

**RESISTANCE MOVEMENTS IN EASTERN
ARUNACHAL PRADESH: THE KHAMTIS AND
THE SINGPHOS 1825-1843**

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DECLARATION

I declare that the thesis entitled “**THE RESISTANCE MOVEMENT IN EASTERN ARUNACHAL PRADESH: THE KHAMTIS AND THE SINGPHOS 1825-1843**” is submitted by me in fulfilment of the requirement for the award of Doctor of Philosophy from Rajiv Gandhi University, Rono Hills, Doimukh, Arunachal Pradesh. This is my own work and has not been previously submitted for award of any degree of this university or any other university.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ALI	Assam Light Infantry
APSA	Arunachal Pradesh State Archive
ASA	Assam State Archive
ASR	Assam Secretariat Records
BJP	Bengal Judicial Proceeding
BSPC	Bengal Secret and Political Consultation
BSPP	Bengal Secret and Political Proceeding
BPP	Bengal Political Proceeding
BPC	Bengal Political Consultation
DHAS	Department of Historical and Antiquarian Studies
FDSP	Foreign Department Secret Proceeding
FPC (P)	Foreign Political Consultation (and Proceeding)
FPF	Foreign Political Proceeding
FSC	Foreign Secret Consultation
SAWB	State Archive of West Bengal
FSP	Foreign Secret Proceeding
FDPP	Foreign Department Political Proceeding
FDSP	Foreign Department Secret Proceeding

JASB	Journal of Asiatic Society of Bengal
LIGB	Letter Issued to the Government of Bengal
LIFGB	Letter Issued from the Government of Bengal
LIDO	Letter Issued to the District Officer
LIMD	Letter Issued to Miscellaneous Quarters
NAI	National Archive of India
NEIHA	North East India History Association
PDP	Political Department Proceeding
SHECCAP	Studies in the History, Economy and Culture of Arunachal Pradesh

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GLOSSARY

<i>Agi or Mireng</i>	Singpho term for a chief
<i>Bhikku</i>	Buddhist Priest
<i>Burkandze</i>	Armed retainer
<i>Chow-Pachow</i>	Knowledgeable and Good orator (Khamti)
<i>Chofa</i>	Khamti term for a chief
<i>Chang</i>	Khamti local name for Vihara (a Buddhist monastery)
<i>Chowmaan</i>	Khamti term for a village elder
<i>Chowkhon Sang</i>	A Supreme creator
<i>Cing-Mung</i>	Commoners group
<i>Chowkidar</i>	Gate keeper
<i>Darbar</i>	Assembly of chiefs
<i>Dao</i>	A two-edged knife about three inches wide at the end
<i>Deka-Cang</i>	Dormitory for bachelor Khamti boys
<i>Dejure</i>	Owner
<i>Ddufan</i>	Singpho royal clan from whom chiefs trace their lineage
<i>Fukan</i>	Singpho term for a skirt
<i>fan</i>	Singpho term for clan
<i>Firman</i>	An official decree, order, licenses, or grant issued by a

	ruler
<i>Gabharu-Cang</i>	Dormitory for unmarried Khamti girls
<i>Gambang-Salai</i>	Singpho Marriage reception Gate
<i>Ghat</i>	River port
<i>Ho Kaa</i>	Bride price
<i>Hong Huinleu</i>	Family
<i>Haak Kan</i>	Love marriage (Khamtis)
<i>Havildar</i>	A non-commissioned army officer
<i>Hats</i>	Markets
<i>Jemadar</i>	Custodian
<i>Khani</i>	Opium
<i>Kufma</i>	Singphos term for gifts/ presents to daughter in law by groom's parent
<i>khat</i>	Plot of land
<i>Khamtis Lahi</i>	Khamtis rice
<i>Liktai</i>	Khamtis script
<i>Lukhun</i>	Singpho term for bangle
<i>Mauud</i>	Weight
<i>Marwari</i>	Trading community
<i>Motchup</i>	Traditional Political Institution of Khamtis

<i>Majai Singrabhum</i>	Natural flat mountain (Singpho)
<i>Mayam</i>	Singpho term for slave
<i>Mathum Matwa</i>	Appease as the giver of all thing to men (Singpho)
<i>Maya-Dama</i>	Asymmetric marriage alliance
<i>Mit</i>	Khamti sword
<i>Nats</i>	Malevolent and benevolent spirit
<i>Posa</i>	A deal of settlement or exchange between the Ahom rulers and the tribal chiefs
<i>Paik</i>	an Assamese peasant whose duty was to render service to the king and the state for a fix period in a year during Ahom rule
<i>Phan Chow</i>	Royal Class (Khamtis)
<i>Phan Eon</i>	Lower class (Khamtis)
<i>Paiphra</i>	Khamtis name for Lord Buddha
<i>Pongtiola</i>	Area where the British were allowed to settle in Sadiya by Khamtis
<i>Panchayat</i>	Village tribunal
<i>Panji</i>	Bamboo spike
<i>Paklong</i>	Commoners
<i>Phi-Paw Humann</i>	Appease for the protection of cultivation as well as the

	village by Singphos
<i>Pargana</i>	Administrative unite almost equivalent to district
<i>Phy</i>	Bride Price
<i>Ryot</i>	People/Peasant
<i>Pura</i>	A small unit of landholding
<i>Sanad</i>	A written authority
<i>Sheristadar</i>	Record Keeper
<i>Sang-pha Apuk</i>	Festival of appease of rain
<i>Singra Fang Wayong</i>	Plain land
<i>Si Long Si Sam</i>	Member of village council
<i>Sepoy</i>	Indian soldier serving under British Government
<i>Sentry</i>	A guard, particularly on the duty at entrance to a military base
<i>Subedhar</i>	Rank of junior army officer
<i>Thamasat</i>	Law Book of the Khamtis
<i>Tra-Tangdai</i>	Singphos traditional village council

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CHAPTER-I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction to the Chapter

This chapter shall provide a background to the geographical detail of the Universe of study from the macro to the micro-level. It shall introduce the highlights of the proposed area of study particularly on the various ways in which colonialism played out. It shall in addition deal with the methodological aspects used for collecting data, a statement of the problem, highlight the significance of the study, review of literature, and chapterisation, etc.

1.2 The Land and the People: An Introduction

Arunachal Pradesh, ‘the land of the first sunrise in India’, is the north-easternmost state of India.¹ It is located within the geographical ambit between 26°28’ - 29°30’ N Latitude, and 91°30’- 97°30’ E, Longitude, in the trans-Himalayan region with a total area of 83,743 sq. km.² Geographically, Arunachal Pradesh is continuous landforms which connects South East Asia, Eurasia, and South Asia, yet politically it is separated and shares its international boundaries with Bhutan in the West (160 km), China in the North and Tibet in the North-West (1030 km), Myanmar in the East (440 km).³ The international boundary demarcated by the ‘MacMohan Line’, separates

¹ H.N. Bora, ‘A Brief Geo-Economic Setting of Arunachal Pradesh’, in Manish Sharma (ed.), *Economy of Arunachal Pradesh*, Guwahati, DVS Publisher, 2008, p.1.

² www.arunachalpradesh.gov.in, accessed on 12/04/2014.

³ www.arunachalpradesh.gov.in, accessed on 12/04/2014.

Arunachal Pradesh from China. The state also shares a common border with Nagaland in Southeast and Assam in the south.

Arunachal is predominantly a mountainous terrain state, with varying elevations ranging from 150 m along the foothills and gradually ascending to about 7000 m finally culminating in the snow-clad Great Himalayan ranges. Due to its high altitude, the region witnesses a highly precipitous and varied terrain.⁴ The geographer divides, Arunachal Pradesh into seven major litho-tectonic belts which are Siwalik belt, Gondwana belt, Dedza-Humanga belt, Se La belt, Tuting-Tidding belt and Mishmi belt.⁵

Arunachal Pradesh constituted of 96 percent of hilly terrain with the lush green forests, deep river valleys, and beautiful plateaus.⁶ Considerable area of the state is covered under forest and the landscape and forests vary from the western end of the State to the east with changing altitude. There are alpine forests, temperate and sub-tropical forests, and semi-evergreen forests. The temperate forests are mainly conifer, larch, juniper, and spruce. On the other hand, in many places the temperate bamboos form the shrubby undergrowth and the broad-leaved forests include magnolia, oak, rhododendron, chestnut, *sal*, teak, and poplar. There are wetlands, where the rivers meet the Brahmaputra, and grasslands in the mountains as well as riverine grasslands.⁷ The entire state is drained by innumerable rivers, rivulets, and streams. The region is more intense and heavily drained than any other parts of North-East India, which forms bulk parts of the Brahmaputra in Assam. Arunachal Pradesh is drained by five major rivers viz., the Kameng, the Subansiri, the Siang, the Lohit, and the Tirap. These rivers, routes,

⁴ Robert L. Fleming, *Great River ecosystem of Asia Trust: A Summary of Biodiversity*, Unpublished Report for Future Generation, cited in *Arunachal Pradesh Human Development Report 2005*, Department of Planning Government of Arunachal Pradesh, Itanagar, 2006, p. 4.

⁵ N.N. Bhattacharyya, *North East India: A Systematic Geography*, New Delhi, Rajesh Publication, 2005, p.160.

⁶ *Arunachal Pradesh Human Development Report 2005*, p. 4.

⁷ www.arunachalpradesh.gov.in, accessed on 12/04/2014.

and hills have acted as the natural boundaries of the different communities that inhabit Arunachal.

Climatically Arunachal Pradesh is located in the sub-tropical monsoon climatic zone. It falls within the heavy rainfall zone of the country due to the south-west monsoon, which makes it as one of the wettest states in the country.⁸ The average annual rainfalls range between 250-400 cm in the outer Himalayan belt, including the river valley and foothills. The area above 2000 m receives average annual rainfall of 100-150 cm along with occasional frost and snowfall. The rainy season extends from the pre-monsoon months of March to April, through the extremely wet months of June-July and continues till September-October.⁹

The foothills are hot and humid for major periods of the year but, the other areas are quite cool, even during spring. Although, it presents a case of climatic diversity due to various factors like its location, large geographical extent, and extremely variegated topography, etc. Temperature distribution pattern varies from location to location, but as a whole three micro-climatic zones can be identified in Arunachal Pradesh;

- (i) Hot and humid sub-tropical climate of the foothills and the southern plains
- (ii) Cold, humid, high altitude climate of the Mid Himalayan zone and
- (iii) Sub-alpine and alpine climate of the Greater Himalayan zone in the north.¹⁰

Arunachal Pradesh is rich in a variety of flora and fauna and has nourished in its hilly terrain different people, cultures and institutional configurations are a sparsely populated hill terrain. According to a provisional population of 2011 census, the state has a population of 1382611 of which males are 720232 and 662379 females respectively.¹¹ The density of population as per 2011 census is 17 per sq km. While the

⁸ *Arunachal Pradesh Human Development Report 2005*, p. 4.

⁹ Deepak Pandey, *History of Arunachal Pradesh*, Pasighat, Bani Mandir Publication, 1997, p. 11.

¹⁰ Deepak Pandey, *History of Arunachal Pradesh*, p. 11.

¹¹ www.arunachalpradesh.gov.in, accessed on 12/04/2014.

sex ratio of Arunachal Pradesh is 920 i.e., for each 1000 male and literacy rate is 66.95 of which male literacy stands at 73.69 percent while female literacy is at 59.57 percent.¹² The uneven distribution of the population can be understood from the perspective of its (i) variation in the degree of the habitat (ii) the economy typical of the hilly region and (iii) social-cultural traits of the tribal communities.

Arunachal Pradesh has received the waves of migration from different directions, over centuries from Bhutan, Tibet, Burma, and Yunnan, which makes it a land of autochthonous tribal society comprising of various tribal groups. Though there are more than 125 tribes, according to the 1991 Census, only 15 of them had a population of more than 5,000 people.¹³ According to 2001 report of Director of Economic and Statistics, Government of Arunachal Pradesh, Arunachal Pradesh inhabited by 26 major tribes and more than 110 minor tribes. The territories occupied by the major tribal group can be put into the following regional frame:

Table 1.1: District and Related Tribes of Arunachal Pradesh

Districts	Headquarters	Main tribes
West Kameng	Bomdila	Monpa, Sherdukpen, Aka, Miji
East Kameng	Seppa	Nyishi, Puroik
Papum Pare	Yupia	Nyishi
Lower Subansiri	Ziro	Nyishi, Apatani
Upper Subansiri	Daporijo	Nyishi, Tagin, Galo
West Siang	Along	Adi, Memba, Khamba, Galo
East Siang	Pasighat	Adi, Galo
Upper Siang	Yingkiong	Adi
Dibang Valley	Anini	Mishmi
Lohit	Tezu	Mishmi

¹² www.arunachalpradesh.gov.in, accessed on 12/04/2014.

¹³ *Arunachal Pradesh Human Development Report 2005*, p. 4.

Namsai	Namsai	Khamti, Singpho
Changlang	Changlang	Tangsa, Singphos
Tirap	Khonsa	Nocte, Wancho
Kurung Kumey	Koloriang	Nyishi, Puroik
Lower Dibang Valley	Roing	Mishmi, Adi
Anjaw	Hawai	Mishmi
Tawang	Tawang	Monpa

Source: Arunachal Pradesh Human Development Report 2005.

All the above-mentioned groups have a heritage based on myths, transmitted orally from generation to generation, tell us about the origin of humans and describe their relationship with the environment. While there are different myths among the tribes, they all speak of human relationship with nature and animals. This oral history tells us about their story of migration to this land. The rich oral history of the western and central zone tribes, tells us that they migrated from Tibet and those tribes inhabiting the western zone, on the basis of their oral history state that they migrated from China and Burma.¹⁴

Linguistically, these tribes are affiliated to the so-called Tibeto-Burman group of language. With regard to their racial affiliation they have been described variously as Indo-Mongoloid, Proto-Mongoloid, Paleo-Mongoloid, and so on.¹⁵ Each of these 26 tribes of Arunachal Pradesh has developed their civilization according to the environment, which helped them to shape their tradition, language, economy, religion, polity, and culture practices. In this context, Verrier Elwin has stated that:

¹⁴ For details on origin and migration see, Toni Huber and Stuart Blackburn (eds.), *Origins and Migrations in the Extended Eastern Himalayas*, Brill's Tibetan Studies Library, vol. 16/4, Boston, 2012.

¹⁵ M. L. Bose, *History of Arunachal Pradesh*, New Delhi, Concept Publishing Company, 1997, p. 21.

The tribes of Arunachal Pradesh have adapted themselves according to nature and evolved a unique civilization where there is no concept of landlords, no extortionist moneylenders, no liquor-vendor and there is none of the economic impoverishment.¹⁶

Among the tribes of Arunachal Pradesh, the Khamtis and the Singphos are two major tribes, with which this study is concerned. They inhabit the districts of Namsai and Changlang of Arunachal Pradesh. The name of the Changlang districts is derived from the river Changlang and the district lies between the latitudes 26°40'N and 27°40'N and Longitudes 95°11'E and 37°11'E. it has an area of 4,662 square kilometer. It was carved out of erstwhile Tirap district in 1987 as 10th district of Arunachal Pradesh. The Namsai district was carved out of Lohit district in 2014 as the 18th district of the state with an area of 1587 square kilometers.

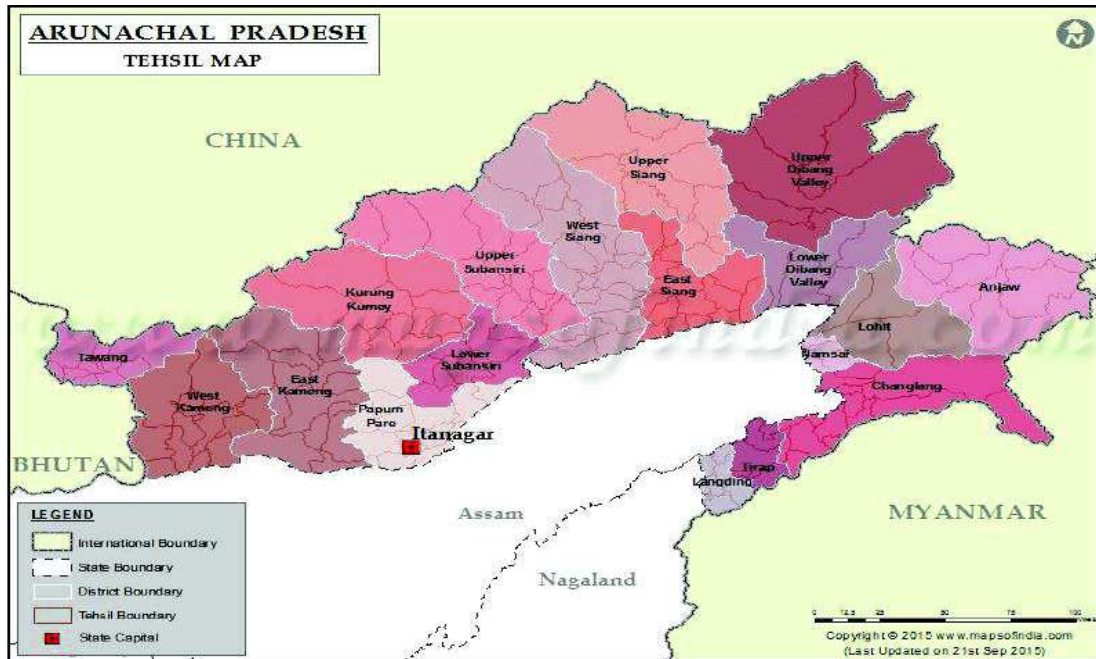
Figure 1.1: Location Map of Arunachal Pradesh in India



Source: <https://www.mapsofindia.com/maps/arunachalpradesh/arunachalpradeshlocation.htm>

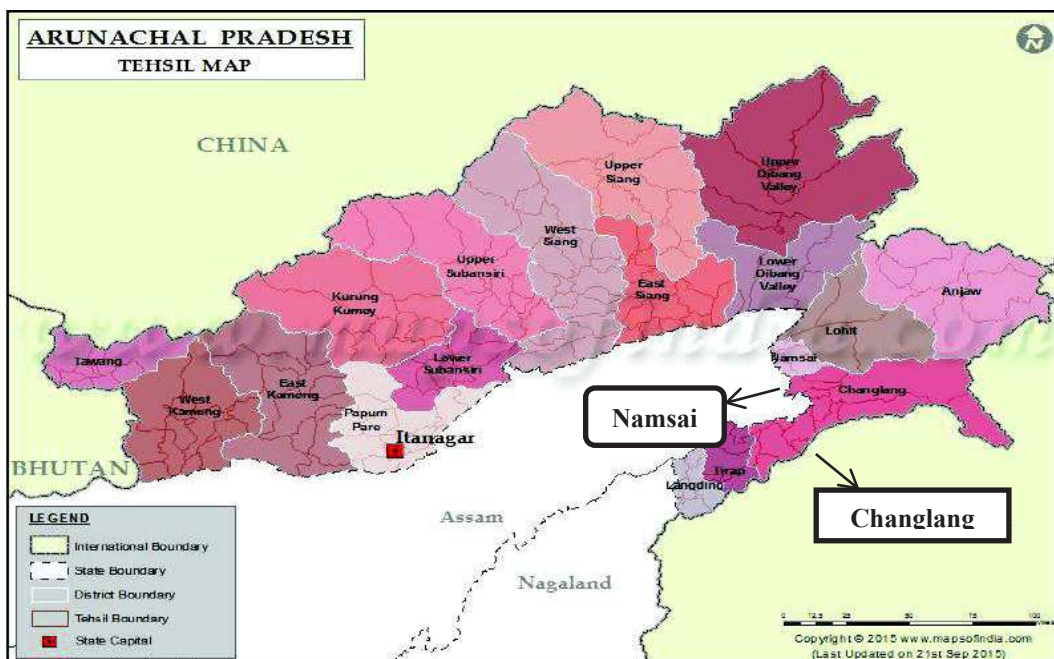
¹⁶ Verrier Elwin, *A Philosophy For NEFA*, Itanagar, Directorate of Research Government of Arunachal Pradesh, 1988, pp. 6-7.

Figure 1.2: Location Map of Arunachal Pradesh Showing Districts



Source: <https://www.mapsofindia.com/maps/arunachalpradesh/tehsil/>

Figure 1.3: Location Map of Arunachal Pradesh Showing Study Area



Source: <https://www.mapsofindia.com/maps/arunachalpradesh/tehsil/>

1.3 The Khamtis

The Tai Khamtis (henceforth, Khamtis) are one of the most important tribes of Arunachal Pradesh.¹⁷ They inhabit the eastern part of Arunachal Pradesh in the Namsai district (former part of Lohit district). The Tinsukia district of Assam, in the north, connects their habitation on the west; in the east it is connected with the Lohit district of Arunachal Pradesh and in the south it is connected with the Changlang district of Arunachal Pradesh. The total geographical area of the Namsai district is 1587 square kilometers, lying in between 95°45' to 96°20' East longitude and 27°30' to 27°55' North latitude, situated at a height of 150 m to 175 m above mean sea level.¹⁸

According, to the Census of 2001 the total population of Khamtis is 12,890 and their literacy rate is 54.24 per cent. They inhabit in more than 20 villages spread across the stretch of Namsai plain like, Chawkham, Momong, Lathaw, Khaleam, Mpong, Human Kaw, Namtisu, Surungtu, Na Nam, Humanmow, Wing Koo, Humantean, Humanna, Lakang, Mohong, Phaneng, Gunangar, Kherem, Mime, Nalong, Humankawa, Tisu and Pankhao.¹⁹ These villages of the Khamtis are mostly located along the river belt of the Tengapani, Teng, Noa Dihing, Zengthe and Barreng river. The villages have definite boundaries demarcated by streams or other natural markers. Every Khamti village has its own *Kyong* or *Chang (Vihara)* and which is prominent among the houses of the village by its height and sometimes type Burmese type roof.²⁰

Ecologically, Namsai district is blessed with a tropical evergreen type of forest which covers the entire district with the vegetation resembling that of the adjacent upper

¹⁷ L. N. Chakravarty, *Glimpse of the Early History of Arunachal*, Itanagar, Director of Research, Government of Arunachal Pradesh, 1973 (Reprint-1989), p. 76.

¹⁸ www.indiatoday.intoday.in/education/story/namsai-officially...district-of.../407543 (accessed on 05/02/2015)

¹⁹ Nang Helina Mantaw, *Tribal Development: Poverty Alleviation Programmes, Planning, Implementation and Implication*, New Delhi, Classical Publishing House, 2003, p. 66.

²⁰ Kondinya, *The Monastic Buddhism among the Khamti of Arunachal*, 1981, cited in Lila Gogoi, *The Tai Khamti of North East India*, New Delhi, Omsons Publication, First Published, 1971, Second revised and enlarged edition, 1989, p. 132.

Assam plains.²¹ *Hullock (Terminalia)*, *Hullong (Dipterocarpus macrocarpus)*, *Mekai (Shorea assamica)*, *Jutuli, Dhuna, (Michelia Chamapka)* Oak and *Betula* and so on. The luxuriant growth of a variety of woody climbers, herbaceous climbers, screw pines, tall grass, epiphytes, and bamboo make the forest dense and impenetrable. The forests surrounding the Khamti habitat nourishes a wide variety of wild animals, the common species being the Indian elephant, the leopard, the *sambar*, the barking deer, etc. Among the smaller species, the insectivores and the rodents are very common. A large number of birds, reptiles, amphibians, and molluscs are also found in this forest.²²

The climate in the region inhabited by the Khamtis is hot and humid during summer and moderately cold during winter. The summer months range from April to October with intermittent heavy rainfall. The winter months start in November and continue till March. The monthly rainfall varies from 750 mm to 850 mm during summer (May-August) with relative humidity remains between 80-85%. The temperature also varies with respect to season. While the winter experiences up to 10° C and in summer it shoots up to 35° C.²³

Namsai is drained by the two big rivers: Kamlang and Noa-Dihing and various seasonal streams. The Noa-Dihing makes its way from east to west through draining the entire northeastern and the northern stretch of the Changlang and meets the Lohit river near Namsai. The main tributaries of Noa-Dihing are Dirak on the left bank and Tengapani, Bereng, Nam Tieng on the right bank.²⁴ The Kamlang rises from the 'Glow Lake' situated at a distance of 20 kilometres from Wakro and flows in an east-westerly

²¹ Sheelawati Monolai, et al., 'Traditional Tai-Khamti Medicinal plants to cure fractured bones', *East Himalayan Society for Spermatophyte Taxonomy*, vol.2, no.7, 2013, ISSN:0973-9467, p. 470.

²² S. Dutta Choudhury, (ed.), *Gazetteers of India: Arunachal Pradesh District Gazetteers Lohit District*, Directorate of Information and Public Relations of Arunachal Pradesh, Shillong, 1978, (Reprint-2008), pp. 13-21.

²³ Sheelawati Monolai, et al., 'Traditional Tai-Khamti Medicinal...', p. 470.

²⁴ Nang Helina Mantaw, *Poverty Alliviation Programmes, Planning, Implementation and Implication*, p.65.

direction to finally meet the Lohit river.²⁵ During the monsoon, the river overflows their bank causing serious erosion. They change their courses very often and cut themselves into innumerable channels.

1.4 The Singphos

The Singphos are one of the major tribes of Arunachal Pradesh with distinct socio-economic and demographic characteristics. They mainly inhabit the Namsai and Changlang districts of Arunachal Pradesh. Their habitations are bounded by the Tinsukia and Dibrugarh districts of Assam in the west, by Tirap district on the south and Lohit district in the north, and Myanmar on its east.²⁶ The area is an elevated plain, which is comparatively old in geological formation covered by wide stretches of thick forest. While moving further east the level rises, and the view is bounded by the offshoot hills of the Patkai ranges. The district lies in between the latitude 20°40' N and 27°40' N, and longitude 95°11' E and 97°11' E.

The Singphos mostly inhabit in foothill areas in the plains in the northern part of the Changlang district under Miao, Bordumsa, and Diyun circles, which are located at lower elevations. On the other hand, several families live on the bank of river Tengapani in Namsai and Chokham circle of Namsai (formerly Lohit) district of Arunachal Pradesh. According to the Census of India 2001, the total population of the Singphos is 7200 who inhabit more than thirty villages in Changlang and Namsai district. In Changlang their main villages are: Goju, Gelenja, Bordumsa, Dirakpathar, Wa-Khetna, Dafkhu, Kherem Bisa, Saimu, Wagum-I, Wagum-II, Wagum-III, Wagum-IV, Modoi, Dumba, Khumsai, Khagam, Liwang, Pisi, Miao, Namphai-II, Sikao and Ningrang all located under Miao and Bordumsa area of the district. In Namsai district, a large

²⁵ Deepak Pandey, *History of Arunachal Pradesh: Earliest Times to 1972 A.D.*, p. 6.

²⁶ A Profile of Changlang District, www.changlang.nic.in, accessed on 11/02/2015.

number of Singphos villages are situated along with that of the Khamtis, they are: Piyong, Wagum, Inden, Inphum, Inchao, and Tingwak.²⁷

As they inhabit the foothills of eastern Arunachal Pradesh, climatically they experience hot and humid conditions in summer between June-August with the weather turning fairly cool and exhilarating between mid-November-February. January is the coldest month with average maximum and minimum temperature ranging between 22° to 13° Celsius respectively. August is the hottest month when temperatures frequently exceed 32° Celsius with an average maximum temperature ranges from 26° 96' degrees to a minimum of 18°63' degree Celsius. The monsoon begins in the month of May and continues until September, during which the area witnesses cultivation season.

The main river in the Singpho inhabited area is Noa-Dihing joined by Kharem stream, which originates from Patkai Range, flowing east to west and joins the Lohit river some five miles away from Sadiya. Its main tributaries are the Dirak on the left bank and the Tengapani on the right bank.²⁸ Like most of the hill streams, the Noa-Dihing river becomes turbulent during the summer, causing great damage to the agricultural fields in the area, while also increasing its fertility through silt deposition along its course.

The natural vegetation in the area is very luxuriant. Most of the plants are of tropical and sub-tropical, wet evergreen, and semi-evergreen nature. The valuable timber species available are *Hullock (Terminalia)*, *Hullong (Dipterocarpus macrocarpus)*, *Mekai (Shorea assamica)*, *Jutuli, Dhuna, (Michelia Chamapka)* Oak and *Betula* etc. There are also different species of bamboos like *Dedrocalmus Hamiltonii* and *Pseudostachym Polymorphum* that grow in abundance. Thatch, elephant grass, and weeds are plentiful in the sandy beds of the Noa-Dihing and the low-lying lands. The

²⁷ Debotang Yapung, 'Buddhism among the Singpho', *RESARUN*, vol. 32, Itanagar, Director of Research, Arunachal Pradesh, 2006, p. 44.

²⁸ Deepak Pandey, *The History of Arunachal Pradesh*, p. 6.

forest in the Singpho inhabited areas has abundantly rich fauna in a variety of animals and birds like tiger, clouded leopard, Indian elephant, gaur, *sambar*, hog deer, wild boar, and lesser panda, etc. The various bird species include Indian hornbill, kaleej pheasant, forest eagle, monal pheasant, wood pecker, and tragopan, etc. Swarms of wild ducks are very often found during winter. Apart from various flora and fauna, the forest supplies articles for food and shelter. Roots, tubers, and mushrooms, supplements the cereals that gathered from the forest during the time of scarcity.

The undertaken subjects made their way from Burma (Myanmar) to present day Arunachal Pradesh in last part of the eighteenth century. The political transaction in Assam had brought them in close contact with the colonial ruler, who adopted the policy of gradual extension over their area. This colonial policy was resisted which finally climaxed in form of an armed rebellion against the British. Therefore, the main aim of this research work is to unearth the history of a resistance movement carried out by the undertaken subjects against the colonial ruler. An attempt shall be made to look at their encounter with the British as a resistance movement within the framework of colonialism. The work also deals with the methods adopted by the British to overcome these resistance movements to establish favorable political environment for successful colonial operation in Assam. Therefore, it is imperative to understand the meaning and some definition of the term ‘resistance movement’ in a historical perspective before proceeding with the topic of research.

1.5 Meaning and Definition of Resistance in a Historical Context

The current usage of the word resistance in social science originates from the self-designation of many movements during World War II, especially from French

Resistance Movement.²⁹ Since then there has been a rapid proliferation of scholarship on resistance, but little consensus on its definition. Scholars have almost used the term resistance and rebellion interchangeably according to their perception. Many have used the term resistance to describe a wide variety of action and behaviour at all levels of human social life. This can be the act of revolution in form of armed uprising or a mute protest in form of passive resistance for example by Algerian to French's 'Civilizing Mission', took the form of mute resistance by refusing to go to French schools, hospital, and other institutions without complaining.³⁰ It has been difficult to find out a single definition, which engulfs all the meaning of resistance. However in a very simple and acceptable term, resistance movement can be defined as, the action of resisting, defying, opposing or fight against and refuse to cooperate with or submit to, in order to safeguard ones' universe of interest.³¹ Therefore, it shows how the scholars of social science to describe a wide variety of action and behaviour at all level of human social existence can use the term resistance.

The act of resistance includes activity occurring in opposition to someone or something else, such act being carried out by an individual or collective, widespread or locally confined. Its target may also vary from individual, group, organization, institution and the social structure, etc. But why do people resist? Resistance takes place when they felt that their rights are infringed upon. It implies that most of the resistance movement started against some form of exploitation with an aim to achieve some sort of change or to curtail the change. However, many a times they are not recognized because

²⁹ Jeffrey Folker, *The Nature and Extent of the French Resistance Against Nazi Occupation During World War II*, Providence College, 2011 Digital Commons @ Providence, p. 7. <https://digitalcommons.providence.edu> (accessed on 12 August, 2015)

³⁰ Malika Rahal, 'Algeria: Nonviolent Resistance: Against French Colonialism, 1830-1905', in Maciej J. Bartkowski (ed.), *Recovering Nonviolent History: Civil Resistance in Liberation Struggle*, Colorado, Lynne Rienner Publisher, 2013, p. 107.

³¹ Jocelyn A. Hollander and Rachel L. Einwohner, 'Conceptualizing Resistance', *Sociological Forum*, vol. 19, no. 4, December 2004, p. 534.

it is their policy to sometimes purposefully remain concealed or hide either their act itself or the intent behind it.³²

Ian Kershaw, an eminent social historian of Britain, views resistance ‘as active participation in an organized attempt to work against the regime with the intention of bringing it down or planning for its end’.³³ Resistance movement generally begins with the desire of individuals, group, to remove intolerable conditions imposed by an unpopular regime and this movement can include any irregular armed force that rises up against an enforced or established authority, government or administration, etc. Generally, this hatred has manifested itself as sporadic, spontaneous non-violent and violent acts of resistance towards the regime. Resistance, therefore, signifies a variety of everyday practices where interventions/aggressions by an authority using force are resisted by adopting either violent or non-violent means. It chronicles a series of continues events. This is in contrast to a rebellion where the oppressed turn into aggressors as a mean to end it. It seeks to overthrow established authority.

In this context, I prefer to use the definition adopted by Robert Rotberg and Ali Mazrui, in their edited work on Africa. They have appropriately distinguished the term resistance and rebellion. According to them:

A resistance is an opposition to external hegemony and occupation prior to the time when an alien power has imposed upon a conquered country a new administrative framework requiring obedience to alien values... whereas, a rebellion is the militant expression of discontent at a later stage or it is the culmination of the resistance movement.³⁴

Within this framework of understanding the present research has attempted to understand the resistance of the Khamtis and the Singphos as an opposition before the

³² Jocelyn A. Hollander and Rachel L. Einwohner, ‘Conceptualizing Resistance’, p. 536.

³³ Jocelyn A. Hollander and Rachel L. Einwohner, p. 536.

³⁴ Robert Rotberg and Ali Mazrui, *Protest and Power in Black Africa*, Oxford University Press, 1970, p. 17.

essential apparatus of colonial administration is fully introduced and takes shape. The undertaken subjects who had been brought under varying degree of subordination after the end of Anglo-Burmese war (1824-26) resisted the attempts of the Government to enforce its authority. They expressed their resistance attitude through various modalities which manifested in forms of the raid, attack, plunder, and defying the command of British Political Agent, etc. This came about mainly when the communities found out that their way of life was adversely affected under colonial rule, and this finally climaxed in form of an armed rebellion by the Khamtis (1839) and the Singphos (1843) and carried out guerrilla warfare for several months. This was a response against the colonial rule, who had been undermining the tribal independence by establishing military station in their villages and appointing British officer to intervene in the traditional political affairs of tribes.

As mentioned above the resistance movement was a reaction against the colonial rule. Therefore, it would be incomplete without the analysis of the various aspects, and functioning of colonialism in India. Above all, it has been universally accepted by modern day scholars, that without discussing and knowing about the colonialism we would fail to understand the history of modern India and it will remain incomplete.³⁵ So, colonial design in northeast India and counter measure by hills tribes they together hold the key to an understanding of the history of British-Tribal relationship vis-à-vis the British policy of expansion in hills area and its neighbouring countries.

1.6 Colonialism

³⁵ Manorama Sharma, 'Colonialism in North-East India: A Historiographic Query', in David R. Syimleh and Manorama Sharma (eds.), *Society and Economy in North-East India*, vol. 3, New Delhi, Regency Publication, 2008, p. 3.

The term colonialism, which we find rampantly in the writing of scholars especially while dealing with the history of underdeveloped economic, or about political structures, and social institution of developing nations of Africa, South America, and Asia, has been associating with a general phrase of the political domination of one country over the other.³⁶ This form of political domination of one country over the other country became rampant after the Industrial Revolution.³⁷ Along with political dominance, the dominated country witnessed the various form of subjugation in their economy, society, religion, culture, etc., according to different colonial policies adopted by the colonial rule, and the responses against the functioning of colonialism are also, therefore, differ from colony to colony.³⁸ Every effort has been made by the colonial and post-colonial scholars to discuss the nature of colonialism. Many have extended the nature and scheme of colonialism beyond all reasonable limits to cover almost any relationship of domination and dependence or extension of influence and power of one nation over others.³⁹ Therefore, it is not possible to give any particular definition of colonialism, but in a lay human understanding, we can say that the country which is subjected by capitalist country is described as a colony and exploitation that colony endured is colonialism. Therefore, colonialism is the name given to an ideology, which manifests in the form of dominance of more powerful state over the weaker state (colony). This dominance was achieved through the expansion of knowledge and power- military, economy, religion, culture, psychology, and in course of time, the

³⁶ Rupert Emerson, 'Colonialism', *Journal of Contemporary History*, vol. 4, no. 1, 1969, pp. 3-16, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/259788>, accessed on 23/06/2014, 06:26 p.m.

³⁷ K. Ruhinikumar Sharma and Aheibam Koireng Singh, 'British Colonial Rule and Ethnic Question in Manipur', *North East India History Association* (henceforth NEIHA), Thirty-third session, Itanagar, Rajiv Gandhi University, 2012, p. 386.

³⁸ Bipan Chandra, *Essays on Colonialism*, New Delhi, Orient BlackSwan, reprint 2006. pp. 18-19.

³⁹ Frantz Fanon, *Wretched of the Earth*, first published 1961, Penguin Classic, translated and reprinted 2001; Amie Cesaire, *Discourse on Colonialism*, translated by John Pinkham, New York, 1967; Andre Gunder Frank, *Capitalism and Underdevelopment in Latin America*, New York, 1967; Ngugi wa Thiongo, 'Decolonising the Means of Imagination' in *Symphony of Freedom*, Hyderabad, 1996., and so on discuss all the negative impact of colonialism ranging from economy to psychology.

colony remained as subordinate to mother country (occupier) in everything. Hence, colonialism means an exploitative and oppressive, wherein the colonizer enriching themselves at the expense of those they rule. They dominate a territory and impose structure- cultural, religious or linguistic- to maintain control over the colony people.⁴⁰ The total system of Imperialist domination of a pre-capitalist country is Colonialism.

1.6.1 Colonialism in India

The fifteenth and sixteenth-century European world had witnessed tremendous development in the field of science and geography due to renaissance movement.⁴¹ Many European adventurous had explored and discovered various new lands, countries, and continents through sea routes. These discoveries of sea routes made it easy for frequent contacts between the people of one continent to another continent through trading. This development of links with new countries, expansion and growth of trade and commerce facilitated the European trading countries to accumulate more wealth. In course of time with development in new technology and advanced knowledge in field of military, science, and geography, etc., facilitate them to acquiesce the lands of weaker countries of Asia, America, and Africa continents.⁴²

India's door too was open for trade and commerce with the countries of the west. The lucrative trade in oriental goods in India had first attracted the Portuguese who discovered the sea routes in 1498.⁴³ They monopolized trade with India till the end of the sixteenth century when she was successively joined by other European countries

⁴⁰ Ronald J. Horvath, 'A Definition of Colonialism', *Current Anthropology*, vol. 13, no. 1 (Feb., 1972), pp. 45-57, *The University of Chicago Press on behalf of Wenner-Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research*, p.46.

⁴¹ Meenaxi Phukan, *Rise of the Modern West: Social and Economic History of Early Modern Europe*, New Delhi, Macmillan India Limited, 1998, pp. 27-54.

⁴² Meenaxi Phukan, *Rise of the Modern West: Social and Economic History of Early Modern Europe*, pp.55-60.

⁴³ B.V. Rao, *World History: From Early Times to A D 2000*, New Delhi, Sterling Publisher Private Limited, first edition 1984, Reprint 2010, p. 183.

like British, Dutch, Danish, and French. This resulted in tremendous rivalry amongst the different Europeans power to monopolize the trade of India. In this struggle among the different western trading companies, the English East India Company was successful in defeating the other trading rivals companies in India, and by the last part of the eighteenth-century; she emerged to monopolize trade between India and Europe.

The arrival of English under the banner of a trading company known as, ‘the East India Company’ in the early part of the seventeenth-century was the root of colonialism in India. This company, which was primarily founded with economic motive it endeavored to secure a monopoly over the supply of products from India for a ready market in England and Europe, which would yield rich profits.⁴⁴ Hence, in compliance with the policy to earn a rich profit the company began to involve themselves in the political affairs of India and ultimately from trading company emerged as a territorial power in India by defeating the ruler of Bengal in 1757 in the battle of Plassey. The annexation of Bengal laid the foundation stone of colonialism and from Bengal, they began to expand through annexation and distinct instruments of ‘Subsidiary Alliance’ and ‘Doctrine of Lapse’ created native Residency’s bringing the entire country under colonial rule. The territorial annexation was just a small part of colonization process, and as stated by Bernard Cohn, ‘the colonialism was achieved through various form of knowledge’.⁴⁵ While they brought in advanced forms of knowledge, they also created knowledge through the encounter of the landscape and people in India. The knowledge that they consequently created hegemonised the mind

⁴⁴ Sarah Hilaly, *The Railways in Assam 1885-1947*, Varanasi, Pilgrims Publishing, 2007, p. 21.

⁴⁵ In order to colonise India, the British adopted various forms of knowledge. The way to obtain the knowledge was through various investigative modalities. Some of the modalities were historiography, observation/travel, survey, enumerative, musicological, and surveillance. Through these modalities information were gathered, ordered and classified. When it is gathered it is put into reports, statistical returns, histories, legal, codes, etc. it is easier for one to look up the information. Bernard S. Cohn, *Colonialism and its Forms of Knowledge: The British in India*, Oxford University Press, 1997.

of the Indians, consequently helping the British to establish their hold their dominion till 1947.

During this long course of colonial rule, Indian population witnessed exploitation in every possible way. Different scholars have evoked different aspects of colonial exploitation across the colonized world. Without going into the discussion centering on the extent and exact nature of colonialism in the world and in India, I would rather confine myself on the nature of the colonialism and its characteristics based on the summary of the arguments advanced by Bipan Chandra, Irfan Habib, and R. P. Dutt, who have argued that India underwent a phases of colonial exploitation. According to them colonialism was not a continuing phenomenon or unified structure rather it went through several stages. The only constant was the subordination of the colonial country and its exploitation, but the forms of subordination and exploitation undergo changes over time from one stage to another.⁴⁶ They have divided the phase of colonial exploitation from 1757-1947 under three broad categories each representing a different pattern of subordination of the colonial economy, society, and polity.⁴⁷ The phases are as follow:

(a) *Commercial phase (1757-1813)*: During this phase, trade and plunder were the main feature of colonialism in India,

(b) *Industrial phase (1813-1858)*: During this phase, India served as a market for British manufactures with simultaneous economic drain of its resources.

(c) *Financial phase (1858-1947)*: This was marked by the British capital investment in India together with intensive exploitation of Indian labour, backed by all the forces of crown.⁴⁸

⁴⁶ Bipan Chandra, *Essays on Colonialism*, p. 62.

⁴⁷ Bipan Chandra, *Essays...*, p. 62.

⁴⁸ For details see, R.P. Dutt, *India Today*, Calcutta, Manisha, reprinted 1986; R.C. Dutt, *Economic History of India*, Delhi, Low Price Publications, first published 1902-1904, reprinted, 1990; Dadabhai

During this long period of colonial rule, India underwent phases of economic damage based on the demand of the international markets and development in their home countries. Therefore, the colonial policies too altered which left a deep impact on Indian society.

Since colonialism is a very vast subject and it would be impossible to put down its history in a few pages. Therefore, I would try to provide a gist about the basic features of colonialism from 1757 to 1858, in order to posit this research as the period of study falls within the first and the second stage of colonialism in India.

1.6.1.1 First Stage of Colonialism in India 1757-1813

During the first stage of colonialism, the colonial state had two main objectives:

- (1) Appropriation of the monopoly of trade with India;
- (2) The second was the direct appropriation of revenue or surplus with the use of political power.

Hence, in conformity with their main objective, the colonial ruler began to eliminate the other European trading companies as well as Indian merchants from the competition, while appropriating the purchase or sale of Indian product. With the use of political power, the English East India Company pressurized the Indians to sell their products at a cheap rate to the English Company, while selling those goods across European markets at a higher price. On the other hand, until 1756, British had to import thousand pounds of silver into India in order to finance their trade, which ceased with the territorial conquest of Bengal. The bullion from England was consequently substituted by the plunder and pillage after the battle of Plassey (1757).⁴⁹ The political dominion

Naoriji, *Poverty and Un-British Rule in India*, First Published in 1901, by Swan Sonnenschein & Co., Ltd., London, First Indian edition, July 1962; Irfan Habib, *Colonization of India Economy, 1757-1900*, Tulika Books, New Delhi, 2006.

after Buxar had empowered them with taxation rights over the province of Bengal, Bihar, and Orissa through the treaty of Allahabad of 1765. The revenue generated from Bengal were utilized to finance its export of Indian goods, strengthen its stronghold over Indian trade and production. This enables them to dictate the weavers of Bengal to sell their product at a cheaper price and export the same to England and Europe at very high value by English.⁵⁰ Therefore, during this phase of exploitation India witnessed under the rubric of 'Merchant Capitalism' was the phase when capital was accumulated through trade and plunder. However, there was no significant import of metropolitan manufactures into the colony and no basic changes were introduced in the colony in the realm of transportation, communication, education, and culture. However, certain changes were made in the administration, judicial system, and methods of agricultural.⁵¹ However, by 1800s, a fully articulated colonial economy emerged in India and began to absorb textiles from English mills. This shattered the pre-colonial India supplied textiles to Asian and European markets and imported vast quantities of bullion.⁵² In 1813, the Charter ended the Company's monopoly of Indian trade. It opened East Indian trade to private enterprise. With the termination of the Napoleonic Wars in 1814-15, an enormous increase of import of British machine-made cloths began to India. Consequently, the total export of Bengal piece goods to the United Kingdom declined.⁵³

1.6.1.2 Second Stage of Colonialism in India 1813-1858

⁴⁹ The English army and navy received the hefty sum of £ 2,75,000 for distribution among their members. The Company received Rs. 22.5 million from Mir Jafar. Lord Clive acquired a personal jagir worth £ 34,567, in Lakshmi Subramaniam, *History of India (1707-1857)*, Hyderabad, Orient BlackSwan, 2010, pp. 47-48.

⁵⁰ R. P. Dutt, *India Today*, p. 97.

⁵¹ Bipan Chandra, *Essays...*, p. 63.

⁵² Tirthankar Roy, *The East India Company*, New Delhi, Random House India, 2016, p. 195.

⁵³ H. Bhattacharayya, *Aspects of Indian Economic History (1750-1950)*, New Delhi, Progressive Publishers, 1980, p. 126.

The second stage of colonialism began with the Charter Act of 1813. Through this Act, the Company was deprived of its monopoly of trading rights in India. The Industrial Revolution in England dramatically changed the whole pattern of colonial policies in India which necessitate the British Crown to take over the direct control and administration of all British territory in India. This was completed in 1858 after the Revolt of 1857. With the ushering of the industrial revolution in England, the colony was modified according to the need of the mother country. Therefore, in compliance with this objective, the colonial exploitation underwent a radical change from 1813 to 1858 and its implication had been manifested in social, economic, culture, administrative, and ideological setting of the colony.

The colonial objective underwent a radical changed after 1813. Now they were not interested to monopolize Indian commodities rather channelizing to capture the Indian market and convert India rapidly into a market for Manchester textiles. This changed objective required free trade which was largely accomplished through the Charter Acts of 1813 and 1833. Through these Charters the British adopted dual policy to exploit the Indian economy. Firstly, Indian markets were opened for the entry of cheap, mass-produced, machine-made British goods, without any tariff restrictions. On the other hand, they obstructed the supply of handcrafted Indian textiles to Britain by adopting high tariff rates on Indian textiles, which had been very popular. Secondly, British Indian territory was developed as a reproductive colony in the agriculture and mineral sphere in which foodstuff and raw material were produced for Britain. This in turn fuelled rapid growth in its manufacturing sector, crucial to the emergence of a powerful capitalist economy in England. These changes reversed the balance of trade that India had enjoyed earlier. Now, Britain scheme to exploit the resources of India by making her a dependent colony to produce and supply the raw material and foodstuffs needed by Britain and make her as a market for colonial goods. This led to uprooting

her traditional handicrafts, and in course of time, India, which was once a homeland of cotton textiles was inundated with Manchester cotton product. In the words of Bipan Chandra:

The essence of the second stage of colonialism was the making of the colony into a subordinate trading partner which would export raw materials and import manufacturers. The larger part of the profits generated by the export trade went to British business houses, which controlled shipping and insurance industries, besides commission agents, traders and bankers.⁵⁴

Spurred by strategies of development and modernisation, the state established its control over the land and resources by introducing various regulations and made financial investments. Simultaneously they opened up the countryside through improvised means of communication culminating in the construction of railways, and the boosting of urban networks to the detriment and ruin of the earlier trade and industrial centers. All these were crucial means of colonization adopted for transforming the economy across India. Hence, during this stage, changes were instituted in the realm of administration where the Western capitalist legal and judicial system and modern education was introduced to make the colony reproductive and promoting the culture of loyalty among the colonial people. Therefore, a liberal political ideology was generated among the colonial administrators who talked of training the colonial people in the arts of democracy and self-governance. This was necessitated with the intention that even if colonial rule come to end in the colony the economic relationship at the heart could be perpetuated.⁵⁵

The British invasion and occupation of Assam in the early part of the nineteenth century coincided with the last phase of merchant capitalism wherein monopoly in trade was the norm and the plantation industry, alongside

⁵⁴ Bipan Chandra, *Essay...*, p. 65.

⁵⁵ Bipan Chandra, *Essay...*, pp. 66-67.

commercialisation of agriculture and extractive revenue. Soon it gave way to the phase of industrial capital wherein more resources were exploited like coal and petroleum and its extraction was facilitated by the creation of infrastructure like steamers and railways. The extractive regime ensured through the transport network raw material from the hinterland to the closest ports for feeding the industries in England. Such activities manifested itself in the colonial scheme in the plains of the Brahmaputra valley and the various hill communities of Assam too became the part of exploitation. However, direct exploitation was largely concentrated only in that areas which they had annexed or else in the rest of the areas it was marked by periodic interventions. The creation of the weekly market and annual trade fairs at the foot of the hills drew the communities into the nexus of the monetised economy.

1.6.2 Colonial Incursion into North East India

The Ahom who had been ruling in Assam since thirteenth-century had tried their best to maintain their political isolation from mainland India mainly due to the bitter experienced they had with the Mughal's invasion. However, this seclusion policy could not be endured for long after the occupation of Bengal by English East India Company, which had put them in direct territorial contiguity with Assam in 1765.⁵⁶ The British did not want to extend their territorial extension in Assam rather they inclined to follow the policy of what Gallagher and Robinson called the policy of, 'trade with informal control if possible'.⁵⁷

So in this background, the company in 1765 formed the Society of Trade permitting the Company's officials to carry out internal trade in salt, betel nut and

⁵⁶ A. C. Banerjee, *The Eastern Frontier of British India 1784-1826*, Calcutta, published by A. Mukherjee, 2 College Square, p. 6.

⁵⁷ Cited in Sekhar Bandyopadhyay, *From Plassey to Partition: A History of Modern India*, Noida, Orient Black Swan, 2004, p. 60.

tobacco.⁵⁸ The Society of Trade was short lived and ceased to exist in August 1868. This was followed by several attempts to open trade relation between Assam and Bengal through various official traders. In this context, in 1774 George Boglee of the Bengal Civil Service was appointed by British Government to explore and report on the possibilities of opening up trade with Bhutan, Tibet, and Assam context.⁵⁹ On the other hand, Hugh Baillie who had better experienced in Assam trade since 1762 had submitted three petitions to the company about profitable trade with Assam in 1771, 1773 and 1776 to grant him permission for conducting trade with Assam on behalf of the Company.⁶⁰ In his petition, he expected to sell for the company in the first year, 100,000 *maunds* of salt, 400 pieces of broadcloth and 300 *maunds* of copper and assured that these sales would increase gradually. The report of George Boglee also pointed out the superior advantage of the Assam, as compared with that of Bhutan, Nepal, and Lhasa.⁶¹ As a result of Baillie and Boglee reports the colonial ruler finally adopted by placing the trade on a proper footing. Mr. Baillie was appointed as Resident of the Company's Government to conduct the salt trade with Assam. Hence once this trade linked opened with Assam, the company was looking for further expansion of her trade with Assam as well as with neighboring state with China and Myanmar.

Therefore, the colonial manoeuvre in Assam shaped largely to exploit the lucrative Assam trade with Bengal and possibility of exploring the inland trade routes through Assam to Tibet to China.⁶² However, this trade exploitation goes in hand and hand with other colonial motives largely to keep abreast with the political happening in

⁵⁸ Sarah Hilaly, *The Railways in Assam*, p. 33.

⁵⁹ S. K. Bhuyan, *Anglo-Assamese Relation 1771-1826*, Guwahati, Lawyer's Book Stall Publication, Third Edition, 1990, p. 86.

⁶⁰ Ramesh Chandra Kalita, *The Assam in the Eighteenth Century*, New Delhi, Omsons Publication, 1992, p. 52.

⁶¹ Ramesh Chandra Kalita, *The Assam in the Eighteenth Century*, p. 69.

⁶² Sajal Nag, *Roots of Ethnic Conflict: Nationality Question in North-East India*, New Delhi, Manohar Publication, 1990, p. 34.

Assam. In this context, in 1792 Captain Welsh was sent to Assam to assist the then Ahom king Gaurinath Singha who was seeking military assistance from Company against the Moamaria rebellion.⁶³ Taking advantage of the opportunity to explore the Assam for colonial benefit Captain Welsh prepared a report under the title of the Sketch of Geography of Assam during his stay in Assam. This report contains valuable information about Assam, where he discussed the unexplored opportunities for the company. On the other hand, after the defeat of the Moamaria, the Ahom king signed a commercial treaty with the company in 1793 by which English was allowed to carry out free trade with Assam. So, this was the beginning of the first political relations between British and Assam, but their relationship still largely confined to trade only.

The declining political system of Ahom Government due to Moamaria rebellion and subsequent follow up of internal rifts among the nobility group had weakened the Ahom government. Unable to cope up with this trouble, the weakened Ahom monarch invoked Burmese assistance, which resulted into series of Burmese invasion (first 1817, second 1819 and third 1821) and subsequently established the Burmese rule in Assam in 1821 and ruled till 1824.⁶⁴ This political development in Assam had bothered the British government and under this circumstance, the British government decided to abandon their non-intervention policy to save their dominions in Bengal from Burmese expansion as well as to exploits the natural resources of Assam.⁶⁵ The British declared war upon Burmese on 5th March 1824 and plunged into the first Anglo-Burmese War and defeated the Burmese in all three sectors of Assam, Arakan, and Rangoon.⁶⁶ This victory of the British in all the sectors compelled the Burmese king to sign the treaty of

⁶³ S. K. Bhuyan, *Anglo-Assamese Relation 1771-1826*, p. 559.

⁶⁴ S. L. Baruah, *Comprehensive History of Assam*, New Delhi, Munshiram Manoharlal, 1985, pp. 457-460.

⁶⁵ Sarah Hilaly, *The Railways...*, p. 37.

⁶⁶ B. R. Pearn, 'Arakan and the First Anglo-Burmese War, 1824-25', *The Far Eastern Quarterly*, vol. 4, No. 1 (Nov., 1944), pp. 27-40, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/204895>, accessed on 29-11-2017, 18:16 UTC

Yandabo on 24 February 1826 by which he surrendered his claim over Assam, Jayantia, Cachar, Manipur and conquered provinces of Arakan, Yeb, Tavoy, Mergui and Tenassirim to the British government.⁶⁷ Thus, in 1826 along with Assam, the pre-colonial monarchies, territories and other political formations in North East India were administratively integrated into the British colonial state in India who thereafter ruled the province for long 120 years.

The British occupation of Assam during the nineteenth century was the most important phase in the history of colonialism. This period saw the beginning of the stage of rampant industrial development and expansion of capital in various part of the world. When industries were rampantly increasing, the demand for raw material reciprocated and made the plantation economy as the priority sector of imperial policies and program in the various colony of the British Raj. Among the colonies of British, India was most coveted colony because it not only provided major raw material but was also emerging as a profitable market for British finished product. Hence, against this background, the British wanted to turn to an agricultural estate of Assam and wanted to transform local tradition institution to suit the colonial pattern of exploitation.⁶⁸

Figure 1.4: Map of Assam in the nineteenth century.

⁶⁷ Priyam Goswami, *The History of Assam : From Yandabo to Partition, 1826-1947*, New Delhi, Orient Blackswan, 2012, pp. 7-8.

⁶⁸ Amalendu Guha, *Planter Raj to Swaraj: Freedom Struggle and Electoral Politics in Assam 1826-1947*, New Delhi, Tulika Books, 2006, p. 2.



Source: John Butler, *A Sketch of Assam with some account of the Hill Tribes*.

After the annexation of Assam, the British pursue the policy of colonization very systematically by dividing the whole province of Assam into two parts: Upper Assam (Kamrup, Nowgang and other parts of Darrang, with Guwahati as its headquarter) and Lower Assam (other parts of Darrang and from Biswanath to the river Buridihing with Rangpur as its headquarter). They brought Assam under the martial law 1824-28 and put it under the joint commissionership under Colonel Richard and David Scott. The former was in charge of civil charge of Upper Assam and Lower Assam was entrusted to David Scott. However, Scott was entrusted the general management of the whole territory.⁶⁹ The traditional economy which was already shattered by the Burmese invasion had not attracted the British, and there was little to offer for colonial exploitation, therefore, they turned towards the land of Assam which was the main source of a revenue generator for Ahom government.⁷⁰ The British recognized that their actual colonization would only leap after the recognition of the colonial authority over the land. Hence, they turn their attention towards the labour power of peasant. This was done during the time of Anglo Burmese war per se by appointing Captain David Scott

⁶⁹ H. K. Barpujari, *Assam in the days of the Company*, (second edition), Guwahati, Spectrum Publications, 1980, p. 14.

⁷⁰ Sarah Hilaly, *The Railways...*, p. 23.

to survey the Lower Assam to assess its revenue scopes, which was completed by the expulsion of Burmese from Assam.⁷¹ The main motive of the British during the martial law period was to earn as much revenue as possible from agriculture and other means. Therefore, this period was largely confined to strengthen their fiscal policy.

In the initial period, the collection of revenue of Lower Assam was entrusted to *Sheristadar* in conformity with practice in Bengal districts. In lower Assam, they continued the *Pargana* system with the assistance from the *Choudhury*. A *Choudhury* was in-charge of each *pargana* to collect tax at the local level. While in Upper Assam the revenue collection was managed by old revenue official known as *Kheldar* or the head of *khel*, the *Hazarika*, the *Saikia* and the *Boras* of Ahom Administration under the native *sheristadar*, Janardan Barbarua who was paid in lands and paiks.⁷²

In 1828 when David Scott found out that under provisional administration the gross revenue yield of Lower Assam was about Rs. 30, 000.⁷³ The revenue yield was considered adequate for covering the administrative expenses; therefore Lower Assam was annexed to British India in 1828. However, Upper Assam was not annexed yet on the basis of economic as well as social viewpoints. Later on with the improvement in condition in Upper Assam, Martial law was lifted in 1828. The post of Junior Commissioner was abolished, and it was designated with Political Agent of Upper Assam and Captain Neufville was appointed in that post and David Scott was made as Commissioner and the Agent to the Governor-General, North-East Frontier. This brought changes in revenue system of Assam.

⁷¹ G. D. Goswami, *British Revenue Policy in Assam and its Social Impact, 1826-1900*, in David R. Syiemlieh and Manorama Sharma, (eds.), *Society and Economy in North-East India*, p.175.

⁷² Nirod K. Barooah, *David Scott in North-East India: A Study of British Paternalism, 1802-1831*, New Delhi, Munshiram Manoharlal, pp. 92-94.

⁷³ Nirod K. Barooah, *David Scott in North-East India: A Study of British Paternalism, 1802-1831*, p. 103.

The British abolished the personal service system of the *paiks* in Upper Assam and instead introduced a poll tax of rupees three per *paik* for his house and land.⁷⁴ In central and lower Assam a tax of *gadhan* of two rupees per head was imposed on *paiks* for which they were entitled two *puras* their arable land.⁷⁵ So far religious rent-free land like *Devottar*, *Dharmottar*, and *Brahmottar* were brought under taxation.⁷⁶ On the other hand, professional tax was imposed on both the division on the braziers, silk-weavers, gold-washer, fishermen, etc., duties on *hats*, *ghats* and fisheries continued to be levied as under the former government.⁷⁷ In 1832 revenue administration was reformed Captain Matthie, Rutherford and Boglee were appointed as collector of Darrang, Nowgong, and Kamrup respectively for introducing a taxation of lands in substitution of the poll tax and Upper Assam was restored to Purandar Singha in 1833.⁷⁸

In the new revenue administration, settlements were made directly with the *rayat*. Title deeds or *patas* were issued under the signature and seal of the collector specifying therein the amount to be paid by each *rayat* and very interestingly revenue was monetization.⁷⁹ This replacement of the hitherto system of payment in labour service was the first step towards monetization of the economy of Assam. To make circulation available the British put out the royal mint of the Ahom Rajah, and replaced the *Narayani* currency by *Sicca* Rupees of the East India Company's. This was done for the convenience of peasant and for facilitating trade in Assam.

In 1834, Lower Assam was divided into four district- Kamrup, Golpara, Darang, and Nagaon. Each district was administered by an officer, designated as the Principal

⁷⁴ M. L. Bose, *Development of Administration in Assam 1874-1920*, New Delhi, Concept Publishing Company, 1985, p. 57.

⁷⁵ Sarah Hilaly, *The Railways...*, p. 24.

⁷⁶ Nirod K. Barooah, *David Scott in North-East India...*, p. 92.

⁷⁷ H. K. Barpujari, *Assam in the Days of the Company*, pp. 28-30.

⁷⁸ Orchid Baruah, *British Administrative Centers in Nineteenth Century Assam*, Unpublished PhD Thesis, Guwahati University, 2014, p. 52.

⁷⁹ G. D. Goswami, 'British Revenue Policy in Assam and its Social Impact, 1826-1900', in David R. Syiemlieh and Manorama Sharma (ed.), *Society and Economy in North East India*, vol. 3, p. 175.

Assistant to the Commissioner, who had to perform his duties as a judge, magistrate, and collector.⁸⁰ Each Principal Assistant also known as Senior Assistant was aided in his duties by a Junior Assistant and a Sub- Assistant who were generally posted at the Sub-division of the district. This made the revenue generation more efficient and in this context, the revenue demand between 1824-25 and 1849-50 was said to have increased by a drastic 480.72 percent.

The coming of English did not only affect the revenue system of Assam but also it ushered a new economy which destroyed the pre-colonial economy and linked up with the world market, i.e. the plantation economy. Till the arrival of the English, Assam did not know about plantation economy, but the arrival of English proved to be a paradigm shift in agriculture. The availability and soil fertility of Assam had encouraged them to try introducing commercial plants like indigo, mustard, sugarcane, jute, and tea etc. In due course of time, these plants make its way in Assam soil for example jute which was recognized as one of the most important commercial crops. On the other hand, the discovery of tea in 1823 was taken up for experimental cultivation in the 1830s. Tea cultivation flourished and cultivation of tea soon spread all over the Assam.

The prospects of its successful culture in the soil of Assam encouraged Jenkins, a true representative of the new school of the industrial capitalist, devised and executed a policy for maximum utilization of land of Assam envisioned the policy of wastelands management. He set upon himself the task of gathering systematic data on wastelands and their agricultural potential. He believed that land lease granted to European planters would attend with the most beneficial effects. It would hastening the development of the resources of this highly fertile tract and improving its communication with the vast

⁸⁰ Orchid Baruah, *British Administrative Centers in Nineteenth Century Assam*, p. 54.

countries immediately beyond to the North and the East.⁸¹ This can be achieved through allowing the private individuals and company to carry out this business by providing lands in very low rent. This can be achieved through the new colonial scheme of Wasteland Grant Rule of 1838.⁸²

In order to generate efficient revenue as well as to encourage the European planter, the Government formulates new rules known as Wasteland Settlement Rule of 1838. According to this system the wastelands were divided into three categories: (a) wasteland amidst cultivated lands to be granted rent-free for five years, then a land revenue of 9 *annas* per acre would be effect for the 6th to 8th years, and then Re. 1-2 *annas* from 9 to 30th years (b) high reed and grass wastes to be granted rent-free for ten years, 9 *annas* per acre for 11th to 13th years and Re.1-2 *annas* for 14 to 35th years (c) forest and high wasteland to be granted rent-free for a term of twenty years, 9 *annas* per acre for 21 to 23 years, and Re. 1-2 *annas* for 24th to 45th years. No grant for agriculture purpose could be made for less than 100 acres at a time and to one who did not possess capital or stock worth Rs. 3 per acre.⁸³ Overall, the government had sole right over it and the rules only permitted Europeans to avail such concession. The rates of revenue for wastelands were consistently kept below those for traditional cultivation in the region in order to facilitate large-scale acquisition of land so that it can be converted into an agricultural colony and supplying raw material for England. This adoption of wasteland policy had facilitated development in plantation economy in Assam.

The increasing importance of the Assamese economy demanded to accelerate the colonization project in North East India, the promoter needs improved

⁸¹ Sarah Hilaly, *The Railways...*, p. 30.

⁸² Kcya Dasgupta, 'Plantation Economy and Land Tenure System in Brahmaputra Valley, 1839-1914', *Economic and Political Weekly*, vol. 18, no. 29, 1983, p. 1281, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/717332> (accessed on 12 December 2017).

⁸³ H.K. Barpujari, *The Comprehensive history of Assam*, volume V, Guwahati, Publication Board, 3rd edition, 2007, p. 38.

communication link between Bengal and Assam, as well as through the improvement of the internal communication, which will help them to transport the labourer, army, raw material and finished commodities more easily.⁸⁴ Hence, they introduced a steamer service in 1847 on the Brahmaputra. The establishment of Public Works Department to construct, maintain and improve roads in the province followed this. The construction of roads and railway whose intended for the consolidation of administration and transportation of commercial goods to serve the basic purpose of colonialism. This Department started construction of roads in the 1860s and the railways in the 1880s. The province's railway mileage which was 114 miles by 1891 grew to 715 miles by 1903.⁸⁵ The development of transport and communication facilities had accelerated the export of raw material like timber, coal, crude and other material in such a way which native people had never witnessed in their former Ahom period. Introduction of railways facilitated the large-scale immigration of labourer and cultivator, which brought about demographic change and transformed the nature of the economy.⁸⁶

Thus, the introduction of improvised means of transport and communication and the monetary system integrated the local economy with the world economy, along with the rest of India, in a subordinate capacity though, in which the yielding profits were accumulated by European and Assam witnessed perpetual drain of resources and its wealth without any favourable return.⁸⁷

1.6.2.1 The consequence of Colonialism in North East India

⁸⁴ Sarah Hilaly, 'Impact of the Railways on the Society and Economy of Assam', in David R. Syiemlieh and Manorama Sharma (eds.), *Society and Economy in North East India*, vol. 3, p. 246.

⁸⁵ Sajal Nag, *Roots of Ethnic Conflict*, p. 41.

⁸⁶ Sarah Hilaly, 'Impact of the Railways...', in David R. Syiemlieh and Manorama Sharma (eds.), *Society and Economy in North East India*, p. 258.

⁸⁷ Sarah Hilaly, 'Impact of the Railways...', in David R. Syiemlieh and Manorama Sharma (eds.), *Society and Economy in North East India*, p. 258.

The discovery of tea and the rosy prospects for this industry, the revenue potential of Assam and the lucrative trade routes to China and Tibet led them to consolidate their hold over Assam. The coming of colonial rule had altered the economy of Assam, which resulted in cataclysmic changes in the pattern of their social life. The weakened Assamese society could not withstand this unprecedented external onslaught and there was a tremendous effect on the non-capitalist mode of production prevalent in Assam. The first target of colonial ruler fell upon the land and labour force of Assam. They disrupted the existing system by the separation of the direct producer from their means by introducing cash taxation. The replacement of taxation from labour service to monetary taxation had forced the peasant to sell their product in order to pay the revenue in cash. This led to break down of existing division of labour in the process. The changes in the existing land tenure were extensive and had disastrous repercussions on the peasant economy. The sadder thing was that since the introduction of revenue system, it was ever increasing and colonial ruler slowly colonized everything of Assam and if we see, there was tax on almost everything on all the resources and aspect of human economic activities like on fisheries and ferries, ponds, specialized cultivation, agriculture, timber, reeds for construction of houses and fodder for cattle etc.⁸⁸, which were earlier obtained by the farmer free of cost, were now no longer free and were brought under taxation. If the peasant failed to pay the revenue in cash within the due date, the government confiscated the houses, ornaments, brass-utensils, silk cloths and even the cattle, which were later auctioned.⁸⁹ So this taxation system was one major aspect of colonization on which human economic was depended and the continuing increase in land rent seriously imperiled the conditions of the labourers, the means of

⁸⁸ Sajal Nag, 'Politics of 'People-ing' Colonial State, Migratory Movements and Rise of a Fractured Polity', in David R. Syiemlieh and Manorama Sharma (eds.), *Society and Economy in North-East India*, vol.3, p.118.

⁸⁹ Sajal Nag, 'Politics of 'People-ing...'', in David R. Syiemlieh and Manorama Sharma (eds.), *Society and Economy in North-East India*, p. 112.

production and eventually undermined the very foundation of the productive forces, which in long course of time led to poverty and stagnation of the society.⁹⁰ The British failed to maintain the traditional canal and irrigation channel for agriculture. It ruined the existing structure of land tenure. Overall they wanted to convert the poor peasant to work as the labourer on the plantation in order to fill up the vacuum of the scarcity of labourer in tea, coal mining and other commercial plantation for the planter.

The main motive behind the introduction of monetary revenue and ever-increasing tax was to finance the budding company in Assam. The surplus generated through them were transferred outward the state, mainly to the metropolitan center and there was no reciprocal for it. In course of this transformation, indigenous cottage and handicraft industries were destroyed to make way for British manufactured goods. By the end of the nineteenth century the indigenous silk and handloom industries (*endi, muga*, etc), a measure of the high standard silk and proficiency of the Assamese, were almost extinct. During the last decade, the use of Assamese silk had visibly decreased and the imported cotton stuff has taken its place. The foreign made goods were gradually finding more favour with the people. By sacrificing the comforts of silk, gold and silver ornaments they could afford these new articles.

The expanding and growing economy under colonial rule provided large-scale immigration for plantation-economy. This migratory population brought huge area of wasteland under cultivation of different cash crops like jute, buckwheat, season, linseed, mustard, onion, garlic, tobacco, sugarcane, tea, rubber, etc. So, what began as plantation purpose spilled over to another sector as well like road construction, mining, railway and petroleum, etc. which provided increased opportunities for investment. In this context, the Marwari businessmen and traders of Dhaka and Sylhet were quick to take

⁹⁰ Sajal Nag, Politics of 'People-ing...', in David R. Syiemlieh and Manorama Sharma (eds.), *Society and Economy in North-East India*, p. 112.

advantage of the situation. The inflow of European capital, traders, businessmen, and speculators increased in an economy where exchange relationship and circulation multiplied manifold. Thus the British Colonial state had tremendously effect on the non-capitalist mode of production prevalent in Assam and subsequently it was linked with the world market.

Therefore, from the above discussion, it is clear that the early contact between British and North East India started through a trade and this control over trade was achieved with the annexation of Assam in 1826. The complete annexation of Assam was achieved through pass wise in 1828 Lower Assam was brought under British dominion and in 1838 Upper Assam was brought under British dominion. In this way, complete annexation of Assam was achieved and this led to a real process of colonization in the plains of the Brahmaputra valley. Like Bengal from where they colonized various part of India; from Brahmaputra valley, they manoeuvre the policy of colonization in whole parts of North East India.

The Anglo-Burmese War of 1824-26 and subsequent annexation of Assam had brought them in contact with a number of hill tribes in the north-east region.⁹¹ The change in the power and authority brought radical change in the Assam plain after 1826. The coming of new administration and economy had disrupted the existing traditional relationship between hill tribes and Ahom which was maintained through *posa* and the commercialization of agriculture, discovery of tea, concept of wastelands, private property, military outpost and cash payment in place of barter had greatly disturbed and this led to drastic change in the attitude and ideas of the people resulted in uneasiness and often ended in open hostilities. Subsequently, this brought the British in conflict

⁹¹ K. C. Chaudhuri, *History of Modern India*, New Delhi, New Central Book Agency, 2011, p. 45.

with various hill tribes of North East India like Khasi⁹², Jaintia⁹³, Garo and Lushai, Naga⁹⁴, and various other tribes of Arunachal Pradesh like, Akas, Nyishi, Adi, Mishmi. In this background, the present research subjects were the first tribes of Arunachal Pradesh who undertook armed rebellion against the British: the Khamtis and the Singphos.

1.7 Statement of the Problems

The Anglo-Burmese war (1824-26) which culminated by establishment of British rule over the Brahmaputra plain had brought them in close contact with the

⁹² The Khasi carried out their resistance in 1829 when the British began to interfere in their traditional land rights in lowland on the northern foothills. The Khasi claimed their right over the northern foothill to till the hill area inhabit by them. After the occupation of Assam, the British ignored the claim of Khasi and began to impose taxes upon the inhabitant of this area. Not only this, on the other hand David Scott wanted to open the hill area of Khasi and therefore he began to make influence over the Khasi chiefs to allow the British to pass through their state. Through his persuasive policy, David Scott brought Khasi chief under the treaty and forced them to open road for British movement. After this treaty they established British station in Nongkhlaw and Cheerapunji, to establish control over Syleth and Assam. This abrupt move of British created psychosis of fear among the Khasis which burst into the massacre at Nongkhlaw and carried out their resistance till 1833.

⁹³ Jaintia Raja Ram Sing II signed agreement with British in 1824. Through this treaty both the parties agreed to assist each other against the Burmese. However, after the end of the Anglo-Burmese war the relationship between Raja and British began to deteriorate. The British taking advantage of political supremacy began to intervene in ritualistic practices of Jaintia who use to practice human sacrifice. In one such incident in 1827 the four British subjects were seized from plain and carried up into the hill. The carried away British subjects were sacrificed but among them one luckily escaped and reported the incident to British. This gave excuse to English who had been eyeing on Jaintia hill and finally in 1835 Jaintiapur was captured and occupied by the company troops.

