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FOREWORD

THE TRIBES OF ASSAM are bewildering in their variety their attractiveness and their rich culture and folklore From the scenic point of view also their land is one of the most variegated and beautiful parts of our country The Tribes differ in their dialects social life and folklore even in a small unit like NEFA (North East Frontier Agency) The Agency has a large number of Tribes with differing ways of living and quite separate dialects Distinct from them is the area of the Nagas who though small in number have earned a significant place in the history of this region In Nagaland also there are various tribes speaking different dialects Then there is the beautiful enclave of Manipur which is one of the most cultured Hindu regions of the country Its arts like dancing and weaving are amongst the most developed in the country To the extreme south on the Indo-Burmese frontier are the Lushais, also called the Mizos a very attractive colourful and likeable people There are also the Mikirs and the Jaintias on the South Eastern border of the State Then there are the Khasis who form a very important section with Shillong the capital in their midst At the very end in the East, bordering Pakistan are the Garos

All these Tribes which border various frontier areas of the State make this region the most attractive and unfortunately the least known to people of the other parts of the country It is essential that the rich traditions and folklore of this part is known better to people outside

Shri S Barkataki, former Chairman of the Public Service Commission, Assam, has compiled this book providing in brief description of the various Tribes which will help in making this region better known and appreciated

B V KESKAR

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S. BARKATAKI

CHAPTER I

LIFE IN THE HILLS

THE WORD *tribal* as used with reference to certain communities living in the plains of Assam is somewhat a misnomer. As a matter of fact we do not know definitely who the original inhabitants of India were. It is not certain whether the Dravidians or Austric speaking people, who peopled the country before the advent of the Aryans from Central Asia, were autocthons or immigrants. Whether the pre-Dravidians spread up to Assam or not is difficult to say; but some anthropologists have noticed pre-Dravidian physiognomical features amongst the people of lower Assam and also amongst certain communities such as the *Kaivartas*. All that we can say with certainty is that from about 2000 B.C. there was a movement of Mongoloid populations from the north to India through Assam and these people along with others who migrated from northern Burma formed from the remote past the bulk of the population of Assam. In ancient Sanskrit texts, such as the two great epics, the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana* and also in the *Puranas*, the inhabitants of Assam are referred to as *Mlecchas*, *Kiratas* and *Cinas* (Chinese), in other words, as non-Aryan barbarians.

There were apparently wave after wave of these migrations and the invaders belonged to the Indo-Chinese linguistic family, of which the two most important sub-families are the Mon-Khmer and the Tibeto-Burman. The third, Siamese-Chinese, includes Shan, which was spoken by the Ahoms, the last of these invaders. The Mon-Khmer speakers appear to have come earlier than the others. They were apparently driven by subsequent Tibeto-Burman hordes into the Khasi Hills, which is the only part of Assam in which the sub-family now exists. Of the Tibeto-Burman sub-family, there were three groups viz. Naga, Kuki-Chin and Bodo. The Naga and Kuki speakers were driven to the hills and Bodo became the dominant language. It includes all the surviving non-Aryan languages

of the plains, the Garo Hills and the North Cachar Hills. Kachari, Mech, Garo, Dimasa, Tipra, Lalung, Rabha and Chutiya are derivations of Bodo.

About the time the Mongolian hordes were entering Assam through the north-east, the Aryans started spreading over the whole of northern India across the Gangetic plain, driving the indigeneous inhabitants to the south. Eventually, some of the Aryans reached Assam in their eastward movement through Bihar and north Bengal. Judging, however, by physiognomy, the strain of Aryan blood in Assam seems very thin. Assamese of pure Aryan stock can perhaps be found only amongst the descendants of Brahmin scholars who were invited by the non-Aryan kings to their courts for their learning and advanced culture. Some others of high and low castes will have also accompanied these Brahmins. For instance the *Kalitas* (Kayasthas) of Assam are of distinctly Aryan appearance and are supposed by Sir Edward Gait to be "the descendants of the first Aryan immigrants by women of the country".

A very significant fact about Assam is the fusion which took place here of Aryan and Mongolian cultures. We find here an example of how a dominant culture, although supported numerically by few, can absorb and impose itself on weaker cultures. Thus we find in Assam, a people by and large Mongolian, speaking at the present day, Assamese, which is an Aryan Sanskritic language. This happened not merely because of the superiority of an Aryan language over the rude tribal dialects but also because of the absorbing power and influence of Hinduism. The Brahmins from Northern India succeeded in absorbing into Hinduism all the tribal people of the plains including the powerful Ahoms who ruled over Assam for over six hundred years and who in course of time not only adopted the Hindu religion, descarding their own, but also forgot their own Ahom language and adopted Assamese. Ahom is now a dead language known only perhaps to about half-a-dozen *deodhais* (Ahom priests) The same thing happened to all the languages of the Bodo group. The complete disappearance of such tongues like Rabha and Kachari, which are still spoken in the interior by old men and the womenfolk, is only a matter of time.

From these facts, it would appear that the bulk of the population of Assam is tribal or at least of tribal origin. Most of these tribal communities through assimilation have lost their tribal characteristics, and similar assimilation of such communities as are called *plains tribals* is continuing. People who can still be regarded distinctly as tribals can be found now only in the hills.

The hill-tribals of Assam live in the districts of Garo Hills, United Khasi and Jaintia Hills, United Mikir and North Cachar Hills and the Mizo Hills. The North Cachar Hills are inhabited by several tribes such as the Dimasas, the Kukis and the Zemi Nagas.

The first thing that strikes a visitor in any part of these hills is the magnificence of their natural scenery and the attractiveness of the people, because of their simplicity, cheerfulness, honesty, courtesy, hospitality, vitality, colourfulness and a perfectly democractic outlook.

With the exception of Kashmir, hardly anywhere in the whole of India, does one come across such beautiful natural scenery as in the hills of Assam. When one drives from Shillong to Haflong through the undulating grassy plateaus, covered with thick woods of oak and pine, one might easily "imagine himself (as Colonel Gurdon aptly observes in his monograph on the Khasis) in Switzerland, were it not for the absence of the snowy ranges". As one enters the North Cachar Hills, the scenery changes into precipitious mountains and deep ravines. Sitting in the verandah of the Circuit House at Haflong of an evening one can experience an exhilarating sensation viewing range after range of blue hills receding far into the horizon, the glow of the evening sun weaving along the tops of the ridges a magic web of indescribable beauty.

In the Mizo District the scenery is different, rather rugged as compared with that of the Khasi and Jaintia or the North Cachar Hills, but yet it has a sombre grandeur which one could not appreciate better from anywhere else than from the top of the Blue Mountain (7600 ft.) in the south-eastern corner of the district. On a clear day one can have from this spot a view of the sun blazing the waters of the Bay of Bengal miles away.

Our surroundings influence our habits and character. The distinctive characteristics which are regarded as tribal are to a consi-

derable extent shaped by the climate, the nature of the soil, the terrain and the scenery of the land which they inhabit. As in countries like Scotland life in these hills is hard. One can hardly imagine the difficulty with which a Mizo or a Zemi Naga has to eke a livelihood out of his little patch of land. From before daybreak the womenfolk of a village march in processions, carrying a number of bamboo tubes in a cane or bamboo basket, hundreds of feet down to a spring or a stream to collect water for the day's use. The return journey uphill with the load of water on their back is strenuous. Immediately after their return they have to get busy preparing food for the family before they accompany their husbands to help them in their work in the *jhum* (cultivation). About half-an-hour is spent at mid-day in eating the pack-lunch (consisting of rice, salt and chillies) they carry with them to the *jhum* and then work goes on again till sun-down—hoeing, sowing, weeding, whatever work at a particular stage it might be. In the evenings the menfolk snatch a few moments of leisure and relaxation which they devote to *zu* (rice-beer or spirit) drinking and singing while the women have to carry on with their household chores—cooking and attending to the pigs, the fowl and their own little ones. On special occasions, there is dancing both by men and women in addition to *zu*-drinking and music. This is, or at least was, till very recently the normal routine of the average tribal's life in the hills which could not perhaps be better described than in the following lines of Thomas Gray composed in a different context:

> Far from the madding crowd's ignoble strife,
> Their sober wishes never learned to stray,
> Along the cool sequestered vale of life—
> They kept the noiseless tenur of their way.

Apropos of *zu*-drinking, dancing, singing and feasting which are a common feature of all tribal life, one cannot fail to notice that all the hill-people are very musical. The Lushais believe that this has got something to do with the echoes which respond from different directions in the hills to their whistles and songs. It is this nymph or satyr, whichever it may be, echo, that, they believe, bestows on them their musical talents.

In physical beauty the Khasi women excel their sisters both in

the hills and the plains. Their complexion is a golden yellow and their soft smooth features have a Polynesian touch. As has already been indicated, ethnologically, the Khasis are different from the other hill-tribes of Assam. While the latter are supposed to have migrated from the North-East, the Khasis came from the South-East. Their Mon-Khmer speech is still spoken in Cambodia and Pegu and anthropologists have noticed some common customs and habits among the Khasis and Malayasians.

According to their legends, the original habitat of the Garos was Tibet, but legends apart, the Garos belong to the stock called Tibeto-Burman and they have close affinities with the tribal races inhabiting the plains of Assam, North Cachar Hills and parts of Tripura. Grierson, in his Linguistic Survey of India, encadres the languages of all these tribes under a single group called Bodo. The Garos have the strongest resemblances, linguistically and physically, to the Kacharis. In fact the resemblances are so strong that they have led Major Playfair in his monograph on the Garos to conclude that these two peoples originally constituted one, subsequently separating themselves, the Kacharis spreading over the north and the Garos over the south bank of the Brahmaputra.

The origin of the Mikirs is obscure. It is not impossible that they are autocthons. Of the tribes of the North Cachar Hills, the Zemis came from the Naga Hills. They are a sub-tribe of the Kachha-Nagas, who again are a branch of the Angamis, whose men are noted for their physical vigour and manly beauty. It is not surprising, therefore, that the Zemi buck is generally a fine specimen of youthful, masculine attractiveness. The Dimasas are a branch of the Kacharis who ruled over Upper Assam until they were driven out by the Ahoms in the beginning of the sixteenth century. The Kukis came to the North-Cachar Hills in two waves from the Mizo Hills from where they were ousted by the more vigorous Lushais, who in their turn had migrated from the Chin Hills of Burma.

As regards their domestic life, customs and beliefs, although a somewhat common pattern runs through all the hill-tribes, there are strong local variations. Apart from hard work in their fields and seeking relaxation and recreation in *zu*-drinking, sing-

ing, dancing, feasting, hunting and fishing, which are habits common to all, each tribe has peculiarities which mark it out from the others. For example, as a Deputy Commissioner of the Garo Hills aptly observed, "Every Garo's life is spent in giving (or refusing) and demanding *dai* (compensation). A man's great-grandfather was killed fifty years ago; he demands *dai* from the heir of the murderer, and if it is not paid his heir will still demand it in turn and so on until it is paid". Although most disputes in the other hill districts also are decided by awarding compensation to the aggrieved party, the system is not carried there to extremes as in the Garo Hills.

Marriage customs, laws of inheritance etc. also differ from tribe to tribe. The most distinctive feature of Garo and Khasi societies is their matriarchate. Descent is claimed from a common ancestress and it goes down through the females. It is the husband who, after marriage, has to go and live in his wife's house and not *vice versa*. Property is inherited by the youngest daughter. Amongst the Garos, when the son-in-law comes to live in his wife's parents' house, he becomes his father-in-law's *nokrom*, i.e. to say a kind of representative of the father's clan. After the death of the father-in-law the *nokrom* marries the widowed mother-in-law, thus becoming the husband of both mother and daughter. This custom is rather extraordinary and there is nothing comparable to it among the other tribes.

All the other hill tribes are patriarchal. The Lushais, Zemi Nagas and Kukis have to buy their wives by paying a marriage price. The price is calculated in terms of a number of *mithans* (wild bulls or cows). If divorce takes place as a result of a lapse on the wife's part, her father has to return the marriage price. If on the other hand, it is the husband's fault which brings about a divorce, he looses the price. The custom of demanding marriage-price for girls among the partiarchal tribes is easy to appreciate when we take into account the fact that a woman's life in the hills is harder than a man's. While an unmarried buck, except for being compelled to put in his share of work in the field, is allowed to go about freely hunting, fishing, drinking, singing, dancing and making love to his heart's content, a girl has to help her mother

rooted amongst these people, and even nowadays, in places like Shillong or Cherrapunji, Khasis are afraid to walk alone after dark for fear of being attacked by a *nongshohnoh*. In order to drive away the *thlen* from a house or family, all the money, ornaments and property of that house or family must be thrown away, as is the case with persons possessed by the demon *Ka Taroh*, in the Jaintia Hills. None dare touch any of the property, for fear that the *thlen* should follow it. It is believed that a *thlen* can never enter the Siem's or Chief's clan, or the Siem's house; it follows, therefore, that the property of the *thlen* keeper can be appropriated by the Siem. A Mohammedan servant, not long ago in Shillong, fell a victim to the charms of a Khasi girl and went to live with her. He told the following story to one of his fellow-servants, which may be set down here to show that the *thlen* superstition is by no means dying out. 'In the course of his married life he came to know that the mother of his Khasi wife kept in the house what he called a *bhut* (devil). He asked his wife many many times to allow him to see the *bhut*, but she was obdurate; after a long time, however, and after extracting many promises from him not to tell, she confided to him the secret and took him to the corner of the house and showed him a little box in which was coiled a tiny snake, like the hair spring of a watch. She passed her hand over it and it grew in size till at last it became a huge cobra with hood erected. The husband, terrified, begged his wife to lay the spirit. She passed her hands down its body and it gradually shrank within its box.'"

It may be stated that the greater number of the Khasis, especially in certain siemships, viz. Cherra, Nongkren and Mylliem, still regard the *thlen* and the persons who are thought to keep *thlens*, with the greatest awe and that they will not utter even the names of the latter for fear some ill may befall them. The superstition is probably of very ancient origin, and it is possible that the Khasi sacrifices to the *thlen* demon may be connected with the primaeval serpent god which characterised the religion of the Cambodians, which Forbes says was 'undoubtedly the earliest religion of the Mons.'"

Such extraordinary local variations of religious practices notwithstanding, the animistic religion of the hill-tribes have the

common feature of having strong affinity to Hinduism. They all believe in a Supreme Being (e.g. the *Pathian* of the Lushais and *Tatara Rabunga* of the Garos), subordinate to whom there are numerous gods and spirits who have to be propitiated with sacrifices of animals and birds for warding off evil and calamities. From these beliefs and practices it would be safe to assume that the *Tantrik* form of Hinduism, which originated in the plains of Assam around the temple of Kamakhya, greatly influenced the tribal religions. To put it in another way, this form of Hinduism contains features which are tribal and which were probably adopted by Brahmin priests for winning over their tribal neighbours, the most characteristic feature of Hinduism having been throughout the ages assimilation rather than conversion. There never was on the part of Hindus any overt effort at any time to convert others to their faith. There is little doubt that but for the advent of the British, and in their wake that of Christian missionaries, all the tribes would have been assimilated into the Assamese Hindu fold like numerous other tribes before them, who came and settled in Assam, the Kacharis and the Ahoms being the most notable examples.

