

**ROADS AND RULE:
COLONIALISM AND THE POLITICS OF ACCESS
IN THE NAGA HILLS, 1826-1918**

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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the dissertation entitled "**Roads and Rule: Colonialism and the politics of access in the Naga Hills, 1826-1918**" submitted by **Lipokmar Dzuvichu** in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the award of **MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY** is his own work. The dissertation has not been previously submitted for any other degree of this or any other university.

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To
My Dearest Parents

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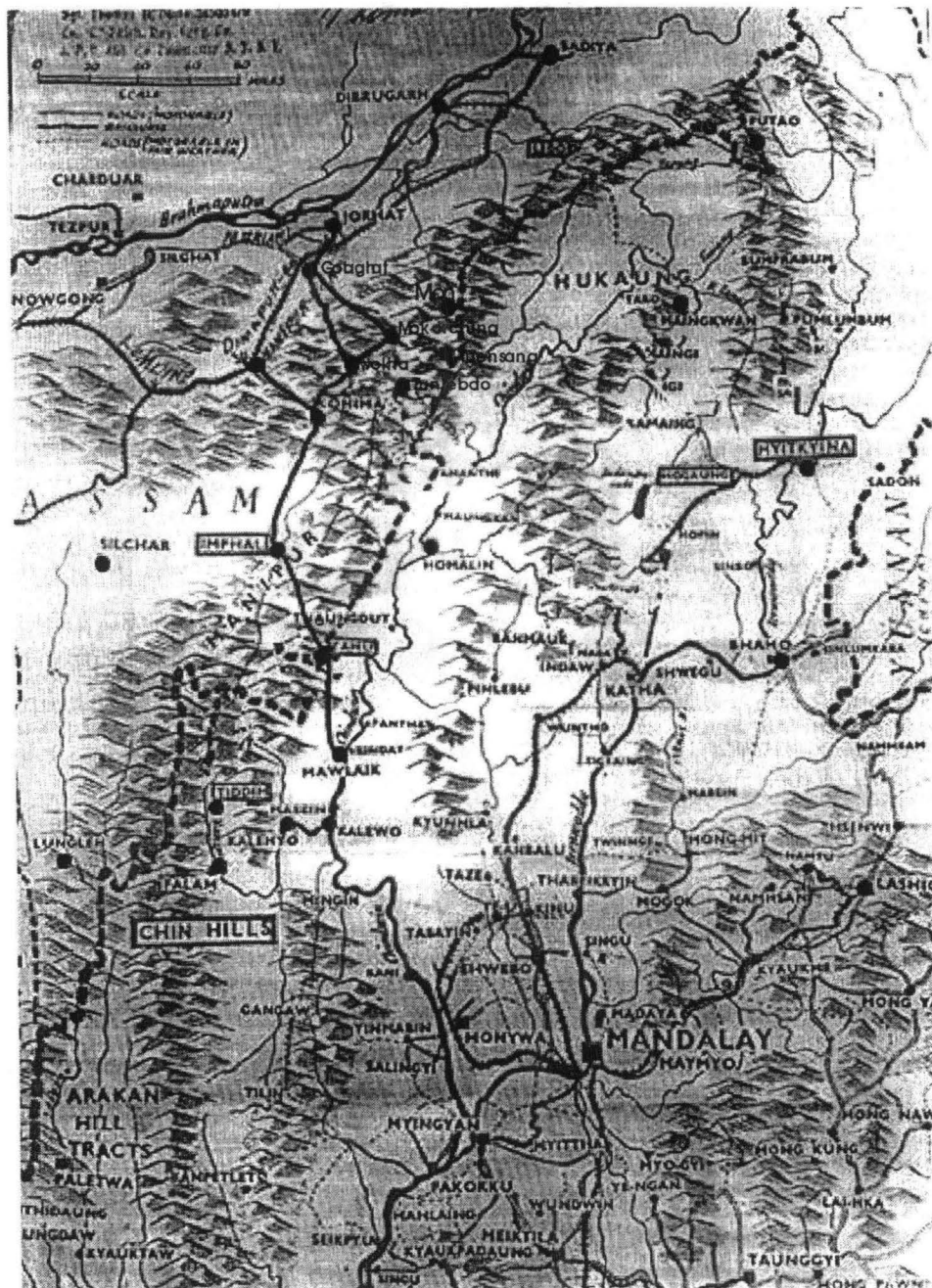
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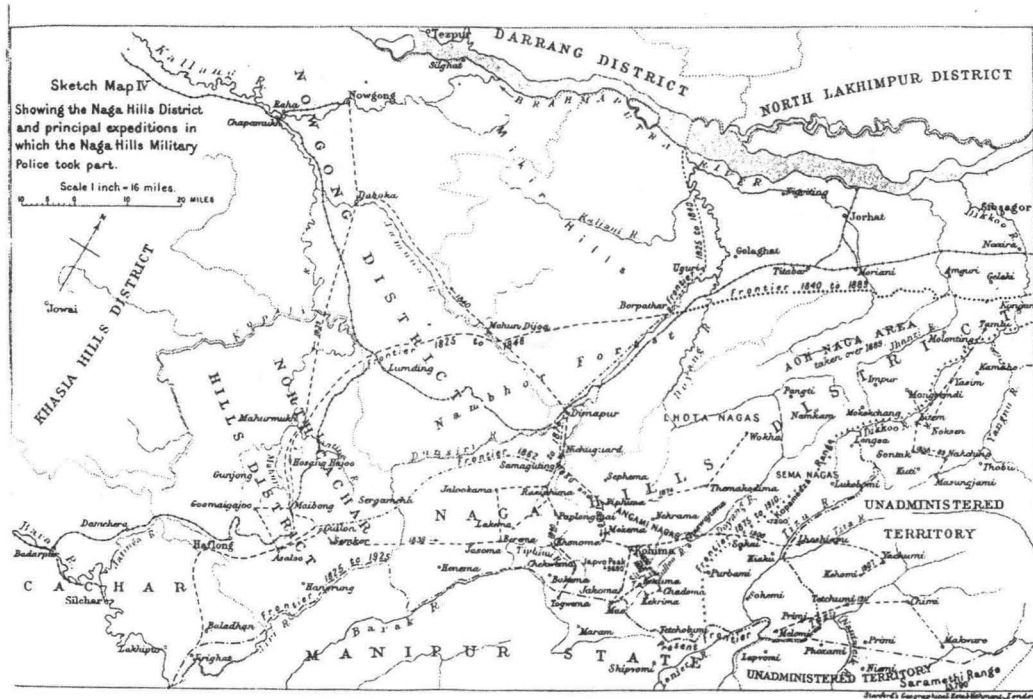
Above all, I give thanks to God for his faithfulness.

*Lipokmar Dzuwichu
July, 2005*



Routes in Assam, Burma, China 1943

Source: www.Chiptaylor.com/tlmp3952-.cfm



Map showing Naga Hills District and the Principal expeditions in which the Naga Hills Military Police took part.

Source: L.W. Shakespear, *History of the Assam Rifles*, 1929

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Introduction

From the British colonial Grand Trunk Road to the recent Golden Quadrilateral Road Project, road building seems to be the past time of empires and governments. The ideology behind road building is often seen as so self-revelatory that they are not discussed in historical monographs. At the same time histories impacted by gradual exchange and interaction through mode of transport and communication has remained marginal. Who decides where roads are made and where movement is channeled? What is the political economy of road building? These are some of the questions, which are hardly addressed by historians of South Asia.¹

My study works with the premise that roads, both material and metaphorical, substantive and symbolic are all about question of power, culture, location and identity. They are conceived, managed, controlled and contested in space. They have great symbolic and political resonance for both states and subjects. They were a vital element in the strategies by which the East India Company and its successor regime, and turned land into territory belonging to the British Empire.²

Jean Deloche in his pioneering work *Transport and Communications in India prior to Steam Locomotion Volume I & II*³ reconstructs the spatial patterns and technological modes of transport in pre-colonial South Asia. Deloche offers a sweeping compendium of the state of roadways, bridges, and engineering works, travelers' amenities, and conveyances during the nearly three centuries of Mughal dominion.

¹ Some of these concerns, though, have been mapped out in a recent study; see Ravi Ahuja, 'Opening up the country?' Pattern of Circulation and Politics of Communication in early colonial Orissa.' *Studies in History*, Vol.20, No.1 (January-June 2004); also see Robert Gabriel Varady, 'The Diary of a Road: A Sequential Narration of the Origins of the Lucknow-Kanpur Road, 1825-1856', *The Indian Economic and Social History Review*, vol. XV, No.2 (1978).

² I draw the 'territoriality' concept here from Robert David Sack's work. 'Territoriality' according to David Sack, is 'a particular kind of behaviour in space' and forms the backcloth of human spatial relations and conceptions of space; it is defined 'as the attempt by an individual or group to affect, influence, or control people, phenomena and relationships by delimiting and asserting control over geographic area. This area will be called "territory"', See Robert David Sack, *Human Territoriality*: pp. 19-26.

³ Jean Deloche, *Transport and Communications in India prior to Steam Locomotion Volume I* (Delhi: OUP, 1993).

Deloche study proves beyond doubt that road engineering and bridge buildings were by no means a British innovation.⁴ Deloche's detail and rigorous scholarship is however confined 'to the technical aspects of transport and communication in India prior to steam locomotion.'⁵

A key colonial text on transport and communication is MacGeorge interesting *Ways and Work*.⁶ MacGeorge reckons that prior to the *pax britannica* there were no constructed and permanent roads in India. The book is a celebratory account of colonial public works as 'enduring material monuments' as bearing 'directly upon the material progress of the people.'⁷ Who decides where roads are made and where movement is channeled? What is the political economy of road building? These are some of the questions, which are hardly addressed by historians of South Asia.⁸

Although accessibility has taken on a new urgency in the context of neo-liberalism, expanding markets to the 'global war against terror', the States concern with physical access to land routes is far from new. Mahnaz Z. Ispahani, in her fascinating work *Roads and Rivals* posits that, States cannot be physically consolidated and politically sustained without the ability to expand access.⁹ Hence, access routes are extremely useful if a state is to expand its political potential outward.

⁴ Recent studies on circulation and communication on the other, has rendered the idea of an immobile and static society untenable. In a collection of essays, titled, *Society and Circulation*, the authors 'reveals' astounding levels of circulation involving large segments of South Asian society. Yet even in this collection, the crucial issue of India's colonial transport infrastructure has hardly been touched - the focus being rather on the mobility and movement of men and goods over large geographical space. See Claude Markovits, Jacques Pouchepadass, and Sanjay Subrahmanyam, (eds.), *Society and Circulation: Mobile People and Itinerant Cultures in South Asia, 1750 - 1950* (New Delhi: Permanent Black, 2003), Preface, pp. 3 & 11. The authors conceive 'circulation' not merely as a 'specialized area of expertise' but rather as a 'frame work within which to look at Indian society and the transformations it underwent'.

⁵ Deloche, *Transport and Communication*, p. viii.

⁶ G.W. MacGeorge, *Ways and Works in India* (London: Archibald Constable, 1894).

⁷ MacGeorge, *Ways and Works in India*.

⁸ Some of these concerns, though, have been mapped out in a recent study; see Ravi Ahuja, 'Opening up the country?' Pattern of Circulation and Politics of Communication in early colonial Orissa.' *Studies in History*, Vol.20, No.1 (January-June 2004); also see Robert Gabriel Varady, 'The Diary of a Road: A Sequential Narration of the Origins of the Lucknow-Kanpur Road, 1825-1856', *The Indian Economic and Social History Review*, vol. XV, No.2 (1978).

⁹ Mahnaz Z. Ispahani, *Roads and Rivals: The Political uses of Access in the Borderlands of Asia* (London: Cornell University Press, 1989), p. 7. Examining the politics of routes in the areas stretching from Iran and

In tracing the major routes or their absence in the politics of access, Ispahani however warns against ‘succumbing’ to a geographical ‘reductionism’, as she admits that ‘routes alone cannot alter state politics.’ In other words, the complex questions of national and regional politics cannot be reduced to questions of geography or routes alone.¹⁰ Indeed the utility of Ispahani’s work resides in the flexibility it brings to the explanation of complex historical developments in the borderlands of Asia; which I speculate can also be usefully employed in the context of the Naga Hills.

Since space is a ‘fact’ of nature, argues David Harvey, this meant that the conquests and rational ordering of space became an integral part of the modernizing project.¹¹ By the end of the nineteenth century, according to Harvey, the world’s spaces were deterritorialized, stripped of their preceding significations and then reterritorialized according to the convenience of colonial and imperial administrations. Not only was the relative space revolutionized through innovations in transport and communications, but what that space contained, was also fundamentally re-ordered.¹² In the search, during the 1820s for an alternative source for tea within the framework of the British Empire, the Northeast frontier was transformed conceptually from an ‘isolated periphery’ to a ‘strategic space’. It also marked the critical first step of their integration into the expanding global capitalist system. Yet drawing upon Derek Gregory, one could say that the enterprise required an indisputable site or foundation of space upon which the temporal plots of empire building could unfold.¹³

In the colonial spatial representation and practices, the areas surrounding Assam came to be mapped out as ‘hills’ or ‘highlands’, characterized by rebelliousness, and an

Baluchistan, to the Hindu Kush, the Karokoram, and the Himalayas, Ispahani asserts that not only nation building, but national security and development continue to be affected by the routes and the access they create.

¹⁰ Ibid. , p. xiii.

¹¹ David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1989), p. 249.

¹² Ibid. , p. 264.

¹³ Derek Gregory, *Geographical Imaginations* (London: Blackwell, 1994), p. 172.

absence of law.¹⁴ Naga Hills was justifiably considered the classic case of a neglected backwater. 'Without roads, culture and civilization,' the Nagas were categorized as 'caterans and murderers' existing only as a pest and nuisance to their neighbours. By prosecuting roads and 'opening up the hills', the Secretary to the Government of Bengal in 1866 hoped 'to wean them gradually from their present habits of plunder and outrage.'¹⁵ To bring the Nagas and other Hill tribes out from their isolation, what was required declared Alexander Mackenzie, the Secretary to the Government of Bengal was, 'to open up the country by good bridle paths enabling the authorities to visit them often and at all season of the year.'¹⁶ Improved roads access, therefore came to be one of the most frequently cited items on the wish list of colonial political officers. Roads, the political officials argued would induce these wild tribes to settled and peaceful pursuits. It would also lead to 'a full development of their potentialities.'¹⁷

One historical approach, which I found useful, is one, which, focus on the symbolic control of public space. Political power is thus symbolically manifested and institutionalized through 'built environments.'¹⁸ At the same time it legitimizes hegemonic structures of power and authority. Roads, I also argue, refigure space and history. In that way they are a central component of colonial transformation. 'Improvements' in transport and communication create new public iconographic landscapes to accord with the new 'values' of colonial regimes.¹⁹ The study of such

¹⁴ David Ludden has argued that the earliest boundary between India and Bangladesh separated peoples of the 'hills' and 'plains'. To him the boundary line explicitly served to restrict and regulate mobility between two political territories, defined as the homelands of two distinct cultures in the 'mountains' and the 'plains' respectively. See David Ludden, 'Political Maps and cultural territories', *Himal*, 16/7 (July, 2003). Also see David Ludden's, 'History along the coastal zone of southern Asia', *Paper for Columbia South Asia Seminar*, October 18, 1999.

¹⁵ Foreign and Political Proceeding-B (From now F&PD) 1866. Nos. 84-85.

¹⁶ F&PD- A. September 1873. Nos. 219 - 229

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Chandra Mukerjee, 'Intelligent uses of engineering and the legitimacy of state powers'. *Technology and Culture* (October, 2003), 44, p. 265. Here 'built environments' could be large buildings, bridges, roads, reservoirs, ports, sewers, and communication system etc; Also see Chandra Mukerji, 'Material practices of domination: Christian humanism, the built environment, and techniques of western power.' *Theory and Society*, 31: 1-34 (2002); also see Thomas F. Gieryn, 'What buildings do'. *Theory and Society*, 31: 35-74 (2002).

¹⁹ Ian J. Kerr, 'Representation and representations of the railways of colonial and post colonial south Asia' *Modern Asian Studies* 37, 2 (2003), pp. 287-326. 'Who represented railways, what was represented, and to whom the representations were directed? These are the three primary concerns, which Ian Kerr explores in his engaging and illustrative essay.

changes can offer significant insights into ways in which colonial states redefine national identities and national past. As 'paths of authority' roads also institutionalize a particular narrative of national history by introducing it into the everyday consciousness of the ethnic populace. Roads, in the Naga Hills, then were one way of concretizing a dominant ideology, a way by which the colonial regime could strive to maintain an 'unending visual contact' between rulers and the ruled. This visualization operated through instances of imposing barriers on travelers, police check post, trade passes, including routine movement of troops and police.

Roads are envisaged by the state, as James Scott argues, which make the outlying province legible to central authorities. An 'illegible society', to use his well-known phrase, is considered a hindrance to effective intervention or government.²⁰ The road projects in the Naga Hills were primarily driven by military and strategic needs. Roads created a proliferating network of exchanges through which intelligence could filter to the colonial authorities through the country. They also served as rearward routes for communication, reinforcement, troops circulation and supply and patrol routes against infiltration and incursions. The revising of routes, and the construction and addition of new road networks, offered a way for the colonial state to affirm that the Naga Hills were no longer a 'savage, stagnant and isolated wildlands.'

However, in the States politics of access and expansion, the Nagas did not simply step aside to make room for colonial roads. Engineered as 'punitive expeditions', the colonial response to the Nagas resistance was one of relentless brutality.²¹ In the course of pacification it became clear that it would be difficult to build roads without tapping the

²⁰ James C. Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Conditions Have Failed* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), p. 78.

²¹The violent encounter between the Nagas and the British, a process described by the colonial officials as 'pacification' of the 'Naga savages' can best be understood in this terms. There were ten 'punitive expeditions' between 1835 and 1851, followed by a policy of 'non-intervention' culminating in the 'Grand finale' of the Naga uprising of 1879, 'leading to the last military encounter'. For an account on the History of British relations with the Nagas see Alexander Mackenzie, *History of the Relations of the Government with the Hill Tribes of the North East Frontier of Bengal* (Calcutta: Home Department Press, 1884), pp. 77-144; James Johnstone, *My Experiences in Manipur and the Naga Hills* (London: S. Low, Martson & Company, 1896); Robert Reid, *History of the frontier areas bordering on Assam from 1888-1941* (New Delhi: Eastern Publishing House, 1942); Julian Jacobs, *The Nagas: The Hill people of Northeast India: Society, Culture and the Colonial Encounter* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1990).

inhabitants for labour. For the landscape of the hills implied that roads were essential for access and conquest, but also for circulation of commodities. However, none of the existing roads were surfaced; most were almost or fully impassable during the rains, and the landscape of the hill roads did not permit cart traffic. Transport and supply had to rely mainly on portage. It was imperative to secure continuous and steady supplies of labour for road building and portage. Demand for impressment of labour however, often resulted in violent outbreaks and uprising in the hills, drawing the colonial state in huge expensive wars. These so-called 'punitive expeditions' were hugely exercised to bring the 'primitive hillmen' under subjection. Most of the hill roads in the Naga Hills were built in the aftermath of uprisings. The labour needed for them worked into the term of the 'agreement' imposed on defeated chiefs.

And yet, colonial officials could not simply have reshaped this frontier or the ethnic landscape of the Hills from above. They had to engage with the 'traditional' structures and institutions. The existing established bridle paths and tracks became the main arteries for the colonial officials to operate in the hills.²² However, these paths and tracks could also be turned into an alternate space, one through which the 'natives' subverted and countered colonial surveillance and control of their everyday life. These traditional routes were very much apart of the people's life, for communication and circulation.

The construction of roads or improvement of trails provided state-controlled axes along which the local population was 'forced' to move. Villages were 'fixed' along accessible physical space so that colonial administration could procure food supply, procure labor and enumerate its subjects. Though the colonial states road-building efforts

²² Paul Carter proposes a 'spatial history' as an alternative to histories of imperialism. In Carter words spatial history is a 'prehistory of places, a history of roads, footprints, trails of dust and foaming waves.' The colonial records suggest that the Naga Hills were a *tabula rasa* in terms of roads and exchange networks. I hope to use the same records to trace the history of pre-colonial Nagas paths and routes. Sometimes their existence had to be more openly acknowledged at certain conjunctures in the nineteenth century. At another level I also suggest that a hybridized, new knowledge evolved in the colonies, in the colonial project of road building, either through direct borrowing and adaptation from indigenous practices and local knowledge. See Paul Carter, *The Road to Botany Bay: An essay in spatial history* (London: Faber & Faber, 1987), p. xxii.

were the most dramatic physical manifestation of a modern territoriality, it was the demand for labour that was the most powerful force for 'change'. Various techniques of physical, spatial, occupational and political discipline were imposed to transform the disordered 'primitive tribes' into loyal, orderly and governable subjects. The creation of 'coolie labour' through an 'indirect' tax, a classic form of 'political labour' was one of these projects. The exaction of coolie labour in official language thus became 'a system for the reformation of the politically unmanageable, and the integration and utilization of marginal and the useless.' In the course of rule, the Naga coolie corp was extensively used in colonial 'pacification' campaigns, termed as 'little wars' in the frontiers of southern Asia and also in global wars, particularly, during the first and the second World Wars.²³

Over the nineteenth century, roads in the Naga Hills thus came to be associated with the exercise of power by the new rulers. Forced labour was recruited to build them, populations were taxed, personnel movement was controlled; and lands near them were expropriated for plantations and mission stations. Representation of the Northeast in general, and the Naga Hills in particular, are of a remote landlocked, undeveloped and troubled hinterland. The emphasis of history and contemporary journalism is on the practices of bounding and excluding practices, followed first by the colonial regime, then by the Indian nation state. By focusing on the politics of access, the historical importance of 'borderland' routes, the way they were laid out, built and monitored, and the changing role of local communities are highlighted. I hope to contribute to the historiography of circulation and communication, by sketching out an approach that situates routes and roads, mobility and movement within relations of power and political economy, both of the colonial period and in a suggestive way, of the present. The so-called petty hill or frontier roads too have a history worth recovering and experiences worth exploring.

The organization of the dissertation is simple. In chapter 1, I attempt to look at how in the search for an alternative source for tea within the framework of the British

²³ A huge amount of labour was mobilized during the First global World War from the then Northeast Frontier of colonial India. Of this 4000 Naga Labour corp was sent to France. Second World War again saw Nagas in action, in the service of the *Raj*, as road coolies, guide, interpreter and soldiers etc.

Empire, the Northeast frontier was transformed conceptually from an 'isolated periphery' to a 'strategic space'. The decade around 1830s provides a plethora of insights and a range of the possibilities imagined for this region, which we don't get in the records of the later colonial period. In this exploratory phase this frontier tract seem to offer a variety of fields for entrepreneurship all of which hinged on access to resources – of land, of plants, minerals and souls. The search for the land routes to Burma and China also placed the northeast frontier in a new spatial grid for some years.

In chapter 2, I look at the pre-colonial routes, circulatory flows, and road building and how these came to be unfolded into the politics of access under colonialism. The colonial search for access to routes and denial of access routes became the axis for brutal military repression but also for contestation and negotiation. I also examine the play of various ideologies of rules in the politics of road building, ranging from a discourse of bringing savages into civilization, to economic liberalism, security, and imperial strategy. Roads become an iconographic representation of state power and sites for political disciplining of the colonized. They were also very crucial to the institution of the routine bureaucratic infrastructures of taxation and population counting etc by which scattered ecologies and small societies, as James Scott puts it, have to be made legible to a centralizing state.

Thereafter, in chapter 3, I attempt to look at how road building creates manpower resources, which the state could tap as in the form of permanent coolie and porter corps, which accompanied troops in frontier campaigns and global wars. This was a process of labour impressment, intimately related to the expansion of the wage labour market, which turned the 'primitive hillmen' into 'coolies.' This chapter broadly seeks to understand how the Naga 'coolie' identity was constructed and reproduced in the nineteenth and twentieth century.

Chapter I

Routes and Empire: Access, Exploration and Colonialism in the early nineteenth century Assam Hills

*On your route ... you will collect statistical and useful information on all subjects, but particularly on the following. The extent and nature of the trade now carried between China and the Burmese dominions, and between them and our territories in Assam, and the best mode of protecting, facilitating, and extending the last mentioned.*¹

Lt. Col H. Burney, Resident at Ava, to G.T. Bayfield, of the medical Establishment of Fort St. George on a proposed journey from Ava to the frontiers of Assam, 1836.

Till the early 1800s the 'North-East Frontier' of the Company *Raj* languished in geographical and political obscurity. In the British cognitive map the North-East Frontier was 'just a vast, fever-infested, jungle area' inhabited by 'numerous savage races'; its interior a blank of white spaces on their maps.² In the unfolding colonial narratives, 'myth's' of impenetrable jungle hostile to human habitation, were loaded with narratives of bewilderment and hopeless struggles.³ Writing on the early nineteenth century. H.A. Antrobus remarked: 'For centuries Assam was the arena of continual warfare and forays between the Ahom and Kachari Rajas ... and subject also to the raids and incursions of the hills tribes, the Nagas, Mishmis, Miris, Arbors, Daflas etc., from their fastness in the hills'.⁴ This unsettled frontier in official narratives deserved no more than the occasional punitive military expedition. However, the networks and rhythms of global capitalism would rudely awaken colonial interest in the frontier.⁵

¹ *Selection of papers: Hill tracts between Assam and Burma* (Delhi: Vivek Publishing Company, 1978; first published, 1909), p. 134.

² H.A. Antrobus, *A History of the Assam Company, 1839-1953* (Edinburgh: T&A Constable Ltd 1957), p. 2; Alexander Mackenzie, *History of the Relations of the Government with the Hill tribes of Northeast Frontier Bengal* (Calcutta: Home department Press, 1884), p. 1.

³ I use the term 'myths' here to refer to those 'tales' and 'legends' that flourished in the colonial narratives during the 'age of reconnaissance.'

⁴ Antrobus, *Assam Company*, p. 3.

⁵ Drawing upon Catherine Hall concept, I use 'global' here to describe the European pattern of exploration and 'discovery', of settlement, of dominance over geographically separate 'others', which resulted in the

Rivalry between the Chinese and the British Empire created a context, which demanded a deeper investigation of India's resources. Previously, all British tea had come from China through the English East India Company; however, in 1833 the Company lost their monopoly in the Chinese tea trade. Experiments with tea cultivation in other British colonies proved disastrous. In April 1832 Dr. N. Wallich, the imperial botanist in Bengal, referred to a total failure of attempts to cultivate tea in Penang, Java, St. Helena, the Brazils and many other places.⁶ These narratives pushed the British East India Company (EIC) to 'turn its attention towards India more seriously.'⁷ Under the drives to find alternative sources for tea within the framework of the British Empire, the North-East Frontier metamorphosed into an area of consuming commercial and strategic interest. The landscape and cultures of the frontier was then, to use Edward Said's word, 'drawn into abstract grids of colonial and imperial power, literally displaced and replaced, illuminating the ways in which these constellations became sites of appropriation, domination and contestation.'⁸

In this chapter, however, a 'history' of tea is not directly my concern here. What I want to engage with is a phase of exploration in the early nineteenth century where the resources of the Northeast frontier were being explored and discussed. This phase was a particular historical moment in the colonial incorporation of the Northeast frontier; in transforming and altering its physical landscape, and reorienting its functional regions. In the search for a global access to resources and lands the frontier was always a culturally contested buffer zone or in Marie Louise Pratts' term a, 'contact zone'.⁹ In this period of

uneven development of forms of capitalism across the world and the destruction of and/or transformation of other forms of social organization and life. See Catherine Hall (ed.), *Cultures of Empire: Colonizers in Britain and the empire in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries: A reader* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), p. 5; for two classic account on world capitalism, which seek an understanding of large systems of relationship and their histories see Sidney M Mintz, *Sweetness and Power: The place of Sugar in Modern History* (New York: Penguin Books, 1985) and Eric R. Wolf, *Europe and the People without History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982).

⁶ Ibid. , p. 13.

⁷ Ibid. , p. 12.

⁸ Quoted in Derek Gregory, 'Edward Said's Imaginative Geographies', in Mike Crang and Nigel Thrift (ed.), *Thinking Space* (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), p. 303.

⁹ Marie Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel writing and Transculturation* (London: Routledge, 1992), pp. 6-7. The term 'contact zone' Marie Louise Pratt argues, is 'the space of colonial encounter'. The phrase

advance into the Northeast frontier the interaction between the between the colonizer and the colonized was in many ways both brutal and yet a more open encounter. In this chapter, drawing upon David Ludden's fine work, I will also try and show as to how the categorized term of 'hillmen' and 'plainsmen' were constructed as binary opposition. This exploratory phase was also a point when a search for alternate access routes began to introduce new spatial orientations to the Northeast frontier.

The search for "autochthonous" tea

Following the first Anglo-Burmese war of 1824-26, serious attention was given to the possibility of cultivating tea in Assam, and for good reason: 'tea was a major source of revenue for the British ... and between 1823-1830, thirty million British pounds were gained accounting for approximately one tenth of the nation's total revenue.'¹⁰ When 'explorers' ventured into uncharted areas like the Naga Hills, they did so with 'imperial eyes' capable of incorporating the specificity of all they surveyed into the universalizing categories of the Enlightenment.¹¹ By 1830s, intriguing stories about the discovery of wild Indian tea floated to Calcutta, threaded by other narratives of exploration and "discovery" in the Northeast frontier.¹²

In 1823, Major Robert Bruce of the Bengal Artillery, 'being addicted to botanical researches "discovered" the tea plant ... growing in the hills in a state of nature'.¹³ 'Tea trees two or three inches in diameter and fifteen or fifty feet' high were sighted in Jykamee village, by E.R. Grange, the Assistant Commissioner of Nowgong during a

foreground's the interactive, improvisational dimensions of colonial encounters so easily ignored or suppressed by diffusionist accounts of conquest and domination.

¹⁰ Avery K. Slater, ' "Sugar and Spice and Everything Nice": Commodifying Mechanism of Empire and Femininity as seen through the tea trade between Victorian England and colonial India', p.1. <http://njrgc.greglaun.org/Issues/Spring2004/Slater.pdf>. On the other Jayeeta Sharma has pointed out that, by 1800, the East India Company was selling about twenty million pounds' worth of Chinese-grown tea in England, while an equivalent amount to this was estimated to have been smuggled into the country. See Jayeeta Sharma, *A Tale of Tea: Empire, Science, and the Assam 'Garden'* (forthcoming article).

¹¹ For by the middle of the nineteenth century, Marie Louise Pratt posits that vision had long since become the dominant sense in the 'appropriating gaze' of the European observer. Pratt, *Imperial Eyes*, p. 7.

¹² Piya Chatterjee, *A Time for Tea. Women, Labor and Post/Colonial Politics on an Indian Plantation* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2001), p. 55.

¹³ William Robinson, *A Descriptive Account of Asam with a sketch of the local geography* (first published 1841; Delhi: Sanskaran Prakashak 1975), p. 136.

military expedition-exploration into the Angami Naga Hills in 1840.¹⁴ Similarly, in 1844, Major Browne-Wood, the Sub-Assistant Commissioner of Nowgong, during a military expedition into the Angami country came across tea trees measuring ‘upto twenty feet high and four to five inches in diameter’.¹⁵ At Raja-piama (Razaphema), Major Browne also found the tea plant growing ‘most abundantly and luxuriantly’ around the village. During this exploration, Jeereebie the *Gaon Boora* or village chief informed Major Browne of his low hills as entirely covered with tea. Sensationalizing his find, Wood writes in 1844: ‘the leaves of the plant (are) larger, and of a finer kind than those seen in the Seebaugar and Muttuck division.’¹⁶ While explorations led to proliferation and speculation of wild indigenous tea, chance encounters with the tea plant suddenly gave a location a new significance. On his return from Raja-piama (Razaphema), a Maun sepoy escorted Major Browne ‘upon some highland, and on both sides of this *nullah* saw the tea plant: he (sepoy) came here searching for fuel and fell upon the tea.’ Browne located this place along the Diboo (Diphu) River, about two miles from the southern base of the Samaguting hill.¹⁷ In a way the discovery of tea plants made the terrain one worthy of being drawn into the fold of empire. In the mental maps of colonial official the tea lands then flourished over an extent of country sufficient to ‘supply the United Kingdom with tea.’¹⁸

English entrepreneurs, as Piya Chatterjee writes, now set to prove that India was the original birthplace of tea. This would, she argue, ‘lay an essential claim from which the positively unmythical and tangible commercial possibilities of tea planting could be realized in their new colony.’¹⁹ Expressing his strong conviction that tea was a ‘native plant’, Francis Jenkins, Agent to the Governor General on the Northeast frontier of

¹⁴ E.R. Grange, ‘A Tour in 1840’, in Verrier Elwin, *The Nagas in the Nineteenth Century* (Bombay: OUP, 1969), p. 220.

