

Khamti-British Relations: A Political Study Upto 1947A.D.

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ABSTRACT : The Khamtis are one of the enterprising tribes of Arunachal Pradesh. They played a significant role in the frontier history of India's extreme north-eastern region and the resistance, they offered to the British marked them out for special attention in the administrative history of the area. The objective of the paper is to provide an outline of the political relations of the Khamtis with the British in a historical perspective. It also tries to give an insight which helped in moulding the frontier policy of the British government during the colonial rule. The methodology which is followed in the paper is both historical and analytical. The study generated data mainly from the primary and secondary sources. Intensive archival and library works have been carried out to collect the relevant materials. For better grasp on the topic, individual and group interviews are taken during the course of field survey to supplement the archival and published materials.

KEYWORDS -Ahoms, British, Singphos, History, Khamti

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I. INTRODUCTION

At the time, when the British settlement in Bengal were ever interested in expanding their trade and territories, the popular rebellion of the Moamorias of Assam created such a crisis that the Ahom monarchy finally had to seek the British East India Company against their own people. On the pretext of helping the Ahoms in the time of distress, the East India Company secured an easy access to Assam, signed an initial trade agreement with the Ahom Government of February 1793AD and by way of subjugating the enemies of the Ahoms, they made reconnaissance of the political, cultural and economic conditions as well as the strategic situation of the kingdom.

Initially, their aim was to derive trade concession from the Ahom monarch and the trade agreement of 1793 AD, manifested beyond doubt the secret of the mission of Captain Welsh in 1792 AD. The prospect of Bengal trade in Assam, rich natural resources of the area and prevailing unstable political scenario of the Ahom Government provided golden opportunities to them to fulfill their scheme of territorial aggrandizement. To execute their political ambition into action, they dragged the Ahom power to dangerous entanglements with the Burmese.

When the Burmese invaded Assam than the British came as deliverers, stayed on as protectors and at last occupied the entire North-East. After the first Anglo-Burmese war, the British resorted the deposed rulers of the neighbouring kingdoms of Assam such as Cachar, Jayantia, Manipur to their respective possessions by way of protecting them.

In upper Assam, David Scott, the Agent to the Governor General North East Frontier, made agreements with the Khamtis, the Singphos and the Mataks in the interest of border security and allowing them to enjoy their autonomy, secured their assurance of not allying themselves with the invaders on the other side of the hills against the British. Company's Government in Bengal had been contemplating to annex the whole part of Ahom kingdom at any opportune moment, which act would help the British greatly not only in bringing the entire North East under their grip but also in having a strategic foot hold against the Burmese, who were suspected of planning to resume war against them.

Since Upper Assam was a greater victim of internal disturbance and the Burmese depredations and was more prone to the raids of the neighbouring hill tribes like the Khamtis, Singphos and Daflas, the annexation of this part of the country then was not considered as a profitable to the British East India Company. David Scott, therefore, suggested the annexation of Lower Assam only, which yielded revenue of more than three lakh rupees and the restoration of Upper Assam from Biswanath to the Burhi Dihing to an Ahom prince [1]. The Government feared that the restoration of Ahom prince right than might create complications in its relations with the frontier tribes, as the restored prince might ally himself with these tribes in a hostile move against it.

For administrative convenience, in the beginning of their rule in Assam, the British Government of Bengal partitioned Assam into two divisions namely, Western or Lower Assam and Eastern or Upper Assam under a Commissioner of each part. David Scott was appointed as a senior Commissioner in-charge of Lower Assam with headquarters at Guwahati while Col. Richard was placed as Junior Commissioner and in-charge of

Upper Assam with headquarters at Rangpur. Senior Commissioner David Scott was to remain in-charge of overall administration so as to keep uniformity in the pattern of administration. Both the Commissioners were independent in their jurisdiction, but were expected to act conjointly when together.

In December 1825AD, Col. Richard resigned from the post of Junior Commissioner and he was succeeded by Col. Cooper who was also the Commander of the troops in Assam. On Scott's request for European assistant Capt. Adam White of the 59th Regiment, and author of 'Considerations on the State of British India' was appointed in December 1825 to assist him at Gauhati [2].

In March 1828AD, Lt. Neufville who had distinguished himself in the operation against the Singphos was appointed Junior Commissioner administered Eastern Assam and had remained in political charge of Sadiya. On Capt. Neufville's death in July 1830AD, Capt. Adam White was appointed to Upper Assam, but he could join the new assignment on October 1, 1831AD. Lt. James Matthie officiated in the interval.

