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Editor's note

This article by Francis Hamilton, also known as Francis Buchanan, first appeared in *The Edinburgh Journal of Science* (vol. 3, April-October, 1825, pp. 32-44). Despite its relatively late dating, Hamilton's understanding of the area and the people were not substantially different from those found in his earlier diaries during his travels in the area in 1798.

M.W. C.

An Account of the Frontier Between Ava and the Part of Bengal Adjacent to the Karnaphuli River (1825)

Francis Hamilton

(M. D. F. R. S. and F. A. S. London and Edinburgh)

The river called Naaf by Europeans, which enters the sea in about 20° 50' north, for a short way forms the boundary between Ava and Bengal; and across it is the only communication known between the kingdom of Arakan subject to Ava and Chatigang subject to Britain. North from the forks of this river, so far as I could learn in 1798, there was no district boundary; but there extends north, along the whole of the Chatigang district, a mountainous frontier occupied by several rude tribes. Through this region flow many rivers; some into the sea, either through Chatigang or Arakan, and some into the Erawadi; and the high land at the sources of such of these rivers as run through the district of Chatigang was commonly supposed to be the actual boundary. The rude tribes indeed, which occupy the hilly countries on both sides of the central eight, claim independence, and support it, so far as their slender means will admit. On this account, we cannot depend on there being no passages through this country, because the inhabitants will naturally conceal them, as an intercourse by these passages would inevitably lead to their more full subjection to either one or other of their more powerful neighbours.

In a map of the Empire of Ava by Mr. Walker, the rivers flowing through Chatigang are laid down as anastomosing with those which run through Arakan; and this may be the case, although I heard not the most distant hint from the natives of such a circumstance. Indeed none of those, with whom I conversed, pretended to know anything of the sources of the large rivers, on the banks of which they dwelt, alleging that a fear of the independent tribes hindered them from ever penetrating so far. Such an anastomosis, in a very hilly country, is singular, and renders uncertain the above mentioned idea of the boundary. This would increase the probability of there being passages direct from the sources of the Karnaphuli to Ava, through the country of the Jo; but I am not acquainted with the authority of which Mr. Walker has proceeded; this, however, from the manner in which it is laid down, would seem to be from an actual survey, and is therefore probably correct, so that the height of the land can only be the boundary towards the northern extremity of the district of Chatigang, concerning which, I am now about to treat.

The total width of the mountainous region, between the Naaf on the side of Bengal, and Zhænbrugiuin [Hsin-pyu-gyin] on the side of Ava, is about 124 miles east and west; one-half of which probably is watered by rivers flowing into the Bay of Bengal, and the other by streams running towards the Erawadi. The whole of this space is occupied by rude tribes alone. As we advance further north, the width of these wilds increases by low hills adjacent on the west to the Mugg mountains of Rennell, and which, on the Karnaphuli, extend about twenty miles west from these mountains, which, by the Bengalese, are there called Barkal.

The Bengalese, and the rude inhabitants of these hills, have an utter abhorrence at each other, and their manners, in almost every thing, are opposite, the rude tribes having more resemblance to the people of Ava, and even of Europe, than the Hindus have. Even their manner of cultivation is totally different. The natives of Gangetic India, especially, altogether neglect land that is not level; while the rude tribes consider such as nearly useless, and cultivate the hills alone. Notwithstanding their mutual abhorrence, this in some measure prevents encroachment; and the low hills, running north from Islamabad (the abode of Faith) to the Phani, are allowed to remain in possession of the rude tribes called Tripura, Jumea, and Chakma. These people seem to have no dependence on the chiefs of their respective nations. In their jooms they rear cotton, rice, and ginger, and a great part of the first and last they exchange with the Bengalese for salt, iron, earthenware and fish. They have no black-cattle; but rear hogs, goats, and poultry, and seem to be in easy circumstances. They are subject to predatory attacks from the Kungkis, nominally dependent on Radun Manik.