⁹⁴ The British came into contact with the Nagas after the end of the Anglo-Burmese war. Due to change in political power in Assam and administrative development in Assam created conflict between British and Nagas. The latter enjoyed freedom during Ahom rule, and when their movements were checked under new power they made a frequent aggression to continue their way of life. This form of aggression gave excuse to British who in order to control the Naga movement established outpost at Mezoma. The officer stationed at Mezoma began to interfere in the activities of Naga. In this context in 1850 an incident occurred when the Naga made an attack upon the officer stationing at Mezoma. This incident gave opportunity to British to strengthen their hold in Naga area and accordingly officer Bogchand enquired about the men who were involved in the attack and arrest them. On his return to Samagutting, while on a night hall at Piphima Bogchand's party was attacked from all side. Twenty two sepoy were killed at Piphima and those who managed to escape were slain in their pursuit. The British force entered the hill and attacked both Mezoma and Khonoma and defeated them but the matter did not end here as the Naga continued with their sporadic raids till the early part of the twenty century.

various hill tribes of the North-Eastern Frontier region. The establishment of British rule was followed by substantial change in the existing system under the Ahom Government like commutation of *posa* from kind to cash; intervention in the social and political sphere of tribes in the name of civilizing mission; creation of military post in foothill areas had created discontent among the tribes which gave rise to many aggressive and unfriendly movements. These movements of tribes and counter movement of the British in form of military expedition and economic blockade was a complex and sensitive issue. However, this intermeshing movement between hill tribes and the colonial ruler has been profiled from the hegemonic standpoint of the colonial state, therefore, this need to be seen from the people's perspective too. Their movements, on the face of it, may appear to be wild and cruel in their tone and temper, but if analysed properly it reveals their form of struggles and resistances against the alien rule to maintain their independence.

In the same context, there exists no satisfactory history of the Khamtis and the Singpho resistance movement against the colonial intervention. The existing knowledge about their movements against the British has been largely reconstructed from colonial documents. Therefore, it has been written and understood from the colonial perspective, and has been perpetuated by the post-colonial writer without giving much thought. The colonial documents have been taken as the primary point of reference by the scholars, and unconsciously or otherwise, accepted the general validity of tribal raids, plunder and attack as an act of savagery against the civilized society. This stereotype of tribal savagery has been overrated without trying to imagine the view from the other side of the channel. We have failed to take into account the opinion of the tribal people and how they perceived about the events or encounters they had with the colonial authority. Therefore, there still remains a serious lacuna as the knowledge, with its intermeshing relationship with colonialism and colonial intervention in the Khamtis and the Singphos

area and the encounter with these tribes could never claim positions of neutrality and objectivity. Hence, in order to move beyond this colonial historiography about the British-tribal relations, oral history of the tribe has been used resourcefully and effectively. With the help of oral history, an attempt has been made to challenge the superior handling of colonial records about the tribes, which act as a means of engaging with the past of the tribes who did not have a culture of historical recording in form of writing. Therefore, in this Thesis, I have taken an approach where both the sources intersect about the British relationship with the Khamtis and Singphos within the framework of colonialism, and its operation against the tribes and their responses in forms of resistance. Before, venturing into the resistance movements of the tribes let's have a glimpse about the background which made it inevitable for coming of English in Assam and their contact with the hill tribes particularly those who constitute the subject of research. It is imperative to have a general understanding about the functioning of colonialism and its various nuances and particularly their British relation with Burma since the last decades of the eighteenth century.

The defeat of the France in the Indian subcontinent had created an unending rivalry between Britain and France in Southeast Asia. France, who had lost its political scope in India, desperately wanted to establish her influence over the Peninsula Southeast Asia and moved towards establishing a friendly relation with the ruler of Ava. Against this background, the British too began to extend their influence in Burma, which was a neighbour of British Bengal bringing them into close contact. The Burmese under Kaunbaung dynasty followed an imperialist policy to establish their dominance over the fertile plains of Irrawaddy valley and eastwards towards the Brahmaputra valley. Territorial expansion was accelerated under Burmese rule when Arakan, which was previously a buffer zone, was annexed in 1785. The expansion of Burmese into Arakan brought them in direct territorial contiguity with British, which therefore

remained as a ticklish issue between both sides. When finally a rebellion broke out among the Arakanese against the Burmese reign and they used Chittagong as a base to attack Arakan. The rebellion was suppressed with a heavy hand, causing a massive civilian exodus to Chittagong. Burmese army crossed the boundary line, demanding that the British government to hand over the rebels to which they did not comply.

This Burmese expansion towards north-west accelerated when King Bagyi Daw made a quick move by sending his military in assistance to Ahom Nobol and in 1819 his army made the conquest of Manipur and then in 1821 the entire province of Assam was brought under the Burmese control. It was just a matter of time before annexing Cachar and Jaintia hills. Consequently the British no longer considered the Burmese as a potential ally against France, but an immediate threat. This brought them into Assam and its neighbourhood resulting in the first Anglo-Burmese war in 1824 when Lower Burma was annexed.

The security concern for Bengal was the main factors, which lead the British into Assam. This strategic perception on Bengal's north-eastern frontier guided the destiny of British policy towards Assam and its neighbouring hills tribes. The Khamtis and the Singphos came in active contact with the British during the course of the Anglo-Burmese war itself. After the end of the war the British had not yet fully established military stations along the strategic areas along the frontiers, which were accentuated by lack of proper infrastructure for rapid troop movements. Therefore, the areas occupied by these tribes were strategically important for the British who wanted to use these tribes as a buffer zone against the Burmese. These tribes had been traditionally engaged in the regional politics and were already acting as buffer between Burma and Ahom kingdom. It is relevant to mention that the Khamtis chief acted as agents to persuade the Burmese to Chandrakanta Singha as the rightful heir to the Ahom throne. The Singphos maintained amicable relation with Burmese ruler who had gifted Rangili an Ahom to

the Singphos chief as a gift seeking to strengthen their relationship. These were indicators that the Khamtis and the Singphos who inhabited both sides of Patkai hill had traditionally engaged in the regional politics.

Against this background, the existing body of knowledge on the Khamtis chronicles the early British attempts to maintain an effective relationship by paying them stipends and supplying arms for protecting the frontiers. They were also assigned the task of keeping a watch over movements of both the Burmese and the Singphos and report any connivance among these powers. Strategic factors played an important role, but coincided with the commercial interest of the British in the North East and beyond, also triggered the idea of bringing these tribes under British dominance. The area inhabited by these tribes had timber, rubber, and elephants, etc. In addition, the English were aware of the existence of trans-border trade between the Burma and India where these tribes played an important role. Hence, they were keen to reopen the commercial relations with northern Burma. In order to connect Assam and Northern Burma and also to China, British after 1813 permitted the Christian Missionaries to work among the frontier tribes. Accordingly, in 1836 the “Shan Mission” was established in Sadiya to spread the gospel as well as to seek to find a route into Tibet and thence on to China. All these attempts to use and open the Khamtis and the Singphos country led to resistance against the colonial ruler which finally climaxed in form of an armed rebellion in 1839 and 1843 respectively.

However, the current body of knowledge regarding the Khamtis and Singphos resistance and rebellion is defined by an account of their attacks on the colonial state and the consequent policies to suppress them through expeditions. Their resistance to British rule has been represented as an attack of the ‘wild tribes’ on the benevolent colonial rulers. The tribes and their resistance to interventions in their social set-up in the form of removal of slavery, restriction of rights over taxing peasants as well as

selectively playing off one tribe against the other has nowhere been profiled. The ‘savage’ and ‘barbaric’ attacks and the British military expeditions coupled with policies of playing off one group against another to suit colonial needs have been profiled from the hegemonic standpoint of the state. Instead of incorporating the multiple causes of resentment within the communities there was an insistence on economic causes. The viewpoint of the tribes is lost in this kind of representation. A narrative of resistance of the common people can help unearth the internal dynamics within the societies, which had resulted in their resistance movement against the British. Therefore, in the subsequent chapters an attempt has been made to relook the archival sources that have been used by both the colonial and post-colonial scholars. It has been supplemented with fresh data gathered mainly from the preserved historical memories of the indigenous community to arrive at a holistic understanding by looking at it from the vantage point of the tribes too.

Therefore, a humble attempt has been made to understand the official version, which continues to be perpetuated in textual productions until date by incorporate the view of the community as reflected in their collective memories. This has provided us an insight into the dynamics of collaboration, simultaneity in areas of conflict of interests on sharing political power, forest and mineral resources with the colonial power. The upheaval in their social structures by the freeing of slaves, which suffered strains of dislocation and displacement and loss of taxation rights over peasantry, was explored outside the archival domain. This would help us understand how sporadic acts of resistance culminated into a large-scale violence seeking to extrude a foreign body. Suppression of resistance and consequent dispersal of the population and its impact on these communities till date can be unearthed by exploring the community memory. The use of the colonial records with a simultaneous corroboration from the oral traditions in circulation among the communities, regarding these sporadic acts of violence and

rebellion can help build a holistic history. By centering the story of the tribes the new narrative can create a new perspective upon the earlier hegemonic narrative looked from the vantage point of the state. The study also tries to look into the anxieties of the colonial state in by examination the noting on British records.

1.8 Review of Literature

The research shall be produced by outlining the relationship between the Khamtis-Singphos has always been pre-fixed with the term ‘Anglo’ where the descriptions about them were from the viewpoint of the problems they created for the British. With regard to subject undertaken for study, no detail history has been written except few literature available in form of short articles, chapters in history books, which would help me, gets a broad outline of the tribes and their relationship, though, are not very exhaustive.

Alexander Mackenzie in his book *History of the Relations of the Government with the Hill Tribes of the North-East Frontier of Bengal, 1884 (renamed and reproduced as The North-East Frontier of India)* devoted two separate chapters on the Singphos and Khamtis and their relation with the British. However, in his entire discussion, he dealt in part only with the tale of constant raids, plunder, and attacks by these tribes against the British authority in Assam. He outlines the various military measures against the tribes. However, there is no detailed discussion on various policies adopted by British which encroached upon the life and property of these tribes, nor does he provide details for the attacks for the Khamtis and Singphos on British military outposts beyond the idea of a mere outbursts of the wild tribes. However, it is a valuable research, which can be used as a source for writing the history of the Khamti and

Singpho resistance movements but only after corroborating it with the other written records and oral sources.

R.M. Lahiri in his book *The Annexation of Assam, 2003* gives details account of the annexation of Sadiya. However, he did not discuss the post-rebellion period of the Khamtis, nor the Singpho rebellion. His work is largely based on archival sources, therefore, it needs to be corroborated with oral history. Overall, it is a very helpful book to understand the British tribal relation and the overall British annexation policy towards North East India.

H.K. Barpujari in his book *Problems of the Hill Tribes North-East Frontier* (1822-42) vol. I and (1843-1872) vol. II, 1970 has also elaborately dealt the British relationship with the Khamtis and Singphos by drawing from a large number of archival records preserved in India and abroad. However, while dealing with British conflicts with the Khamtis and Singphos, he failed to unearth the internal dynamic within the societies, which forced these tribes to carry out their resistance movement against the British. However, his work has brought out many new facts, which has helped me to understand the Khamti and Singpho struggle against the British.

Lakshmi Devi in her book *Ahom-Tribal Relations, 1968* has dealt with the early history of both the Khamti and Singpho tribes. This book does not deal specifically with the Khamti and the Singpho resistance movements against the British but has been a great source to understand their relationship with the Ahom state in the pre-colonial period. This book provides a general background about the tribes and is of relevance to the current research

Bipan Chandra, et al., *India's Struggle for Independence, 1987* gives a good account of Indian national movement as well as civil rebellion and tribal uprisings. However, his work did not mention any single tribal rebellion of northeast India, which

to some extent quite different in nature as compared to other part of India but his work gives a general understanding of the tribal uprising in mainland India.

Shobhan N. Lamare in his book *Resistance Movements in North-East India: The Jaintias of Meghalaya 1860-1863*, (2001) has made a very detailed study on one of the most important resistance movements against the British rule in North-East India after 1857. This book though is confined to the Jaintias resistance movement, yet it had given me a picture to understand the study of tribal resistance in particular and British imperialism in North-East India in general.

Won Khay Pomoung's unpublished Ph. D. Thesis titled *Social Life of the Singphos*, Rajiv Gandhi University, (2001), also discusses the British-Singpho conflicts in few paragraphs but without much detail. Here he did not examine the changes that undertook in the social life of the Singphos after their contact with the British.

Srinibash Panda in his unpublished Ph. D. Thesis title - *Imperial Dynamic in India's North-East Frontier: A Case Study of Arunachal Pradesh*, Rajiv Gandhi University, (2008), has discussed the colonial penetration in Arunachal Pradesh. He also discussed in detail about the British military expedition against the Khamti and Singpho tribes. However, he did not give emphasis on various issues, which forced these tribes to carry out their resistance against the British. His work is much focused on the political strategy of the British and overall policy towards the various tribes of Arunachal Pradesh. Therefore, his work provides a limited view of the conflict yet ample clue for further research, which I have undertaken in this work.

S. Dutta's "British-Singphos Conflicts: An Analysis of Strategic and Economic Aspects," in North East India History Association Proceedings, 1993 has stressed on the economic and strategic importance, which led to the establishment of the colonial hegemony over the Singpho area.

M.L. Bose's, *British Policies in the North-East Frontier Agency (1979)*; and *History of Arunachal Pradesh (1997)*; L.N. Chakravorty's, *Glimpses of Early History of Arunachal Pradesh (1989)*; J.N. Choudhary's, *Arunachal Through The Ages (1982)*; and *Arunachal Panorama* etc. discussed the Khamtis and Singphos rebellion. However, not all these works go into any detail of the Khamti and the Singpho rebellion, though it formed one of the many other tribal histories they studied in their books. On the other hand, all these works almost seem like repetitive work of Alexander Mackenzie and Edward Gait where overviews of all tribes have been provided. They failed to throw sufficient light on the people's participation, which directly or indirectly shaped the frontier policies of British. Nor do their works made any critical analysis on the impact of the conflicts on the later socio-economic and political life of these tribes

1.9 Objective of the Study

This study intends to fulfill the following objectives-

- I. To understand the resistance movement among the Khamtis and Singphos beyond the earlier official narratives;
- II. To incorporate the view of each of these communities to view the people's perspective;
- III. To understand the idea of the buffer zone and how the British used it in their policy towards these tribes;
- IV. To study the impact of British policy leading to rebellion;
- V. To understand how the British dealt with the rebellion and the policies followed in its aftermath.

1.10 Sources and Methodology

This work is a historical study based on primary and secondary data. Intensive reading has been done on the secondary sources, which includes the published documents like books, articles, journals, periodicals, unpublished M.Phil. dissertations and Ph.D. thesis collected from the Library of Rajiv Gandhi University, North-Eastern Hill University, Guwahati University and available theses in Shodhganga website.

This was followed by an extensive collection of the primary data by carrying out intensive fieldwork in Namsai and Changlang Districts of Arunachal Pradesh inhabited by the Khamti and Singpho population. While carrying out fieldwork, mixed methods samplings (probability and purposive) were used in order to collect primary data. Both closed and open-ended interviews were conducted with the local population. Beside these questionnaires and schedule were used to collect data. Attempt has been made on the examining the various stories in the community memory about the war that they had waged. In order to capture all the fieldwork data, various scientific tools like voice recorder, video camera, and photo camera etc., were used.

For getting official data available in the archives, Arunachal Pradesh State Archives Itanagar, Assam State Archives Dispur, the National Archives of India, Delhi and the West Bengal State Archives at Kolkata were visited. The relevant archival files which include letters, reports administrative accounts of various Departments, accounts of ethnographers, botanists and explorers, administrative and military reports, gazetteers, tour diaries, political and judicial proceedings etc., were collected.

This was followed by extensive synthetic operation of all the collected primary and secondary data and attempts have been made to understand it within the framework of colonialism and its operation in order to give a scientific, objective, and coherent picture of the Khamtis and Singphos resistance movement.

1.11 Chapterisation

This thesis is divided into the following six chapters:

Chapter I - Introduction

This chapter provides a detailed geographical background of the universe of study from the level of the state to the specific districts. It introduces the population studied within the landscape. Colonialism as a concept is introduced with its manifestation in India as a whole and Northeast India in particular. The relevance of colonialism for the present study in the context of Arunachal Pradesh has been discussed briefly. In addition the chapter deals with the methodological aspects used for collecting data, statement of the problem, highlights the significance of the study, review of the literature, chapterisation, etc.

Chapter II - Historical Background

This chapter outlines the story of the migration of the Khamtis and Singphos from their pre-migration points of contact. Their pattern of settlement in Arunachal Pradesh and contiguous areas and points of contact and conflict is explored. A background of their relationship with the pre-colonial state has been dealt with too. A profile of their social, economic, political religious and cultural life has been traced. An understanding of the institution of slavery too has been traced to provide a background.

Chapter III - Khamti Resistance and Colonial State

This chapter deals with the early British policy towards the Khamtis and the various mechanisms of colonial control. The points of an encounter, as well as the conflict between the unequal powers, have been explored. A history of sporadic resistance triggered by constraints faced from instruments of colonial rule in its multiple dimensions has been explored. The culmination of the resistance in the rebellion of 1839 and its consequences has been discussed in details.

Chapter IV - Singpho Resistance and Colonial State

This chapter deals with the early British encounter and policy towards the Singphos and the various mechanisms of colonial control. The areas of collaboration between sections within the community and the British have been explored. An attempt has been made to unearth multiple reasons for the conflict beyond those currently chronicled. A history of resistance from one group of the Singphos culminating in the rebellion of 1843 and its consequences have been discussed.

Chapter V - Post-Pacification History of the Khamtis and Singphos

This chapter explores the policies followed by the British following the suppression of the major rebellion of the Khamtis and Singphos. The impacts of the changes brought in by a subsequent change in the frontier policies of the British on these specific communities have been examined. Further, their impacts of their internal socio-economic structures have been examined.

Chapter VI - Conclusion

This chapter sums up the major findings of the preceding chapters. Here all the findings regarding the resistance movement have been interpreted seeking to analyse the nature of resistance, cause for their failure and significant changes appear in the social, economic and political life of the Khamtis and Singphos. The role of the tribes played in the making of a frontier history has been analyzed in a framework to arrive at a logical conclusion.

CHAPTER-II

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

2.1 Introduction to the Chapter

As stated by E. H. Carr that, ‘history is a continuous process between the present and the past’.⁹⁵ Therefore, history cannot be studied in isolation, as in order to understand any particular historical period, one has to study the preceding period. In order to trace the history of colonial encounter of the Khamtis and the Singphos, it is imperative to outline the historical background of both the tribes. Therefore, this chapter would outline the story of the migration of the Khamtis and Singphos from their pre-migration points, and their pattern of settlement in Arunachal Pradesh and contiguous areas. A profile of their social, economic, political, religious, institution of slavery and cultural will be traced in order to understand the context of the resistance to a hegemonic power.

2.2 The Khamtis

The Khamtis belong to an offshoot of the great Tai or Shan race.⁹⁶ Their population is spread in certain polities in Southeast Asia and racially according to the present state of knowledge as belonging to the Mongoloid stock. They speak the

⁹⁵ E. H. Carr, *What is History?*, London, Penguin Books, first published by Macmillan 1961, (Reprint in Penguin Books 1990), p. 114.

⁹⁶ The Tai is a generic name given to the great bunch of Mongoloid population of Asia. They are mostly concentrated in the Indo-Chinese peninsula. The present habitat of the Tai extends from Assam in the West to Guangxi and Hainan in the east and from interior of Yunnan in the north to Thailand in the south. They are known by various names- *Shan* in Myanmar, *Siamese* in Thailand, *Lao* in Laos, *Paiin* Yunnan so on. On the other hand, the Tai subgroup also have different local name in different regions. For example, the Shans of Burma called *Htai*, *Moi*, *Muong*, *Tho*, *Tai-Lung*, *Tai-noi*, etc., in the same way various Tai groups inhabiting in Northeast India are likewise known by their local name, such as *Ahom*, *Nora*, *Phakyal*, *Aintoniya*, *Khamti*, *Khamyang* and *Turung*.

language of the Tibeto-Burman family which shares affinity with Siamese. Regarding their language, Grierson has observed that ‘the Khamti language belongs to Tai speech families of Siamese Chinese sub-family, which is a branch of Tibeto-Chinese family’.⁹⁷ They have their own script called *Lik-Tai*, which resembles the script used by the Mon in Myanmar.

The word Khamtis means, ‘tied to the place’ or ‘golden locality’.⁹⁸ Scholars like Lila Gogoi and Pushpa Gogoi state that the Khamtis prefer to align with the meaning ‘golden locality’ or ‘land full of gold’.⁹⁹ The colour of their skin vary from light to medium brown and are generally of tall stature with an average height of about five feet six inches for men.¹⁰⁰ On the general characteristics of the tribe, John Butler states thus:

In stature, the Khamtis are middle-sized, in countenance resembling the Chinese more than any other tribe on the frontier, and possessing the same kind of complexion; perhaps a shade darker. They are an active, intelligent, shrewd, warlike-looking race of men, but there is a sinister expression, mixed with a peculiar severity, pervading their countenances, that leaves anything but a favourable impression of the benevolence of their dispositions.¹⁰¹

T.T. Cooper raises the question as to the applicability of the term tribe on the Khamtis thus:

To speak of the Khamtis as a tribe is to do them little justice, for there is that about the word tribe which conveys the idea of wildness and want of culture, very far from forming a characteristic of the Khamtis, far from some of their social laws even civilized nation might take a lesson.¹⁰²

⁹⁷ L.P. Vidyarthi and B.K. Rai, *The Tribal culture of India*, New Delhi, Concept Publishing Company, 1976, p. 68.

⁹⁸ J. Needham, *Outline Grammar of the Khamti Language...*, Rangoon, Superintendent, Government Printing, 1894, p. i.

⁹⁹ Lila Gogoi, *The Tai Khamti...*, p. xxxiii

¹⁰⁰ L.A. Waddell, *The Tribes of the Brahmaputra Valley: A Contribution on their Physical Types and Affinities*, Logos Press, New Delhi, First Published 1937, First Indian Reprint 1986, p. 47.

¹⁰¹ Lila Gogoi, *The Tai Khamti...*, p. 183

¹⁰² T.T. Cooper, *The Mishmi Hills*, New Delhi, Mittal Publication, First Publication 1873, Reproduced 1906, p.145.

E.T. Dalton too stated that, ‘the Khamtis were very far in advanced of all the north-eastern frontier tribes in the realm of knowledge, arts, and civilization’.¹⁰³

2.3 Origin and Migration

The history of the migration of the human beings is probably as old as the race itself. The process of migration is a complex phenomenon and most of the theories considered Africa as the citadel of human origin, and from there human groups had spread out to occupy all the major land areas of the earth some 20,000 years back. The causes assigned for migration ranges from natural calamities, epidemics, drought, political persecution etc., which can be broadly grouped under ‘push-factor’ and ‘pull-factor’.

The historiography of origin and migration of the tribes of Arunachal Pradesh centred around two popular hypotheses: known as ‘Tibet/China’ or ‘Burma’ hypothesis.¹⁰⁴ Due to the absence of sufficient archaeological and literature records, we have to depend on the hypothesis mostly based on the oral history of the tribes. An attempt has been made to reconstruct the history of origin and migration of tribes with the help of memories of origin and migration, which are very strong among the tribes of Arunachal Pradesh.¹⁰⁵ Most of the tribes have a clear sense that they are not native to the region, and they have arrived from somewhere else.¹⁰⁶ Hence, the Khamtis too like other tribes of Arunachal Pradesh considered that they are not original to this land and

¹⁰³ Verrier Elwin, *India's North East Frontier in the Nineteen Century*, Oxford University Press, First Published 1959, Third Impression 1972, p. 366

¹⁰⁴ For details see James C. Scott, *The Art of Not Being Governed: Anarchist history of upland South-East Asia*; Yale Agrarian Study; Richard O'Connor, ‘Agricultural Change and Ethnic Succession in Southeast Asian states: a case for Regional Anthropology’, *The Journal of Asian Studies*, vol. 54, no. 4, 2009, pp. 968-996; Toni Huber and Stuart Blackburn (eds.), *Origins and Migrations in the Extended Eastern Himalayas*, Brill's Tibetan Studies Library, v. 16/4

¹⁰⁵ Sarah Hilaly, ‘Migration, Memory and Politics in North East India’, *Dialogue*, vol. 16, no.1, July-September, 2014, p. 153.

¹⁰⁶ Sarah Hilaly, ‘Migration, Memory and Politics in North East India’, p. 153.

migrated from somewhere else.¹⁰⁷ The traditional history of their migration has contained in the migration myths embedded into their collective consciousness.¹⁰⁸ Therefore, it is imperative to corroborate both the written records as well as the myth embedded with the oral tradition to reconstruct the history of the origin and migration of the Khamtis of Arunachal Pradesh.

However, in order to understand the origin and migration of the Khamtis, it is imperative to have some general idea about the history of the origin and migration of Tai/Thai as a whole. It is imperative because the Khamtis belongs to the Tai race itself. They are considered to be one of the most scattered races in the history of humankind.¹⁰⁹

2.3.1 Migration of Tai from Yunnan to Burma

The original home of the Tai was in Central Asia, in the region of Kiulung mountains in the upper vicinity of Howang Ho (henceforth Yellow river) river of China.¹¹⁰ In course of time, they gradually migrated toward south-west being driven by the hardship of the semi-desert region in the north and following the course of Yellow River and established Nanchao kingdom in Yunnan region.¹¹¹ In this region, the Tai emerged as a ruling race long before the formation of so-called Chinese race and before Christ.¹¹² However, this migration was not sudden and drastic; rather they descended down in a different direction from Yellow river to Yunnan in phases at different points in time. In this context, Coedes has stated that ‘Dai (Tai) penetration of the South was

¹⁰⁷ Chow Khok Manpoong, 87 years of aged, male, retired Government Servant, renowned public leader of Khamti, Namsai, interviewed on 12th January, 2016.

¹⁰⁸ Sarah Hilaly, *Migration, Memory...*, p. 153.

¹⁰⁹ Lila Gogoi, p. xxviii

¹¹⁰ Lila Gogoi, p. 2.

¹¹¹ Chao TzangYawngghwe, *The Shan of Burma: Memories of a Shan Exile*, Singapore, Institute of South East Asian Studies, 1987, Second Reprint-2010, p. 62.

¹¹² Lila Gogoi, p. 3.

an old and gradual process...not a sudden infuse which continued until the rise of Mongols thirteen century'.¹¹³ Therefore, it is believed that the Tai continued their rule in Yunnan region till the rise of Kublai Khan in thirteenth century.¹¹⁴ However, the Yunnan province too did not remain as their primary homeland as they had to move from Yunnan looking for newer areas for settlement. This migration was presumed to be an escape from the increasing Chinese persecution, pressure of increasing population, scarcity of irrigation field, and finally rise of the Mongols.

The Tai who persisted through the course of migration took the course of the major river and tributaries like- those who followed Mekong river settled in Thailand and Laos; those who followed Salween and Irrawady (*sic*) rivers settled in Burma (Myanmar), and those who followed Black and Red rivers settled in Vietnam.¹¹⁵ The Tai who came out from their original homeland established various petty states, which in due course of time emerged as strong political centres.¹¹⁶ This was mainly due to their superior knowledge of agriculture of 'wet rice cultivation' which other community was not an expert at it.¹¹⁷ Due to their superior agriculture skill, they produced a surplus, which resulted in their domination over other communities and subsequently brought other under their fold. Their unique knowledge about wet-rice cultivation made them distinct from other *jhum* cultivators. Therefore despite belonging to same ethnic conglomeration they are known by non-Tais like on the basis of their settlement in Thailand as Siamese, those settled in Burma were known as Shans, and those settled in

¹¹³ G. H. Luce, *The Early Syam in Burma's History*, Burma, National Government Publication, 1959, p. 126.

¹¹⁴ Chao Tzang Yawngghwe, *The Shan of Burma: Memories of a Shan Exile*, p. 62.

¹¹⁵ Lila Gogoi, p. 3.

¹¹⁶ Lila Gogoi, p. 3.

¹¹⁷ This could be clearly witnessed in context of Assam where the other communities who were dependent on the slash and burn cultivation, were later on dominated by Ahom who brought wet rice cultivation in Assam in Sarah Hilaly, *The Railways in Assam...*, p. 5.

Yunnan were known as Pai.¹¹⁸ Therefore, the Tai/Thai/Dai is an umbrella term, which denotes for various groups like Shan, Siamese, Dai, and Pai, etc.

From Yunnan, one group of Tais who moved south, following the Irrawaddy river settling in various parts of Burma by the seventh century. The migrants advanced westwards along the river valleys of Upper Burma, conquered the territories then under an Indian dynasty, and established their political supremacy over Mogaung.¹¹⁹ This historical narrative has been corroborated with the oral tradition of the Khamtis that narrates as follow:

According to the oral tradition of the Khamtis, the two heavenly brothers *Khunlu* and *Khunlai*, on being asked by the celestial king *Khun Shang*, descended on earth by a golden ladder. This was to rule righteously as a king, as the state of disorder and lawlessness prevailed. Accordingly, *Khunlu* and *Khunlai* in Mung-Hee-Mung-Ham established a Tai kingdom, presumably located in Yunnan province of China in 568. From there one group migrated towards the South of China under the leadership of Ai-Khum-Long, the eldest son of *Khunlai* establishing a new kingdom known as Mung-Kong (henceforth Mogaung) in 608 A.D.¹²⁰ Mogaung was known as Mongmarong to the Shan and kingdom of Pong in the chronicles of old Manipur.¹²¹

Chao TzangYawnghe in his book, *The Shan of Burma: Memories of a Shan Exile*, stated thus:

From historical and political evidence one can argue that the Tai or Shan had probably achieved a very high form of political organization... in fact from the fall of Pagan (1286) to the rise of new Burmese power centre under Burinnong (1551-81), the Tai or

¹¹⁸ George Scott and Hardiman, *Gazetteer of Upper Burma and the Shans States*, part I, vol. 1, Cited in Lila Gogoi's, *The Khmati...*, p. 2.

¹¹⁹ N. Elias, *Introductory Sketch of the History of Shans in Upper Burma and Western Yunnan*, Calcutta, Foreign Department Press, 1876, p. 13.

¹²⁰ For details see N. Elias, *Introductory Sketch of the History of Shans in Upper Burma and Western Yunnan*, pp. 9-16.

¹²¹ W.W. Hunter, *A Statistical Account of Assam*, Delhi, B. R. Publishing Corporation, First Published 1878, second reprint, 1982, vol. 1, p. 309.

Shan dominated all Burma, with the exception of Arakan and some Mon area... from two important centre of Tai power – (1) Ava and Mogaung where they continued their rule prior from thirteen century onwards till the defeat of Ava by rising Burmese power under Burinnong in 1554 (2) in Mogaung they ruled till 1604 A.D. when they fell to the advancing Chinese force.¹²²

The later history of the Shans of Mogaung and Ava is the history of their struggle against the Burmese over lordship for their independence. Hence, the kingdom of Mogaung became the homeland for many Shan groups like the Ahoms, Khamyangs, Phakkey, Naras, Aitonias, and Khamtis, where they lived together for a very long period. Hence, it is believed that the Khamtis along with other Shan groups dwelled in Mogaung until the thirteen century from where they later on migrated towards BorKhamti/ Khamtilong. Therefore, it has been regarded by the Khamtis that they were originally from BorKhamti area of Burma; from there they migrated to present habitat. Their migration continued in a series of waves which started from the middle of the eighteen century till the middle of the nineteen century.

2.3.2 Khamtis Migration from Mogung to Putao/Khamtilong/BorKhamtis

The Khamtis as a separate identity among the Shans was mentioned for the first time in the Pagan inscription in 1192 before Sukhapa entered Assam.¹²³ So far there is no exact recorded date of their migration from Mogaung to Khamtilong or Putao region. It is believed that they migrated to Khamtilong region well before twelfth century, though Wilcox considers that they migrated soon after the Tai Ahom groups had settled in the Brahmaputra valley:

¹²² Chao Tzang Yawnghwe, *The Shan of Burma: Memories of a Shan Exile*, pp. 62-64.

¹²³ Gordon Luce, 'The early Syam in Burma's history', *Journal of Siam Society*, 1958, cited by Chowna Mein, *To The Land of Tai Khamti of Myanmar*, Chumphra Publication, Dhemaji, Assam, 3rd edition 2013, p. 33.

With respect to their history, I can only notice here that the Khamtis are supposed to have been in possession of the country (Khamtilong) from about the same time that Assam was conquered by another party of their nation. They are Shans, and came from that part bordering of Yunnan and Siam.¹²⁴

Therefore, in absence of any written record, their history is mingled with legends and preserved in their memory particularly living through their folk narratives. In this context the oral tradition of their migration from Mogaung to Putao is as follows:

According to a popular legend, a colony of Tai migrated from Nanchao towards the north-west direction and established a semi-independent principality known as Mantale in the upper vicinity of Irrawaddy (*Nam Kiew*) in present Putao border region. The ruler of Mantale had seven daughters. The youngest named Nang King-yawas blind by birth, therefore she was considered unbecoming for marriage to any royal family. Hence, one day king ordered her banishment, she was put on a raft and settling her adrift. Witnessing her predicament a heavenly being as a white tiger, took her and lived together in a forest. In due course, she bore three sons and four daughters. When the sons grew up they approached their maternal grandfather, king of Mantale, claiming for the share of the ancestral property. The king, verifying the ring Nang King-ya sent with her sons as a proof of their origin, took them as his grandsons, begotten of the tiger. The king conferred upon them a generic name Fan-Sou-Khou-shang meaning tiger lineage of celestial origin and gave names Sou-Ka-Fa to the eldest brother, Sou-Houm-Fa to the second brother, Sou-Loung-Fa to the third brother. The king presented them royal heirloom, of a drum to Sou-Ka-Fa, a sword to Sou-Houm-Fa, a heron statue to the third brother. The king asked the three princes to go to across the wide world in an easterly direction with their respective royal gifts searching their own fortune. At the appearance

¹²⁴ Lieutenant R. Wilcox, 'Memoir of a survey of Assam and the neighbouring countries, executed in 1825-9-7-8', *Hill Tract between Assam and Burma: Selection of Papers*, Delhi, Manas Publication, 1988, p. 75.

of the appropriate fortune, it would reveal by itself, with the drum making a sound, the sword coming out of its sheath and fixing itself upright on the ground, the heron would make seven loud calls. Following such cue, each of them should halt at these places and establish kingdoms. Accordingly, the three princes set out with their respective royal gifts. After wandering across a wide expanse in different directions for four months, the drum, the sword, the heron revealed their prophetic indications. Thus, Sou-Ka-Fa, Sou-Houm-Fa, and Sou-Loung-Fa founded Maung Kong, MaungMit-Wiengsou and Maung Yang kingdoms respectively in upper Burma regions towards the close of twelve century. Tai people of these kingdoms are known as Tai Nou (Northern Tai) and called Tai Long (Great Tai) or Shan by the Burmese while those of Mekong delta are Tai Tau (Southern Tai) and called Tai Noi (Little Tai).¹²⁵

According to another oral version, it was presumably in the middle of the thirteenth century when Tai principality of Mantale (putao) decayed and was on the verge of disintegration owing to the extinction of ruling clan. The Mantale people approached ChauHoseng (reigning king) of Mogaung asking for a human of royal lineage to be the king of Mantale. Conceding to the request ChauHoseng asked a prince named Ai Khamtis-Thien to proceed to Mantale and rule the country as a king. The prince agreed to go while indicating a renaming of the country from Mantale to Khamtis-Thien after him. Empowered him with the wish, he proceeded with a large number of Tai Nou (Northern Tai) or Tai Loung and was installed as the king and the country was renamed as Khamtis-Thien. Henceforth he and his descendants (Lum-Khun dynasty) ruled the country until modern times under the suzerainty of the king of Maung Kong till the middle decades of eighteenth century. Thus, a country called

¹²⁵ Interview with Chow Khok Manpoong, 87 years of aged, male, retired Government Servant, renowned public leader of Khamti, Namsai, interviewed on 12th January, 2016; corroborated with Jayanta Sarkar, *Society, Culture and Ecological adaptation among three tribes of Arunachal Pradesh*, Calcutta, Director Anthropological Survey of India Ministry of Human Resource Development Department of Culture Government of India, 1987, pp. 4-8.

Maung Khamtis-Thien, later simply Maung Khamtis Loung or Maung Khamtis.¹²⁶ The Lum-Khun dynasty ruled Maung Khamtis Loung from their capital Putao as capital in extreme north Burma.¹²⁷

In this context, Edmund Leach also states that ‘Khamtis are believed to have been associated with the royal family of the Mogaung’.¹²⁸ The Khamtis of Khamtilong lived for hundreds of years in peace and prosperity under seven different Tai principalities. Edmund Leach located all their habitats on a map with Lonkyein, Manse, and Mannü in the northern part of the valley; Putao in the middle; and Kanglao, Müngyek and Langnu in the south (sic).¹²⁹ According to their legends, the distance from Mogaung to Putao was seven days march.¹³⁰

2.3.3 Khamtis migration from BorKhamtis to Tengpani area

The crux of their migration lies in the destruction of the Shan empire Pong by King of Burma, Alompara. This subjugation of Shans under the Burmese started from sixteen century and by the seventeenth century. Yet they enjoyed a substantial degree of independence from Burmese rule till the middle of the eighteen century. However, due to successive wars between the Chinese and the Burmese the Shans took advantage by asserting their independence, and siding with the Chinese, which subsequently led them suffering and destruction at the hand of Burmese armies.¹³¹ This subjugation and

¹²⁶ Interview with Chow Khok Manpoong, 87 years of aged, male, retired Government Servant, renowned public leader of Khamti, Namsai, interviewed on 12th January, 2016

¹²⁷ A small village Pu Tung, name of an old Khamti pious man, after whose name the village is named, became the seat of the central Tai Khamti. The word Putang could not be well pronounced by the Non Khamti Shan, so the name came to be called Putao by the British after the British annexation of Putao Khamti Long, by Chow Khok Manpoong, 87 years of aged, male, retired Government Servant, renowned public leader of Khamti, Namsai, interviewed on 12th January, 2016

¹²⁸ Edmund Leach, *Political Systems of Highland Burma: A Study of Kachin Social Structure*, The London School of Economics and Political Science, University of London, 1954, p. 34.

¹²⁹ Edmund Leach, *Political Systems of Highland Burma*, p. 33.

¹³⁰ Lila Gogoi, p. xxx and Edmund Leach, p. 33 (map)

¹³¹ Edmund Leach, *Political Systems of...*, p. 34.

oppression continued against those whose loyalties were in doubt. The level of oppression was so high that by end of the eighteenth century no regular Shan princes could withstand the oppression carried out by Burmese armies, which reached its peak during the reign of Alungpaya of Konbaung dynasty. He not only oppressed the Shans of Mogaung area but also was determined to subjugate all their principalities established in Burma.

The policy of oppression was continued by his successors added to the policy of divide and rule by instigating the younger brother against the elder or subordinate rulers. They were encouraged to seize the throne or rebel against the superior chief, and the rebelling *myoza* or *ngwekhunhmu* were recognized as separate entities by Burmese court.¹³² This policy of divide and rule fuelled the already existing clan feuds in Khamtilong which had persisted between two great clans for over 50 years giving rise to internal dissensions and numerous clan wars among the Khamtis.¹³³ Hence, the Khamtilong principalities suffered the wrath of anti-Shan oppressive and divide and rule policy of Burmese. Following this state of insecurity, the Khamtis batches ranging from 200 to 600 (including other Shans like Phakials, Naras etc.) migrated west of Khamtilong, at different times spanning over 100 years until 1853 in hope to discover a new promising space.

Lila Gogoi in his book, the *Tai Khamtis of North East India* has put forth three most significant versions of the migration story of the Khamtis:

The first version states that Khamtis of Khamtilong established their rule under seven principalities and united under the banner of Mogaung Shan. But in course of time when Tai kingdom Mogaung became victim of Burmese subjugation, the disunity between the two powerful chiefs Long-King and Mancu of Khamtilong emerged. In this

¹³² Chao TzangYawngwe, p. 66.

¹³³ Hkhamti were also variously spelt as Kanti, Kansu, Khamti, Khamti etc. it has been originally a title associated with the royal family of Mogaung in Edmund Leach, p. 34.

feud, Mancu killed the Long-King and subjugated his country, and his three sons namely Phra-Taka, Chautang and Long-King, were imprisoned. Later Mancu was assassinated by his son bringing the principality under his control and released Phra-Taka, with his two brothers. Under such circumstances, Phra-Taka, Chautang, and Long-King, left their home land, crossed over the Patkai ranges through the Chau-Kang pass and subsequently arrived at the Ahom kingdom in 1751 A.D. Phra-Taka, the eldest brother was very pious, who brought with him an image of Lord Buddha, and the *farman*, i.e. 'Hee-Hoo Seng' presented by the king of Mogaung.

The second version states that there was a chief named Chau-Cham-Longking-Kham, in the principality of the Long-King dynasty in Putao. He had a matrimonial relationship with the royal house of Mogaung and had two sons. The elder one killed his father to occupy the throne, while the younger one Chau-Ngi-Long-King-Kham, in view of insecure conditions created, migrated with two hundred Khamtis followers through the Chau-Kang pass and arrived at Khamong. It is at Vijoynagar in Changlang district of Arunachal Pradesh that they settled for some time. It was the lack of land for agricultural land that they later on migrated towards Tengapani area in 1751.

According to the third version, the king in Putao, was Khun-Cham-Lu, who had three sons. These three sons were the king of Ahom, the Khamtis, and the Khamyang. Of these the second son came to Assam, to occupy the country from the Patkai range to the river Subansiri on the west, and from the Mishmi hills to the Brahmaputra and the Burhi-Dihing on the south. In fact, the region came under the control of the Khamtis during the reign of Ahom ruler Gaurinath Singha in 1780-95.

All these narrations provide an insight into their original homeland in Khamtilong, and subsequent movements into this region.

According to E. T. Dalton, and Alexander Mackenzie, the first batch of Khamtis numbering about 200 under their chief Namsom immigrated from Khamtilong and

their first settlement at Tengapani in 1751 situated south of Sadiya with the permission from then Ahom ruler (either during the reign of king Pramatta Singha 1744-51, or of Rajeswar Singha 1751-69 A.D).¹³⁴ This group was later referred to by the British as Sadiya Khamtis.¹³⁵

However, Y. A. Raiker presents a different version of the story of migration. He states that Tengapani was not the first settlement area. Based on his research, he claims that the Khamtis entered India through Choukang Pass in the eighteenth century and settled at a place called Khomong, now known as Vijaynagar situated in the easternmost corner of present Changlang District of Arunachal Pradesh.¹³⁶ Therefore, Khomong not Tengapani was the first settlement of the Khamti from where they subsequently moved further westwards to reach Tengapani area and established a colony of about one hundred families at Chong-Kham (Chowkham) on the bank of Tengapani river.¹³⁷ His statement is based on the Buddhist archaeological evidence found in Khomong. In April 1971, a Buddhist *stupa* at Vijaynagar was archeologically explored and excavated.¹³⁸ To augment his claim he has even corroborated the importance of Khomong with the available secondary sources. He believed that Khomong was known to the travellers of both Assam and Burma, as it has been mentioned in the Assamese biography of Burmese Bhikku Piyin-din-Sirado written by Thirinda Bhikku.¹³⁹ In this biography, Thirinda Bhikku mentioned that Sirado came to India in 1883 and stayed at Khomong for 8 days. This proves that it was an important

¹³⁴ Lakshmi Devi, *Ahom-Tribal Relations (A Political Study)*, Guwahati, Lawyer's Book Stall, Assam, second edition 1992, p. 242.

¹³⁵ Verrier Elwin, *India North East Frontier in the Nineteen Century*, p. 364.

¹³⁶ Y. A. Raiker, 'Khomong in the History of Khamti', *RESARUN*, Shillong, Research Department Government of Arunachal Pradesh, vol. III, no. 3, 1977, pp. 10-12.

¹³⁷ Interview with Chownawing Namchom, 67 years of aged, male, Chief of Momong, Chowkang, Namsai district, Arunachal Pradesh, interviewed on 16th January, 2016.

¹³⁸ Subir Kumar Barua, 'The Khamti and their Religion', *RESARUN*, Shillong, Research Department Government of Arunachal Pradesh, vol. II, no. 1, January 1976, p. 24.

¹³⁹ Sirado is said to have introduce true Hinayanism among the Khamti and converted most of Singpho into Buddhism, in Y.A. Raiker, 'Khomong in the History of Khamti', p. 10-25

Buddhist centre and even after their settlement in Tengapani area. Even during the colonial period they continued their relationship with Khamtilong for religious and cultural inspiration.¹⁴⁰ Therefore, Khomong which was in the midway between Tengapani and Khamtilong played a permanent transit camp, which lost its relevance when the Khamtis became wedded to the new soil, and no more dependent on Khamtilong.¹⁴¹

Between, 1780-1790, another group of about 400 Khamtis emigrants arrived at Khomong. Later they, along the downstream of Diyunriver established themselves in the upper vicinity of Tengapani. This migration took place during the Moamaria rebellion in Assam under the leadership of Bhodia. The third phase of migration took place in 1835 when about 230 Moonglary Khamtis migrated from Khamtilong. The fourth batch of migrants arrived in 1850 with 300-400 members, while last migration is recorded in 1852 comprising of 300 members under Chaupha Singthi Gohai.¹⁴² Hence, this migration in batches from Khamtilong eventually resulted in increase of population, and the total population reached up to 3040 in Assam province by 1891.¹⁴³ Therefore, despite the existence of multiple versions of their migration, it is clear that they migrated from Khamtilong and roots of their migration could be assigned to certain expansion of space for livelihood concerns, facilitation by the existing ruling dynasty in Assam, contingent political situation in Burma all coupled to create circumstances to trigger migration journey from their homeland in search of a better place into the present habitat.

¹⁴⁰ Y. A. Raikar, 'Khomong in the History of Khamti', pp. 15-16.

¹⁴¹ Y. A. Raikar, pp. 15-16.

¹⁴² Y. A. Raikar, p.15.

¹⁴³ G. A. Grierson, *Linguistic Survey of India*, vol. II, Bombay, Motilal Banarasidas, 1968, p. 63.

2.4 Socio-Cultural Profile of the Khamtis

The Khamtis have specific aspects of social, economic, and cultural defined within the landscape of Arunachal Pradesh. However, the lived experiences are not only a product of their experiences and encounter with their new habitat, but also of their lineage to the Tai-Shan, which could be best explored through exploring certain practices. Institutions like kinship, marriage, slavery, etc., shall help to provide a socio-cultural profile of the Khamtis.

2.4.1 Social Institutions of the Khamtis

In order to maintain and preserve a basic societal value of their community they have various social institutions. These social institutions are complex, and integrated set of social norms which the society adhere and maintain. The social institutions of Khamtis are as follow:

2.4.1.1 Family

Like numerous tribe of Arunachal Pradesh, family is the basic social institution of their society, which comprises of husband, wife and children known as *Hong Huinleu*.¹⁴⁴ They practice tribal endogamy and clan exogamy. Monogamy is socially approved though polygamy is also been practiced, especially among the royal clans. They follow the tradition of patrilineal and patrilocal family system, and normally live in a joint family. The inheritance too is patrilineal where every male child get equal share of property. In the event of misunderstanding among the members of a family a married couple establishes a separate house.

¹⁴⁴ Jayanta Sarkar, *Society, Culture and Ecological adaption among three tribes of Arunachal Pradesh*, p.100.

2.4.1.2 Clan

Kinship ties are crucial in ethnically defined societies. Next to the family is the *phans*(clan). The clan is an important social institution and there exists multiple clans within a single village. It comprises of grouping of several families, with most of them tracing their origin to a common ancestor. However, it is interesting to note than clan names refer to their earlier place of settlement.¹⁴⁵ Another interesting practice is the practice of *Si Long Si Sam* (the phratry) in a loose form. Instance of the existence of the phratry is visible among clans like *Mansai*, *Manphai*, *Khamhoo* and *Kokma* who constitute a unified group among whom marriage is strictly prohibited as they considered themselves belonging to the same *Si Long Si Sam*.¹⁴⁶

2.4.1.3 Marriage

They used the term *Tang Hawn* for marriage. The literal meaning of this term is ‘to set up home’. Marriages are of three types: *HaakKan* (love marriage), *Khonkoi* (marriage by service), *Anlaak* (forced marriage or marriage by elopement). Marriage is universal, cross cousin marriages are the preferential mode, with first preference given to *Ego*(mother’s brother’s daughter). However, parallel cousin marriages are strictly prohibited. When the bride is selected, *Ho Kaa* (bride price) has to be paid to her parents about which there are prescribed norms in the *Thamasat* (Law Book). The bride’s family offer *Khung Yam* (gifts) in the form of articles of daily use such as *Saa* and *Ampaa* (baskets), *Mit (dao)*, *KhaungHok* (traditional loom) etc. This *Ho Kaa* is mainly paid for two reasons: firstly, it is the price given to the bride’s parents for bringing up the girl, and secondly, as the family is alienating her from her family

¹⁴⁵ Jayanta Sarkar, *Society, Culture and Ecological...*, p. 10. For instance the two clans Mannow and Mantaw assumed distinct names despite common ancestry. The name they inherit from their former settlement area. The group that settled in the upper course of river in Khamtilong were identified as *Manmow* and the group that settled in lower course of the river are identified as *Mantaw* Nang Helina Mantaw, p. 70.

¹⁴⁶ M.C. Behera, ‘Migration and Tribal Political Organisation: Case of Arunachal Pradesh’, *Asian Mirror-International Journal of Research*, volume III, Issue I, March 2016, p. 46.

resource pool. A set of rituals and rules are observed during the marriage rituals. Some of them are as follows:

In the *HaakKan* form of marriage, the groom's parent hire a negotiator (knowledgeable and a good orator) known as *Chow-Pachaw* who along with his assistants selected by him would visit the bride's house. The *Chow-Pachaw* would take *hopa* (sugar) neatly packed by two leaves and tied around by seven pieces of white thread and *Baan Moya* (a platter of flowers) and present it before the bride's family. Here, *hopa* is for good omen and *Baan Moya* is a mark of respect from groom's side.

In the *Khonkoi* form of marriage the bride's parent ask for *Pha* (token) comprising three items (a) *Pa heing* (smoked fish) (b) *khaw tom* (cooked rice) (c) *wan Khai* (bowl filled with 5 or 7 eggs). Here *Pa heing* particularly the eggs represents a blessing to the newly married couple too procreate in order to increase the member in the family in the future. Further, sticky rice represents love between the groom and bride to be everlasting with blessings to remain together like the rice grains, which combine into one sticky mass. The *wan khai* represent that information is provided to the celestial bodies like sun, the moon, the stars and earthly things about the marriage.

In *Anlaak* form of marriage, the parent of groom sends *hopa* (token money and some amount of sugar packed in leaves for compensation for thieving their daughter) and *baanmoya* (flower platter for prevention of violence).¹⁴⁷ If it is accepted by bride's family then traditional marriage system is carried out accordingly.

2.4.1.4 Social Division

Under Buddhist fold, they believe that all men are equal, and the position of humans is not determined by birth, rather by his material and spiritual actions. Despite such belief system, they are not free from social stratification, and follow hereditary

¹⁴⁷ For details on marriage see Nang Laxmee Namchoom, 'Marriage System of the Khamti of Lohit District in Arunachal Pradesh', in Tamo Mibang and M.C. Behera (eds.), *Marriage and Culture: Reflection from Tribal Societies of Arunachal Pradesh*, vol. 1, 2006, pp. 70-76.

classes.¹⁴⁸ Their society is divided into three distinct social strata: the royal class, the commoner and the slaves.

The *Phan Chow* (royal class) occupies the highest strata of the society. According to oral tradition, the *Phan Chow* members were previously rulers in Burma at some point or another. This tradition, therefore, created a trend of an exaggerated awareness of hereditary classes of nobility among the Khamtis who trace their genealogical link with the ruling *Chofa*.¹⁴⁹ Because of such claims to royal origin, the nobility enjoyed the highest position in the society. As rightly pointed out by Mary Helms that, ‘distant places, events and people and the objects associated with them are vested with authority, authenticity and power’.¹⁵⁰ Therefore in the context of the Khamti tradition of genealogical links with ruling *Chofa* forms such a premise of ‘authority, authenticity and power’ to the group of people who claimed themselves to this link.

The second rung of the hierarchy is formed by the commoners who are mostly from the farming class known as *Paklong* (commoners), who constitute the bulk of their society. Their primary interests’ lies in their land and are engaged primarily in productive activities like agriculture, trade, hunting, craftsmen and smithy etc. In the sphere of the personal and social life, the *Paklong* enjoyed independent status not in the control of the chief. The basic relationship between commoners and their chief is based on mutual help and assistance. The chief must protect his people and allow them to cultivate under his jurisdiction, and in return, the people must render him certain services and come to him when called upon for some assistance.

Phan Eon (lower class) occupies the lowest class. This stratum of the society is occupied by *Lok-Kha* (slave) and other groups who are mostly assimilated from non-

¹⁴⁸ Interview with Chownawing Namchom, 67 years of aged, male, Chief of Momong, Chowkang, Namsai district, Arunachal Pradesh, interviewed on 16th January, 2016.

¹⁴⁹ Here *Chofa* means, *Cho* means a god or king and *fa* means heaven in Edmund Leach, p. 215.

¹⁵⁰ Mary W. Helms, *Craft and the Kingly Ideal: Art, Trade and Power*, United States, University of Texa Press, 1993, p. 96.

Khamtis into the Khamtis fold to carry out economy activities.¹⁵¹ The *Phan Eon* population were considered mostly as descendants of the non-Khamtis progenitors such as the Ahom, Morans, Miris and Matakas, the inhabitants of Sadiya. With regard to the rise in the population of *Phan Eon*, the population of *Lok-Kha* also tripled. It is said that when the Khamtis occupied Sadiya from Ahom Government they kidnapped a large number of men and women and brought them under a class of slavery. The discussion of *Phan Eon* class would be incomplete without going into details about the institution of slavery; therefore, it is important to highlight some of the general traits of slavery institution in the society, which was a vital component in the Khamtis society for social and economic reason.

Besides this, another group constitute a distinct strata of the society are the monks. They enjoy a very respectable position in the society, but in reality, they are not considered within the stratum in the three-fold hierarchy due to their detachment from the mundane affairs of life.¹⁵²

2.4.1.5 Institution of Slavery

There are various notions about the emergence of slavery institutions in different parts of the world. One of the important notions is that slavery was contingent on the economic necessities of the state or non-state society. In compliance with this notion scholars like Nieboer states that, the main reason for the large scale practice of slavery in tribal society largely fall under two categories. First, the community should be agriculturist with abundant uncultivated fertile land with lack of population plus without any concept of voluntarily labour or absences of wage labour. According to Nieboer, 'slavery could occur in those societies where there is no supply of voluntarily offered

¹⁵¹ M. C. Behera, *Planning and Socio-Economic Development of the Tribals*, New Delhi, Commonwealth Publisher, 1994, p. 13; Jayanta Sarkar, p. 85.

¹⁵² S. N. Mishra, *Tribal Elites and Social Transformation*, New Delhi, Inter India Publication, 1994, p. 53.

labour'.¹⁵³ This type of environment encourages the emergence of slavery as the agriculture-based society needs more labour force to engage in the production activities. In this type of space where there is availability of resources, the absence of manpower creates an imbalance in production process. This status could be balanced with the introduction of the labour service from within the community or outside by measure of compulsion. Secondly, the society should be stratified with marked difference of status between the highest and lowest status in hierarchical categories and labour seekers must be more powerful enough to impose their measure of compulsion the service of labour and maintain this labour force in a state of subjugation. Alternatively, it may be possible that in such stratified society the group with the higher social status will impose a degree of authority such that all member of the lower category are reduced to a condition of enslavement.¹⁵⁴ Therefore, the tribal economy of Arunachal Pradesh is characterized by use of human labour as historically the territory been labour-scarce. Moreover, the devices for agriculture were very simple in nature and given the abundance of land, the labour power played a significant role in the economic process. Therefore, one can assume that in order to overcome labour deficiency the institution of slavery was maintained by almost all the tribes.¹⁵⁵ Verrier Elwin states that the tribes of Arunachal Pradesh acquired slaves through various means as being war captives. They

¹⁵³ C. Baks, J. C. Breman and A. T. J. Nooij, 'Slavery as a system of production in tribal Society', *Anthropologica VIII*, 1996, pp. 90-109, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/27860584> (accessed on 05 April 2016)

¹⁵⁴ C. Baks, J. C. Breman and A.T.J. Nooij, 'Slavery as a system of production in tribal Society', p. 96.

¹⁵⁵ If we look back into history there were various forms of slavery flourished in the ancient and medieval worlds. The Egyptians, Greeks, and Romans all used enslaved labourers in construction work, the armed forces, agriculture, industry, and domestic service. The institution of slavery emerged with the transaction of human evolution from primitive communism and beginning of private ownership of land. The emergence of private ownership created new system where the manual labor remained as the most important source of material production, as it was the first recorded mode of production dividing the society into two antagonistic classes of slaves and slave-owners, A.K. Thakur, 'Comparative Perspective of Origin of Slavery and the Position of Slave of Arunachal Pradesh', in S. Dutta, (ed.), *Studies in the History, Economic and Culture of Arunachal Pradesh* (henceforth SHECCAP), Delhi, Himalayan Publisher, 1997, p. 52.

were also procured through barter, and were a part of the bride-price and were at times taken from the members of the community who were unable to return their debts. Sometimes a member of the community could become a slave because he/she has committed a serious offense against and could not afford to pay the fine demanded. In Khamtis society, the possession of slave was considered as symbol of luxury and power that enhance a person's status in the society. They were mostly engaged in lowly activities as butchers, pig breeders and liquor dealers the occupations that are forbidden in the scale of Buddhist codes.

However, this institution of the *Phan Eon* population increased fourth fold after the arrival of Khamtis in Sadiya, largely due to economic and social necessities within the new area. Their traditional economy was based on wet-rice agriculture, supplemented by hunting and fishing. In order to obtain the desired result from such economic activities more hands and hard labour were necessary. Therefore, the agriculture yield was proportionate to the quantum of human labour engaged in the field.¹⁵⁶

The institution of slavery became more important and its population increased fourth fold after their occupation of Sadiya in the last decades of eighteenth century. Therefore, when they usurped the political position of Sadiya from Ahom government they found out that the Assamese peasants were practicing rain fed agriculture. Rain fed agriculture became more labour intensive and hence it was necessary to hold their control over the Assamese population of Sadiya who were unaware of the tradition of *nom-phai*.¹⁵⁷ Sadiya with its peasant population who were both indigenous as well as

¹⁵⁶ S. Dutta, 'Border Trade of Arunachal Pradesh: Its Impact on Economy and Society 19th -20th Centuries', in David R. Syiemlieh and Manorama Sharma (eds.), *Society and Economy in North-East India*, p.72.

¹⁵⁷ Interview with Chow Khok Manpoong, 87 years of aged, male, retired Government Servant, renowned public leader of Khamti, Namsai, interviewed on 12th January, 2016

those who fled from Moamarias rebellion and Burmese invasion, helped to bring a large section of local population under their control.¹⁵⁸

The Khamtis socially favoured the institution of slavery as it helped to sustain stratification. The slaves were socially open to interactions with the master's family and it was the responsibility of master to finding a wife and bear all the marriage expense. This included expenses for setting up a separate home for slaves after marriage, giving him livestock and field for his support.¹⁵⁹ The master was responsible for the well-being of the slave in matters of food, clothing, security, shelter and other expenses. They lived under the same roof though in terms of workload the slave had to work tirelessly on behalf of his master for agriculture, clearing forests, construction works and all those various works which are forbidden under the Buddhist code.¹⁶⁰

2.4.1.6 Dormitory

Like a few other tribes of Arunachal Pradesh, the Khamtis too had dormitories for both boys and girls at the level of the village. The boy's dormitory is called the *deka-cang* where the bachelor boys of the village dwell. The dormitory for girls is known as *gabharu-cang* where the unmarried girls of the village dwell.¹⁶¹ As they attain puberty all the girls are sent to this house. Therefore, the girl's dormitory is called as 'the House of the virgins' as it is reserved only for the unmarried women to dwell.¹⁶² This dwelling is considered as a sacred place therefore no men are allowed to enter there. It is under the guardianship of older women who look after the house and prevents any male member from entering. All the unmarried Khamtis girls sleep in this

¹⁵⁸ John M'Cosh, *Topography of Assam*, New Delhi, Logos Press, first published 1837 (Second Indian Reprint, 2000), p. 150.

¹⁵⁹ M.L. Bose, *History of Arunachal Pradesh*, p. 27.

¹⁶⁰ Interview with Chownawing Namchom, 67 years of aged, male, Chief of Momong, Chowkang, Namsai district, Arunachal Pradesh, interviewed on 16th January, 2016.

¹⁶¹ The Adi dormitory is called *Mosup* for boys and *Raseng* for girls. Aka called their dormitory as *Thumsana*.

¹⁶² T.T. Cooper, *New Routes for Commerce: The Mishmee Hills*, New Delhi, Mittal Publication, 1995, p. 148.

place at night. However, she returns to her parents' house in the morning, and spends the day in their parents' house. They perform all the household duties and assist the family in day-to-day activities. The boys also spend the day in their parent's house and assist in household activities and at night they return to the bachelor house. *The deka-cang* and *gabhru-cang* are constructed in both end of the village. The main purpose of this dormitory was to ensure the girls and boys spend their day time helping their parents and doing other communities works, but once he or she entered this house then they were not allowed to sleep anywhere else until married.

2.5 Traditional Political Institution

The Khamtis follows traditional political institution based on a centralized notion of chieftainship system and their chief is known as *Chofa*.¹⁶³ He is regarded as the political head of their society and below him is a village chief for every village. The chieftainship system is based on rotation among the royal clans who claim their link with *Chofa*, therefore it is hereditary within the royal families. He continues to hold his position either till dies or is incapacitated by old age or otherwise. Although, he is considered as the political head of the community, but while dispensing his routine political affairs, he is assisted by village council known as *Mokchum*.¹⁶⁴ Here *Mokchum* is composed of elders of the community known as *Mulijum*. Traditionally, *Mulijum* acted as an advisory in nature and the real political and territorial power lies with the chief. The chief acquired his right over the land through three ways: Right by clearing of jungles, Right acquired by inheritance, and Right acquired by transfer. He had sole

¹⁶³ *Chofa* is selected on the basis of age and experience the line generally goes from brother to brother.

¹⁶⁴ Here, *Mokchum* is a traditional political institution of the Khamti, which is chaired by *Chofa* under the guidance and assistance from the community elders. For details see S. Chowdhuri, 'Tribal Village Council of Arunachal Pradesh: The Khamti', in B.B. Pandey, et al (eds.), *The Tribal Village Councils of Arunachal Pradesh*, Itanagar, Directorate of Research Government of Arunachal Pradesh, 1999, pp. 315-319.

authority to allot a land to villagers or to new comers.¹⁶⁵ However, *Chofa* makes his decisions only after taking into consideration the *mokchum*'s decision and delivers the verdict according to the provision codified in *Thamasat*.¹⁶⁶

Chofa being a political head of their community on many occasions is unable to adjudicate in each case. Therefore, for the smooth functioning of their daily life power has been relegated to the *Chowmaan* (village headmen).¹⁶⁷ The *Chowmaan* enjoys great respect in their respective village affairs. He enjoys various powers to make allotment of the land to the individual as well as to the *Konmau* (newcomers) who wants to settle in the village area. He also helps to resolve internal disputes among the villagers, imposes fines or delivers punishment to the offenders in accordance with customary law of community, and he strictly check those who practice witchcraft or sorcery etc., in the village.

It is interesting to note that though *Chofa* is the head of their community, but he never interferes in the functioning of *Chowmaan*. However, the *Chofa* and *mokchum* acted as a highest appellate body in the society. Therefore, whenever cases are not resolved at the village level they are referred to *Chofa* who gives judgment in consultation with the *mokchum*. Overall, it is only the *Chofa* can decide on cases to allow establishing new villages and to permit non-Khamtis seeking to settle in the area in consultation with the *mokchum*.

¹⁶⁵ However, this power and position of chiefs changed in course of time. Now-a-days *Mokchum* primarily control the power and functions of the community. It take cognizance of all the issues like settling village disputes, negotiating with outsiders, organizing wars, organizing economic pursuit, establishment of a new village and decisions on permitting settlement area to non-Khamtis.

¹⁶⁶ R.K. Deuri, 'Customary Land Tenure System of the Khamti', in P.C, Dutta and D.K. Duarah, (eds.), *Aspects of customary laws of Arunachal Pradesh*, Itanagar, Directorate of Research Government of Arunachal Pradesh, Itanagar 1990, p.217

¹⁶⁷ S. Chowdhuri, p. 316.

2.6 Economic Life of the Khamtis

The traditional economy of the Khamtis is sustained by agriculture and non-agricultural practices. The practice of agriculture holds a very significant position in their society as they had been traditionally practicing wet-rice cultivation. Alongside wet rice cultivation, they practice dry cultivation too. In wet farming plots, they raise paddy cultivation and in dry cultivation, they raise potato, maize, vegetables etc. However, though they practise both wet and dry cultivation, yet wet rice cultivation is the mainstay of the traditional economy. They developed a remarkable system of ‘*nom-phai*’ irrigation by erecting bunds to retain water in the fields and constructing channels. This agricultural practice is a labour intensive activity and hence to maximize production they use animal traction with the water buffalo for tilling the soil. It has been noted that in pre-colonial period they even used to engage elephant in agriculture field for ploughing. In the absence of wage labour in their traditional society the cultivation involved the entire population, except the royal class, whose allotted portion of land is tilled by villagers and by their servants.¹⁶⁸ In addition, some other sections of the society like the monks, traders and craftsmen remain absent from working in the fields as they lived on contribution of rice given to them in exchange for services rendered by them to the community in return. The rice produced is of very high quality, which is famously known as *KhamtisLahi*.¹⁶⁹ It is small-grained rice, which is sticky, sweet and pleasantly oily and odour. Among the varieties *Khamtis lahi* and the *KhawAan* is the best and it harvests early; the *Khow Nowis* the stickiest of all and is also used for making liquor; while the *KhawPakhi* and *KhawNamtik* are good for deep water cultivation.

¹⁶⁸ R. N. Bagchi, ‘Family System and Inheritance of Property Among the Tribes of Arunachal Pradesh’, *RESARUN*, Shillong, Directorate of Research Government of Arunachal Pradesh, vol. v, no. 1, 1979, P. 40

¹⁶⁹ Interview with Chownawing Namchom, 67 years of aged, male, Chief of Momong, Chowkang, Namsai district, Arunachal Pradesh, interviewed on 16th January, 2016.

Since, the agriculture is a dominant means of livelihood, they observe various rituals related to their agriculture life. Some of the agriculture related rituals are *Sang-PhaApuk* (festival of appease of rain), *Phi-Paw Humann*(appease for the protecting of cultivation as well as the village) etc. There is also a practice of *Hong-Khon-Khao*, which is to bring the first grain of rice to the house. It is generally done by women as she observes silence while bringing the grain of paddy into the house. A celebration using the new rice is observed, wherein an offering is made to a temple and the villagers. Ritual associated with agriculture activities are performed by the villagers but neither by the hereditary priest nor by the monk.¹⁷⁰

In order to supplement the agriculture they largely depend on non-agricultural economic activities like hunting, fishing, gathering of wild roots, vegetables, fruits and leaves etc., while they are quite expert in hunting on both ground and water.¹⁷¹ In order to maintained the household needs they developed their traditional manufacturing skills and are expert in making varieties of handicrafts, like carving in wood, bone, ivory, bamboo, cane, silver, gold, iron works as household articles, farm tools, weapons, jewels. They make embossed shields of buffalo hide, coating them with skill and taste. In making ivory handles, they evince great skill, taste and invention, carving high relief twisted snakes, dragons, monsters with gracefulness of design. They are fond of making masks mainly of horror type for use in dances.¹⁷² They usually produce for self-consumption, though some items are exchanged for other items among the community and with the other friendly neighbouring communities.

Therefore, a major chunk of source of their livelihood came from trade with neighbouring communities. They were quite adept in trade since pre-colonial days. They have been trading with Assam ever since their settlement in India. Besides, this

¹⁷⁰ Nang Helina Mantaw, p. 79

¹⁷¹ T. T. Copper, *The Mishmi Hills*, p. 150.

¹⁷² Lila Gogoi, p. 181

they engaged in elephant catching and extracting rubber extracted from the forest which was subsequently traded with Assam. During the colonial period, the volume of rubber trade increased a lot at the Sadiya trade fairs till the end of the nineteenth century. Traditional items exchanged usually consisted of forest produce like honey, ivory, rubber, elephant, etc., and agricultural produce like rice and potato, Burmese cloth, gold dust, deftly woven Khamtis bags, and opium are the major items which they traded with the people of plains.¹⁷³ In exchange they received cloth, salt, liquor, glass tobacco, muslins etc., from the people of Assam, which was in turn, was exchanged with the hills tribes inhabiting the areas adjacent to Sadiya.¹⁷⁴ R.B. Pemberton in his, *Report on the Eastern Frontier of British India 1835*, stated thus:¹⁷⁵

They reside at Sadiya, and import broad cloths, muslins, long cloths, coloured handkerchief, chintzes and various other descriptions of cloths; salt and opium, liquor, glass, and crockery-ware, tobacco, betel-nut and rice for the troops, and these article they barter to the different tribes occupying the surrounding hills, from whom they obtain in exchange, gold dust, and gold, ivory, silver, amber, musk, *daos*, a few Burmese cloths and some small Chinese boxes.¹⁷⁶

It has been reported in nineteenth century when their area was visited by T.T. Copper who stated that, ‘the Khamtis inveterate traders, and to their Northern Assam is much indebted for the best rice and vegetables, especially potatoes’.¹⁷⁷

¹⁷³ Interview with Chownawing Namchom, 67 years of aged, male, Chief of Momong, Chowkang, Namsai district, Arunachal Pradesh, interviewed on 16th January, 2016.

¹⁷⁴ S. Dutta Choudhury (ed.), *Arunachal Pradesh District Gazetteers, Lohit District*, p.175.

¹⁷⁵ Captain Robert Boileau Pemberton’s *The Report on The Eastern Frontier of British India*’ was first published in 1835 and printed at the Baptist Mission Press, Calcutta. The work came out as a result of the survey undertaken by Pemberton on the entire North East Frontier under the order of Lord William Bentinck in 1832. The Report covers a wide range of subjects, bearing on the physical, anthropological, economic and political conditions of the people inhabiting a large area including Assam, Manipur, Arracan, Kingdom of Pong, Ava and a few other places in Burma. The Report also incorporates valuable data on military affairs and commercial routes between Assam and Burma and on passes between Assam and Bhutan.

¹⁷⁶ R. B. Pemberton, *Report on the Eastern Frontier of British India*, Calcutta 1835, reprinted under the Eastern Frontier of India, New Delhi, 1979, p. 72.

¹⁷⁷ T. T. Cooper, p. 73.

The women contribute a lot towards the economic activities especially agriculture. Their work starts right from preparing the nursery bed to till harvesting. However, ploughing of the field and felling of trees is done by men. Besides agriculture, the women take care of weaving, collecting firewood and edible plants from forests while, other household activities like cooking, taking care of children and domestic animals etc., are done by them.¹⁷⁸ The Khamtis women are expert in the art of weaving and embroidery and make beautiful multi-coloured shawls, intricately designed shoulder-bags, hair bands, finely woven waist-belts, chequered cloth, prayer flags with beautifully embroidered design, etc.

Therefore, from the preceding discussion it is clear that they manage their economy very efficiently. In the absence of wage labour they practiced the norm of labour exchange during the time of agriculture. Such reciprocal labour services are enlisted for fencing around paddy fields, construction of house, construction of irrigation channel, hunting and fishing are done communally.¹⁷⁹

2.7 Religion of the Khamtis

The Khamtis are followers of Theravada School of Buddhism.¹⁸⁰ Lord Buddha is known as *Paiphra*. He is regarded as a great moral preceptor and an embodiment of love and pity, truth and righteousness. They seek his blessings for the welfare of the family and the society as a whole. The people follow the principles of *Sin-tta* (*Pancha-Sila*), *Sin-pet* (*Ashta-shila*) and *Sin-sip* (*Dasa-shila*).¹⁸¹ The Khamtis calendar is centred around various religious rituals and which they observe throughout the year. Some of

¹⁷⁸ T. T. Copper, p. 150.

¹⁷⁹ Nang Helina Mantaw, pp. 74-75.

¹⁸⁰ Sristidhar Dutta and Byomakesh Tripathy, *Buddhism in Arunachal Pradesh*, New Delhi, Indus Publishing House, 2008, p. 135

¹⁸¹ Sristidhar Dutta and Byomakesh Tripathy, *Buddhism in Arunachal Pradesh*, p. 135

the important religious rituals are *Borkha-bakh* or *Mou-Wa*.¹⁸² At the end of the *Mou-Wa*, they observed another ritual known as *Poi- Putwa*. This is mainly performed as a farewell to *Mou-Wa* ceremony. This celebration has a rotatory policy across the villages and each village takes it as an honour to host and serve. For them religion is very essential and powerful tool for everyday existence. A belief goes that there are certain religious chants which can even open a lock without a key. The religion therefore brings people together which in turn provides a space for interaction as everyone gets involved through different religious rituals. The Khamtis observe a number of ceremonies and Buddhist festival which are tied to the lunar calendar of Buddhism.¹⁸³ These festivals are Sangken, (The New Year), PayaPuthikham (Buddha pumnima), Neova (Vassavasa), Kathing (robe offering ceremony) and others. The Sangken festival is observed at the juncture of ChaitraandBaisakh corresponding to March-April. During the festival, the image of Buddha is brought out from the Vihara and kept in a mall make shift structure, called Kyangfra and washed ceremoniously with great devotion. To celebrate this festival, men, women and children sprinkle water on each other out of fun. People sings the panacea and tisarana formulae in unison.