Eastern Assam, according to the division of Scott, covered roughly the then district of Sibsagar, Lakhimpur, a small portion of Darrang and the Sadiya Frontier Tract. It included three tracts of considerable political importance, *viz*, the territories occupied by the Moamorias, the Khamtis and the Singphos and as they were managed at first from the British station of Sadiya, hence they were generally known as the Sadiya country.

II. DISCUSSIONS

When the British took over the administration of Assam, they found the Khamti's controlling the Sadiya tract. They thought it expedient to give recognition to the office usurped by the Khamti Chief and David Scott, the Governor General's Agent, went to extent of recommending that the area inhabited by the Khamtis along with the Matak should be kept apart in the event of making over the administration of Upper Assam to a native Ahom prince.

Mr. Scott, the Governor General's Agent, recognized the Khamti Chief *Chou Salan Sadiya Khowa Gohain* as the local officer of the Assam Government, permitted him to collect the poll tax of Assamese of the district and entered into arrangements under which the *Khawa Gohain*, instead of himself paying taxes, undertook to maintain a contingent of 200 men, to be armed by the British Government [3]. That contingent is supplied by arms and ammunition at the expense of Government; they are drilled by the subedar of the Assam Light Infantry four months in the year, and arms, when in want of repair, are forwarded to head-quarters at Biswanath [4]. In 1824AD, this force rendered material aid against the Singphos. The internal management of the Khamtis vested in their own Chief who dealt with petty cases amongst the local Assamese but all the important cases of revenue and civil jurisdiction were referred to the British political Agent.

The relations that existed between the Khamtis of Sadiya and their brethren in Bor-Khamti led, however, at times to much uneasiness and doubts as to the loyalty of the former. In 1830AD, for instance, a body of Singphos and Bor-Khamptis invaded the tract South of Brahmaputra, but were dispersed by troops under captain Neufville [5]. At that time rumours were floated that the *Khowa Gohain* was in league with the Borkhamti and Singphos which report was however discredited by the local British officers.

In May 1835AD, immigrants of Moonglary Khamtis numbering 230 souls came wishing to settle under the British Government and asking for arms and exemption from taxes for 10 years. They were allowed by the British Government to live free from all dues for three years but their prayer for firearms was turned down. The Government seems at this period to have been much impressed with the advisability of inducing colonists to take up land at the head of Assam valley, provided that their doing so did not interfere with the area reserved for tea cultivation [6]. What was wanted was a cheap and effective barriers against future invasion from Burma, the dread of which long continued to trouble the Government, and explain much of the policy in regard to Upper Assam, Manipur and this frontier generally [7].

Everything went on peacefully, so long as Chou Salan Sadiya *Khowa Gohain* was in power but after his death in early 1835AD, his son Chow Rangfat Sadiya *Khowa Gohain* came to power. With the coming of their new Chief, the Khamtis showed signs of dissatisfaction and it was due to the arrogance of the new chief compelled the British Government to remove the Khamtis from the position of pre-eminence which they had hitherto enjoyed.

A dispute had arisen between the Sadiya *Khowa Gohain* and the *Barsenapati*, the Chief of the Matak, regarding a tract of land called Saikhowa, on the south bank of river Brahmaputra. To prevent the collision between the two, the British officer officiating at Sadiya attached the land and ordered both the parties to refer their claims for his consideration. Khamti Sadiya *Khowa Gohain* was reluctant and in defiance of the order, took forcible possession of the disputed land and treated all remonstrances with open contempt. The Governor General's Agent was compelled, in vindication of his authority, to order first the suspension, and thereafter the removal of the Khamti Chief from the post of *Khowa Gohain*. To maintain proper control over Sadiya tract, the Government took some punitive actions against the tribes inhabiting the area.

The *Khawa Gohain* was therefore removed to a station down the river out of the reach of temptation to intrigue, and his post was abolished, the duties being made over to the British officer stationed at Sadiya in charge of the troops, who was to collect the capitation tax from those cultivators who paid it and to administer justice to the Assamese either directly or by a *punchayat*[8].

As regards internal management, the Khamtis were left to their own chiefs. No change was made in their relations to Government, and no taxation was in fact ever imposed on them. The British officer in - charge was, as far as they were concerned, left to interpose or mediate only in serious cases or where members of different tribes were parties to the dispute[9].

