



SITUATING THE ROLE OF KA¹ PHAN NONGLAIT IN THE ANGLO-KHASI CONFLICT

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Abstract:

The Anglo-Khasi War of 1829-1833 was an important event in the establishment of British power in the Khasi hills of Meghalaya, North East India. The conflict revolves around the policy of the English East India Company to effect measures to secure the right of road passage through Nongkhlaw territory under the chieftainship of Tirot Sing. The subsequent growing British encroachment and exploitation, indifferences and disregard of the local sentiments resulted in a clash with the common people which brought about the War. A notable feature of the struggle was the voice of protest and the role played by a woman leader of this tribal community whose tales of courage and bravery resonates till today.

Keywords: British, English East India Company, Khasi hills, Nongkhlaw, Ka Phan Nonglait, Tirot Sing,

I. Introduction

The British interest in North East India was first brought about by a desire to protect their commercial and trading interest in Bengal. It was for strategic reasons that the British first came to North East India when they felt that their possessions were threatened by the aggressive Burmese who had then come to control some portions of North East India. The first contact of the English East India Company with the Khasi-Jaintia people was made after acquiring the *dewani* (*rights to collect revenue*) rights of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa in 1765 from the Mughal Emperor Shah Alam II. After 1765, the Khasi had some sort of trade relations with the English when the Company took hold of Goalpara following the renunciation by the later Mughals and the simultaneous acquisition of Sylhet². The British interest in the neighboring Khasi states was later brought about by their involvement in the Burmese War which came to an end by the Treaty of Yandaboo 1826.

The objective of this paper is to explore the growth of British interest in the Khasi hills located in North East India and their consequent effort to accomplish a road construction project in order to reduce the marching duration of the *sepoy*s or soldiers of the English East India Company from one headquarter (Lower Assam) to another (Sylhet) and to effectively bring the Khasi chiefs under their control. It tries to examine the factors leading to a clash between the British and the Khasi people. The paper also specially tries to situate the contribution and role of the Khasi woman Ka Phan Nonglait in the context of the Anglo-Khasi War.

¹ Literally meaning 'she' or indicating a female

² Hamlet Bareh (1974) - MEGHALAYA - North-Eastern India News and Feature Service, Shillong, R.K. Printers, Delhi, pp. 124-125

II. Background

The Khasi were a trading people and they possessed lime quarries which could supply the whole of Bengal. In addition, they traded in iron, silk, wax, honey, ivory and other items of trade³. It may also be noted that with the acquisition of Sylhet, the British became close neighbours of the Khasis and it was not long before they realized the potential of trading with them. As in other parts of the country, the British East India Company took keen interest in these areas where the opportunity for trade existed. About the interest of the English East India Company in the affairs of Khasi hills which ultimately manifested into an open confrontation, D.R. Syiemlieh writes, “Its (East India Company) interest in the Sylhet frontier was one in which the limestone trade from the hills could be encouraged, to check the frequent raids of the hill men into the plains and to stake a firm claim over the foothills which the Khasi chiefs also claimed as forming portion of their states”⁴.

The first Khasi political contact with the British must have started at Barduar which belonged to the Nongkhaw State. The Nongkhaw *syiem*⁵ were in the habit of visiting Barduar now and then to collect revenue and to attend public celebrations. It may be noted that the Jaintia *Syiem* also allowed a construction of road by the Company through his kingdom. In consequence of the treaty held in 1824, a road was built from Nowgong District to Jaintiapur⁶. In the meantime, David Scott, Political Agent to the Governor General of India, in order to persuade the Khasis for another road which will pass through their territory closed the *dwars*⁷ (also spelled dwars) to Khasi traders and bent upon annexing Barduar in the plains which belonged to Nongkhaw state. Of course Scott agreed to restore Barduar and open the *dwars* provided Tirot Sing, the *syiem* of Nongkhaw, agreed to allow the East India Company to construct a road through his kingdom to connect Gauhati and Sylhet⁸.