The most remarkable feature about tribal life in the hills of Assam is the fundamentally democratic basis of their social and administrative organizations. With minor exceptions, the land belongs to the community and not to any individual. Although in the Garo Hills the *Nokma* (the head of a clan or a village), in the Khasi and Jaintia Hills the *Siem* or the *Doloi* or the *Raja*, and in the Lushai Hills, till recently, the Chief was the nominal proprietor of all lands within his jurisdiction, every villager could cultivate his plot of land anywhere as a matter of right. In society, there is no distinction between high and low. Wealth and income do not confer social privileges. The once powerful Lushai Chief and the Khasi Siem, who were regarded by neighbouring peoples as Raja or King, were as much commoners as the humblest of the humble. The rich is always ready to help those of their co-villagers who are in need and the strong is similarly inclined to the weak. In fact the Lushai Chief, who wielded enormous authority over his subjects, was the *de jure* father of the villagers over whom he ruled. In times

of scarcity, if the villagers committed robbery of grain from the Chief's granary, they committed no offense.

This democratic spirit was strongly reflected in the indigenous tribal administrative organizations. The Khasi Siems were constitutional monarchs. They can hardly ever give any decision independently. It is his *myntries* (ministers) who generally decide all matters for him. Although the Lushai Chiefs were more powerful and sometimes autocratic, they could disregard the advice of their *upas* (village elders) only at their own risk. Thus, in spite of the Chiefs and the *Siems* being chosen on the hereditary principle their administration was throughly democratic. In other areas, such as the North Cachar Hills, both the hereditary and the elective principles are followed side by side by different tribes in choosing the chief or the leader. Disputes are heard in open court where all the male members of the village take part. In some areas even the women are allowed to be present at the trial of cases. The judgement passed on an offender is regarded as a judgement of the whole village and not merely of the chief and his advisers. This system of administration suited the genius of the people and they were happy under it. The British, with their experience of administration over half the world, were wise enough not to interfere with the indigenous administrative machineries. Administration was left almost entirely to the village headmen and the elders, the Deputy Commissioner and the Sub-Divisional Officer merely sitting over them as superintendents and intervening only in serious matters, such as a dispute over the boundary between one village and another, or cases of a seriously criminal or political nature.

Since independence, the tone and colour of administration in the hills have undergone a complete metamorphosis. The establishment of the District Councils under the sixth schedule to the Constitution suddenly brought party-politics into the hills where it was unknown before. In addition, the creation of numerous new government departments, and as a result of the induction of hordes of officers from the plains, with hardly any service to render to the people and with hardly any co-ordinating agency to regulate their activities, practically destroyed over night the old,

strong, efficient administrative set up and disrupted the life of the people.

From this point of view the abolition of the institution of Chiefs in the Lushai Hills was perhaps a premature and unfortunate step, the consequences of which are seen in the disturbances which are now shaking the once happy and smiling land of the Mizos.

Be that as it may, the greatest harm caused to the hill peoples by the new dispensation was the damage and degradation caused to their character. The most outstanding characteristic of these people had always been their strong spirit of self-help and self-reliance. They made and maintained village paths, constructed school, church and hospital buildings, wells, water tanks, play-grounds and did other works of public utility voluntarily without remuneration. These were community projects in the true sense of the term. The establishment of development blocks on a stereotyped all-India pattern without taking local conditions and the temper of the people into account and the liberal doling out of grants, loans and subsidies in the name of community development have now completely changed the picture. The people now not only refuse to perform any of the tasks mentioned above without payment, but these doles have affected their attitudes to such an extent that they have stopped giving proper attention even to their rice fields, knowing that if crops fail, free or at least subsidised rice would be made available by 'Government'. Extracting something out of 'Government' for nothing has in fact become a practice with them and it is looked upon as a creditable performance. These once sturdy, self-respecting and self-reliant people have thus been so demoralized and corrupted that they do not hesitate to resort to chicanery for obtaining gifts which they look upon as graft for keeping them quiet and peaceable.

Mass conversion to Christianity has been another disrupting, demoralising, devitalising and denationalising factor affecting the life and character of the hill-people. To elaborate the point, I would give the instance of the *Deka-changs* (Youngmen's village club houses) called *Nok-pates* in the Garo Hills, *Zawlbuks* in the Lushai Hills. *Morungs* in the Naga villages and the *Maro* by the Mikirs. These *Deka-changs* are an excellent institution and a distinctive fea-

ture of every tribal village. These clubs where young boys have to serve and obey the older boys, besides being associated with agricultural, social and almost all other activities of the village community, instilled into the youth discipline, respect for and obedience to elders, a spirit of service to the community and a number of other admirable qualities.

The village youths belonging to the club work in the fields together, a portion being allotted to each house. Work is enforced by penalities. In the Mikir Hills, in the olden days, it is said, shirkers were roasted alive Now-a-days, of course, such drastic punishment cannot be meted out. Nevertheless, severe beatings are often given. The boys of the *Maro*, or *Zawlbuk* or *Morung* are in great demand for social services also, especially tasks and ceremonies connected with the dead Dancing and singing are also practised in these clubs, which keep old ways and customs alive.

It is a pity that these clubs are gradually becoming a thing of the past.

Wholesale and indiscriminate imposition of alien institutions on primitive races in a practice which cannot be too strongly condemned. It sort of tears them away from their roots, breeding in them a contempt for their own race and racial traditions, causing a loss of pride and self-respect and turning them into unnatural specimens of humanity ill-at-ease everywhere, at home nowhere. By disrupting tribal foundations and destroying an age-old way of life, not inferior to any other, it engenders in them a sense of frustration or *ennui* and an indefinable fear about the future, a kind of mental unrest which finds expression periodically in violent eruptions as in the Naga and Mizo Hills.

CHAPTER II

THE GAROS

THE GAROS inhabit the Garo Hills District on the western extremity of Assam adjoining the Mymensingh District of East Pakistan. Besides, there are large groups of Garos in the contiguous plains areas of the Districts of Goalpara and Kamrup in Assam. A sizeable population also lives in the Mymensingh District of East Pakistan. About a lakh of these Mymensingh plains Garos—mostly Christians—migrated to Assam in the beginning of 1964 due to systematic persecution in Pakistan. Some thousands of these unfortunate people, deprived suddenly of their hearth and home, have been rehabilitated in the Garo Hills and thousands are still awaiting rehabilitation in a huge refugee camp at a place called Matia in the Goalpara District of Assam. The population of the Garo Hills District is just over three hundred thousand and it has an area of three thousand square miles.

The Garos call themselves *achik-mande* (*achik* = hill, *mande* = man) just as the Lushais (another hill-tribe of Assam) call themselves Mizos (*Mi* = man, *zo* = hill). The original home of the Garos is not known. They themselves believe that their original homeland was in Tibet.

A legend to this effect has persisted amongst the Garos for generations. In his monograph on the Garos, Major Playfair points out certain linguistic resemblances between the Tibetan and the Garo tongues and also refers to the reverence which the Garos, like the Tibetans have for gongs and the value they attach to the *Yak*'s tail, although the animal never inhabited these hills. But such scrappy pieces of evidence are not sufficient for establishing a historical connection of the Garos with Tibet. It is more probable that like most of the plains tribals of Assam, the Garos moved into their present habitat through the north-eastern routes from China and Upper Burma. This movement was part of a great Mongolian influx into this part of India in prehistoric times. It is

not merely possible, but very probable, that the movement started originally from Tibet and other parts of the Western China.

The Garos belong to the linguistic stock called by ethnologists the Tibeto-Burman. They have close linguistic affinity with tribal races inhabiting the plains of Assam, the North Cachar Hills and parts of Tripura. Grierson, in his *Linguistic Survey of India*, encadres the languages of all these tribes under a single group called the *Bodo*. Among all these tribes, the Garos bear the strongest resemblances linguistically as well as physically to the Kacharis. In fact the resemblances are so strong that they have led Major Playfair to believe that these two tribes originally constituted one, subsequently separating themselves into two, the Kacharis spreading over the North and the Garos over the south bank of the Brahmaputra. In support of this view he points out the similarity between the monoliths of Dimapur (Manipur Road), the ancient capital of the Kachari Kingdom and the *Kimas* or memorial posts which the Garos erect in memory of their dead. But this, as Major Playfair himself admits, is a comparison of the great with the small.

In his attempts to trace the origin of the Garos, Major Playfair further observes: "One of the evangelists of the American Baptist Mission in Tura (a Garo) who spent some time in the Ao country (Nagaland), told me that he had been asked by some Aos if he was not one of the descendants of a party of 700 Aos who left their country and travelled westward in the long forgotten past." Certain features common to the Nagas and Garos in the performance of their funeral ceremonies (the practice of tethering a bull to a Y-shaped post before it is sacrificed) and other customs, especially the practice of head-hunting, point towards a link between Nagas and the Garos. Head-hunting was never in vogue amongst any other tribe in this region except amongst these two. Major Playfair surmises from these facts that the Garos probably inhabited originally some area near Dimapur and there, because of proximity, picked up some of the Naga customs and habits.

As regards their physical features, the following picturesque description given by Colonel Dalton in his '*Descriptive Ethnology of Bengal*' could not perhaps be improved upon. "Their faces are round and short. The forehead is not receding, but pro-

jects very little beyond the eye, which is small, on a level with the face, very dark and obliquely set. The want of prominence in the nose is remarkable. The whole face has the appearance of being flattened out, the mouth sharing in the compressed appearance and not at all prognathous." The average height of the male would be just above five feet and that of the female 4-3/4 ft. A few more characteristics added by Major Playfair would make the description complete:

"The women are not beautiful, especially when they pass middle age, but when young they are buxom and healthy in appearance and their good natured smiling faces are far from unattractive. A great disfigurement is the distension of their ears by the weight of enormous ear-rings, which often break the lobes in two. The men rarely have hair on their faces though some grow apologies for beards. If a moustache is worn, it usually consists of a few hairs on either side of the upper lip, owing to the custom of pulling out the rest."

This description of physical features would apply with equal aptness to most of the tribals inhabiting the plains of Assam, particularly the Kacharis. All these tribes, as a result of living in the plains under the suzerainty of Assamese kings and coming under the influence of Hinduism, have become completely assimilated with the Assamese. Although the older folk are still to some extent bilingual, complete disappearance of their tribal languages is only a matter of time like the disappearance of the languages of the once powerful Ahoms and the Chutiyas and numerous other races which had been inundating from time immemorial the fertile and alluring valleys of the Brahmaputra and its tributaries.

This process of assimilation did not extend to the hill-tribes mainly because of the inaccessibility of their habitat. There is little doubt that with the development of communications the same process would have taken place amongst the Garos (as has been happening before our eyes amongst the Mikirs) but for the advent of the British and in their wake the Christian missionaries, who in their zeal to preserve ' the separateness and originality ' of the hill-tribes and to civilize them, admirably succeeded in dividing them from the people of the plains. The consequences of

this civilizing zeal have become painfully visible today in the demand for a separate hill-state by the Garos and other hill-tribes of Assam.

As regards the history of the Garos, practically nothing is known. They are no doubt still very primitive. Till recently they were regarded as nothing more than cruel, blood-thirsty savages, this notoriety having been gained by them as a result of frequent and numerous raids carried out by them on the people of the neighbouring plains districts. On the occasion of each such raid a number of people were killed and their heads carried off as trophies, head-hunting having been with them as with the Nagas, their most favourite pastime. Apart from this killing for sheer fun, human victims were required for sacrificial purposes also. The sacrifices were made to propitiate the gods after a fateful event such as the death of *nokma* (the head of a village or a clan). Similar human sacrifices were performed by the Jaintias of the United Khasi and Jaintia Hills District. The stone on which the victims were decapitated can still be seen on the bank of the Kopili river near Garampani in the Jaintia Hills. Head-hunting was effectively stopped in the Garo Hills as late as 1876 only. In that year not less than two hundred skulls were surrendered by the Garos to the Deputy Commissioner or in his camp at a place called Rangrengiri, a few miles from Tura, the district headquarters of the Garo Hills District. It was due mainly to these depredations that the British, whose policy till then was to leave the hill-tribes alone (because of absence of potentialities of exploitation of resources in these barren areas), were compelled to occupy the land of the Garos physically in 1872, along with the effective extension of their administration to the rest of Assam. Prior to this, Goalpara, including Garo Hills, but excluding Eastern Duars, was administered from Rangpur in Bengal and as such formed a part of the province of Bengal, which by the Mughal Emperor's *farman* of the 12th August 1765, was transferred to the East India Company.[1] It became a part of Assam in 1874, when Assam was constituted into a separate Chief Commissioner's province.

Since then, till shortly after independence, when tribal Dis-

[1]Gait's *History of Assam*.

trict Councils were established, the Garo Hills District was administered by a Deputy Commissioner, who was more or less the final authority in all matters, judicial and executive. He was, however, only some kind of an overlord. The villagers themselves managed their affairs with the help of village elders. A group of villages elects a *Laskar* for life and he functions as a magistrate for the purpose of petty cases (serious crimes are rare). Real power is, however, exercised not by the *Laskars* but by the heads of clans called *Nokmas* who elect the *Laskars*. This system worked democratically and efficiently; but with the establishment of the District Councils authority is gradually shifting from the villages to the centralised headquarters at Tura. It is doubtful if this is proving beneficial for the common man.

II

DOMESTIC LIFE

Dress

The Garo dress is simple. The man's attire consists of a loin cloth, six or seven feet long and about six inches wide. A blouse is sometimes worn to cover the upper part of the body but more commonly it is left bare except in winter when it is covered with a wrapper of blue cotton cloth. A turban, which is generally worn, goes round leaving the top of the head bare. The woman's attire is similar—a cloth about a foot and half long and about a foot wide round the waist, sometimes a blouse or a wrapper and a turban, but except during the cold weather the upper part of the body is not encumbered by any covering. Such exposure, especially on the part of buxom young females, gives to outsiders (particularly young people) at first sight a funny sensation. The loin cloths are sometimes ornamented with beads or *cowries*. Both men and women are very fond of ear-rings, the women wearing up to fifty of them, the weight of which distend the ear-lobes, sometimes splitting them in two. On festive occasions and when dancing, both men and women ornament their head-dress with rows of beads and stick to

from dawn to dusk in running the household and catering to the needs of the menfolk. It is no wonder, therefore, that an unmarried girl is looked upon by the family as a valuable asset which cannot be parted with except for a reasonable price.

Divorce is easy to obtain amongst all the tribes. Among the Garos it is allowed almost automatically on payment of the customary *dai* of sixty rupees or so. Amongst the Khasis it is even easier. In the presence of witnesses, the husband gives five *cowries,* or five pice in lieu, to the wife and the wife does the same. The husband then takes all the ten *cowries* and throws them on the ground and this completes the divorce.

Divorce amongst the Khasis and the Jaintias (Syntengs) are so common an occurrence that children very often do not even know the identity of their fathers. In spite of this laxity in the matter of divroce, it has been justly observed by Colonel Gurdon "that the great drawback attaching to divorces in ordinary communities, i.e. the effect that it has on the lives of the children of the marriage, does not apply to the Khasis, for with them the children always live with their mother and their mother's family, which latter would be bound to maintain them in the event of a divorce."