¹⁵ F&PD. 24 August 1844. Nos. 34 - 44, F.C.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Antrobus, *Assam Company*, p. 37; David N Livingstone has argued that post-enlightenment geographers and cartographers, through their own manufacture of imaginative, exotic geographies, saw themselves as participating in a historical enterprise called ‘discovery’. In the light the term ‘discovery’ soon came to be used to describe both the progress of geographical exploration and scientific breakthrough. See David N. Livingstone, *The Geographical Tradition. Episodes in the History of a contested enterprise* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1992), p. 34.

¹⁹ Chatterjee, *Plantation*, p. 56.

Bengal, remarked: ‘there can now be little doubt (that) it is an indigenous production of the mountain tracts, for there being no tradition even of these hills ever being inhabited by other than rude Naga savages.’²⁰ In 1839, the Assam Tea Company’s investigation concluded that ‘the genuine plant of China is indigenous in Assam’.²¹ These stories, fascinatingly narrated by the colonial officials became the expression of a collective mentality.

In the unfolding narrative of tea originity, colonial officials ascribed tea as ‘the favourite beverage’ of the ‘hills tribes’. William Robinson, the imperial botanist from Bengal, thus claimed that ‘the Singphos have long known and drank the tea.’²² By the 1830s imperial botanists had concluded that tea was indigenous and would indeed flourish in the Northeast frontier.²³ Such expeditions, in search of tea plants were a manifestation of forces that would soon encompass the Assam hills into the frontiers of empire. Such images of discovery in unknown and uncharted country were also, as Felix Driver puts it, ‘adaptable to a variety of purposes.’²⁴ Exploration ‘served to sustain more directly colonial and imperial projects: to explore unknown country was in this sense also to subdue it’.²⁵

Cultivating the garden: ‘Chinamen’, and the ‘humanizing mission’

Cultivating the land in the official narratives was cast metaphorically as the subjugation of wild nature. Sufficient jungles were to be cleared to allow ‘free circulation

²⁰ F&PD. 24 August 1824. Nos. 34 - 44, F.C.

²¹ Antrobus, *Company*, p. 37.

²² Robinson, *A Descriptive account of Asam*, p. 133.

²³ *Ibid.*, pp. 129-131. William Robinson in his research assumed that the finest tea produced in China lies between the 25th and 33rd degree of latitude. Similarly in the hilly tracts on the frontier lands he found the tea between: ‘the 27th and 28th parallels or almost centrally situated within those limits most favourable to the development of the plant.’ Another botanist, Piddington who had compared and analyzed the tea soils of Assam and those of China found it ‘so exactly alike.’

²⁴ Felix Driver, *Geography Militant. Cultures of Exploration and Empire* (Oxford and Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishers, 2001), p. 21. Felix Driver analyzes the contexts in which geographical knowledge was produced and consumed through practices of exploration in the nineteenth century, interpellated with numerous other discursive contexts, in particular with the truth claims of western science, with popular discourses of adventure and masculinity and with the commercial and missionary imperatives of colonial and imperial conquest. p. 8.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 21.

of air' and the cleared soil 'well ventilated by the winds and rains.'²⁶ Concerted efforts was made by the "tea committee", set up in 24th January 1834 by William Bentick, the Governor General of Bengal, to cultivate tea. One solution it was thought was to encourage Chinese immigrants to settle in the nascent tea plantations.²⁷ Officials were more anxious to obtain Chinese workers, since the 'primitives' were not likely to possess the expertise and skills to one who has cultivated tea for centuries. Writing to the Secretary, Government of India in 1836, Francis Jenkins, Agent to the Governor General on the North-East frontier of Bengal, expressed his desire to bring in as many "Chinamen" for the tea plantation.²⁸

Meanwhile, efforts of the tea committee, through its Secretary G.J. Gordon had secured 'a few ... manufactures brought around from China'. Thus by the end of 1837 a consignment 'of 46 boxes of Assam tea' was submitted to the tea committee.²⁹ British opinion about the quality of Chinese workers, writes Piya Chatterjee, was however mixed. Chinese "coolies" noted one planter were 'poorly selected and a quarrelsome lot ... shoemakers and carpenters from the bazaars who knew nothing of tea making'.³⁰ On the other hand, early efforts by Company officials to induce the Singphos and the Khamptis in productive 'agricultural habits' were a disappointment. In 1832, Robertson, Agent to the Governor General on the North-East frontier Bengal expressed his helplessness as 'they were principally occupied in the hunting and catching of elephants for the sake of their teeth'.³¹ Inducement in terms of Kaunee (opium) was later suggested to engage the 'idle populations' in clearing jungles for cultivation.³² While at one level,

²⁶ F&PD. 4 April 1838. Nos. 112-113. P.C.

²⁷ F&PD. 27 June 1836. Nos. 49-51, P.C.; The Tea Committee dispatched its first mission, under G.J. Gordon the committee secretary, in June 1834 and a second mission, again under Gordon in 1836 to obtain Chinese tea workers, see Antrobus, *Assam Company*, pp. 30&34.

²⁸ F&PD. June 1836. Nos. 49-51.

²⁹ Antrobus, *Assam Company*, p. 138.

³⁰ Chatterjee, *Plantation*, p. 347. Till 1843, when their services were dispensed, the Chinese were paid at four to five times the wage rate paid to the corresponding categories of Assamese labour. The few who remained in the Dooars and Assam worked as carpenters and contractors. During the Indo-China border conflict of 1962, people who lived in Makum (Assam) who were descendants of these Chinese 'tea-men' and carpenters were imprisoned by the Indian government; Antrobus, *Company*, p. 36; Amalendu Guha, *Medieval and Early Colonial Assam. Society, Polity, Economy* (Calcutta and New Delhi: K. P. Bagchi & Company, 1991), p. 162.

³¹ F&PD. 15 October 1832. Nos. 114 A - 114 J, P.C.

³² F&PD. 4 April 1838. Nos. 112-113, P.C.

these accounts reveals key elements of how Company officials viewed the 'natives' labour in terms of capitalist notion of productivity; on the other such representation characterized the Singphos and other communities as too ignorant to understand or appropriate the systematic cultivation and developing tea.

An important thread in the politics of access was as I pointed out earlier, the idea of 'importing' 'Chinamen' through an alternative overland route from Assam into China via Burma. In 1836, Andrew White, the political agent of upper Assam reported that he had learnt of a thousand Chinese residing in the Burmese district of Hookoom. A Burmese officer, as we are told, assured White that 'they would willingly come to Assam provided the road (from Ava to Assam via the Hookoon valley) was open.'³³ About the same time, in 1835-36, Captain S.F. Hannay of the 40th Regiment Native Infantry, posted at Ava reported of Chinese settlement at Bamo, in the Shan Province of upper Burma.³⁴ Captain Hannay, in this instance was engaged on an imperial mission, to trace an overland route from the 'Patkoi mountains into Assam.' According to his estimate the town contained of 200 Chinese settled families. And still a great number from Yunan were said to 'either come to make purchases or to be hired as workman.' Having further enquired from the Chinese, he is supposed to have 'learnt the existence of several passes from Bamo into Yunan.'³⁵ Fascinated with the news of settled Chinese population, Francis Jenkins permitted the 'Chinese interpreter' in 1836, to accompany Dr. W. Griffith, Assistant Surgeon on the Madras Establishment, on the journey through upper Assam towards Hukawng, Ava and Rangoon. According to Jenkins, the presence of the Chinese interpreter would 'greatly induce the immigration of the Chinese.'³⁶ The development of a route from Assam across Burma to China thus attracted the EIC officials. Interestingly, even half a century later, in 1878, the Secretary of State wrote to the Hon. Viscount Canbrook stressing the importance of opening up a practicable route

³³ F&PD. 27 June 1836. Nos. 49-51, P.C.

³⁴ *Selection of Papers*, p. 92.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ F&PD. June 1836. Nos. 49-51.

between Assam and the South West of Yunan for the purpose of 'bringing a large needy and industrious' population for work in Assam.³⁷

The "import" of Chinese workman in tea plantations is threaded through with another story of evangelical adventure in the highlands. Early efforts to induce 'primitives' to grow tea provided the occasion for the entry of missionary enterprise in the Assam hills. Far beyond the Company's frontier, in the Namsang Naga country, Rev. Miles Bronson an American Baptist missionary mused about the task of "civilizing" the Nagas: 'Our coming among them will tend to increase their confidence and dispose them to habit of civilized life.' In this respect, Rev Bronson in 1840, urged Francis Jenkins, Agent to the Governor General on the North-East frontier of Bengal, to use every effort 'in our power ...to connect their indolent habits and to introduce among them some knowledge of the arts.'³⁸ Bronson's polemic reinforced the colonial notion of the natives as lacking any comprehension of the use of tea. It also determined an imperialistic colonial mission, which involves, as T.O. Beidelman argues 'a sense of ... spreading a "nation's" vision of society and culture to an alien, subjected people.'³⁹ Such notions of 'an expansionist and proselytizing ethos' as Beidelman suggest are intensified in a religious mission. It based on a sense of both 'duty and domination', which is manifested in a policy of 'paternal guardianship.'⁴⁰

To turn the attention of the Nagas to industrious pursuits, Rev Bronson hoped 'to get them all engaged in the cultivation of the plant and in the manufacture of green tea'. To him manufacturing tea seem 'so simple that little instruction would be required to enable them to carry the business independently'. All said and done, 'it would send' he noted 'a lot of tea into the market without trouble and care on the part of the

³⁷ Nirode K. Baruah, *David Scott in North-East India, 1802-1831. A Study in British Paternalism* (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1970), p. 129.

³⁸ F&PD. 11 May 1840. Nos. 128-129, F.C.

³⁹ T.O. Beidelman, *Colonial Evangelism. A Socio-Historical Study of an East African Mission at the grassroots* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982), p. 4. Basically what Beidelman argues is that 'in many respects all colonial structures are similar, though some separate missionaries from administrators and traders'. To him all colonialist poses certain common traits, determined by hierarchical, elitist structure, by policies of domination and social change, and by the developmental cycle of newly founded institutions, pp. 28-29.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

superintendent.’⁴¹ While engagement in tea cultivation would ‘enrich and improve the country’, in Bronson’s rhetoric, it would ‘bind the Nagas to the Company by another strong link.’⁴² In this humanizing mission, providing access in the Assam hills became imperative for the Company. Seeing the Angami country as ‘a fine field for missionary labour’ Francis Jenkins hope to establish a thanna or cantonment, which will give complete command ‘of all the more direct routes leading from Assam to Munipore.’ In 1841, a sum of Rs 2000 was sanctioned for improving communication along the frontier post. Jenkins stressed that every opportunity should be seized ‘to construct roads readily practicable to and between our post and to open out such communication as will render the hills easily accessible to our detachment of troops.’⁴³

Initially, the idea of drawing the ‘wild’ inhabitants of the Naga Hills seemed to promise an access to labor. Engaging the Nagas seems to have enabled them to enter ‘on a most profitable business with the tea gardens’. Colonial officials celebrated over the fact that ‘those so engaged have already been partially humanized ... (and) their occupation has forced them to neglect their internal bickerings.’⁴⁴ Writing to the Foreign Department in 1849, Jenkins found the Nagas as ‘most content’ and ‘willingly undertook service at the plantation.’ In the tea Barri of Hukun Jooree, we are told that the Nagas ‘formed almost entirely the only labourers employed in it.’⁴⁵ Working the Assamese, the Nagas and the Singpho hillsmen in the plantations was cheaper and worked out well. However, it was found that their agricultural works meant that their labor was withdrawn when they were not readily available when needed most in the tea gardens. Thus as Frederick Downs writes, ‘began the practice of bringing in labourers from other parts of the country.’⁴⁶

Having acquainted himself with ‘the language of the Nagas’, and ‘residing amongst this interesting branch of the hill tribes’ Jenkins found in Rev Miles Bronson, a

⁴¹ F&PD. 11 May 1840. Nos. 128-129, F.C.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ F&PD. 19 April 1841. Nos. 106, F.C.

⁴⁴ H.B. Rowney, ‘The Wild Tribes of India’ in Verrier Elwin, *Nagas in the Nineteenth Century*, p. 99

⁴⁵ F&PD-B. March 1880. Nos. 314 – 317.

⁴⁶ Frederick S. Downs, *Christianity in Northeast India. Historical Perspective* (New Delhi: Indian Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1983), p. 28.

person to further the imperial interest. Seizing the opportunity would enable the Company 'to avail ... of the great natural resources of this fine tract of mountainous country.'⁴⁷ 'The missionaries should be early in the fields', urged Jenkins.⁴⁸ What John and Jean Comaroff argue, though in a different context, holds true in our case too: 'by remaking his person and his context; by reconstructing his habit and habitus ... they (missionaries) wished to established a viable peasantry tied at once to the soil and to an ethos of universal commerce.'⁴⁹ Comaroff reminds us by stressing that 'their mission was conditioned by an imperial vision',⁵⁰ conjured up in the fervent images of a 'triumphant peasant cultivator' in the age of capitalism.

'Civilizing projects' and reactions to them

If geographical knowledge cleared the path for capitalist enterprise, commercial and strategic concerns informed investment in communication infrastructure. Interestingly, in the 1830s, the EIC had come under severe criticism for not investing enough in communication infrastructure in India, especially on roads. Writing under pseudonyms, in late 1820s and 1830s, John Shore an Indian Civil Service officer 'assailed the whole system' of British rule as it existed upto 1837.⁵¹ In one of his polemical passages he writes:

Seeing the advantage derived by the mother-country ... its children ... are at a lost to conjecture the reasons for a different course of policy in the case of a territory so extensive as this ... more especially when it is found that, after many years of dominion, no change has taken place. Most people, on their first arrival in India, are struck with the little progress that has been made in the general improvement of the country, and with the few attempts that have been made to introduce many comforts and conveniences, which might be done at no great trouble or expense.⁵²

⁴⁷ F&PD. 11 May 1840. Nos. 128-129, F.C.

⁴⁸ F&PD. 16 May 1838. Nos. 53 – 58, P.C; F&PD. 19 April 1841. Nos. 106, F.C.

⁴⁹ Jean and John Comaroff, 'The Colonization of Consciousness' in Michael Lambek (ed.), *A Reader in the Anthropology of Religion* (Massachusetts and Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), p. 496. Writing in the context of the South African interior, Jean and John Comaroff argues that the missionaries as the vanguard of the British presence were 'the most ambitious ideological and cultural agents of Empire', bearing with them the explicit aim of reconstructing the native world in the name of God and Great Britain.

⁵⁰ Ibid. , pp. 495 & 496.

⁵¹ Richard Dale MacLean and Peter Penner, *The Rebel Bureaucrat. Frederick John Shore, 1799-1837, as critic of William Bentick's India* (Delhi: Chanakya Publications, 1982), p. 240. Phillip Woodruff believed that 'some of (Shores) criticism were met' in the charter act of 1833.

⁵² Ibid. , p. 213.

Writing of the roads in the Company's territory, Shore argues: 'excepting those within the limits of the civil stations, sixteen miles between Calcutta and Barrackpore is all that we have to boast of ... just after the annual patchwork repairs, which the first shower washes away, (the roads are) in no respect better than the common unmade Indian track.' In his concluding observation Shore sourly remarked: 'Unless the construction of these roads be on better plan, and the provision for keeping them in repair on a better footing ... government might just as well spare their money.'⁵³ Such moments of controversy opened up to scrutiny some of the less obvious contradictions, which shaped the points of transition in the colonial enterprise.

The conjuncture was therefore one in which the Government of India was receptive to the idea of investing in road works in Assam to create access to future tea lands. Writing in 1853 to A.J. Moffat Mills, Judge of the Sudder Dewanny and Nizamut Adawlut, at Calcutta, Francis Jenkins pointed out that 'a great obstacle now to the want of clearing of wastes is the want of communication between these tracts and the cultivated districts.'⁵⁴ Ambitious plans were framed for constructing roads with regular repair and maintenance, enabling settlement 'amongst wastes' with productive agricultural schemes. Putting his case more firmly, Jenkins drew upon the success of another ambitious public work, i.e., the canal irrigation scheme in the western provinces of U.P. Such a scheme 'will as certainly be returned to government by increased revenue as the money which has been expended on canal in the western provinces.'⁵⁵ In the process, colonial officials paternalistically produced images of 'large productive tracts' of the frontier landscape, which had for long remained 'uncared for, and unknown.'⁵⁶ Not only officials viewed the wastelands as 'highly capable of improvement' and 'highly productive if cleared'. The 'new settlers' too found the extensive *pathars* or fields of rice cultivation 'an object of attraction'. To encourage the extension of settlements towards the hills, Jenkins desired to connect the Naga Hills with Assam and Manipur 'by easy and

⁵³ Ibid., p. 241.

⁵⁴ A.J. Moffat Mills, *Report on Assam* (Delhi: Gian Publication 1980; first published 1851), p. v.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Grange, *A Tour in 1840*, p. 220.

secure lines of roads'.⁵⁷ A consensus from the statements thus informed that roads would indeed be needed in the province.

Writing to Cecil Beadon, the Lt. Governor of Bengal in 24th July 1853, Moffat Mills considered the 'subject of the roads is one of much importance.' In order to manage the country efficiently and effectively he suggested that 'there should be two main roads in Assam'. The first one began from Bengal and running along the south bank by Gowalpara, Nowgong, Golaghat, Seebasagur, Debrooghur and Saikhwa; the second, from the north bank going from Gowhatty to Mungledye, Tezpoor and Luckimpoor.⁵⁸ And yet, most of these routes traversed already existing passageways or roads. A great-embanked road reportedly existed all around the tract, which officials assumed could be readily restored.⁵⁹ This road formed part of the three main *Ali* or roads highways in the Assam province; one is the *Ceuni Ali*, today's trunk road, connecting Kalibari, Jorhat, and Jaipur; second, was the *Dhodar Ali* linking Kamargoan and Jaypur, and the third the *Naga Ali*, which led to the vicinity of Sibsagar in the Naga Hills.⁶⁰ In fact, Jenkins has had actually encountered these roads when he writes of 'well-raised *alees* (roads) of great height and breath' in the country.⁶¹

For constructing a regular road from Mohong Dezooh towards the Naga Hills, Lt Bigge, assistant Agent to Francis Jenkins, hoped to engage 'a large number of coolies' from Tularam Senappati's country. In addition, Lt Bigge proposed to settle 10 to 15 Mikir families along the road, 'for the purpose of clearing the road and for the future.'⁶² Repair and maintenance of roads between the *thannahs* and markets, was committed to the district magistrate.⁶³ 'Broad and expensive roads', writes Moffat Mills were

⁵⁷ F&PD. 19 April 1841. Nos. 106, F.C.

⁵⁸ Mills, *Report*, p. 22

⁵⁹ F&PD. 19 April 1841. Nos. 106, F.C.

⁶⁰ Jean Deloche, *Transport and Communication in India prior to Steam locomotion. Vol.1* (Delhi: OUP, 1993), p. 111.

⁶¹ Mills, *Report*, p. b1. It had served 'all the purposes of *bunds* (dykes) protecting the crops from inundation.' These dykes were crossed by highways, which were again joined by smaller *bunds* graduating down and connecting the mouzahs, villages and fields. Jenkins lamented that 'these roads have been almost neglected by our government.'

⁶² See 'Lt Bigge's Tour in 1841', in Verier Elwin, *The Nagas in the Nineteenth Century*, p. 230.

⁶³ Mills, *Report*, p. b1.

unnecessary in the country since ‘wheeled carriages are unknown’. Instead he pushed for plans ‘to open up the jungles in the upper and the middle Assam: wherever the jungles are opened, the people settle along the road on the new wastelands.’⁶⁴ Building roads was then an attempt to reconcile the various different colonial interests within a single enterprise. Through its rhetoric of infrastructural improvement, the EIC officials hoped to resolve contending dispute within its own establishment. On the other, by building roads across the landscape the colonial enterprise sought to transform the ethnic landscape through spectacles of its physical infrastructure.

By improving access and occupying these frontier tracts would enable the company *Raj* ‘to connect lower Assam with Sadiya by a good practicable road ... for our troops towards the most vulnerable portion’s of our frontier, the passes to Ava and the Singpho country.’⁶⁵ However, to secure and open up communication with the Ava kingdom through the hills British officials confronted a landscape straddled by complex networks of routes. A flurry of activities involving travel journeys across the hill tracts between Assam and Burma assumed importance during the early nineteenth century. Connecting the Hill tracts between Assam and Burma then assumed an important thread in official rhetoric.

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The ‘game of routes’ between Assam and Burma

Spurred on by the commercial and strategic concerns, collecting reliable geographical information on routes became a prime concern. From its base in Sadiya in upper Assam, Company officials moved across the hill tracts between Assam and Burma to gather information on the lines of communication and logistical resources. As early as 1825, Captain Bedford and Lt. Wilcox and Burlton, employed in the Company Revenue Surveys, had surveyed the routes from Assam to Tibet and Yunnan through the country in the extreme north of Burma inhabited by the Khamptis and the Mishmis.⁶⁶ Yet another

⁶⁴ Ibid., p. b1.

⁶⁵ F&PD. 16 May 1838. Nos. 53-58, P.C.

⁶⁶ Baruah, *David Scott in North-East India*, p. 125. This route however could not be followed beyond the borders of the Khamptis as the survey officials ‘feared to rouse the jealousy and suspicion of the Burmese’;

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important route surveyed was the Hukawng valley route, part of which lay in the Singpho territory, which had 'both military and commercial value.' On this route David Scott, the first Agent to the Governor General on the North-East frontier Bengal, had placed 'his greatest hopes' of improving trade with Burma, while inducing the Singphos 'in peaceful pursuits.' Three months before his death, on 18 May 1831, this is what he wrote to the government:

The evidence lately given before the two houses of parliament in regard to the obstructions offered to the introduction of British woollens from Canton into the interior of China by the imposition of high duties seems fully to confirm the expediency of endeavoring to open other direct channels of communication with the inland provinces of that empire from some of which Sadiya is distant little more than 200 miles.⁶⁷

Testifying to the imperial vision of opening up China *via* an overland route from upper Assam, a series of explorations were conducted during the 1830s and 1850s. On an information gathering mission on access routes in the south-east frontier of Assam, Captain Hannay was informed, by 'Chinese Musalmans', of the Bamo (Bhamo) route as the 'safest and the best route' to China. Bamo, as Hannay informs us, was also known as 'the emporium of a trade' between the Burmese and Chinese, 'in which our aspiring merchants were most anxious to share.'⁶⁸ In the search for access routes, information gathering from the local population however often proved to be a futile exercise. The people of Bamo having been strongly impressed with the idea that Captain Hannay's only object was 'to find a road by which British troops might penetrate to China,' refused any information 'regarding the routes into that country.' Despite this setback, the narrative informs us of 'the Chinese themselves' informing Hannay of 'several passes from Bamo into Yunan.'⁶⁹

Also see Lt. R. Wilcox, 'Memoir of a Survey of Assam and the Neighbouring Countries, executed in 1825-6-7-8', in *Selection of Papers*; For a comprehensive account on the military affairs and commercial routes between Assam and Burma and on the passes between Assam and Bhutan, see Captain R.B. Pemberton, *Report on the Eastern Frontier of British India* (1835; Guwahati: Department of Historical and Antiquarian Studies, 1991).

⁶⁷ David Scott quoted in Baruah, *David Scott in North-East India*, p. 126-30. By April 1826, messengers from the Chinese-Burmese border area brought information to the effect that there would be a considerable demand for woollen cloth and other European manufacturers in their country, in exchange for which they could give horses and silver. However while the first of the whole consignment was plundered, 'the want of any officer to supervise the business led to the venture failing through.'

⁶⁸ *Selections of papers*, p. 108.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 93.

While mapping routes remained the prime engagement of the colonial officials, yet locating areas of key raw materials and resources was also an important motive in this search for access. For instance, W. Griffith, Assistant Surgeon of the Madras Establishment, on a journey from upper Assam to Ava in 1836, came across numerous 'petroleum wells' in the vicinity of the Naga Hills, along the Kamrup River.⁷⁰ While in 1838, Captain H. Vetch, the Political Agent of upper Assam, was reportedly struck by the 'discovery' of coal beds all along the north bank of the Brahmaputra.⁷¹

Meanwhile, in 1838, Francis Jenkins wrote to the Secretary, Government of India (Secret Department), proposing aggressive measures to improve access across the Naga Hills. Such a step he hoped would help the Company secure 'a large tract of country abounding in tea tracts, excellent coal, Iron ore and petroleum.'⁷² In securing information of the oil wells, Company officials, anticipated by nearly a century the British interest in oil and the foundation of the Assam oil.⁷³ By the 1840s a series of explorations confirmed astounding amount of resources in the North-East frontier. William Robinson informs us in 1841 of an extensive coal bearing tract, extending from the Singpho Hills, along the Naga Hills, Cachar Hills, Jaintia Hills, including Pandua and Sylhet. Springs or wells of petroleum were found in the vicinity of these coal fields. In his useful journal, brine springs were located in Borhat, Nagahat, and Jaipur, while 'the best-iron' was found in the Bor-Khampti country.⁷⁴ In part, these 'discoveries' of 'untapped resources', being a mere pretext for domination, operated with a notion which was pervasive during the early nineteenth century; that it was a 'moral obligation' of the Europeans, its destiny and duty

⁷⁰ *Selection of Papers*, p. 125. The places near the petroleum wells were found to be 'free from shrubs.' The petroleum, reports, Griffith, is of all colours, from green to bluish white, or graying clay and water.

⁷¹ 'Report on the coal Beds of Assam', *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal* (JASB), vol. VII. Part I (January-June, 1838).

⁷² F&PD. 16 May 1838. Nos. 53-58, P.C; F&PD. 7 February 1851. Nos. 192 – 207, F.C. Pushing for early intervention and occupation of the country, colonial officials claimed that: '...five thousand square miles of a most fertile tracts of country is rendered utterly useless by the inroads of these Nagas.'

⁷³ The Assam Oil Company Ltd was formed in 1898, in London with a capital for 3, 10, 000 pounds. See P.C. Baruah, *The Saga of Assam Oil: From Nahorpung to Numaligarh, 1825-1999* (Guwahati: Spectrum publication, 1999), p. 42. For a similar instance in the case of Burma, see C.A. Bayly, *Empire and Information*, p. 118.

⁷⁴ Robinson, *An Account of Asam*, pp. 30-35.

to develop the resources of the globe.⁷⁵ These ‘discoveries’ gave added urgency in the colonial enterprise of securing and regulating access to sites of future resources.

By 1840s Company officials were asserting territorial control over strategic nodes of communication networks. Major Francis Jenkins, letter to G.A. Bushby, Secretary to the Government of India in the Political Department, in June 1842, subscribe to such a view. With a strong post at Ningroo and ‘establishing our authority over the Naga Hills in advance’, Jenkins assures Bushby that these strategies will give ‘the means of commanding the passes towards Ava,’ and ‘will contribute to our military strength and political supremacy.’⁷⁶ In addition, the native’s trade routes or passes increasingly came under official surveillance. In 1842, Francis Jenkins recorded the following principal *dwards* or passes in the Naga hills - the Konghon, Teeroo, Bheetur, Namsang, Joboka, Banfera, Moothon, Borhath and Jeypore etc. Interestingly, the roads along these routes were generally found in very good condition, twenty to thirty feet wide, and shaded lightly with bamboos on each side. Expressing his fascination on the native roads, Jenkins notes of encountering hardly any ‘swamp throughout our journey’.⁷⁷ ‘From the Changnoee village, in the Naga Hills, Francis Jenkins had earlier seen roads and villages in many directions with a pass leading thence to Burma.’⁷⁸

Opening an access route to China was a vital concern for the EIC. However, British policy makers were wary about route development towards China, especially across the Burmese territory. Holding a fragile frontier, the EIC policy also consisted largely of preventing the Burmese from gaining any access from the Assam hills.⁷⁹ For in the politics of access, the Ava kingdom had its own project of expansion by building access routes into the Northeast frontier. In 1840, disturbing news reached Calcutta on

⁷⁵ Adas, *Machines as the Measure of Men*, p. 220.

⁷⁶ *Selection of Papers*, p. 256.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 261.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 261 & 309.

⁷⁹ As Frederick Cooper and Ann Laura Stoler argue that in imperial projects ‘there are inherent tensions, which reveal competing agendas and doubts about the legitimacy of the venture. Their study focuses on the tensions of empire ‘as a way of exploring how imperial projects were made possible and vulnerable at the same time.’ See Frederick Cooper and Ann Laura Stoler (ed.), *Tensions of Empire: Colonial Culture in a Bourgeoisie World* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 1997), p. 6.

the reported intention of the Ava king 'to open a road to Assam through the Naga Hills from the Kyendwin (Chindwin) River.'⁸⁰ Roads, in this context would then mean that, it could be built and used from either direction by the competing powers. With Burma still regarded as an expanding empire, the British military strategist, having experienced serious setbacks in the first Anglo-Burmese war of 1824-26, wished to avoid another such repetition at this stage.⁸¹ A flurry of correspondence between officials in Calcutta and Assam tried to play down the issue as simply 'rumours'.⁸² Writing to Captain Vetch, the Political Agent of Upper Assam in 1840, Captain Jenkins correspondence reads:

If true [of opening up a road] and the Burmese has really intentions of a hostile move in the direction of Jorehut ...any considerable body of Burmese would be placed at our mercy if they made the attempt by Barpulhing as they would not only have to fight their way among the Nagas but opposed in the rear from Muneepor and if not able to maintain themselves at Nagira must perish and from starvation in the forest at the foot of the Naga Hills.⁸³

In other words the above statement would mean that the ecology and the 'savage' tribes inhabiting the region afforded a 'natural' barrier or 'antiroutes' against Burmese invasions.⁸⁴ This notion of the hills as a 'natural' barrier against 'hostile neighbours' would continue to shape imperial policy on communication infrastructure in the frontier.

⁸⁰ F&PD. 29 June 1840. Nos. 109-111.

⁸¹ Douglas Peers argues that the Burma war was 'the costliest war fought to date' and most controversial. It not only failed to secure any tangible benefits for either the colonial state or the troops and officers in the army. The regime was shot through with so many flaws and inconsistencies that effective military operation was made less certain. See Douglas Peers, *Between Mars and Mammon: Colonial Armies and the garrison state in India, 1819-35* (London and New York: I.B. Tauris Publication, 1995), pp.144-183; For an illustration on the crucial role of information order in the Burmese war See, 'Misinformation and failure on the fringes of empire' in C.A. Bayly, *Empire and Information: Intelligence gathering and social communication in India, 1780-1870* (Cambridge: CUP, 1996). C.A. Bayly suggests that, the impermeability of the Burmese information order 'remained strikingly meager into the later nineteenth century.

⁸² F&PD. 29 June 1840. Nos. 109-111. Francis Jenkins assures Captain Gordon, Political Agent to Manipur, and Lt Brodie and Bigge of the reports as just 'rumours', even as he writes of the impending threat: 'the only bad consequences from the opening of such a road should it be actually under construction would be the alarm of the Assamese. For as regards military operations the load would be of more consequence to us than to the Burmese with their light equipped levies. But with the ready means possessed by us of moving on and from Muniapore by Cachar ... we need not comprehend that the Burmese will ever venture to invade Assam in any force. All that we have to guard against in my opinion are desultory irruptions of the border tribes and insidious counsel can do aid to our own discontented chiefs.'

⁸³ *Ibid.*

⁸⁴ In January 1846, Captain S.F. Hannay, Commanding 1st Assam Light Infantry writes to Captain T. Brodie, Principal Assistant Commissioner, Sibpore on the importance of the Naga Hills as a 'buffer',

While explorations were a major strategy to capture, or deny the Burmese the access routes to the Assam hills, the explorations also added a new element to the British military strategies. Henceforth, officials sought to position military outposts at sites most 'commandable' to monitor movements along the frontier. At the same time, the EIC devised stratagems to defend all possible land avenues of advance towards Assam. To better 'intelligence gathering on the Burma situation' a station was established at Jeypoor by Captain S.F. Hannay, commanding first Assam Light Infantry. Through this station he hope to 'have an opportunity of watching the Namsang Nagas to the Kyendwen River' as well as gaining a knowledge of that important route.⁸⁵ Of special concern for the Company officials was the close proximity of Burma with the tea gardens in Assam. Company officials were aware that an engagement with the Burmese would be injurious to the economic interest of the Company. Yet EIC officials were also aware of the strategic importance of holding this route. A possession of this route would place the British at the shortest possible land route or doorway to China and Southeast Asia. The route would also enhance British commercial and political influence, providing a defensive flank in Southeast Asia.

