and the departure of Henry McMahon to Egypt made the whole issue of North East India a remote concern to the authorities. The government was also not in a mood to publish the text of Simla Conference as long as there remained any hope of the final settlement of the Tibetan issue by negotiations with the Chinese. It was only in 1924 that a summary of the Simla Conference and the Boundary Agreement was published by Charles Bell in his book *Tibet, Past and Present*.

The overall concern of the British government was to secure the frontier with China and to keep the tribal area of Arunachal as a buffer. Syed Ali Imran, the only Indian member of the Viceroys' Council was not very happy with this policy and pointed out: 'Is it (McMahon Line) intended to keep the wild tribes as buffer between the expansion of China and ourselves? If that be so, it entails our keeping them neither down in their present unhappy and barbarous condition for all time to come – for we will not govern them nor will we allow others to do so'. The McMahon Line remained only on the files of the Government of India for many years to come. In 1935, Olaf Coroe, deputy Secretary in New Delhi, insisted that the boundary dispute in the North East should be settled and, therefore, in 1937, the Survey of India authenticated the McMahon Line as the North East boundary of India.

As we have seen earlier, after the British annexation of Assam in 1826 till very late, the extent of the territories of Assam and the hills was not known definitely. We have also noticed that some sort of agreement had been arrived at between the hill tribes and the British wherein the latter had agreed to pay *Posa* to the former, but again the question of British jurisdiction was never settled. The Inner Line Regulation also did not specify the exact relations of the British with the tribal nor did it solve the issue regarding jurisdiction. Broadly speaking, British relations with the hill tribes were based on the fulfillment of the economic interests of the Empire, which had resulted in an undefined and flexible frontier policy. It had been suggested by some officials that after the annexation of Assam the government had undertaken a moral obligation to administer and civilize the hill tribes but the government always avoided this responsibility.

The British not only avoided any direct administration over the hills, they also did not bother to specify the 'external boundary' of their rule in this part of India. In the form of the Outer Lines, the external limit of their rule was defined very vaguely. However, the issue of the demarcation of the northern boundary to the extent of the British Empire would not be kept pending after the increasing Chinese influence in the hills, either on the other side of the Outer Line or in NEFA.

## 4.6 SUMMARY

In this unit, you have learnt that:

- The British administrators neither had the intention to understand the true nature of *posa* nor could they make their doubt clear as to what it was.
- The British continued the *posa* system even after the occupation of Assam as it was under the Ahoms.

**Check Your Progress**

9. What is the McMahon Line?
10. What was the major benefit of Great Britain from the Simla Conference?

NOTES

- During the British period though the payment of *posa* continued, we also witness that the payment was stopped to some as a punitive measure against the tribe.
- Cash payment in lieu of all *posa* claims were given with a view to popularizing British products in the hills and for revamping the transborder trade.
- David Scott succeeded in concluding an agreement with the Hrussos (Akas) by which they agreed to forego their right of direct collection of *posa* from individual ryots for an annual payment of ₹175 by the British government.
- On 28 February 1836 Captain Mathie entered into an agreement with the Sat Rajas of the Sherdukpens commuting the *posa* to an amount of ₹ 2526-7-0 annually.
- The Monpa chiefs of Thembang collected *posa* from the Mazbat area in *Charduar*. In 1844, they were allowed an annual sum of ₹145-13-6 as commutation of their *posa* to cash.
- Even after the occupation of Assam by the British, the Nocte chiefs continued to retain their *khat* managed by their respective *katokies*.
- The British power did not adopt the policy of annexation in the areas of Arunachal Pradesh. Neither did they have a uniform policy towards the tribes of Arunachal Pradesh. Force was used as and when required, otherwise the policy of peace and non-intervention was followed.
- The change in the mode of collection of *posa* during the British period was unacceptable to the Nyishis as a whole and remained a matter of dispute between the two forces. Their policy of raid was also a point of constant dispute between them.
- During the period of the Burmese occupation of Assam the relationship between the Singhphos and Khamptis became an open confrontation and the Khamptis lost.
- The markets on the borders of Assam and Arunachal Pradesh underwent tremendous change during the British period from that of the Ahom period.
- Restoration of administration (after the Burmese intrusions) had created a political environment, which boosted trade within and outside Assam.
- Revival of the trade fairs was in line with the broad framework of the mercantile motive of the East India Company reflected in its Report of 1797 which gave emphasis on 'creating a demand for articles, the products of Europe and Bengal' and supplying with a valuable return in bullion.
- After the occupation of Assam in 1826 the British followed almost the same policy towards the tribes of Arunachal Pradesh. The Ahoms followed the policy of reconciliation towards the tribes and at no time considered the extension of their rule into the hills.
- The Inner Line was notified for Lakhimpur District on 3 September 1875, in accordance with the Regulation of 1873. This Line was initially proposed by Major W. S. Clarke, Commissioner of Lakhimpur district, on 22 May 1875.
- Inner Line was the boundary of the ordinary and political jurisdiction of the district officers. The Outer Line was the originally accepted boundary of Assam.
- The main aim of the British government in Assam, as in other parts of India and the world, was promotion of their imperialistic designs and profit maximization out of the rule.

- The Inner Line Regulation was the outcome of lengthy correspondence between the Government of India and the Government of Bengal on the subject of frontier policy.
- As far as the positive aspects of the Inner Line are concerned, there cannot be any doubt that this regulation was a well-thought out measure and was not objected to by either the tribal or the plains' people.
- The Tripartite Conference, better known as the Simla Conference, was formally opened on 6 October 1913 at the summer capital of British India, under the chairmanship of Sir Arthur Henry McMahon, Foreign Secretary, Government of India.
- Great Britain gained the most from the Simla Conference and the agreement signed with Tibet. Her policy of making Tibet a 'buffer' between India and China was immensely successful.

## 4.7 KEY TERMS

- **Ahom:** These are the descendants of the ethnic Tai people that accompanied the Tai prince Sukaphaa into the Brahmaputra valley in 1220 and ruled the area for six centuries.
- **Ryot:** It refers to an Indian peasant or tenant farmer.
- **Malgoozari:** It stands for the local revenue officer.
- **Paiks**: It refers to the adult male manual workers.
- **Mishmi teeta**: This is a temperate herb found only in Arunachal Pradesh.
- õ **Frontier:** A line or border separating two countries.

## 4.8 ANSWERS TO 'CHECK YOUR PROGRESS'

1. David Scott succeeded in concluding an agreement with the Hrussos (Akas) by which they agreed to forego their right of direct collection of *posa* from individual ryots for an annual payment of ₹175 by the British government. An agreement was made with Taghi raja wherein he agreed not to attack the ryots in the plains for a monthly pension of ₹20. Suitable stipends amounting ₹ 360 per annum were also granted to other chiefs of the Akas with further extension of six more pensions in 1848 to another six chiefs.
2. The main duties of these *katokies* were to go into the hills as and when required and to provide information about the tribal affairs to the authorities. These *katokies* also accompanied the deputy commissioners when the latter went into the hills on tours. They were in close contact with various tribes and accompanied the tribal when they came down to the plains during fairs and other occasions.
3. The areas of conflict between the British rulers and the Nyishis were the change in the mode of collection of posa during the British period and their policy of raid.
4. The annual trade at Udalguri fair showed a downward trend mainly due to the reduction in the market price of salt owing to the introduction of cheap manufactured salt. With the beginning of tea plantation in the Brahmaputra valley, local markets established themselves at all centres where the villagers were encouraged to being their produce for sale.

5. The Regulation I of 1873 was called 'Regulation for the Peace and Good Government of Certain Districts on the Eastern Frontier'.
6. The motives behind the extension of the Inner Line Regulation into Darrang and Lakhimpur frontier were largely economic and commercial and can be summarized as follows:
   - To regulate the trade in Indian rubber between the hills and the British traders.
   - To regulate the transfer of lands in these areas.
   - To control the extension as well as to protect the tea plantations in the foothills.
7. The Outer Line was not fixed and kept undefined due to the following reasons:
   - The British could extend the Outer Line up to any limit as and when necessary so as to bring any tract of territory within the jurisdiction of their officers.
   - The undefined Outer Line would also make the task of extending the Inner Line to any extent into the hills to suit their colonial interests.
8. The issue of Outer Line became more prominent after the Chinese incursions increased in the North Eastern region of India.
9. McMahon Line was a line proposed by the British under Sir Henry McMahon at the Simla Conference (1913–14) as the frontier between Tibet and Assam, running along the Himalayas from the eastern border of Bhutan to the Brahmaputra river.
10. Great Britain gained the most from the Simla Conference. Its policy of making Tibet a 'buffer' between India and China was immensely successful. A proper frontier was defined and the confusion regarding the ill-defined Outer Line was over.

## 4.9 QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

### Short-Answer Questions

1. Write a short note on the agreement of Captain Gordon with the Sat Rajas.
2. How did the British occupation of Assam bring about a change in the *posa* rights of the Adis?
3. Who did the *katokies* deal with? How were they appointed?
4. What was the significance of Udalgiri?
5. What did Regulation I of 1873 concern?
6. What did the Outer Line signify?
7. What path does the McMahon Line follow?
8. Write a short note on the Simla Conference.

### Long-Answer Questions

1. Write a short note on the *posa* system.
2. How did the British impose force on Arunachal Pradesh?
3. Discuss the *katokies*.
4. Discuss the significance of the Inner Line.
5. What were the implications of the Inner Line Regulations of 1873 on Arunachal Pradesh?
6. What led to the recognition of the McMahon line? Discuss.

## 4.10 FURTHER READING

Gait, E.A. 2010. *A History of Assam.* US: BiblioBazaar.

