

# MEGHALAYA

**TRIUMPH OF THE TRIBAL GENIUS**

**KAMALESHWAR SINHA**

*National Herald, New Delhi*



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# **MEGHALAYA**

***Triumph of the Tribal Genius***

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The Prime Minister Mrs Indira Gandhi at Shillong on April 2 1970 in connection with the inauguration of Meghalaya Mr B K. Nehru the Governor can be seen on the left and Air Marshal H. N Chatterji, A O C in C, Eastern Air Command, on the right



## **P R E F A C E**

I had had an opportunity of working as a social worker among tribal people of the Assam hills during my student days and, therefore, this occasion for renewing my acquaintance with them and for deepening my knowledge of the ageless grandeur of their culture has brought me much joy.

I have tried to trace the development of the tribal genius by considering the common, salient features of the pastoral culture of the tribes of India and elsewhere as a many-stranded single phenomenon.

The tribal genius is the sum of a complex historical past and the potentialities of an incalculable future. To most Indians in the plains, the beauty of tribal culture is confined to the parade and pageantry of our Republic Day. My endeavour in this book has been to present a coherent picture of tribal life – of its evolution, changes, strivings, trials and achievements.

My task was made easier by the works of Maj. Gurdon and Maj. Playfair whose labour and insight have enriched anthropology and sociology and spotlighted the strength and vitality of tribal culture.

Their works occupy a pride of place in the tribal archives and I have felt a sense of deep gratitude to their scholarship while using the fruits of their labour.

The Vice-President of India, Mr G.S. Pathak, has shown a keen interest in my work and has blessed my efforts. I am thankful to him. Prof G. G. Swell, the Deputy Speaker of the Lok Sabha, has, in his supreme generosity, given me valuable advice. Mr B. K. Joshi, the Chief of the Bureau of the Herald, has improved the text with many useful suggestions. Mr J.S. Parmar

of the Associated Journals has made useful source material available to me and Mr. Padam Singh has done the typing tirelessly. Mr V. P. Dhawan (of R. K. Printers), the doyen of Delhi's book-makers, has designed the cover and supervised the production of the book with meticulous care and imagination. I am grateful to them.

Thanks are due to the officials of the Public Relations Department of the Government of Meghalaya who have helped me with facts and photographs regarding the state.

The publication of this book would have been an impossibility without the constant help of my wife. I do not have words to thank her adequately.

All efforts have been made to check the data and facts with the original sources, but it is possible that some errors might have crept into the book. I shall be grateful if the readers kindly bring them to my notice.

KAMALESHWAR SINHA

*National Herald*  
*New Delhi-1*

May 25, 1970

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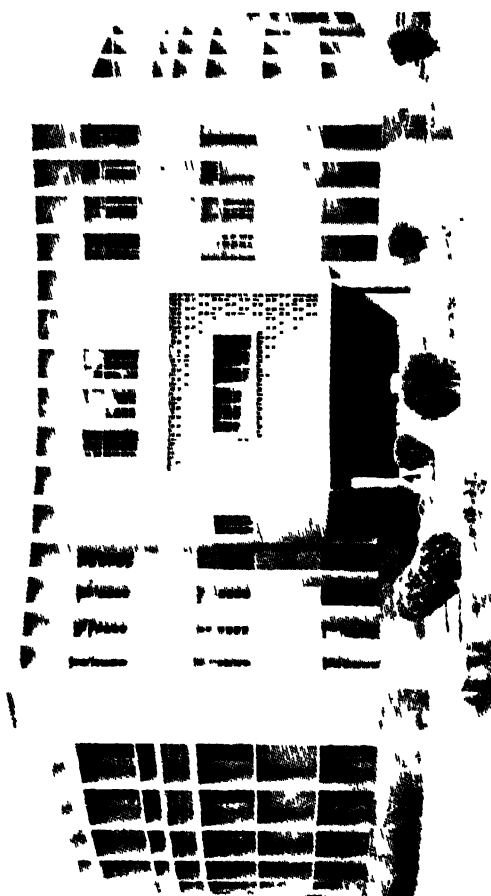
*Dedicated to*  
*Mr. M. Chalapathi Rau*

*"To us he is no more a person now  
But a whole climate of opinion"*

(W. H. AUDEN)

# **MEGHALAYA**

***Triumph of the Tribal Genius***



The Meghalaya Secretariat

# PART I

## THE BIRTH OF MEGHALAYA

*The Hill People's Movement for Autonomy*

*The Syiems, the National Khasi Durbar*

*The Bardoloi Sub-committee's Assessment  
of the Situation*

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Bill*



**"There have been, in spite of the seeming sameness, many approaches to Indian integration. There is the non-economic approach, which is not a complete approach, and there is the conservative approach, in which integration leads to monolithic nationhood, with the kind of a simple process which made Sanskritization and westernization effective in the past. Neither history nor economics, neither language nor class can be ignored, and it is good that Indianness, as broadly accepted, allows for diversities of religion, community, tradition, mood and expression. It is only those elements which insist on the Indian nation being one in the sense of being single-stranded and not composite that are threatening the nation-building process and encouraging fascist trends. There are bound to be groups and communities within a nation and people can be simultaneously members of many different groups without being anti-national. Integration should not be strained to the point of denying the right to these diversities".**

**M. Chalapathi Rau**  
**—Fragments of a Revolution**

# 1

## The Hill People's Movement for Autonomy

**W**HEN Meghalaya was born on April 2, 1970, the Indian Constitution and parliamentary democracy received a fresh sacrament of confirmation. After a difficult period of indecision, suspicion, political un-wisdom and time-consuming, wasteful procedural wrangles, a new era was ushered in.

Meghalaya is a small state, barely about 8,706 square miles in area. But it is a significant entity—historically, geographically and strategically.

Jawaharlal Nehru recognised the importance of this area much before independence. His supreme sense of history told him that if diversities—racial, religious, linguistic and cultural—had to be unified into a meaningful national pattern, a revolution was to be carefully guided according to the peculiar genius of this India that ever was, despite the fact that there always had not been an Indian nation. "The India of the past was a concept, a civilization, a meeting place of cultures, sometimes a dream. There were many states in India, kingdoms and republics, and she was politically divided and different from time to time, but there was always a cultural unity and there was always a consciousness of oneness."<sup>1</sup> In his plan of total integration and a total revolution—scientific, industrial, economic, social and political—the idea of autonomy for the culturally homogeneous people got priority and he fostered it despite bitter and short-sighted opposition from some colleagues at the Centre

<sup>1</sup> *Fragments of a Revolution.*

as well as leaders in states. But he declared that the continuity of Indianness envisaged the proper placement of races, religions and communities comprising the nation and he stood firmly for giving as much autonomy as seemed possible at that time to the hill areas of Assam within the four corners of the existing state. The purpose was to initiate the process of an administration which would protect the identity and culture of the hill people. It was a definite step, now known as the Scottish Pattern Proposals. By this time the hill people's efforts for securing full scope for the fulfilment of their aspirations had become identifiable as a mass movement with the conflicts and candour of a sprouting revolution. Nehru recognised it and helped it grow.

This movement had its roots in the culture of the people. Those who know of the story of U Tirot Singh and his resistance to British encroachment on the hill people need no explanation for the independent bent of mind of the self-respecting tribal communities. Garnished and cumbered by alien domination encircling them from across easily accessible plains and convinced of their power to defend their genius, they struggled through their social and political systems to keep themselves relatively free. Their *syiems* governed with judiciousness and propriety; their ways of life were maintained in the teeth of occasional cultural invasions and their institutions remained functioning in the traditional manner. This was the triumph of a culture which had grown from the soil, a real home crop.

Before independence, there were fifty *syiems* or kings in the Khasi Hills with as many kingdoms. They were in some respects like the "free" states under the British rule.

# 2

## The Syiems and the National Khasi Durbar

**T**HESE administrative units of the Khasi Hills united just before independence to form the Khasi National Durbar, the first major political organisation of the area. The syiems wanted a sovereign federation of the Khasi states. It was a spontaneous but insufficiently considered move which the far-sighted hill people's leader, the Rev. J.J.M. Nichols Roy, opposed with logic and facts. He shared Nehru's unified vision of the Indian nation and explored the prospects of fullest possible autonomy for the hill people within the Indian Union. By that time, making of the Constitution had become the serious concern of political leaders.

On the Rev. Nichols Roy's suggestion, the Bardoloi Sub-committee was appointed to study the problems of the hills. It recommended, among other measures, setting up of District Councils in the hill districts with powers of legislation over occupation or use of land other than the land comprising reserved forests. All social laws and customs were to be left to be controlled or regulated by the tribes themselves.

Even in the matters of criminal offences, except in those punishable with death, transportation or imprisonment for five years and more, local practice was to have the final word. The District Councils were to have the powers of management of primary schools, dispensaries and other institutions normally falling within the scope of local self-governing institutions in the plains. The committee also suggested that certain taxes and financial

powers should be allocated to the councils. Regional councils were suggested for different tribes.

These were welcome proposals promising a statutory guarantee of protection of some of the vital interests of the tribal communities and they were generally appreciated. The Rev. Nichols Roy strove hard during his four-year term in the Constituent Assembly to mould opinion in favour of functionally adequate autonomy for the hill people without concealing his dissatisfaction with the measures which seemed to diminish the effectiveness of the limited provisions for autonomy.

The committee had declined to recommend statutory provision for a fixed proportion of provincial funds to be spent on the hill districts. High school education had to have "some integration" with the general system of the province. The management of mineral resources, in which the hill areas were apparently so rich, was sought to be centralised in the hands of the provincial government and only "the right to the share of the revenues" of the District Councils was to be "recognised." The Governor of Assam was to have the last word in all vital matters and much of the financial requirements of the hill areas was to come from the Centre through the state Government.

However, the Bardoloi Sub-committee did a magnificent job. It presented a coherent picture of the conditions prevailing then in the hill areas and provided a perspective on the problems of the various communities living there.

The Sixth Schedule of the Constitution was the first landmark in the history of the movement for autonomy for the hill districts of Assam. It was criticized as unsatisfactory and far short of expectations. Therefore, it will be appropriate to see what led the Bardoloi Sub-committee to formulate the proposals or recommendations it made to the makers of the Constitution about this region.

## The Bardoloi Sub-committee's Assessment of the Situation

**T**HE sub-committee found that the hill people, even of the "excluded areas, were not found lacking in political consciousness." "Perhaps, not without instigation by certain elements, this consciousness has been instilled by ideas of an independent status external relations under which would be governed by treaty or agreement only."

It said that in the Lushai Hills district the idea of the superintendent, who constituted himself as the President of the "District Conference", which he himself had convened, was that the district should manage all affairs with the exception of defence in regard to which it should enter into an agreement with the Government of India.

A "constitution" based on this principle was later drafted by the conference. (The great majority of the Lushais, however, could not be regarded as holding these views and it was doubtful if the District Conference represented the views of anybody other than certain officials and chiefs.) In the Naga Hills, although the original resolution as passed by the area was more or less as in other parts of Assam, a demand was subsequently put forward for "an interim Government of the Naga people" under the protection of a "benevolent guardian power" which would provide funds for development and defence for a period of 10 years after which

the Naga people would decide what they would do with themselves. Here again it seemed clear to the committee that the views of a small group of people, following the vogue in the Naga Hills of decisions being taken by general agreement and not by majority gained the acceptance of the National Council for little more purpose than that of presenting a common front. In other areas more moderate views prevailed.

In the Garo Hills, the draft constitution asked for all powers of government including taxation and administration of justice to be vested in the legal council and the only link proposed with the Provincial Government was in respect of a few subjects like higher education, medical aid etc. other than the subjects of defence, external affairs and communications which were not provincial subjects. In the Mikir Hills and in the North Cachar Hills, which were the least vocal and advance of the areas under consideration, there could probably be satisfaction if control over land and local customs and administration of justice were left to the local people.

The Khasi Hill proposals were for a federation of the states and the British portions; otherwise the proposals were similar to those made for the Garo Hills. A feeling common to all the Hill districts was that the people of the same tribe should be brought together under a common administration. This had led to a demand for rectification of boundaries. The Lushais wanted Kuki (Manipur) and other areas in their boundary, the Nagas wanted areas of the north Cachar Hills included in their district and so on.

Except for the municipality of Shillong there were no statutory local self-governing bodies in any of the hill districts. The partially excluded areas had elected representatives in the provincial legislature but in the Garo Hills the franchise was limited to the Nokmas and in the Mikir Hills to the headmen. Generally, however,

the tribes were all highly democratic in the sense that their village councils were created by general assent or election.

Chiefship among certain tribes, like the Lushais, was hereditary (although certain chiefs had been appointed by the superintendent) but among other tribes appointment of headmen was by common consent or by election or, in some cases, selection from particular families.

Disputes were usually settled by the chief or headman or by the Council of Elders. In the Naga Hills what was aimed at was a general agreement in settling disputes. Allotment of land for "jhum" was generally the function of the chiefs or headmen (except in the Khasi and Jaintia Hills) and there were doubtless many other matters pertaining to the life of the villages which were dealt with by the chiefs or elders, but while this could form as suitable background for local self-government, the tribes altogether lacked experience of modern self-governing institutions.

The "District Conference" of the Lushai Hills, the Tribal Council of the North Cachar Hills and the Naga National Council were very recent essays in organising representative bodies for the district as a whole and had no statutory sanction. While there was no doubt that the Nagas, the Lushais, the Khasis and the Garos would be able to manage a large measure of local autonomy, the North Cachar tribes and the Mikirs might yet want a period of supervision and guidance.

The committee felt that whatever the capacity of the different councils or conferences to manage the affairs of the areas might be, the general proposals for the administration of these areas must be based upon the following considerations : —

- (a) The district social customs and tribal organisation of the different communities as well as their



religious beliefs : For instance, the Khasis and the Garos had a matrilineal system, the Lushais had hereditary chiefs and the Nagas had got the council of Elders called "Tatar", which was periodically renewed by election. The laws of succession of the Lushais permitted the youngest son of the family to succeed to the property of his father. Similarly, in the case of the Garos, the youngest daughter got her mother's property and so on. Christianity had made considerable headway among the Lushais, the Khasis and the Garos, but large numbers of the hill people continued their own tribal forms of worship which some people described as "animism."

- (b) The fear of exploitation by the people of the plains on account of their superior organisation and experience of business : The hill people feared that if suitable provisions were not made to prevent the people of the plains from acquiring land in the hill areas, large numbers of them would settle down and not only occupy land belonging to the hill people but would also exploit them in the non-agricultural professions.

Thus the hill people seemed to attach special value to the present system of an 'Inner Line' to cross which non-tribals entering the area required a pass, and the provisions prohibiting non-tribals from settling down or carrying on business without the approval of the district-officer.

It was felt that even industries should not be started in the hill areas by non-tribals because that might mean exploitation of the people and the land by non-tribals.

In addition to these main points there was the question of preserving their ways of life and

language and methods of cultivation. Opinions were expressed that there could be adequate protection in these matters only by transferring the government of the area entirely into the hands of the hill people themselves.

- (c) In making suitable financial provisions : It was feared that unless suitable provisions were made or powers were conferred upon the local councils themselves, the provincial government might not, owing to the pressure of the plains people, set apart adequate funds for the development of the tribal areas.

The anxiety of the hill people about their land and their fear of exploitation were undoubtedly matters for making special provision. It had been the experience in other parts of India and in other countries that unless protection was given, land was taken up by people from the more advanced and crowded areas. The question had already acquired serious proportions in the plains portions of Assam and the pressure of population from outside had brought it up as a serious problem which was soon expected to become much more acute.

There seemed to be no doubt that the hill people should have the largest possible measure of protection for their land and provisions for the control of immigration into their areas for agricultural or non-agricultural purposes.

It also seemed clear that the hill people would not have sufficient confidence if the control on such matters was kept in the hands of the provincial Government which might only be too amenable to the pressure of its supporters. Even the Head of State under the Constitution would be an elected head, and even though he might be elected also by the votes of the hill people,

they might still have the fear that he would give way to the pressure of the plains people on whose votes he might be largely dependent.

### FEARS AND SUSPICIONS

The atmosphere of fear and suspicion which prevailed, even if it was argued that it was unjustified, was nevertheless one which must be recognised and in order to allay these suspicions and fears, it appeared necessary to provide, as far as possible, such constitutional provisions and safeguards as would leave no room for them. Moreover, in the areas where no right of private property or proprietary right of the chiefs was recognised, the land was regarded as the property of the clan, including the forests.

Boundaries of the areas of the hills or the tribes were generally recognised and their violation might result in fighting. Large areas of land were required for jhum and this explained in part the fear of the tribesmen that their availability would be reduced if incursions by outsiders were permitted.

In all the hill areas visited by the committee, there was an emphatic unanimity of opinion among the hill people that there should be control of immigration and allocation of land to outsiders, and that such controls should be vested in the hands of the hill people themselves.

Accepting this then as a fundamental feature of the administration of the hills, the committee recommended that the hill districts should have powers of legislation over occupation or use of land other than the land comprising reserved forest under the Assam Forest Regulation of 1891 or other applicable laws. The only limitation the committee wanted to place upon this was

to provide that the local councils should not require payment for the occupation of vacant land by the provincial Government for public purposes or prevent the acquisition of private land, also required for public purposes on payment of compensation.

## FOREST

A part of the question of occupation of land, the transfer of the management of land classed as reserved forest had also been raised. The committee recommended that the legislative powers of the local councils should not cover reserved forests. While accepting the need for centralised management of the forests, it emphasised that in questions of actual management, including the appointment of forest staff and the granting of contracts and leases, the susceptibilities and the legitimate desires and needs of the hill people should be taken into account. It, therefore, recommended that the provincial Government should accept this principle as a part of their policy.

## JHUMING

The committee also recommended that the tribes should have the right of deciding for themselves whether to permit jhum cultivation or not. Jhum cultivation had many evils—it led to soil-erosion, alteration of the rainfall pattern, floods and change of climate. The tribes might not always be aware of these dangers but they had definitely begun to realise that settled or terraced cultivation was better. The Angamis had taken to the terrace method on a large scale and in most of the hills. The main difficulty, however, was the fact that all hill areas did not lend themselves to terracing equally well.

Terracing meant labour, a suitable hill side and the possibility of irrigation. When these were not available, it was obvious that the tribes could not be persuaded to take up terracing and must continue jhum. It was suggested that jhuming should be discouraged and stopped whenever possible. No general legislative bar could be imposed without taking local circumstances into account. Besides there was a feeling among the tribes that jhuming was part of their way of life, and interference with it was undesirable. The wearing out of that feeling must come from within rather than as an imposition from outside which might cause undue excitement among the tribes. It was suggested, therefore, that the control of jhuming should be left to local councils which could be guided by expert advice.

On the principle that the local customary laws should be interfered with as little as possible and that the tribal councils and courts should be maintained, the committee felt that the hill people should have full powers of administering their own social laws codifying or modifying them.

### **KHASI AND JAINTIA HILLS**

This was then a partially excluded area, consisting of the Jaintia Hills formerly forming part of the kingdom of the old Jaintia Kings. It formed the Jowai sub-division, and some 176 villages in the Sadar sub-division. The Khasi and Jaintia Hills as a whole consisted of a large territory between the Garo Hills on the west and the North Cachar Hills and the Mikir Hills on the east. The Khasi states which consisted of 1,509 villages covered the western portion of the hills and the British villages were interlaced with them. The people of the Jowai sub-division, known as Synteng or Pnar, spoke a dialect.

With the exception of a small number of Mikirs on the northern slopes of the hills, the whole population of these hills could be regarded as uniform. Unlike their neighbours who spoke Tibeto-Burman tongues, the Khasis formed an island of the Mon-Khmer linguistic family.

The Khasi states, which were about 25 in number, were some of the smallest in India. The largest states were those of Khyriem, Mylliem and Nongkhlaio and the smallest was Nonglewai. The system of inheritance of chiefship was described as follows : —

### CHIEFSHIP

“The chiefs of these little states were generally taken from the same family, inheritance going through the female. A uterine brother usually had the first claim and failing him, a sister’s son came in. The appointment was subject to the approval of a small electoral body, and the heir-apparent was occasionally passed over, if for any reason, mental, physical or moral he was unfit for the position. The electors were generally the myntries or lyngdohs, the representatives of the clans which formed the state.”

In Langrin, the appointment was by popular election. In some of the states, if the myntries were not unanimous in their choice, a popular election was held. The chiefs were known as syiems in most states ; but in some they were called sardars, lyngdohs in three of them and wahadar in one. The functions of the chiefs were largely magisterial and in the discharge of their duties they were assisted by their myntries.

The relations between them and the Government of India were based upon sanads issued to them. Under the terms of the sanad, the chiefs were placed completely

under the control of the Deputy Commissioner and the Government of India. Waste land as well as minerals were ceded to the Government on the condition that half of the revenue was made over to the syiems.

### **CRIMINAL AND CIVIL AUTHORITY**

Their criminal and civil authority was also limited. The sanads did not mention the right to levy excise on liquor and drugs and presumably the syiems had that right. Though the states were not in the partially excluded areas, the main interest attracting them was the fact that there was an understandable feeling among the people of the states that there should be a federation between the states and the British portions so that all the Khasi people were brought under a common administration. The position was that in the British areas, though there was the franchise and a member was sent to the provincial legislature, there was no statutory body for local self-government. The states, on the other hand enjoyed certain rights as stated above and the problem was to bridge the gap.

The Khasi and Jaintia Hills had the advantage of the provincial headquarters, Shillong being situated among them. Literacy among the Khasi then was about 11 per cent. Male literacy was 19 per cent. The district was already enfranchised and the special features which it was desirable to bear in mind was the matrilineal system prevalent there, the democratic village systems and other special customs and traditions.

Cultivation in the Khasi and Jaintia Hills might be regarded as comparatively advanced. There was a good deal of wet cultivation and the culture of oranges and potatoes was common. The Khasis had also taken to non-agricultural professions - much more than other hill people.

## THE GARO HILLS

Situated at the but-end of the range of the hills which constitute the watershed for the Brahmaputra and Surma valleys, this area, inhabited mainly by the Garos (people of Tibeto-Burman origin, somewhat similar to the Cacharis) measured 3,152 square miles, with a population then of 233,569 of which 198,474 or nearly 85 per cent, were tribals. The Garos inhabited not only the district which bore their name but there were villages inhabited by them in Kamrup and Goalpara also. Portions of the Mymensing district of Bengal joining the Garo Hills was inhabited by thousands of Garos.

The Garos were people with a matrilineal system like the Khasis. The tribal system of the Garos was found to be highly democratic and entire villages with the Nokmas as heads or chairmen took part in the council if any matter was in dispute. The district as a whole was pretty backward with only about five literates in a hundred and lacking in means of communication. Christian missions had been active and there had been a certain amount of conversion but, on the whole, the Garos, even while being able to produce a fair number of intelligent and literate people, had yet to come up to the degree of the Khasis or the Lushais. Franchise was restricted to the Nokmas but it was unlikely that there would be much difficulty in working a system based on adult franchise.

In the Garo Hills also the sole occupation was agriculture. Garden crops were grown round the huts sometimes but the method was largely that of jhuming. People wove their own clothes but there was no important cottage industry. The area was, however, much more in contact with the plains on either side of it than those like the Lushai Hills or the Naga Hills.

The Garos were keenly desirous of uniting all the



villages inhabited by the people of their tribe whether in the plains of Assam or in Mymensing district of Bengal under a common administration. The Bengal district of Mymensing seemed to be the home of about 43,000 Garos most of whom were on the fringe of the Garo Hills, and the question of rectification of the boundary to include this area in the Garo Hill district of Assam definitely deserved consideration. A similar examination was deemed necessary in respect of other Garo villages in the Kamrup and Goalpara districts of Assam.

This was the background against which the first statutory provisions for limited autonomy for hill areas of Assam were made by the Constituent Assembly. The Sixth Schedule of the Constitution was the first landmark in the constitutional history of the region in free India.

## The Sixth Schedule and The First Note of Caution

**T**HE Rev. Nichols Roy, who played a vital role in matters of freedom of speech and religion against the suggestions made in the Cabinet Mission's grouping plan, sought more autonomy than the Sixth Schedule, evolved after studying the Bardoloi report provided for. His was the first warning of an intensified struggle by the hill people for unfettered right to have full autonomy "to shape their destiny according to their genius." But the Constitution was inaugurated, the District Councils were formed and the day-to-day administration was carried through according to the functional, wooden system which recognised the necessity of the rule of law without ensuring what the rule was to preserve, protect or foster—human institutions and aspirations compounded of necessities, wishes and dreams.

### TURA CONFERENCE OF 1954

Within three years of the formation of the District Councils, the chief executive members from the Khasi and Jaintia Hills and the Garo Hills met in Shillong. Their main decision was to convene a conference of hill leaders at Tura, the cultural capital of the region from time immemorial. This decision taken on June 3,

1954, marked a change in the course of the hill people's persuasive plea for autonomy.

The four-day deliberations at Tura, attended by leaders from the four autonomous districts of the Khasi and Jaintia Hills, the Garo Hills, the Mizo Hills, and the North Cachar Hills, came out with an emotion-charged demand for the first time for a separate hill state. The following areas were proposed as its constituents, the Garo Hills, the Khasi Hills, the Jaintia Hills, the Mizo Hills, the Naga Hills, the Mikir Hills and the North Cachar Hills.

### **THE EITU AND THE GNC**

To guide the people in their struggle for a separate hill state, the conference constituted the Assam Hill Tribal Union. The subsequent unification of the Eastern India Tribal Union of the Khasi Hills and the Garo National Conference lent considerable force to the movement led by Captain W.A. Sangma.

Capt. Sangma was the president of the AHTU and Mr. B.B. Lyngdoh was its general secretary. Its other members included Mr. Hagjer, Mr. Lalmawai, Mr. A. Alley and Mr. B.M. Roy. This was the initiation of a direct action programme. Some people wanting in a balanced perspective of political freedom and a sense of history misinterpreted it as the first step towards cessation. When this kind of suggestion emanated from Assam, it caused apprehensions of political sabotage in the hill people's minds and the democratic methods of arriving at agreed solutions were often impeded.

### **DIFFICULT MOMENT**

In the hill-bound region, the slogans of a separate state reverberated drowning the voices of persuasion.

Assam had to face a difficult moment of political crisis. It was not just a question of facing energetic expressions of political views. It was a complex situation rooted in distrust and foreboding dangers to peace.

The Naga Hills had long ago boycotted the Hill District provision of the Constitution. Certain sections of the Mizos were voicing menacingly their ill-thought plans for independence and there was much pollution of the social air between the hills and the plains. A poison tree was growing—a tree of mutual distrust and doubts and unhealthy political rivalry in a hitherto apparently united state-family.

# 5

## States Reorganisation Commission Visits Assam

**A**T this point of time, the States Reorganisation Commission visited Assam. It saw what it could from a distance, of the simmering pot of political unrest in the hill areas, visited Tura, Shillong and comfortably accessible areas in 1955 and submitted its report in 1956. In support of its thesis that the demand for a separate hill state was not acceptable it said :

“The hill districts have pressed the case for the formation of a hill state. This demand, reiterated at the Tura Conference of tribal leaders in October 1934, contemplates the unification of all the hill districts mentioned in Part A of the table appended to the Sixth Schedule to the Constitution, including also the Naga Hills district. The Naga National Council seeks independence from Assam and India and to remain aloof from the proposed hill state. As a compromise between these extreme positions, but for entirely different reasons, the formation of a Kamatapur State consisting of Goalpara Garo Hills, Cooch Behar, Darjeeling and Jalpaiguri, or of a Purbachal State consisting of the areas round Cachar has also been suggested. It is of paramount importance to establish a stable administration in the north-east based on the goodwill of the tribal people and it is clear that such an administration will have to be primarily concerned with the well-being of the tribes. We have, therefore, examined the proposal for a hill state

with great care and sympathy and with particular regard to these objectives

The problem is in a substantial measure an inheritance from the pre-independence days. The extremist demands of the present time reflect what has sometimes been labelled as the National Park approach. This was fundamentally the British policy and there were attempts to demarcate the tribal zones and to isolate them as far as possible from external influence preventing in particular immigration from elsewhere into the scheduled areas. This went to the extent of stopping Indian officers from entering these areas.

The inner line regulation in the pre independence period, although it was ostensibly intended to discourage unnecessary interference with and the economic exploitation of the tribal people was administered rigorously so as to exclude all contact between them and the inhabitants of the plain districts.

The demand for a separate tribal state is partly a hangover of this policy. With the departure of the British however conditions have changed radically in the sense that there is now a growing awareness amongst the tribal people of their political rights as full and equal citizens of the Indian Union which they did not have and indeed, under the conditions which prevailed could not well have had before independence.

The creation of a new hill state will, in our opinion, accentuate these distinctions. It will, therefore, prove, in the long run against the interest of the Scheduled Tribes.

Having considered all aspects—geographical, historical, political, economic, financial and administrative—the Commission came to the conclusion that the formation of a hill state in this region was neither feasible nor in the interest of the tribal people themselves. "The hill districts, therefore should continue to form part of

Assam and no major changes be made in their present constitutional pattern."

The moist air of the hills grew heavier with the rejection of the demand and in the general election in the following year (1957), the people of the Garo Hills, the Khasi Hills, the Jaintia Hills and the North Cachar Hills made their separate hill state demand on this issue. The rift between the hill leaders and the leaders of Assam reached a breaking point.

It was a grave situation which needed prompt action and the Centre rose to the occasion. Pandit Govind Ballabh Pant, then the Home Minister, rushed to Assam and the leaders agreed to a tentative plan for reconciliation. The main plank of the plan for rapprochement was the inclusion of the president of the Tribal Union, Mr Williamson Sangma, in the Cabinet. He was given charge of the departments of the tribal areas. This portfolio was so far held by the Chief Minister. This arrangement worked rather well till 1960 - for two years.

## The Official Language Bill : The APHLC is Born

**I**N 1960, the Assam Government introduced the Official Language Bill in the Legislative Assembly to make Assamese the official language of the entire state. The hill leaders reacted sharply to this proposal seeing in it an attempt at Assamizing the tribal people of the hills. The spurt of violence in the valley districts in July confirmed their suspicion. Thinking that if there could be such intense feelings in the state against the Bengalis, who were close to the people in the plains by association, linguistic similarities and economic reasons, the fate of the hill people could be much worse, they decided to press the demand for a separate hill state with greater vigour.

Captain Sangma resigned from the State Cabinet. The hill leaders met at Shillong on July 6 and 7 and formed a council of action which was to be the political nucleus of the hill people in their agitation for a separate state. This second conference of the leaders of hill people shaped their major political weapon—a broad-based All-Party Hills Leaders' Conference (APHLC). Mr Jayabhadra Hajger, then a Congress M.P., presided over the inaugural session.

The APHLC comprised the Hill District Congress Committees, the Tribal Union, the Mizo Union and hill units of the Swatantra and other local parties. Its action committee was assigned the task of forging effective



instruments of negotiation under the imaginative guidance of Mr. Thanglura, its chairman, Mr. S.D.D. Nichols Roy, its general secretary and Capt. Sangma, Mr. Sawpranga, Mr. J.B. Hajger, Mr. S. Barman, Mr. B.B. Lyngdoh, Mr. T. Gajee, Mr. Maham Singh and others as its members. Their immediate action was directed towards fighting out the "imposition" of Assamese on them and they met Nehru to request him to intervene. They told him that if the bill was passed and the language was imposed on them, they would separate from Assam.

The bill was passed on October 24, 1960. The events had come full circle. According to the tribal people of the hills, there was nothing else for them to do but to fight out what they called the "Assamization of our culture." The APHLC met at Haflong on November 23, 1960 where it decided that the Hills Districts would separate from Assam and form the Eastern Frontier State. This decision of the hill leaders was largely misrepresented by interested sections and people ignorant of the basic nature of the issue. The hill leaders emphasised that what they had demanded was not secession or any vague, abstract right. It was a crystal clear demand caused to be tinged with a certain amount of vehemence by lack of understanding on the part of the leaders from the plains. They visited Delhi three times in delegations between November 1960 and May 1961. Nehru was convinced that the demand for greater autonomy and resentment over the Assamese Language Act did not necessarily mean a desire to overthrow the government. The demands spotlighted by the hill leaders were politically understandable. They primarily stressed that people with distinct culture and problems and excellences peculiar to their genius had a right to seek fulfilment of their aspirations. The Constitution had recognised their needs but had been able to lay down only limited provisions

for satisfying them. Perhaps nothing much was possible at that time when the image of a whole nation with a multitude of problems was to be interpreted in constitutional terms.

What the hill leaders envisaged was a constitutional protest against what they thought to be injustice, and provision of scope for the fruition of the tribal genius. They argued that despite the overtones of vehemence, they were voicing plain grievances to seek their redressal and that they wanted the central Government to work within the framework of the Constitution and representative institutions. The institution that governed them had failed them and there was no point in treating it as their representative institution. This was, briefly, their logic.

## Nehru's Scottish Pattern of Autonomy

**B**ETWEEN November 1960 and May 1961, the APHLC sent three delegations to Nehru who offered them proposals for autonomy popularly known as the "*Scottish Pattern Plan*." The APHLC held conferences at Shillong in April 1961 and at Tura in July 1961. The Tura conference resolved to boycott the general election of 1962.

This led to the breach with the hill DCCs. They did not attend the Tura conference and decided to participate in the elections on the issue of autonomy. The APHLC leaders modified their decision at their sixth conference at Aijal where they decided to fight the election.

In the 1962 election, the Congress won all the four seats in the United Mikir and North Cachar Hills, while the APHLC bagged all the eleven seats in the Khasi, Garo and Mizo hills. The APHLC reiterated its demand for full-fledged statehood for the hills. Following its rejection, seven APHLC MLAs resigned from the Assembly. Those who did not were one Mizo, two Garo and one Jaintia MLAs. This was in October 1962, when the Chinese aggression took place.

### UNITED THEY STOOD

The APHLC, however, unlike the secessionist Naga National Council and the Mizo National Front, never

pressed the demand of sovereignty. All that it wanted was a separate state within the Indian Union. In the true spirit of patriotism, in the wake of the massive invasion by the Chinese, the APHLC leaders threw their entire weight behind the defence efforts. At its meeting on October 30 at Shillong, it postponed the decision taken only a fortnight back at Tura of launching a non-violent direct action movement by March 31, 1963.

The Shillong meeting resolved : "Having regard to the grave situation now obtaining in the country as a result of the Chinese aggression and also realizing that the united stand of the nation against the aggressors is of paramount importance in this hour of national crisis, the Council of Action resolves that the implementation of the (Tura) resolution on direct action be kept in abeyance "

Another resolution adopted at this meeting stated : "This Council of Action also resolves that the full import of this resolution as well as the danger of the Chinese aggression be explained to the people."

When conditions became normal, it was decided to hold by-elections to the seats vacated by the APHLC MLAs. This was in 1963. The breach with the Hill DCCs made the APHLC leaders wiser. They participated in the by-elections and won all the five seats in the Khasi and Garo Hills. One seat in the Mizo Hills was won by the secessionist Mizo National Front.

Nehru worked out his plan of Scottish pattern of autonomy for the hill areas of Assam with meticulous care considering the well-being of the hills and the plains both. The proposals given in writing on October 5, 1963 promised a pattern of administration which would protect and preserve the identity and culture of the hill people. According to its provisions the hill members of the Assam Cabinet were to be selected by the Chief Minister of Assam on the recommendation of the

MLAs from the hill areas. There were to be other junior ministers also. Subjects like education, agriculture, forest, health and roads were to be under the Hill Minister.

The plan also laid down that the hill ministers would have the authority to determine the language or languages to be used in the separate wing or department of the hill areas and other offices in the hill areas dealing with subjects allocated for separate administration. At the beginning of every financial year, a separate complete budget allocation for the subjects allocated to the hill areas was to be made. This was to take the form of an area budget under the subjects meant for separate administration.

After the advent of the Sixth Schedule, this was a great landmark in the movement for autonomy in the hills.

Although the plan did not meet the full demands of the people, the proposals of Nehru recognised the areas where greater autonomy was immediately necessary and sought to remove the irritant on the issue of language. And this was not all. The hill areas were to get room for considerable legislative initiative also. The MLAs of the autonomous hill districts were to form a regional committee in the Assam Assembly. All proposals relating to the legislation concerning the hill areas were to be referred to the Regional Committee by the State Assembly. This committee could also initiate legislative proposals. It was hoped that, normally, the recommendations of the committee would be accepted by the legislature. In the event of disagreement between the committee and the Assembly the Governor's discretion would prevail. The Governor was to obtain directions from the President "where necessary."

These proposals were considered as an evidence of Nehru's sympathy and respect for the tribal people's aspirations. The hill leaders maintained that the Scottish

Pattern was not an adequate answer to their problems but they convened the twelfth session of the APHLC on April 18, 1964, to consider the proposal. They adopted the following resolution :—

“Having regard to the Prime Minister’s sincere efforts as embodied in his offer and his other assurances, to his state of health which prevented the APHLC delegation from meeting him again and to the situation prevailing in the country, this conference, while reiterating that the creation of a separate hill state would be the simplest, best and final solution to the problems of the hill people, nevertheless, feels that the Prime Minister’s offer of full autonomy be given a fair trial and requests the Prime Minister to proceed with the appointment of the (proposed) commission to work out details for implementing his offer of full autonomy and his various other assurances. The conference reserves the right to revise its decision.”

The death of Nehru on May 27, 1964 took away the element of his personal persuasiveness and trust from the atmosphere of near-conciliation.

# 8

## The Pataskar Commission

**T**HE Pataskar Commission was appointed to suggest constitutional and legislative measures to give effect to the Nehru plan. It was not a commission of inquiry and this was one of the reasons why the hill leaders questioned its right to make a fresh study of the problems of reorganisation of Assam and to make recommendations on the basis of its findings. The APHLC particularly noted the attitude of the Assam Congress which had, in a note submitted to the Prime Minister, characterised his plan as "pregnant with undemocratic principles, constitutional absurdities and possibilities of deadlock." It was on January 8, 1964. The appointment of the commission was delayed.

The Central Government headed by Mr. Lal Bahadur Shastri appointing the Hill Areas of Assam Commission (with Mr. H.V. Pataskar as its chairman) said in a resolution on March 16, 1965 :

"... It has been represented to the Government of India from time to time that for accelerating the pace of and ensuring fuller participation of the people in the development of these areas, and for safeguarding more effectively the interests of the tribal people, it is necessary to widen the autonomy enjoyed at present by these areas.

"The Government of India, after giving careful consideration to the needs of these areas and the necessity in the interest of the people of the hill areas themselves of enabling them to participate in the larger political and

economic life of the state, have come to the conclusion that it would be desirable for the hill areas to have a full measure of autonomy subject to the preservation of the unity of Assam, the continuance of a common legislature for the whole state of Assam and the maintenance of the Cabinet Government of the accepted form functioning on the basis of collective and joint responsibility to the state Assembly.

"The general pattern of the administrative set-up which might be evolved for the hill areas of Assam was discussed by the late Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, with some of the hill leaders and certain broad conclusions were reached. The Government of India consider it necessary that a detailed scheme for the reorganisation of the administrative set-up of these areas on the basis of those discussions and conclusions should be drawn up by a commission to be appointed for the purpose, after a careful study of the various aspects of the problems involved.

"Having regard to the main objectives of conferring a full measure of autonomy on the hill areas, subject to the preservation of the unity of the state of Assam, the continuance of a common legislature for the whole state of Assam and the maintenance of the Cabinet Government of the accepted form functioning on the basis of collective and joint responsibility to the state Assembly, the commission will recommend a detailed scheme for reorganising the administrative set-up of the hill areas. The commission will also recommend the administrative, financial and legal measures necessary for giving effect to the scheme.

The commission will consider whether in the light of the scheme which it may suggest for the administration of the hill areas, it is necessary to make changes in the powers and functions of the district and regional councils constituted under the Sixth Schedule of the Consti-



tution and recommend, after examining the working of the district and regional councils, what changes, if any, should be made in that Schedule."

The Pataskar Commission report was submitted to the Government of India on March 31, 1965.

### **APHLC REJECTS THE RECOMMENDATIONS**

The APHLC rejected the report. It felt that the Commission had exceeded its scope. Instead of suggesting constitutional and legislative measures to implement the Nehru Plan, it had made its own study of the situation and made recommendations on the basis of its findings.

The APHLC leaders said that the situation was thoroughly discussed by the Prime Minister himself with the APHLC over a period of some years and conclusions had been reached. But instead of confining to this role the Commission erroneously conceived of itself as a commission of inquiry and started by formulating its own "basic considerations". Proceeding on this misconception and relying mostly on paper statistics supplied by the Assam Government, the commission went about building up a case against the stand of the APHLC and laboured at reducing the autonomy envisaged in the Nehru Plan to the barest minimum.

They gave the following examples in support of their contention :—

(1) In the Nehru Plan the words "full autonomy" were used after a good deal of negotiations. The commission would have these words to mean only "largest measure of autonomy" or "maximum autonomy" and argued back and forth to support its interpretation.

(2) In the matter of the appointment of the hill minister, the plan had laid down that the Chief Minister

would be "guided by the recommendations of the MLAs of the hill areas". But the commission would have the Chief Minister only to consult the hill MLAs. "Thus, to conclude, we recommend that before making appointments of the hill ministers, the Chief Minister should consult the hill MLAs and obtain their views. He may do so in an appropriate manner, of which he would undoubtedly be the best judge."

(3) With regard to the powers of the regional committee, the plan had clearly stated that the committee would also be able to "initiate legislative proposals". The commission would have the regional committee reduced to a mere standing committee of the Assembly and would confine its powers to only making proposals to the state Cabinet which might or might not be accepted by the Cabinet.

(4) In the matter of expenditure control, the plan had clearly provided that "the hill ministers would have complete power of expenditure control over the allocations for the departments to be separately administered". Instead of this the commission would have the Hill Areas Department as a subordinate body of the state's Finance Department to which the Hill Areas Financial Adviser would send monthly reports of decisions taken by the Hill Areas Department. Further, the Hill Areas Financial Adviser, an official of the Department, would also be invested with powers to write over the head of the Hill Areas Minister to the State Finance Minister on matters where his advice had not been accepted by the Hill Minister.

This last suggestion was, to say the least, "degrading", the hill leaders said. "The commission went further afield in excess of its scope by recommending that Shillong, along with an area within a radius of ten miles, which was an integral part of the Khasi-Jaintia Hills District under the jurisdiction of the District Council,

should be excluded from the purview of this District Council "

### **GROWING GLOOM**

Between April 1965 and December 1966 an atmosphere of growing gloom prevailed in Assam. The hill leaders pressed their demand for a separate state vehemently. The leaders of the plains, despite the sobering influence of Mr B P Chaliha the Chief Minister of Assam, accused the hill leaders of heading towards a secessionist policy. They also suspected that the Centre, feeling disturbed by the Mizo disturbances, was succumbing to a demand amounting to sanctification of divisive and disintegrating forces. During this period, in their earnest search for a solution to the problem, the Union Government appointed a six-member Cabinet committee headed by Mr Gulzari Lal Nanda to go into the question of the separate hill state demand.

## The Federal Scheme

**M**R G.L. Nanda visited Shillong in June 1966. His discussions with the hill leaders were continued in Delhi in the following month. After wide consultations among the hill leaders and members of the Union Cabinet, the sub-state plan was evolved under which the hill areas were to have a separate legislature and a council of ministers but they were to remain in the state of Assam. This proposal was agreeable to none of the parties. Assam leaders were opposed to anything more than the Pataskar Commission's recommendations and the hill leaders would have nothing short of a state. A sub-state won't do. The APHLC rejected this plan and decided to boycott the 1967 election and to launch a programme of non-violent direct action by the end of the year.

### DIGNITY STATUS

The Prime Minister, Mrs Indira Gandhi, later decided to visit Shillong in search of an acceptable solution to the Centre and the leaders of the plains and the hills.

December 27, 1966, will be remembered as a day of historic importance in the history of Meghalaya. It was on this day in Shillong that speaking to a huge public rally Mrs Gandhi recognised in unequivocal terms the political and cultural aspirations of the people of the hill areas. She said :

"I am conscious that the present set-up does not provide satisfaction to the hill people. As I have said

earlier, I appreciate your desire for a set-up which would give you requisite dignity and status. The Government have decided that there should be some suitable reorganisation and this should be done as early as might be practical. The broad suggestion is that political freedom be provided for the hill people to promote their essential economic development and to administer these for the welfare of the people inhabiting these districts. However, this should be consistent with some minimum and essential links of overall unity at the top. I feel that this is a matter of as much interest to the hill people and the hill areas themselves as it is for the people of the rest of the state. But before any final decision can be taken, it is necessary for us all to sit down in one meeting or perhaps more than one meeting with some of my colleagues, the Chief Minister of this part, your leaders and others concerned for a full exchange of views and with the objective of arriving at an agreed set of details which the Government would then consider and give their opinion on."

A series of meetings took place in New Delhi on January 11, 12 and 13, 1967, in which the Prime Minister, the Home Minister, other Union ministers, the Chief Minister of Assam and some of his colleagues, the president of the Assam Pradesh Congress Committee and the APHLC leaders participated. On January 13, the Union Government announced a comprehensive decision to reorganise Assam.

### THE JANUARY 13 ANNOUNCEMENT

The Government said —

'The Prime Minister and the Home Minister have held detailed discussions with the leaders of the APHLC. The Government of India appreciate the political aspira-

tions of the people of the hill areas and have decided to reorganise the state of Assam.