The Khamti Chiefs seemed satisfied with these arrangements. During the subsequent period, the relations between the Khamtis and the British remained quite cordial. The Khamtis rendered valuable services to the British Government. In the year of 1835AD, the Singphos under one of Hukong valley Chief Duffa Gam entered Assam and took the possession of Gaekwah and attacked the British ally, the Bisa Chief and killed ninety of his people, the Khamtis assisted Captain Charlton with their contingent to disperse the rebel Singphos. They (the Khamtis) did certain good service immediately afterwards against the Singphos – so good indeed that the Government rather rashly rewarded them by permitting the ex-*Khawa Gohain* to return to Sadiya in a private capacity to live among them[10].

In fact, they were not contented, and the ex- *Khawa Gohain* fomented the hostile feelings. They had lost their profitable position of control over the Assamese; their slaves had been released; and they knew it was possible that they might be taxed[11].

With the abolition of slavery in the year 1834AD, the Khamtis had to incur a great set back in to their traditional economy because they were mainly depended upon the Assamese slaves for cultivation of their land. The British action in releasing the slaves was resented and regarded as the most highhanded act of all. Many incentives to revolt were secretly ranking in their mind.

In 1837AD, the local officers were warned that the ex-*Khawa Gohain* was intriguing to form a combination of tribes to attack Sadiya, but no tangible proof was obtained, and the warning was disregarded[12]. In this connection, John F. Michell wrote, “In this year (1837) the Khamtis were supposed to have entered into a treaty with the Abors and Mishmis to attack us. The Khamtis marched into the Mishimi country ostensibly for the purpose of recovery of slaves”[13].

At length in January 1839AD, the long meditated plot developed itself in action[14].The Khamtis made a sudden attack on the British station at Sadiya. Way back in 1883 Alexander Mackenzie reported that “On the evening of the 19th of January, Colonel White, the officer in command at Sadiya, had held a *durbar* at which the Khamti Chiefs attended, to all appearances as friendly and loyal as they had hitherto outwardly shown themselves. The very night, a body of 500 Khamtis under their Sadiya Chiefs advanced upon the post from four directions, surprised the sentries and made for Colonel White’s quarters and the sepoy lines, firing the station as they rushed through. The surprise was complete, and their enterprise was fatally successful. Colonel White was butchered, eighty others were killed or wounded, and all the lives but two were burnt to the ground”[15].

There is a discrepancy in respect of the date of attack as between the account of Mackenzie and Michell. To quote Michell, “In 1839AD, it was supposed that all danger had blown over, and it was thought the Khamtis would never rebel unless supported by a large Burmese army, but on the 28th January, about 2 in the morning, Sadiya was attacked by 600 Khamtis divided into four parties, who stormed the stockade in which the troops and their families were killing 80 persons and the political Agent. The Khamtis lost 21 men killed”[16].

The attack was conducted in a very systematic manner. The Assamese nobles residing at Sadiya were privy to it. The whole town lay at their mercy. Then contrarily to all expectations, they suddenly retired. It was the boldest attempt yet made by the hill tribes. Had they combined with the Matak chiefs or with Singphos, the whole of Upper Assam would have been lost to the British and turned into a desert[17]. The inhabitants were greatly alarmed and they became further terror-stricken by the rumour that the Burmese had been coming in the rear of the Khamtis[18].

After the daredevil attack, the winner of the game, the Khamtis, instead of taking possession of Sadiya, retreated for unknown reason. Among their leaders, *Tao-a-Gohain* and *Kaptan Gohain* retreated towards Dibang valley, while *Chaupha Plung lu* and some others took refuge in the Singpho-Mishmi areas.

Mention may be made on the legendary hero of the attack *Chaopha Plung lu* alias *Ran Gohain* or *Ranua Gohain* (a appellation by the plain people of Assam. The word ‘*Ranua*’ denotes warrior in Assamese. For being a warrior of indomitable nature, he was known as *Ranua Gohain*). He was bold, frank and self-respected man, popular among all section of people including hill tribes of neighbouring areas. He was known a *Chaopha kon mung* (great king of the land). Tale of his bravery is told in great length among the Khamtis. He was instrumental in fomenting discontent among the Khamtis against the oppressive British *Raj*. From his childhood he had nurtured hatred against the British and as a true patriot, his objective was to liberate the land from the British servitude. It was he who took a quarrel with Col. Adam White on the issue of emancipation of two slaves which was treated as an act of British highhandedness by the Khamtis, resulted to an uprising. He proved no