They observe all the ceremonial pieties associated with Theravada Buddhism. Accordingly, they accept the concept of salvation or nirvana after the death. This could be attained by following the noble eight-fold path of non-violence, truthfulness, abstention from adultery or theft, abstention from drinking alcohol, abstention from giving false evidence, strict observance of celibacy, and total abstinence from

¹⁸² It is a religious conduct where the Khamti people and *Bikhus* accept the *Sheels*, in the month of July-August. The general public accept five *Sheels* and the *Bikhus* accept ten *sheels*. The *Mow-Wa* starts on a full moon day and the *Sheel* is accepted thirteen times during the *Mon-Wa* period. While acceptance of the *Sheel* continues in the *Mon-Wa* period the *Bikhus* do not keep themselves away from the temple. Even if they have to go out they have to return to their respected temples by nightfall.

¹⁸³ B. Tripathy and S. Dutta, Theravada Buddhism among the Khamtis of Arunachal Pradesh, pp. 22-23 *RESARUN*, 2007

amusement, dance, song and music, etc.¹⁸⁴ Therefore, as Buddhists every Khamtis village has a *Chang (Vihara)*. Almost all the Buddhist monasteries are built on the eastern side of the village and generally situated along the river bank.¹⁸⁵ One cannot think of a Khamti village without a *Vihara* and *Bhikkus*.¹⁸⁶

However, despite their adherence to Buddhism certain extra-Buddhist religious practices are observed in their religious tradition. In this context, Helina Mantaw has stated that religious life of the Khamtis can neither be studied under the ‘tribal religious faith’ nor strictly under the Theravada cult of Buddhism which they profess.¹⁸⁷ Some of the Non-Buddhist practices are found in their belief in *Chowkhon Sang* (a supreme creator) and *Chow Chi Giya* (benevolent god) who looks after the welfare of human being.¹⁸⁸ They also believe in existence of numerous spirits called *Phi*¹⁸⁹ (malevolent spirit) and benevolent spirits like *Phi Mung* (the deity of village), *Phinoy* (the deity of forest), *Hong KhonKhao* (goddess of paddy), etc. They believe in family, village and

¹⁸⁴ For details on religion of Khamti please see Subir Kumar Barua, ‘The Khamti and Their Religion’, *RESARUN*, Shillong, Directorate of Research Government of Arunachal Pradesh vol. II, no. 1, 1976, pp. 28-36

¹⁸⁵ Bhikshu Kodninya, ‘The Monkhhood and Rules of conduct in Khamti Society’, *RESARUN*, Itanagar, Directorate of Research Government of Arunachal Pradesh, vol. 6, no. 1, 1980, p. 12.

¹⁸⁶ A Bhikku is considered as a spiritual leader and is enjoined the duty of guiding people in religious tenants of Buddhism as well as in rites and rituals.

¹⁸⁷ Nang Helina Mantaw, p. 75.

¹⁸⁸ Interview with Chow Moho Chowmoung, 51 years of aged, male, village elder, Piyong village, Namsai district, Arunachal Pradesh, interviewed on 17th January, 2016.

¹⁸⁹ The Khamti believe in evil spirit called as *Phi*. They believe that their Phis are controlled by some magicians who are known as *Pee Chew*. According to the Khamti legend there was a very big tree with iron trunk with twelve branches, with six on each side of the tree. On the one side of the six branches, the flowers were of gold and on the other six branches were of silver fruits. When it got ripe, it dropped on the tank, which they used to collect; as a result the people of Mon-Khamti were very wealthy and prosperous. Therefore, the neighbor in order to destroy the wealthy Khamti built a very big wooden bird and with magic put life into the wooden bird. The bird was so big that it could sit on that particular tree. The bird started eating the children regularly, they tried to kill bird but in vain therefore they decided to uproot the tree so that the bird could not get any place to sit. Accordingly they put fire to the tree which melted down the iron tree and thus the tree which gave them wealth was uprooted. But the bird sat on the nearby mountain and as usual continues to eat the children. The people ultimately killed the bird with very big bow and arrow and out of anger and as avenge some people eat the birds flesh. And those who ate the bird flesh became *Pee Chew* or magician and they always wanted to eat human flesh especially children. Therefore, still they believe in existence of these spirits.

clan spirit and therefore they propitiate the spirit of the deceased parents or grandparents known as *Phi Hun* or *Phi Numhum*. They also propitiate the spirits of the founder of their clan called *Phi Nam Hum*. The Khamtis believe that each village has its own spirit called *Phi man*. A small monument is constructed in the name of the *Phi man* at the entrance of the village. This symbolic monument or hut is known as *Ho Phi*.¹⁹⁰

All these extra-Buddhist practices suggest that the Khamtis had adopted Buddhism in course of time. However, their date of conversion to Buddhism is not known, except that their oral tradition records that they had adopted Buddhism under the influence of Burmese.¹⁹¹ However, the practices became more dominant only in the last decades of nineteenth century when many came into the fold of Buddhism by Piendum chow Sirdow. The biography of Burmese monk Piendum chow Sirdow mentions his coming to the eastern frontier of India, sometimes in 1882 from Burma for propagation of Buddhism among the Theravada Buddhist among the tribes of northeast frontier. He is said to have visited various Khamtis villages in district Lohit like Chowkham, Shengchap, Sunpura, Kheren and Sadiya in 1892. He was instrumental in constructing two-ordination temples, at Chowkham and Borphakey villages adjoining Assam. Therefore, credit goes to Siradow, for popularizing Buddhism among the Khamtis, by introducing various Buddhist rituals including the procedure of *Sangkhom* (ordination of monks).¹⁹²

They believe that in pre-Buddhist times they practiced animistic faith based on the appeasement of the *nats*. Although, they brought Buddhism along with them but its

¹⁹⁰ LekhiSitiang, *A Study on Theravada Buddhism in Arunachal Pradesh*, Unpublished PhD Thesis, Rajiv Gandhi University, Doimukh, 2006, p.107

¹⁹¹ Interview with Chow Moho Chowmoung, 51 years of aged, male, village elder, Piyong village, Namsai district, Arunachal Pradesh, interviewed on 17th January, 2016.

¹⁹² B. Tripathy and S.Dutta, 'Theravada Buddhism among the Khamti of Arunachal Pradesh', *RESARUN*, vol. 33, 2007, p. 15.

practice was interspersed with a strata of indigenous faith remaining embedded too. T.T. Copper has observed this in 1873, which he states thus:

In religion they effected to be strict follower of Burmese Buddhism, but, excepting among the priest their religion is little more than polytheism under the veil of Buddhism pantheism...they kill and eat all animals and use the flesh and milk of cow and buffaloes without scruple.¹⁹³

2.8 The Singphos

The Singphos belong to the Tsaen clan of the Kachin or Jingphaw speaking people of highland Burma.¹⁹⁴ Like the Tais, the Singphos have their kinsmen spread across various parts of Southeast Asia - India, Myanmar, Thailand, and China. The word 'Singpho', in their indigenous language means, 'human'.¹⁹⁵ Linguistically, the Singphos belong to the Kachin-Lolo group of the Tibeto-Burman languages. Their racial affiliation is considered to be Mongoloid in character.¹⁹⁶ The colour of the skin varies from light to medium brown, leiotrichous hair and prominent cheekbones. Physically the men are athletic and have a fair height, with the average height of men being five feet six inches.¹⁹⁷ The face is generally broad with prominent cheekbones and a flat nose. The men wear their hair long and coil it tightly on the crown, while the women do their in a bun at the nape. Their eyes are brown and seldom large. On the issue of their physical characteristics, E.T. Dalton writes thus:

The feature are of the Mongolian type, very oblique eyes and eyebrows, mouth wide, cheek bones high, and heavy square jawbones. Their complexion, never ruddy, varies from a tawny yellow or olive to a dark brown. Hard labour tells on the personal

¹⁹³ T. T. Copper, p. 145.

¹⁹⁴ E. R. Leach, pp. 57-58.

¹⁹⁵ P.C. Dutta, *The Singpho*, Itanagar, Directorate of Research Government of Arunachal Pradesh, 1990, p. 1.

¹⁹⁶ S. Dutta Choudhury, (ed.), *Arunachal Pradesh District Gazetteers, Lohit District*, p. 63.

¹⁹⁷ L. A. Waddell, *The Tribes of the Brahmaputra Valley...*, p. 40.

appearance of the females...they are generally a fine athletic race above the ordinary standard in height and capable of enduring great fatigue.¹⁹⁸

The Singphos were a very warlike, virile and vigorous people when they came and settled in this side of the Patkai attributed to them by the colonial masters. W. Robinson has credited their characteristics thus, 'they were by far the most powerful tribe bordering on the valley'.¹⁹⁹

2.9 Origin and Migration

There is no recorded date except the colonial administrators who regarded the Singphos having arrived in the last decades of eighteenth century during the troubled period of Moamaria rebellion. According to Dalton, 'they showed themselves in 1793 when they ousted the Khamtis from Tengapani area and brought whole area under their control'.²⁰⁰ By quoting, Colonel Hannay, Alexander Mackenzie states thus:

The Singphos are identical in race with the Kakus or Kakheyns of Burma, whose chief habitat was on the great eastern branch of the Irrawady...with the breakup of the Northern Shan Kingdom, the Kakhyen entered on a career of aggression and conquest during the troubles following on the Moamariah (sic) rebellion in the reign of Gourinath...which practically place in their hands the whole country lying between Upper Assam and Bhamo (Burma).²⁰¹

According to Edward Gait,

Their real home is in the hilly country between the Chindwin river and the Patkai, where they are known as Kakhyens. The name by which they are known in the Assam

¹⁹⁸ Tapan Kumar Baruah, *The Singpho and their Religion*, Shillong, Director of Information and Public Relations Government of Arunachal Pradesh, Shillong, 1977, p. 4.

¹⁹⁹ William Robinson, *A Descriptive Account of Assam*, Delhi, first published 1841, reprint 1975, p. 379.

²⁰⁰ E. T. Dalton, *Descriptive Ethnology of Bengal*, p. 9.

²⁰¹ Alexander Mackenzie, p. 61.

frontier is simply the tribal word for 'human'. They made their appearance on the outskirts of Assam during Moamaria rebellion.²⁰²

Therefore, the British administrators accepted that the Singphos migrated from Hukwang valley in 1793 and settled at Tengapani river valley along with the Khamtis. The Khamtis being early settlers in the Tengapani area tried to impose some sort of tax on them, which was opposed. Consequently, they rebelled that leading to the ejection of Khamtis from the Tengapani area in 1793. This victory over the Khamtis subsequently made them a prominent group as they consequently brought large areas under their control, especially during the political chaos caused by the Moamaria rebellion.

Apart from the historical records, the Singphos have their own legend about their origin and settlement. The oral history of the Singphos states that their original homeland was in Hukwang Valley in Burma. The traditional story of their migration tells us that they came into batches from Hukwang valley through two important passes which connects India and Burma. The one group came through the Chowkam pass which run along the bank of Upper Noa-Dihing and other group came through Daru pass.²⁰³ They came in different batches at different points of time, halting in several places before finally settling themselves in their present settlement area. The first group who crossed the Patkai ranges settled in a small village called Khumuga where they stayed for a long time. However, when population increased and other kin groups joined them from Hukwang they resumed migration. They established a village called Tufaga and migrated further from Tufaga and settled in Penga. At Penga they stayed for long period and then in batches moved in different directions settling in Miao, Bisi, Gagam, and Luwang villages. The second group who came through the pangsung pass did not halt much in route at various places unlike the first group who came via Chowkam pass.

²⁰² P.C. Dutta, *The Singpho*, pp. 4-5.

²⁰³ Interview with Nirmara Maio, 55 years of aged, female, ASM, Piyong village, Namsai district, Arunachal Pradesh, interviewed on 14th January, 2016.

This group crossed the river Namjung and directly settled Mio Kung where they stayed for few years and later on spread into different direction and establish Gillnja, Bordumsa, Haru, Dumsa and few other village.²⁰⁴ According to the Singphos oral tradition the first batch of the Singphos migrant arriving into the plains of Assam was headed by their chief of Beesa, Tangai and Maia clans.²⁰⁵

Tapan Kumar M. Baruah, has recorded two versions of the legend of migration in his book, *The Singphos and their Religion* chronicling the reason for Singphos migrated from the Hukwang valley in Upper Burma thus:

According to the first version the original homeland of the Singphos was in Hukwang Valley, a vast tract lying towards the North-east of the Patkai ranges. Hukwang itself is a Singphos word which means, 'a fence of human heads' (Hu-human heads, Kawng-fence). The name refers to a great massacre of the Singphos by the Burmese. It is stated that the carnage was so brutal that the heads of the slain would have raised a barriers against further advance of the Burmese. So in order to escape from Burmese persecution the Singphos look out for new settlement. Since, the vast plain stretches the south of the Hukwang valley was inhabited by the Burmese and being obstructed their southward migration, the Singphos turned towards south-east crossed the Patkai ranges of the Indo-Burmese border and entered the present habitation in the early decades of 18th century. In course of time they occupied a large area of the Upper Assam region.²⁰⁶

The second version goes thus:

According to second version once in the Hukwang valley the flowering of the bamboos was followed by a famine, which was believed to have been caused by the

²⁰⁴ Interview with Nirmara Maio, 55 years of aged, female, ASM, Piyong village, Namsai district, Arunachal Pradesh, interviewed on 14th January, 2016.

²⁰⁵ Interview with Nirmara Maio, 55 years of aged, female, ASM, Piyong village, Namsai district, Arunachal Pradesh, interviewed on 14th January, 2016.

²⁰⁶ Tapan Kumar M. Baruah, *The Singpho and their Religion*, p.7.

wrath of a spirit called *Kiyagung* who descended to the earth in the shape of a wild fowl and sent hoards of rats to destroy the crops. Soon afterwards, there occurred a terrible fire, which spread throughout, and they deserted the valley and took refuge in the neighbouring countries. Some of them migrated to the Patkai Hills and from there came to present habitat. This group of Singphos opened the way to beyond the Patkai hills for other who followed them.²⁰⁷

Hence, the crux of migration story of the Singphos too like that of the Khamtis lies in the rise of Burmese power and subsequent persecution policies against Kachins which forced them to migrate westwards in search of better space. The policy of the Burmese further added inter-tribal conflict among Singphos themselves due to difference in administrative policy of the *Gumsa*, and *Gumlau*.²⁰⁸ This conflict between *Gumsa* and *Gumlau* resulted into the fleeing of former to Assam, avoiding the *Gumlau*'s attack. Those *Gumsa* who migrated are (1) Daihpa or Duffa (2) Pyisa or Bisa.²⁰⁹

2.10 Socio-Cultural Profile of the Singphos

Like most of the tribes of Arunachal Pradesh, the Singpho adapted with the land and it's climatic and accordingly maintained specific aspects social, economic and cultural practices that shaped their society. However, the existing practices are not only a product of their experiences and encounter with their new habitat, but also of their lineage to the Kachin of Burma, which could be best explored through exploring certain

²⁰⁷ Tapan Kumar M. Baruah, pp. 9-10.

²⁰⁸ Two opposing poles of politics among the Kachin people of Burma, according to Leach, *Gumsa* is similar to the feudal hierarchical approach of the neighbouring Shan, and *Gumlau* is anarchist and egalitarian, does not believe in social stratification by lineage or chiefdom, etc. This difference in political poles many a time led to clash among the Kachin who practice and oscillate between these types of politics.

²⁰⁹ Kaw Nan, *Institution of Kachindu-waship (1852-1930)*, unpublished PhD Thesis, Department of History, University of Mandalay, Myanmar, 2013, pp. 14-15, <https://umoar.mu.edu.mm> (accessed on 06 February 2016)

practices. Institutions like kinship, marriage, slavery etc., shall help to provide a socio-cultural profile of the Singpho.

2.10.1 Singpho Social Institutions

The various social institutions of Singphos are as follows:

2.10.1.1 Family

The social structure of the Singphos is defined by the family as the smallest social unit. They follow the patriarchal family system where the father is the head of the family who takes responsibility on matters relating to the marriage, rituals, sacrifice and economic pursuit etc. Monogamy is the general rule yet the practice of polygamy is not restricted among the Singphos. They generally live in joint families. However, in the case of misunderstanding among the members, the family breaks up and the married sons establish separate households. In case of such separation, the youngest son remains with the parents. The property is equally distributed among the sons, but the one who stays with the parents gets more in addition to his share.²¹⁰

2.10.1.2 Clan

Clan is another important social institution among Singphos, which is constituted by several families of the kin group. They used the term *Fan* for clan, which literally means, 'belonging to the same blood'. Therefore, they maintain clan exogamy where no person is allowed to marry within their own clan. They prefer cross-cousin marriage, or marrying of one's own mother's brother's daughter and negotiated marriages are most common than any other form of marriage.²¹¹ The Singpho clan organization is based on lineage or sub-lineage groups. It is pertinent to note that the Singphos do not trace their clan names from a totemic object. The Singphos clan names

²¹⁰ S. Dutta Choudhury (ed.), *Arunachal Pradesh District Gazetteers, Lohit District*, p. 82.

²¹¹ S. Dutta Choudhury (ed.), *Arunachal Pradesh District Gazetteers, Lohit District*, p. 87.

came into being as a result of some particular historical happening. For instance, the *Langa* (growing of banana tree) clan name was derived when their ancestor had witnessed an unusual growth of a banana sapling on the roof of his house. Sometimes a clan is named after the habit and aptitude of any individual like the *Fup* clan (Restless). It is said that the forefather of this clan was restless, ‘like a fowl’. During their migration, a particular section built their camp under a tree called *Imbu*. Hence, their descendants came to be known as Imbus.²¹²

Table 2.1: Clans and Sub-Clans of the Singphos

Sl. no	Clan	Sub-clan
1.	Miripgam Gumja	Singjat, Inbu, Sindu, Phup, Indong, Ligai, Sikao, Ning-rang
2.	Michowa Singkhum	Sikheth, Ingan, Kumgi, Lingen, Tugum, Kumciyen, Sineng, Kumin, Impop, Indub
3.	Lithong Nong Nunglon	Not present in Arunachal Pradesh but in Assam
4.	Pichiwa Kumfor	Pisi
5.	Pendingcha	Not present in Arunachal Pradesh
6.	Changmuja	Inchoi, Wadat, khakhu, Ang, Kongba, Amut, Miyang Timba, Singkhet
7.	Ingha Kacha	Incha, Kinchu, Thumon and Pusa
8.	Ingdu Tuchen	Wakhet, Dumsa, Amun, Mongkoi, Siyong, Biso, Liku, Sibbo, Goju, Minlong, Phungin, Imba and Ligo

²¹² Tapan Kumar M. Baruah, p. 49.

9.	Tuliyeng Khap Pinwa	Gilanja, Mili and Khola
10.	Pangwa Thangan	Dibo, Dibom, Tangmin, Wala, Inla and Nongbu
11.	Lofaite Nala	Not present in Arunachal Pradesh
12.	Intenjo Youngcha	Innao, Chingo and Inden
13.	Ichu Kungong	Ingkhao and Lichu

Source: Data collected from fieldwork.

2.10.1.3 Marriage

As discussed above, the principal features of the marital organization among the Singphos is the clan exogamy. Therefore, the Singphos largely preferred the *Mutungdi-fi-dai* (negotiated marriage) which is a common place and is settled by the mediation of a *Khumbang* (go-between). The marriage rituals begin with the acceptance of marriage proposal. The groom's parent presents *Kufma* (gifts) such as a piece of *Fukan* (skirt), *Lukhun* (bangle), silver hair clips and some quantity of rice-beer for the girl's parents. After a few instalments of the bride price having been paid, necessary preparation for the wedding are made by both the parties. A *Dumsa* is summoned for this purpose who through divination ascertains the day for the wedding. A couple of days prior to the date fixed for solemnising the marriage, the bridegroom along with his mother and some relations proceed to the bride's village and present two buffaloes, rice beer and few baskets of dried fish. A rituals known as *Ghumbang-Chum* follows. On the day of wedding, three women members of the groom's family along with some elders, visit the bride's house with the *Phy* (bride price).²¹³ On the day bride arrives at the bridegroom's village, where a gate called *Gambang-salai* is erected in front of the bridegroom's house. On the arrival of the party, a bundle of reeds collected from the forest and

²¹³ The orthodox bride price is consist of a Khamti *dao*, a velvet jacket, silk *lungi* etc. those who can offer usually give gold and buffaloes.

planted near the house, where a pig and a fowl are sacrificed. However a fowl is freed too and if it enters the house, it is considered that the bride will prove herself as a good housewife. Another fowl is then cut and its blood sprinkled inside the *Gambang-salai*. Thus a marriage is settled, which is followed by a feast.

2.10.1.4 Social Division and Slavery

The Singpho society is stratified into the classes of chiefs, commoners and slaves. The highest strata in society are occupied by the *Ddufan* (royalty).²¹⁴ According to their belief, there was a clan called *Dalup-Dumas Kumlo* in Hukwang valley regarded as the original ruler of Singpho country. They are ranked superior to all the other *Ddufan* clans. The first Singpho group who migrated to Assam under the chiefs of Bisa, Tangai, and Maia clans claimed their link with the *Ddufan* kin group. This genealogical link with the mythical ruler created a trend of a hereditary class of chiefs known as *Agi* or *Mireng* who enjoyed highest position in their respective clan villages.

The second strata of the society is occupied by *Cing-mung* or *Mreng-don* (commoners) refers to all those who are under the jurisdiction of the *Agi*. This group of strata makes up the bulk of the society and has a major role in the productive activities of the Singphos society like agriculture, trade, hunting, craftsmen, etc. The commoners enjoy independent life in sphere of personal and social life without any control from their chiefs. The relationship between commoners and chief is largely confined to mutual help and assistance. The chief must protect his people, and allow them to use the lands under his jurisdiction for cultivation and settlement purposes, and in return the people must render him certain services and come to him when called upon for some assistance.

Mayam (slave) who were captives as well as people within their societies who were compelled to accept bondage either temporarily or for life to their chiefs or their

²¹⁴ Tapan Kumar M. Baruah, p. 46.

more prosperous neighbours occupied the lowest class. The institution of slavery among the Singphos society was as old as other social institution that evolved along with other social institution of the society though in a rudimentary form.²¹⁵ This institution was primarily involved in carrying out livelihood activities for sustaining their society. Therefore, the procurement of slaves were an important economic assets as they provide their owner or captors wealth and economic stability through labour and payment of ransom on their release and many a times slaves were sold to neighbour community and to Hukwang at handsome rate.²¹⁶ In this context, Neufville has recorded that:

When in their own country, and before the plunder of Assam furnished them with slaves, they appear to have cultivated their lands, and carried on all other purposes of domestic life, by means of a species of voluntary servitude, entered into by the poorer and more destitute individuals of their own people who, when reduced to want, were in the habit of selling themselves into bondage, either temporarily, or for life, to their chiefs or more prosperous neighbours.²¹⁷

The Singpho chiefs extracted service from the disadvantaged poor and destitute who cultivated their master's land and served in the domestic sphere.²¹⁸ According to Leach, in Kachin society:

Sometimes a person voluntarily resorted to this step in order to secure wife from a family, he incorporated himself into the family performing domestic and agricultural service. These practices of servitude bondage of the Singphos were called *gumlao*.²¹⁹

The demographic composition of the *Mayam* group increased a lot with their settlement in Noa-Dihing valley in last decades of eighteenth century. Due to political upheaval in

²¹⁵ Tapan Kumar M. Baruah, p. 48; Edmund Leach too discussed about the nature and many grades of Kachin *mayam* in Appendix III.

²¹⁶ S. Dutta, 'Border Trade of Arunachal Pradesh...', in David R. Syimleh and Manorama Sharma (eds.), *Society and Economy in North-East India*, p. 67.

²¹⁷ Neufville, *On the Geography and Population of Assam*, pp. 641-42.

²¹⁸ Neufville, *On the Geography and Population of Assam*, p. 641.

²¹⁹ Neufville, *On the Geography and Population of Assam*, p. 642; Edmund Leach, p. 162.

the last of consequent to the Moamaria revolt in Assam (1769-1792), Ahom power declined. Taking advantage of this opportunity the Singphos raided into Ahom territory in which the women, and children from the Kachari, the Morans, the Miris, the Matak, the Ahom, and the other castes and tribes from Assam as their slaves.²²⁰ The Singpho used to assimilate the women folk from other communities due to shortage of women folks in their community. In the words of Michell, ‘though polygamy was allowed, but women were so scarce among the tribes that it was extremely difficult for a Singpho to find a wife at all, and they frequently remained unmarried or marry their slaves’.²²¹ On the other hand they also took Assamese wives, largely for economic reason too.²²² This inclusion of non-Singphos population under the fold of *Mayam* led to a surge in their composition. In course of time, the captives became a class by themselves adapting to Singpho language and culture and clan-names of their respective owners. Because of inter-marriage between Singphos with non-Singphos particularly with their Assamese slaves, their progeny were known in Upper Assam as *Duanias*.²²³

The institution of slavery increased a fourfold during the time of Burmese invasion as it resulted in mass plunder and ravages in Assam. The situation was so chaotic forcing the Ahom rulers to flee. Under such circumstances the Singphos had to choose between sharing in the plunder or be plundered by the Burmese and suffer like the Assamese.²²⁴ The Singphos who had already been looking to expand their niches into their present settlement took the advantage and decided to partake in plunder,

²²⁰ R.N. Pareek, ‘Duwanias’, *Arunachal News*, April-May, 1983, pp. 39-41, cited in A.K. Thakur, *Slavery in Arunachal Pradesh*, New Delhi, Mittal Publication, 2003, pp. 97-98.

²²¹ Michell, p. 126.

²²² Pisi Gam, Gaon Bura, 67 years of age, male, Miao Township, Changlang district, Arunachal Pradesh, interviewed on 18th January, 2016. Two wives meant an additional pair of helping hands in agriculture, as well as in the domestic works. A Singpho chief normally possesses more than one wife as his social position necessitates him to entertain more guests with food and drink.

²²³ The name *Duanias* were given to those born from Assamese slaves in Assam and similar to *yam* in the Hukawng valley born from Kachin and Assamese parentage.

²²⁴ Kolkata, West Bengal State Archive (henceforth WBSA), Bengal Secret Political Consultation (henceforth BSPC), from Neufville to Scott, no. 26, 18th May, 1825.

which would provide them with surplus dependent population from Assam. They renewed their ravages and carried off thousands of Assamese as a slave during the time of Burmese invasion and subsequently during the Anglo-Burmese war of 1824-26.²²⁵ During this tumultuous phase, many Assamese voluntarily sought protection under the direct authority of the Singpho chiefs to escape the wrath of Burmese.²²⁶ When the Burmese aggression was over, they settled down in the territory ruled by the Singpho chief Bisa Gam and settled under the fold of Duanias.²²⁷

This development was parallel to their practice in Hukwang valley, wherein, the chiefs protected the valley-dwelling wet-rice cultivators in return for rice. The Singphos considered themselves as a predominantly warrior group a tradition which continued in Namrup wherein the Assamese population voluntarily began to reside as cultivators seeking protection and return favours as tribute in rice.²²⁸ Therefore, anyone who attacked the population under their protection would find themselves embroiled in a feud with the Singphos chief.²²⁹ This practice of reciprocity incorporated thousands of non-Singphos population within the domain of the Singphos chiefs reduced them to the status of slaves.

Therefore, when English arrived in Assam they witnessed that, 'it was commonplace for any Singphos to keep twenty Assamese under their command'.²³⁰ When the Burmese aggression was over, they settled down in the territory under the Singpho chief Bisa Gam. Here, the Duanias learnt the Singpho dialect, known as

²²⁵ Lakshmi Devi, *Ahom Tribal Relation...*, p. 247.

²²⁶ Kolkata, WBSA, BSPC, Neufville to Scott, no. 26, 18th May, 1825.

²²⁷ A.K. Thakur, *Slavery in Arunachal Pradesh*, New Delhi, Mittal Publication, 2003, p. 98.

²²⁸ E. R. Leach, p. 187.

²²⁹ E. R. Leach, p. 187.

²³⁰ S.F. Hannay, 'Sketch of the Singpho', pp. 42-43, cited in H.K. Barpujari, *The Problems of The Hill Tribes North-East Frontier, 1822-42*, vol. 1, NEHU, Reprint 1998, p. 31; S. Dutta (ed.), SHECCAP, p. 327.

duwan. In the Singpho dialect the word *duwan* means 'king' and the term Duania therefore signifies the subject of the king.

However, the Singphos divide them into two groups' viz., *Ngong mayam* and *Tinung mayam*.²³¹ The *Ngong mayam* do not live with their masters yet acknowledge the right of their masters. They offer labour services, share with half of domestic animals born into their house, with the first bunch of plantains from each tree, half of the marriage price of a bride etc. The *mayam* were similar to the serfs who were valuable assets for the master as their prosperity depended on them.²³² They were largely constituted by the Assamese subjects who were brought under control during the time of Moamaria rebellion and Anglo-Burmese war. The *Tinung* were those who lived with their master and served them in the domestic and economic spheres. Yet they had no right over the property but were well cared for and hardly distinguished from the other family members. It was the responsibility of the master to provide food, clothing, shelter and even marriage expenses as well as bear the cost of sacrifice to deities when they are sick.

The Assamese slaves were not treated differently from the bondsmen from among their own tribe.²³³ Therefore, the fate of Assamese slaves was a transitional one in the Singpho society where a large number of them were transported into Hukwang valley and engaged in wet-rice cultivation. Therefore, it is clear that the slaves were their primary bonded human resource wherein possessing them in huge numbers enhanced a persons' social and economic standing. Therefore, their masters very keenly protected slaves and competition among the chiefs was mostly directed at possessing

²³¹ E. R. Leach, p. 299.

²³² E. R. Leach, p. 300.

²³³ E. R. Leach, p. 161.

greater number of slaves with even ordinary hillman possessing between forty to sixty slaves.²³⁴

2.11 Traditional Political Institution of the Singphos

The Singpho traditional political institution is based on the system of chieftainship. Their chief, known as *Agi* or *Mirengand* occupies a very high position in the social and political life of the village.²³⁵ The position of the chief is hereditary in nature, though when a chief dies without male heir the chieftainship passes on to his nearest agnates even if he belongs to some other village. The chief is defined as a clan and territorial authority of his village. Therefore, chief is regarded as having *dejure* (owner) rights over the village land and normally a village is named after its founder with the same clan villages. Being a territorial chief he distribute lands to the families of the village and allows the villagers to cultivate on it. Besides territorial power, a chief also holds judicial and administrative jurisdiction over the village. He decides all the cases civil and criminal except the inter village, clan or inter-tribe disputes. For this purpose, he seeks support from the traditional village council known as *Tra-Tangdai* whose members are known as Singpho *Silang*. This village council is not a formally established body, as it is convened only when there are some important matters to be discussed like inter clan feuds and territorial disputes. They also assist the chief to solve the various cases related to theft, disputes on property, seduction of girls, etc., where the decision of the council is taken as final and accepted by all.²³⁶ The *Tra-Tangdai* is preside by the chief and their members are chosen from among village elders who are

²³⁴ S. Dutta, 'The Historic and Pioneering role of the Singphos in Tea cultivation of the North-East', in S. Dutta (ed.), SHECCAP, p.327.

²³⁵ Deepak Pandey, *The History of Arunachal Pradesh*, p. 271.

²³⁶ S. Dutta Choudhury (ed.), *Gazetter of India Arunachal Pradesh, Tirap District*, Shillong, Director of Information and Public Relation Government of Arunachal Pradesh, Reprint 2008, p. 174.

experts in traditional customary law of the Singphos. During the meeting of the *Tra-Tangdaiall* villagers can attend and participate. According to S. Dutta Choudhury:

Chieftainship is an important feature of the Singphos society. The chief has several privileges, but his authority is not absolute. He is in theory the lord of all lands in the territory under his jurisdiction, but in practice individual rights in land are also recognized.²³⁷

2.12 Traditional Economy of the Singphos

The traditional economy of the Singpho is based on agriculture and allied activities too. As argued by Madhav Gadgil, 'all human civilization are intimately related to the resources of the lands they inhabit and lands and water they have access...'.²³⁸ Hence, they are entirely dependent on their environment for their economic survival. Since, they occupied the plains around the foothills therefore largely practice agriculture, which is the mainstay of their economy. They practiced both permanent and shifting cultivation in which the entire population of the community is engaged except the chiefs, traders and craftsmen, who rendered specialized services to the agriculturist in return for rice from them. However, they were not purely an agricultural tribe in the Hukwang valley and especially wet rice cultivation was adopted after their settlement in the present habitat.²³⁹ According to Marshall Sahlins:

In tribal society generally production is geared to the customary requirement of the family by prudent use of resources of immediate environment, production process is taken up for livelihood and hence it is intrinsically anti-surplus in nature. Therefore, despite the availability of land resources their productions remain just as much as require, just sufficient to save off starvation.²⁴⁰

²³⁷ S. Dutta Choudhury (ed.), *Gazetter of India Arunachal Pradesh, Tirap District*, p.81.

²³⁸ Madhav Gadgil, 'Towards and Ecological History of India', *Economic and Political Weekly*, 1985, cited in J. B. Ganguly, Presidential Address, 7th NEIHA Session, JNC, Pasighat, 1986.

²³⁹ Tapan Kumar Baruah, p.5.

²⁴⁰ Marshall Sahlins, 'Stone Age Economics', 1972, cited by S. Dutta, 'Border Trade of Arunachal Pradesh: Its Impact on Economy and Society 19th-20th centuries', in David R. Syiemlieh and Manorama Sharma (eds.), *Society and Economy of North-East India*, p. 65.

Next to agriculture, the other economic activities were largely dependent on the forest resources whether for useful products like building material, medicine, fuel wood vegetable and fruits etc. In addition, the forests have been one of the major sources of their economic activities in the form of hunting and gathering. Forest resources substitute the insufficiency of agriculture production. Hunting is not merely a habitual activity rather it has deep utilitarian value as well. It satisfied the needs of the people for meat, skin, horn, feathers, etc. Fishing too, made up for the deficiency in their food supply. Besides this, in pre-colonial as well as during the colonial period wars and raids were another integral part of the Singpho economy to obtain slaves and valuable items not available in their country. They also depended on barter with other neighbouring communities by exchanging the products like ivory, elephant tusk, medicinal plants, rice and the rubber, etc., with the Assamese in exchange of salt, cloth, iron and other items which were not available in their country.²⁴¹ As expert weavers women made the dresses for themselves, the family members and also exchanged in times of need. To quote Dalton:

The Singphos understand the smelting of iron and their blacksmith with no implements but a lump of stone as an anvil, and a rude hammer, forge weapons-especially *daos*, which are highly prized all over the frontier for their temper and durability.²⁴²

Since, their economy is largely dependent on the agriculture therefore it is associated with various rituals. The Singphos observe two rituals associated with agriculture. The first is performed to appease the spirit *Insam Nat* just before commencement of ploughing. This spirit is considered the custodian of the fields, who unless properly appeased, destroy the crops. Another ritual performed to appease the spirit *Swon Nat* and *Sithun Nat* before threshing of the grains. The sacrificial offering

²⁴¹ S. Dutta Choudhury (ed.), *Arunachal Pradesh District Gazetteers, Lohit District*, p. 227.

²⁴² E.T. Dalton, *Descriptive Ethnology of Bengal*, Calcutta, Office of the Superintendent of Government Printing, 1872, reprint Delhi, Cosmo Publication, 1973, p. 11.

consists of one pig, six fowls, and cooked rice. A number of taboos are associated with the agriculture activities. From the time the ears of crops began to show, till the harvest, the field is to be guarded from animals and birds. Normally a hut is built in the field where young boys stay in the night to watch the crops. It is a taboo for a woman to enter into the hut. Making love in the field is another important taboo. Throwing of bones and anything made of iron into the field is said to bring pests, unfavourable weather and harm to the crops. Similarly, cutting of the forest around the field at the time when the crops ripens is a taboo. It is believed that anyone who does so offends the spirit *Ca Nat*, is punished by pests who devour the crop.

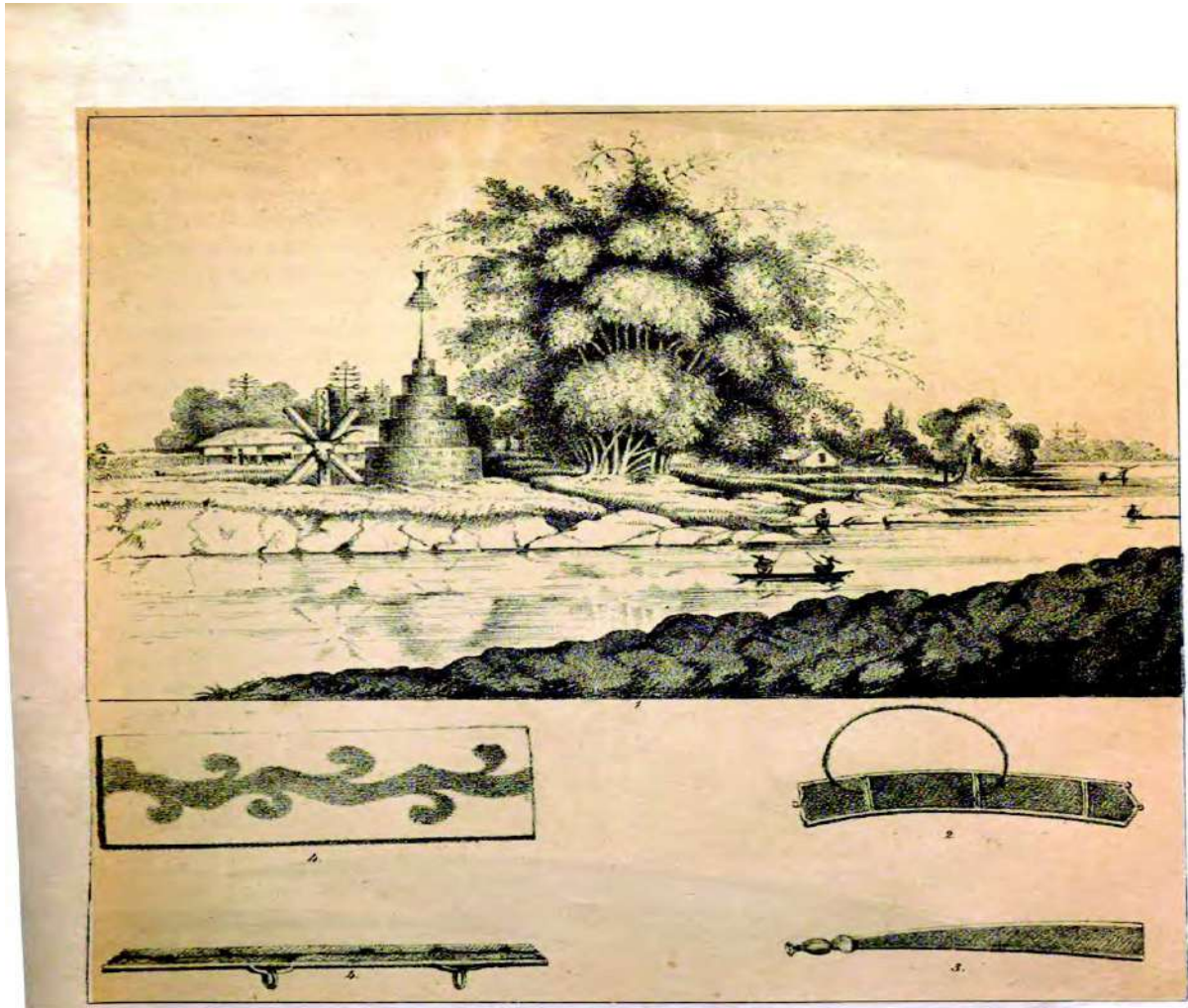
In times of drought, the people resort to performing some rites and rituals to invoke rain god. There is a strong belief that a drought is caused by the spirit *Bum Nat* who obstructs rainfall and confines the water to the cloud up in the space. During such periods it is common practice to place a fishing trap on the road and play on a string instrument in order to draw attention of the spirit *Bum Nat*.

2.13 Religion of the Singphos

The Singphos are followers of Theravada Buddhism. According to their oral history, they were originally not Buddhists, after the rise of Burmese power and spread of its influence in Hukwang brought the faith among the Singphos. However, the spread of Buddhism among the Singphos gained momentum in their present habitat due to their closer contact with the Khamtis who were ardent followers of Buddhism. Historically, Buddhism was adopted during of the end of the nineteenth century, introduced by a Buddhist monk from Hukwang valley known as *Ding la Chrato*. He propagated Buddhism with great zeal and converted many Singphos into its fold. The main teachings were aimed to spread knowledge about the path of *Panchsila*. The teachings

stressed to abstain from killing living beings, stealing, sexual misconduct, false speech, intoxicating drink and drugs.²⁴³

Figure: 2.1. Singpho Monuments and Weapons



Source: Neufville, *On the Geography and Population of Assam*, p. 342.

However, despite adhering to Buddhist practices, the Singphos did not abandon their former faith and belief system. Along with the teachings of Lord Buddha they continued non-Buddhist religious practices defined by a belief in a number of spirits who they believed to be malevolent and responsible for causing miseries and some were

²⁴³ Debotang Yapung, 'Buddhism among the Singpho', *RESARUN*, vol.32, 2006, p. 47.

benevolent too known as the *Nats*.²⁴⁴ They considered *Mathum Mathwa* as giver of all things to men. There are nearly eighteen *nats* among which some occupying an important position are the *Ningsek Nats* (spirit of thunderbolt), *Bum Nats* (spirit of the mountains and hills), *Madai Nats* (war spirit, which helps against the enemy), *Sithung Nats* (forest spirit), *Mataitang Nats* (sky spirit), *Namsang Nats* (protector of Village), *Nathgun* (protector of household), *Khak Nats* (spirit of pond and river).²⁴⁵ All these spirits are considered to be a controller of their daily activities and to appease these spirits they seek help from their village priests who are known as *dumsaw*. They act as intermediary between spirits and humans and propitiated with rituals accompanied by sacrifice of bulls, cow and chickens.²⁴⁶ The Singphos appease these *Nats* on a number of occasions. The non-Buddhist rituals are observed for the welfare of the individual and family, rituals for curing the sick, and rituals for the dead.

The Singphos also observe a very important non-Buddhist festival called the *Shapaywang Yawongmanua Poi* every year. The deity *Shapaywang Ywang* is associated with the creation of human civilization. They appease this particular deity to ensure happiness and prosperity for their community and their land. However, after embracing Buddhism they no longer perform sacrifices rather they offer fruits. Nowadays these rituals, no longer signifies an effort to please the *Nats*, but is used as a medium of promotion for brotherhood and unity amongst the tribes and to propagate the rich cultural heritage of the Singphos.

2.14 Conclusion

The above discussion makes it clear that the migration of the Khamtis and Singphos is an important and helps in positioning them within their current habitats in

²⁴⁴ Tapan Kumar Baruah, p. 73.

²⁴⁵ Debotang Yapung, 'Buddhism among the Singpho', p. 46.

²⁴⁶ S. DuttaChoudhury (ed.), *Gazetteer of India Arunachal Pradesh, Tirap District*, p. 73.

present day Arunachal Pradesh. Migration of the Khamtis and Singphos from the Khamtilong and Hukwang respectively were contingent to the insecurities of threat from Burmese, quest to secure more cultivable land, growth of population in principle villages, tribal feud, etc. The society is patriarchal in nature based on kinship ties and each socially stratified into royal, commoner and lower classed. Slavery constituted a very important social institution in both the tribes, while politically they were under the chieftainship system largely based on clan lineage. The Singphos were divided into innumerable independent chiefs on the basis of lineage, without an overarching chief. Economically both the tribes were largely dependent on agriculture and forest and items they lacked in was procured through barter with other neighbouring communities. Being agriculturists and forest dependent groups their life is governed by innumerable rituals and taboos which makes it a nature-human-spirit-complex where the three elements function actively.

CHAPTER-III

KHAMTI RESISTANCE AND COLONIAL STATE

3.1 Introduction to the Chapter

The internal challenges that Ahom Government encountered in the last decades of eighteenth century and early part of nineteenth century proved to be a fatal for its rule in Assam. However, had there been no emergence of imperialist power in Bengal under the British and in Burma under the Konbung then the history could have been different for Ahom rule in Assam. The internal rifts among the Ahom nobility made it vulnerable when its representatives in turn invited these two rising power to help them reclaim their dominant position in Assam. This invitation subsequently victimised Assam of Burmese expansionary regime (1821-1825) and subsequently under the British regime (1826-1947). The Burmese reign had devastated the political and economic scenario of Assam rendering it depopulated. The British occupation and annexation of Assam included the plains of the Brahmaputra and Barak. In course of time the intervening hills like the Khasi hills and the Jaintia kingdom were annexed in the first half of the nineteenth century, the Garo, Naga and Lushai Hills came under direct control in the later decades of the nineteenth century. In the same context, the Khamtis and Singphos' who territorially constituted the northern and eastern frontier of Assam were brought under the ambit of active colonial intervention.

This chapter shall deal with the historical background of the Khamtis in its relation with the pre-colonial state and its neighbours. It shall try to outline the story of early colonial contact and the various mechanisms used for control. The chapter shall try to explore the various sectors in which their interests met as well as the conflicts triggered due to an unequal relationship. A history of sporadic resistance triggered by

constraints faced from instruments of colonial rule shall be explored. The culmination of the resistance into the rebellion of 1839 and its consequences shall be discussed. However, in order to understand the early contact, it is imperative to understand the political scenario in Assam prior to the coming of the British. It is also necessary to study under what conditions the interaction between the two took place, and the subsequent developments. The consequent conflict with the British stretching to five long years against the Khamtis has been outlined too.

3.2 Historical Background

Before venturing into the details about the colonial state and Khamti resistance, it is important to know the historical relationship they shared in the pre-colonial period with the Singphos and Ahoms in order to situate the political transition in Assam.

3.2.1 Khamti-Singpho Relations

The sources left by Wilcox, C.R. Macgregor, and Robert Gosset Woodthorpe who visited in Khamtilong in nineteenth century as well as the oral narrations of the Khamtis tend to suggest that there was no amicable relationship between the Shan and Kachin in Burma.²⁴⁷ In this context, William Shakespeare states that, the Kachin tribes inhabited Putao prior to the arrival of Shan from Mogaung, but eventually Shans subjugated the former.²⁴⁸ In the Hukwang valley too, both the Shan and Kachin

²⁴⁷ For details see Wilcox, 'Survey of Assam and the Neighboring Countries, executed in 1825-6-7-8', *Asiatic Researches*, 17, (1832) pp. 314-469; Robert Gosset Woodthorpe, 'The Country of the Shan', *Geographical Journal*, vol. 7, no. 6, June 1896, pp. 577-602. More details can be found in C. R. Macgregor, 'Journey of the Expedition under Colonel Woodthorpe, R. E. from Upper Assam to the Irawadi, and return over the Patkoi Range', *Proceedings of the Royal Geographical Society*, vol. 9, no. 1, January 1887, pp. 19-42. See also C. Macgregor, 'Rough Notes on the traditions, customs, etc. of the Singpho and Khamti', *The Babylonian and Oriental Record*, vol. 7, 1894, pp. 172-174.

²⁴⁸ L.W. Shakespear, *History of Upper Assam, Upper Burma and the North-East Frontier*, First Published by Macmillan and Co., LTD, London, 1914, New Delhi, First Indian Reprint, Spectrum Publication, 2004, p. 163.

populations inhabited contiguous areas. The Kachins in due course began to expand and drove the Shans from Hukwang valley, hence isolating the early Shan colony in Khamtilong.²⁴⁹ Besides this, an oral narration of Khamtis records that they had to defend themselves from the persecution of the Singphos, as they migrated towards Putao. The Singphos had blockaded the Tais and ransacked fiercely, so bloody was the ambush that it reddened the water of Malikha river.²⁵⁰

This tussle continued even after their migration from Burma to their present habitat. One of such conflict between two groups still finds an echo in the oral tradition of the Khamtis, which records their fight against the Singphos in Tengapani area. In one of the oral narrations, one night Bisa Gam sent thirty soldiers to murder the Khamti chief Lung-king, but they were defeated and sent back to Bisa Gam. When Bisa Gam heard about their loss, he himself advanced with an army to fight against the Khamtis. Then the Khamtis chief said to Bisa Gam, 'I belong to the great heavenly dynasty of Khun-lung and Khun-lai. If this country is to be ruled by me then the water of this river will be *soom* (tenga, sour)'.²⁵¹ This postulation of Khamtis chief happened mysteriously and after tasting the water of the river, Bisa Gam denounces his claim on the area occupied by the Khamtis.

Therefore, it can be deduced that the relationship between the Khamtis and Singphos were not so cordial even after their migration from Burma. However, due to Burmese persecution, both had to adjust and settled in the Tengapani area in the last part of eighteenth century. There was a friendly relationship that coexisted till passing away of Choulsan Sadiya Khowa Gohain's father. In due course, the Khamtis claims of being an early settler in the Tengapani area raised a demand for tribute from the

²⁴⁹ L.W. Shakespear, *History of Upper Assam, Upper Burma and the North-East Frontier*, p. 168.

²⁵⁰ Interview with Chownawing Namchom, 67 years of aged, male, Chief of Momong, Chowkang, Namsai district, Arunachal Pradesh, interviewed on 16th January, 2016.

²⁵¹ Interview with Chownawing Namchom, 67 years of aged, male, Chief of Momong, Chowkang, Namsai district, Arunachal Pradesh, interviewed on 16th January, 2016.

Singphos. Such claims were challenged by the latter, who rose in rebellion and sought aid from the Singpho of Burma. This conflict between two resulted in dislodgment of the Khamtis from Tengapani area to the banks of the Buri Dihang where they halted for some time.²⁵²

When their area was visited by Wilcox in 1828, he mentioned that; ‘we found that a certain degree of enmity existing between the Khamtis and Singphos made the latter a little shy’.²⁵³ However, despite such conflicts, they also were instances of collaboration in the need to counter the pre-colonial and colonial states. This was evident in 1794 when the Singphos supported the Khamtis against the Ahom Sadiya Khowa Gohain. Another instance was when the Abors (henceforth Adi) attacked the Khamtis for which they received support from Singphos. This conflict between the Adi and the Khamtis broke out in connection with Miris who were considered as the protected subject of the Adis. The Khamtis while establishing their domain in Sadiya area began to kidnap the Miris and other inhabitants to engage them in agriculture and other works as slave. This forced the Adis to descend down to the plains and carried out ravages among the Khamtis inflicting considerable loss to them.²⁵⁴ Therefore, it can be said that even though clashes were there on some occasions, but they always cooperated with each other when challenged by other communities or the states like Ahom, Burmese and the British.

3.2.2 Ahom-Khamti Relations

The long rule of the Ahom began to decline rapidly after the outbreak of Moamaria rebellion in the last decades of eighteenth century. This rebellion broke out

²⁵² New Delhi, National Archive of India (henceforth NAI), Foreign Political Consultation (henceforth FPC), F. Cutter, Political Officer to Major F. Jenkins, Agent to the Governor General of Bengal, July 15, 1843, no. 70.

²⁵³ Wilcox, p.62

²⁵⁴ John Butler, A ketch of Assam with some account of the Hill Tribes, London, Smith Elder and Co, 1846, pp. 40-41

during the reign of Ahom King Gaurinath Singha, (1780-94) in 1789. In the words of R.M. Lahiri:

The rebellion was so strong that all attempt to resist the tide of the Moamaria invasion failed...the capital (Rangpur) itself was occupied and the *Svargadeva*(sic) had to flee from the Guwahati...this temporary eclipse of the royal power was a further signal for the mushroom appearance of numerous petty rajas in various part of the distracted country.²⁵⁵

Therefore, taking advantage of this political chaos the Khamtis who had been aspiring for a suitable political and economic space since their dislodgement from Tengapani area crossed the Brahmaputra in 1794 along with the Singphos and invaded Sadiya.²⁵⁶ They defeated and established their rule by usurping the office and title of the Sadiya Khowa Gohain.²⁵⁷ The Ahoms who were engaged in suppressing the Moamaria rebellion were not in a position to deal with the Khamtis, therefore, acquiesced their over Sadiya, as they were considered as their nearest kinsmen.²⁵⁸ However, the Khamtis did not receive *posa* from Ahom government, but in due course of time made Sadiya as their main seat of power, and began to rule like an independent prince.²⁵⁹

However, the Khamtis did not want to remain confined to Sadiya, therefore, in 1799 during the reign of Kamleshwar Singha (1795-1811 A.D) they along with other

* The Ahoms realised the importance of maintaining vigilance over the tribal people and, therefore, appointed frontier wardens. Thus the Sadiya Khowagohain was charged with over-seeing the tribes in the Sadiya area, viz. the Adis, the Miris, and the Mishmis, etc., in P.N. Luthra, 'North East Frontier Agency Tribes: Impact of Ahom and British Policy', *Economic and Political Weekly*, June 5, 1971, p. 1144, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3020877> Accessed: 03-12-2016 10:59 UTC.

²⁵⁵ R.M. Lahiri, *The Annexation of Assam (1824-1854)*, Firma KLM Private Limited, Kolkata, 2003, p.4. The Moamaria are also known by the generic name of Mattaks (strong) – The Moamaria according to Gait (vide History of Assam, p.58) 'consisted mainly of persons of low social rank such as Doms, Morans, Kacharis, Haris and Chutiyas and they denied the supremacy of the Brahmans', but according to the old records preserved in the Assam Research Society Office, Guwahati, it consist some group of Brahmins, Daivajnas, Kayasthas, Kalitas, Kelos, Kochas and other'.

²⁵⁶ S.K. Bhuyan, (compiled, edited and translated), *Tungkhungia Buranji, or History of Assam 1681-1826 A.D.*, London, Oxford University Press, first published 1933, reprinted 1983.p. 120.

²⁵⁷ R.M. Lahiri, *The Annexation of Assam*, p. 6.

²⁵⁸ U.N. Gohain, *Assam under the Ahoms*, p.7, cited in the Lakshmi Devi, *Ahom-Tribal Relation*, p. 241.

²⁵⁹ M.L. Bose, *British Policy in North-East Frontier Agency*, New Delhi, Concept Publishing Company, 1979, p. 79.

Shan tribes like Pani Naras and Phakials, and adjoining hill tribes like the Miris, Mishmis, Muluks, Nagas and Abors tried to invade further south of Sadiya.²⁶⁰ This attempt was arrested by Ahom Prime Minister, Purananda Burhagohain, who brought a large number of Khamtis captives into Jorhat, and settled them at Toklai forest south of the camp, and the Khamti chief Bura Raja was kept under guard.²⁶¹ Hence, for the time being, the Sadiya tract was freed from Khamtis and a new Sadiya khowa Gohain known as Barir-Putek was appointed by the Ahoms.²⁶² The remaining Khamtis under Deka Raja went back to the Buri Dihing. After this, the Matak too were defeated in 1805 and Matibar (son and successor of Sarbananda Singha) was forced to sign an agreement. Through this agreement, the Ahom recognized the territory that lay in the angle between the Brahmaputra and the Buri-Dihing as Matak country and recognized Matak chief as the Barsenapati.²⁶³

3.3 Initial Contact between the Khamtis and the British

Even after the successful suppression of the Khamtis and the Moamaria rebellion, troubles for the Ahom rulers did not end. The suppression of Moamaria rebellion was followed by recurrent internal rifts amongst the Ahom nobility in the early decades of nineteenth century. In 1817, Badan Chandra Barphukan (governor of Lower Assam) fled to Bengal due to the outbreak of an internal conflict with Bura Gohain (Ahom prime minister) to seek political support from English against Bura Gohain. Unable to solicit support from the British, he approached the Burmese representative in Bengal against Bura Gohain. The imperialist Burmese who had been waiting for an opportunity to extend their influence towards the west, accepted the plea of Badan

²⁶⁰ Laxmi Devi, *Ahom Tribal Relations...*, p.242.

²⁶¹ Lakshmi Devi, p.243.

²⁶² Son of a widow, belonging to the family of Purnanda Burhagohain.

²⁶³ For details see, S. Dutta, *The Matak and Their Kingdom: Caste and Tribe of Assam*, Allahabad, Chug Publication, 1985, pp.176-77.

Chandra Barphukan, and made their appearance in Assam in 1817.²⁶⁴ However, when they invaded Assam they found out that Bura Gohain was already dead and was succeeded by Purandar Singha. Purandar Singha was subsequently defeated and Chandrakanta Singha was restored as a rightful claimant to throne and Burmese returned back with a huge indemnity. However, in 1819 once again Chandrakanta appealed to Burmese after he was deposed by Purandar Singha. Hence, this internal rift amongst the nobility made the state vulnerable and offered an opportunity, which along with territorial interest provide sufficient motivation for Burmese intervention into the political affairs of Assam.²⁶⁵ Therefore, they once again reinvaded Assam in 1819 and this time they did not go back, rather eventually established their rule in Assam in 1822. A puppet ruler, Jogeswar Singha was installed in throne with *de facto* powers vested in by Mingimaha Bandula (Burmese general), who unleashed the reign of terror in Assam.²⁶⁶ This enthronement of a puppet ruler virtually marked the end of Ahom rule in

²⁶⁴ From late eighteenth century onwards the Burmese had been intermittently making efforts to expand their control over the Brahmaputra valley which was famous for the wet-rice cultivation. This eye over the Brahmaputra valley was largely due to effort of the Konbaungs who brought about the valley-wide integration of the Irrawaddy after overthrowing the Toungoos at Ava in 1752 were insistent on pushing the frontiers of state space beyond the immediate valley complex. As Mon resistance and shrunken commerce restricted the Burman expansion in the delta area in the latter half of the eighteenth century, Ava eyed the neighbouring wet-rice producing formations stretching across from the Mekong through the Brahmaputra. Therefore, when internal rifts among the Ahom nobility invited the ruler of Ava willingly accepted their request and sent his military in Assam.

²⁶⁵ In India, the Mughal Empire began to decline rapidly after the death of Aurangzeb 1707 which resulted into emergence of the various regional powers in India. In this context Bengal sprang up as an independent regional power under Alivardi Khan. Due to considerable amount of resources and potential for mercantile company Bengal attracted the English and French who wanted to have mastery over it along with other regions of India. Their interest in Bengal and other province of India consequently led them to entangle in the political affairs of India which consequently brought them in conflict with ruler of Bengal in 1757 known as battle of Plassey and in 1764 known as battle of Buxar. This victorious in subsequent wars had made the English as dominion ruler of Bengal, in Sekhar Bandyopadhyay, *From Plassey to Partition: A History of Modern India*, pp.12-13. This political development in Bengal had put the English in direct territorial contiguity with the following polities: Cooch Behar, Tripura, Ahom, Jaintia, Khasi hills, Cachar and Arakan. In this context, when Arakan was brought under the control of Burmese, a large number of Mags took shelter to the British dominions. Hence, by the last part of eighteen century the Ahom state was squeezed between these two powerful expansionist groups from both east and west.

²⁶⁶ Priyam Goswami, *The History of Assam...*, p.15.

Assam.²⁶⁷ The British in Calcutta were aware of the atrocities carried out on the Assamese people. Due to their non-interventionist policy, they were not ready to entangle themselves in the affairs of Assam.²⁶⁸ The *status quo* did not remain the same when the Governor of Arakan illegally seized several British subjects engaged in hunting elephants on the frontier of Chittagong and Arakan (1821-22) under the pretext that they were within the Burmese territories.²⁶⁹ Besides, the Burmese armies were expanding their influence by launching attacks on the rulers of Goalpara, Manipur, Cachar and Jaintia. This culminated in an attack upon the island of Shahpuri on the Chittagong frontier, which made the situation more alarming for the British government.²⁷⁰ It was inevitable for British to abandon their policy of non-intervention, and prepare themselves to counter Burmese expansion into their domain, through a vigorous display of power²⁷¹. This resulted into the outbreak of the first Anglo-Burmese war 1824-1826 A.D.

When the British declared war on the Burmese in Assam, they did have very little knowledge about the geography of the Assam, and were aware that to fight the war co-operation of the native inhabitants of the Assam was essential. Therefore, just after declaring war, David Scott proclaimed in February month itself:

We are not led into your country by the thirst of conquest, but are forced in our own defense, to deprive our enemy of the means of annoying us. You may, therefore, rest assured that we will...re-establish...a Government adapted to your wants and calculated to promote the happiness of all classes...Come forward, therefore, without fear for the present or for the future. Supply our troops with provision for which ready money will be paid and fail not where you have an opportunity to wreak your vengeance on the remnant of those who had caused you so many calamities...attack them therefore with

²⁶⁷ Priyam Goswami, *The History of Assam...*, p. 15.

²⁶⁸ With the arrival of Sir John Shore (1793-98) as governor general the British followed non-intervention policy in the affair of the natives states. The British at this period had the notion that by intervening in the mutual quarrel among the native Princes that the English could make their power unassailable in India.

²⁶⁹ Edward Thornton, *The History of the British Empire in India*, Boston, Adamant Media Corporation, vol. V, 2001, p. 7.

²⁷⁰ Edward Thornton, *The History of the British Empire in India*, p.16

²⁷¹ Copland, *The British Raj and the Indian Princes*, Bombay, Orient Longman, 1982, pp. 16-17.

the confidence with such weapons as you can collect and revenge the cruel indignities you have so long suffered at their hands.²⁷²

Not only did the British appeal for cooperation from the plains of Assam, but also to various groups inhabiting the adjoining powers like the Cachar, Manipur, and Jaintia.²⁷³ Within three weeks of the declaration of the war, Assam up to Kaliabar came under the possession of British.²⁷⁴ After pushing out the Burmese army from the Lower Assam, the British reached at Rangpur in 1825 the last stronghold of Burmese in Assam. In the meantime, dissensions cropped up in the Burmese ranks, coupled with an acute shortage of foodstuff compelled the Burmese leaders at Rangpur to surrender without much resistance to the British on January 31, 1825.²⁷⁵ With the capitulation of Rangpur, the First Anglo-Burmese War in Assam came to a close, though it was continued in two other fronts, Arakan and Rangoon till the Burmese were finally defeated and peace was concluded at Yandaboo on February 24, 1826.

Although Burmese were expelled from Rangpur, yet it did not completely eliminate its menace from Upper Assam. The Burmese military leaders, Boglee Phukan whom British allowed to leave unmolested from Rangpur fort were halting near Sadiya.²⁷⁶ Matters got worse when his troops were refused passage by the Singphos across their territories and forced the former to assist the latter in plundering the

²⁷² H.K. Barpujari, *Assam in the Days of the Company: 1826-58*, p. 39

²⁷³ H. Srikanth, 'British Colonialism and the hill Tribes of Composite Assam', *Man and Society A Journal of North East Studies*, vol. III, 2006, p.85

²⁷⁴ A.C. Banerjee, p. 250.

²⁷⁵ A.C. Banerjee, p. 285.

²⁷⁶ R.M. Lahiri, p. 26. Sadiya at time was under the possession of the Khamti. As discussed above the Khamti had been arrested by Ahom ruler, but during the first Burmese invasion they were freed by Burmese (1817), and directed them to return back to KhamtiLong, but instead former resettle in Sadiya tract in 1817 in Puspahar Gogoi, *Tai of North-East India*, Dhemaji, Assam, Chumpra Publication, 1996, p. 77. After returning to Sadiya they once again able to establish their control over the population of Sadiya and succeeded in keeping the tract free from the Anglo-Burmese turmoil in M.L. Bose, *British Policy in North-East Frontier Agency*, p. 80.

Moamaria and the Khamtis country.²⁷⁷ Accordingly, towards end of the second week of March, 1825 a news arrived of about 7500 Singphos armed with 650 muskets having gathered and erected a stockade on the mouth of the Noa Dihing. They were carrying out depredations in the Khamtis and Moamaria country.²⁷⁸ Considering the formidability of the raid, the two chiefs, viz., Matibar Barsenapati of the Matak kingdom and the Khamti chief of Sadiya, appealed for the British help.²⁷⁹

This depredation of the Singphos with the help of Boglee Phukan engaged the serious attention of the British. It needed most active and efficient measures to be adopted against the remnants of the Burmese army and break their alliance with the hill tribes. Therefore, British agreed to respond to the appeal of Matak and Khamtis in anticipation that they would be able to win over them, whose service could be utilized against the Burmese and their allies in future.²⁸⁰

Accordingly, Lt. Neufville proceeded against the Singphos and Boglee Phukan in March, 1825.²⁸¹ He was accorded full powers to conduct negotiations with the tribes and chiefs of eastern Assam and further instructed to bring formidable tribes under subjugation through partly conciliatory and partly coercive measures. During this expedition, Neufville was offered all possible help by Khamti and Matak. The repressive measures of the British with the help from the Khamtis and Matak brought crushing defeat on the Singphos and remnants of the Burmese army. This defeat of Singphos and Burmese in Assam was followed by the major victory of British in Arakan and Rangoon which led to peace treaty at Yandaboo on February 24, 1826. By

²⁷⁷ R.M. Lahiri, p.26 The Singpho who occupies the passage from Assam to Burma reaped a full advantage of the anarchical state of the country and committed outrages and carried away a large number of the Assamese as slaves.

²⁷⁸ H.K. Barpujari, *The Problems of Hill Tribes*, vol. I, p. 29.

²⁷⁹ Kolkata, WBSA, BSPC, letter no. 13, 15th April, 1825.

²⁸⁰ S. Dutta (ed.), *Arunachal Pradesh District Gazetteer, Lohit*, p.205

²⁸¹ Nirode K. Barooah, *David Scott in North-East India*, New Delhi, Munshiram Manoharlal, 1970, p. 116.

this treaty, the Burmese monarch gave up his claim on the province of Assam, Manipur, Cachar and Jayantia.²⁸² Hence, the Khamtis and the British came into contact with each other for the first time during the course of the first Anglo-Burmese war (1824-26 AD).²⁸³

3.4 Creation of a Buffer Zone

From 1790s, the colonial administrators held divergent views over the potential of the north-east frontier. While one group looked upon north-east frontier region as an unpredictable threat which was destructive without any economic scope; the other group viewed it as a possible area for entrepreneurship and commerce with vast unexplored natural resources.²⁸⁴ Therefore, in the initial period, the British favoured to use it as the Eastern Frontier of Bengal²⁸⁵ and considered it merely as a natural barrier between Bengal and Burma, rather than a territorial possession of the British.²⁸⁶ However, the Burmese invasion of Assam proved to be a paradigm shift for the British in Bengal. Now they realized the importance of stable frontier for a smooth functioning of trade and commerce. In the words of Gallagher and Robinson, ‘trade with informal control if possible; trade with rule when necessary’.²⁸⁷ In this context, Michel H. Fisher has stated that;

It has been accepted by most British political and military strategies that the Company’s position in India could never secure as long as it faced hostility or instability within the Indian states located on its border or embedded in its territory...the futile search for a

²⁸² C. U. Aitchison, *A Collection of Treaties, Engagement and Sanads*, vol. XII, Calcutta, 1929, p. 230.

²⁸³ M. L. Bose, *History of Arunachal Pradesh*, p. 88.

²⁸⁴ Abikal Borah, ‘A Region in a Mobile World Integration of Southeastern Sub-Himalayan Region into the Global Capitalist Economy (1820–1900)’, *Research Foundation of State University of New York for and on behalf of the Fernand Braudel Center*, vol. 37, no. 2 (2014), pp. 87-127, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/90011556>, accessed on 29-11-2017 07:05

²⁸⁵ Present day whole north-eastern Indian states (Assam, Nagaland, Mizoram, Arunachal Pradesh, Tripura, Manipur, Meghalaya).

²⁸⁶ H. Srikanth, ‘British Colonialism and the hill Tribes of Composite Assam’, p.81.

²⁸⁷ Cited by Sekhar Bandyopadhyaya, *From Plassey to Partition: A History of Modern India*, p. 60.

stable external frontier therefore led the British into one war – and often annexation-after another.²⁸⁸

Sekhar Bandyopadhyaya states that;

The English obsession with stable frontier, as necessary precondition for smooth operation of trade, was another motive behind conquest, as one annexation brought them to more unstable frontier, which was necessitated more conquest.²⁸⁹

Therefore, to make Bengal as a commercial hub, it was vital to secure and stabilise its external frontier. This search for secure frontier manifested in the form of entanglement into the affairs of Assam against the Burmese army in 1824-26.²⁹⁰ This war with Burmese resulted in annexation of Assam which further created necessitate securing the newly acquired province too. The western flank of Assam which was separated from Bengal by various mountains inhabited by various hill tribes, they were not considered a big threat. The northern frontier with Tibet was dormant, as China had not yet become a power. The eastern flank though secured for the time-being from Burma in 1826, remained as a source of danger for the British in Assam. This was largely because, the defeat in the Anglo-Burmese war 1824-26 had made the Court of Ava not less but more arrogant.²⁹¹ There was doubt amongst the British administrators that a humiliated Burmese might undo the treaty of Yandaboo, and put Assam under threat.²⁹²

²⁸⁸ Michael H. Fisher, *The politic of the British Annexation of India 1757-1857*, New Delhi, Oxford University Press, Third Impression, 2005, pp. 27-31

²⁸⁹ Sekhar Bandyopadhyaya, p. 61.

²⁹⁰ H. Srikanth, p. 81. Till the outbreak of the first Anglo-Burmese war the British did not have much economic interest in extending their control beyond the eastern part of Bengal, which they named as the North East Frontier of Bengal.

²⁹¹ D.G.E. Hall, *A History of south east Asia*, 1st edition 1955, Reprint, London, p. 642

²⁹² The Burma's defeat in the war with the British had far-reaching consequences. Her territorial losses were great, but even great were the blow to her national pride. Her military power, once the terror for all her neighboring was broken beyond recovery. Such a situation would lead to a stipulated assumption that the stock of defeat would have a salutary effect upon the Court of Ava and lead to mend its ways. A.C. Banarjee, *Annexation of Burma*, Pp. 29-31.

This apprehension appeared real with news of Burmese outrages on British territory along the Moulmein frontier with similar complaints from Arakan too immediately following the treaty of Yandaboo in 1826.²⁹³ Besides, John Crawfurd (the first British Resident in the court of Ava) in September 1826 reported that the Burmese government was very reluctant to admit an English resident in Ava. His report was further augmented by his successor Major Henry Burney who stated that:

The Court of Ava was not happy with the war indemnity, article 7, and boundary issue between British and Burma. They are manifestly dissatisfied with the present state of things... all here are certain that Ava will rise again from her present reduction...and not only the king's court but the lower rank of the people and many inhabitant of the Tenasserim province firmly believe that in the last war it was English turn to conquer, but in the next contest it will be the turn of Ava.²⁹⁴

In 1828, Captain Neufville received a letter from a Burmese military leader with a request that he should not advance any further but return to Rangpur (in Bengal). Neufville though acknowledged the letter and replied, "If my friends, you want us to quit the country of Assam you had better come and turn us down."²⁹⁵ All these reports created Burma-phobia among the British administrators in Assam. The nascent British defensive establishment in Assam was not geared to forestall any Burmese advance to India from its northeast frontier.²⁹⁶

In this context emerged the strategies for safeguarding the frontier between Assam and Burma since 1824 under Edward Paget, the Commander-in-Chief in India. In Dec 1824, he proposed that the Eastern Frontier must be secured by a system of fortified military posts strategically located on the most vulnerable positions in

²⁹³ A.C. Bannerjee, p. 501.

²⁹⁴ A.C. Bannerjee, pp. 504-505.

²⁹⁵ Meena Sharma, p. 211.

²⁹⁶ P.N. Luthra, 'North East Frontier Agency Tribes: Impact of Ahom and British Policy', p. 114.

Assam.²⁹⁷ Instructions were issued to Colonel Richard* to select suitable sites for stationing military with a view to future arrangements, wherein the defence of the frontier would be entrusted to the Local Corps.²⁹⁸ Richard accordingly selected Sadiya, Borhat and Jaipur as an advanced post for the defence of Upper Assam, and these in turn would be supported from Jorhat and Biswanath. He recommended that Bishwanath be the military headquarters for Upper Assam. Both David Scott and the Governor General-in-Council attached considerable importance to the recommendation of Colonel Richard.²⁹⁹ Hence, in 1825, David Scott placed Lieutenant Bedingfield and Burlton in-charge of Sadiya. In order to check the Burmese incursion, Scott wanted to establish direct military control over the Sadiya frontier. Due to ill health of Bedingfield and his successor Burlton, the scarcity of officers, and tough geographical and climatic condition no permanent English officer could be stationed therein.³⁰⁰ The extreme humidity in summer and intense cold in winter followed by heavy rainfall throughout the year was one of the main obstacles for British military administration in Assam.³⁰¹ This difficulty has been reported by Wilcox in 1825 as:

...leeches and *damdums* scarcely bearable, we once took the trouble to count the collection for about half-an-hour, and tore thirty-five leeches from one leg. We went through thick forests of trees and prickly jointed bamboos, and allowed us to see nothing beyond the deep ravines which we were moving down, and closeness of the

²⁹⁷ New Delhi, NAI, Foreign Department Secret Proceeding (FDSP), no.1, 14 Jan 1825, Minute by Paget, 15 Dec 1824.

* Colonel Richard, Junior Commissioner and Officer Commanding was entrusted to look after the administration of civil and criminal justice of Assam as well as to establish police establishment in Guwahati during the Anglo-Burmese war.

²⁹⁸ New Delhi, NAI, FDSP, 14 Jan 1825, no.1, Minute by Paget, 15 Dec 1824.

²⁹⁹ Imdad Hussain, *Problem of Defence: North-East Frontier with Special Reference to Local Corps and Irregulars 1822-1866*, Unpublished PhD Thesis, Guwahati University, 1975, p. 30.

³⁰⁰ New Delhi, NAI, Foreign Secret Consultation (henceforth FSC), 10 November 1826, nos. 21-22.

³⁰¹ C. R. MacGregor, 'Journey of the Expedition under Colonel Woodthorpe, R. E., from Upper Assam to the Irrawaddy, and Return over the Patkoi Range', *Proceedings of the Royal Geographical Society*, pp. 19-42, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1801262> (accessed on 5 January 2016)

trees made it extremely difficult to me to note any bearing of the direction we were travelling in.³⁰²

G. Tyson too, in his *Forgotten Frontier* mentions that;

All the mountain tracks from Burma into Assam, and particularly those which descend upon the Manipur plain, have certain geographical conditions that are common throughout the Assam-Burma frontier. The frontier runs from northeast to southwest through a series of parallel forest hill tracts with heights occasionally running up to 12,000 feet above sea level, but more often ranging from 5,000 to 8,000 feet and diminishing in height to the southwest. On the Burma side of the frontier runs the river Chindwin, flowing from north to south through a plain liable to heavy flooding, almost road less and thinly populated.³⁰³

Later on the difficulty of the frontier with Upper Assam has been reflected in reports of various colonial officials who visited these tracts from time to time. They mentioned about the inhospitable climatic condition, dense forest, high altitude, bad communication, etc.³⁰⁴ Besides this, transport was another difficulty as there were no bridle paths, with a very steep and narrow that a column has to march in a single file. All baggage had to be carried by men, who required a baggage guard in the hostile country.³⁰⁵ These concerns expressed were based on the experiences of the British expedition against the Singphos and Burmese in 1825-26. Particularly concerns were raised regarding the adequate supply of rations due to scanty population and lack of communications.³⁰⁶ Besides, as the military men were mainly recruited from Upper Bengal, Bihar, and Orissa therefore the issue of acclimatization had proved to be very

³⁰² Wilcox, p.66

³⁰³ G. Tyson, *Forgotten Frontier*, Guwahati, Spectrum Publications, 1992, pp. 26-27.

