



## Chapter: II

### Strategies to Defend the North-East Frontier: Exhaustion, Subversion and Intimidation (1826-1857)

The process of empire building has always been wheeled by wars. Expansion of the British rule in India also involved severe warfare. The English East India Company (hereafter Company) conducted their business with the aid of soldiers, guns, forts and treaties.<sup>1</sup> Being a mercantile enterprise, the ultimate goal of the Company in India was to earn profit through trade and for that purpose the Company used all the resources it had in its disposal. The Company tried to establish its political hegemony in India to safeguard its trade interests. After acquiring mastery over a large territory of the Indian subcontinent, the Company framed its policies in such a manner which ensured its territorial integrity in India and opened up new ways to expand its empire in India. The absence of a strong indigenous power to keep the country under one political entity boosted the Company's interest in acquiring more territory. However, it was not easy for a European company to establish dominance over India. To meet that goal, the Company first raised an efficient army, which in fact had all the ingredients of a good army.<sup>2</sup> The army of the Company was modeled on the British Army. British army learned to utilize the technologies like gunpowder weapons and trans-oceanic sailing vessels from the sixteenth century. There were three major characteristics in British warfare: i) a transformation in tactics, where the old lance and pikes along with their armored cavalry were rendered useless by muskets, ii) tactic changes resulted in larger militaries and iii) the adoption of complex and intricate strategies to effectively

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<sup>1</sup> Wilbur, W.E. *The East India Company*, California, 1945, p. ii.

<sup>2</sup> Singh, Madan Paul *Indian Army under the East India Company*, New Delhi, 1976, p. 23.

implement large armies during a war.<sup>3</sup> Cavalry was replaced by trained infantry, which was useful in terrain warfare. With the advent of firearms and subsequent changes in military strategy and tactics, the professional military came into existence. This new professional army was a standing military where the members were systematically recruited, better disciplined and trained than the preceding armies. These changes in the army contributed to the creation of a highly structured and well-organized bureaucracy dedicated to the prosecution of war<sup>4</sup>. Thus, the army in England was converted into an asset of the Empire which contributed to the British domination over many parts of the world. By the beginning of the nineteenth century, with the aid of its army, the Company brought major revenue earning areas of India under its banner.

The Company authorities had to take several elements into consideration to form a strategy in the North-East Frontier of India. The first half of the nineteenth century witnessed a gradual change in the policies of the Company in India. The events in Europe, especially the French Revolution and the rise of Napoleon Bonaparte had critical impact upon the think tank of the Company. The London Head-Quarter of the Company emphasized upon maintaining peace, as wars could hamper trade. The Court of Directors opined that stable commerce required peace. After the Pitts' India Act of 1793, the London authorities wanted to maintain peace, thereby reducing cost on military and concentrating more on trade. But the officers stationed in India, who were familiar with the country, understood that war must be used to gain political control. In 1803, Richard Wellesley, the then Governor General, in a letter to Lord Castlereagh, the then president of the Board of Control, opined that trade and commerce in India

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<sup>3</sup> Sok, Daniel, *An Assessment of the Military Revolution*, URL: <https://.history.emory.edu>, accessed: 23-08 2015 11:30 UTC.

<sup>4</sup> Rogers, Clifford J. 'The Military Revolution Debate' in *Readings on the Military Transformation of Early Modern Europe* San Francisco, 1995. pp. 299-333.

depended on secure frontiers for which war was needed.<sup>5</sup> Wellesley was one of the most expansionist governor generals of the Company and he knew how to use political power to maintain and increase commerce. During his tenure, most of the north Indian territories came under the direct control of the Company. He and his brother Arthur, a general of the Company army, convinced the Board of Control that to safeguard India from the Shah of Afghanistan and the French the Maratha territory must be annexed. Consequently, the Maratha confederacy was broken after the Treaty of Bassein (1802) and the French influence on the north-west frontier of Awadh was curbed down. It further provided the Company with an opportunity to enter the Sikh territory, thereby establishing a base in the North Western Frontier to thwart any invasion from Afghanistan and Russia. The rapid expansion in north India was the outcome of the idea that, security was essential for a steady growth in trade.<sup>6</sup>

In North-East Indian military landscape, Company's methods varied in order to meet the varied demands of warfare and ecology<sup>7</sup>. Unlike in other parts of India, Cavalry was barely used here. This region was a factor in securing global dominance for the British Empire.<sup>8</sup> The basic argument one would put for this statement is the location of the region. Introspecting the post Buxar (1764) period, it is observed that the Company was fast expanding its hold over the economic resources. They moved eastward from Bengal, halted in the Garo Hills and tried to penetrate through the then

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<sup>5</sup> Owen, Sidney J. (ed) *A Selection from the Despatches, Treaties, and Other Papers of Marquess Wellesley, During His Government of India* (Oxford, 1877) cited by Kumar Gagan in 'Small Wars' On The Frontier: The Raj And The Army, C.1800-C.1900, Unpublished PhD thesis, 2010, JNU, p. 22.

<sup>6</sup> Kumar, Gagan 'Small Wars' On The Frontier: The Raj And The Army, C.1800-C.1900, Unpublished PhD thesis, 2010, JNU, p. 21.

<sup>7</sup> Roy, Kaushik. (ed) *Warfare, State and Society in South Asia, 500 BCE-2005 CE*, New Delhi, 2010, p. 356.

<sup>8</sup> Cederlöf, Gunnel. *Founding an Empire on India's North-Eastern Frontiers 1790-1840, Climate, Commerce* New Delhi, 2014, p. 1.

Ahom kingdom. But they had to wait for two and a half decades. However, after the Treaty of Yandabo (1826), the Company virtually became the master of the North East Frontier; brought the kingdoms of Cachar, Jayantia and Manipur under their 'protection' and put the Assam Valley, i.e., the erstwhile Ahom Kingdom under martial law. The Company's troops were stationed at military outposts of Goalpara, Bijni, Guwahati, Golaghat, Nagaon, Tezpur, Jorhat, Sivasagar, Lakhimpur and Sadiya in the Brahmaputra Valley and at Sylhet, Cherrapoonji, Jayantiapur and Silchar in the Barak Valley. A military head quarter was established at Bishwanath, located on the north bank of the Brahmaputra to the east of Tezpur. Bishwanath was chosen as it was situated on a higher ground and was therefore suitable for magazine store room. The military headquarter in Assam required an ample stock of ammunitions because of the difficulties in transportation from Fort William. Biswanath had the provision of erecting large arsenal and it was navigable through the Burigang River.<sup>9</sup> The Company officials were instructed to stay alert for a possible Burmese attack and the 'depredations of wild hill communities'.<sup>10</sup>

At the time of the arrival of the East India Company in the North East India, it had one of the most organized and effective army with it. It had resources, logistics and experienced officers to carry on its plans. To reduce the cost of maintaining European soldiers, the authorities at the Fort William encouraged the use of 'native troops' in the North East. In 1828, the Assam Light Infantry was raised by amalgamating the Rangpur Light Infantry and two Gurkha Companies.<sup>11</sup> Its duty was to guard the Brahmaputra Valley with the strength of 960 *sepoys*. The Assam Light Infantry (henceforth ALI) was

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<sup>9</sup> Barpujari, H.K. *Francis Jenkins, Report on the North-East Frontier*, Guwahati, 1995, p. xviii.