This necessitated the violation of the ancestral rights of the Nongkhaw which brought David Scott into closer contact with Tirot Singh the then chief of Hima Nongkhaw and his mother *ka* Ksan Syiemlieh who later travel to Barduar to settle the border dispute. Tirot Singh protested against the Company’s acquisition of his ancestral domain and David Scott agreed to restore the territory to him provided he granted to the Company the right to construct a road through his territory connecting the Brahmaputra valley and the Surma Valley. In reply Tirot Singh told him that according to the usages of the land he himself had no authority to grant such a concession. Such a matter has to be deliberated and pass by the *syiem* in council.

Arrangements for the state durbar at Nongkhaw was made and Tirot Singh send messages to his countrymen and about 500 to 600 men were present at the meeting. The debate continued for the whole day. The next day the meeting was continued and finally ended till midnight in favour of the proposal of the British Government. An agreement known as the Nongkhaw Agreement was concluded between Tirot Sing and David Scott on 3rd November 1826⁹ which approves the road construction, allow a free passage of the Company’s troops, to provide men and materials for the work and that British would protect the Khasi subject against the attack of any foreign enemy. But many returned home dissatisfied over the approval given to the Company. The villagers of Nongbri under Tirot Sing challenged to veto it as no representative from it had been invited to the Durbar. Here, it is pertinent to note that there were as many as 30 states in the Khasi Hills before the advent of the British. The chiefs of these states were in no sense territorial sovereigns with unlimited powers. They were merely elected heads of little republics. Each had a council of his own without whose sanction no business of importance could be executed by the *syiem*. The Khasi nation as a whole presented the appearance of a

³ Meghalaya Chronicle, Vol. 1, No. II,P.13

⁴ D.R. Syiemlieh, "British Policy Towards the Khasi States", in J.B. Bhattacharjee (ed), Studies in the History of North-East India (1986), North Eastern Hill University (NEHU) Publications, Shillong, p.186

⁵ Literally meaning an elected chief

⁶ Hamlet Bareh (1974) - MEGHALAYA - North -Eastern India News and Feature Service, Shillong, R.K. Printers, Delhi,p. 144

⁷ Alluvial floodplains in eastern north east India

⁸ Ibid p. 145

⁹ Helen Giri The Khasis under British Rule (1990) p. 55, Regency publications, New Delhi

congregation of little oligarchical republics subject to no common superior yet of which each member was amenable in some degree to the control of the confederating states¹⁰

A company of Sepoys under British generals was placed to supervise the construction. In the beginning things were amicable and well maintained. Tirot Singh kept his word and continued to furnish adequate provisions in materials and labourers to support the construction work which earned him a royal palanquin, as a mark of high honour of the British government¹¹. However, this peaceful situation did not last long and soon there were clashes between the Khasis and the British leading to the Anglo-Khasi War of 1829.

III. Beginning of Conflict

There were a number of reasons that brought the War. Firstly, Tirot Singh had a personal grudge against the English East India Company because of the proposed annexation of Barduar of which the the British later had agreed to return. Quoting from Barpujari's about Tirot Sing's unhappiness in his dealing with the Company, "Mr. Scott formerly made friendship with me previously saying your enemy is Company's enemy and that he would relinquish the Barduar revenue, both in money and pykes. He has not done it and has the wish to give troops to my enemy, the Ranee Rajah¹²". Tirot Sing was disgusted with the refusal of the Company to furnish him military assistance against the Nongwah Syiem (Rani Sing), Bolaram against whom Tirot Sing and Bor Manick had a common animosity.

Secondly, then there were the antecedents of the beloved ally and companion of Tirot Sing, U Bor Manick, a *Syiem* of Mylliem, had quarreled with the authorities of the East India Company as regards jurisdiction and authority over the Desh Dimurua and in March 1828, he marched down to the dwars where he seized the revenue from the revenue officers posted by the Government (British).

