

When the British army marched into Assam in March, 1824, the authorities of the Fort William issued a proclamation to the people of Assam. The proclamation ran as follows: 'We are not led into your country by the thirst of conquest; but are forced in our defence to deprive our enemy of the means of annoying us...'. In February, 1824, Swinton, the Political Secretary to the Government of India, wrote to David Scott, 'although by our expulsion of the Burmese from the territory of Assam, the country of right becomes ours by conquest, the Governor-General in Council does not contemplate the permanent annexation of any part of it to the British Dominion.' But after the expulsion of the Burmese from the Brahmaputra Valley, the British changed their policy. In March, 1828, the Lower Assam was annexed to the British dominion. An attempt was made to restore the old Ahom dynasty in the Upper Assam, but the experiment failed and then in 1837 the Upper Assam too was annexed to the British dominion.

(1826-1831): After the expul

dominion. Here a question arises: Were the British justified in doing so? Outwardly it appears that it was immoral on the part of the British to occupy Assam in violation of the pledge given by them. But we know politics and morality do not go hand in hand. There are hundreds of instances in history which show how pledges and commitments were totally ignored and discarded under exigencies of situation. It was from very many practical considerations the British annexed Assam in violation of the promise given by them. Moreover, excuses were not wanting. One excuse was that the Ahoms did not render any help to the British during the war against the Burmese. Actually Assam was conquered solely by the British, and by right of conquest, Assam, they thought, now belonged to them. A second excuse was that at the end of the war many petitions were submitted to the British by the inhabitants of Lower Assam (not the Ahoms) imploring the British not to leave the country. But the fact that weighed most in prompting the British to annex Assam was their apprehension that with their withdrawal Assam would relapse into anarchy. The Ahom princes would return and there would begin a civil strife taking back Assam to pre-Burmese war days. Some Britishers feared renewal of anarchy might again lure the Burmese to advance towards Assam. It was no doubt an exaggerated fear, for the Burmese had got such a beating in the hands of the British that they would not have dared to attack Assam again. But that with the withdrawal of the British Assam would have relapsed into anarchy there was no doubt about that. In case of anarchy the situation might so develop that the British would have been compelled to interfere in Assam as they did in time of Gourinath Singh. In such an eventuality the British loss of men and money lost during the Burmese war would have gone in vain. Considering all these factors the British were not unjustified in annexing Assam after the Burmese war. Only thing that can be said against the British policy is that in stead of annexing Assam they might retain it as a protected kingdom. In Central India there were so many protected states. If Assam was kept under the protection of British arms, there would have been no renewal of anarchy, the threat of Burmese attack would not have been there and the wild tribes of the frontier could also be kept subdued. Above all, in that case the British would not have been guilty of the violation of a solemn promise given by them.

PART II

CHAPTER I

ADMINISTRATION OF DAVID SCOTT

With the defeat of the Burmese the whole of the Brahmaputra Valley came under the control of the British. When the British entered into the Brahmaputra Valley they declared that they had not entered into Assam with the thirst of conquest but to expel the invaders from this country. But with the expulsion of the Burmese the British wholly ignored the pledge on the plea that the Ahoms did not help the British in any way in fighting against the Burmese, and made up their mind to settle Assam affair in their own way. They divided the valley into three parts—Lower Assam comprising of Kamrup, Nowgong and part of Darrang, Upper Assam extending from Biswanath to the Buridihing, and the Matak country. So far as the Lower Assam was concerned they annexed it to the British dominion and put it in charge of a Commissioner. David Scott was the first Commissioner. So far as the Upper Assam was concerned, after prolonged discussion and in pursuance of suggestion given by David Scott it was given to the Ahom prince Purandar Singh in 1833 under certain conditions. The most important condition was the payment of Rs. 50,000/- as annual tribute. On the plea that the Ahom prince could not govern the country well and that he could not pay the tribute regularly, the Upper Assam was annexed to the British dominion in 1838.

So far as the Matak country was concerned, inhabited as it was by turbulent tribes like Singphos, Khamtis and Moamarias, the British decided to keep it under their direct control and appointed Neuvilie as its Political Agent with head quarters at Biswanath.

Were the British justified in annexing Assam? When the British marched into Assam to fight against the Burmese they categorically declared that they had not done so by the thirst of conquest but by the urge to drive out the Burmese from the Brahmaputra Valley. But after the expulsion of the Burmese they forgot the pledge and annexed the Brahmaputra Valley to their

On 26th Dec., 1825, the Burmese offered terms for the termination of hostilities. After prolonged negotiations the treaty was signed in Feb., 1826 at Yandabo.

The terms of the treaty were :

- (a) The Burmese were to pay rupees one crore as indemnity.
- (b) The king of Burma renounced all claims upon, and agreed to abstain from all interference with, the principality of Assam and its dependencies.
- (c) He was not to interfere with the contiguous states of Cachar and Jayantia.
- (d) Gambhir Singh was to be recognized as the Raja of Manipur.
- (e) The Burmese king ceded to the British the conquered provinces of Arakan, Yeh, Tavoy, Mergni and Tenassirim.

Terms of the treaty

Raja of Manipur.

The effect of the Burmese War was the