"Bearing in mind the geography and the imperative needs of security and coordinated development of this region as a whole the Home Minister discussed with the APHLC leaders the proposal that a federal structure composed of federating units having equal status, not subordinate to one another should provide the basis for this reorganisation. Under this arrangement a limited number of essential subjects of common interest would be assigned to the regional federation. would be worked out within six months by a committee on which all concerned interests would be represented. At a later stage, other administrative units in the eastern region might also join the regional federation. The announcement consisted of two parts

(1) The operative part announcing the decision of the Government to reorganise the state of Assam and (2) the proposal part, outlining the composition and character of the federal structure which should provide the basis for reorganisation. Read in the context of all the developments that have been recounted, certain of its basic features cannot escape notice (1) For the first time the Government of India announced their decision to reorganise the state of Assam. So long, all offers that were made whether the Scottish Pattern or the Nehru Plan for full autonomy or the sub-state plan, were merely proposals for administrative rearrangement within the state of Assam. The distinction between the reorganisation of the state and the reorganisation of its administration was clearly recognised, and in the context of the use of the word "reorganisation" with regard to Madras when Andhra was created, to Bombay when Maharashtra and Gujarat were created, to Punjab when Punjab and Haryana were created, the decision to 'reorganise the state of Assam' could have only the meaning

of the decision to divide Assam as demanded by the APHLC consistently This was endorsed by the Government of India

### THE GENERAL ELECTION OF 1967

In the discussions prior to the announcement, the question whether the APHLC should participate in the 1967 general elections or not featured prominently and the APHLC revoked its decision to boycott these elections on account of clarifications and assurances given by the Home Minister the gist of which is contained in the following extract of the proceedings which the Secretary of the Ministry of Home Affairs subsequently sent to the chairman of the APHLC —

(1) During the course of the talks it was suggested by the hill leaders that the elections from the hill areas to the Assam State Assembly should be put off pending the finalisation of the scheme for the reorganisation of the state It was explained by the spokesman of the Government of India that the Constitution and the election law did not permit such postponement It was, however, explained that in the context of the reorganisation scheme, as it may finally emerge, it may be expected that the reorganisation law will provide for the reconstitution of the state Assembly and re-allocation of the members of the Assembly to the assemblies of the federating units Under other schemes of reorganisation such as the one for the reorganisation of Punjab members of the composite Assembly were allotted to the interim assemblies of the new units If necessary, interim assemblies could be set up for the contemplated federating units with such composition as may be decided upon The APHLC leaders were therefore, advised not to dissociate themselves from the elections

(2) The proposal part of the announcement went to reinforce the above meaning of the decision to reorganise Assam. Normally reorganisation of a state meant division of that state. But because of the geography of the area, its special needs of security and development, as the announcement said the Government thought of a formula by which the essential requirements of reorganisation could be met and at the same time some coordination of the region as a whole could be secured. Even the details of the formula presupposed division. There could not be equal status between the hills and the plains unless the two were first separated and there could not be a federation between them before separation.

(3) The decision to reorganise Assam was unequivocal and unconditional. It did not depend on any other thing; the Government would have to carry out their decision. This meant that if for any reason the proposal of a federal structure was found to be unimplementable, the Government would have, all the same, to reorganise a divided Assam and the reorganisation would have to be commensurate with the political aspirations of the hill people which the Government had appreciated. This aspect was pointedly discussed by the APHLC leaders with the Home Minister, Mr. Y.B. Chavan, on January 13 before the announcement was made. A question was posed to him as to what would happen if the Assam valley politicians refused to cooperate in implementing the federal structure proposal. His reply was that in that event it would simplify the situation and make it easier for the Government of India to go ahead with what the APHLC wanted, as "the alternative was clear."

(4) There would be no more delay with regard to the implementation of its announcement. The Government imposed on themselves a time-limit of six months within which the details of the proposed federal structure would be worked out.



# 10

## The Asoka Mehta Committee

**T**HE decision of the Government was hailed by the hill people. Even the warring factions in the Assam Congress for a time looked somewhat reconciled to the federal plan. They called it a *fait accompli* and added in the spirit of accommodation that the plains people would not bear the sponsors of the separate hill state any grudge if its establishment removed misunderstandings and promoted goodwill between the people of the plains and the hills.

But the silver lining in the clouds began to recede and dwindle soon. The political weather in Assam became foul and the opponents of Mr. Chaliha, who was openly criticised for helping the central leaders in evolving the federal plan, assumed stiff postures in the matter. A painful spell of fruitless joint discussion followed. A committee headed by Mr. Asoka Mehta was formed on July 22, 1967 to study the issue and the agitated hill people felt chagrined at the futility of even an agreed solution like the one contained in the federal plan. There was little scope for an agreed solution. The hill leaders who wanted a separate entity within the Indian Union, felt that the plains leaders wanted the hills as appendages to the plains, within Assam.

The Union Home Minister reportedly pointed out to the basic soundness of the regional federation proposal but the Assam Congress set itself against it. It, however, wanted the Asoka Mehta Committee to continue its efforts to seek an agreed solution. The APHLC saw

no point in participating in the committee's deliberations and boycotted it.

It noted that in terms of the objective for which it was appointed, the committee was a failure. This objective was "to examine the proposals for the reorganisation of Assam and to make an effort to reach an agreed solution." This agreed solution was to be reached between the APHLC and the plains' political parties. The role of Mr. Mehta as chairman was to preside over the deliberations between the two sides and as a representative of the Government of India to make the federal structure proposal acceptable to both sides. But with the non-participation of the APHLC, the committee became a one-sided body and the question of any "agreed solution" did not arise.

The hill leaders thought that the Asoka Mehta Committee had outdone even the Pataskar Commission. "While the Pataskar Commission tried only to water down the quantum of autonomy offered by Nehru, the Asoka Mehta Committee came out with a frontal repudiation of the proposal of the Government." The APHLC found the following recommendations particularly unacceptable.

Federal structure should not be the basis of reorganisation of the present state of Assam.

While the Committee considered the unity and integrity of the present state of Assam as essential for the interest of the plains and the hills, it recommends maximum autonomy to the hill areas.

As the hill areas differed from one another in the matter of development, social customs, ethnic origin, language, inheritance etc., they should be given maximum possible autonomy with the right to merge with other autonomous areas after a resolution is passed in their respective legislatures by two-thirds majority of the total of the representatives of each legislature.

Every bill shall be submitted to the Governor of Assam. In giving his assent, the Governor shall act on the advice of the Chief Minister as well as the Chief Executive Councillor of the autonomous area concerned.

In appointing the ministers from the hill areas, the Chief Minister will consult the members of the Assam Legislative Assembly representing the hill areas as well as the Chief Executive Councillor as a matter of convention.

Giving reasons for their rejection of the report, the APHLC said: These recommendations mean that the unity that the hill people had forged among themselves should be broken down and a constitutional bar should be placed in the way of their coming together administratively, that the autonomous bodies which were euphemistically termed legislatures should function as mere departments of the Chief Minister of Assam, and that the appointment of the hill ministers should vest solely in the pleasure of the Chief Minister. It called the character of the committee self-contradictory. While it would advocate for the hill districts staying separately from one another because of what it thought were difference of development, customs, ethnic origin, language, inheritance, etc., it would oppose the separation of the hill areas from Assam although the difference between the hills people and the plains people in these matters were far greater and more fundamental.

While it talked of 'maximum autonomy' and of the transfer of as many as fifty subjects to the purview of the autonomous district "legislatures", it would have the position of the hill areas reverted to the pre-Nehru-Plan days. The Nehru Plan provided for one separate administration for the hill areas, for the appointment of the hill minister on the recommendations of the hill MLAs with which the Chief Minister would be "guided" for the power of the hill regional

committee to initiate legislative proposals and to have any difference between itself and the Assam Legislative Assembly resolved by the Governor acting on his discretion.

As against all this, the committee would have only separate district administrations, it would have the Chief Minister only to consult the hill MLAs and chief executive councillors in the matter of appointment of hill ministers and he would not be bound by their advice, and it would subject the legislative power of the hill districts "legislatures" solely to the pleasure of the Chief Minister.

It most vehemently resented the thesis by which the Committee came to its conclusion and then made its recommendations. Mr. Chaliha was said to have come out firmly with a statement that the "status point" advanced by the APHLC was a myth. In regard to the question of status he talked about in the Asoka Mehta Committee, he, according to the hill leaders, was plainly unfair to the hill people. "Status" was never the point of the APHLC ; its point had consistently been a state separate from Assam. "It was the Prime Minister who first raised this issue and first used the word in her public speech in Shillong on December 27, 1966, and it was the Home Minister who elaborated on it in the January 13, 1967 announcement."

The APHLC said that the best thing that could be done to the Asoka Mehta report was to bury it and then to have an unbiased view of the state demand.

### REFERENCE TO NATIONAL FORUM

The Union Government then took the unprecedented step of referring the issue to the "national forum". An official announcement on September 25, 1967, said :

“Following on the joint discussions at Delhi in July the Government had appointed a committee under the chairmanship of Mr Asoka Mehta, the representative of the APHLC did not participate in the working of the committee. It, therefore, became necessary that the proposals made by the committee should be placed before and discussed with the hill leaders. This has now been done. As the APHLC leaders do not see usefulness in discussing the Asoka Mehta Committee’s proposals even with a view to improving upon them as necessary, the stage now reached is that the whole question goes to a national forum. Any legislative proposals for the reorganisation of Assam have to be placed before Parliament and for this purpose it is necessary to consult with leaders of opposition parties in Parliament. This the Government have assured to do early during the next session. The opposition leaders will be furnished very soon with all the relevant documents for effective consultation. The Government will try to finalise the proposals in the course of the next session of Parliament.”

The Government worked on a possible solution and finally decided to go ahead with a state plan. The first requirement was to seek a consensus within the Parliamentary Party of Congress. In the teeth of opposition from their colleagues, the Prime Minister and the Home Minister forcefully pleaded for an autonomous state for the hill areas.

### **MR CHAVAN SUMS UP THE PROBLEM**

Explaining the stand of the Government on the issue Mr Chavan told the Congress Parliamentary Party on June 6, 1968 that reorganisation of Assam was a necessity. The proposal of the Government for an autonomous

state was not the result of a doctrinaire attitude but was the fruit of continuous efforts in search of a solution.

He said he was associated with this matter even before he became the Home Minister. In a way he was "soaked in this problem of Assam for about three and a half years."

### **AGITATIONAL POSTURE**

After he became the Home Minister he found that "with the general elections approaching the, All-Party Hill Leaders Conference seemed to be wanting to take a certain agitational posture on the issue of Assam's reorganisation."

Further discussions were carried on with the APHLC, the Assam Chief Minister and the APCC president and the matter was put up before the Internal Affairs Committee which discussed afresh this issue with the APHLC and the APCC. These discussions led to the issue of a statement dated January 13, 1967. This resulted in a calmer atmosphere in the hill areas and gave satisfaction to the APHLC.

These discussions were initiated because the Patas-kar Commission's report was not wholly acceptable to both the APHLC and the APCC and the latter seemed to have serious doubts about it.

After the general elections, Mr Chavan said, he visited Gauhati with Mr Fakhruddin Ali Ahmed and had extensive talks with all those who were interested. During these talks, he found that the idea of a federation was not acceptable to the valley. He had also talks with the representatives of all political parties represented in the Assam Assembly and later on they were called to Delhi for a conference. In this conference the Government of India were represented by him.

Ultimately, Mr Asoka Mehta was requested to head a committee to discuss these matters in order to evolve an agreed solution. The APHLC leaders kept out of this discussion. Mr Mehta submitted a report containing certain proposals. These proposals were acceptable to the Assam Congress leadership but were not acceptable to the APHLC.

Talks were continued with the two groups. Ultimately, the Prime Minister told them to redouble their efforts to find an agreed solution. If they did not do so, the Government of India would take their own decision.

The Internal Affairs Committee had fresh talks with the two groups and came out with its own proposals. These proposals were a modification of Mr Mehta's proposals in certain respects.

The proposal of an autonomous state Mr Chavan said, was borrowed from the idea of autonomous areas envisaged by the Asoka Mehta Committee. It provided that university and higher education and also law and order would vest with the autonomous state with the rider that law and order would exclude matters pertaining to border security, armed police and public order which would be within the responsibility of the Governor of Assam to be discharged in his discretion.

## THE BACKGROUND

Mr Chavan said that the problems of Assam needed immediate solution and did not brook any delay. The background of the problem was such that "we are dealing with a most sensitive state which has three international frontiers, two of which are hostile."

The tribal area were in a state of political ferment. What was to be decided was "how to keep with us

those groups of tribals which are nationalist besides being moderate and are in a position to provide proper leadership. Therefore, the political solution which we have to find out should answer adequately and fully these requirements."

While discussing the law and order aspect of the reorganisation issue, the Home Minister said that under the Sixth Schedule even today the village and town police with some legislative powers were with the district councils.

Mr Chavan said that nobody would stand on false prestige. But the urgency of the problem was such that he felt that the solution would strengthen India's eastern borders.

Mr Chavan's views were not to the liking of most political leaders of the Assam plains. They accused him of encouraging divisive forces and ignoring economic and political realities.

### **APHLC ARGUMENT**

Answering the leaders of the plains, the APHLC said : The demand of the people for a separate state emerged from their history. Historically, the hills were never apart of Assam. In the pre-British days the hill people lived free and independent in their various small democratic republics and they jealously and fiercely guarded their independence. To quote only two instances from history : in 1830 when the British first came to the Assam Valley, they wanted to build a road over the Khasi Hills, to connect the Brahmaputra Valley with the Surma Valley, now in East Pakistan, a Khasi Chief of a small principality, u Tirot Singh, resisted them with arms for four years and the fight ended only with his capture through a subterfuge and his exile to Dacca ; and a few



years later another warrior of the Jaintia Hills, u Kiang Nongbah, fought the British and bravely met death on the gallows which he preferred to living in subjection to the British. Many similar instances can be cited of the Garos the Mizos and other hill people. The contacts they had with the plains were mostly through trade and commerce. Although ethnically and linguistically different among themselves yet centuries or millenia of habitation under similar conditions of a mountainous country bred in them characteristics that were common, such as freedom and respect for the individual love of democratic methods in dealing with problems, equality and freedom of the sexes and abhorrence for caste and class distinctions. They developed an ethos that was distinctly and even antagonistically different from that of the plains people. It was only after the British came, some 130 years ago that for the first time the hills and the plains were brought together under one administration. But feeling of difference and distance persisted.

In 1947 when independence came it was for India to build a new bridge that would span this gulf. But in 1954 she failed in Nagaland because it was content to leave the Naga problem to the Assam Government. In 1966 she failed again in the Mizo hills for the self-same reason. In political terms the question is Will India continue to leave the hills to the machinations of Assam politicians and let frustration take its course or will it be bold enough to take them directly under her own care by establishing direct links with them? That in other words, is the question of whether to grant the hills a separate state or not. But, apart from this historical compulsion are there other good reasons for the creation of a separate Hill State? What are the objections to it?

Taking the country as a whole, its territorial integrity being assured what does the addition of one more state matter? The USSR with less than half the popu-

lation of India has 15 Union republics and more than a hundred autonomous republics. The USA with one-third the population of India has 50 states and both these countries are incomparably richer and stronger than India. Their strength accrues from the feeling of commitment to the country that their peoples have and their examples may provide a lesson to us that where the people, in any part, feel terribly strongly that they should have a separate entity within India making a fetish of an opposition against such a demand may well be at the country's cost.

# 11

## The Autonomous State Plan

**O**N September 11, 1968, the Government of India announced the Autonomous State Plan ending uncertainties fears and speculations. Every observer with a nationalistic perspective realised that nothing wiser could be done at the moment to cement and consolidate the basic strength of the communities in a region kept perpetually insecure by trouble shooters across the borders and irritated by politicians and squabbles next door. The announcement of the plan was clear and conclusive -

In a statement issued on January 13, 1967, the Government of India had indicated their decision to reorganise the State of Assam. Since the announcement, the Government have given detailed and careful consideration to the form which the reorganisation might take. They have held discussions and consultations with the Government of Assam and the parties directly concerned, as also with the leaders of various parties in Parliament.

The effort in these discussions had been to try and evolve a broad consensus such as could be expected to further the larger national objectives involved. The Government specially kept in view the fact that the north-eastern region as a whole occupies an important and vital position which calls for an integrated and well-coordinated approach towards the development as well as the security of the region. In arriving at the decision, therefore, the Government have been guided by the

consideration that consistently with the need to provide adequate scope for the political aspirations of the hill people, and the well-being of the people inhabiting the other parts of the state of Assam, the overall unity of the state should be preserved.

The Government have decided to undertake legislation to constitute an autonomous state within the state of Assam comprising the autonomous districts of the Garo Hills, the Khasi Hills and Jowai. The legislation will also provide for the setting up of a high-level advisory council for the North-Eastern region as a whole to be designated as the North-Eastern Council, with a view to encouraging an integrated approach to the security and development of the region.

Each of the autonomous districts of the Mikir Hills and the North Cachar Hills will be given the option, to be exercised by a specified date, to join the autonomous state on the basis of a resolution adopted by a majority of not less than two-thirds of the members of the district council.

The autonomous state will have a legislative assembly and a council of ministers. Under this arrangement, except for a few subjects of common interest, all other subjects in the state list will be transferred to the autonomous state. The subject which will be transferred exclusively to the autonomous state will include Agriculture, Forests and Fisheries, Education (including university education), Communications (other than highways important to the state as a whole), Medical and Public Health, Local Bodies and Co-operatives, Land, Mines and Mineral Development, Medium and Small-scale Industries, Administration of Justice and Prisons. Matters affecting the tribal people's interest such as inheritance, marriages, social customs, appointment and succession of chiefs would also be within the purview of the autonomous state.

The autonomous state will also have taxation powers in respect of the subjects assigned to it including land revenue and agricultural income-tax, excise duty taxes on mineral rights, taxes on goods and passengers and entertainment tax. The autonomous state will also be assigned its relatable share out of sales tax.

The executive power of the autonomous state will be co extensive with the subjects assigned to the autonomous state and will vest in the Governor of Assam who will act on the aid and advice of the council of ministers of the autonomous state.

Bills passed by the legislature of the autonomous state will be submitted to the Governor of Assam for his assent and in this matter he will act on the aid and advice of the council of ministers of the autonomous state, except where it relates to subjects concurrent to both legislatures and where its provisions are repugnant to a law passed by the legislature of Assam.

The Government and the legislature of Assam will continue to exercise all the powers of the state as hitherto in respect of areas other than those constituting the autonomous state. So far as the latter areas are concerned, the Government and the legislature of Assam will have jurisdiction in respect of certain subjects which are of common importance such as state highways, major projects in the fields of irrigation, flood-control, drainage, water-storage and water power, navigation and major industries. With a view to providing unified administration of public order and police (excluding village and town police assigned to the district councils under the Constitution) these subjects will also be with the state of Assam.

In respect of schemes of agriculture of common benefit to the autonomous state and the rest of Assam, conservation of forest in catchment areas of major irrigation, flood-control, hydro-electric and navigation

projects, and a few subjects out of the Concurrent List such as acquisition and requisitioning of property, transfer of non-agricultural property, registration of documents, recovery of public dues, the legislatures of the state of Assam and the autonomous state shall have concurrent powers of legislation. Other subjects in the Concurrent List will remain with the state of Assam as at present.

The hill areas of Assam, including those constituting the autonomous state will have representation in the Assam legislature as at present. In choosing the ministers of the Assam Cabinet, adequate representation will be given to the area forming part of the autonomous state and other hill areas.

A standing committee consisting of the members of the Assam legislature from the autonomous state and other hill areas, with a few other members of the legislature will be constituted. Bills (excluding money bills) in respect of subjects which are of common interest to the state of Assam as a whole, *i.e.*, other than the subjects which are exclusively assigned to the autonomous state will be referred to the standing committee for consideration after introduction in the Assam legislature. The views of the committee will be taken into account when the bills come up for consideration in the house.

The Assam High Court, the Assam State Public Service Commission and the Assam State Electricity Board will continue to have jurisdiction in the autonomous state, and there will be joint cadres of All India Services and some of the higher state services.

As stated earlier, one of the basic objectives of reorganisation has been to provide for a unified and coordinated approach to the security and development of the north-eastern region as a whole. With this end in view and after careful consideration, the Government

have decided to set up the proposed North Eastern Council (NEC) consisting of the Governor of Assam and Nagaland as chairman, the Chief Ministers of Assam, Nagaland and the autonomous state, one minister from each of these states, and the Chief Commissioners and Chief Ministers of the Union Territories in the region. The council is intended to provide for a unified and coordinated approach towards the development of inter-state communications, common irrigation and power and flood control projects and coordinated plans for agricultural production, regional food self-sufficiency and balanced industrial development of the region. The council will prepare, in respect of these an integrated plan for the region as a whole. It will also discuss other matters of common interest to the region and suggest suitable measures including appropriate institutional arrangements.

### SECRETARIAT

The Central Government will provide to the council a secretariat of adequate status and experience and also a planning cell with the necessary complement of experts under a planning adviser to advise the council.

Because of the special problems and strategic importance of the north-eastern region as a whole, security and public order are inseparable ; they are of vital concern not only to the states and Union Territories in this region, but also to the entire country. For the purpose of effective co-ordination in the administration of these subjects for the region as a whole, the proposed North-Eastern Council will have a committee consisting of the Governor of Assam and Nagaland as chairman, the Chief Ministers of Assam, Nagaland and the autonomous state, and the Chief Commissioners of the Union

**Territories in this region. The committee will be assisted by such staff as may be necessary.**

**The district councils will continue with their present powers in the autonomous state. They will be under the control of the Government of that state. The Sixth Schedule to the Constitution will be amended in order to improve the procedures of the district councils and to enable them to function efficiently and, if necessary, to give them more powers.**

### **SHILLONG**

**Shillong will continue to serve as the headquarters both of the state of Assam and the autonomous state. The state of Assam will have the same legislative and administrative control over the cantonment and municipal areas of Shillong as at present. The present powers of the district council under the Sixth Schedule in regard to certain areas of the Shillong municipality will remain with the body.**

**The details of the administrative and financial relationship between the state of Assam and the autonomous state, the division of legislative and executive powers, services, assets and liabilities and resources and other matters will be worked out and included in the proposed legislation to the extent necessary.**

**The scheme of reorganisation and close regional co-ordination outlined above has been evolved after many months of patient deliberation and wide consultation. The arrangements proposed are designed to safeguard and promote the security of this sensitive border region. It also seeks to give adequate expression to the aspirations and interests of the people inhabiting the hills and plains of Assam as well as to the larger hopes shared by all sections of the north-eastern region for more rapid**



and meaningful development based on the full utilisation of its abundant and varied natural resources which alone can ensure rising living standards and expanding employment opportunities.

The Union Government, hoping that the new scheme would be worked out by all parties and sections of the people in a spirit of co-operation and understanding and in the common interest of the people of Assam, the north-eastern region and the country as a whole, spelt out the provisions without the ambiguities attending such proposals in the past.

The Constitution, as envisaged in the announcement was amended by a bill introduced in the Lok Sabha on December 10, 1968. The Constitution (22nd Amendment) Bill aimed at adding a new Article (244 A) in the Constitution to confer the necessary legislative power on Parliament to enact a law for constituting an autonomous hill state within Assam and to provide the new state with a legislature and a council of ministers.

One of the clauses of the bill made a consequential amendment to Article 275 in regard to certain special grants payable to the state of Assam for the areas which might form part of the autonomous state.

There was a provision for the constitution of a committee of the Assam Legislative Assembly consisting of members of the body from the tribal areas and a few other members.

The bill encountered preliminary objections on the ground that it might open the floodgates of demands for autonomous states.

Already, the people of Kumaon were clamouring for a hill state to be carved out of Uttar Pradesh. There were similar demands in Bihar, Andhra Pradesh and other parts of the country.

The creation of a separate state within the framework of the state of Assam would lead to constitutional and

legislative anomalies. There were the district councils which at present enjoyed a certain measure of autonomy. With the formation of the new state, there would be a system of triarchy consisting of the district councils, the legislative assembly of the new state and the existing Assam Assembly.

Following procedural delays and re-introduction, the bill was passed by the Lok Sabha on April 15, 1969 by 309 votes to 28. Only Jana Sangh members opposed it. The Rajya Sabha approved it by 175 votes to eight on April 30.

It was clear from the debates that the Government had taken a calculated step, recognising the needs of the tribal areas of the Assam hills and that they had not necessarily set a precedent. It was a special case, needing a special solution. Mr Chavan strongly disagreed with the view expressed by Dr Z. A. Ahmed (CPI) that the Government should keep their mind open for similar arrangements within the linguistic state set-up if such demands were made from other areas also.

Mr Chavan said setting up of linguistic states had been wise and good enough. But there should be no further break-up.

Mr Chavan humorously pointed out that if the Government were to keep their mind open on the subject, it would mean keeping the mind open at both ends and then nothing would remain in the mind.

He said the hill areas of Assam had always been treated as a special problem, getting a special treatment under the Constitution.

The bill had to secure the approval of the 17 states and to get the Presidential assent.

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## The Meghalaya Act

**I**N its final form, the act emerged as an answer to the problems posed over the years since independence. The reaction to it was clad in rays of hope and shades of jubilation.

The legislation for the creation of the autonomous state of Meghalaya within Assam was passed by both Houses of Parliament on December 24, 1969.

Inaugurating the state on April 2, 1970, the Prime Minister summed up the significance of this political landmark in the constitutional history of India thus :

“Whatever had been achieved today was the fruit of the spirit of co-operation shown by the hill leaders and their people. The Government of India would do every thing they could to help the advancement and well-being of the people inhabiting this strategic and beautiful part of the country. It would be the endeavour of the Government of India to see that the pace of growth and development would reach every part of the land and every section of the people.”

The Chief Minister of Meghalaya, Mr Williamson Sangma, saw in the Union Government's decision to grant statehood to the hill people the political wisdom or the central leadership guided by Mrs Gandhi :

“It is largely due to the keen interest shown by you and the statesman-like manner in which you handled this very delicate problem that this state has come into being peacefully with goodwill from all sides.

"Now that the state has come into being, we want to take all necessary steps to discharge our responsibility to the people and to bring the state at par with other more developed regions of the country.

"The statesmanship, understanding and sympathy shown by you and your father, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, in tackling the problem of Meghalaya have touched the hearts of the people.

"We appreciate the statesmanship and cooperation shown by the Assam Chief Minister, Mr B. P. Chaliha, and his colleagues with whom we look forward to working in goodwill and understanding."

Thus the process of autonomy initiated by Jawaharlal Nehru was led to a logical conclusion by Mrs Gandhi's political wisdom and sense of perspective developed under the guidance of Nehru.

In this act of faith of the hill people, the people of the plains and leaders of the nation one can see the affirmation of the continuity of India, a deterrent to political myopia and separatism and the pride of place of the tribal people in the multi-community structure of the nation. A syndrome was prevented from becoming a trauma. This political prophylaxis was a triumph of the tribal genius.

### **NORTH-EASTERN COUNCIL BILL**

The Parlaiment passed a bill for setting up a "North-Eastern Council" to pursue a coordinated approach to the development and security of Assam, Meghalaya, Manipur and Tripura.

It keeps the council's doors open for Nagaland which does not wish to join it now because of a feeling that membership of the council would detract from its status as a full-fledged state.

The Governor of Assam (Chairman), the Chief Ministers of Assam and Meghalaya along with a cabinet colleague each, the administrators and the Chief Ministers of Manipur and Tripura, and the tribal areas adviser to the Governor of Assam are to be the members of the council.

It is to be charged mainly with the task of formulating, and, reviewing implementation of regional plans for the area.

The bill originally sought to include "border disputes and linguistic minorities" within the purview of the council, but the Home Minister, Mr Y. B. Chavan, had the provision deleted through an amendment. Mr Chavan said he did not wish the functioning of the council to be jeopardised by controversies over these "sensitive" issues.

## REVIEW

A co-ordination committee of the council is charged with the job of reviewing periodically "the measures taken by the states represented on the council for the maintenance of security and public order".

According to Mr Chavan an expert on defence and security would be appointed by the Centre to the council's secretariat which will also have a planning advisor.

Mr N.G. Ranga (Swa) said the council would be able to discharge its duties well only if non-political persons well-versed in defence problems and needs of the area alone were appointed as Governor of Assam.

He expressed the hope that Nagaland would eventually agree to join the council.

The first-reading debate was marked by criticism of Nagaland's refusal to join the council and the acceptance of the position by the Centre.

### **BAD PRECEDENT**

Mr Asoka Mehta, questioned Nagaland's right to stay out and said by accepting this the Central Government were setting a bad precedent. This might leave the door open to some state in future to refuse to join the deliberations of the Planning Commission.

Moving the bill in the Lok Sabha the Home Minister said for the present Nagaland was not willing to join the council. However, an enabling provision was being made in the bill for the inclusion of Nagaland later and he expected it to join the council once it started functioning.

Mr Mehta and others who spoke on the bill, however, welcomed the constitution of the council to devote special attention to the security and development problems of the region.

Mr Chavan explained that the proposed council would be an advisory and not a decision or policy-making body. The Government wanted its membership to be on a voluntary basis.

### **COMMON PROBLEMS**

The formation of the autonomous region of Meghalaya and other developments necessitated the proposed council as distinct from the Eastern Zonal Council. Even though the region was divided into separate political units, there were several economic and security problems common to the region which called for a coordinated approach. In an enlarged zonal council, like the Eastern Zonal Council, which had among others states like West Bengal and Bihar, the security aspect was often relegated to the background.

Mr Chavan said though it was originally proposed to include within the scope of the council border and

boundary problems within the region, it was later felt that this would complicate matters. He, therefore, proposed to move an amendment during the course of the discussion to delete this aspect from the provisions.

The council which would be presided over by the Governor, would consist of the Chief Ministers of Assam, Meghalaya, Manipur and Tripura and the Adviser to the Governor on NEFA.

He said the bill provided for decision by majority in place of consensus as suggested by some. This had been done as it was felt that even in an advisory body the practice of consensus could give any member the right to whittle down the recommendations.

The main attempt was to associate the representatives of the people of the region with the security and development of the region. He did not want the impression to get round that in reorganising Assam, the Government had sought to fragment the region for political reasons at the cost of security.

## **PART II**

# **THE TRIBAL GENIUS**

***Tribes—Meaning and Significance***

***The Wind of Change***

***The Main Tribes of North-Eastern India***

***The Nagas and the Mizos***

***The Khasis and the Garos***

***War or Peace?***

***Expression of Tribal Genius***



**The Indian approach accepts the validity of the different traditions — SARVAGAMA PRAMANYA. Every tradition which helps man to understand his environment, which assists him to live in freedom and friendship with his neighbours, which helps him to lift his heart to the Divine is worthy of acceptance. We must approach the tribal people with affection and friendship and not condescension or contempt. We should not deprive them of their innocent joys, their songs and dances, their feasts and festivals. We should give up the 'big brother' complex. Manu tells us that it would be our duty to teach every group its own tradition. We must give equality of opportunity even to unequal groups. We did not isolate the tribal communities ; nor did we encourage indiscriminate amalgamation. Without creating great racial disturbances, we aimed at achieving racial harmony. This catholicity of outlook marks the Indian approach from the beginning of history.**

**—Dr. S. Radhakrishnan**

## Tribes – Meaning and Significance

"Dim through the night of these  
  tempestuous years  
A Sabbath dawn over Africa appears,  
Then shall her neck from Europe's yoke  
  be freed  
And healing arts to hideous arms succeed ;  
At home fraternal bonds her tribes  
  shall bind  
Commerce abroad espouse them with  
  mankind..."

—*James Montgomery* (1841)

**D**IMNESS, mystery and tempest describe the march across the centuries not of the African tribes alone but of the tribal part of the entire humanity. "Unutterable mysteries of fate" is the general assessment of the tribal situation.

History is a fraud so far as the documentation of tribal life is concerned. One cannot establish a coherent relation between the past and the future by Xenophobia. And this is what most of the historians of tribal life have done by writing their narrowly national or regional bias into what could be objective glimpses of the general condition of mankind.

The tribes of India had difficult early historians—British officers with the ambition of recording “something of the life of the uncivilised races of our empire.”

Their aim was to "serve the purpose equally of those who remain at home and those who fare forth into the world and come into personal contact with peoples in the lower stages of culture."

A look at faces in the course of a tour of the Santhal Parganas convinced one of them that all the hill people were "Mongoloids". A day's stay in Chhotanagpur gave another the "clue" that the jungle life of the dark-skinned races beneath the British flag was hemmed in by dirty laces of treachery and sloth.

The world has in the unknown tabernacles of its vastness masses of humanity whose unfolding through the years constitutes a fascinating story of development. The colonial bias has hampered the discovery of this part of civilization more than any other factor and deprived us of great segments of historical experience.

In a study of tribal life two things must be borne in mind: (i) most historical writings have sought to reflect man's disunity and, therefore much of what has been written about the tribes in various parts of India or elsewhere is information or conjecture needing fresh examination and a new perspective, and (ii) most of the foreign historians or anthropologists, in their eagerness "to open up the mysteries of savage culture," have been struggling hard to reflect the colonial situation and to meet its colonial requirements

Such scholars began with the day of European penetration, dragged on their thesis of uncivilization through the throes of European conquest and finally prescribed ways of salvation for "the children of nature who have forfeited any claim to equality of treatment with other men."

Some of them laid down, with the vehement conviction of a believer, that the tribal people must be taken in hand by superior nations and shown the way in which they should grow. Such colonial ethos has undermined

the whole concept of the study of tribal life and this is why we do not even have coherent, logical or broadly applicable definitions of tribe.

Defining "tribe" has been something like the speculations of a group of blind men seeking to describe an elephant by touching various parts of its body. To one, the elephant was like a thick, tight rope because his hands lay on its tail while to another it was a solid rocky wall covered with a rough sheet. The latter was feeling its massive back. And this is one of the reasons why the division of the "ancestral stocks" into great variety of distinct peoples is only reluctantly referred to as "tribes".

One of the most popular definitions of "tribe" is by Mr W. H. R. Rivers who calls it a social group of a simple kind the members of which speak a common dialect, have a single government and act together for such common purposes as warfare. Other characteristics of a tribe have been given as a common name, a contiguous territory, a relatively uniform culture or way of life and a trace of common descent. But these characteristics are only superficially relevant.

In one tribe there can be many communities comprising neighbourhood and villages. Many sociologists have preferred to study them as "clusters of a higher order". They have called them nations. Many tribes claim that they had mythical or historical ancestry while some refer to a bird or an animal while describing their descent.

The avowed obligation of some communities to assist their brethren in blood feuds in olden days has injected the notion of ferocity and terror in the concept of "tribe". Many sociologists have kept out the social orders which have achieved strictly territorial organisations in large states from the purview of the term "tribe." They limit their studies to groups whose unity is based on extended ties of kinship or clans.

The concept of tribe, we can see, is composed of as many rules as exceptions. A language does not necessarily lie at the foundation of a tribe. In Uganda, the Ambas speak at least two mutually unintelligible languages. The Zunis are only one community. The Kiowa Apaches constitute one band of the large Kiowa tribe. The Doroho tribe lives scattered among the Nandis and the Masais for whom they hunt and perform ritual services.

The criterion of political integration is also not universally applicable to tribal groups. In Australia, Melanesia, Amazonia and Western North America, there are many tribal communities which are politically autonomous. The division of these communities is made as distinct tribes by anthropologists on the basis of linguistic and cultural resemblances. Sometimes the criterion of similarities of trades or inter-marriage in a cluster of independent local peaceful groups is treated as the basis of tribal classification.

Common cults, age-grades, and social organisation, despite the lack of political integration, seem to have prompted anthropologists and sociologists to call certain groups as tribes. In certain cases what distinguishes one tribe from another is a common dialect and cultures. For this reason there have been discernible recent trends towards employing the term "tribe" for any group which can be listed as the carrier of a distinctive culture. In the absence of territorial states, the term 'nation' is used to designate comparable but larger culture-bearing groups.

Thus among the elements which seem to lie as the foundation of a tribe, kinship and culture are outstanding. Kinship is an important motivating force in all human societies. It regulates behaviour among persons and plays a vital role in the formation of social, political and territorial groups. The domestic family survives at least as a residential unit in modern industrial society.

while in tribal societies, kinship is even a more significant factor in determining inheritance, group membership, succession to office and the perpetuation of particular groups. Of the social organisation of India there are two broad features : tribes and castes. The tribes, as understood in this part of the country, are a collection of families or groups of families bearing common names. People claim to have descended from a mythical or historical ancestor and are often held together by bonds of kinship. Each tribe is settled in a particular region and speaks a particular language. A common language and a definite territory lend enormous weight to the ties of kinship. In many cases, tribes are not endogamous — it is not a general rule that a man of a particular tribe must have a wife of that tribe and that he cannot resort to inter-tribal marriages. This factor, however, does not weaken the element of kinship in a tribe.

Throughout the processes of their development human beings have lived in families which are units based on marriage and recognition of parentage. Sexual reproduction entails two genetic parents, a father and a mother. But the physiology of human reproduction has been elucidated only in recent times. Earlier, it was rather difficult to identify the genetic father of a given individual, though the social and legal father might have been clearly known. This is now possible with the development of research in genetics.

Social kinship is thus a cultural artifact. It is not necessarily coincident with genetic connections. In many cultures people believed that reproduction was a process not requiring male intervention.

Sometimes kinship is used to cover the whole of society. A king is called the "father of his people". The notion of common descent of a comprehensive stock or community is often found among communities, but frequently the population of clans is divided into several

sections, each recruited by descent from its own founding fathers. Members of 100 or more homologous sections may be found in some communities while in others there can be merely two such divisions, with or without a myth of a common descent known as moieties.

Morphologically intermediate between moieties, the lineages are clans which are associations of lineages or lineage segments having certain interests in common. One of them is the regulation of marriage. Whereas members of a lineage can usually trace out their genealogical relationship to one another, clan members may believe themselves to be related without necessarily being able to specify such connections.

In certain clans there is no notion of common descent. They can be matrilineal or patrilineal. (Those in Meghalaya are matrilineal.) They are sometimes territorially dispersed and may be totemic. If a lineage as a whole is not exogamous, the term clan is sometimes used for its largest exogamous segment. Where there are divisions intermediate between the clan and the smaller lineages or lineage segments, sociologists and anthropologists use the term sub-clans.

## The Wind of Change

**T**RIBAL people, looked down upon as products of low strata of society and rude forms of culture, have, with the advent of fact-based history and geography of the entire human race, proved the worth and relevance of their many-splendoured culture in many parts of the world. Africa and Asia, particularly India with her vast mountainous regions, have thrown up much valuable information about the tribal people whose social organisation and cultural grandeur distinguish them as a resourceful, valiant, tough and cheerful part of the human race.

The world is gradually extricating itself from the slush of narrow national and regional limitations. Greater dispersal of knowledge about various parts of the world, the victory of man over the hurdles of space and time and reformation of short-sighted, racial or colonial attitudes by science-oriented outlook on the part of historians, sociologists and anthropologists have made it possible for rational people all over the world to take a balanced view of the totality of mankind. Achievements of archaeology have pricked the balloon of bogus claims of cultural superiority by modern man. Every day more and more facts are found to discourage narrow beliefs about the past and the unknown.

Before the evidence of the spade and the trowel, the interdependence of ancient cultures makes exclusive claims ridiculous. Antiquity is no longer confined to Greece, Rome, the Vedas, or even the Old Testament, It



is difficult for one to shut one's eyes to the superior forms of culture and civilization laid bare by history-diggers—those of Sumer Akkad, Babylon Harappa, Mohenjo daro With the discovery of the magnificence of Pharaonic Egypt explanation of the Phoenicians, exploration of the ruins of Minos and Mycenae even the civilization of Greece and Rome has acquired deeper meaning and greater lustre Indian discoveries a process which will continue for decades, have revitalised the picture of the past Mohenjo daro exhibits consummate building skills of the human race taking us about six thousand years in the heart of history And the mounds of Mohenjo daro were not built in a day Excavations in Rajasthan and Central Asia have reflected the presence of a superior form of culture and ways of life

The ghost of the imperial epoch has been exorcised from many minds and the impulse of inquiry has been quickened The history of mankind is being considered as a single though varied process The concept that no group of people is an island entire by itself but all are part of the main has come to stay among our instruments of knowledge This spirit of inquiry and broadening of outlook is largely responsible for the eradication of the apparently sophisticated but contemptuously acquired notions about the tribal people

An intelligent view of antiquity brings forth a coherent and heartening picture of human change and progress And this wind of change is more powerful than prejudices The evidence is overwhelming Dr Louis Leakey has recently discovered a geological bed in Lake Victoria (East Africa) He has found there fossilised fragments of a creature which lived on the ground but walked erect The geological bed is about 25 million years old This creature, called *Proconsul* by Dr Leakey may not be a man But could not he be an ancestor of man ?

This scientist's other find, *Zinjanthropus*, is from North Tanganyika—it belongs to a date about two million years ago. This *Zinjanthropus* made crude stone tools. Was he not a man? We have a large stretch of the Old Stone Age and the Age of Metals—the Iron Age, spreading over several hundred thousand years.

Man struggled, faltered in the course of his nomadic adventures of existence and invented agriculture after endless experiments. Man was only a part-time farmer. There were rudimentary forms of farming in the lower Nile region in Africa about six thousand years ago. Some form of cultivation was practised in the hill areas of what we know now as North-Eastern India.

The relative isolation of these areas, poor rocky soil, crude tools, unhelpful weather and feuding neighbours could not stop these people from developing systems of cereal growing and stock-raising. These groups also developed forms of art—rock engravings, cave paintings, dance, songs, musical instruments and intricately patterned colourful dress. They thought out their own systems of philosophy and religion, believing in what life showed them and experience seemed to confirm, worshipping what inspired awe or admiration in them and despising what hurt their feelings.

The ferrous technology brought about the most powerful revolution. It opened the gates of prosperity and paved the way for modernity. Iron-mining and smelting are known to be as old as 500 B.C. But this is a very conservative estimate. West Africa has evidence of geological and technological activities of times much before the fifth century before Christ. The portions now comprising Meghalaya have claims to even earlier periods in the field of mining and forging of weapons.

In the sparsely populated areas people engaged in hunting, gathering wild vegetables and protecting part-time agriculture, jhuming, practised in the hills of

North-East India even now, was a great feat. To think of growing food in the ashes of secondary forests was an idea which only a deep consciousness of the utility of agriculture coupled with an imaginative approach to soil creation and cultivation could have produced. Working out their ways of life over countless generations the tribal people have preserved their identity and shown their genius in many fields. "Left to themselves, they would perhaps continue to live in the traditional way", people say. But would they have left themselves to themselves? Ideas are contagious. Infected by them people tend to be restless until they infect others with them.

Mutual curiosity between the people of the hills and the plains brought the first brief contacts which were marked with diffidence, suspicions, fears and fights. But these contacts gradually opened avenues for mitigation of isolation and richer and fuller life. Iron spears and tools and the prospect of improving the quality of food were the two great factors which made life leap into vigorous action.

Choice of food necessitated better contacts involving shedding of mental reservations. Extra-regional communication and better weaponry led to concepts of power. Organised farming for growing foodgrains led to concentration of population in particular areas and later pressure on land caused migrations. The spear became a symbol of power round which grew ideas and answers to the need of government. The old tribal communities managed their affairs with little or nothing of the governing machinery but with sharp weapons ambitious and strong groups could impose their will on weaker groups. They took pride in doing so. Thus emerged the sprouts of organised and centralized political organization of kingship and bureaucracy. It brought in its process class differences—the servant and the

master, the ruler and the subject. The composite nature of a monolithic concept was fractured and an era of cleverness marched on the human scene with its attendant vices of jealousy, feuds, social tensions and political competition. At this stage the hill man became a partner in the daily anguish and strife of life with the man in the plains and the teasingly vague fence of separation between the two began to recede and dwindle.

After this nothing could even be the same. The onward movement of the tribal people was the symbol of a revolution, of sensational changes. The winds that blew from across the tribal borders to their huts and shelters mingled tradition with innovations, heralding a new order and laying the foundations of new ways of life. Dress underwent changes and so did the dialects. The vocabularies got bigger and richer and the iron curtain of secrecy, privacy and reservations gave way under the onslaught of imported notions. Nearby plains' markets requisitioned tribal goods and commerce began to grow.

From barter there was a transition to cash transaction. From commodities to cash was a big leap forward and this brought in the spirit of modernity and the rhythm of faster life into slowly evolving social systems. There were stresses and strains and repercussions. Many lacked the will to grow and where there was a strong will, there, occasionally, was not sufficient power in the economy or enough dynamism or flexibility in society. Thus the progress was slow. This is why there have been a hiatus between the relationship of the hills and the plains, regional imbalances and a sense of inevitable disparity.

These happenings are modern changes. Their cause is universally the same : man's desire to grow, to evolve easier ways of life, to live protected and in peace,

# 15

## The Main Tribes of North-Eastern India

**I**F one understands how the Bantu-speaking communities in the southern and central regions of Africa have emerged from isolation and managed to dominate the whole region, one can also understand how the Khasis of Meghalaya or the Mizos of the erstwhile Lushai Hills have acquired skill in almost every profession from warfare to science and arts. To assess the growth of the tribes of India, we must go back to the past and review the general tribal situation in the country—especially in the northern part which is a cultural treasure-house and a meeting point of two civilizations—those of the tribal people and men of the plains.

Tribes live in their multi-stranded cultural glory in the hill tracts which are the home of the most ancient races. Crookes noting that the conditions of the hill country are peculiarly favourable to the growth of these self-independent entities, says that in the early days each narrow valley with terrace cultivation on the adjoining slopes supported a small number of families, isolated from the outer world, and depending upon their own labour for all the necessities and most of the luxuries of life.

Few people in India enjoyed a happier life than the residents of some of these valleys.

As a typical example of the most outstanding form of tribe one can select the races of Assam and its

borderland. The hill country is occupied by groups of tribes whose customs and institutions are hundreds of years old. Beginning from the west are the Akas, the Daflas, the Miris, the Abors, and the Mishmis. These communities preserving their original forms of culture, occupied the wild country centuries ago.

To the east of the Assam valley the Nagas formed a compact group. They were by far the most interesting of the Mongoloid tribes. In some respects they were in a state of savagery in early days but their cultural advancement and education have distinguished them now.

Their fierce tribal feuds, their disregard of the sanctity of human life, their habit of raiding the settled villages on their borders in search of slaves or heads illustrated the fiercer side of their character before the modern age overtook them. They have attained considerable skill in agriculture and science.

# 16

## The Nagas and the Mizos

**A** large part of the Naga tribe is the Angami community. Their culture was considered far superior to that of the other members of the Naga group. The Angamis grew their rice on terraces dug out from the hillsides with great skill and labour, and watered by means of channels excavated for long distances along the contours while many other communities practised only jhuming. This art, according to British historians, came from Manipur which the Angamis believed to have been their original home. This improved style of farming was adopted because they had become accustomed to a diet of rice in place of the coarser grains which their kinsfolk used. Rice-growing was impossible in the elevated country which they occupied without artificial irrigation, which could not be provided when the holding was periodically abandoned in a thriftless fashion.