Thirdly, the emergence of the Pandua Khasis, who along with Bengali collaborators carried on dishonest practices in the lime trade, caused anxiety in the minds of the Khasis. It may be noted that Scott had virtually advocated a policy of interference to put an end to the frequent trade disputes. Dissatisfied chiefs of Assam frontier such as Bur Manick and others were already actively inciting their neighbours playing probably on their past feuds with the British Government. The chief of Nongstoin had refused to grant the lease of his quarries to George Inglis, a British merchant and his dispute with his neighbor, the chief of Langrin continued. At any rate, Scott's interference in the Assam frontier might have revived their ancient animosities and if hostilities broke out with the Government, the chiefs of the Sylhet frontier might also plunge into it¹³

Tirot Singh also found out that the British Government was making vast scheme of territorial expansion all over India. He now fully realized the danger of the agreement he had made with the EIC. He knew it well that it would appear awkward on his part to suddenly put a stop to the road construction. Therefore he wanted a better opportunity to oppose it without actually breaking the Treaty.

The highhandedness of the British soldiers at Nongkhaw, their harsh treatment towards the poor inhabitants and other misdeeds had sapped the sentiments of the people who had begun to lose confidence in the good works of David Scott. The occupation of Bengal and Assam also affected the Khasi traders as they could no longer continue their relations with the plains people as before. It was also reported that the foolish boast of a Bengali peon who in a quarrel with the Khasis taunted them with the prospect of subjugation and taxation as soon as the road construction was completed. This may also have alarmed the Khasis who decided to strike against the British before it was too late. Such was the situation in the Khasi Hills when in the early part of April, 1829 David Scott arrived at Nongkhaw with a view to proceed to Cherra with a small escort of sepoys, to oversee the road construction work. Scott was probably unaware of the complete revulsion of the feelings in Nongkhaw, though he was aware of some opposition to the alliance with the British. He put absolute reliance on Tirot Sing to remain loyal. Otherwise he would not have undertaken a journey

¹⁰ R.M. Lahiri , The Annexation of Assam, Reprint 1975, published by Firma K.L Mukapadhyay Calcutta

¹¹ H.K Barpujari, Problems of the hill tribes North East Frontier, Vol. 1(NEHU Publications) NEHU Reprint 1998, p. 49

¹² Ibid. p49

¹³ P.N. Dutta, (1982), Impact of the West on the Khasis and the Jaintias - A Survey of Political Economic and Social Change, Cosmo Publications, New Delhi, p. 64

through a country simmering with discontent. Within a few days of his (Scott) departure Nongkhlaw was aflame and it engulfed the whole of Khasi hills¹⁴.

2nd April 1829 marked the beginning of the Khasi Peoples War of Liberation. It was their last resort to protect their motherland realizing that they have to face the greatest power in the world. Tirot Singh had already made a secret plans with his loyal friend Bor Manik to drive out the British from his lands. On the fateful morning of 2nd April 1829 a band of warriors under the Khasi leader Mon Bhut surrounded the entire campus of the British station at Nongkhlaw while Tirot Singh proceeded to massacre almost all the British residents. Meanwhile David Scott the Political agent managed to escape to Sohra or Cherrapunjee.

Following this on 4th April 1829, Tirot Sing opened hostilities against the Government, by luring Lieutenant Beddingfield, a British officer to a conference and killed him. The other officers and their Indian subordinates were then besieged in their bungalows. For the whole night Lieutenant Burlton defended himself against the attack of the enemy and on day break he determined his way to Gauhati. He and his men escaped from the burning inferno as their bungalows and barracks were set on fire. However, they were all killed after a hot chase at a place called Pamdkhar, in all fifty or sixty men. The massacre at Nongkhlaw become the signal for an almost universal uprising, as almost all the chiefs of the Khasi Hills, both of Assam and Sylhet frontier made a common cause in the hostilities against the British Government¹⁵. At Gauhati, rumours were afloat that the agent to the Governor General in the meanwhile had also perished along with other victims; that the Khasi had already descended upon the plains and advanced as far as Beltola¹⁶. According to D. R. Syiemleh, "the growing British interest in the hills, their treaty with those states which agree to the road, the growing establishments at Nongkhlaw and Cherrapunji, their control of Sylhet and Assam must have created a psychosis of fear among the Khasis which burst into the massacre at Nongkhlaw"¹⁷.

