

# THE ANNEXATION OF ASSAM

(1824 - 1854)

With a Foreword

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## SECTION IV

### THE ANNEXATION OF CENTRAL CACHAR (*Western part of Tulārām's Dominion*)

We have seen how Govindarām, aided by the Rānīs of the late Govinda Chandra, continued to give troubles to Tulārām even after the death of Govinda Chandra in obedience to a secret understanding arrived at between him and the late Raja. With Dharampur as his base of operation Govindarām made a second irruption into Tulārām's country in the summer of 1830 immediately after the death of Govinda Chandra. His third attack was launched in October 1831. Tulārām was practically deprived of the western part of his kingdom by his "rascally cousin". The people of Central Cachar knew no peace. They were ground down alternately by the contending chiefs, Tulārām and Govindarām. The latter, drawing supplies of arms and ammunition from the Rānīs, began to erect stockades at strategic points on the hills of Central Cachar. Govindarām had under his command four hundred men, fifty of whom were armed with muskets.<sup>1</sup> Central Cachar was on the verge of complete ruin.

July, 1832.

At this juncture, Captain Fisher, who was in charge of the Cachar plains, intervened on behalf of Tulārām, who according to him appeared to be on the defensive and as such was entitled to be restored to his lost possessions according to the terms of the treaty of August 1829.<sup>2</sup> Tulārām and Govindarām were much alike in their personal character. Both were tyrannical, oppressive and treacherous. Both were products of a palace revolution. But of the two, Tulārām appeared to Captain Fisher somewhat better because he was more tractable, and was prepared to acquiesce in any arrangement that would give him a respectable settlement.<sup>3</sup>

Captain Fisher suggested a number of remedies to bring about a complete cessation of hostilities. His first suggestion was that Govindarām, Durgācharan and others, who had acted in the first instance without any provocation from Tulārām, should be immediately removed from the service of the widowed Rānīs and detained at some place far away from Cachar. He suggested secondly, that

<sup>1</sup> P. C. 1832, August 20, No. 94.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> P. C. 1832, June 18, No. 4.



the Rānīs should be persuaded to reside near him (Fisher) under the guardianship of Pārbatī Singh, brother of the senior Rānī. His further suggestion was that Tulārām should at the same time be provided with fifty muskets and a sum of one thousand rupees to enable him to retain the possession of the western half of his kingdom from foreign aggression. He also suggested a number of measures for the better administration of the revenues of hill Cachar. "By these advantageous arrangements" Captain Fisher aimed at rendering Tulārām a useful ally in the event of any future war and suggested that in place of tribute, he should be bound to supply coolies and pioneers.

Mr. Robertson, who was Agent on the north east frontier at that time, had no objection to placing the Rānīs under the supervision of their own relative. But with great hesitation he approved of the first suggestion of Captain Fisher, because depriving those persons of considerable rank and influence of their liberty merely upon suspicion of their having acted in a hostile manner towards a dependent chief appeared to him not very fair<sup>4</sup>.

July 27,  
1832.

When the suggestions of Captain Fisher were forwarded to the Supreme Government, they no doubt approved of the measures adopted with regard to Govindarām, Durgācharan and the Rānīs, because as successor to the late Raja Govinda Chandra they were pledged not to allow its subjects to molest Tulārām in his hill possessions, but they questioned Fisher's right of interference on behalf of Tulārām. They pointed out that by the treaty of 1829, the British Government had guaranteed to Tulārām nothing further than that he should not be molested by the late Raja Govinda Chandra in his hill territory. The Calcutta authorities held that he had no claim on the British Government for protection and support against any other individual who might dispute with him the right to that tract. Under such circumstances the Supreme Government instructed him not to interfere on grounds of expediency in the intestine dissensions which might prevail in that tract.<sup>5</sup>

August 1832

Under the terms of the old treaty Tulārām was strictly speaking not a dependent of the British Government entitled to the protection of the latter in case of aggressions by a third power. By the arrangement of 1829, the Company was only bound to protect him from any attack made by Raja Govinda Chandra.

So Captain Fisher proposed the conclusion of a new treaty with Tulārām by which the latter was to become a direct tribu-

Aug 14,  
1832

<sup>4</sup> P. C. 1832, August 20, No. 94.

<sup>5</sup> P. C. 1832, August 20, No. 95.



Aug 21,  
1832

tary of the British Government and also recommended assignment of a small force to him for the protection of himself and his country against aggressions by independent powers such as the Nāgās.<sup>6</sup> This proposal of Captain Fisher was strongly supported by the Agent.<sup>7</sup> But the Supreme Government turned it down as it appeared unnecessary to them to enter into any fresh engagement with Tulārām. The earlier proposal of Captain Fisher regarding the supply of arms and money to Tulārām or posting of a small force in any part of Tulārām's country was also negatived by the Supreme Government. The Supreme Authorities stated, "No reason exists for burdening ourselves with any expense whatsoever for the purpose of maintaining the authority of Tulārām", and aptly remarked, "what he cannot keep in order by his own means he ought to relinquish".<sup>8</sup>

Sept 17,  
1832

We find from the records that though Tulārām had no direct help from the British Government as desired by his well-wisher Captain Fisher, the local officers adopted all possible means they were capable of taking under the old treaty provision, to save his territory from further molestations and he was firmly seated in his government. But Tulārām deserved no such help. Just at this stage when things were brightening up for him, he committed acts of treachery and brutality which not only cost him the good will of the Paramount Power but also deprived him of a good part of his kingdom.

