

# **Ethnicity and great power politics: a case of transnational ethnic Kachin of Myanmar and Singpho of Northeast India**

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## **Abstract**

How did the meaning and understanding of transnational ethnic group like Kachin/Singpho change over time due to great power politics? In the first place, how did such ethnic group become transnational? Who were the primary agents of categorising, demarcating and defining ethnic Kachin/Singpho? What were the consequences of such bifurcation? The paper attempts to answer those questions mentioned above by doing a historical case study of the period from early 19<sup>th</sup> century (early Kachin/Singpho contact with the British) to 1930s (when Great Britain had done its territorial consolidation in northern Burma). This period was significant because it sealed the political fate of ethnic Kachin/Singpho to be what they are today. The paper maintains that great power rivalry and war of resistance, inter alia, were the primary catalysts responsible for categorising, demarcating and defining ethnic Kachin/Singpho. First, the fierce geopolitical rivalry between Great Britain and France in Indo-China led to Great Britain’s incorporation of Northeast India and northern Burma into British India. The process of colonisation, thus, changed the whole political landscape of the area. The categories such as Kachin and Singpho emerged during the period of rapid colonisation of the area. Prior to that, Kachin/Singpho acted as buffer between Burmese Kingdom and Chinese Empire and between Ahom kingdom and Burmese Kingdom. Second, with the weakening of Chinese Empire and incorporation of Burmese kingdom into British India after the third Anglo-Burmese war, the Kachin had no other political alternative but plunged itself into war of resistance against the British. It took almost fifty years (1886-1934) for the British to fully integrate Kachin into British Empire. Earlier than that the British started colonising the Singphos as early as 1817 and successfully incorporated their areas into British India. During this period of resistance internal political division among Kachin/Singpho chiefs occurred; some chiefs became pro-British and some still wanted to continue the fight against the British, resulting in incorporation of some portions of Kachin/Singpho homeland into British India and some into British Burma. This period also saw the shift of meaning of Kachin/Singpho from ‘disturbing race’ for peace and stability of the Empire to ‘potential soldiers’ for the imperial army. With that shift of perception, the British government started the process of rapid employment of Kachin/Singpho to British military service. This has far reaching political repercussions. Current civil war in Kachin State is one among them. In conclusion, this paper would attempt to trace the political consequences of this period upon Kachin/Singpho, analysing the meaning of Kachin and Singpho today, their perceptions about themselves, their belongingness and the like.

**Keywords:** Ethnicity, Great Power politics, Kachin, Singpho, buffer, colonisation, resistance

I intend to write this paper with four questions in mind: first, how did the meaning and understanding of transnational ethnic people like Kachin/Singpho change over time due to great power politics? Second, how did such ethnic group become transnational? Third, who were the primary agents of categorising, demarcating and defining ethnic Kachin/Singpho? And fourth, what were the consequences of such bifurcation?

## Introduction

At the outset it will be proper to trace the etymological development of the names, Kachin and Singpho. In fact they are denoting the same ethnic people residing in two countries side by side. Where and when did this people get the present names, Kachin and Singpho?

Kachin or Singpho people call themselves Jinghpaw or Nhpaw or Dumhpaw.<sup>1</sup> A Dictionary of the Kachin Language defines Jinghpaw as “*The largest and most influential tribe of the race known as Kachin; the Jinghpaws are divided into numerous clans and tribes of which the Lahpai, Marip, maran, Lahtaw and Nhkum are the most noteworthy; the meaning of the name is uncertain; pawng Jinghpaw masha ni, the central Jinghpaw race.*”<sup>2</sup>

The uncertainty of the meaning of the name gives rise to multiple meanings. At one level it means simply ‘man (homo).’<sup>3</sup> At the other ‘it is a category applied to themselves’ who speak the Jinghpaw Language.<sup>4</sup> More confusing still, with regard to the origin of the name at least there are three dominant explanations for the evolution of the name. One account suggests that Jinghpaw means the civilised people well versed in the art of living.<sup>4</sup> Literally it means awakened people or open-eyed people for the word ‘*hpaw*’ means to open, as an eye. Another view maintains that its origin goes back to the legend of great flood. Only a few people were escaped from the deluge by being able to enclose themselves in a big ‘*Chying*’ or drum. When the flood was over, they opened the drum and came out of it. The descendants of them were called ‘*Chyinghpaw*’ (literally it means ‘*Opened Drum*’). From ‘*Chyinghpaw*’ there came ‘*Jinghpaw*.’<sup>5</sup> The recent view expounded by Htoi Man aka Li Xiangqian, a Jinghpaw scholar from Yunan, suggests that Jinghpaw means the people who lorded over salt mines, for ‘*Jum*’ in Jinghpaw language means salt.<sup>6</sup>

Undoubtedly the name Singpho<sup>7</sup> derives from Jinghpaw. The Nagas call Jinghpaw ‘Chinpok.’ The Nagas reside between the Jinghpaw and Tai-Ahom peoples. Tai-Ahom people could not

pronounce the sound 'Ch.' For 'Ch' they pronounce 'Sa.' Hence, they call Singpho for 'Chinpok'. The Burmese on the other hand pronounce 'Ta' for 'Sa.' Therefore, their old name for Jinghpaw is 'Theinbaw.'<sup>8</sup> They must have known the name from the Tai-Ahom people.<sup>9</sup>

