

Revenue System in Upper Assam :

We have discussed in details the revenue system as introduced by Scott in Lower Assam. Here a few words may be said about the system as adopted by Scott in Upper Assam. Here he based his revenue measures entirely on the earlier system and altered the old

system when it was considered absolutely necessary. In Upper Assam the Khel system was retained intact. But here as in case of Lower Assam, Scott demanded revenues in cash in lieu of personal service or produce, Janardhan Barbarua, a former Ahom officer of influence and rank, was placed in charge of the revenue department. Here he was aided by the Kheldars—the Hazarikas, the Saikias and the Baruas. In Upper Assam except the poll tax of Rs. 3/- per pyke no other tax was levied.

Judicial system: After the occupation of the Brahmaputra Valley, provisional judiciary was set up. In Upper Assam, for the trial of civil cases, Lambodar Barphukan, a brother-in-law of ex-Raja Chandrakanta, was appointed in May, 1825, a coadjutor with the Barbarua of the revenue department. Some panchayets consisting of former pundits were also instituted to decide summary suits of minor importance. Criminal cases were tried by the Junior Commissioner, and later, by the Political Agent of Upper Assam. Trials of heinous offences were held before the jurors with the Barphukan as the President, although the Barphukan's verdict was subject to revision by one of the Commissioners.

In Lower Assam, the Senior Commissioner tried civil cases without any limit, and criminal offences not involving sentences of death. In discharging the judicial duties the Senior Commissioner was assisted by his only assistant, Captain White. In spite of their best intentions it was not physically possible for them to dispose of the cases filed. In consequence there was accumulation of cases in files. Scott was so greatly alarmed at the arrears that without waiting for the sanction of the Supreme Government he set up provisionally three native courts of which two were to dispose off civil and the third the criminal cases of minor importance. These courts were also to hear appeals from the Rajas and the Choudhuries and other revenue officials, who were allowed, as before, to exercise judicial functions in their respective jurisdictions. Scott, further, erected a number of panchayet courts in the populated areas of Nowgong, Kaliabar and Charduar in Central Assam, to which petty civil suits were referred with a right of appeal to the courts at Guwahati. The members of the Panchayet courts were elected by the people of the locality. In 1828 the Supreme Government accorded approval to the arrangement made by Scott.

We have seen above that the senior Commissioner was not empowered to pass death sentence; for the trial of heinous offences requiring sentences of death, a tribunal was set up under Colonel Richards. As the tribunal could not assemble even for one occasion, a large number of suspected criminals were kept confined in Guwahati jail.

In 1828 the Supreme Government gave approval to the native courts set up by Scott. Moreover, for the speedy trial of persons guilty of heinous crimes, the Supreme Government, in pursuance of Scott's suggestion, agreed to the setting up of Bar Panchayet consisting of three native judges. This court was to work under the supervision of the Political Agent in Upper Assam, and the Assistant to the Commissioner in Lower Assam. This court was empowered to execute sentences not involving an imprisonment beyond three years, subject of course to the right of appeal in all cases to the Commissioner. The Commissioner was empowered to pass and execute sentences of death even without previous reference to the Supreme Government.

Police organization: During the early British period it was not possible to set up an elaborate police organization. The police establishment of Scott's time consisted of one Daroga, a Jamadar, and a few constables, and it was maintained at the headquarters. Mufassil police was left entirely in the hands of the Rajas, the Choudhuries, the Patgiris and other revenue officers. The maintenance of law and order was in those days considered the joint responsibility of the people. If the local people failed to detect and apprehend the criminals, a regular force was sent to the affected area, and the expenses of the same was realized by a collective fine on the inhabitants of that area.

(1) Relation with frontier tribes: Political events: With the expulsion of the Burmese, peace and tranquility was not immediately established in the north-east frontier inhabited by different tribes. Of the tribes, the Moamarias occupied the south bank of the Brahmaputra, from Sadiya to the Buridihing, in the modern district of Dibrugarh. The title of the Moamaria chief was Bara Senapati. The Singphos who, coming from the Hukawang Valley, had crossed into the head of the

Assam Valley settled between the Patkoi range and the Brahmaputra. The Khamtis, who had come from the Shan State, first settled, with the permission of the Ahom ruler, on the bank of the Tengapani, but during the reign of Gaurinath Singha they forcibly occupied Sadiya ejecting the ruling chief, the Sadiya Khowa Gohain. The leader of the Khamtis usurped the title of previous ruling chiefs. Thus broadly speaking, the lands to the east of Rangpur, along both banks of the Brahmaputra, were under the occupation of three tribes. When the Burmese were expelled from the Brahmaputra Valley, these tribes were left untouched by the British army. Incidentally it may be said that they were independent even during the Ahom period.

In March 1825, came the news that about 7500 Singphos were about to attack the Khamtis and the Moamarias. The Moamaria chief Bara Senapati, finding himself helpless appealed to the British for help. Lieutenant Neufville was hurriedly despatched to Sadiya.

On arrival of Neufville to Sadiya, the Singphos hurriedly left that place. And what was more striking to submission was that messengers from Singpho chiefs came with peace proposals. But peace negotiations broke down when a Burmese force arrived at the scene. This forced Neufville to carry hostilities into the heart of the Singpho territory. Within a few weeks Neufville drove the Burmese to the other side of the Patkais and reduced to submission several of the Singpho chiefs.

In May 5, 1826, Scott, during his visit to Sadiya, entered into an agreement with 16 Singpho chiefs (out of 28). By this agreement the Singphos acknowledged their allegiance to the British government and agreed not to have any connection with the Burmese or any foreigners and to furnish secret information and provisions to the British in the event of any hostilities in the frontier.

By an agreement of May 13, the Bara Senapati was recognized as the chief of the Moamarias or Mutuks and the latter undertook to supply 300 pykes and provisions when demanded, of course, on payment. By another agreement on May 15, Salan Sadiya Khowa, the Khamti chief, was confirmed in his possession on condition of his agreeing to contribute a contingent of 200 to be trained and equipped by the British Government.

The chiefs were left free in their respective jurisdictions and entirely exempted from taxation. They were invested with limited power of deciding civil and criminal cases.

Scott was opposed to the idea of the inclusion of the tribes within the British dominion. He, however, felt the necessity of the presence of a European officer permanently at Sadiya. It was in pursuance of his suggestion Neufville was appointed Political Agent in 1828, and in that capacity his duty was to keep the tribes under effective control. His headquarters was at Biswanath.