From the liberal nature of their marriage and divorce laws it would be seen that the hill people have a very scientific and liberal attitude to all matters concerning sex. Unmarried boys and girls are not interfered with in their love-making and even the bearing of children out of wedlock before marriage is not strongly frowned upon. A different standard in sexual matters is, however, expected, particularly of the womenfolk, after marriage. This is especially true of the Zemi-Nagas and all other Naga tribes. Rape of a married woman is considered an offence more heinous than murder. Ursula Grahman Bower in her book *The Naga Path* gives an interesting account of how a raptor was saved from being speared to death by the youngmen of the village by the prompt intervention of the village elders, who satisfied the sense of public justice by banishing the man from the village.

Besides hunting, fishing etc., a popular pastime of the Garos and the Nagas till recent times was head-hunting. Apart from killing human beings in their raids on the plains for sheer fun, human

victims were required for sacrificial purposes also. Head-hunting was effectively stopped in the Garo Hills as late as 1876 only. In that year as many as two hundred skulls were surrendered by the Garos to the Deputy Commissioner in his camp at a place called Rongrengiri, a few miles from Tura, the district headquarters.

There is no evidence of head-hunting having been practised by any of the other tribes except perhaps the Kukis. The Lushais also raided the plains frequently before their land was occupied by the British, but they were satisfied with carrying off captives and were not after heads. Human sacrifices were, however, common in the Khasi and Jaintia Hills, especially among the Jaintias who might have borrowed the practice from *Tantrik* Hindus of the plains. Such sacrifices are known to have been practised in the temple of Kamkhya near Gauhati and particularly by the Hinduised Miris, in the temple of the dread goddess Tamreswari near Sadiya. Colonel Gurdon, however, expresses the opinion that these sacrifices were originally made to the river Kopili, which the Jaintias worshipped as a goddess. The stone on which the victims were decapitated can still be seen on the bank of the Kopili river near Garampani in the Jaintia Hills.

The practice of human sacrifice among the Khasis is an extraordinary institution. There is a superstition among the Khasis about a gigantic snake called 'U Thlen' which has to be appeased by the sacrifice of human victims. The following account taken from Colonel Gurdon's book will give an idea of this blood-curdling institution :

"The tradition is that there was once in a cave near Cherrapunji a gigantic snake, or *thlen*, who committed great havoc among men and animals. At last one man, bolder than his fellows, took with him a herd of goats and set himself down by the cave and offered them one by one to the *thlen*. By degrees the monster became friendly and learnt to open his mouth at a word from the man to receive the lump of flesh which was then thrown in. When confidence was thoroughly established, the man, acting under the advice of a god called *U Suid-Noh* (who has as his abode a grove near Sohrarim), having heated a lump of iron red-hot in a furnace, induced the snake, at the usual signal, to open his mouth, and then threw in

the red-hot lump and so killed him. He proceeded to cut up the body and sent pieces in every direction with orders that the people were to eat them. Wherever the order was obeyed, the country became free of the *thlen,* but one small piece remained which no one could eat, and from this sprang a multitude of *thlens,* which infest the residents of Cherra and its neighbourhood. When a *thlen* takes up its abode in a family there is no means of getting rid of it, though it occasionally leaves of its own accord and often follows family property that is given away or sold. The *thlen* attaches itself to property and brings prosperity and wealth to the owners, but on the condition that it is supplied with blood. Its craving comes on at uncertain intervals and manifests itself by sickness, by misadventure, or by increasing poverty befalling the family that owns the property. It can only be appeased by the murder of a human being. The murderer cuts off the tips of the hair of the victim with silver scissors, also the finger nails, and extracts from the nostril a little blood caught in a bamboo tube, and offers these to the *thlen*. The murderer, who is called *u nongshohnoh*, literally 'the beater', before he sets out on his unholy mission, drinks a special kind of liquor called, *ka 'iad tang-shi-snem* (literally, liquor which has been kept for a year). This liquor, it is thought, gives the murderer courage and the power of selecting suitable victims for the *thlen*. The *nongshohnoh* then sets out armed with a short club, with which to slay the victim; hence his name *nong-shohnoh,* i.e. one who beats; for it is forbidden to kill a victim on these occasions with any weapon made of iron, inasmuch as iron was the metal which proved fatal to the *thlen*. He also takes the pair of silver scissors above mentioned, a silver lancet to pierce the inside of the nostrils of the deceased, and a small bamboo or cylinder to receive the blood drawn therefrom. The *nongshohnoh* also provides himself with rice called *'u khaw tyndep*', i.e. rice mixed with turmeric after certain incantations have taken place. The murderer throws a little of this rice over his intended victim, the effect of which is to stupefy the latter, who then falls an easy prey to the *nongshohnoh*. It is not, however, always possible to kill the victim outright for various reasons, and then the *nongshohnoh* resorts to the following subterfuge. He cuts off a little of the hair or the hem on the garments

of a victim, and offers these up to the *thlen*. The effect of cutting off the hair or the hem of the garment of a person by a *nongshohnoh* to offer up to the *thlen* is disastrous to the unfortunate victim, who soon falls ill and gradually wastes away and dies. The *nongshohnoh* also sometimes contents himself with merely throwing stones at the victim or with knocking at the door of his house at night, and then returns home, and, after invoking the *thlen*, informs the monster that he has tried his best to secure him a prey but has been unsuccessful. This is enough to appease the *thlen* for a time, but the demon does not remain inactive long and soon manifests his displeasure for the failure of his keeper to supply him with human blood, by causing one of the latter's family to fall sick. The *thlen* has the power of reducing himself to the size of a thread, which renders it convenient for the *nong-ri-thlen*, or *thlen*-keeper, to place him for safety in an earthen pot or in a basket which is kept in some secure place in the house. When the time for making an offering to the *thlen* comes, an hour is selected generally at dead of night, costly clothes are spread on the floor of the house of the *thlen*-keeper, all the doors are opened, and a brass plate is laid down on the ground in which is deposited the blood, or the hair, or a piece of the cloth of the victim. All the family then gathers round and an elderly member commences to beat a small drum, and invokes the *thlen*, saying, '*ko kni ko kpa* (Oh, Maternal Uncle Father), come out, here is some food for you; we have done everything we could to satisfy you and now we have been successful; give us thy blessing that we may attain health and prosperity.' The *thlen* then crawls out from its hiding-place and commences to expand, and when it has attained its full serpent shape, it comes near the plate and remains expectant. The spirit of the victim then appears and stands on the plate, laughing. The *thlen* begins to swallow the figure, commencing at its feet, the victim laughing the while. By degrees the whole figure is disposed of by the boa constrictor. If the spirit be that of a person from whom the hair or a piece of his or her cloth has been cut, directly after the *thlen* has swallowed the spirit, the person expires. Many families in these hills are known, or suspected, to be keepers of a *thlen* and are dreaded or avoided in consequence. This superstition is deep-

them feathers of the *bhimraj* (horn-bill). Brass or silver bangles are popular with men as well as women. Important persons like *nokmas* (headmen of villages or clans) wear a heavy ring of iron above the elbow, which is called *jaksil*. A belt covered with beads completes the attire. The men are often seen carrying weapons—spears or swords.

The Garo is essentially a cultivator. "Cultivating the soil," says Major Playfair, "with him is the beginning and the end of his life's work, and the occupation to which he devotes all the energy he possesses." Like the other hill-tribes of Assam they follow the destructive *jhumming* method of cultivation. An extensive area covered by valuable trees is chosen each year for an entire village, the trees are felled and after allowing sometime for the timber to dry the entire area is destroyed by fire. After manuring the land in this fashion, seeds are broadcast. Similar treatment is given to another area the following year. As land in the possession of a particular village is limited in area the villagers have to go back to the same land after some years (the *jhumming* cycle) and destroy once again the trees which in the meantime have grown. Because of growth of population the *jhumming* cycle is gradually becoming shorter and shorter, from ten or twelve years to five or even three years. The soil erosion caused by this method of cultivation is enormous. Unless this devastation of virgin forests can be stopped by replacing the present methods of cultivation by permanent ones, such as terracing as practised by the Angami Nagas, most of these hill areas will turn, in the not distant future into the deserts unfit for human habitation.

Crops

The principal crop is rice which is also the staple food. Millets, maize, vegetables, ginger and indigo are grown extensively. Cashew-nuts and tapioca have been recently introduced. But the most important crop next to rice is cotton, abundant cultivation of which gives the Garos an economic advantage over the other hill-tribes of Assam. By far the largest part of the wealth of the Garos comes from this product. Lac is also cultivated in several parts of the district.

Food and Drink

Rice is the main food and it is eaten three times a day. So far as animal food is concerned the Garos eat almost everything—goats, pigs, fowls, ducks, dogs, cats, snakes, lizards, bats, and even flying white-ants. Elephant's flesh is highly prized. The only line drawn is at the tiger's flesh. Dried fish called *nakam* is a daily dish.

As with the other hill-tribes, drink is an indispensable part of life, although Christianity is interfering with it perhaps to an undesirable extent. The liquor is not distilled but is always brewed out of rice, maize or millet. Apart from its daily use, drinking in profuse quantities is a must in religious ceremonies and at feasts, the prestige of a *nokma* or any other person of importance being dependent on the quality and quantity of drinks served on such occasions in addition to the abundance of solids

Dancing

Along with drinking, dancing to the accompaniment of music produced by buffalo horn *singas*, bamboo flutes and drums is also an integral part of all religious ceremonies and social functions. The men dance sword and shield in hand, interspersing the bodily movements with shouts of *Kai*, *Kai*. Men and women dance together in some dances and separately in others. Garo dances are however rather tame compared with those of the Nagas or even the Lushais. The only musical instruments used are those mentioned above, namely drums, wind instruments made of horn or bamboo, brass gongs and cymbals. Besides drinking and dancing they have hardly any other form of communal amusements, games being generally trials of physical strength only and not of skill or dexterity. Hunting and fishing are popular but hunting is hardly ever done with weapons. The usual method is to set traps which are often dangerous to human beings. In catching fish which is their favourite item of food, the Garos use similar methods of trapping by building weirs across streams and rivers, but in the Someswari river one comes across the sight of Garos killing fish in running water with spears made of bamboo. The Garos of this area are experts in this form of fishing.

INDUSTRIES

As has already been stated, the Garo is essentially an agriculturist. Except for weaving of cloth by the womenfolk, which is a common practice all over Assam, both hills and plains, and making of some bamboo and cane mats, dugouts and boats and rudimentary implements of metal, they have hardly any cottage industries. But the district is rich in mineral resources particularly coal of high grade. A thermal power station has been set up at Nangalbibra near the Khasi Hills border, near which extraction of coal on a commercial scale is to be undertaken. If the district is connected by rail there is the possibility of an industrial complex growing up around this area which would alter the entire complexion of the district and the character of the people.

III

CUSTOMS AND BELIEFS

As already pointed out, there are large communities of Garos living outside the Garo Hills in the plains of Assam and East Pakistan. The Garos are divided into various sub-tribes with varying customs and manners. But the main septs or clans into which the race is divided are three, the *Maraks*, the *Momins* and the *Sangmas*. Each sept is exogamous, marriage within the clan being strictly taboo. Some sub-clans like the *Abengs*, *Arengs*, and *Siras* are beginning to branch away from the original clans and are developing into independent exogamous clans.

Like the Khasis the Garos are a matrilineal people. The unit or group on which society is based is the *machong* which has been translated by Colonel Dalton as, 'motherhood', which is not the same thing as a family. All members of a *machong* claim descent from a common ancestress or mother, descent always being through the female or the mother. The father, both amongst the Khasis and the Garos, is more or less an outsider and his family is hardly recognized by the children. *Machongs* are generally named after animals, rivers, caves etc., e.g. the *Rangsan machong* or 'the child-

ren of the bear', the dove machong, *Wasra machong* (after the Wasra stream) etc.

Marriage is strictly exogamous. The husband and wife must belong to separate clans—a Sangma cannot marry a Sangma or a Momin a Momin. The children take the mother's clan. If the mother is a Momin and the father a Sangma the children all become Momins, not Sangmas. The proposal for marriage always comes from the woman's side and it is the girl who normally chooses her husband. But an only daughter or the youngest daughter is generally given in marriage to the son of her father's sister or in the absence of such a first cousin to another person of her father's motherhood. After marriage the son-in-law comes to live in his wife's parents house and becomes the father-in-laws' *nokrom*, that is to say, a kind of representative of the father's clan in the mother's family. After the death of the father-in-law the *nokrom* marries the widowed mother-in-law, thus becoming the husband of both mother and daughter. This custom, which is beginning to be discarded amongst enlightened sections of Garos, is rather extraordinary and I do not know if there is anything parallel in any other primitive society. Mere marriage with the widow is not sufficient. In order that the famale children may be entitled to inherit the mother's property there must be nuptial consummation between the young husband and in his old wife.

When there is no *nokrom* for a widow to marry, she is not allowed to remarry without the permission of the family of the deceased husband. As this custom, called the law of *akim* worked harshly on the womenfolk, the Government refused to recognise it. Nevertheless, the custom is still honoured in practice.

A man can marry as many wives as he wishes but if he marries two sisters he is required to marry the elder one first. Before a man marries a second wife he has to obtain the permission of the first, failing which he is liable to pay compensation (*dai*) to her. The first wife is called *jik-mamung* or principal wife and the other wives are called *jik-gites*, that is, concubines, but this does not mean social inferiority of the *jik-gites*. When a man marries his uncle's widow she always becomes *jik-mamung* irrespective of whether she is married earlier or later than the other wives. A

widow who refuses to marry her husband's nephew is required to pay *dai* to the nephew.

There is no custom among the Garos of paying any marriage-price, which exists amongst the Mizos.

Divorce is common and easily obtained on grounds of adultery etc. A man or a woman is entitled to a divorce even without a cause in which case the party seeking the divorce has to pay the customary *dai* of rupees sixty only.

Inheritance

The law of inheritance is based on the principle of descent through the mother and not the father and is strictly restricted to the female line No male is entitled to inherit property. A daughter inherits and her daughter after her; when a woman has no female issue, the property goes to another woman of the same *machong* or motherhood

Land Tenure

Unlike some other hill-tribes of Assam amongst whom all land belongs to the village community and not to any individual, amongst the Garos it is the *nokma* or the village headman who is regarded as the guardian of all the land of a village. But this is in theory only. In actual practice a person is free to cultivate any plot he chooses within the village. Land can be sold by a *nokma* only with the permission of her wife's *machong*.

Decision of Disputes

A Deputy Commissioner of the Garo Hills District aptly observed : "Every Garo's life is spent in giving (or refusing) and demanding *dai* (compensation). A man's great-grandfather was killed 50 years ago; he demands *dai* from the hands of the heir of the murderer, and if it be not paid, his heir will still demand it in turn and so on until it is paid." Disputes between parties are generally of a petty nature in which *dai* is claimed by one party from another. Since the establishment of British administration, a class of village officials called *Laskars* was created, who serve as rural police and also as honorary magistrates. The *Laskar* decides all disputes, the

entire village taking part in the trial, and he gives his decision as the presiding officer. Criminal cases of a serious nature are heard by Government magistrates at the headquarters, Tura. Appeals also lie with these magistrates from the decisions of the *Laskars*.

When a dispute cannot be decided on the oral evidence adduced, trial by oath and ordeal is resorted to. Major Playfair records two kinds of ordeals. The first is the *sil-soa*, or ordeal by hot iron. A piece of metal is made red-hot by the *kamal* (priest), who then administers an oath to the witness and the metal is made to pass over the witness' palm covered with some cotton and leaves. He is supposed to escape unscathed if he is speaking the truth. In the second kind of ordeal called *chokela-soa*, an egg is placed in a bowl of boiling water and the person speaking the truth is expected to extract the egg by dipping his hand in the water without receiving any injury. In the old days, a person's veracity was sometimes tested by tying him up to a tree in a jungle and leaving him there alone for the night. If he was not devoured by a tiger he was supposed to have told the truth The practice is still observed, but nowadays a bullock or a pig represents the human being.