Against this Burmese anxiety, Company officials argued for an open policy in the development of routes across China. In his communication to G.A. Bushby, Secretary, foreign department, in 1846, Francis Jenkins argued that nothing should 'impede a communication with Ava'. To him such a measure was considered

in the highest degree desirable ... whenever our relations with the government of that country will permit ... we should take every measure in our power to remove the jealousy of the Naga tribes to the opening up of a road between Ava and Assam and endeavour to establish a perfectly free intercourse between the two countries, an intercourse that could not but be attended with highly beneficial results to both.⁸⁶

especially during the First Anglo-Burmese war: 'it is a known fact it was only the difficulty attending the subjugation of the Nagas that prevented the Burmese passing into the assam by the heads of Dikho River instead of being obliged to take the circuitous and difficult route by the valley of Hookong, the principal supplies for the army having been brought up the Kyendwen to Kaksa, a point higher up than the heads of the Dikho.' See *Selection of Papers*, p. 315.

⁸⁵ F&PD. 4 April 1838. Nos. 112-113.

⁸⁶ *Selection of papers*, p. 309.

Already, in the knowledge of the EIC officials, an open road existed from upper Assam into Burma, which further extended into China. Along this route a considerable trade in Chinese and Burmese manufactures was carried out.⁸⁷ The Burmese were generally believed to have entered Assam by this route in 1824 i.e., during the Anglo-Burmese war, and by which they returned back. Leaving Sadiya by Bisa the line crosses the Hukawng valley to the town of Munkung on the Irrawady. Here merchants both from Ava and China disembarked their goods and conveyed their exchanged goods on mules; on their way crossing the Shans country, and thence into the Chinese province of Yunan.⁸⁸ An overland route further linked China with Bhutan via Assam. From Peking, caravans packed with supplies, especially tea passed through Burma, Guwahati and journeyed thence to Bhutan. An estimated amount of Rs 7 lakhs was assumed to be the volume of trade in tea alone.⁸⁹ While Company officials expressed optimism of tapping into this trade, on the other, its intension was also aimed to tap into already established routes by land from Assam to China. Interestingly, the imperial quest to connect Assam with Burma and thence to China, as we shall see below, also coincided with the evangelical imagining of a “celestial highway” to China.

Evangelical imagining: the “celestial highway”

Immediately after the first Opium war in 1842, the Evangelicals turned their gaze to the celestial empire of China, *via* Assam. In other words, the Opium war pulled the missionary gaze towards not only a sea route to China, but also by land; and here Assam seems to offer a highway to the celestial kingdom. As part of its Asian strategy evangelicals imagined of planting ‘a chain of mission stations ... among kindred races: commencing in Siam and stretching through Tenasserim provinces and the British Empire into Assam thereby encircling the western frontiers of China with influences and

⁸⁷ Robinson, *Geography*, p. 247.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 248. Robinson estimates this route as ‘extremely tedious’ and can only be followed by a trading people who traffic as they go along.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 134-35.

agencies that must sooner or later penetrate into hitherto impassable barriers of China.⁹⁰ A 'double interest', argues David Zou, envisioned the evangelistic enterprise: 'to make enquiry about the culture of the tea plants and then carry the gospel to China beneath the protection afforded by the East India Company.'⁹¹

As early as 1835, Rev. John Mack in his letter to the Church Mission Society, London presented the commercial possibilities of Assam, 'particularly mentioning the cultivation of tea.' He predicted that, 'Assam could become a highway of commerce between China and the East India Company's realm.'⁹² On a similar vein, Nathan Brown and O.T. Cutter, both American Baptist Missionaries, who arrived at Sadiya in Upper Assam in 1836 also applied to the Board of Trade in 1841 suggesting the possibility of opening an experimental farm at Sadiya.⁹³ At a time when the retrenchment measures of the Company's government made any heavy expenditure on any commercially unprofitable field impossible, Nirode K. Baruah suggest that the voluntary services of the missionaries was to be encouraged and exploited on humanitarian grounds.⁹⁴

Since its occupation by the East India Company in July 1834, the American Baptist Mission (ABM) saw the Sadiya station as 'a step towards entering China from the West.' Rev P.H. Moore reminds us that the celestial highway to Tibet and Western China, enhanced its value 'from a missionary, as well as political and commercial point of view.'⁹⁵ In the scheme of things local situation also favoured this venture. Having convinced by C.A. Bruce, Jenkins corresponded with the ABM home board in America by making proposals for new work 'sweetened with offers of financial assistance.' The

⁹⁰ Lal Dena, *Christian Missions and Colonialism. A study of missionary movement in Northeast India with particular reference to Manipur and Lushai Hills, 1894-1947* (Shillong: Vendrame Institute, 1988), p. 22.

⁹¹ David Vumlallian Zou, 'Colonial Discourse and Evangelical Imagining on Northeast India', *Religion and Society*. Vol. 48, No.2. (June 2003), p. 60; for a comprehensive history on Christian mission in Northeast India See Frederick S. Downs, *Christianity in Northeast India. Historical Perspective* (New Delhi: Indian society for promoting Christian Knowledge, 1983)

⁹² Baruah, *David Scott in North-East India*, p. 188.

⁹³ Sponsored by Francis Jenkins this undertaking was sanctioned by the Board. Accordingly it was desired to send two or more 'pious and intelligent families' of suitable qualifications whenever such families could be found. This undertaking, according to Baruah, however never materialized due to the insurrection of the Khamptis. *Ibid.*, p. 188-89.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 189.

⁹⁵ *The Assam Mission of The American Baptist Missionary Union. Papers and Discussions of the Jubilee Conference held in Nowgong, December 18-29, (1886)*, p.18 (hereafter *Jubilee papers*)

ABM readily accepted the offer as they saw in it the prospect of opening the 'gateway to the celestial empire' at no distant future.⁹⁶ However, in spite of such ventures Sadiya turned out to be a barred door rather than an open gateway to China. The American civil war imposed serious financial constraints on the American missionary enterprise in the Northeast. The spirals and unrest generated by the Company's penetration of the region dampened the evangelical vision of reaching out to China. At the 50th Jubilee celebration of the American Mission in the Northeast frontier, Rev P.H. Moore soberly remarked:

The ABM union occupied Assam in 1836 simply as a step towards entering China from the west. God turned us back, and has kept us here now fifty years. Was it because He saw that it was necessary that we first evangelize this valley and surrounding hills as a base of supply for more extended operations in the regions beyond which are still unknown quantity in all our Geographies, both physical and moral?⁹⁷

Ultimately the celestial highway stopped short in the hills. The Rev Miles Bronson had to content himself with his mission among the Singphos and Namsang Nagas in 1838. Imagining Assam, as a highway to China is a recurrent theme produced in the Missionary's narrative. The rhetoric of missionizing the landscape seemed to dissociate the American evangelical enterprise from the drives of British territorial aggrandizement. However their expansive narratives tended to advance the imperial agenda. Because in their depictions of uninhabited or sparsely inhabited places, they effectively 'erased' native people, thus encouraging the EIC to view the landscape as ripe for colonization. It implicated them in the process of colonial dispossession and resource appropriation.⁹⁸

⁹⁶ Dena, *Christian Missions*, pp. 22-24.

⁹⁷ *Jubilee papers, 1886*, p. 18. Another reason put forward is the missionaries failing health and their frequent removal from place to place contributed to the slow progress of converts, while on the home front, debts accumulated upon the missions treasury which heavily told upon the progress of the missionary work on the field.

⁹⁸ I draw here the concept from Marie Louise Pratt. In her 'anti-conquest' concept Pratt labels the 'seeing man' as the 'main protagonist – he whose imperial eyes passively look out and posses.' The term 'anti-conquest' basically refers to the strategies of representation whereby European bourgeoisie subjects seek to secure their 'innocence' in the same moment as they assert European hegemony. See Pratt, *Imperial Eyes*, p. 7.

Making room for tea⁹⁹: Mapping raids, Mapping people

The idea that expansion was a defensive response to ‘raids and aggressions’ runs through and is replete in official narratives. While imperial vision imagined a highway to China, officials saw vistas of tea cultivation stretching out ‘to Munipore on the south, and on the east to the Patkoi range and the borders of Burmah and China.’¹⁰⁰ By the 1840s there was large-scale incorporation of land in the state managed space. The land grab profoundly disrupted the native’s access to reserves of resources. In the process of ‘making room for tea’, grazing fields were usurped and planters encroached upon the *jhum* rights of the tribal shifting cultivators. It also disrupted the established trade routes and the exchange networks of the indigenous communities by fencing existing public roads; while villagers were denied access through the tea gardens.¹⁰¹

Expanding plantations soon came into direct conflict with the Nagas and other frontier ‘tribes’; contestation against colonial intrusion saw numerous attacks on the tea plantations and valley settlements.¹⁰² As David Ludden argues, ‘mobile societies and expansive, shifting social spaces resist the imposition of boundaries by states’.¹⁰³ Settling the frontier then emerged as an enduring colonial project, both to augment profit and to

⁹⁹ I borrow the phrase ‘making room for tea’ from Sanjib Baruah, See Sanjib Baruah, ‘Clash of resource use regimes in Colonial Assam: A Nineteenth century puzzle revisited’, *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, vol. 28, No. 3 (April, 2001), pp. 109-24. Sanjib Baruah study analyses the impact of colonial land settlement project in nineteenth century Assam locating it within the larger meaning of colonial rule in terms of the shifts in the global geography of resource use.

¹⁰⁰ Rowney, *Wild Tribes*, p. 99.

¹⁰¹ Amalendu Guha, *Planter-Raj to Swaraj. Freedom Struggle and Electoral Politics in Assam, 1826-1947* (New Delhi: Peoples Publishing House, 1977), pp. 13-15. In 1838, following the Wasteland rules, one hundred acres of land with a forty-five years lease was offered to planters. A decade later, the new Wasteland rules permitted the purchase of land grants of a minimum of five hundred acres with ninety-nine leases; For a general comprehensive history see Percival Griffith, *The History of the Indian Tea Industry* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1967).

¹⁰² During the nineteenth century we can map out a series of violent reactions by the indigenous communities against colonial intrusion. For instance, the Bhutias ‘outrages’ and ‘raids’ in 1828, 1836 and 1854; Abors in 1848, 1858, and the second Abor expedition 1859; Singphos invasion of Sadiya, 1825; the Khasi insurrection 1829 and outbreak 1831; the Sinteng rebellion 1860 and a second rising in 1862; the Garos raids of 1852; renewed raids, 1856 –59; Lushai raids of 1844, 1848, 1849, 1862, 1868-69, 1871, raids on Cachar 1871 etc. See Mackenzie, *History*.

¹⁰³ David Ludden, ‘History Outside Civilization and the Mobility of South Asia’. *South Asia*, vol. XVII, no.1 (1994), p.18. David Ludden argues that, ‘the idea of civilization radically distorts social and cultural space, making South Asia seem closed and sedentary when it is open and mobile.’

colonize the frontier. It was further strengthened by the violent encounters. Officials began to see the hills not merely as they were but as they might be, once they were successfully situated in the imperial scheme of things.

The 'economy of objects and identities', to Edward Said 'depends on the orders, systematic and differentiated assignments of *place*.' This spatial metaphoric he argues 'is a vehicle for the fabrication of identity'. The *poetics of space*, then operates 'through the universal practice of designating in one's mind a familiar space which is "ours" and an unfamiliar space beyond "ours" which is "theirs"'.¹⁰⁴ An examination of the *indexes*, of the *Foreign and Political Department*, in the National Archive shows how entries under Naga Hills are replete with accounts of "raids" and "aggressions" committed by 'wild tribes' inhabiting 'the forest clad mountainous tracts'.¹⁰⁵ Concomitant with the raids, by 1840s the EIC were buckling down to the task of gaining extensive territory in which to set up tea plantations. In responding to the native's reaction, Company officials had to however confront and determine the complex ethnic landscape of the hills.¹⁰⁶

To deal with the population mobility around them, in terms of the 'raids' and 'outrages', colonial sensibilities aimed to rationalized the project by fixing populations in space. As James Scott has argued that enhancing the legibility of the rural landscape and population originates in a constellation of seemingly disparate processes. Sedentarizing people on the basis of categories, 'hillsmen' and 'plainsmen' simplified the raids (in face of considerable resistance) and made the landscape more legible. This essential divide was further strengthened by projecting the raids as a 'necessary consequence of their

¹⁰⁴ Quoted in Gregory, *Geographies*, p. 313.

¹⁰⁵ For example see F&PD. 6 March 1837. Nos. 1-4, P.C; F&PD. 21 November 1838. Nos. 104-108, P.C; F&PD. 6 February 1839. Nos. 60-61, P.C; F&PD. 1 February 1845. Nos. 146-150, F.C; F&PD. 7 June 1850. Nos. 140-143, F.C;F&PD-A. December 1862. Nos. 392 -394; F&PD-A. June 1865. Nos. 193-195; F&PD-A. August 1865. Nos. 66 -67; F&PD-A. December 1868. Nos. 418-424; L.W. Shakespear, *History of the Assam Rifles* (Gauhati: Spectrum Publications, 1980; first published 1929), p.2.

¹⁰⁶ Julian Jacobs, *The Nagas. The Hill people of Northeast India: Society, Culture and the Colonial Encounter* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1990). Julian Jacobs have argued that ethnographers and missionaries engaged in the Naga Hills confronted an 'ethnographic chaos': 'Hundreds if not thousands of small villages seemed to be somewhat familiar to each other but also very different, by no means always sharing the same customs, political system, art or even language', p. 23.

mode of life and nature ... prompted always by the personal grievances.'¹⁰⁷ In the colonial imaginings, the hillsmen were then perceived as a serious threat to the plantations and the valley settlements.

By the 1840s movements in the frontier became increasingly associated with identifications based on 'race'. Characterizing the Angamis as 'cunning, treacherous, vindictive and warlike', colonial officials in addition, identified the Angamis as 'the tribes ... having laid waste our border villages we are now directly interested'- the tea lands.¹⁰⁸ A descriptive image of a Naga 'raider' is represented in this Mackenzie's report: 'Ikkari ...the chief of Mozemah, who had led most of the raiding parties in Cachar, a perfect savage, wild and suspicious, wearing a collar fringed with hair of his enemies' scalps, came down to see for himself what the camp was like.'¹⁰⁹ Constructed primarily with the aim of supplying military intelligence, these early observations operated to make the native warriors seem *less fearsome* by making their unusual feature familiar. Such description was an early example of ethnography that sought to express the bizarreness of the 'enemy' in order to prevent surprise, terror and military rout.¹¹⁰ The 'exotic costumes' and paraphernalia then became another marker in the identity of a raider, a Naga. These 'costumes', in the process became a chief visible distinguishing characteristic of the Naga 'tribes' in colonial ethnography. There is, furthermore, a crucial link between the hillsmen identity and movement. In a sense, his is an identity dependent on a 'shuttling' between two spaces, the primitive hills retreat and the colonized plains or valley. It cannot exist outside of that spatio-temporal process.

In inscribing the hillsmen identity, the landscape was taken as another marker. The hills came to be characterized as the natural boundaries between the Nagas and the

¹⁰⁷ Sanghamitra Misra, 'The Nature of Colonial intervention in the Naga Hills, 1840 – 1880', *Economic and Political Weekly*, December 19, (1998), p. 3276.

¹⁰⁸ F&PD. 7 February 1851. Nos. 192 – 207, F.C.

¹⁰⁹ Alexander Mackenzie, 'Mackenzie's History', in Elwin, Verrier, *The Nagas in the Nineteenth century*, p. 151.

¹¹⁰ Joyce E. Chaplin has argued that early English colonist in America conceived of the 'native Indians' as people whose quotidian weapons, dress, physique, and movements gave clues to future battle or exchange.' See, 'No Magic Bullets: Archery, Ethnography, and Military Intelligence' in Joyce E. Chaplin, *Subject Matter: Technology, the Body, and Science on the Anglo-American Frontier, 1500-1676* (Massachusetts: Harvard university Press, 2001), p.81.

Assamese Valleys. Writing in 1827, Pemberton's had subscribed to this notion: 'they have in every instance established themselves upon the most inaccessible peaks of the mountainous belt they inhabit'.¹¹¹ Inscribing such stereotypes remained powerful organizers of people's lives and through which as Derek Gregory argues 'places and identities were deterritorialized and reterritorialized.'¹¹² In colonial records and often in post-colonial writings the interaction between the hills and the plains seems to be linked to a series of outrages and raids inflicted on the plainsmen by the Nagas. Yet, this construction of cultural impermeability was belied by centuries of contact through trade and revenue collection. This alternative space can be traced in the colonial writings where there are numerous references to trade links and exchanges between the Brahmaputra valley and the surrounding hills. This circulatory regime that the Naga Hills, were accessible to the people of the plains and the Nagas to the plains. For instance, in 1848 Major Butler writes in his account as follows: 'During the year 1848, a thousand Angami Nagas visited the station of Now-gong, to trade with the merchants in salt and cornelian beads, which they greatly prize and the utmost good will was manifested towards the authorities and the people of the plains.'¹¹³

'As places were identified with groups that occupied and controlled them', David Ludden suggest that, 'geographical areas assumed the character of ethnic territories, large and small. Territory became ethnically identified through traditions of group rank, power and ritual activity as people were identified increasingly with territories that became literally their "home" lands.'¹¹⁴ This grand narrative of history in south Asia provided the first framework for the colonial rationalization project. It informed distinct cultures and identities and perpetuated the idea that hillsmen and plainsmen represented difference in their fixed geographical space.¹¹⁵

¹¹¹ R.B. Pemberton, 'A Singular Race', in Verrier Elwin, p. 42. The ethnic landscape, which distinguished Nagas from the plains people, was further strengthened with the introduction of the Inner Line Permit in 1873.

¹¹² Gregory, *Geographies*, p. 303.

¹¹³ John Butler, *Travels and Adventures. Province of Assam during a residence of fourteen years* (London: Smith, Elder 1855), p. 173.

¹¹⁴ David Ludden, *India and South Asia. A Short History* (Oxford: One World Publication, 2002), p. 99

¹¹⁵ This narratives Ludden argues have 'thus helped to bolster the modern association of national polities with separate domains of world history in Europe, the Middle East, and South Asia.' *Ibid.* , p. 7.

'Local feuds' as a threat and 'Local feuds' as a trope of colonial wars

In this period of advance upon the Northeast frontier, military officials emphasized the need to deploy enough force at the very outset: 'the fastness of the hills are in many ways placed extremely strong and the Nagahs are really brave men accustomed to attempt surprise. The stronger the party the better it will give the Nagahs a good knowledge of our strength and strike a dread as will make the defence of our hills less expensive afterwards.'¹¹⁶ In response to the challenges, military strategist planned to punish 'the Nagas severely in their own villages'. Such a measure it was hoped will eventually 'put a stop to the constant recurrence of their aggression'.¹¹⁷

One important justification for the punitive campaigns to hem in 'wild tribes' was that the EIC had to protect its subject from being taken away as slaves. 'To repress the yearly incursions of the Angami Nagas into Cachar for plunder and slaves' the first expedition was launched in January 1839.¹¹⁸ The Angamis were believed to conduct an active barter economy in slaves. To replenish this trade they were described as having committed depredations far and wide. Ironically, in India, some Company officials had opposed measures to abolish slavery. One of the argument as Radhika Singha suggests, used by the EIC officials in opposing abolitionism in its domains was that slavery in India unlike its American and West Indian counterpart was merely a 'mild domestic servitude'.¹¹⁹ In the context of the Naga Hills, however the cause of abolition could be taken up with far less ambivalence. Here, the anti-slavery cause polished the imperial self-image, enabling the colonial army to claim an altruistic reason for the warfare - to protect its 'subjects'.

¹¹⁶ F&PD. 21 November 1838. Nos. 104-108, P.C; The scheme proposed for the Angami hills was to repress the 'excesses and acts of violence of the Naga tribes and bringing them under proper understanding of the necessity of living on favourable term with all their neighbours.'

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ F&PD. 7 February 1851. Nos. 192 – 207, F.C.

¹¹⁹ Radhika Singha, *A Despotism of Law. Crime and Justice Crime and Justice in Early Colonial India* (Delhi: OUP 1998), pp. 152-162.

A series of military engagements in the Naga Hills during the 1840s and 50s were marked by violent encounters in the form of 'the burning of many villages, the destruction of much grain, the loss of many lives and the confirmed hostility of the whole tribe.'¹²⁰ However, despite early assertions of their superior military technology, it was quite apparent in the moment of contact that the British officials also 'feared the native'. For instance, on their way to Khonoma in 1851, Lt Vincent's detachment suddenly 'panicked' when two spears were suddenly thrown across the path. In the ensuing moment, 'the sepoys began to fire in all direction and in confusion, I regret to say', reports Lt Vincent 'a sepoy of the 2nd Assam Light Infantry was wounded.'¹²¹ Certainly this account relates that the landscape and people seemed terrifyingly unfamiliar. And yet, through these 'small skirmishes' military strategist sought to show the soldiers 'little by little that neither their enemies were invisible nor more valiant than themselves.'¹²²

In one of the dramatic confrontation in the Naga Hills, which took place on the 8th February 1851, Kekrima, an Angami village east of Kohima, sent two messengers to the camp of Captain Vincent. Offering a trial of strength, they handed over a handsome spear to Vincent saying: 'your *sipahees* are flesh and blood as well as ourselves, come and fight man to man, and here is a specimen of our weapons.'¹²³ From this statement, I would speculate that the Nagas were trying to establish a more equal ground for engagement, by sharing weapons against its enemy.¹²⁴ Nevertheless, determined to suppress the 'disorder' in the hills and above all 'to uphold the name and honour of the government', Captain Reid the commanding officer, 'at once accepted the challenge.' As the battle commenced 'our friendly Nagas fighting with the greatest desperation and in the heat of battle attempted to cut off the heads of the Nagas as they killed them.' In the ensuing engagement between the Nagas the colonial *sepahees* intervenes in the form of the first

¹²⁰ Mackenzie, *History*, p. 88.

¹²¹ F&PD. 7 February 1851. Nos. 192-207, F.C. Lt Vincent further complained that '50 shots have been uselessly expended.' What was more regrettable, he remarked, 'was that I gave the enemy intimation of my whereabouts'.

¹²² Here I draw the concept from Joyce E. Chaplin's study on the early American colonialist encounter with the 'Native Indians'. To guard against the 'panicked fear' British military strategist staged 'small skirmishes' which would show soldiers that 'neither their enemies were invisible nor valiant than themselves.' See Chaplin, *Subject Matter*, pp. 100-102.

¹²³ Mills, *Military Expedition*, p. 142.

¹²⁴ See Chaplin, *Subject Matter*, pp. 107-08.

and second Assam light Infantry (ALI): '(the ALI) soon drove them out of the village, killing and wounding many of them.' Despite this deployment of Nagas on the side of the EIC's forces the encounter is cast as the triumph of a well-organized infantry operation. At the end of the day three hundred Nagas lay killed or wounded as to the attackers, three killed and seven wounded.¹²⁵

Use of superior military technology in such engagement completely changed the balance of power. Also colonial intervention was often projected not as one from outside but rather from within. Categories such as 'friendlies' and 'hostiles' sought to give the impression that the invasion was merely a flurry of reaction against local feuds. In the official narratives the hostiles in a village or hostile villages were identified as perpetrators of outrages and thus subject to serious reparations. This absolved the 'friendlies' from any government exactions, such as supplying food and carriage labor. Local notions of 'feuds' and 'raids' as a site for negotiations were rather interpreted as acts of aggressions on territory over which the EIC had exclusive sovereignty. In the process a different notion of 'war' seeped into the hills. In the colonial notion of 'order' it meant complete subjugation.

Colonial dilemmas and the price of access

Surprisingly, even a decade after hostilities began the British had effected little success in repressing the hillsmen: 'it may not be a matter of surprise with so rude a people that we have not yet succeeded in putting a stop to these aggressions altogether.'¹²⁶ As contingent of troops marched into the hills, the conquerors faced unforeseen difficulties. Lack of information and knowledge of the local routes posed serious problems during the military campaigns. Getting access to food supply remained a recurrent colonial anxiety throughout the period of military encounter. Often 'the whole party suffered from the want of provisions and ... were obliged to march all day through

¹²⁵ Ibid, pp. 143 & 144.

¹²⁶ F&PD. 24 August 1844. Nos. 34 – 41, F.C.

... heavy dark forest'.¹²⁷ If troops were 'badly provided with provisions', there was 'few coolies to convey their baggage and food'. Writing in 1841, Lt Bigge, the Assistant Agent to Jenkins, considered it impossible to provision a force 'of four companies, with two European officers along with six hundred coolies (from the plains) in the hills'. He knew that 'procuring grains and men would result only through coercion.' For already demand for supplies from Paplongmai village have given 'rise to much irritation on the part of the inhabitants'.¹²⁸

Proposed lengthy tours were often abandoned due to logistical constraints imposed by the terrain. Filing his report in 1844, Major Brown Woode is disappointed as he was unable to proceed due 'to non-arrival of rice for his coolies.' The monsoon rains further dampened the progress 'rendering marching in these hills both sickly and harassing.'¹²⁹ Feeling the pressure of its dwindling food supplies officials were cautioned of their military actions during campaigns: 'an indiscriminate destruction of Naga villages cannot be contemplated, as we should destroy our resources and have no claim on the Nagas to supply us with rice.'¹³⁰ And yet, contrary to official rhetoric on 'friendly' Naga villages, help was not always forthcoming. Stationed in Mozumah (Mezoma) village, considered one of the friendlies, Major Butler is disappointed: 'although they have apparently abundance of rice they did not bring it for sale ... and we were so pressed having only a few days supply in store.'¹³¹

Logistically, the colonial army encountered great difficulty while on the move 'in a woody and mountainous country.' With huge contingents of coolies and followers, when opposed the army had to 'suffer serious loss without the possibility of being able to injure the enemy.'¹³² Military maneuvers in the hills were as such always uncomfortable for the colonial officials. 'The heavy forest ... would be an obstruction to our movement and advantage to those of the rude enemies we may have to encounter' writes Jenkins

¹²⁷ Mills, *Military Expeditions*, p. 114.

¹²⁸ F&PD. 19 April 1841. Nos. 106, F.C.

¹²⁹ F&PD. 24 August 1844. Nos. 34 – 41, F.C.

¹³⁰ Ibid.

¹³¹ F&PD. 7 February 1851. Nos. 192-207, F.C.

¹³² Butler, *Travels and Adventures*, p. 200.

while contemplating an expedition on the southeast frontier.¹³³ Unable to make the frontier secure, officials considered interdicting travels into the hills. In their mentality the hills remained dangerous ‘until the Angamis be brought properly under control.’¹³⁴

Setting up outpost with connecting roads was a crucial matter of concern: ‘without the protection of military guards the tea on this neighborhood will neither be worked safely or with profit.’¹³⁵ A new organizational technology was proposed ‘by raising irregular troops for their defence against ...repeated aggression of the Nagas.’ A body of Caharees, a ‘tribe’ living in the eastern part of North Cachar, was considered appropriate as Jenkins found them to be ‘a robust and manly race, acclimatized to the hills and could subsist as they are accustomed to, on the produce of the country.’¹³⁶ Already a local militia comprising of the Dhoeeahs and Kamptis was proposed to protect ‘the coolies and workmen at the tea gardens ... and for sending about the country when necessary.’¹³⁷

Both to hem in and to open up communication with the Nagas, officials planned to construct a road towards Dhemapore (Dimapur). The location attracted the officials as it was close to Nagura, a market frequented by the Nagas. In addition the country was well cultivated with the river being navigable upto Dhemapore.¹³⁸ Earlier in 1838, military strategist considered the Naga Hills as affording a strong position. Acquisition of the hills would ‘secure the whole of Assam with a small force from any attempt of our ambitious neighbours (here Burma).’¹³⁹ With a permanent post in the Angami country, official’s aimed to ‘command all the Angami country’. Pushing for rigorous military patrolling of the hills, permanent outposts were planned connected with good roads. From the Angami country officials hoped to open up ‘an easy line of communication’, which would connect Assam and Manipore.¹⁴⁰

¹³³ F&PD. 16 May 1838. Nos. 53 – 58, P.C.

¹³⁴ F&PD. 19 April 1841. Nos. 106, F.C.

¹³⁵ F&PD. 4 April 1838, 112-13, P.C.

¹³⁶ F&PD. 21 November 1838. Nos. 104 – 108, P.C.

¹³⁷ F&PD. 4 April 1838. Nos. 112-113, P.C.

¹³⁸ F&PD. 24 August 1844. Nos. 34 – 41, F.C.

¹³⁹ F&PD. 16 May 1838. Nos. 53 – 58, P.C.

¹⁴⁰ F&PD. 19 April 1841. Nos. 106. F.C.

Following the conclusion of the tenth military expedition in 1851, there appears to have been much debate over the immediate objective of colonial rule in the hills. The result was a gradual change in the British military and political strategy. Outright conquest became more distant as the political struggles dragged on. Suggestions for the establishment of a permanent military post in the hills, with the view of 'effecting progressive reform'; constructing roads, which would make the hills easily accessible, were countered by arguments which urged a complete and immediate abandonment of the hills.¹⁴¹ Ultimately, on 31st January 1851, F. Halliday, the secretary to the GOI, directed Jenkins for 'immediate withdrawal of all the troops to Dhemapore beyond which no force is to be maintained.'¹⁴² In 1853, the government further withdrew the outpost to Assaloo, in North Cachar.¹⁴³ The *Pioneer*, an English based newspaper in Bengal, in an article on 24th March 1870 assessed the early Anglo-British relations in the following words:

Baffled at length by the inveterate savagery of the people and the difficulties of their hills the government fell back on a policy of absolute non-interference and defence; and even the imperial Dalhousie emphatically pronounced *the game not worth the candle*. We had *nothing* to gain he said by annexing a wild people and their barren hills. So we relegated them to a kind of political *Coventry*.¹⁴⁴

Until the beginning of 1880, the Nagas were able to limit the penetration of the British army. Thus in 1851, Captain John Butler, considered to be one of the most 'experienced' military officer of the time have to say this: 'there is very little prospect indeed of restraining such an enemy to whom every mountain torrents is a highway and no forest however dense is impassable by any system of defensive post that we could invest.'¹⁴⁵ Dodging the military posts, the Nagas continued to 'infiltrate' the plains and directly hit the British plantations and settlements. Mobility and efficacy of the colonial troops were

¹⁴¹ F&PD. 7 February 1851. Nos. 192 – 207, F.C.

¹⁴² Ibid.

¹⁴³ Piketo Sema, *British Policy and Administration in Nagaland, 1881-1947* (New Delhi: Scholar Publishing House, 1992), p. 8.

¹⁴⁴ Mackenzie, *History*, p. 88. The Governor General, Lord Dalhousie, wrote his minute of the 21st February as follows: 'Our future policy ought to be confined to our own frontier, to protect it, as it could and ought to be protected, never meddle in fights and feuds of these savages, to encourage trade with them so long as they were peaceful towards us and rigidly to exclude them from all communication either to sell or to buy on their becoming turbulent or troublesome.'

¹⁴⁵ F&PD. 7 February 1851. Nos. 192-207, F.C.

further challenged as they negotiated with the native paths. Officials often complained of the native paths as Major Butler remarks in this instance: 'our feet were terribly lacerated and bruised by walking barefooted over the rolling stones; and few of us in a long life probably will easily forget the pain and suffering of the days march.'¹⁴⁶ Officials also encountered difficulty in their surveillance of the Nagas: 'but to distinguish the guilty from the innocent is exceedingly difficult'.¹⁴⁷ To add to this the 'friendly' Mozumah village chief, in his conference with Jenkins, after the tenth military expedition, 'showed no desire for our permanently occupying the country'.¹⁴⁸ Even as the British army retreated after the military debacle in the Naga Hills, it would soon recast its colonizing gaze on the hills.

Conclusion

In the search for an alternative access to a global phenomena, tea, the Northeast frontier became a site of transition from the idea of an 'isolated periphery' to a 'strategic space'. The frontier as a contested space is then appropriated and reconfigured by the colonial regime through interventions and interactions in the politics and culture of the colonized region. By 1860s the British *Raj* had firmly secured its eastern empire with the successful conclusion of the second Anglo-Burmese war of 1852-53 and the second Opium war in 1856-1860. A significant intervention in the Northeast frontier during this phase was the introduction of steam communication between Calcutta and Gauhati in 1847. Steam communication now provided a safe and speedy communication to the Assam Company and to all residents and persons engaged in commercial pursuits in the province.¹⁴⁹ With steamers as an emerging 'tools of empire', both for commercial and strategic concerns, I speculate that the significance of land routes recedes. Settling the Burmese and the Chinese question also solved the problem of access barriers imposed by

¹⁴⁶ Ibid. , p. 29.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid. , p. 204.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

¹⁴⁹ *Mills, Report*, p. xx. Besides safe and speedy communication with the province and for the transit of treasure and produce, it also offered a practical means for the effectual conveyance of coolies for the tea gardens; F&PD –B. March 1880. Nos. 314-317. In the theatre of war, steamers have been successfully employed in securing victory, especially during the Second Anglo-Burmese war 1852-53, and the second Opium war of 1856-58.

the Chinese empire to trade through Canton. Connectivity, through overland routes, once a thrust in imperial vision now seemed outdated or outlandish in colonial mentality. Nevertheless, the geopolitical connections of the Assam hills in the colonial mentality remained a 'cornerstone of British policy through the nineteenth and the mid-twentieth century.