To the east of these hills is a fine valley watered by the Havildar river, which falls into the Karnaphuli. This valley is level, and cultivated for rice by the Bengalese. East from this is a chain of low hills called Korilliya pahar, which extends far south beyond the Karnaphuli, on the southern bank of which are two steep cliffs, that return the most distinct echo which I have ever heard. These hills are of inconsiderable height; but, like those north from Islamabad, are neglected by the Bengalese, and allowed to remain with the Muggs, who cultivate after the joom fashion.

The Karnaphuli (Ear-ring) river, which Rennell calls Curumfullee, forms at its mouth a good harbour for ships of considerable burthen, and would be of great importance, were it not so deeply embayed, that in the S. W. monsoon, ships cannot proceed to sea without danger. At Patarghat, the ferry from Islamabad towards the south, it is about a mile wide; and at Korilliya pahar, it diminishes to about 200 yards, but the tide runs up strong.

East from Korilliya pahar, is a fine valley called Rumagniya, which extends north and south from the Karnaphuli, on the banks of the Ishamati towards the former, and on those of the Silun towards the latter. Although it contains some small hills, it is well cultivated by Bengalese peasants; and some parts still belongs, as the whole did formerly, to the hereditary chief of the tribe called Muggs at Calcutta, where they are much employed by Christians as cooks, their habits fitting them for preparing our impure diet, which neither Hindu nor Muhammedan can approach without disgust. Beyond the low hills, which bound the valley of Rungamiya on the north, east, and south, no Bengalese cultivators have settled, but the hills are as fully occupied by rude tribes as the nature of the joom cultivation will admit; and, in 1798, when I visited the country, Taubbokha, the hereditary chief of the Mugg people, retained among these hills a kind of independence, although in the parts of his estate, cultivated by Bengalese, he was reduced to the same footing, as the other proprietors of land (Zemindars) in Bengal. In the following account, I shall confine myself to a description of the territory within the hills, which forms a part

of the frontier, and, at its southern end, is not above fifteen miles wide from east to west; but it increases much in width farther north, towards the sources of the Chimay and Karnaphuli rivers, where it is probably from thirty to forty miles from east to west. Its length is probably about seventy miles; but of this a considerable portion towards the north, has been occupied by the Kunkis called Lusai, who are quite independent of the Mugg chief.

Some miles within the western boundary of the low hills, a chain of greater height runs northerly (about N. 40' W.) from the Sungkar, and crosses the Karnaphuli, the course of which, from the Mugg mountains of Rennell, to beyond this chain, is about N. E. by N. and S. W. by S. with most numerous and great windings. This ridge of hills seems to be about 500 feet in perpendicular height; and, being of a good soil, is well cultivated after the joom fashion. The portion of it south from the Karnaphuli, is called Sita pahar or Sita mura, and that north from thence, is called Ram pahar, and the continuation of the same ridge is probably that called by the Tripuras, Debta mura, or the Deities Head, the southern portion being dedicated to the God Rama and his wife Sita. At its northern end, Sita pahar descends to the Karnaphuli with a shelving rock, called Sitaka ghat (the landing place of Sita), which is highly venerated, and the Hindus, therefore, offer grain, flowers, and eggs, to Sita and Rama, while the Muggs worship Taung-maung, (Mountain-prince). Even the Muhammedans of this province have adopted the superstition, having contrived some fable for almost every place held sacred by the Pagans, thinking probably, that it would be disgraceful for their religion, were they not provided with as many ceremonies and holy places as their neighbours.

Above Sitaka ghat, the Karnaphuli is about 100 yards wide, and of considerable depth. Although the tides flow pretty strong, the water is quite fresh; but even in the dry season, is rather muddy. The concave side of its reaches have low banks, while, on the convex low hills come down to the water-edge, as indeed is common in hilly countries and small rivers. The soil seems in general to be good, and rests on a rock consisting of thin horizontal strata of clay and sand slightly indurated. The hills are cultivated for jooms, as much as the nature of the process will admit; and on the levels, there are Mugg villages (para) surrounded by many plantain trees, and gardens or small plots, in which are reared ginger, betle-leaf, sugar-cane, indigo, tobacco, and capsicum. These are their permanent places of abode; but, at their jooms, they have temporary villages called Kamar, which are changed almost every year, and are only occupied by the labourers in the season of cultivation.