Up until 1895<sup>10</sup> the names Kakhyen and Singpho were used interchangeably denoting the people occupying the mountainous region stretching from Upper Assam across Northern Burma beyond the Chinese boundary into Yunan.<sup>11</sup> With regard to the origin of the name, here again, there are different explanations.<sup>12</sup> The most convincing account pertaining to the origin of the name Kachin is the one given by Lahpai Zau Tu, a centenarian pastor and traditional chief from Sinlum. According to him, *'the name arose when foreigners asked the Kachin chiefs of the Ga Hkyeng area near Mogaung their name, and through a misunderstanding applied a corruption of this term to all Kachins.'*<sup>13</sup> Therefore, Kachin is a corrupt term for Ga Hkyeng or Kakhyen. It is, therefore, a colonial construct formalised in 'Kachin Hill Tribe Regulation of 1895.' Enough said about etymological evolution of the terms Kachin and Singpho. Now it will be proper to divert our attention to the political background in which how the meaning of the names changed over time and its consequences.

Accordingly, this paper is separated into two parts. The first portion of the paper will deal with how great power politics categorised and defined the meaning and understanding of the ethnic Kachin/Singpho people and the process by which the ethnic group became transnational. And the second portion will look into the consequences of bifurcation of ethnic Kachin/Singpho into two different political entities. Certain conclusions will follow suit.

## I

### **Great Power Politics and the Ethnic Kachin/Singpho<sup>14</sup>**

#### **General Political landscape of Southeast Asia in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century**

From the last part of 18<sup>th</sup> century onwards we saw a growing rivalry between Britain and France in Southeast Asia. Having lost competition against Britain for the control over India, France was

desperate to gain control over the Peninsula Southeast Asia through 'mission, fraud and force.'<sup>15</sup> It further intensified in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In the name of protection of the Church Napoleon III announced on November 14, 1858 France exhibition plan to attack Annamite kingdom.<sup>16</sup> Soon Annam fell under French colonial rule.

Without losing any time, France moved quickly to implement its imperial design in South East Asia. In 1863 France entered into a treaty with Cambodia reducing the kingdom into its protectorate. Further, a later treaty with Siam in 1867 gave to France the right to navigate the Mekong and Tonc-Sap rivers where they bordered on that Kingdom. Later 1869 convention granted all the river area of Mekong to the French.<sup>17</sup> As early as 1860s France had dispatched its expedition team headed by Francis Garnier, a young naval officer, to seek inland trade road to Yunnan. They found Mekong River was utterly useless as a trade route, and instead acquired valuable information that Red River of Tongking had waterway link with Yunnan. 'French interest, therefore,' writes Historian Hall, 'in the approach to western China was transferred from the Mekong to Tongking.'<sup>18</sup> Meanwhile France enjoyed a cozy relationship with the Kingdom of Mranma.<sup>19</sup>

Britain's Burma policy evolved against this backdrop. Britain sent its first official delegation to the Court of Ava (the then capital of Mranma kingdom) in 1795 headed by Michael Symes, who found himself disadvantageous in comparison to the French agent.<sup>20</sup> Successive emissaries after Symes found more or less similar response except gaining some trade concessions. The prime concerns of Britain during this period were threefold: to look after British trade interests, to keep an eye on French activities and to convince successive Mranma Kings, by showing superior British military strength, that Britain was a more preferable ally than France; in other word, to show that it would be more desirable to have Britain as a friend rather than a formidable foe.<sup>21</sup>

Mranma king interpreted these British diplomatic overtures as British weakness. Mranma King, Bagyidaw, 'even considered offering military assistance to Lord Wellesley to defeat the French.'<sup>22</sup> Such was the nature of misconceptions of each other's maneuvers leading to three tragic wars in 1824, 1852 and 1885 respectively. The outcomes of the wars were highly asymmetric: Mranma Kingdom had lost its independence, and for Britain now it had pushed its boundary further eastward checking France's imperial design to swallow up Siam.

The first and last wars were more significant in terms of eventuality for the second one was rather a mistake or could have been avoided; there was no big drastic clash of interests, which could lead to outright military escalation. Lord Dalhousie, when he first dispatched two vassals of Royal Navy in 1852, did not mean to wage the second Anglo-Burmese war—it was a mere intent to force the Pagan King to change his unreasonable policies towards British trade interests.<sup>23</sup> However, the first and second war involved bigger geopolitical concerns.

### **The First Anglo-Burmese War (1824)**

At the heart of the causes responsible for the outbreak of Anglo-Burmese war, there lied Arakan issue. Arakan prior to 1785, the year when Mranma King Badon conquered Arakan, served as a buffer between Kingdom of Mranma and British Chittagong. As soon as this buffer had been removed we saw Britain's effort to have diplomatic relation with kingdom of Mranma for the simple reason that the boundary line should be respected.

However, long before Britain nurtured a covet desire to annex Arakan. This line of strategic thinking was clearly visible in the report written by Lieutenant John Canning, who headed the British diplomatic mission in Ava from 1803-1812:

*“the possession of Arakan offers considerable advantages to the British Government....being a continuation of the plain that extends from Chittagong as far as Cape Negrais, and bounded on the East by the high range of Mountains that anciently formed the boundary of the Burmese Empire... the possession of this Province would place the entire extent of Coast from Cape Comorin to Cape Negrais under the British power, and eventually exclude French ships of war from their favourite haunts of Ramree and Chedate.”*<sup>24</sup>