Around the 1860s, colonial officials began to recast its gaze towards the Naga Hills, even as rhetorics of the 'unsettled frontier' began to gain ground. The defensive strategy was declared to have proved ineffective as the frontier was exposed to 'sudden inroads by the hillsmen.' Further, in the politics of access, the denial of access to routes by the natives remained an imperial irritation. To tame the 'savages', colonial officials engineered a new discourse of 'opening up the hills' by constructing roads. Rumbblings of colonialism in the hills could be heard even as officials rhetorically produced images of a marginalized and isolated hinterland.

Chapter II

The politics of road building in the Naga Hills

A country void of roads, void of supplies, a country of interminable hills, of vast swamps covered with dense forest; save where here and there a speck in the ocean of wilderness reveals a miserable Mikir or Cachari clearance, could not possibly be defended at every point against a foe for whom hill and swamp and forest are resources rather than obstacles. It would be embarking on an unknown sea, for we knew nothing of the tribes beyond the Angamis, except that they are fierce and warlike ... our acquaintance with them should be made gradually and peacefully...He (Lt. Gregory) would advance step by step, yearly opening out a good road as he went, never getting in advance of the road ... until he reached the very center of the most thickly populated part of the country. There... on the slopes of what is described as a most beautiful country... he would build the permanent station. Where roads are necessary, they must be constructed on a simple and experience(d) manner, just sufficient for the opening of the country to the extent actually required.¹

Colonel H.Hopkinson outlining the position, taken by Lt.Gregory, First political officer, Naga Hills 1866

Colonial reports of the 1860s, tended to describe the Nagas as ‘a small and scattered population unable to maintain their own roads in a condition fit for traffic.’² In fact this assessment sprang from the difficulties they themselves had encountered in campaigns of conquest and re-conquest in this region. Knowledge of the native roads routes was limited, and the little that officials managed to assemble did not prepare them for the difficulties they would face in a hill terrain. They also underestimated the problems of engaging with a resourceful enemy who could, at will withdraw almost indefinitely to further ranges of hills.³ In working out ways to open up the Naga Hills through road networks and bring the territory out of its ‘geographical isolation’ a

¹ Alexander Mackenzie, ‘Mackenzie’s History’ in Verrier Elwin, *Nagas in the Nineteenth Century* (Bombay: OUP, 1969), pp. 167-168.

² F&PD-A. January 1882. Nos. 86 – 105.

³ Some such instances are the Mezoma expedition in 1878, the Anglo-Naga war of 1879-1880 and also the Lushai hills expedition in 1869 and the Kuki uprising in 1917-1918. For more see F&PD-A. October 1878. Nos. 7-51; F&PD-A. March 1880. Nos. 331-339D; F&PD-A. December 1869. Nos. 216-292; F&PD. External. B. January 1918. Nos. 34-36.

common presumption was that those living in the Hills were both *living in the past and outside of time*.

In the Naga Hills road building was closely woven into a complex network of colonial practices devised to subjugate space by transforming it into place. To restrain the ‘savage tribes, which infest the frontier’ suggestions were made for constructing roads, which would make the Hills easily accessible.⁴ Since the Nagas, in the official discourse, existed only as ‘pest and nuisance to their neighbours’ prosecuting roads in the hills would ‘wean them gradually from their present habits of plunder and outrage.’⁵ As Patrick Carroll Burke remarks for another context; in ‘engineering culture’ the physical condition of land and people had to be made a target of governing strategies. To incorporate recalcitrant subjects into the state, these strategies involved the incorporation of land, built environment and bodies into governed and governing spaces.⁶ However, the Nagas did not simply step aside to make room for ‘colonial roads.’ By reading colonial records against the grain, the study explores how the incorporation of ‘land, built environment, and bodies’ to the purposes of colonial road-building was contested and negotiated.

From police post to strategic hamlets

Following the re-occupation of Samaguting in 1866, a policy of what I describe as simultaneous *inclusion* and *exclusion* was formulated for the Hills.⁷ The *exclusionist* policy marginalized the Hills separating them from the plains by ‘anti-routes’.⁸ At the same time, through a policy of *inclusion*, there was a sustained drive to set up

⁴ F&PD –B. 1866. Nos. 84 – 85.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Patrick Carroll-Burke, ‘Material Designs: Engineering Cultures and Engineering States, Ireland 1650-1900’, *Theory and Society* (TS) 31: 75-114 (2002), p. 103.

⁷ I have borrowed the concept from Nicholas K. Menzies, ‘Strategic Space: Exclusion and Inclusion in Wildland Policies in Late Imperial China’, *Modern Asian Studies* (MAS) 26, 4 (1994), pp. 719 – 733.

⁸ Here I use the concept of ‘anti-route’ developed by Mahanaz Ispahani in her study. Antiroutes mean ‘any natural or artificial constraint on access, such as mountains, deserts, legal boundaries and tariffs etc. In the context of the Naga Hills the antiroutes was in the form of ‘legal boundaries’, such as the Inner Line Permit of 1873, prohibiting entry around them, which in some parts of Northeast India, continues till this day. Mahanaz. Z. Ispahani, *Roads and Rivals: The Political uses of Access in the Borderlands of Asia* (Ithaca and New York: Cornell University Press, 1989), p. 2.

infrastructure of communication, taxation, and military control, which would enfold the 'strange wild tribes' and secure a borderland for empire.⁹ By 1880 police outposts were established along most of the routes used by the Nagas when leaving their hills 'to trade or raid below.'¹⁰ Police outposts were now set up at Borpathar, Mohan Dijao, Dimapur, Mahurmukh, Hosang Hajoo, Guilon, Gumaigaju, Hangrung, Maibung, and Asaloo etc. to block this circulation between the hills and the plains.¹¹

The dominant objective was to protect and secure the tea plantations in the North Cachar Hills from 'sudden inroads' by the hillsmen. *Patrol paths* were constructed to ensure troop mobility between the chains of outposts 'in the edges of the country which we claim.'¹² Regular patrol between these points was maintained 'to give confidence to the coolies' in the tea gardens.¹³ In 1882, the new Commissioner of Assam, C.S.Elliott proposed a series of 45 frontier posts to provide sentries and border patrols. This measure at one level sought to effectively transform the Nagas from 'a warlike and marauding to a peaceful race'. At another level, the measure Elliott hoped, would 'make our Government more visible to people within the borders.'¹⁴ Roads more than any other state infrastructure symbolizes the states territorial boundedness.

As icons of state power, the police outposts, wrote S.C. Bayly, the Commissioner of Assam, were not 'merely placed ...to protect the roads'.¹⁵ They were also expected 'to protect some of the villages inhabited by what are called *tamed Nagas*.'¹⁶ Designed to pacify and develop 'friendly' settlements, the strategy operated in a sequential phases, to what Michael Mann terms as the logistics of 'concentrated coercion.'¹⁷ Beginning with

⁹ F&PD- A.E. September 1882. Nos.135 –137.

¹⁰ L.W. Shakespear, *History of the Assam Rifles* (first published 1929; Calcutta: Firma KI M, 1989).

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² F&PD-A. March 1880. Nos. 331-395 D.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Cited in Peter Robb, 'The colonial state and construction of Indian Identity: An example of the North East Frontier in the 1880s', *MAS*, vol. 31, No.2. (May 1997), pp. 258 – 259.

¹⁵ F&PD-A. March 1880. Nos. 331-395 D.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ According to Michael Mann, 'concentrated coercion' operates when 'Superpowers' imposes 'friendly' regimes and destabilizes the unfriendly through client military elites and their own covert paramilitary organizations. See Michael Mann, 'The Autonomous Power of the State: Its Origins, Mechanisms and Results,' in John A. Hall (ed.), *States In History* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986), p. 124.

clearing the 'hostiles' from an area and protecting the 'friendly' populace, it progressed through the establishment of government infrastructure; thence to the provision of services, which would lead the colonized communities to identify with colonial rule.

In 1874, Medziphema and Sitikema described as two 'weaker' villages were taken under the British protection to defend them from the 'powerful and turbulent communities' of Mezoma and Khonoma. Following the incorporation of these two villages, the Commissioner of Assam announcing the formal extension of colonialism into the Naga Hills: 'we shall first become the champion of the weak. The championship of the weak will entail on us the restraint of the strong.'¹⁸ By 1878 these protected settlements reached up to sixteen, paying a total revenue of Rs 1, 032.¹⁹

Population relocation into strategic hamlets worked on alliances with certain tribes based on their willingness to supply militia and intelligence. 'The Kukies' writes Col. James Johnstone, the political agent in the Naga Hills, 'have furnished many coolies during the working season.'²⁰ In his assumption they 'pursued their duties with alacrity and fidelity.'²¹ To supplement the military force with effective operational mobility, the Kukis were organized into a hundred strong militia. They were specifically deployed as scouts in connection with their lines of defense post established towards the Naga Hills.²²

Settlements were implanted for other purposes as well. For instance, a permanent *Beldar corp* was settled in the station headquarter, Samaguting.²³ Primarily, they were engaged in clearing paths, jungles and constructing roads around the station. Nepalese

¹⁸ F&PD – A. August 1877. Nos. 133 – 177.

¹⁹ F&PD-A. July 1874, Nos. 40-45. *Teseprimah, Jalukemah, Phuima and Intu* taken under protection in 1875; *Jowana, Nidzuma* in 1876; *Henima, Thesima, Injas, Injaoma, Merama, Impi or Tapama* in 1877; *Sohema and Keruphama* in 1878. F&PD-A, February 1880, Nos. 291 – 305. Also see Sema, Piketo, *British Policy and Administration in Nagaland, 1881-1947* (Delhi: Scholar Publishing House, 1992), p. 13.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

²² F&PD-A. April 1882. Nos. 207-215.

²³ The English word equivalent for *Beldar* would be *navvy*. According to the *Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary*, the word *navvy* refers to person employed to do hard physical work especially building roads etc. See *Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary* (Oxford: OUP, 2000). In fact the Nepalis now settled in Nagaland, especially in Kohima were descendants of soldiers and labourers brought by the British. They were frequently engaged in the road works in the Naga Hills. See K.S. Singh (ed.), *People of India: Nagaland*. Vol. xxxiv (Calcutta: Seagull Books, 1994), p. 213.

formed the main work force in this Beldar corp.²⁴ In 1882, the Commissioner of Assam, C.A.Elliot had suggested another alternative for labour. He proposed to settle a permanent staff of coolies, between Nichuguard and Kohima road paying them good wages. The coolie staff was composed of ten men at three stages of the Nichuguard-Kohima road.²⁵ While the parameters of the Northeast frontiers were constantly shifting, as colonial control of the hills expanded, physical access in the strategic space remained limited. To consolidate its control over the 'wild tribes', the states politics of access demanded reaching out into the heartland, here Kohima; dispersing state power so as to incorporate the land into the state. To locate, identify and police the people, colonial officials had to confront and negotiate with the existing structures and institutions, i.e. , imperial versus local accessibility.

Spaces of the 'other': Naga paths and escape routes

Though the Naga Hills were described as a country void of roads, yet even a cursory examination of the colonial records reveals a vibrant network of 'native paths', well adapted to local conditions.²⁶ Villages were interlinked and connected through a network of bridle paths or tracks. The working of these paths often baffled colonial officials. 'Every village is a fortress' writes the Commissioner of Assam during a tour in 1878, 'into which the intrusion of strangers is warmly resented and yet the ordinary means of progress is by the Naga paths from village to village.'²⁷

There were several purposes to which the Nagas put the tracks or paths. One was inter-tribal trading, existing between the various Naga groups and the people of the plains.²⁸ Yet another purpose the paths served was to link the villages to their cultivated

²⁴ F&PDP – A. June 1882. Nos. 134 – 137.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ In *The Road to Botany Bay*, Paul Carter proposes a spatial history – a 'prehistory of place, a history of roads, footprints, trails, of dust and foaming waves – as an alternative to histories of imperialism. See Paul Carter, *The Road to Botany Bay: An Essay in Spatial History* (London: Faber and Faber, 1987), pp. xxi-xxiv.

²⁷ F&PD-A. October 1878. Nos. 7-51.

²⁸ Julian Jacobs, *The Nagas. The Hill people of Northeast India: Society, Culture and the Colonial Encounter* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1990), pp. 39-40. There was considerable specialization in trading items, for instance, Khonoma, 'had more or less monopoly in *cowrie shells* for the whole of the

paddy fields.²⁹ In one of the annual tours in the hills, A.E Woods, the Deputy Commissioner came across 'various paths leading to their fields'. The paths were 'excellently graded and kept well cleared of jungle.'³⁰ Perhaps as important, it was the means by which the powerful villages exerted their dominance along specific routes. As the district gazetteer informs us, extra territorial right was entertained only when peace was concluded amongst the communities, but during the village feuds, they were withheld.³¹

Bridle paths and trans- village tracks connected the Hills with Cachar, Sibsagar, Manipur and the eastern region, including Burma. As the district Gazetteer records, these routes were used 'by groups of tribal immigrants, as well as the traders, warriors and ambassadors.'³² Often officials found a number of routes spread over many bridle paths, which connected the villages in the hills. For instance Captain Butler, the Political Agent in the Naga Hills writes: 'the paths leading to permanent cultivation ...are often wide and well made, and sometimes to paths adjoining adjacent villages.'³³ In 1878, while touring the Naga Hills, the Commissioner of Assam, R.H. Keatinge came across a 'Naga path which crossed the political path or the high road. This path led to Keruphima, Mozema and Konoma.'³⁴ Even after settled administration the Naga paths continued to form the main arteries of connectivity for the colonial officials. 'I left Kohima to Sakhabama' records H.C. Barnes, Deputy Commissioner of Naga Hills in one of his tour diary, 'mostly by Naga paths.'³⁵

And yet colonial officials could be confronted with a virtual 'information famine' on local routes. Well adapted with the terrain, Nagas often appropriated the bridle paths or tracks as *escape routes*. On one such occasion the Deputy Commissioner of Cachar

Naga areas, obtaining them from Calcutta.' At the same time Angamis traded *beads* widely including into Burma along old trade routes.

²⁹ *Wokha District Gazetteer, Nagaland*, 1979, p. 105.

³⁰ *Tour Diary of A.E. Woods, Deputy Commissioner, Naga Hills, 1900*. GRC, NS, K.

³¹ *Gazetteer of India, Nagaland*, 1969, p. 129.

³² *Ibid.*

³³ Quoted in J.H. Hutton, *The Angami Nagas* (Bombay: OUP, 1969), p. 45.

³⁴ F&PD-A. October 1878. Nos. 7-51.

³⁵ *Tour Diary of H.C. Barnes, Deputy Commissioner, Naga Hills 1917*, GRC, NS, K.

reports: 'the police loaded and followed them up the Asalu road for about two miles, when the Angamis suddenly turned off into a path leading to the left. They then fired in the direction the Angamis had gone and marched back to Asalu.'³⁶ We have innumerable such stories of escape in the official narratives. For instance, one of the main objective of the Mezoma expedition in 1878 was to attack the 'enemy simultaneously from both sides and to prevent their escape'. However, this was not as simple as the officials thought. If the natives manage to escape without being seen, as the case often was, how could they be prevented from escaping? The officer in charge reported that 'no serious loss was inflicted on the enemy during the assault ...and the party which had been sent on to intercept them having failed ...there was nothing to prevent their escape'.³⁷ Again, during the Anglo-Naga war of 1879-80, the Commissioner of Naraingunge writing to the Secretary, Foreign Department, expressed his bewilderment on 'how Angamis could pass unmolested through Kutcha Naga and Kuki country passing our outpost in North Cachar' to attack the Baladhan tea garden.³⁸ Such a daring act during the height of the 1879-80 Anglo-Naga war, he admitted showed 'great and unusual enterprise'.³⁹

Since the 'enemies' frequently ruptured surveillance and organizational mechanism of the military, one strategy was to create a cadre of 'Kookie scout's', considered to be intimately familiar with the landscape.⁴⁰ These Kuki scouts were required to discover the various 'secret passes' by which the Angamis descended into the plains. Col. H. Hopkinson, Commissioner of Assam, writing on the Angami trading passes claimed: 'but the Cacharies say that there is at least one "thief's path" which does not pass through any of these villages, and I suspect that there must be more.'⁴¹

³⁶ Such incidents of escapes through appropriation of traditional routes undermined the mobility and access of the colonial officials in the Naga Hills. F&PD – A. August 1877. Nos. 133- 177.

³⁷ F&PD-A. October 1878. Nos. 7-5.1

³⁸ F&PD-A. March 1880. Nos. 331-395D

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Alexander Mackenzie describes of the Kukis as a hardworking, and self-reliant race, and 'the only hillmen in this quarter who can hold their won against the Angamis.' Using bows and arrows, instead of spears, 'they were much respected by the Angamis.' They were thus employed as 'a buffer or screen' between our 'more timid subjects and the Angamis.' See Mackenzie, *The Northeast Frontier*, p. 146.

⁴¹ F&PD-A. December 1866. Nos. 137-140. Col Hopkinson earlier claimed of the knowledge the Angamis trading passes as passing through the villages of Sumoogooting, Setekemah, and Tessepemah.

Knowledge of this, officials argued, 'will be of great importance and in which we are at present greatly deficient.'⁴²

The circulation of firearms during the Nineteenth century, in the Naga Hills. Preventive measures, aimed to thwart the entry of firearms into the hills, through blockading of local routes proved futile, As early as 1853 Moffat Mills expressed his anxiety on guns getting into Assam: 'guns passed by sale or barter from hand to hand until obeying a law of gravitation towards the person who will pay the most for them, they reached the savage, and the operation of this law cannot be effectively checked with a frontier of some 800 miles (both sides of the Brahmaputra) to act in.'⁴³ The police were likewise asked to be vigilant along the frontier's where firearms were routed. However, interdicting the circulation of arms was marked by skepticism. For officials were aware that the 'shutting up of Assam would be insufficient unless Sylhet and Cachar were equally well closed, even then Manipur would not suffice without British, Burma or the latter without Bangkok'.⁴⁴

Contestation over physical access was bound up with culturally different spatial concepts about routes. Col R.G. Woodthorpe narrates an incident in his lecture before the Royal Anthropological Institute in London:

Captain Butler told me one day that he had seen a few twigs and leaves stuck here and there along a path leading to a village. He asked the meaning of it and was told that the demon of smallpox had visited another village near, and might wish to go to that village also, but if he came upon the twigs he would say, dear me! I thought there was a village path here, but this is all jungle, I must try for another road.'⁴⁵

⁴²Ibid. , Apart from locating the 'routes', the 'Kookie scouts' sole duty was to scout the jungle around Sumoogoodting (sic) and Dhemapoore (sic) and keeping it and the road between those posts clear of prowling parties of Angamis.

⁴³ A.J. Moffat Mills, *A descriptive account of Assam* (first published 1853; Gauhati: Assam Publication Board, 1984).

⁴⁴ S.K. Barpujari, 'Firearms traffic and use in the Naga Hills in the nineteenth century', *Indian Historical Review*, session 32, vol.2, Jabalpur (1970), pp. 82&83. Officials report further attest to the fact that, seizures of arms and ammunition in the Punjab were on their way to the eastern frontier and upper Burma. Illicit traffic in firearms in the Hills remained rampant, as the states interdiction capabilities were still very limited and knowledge of local routes remained marginal.

⁴⁵ R.G. Woodthorpe, 'Meetings of the Anthropological Institute', in Verrier Elwin, *The Nagas in the Nineteenth Century* (Bombay: OUP, 1969), p. 58.

But this was not all, 'the Nagas' he lamented, 'never gave us credit for an intelligence superior to that of their devils.'⁴⁶ He went on to categorize the different tribes on their skills at road building. The Hatigorias or Ao Nagas were categorized as 'road engineers' who 'far surpass their neighbours.' The narrative goes on:

Their roads are constructed with due regard to the easiest gradients, and are not carried up and down over every little hillock. The steeper parts are stepped and paved to prevent the rain-washing channels in them, and in the gentler gradients cuts are made across the road at every change of inclination or direction in the most scientific manner to carry off the water down the hillside.'⁴⁷

With the Lotha Nagas in comparison, Woodthorpe declared the

paths are narrow, never avoid obstacles and often seen made expressly to carry of the drainage of the country around. The mode of repairing them when the narrow path has been worn into a deep furrow, is to fill the later with long tree trunks, the wobbling of which, and the steep slope at which they are often laid, making them very unsafe.'⁴⁸

Here I would argue that the difference in the material and technique of road building of the different communities would depend on the basis of their ecology. And perhaps the kind of roads made by the Ao's was very familiar to Woodthorpe in England. Indeed the representation of different categories of roads also conveys to us a sense that there were as many roads in the Naga Hills. Yet in the mentality of the British colonial officials, only one type of road was preferred. At another occasion Woodthorpe observed 'at various parts of the road, outside their gates ...we found portions of a puppy, which had been killed, cut up and buried.' This ceremony was supposed to give them 'immunity from our bullets and secure their village from destruction.'⁴⁹ Within the colonial culture, the role of native's material practices and conception of space and time served as powerful imaginative site.⁵⁰

⁴⁶ Ibid. , p. 58.

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 71.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid. , p. 59.

⁵⁰ Michael Adas, *Machines as the Measure of Men. Science, Technology and Ideologies of Western Dominance* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University press, 1989), p. 68. Adas have argued that European perception of the material superiority of their own cultures, particularly manifested in scientific thought and technological innovation, shaped their attitudes and intention with peoples they encountered. Thus the imperial perceptions of the native paths reflected and accorded technological superiority in subduing the Naga Hills.

Samaguting c. 1878-79: a 'disaster' as an operational center?

The first British district headquarter was established at Samaguting in 1866. Operating from Samaguting the British Empire began to spread its tentacles further inside the Naga Hills.⁵¹ However, within a decade of its occupation, Samaguting was perceived as geographically and politically at the periphery of the Naga Hills. Its location, official's argued, prevented the exercise of effective control of the Naga Hills from without: the area's physical environment retarded effective integration within. Physically it was located sixty miles from Golaghat by road and forty-eight miles from Borpathar, the first village on the road. The first complaint was that it was 'located far away from any powerful Village'.⁵² Samaguting on the other as, the Commissioner of Assam, S.O.B. Ridsdale explains, was 'out of their sight and almost out of their country.'⁵³

By 1872, there is recurrent reference in official records to Samaguting, as the 'most unhealthy stations in a most unhealthy province'. Plains of lofty forest, dense malarious jungle, marsh and pestilential tract, these were the images used to describe the landscape.⁵⁴ This was a perception, shaped perhaps by a growing consciousness of the difficulties posed by the terrain. The optimism of Alexander Mackenzie, Secretary of the Government of Bengal, gave way to a pessimistic view. The long list of disease (?), he wrote, apart from fever and dysentery 'often baffled the skill and energy of some of our best medical officer'.⁵⁵ The reputation of Samaguting seemed worse with the natives, when Hills men from Darjeeling who had worked in the Wokha road refused to take up service in the *Beldar corp*. The vagary of the climate on the Europeans constitution was further subscribed to the notion of a most unhealthy station. For instance, a Missionary, Rev. Roth was compelled to leave, never to return after a short stay of three months. In addition, the Assistant Conservator, and the Medical Officer, A.C.Cooper, had to be perpetually confined in their house. Ironically, most sickness among the inhabitants and

⁵¹ In 1866, Lt Gregory, the first Political Officer in the Naga Hills marched into Samaguting. Soon jungles were cleared and hutments erected to settle the sepoys. A road was made to connect Samaguting, the first district headquarter in the Naga Hills with Dimapur. F&PD- A. August 1877. Nos. 120-132

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ F&PD- Gen.A. September 1872. Nos.34-46.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

the Europeans was, 'sown on the journey between the Golaghat and Samoogoodting road'.⁵⁶ Already by 1873, it was better identified as a station where 'a two years residence ... was quite sufficient to ensure a sick certificate to England.'⁵⁷ The Commissioner of the Northeast frontier goes on to remark that 'the road marked as unhealthy saw not even one instance of any one traveling on it between the end of April and the end of November that has not suffered'.⁵⁸

By 1878, Samaguting no longer retained any significance as a station headquarters. Growing consciousness of the physical limitation of British power in the Naga Hills made the identification of 'healthy' areas more urgent than ever. Earlier, on October 1872, Lt. Col. D.J.F. Newall had delivered a lecture entitled '*On Military Colonization of the Mountain Ranges of India*', at the United Service Institute for India at Darjeeling. Presenting his case for the urgent establishment of military villages in the mountain ranges of India, Newall anxiously argued:

Whether Providence has willed our occupation of this foreign soil to be lasting, who can say? At present, we have no permanent grasp on it; and regarding our future from the standpoint of historic study, it seems possible, that the day may eventually arrive ... when the great British nation, strong and firm as it may believe itself to be, perhaps at present is, may have to relinquish its grand Asiatic dependency and retire within the limits of its own Ocean Island Home. In such a contingency, what better source to fall back on than military colonies in Himalayan and other mountain ranges of India from which to form a reserve force.⁵⁹

Given the political anxieties, which underlay such narratives, it is hardly surprising that the identification of suitable areas for such establishments was accompanied by an idealization of the landscape. Thus even as official narratives represented of a 'hellish' and insalubrious space, at the same time stories began to float about of a unique landscape full of natural marvels. The Angami country was said to be fertile and healthy,

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ F&PD-A. September 1873. Nos. 219-229.

⁵⁸ F&PD-A. September 1876. Nos.142-145; F&PD-A. September 1872. Nos.34-46. In 1874 changed to the office of the Chief Commissioner of Assam

⁵⁹ Quoted in Baruah, *David Scott in North-East India*, p. 228. Also see Lt. Col., D.J.F. Newall, 'On Military Colonization of the Mountain Ranges of India', *United Services Institution India Proceedings*, vol. II, No. 12. Establishing military colonies for the ultimate defence of India remained a subject of serious discussion throughout the nineteenth century, argues Baruah.

one, where food was got without much labour and the 'tonic' air of the hills held out the promise of healthier settlement.⁶⁰ Captain Butler, claimed to have got rid of his 'fever' when he and his brother toured 'the fine healthy country inhabited by the Angamies.'⁶¹ Describing the area as well watered and lightly timbered, Butler said both the country and the climate reminded them of New England instilling new life making them feel as strong as ever.⁶² Over such an exotic landscape 'good roads might be made in almost any direction.'⁶³ These official narratives convey a sense of how the colonized world was being 'dreamed, theorized, and modeled' even as the Victorian mind sought to portray roads as an important instrument and measure of progress in the hills.

'At the Apex of triangle': The politics of aligning with the Angamis

The effort to find a new location for the military station brought Wokha and Kohima under scrutiny. Since political authority operates within certain spatial limits, *Location*, Jean Gottman suggest, plays an important part in both geography and politics.⁶⁴ In choosing a station, officials were often attracted to locales with easier transportation or communication links to the plains. Another colonial imperative was to identify tracts, which could support a large concentrated population in the hills. These were the instructions given to the committee appointed to locate a feasible site for the new station in the hills.⁶⁵ Captain LaTouche the Assistant Commissioner of Jorhat expressed his strong preference for Wokha as the new station. His contention was that by building a good cart road from Golaghat goods could be brought to Wokha very easily.⁶⁶

⁶⁰ F&PD-A. September 1873. Nos. 219-229; also see Dane Kennedy, 'Guardians of the Edenic Sanctuaries: Paharis, Lepchas, and Todas, in the British Mind', *South Asia*, 14 (1991), pp. 118-40.

⁶¹ F&PD. General. A. September 1872. Nos. 34-46.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Gottman, *Center and Periphery*, p. 14.

⁶⁵ F&PD-A. August 1877. Nos. 120-132.

⁶⁶ Ibid. Being two days march to Golaghat from Wokha, boats was assumed to proceed up to the Doyang as far as Sorupani. With a good road running across Wokha *via* Guragoan and thence to the Sorupani, goods could be easily supplied to Wokha. Subscribing to this view the Commissioner of Assam, suggested a sum of Rs.45, 000 to construct a road between Wokha and Kohima through Golaghat.

However, this choice was harshly critiqued by Col James Johnstone, one of the foremost advocate for a settlement in the Angami Naga Hills. 'Wokha' argues Col Johnstone, 'lies far away from North Cachar and the Angami country.'⁶⁷ On the other hand, Kohima placed as it was in the midst of 'the most powerful Angami village' could 'control relations with Manipur.' Kohima, being placed thirty-six miles from Samaguting and fifty-one miles from Wokha was at the apex of the strategic triangle constituted by these three bases. A crucial plank of Johnstone's argument was that by choosing Kohima, they could benefit from the importance positioned along an important Angami trading route, instead of taking the risk of creating a new trade route:

A new trade route is not opened out in a day; how can we tell that the Angami Nagas will use the new route via Wokha? If they do not but keep to their old route, one great opportunity of constantly meeting our officers will be lost as it is their trading expeditions that they become acquainted with the Political Agent. The Rengma Nagas who intervene between the Angamis and the Wokha are a powerful tribes and it is hardly likely that the Angamis will care to risk going by a new route.⁶⁸

It was argued that the economic possibilities of the site could also be extended. The road from Samaguting to Kohima once opened out, wrote Johnstone, will make communication easy and traders would be able to pursue whichever route they please.⁶⁹

There was a larger purpose in aligning with the Angamis. The Angamis had early attracted official's attention as 'the largest of the Naga tribes' and their terraced cultivation seemed to make them out as a superior community. Col. James Johnstone in his 1877 report clarified that, it was an 'entire misconception' to suppose that supplies were obtainable only from the plains. The Angami Hills he argued were 'the most thickly populated hills in India...and was capable of supplying rice for the whole force'.⁷⁰ In a report in 1874, Butler put the density of the Angami Naga population at 50 per square

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Ibid. In 1881, Kohima was made a full fledged district under the Assam province, while Wokha was turned into a Subdivision, later abandoned for Mokokchung in 1889.

⁷⁰ F&PD-A. August 1877. Nos. 120-132. In 1874, official records show Kohima as containing 865 houses, Khonoma 545, Viswemah 530 and Jotsoma 434 houses. Altogether John Butler assumes of 46 Angami villages, 6367 houses with a total population of 31, 835.

miles, in contrast to 23 souls per square mile in the Khasi Hills, and 10 in Chittagong Hill tracts, and 9 in Tipperah 9.⁷¹

A prime reason for the eagerness to enter in political engagement with the Angami Nagas was that the Angamis, it was said, 'were very influential.'⁷² They levied contributions in one or several villages.⁷³ They were powerful by virtue of their position in the networks of long distance trade. Some of them, making long journeys for the purpose of barter to Calcutta, Bombay and Rangoon.⁷⁴ Angamis resistance against British intrusion from the 1830s had also been very determined.⁷⁵ In 1879, by opening its new station head quarter in the Angami country the British found an outpost from which they could watch over their imperial interest in Assam and Burma.

Ideology of rule in road building

Connectivity was an important element in the colonial policy of rule. But what determined where roads were built? Initially, the most important imperative was to establish supply and communication links to Assam. Subsequently colonial officials wanted roads, which linked the headquarter towns and sub-divisional station to the villages so that they could replenish food stocks and supplement carriage. Two means of communication with Golaghat was identified. One, by water down the river Dhunsiri; and the other by a road along its banks.⁷⁶ With abundant timber around the station, the streams along the route could be bridged till masonry bridges could be constructed. This

⁷¹ F&PD – A. July 1874. Nos. 40 – 45.

⁷² F&PD - A. April 1880. Nos. 218 – 229. According to Visier Sanyu, a Naga scholar, in his study posits that the Angamis controlled the general affairs of some of the tribes, such as the Zeliang's and the Liangmais, for centuries. Tributes were demanded from these villages, and in return they provided security to them. The refusal to pay tribute was taken as a denouncement of Angami power and authority. Such villages were burnt and properties were confiscated. Such developments gave the Angamis a political strength and security, while remaining in constant touch with the affairs of the tribes bordering their territory. See Visier Sanyu, *A History of Nagas and Nagaland: Dynamics of Oral Tradition in Village Formation* (Delhi: Commonwealth Publishers, 1996), pp. 31-2.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ F&PD – A. September 1882. Nos. 135 – 137.