match for the well trained British soldiers. He killed Colonel Adam White and some eighty soldiers' single handed[19] and then being overpowered by the British, had to surrender. He was made captive and confined at the Sadiya magazine. He effected his escape from the magazine along with his brother in law, after killing the guards of the post while on flight, his brother-in-law Chow Ingci Mang got wounded by a bullet firing and as a consequence of it, he had to carry his brother-in-law at his back, but unfortunately, he fell down into ditch and got one of his feet broken. However, he managed to arrive at Kundil by crossing the river and sheltered in the jungle where some fishermen saw him and reported to the British authority at Sadiya. An expedition was led against *Ranua Gohain* and he was surrounded in his abode from all sides. Being incapable of moving due to his wounded foot, he preferred death in the hand of his enemies. He came forward to surrender in front of the British. So, he removed his armlet that was believed to have magical power that protected him from all sorts of danger. Then he sat on a few '*pan*' leaves in a yogic posture. While on his posture, he was reciting religious sermons. He received bullet shots fired by the soldiers at which he was succumbed to death[20].

Considering his selfless braving, able leadership and unrivalled individuality people respected him as king i.e. *Chau Pha Kon Mung*[21].

Alexander Mackenzie gave his impression of the Khamti uprising in the following words, "Had the Khamti Chiefs now shown resolution equal to their skill in combination, they might have done serious damage to our position in the frontier. As it was their hearts failed them after the capture of Sadiya. They retreated with all adherents without waiting for attack and deserting their villages took refuge with their leaders, the Tao and Captain Gohain, among the Dibong Mishmi. A rising among the Khamptis south of the Brahmaputra was put down by the troops. The Singphos, Muttocks and Abors at once offered their aid in punishing the insurgents. The Khamptis had no friends among those they had so long oppressed"[22].

Major Jenkins, Agent to the Governor General, giving his account of the uprising in a letter to Princep on 4th February, 1839AD, wrote; "The attack of the Khamtis was the boldest attempt yet made in the eastern frontier." He was disposed to believe that the Singphos, the Muttocks and even the court of Ava had actively instigated the insurrection. The Muttocks were reported to be in a state of disaffection and defiance. Captain Hannay connected fresh arrival of a number of 'Kakos' from across the Patkoi in neighbouring Singpho villages immediately preceding the uprising with a 'deep laid plot' to subvert British presence in Assam[23].

After order had been restored at Sadiya, reinforcements were sent to different directions to trace the movements of the Khamti rebels. They found all the Khamti villages and settlements deserted. Men, women and children all had retired in the direction of Mishmi hills for fear of retaliatory actions. All the deserted Khamti villages were burnt down and the soldiers returned to Sadiya without effecting a single arrest[24]. Captain Vetch, who was placed in-charge of Sadiya, was bent upon retaliatory measures and insisted on issuing a general proclamation of outlawry against the insurgents in arms. But he was prevented from taking so drastic a step by the supreme Government[25] who simply approved of his measures for announcing rewards were offered for the arrest of the insurgent leaders, but this produced no desired result[26].

From 1839 to 1843AD, the Khamtis had to pass very hard days; the British soldiers burnt down their villages, killed their domestic animals and destroyed the granaries. Combing operations were held to capture their leaders. Finally, they were able to capture *Chau-lik*, the second son of *Ranua Gohain*, who being refused to surrender, ultimately killed by the British. With the help of the Singphos and the Mataks, the British troop caught *Chau Keing*, the eldest son of *Ranua Gohain* who had to surrender under circumstances. That was the first batch of the Khamtis to surrender. *Chau-Keing* and his two hundred followers were deported to the southern bank of the Brahmaputra in Lakhimpur District. They were allowed to settle on the bank of the river Dibrus locally known to the Khamtis as *nam-che-pu*. Gradually, this group of Khamtis established a small hamlet at *Chau-kei-ting* (present Chowkidangi of Dibrugarh town is the corrupt form of Chau-Kei-ting) and Jakai areas about seven miles from Dibrugarh town. As the area was possessed by Khamti Chief *Chau-kei-ting* it was named *Chau-kei-ting* (in Tai, *ting* means highland). This group of Khamtis extended their settlements towards south bank of the river *nam-jin*, i.e. Ceca in subsequent period. The descendants of *Chau-Keing* and his followers lived on the bank of river *Ceca* and *Khamtighat* areas till 1942-43AD[27].