Arakan thus remained as a ticklish issue between both sides. To make the matter worse, after the Mranma conquest of Arakan, there broke out an Arakanese rebellion headed by Nga Chin Pyan or Kingbearing who used Chittagong as a base to attack Arakan. Historian Than Tun points out, *“they (Arakanese) rebelled not against government but against tyranny. Taxes were heavy and very often hundreds of young men were taken to serve in the labour gangs. 3000 were taken to repair Meiktila Lake and none returned. In 1790 Chiang Mai Campaign, 6000 were taken way to*

*serve in the army and many hundreds never returned. In 1792, 2000 men were demanded to make bricks for the Mingun pagoda. Therefore, the people rose in rebellion.*<sup>25</sup>

The rebellion was suppressed with a heavy hand, causing a massive civilian flee to Chittagong where conditions under the British were a little better. Nga Chin Pyan, cumulating men power from Chittagong, continued his attack on Arakan. Mranma army responded brutally, and in pursuit of the rebels they crossed the boundary line, demanding the British government to hand over the rebels. The British government methodically replied that ‘it was ready to surrender criminals but not political refugees.’<sup>26</sup> Virtually after Nga Chin Pyan had exhausted the British Government’s hospitality, the British Government invited the Mranma army to cross the boundary and hunt him down. Historian Than Tun notes, ‘this permission to come over and hunt down the rebel was taken as a sign of British weakness.’<sup>27</sup>

The perceived ‘British weakness’ prompted Mranma king Bagyi Daw to make quick strategic moves. In 1819 his army made the final conquest of Manipur, and then in 1821 with the army of 20,000, including Jinhpaw/ Sinpho (Kachin) levies, made an invasion to Assam in order to ‘consolidate Ava’s permanent hegemony over the country.’<sup>28</sup> It was now just a matter of time to annex Cachar and Jaintia hills. Nevertheless, the ultimate prize was Bengal. For that Britain could no longer tolerate Mranma’s westward expansion. Now Britain no longer looked Mranma kingdom as a potential ally against France, but an immediate threat. The first Anglo-Burmese war eventually broke out in 1824 resulting in the British control over lower Burma.

### **The Third Anglo-Burmese War (1885)**

King Thibaw (1878-1885), the last King of Mranma, during his rule faced multiple problems—rebellions, banditries, chaos, and civilian movement to lower Burma, which was under British control. Under this condition efficient taxation was impossible, and the government was almost bankrupt.<sup>29</sup> Anti-British sentiment became dominant among the people. On the other hand, Mranma government became even closer to France. Various trade concessions and rights to exploit natural resources were given to the French.<sup>30</sup> It was said that the French were negotiating to take over the management of the royal monopolies, control of postal system, run river steamers in competition with the Irrawaddy Flotilla Company, obtain a lease of the ruby mines, and open up overland trade with Tongking.<sup>31</sup> Mranma police and army were also built with the

help of France and Italy.<sup>32</sup> It worried Britain that 'Mranma would be eventually become a French protectorate if the French were allowed a free hand in Mranma.'<sup>33</sup>

In response to this strategic development, Britain decided to take drastic measures against Mranma. Bombay Burma Trading Corporation incident was just a spark to set the fire. As the dispute evolved, in October 1885 the British Government sent an ultimatum to the Mranma king giving only three weeks' time for a reply. The ultimatum stated that 'a British Resident must be received at the capital and the Bombay Burma Trading Corporation case was to be revised and all the foreign relations of Mranma must be put under the English control.'<sup>34</sup> Two opposite policies were suggested to the King in response to the ultimatum: the first led by Minister Kinwun Mingyi proposing to accept all demands made by the British government, and the second was a confrontational one championed by the Dowager Queen Sinbyumashin.<sup>35</sup> Eventually the second group won the contest, and a war was declared against Britain only to be defeated within two weeks. Thus was the end of Mranma kingdom.

### **The Question of Northern Frontier**

The end of Mranma kingdom did not mean the end of other autonomous entities in upper Burma such as Kachin/Singpho's areas under their own autonomous chiefs or Duwas. The British had to wage many costly campaigns<sup>36</sup> against the Kachins as early as 1868, when Colonel Sladen, British Resident at Mandalaya, headed a mission through Bhamo to Momein (Tengyueh), suffered from Kachin provocations.<sup>37</sup> The British Government could not include the whole Kachin areas into British Empire until 1934.<sup>38</sup> Notwithstanding, eventually British policies—the extensive use of the Kachins in military service and the imposition of indirect rule under which the traditional chiefs still maintained their autonomy, at least for some degree—paid off handsomely. The Kachin became one of the most loyal peoples of the British Empire, which they intelligently utilize during the Second World War in its fight against the Japanese.<sup>39</sup>

Beside the fierce Kachin resistance, while Britain was approaching to Northern frontier it had a bigger geopolitical concern i.e., China's possible intervention in combination with France. Britain thus chose diplomatic means to deal with China so that it will not militarily ally with France. China on the other hand welcomed the move so that 'Britain and China could decide on spheres of influence.'<sup>40</sup>

This line of thought can be clearly seen in Tsung-Li Yamen, the Chinese Foreign Minister to the Foreign Office, in his letter to the British government when Britain had already launched the expedition to annex upper Burma, saying:

*“the expedition cannot be recalled and English demand goes beyond what we could properly advise compliance with: if we interfere officially we shall only create complication, therefore we authorize you to devise some settlement privately, which we can afterwards make official, and **which will give England what English want, give China what Chinese want**, and close the door for ever against any third party (denoting France) in that quarter.”*<sup>41</sup>