⁷⁵ See Mackenzie, *History*, pp. 101 – 143. The resistance of the Angamis against colonial intrusion dates back to the 1830s when Lt. Jenkins and Lt. Pemberton marched through the hills to open up communication between Assam and Burma.

⁷⁶ F&PD-A. December 1866. Nos. 137-140.

too did not seem to present a problem as, 'stones were procurable and limestone at no great distance'.⁷⁷ Rest houses were planned along the road and rivers cleared of obstructions. The cost of construction was estimated at the rate of Rs 100 per mile with labour drawn from Seeksagur and Nowgong.⁷⁸

'One of the most important road,' officials presumed was the Golaghat-Samagutting road.⁷⁹ The importance of this road lies in the fact that this road served as the 'life-line' for the British officials, linking the station headquarter at Samagutting with Assam. Seventy-three miles in length, this road was 'put in cold weather condition by the middle of November 1873.'⁸⁰ In 1873, *the administration reports* records of the Samagutting-Hurriojan road as being thoroughly repaired. Widened out to eighteen feet, work along this road involved clearing heavy timber and stumps rooted out. Bridges were repaired with *adjar*, 'the best wood procurable'. Widening the hill portion of this road allowed two riding abreast for half the distance.⁸¹ The new bridle path to Piphema was considered as 'a great gain in every way.'⁸² Hoping to attract trade and labour, it would also enable officials 'to reach the highlands without much difficulty', while pushing for the speedy extension to Sagemah.⁸³ In 1874, the forty-mile Samagutting-Kohima bridle path was completed and declared open for trade.⁸⁴

Despite the ideological importance given to road building district officers would often complain of insufficient funds for local works. 'Little has been done', wrote Major Butler, 'in opening out paths through the hills when we come to consider that we have been in occupation of them since 1867.'⁸⁵ Ironically, demands for increased funding for

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ F&PD-A. September 1873. Nos. 219-229.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ F&PD-A. May 1876. Nos. 101 – 103.

⁸² F&PD-A. September 1873. Nos. 219-229.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ F&PD-A. August 1874. Nos. 273-275.

⁸⁵ F&PD-A. September 1873. Nos. 219-229. Expressing his limitation in the imperial project, the district officer argued: For if a liberal supply of money was sanctioned, labour could always be got. The small sum of Rs 1000 sanctioned annually by the PWD for the construction of hill paths, and the few hundreds, which can be spared from the Rs 2000, allotted this year for the whole district from the road fund cannot be considered anything like a liberal sum to expend on such useful works. Four times this sum might now be

road works in the Naga Hills were countered with proposals ‘to curb state expenses’ on Golaghat-Kohima route.⁸⁶ The justification for this was that ‘local needs of the Naga Hills do not count for such in the plains.’⁸⁷

Since hill roads, as the official records show, were given low priority. Thus District officials had to search for strategic and military reasons to make out a case for expenditure. Punitive expedition seems to provide an avenue in this context. Considering the ‘great distance of the country of the offending tribes ... and the absence of good road’ the Quartermaster General, F.S.Robert strongly suggested ‘the opening up of fairly practicable roads between British territory and their (Angami) villages’.⁸⁸ ‘Advantage’ he argues ‘should therefore be taken of every opportunity to construct them.’⁸⁹ These advantages, I argue, primarily worked through a series of engineered ‘punitive expeditions’ against Naga raids or uprisings.

These punitive expeditions while increasingly expanded the physical access and extended the geographical knowledge of the region. At the same time it symbolically consolidated and sustained the extension of the states authority and the legitimacy in the Hills. In fact some or most of the hill roads in the Naga Hills were built at times of uprisings, set out purposefully to enforce military subjugation. ‘From 5th to 12th of February, all hands were hard at work opening out the several roads and building bridges over the Tevai, Tising and Dilli rivers’ reports Captain Butler in 1875, during the military campaigns against the Namsang and Borduar Nagas.⁹⁰ Again during the Mezoma

spent annually most advantageously the next four or five years, until three or four main paths are made with village paths leading off from them.

⁸⁶ H&PD. June 1883. Nos. 140 –143. Col. R.C. Low, Deputy Commanding General Transport, proposed to lease ‘blocks of land on each side of the road ... to planters on the “usual terms”, on the agreement that the road should be maintained by them, that all further expenses connected with the road would be saved to the state.’

⁸⁷ *Tour Diary of H.C. Barnes, D.C. Naga Hills, 1916, GRC, NS, K.* Expressing his strong reservation on the Assam administrations policy on road building, H.C. Barnes the D.C. Naga Hills remarked: ‘Mr. Entwisle complains of the failure of the Sibsagar local boards to make the four miles of road from Naginimara to Sentok *hat*. If the mines were in the Sibsagar district, the road would probably have been made.

⁸⁸ F&PD– A. August 1877. Nos. 137 – 177. This statement was forwarded to the secretary to the government of India after conditions made it impossible for a punitive expedition against the Angami Nagas who had earlier raided a Manipur Naga village.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

⁹⁰ F&PD – A. December 1875. Nos. 91- 99.

expedition of 1878, coolies were engaged to clear 'the worst part of the road.'⁹¹ Sappers and Miners were also deployed to clear part of the Samaguting-Dimapur road: 'having opened a barrel of powder (they) blast(ed) the large immovable boulders lying on it and making it possible.'⁹² Another example was the Golaghat – Kohima road, 'repaired and constructed' during the Anglo-Naga war of 1879-1880. Sixteen years later Colonel Johnstone reminisces about this road in his book *My experiences in Manipur and the Naga Hills*: 'I began to make this road during the Naga Hills campaign of 1879-1880, and it has been since regularly used.'⁹³ Constructing roads in the hills remained a perennial state project and facilitated the settlement of the independent tribes.

Following the establishment of an administrative post at Kohima in 1881, grand plans of 'public works' were announced aimed to make the district more accessible.⁹⁴ These paths were meant to radiate power outwards from Kohima towards all the surrounding areas.⁹⁵ Plans were also framed which emphasized on keeping important communication lines open throughout the year. With this intention a proposed wire suspension bridge over the Doyang on the Kohima-Wokha-Golaghat road sought to 'to keep the route open all the year round'.⁹⁶ In 1883-84, the following bridle paths were declared as opened out in the hills (see table).⁹⁷

Route(s)	Distance (in miles)	Expenditure
Kohima-Chichema-Mao	12	9,794
Kohima-Mao	23	12,718
Kohima-Jotsoma	6	2250
Kohima-Themokotsoma-Lazami	7	1250

⁹¹ F&PD-A. October 1878. Nos. 7-51.

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ James Johnstone, 'My experiences in Manipur and the Naga Hills, 1896'. In Verrier Elwin, *The Nagas in the nineteenth century*, p. 26.

⁹⁴ F&PD – A. September 1882. Nos. 135-37.

⁹⁵ Ibid. For instance, a permanent trace was to be cut from the Diphu Gorge road as far as Zumha, and thence from Zumha to Kohima. Another 'well aligned bridle path from Kohima to Manipur frontier' would connect and open up the two regions. Colonial officials also wished to construct 'a good and easy path between Kohima and Khonoma'. It also aimed to secure 'a good means of access from Kohima (to) the Kutcha Naga country and the Cachar frontier.'

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ F&PD. External. A. December 1886. Nos. 39-41.

Colonial officials celebrated over the fact that the Nagas could easily adapt to their 'new' roads. Along the Kohima-Khonoma and the Manipur road, the *administration report* of 1885 recorded with satisfaction: 'the Nagas have completely abandoned their old paths, with their steep ascent and descents, and taken to the more lines laid out by the engineer.'⁹⁸

Colonial officials, however, could not have simply framed policies and wove a mesh of roads in the hills from above. They had to engage with the existing structures and institutions, whereby they negotiated, operated and often appropriated local knowledge of road making.⁹⁹ In laying out a road, an existing trail was often a preferential basis for locating the 'new' colonial routes. For instance, a proposed bridle path in the newly occupied Ao country, followed traces of a 'Naga path', which commenced from Jekum and emerged finally at the plains of Amguri.¹⁰⁰ Communication along these routes followed the contours of the landscape. For instance J.P Mills pointed out that Ao roads to 'the fields passes near no stream or spring', and thus avoiding places prone to inundation.¹⁰¹ Such roads often needed just a little additional widening and also incurred less expenditure. Though 'native roads' were 'circuitous and condemned' by colonial officials, Ravi Ahuja has argued that their own 'straight' and 'scientifically' constructed roads could be defended against the forces of nature only with difficulty and at high maintenance cost. Moreover, the old winding tracks reflected the villagers 'age-old experience of their environment.'¹⁰²

⁹⁸ F&PD. External. A. December 1886. Nos. 39-41. And in 1886, the Under Secretary of the Foreign Department declared that the Naga tribes 'have settled down and excepted British rule.' Having connected Kohima with a good riding road to Manipur, the country he continued 'have been opened up by good roads. Employing the Sappers and Miners for bridging the Diphu River, Col R.C.Low, Deputy Commanding General Transport commented that 'the whole road from Nichuguard to Kohima will be quite equal to the best of the many excellent hill roads which traverses Kumaon and British Garwal.' H&PD. June 1883. Nos. 140-143.

⁹⁹ David Arnold has suggested that a hybridized, new knowledge evolved in the colonies as sites of technological innovation through borrowing and adaptation from indigenous practices and local knowledge. See David Arnold, 'Europe, Technology, and Colonialism in the nineteenth century.'

¹⁰⁰ F&PD. External. A. January 1889. Nos. 76-88. In addition, the Naga path from Noagaon (Merangkong) and Assiringia (Nokpu) to the plains was improved and kept free from jungle.

¹⁰¹ Mills, *The Ao Nagas*, p. 128.

¹⁰² Ahuja, 'Opening up the Hills?', p. 94.

Celebrating the transformation of the Naga path between Golaghat and Kohima, Col R. C. Low, Deputy Commanding General Transport remarked that, prior to 1881, the road was 'nothing but a goat track.'¹⁰³ It was now 'an excellent road for pack animals during the cold season with several section of it on a gradient fit for wheels.'¹⁰⁴ At times, colonial officials openly expressed their appreciation on the native mode of road making. In a lecture he gave to the Royal Anthropological Institute in London, R.G. Woodthorpe would describe the Aos as 'road engineers', who constructed their roads

with due regard to the easiest gradients, and are not carried up and down over every little hillock. The steeper parts are stepped and paved to prevent the rain washing channels in them, and in the gentler gradients cuts are made across the road at every change in the most scientific manner to carry off the water down the hill-side.'¹⁰⁵

J.H.Hutton found that Angami bridges were well maintained, and securely constructed: 'when the stream is narrow a single tree suffices ... but where a long span is necessary, a suspension bridge made of a long cane cradle ... is slung from high trees on either bank by strong ropes of single canes'.¹⁰⁶ (See picture of Jessami Bridge, p. 63) In 1919, crossing the Lanier River by the Jessami-Lozaphephomi bridge Cantlie encountered 'a marvelous cane suspension bridge across the Tizu (river).'¹⁰⁷

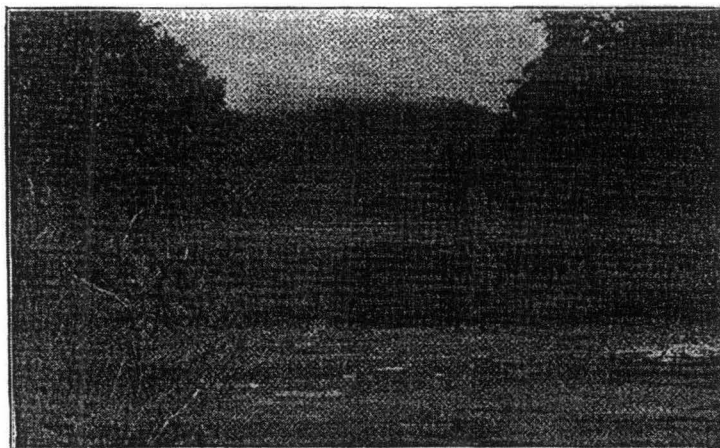
¹⁰³ H&PD. June 1883. Nos. 140–143.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ R.G. Woodthorpe, 'Meetings of the Anthropological Institute', I Verier Elwin. *The Nagas in the nineteenth century*, p. 71.

¹⁰⁶ Hutton, *The Angami Nagas*, p. 46.

¹⁰⁷ *Tour Diary of K. Cantlie, offg D.C. Naga Hills, 1919, GRC, NS, K.*



ANGAMI BRIDGE AT JESSAMI

Source: J.H. Hutton's (1921), *The Angami Nagas*. p. 46

Roads as reflections of colonialism

A stark contrast emerges between the grand claims made for colonial road building and the modest projects undertaken in the Naga Hills. Ironically, while official records are essentially soaked with rhetorics of 'improvement', as Ravi Ahuja has remarked in another context, important military roads were not always kept in repair regularly. They were rather brought into a passable condition when they were actually required.¹⁰⁸ One illustration of the makeshift nature of road making is the breakdown in 1880 of the Golaghat-Kohima line and the vulnerability of military supply line.¹⁰⁹

In 1880, with the Anglo-Naga war still inconclusive, the Govt in December 1880 deputed Major G.S.Hills as Officer on Special Duty, to report on the condition prevailing along imperial line.¹¹⁰ During his inspection, Hills found the Golaghat-Kohima route 'overgrown with jungle' with the whole route 'utterly neglected'.¹¹¹ The bridges were in a deplorable condition impassable even for ponies. 'The transport service', he warned, 'was on the point of breaking down, and the garrison at Kohima was living from hand to mouth, there being on the 1st of December only one days supply or *russud*.'¹¹² Another grim detail was the mortality, both of animals and humans in the Naga Transport corps.¹¹³

¹⁰⁸ Ahuja, 'Opening up the country?', p. 94.

¹⁰⁹ F&PD-A. January 1882. Nos. 119-133. Since the early military encounters, transport and supply in the hills had relied on seasonal communication. Originating from Nigrating in the Brahmaputra, the route passed through Golaghat and Kohima via Dimapur. This line remained open for traffic only during four months of the year. According to Major Hills, 'between these two points we are entirely dependent on river traffic for carriage of supplies, for which arrangements must be made beforehand, so that 12 months supplies may be collected at Dimapur during the rains, while the river is navigable for large boats.' During the rains, steamers landed supplies at Dhunsiri Mukh. This was then forwarded by boats upto the Dhunsiri River to Dimapur. In cold weather the supplies were landed at Nigrating. Nigrating a landing spot for supply and transport was located above the Dhunsiri Mukh on the Brahmaputra River. Officials viewed Nigrating as a variable point on the Brahmaputra, which was represented as the most convenient point on which to land stores according to the height and the navigable channel of the river.

¹¹⁰ F&PD-A. January 1882. Nos. 119-133. Interestingly, Major Hills withdrew his first report to the Quarter Master General, 'at the request of the Brigadier General Nation' Commanding the Naga hills campaign.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ As Col.D.Robinson, Commanding the Naga Transport Corp, reports: '100 ponies dead; out of 105 Khasi coolies 40 invalid or died, remaining sick; of 105 Bhutias only 30 or 40 fit for work; of 125 syces, 100 grass cutters and pony attendants, majority are sick and increasing daily.'¹¹³ The heavy toll and cost on the elephant train, from November 1879 to June 1880 reportedly amounted to Rs 4,03, 091. *Frontier and Overseas Expeditions from India. Vol. IV. North and Northeast Tribes*. New Delhi: Mittal Publications 1983, pp. 217-18.

Considering the nature of the situation, Major G.S.Hills decided to abandoned this 'imperial line', between the Naga Hills and the plains during the rains.¹¹⁴ Strategic consideration however remained central in Major Hills report. The Pherima-Pephima line was thus considered impracticable for a military road, while the section between Kohima and Pephima was considered impracticable for pony transport.¹¹⁵ Old routes were thus diverted or abandoned, while new lines were drawn in the hills. By placing the new routes along villages, officials strategically hoped to solve the problem of victualling troops and coolies on march. Labour, for road construction and carriage, though contested could be impressed more easily. Tax, a central component in the politics of control could now be assessed making the 'strange' subjects 'familiar' to the authorities.

Rice, roads, and the politics of territory

Supplying food to the troops and coolies engaged in the hills was a particular anxiety, throughout the nineteenth century. Dependence on a seasonal communication with Assam for supplies had already 'proved difficult' for navigation depended much on the rains.¹¹⁶ A solution suggested was to encourage *Kayahs* or Marwaris to establish *golahs* at Dimapur and Samagudting.¹¹⁷ Another solution was to open up links with interior villages in search for rice. For, connecting roads with the villages provided access to valuable commodities, such as rice. In 1876, officials discovered that large amounts of rice trickled in to Samaguting from the Katcha Naga country. P.T. Carnegy, the Political Agent in the Naga Hills, expressed his desire 'to open out a bridle path to that part of the hills ... that it would lead to larger supplies coming in.'¹¹⁸ Finding 'cheap rice' coming in from Manipur to the plains, colonial authorities now planned to divert the supply line to

¹¹⁴ Ibid. Since the high cost of year round maintenance would cost great sacrifice in life, both of men and animals: 'up and down these cruel slopes, the men and animals of the transport service had to make two trips a day. The former carrying 30 seers, the latter 2 maunds. Can it be a matter for surprise that 50% of men and animals succumbed in 6 months under such a trail?'

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ F&PD. General. A. September 1872. Nos. 34-46

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ F&PD-A. September 1876. Nos. 142-145; F&PD-A. September 1873. Nos. 219-229. Anxiously, Alexander Mackenzie had earlier enquired as to "what roads and paths are required to open up the district and promote trade? Interestingly a prime item of this trade was on rice. The administration report of 1875-76, records of, among others, eight thousand rupees as the amount exchanged in rice trade.

Manipur instead of bringing it up 'at great expense and trouble from the plains of Assam.'¹¹⁹

Hard pressed in a hostile land, obtaining 'cheap rice' was often a matter of celebration. A rich harvest in the hills, reports P.T Carnegie, happily had reduced the price of grain without this he added 'things would have been in a very bad way indeed.'¹²⁰ In addition, to the strategic issue, a major factor, why colonial officials turned their gaze on the Angami hills was perhaps due to 'permanent terraced cultivation'. In 1877, Col. James Johnstone in his report sought to clarify an 'entire misconception' about the difficulty of obtaining supplies for the hills. The Angami Hills he argued was 'the most thickly populated hills in India...and was capable of supplying rice for the whole force'.¹²¹

In 1882, a survey of the country lying between Golaghat and Kohima was organized to assess the resources of the country in the vicinity of the Golaghat-Kohima road. The survey interestingly focused on three things. The distance of villages along the road; the number of houses in them; and the supply of coolies expected from the inhabitants and their aggregate food stocks.¹²² Villages, which practiced *Jhum* cultivation, were dismissed as 'unimportant' because 'they grow only as much grain as will suffice for their own want.'¹²³ As Jean Gottman have argued that, 'the need to define every location in a way establishing its uniqueness and its spatial relations with other points is especially indispensable to movement between specified places.'¹²⁴ Thus by

¹¹⁹ F&PD-A. March 1876. Nos. 331-395 D.

¹²⁰ F&PD. General. A. July 1872. Nos. 6-7.

¹²¹ F&PD-A. August 1877. Nos. 120-132; F&PD-A. January 1882. Nos. 135-37. Opening up the route along the Nambhor forest was assumed to have reduced the freight charge between Dimapur and Golaghat, from Rs. 2- 8, in 1880-81 to Rs. 1-8 per maund in 1881-82. It also enabled the whole supplies for the station to be 'brought up by river during the rains from Dimapur to Kohima.'

¹²² F&PD-A. January 1882. Nos. 86-105. Mapping out the prospective villages the survey records of Borpathar, a village with one seventy houses, located nineteen miles from the Golaghat road. It could supply two hundred coolies for a week in a year, including three hundred maunds of *dhan*. Nine miles on the road was Merphalani. With fifty hamlets, it could easily supply fifty maunds of rice and coolies in the year. Yet Koliani, Sitikema, Medziphema, Pherima and Serhima were identified as 'unimportant villages'.

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ Gottman, *Centre and Periphery*, p. 12.

clearly locating the villages along the road officials hoped to create channels of movements which would meet the state's need for resources.

Securing food stocks was especially important to support a concentrated population such as the army and the coolie gangs. An important objective for developing the Assam-Burma road route was to reduce 'the cost of victualling Kohima.' However, G.K.Watts, the superintending of works, Nichuguard - Manipur road, in 1893 argued this to be impossible, 'till the Gauhati - Lunding - Dimapur railway is open'.¹²⁵ With the opening of the railway to Dimapur, G.K.Watts notes that, 'the cart road would enable Manipur to compete for supply of rice and dried fish for the railway work people.'¹²⁶ At one point, C.A. Elliott even expressed his desire 'to encourage the growth of potatoes and other vegetables' in the hills.¹²⁷ While the question of food stocks remained a colonial anxiety, the local populace was often coerced to replenish dwindling colonial supplies. Along with settled government and pacification of the tribes, food was more easily procured, especially when revenue was derived in terms of rice.

Contestation and resistance

Roadwork, intruded into the everyday life of the people, which was contested and passively resisted by the local populace. 'Passive resistance' took the form of avoiding labour recruitment, or refusing to supply foodstuffs or demanding high prices for supplying labour and food. In 1876 complaining of the high wages demanded by the Nagas, P.T.Carnegy the political agent Naga Hills observed: 'when the rates have been allowed to run high ... it is very hard to bring it down again.'¹²⁸ Attempts to increase the 'customary' working rates, from Rs.1 = to 3 days, to Rs.1 = to 4 failed as the 'Nagas

¹²⁵ F&PD. Sec-E. May, 1895.Nos.139-178. Railway work, G.K.Watts observed, however remained uncertain as coolies and contractors have abandoned the work with many men turning back from Dhubri without coming to Gauhati as 'buyers have lowered Upcotts rates.

¹²⁶ Ibid.

¹²⁷ R. McCabe the Deputy commissioner was instructed to pursue 'by all means in his power to procure seed and distribute it to suitable persons.' F&PD-A. January 1882. Nos. 86-105.

¹²⁸ F&PD - A. September 1876. Nos. 142 - 145; F&PD. External -A. September 1885. Nos.36-38. The wage was assessed at Rs.9-10 per month. And in 1885 the Commissioner of Assam asked Mr. McCabe, the Deputy Commissioner 'to lower the exorbitant wages for coolie labour which hinder progress in many direction'.

struck work and the idea given up'.¹²⁹ There were some instances where people openly defied colonial authority. The Lukrimi Khel of Thachumi, K. Cantlie, D.C. Naga Hills reports, were 'always ill-disposed towards government.'¹³⁰ They had 'killed a pig and taken oath that they will never again supply any coolies to government or obey any order given them, and have repeated the oath killing a bull and distributing its flesh'.¹³¹

Officials often complained about the difficulty in procuring food, and even if available, of being 'overcharged'. In 1873, the price of victuals at Samagutting was assessed as 'three to four, even five times as high as in other neighboring station of Golaghat and Nowgong.'¹³² 'Every article of food is dearer than it was last year', writes Captain Butler in 1874; coarse rice ranged in price from Rs. 4-6 per maund.¹³³ On the other hand, demands by civil and military detachments moving up and down the roads were greatly resented. In one case an old man of Namsang village asked Col Woodthorpe, 'why should we show you water? Why are you here again? Have you no rice in your own village that you travel about to eat?'¹³⁴ In 1882, the district administration noted that 'the Nagas are not in the habit of bringing their food crops to sale'.¹³⁵ During punitive expeditions local supplies were usually hidden in 'crevices', 'ravines' or nearby 'jungles'.¹³⁶ These aim was to withhold any logistical support to military detachments. To replenish its food stocks during the Mezoma Expedition of 1878, 'coolies with pick axes [were] sent to search for *dhan* under guard' while there was 'constant lookout for forages.'¹³⁷

The presence of work party under guard and police outposts all along in the vicinity of the village was an open challenge. In 1878, the Commissioner of Assam,

¹²⁹ F&PD-A. September 1876. Nos.142-145.

¹³⁰ *Tour diary of K. Cantlie, offg D.C. Naga Hills, 1919, GRC, NS, K. Cantlie further remarked that this Khel is a 'great thorn' in the side of its own village as the members do not hesitate to loot from their fellow villagers and are said to freely take false oaths when accused of stealing and then to demand and extract a fine for having been put to dignity of taking an oath. He concludes by saying, 'they sound like Semas.'*

¹³¹ Ibid.

¹³² F&PD. General-A. July 1872. Nos. 6-7.

¹³³ F&PD-A. August 1874. Nos.273-275.

¹³⁴ F&PD - A. January 1877. Nos. 146 - 151.

¹³⁵ F&PD-A. September 1882. Nos. 135-137

¹³⁶ F&PD-A. October 1878. Nos. 7 - 51.

¹³⁷ Ibid.

R.H.Keatinge was apprehensive of ‘serious disadvantage’ as the greater length of the road between Kohima and Samaguting had to be protected from attacks by the Nagas.¹³⁸ During the Mezoma expedition of 1878, W.J.Williamson the IGP, Assam reported, ‘I posted detachments of the troops and police at ... Golaghat, Borpathar, Harriajan and Dimapur and thus secured the safety of the main road between Golaghat and Samaguting.’¹³⁹ Nevertheless ‘lines of communication were interrupted, daks cut off, roads were blocked and destroyed in several places, even the road as far as Borpathar, 38 miles from Samaguting was threatened’.¹⁴⁰ On other occasions, villagers would try to divert officers away from village paths. According to one account, ‘the Nagas would frequently try to mislead us ... by planting small branches in the path by which they did not wish us to travel, hoping that we should think that it was a disused one.’¹⁴¹

With a settled administration, we see subtle forms of resistance, in this context, damaging bridle paths by walking cattle’s over them. On the road to Khizobama Hutton found the road ‘badly damaged in places by the Mesolozumi cattle, though the village was ordered not to use the bridle path as a cow path’.¹⁴² As a site of contestation and negotiation roads emerges as part of a larger scheme of social restructuring and ordering of the landscape. In the process roads also became a site where Nagas were subjected to new forms of ‘political disciplining.’

Representing the Raj: ‘Political paths’

‘Improvements’ in communication infrastructure creates new public iconographic landscapes, which accord with the new ‘values’ of the colonial regime.¹⁴³ An interesting theme, which emerges in the official records, was the idea of a *political paths*, which became synonymous in the official records by the 1870s. Running across Samaguting, Piphima, Nerhema, and Wokha, the political path Lt.H.Maxwell declared in 1878 was

¹³⁸ F&PD-A. October 1878. Nos.7-51.

¹³⁹ F&PD- A.E. September 1882. Nos.135 –137.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

¹⁴¹ Elwin, Verrier, *The Nagas in the nineteenth century*. Bombay 1969, pp. 26-27.

¹⁴² *Tour Diary of K. Cantlie, offg D.C. Naga Hills, 1919, GTC, NS, K.*

¹⁴³ See for instance Kerr, ‘Representation and Representations’.

‘sacred ... and ... dedicated to peace.’¹⁴⁴ Any interference with people on peaceful errands on the political path, he stated, between Samaguting and Wokha would invite punishment.¹⁴⁵ However, this new doctrine of *via sacra* of the Naga Hills, the Commissioner goes on was ‘hardly impressed on the Angami minds’. A small fine was considered the best punishment for the outrages on the *via sacra*. The political paths came to represent the colonial theatrics of power, which were displayed through routine movement of troops and police. At the same time notion of a public order was to be maintained along these paths of authority.

Roads became a site of political rituals where the officials and authorities were introduced to the ‘great estate’ through their tours and travels. ‘Improvements’ of roads were also vital for making the rural landscape more legible to power.¹⁴⁶ Moreover, by providing roads to the varied sections in the hills, the internal territory was expanded. Access inside the Naga Hills was interpreted and displayed the power of the state as this account by S.B.Ridsdale show: ‘I proceeded from Golaghat to Samaguting and from thence by the political path to Wokha, leaving the road to visit, first the valley around which Mezoma, Konoma and Jotsoma are situated and secondly, Kohima and its neighborhood. From Wokha I returned to Golaghat by the political path.’¹⁴⁷

Generally these political paths were assumed to be roads ‘good in repair... and all along was practicable for ponies or mules.’¹⁴⁸ By second half of nineteenth century the district official [s] is manifested and particularly represented as one responsible for repairs, supervision, constructing and maintaining roads in the district. For example Colonel Johnstone after inspecting the Golaghat-Samaguting road reports the need of ‘a

¹⁴⁴ Frontier and Overseas Expedition from India. vol. IV. North and Northeast Frontier Tribes, p. 201; F&PD-A. December 1878. Nos.58-60. This was made known while settling a case of offence, committed by the Mezoma village on some Nagas from Kohima on the ‘political paths’ between Samaguting and Wokha

¹⁴⁵ F&PD-A. December 1878. Nos.58-60. This was made known while settling a case of offence, committed by the Mezoma village on some Nagas from Kohima on the ‘political paths’ between Samaguting and Wokha

¹⁴⁶ F&PD-A.E. September 1882. Nos.135-137. This was after the visit of the Commander-in-Chief in November 1882. Interestingly, the C-I-C permitted a company of sappers and a wing of the 23rd pioneers, including the 42nd regiment to be employed on this portion of the road.

¹⁴⁷ F&PD-A. October 1878. Nos. 7-51.

¹⁴⁸ F&PD-A. October 1878. Nos.7-51.

large sum of money annually ... to keep it in repair'. He observed that 'much of the time of the district officer is taken up in superintending the works. Such a road will be invaluable and the repair for a longtime would be limited to cutting the jungle on either side every side.'¹⁴⁹ Listen to what the Naga Hills administration report of 1877-1878 have to say on this: 'the bridges on the road below Samaguting and Golaghat have been repaired and renewed where required and a small amount of earthwork thrown up in one or two of the low parts of the road. The rest houses at Dimapur and Hariojan are in fair repair but the rest house at Borpathar ... requires attention.'¹⁵⁰

The very presence and supervision by European officials in repairing and constructing roads sought to represent authority to the people. Major Johnstone the political agent Naga Hills thus writes of Needham, his assistant who 'in February and March ... made five trips into the Hills to superintend the road works'.¹⁵¹ Needham was highly praised for his managerial skills over the Nagas, especially 'for teaching the Mohurir in charge to work properly.'¹⁵² This supervisions and inspections meant to James Johnstone that 'life was never monotonous.'¹⁵³ Such a break he describes happen through long walks, while inspecting roads and bridges in the hills – 'a very important work.'¹⁵⁴

Roads also became a site for invoking 'order' among the natives. Traveling through Khonoma in 1921, Hutton fined a sum of Rs. 50 against the Semoma Khel. He also make them construct a new bridle path between within four months.¹⁵⁵ Hutton had earlier warned this village against taking their cows through the bridle paths, which caused ruts and holes.¹⁵⁶ On the other hand 'small offence', such as using opium, provoked the district officials to correct them by working them on the roads¹⁵⁷ Roads also

¹⁴⁹ F&PD-A. August 1874. Nos. 273-275.

¹⁵⁰ F&PD-A. December 1878. Nos. 58-60.

¹⁵¹ F&PD-A. September 1876. Nos. 142-145.

¹⁵² Ibid.

¹⁵³ See 'Samaguting' in Elwin, Verrier, *The Nagas in the nineteenth century*, p. 30.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵⁵ *Tour Diary of J.H. Hutton, D.C. Naga Hills, 1921, GRC, NS, K.*

¹⁵⁶ Ibid.

¹⁵⁷ *Tour Diary of K. Cantlie, offg D.C. Naga Hills, 1919, GRC, NS, K.* For instance, in 1919, K. Cantlie the officiating D.C. of Naga Hills fined a Khonoma man and another from Kohima for using opium by working them in the Zubza road.

became 'showy display places' where the colonial state could control the Naga Hills through a varied network of routes and making them seem well tended, retained the colonial value as sign of 'civility'.¹⁵⁸ The seasonal improvements and tours through the hills would seem to suggest that the land -like its power- was safe in their hands.

Politics of route making: from Nigrating to Chindwin

It has been argued that, land routes are integral to the formation of states and empires, and to their continuation and expansion. The building of major routes also helps determine the potential strength of states. A reconstruction of the complex communication network in colonial Naga Hills discloses two major lines both starting from Nigrating in the Brahmaputra, to Golaghat and Borpathar, moving across the Dhansiri River to Kohima via Dimapur. It then extended across Manipur to Kalewa in Upper Chindwin, Burma. The second route went from Nigrating to Golaghat, then turned to Wokha via Borpathar, crossed the Doyang River and reached Kohima. From Kohima the route led to Mao and through the Manipur frontier on to Burma. Apart from these two major routes, numerous paths and routes linked villages to the plains below (see Map).