Soon after the deportation of *Chau-Keing* to Dibrugarh, about 900 Khamtis laid their arms and surrendered under their two leaders, *Chau-Thun Gohain alias Sissi raja* (cousin of Sadiya *Khowa Gohain*) and *Chau-La Gohain alias Bhadiya Gohain*. *Chau-Thun Gohain* and his 400 followers were sent to the northern bank of river Brahmaputra and allowed to settle at Dhemaji. *Chau Thun alias Sissi raja* was very rich in gold, a huge amount of gold and silver were possessed by the British from him. He was childless. After his death, some of the Khamtis migrated to Narayanpur and Sadiya and a small number of them merged with the local people in the subsequent period.

The second division, under the leadership of *Chau-La alias Bhadiya Gohain*, son of ex-Sadiya *Khowa Gohain* and his 500 followers were sent to Narayanpur in the western part of Lakhimpur district.

Tao-a-Gohain and Kaptan Gohain (a cousin of late *Sadiya Khowa Gohain* were chased and both were compelled to surrender. A small colony was set up under *Kaptan Gohain* at Chunpura, a short distance from Sadiya.)

In the cold weather of 1839-40AD, two more campaigns went into action dislodging those of the rebels who sought refuge, and were still in hiding in the interior of the Mishimi hills. The insurgents surrendered in batches. But it was not until December 1843AD, that the last batch came in and submitted. Those who surrendered last were settled about Sadiya to form a screen between the Assamese and Mishmi and they were so dispersed that ceased from that time to be of any political importance[28].

During the period of Khamti-British conflict (1839-43AD) a group of Khamtis left for Borkhamti country, their original home in Burma. In 1843AD, sons of *Ranuwa Gohain* and *Tao-a-Gohain* sent a petition to conclude a treaty for permission to return to Sadiya to place themselves under the protection of the British Government[29].

An agreement with the Khamti chief was concluded by the British in 1843AD. The excerpt of the agreement is given below-

"We, late inhabitants of Derack and Suddeya, were engaged in the attack upon the latter place, and fled to the Mishmee country; we have offered our submission to return back, if our former offences were overlooked, and now we have returned agreeably to the orders of the political Agent, with our followers, viz, Chowdung, Chawding, Long Fong, Poychoy, Chalan, Sham, Poom, Metong and Chowlah, but the whole of the Khamtees are unable to return for the present, owing to their crops being uncut. However, they hereby promise to come in with all their families after their crops have been gathered, or with a month and half from this date.

1. We shall be allowed a sufficient quantity of lands for our support, either at Choonpoora or at Noa Dehing, for a term of five years rent free, and after the expiration of that period we agree to pay a moderate rent for the lands we may cultivate, or pay a house tax, as Government may choose to authorize. Any orders that may be issued respecting the Abkarry shall be duly attended to.

2. We engage also to endeavour to prevent or intercept any inroads of the Singphoos or Mishmees on the Suddeya ryot, and shall obey all orders of the civil or political authorities on the frontier.

3. We further engage that we shall desist from trafficking in slaves according to the regulations of Government generally.

4. All petty crimes and offences occurring amongst ourselves shall be settled by the chiefs of the villages, but in all heinous offences, such as robbery, murder, dacoity, wounding and counterfeiting the coin, we promise to make over the offenders to the political Agent, with their respective witnesses for trial; and disputes between the heads of the different villages or clans shall also be referred to the same authority.

5. At the expiration of ten years the whole of our engagements will be subject to a revision and alteration, as it may seem best to His Lordship to determine on.

6. Should we or any of the Khamtees in any way depart from the faithful adherence of the above Agreement, and commit any acts of violence, we shall be subject to be driven out of the province, and be without further excuse.

(True translation)

Frans Jenkins

Agent, Governor-General"[30]

As per the term of the treaty the Khamtis were allowed to return back with their wives and children and they were allowed to settle in the valleys of rivers Tengapani, Tengapani Kamlang and Dirak respectively. These villages were administered under the chieftainship of the descendant of *Chau-Cham-Lung-Keing-Kham* and *Chau-noy-Lung keing-Kham*.

In 1844 A.D, the Khamtis were allowed to settle somewhere in the vicinage of their old villages. Most of them were re-settled in new villages and since that time they have been perfectly well behaved.