What did China want in Northern and Eastern frontier? And what did Britain want? Main concern of China was the security of Yunnan, where the great Muslim (Panthay) rebellion was ended only in 1873. On the other hand Britain's primary concern was the security of British India. China coveted to have the Irrawaddy as the boundary line between the two: let the western bank of the river be of Britain and the eastern bank China's.<sup>42</sup> It was rejected by the British. However, diplomatic rapport with Britain was not at all bad for China. Initially this diplomatic rapport with Britain was beneficial for Britain, after signing 1894 Convention, renounced its suzerainty rights over two trans-Mekong states of Mung-Lem and Keng Hung to China with the strict proviso that China must not cede either of them to any other nation without British consent, and it also made two small concessions of territory on the Chinese frontier.<sup>43</sup>

The entire situation was rapidly changed by the quick action of the French, who had staged the 'Paknam Incident' on 13 July 1893 and subsequently occupied all Siam's territories east of the Mekong. China ceded Keng Hung to France and, in due course, after the Mong Sing incident of 1 January 1895, Keng Cheng, which Britain had proposed to cede to Siam, also went to France,<sup>44</sup> resulting in Britain's strict fencing of the northern frontier with little room for China to move strategically.

On the other hand, from the start Britain rejected outright the initial Chinese proposal i.e, Irrawaddy as a demarcation line between British India and China, for the simple reason that China had never been practically in control of these territories east of Irrawaddy. Instead, Britain reasoned that the mountain ranges between Salween and Irrawaddy River (Lat 25 ° 30) should be

the boundary. Lieutenant L.E. Elliott, who did the actual survey of the areas, suggested in 1981 to the Foreign Office, “*to permit the Chinese to cross the mountain ranges which separate the river systems of the Irrawaddy and the Upper Salween, would be inconvenient to the Government of India and would complicate their action in the part of the Country.*”<sup>45</sup> His advice was taken seriously by the British government and the boundary was demarcated more or less in that fashion as he suggested after signing the Second Anglo-Chinese Treaty of June 1897.<sup>46</sup> The primary aim of Britain was ‘to prevent any power (France or China) between British Burmese territory and the great mountain ranges to the north.’<sup>47</sup>

The final boundary line was thus drawn out of trade, security and above all geopolitical competitions. China saw, in this intense geopolitical competition, substantial encroachments towards its spheres of influence: Britain from the west and France from the South. In this changing geopolitical landscape, Kachin/Sinpho also lost their traditional role as buffer between Mranma Kingdom and Chinese Empire on one hand and between Ahom Kingdom and Mramma Kingdom on the other, being forced to leave their brethren Jingpho in Yunnan under Chinese rule. This theme will be the main point of discussion for the next part.

## II

### **Colonisation, Resistance and Bifurcation**

As mentioned in the first part, traditionally Kachin/Singpho acted as buffer between Mranma Kingdom and Chinese Empire on the one hand and between Ahom Kingdom and Mranma Kingdom on the other. In this regard J.G. Scott remarks:

*‘.... It is many years since there has been any neighbourliness between the Mountain Rivers and the Burman villages. Intercourse has been confined to perpetual warfare, chequered by crucifixions. Nevertheless, the Kachyens form an admirable neutral State- if they can be called a state- between China and Burma.’*<sup>48</sup>

It was the Kachin/Singpho’s traditional way of engaging in regional politics.

## **Colonisation of the Singpho**

The Singphos of Hunkaung Valley and Assam also acted as a buffer between Mranma Kingdom and Ahom Kingdom: when they maintained neutrality peace flourished in the borders, when they tilted towards one side war was inevitable. As we have mentioned roughly in the first part, the Singphos played an important role in helping Mranma's westward expansion into northeast frontier of British India threatening Bengal, the seat of British Indian government. The Singphos abandoned the traditional role of a buffer state for two objectives: 1) to capture as many Assamese slaves as possible, and 2) to obtain extra territory.<sup>49</sup>

The Singphos of Huakaung Valley pursued the first objective and the second by the Singphos of Assam. By that time the Singphos of Assam already felt the ever-pushing British power towards northeast frontiers. They along with the Khamtis resisted against the British. At this time, 7,500 Singphos armed with 650 muskets attacked the Moamaria country on the eastern front of Assam. The British intervened and launched an expedition against the Singphos.<sup>50</sup> The Singphos, hence, found in Mranma a natural ally against the British. They threw their geopolitical bottom dollar on Mranma against the British.

The Burmese invaded Assam in 1817 and 1820 from Ava, Mranma's capital, via Hukawng Valley.<sup>51</sup> In April 1819, about 20, 000 strong Burmese army captured Rongpur, and when they left, the Singphos kept the Kingdom under their control. The Singpho Pisa Chief named it Pisa Country.<sup>52</sup> British kept pushing into Bramaputra valley. Pisa Chief, Pisa Naw in order to gain reinforcement from the Burmese King Bodawpaya, offered the Ahom princess named 'Rangili', whom he received as a gift from Ahom King.<sup>53</sup>

The Singphos' resistance against the British in Assam continued till the leading Singpho Chiefs signed an agreement with the British on 5 May 1826 after the Burmese and the British had signed the Yandabo treaty on 24 February 1826, marking the end of first Anglo-Burmese War. The agreement reached between the British and the Singpho runs as follow:

Whereas, we the Singphos Chiefs named Bum Koomjoy, Mee Jong Jow, Chowkhen, Jowrah, Jowdoo, Chow Chumun, Neengun, Tangrung, Chowbah, Chamuta, Chowrah, Chowdoo, Choukam, Koomring & etc., are under the subjection of the British Government, we execute this

Agreement to Mr. David Scott, the Agent of the Governor General, and hereby engage to adhere to the following terms, viz.