³⁰⁴ Jenkins, 'Notes on a Trip across the Patkoi Range from Assam to the Hookong Valley' in *Hill Tracts between Assam and Burma*, Vivek Publishing Company, Delhi.

³⁰⁵ This difficulty has been later on reported by J.P Mills at the Meeting of the Royal Geographical Society in 1926 where he mention that the rainfall is one of the heaviest in the world, and mosquito, leaches, sandflies, and other pests abound. The Anopheles mosquito is plentiful, and many of them are infected, J.P. Mills, 'The Assam-Burma Frontier', *The Geographical Journal*, vol. LXVII, no. 4, April 1926, p.291

³⁰⁶ New Delhi, NAI, FSC, 13th June 1825, no. 14, from Richard to Shuldham.

worrisome for the administrators, as they had never perceived themselves to be permanently quartered in Assam.³⁰⁷ On the other hand even if they were able to provide security at some important passes, there remained the possibility of the Burmese using alternate passes for passage. Hence the military division and stations along all the passes was not considered feasible as it would weaken the military strength for being spread thin against the Burmese forces.³⁰⁸

Therefore, in such a critical phase of the spectre of Burmese re-invasion and security of frontier of Upper Assam was consequently interlinked with the tribes inhabiting the space straddling Burma and foothills of Assam. The strategic location of this eastern frontier of Assam and the tribes inhabiting it became important for British. This strategic importance of frontier can be better understood in the words of John M'Cosh's in his *Topography of Assam* where he states thus:

Few nations bordering upon the British dominion in India are less generally known than those inhabiting the extreme north-east frontier of Bengal; and yet in a commercial, a statistical or a political point of view no country is more important. There our territory of Assam is situated in almost immediate contact with the empires of China and Ava, being separated from each by a narrow belt of mountainous country, possessed tribes and capable of being crossed over in ten or twelve days.³⁰⁹

Therefore it is not difficult to visualize the strategic importance of territories under Matak (Moamaria), Khamtis, and Singphos due to contiguity with Burmese upland territory as they commanded the crucial passes between Upper Assam and Burma. It was imperative for the British to bring the areas inhabited by the Khamtis and Singphos under their sphere of influence as the first line of defence, alternately seeking their neutrality in the event of a Burmese invasion. The British encountered the Khamtis during their participation in an expedition against Singphos and Burmese, and were

³⁰⁷ Imdad Hussain, *Problem of Defence...*, p. 41.

³⁰⁸ Imdad Hussain, p. 86.

³⁰⁹ John M'Cosh, *Topography of Assam*, pp.132-33.

impressed by their strong, sturdy and courageous feats. They realized that the Khamtis along with Matakas were the only communities of consequence in Assam, who could ensure maintenance of tranquility on its borders.³¹⁰ English, therefore, wanted to maintain the territories of these people as buffer between the Burmese and British Empire. This policy has been later on reflected in the writing of M. C. Mac Gregor:

Since our annexation of Upper Assam it is of course important that we should have as many friends as possible in the tribes of the far north, and although the Khamti Shans, whom we visited, are not a very numerous clan (I should say that the whole community does not exceed 12,000 souls), yet, owing to their superior civilization superior when contrasted with the semi-barbarism of their neighbours they would prove of use to us; they certainly showed their willingness to be friendly in every way.³¹¹

David Scott, the Agent to the Governor-General, North-East Frontier, suggested for utilizing the hill tribes inhabiting the Sadiya frontier to act as a first line of defence between the Burmese and the newly acquired possessions.³¹² He, recommended that the territory under Khamtis, Singphos, and Matakas should be handed over to their own management and they be allowed to enjoy the rights and privileges previously acknowledged, after their nominal annexation. He also urged upon the government to bestow upon the chiefs of these territories some mark of distinction.³¹³ The British henceforth pursued a policy of conciliation by securing its frontiers encircled with friendly polities between British and Burma along its eastern frontier.³¹⁴ Accordingly the Khamti chief Chowsalan Sadiya Khowa Gohain was placed in the semi-independent status in possession of the Sadiya country. Further, Scott entered into an agreement with him on 16 May, 1826.

³¹⁰ R.M. Lahiri, p. 35.

³¹¹ C. R. MacGregor, 'Journey of the Expedition under Colonel Woodthorpe, R. E., from Upper Assam to the Irawadi, and Return over the Patkoi Range', p.20.

³¹² Kolkata, WBSA, Bengal Political Consultation (henceforth BPC), 1826, July 14, no. 2.

³¹³ New Delhi, NAI, Foreign Secret Proceeding (FSP), 1826, July 14, no. 9.

³¹⁴ New Delhi, NAI, FSC, 31 Oct 1823, no.17.

3.5 Agreement of May 16th, 1826

I am made Khowa Huddah of Suddeya for the purpose that I perform all the duties of the Company, and while I agree by this writing to do. The 12 Siring under me have 43 Gotes of 3 Pykes, and of Khamptee there are 40 and 1 Poa, and of Doom there are 12 Gotes, 1 Poa- total 95 Gotes, 2 Poa of these the Siring Burriah has 1 Gote 1 Poa and 8 Gotes of Siksos, and my own are 10 Gotes with 1 Poa for Runnut Mura. Also the Bura of Khamptee and Dooms have 4 Gotes-remaining 72 Gotes of these 40 are fighting men, and 20 working men, and 12 fishermen: these shall be forthcoming according to the customs of the country by Mal, Dewal, Tual, and I will do justice to the people under me, but in case of murder, the paper, witness, and offender shall be sent to the Huzoor, and I will always be ready to obey the order of the Huzoor, and what russed shall be given on payment. This paper is written before everyone (sic).³¹⁵

Witness: Kogessuy, Duftry

(Sd.) Salan Suddeya Khowa

Sundee Sing, Chupprasse

Signed with Mr. Scott's

16th May, 1826.

According to this agreement, David Scott recognized the Khamti chief 'Chousalan Gohain' as the local officer of the Assam Government. He permitted him to collect poll-tax from the Assamese subjects within his domain while he was exempted from paying tax. This was contingent on maintaining a body of 200 men to be armed by the British Government.³¹⁶ Besides, the Sadiya Khowa Gohain had to report all the serious issues to the British agent. The armed contingent was to act as the first line of defence against future Burmese incursions, and keep track over suspicious movements in the vicinity, especially the Singphos.

³¹⁵ Aitchison, C.U., *A Collection of Treaties, Engagement and Sanads: Relating to India and Neighbouring Countries*, vol. XII, Calcutta, 1929, p. 122; M.L. Bose, *Historical and Constitutional Documents of North-East India (1824-1973)*, Concept Publishing Company, Delhi, 1979, p.150.

³¹⁶ H. K. Barpujari, vol. I, 1981, p. 38.

Therefore, the strategic compulsion was the deciding factor in extension of colonial interest into the eastern frontier of Bengal. The Khamtis and Singphos were thus constituted into a buffer zone. The agreement with Khamtis proved to be an advantageous to the British who secured the loyalty of an independent tribe, which they began to undermine in due course.

3.6 Roots of the Khamtis Resistance

As discussed in the previous chapter the Khamtis had their own traditional socio-economic and political institutions, which was quite distinct from that of the colonial state. Therefore, when they came into close contact with the colonial state they found their indigenous traditions threatened which compelled them to resist defending their territory when the colonial state began to introduce various changes.

3.6.1 Administrative Development in the Khamti area

In January 1825, Rangpur, the last stronghold of Burmese army in Upper Assam was brought under British control. With the Burmese defeat in Rangpur, the British brought the entire Brahmaputra valley under their military occupation and subsequently martial law was extended to Upper Assam. This extension of martial law was pushed into Sadiya in March 1825, when Captain Neufville arrived there to assist the Khamtis and Matakas against the Singphos and Burmese depredations. In view of the strategic location of Sadiya, he pressed for the establishment of a military post, which would be assisted by Khamtis and Matakas to help restrain the Singpho plunder. Accordingly, on 2nd April 1825, he retained two gunboats at Sadiya to guard against an attack by the

Singphos.³¹⁷ Thus, the first British military post was established in Sadiya. Though there is no official record about the agreement on the land leased for the military station at Sadiya, it finds a place in the oral history of the Khamtis. According to the oral history, the British came to Pang-Tewla (Sadiya) and sought permission from the Sadiya Khowa Gohain to establish their temporary military post in order to check the Burmese and the Singphos ravages in Upper Assam, which was willingly offered by Sadiya Khowa Gohain.³¹⁸ The designated site handed over to British was known as *Pongtiola* (pong-field, tio-day, la-long). This area was said to be so vast that it would take whole day's walking without rest to cover its vastness.³¹⁹

David Scott was apprehensive that the establishment of a temporary military station or a political settlement alone with these tribes would not result in complete pacification and achieving a lasting result.³²⁰ Therefore, in order to secure the British strategic interest in Sadiya frontier, they temporarily stationed an Intelligent Department under the Cheering Baruah, an officer of the former government to check on their fidelity in 1826.³²¹ Lieutenant Bedingfield was entrusted the civil charge of Sadiya in addition to his normal duties as an officer commanding at that post with a detachment of 250 men and 5 gunboats.³²² His primary job was to settle tribal disputes and eradication of predatory habits of the surrounding tribes.³²³ He was instructed not to interfere in their internal affairs of tribal chiefs except only in the instance of serious travesty of

³¹⁷ John F. Michell, *The North-East Frontier of India: A Topographical, Political, and Military Report*, p. 149, <http://www.southasiaarchive.com/Content/sarf.143016/209522/005> (accessed on 28 Nov 2017 at 05:05:45)

³¹⁸ Interview with Chownawing Namchom, 67 years of aged, male, Chief of Momong, Chowkang, Namsai district, Arunachal Pradesh, interviewed on 16th January, 2016.

³¹⁹ Interview with Chownawing Namchom, 67 years of aged, male, Chief of Momong, Chowkang, Namsai district, Arunachal Pradesh, interviewed on 16th January, 2016.

³²⁰ R. M. Lahiri, p.47.

³²¹ H.K. Barpujari, vol. 1, p.38.

³²² Lila Gogoi, p. 242.

³²³ Kolkata, WBSA, BSPC, 1826, 14 July, no. 9.

justice, under the instructions of the Cheering Barua and Sadiya Khowa Gohain should be treated with respect, due to his control over the frontiers of Sadiya.

In 1828, Sadiya became as full-fledged British Agency under the supervision of Neufville the Political Agent of Upper Assam stationed at Bishwanath.³²⁴ The duties assigned were to tour Sadiya annually in order to ascertain the stability of the tribes and the military stationed.³²⁵ The Assam Light Infantry, with the two companies of one hundred *Sepoy* were posted at Sadiya.³²⁶ Neufville, while dealing with the Khamtis and Singphos, respected the time-honoured rights and privileges of these chiefs without showing any subservience to the English government. No attempts were to be made to introduce any portion of English Law for adjudication as they were allowed to decide on administering justice in their respective jurisdictions. They were authorized to try cases and award punishment on theft, to the extent of rupees fifty. However, cases related to capital punishment had to be referred to a higher court of the *panchayat* at Sadiya comprising of the Political Agent, one of the three *Gohains* and the chief in whose territory the crime was committed.³²⁷ The British followed a policy of conciliation and

³²⁴ M.L. Bose, *The History of Arunachal Pradesh*, p. 154.

³²⁵ John Bryan Neufville, born at Lynington, England on 16th January, 1795 was educated at Eton. He became a cadet in 1810 and joined the 21st Native Infantry, Bengal in 1811. In May 1824 he was transferred to the 42nd Native infantry and took part in the first Anglo-Burmese war in Arakan in 1825. Later on, he was transferred to Assam and became a Captain on 16th June, 1826. He was appointed the Political Agent of Upper Assam in 1828. On 10th March, 1828 he became the Commandant of the 1st Assam Light Infantry and was in that capacity till his death in July 1830 at Jorhat. -Hodson, Major V.C.P., *List of the officers of the Bengal Army (1758-1834)*, Part II, pp 312-383.

³²⁶ The command of the Rangpur Light Infantry which had been in Assam since the outbreak of Anglo-Burmese war was now invested in the Political Agent of Upper Assam. The Rangpur Light Infantry was permanently attached to Assam and entrusted all its local duties of watch and ward, its title being changed of Assam Light Infantry in 1828.

³²⁷ Kolkata, WBSA, Bengal Secret Political Proceeding (BSPP), letter from Lieutenant Neufville, Political Agent of Upper Assam to David Scott, the Agent to the Governor-General, North-East Frontier, no. 8, 7th November, 1828.

non-intervention which was replaced by a policy of gradual and cautious intervention in the Khamtis affairs after the death of Neufville, on 30 June 1830.³²⁸

This new strategy was fuelled by rumours about the breach of fidelity by the frontier tribes during the rebellion by Ahom nobles and during the Singpho invasion of 1830. In order to establish enhance control over the frontier, Scott recommended on 11 May 1831, the setting up of a new political unit in eastern Assam with headquarters at Sadiya.³²⁹ It was suggested that it should be placed under a European officer commanding the troops and supervise the tribal militia and serve as an Assistant to the Political Agent, Upper Assam. Such an official would control border tribes, hold criminal trials, and any other business that might arise at the frontier. Two companies of Assam Light Infantry were proposed to be permanently stationed at Sadiya as a distinct unit.³³⁰

These recommendations were further stressed upon by his successor, Francis Jenkins, in April 1834.³³¹ He added that with a strong military station at Sadiya they

³²⁸ H.K. Barpujari, vol.I, p.75. This has been witnessed after the arrival of Francis Jenkins who carried out survey in Assam. When he visited this area in 1831 he found out that the North East India, particularly the location of Sadiya was important from strategic and commercial point of view. Because of its vicinity with Burma and the Singpho country, people inhabiting in its neighbourhood could disturb the peace of the Sadiya frontier even after the expulsion of the Burmese invaders. In this context, Jenkins recommended to the Government of Bengal that the military post at Sadiya be strengthened. Apart from strengthening the defence against any attack of the Singpho and the Burmese, Jenkins opined that the measure would improve the resources of this part of Assam and thus enable British military operations without much difficulty.

³²⁹ Kolkata, WBSA, BPC, letter no. 5, 10th June, 1831.

³³⁰ Kolkata, WBSA, BPC, no. 5, 10th June, 1831.

³³¹ Francis Jenkins joined East India Company and sailed from England to India in 1810. Rising through the ranks, in 1828 he was appointed the 5th Chief Commissioner of Assam, stationed at Guwahati. By 1831 he was a captain and was deputed to undertake a survey of Assam, including Cachar and Manipur, following its annexation by the British. Having successfully completed this mission, he was created the first Commissioner and Agent to the Governor-general for Assam in 1834. He remained in this position until his retirement in 1861 with the rank of Major General. Under the direction of the Secretary, Government of Bengal, Francis Jenkins conducted a survey on Assam and Cachar, in 1832. The report of the survey which Jenkins forwarded to the Government of Bengal have been brought in an edited volume by H.K.Barpujari, under the title, *Francis Jenkins Report on the North East Frontier of India (1995)*. The work is divided into two parts. The first part deals with the subjects like strategy, transport and communication, trade and natural resources of Assam and the second deals with the transport and communication as well as the products of Cachar.

would be able to suppress the tribal uprising in the Upper Assam. His proposal was based on his prior knowledge of the area on his arrival at Assam, particularly about the importance of Sadiya from a strategic and commercial point of view. Its location at the vicinity of Burma and the Singpho territory, held the possibility of renewed uncertainty, which he conveyed and to the Secretary, Government of Bengal thus:

If strong detachments are continued for some time longer at Sadiya and Jaipur we shall succeed in putting down all attempt all disturbance in the Singphos district and as no invading party from the Burmese territories can pass.³³²

Therefore, he strongly recommended that the military post at Sadiya be strengthened. Apart from strengthening the defence against any attack of the Singphos and the Burmese, he was of the view that it would improve the resources of this region of Assam and support a British military operation without much difficulty.³³³ Jenkins further stated that ‘the position of Sadiya is so important that it would be extremely inexpedient to put into with high authority there any chief in whom we can’t place entire confidence’.³³⁴ This need for a complete control over the affairs, lead to an enactment by the Governor-General in Council on 30 May 1833 bringing the area under Mataks, Khamtis, and Singphos under an permanently posted officer at Sadiya. This accelerated the process of colonial intrusion, which subsequently led to the creation of the post of the officer-in-charge of Sadiya in 1834.

Accordingly, in 1834, Lieutenant Charlton was appointed as the office-in-charge of Sadiya, with a series of instruction issued by the Agent to the Governor-General which is enumerated below:

³³² Dispur, Assam State Archive (henceforth ASA): Political Department Proceeding (henceforth PDP), letter from Francis Jenkins, the Agent to the Governor-General for Assam to the Secretary to the Government of Bengal, Fort William, vol. 1, no. 131, 5th November, 1838.

³³³ Dispur, ASA, PDP, letter from F. Jenkins to the Secretary, Government of Bengal, no. 2, 13th March, 1835.

³³⁴ Dispur, ASA, PDP, letter from F. Jenkins to the Secretary to the Government of Bengal, no. 2, 13th March, 1835.

1. Take cognizance of all murder committed within the territory of the Singphos and the Khamtis chiefs and of the Barsenapati. The offender were to be brought to Sadiya before a *panchayat* of native rank from the neighbourhood, whose opinion on the guilt of the offender and punishment they would inflict agreeably according to their own custom you will record your proceeding and forward the same with your own opinion as to the verdict and your recommendations as to the punishment through Major White to this office.
2. You will proceed to deal in like manner with other heinous offenses committed by the subject of one chieftain against the subject of another whenever your interposition is called for or when you have reason to fear the disturbance will arise from one chieftain endeavouring to retaliate upon the other for the injuries received.
3. You will consider it your particular duty to cultivate a friendly communication with the whole of the Singphos and other chiefs, and you will encourage them to visit you once a year and you yourself will be pleased to a make tour in the cold weather through such parts of their country as you can conveniently.
4. Another great object will be the advancement of the commerce of the frontiers and any obstruction to a free trade that the agent of the Marwari may bring to your notice either on our side or on the side of Ava you will endeavour to remove or report to me as you deem necessary.³³⁵

From the above instructions, it is clear that such an appointment of the officer-in-charge was to bring the frontier tribes under stricter control of British. Therefore, in compliance with this policy, four companies of the Assam Light Infantry were stationed, under the command of a European Officer, vested with the political authority. Two gunboats were also stationed; each having one 12-pound mounted on slides, and is well manned and equipped for service...there was also a small stockade erected, with a few guns mounted.³³⁶ The creation of this new position was much against the wishes of

³³⁵ New Delhi, NAI, Foreign Department Political Consultation (henceforth FDPC), letter from F. Jenkins to Lieutenant Charlton, no.78, 24th July, 1834.

³³⁶ John M'Cosh, p.147.

the Sadiya Khowa Gohain. Though he was empowered by the *sanads* of May 1826, to administer the internal affairs of Sadiya, yet his autonomy was compromised with the appointment of Charlton. Henceforth, all the criminal and civil cases at Sadiya had to be reported to Charlton. Further, his presence would help them to promote commerce at the frontiers and beyond the borders of Assam. This move curtailed the powers, of the Sadiya Khowa Gohain over civil and criminal matters over the inhabitants of Sadiya. The appointment of Charlton as the officer-in-charge of Sadiya was interpreted by the Khamtis chiefs as a breach of the agreement.

Jenkins further amplified the commercial potential of Sadiya as a centre catering to extensive trade with Tibet, Ava and with China through the Shan provinces in produce like musk, amber, ivory, gold, silver, lead, Burmese silk, drugs, and cotton. Hence, he suggested that ‘some adequate share’ of Company’s income be spent for ‘local improvement’ particularly in the construction of roads for commercial relations.³³⁷ The economic potential of Sadiya was previously reported by Francis Buchan Hamilton in his *Account of Assam* (1807-1814) where he states that ‘in the province of Sadiya, is an important mine of salt, which in case of a dispute with Bengal is the only supply on which the country can depend, and the supply is scanty’.³³⁸ In addition, the administration in Assam was brought keen on using the Hukwang Valley as a route to connect with Ava, with the ultimate goal to establish trade routes leading to China.

Captain Hannay was appointed to explore the possible trade routes towards China and a regular route between Assam and Ava in November 1835. Instruction to Captain Hannay by Major Burney read as follows:

³³⁷ Dispur, ASA, PDP, letter from F. Jenkins to the Secretary to the Government of Bengal, Political department, Fort William, vol. 1, no.131, 5th November, 1838.

³³⁸ F. Hamilton, *An Account of Assam*, first compiled 1807-1814, (ed.) S.K. Bhuyan, Guwahati, DHAS, 1940, reprint 1963, p. 49.

It would be useful for you to ascertain as many routes as you can from Burma to China, and from Mogaung to Assam. You will also take particular pains to ascertain how far the plan proposed by Captain Jenkins of establishing a regular route between Sadiya and the Burmese dominions is likely to succeed, what are the difficulties of the overland route between Mogaung and Assam, and how they may be removed, what are the products and their usual prices on the Burmese side, what articles of British and Indian manufacture are in demand there, and the present rate at which they are selling; what duties are levied, and in what manner, what oppressions or difficulties traders are subjugated to and in short ascertain the present state of this commerce and the best mode of extending and improving it, taking also every opportunity of pointing out to the Governor of Mogaung and other Burmese officers the great advantage and convenience to themselves of establishing a regular trade between their territory and Sadiya.³³⁹

Besides this R.B. Pemberton in his report stated that;

Four native Marwari merchants from the western extremity of India reside at Sadiya, and import broad cloths, muslins, long cloths, coloured handkerchiefs, chintzes and various other description of cloths; salt and opium, liquor, glass and crockery-ware, tobacco, betel-nut and rice for the troops: these articles they barter to different tribes occupying the surrounding hills, from whom they obtain in exchange, gold dust, and gold, ivory, silver, amber, musk, *daos*, a few Burmese cloths, some small Chinese boxes...this trade is gradually extending across the mountains to the Hukwang valley on the Burmese side of the pass, and there can be little doubt that it will annually become more valuable and extensive.³⁴⁰

Considering the strategic and commercial importance of the frontier could not be left under the control of Khamtis without strict supervision under Lt. Charlton, who began to monitor the affairs of Sadiya. Just after arriving in Sadiya, he constituted *panchayats* from native rank in Khamti villages. Acting on the principle of equity and justice, he gave equal representation to the Assamese *ryots* of Sadiya, whom the Khamtis considered as their subjects, hence socially inferior. A large concentration of *ryots* in Sadiya naturally acquired a majority in most of the villages' *panchayats*. As a

³³⁹ Dorothy Woodman, *The Making of Burma*, London, The Cressett press, 1962, p. 88.

³⁴⁰ R.B. Pemberston, pp.72-73

result, the chiefs lost the privilege of dictating terms over the Assamese *ryots*.³⁴¹ The elevation of these *ryots*, who had been enslaved since a few generation back, in terms of equity, became a sensitive issue. This was interpreted as an encroachment on their traditional rights and privileges by Khamti chiefs. In fact, a system of slavery subsisted over the *ryot*, which was threatened by the present arrangement. Further, Charlton proposed in December 1834, that census of the population be taken with the view to levying a capitation tax, to be renewed every five years, in lieu of military service to the state.³⁴²

Charlton began to interfere in the personal affairs, when he accused Sadiya Khowa's brother-in-law of kidnapping and selling an Assamese subject to the Singphos in Burma. He also accused the Sadiya Khowa Gohain of shielding his brother-in-law when the former behaved with great authority denying Charlton's allegation, refusing to allow his brother-in-law to be brought under investigation.³⁴³ The charge was satisfactory, though, not legally tenable as the Sadiya Khowa Gohain justified his stand with Adam White, stating that Lt. Charlton had inquired into the matter once and dismissed the case. Therefore, he saw no reason that the person should be tried twice refusing compliance with the order of Lt. Charlton.³⁴⁴ The summons to the English court was viewed as a great humiliation by the chief. The stand taken by the Sadiya Khowa Gohain in the matter was treated by Lt. Charlton as a violation of the agreement, and wanted to depose the Sadiya Khowa Gohain from his position. This act once again raised the issue of his fidelity towards British government. Since the outset, his fidelity had been in doubt among the British officers in Upper Assam, and in this line Mr. White had already expressed thus:

³⁴¹ H. K. Barpujari, vol. I, pp. 76-77.

³⁴² John Butler, *A Sketch...*, p.46.

³⁴³ Kolkata, WBSA, BPC, letter from A. White to the Agent of the Governor General Assam, no.2, 13th March, 1835.

³⁴⁴ Kolkata, WBSA, BPC, no.2, 13th March, 1835.

Sadiya Khowa Gohain has been a great intrigues and was the first person who invited the Burmese into the country and at present he keeps up an relations with Ava through a sister and maintain a very general correspondence throughout the frontier.³⁴⁵

Besides this, in order to establish the colonial hegemony, the Khamtis were viewed as a subjugator who had reduced the population of Sadiya into slavery. This was expressed by Jenkins thus:

The Khamtis did not pay any taxes to British government except in form of military aid in time of emergency. Whereas, they enjoyed the benefit of labour of Assamese subjects of Sadiya who constituted the bulk of the population and the entire productive classes were formed by Assamese subject whom the Khamtis considered nearly in light of their slave.³⁴⁶

Therefore, Jenkins sought to bring the Assamese population of Sadiya under the British control, and make an appointment of new Sadiya Khowa Gohain from Assamese subjects. On the other hand, the Khamtis Sadiya Khowa Gohain should be made as the chief of Khamti militia.³⁴⁷ The demand for a reorientation of the powers of the Sadiya Khowa Gohain was intensified and the colonial ruler was waiting for an excuse to dislodge the Sadiya Khowa Gohain from his position.

3.6.2 Dislodgement of the Sadiya Khowa Gohain

The question of dislodgement of Sadiya Khowa Gohain came to the forefront in 1834 when a dispute arose between Sadiya Khowa Gohain and Bar Senapati over the issue of the tract of land known as Saikhowa comprising of an area of 21,600 acres situated opposite of Sadiya.³⁴⁸ Saikhowa had become an important area both coveted by the Khamtis and Matak. Its land was very fertile and with prospects for cultivation of

³⁴⁵ Kolkata, WBSA, BPC, letter no.2, 13th March 1835.

³⁴⁶ New Delhi, NAI, FSC, letter no-4, 16th January, 1836.

³⁴⁷ New Delhi, NAI, FSC, letter no-4, 16th January, 1836.

³⁴⁸ Kolkata, WBSA, BPC, letter nos. 1-2, 13th March, 1835.

high quality paddy, sugar, opium, tea, and the early rice.³⁴⁹ In addition it had a conglomeration of population who had taken refuge from the territory of Puranandar Singha (then Ahom ruler of Upper Assam). Certain sections had been settled by the Sadiya Khowa Gohain, which had increased and vied as a manpower pool, resulting in dispute for control over the land and its resources. The disputed tract was formerly *khat* or land belonging to the Ahoms which they continued to hold till it was usurped by the Khamtis who founded claims over the area.³⁵⁰

This conflict between the Khamtis and the Mataks worsened when Chousalan died in November 1834 and was succeeded by his eldest son Chau-rang-pha. He was keen on eliminating the British from Sadiya and considered Saikhowa as a legal possession of his ancestors.³⁵¹ It was further complicated, when the matter was brought before Lt. Charlton who asked both the parties on 23rd Dec 1834 to send their claims and till its resolution the land would be in possession of the British Government. This order of was unacceptable for the new Sadiya Khowa Gohain who defied the order stating that ‘I am no one’s slave... I will not conform to his order as he is going to seize the land that my father allowed them to settle there’.³⁵² He defied the order and forcibly took possession of Saikhowa. This provided the British with an opportunity to dislodge him from his post. The incident was reported to Major White, the Political Agent, who ordered his removal from his post. The removal order is recorded thus:

A direct disobedience of the officer order is sufficiently proved against the Gohain and that the preceding fully shows that he had thrown off all regard to that officer’s authority as the representative of the British Government at Suddeyah (*sic*). Upon this

³⁴⁹ A.J. Moffat Mills, *The Reports on Assam*, Gian Publication, Delhi, 1980, p. 2.

³⁵⁰ Kolkata, WBSA, BPC, letter from A Charlton to the Political Agent of Upper Assam, no.1, 6th Dec 1836.

³⁵¹ R.M. Lahiri, p. 248.

³⁵² Kolkata, WBSA, BPC, letter from A. White to the Agent of Governor General Assam, letter no. 2, 23rd Feb, 1835.

ground, I have from officer and recommended permanent removal from the appointment of Suddeyah Khowa Gohain at the same time.³⁵³

Accordingly, Chau-rang-pha was removed from his post on 12th Jan 1835. His removal brought in a pall of gloom atmosphere with an apprehension that Chau-rang-pha would instigate other chiefs against the British. Therefore, Jenkins recommended for his removal to Bishwanath. In this context, the Court of Directors approved the measure proposed by Jenkins and immediately thereafter, the Sadiya Khowa was removed from his post and sent him to Bishwanath in February 1835. This finds echoes in the British records thus:

As it is evident from his late behaviour that nothing but entire independence is aimed at by him to retain the delegate authority originally allow him or permitted him to assume the rank of a tributary chief.³⁵⁴

The anticipation of his instigation with other chiefs caught the attention of British when the Singphos made their attack in 1835. This attack of Singphos was presumed as the outcome of instigation of deposed Sadiya Khowa Gohain. Apprehending further trouble, Jenkins ordered his internment at Guwahati with the subsistence amount of 50 rupees a month.³⁵⁵

After the dislodgement of the Sadiya Khowa Gohain, there emerged various views among the officers about the management of Sadiya. Jenkins proposed that a new Sadiya Khowa should be appointed from among the Assamese subjects. He concurred with the Major White's step and conveyed it to the Bengal Government thus:

It would be highly inexpedient to reinvest with high authority the chief, whose conduct since the incursion of the Singphos, in 1830 was not above board; the only alternative

³⁵³ Kolkata, WBSA, BPC, letter from Major White to the Agent of Governor General Assam, no. 2, 23rd Feb, 1835.

³⁵⁴ New Delhi, NAI, Foreign Department Political Proceeding (henceforth FDPP), letter from F. Jenkins to the Secretary to the Government of Bengal, no. 2, 13th March 1835.

³⁵⁵ New Delhi, NAI, FDPP, letter from F Jenkins to the Political Agent of Upper Assam, no.11, 8th December 1835.

was to restore an Assamese chief or allow Charlton to exercise direct authorities over them, leaving, in either, case the remaining Khamtis chief in the management of the respective affairs.³⁵⁶

According to Jenkins, Captain White found that the Assamese community had remained loyal to the British Government and, therefore, Sadiya Khowa Gohain be appointed from among them while the Khamti chief be appointed as a militia chief. Major White was of the view that:

It will be alluded with the very beneficial consequence of Mr. Scott arrangement are now fully adopted there were to make the supreme native chief an Assamese and the title of Khamtis Gohain to represent the Miletus of the Khamtis.³⁵⁷

The alternate proposal was to take over the direct administration of Sadiya. Consequently, the post of Sadiya Khowa Gohain was finally abolished and Lt. Charlton took over the direct responsibility of the Khamti tract. This act of resuming rights over the Assamese inhabitants was justified by proclamation that, ‘the barbarous state in which it was kept by the Khamti chiefs has been broken through and it will gradually rise in civilization’.³⁵⁸

3.6.3 Changes introduced after dislodging Sadiya Khowa Gohain

The Political Agent brought under his control, the territories on either side of the river i.e. Sadiya, and Saikhowa. In right earnest, the investigative modalities were launched in the form of a census of the population of Sadiya, while ascertaining the resources of the territory the British asserted their supremacy.³⁵⁹ Accordingly, census was carried out at Sadiya which revealed that Assamese *paiks* constituted about 2/3rd of

³⁵⁶ Kolkata, WBSA, BPC, no. 2, 13th March 1835.

³⁵⁷ Kolkata, WBSA, BPC, letter from F. Jenkins to the Secretary to Government of Bengal, no. 1, 13th March, 1835.

³⁵⁸ Dispur, ASA, PDP, letter issued to the Government, to the Secretary to the Government of Bengal, no. 4, 16th Jan, 1836.

³⁵⁹ Kolkata, WBSA, BPC, no. 1, 13th March 1835.

the population who were brought under assessment.³⁶⁰ The Khamtis were 1,975 in number.³⁶¹ Subsequently the British usurped the right to taxation over the *paiks* and Marwari as a monopoly. The peasants were taxed at the rate of Re.1/- per head in lieu of their personal service.³⁶²

The judicial powers hitherto exercised over the population were replaced by the British judicial system, administered by the officer-in-charge at Sadiya. While petty civil and criminal cases remained under the domain of the village *panchayats* who were exempted from the written disposition. In cases, where a sentence exceeded six months imprisonment, it was necessary to take a written deposition and pass a sentence to be tried by the officer-in-charge. In addition, matters like inter-tribal feuds were to be dealt by him too.³⁶³ A monthly statement of the number of cases either civil or criminal cases disposed either by the officer-in-charge or *panchayat* on trial of murder, dacoity, slavery etc., along with other heinous offenses had to be sent into Political Agent of Upper Assam.

However, the Khamtis were not brought under direct taxation as they considered that the sudden introduction of direct British rule would cause a violent shock to the habits and the result in all probability would be a harassing rebellion.³⁶⁴ Accordingly, the Government deemed it fully unsafe to enforce the plan of assessment and therefore they were exempted from direct taxation on condition of rendering military service as demanded by the Government. However, the previous system of providing muskets under Captain Neufville was withdrawn.³⁶⁵

³⁶⁰ H.K. Barpujari, *The Problems of Hill Tribes in North-East India 1822-42*, p.144

³⁶¹ Lila Gogoi, p. 223.

³⁶² R.M. Lahiri, p.249

³⁶³ Alexander Mackenzie, pp.58-59

³⁶⁴ Kolkata, WBSA, letter from F. Jenkins to the Political Agent of Upper Assam, no. 1, 13th August 1835.

³⁶⁵ J. Butler, pp. 46-47.

Amidst the already strained relationship, in May 1835 a new group of 230 Moonglary Khamtis arrived from Burma to settle in Sadiya. Since the Sadiya Khowa Gohain was deposed, the migrants were forced to seek British permission to settle.³⁶⁶ The Moonglary Chief in view of the existing norms demanded a tax-free settlement for ten years and solicited arms for purpose of driving away wild beasts. Further, he assured Lt. Charlton that if their proposal for taxation was agreed upon, greater numbers would migrate, in the near future.³⁶⁷ Since the British had trouble with Sadiya Khowa Gohain, did not concede to providing firearms without agreements of fidelity, 'whether their habit are peaceful and industrious or of that indolent predatory and lawless stamp which is usually to be met with in rude tribes'.³⁶⁸ It was further viewed that the tax exemption would create disgruntlement among the *ryots* of Sadiya and Saikhowa.³⁶⁹ Simultaneously, relationship with Chinese strained over the issue of opium smuggling, and there was a speculation of tea embargo on the British. This forced the British to seek alternative source of tea in British colonies. Rudimentary experiments were undertaken in Assam by appointing Tea Committee in 1834 to ascertain the wild tea abundantly found in the frontier of Sadiya and commercialize it. The attempts were made to cultivate tea in the nurseries under the supervision of C.A. Bruce and produce it for international market but due to the absence of wage labour in Assam, the British were in look out for a group of people who could be employed in tea estates. Against this background, the newly arrived Moonglary Khamtis could be used for tea cultivation and as reported by the Moonglary chief, if assistance was provided more migrants were expected. Therefore, in this context, Adam White states that:

³⁶⁶ Interview with Chownawing Namchom, 67 years of aged, male, Chief of Momong, Chowkang, Namsai district, Arunachal Pradesh, interviewed on 16th January, 2016.

³⁶⁷ Kolkata, WBSA, BSPP, letter from A. White to the Agent to the Governor General of Assam, no. 4, 17th May, 1835.

³⁶⁸ Kolkata, WBSA, BSPP, no. 4, 17th May 1835.

³⁶⁹ Kolkata, WBSA, BSPP, no. 4, 17th May 1835.

As with reference to the embargo tea speculation, I should think that the existence of a colony of the latter character would prove extremely detrimental to its interest the more particularly as it is desirable at present to reserve as much fresh land as possible. Upon this principle I should not have been inclined to write the present number small as it is has timely information been given me until the success of the experiment had been ascertained or otherwise but if the cultivation succeeds to and the colonist can be prevailed upon to engage in it, it will become desirable to hold out every encouragement to a further emigration.³⁷⁰

This statement of White makes it clear that they were willing to settle them and take up land in the vicinity of Upper Assam provided they did not interfere in the area reserved for tea cultivation. Further, they were planning to invite more immigrants from Burma if the newly arrived Khamtis proved industrious. Mr. White's proposal received support from Jenkins, who stated thus:

The accession of a large body of inhabitant as is promised to be brought in by the chief. I consider of the highest advantage to the eastern district if they can be prevailed upon to settle quietly and conduct themselves industriously. It seems very desirable that we should endeavour no to lose the opportunity of obtaining by offering the best terms in our power in fairness to the rest of our subject.³⁷¹

Therefore, in order to ascertain their nature and verify their capabilities to be employed as cultivators, they were allowed to settle in colonies, on the land lying waste and desolate along the frontier, with exemption from taxation for a period of three years.³⁷² To encourage further immigration, the Political Agent instructed Charlton to provide a small advance in grain for subsistence and for seed.³⁷³ This permission was primarily granted to settle these migrants with the view to engage them in tea

³⁷⁰ Kolkata, WBSA, BSPP, no. 4, 17th May 1835.

³⁷¹ Kolkata, WBSA, BPC, letter from F.Jenkins to the Political Agent Bishwanath, letter no.4, 21st May 1835.

³⁷² Kolkata, WBSA, BPC, no. 4, 1st June 1835.

³⁷³ Kolkata, WBSA, BPC, no. 4, 1st June 1835.

cultivation in future while offering an effective and cheap barrier against the future Burmese invasion.³⁷⁴

3.6.4 Reinstatement of the Sadiya Khowa Gohain

The Khamtis chiefs and the Assamese *Baruas* unanimously submitted a plea to the British for the return of Sadiya Khowa Gohain and restoration of his erstwhile position.³⁷⁵ Lieutenant Charlton, who considered the banishment of the Sadiya Khowa Gohain was necessary for the tranquillity of the country, decisively opposed this.³⁷⁶ However, the circumstances which unfolded in the interim period witnessed an attack of Duffa Gam along the southern sections of Sadiya. Fear of disgruntlement among the Khamtis chiefs and the specter of Burmese invasion compelled the British to reconsider their stand as they could not afford to alienate them in such time. The invasion of Duffa Gam was so sudden that it could not be easily controlled by both the British and their ally, Bisa Gam.³⁷⁷ Lt. Charlton had to seek help from the Khamtis, who had previously offered their assistance against the Singphos.³⁷⁸ This need for assistance was acknowledged by Jenkins who, recommended thus:

I beg particularly to bring to the favourable notice of Government about the behaviour of the Khamtis chief. Lieutenant Charlton had entertained a considerable suspicion that they had been intriguing with the Duffa Gaum but their conduct has shown that there was no reason to mistrust their fidelity....I beg to recommend a appropriate gift that a good rifle and *chadder* of 3 yards of red broad cloth be presented to each Khamtis chief.³⁷⁹

³⁷⁴ J.N. Chowdhury, *Arunachal Through Ages*, Srimati Jaya Chowdhry, Meghalaya, 1982, p.

³⁷⁵ Kolkata, WBSA, BSPP, letter from A. White to F. Jenkins, no. 11, 5th November, 1835.

³⁷⁶ Kolkata, WBSA, BSPP, letter from A. White Political Agent to Captain Jenkins, no. 11, 8th December 1835.

³⁷⁷ Dispur, ASA, Foreign Department Proceeding (henceforth FDP), Letter from F. Jenkins Political Agent to the Secretary to Governor of Bengal, no. 12, 20th July, 1835, vol. 3, series-II.

³⁷⁸ Kolkata, WBSA, BPP, letter from F. Jenkins to the Secretary to Governor of Bengal, no. 12, 24th November 1835.

³⁷⁹ Kolkata, ASA, PDP, letter from F. Jenkins to the Secretary to the Govt. of Bengal, no.22, 5th September, 1835.

The services of Tao Gohain, Ranua Gohain, and Kaptan Gohain towards British, foregrounded the notion that the British could not afford to alienate and let their grievances fester to their peril compelled to reconsider the proposal.³⁸⁰ Eventually, the British yielded to the appeals of Khamtis chiefs and Chow-rang-pha was reinstated back to Sadiya in November 1835. In the words of Governor General in Council;

In the consideration of the recent good conduct of Tao Gohain, Kaptan Gohain, the other Khamtis Chiefs and their people in rendering their assistance towards British, and in consideration of the former service of the Chow-rang-pha Gohain himself, the Governor General Agent has determined to comply with the request of the chiefs and the Gohain is hereby informed that he is at liberty to return to his home whenever he pleases but in his private capacity.³⁸¹

The Political Agent expressed his belief that the return of the Khamti chief would not create any further disturbance as anticipated by Charlton;

I hope that the punishment the Sadiya Khowa Gohain has undergone for his disobedience of Lieutenant Charlton order will have been sufficient to teach him the necessity of obeying and submission to the authority of the Officer-in-charge of Sadiya in future.³⁸²

Accordingly, Chow-rang-pha Gohain returned to Sadiya, while his monthly allowance ceased, yet he received one month's allowance in advance for November 1835. He returned in his capacity of a private individual as his authority over the subjects in Sadiya had been taken over by the British government. He had control merely over the Khamtis population.

³⁸⁰ R.M. Lahiri, p.

³⁸¹ Kolkata, WBSA, BPP, letter from F. Jenkins Agent to the Governor General, no.11, 5th November, 1835.

³⁸² Kolkata, WBSA, BPP, no. 11, 5th November 1835.

Charlton persuaded the Khamtis to voluntarily commute their personal services for a payment in money at the same rate as fixed for the Assamese.³⁸³ This proposal was made keeping in mind that the Khamtis prior to their migration to Sadiya had been taxed by the Burmese, though were exempted by the Ahom Government. However they acknowledged allegiance by paying tributes and doing feudal service for the Ahom rulers.³⁸⁴ Hence, this proposal to bring them under taxation and simultaneous conduct of census in Sadiya magnified resentment among the Khamtis.³⁸⁵ On the other hand proposal had been made by Jenkins that a new treaty should be signed with the Khamtis; new census should be carried out to ascertain the population of Khamtis every five to ten years; and should made it known to the Khamtis that all wasteland as the property of the state.³⁸⁶ Through this wasteland policy, they categorized the unused/community land as wastelands, and brought it under their domain. However, for the Khamtis, apart from agriculture, forest was a major alternate source for the economy, from where they procured firewood, forest produce and was a hunting ground for all kinds of animals and elephant catching. The Governor General instructed the Political Agent to declare wastelands as the property of the state. Hence, for the cultivation, they had to take permission from the British officer of Sadiya who would grant *puttah* for the same, to the tribe. This concept of 'wasteland' became important due to emergence of the tea industry in Assam.³⁸⁷ These policies under Jenkins created resentment and amongst the Khamtis. Jenkins reported on this matter thus:

³⁸³ Dispur, ASA, PDP, letter from F. Jenkins to the Secretary to the Government of Bengal, no. 4, 16th January, 1836.

³⁸⁴ Dispur, ASA, PDP, no. 4, 16th January, 1836.

³⁸⁵ Kolkata, WBSA, BPP, letter from A. White to Captain Jenkins, Agent to the Governor General of Bengal, no.11, 24th November 1835.

³⁸⁶ Kolkata, WBSA, letter from Jenkins to the Political Agent of Upper Assam, no. 1, 13th August 1835.

³⁸⁷ For details see Sarah Hilaly, 'Imagining Colonial Assam: The Figurine of Wasteland in its Making', *Economic and Political Weekly*, January 16, 2016, vol. no.3, pp.55-62, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2020377> accessed on 05-02-2017. According to this system the wastelands were divided into three categories: (a) wasteland amidst cultivated lands to be granted rent-free for five years, then a land revenue of 9 *annas* per acre would be effect for the 6th to 8th years,

The minds of the Khamtis chiefs have been alienated from their fidelity to the British Government by the line of policy adopted towards them by me and the late disturbance of Singphos (1835) have either originated in their suggestion or been at least fomented and protracted by their integrities in consequence of the disaffection thus created...³⁸⁸

The resentment of the Khamtis was not the immediate outcome of the policies, rather a culmination of a long process of government policies since taking over the administration of Assam, which finds echo in Jenkins' words thus:

I consider it necessary to observe and examine of the correspondence...that long previously to my being inexpedient with the present appointment, and long before any

and then Re. 1-2 *annas* from 9 to 30th years (b) high reed and grass wastes to be granted rent-free for ten years, 9 *annas* per acre for 11th to 13th years and Re.1-2 *annas* for 14 to 35th years (c) forest and high wasteland to be granted rent-free for a term of twenty years, 9 *annas* per acre for 21th to 23th years, and Re. 1-2 *annas* for 24th to 45th years. No grant for agriculture purpose could be made for less than 100 acres at a time and to one who did not possess capital or stock worth Rs. 3 per acre.³⁸⁷ Overall, the government had sole right over it and the rules only permitted Europeans to avail such concession. The rates of revenue for wastelands were consistently kept below those for traditional cultivation in the region in order to facilitate large-scale acquisition of land so that it can be converted into an agricultural colony and supplying raw material for England. This adoption of wasteland policy had facilitated development in plantation economy in Assam. According to this system the wastelands were divided into three categories: (a) wasteland amidst cultivated lands to be granted rent-free for five years, then a land revenue of 9 *annas* per acre would be effect for the 6th to 8th years, and then Re. 1-2 *annas* from 9 to 30th years (b) high reed and grass wastes to be granted rent-free for ten years, 9 *annas* per acre for 11th to 13th years and Re.1-2 *annas* for 14 to 35th years (c) forest and high wasteland to be granted rent-free for a term of twenty years, 9 *annas* per acre for 21th to 23th years, and Re. 1-2 *annas* for 24th to 45th years. No grant for agriculture purpose could be made for less than 100 acres at a time and to one who did not possess capital or stock worth Rs. 3 per acre.³⁸⁷ Overall, the government had sole right over it and the rules only permitted Europeans to avail such concession. The rates of revenue for wastelands were consistently kept below those for traditional cultivation in the region in order to facilitate large-scale acquisition of land so that it can be converted into an agricultural colony and supplying raw material for England. This adoption of wasteland policy had facilitated development in plantation economy in Assam.

³⁸⁸ Dispur, ASA, PDP, letter from F. Jenkins to the Secretary to the Government of Bengal, no.4, 16th Jan 1836.

location of the Khamtis was agitated...the conduct of some of the Khamtis chief was looked upon with great suspicious by officers. This has been admitted by Major White that the Ex-Sadiya Khowa Gohain was notoriously implicated in the previously implicated in the previous irruption of the Hookam (sic) Singphos (1830), but Captain Neufville merely overlooked his share out of policy, so that the commencement of the feeling of disaffection attributed to the Khamtis chief was antecedent to the measure now under discussions.³⁸⁹

However, it has to admit that the move to impose taxation on the Khamtis ran counter to the policy of Neufville, who consistently aimed at conciliating these warlike' tribes to make them faithful allies against the Burmese.³⁹⁰ Therefore, in view of the rebellious attitude of the Khamtis, the proposal for taxation was shelved because of increasing importance attached to the security of the Sadiya frontier. However, the net impact of such proposal was negative, as beneath, the apparent coolness in the surface, frustration was mounting, as the emancipation of slavery did not only hurt their pride but also destroyed their economy which was largely dependent on the slaves and Assamese *paiks* at Sadiya. Despite dropping the plan for tax assessment, governmental extraction from Assamese *paik* was interpreted by these tribes as a breach of agreement. Therefore, the smoldering embers of discontent lay dormant to burst forth when an opportunity presented itself.

3.6.5 Colonial Intervention in the Institution of slavery

A new phase of slavery known as Atlantic Slave Trade or Trans-Atlantic Slave trade emerged with the rise of imperial powers like the British, French, Spanish, Portuguese, Dutch, and Belgium who colonised Asia, Africa, and America since the

³⁸⁹ Dispur, ASA, PDP, no.4, 16th January 1836.

³⁹⁰ New Delhi, NAI, FSC, letter from F. Jenkins, Agent to the Governor General to Major White Political Agent upper Assam Bishwanath, letter no-11, 8th October, 1835. It was David Scott, who conceptualized the idea of restore the Ahom lineage to the position of power at Sadiya. He wanted Chousalan Sadiya Khowa Gohain as the Khamti militia chief, while an Assamese subject to be appointed to the post of the Sadiya Khowa Gohain who would act according to their will. Lieutenant Neufville did not favour this idea due to his close personal experience with the different tribes on the frontier, who convinced the Khamtis, Mataks and the Singphos to negotiate an agreement in 1826

Sixteen century onwards. These imperial countries built their empires initially based on plantation agriculture. This plantation economy was sustained mainly by engaging slaves that were procured from Africa through slave trades.³⁹¹ The first country of engage in the Atlantic slave trade was Portuguse. They ventured in this scheme in the sixteenth century and later on, joined by other European countries.

The British had joined slave trade in 1562 under Captain John Hawkins during the reign of Elizabeth I. In due course, slavery and the slave trade between Africa and American colonies, and slave labour plantation in the American colonies was the most profitable enterprise known to British commerce.³⁹² However, in England the legality and morality of slave trade was in question from very early stage largely due to influence of Renaissance, humanitarian and theological movement. Hitherto, such was the importance of slavery to the British economy that these questions were overlooked and ignored till the last decades of eighteenth century when opponents and supporters of slavery entered into discourse, which led abolitionist movement in England and various colonies of British Empire. This discourse can be gleaned from the wide range of texts, including poetry, fiction, essays, and tracts, where the question of slavery was narrativised, represented, and discussed by the various abolitionist group.³⁹³ This ultimately resulted into turning of popular sentiment against slavery and gradually

³⁹¹The slave trade was carried out by the trading ships that set sail from Europe with a cargo of manufactured goods to the west coast of Africa. There, these goods would be traded, over weeks and months, for captured people provided by African traders. Once full, the European trader's ship would depart for the America or the Caribbean province. During this voyage, the slaves would be kept in the ship's hold, crammed close together with little or no space to move. Conditions were squalid and many people did not survive the voyage. On the final leg of the transatlantic route, European ships would return home with cargoes of sugar, rum, tobacco and other luxury items. It has been estimated that by 1790s, 480,000 people were enslaved in the British Colonies in Arjun Dev, Social Science: Textbook in History for Class IX, Part 1, National Council of Educational Research and Training, New Delhi, 2005, p. 1.

³⁹² J. R. Ward, 'The Profitability of Sugar Planting in the British West Indies, 1650–1834', *Economic History Review*, 2nd ser., 31 (1978), 197–213, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1020577> (accessed on 02-03-2017).

³⁹³ Brycchan Carey and Sara Salih (eds.), *Discourses of slavery and abolition: Britain and its Colonies, 1760-1838*, University of London, 2004, p.2.

England had to pass various legislations in favour of abolition of slavery like the Act for the Abolition of the Slave Trade by British Parliament on 25th March, 1807. The intention of this act was to entirely outlaw the Atlantic Slave trade within the British Empire. This was followed by the Slavery Abolition Act passed on 1st August, 1833 which outlawed slavery throughout the British Empire, with the exception of India. Full emancipation was granted in 1838 through the Indian Slavery Act, 1843.³⁹⁴

The slavery discourse was so strong in England that the administrators in her colonies were strictly instructed to end the practices of slavery in any forms. Hence, in India they wanted to implement the doctrine idealism of the home authorities by abolishing and emancipating those under slavery. However, the local administrators in North East India were of the view that the Directors had no clue of the social structure in India and the needs of the common people. The people of the east were familiar with slavery; hence prejudice of the Europeans against such conditions of civil life was quite unintelligible. Hence, the tribe as an encroachment to their rights would interpret sudden prohibiting such practices of slavery. In Assam, David Scott and his contemporaries who believed that any attempt abruptly to abolish the system would be wrong. They were not blind to the evils in the system, yet in view of the organic nature of society, they believed that advance must be slow, and directed to the lessening of the evils without infringing the proprietary rights of individual.³⁹⁵ Therefore, they wanted the gradual abolition of slavery by adjusting with the local needs of the area. Scott made such an adjustment to local sentiment in Northeast India when he announced that the Assamese populations were allowed to sell themselves as the slave from June to October to keep themselves alive from starvation during the famine in 1825.³⁹⁶ He believed that the abolitionist fervor would cause the death of the starving poor, and the

³⁹⁴ Brycchan Carey and Sara Salih, p. 3

³⁹⁵ A.K. Thakur, *Slavery in Arunachal Pradesh*, p.118.

³⁹⁶ New Delhi, NAI, FDPP, no. 18, 3 April 1828.

sudden abolition of slavery such as the doctrine idealism of the home authorities would do serious violence to the society, possible without any corresponding benefit to the slaves. He further notified for Lower Assam that, ‘the right of the Assamese to their property and slave would be respected’.³⁹⁷ However, the Court of Directors who strongly favoured discouraging the practice of slavery among the British subjects rejected this act of Scott. Decision to this effect it was declared in a letter of 10 March, 1830, that slavery in every form was peculiarly revolting to the moral feeling of British. Rather David Scott was asked to report on the practice of slavery in Assam, and adopt practicable expedient measures for the gradual abolition of the system of slavery.³⁹⁸

However, the abolition of slavery order was implemented in letter and spirit among the Khamtis.³⁹⁹ To delegitimize the institution of slavery and to convince the Governor General-in-Council of the effectiveness of such a move, the Khamtis were presented as refugees from Burma, who had reduced Sadiya and its population into a barbarous state and it was the duty of the British to restore a semblance of order and civilization.⁴⁰⁰ Hence, under the pretext of civilizing mission the institution of slavery was attacked just after the expulsion of the Burmese from Assam; by signing treaties with Khamtis. Neufville insisted on the surrender of their large number of slaves, in lieu of a compensation of rupees four thousand. Of the slaves liberated, 300 were incorporated into the regular fighting forces under Captain Neufville.⁴⁰¹ The Khamti and Singpho chiefs, who were reluctant to release their slaves, were served notices with the threat of confiscation of property and expulsion from the lowlands.⁴⁰²

³⁹⁷ Meena Sharma Barkakti, *British Administration in North East India (1826-1874): A Study of their Social Policy*, Mittal Publication, Delhi, 1985, p. 140.

³⁹⁸ A.K. Thakur, *Slavery...*, p. 116.

³⁹⁹ A.K. Thakur, p.125.

⁴⁰⁰ Dispur, ASA, PDP, letter no. 4, 16th January 1836.

⁴⁰¹ Kolkata, WBSA, BSPC, nos. 22-24, 2 September, 1825.

⁴⁰² H.K. Barpujari, vol. I, p.38.

The Khamti royal class, who were largely depending on the slave population for agriculture and other domestic work, in absence of wage labour grudgingly accepted the terms of British agreement of 1826. Despite this agreement, slaves continued to be held by the Khamtis. However, in course of time especially with British stationed at Sadiya, many slaves took advantage of the military station, especially the women slaves ran away with military guards. In one such instance, a female slave absconded from the chief Tao Gohain, taking refuge in the Upper Assam with one of the *chuprassies* of a British Officer, Mr. Millar.⁴⁰³ The escape of this female slave was not due to maltreatment, rather because, the *sepoys* and others serving under the company with higher salaries were capable of rendering them a comfortable life.⁴⁰⁴ The freed slaves were employed by the British officers, which created a lot of inconvenience, who considered this as an injustice.⁴⁰⁵ In addition, the British lured the slaves to work as wage labourers, especially the mature male slaves who frequently escaped into British jurisdiction. The slaves who remained with the Khamtis were old and aged who could not work for their masters, rather becoming a burden to sustain them.⁴⁰⁶ The situation worsen with the ouster of the Sadiya Khowa Gohain, and the Assamese *paiks* who constituted two-thirds of the population were declared free and were placed under the direct control of a British officer. The Assamese subsequently were taxed at the rate of Re. 1/- per head in lieu of their personal service. In the words of Jenkins:

The bulk of the population the Assamese portion independent of the Khamtis chief by whom they had been kept in almost a state of slavery and gradually as the district increase in population and the assessment are raised it will in part or whole remunerate

⁴⁰³ Meena Sharma Barkataki, p.157

⁴⁰⁴ Meena Sharma Barkataki, p.157.

⁴⁰⁵ Meena Sharma Barkataki, p.157

⁴⁰⁶ Interview with Chownawing Namchom, 67 years of aged, male, Chief of Momong, Chowkang, Namsai district, Arunachal Pradesh, interviewed on 16th January, 2016.

the Government for the expenses they are now necessarily put in to maintaining a garrison at Sadiya.⁴⁰⁷

This action changed the attitude of the chiefs Sadiya Khowa Gohain, Tao Gohain, Ranua Gohain, and Kaptan Gohain, they were unable to tolerate the loss of Assamese slaves, their only source of wealth. The old tradition of the Ahom government of restoring fugitive slaves to their masters was curtailed under British rule.⁴⁰⁸ The British government directed the Political Agent that:

It is the rule to refrain from any summary interference for compelling the return to a state of slavery individuals who may have affected their escape from it. Every individual must be presented to be in a state of freedom until the contrary is proved.⁴⁰⁹

Therefore, the runaway slaves were not forced to return to their masters, rather protected them as British subjects.⁴¹⁰ The Governor General-in-Council issued instructions to Jenkins to reject all applications of the slave masters seeking restoration of the slaves claimed as their property.⁴¹¹

The process of maintaining slaves was expensive as they were captured either through war or inherited from the family, while many were bartered with precious materials from other neighbouring tribes.⁴¹² However, under British rule the slaves were freed without paying compensation and on the other hand the freed slaves were engaged in constructing of roads, building stockades, and houses for officers, and employed as soldiers etc. Jenkins states thus:

⁴⁰⁷ Dispur, ASA, PDP, letter from F. Jenkins to the Secretary to the Government of Bengal, no.4, 16th January 1836.

⁴⁰⁸ Meena Sharma Barkataki, p. 157.

⁴⁰⁹ Dispur, ASA, PDP, no. 3, 12 September, 1836.

⁴¹⁰ New Delhi, NAI, FPC, letter from Vetch to Jenkins, no. 139, 8 June, 1840.

⁴¹¹ New Delhi, NAI, FPC, letter from Prinsep to Jenkins, no. 87, 9 November, 1842.

⁴¹² Interview with Chownawing Namchom, 67 years of aged, male, Chief of Momong, Chowkang, Namsai district, Arunachal Pradesh, interviewed on 16th January, 2016.

From the first date of ours occupying Sadiya to this time I estimate that upwards of 1000 slaves have been released from the Singphos and Khamtis of Sadiya. These released slaves are likely to prove of eminent service to us as Major White considers them as entirely faithful to us and as much distinguished for courage as any of the frontier tribes. He has from his experience of their service in the late transition formed a portion of them into a militia to that we are likely to raise up a power against the Khamtis out our Assam subject.⁴¹³

Hence, all these development under British was considered as an encroachment upon their traditional institutions. Hence they were prepared to take up an armed struggle when the right opportunity arose.

Not only the freed slaves, even the Khamtis levies, who acted as militia too were engaged at construction works like building houses for officers, clearing of forest for road construction and building of stockades, etc. These manual work and labour irked the tribes who perceived themselves as belonging to a warrior race. This coupled with resentment on other counts finally manifested itself in a violent attack over the British military station at Sadiya.⁴¹⁴

3.6.6 Attempts to proselytize the Khamtis

In order to understand the attempts to proselytize among the Khamtis, it is imperative to have an overview of the establishment of Christianity in India. About the foundation of Christianity in India, E. Tisserant in his book *Eastern Christianity in India* states that one of the twelve Apostles of Jesus Christ, St. Thomas in 52 A.D in south India present-day state Kerala, laid down the foundation of Christianity.⁴¹⁵ The Christian population under St. Thomas foundation were known as St. Thomas Christian, and were largely confined to Malabar Coast. They had not done much to proselytize the

⁴¹³ Dispur, ASA, PDP, letter from F. Jenkins to the Secretary to the Govt. of Bengal, no.4, 16th January, 1836.

⁴¹⁴ Interview with Chownawing Namchom, 67 years of aged, male, Chief of Momong, Chowkang, Namsai district, Arunachal Pradesh, interviewed on 16th January, 2016.

⁴¹⁵ E. Tisserant, *Eastern Christianity in India*, Orient Longman, London, 1957, p.10.

Indian community rather they assimilated themselves with the tradition and customs of Malabar, while retaining their religious identity.⁴¹⁶

India witnessed a major evangelization period with the arrival of Roman Catholic Mission under the banner of Portuguese in India in 1498.⁴¹⁷ The arrival of this mission, backed by the political power as the Portuguese Kings viewed it as their sacred duty to render all support to spread the gospel.⁴¹⁸ King John of Portugal requested the Pope and the newly formed Society of Jesus for missionaries to be sent to India.⁴¹⁹ Accordingly, Francis Xavier⁴²⁰ (1506-1552) was chosen as the first person who set out for India in 1541 with the object of reclaiming for Christ the ‘heathen’ population of the areas under Portuguese influence, or ‘conquer the East for Christianity’.⁴²¹ Thus, arrival of Francis Xavier accelerated the working of Jesuit mission in India, which really changed the cartography of Christianity in Asia. Therefore, missionary activity in essence in India was pioneered by the Portuguese. Though regarded as pioneers but due to mixing of religion and politics, the missionary and ecclesiastical progress could not sustain and Roman Catholic Mission under Portuguese control which began to die down along with the decline its political power in the subcontinent.

The Dutch and the British followed the Portuguese brought in Protestantism along with them. The first Protestant missionaries to arrive on Indian soil were two German missionaries Ziegenbalg and Plutschau sent by the King. They landed on July 9th, 1706 in Tranquebar, a Danish trade port. Julius Richter regards this event as the

⁴¹⁶ Placid J. Podipara, *The Thomas Christian*, Darton Longman & Todd, 1970, London, p. 27.

⁴¹⁷ Julius Richter, *A History of Mission in India*, p. 44, <https://archive.org> accessed on 18.02.2018.

⁴¹⁸ K. M. Panikkar, *Asia and Western Dominance*, George Allen & Unwin Ltd., London, 1974, p. 280.

⁴¹⁹ Ignatius of Loyola organised spiritual exercise to help other followers follow the teaching of Jesus Christ. In 1534 he along with six other young men, including Francis Xavier and Peter Faber, gathered and professed vows of poverty, chastity and later obedience, including a special vow of obedience to the Pope in matter of mission direction and assignment. Ignatius’s plan of the order’s organization was approved by Pope Paul III in 1540 by a bull containing the formula of the Institute.

⁴²⁰ Francis Xavier was educated in Paris where he had come under the influence of Ignatius Loyola.

⁴²¹ K.M. Panikkar, *India Through Ages*, Discovery Publishing House, New Delhi, 1988, pp. 225-226.

birthday of Protestant missions in India.⁴²² As other European company's brought new evangelization work during the eighteenth-nineteenth century into India, it was based on the binary distinctions of European and Indian, white and brown, civilized and primitive and Christian and pagan. This binary division gave the colonizers grounds for justifying the European project of colonization of India and proselytizing of the Indians. However, with the elimination of Dutch, evangelization was undertaken by British who initially maintained neutrality with regards to religious and social affairs of Indians, but eventually gave way for evangelization of the Protestant church. The Baptist Missionary Society sent their first missionaries William Carey and John Thomas to Bengal in 1793 and founded of Serampore Mission in Calcutta. This set in motion the intensification of missionary activities in India. The favourable provision for missionaries began with the renewal of the Company Charter in 1813. Through this act the missionaries were formally permitted to preach the gospel in India and it accelerated the expansion of their activities.⁴²³ Finally, in 1833, company policy was abandoned under pressure from the Evangelicals in England. The Charter of 1833 approved the permanent presence of missionaries in India making provision for Anglican hierarchy at Calcutta. Hence, through the various enactments, an attempt was made to establish a renewed cooperation between the missionaries and the colonial power in helping one another in setting up missions.⁴²⁴ Consequently missionaries established dioceses at Madras, Calcutta, and Bombay, became powerful and their style of work changed. A new set of missionaries rooted in the iconoclastic zeal of extreme Protestantism began to arrive and soon through letters, reports, and stories, created a much distorted image of the people

⁴²² Julius Richter, p. 103.

⁴²³ J.P. Marshall, *Problems of Empire, Britain and India*, p. 72, cited in N.T. Rikam, *Emerging Religious Identities of Arunachal Pradesh: A Study of Nyishi Tribe*, New Delhi, Mittal Publication, 2005, p. 17

⁴²⁴ Jacob S. Dharmaraj, etal, *Many Faces one Church*, Abingdon Press, United State, 2006, p. 19

and culture in India. They were imbued with the western ‘imperial sentiments’ and the sense of cultural superiority.⁴²⁵

At this juncture, the missionaries work extended in northeast India too, although the first recorded date of missionary arrival in northeast India was in 1626 when two Jesuit missionaries Frs. Stephen Cacella and John Cabral reached Pandu near Guwahati, probably on their way to Tibet and China.⁴²⁶ Besides, there is a chronicle of the Augustinian Friars of Bandela in Bengal, which mentions that in 1682 there were about 7000 Christians flourishing at a place called Rangamati in Lower Assam. This information was reiterated in January 1715, by Bishop F.T. Laynez of S. Tome Mylapore who spent 25 days at Rangamati and confirmed the existence of 1000 Christians.⁴²⁷ The Christians settled in Rangamati were Roman Catholics.⁴²⁸

However, the expansion of missionary activities in North East India set into motion after the establishment of Serampore Mission in Calcutta, 1800. Most notable is the work of William Carey who founded the Serampore College in 1818 A.D. This college became a nodal centre for academic, as well as missionary activities. He even took keen interest to spread Gospel among the hill tribes of North East India, and under his direction Krishna Chandra Pal, the first Serampore convert was sent to work among the Khasi refugees. Despite his efforts the mission proved to be short-lived as he was unable to establish a regular missionary centre, nor create enthusiasm among the local people. However, Carey’s plan to expand missionary in the east of Bengal did not die, rather found a new lease of life with the formal annexation of Assam in 1826. Hence, at

⁴²⁵ C. P. Mathew and M.M. Thomas, *The Indian Church of Saint Thomas*, Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, Delhi, 1967, p. 48.

⁴²⁶ F. S. Downs, Rangmati, *Indian Church Review*, 1978, Vol. XII, No. 2, cited in N.T. Rikam, *Emerging Religious Identities of Arunachal Pradesh: A Study of Nyishi Tribe*, p. 80.

⁴²⁷ Milton Sangma, *History of American Baptist Mission in North-East India (1836-1950)*, vol. I, Delhi, Mittal Publication, 1987, p. 172.

⁴²⁸ N. T. Rikam, *Emerging Religious Identities of Arunachal Pradesh...*, p.80.

the initiative of Carey and David Scott, the Serampore Mission opened a mission centre at Guwahati in 1829 and David Scott urged that a school should be started in Guwahati. James Ray, the first missionary at this mission centre reported in 1830 that he had under his guidance twelve interesting youths- three Khasis and nine Garos, committed to his care by Mr. David Scott.⁴²⁹

The determined attitude of the British, with regard to slaves and the plundering raids conducted by the tribes into the plains of Assam proved to be a main hurdle in securing an agreement between both the parties.⁴³⁰ Accordingly in 1835, Jenkins, wrote to British Baptist at Calcutta to start a mission in the frontiers of Assam particularly in among the Khamtis and Singphos.⁴³¹ The administration created a favourable provision for bringing the missionaries to Upper Assam as outlined below:

No attention of mine should, of course, be wanting to make the place comfortable to any missionaries and I will be willing to contribute my mite to their establishment. You may mention that I will subscribe 1000 rupees, if a family is settled as a mission at Sadiya; and whenever they have had a press at work for six months I will be happy to double that sum, if I remain in charge of the province.⁴³²

Jenkins offered the Mission protection. The British Baptist Mission wrote to American Baptist Mission as the latter had already established their mission in Burma since 1813 and were looking for opportunity to introduce the gospel among the Shans of Upper Burma. On the other hand, they wanted to reach China via inland route, whose seaports had been sealed against foreigners.⁴³³ It was hoped that under the protection afforded by the English in Sadiya, they could ascend into Siam river, which would take them to the

⁴²⁹ Victor Hugo Sword, *Baptist in Assam: A century Missionary Service 1836-1936*, Spectrum Publication, Delhi, 1992, p.37

⁴³⁰ Sheila Bora, 'American Baptist Missionaries' Ethnological Writing: The Singpho and the Namsang Nagas, p. 318, in S.K. Singh and Ashan Riddi (eds.) *Pre-Colonial History and Traditions of Arunachal Pradesh*, Guwahati, DVS publisher, 2017.

⁴³¹ Victor Hugo Sword, *Baptist in Assam...*, p. 42.

⁴³² Victor Hugo Sword, p. 42.

⁴³³ Victor Hugo Sword, p. 41.

northern branches of the Salween and Irrawaddy and further to the western borders of China.⁴³⁴ From there ‘Celestial Empire’ China would be easier to approach and plant Christianity at the heart of the empire.⁴³⁵ While accepting the invitation in a firm belief that Assam would be the gateway into northern Burma and thereafter into China, the American Baptist Mission sent its two missionary families from Burma mission centre to open a Mission at Sadiya as the ‘Mission to Shan’.⁴³⁶ Sadiya which was at the crossroads, held the promise of becoming a great centre through which contacts between China and India would take place.⁴³⁷ The missionaries under Nathan Brown and Oliver Cutter setting out from Calcutta on November 20, 1835, reached Sadiya after an arduous journey in March 23, 1836, to open the centre.⁴³⁸ In an attempt to deflect the general course of the life of the hill-tribes, Brown and Cutter established a school at Sadiya in June 1836, which within a week had twenty boys.⁴³⁹

However, they were surprised and disappointed on discovery that the Khamtis and Singphos were unrelated both culturally and linguistically from Shans of Upper Burma. Despite that Mr. Brown and other missionaries visited the Khamtis and Singphos villages to learn their language.⁴⁴⁰ They even brought printing press, which they established at Sadiya under the supervision of Cutter, where printing was done in Singpho, Khamti, and Assamese, Nagas languages in both Roman and Bengali characters. A series of vocabulary books were compiled by Miles Bronson like *A Spelling Book and Vocabulary in British, Assamese Singphos and Nagas, Catechism in*

⁴³⁴ O.M. Rao, *The Venture of Faith: A Pagant dealing with the beginning of the America Baptist Mission work in North East India*, William Carry Christian College Visakhapatnam, 2011, p. 8.

⁴³⁵ Gammel, W, *History of the American Baptist Mission*, Boston, 1850, pp. 12-213.

⁴³⁶ Assam Mission Jubilee Report, 1886, cited in Sheila Bora, p. 319.

⁴³⁷ O. M. Rao, *The venture of Faith...*, p. 6.

⁴³⁸ Milton S. Sangma, *History of American Baptist Mission in North East India 1836-1950*, vol. 1, p. 174.

⁴³⁹ Victor Hugo Sword, p.48.

⁴⁴⁰ W.A. Gamell, *A History of American Baptist Mission*, pp.213-214.

Nocte and *The Khamti and Shyan Catechism*, etc.⁴⁴¹ In 1837, the Home Board sent two more missionaries with their families to assist the Sadiya Mission in their work in the frontier regions. However, on their way, Jacob Thomas was killed when the trunk of a tree fell on the top of his boat, while Bronson reached Sadiya in July 1837.

This establishment of Mission in Sadiya and missionary tours into Khamtis villages further aggravated the existing hostility against the British. This attempt to expand Christianity by learning their language was not successful as prior as the Khamti rebellion broke out in 1839. The ravages carried out at Sadiya, compelled the American Baptist Mission to pull out in 1839 and move back to Sibsagar. Hence, an attempt to proselytize by the missionaries was truncated and unsuccessful and the Shan Mission station was closed till 1905. Though, it was reopened in 1905 but its original objective had lost sight over Khamtis and Sadiya was reopened for evangelizing the Miris and Abors tribes.⁴⁴² The Mission was augmented with the coming of Messers Savidge and Lorraine of the Arthington Aborigines Mission who settled in Sadiya and prepared for evangelizing the Abors.⁴⁴³

3.7 Outbreak of Armed Rebellion in January, 1839

It is therefore evident from the above discussion that the Khamtis were discontented under the new political dispensation in Assam. In 1835, the Sadiya Khowa Gohain defied the order of the Political Agent to protest against British encroachment over the traditional rights. However, this nascent opposition was unsuccessful, which compelled them to prepare for the greater resistance without showing any apparent signs

⁴⁴¹ Gillespie George, 'Missionaries and Dictionaries', *Indian Church History Review*, vol. 9, no.1, cited in Sheila Bora, p. 325.

⁴⁴² Rev. H. W. Kirby, *Report from Sadiya Field*, Guwahati, pp. 4-13, cited in Milton S. Sangma, p.175.

⁴⁴³ A.J. Parker, *Report from Dibrugarh Field*, Guwahati, pp.22-31, cited in Milton S. Sangma, p.175.

of discontent. The plot to attack the British station at Sadiya was meticulously organized, that even when in 1837 intelligence report reached Charlton that the ex-Khowa Gohain, in collaboration with the Singphos planned to attack the post at Sadiya was dismissed as baseless, in the absence of viable proof and no signs of disloyalty of the Khamtis.⁴⁴⁴ This clandestine preparedness for resistance accelerated with the news of Lt. Miller's departure from Sadiya and entrustment of duties of civil administration to Major Adam White. The responsibility to function as a collector, magistrate, and judge over an extensive area located at a distance of 250 miles from Bishwanath was not an easy task.