The Khamtis living about Sadiya and Saikhawa paid revenue but those living on the Tengapani beyond the inner line though acknowledged allegiance to the British Government but paid no revenue. A small force of 24 men known as the Khamti volunteers was employed for the protection of the villages around Sadiya. They received a trifling yearly pay from the Government and were supplied with muskets and ammunitions for patrolling the paths to the north and east of Sadiya by which the Mishmis came down to the plains[31].

The settlement of Sadiya, Derak, Nidopani, Tengapani, Dehing, Morowapani and Kopahatoli did not pay any revenue where as the other Khamtis paid revenue and were much of the same footing as the other ryots on the plains[32].

To break their resistance for ever and to prevent them from forging any future combination, the Khamti settlements were dispersed over a very wide stretch of country. In 1844AD, the position of the Khamtis was as follows: "One body had been settled at Sunpura above Sadiya under Captain Gohain, cousin of late '*Khowa Gohain*' when the British found in position on assumption of power. Another batch consisting of Moonglary

Khamtis were shifted to and settled near Saikhowa to the south of the Brahmaputra river. A third body under Chowtang Gohain was settled at Dhemaji while a fourth under Bhodia son of late Khowa Gohain to the west of Luckimpore”[33].

By this dispersion, they were effectually prevented from doing mischief and from that time onward, they ceased to be of political importance. The Khamtis were in good office with the British Government after the incident of 1839AD.

After the Anglo-Khamti treaty of 1843AD, the relations between the two became quite normal and friendly, the Khamti chiefs were given the authority for their internal management particularly Khamti chief of Chowkham area, *Choucha* was authorized to levy taxes on the non-tribal residing under his jurisdiction and on the pilgrims coming to visit *Parsuramkunda*. The revenue thus collected amounted to be about two lakhs a year. He also imposed tax on the merchants coming through the Lohit river to collect limestone[34].

The relation of the Khamtis with the British Government in the post 1839AD incident was reflected in the report of John F. Michell in 1883AD. He reported, “In 1852 *Chow Singthi Gohain* arrived from the Borkhamti country with 300 settlers, and was allowed to settle on the Dirak river near Saikwah, receiving advance on the condition of being assessed in a few years. In 1853 Captain Dalton reported his having appointed a Khamti chief, named *Chow King Gohain*, as chief of his intelligence establishment, and he relied on him for information about all events of importance in the Mishmi country, and in that of the Shans and Singphos on the Tengapani, Now-Dihing, Kerimpani and C. In 1859 the Khamtis furnished us with a contingent of 100 men for the second Abor expedition, a few also supplied to the first expedition of 1858”[35].

Khamti Chief *Choucha Gohain* was succeeded by *Chouna Gohain* who assumed the title of *Chaufa kon mung* i.e. the king of the country. He rendered valuable service to the contemporary British authority. The British Government, recognizing his help facilitated him with the dignity of *Rai Bahadur* and gave him some precious gift[36]. He was also granted honorarium of Rs.900/- per month till his death. He accompanied Lt. Eden in his campaign against the Mishmi of upper Lohit valley.

In 1854AD, two French Missionaries, M.M.Krick and Burry endeavored to penetrate via Mishmi country to Tibet. Both of them were plundered and brutally murdered by the Mishmis under one *Kai-ee-sha*. The Mishmis themselves urged the British to retribution, and the call was not disregarded. In this connection, S.K. Barpujari writes, “In the latter end of February 1855, a little body of twenty Assam Light Infantry with forty Khamtee volunteers, under the command of Lieutenant Eden, entered the hill. For eight days they pressed on and up, swinging themselves across dangered torrents on bridges of single canes, climbing for hours at a time in bitter cold, and without water, until at length about four O’clock one morning they arrived at *Kai-ee-sha*’s village. To carry it in face of a light of poisoned arrows was the work of five minutes. *Kai-ee-sha* was taken alive, his sons fell fighting, his daughter surrendered, his village fled, and the triumphant little hand retired more slowly to the plains, cutting away the bridge behind them as they passed. This brilliant exploit has not yet been forgotten in the north-eastern hills by the Tain and Mezhoo Mishimees”[37].

In return to their help, the British established an outpost in the Khamti village of *Chow Keng Gohain* to check the frequent inroads of the *Chulikatta Mishmis*. In October 1857AD, and in the beginning of 1866AD, the *Chulikalta Mishmis* attacked the village of *Chow Keng Gohain* and though beaten off with loss, yet left mark behind them. Arms had been supplied to the Khamti villagers by the British Government and they were as a rule will able to defend themselves.