1<sup>st</sup>: Assam being now under the sway of the British Government we and our dependent Singphos, who were subjects of the Assam states, acknowledge subjection to the Government. We agree not to side with the Burmese or any other king to commit any aggression whatever, but we will obey the orders of the British Government.

2<sup>nd</sup>: Whenever a British Force may march to Assam to protect it from foreign aggression. We will supply that Force with grain etc., make and repair roads for them, and execute every order that may be issued to us. We should on our doing so be protected by that Force.

3<sup>rd</sup>: If we abide by the terms of the Agreement, no tribute shall be paid by us, but if any Assam Paeeks of their own accord reside in our villages, the tax on such Paeeks will be paid to the British Government.

4<sup>th</sup>: We will set at large or cause to be liberated any Assam people whom we may seize, and they shall have the option to reside wherever they please.

5<sup>th</sup>: If any of the Singphos rob any of the Assam people residing in our country, we shall apprehend the former and surrender him to the British Government, but if we fail to do so, we will make good the loss thus sustained by the latter.

6<sup>th</sup>: we will govern and protect the Singphos under us as heretofore and adjust their differences and if any boundary dispute occur among us, we will not take up arms without the knowledge of the British Government.

7<sup>th</sup>: We will adhere to the terms of this Agreement and never depart from them. This Agreement shall be binding upon our brothers, sons, nephews and relatives, in such way as the Agent to the Governor General may deem proper. We have executed this Agreement in the presence of many.

Written at Suddeea on Friday, the 5<sup>th</sup> May 1826 or Sukabda 1748, or 24<sup>th</sup> Bysakh 1233 BS. Singed by 36 Singpho chiefs, similar agreements were singed by other chiefs later.<sup>54</sup>

The Singphos of Assam had to undergo three important political consequences after signing the agreement: 1) they lost their political status as a buffer; they could no longer play the role of counter-balancing outside forces in order to maintain its freedom of manoeuvre. 2) The Singpho chiefs were now bereft of Assamese slaves, an important plank of political, economic, and social significance for their chieftainship. 3) They were politically segregated permanently from their kinsmen of Hukawng Valley and other areas.

### **Colonisation of the Kachin**

After singing the Anglo-Singpho Agreement of 1826 the British could successfully brought the Singphos<sup>55</sup> under the dominion of British India, they continued their march towards the Chinese border via the Kachin's homeland. With Singphos the British's primary concern was to deter Mranma's encroachment into its sphere of influence viz. Assam and Manipur. Now that Assam was fully under their control, their eyes were firmed on Hukawng Valley to connect with Ava, Mranma's capital. Their ultimate goal was to establish trade routes leading to China. Weakening China on the other hand recognised Upper Burma as an important and lucrative trade area and still controlled it.<sup>56</sup> The uneven geopolitical friction between the two great powers, therefore, sealed the Kachins' political fate.

Then Major Burney was the Resident in Ava. He appointed Captain Hanny to explore as many possible trade routes towards China and a regular route between Assam and Ava. On 22 November 1835 the new Governor of Mogaung and Captain Hanny left Ava with a force of about 1, 200 men, in a fleet of thirty-four ships of various sizes. Major Burney's instruction to Captain Hanny reads as follow:

*'It would be useful for you to ascertain as many routes as you can from Bamau into China, and from Mogaung into Assam. You will also take particular pains to ascertain how far the plan proposed by Captain Jenkins of establishing a regular route between Suddiya and the Burmese*

*dominions is likely to succeed, what are the difficulties of the overland route between Mogaung and Assam, and how they may be removed, what are the products and their usual prices on the Burmese side, what articles of British and Indian manufacture are in demand there, and the present rate at which they are selling; what duties are levied, and in what manner, what oppressions or difficulties traders are subjected to and in short ascertain the present state of this commerce and the best mode of extending and improving it, taking also every opportunity of pointing out to the Governor of Mogaung and other Burmese officers the great advantage and convenience to themselves of establishing a regular trade between their territory and Suddiya.'*<sup>57</sup>

Hanny saw the Chinese enjoying monopoly on the trade to the north of Ava. When they arrived in Bhamo they found a cosmopolitan town: Chinese, Shans, Kachins as well as Burmans and Assames. On 5 January 1836, they arrived in Mogaung. On 22 January 1836 they started a journey into Hukawng Valley.<sup>58</sup>

China saw this British move as a potential challenge to their monopoly. Shortly after Captain Hanny left Ava, Chinese merchants in Ava demonstrated against the mission.<sup>59</sup> A Burmese version of the letter supposedly sent from the Viceroy of Yunnan during that time reads as follow:

*'Everything that occurs in Elder brother's Empire shall be made known to younger brother with respect to younger brother's Empire. It is not proper to allow the English after they have made war, and Peace has been settled to remain in the city. They are accustomed to act like the "Pipal" Tree. Let not Younger Brother therefore allow the English to remain in his country, and if anything happens Elder Brother will attack, take and give.'*<sup>60</sup>

From now on the British increased its imperial scheme of controlling trade routes leading to China through Upper Burma. By political pressure and exploration, the British could establish the road from Assam through the Hukawng Valley to Ava. More than this, as Historian Woodman aptly remarks, 'the men on the spot could see that a way between Assam and China had been established.'<sup>61</sup>