<sup>10</sup> Shaekespeare, L.W. *The History of the Assam Rifles*, Aizawl, 1977, p. 35.

<sup>11</sup> WBSA, FSC, 1828, March, Nos. 4-8, June, No. 119.

mostly comprised of soldiers from Bihar, Awadh and Bengal. They had been serving in the North East Frontier for a long time and therefore were reluctant to continue their service in the Regiment. One important reason for their reluctance was the discontinuation of the extra allowance granted to the soldiers serving in the North East after the First Anglo-Burmese War. This step was taken to reduce the expense. Therefore, David Scott tried to increase the number of recruits from the North East itself, specially Gurkhas, Manipuris and Jurwas. He was informed by Captain John Bryan Neufville in August, 1828 about the expertise of these communities as soldiers. They were accustomed with the topography and climate of the region and they would be happy to serve with an allowance of INR 1 per month. Compared to the recruits from Bengal, the soldiers of these communities were more immune to 'jungle fevers' and hence they could be stationed in hill tracts where the fever was widespread.<sup>12</sup> David Scott was of the view that the ALI could continue with local recruits. The Government of Calcutta approved his proposal and increased the allowance of the soldiers to attract local people.<sup>13</sup> The Sylhet Light Infantry (henceforth SLI), which was entrusted with the duty of defending Cachar, was rejuvenated as per the instruction of the then Governor General Bentinck by enlisting more Gurkha soldiers. By 1840, there were four regular regiments of the Company in the North East, viz, the First ALI, the Second Light Infantry, the SLI and a Bengal Infantry Battalion. But the Company Government thought that regular troops would be too elaborate and costly for small expeditions in the Frontier. These expeditions, when required could be conducted more rapidly and with less expense by a militia body. This militia body would be a separate force under the civil administration. It would be put on a better footing than the ordinary police.

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<sup>12</sup> Cederlöf, Gunnel, 2014, *op. cit*, no. 8, p. 180.

<sup>13</sup> Barpujari, H.K. (ed) *The Comprehensive History of Assam, Vol IV*, Guwahati, 2007, p. 189.

This militia body, called Levy would have military duties and it would replace the regular troops in certain parts of the Frontier. This force would be given elementary training and would be armed with the Brown Bess rifles.<sup>14</sup> Accordingly, the Cachar Levy was raised in 1835. In 1838, the Jorhat Militia was formed to guard the Naga Hills frontier.<sup>15</sup>

By this time, the Company had brought a vast area of India under its control and the Company properly utilized the local resources to secure and defend the territories under its political control. However, in the North-East Frontier of India, the Company had some disadvantage. Most of the officers of the Company were unfamiliar with the region. The Company's officers needed information on the physiographical variations of the region to form strategy. During the First Anglo- Burmese War, the Company's soldiers were wandering hopelessly in jungles of the North East.<sup>16</sup> There was an utmost necessity of carefully collecting all information likely to be of use in military operations in the North East. The officers of the Company's army were instructed to collect information regarding the inhabitants of the region, including their system of warfare and their arms and ammunitions. The Governor-General instructed the army to maintain diary of field book.<sup>17</sup> The officers and the soldiers had to note down the names of places, objects and estimated distance. Towns, villages, rivers, forts and other landmarks were regarded as objects and the distances were calculated by the time taken

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<sup>14</sup> The Brown Bess Rifles, officially named as the Long Land Pattern Musket, became the standard gun of British foot soldiers from 1722 and remained in service till the late nineteenth century. It was a flintlock musket and it was considered a reliable weapon in all weather condition because the steel flint could produce the required ignition to fire in less time than the earlier matchlock muskets. see Bocetta Sam, *The Brown Bess* in MilitaryHistoryNow.com. URL: <https://militaryhistorynowcom.cdn.ampproject.org/militaryhistorynow.com/2017/07/05>, accessed: 21/05/2020 14:35 UTC.

<sup>15</sup> Shakespeare, L.W. 1977, *op. cit*, no. 10, pp. 6-8.

<sup>16</sup> NAI, Michell, John F. *The North-East Frontier of India (A Topographical, Political and Military Report)* Calcutta: The Superintendent of Government Printing, 1883, pp. iv-v.

<sup>17</sup> Singh, Madan Paul 1976, *op. cit*, no. 2, p. 33.

to cover them. By an order in 1804, these journals were to be transmitted to the Quartermaster General and then to the Surveyor General. All these information proved to be remarkable asset for the Army to frame policies. Geographical knowledge was considered to have powerful influence in strategic and operational outcomes<sup>18</sup>. In 1781, Captain James Rennell had already surveyed the province of Bengal and prepared the Bengal Atlas. The Company authorities instructed the army to survey the North-East Frontier. Surveyors and troops moved simultaneously.<sup>19</sup> During the expedition of 1792-93, Captain Welsh provided the Company Government with useful description of Assam. After 1826, many British officers visited different areas of the North-East to find useful commercial routes and to understand the customs and strength of the hill communities. To gather knowledge about the physical features of the North-East Frontier, revenue surveyors were put under the military officers. These surveyors submitted 'reports', which were used to determine strategic policies. Francis Jenkins in his *Report on the North-East Frontier of India* emphasized on the importance of Sadiya as a strategic location. He pointed out that the Burmese could come through that area and might use the Singphos and the Khamtis inhabiting Sadiya as allies. Therefore he recommended increase in the number of troops stationed at Sadiya and to maintain a constant line of supply. Moreover he wrote that these two communities could be brought to the British side. He sought to erect the foundation of defensive measures at Sadiya with the help of these communities.<sup>20</sup> Jenkins further pointed out that the south-east frontier of Upper Assam was in a defenseless state. He suggested that Jaipur on the bank of the Buri Dihing River should be selected as the location for a military post. Jaipur was well connected by road and waterways and the place would be suitable to

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<sup>18</sup> Rogers, Clifford J. 1995. *op. cit*, no. 4, p. 230.

<sup>19</sup> Cederlöf, Gunnel 2014, *op. cit*, no. 8, p. 67.

<sup>20</sup> Barpujari, H.K. 1995, *op. cit*, no. 9, p. xiv.



keep an eye on the hill communities of the south-east frontier of Upper Assam.<sup>21</sup> Captain Bedford and Lieutenant Wilcox prepared maps of the eastern part of upper Assam. They found routes to Tibet and Yunan from Assam through the region inhabited by the Khamtis and the Mishimis.<sup>22</sup> Moreover, Captain John Bryan Neufville identified the route used by the Burmese in 1817 and 1825 which was located in the territories under Beesa *Gam*, a Singpho chief.<sup>23</sup> British officers also paid attention to stationing of troops in suitable areas. Alexander Mackenzie, in his letter to the Quarter Master General of the Army, Fort William, wrote ‘Military cantonments should be established in Tezpur. Bishwanath is too far to the Eastward to be fitted for the site of the Cantonments, and its distance from any Civil Station is also a very strong objection to its selection.’<sup>24</sup> R. B. Pemberton, in his *Report on the Eastern Frontier of India*, included the strength of the troops stationed in the North East India during 1833-35. His Report also includes a table of latitude, longitude and elevation of different places of the region.<sup>25</sup>

For a thorough understanding of the issue in question, the strategies adopted by the British in the North-East Frontier of India needs to be categorized. Here, the Company’s policies against the political principalities around Sadiya, the rulers of Jayantia, Manipur, Cachar, and the Khasi Chiefs shall be analyzed. After 1826, there were two opposing opinions within the bureaucrats of the Company; the officers stationed in the North East advocated an aggressive policy involving active warfare,

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<sup>21</sup> NAI, FSP, Jenkins to the Secretary, Government of India, 15 December, 1838.