In the meantime David Scott send a message to the authorities at Sylhet and Captain Lister proceeded to the war torn country and Lieutenant Vetch was send from Kamrup district to Nongkhlaw. The news of the unexpected events reached the authorities at Calcutta and the Governor General in Council ordered for the immediate suppression of the rebels.

The Khasi formed a Confederation of the Chiefs called the Khasi League of Princes under Tirot Singh who was to command the South and Bor Manik who will command the northern part of the Khasi Hills. Letters were send to the Assamese Nobles, the Bhots, the Singphos... exciting them to throw off the yoke of the English¹⁸. The syiem of Khyrim, Myriaw, Jirang, Mawsynram, Maharam, Bhowal, and Nongpoh gave full support to Tirot Sing. With the exception of Duwan Singh who was an ally of the British neutral states remained spectators. It was in these circumstances that the legendary female freedom fighter from the Khasi hills, Ka Phan Nonglait appeared and played her role providing inspiration to her fellow countrymen to raise the banner of freedom and liberty from foreign rule.

IV. The Role of *Ka Phan Nonglait*

The contribuition *ka Phan Nonglait* in the context of the struggle against the British assumes significance taking into account the matrilineal system that characterizes the culture and society of the Khasis. Women played an important role in society with special privileges on property and family possessions. It is a society where women were treated with respect and empowered with the right of custodian of the family inheritance. It is interesting to note that while there was a rich repository of knowledge and information in the folk tradition and culture of the Khasi on the role of *Ka Phan Nonglait* in this struggle, her heroic exploits was not mentioned in the official records of the colonial rulers. *Ka Phan Nonglait* was the younger of the two daughters of U Bor Syiemleh and ka Subon Nonglait. She was born in 1799 at Nongrimai village in today's West Khasi Hills District which forms a part of Nongkhlaw chieftainship. As the youngest daughter of the family she was raised in an atmosphere of utmost care, love and respect. From a very young age she was taught to imbibe the basic value of life that will suitably reflect the socio-cultural and religious order of the day. She was train to inculcate the doctrine of prayer, honoring parents, knowing God and man and earning righteously. After the death of

¹⁴ Ibid. p. 64

¹⁵ Ibid. p. 64

¹⁶ H.K, Barpujari, Op.cit, p. 47

¹⁷ D.R. Syiemleh, British Administration in Meghalaya - Policy and Pattern, p. 47.

¹⁸ H.K, Barpujari, Op.cit, p. 50

her parents in her early twenties Phan Nonglait stayed alone at Nongrmai and look after the family property being the youngest daughter and custodian of the ancestral possession. Her sister was married away in 1824. Phan Nonglait had only one daughter named ka Shaimon Nonglait nicknamed as '*'Shai'* by the people of Nongrmai and '*'Shine'* by the British¹⁹. She inherited the independent spirit and strong character of her village folk which had been moulded and shaped by the natural environment and tuned by the difficult and hardy lifestyle itself. As the youngest daughter she was filled with additional sense of responsibility and attachment to her lineage and ancestry. Tradition had endowed upon her the mantle of guardianship. She therefore grew up with an acute sense of concern and awareness to the happenings around her.

Ka Phan Nonglait was deeply moved by the events following the permission given to the East India Company to construct a road through Nongkhaw territory. Being a young mother she shared the burden of her countrymen as the state was being used by the British for their interest with sans regard to the sentiments of the people. The stories of British cruelty and ill treatment of the simple inhabitants and their high handedness on the village folk at the road construction site cause a deep sense of distress and anger inside her. She shared the popular conviction that British should not have been granted the permission to construct a road through their country. But she was also willing to throw in her lot with the others in their effort to put a stop to the injustices done to her people. Thus even before even when Tirot Singh launched the first offensive to drive away the English from Nongkhaw she was filled with her burning desire to be a part of the struggle for liberation of her motherland. Her intense love for her native land her dedication to the spirit of freedom and sacrifice soon attracted the attention of the men in arms who readily included her in scheme devise to drive away the British from these hills.