Their villages were designed to protect the inhabitants from the attacks of hostile tribes. Each was a stockaded fortress situated on an eminence, the houses being massed together without much attempt at arrangement, and the settlement guarded by an almost impenetrable fence of thorny shrubs and stinging nettles. Narrow sunken paths gave entrance to the enclosure. The actual gateway was protected by a strong wooden door. The better dwellings followed the type of the house common in Eastern Asia. The chief's palaces, were often 250 or 300 feet in length and occupied central and the highest position in the village. Much

trouble was taken to decorate the houses. The approaches to the village were lined with trees, beneath which lay the receptacles which contained the remains of their dead. This habit of burial close to the house produced among them an attachment to their village sites which was unusual among the hill tribes. Nothing short of an emergency would force them to abandon a place consecrated, as they believed, by the spirits of the departed.

But the remarkable fact was that the village was not a united community. The unit of Naga society was the Khel or the sept, and each of these was an exogamous groups or "brethren by blood at war with the rest of the world". Rivalry existed between the Khels of the same village. The feuds among the villages and their neighbours have now ceased.

The quarrels between the Khels often resulted in riots and free-fights at the great drinking festivals.

The Nagas of North Cachar had a curious arrangement for mitigating the rancour caused by blood feuds. At stated times, once or twice a year, the whole village assembled at a convenient place, and a general melee took place in which every one fought for his own hand. No weapons were used but severe bruises were inflicted. These never gave cause for ill-feeling, whereas at other times the mere lifting of a hand would be a signal for a blood feud.

The Angamis believed in a Supreme Creator. With this concept was combined animistic worship of the spirits of trees, rocks, and pools of water.

The Aos were even more tradition-bound than the Angami branch of the Nagas. "Each of their villages," says Davis, "is a small republic, and each man is as good as his neighbour. Indeed, it would be hard to find anywhere more democratic communities. Headmen do exist, but their authority is small."

Even in the early days of the British rule the Aos



were known for the kidnapping of slaves. In the old days slaves were generally kindly treated, being considered almost as members of the family, but those who were troublesome were sold to distant savage tribes, among whom the custom of human sacrifice persisted.

They were often made over by one village to another as a means of healing a feud, in satisfaction for any heads which might have been taken. "Slaves paid in this way were invariably slaughtered by the village which received them as an offering to the spirits of the men on their side who had been killed."

The Semas, who are included in the Naga tribe, were more fierce than the Aos. Until late in their history they hated the use of money and the custom of head-hunting prevailed among them. The practice of head-hunting supposedly came from the wilder tribes of Upper Burma who are ethnically related to some hill people of Assam. "Their object in capturing the head of an enemy was to bring into subjection the spirit of the dead man which was believed to accompany his skull to the home of the murderer. Hence, with a perfectly logical grasp of the situation the skull of a stranger was preferred because the spirit did not know its way in a strange land and was less likely to wander."

Among the Nagas, on the contrary, the habit arose from the much less primitive desire of acquiring a trophy.

An old account of the Naga way of head-hunting by Davis says: "All the Naga tribes are on occasions, head-hunters. Any head counts, be it that of a man, a woman or child, and entitles the man who takes it to wear certain ornaments according to the custom of the tribe or the village. Heads were used to be taken often not in fair fight. A common method was for a man to lurk about the water ghat of a hostile village, and kill the first person who came to draw water. Sometimes expeditions on a large-scale were made, several villages

combining for the sake of making a large bag. If the village to be attacked was found prepared, the warriors who had come against it would retire without striking a blow. If, however, it was found that the whole adult population was away in the fields, an attack would be delivered, and as many children and old people as could within a reasonable time be killed would be killed, a retreat being effected before the men of the village attacked could have time to receive the news and return from their fields." However, there is no documentary evidence to support this apparently exaggerated view.

The desire for taking heads was felt strongly by the younger generation until recent times. This was attributed mainly to the women who "are given to laugh at the young bucks at the village festivals who have no heads to their credit." This was in contrast to the tradition among the Bhils of the central hill tract whose women protected the stranger and resented any cruelty or licence on the part of men.

The head-hunting and ruthless disregard of life which characterised the Nagas in the early days naturally checked the social intercourse of the tribes. Among the allied villages, communications were admirably maintained by improving the hill paths and bridging the streams.

But in some places passers-by were interrupted by the savagery of the people. Dr Grierson called them a sample-bag of tribes "among whom the extraordinary divergences of speech, difference of language, not merely of dialect clearly, reflect the reign of terror which the people have endured for countless generations."

Damant writes : "Every tribe, almost every village is at war with its neighbour, and no Naga of these parts dare leave the territory of his tribe without the probability that his life will be the penalty."

Within twenty miles five or six different dialects were often met with. Monosyllabic languages, like that of the Nagas, possessing only works of oral tradition and uncertain rules of pronunciation, changed rapidly and quite independently of each other. This process was facilitated by the robustness of the race.

The tattoo marks, which each successful head-hunter wore, differed in pattern with each tribe, and according to Peal, they afforded a means of recognising strangers. Without such marks and the use of gestures, communication between the branches of the tribes, each speaking a different language, could have been impossible.

The Bachelors' Hall, known among the Nagas as the Dekha-chang or Morang was also found among the Dravidian tribes of the Bengal hills, among the Malane-sians, and elsewhere. This points to the pervasiveness of the Naga culture. Only very young children lived with their parents. Unmarried boys and girls slept in separate houses apart. The young men's hall was the village guardroom. It was built on a platform commanding an extensive view of all the approaches to the village. Here a tribal sentry was posted. He sounded the alarm by beating a hollow tree trunk with a wooden mallet. This wooden drum was tastefully carved, "like the figure-head of a ship." In this hall were preserved the skulls of enemies taken in battle, and the inmates were in charge of the arms of the tribe, which they carefully cleaned and polished. Along both sides lay the sleeping-berths of the young men, and the central space, floored with massive planks, was left open to be used by the brave youths in their dances. Outside were seats where the elders assembled in the evening to watch the youths practising running and putting the stone, amusements in which they delighted. In the girls' house the maidens slept two or three together, and sometimes an old woman was posted there as chaperon.

The Nagas observed elaborate rules of the Genna or taboo. These regulations enjoined the closing of the houses or villages and were enforced on occasions of special manifestations of supernatural powers, or when "gods and goddesses were supposed to communicate directly with their worshippers." Thus a Genna was proclaimed in the event of an earthquake, eclipse, or the burning of a village. Such events were followed by the consultation of omens, and a special purification was carried out to expel the evil spirits which were said to be responsible for the misfortunes. The village or the house was then closed for two or three days. The inhabitants abstained from all labour. Neither going out of the residents nor the entry of any stranger was allowed in the village.

Genna was also declared at the annual ceremony of making a new fire for the village. A sacrifice was offered and the fire, when produced by friction, was first used in burning down the jungle for the sowing of the crops (Jhum). This practice was also followed at the birth of a child, or a domestic animal.

Damant, then district officer of Assam, was once refused a drink in a house because a bitch had produced puppies. A similar taboo was enforced at the death of an important person. The village, in that case, was closed for two or three days.

When the anger of the gods were propitiated, festivals of rejoicing followed. If a member of a family was drowned, crushed by a tree, or killed by a wild beast, the household resorted to a rite of purification. The members abandoned their house with all their property. Everything they possessed was burnt and they kept only enough of clothing to cover their nakedness. They wandered in the jungle for a month, after which the wrath of the gods was supposed to have been mitigated. The taboo extended even to the site of the house. When

another house was to be built, a new place was selected.

Though from the social point of view the Nagas were in a state of savagery they had in other ways attained a fairly high state of culture. Their agricultural knowledge was higher than that of their neighbours and their dress and arms exhibited some artistic taste and skill. They made coarse clothes from the bark fibres of the nettle plant. Their finer fabrics, curiously bordered and marked with triangular patches of red and black, were woven from the cotton which they grew.

All their household vessels were of wood which they carved with daos (knives). Their spears and other arms were excellent specimens of metal work. They made rough pottery, shaped by hand, without the use of the wheel.

Their arms included pole-axe with a short black handle to which was hung a tuft of goat's hair. It was dyed red. Then there was a broad-bladed spear, the shaft of which was covered with coloured hair and a shield of buffalo hide.

Their most important implement was the dao, a multi-purpose heavy, short knife, which was used in war, for carpentry and wood-carving, for felling trees and cutting firewood. They were adepts in laying out 'Pangis,' sharpened stakes of bamboo, along the paths when they retreated before an enemy.

The helmet, made of wicker-work or plaited cane, was conical in shape, about a foot high, and was covered with black or red fur or hair.

Sometimes it was decorated with pieces cut out of large shells.

Distinguished warriors wore the hair of slain enemies. It hung from the ornaments of the helmet and formed a fringe round the face. Women's tresses were preferred because they were longer.

Some Naga warriors wore a special collar on taking the first head. To this boar tusks were added to

commemorate a second victim. After taking a third he might wear an apron covered with cowry shells arranged in a pattern which served as a tally to mark the number of persons he had slain.

The eastern Nagas used a kind of clan tartan. This cloth was made of cotton, dyed black with shades of red, blue, and green, arranged in stripes differing from tribe to tribe. Among the Aos the pattern of the small apron differed from village to village. Their hairdo was also distinctive.

According to Col Dalton, women used simple costume consisting of necklaces and an apron. Sometimes there was no apron. In North Cachar married women had a dress which distinguished them from the maidens of the tribe. Married women left their bosom uncovered, while the virgins wore a piece of cloth tightly folded round the breast. Married women had their long hair plaited and knotted at the back, or sometimes in cascading down the shoulders. Unmarried girls had their hair cut square and brushed down over the forehead up to the eyebrows.

Another remarkable portion of the Naga wardrobe was a wooden appendage resembling a tail, which among the Semas was about 18 inches long. It was decorated with bunches of goat's hair dyed scarlet.

Colonel Woodthorpe writes that the "Naga decorations have a defensive purpose". They were planned to ward off the spear and the axe. Long hair waving about with every movement of the wearer, distracted the eye of the enemy levelling a spear at him and disturbed his aim.

The Bhotiyas of North Assam retained more of the Mongoloid characteristics than the Nagas. Their broad and flat faces, small and oblique eyes, large mouths, short and low noses made them conspicuous. Their young women possessed fine, plump, rosy cheeks,

"healthy and pleasant." Their light olive complexion appeared charming.

The Nagas were animists and the Bhotiyas professed to be Buddhists. But the Buddhism of the Bhotiyas retained many features of the traditional animist faith. Polyandry was in vogue as a recognised institution among them.

Their chief amusement was horse racing. At the starting-post all the riders dismounted and the ponies were flogged into a gallop by a group of men armed with long whips. The rider held on by the mane until the pony started and then he vaulted into his seat. No saddle or pad was allowed. The context was not so much a trial of the animal's speed as a test of the agility and horsemanship of the riders.

It was from tribes skilled in this sport that polo was carried to Assam on the Burma frontier. It was adopted by Europeans from there.

The Lushai Hills, now known as the Mizo Hills, had tribal communities, as ancient as the Nagas or the Garos. They had accomplished a high social organisation and a self-governing system. With ways of life akin to the communities living in the region now known as Nagaland, the Lushais or the Mizos broke with their past largely owing to the dedicated work by Christian missions.

Their past was no less spectacular than that of the other tribal communities like the Angamis, the Semas, the Lhothas, the Aos, the Rengmas, the Sangtams and the Kukis.

The high percentage of literacy among them in recent times and their agitation and rebellion have made them a much talked about socio-political factor in India. We will discuss them in detail in the fourth part of this book.

From the land of the Nagas, and the Bhotiyas, we come to the western Himalayas where the valleys open up easy

routes to the mountainous hinterland. These entries must have been used by the people of the plains from a very early time. Much sanctity is attached to this region which appears in the earliest traditions of the people of the plains. This traditional country north of Kashmir is fascinating. This mountain region was regarded as the home of gods. (It contains some most sacred places of the Hindus.) The original hill people of this region had none of the Naga fierceness and they never raided the plains.

The greatest of these valleys is that of Kashmir, a basin surrounded by lofty mountains, and in the midst a fertile alluvial plain watered by the Jhelum and its tributaries.

Drew's race map shows the wonderful mixture of races occupying the country. To the direct north, near Gilgit one could find the Dards inhabiting the upper valley of the Indus. To the east and the south were Baltis and the Ladakhis. The valley itself was occupied by the Kashmiris, with the Paharis to the south-east, and the outer ring of the hill country was held by the Chibhalis to the north and west, and by the Dogras to the east and south.

The hinterland was occupied by Mongoloid tribes while the more accessible valleys were the home of races most of whom were immigrants from the plains.

The Dards were of the Aryan stock, "broad-shouldered, fair-complexioned, stoutly built, and well proportioned; excellent mountaineers and hill porters fairly goodlooking, with black or brownish hair. Their eyes were either brown or hazel. They spoke a dialect derived from Sanskrit. Further down, it assimilated some Poshtu nuances in contact with the Pathans' pervasive influence. In spite of the rigour of the climate this bold, cheery, independent race, like some of the Indo-Chinese people, held the cow in abhorrence. They did not use



milk or butter, and even refused to burn cowdung."

Further inland there were three races of the Indo-Tibetan kind—the Champas, who led a nomadic life in the higher valleys where no cultivation was possible and the mode of life was pastoral; the Ladhakis who were of Tibetan stock settled in the main and side valleys of the Indus, and the Baltis, of the same stock as the Ladakhis who had spread further down the Indus valley and had been converted to Islam. 'These races bore in their appearance the stamp of their nationality. The Ladakhis were short in stature, with high cheek-bones, from which the face rapidly narrowed downwards. Their chin was small and retreating. The most persistent peculiarity was that outer corners of their brown eyes were drawn out, and the upper eyelids overhung by a fold of the skin above them. Their nose appeared to be pressed into the face, and often depressed at the bridge. The mouth was large and inexpressive, the lips projecting, but not thick. Their black hair was cut close to the front and at the side of the head. The beards and moustaches were scanty.'

The Champas and the Baltis were of the same physical type. The former spent their lives in tents, wandering about with their flocks in search of pastures as the snow yielded to the increasing heat.

This area was the meeting ground of three religions—the Dars were Mohammedans, with outlying sections which followed Buddhism; the Ladakhis and the Champas were mostly Buddhist, the Baltis had many Hindus among them.

Towards the Kulu and Kangra valleys one met the Rathis, the Chiraths, and the Kanets. Strictly speaking, they were not tribal people. They were mostly Rajputs who had 'fallen in the world' and had taken to a life of agriculture subordinating their talent to the Rajputs and other land-owning castes.

Two other races of the western hills deserve special mention—the Nagas and the Khasas.

The first community is different from the race of the same name in Assam. A European scholar gathered that "one branch of them was created to people Patala, or the underworld, where they still reign in splendour. An ancient poem describes the city of Naga Raja, which contained two thousand million Naga Rajas, all of whose wives were of surpassing beauty. The city supplied more jewels than any person in the world had ever seen, and there was a lake there in which flowed the water of life. In it all the serpents used to bathe." The other, the terrestrial branch, was said to have occupied a large part of Northern India in prehistoric times.

Dr Oldham attempted to show that they and the "Asuras", a kindred race, were non-Aryans who opposed the Aryans. The defied Nagas were the sainted ancestors of this group. It is known that they were serpent worshippers. Whether the Nagas constituted an ethnic group or were merely an aggregate of more than one tribe united by a common faith is debatable.

The Khasas were supposed to be one of the Aryan tribes driven by later immigrants to take shelter in the hills. Their successors were the Khasiyas of Kumaun. Some Gurkhas also lived in the areas on the borders of India with Nepal. Noteworthy among them were the Newars who were partly Mongoloid and partly Aryan.

## The Khasis and the Garos

**T**HE far north-eastern corner of India is a store house of nationalities. The fertile valley of the Brahmaputra which intersects it, was raided for many centuries from Burma on the one side, and from the Indian plains on the other, and the raiders left behind them an abundant store of races, religions and languages.

Thus there are ancient collections of humanity. There were the lairs to which older nations had retreated before the pressure exerted by an abundant and more resourceful population upon the productive areas fringing the river.

Apart from the Nagas and their tributaries, the Garos and the Khasis were two other most powerful tribal units. Colonel Dalton's work, "The Descriptive Ethnography of Bengal," census reports, articles in the journals of the Asiatic Society and other societies, gave colonial but interesting accounts of these tribes. But the information available is scattered and fragmentary.

British officials and missionaries who came in close contact with the tribes wrote with interest and facility which come from writing on the spot. Major Playfair's name is outstanding among the historians and sociologists of the Garos.

Inhabiting the outermost end of the mountain promontory which runs out into the rice land of Bengal, the Garos were the first mountaineers with whom the people and the Indian and foreign rulers of Bengal came in contact. They are mentioned frequently in the

early records of the British rule. Although they are generally mentioned with disapprobation as a truculent, obstinate people much given to harrying the plains, much of the old notions about them springs from the fact that in their desire to save their identity, they often engaged in feuds with the ambitious proprietors of the plains villages which fringed their hills asserting that their rights originally extended over these villages and that they had been dispossessed by fraud and by the assistance which these proprietors had been able to secure from the former rulers of Bengal.

The British Government laid down a boundary line for strategic reasons and the Garos refused to accept it. They saw in it the British Government's desire to aid and abet these proprietors. They did not accept that their claims to practical rights over those villages had been extinguished by lapse of time.

For them tradition did not fade before prescription. Rice land of the plains in contact with the stony slopes which they cultivated by jhuming or tedious terracing, and persistency of their ideas were the cause of their exploitation by lawyers of Calcutta who did not bring the claims before the courts but fostered hopes among the Garos of their recovery to make money.

According to historians the Garos are of the stock known as Tibeto-Burman, which drifted into Eastern India and Burma across the plateau of Tibet

Their language still retains some similarity with Tibetan, and some of their ideas, such as the sentimental value they attach to gongs, are identical with those prevailing in Tibetan villages.

Their language in its general construction and in a few survivals of vocabulary, shows traces of affinity with the Turkish language. It supports the theory that from some spot in Central Asia a vast migration was impelled, possibly by growing scarcity of rainfall.

Tradition bound and unwilling to change too rapidly, the Garos still talk of their migration from the uplands of the Himalayas to the valley of Assam. Tenacity of oral tradition in races without a medium of written communication can be seen elsewhere too.

The main feature of the Garo economy is the surviving influence of the matriarchate. It is the woman who owns property. Perhaps the Garos have, in this respect, been influenced by the practice among their neighbours, the Khasis, between whom and the Garos there is evidence of inter marriage.

Amongst the Khasis the matriarchate is a living and active institution, influencing profoundly social and political life. A man's heir is not his son but his sister's son. So amongst the Garos it is to his sister's son that a man looks for the guardianship of his widow and children. We will describe other aspects of their life and culture in the next part.

Considering their historical and political background the progress of the Khasi race in the midst of a great population most of whom belong to the Tibeto-Burman stock and that of their languages and institutions has been amazing. Many comparative philologists and ethnologists have been attracted by the strength of their civilization and culture. Dr Grierson's *Linguistic Survey of India* and the valuable work of Mr J R Logan who in a series of papers published at Singapore around 1857 in the *Journal of the Indian Archipelago* showed the ties between the Khasis and certain communities further down in India and in other parts of Asia. They mentioned among others the Mons or Talaiings of Pegu and Tenasserim, the Khmers of Cambodia, and a majority of the inhabitants of Annam. They even discovered, with the help of the vocabularies furnished by Bishop Bigandet, the akinness between the Khasis and the Palaungs, a tribe inhabiting one of the Shan states in

the north-east of Mandalay of the middle Salween."

Research showed that the Mon-Khmer group of Indo-China, to which the Khasis belong, was in some way connected with the large linguistic family in the Indian Peninsula once called the Kolarians, but now more generally known as the Mundas, who inhabit the hilly region of Chhotanagpur and parts of the Satpura range in the present Madhya Pradesh. Of these tribes the main are the Santhals, the Mundas, and the Korkus. In physical characters they appear different from the Cambodian people often referred to as Indo-Chinese Khasis but the points of resemblance in their languages and in some of their institutions are noticeable.

Prof Ernst Kuhn of Munich did important work on the languages and peoples of India. He and Pater W. Schmidt of Vienna, in his work "*Die Mon-Khmer Völker ein Bindeglied Zwischen Voilkern Zentralasiens,*" brought out the salient features of the Khasi phonology. The latter has established the relationship of Khasi not only to the Mon-Khmer languages, but also to Nicobarese and several dialects spoken by tribal people in the Malay mountain regions.

In the Linguistic Survey four dialects are dealt with — the standard literary form founded on the language of Cherrapunji, Pnar or Synteng of Jowai, War spoken in the valleys on the southern face of the hills, and Lyngngam spoken in the tract adjacent to the Garos on the west. A fifth, that of Jirang of Mynnar, spoken in the extreme north was found later by Major Gurdon.

The Khasi language is the only member of the Mon-Khmer family which possesses genders distinguishing all nouns as masculine and feminine. Like the matrilineal institutions among them the feminine nouns preponderate. The pronouns of the second (me pha) and third persons (u ka) have forms for the sexes in the singular but in the plural only one is used (phi ki). This is the

plural form of the feminine singular.

The vigorous and sturdy Khasis, who have preserved their independence and their ancestral institutions through many centuries in the face of the attractions offered by the alien forms of culture around them, have a well-organised social system. In the plains although much praise is showered on the status of women—an ancient shloka says that God dwells there where women are duly honoured—they are respected nowhere more than in the Khasi areas. Women are the foundation of their society. The mother is the head and the source, and the only bond of union of the family. In the Synteng country, she is the only owner of real property and through her alone is heritance transmitted. The father has no kinship with his children who belong to their mother's clan. What the man earns goes to his own matriarchal stock. After his death his bones are deposited in the cromlech of his mother's kin.

Veneration of ancestors is the foundation of tribal piety. There are numerous ways among the Khasis to express respect for women. The memorial stones set up to perpetuate the memory of the dead are called after the woman who represents the clan (*maw kynthei*) and the standing stones ranged behind them are dedicated to the male kinsmen on the mother's side.

Most of the spirits to whom propitiation is offered by the Khasis of traditional faith are female.

The powers of nature, even the terrible ones like those of sickness and death, are female.

The main protectors of the household are goddesses with whom the first father of the clan, Thawlang, is also worshipped.

Women act as priestesses. In the state of Khyrim the high priestess and actual head of the state used to be a woman, "who combined in her person sacerdotal and regal functions."

The traditional religion is based on animism embodying the superstitions and beliefs of the simple folk.

Sociologists have surprisingly found among them identical method of extispicium which was in use among the Romans and the practice of egg-breaking said to be in vogue in ancient Hellas.

The Khasi memorials of rough stone, of the same style and character as the menhirs and cromlechs found in Western Europe, Northern Africa, and Western Asia are spectacular monuments. Referring to them Prof G. G. Swell says :—

Anthropologists and linguists, who have studied their physical features, language, customs and traditions, consider them to be the kin of the Khmer people of Cambodia who between the eighth and twelfth centuries ruled over the greatest empire in South-East Asia and built the enormous and breath-taking stone structures of Angkor Vat before which, it is said, the splendours of Greece and Rome pale into insignificance."

He poses the question : Did the Khmer people go to Cambodia from North-Eastern India or did the Khasis come to the Khasi Hills from Cambodia when the Khmer Empire suddenly broke up and disappeared in the twelfth century?



# 18

## War or Peace ?

**T**HE image of the tribal people fighting inter-tribal wars, resolving family feuds, indulging in cannibalism and head-hunting, though with some basis in the past, is often presented with a malice by those who have a warped view of human history and development.

What did the tribal people fight for ? Food, land, honour or just lust for fighting, thirst for blood ?

In tribal history there are two extremes of myth : one projects the image of the tribal people as savage, fierce, quarrelsome, untrustworthy and dangerous while the other shows them as ignorant children, incapable of learning or taking care of themselves with dignity and civility. Historians have now began to realise how the tribals were exploited. Their meagre resources of land and crop served the first settlers in their neighbourhood, their skill in hunting and fighting inclement nature was absorbed by non-tribals and it made them live and grow. Their methods of warfare were learnt and turned against them. But still they remained "savage and rude" in the eyes of their "civilizers".

Investigators have not sufficiently discussed the reason for the warlike behaviour of many tribes. They have superficially gone into the way of tribal warfare and drawn the conclusion that war, not peace, has been the motivating factor of tribal progress. This attitude is unfair.

There was a whole Monomotapa empire in tribal Africa. It was later divided into four kingdoms—those of Mono-

motapa, Quiteve, Sedanda and Checangs. When the emperor found the administration of the empire too heavy a task for himself, he divided the empire into convenient administrative units.

In 1607 the king of Monomotapa, faced with the revolt of powerful vassals, acceded to a Portuguese request to help him save his position. They did so with men from Sena and Tete fighting under Diogo Simoes. Simoes tricked the king into agreeing to give to the Portuguese first all the silver mines and then all the mines of gold and other metals of his kingdom.

There was a brutal war in which countless men recruited by the Portuguese were killed. But Portuguese historians put forth the following account :

"Having made this donation, the army of the emperor set out with our Kaffirs, vassals of Tete, and the other Portuguese with Diogo Simoes in the rear. The army of the Monomotapa went forward in the order aforesaid, of which the enemies were not informed, and therefore they attacked it in the van, as they had done before, but finding the resistance different from what they expected, and that our people were killing them like hens, they turned their backs, and our people pursuing them, wounded and killed as many as they overtook."

But steady Portuguese encroachments met with resistance the tribal chiefs who loved liberty and who were proud of their rich and ancient land. During that period, all news of South-East Africa passed via India and we learn from the "Advices of Goa" that Portuguese used their treacherous professions of friendship and help as well as early alliances as the door to large-scale usurpation of territory by force and deceit. The independence of Monomotapa was largely destroyed.

Then Monomotapa awoke to the truth. In a fierce struggle, the Portuguese were vanquished and their

ambassador, sent by their captain at Mozambique, lost his life.

This was the nature of wars tribal people have fought down the ages. Conscious of their honour and culture, they have not turned down offers of friendship and co-existence but when their pride has been hurt, they have fought to vindicate their honour.

The Portuguese, in their inglorious defeat at Monomotapa, saw a reply to treachery but their historians called the king of Monomotapa vicious and ungrateful and accused him of robbing the Portuguese. They sought to justify their pronouncements and pranks by quoting their later victory secured again by dividing the tribals and mounting sinister, unethical attacks.

Similar incidents abound in India. The Nagas are invariably described by foreign historians as warlike people. They do not care to look into their peaceful social order, strict laws for punishing crime, records of hospitality shown to European missionaries and officials despite many instances of intrusion into their time-honoured ways of life and belief.

In the Khasi Hills one hears the story of U Tirot Singh, the valiant Syiem of Nongkhlaw. The British had, by 1824, tightened their grip over lower Assam. The Agent of Governor General David Scott in his ambitious bid to build roads to the Khasi Hills from lower Assam, tricked the syiem into a treaty. He promised to set up a sanatorium at Nongkhlaw for the welfare of the people. But when the purpose of the British request became clear, the syiem became vigilant. He realised that the whole attempt of the Agent was aimed at enslaving the free tribal people and then to grab his territory. He resisted and attacked the British station at Nongkhlaw in 1829. In the fighting two British officers and at least 60 men were killed. The Khasis were

subjected to sabotage and pre-meditated attacks. They, too, suffered but did not give up. There was a long struggle between them and the British. U Tirot Singh, the patriot and matchless mighty man, remained firm in his resolution to guard the freedom of the majestic mountains. He was banished to Dacca in 1833 where he was tempted and lured. But he preferred privations to the barter of freedom and died. As long as he lived his mind was in a state of ceaseless war against a scheming enemy.

Another great tribal leader, U Sajar Nangli, following differences with his king whom he served as a commander of his forces, left the Khasi Hills with a large number of followers and went eastward. When one sees the sky-touching structures of Angkor Vat one is inclined to think that perhaps they were the "Khmer people's expression of nostalgia for their mountainous homeland in the humid heat of the Mekong Delta." How did the migrants become a part of a new land? Not by brute force but by adaptability and peaceful co-existence leading to their identification as a vital community is the obvious answer.

# 19

## Expression of Tribal Genius

**T**HERE is an irresistible spell in tribal life. It springs from nature both human and elemental. The vast tribal world, in its fragmented and scattered identity all over the earth, has often remained separated from other sources of ideas and men who have influenced the destiny of the mankind. But it has still exerted a potent influence on the world at large as a source of strength and nourisher of thoughts of progress. It has affected for good the history of the human race.

There is an ageless grandeur about the expression of the tribal genius, a grandeur evolved by isolated people through activity and energy.

The story of the search for expression by the tribal people of their genius is something like the story of fetching fire from heaven or that of the mythological Raktabeej, every drop of whose blood gave rise to a new being. It is a struggle and an adventure. When a hut was built after telling trees, gathering leaves and twigs for a thatched roof and walls, life force recorded an expression of the victory of man over nature. When sharp spears were moulded out of crude iron, a new feather was added to the tribesman's cap. When rhythm pervaded the being of a maiden and she swung herself in a dance of joyous abandon, the earth became grateful at the transmutation of energy into a translucent lilt. Orchids and cacti were united by a bond which thrilled their common Mother Earth. The tribal dance continued redeeming the past and spanning space in a broad sweep.

One has to look at their cromlechs and monuments of rough stone symbolising the ruggedness of their life to know the extent and the vitality of their genius. One has to hear their drum beats to know the urge of their soul. And one has to sit through their religious ceremonies to feel how life, when immune from sickening comfort, yearns for a spiritual communion and solace in contemplation of the unknown in a simple way. Even their superstitions make sense if you look into their origin.

Cave paintings, multi-coloured gay garments and zest for life indicate the immense vitality of the tribal people.

The Jaintias express their joy of victory over disease by celebrating Ka Bah Dein Khlam. It is an occasion which is preceded by abstention and sacrifice. Each family gets a pole ready to drive away the cholera demon. In a symbolic ritual on the third day people beat their houses with these poles. This symbolises the final expulsion of the dangerous disease, the demon, from the neighbourhood. July is the time for it. Plainspeople know that summer is the choicest period of cholera. It still kills thousands in Bihar, Bengal and U.P. in these months owing to the presence of infection-fostering factors in villages and towns.

The whole celebration is an expression of the people's resolution in a highly artistic form to end disease. Such is the stuff of which subtle strands in vital cultures are made. It speaks of science and sense through poetry in an understandable range of mythology. The festival lasts a week. The concluding function is marked by great pageantry. "Raths" are taken out for immersion to the tune of scintillating music produced by drums and pipes. Women and children dressed in their best clothes participate in the immersion ceremony performed in Wah Eit Nar, a pool. With the drowning of disease and its fear,

a new period of healthy life is ushered in. The message of this festival is the perpetual quest of well-being by the entire community.

This is an example. Most of the traditional rituals and festivities bring to the people messages of a happier and healthier life, of the well-being of the community.

The tribal ways of respecting women, of dispensing justice, of ending disputes and of self-government all indicate the basic soundness of the way of life developed according to the needs of the community in accordance with the demands of time.

The name, Meghalaya, in itself is a great expression. It refers to the totality of the culture of India, being chosen from the time-honoured vocabulary of Sanskrit, the mother of many languages. It lifts the concept of a state above linguistic and regional prejudices and indicates the basic physical condition of the land.

Only a sky-like free and unfettered intellect can offer such an example of universality in political matters by mixing tradition with the spirit of the age and keeping narrow views out of broad human considerations.

Many tribal languages do not have developed scripts. Therefore, despite the development of their vocabularies and richness of ideas among their poets, musicians and story-tellers, they continue to be termed as dialects. But some tribal literatures have powerful works of abiding value. "Utendi wa Inkishafi" a poem written by Abdullah ben Nasir of Pate, in Swahili is an example of the matic richness of tribal literature. It was written about 150 years ago. Its translation by Lyndon Harris bears the title "The Soul's Awakening" :—

How many rich men have you seen  
Who shone like the sun  
Who had control of the weapons of war  
And stored up silver and gold ?

**All the world paid them homage  
And their world was straight ahead of them.  
They walked with heads held disdainfully  
And eyes closed in scorn.**

**Swinging their arms and arching their necks  
While behind and in front crowds accompanied them.  
Everywhere they live there are seats of honour,  
And troops of soldiers attend them.**

**Their lighted houses were aglow  
With lamps of crystal and brass.  
The nights were as the day ;  
Beauty and honour surrounded them.**

**They decorated (their houses) with choice porcelain,  
And every goblet was engraved;  
And in the midst they put crystal pitchers  
Amongst the decorations that glittered . . . .**

Now they lie in a town of finger's span  
with no fine curtains nor cushions,  
And their bodies are destroyed  
For the constraint of the grave has come upon  
them . . .

**Their lighted mansions are uninhabited,  
The young of bats cling up above.  
You hear no whisperings, nor shoutings,  
Spiders crawl over the beds.**

The wall niches for porcelain in the houses  
Are now the resting place for nestling ;  
Owls hoot within the house . . . .

**It is not difficult to find such pieces of literature.**



The ingredients of tribal expressions include vivid imagination, sharp wit, understatement of the introvert, a deep sense of lyricism and a simple way of phrasing things all wrapped up in an attitude towards life that recognizes its absurdity and realises its tragedies, disappointments, sorrows and death as man's lot.

Such ingredients leave a lot of room for sentimentality and charity.

They imply a strong feeling for religion and the supernatural, a respect for tradition and folklore and an instinctive regard for whatever is natural rather than artificial. No one is quicker to spot artificiality than a tribal and no one can be more caustically critical of the phony—including the phony tribal.

## **PART III**

# **CULTURAL PATTERNS**

***Racial Confluence***

***Environment and the tribal man***

***Social patterns, religions, superstitions  
beliefs and customs***

***Matrilineal structure — the law of  
inheritance***

***Fountain springs of tribal art***

## Racial Confluence

**T**RADITIONAL tribal culture has two sources of origin, development and perpetuation--religion and social organisations.

Tribal culture is based on aesthetic intuition which comes quite close to religious vision conceived under pastoral circumstances. The tribal genius is essentially pastoral genius tempered with imagination and romanticism rather than with discursive logic or scholasticism. Its expressions stir the strings of the heart.

It cast off the dull cloak of logic and ostentatious rationality when it felt that at Tataara Rabuga's command the world was created. He cured wasting diseases and brought good cheer to life. The Garos thought of him and worshipped him as a spiritual force living with them in their pastoral homes. The power of Chorabudi protected their crops and trees. He was offered the first flowers of the season and the first ears of corn. Saljong, the god of fertility, represented the cheerful message of sunshine and the smiles the fields wear before harvest.

Scholars term such spiritual manifestations of intuition, imagination and simple pastoral faith as animism. May be, they are not wrong but the message of the religious aspect of tribal culture is far deeper than what animism implies--the doctrine of the anima mundi based on the phenomenon of animal life produced by an immaterial soul.

In tribal consciousness spiritualism transcends materialism and goes far beyond the mere attribution of living

soul to inanimate objects. It intuitively experiences the spiritual basis of all creations and the processes of this experience do not encourage any intellectual quarrel or dogma and schism. It is pure faith.

### **METEMPSYCHOSIS**

The concept of a benevolent creator and ancestor worship, the fertility cult and various representations in stone and wood depict the eagerness of the tribal mind to grasp the spiritual essence of the creative process. It shares with established non-tribal faiths the doctrine of metempsychosis or transmigration of the soul and thus looks beyond the materialistic curtains of possession and acquisition to continuity of life, to life after death, to eternity. This wider perspective of religion is not peculiar to the Garos.

### **THE KHASI PANTHEON**

The Khasi pantheon of gods indicates the basic foundation of the culture of that community. It has both good and bad spirits. U Blei Nongpha, the creator, is an incarnation of kindness. U Lei Longing protects the household and U Lei Longspah brings wealth to his devotees. But then there are angry spiritual powers like U Rih, who brings malaria, and U Ka Khlam who brings cholera. Offerings are made to both kinds. The Jaintias, we have seen earlier, have a festival dedicated to the deity who has command over cholera.

The acts of offering made to the good as well as evil spiritual powers show how tolerant is tribal culture. Tribal culture treats life as a mixture of good and evil and thus takes note of the basic reality of all human beha-

viour. The universe is an enigma in which sunny lines on the horizon are often engulfed by the shadows of clouds. Life in its exalted, intricate moments is a mystery in which happy streaks of smiles are washed away by unseen forces unceremoniously in an avalanche of tears. The tribal view of culture, so far as it is based on religion, is a confluence of idealism and realism, of good and evil, of tragedy and comedy. A tribal enjoys the stormy situations because they often lead to a halcyon ending.

In its social aspect this culture, many-stranded and liberal, looks beyond the inhibiting limitations imposed by the two enemies of culture : provincialism and philistinism. The people of Mon-Khmer origin brought in different social traits in their personalities than those of Indo-Burman origin. But after their individual fights against the odds of the elements to hold on to the land they chanced upon and against one another, they made a common cause of their struggle.

### **E PLURIBUS UNUM**

When the rocky soil fought them back, they united and made it yield its strength. Their land was no gift to them. They had to cultivate it and fight and die for it. To make it gentle and smooth, they had to grow tough muscles and strong, resolute minds. To subjugate the wilderness of the secretive forests they had to conquer fear—the fear of fear—, laziness and the natural tendency to comforts. They had to unite. The Garos, the Khasis, the Jaintias and in the neighbourhood, various septs of the Nagas and the Lushais had to transform a seeming racial anarchy into new multi-racial social units rooted differently but organised for meeting the challenges of life in a broad functional order. Such a social order is

essentially what the Americans call in their motto *E Pluribus Unum*.

This unity of socially different entities is another aspect of the tribal cultural confluence. The first cultural flowers of the tribal soil on the plants of their social organisation—the divined matriarchate, chiefship, syiemship, systems of dispensation of justice, ways of rewarding valour and honouring initiative, the organised manner of performing religious rites and duties and celebrating festivals.

It is often said that the way the tribal people stick to their tradition and show concern for preservation of their ancient social customs indicates inertia and lack of will to change with changing times. It is a wrong guess.

Ancient tribal organisations are strikingly different from the institutions of our naked society, laid grotesquely in the glare of external observation and restraint. In the former, there is an enduring charm, almost like that of a work of art because they value the privacy and dignity of man and embody his ambitions and feelings ; in the latter, society is constantly pushing in on individuals. It is worse than regimentation. It is invasion of the individual by an extra-social system passing for a social order. It means loss of liberty which, in the words of Justice Learned Hand of America, lies in the hearts of men and women and when it dies there, no constitution, no law, no court can save it.

Nothing shows a decline in creative force in such a clear manner as loss of interest on the part of individuals comprising a community in social institutions which govern them. Those who helped social institutions evolve treated themselves as their raw material. When institutions were evolved, they became instruments of further evolution of a higher kind—the evolution of mind and spirit for attaining happiness. When people cease

to care deeply for such institutions, they cease to represent them or interpret them with insight or power.

The tribal people have not ceased to preserve their feelings for their institutions. The Garos, the Khasis and the Jaintias respect the matrilineal structure because it represents their feelings that the mother is the source of the race, a definite source that gives all the best that life needs to grow and prosper.

They look upon their festivities with a childlike delight, and their machinery of justice with respect. What seems commonplace to outsiders is perpetually novel to them because it comes to their help and renews its appeal by its utility and efficacy. To this kind of spirit of looking at things nothing becomes stale and hackneyed ; everything remains fresh and significant. The tribal social world refuses to grow old in feeling and, therefore, it is not incapable of producing values on spiritual lines. Its expression of concern for its institutions exhibits their unwearied vitality and utility.

Tribal culture, in its essence, is a culture expressing itself through action.

In this respect it is pertinent to examine the role of a tribesman. He cannot be provincial in outlook. He enjoys a wider citizenship. He is proud of it. It has been beautifully summed up by Hamilton Wright : "The man of provincial tastes and ideas owns the acres, the man of culture commands the landscape. He knows the world beyond the hills. He sees the great movement of life from which the village seems almost shut out. He shares those inclusive experiences which come to each age and give each age a character of its own. He is in fellowship and sympathy with the smaller community at his doors but he belongs also to that greater community which is coterminus with humanity itself. He is not disloyal to his immediate surroundings when he leaves them for exploration, travel and discovery. He is fulfill-

ing that law of life which conditions true valuation of that into which one is born upon clear perception of that which one must acquire for himself."

The ideal tribal is a man of culture. A Jaintia, although belonging to a smaller community than a Khasi, is not despised but is treated as an equal in social and political activities. The taint of tantrism on the Jaintia faith is not a cause of communal violence in the United Khasi and Jaintia Hills. The Garos, with their leaders, sat with the Khasis and the Jaintias and fought for their political and economic rights. They, acting together, brought Meghalaya into being. Racial rivalries and neighbourhood feuds were caused by economic reasons. When the economy took primarily off from the level of concern towards the stage of sufficiency, such aberrations declined and finally stopped.

The people of Meghalaya represent that craving for deeper knowledge and wider experience which is the primary stuff that goes into the making of history. The variety and diversity of the social and racial phenomena of this region get a deeper meaning at the cultural confluence from which arises the dream of a rich and full life and surges forth towards the richer and fuller ocean of the composite culture of India. Mountains are the source of nourishment for all the seas and the oceans.



## Environment and the Tribal Man

**R**ACIAL groups settled in a given area follow a pattern : they arrive, they get accepted by the area and they are absorbed by it. This process is governed by the environment of which there are three major factors : the mountain ranges, the river system and the climate, including rainfall. The Himalayas are the chief source of the snow-fed rivers of India. They stretch across about 1,500 miles along the northern frontier of the country. The varying conditions of Himalayan orography have deeply affected the ethnology of the region.

For many years in the east the difficult forest infested terrain made communication almost impossible between the hills and the plains. To the west, the fertile valleys provided routes to the northern hinterland. This area has been the abode of many migrant races and communities.

The eastern region, whose lower hills are the home of the people of Meghalaya, have always presented numerous challenges to its inhabitants. Life there has been a perpetual struggle. It has made great demands on man's capacity to earn his bread. Soil has been meagre and health has required protection from the forces of nature and disease. It has been nature's protectorate unwilling to yield a passage to large armies. This is why invasion was almost impossible from this side. The eastern gap where the Brahmaputra—literally the son of Brahma—forced its way through the solid mountain

system, lent itself benevolently to the Tibeto-Burman races and allowed them to enter.

The Garos belong to this group. The area in which they settled came to be known later as the Garo district. This district corresponds roughly to the geographical region of the Garo Hills which form the westernmost part of the Shillong plateau. The young folded mountains of the Himalayan foothills on the north and the Assam-Burma ranges on the east loom large nearby. It forms the outlying block of the extremely ancient stable formations of peninsular India.

### THE ABODE OF CLOUDS

These formations include archæan quartziten and schist with granite intrusions. The plateau makes a barrier through which the Brahmaputra has flowed directly upto several hundred miles westward before inclining southwards to culminate into the Bay of Bengal. The plateau occasionally rises as high as 5,000 feet or more and drops steeply over the Brahmaputra valley on the north and the west, and to the plains on the south. On the advance of the monsoon, masses of clouds strike the lower summits and dissolve into torrential rains. Meghalaya, the Abode of Clouds—is an appropriate name for this region.

The unusually high rainfall leads to a luxuriant growth of forests which are rich in minerals. Coal and limestone are present in large quantities. There are indications of the presence of petroleum also. The Garos, with their Tibeto-Burman origin, owe a tribute to this mountainous land for giving them a home down the ages and the region owes the Garos eternal gratitude for giving it a place in human history. The hills have given the inhabitants the essential quality of hard work and tolerance. Unlike the plains people, for whom agriculture

is an easy way of life, these hill people have won, tamed and cultivated the soil taking great pains and fought out beasts and the weather to exist

Owing to their adaptability and initiative the migrants are likely to have absorbed the sparse population of the indigenous stock. The relationship of the Garos to the Rabhas, the Kacharis and the Tipperas is evident. This indicates the desire of the Garos to communicate with a wider range of people outside their own limited mountain home and their propensity for self perpetuation.

The atmosphere and the locale gave the Garos the tendency to keep the land as community property. It was their primary possession earned by labour and made useful by tireless experiments. When men went out in search of livelihood women conquering fear and dangers looked after their homes, brought up the future fighters for land and life and thus earned and elevated their position as the most respectable entity of the race. The matriarchate in its revered form owes much to the environment. The shifting cultivation, often rendered unproductive by the emaciating influence of cotton-growing, has kept the value of land and consequently that of materialism rather low in the estimation of the people. The system of compulsory cross cousin marriage was also influenced by geographical limitations and so was the tight system of dispensing justice. If the rule of law becomes slack or less liberal than what it of necessity ought to be, the internal solidarity of a localised community eventually withers away threatening its very existence.

The Khasi and Jaintia Hills, with an approximate area of about five and a half thousand miles comprise two adjacent highland systems which form a single massif between the Brahmaputra valley and the Surma valley. The massif consists of a series of steep east-west ridges with elevated tablelands between them. On the

side mountains rise precipitously from the Surma valley and form a plateau which is four thousand to six thousand feet above the sea-level. This plateau has given Meghalaya its beautiful seat of government—Shillong. It lies in this plateau at 4,900 feet. Behind it is the magnificent Shillong range. Cherrapunji, with its heavy rainfall, is known all over the world. On the north there are similar but lower plateaux. The variety and number of plants are amazing.

The orchids, which are particularly prolific, explain the passion of the people of the region for flowers and their excellence in natural decorations.

### **TALL TREES TOUGH MEN**

At 3,000 feet the indigenous pine grows abundantly. The tall trees present a befitting background for the tough men who have the ruggedness of mountains in their muscles and the rush of the rivers in their veins.

