

## CHAPTER VI

### BRITISH RELATION WITH THE KHAMTIS AND THE SINGPHOS

The Khamtis belong to the same Shan stock as the Ahoms. They were originally inhabitants of the Bar-Khamti country, the hilly region between the extremity of Assam and the Irrawady Valley called Khamti-Long by the Burmese. The Khamtis are Buddhists in faith and have their own literature. They first came to Assam towards the end of the 18th century and settled at Tengapani. But under the pressure of the Singphos they crossed the Brahmaputra and about the year 1794 they expelled the Ahom Governor of Sadiya whose title was Sadiya Khowa Gohain. The Khamti Chief assumed the title and authority of the Sadiya Khowa Gohain, and the weak government of Gaurinath Singha had to recognize the usurpation.

The British on their occupation of the Brahmaputra Valley in 1826, found the Sadiya tract entirely under Khamti control. The British recognized the Khamti Chief as the lawful ruler. He was not required to pay any tribute, but he agreed to maintain a force of two hundred men who were provided by the British with arms and ammunitions. The internal management of the Khamtis vested in their own Chief, who also dealt with petty cases amongst the local Assamese and collected from them a poll-tax of one rupee a head. This they remitted to the Political Officer, who tried serious offences committed by the Assamese.

The Old Khamti Sadiya Khowa Gohain died in 1835 and was succeeded by his son. A dispute arose between the new Sadiya Khowa Gohain and the Barasenapati, the ruler of the Matak country, regarding a certain tract of land. The British Officer at Sadiya, to prevent a collision, attached the land and told the disputants to appear before him and place their respective claims. The Sadiya Khowa Gohain, in defiance of this order, took forcible possession of the land and refused to give it up when called upon to do so. So his post was abolished and he was removed to another part of

the province (1835), and a British Officer assumed thenceforward the responsibility of administering the Sadiya country. But the Khamtis themselves were left untaxed and were still allowed to manage their own affairs under their own chiefs. But they were deprived of their control over the local Assamese, the jurisdiction over whom was thenceforth exercised by the Political Officer at Sadiya.

Since 1835 the Khamtis remained outwardly loyal and passive. Actually shortly afterwards they assisted the British in the operations against the Singphos as a reward for which their late Chief was permitted to return from exile. But the loyalty of Khamtis was only apparent; really they were in a state of simmering discontent. In 1839 the British shifted the headquarters of the Assam Light Infantry from Biswanath to Sadiya. Hardly had a portion of the troops moved to the newly constructed lines, when on January 29, 1839, the Khamtis numbering 600 men, armed with dahs, spears, muskets attacked the cantonment from all sides, killing a large number of men, women and children. A punitive force was at once despatched to Sadiya. The insurgents sought refuge amongst the Mishmis. They were followed up and repeated defeats were inflicted on them, and in Dec. 1843, the last of the rebels made his submission. Some were deported to Narayanpur, on the Dikrang, in the western part of the district, and others were settled above Sadiya town to form a screen between the Assamese and the Mishmis.

**The Singphos:** The Singpho country lay to the east of Matak country and was bounded on the north by the Lohit river and on the south by the Patkai range. The Singphos are Shan in race, and they originally lived in the northern Shan kingdom. On the break up of this kingdom they gradually moved towards Assam, and it was during the weak rule of Gaurinath Singha they drove the Khamtis from the Tengapani area, and settled in upper Buridihing and in Namrup. During the Moamaria rebellion the Singphos joined hands with the rebels and pillaged Assamese villages. Purnananda Burha Gohain's attempts to placate the Singphos failed. In violation of the terms of the treaty made by Purnananda the Singphos carried away some thousands of Ahom subjects as captives. During the Burmese occupation of the Brahmaputra Valley, the Singphos, as allies of the invaders, made constant raids on the helpless Assamese carrying

away many more thousands as slaves. They attacked and shut up the Sadiya Khowa Gohain within his stockades and attacked the Barasenapati in his own territory. Both appealed to the British, who sent help to them, whereupon the Singphos desisted from their attacks and entered into negotiations. At this juncture the Burmese again appeared on the Patkai, and the Singphos made common cause with them. Captain Neufville at once advanced with an army up to Noa Dihing, and after a series of assaults forced the Burmese to make their final exit from Assam, and compelled the Singphos to submit. During these operations Captain Neufville released no less than 6000 Assamese from captivity. The terms of the settlement made with the Singphos in May 1826 were :

(i) The Singpho chiefs acknowledged the subjection of the British Government.

(ii) They promised not to side with the Burmese or any other king to commit any aggression on British territory.

(iii) In time of need they were to help the British force with grain etc. and to repair roads for them.

(iv) The Singpho chiefs were not to pay tribute to the British.

(v) They were to liberate the Assamese whom they had carried away as slaves.

(vi) Boundary disputes among the Singpho chiefs were to be settled with the knowledge of the British Government.

(vii) The Singpho chiefs were allowed, as in case of the Matak and Khamtis, to try minor civil and criminal cases in their respective jurisdiction according to their former usages.

(viii) The chief of the Bisa clan was to have a general control over the chiefs who had submitted.

Now 16 out of 28 Singpho chiefs submitted and the remaining 12 continued to carry on raids on territories of chiefs who had surrendered to British. Such raids continued throughout the thirties. In 1843 there was a general uprising of the Singphos, in which all Singpho chiefs, including those who had entered into negotiations with the British earlier, took part. The main cause of this rising was British encroachment on Singpho territories. No time was lost in marching troops against the rebels. The operations dragged on for months, but they ended in the capture of the chiefs who had instigated the rebellion and in the complete submission of the Singphos. Since then the Singphos had not given any more trouble.

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