"The Garo oath," says Major Playfair, "is a long one and consists, first of a declaration of the truth on the coming statement, and then of calling down upon the speaker of all the worst evils that can be imagined, should he speak falsely." Like the Nagas, the Garos also take oaths by biting a tiger's tooth, implying that if he is speaking falsehood he would be killed by the teeth of a tiger, which is the worst calamity that can befall a human being, necessitating numerous sacrifices of animals and birds to the deities for the protection of the family and relations of the deceased.

Religious Beliefs

The religion of the animistic Garos of whom over 30 per cent have already been converted to Christianity by American Baptist and Roman Catholic missionaries, is nothing but Hinduism in its elementary or crude form. Their conception of the origin of the earth and man, however, resembles more the biblical version.

In the beginning there was nothing in existence but a vast watery plain. There was no land and darkness reigned over everything.

Then Tatara-Rabunga, the chief god or spirit in the Garo pantheon, corresponding to Brahma of Hindu mythology, created the earth out of this nebula, deputing one of his subordinates, a lesser spirit called Nestu-Nopantu for the purpose. Nestu-Nopantu sent a beetle down to bring up a handful of clay from under the water, with which eventually the earth was fashioned. Of the terrestrial animals the first to be created was the monkey and of the aquatics the frog. Man, the paragon of animals, was the last to come. The first man and woman were Sani and Muni, whose children Ganchong and Dujong were the parents of Noro and Mande (*Noro*—*Sanskrit* for man, *mande*—Garo for man), and these last two were the progenitors of the Garo people.

Apart from this conception of the origin of man and the earth the Garo's religious conceptions are a mixture, as already stated, of Hinduism and pantheism. They believe in the existence in man of a spirit, which after death spends sometime in another sphere before he is reincarnated. Sin in one life affects the form of reincarnation in the next. The lowest form of incarnation is to be reborn as an insect or plant, the next higher being birds and animals and the last in human form. The greatest reward for a virtuous life is to be reborn in the same *machong*.

As in the Hindu pantheon, besides Tatara-Rabunga, the chief deity, the Garos have numerous deities or spirits such as *Chora-duhi*, the protector of crops, *Saljong*, the god of fertility, *Goera*, the god of strength, *Susime*, the goddess of riches Natural forces are also deified in the Hindu fashion. The sun, moon and stars are believed to be spirits placed in the heavens for ruling the seasons. Thunder, lightning, rain, wind, earthquakes have corresponding spirits controlling them, and they have to be propitiated with sacrifices of birds, animals etc. When there is a drought, the rain-god is worshipped by pouring water contained in gourds on the head of the priest to the accompaniment of drum-beating. On the other hand when there is too much rain the *Salaksoa* (worshipping of the sun-god) ceremony is performed by lighting fires for bringing in warmth and sunshine. In both the ceremonies a goat or a fowl is offered in sacrifice.

In all religious ceremonies sacrifices are essential for the propi-

tiation of the spirits, who are invoked not only for good harvest but also in the case of illness, births, deaths and marriages. Besides the sacrifices performed in the case of individual illness etc. annual ceremonies, attended with sacrifices, are performed by entire villages for the welfare of the community as a whole and for its protection from dangers and calamities.

As the Garo depends entirely on agriculture, there are various ceremonies connected with the growing of crops performed at different stages, commencing with the sowing of the seeds. The most important of these is the *Wangala* ceremony, or festival, which corresponds to the Assamese *Bhogali bihu*, observed after the harvest has been gathered. It lasts for several days and is marked with feasting, dancing and drinking. The main burden of these entertainments falls on the *nokma*. Like the Hindus, the Garos also show great reverence for their ancestors, as is indicated by funeral observances such as offering of food to the departed souls and the erection of memorial stones

From these practices and beliefs it is safe to conclude that the Garos were greatly influenced in their religious beliefs by the neighbouring Hinduised tribals of the plains. The *Tantrik* from Hinduism, which grew up in Assam around the famous shrine of Kamakhya, near Gauhati, contains many elements which contain tribal features and which were probably adopted by Hindu priests for winning over their tribal neighbours, although there was no overt effort at conversion, the characteristic feature of Hinduism having been throughout the ages assimilation rather than conversion

CHAPTER III

THE KHASIS

THE KHASIS today live in the district of Khasi and Jaintia Hills which, along with the Garo Hills, the North Cachar Hills and the Barail Range form the Assam ranges which interpose between the Brahmaputra and Surma Valleys. The remarkable plateau of the Garo-Khasi-North Cachar Hills is joined at its eastern extremity by the Patkoi Range to the Himalayan system and by the hills of Manipur to the Arakan Yoma of Burma. The highest points of the table land are the Shillong Peak, 6,450 feet, the Suer, 6,390, the Rableng, 6,283 and the Diengiei, 6,077. The whole of the plateau is inhabited and cultivated.

On the southern slopes, the hills rise abruptly from the plains and present a succession of precipitious faces into which the rivers and streams fed by the enormous rainfall of this region (400-600 inches a year), have cut deep gorges as they issue upon the plains of North Sylhet (now in East Pakistan). The lower portions of these hills are forest-clad but in the upper and central plateau the landscape is one of undulating hills, with occasional pine and oak groves. Most of these groves are sacred and are situated normally just below the brow of the hills.

ORIGINS

While the question as to where the Khasi people came from will perhaps ever remain unanswered, mention may be briefly made of the theories that have been propounded from time to time on this subject.

Gait mentions four language formations that have dominated the culture of India. They are the following: The Dravidian, the Munda, the Indo-Chinese and the languages of the Aryan group. He further divides the Indo-Chinese into the Mon-Khmer, the Tibeto-Burman, and the Siamese-Chinese. Following the findings

of the great linguist Sir George Grierson, Gait says that the Khasis belong to the Mon-Khmer group and are in fact the only people remaining today in India that speak this language.

Gurdon tells us of the findings of Logan, who through the study of various vocabularies has tried to demonstrate the existence of a linguistic relationship between the Khasis and certain peoples of Further India, the chief representatives of whom are the Mons or Talaings of Pegu and Tenasserim in Burma, the Khmers of Cambodia and the majority of the inhabitants of Annam. Gurdon further tells us that Pater Schmidt has established the relationship of the Khasi language not only with the Mon-Khmer languages but also with the Nicobarese and several dialects spoken in the Malay Peninsula.

In 1896 Peal drew attention to 'singular shoulder-headed celts' found in the Malay Peninsula in 1875, when they were also discovered in Chota Nagpur—the land of the Ho-Mundas. Two tribal groups have been found that still use the iron version of these 'celts' just described; a certain Naga tribe and the Khasis. It is somewhat strange that the Khasis have never taken to the plough like their other neighbours, but have stuck to their shouldered hoe to this day. Furthermore the Naga tribe calls their celts *mo-gyu*, the Khasis call theirs *moh-khiw* or *mo-khu*. Is it possible to deduce from this that the Khasis are connected with people who inhabited the Malay Peninsula and the Chota Nagpur division at the time of the Stone Age?

Another ancient Khasi custom has been the erection of memorial stones or monoliths. Such stone monuments as has been pointed out by Ferguson are also found in other parts of the world. In India, however, the custom seems to be confined only to a few tribal groups, among them the Ho-Mundas and the Khasis. A comparison of the monoliths found in the Khasi and Jaintia Hills with those in other parts of the country shows that they resemble most of those that are found among the Ho-Mundas. It has also been found that the burial system of the groups is very similar. Both, for instance, cremate the dead and then gather uncalcined bones and put them in stone cairns—or what the Khasis call *mawshieng* (bone-stone). We also now know that in both areas the monoliths were erected

to perpetuate the memory of deceased ancestors. Taking all these affinities into consideration, can it be said that the two groups, one almost in the centre of India and other in the far north-eastern corner, stem from the same parent group? It may also be that both groups received there culture-elements from a common source, even if they were not related to one another.

AGRICULTURE

A monograph dealing with this aspect of their life makes the following observation : "No others among the hill-tribes can compete with the Khasis in the value of their staples, or the enlightened character of their agriculture." Among the Khasis the system of agriculture is comparatively elaborate, and carefully adjusted to the productive power of the soil. In the flattish valleys, with which the central plateau abounds, rice is grown in terraced and well-irrigated fields, and such fields are found also on the northern margin of the district wherever the conformation of the surface admits of them. With this exception, however, the rest of their crops like unirrigated rice, potatoes, millets, chillies etc., are grown on hill-sides, by *jhuming*.

MINES AND MINERALS

The Khasi and Jaintia Hills abound with coal. The largest of these fields are in Cherapoonji, and Lakadong. Iron is another mineral that exists in the Khasi and Jaintia Hills as it does in other parts of India. The Khasi Hills iron which is still made in small quantities and exported to local bazaars is derived from the small crystal of titaniferous iron ore, which is found in the decomposed granite on the surface of the central dyke of that rock, near the highest portion of the plateau. The quality of the iron is good, and is sought after for manufacture into hoes and *waits* (a form of heavy knife for general use). It must be mentioned at once that in spite of the great extension of the industry in the earlier days, it is fast dying out now because it cannot withstand competition with mill-made products.

Next in importance stand the vast stores of limestone which exist on the southern part of the district, where the nummulitic

beds have been worked for the supply of lime from a period long anterior to British Rule. 'Sylhet lime' was monopoly of the Moghul governors of Bengal, and, as such, figures in the early *sanads*, *farmans* and treaties by which the East India Company acquired command over the province.

Administration

The greater part of the Khasi Hills consisted of the territory of the native chiefs in subsidiary alliance with the British crown; only a few scattered villages remained British since the conquest of 1833, or were ceded since then under special circumstances. The people governed themselves through their elected rulers, who were responsible to their respective *durbars* or councils. They paid no revenue to the Government, but the *siems* (chiefs) were required on investiture to confirm the cession to the paramount power (the British), of the mines and minerals, elephants and forests, and other natural products of their states, on the condition of receiving half the profits from these sources. All petty crimes committed by their subjects were dealt with by them and their *durbars*, only heinous offences, or those cases in which subjects of different states were concerned, being tried by the court of the Political Agent.

Later on this power was vested in the Deputy Commissioner and his court. Now, and especially since 1952, the district has been administered under the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India.

Land Tenure

It may be said without any fear of contradiction that among the Khasis the land ultimately belongs to the people. The chief may have some land and property of his own as an individual but he has no extra privileges over the land by virtue of being a chief.

The land is the peoples', whether they be lands that are owned by the families and clans or State lands that are owned by the people of a State as a whole. The chief owns no land as such and can levy no taxes on the people for the use of the land. The people cannot be taxed because the common man is the child of the State and as such therefore they have a right on the land.

Types of Punishments Meted Out

The Khasis had a high sense of morality and of law and order. The severity of some of the laws would shock our conscience today but Khasis were severe with the lawbreakers because they did not want any repetition of the crime

Murder was punishable by beating the culprit to death. Adultery was punished by life imprisonment or a fine of 1100 rupees and one pig. A husband finding his wife and a man in *flagrante delicto* could, as under the law of the ancients, kill both of them without being himself punished for murder. Rape brought an imprisonment for life in case of a married woman, and a heavy fine and a pig in case of an unmarried woman. The breaking of the incest taboo brought the dreaded punishment of ex-communication and an eventual exile from the village. Arson was either punished by life imprisonment or deportation beyond the bounds of the Khasi country. The punishment for causing people to be possessed with devils was exile, but if the person so possessed died, the sorcerer was hurled down a precipice Punishment for robbery or theft was the stocks or the culprit was compelled to sit on a bamboo platform under which hot chillies were burnt The result of such a punishment can be better imagined than described

Religion and Some Interesting Myths

The Khasis have a very strong belief in *U Blei Nongthaw* (God, the Creator) They believe that there was a time when the world was young and good or without sin and men communicated with their Maker freely animals talked like men and god man, and the animals lived in perfect harmony. They believe in the existence of a covenant between man and god, which was broken by the selfishness and jealousy that arose in the heart of man. They also believe, however, that their religion is a god-given one -a way to show man how to restore that broken relationship To the Khasis, therefore, their religion is a 'way' or a 'practice' or as they call it '*Ka nuam khein ka niam bishar*' (the religion of figuring out, the religion of judging or reasoning) Thus, to the Khasis, all that they do -divination, sacrifice, prayer, naming of a child, cremation of the dead, etc., is just an attempt to find that way back to God. All

these ideas have been handed down from generation to generation in the following myth:

Long, long ago, on the very first day, God created heaven and mother earth. Mother earth had five children, the moon (male), the sun (female), the water, the air, and the fire. The moon and the sun in turn gave birth to all the heavenly constellations and from the other three children were born all the things that are on the surface of the earth. When all these things came into being, the world was clothed in beauty. Then mother earth requested God to give a ruler that would rule over all these things. God agreed to do so and called a council of the sixteen tribes that dwelt with him. After sometime it was decided that seven of the sixteen would descend to the earth to live there. It is for this reason that the Khasis call themselves 'the people of the seven huts and the seven nests'.

Under the reign of the seven tribes the earth prospered and God and his whole creation communicated with each other freely. God even made a covenant with the seven, promising to communicate with them as long as they lived a good life The symbol of this covenant was a great tree called *ka diengiei* planted by God on a mountain mount Diengiei, which was used as a ladder to go up and down as they wished. Thus man lived happily having free access both to heaven and to earth.

Not long after this, however, a being arose from the sea, who, seeing that mankind was happy and prosperous, became jealous of him and of God and began to plot for man's downfall. With this in mind he befriended two brothers, Sormoh and Sorphin. In course of time he said to his two friends: "Now look here, this Diengier is a big tree and if you don't watch out it will some day grow so big that it will blot out the sun and the moon and the stars thus enveloping the whole earth in a terrible darkness, and we shall all die of suffocation." This advice seemed very sound to the two brothers and they decided to pass the news to the others and to get their opinion on it, while the tempter seeing that he had accomplished his aim, returned to his home under the sea.

When this matter was brought before the others they all agreed that it was a good idea to cut the tree down and so they asked the smith to make them a good strong *wait* (a kind of knife) and an

axe. Having secured these two, they went to work on the tree and worked at it all day but in the evening they returned home with the idea of working at it some more the next day. But in the middle of the night when all was quiet, the Tiger went and licked at the wounds of the tree and the tree was whole again, so that the next day when the men came to work, they were very astonished to find that there were no marks of any cuts on the trunk of the tree. However, they worked at it again but that night after they were all gone home the Tiger came back and did the same thing. After this happened the third time it was decided to call a council of all the people to discuss this whole matter and to try to solve this deep mystery. A day was set.