Each para is under the authority of an officer, termed Dewan, who communicates his name to the place; so that the names of the paras undergo frequent changes. In the paras, the huts are better than in the kamars, although each has only one apartment; but the stage, on which it is raised about twelve feet from the ground, is about forty feet by twenty, affording a platform before the door for air and domestic work. The ascent to the house is by a notched stick, which serves for a ladder, and is drawn up when the family wishes to avoid intrusion. Except the houses of the chief and of his brother, all the huts of the country seemed very much alike; and the wealthy, as usual in India, rather occupy a greater number of huts, than build houses on a large scale. On the whole, however, the huts in the Mugg paras seem more comfortable than those of the Bengalese cultivators. The people have abundance of poultry and hogs; and, as there are many plains of some extent, which are not fitted for the joom cultivation, the Muggs keep some oxen and buffaloes, which pasture there, and are probably fattened for eating, although, to avoid offence, this is concealed from the Hindus; but they are not used in the plough. The country, however, is in a poor unproductive state; and, if cultivated like the West Indies, which its hills equal in soil, it might become of great value.

Every Mugg cultivates as much land as he pleases, and the revenue of the chief arises from a poll-tax, and not from a land-rent. Each man pays in proportion to the strength of his family. It is said, that a married pair, living without any assistance from children or servants, pays annually five rupees; and that other families, in proportion to their strength, pay ten, or even fifteen rupees. If the cultivator disposes of the produce of his farm, he pays the tax in money; but, if he chooses, he may pay it in cotton at a fixed price, so that in case of a bad market, the prince may not have it in his power to exact too great a share of the produce. What part of the revenue goes to the Dewan, for his trouble of management, I did not learn; but it is probably small, as I saw no appearance of affluence about the habitations of these officers. The chief also receives money from the Bengalese, who cut grass for thatch on the plains, which abound with this material of an excellent quality; and he levies some duties on boats ascending the Karnaphuli.

The people called Muggs, at Calcutta, are scarcely known by that name in their native country. By the Bengalese, they are commonly called Chakma or Sagma, or, in ridicule, Dubades, (two-linguaged) because they have in general forgotten their original language, which is the same with that of Arakan or Roang, as they call it, and have attained a very imperfect knowledge of the Bengalese, although several of them read and write this dialect. They all, however, retain some words of the Roang language, especially their names; and their priests use both the character and language of Arakan, little different from that of Ava. They all follow the doctrines of the Boudhas, but have engrafted on these many Hindu superstitions, and especially bloody sacrifices offered to the Debtas, or deities of the woods, rivers, and mountains. In spite of the admonitions of their priests, this superstition is very prevalent among the Muggs. The Debtas are supposed to dance and sing in the air; and, by their manner of doing so, to render their will known to certain women, called Diyari. On all occasions, when the Muggs are strongly influenced by hope or fear, such as in sickness and dearth, they apply to a Diyari, who consults the Debta, and is informed by him what sacrifice will be acceptable. This sacrifice is vowed; and, if the person obtains the object of his wishes, the animal is immolated at the place where the Diyari says that the Debta resides. These Diyaris, by their influence with the Debtas, and by their skill in drugs, are supposed to be also able to render a joom inaccessible to tigers and wild elephants; which, as the natives repose the utmost confidence in the science, is perhaps a sign that these animals are not very destructive. The magical power, attributed to their Diyaris by the Muggs, by the silly Bengalese, has been extended to the whole tribe, and towards the Megna, a Mugg is beheld with a mixture of abhorrence and fear, from his eating without the observance of east, and from his supposed power in the black art; so that he is considered nearly as bad as a Christian.