Choudhary, Pratap Chandra. 1966. *The History of Civilisation of the People of Assam to the Twelfth Century A.D.* Assam: Department of Historical and Antiquarian Studies in Assam.

Sinha, Surajit. 1987. *Tribal Polities and State Systems in Pre-colonial Eastern and North Eastern India*. Kolkata: Centre for Studies in Social Sciences.

Chakravarty, I. N., Chakravarty, Lakshmi N. 1973. *Glimpses of the Early History of Arunachal*. Arunachal Pradesh: Research Department, Arunachal Pradesh Administration.

NOTES

# UNIT 5 RESISTANCE TO COLONIAL RULE IN NORTH EAST INDIA

NOTES

**Structure**

5.0 Introduction
5.1 Unit Objectives
5.2 Impact of Colonial Rule: Society, Economy and Polity
  5.2.1 Hopkinson's Proposals
  5.2.2 Declaration of Scheduled Districts
  5.2.3 Direct Administration
  5.2.4 Division of Frontier in Three Tracts
  5.2.5 Government of India Act, 1919
  5.2.6 Government of India Act, 1935
  5.2.7 Regulation Act of 1945
5.3 Agrarian Revolts
  5.3.1 Phulaguri Dhewa
  5.3.2 Munda Rebellion (1899-1900)
  5.3.3 Jaintia and Garo Rebellion (1860-1870s)
5.4 Freedom Struggle in North East India: Non-Cooperation Movement, Civil Disobedience, Quit India and India's Independence
5.5 Summary
5.6 Key Terms
5.7 Answers to 'Check Your Progress'
5.8 Questions and Exercises
5.9 Further Reading

## 5.0 INTRODUCTION

A new era started in the history of North East India with the signing of the Treaty of Yandabo in 1826, which saw the expansion of the British rule over this part of the country. With the establishment and gradual expansion of the 'Raj', the era of modern politics also began in this region. After the assumption of political power, the task before the British was to consolidate their position, politically as well as economically, in this area. In this imperial desire they faced the problem of the hill tribes of Assam and the neighbouring hills, including the areas of modern Arunachal Pradesh. We have earlier seen that the British government aptly realized the political necessity and the economic potentiality of these frontier areas, especially the hilly tract inhabited by the tribal of present-day Arunachal Pradesh and initiated a number of measures to safeguard colonial interest. Direct military action was not feasible and, therefore, the British came forward to enter into peace agreements with various tribes of these frontiers. At the same time, taking advantage of the basic weakness of these tribes – the divided house of the tribes as a whole – the colonial rulers called upon these tribes to forego their rights over the foothills and the adjoining plain lands for imperial interests. On the whole, however, the British followed a policy of watch and ward, limited or no direct interference and military intervention only when unavoidable.

Hence, as the beginning of the administrative measures, the Frontier Tracts Regulation was passed in 1880. It was mainly due to the unique geo-political conditions as well as the nature of the relationship between tribes and the British. These areas, at that time were not under direct British administration and the terrains were also not

NOTES

suitable for the same. The provisions were made applicable not only to the areas of Arunachal Pradesh but also to the other areas of the region. The new regulation provided that the operation of all unsuitable laws might be barred in the hill districts, in the north Cachar subdivision, the Mikir hills tract in Nowgong and the Dibrugarh frontier tract in Lakhimpur. By orders issued under this regulation, the tracts in question were excluded from the operation of the enactments relating to criminal procedure, (the Civil Procedure Code was never in force in any of the hill districts), stamps, court-fees, registration and transfer of property. A simpler system of administering justice in civil and criminal matters was prescribed by rules framed under the Scheduled Districts Act. In these tracts, the head of the local government was to be the chief appellate authority in civil and criminal matters, and the high court would have no jurisdiction except in criminal cases against European British subjects. The deputy commissioner would exercise the combined powers of judge and district magistrate, and the assistant and the extra-assistant commissioners, the powers of magistrates and munsifs. Petty cases, both civil and criminal, were to be dealt with by village tribunals, presided over by village headmen elected by the people themselves, whose procedure was to be free from all legal technicalities. The Eastern *Dwars* in Goalpara were to be administered in civil matters in accordance with the rules under the Scheduled Districts Act, in lieu of the Civil Procedure Code which had not been in force there.

The Government of India Act, 1919, was an Act of the Parliament of the United Kingdom. It was passed to expand participation of Indians in the Government of India. The Act embodied the reforms recommended in the report of the Secretary of State for India, Edwin Montagu, and the Viceroy, Lord Chelmsford. The Act covered ten years, from 1919 to 1929.The Act provided a dual form of government (a 'dyarchy') for the major provinces.

The Government of India Act, 1935 was originally passed in August 1935, and is said to have been the longest (British) Act of Parliament ever enacted by that time. The Act of 1935 provided for the federal structure, distribution of powers, provincial autonomy, responsible form of government, bicameral legislature, and emergency power of Governor General.

The North East Frontier Agency (NEFA) (formerly the North East Frontier Tracts) was one of the political divisions in British India and later the Republic of India till 1972, when it became the Union Territory of Arunachal Pradesh. Its administrative headquarters was Shillong (till 1974, when it was transferred to Itanagar).

In 1914, some tribal-majority areas were separated from the erstwhile Darrang and Lakhimpur districts of Assam province of British India to form the North East Frontier Tracts (NEFT). The NEFT was initially divided into two sections: the central and eastern section (comprising the erstwhile Dibrugarh Frontier Tract, created in 1882, and some more areas in south) and the western section. Each section was placed under a political officer. After the Independence of India in 1947, NEFT became a part of Assam state. In this unit, you will study about the impact of colonial rule in North East India and the contribution of the region in the Indian freedom struggle movement.

## 5.1 UNIT OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- Explain the few basic policies followed by the British towards the North East Frontier Tract
- Assess the significance of the Phulaguri movement in Assam
- Discuss the impact of the freedom struggle movement in North East India

## 5.2 IMPACT OF COLONIAL RULE: SOCIETY, ECONOMY AND POLITY

NOTES

We have seen that the British government followed a few basic policies towards the North East Frontier Tract. The first and foremost policy of the British was to contain the frontier tribes by continuing with Ahom period's provisions with certain changes in the right to collect *posa*. Cash payment, instead of kind, was started.

Second, the East India Company government tried entering into friendly relations with these tribes through political negotiations and treaties. However, any violation of these treaties was viewed very seriously by the government and force was often applied against such acts.

Third, the government resorted to the 'blockade system', by which the tribes were debarred from coming down to the plains to buy their necessary commodities from the markets of adjoining areas. In case of a serious offence like murder or kidnapping of British subjects, a demand of surrender of the culprits to the British authority was imposed through the native political agent for the trial of the offender. Sometimes, expeditions were dispatched to arrest the offenders, or in the case of kidnapping, to secure the release of the captives. Evidences are not lacking in which the whole tribe or the village of the offender, as a whole, was punished severely, probably to impress upon the whole tribe or the village dire consequences of the acts of a few guilty persons. Though various frontier tribes tried to challenge the authority off and on, the British government over shadowed them with their superior force.

Fourth, the British government established a few markets and organized fairs in the foothill areas, such as Sadiya, Udalguri and Doimara. However, the main motive behind these trade fairs was the promotion and popularization of European goods. Though the British wanted to open stores to provide the necessities to the tribal, this was not successful.

Fifth, the British followed a trade policy that led to the destruction of the tribal cottage industry and crafts. The import of salt, influx of the mill-made goods and yam, and other machine-made goods destroyed the local productions and slowly a tendency developed to purchase manufactured goods and tools from the plains.

Sixth, the British stressed on consolidation but no extension of their rule to the hills. They tried to consolidate the portion of the frontier territory already under their possession and to secure its good administration. For this purpose, the government appointed the *kotokis* mainly to deal with the Nyishis, Adis, Akas, and other hill tribes in the frontiers. In fact, these *kotokis* were like political officers and at the same time worked like ambassadors. The duties of the *kotokis*, as told by H. S. Bivar, were to proceed to the hills on any occasion when required to do so in connection with the tribes and to render aid in furnishing information on the tribes and in interpreting any matter as also to attend upon the deputy commissioner when he proceeded to the country bordering the hills of the tribes to which they were attached.

In addition, the British government established a network of the intelligence service, just after the Anglo-Burmese War of 1824–26, to keep strict vigilance on the movement and communication of the tribes beyond the frontier, particularly those situated near the Burmese frontier and gaining through them information of all movements in upper Burma. As per the British records, by the middle of the nineteenth century there was one Jamadar, a Shan interpreter and seven Harkars in Sadiya Agency. Sadiya Agency continued to

NOTES

function under the district officer of Dibrugarh. However, after the information of the combined Mishmi and Singpho rebellion proved to be a rumour in 1866, the intelligence service was subordinated to the police establishment of Sadiya. It is also known that after the Bhutia's raid of 1849, one Jamadar and ten Chowkidars were appointed to watch the Darrang frontier. Thus, at certain points, which were crossroads of the tribal movement, some intelligence was set-up.