Government however approved more extended scheme of village defence. A good frontier militia was better fitted to keep these savages in check than any number of regular posts, and a Khamptee colony was forthwith settled at an advanced spot towards the Dikrang, a certain number of its members being fully armed for its defence[38].

In 1885AD, as a expert pioneer *Chau-Cha Gohain* accompanied Political Officer Mr. J.F. Needham to Rima and Burma, Sir Robert Reid, Governor of Assam (1937-41AD) in this connection writes, “Mr. Needham’s principal native assistant on his journey was Chowsa Khamti *Gohain*, of whom he spoke in the highest terms in his report and who was presented with a double barreled gun as a reward, suitably inscribed as from Governor general”[39].

In a significant move from 1892-93AD, the force of Khamti volunteers were gradually abolished and no fresh requirements were made to replace losses by death etc. The conditions of the Khamtis were changing gradually and ultimately, they acknowledged allegiance to the British Government but paid no revenue.

The record of 1896-97AD, reveals that the Khamti Chief *Chowna Gohain* was permitted to hunt elephant in the Diphu Khet beyond the Inner line for which he was required to pay one hundred rupees as royalty for each elephant caught. During the first year, he caught elephants for which he had to pay eight hundred rupees as royalty[40].

After a few years, being satisfied with the peace loving attitude of the Khamtis under the *Chowna Gohain*, this personage was invested with the title of *Raja* by the Chief Commissioner since 1914AD. *Chowna*

Gohain alias *Chau-fa-kon-Mung* was the person to render valuable service to Noel Williamson and escorted him to Rima in January 1908AD.

But from 1917-18AD, the Khamtis lost their former privileges of exemption from poll tax; they were assessed to poll tax and treated as full-fledged British subject. All the Khamtis living in the Sadiya Frontier Tract came under the purview of poll tax except their *Raja Chowna Gohain* and his clan (*Namchoom*), living in Chowkham.

The allowance paid to the *Raja Chowna Gohain* Khamti at the rate of Rs.30 per mensem in accordance with instructions issued under the Eastern Bengal and Assam Government Letter No.798 P. dated 21st October, 1910AD on account of the political services rendered by him to the Government was considered inadequate and so it was decided that the amount should be raised to Rs.150 with effect from 1917-18AD[41]. However, the allowance was personal to the *Raja* and was stopped after his death in the year 1925AD. In fact, he was the last Khamti Raja exercising influence and enjoying respect both from the British and the Mishmis.

After the death of *Chowna Gohain*, a monthly allowance of Rs.40/ was however sanctioned in favour of his successor *Chow Aimong Khamti Gohain* for the assistance to be given by him to Government in collecting information, apprehending offenders and generally maintaining the quietude of the frontier. The allowance was sanctioned with effect from 1st April, 1927AD.

But ultimately on the basis of a report Mr. J.H. Crace, Political Officer, Sadiya Frontier Tract, the Khamti *Gohain* *Chow Aimong* was replaced by *Chowfa Kanan Gohain*, the eldest survivor of the royal family and the allowance of Rs.40 per month was also transferred in his favour for similar assistance to be given by him to Government[42].

Chowfa Kanan was one of the great Khamti chief who died in 1947AD. He was a pious gentleman; benevolent and popular among his subjects who was able to enjoy confidence from the British due to his cool temperament and gentle behaviour.

In the early phase of post independent period the Khamti chiefs played a dominant role in the politics of the region i.e. NEFA (North East Frontier Agency, former political segment of present Arunachal Pradesh). After *Chowfa Kanan* who died in 1947AD, his son *Chow Khamoon Gohain* became the Khamti chief. It was for his strong adherence to his independent view, strong personality and modesty; he was nominated by the President of India, the only Member of Parliament from NEFA in 1952AD - making him the first man to achieve high regard position of the time. He was a humanist, loved all people without distinction with a burning passion. He championed the cause of the people of NEFA during his tenure of the Member of Parliament for two consecutive terms. People of all social strata's adored him for his quality of head and heart. After *Chow Khamoon Gohain*, *Chow Chandret Gohain* (one of the son of late *Chowfa Kanan*) was nominated by the President of India as a Member of Parliament who distinguished himself as a politician of high order and a veteran social worker.

In retrospect, the relations of the Khamtis with the British simultaneously reveal the strength and weakness of their foreign policy. At the time of the British occupation of Upper Assam, they found the Sadiya tract under the possession of the Khamtis. Their chief was recognized by the British Government as the lawful ruler. He was not required to pay any tribute. The internal management of their territory was vested to 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. The Khamtis were contended with the new arrangement.