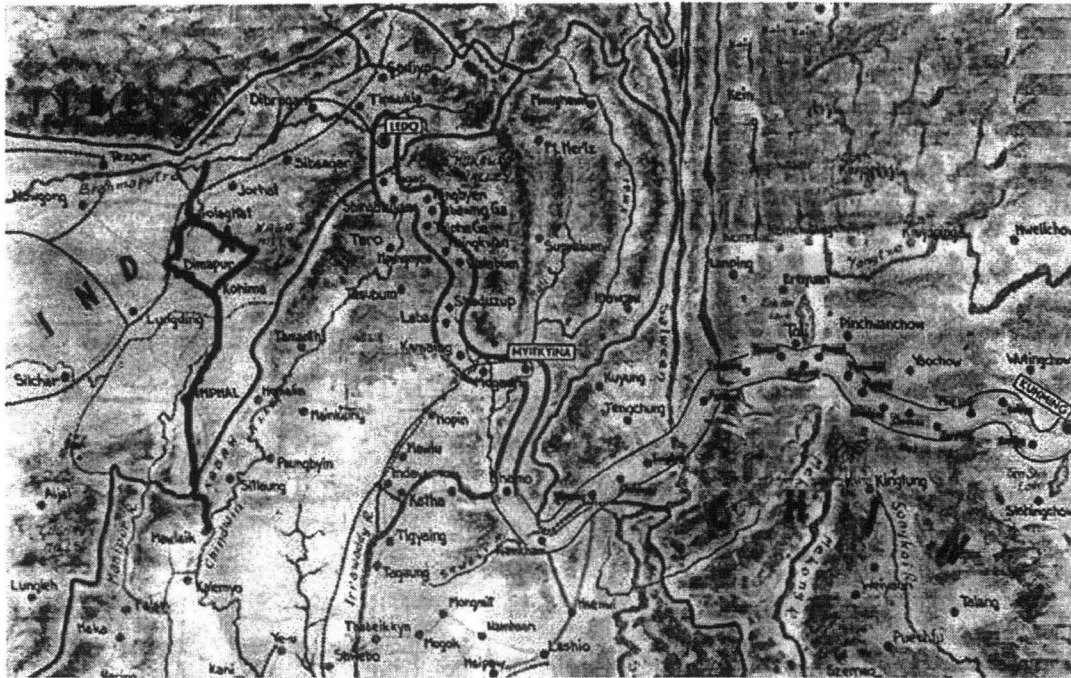
A key concern for British imperial strategy was the Assam-Burma road, which ran through the Naga Hills and Manipur. The total length of this strategic route was estimated to be 365 miles and it was divided into four sections.¹⁵⁹ (See table.1)

Table.1. Division of section and the length/miles of the Assam Burma Road, in 1895.

Division of section	Length/Miles
Nigrating to Nichuguard (plain section)	83
Nichuguard to Kohima (hills section)	40
Kohima to Manipur	92
Manipur to Kalewa	150
Total	365

¹⁵⁸ By 'showy display places' I mean the manifestation of the dominant power in which human capacity to dominate land was key, through visible acts of engineering. See Mukerji, Chandra. *Material practices of domination*, p. 8.

¹⁵⁹ F&PD. Sec-E. May 1895. Nos. 139-178.



Route map of the Assam-Burma road, 1943

Source: www.Chiptaylor.com/tlmmnp3952-.cfm

In recognition of the importance of this route a sum of Rs 22 lacs was sanctioned between 1891-95, for its construction.¹⁶⁰ Sequential conflict however disrupted this enterprise. In 1881, following the Anglo-Naga war, the section running through the Naga Hills was taken up. Again, in 1891 the Manipur rebellion created an urgent need to construct a road across Manipur by which reinforcement could be rapidly brought in. Yet, in opening the road, colonial authorities also expressed the hope that Manipuris would be able to earn money to pay their revenues by 'supplying rice and dried fish for the Assam-Bengal railway work people at Dimapur'.¹⁶¹ By extending the road into Burma, this route would form a secure 'life line' between Assam and Upper Burma.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.

¹⁶¹ Ibid. In order to meet the expenses on this route, policies were framed whereby Manipur was required to pay half the cost of Mao-Manipur road.

At particular conjunctures, when the Assam-Burma border with China becomes an area of contestation for imperial powers, ambitious design for buttressing the road link with a railway line as well was set out. Earlier in his reference to the Naga Hills in 1906, Major C.G. Stewart, Assistant Quarter Master General (Strategy), wrote to General Mulla as follows: 'the strategical importance of this area lies in the possibility of establishing railway communication. Any development of affairs in Yunan or Siam will lend considerable importance to the construction of such a railway, although at present it may be said to be not required.'¹⁶² Ambitious project could take shape as for instance in 1912, following reports of 'Chinese activity along the Assam borderland' colonial authorities proposed to 'connect and establish railway communication between Assam and Burma'.¹⁶³ Surveys were conducted on possible railway routes in 1912 and cost estimate made.¹⁶⁴ However, the plan was abandoned as the distances were too long, especially from a commercial point of view, the cost too high, and the route too difficult to build.¹⁶⁵

An important motive for establishing communication networks through the Naga Hills was of securing access to key raw material resources.¹⁶⁶ In 1908 B.H. Butler the Secretary to the Government of India, sets out the reasons for securing access to the Naga Hills: 'there is no foreign power on the other side of them, who is absorbing them. They lie between Assam and Burma. I think we must extend when we find coal or minerals ad

¹⁶² F&PD-A. March 1907. Nos. 103.

¹⁶³ F&PD. External -A. November 1912. Nos.1; F&PD. Sec-E. October 1911. Nos. 52-123. The need for better connectivity was further justified, by evidence of the 'reputed visit of Chinese emissary into the Aka unadministered region and the departure of additional Chinese soldiers from Gyantse and Phari to the Poyul district, north of Mishmi country' (present Arunachal Pradesh). In addition, precautionist measures were reportedly taken to prevent 'encroachment by the Chinese into the unadministered territory extending from the borders of Bhutan to Manang Pum'.

¹⁶⁴ Chittagong-Akyab-Minha route about 450 miles, estimated cost at 7 crores; Manipur route, 385 miles, estimated cost at 6.5 crores; and the Hukong valley route, 284 miles, estimated to cost 3.83 crores.' F&PD. External -A. November 1912. Nos.1.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid. B.S. Cary of the Bengal Government later remarked that the propose railway line between Burma and Assam was surveyed and rightly abandoned. He hoped that some day there will be a railway line from Bengal to Burma passing through Arakan but when there is, the trains will run to lower Burma whilst troops will be required in upper Burma. The Hukong valley railway line will someday be made, but it will not serve many of the places where troops will be needed.

¹⁶⁶ F&PD. External. A. July 1908. Nos. 123.

British capitalist go up and poses the land.'¹⁶⁷ However, intense British activity to open and secure access routes in the frontiers with Burma culminated only after the First World War.

The First World War gave a tough lesson about military logistics in the Northeast frontier of Burma. Lamenting on the state of communication between Assam and Burma B.S.Carey of the Bengal government remarked: 'the deplorable state of the route was brought home to us in 1914, when a solitary enemy light cruiser *Emdem* impeded communication between Indian Burma, and when it was proposed to carry the Burma mails to the Bengal-Assam railway via the Chindwin river and Imphal.'¹⁶⁸ Despite being 'the Northeast bastion of the Indian empire', Burma he said was 'not garrisoned with the view of protecting either itself or India.'¹⁶⁹ In addition to strategic concern, there were, he pointed out, also big commercial issues at stake. Because the route passes through the vast undeveloped coalfields of Datthwe Kyaung. What is more important, he states, is that the traffic and volume of trade passing between Assam and Burma is increasing annually in volume and inter-provincial communication¹⁷⁰

Colonial interest on China was also predicated with concerns to open up access to future sites of productive markets, especially in southwest China. The struggle for resources was uppermost in the mind of C.M. Webb, Chief Secretary to the Government of Burma in 1919, as he surmised in this statement:

the next decade will however in all probability see a severe economic struggle between the nations interested in the development of China's vast natural resources and of China's dormant markets.

¹⁶⁷ F&PD. External. A. July 1908. Nos. 123. At the same time, he rejected the idea of expanding and annexing the eastern Naga Hills as, 'I would strongly resist any proposal for extension of responsibility merely to prevent those savages from killing one another.'

¹⁶⁸ F&PD. External. A. August 1919. Nos. 1-2. According to the British military strategist, up till the War, communication between India and Burma operated only through two ports, Rangoon and Moulmein. At any rate wrote B.S. Cary of the Bengal Government, the Government of India cannot claim complete control of the Bay of Bengal in all or any circumstances. The port at Akyab is of no use from a military point of view because the Yoas still bar the way from Arakan to Burma proper except to individual men n animals.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid. According to B.S. Carey, 'the present war is a reply to such a question. We have but to comprehend the millions in China and the loose cohesion of that empire; to meditate on the rapid rise and modernization of Japan and remember our unpreparedness for the present war in spite of the numerous omens.'

India in order to take her part in this struggle must develop early-improved land communication between Burma and India.¹⁷¹

To develop this important land route between Assam and Burma, B.S. Carey even suggested of employing the 'Turkish prisoners of war for road works'.¹⁷² In the Naga Hills, H.C. Barnes, the D.C. was already engaged in 'the cutting of a path by free labour' from Karami. Extending this path would connect it with the path to the Burma police outpost at Thamanthi, the junction of the Tizu and the Chindwin. Barnes believed that 'the administration can only be strengthened by the establishment of through communication between Kohima and Thamanthi and at the same time we make insubordination more difficult for the Kukis in the Burma Tract.'¹⁷³ Though the improvement of road communication between Assam and Burma was justified on grand imperial designs, the post-war politics will determine political shifts and policies in the Northeast frontiers.¹⁷⁴

Conclusion: Roads, 'a great blessing to the people'

Road building in the Naga Hills could take low priority and be regarded as an unnecessary expenditure at conjunctures in which military-strategic imperatives dominated the picture. That there were local skills associated with road making, and that there were complex trade networks criss-crossed the supposedly impenetrable hills, often came as a surprise. Even so colonial officials could invest on the extension of a small bridle path with great civilization significance for a 'backward tract.' Colonial officials celebrated over the extension of a small bridle path as bringing 'comfort to the trading Nagas'.¹⁷⁵

¹⁷¹ F&PD. External. A. August 1919. Nos. 1-2.

¹⁷² F&PD. External. File. No. 505-x/ 1923. Carey remarked: 'But when I heard that Turkish prisoners of war were available for road work I suggested their being employed on this Assam-Burma motor transport road at once.'

¹⁷³ *Tour Dairy of H.C. Barnes, D.C. Naga Hills, 1916.*

¹⁷⁴ F&PD. File No. 554-X. serial Nos.1-3. 1926. This for instance is seen in the matter of financing road works in the hills, where the Assam Legislative Assembly sought to pass off all the costs of the project to the local administration. I hope to explore on the Post war politics and its implications in the Northeast, later in my research.

¹⁷⁵ FPP.External.A.sept.1885, Nos.36-38.

The demand for labour generated by road making was harked as having engendered 'a taste of luxuries of civilization' among the inhabitants who now invest in 'umbrellas, tobaccos, sugar and cattle's etc'.¹⁷⁶ It had bestowed 'a great blessing to the people'.¹⁷⁷ On the contrary, filtering of monetisation had been earlier considered unfit for a hilly country, as Captain Butler writes: 'A people who know little of the value of money and only make use of it to purchase luxuries are really in the end benefited by being overpaid and so enabled to live in idleness instead of acquiring industrious habits.'¹⁷⁸

In the official narratives road making through the hills was considered as 'the most useful work of a civilizing nature'.¹⁷⁹ Thus in 1876, Colonel R.H.Keatinge describes the inhabitants of Wokha who 'formerly never visited the plains' going now 'in numbers to Golaghat to buy salt.'¹⁸⁰ What brought his satisfaction was that the political path laid out passed through 'number of villages on their routes.'¹⁸¹

Despite grand claims, many of the roads made under the British dispensation actually followed existing Naga paths, leveling out certain sections, erecting more 'permanent bridges', and filling in holes and ruts etc. And yet these improvements could often be very ephemeral. Heavy rains could turn supposedly all weather cart roads into a morass. This is what the Manipur *administration report* of 1899-900 has to say on the Golaghat-Kohima road:

It is serious matter that it should have been found to keep open during the rains the cart road from Golaghat to Kohima, which was made at a cost of 35 lakh of rupees. It is unmetalled and traverses heavy soil which when soaked with rain cuts into a morass.¹⁸²

¹⁷⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid.

¹⁷⁸ F&PD-A. August 1874. Nos. 273-275; H&PD. Judicial-A. June 1883. Nos. 140-14.

¹⁷⁹ F&PD-A. September 1876. Nos. 142-145

¹⁸⁰ F&PD-A. October 1878, Nos. 7-51

¹⁸¹ Ibid.

¹⁸² F&PD. External. A. December 1900. Nos. 24-26

Even by the 1920s colonial projects evoked no more than little ‘improvements’ of existing bridle paths. And against this one has to balance the fact that old circulatory routes were blocked off, and access in the Naga Hills was sporadically denied or regulated. According to the *Imperial Gazetteer* of 1905, the total mileage of roads in the district in 1903-04 was 73 miles of Cart Road and 470 miles of bridle path¹⁸³, which by 1909 came to total 621 miles of Bridle path.¹⁸⁴ To add to this, the state of communication was considered as ‘sufficient for the requirements of its inhabitants’.¹⁸⁵ However, a mesh of bridle paths proliferated across the frontier in the direction of Burma, and slowly but gradually alongside these routes, military and civil stations were established at strategic intersection.¹⁸⁶ And yet for this modest network the inhabitants of this territory, as I shall show in the next chapter, often had to pay a heavy price. The ‘modernizing’ or the ‘civilizing’ basis of the colonial state napped into view as, to use Ralph Fox’s term, ‘the white man charges very heavily for bearing his burden’.¹⁸⁷

¹⁸³ *Imperial Gazetteer of India* 1905, p. 293.

¹⁸⁴ Bareh, H. , p. 129.

¹⁸⁵ *Imperial Gazetteer of India* 1905, p. 293.

¹⁸⁶ F&FD. External. A. November 1887. Nos. 64-66. A. Porteous, the D.C of Naga Hills, after a tour explains his objective of ‘fixing further hearing of the case at Kohima to familiarize the Nunkum people with Kohima and the road thither. He reports that ‘no Ao’s had ever hitherto visited Kohima’.

¹⁸⁷ Ralph Fox, *The colonial policy of British Imperialism* (New York: International Publishing, 1933).

Chapter III

Turning 'primitive' hillmen into 'coolies'

They (northern Nagas) are distinguished by a restlessness strongly characteristic of their usual habits of life, and the muscular strength displayed in the swelling outline of their well-formed limbs, evinces men capable, from long habit, of performing journeys, which by the less practiced inhabitant of the plain, would prove impossible. They never travel but in parties, each man carrying a conical-shaped basket on his back, secured by two straps, one of which embraces the chest, and the other passes round the forehead – the right hand grasps a spear, shod at the lower extremity with and friendly support.¹

R. B. Pemberton, 1827

Coolies from villages to which no agricultural lands were attached seemed tall and slender, while the men, who had spent any time on their fields, were short, with magnificent chests and shoulders. Both sexes among the Nagas are adepts in the carriage of heavy packs, and will march quite steadily beneath a load of one hundred and twenty pounds.²

Angus Hamilton, 1912

Some of the Semas have recently traveled far afield to 'do their bit' in the labour-corps of our Army. In September 1917, in Eastern France, I came across a gang of Nagas, many of them, no doubt, Mr. Hutton's own protégé, engaged in road-repairing in the war-zone, within sound of the guns. They appeared to be quite at home and unperturbed.³

Henry Balfour, 1921

For most colonial authorities it was clear that the roads of empire could not be built without the use of coolie labour. On the other, military campaigns to extend the British Empire in the Northeast frontier implied that overland routes became essential. Since virtually all transportation in the hills was on foot, in the absence of carts, bullock's, boats or 'roads'. In addition, the annual tours by the District Commissioners and other officials meant that coolies had to be found to carry their baggage and supplies. This, of course, was where the Naga 'coolies' came into the picture, since their primary function was to build and maintain roads and bridges, carry the supplies and baggages of officials on tours, and to provide various support services. In part, coolies in the Naga

¹ R.B. Pemberton, 'A Singular Race of People', in Verrier Elwin, *The Nagas in the Nineteenth Century* (Bombay: OUP, 1969), p. 44-45.

² Angus Hamilton, *In Abor Jungles* (London: Eveleigh Nash, 1912), p. 139.

³ J.H. Hutton, *The Sema Nagas* (Bombay: OUP, 1921; reprint, 1969).

Hills made possible the delineation of empire and allowed the district officials to travel to its margins.

Impressed labour in the Naga Hills fell in with the imperial project of introducing the 'primitive tribes' to the disciplining power of wage labour capitalism. In the official mentality as Macdonald suggest, this would encourage villagers in the 'habits of steady industry,' before awarding them 'complete freedom in the disposal of their own labour.'⁴ However, efforts of the colonial authorities to get the Nagas to do many of these 'novel things', naturally enough, were not readily or easily accepted. Attempts to impress labour were met with violent resistance or by desertion. Focusing on the period from 1880s till the early twentieth century, this chapter primarily seeks to understand the historical constitution of 'primitive hillmen' into 'coolies' in the Naga Hills.⁵

Men for 'mountain work'

The British military strategists knew that it was difficult to manage an expanding frontier without a controllable, flexible and mobile labour force. It was crucial to get a continuous supply of labour over a long stretch of time. Following the occupation of Samaguting in 1866, officials discussed and debated on how to get labour for the hill works. One suggestion was to generate local resources and labour. Thus in December 1866, Lt Gregory, the Political Agent in the Naga Hills, framed rules of 8 days labour or alternately a tax of Rs 2 per house as the preferred tax rate.⁶ In this project, Lt. Gregory sought to locate a village chief who could be induced to collect house tax, offering him 20% of the amount collected for his service. This headman was also required to distribute labour demand among the households.⁷

⁴ Kenneth Iain Macdonald, 'Shove and Push: The Spatial History construction of a Portering Economy in Northern Pakistan', *Comparative Study of Society and History* (CSSH), vol. 40 (1998), pp.287-91.

⁵ Much of what follows learn from and share the theoretical framework of the Sherry B. Ortner's work on the Sherpas of Nepal and Kenneth Iain Macdonald's work on the 'Balti coolies'. See Sherry B. Ortner, *Life and Death on the Mt. Everest: Sherpas and Himalayan Mountaineering* (New Delhi: Princeton University, 1999) and Macdonald, *Shove and Push*.

⁶ F&PD-A. December 1866. Nos. 137-140.

⁷ *Ibid.*

However, if local labour has to be tapped, then the rhythms of cultivation would also have to be taken into account to prevent any serious disruption with their agricultural activities. Thus Gregory suggested that the course of eight days labour should be 'paid in the cold weather immediately after harvest.'⁸ This was described as a slack period for the Nagas when they stayed idle and which would not interfere with their agricultural work.⁹ Moreover, characterizing the Naga labourer as inexperienced and indolent, the colonial officials tended to consider him fit only for the simple task of road making.¹⁰ This suggestion was however marked with inherent flaws. The rhythm of the agricultural cycle and the demand for labour often clashed with the need for continuous labour on road works. For instance in 1873 an official working on the Golaghat-Samaguting road reports: 'Beginning of December and end of February ... work on the roads came to a standstill as coolies left to their homes to cut and store their rice corps.'¹¹ A steady supply of labour gang was thus needed to develop 'public works' in the hills.

As an alternative to the labour exigencies in the Naga Hills, the colonial authorities sometimes drew upon the Nepali coolies who had been brought in to work in the Assam tea gardens. However, this excited the vehement opposition of the tea planters. Thus Alexander Mackenzie, the Joint Secretary to the Government of India, remarked in 1873: 'sudden call for their services places the planters in an unfair position and leads to much grumbling.'¹² These Nepali coolies, recruited mostly from Darjeeling and Jalpaiguri, were often employed in the campaigns, since other source of requisitioning coolie labour according to Mackenzie was of great difficulty in the Northeast frontier. However, in requisitioning these coolies suddenly and marching them hurriedly to field service resulted in sickness and much loss of life. Nevertheless, with care and proper supervision, Mackenzie was hopeful of easily enlisting these 'excellent men' for 'mountain work'.¹³

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ F&PD-A. September 1873. Nos. 219-29.

¹¹ F&PD- A. September 1873. Nos. 219 – 229.

¹² Expressing his concern on the state of garden coolies in 1873 he writes: 'this year there has been a considerable scarcity of this labour, and any large indent for coolies by government would tell seriously upon the prospect of many garden.' See F&PD-A. October 1873. Nos. 277-293 A.

¹³ Ibid.

In 1873, Alexander Mackenzie, in his letter to the Secretary, Foreign Department, explained that ‘the want of carriage’ was ‘the greatest difficulty’ confronted by the military during hill campaigns in the Northeast frontier.¹⁴ Mackenzie knew that success and efficiency of the military campaigns on the Northeast frontier would ‘depend more on the efficiency of the coolies than of the soldiers.’¹⁵ Moreover, in the wake of the large-scale expansion of tea plantations in the eastern frontier district, Mackenzie predicted ‘from time to time to have “little wars” on our hands.’¹⁶ Keeping these imperial interests in mind, Mackenzie proposed to form a *Permanent Labour Corp* for the Northeast frontier. He hope to engage them in opening hill roads, in time of peace while moving this ‘small efficient force when the need arises.’¹⁷ In this enterprise, Mackenzie found the Nepali coolies as ‘the very class of men who would form the coolly corp.’ He knew that such a coolie corp would be indispensable even as the empire expanded in the frontier. Thus in his concluding remark he writes: ‘In the Garo and Naga Hills, and on the south frontier of Cachar, there is work enough to occupy such a corps for years to come.’¹⁸

Yet in the scheme of colonialism, policies are not framed in isolation. There are always linkages and pressures around which grandiose policies are plotted. With the introduction of the Inner Line Permit in 1873, having a more regulated and organized coolie corp became essential as mobility was brought under stricter control.¹⁹ For instance, a large labour force could now move across the frontier only under the sanctioned order and supervision of the colonial officials. Thus in 1876, Nepalis recruited from Darjeeling, reportedly carried out most of the hill work on the Wokha road.²⁰ In 1879, another group of 150 Nepalese coolies from the Garo Hills, along with 50 Mikir

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ A cursory examination of the ILP regulation shows that British subjects or those of specified classes were prohibited from going beyond a certain line, laid down for the purpose, without a pass or license issued by the Deputy Commissioner. See Edward Gait, *A History of Assam* (1926; Guwahati: Lawyers Book Stall, 1997), pp. 316-17.

²⁰ F&PD-B. March 1876. Nos. 163 – 167.

coolies were employed in the Samaguting-Kohima road by G.H. Damant, the Deputy Commissioner of Naga Hills.²¹

Even as imported coolies were increasingly employed in the Naga Hills, contradictory elements seep into the official narrative. Colonial officials were consistently expressing reservation on the adaptability of the 'plain' coolies in the hills. 'I do not consider the Punjabi plainsmen, as a rule, make the best coolies for hill works', wrote John Butler in 1875.²² On the contrary, he found the Khasis and the Kukis cheerful and jolly. In his eyes, their work was 'such a marked contrast to the sad and weary manner of the Punjabi that it was a matter of general remark.'²³ In another striking instance in 1876, J.F. Needham the Assistant Political Agent in the Naga Hills, complained bitterly against the Assamese and the Goorkha coolies, who were employed in the Golaghat-Wokha Road.²⁴ Dismissing them 'as useless for road making', he hoped to replace them with 100-200 Cacharies.²⁵

Arguing against the policy of importing coolies in 1878, Col James Johnstone, the Officiating Political Agent of Naga Hills insisted that labour could be tapped within the hills themselves. In fact they were crucial both for political and financial reasons. Writing in 1878 to one Mr. Thompson, Member in Council in the Foreign Department he retorted:

The Govt should not have been burdened with a heavy expense annually for coolies from the plains, when local labours was at hand, nor should the disgraceful spectacle have been seen of coolies forced up from the plains to work on the Hills Roads, because we were afraid to make the *lazy hillmen* perform their share of necessary work.²⁶

²¹ F&PD-A. January 1880. Nos. 495-497.

²² F&PD-A. December 1875. Nos. 91-99.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Mr. Needham expressing his anguish over the works carried out by the Assamese and the Gurkhali coolies narrates thus: 'instead of digging around the roots of the trees in clearing a path through the forest and then cutting them well under ground they've cut nearly the whole of the tree level with the ground and then thrown a little earth over all to make believe that the work has been properly done while the numerous hollow which occur have been so loosely fitted in with earth as to render it impossible to move out for a walk or on horseback for fear of breaking ones pony's legs and the numerous steep approaches to the nullahs and joins have been but partially razed down and are consequently many of that still too steep to ride down with comfort.' See F&PD-A. September 1876. Nos. 142 – 145.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ F&PD-A. October 1873. Nos. 277-293 A.

Johnstone thus pushed for a more aggressive policy in the Naga Hills. Extracting labour from the Nagas was to be a more forceful process.

In November 1879, G.H. Damant, the Deputy Commissioner of Naga Hills impressed on the Angamis to comply with the governments demand for payment of revenue and labour for the carriage of supplies.²⁷ A non-compliance was threatened with coercive violence, with the aim to force people to embark on this new undertaking.²⁸ To a large extent this coercive policy was framed from the perspective that the Angamis were the most outspoken opponents on the issue of forced labour. At another level, it was assumed that a compliance with the government demands by large Angami villages such as Khonoma and Mezoma, would compelled the weaker villages to follow suit.²⁹ Planned military forays were thus designed to demonstrate not only to the people against whom they were sent, but to their neighbours as well, that resistance was futile.

To pursue this imperial objective, Damant in November 1879 sets out on a tour to Khonoma, Jotsoma, and Mezoma. However at Khonoma, as the official narrative informs us, Damant along with his detachment of 54 sepoy were killed in a skirmish.³⁰ As the narrative unfolded, the coalition of Angami Nagas laid siege on the British military base in Kohima. Described as the 'last major military encounter' in the Naga Hills, this Angami uprising took almost a year, and a massive mobilization of resources by colonial officials to finally pacify the hills.³¹

²⁷ This tour was to be followed by a visit to the Ao Nagas, 'a fierce race dwelling in large villages containing 5000- 6000 houses.' Damant had hoped to employ the coolies procured from the Angami country in this proposed visit. See F&PD – A. March 1880. Nos. 331 – 395 D

²⁸ Violence was to be used in an exemplary fashion, hoping to render its further use unnecessary. Yet such a coercive policy had been already determined in 1873 by Alexander Mackenzie: 'an unfortunate "little war" begets a dozen, but one well conducted expedition obviates many more.' See F&PD-A. October 1873. Nos. 277-293 A.

²⁹ In 1879, G.H. Damant, the Political Agent in the Naga Hills wrote to the Commissioner of Assam on the imperial objective of subjugating the Angami Nagas. According to Damant, 'the larger villages in the Angami community have been for generations past in the habit of levying contributions from all their weaker neighbours whether of their own or different tribes, and they will not readily pay revenue in place of receiving it.' However, Damant was confident that once large villages such as the Khonoma and Jotsoma 'are compelled to pay revenue ... no further difficulty is to be anticipated as all the weaker villages will at once follow their lead.' See F&PD-A. January 1880. Nos. 498-511.

³⁰ F&PD – A. March 1880. Nos. 331 – 395 D.

³¹ A force of 1135 of all ranks along with two mountain guns (from Calcutta) was mobilized under the command of General Nation, from Shillong; apart from Col. James Johnstone force of 2000 Manipur troops

In the eyes of the colonial officials violence was thus required to force people to embark on this new undertaking. Non-compliance to the state's demand invoked instant coercion. When Kohima refused to furnish coolies during the 1879-80 Anglo-Naga war, 'rockets were fired into the village.'³² General Nation, the Commanding officer expressed his satisfaction over such an action as the 'four khels at once furnished coolies.'³³ With the pacification of the Angami country in 1879-80, dependence on imported labours in the Naga Hills gives way to a policy of dependence on the local labour and resources. Thus in 1880, a plan proposed by G.H. Damant, the Deputy Commissioner of Naga Hills, to organize a coolie corp of 200 Nepalese was subjected to an outright rejection by Steuart Bayley, the Commissioner of Assam. Citing his reason, Steuart Bayley remarked: 'This is partly on the ground of expense, partly because it passed over *the only way we had of making the Nagas pay something for their administration*'.³⁴ In other words, this policy was interpreted as a labour tribute along with its function to signify the Nagas submission to the administration.

Taxing the 'Primitive'

Following the pacification of the Angami country, a set of terms and conditions included a regular supply of labour, supplies, and an annual house tax. Organizational structure, in the figures of the Headmen and the Dobhashi, was set in place. To create important reservoirs of labour in the hills, Steuart Bayley, the Commissioner of Assam demanded in 1880, 'supplies of so many *beggaries* for so many days in the year from each village'.³⁵ On political ground, explained Steuart Bayley, it was considered as 'a

including his own personal escort of 30 men with 50-frontier force. F&PD-A. February 1880, Nos.275-289; The Transport Train organized during the expedition, for transport and supply comprised of 700 boats, 200 carts, 305 elephants, 227 ponies and 405 coolies. See V.J. Brig Moharir, 'Operations on the eastern frontier' in *History of the army service corps. Vol.2.1858-1913*' (New Delhi: Sterling Pub (p) Ltd., 1984), p. 306.

³² F&PD-A. March 1880. Nos. 331-395D.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ F&PD-A. February 1880. Nos. 291-305.

³⁵ Ibid; E. Balfour defines *Begar* as 'forced labour for the repair of roads, tanks, forts, barracks, and for carrying baggage. *Begari*, a person so compelled to labor. See Macdonald, *Push and Shove*, p. 290; also see E. Balfour (ed.), *Cyclopedia of India and of Eastern and Southern Asia Commercial, Industrial, and*

necessary step towards linking these savages into the first rudiments of civilized life.³⁶ It would also enable the administration to save enormous expenses in importing coolie corp for the carriage of supplies in the hills.³⁷ This demand was rationalized through a system of 15 days of contributed labour by each house at 4 annas a day. Existing system of *Begar* in Assam and Manipur was then taken as a justification for introducing the new labour system in the Naga Hills.³⁸

However, if local labour was to be tapped, as I pointed out earlier, the British administrators would have to take the rhythms of cultivation into some account in calculating labour resources. Thus in 1880 Col Johnstone, Political Agent in Manipur, cautioned the district officials against engaging the Nagas during their agriculture cycle.³⁹ And in 1882, C.A. Elliott, the Commissioner of Assam directed the district officials to engage the 'contributed labour' when the Nagas are not engaged in their agricultural work; and within the proximity of the labourers village.⁴⁰ Such a policy operated with the aim to number potential subjects or their holdings and income. At the same time, by locating the Nagas within his normative cosmology colonial officials could draw upon a steady supply of labour, as well as food supply.⁴¹ And here, I would argue, the role of the Headmen and the Dobhashi became significant, since they were entrusted with the task of locating and enumerating houses and men. Apart from assessing revenue for the state, the

Scientific: Products of the Mineral, Vegetable, and Animal Kingdoms, Useful Arts and Manufactures (Madras, 1871).

³⁶ F&PD-A. February 1880. Nos. 291-305.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ *Ibid.* Here it should be mentioned that, in Assam and Manipur the British arrived to find a centralized system of labour aggregation i.e., *lallup* in Manipur, and the *paik* system in Assam. Hence, the existing structure could actually enable the colonial officials to tap into the local labour with any marked transformation. In the context of the Naga Hills, while a centralized system of authority was absent, as in the case of Assam and Manipur. Neither a state controlled labour organization operated. However, the war of 1879-80 provided an incentive for the colonial officials to frame policies, most importantly justify framing them, through which they could tap local labour and resources.

³⁹ In 1880, the military transport and supplies was seriously hampered as the anticipated Naga labour and rice was not realized as they tended their agricultural fields. F&PD-A. April 1880. Nos. 218-29.

⁴⁰ C.A. Elliott describes the seasonal agricultural occupation of the Nagas. Among the Lhotas, part of March was occupied in sowing and from May to November, in working and reaping the crop; the month from December to February and April are those in which labour may safely be demanded. F&PD-A. June 1882. Nos. 134-37.