### 5.2.1 Hopkinson's Proposals

In 1862, Colonel Henry Hopkinson, the Commissioner of Assam, had proposed to the Government of Bengal the ways and means to be adopted for the administration of the North East Frontier Tract as he believed that the policy of conciliation with the hill people had failed. He wrote that, 'in restraining the savage tribes, which infest our frontier, reliance cannot be placed in one course of policy, but there must be a ready adaptation of expedients to suit every varying circumstances; sometimes we must apply coercion, pure and simple, sometimes blockade; very often a judicious system of subsidizing will keep the tribes quiet for long while, but still the surest foundation on which to build our control over them will be their fear of us.' He further argued that the payment of subsidies alone was not sufficient unless it was backed by military power. Hence, he urged upon the government the need for military preparedness to meet any tribal outrage. He seems to have been more in favour of coercion than of conciliation. He held, 'I believe that in our ability to coerce them (that is, the hillmen) where conciliation fails, and in their absolute conviction that we can coerce them if they go too far… lies the most durable guarantee for their good behavior.' He also wanted that the British 'must cease to regard them (that is, the hillmen) as aliens, or even as enemies, instead acknowledge them as subjects, seek to establish ourselves among them, to extent our influence over them, and bring them under our control and within the pale of civilization.' In other words, he wanted that the tribal area should be brought under British occupation.

Colonel Hopkinson was the first British officer who had the foresight to see that by the annexation of Assam, the British government accepted the obligation to undertake the administration of the North East Frontier tribes, and he criticized the government for creating a wall of separation between the hills and the plains of the province. In a nutshell, Hopkinson urged the British to undertake various developmental projects for proper administration of the area. There would be no rest for the British, he held, in Assam till arrangements for administration of the hills were provided for. Colonel Hopkinson wrote in his Report to the Government of Bengal: 'In taking possession of the country (Assam), we incurred a very distinct and positive obligation to administer it to the best of our ability, and at any expense to secure the most absolute protection to life and property by every means available to a civilized government; and it seems inconsistent with this view of our duty that we should have separated the people of the plains from the people of the hills and have made the former our subjects while we renounced the latter, and left them to prey upon those whom we had professed to take under our protection.' He further recommended the construction of roads in this inaccessible land, which he held 'would afford facilities for intercourse between the external world and the world of the tribes', and urged the government to help and aid the missionaries in their work among these hill tribes. This was not accepted by the British government. He also recommended the reorganization of the police force of Assam and the withdrawal of the military and paramilitary forces from the border, which was, however, accepted by the authorities. At the same time, he urged the government to raise a local force under the orders of the chief civil authority for the defence of Assam frontier, because

the management of the frontier tribes was a responsibility of that authority. This view seems to have been accepted by the Government of Bengal which requested the supreme government's sanction of the proposal to raise a force like that of Punjab.

In fact, the Government of India was convinced of the necessity of reorganization of the military force as suggested by Hopkinson, and accordingly, two battalions of military police were recruited, who were posted along the Inner Line. At the same time, heavy concentration was made at the district headquarters for immediate march of the army in any emergency.

It has been suggested by some historians, and with some justification, that the beginning of the political evolution of Arunachal Pradesh can be traced to the Inner Line Regulation of 1873, which was formulated to bring 'under more stringent control the commercial relations of the British subjects with the Frontier Tribes.' It is also worth mentioning that the experience of the colonial rulers with the tribal in India had not been a pleasant one and they had faced trouble in different parts of the country while dealing with them. This was evident through the Mutiny of Singbhum in 1831, Khond Uprising in 1846 and Santhal Rebellion in 1885. Generally, therefore, the British declared these areas as Non-Regulation Tracts to be administered by the Deputy Commissioner according to the needs of the time.

### 5.2.2 Declaration of Scheduled Districts

The constitutional and administrative growth of Arunachal Pradesh had its genesis in the Scheduled Districts Act of 1874, by which the districts of Kamrup, Darrang, Nowgong, Sibsagar, Lakhimpur, Garo, Khasi and Jayantia Hills, Naga Hills and Cachar were declared 'scheduled districts' on 1 January 1875. Goalpara and Sylhet were also made almost as scheduled districts. This arrangement had a basic aim behind it – to provide a simpler form of administration in the province of Assam. Special rules for the administration of justice, in civil as well as criminal matters, were provided by this Act.

The problem of tribal administration caught the attention of the British Government of India after their occupation of Assam. Therefore, the government wanted to provide a simple form of administration in those areas where the local tribal customs and conventions could be accommodated for settling various tribal disputes; thus, the idea of the scheduled districts came into being. By this Act, the chief commissioner of Assam was authorized to extend the Act to the frontier tracts for peace and governance, with the previous sanction of the Governor General in Council. He could also extend to these areas any Act, or part thereof, passed by the legislators of any provincial or of the central government by a notification in the local gazette. Under Section 2 of the mentioned Act, the chief commissioner had the power to propose to the Governor General in Council, the draft of any regulation for peace and the good government of the frontier tracts, which when approved by the Governor General in Council, had the force of law after notification in the local gazette. The same Act authorized the chief commissioner, under Section 6, Clause C, to define by what authority and jurisdiction, powers and duties incidental to the operation of any enactment, for the time being in force in the Frontier, would be exercised and performed.

Meanwhile, the Inner Line Regulation had been passed in 1873, and the deputy commissioners were asked by the chief secretary to propose the Inner Line of their respective districts. The Deputy Commissioner of Lakhimpur, Colonel Clarke, while submitting his proposal with respect to his district, stated that the frontier of his district was inhabited by tribesmen whom it would be inadvisable to administer as people in

NOTES

other parts of the district. Therefore, the chief commissioner of Assam wrote to the Government of India for drafting a set of rules for the administration of justice in the frontier areas, which was approved by the authorities. This provided the basis of administration of justice in this area, the aim of which was to provide an outline pattern of rules, applicable ordinarily to all tracts of the frontier districts, allowing exemption to semi-barbarous or barbarous people over whom British control had been extended.

The passing of two Acts – the Scheduled District Act XIV of 1874 and the Laws Local Extent Act XV of 1874 – made it clear how and in what parts of British India different laws passed by the government were to operate. The Laws Local Extent Act XV specified the laws which were in force in India generally, except in certain backward tracts, described as 'Scheduled Districts'. The Scheduled Districts Act, XIV of 1874 authorized the government to declare by notification in the gazette what laws were in force in such districts, and to extend to them any enactments in force elsewhere which might seem desirable to bring into operation.

### 5.2.3 Direct Administration

The next stage of administrative growth can be noticed in the Assam Frontier Tract Regulation (Regulation 2), 1880. The Act provided for the removal of certain frontier tracts in Assam inhabited or frequented by 'barbarous or semi-civilized' tribal from the operation of enactments in force therein. As a result, the first frontier tract called Dibrugarh Frontier Tract came into being in November 1882, under the authority of the deputy commissioner of Lakhimpur. In the same year, the government realized the need of a local official to function among the frontier tribes. By the advice of Sir Charles Elliot, a separate office of assistant political officer was established at Sadiya in 1882, and J F. Needham, a British official, originally belonging to the Bengal police, was appointed as the first political officer, to regulate the political relation of the British with the Adis, Mishmi and the Singpho-Khampti tribes of the frontier tract. Till 1882, as we know, the conduct of relations with the frontier tribes was left with *kotokis*, on whom the British officials in general put little reliance and to whom they used to pay some attention. But now onwards, the British officials started touring various parts of the frontier area and prepared notes and reports which were given due weightage by the British government.

Needham was succeeded by Noel Williamson in 1906, who acted with indefatigable energy, courage and enthusiasm in putting the frontier service on a sound basis, till his murder in Abor hills in 1911. Williamson toured various parts of the Adi and Mishmi Hills and tried to cultivate good and personal relations with the people of different tribes. Like Williamson, the Lieutenant Governor of the new province of Eastern Bengal and Assam, Sir Lancelot Hare was also a practical man and supported the ideas of Williamson with regard to the frontier policy. He had his own idea of adopting a policy of direct and immediate British administration of these frontier tracts, which, however, was turned down by the Government of India. Though the government agreed that the British territory should be protected at any cost, it forbade any expeditions to be sent beyond the Inner Line.

As early as the beginning of the twentieth century, that is, in 1908–11, the Chinese movement across the boundary, particularly in the Aka Hills, the Abor Hills and the Mishmi Hills became a matter of concern which forced the government to propose to the Secretary of State for India to secure, as soon as possible, a sound strategic boundary between India and Tibet. At that time, the local government proposed that in future their (British) policy towards the frontier tribes should be one of loose political control, having

minimum interference and at the same time the government should assure the security and protection of tribes from unprovoked aggression from outside, so that they would be prevented from violating either the administrative border or the Chinese territory. Though, as a rule, the Government of India accepted the recommendations of the local government in the real sense of the term it did not permit the extension of the administrative boundary beyond the existing line. The Government of India also sanctioned various expeditions to tour the Mishmis, Miri, Adi and Nyishi Hills to know more about the land and the people for effective administrative control. It also addressed a dispatch to the Secretary of State for India, on the frontier issue, recommending the lines of action proposed by the Governor of East Bengal and Assam, C A. Bell, and the General Staff of Army. The Secretary of State, however, did not take any interest for pushing the British territory into the hills. The Government of India protested as they contemplated the idea to exercise loose political control over the tribes, which could not be done beyond the Inner Line boundary. The Secretary of State now agreed to the proposals and thus the hill tracts of North Eastern Frontier areas were subsequently brought under direct administration.

The direct administration of this area, however, remained on paper and practically no arrangement was made for proper and direct administration. The political officer, responsible for direct administration, continued to be under the local administration and was instructed to exercise 'loose political control' over the tribes. It seems that the Government of India was influenced by the 'buffer' concept of Sir Henry McMahon and his advice, not to offend the Tibetan vested interests in the tribal tracts south to the McMahon Line.