Therefore, on 7 September 1838, the Commissioner of Assam ordered Adam White to relocate the headquarters of the Assam Light Infantry as well as Political Agency from Bishwanath to Sadiya. This was in view of the considerable importance of the place and growing security concerns at the frontier.⁴⁴⁵ The corps consisted of ten companies of which three were to be located at Jorhat, one at Lakhimpur, two at Jaipur and the remaining four at Sadiya. Accordingly, White relocated along with men and provisions of the Assam Light Infantry to Sadiya on 25 Jan, 1839. This move raised alarm among the Khamtis that the new administration was determined to stay at Sadiya. The loss of their privileges within their own territory galvanized them to prepare for an open rebellion before White consolidated his position in Sadiya.

Three days following the partial shifting of the military headquarters from Bishwanath to Sadiya, White held a Durbar at his residence, where various frontier chiefs were invited including the Khamtis. Official sources recorded that the Khamtis revealed no signs of discontent, rather displayed loyalty as usual. However, the oral tradition records a different tale. According to oral history the Khamtis had been

⁴⁴⁴ New Delhi, NAI, FPC, nos. 12-13, 15th May, 1837.

⁴⁴⁵ New Delhi, NAI, FPC, no. 161-62, 17th October, 1838.

complaining to White about the loss of their buffalo killed by the military stationed at the Sadiya. The British subjects stationed at Sadiya cultivated poppy, and especially during the flowering season, the buffaloes very frequently trespassed into the field, and grazed upon the poppy plants. On many occasions, this resulted in the killing of buffalo by soldiers stationed there. So, on that evening in the durbar the Khamtis chiefs lodge their complaint to Captain White, but instead of sympathizing to their complaint he insisted that they should take care of their buffalo. Besides, he warned them that failing which their buffalo would be killed as usual, and the penalty would be imposed on them as a compensation for the losses incurred for destroying poppy plants.⁴⁴⁶

This killing of buffalo may not be only due to losing of the poppy plant. The 1830s rather coincided with attempts to develop the tea nurseries in Sadiya. They were experimenting growing of tea plants from seeds, with young plants and seedlings procured from wild tea of Khamti and Singpho frontier. C.A. Bruce the pioneer reported that:

In March 1838 about eight thousand tea seedling were brought from Mutttock country and planted in different thick forests at Sadiya, however many of these died in consequence of the buffaloes constantly breaking in amongst them; the rest are doing well, but I am afraid will be killed from the above cause.⁴⁴⁷

Therefore, it is not difficult to deduce that chances were high that domesticated buffalos were killed at the military station at Sadiya to protect the tea barriers and poppy cultivation. Therefore, the rude response of Adam White acted as trigger in the existing situation of mistrust and hatred, which prevailed and needed an opportune moment.

⁴⁴⁶ Interview with Chownawing Namchom, 67 years of aged, male, Chief of Momong, Chowkang, Namsai district, Arunachal Pradesh, interviewed on 16th January, 2016.

⁴⁴⁷ C. A. Bruce, 'Report on the Manufacture on the Tea, and on the extent and produce of the Tea Plantations in Assam', presented by the Tea Committee and read at a Meeting of the Agriculture and Horticulture Society of India, 14th August 1839, *Journal of Asiatic Society of Bengal*, 1839, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/7180255> (accessed on 21-34-2017)

Following the conclusion of the *darbar*, White retired to his official residence, while the chiefs dispersed. In the early hours of the morning, on 28th January, 1839, the station was attacked.⁴⁴⁸ The attacking party consisted of Khamtis and other inhabitants numbering about 600 fighting men who were armed with *daos*, spears, and muskets. They attacked at the vulnerable positions with extreme swiftness.⁴⁴⁹ They had the advantage of being inhabitants of villages in the neighbourhood of cantonment, allowing them to choose the time for their attack. The experience of their chief Kaptan Gohain, who had been a leader of the Khamti militia was armed with a definite knowledge of the British settlement helped.⁴⁵⁰ The other advantage was that their language was unknown to the Assamese population, which helped to keep their plans a secret.⁴⁵¹ To ensure speedy action they organized themselves into four groups under the chiefs- Chau-rang-pha, Tao Gohain, Kaptan Gohain, Chau-pha-Plung-lu Gohain, Ranua Gohain, who made simultaneous attacks on different vulnerable positions of the British post.

The important centres targeted were the stockade where the military were stationed, the magazine guard, officer's bungalows, the residence of the commanding officer, soldier lines or barracks, the location of the bell of arms, the dwelling houses of soldiers' families and the bazar line. Taking over the stockade was very crucial and control of the military barracks as well as the magazine guard where ammunition was stored.

One group advanced upon the magazine guard situated close to the open gate of the stockade where 1 Havildar, 2 Naiks, 1 Bugler, and 31 Sepoy were stationed. The

⁴⁴⁸ New Delhi, PDFC, letter from F. Vetch to Captain F. Jenkins, Agent to the Governor General of Assam, letter no. 1, 18th April, 1840.

⁴⁴⁹ New Delhi, NAI, FDPC, letter from F. Jenkins to the Secretary to Government of India, no. 159, 27th February, 1839.

⁴⁵⁰ New Delhi, NAI, FDPC, no. 159, 27th February, 1839.

⁴⁵¹ New Delhi, NAI, FDPC, no. 159, 27th February, 1839.

attacking party armed with muskets attacked from the rear of the stockade. They killed a sentry guarding the northeast corner of the stockade at the gateway and took the deployed men at the gateway by complete surprise.⁴⁵² They next occupied the guardhouse by attacking the *havildar* and *sepoy* who guarded the prisoners and the treasure under their charge. They attacked the sentry at the magazine guard taking possession of it and set it on fire.⁴⁵³ The second group attacked the rear guard of the stockade, slaying the sentry, wounded three others and moving on to the centre of the stockade where the bells of arms were kept and set fire on it. While these two groups attacked the stockade and magazine guard, the third group found the bungalow of Second-in-command close on the left of the line. They attacked the left company lines, setting fire on them, slaying every human, women and children that came in their way. The burning down of the bell of arms evidently weakened British positions as they could not fight without firearms, while the Khamtis were heavily equipped with short *daos* and spears. The fourth group went around the rear of the Light Company lines and was searching for White. Amidst this chaos, White left his own bungalow, proceeding by the new road to the lines when the fourth group who were evidently in search of him confronted him. He was stabbed at nine different places by a spear and was found dead by the Sergeant Major who arrived on the spot minutes after the occurrence.⁴⁵⁴

This night attack of the Khamtis was swift and unexpected. This was one of the boldest attacks ever made by the hill tribes on the North-East Frontier against the British. For several hours, the entire cantonment was at their mercy with sepoys sought out to be killed. The insurgents killed seventy men and set the barrack and the ammunition store on fire. They also burned down the hospital and all the stock of

⁴⁵² New Delhi, NAI, FDPC, letter from F. Hannay, Commander Assam Light Infantry to H. J. Prinsep, Secretary to Government of India, no-111, 22 May, 1839.

⁴⁵³ New Delhi, NAI, FDPC, letter no-111, 22 May, 1839.

⁴⁵⁴ New Delhi, NAI, FDPC, letter no-111, 22 May, 1839. Colonel White had been a political agent with long experience in the region who had repressed an earlier rebellion of the Singpho.

medicine. They left behind 82 people, who were severely injured, with some slightly wounded needing immediate medical aid. With the hospital razed to the ground, including its stock of medicine, there is no relief for the survivors who were later sent down to Bishwanath.

Table 3.1: List of casualties in the attack of Sadiya on 28th January, 1839

	Killed	Wounded
Assam Light Infantry	1 Lieutenant Colonel	1 Havildar
	1 Subedar Major	1 Naiks
	1 Naiks	1 Bughees
	1 Bughees	25 sepoy
	9 sepoy	1 Bhistees
Artillery	1 sepoy	4 sepoy
Gun Boat Establishment	3 Clossal	1 Gunlady
		1 clossal
Sepoy Lines	6 Children	2 children
	5 Women	11 Women

Source: Report of Captain F. Hannay, Commanding Assam Light Infantry.⁴⁵⁵

⁴⁵⁵ New Delhi, NAI, FDPC, letter no. 66, 29th January, 1839.

When an estimation of the loss of British property was taken, it was uncovered that the contents of gun shed with exception of one six-pounder, which was shrunk, and an iron tank, a three six-pounder and other gun pounder had been burnt down. However, the attackers surprisingly did not take anyone captive nor did they take any weapons as reflected in the following quote of Hannay thus:

I was happy to say that this is the extent of the loss the evening not being able to take away a single captivity or weapon of any kind although they had obtained possession of the magazine containing everything.⁴⁵⁶

3.7.1 Military operations against the Khamti Rebels

When the news of the massacre reached Sibsagar, Captain Vetch, Captain Hannay, and Lieutenant Marshall rushed for Sadiya on 29th January, 1839, with four hundred men of the Assam Light Infantry.⁴⁵⁷ The reinforcements were sent in different directions to track and apprehend the rebels. It was not known clearly as to who lead the attack until Ram Dhun Sykia told Captain Hannay that it was the Khamtis.⁴⁵⁸ With confirmation of the identity of the of the rebel leaders he ordered an expedition against the Khamtis in the morning of 30 January, 1839, under Lt. Marshal with reinforcements of a complete company under him. The military sent under Marshal moved into the villages of Sadiya within a radius of about two and a half miles. They vigorously launched a search operation to capture the Khamtis chiefs who led the attack. To their utter disappointment, the villagers had already deserted their villages prior to the arrival of the British contingent retreating deep into the forests of the frontier.

The search operation continued till they reached Dirak, yet they did not encounter any of the rebel groups. Therefore, the expedition was unable to apprehend the insurgent groups who had disappeared into those thick forests. It became difficult to

⁴⁵⁶ New Delhi, NAI, FDPC, letter from F. Hannay to Major Huussray, no. 66, 29th January, 1939.

⁴⁵⁷ New Delhi, NAI, FDPC, letter from F. Hannay to H. Vetch, no.160, 27th Feb 1839.

⁴⁵⁸ New Delhi, NAI, FDPC, letter no. 66, 29th January, 1839.

penetrate the thick and unknown forests, further aided by bad weather with a looming violent storm confounded the woes of the expedition against the rebels. Thus, in desperation, the British forces adopted the tactic of indiscriminately burning down all the houses in the Khamti villages they traversed, carrying away the rice stocked in the granaries and burning them down. This tactic was aimed to starve the villagers and those who had collaborated against the government.⁴⁵⁹ Consequently, the expedition contingent returned to Sadiya on 2nd February 1839, without arresting any rebels except burning down the dwellings and granaries.

The Khamtis withdrew despite their success in razing the military station at Sadiya and retreated into deep forest to protect their families from a counter attack, and to make strategies to launch a counter-attack with other hill tribes.⁴⁶⁰ Accordingly, the Khamti leader divided themselves into two groups and retreated in different directions. One group under the leadership of Tao Gohain and Kaptan Gohain retreated towards the Abors hills, while the second group under the leadership of Chau-pha-Plung-lu and Chau-rang-pha retreated towards Mishmi hills, and Singpho habitations to persuade the other frontier tribes to stand united against the British.⁴⁶¹ Besides, they were aware of the inferiority in arms made them vulnerable against open attack from the British. Therefore, they retreated to the forests and adopted guerrilla warfare strategy to attack the British.⁴⁶²

Accordingly, another sudden and swift attack was carried out on the night of 10th February, 1839, at around 8 pm when the British troops were incapacitated due to constant rains and stormy nights. Taking advantage of the stormy night, the Khamtis

⁴⁵⁹ New Delhi, NAI, PDFC, letter from F. Hannay to H. Vetch, no.160, 27th Feb 1839.

⁴⁶⁰ Interview with Chow Khok Manpoong, 87 years of aged, male, retired Government Servant, renowned public leader of Khamti, Namsai, interviewed on 12th January, 2016.

⁴⁶¹ Interview with Chownawing Namchom, 67 years of aged, male, Chief of Momong, Chowkang, Namsai district, Arunachal Pradesh, interviewed on 16th January, 2016.

⁴⁶² New Delhi, NAI, FDPC, letter no.160, 27 February 1839.

renewed attack on the reinforcements at Sadiya invaded Saikhowa with about 400 men ravaging the villages of Saikhowa. When this news reached Captain Hannay, immediately dispatched an expedition under a *havildar* to aid the villagers of Saikhowa Duanias. The contingent was soon overpowered by the Khamtis who were joined by a group of Singphos living close to Saikhowa. This combined force of the ravaged the Duanias villages by setting them on fire and even they erected a stockade near the Chuchku Nallah to resist the British. To this attack, Captain Hannay responded by dispatching another reinforcement under Lt. Marshall with 30 more sepoy to assist the Havildar's unit. This reinforcement, armed with better weapons overpowered the Khamtis who were forced to retreat as the Singphos who were assisting them had already left before Lt. Marshal reached the spot. The Khamtis defending themselves under stockade came under attack; fire was set over the stockade, and a constant volley of firing came from the British contingent. This created great confusion among the rebels and forced them to take flight towards the forests.⁴⁶³ In this expedition, the British lost 1 sepoy, while one was wounded, wherein the Khamtis left 3 dead bodies behind them, and a large quantity of arms of different kinds including- *dao*, bow and arrow, spears and stones, etc.⁴⁶⁴

A contingent under Marshall chased the Khamtis who left for the forests as the former had carried away a number of Duanias as captive. One of the families was that of a British spy named Dana Hazaree. The contingent under Marshall caught up with a group of Khamtis on 14th February as the latter groups were leaving towards hills carrying their injured chief Ranua Gohain. This group of about 20 men bravely fought against British contingent to protect their chief from being captured. Less in number and armed with traditional weapons, they were no match against the superior British forces.

⁴⁶³ New Delhi, NAI, FDPC, letter from F. Hannay to captain F. Jenkins, no.31, 20th March, 1839.

⁴⁶⁴ Dispur, ASA, PDP, letter from F. Jenkins to the Secretary to Government of India, no.34, 20th March, 1839.

In this encounter, Ranua Gohain and his brother-in-law were killed along with 12 subjects.⁴⁶⁵ Two rebels, Firingi Dyang and Ranua Tekela, a peon under Government Service, who participated in the massacre, were apprehended by Subedar Baidyanath Singh in a village near Boyong.⁴⁶⁶ According to the oral sources of the Khamtis, their chief Ranua Gohain was arrested and imprisoned at Sadiya. Subsequently along with his brother-in-law, Chau-ci-mung escaped from prison, but unfortunately while escaping Ranua Gohain was hit by a bullet in his leg, yet managed to escape taking shelter in the forest. Their hiding place was reported by an Assamese fisherman Nao Ria and consequently, the British sent expedition and surrounded his abode. Ranua Gohain died like a hero and fought till his last breath being the last man to surrender. While furiously attacking the commander of the team, he was hit by a bullet to which he succumbed later. Perceived as a selfless leader and a brave person, providing able leadership with unrivalled individuality, people respected him as Chaupha-kon-ming (king).⁴⁶⁷

This second expedition was successful for the British as they able to kill one of the main rebel leaders. The destruction of villages and granaries of rebel groups proved to be very effective measure, as they had not carried enough foodstuffs along with them, forcing them to depend on other frontier tribes. This pressure on food grains resulted in acrimony among the rebel groups weakening their unity.

Despite this successful expedition against Ranua Gohain, the British were still in a difficult position. This rebellion instilled immense anxiety among the British officials as it exposed the vulnerability of the frontier. The Khamti succeeded in destroying Sadiya and the attack on Saikhowa opened the possibility of future rebellion by other hill tribes on this frontier. Once again, it opened Upper Assam to the possibility of

⁴⁶⁵ New Delhi, NAI, FDPC, no. 66, 19th June, 1839.

⁴⁶⁶ New Delhi, NAI, FPC, no. 128, 20th May, 1839.

⁴⁶⁷ Interview with Chow Khok Manpoong, 87 years of aged, male, retired Government Servant, renowned public leader of Khamti, Namsai, interviewed on 12th January, 2016.

plunder that even make it difficult to recover from the shock.⁴⁶⁸ In addition, there was a constant stream of information from Bisa Gam, that the Khamtis, Singphos, and Matakas were planning a combined attack on Sadiya and Jaipur to drive out the British, while taking an oath to be faithful to each other, until they had accomplished their mission.⁴⁶⁹ Even they had solicited help from the BorKhamtis and Kakhu Singphos against the British. Therefore, it was very crucial to break the resistance of the Khamtis. In order to achieve the goal Jenkins ordered Charlton to proclaim that if the rebels surrendered they would be leniently treated in matters of trial and punishment in the aftermath. A reward of amount of rupees 1000/- was offered on the head of Tao Gohain and his eldest son and Kaptan Gohain an amount of rupees 500.⁴⁷⁰ However, despite this proclamation the news of confederacy between the Khamtis and the Singphos did not diminish the anxiety, which ultimately compelled the British to send a combined expedition to break the alliance between them in October, 1839.

On 19th October 1839, a joint expedition was sent to pursue them until they surrendered, and to break-up the alliance between the Khamtis and Singphos.⁴⁷¹ Captain Vetch who was joined by Captain Hannay and Dalton led this expedition. They led a force comprising of two Companies of the Assam Light Infantry and one hundred men from the Duania who assisted them in cutting roads through the forests and erecting stockades.⁴⁷² On 24th October, 1839, as the expedition approached the neighbourhood of the Khamtis village of Palangpan, Captain Vetch and his contingent erected a stockade from where the entire expeditions would be launched. He further ordered the chief of Palangpan for clearance of a spot for the detachment to encamp enroute to Palangpan.

⁴⁶⁸ New Delhi, NAI, FPC, no. 160, 27th February, 1839.

⁴⁶⁹ New Delhi, NAI, FPC, letter from C.A. Bruce to the officer in Military on Civil Charge at Rungpore or Jorehauth, no.43, 28th Feb, 1839.

⁴⁷⁰ Dispur, ASA, PDP, letter from Francis Jenkins to the Secretary to Government of India, no. 102, 27th Feb, 1839.

⁴⁷¹ New Delhi, NAI, FPC, letter from H. Vetch to F. Jenkins, no. 96, 21st Nov, 1839.

⁴⁷² New Delhi, NAI, FPC, no. 96, 21st November, 1839.

The other Khamtis groups like Palang-man Gohain and Ionlong Gohain Khamti also visited the camp of Captain Vetch and tendered their submission, seeking permission for the return of their families to Sadiya. Besides, one Singpho chief Tang Sang Gaum also visited the camp and informed him that the Khamti rebels erected a strong stockade at their village and intended to make a stand against the British force, but if defeated they would retreat to the mountains.⁴⁷³

On the 25th October, 1839, a British contingent marched towards a village held by the rebels. As they marched, they were joined by a Khamti deserter who informed them about the whereabouts of the rebels. The Singphos who collaborated with the chief Tao Gohain had expressed their inability to join the resistance against British any further. Despite this Tao Gohain expressed his determination to make a stand and stated that ‘there was no way of turning back’.⁴⁷⁴ The Khamtis strategically prepared by throwing up breastwork in different parts of a formidable defile leading to the village. Their objective was to allow the British contingent to get entangled in it and then trick the officer by firing upon them from the height.

However, prior to this engagement with the British forces, they sent off their families to the Mishmi Hills in the direction of BorKhamtis. A Mishmi of Dushan, who had been employed as a guide, conveyed this strategy to the British. Dushan led the expedition by an alternate path to the rear of the village. The Khamtis who were waiting for British force were surprised by an attack from the rear. In a confused state, they were unable to resist with force as planned and consequently, the contingent under Captain Vetch captured 14 rebels.⁴⁷⁵ Among the captives was Chowkhat Sangh Gohain who had led a section of the rebels to attack the cantonment in January, 1839. This surprise attack from the rear side of stockade forced the Khamtis to retreat towards the

⁴⁷³ New Delhi, NAI, FPC, no. 96, 21st November, 1839

⁴⁷⁴ New Delhi, NAI, FPC, letter from H. Vetch to Jenkins, no. 96, 13th November, 1839.

⁴⁷⁵ New Delhi, NAI, FPC, no. 96, 13th November, 1839.

forest. Contingents were sent out by Captain Hannay to chase the deserters, who could not be captured, hence they had to remain content by the destruction of the villages, and carrying away grains including destroying all standing crops to deter them from returning to the villages.

On 9th November, 1839, a band of Khamtis and Mishmis attacked the village of Boya Cacharee (sic) at about 8 pm and killing three Duantias, with two injured, while they carried away 8 persons as captives.⁴⁷⁶ Tao Gohain launched this combined attack. As this news reached Sadiya, Captain Vetch ordered Captain Hannay to send a contingent towards the Debong to prevent the retreat of the rebels. He also directed the Subedar to overtake his contingent, reach the spot and assist the villagers. These dispatches of the military chased the enemy till Dirak without much success, as they retreated deep into the forests. However, the troops succeeded in apprehending 4 rebels and brought them to Sadiya as a prisoner.⁴⁷⁷

There were several intelligence reports that the Khamtis who retreated towards the Mishmi and Abors hills under Tao Gohain was forging an alliance with the Abors and Mishmis.⁴⁷⁸ In addition, there were also confirmed reports of the formation of an alliance among the frontier tribes to oppose the British rule in Sadiya. About such plans, Captain Vetch states thus:

I have received information from a deserter that it is the intention of the Abors and the Mishmis to unite with the remnant of the Khamti insurgents either for the purpose of opposing our troops or a committing aggression on the frontier.⁴⁷⁹

The main leader of the Khamti rebels' chief Tao Gohain finalized an agreement with the Shib Abor Gaum, Kilko Abor Gaum, and Benyim Abor Gaum who sacrificed a *mithun*

⁴⁷⁶ New Delhi, NAI, FDPC, letter from F. Jenkins to the Secretary to the Government of India, no. 238, 3rd December, 1839.

⁴⁷⁷ New Delhi, NAI, FDPC, no.238, 3rd December, 1839.

⁴⁷⁸ New Delhi, NAI, FDPC, no.153, 24 December, 1839.

⁴⁷⁹ New Delhi, NAI, FDPC, letter from H. Vetch to captain F. Hannay, no.154, 24th December, 1839.

(*bos frontalis*) for feast and took an oath along with them. In return, Tao Gohain presented a Khamti slave Runga Doriya to Shib Abor. According to this agreement they agreed to descend the Dihong and Debong and launch an attack on the company's troops. The Mishmi and their *ryost* were also in league with them. In his report, the Subedar stated that while on his expedition to the north of Dibong he seized two Abors and four Meeris who stated the Tao Gohain was at Allung village with 30 families and the Ranua Gohain's son with the Aplung Meshmee with 100 men.⁴⁸⁰

It became very crucial for the British to separate Tao Gohain from the Abors and the Mishmis and to achieve this mission. Captain Vetch instructed the Sunzatee at Sadiya to use his power to call upon some of the influential Abor and Mishmi men and instruct them that if they offered any resistance to the expedition, the British would expel them entirely from the plains, confiscating all their grain and domestic animals. Captain Hannay was instructed to take as many Abors prisoners in the event of hostility as it would enable them to come to an agreement with them and help to get Khamtis insurgents in exchange.⁴⁸¹

In order to prevent the combined attack, the British were aware that they should open their hostility by sending an expedition against these combined forces of Khamti-Abor-Mishmi, as a delay will proved a chance to the tribes to strategise and embolden and give time for removal of their effect.⁴⁸² Mr. Bruce requested Lt. Stuart to join them without much delay to prevent the attack of the joint forces of Khamtis and Abors over Sadiya and Jeypoor. Mr. Bruce feared that a joint attack would have disastrous effect, and in this context, he stated thus:

Their attack would have disastrous effect on the country at large, and to the new settlers and Chinamen in particular, who are now even ready to run off and our tea prospect in

⁴⁸⁰ New Delhi, NAI, FDPC, 21 Dec 1839, Report from Chowkour translation by F.Jenkins.

⁴⁸¹ New Delhi, NAI, FDPC, letter from H. Vetch to F. Jenkins, no.153, 24 December, 1839.

⁴⁸² New Delhi, NAI, FDPC, letter from H. Vetch to Hannay, no.154, 24 December, 1839.

general for if we do not commence our tea manufacture by 10th or 15th of March we shall lose the manufacture of whole year.⁴⁸³

Captain Hannay was directed to send an expedition against the insurgents and break up the threatened combination of the Abors and Mishmis with the Tao Gohain. On 6th January 1840, he along with Subadar proceeded with a full contingent of the Assam Light Infantry to the vicinity of Upper Dibong and Sassar river (*sic*) to trace, hunt down and capture Tao Gohain and his group. On 11th January, a major encounter took place between the Khamtis and British in which a Duania guide was shot by one of the rebels as he was climbing into the stockade. The struggle continued for almost three hours, but due to inferior arms and military strategy, the Khamtis were subjugated. However, their leader Tao Gohain along with about twenty-five of his followers fled from the scene and was pursued by Subedar from hill to hill until further pursuit into the forests was futile. Though Captain Hannay failed to seize Tao Gohain, the main offender; he succeeded in apprehending several others and successfully broke up the confederacy between the Khamtis-Mishmi and Abors rebels.⁴⁸⁴ The most important outcome of this expedition was the surrender of Chau-Keing Gohain, the son of Ranuwa Gohain in 1840 along with four hundred Khamtis.

This was the first batch of the Khamtis to surrender before the government. Subsequently, they were removed from Sadiya to the southern bank of the Brahmaputra in the Lakhimpur district without any trial and punishment. This is because they considered Choukeng Gohain to be a young man who did not deserve punishment for his father's complicity in the insurrection.⁴⁸⁵ Captain Hannay and his contingent burnt down the Khamtis and Mishmi villages of those who had entertained Tao Gohain and

⁴⁸³ New Delhi, NAI, FDPC, letter from H. Vetch to Hannay, no.154, 24 December, 1839.

⁴⁸⁴ H.K. Barpujari, *Problems of the Hill Tribes: North East Frontier, 1822-42*, p.190.

⁴⁸⁵ Dispur, ASA, PDP, letter from F. Jenkins to the Secretary to the Government of India, no.14, 23 January, 1840.

destroyed their granaries. This was carried out to create a cleavage between those who supported and opposed the Mishmi groups for harbouring the Khamtis. The result of expedition was satisfactory for the British as they considered it as:

Necessary and unavoidable for every days experience confirms any conviction that until offensive operation are carried into the hills of any of the hostile tribes and they are made to feel that we can punish them in their own follyness. We should never be free from their inroads and that no number of guards along the frontier would secure our *ryot* from suffering constantly from their predatory attack.⁴⁸⁶

With the surrender of Chaukeng Gohain, various Khamtis rebel groups too were willing to surrender, and from 1840 there was no fierce resistance from the Khamtis due to repressive measures followed by the British against the rebels groups. The destruction of granaries and standing crops affected their livelihood and hence survival in the resource-scare region proving disastrous for the Khamtis. The strategy of punishing neighbouring tribes who had harboured rebels by burning down their houses, crops, granary and killing their domestic animals created problems for those tribes who began to opt out from supporting them in course of time.⁴⁸⁷ The hardship compelled many Khamtis who had not directly participated in rebellion did come forward to surrender before the government which weakened the resistance movement. Despite surrender of various groups, the main rebel group under Tao Gohain remained at large. In order to instill fear among the rebels, Captain Vetch proposed that all Khamtis insurgents still in arms were to be proclaimed as outlaws and all those who did not voluntarily surrender should be liable to punishment.⁴⁸⁸

⁴⁸⁶ Dispur, ASA, PDP, letter issued to Government, from F. Jenkins to H.J. Prinsep, Secretary to the Government of India, no.10, 20th January 1840.

⁴⁸⁷ New Delhi, NAI, FDPC, letter from F. Jenkins to the Secretary to Government of India, no. 102, 24th January, 1840.

⁴⁸⁸ New Delhi, NAI, FDPC, letter from F. Jenkins to the Secretary to the Government of India, no.135, 4th Feb, 1840.

On 8th April, 1840, the British Political Agent of Upper Assam carried out the trial of 17 Khamtis and 1 Singphos, for rebellion in the Sadiya attack. In another trial, 7 persons were convicted for attacking Saikhowa and Boya Cachree village in February and November, 1839. After studying their defences, Captain Vetch and *panchayat* found out that only very few rebels had participated in the rebellion on their own volition, rather were forced by their chiefs. Therefore, those who participated in the open revolt like Chowket Sang Kong, Palenghain Phoken, Nussang, Lisso Sykeah, Natoong, Hantang, Moby Seong, Sowitang Boom, Tonla and Shang Kong were convicted, imprisoned and banished for life. However, many of the prisoners like Hantang, Moby Seong, Sowitang Boom, Tonla and Shang Kong died of cholera in Guwahati prison.⁴⁸⁹ The rest who supported the rebellion like Needow, Chowtang, Naton, Sowitang Boom, Moongjang, Chow, Payeah, Sow and Lakum Leellu were imprisoned for 5 years and subject to hard labour on the ironwork site in Tezpur prison. The women and children of those convicted were allowed to join their brethren in the Lakhimpur division.

Surrender of the Khamti chief and their followers and lenient punishment meted by British encouraged other rebels to seek for peace. Captain Vetch, in addition, undertook tours of several Khamti and Singpho villages to renew friendly overtures with their chiefs to put an end to existing feuds amongst tribes and to prevent any attempts by the remnant insurgents from entering Assam or create disorder on the frontier.⁴⁹⁰ On 4th November, 1842, accordingly, he visited villages on the Tengapani and reached Palampan on the 7th November. He found that the river was not navigable for boats carrying loads of above one ton, hence summoned many Singpho chiefs to assist him in crossing from Palampan to Seru, accompanied by guns and elephants. He

⁴⁸⁹ New Delhi, NAI, FDPC, letter from F. Vetch to F. Jenkins, no.1, 18th April, 1840.

⁴⁹⁰ Dispur, ASA, PDP, Letter Issued to Government, vol.12, letter from F. Jenkins to the Secretary to the Government of India, no.6³/₄, 18th Jun 1843.

left Palampan on the 11th, crossed Jinsha, one of the largest of the Singphos villages the next day, which was strategically situated on a piece of table-land forming a spur to the mountain behind, and commanding a view of the snowy range, as well as the plains of Assam. He further continued his march over low hills, with much cultivation on both sides of an excellent and well-beaten path to the village of Dabom, and having passed many villages, descended onto the banks of the Tengapani. It was about here that Captain Neufville had earlier proposed for an outpost. For the next two days he was engaged in settling disputes between Singpho and Khamti chiefs, and fined the villagers of Palampan Rs. 60 for participating in the outrage. On 14th he marched up the bed of the Tenga river, passing the site of the former village of Latora and reached Naing. It was here that he was visited by the chief of the Roon Singphos, who had emigrated from Hukwang about four years ago. The chief was called upon to furnish men to clear the road to the Teerahpani, which he willingly did. The next day he ascended the Menabhom hills amidst cultivation from where he could view Assam valley extensively and he halted the night some miles down the pass in an open part of a glen. He further pushed to foot of the hills, through a well-watered and well-cultivated country, to a Singpho village named Neering, and further over flat land covered with rice cultivation and arrived at Seru, a large Singpho village with 500 inhabitants. The Chief had lately settled in from the Burmese side. The next day, the 17th, he reached Beesa. He visited all the important Singpho villages and instructed them not to support the rebels. However, Duffa Gam did not respond to the appeals of Captain Vetch, hence the village under his control was burnt down.⁴⁹¹

Despite such peace offers the remnant rebels were still at large despite having to bear immeasurable hardships, especially in their inability to procure weapon which they

⁴⁹¹ Dispur, ASA, PDP, Letter Issued to Government from F. Jenkins to the Secretary to the Govt. of India, no.6³/₄, 18th Jun 1843.

had previously procured from the Singphos in exchange for slaves.⁴⁹² However, the shortage of captive slaves diminished their capacity to purchase *dao* from Burma hence reducing their efficiency in countering British military strength. The Khamti hideout at Dirak became a source of trouble constantly threatening to make inroads into Sadiya and Saikhowa. Further, there were reports about receiving a reinforcement of about 100 men and slaves from BorKhamti. With the possibility of renewed attacks on Sadiya, it appeared that they would get the considerable following from the Abors who were dissatisfied over the issue of Miris settling in Assam.⁴⁹³ In order to pre-empt such a move Captain Vetch decided to depute the surrendered chiefs previously settled in the Lakhimpur and Dhemaji as well as influential Assamese and Duania living in Sadiya and Saikhowa to persuade the remaining Khamtis rebels to surrender.⁴⁹⁴ Accordingly, he deputed the chiefs along with some headmen of Sadiya under a *Sheristadar*, who successfully persuaded the remaining rebels to make their submission. This persuasive strategy by the indigenous leaders on behalf of the British led to the surrender of Kaptan Gohain, Chowtang Gohain, Koromaong Gohain, Charoba Tonken, Porongar son of Daria Phoken and Soongat Bora. However, the main two leaders Tao Gohain and Ranua Gohain's son Melleion were not ready to come down to Sadiya though they conveyed through their deputies that they would surrender soon after securing their crops and arrange for the movement of their families.⁴⁹⁵ The final surrender of the rebels eventually led to the signing of a new agreement with the British whose terms were as follows:

⁴⁹² New Delhi, NAI, FDPC, letter from H. Vetch to F. Jenkins, no.96, 21st Nov, 1839.

⁴⁹³ New Delhi, NAI, FDPC, no.165, 18th November 1843.

⁴⁹⁴ New Delhi, NAI, FDPC, letter from F. Jenkins to the Secretary to the Government of India, no.82, 18th November, 1843.

⁴⁹⁵ New Delhi, NAI, FDPC, letter from F. Jenkins to the Secretary to Government of India, no.106, 20 January, 1844.

3.8 British-Khamti Agreement of 1843

We the inhabitant of Dirak and Sudiya, were engaged in the attack upon the latter place, and fled to the Mishmi country; we have offered our submission to return back, if our former offences were overlooked, and now we have returned agreeably to the order of the Political Agent, with our followers, viz, Chowdung, Chowding, Long Fong, but the whole of the Khamtis are unable to return for the present, owing to their crops being uncut. However, they hereby promise to come in with all their families after their crops have been gathered, or within a month and half from this date.

1. We shall be allowed a sufficient quantity of land for our support, either at Choonpoora (Sunpura) or at Noa Dihing, for a term of five years rent free, and after the expiration of that period we agree to pay a moderate rent for the lands we may cultivate, or pay a house-tax, or Government may choose to authorize. Any order that may be issued respecting the *Abkarry* shall be duly attended to.
2. We engage also to endeavour to prevent or intercepts any inroads of the Singphos or Mishmis on the Sadiya *ryot*, and shall obey all orders of the Civil or Political authorities on the frontier.
3. We further engage that we shall desist from trafficking in slaves according to the regulations of Government General.
4. All petty crimes and other offences occurring amongst ourselves shall be settled by the Chiefs of the Village, but in all heinous offences, such as robbery, murder, dacoit, wounding, and counterfeiting the coin, we promise to make over the offender to the Political Agent, with their respective witness for trial; and disputes between the head of the different villages or clans shall also be referred to the same authority.

5. At the expiration of ten years the whole of our engagement will be subject to a revision and alternation, as it may seem best to His Lordship to determine on.
6. Should we or any of the Khamtis in any way depart from the faithful adherence of the above Agreement, and commit any acts of violence, we shall be subject to be driven out of the province, and be without further excuse.⁴⁹⁶

Francis Jenkins

Agent to the Governor General

Accordingly, the remaining Khamtis gathered their crops and settled at Sunpura situated approximately at 10 miles above of Sadiya. The Khamtis were settled at Sunpura on the north bank of the Brahmaputra with the intention of creating a buffer between the Assamese *ryots* of Sadiya and the Mishmis who were in the habit of making inroads to carry away the inhabitants as slaves and their cattle for food.⁴⁹⁷ Later on, this settlement at Sunpura proved to be beneficial for the villagers who settled above Sadiya.

The outbreak of the Khamti insurrection at Sadiya drove home to the authorities at Calcutta about the insecurity of the whole of the North-East Frontier. The gravity of the situation found eloquent expression in a minute of W.W. Bird, a member of the Supreme Council, wherein he observed thus:

The affairs of Sadiya sufficiently demonstrate what these tribes are capable of effecting. There is little doubt that had that attack been successful Upper Assam, would have been in the utmost danger of being lost; and even though it failed, the panic which it occasioned extended not only throughout the province but all along the eastern frontier.

⁴⁹⁶ M.L. Bose, *Historical and Constitutional Documents of North-East India (1824-1973)*, pp.151-152.

⁴⁹⁷ New Delhi, NAI, FDPC, letter from F. Jenkins to the Secretary to Government of India, no.106, 20th January, 1844.

The loss of the province or even any serious impression made upon our forces in that quarter would be attended with consequences, the extent of which it is not easy to foresee. Not only would the whole of the tea cultivation, now of more importance than ever, be swept away but it would open a road into the heart of our most valuable province to a host of enemies.⁴⁹⁸

3.9 Conclusion

From the above discussion, it can be inferred that the contact between Khamtis and British was inevitable due to a political transition in Assam. The occupation of Assam valley by Burmese had bothered the British in Bengal. In order to secure its frontier from Burmese incursions, the British invaded Assam and dislodged the former from Assam. The coming of British had brought them in contact with the formidable Khamtis while dealing against the Singphos who sided with the Burmese depredation in Upper Assam. During their operation against the Burmese and Singphos, the Khamtis rendered military and material aid. As their territory occupied a strategic position, the British negotiated with them to create a buffer zone against the Burmese. In return, the Khamtis agreed to provide two hundred men for British in time of need.

However, in due course, the British began to encroach upon the right and privileges which was eroded further when Sadiya Khowa Gohain was removed from his position over absorbing land held by Matakas and extending control over the Assamese subject of Sadiya. However, without showing any apparent sign of discontent the Khamtis acquiesced. Yet it was further aggravated by the proposed census and future introduction of poll-tax which created resentment. The shifting of the headquarters of Assam Light Infantry from Bishwanth to Sadiya in 1839 alarmed the Khamtis who inferred it as an attempt to brought their area under direct administration, ultimately led to armed uprising against British in 1839 culminating on the murder of Major White

⁴⁹⁸ Cited in H.K. Barpujari, vol. I, p. 154, IPC, 5 June 1839, see Minutes by W.W. Bird, 22 May.

and the razing of the military station at Sadiya. This armed rebellion of Khamtis was not an isolated event rather it was perpetual negation against the colonial scheme with aim to maintain their independence in polity, territory, society and economic life of the tribe. However, due to traditional techniques and lack of sophisticated weapons they could not stand against British might, and the disunity created among them and between their supporters, led them to surrender eventually. Though a failed resistance, but the gallantry which the Khamtis displayed in attacking the garrison of Sadiya and continued their rebellion for five years against a massive organized British force speaks very highly of their martial value.

CHAPTER-IV

SINGPHO RESISTANCE AND COLONIAL STATE

4.1 Introduction to the Chapter

In the preceding chapter, detailed discussion has been made about the Khamti rebellion and its course between 1839 and 1843. It has been seen that the armed rebellion of the Khamtis was not a sporadic occurrence, rather a culmination of their prolonged tradition of resistance against state control strongly manifested against the British. In the same line, an attempt shall be made in this chapter to examine the early British policy towards the Singphos and various mechanisms to establish the colonial control which was resisted by this tribe and how it culminated into an armed rebellion of 1843 and its consequences.

4.2 The Ahom-Singpho Relations

As discussed in chapter two, the Singphos made their first appearance in the Tengapani area in the last decades of the eighteenth century during the troubled period of the Moamaria rebellion. They made their presence known in 1793 by driving out their neighbouring Khamtis from Tengapani area on the issue of tribute demand, which coincided with the period when the Ahom polity was on the decline in the aftermath of the Moamaria rebellion. State control was practically absent in the region bounded by the Noa-Dihing to the west, Mishmi hills to the east, Brahmaputra to the north and the Patkai hills to the south, over an area of 1200 to 1400 squares miles.⁴⁹⁹ Even, the Ahom capital Rangpur was brought under the control of rebellion on 20th January, 1788, and remained under the control of Moamaria till March, 1794. When

⁴⁹⁹ R.N. Pareek, 'Duwanias', *Arunachal News*, April-May, 1983, pp. 39-41

help was solicited from the British, Captain Welsh freed Rangpur from the clutches of Moamaria and Ahom position was re-established in on 19th March, 1794.⁵⁰⁰ However, soon after his return, the Moamaria once again brought Rangpur under control and held it till 1799. Under such conditions of political chaos, the Singphos took advantage and carried out frequent raids into the plains of Assam.⁵⁰¹ During such raids, they carried away many men, women, and children from among the Kachari, Morans, Miris, turn them into slaves.⁵⁰² Subsequently, in absence of any strong state power, they occupied the entire country watered by the Buri-Dihing, the Noa-Dihing and the Tengapani rivers over the tract called Namrup.⁵⁰³ This resulted in the occupation of vast tracts of land connecting Assam and Burma under a number of distinct and independent chiefs. All of them traced their lineage from the *Tangai* lineage of the *Tsasen* clan, yet were defined as distinct clans like Wahkyet, Sharaw, Hpungin, Ningkrawp, Latao, Numbrawng, N'Gaw, Ningru, Hkawtsu, Gasheng, Daipha, etc.⁵⁰⁴ Thus they created a political and economic space for themselves in the last decades of the eighteenth century.

The initial contact between Ahom and Singphos was recorded during the reign of Kamleshwar Singha (1795-1811) when the Moamaria leader Bharat Singha took refuge in Namrup following his defeat at the hands of the Ahoms.⁵⁰⁵ With the help of Singphos, the Moamaria carried out ravages in a number of villages in the eastern part of Upper Assam. When this news reached Kamleshwar Singha, he sent a military

⁵⁰⁰ For details see Sristidhar Dutta, *The Matakas and Their Kingdom*, pp. 140-163.

⁵⁰¹ R.N. Pareek, 'Duwanias', pp. 39-41, also in A. K. Thakur, pp. 97-98.

⁵⁰² R.N. Pareek, pp. 39-41.

⁵⁰³ Lakshmi Devi, *Ahom-Tribal Relation*, p. 246.

⁵⁰⁴ E. R. Leach, *Political System of Highland Burma*, p. 224.

⁵⁰⁵ Sristidhar Dutta, *The Matakas and their Kingdom*, p. 171.

force under the command of Haripada Deka Phukan, and other officers to break up the combined resistance.⁵⁰⁶

When the army reached Dangaikukh, the combined force of Singphos and Moamaria strongly resisted by erecting a fort and mounting guns aground the palisade. During the initial resistance they were able to weaken the Ahom army by killing fifteen *sepoys*, but subsequent reinforcements helped destroy the fort with the Singphos and the Moamaria fleeing in different directions and take possession of it.⁵⁰⁷ However, in 1805 the Moamaria targeting the recovery of Rangpur, appealed for Burmese help through the Singpho chief Bisa Gam. The Burmese emperor Bodawapaya (1782-1819) immediately responded to this appeal by sending an army, which on its arrival was won over by Purananda Buragohain through diplomatic overtures.⁵⁰⁸

This role of Singphos in persuading the Burmese to aid the Moamaria further alarmed the Ahoms who had already witnessed stiff resistance previously. In order to woo the Singphos to their side or at least to have their neutrality, the Ahom Prime Minister Purananda Buragohain offered an Ahom girl Rangili, along with numerous slaves and attendants to the Singpho chief Bisa Gam.⁵⁰⁹ This gift from the ruler was unable to ensure buy long-term peace; with rather Bisa Gam renewed his friendship with Burmese ruler and offered Rangili to him.⁵¹⁰ Though they did not initiate further rebellion and remained peaceful, yet renewed raids during the Burmese invasion of Assam.⁵¹¹

⁵⁰⁶ Sristidhar Dutta, *The Mataks...*, p. 171.

⁵⁰⁷ Sreenath Duara Barbarua, *Tungkhungia Buranji* (ed.), S. K. Bhuyan, p. 144.

⁵⁰⁸ S. O. Hannay, 'A Short Account of the Moamora Sect and the Country occupied by the Bur Senaputee', *Journal of Asiatic Society of Bengal*, No. 80, August 1838, Vol. II, Part-II, p. 673.

⁵⁰⁹ Lakshmi Devi, p. 247.

⁵¹⁰ Lakshmi Devi, p. 247.

⁵¹¹ H. K. Barpujari, vol. I, p. 20.

4.3 Initial Contact between the Singphos and the British

The chaotic political situation of Assam in the second decade of the nineteenth century led to the invasion of Burmese in Assam.⁵¹² This Burmese invasion as already discussed in the earlier chapters in detail, resulted in mass plunder and depopulation of the province. The Singphos had the option to either plunder or be plundered by the Burmese and suffer like the Assamese population.⁵¹³ They had already been looking to expand their niche into their present settlement, subsequently took advantage and renewed their ravages and carried off thousands of Assamese as a slave during the course of the Burmese invasion.⁵¹⁴ When the British reached Upper Assam in January 1825 to dislodge the Burmese they witnessed the predatory raids and ravage of the Singphos across vast sections of the plains up till Jorhat.

However, as aptly remarked by Robert Richard Gott in his book, *Britain's Empire: Resistance, Repression and Rebellion*, 'wherever the British sought to plant their flag, they met with opposition...they never arrived as a welcome guest, for the expansion of empire was invariably conducted of as a military operation'.⁵¹⁵ In the north-eastern region too even after the fall of Rangpur, the last stronghold of Burmese in Upper Assam, on 31 January 1825, the British had to face strong resistance from the Singphos a formidable tribe in the southeast frontier of Assam.⁵¹⁶

While the British successfully engaged with the Burmese at Rangpur in January 1825, there was news of Singphos lurking in the village of Dalang Nandi, at a distance of 7 miles from Rangpur.⁵¹⁷ The British presumed that their presence would be a hindrance to the on-going talks between the British and Burmese armies.

⁵¹² For details see chapter one and three of this thesis.

⁵¹³ Kolkata, WBSA, BSPC, letter from Neufville to Scott, no. 26, 18th May, 1825.

⁵¹⁴ Lakshmi Devi, 247.

⁵¹⁵ Robert Richard Gott, *Britain's Empire: Resistance, Repression and Revolt*, London, Verso, 2011, p.2.

⁵¹⁶ S. K. Bhuyan, *Anglo-Assamese...*, p. 542.

⁵¹⁷ S. K. Bhuyan, p. 543.

Therefore, in order to dislodge them from the vicinity of Rangpur, Colonel Richard sent Captain Martin at the head of the mounted cavalry against the former.⁵¹⁸ However, on arrival, the Singphos had already dispersed into three batches in different directions, but were pursued with the intention to push them towards the hills. In this expedition, Captain Chapman and Waldron, who successfully dispersed them into the deep forests, assisted Martin. However, this expulsion from the vicinity of Rangpur did not end their resistance.

In March 1825, the British received reports from the Khamtis and Matak chiefs that, about 7500 Singphos armed with 650 muskets were planning to attack them.⁵¹⁹ The Singphos of Beesa area did not permit retreating Burmese army under Boglee Phukan through their territory and coerced them to join in plundering of the Khamti and Matak territory.⁵²⁰ To launch an attack they jointly erected a stockade at the mouth of Noa-Dihing. News of an imminent uprising of Singphos against the Khamtis and Matak in collaboration with the remnant Burmese army demanded serious attention of the British. To eliminate the menace of Singphos and Burmese, the British sent a detachment of sepoy under Captain Neufville of the 42nd Native Infantry with instructions to negotiate with frontier chiefs wherever possible and send military campaigns against those chiefs who failed to come under negotiation.⁵²¹ Therefore, the partly conciliatory and partly coercive policy coupled with inducements was adopted to strive for a peaceful settlement.⁵²²

Captain Neufville from Rangpur advanced up to the Noa-Dihing along with the Matak and Khamti militia, where he was visited by several Singphos chiefs including

⁵¹⁸ S. K. Bhuyan, p. 543.

⁵¹⁹ R. M. Lahiri, p. 26.

⁵²⁰ R. M. Lahiri, p. 26.

⁵²¹ H. K. Barpujari, vol. I, p. 29.

⁵²² H. K. Barpujari, vol. I, p. 32.

the Bisa Gam on 4th April, 1825, with overtures for a settlement.⁵²³ In the subsequent negotiations, Singphos found themselves in a dilemma, for if they opposed the British successfully aided by Burmese the latter would take the plains away from them. However if they aided the British against the Burmese, and the former were victorious, they would insist on the surrender the thousands of slaves held in their possession.⁵²⁴ Therefore, no tangible progress was made in the negotiations as they stubbornly opposed the demand for restoration of the captives and stop plunder.⁵²⁵ Boglee Phokun had entrenched up the Noa-Dihing river about 25 miles from the mouth and sought reinforcements from the Burmese ruler. This news of Burmese reinforcement consequently stopped further negotiations.⁵²⁶ It became clear that unless the Burmese armies were dislodged, British would not be able to bring the Singphos to the negotiating table for a peaceable agreement. Therefore, on 7th May, Captain Neufville, with half of his detachment carried out an attack on the entrenchment of Boglee Phokun. In this expedition, one British sepoy was wounded, with eight Burmese soldiers killed and many wounded, with the rest along with their leader fleeing away.⁵²⁷ The contingent of Boglee Phokun fled towards Duffagaon joined by Burmese reinforcement comprising of about 200 foot and 50 horses, and had taken a post at a stockade in the vicinity.⁵²⁸ To counter this invasion, Captain Neufville, reached at Duffa village on 5th June, 1825 and took hold of the position. On 9th May 1825, Neufville sent, Lt. Kerr who commenced an attack on the enemy stockade from the

⁵²³ H. K. Barpujari, vol. I, p. 31.

⁵²⁴ The Singpho and Khamti report, This document was downloaded by: N list Programm<http://www.southasiaarchive.com/Content/sarf.143016/209522/005> On: 28 Nov 2017 at 05:05:45 Publisher: Taylor &Francisp.128

⁵²⁵ Alexander Mackenzie, pp. 63-65.

⁵²⁶ R. M. Lahiri, p. 27.

⁵²⁷ John F. Michell, *The North-East Frontier of India*, 1883, this document was downloaded by: N list Programm<http://www.southasiaarchive.com/Content/sarf.143016/209522/005> On: 28 Nov 2017 at 05:05:45, Publisher: Taylor & Francis.

⁵²⁸ S. K. Bhuyan, *Anglo-Assamese Relation 1771-1826*, p. 545.

right, but the enemy fled through the other side of the gate. Without cavalry, they could not pursue the enemy further as they were soon lost in the forest and fled to Beesagaon where along with the Singphos planned to resist the British armies.⁵²⁹

When Neufville reached Beesagaon on the afternoon of 11th June, 1825, the enemy fled without resisting from stockade to the stockade. As the army continued to pursue them from till they finally fled away toward the pass to Burma in great panic, leaving behind gilt umbrellas, silver swords and other insignias of the chiefs on the way.⁵³⁰ The Singphos too fled towards the hills, giving Neufville the opportunity to burn down the stockade at Beesa and destroying their houses. He even released all the Assamese captured by the Burmese and Singphos numbering about 3000.⁵³¹ On 1st July, 1825 Scott reported to the Secretary, Government of Bengal, about the final expulsion of the Burmese from this side of the frontier.⁵³² Yet there remained, a large number of slaves in possession of the Singphos, and there was an apprehension that they would migrate with their slaves across the Patkai after the harvesting season. This would defeat the very objective of the British to bring the Singphos under their control.

In order to succeed in their mission, Neufville solicited Mataks and Khamtis to aid them while planning an attack from Beesa to Luffabari. This would allow them a commanding position over the entire country occupied by the Singphos including the hill passes through which they might despatch their captives. Accordingly, a combined force of British, Khamtis and Mataks carried out an attack on the Singpho villages when a large number of slaves from Hukwang Valley were engaged in harvesting. The captives were liberated and Neufville marched into the heart of Singpho territory

⁵²⁹ H. K. Barpujari, vol. 1, p. 34.

⁵³⁰ Neufville to Brigade Major Martin, June 15, 1825, Wilson's Documents, No. 95, cited in S.K. Bhuyan, p. 545.

⁵³¹ S. K. Bhuyan, p. 545.

⁵³² H. K. Barpujari, vol. I, p. 34.

attacking Luttora and Beesa resulting in unconditional surrender of several chiefs like Kassan, Mullarko, Pessi, Set, Neeche, Naggo and Bisa Gam when they found their resistance no longer effective. They surrendered all arms, ammunition and slaves numbering about 1400, paving the way for a general settlement and pacification.⁵³³

When the Burmese renounced their claims over Assam and its adjoining states after the treaty of Yandaboo in 1826, the Singphos too feared expulsion from Assam hence they finally approached the British to ink an agreement when David Scott visited in May, 1826.⁵³⁴ The British took advantage of the helpless situation seeking to weaken this group demanded the release of all captive slaves captured and insisted that they refrain from plundering villages in the plains of Assam. Accordingly, out of 28 chiefs, 16 negotiated an agreement with the British in May, 1826.⁵³⁵ Thus the British came into close contact with the Singphos during the second decade of nineteenth century and their relations was characterised by series of expeditions and their determined resistance.

4.4 British-Singpho Agreement of 5th May, 1826

Whereas, we, the Singphos Chiefs, named Bum, Koomjoy, Meejong, Jow, Chowkhen, Jowrah, Jowdoo, Chow, Chumin, Neegun, Tangrung, Chowbah, Chamuta, Vhowrah, Chowdoo, Choukam, Koomring, etc., are under the subject of the British Government, we execute this Agreement to Mr. David Scott, the Agent to the Governor-General, and hereby engage to adhere to the following terms:⁵³⁶

⁵³³ H. K. Barpujari, *The Problem of the Hill...*, vol. I, p. 36, and R. M. Lahiri, p. 27.

⁵³⁴ M. L. Bose, *British Policy in North East Frontier Agency*, Concept Publishing Company, New Delhi, 1979, p. 82., and in H. K. Barpujari, *The Problem of the Hill...*, vol. 1, p. 32.

⁵³⁵ H. K. Barpujari, *The Problem of the Hill...*, vol. 1, p. 32.

⁵³⁶ C.U. Aitceison, *A Collection of Treaties, Engagement, Sanada, India and Neighbouring Countries*, vol. 1, pp. 303-305.

- A. Assam being now under the sway of the British Government, we and our dependent Singphos, who were subjects of the Assam state, acknowledge subjection to that Government. We agree not to side with the Burmese or any other King to commit any aggression, whatever, but we will obey the orders of the British Government.
- B. Whenever a British Force may march to Assam to protect it from foreign aggression, we will supply that Force with grain, etc., make the repair roads for them, and execute every order that may be issued to us. We should on our doing so be protected by that force.
- C. If we abide by the terms of this Agreement, no tribute shall be paid by us; but if any Assam *Paiks* of their own accord reside in our villages, the tax on such *Paiks* will be paid to the British Government.
- D. We will set at large or cause to be liberated any Assam people whom we may seize, and they shall have the option to reside wherever they please.
- E. If any of the Singphos rob any of the Assam people residing in our country, we will apprehend the former and surrender him to the British Government; but if we fail to do so, we will make good the loss thus sustained by the latter.
- F. We will govern and protect the Singphos under us as heretofore and adjust their differences; and if any boundary dispute occurs among us, we will not take up arms without the knowledge of the British Government.
- G. We will adhere to the terms of this Agreement and never depart from them. This Agreement shall be binding upon our brothers, sons, nephews, and relatives, in such as the Agent to the Governor-General may deem proper. We have executed this Agreement in the presence of

many.

Written at Sadiya on Friday, the 5th May 1826, or Sukabda 1748, or 24th

Bysakh 1233 B.S.⁵³⁷

The chiefs who signed the agreement accepted the British suzerainty agreeing to maintain peace in the frontiers and agreed to appraise about any unusual activities on the frontiers of Assam. In return, they were assured of British assistance in the event of any external aggression. Accordingly, the chiefs agreed to release the captives and promised to assist the British troops in the future. This agreement however was not endorsed by Duffa Gam, who returned to the hills along with other chiefs aligned to him. The treaty of May, 1826, sought to break the alliance between the Burmese and the Singphos of Assam.⁵³⁸ Hence, since 1825 till the agreements of 1826, Lt. Neufville was able to release 6,000 Assamese captives.⁵³⁹ This agreement had put the British into the power path and has proved to be a means to enter and encroach upon the political, economic and social institutions of the Singphos. Therefore, in order to comprehend the history of their resistance movement against the British, it is imperative to understand the developments took place after their agreement of 1826.

4.5 Singphos as a Buffer Tribe

Despite the agreements enacted, a major concern remained was that a large number of influential Singpho chiefs of about twelve evaded negotiation with the British. One of the evading chiefs was Duffa Gam, an arch rival of Bisa Gam, who inhabited the Hukwang valley and the possibility of the feuds disturbing the tranquillity of the south-east frontier loomed large. Further, there were suspicions that

⁵³⁷ M. L. Bose, *Historical and Constitutional document of North-East India (1824-1973)*, pp. 152-53.

⁵³⁸ Kolkata, WBSA, BSPP, 28th August 1835, no. 1.

⁵³⁹ R. M. Lahiri, p. 27.

the Burmese Court might use the evading Singphos of Hukwang to foment disturbance in Assam.⁵⁴⁰ In addition, they could be used as the first line of defence against the British.⁵⁴¹ It was, therefore, of great significance to secure the support of the Singpho chiefs inhabiting Assam, or at least seeks their neutrality, in the event of an invasion from Burma.⁵⁴²

Against this background, the British formulated their policy towards using the Singphos as the first line of defence against the Burmese invasion. This was necessitated by the fact that all the vulnerable locations and passes between Assam and Burma was through Singpho territory. Captain Neufville emphasised the importance to seek alliance with Bisa Gam in order to secure the routes through his village and the pass by the river Tengapani.⁵⁴³

The English could have pursued the policy of blood and iron against the evading Singphos, as against the Burmese, but the peculiar geography and climatic condition rendered any further military operations futile.⁵⁴⁴ They were neither fully acquainted with the land and people nor in a position to protect the people of Assam through military might, in view of intervening ranges between Burma and Assam. These were extensive tracts of forest-clad mountains ranges varying from 500 to 5500 feet high with various passes like Beesa, Tenga, and Hukwang, vastly unexplored

⁵⁴⁰ Sukanya Sharma, 'Building Roads to Myanmar: A Historical Overview', *Economic and Political Weekly*, vol. 40, no. 48 (Nov. 26 - Dec. 2, 2005), pp. 5120, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4417464>, Accessed: 23/06/2014 06:39 and E.R. Leach, *Political System of Highland Burma: A Study of Kachin Social Structure*, p. 224.

⁵⁴¹ David Nugent, 'Closed Systems and Contradiction: The Kachin In and Out of History, Man', *New Series*, vol. 17, no. 3 (Sep., 1982), pp. 508-527, *Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland*, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/5526452>, Accessed: 24/06/2014 03:52

⁵⁴² Imdad Hussain, p. 33.

⁵⁴³ A. C. Banarjee, p. 483.

⁵⁴⁴ John F. Michell, *The North East Frontier of India, 1883*, cited in Lila Gogoi, *The Tai Khmati of North East India*, p. 238.

territory without any roads.⁵⁴⁵ Even if the troops were concentrated on one of its passes, leaving the others exposed, dividing troops across each pass would render each detachment too weak to withstand an enemy onslaught.⁵⁴⁶ Hence, a strategic settlement with the Singphos straddling both Burma and Assam was the suitable for British. The community could be used as a buffer zone against the Burmese until a complete cartographic exploration of the area.⁵⁴⁷ However, this policy of buffer zone was not feasible without maintaining strict control over the tribes at the frontiers straddling the divide.⁵⁴⁸ The British armed Bisa Gam and those allied chiefs with 40 or 50 muskets to enable them to preserve peace in the frontier.⁵⁴⁹

4.6 Roots of the Singphos Resistance Movement

In order to understand the roots of the resistance movement, it is important to recapitulate the pre-colonial socio-economic and political profile of the Singphos. The Singphos were divided into innumerable independent groups under different chiefs on the basis of lineage and clan. These chiefs were independent of each other and did not follow any common chief family system, therefore, the political and defence unit of tribe starts with the household and lineage of the particular chief, followed by the clan and village. Each chief had its own network of friendships and an alliance and often indifferent to the fate of co-powerful chiefs. Sometimes, one or more villages were

⁵⁴⁵ The road used for many hundreds of years between Upper Burmah and Assam was from Old Bisa in the Hukawng valley to Bisa, a Singpho village in the district of Lakhimpur, about due south of Sadiya. Bisa can be reached from the Brahmaputra in four days by either the Buri Dihing or the Noa Dihing, and there are paths to it by the banks of these rivers. It will be seen by the following routes that from Beesa to the summit of the Patkai is a four days' march, and from there to Old Bisa or Nenpyen, at the Burmese side of the pass, is an easy six days' march through the hills. There are only a few villages between Bisa and Old Bisa, and provisions have to be carried, thus rendering the route difficult for individual traveller.

⁵⁴⁶ Imdad Hussain, p. 33.

⁵⁴⁷ New Delhi, NAI, FSC, no. 15, 11 June, 1824.

⁵⁴⁸ Kolkata, WBSA, Bengal Judicial Proceeding (henceforth BJP), no. 1, 20th September 1835.

⁵⁴⁹ Dispur, ASA, PDP, letter issued to Govt. vol. 3, form F. Jenkins, letter no 22, 5th September, 1835.

attacked and burnt by a hostile raiding party, while the other villages did not even attempt to come to their rescue until they were not an alliance. There were numerous feuds among the chiefs and it was common practice to capture the debtor or any of his relatives and keep him in captivity until the repayment of debt or ransom. The lure of loot, hope for handsome ransom from the enemy, and claim of unpaid dues and sense of redressing the wrong through retributive action were a major cause of feuds and killing. The elopement with another's wife, prospective wife and stealing of the animals were some of the other motivating factors. Sometimes their conflicts were settled by the intervention of a reinforcing authority of *Tra-Tangdai*. The problem related to the individuals, village and inter-village were under the purview of *Tra-Tangdai*. Trespassing dominions of others like hunting ground, fishing area, cultivatable land etc without the consent of the village chief was tantamount to meddling, amounting to loss of manhood for the person concerned. Such meddling was viewed as a violation of the chiefs' rights and against the customary laws of the village. They practiced the certain tradition of honour and revenge based on *lex talionis*. They believed that the soul of the murdered individual will torment them until his soul is appeased by the death of his enemies and further the anger of the deity would be roused, if an opportunity of retaliation be neglected.⁵⁵⁰ All these practices were unlike English common law.

4.6.1 Colonial Intervention in Tribal Feuds

The numerous Singpho chiefs, compete with each other for political and economic space, with the more powerful possessing greater influence over the neighbouring chiefs.⁵⁵¹ This competition resulted in constant feuds among the chiefs

⁵⁵⁰ Interview with Nirmara Maio, 55 years of aged, female, ASM, Piyong village, Namsai district, Arunachal Pradesh, interviewed on 14th January, 2016.

⁵⁵¹ Dispur, ASA, PDP, Letter Received from District Officers, April to December 1825-1828, vol. 1, from Neufville to David Scott, 19th April 1825.

representing different clans. All the chiefs had made their fortune as military leaders since the days of Moamaria rebellion; therefore, it was difficult to control these chiefs. These feuds among them began to spread and intensified after Burmese withdrew from Assam.⁵⁵² This ultimately led to a division of the Singphos into two opposing camps allied either to the Duffa Gam or Bisa Gam.⁵⁵³ Therefore, they were always on a lookout to outdo the other by aligning with the two powerful chiefs.

The quarrel between Duffa Gam and Bisa Gam began in early 1823, when Bisa Gam proposed to Duffa to attack the Moamaria chief, Barsenapati. The offer was not only declined but a timely warning to the Barsenapati led to a considerable loss to Bisa Gam.⁵⁵⁴ Hence, in retaliation Bisa attacked Duffa's village, brutally murdered his wife and several others, forcibly taking possession of his property and slaves, forcing him to take shelter in Hukwang valley.⁵⁵⁵ According to oral traditions, the main reason for these unending family feuds between these two chiefs began after the elopement of Duffa Gam's wife with Bisa Gam, though not claimed by British sources.⁵⁵⁶ It is pertinent to mention Edmund Leach's observation 'among Kachins the feuds are typically between lineages and the disputes typically concern women- it is a feud between group potentially in *mayu-dama* (asymmetric marriage alliance) relationship'.⁵⁵⁷ Therefore, in the spirit of vengeance Duffa Gam did not support Bisa against the Moamaria instead; he informed Moamaria about the impending, which had enabled them to repel the attack while Bisa's party incurred several losses.⁵⁵⁸

⁵⁵² E. R. Leach, p. 224.

⁵⁵³ Both these Gam were distant lineage brothers.

⁵⁵⁴ H. K. Barpujari, vol. 1, P. 99.

⁵⁵⁵ Kolkata, WBSA, BPC, no. 1, 28th August, 1835.

⁵⁵⁶ Interview with Nirmara Maio, 55 years of aged, female, ASM, Piyong village, Namsai district, Arunachal Pradesh, interviewed on 14th January, 2016.

⁵⁵⁷ For details see E. R. Leach, p. 217.

⁵⁵⁸ H. K. Barpujari, vol. I, p. 100.

Hence, when British came to Upper Assam they found the Singphos despite being a powerful group stood disunited under various jealous chiefs scattered into a number of independent chieftainships without any common authority or bond of union, except during when opportunities to satisfy personal vendetta arose.⁵⁵⁹ The British encountered the Singphos were under different chiefs in the vicinity of Tengapani were Niphoonnong, Tangsangtau, Jowbsang, Nidong, Koonkie, Phoop, Oompheedor, Luttora, Ong, Keemingdoo, Niyang, Lajee, Humannong, Nakinchong, Nisah, Koomiyunglah, Ninayong, jooloo, Nisah, Doboan, Jowna, Wakhut. Along the Noa Dihing river were Komonjong, Wakhut, Soanjang, Kamchowjow. On the Mudhoo and Jengloo-Phanee river were Luthaon-Jowbong, Simaen, Moolan, Jowken, Nisam, Phoinchee, Seerola Sen, Mokhok, Nidhen Lekhala, Nizen Chowkhen. In addition, on the Boree Dihing were Kimglong, Chamsong, Ningroola, Bisa, Lakhoon, Noobrong, Lajong, Seong, Bathamgam, Moongong, Lpwkeem.⁵⁶⁰ Bayfield refers to this aspect thus, 'the Singphos have no acknowledged chief, each chief is the independent head of his own village, and attacks his neighbours if aggrieved or thinks he can do so with success.'⁵⁶¹In the words of Mackenzie:

They were not ordinarily, or save for combined aggression, a united tribes, but an aggregation of independent petty canons each under its own chief and each jealous of independent of the other and quite ready to attack its neighbour, if need were or interest prompted.⁵⁶²

The existing tribal feuds were further intensified when the British decided the first line of defence proclaimed Bisa Gam as the head of all the Singphos in 1829 and

⁵⁵⁹ Kolkata, WBSA, BSPC, no. 25, 20 May, 1825.

⁵⁶⁰ J. Butler, pp. 60-61.

⁵⁶¹ Bayfield, G. T. 1873. Narrative of a journey from Ava to the frontiers of Assam and back, performed between December 1836 and May 1837, under the orders of Lt. Col. Burney, Resident at Ava, *Hill Tract between Assam and Burma: Selection of Papers*, p. 222.

⁵⁶² Alexander Mackenzie, p. 63.

made him as *Sunzatee*. He was vested with some degree of authority over the rest of the chiefs, and became the channel for official communication. His duties consisted mainly of furnishing information to the authorities of any happening near the frontier perceived to excite agitation and apprehension.⁵⁶³ This was followed by a proclamation that, ‘the Singphos would be expelled from Assam and their properties would be confiscated if they fail to come forward for the agreement within two months’.⁵⁶⁴ This policy of divide and rule further intensified the existing bitterness and hurt the pride of the other rebel chiefs who did not consider Bisa as supreme chief. This had been testified by Jenkins that;

The Bisa Gam chief of Singphos was selected by Mr. Scott to be the organ of communication with the British government and in alliance with us but otherwise, he possessed no superiority over the other chiefs and was considered as their equal.⁵⁶⁵

Therefore, this policy of eliminating other chiefs who did not come for agreement by making Bisa Gam as head of all chiefs had hurt the pride of other chiefs who transferred their allegiance to Duffa Gam.⁵⁶⁶

The British intensified the tribal feud by supporting Bisa Gam, who was taking advantage of their support resorted to ravage and plunder in the lowlands belonging to Duffa Gam.⁵⁶⁷ In 1834 Bisa Gam attacked Wa-khyeet-teng and killed its chief who happened to be the father-in-law of Duffa Gam.⁵⁶⁸ Besides, he even challenged Duffa Gam by sending him a musket ball and a flint with a message- ‘if you are a human, come on’.⁵⁶⁹ This act of Bisa Gam under British protection had aggravated the existing

⁵⁶³ Kolkata, WBSA, BSPC, no. 9, 14th July, 1826.

⁵⁶⁴ H. K. Barpujari, vol. 1, p. 38.

⁵⁶⁵ Kolkata, WBSA, BPC, no. 1, 28th August, 1835.

⁵⁶⁶ Edmund Leach, p. 224.

⁵⁶⁷ Pisi Gam, 67 years of aged, male, public leader, Miao Township, Changlang district, Arunachal Pradesh, interviewed on 18th January, 2016.

⁵⁶⁸ H. K. Barpujari, vol. I, p. 100

⁵⁶⁹ Dispur, ASA, PDP, Letter issued to Govt. series-II, vol. 3, no. 12, July 1835.

rivalries. Accordingly, on 10th July 1835, Duffa Gam made a surprise attack supported by Hukwang Singphos in the district south of Sadiya occupied by clans allied to Bisa Gam.⁵⁷⁰ The invaders attacked the village, plundered and burnt down their houses after massacring its inhabitants indiscriminately killing near about 90 people. Among them were various Marwari families, including the wife and the sister-in-law of the Bisa Gam.⁵⁷¹

This attack by Duffa Gam generated a discussion among the higher British officials like the Deputy Governor of Bengal, enquiring into the degree of interference in the internal feuds of the Singphos seeking justification. Major White responded thus: ‘we are amply justified in retaliating Duffa on the ground of his wanton massacre and plunder of property of British native merchants residing at Beesa’.⁵⁷² Further he reminded him of David Scott’s agreement to treat them as the first line of defence thus:

It was with the object of neutralizing the hostility of a substantial majority of the tribe and of making them a counterpoise against the hostile elements on the other side of the patkai, that engagement was made with Bisa and several other Gams.⁵⁷³

To keep Duffa Gam restrained at Hukwang, Major White was ordered to pursue with the Court of Ava to arrest Duffa Gam. He was also empowered to exercise his discretion to carry out an operations against the Duffa Gam and authorized to offer Rupees 1000 as an incentive for apprehension of Duffa Gam.⁵⁷⁴ Accordingly, he pursued Duffa for dialogue and on 17th November 1835 finally, Duffa Gam agreed to attend a meeting with him at Manbhoom Hills. In this meeting, Duffa put forth his grievances and demanded to be allowed to reoccupy his ancestral land which was

⁵⁷⁰ Dispur, ASA, PDP, Letter issued to Govt. series-II, vol. 3, no. 12, July 1835.

⁵⁷¹ Kolkata, WBSA, BSPC, no. 10, 3 August, 1835.

⁵⁷² H. K. Barpujari, vol. I, p. 100.

⁵⁷³ Kolkata, WBSA, BPC, no. 1, 20 September, 1835.

⁵⁷⁴ Dispur, ASA, FDP, no. 11, 24th November, 1835.

captured by Bisa under British protection. Instead of taking into consideration these demands, Major White insisted on his unconditional surrender and payment of a penalty for destruction of property of merchants and the murder of Beesa villagers. This fine was in the form of cash, elephant teeth or gold dust, etc.⁵⁷⁵ On the other hand, Duffa Gam declared that 'it would be impossible for him to remain quiet and happy as long as he is deprived of his paternal estate'.⁵⁷⁶ Consequently, this resulted in the breakdown of negotiation and the hostilities were renewed.

4.6.2 Colonial Intervention in the Institution of Slavery

As discussed in chapter three, the emancipation of slavery found great favour among the abolitionist in England whose impact manifested itself in India. Slavery among Singphos came under direct attack in 1825 when Neufville on 4th April informed four cantons under Luttora Gam, Lattao Gam, Bisa Gam, and Duffa Gam that they would be allowed quiet possession of their lands if they surrender their slaves, and gave up their booty.⁵⁷⁷ Singphos resisted this demand of emancipation of slaves with the help of the Burmese.⁵⁷⁸ This resistance was successfully dealt with by Neufville, who chased out the remnants of the Burmese army from the Assam frontier by July, 1825 and chased the Singphos towards the forests, liberating over three thousand slaves.⁵⁷⁹ However, despite such measures, the Singphos were not completely subjugated and slavery continued to thrive among them. Neufville further marched into the very heart of the Singpho area on 27th August, 1825 and released

⁵⁷⁵ H.K. Barpujari, vol. 1, p. 103.

⁵⁷⁶ New Delhi, NAI, FPC, letter from Lieutenant Burney to the Secretary to the Government of India, no 45, 26th September, 1836.

⁵⁷⁷ Alexander Mackenzie, p. 63.

⁵⁷⁸ The slaves who were the back bone of Singpho's economy, who performed all the agriculture labour like breaking up of soil with common plough of Assam, and buffaloes, S.F. Hannay, *Sketch of Singpho*, pp. 22-23.

⁵⁷⁹ Kolkata, WBSA, BSPC, no. 19, 2 September, 1825.

about 1400 slaves.⁵⁸⁰ Through their agreement of May, 1826, the Singphos were forced to agree to set free any Assamese people whom the British seized, and the freed slaves were allowed to reside wherever they pleased as a British subject.⁵⁸¹

This policy of punishing the Singphos appeared conflicting as the British followed an inconsistent policy for Assam. The slaves as personal property were allowed to be retained by the people of the plains in Assam while they forcefully released the slaves of the hill tribes. In 1825 David Scott and Colonel Richards issued a joint proclamation notifying that 'the right of the Assamese to a property in their slaves would be respected'.⁵⁸² On the contrary, the Khamtis, Singphos, and Matakas were forced to free their slaves. Despite such strict stand on slavery, it continued among the Singphos clandestinely till 1833.