⁴¹ A disperse swidden cultivator, such as the Aos, Semas or Lothas would mean that, populations could not be captured for corvee labour; nor could tax collectors monitor either the number of potential subjects or their holdings and income. However, in the case of the Angami Nagas, a settled terraced cultivation could enable the colonial administrators to assess revenue rigorously.

headman was also required to allocate or distribute labour demand among the households of a village.

Closely linked with the labour tax was the assessment of an annual house tax. In 1882, C. A. Elliot, the new Commissioner of Assam, had standardized the house tax in the Naga Hills, fixing the rates at Rupees two for the Angamis, and at one for the Rengmas and the Lhotas.⁴² The house tax of Rs two, later increased to three, when worked out is equivalent to fifteen days of labour.⁴³ This house tax, as we shall see below, was also a process of bringing the Nagas within the capitalist mode of wage economy. Through this tax colonial authorities sought to impress upon the people that there was a supreme government over them. Direct taxation made the contract between the state and its subjects more visible than it had ever been. Paying revenue to the government thus emerged as a 'rate of passage' to the development of a governable society.⁴⁴ Thus the administration report of 1885 claimed a satisfactory increase in revenue; while the Kukis were reportedly assessed for the first time in the district (see table).⁴⁵

Table 1. House tax derived from the Naga Hills in 1885.

⁴² C.A. Elliott paternalistically insisted to have only two or three class in the revenue grade, arranged on the basis of the community's condition and capacity. Such a measure was considered as necessary so as not to perplex the Nagas by minute differences. Because the Rengma Nagas are apparently poor and the Lhotas much poorer than the Angamis, they could not bear as high an amount. The rates were fixed at Rs three for the Angamis, later reduced to two rupees, and one for the Rengmas, and the Lothas. An amount of Rs 28, 383/- was reportedly assessed in 1882, among the Angami and Kutcha Nagas (Rs. 2), while the Rengma, Lhotas and Sema Nagas (Rs.1) who were assessed for the first time bringing in 8, 954, paid in rice at Rs. 3/- a maund. See F&PD –A. January 1882. Nos. 134 – 137.

⁴³ Ibid. For instance, an amount of four annas equaled to twenty-five paise. And a total of sixteen annas made a Rupee. By contributing an annual labour of 15 days for four annas a day, the amount earned by an individual works out at three Rupees and twelve annas. This was more or less equivalent to the House tax of Rs two, later increase to three Rupees, on the Nagas. Major Mitchell, the Political Officer in the Naga Hills reports of assessing a revenue of Rs 10, 312 from 100 villages in 1882.

⁴⁴ The logic of realizing revenue in the official notion of rule operated on the premise that 'a savage who pays revenue considers himself a British subject bound to carry out all orders given him, while a savage who does not pay revenue considers himself independent and free to obey orders or not he chooses.' See F&PD. March 1880. Nos. 331-395 D; also see Piketo Sema, *British Policy and Administration in Nagaland*, pp. 115-25.

⁴⁵ In 1885 the Naga Hills became a full-fledged district. This was considered important, since the district, like any other district of the Assam province was now under its regular tax regulation. Besides the title of the official responsible for administering the Naga Hills was also changed from one of Political Officer to the District Commissioner. See F&PD-External. A. September 1885. Nos. 36-38

Tribe	No. of village	No. Of houses	Rate (in rupees)	Amount (in rupees)	Commission to headmen 12 ½ % (in rupees)
Angami	60	6,316	2	12,632	2,626
Kacha Naga	27	1,182	2	2,364	473
Sema	7	1,417	2 and 1	1717	342
Lhota	54	6,308	1	6308	1261
Rengma	8	1328	1	1328	266
Misc. (7 Mauzas in north-west district)	8	1716	2	3,432	515
Kukis	8	516	2	1032	206
Total	172	18,783	-	28,813	5,590

On the eastern frontier of the Wokha subdivision, the Semas resisted the tax assessment. Resistance was however met with punitive expedition, which usually concluded with a 'treaty' in which the subjugated village was obliged to supply labour or alternately revenue in cash to the state.⁴⁶ As Julian Jacobs observed, paying tax thus brought each household – at least in theory – under the direct control of a centralized authority for the first time.⁴⁷

Tax was meant to push the Nagas into a wage labour market. As road building expanded in the region it also extended labour commodification. Ironically this was now cited as the justification for harshening the house tax in villages near the roads. In 1895, large number of Naga gangs had been employed on the Assam-Burma road, which ran across the Naga Hills. The argument was that this road-building project had privileged the Angami 'tribes' living along the line of construction. The Commissioner of Assam

⁴⁶Military Expeditions were undertaken against Munatung, Nungtang, Mangrung, Chichemi and Latisame, to suppress the native resistance against colonial tax. The villages were burnt, while a fine was imposed on the villages. A police detachment was usually posted in the villages subjugated, which sought to increase pressure on the subjected people to comply with the state demands. Ibid.

⁴⁷ Julian Jacobs, *The Nagas. The Hill people of Northeast India: Society, Culture and the Colonial Encounter* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1990), p. 23.

thus proposed to raise their house tax from rupees two to three.⁴⁸ The Foreign Department was apprehensive about the reaction to this increase. However, the Commissioner of Assam said he had given an assurance that there would be no further increase for ten year.⁴⁹

Following the completion of the Assam-Burma Road, A.E. Howell, the Deputy Commissioner reports of a decrease of Rs. 1, 700 /- in the Angami revenues in 1904.⁵⁰ The decrease demands some explanation. By the 1890s public works in the Naga Hills had emerged as a major sector of work for the Nagas without which paying their house tax became difficult. Once the works vanished, the Nagas had to look for an alternative source to pay their revenue. In turn, the search for an alternative source ultimately drove the Nagas into a wage labour economy.

From the Naga perspective, as Julian Jacobs suggests, the imposition of taxation had dramatic consequences. It was recognized as a turning point in their history.⁵¹ For instance, a Sangtam villager in the early twentieth century complained: 'when we were administered we had to sell our buffaloes to pay the tax.'⁵² By 1930s, writes Jacobs, the Nagas had become involved in economic activities outside the traditional patterns of Naga trade. To meet the tax Nagas in particular worked on the railways, as load carriers, in the coalmines at Borjan and as seasonal labourers on the tea plantation in the plain.⁵³ 'Gangs, especially of Semas and Aos, go down in the cold weather to work on tea

⁴⁸ An estimated cost of Rs 18, 15, 643 lakh was reportedly spent in this Hill section. 'This tribe' the Commissioner of Asam remarked, 'has gained more than any other tribe by the money, which has recently been spent in these hills on public works of considerable magnitude, more especially in the villages in close proximity to the main lie of road.' See F&PD-External. B. October 1895. Nos. 152-154; and, F&PD-External. A. December 1900. Nos. 24-26.

⁴⁹ Ibid. By proposing such a rise colonial authorities hope to increase the annual revenue tax to Rs. 20, 778 from the previous 13, 852.

⁵⁰ Following the completion of the hill section of the Assam-Burma road, A.E.Howell remarked that there was 'no longer the stream of silver into the district which made money so plentiful ten years ago'. Revenue-A, June 1904. Nos. 38-44. *Government Records Cell (GRC), Nagaland Secretariat (NS), Kohima (K)*.

⁵¹ Jacobs, *The Nagas*, p. 22.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid. , pp. 38-40

gardens in order to earn cash for their tax', recorded J.P.Mills, in 1931.⁵⁴ Taxation thus became a factor driving the hillmen out in search of wages. While taxes were gradually increased, those persons unable to raise money through the sale of their agricultural or pastoral surpluses were often forced into the labour market in search of wages.

Rationalizing Labour Impressment

Around 1880s, colonial officials were forced to re-evaluate the operation of the Impressment of Labour. In 1882, the Commissioner of Assam organized a district officials' conference. Instructions were dispatched to the district officials to report on the respective methods and policies, the conditions and eligibility including the machinery used and rates of wages of the labor impressed in their respective district. Coming close on the heels of two massive wars in the Hills i.e. , the Naga war of 1879-80 and the Garo war of 1881, and a mounting public protest in Assam against impressment around the same time, the district official's debated on the required evaluation of the system.⁵⁵

In the ensuing discussions, the District officials from Gowalpara, Kamrup, and Nowgong argued that impressment is rarely necessary or hardly employed for road repairs except for baggage, 'which is at times done in a disorderly and reprehensible manner.'⁵⁶ Those from Lakhimpur, Sibsagar and Cachar, reported that there was no labour impressment, the roads being maintained by the tea managers. However they admitted that at 'other times, the contract is given to a *mauzdar*, who probably impress labour, which does not work out with great care and efficiency.'⁵⁷ The colonial

⁵⁴ J.P. Mills, 'Notes on the effect on some primitive tribes of Assam of contacts with civilization', in *Census of India, 1931*, vol.1 – India, Part III – Ethnographical (Shimla: Government of India Press, 1935), p. 147.

⁵⁵ Col. J. Johnstone Political Agent to Manipur reports to the Commissioner of Assam: 'as far as I can gather from the Naga reports, Mr. Damant had gone to Khonoma to procure coolies.' Following the violent encounter in which Damant, the D.C. and his troops was killed, the Angamis laid siege on the British military base at Kohima, leading to the Anglo-Naga war of 1879-80. See FPP – A. February 1880. Nos. 308-335; One of the prime cause for the Garo Outbreak of 1881 was, 'the unwillingness of some villages to contribute labour for the purpose of making a road.' See H&PD. Judicial. March 1882. Nos. 58 –67.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Ibid. Generally, in Assam these impressments operated on the basis of the *Regulation XI of 1806*, which empowered the district officials to 'impress for carriage of loads.'⁵⁷ Under this regulation the district

vocabulary notwithstanding, the general conclusion was pointing more to the need of a relatively equal and systematic allocation of impressment rather than its complete abolition.

In this conference the Commissioner of Assam, made some far-reaching decisions. One, the supply of labour for repairs of roads and other useful works will rest upon the landowners in the village or circle in which the roads lie. Two, the contribution of such labor should be systematized and regulated, so as not to prove a heavy or unequal burden on the landowners of the province.⁵⁸ He also predicted that improved communication with Bengal, either by steamer or railway, will eventually lead to a flow of more free labor and as cart road increases less use of porters.⁵⁹ The effects of an authoritative juridical discourse that wrapped impressment of labor in a system of restrictions and prohibitions therefore, was to enable a non-judicial forms of domination.⁶⁰

Ironically, district officials from the hill districts, we are told, 'were not called to report' on impressments. Administration, in the absence of carriage in the hills district, as Peter Robb argues, would have been impossible without using force for transportation. Swayed by 'customs and necessity', the Commissioner however settled for increasing regulation of the system.⁶¹ '(T)he population is sparse in these tracts', commented C.J. Lyall, Secretary to the Commissioner of Assam, and 'labour from the different villages

official can 'impress carts, bullocks and boats for the use of either of troops or of officials traveling on public duty, or even of private persons traveling on their private affairs.'

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ibid. Earlier officials expressed their anxiety if labor impressment was 'systematized and legalized'. They argued: 'there are great differences in different district and that any person can refuse to serve and can sue the mauzdar in court if he uses force in compelling him to serve.'

⁶⁰ I draw this phrase from Gyan Prakash in this reference. He also argue, though in the context of the *Kamias* in Bihar, that the articulation of an authoritative juridical discourse, meant subordinating and silencing discordant voices, and making them speak the language of freedom. See Gyan Prakash, *Bonded Histories: Genealogies of Labor Servitude in colonial India* (Cambridge: CUP, 1990), p. 141.

⁶¹Spilling and circulating from one space to another, thereby linking them, the combined effects of the nineteenth century discursive practices thus reconstituted the 'coolies', especially in the hills district into 'fixed laborers.'

would be hard to introduce'.⁶² Roads and other public works, he added, were very few, a situation which 'makes impressments unnecessary'.⁶³

Regarding the Naga Hills, the impressment question, as the official record informs us, 'was separately discussed on political grounds'.⁶⁴ Though the details of the discussion is not presented in the colonial records. Yet through the impressment question, we can speculate and analyze the possibility of an evolving rationalization project of the state in the context of labour and tax aggregation. By the 1880s a rationalized labor system was already evolving, through the means of what C.J. Lyall terms as the 'practical steps' in the Naga Hills. A rationalization step in labour aggregation was in the form of the 'indirect tax'.⁶⁵ Under the new politico-economic regime, the Nagas were required to work for 15 days in a year. On this mechanism colonial official's also developed the idea of rotating labor from different village while working them on the few roads and other public works.⁶⁶ However, since tax or conscription list were inconceivable without some means of fixing an individuals identity and linking him or her to a kin group. On this rationale colonial authorities employed the '*register*' to assign a permanent one which would make their 'strange' subjects 'familiar'.

In 1881, Steuart Bayly have proposed to maintain 'a *register* of all adult males in each village whether near or far'.⁶⁷ When need for labour arise the register can be consulted and the services of the *Lambardars* used to meet the required order of labours.⁶⁸ This policy of quantification also operated as a key to a colonial imagery in

⁶² H&PD. Judicial. March 1882. Nos. 58 –67. Regarding the Naga Hills, the impressment question 'was separately discussed on political grounds'. C.J. Lyall reports of 'practical steps' being taken in the hills.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Robb, 'The Colonial State and Indian Identity', p. 261.

⁶⁸ F&PD -A. January 1876. Nos.101-103; F&PD -A. May 1873. Nos. 271-274. Since the government hitherto had had 'no real information as to the number of houses in any village' Peter Robb suggest that officials had to accept 'the rough estimates' of village elders. The working of the 'record keeping had infact as Peter Robb pointed out that 'serious flaws had appeared in the work, partly because officers had no experience of how it was done in the rest of India'. Robb, 'The Colonial State and Indian Identity', p. 261.

which countable abstraction of people and resources at every imaginable level and for every conceivable purpose, created the sense of a controllable indigenous reality.⁶⁹

The functionality of the register, was justified as a way of distributing the labour demand more equitably between the households and villages. As the administration report of 1884-85 informs us, the register was employed to record the number of coolie, name of village etc 'to prevent undue demands on any special village'.⁷⁰ Along with the expansion of territory, the register, as Peter Robb suggests, was perhaps 'the force which helped move the colonial state towards both hegemony and responsibility.' The register thus created a 'standard grid' whereby the state could centrally record and monitor its subjects. 'Registers are kept showing the total number of houses, the number of revenue-paying houses, and the number of tax-free houses in each village' writes J.P. Mills, in 1926.⁷¹ In this 'social simplification' project as James Scott argues, it not only permitted a more finely tuned system of taxation and conscription but also greatly enhanced the extracting capacity of the state.⁷²

Yet even as the 'free' labour market widened and labour was available more easily for public works, the system of impressment continued. In 1885, McCabe, the Commissioner of Assam, complained that, 'the most unpleasant work which falls to the lot of deputy commissioner of this district is the impressments of coolies'.⁷³ This remark came even as his annual report for year 1882-83, recorded 20,000 coolies employed 'voluntarily' in the local roads in the headquarter subdivision; and another 30,000 coolies were employed in road works and carriage of rice in the Wokha subdivision.⁷⁴ The argument here was that unpaid labour was 'traditional' and therefore could continue to be

⁶⁹ Arjun Appadurai, 'Numbers in Colonial imagination', in Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Delhi: OUP, 1997), pp. 116-17. Appadurai has argued that, by the eighteenth century, number, like landscape, heritage, and the people, had become part of the language of the British political imagination and the idea had become firmly implanted that a powerful state could not survive without making enumeration a central technique of social control.

⁷⁰ F&PD. External-A. September 1885. Nos. 36-38.

⁷¹ Mills, *The Ao Nagas*, p. 404.

⁷² Scott, *Seeing like a State*, p. 3.

⁷³ F&PD. External. A. Sept. 1885. Nos. 36-38.

⁷⁴ *Report on the administration of the province of Assam for the year 1882-1883* (Assam Secretariat Press: Shillong, 1884).

treated as a resource at the disposal of district authorities. In his justification on impressment in 1885, R.C. Low, the military officer Commanding on the Eastern frontier stated categorically:

No impressments of any description is being resorted ... in procuring labour If labour is required a requisition is made to the civil authorities with whom it rests to obtain voluntary labour or in difficulty to impress the labour required'.⁷⁵

And yet, anxious to find labour for extending the network of bridle paths in 1916, H. C. Barnes remarked:

It would be foolish to let it (impressed labour) pass by as the labour costs nothing and is most freely given. The work done today was done mostly by Phozanagwemi and Phozanasami coolies and they worked hard.⁷⁶

Barnes also found the Lumakami people, quite ready to work on the bridle paths. These coolies, he wrote, would then be employed on the branch road from Primi to Lumakami, extending on to Thatchumi.⁷⁷ Well into the early half of the twentieth century the colonial records report incidents of impressment in the Naga Hills. H.C. Barnes' tour diary of 1916 reads as follows: 'the Sibsagar local boards have not yet made the road from Santok Hat to Naginimara passable for carts. So 135 coolies had to be impressed from a distance and sent to Nazira.'⁷⁸

By 1916, official records show that Naga labour engaged in the district were demanding an increase in their wage. For instance, Barnes was confronted in 1916 by the Kekrima labourers for a rise in the coolie rate to Tekhubama from the existing 6 annas. Pressing their demand they argued that other villages were paid 8 annas for the state and as such they also deserve the same equivalent rate.⁷⁹ I would argue that this incident reveals how the coolies themselves were also aware now of different wage rates, in different labour markets i.e., state labour market and the 'free' labour market. What they

⁷⁵ F&PD. Sec-E. May 1885. Nos. 139-178.

⁷⁶ *Tour Diary of H.C. Barnes, D. C. Naga Hills, 1916, GRC, NS, K.*

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

were asking for here was not even the rate on the 'free' labour market, but the rate given for state impressed labour elsewhere. And yet, the official rejected this as 'a pure invention.'⁸⁰

As a result of these changes by the twentieth century formal *Parwannas* or government permits had to be made out to procure labour in the district: 'Yanho-Yantha asked for a copy of the *Parwana* saying that they need not supply coolies on requisition other than those coming from my office or sub-division office'⁸¹ In the initial system of procuring labour supply by rounding up people was now deemed morally repugnant and no longer necessary. New, and subtler forms of compulsion were thus being introduced which remained at the heart of colonial control.

Colonial Chiefs: 'Lambardars' and 'Dobashis'

In order to simplify and systematize the revenue aggregation, colonial authorities conferred 'absolute' right on the village headmen to allocate labour and house tax. Redefined as *Lambardars*, the headmen became the 'native' collector and the principal labour recruiter, the lynchpin of colonial authority in the hills. The absence of any permanent chief in the village, wrote Major James Johnstone in 1877, was a great obstacle, especially in the event of demanding labour and supplies. As the Officiating Political Agent in the Naga Hills, Johnstone thus suggested that 'each large village select the most influential man (richest man) ... as the channel of intercourse.'⁸² A few such men along the principal roads, wrote Johnstone, was considered to be of immense advantage to the travelers and detect outrages.⁸³

In 1882, C.A. Elliott, Commissioner of Assam established a two-layered agency in the Naga Hills i.e., the *Lambardars*, or Headmen and the *Dobhashi* or interpreters. Such configuration in the Naga Hills was an attempt to affirm and institutionalize a new

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ *Tour Diary of J.H. Hutton, D.C. Naga Hills, 1921, GRC, NS, K.*

⁸² F&PD – A. August 1877. Nos 120 –132.

⁸³ Ibid.

official narrative. These headmen, Elliott hoped, would gradually grow to be ‘possessor of power and authority’ over the young men of the village.⁸⁴ However, such a change, he commented ‘from the democratic and independent habits ... into one of subordination to a council of elders under a village headmen must be necessarily slow.’⁸⁵

Following Elliott’s proposal, Major Mitchell, the Political Officer of the Naga Hills, appointed twenty headmen in the Angami Naga Hills. These headmen were to receive 20% of the collection. However, in the colonial scheme of things, the name ‘mauzdar’, as suggested by Mitchell for the new headmen was considered to be inappropriate, as it was applied to a class of contractors in Assam.⁸⁶ For a symbolic representation of a regime change in the hills, has to be initiated in the narrative. Thus a new name was invented to represent a new authority, called *Lambardars*.⁸⁷ The whole process in this colonial enterprise, as Peter Robb argue, ‘was marked by particularly obvious social engineering and standardization in interest of the state.’⁸⁸

These *lambardars* proved invaluable to the Govt. for labour recruitment in road construction, as escorts, and also getting supplies for the coolies employed.⁸⁹ For instance during one of his tours in 1917, H.C. Barnes, the D.C. records: ‘the headmen of Phozanagwemi and Phozanasami ...brought 90 free coolies for work on the path and pressed me to go on with the path to Karami ...for which they will give free labour.’⁹⁰ In 1919 enumerating houses in Cheswalimi K. Cantile refers to a case where he missed out certain houses and the goanburra pointed out his oversight:

⁸⁴ F&PD –A. January 1882. Nos. 134 – 137.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ ‘Mauzdar’ was applied to a totally different class of men in the Assam valley, commented Elliott the Commissioner of Assam. Having the responsibility for revenue aggregation he was directed that they should not be looked on as contractors or as liable to make good any default in revenue.

⁸⁷ F&PD - A. January 1882. Nos.134-137.

⁸⁸ Peter Robb, ‘The Colonial State and Indian Identity’, p. 261.

⁸⁹ F&PD-A. January 1876. Nos.101-103; F&PD -A. May 1873. Nos. 271-274. The recruitment of these *lambardars*, with the motive to assist the state efficiently, began in the 1870 when the Govt devised the policy of receiving ‘residentiary delegates’ from the different Naga clans at samoogoodting, a policy earlier experimented during the 1840s, but was later abandoned with the govt. policy of non-interference in the hills.

⁹⁰ *Tour Diary of J.H.Hutton, the Deputy Commissioner (D.C), Naga Hills, 1917, Government Record Cell (GRC), Nagaland Secretariat (NS), Kohima (K).*

Kohavu and the gaonbura said ...I missed out new houses. To test the truth back I went to Cheswalimi with a precipitous climb and found they were right. I went triumphant privately thinking I had caught them out and came back humbled.⁹¹

This incident shows that the gaonburas could use the house tax system to draw households under their influence and to tap more than their allocated commissions. In 1924, Surendra Nath Majumdar, the Medical Officer at Mokukchung, gave a description of one such headmen who had done very well out of this dispensation: Imna Meren, the Ao chief, 'has built a large house roofed with corrugated sheets and has 150 "mithans", the price of each being on average rupees hundred.'⁹² Moreover, this chief, Majumdar claimed, 'has sufficient cash and was the chief interpreter of the government office at Mokukchung. Mirin was the only Ao practicing wet cultivation or "panikhets".'⁹³ This statement could further suggest that he had also appropriated the better cultivable lands. However, chiefs could also be held responsible for delays in supplying labour, collecting revenue, or displays of village truculence. During a tour in the Naga Hills, the *gaonbura* failed to bring in any coolies as a result of which, remarked J.H. Hutton, 'the *gaonbura* ate stick'.⁹⁴

By making themselves indispensable to the British, headmen could also impoverish and weaken their rivals by sending them out onto labor levies. Although every adult male was eligible for communal labor, in fact chiefs sent those who were their political antagonists or economically weak.⁹⁵ One such incident is recorded in the 1919 tour diary of K. Cantile, the D.C. Naga Hills:

The Meemi gaonbura came forward with a complaint against one Yehovi of their village who lives between the two khels and gives no help with rice, coolies etc to either of them. He also gets

⁹¹ *Tour Diary of K. Cantile, officiating (offg.) D.C. Naga Hills, 1919, GRC, NS, K.*

⁹² Surendra Nath Majumdar, 'The Ao Nagas', *Man in India*, vol.41 (1924), p. 43. Imna Meren was the head Dobhashi in Mokukchung, from 1/06/1914 to 21/10/1917. See Purtongzuk Longchar, *Historical Development of the Ao Nagas in Nagaland* (Dimapur: Print Home, 2002), p. 374.

⁹³ *Ibid.*

⁹⁴ *Tour Diary of J.H. Hutton, D.C. Naga Hills, 1921, GRC, NS, K.*

⁹⁵ Here it should be mentioned that, prior to British annexation, collective labour project were governed by an 'age group system'. This group system formed the labour teams for every communal work in the village. For instance, as J.P Mills notes, 'when village paths are being cleared, each group is given a stretch.' Despite such a mechanism, the chief now represented as a center of power in the village, could deploy his power, pushing rivals in labour works.

commission on the revenue of these 12 to which he is not entitled being no *gaonbura* and not even exempted himself or getting any cloth.⁹⁶

K. Cantile declared Yehovi and the other 12 houses as part of the upper khel of Momi and under the *gaonbura* of that khel.⁹⁷

The supply of labour to the colonial administrators and the threat of retribution, which buttressed it came to shape the relationship between the different khels. Communities were often divided into factions with rivals refusing to go out on labor levies. Thus at Mozungjiami (Tuensang), conflict arose between the various khels on the question of supplying labour. Even as A.E. Wood records: 'The upper khels mildly suggested that I should burn the lower khel, and then they themselves would supply my coolies.'⁹⁸ 'Heated exchanges' among the Nagas over the allocation of labour levy prevented Hutton from halting at Bhandari on one of his tours: 'there is some trouble between Imbarasa and Lisio over the proper shares of coolies who would go down to Furkating'.⁹⁹ This then shaped new line of distinction and also of conflict between the khels in the villages.

Another important institution, which served both, as an instrument of pacification and as channel of communication was that of the *Dobashi* - 'a man of two words'.¹⁰⁰ The recruitment of these *dobhashis* began in the 1870s when the government devised the policy of receiving 'residential delegates' from the different Naga clans at Samagudting.¹⁰¹ 'Appointments were given to good picked men' explains Major John Butler in 1873.¹⁰² Butler described them as accompanying him 'in all tours into the

⁹⁶ *Tour Diary of K. Cantile, offg D.C. Naga Hills, 1919, GRC, NS, K.*

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

⁹⁸ *Tour Diary of A.E. Woods, D.C. Naga Hills, 1900, GRC, NS, K.*

⁹⁹ *Tour Diary of J.H. Hutton, D.C. Naga Hills, 1921, GRC, NS, K.*

¹⁰⁰ Piketo Sema, *British Administration in Nagaland, 1881 - 1947* (New Delhi: Scholars Publishing, 1992), pp. 32-36.

¹⁰¹ This was a policy, which had been introduced in 1840s, but the experience had been abandoned following the policy of non-interference in the 1850s.

¹⁰² F&PD-A. May 1873. Nos. 271 - 274. Every village, claimed Butler, have learnt the advantage of furnishing me with a 'dobhasha'. As Butler informs us, villages, which have earlier remained aloof were now anxious to leave a representative always with the Political Agent. *Dobhashis* were appointed from

interior, ready cheerfully to carry out any orders.¹⁰³ They also formed a crucial part operating as Butler's 'intelligence department', as well as interpreters in road works and escorts. Seeing the efficacy of these *dobhashis*, Butler in 1873 had proposed to increase their existing strength from 10 to 15 at a cost of Rs. 500. Well-paid and well treated, comments Butler, they helped ensure matters to run smoothly.¹⁰⁴

Yet villagers would often complain of the abuses by the *Dobhashis*. In 1918, the Makama villagers thus complained about their Jhums being burnt by passing *dobhashias* and *sepoys*.¹⁰⁵ As interpreters, the *dobhashis* were also the channel of communication between the coolies under their command and the colonial authorities. In 1936, anthropologist Furer-Haimendorf captures the *dobhashis* organizational role in camp as preparations were made for an expedition against the Kalyo Kengyus in the northeastern Naga Hills: 'every open space was occupied by camps and groups of Ao's, Lhotas, Sangtams, and Rengmas crowded together under improvised shelters. *Dobhashi* in red cloths hurried through the swarms of people ordering about the coolies and men of different tribes'.¹⁰⁶ *Dobhashis* also furnished district officers with news from the locales, thus acting as informants of the intelligence department. 'The first thing in the morning' writes Lt C.R. Macgregor, Commanding Detachment 44th regiment, Sylhet Light Infantry at Kohima, 'a *Dobhashi* of Kohima came in ... and reported that the road was panjied and obstructed, and resistance intended.'¹⁰⁷ All the government orders were also communicated through them. By 1930, the number of *dobhashis* in Mokukchung sub-division stood as follows: Ao's-10; Lothas-4; Semas-4; Changs-3; and Konyaks-1.¹⁰⁸ The colonial administration thus effectively utilized the services of the native administrative agents for the perpetuation of their rule in the Naga Hills. As the headmen and *dobhashis* were attached to the interests of the colonial state, the process of social stratification

villages which has 'not enjoyed the privilege of having a representative.' Thus for instance, when Supule of Kerumah failed to present himself, Butler at once nominated Terhule of Kedimah to act for him.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ *Tour diary of J.H. Hutton, D.C. Naga Hills, 1918*, Nos. 540-553. GRC, NCS, K.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., p. 121.

¹⁰⁷ F&PD-A. January 1880. Nos. 498-511.

¹⁰⁸ Sema, *Administrative policy and its Impact*, p. 35. Piketo Sema has argued that with the gradual incorporation of the Naga tribes into the fold of administration, the appointment of new *dobhashis* for representing tribes having different linguistic groups and regions became increasingly necessary.

among the Nagas was also set in motion. Increasingly emerging as dominant brokers between the society and the state, they continued to hold considerable stake in the statist projects.

The Making of the Naga 'Coolie'

Even as the coolies were engaged in varied colonial enterprise, they were also being constructed in official records through measurement of their bodies, social hierarchy, cycle and work. In this project, tours of the district officials come into prominence. Period of 'pacification', especially after the 1879-80 war, were followed up by process of long regular tour, which often worked in the odd punitive expeditions. In 1882, C.A. Elliott, the new Commissioner of Assam decided that the District Commissioner should spend a full one third of the year on district tours.¹⁰⁹ Covering every village in his jurisdiction, he should 'enquire into their revenue assessment ... their supply of contributed labour'.¹¹⁰ To give one example of this practice, in 1881-82 the district tour of Mitchell and McCabe, two District Commissioner's of Naga Hills, took 102 days.¹¹¹ In these tours, virtually all transportation was on foot, in the absence of carts, bullock's, boats or 'roads' and the Naga 'coolies' were irreplaceable.

In 1885, R.B. McCabe, the Deputy Commissioner of Naga Hills, conducted one of the first cold weather tour in the Naga Hills even as he narrates:

This is the first occasion on which a party has proceeded into these hills trusting to obtain from village to village (coolies and supplies), and I considered that the

¹⁰⁹ One major function of this colonial regulation was the administrative division and organization of space. In 1905, the *imperial gazetteer* records show two subdivisions, Kohima and Mokukchung in the Naga Hills district, along with a chain of territory being annexed into 'the empire's geography'. For some early instances, Samaguting in 1866, Wokha in 1878, Kohima in 1881, the Ao Naga country in 1889, the Semas and the Eastern Angamis (now Chakesang) in 1906 etc. See *Imperial Gazetteer of India*, vol. xviii (Delhi: Today's Tom Publishers, 1905), p. 287.

¹¹⁰ F&PD - A. January 1882.Nos.134-137; F&PD-A. January 1882. Nos. 35. C.A. Elliott declared in his memoir of 1882: 'I attach the greatest importance to constant and free personal intercourse between district officers and their assistants on the one hand, and that this intercourse is best secured when the officers are as little at their headquarters and as much possible on tours in the district.'

¹¹¹ F&PD-A. January 1882. Nos. 35.

success or failure of this attempt would enable me better than any other condition to gauge the real attitudes of these tributes towards our government.¹¹²

Thus reaching Razami, east of the Lotha country, McCabe requisitioned thirty-five coolies to carry their baggages and supplies to Thecholumi. In the unfolding story McCabe records:

About 8 a.m, twenty coolies appeared and when I asked for the remaining fifteen the headmen said, oh! You had better stop another day with us. We'll pay all expenses. As I had a long march to do, I took ten sepoy and marched into the village where I demonstrated forcibly that orders were meant to be obeyed. In less than five minutes over seventy coolies turned out, and as they relieved one another every few miles, we were enabled to make a very quick march to Thecholumi.¹¹³

Pretending to be offended by the denial of labour, McCabe precipitated an incident to make their political presence felt through coercion. Following this incident, McCabe claimed to have faced no difficulty in obtaining carriage throughout the whole tour. In the process official tours sought to set a standard for compliance where unreliability would invite coercion.

If coercion was used to derive carriage from the Nagas, they were also required to live off the land during the military expeditions. 'No special supplies were taken for the coolies', noted A.E. Porteous, the D.C. of Naga hills in 1889, during a punitive expedition against trans-Dikhu Naga villages.¹¹⁴ Porteous further claimed that, 'in a deserted village ample supplies of pigs and rice are usually forth coming.'¹¹⁵ Extra coolies were added to accompany each detachment, to carry a few days supply of food and liquor for their friends. They would also supplement the places of men falling sick and getting panjied. These measures, as Porteous informs us, were based on 'experiences in these short expeditions.'¹¹⁶

¹¹² F&PD, External. A. May 1885. Nos. 175-181.