The highest ridges bear oaks and chestnuts pointing to the quality of greatness which is acquired only after rising high—above the drudgery and dissipation of lower pulls. The area is rich in mineral wealth. Iron ore and sulfurous tertiary coal have been found and the hills will yield more of their secrets to the endeavours of their children when Meghalaya takes big strides to prove that its dependence for food and financial resources on the plains is not a chronic drag. When the resources are properly tapped, the region will not only be financially self-sufficient but also contribute substantially in mineral wealth and money to the well-being of the nation.

The environment has also influenced the food habits of the people. Wet rice, grown with comparative ease in the valley's bottom and terraced gardens, provides the main subsistence. Jhum, the wasteful method of

cultivation, was in the beginning the only convenient way to grow foodgrains. There was meagre soil and little experience and those who grew food in ashes were certainly more enterprising than those who loved to live on others' labour, on shop-supplied loaves and fishes. Formerly the district was famous for oranges for which the principal markets lay in the Sylhet area, now in East Pakistan.

### **INFLUENCE ON SPIRITUAL LIFE**

The influence of the surroundings led the people to nature-worship, pastoralism and animism. The simplicity of the milieu drew devoted men of god most of whom, despite the inhibiting pressure from the alien rulers to act as instruments of imperialist expansionism, brought good cheer, light and science to the isolated region braving great odds and seeking to be understood through the slow but sincere process of the brotherhood of man. The enlightenment in these hills is largely due to the work of missionaries—more notably those of the Baptist Church Mission.

The open-heartedness of the people owes its growth to their open-air life.

Now the creatures of environment are becoming the creators of new values of life and politics. It is only natural that while thinking of a name for the new state they did not forget the showers that sing while they work or play, the thunders that proclaim the majesty of their perennial culture and the clouds that crest the mighty mountains sometimes dark like sorrows and sometimes bright like smiles.

# 22

## Social Patterns, Religions, Superstitions and Beliefs

**A**S we have seen in the chapter on culture, the traditional faith of the Garos is generally animistic. The entire life of a man is controlled by various spirits or deities. They are both good and bad. This acceptance of the element of evil gives the Garo religious way of life breadth and logic.

Animism presupposes the existence in man of some force or spirit which, after death, wends its way to an appointed place. It dwells for some time before being re-incarnated. Sin in one life affects the form of incarnation in the next.

Animism is thus a basis of popular beliefs.

"All the many movements and changes perpetually taking place in the world of things were", says Dr Jevons, "explained by the primitive man with the theory that every object which has activity enough to affect him in any way is animated by a life and will like his own."

"It divides", writes Prof Taylor, who, perhaps, invented the term animism, "into two great dogmas forming part of one consistent doctrine : first, concerning the souls of individual creatures capable of continued existence after the death or destruction of the body ; second, concerning other spirits, upward to the rank of powerful deities. Spiritual beings are held to affect or control the events of the material world, and man's life here and hereafter ; and it being considered that they

hold intercourse with men and receive pleasure or displeasure from human actions, the belief in their existence leads naturally, and it might also be said inevitably, sooner or later to active reverence and propitiation."

Thus animism, in its full development, includes the belief in the presence of a soul and in a future state. Seeking to explain the ways of the deities and subordinate spirits, these doctrines result in some kind of active worship.

### **WORLD OF SPIRITS**

The hillman of traditional faith usually thinks that he is environed by a world of spirits which control all the conditions of his life. These spirits affect him more for evil than for good and those that are malignant in their nature require special propitiation while those that are benevolent are accepted as normal, and receive only slight and infrequent worship.

The hillman, however, generally distinguishes between the spirits which animate the natural objects which surround him and the tribe of ghosts and spirits not embodied in the forms of nature which control his life

In the first category come natural phenomena the movements and peculiarities of which are supposed to be due to an indwelling spirit agency like the powers of nature. These are the first phenomena which attract the attention of the simple folk. First in order come the sun, the moon and the planets.

Rivers and springs are believed to flow under the inspiration of an indwelling spirit which is generally benign. Bathing brings the sinner or the man polluted by taboo into communion with this spirit and makes him clean in a "moral" sense.

Mountains are naturally regarded with awe and are supposed to be spirit-haunted.

(Tree-worship forms a large part of the animistic beliefs of the people of the plains and many trees have been adopted into the worship of the higher gods.)

According to Playfair the following are some of the salient features of the traditional Garo faith :

(1) Tatara Rabuga is the creator, at whose command the world was made by two lesser spirits, Nostu-Nopantu and Machi.

He is looked upon as the greatest of the spirits. His special mission with regard to the welfare of man is curing of wasting diseases like various kinds of persistent fever.

(2) Chorabudi is a benign spirit, the protector of crops. Before partaking of the first fruits of the season, such as corn, millet, and melons, a small quantity of these is always offered to him.

(3) Nostu-Nopantu is the deity who, at the command of Tatara-Rabuga, fashioned the earth with the help of Machi.

(4) Saljong is the god of fertility. He is represented by the sun, and is worshipped because all crops are in his care, and without his favour no harvest would be reaped. The great festival of the year, Wangala, is celebrated in his honour, but the actual sacrifice to him is offered in the fields before the village festival begins. A cock is killed, its blood is sprinkled on the sacrificial altar, a little liquor is poured out on the ground in front of it, and the worshipper then returns to the village for the Wangala rejoicings.

(5) Goera is the god of strength, and the causer of thunder and lightning. He is prayed to for health and strength after long illnesses. Sacrifice is always offered to him at the foot of a tree, and a pig, a fowl or a duck may be the offering.

(6) Kalkame is Goera's brother. He is the spirit who holds in his hands the lives of all men. To him prayers



are offered in the Asongtata or Asongroka ceremony. He is entreated to keep the people of the village safe from all dangers of the forest during the year.

(7) Susime is the giver of riches and the causer and curer of blindness and lameness. A pig, a fowl and some liquor are normally offered to her.

(8) Asima-Dingsima is the mother of Susime. She does not appear to have any particular attributes, and is not offered sacrifices but a superstition exists that it is very unlucky to pronounce her name. The idea seems to be that Susime will not like it. Other names for her are Norekbak-Norekdim, Sonakale-Kaburanche, and Mikrongitok-Kishangsitok.

### BLACK MAGIC

Black magic was supposed to be in vogue among the Jaintias in the past. They are also said to have been influenced by the Tantrik cult of the Hindus of the plains. Black magic, however, is nothing peculiar to the tribal people. Even in the plains it has been practised by many communities, including the so-called higher ones.

Some scholars divide magic into three categories : black, white and imitative. A clear distinction is made between black and white magic.

The former is a recognised method of promoting the interests of the community, as, for instance, in rain-making and by other devices for the general benefit of all members of the tribe. It is different when any one, who has gained this power, employs it for his own interest—to bring others under his power, to punish an enemy or a rival. This is black magic, or witchcraft, which is regarded an offence against the community at large.

The worker of such arts is regarded as a common danger, a public enemy.

Magic in these forms depends on two principles : (i) the like produces the like, or that an effect resembles its cause ; (ii) the things which have once been in contact continue to act on each other even after the contact has ceased producing contagious magic.

An example of imitative magic can be seen in the method by which a magician seeks to injure his enemy by operating upon his image in the belief that as it wastes he dies, as it perishes he perishes.

One important branch of imitative magic is rain-making.

In the plains while performing the rain-making rites, women would at night with a plough into the fields and dragged it for some distance through the soil, with invocations to the rain-god to remove the drought and permit the regular ploughing to proceed.

Part of this belief is contagious magic. Its theory indicates that a man may be injured by placing something upon his footmarks, which are supposed to be an integral part of his personality. The forest tribes of the central hills have many devices of this kind and claim to know the special things which, so placed, will cause various kinds of disease. They look suspiciously on any one who examines the marks after they have passed along a jungle path. This method is generally employed to remove epidemic diseases from sick children. The cross-roads are the place where the charm works best.

### EVANGELISATION

We have surveyed the general principles of tribal religion in the chapter on culture. Apart from the animistic aspects coming from antiquitous tradition, a point worth mentioning is the practice of ancestor worship. This and other aspects of the traditional Khasi faith have been mentioned in some detail in the context of laws,

customs and tribal organisations in the last part of the book.

It is important to note that with their dedicated social welfare work, various missionary organisations have drawn a large number of tribal people away from their traditional religious beliefs to the fold of Christianity.

Therefore, it is grossly incorrect to speak of one tribal religion. Liberal education has been a great force behind the conversion of tribal people to Christianity. A Khasi graced the chair of Deputy Speaker of the Lok Sabha and a Garo became the first Chief Minister of Meghalaya. There are, bright scientists and professors of art, literature, history, culture, sociology and economics among the citizens of Meghalaya.

Their achievements are largely due to their own labours and the labours of the missionaries.

It is also wrong to deduce that Christianity has replaced or displaced the tribal ways of life. It has only modified them. In a secular country, all religions have equal status and people are free to embrace any religion they wish.

One of the main duties of the social path-finders in Meghalaya is to ensure that the people belonging to traditional faith need not feel that they are being subjected to the forces of detribalisation in religious or other fields. The present understanding leadership is fully capable of doing so.

# 23

## Matrilineal Structure— The Law of Inheritance

**M**ARRIAGE is a great social institution among the Khasis.

The most remarkable feature of the Khasi marriage is that it is usual for the husband to live with his wife in his mother-in-law's house, and not to take his bride home as is the case with other communities of the plains. As long as the woman lives in her mother's house, all her earnings go to her mother who uses them to maintain the family. After the birth of one or two children, the man frequently takes his wife and family to his own house. Then she leaves her mother's house for good. She and her husband pool their earnings which are used for the well-being of the family.

Amongst the Syntengs, the case is different. The husband does not go and live with his mother-in-law. He only visits his wife there.

There is no polygamy amongst the Khasis. Their strict adherence to the matriarchate or the matrilineal system keeps them away from it.

However, there are instances of men having wives other than those they have regularly married. But this is generally looked down upon. Among the Wars children by such wives share their father's acquired property with the children from his legal wife. Owing to the exogamous character of society, a Khasi cannot

marry a girl from his own clan. If he does so, he will be liable to serious religious and social consequences.

Divorce is not unusual among the Khasis. Adultery, barrenness and incompatibility of temperament leading to mal-adjustment in domestic life are some of the possible causes for divorce. But both parties must agree to the proposition of divorce. Among the Wars, the party, who gives a divorce without the consent of the other party, has to pay compensation. It is called *ka mynrain*, or *ka thnem*.

Among the Khasis and the Jaintias the mother is the supreme source of most of the blessings of life including ancestral property which lends the element of security to existence.

The Khasis have a saying among them explaining its reasons: "*long jaid na ka kynthai*" (from the woman sprang the clan.)

## INHERITANCE

The Khasis and the Syntengs have almost identical laws of inheritance.

The War law of inheritance, however, differs greatly from that of the Khasis, and the customs of the Bhois or Mikirs, who inhabit the Bhoi doloiship of the Jaintia Hills, are totally different from those of the Khasis.

The Mikirs are of Bodo origin, and not of Mon-Khmer origin. The Lynngams follow the Khasi law of inheritance.

Women, in their capacity of priestess in religious celebrations, enjoy a position of holiness and piety. Their status has enabled them to inherit property and guide the financial life of the community.

The general rule amongst the Khasis is that the youngest daughter holds the religion, "*ka bat ka niam*". Her house is called, "*ka iing seng*" where the members of the family assemble to see her perform the family

ceremonies. Hers is the largest share of the family property because she performs the ceremonies and propitiates the ancestors.

Amongst the Khasis all property which has been acquired by a man before marriage is considered to belong to his mother.

The matriarchate lays down the rule that a man belongs to his mother's clan. His children, following the same logic, belong to their mother's clan. His wife's clan is outside his jurisdiction. He can have a say in matters pertaining to his clan but not in those of his wife's. The founder of a clan, an old ancestress, is deeply revered. Against this background it should not be surprising to find that the ancestral property of the clan is inherited by a woman of the clan.

For the alienation of property the agreed will of all the heirs is necessary. The proceeds of the property are shared by women, the youngest of them getting the highest share for performing many duties like conducting and paying for religious ceremonies, and looking after property.

The principle governing the law of inheritance among this community is that obligations create rights.

### THE GARO TRADITION

Among the Garos marriage is supposed to be strictly exogamous. The husband and the wife must belong to different septs and motherhoods. Thus a Sangma cannot marry a Sangma or a Marak a Marak. The children belong to the mother's sept. Those who break this rule and marry within their own clan are guilty of a social sin.

The proposal for marriage comes from the girl who, if accepted, lives for a time in the bridegroom's house. This system is subject to compulsory cross-cousin

marriage. There was an ancient rule by which a man must marry his wife's father's widow, who was, in such cases, the husband's father's sister—actual or classificatory.

A man's sister's son, called his *nokrom*, stood in intimate relationship to him, as the husband of one of the daughters and ultimately of his widow and as the vehicle through which his family's interest in the property of his wife was secured for the next generation.

The girl's elders bring about the union. Among the Abengs and the Matabengs, there used to be the custom that the man first "refused" to marry the girl from whose side the proposal came. He pretended to run away and hide himself. A party of friends then searched for him and brought him back "by force". He escaped again and was captured the second time. Then he got married. If he really did not want to marry, he ran away for the third time. In that case he was not forced to marry.

The bride, before the final sacrament, lives in the house of the bridegroom's parents – the bridegroom does not stay there for a month or so. This period is used for mutual acquaintance.

Playfair points out an exception to the rule that a girl may choose her husband. He says that this exception occurs when a daughter of a family is given in marriage to a son of her father's sister. Should she not have such a cousin, she must marry a man of her father's motherhood, who is chosen for a substitute. The daughter's husband then becomes his father-in-law's "*nokrom*". When a girl is thus given in marriage to her cousin, the couple start living with the former's parents. At the death of his father-in-law, the "*nokrom*" marries the widow, thus assuming the anomalous position of the husband to both the mother and the daughter. When there is no "*nokrom*" for a widow to marry, she is governed by the law which lays down that

a widow or a widower may not marry again without the permission of the family of the deceased husband or wife. Even if they marry, they will have to do so in their respective 'motherhoods'. The law is especially hard on women. They are the owners of all property, and the relations of a deceased husband often keep his widow waiting for years for a mere child. By the time the child is of marriageable age, the woman is already old. In such a case the young husband is always allowed to marry a young girl as well so the widow is kept unmarried for years for the sake of her property.

In some circumstances a man may marry two sisters, but he must marry the elder before the younger. Before taking a second wife, he must obtain the permission of the first. If he is a defaulter, he has to pay her compensation.

Divorce is permitted by mutual consent when the husband and the wife disagree on vital matters of life. It is easily obtained by mutual consent. Adultery and non-co-operation in maintaining the family are other grounds for divorce. Village elders preside over the proceedings which entail a thorough inquiry.

The divorce proceedings in their final form are called *bolseki dena*. *Bolseki dena* is an elaborate ceremony which has been described thus. Before an assembly of villagers the husband and the wife take some dust in their hands, and swear to have no dealings with nor to claim anything from each other in the future. The oath having been administered, the priest takes a sword, a chopper or a spear, strikes a tree with it and calls upon 'the son of the Earth' to be a witness to the oath which has just been taken. The weapon used is provided by the man whose marriage is being annulled and becomes the perquisite of the officiating priest.

Compensation is to be paid for the divorce given without mutual consent.



**According to the Garo law, inheritance is restricted to the female line. A man cannot possess property unless he has acquired it by his own labour.**

**The essence of the law of inheritance among the Garos is that property cannot pass out of the motherhood limits.**

## Fountain Springs of Tribal Art

**T**RIBAL art is unalloyed expression of beauty and natural piety conceived by perceptive minds in their innate simplicity. The tribal artist is, however, conscious of dual beauty—one of nature and the other of art.

Croce's theory that nature provides the raw material for art is in agreement with the tribal view of art. Its basic elements are those which underline the essential qualities of tribal life or tribal culture. It can be best understood in the light of cultural origins. Its traditions are allied to religion. It reflects and contributes to the needs of the people—the needs of individual and collective security understood in such terms as wealth, prestige, health, wife, children and crops. It neither condemns nor questions popular values.

There is much room for skill which is revered and admired in the community.

Dance, music and utilitarian objects like beautifully-patterned and coloured cloth, realistically carved pottery, weapons and gongs, all point to the basic simplicity of tribal art. Let us first have a glimpse of tribal music.

### ENCHANTING MUSIC OF THE HILLS

Music goes naturally with the people of the hills. Folk-songs are a flowering of their surroundings. From the hill-top to the green groves of the jungles, the stream of songs meanders with gusto. The sons and

daughters of the soil transmute into their songs their smiles and tears, hopes and dreams, triumphs and despairs.

Apart from traditional songs, there are countless folk compositions of a popular character habitually sung by tribal people. They are neither old, nor new. They are popular because of their spontaneity and beauty. There is no question of date or authorship. They represent the effect of grafting the new onto the old. Each of these songs is like a forest tree with its roots deeply buried in the past but perpetually putting new branches, new leaves and new fruit. The themes have remained the same but the songs have evolved as they have passed through the minds of different men and different generations. As a whole, they are the products of the imagination of thousands of men and women through hundreds of years of human evolution.

These songs, preserved by oral tradition, are human documents. For a hillman, life and song grow side by side.

### Love Songs

Love is the theme of thousands of them. The hillman's heart looks at love as the air he breathes. The love of man for woman and woman for man is a recurring idea. Love permeates every thing a hill man sees.

A maiden talks to a pine tree.

"O pine tree of the hill-top, your branches are about to interknit; I also have offered you my life, my love ! Now why do you beg for my heart ?"

The river surrounds a hillock like the beloved's arms; the koel sings in tune with the movements of her graceful body ; the translucence of water has been borrowed from her smile ; and music and moonlight are nothing but she. And to a Khasi lover his beloved is the dearest thing. He is the green mountain and she the blue waters surrounding all ruggedness with her liquid loveliness.

He is the tune played on the bamboo flute. The rhythm resounds in everything, surrounds her whole existence and draws her out of her house to him.

### **Full Moon**

The songs are frank and bold. The pastoral metaphors lend them local colour. A Garo hillman sings :

“I looked on to the bamboo-tops,  
I looked into the face of my beloved,  
O, it was the full moon.”

Love often leads to marriage. A Lushai youth, in a playful song, says to his girl :

“The birds are calling, my love,  
The birds are calling  
The she-pigeon’s wedding is near,  
We must go to the wedding dance ”

One day their own wedding day will arrive and thinking of it they go and sing rejoicing vicariously at a wedding dance.

The love of the tribal people everywhere is free and unrestrained. Love leads to the desire to meet. Apart from the woodlands, fields and river banks the Murias meet in their “ghotuls” the Nagas in their ‘morungs’ and the Uraons in their own bachelor (or spinster) clubs.

Boys and girls victimised by the green-eyed monster called jealousy, warn each other through the mild irony of a simple song :

“O, my dear !  
The road has many sharp turns,  
Do not walk over clouds, my darling  
You will fall.  
Yes you will fall.”

The apprehensions, inhibitions and longings of a bride find expressions in many tribal songs. The girl complains to her mother :

"The birds brought up their offspring  
That beautify the branches of the tree.  
O, my mother brought me up with love,  
Only to adorn a stranger's house."

Among coloured corns, flowers and leaves, the bride with her tribal dress and ornaments looks like a column of gold. "Like burning candles, her fingers illumine the place. Behind her dark hair, like a rose she blooms ; in the midst of all, her face is another moon."

The ceremonies over, it is time for the bride's departure. It is a moment for the softest thoughts and the most poignant tears. But do all feel alike for the bride at the parental home ? No. Let the girl tell you :—

"Where do the rain drops fall ?  
In the sky the dark clouds gather,  
On the earth the rain drops fall.  
Who weeps like a rippling river ?  
Whose little soul is restless now ?  
Who sheds tears from eyes of pearls ?  
And whose eyes are cold and hard ?  
Father weeps like a rippling river.  
Mother's little soul is restless now.  
Brother sheds tears from eyes of pearls,  
But his wife's eyes are cold and hard".

The proverbial "bhabhi" is the same everywhere.

### **Flowing Milk**

Time moves on. A wife becomes a mother. A little marvel enters the world. He has to struggle with his delicate body against heat and cold, sound and light and many other factors that impinge on life. The

mother has to cast his life in the mould of joy and strength. So she sings to him :

“Mother Moon, bless my baby.  
Let him live a hundred thousand years.  
Give him milk and food :  
Let it come swaying this way,  
Let it come swaying that way.  
And straight into baby’s mouth.

She sings for the baby at all times. She sings  
and he sleeps.

“Sleep, sleep

O prince of my hopes, now sleep !”

The prince of hopes grows through the trials of life. He grows to toil and labour. He sees appalling poverty and endless misery around him. He tills the soil and hopes for harvests. But floods wash away his crops and his home. Diseases come with unrelenting ferocity. Death rules ; life lies low in growing gloom.

### **Work Song**

But the hillman has an unyielding spirit. As the dawn triumphs over the dark night, he will vanquish all the enemies of growth. He sings while sowing paddy, making baskets, rowing his boat or taking cattle to the pastures. He also sings when he is unhappy, and that is the surest sign of the eventual victory of his vitality over the forces of decay. Tired hill women sing such songs to relieve the strain of work :

“The lightning dazzles,  
The rain is streaming, mother !  
The fields are filling. . . .  
A bachelor went to fetch green bamboos.  
The flooded river took him in its currents.  
A married man : his wife and children would  
have mourned him,  
A bechelor : who will weep for him ?

But singing his sorrows out, the hillman has preserved his zest for life. Many have been uprooted from their soil and forced into urban areas to compete for jobs. There have been grave encroachments upon their musical traditions by westernized music. After all, the hills are no longer isolated corners. But tribal musical traditions have shown surprising tenacity.

These songs are a vital part of our national heritage. There is not much sense in approaching a living form of art with an antiquarian's attitude. It is far easier to perceive the loss of the old features than to identify the new that are being woven into the old. The tribal songs that survive are an individual flowering on a common stem.

### MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS

These are the popular musical instruments of North-Eastern India. The tribal people use quite a few of them :—

1. Dhak is a long wooden drum, hung with one end and beaten with two small sticks.
2. Dhol is another long wooden drum, beaten at one end with the hand, and at the other with a stick. It is hung before the performer.
3. Madol is a long drum of potter'sware beaten at the two ends with the two hands and hung in the same manner.
4. Kara is a conical drum made of potter'sware beaten at the thick end with a stick in one hand and with the fingers of the other.
5. Tasa is a flat drum made of potter'sware, which is beaten by two sticks.
6. Dogor is a smaller drum of the same form and is used in the same manner.

7. Tikara is a drum made of potter'sware, and is nearly of the same form as a kettle-drum. The two are always used at the same time, the performer beating with a small stick, on one side with his right hand, and on the other with his left. It cannot, therefore, be used in processions.
8. Kangsi is a small plate of bell-metal somewhat like a Chinese gong. It is beaten with a stick.
9. Shehnai is a kind of hautboy, which is made of wood where the holes are ; but both ends are of brass. The reed is made of four cuttings of the Tal leaf.
10. The Tota Shehnai is another hautboy, which consists entirely of wood, except the mouth-piece, which is of brass. Each instrument has seven holes for the fingers, and the mouth-piece is surrounded by a round plate of brass.
11. Turi or brass trumpet is very thin everywhere except just at the mouth.
12. The Ron Singa, or horn of battle, is in the form of a horn, but is made of brass and has a mouth-piece of the same structure with that of the trumpet. It consists of three pieces, one let into the other, so that it may be turned into a semicircle, or into a curve like an S. It produces very loud sounds.

### FOLKLORES AND FOLK TALES

The Garos and the Khasis have a large collection of folk-lore and folk tales. Some of them are immensely illuminating. They throw a flood of light on the simple way of reasoning and the jocund imagination of the people. They reflect religious beliefs, superstitions and the basic nature of the hillman's guileless life.

- The following story, as narrated to Playfair by tribal people, gives an uncomplicated mind's conjecture about how the creation would have begun.



## CREATION

In the beginning what is now the Earth was a vast watery plain. There was no land, and darkness was over everything.

Tatara-Rabuga decided to create the Earth, so he sent a lesser spirit, Nostu-Nopantu, in the shape of a woman, to carry out his will. There was no dry place for her to set foot on, so she took up her abode in a spider's web which was stretched over the water. Tatara-Rabuga gave her for material a handful of sand, but when she set about her task, she found that she could not make the particles stick together. So she sent the big crab down under the water to fetch some clay, but it was too deep, and he was obliged to return with his errand unfulfilled. Nostu then sent Chipongnokma-Balponggitel, the small crab, to do her behest, but he was afraid and returned without performing his errand. Last of all, Nostu chose Chiching-Barching, a beetle, and sent him down, and he returned with a lump of clay, with the aid of which Nostu-Nopantu fashioned the Earth.

The Earth was called Mane Pilte, the big rocks were called Mojar and the little rocks Dinjar. But all was still wet and unfit to walk upon. So Nostu prayed to Tatara-Rabuga and asked for help. He placed the sun and the moon in the sky and sent the wind. And the three between them dried up and hardened the surface of the Earth.

Then Tatara gave the Earth a riking or petticoat (the Earth is spoken of as a woman) and a pagri made of clouds, and caused hair to grow on her in the shape of the prap (*Ficus Rumphii*), the bolong, the sawe (sago palm), the rejok (a kind of cane), and the ampang (thatching grass).

Of the animals which Tatara created, the first was a kind of ape, and its mission on the Earth was to utter loud

cries and prevent Mane (the Earth) from sleeping and neglecting her work of productivity. After it the "hanu-man" and the common brown monkey were created. Then came all other beasts.

In the water, the first animal created was the frog, for it was appointed to proclaim the advent of rain to all living things by its loud croak. After the frog, fishes were created.

Under the Earth there was much water, but on the surface there was none. Seeing this, the creator made rivers to flow and sent Norechire-Kimrebokre, or rain, to water the Earth. He sent a voice (thunder) before the rain to announce its coming.

Man had not yet been created, so Tatara called around him the lesser spirits, and declared his intention of placing man on the Earth. He chose a goddess named Susime, and sent her down to prepare it for its new inhabitants.

The first abode of man was Amitong-Asiljong (somewhere in the east), and the first man and the woman were Sani and Muni whose children, Gancheng and Dujong, were the parents of Noro and Mande, who were the progenitors of the Garo race.

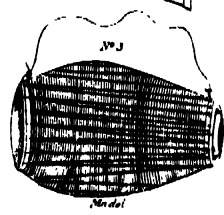
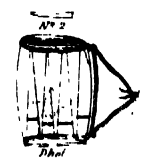
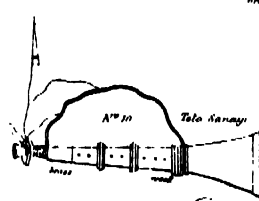
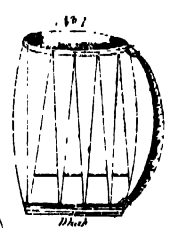
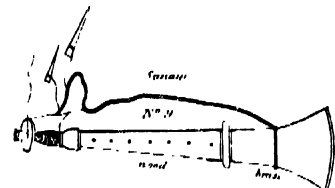
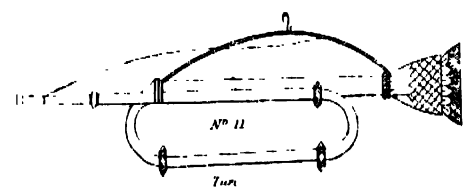
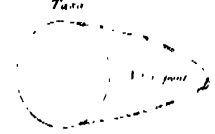
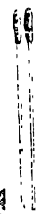
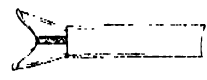
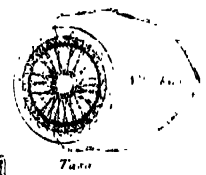
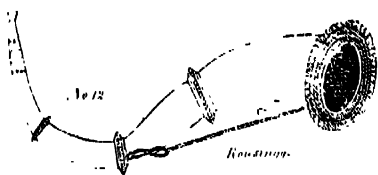
The first inhabitant of the Earth had no rice to eat, so they had to satisfy their hunger with roots and fruits which they found in the forest.

The first human beings to cultivate the soil were two dwarfs, Bonejasku and his wife Jane-Gando. They cleared the forest as is done at present and Tatara-Rabuga, to whom they made an offering of pumpkins, rewarded their industry by causing rice to grow.

The Garos have a large number of stories in verse, too.

### THE EARTH-WORM TALE

Now read how the earth-worm wore the nokma's ring :



Tuburn



Carved post of a Nokante or Bachelors house



A Garo wearing the pandra or dancing dress  
(old illustration)



Garo women wearing the Penta, an ear ornament

Other names for the earth-worm are Pongrengmea-Pong-sengpante and Mikang-Chijim-Kasot-Tingring. The earth-worm determined to assume the jaksils (rings worn by nokmas) and to go through the gana ceremony. So he ordered the messengers of the gods, that is, the sons of Saljong, to prepare a path and to make bridges for him, saying that on a certain day he would appear. But Pongreng-Pongseng thought to assume the rings before the appointed day, so he started before Saljong's servants had finished the path or had made the bridges, and as he came unseen, and they were still digging, he accidentally received a blow and was killed.

From that time to the present day, whenever Earth is being dug, worms are constantly being killed.

(For this reason also the assuming of the rings must take place on the date fixed upon, and the ceremony must not be performed a day sooner or later, for fear of pains in the legs or arms and other misfortunes.)

### KYLLANG AND SYMPER

The Khasis, too, have beautiful folk tales. The two given below (from Gurdom) are comparable to any short story from anywhere on the points of plot and climactic elegance :—

Kyllang is a hill which is near the village of Mawnai in Khadsawphra, and Symper is a hill which is situated in the Syiemship of Maharam. The old folks say that there are gods who inhabit these hills, which are called U Kyllang and U Symper. These gods had a quarrel for some reason that we mortals do not know. They fought by throwing mud at one another. After they had fought, once or twice, U Kyllang proved victorious. So U Symper, having been humiliated, sits quietly in his own place to this day, and U Kyllang sits very proudly because

he was victorious in the fight. The holes which are like tanks in U Symper's sides remain to this day ; it is said that U Kyllang made those holes during the battle.

### WHY THERE ARE SPOTS ON THE MOON

In olden days, there was a woman who had four children, three girls and one boy. Their names were : Ka Sngi (sun), Ka Um (water), Ka Ding (fire) and U Bynai (moon). These four children belonged to rich gentle folk. The Moon was a wicked young man, for he began to make love to his elder sister, Ka Sngi. In the beginning Moon was as bright as the Sun. When Sun became aware of his bad intentions, she was very angry. She took some ashes in her hand and said to him, "Do you harbour such a incestuous and wicked intention against me, your elder sister, who has taken care of you and held you in her arms, and carried you on her back like a mother does ? Now I will cover your brow with ashes, you wicked and shameless one ; begone from the house " Then Moon felt very much ashamed, and from that time he gave out a white light because Sun had covered him with ashes. What we see like a cloud (on the moon) when it is full, are the ashes which adhered from the time Sun covered him with them. The three daughters, however, remained at home to take care of their mother, until she grew old and died.



**PART IV**

**OF PLACES, PEOPLE  
AND  
PROBLEMS**

*The Live, Sensitive Border*

*The Neighbours*

*Shi long : Problematic Prettiness*

*Tasks Ahead*

*The Founding Fathers*

**The people who constitute the population of Meghalaya are mainly the Garos and the Khasis. Considering their historical and political background, their progress from isolation has been astounding. There is no written record about their remote past but it is universally accepted that at one time the Garos migrated from Tibet and are classified as a Tibeto-Burman people. Compared to the Khasis, who are confined more or less to their home district, the Garos are more widespread. They are to be found today not only in various parts of Assam but also in considerable areas in East Pakistan.**

**The Khasis have been inhabiting the Khasi and Jaintia Hills from times immemorial. They are an ancient people and no one is able as yet to say from where they came. Anthropologists and linguists, who have studied their physical features, language, customs and traditions, consider them to be the kin of the Khmer people of Cambodia who, between the 8th and 12th centuries, ruled over the greatest empire in South-East Asia and built the enormous and breath-taking stone structures of Angkor Vat before which, it is said, the splendours of Greece and Rome pale into insignificance.**

**—Prof. G. G. Swell**

## The Live, Sensitive Border

**"P**AKISTANI leaders," Mr V. K. Krishna Menon, told Michael Brecher, "looked upon Pakistan as a first instalment, thinking in terms of the English doctrine 'take what you can and fight for more.' They never seem to have accepted the partition as final, as we did. Their main approach to the problem was that India was theirs; India was a Muslim country historically; the British had taken it away from them; now the British had gone away and it should be handed over to them."

Developing his thesis he said :

"Pakistan will do anything and everything against us. The original Pakistani doctrine of Rehmet Ali, a Cambridge student, was that Bengal was Pakistan, Hyderabad was Pakistan, Kashmir was Pakistan, Punjab was Pakistan, and so on. Now, according to these ideas, what haven't they got? They do not have even half of the Punjab, they have not got Kashmir, they have not got even half of Bengal, and they have not got Hyderabad. So when we talk about Kashmir this is only part of that Rehmet Ali map - and there is of course the larger map - which could place almost all of India in Pakistan . . .

"Pakistan's aggression is not for a place, not for Kashmir alone; the aggression is against India, against secularism. What has Pakistan claimed since we partitioned? They claimed various parts of what was then India. On account of the partition arrangements, we agreed to plebiscites in the North-West Frontier Province, Sylhet, certain villages and so on. We lost them . . ."

The truth of this analysis is becoming clearer day by day. Nehru offered a no-war pact to Pakistan's leaders time and again. Lal Bahadur Shastri concluded his life with a declaration of India's peaceful policy towards Pakistan at Tashkent. Mrs Indira Gandhi has reiterated the desire of India for peaceful co-existence on each day of significance to India and Pakistan and on each occasion for eliminating possible tensions – be it with regard to the river water dispute or diplomatic discussions on political irritants. What results has our profession of faith in peace yielded ? It has caused no change in the basic policy of hatred of Pakistan towards India. But it has confirmed our will to strive for peace until conflicts become necessary. This is in fitness of the things that make us a secular, tolerant republic despite the communal aberrations we encounter from time to time.

But to say that professions of peace will obviate the need of keeping the nation guarded and strong is a childish illusion. With the collusion between Pakistan and China, the long border between East Pakistan, and Assam and Meghalaya remains perpetually live. There are frequent intrusions. Meghalaya has a longer border stretch than Assam has and, therefore, it is only prudent to take stock of the situation in this area of international tension. Let us look at the geographical situation of East Pakistan.

### **EAST PAKISTAN**

East Pakistan comprises the eastern territories of the partitioned province of Bengal and the former Assam district of Sylhet, with the exception of certain thanas of the Karimganj sub-division. It is administratively divided into three divisions and 17 districts : (1) Dacca Division – the districts of Dacca, Mymensing, Faridpur

and Bakarganj ; (2) the Chittagong Division—the districts of Chittagong, Tipperah, Noakhali, Chittagong Hill Tracts and Sylhet ; (3) Rajshahi Division—the districts of Rajshahi Dinajpur, Rangpur, Bogra, Pabna, Kushtia, Jessore and Khulna.

And now let us see the situation of Assam :—

Assam first became a British protectorate at the close of the first Burmese war in 1826. In 1832, Cachar was annexed ; in 1835 the Jaintia Hills were included in the East Indian Company's dominion, and in 1839 Upper Assam was annexed to Bengal. In 1874 Assam was detached from Bengal and made a separate Chief Commissionership. On the partition of Bengal in 1905, it was united with the eastern districts of Bengal under a Lieutenant-Governor. From 1912, the Chief Commissionership of Assam was revived, and in 1921 a Governorship was created. Following the partition of India almost the whole of the predominantly Muslim district of Sylhet was merged with East Bengal (Pakistan). Dewan-giri in North Kamrup was ceded to Bhutan in 1951. The States Reorganization Act, 1956, effected no territorial changes in the case of Assam.

*Nagaland (the Naga Hills-Tuensang area)* : The Naga Hills-Tuensang area was constituted as a centrally administered area under the Ministry of External Affairs on December 1, 1957. It included the Naga Hills district of Assam and Tuensang Frontier Division formerly under the North-East Frontier Agency.

Nagaland has an area of 6,236 sq. miles.

*The North-East Frontier Agency* : It includes Kemang, Tirap, Subansiri, Siang and Lohit Frontier Divisions, and has an area of 31,438 sq. miles.

Our north-eastern borders, we thus see, is perpetually threatened by expansionists having political ideologies different from ours. Chinese arms poured into Pakistan pass, owing to the difficulties of the terrain and

the nature of forests which provide cover to smugglers and saboteurs and hide-outs to misguided hostile factions of the Nagas and the Mizos, into wrong hands in West Bengal and Assam. No security can be fool-proof in these regions. Infiltration by East Pakistani miscreants is frequent and in any long-drawn war between Pakistan and India or China and India the people of Meghalaya will have to shoulder heavy responsibilities. This was one of the points which the hill leaders emphasised while demanding an autonomous state. When the Chinese invaded India in 1962, they suspended their agitation and showed their power to strengthen the defence system of the country.

The Pakistani thrusts in 1965 were confined to the Punjab and Jammu areas. Defence efforts on our Assam front were an obvious deterrent to Ayub Khan's miscalculated plan to walk over the Indian territory.

Thus taking into consideration the Chinese game of shifting boundaries on the map and the hate-India bogey launched in Pakistan on every occasion of external pressure or internal crisis, the powder will have to be kept dry and the morale of the people kept high in Meghalaya.

The borders of the hill states, particularly that of Assam and Meghalaya with Pakistan should be sealed. The Burma frontier is particularly troublesome owing to the difficult terrain escaping into which Nagas and Mizos step into Chinese territory and get money and weapon for indulging in sabotage.

But this precaution is not a wholly workable proposition. A sensitive border area cannot be fenced off by barbed wire as we fence off a garden against the intrusion of stray cattle. Even expert military vigilance of the highest order has human limitations and logistic handicaps. It is essential but it is not fool-proof.

Therefore, it has to be supplemented by a well-trained

force of vigilant citizens living in peace but ready to meet other eventualities too. For this the entire border region of North-East India needs a broad economic base for its people. A clear understanding of the political and social problems of some parts of the region, which have not yet been solved, is a basic need. If the battle of wits among the leaders of Assam and the hill people would not have been concluded with wisdom by creating the new state of Meghalaya, North-East India would have been the poorer for it. There are more or less identical problems in Nagaland and the Mizo Hills, although there is not even a fraction of the willingness that was available in the Garo Hills and the United Khasi and Jaintia Hills to take the irritants away from the political atmosphere.

### **A POLITICO-ECONOMIC PROBLEM**

But with a measure of persistence, vigilance and negotiation for peace with the right kind of local leaders at the right point of time, a sensible solution can be evolved and even the dark conceited world of the misguided tribals can be illumined by an era of co-operation between them and the rest of India.

Border defence is a politico-military problem and there is no better source of military strength than settling enlightened and economically self-sufficient communities in politically stable conditions in the sensitive areas.

Observers often stress two key goals for the under-developed areas—economic development and modernization on the one hand, and political stability on the other. The compatibility of these goals, however, is very limited.

Without a constitutional tradition of peaceful change some form of violence is virtually inevitable. In the

underdeveloped areas, the alternatives, broadly speaking, are not constitutional change or violent change, but gradual change through revolutionary ways or revolutionary coups d'état. The enforced absence of change, political "stability" without coups d'état, is often only the breeding ground for worse forms of violence.

In the border areas we need democratization of government to which the only alternative seems to be an ostentatious democratization of violence—if we insist on our being called a democracy. And the former order is honourable and not alien to our tradition or national genius.



## The Neighbours

**C**ARVED out of Assam, Meghalaya has the original state as the first real neighbour. There are other neighbours too, near ones and distant ones. Some of them owing to contiguity could have even joined Meghalaya and become equal partners in national greatness. Bengal is a distant neighbour bound by cultural and historical ties emanating from history and tradition. The hill administrative units of Nagaland, NEFA, Manipur and Tripura have suffered from some drawbacks which have been a drag for the people of Meghalaya. The inhabitants of the new state have many common experiences with the hill people elsewhere which can act as bridges of mutual goodwill. Since Meghalaya is an achievement of the tribal genius, it is essential that the people of this state know their neighbours well to profit from their strength, to avoid their weaknesses and to work with them for nation-building.

### ASSAM

We have seen in the previous chapter that Assam became a British protectorate in 1826 and that the annexation of Cachar and the inclusion in the East India Company's grabbed territory of the Jaintia Hills followed. In 1839, Upper Assam became subservient to Bengal. Then followed a series of addition and subtraction of territory and administrative powers. The division of the country caused the transfer of part of Assam to Pakistan. Thus the map of Assam has been ever changing. Naga-

land, Manipur, Tripura, NEFA and Meghalaya have all been parts of the Assam set-up. It has been bordered by Tibet, Bhutan and Burma and has been known as the home of some of the most ancient tribes of the world. Its language, Assamese, has made considerable progress. Its political institutions have gained maturity and its people have distinguished themselves in all walks of life. Before the creation of Meghalaya its geographical area was 30·1 million acres and according to the last census its population was 1,18,72,772. The density of population then worked out to 97 per square kilometre. Literacy had risen in the year to 27·4 per cent. Now although it has shrunk in size, it continues to be a vital link between the hills and the plains. The University of Gauhati, established in 1948, runs around three dozen colleges and its capital, Shillong, provides sanctuaries to the administrators of Meghalaya as well as NEFA. Its judiciary has the highest tradition and its local bodies include 16 Mohkma Parishads, 120 Anchalic Panchayats and 2,570 Village Panchayats in the plains alone. Before the reorganization of Assam, it, however, suffered excruciating agony owing to internal party feuds and deeply felt and bitterly levelled allegations from the people of the hills. The Congress continues to be a major force.

Despite his failing health, Mr B. P. Chaliha has provided, a clean and efficient administration. He has succeeded, in a large measure, in securing the goodwill of the people of Meghalaya by agreeing to its creation in a statesman-like manner, redeeming the obscurantist approach of some of his colleagues to the reorganization of the state. There are about 700 tea plantations in the state, employing about five lakh people. Even after the creation of Meghalaya, its natural wealth of forest-produce is considerable. Its mineral wealth includes petroleum, sillimanite, coal and limestone. Cotton-cloth-weaving is a major industry and its silk is famous. It has

made big strides in generation of electric power and is in a take-off stage for industrial development.

Its social welfare institutions are many and broad-based. It is linked with Meghalaya, apart from geographical factors, by subjects of common interest like highways, major irrigation projects, flood control, navigation, major industries and overall security. If political bickerings in Assam do not drag the feet of the state, it will not only contribute to its neighbours' welfare but also influence their development plans and rate of growth beneficially.

### BENGAL

Bengal, the land of saints and bauls, religious reformers and martyrs, epoch-making artists and scientists and, above all, simple common men and women is a timeless legend. Situated among culturally rich neighbours like Assam, Bihar and Orissa, and having international frontiers with Nepal, Sikkim, Bhutan and Pakistan, it has given away areas under its administrative control as a contented man gives up meaningless trappings or acquisitions. Bihar and Orissa and the present East Bengal were all its parts and parcels. Its essentially folk culture has been continuously invaded by alien ways of life and it has been exploited by selfish people with morbid mercantile morality as their cult.

The British found the Bengali community a friendly lot and entered into their hearts with concealed deceit to further their ends but the culture of Bengal assimilated much of the invading influence and transmuted the base material of craft and graft into instruments of progress. Bengalis rising from the level of clerks, became the highest and most capable officials of their time and earned the admiration of the rulers who derided their culture and sought to destroy their social institutions.

With partition, or to be exact, the Indian Independence Act of 1947, Bengal got a new birth. The territory of Cooch Behar was merged in it. Later the French possession of Chandernagore became part of it and some areas of Bihar were also added. It has 15 districts, excluding Calcutta. There are 80 municipalities. The Calcutta Corporation is a mighty edifice. Its total area is 34,194 square miles and its population is around 36 million. The percentage of literacy is around 38 and it has few rivals in judicial institutions and seats of learning. It is highly industrialised and its share in the manufacturing labour force is around 23 per cent. With only three per cent of the country's area it shares well above eight per cent of her population. Famous for jute, tea, coal, cotton textiles, paper, rubber and engineering industries, it has about 9,000,000 workers in about 6,200 registered factories. The recent political instability in the state is not an alarming phenomenon. The land, with its capacity for assimilation of unhappy trends, is fully capable of outliving the Naxalite aberrations and spurts of violence. These are aspects of change—political change, social change and economic change.

Naxalbari is just a name for the womb of progress through which expressions of valid and lasting concepts emanate preceded by unworthy, formless expressions of crude forms of transition. The United Front Government was a limited exercise in political life. The day is not far when from the dark tunnel of experimentations in Bengal, the light of reason and stability will issue forth—the light of which Ramkrishna and Vivekananda spoke in religious idiom; the light which illumined the scientific vision of Jagadish Chandra Bose, the light which Tagore called the seed of creation and the light which still burns undimmed in the tabernacle of the heart of every Bengali who has not been uprooted from his cultural soil.

## NAGALAND

Nagaland, the home of the Nagas, earned a rather poor reputation for being unhelpful to the motherland right after independence. It is not that all Nagas are hostiles. With an area of 6,366 sq. miles and a population of 3·70 lakhs, Nagaland is the smallest state of India. It was inaugurated on December 1, 1963. A narrow mountainous strip lying between the Brahmaputra Valley of Assam and Burma and comprising about 1,000 villages, it is the home of over a dozen tribal groups including the Angamis, Semas, Lhothas, Aos, Rengmas, Chakesangs, Sangtams, Konyaks, Changes, Phoms, Yimchungers, Khemnyuans and Kukis.

During the British rule, the present area was cut off from the rest of the country by geographical factors. During World War II arms were freely distributed among the Naga people to help them build up a defence against a possible attack from the Japanese who had occupied Burma. After independence, some foreign elements misguided some Nagas to form a so-called federal government and to start an agitation for a free state. Phizo, who after a spell of stay in Pakistan, is now residing in England, propounded the untenable theory that Nagaland was never a part of India and that no nation had control over it before the British. This was a wrong stand. In this connection the following statement issued by the Lieutenant Governor of Bengal in 1866, who had then jurisdiction over the Naga hills, is worth remembering :

“The treaties with Burma and Manipur recognise the Patkoi and Burrail ranges of hills running in a continuous line from the sources of the Dehing in the extreme east of Assam to those of the Dhunsiri in North Cachar as the boundary between those countries and British India. There is no intermediate independent territory, and while

the wild tribes who inhabit the southern slopes are subject to Burma and Manipur, those who inhabit the northern slopes are subject to the British Government."