<sup>22</sup> Barooah, Nirode K. *David Scott in North-East India*, Guwahati, 2015, p. 151.

<sup>23</sup> Ma, Thaung *British Interest in Trans-Burma Trade Routes to China*, Unpublished PhD thesis, London University, 1955, p. 24.

<sup>24</sup> WBSA, Letter to the Quarter Master General of the Army, Fort William dated 25<sup>th</sup> March, 1867.(B.G.Files).

<sup>25</sup> Pemberton, R.B. *Report on the Eastern Frontier of British India*, 1991, Guwahati, pp. 38-62.

whereas the Authorities at the Fort William favored the policy of non-intervention. A. C. Bannerjee aptly described that the Company authority ‘remained a prisoner of indecision’.<sup>26</sup> This state of indecision remained there till the British Crown took over the administration in 1858. However, the Company opted for a multi-faceted strategic policy and formulated its policies on the basis of its military strength. Like the North-Western Frontier, the political principalities of the North East were rather dealt with diplomacy as they were already under pressure and in an unstable condition. The Company tried to avoid military engagement in the North East as much as possible.

### **2.1 Strategy of Exhaustion:**

During the initial years of its occupation of the North East, the Company pursued a defensive strategy. Immediately after the First Anglo-Burmese War and the Treaty of Yandabo (1826), the Company followed what can be termed as the strategy of exhaustion. The Oxford Essential Dictionary of the US Military (2001) defines the strategy of exhaustion as, “A strategy emphasizing the gradual and often indirect erosion of the enemy's military power and will to resist.”<sup>27</sup> It is also known as the Fabian strategy, named after Roman general Quintus Fabius Maximus Verrucosus, nicknamed the Cunctator (“delayer”) because of his delaying tactics in battles.<sup>28</sup> Generally, it is used by the defending party when it starts losing the war, or placed in difficult situation with shortage of necessary resources. Its execution depends on the situation, which was the reason for which the Company decided to adopt it. After 1826, the Company had a recurring Burma-phobia. The First Anglo-Burma War was a costly

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<sup>26</sup> Barpujari, H. K. (ed) 2007, *op. cit.*, no. 13, p. 124.

<sup>27</sup> The Oxford Essential Dictionary of the U.S. Military, New York, 2001, p. 419, Retrieved from the Library of Congress, URL: [www.locn.loc.gov/2002449841](http://www.locn.loc.gov/2002449841) on 12/09/2015 09:30 UTC.

<sup>28</sup> Bowdish, Randall G. *Military Strategy: Theory and Concepts* Unpublished PhD thesis, University of Nebraska, 2013, p. 208.

affair, with a whooping amount of 13 million Pound Sterling being spent.<sup>29</sup> The Company therefore did not want to spend more money in wars, unless the region appeared to be profitable. Moreover, the soldiers from Bihar, Bengal and Awadh were anxious to return home as they could not stand the ‘unhealthy’ climate of the region for long.<sup>30</sup> The Company was deficient on the question of necessary men power right after the Treaty of Yandabo and was yet to assess the military strength and battle tactics of the communities inhabiting the region. Earlier in 1824, David Scott, the then Governor General’s Agent in the Frontier, in his letter to George Swinton, Chief Secretary of Staff, Fort William, reported the lack of proper knowledge of the martial strength of the communities when he wrote,

“.... the Nagas, the Singphos, the Khamtis and other communities to the eastward of Assam are perhaps too little advanced in the art of governance and war.”<sup>31</sup>

Till that time, the Company had fought several wars in India and the Company Authority was aware of the futility of waging war without understanding the local condition. The British army utilized the local resources while framing their strategy in colonies.<sup>32</sup> The British initially tried to avoid offence. They saw the success of the policy of exhaustion during the American War of Independence, where George Washington avoided direct collision with the British troops which helped him to save resources for a longer period.<sup>33</sup> Therefore, the Company officers desired to establish colonial influence in the region without waging war.

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<sup>29</sup> Than, Myint U. *The River of Lost Footsteps: Histories of Burma*, New York, 2008, p. 113.

<sup>30</sup> Barpujari, H.K.(ed) 2007, *op. cit*, no. 13, p. 189.

<sup>31</sup> NAI, FSE, 1824; 26 November, No 11. Scott to Swinton. 9 November.

<sup>32</sup> Deshpandey, Anirudh *British Military Policy in India, 1900-1945*, New Delhi, 2005, p. iv.

<sup>33</sup> Bowdish, Randall G. 2013, *op. cit*, no. 28, p. 209.

“The British policy was to wait and watch the existing conditions and then gradually they began to enter into a system of engagement with the hill communities of the region. The engagements provided them an opportunity to secure the reaction of the cross country powers and provided them with a basis of intercourse with the communities.”<sup>34</sup>

Before engaging with the communities of the region, the Company had to ensure the defence of the frontier from the Burmese. During their first invasion to Assam, the Burmese used the route via the Patkai Hills.<sup>35</sup> There was a possibility that they might use this route again. Therefore, Sadiya was identified as the most important military post of the Frontier. It could be connected through road from Dibrugarh and there was the provision of water communication by the Brahmaputra. Sadiya was a key location from which colonial influence could be extended in the adjoining hill and plain territories. Moreover, the commercial potentiality of Sadiya tempted the Company. Francis Jenkins in his Report stated about the possibility of trade in Sadiya as it was the meeting place of the merchants from Tibet and the plain areas.<sup>36</sup> Considerable varieties of merchandize in large amount were exchanged here regularly. The communities inhabiting the region surrounding Sadiya could be used by the Company as allies for commercial and political stability.<sup>37</sup> The eastern part of upper Assam was depopulated due to the Burmese invasion and the continuous civil war prior to the invasion. Most of the villages turned into jungles wastelands. The Company desired to transform these jungles into productive tracts, especially tea gardens and for that, administrative

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<sup>34</sup> Bose, Manilal *British Policy in the North-East Frontier Agency*, New Delhi, 1979, p. 2.

<sup>35</sup> NAI, BSPC, Scott to MacMoline, 13<sup>th</sup> February, 1824, No. 16.

<sup>36</sup> Barpujari, H.K., 1995, *op. cit*, no. 9, p. 17.

<sup>37</sup> Rowlatt, E.A. 'Report of an Expedition into the Mishimi Hills to the North-East of Sudyah' in *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, vol. XIV, 1845, pp. 477-495.

arrangements was necessary. The report of the Tea Committee of India which authenticated the quality of the tea discovered in Upper Assam had played a significant role in formulating the policy of the British in the Sadiya region. The Committee termed the discovery of tea in the region as ‘the most important and valuable that has ever been made on matters connected with the agriculture or commercial resources of this empire.’<sup>38</sup> Apart from its importance in the strategy of defence against the Burmese attack, Sadiya now became commercially valuable for the Company.