On the appointed day all the people came and they began to find ways and means to fell that great tree which seemed as though it was going to cover the whole earth and throw the whole world into complete darkness. But though they talked and argued nothing was settled and the poor people were just as baffled as they could be. Just at this juncture, however, a *phreit* (a very little bird) appeared and it addressed mankind thus: "I chanced to hear uncle Tiger, the strong (literally with the strength of twelve), saying that soon he would roam the world in peace as it was going to be dark because of the *Diengiei*. He said he would keep on licking the *Diengiei* to heal it of its wounds." When the council heard this, terror struck into its heart and they were all the more puzzled. The *phreit* spoke again saying: "O Ye men, do not be afraid. Tomorrow after you have worked for the day instead of taking your instruments away, tie them to the tree with the sharp edge jutting out and when the tiger comes to lick it again his tongue will be hurt and that will stop him from repeating the performance." This piece of advice pleased the council very much and the next day they did as they had been told, and the tiger finding that his tongue had been sliced fled away in terror and then mankind was able to fell the tree and what a fall it was! It was felt all over the world and wherever the sap of that tree mixed with the sand, it turned into coal. The uprooting of that tree was so complete that to this day there is no more *Diengiei* anywhere on the earth because all its seeds perished with it.

After the fall of the *Diengiei* man saw that hz had cut his very life-line, no more could he communicate freely with his Maker, nor with the holy ones in heaven Gone was the peace and the joy that he had enjoyed and he was again at a loss. But God who is merciful, seeing the plight of man, took pity on him and came down to him for the last time to teach him how to get back to his home. God felt that before he withdrew himself from man for good he would show him the way back. So he came and showed man how to till the soil and to sow the seeds in their proper season, and gave him the rites and the ceremonies that he had to keep in order to be able to find his way back to God. No more would God talk to man face to face but only through signs and symbols, but man had to know and understand these signs and symbols. This he could do only by performing accurately the rites and ceremonials laid down for him And then God retired.

For a while man tried to fulfil his part of the covenant But try though he did he could not get to God nor get his hearing He was always finding that he lacked somewhere or had left something undone. In despair he realized that he was falling more and more away from the presence of his Maker, he realized that he was now under the domination of *ka Tyrut* - the queen of the spirits, and that he could not wash himself of this taint, but that this taint or as he calls it *ka Raibi*, stuck to him through the generations. So in complete bafflement he turned to the animal world that part of creation which had not fallen under the curse of *ka Tyrut* or *raibi*.

In the great council man requested some animals to volunteer to go and plead for him before God But the animals recoiled from so great a responsibility When almost everything seemed to be lost, the cock arose and volunteered to do the impossible. He went and bowed low before the Lord and told him that he had come to be *u ksiang* (mediator) between man and God. God asked him if he was prepared to take upon himself the consequences of man's sin and taboo. The cock said that he would do just that. Upon hearing this God accepted the cock as mediator, and, as a symbol of his acceptance. God gave the cock the ability to crow which was the means of telling man the hour of the day from the rising of the sun into the setting of the same. God also promised that whenever

man sought him he would make his will know through the entrails of the cock and in the shells of a hen's egg.

THE MYTH OF U THLEN – THE SERPENT

Like most other primitive groups the Khasis too have a strong belief in a serpent-deity, which they call *U Thlen*, regarding whom they have a myth. The myth as would be expected, through the years, has taken several forms. Nobody seems to know what this *thlen* really looks like. It is thought of as able to take the shape of various animals like a mouse, a cat, a leech, a fish, and sometimes even as an inanimate object such as a great big black kettle! However, we think of it more as a serpent, because the word *thlen* is the word that is used to denote a kind of python that is found in these hills. We give here an account of this *thlen* which seems to be the gist of the various stories and legends that have grown around the idea of *U thlen*.

Long long ago the little village of Rangjyrteh was a great commercial centre and people from all over the country came to this market place with their produce. It so happened that if the villagers came to the market in odd numbers, the one forming the odd number would just disappear very mysteriously. This happened again and again so that people began to be very afraid to go to the market at Rangjyrteh. In desperation they prayed to *U-Blei* or *Ka Blei* for help, and *U-Blei* (God) who was merciful ordered *Lei Shillong* (Spirit or God of the Shillong Peak) to look into the matter. *Lei Shillong* took Chief Syrmoh or Chief Kyrsan along with him to look into the matter of *U Thlen*. After a thorough investigation *Lei Shillong* found that it was a spirit that lived in a nearby cave that was molesting and devouring mankind. He then ordered Chief Syrmoh to kill the monster. Chief Syrmoh there upon took a red hot piece of iron and went to this cave and said to the *thlen* that he had brought him some pork to eat. On hearing this, the *thlen* opened his mouth very wide and Syrmoh thrust the red-hot iron into his throat. This wounded the monster fatally. Then Syrmoh went and told the people of Rangjyrteh of all that had happened and told them that they were supposed to eat the monster up completely, for, otherwise, he would come back to

life again. This pleased the people very much and they all went and skinned the reptile, whose body was several miles long, and whose writhing at the time of death caused a landslide forming what is now called the *Mawiew Gorge*. The body was cut into several pieces and distributed among all the people who were asked to eat the meat up and not to save any portion of it at all, telling them that if anyone was found breaking this rule such a person would be punished with death.

Everybody did as he was told—save one—an old woman who wanted to take a small portion home to her grand-daughter. When this woman got home, she put this piece of meat on top of the *tyngier* (a small platform-like shelf over the open fireplace), and she kept forgetting to give it to the child. One day while she was all alone at home she heard a voice saying: "Shall I live or shall I die?" And an answer from a mysterious voice came saying: "Live, for man had disobeyed my command." This terrified the woman and when she peeped into the little earthen-ware in which she had put this piece of *thlen* meat, she saw that it had come alive again and was now a little spirit. And this spirit asked the woman to keep and take care of it for, the spirit said that if the woman did so, it, in turn, would bring wealth and prosperity. The woman had no choice but to take care of the spirit as she feared that if she went and told the others about this she would be put to death for having disobeyed.

In course of time the woman became wealthy and prosperous as the *thlen* had promised. But one day the *thlen* asked her to go and get a goat with a spot on the head as a sacrifice to it. The woman did as she was told but when she brought the goat the *thlen* would not accept the sacrifice but was very angry and told the woman that what he wanted was one that looked like her and that had her features. Then it dawned upon her that what he was asking for was a human being. This caused her to tremble all over but she had to do its bidding. Thus, to this day we find the belief among Khasis that there are people who are suspected of having the *thlen* and who go out in the dead of night to get people and to bring their blood, finger nails and hair as a sacrifice to the *thlen*. If they cannot get to kill a person, it is said that they sometimes just cut a piece of the

victim's clothing or hair. The *thlen* moreover will not accept the blood of a person that was in any way imperfect or handicapped, like that of a deaf and dumb person or a lame person. Furthermore, the *thlen* will accept only the blood of a Khasi for according to the story it was only the Khasi that had not eaten *all* his meat, while all the other people had eaten up all their share.

Religion

Rituals permeate every important aspects of the people's life. In fact, with no fear of exaggeration, it can be said that their whole outlook on life is ritualistic, nay, life *is* a ritual. For, to a Khasi, his religion is a 'practice' or a 'way of life': it is something that he does. There are certain rules that have been set down for him to follow and do, with respect to *U Blei* or *Ka Blei* (God), the ancestors, the spirits, and with respect to those that are living, his parents, uncles and aunts, brothers and sisters, friends and relatives. But more, his everyday life is hemmed in with rituals and ceremonies From the moment he gets up in the morning and starts the fire for the day to the time that he creeps into bed at night his life is one long series of ritual. For instance, when he gets up in the morning he ' greets ' the *maw byrsiew* (the three stones in the fire place on which the family kettle is placed). He does that by hitting it gently with a pair of tongs. Or again, he never kicks the fire-place instruments, like the tongs, the bellows, and all the utensils that he uses for cooking, for that is *sang* (taboo). No one is served from a pot of boiling meal on the fire, but if it has to be done the housewife will first utter a formula : *tyrsaw tyrsiang* before serving it. For it is believed that to eat from a pot of meal that has not been allowed a cool off a little after cooking is bad luck in that it might cause the eater to meet with an accident.

When a person is about to partake of a meal he takes a grain of cooked rice from his plate and puts it out as a libation to the gods uttering some words of thanksgiving -very much like the Christian practice of saying grace before a meal. Drinking water is usually taken out of a bronze pot with a cup formed from the half of a coconut shell. It is *sang* to make too much noise when taking out water in this way for it portends emptiness which might mean

emptiness in the whole family life - emptiness of the family treasury, or the family womb!

In matters of social calls again one finds this sense of ritual. In fact, it is a ritual. A caller is never supposed to walk right through a house. That is if he enters through the front door he is supposed to come back through it, for if he otherwise should walk out through the back door he is carrying away with him the *lei ing* or the household deity. An important form of hospitality is to offer the caller some betel-nut which is eaten with the *pan* leaf with lime smeared over it. A *pan* leaf is never to be folded inside out but outside in. If the visitor needs more lime, that should be given on the tip of a piece of *pan* leaf and not on the tip of a knife which is used to cut the betel-nut. For to do the latter would be like threatening him with a knife. For the latter method is the one used when one sacrifices a goat or chicken - the tip of the knife is first dipped in rice and then it is used to cut the neck of the victim. When a visitor leaves, the host should not throw any rubbish immediately after his departure for that would be like 'shooing' the devils after him. When one shuts the door one must face it and not shut it with a backward push of the hand or the body without looking at it for only the spirit of the dead do that. The idea is that the dead do things in exactly the opposite way from that of the living. And if this is followed to its logical conclusion it means that if a living person does things in the manner of the dead, he becomes susceptible to death.

General Remarks

The Khasis are lighthearted and cheerful in disposition and they can thoroughly appreciate a joke. It is pleasant to hear on the road down to Tharia ghat from Cherrapoonji the whole hillside resounding in the morning with the scraps of song and peals of laughter of the coolies, as they run nimbly down the shortcuts on their way to market. The women are especially cheerful, and pass the time of day bandying jokes with passersby with quite an absence of reserve. They are an industrious people, generally good-tempered, but are occasionally prone to an outburst of anger accompanied by violence. This is perhaps due to the spirit of free-

Plate 1—Garo—Chilok Woman Ready for Dance

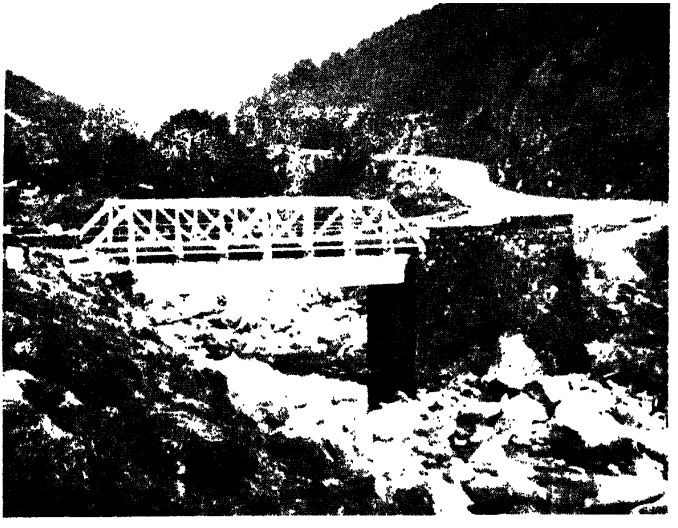

Plate 2—Umtyang-ngar Bridge, Khasi Hills

Plate 3—Khasi Women Fetching Water

Plate 4—Khasi Chiefs

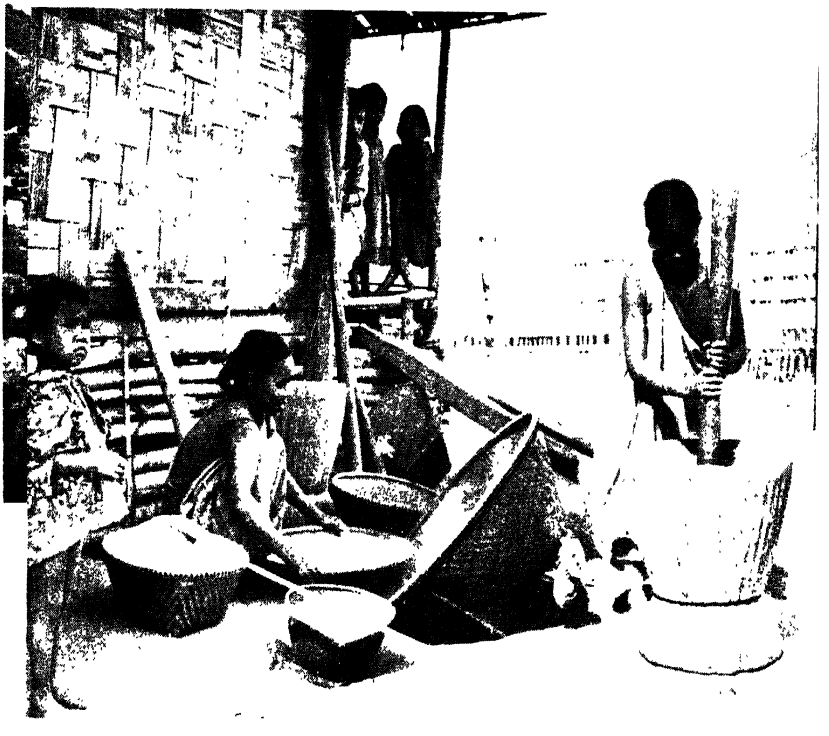

Plate 5--Small Scale Industries, Khasi Hills

dom which seems to be innate in them, for, though they are courteous, yet they are by no means servile

The Khasis are a very musical people. They love to sing and today after having been under Welsh influence for over a hundred years, they can sing Welsh tunes perhaps better than the Welsh themselves! This again shows that they are a people that can adopt and adapt to new ways and modes with ease.

They also are a people of the great outdoors They love a day out in the woods. Hunting, fishing, and archery are their main forms of recreation. The bow and the arrow are their weapon *par excellence* and they excel in the use of these weapons It is always a thrilling experience to watch an archery match on a market day.

A Khasi is not above manual labour and a clerk in one of the Government Offices or a doctor, or a teacher, is quite ready to take his turn at the hoe in his potato garden. They are inveterate chewers of *supari* (betel-nut) with the *pan* leaf. Men, women and children indulge in this and distances in the interior are often measured by the number of betel-nuts that are usually chewed on a journey. They are not addicted to the use of opium though they are hard drinkers and consume large quantities of spirits distilled from rice or millet Rice beer is manufactured within the country and is used not only as a beverage but also for ceremonial purposes.

Today the Khasis number nearly 300,000 souls and are playing a very vital and constructive part in the life of the State of Assam, as college professors and school teachers, doctors and nurses, magistrates and judges, clerks and administrators, merchants and businessmen. In all these affairs women take just as important a part as the menfolk

The standard of education is high and the extent, especially of primary education, is, perhaps, the widest in the whole of India. Several of the young men and women have had the opportunity to study abroad either in America or Britain

CHAPTER IV

THE JAINTIAS ALSO CALLED PNARS

THE EARLY history of the Jaintias or Pnars is as obscure as that of other hill-tribes of Assam. There are no written historical records and nothing certain is known about their origin.

It is believed that they came to their present abode from either the Far East or from China via Burma and established their kingdom in the hills now known as Jaintia Hills. Later they extended their dominion to the adjoining plains districts of Sylhet and Nowgong.

From some records as well as from the inscriptions on coins and copper plates it is conjectured that Parbat Ray was the first king who extended the sway of the Jaintia kings over the plains districts.