However, profit and risk hanged in the balance for the British. In 1854 alone the volume of trade between China and Burma via Bhamo was worth £ 500, 000. But Kachins and Shans, not necessarily friendly towards the British, occupied the hills and valleys between the two

countries.<sup>62</sup> The French Mission of 1873-74 mentioned ‘Kakhyen pirates concealed in the high jungle attack boats which are being towed up stream. Vessels coming down with the full force of the current are safe from their plunder.’<sup>63</sup> Earlier than that in 1868 during the time of Colonel Sladen’s Mission to Bhamo and Tengyeh, after suffering much provocation from the Kachins, General Fytche, Chief Commissioner of British Burma remarked them as ‘dirty, ugly, barbarian Kakhyens.’ In 1872 the Kachins attacked Mogaung, killed the Burmese official and took the Amber mines.<sup>64</sup> Though the British considered these acts as barbaric, unruly and lawless provocations, the Kachins considered them as defensive acts against the invader.

The Kachins, however, launched full-scale resistance against the British only when they started incorporating the Kachins under their rule after the Mranma Kingdom fell under their hand in 1885. Bhamo (the gateway into northern Burma and China) and Mogaung (the gateway to Hukawng valley and Assam) were two important strongholds of the British in colonising the Kachin’s areas.

In March 1886 the British forces led by Captain Cooke moved to Mogaung from Bhamo, they realised that more troops would be needed. In December the British increased the number of troops from 14,000 to 25,000 constituting 99 posts and simultaneously movable columns were in almost every district.<sup>65</sup> Brute military occupation was top among the British policy priorities. Major General George S. White summarised the British policy during that time as follow:

*‘The experience of the last few months had made it apparent that the most effective plan of establishing one rule in Upper Burma and at the same time protecting and gaining touch of the villagers, is a close occupation of the disturbed districts by military posts.’<sup>66</sup>*

In Mogaung area, the British faced fierce resistance from Lahpai Kachins in the North and Ithi Kachins in the South, and Sana Kachins and Makan Kachins. Four expeditions launched simultaneously against them; On 7 January 1889, the 1<sup>st</sup> Mogaung expedition was launched against Sama Duwa. On 11 March, the second expedition was launched against the Ithi Kachins, south of Mogaung. On 1 April, the third Mogaung expedition was launched against the Sana Duwa. On 10 April, the fourth expedition was launched against the Makan Duwa. (Wood 349-350) The aim was to break down the Kachin’s spirit of resistance by imposing reign of terror

among the Kachins and demonstrated the Kachins that ‘not even the remotest villages in the jungle were invulnerable from the British troops,’ serving as ‘an excellent deterrent effect.’<sup>67</sup>

The scale of cruelty of these expeditions can be observed from the following table.

| <b>Expedition</b> | <b>Villages burnt</b> | <b>Houses burnt</b> | <b>Paddy destroyed</b> |
|-------------------|-----------------------|---------------------|------------------------|
| First             | 17                    | 279                 | 149,000 lbs            |
| Second            | unknown               | unknown             | 160,000 lbs            |
| Third             | -                     | -                   | -                      |
| Fourth            | 46                    | 639                 | 509,000 lbs            |

Source: Woodman, *The Making of Burma*, pp. 349- 351

The Kachin’s resistance in Bhamo, Myitkyina areas and areas along the eastern Irrawaddy bank was an uphill struggle for the British. Ponkan Duwa, Sadon Duwa, Kara Duwa, Sana Duwa and others fiercely resisted against the British. Several expeditions (1886-98), led by Irrawaddy Column, North-Eastern Column and Kaukkwe Column, were launched to subdue these stubborn Kachin chiefs.<sup>68</sup> The general objective of these expeditions was to disarm the Kachins, only Kachins in frontier villages were allowed to keep their guns, and to extract tribute money from the villagers.<sup>69</sup> In addition to that they studied local conditions and the people, established communication with Bhamo by signalling, studied the routes, and especially the routes that led to China and the remains of any evidence of Chinese occupation.<sup>70</sup> Chinese in a way, though it did not engage actively in the affairs, encouraged those who resisted against the British. Most formidable leaders of Kachin resistance found exile in China and maintained contacts with the movement from over the border.<sup>71</sup>

Overall, by the end of 1898 the British considered the Bhamo and Myitkyina areas as settled.<sup>72</sup> But the British could not bring these areas under its effective control till 1934. In December 1914 the Kachins, considering the dispatch of Military Police detachments on war service as an opportune time, once more reorganised and rebelled, though unsuccessful, against the British rule in Mogaung and Kamaing jurisdictions of the Myitkyina district, and Wawang in the Putao District.<sup>73</sup> Even till 1927 there was a tendency to raid into the Myitkyina District. Harder still, only on 8 January 1934 the British could announce the extension of British-Indian control over the Triangl with the fear that China might seek to annex the Kachin lands from the Tibetan side.<sup>74</sup>

Now the British concern was how to rule and prevent them from engaging in rebellions against the British rule. For this problem Mr. G. W. Shaw, Deputy Commissioner of Bhamo, suggested, after the four Mogaung expeditions, as follow:

“The Kachin cannot be expected to change his ways in a moment or even in a generation. Like his prototypes, the Highlanders of Scotland of the last century, and other savages or semi-savages, he will go on thieving and cattle lifting, murdering and plundering, here and there for years to come. If we impress the mass of Kachins sufficiently with our power to punish, to prevent them from doing these things on a large scale, and with the frequency which distinguished them in the past times, we may consider that we have secured a success so far, and so if we succeed in *inducing* those Kachin tribes who be *nearest to us* to keep the Queen’s peace.”<sup>75</sup> (Italics are mine)