The national religion of the Muggs, is the same with that of Arakan, (Rakhain), that is to say, they follow the sect of Maha Muni among the Bouddhists. The chief priest assumes the same title, Paun-do-gri, with the spiritual guide of the king of Ava. He informed me that they have two orders of priesthood, the Samana, and Moshang; the latter of whom are superior in point of dignity, and by the Bengalese are called Raulims. The priests, like those of Ava, use a yellow dress, and seem very numerous in proportion to their followers; but do not appear to be so much respected by the laity, as the priests of Ava are. Some of the laity assume the yellow dress for a time, and give themselves up to study, but the books which I saw such using, were in the Bengalese character, and except a few words, they understood no other language.

The name Chakma or Sagma, given to this people by the Bengalese, is evidently a corruption from Saksah, the name they give to themselves; while, in the dialect of Ava or Aree, as they call it, they are termed Sæk. They seem to be the remains of the first colony from Arakan, that occupied Tripura on the conquest of that country from the Muhammedans. Many of them still remain in Arakan or Roang, having probably retired there, when the Moslem power was restored in Tripura, and these are distinguished from the conquered portion by the name Sak-mi, and speak the language of Rakhain alone. The Bengalese they call Koar. The men have adopted the Bengalese dress; but the women retain that of Arakan and Ava; and both entirely resemble in person and features the natives of these cities. Like the other rude tribes in the vicinity, they eat every thing, and have no objection to eat along with individuals of other nations; but they do not intermarry with strangers. Although both their rivers and marshes abound in fish, they have not the art of catching these animals, and employ Bengalese fishermen for the purpose. Their principal men have slaves, but these are chiefly Tripuras; nor is it allowable to hold a Saksah in bondage. Several villages, however, both of Tripura and Kungkis, in a state of personal freedom, live in the territory of the Saksah chief, and subject to his authority.

From Sitakaghat to the hills, called the Mugg mountains by Rennell, the course of the Karnaphuli, in a direct line, is between thirty and forty miles; but I took almost four days to ascend this length in a good boat, for which there was a sufficient depth of water, and I reckoned the distance eighty miles by the course of the river. For about two-thirds of the way, I had at times a slight tide with me. Above this, the river contracts to about fifty yards in width, and becomes more rapid and clearer. Where it reaches the Mugg mountains, at a place called Barkal, a ledge of rock running entirely across the river, stops boats from passing; and about a mile farther up, there is a higher ledge, over which the river falls in various beautiful cascades, about six feet high, which, in the rainy season, unite in one great torrent, as appears in the rainy season, unite in one great torrent, as appears from evident marks on the banks. The river in May is beautifully clear, and full of fish. The western face of the hills near Barkal is cultivated in jooms; nor is the term Mugg mountains known in the vicinity. The rock is sand-stone.

I shall now give some account of the streams which fall into the Karnaphuli between Sitakaghat and Barkal, and which water the intermediate country, that is the proper seat of the Saksah.

About ten miles above Sitakaghat, following the course of the river, the Kapy enters, coming from hills at a considerable distance to the southward. Canoes can ascend this rivulet to a village named Kamsey. About the year 1795, a large band of the Bonzhu tribe of Kungkis descended by this rivulet, and committed great devastation on the Bengalese of Runganiya.

About eight miles above the Kapy, the Karnaphuli receives the Rain-ghiaun, coming far from the south-east. About two hours and a half rowing from its mouth, lived a Saksah chief of some note, who had several villages (para) under his authority. Six days journey farther up this river brings the traveller to the country of the Kungkis, called Bonzhu or Bonjugies. If Mr Walker's idea of these rivers be right, the Rain-ghiaun must be the anastomosing branch, which connects the Karnaphuli with the Sunkar and Peercally, which last falls into the Arakan river. The Bonzhu, in this case, will occupy the vicinity of the great peaks called the Blue Mount and Pyramid Hill, along the Peercally and Koladyng rivers. At any rate, they have the Saksah and the Longshue or Lusai tribe of their own nation on the west, and the Jo on the east, and extend,

near the 93° of east longitude from Greenwich, from about the 22d to the 24th degree of north latitude.

