

## CHAPTER XIV

### TRIBAL POLICY OF THE AHOMS

The Ahom rulers' one primary function was to check the inroads of the various tribes, such as Bhutias, Akas, Daflas, Miris, Mismis, Singphos and Nagas. There were two main reasons behind the inroads of the tribal people. One reason was their natural ferocity, and the second reason was their necessity to procure some of their essential commodities. The tribal people fought with primitive weapons which were effective in close-range fights.

The Ahoms fought with match-locks and guns. The basic Ahom policy towards the tribes was one of conciliation. If conciliation failed, they used force to break the power of the turbulent tribes. The Ahom rulers had the practical sense to understand that it would never be possible to subjugate the tribes completely and occupy their territories. They therefore never tried for annexation of tribal lands. The astute politician Ata Buragohain rightly said, "The Dafla miscreants can be captured only if an elephant can enter into a rat-hole." Some of the rash Ahom generals tried to enter into tribal territory but the results were disastrous.

The brunt of tribal attacks fell upon the inhabitants of the tracts lying between the foot of the hills and the extremities of the plains. Shortage of labour was also a cause of tribal inroads. They captured people from plains and took them away to be employed as slaves. We will refer here to some instances of the use of force by the Ahoms to curb the power of the turbulent tribes. It is to be remembered that the tribal people always gave provocations by raiding Ahom territories.

During Pratap Singh's reign two expeditions were sent against the Daflas and the Daflas were made to submit. King Jayadhvaj Singh sent two expeditions against the Nagas and made them make submission. During Chakradhvaj's reign Bar Barua led an expedition against the Daflas who raided a viillage. But this expedition failed to achieve its end. King Gadadhar Singh was a tough man. He ruthlessly punished the Miris and the Nagas who plundered his

subjects. Gadadhar Singh constructed embankments and forts as measures of security against tribal attack. The Daflas who were never properly subdued, committed several raids during the reign of Rajesvar Singh. As a punishment, forts were erected along the frontier, and the Daflas were prohibited from entering the plains. The blockade had the desired effect but the Dafla power was not completely curbed. Finally a settlement was made and Daflas were permitted to levy yearly, from each family living in the foot-hills, a pura of paddy and three hundred and twenty cowries, on condition of their refraining from other acts of aggression. But the Daflas were not tamed. During Kamalesvar Singh's reign, they, joining hands with the Moamarias, raised the standard of revolt. Purnananda Burha Gohain, however, reduced the Daflas to submission. During the reign of the same king, Purnananda Burha Gohain had to curb the power of the Singphos and Khamtis in Sadiya. During this disturbance the Khamtis were helped by the Abors and the Miris. After Kamalesvar's reign (1795-1810) the Ahoms got involved in affairs with the Burmese and we do not hear any more of tribal aggression.

The Ahom rulers appointed some officers in the frontiers to keep watch on the tribal people. Thus the Sadiya Khōwa Gohain kept watch on the Abars, Miris, and Mismis; the Salal Gohain on the Akas and Daflas; the Marangi Khōwa Gohain on the Kacharies and Mikirs; and the Jagiolia Gohain and Kajalimukhia Gohain on the Jayantias.

Now we will discuss as to how the Ahom rulers tried to conciliate the tribes. So far as the Bhutiyas were concerned the Ahoms tried to conciliate them by making over the Duars of Kamrup and Darrang to Bhutan. These Duars connected Bhutan with Assam, and these were normally the property of the Ahom Government. The Ahom rulers made over these Duars in consideration of an annual tribute. A formal ambassador was sent to Bhutan in 1802 to adjust the mutual relations between the two kingdoms.

Another method to conciliate the tribes was the grant of the right to levy posa or tribute in certain villages along the foot of the hills. This right was granted to Bhutias, Akas, and Daflas. In case of every tribe the posa was clearly defined. Thus one Aka tribe was permitted to levy from every house 'one portion of a

female dress, one bundle of cotton thread and one cotton handkerchief.

So far as the Nagas were concerned, those near the frontier paid annual tribute to the kings and in return they obtained grants of land in the plains adjoining the hills. Such lands were known as Naga Khats. Nagas were sometimes given the right to fish in tanks in the plains in the neighbourhood of the Naga hills. When peaceful relations prevailed the Nagas carried on considerable trade in cotton and their other produce. They exchanged their product for salt and rice. But in spite of the best efforts to maintain good relations with the Nagas, Naga trouble was something chronic. It is because of all the tribes the Nagas are most desperate and daring in nature.

In conclusion we may say that the Ahom tribal policy, under the circumstances prevailing then, was quite judicious. The rulers were stern in dealing with the tribes when they indulged in loot and plunder. They could understand that a soft or mild policy would, instead of pacifying them, encourage them to extend their aggressive operations in the plain lands. But the Ahom rulers had the practical sense to understand that mere sternness was not enough to keep the tribes quiet. They were ready to mitigate the genuine causes of their distress. Moreover, it should be said to the credit of the Ahom rulers that they were conscious of the limitations of their power, and so they did never try to conquer and occupy the tribal territories.