How to induce Kachin? How to make them nearer to the British imperial system? Mr. Shaw, though raised the right questions, did not give answers to his question. In 1889 Mr. G.D. Burgess, Commissioner of the Northern Division, again picked up this problem describing the British aim as wishing to turn the Kachin—

“into a really useful member of the community. Not only should we make him peaceful himself, but we should *employ his strength and vigour for keeping the peace among others*. We should educate him, using the word of course, in its broad sense, find out what he is best adapted for and help him to find suitable means of subsistence.”<sup>76</sup> (Italics are mine)

We can see even when they were engaging in the gory expeditions against the Kachins, they recognised Kachin's potentiality for the Imperial service of stability and order. Hence, as early as 1897 the Kachins had been enlisted in the Burma Military Police, Bhamo Battalion.<sup>77</sup> In February 1914, loyal Kachin service men of BMP, Bhamo Battalion were included into 85<sup>th</sup> Infantry Burma stationed at Maymyo.<sup>78</sup> Since then the British military service had been employing the Kachins extensively. In 1920 the 3-20<sup>th</sup> Kachin Rifles was formed. In 1921 Kachin soldiers served with distinction in the Moplah Operations in Malabar. 'Since the reorganisation of 1925,' Major Enriquez remarks, 'the Kachins and cognate races, have furnished one-half of the Burma Rifles Group.'<sup>79</sup>

During this period of rapid colonisation, the meaning of Kachin had drastically changed from being 'dirty, ugly, barbarian Kakhyens' into distinctive loyal service men of the British imperial Army, eulogising them as a martial race.<sup>80</sup> The Kachins learned the techniques of modern military organisation from the British during that time. This colonial legacy, in an important way, shaped the political course that the Kachin took in the later decades.<sup>81</sup>

### **Conclusion**

The reasons — why Singpho and Kachin, though they are one and the same people, are being transnational ethnic groups — can be traced back to the colonial era. It is nonetheless a resentful political scar left on the national body of Singpho/Kachin people by the intense geopolitical struggle between Great Britain, France and China. The repercussions of that colonial legacy were far and wide; on the one hand, the Singpho in Arunachal are now being less than its former politico-economic self, and on the other, the Kachin in Myanmar are still wallowing in the valley of armed politics. It can be concluded, therefore, that the period (1817-1934) will constitute as one of the most important historical episodes enlightening the study of contemporary Kachin/Singpho politics in general and society in particular.

## References and Notes

1. Inhabitants of the up-river area of Irrawwady (Mali Hka) or Mali Nmai Walawng also know as Triangle area, call themselves *Nhpaw* or *Dumhpaw*; inhabitants of the lower riparian areas including the Kachin of northern Shan State call themselves *Jinghpaw*. Singhpos of Assam and Arunachal Pradesh migrated from the up-river area via Hukaung valley. They also call themselves *Nhpaw* or *Dumhpaw*.
2. Hanson, Ola (1906), *A Dictionary of The Kachin Language*, Rangoon, Baptist Board of Publications, Reprinted 1954, p. 212
3. Hanson, Ola (1907), "The Kachin Tribes And Dialects," *The Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, p. 381
4. Sing Wa, Sumdu (Date Unknown), *Jinghpaw Wunpawng hte Wunpawng Lachyum Shaleng* (Explanation of the meanings of Jinhpaw Wunpawng and Wunpawng), Place Unknown: Publisher Unknown, p. 8
5. Ibid.
6. Manam Tawng's lecture delivered at Jinghpaw Wunpawng Ginru Ginsa Labau dup Ginrat Hpawng (Conference on compilation of Kachin History), Ruili, 2006
7. Misinterpretation of the name Singpho as cannibal by scholars like Ola. Hanson (1907) and H.N.C. Stevenson (1945) had long been proven wrong. For more details see Maran, B.D. (2010), "Kachin Amyu Sha Amying Shingteng Ni (A Study on The Names of Kachin People)," *Kachin Research Journal*, Special Issue, pp. 29-44
8. Leach, E.R. (1954), *Political Systems of Highland Burma: A Study of Kachin Social Structure*, London, The London School of Economics and Political Science, p. 41 See also Cushing, J.N. (1988), "Grammatical Sketch of the Kachin Language," *The Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, p. 395
9. Maran (2010), op.cit.
10. The name Kachin was first formally appeared in 'Kachin Hill Tribe Regulation of 1895.'
11. Cushing (1988), op.cit.
12. For different views propounded by Hanson (1913), Hertz (1935), Cushing (1880), Carrapiett (1929) and Ma Khin Mya (1961) see Tegenfeldt, Herman G. (1974), *A Century of Growth: The Kachin Baptist Church of Burma*, California: William Carey Library, p. 11 and for their refutations see Maran (2010), op.cit.

