



Annexation of Jayantia Kingdom: A historical overview

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Abstract :

The Kingdom of Jayantia was most ancient Kingdom of Assam and had been comprised both hill and plains. Original inhabitants of the Kingdom were Synteng. Prior to the British annexation, Jayantia Kingdom was protected state. But this soon changed and from 1830 the relationship between Jayantia and British became rather strained. They start the conflict for establishment of boundary. In 1832 two British subject were kidnapped but however they were able to escape. Again in the same year the Raja of Gobha seized four British subjects. Three persons were immolated at the Shrine of the Goddess Kali. On account of this heinous crime the British Government took up the punitive measure. Thus in 1835 AD the Jayantia Kingdom was annexed by the British Empire.

Keywords : Anglo-Jayantia relations, Annexation, Kingdom of Assam.

Introduction: Jayantia Kingdom was an ancient hill kingdom of Assam. The Kingdom consisted of present day Meghalaya State and the plains of Sylhet in Bangladesh. In medieval period most part of today's greater sylhet was within the territorial jurisdiction of the Jayantia king. Ethnically, the inhabitants belong to the same type as the khasias and speak the same language. The Jacinta people were, and largely still are, animist and matriarchal. But the king adopted Sanskrit name around 1500 AD. Parbat Ray was then the king and his capital was at Jaintapur. Between 1548 and 1564, Jayantia was conquered by the king of Cooch Bihar.

In the late sixteenth century the kingdom came under the control of the Kachhar king. The kingdom regained its independent in 1605 with the help of the Ahom king. Lakshmi Narayan (1669-1697) was a vigorous king. He got the glory of constructing a brick-building in his capital, Jaintapur. The east India company drove the Jayanta king from the plains of Sylhet after the acquisition of diwani (1765). The kingdom of Jayantia lost its independence when the Burmese conquered Assam in 1824. Soon, the British drove the Burmese away, and the kingdom's independence was restored in 1825. To facilitate their trade on chunam (lime stone) and rattan (cane) in Sylhet, the East India Company annexed the Jayantia kingdom to their Bengal state in 1835.

Objective :

- To highlight the Anglo-Jayantia relations and its annexation with British empire.
- To explore the impact of annexation of the Jayantia Kingdom.

Methodology :

To prepare this paper is based on secondary sources only. Historical and Analytical methods are adopted in presenting this paper.

Historical Overview:

The Kingdom of Jayantia is perhaps the most ancient Kingdom of Assam. The Kingdom of Jayantia was also such principality and was divided into two parts, Jayantia Hills and the adjoining plains land. The original inhabitants of the Kingdom are known as Synteng. Racially They are akin to the Khasis, it is evident from the similarity in their physical features and in their customs and practices. The Kingdom included two entirely territories, namely, the Jayantia Hills and Jayantia Parganas of Sylhet District. While the Jayantia Hills are inhabited by the Khasi tribes call Synteng, the Bengali Hindus and the Muslims are the main inhabitants of the plains of the Jayantia Parganas. Original house of the Jayantia Kings was in the hills, the plains of Jayantia Parganas were conquered later. The capital of the Jayantia Kingdom was Jayantiapur, in ancient literature it has been called as already mentioned "A Woman's Kingdom". The matriarchal system of the Khasis and the Jayantias in which the female predominate and which persist even today appears to bear out the traditions preserved in literatures of ancient times. The Jayantia Kingdom was annexed by the British empire in March 1835, due to the various events during the time of their relations which the Britishers which is led to the annexation of Jayantia Kingdom. Events leading to the annexation of Jayantia Kingdom

The Britishers first came into contact with Jayantia Kingdom when they invaded the Cachar and occupied on January 1824, and even threatened to attack Jayantia Kingdom. To protect the Jayantia Kingdom from Burmese invasion, the British then opened negotiation with Ram Sing II who had ascended the throne of Jayantia Kingdom in 1789. But the Raja Ram Sing was not ready to enter into any settlement with British compromising his independence. But on the other hands Burmies asked Raja Ram Sing to submit to them. At this stage the British came forward and asked that the Raja has sought British protection. Thus to protect the Kingdom from Burmies the British Government sent a small detachment to Jayantia on the arrival of the British force the Burmese retreated from Jayantia Kingdom. Finally Raja Ram Sing II agreed to signed a treaty with the British. Thus in 1824 a treaty was signed between the British and Raja Ram Sing of the Jayantia Kingdom. By this treaty Raja was formally agreed to be dependent of the British Government. He also promised not to be enter into any negotiation with any foreign powers without the approval of the British. Thus the relationship between British and Jayantia was fairly cordial and Raja Ram Sing had even sent a contingents of troops to aid the British troops in quelling the Khasi disturbances. But on the death of David Scott in 1831 the friendly relation between Raja Ram Sing and the British soon developed which embittered the mutual relation between two Government even they began to conflicts, the cause of the first conflict between the British and Raja Ram Sing arose out of a dispute in