¹¹³ F&PD, External-A. May 1885. Nos. 175 -181.

¹¹⁴ F&PD, External - A. May 1889. Nos. 209 - 212.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

Even as Nagas were being engaged in the military pacification campaigns, stereotypical representations of the coolies as stupid or cowardly were threaded over a colonial tapestry. 'Their alarm (of Ao coolies) at hearing that they were to be taken into the Sema country was so great that, notwithstanding they were under guard, almost the whole number succeeded in escaping, without demanding their pay during the night', wrote A.E. Porteous in 1887.¹¹⁷ However, desertion could also convey different meaning in different context in the frontier. Desertion in this context could mean a sense of the native's notion of a boundary. Crossing beyond a certain distance could also mean putting yourself in danger by entering into a rival's territory. And yet to this was ascribed a rooted fecklessness of the Nagas, even as K. Cantle, the D.C. of Naga Hills, complains of finding 'difficulty in getting three coolies for my loads. There is some reason why Nagas do not thrive beyond this line.'¹¹⁸

'Lack of self-control' on the other often tended to 'threaten' the success of expeditions. For instance A.E. Woods, the D.C. Naga Hills had to turn back from Yachumi on account of 'difficulty in keeping the coolies, who had been looting pretty freely all round'.¹¹⁹ This notion of looting was inscribed frequently on the Nagas. While engaging the Yaru coolies, A.E. Woods was strongly convinced of their intention to loot and steal from the Yachumi village.¹²⁰

If the Naga coolie was unreliable, colonial officials developed counter strategies. Coolies were often forced to do double marches, especially when villages showed an attitude of non-compliance in producing coolie service.¹²¹ Unwillingness to proceed required instant correction, as was the case with the Angamis employed in the Abor expedition of 1911-12, making the primitive learn and to be willing to go on.¹²² Routines

¹¹⁷ F&PD, External – A. November 1887. Nos. 64 – 66.

¹¹⁸ *Tour diary of K. Cantlie, offg D.C. Naga Hills, 1919, GRC, NS, K.*

¹¹⁹ *Tour Dairy of A.E. Woods, D.C. Naga Hills, 1900, GRC, NS, K.*

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ *Tour Diary of K. Cantlie, offg D.C. Naga Hills, 1919, GRC, NS, K.* Finding that coolies have not arrived, Cantlie, the D.C. imposed on the Khozama village a sum of Rs 50 with the coolies forced to do a double march to Kohima or Khezabama.

¹²² A. Bentick, the Assistant Political Officer in the Abor expedition 1911-12 thus writes of the Angamis : 'We tried to make an early start, but ... the coolies particularly the Angamis gave any amount of trouble and over an hour was lost in getting clear the camp. There was more trouble with the Angamis when we

of cleanliness were also deployed in the effort to turn unruly primitives into docile coolies.¹²³ While engaging a body of coolies in his tour, A. E. Woods described the Semas to be awfully dirty making them bathe in the Doyang River.¹²⁴

By the early twentieth century, the ethnic label Naga was inextricably entangled with the class label coolie. The portering economy in the eastern hills came to be represented as a 'natural' conformant of life and livelihood in that part of the empire. By the Abor expedition of 1911-12, the Nagas essentially seems to have been more or less perfect, ready and willing, doing everything well. 'Shouldering his packet-basket' the Naga porters, as Angus Hamilton writes were, 'quiet and law abiding, they exhibited a naturalness that was positively bewildering and impossible to check.'¹²⁵ Arriving in 1936, anthropologist Christoph Von Furer-Haimendorf observation attest to the naturality of an existing established porter economy in the Naga Hills. He writes: 'as soon as one leaves the motor road one is dependent on coolie transport, and my suitcase and boxes were all too heavy or of the wrong shape. Nagas carry on their backs, the load supported by a headband, and everyone traveling in the hills uses high covered baskets plaited of cane and bamboo.'¹²⁶

By the first decade of the twentieth century, the Nagas were increasingly singled out in the official records as 'excellent carriers'. It is as load bearers that their physical capacities are assessed and praised. For instance a description of the Angamis is as follows:

turned off the path, which leads homewards, one throwing off his load and bolting into the jungle ... throughout the day they continued putting down their loads on every possible occasion.' F&PD. Sec. E. November 1912. Nos. 599-690

¹²³ As David Arnold has argued that 'colonialism used or attempted to use the body as a site for the construction of its own authority, legitimacy, and control.' See David Arnold, *Colonizing the Body: State Medicine and Epidemic Disease in Nineteenth-Century India* (Delhi: OUP, 1993), pp. 290-94.

¹²⁴ *Tour Diary of A.E. Woods, D.C. Naga Hills, 1900. GRC, NS, K.* In one of his tour diary, Hutton records another such instance: 'One of the coolies who turned up to my loads was so filthy that I told him that he must wash in a stream by the way. He admitted that it was years since he had washed. When he get in he confessed to having washed his legs only on the way. So he had a bath with soap and assistance in public at Sayang.' See *Tour Diary of J.H. Hutton, D.C. Naga Hills, 1921, GRC, NS, K.*

¹²⁵ Hamilton, *In the Abor Jungles*, p. 156.

¹²⁶ Christoph Von Furer-Haimendorf, *The Naked Nagas* (first published, 1968; Calcutta: Thacker Spink & Co, 1939), p. 6.

The physical powers of the Angami are considerable, for though he is not athletic in a gymnastic way, he has great powers of endurance, being able to do forced marches of thirty to forty miles on successive days over exceedingly steep country. In fact he prefers marching over hilly country to marching on the level. He can stand exposure well, both to the cold, wet, and sun, ordinarily wearing no covering on his head, but is unable to tolerate the heat of the plains in the hot and rainy season, or the deep snow of the Himalayas. He is also able to carry very considerable burdens, the standard load being 60 lb., which is carried easily for sixteen miles or so on a sling passing over the forehead. The women can also carry loads, but with less endurance.¹²⁷

Primarily 'valued' for their physical strength and stamina, this notion of 'excellence' even fascinated anthropologist like Furer-Haimendorf. Writing of Chinyang, a Konyak *goanburra*, Furer-Haimendorf romanticizes the exotic natural physicality of his subject: 'in spite of his sixty years his extremely slim body showed hardly a trace of old age. When he climbed a hill in front of me, the muscles playing under the brown skin at every step might have been those of a young man, so beautiful was this well-trained body.'¹²⁸

If excellence was played out in the physicality of the Nagas, a prime qualification for the Naga coolies was their ability to navigate through the space and topography of the hill terrain. Being adaptable to the landscape, they could easily cut jungle, build their own stockade or hut themselves in the hills. After negotiating through a steep precipice in the Abor country in 1909, Colonel D.M. Lumsden exclaimed: 'I was indeed thankful when I saw all our coolies safely over. Only hillmen could have done it with loads on their backs.'¹²⁹ Many a times, the landscape were seen to be steep, very narrow, with more or less precipitous drop.¹³⁰ Over such a dangerous terrain, Barnes expresses his surprise as to how 'the coolies however did not seem to be in the least affected by it and carried their loads without apparent difficulty where one wondered how they could keep their balance on the shale path.'¹³¹

In the baggage of 'excellence' was blended a certain 'good-natured' or 'good-humored style' of Nagas 'temperament'. This affability of the coolies was especially

¹²⁷ J.H. Hutton, *The Angami Nagas* (first published 1921; Bombay: OUP, 1969), p. 20.

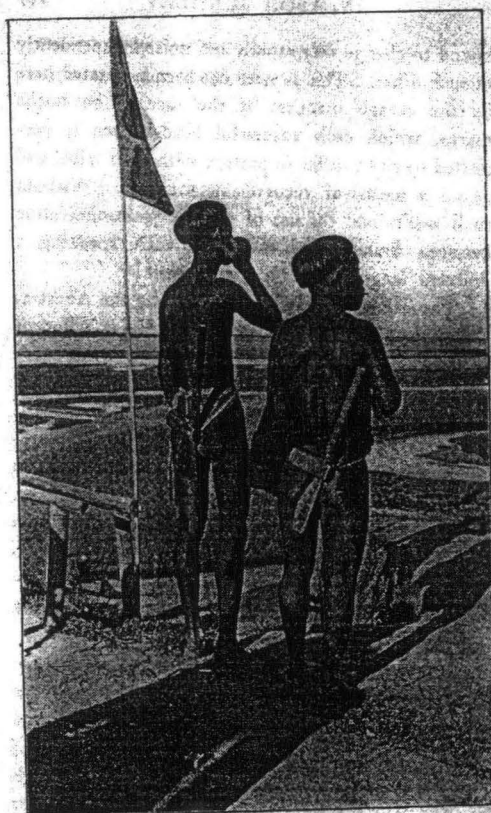
¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 64.

¹²⁹ D. M. Lumsden, 'A journey in the Abor country,' <http://www.jstor.org/cgi-bin/jstor/pdf>. The critical representation of Nagas as particularly strong for heavy load carriers, is however contested. For load carrying was a fact of life in the Naga Hills as elsewhere in the Northeast frontier etc.

¹³⁰ *Tour Diary of H.C. Barnes, D.C. Naga Hills, 1917, GRC, NS, K.*

¹³¹ *Ibid.*

played out during the Abor expedition. Colonial officials commented that even under conditions and circumstances of 'hardship and exposure' the Naga coolies were 'willing and cheerful'. In addition they possessed 'a childlike faith and trust in the *Sahib*', besides being 'remarkably honest and careful with their loads.'¹³² By playing out the affableness of the Naga coolies, colonial officials also congealed their paternalistic attitude of superiority. Considering the Nagas 'cheerful temperament,' Haimendorf was however, intrigued by his bearer Tsampio, a Lotha who rather 'took himself and his work extremely seriously and it was all too seldom that he smiled.'¹³³



THE NAGA HAS SOLVED THE PROBLEM OF WHAT IS REALLY A SIMPLE COSTUME!

Source: Angus Hamilton (1911-12), *In Abor Jungles*, p. 144-145

¹³² Ibid.

¹³³ Haimendorf, *Naked Nagas*, p. 6. At first, Haimendorf writes, 'I attributed this to the difficulty of understanding me, but though gradually this difficulty disappeared, there was no change in his temperament.'

Another theme stressed by the colonial officials was on the dresses of the Nagas. Since 'many coolies were untutored savages' they 'wears little and goes bare-footed'¹³⁴ (See pic.). This was attested to their better adaptability for hill works, but not 'beyond the snowline.'¹³⁵ A stark contrast with the Gurkhas, as official records show. According to the Intelligence Branch, 'the Gurkhali (wears) a good many clothes, including boots. For this reason the latter is better suited for work above the snow-line.'¹³⁶

In the set of preference was added the dietary habit of the Nagas. According to the Intelligence Branch report during the Abor expedition, Nagas 'have no caste prejudice,' and thus 'will eat almost everything'.¹³⁷ Representing the native's inchoate materiality and 'savage' dietary traits worked to the detriment of the colonial officials, textured with prejudice. Estimating the expenditure on the Nagas and Gurkhas, both employed during the Abor expedition, the Intelligence Branch observed: 'although Nagas were paid more than Gurkhalis their clothing as well as their rations cost less.'¹³⁸

Accounts of this expeditions remarked acts of 'self sacrifice' and 'outright heroism', which had the effect of glossing over the conditions under which the coolies were engaged. Employed in the Mishmi mission during the Abor Expedition of 1911-12, A.B. Cornelius, the Medical Officer, describes one such incident. A Naga coolie, reportedly wounded during one of the 'ordered' column marches, was carried over by his colleagues for roughly five miles. For such an extraordinary effort Cornelius writes: 'I must express my admiration for the Naga coolies who carried the wounded man up hill and down dale over most precipitous paths.'¹³⁹ (See pic)

If Nagas were praised as exemplary carriers in the Abor expeditions, yet their physical fatigue and subsequent breakdown was frequently equated with indolence. In his

¹³⁴ *Frontier and Overseas Expedition*, p. 133.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*

¹³⁶ Hamilton, *In Abor Jungles*, p. 138, 151 & 156. 'Light hearted and elemental, the Nagas' writes Angus Hamilton, 'have reduced their habits, together with their dress, to an inelegant simplicity.' They were thus 'accustomed to a style of dress that was curiously suited to their mode of life'.

¹³⁷ *Frontier and Overseas Expedition*, p. 133.

¹³⁸ *Frontier and Overseas expedition*, p. 135.

¹³⁹ F&PD. Sec. E. Nov' 1912. Nos. 599-690.

observation on the coolie's health during the Abor expedition, the medical officer, A.B. Cornelius registered large number of sick cases, that is 10.44%, from the Setagima village. He concluded that coolies from this territory as 'lazy and undisciplined to work'. Of coolies from Themokedima village where the rate of sickness was 8.16% he wrote that they the 'most intelligent ...inclined to sham sick and get out of work.' Coolies from Kotsima village were considered as the 'best workers' because their percentage of sickness stood at 3.14%, and thus the lowest cases of sickness. This, A.B.Cornelious claimed was 'due to their chief *goanburra* Hachemo who certainly looked after his men and saw to their wants.'¹⁴⁰ Biases and fantasies apart, colonial officials also sustained the notion of the childlike innocence of the Nagas. Speaking 'highly of these men', while admiring them as 'simple and winning', Major Bliss, the Commanding Officer of the Mishmi Mission, informs us that 'inspite of all the hardship and their obvious weakness they remained cherry to the end.'¹⁴¹



WOUNDED NAGA COOLIE.

Source: Angus Hamilton (1911-12), *In Abor Jungles*, p. 243

¹⁴⁰ F&PD – Secret. E. November 1912. Nos. 599-690.

¹⁴¹ Ibid. Major C. Bliss, writes: 'they were deprived of their favourite liquor "Zoo" ... got very little meat... and they had very little tobacco.' In his concluding remark he notes: 'they were a lesson to us all in their doglike good humour.'

Considering the service of the Naga Carrier's in the Abor Expedition, colonial authorities simultaneously evaluated the communities, which would prove to be the 'best tribes' of labor. Concomitantly they sought to promote a regimentized corp on the basis of their physical adaptability and 'discipline'. In that light, the Semas, the Eastern Angamis and the Tangkhuls, were categorized simply 'as having done excellent work'.¹⁴² While the 'Kukis were best for loads,' Lhotas were considered to be 'the most reliable all round man and much more amenable to discipline.'¹⁴³ Being 'very independent' who preferred 'much fighting to carrying a load,' the Sema Nagas, officials recorded, required 'a much heavier hand over him.'¹⁴⁴ Subsequently, on the Ao Naga, colonial officials found 'one of the finest carriers'.¹⁴⁵ Since he was 'not a great fighter' he also was 'very amenable to discipline.' Being 'a small, wiry man' he could easily carry his 60 lb., load with ease and could 'endure great hardships and privations.'¹⁴⁶

Colonial discourse thus imputed to the various communities of the Naga Hills the characteristics for hard labor with a primitive, uncivilized and laboring other. While it also set a new standard calculus entailing on the combination of physique, stamina, and good health. Though such narratives are blended with stereotypical prejudices, yet what goes on in the frontier expeditions is at least much a function of what goes on at "home". For in their "home", in the Naga Hills, the Nagas was already engaged in wage labour, apart from being 'disciplined' in their dealings with the district officials.¹⁴⁷

And yet there were also different imperatives operating in the frontier, which threads the story of engaging the Nagas in the frontier campaigns. The notion of a fearsome terrain to the colonial officials, laced hostility of the 'wild tribes', would seem to provide an opportunity to tap into the Naga warrior propensity. Naga coolies engaged were also adaptable to a variety of other purposes at the same time. Apart from servicing

¹⁴² *Frontier and overseas expedition*, p. 133.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁷ A striking parallel comes from the context of Sherpa disciplining. Sherry Ortner suggests that the 'cultural encounters' in the Himalayan mountaineering is as much determined by the "home" encounter itself. See Ortner, *Sherpas*, pp. 52-55.

the Nagas as 'coolies' in the campaigns, the 'natural warriors' characteristics were concomitantly played out to serve colonialism in the frontier game. For colonial officials knew from experience in the frontier that fighting in the open was a thing, which the tribes most rarely undertake in the hills. Angus Hamilton, captures an interesting moment in the story of the Naga coolie during the Abor expedition:

For their protection the Nagas were permitted to carry spears and dhaos, which were more than sufficient for their safety. As natural warriors they preferred their own weapons to any carried by the soldiers of the expedition. Feeling nothing but contempt for the Abors, they could not understand the large numbers of troops, the supplies of rifles, guns, elephants, etc., which were to be employed. Indeed, on one occasion, the Naga headmen offered to "do" the job for General Bower in exchange for a gift of the country of the Abors, with which they had been greatly taken and openly coveted. No doubt, too, they would have "done" it very cheaply, though of course the offer could not be accepted.¹⁴⁸

Angus Hamilton goes on to add that, because of their 'head-taking propensities' the Nagas were 'dreaded by the Abors than all the troops of the field force put together'.¹⁴⁹ In the expeditions, military strategist moved the coolies in advance, long before the troops moved out so that 'the force could feed to live and live to feed again'.¹⁵⁰ (See pic.)

Probably the best overall summary of servicing the Nagas as coolie-warriors came from anthropologist Furer-Haimendorf, writing in 1936: 'the coolies grasp their shields and spears; they are already prepared. It is only a matter of seconds to throw off their loads and transform themselves from carriers into fully-armed warriors.'¹⁵¹ Generally 'warriors of a warlike village' were preferred as coolies. Thus in choosing the combat unit against the Kalyo Kengyus, Haimendorf writes: 'their rich tattoo and ornaments tell of many victories – they seem dangerous men indeed.'¹⁵²

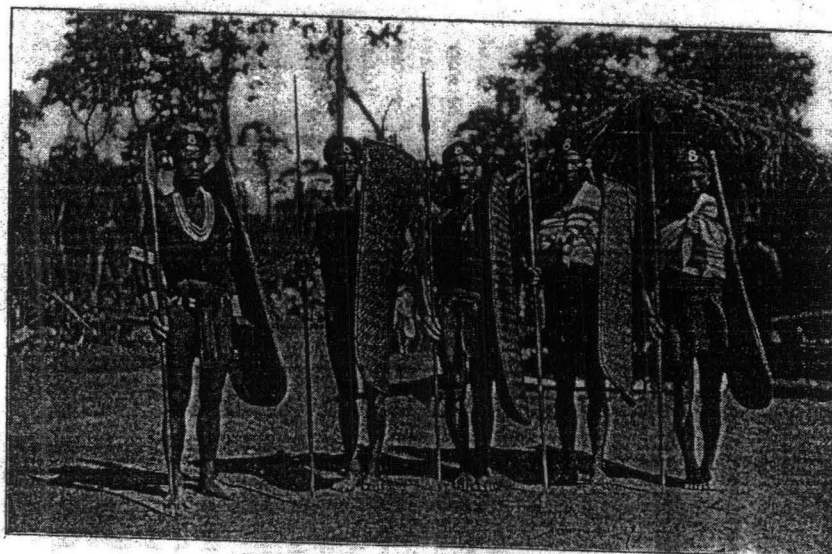
¹⁴⁸ *In Abor Jungles*, p. 157. The concept of a 'coolie-warrior' has been brought out by Radhika Singha in her forthcoming study on the World War I labour corp. See Radhika Singha, 'Convicts, Primitives And India's contribution to the Great War, 1916 –1920.

¹⁴⁹ *In Abor Jungles*, p. 145.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 137.

¹⁵¹ Haimendorf, *Naked Nagas*, p. 144.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 145.



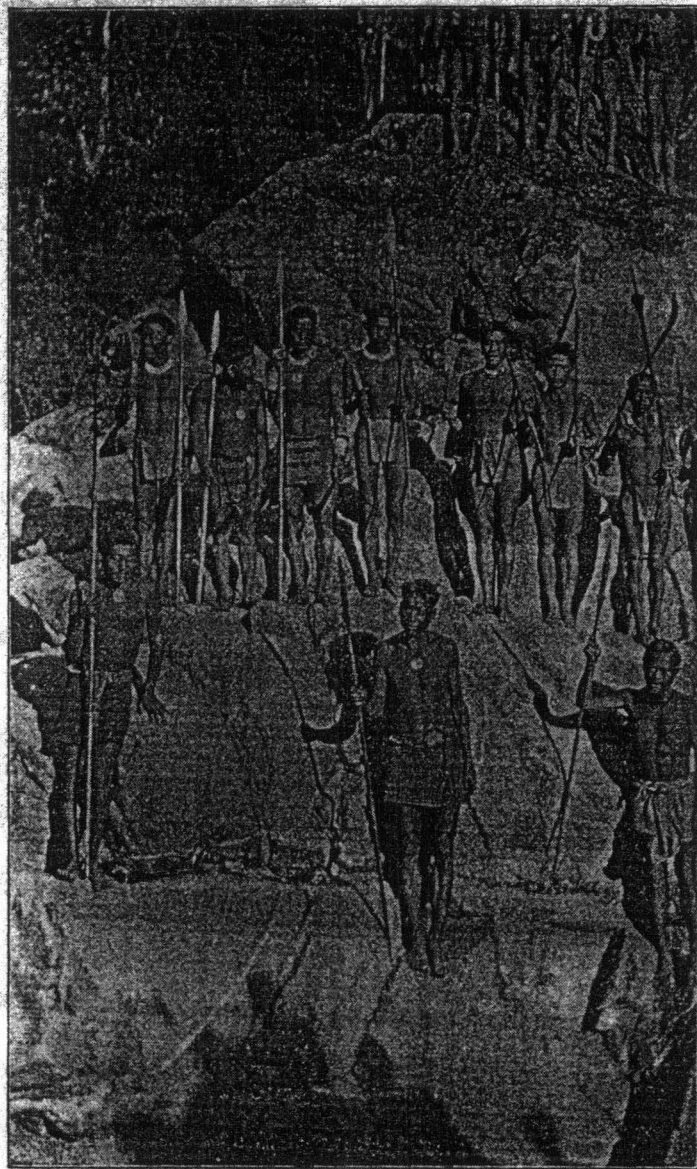
SEMA NAGAS, WHO SERVED WITH THE MISHMI MISSION.

Source: Angus Hamilton (1911-12), *In Abor Jungles*, p. 144 (See head badges)

Organized under a headman, each carrier group was in addition attested with certain *identity disc* and *colored armbands*, specifically aimed to distinguish the 'friendlies' and the 'hostiles' in the expected engagement. 'We have tied white bandages round their heads and chests,' writes Haimendorf.¹⁵³ These bandages as Haimendorf informs us 'are marks of identification, lest our Chang scouts be taken for enemies in the confusion of the fight.'¹⁵⁴ Similar strategy of attesting 'identity discs' on the coolies had been employed even during the Abor Expedition of 1911-12 [see pic]. To operate in a landscape where physicality of the natives was often blurred, an 'identity disc' sought to draw a clear demarcation between the 'friendlies' and 'hostiles'.

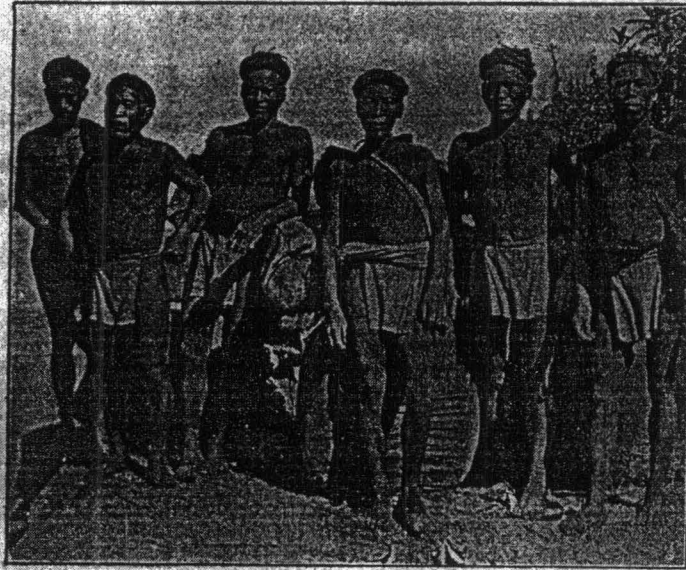
¹⁵³ Ibid.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

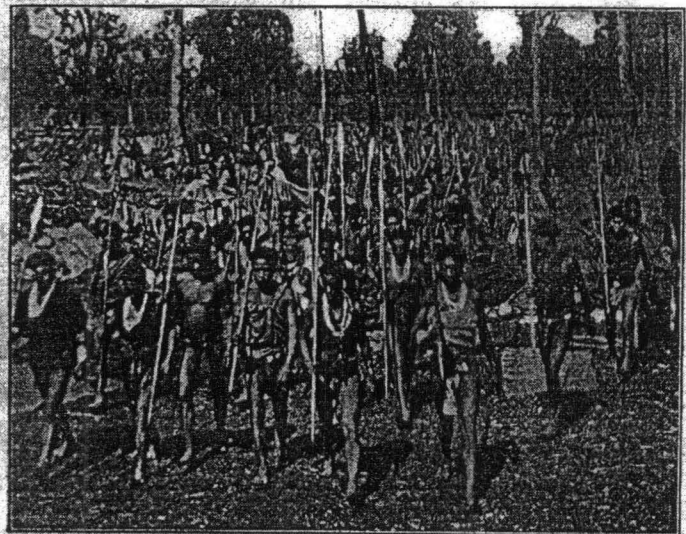


NAGA HEADMEN WHO SERVED WITH THE MISHMI MISSION.
Middle row.—Lotha Nagas. Bottom row.—Angami Nagas.

Source: Angus Hamilton (1911-12), *In Abor Jungles*, p. 204



"THE UNSOPHISTICATED NAGA IS THE CHILD OF NATURE."



NAGAS REHEARSING A FORMATION OF THE COLUMN.

Source: Angus Hamilton (1911-12), *In Abor Jungles*, p. 158

The 'remarkable fighting qualities' of the Nagas in jungle warfare, a construct traced back to the early encounters, fitted well into the British notion of the 'noble savage'. To control and expand the frontiers of the empire, the British strategy was to

establish a 'loyal', non-British Indian force at its disposal, by pitting one ethnic group against the other. The 'proud' people as the Nagas were characterized with their spirit of independence provided an 'elite troop' and as powerful combat units in frontier wars. This notion of 'excellence' has been central to the conditions of the Naga employment in frontier wars and global campaigns. This policy also paid dividends particularly during the World Wars.

Of resistance and of contestation

While colonial authorities tried to wring as much labour as they could from the Naga coolies, the coolies often countered this by developing tactics to avoid work, and minimize their labor.¹⁵⁵ I am drawing here upon the work of Michael Adas and James Scott who have stressed the importance of everyday resistance that 'prosaic but constant struggle between the peasantry and those who seek to extract labour, food, taxes, rents and interest from them.'¹⁵⁶

Michael Adas considers flight as the most disruptive of regular production routines and social control networks. Flight was a potent means of defense and protest in Nagas strategy of resistance to tax, corvee, and forcible military service. Military service could be avoided and tax and corvee burdens evaded.¹⁵⁷ The coolies employed by A.E. Woods in 1900 'bolted leaving the load here (Lemhama)'.¹⁵⁸ In 1923 while touring the

¹⁵⁵ Douglas Haynes and Gyan Prakash, 'Introduction: The Entanglement of Power and Resistance,' in D. Haynes and G. Prakash (ed.), *Contesting Power: Resistance and Everyday Social relations in South Asia* (Delhi: OUP 1991), p. 2.

¹⁵⁶ Michael Adas, *State, Market, and Peasant in Colonial South and Southeast Asia* (Ashgate: Aldershot, 1998), p. 133; Haynes and Prakash, 'Introduction', p. 29; James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: The Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), p. xii. As Scott describes it, everyday resistance consists of: 'the ordinary weapons of relatively powerless groups: foot dragging, dissimulation, false compliance, pilfering, feigned ignorance, slander, arson, sabotage and so forth. These Brechtian forms of class struggle have certain features in common. They require little or no co-ordination or planning; they often represent a form of individual self-help; and they typically avoid any symbolic confrontation with authority or with elite norms. To understand these forms of resistance is to understand what much of the peasantry does 'between revolts' to defend its interest as best it can.'

¹⁵⁷ Adas, *State, Market, and Peasant*, p. 233.

¹⁵⁸ F&PD, External - A. May 1900. Nos. 152 – 153. For this A.E.Woods the D.C. considered 'a few days punishment labour in Kohima will make them think twice before they bolt again.' The village he assumed contained over '600 houses and has always been able to hold on its own' and as such he expected the

Konyak country, J.H. Hutton reports that 'eight of his coolies ran away' after passing through Longphong.¹⁵⁹ Often colonial officials on tours would find the whole village deserted.¹⁶⁰

Refusal to move was another popular strategy in the exercise of resistance.¹⁶¹ While non-compliance to demand for 'coolie' labour provided another outlet to effectively respond against the excessive demands by the colonial authorities. A.E. Porteous was compelled to halt a day during a military expedition in the Sema country, as 'no coolies were forthcoming'.¹⁶² Through these non-confrontational resistances and contestatory behaviors subordinate groups sought ways in which the subjectivity of the dominated is constrained, modified and conditioned by power relations.

Conclusion

In the nineteenth and first half of the twentieth century, colonial official relied heavily coercion to recruit labor for colonial 'public works' and also to provide various support services. An expanding frontier required a continuous supply of coolie labour over a long stretch of time. Ensuring adequate supplies of labour was also bound up with drives of pacification and conquest. In a sense therefore, 'coolie labour' on the frontier was 'political labour'. Direct impressment was characterized as both unnecessary and morally repugnant. Although taxes were first introduced into the Naga Hills in the 1870s, it was not until 1880s that they had to be paid in cash, rather than kind. Thereafter, taxes were sharply increased, collected efficiently by the headmen. Yet paying tax in cash forced households into the market economy in search for wages. In colonial rhetoric

demands to be met. In this expedition A.E. Woods also burned the Yachumi village on the simple reason that "the village had offered so much opposition all through".

¹⁵⁹ J.H. Hutton, 'Diaries of Two Tours East of the Naga Hills', *Memoirs of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, 1929 (reprinted as republished in 2002), p. 41.

¹⁶⁰ I found that all the coolies who had accompanied me yesterday had cleared during the night, and most of the people from this village for some unknown reason had also bolted,' writes A.E. Woods. *Tour Diary of A.E. Woods, D.C. Naga Hills, 1900*

¹⁶¹ Hutton complained of waiting for 'an hour and a half' for the Tuensang coolies. Hutton, *Diaries of two tours*, p. 55

¹⁶² F&PD, External-A. October 1887. Nos. 1-6.

immobilized 'primitive tribes' were being connected to the network of commodity exchange through labour.

Any mention of the Naga Hills in contemporary historical writings recalls the 2,000 Nagas who were taken to France as members of the labour corp during the World War I (WWI). Nevertheless, there has been no clear articulation of the story of the Naga coolies either before or after the War. For coolies, from the Northeast Frontier, particularly from the Naga Hills had been employed in the service of the British Raj for decades before the War. By tracing the story of Naga 'coolies' within the larger story of the politics of access, this study sought to retrieve a forgotten history; and at the same time open up new themes of research on the history of the Naga Hills.

Conclusion: 'Either find a road or build it'

This study of roads, road building and the politics of access in the Naga Hills show pre-colonial circulatory flows, along tracks and bridle paths, were either appropriated or closed off as the area was pacified. Access and denial to routes was the focus of dissent and contestation during the colonial period.

Road building also created manpower resources, which the state could tap as in the form of coolie and porter corps, which accompanied troops to frontier and global campaigns. In brief, this study was an attempt to highlight the importance of 'borderland' routes, the way they were laid out, built and monitored, and the role of local communities in their history.

For long, the North-East has been little more than a subject of romanticized curiosity. And yet the representation of Northeast India in recent history as a remote landlocked, undeveloped and troubled hinterland is neither self-evident nor unchangeable. At particular conjuncture, this area has suddenly swung into the center of geo-strategic imperatives. Its marginalisation has to be understood in historical terms as the product of changes brought about by powerful global forces including colonial and post-colonial geopolitics.

Given the recent interest of the Indian government in restoring land routes and communications from North-East India to Myanmar and the South-east Asia, this exploration of colonial road building, in a way also sought to understand contemporary concerns about access in a crucial border region. As the region is drawn into new phases of regional and global interconnections, it is very likely that new and not so new politics of access will emerge.

¹ I have borrowed this phrase, which is the motto of the Pioneer Corp.

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