In order to increase colonial influence in the region, a fort was erected at Sadiya with a masonry arsenal in the centre surrounded by a loop holed stockade. The fort had a storehouse which could hold supply for four months.<sup>39</sup> On Jenkins’ advice, another fortification of strong timber was constructed to store ammunitions. He further instructed to substitute the 12.PDR Carronades of the gunboats with 4 PDR brass-guns. The officers appointed local people as gunners and they were paid INR 12 a month.<sup>40</sup> It reduced the cost of maintaining gunboats to navigate the region. From Sadiya up to Lakhimpur on the north bank and Sibasagar on the south bank of the Brahmaputra, a series of forts were constructed to assist the post at Sadiya in times of emergency.<sup>41</sup> Soldiers were instructed to start patrolling the area twice a day to gain idea about the local response to the establishment of a British fort at Sadiya. The Field Service Regulation of the British Army prescribed for the provision of a proper supply line to military posts.<sup>42</sup> Hence Sadiya was selected as it was well connected by waterways and

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<sup>38</sup> Tani, Rubu *Resistance Movements in Eastern Arunachal Pradesh: The Khamtis and the Singphos, 1825-1843*, Unpublished PhD thesis, Rajiv Gandhi University, Itanagar 2018, p. 257.

<sup>39</sup> ASA, *Report: Topographical, Political and Military on the North East Frontier of India, 1828* p. 5.

<sup>40</sup> Barpujari, H.K. 1995. *op. cit*, no. 9, p. 9.

<sup>41</sup> ASA, *Report: Topographical, Political and Military on the North East Frontier of India, 1828*, p. 7.

<sup>42</sup> Maurice, Frederick *British Strategy: A Study of the Application of the Principle of War*, London, 1935, p.2.

roads from Guwahati and therefore, supplies could be provided here without much delay.

The Company needed the communities inhabiting the Sadiya region as allies for the defence of the Frontier from the Burmese. The region was inhabited by the Singphos, Khamtis and the Muttocks. More importantly, the Khamtis and the Singphos inhabited the frontier region between Assam and Burma. They had trade relations with Burmese merchants. Under these circumstances, Captain Neufville, the commander of the platoon stationed at Sadiya, was instructed to pacify the communities and to form an alliance with them.<sup>43</sup> To communicate with the neighbouring communities, *kotokis* (interpreters) were appointed.

The Singphos inhabited the area between the Patkai range and the Buri-Dihing River. They were divided into twenty eight clans, each under one *Gam*. During the First Anglo-Burmese War, the Singphos joined hands with the Burmese plunderers and took many peasants from the Ahom kingdom as captives. In 1825, Neufville approached the Singphos with an army and convinced the influential Singpho chiefs, Beesa *Gam* and Daffa *Gam* and brought them to his side. The *Gams* had no other options as it was impossible for them to fight the British troops with their comparatively primitive weapons and untrained soldiers. Neufville was also successful in releasing the captive peasants from the Singphos.<sup>44</sup> Immediately after the signing of the Treaty of Yandabo (1826), David Scott, the Agent to the Governor General, made alliance with sixteen Singpho chiefs on 5<sup>th</sup> May, 1826. They agreed to supply the British troops with grains and to construct and repair roads for them. They further declared their loyalty to the

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<sup>43</sup> Barpujari, H.K. (ed), 2007, *op. cit*, no. 13, p. 141.

<sup>44</sup> Barooah, Nirode K. 2015, *op. cit*, no. 22, p. 143.

Company Government and promised to abstain from aiding any foreign powers like the Burmese in attacking Assam.<sup>45</sup> Scott in order to ensure their loyalty arranged a system of keeping a close relative of the *Gams* as hostage under the custody of the Company. The remaining twelve Singpho chiefs were intimidated that if they would not agree to the Company's proposals within two months, they would be expelled from Assam and their property would be taken away.<sup>46</sup>

Thus, the British tried to hold control over Sadiya without fighting the communities living in the region. For the defence of the region, proposals were made to form a local armed force by enlisting the Khamtis and Matakas. These men were from agrarian backgrounds and to make them familiar with military works, it was suggested that they should be trained to build stockades, trench-work and making canoes.<sup>47</sup> However, to convince the natives of the permanent nature of British occupation of Sadiya, a regular Company troop of 600 soldiers was stationed at the main outpost of Sadiya. In 1827, the Sadiya Militia was formed with strength of 450 men. The security of the Sadiya frontier was also necessary for the purpose of trade across the Assam-Burma border. After 1826, surveyor parties were sent to study possible trade routes in the frontier region. The route to Hukawng Valley that was used by the Burmese to reach Assam in 1817, 1820 and 1825 attracted the attention of the British authorities. There was possibility of profitable trade of woolen cloth and other European goods. Captain Neufville held a fair of European merchandize and gifted the Singpho chiefs with attractive European manufactured items.<sup>48</sup> The reason for this gesture was that, the route to the Hukawng Valley was through the territories of Beesa *Gam*. This policy of

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<sup>45</sup> Barpujari, H.K. *Assam in the Days of the Company*, Guwahati, 1996, pp. 35-36.

<sup>46</sup> Barooah, Nirode K. 2015, *op. cit*, no. 22, p. 144.

<sup>47</sup> WBSA, BSPC 21<sup>st</sup> July, 1826, no.14, Bedingfield to Scott, 4 June 1826.

<sup>48</sup> Barooah, Nirode K. 2015, *op. cit*, no. 22, p. 153.

appeasement was part of British strategy in the North Eastern Frontier during the post Yandabo period.

The Muttock kingdom, under the Bar Senapati<sup>49</sup>, near Sadiya, was a tax-free territory. In 1826, the Bar Senapati acknowledged British supremacy. He was not asked to pay any tribute to the Company at that time.<sup>50</sup> But the Company was eager to bring the fertile Muttock kingdom under its direct control for revenue purpose. Moreover, many subjects of Upper Assam and districts under British rule began to migrate to the Bar Senapati's kingdom to get redemption from tax. On the other hand, the kingdom was found suitable for tea cultivation. Under these circumstances, the British demanded a tribute of INR10, 000 but the Bar Senapati refused to fulfill their demand and since then, the frontier officers were looking for an opportunity to annex his kingdom. The kingdom was divided into seven distinct tracts among the seven sons of the Bar Senapati. Captain Jenkins proposed to make separate agreements with his sons in order to weaken their unity. But the Calcutta authority refused it as it would provoke the Bar Senapati against the British. For them, maintaining a cordial relation with the Muttock kingdom was necessary for the security of Sadiya and political expediency of the Company. Therefore, after the death of the Bar Senapati in January, 1839, the British agreed to acknowledge the deceased Bar Senapati's son Maju Gohain as the new Bar Senapati, provided he continued the payment of the tribute. Maju Gohain in return agreed to open up the wastelands for tea cultivation and to appoint a British officer to settle disputes between Europeans and Muttocks.<sup>51</sup> This was the beginning of colonial expansion into the Muttock kingdom. The final opportunity emerged in the form of a

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<sup>49</sup> Bar Senapati was the designation for the chief of the Muttock Kingdom. During that time Matibar was holding the position of Bar Senapati.

<sup>50</sup> Barpujari, H.K. 2007, *op. cit*, no. 13, p. 8.