In the course of the next four miles, the Karnaphuli receives from the south-east three small streams, the Duliya cherra, the Tara cherra, and the Kuburiya cherra, which run through a country in general level, and covered with long grass and a few trees. On this account it is less populous than the more hilly parts, being mostly unfit for the joom cultivation.

About twelve miles farther up enters from the north-west a river of little importance, called Manik cherra. A little higher up, on the opposite side, is the mouth of Mug-ban, which comes from a marsh of the same name. This and another marsh, (jil) on the Duliya, are said to contain immense quantities of fish, and to be common resorts of large herds, of wild elephants.

Above Manik cherra about ten miles, a little above the mouth of the Ranggamati, is the principal residence of the chief, who, by his people, is called Mang, their pronunciation for what, according to the Alphabetum Barmanum, should be written Mæn, one of the titles usually assumed by the sons of the king of Ava, and therefore analogous to our word Prince. This residence (Rajarbari) contained not only the house of the Raja, but that of his brother, with all their families, except some Bengalese servants, who had huts on the outside of a fence made of bamboo mats, constituting what is called a fort or castle. The whole habitations within were thatched huts, so far as I could see by looking in at the gate; for I did not enter as the chiefs were absent, and as their women and pigs were alarmed. The former, I was told, might, without offence, be seen by strangers; but their timidity, at the approach of an European visitant, occasioned a general scream, on which I retired. The same cause in general prevented the women of a lower rank of Saksah from approaching me. They seem to be drudges, being darker coloured than the men, who, compared with the Bengalese, are very fair,

From the chief's residence there is a fine view of both the ridges of mountains by which the territory of the Saksah are in a great measure bounded. They appeared to me farther distant than I could allow by computing the distances travelled, Since I was there, to judge from Mr Walker's map, the residence of the chief has been moved farther up the river.

About two miles above the chief's residence, a considerable river enters from the north. By the Bengalese it is called Chingay, Singay, or Chimay, and is no doubt that called Chingree by Kennell. My boatmen said, that canoes can ascend it for six days, which will give a direct course of between thirty and forty miles. One of them, in proceeding to a residence of the chiefs, had gone up five days, during which time the canoe was twice unloaded, and carried past water-falls.

The Saksah say, that this river springs from hills near Kundal, so that its total course, in a direct line, may be about fifty miles, allowing Kennell to have placed its mouth correctly, which, so far as I can judge, is the case. They gave me the following account of the rivulets that they pass, in proceeding up its channel, so far as canoes can go. 1st, Kanda cherra on the left; 2d, Kausgurra on the right; 3d, Guy cherra on the left; 4th, Tamarang on the left; 5th, Karik khung, the first on the right; 6th, Khundy cherra on the left; 7th, Dungata on the right; 8th, Kabutkia on the right; 9th, Maha karung on the left; 10th, Nana karung on the left; 11th, Poli on the left; 12th, Incha cherra on the right; 13th, Toisakma on the left; 14th, Karik khung, the second, on the right; 15th, Bæscherra on the left. The Raja had formerly a house at Dungata; but he has been driven from thence by fear for the Kungkis, called Lusai; and no Saksah now reside beyond Kanda

cherra, half a day's journey from the Karnaphuli. The country, however, between the Chingay and Rampahar, is occupied by Kungkis, subject more or less to the Saksah chief.