However, retaining of slaves became difficult with the arrival of Lt. Charlton at Sadiya in 1834. He was empowered to conduct relations with these chiefs and take cognizance of affairs of Sadiya.⁵⁸³ Colonial intervention had created constraint in the economic practice and it disrupted the political atmosphere in the hills. In order to renew the supply of slaves, the Singphos frequently raided the Mossang, Longchang and Muklom Tangsa villages.⁵⁸⁴ Accordingly in 1837 Captain Hannay and Dr. Griffith's were sent across the Patkai hills to negotiate with Burma regarding the Duffa Gam. They encountered a rebel group who had destroyed several villages in the present Changlang district and dragged the gang of captives.⁵⁸⁵ The government thought of appointing a European officer on the upper waters of Buri Dihing, which

⁵⁸⁰ Kolkata, WBSA, BSPC, no. 15, 30 September, 1825.

⁵⁸¹ H.K. Barpujari, p. 37.

⁵⁸² Parliament Paper, 1837-38, Mathie to Jenkins, 31 July, 1837, cited in Meena Sharma Barkataki, *British Administration...*, p. 140.

⁵⁸³ Alexander Mackenzie, p. 66.

⁵⁸⁴ Narayan Singh Rao, *The Tutsa Tribe of North East India: Origin, Migration and History part-I*, Mittal Publication, New Delhi, 2010, p. 183.

⁵⁸⁵ New Delhi, NAI, FPC, no. 65, 8 May, 1837.

was abandoned due to economic considerations.⁵⁸⁶ On 19th April, 1837 Jenkins, after consulting Captain S.F. Hannay, who had returned from the frontier, submitted a proposal to Government on the establishment of a military post close to the Nagas on the river Buridihing between Jaipur and its confluence with the Brahmaputra. The post was to be manned by a European commanding officer, a native commissioned officer and detachment of twenty sepoy from Assam Light Infantry. A proportion of non-commissioned officers comprised of two Havildar, two Naiks and twenty men each to be raised from among the Duaniyas and Khamtis. The Government was initially reluctant to adopt this plan as the proposed post would be too isolated and far removed from the support base. When further inroads of the Singphos into Nagas territory were reported the following month, the Agent once again pressed for the adoption of his plan to which the Government accorded sanction.⁵⁸⁷ This use of Nagas against the Singphos proved to be beneficial for the British in the long run as they could check their movements across the frontier. It proved particularly beneficial during a major Singpho rebellion as the Nagas along with Duania formed the main levies supporting the British to suppress the insurgent groups. Tribal feuds were thus manipulated and this instance of the Company began to play the Eastern Nagas (Nocte and Wancho - Mossang, Longchang, Muklom, Lungwangs Tangsa, and Noctes) against the Singphos.⁵⁸⁸ This conflict manifested itself after 1825, the sole reason being the frequent raids by Singphos into Tangas villages.⁵⁸⁹ Raids continued primarily to ensure a supply of the slaves as it was no longer possible to enslave *ryot* of Assam who were British subjects.

⁵⁸⁶ Narayan Singh Rao, *The Tutsa Tribe of North East India*, p.166.

⁵⁸⁷ Imdad Hussain, p. 83.

⁵⁸⁸ In the annual administration report of the British period the Noctes together with the Wanchos have been referred to as the Eastern Nagas.

⁵⁸⁹ Sig Chau Ja Maio, 58 years of aged, male, public leader (President of the Tai Khamti-Singpho Council), Piyong village, Namsai district, Arunachal Pradesh, interviewed on 14th January, 2016.

However, anti-slavery was posited as a humanitarian measure to punish the tribes. In real terms, it was linked with labour demands on the tea plantations since the 1830s. Indigenous labour was generally insufficient to meet even the local needs for agriculture.⁵⁹⁰ Procuring free labour was difficult in the plains of Assam in the absence of the concept of working for wages. Land and capital were in abundance and the sole impediment to the uninterrupted development of the tea gardens was inadequate supply of labour. C.A. Bruce, the Superintendent of tea culture in Assam, voiced his concern about the acute shortage of population to work as labourers and tea makers.⁵⁹¹ In view of this scarcity, the institution of slavery became the primary target for the colonial rulers.⁵⁹² The release and resettlement of slaves would provide labour force for growing plantation industry and other colonial ventures like construction of roads, stockades, officer's bungalows, and barracks for armies, etc. The slaves of Singphos were considered fit as they were energetic and industrious.⁵⁹³

The establishment of the tea industry and military posts further disrupted slavery as many slaves taking advantage of the British posts escaped to their jurisdiction. This escaping of Singpho slaves is evident from the following passage thus:

No encouragement has been held out by us to the slaves to desert, but...the high pay they can command for their labour at Assam Company's Tea plantation is a great additional inducement to elope; for a short period of service enables them to save sufficient money to set themselves up comfortably as *ryots*.⁵⁹⁴

⁵⁹⁰ H. Goswami, 'Circumstance Leading to the Importance of Tea Estate Labourers to Assam', *Journal of Historical Research*, vol. II, March 1977, p. 1.

⁵⁹¹ A.K. Thakur, *Slavery in Arunachal Pradesh*, p. 136.

⁵⁹² Amalunda Guha, *Planter Raj to Swaraj*, p. 206.

⁵⁹³ New Delhi, NAI, FPC, letter from White to Jenkins, no. 49, 27 June, 1836.

⁵⁹⁴ New Delhi, NAI, FPC, letter from F. Jenkins to the Secretary to the Government of India, nos. 90-106, 12th August, 1843.

So taking advantage of the situation a large number of slaves have deserted their women and children. All these slaves were either the captives formerly taken away from Assam or their descendent and they were claimed by the chiefs as their obtained by purchase or descent.⁵⁹⁵

In 1840, sixty runaways were claimed to be their slaves by the Singpho which composed of 21 males, 28 females and 11 children. The desertion of slaves on their own volition further fuelled discontent among the Singphos when the British refused to return the runaway slaves. This was contrary to the traditional practice under the Ahoms who returned the deserting slaves to the rightful masters.⁵⁹⁶ Captain White in 1836 gave permission to a considerable number of Assamese populations settled under the jurisdiction of chief Beesa and Jagoon to shift to Dalla and Jaipur. The deprivation of their principal source of wealth created ill will against the government.⁵⁹⁷

Targeting the institution of slavery revolved around three major issues. By emancipating the slaves, British wanted to weaken the tribe and force them as an agricultural tribe. In the words of Neufville, ‘emancipation of slavery would automatically weaken the Singphos to the necessity of their own exertions’.⁵⁹⁸ Later on Jenkins added, ‘on the other hand, the British were of the view that as long as any slave remains with the Singphos, they would never settle down quietly, either to agriculture or commerce’. He also stated that , ‘between 1826 to 1837 the British government was able to release 10,000 slaves from the Singphos and Khamtis’, and they believed that, ‘this release of slave will force them to settle into order and

⁵⁹⁵ New Delhi, NAI, FDPC, no. 139, 20th May, 1840.

⁵⁹⁶ Meena Sharma Barkataki, p. 157.

⁵⁹⁷ New Delhi, NAI, FSC, no. 1, 20 November, 1843.

⁵⁹⁸ Neufville, *On Geography and Population*, pp. 343-4.

tranquillity, and that by a gradual amelioration in their habits and character their descendent may become peaceable and valuable subject'.⁵⁹⁹

The freed slaves seeking wage labour would be a boon to the tea industry suffering from terrible labour shortage in the early part of its development. Further emancipated population could be converted into a population of taxpaying *ryots* on government settled lands in the plains. Hence, the release and desertion of the slaves impoverished the Singpho economy which was visible just after the arrival of British into the area as noted by Wilcox:

Latao a Singphos village of six or eight houses was surprised by Captian Neufville's party in 1825, and now, deprived of his slaves, I found the Chief (a fine old human of a very communicative disposition), reduced to the necessity of guiding the plough with his own hands. Many of the Singphos villages had suffered equally with this...a great number of the scanty population would probably have been compelled to emigrate to Hukwang.⁶⁰⁰

Hence, this made the Singphos more discontent and rebellious against the British.

4.6.3 Singphos and Cross-Border Trade

Due to the geographical location, Arunachal Pradesh or erstwhile North-East Frontier Tract is traversed the existence of numerous overland passes into Tibet, China, and Burma through its territories. These traditional passes or trade routes encouraged the flow of populations and goods attracting the attention of the British in the early nineteenth century. The Governor General's Council in a Minute stated that as early as 1826, 'we may expect to open new roads for commerce with Yunnan and other south western provinces of the Celestial Empire through Assam and Manipur'.⁶⁰¹ This opening of the trade route from Assam to Burma would ease transit for the

⁵⁹⁹ New Delhi, NAI, FDPC, letter from Agent to the Governor General in the North-Eastern Frontier to the Secretary to the Government of India, nos. 101-04, 23rd May, 1850.

⁶⁰⁰ Lieutenant R. Wilcox, Memoir of a survey of Assam and the neighbouring countries, executed in 1825-9-7-8, *Hill Tract between Assam and Burma: Selection of Papers*, p. 25.

⁶⁰¹ Kolkata, WBSA, BSC, May 12, 1826 (minutes on the treaty of Yandaboo), cited in R.M. Lahiri, p.49.

representative of the East India Company stationed at Canton, in view of the truncated transmission of European goods into the interior in China due to the imposition of high duties by Chinese.⁶⁰² Therefore, the southwestern province of China construed to be at a distance of two hundred miles from the northern-most region of the Singpho territory was very alluring for the mercantile British in Assam.

Aware of the strategic position occupied by the Singphos in the context of Burma the British were not keen of keeping the tribe discontented in the interest of frontier policy. Hence, a certain measure of conciliation it was felt could help balance the situation and engage them in productive activities to compensate for their loss while benefiting the British too. Therefore, Mr. Scott tried to address this difficulty by opening up the traditional trade routes from Assam through Singpho territory to Burma and from there to China⁶⁰³. This would not only facilitate the establishment a commercial links with Burma and China but also will weaning away the Singphos from their predatory habits once they were engaged to act as a go-between in trading process between Assam and Burma.⁶⁰⁴

It is imperative to mention that Wilcox, Bedford, and Burlton were pioneers of survey and exploration of the terrain in this region. Their inquiry not only dispelled the myth which had previously enveloped this extreme northeast frontier of India but also produced a rich corpus of commercial information about this region.⁶⁰⁵ Their reports of explorations revealed that extent of the area inhabited by the Singphos provided access to innumerable commercial routes in the eastern frontier of India. There was a considerable demand of the European goods as well as a species of silk cloth supplied

⁶⁰² Kolkata, WBSA, Political Consultation, no. 50, 10 June, 1838.

⁶⁰³ Kolkata, WBSA, BPC, no. 114, 5th October, 1831; S. Dutta (ed.), SHECCAP, p. 65.

⁶⁰⁴ R.M Lahiri, p. 48.

⁶⁰⁵ R.B. Pemberton, pp. 134-136.

by the Burmese in the Khamti and Singpho areas.⁶⁰⁶This encouraged the British to establish a market in the foothills of their habitation with the view to promote the British woollen goods in north east of India.⁶⁰⁷

Steps were taken by Mr. Scott and Captain Neufville to facilitate such trade. As private merchants were not available to carry on trade in this remote and inhospitable region, therefore, an attempt was at first made to carry on trade through the government agency. In 1828 of about 4000, rupees of woollen goods were sent up to Sadiya.⁶⁰⁸ With an intention to open a trading facility in 1830, an attempt was indeed made to create a trading point at Sadiya, through a government depot. Charles Alexander Bruce described by the historian as a ‘merchant adventurer’ was appointed on a monthly salary of Rs. 100 and with a share in the profits.⁶⁰⁹ This initiative of British proved to be favourable for the development of trade development in Sadiya. With the stationing of a permanent British officer in Sadiya many enterprising Marwari merchants hailing western side India reached here to carry on the commercial transactions. They established factory at Sadiya and Beesa. It is imperative to mention that one of the Marwari pushed on to the Hukwang Valley in Burma with a view to opening a factory there.⁶¹⁰ They imported broadcloth, muslins, long clothes and coloured handkerchiefs, chintzes, salt, opium, wine, rice, glass and crockery wares, tobacco, betel-nut etc., which they bartered to different tribes occupying the surrounding hills for gold, gold dust, ivory silver, amber, musk, Burmese cloths and Chinese boxes.⁶¹¹ In the year 1833, cotton, up to the quantity of 400 *maunds* was

⁶⁰⁶ R.B. Pemberton, pp. 146-188.

⁶⁰⁷ R.M. Lahiri, p. 48.

⁶⁰⁸ J. Butlar, p. 88.

⁶⁰⁹ Nirode Barooah, *David Scott in North-East India*, p. 126.

⁶¹⁰ R.B. Pemberton, p. 72.

⁶¹¹ R.B. Pemberton, p. 72.

bartered to the Marwari merchant by the hill tribes.⁶¹² Captain S.F. Hannay, of the 40th Regiment, Native Infantry who had travelled from the capital of Ava to the amber mines of the Hukwang valley, on the southeast frontier of Assam in 1835-36, recorded extensive trade that went on in several places of Burma between the Burmese and the Chinese.⁶¹³ His report, established the position of the district of Bhamo as an important site trade between the Burmese and Chinese, which the British merchants were most anxious to share. Captain Jenkins too reported that the:

Singphos of Assam now carry on trade of some consequence with the Shans and Chinese of Yunnan through the province of Ava and the Resident of Ava should be advised to watch this rising trade and to give it all the support.⁶¹⁴

It was believed that once the trade routes open to connect Burma, they would easily be able to check the movement of Singphos residing in Hukwang. In this context Jenkins states that:

If we able to open this routes with the cooperation from Burmese ruler then it will help us to make the Burmese held responsible for any outrages committed on our frontier by any tribes inhabiting within their boundary. The Singphos will perceive that we are able to command the interference of the Burmese and that they are consequently liable to a concert attack from both power... this will greatly help to restrain them from any future incursion. On the other hand, the presence of military in both Assam and Burmese side will discourage the Singphos to make any attack. The presence of a respectable force on our side at Sadiya and of a Burmese at Hukwang will compel the chiefs to be quit and obedient. This will bring a reformation of their present turbulent habit and will gradual led to a state of tranquility and advancement of trade and agriculture. Therefore our (English) resident will be instructed to pursue the Burmese resident to station a force permanently at Hukwang to act in concert with our troops if need against the Singphos but more particularly with a view to secure a safe communication between the frontier provinces for the trade of either country.⁶¹⁵

⁶¹² R.B. Pemberton, p. 72.

⁶¹³ For details see, 'Abstract of the Journal of a Route travelled by Captain S.F. Hannay', in *Hill Tract Between Assam and Burma*, 1988.

⁶¹⁴ Kolkata, WBSA, BPC, no. 90, 11 February, 1835.

⁶¹⁵ Kolkata, WBSA, BPC, letter from F. Jenkins to the Secretary to the Government of Bengal, no. 23, 5th April, 1835.

Further by opening the trade link through Singpho territory would help them to emancipate the remaining slaves controlled along the Burmese frontier. In the words of Jenkins, ‘if open the road to Ava this would be in great measure accomplishment...as it would help us to free the slaves and taking advantage of the road the slave will migrate toward Assam’.⁶¹⁶ To open this commercial link medical officer Mr. G. T. Bayfield from the establishment of Fort St. George, was deputed to tour from Ava to the frontier of Assam and back in 1836-37.⁶¹⁷ It was to determine the extent and nature of the trade between China and the Burmese dominions as well as the British territories in Assam, while persuading the governor of Mogaung to prevent the Singphos and other tribal subjects of Ava from committing incursions. Therefore, while keenly seeking to extend their trade into neighbouring countries, they also desired to manipulate commercial manoeuvres articulated more so to control the tribes. This did not take off, as by 1830s British interest shifted from trade to industries like tea plantation, coal mining, gold washing, petroleum industry and exploitation of forest resources.⁶¹⁸ Its failure was summed by Mackenzie thus: ‘the idea was a good one, and, if properly developed might have had a very marked effect upon the relations of the English with ethnic groups of this frontier.’⁶¹⁹

4.6.4 Duania Levy and the Singphos

As already discussed earlier the name Duania were given to those born from Singpho and Assamese parentage. Though they emerged as a distinct tribe and even learnt the Singpho dialect known as *Duwan*. The Singpho considered them as their

⁶¹⁶ Dispur, ASA, PDP, letter from F. Jenkins to the Secretary to the Government of Bengal, no. 36, 6th June, 1836.

⁶¹⁷ Dispur, ASA, Letter received from Government, vol. 26, no. 402, Elliot to Jenkins, 18th February 1838.

⁶¹⁸ S. Dutta, ‘Border Trade of Arunachal Pradesh: Its Impact on Economy and Society 19th – 20th Centuries’, in David R. Syimleh and Manorama Sharma (eds.), *Society and Economy in North-East India*, p. 69.

⁶¹⁹ Mackenzie, pp. 64-65

subject as the term *Duwan* means king and the term *Duania* therefore signifies the subject of the king. Therefore, when the British began to interfere in the slavery institution of the Singphos hundreds of *Duanias* were also freed from the masters.⁶²⁰

Singpho inroads between 1830 and 1835 amply demonstrated the vulnerability of Patkai frontier. Except *Bisa Gam*, the other chiefs supplied neither grains nor men, nor even information as demanded by the British; rather they rendered substantial aid to the rebel *Duffa* and his followers. There was general feeling among the friendly chiefs that their alliance with the British brought no gain, rather put a check on plundering the lowlands, and previously used to procure slaves essential for their livelihood.⁶²¹ This attitude of Singpho had shaken the policy of buffer tribe, therefore, in order to contain *Bisa Gam* and his parties it was suggested by *Jenkins* that the best strategy was to communicate the court of *Ava* and arrest Singphos of *Hukwang* valley. This policy of *Jenkins* too failed miserably. Hence, the other option was to extend the lines of defence and bring the tribes under direct military subjugation, but this too was considered unfeasible as such a vast frontier lacked adequate military cover.⁶²² On the other hand if large military would be sent in the frontier then it would create suspicious among the tribes who cherished their independence above everything else.⁶²³ After exploring options on containing the Singphos it was hinted that a distinct militia should be created to assist the military station against attacks.

Accordingly, *Jenkins* found the *Duania* suited to be a fighting force like the *Garos* of Lower *Assam*. According to *Jenkins* the *Duania* were, ‘*Assamese* by race, but *Burmese* and *Shan* or *Singphos* by education and habits’.⁶²⁴ Therefore, if they

⁶²⁰ Interview with *Mirim Du Singpho*, 72 years of aged, male, village elder, *Bordumsa* township, *Changlang* district, *Arunachal Pradesh*, interviewed on 19th January, 2016.

⁶²¹ *H.K. Barpujari*, vol. I, p. 104.

⁶²² *New Delhi, NAI, FPC*, no. 90, 29th August, 1838.

⁶²³ *Imdad Hussain*, p. 84.

⁶²⁴ *New Delhi, NAI, FPC*, letter from *Jenkins* to *White*, no. 90, 29 August, 1837.

were recruited under a European officer, they could obviate the necessity of employing upcountry sepoys in this frontier. The Duania Levy thus created and trained by a competent military officer could take over the duties at the outposts hitherto earlier held by the Assam Militia. In times of native military operations, they could be useful as an auxiliary force in bringing up convoys and securing the lines of communication. The Agent also hoped that if government sanctioned the Duania militia levy then it would lay down the foundation of a military spirit among the frontier tribes, which could be of great value in the future.⁶²⁵ Through them government sought to persuade to create a group of people who would stand in support of British. As the Singpho incursion of 1830 and 1835 had proved that the British had failed to win the support of Singphos who made agreement with British in 1826. On the other hand their attachment to government cannot, for many years, be expected to be sincere.⁶²⁶ Therefore, they were looking for other group and in this context the Duania were the best choice. The British knew that the Duania were of the same class as the Singpho tribes. Therefore, they could be very useful auxiliaries in frontier wars from their knowledge of the Singpho language and tactics, while assured of their fidelity as the Government had released them from the Singphos yoke.⁶²⁷ The energetic frontier population of the Duania could be a valuable prop for the Government. Without their aid, no military detachment could move to many parts of the frontier, for none were as expert as pioneers. With the *dao* they easily cut a footpath through the dense forests in the most expeditious manner, which enables the British troops to move almost in any direction.⁶²⁸

⁶²⁵ Imdad Hussain, p. 84.

⁶²⁶ New Delhi, NAI, FPC, letter from Jenkins to White, no. 90, 29 August, 1837.

⁶²⁷ E.T. Dalton, pp. 9-13; Verrier Elwin, p. 402.

⁶²⁸ J. Butler, p. 126.

Finally after the Khamtis insurrection of 1839, four companies were founded under the Upper Assam Sebundy Corps with headquarters at Bishwanath with Captain Philip Mainwaring of the 33rd Native Infantry as commandant of this sebundy corps, of which one corps was completely recruited from among the Duania and other hills tribes. Loosely organized and armed only with the musket and whatever side arms the men might choose to carry, they were scattered in advance of the cordon of posts to act as scouts and guides. This policy of British to recruit the Duania was perceived by the Singphos as an encroachment on their traditional rights and privileges and gave them every reason to treat this as a grievance. This Duania militia taking advantage of the British force frequently intrigued with the women of the village, taking them into the stockades where they were seduced by the sepoys. Particularly vulnerable were the women slaves, a few of whom when the guards was relieved eloped with the sepoys. The Singpho chiefs had also to face social issues when a chief's affianced bride was also seduced by the sepoys stationed at stockade.⁶²⁹ Captain Hannay states that within the last few years greater changes have taken place in the circumstance of the Singpho chiefs than at any former period. One principal cause identified had been the occupation of tea land, the demand for coolies and the favourable wages given to men principally of the Duania class as tea makers.⁶³⁰ The effect of this was that several chiefs were left without even the means to subsistence for it must be held in recollection that most of the Singphos village of the Beesa and Duffa families beyond the chief and his immediate relation consisted solely of slaves and dependents.⁶³¹ The Duania infantry were actively engaged against the Singphos rebels.

⁶²⁹ New Delhi, NAI, FDSP, letter from C. L. Reynolds Lt ALG to Major White, no. 92, 12th November, 1843.

⁶³⁰ New Delhi, NAI, FDSP, letter from F. Hannay to F. Jenkins, no. 92, 20th November, 1843.

⁶³¹ New Delhi, NAI, FDSP, no. 92, 20th November, 1843.

4.6.5 Tea and Land Encroachment

The Singphos who established themselves in a fertile tract of the country called Namrup was important in terms of the natural resources produced. Their original settlement was along the southern slopes of the Patkai range extending as far as the Hukwang valley, thus occupying a wide tract of country extending along both Assam and Burma.⁶³² The soil was rich and fertile, and abundant crops of rice were easily raised both on the high and low lands. Sugarcane grew luxuriantly and tea likewise was found wild, with every part of the country intersected by fine clear streams.⁶³³ During the course of Anglo-Burmese war Neufville reported that:

The Assamese lowland occupied by Singphos, is extremely fertile, consisting almost entirely of a surface of rich alluvial earth, on a gravelly basis...it yields two crops annually, and was adapted in an admirable degree to rice cultivation, being well watered by numerous streams.⁶³⁴

The fertile land occupied by the Singphos became immensely valuable to the British when reports emerged of abundant growth of wild tea in the area.⁶³⁵ There was a possibility of it belonging to the same species found in China, one of the most coveted trading items of East India Company.⁶³⁶ However, the potential of Assam tea

⁶³² Kolkata, WBSA, BSPC, letter from A. White to the Agent to the Governor General Assam, no. 1, 28th August, 1835.

⁶³³ John Butler, *A Sketch of Assam*, p. 60.

⁶³⁴ Neufville, *On Geography and Population...*, pp. 343-4

⁶³⁵ The earliest colonial mention about the growing of wild tea in India was date in early 1815 Col. Latter, a British army officer reported that, 'the Singpho hill-tribe of Assam gathered a species of wild tea, ate with oil and garlic, after Burmese manner and also made a drink of it', in W.H. Ukers, *All about Tea*, Vol. I, New York, 1935, p. 135. This report of Col. Latter encouraged other European officers like Robert Bruce, who visited the Singpho area who sought some tea specimens as a sample from Bisa chief. He agreed to supply him tea plants and seeds during his next visit in 1824 in return for some handsome present. However, on account of the outbreak of the Anglo-Burmese war Bruce could not procure the tea samples and in the meantime he died the same year. Therefore, this pursuit was taken up by his brother Charles Alexander who was sent to Sadiya as a magazine guard with additional responsibility to explore the possibilities of the tea cultivation project in Upper Assam after the end of Anglo-Burmese war.

⁶³⁶ Jayeeta Sharma, *Empire's Garden: Assam and the Making of India*, Permanent Black, New Delhi, 2012, p. 30.

remained unknown and no serious attempt was made till disruption of supply of Chinese tea.⁶³⁷ In view of strained relation with Chinese in 1830s a serious attempt was made at the outset to determine the credibility of this wild variety for cultivation. The success of this variety as a cultivar could open up immense possibility for trade across the world. This would help the British to break Chinese monopoly as the sole producer of tea in the world market. Therefore, in order to compete with the Chinese in the world market, the English were interested in tea plant's provenance and dissemination.⁶³⁸ Lieutenant Andrew Charlton of the Assam Light Infantry took keen interest to find out the credibility of wild tea abundant in Singphos area. In this regard he also observed thus:

The Singphos and Khamtis are in habit of drinking an infusion of the leaves, which I have lately understood they prepare by pulling them into small piece, taking out the stalks and fibres, boiling and squeezing them into a ball, which they dry in the sun and retain for use⁶³⁹. He reported that tea was indigenous to this place and grew wild everywhere, all the way to Chinese province of Yunnan.⁶⁴⁰

Reports by Lt Charlton encouraged, the government to appoint a Tea Committee in 1834 to assess the scientific credibility of this wild species of tea found in the frontier of Sadiya and scope for its commercialization. Mr. Bruce, who was placed in charge of the experimental tea enterprise had obtained several hundred plants and a

⁶³⁷ If we explore the history of tea in world market, the Chinese were the sole producer and exporter of tea till the early part of nineteenth century across the world market. Its high demand in international commerce, the commodity had always been eyed by British who trade through an outflow of silver and gold bullion. There were trading restrictions in gold and silver bullion under mercantilism. Therefore, it was necessary for the British to look out for tea in their colonies so that they could save their bullion and replace monopoly of Chinese tea in the world market. The attempt to control trade intensified in 1830s due to her strained relationship with China over the East India Company's involvement in opium smuggling in China which consequently restricted the supply of tea to the English. This restriction on supply of tea forced the British mercantile interests to demand for alternate options, which would provide the regular supply of this article. Therefore, attempts to find out alternate source of tea especially in the English colonies intensified.

⁶³⁸ Jayeeta Sharma, *Empire's Garden...*, p. 28.

⁶³⁹ New Delhi, NAI, FDSC, letter from Charlton to F. Jenkins, no. 27, 8 November, 1834.

⁶⁴⁰ New Delhi, NAI, FDSC, no. 27, 8 November, 1834.

considerable quantity of seeds of the local tea plant and dispatched to the Calcutta Botanical Garden for tests to identify the specimen as cultivable variety which confirmed that, 'it is not different from the tea-plant of China'⁶⁴¹. The Tea Committee of India debunked the hitherto doubt about the authenticity of wild tea found in Assam.⁶⁴² Once it was confirmed the wild tea found in the hill tracts held prospects for commercialisation resulted into subsequent setting up of the plantation industry by the Europeans in the foothills areas.

Establishment of the plantation industry by Europeans was resented by Singphos chiefs. In 1836, the chiefs Ningroo Gam and Koojo Gam objected on the ground that their slaves would escape if the plantation industry under European planter commenced.⁶⁴³ Therefore, they requested the officials to allow them to clear the area, fence in the tea tract, guard them with their own people in return for British pledge to surrender any runaway slaves.⁶⁴⁴ However, the British did not endorse this proposal on the ground that it would be disadvantageous for planters to allow the chiefs to cultivate and manage the plantation according to their desire.⁶⁴⁵ They were also not willing to return the runaway slaves, which constituted as a major workforce in their nascent plantation industry in Assam.

Meanwhile this development of tea cultivation in frontier of Assam was subsequently linked with the wasteland policy. The growing demand for tea in international market, scope of its commercialisation required acquisition of vast tracts of unused land or wastelands. However, in traditional Singpho society there was no

⁶⁴¹ N. Barua, 'The Tea Industry of Assam, Its Historical Background', *Souvenir Published on the occasion of NEIHA session at Jorhat*, November, 1993, p.7.

⁶⁴² Debes C Gosh, *Tea Industry and Trade, Indian Tea Planters' Association*, Jalpaiguri, p.107, download by N list programme <http://www.southasiaarchive.com/Content/sarf.143016/209522/005> On: 29 November 2017 at 01:34:04, Publisher: Taylor & Francis

⁶⁴³ New Delhi, NAI, FSC, letter from F. Jenkins to the Secretary to the Government of Bengal, no. 44, 29th June, 1836.

⁶⁴⁴ New Delhi, NAI, FSC, no. 44, 29th June, 1836.

⁶⁴⁵ New Delhi, NAI, FSC, no. 44, 29th June, 1836.

concept of wasteland as they claimed all the territories under cultivation and those, which were not under cultivation, were considered as hunting ground in accordance to traditional rights. Unused land in Singpho territory was attributed to the original predatory habits of the people and hence the areas overgrown with forest should be brought under government control.⁶⁴⁶ In this context Major White states thus:

Waste may be considered to belong to government, but if the tea forest were source of any profit or advantage to the Singphos then it should not be looked upon as mere waste. It must be viewed as property to which the chiefs were entitled from actual possession but whether strictly property or not whether a forest...it would have been in my opinion beneath the liberty and dignity of the British government to take possession of the tea tract without making due compensation had any been demanded.⁶⁴⁷

Under the wasteland rule, several areas in Singpho territory were offered to the planters. Besides, they directly annexed portions of the land favourable for tea cultivation on the various pretexts. The territory under chiefs of Koojo and Jogundoo's were annexed on the ground that, 'Koojo chief had aided the Khamtis insurgent at Sadiya in 1839' and 'Jogundoo had sent a party of armed men into Matak country to steal cattle'.⁶⁴⁸ This territory under these chiefs was highly favourable for tea cultivation; consequently they were displaced from their respective habitats and pushed towards higher reaches of Dihing.⁶⁴⁹ Subsequently a European tea-planter, W.F. Bonyng moved into clear the space to occupy the tea *baris*.⁶⁵⁰

These acts of land grabbing further intensified the already embittered relations among the Singphos. Therefore, in order to pacify them the British adopted a policy of

⁶⁴⁶ Horatio Bicherstaffe Rowney, *The Wild Tribes of India*, 1882, cited in S. Dutta, 'The Historic and Pioneering Role of the Singpho in Tea Cultivation of the North-East', in S. Dutta (ed.), SHECCAP, p. 327.

⁶⁴⁷ New Delhi, NAI, FSC, no. 44, 29th June, 1836.

⁶⁴⁸ New Delhi, NAI, FDPC, letter from Vetch to Jenkins, nos. 90-106, 12 August, 1843.

⁶⁴⁹ Interview with Tingud Nong Singpho, 51 years of aged, male, Government Servant, Bordumsa township, Changlang district, Arunachal Pradesh, interviewed on 19th January, 2016.

⁶⁵⁰ New Delhi, NAI, FDPC, nos. 90-106, 12 August, 1843.

appeasement by engaging them in tea cultivation. They presumed that it would pacify them and compensate their loss in land and slave once they ventured into tea cultivation. The chief Ningroola was, therefore, encouraged to take up tea cultivation with incentive to assist him with financial and technical knowledge. This was done in order to encourage the other Singpho chiefs to get busy in such ventures hence left with little time to foment troubles against the British.⁶⁵¹ Ningroola was the only chief who was much advertised as the native maker of tea in Assam and the success of his product was that it was sold for the first time in 1840 in the Calcutta market costing 480 rupees.⁶⁵² It was thus presumed that Ningroola's success would be exemplary for others to emulate according to Jenkins:

The price his tea fetched will no doubts so well satisfy him that he will probably be induced greatly to increase his cultivation, and a reasonable hope may be entertained, that he and other Singphos similarly situated, by eventually became valuable auxiliaries to the objects of our Company.⁶⁵³

However, earnings in tea were of no significance to the Singpho as a price of political freedom and their ancestral lands. The British in order to make way for European planters in Assam slowly pushed away the Singphos from low land towards the hill tracts and converted their territory into lush tea gardens. Captain Hannay noted that, within last few years however greater change have taken place in the circumstance of the Singpho chiefs than at any former period. One principal cause of this has been the occupation of tea lands and demands for coolies and the lucrative wages given to men principally the Duania class as tea maker.⁶⁵⁴ He further argues that, 'the effect of this

⁶⁵¹ Dispur, ASA, PDP, letter from G. A. Bushly to Major F. Jenkins, 3rd August 1842, series.1, vol. 17.

⁶⁵² Dispur, ASA, PDP, Wallich to Deputy Secretary, Government of India, no. 282, 22 August, 1842.

⁶⁵³ Dispur, ASA, FDC, 30th Jan 1843, no. 17.

⁶⁵⁴ New Delhi, NAI, FDPC, letter from Hannay to Jenkins, no. 92, 20 November, 1843.

was that several chiefs were left without even the means of subsistence'.⁶⁵⁵ This large-scale occupation of land further added fuel to the fire against the British and in 1842 Bisa Gam had complained bitterly of the loss of lands due to colonial encroachment.

He claimed that:

From Namsang Mookh, Noa Dihing Mookh and to the Patkai, Gulling hills are the Singphos land...but you of the Company have forgotten what was said by Scott Sahib and Neufville Sahib and after this the Major Sahib (late Col. White) said the land is yours.⁶⁵⁶

Brodie, the acting Political Agent of Upper Assam, wrote back to the chief stating that there was no record in the Agent's office of Scott or Neufville of having ever granted any land to the Singphos. Bisa Gam replied that even if the written order was not on hand, there were government servants from the plains who could bear witness to the validity of his claims:

No *peruanah* was given, but on the Bisa's asking it, the country was given; and when Ningroola asked for lands, he was told he would receive them from the Bisa for at that time, I was proprietor, as far as Dihing Mookh. Now wherever you find tea, you make a tea garden. If it is to be so, there will be no room for the 12 gaums to remain and if you do not allow the Singphos to remain, I can say nothing.⁶⁵⁷

Hence, the colonial administrators argued that, 'no objection could be raised to the occupation of forest of which they made no use and the tea plants were not considered of any value by the Singphos'⁶⁵⁸. However, the truth was that the Singphos had been using tea since early times as they stated thus:

⁶⁵⁵ New Delhi, NAI, FDPC, no. 92, 20 November, 1843.

⁶⁵⁶ New Delhi, NAI, FDPC, nos. 90-106, 12th August, 1843, in Appendix-F, Translation of Beesa Gaum's Letter.

⁶⁵⁷ New Delhi, NAI, FDPC, nos. 90-106, 12th August, 1843, in Appendix-F, Translation of Beesa Gaum's Letter.

⁶⁵⁸ Kolkata, WBSA, BSPC, no. 51, 12th August 1843.

As far as Ningroo and that below Assam now it is said that where the tea grow that is yours but when we make sacrifice we require tea for our ritual. We, therefore, perceive you have taken all the country, and if we the old and respectable cannot get tea to drink we are not well satisfied.⁶⁵⁹

Just eight day before the insurrection broke out; the Deputy Commissioner had submitted a sketch, in which three lines were drawn from a common point at the mouth of the Noa Dihing diverging south. The most westerly was the limit of the Singphos tribes in Scott's time; further east was the limit of their cultivation now; while still further east from the Noa Dihing Mookh to Ningroo was the line to which Captain Vetch in future proposed to limit them to. This showed clearly, the Government thought how the action of the local officers was gradually pushing back these tribes from territories, which they once had occupied.⁶⁶⁰

4.6.6 Missionary Activities among the Singphos

The British failed to bring the Singphos under control through military and diplomatic persuasion. Therefore, an attempt had been made to pacify the frontier tribes despite having little administrative control over them with the help of missionaries.⁶⁶¹ Hence, they invited American Baptist Mission to carry out their missionary work and selected Sadiya as their main centre for carrying out evangelizing among the inhabitants of that area and ultimately to target China.⁶⁶² Along with Sadiya, Jenkins planned to further establish a mission at Jaipur, one of the principal English posts to extend evangelising among the hill tribes like Singphos and Nagas, etc. In 1838, Bronson moved to Jaipur with his family where Mr Robert Bruce, the agent for promoting the culture of the tea plant, welcomed him. From these two

⁶⁵⁹ New Delhi, NAI, FDPC, no. 95, 12th August 1843.

⁶⁶⁰ Alexander Mackenzie, p. 70.

⁶⁶¹ Meena Sharma Barkataki, pp. 91-92.

⁶⁶² O.M. Rao, *The Venture of Faith...*, p. 8.

centres at Sadiya and Jaipur, the missionaries began to visit the villages of Singphos, Khamtis and Nagas, and undertook to study their language.⁶⁶³ They also planned to open schools in the villages of the tribes, which was unsuccessful because of attitude of the Singphos toward education. However, some of the Singpho chiefs who accepted British dominance were instructed by the Political Officer at Sadiya to co-operate with the missionaries. Accordingly, Mr Brown on 3rd October, 1839 visited Bisa Gam and appraised about his plans to write books on the Singpho language, which aroused keen interest of the latter. Brown reflected on it as, ‘he is quite intelligent and speaks Burmese and Shyam fluently. I gave him the Shyam digest, and the Shyam catechisms and a few medicines which he asked for’.⁶⁶⁴

There was a general feeling of discontentment and suspicion against colonial intervention and changes undertaking in the socio-economic and political conditions of the area. The coming of missionary and venturing into their villages further aggravated suspicions against the government; hence, there was concern among the missionaries about their security. Such apprehensions were reported by Bronson thus: ‘they do not look to us as superiors...they are very treacherous and revengeful...we could not trust them since, one can never know what they would do next’.⁶⁶⁵ Hannay too agreed to Bronson’s report stating that: ‘the prospect of a mission very bleak amongst the Singphos and it is not fit for missionary to carry out their effort in such an irritable state’.⁶⁶⁶ The apprehension of the missionaries and official found confirmation in 1839 when the Khamtis erupted in a rebellion and indiscriminately carried out ravages against the military and British subject stationing in Sadiya. This anti-British rebellion of the Khamtis at Sadiya resulted in the relocation of the evangelical mission to Jaipur.

⁶⁶³ Sheila Bora, *American Baptist Missionaries...*, p. 324.

⁶⁶⁴ Sheila Bora, p. 324.

⁶⁶⁵ Sheila Bora, p. 322.

⁶⁶⁶ Sheila Bora, p. 322.

From Jaipur they tried to carry out their proselytising activities, but the attitude of Singphos and other hill tribes did not permit them to continue their work among them.

4.6.7 British Administration in the Singphos area

The treaty of May 1826 brought Singphos under scrutiny of the British Political Officer who would annually visit from Rangpur to Sadiya to take cognizance of the security of the frontier area.⁶⁶⁷ This was done 'to engage this tribe as a buffer zone' against the Burmese. They, allowed them to manage their internal affairs by themselves, but major issues related to security of frontier had to be reported to British at Sadiya.⁶⁶⁸ This policy of British continued till the tenure of Neufville and David Scott who keeping in mind the policy of buffer zone, followed a policy of conciliation and non-interference. However, this policy of non-interference towards the un-administered Singpho area could not continue for long especially after the death of Neufville and Scott. This due to the invasion of Singphos from other side of Patkai in 1830, coupled with reports of their complicity with the Khamtis. Therefore, in order to check their movement it was imperative to station a permanent officer at Sadiya to assist the Political Officer of Upper Assam.

With the appointment of Lt. Charlton in 1834 as the Officer-in-charge at Sadiya, he was empowered to decide cases related to the Khamtis and Singphos.⁶⁶⁹ This included the power to intervene in the internal affairs of the chiefs. Colonial control was further strengthened when Jenkins proposed to establish a military post in the vicinity of Buridihing between Jaipur and the confluence of that river Brahmaputra to restrict the movement of Singphos.⁶⁷⁰ Consequently, the Governor-General in Council sent Hannay on deputation in June 1837 to establish a military outpost on the

⁶⁶⁷ R.M. Lahiri, p. 35.

⁶⁶⁸ R.M. Lahiri, p. 35.

⁶⁶⁹ For details see H.K. Barpujari, vol. 1, pp. 75-76.

⁶⁷⁰ Imdad Hussain, pp. 86-87.

Buridihing.⁶⁷¹ The Khamtis insurrection of 1839 had raised serious concerns regarding the defence of the frontier of Assam. This vulnerable position of military in Upper Assam, led to re-examination of the question of frontier defence. In April 1839, Jenkins once again submitted a scheme to push forward a cordon of military posts into the Singpho hills.⁶⁷² The objective of this policy was to block potential lines of Singpho inroads from Hukwang, to tighten military control over the frontier generally and undermine Burmese influence over the tribes. The posts therefore had to be in the direction of the most frequented passes and as far advanced as possible. He proposed at least three stockaded posts in the Singpho district.⁶⁷³

This proposal of Jenkins coincided with the growing importance of tea industry at the head of the Assam valley and the consequent need for imposing a check upon the various frontier tribes. The establishment of new military station in the Singpho country was established in Beesa, Kojoo, Ningroo, and Saikhowa. All these important military stations were connected by road to facilitate speedy movement of troops in time to deal with raids. Beesa, situated in the midst of the Singpho habitation it was presumed would restrain their excesses and connected by a path it could be reached in one day. Ningroo was also important as regards to the eastern Nagas and the passes leading to the Hukwang valley. Kojoo commanded the center, between Buri Dihing and Noa Dihing rivers. To connect Kojoo with Saikhowa another post was established at Tazee. Apart from these posts forming the line of defence, there was a large post at Jaipur to provide support.⁶⁷⁴ The establishments of these posts aimed at keeping tea *baris*, those employed in tea cultivation to be put behind this line, and simultaneously

⁶⁷¹ Imdad Hussain, pp. 86-87.

⁶⁷² New Delhi, NAI, FDPC, no. 84, 5th June, 1839.

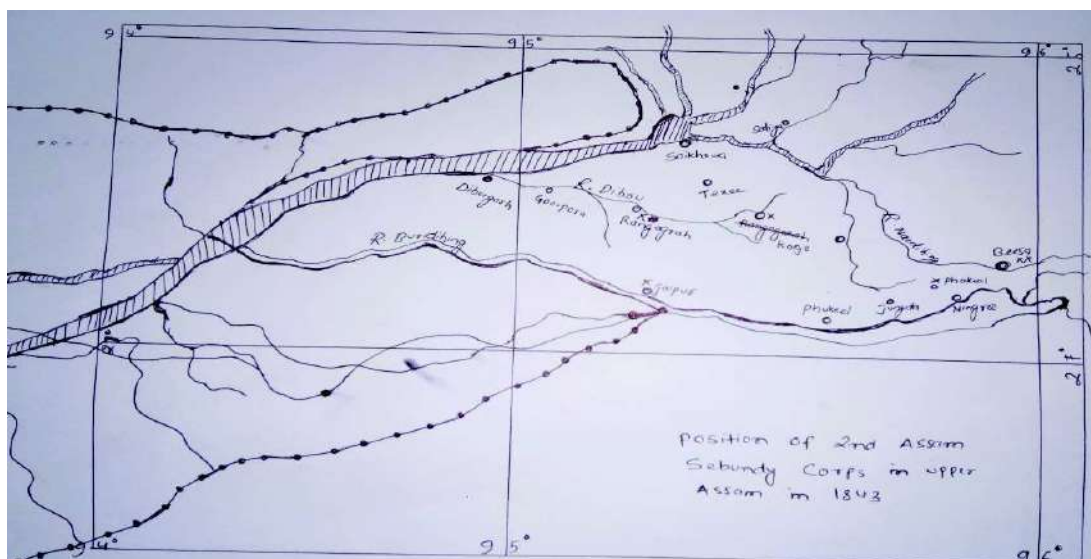
⁶⁷³ New Delhi, NAI, FDPC, no. 84, 5th June, 1839.

⁶⁷⁴ Imdad Hussain, p. 109.

disallowing the disaffected Matakas from carrying on intrigues with the Singphos.⁶⁷⁵ The presence of a European officer with a detachment so close to their habitats could encourage the remaining slaves to run away. Unaccustomed to the control from outside, the presence of the Officer-in-charge at Sadiya and his active interference in their affairs and establishment of military post in the Singpho heartland produced as sense of deep resentment. They for the first time saw cantonments, jails, barracks, courthouses, government executive building, and bungalows mushrooming in Upper Assam. Regarding this sense of dissatisfaction has been reported by Lt D. Reid on the issue thus:

It appears to me that the placing of guard in their country at Beesa, Ningroo and Kojoo must have been a source of no small annoyance to a people like the Singhos who have ever been subject to foreign rule, and doubtless they thought that the sending of soldiers into their country was only a preparatory measure to placing them under complete subjection.⁶⁷⁶

Figure 4.1: Sketch Map of the position of 2nd Assam Sebundy Corps in Upper 1843



Sources: Sketch map compiled from Captain Mainwarings' report.⁶⁷⁷

⁶⁷⁵ New Delhi, NAI, FDPC, no. 70, 30th July, 1839.

⁶⁷⁶ New Delhi, NAI, FPC, letter from D. Reid to White, no. 92, 12th November, 1843.

⁶⁷⁷ New Delhi, NAI, FDPC, no. 398, 1st March, 1843.

Their discontent was fuelled further by actions of the Duania sepoys stationed at these guards. They frequently intrigued with the Singpho women, taking them into the stockades where they were seduced by the sepoys. Besides, women slaves very frequently eloped with the guards when the latter were relieved from their duties. Therefore, the establishment of British administration reduced these tribes to insignificant power and positions from their former paramount status, which became a perpetual source of heart burn and discontent.⁶⁷⁸

In order to prevent any combination among the tribes and to instill fear among the people, the British officials frequently toured the Khamti and the Singpho areas. During such tours officials accompanied by other officers, tried to assess the natural resources available in these areas. However, during such tours the tribes were troubled with various works like clearing of forests, construction of camps and had to provide rations, etc. Further, the tribes were also forced to pledge their fidelity and submission to British authority. In 1828, Lt. Burnet was deputed by David Scott to explore the Khamti and the Singpho areas with the object of exploring the possibilities of establishing commercial relations with Burmese province. However, owing to Singpho opposition, as they occupied the intermediate space between the summit of the pass and Mogaung, the party could not proceed beyond the summit.⁶⁷⁹ Further, in February 1837, Major White accompanied by Dr. Griffiths, Captain Hannay, Lieutenant Bigge travelled through Khamti and Singpho country, reached Yaoung Sang Nullah (north face of Patkai hill) with the intention to make the top of Patkai mountains as the boundary between British India and Burma. In November, 1839, after the outbreak of Khamti rebellion seeking to break the alliance among the tribes, Jenkins undertook a

⁶⁷⁸ New Delhi, NAI, FDPC, letter from C. Holroyed Lietenant A.S. Corps to White, no. 92, 20th November, 1843.

⁶⁷⁹ Priyam Goswami, 'Pemberton's Report: Trade and Trade-Routes between Assam and its Neighbourhood', in Ranju Bezbaruah, et al (eds.), *North-East India: Interpreting the Sources of its History*, Aryan Books International, New Delhi, 2008, p. 171.

peace tour in the Khamti and Singpho habitations where he marched from one village to another like Inshaw, Dobom, Inban, Luttora, Koomkie, and Tang Sang Tang situated in the foothill of the Mishmi Hills. During this tour, he ordered all the chiefs to assemble, and those who failed to do so were fined and others were forced to submission and secured a pledge of loyalty to the British authorities. Again in 1841, Jenkins he toured with the help of Assam Light Infantry, a body of Golundaz, and two three pounders carried on elephants, through the greater portion of the Singpho territory. The route traversed from Saikhowa up the Brahmaputra to the Tengapani across the villages of Kinglong, Dohing Koomkee. The principal chiefs Neesaka of Jusha, Ong of Luttora, Labing of Dobom, Tang Sang Tang, and Koomong of Koomkee and Samnong, son of the chief of Wakheth paid their respects. All these official tours created uneasiness among the people. The traditional society rested on an understanding between the chiefs and his subjects, who enjoyed freedom without exerting forces from their chiefs. However, when the British officials forced the chiefs stationed at Sadiya and Beesa to engage the common people through the chiefs, this created discord between subject and the chiefs from whom both wanted freedom.

Apart from surrounding the Singphos with military establishments, their resources were depleted due to emancipation of slaves, while they were further forbidden to seize any Assamese subjects as slaves in the future. The added discomfiture was the role of the military station at Sadiya which checked their movements. An attempt by the British to engage them in agriculture and commerce was viewed by the tribe as interference in their internal affairs. The Singphos were not the only one who held grudge against the newly established British rule in Assam. Discontent among the Ahom nobility and other independent groups like the Khamtis and Matak led them to look for opportunities to drive away the British from Assam. Hence, the first attempt to drive away the British was carried out by Ahom nobility

under the leadership of Gadadhar Singha in 1828.⁶⁸⁰ This was followed by another rebellion in 1829 led by the Khasis.⁶⁸¹

4.7 The Course of the Singpho Insurrection

The first insurrection against the British took place in 1830. However, this was not a sudden outburst rather it took three years to materialise their plan. The planning was initiated by Singphos from Hukwang valley under the leadership of Wackun Khoonjun who made a determined plan to fall upon Sadiya.⁶⁸² The strategy was to bide for a perfect timing decided by studying the on-going political situation. Wackun Khoonju informally visited Lt. Rutherford to check the strength and resources of the British at the frontier. Simultaneously, he met with other Singpho chiefs like Gam of Luttora and made an agreement with him for the plunder of Sadiya and country around. When the arrangements were complete, the Singphos from other side of the hill crossed over in numbering about 2000 men. They crossed the Buri Dihing and were joined by Luttora Gam at the head of Tenga river where their number swelled to nearly 3000. The Singpho men were armed with spears, swords and muskets. They held a contemptible opinion of the English and were fully confident of their ultimate success.⁶⁸³

Captain Neufville, who immediately ordered all the friendly chiefs of the eastern region to send in reinforcements, viewed this hostile combination on the frontier by the Singphos seriously. He marched toward Sadiya on 14th February, 1830, with sufficient forces where he was joined by the Bar Senapati and the Sadiya Khowa

⁶⁸⁰ For details see R.M. Lahiri, *The Annexation of Assam*, pp. 69-72.

⁶⁸¹ R.M. Lahiri, pp. 80-85.

⁶⁸² R.M. Lahiri, p. 118.

⁶⁸³ New Delhi, NAI, FDSP, nos. 7-9, 16th April, 1830.

Gohain.⁶⁸⁴ These reinforcements gave edge to the British who already possessed advanced weapons. Despite possessing inferior weapons, the Singphos under the leadership of Wackum Khoonjun refused to accede to Captain Neufville's who sent a messenger to Wackum Khoonjun and other leaders ordering them to stand back. The Singphos were adamant to make a stand against the British force that they even performed sacrificial rituals and planned to move down to Noa Dihing. Accordingly, on 27th February 1830, they moved down and reached to village of Luttora.

Captain Neufville suppressed this attempt by forcing the Singphos to disperse into the forests at night, though this did not complete the rout as they again re-assembled at Luttora and were engaged in erecting stockades.⁶⁸⁵ In order to eliminate the Singpho insurrection finally, Captain Neufville received reinforcements from the Khamti and Matak chiefs. Fortified with levies from frontier chiefs, Neufville marched towards Luttora on 11th March 1830, drove them across the hills, and fled towards the Bor-Khamti. The village of Luttora and the stockades erected therein were destroyed and he returned to Jorhat leaving strong detachment at Sadiya.⁶⁸⁶ The first insurrection came to end without achieving much against the British due to internal feuds among the Singphos where Bisa Gam and his allies came forward to support the British force for which the British rewarded them later on.⁶⁸⁷ Hence, the efficient officer, Captain Neufville, easily tackled the first insurrection.

The next major Singpho insurrection was witnessed on 10th July 1835, when Duffa Gam made a surprise attack with a horde of Hukwang Singphos in the district south of Sadiya occupied by clans allied to Bisa Gam.⁶⁸⁸ The invaders carried out

⁶⁸⁴ R.M. Lahiri, p. 119.

⁶⁸⁵ R.M. Lahiri, p. 120.

⁶⁸⁶ Kolkata, WBSA, BSP, nos. 8-9, 6th April, 1830.

⁶⁸⁷ Dispur, ASA, PDP, letter from F. Jenkins to the Secretary to the Government of Bengal, no. 22, 5th September, 1835.

⁶⁸⁸ Dispur, ASA, PDP, Letter Issued to Government series-II, vol. 3, no. 12, July 1835.

attack on the village, massacred its inhabitants indiscriminately in which about 90 people were killed. Further, they plundered and burnt down their houses carrying away the grains and other properties. Among the families killed, some were Marwari families, including the wife and the sister-in-law of the Duffa Gam.⁶⁸⁹ After this indiscriminate attack, they erected two stockades at Gakyn to face the British.

When the news of this attack reached Captain White, he hurriedly despatched a force under Lt. Charlton consisting of thirty sepoy from Sadiya. On 12th August 1835, assisted by two Khamti chiefs Ranwa Gohain and Kaptan Gohain, they stormed the stockade while Lt. Charlton carried continued firing upon the first stockade. In this encounter, the troops of Lt. Charlton faced serious opposition from the Duffa's party who shot a musket at him and broke his right leg, while his Khamti assistant Kaptan Gohain too received a severe wound on his neck.⁶⁹⁰ With Charlton and the Khamti chief wounded, the Singphos won the skirmish killing four *sepoy* on the battlefield, while eight more wounded of which two died of their wounds.⁶⁹¹ Reinforcements arrived under Mr. Bruce (commanding the Gun Boat at Sadiya), who charged against the stockades from long intervening distance which produced little effect. On the second day, they shifted the guns within 200 yards of the enemy stockade, which made the shots more effective and began to make an impression on the stockade controlled by Duffa Gam. Constant firing forced Duffa Gam and his group of rebels to evacuate the stockade in the course of the night and flee towards other stockades.⁶⁹²

The evading rebels from the first stockade were pursued by Lt. Miller, Duffa's group was encountered at the second stockade located in the hill about four hundred

⁶⁸⁹ Kolkata, WBSA, BPC, no. 10, 3rd August, 1835.

⁶⁹⁰ Kolkata, WBSA, BPC, letter from A. White to the Agent to the Governor General of Assam, no. 1, 31st August 1835.

⁶⁹¹ Kolkata, WBSA, BPC, letter from A. White to the Adjutant General of the Army, no. 1, 31st August 1835.

⁶⁹² Kolkata, WBSA, BPC, no. 1, 31st August 1835.

feet in height. About fifty to sixty Singphos heavily defended this stockade.⁶⁹³ When the army stormed the stockade by firing a few shots the Singphos too retaliated in which Lieutenant Miller was wounded by a musket shot which broke his shoulder.⁶⁹⁴ In this encounter the British suffered the loss of one Havildar and four Sepoy were wounded forcing them to retire for a while and wait for the arrival of reinforcements. Mr. Bruce with his artillery succeeded in blowing open the second stockade to a considerable extent. The lead Duffa Gam and his group realise it untenable to defend the stockade, finally deserting it in the course of the night with very little loss withdrawing towards Hukwang.⁶⁹⁵

This encounter proved the anti-British stance among the Singphos chiefs except Bisa Gam. None of the Singpho chiefs supplied either grain or men, nor even provided information, on the contrary it was suspected that many of them rendered substantial aid to Duffa and his followers.⁶⁹⁶ Not unnaturally, they were looking forward to the defeat of the British which might place the lowlands again at their mercy.⁶⁹⁷ As a corollary, in the contest between the two rivals Gam, they were actuated by a dislike of Bisa Gam who was considered a henchman of the British government. They found it was hurting their dignity to be under an agreement to surrender their slaves, a duty, they alleged, he enforced not on his own interest. Therefore, as stated by Lt. Charlton that, 'all the Singpho clans have evinced a disposition to support the Duffa Gam'.⁶⁹⁸

⁶⁹³ Kolkata, WBSA, BPC, letter from from A. Charlton to the Officer Commanding Assam Light Infantry, no. 2, 10 September 1835.

⁶⁹⁴ Kolkata, WBSA, BPC, letter from F. Jenkins to W.H. Maenaghten Secretary to Government, no. 12, 24th November, 1835.

⁶⁹⁵ Dispur, ASA, PDP, Letter Issued to Govt. series-II, vol. 3, no. 20, July 1835, from F. Jenkins to Secretary to the Governor General in Council.

⁶⁹⁶ Dispur, ASA, PDP, letter from Political Agent of North East Frontier to the Secretary to the Govt of Bengal, no. 23, 5th April, 1835.

⁶⁹⁷ Dispur, ASA, PDP, no. 23, 5th April, 1835.

⁶⁹⁸ Dispur, ASA, FDP, Letter Issued to Government series-II, vol. 3, no.12, July 1835.

After the flight of Duffa, the Political Agent adopted deterrent measures against his adherents by burning their villages, destroying crops, seizing cattle and releasing their slaves. Such measures were considered highly desirable to make the chiefs feel the consequence of their alliance with Duffa Gam, with a view to dissuading them from inviting him again to repeat his marauding activities.⁶⁹⁹ Even the chiefs apparently friendly to the British were forced to provide security for their good behaviour. They were warned sternly that in the event of Duffa's re-entry, they would be held responsible individually and war would be declared against them by destroying crops, releasing slaves and carrying away their cattle. He firmly believed that without the covert aid of the Singpho and the Khamtis, Duffa could not dare to cross the boundary.⁷⁰⁰ Various Singphos villagers arrested by Hannay were later released on the request of Mirip Singpho Gam.⁷⁰¹ On the other hand no concrete information was received from the arrested villagers.⁷⁰² The request of Mirip Singpho to take the villagers with him was accepted by British as they wanted to use his influence over his people to open the road to Ava and further extend their influence on this frontier. Further, he could assist the English in bringing up any number of Chinese settlers as they may be required for the tea plantation.⁷⁰³

To keep Duffa Gam restrained in Hukwang, Major White was ordered to pursue with the Court of Ava to arrest him. He was also empowered to exercise his own discretion to carry out operation, while offering Rupees 1000 as incentive for the

⁶⁹⁹ New Delhi, NAI, FPC, letter from White to Jenkins, no. 2, 9th February, 1836.

⁷⁰⁰ New Delhi, NAI, FPC, no. 2, 9th February, 1836.

⁷⁰¹ Settled in the frontier between Assam and Hukwang valley and his mother is a Chinese and the brother of his wife is a Singpho residing within the Chinese territory.

⁷⁰² Dispur, ASA, PDP, Letter receive from Govt., vol. 11, part 2, 1836.

⁷⁰³ Dispur, ASA, PDP, letter from F. Jenkins Political Agent North East Frontier to Secretary to the Government of Bengal in the Political Department Fort William, vol. 4, no. 57, 21st July 1836.

apprehension of Duffa Gam.⁷⁰⁴ Accordingly, he pursued Duffa for dialogue and on 17th November 1835 he finally agreed to attend a meeting with Major White at Manbhoom Hills. In the meeting, Duffa put forth his grievances and demanded that he be allowed to reoccupy his ancestral lands captured by Bisa Gam with the help of the British. Instead of taking cognisance these demands insisted on his unconditional surrender and payment of a penalty for destroying property of merchants and the murder of villagers at Beesa. Fines was in the form of cash, elephant teeth or gold dust etc., was also imposed.⁷⁰⁵ Duffa Gam declared that, 'it would be impossible for him to remain quit and happy as long as he is deprived of his patrilineal estate.'⁷⁰⁶ Consequently, it resulted in the breakdown of negotiation and hostilities were renewed.

The failure of Major White to pursue Duffa Gam and forcing him surrender before British authorities resulted in changing their policy. The British authorities in Assam suggested that Ava Government should be held responsible for the invasion of Duffa Gam and the English Resident at the Court to deliver this message.⁷⁰⁷ In order to create pressure on him through the Court of Ava, Captain F. Hannay was sent to pursue the matter with Burmese Government for securing the surrender of Duffa Gam. Since, the Burmese too were inclined to use the Singphos of Hukwang valley as the first line of defence against the attack from west of the Patkai range did not respond aptly till the close of 1835. On 11th October 1835, Lieutenant Colonel H.W. Burney, the British Resident at the Court of Ava, was instructed to reiterate their demand to

⁷⁰⁴ Dispur, ASA, PDP, letter from Secretary to the Government of Bengal to the Agent of Governor General North East Frontier, no. 11, 24th November, 1835.

⁷⁰⁵ H.K. Barpujari, vol. 1, p. 103.

⁷⁰⁶ New Delhi, NAI, FPC, letter from Lieutenant Burney to the Secretary to the Government of India, no. 45, 26th September, 1836.

⁷⁰⁷ H.K. Barpujari, vol. 1, p. 105.

restrain Duffa from repeating aggressions along the British frontier in Assam.⁷⁰⁸ Burney requested Court of Ava to communicate the Governor of Mogaung to send his military force to accompany S.F. Hannay, who was assigned the task to find out the habits of Duffa Gam. After long persuasion, the Court at Ava agreed and accordingly Hannay, left Ava on 22nd November 1835 arriving at Mogaung on 5th January 1836, proceeding further to Mainkhow the capital of Hukwang on 31st January, 1836.⁷⁰⁹

However, the Governor of Mogaung did not cooperate, rather prevented Hannay from proceeding towards north of Hukwang, nor did he disclose information about Duffa Gam. Therefore, using his personal influence Hannay sent a message to Duffa inviting him for a friendly meeting at Mainkhow. After long persuasion, finally on 22nd March, Duffa Gam made his appearance at the camp where he was received by Hannay and the Governor of Mogaung. At the camp Duffa had several rounds of negotiations with Hannay on 23rd and 24th March 1836, wherein his statements were recorded under strict guidance of governor of Mogaung.⁷¹⁰ After this interview with Duffa Gam, Hannay later concluded that, ‘Duffa was victim of injustice through misrepresentation of his enemy, therefore punishing him of no use rather it will aggravate the situation.’⁷¹¹ He advocated for Duffa’s restoration to his former lands in Assam. Lt Colonel Burney, the Resident of Ava too noted that Duffa Gam as a recalcitrant chief, commanded loyalty from many chiefs as well as exhibited military prowess among the Singphos of Assam and Hukwang. Therefore, agreeing with Hannay, he too suggested that, ‘whether it could not be a more advantageous policy to appease and gain this influential chief and his numerous supporters, than to upset them

⁷⁰⁸ Kolkata, WBSA, BPC, letter from White to Jenkins, no. 47, 26 September, 1836.

⁷⁰⁹ Kolkata, WBSA, BPC, no. 47, 26 September, 1836.

⁷¹⁰ Kolkata, WBSA, BPC, no. 47, 26 September, 1836.

⁷¹¹ Kolkata, WBSA, BPC, no. 47, 26 September, 1836.

and derail them to despair'.⁷¹² However, this conciliatory move of Hannay disappointed many British officers in Assam, with Major White opposing this considering the Chief not entitled to such mercy.⁷¹³

To add to British discomfiture, following the departure of Hannay, the court of Ava instead of restraining Duffa Gam on the contrary bestowed him marked of favours and honour by presenting him with silk cloths and other articles like the saddle, hat and *dahs* including his principal followers. The king of Ava had conferred honorary titles on them: Taunglon Thiha Kyawzawa, Saton Humani Nawyahta, Tanebung Naung Nawyahta, Ganda Thikdi, Taunglon Thiha Kyawhtin, Sawbi Thura Nawyahta, Thiri Paphahta Tabayaza, Thinba Thura Yaza, Maha Thiri zeya Tabayaza.⁷¹⁴ Duffa Gam had now been elevated to a higher status of the Maha.⁷¹⁵ To this act of Burmese court, the British made it apparent that they had no direct control over the Singphos of Hukwang valley, yet they were aware of the advantage of having them as a first line of defence against the British invasion from Assam, hence they were willing to facilitate surrender of Duffa Gam to the British.

4.8 The Singphos Insurrection of 1843

Colonial encroachment on the social, economic, political, and religious affairs of the Singphos after the 1826 compelled the Singphos to carry out a series of resistance between 1830 and 1835. However, simultaneous internal feuds among chiefs made the resistance not very forceful. Singpho resistance took an altogether different turn in the month of January, 1843. It was the long term planning which

⁷¹² Dispur, ASA, PDP, letter from Burney to the Secretary to the Government of India, no. 45, 26th September, 1836.

⁷¹³ Dispur, ASA, PDP, letter from F. Jenkins to the secretary of the Government of Bengal, no. 35, 1st June, 1836.

⁷¹⁴ Kaw Nan, pp. 18-19.

⁷¹⁵ New Delhi, NIA, FPC, letter from Burney to Macnagthen, no. 45, 26 September, 1836.

finally galvanised this armed rebellion, in which the chiefs setting aside their personal feuds presented an element of surprise. This manifestation was due to ever growing difference between the Singphos and the English, which widened into a yawning gulf and finally made itself apparent in form of an armed rebellion of greater magnitude.

The preparation for the Singphos insurrection accelerated after the Khamtis rebellion of 1839. The preparation went on unnoticed, when villagers of Beesa and Ningroo were relocated towards the forests and hillsides. It was planned that the attack would be deferred until they had established themselves comfortably in their new settlements as they had already lost most of their bondsmen and slaves.⁷¹⁶

In Hukwang after the death of Duffa Gam in 1842, Seroola Sen Gam occupied his position as the successor with the blessing of Tipam Raja.⁷¹⁷ Tipam Raja gave Serool Sen 5 seers of silver, 1 horse, 1 *burkha*, 1 *chattah* and made him commander of the force that would attack the British. Duffa Gam was to stay at Hukwang till the opportune moment arrived. In order to strengthen his alliance with other Singpho chief, Tippam Raja sent handkerchief and needles to Bisa Gam through Singman Gohain. This succession of Seroola Sen into the position of Duffa Gam finally brought an end to the long standing feud between Bisa Gam and Duffa Gam. The former had declared Seroola Sen as his son. Meanwhile on 29th December 1842, Bisa Gam performed a ritual by sacrificing a buffalo and placing his sword on fire, by invoking the gods for successes in war. Further he distributed its flesh among the Singpho and

⁷¹⁶ New Delhi, NAI, FSP, nos. 99-102, 12th August, 1843.

⁷¹⁷ New Delhi, NAI, FSP, nos. 99-102, 12th August, 1843; Tipam Raja or Bishwanath Singha, was the brother of Hemo Aideo, a Ahom girl, whom Raja Chandrakanta (1810-18) offered as a present to the king of Ava. With the influence of his sister, Tipam was made as the Governor of Hoopong Moule a part of Mogaung, by the ruler of Ava and he got the district of Bhamo from his sister. While staying in Mogaung, he used to claim his rule of Upper Assam on the strength of his right as a *jubaraj* (heir apparent) under King Jogeswar Singha (1821). Although this was turned down by the government but he never ceased to make the Ahom families in Upper Assam believe that he was determined to recover his kingdom if it was not willingly made over to him by the British and that the made gifts to the priests for his success. In this context the disaffected Singpho had good terms with Tipam Raja and many a times they used Tipam Raja's name for their own purpose, in H.K. Barpujari, Vol. II, p. 6.

sent his men with three seers of needles along with buffalo meat to distribute among the people of Tengapani.⁷¹⁸ This was the sign of preparation for war in the enemy country. Subsequently, on 3rd January, 1843 the gong was sounded at Ningroola with information conveyed to the villagers that warriors were expected from Hukwang by Ningroola's son Sahuman, who had visited Hukwang and made an agreement with Seeroola Sen by sacrificing a buffalo.⁷¹⁹ When everything was planned and villagers were moved further away, Bisa and Ningroola had sent Seeong Komal Gam, Thabong, Labong and Jowkhing to persuade Seeroola Sen and informed him that the British were preparing to carry away their wives and children urging him to join against the British. Seeroola Sen seeking permission for the invasion of Assam communicated this message from Ningroola and Bisa Gam to Tipam Raja. Tipam Raja wrote back requesting not to attack till the month of *Chait*, when he himself would invade Assam. However, Seerola Sen insisted on proceeding for the operation for which the Tipam Raja accorded him permission.⁷²⁰ Accordingly, Seerola Sen brought along 200 fighting men from Hukwang under the pretext of searching for a lost slave and reached Tengapani where he was provided with clothes and sepoy, seeking permission to travel further to Maun (Assam) country with muskets and other objects.⁷²¹ Therefore, with meticulous planning without arousing suspicion they were waiting for a trigger, which finally presented itself in the humiliation of their leaders on 9th January, 1843.

On 9th January, 1843 Luckhee Ram Jamadar who commanded the Beesa station ordered both Bisa Gam and Late Gam to clear the jungles in around the stockade and repair the doors of the stockade. By evening when the task remained incomplete for which the Jamadar abused the Gams by calling *Radha Gora* (abuse

⁷¹⁸ New Delhi, NAI, Foreign Secret Proceeding, 1843, 12th August , nos. 99-102; Handkerchief and needles were symbol of friendship.

⁷¹⁹ New Delhi, NAI, FSP, nos. 99-102, 12th August, 1843.

⁷²⁰ New Delhi, NAI, FSP, nos. 99-102, 12th August, 1843.

⁷²¹ New Delhi, NAI, FSP, nos. 99-102, 12th August, 1843.

meaning variously as old cow, old dog and unuseful horse, etc.) and ordered them to finish incomplete task.⁷²² This humiliation of the chiefs in front of commoners infuriated them, conferred to jointly attack the Beesa stockade.⁷²³ Therefore, Bisa sent his fighting men to the villages appealing them to join against the British, threatening to massacre if they failed to oblige. Bisa Gam sent his contingent of fighting men under the leadership of Kosington, Latesing Bung Seong, Labrong Labong, Kashrung, Nunglao, Joygndoo, Aobooling and Seeling Lah the same night. When the military stationed inside the stockade were in slumber, the Singphos commenced firing with arrows, poison spears and stones upon stockade at Beesa. This stockade was housed by a detachment from Second Sebundy Corps consisting of one Jamadar, one Havildar, one Naik and 21 sepoy. The stockade being strongly defended could not be easily destroyed and the exchange of fire continued till early morning in which three British soldiers were severely injured.⁷²⁴ In course the Singphos had erected the breastwork or hole in the ground, each large enough to covered a man. On the other hand the Singphos were performing their war dance and invoking the spirit and abusing the British subject station in the stockade. The firing exchange continued whole day and the next night in which the Singphos had collected stones from river and kept throwing them into the stockade from the jungles. On the second day of the fight the Singphos commenced calling to Havildar, ‘why do you fight against your own Raja, the Tipam Chief’. The Singphos further said, ‘you will not let us into the stockade and you do not understand our language we will send Askrun Kyah who will talk to you for us’.⁷²⁵ Accordingly, Askrun Kyah translated for Singphos who asked the Jamadar that, ‘he need be under no apprehension as the Singpho had sworn in

⁷²² Pisi Gam, 67 years of aged, male, public leader, Miao Township, Changlang district, Arunachal Pradesh, interviewed on 18th January, 2016.

⁷²³ New Delhi, NAI, FSP, nos. 99-102, 12th August, 1843.

⁷²⁴ New Delhi, NAI, FSP, nos. 99-102, 12th August, 1843.

⁷²⁵ New Delhi, NAI, FPP, no. 390, 18th April, 1843.

Tiger's teeth and on Elephnat's tusks and had drunk water in which they washed their Daos, to destroy and expelled the British from their area' and if Jamadar want to save his life then he should opened the stockade and evacuate it without posing any challenge to Singphos and he would be allowed to return to Saikhowa.⁷²⁶

In the evening of 12th January, 1843 Luttora Gam, Lakowteng and Sing Kungn with Askrun Kyah and Tippum Chand visited the Jamadar and warned him from outside of the stockade stating that, 'it was futile to fight as Maun Rajah and Tippam Rajah had taken possession of Saikhowa, Dedromookhk, Ningroo , Khojoo'.⁷²⁷ They also stated that, 'in addition to Beesa stockade, they had already taken over the others stockades except Rungpoor and before assistance could arrive from Rungpoor the Singphos would murder them all'.⁷²⁸ They also stated that Tipam Raja marched towards Beesa to join them, hence if they want their lives to be spared then they should abandon their muskets and surrender themselves. The Jamadar who had dispatched four *daiks* earlier and received no intelligence believed their words. Therefore, in hope to saving themselves, he opened the door of stockade and surrendered by laying down the muskets. Accordingly, about 200 Singpho rushed in, some by the gate, others by claming over the stockade they overpowered the British military and seized their arms and dragged all the sepoy's off to the Let Gam's stockade and confined for the night at his stockade.⁷²⁹

The next morning on 13th January, 1843 they took Havildar Kena Ram, Lushavik Duania sepoy's and Jamadar to a place near Beesa stockade where one of the Singpho Gam was killed in the fight and had been buried there. The Jamadar and Havildar were first shot with arrow by Chung Lang (nephew of Let Gam), and then cut

⁷²⁶ New Delhi, NAI, FPP, no. 390, 18th April, 1843.

⁷²⁷ New Delhi, NAI, FSP, nos. 99-102, 12th August, 1843.

⁷²⁸ New Delhi, NAI, FSP, nos. 99-102, 12th August, 1843.