<sup>51</sup> Barpujari, H.K. 2007, *op. cit*, no. 13, p. 120.



clash between the Morans, a community inhabiting the Muttock kingdom and Maju Gohain. The British diplomat distorted the provisions of a treaty between the deceased Bar Senapati and the Morans. Moreover, the Company supported the claim of the Morans of a free territory. Maju Gohain vehemently opposed this and eventually, the Muttock country was annexed in December, 1839.<sup>52</sup> This annexation shows the British strategy of gaining profit by interfering in internal politics of the kingdoms of the North Eastern Frontier. This annexation provided them with the mastery over the strategically important Sadiya region along with a region suitable for tea cultivation.

The Khamtis inhabited the area near the Tengpani River and since the reign of Gaurinath Singha, the Khamti chief had usurped the post of Sadiya Khowa Gohain, the frontier officer during the Ahom rule. They dominated the Assamese people of the region and even helped the Burmese in their invasions of Assam.<sup>53</sup> Neufville maintained good relation with the Sadiya Khowa Gohain and recruited Khamti men in the Sadiya Militia. The Khamti chief had political ambitions and the British commander of the gunboats of Sadiya C.A. Bruce informed the high command about this.<sup>54</sup> The Company in an attempt to reduce the influence of the Sadiya Khowa Gohain, occupied the territory between Sadiya and Saikhowa and brought the Assamese population under Company's taxation.<sup>55</sup> These actions had consequences for the British. The Company Army faced the boldest display of 'tribal warfare' in the frontier on 28<sup>th</sup> January, 1839, when a force of about six hundred Khamtis attacked the Sadiya outpost. The troop at Sadiya offered feeble resistance, as they were caught unprepared.<sup>56</sup> The outpost was

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<sup>52</sup> *Ibid*, p. 121.

<sup>53</sup> WBSA, BPC, 11<sup>th</sup> February, 1835, Bruce to Jenkins, no. 91.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>55</sup> Barpujari, H.K. 1996, *op. cit*, no. 44, p. 145.

<sup>56</sup> Bhuyan, S.K. *Early British Relation with Assam*, Guwahati, 2010, p. 39.

attacked by at least five groups of the Khamtis from different directions. They put the whole camp on fire and massacred most of the soldiers, including Captain White, the Political Agent of Upper Assam.<sup>57</sup> This incident provoked the Company Army and in retaliation, they burnt down the Khamti villages and destroyed their grains. The Government shifted the outpost towards Saikhowa, so that supplies could be reached easily. On the orders of the Commander-in-Chief, General Gough, more troops were sent to eastern frontier and an additional outpost was established at Dum Duma as rumors of a Burmese invasion were getting strong after the attack.<sup>58</sup> In 1843, the headquarters of the army in the eastern frontier was shifted to Jaipur with reinforcement stationed in the outposts of Sadiya, Saikhowa, Dibrugarh, Dum Duma and Ningroo. The ALI was entrusted with the task of defending the frontier.<sup>59</sup> Thus, following the establishment of martial rule in Assam, the Company emphasized on securing the easternmost frontier of the province. They followed the strategy of exhaustion and bought time to secure the region surrounding Sadiya to thwart possible Burmese aggression. The Company authority demonstrated the martial capacity of its army only when necessary.

## **2.2 Strategy of Subversion:**

The North Eastern Frontier of India, during the early decades of the nineteenth century, had a number of independent and semi-independent political principalities. The English East India Company came into contact with some of them in the eighteenth century itself. However, the First Anglo-Burmese War opened up new avenues of trade

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<sup>57</sup> Gait, Edward *A History of Assam*, New Delhi, 2010, p. 361.

<sup>58</sup> NAI, FPC, letter from Commander-in-Chief to the Governor-General in Council, 18<sup>th</sup> October, 1843, no. 168.

<sup>59</sup> Hussain, Imdad *Problem of Defence: North East Frontier with Special Reference to Local Corps and Irregulars, 1822-1866*, Unpublished PhD thesis, Gauhati University, 1975, p. 138.

and possibilities of empire expansion before the Company. In order to establish itself as the strongest force in the Frontier region, the Company adopted the strategy of subversion. The strategy of subversion is defined as, ‘the undermining or detachment of the loyalties of significant political and social groups within the victimized state, and their transference, under ideal conditions, to the symbols and institutions of the aggressor’<sup>60</sup>. This strategy has been often used by the colonial powers, basically to win the loyalty of an influential group of the society or the state. It enables the policy makers to earn political gain. The strategy of subversion can be described as a ‘high reward with low cost strategy’ because it can potentially provide a political objective like a profitable trade policy or even control over a state, only by manipulating influential people and institutions. It does not require maximum manpower and finance. It is an attractive strategy for the aggressors with minimum resources, though it has been used quite often by major powers.<sup>61</sup> However, implementation of this strategy may require a very long time to achieve a political or commercial objective. This strategy is best used as a concealed strategy when the aggressor intends to avoid warfare.<sup>62</sup> The English East India Company used this strategy multiple times in India. The events leading to the Battle of Plassey (1757) could be considered as the British strategy of subversion. Even in the nineteenth century when the British expansion in India was at its peak, the government did not want to take the responsibility of administering many Indian states. For financial and manpower related reasons, the Company preferred to leave the states with no substantial military strength to themselves. The states with less

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<sup>60</sup> Blackstock, Paul W. *The Strategy of Subversion: Manipulating the Politics of Other Nations*, Chicago, 1964, p. 56.

<sup>61</sup> Bowdish, Randall G, 2013, *op. cit*, no. 28, p. 230.

<sup>62</sup> Howard, O.O. ‘British Strategy in South Africa’ in *The North American Review*, Vol. 171, No. 525 9 Aug., 1900) pp. 259-264.

prospect of revenue were kept under indirect rule of the Company.<sup>63</sup> In these states, a section of the ruling class was ensured to maintain their loyalty towards the Company. After the Treaty of Yandabo, the Company showed no haste in annexing the erstwhile Ahom kingdom.

“...although by our expulsion of the Burmese from the territory of Assam, the country would of right become ours by conquest, the Governor-General in Council does not contemplate the permanent annexation of any part of it to the British dominion.”<sup>64</sup>

This statement by the Company Government clearly indicates their shrewd policy to win over the support of the influential class of the region and to justify their military action to the people. David Scott, the Agent to the Governor General also declared “...we are not led into your country by the thirst of conquest but are forced in our defence to deprive the enemy of the means of annoying us.”<sup>65</sup> Such statements assured the people; especially the aristocrats and they welcomed the British. It is to be noted that the first anti-British uprisings of a few Ahom nobles and heads of different communities failed due to the support shown to the British by a section of the influential people. The use of the strategy of subversion by the Company in the North East was visible in its treaties with the rulers of the states and the chiefs of the communities. The Company’s officers with due permission from the high command, interfered in the feuds of the communities and earned profit by supporting the one who seemed friendly towards them.

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<sup>63</sup> Bandyopadhyay, Sekhar *From Plassey to Partition, A History of Modern India*, 2008, p. 71.

<sup>64</sup> FSC, 1824; 20 February No. 15. Cited in Barpujari, H.K.(ed) *The Comprehensive History of Assam, Vol. IV*. Guwahati, 2007, p. 6.

<sup>65</sup> Cited in Barpujari H.K.(ed), 2007, *op. cit*, no. 13, p. 6.