### 5.2.4 Division of Frontier in Three Tracts

In 1912, the administrative divisions were recognized in Assam and a new system of administration on the frontier was introduced. Two new charges, afterwards known as the Sadiya and Balipara frontier tracts, were created and placed under the control of political officers. These charges consisted partly of the settled plains of the Lakhimpur and Darrang districts, in which the administration was practically the same as that existing in those districts, and partly of areas beyond the Inner Line inhabited by the border tribes, over whom only loose political control was exercised. The Sadiya Frontier tract extended in the North East to the confines of Tibet and touched Burma on the south-east and south, whereas Balipara tract included the important trade route from Udalguri into Tibet, which is the shortest way from India to Lhasa. As a result of this territorial reorganization, the relations between the hillmen and the people inhabiting the plains were considered to have greatly improved.

The Naga Hills, the Lushai Hills, the Garo Hills, the Khasi and Jaintia Hills, and the North Cachar and Mikir Hills formed five ordinary hill districts of the state, of which the north-eastern border areas of Assam were put directly under the Government of India to be administered by the Governor of Assam. This north-eastern frontier land, known as the North-eastern Frontier Agency (NEFA) came to be divided into six zones: the Kameng Frontier Agency, Subansiri Frontier Agency, Siang Frontier Agency, Lohit Frontier Agency, Tirap Frontier Agency and Tuensang Frontier Agency.

The Kameng Agency included the Akas, the Subansiri Agency included the Nyishis and Hill Miris, the Siang Agency included the Adis, the Lohit Agency included the Mishmis and Khamptis, the Tirap Agency included the Singphos, and the Tuensang Agency included some of the Naga clans.

NOTES

The Anglo-Abor War of 1911–12, was a turning point in the administrative history of Arunachal Pradesh. After the war, Major General Bower, who was incharge of the famous Abor expedition, in his letter on 16 January 1912, recommended that the frontier should be divided into three sections as follows:

1. The central section would comprise all the Abors and extend westward to the eastern watershed of the Subansiri but exclusive of that watershed under two political officers. It has to be kept in mind that the Abors have always been the most troublesome tribe on this frontier, and past experience has proved the impossibility of exercising effective control over them from a post in the plains.
2. The eastern section would include all the Mishmis and Khamptis, and should be in charge of an assistant political officer with headquarters at Sadiya.
3. The western section would include the eastern watershed of the Subansiri and extend westward to the borders of Bhutan. This section should be under the control of an assistant political officer with headquarters at some convenient centre to be selected later.

His proposal was accepted by the higher authorities with certain modifications. The Government of India, Foreign and Political Department Notification of 1914, promulgated that the Assam Frontier Tracts Regulation would extend to the hills inhabited or frequented by the Adis, Miris, Mishmis, Singphos, Nagas, Khamptis, Bhutias, Akas and Nyishis, and these hill areas were separated from the then Darrang and Lakhimpur districts of Assam.

Later it was decided that both geographically and ethnically the main channel of the Subansiri was a better dividing line between the central and western sections than the Subansiri–Siyom divide. But, in spite of this decision, some confusion seems to have remained even afterwards regarding the boundary between the central and western sections, since as late as 1921 the Indian general staff referred to the Subansiri–Siyom divide as the boundary. While supporting the proposals of Bower, the local government recommended that the political officer on this frontier should work directly under the chief commissioner of Assam; it should be inadvisable that they should be controlled either by the deputy commissioner, Lakhimpur, or by the commissioner of the Assam valley districts.

In July 1912, the Chief Commissioner of Assam proposed that the entire tribal area east of the Subansiri–Siyom divide should be in the charge of Dundas, who should have the status of a deputy commissioner and work under the chief commissioner. Dundas would require four assistants to begin with: one for the Lohit Valley; the second for the Bebejiya and Chulikatta Mishmis; the third for the Abor Hills; and the fourth for assisting the political officer at the headquarters in the administration of the plains below the foothills. It was believed that these proposals were within moderate limits and that before long the political officer would require further assistance. For the area west of the Subansiri–Siyom divide, the chief commissioner recommended Captain G. A. Nevill as the political officer who would work directly under the chief commissioner.

In September 1914, the southern boundaries of the eastern, central and western sections were notified to separate them clearly from the adjoining plains districts of Darrang and Lakhimpur. In 1919, the eastern and central sections were officially renamed as the Sadiya Frontier Tract, and the western section as the Balipara Frontier Tract.

Thus, the North East Frontier Tract came into existence, composed of the following three administrative units, as recommended by Bower: (i) The central and eastern section (ii) the Lakhimpur Frontier Tract (iii) The western section. The boundary of the central and eastern section ran along the then existing Dibrugarh Frontier Tract, stretching a little further south of it and included lands inhabited entirely by the Miris including five small villages inhabited by the Assamese people. The boundary of the Lakhimpur Frontier Tract was so defined as to leave it within the regular jurisdiction of the deputy commissioner of Lakhimpur. The boundary of the western section of the North East Frontier Tract ran from the Subansiri river, which was the boundary between the central and eastern and western sections.

To extend British authority over the three frontier tracts, a political officer was appointed in each of these tracts. W C M. Dundas of Bengal police was appointed as political officer of the central and eastern section, and G A. Neville of Bengal police was appointed as the political officer of the western section, while the Lakhimpur Frontier Tract was left in the charge of the deputy commissioner of Lakhimpur. With the appointment of three political officers in these tracts, loose political control was gradually established over these areas. The political officers yielded a lot of influence regarding the administrative problems of the hill tracts. They had the powers to expel anybody from their respective jurisdiction, if the presence of such a person was prejudicial for the security and peace of the area. These political officers were assisted in their work by the political Jamadars, Harkars and *kotokis*. The political officers were to hold an 'Annual Durbar' where they would present *posa* to the tribes, listen to their grievances and explain to them the policy of the government.

The policy of non-interference introduced by the British in the nineteenth century lasted till 1911. But thereafter British tribal policy on this frontier underwent a fundamental change to cope with the Chinese threat from the north. The old policy was replaced by a policy of loose political control, and a very timely opportunity to introduce the new policy was provided by the murder of Williamson.

## 5.2.5 Government of India Act, 1919

With the passing of the Government of India Act of 1919, there were some changes in the nomenclature of the sections of the North East Frontier Tract. The Act of 1919 authorized the Governor General in Council under Section 52(A) of the Act to declare any territory in British India to be a 'Backward Area.' Accordingly, in 1921, all the tribal areas in Assam were declared as backward areas. This was followed by an Instrument of Instructions to the Governors of these provinces which laid down that he was responsible for carrying out measures for the social welfare of the tribal areas under his exclusive charge. In actual practice, this Instrument of Instructions implied that the rules framed by the Government of India as well as by the Government of Assam were not applicable to the tribal areas. Thus, while in theory the North East Frontier Tract was a part of the province of Assam, it was denied actual participation in the political process.

Now onwards, the central and eastern sections were to be known as the Sadiya Frontier Tract, and the western section as the Balipara Frontier Tract. However, there was no change in the name of Lakhimpur Frontier Tract. This position continued upto 1937, during which certain areas were either included or excluded in the so called North East Frontier Tract. By the Government of India Act 1919, the North East Frontier Tract was politically made a part of the province of Assam, but the Government of Assam

NOTES

denied direct participation in the administration of the area. In the real sense, the tracts continued to be governed according to the Assam Frontier Tracts Regulation of 1880 and 1884 up to 31 March 1937.

Moreover, after the First World War, a spirit of humanism spread in the world. People began to talk of human rights and protest against exploitation. The concept of 'mandate' was developed for protecting the interest of the underdeveloped peoples under the supervision of the League of Nations. As a part of this worldwide change of outlook, the protection of tribal rights now caught the attention of the philanthropic people. In India, British administrators like J.P. Mill and J.H. Hutton who served in the hills in the North East were struck by the exploitation of the simple tribal people by adventurers and businessmen which, if not actively patronized, was at least tolerated by the government. Essays appeared in the journals to enlist popular support for stopping such practices towards the tribal people. The government now adopted a more or less benevolent attitude towards the tribal people. But in an atmosphere of political tension between the rulers and the politically conscious sections of the Indian nation, the government solicitude for tribal welfare was utilized more for segregation of the tribal folk from the rest of the Indian community than for actual amelioration of their condition.

This policy of segregation was given shape for the first time in the Reform of 1919 although its beginnings may be traced back to the late nineteenth century. It has already been observed that the Scheduled Districts Act was passed in 1874 to provide for the administration of the tribal areas in a rough and ready manner and the Inner Line Regulation of 1873 began to be applied to segregate tribal areas of the North East Frontier from 1875 onwards. When Edwin Montagu, in concert with Lord Chelmsford, under the direction of the House of Commons, prepared their report on constitutional reforms in India, they recommended measures to be taken for reconstruction of the Indian Government, but the tribal issue was not given any new complexion. While recommending the increasing association of Indians in every branch of administration and 'the gradual development of self-governing institutions with a view to progressive realization of responsible government in India as an integral part of the British Empire', they did not deem it proper to either encourage the tribal people to participate in their own administration or to associate the Indian minister and legislators with the administration of the tribal hills of the frontiers.

The Mont-Ford scheme, which involved the division of functions of the provincial government between elected Indian ministers and appointed executive councilors, proposed to keep the tribal areas separate from the regularly administered territory, on grounds that in those areas 'there was no material on which to found political institutions.' It was held that the tracts mentioned in the schedules and appendices to the Scheduled Districts Act, 1874, with 'certain exceptions and possibly certain additions, should be reserved for further consideration'. It was also suggested that the typically backward tracts (frontiers) should be excluded from the jurisdiction of the reformed provincial governments and administered by the head of the province. In these areas, therefore, the old system was to continue, and the tribes were to be kept apart – ostensibly for their own welfare – from the people of the plains.

