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### CHAPTER III BRITISH RULE

At the time of the inception of Christianity, the British government, as mentioned, was for all practical purposes in control of the province. In 1836, when the Brahmaputra Valley came under British control, it was in the most deplorable condition. Not less than 30,000 Assamese had been carried away as slaves. The invaders by their inhuman and barbarous conduct had destroyed more than one-half of the entire population which had already been thinned considerably by "intestine commotions and civil wars".<sup>1</sup> The sufferings which the Burmese inflicted upon the Assamese were typical of the most atrocious deeds of conquering pagans.

Sylhet, which was later made a part of Assam, was then under the government of Bengal. It was, according to a treaty dated August 12, 1765, with the Mogul emperor, ceded to the East India Company. Cachar came under British protection by treaty of March 6, 1824; and the prince Gobind Chandra acknowledged his allegiance to the East India Company and agreed to pay a yearly tribute of Rs. 10,000.

In 1835, the whole valley, including Goalpara, was placed under the control and superintendence of British authority, and two years later, rules for administration were issued under the sanction of government.

The administration of this multi-tribal and multi-linguistical province was not as easy as it may be thought. The people on the plains were constantly in

terror because of the raids made by the barbarous hill tribes on both sides of the valley. The Goalpara district was encircled by the Garo Hills, which were inhabited by wild head-hunting Garos, who, like most of the northeast frontier tribes, lived in constant inter-tribal warfare and made frequent murderous raids on the people of the plains, sometimes taking captive whole villages of men, women, and children. The Naga tribes who lived farther east were equally barbarous and would occasionally sweep down upon the bordering villages and carry away captives and heads with which to decorate their door lintels in the Hills.\* In order to keep marauders from doing too much damage, the chiefs of the border countries were made responsible for restraining incursions and in return for their services were allowed to hold their estates at a very light revenue.\*\*

The Khasis were like unto the rest, troublesome marauders on the plains of Sylhet. For years, they had plundered the vicinity without much interference and it was not until 1826, after the conquest of Assam, that they came in contact with the British government.

\* Ten military expeditions were led into the Naga Hills between 1835 and 1861, the greater number to punish raids. The burning of villages and the killing of several hundred tribesmen in these "punishing expeditions" led the governor-general Dalhousie to suggest a withdrawal of interference in internal affairs of the tribes. He wrote in his minutes, according to Dr. Mason, who evidently got his quotation from Government Reports dated February 20, 1851, "Hereafter we should confine ourselves to our own grounds; protect it as it can and must be protected; not meddle in the feuds or fights of these savages; encourage trade with them as long as they are peaceful toward us; and rightly exclude them from all communication, either to sell what they have got or to buy what they want, if they should become turbulent or troublesome".

\*\* Account given by Dr. Mason who for fifty years was a missionary among the Garos.