The policies towards Manipur could be considered as examples of the strategy of subversion. Manipur was an independent kingdom on the south-eastern frontier of Assam and the kingdom was treated as an ally of the British during the First Anglo-Burmese War. The reason behind this was the location of Manipur; it was viewed by the British as a buffer zone, a shield against Burma. Since the 1820s, some of the policy makers of the Company had devised a grand plan to bring Tibet, Sichuan, Yunan, Arakan and Upper Laos under its subjugation and Manipur was identified as the centre of this plan.<sup>66</sup> Moreover, Manipur could provide the Company Army a direct route to Burma. Some of the Company officers were of the opinion that, if there was another Burmese attack, it would be through Manipur.<sup>67</sup> The Company supported Gambhir Singh as the king of Manipur and supplied him with European arms and ammunition, including four 3.PDR Mountain guns and an artillery contingent of 100 soldiers and also trained his troop in modern fashion.<sup>68</sup> During the First Anglo-Burmese War, Gambhir Singh's troops proved their competence and defeated a Burmese troop and even entered the Burmese border crossing the Chindwin River on the Burma-Manipur frontier. The Company therefore turned a blind eye towards Gambhir Singh's oppression upon the Nagas near the border and in North Cachar. In 1833, the Governor General William Bentinck expressed the Company's grand plan of securing the Manipur-Burma border. He instructed the officers of the North East Frontier to use the Nagas, Kukis, Cacharis, Gambhir Singh's troops and even the European planters in this strategy. He indirectly encouraged the king of Manipur to invade the Naga Hills to subjugate the hill communities inhabiting the Manipur-Burma border region. The Company did not want to spend manpower and wealth in this matter. The Company officers were further

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<sup>66</sup> Gunnell Cederlof (2014) mentions about a map describing this plan of the East India Company. p. 197.

<sup>67</sup> NAI, FPC, 1832, 9 April, No. 92.

<sup>68</sup> Pemberton, R.B., 1991, *op. cit*, no. 25, p. 52.

instructed to make sure that Gambhir Singh would not harm the interest of Purandar Singha. Bentinck did not want to disturb Purandar Singha to fulfill his plan.<sup>69</sup>

There was no specific boundary line between Manipur and Burma. Manipur claimed the territory west of the Chindwin River, the natural boundary between Burma and Manipur. The fertile Kabaw Valley on the bank of this river was identified as an important strategic location by the Company Government.<sup>70</sup> It was suitable for transporting the contingents in its possible war on Burma. It was a part of the market chain between China and the North East Frontier.<sup>71</sup> Securing this portion would be beneficial for the Company to establish trade with China. But the Company moved cautiously and surrendered the Kabaw Valley to Burma. The Company's policy at that time was to defend the frontier and therefore, it did not want to enrage Burma. Gambhir Singh, as a consolation was given free hand upon North Cachar and the Naga Hills frontier.

Since 1826 Cachar, one of the most important kingdoms of the North East Frontier of India was in a chaotic situation. Govinda Chandra, the king of Cachar acknowledged British suzerainty and agreed to pay a tribute of INR 10,000 per annum in 1824.<sup>72</sup> After the Treaty of Yandabo, he ruled over Cachar as a 'protected' king. The Company stationed a political officer at Silchar and built a cantonment there. Silchar was situated at a comparatively higher ground and therefore the open countryside was favorable for stationing of the troops.<sup>73</sup> Cachar was repeatedly disturbed by the

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<sup>69</sup> FPC, Minute, Governor-General, William Bentinck, 25<sup>th</sup> March, 1833, cited by Gunnel Cederlöf in *Founding an Empire on India's North-Eastern Frontiers 1790-1840, Climate, Commerce* New Delhi, 2014, p. 197.

<sup>70</sup> Pemberton, R.B. 1991, *op. cit*, no. 25, p. 56.

<sup>71</sup> Cederlöf, Gunnel 2014, *op. cit*, no. 8, p. 198.

<sup>72</sup> Barpujari, H.K.(ed) 2007, *op. cit*, no.13, p. 56.

<sup>73</sup> Cederlöf, Gunnel 2014, *op. cit*, no. 8, p. 180.

aggression of Gambhir Singh across the Barak River. On the other hand, the king of Cachar had internal problems in the form of Tularam, a chief who claimed to be its rightful king. Tularam controlled most of the north Cachar, north and west of Haflong and Semkhor. Gambhir Singh was also looking for an opportunity to bring Cachar under his rule. In the dispute between Cachar and Manipur the Company often took the side of Manipur, because Cachar would not be able to aid the Company if the Burmese attacked for the second time. Manipur would provide the Company an easy passage to Burma and also support the Company with a large army.<sup>74</sup> Govinda Chandra mistook the Company as his savior and as a result, his kingdom and his life became vulnerable. Gambhir Singh was eager to annex Cachar and on 24<sup>th</sup> April, 1830, he had Govinda Chandra murdered by assassins.<sup>75</sup> The Company overlooked Gambhir Singh's involvement and held internal politics of Cachar responsible for the incident. The deceased king was childless and his wish to adopt an heir was already rejected by the Company Government.<sup>76</sup> There were four claimants to the throne and after much deliberation the Company annexed the plain territories of the erstwhile Cachar kingdom in 1832.<sup>77</sup> Tularam's hold over the hills was not disturbed by the Company. To appease Gambhir Singh, the region east of the Barak River was handed over to him. The Company, at this stage did not want to lose the support of Manipur as it was considered to be an important ally for the defence of the North East.

After occupying the plains of Cachar, the Company planned to fix the northern boundary of Cachar as it would also become the northern boundary of its dominion in

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<sup>74</sup> WBSA, FPC, 1832, 9 April, No. 8.

<sup>75</sup> Gait, Edward *A History of Assam*, New Delhi, 2010, p. 356.

<sup>76</sup> Barpujari, H.K.(ed) 2007, *op. cit*, no 13, p. 64.

<sup>77</sup> WBSA, FPC, 1832, 9 July, Nos. 15-17.

the region.<sup>78</sup> Survey parties were sent into the jungles to find routes of communication between the Brahmaputra and Barak Valleys. But the Naga and Kuki communities constantly attacked the troops despite the British having an upper hand in men-power. It was not easy for the Company to fight against the hill communities as the soldiers were not trained to fight in hills and forests. In 1834, Tularam was compelled to surrender the territory between the Mahur and Dayang Rivers on one side and the Dayang and Kapili Rivers on the other. He was given the eastern part of his former territory which he ruled over under strict British supervision.<sup>79</sup> The Company brought the whole of Cachar, excluding the tract ceded to Tularam, under its direct control. The annexation of Cachar was an outcome of the strategy of subversion, it did not involve any battles, nor did it require any financial expenditure for the Company.

While the British tried to subvert the loyalty of influential section of the society towards them, at the same time they tried to weaken some of the communities by dividing their loyalty. The communities remained loyal to their respective chiefs. Especially in times of wars, the chiefs had the advantage of loyal fighters in his army. The Political Agent of Upper Assam observed the unity among the Khamtis during the attack of 1839 on the Sadiya outpost. He opined that the real strength of the Khamtis lay in the intrinsic unity under one chief.<sup>80</sup> In order to divide this loyalty, the Company divided the Khamtis into four groups under four different chiefs and they were relocated to different locations in the eastern frontier.<sup>81</sup> The Khamtis were thus subdued by breaking down the loyalty and unity among them. In this regard, Jenkins observed, ‘the Khamtis who are by far the most civilized and intelligent tribe on this frontier are now

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<sup>78</sup> Cederlöf, Gunnel, 2014, *op. cit*, no. 8, p. 189.