Sept 20,  
1832

Tulārām made a swift descent towards the end of September 1832 upon the district of Dharampur, which was under the management of a native officer appointed by the British Government, and after burning four or five villages, carried away several individuals, two of whom, namely Sonārām and Mathur, were murdered in the jungles. These diabolical murders were committed by agents of Tulārām and under his own immediate personal direction and order. The murdered men who were British subjects, were reported to have given Tulārām great offence.

When this ghastly news was conveyed to the Agent he issued immediate orders for the apprehension of Tulārām, whom he declared to be the leader of a gang of lawless marauders liable to the severest punishment. On the 3rd October, Tulārām was arrested by Captain Fisher and sent down to the Magistrate of Sylhet to stand his trial.<sup>9</sup> As Tulārām was an independent hill

<sup>6</sup> P. C. 1832, September 17, No. 136.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> P. C. 1832, September, 17, No. 137.

<sup>9</sup> P. C. 1832, October 20, No. 132.



chieftain, not liable to be tried by a British magistrate, the Supreme Government disapproved of the decision and instructed the Agent to withdraw all proceedings against him. Tulārām's name was accordingly withdrawn from the calendar of criminals. The Calcutta authorities further instructed him to hold an enquiry into the matter as the Agent to the Governor-General in his political capacity.<sup>10</sup> The action of Mr. Robertson with regard to the arrest of Tulārām was also severely criticised by the Court of Directors who held, "it was ill-judged in Mr. Robertson to send Tulārām to be tried for murder at Gowhatty. He is not amenable to any laws administered by us".<sup>11</sup>

The enquiry conducted by the Agent revealed that the men who were put to death did actually belong to villages within Tulārām's jurisdiction and that the spot on which they were done to death was also in his undisputed possession. It was also found that the murdered men committed gross and unprovoked outrages against Tulārām and the Agent was fully convinced that the latter did not contemplate committing any offence against the British Government. So Tulārām was set at liberty on the murder charge,<sup>12</sup> but as the aggression was committed in violation of the condition of the treaty of 1829, it was punishable by forfeiture of his possessions.<sup>13</sup> The British Government, however, had no mind to resume the whole of his territory. They resolved to occupy only the Central portion of Cachar i.e. the western part of his dominion, including Dharampur, which had been the bone of contention between Tulārām and Govindarām during the previous two years. This division of Cachar was also of value to the British. It was the meeting ground of four principalities, namely, Assam, Sylhet, the Khāsi hills and Manipur.<sup>14</sup>

With a view to ascertaining the wishes of the inhabitants of the tract in question regarding its proposed transfer, the Agent despatched Captain Fisher and Jenkins on tour. They found the hillmen decidedly averse to the rule of Tulārām and they all expressed their desire to come under British administration.<sup>15</sup> Accordingly Central Cachar was annexed by the British Government and a new treaty was concluded with Tulārām by which he

Janu 5,  
1833

<sup>10</sup> P. C. 1832, October 29, No. 133.

<sup>11</sup> Letters from the Court of Directors No. 14 of 1834.

<sup>12</sup> P. C. 1834, July 31, No. 22A.

<sup>13</sup> Letters from the Court of Directors No. 14 of 1834.

<sup>14</sup> G. G's Minute on Cachar dated the 29th March 1833.

<sup>15</sup> P. C. 1833, May 30, No. 100.



Nov 3.  
1834

was allowed to retain only the eastern portion of hill Cachar. He agreed to pay a nominal tribute of four pairs of elephant's tusks each weighing 70 lbs in token of subjection which later on was commuted to a cash payment of Rs. 490/-. On the other hand he was given a pension of Rs. 50/- per month. He was not given the title of Raja. His other powers were also greatly reduced.<sup>16</sup> Thus Central Cachar came under British administration and peace at last dawned on the unhappy tract. Govindarām and Durgācharan were also awarded pensions. But they were directed to live in south Cachar i.e. in the Cachar plains.

Gait does not mention this important treaty of 1834 which divested Tulārām of the western half of his hilly kingdom. Gait writes "Tulārām laid claim to the vacant Raj, alleging that he was the descendant of the ancient line of princes, but his pretensions were summarily rejected. He was, however, confirmed in the possession of the greater part of the tract assigned to him by Govinda Chunder. He agreed to pay a tribute of four elephants tusks".\* We have seen that after the death of Govinda Chandra, when the Cachar plains were annexed by the British Government in 1832, a settlement was made with Tulārām by which he was simply confirmed in the possession of the tract assigned to him by Govinda Chandra by the treaty of 1829. No part of his kingdom was taken away at that time. He had to surrender the western half of his kingdom in 1834 under the circumstances mentioned above. Gait mentions the treaty conditions of 1834 as binding on Tulārām in 1832, when actually no such treaty was concluded and no mutilation of his territory took place.

<sup>16</sup> Letter from Court No. 24, 1836.

\* Gait "History of Assam," Page 306.