Initially, their relations with the British were quite cordial but with the coming of their new chief *Chowfa plunghlu alias Ranua Gohain*, the relations took a new dimension. Slavery stood as one of the most important barriers in the way of establishing friendly relations' between the Khamtis and the British. In 1834AD, slavery was declared illegal by the British Government. Economy of the Khamtis which was based on the labourers of the Assamese subjects, which they procured by means of raids in the adjoining territories of the Ahoms and the Matakas received a great set back.

Economic consideration was largely responsible for the hostility between the Khamtis and the British. The abolition of the slavery resulting the release of the Assamese slaves hitherto employed by the Khamtis, undue interference of the British in the border disputes between the Khamtis and the Matakas, coupled with the intense love of independence by the new chief, the Khamtis made a sharp reaction. They took a prompt action against the British on the issue of the release of the two Assamese slaves under the possession of the Khamti chief by Col. Adam White, the head of the British garrison at Sadiya. The very day of the release of these two slaves by Col. White, the Khamtis made a sudden attack on the British garrison stationed at Sadiya.

Being intoxicated at their previous successes against the neighbouring tribes, they made a bold attempt but it was imprudent as it rewarded with a failure. Had they employed diplomatic skills with force while dealing with a strong enemy having enormous resources of both men and material at their command, thing would have took a different turn. They failed to maintain diplomatic relations with the states contiguous to their immediate frontier such as the Matakas, the Ahoms and specially the Burmese with whom they had socio-religious affinity and ethnical bond.

Had they followed a liberal policy towards the Matakhs and the Ahoms and allowed them to maintain their coveted hereditary powers and privileges, they might easily have been converted into useful allies in the time of need and employed them in fighting against the British. Their high handedness and frequent raids alienated sympathy and co-operation of the neighbours. Instead of coming to the aid, the discontented Matakhs and the Singphos, in collaboration of the Abors sided with the British in tracing out the fugitive Khamtis after the uprising of 1839AD. It was the diplomatic failure on the part of the Khamtis to call for the war of liberation.

III. CONCLUSION

In retrospect, the relations of the Khamtis with the British simultaneously reveal the strength and weakness of their foreign policy. After the uprising of 1839AD, the Khamtis were reconciled and became increasingly loyal to the British Government. The Khamti chiefs such as *Chow Cha Gohain*, *Chow Kon Mung Gohain*, *Chow Kanan Gohain* and other rendered desired services to the British authority and they were duly recognized as chiefs by the latter. Most of the Khamti chiefs enjoyed the confidence of the British officials. One Khamti chief named *Chow Keng Gohain* even held the post of the chief of the intelligence branch of the British administration. For this valuable service to the British Government one Khamti Chief *Chow Na Gohain* was rewarded with title of *Raibahadur*. The Khamti chiefs were entitled to small rewards by the British administration like exemption of taxes, exemption from the restriction of catching elephants, receipt of occasional gifts, paying regular allowances and so forth.

From the British point of view, the cardinal point of their policy towards the hill tribes was both conciliatory and suppressive. In dealing with the stubborn hill tribes like the Khamtis, the British were conciliatory no doubt, but they did not hesitate to employ coercive measures when situation demanded. The policy of conciliation was always backed by the display of force. They allowed the tribal groups to enjoy full local autonomy and to preserve their age old traditional set up. Tribal policy of the British reflected in their command to frontier officers and commandant that, ‘Conciliate these savages if you can. Be persistent in demanding surrender of murderers, but endeavour so to approach the tribes that a basis may be opened for friendly intercourse in the future’ [43]

The British never envisaged the plan of the complete subjugation and annexation of the territory of the Khamtis to the British dominion, and to take part in their internal administration probably thought that such a policy would be hazardous and never be successful. The treatment meted out by the British to the Khamtis was in fact, most judicious. As the Burmese phobia was looming large in the minds of the British, they rightly calculated the strategic importance of the Khamti territory in creating a buffer state would have go a long way in safeguarding the eastern zone of their dominion. Initially, the British were suffering from possible Burmese attack, therefore to safeguard their eastern frontier of their dominion; they followed an appeasement policy towards the frontier tribes including the Khamtis. When the Burmese menace was over, they resorted to their traditional policy of ruthless annexation. Conciliation backed by display of force was the main theme of the external policy of the British particularly in case of the frontier tribes.

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