THE JAINTIA KINGDOM

Prior to the advent of the British to Assam, the Jaintia Kingdom consisted of a tract of plains country lying between the town of Sylhet and the Cachar border and also the territory stretching from the foot of the hills overlooking the Surma Valley to the Kalang river in Nowgong district. This kingdom was governed by the Jaintia Rajas who were then very powerful and maintained diplomatic relations with the Ahom and the Kachari kings of Assam.

They ruled over the kingdom of Jaintiapur up to 15th March 1835, when the last of the Jaintia Rajas, Rajendra Singh, was dispossessed of his kingdom by the British.

THE PEOPLE

The Jaintias or Pnars inhabit the Jaintia Hills portion of the United Khasi-Jaintia Hills District. Some Jaintias also inhabit the forest areas of the district of Cachar and also the adjoining Sylhet district of East Pakistan where they had migrated for culti-

vating *pan* leaves. The Jaintias or Pnars belong to the same race as the Khasis. They have many customs in common and are similar to each other in many respects. Indeed to an outsider they look identical. They alone know the dissimilarities they have.

LANGUAGE

The principal language spoken in the Jaintia Hills is Pnar which is closely akin to Khasi in form, content and pronunciation.

This language is said to belong to the Mon-Khmer family to which Mon-Palaung and Wa belong. Pnar language has no written literature. With the advent of the British, the Khasis and Jaintias adopted the Roman script. The only book so far published in Pnar is *Ka Kot Rwai Pnar* by Shri Albin Pariat of Jowai.

OCCUPATION

The Pnars are mostly agriculturists. Unlike the other hill-tribes of Assam the majority of them are engaged in parmanent and not shifting cultivation. Rice is the chief crop grown in the wet lands and a certain quantity of the crop is also grown as highland paddy. The Pnars are a hard-working people and are skilful in making wet paddy-fields. These fields are irrigated in beautiful terraces by indigenous systems of irrigation channels which involve much skill in survey and construction, bringing water from long distances to the fields. They also use the plough drawn by bullocks. Other crops like maize, potato, sweet potato, millet are grown in gardens and in the neighbourhood of the villages as subsidiary food crops. The gardens are protected from damage by cattle with mounds of earth about 4 ft. to 5 ft. high over which some shrubs are planted. In the border areas adjoining East Pakistan various kinds of fruit, such as oranges, pineapples, lemons, *litchis* are grown very successfully. Areca-nut and *pan* leaves are also grown abundantly in these areas. Prior to the partition of India the people of these areas were very prosperous, as they could dispose of their produce in the flourishing markets established all along the border. Consequent on the partition, this prosperous trade was lost to them and their economy was shattered. A number of them had to leave their hearth and home to seek employment and cultivable lands elsewhere. Men

and women work together side by side in the fields, in the gardens and in the forests. They take part in road construction works and possess commendable skill in constructional works. On market days it is not uncommon to see the womenfolk coming to the local markets carrying basketfuls of their produce for sale. They return late in the afternoon to their village with basketfuls of daily necessities. They love life; they love their work. They sing, they joke, they laugh all the way, however hard and long it may be. They travel miles to attend their bazaars. Many a time they halt overnight. No work is considered to be below the dignity of any to undertake. There is no class distinction based on occupation.

Subsidiary occupations of the people are basket-making, mat-making and livestock rearing. A number of them are traders and many are engaged in tailoring, carpentry, goldsmithy and other useful and gainful occupations.

Customs and Beliefs

Like the Khasis the Pnars are a matriarchal people. The group on which the kinship is based is the *kur* which is subdivided into *kpohs*. All members of a *kur* claim descent from a common ancestress, descent always being through the mother.

Marriage is strictly exogamous. The husband and wife must belong to separate clans. A Rymbai cannot marry a Rymbai or a Blah a Blah. There are subsidiary *kurs* also. A Rymbai cannot marry a Najiar and in other *kurs* the kinship of which dates back to ancient times when daughters gave their names to a clan, or a mother of one *kur* suckled the child of another, or when one *kur* came to the rescue of another in need. The children take the mother's clan. If the mother is a Rymbai and the father a Blah, all the children become Rymbais and not Blahs. The proposal for marriage always comes from the man's side and it is the young man who normally chooses a wife, not his parents. After marriage the son-in-law does not come to live in his wife's parents' house as a full member of that family. He comes after sunset to spend the night with his wife and early in the morning he leaves the house to have his food and do his work for the day in his mother's house and lands. His earning go to his mother and sisters and not to his wife

and children. He belongs to his mother's *kur* in life, and in death he is owned by it His dead body should not be cremated by the wife's relatives but by his own *kur* who collects the bones and keep them in the family cairns. This custom is however disappearing slowly. Among the Christian converts it may be said to have been completely given up. Among those who still follow the joint-family system under the mother, the brothers and uncles of the wife manage the property Even among those who retain the old faith the custom is losing its hold. The educated and the salaried classes now set up their own homes and man and wife together bring up and educate the children The change has been necessitated by changed conditions. Men nowadays leave their home and village in search of work. They set up new homes with their wives where they live and work together. The spread of education and easier means of communication have widened social contacts. Gone are the days when the village was looked upon as the entire world. It would be difficult to think of arranging marriages nowadays within the village or even within walking distance of the village. The man has either to stay with his wife and children or with his mother and sister, and circumstances force him today to cast his lot with the former This change has not, however, seriously affected the social structure. The children still take the mother's clan. The matrilineal system still rules.

The Pnars cremate their dead and their bones are gathered together to be placed alongside those of their ancestors under the clan ossuaries. They believe in life after death. This is evident from the religious ceremonies performed in sickness or in connection with the dead. When there is a sickness in the family prayers are offered to the ancestors to intercede to help drive away the evil.

ADMINISTRATION

During the time of Jaintia Rajas the administration of the Jaintia hills was vested in the local chiefs called the *Dolois* and the *Sirdars*, who belong to special clans and are elected.

Besides their function as administrative heads, the *dolois* have also to perform certain religious rites. They are assisted by subordinate officers called the *Pators*, *Basans* and *Dans*. The *Pators* have

jurisdiction over petty disputes in their respective areas, the *Basans* execute the orders of the *Dolois* as policemen-cum-peons; and the *Dans* are assigned the duties of collecting tolls and taxes from the markets under each doloiship. There are other officials too under the employment of the Doloi, viz. the *Sangot*, the *Chutia*, the *Haramuid* and the *Duhalia*. The *Sangot* is an officer subordinate to the *Pator* and has powers similar to that of a *daroga*. The *Chutiya* is the village crier and performs other menial duties such as making seating arrangements in the court and for *durbars*. The *Haramuid* is in charge of the musicians as a bandmaster with *Duhalias* under him whose duty is to play the flute, the *bhuri* and different kinds of drums used in religious ceremonies.

In some areas like Nartiang, Raliang, Jowai, Nongbah and Shangpung, the *Dolois*, the *Pators* and other officers are given paddy-lands to remunerate them for the services they render to the community

No tax was ever imposed on the Pnars by the Jaintia Rajas Each of the Dolois gave him one he-goat a year in token of their acknowledgement of his overlordship.

When the Jaintia kingdom was annexed by the British in 1835 they adopted the same system of administration as was in vogue during the reign of Jaintia Rajas. They retained the *Dolois* and the *Sirdars* as heads of the local administration. The *Dolois* are empowered to hear all civil cases and all criminal complaints not of a serious nature.

In 1853 Mr. Mills, in his Administration Report on the district, drew attention to the absence of administrative control in the Jaintia area and proposed imposition of house-tax and the establishment of a Police Station to check the lawless activities of the *Dolois*. Accordingly, a *thana* was established at Jowai, but the imposition of house-tax in 1860 caused a rebellion which was suppressed. Thereafter the British authorities took steps for imposing income-tax also which created great resentment and the embers of the 1860 fire were fanned afresh. Under the able leadership of U-Kiang Nongbah, the people rose as one man to fight the British and regain their independence. It took the British Government two years to win this war. It was not till November 1863 that U-Kiang

Nongbah could be captured through the treachery of a man suborned by the British. They offered U-Kiang Nongbah a high position as a price for collaboration which he refused and as a result was hanged. The Jaintias adored him and to this day they speak of him with pride, love and respect.

The transfer of power to the people of India in 1947 ushered in a new era of autonomous administration for the hill regions of Assam. Under the Sixth Schedule to the Constitution of India, the hill-districts were given autonomous legislative and executive bodies called District Councils with powers to manage all affairs pertaining to their welfare. The Khasi Hills and the Jaintia Hills were first constituted into one autonomous district known as the United Khasi and Jaintia Hills Autonomous District. But the Jaintias from the beginning had always their own king, and even when annexed by the British, had their own separate administrative arrangement. In view of this a separate District Council for the Jowai Subdivision was constituted in 1967.

Festivals

The Pnars are by nature a cheerful people. They love sports, jokes and merry-making. Hunting, fishing, dancing and wrestling are favourite pastimes. Among their festivals the most important is *Behdeinkhlam* which is performed annually with great zest at the subdivisional headquarters of Jowai and the neighbouring villages. The festival is usually celebrated in the month of July It is a very popular and colourful festival. Men only, young and old, take part in the dancing to the tune of the drums and pipes The form of dancing can be called the forerunner of modern rock-'n-roll and twist. The dancers either do it alone or in pairs or in crowds swaying the body and moving the hands and feet in rhythm with the music.

The festival lasts a week. The last day is the biggest Towards noon that day chariots (*raths* or *rots*) are taken for immersion in the pool called Aitnar. The *rots* are tall, gorgeous structures made of bamboo and covered with coloured paper of different designs. Women and children don their best clothes to watch the men dancing and performing the concluding rites. When all the *rots* are

brought to Aitnar, the men dance in wild joy, posturing, attitudinising, twisting, rolling and rocking. Water is splashed and mud is spattered all around. People from all parts of the country gather to see this joyous spectacle.

The festival strongly resembles the *ratha-yatra* festival and clearly shows the influence of Hinduism on the Jaintias.

Places of Interest in the Jowai Autonomous District

There are several places of interest in the district which are accessible to road from the subdivisional headquarters at Jowai. On the northern side we find Nartiang which was once famous as the summer capital of the Jaintia Rajas. It is situated on the bank of the Myntang river. There is a weekly market nearby called Iaw Mulong which is surrounded by gigantic stone monoliths and cromlechs. As there is no stone quarry in the area, the setting up of these monuments by the Jaintia Rajahs must have involved a tremendous amount of human labour and skill. The tallest monolith measures 26 ft., 6 inches high above the ground, 6 ft. 9 inches wide and 2 ft. 3 inches thick. There is also a number of ancient tanks in the locality, the biggest of which are Bir Jympamasi Myngkoitok and Umtisong.

On the top of a hill overlooking the Myntang River are the remains of the ruined palace of the Rajah. Part of the wall of the palace still stands to remind visitors of the once glorious days of Nartiang. The wall was made of bricks and there is an arched entrance to the inside of the palace. Within the compound still stands the residence of the priest who performs religious rites for the people of Nartiang to this day, which are clearly of Hindu origin.

On the southern side are the famous limestone caves of Rupasor near the village called Syndai situated 22 miles from Jowai. These caves are huge underground tunnels of different shapes and sizes with mural decorations. Near the entrance to the caves is the Elephant Pool and other carvings that have withstood the ravages of time. The Elephant Pool with an elephant standing on one side of it in the posture of one going for a dip is carved out of solid rock. Two other carvings represent the sun and the moon. Prior to the

partition of India people from the Sylhet district (now in East Pakistan) visited these places of pilgrimage in large numbers.

The road from Jowai to Jaintiapur constructed by the Jaintia Rajahs passes through very beautiful country and gives evidence of engineering skill of a high order. The stone bridges at Thlu Muwi and Umiaknieh have withstood floods for centuries. They are made of single solid blocks of stone and elegantly ornamented with carvings

On the eastern side of the district, there are hot springs located about a furlong away from the Kopili River. These springs gush out of the earth at a fairly high temperature. On the upper reaches of the river is the waterfall called the Iale, formed by the sudden drop of the Kopili which is a rare combination of majesty and aweful beauty by the side of which, they say, human beings were once sacrificed to the goddess *Kali*

Towards the west at a distance of about 6 miles from Jowai is the beautiful lake called Thadlaskein situated in the heart of undulating downs dotted with pine forests. This lake is said to have been dug by the soldiers of the greatest of Jaintia generals, U-Sajar Nangli, with the tips of their bows when they bivouacked there during their march from Jaintiapur towards Nowgong for campaigning against the people of the plains

The entire plateau of Jaintia Hills, about 4,000 ft. high, with its bracing climate and covered with pine forests and studded with golden orange groves is magnificent country, the like of which is not to be seen anywhere else in this part of the world.

CHAPTER V

THE MIKIRS

THE MIKIRS are a populous tribe numbering about one hundred thousand. They are scattered over the Golaghat subdivision of the Sibsagar district, Nowgong, Kamrup, Khasi Hills and North-Cachar Hills but their main habitat are the hills named after them. Mikir is a name given to the tribe by the Assamese. They call themselves *Arleng*, which means *man*. We find other tribes of this region also calling themselves just *man*, e.g. *Singhpho* (=man), *Boro* (=man) are the names of two other tribes and so are *Achik-mande* (=hill-man), Mizo (hill-man), the names respectively of the Garos and the Lushais. Apparently each tribe considered the members of his own race alone to be human.

The Mikir Hills are of much lower elevation than the neighbouring Khasi or Naga Hills. The climate of the hills and the contiguous plains inhabited by the Mikirs is not salubrious like that of the Khasi and Jaintia Hills. Till recently it was highly malarious and infested by Kala-azar. The percentage of leprosy cases is also the highest here in the State. The climatic disadvantages find themselves reflected in the physical appearance of the people. One does not find among the Mikirs that fair skin and rosy cheeks that greet you in the neighbouring Angami Naga and Jaintia lands. Their features resemble more those of the tribal elements among the Assamese than Tibeto-Burman races inhabiting the hills. The complexion generally is yellowish brown with a sprinkling of the quite fair. The men are comparatively tall, the average height being 5 ft 4". As with the Garos facial hair is scanty, a very thin growth over the upper lip of men being only an apology for a moustache. Although not robust like the Nagas, the Mikirs are a hardy people, capable of prolonged, arduous labour. They make good porters and can carry heavy loads over several miles at a stretch. The load is carried on the back, tied with a bamboo or cane strap (tump-line) passing over the forehead.

A Mikir House

The Mikir dress is elegant. The men put on a long striped coat (*choi*) without sleeves and with fringes covering the lower part of the body up to the knees. They wear a short *dhoti* called rikong, sometimes of silk. On the head they wear a *pagri* (*pohu*). In cold weather they cover themselves like the Assamese with a wrapper or *bor-kapor* of *eri*-silk which is warm.

The women wear a petticoat (*pini*) fastened round the waist with an ornamented belt (*vankok*) exactly like the Lakhers of the Lushai Hills. The upper part of the body is covered with a wrapper (*jiso*) passing under the arms and drawn tight over the breasts.

Both men and women draw their hair back which is tied in a knot above the nape.

The women insert a silver tube (*kadengchinro*) in the ear-lobes, which is a Mikir version of the Assamese *thuria*. Ear-rings of gold and silver (*no-rik*) are suspended from the upper part of the ears. Necklaces (*lek*), rings (*arnam*), bracelets (*roi*) of gold and silver are worn Khasi-fashion. Feathers of the horn-bill (*thumai*) adorn the head of both men and women on festive occasions. The weapons used are the *dao* (*nok-jar*), the spear (*chir*) and the bow (*hop-thali*) made of bamboo.