⁷²⁹ New Delhi, NAI, FPP, no. 390, 18th April, 1843.

to pieces by dao as sacrifice over the grave of the Singpho chief. Two sepoy were murdered at the door of the stockade, while four sepoy were tied and sent to Beesa as slaves and from there they were sent to Hukwang to to be shown to the Tipam Raja.⁷³⁰ The remaining sepoy were distributed among the tribe and subsequently sold to the Upper Singphos and Nagas.⁷³¹

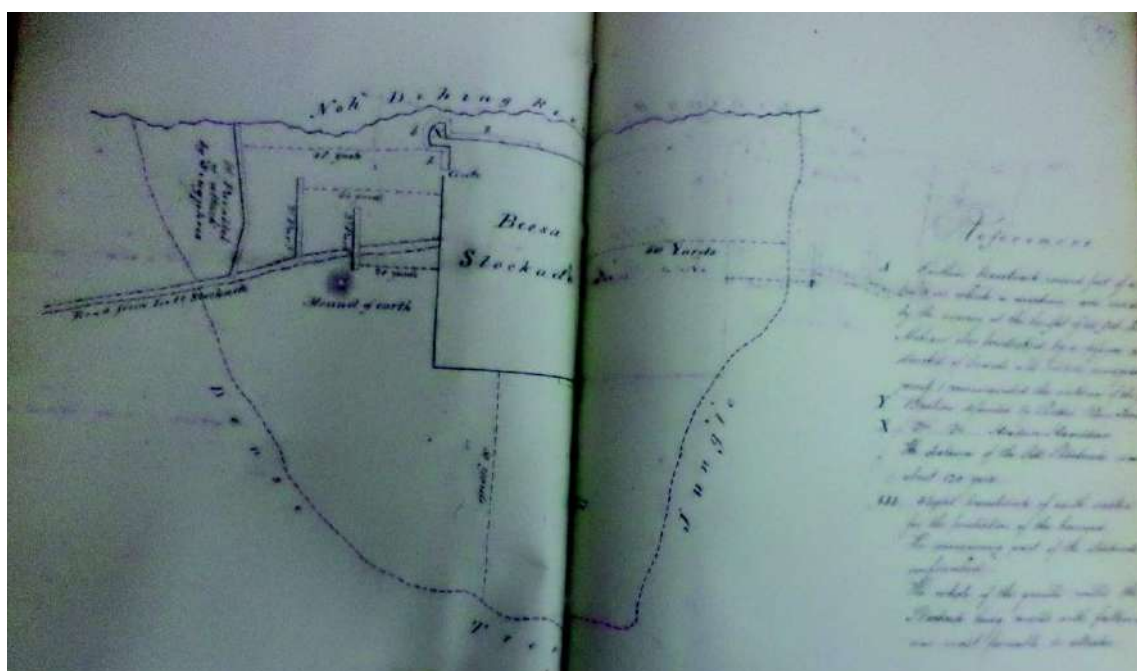
Simultaneously, on 11th January 1843, the Singphos attacked the post of Koojo and Ningroo. The Koojo post was attacked under Seemkoomal Gam who had been ordered by Bisa Gam, as the tea plot at Koojo had been denied to him. The post of Koojo consisted of a detachment from Second Sebundy comprising of one Havildar and thirteen Sepoy. The post of Ningroo was attacked under the leadership of Seroola Sen, along with Sahuman (son of Ningroola) who guided him and his men to the stockade the same morning.⁷³² Luttora Gam, who married the daughter of Seeroola Sen, later joined this attack on Ningroo stockade. The stockade at Ningroo had of a detachment from the Second Sebundy consisting of one Subedar, two Havildar, one Naik and thirty Sepoy, while a detachment from the Assam Light Infantry comprised of one Subedar, one Jamadar, four Havildar, four Naiks and eighty Sepoy. Therefore, it was heavily stationed with soldiers under the command of Lieutenant Holroyd of the Sebundy Regiment, who strongly defended the stockade till the arrival of reinforcements.

⁷³⁰ New Delhi, NAI, FSP, nos. 99-102, 12th August, 1843.

⁷³¹ New Delhi, NAI, FPP, no. 390, 18th April, 1843.

⁷³² New Delhi, NAI, FPC, letter from the Agent to the Governor General north east frontier to the Secretary to the Government of India, no. 17, 30th January, 1843.

Figure 4.2: Map of Beesa Stockade

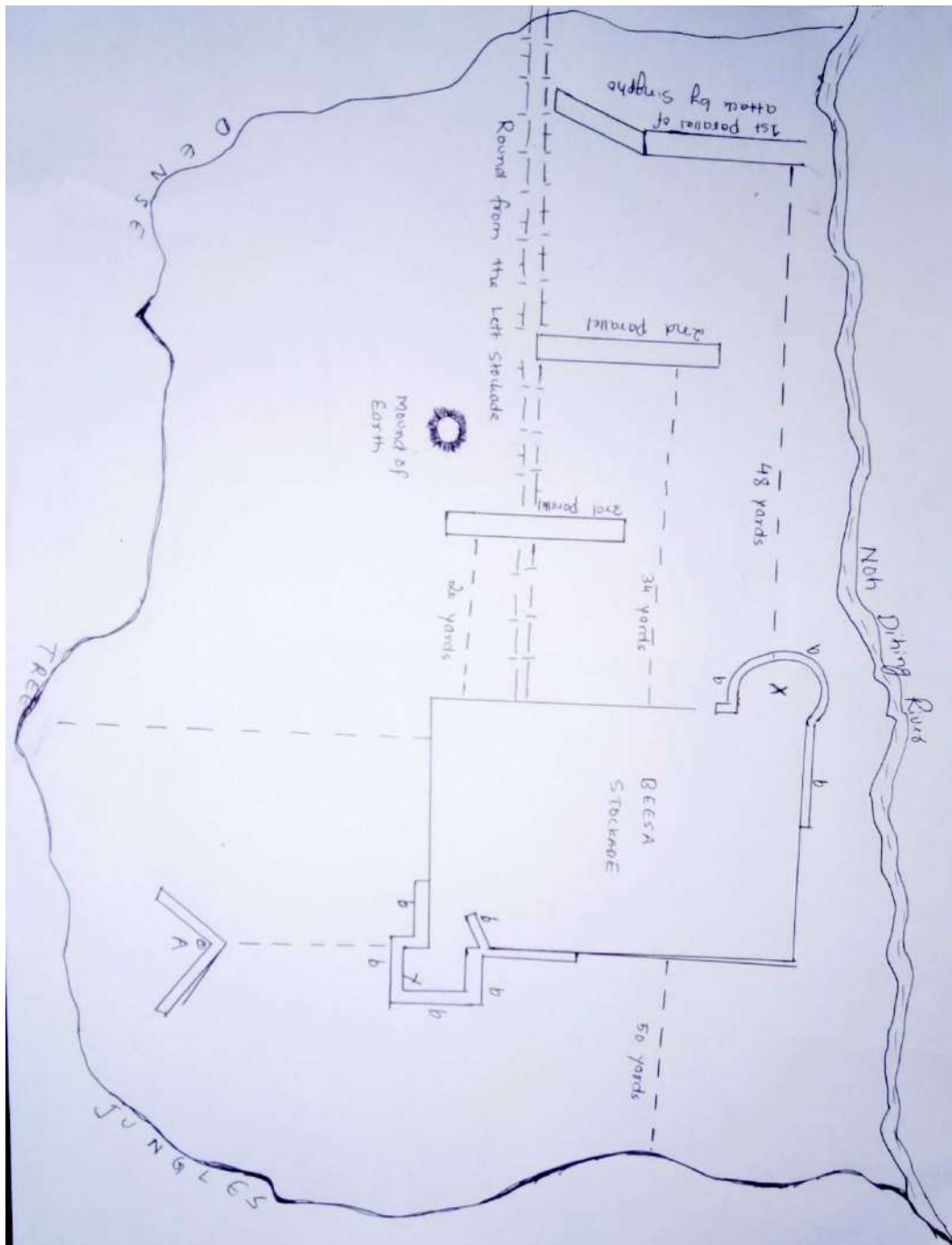


Source: Lieutenant Reynolds acting Adjutant Assam Light Infantry

These attacks upon Ningroo and Koojo were unsuccessful as better weapons and sufficient army in the stockade overwhelmed the Singphos. Attempts were made to burn down the stockade, but constant muskets shooting from inside had stopped them from approaching it. Consequently the Singphos retreated into the forests, when recieved news about a larger British reinforcement coming to rescue Beesa and Ningroo. The retreating party of Seroola Sen and Sahuman were instructed by Ningroola Gam to move towards Hukwang. He handed over two guns to his son Sahuman, and asked them to return the next year when another attack would be launched with full preparation.⁷³³

⁷³³ Imdad Hussain, pp. 133-34.

Figure 4.3: Sketch Map of Beesa Stockade



Source: Lieutenant Reynolds acting Adjutant Assam Light Infantry.

4.8.1 Military Campaign against the Singphos

As soon as the news of the Singpho rebellion reached Vetch, he hurried from Jaipur towards Ningroo on the morning of 14th January, 1843, to take stock of the

situation.⁷³⁴ This insurrection had alarmed the British, as they had not yet fully recovered from the surprise attack of the Khamtis of 1839. Meanwhile, the British still had to contend with the remaining insurgent Khamti factions, who were still at large defying their authority. Intelligence reports claimed that Saikhowa was threatened by an attack by a large body of insurgent Khamtis.⁷³⁵ In order to deal with this rebellion, Vetch had placed necessary requisition for force to Captain Hannay and Captain Smith commanding Bishwanath along with Lieutenant Reid the commandant of the Local Artillery Dibrugarh to join him at Ningroo with a couple of guns and a mortars, at the earliest.⁷³⁶ Similar requisition was sent to authorities in Bengal (and) recieved approval. Panic among British frontier officers ran so high that Captain Vetch as a precautionary measure requested Major F.G. Lister, Commanding Sylhet Light Infantry at Cherapunji to detach two companies of troops to Assam. In addition, the commanding officer of the 23rd Regiment at Jumalpur was asked to move two more companies of that Regiment for services in Assam at the shortest notice.⁷³⁷

These reinforcements created panic among the Singphos especially, among those who had been forced to join against the British, resulting in discord among the rebels.⁷³⁸ When British troops reached the stockade of Ningroo and preparation was on to send expedition against the Singphos, many villagers fled towards forest but several chiefs like Seroola Sen, Ningroola and Luttora Gam took up their position at Darap at little distant from Ningroo with a strength of 700 fighting men waiting armed with firearms, spears and long knives.⁷³⁹

⁷³⁴ H.K. Barpujari, vol. II, p. 1.

⁷³⁵ Dispur, ASA, FDP, Letter received form Govt. vol. 19, 1843, no. 27, from Secretary to Jenkins.

⁷³⁶ Dispur, ASA, FDP, Letter received form Govt. vol. 19, 1843, no. 27.

⁷³⁷ Dispur, ASA, FDP, Letter received form Govt. vol. 19, 1843, no. 27.

⁷³⁸ Interview with Mirim Du Singpho, 72 years of aged, male, village elder, Bordumsa township, Changlang district, Arunachal Pradesh, interviewed on 19th January, 2016.

⁷³⁹ Dispur, ASA, FDP, Letter received form Govt. vol. 19, 1843, no. 27.

With sufficient reinforcements to take on the insurgents, Captain Vetch sent out troops of the Assam Light Infantry under Captain Mainwaring on 19th Jan, who reached the village at night with the help of Duania levy and other Naga levies.⁷⁴⁰ The Singphos did not expect a night attack from the British, and were completely surprised by the attack in which a number of the rebels trying to protect their stockade were killed and many were wounded. After suffering severe reversals on account of the surprise night attack and inferior arms, the Singpho leaders escaped into the hills, where they could not be followed.⁷⁴¹ They made a hasty retreat abandoning their property and slaves and a portion of their arms. The retreating rebels were pursued by military contingent, in which Duantias and Nagas killed several of the Singphos.⁷⁴² In this encounter, Captain Mainwaring reported that 15 were killed and many were wounded and detained by the British forces. The stockades erected by the rebels were destroyed and sepoys marched from village to village in Ningroo destroying deserted houses. This defeat of the Singphos at Ningroo, and burning down of his villages by British force stunned Ningroo Gam, who consequently surrendered before Lieutenant Reynolds on 20 January, 1843.⁷⁴³

Another expedition was despatched on 22nd January, 1843, when Vetch accompanied by 150 sepoys advanced towards Karempani near Beesa to destroy the stockades then strongly entrenched by Seroola Sen, Bisa Gam and Luttora Gam's group.⁷⁴⁴ Karempani was situated on the top of a high mountain ridge and direct approach to it was very difficult for the sepoys. The Singphos had blocked the path by cutting down trees and throwing them across the paths. Therefore, to reach the

⁷⁴⁰ Dispur, ASA, FDP, Letter received from Govt. vol. 19, 1843, no. 27.

⁷⁴¹ Dispur, ASA, PDP, letter from F. Jenkins to the Secretary to the Govt. of Bengal, no. 27, 10th April, 1843.

⁷⁴² Dispur, ASA, PDP, no. 27, 10th April, 1843.

⁷⁴³ Dispur, ASA, PDP, no. 27, 10th April, 1843.

⁷⁴⁴ Dispur, ASA, PDP, no. 27, 10th April, 1843.

stockade Captain Mainwaring had to follow a circuitous route through an extremely difficult mountain path. On reaching the place, they found out that the stockades was strongly defended from the front, while on its rear and sides there were deep forests and ravines. The route was full of hidden pits, filled with spikes. Duanias, who were skilled in detecting the hidden pits filled with spikes, guided the route to these stockades. When the sepoys slowly moved towards the stockades, the Singphos lying in wait attacked the contingent led by Captain Mainwaring, which created panic among the sepoys, and many fell into the pits and were severely wounded. The Singphos attacked with dozens muskets shots and stones were thrown at them accompanied with showers of arrows. However, with the help of Duanias and Nagas the British sepoys could launch a counter attack at the stockades with firearms, which resulted in killing a few Singphos inside it. Within very short period, the resistance from Singphos began to decline as they had exhausted their fighting tools. Hence, majority of them made their escape into the dense forests which led to capture of the stockade. After capturing the stockades the soldiers burned it down, and pursued the evading rebels, plundered their village, seized their household items, in order to instill a sense of fear in their minds and discourage them from building stockades or fortifying their villages.

However, the Singphos continued to remain at large and erecting stockades and lurked in the neighbourhood of Beesa. The rebels were chased by Captain Mainwaring and after a march lasting a few days through impenetrable forest, succeeded in making a surprise attack on a party led by Luttora Gam on 3rd Feb, 1843. This intense encounter took place in the neighbourhood of Beesa where three stockades were erected. The stockades were surrounded on all sides by *panjis*, (pointed bamboos fixed to the earth) and had two kinds of bamboo breastwork outside them. On its inside there was a deep trench thrown up all round direction with *panjis* and stakes between it and

the outer walk and trenches of 8 feet deep to shelter the garrison from the shots. The doorway was covered with pits and strung with spikes of bamboo altogether. These were protected by Bisa Gam and Luttora Gam and the fight was carried out with few muskets, arrows and stones with the presence of the deep forests and ravines working in their favour. Nevertheless, in this fight, which was a sustained through intense resistance, 30 rebels were killed and many were wounded. The British with the help of Duanias and Nagas ravaged the villages at Beesa, as most villagers had fled into the deep forest by abandoning their stores and slaves. The family of Luttora Gam and Bisa Gam were intercepted by a detachment at Towkak, which compelled the chief to surrender to Lieutenant Holroyd at Ningroo.⁷⁴⁵ These subsequent military expeditions and punishment perpetrated on the Singphos, had convinced them that they could be easily taken to task for their offences against the British. As a result, with the surrender of the major Singpho chiefs, the uprising began to peter-out and remaining Singpho chief under the leadership of Seelora Sen retreated back to Hukwang valley.

As Reynolds was proceeding to Ningroo, he received a letter from a Duania sent by Serrola and fourteen Gams a translation of which reads as follows:

This land is ours and Vetch Sahib has taken it from us. Formerly Scott Sahib and Neufville Sahib gave to the Tengi Meyo⁷⁴⁶ from Dihing mukh. From Namsang mookh, from Tipaln hill and in consequence of Vetch Sahib having taken it away we have made war and on that account we have fought also. Vetch Sahib has seized and carried off our Singphos. Further we have received orders from the Tipam Rajah to make war; now if you will abandon the country from the guard at Dihing mookh we shall come to Karemookli, but if you will not. We will not come. If you do not come, you will have the burning of all the villages on the Tengapani; once if we set to work we shall plunder

⁷⁴⁵ Dispur, ASA, PDP, Letter received form Government, no. 27, vol. 19, 1843, from Secretary to major Jenkins.

⁷⁴⁶ The Singpho who were commonly called TengiMyo were reported to have descendants of three brother- Myo, Naikee and Tengi. From the first derived the clans of Laloo, Duffa and Ningroo, from the second Noomly or Beesa and from the third Serro-la-Ten and Waquet, in H.K. Barpujari, Vol.II, p. 4.

the country thoroughly⁷⁴⁷. If you will release Bisa Raja, it would be your pleasure, but if you will not let Bisa Rajah, we Singphos are not all dead or destroyed and if you will let the Bisa Raja go, we will all build village and cultivate the *pators* (rice fields).⁷⁴⁸

These letters of Singphos chiefs drew the attention of the Governor-General in Council who had been shaken by this armed rebellion along this fragile frontier of eastern Assam. Therefore, their anxiety about the affairs of the Khamti and Singpho frontier compelled them to examine the causes for the outbreak of this rebellion. They were instructed to set up a committee to examine, whether the allegations regarding encroachment of land was true. They were to further examine if any British officer with Singphos in this connection had signed any official agreement. They uncovered that the outbreak had deeper roots of mistrust build up over years of oppression or else Ningroola, a loyal chief engaged in tea-cultivation, would not have collaborated with the insurgents⁷⁴⁹. Accordingly, a Commission was constituted consisting of Colonel G.B. Lloyd and H. Stainforth to inquire into the causes and nature of the insurrection and to suggest measures to prevent its recurrence.⁷⁵⁰ However, the committee could not carry out field visits, as the members could not tour the frontier on ground of indisposition.

Therefore, the Agent to the Governor-General was directed to furnish information in consultation with local authorities to enable them to form an opinion on the subject. Since direct accusations had been made by the chiefs against the Political Agent, T.R. Davidson, Secretary to the Government of India in the Foreign Department, insisted that Jenkins should enquire whether any encroachments had

⁷⁴⁷ New Delhi, NAI, FDPC, letter from H. Vetch Political Agent of Upper Assam to Major F. Jenkins, no. 268, 7th December, 1843.

⁷⁴⁸ New Delhi, NAI, FDPC, no. 268, 7th December, 1843.

⁷⁴⁹ H.K. Barpujari, vol. II, p. 4.

⁷⁵⁰ H.K. Barpujari, vol. II, p. 4

taken place since the days of Scott.⁷⁵¹ On directions of the authorities in Bengal, Major Jenkins directed all officials to report on the cause and origin of the Singpho insurrection, while he carried out various enquiries by interrogating the surrendered Singpho chiefs, other participants and Duania to unearth the root cause of the armed rebellion.⁷⁵²

Finally, in February 1844, Captain Vetch submitted his report after compiling all the information he received from the officers and information gleaned from his personal interview he carried out in Saikhowa and Diburgarh. In this report, he categorised the causes for the outbreak of the arm rebellion by Singphos as follows:

1. The desertion of Duania slaves and other dependent group which started after the coming of British in Assam was one of the major causes of discontentment among the Singphos against the British. The deserters were offered facilities by English advanced posts and these deserters were engaged in the tea cultivation near the frontier.
2. The second cause for the discontent among the Singphos chiefs like Bisa, Ningroo and Luttora Gam were the seizure and punishment by local officers to some member of their tribes.
3. The third cause was instigation of Tipam Raja, chief of Hukwang province under Burma.⁷⁵³

In his report Jenkins, the great tea enthusiast, was unwilling to lose the area brought under the tea cultivation, played his card well by suggesting to the Government that:

⁷⁵¹ New Delhi, ASA, FDP, Letter received from Government vol. 19, no. 60, 26th September, 1843 from Secretary to F. Jenkins, Agent to the Governor General North East Frontier, Fort William.

⁷⁵² New Delhi, ASA, FDP, no. 60, 26th September, 1843.

⁷⁵³ New Delhi, NAI, FDPP, no. 142, 9th March, 1844.

The loss of land has nothing to do with the Singphos rebellion rather it was a pure and simple case of primitive reaction against the enlightened abolition of slavery...and he convinced to the Government that the loss of slavery would soon compell the Singphos to settle down and engage personally in cultivation as many of them had already done.⁷⁵⁴

He further informed the Governor General-in-Council that Bisa's demands was not an estate rather an independent territory, which if granted would hold that tract under the tutelage of Burmese Government.⁷⁵⁵ Jenkins' report could not be agreed upon more by the obsessive defender of abolitionists in England, who could not imagine themselves ending up as a defender of Singpho slavery system. Therefore, they easily accepted the report of Jenkins that, 'the territorial rights were not at all based on any records hence dismissed them on the ground that neither the British Government nor had the Ahom rulers ever granted such territorial rights'.⁷⁵⁶

Thus, the uprising that had shaken the southeast frontier of Assam was finally suppressed after the arrest and surrender of important Singpho leaders by the middle of 1843. This uprising of Singpho though unsuccessful in expelling the English from their area, yet the rebellion shook the foundations of the nascent state in the frontier of Assam. On the attack, Jenkins remarked that, 'the loss we have sustained and the number of lives lost would lead me to suppose an extensive organized and bolder attacks then we have been accustomed to this part of the Singphos'.⁷⁵⁷

4.9 Conclusion

The outbreak of the Anglo-Burmese war 1824-26 made it inevitable for British to encounter the Singphos. The British were keen on breaking the alliance between the

⁷⁵⁴ New Delhi, NAI, FDPC, nos. 89-91, 23rd March, 1844.

⁷⁵⁵ New Delhi, NAI, FDPC, nos. 89-91, 23rd March, 1844.

⁷⁵⁶ New Delhi, NAI, FDPC, nos. 89-91, 23rd March, 1844.

⁷⁵⁷ Dispur, ASA, PDP, letter from F. Jenkins to the Secretary to the Govt. of Bengal, no. 5, 17th June, 1843.

Singphos and the Burmese. This attempt of the British was resisted by the Singphos who waged a war but were ultimately defeated by superior force. This subsequently resulted in the release of thousands of slaves possessed by the Singphos, and they in turn were made to sign an agreement with the British in May, 1826. Through, this agreement, the British restricted the power and position of the Singpho chiefs. However, the British did not adopt a strict policy but one of conciliations and non-intervention except only in the case of unavoidable circumstances. This policy was adopted in the backdrop of keeping the Singphos as the first line of defence against the Burmese.

However, this policy of non-intervention rather altered accordingly to colonial design in Assam. It was replaced but steady intervention in the Singpho affairs when the British found that the areas occupied by them were quite fertile and was important from a military point of view against future Burmese incursions. Besides, the area also held the scope for cross-border trade from Assam to Burma and then to China. This tract held by Singphos was full of wild tea which could be commercialized like the Chinese tea which intensified colonial intervention.

British military posts were subsequently strengthened at Sadiya with the stationing of permanent English officer to take control over the Singpho affairs. Besides, in order to restrict their movement, the military posts were established in important areas like Beesa, Koojo and Ningroo. The freed slaves were raised as a levy to fight against them. The *sepoy* stationed frequently issued *farman* and demanded manual services from them which included construction of stockades, roads, repairing officers house, etc. To add to their anguish, the military seduced village girls and many slave girls escaped with them.

With the development of tea cultivation in frontiers of Singpho habitation, the planters with state support began to encroach upon the foothills under the Singphos

and treated as wastelands, while directly annexing land in possession of the chiefs under various pretexts. Taking advantage of the military station the slaves very frequently escaped into the British territory as plantation workers as it provided them easy money and freedom. All these created changes in their social, economic and political affairs who wanted to revive back their old system and dislodge the British forever. This compelled them to rise in an armed rebellion in January, 1843. Though they fought very bravely and destroyed the Beesa stockade but they could not seize the other stockade erected by the British. The reinforcements with better and advanced weapons and help rendered by the Duania and Naga tribes helped to fight the Singphos, who fought with traditional weapons like *dao*, spears, stone, bow and arrows and a few muskets, etc. Without reinforcements in times of emergency, forced them to engage their slaves in the fight, who were not trained for combat. The Singphos fighting force ultimately succumb before the superior British force.

CHAPTER-V

POST-PACIFICATION HISTORY

5.1 Introduction to the Chapter

In the preceding chapters the discussion centered colonial intrusion into the Khamti and Singpho territory commenced after the Anglo-Burmese War (1824-26). The tribes in various forms resisted this intrusion, but their resistance movement did not succeed in preventing encroachments into their socio-economic and political lives. To halt the intrusion of the colonial rulers they finally undertook armed uprisings against the state. However, though they fought very bravely by using the best traditional knowledge of war but failed to withstand the military might of the British for long. Consequently, they succumbed to the repressive measures adopted by the British and finally lay down arms. While the Khamti, population was dispersed and were brought under a series of agreements. Some sections of the population were allowed to settle in the plains with house tax raised from them.

Therefore, in this chapter, I seek to explore the aftermath of the armed rebellion and the policies following its suppression. Besides, an attempt would be made to assess the impact of British policies and the subsequent changes that occurred in the internal socio-economic and political structures of the tribes.

5.2 Consequence of the Armed Rebellion

As discussed in previous chapters, pacification of the Khamti and Singpho armed rebellion were not an easy task for the British. They had to deal with the tribes who destroyed the British outpost and retreated to the forests, providing the right

environment for guerrilla warfare in which the rebels had expertise making them untraceable to the British military. In order to subdue the rebel tribes, the British adopted several mechanisms by sending various military expeditions and engaging the neighbouring communities against them like Duania and the Nagas, who too were expert in guerrilla mode of warfare. During such expeditions the British not only targeted the rebel groups but also to those communities who were supporting or harbouring the rebels. As discussed in the previous chapters, punishment meted out assumed various forms, which included indiscriminate burning down their villages, destroying their standing crops and granaries, seizing cattle and punishing those who harbored the rebels.⁷⁵⁸

This policy of repression was adopted to display superiority of the British force to reduce the rebel groups into submission and warn the other communities against harbouring rebels. Regarding this strategy Jenkins stated thus:

The most humane and officious punishment we can inflict upon the hill tribe is the burning of their villages and the destruction of their hoarded corn and once we made them feel that we can effect this they would seldom repeat their attack upon the people.⁷⁵⁹

Under such repressive measures the rebels group could not endure for long against the advanced British force with traditional mode of warfare and it was particularly difficult for rebels to fight with their families. Repressive measures sought to prevent future rebellion and remove the fear of Singpho power among the Assamese subjects in Upper Assam. Captain Mainwaring has stated that:

⁷⁵⁸ After their attack over Sadiya, the Khamti had to take refuge in the Mishmi and Singpho country. They received shelter, food and weapons from these tribes..., Chow Khok Manpoong, 87 years of aged, male, retired Government Servant, renowned public leader of Khamti, Namsai, interviewed on 12th January, 2106.

⁷⁵⁹ New Delhi, NAI, FDPC, letter from Agent to the Governor-General of the North Eastern Frontier to Secretary, Government of India, no. 95, 7th September, 1840.

The mystery which at present hangs over this region, the imaginary terrors of Singphos power under the present scenario has entrenched like a disease on the mind of our Upper Assamese subject. It should at once and forever be dispelled and removed it by inflicting sufficient punishment and message should be circulate amongst the chiefs, that any repetition of the offence in near future would be visited with heavy punishments.⁷⁶⁰

The rebel groups sought for peace and in due course had gained wider acceptance and consequently many chiefs surrendered before the British government. This period also coincided with the new colonial policy driven by industrial capitalism in Britain, seeking to utilize raw material from the colonies while integrating the Indian market for its machine made manufactured goods transforming the erstwhile monopoly trade.⁷⁶¹ This required a more effective administration for tying up the economy of colony to that of the mother country. As the imperial progress in India in nineteenth century, for reason of both finance and manpower, it preferred to keep many of the Indian states under indirect rule, rather than administer them directly. The choices were dependent on many factors. The states, which were not in a position to challenge the military power of the British, were left to themselves. Particularly those situated in remote corners or on hostile terrains were also left alone; while those having little arable land, and therefore limited prospect of revenue returns, held little attraction for direct conquest.⁷⁶² Entire Sadiya was annexed to British dominion and they established their hold over the fertile Namrup tract in 1842, which pushed away both the tribes towards the hills and forests. Therefore, now the area occupied by the Khamti and the Singpho held little scope of revenue return and it was situated in

⁷⁶⁰ Dispur, ASA, PDP, letter from captain Maniwaring, commander 2nd Assam Sebundy Corps to Major Jenkins, no. 410, 25th November, 1845.

⁷⁶¹ Sekhar Bandyopadhyay, p. 71

⁷⁶² Sekhar Bandyopadhyay, p. 114.

remote corners or on hostile terrains which was left them alone exercising loose political control.

Therefore, Agent-to-Governor General was instructed that it was the duty of British to protect its subject and to punish those who carried out wanton aggression, yet it was hoped that something might be effected by kindness and conciliation.⁷⁶³ This would help to establish a tranquil frontier to avoid unending expensive frontier wars against the Khamtis and the Singphos.⁷⁶⁴

5.2.1 Measures against the Khamtis

The sudden outbreak of the Khamti rebellion in Sadiya and their strong resistance had convinced the Political Agent of Upper Assam that the real strength of the Khamtis lay in the inherent unity among themselves under a single chief. This inherent loyalty towards their chief was a distinct advantage in times of war. Therefore, in order to weaken this powerful group in Sadiya frontier the British strategically broke the community into groups under separate leaders and settled them in different pockets of Assam.⁷⁶⁵ Therefore, the groups were dispersed in the following manner:

One group of the Khamtis under the leadership of Chau-keing Gohain and his two hundred followers were removed from Sadiya to the southern bank of the Brahmaputra in the Lakhimpur district without any trial and punishment. They were allowed to settle on the banks of the river Dibru. In course of time, they established their colony at Chowkidingi and Jakai area seven miles from Dibrugarh. As the Khamtis chief possessed the area, it was named as Chau-keiting (highland).⁷⁶⁶

⁷⁶³ New Delhi, NAI, FDPC, letter no. 85, 28th April, 1840.

⁷⁶⁴ Shakespear, p. 67.

⁷⁶⁵ New Delhi, NAI, FDPC, letter no. 61, 20th January, 1844.

⁷⁶⁶ Lila Gogoi, p. xxxix

The other group consisted of 900 surrendered Khamtis were divided under the leadership of Chau-la Gohain or Bhodia (son of Sadiya Khowa Gohain) and Chowtang Gohain (cousin of Sadiya Khowa Gohain). These groups were separated and settled in Lakhimpur district. Bhodia along with his 500 followers were settled at Narayanpur in the western part of the present Lakhimpur district.⁷⁶⁷ Chowtang Gohain along with his 400 followers was removed to Dhemaji on the north bank of the Brahmaputra.⁷⁶⁸ He was popularly known as Sissi Raja as he settled on the bank of river Sissi about seven miles from present Dhemaji. After his death, most of the Khamtis migrated from Sissi and joined their brethren settled in Narayanpur and Sadiya.⁷⁶⁹

The third groups of Moonglary Khamtis formerly settled on the Tengapani were dispersed by the late disturbance and consequently they were settled near Saikhowa south of the Brahmaputra.⁷⁷⁰

The last group who surrendered in 1843 under the leadership of Kaptan Gohain (cousin of Sadiya Khowa Gohain) the main architect of 1839 attack and his followers were settled in Choonpura or Noa Dihing area at a short distance from Sadiya. Living there for few decades, they migrated towards Tengapani, Kamlang and Dirak.⁷⁷¹

Thus, the Khamtis, one of the most formidable group of the Sadiya frontier were divided into four groups and dispersed across distinct locations. This policy of divide and rule was a successful adopted to prevent any combination in near future against the British rule in Sadiya frontier.⁷⁷² In the words of Jenkins, 'the Khamtis who are by far the most civilized and intelligent tribe on this frontier are now divided into

⁷⁶⁷ New Delhi, NAI, Foreign Department, from Jenkins to Davidson Officiating Secretary to the Government of India, 20th January 1844, no. 61-66.

⁷⁶⁸ M.L. Bose, *British Policy in the North-East Frontier Agency*, p. 79.

⁷⁶⁹ Lila Gogoi, p. xxxviii

⁷⁷⁰ M.L. Bose, *British Policy in the North-East Frontier Agency*, p. 79

⁷⁷¹ Shakespear, p. 67

⁷⁷² Alexander Mackenzie, p. 64.

four parties and I think there is no future apprehension to be entertained of any combination amongst them'.⁷⁷³

5.2.2 Measure against the Singphos

The Singpho armed rebellion which broke out in January, 1843 did not last long and was finally pacified by May, 1843. The surrender of important leaders like Ningroola, followed by Bisa Gam and other Singphos chiefs weakened the uprisings which ultimately lead to the breakdown of the rebellion very quickly.⁷⁷⁴The pacification was followed by the trial of rebel leaders. Accordingly, on 21st February, 1843, Captain Brodie initiated the proceedings on the trial of Bisa Gam, the principal rebel for treason and rebellion against the Government. He was convicted for treason and rebellion, and sentenced for life imprisonment. In consideration of his age and infirmity, the sentence was reduced to one of confinement at Dibrugarh jail.⁷⁷⁵ It was a measure of precaution rather than punishment as the British considered Bisa Gam's presence might encourage the other Singpho chiefs to continue the rebellion. Such an apprehension arose after intercepting a message sent by Seerol Sen who expressed displeasure over the conduct of the British Government, appealing for the release of Bisa Gam. Under such circumstances of suppressed anger visible among other chiefs, he was deported to Dibrugarh to keep him away. However, due to his infirmity he died in prison in 1844.⁷⁷⁶

On the other hand Ningroola, the privy to the plot was liberated, while his son Sahuman, an active adviser and contriver, was convicted and confined at Dibrugarh until such time as might be considered necessary by the Political Agent. Later on, he

⁷⁷³ New Delhi, NAI, Foreign Department, from Jenkins to Davidson Officiating Secretary to the Government of India, 20th January 1844, nos. 61-66.

⁷⁷⁴ Dispur, ASA, FPP, letter nos. 76-77, 31st May, 1843.

⁷⁷⁵ Dispur, ASA, PDP, letter from F. Currie, Secretary to the Government of India to Major F. Jenkins, no. 298, 9th March, 1844.

⁷⁷⁶ P.C. Dutta, *The Singpho*, p. 106.

was released after twelve years.⁷⁷⁷ Likewise, capital punishment was commuted to one of transportation to life in favour of Luttora Gam's son La Mungoloo on the ground that he merely acted under the orders of their immediate chiefs. Luttora Gam died before the trial on 10th July, 1843.⁷⁷⁸ Let Towman was tried for treason and rebellion and sentenced to life imprisonment at Dibrugarh jail, later died on 17th March, 1844.⁷⁷⁹ Deserted by his followers, Seerola Sen left for Hukwang and nothing was heard of him afterwards.⁷⁸⁰

Thus, the British successfully suppressed the armed rebellion of the Khamtis and Singphos. Subsequently, this made the British to relook into the policy that they were following towards the hill tribes, and devise certain measures that would help them to prevent such armed uprising in near future. This armed uprising had convinced the Government that its policy of establishing direct control over these tribes was not inexpedient, but commensurate with the trouble and the expense. Hence, after restoring order into the Khamti and the Singpho area, the question of future relation with the tribes engaged the serious attention of the Government. This led to re-examination of present policy of the Government and change in policy adopted by British towards them as discussed below.

5.3 Post-Pacification Policies towards the Khamtis and the Singphos

The immediate objective of colonial rule in the Khamtis and Singphos area after pacification generated diverse opinion among the colonial officials working in this frontier. Captain Mainwaring, commanding Second Assam *Sebund* suggested that:

⁷⁷⁷ Dispur, ASA, PDP, letter no. 298, 9th March, 1844.

⁷⁷⁸ New Delhi, NAI, FDPP, letter from F. Jenkins to R. Davidson, Secretary to the Government of India, no. 22, 18th March, 1844.

⁷⁷⁹ New Delhi, NAI, FDPP, letter no. 22, 18th March, 1844.

⁷⁸⁰ New Delhi, NAI, FDPC, letter nos. 1456-46, 9th May, 1845.

Any relations with these tribes were a necessary evil; it should be confined to bare exchange of civilities. The communication to the chiefs, if any, should be couched in complimentary terms and not by *parwanas* or a mode of correspondence which the latter thought served only to lower orders. The necessity of subjecting the chiefs to formal process of court of law should be avoided, but in the event of any outrage, of course detachment should be sent out to demand reparation. This can be achieved through maintaining strong advanced post in all the strategic location.⁷⁸¹

Frank Bonyngre:

I do not regard the Singphos as a people that a great Government should look upon as a nation at enmity with it. They should rather be regarded as a body of Dacoits and a vigilant officer among them with 150 or 200 men at his disposal would do more to preserve peace than all the forts that may be erected without such as officer...and the only step in my opinion the Government need take to thwart all their evil design is vigilance and a timely use of the power already on the frontier.⁷⁸²

This argument was further sustained by Vetch who stated thus:

If peace were to be maintained in frontier of Khamtis and Singphos, then two options are open: either to leave these tribes in their old state and not to interfere in their activities; or they should be brought under direct administration through constant relations and introduce civilization and order among them.⁷⁸³

Since the Government of India had incurred heavy financial losses in the first Anglo-Afghan war (1839-42) and Opium War (1839-42) it forced the Court of Directors to instruct the Governor-General in Council, 'that every practicable economy had to be effected in the administration'.⁷⁸⁴ Therefore, the Agent to Governor General was directed to effect a sharp retrenchment in both military and civil establishment in the North East Frontier.⁷⁸⁵ Given this context, the colonial government was not keen in extending its administration in hills inhabited by the

⁷⁸¹ New Delhi, NAI, FDPC, letter from Maniwarang to Jenkins, no. 80, 20th March, 1844.

⁷⁸² New Delhi, NAI, FDPC, letter from Secretary to Jenkins, no. 278, 31st November, 1843.

⁷⁸³ New Delhi, NAI, FDPC, letter from Jenkins to Secretary, no. 78, 12th April, 1844.

⁷⁸⁴ New Delhi, NAI, FPC, no. 180, 6th April, 1843.

⁷⁸⁵ New Delhi, NAI, FPC, no. 180, 6th April, 1843.

Khamti and Singpho on the issue of high costs. They were rather intent on concentrating resources for administering the plains, which were commercially viable in ways the 'barren' hills were not. In this context, Lord Dalhousie, has echoed a similar view in his speech later on: (Font)

I dissent entirely from the policy which is recommended of what is called obtaining a control, that is to say, of taking possession of these hills, and of establishing our sovereignty over their savage inhabitants. Our possession could bring no profit to us, and would be as costly as it would be unproductive.⁷⁸⁶

Therefore, the Political Agent was directed to exercise and act with discretion in those areas, which were acquired, by right of conquest. He was advised not to take cognizance of any offences that might occur within the jurisdiction of the Khamti and Singpho chiefs.⁷⁸⁷ The declared British policy was to leave them alone, yet there were initiatives to keep abreast of the intentions or movements of the tribes, by stationing military at important locations in the southeast frontier of Assam.⁷⁸⁸ Besides this they should establish their indirect control over the chiefs and in this line F. Hannay said:

With regard to future measure with the Singphos and the Khamtis of the frontier an influential chief ought in my opinion to be made responsible for the good behavior of that people generally: but particularly with reference to the inhabitant of the Tengapani where the bulk of the population settled.⁷⁸⁹

Despite such policy of the absence of direct penetration, there was continuous intrusion in the form of expeditions, taxation in the form of house tax and demands for labour. In this context, Jenkins has stated that:

⁷⁸⁶ Cited by Jelle J. P. Wouters, 'Keeping the Hill Tribes at bay: A Critique from India's Northeast of James C. Scott's paradigm of state evasion', *European Bulletin of Himalayan Research*, 2011, p.58.

⁷⁸⁷ New Delhi, NAI, FDPC, letter from Secretary, Government of India to Jenkins, no. 48, 7th May, 1844.

⁷⁸⁸ M.L. Bose, *British Policy in the North-East Frontier Agency*, p. 146

⁷⁸⁹ New Delhi, NAI, FDPC, letter from Hannay to Jenkins, no. 79, 20th November, 1843.

In a country like theirs (Khamtis and Singphos) it is scarcely possible that our troops would ever succeed in making prisoners. On the approach of a Detachment, the Singphos would fly for shelter to the woods and forests, a deserted village would be the only result of such expedition. With respect to punishing Singphos beyond the frontier for the aggression I think this would be best effected by carrying fire and sword through the country...Rather by establishing a post in some of the active routes for short time which would help in quick military movement and established military post would encourage the slaves to escape to our camps. This measure would inflict a most severe loss on the Singphos without shedding any blood, while it would be best an act of justice and humanity to these poor people to relieve them from their bondage.⁷⁹⁰

The primary aim of the Government was to secure the exposed villages in the Sadiya and Matak area and tea gardens from the raids of the Singphos and other tribes. While effectively controlling them by setting up military stations in important and vulnerable areas and backed by a strong force that station in plains of Assam, and through vigorous repression of future disturbance and raids.⁷⁹¹ Accordingly, the line of defence for the Khamtis and Singphos frontier was reorganized.

5.3.1 Reorganization of the Defense Line

The simultaneous outbreaks of Khamti and Singpho rebellions forced the colonial state to re-examine the existing line of defence at the easternmost frontier with Burma. This measure was quite significant in order to cope up with the future insurrection and maintain peace along this frontier of Assam. Officers working in this frontier suggested three possible line of defence. The first line was from Saikhowa-Beesa-Ningroo; the second was Saikhowa-Kojoo-Ningroo; and third was Saikhowa-Jaipur line. The post of Beesa was considered to be too remote and isolated from Saikhowa as it was situated in the middle of the Singpho country. Due to its remoteness, reinforcements could not be sent easily in the event of future

⁷⁹⁰ Dispur, ASA, PDP, letter from Major Jenkins to the Secretary, no. 410, 28th November, 1845.

⁷⁹¹ M.L. Bose, *British Policy in the North-East Frontier Agency*, p. 146

insurrections. On the other hand, such establishment of military post at the heart of Singpho area always remained as a source of anxiety for inhabitants. Therefore, the Beesa post was abandoned.

Hence, the two probable lines remaining were Saikhowa-Kojoo-Ningroo and the Saikhowa-Jaipur line. There were disagreements among the British officials about the alignment of these two lines of defence. Captain Hannay argued that the post of Ningroo was isolated, in the midst of desolate country devoid of population and without resources for its support. Therefore, it would be difficult to maintain it throughout the year. In the event of its retention then it would require considerable expenses.⁷⁹² On the other hand, due to its isolation, an enemy group similar to the happening at Beesa post could easily seize it. Therefore, the post at Ningroo should be withdrawn back to Makum seven miles lower down the Buri Dihing.⁷⁹³ He favoured the retention of Saikhowa-Jaipur line, which stood more favourably in comparison to the Saikhowa-Ningroo line. In his opinion, the Saikhowa-Jaipur line was not easily accessible by the enemy due to its remoteness from Singpho territory, while it was located in the midst of Assamese population full of resources. Besides, it would be an excellent vantage point to form a base during an offensive operation with open rear affording a free communication with the Jorhat division.⁷⁹⁴ Therefore, he argued for the Saikhowa-Jaipur line to be adopted as line of defence along the frontier of Khamti and Singpho territory.

However, Hamilton Vetch was not in favour of abandoning the Saikhowa-Kojoo-Ningroo in favour of the Saikhowa-Jaipur line. This was in view of the strategic locations of these posts, especially the Kojoo, which had been attacked twice by Singphos during the invasion of the Matak country. Therefore, the retention of Kojoo

⁷⁹² New Delhi, NAI, FPC, no. 180, 6th April, 1843.

⁷⁹³ New Delhi, NAI, FPC, letter from Vetch to Jenkins, no. 159, 18th November 1843.

⁷⁹⁴ New Delhi, NAI, FPC, letter from Hannay to Jenkins, no. 56, 18th November, 1843 (Delhi)

was very important to safeguard the villages of Saikhowa.⁷⁹⁵ He argued that it was the post at Ningroo, which withstood the Singpho insurrection, as reinforcements from Jaipur, and Saikhowa could only have prevented the plundering of all the villages above Jaipur.⁷⁹⁶ Hence, to withdraw the Kojoo-Ningroo post would enable the enemy to invade deeper into Matak area and expose the *ryots* to plunder and slaughter above Jaipur.⁷⁹⁷

Jenkins supported Captain Vetch, as the Saikhowa-Kojoo-Ningroo post had inspired confidence among the inhabitants of Matak and Jaipur and its neighborhood during the course of the Singpho insurrection.⁷⁹⁸ Besides, for the security for villagers in Saikhowa, Jenkins advocated that, ‘this line was very important on the account of extension of the tea cultivation in Upper Assam’.⁷⁹⁹ He further viewed that withdrawal of these post would encourage the Singphos to renew their attack and would be interpreted as victory over British post. It would be similar to the Khamti perception in 1839 after the Assam Light Infantry headquarters was withdrew from Sadiya to Saikhowa. The Khamti construed this measure as a sign of withdrawal by the colonial state and hoped to dislodge them from Assam continued their rebellion for very long period.⁸⁰⁰ Therefore, it was considered disastrous for the British to repeat the mistake by removing the military post from Ningroo. This would boost the confidence of the Singphos to take up cudgels against the colonial state.

⁷⁹⁵ New Delhi, NAI, FPC, letter from Vetch to Jenkins, no. 159, 18th November 1843.

⁷⁹⁶ One of the objectives for retaining the Ningroo post was to give the means of safe retreat of the Assamese then kept in bondage in the northern district of Burma. The presence of an officer and the detachment had always been acted security for refugee and it was hoped that continuing this post would further encourage the escape of Assamese slave and it would greatly tend towards the maintenance of tranquility all along the frontier, in H.K. Barpujari, vol. I, p. 160.

⁷⁹⁷ New Delhi, NAI, FPC, letter from Hannay to Jenkins, no. 56, 18th November, 1843.

⁷⁹⁸ H.K. Barpujari, vol. II, p. 10

⁷⁹⁹ H.K. Barpujari, Vol.II, p. 10

⁸⁰⁰ H.K. Barpujari, Vol. II, p. 10

The Commander-in-Chief, General Gough while accepting the proposals, recommended for the establishment of an additional post at Dum Duma about half way between Ningroo and Kojoo.⁸⁰¹ He further argued for the fortification of these outposts and to expedite the on-going construction of the all-weather road, which was commenced after the Khamti insurrection, for ensuring speedy movement of troops and easy supply of raw materials. The entire frontier outpost from Saikhowa to Ningroo was to be linked to each other and principal military post.⁸⁰² Similarly, breastwork was to be constructed in these frontier outposts in order to enable the detachment to hold out the attack until reinforcement arrived from the rear. The Governor General in Council on 23rd August, 1843 approved the recommendations by declaring Saikhowa-Ningroo as the defence line for the Khamti and Singpho frontier and ordered for establishment of two additional posts in Dum Duma and Tazee.⁸⁰³ The defence of this line was entrusted to the Assam Light Infantry with its headquarters at Jaipur. The strength of each post was fixed as follows:

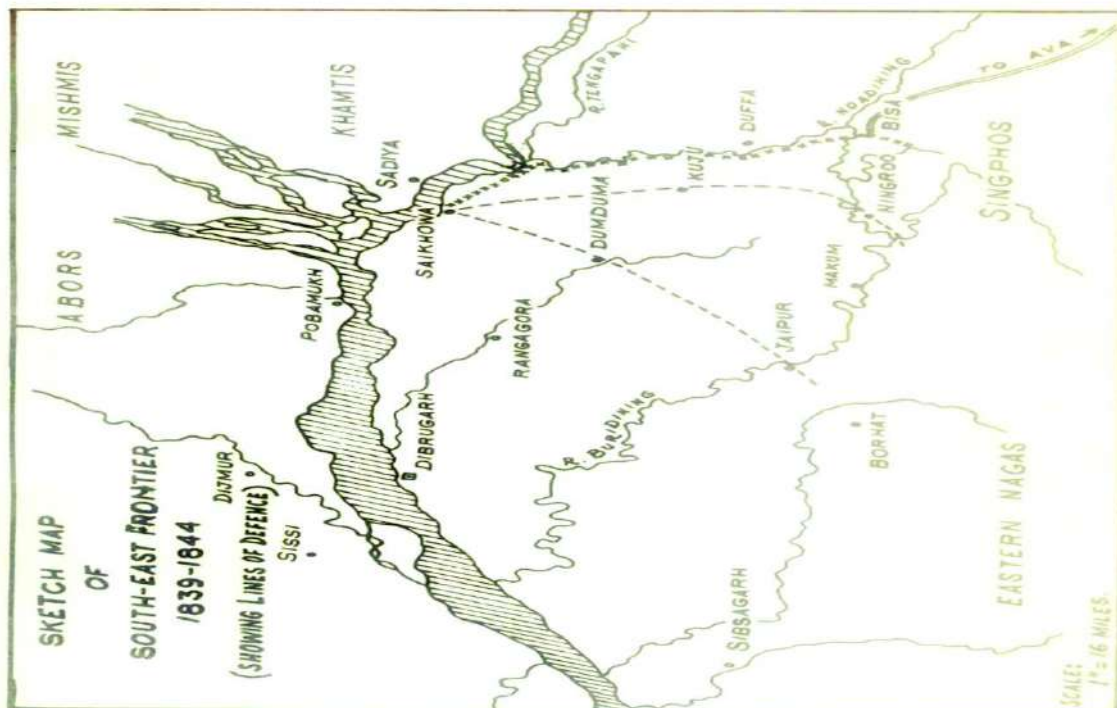
1. Jaipur: 4 Companies and Headquarter.
2. Saikhowa: 2 Companies
3. Ningroo: 1 Company
4. Dum Duma: 1 Company
5. Diburgarh: 2 Companies

⁸⁰¹ New Delhi, NAI, FPC, letter from Commander-in-Chief to the Governor-General in Council, no. 168, 18th October, 1843.

⁸⁰² Imdad Hussain, p. 138.

⁸⁰³ New Delhi, NAI, FPC, letter no. 169, 18th November, 1843.

Figure 5.1: Sketch Map of South East Frontier showing lines of defense



Source: Imdad Hussain, *Problem of Defence: North-East Frontier*.

Thus the British successfully reorganized the line of defence, by establishing military outposts at different strategic locations along the Singpho area, which was followed by a radical change in policy due to various changes emerging in frontier affairs of Assam.

5.3.2 Change in the Policy of Buffer Zone

The armed rebellion of the Khamtis and Singphos though suppressed, had sent a wave of shock among the colonial officials working in this frontier. It was a revelation for British administrators of Assam about the vulnerability of this eastern frontier. Their encounter with these tribes since the First Anglo-Burmese war had taught them that they were a foe by no means to be despised for their strategic location.

Despite incurring losses, the British expedition against the rebels proved to be a great reliever for them from ever haunting Burma-phobia. Until the uprising, British wanted the fidelity of the both the tribes or at least their neutrality in event of war against Burmese. With the suppression of the armed uprising, the urge of sustaining a buffer zone began to decline. This came about in 1843 when the British did not witness any reinforcement from the Burmese in support of the Singphos. No doubt, there were rumors about the instigation of the Tipam Raja but this too was without any concrete evidence. Hence, this made the Singphos less significant in frontier history of Britain with Burma. Finally, the chances of the Singphos to recover power from the British completely died away with the outbreak of the second Anglo-Burmese war in 1852. The defeat of Burmese in 1852 had put the British in more advantageous position than before in Burma. Consequently, this put to an end to the chances of aggression from Burma, which had troubled the British since the first Anglo-Burmese war (1824-26). The only sense of external danger that British in India were having from Russian Czar, from the North-west Mountain passes of Hindukush. Therefore, once eastern frontier was secured by middle of nineteenth century the British defensive machinery in India was geared to forestall any Russian advance into India from the north-west.⁸⁰⁴

The possibility of establishing trade connections with Burma and China through the Khamti and Singpho territory also lost impetus after the Second Anglo-Burmese war (1852). This war had brought the Lower Burma under the direct dominion of British thus shutting off independent Burma altogether from the sea. The entire coastline of Bay of Bengal from Cape Comorin to the Malaya Peninsula passed

⁸⁰⁴ P.N. Luthra, 'North-East Frontier Agency Tribes: Impact of Ahom and British Policy', *Economic and Political Weekly*, June 5, 1971, Downloaded 03 Dec 2017 10:21:27 UTC, <http://about.jstor.org>

under the British control.⁸⁰⁵This could fulfill the long-coveted British desire of monopolising control over Burmese ports and commerce, which obviated the necessity of trade route through the Northeast, which was greatly difficult and hazardous. Therefore, against this background the British changed their policy towards the Khamtis and Singphos.

5.3.3 Espionage and the First Line of Defence against the Sadiya Frontier Tribes

The rebellion of Khamtis and Singphos along with other tribal disturbances in northeast frontier had acquainted the British about hill politics, ‘that the more the British had expanded towards the hilly peripheries, the greater the territory it had to defend and the more vulnerable to raiding tribes it became’.⁸⁰⁶ In this context, the British Government realised that:

Inexpediency of pushing the frontier too far and of maintaining detached outposts in close proximity to the tribes had experienced much trouble. In so doing the local authorities had mixed themselves up with internal feuds and allowed themselves to be drawn into quarrels which often led to murderous attacks on British subjects. It was therefore finally resolved not to meddle any more in their internal feuds and to confine the attention of the local authorities to the legitimate boundary of actual subject population, to punish inroads on British possession by following the offenders and inflicting summary punishments in their villages.⁸⁰⁷

This policy sought to provide security and encourage European planters to invest in tea cultivation in Assam. As discussed in previous chapter, the historic formation of Tea Committee in 1834 had ascertain the authenticity of indigenous wild tea found in the frontier of Sadiya and explore the scope for its commercialisation. The Tea Committee of India debunked the hitherto doubt about the authenticity of wild tea found in Assam by reporting to Governor General in Council as under:

⁸⁰⁵ Sristidhar Dutta, ‘British-Singpho Conflict: An Analysis of Strategic and Economic Aspects’, in S. Dutta, (ed.), SHECAP p.72.

⁸⁰⁶ Jelle J. P. Wouters, ‘Keeping the Hill Tribes at Bay...’, p. 58.

⁸⁰⁷ H.K. Barpujari, vol. II, p.13

It is with feeling of highest satisfaction that we are enabled to announce to His Lordship in Council that the tea shrub is beyond all doubt is indigenous in Upper Assam being found there through an extent of country one months' march within the Appeasable Company territories from Sadiya and Beesa to the Chinese frontier province of Yunan.⁸⁰⁸ We have no hesitation in declaring this discovery...to be by far the most important and valuable that has ever been made on matters connected with the agriculture or commercial resources of this empire.⁸⁰⁹

This announcement and subsequent development and expansion of tea cultivation in Assam by Joint Stock Companies were a turning point in its history. The realisation that tea found in the frontier of Upper Assam was genuine tea, a commercially marketable item of immense potential.⁸¹⁰The first consignment of India tea dispatched to England in 1838 had aroused great interest in London. It stirred-up the speculative world and encouraged the private company to take up the tea cultivation in Assam. The first Joint Stock Tea Company, The Bengal Tea Association was formed in 1839. The success of this company encouraged many others to invest large capital in the plantation sector, which despite an early phase of slow growth led to proliferation of various tea companies in Assam. The immediate attention was directed towards concentration of manpower and systematic production of tea so that they could replace the Chinese tea in international market.⁸¹¹Anxiety to protect and promote tea manufacture could be seen during the time of Khamti rebellion where Mr. Bruce reported that:

I strongly beg to recommend your joining us with a reinforcement with as little delay as possible to prevent any attack on this place not that we could not repel one, but for fear of the disastrous effects it would have on the country at large to the new settler and Chinamen in particular, who are now even ready to run off, and our Tea prospects in

⁸⁰⁸ Debes C Gosh, *Tea Industry and Trade...*, p.107.

⁸⁰⁹ Rajen Saikia, *Social and Economic History of Assam (1853-1921)*, Manohar Publication, New Delhi, 2001, p. 146.

⁸¹⁰ B. Datta Ray, 'An Aspect of North-East Frontier Policy of the Raj: An Overview', in S. Dutta, (ed.), SHECAP, p. 247.

⁸¹¹ Debes C. Gosh, *Tea Industry and Trade, Indian Tea Planters' Association*, p. 107.

general, for if we do not commence our tea manufacture by 10th or 15th of March 1839 we shall lose the manufacture of whole year.⁸¹²

Next to tea during this period, petroleum and coal were the two important discoveries of the British in Assam. Preliminary discoveries of petroleum were made by Major A. White at Nampong (1838), Lt. W. Bigge at Namrup (1837), Captain F. Jenkins at Borhat and Makum (1838), Captain H. Vetch at Makum (1842), and captain P.S. Hannay at Namchik Pathar (1845). On the other hand the development of tea industry raised the demand for coal.⁸¹³ All these discoveries held promises for the British capitalists. Therefore, to nurture it for world market they needed to encourage investment in tea cultivation from European planters and give them a free access within the province by providing security against raids and rebellion in lowlands of the frontiers.

However, the disturbance witnessed in form of armed rebellion in the frontier of Sadiya was not a welcome sign for investors. Following the outbreak of the rebellion there was various reports on the frontier which tends to suggest to Jenkins that it was a well-planned attempt to subvert the British from Assam.⁸¹⁴ The report suggests that:

If there was no prompt action from British by reinforcing military in Sadiya then these rebellion would have been joined by other frontier tribes...and this would have resulted into the countless plunder and Upper Assam would have once again plunged into worse state than in Anglo-Burmese period.⁸¹⁵

The annexation of Upper Assam in 1838 had brought them into close contact with frontier tribes like Miris, Adis, Nagas and Mishmis. Their closer interaction became

⁸¹² New Delhi, NAI, FDPC, letter from Bruce to Jenkins, no. 26, 5th February, 1839.

⁸¹³ Rajen Saikia, p. 149-152.

⁸¹⁴ New Delhi, NAI, FPC, no. 61, 20th January, 1844.

⁸¹⁵ New Delhi, NAI, FPC, no. 61, 20th January, 1844.

inevitable when a proclamation was issued announcing the incorporation of Matak and Sadiya to British territory in Lakhimpur district with headquarters at Dibrugarh in 1842.⁸¹⁶ The management of the Sadiya was transferred from Political Department to the Revenue and Judicial Department of the Bengal Government. This annexation of Sadiya had directly brought them into contact with the frontier tribes near Sadiya. Therefore, the prospects of development of tea cultivation and the need of security for the planters added a fresh dimension to the British relation with the Khamtis and Singphos.

The Upper Assam frontier is inhabited by various tribes which need special vigilance to maintain control over these tribes. F. Jenkins has reported that:

The frontier of Upper Assam is inhabited by various tribes and who are divided into different groups and to manage all these tribes, many of whom speak distinct language and who are constantly at discord amongst themselves and with their neighbor requires much tact and vigilance; and all the hill tribes are dependent on Assam in great measure for the necessaries of life for which and the few articles of luxury that they indulge in they carry on a useful barter; but if not carefully watched they are always ready to have recourse to violence, particularly carry off slaves and cattle.⁸¹⁷

Now the British were in look out to settle friendly tribes in frontier areas for defensive purposes against the unfriendly tribes inhabiting in the interiors like the Mishmis and Adis. Under altered circumstances, the presence of the Khamtis and Singphos as friendly tribes in this fragile frontier was imperative for the colonial state. Against this background, the Khamtis still continued to be an important tribe in Sadiya frontier for the British.

Therefore, the British allowed one group of Khamtis under Kaptan Gohain to settle in Sunpura in 1843 on the north bank of the Brahmaputra with intention to settle

⁸¹⁶ Orchid Baruah, *British Administrative Centers in Nineteenth Century India*, Unpublished PhD Thesis, Guwahati University, 2004, p. 102.

⁸¹⁷ New Delhi, NAI, FDPC, letter from F. Jenkins to R. Davidson, no. 11, 15th February, 1844.

them as the buffer against the Singpho, Mishmi and Adis depredations who were occasionally in the habit of making inroads in Assamese ryots in Sadiya.⁸¹⁸ Besides, the settlement of former would facilitate the extension of agriculture land in the valley and it would facilitate the movement of British troops easily towards hills and their settlement would lead to friendly traffic with the Mishmi.⁸¹⁹ In compliance with this policy, Chowsengti Gohain, a Khamtis chief of the Bor Khamtis who arrived with 380 followers were allowed to settle on the banks of river Dirak southeast of Sadiya in 1852.⁸²⁰ In order to encourage and establish friendly relations with the newly arrived Khamtis population, Jenkins proposed to distribute a *kodall* (spade) and a hatchet to each male capable of using them. Besides, he proposed to offer stipend of one rupee for each individual human, woman, and child per month for the next three months. The area where they were settled had been covered with heavy forests. Therefore, it was to be treated rent-free for the first ten years after which they were required to pay revenue at the normal rate of the ordinary *ryots*. The condition attached to it was that nobody could leave the settlement chosen by them without permission.⁸²¹ However, the idea of a longer duration of grace was granted to them even after the expiration of the stipulated period, due to their industrious nature, which they felt the frontier tribes deserving such encouragement for peaceful frontier and expansion of tax base.⁸²²

⁸¹⁸ New Delhi, NAI, Foreign Department, from F. Jenkins to Secretary to Government of India, 20th January, 1844, no. 61-66.

⁸¹⁹ New Delhi, NAI, Foreign Department, from F. Jenkins to Secretary to Government of India, 20th January, 1844, no. 61-66

⁸²⁰ New Delhi, NAI, Foreign Department, from the Jenkins to C. Aleen Secretary to the Government of India, no. 74, 1852; John Michell, *The North East Frontier of India*, New Delhi, 1973, p. 138

⁸²¹ New Delhi, NAI, FDPC, letter from F. Jenkins to C. Allen, Officiating Secretary, Government of India, nos. 134-36, 18th June, 1852.

⁸²² The British-Khamti treaty of 1843 contained that, 'We shall be allowed a sufficient quantity of land for our support, either at Choonpoora or at Noa Dihing, for a term of five years rent free, and after the expiration of that period we agree to pay a moderate rent for the lands we may cultivate, or pay a house-tax, or Government may choose to authorize. Any order that may be issued respecting the *Abkarry* shall be duly attended to'.

Further, they were allowed to settle in the valleys of river Tengapani, Kamlang and Dirak and allowed to retain structures for their internal administration.

Dalton, the Principal Assistant to the Agent to the Governor-General in 1853 appointed Chowken Gohain as the chief of his intelligence establishment. This was to keep a check on the suspicious activities in the Sadiya frontier. The appointment of Chowken proved to be of great advantage for British as he proved to be a major source of information in the Sadiya frontier. He communicated regarding the happenings across the Mishmi country and in that of the Shan and Singphos on the Tengapani, Noa Dihing and Kerimpani.⁸²³ The service of Chowken was evident in 1854, when he supplied forty Khamti warriors to assist Lieutenant Eden who lead a small body of twenty sepoy to capture Mishmis chief Kaisa.⁸²⁴ With their help, the British successfully captured Kaisa and brought him down to Sadiya. Following this successful expedition against the Mishmis, they were further engaged against the Adis in 1858. In this Abor expedition the Khamtis rendered their service by recruiting a hundred Khamti coolies.⁸²⁵ In addition, Chowken undertook a mission on behalf of British to Tibet in the late 1860s. He undertook this dangerous long journey from Sadiya and marched through some one hundred seventy to one hundred eighty miles along the course of the Brahmaputra to reach Tibet. This mission of Chowken provided valuable information regarding the nearest route to Tibet from Assam and also about the lesser known communities inhabiting in the Lakhimpur frontier tract.⁸²⁶

Hence, it is not difficult to construe that the British were happy with role of the Khamtis in the Lakhimpur frontier. Their settlements now acted as surveillance centres

⁸²³ John Michell, p. 138.

⁸²⁴ New Delhi, NAI, Foreign Department, Secret 'E' Proceeding, nos. 451-462, February 1887.

⁸²⁵ L.N. Chakravarty, *A Glimpse of Early History of Arunachal Pradesh*, Director of Research, Itanagar, 1973 (Reprinted 1989), p. 78.

⁸²⁶ Dispur, ASA, File no. 652 AC, Sl. No. 2, 1869, John Gregory, Deputy Commissioner, Lakhimpur to the Personal Assistant to the Commissioner of Assam, dated 8 September 1869 in Account of Journey made by Chowken Gohain, Khamti *Chief to Tibet and the Description of Tribes bordering it*.

and provided security as buffer to the Assamese and Miris villages against incursions of the Adis and Mishmis. In January 1857, the Mishmis attacked and cut-off a village near the *sepoy* guard at Sadiya. However, retaliatory measures against such high-handed action of the Mishmis could not be pursued in view of the Sepoy Mutiny in Upper India.⁸²⁷ Further, in November, 1857, the Chulikata Mishmis attacked and murdered the women and children of a Khamti village while the male inhabitants were absent. This outrage roused the spirit of the Khamtis who started to prepare for their own defence. Shortly afterwards they drove back a body of Chulikatas whom they detected of stealing upon their settlement. In 1861, the Mishmis again attacked Chowken Gohain's village on Kondil, and though were beaten off with losses, yet they inflicted some damage. These frequent raids of the Mishmis had threatened the prosperity of the settlement around Sadiya. For a permanent resolution of insecurity along this frontier caused by recurring raids, the British engaged the Khamtis against the Mishmis by providing arms and a monthly payment. Colonel Comber called out these volunteer in 1865, after the raid of the Mishmis on the village of Dulo. These Khamtis volunteer were the inhabitant of the village of northern Sadiya. At initial period, there were 12 Khamti engaged who were called out for service in the shape of patrol parties from about the 15th October, 1865 to the end of April, 1866. The British had appointed two Khamtis as headmen and ten subordinates, the former were paid Rs. 24 and the latter Rs. 10 annually. On the other hand each volunteer was provided a firelock and periodically with a small supply of ammunition. Their duties were to watch the paths from the Mishmi Hills and patrol along the line of passes and between outposts while keeping the guards informed and on the alert. In the word of Deputy Commissioner of Lakhimpur:

⁸²⁷ Gomandhi Miye, *The British Policy Towards the Mishmi Hills: A Native Response (1826-1919)*, Unpublished M.Phil Dissertation, Rajiv Gandhi University, 2013.p.28.

They are a hardy, useful set of men, always ready to accompany an expedition if necessary or the Deputy Commissioner or any officer on any special duties; consider themselves a part of the protective force of the frontier.⁸²⁸

This frontier militia proved to be a successful measure against future Mishmi inroads. A strong colony occupied a position towards the Dikrang and the Chulikatas since then had not attempted to give trouble.⁸²⁹

The Khamtis settlements in the Lakhimpur frontier proved to be very important and continued to provide crucial support to the military and civil authorities.⁸³⁰ As reported by the Deputy Commissioner of Lakhimpur in 1871, the Khamtis inhabited seventeen villages located along the north and south bank of the Brahmaputra as follows:

Table 5.1: Statement of Khamtis Volunteers of Ujan Sadiya

Sl. no	Name	Rank	Caste/Tribe	Number of arms	No of ammunition
1.	Chownok Loongkang	Head Volunteer	Khamtis	1 musket and <i>a dao</i>	12 balled Cartridges and 12 caps.
2.	Chowai Kouhuman	Ditto	Ditto	Ditto	Ditto
3.	Chowkit Humanloi	Volunteer	Ditto	Ditto	Ditto
4.	Palang Met	Ditto	Ditto	Ditto	Ditto
5.	Palang Nisoi	Ditto	Ditto	Ditto	Ditto
6.	Chowsai Humanboot	Ditto	Ditto	Ditto	Ditto
7.	Chowhuman Bundi	Ditto	Ditto	Ditto	Ditto
8.	Chowngi Humanpo	Ditto	Ditto	Ditto	Ditto

⁸²⁸ Dispur, ASA, Government of Bengal Paper. 9, file no. 92/141, 13th May 1873, correspondence connected with Khamti volunteers and Tekak Nagas.

⁸²⁹ L.N. Chakravarty, pp. 56-57.

⁸³⁰ Dispur, ASA, FDP, letter from E.J Dalton, Principal Assistant to the Agent to the Governor-General on the North-East frontier to F. Jenkins 28 November, nos. 71-72, 17th October, 1856.

9.	Bisoni Aiton	Ditto	Khahumang	Ditto	Ditto
10.	Chowkia	Ditto	Ditto	Ditto	Ditto
11.	Mezer	Ditto	Ahom	Ditto	Ditto
12.	Khongte	Ditto	Naga	Ditto	Ditto

Source: Debrooghur Deputy Commissioner's Office, 2nd May, 1873.⁸³¹

Table 5.2: Khamtis villages in north and south bank of the Brahmaputra in 1871

Sl. No	North Bank of the Brahmaputra	South Bank of the Brahmaputra
1.	Narainpur	Bogyarah
2.	Bungfang	Sesee
3.	Dikrong	Humankatta
4.	Dhamaje	Choykhowa
5.	Sadiya	Derak
6.		Makoom
7.		Joypore
8.		Nidopani
9.		Tengapani
10.		Dihing
11.		Morowapani
12.		Kopahatoli

Source: Report of the Deputy Commissioner of Lakhimpur on the Singphos, 9th May, 1871.⁸³²

⁸³¹ Dispur, ASA, Government of Bengal Paper. 9, file no. 92/141, 13th May 1873, correspondence connected with Khamti volunteers and Tekak Nagas; Annual Report on Assam Frontier tribes, February 1873, no. 13.

⁸³² P.N. Luthra, p. 79

The total population of these settlements is estimated to be 3,930, of which 1,870 are estimated to be male, 930 female adults, and 1,130 children of both sexes. Besides, these there were four *khels* known as Mongiong, Chahumangthee, Panangpan and Humanoho, who live with the Singphos, and have the same relationship with Government as the Singphos. The Khamtis settled at Sadiya, Derack, Nidopani, Tengapani, Dihing, Morowpani and Kopahatoli did not pay revenue, while the rest paid revenue, and were on the same footing as the other *ryots* of the plains.⁸³³ With the introduction of Inner Line Regulation of 1873, most of the Khamti villages were brought under Inner Line and the Annual Report of 1891 summarised that, ‘the Khamtis villages within the revenue line provided the best class of *ryots* in the North Lakhimpur subdivision’.⁸³⁴ Even the villages outside the Inner Line were deemed more sociable, more civilized and more scientific in spirit than the other savage settlement. Their habitats came under closer scrutiny of British administration with the introduction of Inner Line regulation and formation of the Dibrugarh Frontier Tract in November, 1882 under the control of the Deputy Commissioner of Lakhimpur. To assist the Deputy Commissioner, a new office of the Assistant Political Officer was created at Sadiya in 1882. J.F. Needham, a Bengal Police official was appointed as the first Assistant Political Officer, to look after the British political relation with the Adis, Mishmis, Singphos and Khamtis.⁸³⁵

The role of Khamtis as friendly tribe continued even during the period of Needham who had reported while on his expedition to Rima in 1885-56 acknowledged that he could not have entered Tibet without the help and company of Chowsa, a

⁸³³ Mackenzie, p. 60.

⁸³⁴ Dispur, ASA, *Annual Report upon Native States and Frontier Tribes of Assam for the Year 1891-2*, Shillong, printed at the Assam Secretariat Printing office, 1892, p. 16.

⁸³⁵ M.L. Bose, *History of Arunachal Pradesh*, Concept Publishing House, New Delhi, 1997, p.176.

trusted Khamtis chief residing outside the Inner Line.⁸³⁶ He states about the event as follows:

It would be impossible for me to exaggerate the service rendered me by this human during my trip. Thoroughly looked up to and trusted by both the Digaro and the Mijus; because (1) he speaks Digaro most fluently, (2) he had been amongst them all (in their own country) before, and had thoroughly ingratiated himself with them, he was in position to conciliate where conciliation was required, and he was believed when he explained to them that I had no ulterior object, detrimental to their tribe, in wishing to march through their hills. His thorough knowledge too of both tribes enabled him not only to make me acquainted with all the really influential headmen, or chiefs, whom it was necessary that I should interview and conciliate, but to coach me in all their tribal dissensions; and by his tact, and influence he overcame the difficulties I had in procuring porters to accompany me right through to Rima, which at first appeared to be insurmountable and which, if they had been, would have effectually prevented my accomplishing the journey; for I am convinced that I should never have been able to perform it had I not succeeded in exchanging my Dowanyas for Mishimi.⁸³⁷

The previous journey of Macgregor and Woodthorpe into Bor Khamti in 1885 was assisted by the Khamti.⁸³⁸ Such loyal service rendered by the Khamtis encouraged the Chief Commissioner to propose to Lord Dufferin, the Governor General of India, to send the Khamti chief a suitably inscribed double barrelled gun as a reward for his services to the cause of science and empire.⁸³⁹ From the records of 1896-97 it could be construed that the Khamtis were permitted to hunt elephant in Diphukhet beyond the Inner Line. In lieu of elephant catching, the British were required to pay one hundred rupees as royalty. However, with the appointment of a Political Officer and gradual reduction of Mishmi raids, the role of Khamtis militia was minimized and

⁸³⁶ Dispur, ASA, Assam Secretariat Record(henceforth ASR), General Department, File no. 1735, 1886, Mr. Needham Expedition to Rima in the Zayul Valley, in Eastern Tibet.

⁸³⁷ Dispur, ASA, ASR, General Department, File No. 1735, (Tribal Areas) Records, Mr. Needham's expedition to Rima in the Zayul valley, in Eastern Tibet, 1886.

⁸³⁸ Errol Gray, *Diary of Journey to Bor Khamti Country*, p.21, <https://archive.org> accessed on 25/12/2017

⁸³⁹ Robert Reid, *History of the Frontier Areas Bordering on Assam: From 1883-1941*, Eastern Publishing House, New Delhi, 1983, p. 186.

subsequently from 1892-93 the force of Khamti militia were gradually phased out and no new recruitments were made to replace losses by death etc. Satisfied with the service of Khamti Chief Chowna Gohain was invested with the title of Raja by the Chief Commissioner since 1914.⁸⁴⁰ A few years later in 1917-18, all the Khamtis were assessed under poll tax and were treated as full-fledged British subjects. Thus, all the Khamtis of the Sadiya Frontier Tract came to be treated as poll-tax paying subjects. The only exception to the rule was that their Raja Chowna Namshoom of Chowkham and members of his clan Namsoom clan. However, these arrangements were purely of a temporary nature to last for the lifetime of the Raja Chowna Gohain. The allowance paid to the Raja Chowna Gohain was at the rate of Rs. 30 per month. In accordance with instruction issued in October, 1910, on account of political services rendered by him to the Government it was decided that the amount should be raised to Rs. 150 with effect from 1917-18. Following his death the allowance was discontinued and monthly allowance of Rs.40 was sanctioned in favour of his heir Chowaimong Gohain. This was in lieu of his fidelity towards the government and assistance in collecting information, apprehending offenders and generally maintaining the tranquillity at the frontiers. This allowance was sanctioned with effect from 1st April, 1927.⁸⁴¹

However, unlike the Khamtis, the Singphos did not receive cordial overtures from the British. As discussed in previous chapter they were not organized under a single chiefly family. Rather they were under a combination of several self-ruling chiefs, ruling over different clan groups and were never ready to unite under a single chief. Due to this tradition, the British had problems dealing with them as a tribe in its entirety. Therefore, even after the pacification the British did not sign any fresh treaty

⁸⁴⁰ P.N. Luthra, p. 80.