<sup>79</sup> Barpujari, H.K.(ed) 2007, *op. cit*, no. 13, p. 75.

<sup>80</sup> Tani, Rubu 2018, *op. cit*, no. 38, pp. 244-245.

<sup>81</sup> Bose, Manilal *British Policy in the North-East Frontier Agency*, 1979, p. 79.



divided into four parties and I think there is no future apprehension to be entertained of any combination amongst them.’<sup>82</sup>

Another method of ensuring loyalty of the communities was the circulation of opium. Before the coming of the British, many communities of the region used opium primarily for its medicinal quality. Captain Welsh observed in 1792 that it was cultivated extensively in Lower Assam.<sup>83</sup> A.J. Moffatt Mills in his Report on the Province of Assam mentioned about the prevalence of opium use among the people of Assam since the time of the Mughal invasions in the seventeenth century. Ultimately, at least seventy five percent of the population of Assam became opium addicted by the middle of the nineteenth century.<sup>84</sup> The British put a ban on opium cultivation and instead, sold it in *abkari* shops controlled by the government. The hill communities were offered opium by the British officers during their visits so that opium would be easily available.<sup>85</sup> The taxation on opium earned enormous profit for the Company. At the same time the fighting capabilities of the communities like the Khamtis and the Singphos diminished due to addiction. In addition, the addicted were ready to work for the Company as carriers, expecting a steady supply of opium. Not only the habit of opium consumption made the people physically weak but the addiction also immensely dampened the spirit of the indigenous people. Colonial writers opined that opium harmed them more than the practice of head hunting did.<sup>86</sup> The British thereby earned the loyalty of a section of the society through opium.

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<sup>82</sup> NAI, Foreign Department, from Jenkins to Davidson, Officiating Secretary to the Government of India, 20 January 1844, nos. 61-66.

<sup>83</sup> Sharma, Jayeeta *Empire's Garden, Assam and the Making of India*, 2011, p. 63.

<sup>84</sup> Mills, A.J. *Moffatt Report on the Province of Assam*, 1984, pp. 19-20.

<sup>85</sup> Tani, Rubu 2018, *op. cit*, no. 38, p. 283.

<sup>86</sup> Elwin, Verrier *A Philosophy for NEFA*, 1988, pp. 108-9.

### 2.3 Strategy of Intimidation:

The Company was eager to use the North-East Frontier of India as a trade route. Therefore, the Company officers in the region were advised to adopt a conciliatory policy towards the communities as much as possible. However, there were always instances of dispute and disturbance. In such times, the Company adopted the strategy of intimidation. The strategy of intimidation is defined as the deterrence from action by the threat of violence.<sup>87</sup> Thomas Schelling described the relationship between physical force and the psychology of intimidation as

“It is the threat of damage, or of more damage to come, that can make someone yield or comply. It is latent violence that can influence someone’s choice—violence that can still be withheld or inflicted... It is the expectation of more violence that gets the wanted behavior, if the power to hurt can get it at all.”<sup>88</sup>

The strategy of intimidation is most effective when used to achieve the objectives without the use of arms; rather pressure is built upon the enemy to give up the political or commercial objective without any resistance. In the North East, when diplomatic attempts failed, the Company created terror among the concerned communities by burning their villages and destroying their grains. In the eastern frontier, the Singpho chiefs were infuriated due to the increasing British influence, which they believed made their position weak in the eyes of the people. One of the Singpho chiefs, Beesa *Gam* had rebelled against the British.<sup>89</sup> To prevent such actions, the Company sent punitive expeditions as a means of controlling the frontier

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<sup>87</sup> Bowdish, Randall G, 2013, *op. cit*, no. 28, p. 223.

<sup>88</sup> Schelling, Thomas C. *Arms and Influence*. New Haven, 1966, p. 137.

<sup>89</sup> NAI, FC, Singpho Insurrection, Nos. 96-130, 12 August, 1843.

communities.<sup>90</sup> The most effective method was burning of houses and destruction of granaries. Supporting this strategy, Jenkins stated ‘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.’<sup>91</sup>

The strategy of intimidation was particularly adopted by the Company against the Nagas. The Angami Nagas created trouble in Cachar since 1835 and to control them, police outposts were established in their territories of inhabitation.<sup>92</sup> But it did not bring any positive results. In 1836, more than 70 Cacharis, under the protection of the Company was killed by the Nagas.<sup>93</sup> The Company authority decided to send punitive expeditions to create fear among the Nagas. Military outposts were established in places like Dimapur, Mohungdijua and Semkur in the Naga Hills frontier. The invading force, instead of attacking the Naga villages, met the headmen and tried to put fear in their minds. The display of British forces with artillery compelled the villagers to refrain from attacking the villages of Cachar. Moreover, they agreed to pay tribute.<sup>94</sup> But the Nagas near the *duars* south of Sivasagar could not be pacified by such measure. Controlling them was not easy, as they learnt the use of fire-arms. Their warfare was transformed and they started village fortification to prevent British artillery.<sup>95</sup> Therefore, the Company Government decided to withdraw military action in the Naga Hills. By this time, there arose a difference of opinion between the local officers and the Calcutta

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<sup>90</sup> Barpujari, H.K., 1995, *op. cit.*, no. 9, p. 48.

<sup>91</sup> NAI, FDPC, letter from Agent to the Governor-General of the North Eastern Frontier to Secretary, Government of India, no. 95, 7th September, 1840.

<sup>92</sup> NAI, Military Report on Presidency & Assam District, Vol. III, Southern Frontier Tracts, GOI Press, Simla, 1930, p. 1.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid*, p. 4.

<sup>94</sup> NAI, Military Report on Presidency & Assam District, Vol. III, Southern Frontier Tracts, GOI Press, Simla, 1930, p. 5.

<sup>95</sup> ASA, FD, North East Frontier- Expedition against the Naga Tribe, Nos. 290-342, 20 December, 1950.

Government. The former advocated offensive measures in the hills whereas the later opted for the policy of non-intervention.<sup>96</sup> After the transfer of power to the Crown, the government changed its strategy towards the Nagas.

Since 1826, the Company was eager to connect Sylhet with Assam by a road across Khasi hills. The road would not only connect the Barak and Brahmaputra valleys, but it would also provide the British with access to the hill territories. David Scott promised 'British protection from external threat' to three Khasi *syiems* namely Sadu Singh, Lal Singh and Chattar Singh in 1824 in exchange of a fixed payment in cash. After the death of Chattar Singh, the *syiem* of Nongkhlaw in 1826, David Scott supported Chattar Singh's nephew Tirot Singh's claim as the *syiem* of Nongkhlaw. In return Tirot promised the Company to provide materials to construct a road from Assam to Sylhet via Cherrapunji which would be used for the movement of the troops.<sup>97</sup> Another road was constructed through the Jayantia Hills. The Jayantia king was 'under the protection' of the Company since 1824.<sup>98</sup> This road passed through two Khasi principalities, i.e., Jowai and Nartiang. After the Nongkhlaw Massacre of 1829, the Company officers had their eyes on inter-tribal politics, as it was the key to the markets of the hills. In 1830, following a dispute with Ram Singh, the king of Jayantia, the chiefs of Jowai and Nartiang refused to take order from the king. The Company took it as an opportunity to establish influence in the Jayantia kingdom. The King of Jayantia had firm control over the plains, but his authority over the hills depended upon his relation with the Khasi chiefs. In the meantime, two British subjects were kidnapped in Sylhet by a few men from Jayantia for the purpose of sacrificing them in a religious

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<sup>96</sup> NAI, Military Report on Presidency & Assam District, Vol. III, Southern Frontier Tracts, GOI Press, Simla, 1930, p. 7.