Mikir men do not tattoo any part of their body but the womenfolk, on attaining puberty, wear a tattoo-line made with indigo, running perpendicularly down the forehead, the nose, the upper lip and the chin. It is said that this practice started during the Burmese invasion of Assam and was intended to protect young girls from the invaders.

The original home of the Mikirs is not known. According to some of their legends they came from somewhere in South-east Asia but these are too vague to be worthy of credence. They do not claim kinship with any other tribe in Assam. There are strong affinities of language with the Kukis and of customs with the Nagas, but yet they form a distinctly separate tribe which cannot be grouped with any of the other Tibeto-Burman races inhabiting the mountainous region between Burma and Assam.

The principal characteristic which marks the Mikirs out from the other tribes is their pacific nature. While their neighbours—Nagas, Kukis, Kacharis and Syntengs—had been indulging for centuries

in internecine feuds amongst themselves, the Mikirs preferred to remain aloof, pursuing their peaceful vocations of agriculture, hunting (animals and birds) and fishing. Furthermore, unlike the other tribes, which after some generations, tend to break up into sub-tribes, the Mikirs have maintained their homogeneity in spite of their migration from their original habitat to widely separated areas

Whatever might be their ancient origin, in recent times, the Mikirs resided in strength in the North-Cachar Hills, where, raids by the Angami and Kaccha Nagas from the east and of the Kukis from the south-east apparently drove them away to the Jaintia Hills. There, harassed again by the Synteng chiefs, they sought the protection of the Ahoms, then ruling over the plains of Assam and since then they have been living peacefully in the region allocated to them.

The Mikirs, as compared with other hill-tribes of Assam, are rather backward, especially in education. This is ascribed to the fact that Christian missionaries have not been able to make much headway among the Mikirs, because of the proximity of their habitat to the plains. In fact, many of the Mikirs living in the plains have become undistinguishable from the Assamese. They have also become bilingual, speaking Assamese generally and Mikir at home This process of assimilation can be seen at work even amongst the hill-Mikirs and if politics and proselytisation do not pull actively in the opposite direction the complete assimilation of the Mikirs, like many a tribe before them, is only a matter of time.

Domestic Life, etc

Unlike their neighbours, except the Kukis, the Mikirs build their houses on piles, the floor several feet above the ground. Houses are built of split, flattened out bamboo, the roof being thatched with sunn-grass. The house is divided into separate compartments. A partition (*arpong*) running longitudinally divides it into two main parts The one on the left is called *kut*, where paddy is stored and the family also sleep. There is also a fire-place in it. The other part is called *kam* which is meant for guests. The *kut* has only one door, while the *kam* has a door in front and another

at the back. There are two fire-places in the *kam*. In this room, on a platform or *chang* called *tibung*, at a level higher than the floor, they keep their water-*chungas* (bamboo-tubes). There is a verandah at the front (*hongkup*) and another at the back (*pang-hongkup*) beyond which there is an unroofed platform (*pang*). On the left-hand side of the *kut* a portion with its floor at a lower level is partitioned off for the fowl and goats (*vo roi*). *Dam-tak* in the *kut* is where the family sleep and the paddy is stored. Behind the fire-place in the middle of the *kut* is the *dam-buk* where the grown-up children sleep. *Theng-poi-rai* is the place for storing fire-wood. In large houses a space is provided for guests to spend the night (*hong-phasla*). The platform of the house is reached by the *don-don* at the right.

The furniture of the house generally consists of a raised platform of split bamboo which serves as bed, a block of wood (*inghoi*) corresponds to the Assamese *pira* or low stool Baskets of bamboo serve the purpose of wardrobes, in which paddy, household goods and clothes are kept. Joints of bamboo (*langbong*, Assamese *chunga*) are used as containers for water as well as ornaments and other valuables.

Crops, Food, Drink etc

The main crop of the Mikirs is rice. Cultivation, as in the other hill-districts, is done according to the *jhumming system*. In addition they grow sizeable quantities of maize, cotton, yams and castor plant, the last especially for feeding the *eri* silk-worms.

Manufactures are few. As all over Assam, the women weave their own and the family's requirement of cloth on rough wooden looms. The cotton or *eri* thread is dyed with indigo, which is grown in almost every house

Every village has a blacksmith's workshop, which is more or less an institution coming down from antiquity. He makes *daos* and knives, spears and fishing hooks. Pottery is made without the potter's wheel, like the Khasis. The Mikirs make their own gold and silver ornaments also but all these industries are dying out because of the tendency to purchase ready-made cheap and tawdry foreign stuff.

Rice, as has been mentioned, is the staple food with which the Mikirs eat the meat of fowl, goats and pigs They are fond of eating eggs, but the finest delicacy is the crysalis of the *eri* silk-worm. Fish, which is available in plenty, is almost a daily dish, especially dried and smoked fish. Like the other hill-tribes they do not drink milk, rice-beer (*morpo*) being drunk on any pretext whatsoever at any time of the day. Opium was freely consumed till it was prohibited by law. Smuggled opium is still used and this is one of the main causes of the emasculation of the Mikirs. Tobacco is smoked and also chewed. So is betel-nut, distance being measured, as by the Assamese, by the time required to chew a *pan* (Assamese — *Ekhon tamol khowar bat* i.e. the distance which can be covered during the space of time required for chewing one *tamol* or betel-nut).

The most important institution (as with almost all the tribes of this region), associated with agricultural, social and almost all other activities is the *maro* or *terang*, the young men's club (Assamese—*deka-chang*). It is a pity that this excellent institution is falling into desuetude.

In the olden days, the village youths, from the age of twelve to twenty, lived together in the *maro*. Of late the Gaonburha's (village headman) house has more or less replaced the *maro*, of which the Nagas and the Mizos have their equivalents in the *morungs* and *zawlbuks* (the latter have almost disappeared completely). The young men's clubs where the younger boys had to serve and obey the older boys instilled into the youth discipline, respect for and obedience to elders, a spirit of service to the community and a number of other admirable qualities.

The *maros* have or at least had a regular hierarchy of office-bearers. The chief boy is called *kleng-sarpo*. Next comes the *kleng-dum*, then the *sodor-kethe*, the *sodor-so*, *sangho-kerai*, the *barlon* (carrier of the measuring rod), *cheng-brup-pi* and *cheng-brup-so* (chief and assistant drummers), *phankri* (attendant on the chief), *moton arce* and *moton arvi*, *langbong-po* (water carrier), *arphek-po* (broom carrier) and the *chinhak-po* (carrier of the basket of tools).

The village youths (*risomar*) work in the fields together, a portion being allotted to each house. Work is enforced by penalities.

In the olden days, shirkers were said to have been burnt alive; now-a-days, of course, such drastic punishment cannot be meted out. Nevertheless severe beatings are often given to shirkers. The boys of the *maro* are in great demand for social services, especially tasks and ceremonies connected with the dead. Dancing and singing are practised in these clubs, which keep old usages and customs alive The Mikirs, especially the youth, are very fond of hunting and fishing. They hunt with dogs and spears and traps. Fishing is sometimes done with rod and line, but mainly with traps and baskets as in other parts of Assam

SOCIAL ORGANISATION, LAWS, CUSTOMS ETC

The Mikirs are divided into three sections, namely, *Chingthong*, *Ronghang* and *Amri*. The Chingthongs live in the Mikir Hills portion of the former Golaghat and North-Cachar Hills sub-divisions, the Ronghangs in the plains of the Nowgong district and the Amris in the Khasi and Jaintia Hills and the Kamrup districts. Each of the three sections has within it some *Kurs* (clans a word borrowed from the *Khasis*) and observe the same rules of exogamy There are five major *kurs* or groups: (1) Ingty, (2) Terang, (3) Teron, (4) Timung, (5) Inghi. The Ingty tribe is again divided into five groups: Hencheck, Kiling, Kathar, Ingleng and Taro The Terangs are divided into eleven groups, the Terons into six and the Timungs and Inghis into thirty each.

The children belong to the father's *kur* and marriage within a *kur* is strictly prohibited, all members of a *kur* being supposed to be brothers and sisters They can, however, marry their first cousins on the mother's side and also maternal uncle's daughters Mikir names of men are *Sardoks*, *Bura*, *Mon*, *Pator*, *Dili* and *Long* and of women *Kureng*, *Kache*, *Kaban*, and *Kajir*. The prefix *ka* to the woman's name had evidently been borrowed from the Khasis.

Child-marriage is practically unknown, A boy marries from the age of 16 and a girl from the age of 14. The most usual age for boys is 18 or 19 years and for girls 15 years. If a young boy likes a girl he sends his father, or both the parents, to the girl's father and leaves a betrothal ring or bracelet with the girl. Sometimes a gourd of rice-beer is taken and accepted. If, after the acceptance, the girl

gets married to another boy, the village council fines the girl's family. The length of engagement is not uniform. If the girl and the boy are of age, it does not last long. After a day has been fixed for the marriage, both the families prepare beer and strong drinks. If the bridegroom is rich, he provides drinks to the whole party. If the bridegroom's party has to go through different villages he has to give a gourd of beer to each village it passes through on his way to the bride's house. When they arrive at the bride's house, they sit down there and the bridegroom's party offers one gourd of beer and one bottle of strong drink to the bride's father. Then conversation starts The bride's father asks the bridegroom's party why they have come and why the presents have been offered. The bridegroom's father replies, "Your sister (i e bridegroom's mother) has become old and cannot work, so we have brought our son to marry your daughter." The reply from the bride's father is as follows : "My daughter is unworthy and she does not know weaving or any other household work." The Bridegroom's father then replies, "Never mind, we will teach her those things ourselves" After these verbal exchanges, the bride's father asks his wife to enquire of the daughter if she is agreeable. According to Mikir custom, unless the girl gives her consent, the beer and drinks cannot be touched If the girl agrees and the consent is given, the beer and drinks are drunk by the two fathers It happens sometimes that they have to sit and wait the whole night before the girl's consent can be obtained During this wait the people of the village also take part in these formalities, singing, "We cannot send our daughter to your house or to the boy's party", to which they receive the reply, "We cannot leave our boy to stay with you", and so on and so forth When consent is finally obtained and beer and drinks are finished the bride prepares a bed inside the house for the bridegroom. If the boy feels shy, he can send his garments to the bed instead of going himself. Next day, the girl goes with her husband to her new home along with her parents. Her parents are entertained with food and drinks and they return home the following day. If the girl is the heiress or only daughter, she does not go out of her house. It is the boy who then has to come to the father-in-law's house This kind of marriage is known as *Akemen*; it is rare.

Generally, Mikirs are monogamous. No one is allowed to marry two wives. There are, however, cases of rich persons marrying more than one wife. Divorce is very rare, but permissible if there is no offspring or if the girl goes home after marriage and refuses to return to her husband. In the second case, the husband has to take a gourd of beer to his wife's parents' house and declare himself free. After divorce both parties are free to marry again. Widow marriage is also allowed.

The sons inherit property. The wife and daughters get nothing. If there is no son, the nearest relatives of his own *kur* inherits. If the deceased has no son or brothers, the widow can retain the property, provided she marries a man of the same *kur* as her husband's. The widow can always retain her personal property. It is the eldest son who gets the major share of the property Very often, the property is divided by the father before death. The sons generally live together even after the father's death and support the widowed mother.

Religious Beliefs

As already mentioned, Christianity has not been able to make as much headway among the Mikirs as among the other hill-tribes of Assam The Mikirs have no idols, temples or shrines Their gods are innumerable and they worship them in different ways at different times and at different places. Arnam Kethe, which means the 'Great God', is one of the household gods. This god gets a sacrifice once in three years, if there is no occasion to worship him oftener. Though he is called the 'Great God' he has no authority over other gods. His appropriate offering is a pig If a man is sick, the diviner declares that the Arnam Kethe wishes to join the household. A ceremony is performed but no offerings are made at that time. After three years, or earlier, if there is any sickness in the family, a pig is killed and a feast with rice-beer and wine is given to the villagers. Another god's name is Peng. He is also a household god. The proper offering to him is a goat which is given yearly. Maize, rice and a gourd of rice-beer are placed for him above the verandah of the house along with the first fruit of the harvest. Another god is Hemphy Arnam. People pray to him for

deliverence from sickness. Rek Anglong is also a household god, but he is worshipped in the fields. The sacrifice to him is a fowl. The god Arnam Paro is entitled to 100 shares of rice. He is worshipped either with a white goat or a white fowl. Besides the above, there are numerous gods who take their names from diseases etc. All natural objects of striking or imposing character, such as the sun and the moon, are regarded as divine objects, but are not specifically propitiated. Localities with impressive mountains, waterfalls, deep pools in rivers, great boulders etc. have each assigned to them gods which are supposed to be interested in the affairs of men and have to be placated by sacrifice. These local divinities of the jungle are worshipped chiefly to avert mischief either by tigers or by terrible plagues. Trees or animals are not worshipped

The Mikirs believe in reincarnation. They generally name their children after their dead relatives, because it is believed that the dead come back to the world

Divination and Witchcraft

Prolonged sickness is generally ascribed to witchcraft or a spell cast by some one, who may be a man or a demon. The services of a *sung-kelang-abang* or *lodet* corresponding to the Assamese, *mongoloti* or diviner, are then requisitioned to find out the author of the spell. Divination is made, as by Assamese *mongolitis*, with the help of rice or *cowries*. As in the case of some other hill-tribes, divination is sometimes made by breaking an egg. Another mode is to use the *nok-jir*, a long-handled *dao*. It is held upright in the hand and the names of probable enemies or displeased gods or demons are pronounced, accompanied by the recitation of a charm (*mantra*). When the right name is pronounced, the *dao* shakes (or is supposed to) and thus the guilt is fixed. If the cause of sickness is a god or demon, he is propitiated. If it is a man, necessary rites are performed to exorcise the evil spirit employed by the person practising witchcraft to do harm. Such persons are tried by the *me* or village council. The *san-kelang-abang* is a superior kind of diviner who is believed to be inspired or to work under divine afflatus. The *lodet* or *lodet-pi* is the ordinary diviner. The general term for both is *Uche* (feminine *Uche-pi*).

Oaths and Ordeals : The Mikirs do not have ordeals of the kind practised by the Garos and other tribes. Oaths and imprecations are resorted to instead. Earth is put on the head of a person who says, "May I be like this dust"; or the scrapings from a tiger's tooth are put in water which is drunk and the oath pronounced, "May the tiger devour me". Similarly, the scrapings of an elephant's tusk is also used, the oath in this case being, "Let the elephant trample me to death". Such oaths are taken to attest the truth of evidence given or of the denial of an accusation.