⁸⁴¹ P.N. Luthra, p. 80.

with them rather continued with that affected since 1826. They considered the Singpho as a trouble race and wanted to replace their role as a buffer by Duania and Naga (Tangsa) in their place. In this context Jenkins has said that:

The position of the Singphos along the frontier has never allowed us to maintain a constant communication with the tribes beyond the Patkai and whilst we have always had apprehend treachery on the part of some of the Gaums, there was constant cause for suspicion and alarm and the means of converging an inroad. We shall now get rid of this troublesome and faithless race and those tribes left on the frontier, the Nagas and the Duania will have a common interest with us in excluding any enemy from the Ava side and will be ever on the watch to give us notice of any intended invasion.⁸⁴²

Therefore, after their subjugation there are not many details left by British officer about the Singphos as their role as buffer zone in the aftermath of the annexation of Lower Burma after the second Anglo-Burmese war of 1852 ceased. This annexation of Upper Burma under British dominion had ended the hope of Singphos to receive any assistance from Burma. And, this subsequently diminished their role as buffer against the Burmese and unlike the Khamtis they were not much inclined towards settled agriculture.⁸⁴³ Therefore, British who were looking for friendly and settled cultivators at the frontier preferred to keep the Singphos undisturbed and isolated in the hills. In course of time, the British official correspondence began to overlook them except for some mixed references about their oddity. Some records mentioned that the Singphos began to adopt labour and settled to agricultural life. However, some official correspondences perpetuated the notion about the ideal life of the Singphos as one of despising working in the agriculture fields. In 1848, Vetch reported that the Singphos

⁸⁴² New Delhi, NAI, Foreign Department Proceeding, form F. Jenkins to the Secretary to the Government of India, letter no. 20, 10th February 1843.

⁸⁴³ New Delhi, NAI, FDPC, letter from Agent to Secretary to the Government of India no. 101, 23rd May, 1850.

chiefs were slowly softening, and they were adopting labour and settling to agriculture, but were indulging to opium addiction. He states about it as follows:

I think there are decided indication of a more settled disposition among them than I have yet seen, and a tendency to apply themselves more to agriculture than formerly when they trusted almost entirely to their Assamese slaves for their field labour, and devoted themselves to forays and feuds, elephant hunting, idleness and opium.⁸⁴⁴

In 1871 the Deputy Commissioner of Lakhimpur reported more emphatically that the Singphos have settled down to agriculture, and do now for themselves what formerly they depended on their Assamese slaves to do for them. They apparently, however, only cultivate sufficiently to meet their own consumption for a portion of the year, the remaining months they live upon wild yams and other forest products, and what they procure from other places. The Government had no fixed relation with them; they are generally obedient, and in such way recognize British supremacy. The Singphos meet the Government officers yearly at the *mela* held at Sadiya, and they are in the habit of visiting the officer in military command at that place. Further than this there is no material relations. As reported by him, the Singphos occupied in eighteen principal settlement areas:

Table 5.3: Principal settlement area of the Singphos in 1871

1. Tengapani	2. Morowapani
3. Pechela Wookh	4. Dissopani
5. Menaboom	6. Naginipani
7. Merippani	8. Tangon Joop
9. Momoidan	10. Dihingpani

⁸⁴⁴New Delhi, NAI, FPC, letter from Vetch to F. Jenkins, nos. 199-201, 24th March, 1848.

11. Borooh Pattar	12. Kherimpani
13. Dhekori Doobie	14. Monking Tap
15. Terap Mcokh	16. Noyan Pattar
17. Nangdoo Pattar	18. Jingthoopani

Source: Report of the Deputy Commissioner of Lakhimpur on the Singphos, 9th May 1871

These settlements contained forty-eight *khels* or sections, numbering about 3,435 persons, of which 1,120 are estimated to be male, 1,180 female adult.

There were now ten to twelve Singphos who had settled in the village of Tegee and Koolie in the Megelamouzah of Lakhimur district, paid revenue, and were on a similar footing as the other *ryots* of the mouzah.⁸⁴⁵ However, on contrary to this John Michell in 1883 reported that many of the Singphos still despised working in the fields as many of them considered this as a shameful idea. Therefore, when they were deprived of their slaves at Noa Dihing many of the Singphos died of starvation and all fell into great poverty.⁸⁴⁶ The emancipation of slavery had worst impact upon the Singphos. The humiliated appearance of the wrecked Singpho elites in the labour market in the 1890s was probably not unrelated to the process of immiseration.⁸⁴⁷ There is no mention of other Singphos rebellion after 1843 and attempts had been made British to keep them in good terms. When J. F. Michell pushed to Hukwang valley from Sadiya via Singpho country in 1883 and 1891 he was assisted by them and there was no sign of opposition.⁸⁴⁸ In 1909, Neol Williamson visited these tracts. He too was assisted by the Singphos and they did not oppose the move of the Political Officer.⁸⁴⁹ In 1914,

⁸⁴⁵ Alexander Mackenzie, p. 72.

⁸⁴⁶ John Michell, 127-8

⁸⁴⁷ Dispur, ASA, Annual Report upon Native States and Frontier Tribes of Assam, Shillong, 1898-99, p. 42.

⁸⁴⁸ Dispur, ASA, ASR, File no. 613 J of 1888.

⁸⁴⁹ Dispur, ASA, Political Proceeding, nos. 13-40, May 1910.

when the Frontier Tracts were divided, the Singpho tracts were brought within the Eastern Section of the North-East Frontier, and gradually they were brought under the loose political control and purview of the Rules for the Administration of Justice in the Frontier Tracts.⁸⁵⁰ Poll tax was to be introduced and collected from the Singpho villages thereafter.⁸⁵¹ According to the annual report of Dundas, the political officer, Singphos were brought under direct administration and all of them paid poll tax. They were found contended, hardly realizing that the conditions were ever different.⁸⁵² In 1943, the Singpho tracts were divided when the Tirap Frontier Tract was created; some were brought within the new charge while others continued to be within the jurisdiction of the Political Officer of Sadiya.⁸⁵³ The Singphos posed no problem for the British till their withdrawal from India in 1947.

In 1895-96 the Singphos were employed to work on roads and carry stores from Sadiya -to Ningrang Nong's village for the Assam-Burma Connection Railways Survey.⁸⁵⁴ Catching elephants for the tea garden owners and the government became a regular job of the Singphos residing beyond the Inner Line.⁸⁵⁵ While referring to the nature of the elaborate and highly organized system of slavery among the Singphos, the Agent to the Governor General had categorically assured the Calcutta authorities in 1873, which despite not being savage as some of the other groups at the frontier were not yet in possession of property in, land. Therefore, Hopkinson reasoned that the Singphos were still continuing to die out from the ultimate effect of opium and general inadequacy. While they abandoned wet rice which is gradually being taken up by foreign settlers, it would not be before long that they would disappear from the Noa

⁸⁵⁰ M.L. Bose, *History of Arunachal Pradesh*, p. 95.

⁸⁵¹ Dispur, ASA, Political Proceeding, nos. 1-3, December 1914.

⁸⁵² Dispur, ASA, Administration Report, 1917-18

⁸⁵³ M. L. Bose, *History of Arunachal Pradesh*, p. 95.

⁸⁵⁴ Dispur, ASA, Annual Report upon Native States and Frontier Tribes of Assam, 1895-96, p.73

⁸⁵⁵ Dispur, ASA, Annual Report upon Native States and Frontier Tribes of Assam, 1895-96 p.73.

Dihing valley, and being replaced by industrious people of another race.⁸⁵⁶By the turn of the nineteenth century a number of the Singphos found themselves irredeemably hypothecated to the *kaya* (moneylenders).⁸⁵⁷

Subsequently, the Annual Reports of Frontier Tribes began to omit their references, except for infrequent references of normative behaviour like idle ease, opium eater, lazy and un-enterprising, and in possession of slaves. In all these reports, they continued to denigrate the character of the Singphos thus: ‘the Singphos were idle, lazy and not keen on hard work’.⁸⁵⁸ However, the question is that if they did not work, neither they nor their trade nor their crafts would have survived for so long. What was being discussed was not whether they worked or not, but the nature of their work. Their work was independent, not time bound and most important was not for wages. The point, however, is that they were never idle or opium eater. In fact, they did a number of other economic activities apart from agriculture. They were traders in all kind of forest and agriculture produce, maintained trade relations with Burmese and Assam prior to the arrival of British. They were expert in smithy, made baskets, mats, and other products for daily use. They were rather marginalized drastically due to colonial intervention, but they probably did not become idle or opium eater certainly not as a whole community.

From the above discussion point it is clear that the Khamtis were given a better deal only to maintain a buffer zone in that part of frontier against the Mishmis and Adis. Thus the good relationship with the Khamtis was not without any interest at stake. Therefore, after the suppression of the rebellion there was no other uprising

⁸⁵⁶ Dsipur, ASA, Annual Report on Frontier Tribes of Assam for the Year 1934-35, Shillong, printed at the Assam Secretariat Printing Office, 1935, p. 4.

⁸⁵⁷ Dsipur, ASA, Annual Report, 1896, p. 42

⁸⁵⁸ See, Annual Reports upon Native States and Frontier Tribes of Assam 1895-99, in Annual Report on the Frontier Tribes of Assam for the Year 1926-27, the Annual Report on the Frontier Tribes of Assam for the Year of 1933-34, p. 5, Annual Report on Frontier Tribes of Assam for the Year 1935-6, Annual Report on Frontier Tribes of Assam for the Year 1933-4.

reported. The agreement were forced upon the tribes in which British had set rules of the game for the other party, and by entering into such agreement the latter had legitimized the British rule and its indirect extension to their country.

5.4 Impact of the British Policies on the Khamtis and the Singphos

The colonial incursion in the Khamtis and the Singphos area, and subsequent policies towards the people had resulted in various impacts on the socio-economic and political changes.

5.4.1 Impact of the British Policy on Economy

As discussed in chapter two, the Khamtis and the Singphos society were not completely dependent on agriculture, having to depend on barter to procure certain essential articles, which were not available in their area such as salt, implements of agriculture and husbandry, iron, cloths, etc. Therefore, their production was supplemented by trade, making their economy just sufficient to support the social structure. However, the British had brought certain changes in the traditional economic system of the tribe.

Such impact is visible on their economy. Like other tribes, human labour was the principle source of power for Khamtis and Singphos. Given the abundance of land, but rudimentary technologies of production, labour was one of the principle sources in the production process. This labour was procured through two main sources viz., kinship and slaves. The latter was prevalent within the hierarchical structure, which existed, among the Khamtis and Singphos in pre-colonial period. However, with the arrival of colonial rule in the master-slave mode of economy was disrupted. The colonial rulers in compliance with the abolitionist policy in England targeted the Khamti and Singpho slaves. The release of slaves as discussed in chapter three and

four drastically affected the economic set up of the tribes and witnessed drastic reduction in production, as it forced them to depend on kinship mode of production only.⁸⁵⁹ The other major source of subsistence in the form of trade too came under new regulations and taxes implemented under colonial rule. In this context, Sudatta Sikadar states that:

Capitalism cannot but be a world-wide system. Propelled by its own logic i.e. the inherent tendency of capitalism to expand market, it entangles whole world in the net of a world market.⁸⁶⁰

Along with strategies to secure the eastern frontier militarily, it was through Khamti and Singpho inhabited areas, they were interested to open the trade routes for approaching the markets of Burma and China.⁸⁶¹ They also aimed at extracting valuable natural resources available in hills through the frontier markets.⁸⁶² To induce European finished goods among the hills tribes the markets were used.⁸⁶³

The objective of colonial rule to connect Burma and China via Singphos and Khamtis country lost its importance after the annexation of Burma. While the other objectives did not prove lucrative due to little demand for machine made products in the hills. The colonial rulers tried to draw the tribes into the market network through expanding it and supporting annual trade fairs from the middle of nineteenth century. The biggest annual fair was held at Sadiya where the main transactors from the hills were the Miris, Mishmis, Khamtis, Singphos and Adis. During the trade fair, the colonial officials conducted a *darbar*, where the British officials presented the hill

⁸⁵⁹ S.N. Mishra, 'Arunachal's Tribal Economic Formation and their Dissolution', *Economic and Political Weekly*, 22 October, 1983, Downloaded, 23 Jun 2014 <http://about.jstor.org>.

⁸⁶⁰ Sudatta Sikadar, *Economic Under Development of Arunachal Pradesh: A Historical Perspective*, in S. Dutta (ed.), SHECAP, p. 315.

⁸⁶¹ New Delhi, NAI, Foreign Political Consultation, External-A, 24 February 1835, no. 26; Dispur, ASA, Assam Secretariat Record, General Department, file no 1671 of 1878.

⁸⁶² M.L. Bose, *British Policy in the North Eastern Frontier Agency*, p. 182

⁸⁶³ M.L. Bose, *British Policy in the North Eastern Frontier Agency*, p. 182.

chiefs with objects like wine, broad-cloth, handkerchief, scissors, porcelain wares, opium etc. as gift during the initial period.⁸⁶⁴ Once the Khamtis and Singphos became accustomed to using such articles, they were forced to purchase them from the markets. Through the foothill markets and trade fairs the cheaper manufactured goods such mill-made cloths, glass, beads, metals, metal wares, opium etc., were pushed into the interior of the hills. In return, raw products such as rubber, timber, ivory, wax, etc., were extracted from the hills.⁸⁶⁵ The agents of imperialism plundered natural resources. The Marwari traders not only engaged in trade, but some of them operated on behalf of European concerns as forwarding agents. Therefore, the coming of the British had transformed wild tea and commercialised it, which resulted in land grabbing by European planters in the lowlands within Singpho territory. The introduction of foreign goods in the Khamti and Singpho economy reduced the demand of local handloom and handicraft industries. They became more and more dependent on imported goods.⁸⁶⁶ Their economy became interlinked with the world economy through opium and tea. Though tea was originally found naturally in the Singpho territory, gradually the planters and government forced them to part with their land by abandoning it and migrating towards hills and Hukwang valley in order to escape from taxation under British control.⁸⁶⁷ This development of tea under colonial rule had deprived the Singphos and pushed them to insignificance, though their commodity was interlinked with world economy but its fruits were harvested by colonial ruler.

⁸⁶⁴ Dispur, ASA, PDP, ASR, no.4569, July 1883.

⁸⁶⁵ Sudatta Sikadar, *Economic Under Development of Arunachal Pradesh: A historical Perspective*, in S. Dutta, (ed.) SHECAP, p. 316.

⁸⁶⁶ Dispur, ASA, ASR, Revenue Proceeding, April 1909, No. 17-18, Report on Trade between Assam and the Adjoining Foreign Countries for the year 1890.

⁸⁶⁷ Sig Chau Ja Maio, 58 years of aged, male, public leader (President of the Tai Khamti-Singpho Council), Piyong village, Namsai district, Arunachal Pradesh, interviewed on 14th January, 2016.

Table 5.4: Sadiya Trade Fair Import and Export

Sl. No	Exports	Imports
1.	Rubber	Ericloth
2.	Wax	Bead
3.	Mishmi-titita	Iron-Utensils
4.	Mishmi-cloth	Silver earring
5.	Adi-cloth	Knives
6.	Spear	Silver Ankle
7.	Dan	Muslin
8.	Basket	Broad cloth
9.	Bag	Coraj
10.	Mat	Opium
11.	Elephant tusk	Tobacco
12.	Rhinoceros horns	Oil
13.	Rug	English thread
14.	Rice	Hand kerchief
15.	Bell metal	Tea, Sugar
16.	Plates	Cambric
17.	Boat	Molasses
18.		Cup

Source: Report on the Administration of the province of Assam 1875-76.⁸⁶⁸

⁸⁶⁸ Dispur, ASA, Report on the Administration of the province of Assam 1875-76, and 1904-05.

Table 5.5: Sadiya Trade Fair Import and Export from 1876-1885

Sl. No	Year	Imports Rs.	Exports Rs.
1.	1876	49,100	44,475
2.	1877	54,720	19,915
3.	1878	51,100	31,639
4.	1879	45,180	27,130
5.	1880	35,721	30,535
6.	1881	75,763	53,240
7.	1882	34,625	26,414
8.	1883	45,502	39,896
9.	1884	60,084	44,171
10.	1885	25,454	37,972
	Grand Total	4,77,249	3,55,387

Source: Report on the Administration of the Province of Assam 1875-76 to 1885-86.⁸⁶⁹

The trade fair organized by British was so popular that in 1873, three thousand tribesmen were present and the number rose in later years. In 1874, they brought down over Rs. 25,000 worth their own articles and took home goods to the value of Rs. 17,630. In 1876, the turnover was much greater as they sold worth Rs. 49,100 and bought Rs. 44,475 worth of goods. As mentioned above, some of the important goods sold by tribes were handicraft, hand woven clothes, rubber, *coptis tita*, elephant tusks,

⁸⁶⁹ Dispur, ASR, Report on the Administration of the province of Assam 1875-76 to 1885-86.

rhinoceros horns and various other forest products. Goods they purchased were English yarn, pottery, salt, brass pots, iron, tea, sugar, oil, *gur*, opium etc.⁸⁷⁰

In 1875 from the Sadiya trade fair, the Khamtis brought rice to the value of Rs. 1000. Further, in the same year, the Singphos and Khamtis also procured a *maund* of opium at the value of Rs. 960.⁸⁷¹ The Khamtis and Singphos were good hunters thus traded in elephant tusks and rhinoceros horns. In addition, they were principal sellers of rubber and therefore could afford to purchase such luxurious articles like, sugar, molasses, handkerchief, opium, rum and loincloth. Rubber was in highest demanded articles by Marwari in the Sadiya fair, where a huge rubber came from the Khamtis and the Singpho along with wax.⁸⁷² In this context, it is imperative to mention some of the important Singpho settlements like Samun, Wakhet and Beesa which were known for rubber trade. The Singpho sold rubber tapped from forests and from the Longlie-Tarun basin, while traders from as far as Bengal came to buy it. The rubber was sold at Rs. 50/- per *maund* at Beesa market.⁸⁷³ Through these trade fairs, the British wanted to channelize their energies towards hill tribes to establish friendly contacts as well as to extract information about the affairs going on in the interiors. In 1877, at the Sadiya fair Colonel Graham took the opportunity to commit Lieutenant Woodthrope's survey party to the care and good office of the Singpho and Khamti chiefs.⁸⁷⁴

Due to this opening of weekly markets at the foothills and trade fairs at Sadiya, the traditional trade system was altered, with the trade relation with Burma

⁸⁷⁰ Verrier Elwin, *India's North-East frontier in Nineteen Century*, Oxford University Press, 1962, pp. 353-54. These are some of the rubber export data of the hill tribes: (a) in 1874, twenty *maunds* of rubber, which in value amounted to Rs. 6000. (b) in 1875 rubber sold for 9000. (c) in 1878, 1200 *maund* of rubber of value Rs. 36000. (d) in 1885 the sale of rubber by the hill tribe estimated Rs. 45,408. For details see Assam Secretariat Record, Foreign Proceeding of April 1874, no. 325, August 1875, no. 32, September 1875, no. 105C and, April 1885, no. 214 G. (Dispur)

⁸⁷¹ Dispur, ASA, ASR, Foreign Proceeding, August 1875, no. 32.

⁸⁷² Sudatta Sikadar, *Trade Fairs in Arunachal Pradesh (1874-1905)*, in S. Dutta (ed.), SHECAP, p. 294.

⁸⁷³ S. Dutta Choudhury (ed.), *Gazetteer of India, Arunachal Pradesh, Tirap District*, 1980, p. 132.

⁸⁷⁴ Sudatta Sikadar, *Trade Fairs in Arunachal Pradesh (1874-1905)*, in S. Dutta, (ed.), SHECAP, p. 296.

disappearing while that with Assam increased. Another change witnessed in trade was the use of money in such exchanges becoming common. Though, the introduction of money economy was not widespread in matters of internal exchange, but exchange with people of the plains in trade fair was now done in cash. Hence, once they realized the value of cash, this colonial innovation created a condition for capital accumulation in a few hands.

The advent Marwari traders as moneylenders played an important role in the economy due to colonial intervention. S.E. Peal in his report on a visit to the Burmese frontier in 1879 noted thus:

Kaiyas, or Marwari merchants or their agents are now seen at every place of importance, they exchange opium, brass-ware, and cloths for ivory, rubber, and such like. Indirectly, they been the cause of the extermination of the rubber-trees over large tract; the ready sale for ivory has also added to the natural tendency among the tribes to hunt and kill elephant for the sake of their flesh.⁸⁷⁵

The establishment of colonial rule in Assam within frequent interventions led to the gradual breakdown of the relative closeness of their village economy. Their economy became linked with the rest of the world, with the resources of the tribal villages exposed to the pulls of external demand. The tribesman became victims of the colonial mode of trade and they rapidly lost their natural resources without having been adequately paid for them. In due course of time the commercialized the trade in elephant and rubber by issuing licenses to Singpho and Khamti chiefs to catch elephant for tea planters and Marwari with profits were shared with the British.⁸⁷⁶ An important source of leakage of resources from the tribal villages was the import of opium from outside. It is noted that opium constituted an important item of purchase

⁸⁷⁵ Verrier Elwin, *India's North-East Frontier*, p. 103.

⁸⁷⁶ Interview with Chow Moho Chowmoung, 51 years of aged, male, village elder, Piyong village, Namsai district, Arunachal Pradesh, interviewed on 17th January, 2016.

by the hill-men. In this context Elwin, mention that in one year at the trade fair at Sadiya the value of opium sold to the tribesmen amounted to Rs. 30,300.⁸⁷⁷ Thus we can sum in the words of Sudatta Sikadar,

The slow penetration of British capitalism could not transform the primitive formation of Arunachal economy. The disintegration of the primitive economy was not complete. There was no replacement by the capitalist mode of production. The result was the emergence of a satellite formation integrated into imperial economy but was clothed in distorted primitive form.⁸⁷⁸

5.4.2 Impact of British Policy on Society and Culture

As discussed in earlier chapters slavery constituted a major component of tribal economy, which enhanced their social and economic status in the society. Not only were men, women and children held in bondage for labour in domestic and agricultural spheres, they constituted bulk of trade item. Slaves were most valued in the Khamti and Singpho societies as they were hierarchically organised. In addition, they were engaged as a fighting force. A person who possessed more slaves exercised more influence on other people. The number of slaves he possessed measured the status of a chief in the society. In conformity with the anti-slavery movement in Europe, the colonial government insisted on the abolition of slavery among the Khamtis and Singphos. The extension of the British dominion into Assam along the foothills of Khamtis and Singphos territory further complicated the slave-master relations. Runaway slaves escaped into British territory taking refuge whenever they got opportunity. The elimination of slaves from their society and the restriction on slave raiding from the plains of Assam created feuds among the frontier tribes. For instance, the Singphos in order to compensate their loss many a times raided the

⁸⁷⁷ Verrier Elwin, *India's North-East Frontier*, p. 354.

⁸⁷⁸ Sudatta Sikadar, *Economic Under Development of Arunachal Pradesh: A historical Perspective*, in S.Dutta, (ed.), SHECAP, p. 320.

eastern Naga tribes like Tangsa. The Khamti and the Singpho chiefs were now bereft of Assamese slaves, an important plank of political, economic, and social significance for their chieftainship. This interruption of colonial rule in master-slave relation proved to be disastrous for them whose population had increased a lot during the early decades of the nineteenth century. However, due to colonial intervention this demographic composition had sharply decline as the slaves were freed and their efforts to assimilate slaves from plains were stopped by British. Therefore, the tribes who favoured more political freedom than territorial possession retreated into hill areas which was beyond the political influence of the British while, many returned back to their former country where slavery were still practiced. The British considered this change as their greatest boon in Singpho and Khamti area. In this context, Butler has said that:

In course of time few slaves remain attached to the Singphos which forced the latter to either resort to manual labour themselves, or starve, or leave the province; which by the way would be the greatest boon we could desire, for the safety and improvement of our peaceable subjects.⁸⁷⁹

Another negative impact of British rule was the growth of addiction to opium among people. There were two opposing arguments about the opium addiction among the people. The British considered that both the communities were already addicted to opium prior to their arrival.⁸⁸⁰ However, this has been denied by the community on the ground that *Kani* (opium) was known to the people, but primarily for its medical properties and used in minuscule quantities for certain type of medicines. Being medicinal in value the opium was not available in their area and they had to procure it by trade from Burma and Assam. However, the British had commercialized it and

⁸⁷⁹ John Butler, p. 127.

⁸⁸⁰ J.F. Michell, p. 127.

made it available and widespread in Assam. While on one hand, they banned opium cultivation they also sold opium through government run *Abkari* shops. This widespread circulation and commercialization of opium is available in A.J. Moffatt Mills Report who chronicles important stages of the introduction of colonial opium in Assam. In his reported Mills had stated that the tradition of cultivating poppy plant was prevalent in Assam from the days of the Mughal invasion in the seventeenth century. However, in pre-colonial days, the Ahom ruler did not adopt any measure for selling it by government directly nor there were any steps to check its cultivation. It was only in nineteenth century the large section of the Assamese people started to use opium unrestrictedly and by the middle of the nineteenth century three fourths of the population were opium eaters in Assam.⁸⁸¹ Mills accepted the people's weakness for opium, as an opportunity to increase the revenue of the government and on the pretext of checking the evil habit, he recommended to the authorities for the enhancement of opium tax, commencing from 4 to 10 Rs. per *purah* or more.⁸⁸² The second measure recommended by Mills to his authorities for checking the opium cultivation at once was to pour into station and into the *Mofussil*, at certain places, a sufficient quantity of government opium for consumption of the people.⁸⁸³ It is evident that, that the proposal of Mills' went in favour of the government as well as against the Assamese people. According to the recommendation of Mills, the government collected tax by increasing assessments on land and by legitimizing the selling of government opium, for which the people had to pay for it.

Besides, the argument of tribes may be true that the British during in their early contact encouraged the tribal people to satisfy their urge for opium smoking. This is evident in the agreement, which the British entered into with the Adis with the latter

⁸⁸¹ A.J. M. Mills, *Report on the Province of Assam*, pp. 19-22.

⁸⁸² A.J. M. Mills, p. 111.

⁸⁸³ A.J. M. Mills, p. 20.

received annual payments, which included opium as an important item.⁸⁸⁴ This instance has been reported in Mishmi hill when J.F Needham visited there, he distributed opium to people who accompanied him as porters.⁸⁸⁵ In 1908 when, Noel Williamson visited the Mishmi hills he distributed opium to the people for their services. Further, when there area was visited by F.M. Bailey, the Mishmi demanded opium an object which they claimed, 'Mr. Williamson always gave them'.⁸⁸⁶ Therefore, all these reports suggested that the British made the supply of opium to hill tribes easily available.

The supply of opium did not only earn profit but also to keep the frontier tribes subdued and morally and physically weak. According to popular opinion among the people, the British introduced it to weaken the Khamtis and Singphos, who were warlike tribes and whose bravery has been praised. L.A. Wadell stated that they were, 'such daring fighters were they which our mercenary Afghan troops quite respected and dubbed them the Afghan or Pathan of Burmese'.⁸⁸⁷ The addiction of opium fulfilled the policy of getting emaciated addicts ready to work for the British as porters whenever they toured the areas. The fact was that growing habit did cause demoralization, indolence and poverty of the addicts. In this context Elwin commented, 'in my opinion, opium addiction is a greater evil than head-hunting...the tribes addicted to opium are poor, thin, miserable, caught in a vicious circle so that the poorer they grow the more they turn to opium for relief, and the more they smoke the poorer they become'.⁸⁸⁸

⁸⁸⁴ Verrier Elwin, *India's North-East Frontier*, p. 268.

⁸⁸⁵ Dispur, ASA, ASR, 1886, File no. 1735, Mr. Needham Expedition to Rima in the Zayul Valley, in Eastern Tibet.

⁸⁸⁶ F.M Bailey, p. 27.

⁸⁸⁷ L.A. Wadell, p. 30, cited in Goken Geyi, *The Singpho of Arunachal Pradesh: A Study in Historical Perspective from 1800-1947*, Unpublished PhD Thesis, Rajiv Gandhi University, Doimukh, 2015, p. 262.

⁸⁸⁸ Verrier Elwin, *A Philosophy for NEFA*, Director of Research, Itanagar, Third Reprint, 1988, pp. 108-9

Another major impact witnessed was in the realm of inter-tribal and inter-clan relationship. The age-old relations, which Khamtis and Singphos had with their immediate neighbours like Mishmis and Adis were, began to diminish due to colonial influence. Their cordial relation and loyalty of the Mishmis was witnessed even as late as 1835.⁸⁸⁹ The Singpho chief Duffa Gam received support from the Mishmis in erecting his stockades while fighting against Beesa and British.⁸⁹⁰ During the time of insurrection as discussed previously Mishmis and Adis sheltered the Khamtis. On the other hand, the Khamtis provided trading facilities to the Mishmis and they acted as buffer between Assam and Tibet, which benefitted both the tribes. Taking advantage of this relationship all the European explorers into Mishmi hill took the Khamtis chiefs as interpreter and pacifiers.⁸⁹¹ However, the British policy of playing one tribe against other tribe disrupted this traditional relationship witnessed in the 1850s when the Khamtis were settled as buffer tribe against the Mishmis and Adis. This created new forms of hostility among the hill tribes.

Culturally the colonial rule did not impact much, though attempts were made to proselytize among the Khamtis and the Singphos by sending Shan Mission in Sadiya in 1836. However, due to various changes that were taking place in the socio-economic sphere of the tribes due to coming of colonial rule in Assam there was a discontent among the former. In this context as mentioned in chapter four Hannay had stated that, 'the prospect of a mission very bleak amongst the Singphos and it is not fit for missionary to carry out their effort in such an irritable state'.⁸⁹² The suspicion of missionaries and officer came true in 1839 when the Khamtis erupted against the British in Sadiya. This anti-British rebellion made the evangelists as well as the local

⁸⁸⁹ F. M. Bailey, p. 27.

⁸⁹⁰ J. F. Michell, p. 97.

⁸⁹¹ M.L. Bose, *British Policy in the North-East Frontier*, p. 90.

⁸⁹² For details see chapter four on intervention of missionary.

authorities to relocate the missions from Sadiya to Jaipur in the same year. From Jaipur they tried to carry out their missionaries activities but the attitude of Singphos and other hill tribes did not permit them to continue their work among the hill tribes. Therefore, this attempt of the missionaries was also not successful to bring the Singphos and the Khamtis under their influence. Therefore, after the armed rebellion the colonial rulers were rather interested in securing the lowland in frontier as the area adjacent to their settlement which emerged as tea hub in Upper Assam.⁸⁹³ However, this effort of spread the message of Christ was renewed in 1900s but without much success as the Buddhism had become the core identity among the Khamtis and had given them considerable culture.⁸⁹⁴ The Khamtis had school in each village and had priests who came from Burma to impart knowledge of Buddhism among the children through the schools.⁸⁹⁵ According to tribes the British did not want to continue their policy of proselytize as it would create further distrust among the tribes, therefore in 1900s the Missionaries again tried to penetrate in Khamtis and Singphos area through medical services. Reverend Kirby and his wife went to Tengapani area, provided medical service and aid to 700 patients and they preached in their village where no missionaries had ever before entered. They preached in their temple courtyard, hanging their lantern sheet to the walls of the temple.⁸⁹⁶ However, the influence of Buddhism was so deep rooted in their culture and they had already experienced bitter encountered with the colonial power, therefore, the missionaries could not leave much impact on the culture sphere of these tribes.

⁸⁹³ Namku Gam Singpho, 55 years of aged, male, public leader, Miao Township, Changlang district, Arunachal Pradesh, interviewed on 19th January, 2016.

⁸⁹⁴ Milton Sangam, *History of American Baptist Mission in North-East India (1836-1950)*, vol.I, Delhi, Mittal Publication, 1987, p. 177.

⁸⁹⁵ Milton Sangma, *History of American Baptist Mission...*, p. 177.

⁸⁹⁶ Milton Sangma, *History of American Baptist Mission...*, p. 177.

5.4.3 Impact of British Policy on the Polity

The colonial rulers did not introduce any drastic or significant changes in the political affairs of the tribes. They were left to continue to rule and administer their community according to their respective customs and tradition with only loose political control. This loose political control was through various agencies like establishment of military station in important location and with the help of chiefs. In this context, David K. Leonard said that, 'colonial power needed a manageable number of leaders whom they could hold responsible for the behaviour of their people'. However, this was stated in context of colonial rule in Africa, but here, the colonial rulers from very beginning tried to bring the Khamtis and the Singphos chiefs under their influence through *sanads* of 1826. This attempt of indirect rule by using the tribal chiefs did not end even after the armed rebellion of 1839 and 1843.

The British adopted this policy despite being equipped with large armies, advanced weaponry, and vast wealth, as they realized that direct rule over the hill tribes would fail for economic, political, and social reason. Therefore, they preferred indirect or loose political control in order to keep law and order in control so that plantation economy can progress in lowland areas, while the tribes should act as the supplier of labour during the time of official tours, military expedition and trigonometrical survey etc. The chiefs continued to be entrusted responsibility in the intelligence branch under frontier British officers, as Chowkan Gohain was appointed in 1853 to act as an intelligence agent for British in Sadiya frontier. These policies of employing the chiefs under British paramount served the dual purpose as it kept the tribes free to govern themselves in their traditional ways and at the same time, it had immensely reduced the responsibility of the government from the detailed and costly affairs of administration. The chiefs became the agents of the colonial administration. In many instance the chiefs were awarded title like Raja for example in 1914 Chowna

Gohain was bestowed with the title of Raja. Besides, he was awarded allowances by the British at the rate of Rs. 30 in the beginning but later on it was raised to Rs. 150 from 1917-18.⁸⁹⁷ This type of colonial connections with chiefs sometime led to direct intervention in the political affairs. In this connection in 1927 after the death of Raja Chowna Gohain the British transferred his allowance to his successor Chowaimong Gohain but reduced the amount from Rs. 150 to Rs. 40 only. However, later on when Chowaimong was found incompetent to report the activities going in Khamtis area then Political Officer of Sadiya, Mr. J. H. Crace reported for replacement of Chowaimong with Choganand Gohain, and the allowance of Rs. 40 per month was also transferred in favour of Choganand for similar assistance to be given by him to government.⁸⁹⁸

As mentioned previously, in the past, when the inter-village feuds were frequent, the question of security against outside attack was the prime consideration that called for village solidarity. This made the functioning of chieftainship and traditional village council in the both the tribes very powerful. The chieftainship and traditional village council played a very significant role in shaping the traditional political institution and they largely accounted for the system of community ownership and conservation of village resources and mutual help and cooperation in carrying out productive activities. However, with the coming of political officer in frontier area indirect intrusion in form of providing security to one chief against the other in due course the Khamtis and Singphos started to seek arbitration of British authorities in their area, whenever differences arose among or between them. In this context in the Singphos of Khamong detained a Khamti traveller of Chaukan route and demanded several items like *dao*, guns and cash money from the traveller. In one such instance,

⁸⁹⁷ L.N. Chakravarty, p. 80.

⁸⁹⁸ L.N. Chakravarty, p. 80

in 1893, Chousa's (nephew of the chief Lakhan) belongings like a golden umbrella, 170 *daos* and Rs. 55 in cash was seized from him while visiting Sadiya. Further in 1894 while returning he was detained and demanded Rs. 100 in cash and two guns from him and detained him for ten days until he complied with their demand. When all these incidents were reported by Khamtis to Assistant Political Officer Mr. Needham in 1895, he proposed the Deputy Commissioner to let him visit the Khamong Singphos with 25 frontier police and induce them to come down to Sadiya and stop such exactions.⁸⁹⁹ Though, Needham was not granted permission to invade the Singphos as it fell beyond the Inner Line, but allowed him to invite the chief in Sadiya and persuade them to keep abstain from harassing and blackmailing the Khamti traveller. The Singphos who received information about the complaint had surrendered all the belonging to Khamti chief before the arrival of Needham. Another instance, in 1880 a dispute arose between the Singphos of Ningro Samon and Beesa Banka. The Beesa people stole a buffalo for the funeral rites of Beesa Banka. Some of Beesa Banka's slaves had since run away to Ningroo Samon's house, and did not return. The Deputy-Commissioner endeavored to get the two villages to settle their disputes amicably.⁹⁰⁰ In 1899, a Mishmis murdered three Khamti British subjects, and carried off three children. An expedition was dispatched against them in the following cold weather, which, after a tedious and difficult march, succeeded in recovering the captives and burning the guilty villages. One of the raiders was subsequently given up, and after due trial, was found guilty of murder, and hanged at Sadiya. The expedition of 1899,

⁸⁹⁹ Dispur, ASA, Assam Secretariat, Foreign-A, nos. 16-18, March 1895.

⁹⁰⁰ Dispur, ASA, Assam Secretariat, Report on Administration of Province of Assam from 1878-79, Shillong, 1800, pp. 12-13.

besides greatly impressing the tribes, added much to the British knowledge of them and their country.⁹⁰¹

Thus, the threats of attack faced by any village from another greatly eased. This outcome of foreign rule slackened the solidarity of the households of any village. It encouraged individual families to think somewhat exclusively in terms of all the families in the village, which disrupted the functioning of traditional village council. Now people began to debate and ponder, ‘whether British rule was good or chieftainship’.⁹⁰²

Hence, the advent of the British and the subsequent exploration and expedition into the Khamti and Singpho inhabited territory marked the beginning of gradual political development. As discussed in preceding chapters the complete annexation of Assam was completed in 1838 however, its administration remains attached to administration of Bengal till it was fully constituted into a province in 1872.⁹⁰³ When it was declared a Province under Chief Commissioner, the question about governing the non-state spaces became imperative. In this context, the policy of isolation to leave the tribesmen alone with indirect control through various mechanisms was most advocated colonial policy. This policy of loose political control was largely adopted for economic and political reason as pointed out by Verrier Elwin:

Partly because the task of administration, especially in the wild border areas, was difficult and unrewarding, partly from a desire to quarantine the tribes from possible political inflection, and partly because a number of officials sincerely held the view that the people were better and happier as they were.⁹⁰⁴

⁹⁰¹ Dispur, Assam Secretariat, Report on Administration of Province of Assam from 1901-1902, Shillong, 1903, p. 78.

⁹⁰² It has been found in field work that still today people ponder about this question, ‘was British rule better or Chieftainship? This suggest that colonial rule had disrupted the working of chieftainship system.

⁹⁰³ Sarah Hilaly, ‘Re-Visiting the Inner Line Regulation’, *NEIHA*, Thirty Third Session, RGU, Itanagar, 2012, pp. 323-24.

⁹⁰⁴ Verrier Elwin, *Democracy in NEFA*, p. 45.

Indirect or loose political control manifested in emergence of a regulation. The Regulation X of 1873, called 'Regulation for the Peace and Good Governance of Certain District on the Eastern Frontier' came into operation on 1st November, 1873. This Regulation declared to be for political security, was defined as an Inner Line was to be applicable in five district of Kamrup, Darrang, Nowgong, Sibsagar, Lakhimpur, Garo Hills, Khasi Hills and Jaintia Hills, Naga Hills, Cachar and Chittagong Hills. Against this background, the colonial rulers exercised loose political control over the Khamtis and the Singphos along with other tribes of Arunachal Pradesh and attached it with the administration of Lakhimpur district. This introduction was purely to check the movement of people of the plains into the hill areas and to check the movement of the hill tribes. This coming of Inner Line had brought new political officer attached to Deputy Commissioner designated as Assistant Political Officers were appointed, whose chief duty was to make themselves acquainted with the languages and politics of the races in the frontier and cultivate their goodwill.⁹⁰⁵ Therefore, the Assistant Political Officer in Sadiya further opened the tribal areas of Arunachal Pradesh, through a conspicuous presence was recorded through tours taken up by the political officers like Mr. Needham from 1881, followed by Noel Williamson. This was with the dual intention of cultivating friendly relations with tribes as well as to inspect the forest resources and mapping the territory. In such tours of Political Officer's they were accompanied by Forest Officers and Surveyors.⁹⁰⁶ Such tours and exploration of tribal areas added fresh dimension to the planter and Marwari in the neighbourhood and other emerging company like the Assam Railway and Trading Company to secure timber and carry out mining and petroleum leases outside the line.⁹⁰⁷ Hence, under the veil of leaving the tribes alone, the colonial ruler administratively declared the hill

⁹⁰⁵ L.N. Chakravarty, p. 39.

⁹⁰⁶ Sarah Hilaly, Re-Visiting the Inner Line Regulation , p. 327.

⁹⁰⁷ Sarah Hilaly, Re-Visiting the Inner Line Regulation, p.327.

areas unfit to be governed, yet continued loose political penetration as apparent from certain administrative measures which began from 1873. This was followed by division of the North East Frontier Tract into three sections in 1914: (1) The Central and Eastern Sections; (2) the Lakhimpur Frontier Tract; and (3) the Western Section. In 1921 through the Government of India Act 1919, the North East Frontier Tract was declared as 'Backward Area'. In the same line in 1935, it was declared as 'Excluded Area' under the Government of India Act, 1935.⁹⁰⁸

5.5 Conclusion

From the above discussion, it is clear that both the communities did not further unite against the British after their loss in 1839-1843 armed rebellion. This was largely due to dispersal of Khamtis in different pockets of Assam, making it difficult for their unification once more. On the other hand, most of powerful Singpho chiefs were convicted and many died in prison which weakened their strength. Besides, the defeat of Burmese in the Second Anglo-Burmese war in 1852 secured the eastern frontier from external aggression and accordingly the buffer role of the communities became redundant. Meanwhile, the plantation economy and the coal and petroleum industries gained importance in Assam. Consequently, they strengthened the military administration to provide security to the European planters. Hence, they established various military outposts in all the strategic location which further restricted the movement of the Khamtis and Singphos. However, the Singphos lost their political status as a buffer and could no longer play the role of counter-balancing outside forces in order to maintain its freedom of manoeuvres. They were politically segregated permanently from their kinsmen of Hukwang Valley and other areas. The Singphos

⁹⁰⁸ J.N. Chowdhury, *Arunachal Through the Ages: From Frontier Tract to Union Territory*, Srimati Jaya Choudhury, Shillong, 1982, p. 235.

and the Khamtis chiefs were now bereft of Assamese slaves, an important plank of political, economic, and social significance for their chieftainship and they were just made as the buffer between Burma and Assam.

CHAPTER-VI

CONCLUSION

The present study reveals that the pacification of the Khamtis and the Singphos which came to end by December, 1843, was neither easy nor peaceful. It also shows that the crux of resistance lay in the abrupt attempts to impose the colonial political hegemony over the former. This attempt to impose colonial state authority over them was challenged in forms of resistance through various modalities like raids, plunder, attack over military station, hostile attitude toward colonial traveller, etc. These modalities were adopted by the tribes to maintain their political independence, right over their territory, customs and way of life. However, the study further revealed that this tribal resistance has been projected by the colonial state as enemies to the peace and prosperity of colonial Assam. This notion of enemy of colonial state was the byproduct of delegitimation policy adopted by colonial state. In this context, Sabyasachi Bhattacharya has rightly stated that:

The legitimation of colonial state's authority was accompanied by the delegitimation of pre-colonial authority at levels ranging from the pre-colonial claimants to sovereignty to lower levels such as the native princes, chiefs and the like.⁹⁰⁹

In the case of the Khamtis and the Singphos, the colonial intervention legitimized the coming of British in upper Assam as a saviour and delegitimized the pre-colonial practices among them like the institution of slavery, authority over the *ryots* of Sadiya, tribal feuds, power and position of chiefs, etc., and projected these tribes as refugees from Burma. Colonial intervention in the slavery institution,

⁹⁰⁹ Sabyasachi Bhattacharya, *The Colonial State: Theory and Practice*, General President's Address, Indian History Congress, 65th session, Bareilly, 2004, p. 14.

intervention of taxation rights over the Assamese *ryots* in Sadiya, intervention in tribal feuds, and establishment of administrative and military station has been projected as the act of saving the society and glorified as a great service to humanity. In order to impose the colonial hegemony over the tribes they played a conscious policy in which the colonial officers carefully structured the reports on them to justify the colonial aggression. In one of such reports, the tribe has been mentioned as wild and barbaric who adopted the life of raids and plunder, and kept the whole population under slavery:

While taking advantage of the civil wars the Khamtis took forcible possession of Sadiya, reducing the Assamese inhabitant to slavery and maintained possession of the district, uniting with the Burmese interest during the invasion and occupation. Another wild tribe, the Singphos had also taken advantage of the weakness of the Assam government and carried their ravages beyond the capital Rungpore, laying waste the whole country as far as Jorhat and carrying off the inhabitant into slavery...of these the greater part were sold to the hill Singphos, Khamtis and Shams, but those retained for domestic and agricultural services in the Assamese low lands 7500 were liberated by the advance of the British detachment, and negotiation were set on foot for the liberation of the rest.⁹¹⁰

This report makes it clear that the colonial ruler considered the Ahom ruler owned all the land of Assam and taking advantage of the weak Ahom rule the Khamtis and the Singphos overpowered the Assamese by carrying out raids, depredation and kept the whole population of Sadiya and Namrup under slavery and their country in a lawless condition. Since, Ahom government was usurped by the British, therefore, the latter had every right to preserve and maintain peace by providing security to Assamese subjects who were forcibly carried away into slavery by Khamtis and the Singphos. In this context, Butler has said that:

⁹¹⁰ *The Report upon the Subject of Slavery*, Indian Law Commission, 15th January, 1841, p. 154.

The Khamtis and the Singphos had kept their country in unsettled and lawless which proved to be retarding for extension of trade; this evil cannot be rectified until these tribes are brought more completely under subjugation to the British Government.⁹¹¹

Therefore, in the pretext of preserving civilization and humanity the British legitimized the policy of colonial intervention by sending military officers to free those slaves from tribal control. The military officers frequently toured the areas without considering the independence and individualistic characteristic of either community. The colonial officers undermined and deligitimized the tribal concept of justice and jurisprudence that was entirely different from the sophisticated colonial administration. Colonial law was too alien and complex for tribe. This abrupt attempt to impose total hegemony over the tribes wounded to their pride who wanted to keep their doors closed and forced them to undertake open insurrection.⁹¹²

The study further reveals that several factors accelerated the colonial penetration into the Khamti and the Singpho areas. However, the immediate factors that accelerated the process were the question of the frontier security of Upper Assam in the aftermath of the First Anglo-Burmese war created psychosis of Burmese reinvasion. Therefore, the communities who occupied various pockets between Assam and Burma were construed fit to act as a buffer against the Burmese till the the administration in Assam was well entrenched. The idea of a buffer zone was thus mooted and these tribes who had raided and plundered along with Burmese and shared filial links with their core communities in Burma were a best choice as a buffer against them. Therefore, this policy to form a line of defence against future Burmese invasion of Assam and attempts to ascertain the fidelity of these independent frontier tribes especially the Singphos, had made it necessary for the colonial ruler to come into

⁹¹¹ Butler, J, *A Sketch of Assam: With Some Account of the Hill Tribes*, London, Smith Elder and Co, 1846, p. 86.

⁹¹² W.W. Hunter, p. 317.

contact with them. Therefore, in the beginning, it was not the economic potential, but strategic consideration was the key for extending British influence into Khamti and Singpho area. To keep such strategic location, free from Burmese influence and to ensure that this frontier did not revert into chaos, the British brought them under the treaty in 1826. After this treaty, accordingly, the colonial ruler set-up a military outpost in Sadiya and made it as an Agency in 1828. The main duty of this Agency was to effectively keep an eye on the important happenings in the frontier and establish their indirect influence over the tribes inhabiting in the south-east frontier of Assam.

With the passage of time, the British found out that territory of the Khamtis and the Singphos if opened to colonial rule, could act as a facilitator in the expansion of colonial trade that would connect Bengal, Assam, Burma, and China via land.⁹¹³ Hence, when this economic potential of the area was added, it incentive the further colonial scheme too. This colonial scheme of intrusion in their daily affairs was viewed seriously by the tribes who were on the path of creating a better place since their migration from BorKhamti and Hukwang valley respectively. Therefore, when they entered in Arunachal Pradesh and settled in the Tengapani area, they embroiled themselves in the political happenings of the Ahom government to curve out better space for themselves. This brought them into close contact with the Ahom rulers, and took advantage of a steep decline of their political power.⁹¹⁴ Both the tribes not only raided and plundered during this political upheaval, rather they notionally exerted sovereignty over the people of the Sadiya and Namrup plains. They established their

⁹¹³ Abikal Borah, 'A Region in a Mobile World Integration of Southeastern Sub-Himalayan Region into the Global Capitalist Economy (1820–1900)' in *Review (Fernand Braudel Center)*, vol. 37, No. 2 (2014), pp. 87-127, Research Foundation of State University of New York for and on behalf of the Fernand Braudel Center Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/90011556>
Accessed: 29-11-2017 07:05

⁹¹⁴ S. Panda, 'Fresh Dimension to the Study of the British Relationship with the Tribes of Arunachal Pradesh', in S. Dutta, (ed.), SHECAP, p. 190.

hegemony over the tumultuous surroundings and newly occupied rivers valleys provided them the physical environment for sustaining their economy and ensured availability of dependent population in bondage. However, this economic and political space was challenged when they encountered the British. The tribes had their respective social, political, economic and legal system that was quite distinct to colonial state practices, which again was beyond the comprehension of the tribes. The tribes who had so far been enjoying independence were unaware of the intruding culture, languages and might of the colonial state. They could not comprehend the intrinsic connotation when the British took advantage of their superior political position in Assam, establishing a nominal control over the tribes on the turbulent Burmese border by military might. The tribes who had been so far enjoying political and economic independence were put under a disadvantageous position through this treaty in 1826. Through this agreement, the British curtailed the practices of slavery, which provided its vital labour demands in the Khamti and Singpho country. Further the powers of the chiefs were restricted as they had to report all the major offences to the British officer stationed in Sadiya. Overall this treaty allowed the traditional chiefs to retain their status but under British suzerainty.

During the initial stages both the communities tried to adjust to the conditions which the British had introduced and continued to show their fidelity towards the British. However, situation began to change in course of time as the land revenue potential was augmented by various discoveries of natural resources like tea, coal and petroleum, etc., necessitating the direct annexation of Lower Assam under their dominion in 1828. However, Upper Assam was not yet directly annexed into British dominion and its management was entrusted to the Political Agent who made annual visits to Sadiya to take cognizance about the affairs there. The reports of various explorers and administrators suggested that Sadiya could act as commercial hub to

dispatch colonial products into the hills area as well as to extend their products through the tribal areas provided new paradigm to colonial scheme within these areas.

The discovery of tea in Assam was hoped the alternate to China's monopoly on tea whose quality was authenticated in 1834. Since then there was no looking back for colonial rulers and their policy was changed from non-intervention to slow and conscious penetration. This resulted into entanglement with the affairs of these tribes. The presence of an English officer at Sadiya had put further restrictions on the raids and plunder of the tribes. Official intervention in the affairs of tribes intensified in last part of 1834, following a land dispute between Matak and the Khamtis, when the British removed the Sadiya Khowa Gohain from his office, taking over this power and privileges' over the Assamese subjects at Sadiya. A census was carried out in Sadiya and attempts were made to impose taxes on the Khamtis.

British intervention in the tribal feuds of the Singphos by declaring Bisa Gam as the head of other chiefs created major discontent among other Singpho chiefs, who had no concept of supreme chief. This was done to eliminate Duffa Gam who was not a signatory to the agreement of 1826. This divides and rule policy had brought them into constant clash with him, as the latter carried out raid and plunder into British territory. In order to meet labour shortages for construction of roads, buildings etc., they targeted the Singpho slaves whom they had freed in thousands. With the development of tea cultivation in Upper Assam, the British began to encroach upon their fertile lowlands bringing under their control, while punishing as many chiefs and pushing towards hills.

Resentment was further intensified when Shan Mission set up its base in Sadiya in 1836 to proselytize among tribes and to continue to do so across into Burma and then to China. The missionaries began to visit their villages to learn their languages with even attempts made to open schools in Sadiya. The missionary

presence made the tribes more suspicious and hostile towards the British station in Sadiya.

When the fidelity of these tribes was in doubt, the British tried to strengthen their military presence in Sadiya by transferring their military headquarters from Bishwanath to Sadiya in 1839. The tribes viewed all these developments as threat to their independence, right over their territory, customs and way of life. Therefore, on many occasions, both the community had made several attempts to present their grievances to the government, but was rebuffed. In this context, Ghanshyam Shah in his *Social Movement in India* has said thus:

During the nineteenth century, the British came in contact with various tribes in different part of India when they annexed tribal kingdoms and introduced British administration in the tribal area. The tribes in general and chieftain in particular felt to loss of power and resources in the new administration. They revolted against the British.⁹¹⁵

Similarly the tribes they too perceived that their power and resources were compromised under the British rule in Assam and when their entire attempts to lodge their grievances against British failed, forced them to undertake armed rebellion by the Khamtis in 1839 after which Sadiya was annexed in 1842. This annexation of Sadiya was a direct result of British anxiety to control of this strategic and economically important area. The rebellions did were not the result of sudden passion; rather it was a climax of continuous forms of resistance. However, this uprising of the Khamtis and Singphos were subsequently suppressed by the end of 1843.

Through aggression that they showed against the British was a clear indication that they wanted to overthrow the British from their land which remained only as a hope. This was mainly because the war between British and Khamti-Singphos were on

⁹¹⁵ Ghanshyam Shah, *Social Movement in India: A Review of Literature*, New Delhi, Sage Publication, 2004, p. 97.

an unequal footing. The British were equipped with a trained armed regiment with the latest weapons, while the Khamtis and Singphos fought through traditional warfare techniques, using basic weapons like *dao*, axes, spears and bow and arrows, stones, while believing in the magical power of their chiefs.⁹¹⁶ Therefore, this made them inferior in comparison of fighting tools of the British. The British not only had fighting men with better weapons, better reinforcements in times of emergency, steady supply of food items to soldiers with the support of the Duania and Naga tribes. All these put them in greater advantageous position in comparison to the tribe. While the Khamtis and Singphos were without reinforcements in times of need, compelling them to engage the slaves who were untrained for such fights. This employment of slaves proved to be total failure, for them as many lost their lives and those who injured in war could not work in fields.⁹¹⁷ The tribes had to take care and move with their families from place to place in forests, which made it more difficult, as they had to constantly shunt between forests.

Though, the Khamtis and the Singphos were numerically small in number, but the tribes were warlike and brave who loved their political independence more than

⁹¹⁶ There is a general belief among the people that their chief used to possess supernatural power. This can be witnessed from the incident of Ranwa Gohain and British forces in 1839 in which former was killed. According to oral tradition, Chau-Pha-Plung-lu was arrested by British and was taken to Sadiya, but he broke away from prison and escaped towards the jungle. While on flight he received a bullet injury on his leg leaving him incapable of moving, he preferred to die as a hero. So he put off his armlet i.e. *Akaa Lak poi* which was believed to have magical powers to protect him from all sort of dangers. Chau-Pha-Plung-lu, then asked the British officer in-charge to bring a *Pan* (betel leaf) from nearby the house, and asked to be shot by the officer thereafter. He then set himself in a yogic posture, started reciting religion sermons. Accordingly, he was shot by the officer in-charge and thus followed by the soldiers. Amazingly, the body of Chau-Pha-Plung-lu had not fall down despite several shots. The British soldiers did not have the courage to go near the body and so, they brought a long bamboo post and pushed to his body and simultaneously fell down. This shows that the tribes had notion of supernatural power possessed by their chiefs and when their chief were arrested or got killed in the encounter, it overwhelmed and discouraged the common people. Interview with Chownawing Namchom, 67 years of aged, male, Chief of Momong, Chowkang, Namsai district, Arunachal Pradesh, interviewed on 16th January, 2016.

⁹¹⁷ Interview with Chownawing Namchom, 67 years of aged, male, Chief of Momong, Chowkang, Namsai district, Arunachal Pradesh, interviewed on 16th January, 2016.

anything else. This keep their spirit alive and their strategies to hide in the forests by erecting stockades and planting invisible traps like pits and covering their stockades with bobby-traps, *panjis* and launching surprise night attacks proved to be effective initially. However, this too could not endure for long as the British took help from the Duania and Nagas who were familiar with the traditional fighting strategies. During the course of the war an attempt had been made by the Khamtis rebels to solicit alliance with the other tribes. However, this strategy was countered by the British, who sent several expeditions warning other hill tribes not to harbor rebels. Measures to instill fear among the hill tribes and to discourage other tribes who were harboring the rebels, the British adopted strict military measures which included burning down the villages, crops, granaries and seizing their cattle which made the rebel as well as allied tribe vulnerable.

The break-up of the tribe into innumerable groups, along separate settlements, made them easy target for the British. This isolation and separate settlements especially amongst the Singphos had foster difference among the tribe, especially when some of the groups approached the British forces to prove their innocence when they reached in their village. This surrender of the groups who did not directly participate in the armed rebellion weakened the strength of tribe and failed to create unity against a common enemy. This measure weakened the possibility of alliance among the hill tribes. In the initial period they were encouraged to take fight against the British in anticipation of external assistance from the Matak and the Burmese. On the other hand rumours were that Singphos were taking help from Burmese but apparently nothing seemed to have brought foreign help. The rebellion was carried out by these tribes without any aid from outside. When the both these factors were eliminated with the annexation of Matak country in 1842 and annexation of Lower Burma in 1852 under British dominion, the source of Singphos strength gradually

diminished and they were subjugated by the British imperialist.⁹¹⁸ So from the above discussion point, as stated by Sekhar Bandyopadhyay:

There were several prominent rebellion movements carried out by tribal against the British across the subcontinent and any generalization about their origin and nature is risky. Yet in a very broad sense it can be said that changing economic relation in the colonial period contributed to their grievances and anguish found expression in these various rebellions.⁹¹⁹

So in the same context, the resistance movement of the Khamtis and the Singphos was essentially a refusal on their part to accept the ways in which their political and social life was sought to be defined by the British. Though the armed rebellions of the tribe were massive in the totality, but were wholly localized in their effect and isolated. They were purely a tribal resistance movement. The primary motive was to oust the British from Sadiya frontier and to restore earlier forms of rule and social relations which they had established prior to the arrival of British in Assam. Therefore, their resistance represented no societal alternative. They had quite sure about the political source of oppression and this was demonstrated in their target of attack- the military outpost. However, they were ignorant about the functioning of British rule in India. They did not have a clear knowledge about the strength of the forces nor were they aware about the very basis on which British imperialism was based. They were traditional in outlook and blissfully unaware and oblivious of the modern world which had knocked down the defense of their society. Such backwards looking and scattered, sporadic and disunited uprising were incapable of fending off or overthrowing foreign rule.

⁹¹⁸ Sristidhar Dutta, 'British-Singpho Conflicts: An Analysis of Strategic and Economic Aspects', in S. Dutta (ed.), SHECAP, p.68.

⁹¹⁹ Sekhar Bandyopadhyay, p. 165.

Resistance movement was initiated by the chiefs and they were joined in the fight by their subjects. The valour that they had shown by invading upon the military station and burning down important military stockades put them in advantageous position in initial period. However, the strategy they adopted of abandoning their village and retreating back to forest with a plan to reinvade did not work well for them. This policy of retreating back to forest had given ample time for British to reorganize and strengthen their military posts in vulnerable location. On the other hand, British reinforcement from various parts of Assam overpowered the rebel groups. The British succeeded in pacifying the rebel group one by one through the policy of divide and rule; gave concessions to the less fiery chiefs in the form of the restoration of their villages, exemption of tax, etc., so long as they agreed to live peacefully under British authority.

The pacification of the Khamtis and the Singphos resistance by 1840s was followed by a beginning of a new phase of colonial forward thrust into the dominion of the Arunachal Pradesh tribes. This policy of forward thrust was mainly adopted because of the discovery and development of tea industry in Assam. Tranquil frontier was necessitated for tea cultivation. Till the discovery of tea in Assam, the British were more inclined to use the Khamtis and the Singphos as a buffer zone against the Burmese and expedite the cross-border trade through their habitations into Burma and further on to China. This development of tea cultivation changed the entire outlook of the colonial state over the plain of Brahmaputra valley and accordingly policies too were mooted to fit to accelerate the process of tea manufacturing in Assam. Successes of the imperial enterprises in Assam's tea industry warranted that the provincial administration should take care of the law and order situation in the state, which was witnessing turmoil at the frontiers. To avenge the losses of the low lands and slaves most frontier tribes resorted to violent raids on the plains of Assam. The successful

experimentation of tea in upper Assam had made it necessary for colonial rulers to bring large tracts under their control. In 1838, Upper Assam was annexed and in 1842 Matak country and Sadiya were brought under the dominion of British. Therefore, the annexation of important strategic locations had brought them in closer contact with the hill tribes of Arunachal Pradesh, which led to change in policy towards the Khamtis and the Singphos.

The policy of buffer tribe was modified and the Singphos, who were not under a single chief, were always difficult to deal with them jointly. Therefore, attempt had been made to keep this tribe in isolation as far as possible and let them settle in hill and government followed a broad policy of non-intervention except in time of unavoidable circumstances. This would give enough space to the British to concentrate on other issues emerging in frontier area with least administrative costs. Therefore, in course of time the official reports began to omit the Singphos except for references to their addiction to opium, proclivity to desist from agriculture and labour, their habits of blackmailing or imposing tribute upon travellers who crossed their country and lazy, etc. and role of buffer diminished henceforth especially after annexation of Lower Burma after the Second-Anglo Burmese war of 1852-53.

The Khamtis who were under the single chief family system were quite easier for British to deal in comparison to the Singphos. Therefore, the British adopted quite a different but friendly policy towards them compared to the Singphos. The extension of British jurisdiction into the frontier of Sadiya had brought them into constant interaction with Mishmis and Adis. These tribes many a times lodged their protest in form of raids and plunder into British jurisdiction. Hence, this necessitated immediate attention in this frontier to maintain peaceful frontier for its capitalist interests. The British found the Khamtis as most suitable choice as the first line of defence against the frontier tribe like Mishmi and Singphos, and paradoxically the British had used

them as a buffer against the Burmese and the Singphos till 1839. The Khamtis who were settled above Sadiya controlled the strategic settlement between British, Adis and Mishmi. Therefore, in order to encourage the Khamtis to settle along the first line of defence, the British encouraged them with firearms and monthly stipend of Rupee 1. This led to formation of Khamtis Frontier Militia with objective to maintain security in frontier of Sadiya and report all the suspicious activities of Adis, Mishmis and Singphos to the military station at Sadiya. Hence, the British administrative policy after 1843 was designed throughout their rule to keep the area isolated and to rule it cheaply through a multi-tier administrative system involving the traditional chiefs as agents of colonial interest and political officer stationed in Sadiya to take cognizance their fidelity.

The tribes were not brought under the direct administration, therefore, many presumed that colonialism was absent in the Khamtis and the Singphos area. However, the tribes witnessed a distinct form of colonialism in their area. They were quickly subjugated, relocated, or decimated, and even though they continued to make their presence, but the colonial ruler viewed or perceived them differently as a 'tribal' problem. They attached the tribal problem with a military and political one, requiring little in the way of legal or administrative innovation. Colonial ruler had no strong interest in extending their way of administration in hill area except to those areas, which were good for tea cultivation, and settlement of Assamese *ryot*. Therefore, colonialism operated and manifested differently in the tribal areas of Arunachal Pradesh. This process started with the acquisition of knowledge about tribal people through various instruments that the colonial state had introduced in the nineteenth century to control the population and resources of the colony people. The three crucial ways in which the Khamtis and the Singphos along with other tribes of Arunachal

Pradesh were made the subject of British colonial knowledge was through cartography, administrative policies and acts.

Colonialism in the Khamti and the Singpho area was made visible through various modalities like, touring of officials in tribal areas, when the tribes were summoned to show their fidelity and hospitality. They had to construct shelters for the soldier and provides ration during their stay. Local disputes were to be presented to the British officer to adjudicate and fine were imposed to those who were found guilty. The display of military power during expedition to punish the tribes by burning down their villages and belongings, seizing of cattle and other movable property were another form of displaying of colonialism power in tribal area.

Colonial indirect control was extended, without attacking the tradition of these tribes, while firsthand knowledge of their language and tradition was taken up. Efforts were made by British frontier officials as well as missionaries to understand the lives and tradition of the hill people included the description of their language.⁹²⁰ Some of the important works done in the field of language are: Reverand N. Brown, *Comparision of Indo-Chinese Languages*, Reverand J.N. Cushing, *Grammar of the Shan Language, 1871*, George Campbell, *Specimens of the Languages of India, including those of the Aboriginal Tribes of Bengal, the Central Province and the Eastern frontier, 1874*, E.T Dalton *Descriptive Ethnology of Bengal 1872* and G.A. Grierson in his *Linguistic Survey of India, vol. II, 1904* had jotted down hundred of words of Ahom, Khamtis, Tairong, Nora and Aitonias, translating them into English. All these efforts created new knowledge to make their influence over the tribes more effective. In 1877 Topographical Survey under Lieutenant Woodthrope was employed during the cold season in the Khamti–Singpho country where Lieutenant Harman joined too. The principle series of triangulation in the vicinity of Sadiya, was carried

⁹²⁰ William Robinson, p. 352.

on to the Dikrang Martello tower; to the Manabum hill station in the Singphos country; south of the Tengapani river, and twenty miles east of Sadiya; and to the Miaobum ridge about forty miles east of Sadiya, and near the main ridge of the Patkoi range and from all these stations a number of other hill peaks were intersected.⁹²¹ All these explorations had opened up hitherto closed geographical knowledge about the tribal area and it made more accessible through maps.

The booming tea industry in Assam brought in its wake not only European planters to Assam but also migrant labourers, Marwaritraders, Bengali *babus*, etc., whose area of operation shifted from the urban centres of Assam to the frontier of the hill tribes' where some tea gardens were located. To support the tea box and match box industry demand for *Simuli* timber drove the trading class to the foothill zone along the tribal frontier, including extraction of rubber. This development and coming of Marwari into tribal areas frequently resulted in conflicts and violence for refusal to meet the demand of the tribes as well as collection of blackmail from the traders. The planters' lobby which held influential position in the local and district bodies demanding immediate halt to violence in Assam's tribal frontier. As a response to this call, the British began to take control the tribal areas by defining and classifying space, resulting in the demarcation of fluid territory between hills and plains was done through the Inner Line Regulation of 1873. This was followed by the introduction of an undefined Outer Line so that such areas, which hold economic potential beyond Inner Line, could be tapped for resources in the future. The Cattle Trespass Act 1871, and the Assam Forest Regulation 1891 and other subsequent regulations affected the mode of the resource use of the tribes, as it prohibited unrestricted movement of the plainsmen into the tribal frontier in pursuit of either trade or for extending the territorial limit of the tea garden into the foothills along the domain of tribes.

⁹²¹ Dispur, ASA, Report on Administration of Assam for 1876-77, p. 17.

However, all these regulations were fluid and subject to manipulation of its re-orientation from time to time. Thus, it appears from the progress of events in the foothill region, that since 1851 the planters' lobby influenced the colonial policy in a major way. Colonial policy was in no way designed to protect the culture and identity of the people, because of the professed policy of non-intervention as the conveniently tampered with as and when they felt like, visible in the modification of *posa*, expansion of control through foothill markets and fairs. Such a policy was aimed at effectively legitimizing colonial intrusion with least coercive force and hence with a relatively low financial expenditure.

New innovations of *mehal* system was made for catching of elephants and extraction of forest produce, foothill were brought under various colonial enterprises, the Khamtis and the Singphos settling there were made to pay full tax or simply driven away if their area was suitable for tea cultivation. The population of Sadiya and Namrup were incorporated as British subjects were assured of protection from their new masters. This new development led to persistently breaking from the traditional covenant they had with the Khamtis and the Singphos. Under such forced and alien circumstances, it was but natural that the land, forest and human resources of the tribes came under the dictates of the capital. It came under colonial shackles in the monetization of economy, settling up of trade fairs, appointment of *gams* and *kotokis* (political interpreters), release of the traditional clientele contributing to expansion of resources base and freedom of slaves etc., the inherent ideology was destined to lead to clashes with traditional wisdom of subsistence ethic. In order to hold control over the tribes a new method was adopted in which counting and classifying of their populations took place and taxation like house taxes and poll taxes were imposed.

From the above discussion and a cursory glance at the British relationship with the Khamtis and the Singphos, one can deduce that the colonial records failed to

project a picture of the tribes in a movement against colonialism. Colonial historiography tended to paint a negative image of everything relating to the tribes. Therefore, to understand the whole gamut we need to see the whole process as a conflict between two differing ideologies. We may conclude that the underlying logic behind the resistance movement of the tribes which gradually climaxed in the form of an armed rebellion were not an isolated incidents, rather an expression of the tribal negation of colonialism and it was a growing contradictions between colonial design and tribal independence.

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Gam, Pisi., 67 years of aged, male, public leader, Miao Township, Changlang district,
Arunachal Pradesh, interviewed on 18th January, 2016, time 6:00 PM to 8:00 PM

Manpoong, Chau, Khok., 87 years of aged, male, retired Government Servant,
renowned public leader of Khamti, Namsai District, interviewed on 12th January,
2106, time 10:30 AM to 1:00 PM.

Maio, Sig, Chau, Ja., 58 years of aged, male, public leader (President of the Tai
Khamti-Singpho Council), Piyong village, Namsai district, Arunachal Pradesh,
interviewed on 14th January, 2016, time 3:00 PM to 5:00 PM.

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Changlang district, Arunachal Pradesh, interviewed on 19th January, 2016, time
7:00 AM to 8:00 AM

Singpho, Mirim, Du., 72 years of aged, male, village elder, Bordumsa township, Changlang district, Arunachal Pradesh, interviewed on 19th January, 2016, time 3:00 PM to 5:00 PM

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Interview Information Form for the topic on The Resistance Movement in Eastern Arunachal Pradesh: The Khamti and the Singpho (1825-1843)

Personal Information of Informant

1. Name.....
2. Designation.....
3. Male/Female.....
4. Age.....
5. Address.....
.....
.....
-Email.....Contact
No.....
6. Date.....
7. Place.....

Signature of the interviewer

Questionnaires for the topic on the Resistance Movements in Eastern Arunachal Pradesh: The Khamti and the Singpho (1825-1843)

Sample Questionnaires for Khamti

Following are the sample of some of the questions asked to initiate the conversation:

- Q. Where did your people come from?
- Q. Can you name the routes or passes used by your people?
- Q. Which was the first place of your settlement area?
- Q. Can you name your leader who led your people from your original homeland to here?
- Q. Did the Khamti have any relationship with the Ahom ?
- Q. Did the Khamti have any conflict with Ahom ruler?
- Q. Did the Khamti have any relationship with the Singpho?
- Q. Did the Khamti have any conflict with the Singpho?
- Q. Do you know anything about the Burmese invasion of Assam?
- Q. Did your people suffer during the Burmese rule in Assam?
- Q. How did your people come into contact with the English?
- Q. Do you know anything about the agreement signed between the Khamti and the British in 1826?
- Q. Do you know that your people had undertaken an armed rebellion against the British in 1839?
- Q. Can you name the important Khamti leaders who lead this armed rebellion against the British?

- Q. Do you know any family whose forefather participated in this armed rebellion?
- Q. Can you tell me why the Khamti undertook armed against the British rule?
- Q. Do you know anything about British officer Major White?
- Q. Who killed Major White and why?
- Q. How many Khamti lost their lives while fighting against the British?
- Q. How many British subjects were killed by the Khamti?
- Q. How Khamti organised themselves during the war against the British?
- Q. Did any tribe assist the Khamti while fighting against the British?
- Q. What weapon and strategy were used by your tribe during the rebellion?
- Q. How your people were defeated and what were the main causes for your loss in the war?
- Q. What happened after the end of the armed rebellion?

Name of the respondent :

Designation :

Date :

Place :

Time :

Questionnaires for the topic on the Resistance Movements in Eastern Arunachal Pradesh: The Khamti and the Singpho (1825-1843)

Sample Questionnaires for Singpho

Following are the sample of some of the questions asked to initiate the conversation:

- Q. Where did your people come from?
- Q. Can you name the routes or passes used by your people to reach here?
- Q. Which was the first place of your settlement area?
- Q. Can you name your leader who led your people from your original homeland to here?
- Q. Did the Singpho have any relationship with the Ahom ?
- Q. Did the Singpho have any conflict with Ahom ruler?
- Q. Did the Singpho have any relationship with the Khamti?
- Q. Did the Singpho have any conflict with the Khamti?
- Q. Do you know anything about the Burmese invasion of Assam?
- Q. Did your people suffer during the Burmese rule in Assam?
- Q. How did your people come into contact with the English?
- Q. Do you know anything about the agreement signed between the Singpho and the British in 1826?
- Q. Do you know that your people had undertaken an armed rebellion against the British in 1843?
- Q. Can you name the important Singpho leaders who lead this armed rebellion against the British?

- Q. Do you know any family whose forefather participated in this armed rebellion?
- Q. Can you tell me why the Singpho undertook armed against the British rule?
- Q. How many Singpho lost their lives while fighting against the British?
- Q. How many British subjects were killed by the Singpho?
- Q. How did the Singpho organise themselves during the war against the British?
- Q. Did any tribe assist the Singpho while fighting against the British?
- Q. What weapon and strategy were used by your tribe during the rebellion?
- Q. How your people were defeated and what were the main causes for your loss in the war?
- Q. What happened after the end of the armed rebellion?

Name of the respondent :

Designation :

Date :

Place :

Time :