The reaction of the Government of India to the recommendations of the joint report was embodied in the Ninth Dispatch on the Constitutional Reforms. The Government of India was anxious to limit exclusion as much as possible both in its local extent and in its degree. With this end in view, it estimated the degree of backwardness of each of the tracts and recommended varying degrees of exclusion to conform to such estimates. The recommendation that the backward tracts should be directly administered

by the Governors was not finally carried out, except in the Shan States of Burma. For Assam, the reserved half of the government was given full discretion to administer the tracts as per enactments under the Government of India Act, 1919.

## 5.2.6 Government of India Act, 1935

NOTES

Meanwhile, the government has pursued a policy of bringing the frontier territory under its political influence. The tour reports of the political officers showed the popularity of the government in the tribal hills. By the time the Statutory Commission arrived, the officers serving in the frontiers and adjacent tribal hills, like the Lushai and Naga Hills, had arrived at the conclusion that the British would withdraw some day from India and Burma, but if they could create a separate tribal belt along the North East Frontier they might continue to possess a foothold on the Indian territory.

In view of this trend of opinion in official circles, the Simon Commission, which was appointed to report on further progress on constitutional reforms in India, did not find it possible to recommend the incorporation of the hill tracts of the North East Frontier for administrative purposes in the province of Assam. It contains that the backward tracts of Assam are of great importance and extent, that nowhere in India is the contrast between the life and outlook of these hillmen and the total distinct civilization of the plains manifest more. The commission recommended that the British Parliament should avow its special obligation for the tribal folk, educate them to stand on their own feet, give them protection against exploitation, and prevent their raids on the plains. The Simon Commission appointed in 1928 made another recommendation regarding the administration of the tribal areas or the hill areas under tribal settlement. It suggested that the tribal areas should be designated as 'excluded' and 'partially excluded' areas in consonance with respective stage of development in the stage of literacy and political consciousness. For administration of the tribal area, excluded from the regular administered districts of the province, the Governor General in Council should use the agency of the Governor.

The Commission expected that for developing the tribal areas and for educating the tribal people, huge money would be required. The money would not be forthcoming from the revenue of a poor state like Assam. Further, the Commission apprehended that the representatives of the provincial legislature would not vote for the appropriation of money for development purposes in the hill tracts since that would not immediately benefit the constituencies of the members who would vote. Though in the prevailing atmosphere of distrust and animosity, the British statesmen and administrators alike wanted to sympathize with the tribal folk and alienate them from the Indian people, the tribal people were a part of the myriad Indian population.

But in spite of the recommendations of the Simon Commission, the British Prime Minister denied any intention of the British Parliament to control any territory of British India. The hopes of the British officers in the tribal areas were thus destroyed. The Government of India now asked for reconsideration of the issue of frontier administration by the Government of Assam since the previous scheme of retention of tribal territory under the British Parliament could not be worked upon after declaration of the British Prime Minister. The Government of Assam, nevertheless, proposed the perpetuation of the separation of the tribal tracts of the frontiers from the regularly administered areas in the province of Assam. It wrote, 'Its (tribal tracts) progressive absorption into the province of Assam in the past was forced upon the government by the unavoidable necessity of securing from the marauding and revengeful raids of its denizens, the safety of the plain

districts for which the government had made itself responsible…what was needed for the future is a policy of development and unification on lines suited to the genius of the hill people, an object in itself of formidable magnitude.'

**NOTES**

The formulation of such a policy could no longer be divorced from political factors. The Government of Assam pointed out that there had already developed in the hills an anti-Indian feeling, probably due to a fear of economic exploitation. It was even apprehensive that a change in policy with regard to the frontiers might provoke rebellion. Therefore, it recommended that in developing a scheme of administration for the hill tribes 'the essence of the system in the administration of the definitely excluded areas would be the personal rule of the Governor exercised through selected officers'. In course of time, it suggested that an indigenous staff of officers of all ranks might be provided for the hill districts and frontiers.

The Government of India Act of 1935, which was passed after taking into consideration Simon Commission's recommendations as well as the points of view of the provincial governments concerned with tribal areas, provided in Sections 91 and 92 that his Majesty by an order in council might declare some territory in India as 'Excluded Areas' or 'Partially Excluded Areas' and empower the Governor of a province to administer that area under the authority of the Governor General. As such, the Government of Assam was vested with wide discretion and authority in matters of administration in these areas. The Governor was given discretion to extend Acts or parts thereof passed by any provincial legislature or the federal legislature to the excluded areas which otherwise would not apply there. Moreover, the Governor was given the power to prepare and approve drafts of regulations for the peace and good government of the excluded areas with the previous sanction of the Governor General in Council. No Act of the federal and provincial legislatures would be applicable to these areas without the prior sanction of the Governor of Assam. However, in 1937, a new development took place when J.P. Mills was appointed as the Secretary for tribal affairs to the Government of Assam. According to the Constitution Act of 1935, it was decided without any difficulty that Balipara Frontier Tract should be an 'Excluded Area'. It accordingly was entered as such in the Government of India (Excluded and Partially Excluded Areas) Order, 1936, and came under the direct administration of the Governor from 1 April 1937.

In 1938, the formation of a 'Control Area' to the north of Pasighat was sanctioned by the Government of India. The purpose of this was to take measures for the abolition of slavery in unadministered areas (this control area was subsequently extended in 1941). In the same year, Godfrey, the political officer, reported about the annual incursion by Tibetan officials into the Memba and Abor villages south of the McMahon Line and realization of taxes from the tribesmen who were claimed to be Tibetan subjects. As a result, Godfrey, the political officer of Sadiya, along with Williams, the assistant political officer at Pasighat, with an escort of forty-five Assam Rifles led an expedition into the south of the McMahon Line in February – March 1939, with a view to ascertaining the position as regards Tibetan infiltration south of the McMahon Line. It was revealed from this expedition that Tibetan influence extended some 70 miles south of the McMahon Line and that the villages of Shimong and Karko had been paying tribute to Tibet. Accordingly, recommendations were made to the establishment of outposts at Karko and Riga in March 1941. In 1940, Godfrey made an extensive tour up the Siyom Valley through the unadministered Galong country for setting a serious land dispute between the Minyong and Galong Abors. A boundary was fixed and peace restored. The Government of India extended the control area of the political officer, Sadiya Frontier

Tract, up to the McMahon Line in the Siang Valley on 20 May 1941, in order to check the Tibetan influence. They also agreed that if these incursions from the north of the McMahon Line did not cease, it might be necessary at some further date to establish one or more additional outposts further up the valley.

NOTES

Also, the Government of India sanctioned the extension of the control area of the political officer, Sadiya Frontier Tract, upto the McMahon Line in the Siang valley, in the year 1941. In 1943, a new administrative tract, called the Tirap Frontier Tract was created by taking certain portions of Lakhimpur Frontier Tract and Sadiya Frontier Tract. The new administrative division was placed under a separate political officer with its headquarters at Margherita. In 1943, N K. Rustomji was appointed as an Advisor to the Governor of Assam to look after the administration of the North East Frontier Tracts including the Naga Hills, the Lushai Hill districts and the North Hill Subdivision of the Cachar district. The appointment of the Advisor is said to have set the pattern for the administration of the North East Frontier Agency area later.

## 5.2.7 Regulation Act of 1945

The year 1945 saw an important administrative development in the North East Frontier Tract. A regulation, known as Assam Frontier (Administration of Justice) Regulation, 1945 (Regulation I of 1945) was introduced and its main objective was to ensure that a vast majority of disputes, both civil and criminal, were decided in accordance with the prevailing traditional codes of the tribal. It was recognized that modern laws that prevailed elsewhere in the country were unsuitable for the tribal areas also. Thus, the Act of 1945 recognized the authority of the age-old village councils and also the authority of the village headmen. The village authorities were also given the duty of maintaining peace and law and order in their respective areas.

In 1946, the administrative divisions of the frontier tract were divided to make their working more viable and efficient. As a result, the Balipara Frontier Tract was divided into the Sela Sub-Agency and the Subansiri Area. Similarly, in July 1948, Sadiya Frontier Tract was divided into two separate units, namely, the Abor Hill District and the Mishmi Hill District, each with its own political officers at Pasighat and Tezu respectively. However, the Sela Sub-Agency and the Subansiri area, with their headquarters at Charduar and North Lakhimpur, respectively, remained under the jurisdiction of the political officer at Balipara.

When India became Independent in 1947, the North East Frontier Tract consisted of Balipara Frontier Tract, Sadiya Frontier Tract, Tirap Frontier Tract and the Naga Tribal Area, which lay beyond the regular administrative jurisdiction of the Assam government. Immediately after the transfer of power, the Governor of Assam was divested of his discretionary powers with respect to the North East Frontier Tract. The Constituent Assembly of India appointed a sub-committee headed by Gopinath Bardoloi to recommend the future pattern of administration of the hill areas of Assam and the frontier tracts. The committee provided for the management of tribal and intra-tribal matters by the people themselves, but general administration, law and order were kept under the government of Assam. It was also recommended that the tribes of the frontier should continue to be kept under their respective political officers, until they (tribal) were developed enough to control their own affairs. As per the recommendations of the Bardoloi Committee, the administration was to be carried out by the Assam government.

**Check Your Progress**

1. What was the underlying motive of the British for organizing trade fairs?
2. State the main aim of the Scheduled Districts Act, 1874.
3. Mention the three administrative units in which the North East Frontier Tract has been divided.
4. What was the main objective of the Assam Frontier (Administration of Justice) Regulation, 1945?

NOTES

## 5.3 AGRARIAN REVOLTS

From 1763 to 1856 in India, against the situations existing in various regions of India due to the Company rule, over forty major rebellions took place and minor rebellions that took place can be counted by the hundreds. Nevertheless, the nature of these rebellions was not national but local, as were the effect that they had. Since the uprisings had their specific local issues and purposes they remained isolated from uprisings in different regions.