The British Indian law applied to the Nagas and Tuensang. It was described as a tribal area in the Government of India Act of 1935. It was considered within India. The stand of the hostile Nagas has been uncompromising. They have been playing into the hands of foreigners inimical to India. This is why the Naga peace mission talks failed. The Rev Michael Scott was exposed and his apparent role of a peace-maker was clearly understood as that of an instigator. Now there is a truce between the security forces and the hostiles. It is in operation since September 6, 1964. It has failed to prevent the Nagas from indulging in sabotage and sniping. The misguided Nagas are paying a heavy price for their mistake of adopting a secessionist policy. Their leader, Kughato Sukhai, realised this fault too late. In the meantime his brother was assassinated by supporters of Mhiasi (a follower of Phizo). In retaliation Mhiasi was kidnapped by Sukhai's supporters. An endless effort on the part of the hostiles to secure arms from Pakistan and China continues and the peace in the region is an uneasy peace. Some elements among the Nagas are demanding a greater Nagaland. The Union Government have shown the willingness to consider any relevant proposal within the four corners of the Constitution to secure a lasting peace in the region.

### THE MIZO HILLS

What is known now as the Mizo Hills District was] formerly known as the Lushai Hills. It covers about 8,000 sq. miles and has a population of about three lakhs; 45 per cent of the people are literate. The Mizos' main

grievance has been that the leaders of the plains are dominating them. They agitated for separate statehood. As we have seen earlier, they impaired our defence efforts and once captured the district headquarters of Aijal. They wanted to run a parallel administration. The security forces dealt with them severely and tackled their hard core. The Government's approach to them is based on sympathy. As a part of their Operation Security, they have planned the shifting of 50,000 Mizos from unsafe villages to a ten-mile safety zone on both sides of Virante-Lungleh Road near Aijal. The growing townships are modern and have medical and educational facilities.

The success of Meghalaya can show the path of reason to the misguided Nagas and Mizos.

### **NEFA**

NEFA has an area of 31,438 square miles and a population of 3,36,558. It is governed by the Home Ministry. It comprises of five districts - Kameng, Subansiri, Siang, Lohit and Tirap. About 60 per cent of the land is under forests, which yield considerable timber. In 1967-68 timber fetched a total revenue of Rs. 92,46,819. It is the home of ancient tribes including the Monpas, the Akas, the Khambas, the Moyas, the Dafflas, the Mikirs, the Mishmis, the Kamans, the Singhphos and the Yobins. About 50 dialects are spoken in the region. Education has made great strides. Agriculture is the mainstay of the people. About 44,000 acres are under cultivation. Weaving, carpet-making, soap-making, pottery, cane and bamboo work and silk are the main industries. In any aggression by the Chinese on North-East India, NEFA will be a victim. Considering the dangers, the work of the people - of building roads and strengthening defence efforts - is commendable. NEFA is another name for loyalty, bravery and endurance.

## **MANIPUR**

Its area is 8,628 square miles and population 9,80,876. It is bounded on the east and the south by Burma and on the north and the west by the Naga Hills and Cachar District of Assam. It is a highly strategic area on the eastern frontier. Two land routes from Burma pass through its territory. The main group inhabiting the area is known as Meiteis. There are 40 tribes and subtribes known by the generic terms Nagas and Kukis. Manipuri and English are the official languages. The dances of the area are famous. Handloom weaving is a popular industry. Colourful Manipuri cloth is famous. There are at least a dozen colleges and over 120 high schools.

## **TRIPURA**

Tripura has an area of 10,680·44 square kilometres. Its capital is Agartala. It has only one district—Tripura. It is divided into 44 tehsils. Education is spreading. The total number of students in colleges for general education is about 13,000 and that of professional and technical colleges well over a thousand. The industries include handloom-weaving, carpentry, sugar-making, shoe-making, fruit-canning and basketry.



## Shillong : Problematic Prettiness

**S**HILLONG is a dream immortalised upon a page of the earth. It is like a poem, a carol of rich exulting life. The sweet candences of its singing breath come from the fragrant pine in the hearth fire or the whispers of the forest wind. The first impression it makes on you is through its cheerful sight. Visitors call Shillong, with some justification, a mini-Scotland.

People living here have a varied ethnic background, as they have in the Scottish highlands. There are dialects and dresses of diverse origin. The soft lilt of the Khasi language, the liquid loveliness of the Assamese consonants, the inherent musicality of Bengali sound-patterns, the loose and long "dhuti," the free-flowing "jama," tribal clothes with accentuated colours reminding one of flowers in the hills and hues of the rainbow's that streak across the moist sky and pass away like clouds, offer thrill and delight. Modern dress and manners of speech and life are no less conspicuous. But the charm of the old is omnipresent. The long natural cleft running down to the houses of the people, the desolate mass of rocks perpetually scourged by wind and rain and the cloistered desire for happiness in the hearts that have communicated with reticence with the world outside preserve the essential silent grace of the hills. Beyond the encroachment of the smug, mercantile urban culture one can hear the joyous lores of the hills. The Shillong highlands, too, had their Burns and ballads like the Scottish highlands. Their cattle and shepherds, their

inbuilt democratic temper and unalloyed independence of mind continue to inspire the receptive mind.

Modernity has modified their civilization. The church, education and industry have led to a quicker pace of development and erosion of accepted ways of life.

It is true that often there are conflicts of culture when the plains man becomes uncompromising and demanding while dealing with the hillman and when the hill man becomes vague or irritable while explaining his stand on various demands. But the land, with its tapestry made of international ways of life, presents a safety valve against dissension. This is why, like Scotland, this highland niche has preserved its charm over the years.

Shillong requires an attractive museum to enhance its importance as a tourist resort depicting fully and with feeling the culture of the hill people like the Edinburgh Castle that impregnable fortress giving a tourist the full view of the rich past of Scotland before bringing him back to the threshold of modernity.

This highland queen has been a siren for tourists and a source of inspiration for the men of the mountains.

The capital of Assam for decades and administrative headquarters of United Khasi and Jaintia Hills District in the pre-Meghalaya days, it has now become a bridge between the state of Assam and Meghalaya, housing their Governments and fostering the bonds of geographical unity. If you are here, the earth will never be too much with you. About 97 kilometres south of Gauhati, it is elegantly placed on the Shillong plateau at 4,987 feet above the sea-level.

It hit the headlines in British days (in 1864) when it was made the headquarters of the Khasi and Jaintia Hills District in preference to Cherrapunji, that little town of relentless rains. Ten years later, it graduated to the position of the capital of the newly formed Assam province. In 1954, the administrative headquarters of

the North-East Frontier Agency were set up there and its meteoric rise to unrivalled political eminence came to a near-climax. With the formation of Meghalaya, it has become the seat of three administrative units. It is natural for this significant town to gather the glamour of controversies attendant on fame.

According to the new administrative arrangements, the Shillong areas, which belonged to the Myllem state, is under the legislative and executive authority of Meghalaya only to the extent the District Council has such powers.

The United Khasi and Jaintia Hills District excluded the Shillong Cantonment and the municipality, exclusive of the area belonging to the erstwhile Myllem state or the former British Shillong. This obviously has never been to the liking of the people of the hills. It may lead to administrative controversies.

The Pataskar Commission considered the position of Assam in the light of the experience gathered since the District Councils came into existence and came to the conclusion that the arrangements in respect of Shillong had not proved satisfactory. The population of the town then was 83,786, the number of non-tribals being 56,565. The need for extending the urban limits of the town seemed pressing. As the difficulties experienced by the Government in the matter of town planning and the hardships encountered by the non-tribal population were "genuine,"

the commission said that unless these difficulties were satisfactorily solved, the utility of Shillong as the capital of the state would be seriously impaired.

The prosperity of the United Khasi and Jaintia Hills District depended, to a large extent, on the location of the state capital there. Therefore "in the interest of the tribal people themselves", the commission pleaded for a "satisfactory arrangement for the administration of the state capital". To this end it suggested that there should be a

uniform administration for the town of Shillong, but its tribal population should be assured that their personal laws would be respected and their agrarian interests would be protected "as far as possible."

The commission made a special reference to the problems of Shillong in its report. It said :

"Non-tribal residents of this city represented to the committee that the jurisdiction of the District Council should not extend to that town and the adjoining areas. They brought to its notice their hardships in acquiring land in Assam's capital, whose permanent residents included persons belonging to various parts of Assam and the country."

Denying the allegation of exploitation of the tribal people by non-tribals it said : 'It cannot be argued that the non-tribals living or desiring to live permanently in the district, particularly on the land around Shillong, on various assignments and requiring a plot of land for residential and other purposes, can be construed as exploiting their land, as alleged'."

The Assam Government said these difficulties of the non-tribal population of Shillong were genuine. They added that the District Council had "made it very difficult under its rules for the non-tribal people to sell or acquire any property for residential purposes within its jurisdiction, even though they had to live there permanently in pursuit of their vocation. The state Government referred to their own "difficulties" about the extension of the limits of the city "which was becoming increasingly necessary because of its being the seat of the Government." They could not extend the state Town Planning Act to the immediate vicinity of the municipal area of Shillong.

The District Council, on the other hand, said that the town was not fully under its jurisdiction.

According to the provisions of the Sixth Schedule,

the position of Shillong was somewhat peculiar. The jurisdiction of the District Council extended to the municipality of Shillong only for certain limited purposes. This was deliberately provided for in the Sixth Schedule in order "to maintain the District Council with its powers and at the same time to integrate it with the larger administration of the town."

in 1960 the state Government appointed a commission "to study the situation." It suggested that :

- (a) the state Government should have the right to extend their Town Planning Act to Shillong and the adjoining areas within a growing radius of ten miles or more, according to the progress of urbanization ; and
- (b) the town should be completely excluded from the jurisdiction of the District Council.

This suggestion was not only resented by the tribal people but in it was seen a clever move to impair the powers of the District Council and a design to undermine the concept of autonomy. The position has not improved.

If a really workable arrangement is not evolved with regard to the administrative position of Shillong, it may well prove to be a disturbing bone of contention between Meghalaya and Assam and consequently between them and the Centre.

Shillong has become a precious place having numerous institutions.

It contains, besides the military cantonment, the Pasteur Institute and Research Laboratory, a dairy farm, colleges connected with Gauhati University, and two large hospitals. A new university will come up here soon. The Barapani hydroelectric power station is one of the largest power plants in Assam. Shillong experiences

frequent earth tremors. (It was devastated by the great earthquake of June 12, 1897.)

When the Prime Minister made a particular reference to Shillong on the occasion of the inauguration of Meghalaya saying that even if it cost more in terms of money and effort, "the planning and architecture of Shillong as the joint capital of the two states must be in harmony with both its surroundings and in consonance with its climate", she was not only referring to the beauty of the place but also to its significance as a link between the hill man and the man from the plains.

## Tasks Ahead

**T**HE problems of Meghalaya are mainly problems of growth. This region has a traditional society in a transitional state. From agitation to fulfilment of social responsibilities lies a wide area. Those who were talking of the revolution of rising expectations have now to carry out actively various programmes to gear up the economy of the area and lead it to quicker social progress.

The experience of political change will inevitably lead the people of Meghalaya to bigger consequential changes in social outlook, financial policies and the pattern of leadership. People have to grow out of ancient lethargies and old ways of farming. At the same time traditional values have to be jealously preserved. The revolution in Meghalaya has to be a giuded revolution and its leaders have to provide the guidelines.

What are the main areas in which guidance is immediatety needed ?

The first problem is the problem of bolstering the economy of the region. Jhum has to give way entirely to terracing and terracing to improved, scientific farming for growing as much food as possible. Leaders of the plains used to say that an autonomous state in the region would never be economically viable. The Tribal leaders, however, felt that this view was incorrect. They pointed out that the mineral resources of the area along with its enormous forest wealth would more than pay for its development programmes and the food bought from

outside. The hills have not been properly surveyed to ascertain the extent of their mineral resources.

Thus apart from improving agricultural methods the state has to seek and obtain the assistance of the Government of India in wresting from the heart of the hills the tremendous resources it has of mineral wealth. The yield from the forests has got to be so planned as not to denude the area. Deforestation does not only affect climate but has a far-reaching impact on the aesthetic sense and the general pattern of behaviour of the people who have been living amidst lush, green natural surroundings. Forests and forest products are the chief resources of the new state.

### INDUSTRY AND EMPLOYMENT

Coal and limestone are available in considerable quantities both in the Garo Hills and the Khasi and Jaintia Hills. Sillimanite in its purest form, fire clay, ceramic raw material and other forms of clay are also available. Small and medium industries have to be set up to achieve dispersed industrial growth.

The problem of unemployment can be solved quickly only through rapid growth of small and medium industries. The state will need some major industries also. With the availability of coal nearby and the prospects of securing sizable quantity of electricity will make the task of industrialization easy. But this solution to the problem of unemployment and slackness of economy will pose another problem—that of improving the transport and communication system. Mr Darwin Diengdoh has rightly pointed out that the economic growth of the present Meghalaya region has, in the past, been retarded by lack of suitable means of communication and the unrelatedness of road construction to the needs of agricultural and industrial development.



## HEALTH NEEDS

The health needs of the people need urgent attention. There are very few qualified medical practitioners in the area, and the general tendency among young medical people is to stick to dispensaries and hospitals in cities and towns. In years to come, Meghalaya will need a dedicated group of doctors and nurses to ensure to the people a happier and fuller life.

## EMOTIONAL INTEGRATION

Meghalaya is a border region. It is of great strategic importance. The educational training of the people has to be defence-oriented and security installations have to be sufficiently strong to ensure the stability of industries as also of the common people.

Emotional integration between the people of the hills and the plains is another vital need. It is essential to enlighten the people in the plains about the peculiarities and excellences of the hill people. No one except the hillman himself can achieve this. Whosoever has met the leaders of Meghalaya, enlightened men of great tolerance and culture, knows that each properly educated hillman is an ambassador of his culture.

## TRANSPORT

For this, apart from publication of informative books and periodicals, the hillman has to work for the removal of the transport bottleneck also. Assam is not yet connected by a broad-gauge railway line. It causes delay in transport of men and material and subjects people to avoidable expenditure. Businessmen find this situation particularly difficult.

In Assam, river transport was cheaper. After the Pakistani invasion in 1965, this system has been stopped,

## CONSTITUTIONAL PROBLEMS

The constitution of Meghalaya may also pose some serious problem. The common Governor may be the source of some misunderstanding.

Paragraph 20 A, sub para 1, of the amended Sixth Schedule provides that the Governor "in relation to Meghalaya, means the Governor of Assam acting on the aid and advice of the Council of Ministers for Meghalaya, except in so far as he is by or under this Schedule required to exercise his functions in his discretion or to exercise his powers under sub-paragraph 4 of paragraph 12 A" (for withholding or modifying the application of the laws of Assam).

How will the Governor exercise his power under Paragraph 12 A, sub-paragraph 4, if he is not to accept the advice of the Council of Ministers of Meghalaya? Will he follow the advice of the Council of Ministers of Assam as he has no discretion in the matter?

As we have seen in the chapter on Shillong, the common capital of Meghalaya and Assam is another potential source of conflict and tension. This problem has to be solved before its crude manifestations become felt.

The Central Government ought to appoint a committee to advise the two governments in respect of the areas of tension.

But these problems are no challenge to the courage of convictions of the faithful, honest and efficient political men of the region who have brought their movement to its logical conclusion. They can surely make the new order work and give politics a better connotation if not a better name. If they succeed in shutting the doors of their legislature on baseless allegations, wastage of time, japes and hurtful procedural and personal gimmicks frequently seen elsewhere, they will inaugurate a new

chapter in the political life of the country. This, too, has to be viewed as a major task ahead.

For the solution of all these problems and many more that will arise in the course of the day-to-day working of the rule of law and evolution of a new social and economic order, the people of Meghalaya will naturally look up to the Founding Fathers—Capt Williamson A. Sangma, Prof G.G. Swell and Mr Stanley Nichols Roy—and to their comrades in and outside the Government for guidance.

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## The Founding Fathers

**CAPT WILLIAMSON A. SANGMA**

**T**HE life of Capt Sangma is an ingratiating social vignette. Its curvilinear patterns resemble a slender vine twisting round a sturdy oak. He has grown from strength to strength and people and institutions have clung to him for direction and support. One cannot reduce such a meaningful life to a formulated description.

His roots are in the soil. Even before he accepted military commission he was a man of the masses. He was helpful to the less privileged people of the community and conscious of their problems.

He entered active political life in 1952 as a man committed not to politics but to social welfare. He knew the people who lived a garnished and cumbered existence, harassed by poverty and eking out a miserable living from an unprofitable soil yet gazing at the world from hill-tops, responding to the miracles of nature and taking pride in their tradition and faith.

The army had given him discipline and training in conquering inertia. It was a rigorous spell of education. He learnt the advice of Rousseau to all administrators and commanders.

"If it is good to know how to deal with men as they are, it is much better to make them what they should be. The most absolute authority is that which penetrates a man's inner being, and concerns itself no less with his will than with his action. Make men, therefore, if you would command men, if you would have them obedient to the laws, make them love the laws, and then they will need to know only what is their duty to do it."

People responded to his sincerity with abundant affection and his friends gave him their absolute trust. He was elected the chief executive member of the Garo Hills District Council. Later came a more intense association with political life when he became the chairman of the Eastern India Tribal Union. In 1957, he was elected as a member of the Assam Legislative Assembly. The following year, he joined the cabinet of Assam to look after the departments of the tribal areas, information, publicity and transport. When the Assamese language bill was passed in spite of opposition from the tribal people, he resigned from the cabinet thinking that it is better to fight for a cause without the trappings of power and be nearer to history than to office. When the A.P.H.L.C. was born, he was elected its first chairman.

Throughout the peaceful struggle for a separate hill state, Capt Sangma underlined the importance of fairplay, integrity and peaceful, political bargaining. He elevated politics from the morass of mean manoeuvres and mischief to the level of faith, efficiency, honesty and ethics. He was convinced that the hill people constituted a community which looked ahead of time. For them he conceived a system capable of renewing itself to meet the changing conditions. He built in the political temper of the hillman a desire to shun violence and negotiate for peace. This quality has raised the people he leads well above the Nagas and the Mizos who have failed to achieve social stability and political strength despite years of existence as groups-in-arms.

Meghalaya has entered the Indian federation under his imaginative captaincy. Those who are aware of his success as a leader know that his achievements have come from the fountainspring of the faith that leaders must be simple at heart. Their love for the people must be reflected not in rhetoric but in acts and that all their actions, motivated by the need of bringing a better life

to the people, must come like Eve from somewhere near the third rib and there must be the leader's own heart beating in them.

### PROF G. G. SWELL

The forty-five-year old academician, Prof G.G. Swell, is a world of thought in himself. He has come to politics after a long and distinguished career as a teacher. His beginnings are humble. He was born in a village called Laityusew, forty miles to the west of Shillong. The family was small and its income was modest. His father ran a small business.

His education began in the village. From there he went to Ramakrishna Mission School, Cherapunji, where he received sound, liberal education and developed a taste for art. The Scottish Church College, his alma mater at Calcutta, opened before him the treasure of world literature. Specialising in the English language, and literature, he took many teaching assignments in colleges and brought greater respect to his profession. In Addis Ababa, where he taught English for some time, his erudition and imaginative original methods of teaching are still remembered by his old boys and the teaching community.

Politics is a means to the end of public service to him. Life, thought, social conditions and hopes of the times through which one lives presents the raw material from which can be fashioned the instruments of helpful change. The invisible and intangible archetypes and prototypes of things, activities and virtues, often expressed by politicians in terms of cliches and conceits, are mere exercises in adolescent mental agility. A politician needs an over-all view of the situation he is dealing with and his ability to look into the heart of the matter is the most significant factor in the struggle for achieving any goal for his people.



Capt. Williamson A. Sangma



Prof. G. G. Swell



Mr. Stanley Nichols Roy



Mr S Murak



Mr E Bareh



Mr B B Lyngdoh



Prof Swell has never indulged in epic celebrations of the lost paradise of the tribal people's culture. He has loved the simple folk because he has felt about their problems as they have felt. He has spoken to them in simple, de-academicised language. He has explained to them the mutations of their failure and extravagance of their conduct. Between him and his people, since he joined the A.P.H.L.C. movement, the great conversation has continued.

His main source of inspiration is the affection of the people. His political affiliations are subservient to his high sense of patriotism. Few people know that he was a Congressman at the beginning of his political career. Representing the tribal people of Assam in the Lok Sabha with dignity and contagious effability for about eight years, he rose to the position of the Deputy Speaker on December 9, 1969. His belief in the infinitude of the private man and the integrity of the individual mind has endeared him to the members of Parliament and thinking men and women in the capital.

In him the tribal people have, perhaps, the finest interpreter of their culture. He sees the problems of the hill people in the context of the problems of South-East Asia. He says : Of all parts of our country, North-East India lies the closest to the South-East Asian theatre to which the world centre of gravity is gradually shifting, and while we may be indifferent to what may go on, other countries are not.

#### **MR STANLEY NICHOLS ROY**

Personal legacies are difficult to preserve. In the wider context of the inheritance of nations or communities a sense of lyrical vagueness and impersonalisation acts as a protective membrane. An ideal lying dormant

beneath the surface of hallowed time does not claim immediate emulation or action. But a person born to a rich family heritage has to meet many challenges. If he proves equal to them, succeeds in measuring up to the standards set before him or, by personal effort and enterprise, helps enrich it, he adds to the existing glory bequeathed to him. Otherwise, his fall from the sublime to the ridiculous writes him off and corrodes his heritage.

Mr Stanley Nichols Roy, with his education, service to the people and high standards in public life, has not only proved himself worthy of the values of his distinguished father, the Rev J J M Nichols Roy, but has also carried forward his mission of service to the tribal people.

His home is in the hills in a village of which he is proud. His work is among the villagers who are proud of him. Educated at Presidency College, Calcutta and at California, U S A, Mr Nichols Roy has appreciated the beauty and serenity of tribal life against the background of urban civilization with its traps, tricks and temptations.

He saw his father's heart and mind crying out for the cherished values of political and social life. He saw him fighting out with brilliant wit and limitless sympathy the forces of disintegration in the hills and the plains of Assam. He saw him working ceaselessly for ensuring to the tribal people their rightful place in the multi-racial country and, above all, he saw him throwing himself, in all humility, on the breast of revealed religion in moments of trial for succour and solace.

Mr Nichols Roy combines in his personality the discernment of a mature politician and the self-effacing spirit of service of a clergyman. He has held executive positions in business, done pioneering work in providing educational facilities to the tribal people and actively campaigned for the political rights of the hill people.

The Union Christian College at Barapani is a monument to his tireless social work. In recognition of his work for their political awakening, the people elected him as general secretary of the APHLC in 1960—the post which he has held ever since. He has always pleaded for non-violence and practised Gandhi's teachings in his daily life. Scrupulously avoiding occasions for unpleasantness in personal and political life, he has developed such a persuasive plausibility of speech and manners that he has come to be regarded as a symbol of friendship between the people of the hills and the plains. He is married to a former American citizen, Miss Helen Randolph. Their family includes four children. But is his family just so small? Mr Nichols Roy feels that a man who believes in the ministry of Christ and the message of his crucifixion to mankind has the whole world as his family.

## Men of the Masses

### MR S. MARAK

**M**R Sanford Marak is an intrepid realist. His scholarship—he holds M. A. degrees in Economics and Political Science—took him to teaching for three years at Tura College.

Realising that well-educated and imaginative workers were required in many other professions also, Mr Marak took upon himself the responsibilities of a deputy superintendent of police.

The enthusiast in him had his fill of hard and honest work in that capacity till April 1967.

His association with active politics is brief but his experience of men and matters is vast. To him facts are sacred and the people are the supreme source of strength.

For every sense of unreality he has a sovereign sense of disregard.

Unreal manners, unreal glory, unreal nationalism, unreal ways of living and loving are all taboos for him. To the new generation in Meghalaya, Mr Marak is a symbol of the magnificent creative urge of youth.

### MR E. BAREH

Mr Edwinson Bareh, 46 and full of vitality, is a man with a passion for reaching for the sky. He joined the

Royal British Air Force in 1943 and worked in it for four eventful years.

Politics claimed his attention in 1957. Since then he has worked as a member of the Jowai District Council, the United Khasi and Jaintia Hills District Council, the Assam Legislative Assembly and as the Vice-President of the APHLC.

To Mr Bareh, integrity is the essence of life. His frankness and capacity for strict administration have endeared him to those who have worked with him. He believes in self-help and the dignity of labour.

He often tells his people and himself : You cannot help people permanently by doing for them what they could and should do for themselves.

### **MR B.B. LYNGDON**

Mr Brington Buhai Lyngdoh, now in his late forties, is an educationist at heart and a lawyer by inclination.

He is educated at Ramakrishna Mission School, Cherapunji, Cotton College, Gauhati, Scottish Church College, Calcutta and the Law College of Calcutta University. Mr. Lyngdoh practised law at Shillong before plunging into politics to lead the Eastern India Tribal Union of which he was the general secretary between 1954 and 1956.

He held several eminent positions including the chairmanship of the Khasi and Jaintia Conference, the vice-chairmanship of the APHLC Action Council and the membership of the Assam Legislative Assembly.

Doing his part by God and man, Mr Lyngdoh treats life as an essay in sincere public service and spends his leisure writing on social and political matters.

# PART V

## FACTS AND BACKGROUND

*Assam : Fables and facts*

*The Garos : An early account*

*The Garo language*

*The Khasis : Some notes*

*Towards autonomy ; the Bardoloi Sub-Committee's findings*

*The Sixth Schedule of the Constitution  
(Text)*

*What Nehru envisaged*

*The Pataskar Commission's findings*

*What the Federal Structure Plan meant,  
and the Asoka Mehta Committee  
Report*

*Meghalaya at a glance*

**The tribal people of India are a virile people who naturally went astray sometimes. They quarrelled and occasionally cut off one another's heads. These were deplorable occurrences and should have been checked. Even so, it struck me that some of their practices were perhaps less evil than those that prevail in our cities. It is often better to cut off a hand or a head than to crush and trample on a heart. Perhaps, I also felt happy with these simple folk, because the nomad in me found congenial soil in their company. I approached them in a spirit of comradeship and not like some one aloof who had come to look at them, examine them, weigh them, measure them and report about them or to try and make them conform to another way of life.**

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**We should have a receptive attitude to the tribal people. There is a great deal we can learn from them, particularly in the frontier areas ; and having learnt, we must try to help and co-operate. They are an extremely disciplined people, often a great deal more democratic than most others in India. Even though they have no constitution, they are able to function democratically and carry out the decisions made by their elders or representatives. Above all, they are a people who sing and dance and try to enjoy life ; not people who sit in stock exchanges, shout at one another and think themselves civilized.**

**I would prefer being a nomad in the hills to being a member of stock exchanges, where one is made to sit and listen to noises that are ugly to a degree. Is that the civilization we want tribal people to have ? I hope not. I am quite sure that the tribal folk, with their civilization of song and dance, will last till long after stock exchanges have ceased to exist.**

**—Jawaharlal Nehru**

## Assam : Fables and Facts

**A**MONG the earliest written scientific accounts of Assam is the record of history, topography, antiquities and statistics of this region prepared under the editorship of Mr Montgomery Martin (Please see the bibliography). It was based on papers at the East India House.

This account of Assam given in "Eastern India" was collected partly from people of Bengal who had visited Assam on several occasions and partly from some residents of Assam who had migrated to Bengal. According to Mr Martin, these people had resided long in Assam and had connections there. This account is interesting because it provides a general pattern consisting of myths and facts about the large framework of the region under which Meghalaya now falls. The Bengali spellings in the original text have been retained. The next chapter should be read as a continuation of this chapter.

### THE LEGEND

Many ages ago two brothers, named Khunlai and Khuntai, came to a hill named Chorai Korong, which is situated south of Gorgango, the ancient capital of Assam. Khunlai, taking with him some attendants and the god, Cheng, went towards the south-east and took possession of a country called Nora which his descendants continue to govern. Khuntai remained in the vicinity of the hill,



Chorai Khorong, and kept in his possession the god Chung, who is still considered by his descendants as their tutelary deity.

The two brothers, Khunlai and Khuntai, are supposed to have "come from heaven." What place that may mean, I cannot say. Since the descendants of the latter have adopted the religion of the Brahmans, the original work is translated as Sworgo (heaven), where Indro reigns. Probably in this some traces of Chinese manners may be still observed. Khunlai remained in Nora, and his descendants still govern that country. By the Hindus they are considered as infidels, and monsters of impurity; but a friendly intercourse is still maintained between the descendants of the two brothers.

Khuntai is usually reported to have been accompanied by the Deodhaing his spiritual guide, and by two Danggoriyas, a Duyara, a Dihingga, a Lahon, a Sondike, and 36 Hatimuriyas, in all 43 persons; although this number is disputed, and some allege, that the Hatimuriyas amounted to only 20 persons.

It is supposed that when Khuntai arrived, the country now called Assam proper was subject to 12 petty chiefs (Baro Bhungiya), who without force submitted to a person very much their superior in dignity and education. This, however, seems rather improbable and the Kachharis allege that the country previous to the irruption of Khuntai belongs to their prince. On the other hand, it must be observed, that the descendants of several of the petty chiefs are said still to remain in the country.

These differences may be reconciled by the supposition, that these chiefs were tributaries of Kachhar, which had shaken off the authority of their prince and fallen into a state of anarchy; for it must be observed, that the Bengalees frequently express this state by the term "twelve landlords" (Baro Bhungiya) just as the people of Karnata use the phrase "Nava Nayaka" (nine captains) to

express the same condition. The improbable part of this story is that either the Kachhari prince or the petty chiefs should have submitted to the authority of Khuntai with his handful of followers. This, however, may be explained by the consideration of the account that is given of these personages.

The Danggoriyas were the companions and confidants of Khuntai. The Duyara was his porter, the Sandike his drawer of water and the term Hatimuriya means commander of 1,000 men. It is, therefore, probable, that Khuntai was accompanied by an army consisting of many corps commanded by an equal number of Hatimuriyas, while his normal cook, porter, drawer of water and goatherd held the chief offices of state, just as the persons called grooms and butlers in Europe were in possession of the chief commands, while the feudal government remained in vigour. In Assam the descendants of those persons still retain their ancient dignities, and, if the Hatimuriyas ever amounted to 36, they are now reduced to twenty families.

The original territory, occupied by Khuntai, included two very long islands formed by branches of the Bihmoputro, together with some of the lands adjacent, on both banks of that great river. Thirteen princes, in a regular succession from father to son, continued to govern this territory with great success according to the rules of their ancestors. They ate beef, pork, and all other foods that shock the natives of India, and drank wine.

The Deodhaings were their spiritual guides, performing the worship of the god Chung with great mystery and secrecy, and possessing some book called Bulongji in a character which appears on the old coin, and seems to have a strong affinity with that of Ava. These books are said to be composed, in a language, which was formerly spoken at the court of Assam, and are said to

contain a chronicle of their kings who were as follows : 1. Khuntai, 2. Chukapha, 3. Chutaupha, 4. Chubinong, 5. Chuinong, 6. Tukophi, 7. Chhachonong, 8. Chupinong, 9. Chhuchong, 10. Churang, 11. Chujang, 12. Chupuk, 13. Chukum. (All these names strongly resemble Chinese names.)

During the government of these princes, three different attempts were made by the Moslems to subdue the country, and all ended in complete disgrace and overthrow. (See *Asiatick Researches*, Vol. 2, page 171.) In the last, which happened in the reign of Aurangzeb, under the command of Mir Jumleh, his army was so roughly handled by the enterprising and warlike Assamese, that he not only was compelled to make a precipitate retreat but to yield up a large part of the lands which had belonged to the Moslems before the invasion took place, and which now forms the greater part of the western of the three governments into which Assam is divided.

In the account above referred to, in the *Asiatick Researches*, the king of Assam is called Jeidej Sing, or Jayadhwaja Sinha but no such name appears in the list of Assamese princes, nor indeed can it be expected that it should ; for from the account it would appear that these princes still retained their original language and customs and *Jayadhwaja Sinha* are Sanskrit words, and probably are a translation of the proper title.

Tradition mentions that the prince then governing, when he attacked the Indian army, dressed a number of low persons like Brahmans and ordered them to drive a great herd of oxen between the armies on which the Hindu soldiers retreated, lest any injury should happen to the sacred order, and the beasts. There is no doubt that in Assam some persons, now employed in the lowest offices, wear the thread of distinction and are called Brahmans on account of their descent from the

persons who were decked out by the victorious king.

There is, therefore, perhaps some foundation for the story ; but we can scarcely suppose, that the army of Aurangzeb should have been influenced by any respect either for Brahmans or cattle, and the fellows were probably called Brahmans as a mark of scorn for the doctrine of caste with which even the Moslems of India are infected and which led the author, who gives the account of the expedition under Mir Jumleh, to consider the Assamese as mere brutes under a human form.

This contempt for the sacred order did not continue long. The son of Chukum introduced this innovation, took the title of Godadhor Singho, and was the fourteenth prince of the family. The conversion of the royal family seems to have been accomplished by female intrigue. Chukum, having been enamoured of a Hindu concubine, departed from the rules of the family, and settled the succession on her son Godadhor who, according to the law of Assam, was entirely illegitimate. On this account, perhaps, it was that he preferred the religion of his mother ; and the Brahmans made a stretch of conscience in order to receive a sovereign among their followers, who, owing to the conquests of the family, then formed a considerable portion of the nation and a portion ready to support the authority of a convert however irregular his claim to succession might be. The old priesthood, however, continued to be the purohits (officiating priests) for the king in the worship of the family deity, Chung, which is still followed. The Bengalee language also became more common, although it was not used on the coin, nor in state affairs, until the time of Rudro, son of Godadhor. Now it is the common language, even of the court, and the original Assamese, commonly spoken in the reign of Aurangzeb, in all probability will be soon lost, as it is now a dead language, and is only studied by those, who follow the old worship.

The evil of departing from the regular succession soon became evident. Godadhor had two sons, Kana and Rudro. The two chief officers of the government, disliking Kana, the eldest son, put out his eyes and placed his younger brother on the throne. Kana had two sons, one legitimate and the other by a concubine. Whether or not any descendants of the former still remain, I have not learned ; but a descendant of the illegitimate offspring is now called king ; although it is generally admitted, that the descendants of Rudro alone are entitled to be called Tungkhunggiya, or to succeed to the government.

The oldest coin of Rudro, the son of Godadhor, is dated in the year of Sak 1618 corresponding with the year of Our Lord 1695 and the latest is dated in 1635 of Sak, or A.D. 1712. Hitherto, the Assamese had been a warlike and enterprising race, while their princes had preserved a vigour, that in the east is not commonly retained for so many generations ; but their subjection to the Brahmans, which was followed by that of most of the nation, soon produced the usual imbecility and the nation has sunk into the most abject pusillanimity towards strangers and into internal confusion and turbulence.

Rudro Singho, finding that the sacred order had fallen into contempt, on account of the pretended Brahmans, who were descended from the persons whom his ancestor in mockery of caste had decked in the guise of Brahmans, made an investigation into the claims of all the Brahmans in the country and degraded all those, whose origin could be discovered to be spurious. The whole order, however, then in the country, having been brought into discredit by the uncertainty of their extraction, he was not contented with a Brahman of Kamrup but adopted as his spiritual guide Ramkrishno Nyayovagis, a Brahman of Bordhoman (Burdwan), who according to report was a very holy man and whose descendants enjoy the office,

The guru usually resides with the king and is accompanied by 12 or 14 of his male relations, one of whom is purohit for the king in the worship of the Hindu gods. The families of these Brahmans reside at Nodiya, and the youth are educated at the seminary of Hindu learning. Some of these, whom the commentator on the account of the expedition of Mir Jumleh had seen and who, of course, spoke only Bengalee, led him to contradict the account where it states, that the Assamese spoke a language peculiar to themselves, and an idea of Hindu perfection seems to have led him to suppose that the barbarians (Mlechchhos) of Assam were superior to the Moguls, the most polished and magnificent race that ever inhabited India.

Owing probably to the intercession of the Brahmans, who would naturally be shocked at the barbarity of the custom, Rudro Singho did not disable his younger sons from the succession, by inflicting a personal blemish, according to the custom of the family, and this seems to have been the first mark of decay in the vigour of the "descendants of Heaven."

Rudro left four sons and was succeeded by Sib Singho, the eldest. The coin of this prince of the earliest date that I possess is in the year of Sak 1644 (A.D. 1721) leaving eight years uncertain between it and the last coin of Rudro.

In this reign it was contrived to throw the whole power into the hands of women. Soon after the accession of Sib, a Brahman by his profound skill in the science called Jyotish, discovered that the reign would be very short, and that Sib, even before his death, would be deprived of his government. It was then suggested that this prophecy might be evaded by resigning the government to a wife in whose fidelity confidence might safely be placed ; and several ladies seem to have enjoyed the royal dignity in succession and their names

appear on the coins. I found coins dated Sak 1646, 1647, 1648 (A.D. 1723, 1724, 1725) in the name of Phuleswori, the wife of Sib Singho. She is said to have governed for three years, and to have died in child-bed. I also found coins dated 1652, 1653, (A.D. 1729, 1730), in the reign of Promoteswori, the wife of Sib Singho; also those dated 1655, 1657, 1658 (A.D. 1732, 1734, 1735), in the reign of Ombika, the wife of Sib Singho; finally those dated in 1661, 1662, 1664, 1665, 1666 (A.D. 1738, 1739, 1741, 1742, 1743) in the reign of Sorbeswori Devi, wife of Sib Singho. During this long period, the name of the poor prince appears only on one coin, that I procured, in the year 1660 (A.D. 1737), and he is said to have enjoyed no sort of authority.

When one queen died, he was merely placed on the throne, in order to marry another, who might assume the government. The eldest son of Sib Singho was killed in war, and left a son named Mohoneswor, but Sib Singho was succeeded by his younger brother Promotto of whom I have coins from the year 1667 to 1672 (A.D. 1744 to 1749), in the former of which he succeeded his brother, or rather his brother's wife.

Promotto had no son and was succeeded by his brother, Rajeswor of whom I have many coins between 1674 and 1690 (A.D. 1751 and 1767) but he is said to have reigned 20 years which is not contradicted by any coin that I have seen. This prince seems to have been inclined to adopt the manners of the Moslems, as I have found several of his coins that have Persian legends. Rajeswor had three sons.

I. Kandura, who has died and left a son that from having been marked was incapable of succession.

II. Majujona (this means middle son, his name I do not know) who left four sons, all perhaps still alive, but they all were marked and were incapable of succession,



An illustration of how the rings are worn, supported by two strings, when their weight becomes too great for the ears.



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J. H. C. Watson, Jr.

Their names are : - 1. Baranati. 2. Kara. 3. Bhakara. 4. Charala.

III. Horujona. This means the youngest son. He is dead and has left two sons, both rendered incapable of governing.

I Boromuri resides at Khaspur in the Kachhar country, in the house of his mother's relations, to which he retired in order to save his children from being maimed. He has had five sons but one died unmarried. The eldest now alive is Brojonath, who in 1809 was at Calcutta soliciting assistance to place him on the throne. He has three sons. 2. Bobon is with his father. 3. Sindura, who is in Bengal. 4. Indu, who is with his father.

II. The second son of Kandura is Tukor who has a son and both reside at Monipoor.

Rajeswor was succeeded by Lokhymi, his brother, of whom I have coins between 1692 and 1698 (A D. 1769, 1775). This prince, according to the custom of his ancestors, maimed all the males of his family so as to secure the succession for his son. The kingdom was now, however, hastening to ruin. The power of the spiritual teachers had acquired such force that their insolence became intolerable, and Lokhymi could no longer retain his anger. To check their pride he burned a splendid building, that contrary to law, had been erected by one of them named the Mahamari, who guided a multitude of the lowest and most ignorant of the people. The inflamed multitude put the chief minister to death but the prudence of Lokhymi enabled him, although with great difficulty, to smother the rebellion ; and he died in peace.

Gaurinath, the son of Lokhymi succeeded his father, and was the twentieth prince and seventeenth generation of the family. The earliest of his coins that I have seen is in 1703, and the latest in 1717 (A.D. 1780,

1794). He seems to have been a weak young man, totally unable to contend with the enthusiastic multitude. The low followers of the Mahamari (mostly fishermen) drove him from this throne, and Pitambor, the spiritual guide of these ruffians appointed Bhorot Singho, his nephew, to be king. This person, in a coin dated 1715 (A.D. 1792), claims a descent from Bhogo Dotto, which had he been successful, would have been considered as an indisputable fact. But Gaurinath, having thrown himself on the protection of Lord Cornwallis, that nobleman, soon before his departure for Europe in 1793, sent Captain Welsh with 1,100 sepoys, who restored Gaurinath to the throne of his ancestors, and after a short stay returned to Bengal, very much to the regret of the prince. During the insurrection of the populace under the Mahamari the most horrid excesses had been committed, and most of the proper Assamese, and men of rank had been compelled to fly for refuge into the large island surrounded by the Brohmoputro and Kolong rivers, and the only person who showed any considerable spirit of enterprise or courage, was one of the great hereditary councillors of state, the Bura Gohaing.

On Bhorot Singho and his rabble having been put to flight by Captain Welsh, I do not know what became of that pretender. It is said that at the intercession of Captain Welsh he received a pardon. He was succeeded in his usurpation by a certain Sorbanondo Singho Norendrosyo who coined money in 1716 and 1717 (A.D. 1793, 1794) and who resided at Byangmara, three and a-half days' journey, south-east from Rangopoor, in the southern part of the province of Sodiya.

On Captain Welsh's retiring to Bengal, the Bura Gohaing, before mentioned as a man of enterprise, seized on the whole authority of government, and in fact was the only person among the chiefs of Assam who seems to have had vigour sufficient for the miserable

circumstances in which the country was placed. He procured soldiers from the west of India, and with these strangers he compelled the followers of the Mahamari to take refuge either in the Company's territory, or in the eastern extremity of the kingdom. He also put to flight a notorious robber, named Merja, who in the confusion, with about 700 Bengalee Burokandaj, the most vile of all rabbles, had been able to spread dismay among the Assamese. This fellow still lurks in the lower parts of Bhotan ; but now he only ventures to act as an ordinary robber. Bhorot Singh, unmindful of the clemency that was shown to him, again rebelled, and coined money in the year 1719 (A.D. 1796) but he was taken and put to death by the active Gohaing.

This chief, far from being contented with the power of acting as a councillor, which was vested in him by the laws of his country, seized on the person of Gaurinath, and drove from his presence the great secretary (Boro Boruya), who was the constitutional minister of the country. In fact Gaurinath became a mere cypher and did not long survive the restraint in which he was placed.

The Bura Gohaing either could not procure a descendant of Rudro that was free from blemish, no person with such pretensions to authority wishing to trust themselves in his power, or, what is more probable, he wished to have a king whose claims were doubtful, as more favourable to his views.

He, therefore, appointed as king a boy named Kinaram, who took the title of Komoleswor, and who is a descendant of Kana, the eldest son of Gadadhar ; but his ancestor, the son of Kana, was illegitimate, so that the title of Kinaram is universally acknowledged to be defective, and the Gohaing has not ventured to propose his coronation. Another cause of disaffection against this poor youth has now been discovered. His forefathers followed

the Kolitas, called the Sologuri Mohajons as their spiritual guides, and he refuses to receive instruction (Upodes) from the Brahmans of Bengal, who have long guided the royal family.

The most keen advocate for the sacred order is the mother of this unfortunate prince, who probably will not long be permitted to live as he is now approaching manhood and as an infant king will answer better the purposes of the Bura Gohaing, who is in full possession of power and is still in the vigour of understanding. His government, however, is not without great difficulties, and in a conspiracy, that happened about the year 1802 or 1803, he was under the necessity of putting to death about 500 persons of some rank, among whom was a brother of his own wife. Although the execution was performed with the cruelties usual then among the Assamese, and several were put to death by the application of burning hoes, the minds of the people have not been quieted, and they seem ripe for insurrection.

Having thus given such historical matters as have come to my knowledge, I shall proceed to mention the principal persons, and officers of the kingdom, in doing which I shall have occasion to detail most of the information concerning its topography that I have received. The accompanying map, drawn by one of my informants, will explain the situation of places.

The persons descended from Rudo Singho by legitimate marriage and entitled to continue the succession are called Tungkhungiva and all these have a right to succeed to the royal dignity, except such as have on their body some blemish or mark—whether from disease or accident, the scar either of an honourable wound, or of smallpox, being equally a complete bar to the royal dignity. In order probably to prevent the dangers of a disputed succession, it was the maxim of the family to mark every youth that was not intended for being the

presumptive heir, so soon as he approached manhood, by a wound on some conspicuous part, such as the nose or ear. This did not prevent him from being considered as prince. He was called Gohaing Deo, and his children, if without blemish, had a right to succession ; although, so far as I can learn, the son of a person who was marked, has never yet succeeded. As a further precaution, all the princes, not sons of the reigning king and their families, were confined on a hill called Tejinamrup, to which there are three ascents and three strong guards – Chaudang, Dolakakuriya, and Kukurachoya. This hill is situated among forests, about two days' journey south-east from Gorgango. The number of princes confined has of late decreased, many having escaped to other countries and having there had children which will no doubt tend to hasten the overthrow of the dynasty. Wherever the usual law of the country does not exclusively give the succession to estates and honours to one son, it becomes impossible to secure the right of royal accession undisturbed, even by the most rigorous precaution such as the Assamese have adopted.

The kings formerly lived at Gorgango but Sib Singho removed the seat of government to Rongopoor Nogar (the city the abode of pleasure) which is situated on the Dikho river, that falls into the south side of the Brohmoputro about three hours' journey south from the Dihing or the southern branch of the Brohmoputro river. Rongopoor was a large town, and was very probably the place so named where Bhogo Dotto had his country residence, although it is not improbable, but this prince may have had two Rongopools, one to the east, and one to the west of his capital which was at Gohati.