It was as if fate had chosen her among the womenfolk to lead the way in this fight against these foreign intruders when she herself became a victim of molestation perhaps the first recorded victim of molestation in the hills, at the hands of a British officer in the spring of 1829. The incident ignites the flame of patriotism inside her and hatred against of the British became more intense and vengeful. She had heard rumours of the atrocities perpetuated on the khasi womenfolk and she decided to raise strong objections against it.

After her sad encounter ka Phan Nonglait took the lead in mobilizing the movement of the womenfolk and raising awareness against the wicked act of the colonizers. She became the flesh and blood of the new protest launched by the women against the British. This boosted the spirit of freedom and struggle against colonial domination. The news of her molestation soon spread like wildfire and this ultimately convinced the people of the need to stand up against the colonial offenders. Ka Phan Nonglait case created a hue and cry among the womenfolk of Nongkhaw as more of them came up with similar narrative²⁰. They were utterly disgusted and furious with the British conduct. Ka Phan Nonglait campaign and appeal against British misconduct received overwhelming support among the women who decide to make a stand for the cause of their modesty and integrity. But as a woman she was aware of her inadequacy and knew that her movement will not succeed without the backing of the male force. Initially hesitant, however, seeing her dedication and commitment to the cause slowly the men were also drawn in this struggle,. Soon her movement became an important subject for the Khasi people to raise their voice against the high handedness of the British rulers and their misdeeds. Her message about British injustices spread across the realm of Nongkhaw and beyond, rekindling among the people the love of freedom and independence of their motherland.

Prior to the movement, *Ka Phan Nonglait* was said to have organized a number of secret meetings in different places particularly at Nongrmai. Her village was a little distant away from Nongkhaw the seat of Tirot Sing's power. It was also said that though she was not well known to Tirot Sing and the people of Nongkhaw. But the initiative taken by her in shaping the anti-British movement for the rights and dignity of women soon transformed her into an important figure and symbol of anti-British injustices. She soon emerged as a leader and constantly reported to Tirot Sing about the continuing exploitations and injustices done by the British at the expense of the people of Nongkhaw²¹. The movement of *Ka Phan Nonglait* was an important factor that reinforced the

¹⁹ Daniel stone Lyngdoh, *Ka Phan Nonglait*, 2022, Pigeon books, New Delhi

²⁰ Ibid. p. 50.

²¹ Ibid. 51

steps taken by Tirot Sing to liquidate foreign control from his lands. It reinforced the belief that the agreement he had concluded with the British was in the nature of an alliance between a superior foreign power and the chief of a petty state and that the former are not keen on respecting it. *Ka Phan Nonglait* case demands that drastic action needs to be taken or more cases of such nature are bound to be repeated. Tirot Sing therefore, took the lead in starting the struggle to defend the freedom and honour of his motherland. He knew that he was up against the greatest colonial power in the world, the sun in whose Empire never sets. But the ideals of freedom, the spirit of liberty and the task of upholding the dignity and honour of his subjects were too dear to be compromised. He therefore took up the mounting task of not only challenging them but to drive the foreigners away from his motherland. He was not concern about the outcome, as long as he performed the sacred duty that destiny had bestowed upon him.

Never before had the people witnessed such fierce fighting and never had the British ever visualized the force of organization of the bands of khasi warriors during the Anglo-Khasi war which lasted for three years. Hundreds of warriors died in the defense of their motherland. Fierce battles were fought at Jiramg, Patharkhah and other villages. The British followed the policy of burning the villages and granaries forcing the people to seek shelter in caves. When Tirot Singh learned that the khasi warriors were retreating from the North to Nongkhaw he rushed immediately to the area to take command by himself. When Captain Lister entered the Nongkhaw territory, the road was heavily blocked by the Khasi warriors. On the way to Nongkhaw the British had to face stiff resistance at the villages of Mairang and Nongrmai the birth place of *ka Phan Nonglait*. In the course of their march from Nongrmai to Nongkhaw the Company's soldiers were overcome by tiredness and fatigues as a consequence of the relentless fighting. On their way they happened to pass through a beautiful and enchanting waterfall later named as *Ka Phan Nonglait Falls* and still bore that name to this day. It was on the spot by the fall that they were given the orders to rest for a while.