### 5.3.1 Phulaguri Dhewa

The British were out to get all the money and material that they could from their Indian colony and with this in mind in Assam, they began their rule with an extremely rigorous policy of taxation. They had implemented land revenue and various other taxes that affected every aspect of a person's daily life: tax on tree cutting and cutting of grass in jungles, tax on cattle grazing. They did not overlook any article that was of regular use. Water, jungle wood, bamboo, opium, everything came under their greedy policies. The diverse and high taxations made a certain restlessness seep into the population.

The Nowgaon district residents got to know that there was to be taxation on betel nut and this caused tension among them. On 17 September 1861, in the village of Phulaguri, about 1000 people went to submit a petition to the district commissioner. The district commissioner did not hear them out; instead he had them detained for a day and imposed a fine on them. A decision was taken by the peasants that the betel tax was not to be paid. For a more widespread mobilization of the sentiment, a Raaiz-Mel (Mass Meetings) of five days was called starting from 15 October. The meeting received huge participation which troubled the administration and on the fourth day of the meeting it sent J.B. Singer who was a senior officer to keep the situation under control. J.B. Singer employed firing and lathi charge which aggravated the crowd and Lieutenant Singer was attacked and killed.

This was the first time that the British administration had received such a shock in Assam. It had put to death thirty-nine peasants and a number of the leaders were hanged. The Phulaguri Movement became an inspiration for peasants to keep rising against the British administration.

### 5.3.2 Munda Rebellion (1899-1900)

The Munda Rebellion is possibly the most prominent and important uprisings to have occurred post 1857. Unlike other tribes, traditionally the Mundas had specific rights that they enjoyed for being the forest's original clearers. Even before the British had arrived in India, money lenders and merchants had been infringing on their rights.

The British got with them the system of traders and contractors and this quickly put an end to the old system. Indentured labourers were required by the contractors. The Munda Rebellion arose as a result of the oppression of the tribals by both the contractors and the British rulers. Birsa Munda was their foremost leader. He to an extent had missionary education which made him a more aware person. His fellow men were encouraged by him to carry on worshipping the sacred groves as they had always done, a great way to keep the British away from snatching the wastelands away from the tribals. This was what Birsa Munda (an Indian Tribal Freedom Fighter) was standing up for in the face of the British officers and the mahajans/moneylenders.

The missionaries, churches and police stations fell under his attack. Misfortune befell the tribals – they were defeated and in 1900, Birsa Munda who was captured passed away in prison. The sacrifice he had given bore fruit. The people got landownership rights to an extent under the Chhotanagpur Tenancy Act of 1908 along with banning tribal bonded labour.

### 5.3.3 Jaintia and Garo Rebellion (1860-1870s)

A road was planned by the British post the first Anglo-Burmese War, to connect the Brahmaputra valley with Sylhet. It was strategically required by them for movement of their troops.

The construction of the road was vehemently opposed by the Garos and the Jaintias. The Jaintias, in 1827, attempted to halt work and unrest spread even to the Garo hills. A number of Garo and Jaintia villages were burnt by the British who had been alarmed by the unrest. There was a rise in the hostilities after the introduction of income tax and house tax by the British. While the British defeated Pa Togan Sangma the Garo leader, they captured and publically hung U Kiang Nongbah, the Jaintias leader.

## 5.4 FREEDOM STRUGGLE IN NORTH EAST INDIA: NON-COOPERATION MOVEMENT, CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE, QUIT INDIA AND INDIA'S INDEPENDENCE

According to Gazetteer of India, Assam state Vol-1, 'Assam had played a significant role in the struggle for freedom though in the earlier stages, her political development was too slow due to want of intellectual contact with the rest of India as a result of backwardness in English education and lack of communication.'

When the non-cooperation call was given, Gauhati's Kaliram Barman took back his nomination paper post scrutiny and resignation was tendered by Kumudram Bora, who was in the council as an elected member.

### 1. Non-cooperation Movement

In India's political history, the year 1919 proved to be extremely eventful. On 1 August 1920, the Non-Cooperation Movement was launched by Gandhiji. This was the Khilafat movement's direct outcome. The Khilafat movement had received tremendous response from both Hindus and Muslims. Public meetings and/or hartals were observed to respond to the Khilafat movement in North Lakhimpur, Sibsagar Jorhat, Goalpara and Gauhati.

In September 1920, Gandhi did not receive support in Calcutta from Nabin Chandra Bordoloi and others. Bordoloi, on his return to Gauhati, went all out to muster support for the Non-cooperation Movement amongst the Assamese intelligentsia. In October 1920, there were discussions on the issue of non-cooperation across Assam where meetings at the district level were held by the association of Dibrugarh, Jorhat, Sibsagar and Nagaon. At the same time, N.C. Bordoloi, C.N. Sarma and Tarunram Phukan travelled through the province in a bid to mobilize public opinion. Due to the initiative of young lawyers, a decision was taken by the Gauhati Bar Association that the visit of the Viceroy would be boycotted by them. Nearly every association at the district level decided that it would boycott the elections of the council and objected to accept honourary posts, honours and titles from the British government.

**Check Your Progress**

5. Name the foremost leader of the Munda Rebellion.
6. Mention the items on which the British decided to impose tax in Assam.

NOTES

The boycott agitation of students had immediate effect. Their demand for national colleges and national schools were fulfilled. In February 1921, a national school was set-up at Bharalumukh, Gauhati within the residential premises of Rohinikumar Choudhury. In other areas in the province, similar schools got established.

The commercial world's equilibrium was disturbed by the outbreak of the First World War. Across both valleys of North East India, all necessities and foodstuff became scarce leading to economic crimes, such as burglary and theft. In his speech on 13 March 1918, Phanidhar Chaliha implored that the government take such steps that will diffuse the situation. In March 1918, the Assam valley saw the fixing of salt's retail price through a notification, followed by equal measures in hill districts and other valleys. The entrenched economic problem had fallen upon the labour population of the plains' districts. The Chargola exodus in which the labourers of the tea gardens of the Cachar district were brutally treated by the European planters was taken up by infuriated nationalist leaders. It started with an economic struggle followed by sporadic strikes leading it to mass political action which caused labourers to collectively break out from the system of bonded labour. This happened when incipient class militancy came in contact with the primitive minds that had felt the impact of Mahatma Gandhi. Darrang, Sibsagar and Dibrugarh hosted strikes. In the whole of Assam, the labourers expressed their unhappiness about the food, inadequate leave facility, extreme workload and low wages. The officials were anxious and troubled by extended labour problems.

## 2. Civil Disobedience Movement

The pace of the Civil Disobedience Movement was kept alive in Assam by Assamese Congress leaders just as it had been proposed by the All India Congress Committee (AICC). It was urged by the Congress Working Committee (CWC) that people need to be ready to calmly face every kind of indignity and hardship and maintain an unflinching devotion towards the Swaraj cause. For Purna Swaraj, people enrolled in huge number as volunteers which added strength to the National Volunteer Corps. On 30 November 1921, both Bordoloi and Phukan who were Assam Congress's foremost leaders got arrested. Next, arrests of a number of leaders followed. The worst hit as far as arrests and sentencing were concerned were Sylhet, Sibsagar, Gauhati, Golaghat and the sub-division of Tezpur. With the economic depression of the 1930s hitting a huge area, the phased Civil Disobedience Movement moved into being an anti-imperialist mass revolt.

Land revenue payments were refused to the British agents by the peasants. Government services lost many government and police official due to resignations. According to the Gazetteer Of India Assam state Vol-1, 'Saptahik Assamiya, a weekly published from Gauhati was prosecuted for defamation of British officer, for publishing a report on defilement of Sundaridiya Satra at Barpeta by Captain Calvert, in course of his repressive operation. Jails were filled with non-cooperators. The British Government exerted its full strength to repress the participants and to suppress the movement by using arms, and finally succeeded in quelling the agitation.'

After the Chouri Choura riots, Gandhiji said that the movement was to be stopped. His decision was backed by the Congress Working Committee. Then on, the Assam leaders pushed forward constructive programmes such as weaving of khaddar, and spinning of yarns.

The AICC meeting was attended by Omeo Kumar Das in 1922. Here, he talked of Assam's severe repression. Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya and Dr Rajendra Prasad visited Assam as a two-member committee to study its political milieu. They were highly

NOTES

impressed by the huge progress that had happened in various parts of Assam as far as the movement was concerned. The people had sacrificed and suffered for the movement and for freedom from the British and this impressed both of them. The contribution of Assam was outstanding. Assam's orthodox non-cooperators were firm in their pledge to implement programmes that were constructive, due to which the formation of the Swaraja party took place in 1923 within Congress.

Due to this movement in Assam, the British government granted that it would slowly decrease the consumption of opium in Assam. For Assam, this was the greatest success. The next huge success was when the Local Self-Government Act was introduced and Assam Municipal Act, 1923 was passed, providing for increased number of elected members and also elected chairman.

The Congress as well as the nation was surprised when, in 1923, an election was held to the Legislative Council. For most seats, the Swaraj party put up its candidates and got support from both the Khilafat organization and the local Congress. Unopposed, Tarun Ram Phukan got elected to the Indian Legislative Assembly. Of Assam Council's thirty-nine elective seats, just thirteen got re-elected. Since the Swaraj had not attained absolute majority it needed the Independents on its side and had to negotiate with them. So to attack the government within the Council and destroy the constitution, the new Council's meeting resolved to establish the Assam Nationalist Party in 1924 just the way it had been done in other parts of the nation. Success was gained with this infiltration policy and in April 1924, the Legislative Council of Assam managed a monthly salary cut for the ministers with salaries falling to ₹1500 from ₹3, 500. Also, on 3 March 1925, the Opium Prohibition Act was passed.