13. Ibid., p. 14
14. This portion is mainly adopted from my article, Seng Lawn, Dan (2015), "Burma/Myanmar: A Fulcrum of Great Power Politics," *World Affairs*, 19 (4): 108-128
15. Panikkar, K.M (1953), *Asia and Western Dominance: A Survey of the Vasco Da Gama Epoch of Asian History, 1498-1945*, London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd, Reprinted 1961, p. 163
16. Ibid.
17. Ibid.
18. D.G.E. Hall (1955), "*A History of South-East Asia*", New York: Mac Millan, Reprinted 1968 (3<sup>rd</sup> Ed), p. 655
19. The word *Mranma* here denotes ethnic Burman or Bamar. (Luce 1985) However, in the subsequent sections, in some places the word *Mranma* will also refer to political territory occupied by the Burman or Bamar ruled by a particular Burman dynasty. *Mranma* therefore denotes the Burmese Kingdom as well as the ethnic Burmese.
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21. Ibid. pp. 44-49
22. Ibid, p. 49
23. Myint U, Thant (2001), *The Making of Modern Burma*, New York: Cambridge University Press, p. 23
24. Bengal Secret and Political Consultations, 29 May 1810 as quoted in Woodman (1962), op.cit. p. 54
25. Tun, Than (2010), *A Modern History of Myanma*, Yangon: Loka Ahlinn Publishing House, p. 16
26. Ibid.
27. Ibid.
28. Baruah, S. L. (1985), *A Comprehensive History of Assam*, New Delhi, pp. 361-8 as quoted in Myint U, Thant (2001), op.cit, p. 16
29. Tun (2010), op.cit, p. 31
30. Ibid.
31. Hall (1955), op.cit, p. 637

32. U Thant (1961), *Pyi Daw Tar Khayi (A Journey towards a welfare state)*, Rangoon: Sarpe Beikman Publishing House, p. 10
33. Tun (2010), op.cit, p. 31
34. Ibid, p. 32
35. Ibid.
36. For detailed account see Woodman (1962), op.cit, especially see Chapter XV.
37. Enriquez, C.M (1933), *Races of Burma*, Delhi: Manager of Publications, p. 32
38. Hall (1955), op.cit, p. 748
39. For the full account of Allied Powers' use of Kachin soldiers in their extensive campaigns against the Japanese in China-Burma-India theater, see Fletcher Jim S (?), *Secret Jungle War*, Atlanta, GA: Published by Don Fletcher, 1997
40. Woodman (1962), op.cit, p. 248
41. Ibid, p. 252
42. Ibid, p. 271
43. Hall (1955), op.cit, p. 746
44. Ibid.
45. Woodman (1962), op.cit, p. 278
46. Hall (1955), op.cit, p. 746
47. Woodman (1962), op.cit, p. 279
48. Scot, J.G. (1886), *Burma: As It Was, As It Is and As It Will Be*, London: George Redway, p. 178
49. See The Intelligence Branch, Division of the Chief of the Staff, Army Head Quarters (1907), *Frontier and Overseas Expeditions*, Shimla, p. 190 and also see Bhuyan, S. K. (1949), *Anglo-Assamese Relations, 1771-1826: A History of the relations of Assam with the East India Company from 1771 to 1826, based on original English and Assamese Sources*, Gauhati: Department of Historical and Antiquarian Studies in Assam, p. 481
50. Woodman (1962), op.cit, p. 84
51. Ibid, p. 83
52. Bhuyan (1949), op.cit, p. 481. Also see Brang Di, Maran (1996), *Prat Ningnan Wunpawng Ahtik Labau Kadun*, manuscript, New Delhi, p. 52
53. Ibid, p. 41

54. Aitchison, C. U. (1909), *A Collection of Treaties, Engagements, And Sanads*, Calcutta: Superintendent Government Printing, India, Vol. XII as quoted in Brang Di (1996), op. cit, p. 54
55. Except the last organized rebellion against the British in 1830, they could no longer rise up in strength anymore against the British though they rose in revolt several times.
56. Woodman (1962), op.cit, pp. 335 & 336
57. Ibid, p. 88
58. Ibid, pp. 88, 89 & 90
59. Ibid, p. 91
60. Desai, W. S. (1939), *History of the British Residency in Burma, 1826-1840*, Rangoon: Rangoon University Press, Appendix as quoted in Woodman (1962), op.cit, p. 92
61. Ibid, p. 93
62. Ibid, p. 173
63. Enriquez (1933), op.cit, p. 32
64. Ibid.
65. Woodman (1962), op.cit, p. 337
66. Ibid.
67. Ibid, p. 351
68. For detail of the operations see Ibid, pp. 52-78
69. Ibid, p. 363
70. Ibid, p. 362
71. Ibid, p. 355
72. Ibid, p. 377
73. Ibid, pp. 378 & 379 and also see Enriquez (1933) op.cit, p. 33
74. Hall (1955), op.cit, pp. 747 & 748
75. Woodman (1962), op.cit, p. 351
76. Ibid, p. 354
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78. The Army and Military Pensioners Ex-Servicemen's Association (1954), op.cit, pp. 30 & 31
79. Enriquez (1933), op.cit, p. 33
80. For the notion of Kachin as a martial race and the process of systematic incorporation of the Kachins into the British army see Mandy, Sadan (2013), *Being And Becoming Kachin: Histories Beyond the State in the Borderworlds of Burma*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 198-253
81. Veterans of the Second World War took the lead in every Kachin armed rebellion against the Burmese Government in post-Independent Burma. The 1949 Kachin armed rebellion was led by Captain Naw Seng and G.O.C. Zau Seng and formed Pawng Yawng National Defense Force. Both were veterans of the Second World War; similarly, G.O.C. Zau Seng led the formation of Kachin Independence Army and Kachin Independence Organisation in 1961. For further information see Kachin Independence Organisation (2014), *Rawt Malan Labau Kadun hte Ninggawn Mung Masa Lam Yan* ( A brief history of KIO's revolution and the general political policy ), Laiza: Central War Office and also see Ah Nang (1987), *The Kachin Sub-State in Northern Theinni (1947-1962)*, M.A. Thesis, Mandalay University