Tradition and Folktales had it that on one particular occasion while the British soldiers were resting near the beautiful waterfall, *ka Phan Nonglait* approached the waterfall from the side where the soldiers were taking rest. She carried on her back a traditional cone basket pretending to search for some wild mushroom plants and crops in the garden close to the resting place. Phan had actually came up with a plan to kill them and inside the basket she had kept a very strong khasi made liquor called *ka kyiad rod* which has a very strong intoxicating effect. When the soldiers saw her they were charmed by her beauty and started teasing her. *Ka Phan Nonglait* then took out the intoxicant and take a drink right in front of them. Sensing the aroma of the liquor they begged her to share it with them. After a few drinks many were knocked down with a feeling of drowsiness. Phan Nonglait then took away all their weapons in guns and ammunitions and threw them in the deep pool below the waterfall. Then she called out the khasi warriors who were hiding in the nearby jungles. After they came back to their sense the soldiers discovered that they were stripped off of their arms. With rage and anger the khasi warriors descended upon the hapless soldiers who were killed with no mercy. This incident which took place on 2nd April 1829 marks the height of the Khasi resistance in their attempt to defend British penetration to Nongkhaw. After the killing of 32 British soldiers *ka Phan Nonglait* was arrested was kept under house detention first at Mairang and later at Nongkhaw. It was during the course of the Nongkhaw Massacre that she manages to escape from the British lock-up²². Later *ka Phan Nonglait* and the womenfolk organized more women resistance first at Mairang and later at Nongkhaw. In all her efforts she received huge support from the khasi people. She took an active part in the battles for the defense of Nongkhaw and it was in one of these fiercest battles at Nongkhaw that Tirot Singh was wounded and he was forced to retreat to a cave near Kyrdemkulai. It was during his illness that the British captured Nongkhaw exactly three months after the commencement of the War.

V. Negotiations and end of War

Tirot Singh did not yield to defeat and with the help of Bormanik an urgent state council was held near the cave where it was decided to carry on with the War through guerilla warfare. The British meanwhile had established their military station at Saitsohpen. Meanwhile Bormanik was captured and imprisoned in May 1830. While other warriors like the chief of Rambrai joined the side of Tirot Singh. In the course of the War David Scott died and he was succeeded by T.C Robertson who initiated a new policy of ending what he called, "a wretched" warfare.

²² Ibid.p. 63

In 1832, the Supreme authority of the Company from Fort William directed him to adopt conciliatory measures and to declare amnesty to those who would submit Robertson announced peace and opened negotiations, whereby small states like Mawsynram, Bhowal and Malaisohmat were compelled to recognize the British Paramountcy by means of subsidiary alliances. Robertson openly declared that he wanted to negotiate with Tirot Sing. The latter sent word, that he could meet the British only in Singmanik's residence at Nongkrem, and that they should go un-armed.

About the meeting of the British and the Khasi representatives on the appointed day, R.M Lahiri described it in this way, "On the 23rd August the representative of the British lion met with the lion of the Khasis in his den. It was a historic interview no doubt - only there was no mighty pen of Todd or Cunningham to depict it as such before the World at large". Tirut Singh was seen in the company of his ministers. The conference was opened by Captain Lister. Many alluring promises were held out and "a policy forgive and forget" was proclaimed by the English representatives and finally they (English) promised to spare the life of Tirut Singh and forgive the misconduct of his followers if hostilities were called off and adequate security furnished for the future conduct²³. But Tirut Singh was not a man to be bought off by promises. Tirot Sing on his part stated that the Company should return to him Barduar in Kamrup which had been brought from one Don Ahom by his predecessors and which was annexed to Assam by the Company; and the Company should abandon the road passing through the Khasi Hills. The meeting ended in a stalemate as the local British representatives had no power to deal with such issues. Negotiation after negotiations failed. In these negotiations, Tirot Singh displayed an audacity not usually found among his contemporaries.