The royal palace was surrounded by a wall of brick about three cubits thick and  $3\frac{1}{2}$  cubits high. The house in which the throne stood (Changgor) was thatched but was supported by sal beams. Its walls were constructed

of bamboo mats. In the same enclosure was a building of bricks in which the Raja sat to view public shows. There was also a small temple composed entirely of copper. In this, as is supposed, the god, Chung, was kept; but the whole worship of that deity is veiled in the most profound mystery.

Since the disturbances in the reign of Gaurinath, the royal residence has been removed to Jorhat, about 20 miles west of Rongopoor. It stands on both sides of the Dichoi river (Dessoye) which comes from the mountains on the southern frontier. According to Mr. Wood this river enters the Brohmoputro in latitude  $26^{\circ} 48'$  north, and in longitude  $94^{\circ} 5' 41''$  east of Greenwich. No buildings of bricks have been erected, nor is any brick house permitted to a subject.

The kings and nobles live in thatched huts with walls of bamboo mats, supported by sal posts, and built after the fashion of Bengal with arched ridges and mud-floors. Each apartment is a separate hut. The king has some gold and silver vessels, and some glassware and rich furniture that has been sent as presents by the Government of Bengal. Where the chief nobles sit in their own houses, a heap of earth is raised, and this is covered with mats and cloth. If any person highly respected comes to visit him, the noble orders a blanket for a seat; but in general all his guests sit on the bare ground, as there is no furniture in the hut where company is received. But very great persons have bedsteads and curtains. Persons of lower rank, who attempted to imitate their superiors in the use of such luxuries, would be severely punished. In courts of justice the judge sits on a low wooden stool; all other persons are seated on the bare ground as if in the royal presence.

The coronation or rather enthronement of the king is performed with much ceremony. The Raja, mounted on a male elephant, and accompanied by his principal wife

(Boro Kumari) riding on a female, proceeds to plant a tree (*ficus religiosa*) on the hill, Chorai Khorong, where his ancestor, Khuntai, first "appeared on earth." By the way, he takes up the young tree and pays the proprietor whatever price he chooses to demand. In performing this ceremony, the god, Chung, is suspended round his neck, he is girt with a sword, (Kyangdang), he carries in his turban the feathers of the sacred bird, Deokukura (*Pavo Bicalcaratus*), and he is accompanied by all the principal officers of the kingdom, by a great part of the army, and by a vast multitude of the people.

Having planted the tree, the Raja and his followers descend to three huts that have been erected for the purpose and which are called Patghor, Holonghor, and Singorighor. The Raja and his Queen first enter the Patghor, where some water is poured on them from a shell called Dokhyinaborto Sonkho, the mouth of which is turned the way contrary to that of the shell, which is usually sounded by the Hindus in order to attract a little notice from the gods.

The two royal persons then enter the Holonghor and sit on a stage made of bamboos, under which is placed one of each species of animals that can be procured such as a man, an elephant, a horse, a cow, a deer, a hog, a fowl, a duck, a snake, an insect, a fish etc. The water from nine tirthos, or holy places, is poured over the King and the Queen, and falls on the animals.

The water of each holy place is kept in a golden vessel and the plants called Sorbaushodhi and Mohaushodhi are infused in it.

The royal persons having been bathed, the Raja replaces the feathers in the turban and advances with his Queen to the Singorighor having in his hand the sword (Kyangdang) and with this, before he enters, he kills a buffalo. The original custom was to kill a man, a criminal having been selected for the purpose ; but since the time



of Rudho Singho, a buffalo has been substituted.

The Raja then enters the Singorighor, and ascends a throne (Singhason) of gold consisting of seven stages. Having been seated, the Queen and the three chief persons of the kingdom make many presents of gold and jewels and then lay their hands on the four feet of the throne. These nobles then walk seven times round the sovereign who orders money to be coined and gives some presents to the Deodhaing and to the Brahman who is his spiritual guide.

He also orders gratuities (Siropa) to be given to all the principal officers and to religious mendicants, and some days' provisions are distributed to the multitude who have assembled to see the show. The Raja and his Queen then dine with all the Assamese of high rank. Then all the tributary Rajas, landlords, and inferior officers are introduced and make presents which occupies a whole month. Over all these ceremonies the Chiring Phukon presides and regulates every thing according to the ancient customs of the kingdom.

There are three great councillors of state, called Gohaing, who have by law no authority to issue orders but whose duty it is to give advice to the king when he chooses to require their assistance. Each receives a certain number of men to work for him and no officer of the government is allowed to possess any jurisdiction over these, so that their whole management and superintendence is left with their immediate master, except when the king personally requires their assistance, which he sometimes, but rarely does. These dignified offices are in the hereditary possession of three great families; but the king may appoint any member of these families that he pleases to hold the office, and he may change them at pleasure. The persons holding the office always live at court. The title, Gohaing, seems to be the highest in the country, and as I have said, is given to the princes

of the blood royal who annex to it Deo or Lord. The latter is a Hindu word, but Gohaing is probably an Assamese term.

The Boropatro Gohaing is the highest in rank, and is descended from an illegitimate son of one of the kings. He is allowed 6,000 men (Payiks) in constant attendance.

The Boro Gohaing is the second in rank and is allowed 4,000 men. He is descended from one of the Dangoryas who accompanied Khuntai.

The Bura Gohaing is descended from the other Dangoriya, and has legally the same allowance ; but the present occupant is in fact the actual sovereign of the country.

The Boro Boruya, or great secretary, is the fourth great officer of state, and in fact he ought to be the prince minister, to whom, of right, the whole executive power, civil and military, is entrusted and to whose court there is an appeal in all cases, except where the servants of the three great Gohaings are concerned. He must be chosen from among the four families called Duyara, Dihingga, Lahon, and Sondiki. He is only allowed 100 servants but he has fees on all commissions and on all cases that come before his court. The present Boruya has been totally deprived of power, and his deputies act under the orders of the Bura Gohaing.

The inferior officers of state at the capital are as follows :—there are six persons called Choruya Phukons, and in general, it may be observed, that Phukon is the title next in dignity to that of Gohaing. Each of these six has a separate title, and the whole forms the council of the Boro Boruya, although they have also other duties.

1. Naoyainche who is allowed 1,000 servants with whom he mans the royal boats ; 2. Dohikya ; 3. Bhitrail ; 4. Naiya ; 5. Deka ; 6. Naisoti. Each of these is allowed 20 servants, and their duty seems to be that of purveyors, to procure whatever the king wants. The Porbotya Phukon

is a Brahman, manages the affairs of one of the queens, and is allowed a secretary or Boruya.

The Raydengya Phukon is an Assamese, and manages the affairs of another queen. He also is allowed a secretary.

The Raja's mother has two officers, the Khonggiya Phukon, and the Khonggiya Boruya; both are Brahmans, and the former is allowed a secretary. The Jolbhari Phukon is a Brahman and has the charge of all the servants that the Raja employs in the Hindu temples. These amount to 1,000.

The Tambuli Phukon is also a Brahman and has the care of the Raja's garden in which beetle-leaf is the chief article of cultivation. The Naosalya Phukon is allowed 1,000 men for building the royal boats. The Chholadhora Phukon has the charge of all the Raja's effects. The Chiring Phukon is the master of ceremonies and the charge of the Deo Dhaings or priests of the old religion. The Deulya Phukon is a Brahman who has the charge of repairing and preserving the Hindu temples. The Kharghariya Phukon has the charge of making gunpowder. The Nek Phukon and the Dihingga Phukon have the charge of the king's messengers. All these Phukons, except such as I have mentioned as being Brahmans, must be Assamese legitimately descended from some of the persons who accompanied Khuntai, and who are called Hatimuriyas.

Boruya seems to be the title next in dignity to Phukon. Of these there are many. The Bhandari Boruya is the king's private treasurer, and is allowed an assistant called Kayastha Bhandari. The Duliya Boruya has the charge of the Raja's palanquins and bearers. The Chaudangiya Boruya has the superintendency of public executions. The Dolakakuriya Boruya is the chief of the footmen. The Khanikar Boruya is the superintendent of artificers. The Sonadhar Doloyi is mint-master and chief jeweller.

The Majumdar Boruya is private secretary and letter-writer to the king and is allowed four Changkoyatis or assistants. The Bej Boruya is the king's physician. The Changmai Boruya has the superintendency of the royal table. The Hati Boruya, the master of elephants, has about 125 of these animals. The Ghora Boruya, or master of horses, has only 50 horses. The Helui Dhari Boruya has charge of the arms, or arsenal. The Devighor Boruya has charge of a private chapel.

The king has 12 Rajkhaoyas, who are under the orders of the Bara Boruya, and are officers of considerable importance, each being supposed to command 3,000 men. They attend the court of justice, and are employed as umpires to settle disputes, and to superintend any public work for the king.

There are also attendant on this prince some persons called Vairagis and Kotokis. The former are sent with messages to a distance ; the latter seem to be a kind of interpreters. The king seldom chooses to communicate the most important orders in writing, and the dismissal of a Gohaing, or of a governor of Kamrup, is merely signified to him by a verbal message ; but it is communicated by three officers, a Kotoki, a Bora and a Takla, all persons of low rank

At Jorhat are 300 soldiers from the west of India and 800 native troops, who are levied indiscriminately from all castes. The whole officers are from the west of India but have married in Assam and have had lands allotted for their support. The whole are under the command of a Captain Gohaing. Each company of 100 men is commanded by one subadar, one jumadar, six havildars, and one adjutant.

When I have said that the king grants a certain number of men to such or such an officer, the following must be understood to be the meaning. By far the greater part of the land in Assam is granted to persons called Payiks

each of whom is held bound to work four months in the year without wages or food, either for the king, or for whatever persons the royal pleasure directs. These people either work for their lord in whatever art they are skilled or pay him a "composition" which is regulated by custom but is very rarely accepted. As each man works only four months in the year to complete the constant attendance of one man, three persons are required and are, therefore, called a full Payik.

It is said, before the country was depopulated by the late disturbances, the men were only required to work on the royal account for three months in the year, and of course, then four men were called a complete Payik. The men for every complete Payik are allowed 12 purus of land free of rent. The puru being 150 cubits square, the land allotted for paying the constant attendance of one man is very near 14 acres which the men who are not on service and their families cultivate. I am told that on one considerable estate at least, the number of persons, young and old, for each Payik amount to from 12 to 14.

The Payiks are placed under four ranks of officers, who, according to their respective authority, are supposed to command 1,000, 100, 20, and 10 men ; but these numbers, and the numbers said to be granted to such or such officers, I am informed, are merely nominal, especially since the disturbances ; so that the Hatimuriya has sometimes in fact, not more than 500.

All these officers are allowed land free of rent which are cultivated by that proportion of the Payiks, that is, allowed to work on their account, and each receives presents from the men and officers that are subordinate to his authority. The whole of the Payiks, I believe, may under these officers be compelled to take the field ; but this is seldom exacted, for they have become a mere rabble, without courage, discipline or arms. There are

two manners in which the king derives an advantage from these Payiks.

He grants a part of them to his officers for their maintenance, and for the support of their dignity, so that there is no issue from the treasury for the pay of any officer, nor indeed to any person except the foreign soldiers, merchants and mendicants. The officer either accepts of the composition or employs his Payiks to cultivate the farms (Khat) which supply his family with provisions, to build his houses, to make and man his boats and to make his furniture and clothing, so that his outlay of money is very trifling.

He also receives presents from all those under his authority and is vested with the charge of the police, the punishment of slight offences, and the settling of petty suits in all the lands (Gangs), which his servants occupy. Each of these branches of authority is lucrative although a considerable proportion, where the number of servants is great, goes to subordinates.

The king, however, employs a vast number of men to work in his farms, gardens, fisheries, mines, arsenals, and manufactories and to man and construct his vessels, who all labour without any expense to the treasury. The officers whom he employs to superintend these works usually receive a commission of 5 per cent, that is, allowed to employ on their own business every twentieth man, and they are, besides, allowed the whole of the profits from presents, from the care of the police, and from the administration of justice in the land occupied by their subordinates.

These are the officers and persons employed near the king. Only it must be observed, that each principal officer has a Doyalya or deputy. The central of the three chief provinces into which the kingdom is divided and which constitute Assam proper ought, by the constitution, to be under the immediate government of the Baro

Boruya, or chief secretary ; but its affairs are now managed by his deputy under the control of the Bura Gohaing.

There are few or no sub-divisions in Assam proper, except into Gangs or manors. Each of the above-mentioned officer receives a certain number of Gangs, to enable him to accommodate people (Payiks) which are placed under his authority. The only hereditary estates are as follows :—

1. Charingga,
2. Tipomiya,
3. Namrup.

These three small territories have always been held by some collateral branch of the royal family, and most commonly by the descendants of Kana. They are all in the immediate vicinity of the hill, Tejinamrup, where the princes not destined for the succession, should be confined.

4. A very considerable estate called *Doyang*, which reaches to the south-west within 10 or 12 miles of the capital, and belongs to the family of the present governor of Kamrup (Bara Phukon), who sends a fixed number of men to work for the king, and disposes of the remainder as he pleases.

5. *Bacha*, east from Doyang, is a small estate on a similar footing, which belongs to one of the Rajkhaoyas or commander of 3,000 men.

6. Chutiya Kumar is a similar estate, held by a family of Kolitas. It is on the north side of the Brohmoputro.

I shall now proceed to mention the other jurisdiction of the kingdom, and the officers immediately dependent on the crown. The most important is the province of Kamrup the greater part of which was wrested from the Moslems early in the reign of Aurangzeb. The chief officer has only the title of Phukon ; but his rank is considered as next to that of the families that are entitled to hold that office.

The reason of his being called only Phukon, while officers of inferior dignity are called Gohaings, would appear to be, that, until the conquest of Gohati, this officer seems only to have governed the western end of the island, included between the Brohmoputro and the Kolong rivers, and even this jurisdiction would seem to have been curtailed by the power of the great military officers stationed in that quarter. He now has not only the management of all the affairs of his extensive province, but is usually entrusted with transacting all the intercourse with the government of Bengal ; but he is not permitted to do anything of importance without the advice and consent of his council, which consists of six Phukons who assemble in the Dupdyar or Council House in Gohati where the Governor resides.

The city of Gohati is a very poor place ; but it was formerly the capital of all Kamrup and according to Mr. Wood is placed in  $26^{\circ} 9'N.$ , and about 70 miles east from Goyalpara. The greatest portion of the lands of the Assamese province of Kamrup has been granted to Payiks for service, and the management of these has been given to the different officers either for their support or to enable them to perform certain duties for the king.

A considerable proportion of the land, however, has been granted to different Rajas, whose dignities are hereditary in certain families ; but the king may appoint any person of the family to be the Raja, may change the



person at pleasure and appoint another individual of the family in his stead.

For other kinds of land rent is paid in money, and their administration is committed to Zamindars, as under the Mogul princes. Other lands have been appropriated to pious purposes and have been granted to various temples, and to Brahmans, or other religious men. Finally, other lands, which chiefly occupy both banks of the river, near Gohati, are reserved to be cultivated on account of the king.

The officers of Kamrup, besides the governor, are as follows : six Phukons, who constitute the provincial council. (1) The Pani Phukon superintends 6,000 Payiks, who are constantly employed in cultivating land, in fishing, and in various manufactures on the king's account. Under him is employed an accountant called Takla Bora Mojumdar. He resides on the north bank of the Brohmoputro. (2) The Daka Phukon superintends 4,000 Payiks, employed in the same manner, but is held to be guided by the instructions of the Pani Phukon. He resides about two or three miles higher up than his superior. (3 and 4) The Dihingga and Phukons are the immediate assistants of the Boro Phukon. (5 and 6) The two Chheutya Phukons are subordinate to the former.

Rajkhaoyas are always in attendance at the court of justice (Boro Choruya), ready to be employed as umpires to settle disputes.

The Bujur Boruya is the collector of revenue, for the whole land of Kamrup, that has not been granted to the Rajas, or for pious purposes. He is under the orders and inspection of the governor of the province but cannot be dismissed from his office without an order from the king. The Boro Kayet is the collector's accountant. Boldi Singho, native of the west of India, is commander (Subedar) of the regular troops, and instructs them in

European tactics. The governor has six companies and the Pani Phukon has two. Each company contains from 60 to 100 men of different countries and castes. About 100 are from the west of India and are paid entirely in money. The natives receive Rs. 2 a month for subsistence and land sufficient to support their families.

The Rajas of Kamrup seem to remain nearly on the same footing as during the Mogul Government. They are the original petty chiefs of the country, each of whom possesses a certain territory which is assessed to furnish a certain number of Payiks. The Raja either sends the men to work on the King's account, or remits the commutation money. No other persons, who hold lands for service, reside on the estates of the Rajas, who may cultivate what is not necessary for the support of the Payiks, in whatever manner they please. The Rajas possess every sort of jurisdiction, except the power of very severe or of capital punishment; and in case of war should take the field at the head of their Payiks. The Rajas are as follows.

1. Baraduyar : The Raja is a Garo and lives at Bhogpoor, two days' journey south-west from Gohati. It is close to the mountains, inhabited by independent Garos; but these consider the Baraduyar Raja as their Chief. It is for his low lands only that he pays tribute to Assam. In his territory is a market-place, named Kukuriya, to which the independent Garos bring salt that they purchase at Rajhat in Jaintiya, and at Laur in the district of Srihatta (Sylhet). The road from Laur, as I was informed by a Brahman, who had come by it, passes through the territory of a Garo chief, named Koiram, who borders on Susango. West from Koiram is the territory of Ganeswar Raja, a nephew of the Raja of Koroyivari.

2. Bholagram is situated east from Baraduyar. The

**Raja is a Mech.**

3. Mairapoor is situated between Bholagram and Baraduyar.

4. Lukiduyar : This territory lies west of Gohati, on the Kailasi river and is larger than that of any of the former Rajas. It borders on the independent Garos and nowhere extends to the Brohmoputro. When Mr Wood accompanied Captain Welsh and made his valuable survey of that country, this Raja seems to have usurped Chamoriya Pergunah. He is of a Garo family ; but has been converted by the Brahmans, and in imitation of his sovereign receives spiritual instruction from the sacred order. He resides at Luki on the side of the Kailasi.

5. Pantan, and (6) Bongram : These two chiefs are of the same family with the Raja of Lukiduyar, and their territories, which are very petty, are adjacent to his on the west towards the frontier of Bengal.

7. Vagaduyar is a small territory south of Pantan. Its chief also is a Garo ; but he adheres to the customs of his ancestors.

8. Beltolya is of the same family with the Raja of Dorong : He is a Koch, claims a descent from the God Sib. and is, in fact descended, from Raja Sukladhwaj, who was the sovereign of the country. On this account he is much respected. He lives at Beltoli (Belletollah), a few miles east and south from Gohati but when the country was in confusion and when Mr. Wood made the survey, he would appear to have retired into a stronghold at some little distance farther from the Mahamaris.

9. Dumuriya (Demooroo, Wood) lives beyond

Beltoli, towards the Garo mountains. In fact he is a Garo chief and the present occupant is supposed to know many powerful incantations by which he can kill his enemies or at least render them foolish. On this account he is very much respected and the governor of the province carefully avoids giving him any manner of offence. I am assured that neither of these two Rajas possesses any territory adjacent to the Brohmoputro ; but it would appear, that when Mr. Wood made his survey, each possessed a small portion of its bank. This was probably an usurpation owing to the confusion of the times.

10. The Raniduyar Raja, in the confusion of the Mahamaris insurrection, seems to have seized on the country immediately west of Gohati, but, in fact, his real country is south from that town at the foot of the Garo mountains, and his residence is among the hills. It is probably at Noghurreah.

The Pamohee of Mr. Wood is said to be a market, where the Garos come to deal with this Chief. He is a Garo by birth ; but has adopted the worship of Vishnu. An intelligent person, who had been in his service, informed me that the Raja is bound to furnish constantly to the king 621 Payiks or men and makes present annually to the value of about Rs. 5,000.

He ought also, with his countrymen, the Garos, to assist in the King's wars. The Raja allows each Payik two ploughs of land and on these there may be from 12 to 14 people young and old. One of these is always on service, and no commutation is received.

There are only about 2,000 ploughs in the whole country ; so that the Raja lets 758 to enable him to discharge the Rs. 5,000 which he makes in presents. His only profit, therefore, is what he receives in presents, and in the management of the police.

His principal wealth is derived from his connection with the Nuniya Garos that frequent his market. They pay him no duties but, on a certain day every year, he invites all the chiefs and free men of that nation. From 5 to 6,000 usually attend, and are feasted. Every one brings a present in cotton or other commodity which sells for about Rs. 4 so that, after defraying the expense of a feast, the Raja has a profit of about Rs. 15,000.

The whole of these Garos are willing to assist in war ; but when in the field the Raja must give them subsistence.

The Garos being more warlike than the present Assamese, the Mahamaris gave the Rani Raja no sort of molestation. After the overthrow of these insurgents, the Governor came with six companies to demand some extraordinary exaction ; but he was opposed by 2,000 farmers, and 3,000 Garos, and an amicable adjustment took place, by which every thing was placed on the former footing.

11. These are all on the south side of the Brohmoputro. On the north side, the only Raja is Dorong, who is by far the most considerable and most respected. In Assam he is called a Koch, the title of Rajbongsi not being acknowledged. He supplies the king with 6,000 men, and no commutation is accepted. The family has divided into two branches the representative of each of which has 3,000 Payiks for his own use, so that the country, besides free land, is estimated at 12,000 farms of a little less than 14 acres each.

The best informed persons, whom I consulted, knew nothing specific concerning the Rajas of Myungh, Koleetah, Bogrutteah Ogooreah, or Goorookeah, whom Mr. Wood found on the island, which lies between the Brohmoputro and the Kolong rivers. The two first are said to be very petty chiefs, who live south from Gohati, and possess a village each. It is probable that the others

are persons of a similar description who, in the confusion of the times, had assumed some degree of consequence and usurped a power to which they were not entitled and which was instantly dissolved by the vigour of the Buro Gohaing.

The Pergunahs of Kamrup that had been reduced to the common system of Mogul finance remain in the same state under the government of Assam. Each Pergunah is let for from one to five years to a Chaudhuri who agrees to pay a certain rent, one-half in money and one half in goods, and whose office is in no sort hereditary.

He lets all the lands that are not given to Payiks for service and that have not been granted for pious purposes. His profit ought to arise from the difference between the rent which he collects and the revenue that he pays to the collector ; but he receives presents not only from the tenants but also from the Payiks that live on the Pergunah. He also acts as an officer of police and it is usually alleged that the Chaudhuris take money to allow rogues to escape. They have no legal authority to inflict any kind of punishment, nor to employ any armed men. Over every four or five manors (Gangs), the Chaudhuri appoints a Talokdar, who is paid in land. In each manor he also appoints a chief (Thakuri) to collect the rent, and the Thakuri is assisted by a messenger called Tarui. Both are paid in land.

It is supposed that the Chaudhuris, who are on the same footing with what the Zamidars of Bengal were before the new regulations do not give the government more than two fifths of what they collect. The revenue of the assessed land in Kamrup which reaches the royal treasury, amounts to Rs. 32,000 a year.

The pergunahs on the north side of the Brohmoputro, beginning at the company's frontier, and going east, are as follows : 1 Bansi, 2 Boronogor, 3 Borobhag,

4 Bojani, 5 Boro Khyotri, 6 Chhota Khyotri, 7 Kongorbhag, 8 Purbopar, 9 Poschimpar, 10 Bongsor, 11 Mohul, 12 Kachhari Mohul and 13 Pati Dorong.

The pergunahs on the south side of the Brohmoputro. beginning at Gohati and extending to west are : 1. Chhoyani, 2. Bronti, 3. Chamuriya and 4. Nogorbera. The governor has granted to one of his Rajkhaoyas a considerable territory called Ghiladhari, which lies between Dorong and the eastern boundary of his government.

Next to Kamrup, the government of Sodiya is the most important charge in the kingdom and its governor is called Sodiya Khaoya Gohaing. This country extends along both sides of the Brohmoputro from the boundary of Assam proper to the extremity of the kingdom. The governor may be appointed from any descendant of the persons who accompanied Khuntai. He resides at Sodiya, near Kundilnagor, where the god Krishno is said to have fought with a certain Kukkmoraja. Sodiya is reckoned six days' journey east from Jorhat. I have learned very little concerning this province or concerning the manner in which it is governed.

The following governments seem to have been established as military stations to protect the frontier. The Morongkhaoya Gohaing governs a small district, south from Jorhat, near the hills. This person must be of the same family with the Bura Gohaing. He has 1,000 Payika or soldiers, and seems to be stationed in order to protect the frontier towards Khamti.

The Solalbor Gohaing governs another small territory, including the east end of the island between the Brohmoputro and Kolong rivers, and resides at Koliyabor. He also manages about a fourth part of the territory called Charidwar, collects the royal revenue, and administers justice. His forces, stationed at Koliyabor, seem intended to check the conduct of the Bhoteas, the

Miris and the Dophlas when these mountaineers collect their shares of the revenue of Charidwar.

A few of his Payiks reside in this territory but the greater part occupy the east end of the island near Koliyabor. This officer must be selected from the family of Boro Gohaing.

The Kajolimukha Gohaing has 1,000 Payiks and some guns and lives at Kajolichauki in the west end of the same island. Lands are allotted to his people in that vicinity. The object of this force seems to be to guard against the encroachments of the Kachharis and the Jaintiyas. Although surrounded by the territory that is placed under the Governor of Gohati and stationed near that place, both he and his people are entirely independent of that officer.

The Jagil Gohaing lives on the Kolong, and is just such another military officer as the Kajoli Gohaing. He is equally independent of the Governor of Kamrup and his object is to guard against the Kachharis. These two Gohaings may be appointed from any family of the Hatimuriyas. Dhing Duyar, situated on the same island, and lately made independent of the Government of Kamrup, is a military station, established also as a check against the Kachharis. It is under the Government of the Raja.

Charidwar is a large territory under a kind of government, which, I presume, must be very disagreeable for the subject. It occupies the whole northern bank of the river—from the eastern boundary of the province of Kamrup to Titli Potarmukh—where the Brohmoputro divides into two branches to form the great island called Majuli, a distance said to be about thirteen days' journey by land in length. The district is also said to be in general about  $1\frac{1}{2}$  days' journey in width, although in some parts its width is not more than one day's journey. The day's journey is said to be from 10 to 12 coss (Kos)



or from 20 to 24 miles.

The King of Asam possesses the right of administering justice, and of levying from each plough Re. 1, and a piece of Muga silk cloth, 8 cubits long, and 2 cubits wide, worth from 16 to 20 annas.

Three mountain chiefs have each a right to levy a certain sum from each plough ; and for this purpose each sends a body of armed men who in the cool season go through the country, live at free quarters and plunder those who do not pay the customary dues.

These three chiefs govern the Kampo Bhoteas who occupy the highest ridges of the norther mountains in the quarter, the Miris or the Michimis, who occupy the lower hills and some of the plain towards Charidwar and the Dophlas, who occupy the lower hills and plain adjacent to the eastern parts of the same territory.

It must, indeed, be observed, that the present territory of Assam nowhere reaches to the northern mountains, and that the Dev Raja, or Prince of Bhotan, has taken possession of all the territory adjacent to the hills which are west from the Miris. This, I know, is a recent usurpation, and there is great reason to believe, that the Kampo, the Bhoteas, the Miris and the Dolas were subject to Assam ; for in the account given of that country in the Asiatick Researches it is mentioned that the northern mountain belonged to it and produced musk and horses which are only the produce of the highest parts.

These three countries have not only been able to reject the authority of the king but levy a share of the revenue from all the low lands on the northern side of the river.

The Kampo Bhoteas resemble in their manners the other tribes of that people, which is spread over the high lands between Kashmir and China. The Miris or the Michimi, and the Dophlas are said to retain the fierce

**and warlike spirit of the ancient Assamese, indulge their appetites in eating unclean food, as much as the impure nations of China and Europe do, and adhere to their old customs altogether rejecting the instructions of the sacred order of the Hindus and what is called the purity of its law.**

## The Garos : An Early Account

*This account of the Garos is particularly interesting because it provides an insight into their ways of life, sufferings and exploitation at the hands of those—both Indians and Foreigners—who appropriated to them the duty of "civilizing" them. Despite being handicapped by the problems posed by unknown languages and variations in accounts culled from different sources in East India Company days, the author puts forth a coherent picture of various aspects of this community's life in the early nineteenth century. Readers, including Garos, will find it interesting because it is in parts valid, historical material. The shrewdness and business-mindedness of the East India Company's agent is only too obvious in it. But there is a genuine tribute to the talent, honesty and sound social system of the Garos.*

**A** wide mountainous tract extends north from Cape Negrais to the Brohmoputro. With its south end it separates the old kingdoms of Pegu (Bagu) and Arakan (Rakhain), both now subject to Ava. Towards the middle and the north it separates Ava and its dependencies from Bengal. At its southern extremity it is narrow and

is inhabited by petty tribes, too poor to have been worth converting by the followers of Gautama or of Vyas.

Towards the middle and north this elevated region widens and contains more extensive valleys. The tribes, therefore, are of greater value and importance. Accordingly, the Rajas of Tripura Monipur, Jaintiya and Kachar, all pretty considerable chiefs, have been restrained from abandoning themselves to an impure indulgence of their appetites, and have received instruction from the sacred order of the Hindus, who adhere to the doctrines of Vyas, as explained by Madhav Acharjya.

Some other tribes, such as the Yo, and others now subject to Ava, have been converted to the doctrines of Gautama.

The Raja of Jaintiya is by birth a Garo ; but he has received instruction from the Brahmans and has been civilized according to the manner and degree, that are usual among the followers of that order of priests. His territory occupies the mountains near the Brohmoputro, bordering on Assam on the north, and Srihotto (Silhet) on the South, and extending as far west as Kajoli, which is about 70 B. miles east from Goyalpara, and in about 91° 50' east longitude from Greenwich.

I have had little opportunity of making myself acquainted with the state of this principality, and shall therefore proceed to give an account of the Garos, who retain their primitive manners.

West from the territory of Jaintiya there extends, parallel to the Brohmoputro, a very mountainous region connected with the former but joining it at right angles. It is about 30 miles in width and 100 in length and is occupied by the rude nation, which the Bengalese call Garo, a name which Major Rennell and Mr. Eliot write as Garrow. This last mentioned gentleman, in the third volume of the Asiatick Researches, has given an account of what he observed concerning the portion of this

people, that live adjacent to the southern side of the mountains.

The account, which I am about to give, was taken from the inhabitants of the north which may account for my having in some points differed from the account given by Mr. Eliot.

The parts, however, where the two accounts contradict each other, appear to me of little or no consequence, but Mr. Eliot had opportunities of describing circumstances, such as their marriage ceremonies and domestic economy, which did not come within the reach of my observation and on other points the accounts, which I received, seem to be more full than what was communicated to Mr. Eliot.

What I have stated as the dimensions of the Garo country, that is 100 miles from east to west and 30 miles from north to south, is the present territory which this nation retains as an independent people and has been secured to them by the difficulty with which it could be penetrated.

It seems a mass of hills from 1000 to 3000 feet of perpendicular height and very steep and, although watered by numerous small streams, contains scarcely any level land, the hills being everywhere immediately contiguous to each other. Towards the centre, I am credibly informed, that there are immense masses of naked rock, and even large spaces totally destitute of vegetation ; but so far as I saw, and, as I am told is the case in, by far, the greater part of the territory, the hills, however steep, consist of a deep rich soil, and are fit for being cultivated by the hoe.

The climate being very moist, such a soil produces a most luxuriant vegetation, and, wherever undisturbed by cultivation, the mountains are covered by noble forests that contain a great variety of trees and plants highly ornamental, curious and valuable. Besides this

natural fortress, and the mountains of the civilized Jaintiyas, the Garos seem formerly to have occupied much of the adjacent low country and still retain some part as subjects to other powers.

In my account of Assam I have mentioned that most of the tributary Rajas on the south side of the Brohmo-putro are of Garo origin and the art of war has hitherto made so little progress among the Assamese that they have not been able to strip the Chiefs of their dominions.

On the contrary, they have contented themselves with a moderate tribute and conciliate the friendship of the independent mountaineers by a free commercial intercourse. The same was probably the case towards the west and south during the government of the Koch and Moguls whose cavalry units were totally incapable of making any encroachment on the hills and woods of the Garos.

No sooner, however, could the Zamindars call to their assistance the terror of the British arms, than they seem to have made violent encroachments on the poor Garos, whose only arms are bows, swords and spears—all of a very imperfect kind. Not that any regulars, so far as I know, were employed ; but the terror of their name, employed by people considered as officers of the Company (Zamindars) was sufficient.

The most exorbitant exactions have been made on every Garo, who comes to the Company's territory to exchange his commodities ; and the chiefs, who possessed lands that were accessible, have been either driven entirely from them, as from the large space between the mountains on one side, and Kalumalupara and Mechpara on the other ; or they have been rendered not only tributary but mere cyphers, as in Haworaghat. It is even alleged that by far the best villages and longest portion of that district are recent and violent usurpations from a Garo chief. As the Garos are an independent people,

an application on their part to the Company's courts of justice, would be highly imprudent and of this they seem abundantly aware. Owing to their remote situation and an insuperable objection which they have against venturing into a boat, they have had no means of laying their case before the government to which alone they could with propriety complain.

On several occasions of gross violence they have, therefore, had recourse to arms and have frequently alarmed the Kites by whom they have been injured.

The country, from which they were driven by the Bengalees of Kalumalupara and Mechpara, continues waste ; and a late imprudent attempt of the Zamindar of the former place to increase the exactions taken at the markets has produced an invasion and several assassinations the terror of which has depopulated the best part of his lands.

The complaints against the Vijni Raja are so strong that had it not been for the fear occasioned by the detachment of sepoy's at Yogighopa, similar consequences would probably have ensued.

The whole of the conduct of the Zamindars towards the Garos seems, therefore, to require a serious investigation, and this will be attended with considerable difficulty.

There would be an absolute necessity that the investigation should be conducted on the spot, by a person fully authorized to call on the Zamindars and their tenants for every sort of evidence, and to punish contumacy and prevarication and there would be an absolute necessity for treating with the Garos, at least with those of the mountains as with an independent people. A considerable time for negotiation would also be required, as no means will be left untried by the Zamindars and Bangalee traders in order to terrify the Garos so as to keep them from an interview or to break off any negotiation that may likely have effect.

With regard to the Garo chiefs, who have possessions in the plains and have been rendered tributary to the Zamindars, there is more difficulty. Why, when the settlement was made, they were not considered as Talokdars or Muzkuris ; and like other persons of that description, were not exempted from the authority of the Zamindars, and considered as tenants in capite, I know not.

The remoteness of their situation, probably, concealed them from the knowledge of those who made the settlement but their case would appear to require a full investigation.

So far as I could learn, it will be found that the Zamindars have no right to levy duties on the trade with the Garos farther than by a long continued practice. Were both parties subject to the same state, this no doubt would constitute a good right ; but the case seems very different where the subjects of a state have been in the custom of making an advantage of an independent people.

Nothing would, I imagine, prevent their sovereign from treating with the foreigners and from regulating the commerce with them in whatever manner he pleased. Nor would any thing short of a positive grant entitle those who had levied such duties to a remuneration for their loss.

The practice having continued long, is only an aggravation of the fault. The commerce carried on with these people being the most important point, I shall commence with an account of the manner in which it is conducted.

Notwithstanding numerous instances of ill treatment, and constant succession of fraud and falsehood, the necessity, which the Garos labour under of procuring salt and iron, the luxury of eating beef, fish, and other animal foods that their mountains produce but scantily, and the desire of receiving brass rings and other finery



in exchange for the cotton which they rear on the hills, compel them to deal with the Bengalees and the trade, in this district at least, is entirely carried on at markets held near the frontier.

To these when on tolerable terms with the Zamindar the Garos repair once a week during the dry season, more particularly in December, January and February.

Almost the only article which they bring for sale is cotton in the seed ; for the conduct of the Bengalees has totally put a stop to the collection of Agalwood.

On the Garo arriving at the market, the Zamindar in the first place takes a part of the cotton as his share (Phul) ; the remainder is exchanged for salt, kine, hogs, goats, dogs, cats, fowls, ducks, fish—dry and fresh—, tortoises, rice, and extract of sugar-cane for eating ; for tobacco and betel nut for chewing ; for some hoes and spinning wheels ; for some brassware and morihari goods as ornaments, and for some silk, erendi, and cotton cloths.

But the value of the cotton far exceeds the amount of these goods ; and a large balance is paid in Narayoni rupees, with which, I believe, the Garos chiefly purchase slaves from Assam. The manner in which this trade is managed in the markets of Haworaghat will give some idea of the hard terms to which the Garos are subject.

At each market place a person who paid a rent to the Vijni Raja, kept a warehouse for salt. This he sold out to petty traders at eight rupees a "man" ( $84\frac{1}{4}$  s.w. a ser or seer).

The petty trader, adding clay and water, increased its weight  $1/8$  part, and then exchanged it with the Garos, at one "man" of salt for three "mans" of cotton. The Garo, therefore, for eight rupees worth of salt, on which were there no monopoly or duties except the Company's, would cost about  $5\frac{1}{2}$  rupees, gives 3 "mans 15 sers

(seers) of cotton in the seed, which at Goyalpara is usually worth Rs. 5 per "man". He, besides, pays a share of the cotton to the Raja, for permission to trade in his market. The petty trader is permitted to bring for sale any other article except salt, and on these he only pays some transit duties. He, of course, sells at the same extravagant rate to the Garos ; but he is by no means allowed to enjoy the whole of that enormous profit. The whole cotton, which he procures, must be delivered to the person who rents the market at  $2\frac{1}{4}$  rupees for a "man".

His profit, therefore, on the 8 rupees, which he gave for a "man" of salt, is 1 R., 4 A., 6 P , returned in one day.

The profit of the renter is enormous. For a "man" of salt, which may cost him Rs.  $5\frac{1}{2}$ , he, in the first place receives eight rupees, or a profit of  $2\frac{1}{2}$  or  $5\frac{1}{2}$  advance and on each "man" of the cotton for which he pays  $2\frac{1}{4}$  rupees, and of which the carriage to Goyalpara and expense of sale may raise the value to Rs. 3, he usually receives a profit of Rs. 2.

About a third part of the cotton is purchased by the tenants on the Raja's estate, who may exchange provisions for as much cotton as their own families can spin and weave ; and they are allowed in exchange for this to give all kinds of provision, paying certain duties on the same.

More liberty is apparently allowed at the markets in the other Pergunahs, and I understand that the Vijni Raja, sensible of the impropriety of the monopoly, has removed it.

But the duties, which are exacted on the transit of the goods in the other Pergunahs, and to which, it is said, the Zamindars have a right, have rendered the markets there still less advantageous to the Garos. There is great reason to fear that these exactions will be pushed

to a ruinous length, and that the Garos, being unable to procure any decent return for their cotton, will diminish the cultivation. There are, indeed, grounds to believe, that this has already taken place to a considerable degree and that although the price at Rongopoor has considerably risen, the quantity brought to market has very much diminished.

I believe that about 47000 "mans" are now annually brought into this district from the Garos but of these about 10,000 "mans" come from the Garos of Koroyivari, who do not belong to this district, and 7000 come from the Garos of Assam. I do not know what quantity may go to the southern markets, nor on what footing these stand ; but had the Garos a reasonable reward for their trouble, I have no doubt that those, who frequent the markets of Haworaghat, Mechpara, and Kalumalupara, whom I propose to be placed under the protection of the Company's agent at Goyalpara, would annually bring 60,000 "mans" in place of 50,000 which I suppose they now do.

By a reasonable reward I mean that they should receive one "man" of good salt for two "mans" of cotton, and were the Company's agent to sell the salt at Rs. 8, and in other respects allow a free trade, there can be no doubt that the petty traders could afford to deal at this rate with nearly the same profit which they at present receive.

The Garos from whom I received the following account of their customs were the Chief of Raumari, the Chief of Ramjongga, or Amjongga, and his predecessor, the Chief of Damra, the chief Digman, and a priest from the hills near Jira, all of the tribe which borders on Haworaghat. What they describe can be only considered as strictly applicable to that division of the nation.

The Chief of Raumari was a boy but had with him some men of sense when he favoured me with a visit.

The Chief of Ramjongga was born in the mountains but has accepted of the management of a territory, which seems originally to have belonged to his family but which is now rendered subject to the Raja of Vijni who appoints to its nominal management some Garo of the original family of proprietors but changes the person whenever he pleases in imitation of the Kings of Assam.

This chief was a well-behaved, intelligent young man, who adhered to the customs of his forefathers, although he spoke the Bengalee language with fluency. His predecessor had been persuaded by the Raja to adopt the worship of Vishnu and had made considerable progress in the art of writing Bengalee. He was a very shrewd, intelligent man. I could not learn the reason of his being dismissed. It is probably, however, that along with the science of the Bengalees, he had acquired some degree of crooked policy.

The Chief of Damra is another well-behaved young man who is exactly on the same footing with the Chief of Ramjongga. He was born in the mountains and retains the customs of his ancestors. The Chief called Digman alleged that he had been deprived not only of his estates in the low lands which amounted to almost a half of Haworaght but had been robbed of a great part of his private property consisting of cattle and slaves. He had, therefore, retired entirely to the mountains, where, however, he was still one of the most powerful chiefs.

He seemed to be a simple, inoffensive man but I believe has been accused of robbery by the Vijni Raja.

The Garos are short, stout-limbed active people, with strongly marked Chinese countenances, as is the case with all the aboriginal tribes of the mountains from the Brohmoputro to Cape Negrais that I have seen. In general, the features of the Garos are harsh ; but their

chiefs are rather handsome and their manners in both urbanity and veracity are superior to those of the Zamindars. The Garo chiefs in their address are equally exempt from insolence and adulation—two extremes into which the Zamindars are apt to indulge, according as they are confident, or afraid, while the veracity of the whole Garo nation is undoubted and it is avowed by the Bengalees that a Garo was never known to forfeit his word. It is admitted that a Garo woman can carry on the hills as great a load as a man of Bengal can carry on the plain ; and that a Garo man can carry  $\frac{1}{3}$  more ; and this is attributed to their using more animal food and spirituous liquors.

My informants say that Garo is a Bengalee word. They do not seem to have any general word to express their nation. Each of the tribes, into which it is divided, has a name peculiar to itself. An individual of the tribe adjoining Haworaghat is called Achhik ; but the collective name or plural number is Achhikrong.

The high hills of Mechpara are occupied by the Abeng with whom I could procure no interview, the Zamindar having probably alarmed them. The Abeng may perhaps be considered as subjects of the Company as their hills are entirely surrounded by the lands of the Mechpara Chaudhuri and are not included in the territory which I have specified as belonging to the Garo nation.

But I believe they have always declined subjecting themselves to the decisions of the courts in Bengal. The tribe bordering on Mechpara and Kalumalupara, that occupies the high mountains and retains an entire independence, is the Kochunasindiya. These people also declined an interview, probably from similar reasons.

The tribe bordering on Susangga is called Kochu or Cough, as Mr. Eliot writes. From the account of that

gentleman, these seem to occupy only the low lands and to be tributary, and their territory is not included in what I have considered as belonging to the nation as independent. The tribe of the Garo nation, that borders on Assam is called Nuniya. Part of the Nuniyas have been converted to the worship of Vishnu and occupy a large portion of the lower part of Assam ; and part, however, inhabits the mountains, is independent, and this only is included in the space which I have considered as belonging to the national property. The Nuniyas are also called Dugol.

The language of the Nuniyas is said to be different from that of the other Garos ; and although all Garos can intermarry, it is generally admitted, that the Nuniyas are of the highest rank. Their priests can officiate for all Garos : but the priest of any of the other tribes cannot officiate for a Nuniya.

The Nuniyas and the Kochu-Nasindiya have made some farther progress in society than the others. Some among them are merchants and trade in slaves, salt and silver while others are artists and work in iron, brass and the precious metals.

The Achhiks and the Abengs are all cultivators who practise some crude arts and who have no other commerce than the exchanging the produce of their farms for the articles which they want for consumption. So far as I could learn, the languages of the four western tribes are nearly the same. The Achhiks seem to occupy by far the greatest part of the territory in which the nation is entirely independent.

In Hawaraghat all the Garos, except the dependent Chiefs, have entirely retired to the mountains and the lands of these chiefs are cultivated by Rabhas or Bengalees. But in Mechpara I saw some houses belonging to the Garos who paid a regular rent and who used the plough and cultivated with fully

as much care as any of the neighbouring Bengalees.

The Achhiks, or the Garos of the mountains of Haworaghat, are subdivided into clans called Chatsibak. In each of these Chatsibaks, there would appear to be three chiefs whose rank is hereditary ; but all are not equal in dignity and their various degrees of precedence have been established by long custom.

Among the Bengalese of Haworaghat these chiefs are called Luskur but the national appellation for a chief is Nok-ma, or collective Nokmarong. Each clan consists of one or more villages called Sung which are usually at a distance of two or three coss (Kos) from each other, and contain from 40 to 300 families (Gonsung).

These villages seem to be fixed and the houses are surrounded by gardens while the territory belonging to them is cleared and cultivated by the hoe after long fallows in which the trees are allowed to spring to the size of copice wood.

The chiefs and the head man of every family assemble in a council called Jingma-chongga and endeavour to reconcile all those of the clan who have disputes ; for it would not appear, that they have a right to inflict any punishment unless a man should be detected uttering a falsehood before them in which case he would be put to instant death, more from popular indignation than from a regular progress of justice.

Dishonesty or stealing seem rarely to be practised and almost the only source of dispute seems to be murder which would appear to be an ordinary crime. But the relations of the man killed are by custom held bound to demand blood, and ought to put to death either the murderer or one of his kindred or at least one of his slaves. The other family then is bound to pursue a similar mode of retaliation and the feud would thus continue endlessly unless the council interfered and brought about a mutual reconciliation which it is usually

able to effectuate by inducing the parties to accept a price for the blood that has been spilt.

Although every head of a family has an equal right to sit in their assemblies, the influence of the chiefs, or of one or two wise men usually decides everything.