<sup>97</sup> Barooah, Nirode K., 2015, *op. cit*, no. 22, p. 228.

<sup>98</sup> Barpujari, H.K.(ed) 2007, *op. cit*, no. 13, p. 106.

ceremony. They were able to escape and the Governor General warned the Jayantia King not to repeat such incident in the future, even though he was not responsible.<sup>99</sup> After a few months, the Jowai chief needed men to sacrifice in a religious ceremony and the Jayantia king instructed the Gobha chief to bring the required men. This time, four British subjects were taken captive in the Gobha principality and three of them were sacrificed. However, one of them escaped and was later rescued by the police.<sup>100</sup> The Company used this case of alleged human sacrifice with the testimony of the surviving victim as an opportunity to take possession of the southern and northern lowlands of the erstwhile Jayantia kingdom. The Company had its eyes on this region due to its fertility.<sup>101</sup> Moreover, establishing control over the hills was a difficult task at that time due to the aggressive nature of the hill dwellers and therefore the lowland seemed more important for them. The Company held Ram Singh responsible for the incident but he died before any action was taken against him. He was succeeded by his nephew Rajendra Singh. Robertson, the then Agent to the Governor General intimidated the young King to pay an annual tribute of INR 10,000 or surrender the lowland region of his kingdom, known as the Seven Banks. Besides he was also asked to deliver the persons associated with the human sacrifice ceremony. Robertson convinced the Calcutta government that the Treaty of 1824 with Ram Singh was a personal one and Rajendra Singh could be intimidated with new demands.<sup>102</sup> The King could not fulfill the demands in due time and this led to the adoption of a Resolution by the Government of the English East India Company in India on 23<sup>rd</sup> February, 1835. By this Resolution, the Company annexed the plain territories of the Jayantia kingdom. The King also

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<sup>99</sup> WBSA, FPC, 1832, 19 March, Nos. 70-80.

<sup>100</sup> Gait, Edward *A History of Assam*, New Delhi, 2010, p. 358.

<sup>101</sup> WBSA, FPC 14 May, No. 117, Fisher to Jenkins, 16 April.

<sup>102</sup> Barpujari, H.K.(ed) 2007, *op. cit*, no.13, p. 108.

surrendered his authority of the hills to the Company.<sup>103</sup> This action of the Company indicates how the British took advantage of the internal disputes and politics to fulfill their objectives. In the case of human sacrifice, place names and other evidences were fabricated to establish a strong case against the Jayantia King.<sup>104</sup> The Company was more interested in the arsenal of the King which stored 236 musket flints, 507 matchlocks and 213 bayonet muskets.<sup>105</sup> After the annexation of the Jayantia kingdom in 1835, the Company needed control over the hills and for that purpose the chieftain of Jowai was targeted to set an example before the hill communities. Captain Lister, the officer-in-charge of the erstwhile Jayantia kingdom, was ordered to raid Jowai and he was given a reinforced troop. But the guerrilla warfare of the Khasis compelled him to negotiate. Using the policy of intimidation and threat of burning the village and destroying their property, Lister humbled the Khasis of Jowai.<sup>106</sup> Thus, the Khasi hills came under the dominance of the Company.

The post-Yandabo period was a period of consolidation for the Company in the North East. Its forces were divided into two portions by the hills that separated Assam from Sylhet and Cachar. A most urgent requirement of the British was to construct secure roads. The territories needed to be physically tied together. Though short roads were constructed for minor purposes, road planning was not done with a bird's eye view. The war with Burma and subsequent fear of more Burmese aggression created the need for broad and hard roads so that the troops could be moved easily across the hills. In the 1830s, several survey expeditions were sent to explore the best route to connect

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<sup>103</sup> *Ibid*, p.113.

<sup>104</sup> Cederlöf, Gunnel 2014, *op. cit*, no.8, p. 173.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid*, p. 176.

<sup>106</sup> Barpujari, H.K. (ed) 2007, *op. cit*, no. 13, p. 139.

Manipur with Jorhat, Cachar with Dhansiri Valley and Sylhet with Guwahati.<sup>107</sup> Francis Jenkins, who had been sent with Pemberton to investigate the best route from Manipur to Assam in 1832, moved towards north Cachar, the densely forested hill tracts between the Barak and Brahmaputra with a troop of 1400 soldiers.<sup>108</sup> These areas were of strategic importance for the Company as they connected Manipur, Jayantia, Cachar and Assam. Since the 1820s, major portion of these territories were controlled by Tularam and the areas to the south and east were under the Nagas. When the surveyors set out from the lower hills to north Manipur, the Nagas refused to send a guide with them. To avoid collision with the Nagas, they had to take a circular route into Jayantia. Jenkins placed 30 soldiers of the Assam Light Infantry at Muhong against a possible Naga attack. They moved towards the north and on the banks of Dhansiri, found a potentially suitable military road. The area had no villages or settlements and therefore the surveyors took initiative to establish a few villages and kept them under military guard. These villages would provide ration and shelter to the troops and the labours.<sup>109</sup> This route became significant for carrying goods and movement of troops from Manipur and Cachar in the south to Guwahati and Jorhat. The Calcutta authority gave high importance to the building of roads, the means by which the new territories of the North East could be physically united. The roads were part of consolidating the subjugated areas and combining them into one administrative unit. In 1834, the Company Government was informed that the road between Cachar and Manipur was absolutely

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<sup>107</sup> Cederlöf, Gunnel, 2014, *op. cit*, no. 8, p. 89.

<sup>108</sup> NAI, Military Report on Presidency & Assam District, Vol. III, Southern Frontier Tracts, GOI Press, Simla, 1930, p.1.

<sup>109</sup> WBSA, BPC, 6<sup>th</sup> February, 1832, 9<sup>th</sup> March 1832, nos. 3-14.

safe from *dacoits* and that Gambhir Singh would supply the labours needed to repair it.<sup>110</sup>

The East India Company's primary concern was trade. Therefore, it did not prefer severe warfare in the North-East because constant warfare would require more European troops, more supply and a lot of expenditure. Therefore, the strategies of exhaustion, subversion and intimidation were adopted. It bought the Company the required time to defend the region, gauge its resources and to find out new trade routes. Different treaties concluded with the influential chiefs of communities and political principalities proved the diplomatic superiority of the Company. These treaties helped the Company to establish its control over the regions that could earn economic and political profit. With the help of the surveys, the Company physically connected different parts of the North Eastern Frontier and trade routes connecting Burma and China were found out. During the period under the Company, the political principalities and the communities of the North East Frontier witnessed the military strength of the British. The Frontier was well-guarded by a series of military outposts. The following period saw the use of British offensive policy in different parts of the North-Eastern Frontier.

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<sup>110</sup>NAI, Military Report on Presidency & Assam District, Vol. III, Southern Frontier Tracts, GOI Press, Simla, 1930, p. 91.