connection with the establishment of a border outpost called Chokey at Chapamukh the river Kopili formed the mutual boundary between Assam and Jayantia Kingdom. Ram Sing established a Chokey at the confluence of Doyang and Kapili river and levied taxes on the all goods passing through that Chokey. There was another Chokey which belonged to the British and they also levied taxes on all goods passing through that Chokey. The British directed Ram Sing to remove the Chokey on the ground that the place where he had established did not belonged to his treaty. But Ram Sing refused to comply with the directive. In spite of this the British did not take any action either to remove the Chokey or to punish Ram Sing for his alleged encroachment of the British land. The matter remains unsettled. The Second cause was more serious; in 1832 a fresh dispute arose. Two British subjects were kidnapped by a group of Jayantias from Sylhet apparently to be sacrificed at the Shrine of Golden Kali. The two persons however were able to escape. They reported the incident to the British Government. But the British Government took no action against the Raja of Jayantia, through the incident was committed by the culprits belonging to Jayantia Kingdom. British Government handover warned him to take steps to stop such ugly incident, failing which the British would annex his territory. A few months after this incident, four British subjects were again kidnapped and three of them were actually immolated at the Shrine of Goddess Kali. It was alleged that the incident was done at the instance of Raja of Gobha, a district of Jayantia, acting upon the order of Raja Ram Sing. The British Government this time instead of doing anything requested Ram Sing to inquire into the affairs and to find out the culprit to handover the alleged person to the British Government. Ram Sing promised to make inquiry but before doing so he died on September 30, 1832. After the death of Raja Ram Sing, his nephew Rajendra Singh became the Raja of Jayantia. The dispute between the Rajendra Singh and the British now took a fresh turn. The British now demanded from Rajendra Singh a new treaty under which he would be

required to pay a tribute of ten thousand rupees. Finding no ground for paying tribute, Rajendra Singh protested against the demand and pleaded his inability to sign the treaty. The question of tribute remained unsettled. Failing to obtain Raja's consent to sign a fresh treaty, the British now turned their attention towards the promise given by his predecessor to hand over the culprit who was attaged to be involved in the crime. The British

Government now demands to hand over the Raja to Gobha to them whom they suspected as the alleged criminal involved in the crime. They also suspected that Rajendra Singh had provided shelter to the criminal to escape punishment. The British Government asked Rajendra Singh to hand over the Raja of Gobha within 20 days and warned that if the Raja refused to surrender the culprit within the stipulated time his kingdom would be annexed. But Raja Rajendra Singh neither complied with the order nor sent any reply. As no reply was received within the stipulated time, the British Government resolved to dispose Rajendra Singh of his territory. So in March 1835, the British force took possession of the plain portion of the territory leaving the hill portion in the possession of the Rajendra Singh. Rajendra Singh found that the British had deprived him of the most economically viable portion of his territory. Realising that the hill portion would be totally insufficient for the maintenance of his administration. Rajendra Singh voluntarily surrendered the entire territory to the British and retired to Sylhet with a pension of Rupees five hundred. The Kingdom of Jayantia was annexed by the British empire.

Conclusion :

Thus above mentioned events leading to the annexation of the Jayantia Kingdom by the British empire in March 1835. The main events was the relationship between the British and Jayantias which is led to the annexation of the Jayantia Kingdom by the British empire. Thus, the King was handed over his property in Sylhet along with a monthly salary of Rs- 500/-. When the British annexed the Jayantia pasganes in the plains, the then syiem from the year 1835 the whole Jayantia Kingdom came under the British rule till India achieved independence on the 15th August 1947.

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