When a man of one clan murders a person belonging to a different community, the matter is arranged with more difficulty, and often produces a war, unless the chiefs mutually endeavour to reconcile matters in which case their influence generally prevails. But they have no authority to declare peace or war, nor even in the field do they pretend to command any free man.

If any man complains of an injury, such as one of his family having been murdered by a foreigner, the whole clan are ready to avenge his cause, or to fight until their companion is satisfied. No compulsion can be used but the man who refused to take the field would be entirely disgraced.

In the field every free man (Nokoba) fights as he pleases. But as the slaves (Nokol) form about two fifths of the whole population, as they almost entirely belong to the chiefs and as they are all led to war and implicitly obey the orders of their masters, the influence of these last predominates in every resolution as their men, acting in subordination, form the chief strength of the clan.

The slaves not only are distinguished for their obedience but for their courage as freedom is a reward often bestowed on such as exhibit valour. Unless, therefore, the injury has been committed by a chief, on some person of a chief's family, the dispute is usually terminated after a little skirmishing and the chiefs induce the injured person to accept a price for the blood of his kinsman.

The important matters of succession and union of the sexes have been arranged in a manner that does not seem convenient.



A Garo man or woman, that has connection with a person of a different nation, is not liable to excommunication and any person who chooses to live among them and follow their manners may obtain the rights of a free man. A young unmarried woman, who proved with child, would suffer no disgrace ; but instances are very rare as women are usually married while children.

A man cannot turn away his wife on account of adultery unless he chooses to give up his whole property and children, and to this he seldom consents except when he knows that some other woman, who is richer, will take him for her husband. A woman, whenever she pleases, may turn away her husband and may in general marry any other person conveying to him the whole property that her former husband possessed and taking with her all her children. But the rank of the children arises from that of their father.

A man is thus placed in a very difficult situation. If his wife chooses a paramour, the husband is terrified lest this invader be able to persuade the woman to transfer the property of the family. It is true that as a remedy he may kill the lover which he may do without blame but he is afraid not only of the revenge of the man's kindred, but of that of his wife, who, if permitted to enjoy her lover, might be unwilling to disturb the family in which she had lived but who would be very apt to avenge her lover's death by choosing a new husband.

In fact, however, I understand that divorces are very rare and many wives, when they are infirm or have no children, allow their husbands to marry a second wife or to keep a concubine. When a chief dies, his heir is any one of his sister's sons, that his widow, or if he has left no widow, that his surviving concubine chooses. The fortunate youth, if married, immediately separates from his wife who takes all his private fortune and children, while he marries the old woman, and receives the dignity,

fortune, and insignia of honour becoming his high rank. These insignia consist of a red turban, two bracelets of bell metal for each arm, and a string of beads for his neck, and are bestowed in a great ceremony, that cannot cost less than Rs. 100. These acquisitions, however, do not always compensate for the disparity of age in his bride.

A boy, who had been lately elevated to the dignity after taking a draught of wine that opened his heart, complained with great simplicity that he had married an old toothless creature while his cousin, although poor, had a pretty young wife with whom he could play the whole day long. When the old lady dies he will, of course, take a young wife who will probably survive him and select a new chief from among his sister's sons.

The wife of a chief may divorce him, but she must choose her next husband from the same noble family as its members are alone capable of being raised to the dignity.

A man cannot marry his father's brother's daughter but he may marry the daughter of his mother's brother. A chief may marry the daughter of any free man (Nokoba) but intermarriages between free men and slaves are not tolerated ; nor can a man even keep a slave girl as a concubine.

A great part of the slaves are procured from the Nuniyas who bring them from Assam. They are chiefly Garos who had been converted and who have lost caste by impure feeding and have been sold as a punishment for their transgression. They, of course, return to the customs of their ancestors and often obtain freedom by their valorous conduct in war. Many poor parents, however, are reduced by want to sell their children conduct that is considered reprehensible but for which there is no punishment. Several chiefs can bring 60 able

bodied slaves into the field which in such small clans gives them a vast authority

The Garos rear for eating kine, goats, swine, dogs, cats, fowls, and duck and they purchase from the inhabitants of the low country all these animals together with tortoises and fish, both fresh and dried

In the hills they also procure many deer, wild hogs, frogs, and snakes, all of which they eat. In fact they have no aversion to any food except milk and its preparations, all of which they abominate, and they have no objection to eat in any company nor to eat what has been dressed by people of another nation.

Their vegetable diet consists chiefly of rice and millet (*Panicum Italicum*), with many arums, caladiums and dioscoreas. For seasoning they have capsicum, onions, and garlic, but they do not use turmeric.

In their dishes they employ both salt and ashes and, sometimes, oil, but they cultivate no plant that produces this. From rice and millet both they prepare a fermented liquor which is not distilled and is used both by men and women to great excess. Poor people usually get drunk once a month, the chiefs once every two or three days. On such occasions, they usually squabble and fight. They like the taste of brandy but prefer wine as not being so strong.

Although the Garos have long raised great quantities of cotton, they formerly neither spun nor wove. They now have begun to practise these arts and weave the small slips of cloth which both men and women wrap round their waists, and their turbans. This constitutes their ordinary dress. For cold weather, they make a kind of rug from the bark of the *cellis orientalis*. This serves as a blanket by night and by day is thrown round the shoulders, the chiefs, or others in easy circumstances, when in full dress, throw round their shoulders a piece of cloth, silk, cotton, or gold. Their favourite ornament

consists of rings of bell metal, which are passed through the lobes of the ears, and are so heavy as to distend these until they reach the shoulders. In science they have not even proceeded so far as to write their own language ; a few have learned to write the Bengalee language.

They believe in the transmigration of the soul as a state of reward and punishment. Those, who are morally wicked, are punished by being born as low animals. Those who have not been wicked and who have made many offerings to the gods are born in high and wealthy families. Saljung is the supreme god who lives in heaven (Rang) and has a wife named Manim. No offerings are made to this goddess but to her husband are offered male goats, swine and fowls.

This seems to be the deity, whom Mr. Eliot called Mahadeva, which merely signifies the Great God ; but there is no affinity between Saljung and Sib, who by the Brahmans is usually called Mahadeva. Saljung, in fact, is the firmament or visible heavens. The heavenly bodies, sun, moon, and stars, and spirits, who preside over hills, woods and rivers, are considered as the agents employed by Saljung to manage the affairs of this world. White cocks are offered to the heavenly bodies and fermented liquor, rice and flowers are offered to the spirits of the hills, rivers and forests. The blood of the animal is first offered and then, after the flesh has been dressed, a portion is added to the offering, the votary eats the remainder. There are no temples, nor images ; before each house, a dry bamboo, with its branches adhering, is fixed in the ground. To this the Garos tie tufts of cotton, threads, and flowers, and before it they make their offerings.

They have an order of priests, who by the Bengalees are called Rojas, from the resemblance between them, and the Rojas of Bengal. In their own language, these

priests are called Kamal. They marry, cultivate the ground and go to war like their neighbours, and the office is not hereditary. Any man, who has committed to memory the requisite forms of prayer, may assume the office. These forms of prayer are publicly repeated at marriages, funerals, and in cases of sickness, or when the clan is about to engage in war.

The Kamals also pretend to explain the fates by an examination of the entrails of sacrifices. The liver, in particular, is an object of their attention. The presence of the priest is not necessary on the occasion of common offerings that are made to the gods.

The funerals of the Achhiks are inconvenient and expensive. When a person dies, the relations are summoned to attend, and ten or twelve days are allowed for their convenience. As they assemble, they are feasted, until the number is complete.

In the meantime, the body falls into a dreadful state of corruption but no attention is paid to that. The head of a stake is then formed into an image supposed to resemble the deceased, and the point of the stake is driven into the ground. The body is then burnt; the bones are collected into an earthen pot.

And then the relations retire. After some months, when the family has recovered from the former expense and has laid in a stock of food and liquor for a new entertainment, the relations are again assembled, and feasted for three days. The bones are then thrown into a river.

The territory of Vihar, of which the descendants of Sib still retain the sovereignty, under the protection of the Company, forms the boundary of a large portion of the district of Rongopoor. I might have readily procured sufficient information concerning its state to have enabled me to enter into minute details, but not, in all probability, without its coming to the ears of the Raja, who would

certainly have been justly alarmed, especially as an unfortunate passage in the Yogini Tontro is explained, as if it prophesied that the present Raja is the last person of the family who will retain the sovereignty. I, therefore, contented myself with procuring such an account of its history as can be found among Hindus.

The nature of the country being entirely the same with that of the adjacent parts of the Company's dominions, and its management being similar to that of the estates, which belong to the Raja as a Zamindar of Bengal, any further details would indeed be superfluous.

# 33

## The Garo Language

**T**HE ARTICLE—This is entirely wanting in the Garo language.

**Noun and Gender :** Nouns denoting inanimate objects have no distinction of gender. In the case of animate beings, gender is expressed either by different words or by the addition of the affixes *bipa* (male) and *bima* (female) to the primary form of the noun.

The following are a few examples :—

Me asa (man)	... Me chik (woman)
Achu (grandfather)	... Ambi (grandmother)
Matchubipa (bull)	... Matchubima (cow)
Do bipa (cock)	... Do bima (hen)

**Number:** The plural number is formed by the addition of the affixes *rang*, *drang*, *mang* or *madang* to the singular.

When numeral adjectives accompany the noun, the plural ending is omitted, as *mande sakbri* (four men). When other adjectives accompany the noun, or when two or more nouns are in conjunction, the last word only takes the plural ending, as *dala matchurang* (large cattle); *do bok aro matchurang* (the goats and the cattle).

**Cases :** The declension is the same for nouns and pronouns and is perfectly regular.

<i>Singular</i>	<i>Plural</i>
Nom. Matchu (an ox)	Matchurang (oxen)
Pos. Matchuni (of an ox)	Matchurangni (of oxen)
Dat. Matchuna (to or for an ox)	Matchurangna (to or for oxen)
Obj. Matchuko (an ox)	Matchurangko (oxen)
Inst. Matchuchi (by an ox)	Matchurangchi (by oxen)
Abl. Matchuoni, or-oniko, from an ox.	Matchurangoni, or, -oniko from oxen.
Loc. Matchuo, -ona, -chi, in, into, or unto an ox.	Matchurango, ona, -chi, in, into, or unto oxen.

**Adjectives:** Adjectives may either precede or follow the nouns which they qualify. If they precede the noun they take no case or plural endings. If one or more follow the noun, the ending is placed on the last adjective and not on the noun.

**Comparison:** The comparative degree is denoted by affixing the word *bate* (than) to the dative case of the word with which comparison is made, and adding the word *bata* (more) to the adjective.

*Example :*

Matchuna *bate* mongma dal *bata*—Than a cow an elephant is larger.

The superlative degree is expressed by putting the word *pilak* (all) before the noun with which comparison is made, which again is in the dative case.

*Pilak matburungna bata* mongma dal *bata*—Than all animals the elephant is larger.

**Numerals :** In the *gare* language, the cardinal numbers always follow the nouns. The numerals up to ten are as follows :—

- |          |             |
|----------|-------------|
| 1. sa    | 6. dok      |
| 2. gni   | 7. sni      |
| 3. gitam | 8. chet     |
| 4. bri   | 9. sku      |
| 5. bonga | 10. chikung |



## The Khasis : Some Notes

### LAW CUSTOMS AND TRIBAL ORGANISATION

**T**HE inhabitants of the Khasi and Jaintia Hills have been broadly divided by Major Gurdon into the following sections : - Khasi, Synteng or Pnar, War, Bhoi, and Lymngam. These divisions represent collections of people inhabiting several tracts of the area and speaking dialects which, although often deriving their origin from the Khasi roots, are frequently so dissimilar to the standard language as to be almost unrecognisable.

The above sections may be sub-divided as follows :—The Khasis into the inhabitants of the central high plateau. Cherra and Nongstion, Maharam, Mario, Nongkhlaw, and the neighbouring Syiemships. The Syntengs or Pnars may be divided as follows :—Syntengs proper, Nongtungs, and Kharwangs ; the Wars into War proper, and War Pnar ; the Bhois into Jinthongs, Mynris, Rynghongs and the Khasi-Bhois, *i.e.* the Khasis who inhabit the low country in the north which is called generally the "Bhoi."

The Lymngams are a separate division. They must not be confused with the Dkos or the Hanas who are Garos. The Lymngams combine the traits of the Garos, and the Kkos or the Hanas are Garos who observe the Khasi custom of erecting memorial stones. The above tribes and sub-tribes are not strictly endogamous, nor are they strictly exogamous, but they are more endogamous than exogamous for instance Syntengs more often marry Syntengs than Khasis and vice versa, and it was

usually considered derogatory for a Khasi of the uplands to marry a Bhoi or a War woman, and a disgrace to marry a Lynngam. These divisions were sub-divided into a number of septs, taking Sir H. Risley's definition of "sept" as being the largest exogamous division of the tribe. It will, however, be more convenient to speak of these septs as "clans."

Many of the clans trace their descent from ancestresses or kiaws (grandmothers), who are styled *ki lawbei-Tynrai*, literally grandmothers of the root (*i.e.* the root of the tree of the clan).

Ancestor-worship is common and common clan sepulchres seem to indicate that the original unit was the family and not the clan, for there would be no reason for the members of a clan to worship the same household gods and to deposit the remains of the clan members in the same tomb unless there was some strong tie, such as that of consanguinity, binding them together. As has been mentioned already, each of these clans is strictly exogamous; this again supports the family origin theory. A traditional Khasi could commit no greater sin than to marry within the clan. Some of the clans are prohibited moreover from inter-marriage with other clans, because of such clans being of common descent, says Major Gurdon.

### KHASI MEMORIAL STONES

Probably one of the first objects which strikes the eye of a visitor to the Khasi Hills is the very large number of monoliths, table-stones and cromlechs that are to be met with almost everywhere in that country. Yule, Dalton and other writers have incidentally referred to them, but little effort has been made to explain in detail what is the peculiar significance of these objects to the Khasis.

These stones are rightly styled memorial stones ; kynmaw, literally "to mark with a stone," is the word in the Khasi language for "to remember." The memorial stone, in the ordinary sense of the word, is a memorial to the dead ; but we have such names of places in these hills as Maomluh, the salt stone (the eating of salt on the blade of a sword being one of the Khasi forms of oath). Maosmai, the oath stone, Maophlang, the grassy stone, and others. To commemorate with a stone an important event has been a constant custom amongst many people in many places, and the erection of grave-stones, to mark the spot where the remains of the dead are buried, was an almost universal practice amongst the western nations, as indeed amongst some of the eastern also. But the Khasi memorial stones are no more grave-stones, in the sense of marking the place where the remains of the dead lie, than some of the memorials of Westminster Abbey ; the Khasi stones are cenotaphs, the remains of the dead being carefully preserved in stone sepulchres, which are often some distance apart from the memorial stones.

They have been classified as follows :—

(a) Mawlynti or mawkjat, the stones which are erected to serve as seats for the spirits of departed clansfolk on their way to the tomb of the clan, *i.e.* when their remains are carried by their relations to the clan cromlech.

(b) Maw shongthait, or flat table stones, often accompanied by vertical stones, which are placed in the market places and by the side of roads to serve as seats for weary travellers. Taking the above main divisions *seriatim*, mawlynti, or mawkjat, may be described as follows. These generally consist of three upright stones, the tallest being in the centre, and a flat tablestone being placed in front. There are, however, some clans which erect more than three upright stones, as mawlynti or mawkjat. As already stated, the clansfolk used mawlynti

(the stone of the way), or mawkjat (the stone of the leg), at each place at which they halted for the night on their way to deposit the bones of their deceased maternal relations in the clan sepulchre, or mawbah. The stones are called mawkjat, or stones of the leg, because it is supposed that the spirits of the departed sit and rest their limbs on the flat table stones.

(c) Mawbynna, or mawnam, are erected to commemorate deceased parents or deceased ancestors, and consist of 3, 5, 7, 9, or even in an exceptional case, 11 upright stones with flat table-stones in front. The upright stones are called mawshynrang, or male stones, and the flat table-stones maw-kynthei, or female stones.

(d) The maw umkoi stones are erected to mark the sites of purificatory tanks, which have been dug so that the remains of deceased persons may be cleansed from the impurities attending an unnatural death and to counteract the adverse influence upon the clan of Kattyut or the Goddess of Death. These stones are sometimes called mawtyrut.

### TRANSPORTING THE STONES

The Khasis say that these great stones were brought sometimes from considerable distances. After being hewn, the stones were laid on large wooden trolleys and dragged across the country by means of ropes of cane, of which plenty can be had from the War country on the southern side of the area, and then placed in position by means of ropes and levers. It seems little short of marvellous that these stones, which sometimes weighed many tons, were placed in position by such difficult means especially when we consider the great trouble there was to re-erect one of the fallen stones at Stonehenge.

**FESTIVITIES — DOMESTIC AND TRIBAL**

Dancing forms the principal part of all the Khasi festivities and is an important adjunct of some of their religious ceremonies. One of the greatest festivals in the Khasi Hills is the Nongkrem dance. It may be said to be as important an event to the Khasis as the Beh Dieng Khlam festivities are to the Syntengs, says Maj. Gurdon.

The Nongkrem dance is really part of what is known as the pom-bläng, or goat killing ceremony, performed by the Syiem of Khyrim (or Nongkrem) with the aid of his soh-blei (high priest) and the various lyngdohs (or priests) to Ka Blei Synshar (the ruling goddess), that the crops may prosper and that there may be a successful era in store for the people of the state.

The goddess on this occasion may be regarded as a Khasi Demeter, although no mysteries form part of her services as at the Grecian Eleusis. The Nongkrem ceremony and dance (as held at Smit) take place in the late spring, generally in the month of May. A lucky day having been fixed, the Syiem sends a ring of cane (kyrwoh) by way of a summons to the people of every village in the state, at the same time informing them of the date of the puja, and requesting them to attend with their offerings, consisting of goats and different articles and food. In the meantime various pujas have been taking place in the house of Ka Syiem Sad, the Syiem priestess.

A fortnight before the puja and dance at Smit the soh-blei, or high priest, pours out libations of liquor in the kyram-bläng, or the place where the sacrificial goats are kept, and in front of the great post (of dieng snüng, or Khasi oak), in the house of the Syiem priestess. Dancing then takes place in front of the post.

Later on the Syiem, with the high priest and other attendant priests, walk with extremely slow gait to a small hill where a stone altar has been prepared, and

sacrifices a cock in honour of U Lei Shillong, or the god of the Shillong Peak. A silver dish with powdered rice, liquor in a gourd (ka'iad um'), betel-nut, and some leaves of the Khasi oak (dieng sning), are also necessary adjuncts of the puja.

A goat is then sacrificed, and the sacrifice is followed by a dance of twenty-two men armed with swords and shields and chowries (fly-flaps).

Having danced before the altar, the party returns to the house of the Syiem priestess and executes another dance in the great courtyard. The Syiem and certain selected persons dance in front of the rishot blei, or holy post of the Khasi oak inside the house of the Syiem priestess, the dancers being entertained with dried fish and ginger. Then follows the great dance of girls and men in front of her house. The girls dance in the centre, taking such tiny steps, that the lifting of their feet from the ground is hardly perceptible, the arms held down to the sides and the eyes demurely downcast.

It is on this occasion that they wear their beautiful peculiar silver (and sometimes gold) crowns. The hair is worn tied in a knot behind the head, but with a long tail hanging down the back. Rich silk clothes are worn by the girls, who present the appearance of being, if anything, over-clothed, or, as Yule aptly puts it, of "perfect parallelograms." They wear a profusion of gold and coral bead necklaces, silver and gold chains, bracelets, ear-rings of gold and any other jewellery they can lay hands on. Not only is the whole of the family jewellery requisitioned by the fair debutante (it is only the unmarried girls who dance), but she also borrows from her friends.

The men dance round the outside of the circle, waving fly-flaps and prancing (often wearing huge boots) with big strides. The music necessary for the dance consists of tangmuri (pipes), drums, and

cymbals. This is ka shad kynthei, or the dance of the women.

Then there is ka shad mastieh, or the dance of the men, who are gaily dressed wearing plumes of black and white cock's feathers (u thuiyah) and holding swords and shields. After gyrating for some time, two men at a time rapidly approach one another and clash their swords together in mock combat. They then retire, and, after again revolving for a period, repeat the process; then other couples follow and take their place. This goes on until the dancers get tired or are told to stop.

There is a very pretty dance called ka shad lymmoh, performed by men who hold the leafy branches of trees in their hands. This is most effective. Then there is a dance of many young girls, very well-dressed, covered with the usual gold and coral beads and silver chains, and wearing the silver crown, or pansngiat. The young women dance with great spirit and with an absence of all shyness, but still with the greatest decorum. Many of the women, spectators as well as dancers, can be observed to be without the usual tap moh khlih, or head-cloth, the absence of which is always a sign amongst the Khasi women of merry-making. The dance is a pretty sight, and one can seldom see such evidence of unaffected happiness as is exhibited by the people on this occasion. Dancing may be described as one of the characteristic features of Khasi life.

### KHASI DEMOCRACY

Tribal society is a model of democratic society. Its structure is simple and its administration convenient for local self-governance and quick disposal of disputes. In the words of Mr Emlyn M. Roy: The Khasis practice a pure form of democracy. A village

has a village-durbar presided over by the headman, where every adult participates. It settles disputes and addresses itself to such matter as sanitation, water supply, maintenance of village roads and paths, school buildings and such other matters as will promote the welfare of the people.

Several villages join together and constitute a commune. The commune durbar is generally presided over by an elected head or priest. All headmen of the villages with village elders participate in the durbar which would settle boundary disputes as between one village and another, look after land and forests to prevent uncustomary occupation and wanton destruction. It also administers justice within its jurisdiction as may be invested by customs and laws in force. Land is common to all, except for a few private ones and given to a clan or individual for meritorious services rendered. A man is free to cultivate any unoccupied land, but should he leave it fallow for three consecutive years, another may step in there.

Several communes join together and constitute a state which is administered by a chief, called "the Syiem", aided by daurbar of elected representatives of the people called "The Myntries". The chiefs with their respective durbars functioned and exercised all authority over their respective areas, in all administrative and judicial matters, and also exercised powers of superintendence over their areas.

The institution of Khasi chiefs is as old as the community itself, it existed uniformly from time immemorial with the wishes of the people. They are considered as divine instruments for the preservation of the community, its ancient customs, rights and usages. They are a force that binds the community together and every member of the community is bound to strictly conform to the rules and usages regulating internal



economy and the democratic administration of the whole community.

A Khasi chief is an elected democratic chief drawn from a particular clan consecrated for the purpose. There were 30 Khasi chiefs in the pre British era. Today there are only 26.

### **SOME TABOOS**

- (i) To build a house with stone walls on all four sides.
- (ii) To use nails in building a house.
- (iii) To use more than one kind of timber in building the hearth.
- (iv) To build a house with resinous timber. Only the Syiem family can use such timber.
- (v) To cut trees from a sacred forest.
- (vi) To take or give anything with the left hand.
- (vii) To step over anyone's body.
- (viii) To kill any animal or bird without first throwing rice over its body.
- (ix) To drink the milk of a cow or goat.
- (x) To talk with anyone, except with one of a man's or a woman's fellow-workers, when the thrashing of paddy is going on.

There are the following special taboos for pregnant women.

- (a) To accompany a funeral procession.
- (b) To finish any sewing she may have commenced before she became enceinte. There is a similar prohibition regarding the finishing of the plaiting of baskets.
- (c) It is not allowed, for the husband of a pregnant woman, to thatch the ridge of the house at such a time, or to fix a handle to an axe or a dao.

## **Towards Autonomy : The Bardoloi Sub-Committee's Findings**

**1.** District Councils should be set up in the Hill Districts with powers of legislation over occupation or use of land other than land comprising reserved forest under the Assam Forest Regulation of 1891 or other law applicable. This is subject to the proviso that no payment would be required for the occupation of vacant land by the Provincial Government for public purposes and private land, required for public purposes by the Provincial Government will be acquired for it on payment of compensation.

**2.** Reserved forests will be managed by the Provincial Government. In question of actual management including the appointment of forest staff and the granting of contracts and leases the susceptibilities and the legitimate desires and needs of the hill people should be taken into account.

**3.** On account of its disastrous effect upon the forests, rainfall and other climatic features, jhuming should be discouraged and stopped wherever possible but the initiative for this should come from the tribes themselves and the control of jhuming should be left to the local councils.

**4.** All social law and custom is left to be controlled or regulated by the tribes. All criminal offences, except those punishable with death, transportation or imprisonment for five years and upwards, should be left to be

dealt with in accordance with local practice and the Code of Criminal Procedure will not apply to such cases. As regards the serious offences punishable with imprisonment of five years or more they should be tried henceforth regularly under the Criminal Procedure Code. To try such cases, powers should be conferred by the Provincial Government wherever suitable upon tribal councils or courts set up by the district councils.

All ordinary civil suits should be disposed of by tribal courts and local councils may have full powers to deal with them including appeal and revision.

Where non-tribals are involved, civil or criminal cases should be tried under the regular law and the provincial Government should make suitable arrangements for the expeditious disposal of such cases by employing circuit magistrates or judges.

5. The District Councils should have powers of management over primary schools, dispensaries and other institutions which normally come under the scope of local self-governing institutions in the plains. They should have full control over primary education. As regards secondary school education, there should be some integration with the general system of the province and it is left upon to the Provincial Government to entrust local councils with responsibility for secondary schools wherever they find this suitable.

For the Mikir and North Cachar Hills the District or Sub-Divisional Officer, as the case may be, should be ex-officio president of the local council with powers, subject to the control of the Government of Assam, to modify or annul resolutions or decisions of the local councils and to issue necessary instructions.

6. Certain taxes and financial powers should be allocated to the councils. They should have all the

powers which local bodies enjoy and, in addition, they should have powers to impose house tax or poll tax, land revenue and levies arising out of the powers of management of village forest.

Statutory provision for a fixed proportion of provincial funds to be spent on the hill districts is not considered practicable. A separate financial statement for each hill district showing the revenue derived from the district and the expenditure proposed on it is recommended. The framing of a suitable programme of development should be enjoined either by statute or by "instrument of instructions".

It is quite clear that the urgent requirements of the hill districts by way of expenditure on development schemes are beyond the resources of the Provincial Government. The development of the hill districts should be as much the concern of the Federal Government as the Provincial Government. Financial assistance should be provided by the Federation to meet the deficit in the ordinary administration on the basis of the average deficit during the past three years and the cost of development schemes should also be borne by the Central Exchequer.

The claim of the hill district councils for assistance from general provincial revenues to the extent that they are unable to raise the necessary finances within their own powers is recognised.

7. If local councils decide by a majority of three fourths of their members to licence money-lenders or traders, they should have powers to require outside moneylenders and professional dealers to take licences.

8 The management of mineral resources should be centralised in the hands of the Provincial Government but the right of the district councils to a fair share of the revenues is recognised. No licence or lease shall be

given by the Provincial Government except in consultation with the local council. If there is no agreement between the Provincial Government and the district council regarding the share of the revenue, the Governor will decide the matter in his discretion.

9. Provincial legislation, which deals with the subjects in which the hill councils have legislative powers will not apply to the hill districts. Legislation prohibiting the consumption of non-distilled liquors like Zu will also not apply ; the district council may, however, apply the legislation.

10. It is necessary to provide for the creation of regional councils for the different tribes inhabiting an autonomous district if they so desire. Regional councils have powers limited to their customary law and the management of lands and villages and courts. Regional councils may delegate their powers to the district councils.

11. The Governor is empowered to set aside any act or resolution of the council if the safety of the country is prejudiced and to take such action as may be necessary including dissolution of the local councils subject to the approval of the legislature. The Governor is also given powers to dissolve the council if gross mismanagement is reported by a commission.

12. The Central Government should continue to administer the frontier tracts and tribal areas with the Government of Assam as its agent until administration has been satisfactorily established over a sufficiently wide area. Areas over which administration has been so established may be taken over by the provisional Government with the approval of the Federal Government.

The pace of extending administration should be accelerated and separate officers appointed for the Lohit valley, the Slang valley and the Naga tribal area.

The Lakhimpur frontier tract should be attached to the regular administration of the district. The case of the portion of the Lakhimpur frontier tract, recently included in the Tirap frontier tract, should be examined by the Provincial Government with a view to a decision whether it could immediately be brought under provincial administration. A similar examination of the position in the plains portions of the Sadiya frontier tract is recommended. The portion of the Balipara frontier tract around Charduar should also be subject to a similar examination. Posa payment should be continued.

13. The excluded areas other than the Frontier Tracts should be enfranchised immediately and restrictions of the franchise in the Garo and Mikir Hills should be removed and adult franchise introduced.

Weightage is not considered necessary but the hill districts should be represented in the provincial legislature in proportion not less than what is due on their population even if this involves a certain weightage in rounding off. The total number of representatives for the hills thus arrived at should not be taken into account in determining the number of representatives to the provincial legislature from the rest of Assam.

The total population of the hill districts justifies a seat for the hill tribes in the Federal Legislature.

Joint electorate is recommended but constituencies are confined to the autonomous districts. Reservation of seats, in view of this restriction, is not necessary.

Non-tribals should not be eligible for election from hill constituencies except in the constituency which includes the municipality and the cantonment of Shillong.

14. Representation for the hills in the Ministry should be guaranteed by statutory provision if possible or at least by a suitable provision in the Instrument of Instructions or corresponding provision.

15. Non-tribal officials should not be barred from serving in the hills but they should be selected with care if posted to the hills. The appointment of a due proportion of the hill people in the services should be particularly kept in mind and provided for in rules or executive instructions of the Provincial Government.

16. A commission may be appointed at any time or permanently to enable the Government to watch the progress of development plans or to examine any particular aspects of the administration.

17. Plains tribals number 1.6 million. Their case for special representation and safeguards should be considered by the Minorities Sub-committee.

18. The question of altering boundaries so as to bring the people of the same tribe under a common administration should be considered by the Provincial Government. The Barpathar and Sarupathar mouzas, included in the Mikir Hills, should be included in the regularly administered areas henceforth.

19. Non-tribal residents may be provided with representation in the local councils if they are sufficiently numerous. For this purpose, non-tribal constituencies may be formed if justified and if the population is not below 500.

20. Provincial councils should be set up by the Governor of Assam after consulting such local organisations as exist. These provisional councils which will be for one year will have powers to frame their own constitution and rules for the future.

## The Sixth Schedule of the Constitution (Text)

### **P**ROVISION as to the Administration of Tribal Areas in Assam

#### 1. *Autonomous districts and autonomous regions:—*

(1) Subject to the provisions of this paragraph, the tribal areas in each item of part A of the table appended to paragraph 20 of this Schedule shall be an autonomous district.

(2) If there are different Scheduled Tribes in an autonomous district, the Governor may, by public notification, divide the area or areas inhabited by them into autonomous regions.

(3) The Governor may by public notification—

- (a) include any area in Part A of the said table,
- (b) exclude any area from Part A of the said table,
- (c) create a new autonomous district,
- (d) increase the area of any autonomous district,
- (e) diminish the area of any autonomous district,
- (f) unite two or more autonomous districts or parts thereof so as to form one autonomous district,
- (g) define the boundaries of any autonomous district :



Provided that no order shall be made by the Governor under clauses (c), (d), (e) and (f) of this sub-paragraph except after consideration of report of a commission appointed under sub-paragraph (1) of paragraph 14 of this Schedule.

**2. Constitution of District Councils and Regional Councils :—**

(1) There shall be a district council for each autonomous district consisting of not more than twenty-four members, of whom not less than three-fourths shall be elected on the basis of adult suffrage.

(2) There shall be a separate Regional Council for each area constituted and autonomous region under sub-paragraph (2) of paragraph of this Schedule.

(3) Each District Council and each Regional Council shall be a body corporate by the name respectively of "the District Council of (name of district)" and "the Regional Council of (name of region)", shall have perpetual succession and a common seal and shall by the said name sue and be sued.

(4) Subject to the provisions of this Schedule, the administration of an autonomous district shall, insofar as it is not vested under this Schedule in any Regional Council within such district, be vested in the District Council for such district and the administration of an autonomous region shall be vested in the Regional Council for such region.

(5) In an autonomous district with Regional Councils, the District Council shall have only such powers with respect to the areas under the authority of the Regional Council as may be delegated to it by the Regional Council in addition to the powers conferred on it by this Schedule with respect to such areas.

(6) The Governor shall make rules for the first constitution of District Councils and Regional Councils in

consultation with the existing tribal Councils or other representative tribal organisations within the autonomous districts or regions concerned, and such rules shall provide for—

- (a) The composition of the District Councils and Regional Councils and the allocation of seats therein ;
- (b) The delimitation of territorial constituencies for the purpose of elections to those Councils ;
- (c) The qualifications for voting at such elections and the preparation of electoral rolls therefor ;
- (d) The qualifications for being elected at such elections as members of such Councils ;
- (e) the terms of office of members of such Councils ;
- (f) any other matter relating to or connected with elections ;
- (g) the procedure and the conduct of business in the District and Regional Councils ;
- (h) the appointment of officers and staff of the District and Regional Councils.

(7) The District or the Regional Council may, after its first constitution, make rules with regard to the matters specified in sub-paragraph (6) of this paragraph and may also make rules regulating —

- (a) the formation of subordinate local Councils or Boards and their procedure and the conduct of their business ; and
- (b) generally all matters relating to the transaction of business pertaining to the administration of the district or region, as the case may be.

Provided that until rules are made by the District or the Regional Council under this sub-paragraph the rules

made by the Governor under sub-paragraph (6) of this paragraph shall have effect in respect of elections to, the officers and staff of, and the procedure and the conduct of business in, each such Council.

Provided further that the Deputy Commissioner of the Sub-Divisional Officer, as the case may be, of the North Cachar and Mikir Hills shall be the Chairman ex-officio of the District Council in respect of the territories included in items 5 and 6 respectively of Part A of the table appended to paragraph 20 of this Schedule and shall have power for a period of six years after the first constitution of the District Council, subject to the control of the Governor, to annul or modify any resolution or decision of the District Council or to issue such instructions to the District Council as he may consider appropriate, and the District Council shall comply with every such instruction issued.

**3. *Powers of the District Councils and Regional Councils to make laws.***—(1) The Regional Council for an autonomous region in respect of all areas within such region and the District Council for an autonomous district in respect of all areas within the district except those which are under the authority of Regional Councils, if any, within the district shall have power to make laws with respect to :—

- (a) The allotment, occupation or use, or the setting apart, of land, other than any land which is a reserved forest, for the purposes of agriculture or grazing or for residential or other non-agricultural purposes or for any other purpose likely to promote the interests of the inhabitants of any village or town.

Provided that nothing in such laws shall prevent the

compulsory acquisition of any land, whether occupied or unoccupied, for public purposes by the Government of Assam in accordance with the law for the time being in force authorising such acquisition ;

- (b) the management of any forest not being a reserved forest;
- (c) the use of any canal or water-course for the purpose of agriculture ;
- (d) the regulation of the practice of jhum or other forms of shifting cultivation ;
- (e) the establishment of village or town committee or councils and their powers ;
- (f) any other matter relating to village or town administration, including village or town police and public health and sanitation;
- (g) the appointment or succession of Chiefs or Headmen ;
- (h) the inheritance of property ;
- (i) marriage ;
- (j) social customs.

(2) In this paragraph, a "reserved forest" means any area which is a reserved forest under the Assam Forest Regulation, 1891, or under any other law for the time being in force in the area in question.

(3) All laws made under this paragraph shall be submitted forthwith to the Governor and, until assented to by him, shall have no effect.

**4. Administration of justice in autonomous districts and autonomous regions.**—(1) The Regional Council for an autonomous region in respect of areas within such region and the District Council for an autonomous district in respect of areas within the district other than those which are under the authority of the Regional

Councils, if any, within the district may constitute village councils, or courts for the trial of suits and cases between the parties all of whom belong to Scheduled Tribes within such areas, other than the suits and cases to which the provisions of sub-paragraph (1) of paragraph 5 of this Schedule apply, to the exclusion of any court in the State, and may appoint suitable persons to be members of such village councils or presiding officers of such courts, and may also appoint such officers as may be necessary for the administration of the laws made under paragraph 3 of this Schedule.

(2) Notwithstanding anything in this Constitution, the Regional Council for an autonomous region or any court constituted in that behalf by the Regional Council or, if in respect of any area within an autonomous district there is no Regional Council, the District Council for such district, or any court constituted in that behalf by the District Council, shall exercise the powers of a court of appeal in respect of all suits and cases triable by a village council or court constituted under sub-paragraph (1) of this paragraph within such region or area, as the case may be, other than those to which the provisions of sub-paragraph (1) of paragraph 5 of this Schedule apply, and no other court except the High Court and the Supreme Court shall have jurisdiction over such suits or cases.

(3) The High Court of Assam shall have and exercise such jurisdiction over the suits and cases to which the provisions of sub-paragraph (2) of this paragraph apply as the Governor may from time to time by order specify.

(4) A Regional Council or District Council, as the case may be, may, with the previous approval of the Governor, make rules regulating—

- (a) The constitution of village councils and courts and the powers to be exercised by them under this paragraph ;

- (b) The procedure to be followed by village councils or courts in the trial of suits and cases under sub-paragraph (1) of this paragraph ;
- (c) The procedure to be followed by the Regional or District Council or any court constituted by such Councils in appeals and other proceedings under sub-paragraph (2) of this paragraph ;
- (d) The enforcement of decisions and orders of such Councils and courts ;
- (e) All other ancillary matters for the carrying out of the provisions of sub-paragraphs (1) and (2) of this paragraph.

5. Conferment of powers under the code of Civil Procedure 1908, and the Code of Criminal Procedure, 1898, on the Regional and District Councils and on certain courts and officers for the trial of certain suits, cases and offences.

(1) The Governor may, for the trial of suits or cases arising out of any law in force in any autonomous district or region being a law specified in that behalf by the Governor, or for the trial of offences punishable with death, transportation for life, or imprisonment for a term of not less than five years under the Indian Penal Code or under any other law for the time being applicable to such district or region, confer on the District Council or the Regional Council having authority over such district or region or on courts constituted by such District Council or on any officer appointed in that behalf by the Governor, such powers under the Code of Civil Procedure 1908, or, as the case may be, the Code of Criminal Procedure, 1898, as he deems appropriate, and thereupon the said Council, court or officer shall try the suits, cases or offences in exercise of the powers so conferred.

(2) The Governor may withdraw or modify any of the powers conferred on a District Council, Regional Council,

court or officer under sub-paragraph (1) of this paragraph.

(3) Save as expressly provided in this paragraph, the Code of Civil Procedure, 1908 and the code of Criminal Procedure, 1898 shall not apply to the trial of any suits, cases or offences in an autonomous district or in any autonomous region to which the provisions of this paragraph apply.

6. Powers of the District Councils to establish primary schools, etc. The District Council for an autonomous district may establish, construct or manage primary schools, dispensaries, markets, cattle pounds, ferries, fisheries, roads and waterways in the district and, in particular, may prescribe the language and the manner in which primary education shall be imparted in the primary schools in the district.

7. District and Regional Funds. (1) There shall be constituted for each autonomous district, a District Fund and for each autonomous region, a Regional Fund to which shall be credited all moneys received respectively by the District Council for that district and the Regional Council for that region in the course of the administration of such district or region, as the case may be, in accordance with the provisions of this Constitution.

(2) Subject to the approval of the Governor, rules may be made by the District Council and by the Regional Council for the management of the District Fund or, as the case may be, the Regional Fund, and the rules so made may prescribe the procedure to be followed in respect of payment of money into the said Fund, the withdrawal of moneys therefrom, the custody of moneys therein and any matter connected with or ancillary to the other matters aforesaid.

**8. Powers to assess and collect land revenue and to impose taxes :**

(1) The Regional Council for an autonomous region in respect of all lands within such region and the District Council for an autonomous district in respect of all lands within the district except those which are in the areas under the authority of Regional Councils, if any, within the district, shall have the power to assess and collect revenue in respect of such lands in accordance with the principles for the time being followed by the Government of Assam in assessing lands for the purpose of land revenue in the State of Assam generally.

(2) The Regional Council for an autonomous region in respect of areas within such region and the District Council for an autonomous district in respect of all areas in the district except those which are under the authority of Regional Councils, if any, within the district, shall have power to levy and collect taxes on lands and buildings, and tolls on persons resident with such areas.

(3) The District Council for an autonomous district shall have the power to levy and collect all or any of the following taxes within such district, that is to say —

- (a) Taxes on professions, trades, callings and employments ;
- (b) Taxes on animals, vehicles and boats ;
- (c) Taxes on the entry of goods into a market for sale therein, and tolls on passengers and goods carried in ferries ; and
- (d) Taxes for the maintenance of schools, dispensaries or roads.

(4) A Regional Council or District Council, as the case may be may make regulations to provide for the levy and collection of any of the taxes specified in sub-paragraphs



(2) and (3) of this paragraph.

9. Licences or leases for the purpose of prospecting for, or extraction of, minerals. (1) Such share of the royalties accruing each year from licences or leases for the purpose of prospecting for, or the extraction of, minerals granted by the Government of Assam in respect of any area within an autonomous district as may be agreed upon between the Government of Assam and the District Council of such district shall be made over to that District Council, (2) If any dispute arises as to the share of such royalties to be made over to a District Council, it shall be referred to the Governor for determination and the amount determined by the Governor in his discretion shall be deemed to be the amount payable under sub-paragraph (1) of this paragraph to the District Council and the decision of the Governor shall be final.

10. Power of District Council to make regulations for the control of money-lending and trading by non-tribals: (1) The District Council of an autonomous district may make regulations for the regulation and control of money-lending or trading within the district by persons other than Scheduled Tribes resident in the district.

(2) In particular and without prejudice to the generality of the foregoing power such regulations may—

- (a) prescribe that no one except the holder of a licence issued in that behalf shall carry on the business of money-lending ;
- (b) prescribe the maximum rate of interest which may be charged or be recovered by a money-lender ;
- (c) provide for the maintenance of account by money-lenders and for the inspection of such accounts

by officers appointed in that behalf by the District Councils;

- (d) prescribe that no person who is not a member of the Scheduled Tribes resident in the district shall carry on wholesale or retail business in any commodity except under a licence issued in that behalf by the District Council;

Provided that no regulations may be made under this paragraph unless they are passed by a majority of not less than three-fourths of the total membership of the District Council :

Provided further that it shall not be competent under any such regulations to refuse the grant of a licence to a money-lender or a trader who has been carrying on business within the district since before the time of the making of such regulations.

(3) All regulations made under this paragraph shall be submitted forthwith to the Governor and, until assent-  
ed to by him, shall have no effect.

11. Publication of laws, rules and regulations made under the Schedule—All laws, rules and regulations made under this Schedule by a District Council or a Regional Council shall be published forthwith in the Official Gazette of the State and shall on such publication have the force of law.

12. Application of Acts of Parliament and of the Legislature of the State to autonomous districts and autonomous regions. (1) Notwithstanding anything in this Constitution—

- (a) No act of the Legislature of the State in respect of any of the matters specified in paragraph 3 of

this Schedule as matters with respect to which a District Council or a Regional Council may make laws, and no Act of the Legislature of the State prohibiting or restricting the consumption of any non-distilled alcoholic liquor shall apply to any autonomous district or autonomous region unless, in either case, the District Council for such district or having jurisdiction over such region by public notification so directs, and the District Council in giving such direction with respect to any Act may direct that the Act shall in its application to such district or region or any part thereof have effect subject to such exceptions or modifications as it thinks fit ;

- (b) The Governor may, by public notification, direct that any Act of Parliament or of the Legislature of the State to which the provisions of clause (a) of this sub-paragraph do not apply shall not apply to an autonomous district or an autonomous region, or shall apply to such district or region or any part thereof subject to such exceptions or modifications as he may specify in the notification.

(2) Any direction given under sub-paragraph (1) of this paragraph may be given so as to have retrospective effect.

13. Estimated receipt and expenditure pertaining to autonomous district to be shown separately in the annual financial statement. — The estimated receipts and expenditure pertaining to an autonomous district which are to be credited to, or is to be made from, the Consolidated Fund of the State of Assam shall be first placed before the District Council for discussion and then after such discussion be shown separately in the annual

financial statement of the State to be laid before the Legislature of the State under Article 202.

14. Appointment of Commission to inquire into and report on the administration of autonomous districts and autonomous regions.

(1) He may, at any time, appoint a Commission to examine and report on any matter specified by him relating to the administration of the autonomous districts and autonomous regions in the State, including matters specified in clauses (c), (d), (e) and (f) of sub-paragraph (3) of paragraph 1 of this Schedule or may appoint a Commission to inquire into and report from time to time on the administration of autonomous districts and autonomous regions in the State generally and in particular on —

- (a) The provision of educational and medical facilities ; and
- (b) The need for any new or special legislation in respect of such districts and regions ; and
- (c) The administration of the laws, rules and regulations made by the District and Regional Councils ; and define the procedure to be followed by such Commission.

(2) The report of every such Commission with the recommendations of the Governor with respect thereto shall be laid before the Legislature of the State by the Minister concerned together with an explanatory memorandum regarding the action proposed to be taken thereon by the Government of Assam.

(3) In allocating the business of the Government of the State among his Ministers, the Governor may place one of the Ministers specially in charge of the welfare of the autonomous districts and autonomous regions in the State.

**15. Annulment or suspension of Acts and resolutions of District and Regional Councils.—**(1) If at any time the Governor is satisfied that an act or resolution of a District or a Regional Council is likely to endanger the safety of India, he may annul or suspend such act or resolution and take such steps as he may consider necessary (including the suspension of the Council and the assumption to himself of all or any of the powers vested in or exercisable by the Council) to prevent the Commission or continuance of such act, or the giving of effect to such resolution.

(2) Any order made by the Governor under subparagraph (1) of this paragraph together with the reasons therefor shall be laid before the Legislature of the State as soon as possible and the order shall, unless revoked by the Legislature of the State, continue in force for a period of twelve months from the date on which it was so made :

Provided that if and so often as resolution approving the continuance in force of such order is passed by the legislature of the State, the order shall, unless cancelled by the Governor, continue in force for a further period of twelve months from the date on which under this paragraph it would otherwise have ceased to operate.