Good times did not last long and in March 1924 the coalition developed a split. The Swarajists were aware that they would not have a majority and in 1925 even though they opposed it, both the Assam Stamp (Amendment) Bill and Assam Court Fees (Amendment) Bill went through. In the end, they lost the majority and were advised in 1926 by AICC to stage walkout in all the legislative bodies.

On 28 December 1926, the 41st session of the Congress took place in Gauhati, under S.Srinivas Iyenger's presidentship. It was attended by responsive cooperators as well as the Swarajists.

Responding to the Civil Disobedience Movement call given by Assam's National Congress in December 1929, on 26 January 1930 there was spontaneous celebration of 'Independence Day'. February in the same year, saw the old leaders in the Provincial Congress resigning from their offices. The situation was diffused by Bishnuram Medhi who volunteered to take on the presidentship of the Congress in Assam. After Gandhi's Dandi March, in April 1930, Civil Disobedience Movement was joined by the Assam Congress as well.

The nation observed the national week of 'war against salt tax'. The law breaking movement spread through violating the forest laws. To quote from the Gazetteer of India, state of Assam, Volume 1 — in Assam, there was boycotting of 'foreign cloths, excisable drugs and the shops selling such goods. Picketing was resorted to. Sri Bishnuram Medhi helped by Tyagbir Hemchandra Barua, Dr Bhubaneswar Barua, Omeo Kr. Das, Sidhinath Sarma, Pitambar Goswami, Gormur Satradhikar, Lakhidhar Sharma and others conducted the movement very successfully. Srimati Chandra Prabha Saikiani and Srimati Durgaprava Barua took up picketing in front of Cotton College Gauhati. The arrest of the national leaders included a spirit of fearlessness amongst the general mass. The authority clamped section 144Cr. P.C. in Nagaon, Tezpur and Dhubri to suppress this

NOTES

popular consciousness. But people from different places participated in the protest demonstration. As a result, police attacked the crowd with lathis and batons in such places.'

The masses in rural regions provided spontaneous support to the movement. Satyagrahis in huge numbers were lathi charged, tortured, arrested and jailed. In the meantime, students started their protest against the circular sent by the government for students and guardians to provide an undertaking of staying away from politics.

The nationalists set-up public high schools such as the Barpeta Bidyapith and Kamrup Academy.

Till May 1934, the movement continued with majority of leaders such as Nobin Chandra Bordoloi being jailed for the second time.

In a bid to retard the movement, the government implemented penal action after arrest and convicted majority of Civil Disobedience Movement members. Till 31 March 1932, in Assam 885 males, fifty-four females were arrested while 672 males and forty-two females were convicted.

From 1930 to 1938, though the leaders of Congress did have differences at times, the organization grew much stronger. According to the Gazetteer of India, Assam state, Volume 1, in a bid to open up fallow wastelands in Assam for cultivation, influxes of landless peasants from East Bengal were being invited to Assam by the then Assam Ministry headed by Sir Md. Saadullah, and because flow of innumerable jobseekers continued to Assam unabated, a section of Assamese nationalists got alarmed and Ambika Giri Roy Choudhury, a staunch nationalist to the core, founded 'Assam Sangrakshini Sabha' and without seceding from the Congress, began to voice through this organization, demands 'for vindication of right of the Assamese people, the children of the soil as against aggression of outsiders.'

One section of the Assam Muslims had great sympathy for those who had come to Assam from East Bengal since most of them too were Muslims. This led to a section of Assam Muslims other than the Assamese Muslims, the old East Bengal Muslims and Hindus not participating in the 1930–32 Civil Disobedience Movement. At a later stage, the Assam Sangrakshini Sabha became Assam Jatiya Mahasabha. Assam Sangrakshini Sabha organized ryot sabhas which became the strongholds of Assam at the time of movements of the later stage which were sponsored by the National Congress.

In Assam's Civil Disobedience a major role was played by Rani Gaidinliu. She organized a revolt against the constituted authorities.

The 1933 meetings held by the Ryot Association, Assam Association and Assam Provincial Ryot Sanmilan, got conducted in different parts with the agenda being non-political in nature. Civil Disobedience Movement's political side got restarted after the declaration of the communal award. The purna swaraj ideal as a priority issue was replaced by the issue of the Harijans. After the Poona Pact, the Assam Congress leaders took up the cause of removal of untouchability and upliftment of Harijans.

In keeping with the decision made by Congress regarding reforms under the Government of India Act, 1936, the Assam Congress took part in the election of 1937, winning thirty-three seats of the 108 in the House and becoming the single largest entity in the House. Since at that time, the Congress policy was not to accept ministry, other groups got together to form a coalition ministry with Sir Saadullah as the Chief Minister. For the past fifteen years, he had been associated with administrative machinery of the

NOTES

British and also the legislature, and was the perfect candidate for the Governor of Assam. To save the humiliation of a no-confidence vote, he had to resign on 13 September 1938, as the coalition's communal policies put the ministry in an awkward position; as they completely neglected to preserve the requirements of 'the children of the soil'.

After this incident, headed by Gopinath Bordoloi, the Congress coalition ministry got formed. In the dispute of the Assam Oil Company, it addressed the issue from the perspective of labourers, which turned the industrial labourers in favour of the Congress. However, September 1939 saw the outbreak of the Second World War, and the ministry in Assam tendered its resignation as Congress did not want to participate in the October–November1939 imperialistic war. Md. Syed Saadullah on 17 November 1939, formed yet another coalition ministry, creating huge problems since he supported the British. In December 1941, the students of Cotton College put up a demonstration in protest of the circular sent out by the government to have students participate in the War Fund Exhibition held at Gauhati Judge Field. The students were lathi charged. Similar lathi charge incidents also occurred in other parts of the nation.

In protest of the atrocities on the students, Rohini Choudhury tendered her resignation. She was part of Syed Saadullah's coalition ministry. The ministry too resigned on 24 December 1941. To stand against Congress's Santi Sena organization, the Village Defence party was established by the British government. In the rural areas, the Santi Senas swallowed up the Village Defence parties.

### 3. Quit India Movement

In October 1940, the Viceroy refused to give in to the national government, which was demanded by the Congress. As a result, an individual Satyagraha campaign was started under Gandhiji's leadership. Leaders like Omeo Kumar Das, Bishnuram Medhi and Gopinath Bordoloi, took part and were later arrested. Meanwhile, British allies were heading to India. In March 1942, Sir Stafford Cripps came to India and made an offer of Dominion status to India. This was refused by the Congress and instead on 8 August 1942, the Congress adopted the 'Quit India' resolution. On 9 August 1942 the British arrested Lila Barua, Dr Harekrishna Das, Debeswar Sarma, Bishnuram Medhi, Fakaruddin Ali Ahmed and Md.Tayabullah as a preventive measure. Both Sidhinath Sarma and Gopinath Bordoloi at that time had been in Bombay regarding the All India Congress meeting but as soon as they returned to Assam, the British had them nabbed at Dhubri. Every organization subscribing to funds from the Congress, and even the Ryot-sabhas, were now declared unlawful. Despite all this, the British were unable to curb the quick pace of the movement.

The action taken by the government on adoption of the Quit India Movement only intensified the people's resolve and acted as a catalyst to the movement. People rose in large numbers against the government policies under local leaders.

According to the Gazetteer of India, Assam state, Volume 1, 'Santi Sena organizations were set-up throughout the state under the leadership of local Congress socialists. Mahendra Nath Hazarika, Lakshmi Prasad Goswami, and Sankar Barua built up an underground resistant movement. A Mritya Bahini or death squad was formed in the state under the leadership of Mahendra Nath Hazarika. The party carried out some serious acts of sabotage throughout the state. In Darrang district, Jyoti Prasad Agarwala, Gohon Chandra Goswami went underground and carried out sabotage at various places by organizing Mrityu Bahini.'

NOTES

The government turned violent to suppress the movement. On several occasions, the government resorted to firing. Many died in the firing, some of whom were Khahulis Numali Taleswari and Kanaklata, all teenage girls.

According to the judgement given for the firing at Dhekiajuli, the police faced severe strictures that could not be relaxed by the high court on any ground. In Dibrugarh and North Lakhimpur some of those who faced atrocities from the police were Pohor Gogoi, Bhogeswar Chetia and Madhuban Chutia. MoulanaTayebulla began the individual Satyagraha movement in Sibsagar. He was Asom Pradesh Congress Committee's president. The Quit India Movement was responded to by the whole of Sibsagar district. Processions everywhere were lathi charged. A number of people were arrested and imprisoned or detained.

To quote the Gazetteer Of India Assam State. Vol-1, 'Kushal Konwar, who was believed to be innocent, was however, declared to be guilty of sabotage and awarded capital punishment by the court that tried him. He was hanged in Jorhat Jail in 1943.'

For undermining the movement, the government resorted to inflicting fines on the people of the different districts of the province.

People formed village panchayats in Bajali in Barpeta subdivision, in Nalbari subdivision and in Kamrup district at Bahjani. Also, they drew up panchayat administration schemes. Rawta Kachari and Madan Barman died in Bajali during police firing. This added fuel to the already flaming hatred that people had towards the repressive bureaucracy of the British.

Food scarcity and mounting prices also added to discontent and people tried paralzsing the oppressive government. The Nagaon district played the most important role as far as the 'Quit India Movement' is concerned. Approximately 11 km to the east of Nagaon town, in the village of Barhampur, police opened fire on a massive gathering and Thagi Sut, Lakhimi Hazarika, Phuleswari Konwari and many others lost their lives.