Rather more than three miles above the mouth of the Chingay, the Basunta enters from the south-east, and is navigable a short way for canoes. Here, again, the country becomes, more hilly and more populous. About three miles above Basunta, on each side of the river, there are hills higher than usual in this range; that on the south-east side, from a large black rock, is called Hattiya, (the elephant,) and that opposite is called Chela. The scenery here is very romantic. The strata are horizontal, and of a schistose structure. A little above the elephant rock, and beyond the hills on which it stands, there enters from the same side a rivulet, called Sualung, up which canoes can proceed some way, and its banks are occupied by those who cultivate jooms.

About six miles above the elephant rock, the river Kazalung enters from the north-west, and is said to spring from the same vicinity with the Chingay. It is said to be a considerable stream, and that boats, drawing twenty-seven inches, can ascend it for a whole day, while canoes can go much farther. The banks of this river, at a little distance from the Karnaphuli, and those of its tributary streams, are occupied by the tribe of Kungkis, called Lusai, Lushi, Langga, or Lingta, who extend from thence behind the Tripura territory, and are a terror to both Saksahs and Bengalese. The tide extends up to the mouth of the Kazalung.

About seven miles above the Kazalung, we experienced difficulty in passing shoals; and about five miles farther on, two small rivulets enter from the south-east, with a narrow point between them. From thence to the ledge of rocks, which closes boat-navigation, is about two miles and a half; and the waterfalls of Barkal are about a mile farther, nearly, I conjecture, in the 23° of north latitude. These waterfalls are probably occasioned by the river passing through the ridge that extends north-north-west from the Blue Mountain, the name of which, if I understood the natives right, is Meindaun among the Saksah, and Munipahar among the Bengalese. This name, however, I suspect is rather applicable, in a general manner, to all the lofty hills in the vicinity, the Blue Mountain rising to between five and six thousand feet perpendicular; but at the Karnaphuli the ridge is not above seven hundred feet.

I shall now trace the course of the Karnaphuli to another great mountain, from the report of a Muhammedan guide, who had been in the country beyond Barkal three times—twice to cut bamboos, and once to kill wild elephants for their teeth. During the four cold months, the former is a common occupation among the Bengalese. They carry small canoes past the waterfalls, and in these embark their provisions. In the distance which the guide went there are three water-falls. The first, named Utanchetri, is two days journey from Barkal;—the second, named Harinaka duar, (Deer-gate,) is one day's journey farther;—the third is at Hattiyaka Mu, (Elephant's Mouth,) and is a day and a half's journey above the second. Beyond this the guide went half a day's journey, and from some of the reaches could see the great Muin Mura, which is probably a continuation of the mountains that separate Arakan from Ava. At its bottom the Karnaphuli falls from a high rock, beyond which the Bengalese canoes never attempt to go. This part of the great Muin Mura the guide estimates to be twice the distance from Barkal that the latter is from Sitakaghat. The course of the river winds much; nor does the guide pretend to know its general direction.

In this part of its course the Karnaphuli receives no great branch; but the largest is at Hattiaka Mu. Between the falls the current is very gentle, and at Hattiaka Mu the body of water

is as considerable as at Barkal. The country is in general level, with some hills, however, near Hattiaka Mu; but during the rainy season a great proportion is inundated, forming jils or temporary lakes. Around these lakes there are immense herds of wild elephants, and the level country there are immense herds of wild elephants, and the level country is not inhabited, although well fitted for the cultivation of rice; but the west face of the great Muin Mara is occupied by the tribe of Kungkis, named Bonzhu or Bonjogy. Their prince, by the Bengalese, was named Taibiak; but whether this was a title, or a proper name, I did not learn. The Saksahs called this chief Taikoup, and said, that he lived on the bank of a small river called Taishang; but into what great river this falls I was not Informed. A branch of the Kazalung has indeed this name; but all that vicinity is occupied by the tribe Lusai. The Saksahs indeed pretend, that the Lusai also are subject to this prince; but this was denied by the Tripuras, and all the incursions of the Bonjugies of which I heard came from the south-east side of the Karnaphuli, while the Kazalung is towards the north-west; and, so far as I can judge, the former seems to be the boundary between the two tribes.