**16. Dissolution of a District or Regional Council.—**The Governor may, on the recommendation of a Commission appointed under paragraph 14 of this Schedule by public notification, order the dissolution of a District or a Regional Council ; and—

- (a) direct that a fresh general election shall be held immediately for the reconstitution of the Council, or
- (b) Subject to the previous approval of the Legislature of the State assume the administration of

the area under the authority of such Council himself or place the administration of such area under the Commission appointed under the said paragraph or any other body considered suitable by him for a period not exceeding twelve months :

Provided that when an order under clause (a) of this paragraph has been made, the Governor may take the action referred to in clause (b) of this paragraph with regard to the administration of the area in question pending the reconstitution of the Council on fresh general election.

Provided further that no action shall be taken under clause (b) of this paragraph without giving the District or the Regional Council, as the case may be, an opportunity of placing its views before the Legislature of the State.

17. Exclusion of areas from autonomous districts in forming constituencies in such districts. - For the purposes of elections to the Legislative Assembly of Assam, the Governor may, by order, declare that any area within an autonomous district shall not form part of any constituency to fill a seat or seats in the Assembly reserved for any such district but shall form part of a constituency to fill a seat or seats in the Assembly not so reserved to be specified in the order.

18. Application of the provisions of this Schedule to areas specified in Part B of the table appended to paragraph 20—

(1) The Governor may—

(a) subject to the previous approval of the President, by public notification, apply all or any of the

foregoing provisions of this Schedule to any tribal area specified in Part B of the table appended to paragraph 20 of this Schedule or any part of such area and thereupon such area or part shall be administered in accordance with such provisions; and

- (b) with like approval, by public notification, exclude from the said table any tribal area specified in part B of that table or any part of such area.

(2) Until a notification is issued under sub-paragraph (1) of this paragraph in respect of any tribal area specified in Part B of the said table or any part of such area, the administration of such area or part thereof, as the case may be, shall be carried on by the President through the Governor of Assam as his agent and the provisions of (Article 240) shall apply thereto as if such area or part thereof were a Union Territory specified in that article.

(3) In the discharge of his functions under sub-paragraph (2) of this paragraph as the agent of the President the Governor shall act in his discretion.

**19. Transitional Provisions.—**(1) As soon as possible after the commencement of this Constitution the Governor shall take steps for the constitution of a District Council for each autonomous district in the State under this Schedule and, until a District Council is so constituted for an autonomous district, the administration of such district shall be vested in the Governor and the following provisions shall apply to the administration of the areas within such district instead of the foregoing provisions of this Schedule, namely : —

- (a) No act of Parliament or of the Legislature of the State shall apply to any such area unless the

Governor, by public notification, so directs ; and the Governor, in giving such a direction with respect to any Act may direct that the Act shall, in its application to the area or to any specified part thereof, have effect subject to such exceptions or modifications as he thinks fit ;

- (b) The Governor may make regulations for the peace and good government of any such area and any regulations, so made may repeal or amend any Act of Parliament or of the Legislature of the State or any existing law which is for the time being applicable to such area.

(2) Any direction given by the Governor under clause (a) of sub-paragraph (1) of this paragraph may be given so as to have retrospective effect.

(3) All regulations made under clause (b) of sub-paragraph (1) of this paragraph shall be submitted forthwith to the President and until assented to by him shall have no effect.

20. *Tribal Areas.* (1) The areas specified in parts A and B of the table below shall be the tribal areas within the State of Assam.

(2) The United Khasi-Jaintia Hills District shall comprise the territories which before the commencement of this Constitution were known as the Khasi States and the Khasi and Jaintia Hills District, excluding any areas for the time being comprised, within the cantonment and municipality of Shillong, but including so much of the area comprised within the municipality of Shillong as formed part of the Khasi State of Myllem.

Provided that for the purposes of clauses (e) and (f) of sub-paragraph (1) of paragraph 3, paragraph 4, paragraph 5, paragraph 6, sub-paragraph (2), clauses (a), (b) and (d) of sub-paragraph (3) and sub-paragraph (4)



of paragraph 8, and clause (d) of sub-paragraph (2) of paragraph 10 of this Schedule, no part of the area comprised within the municipality of Shillong shall be deemed to be within the district.

(2A) The Mizo District shall comprise the area which at the commencement of this Constitution was known as the Lushai Hills District.

(2B) The Naga Hills-Tuensang Area shall comprise the areas which at the commencement of this constitution were known as the Naga Hills District and the Naga Tribal Area.

(3) Any reference in the table below to any district (other than the United Khasi-Jaintia Hills District and the Mizo District) or administrative area (other than the Naga Hills Tuensang Area) shall be construed as a reference to that district or area at the commencement of this Constitution :

Provided that the tribal areas specified in Part B of the table below shall not include any such areas in the plains as may, with the previous approval of the President, be notified by the Governor of Assam in that behalf.

## **TABLE**

### **Part A**

1. The United Khasi-Jaintia Hills District.
2. The Garo Hills District.
3. The Mizo District.
4. The North Cachar Hills.
5. The Mikir Hills.

### **Part B**

1. North-East Frontier Tract including Balipara Frontier Tract, Tirap Frontier Tract, Abor Hills District and Misimi Hills District.

2. The Naga Hills Tuensang Area.

**21. Amendment of the Schedule (a) : Parliament may from time to time by law amend by way of addition, variation or repeal any of the provisions of this Schedule and, when the Schedule is so amended, any reference to this Schedule in this Constitution shall be construed as a reference to such Schedule as so amended.**

**(2) No such law as is mentioned in sub-paragraph (1) of this paragraph shall be deemed to be an amendment of this Constitution for the purposes of Article 368.**

## What Nehru Envisaged in the Scottish Pattern of Autonomy

**T**HE following is the summary of Jawaharlal Nehru's plan for a set-up for the autonomous districts of Assam—

### **1. Objective**

The objective to be kept in view is full autonomy for the hill districts, subject to preservation of the unity of the state of Assam.

### **2. Executive Wing**

Cabinet Government of the accepted form should remain. There should be collective and joint responsibility to the state Assembly. There should, however, be a cabinet minister in charge of the administration of the hill areas assisted, as far as may be necessary, by, possibly, a minister of state and one or two deputy ministers. In the appointment of the minister for the hill areas, the chief minister will be guided by the recommendations of the MLAs of the hill areas.

A list of certain subjects such as education, agriculture, horticulture, forests, health and, possibly, roads will be drawn up. The administration of these subjects in the hill areas will be entirely in charge of the cabinet minister for the hill areas and his junior ministers.

There will be a separate wing or department of the secretariat for the hill areas to be divided into the

necessary number of special departments for the administration of the subjects allocated for separate administration in the hill areas. The necessary complement of staff will have to be provided.

Full executive power will be given to the group of hill ministers for the administration of these subjects in the hill areas.

The hill ministers will have authority to determine the language or languages to be used in the separate wing or department of the hill areas and other offices in the hill areas dealing with subjects allocated for separate administration.

At the beginning of each financial year a separate complete budget allocation for the subjects allocated to the hill areas will be made. This will take the form of an area budget under the subjects meant for separate administration.

In regard to other subjects not transferred for separate administration, the share of allocation of funds to be spent in the hill areas should be indicated under the budget heads.

The hill ministers will have complete power of expenditure-control over the allocations for the departments to be separately administered.

The hill wing or department of the secretariat of the hill areas will have its own separate Financial Adviser for expenditure control.

### **3. Legislative Wing**

The MLAs of the autonomous hill districts will form a Regional Committee of the Assam Assembly. All proposals relating to the legislation concerning the hill areas will be referred by the state Assembly to the Regional Committee. This committee may also initiate legislative proposals. Normally, the recommendations of

the Regional Committee will be accepted by the legislature. In the event of a disagreement between the state Assembly and the Regional Committee, the matter will be referred to the Governor who, acting in his discretion, may take decisions, after obtaining directions from the President, where necessary.

The portion of the Annual Financial Statement in so far as it relates to the hill areas shall be referred by the Assembly to the Regional Committee for consideration.

#### **4. Judicial Wing**

There will be a common High Court for the whole of Assam. The judicial set-up in each of the autonomous units will be as provided in the Sixth Schedule.

## The Pataskar Commission's Findings

**T**HE hill areas of Assam, comprising the Garo Hills, the United Khasi and Jaintia Hills, the Mizo Hills, the United Mikir and North Cachar Hills districts began to be administered in free India subject to the special provisions of the Sixth Schedule to the Constitution which conferred a certain measure of autonomy on these areas. It was represented to the Government of India from time to time that for accelerating the pace of and ensuring fuller participation of the people in the development of these areas, and for safeguarding more effectively the interests of the tribal people, it was necessary to widen the autonomy enjoyed at present by these areas. The Government of India, "after giving careful consideration to the needs of these areas and the necessity in the interest of the people of the hill areas themselves of enabling them to participate in the larger political and economic life of the state" came to the conclusion that "it would be desirable for the hill areas to have a full measure of autonomy subject to the preservation of the unity of Assam, the continuance of a common legislature for the whole state of Assam and the maintenance of the cabinet government of the accepted form functioning on the basis of collective and joint responsibility to the state Assembly."

The general pattern of the administrative set-up which might be evolved for the hill areas of Assam was dis-

cussed by Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru with some of the hill leaders and certain broad conclusions were reached. The Government of India considered it necessary that a detailed scheme for the reorganisation of the administrative set up of these areas on the basis of those discussions and conclusions should be drawn up by a commission to be appointed for the purpose, after a careful study of the various aspects of the problem involved. The Union Government, in consultation with the Government of Assam, decided to appoint a Commission consisting of :

Mr H.V. Pataskar (*Chairman*),

Mr Shankar Prasad (*Mamber*)

Mr G.S. Rau (*Mamber*).

## **SUMMARY OF THE CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE PATASKAR COMMISSION**

### **ECONOMIC AND FINANCIAL ASPECTS**

(1) Dissatisfaction with the economic progress of the hill district is at the root of the unsatisfactory general relationship between the two regions - the hills and the plains—of Assam.

(2) A comparison of the revenue and expenditure of the two regions shows that :

(a) The relative contribution of the hill districts to the state-revenues is much less in proportion to their population ; and further it has gone down over a period of 12 years since 1951-52.

(b) The per capita contribution of the hill districts to the state-revenues is much less than that of the

plains. While the per capita contribution of the plains has more than doubled during the past 12 years that of the hills has remained more or less the same.

- (c) The share of the hill areas in revenue expenditure has always been more than their share of population. It is also much in excess of their relative contribution to the state revenues.
- (d) The per capita expenditure in the hill districts, which is 5 to 6 times as large as it was in 1951-52, is much more than in the plains.
- (e) The capital expenditure in the hills has been relatively small but since 1956-57, it has been stepped up.
- (f) While the allocations of the Plan outlay for the hill districts have not been unfair vis-a-vis their population, as a percentage of the total outlay these have gone down slightly during the Third Plan period.
- (g) The hill districts have recorded a higher rate of increase than the plains in respect of the state and per capita incomes.

(3) There is no evidence of any deliberate neglect of the hill areas in the matter of development ; nor has there been any diversion of funds allocated to the hill areas for the benefit of the plains.

(4) In respect of certain pressing needs of the hill areas, such as means of communications, the progress has been unsatisfactory.

(5) The financial assistance by the Central Government has generally been on a more generous scale to Nagaland, NEFA, Manipur and Tripura than to the hill areas of Assam. This has contributed to the dissatisfaction in the latter areas.

(6) While there has been no failure on the part of the



state government to take cognizance of the difficulties of the hill districts, the needs of these districts are greater than those of the plains areas. The exceptional difficulties of these districts justify exceptional treatment.

### **BASIC CONSIDERATIONS**

(7) The basic problem of the hill areas is that of economic development for which the two regions of Assam—the hill areas and the plains—are interdependent. The links of the hills with the plains constitute a factor of importance to both of them; and there is great need of preserving these links.

(8) There should be active participation of the hill people, through their district councils, the development programmes. The necessary guidance and counselling to these councils should also come from their own representatives functioning at higher levels.

(9) Social and personal matters of the tribal communities should be left entirely in their own hands.

### **AUTONOMY OF THE HILL AREAS**

(10) The scheme of autonomy that emerged from the discussions between Prime Minister Nehru and the hill leaders did not envisage a completely separate administration for the hill areas with only a superstructure remaining common with the rest of Assam.

(11) The scheme assured the hill people that the state Assembly would pass laws applying to them with the approval of their representatives, and that they would have full opportunity to control their social, cultural and personal matters and the development of their areas within the framework of the larger political and economic life of Assam.

### **LEGISLATION FOR THE HILL AREAS**

(12) The broad principle enunciated by Prime Minister Nehru on the legislation applicable to the hill people is already embodied in the Sixth Schedule in respect of certain matters. No basic change is proposed in that position.

(13) The MLAs of hill districts should constitute a Hill Areas Committee of the state Assembly. The latter should refer to this committee all "proposals relating to legislation concerning the hill areas." If a question arises whether a Bill concerns the hill areas or not a certificate issued by the Governor should be final.

(14) Normally, the state Assembly should accept the recommendations of the Hill Areas Committee. But in case of difference of opinion the Speaker will submit the matter with relevant records to the Governor for decision in his discretion. The Governor should convey his decision in a message to the Assembly, which on being reported to the House by the Speaker, should be deemed to be the decision of the Assembly itself.

(15) Autonomy of the hill areas in the legislative field should be provided by making a provision similar to article 37(1) of the Constitution in the Sixth Schedule. A Presidential Order under that provision should then lay down the constitution, functions and the procedure of the Hill Areas Committee.

### **MINISTERS FOR HILL AREAS**

(16) In the new set-up the cabinet minister in charge of hill districts should be called the Minister for Hill Areas. He should be assisted by as many junior ministers as may be necessary.

(17) In making appointments of the hill ministers the

Chief Minister should consult the hill MLAs and obtain their views in an appropriate manner.

(18) The number of hill ministers and the allocation of ministerial business etc. to them are matters which should be decided by the Chief Minister as the head of the cabinet.

### DEPARTMENT OF HILL AREAS

(19) There should be a separate department of hill areas in the Assam secretariat.

(20) The department should be entrusted with the administration of the following subjects in the hill districts :

“Agriculture including minor irrigation ; horticulture ; co-operation ; animal husbandry and veterinary ; forests and soil conservation ; community development ; national extension service and tribal development blocks ; education including higher and technical education ; public health ; local government ; social welfare ; revenue ; public works (roads and buildings) ; small scale and rural industry ; sericulture and weaving ; publicity and information ; market and fairs ; burial and burial grounds, cremation and cremation grounds ; and prevention of cattle trespass.”

(21) The department should also be responsible for the following :

- (i) matters relating to district councils ;
- (ii) supervision over the development programmes of these councils ;

- (iii) special development programmes for the hill districts out of grants under Article 275 of the Constitution ; and**
- (iv) any special development programme approved by the Central Government Planning Commission and the State Government.**

**(22) Even in respect of subject not transferred for administration to the department of hill areas the hill minister should be consulted on all important matters.**

### **COMMISSIONER FOR HILL AREAS**

**(23) There is great need for strengthening the administrative machinery at the field-level. It should be presided over by a commissioner, who should not have any additional responsibilities not connected with the hill districts. His main duty should be to guide, direct and supervise administration and development work in the field in the hill district.**

**(24) Senior officers of the rank of additional/joint/ deputy heads of departments should be put in charge of the administration of their respective subjects in the hill areas. Administratively, these officers should work directly under the commissioner but for technical purposes they should seek necessary guidance from their respective heads of departments.**

**(25) There is no need for separate cadres or sub-cadres exclusively for the hill areas ; the present practice of common cadres for the whole state should continue. But the manpower requirements of the hill areas should be fully taken into account in the management of cadres. In the deployment of personnel also, the views of the hill ministers should be given full consideration.**

## FINANCIAL ADMINISTRATION

(26) As far as practicable, the general economic condition of the hill areas should be raised to the level of that of the plains within a reasonable period of time. The Central Government should accept special responsibility for the development of these areas. As a general principle, the total development expenditure in the hill areas of Assam should at least be of the same order as in the neighbouring territories of Nagaland, NEFA, Manipur and Tripura.

(27) Merging of Article 275 grants in the state Plan outlay and in the Central assistance given for the purpose tends to make these grants subject to the same kind of downward adjustments which occur in the case of state Plan provisions. It would, therefore, be desirable to treat Article 275 grants as special allocations earmarked for the tribal areas.

## BUDGET

(28) The form of the state budget should suitably be modified to include a new "area budget" to show allocations for the hill districts in respect of subjects transferred to the department of hill areas. In respect of other *i.e.* "non-transferred" subjects also, the budget allocations for the hill districts should be shown separately. For the convenience of the Assembly, a supplementary statement giving at one place the total receipts from and expenditure on the hill districts in respect of both transferred and non-transferred subjects should be prepared and presented to the Assembly along with other budget documents.

(29) The Hill Area Committee should be given an opportunity to express its views on the budget for the

hill areas before it is presented to the state Assembly. The discussion of the state budget in respect of an autonomous district by the district council concerned should be dispensed with.

(30) The control of the area budget should vest in the department of hill areas. The savings in the funds allotted for the hill districts in respect of non transferred subjects should also not be diverted for other purposes without consulting the minister for hill areas. The department of hill areas should have its own financial adviser, who should have the widest possible measure of delegated authority to enable him to carry out his duties satisfactorily.

### **DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL**

(31) At the headquarters of the state Government, there should be a Hill Areas Development Council with the Chief Minister of Assam as its chairman. The main duty of the council should be to advise the state Government on the administration and development of the hill areas.

(32) The Sixth Schedule should contain a provision for the setting up of such a council. Similarly the new administrative arrangements should be based on appropriate provision in the Sixth Schedule and the Assam Rules of Executive Business framed in pursuance of article 166(2) and (3) of the Constitution.

### **DISTRICT COUNCILS**

(33) There is widespread dissatisfaction with the district councils. The criticism and suggestions made on their working raise two fundamental questions,

namely, whether the present organization of functions of the district councils are adequate in relation to the needs of the hill areas ; and whether the financial relationship between them and the state Government is satisfactory.

(34) In view of the setting up of the Hill Areas Committee there is not much need to widen the legislative authority of the district councils. Only application of the existing powers in respect of certain subjects is recommended.

(35) A wide extension of the sphere of the activities of the district councils is desirable and necessary. The administrative and executive functions of a district council should include the following :

Land and revenue administration ; establishment, construction, management and administration of primary schools and educational institutions upto the higher secondary stage and in particular the prescription of the language and the manner in which education in the primary, middle English and middle language schools is to be imparted ; the establishment, construction, management and administration of roads and waterways with the district ; community projects ; national extension service and tribal development blocks ; agriculture and minor irrigation ; animal husbandry, veterinary services and dairy farming ; co-operative ; fisheries ; small-scale and rural industries, and sericulture and weaving ; rural water supply ; public health ; works programmes for rural manpower utilization ; social welfare ; village planning and rural housing, publicity and information".

(36) A district council may undertake any commercial business or other enterprises, including means of transport, and industry authorised by the Governor,

(37) The policy of democratic decentralization should be extended to the working of the district councils and subordinate and village councils should be set up at the block and village levels respectively for the successful implementation of rural development programmes.

(38) The services of the gazetted and inspection staff should be made available to district councils by the state government on deputation. A district council should recruit its own clerical and subordinate staff but this should be done through properly constituted recruitment board or boards.

(39) The post of the secretary to a district council should be filled by deputation of an officer of the rank of additional district magistrate belonging to the Assam Civil Service Class I.

### **DEVELOPMENT BOARD**

(40) Each hill district should have a District Development Board under the chairmanship of the deputy commissioner to help the district council in the execution of welfare and development schemes.

(41) The question of creating separate civil districts for the North Cachar Hills and Jowai should be favourably considered by the state Government.

### **FINANCIAL ADMINISTRATION**

(42) A detailed examination of the financial administration of the district councils shows that:—

- (i) The councils have not fully exploited the financial resources available to them.
- (ii) There is reluctance to impose taxes and laxity in



realizing them with the result that sizable arrears have accumulated in all the councils.

- (iii) The councils have very often not been able to balance their budgets.
- (iv) The expenditure on staff and establishment is unduly heavy and there is clearly an urgent need for economy.
- (v) The councils have been able to devote only meagre funds, if at all, to the development programmes which have been mostly financed out of Government grants.

(43) Investing a District Council with additional powers of taxation will not improve its finances materially. The most satisfactory arrangement would be to help a district council by way of increased grants-in-aid from the state Government.

(44) Having regard to the need for both accelerating development and economy in administration of a council, the state Government should evolve a system which would encourage financial discipline and thrift on the part of district council.

(45) At the beginning of each financial year, a district council should be informed of its shares of taxes on motor vehicles and royalties on minerals on the basis of averages for the preceding three years. Actual payment should then be made quarterly, the necessary adjustments being made in the last quarter of the year on the first quarter of the following year.

#### **DISTRICT FUND AND ITS AUDIT**

(46) There should be uniform District Fund Rules framed by the Governor for all the district councils. The rules should provide for the laying of the audited annual

accounts before a district council. A district council office should have a separate, well-organized, finance and accounts branch. The services of an SAS accountant should be obtained on deputation from the Accountant-General, Assam, to supervise the working of this branch. An examiner of accounts should be attached to the staff of the commissioner for hill areas for conducting a review and internal audit of the councils' accounts.

(47) The Accountant-General should present an audit report on the accounts of the grants received by the district councils as a separate section of his audit report on the accounts of the State as a whole. This report would be examined by the Public Accounts Committee of the State Assembly, which should co-opt three representatives of the Hill Areas Committee for the purpose. The Secretary of the Hill Areas Department should assist the Public Accounts Committee in examining the report.

### **ADMINISTRATION OF JUSTICE**

(48) No change in the existing system is recommended. It may, however, be got examined after a few years, if any modification is required in the law and the procedure followed by the tribal communities.

### **REGIONAL COUNCILS**

(49) The Sixth Schedule provides for setting up of regional councils for different tribes in an autonomous district. So far only one such council—the Pawi Lakher Regional Council in the Mizo district—has been set up. The performance of this council has been very unsatisfactory. In the nature of things such a council can

hardly make any substantial contribution to the well-being of the tribal people. The institutionalization of autonomy of each and every tribe inhabiting an autonomous district is not desirable. The setting up of regional councils is, therefore, not recommended. The existing regional council should also be abolished. The existing provision empowering the Governor to set up regional councils should accordingly be deleted from the Sixth Schedule.

### **NON-TRIBAL RESIDENTS IN THE HILL DISTRICTS**

(50) There is no evidence to show that the District Councils have imposed restrictions on non-tribals in acquiring and disposing of land in an arbitrary or unreasonable manner. No change in the present position is recommended.

(51) While a District Council should continue to frame regulations to control money-lending and trading activities within its jurisdiction, these regulations should uniformly apply to both tribals and non-tribals.

(52) The Governor's assent should be necessary for giving effect to the taxation laws passed by a District Council.

(53) The state Government should have the right to extend their Town Planning Act to Shillong and the adjoining areas within a growing radius of ten miles or more according to the progress of urbanization ; and the town of Shillong should be completely excluded from the jurisdiction of the District Council.

### **COMPOSITION OF THE DISTRICT COUNCILS**

(54) There should be a provision in the Sixth

Schedule itself laying down the term of a council as five years, subject to the condition that the Governor may extend it by not more than six months at a time and in no case by more than two years in all.

(55) The delimitation of the constituencies of a council should be done by a "District Councils Delimitation Committee" appointed by the Governor under the chairmanship of an officer of the rank of District Judge.

(56) While in view of the peculiar conditions of the hill areas it may be necessary to prescribe residential qualifications for the non-tribal population for voting at a council's elections, the present requirement of 12 years' residence is in the nature of an excessive and unreasonable restriction. The legitimate interest of the tribal people would remain fully protected, and the harshness of the restriction on non-tribals would be mitigated if this period is reduced to two years.

(57) The Governor should be responsible for the conduct of elections and related matters.

(58) Not more than four seats in a district council should be reserved to be filled by nomination of persons to provide representation to special interests such as minorities etc. In making these nominations it should not be necessary for the Governor to be bound by the advice of the council concerned.

(59) The Governor's authority with regard to annulment or suspension of an act or resolution of a district council should not be confined to cases where safety of the country is endangered but all acts or resolutions prejudicial to public order should be brought within its ambit.

(60) As regards dissolution of a council and the assumption of its administration by the Governor the existing provisions seem to be satisfactory.

(61) When the Governor is satisfied that a situation has arisen in which the administration of a district

council cannot be carried on in accordance with the provisions of the Sixth Schedule and the rules made thereunder, he may assume to himself all or any of the functions of the district council concerned. The Governor's order in this regard should be laid before the state legislature.

(62) The administration of forests in the hill districts should vest in the minister for hill areas, assisted by an advisory committee of all the chief executive members of the District Councils.

(63) A district council should be empowered to frame regulations within the general framework of the forest policy and any consequential legislation to control "jhum" cultivation.

## What the Federal Structure Plan Meant and the Asoka Mehta Committee Report

The reaction of the hill people's leaders to the Patas-kar Commission report was that it went about building up a case against the APHLC stand and laboured at reducing the autonomy envisaged in the Nehru Plan to the barest minimum. The APHLC rejected it. Then followed the formation of a Cabinet study team under the then Home Minister, Mr Gulzarilal Nanda. He visited Shillong. Later, talks were held at Delhi between the APHLC and the Cabinet committee. This led to the formation of a sub-state plan—with a separate legislature and a council of ministers, but subordinate to Assam. Then the Prime Minister conformed the Government's desire to reorganise Assam with proper regard to the hill people's demand. Assam came out with opposition to the possibility of the formation of a separate state and a committee was appointed to examine the reorganisation proposals.

The Government of India appointed the Committee with Mr Asoka Mehta as chairman and the following persons as members "for giving further consideration to the question of re-organisation of the present state of Assam" on the basis of different views expressed by members in the joint discussions held on July 8 and 9, 1967 :—

Mr B.P. Chaliha, Chief Minister of Assam (Congress), Mr C. S. Teron, Minister, Tribal Areas (Congress), Mr Hem Barua, M.P. (PSP), Mr B. Bhagavati, M.P. (Congress), Mr Moinul Haque Chaudhury, M.B.A. (Congress), Mr Williamson A. Sangma, M.L.A. (APHLC), Mr S.D.D. Nichols Roy, M. L. A. (APHLC), Mr Atul Chandra Goswami, M.L.A. (SSP), Mr Phani Bora, M.L.A. (CPI), Mr G.S. Bhattacharji, M.L.A. (United Legislative Party), and Mr Shamshul Huda, M.L.A. (RCPI).

*The Committee's Report :*

**The Task :** To examine the proposals for the reorganisation of Assam and make an effort to reach an agreed solution.

The Committee held three meetings—the first at Gauhati on July 28, 1967, the second at Shillong on July 29 and 30, 1967, and the third at New Delhi on August 28, 29 and 30, 1967.

The Chief Minister of Assam could not be present at the meetings held at Gauhati and Shillong due to indisposition. Mr Williamson Sangma and Mr S.D.D. Nichols Roy did not participate in any of the meetings of the committee. At the first meeting, the committee was engaged mainly in preliminary exploratory talks. At the second meeting, the schemes proposed by Mr Hem Barua, M.P., Mr. Shamshul Huda, M.L.A. and Mr A.C. Goswami, M.L.A., were informally discussed. At the third meeting, the Chief Minister of Assam proposed a scheme recommended by the Assam Pradesh Congress Committee and Mr Phani Bora put forward certain proposals which had been endorsed by the Assam State Executive Committee of the Communist Party of India.

*1. The Scheme of Reorganisation proposed by the Chief Minister of Assam :*

The main features of the scheme are as follows :—

- (i) Each of the existing autonomous districts—the Khasi Hills District (excluding the Cantonment and the Municipality of Shillong) the Jaintia Hills, the Garo Hills, the Mizo Hills, the North Cachar Hills and the Mikir Hills—will be declared as an autonomous area in the state of Assam.
- (ii) There will be a Council of Representatives for each autonomous area consisting of not less than 20 and not more than 40 elected members, and not more than three nominated members to represent the interests of the minorities. There will be a Chairman and a Deputy Chairman of the Council of Representatives.
- (iii) The Council of Representatives will have powers to make laws in respect of specified subjects (49 subjects in the state List have been enumerated).
- (iv) The administration of the autonomous areas in respect of these subjects will be vested in the Council of Representatives.
- (v) There will be an Executive Council with the Chief Executive Councillor at the head. The executive will be responsible to the Council of Representatives.
- (vi) There will be an administrative set up under the Council of Representatives at the headquarters of each autonomous area for the administration of the duties and functions devolving upon them, and the same will be under a secretary not below the rank of an additional District Magistrate deputed by the Government of Assam, who will be designated Principal Secretary.
- (vii) Representation of the autonomous areas in the Assam Legislative Assembly will continue as at present.



- (viii) In appointing ministers, a convention may be created for giving adequate representation to the autonomous areas.
- (ix) One of the cabinet ministers may be placed in charge of the autonomous areas. He should be assisted by such number of junior ministers as the Chief Minister may decide.

## **II. *The Scheme Proposed by Mr Phani Bora :***

In view of the demand for separate states which have already come up from some hill areas, the hill peoples concerned should be granted separate statehood, each of the hill tribes having its own state. It will, however, be open to them, for more than one such hill peoples, if they so desire, to unite and constitute a single state. After the present Assam state is so reorganised, the newly created hill states may work out and arrange their relations with the state of Assam through mutual consultations and mutual consent.

## **III. *The Scheme Proposed by Mr Hem Barua :***

The recommendations of the Pataskar Commission should be accepted with the following modifications :—

- (i) Whichever political party may be in the Government, one minister each from the four hill districts chosen from among the hill MLAs should be in the cabinet.
- (ii) There should be one separate commission for the economic development of the hill areas with an equal number of representatives elected by the district councils. The commission should be an independent body directly under the Central Finance and Planning Ministry. Necessary rules should be framed to avoid conflict with the state's general development scheme.

- (iii) The district police should be under the district council which, however, would not mean that the state police shall be dispensed with

#### ***IV. The Scheme Proposed by Mr Shamshul Huda :***

- (i) The whole of the hill areas may be treated as an autonomous region. If any hill area wants to remain as it is, it should be allowed to do so and its present status should not be disturbed.
- (ii) The autonomous region will have an elected assembly with full legislative powers on the subjects allotted to the autonomous authority (49 subjects in the autonomous list have been enumerated).
- (iii) The autonomous region will have a cabinet of its own which will be responsible to the autonomous assembly.
- (iv) The autonomous region will have representation in the Assam Legislative Assembly, the Lok Sabha and the Rajya Sabha as at present.
- (v) There will be reserved representation of the minorities to the autonomous assembly and its cabinet.
- (vi) There will be a separate administrative set-up at the headquarters of the autonomous region which will have its own administrative cadre.

#### ***V. The Scheme Proposed by Mr A.C. Goswami :***

- (1) The scheme of recognition should be taken up in two stages, namely (a) the extension of democratic rights to the people, and decentralisation of state powers to the different district units, both hills and plains in Assam, as also NEFA, (b) establishment of a new integrated political set-up comprising the states of

Assam and Nagaland the Union Territories of Manipur and Tripura, and also North Bengal.

(2) Any scheme of reorganisation must be based on the principle of a four pillar-state, namely, the state standing on the four pillars of the Centre, the state, the district and the village or town. The existing distribution of the powers between the Centre, the state and the district should be reviewed and necessary amendments be made to make the district government more meaningful, purposeful, effective and efficient.

From the proposal given by the members representing various parties, there was a broad consensus that the unity and integrity of the state should be maintained and maximum autonomy should be granted subject to this overriding consideration. Mr Phani Bora, however, felt that the hill areas should be granted separate statehood, each of the hill tribes having its own state. He, however, stated that he would not press his suggestion if a workable and acceptable alternative could be evolved. All the members were, however, opposed to the idea of a federation, as they consider that it would lower the status of the present Assam state and subsequently pave the way for the disintegration of the state.

As regards the quantum of autonomy to be granted, there was agreement among all the members regarding the subject which should be retained with the state Government. The Congress proposals envisaged that out of 66 subjects in the State List, 49 subjects with certain reservations should be transferred to the autonomous districts.

The Chief Minister, however, explained that it should be possible to make some adjustments in regard to certain subjects which are proposed to be retained with the State Government. For instance, he agreed to the transfer of transport of intoxicating liquors, agricultural

education and veterinary training except at the college and post-graduate stages, enforcement of weights and measures, relief of agricultural indebtedness and cinemas to the autonomous districts.

He, however, emphasised that from the security point of view, there should be a single police administration for the whole state and that law and order, police and prisons should be retained with the state Government. Mr Shamshul Huda, had also proposed that minerals, heavy industry, major and medium irrigation, power, police, education at the college and university stages and inter-regional communications should be included in the State List. He further clarified that he was also in favour of keeping the police administration with the state Government.

There was some difference of opinion as to whether districts should be granted autonomy individually or should be permitted to combine into bigger units. According to the Congress scheme, autonomy is sought to be given to each of the six autonomous districts. The Chief Minister, however, conceded that if the councils of representatives of two or more districts passed a resolution by two-thirds majority to form a larger unit, they should be permitted to do so. Mr Teron was of the view that it would be desirable to grant autonomy to each autonomous district as the conditions, economic, linguistic and cultural, varied from district to district.

Mr Moinul Haque Chaudhury said that the difficulties which might arise by constituting an autonomous region of the hill districts should also be appreciated. He stated that if the hill districts were allowed to form into an autonomous region, then Cachar and Mizo Hills would be cut off from the plains districts, and in that event the question of the future political set-up of the district of Cachar as well would have to be decided. Mr Bhagwati pointed out that if some of the autonomous

districts preferred to combine into a larger unit even at the first instance, he saw no reason to disagree with it if that could lead to greater satisfaction among the hill people. Mr Shamsul Huda, who had proposed the constitution of hill districts into autonomous region, said that if any hill district wanted to remain as at present, it should be allowed to do so with its present status.

The Congress proposal envisaged that there should be council of representatives for each autonomous district which would have full powers to legislate on the transferred subjects. The executive for each autonomous district would consist of an Executive Council with a Chief Councillor at the head elected by the council of representatives by majority of members present and voting and a number of other councillors. The other councillors would be appointed by the Governor on the advice of the Chief Councillor from amongst the Representatives of the Council. Mr A.C. Goswami had suggested an amendment and proposed that the Governor should appoint the leader of the majority party as the Chief Executive Councillor, following the practice in the states.

As regards the nomenclature of the legislative body as well as Chief Executive Councillor, there was some agreement that it could be suitably changed provided they were not called Legislative Assembly and Chief Minister respectively so as to avoid confusion with the Assam Legislative Assembly and the Chief Minister of Assam

The question as to whether the Council of Representatives would be just a corporate authority like a local body or a legislative authority within the powers allotted to it, the Chief Minister clarified that it would be a legislative authority and would have the privileges of a legislature

He further explained that while giving his assent to the laws and regulations made by the Council of

Representatives, the Governor of Assam would act as a constitutional Governor on the advice of the state ministers.

It was stated that there was a similar provision in the Sixth Schedule under which all the laws and regulations made by the district councils had to receive the assent of the Governor of Assam, who was assisted by the Council of Ministers of Assam. Mr Goswami stated that while this provision has existed in the Sixth Schedule, there had been hardly any occasion in the past when the Council of Ministers thought it necessary to advise the Governor to withhold his assent, although in quite a few cases they had held views different from the District Councils. As regards the powers of appeal mentioned in para 32 of the Assam Pradesh Congress Committee scheme, it was explained that the order of the Chief Councillor would be subject to an appeal to the Governor of Assam only when an order was passed affecting minority interests.

In regard to the subjects which were proposed to be retained with the Assam state, it was considered that the hill areas should have some say in the framing of legislation of policy. The Congress scheme provides that one of the Cabinet Ministers may be put in charge of the autonomous areas and assisted by such number of junior ministers as the Chief Minister may decide. In appointing these Ministers, a convention may be created for consulting the representatives of these areas in the state Assembly.

Mr Hem Barua proposed that each administrative district should be represented in the Cabinet and that a Deputy Chief Minister may be appointed from the hill areas. The question whether this would mean perpetual coalition being formed at the state level in view of the fact that the party in power in the state may be different from the party to which members coming from the hill

areas might belong was also considered.

It was thought that it would not be possible to make any constitutional provision in this regard and that this would have to be governed by convention. Mr Shamshul Huda, however, thought that this should be provided for in the Constitution itself by having reserved seats in the Cabinet for the representatives of the hill areas.

Another suggestion which was made was that in regard to subjects which are reserved with the state, it should be so arranged that whether the minister came either from the hill area or the plains, he should be assisted in regard to that portfolio by a state minister or deputy minister coming from the other area.

The committee having considered different proposals sufficiently and discussing them in all their perspectives arrived at the following consensus :

- (1) Federal structure should not be the basis of the re-organization of the present state of Assam.
- (2) While the committee considered the unity and integrity of the present state of Assam as essential for the interest of the plains and hills, it recommends maximum autonomy to the hill areas.
- (3) As the hill areas differ from one another in the matter of development, social customs, ethnic origin, language, inheritance, etc., they should be given maximum possible autonomy with the right to merge with other autonomous areas after a resolution is passed in their respective legislatures by a two-thirds majority of the total of representatives of each of the legislatures.
- (4) In the event of this scheme being accepted, the present district councils will cease to exist.
- (5) The legislatures of the autonomous areas will have full legislative authority and will have privileges of a legislature in respect of the subjects assigned to

such legislatures of autonomous areas.

- (6) The subjects assigned to such legislatures of autonomous areas are clearly stated in the list enclosed in addition to the subjects allotted to the district councils under the Sixth Schedule. Some other subjects like the transport of intoxicating liquors within each of the autonomous areas, agricultural education and veterinary training, except at the college and post-graduate stages, enforcement of weights and measures, relief of agricultural indebtedness and regulation of cinemas may be assigned to the autonomous areas.
- (7) The legislature shall consist of representatives for each autonomous area, consisting of not more than 40 and not less than 20 elected members including not more than three nominated members to represent interests of the minorities. There will be a chairman and a deputy chairman of the legislature.
- (8) The executive powers in respect of assigned subjects will be exercised by the Governor with the aid and advice of an Executive Council which shall be responsible to the legislature.
- (9) The Executive Council will consist of a Chief Executive Councillor appointed by the Governor and other councillors appointed by the Governor on the advice of the Chief Executive Councillor.
- (10) The Executive Council will have its own secretariat.
- (11) Every bill shall be submitted to the Governor of Assam. In giving his assent the Governor shall act on the advice of the Chief Minister of Assam who will consult the Tribal Ministers of his Council of Ministers as well as the Chief Executive Councillor of the autonomous area concerned.
- (12) In the matter of an appeal affecting minority interest, the Governor will be the appellate authority.



- (13) In appointing the Ministers from the hill areas, the Chief Minister will consult the members of the Assam Legislative Assembly representing the hill areas as well as the Chief Executive Councillor as a matter of convention.

*Note :—* Mr Phani Bora, representing the C.P.I., and Mr. Shamshul Huda, representing the R.C.P.I., while agreeing with the above consensus kept reservations on the following points:—

- (a) Mr Bora said that autonomy, in his view, might be extended upto the stage of the right to form autonomous state or states by the hill areas.
- (b) Mr Shamshul Huda said that instead of starting with several hill areas, the start ought to be only with one autonomous region covering all the hill areas with the right of these areas to opt out if it so desired.

The committee hoped that the provision of the scheme would in course of time be extended to N.E.F.A.

## SCHEDULE A

### *List of subjects for the legislature of the autonomous areas*

1. Matters relating to village or town administration including village or town police.
2. Administration of justice, constitution of village councils or courts for trial of suits and cases between parties all of whom belong to the Scheduled Tribes of the district.
3. Local Government, *i.e.*, the constitution and powers

of municipal corporations, district boards for the purpose of local self-government of village administration.

4. Public health and sanitation ; hospitals and dispensaries.
5. Intoxicating liquors, that is to say, the production, manufacture, possession, transport, purchase and sales of intoxicating liquors.
6. Relief of disabled and unemployable.
7. Burials and burial grounds, cremations and cremation grounds including provision of such grounds for the use of the non-Scheduled Tribes of the hills.
8. Education upto middle schools subject to the state and national policy.
9. Libraries and museums financed by the autonomous areas.
10. Intra-district roads (excluding national highway, State and border roads and inter district roads), bridges, ferries and other means of communications.
11. Agriculture, including agricultural education (except at college and post-graduate stages), agricultural research, protection against pests and prevention of plant disease and training of village-level workers in agriculture.
12. Preservation, protection and improvement of stock and prevention of animal diseases ; veterinary training (except at college and post-graduate stages).
13. Pounds and prevention of cattle diseases.
14. Water, *i.e.*, water supplies, minor irrigation and canals, drainage and embankments and water storage for agricultural and consumption purposes.
15. Land, that is to say, rights over land ; land tenures, including relationship between landlords and

tenants and the collection of rent ; transfer and alienation of agricultural land land improvement, occupation or use or the setting apart of land, other than any land which is a reserved forest, for the purpose of agricultural or grazing or for residential or other non-agricultural purposes or for any other purposes likely to promote the interest of the inhabitants of any village or town.

Provided that nothing in such laws shall prevent the compulsory acquisition of any land whether occupied or un-occupied for public purposes by the Government of Assam in accordance with the law for the time being in force authorising such acquisition.

Provided further that there shall be no discrimination against the non-Scheduled Tribes of the autonomous areas permanently residing in the area in the matter of allotment, transfer or assessment, etc.

Provided also that any land used for any common purposes or used as burial grounds or cremation grounds by any community shall not be allotted for any other purpose without making any other alternative provision.

16. Constitution, development and management of any forest as reserved forests, not being the existing reserved forests.
17. Protection of wild animals and birds.
18. Fisheries except in the water reservoirs for generating hydroelectric power or in the inter-district canals.
19. Cottage and small-scale industries.
20. Trade and commerce within the district.
21. Markets and fairs.
22. Regulations for controlling money-lending and money-lenders ; relief of agricultural indebtedness.

23. Inns and inn-keepers.
24. Theatres and dramatic performances, sports, entertainments and amusements ; regulation of cinemas.
25. Betting and gambling.
26. Works, lands and buildings vested in the autonomous areas.
27. Treasure trove.
28. Land revenue including the assessment and collection of revenue, maintenance of land records, survey for revenue purposes and records of rights, and alienation of revenue.
29. Taxes on agricultural income.
30. Duties in respect of succession of agricultural land.
31. Estate duty in respect of agricultural land.
32. Taxes on land and buildings.
33. Excise duty on local manufacturers.
34. Taxes on entry of goods into a market for sale and tolls on passengers and goods carried in ferries.
35. Taxes on the sale or purchase of goods other than newspapers.
36. Taxes on advertisement other than advertisements published in newspapers.
37. Taxes on goods and passengers carried by road or on inland waterways.
38. Taxes on animals, vehicles other than mechanically-propelled vehicles and boats.
39. Tolls.
40. Taxes on professions, trades, callings and employments.
41. Taxes on luxuries, including taxes on entertainments, amusements, betting and gambling.
42. Offences for violation of laws in this list.
43. Jurisdiction and powers of village councils or courts or Council of Representatives or courts subject to the provisions of paragraphs 19, 20, 21,

22, 23 and 24 of this Scheme.

44. Fees in respect of any of the matters under this list but not including fees taken in any court.
45. Regulation of the different forms of shifting cultivation subject to the preservation of catchment areas or areas covered by hydro-electric projects.
46. Appointment or succession of chiefs or headmen of the hill tribes.
47. Inheritance of property of the hill tribals of the district excluding the tribes who are not hill tribes and other minority or backward communities.
48. Marriage and divorce where the parties are Scheduled Tribes of the hill.
49. Social customs and traditions of the hill tribes of the district.
50. Enforcement of weights and measures.

## **SCHEDULE B**

### *Concurrent List*

1. Secondary and higher secondary education.
2. Inter-district schemes having a bearing on agriculture.
3. Management of any forest not being reserved forest in pursuit of the general policy of conservation of forest, specially in the catchment areas, any streamlets or rivers utilized for hydro-electric schemes or inter-district navigation.
4. Fisheries in the water reservoirs for generating hydro-electric power or inter-district irrigation canals.
5. Medium industry.

## Meghalaya at a Glance

### COMPOSITION

Two hill districts of Assam—The United Khasi and Jaintia Hills and the Garo Hills.

### TOTAL AREA

22,445 square kms.

*Khasi and Jaintia Hills* — 14,364 square kms.

*Garo Hills* — 8,081 square kms.

### POPULATION

According to the 1961 Census :--

*Khasi and Jaintia Hills* — 4,62,870

*Garo Hills* — 3,06,836

In view of the fact that population-rise during the decade 1951-61 was 27·10% in the Khasi and Jaintia Hills and 26·91% in the Garo Hills, the population of the state should be much higher now.

Roughly — 1 million

### DENSITY OF POPULATION

*Khasi and Jaintia Hills* — 32 (per sq. mile)

*Garo Hills* — 38 (per sq. mile)

**LITERACY***Khasi and Jaintia Hills* — 31·5%*Garo Hills* — 20%**PER CAPITA INCOME***Khasi and Jaintia Hills* — About Rs 584/-*Garo Hills* — About Rs 195/-

(All-Assam average : Rs 441/-)

**TOWNS AND VILLAGES***Khasi and Jaintia Hills* — 5 towns and  
1,992 villages*Garo Hills* — 1 town and  
2,415 villages**CONVEYANCE***Khasi and Jaintia Hills* — Private motor cars 1,600

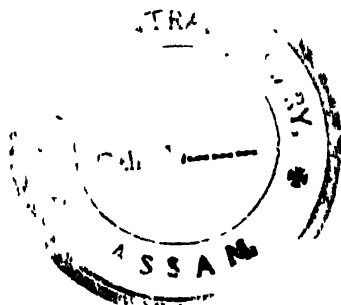
Bicycles 9,000

Radio sets 14,900

*Garo Hills* — Private motor cars 10

Bicycles 2,000

Radio sets 500



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