For a month, military supplies were terminated and bazars and *hats* were shut. Troops were positioned all over the state and even then it was not possible to stop or even lessen the sabotaging by Santi Senas.

Azad Hind Fauz organized by Subhas Chandra Bose tried to get India free in 1943, with the help of Japan and Germany. They entered Assam via Burma. The British government in India was shocked by this act. The government decided to release Gandhiji in May 1944; he was in jail, and was sick. Gandhiji, in January 1945, in his last visit to Assam, visited Gauhati with four leaders of Assam. Here, he performed mass-prayers.

The Quit India Movement was not enough to make the British government move out of India. The call for a separate Muslim country gathered force due to the 'communal policy undertaken by the pro-Muslim League, Saadullah ministry in Assam and the increasing number of mutually apathetic East Bengal Hindu and Muslim immigrants' entry into Assam.' There was a rise of strong communal feeling in Assam with the Muslims of Assam being in favour of India's Partition.

Pandit Nehru in December 1945 went on a quick Assam tour and left behind a favourable picture of the Congress in the minds of the people. In the elections, this led to the victory of Congress and the latter won fifty out of 108 seats. With two of the Independents joining them, the strength rose to fifty-two and on 10 February 1946, Congress Prime Ministership of Gopinath Bordoloi formed its ministry.

According to the Gazetteer of India, Assam State, Volume 1, 'The Muslim League went for secret organizational activities to constitute *"Banglo-i-Islam"* comprising Bengal

with its hinterland or Assam as envisaged by the Pakistan National Movement since 1940 for the Millat of Islam.'

Cabinet Mission to India arrived with the intention of solving the problem faced by India. In May 1946, the grouping system was initiated by this mission that led to complete rising of the Assam Provincial Congress against inclusion of Assam in the grouping system which would have branded it as a majority state. The Assam Jatiya Mahasabha also rose up and throughout Assam organized mass agitation.

Assam Jatiya Mahasabha obtained from the Bengal Khidirpur Dock a secret document that revealed Maulana Bhasani group from eastern Bengal forming a conspiracy for invading Assam via migration of population. At this point, Gopinath Bordoloi and Syed Saadullah on the part of Assam took part in the Constituted Assembly making sure that the sixth schedule I of the Constitution was incorporated. This helped to set the disintegration of population and geographical Assam happening for future. Finally, India was split into India and Pakistan in August 1947.

NOTES

## 5.5 SUMMARY

In this unit, you have learnt that:

- A new era started in the history of North East India with the signing of the treaty of Yandabo in 1826, which saw the expansion of the British rule over this part of the country.
- The British government aptly realized the political necessity and the economic potentiality of these frontier areas, especially the hilly tract inhabited by the tribal of present-day Arunachal Pradesh and initiated a number of measures to safeguard colonial interest.
- As the beginning of the administrative measures, the Frontier Tracts Regulation was passed in 1880. It was mainly due to the unique geo-political conditions as well as the nature of the relationship between tribes and the British.
- The Government of India Act, 1919, was an Act of the Parliament of the United Kingdom. It was passed to expand participation of Indians in the Government of India.
- The North East Frontier Agency (NEFA) (formerly the North East Frontier Tracts) was one of the political divisions in British India and later the Republic of India till 1972, when it became the Union Territory of Arunachal Pradesh. Its administrative headquarters was Shillong (till 1974, when it was transferred to Itanagar).
- The first and foremost policy of the British towards the North East Frontier Tract was to contain the frontier tribes by continuing with Ahom period's provisions with certain changes in the right to collect '*posa*'.
- In 1862, Colonel Henry Hopkinson, the Commissioner of Assam, had proposed to the Government of Bengal the ways and means to be adopted for the administration of the North East Frontier Tract as he believed that the policy of conciliation with the hill people had failed.
- The constitutional and administrative growth of Arunachal Pradesh had its genesis in the Scheduled Districts Act of 1874, by which the districts of Kamrup, Darrang, Nowgong, Sibsagar, Lakhimpur, Garo, Khasi and Jayantia Hills, Naga Hills and Cachar were declared 'scheduled districts' on 1 January 1875.

**Check Your Progress**

7. When was the Non-Cooperation Movement launched by Gandhiji?
8. What was the outcome of the Civil Disobedience Movement in Assam?

NOTES

- Administrative growth can be noticed in the Assam Frontier Tract Regulation (Regulation 2), 1880.
- In 1912, the administrative divisions were recognized in Assam and a new system of administration on the frontier was introduced. Two new charges, afterwards known as the Sadiya and Balipara frontier tracts, were created and placed under the control of political officers.
- With the passing of the Government of India Act of 1919, there were some changes in the nomenclature of the sections of the North East Frontier Tract.
- The Government of India Act of 1935, provided in Sections 91 and 92 that his Majesty by an order in Council might declare some territory in India as 'Excluded Areas' or 'Partially Excluded Areas' and empower the Governor of a province to administer that area under the authority of the Governor General.
- The year 1945 saw an important administrative development in the North East Frontier Tract. A regulation, known as Assam Frontier (Administration of Justice) Regulation, 1945 (Regulation I of 1945) was introduced and its main objective was to ensure that a vast majority of disputes, both civil and criminal, were decided in accordance with the prevailing traditional codes of the tribal.
- The Munda Rebellion is possibly the most prominent and important uprisings to have occurred post 1857. Unlike other tribes, traditionally the Mundas had specific rights that they enjoyed for being the forest's original clearers.
- When the non-cooperation call was given, Guwahati's Kaliram Barman took back his nomination paper post scrutiny and resignation was tendered by Kumudram Bora, who was in the council as an elected member.
- The pace of the Civil Disobedience Movement was kept alive in Assam by Assamese Congress leaders just as it had been proposed by the All India Congress Committee.
- The nationalists set-up public high schools such as the Barpeta Bidyapith and Kamrup Academy.
- In keeping with the decision made by Congress regarding reforms under the Government of India Act, 1936, Assam Congress took part in the election of 1937, winning 33 seats of the 108 in the House and becoming the single largest entity in the House.
- The action taken by the government on adoption of the Quit India Movement only intensified the people's resolve and acted as a catalyst to the movement. People rose in anti-government mass protests, under local leaders.
- The Quit India Movement was not enough to make the British government move out of India. The call for a separate Muslim country gathered force due to the 'communal policy undertaken by the pro-Muslim league Saadullah ministry in Assam and the increasing number of mutually apathetic East Bengal Hindu and Muslim immigrants' entry into Assam.'

## 5.6 KEY TERMS

- **Regulation:** It is a rule or directive made and maintained by an authority.
- **Tract:** It refers to an area of indefinite extent, typically a large one.
- **Uprising:** It is an act of resistance or rebellion.

NOTES

## 5.7 ANSWERS TO 'CHECK YOUR PROGRESS'

1. The main motive behind trade fairs was the promotion and popularization of European goods.
2. The main aim of the Scheduled Districts Act, 1874 was to provide a simpler form of administration in the province of Assam. Special rules for the administration of justice, in civil as well as criminal matters, were provided by this Act.
3. The North East Frontier Tract has been divided into three administrative units which are as follows:
   - Central and eastern section
   - Lakhimpur Frontier Tract
   - Western section
4. A regulation, known as Assam Frontier (Administration of Justice) Regulation, 1945 was introduced and its main objective was to ensure that a vast majority of disputes, both civil and criminal, were decided in accordance with the prevailing traditional codes of the tribal. Hence, the Act of 1945 recognized the authority of the age-old village councils and also the authority of the village headmen. The village authorities were also given the duty of maintaining peace and law and order in their respective areas.
5. Birsa Munda was the foremost leader of the Munda Rebellion.
6. The British decided to impose tax on items of regular use in Assam which included tax on tree cutting and cutting of grass in jungles, tax on cattle grazing, water, jungle wood, bamboo, opium, betel nut and others.
7. The Non-Cooperation Movement was launched by Gandhiji on 1 August 1920.
8. Due to the Civil Disobedience Movement in Assam, the British government granted that it would slowly decrease the consumption of opium in Assam. The next success was the passing of the Local Self-Government Act and the introduction of the Assam Municipal Act, 1923, which provided for increased number of elected members and also elected chairman.

## 5.8 QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

### Short-Answer Questions

1. Write a short note on Hopkinson's proposals.
2. Who were the 'kotokis'?
3. What did the 'Instrument of Instruction' imply?
4. What were the six zones into which NEFA was divided?
5. What role did Assam play in the Quit India Movement?
6. Write a short note on aggrarian revolts in North East India under the British.

### Long-Answer Questions

1. Explain the few basic policies followed by the British towards the North East Frontier Tract.

NOTES

2. What changes were introduced in the nomenclature of the sections of the North East Frontier Tract by the Government of India Act, 1919?
3. Discuss the Government of India Act, 1935.
4. Analyse the significance of the Phulaguri movement in Assam.
5. Discuss the impact of the freedom struggle movement in North East India.

## 5.9 FURTHER READING

Gait, E.A. 2010. *A History of Assam.* US: BiblioBazaar.

Choudhary, Pratap Chandra. 1966. *The History of Civilization of the People of Assam to the Twelfth Century A.D.* Assam: Department of Historical and Antiquarian Studies in Assam.

Sinha, Surajit. 1987. *Tribal Polities and State Systems in Pre-colonial Eastern and North Eastern India*. Kolkata: Centre for Studies in Social Sciences.

Chakravarty, I. N., Chakravarty, Lakshmi N. 1973. *Glimpses of the Early History of Arunachal*. Arunachal Pradesh: Research Department, Arunachal Pradesh Administration.