When nothing came out of negotiations, Robertson adopted the policy of "economic blockade"²⁴, and directed all trade and intercourse with the Khasi hills to be stopped. After he had completed the economic blockade, some Khasis thought of surrender when cultivation nearly came to a standstill and no foodstuff could be procured from outside. However, some people on the border of Kamrup got rice and other foodstuff secretly brought by the Assamese friends, chiefly led by Peoli Phukan and Maniram Dewan. The Assamese nobility were found greatly dissatisfied and such was the condition at Gauhati that Mr. White, assistant to the Agent could not count upon the loyalty of more than two Assamese of rank. The rest were either indifferent or in league with the Khasis²⁵.

At last, Tirot Singh was baffled. He had been conducting his aggressive campaign for nearly four years. None of the *Syiem*s of big States were willing to support him. His people were mostly occupied with war and after the economic blockade, food ran short. His people would perhaps starve if the war went on. The strength of his men declined. His own health was also failing. Tirot Singh could no longer bear these circumstances. He decided to open negotiations with the British. On 9th January, 1833 he deputed Jit Roy one of the *Myntries (Mantris)*, to negotiate with Captaint Inglis who commanded the post at Shilliang-um. At last on 9th January, 1833, Jit Roy, met Captain Inglis and opened negotiation for the surrender of his master (Tirot Sing), on the condition that his life should be spared. No sooner had Tirot Singh arrived he was surrounded and captured by the British forces at a place not far from Diengiei Peak

Tirot Sing was taken to Cherrapunjee where he was tried and found guilty. He was asked to choose his kingdom under British Paramountcy or face a severe sentence. He refused to come to terms with the former and was given a life sentence. He was send to Dhaka where according to colonial records he passed his remaining days as a political prisoner. Tirot Sing died on 17th July 1835 at Dhaka in Bangladesh. With his death the Anglo-Khasi War came to a close. Some *syiem*s continue to offer resistance but soon most of them were either captured or surrendered to the British authorities.

VI. The Legacy of *Ka Phan Nonglait*

While the role of legendary chiefs like Tirot Sing and Bor Manik had been sufficiently attested and recognized the part played by *ka Phan Nonglait* continues to elude literary and academic circle. *Ka Phan Nonglait* did not attain martyrdom like Tirot Sing but continue to inspire the Khasi people and was an icon to them through her gallant acts of courage and bravery. She breathed her last on 6th December, 1850 during the reign of Jidor Sing *Syiem*, chief of Nongkhla. She was only 51 years old when she passed

²³ R.M. Lahiri, Op.cit, p. 93

²⁴ Ibid. P. 92

²⁵ Ibid, p. 82

away .Her daring act to raise her voice against the shameful deeds of the British during that era, was nothing short of exemplary. While her commitment to the cause of freedom by helping her compatriots was a noble task indeed. She sought to avenge her aggressor and to redeem her womanhood and the pride of all her fellow women by collaborating with Tirot Sing the chief of Nongkhaw state. She became a role model during the struggle and emerged as a true iconic figure in the fight for the cause of freedom and dignity of all khasi women. Daniel Stone Lyngdoh hailed her as the pioneer and mother of feminism in the Khasi and Jaintia hills who dared to come forward bravely fighting against the British regime²⁶

Today her name is immortalized by the waterfall at Nongrmai which was named after her to commemorate the infamous killing of the 32 soldiers. A private school at Nongthliew village, west Khasi hills and the public park in the hill city of Shillong was named after her. Recently the Government of India through the Ministry of Culture on April 2022, recognizing her contribution to the freedom struggle accorded her with the status of the ‘Unsung Hero’ of the Freedom Struggle.

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²⁶ Daniel Stone Lyngdoh, op.cit. p 68