Funeral Ceremony[1] : The funeral ceremony is very elaborate, costly and the most important of all the ceremonies performed by the Mikirs. These ceremonies are obligatory in the event of the birth of a still-born child also. Persons dying of smallpox or cholera are buried immediately but the funeral service is performed later on after digging up the bones which are then duly cremated. The dead body is kept in the house for one day but if a regular funeral service is held, it may lie there for more than a week or 12 days The body lies in the *kut* During this period the cooking of the family is done in the *kam*. The dead man's wife or any major close relative of the dead person must go across a stream or a creek to cook and eat No one during this period can stay in the house. If the deceased is a rich man, beer is prepared in the house; rice is husked and a convenient day is fixed for the funeral service. If the house is not big enough, the villagers build and add a platform to it, attached to the platform in the front. From the day of death each household in the village gives a man to sleep in the dead man's house every night. When sufficient rice and beer required for the function lasting for four or five days have been prepared, the young men of the village are called out about eight in the evening. They come with their drums and beat them in front of the house and some of them dance in pairs holding in their left hand a shield and in the right hand a stick. They go round twice in a circle and then holding each other's hands dance round and round. This dance is called *chomang kan*. After an hour is spent in this way, they go back to the village headman's house to sleep. Next morning,

1. Contributed by L S. Ingty, I A.S.

they come without beat of drum and dance the same dance again. After some time they go back to their own houses. The following day they come again and repeat the performance. Next morning, a fowl is killed and roasted. The third and the last night is their great dance-night and before that night during day-time the young people have to work hard to get ready stout bamboo poles to which the corpse is to be slung, a *banjar* i.e. a long bamboo ornamented with curly shavings and projecting arms and a shorter bamboo stick similarly ornamented and tipped with leaves. The men have to go to the village burning place and prepare a *machang* or platform there with logs for burning the body. A skilled old woman is then called to prepare the necessaries while an assistant beats a drum. Then comes a young girl who is supposed to be the bearer of the corpse although she does not actually carry it but carries on her back only a gourd for holding beer. This girl must belong to the dead man's mother's clan. If the family can afford, a goat is now killed for the dead. About mid-night the villagers armed with torches and drums assemble in the house. Each contingent is welcomed with drum beating and joins in the concert. All the young boys and girls are dressed in their best. The *kleng sarpo* (leader of the village young men) calls the young people to touch the beer. They are not allowed to taste it yet. After touching the beer they start dancing. All present join and dance in a circle, holding each other's hands. Young girls join the dance by holding the coat of the boys and the boys hold the belt of the girls. The girls cover their head with a black scarf and wear a petticoat with red stripes. Just before cock-crow, seven young men go up to the platform. One of them goes inside the *kam* and dances there while the other six wait at the door. After a quarter of an hour they return to the circle of dancers. At dawn they go up and dance in the *kam* again till sunrise. As soon as daylight comes the circle breaks up and the drum-beaters go round and round and dance from 10 to 20 times, playing a different tune each time. At that point a pig is brought near the dancers and tied up for killing. The young people in successive parties recount over the tied-up pig the history of the deceased and his family. The pig is then killed and cut up for the young boys and men engaged in the funeral service. These people have to cook and

eat this meat. A small portion of the meat is cooked by a selected old woman for the dead man and this portion is put in the plate of the dead and carried up to the body. An old experienced man then performs certain rites over the dead body. The cooked meat and rice are then distributed to the young girls also. The young boys are provided with rice, beer, salt, chillies and green vegetable from the dead man's house for their entertainment. After they have been fed, two or three of the young people pick up a cock from anywhere on the road, take it to the burning place, kill it and eat it there. A small pig is killed by the young lads where they dance and the head and a leg are sent to the young boys on the roadside. The blood of this pig is caught in a bamboo tube. The old woman has by now got the food ready. The woman and the girl then proceed to the burning place. An old man enters the house and wraps the dead body with the dead man's clothes and they tie it to a bamboo Thereafter, beating the drum they all march in a procession to the burning place. The dead body is placed on the pyre and it is lighted. The women who knew the deceased start singing his life-story and telling the others how and where he is going to see his dead relations. Dancing by the young lads continues on the cremation ground till the body is fully burnt. The bones that remain unburnt are tied up in a cloth and buried. The old woman now places the food she prepared on a flat stone over the grave and the ceremony comes to an end

Festivals : The Mikirs observe several festivals. The one known as *ringker*, is an annual compulsory village festival. It is held in the beginning of the cultivating season, i.e. in June. At this festival they sacrifice a goat or a fowl, whichever they can afford. There is no music or dancing at *ringker*. At the time of harvest there is no sacrifice but all the villagers help one another in reaping the crop and bringing it home, after which they feast together on rice-beer and dried fish which are saved up from a long time before for this occasion. No animal is killed at this feast as they believe that if an animal is killed at that time the paddy they bring home would be small in quantity.

CHAPTER VI

TRIBES OF NORTH CACHAR HILLS

THE NORTH Cachar Hills sub-division is inhabited by three main tribes namely, the Dimasa-Kacharis, the Kukis and the Zemi Nagas. The Dimasas are the most populous of the tribes numbering about twenty-five thousand and it is they who ruled over the other tribes from the beginning of the sixteenth century (1536) till British annexation in 1854

The present North Cachar Hills sub-division was a part of the Cachar district till the formation of the United Mikir and North Cachar Hills district, when it became a sub-division of that district, with a separate District Council of its own, exercising legislative, executive and judicial authority. The area of the sub-division is 1888 sq. miles and the population is 54,000

1. THE DIMASA KACHARIS

The Dimasas of North Cachar Hills are interesting from the point of view of their differences with their kinsmen in the plains. While the latter have become completely assimilated with the Assamese (Bengalis in the Cachar plains) and have to some extent forgotten their own language and customs, the Dimasas, living in the fastnesses of the hills, removed from close contact with the people of the plains, have still preserved themselves to some extent as a tribal community with distinctive tribal features although the majority of them have become Hinduized.

HISTORY

The district of Cachar in Assam owes its name to the Kacharis, who ruled over the district before its annexation to British India. The Kacharis belong to the great Bodo race, whose original home is believed to have been between the upper reaches of the Yang-tse-Kiang and Howangho rivers in China, from where in the dim distant past hordes of them migrated to Assam and North

Bengal and as far to the west as Tipperah. The Koches and Meches of North Bengal and Western Assam, and most probably the Garos also, are sub-tribes of the Kacharis and so are the Lalungs, Rabhas, Dimasas and some other tribes inhabiting the hills and plains of Assam.

Just before the advent of the Ahoms in the beginning of the 13th century A.D. the Kacharis were ruling over the western part of the Sibsagar district of Upper Assam, the present Nowgong district and the northern part of the Cachar district with their capital at Dimapur (Manipur Road). Unable to withstand the rising might of the Ahoms, who invaded the Kachari kingdom repeatedly and sacked their capital in 1536 and continuously harassed them even after that date, the Kacharis under their king Detsung shifted their capital to Maibong on the Mahur River in North Cachar Hills and established a new kingdom around it, hoping that the intervening hills and forests would protect them from further Ahom incursions. The ruins of the Kachari capital at Dimapur show that the Kacharis had attained a state of civilization and culture far superior to that of the Ahoms.

The Ahoms did not leave the Kacharis at peace even in their new abode. In 1706, Rudra Singha, one of the most powerful of Ahom monarchs, invaded the new Kachari kingdom with a large force consisting of no less than 35,000 men, occupied and sacked Maibong, the new capital. The Kachari king sought refuge at Khaspur in the plains of Cachar, which thus became the new capital. According to one reliable historical source, shortly after this, a Kachari prince married the daughter of the king of Tipperah and received the valley of the Barak, which constitutes the present Cachar district, as dowry. Over this part of the country, which was that time thinly populated, the Kacharis ruled in peace as a feudatory power under the suzerainty of the Ahoms till they got into trouble with the kings of Manipur and the Burmese. The latter was growing very powerful at this time (beginning of 19th century) and after having defeated the Ahoms and having conquered Manipur were advancing towards British territory, namely, Sylhet, which was a part of Bengal.

In 1757 envoys of the Kachari Raja approached the Ahom

king for protection against the Tripuris who had been making large-scale depredations on Kachari territory. The Kachari Raja fled to Mekheli and his uncle to Maibong. The Ahoms sent an expedition but the Tripuris managed to escape back into the Tripura hills in good time.

The Kacharis, especially that section of the people who settled down in the North Cachar Hills, call themselves Dimasa. The word is supposed to have been derived from Hidimba (Dimapur being a shortened form of Hidimbapur), a demoness, through whom the second Pandava prince Bhima, according to the legend, produced a son, Ghatotkacha. This origin of the Kachari kings was apparently an invention of Brahmin pundits, made after the formal conversion of the Kachari kings to Hinduism in 1790 A.D. It is on record that Raja Krishna Chandra and his brother were placed inside a copper cow and thence produced by Brahmins who proclaimed them Hindus and Kshatriyas descended from Bhima. An imaginary genealogy going back to several centuries and hundreds of kings was also drawn up.

About 1809 Madhu Chandra, Raja of Manipur, was deprived of his throne by his brothers Charjit Singh and Marjit Singh. Madhu Chandra sought the help of the Kachari king which was given but he was killed in his attempt to regain his throne. Shortly afterwards Charjit and Marjit quarrelled and the latter was forced to seek refuge in Kachari territory. There, he had a quarrel again with Govinda Chandra, brother of the Kachari king, over a Manipuri pony which he had brought with him. Marjit left Cachar in a temper and having obtained the help of the Burmese, drove his two brothers Charjit and Gambhir Singh out of Manipur in 1812 A.D. In 1818 he invaded Cachar but was forced to retreat by his brothers Charjit and Gambhir Singh who succeeded thereafter in usurping the Kachari throne. At this, the Burmese made preparations to invade Cachar and add it to their expanding dominion. The British who were in occupation of adjoining Sylhet were alarmed by the prospect of a powerful nation advancing so close to their territory and came to an understanding with the titular Kachari king Govinda Chandra, expelled the Burmese and the Manipuri usurpers and seated Govinda Chandra once

again upon the throne He took up residence in Haritikar but was assassinated in 1830 under the orders of the Manipuri Raja Gambhir Singh. As he left no heir the British annexed Cachar to British India in 1832.

It would be seen from what has been stated that the Kachari race has two distinct branches, that living in the valley of the Brahmaputra called Boro or Bodo and the other branch who at one time ruled over the Dhansiri Valley with their capital at Dimapur and then migrated to North Cachar Hills, known as Dimasa. According to Sir Edward Grait, the word Dimasa is a corruption of Dima-fisa *i.e.* sons of the Great River.

No history of the Dimasa, howsoever condensed, would be complete without a mention of Tularam Senapati. His father Kacha Din was a domestic in the employ of the Kachari Raja Krishna Chandra. He was given by the Raja some official position in the North Cachar Hills. On his rebelling later against the Raja, he was put to death by the Raja's agents His son, Tularam, who was at the time an orderly peon of the Raja, escaped to the hills and rose to be a self-appointed general with large hill-tribal levies under his command. With this help he successfully resisted all attempts made by the Kachari Raja to subdue him. The Dimasas under him ruled over most parts of North Cachar Hills inhabited by different tribes, such as Kukis, Hmars and the Zemi Nagas, and also the southern part of what is now the Mikir Hills district. His cousin Govind Ram, who was entrusted by him with the command of his levies defeated Govind Chandra's troops and then treacherously attacked Tularam who fled to the Jaintia Hills. Later, at the intervention of Sir David Scott, agent to the Governor-General for the North East Frontier, Tularam was allotted a definite tract of land in North Cachar Hills with an area of about 2,000 sq. miles with a population of only 5,000 or so over whom he ruled till his death in 1850. Four years after his death the British annexed his territory to the Cachar district.

A noteworthy feature about the Dimasa-Kacharis of the North Cachar Hills is that while the majority of the other tribes inhabiting the area, namely the Kukis and the Zemi Nagas, have embraced Christianity they have by and large adopted Hinduism and those

who have not been completely Hinduized continue in their old religious beliefs and custom. The number of the latter is, however, negligible and their aboriginal customs and practices are at present of historical interest only. It is not correct to say, as has been done by English writers writing about the Kacharis during British days, that they were Hinduized after the shifting of their capital to the plains of Cachar under the influence of Brahmins. From the numerous temples constructed by them at Maibong dating from the 16th century and from the archaeological remains to be found in their former capital of Dimapur in Upper Assam, it is evident that the process of Hinduization had started much earlier.

The earliest authority on the Dimasas, writing in English, is C.A. Soppitt, who gives a rather damaging picture of their character, saying that they are "neither brave, honourable or truthful", but as opposed to it we have the following opinions of Stuart Baker, who spent thirteen years in North Cachar: "As regards their bravery, I do not know that the Cacharis as a race could be called either brave or cowardly, but I have known many Cacharis do deeds that no one could have failed to call brave. For instance, once when a man-eating tiger was hunting a village, three men sallied out with spears, took up the tracks, and followed them into dense jungle Coming on the tiger suddenly, the foremost man was seized by the thigh, but whilst the tiger was carrying him off, the two other men thrust their spears into him and forced him to drop the man. After this all three continued their chase and killed the tiger. Many other instances could be enumerated, and my personal acquaintance with the Cachari as a companion when out shooting absolves him of all cowardice, and induces me to give him a very good character for staunchness and coolheadedness.

"As to his being honourable, I think, that when he has not been contaminated by civilization, the Cachari is as honourable as the average man * * * *

"As regards morality, my long residence amongst the hill-tribes has certainly led me to consider the Cacharis as the most moral of all. Infidelity, either of man or woman, is very rare indeed, and the unmarried men and girls are infinitely more virtuous than among any other hill people.

"In physique the men are hefty and well built; the women are unusually big and sturdy. The complexion is generally a dark tan. Both males and females have thick lips, large noses and prominent cheekbones."

Domestic Life

The Dimasas are a pacific people but when provoked they can be very vindictive. Unlike the hill-tribes of the Kuki group and the Mikirs they build their houses on the ground, and the roof, unlike that of Zami houses, is built straight and almost parallel to the ground. The villages are situated in the valleys in the midst of hills. Each village has a raised house called *nodrang* in an easily accessible, open space. The *nodrang* is used by the youth as a club-house and females are not admitted to it.

The men wear a *dhoti* and a *pagri* of cotton or *eri*-silk The women wear two pieces of garments, a skirt usually of *eri*-silk covering the part from the waist to the knee and an upper piece fastened above the breast falling to the waist.

Non-Hinduized Dimasas eat almost anything except dogs, cats, monkeys, snakes and animals of prey. Lizards are eaten and white ants are said to be a delicacy. The *mithun* (*Bos frontalis*) is valued for the flesh as well as property. It is domesticated and its possession is looked upon as an insignia of wealth and prosperity. The Dimasas are heavy smokers and till sometime ago were also inveterate opium-eaters As compared with the other hill-tribes, especially the Nagas, they are spare drinkers. It is indulged in only on the occasion of feasts, weddings or deaths and particularly during the Bishu festival (Assamese Bihu) which lasts several days During this festival, which is a kind of harvest-home, the men drink as much as they can, and dancing in pairs with women, remain continuously in a state of exhilaration.

They make use of every plot of flat land for wet-rice cultivation. Those to whom such land is not available practice *jhuming*

Kacharis generally, including the Dimasas, make fine soldiers and they were freely recruited by the British to the army and the armed police constabulary. *Eri*-silk rearing, cotton spinning and weaving are the main cottage industries. These are practised by the women only.

VILLAGE ORGANIZATION

During the days of the Kachari Rajas, the management of the hills was entrusted to a *senapati* or general and a chief law officer with a number of assistants. Each village had, and even now has, a headman called *Kunang* who is elected but is generally succeeded by his descendants. Large villages have an assistant headman called *Dilo*. The *Kunang* wields considerable authority. All cases of petty theft and quarrels and disputes of all kinds are settled by him with the assistance of as many of the villagers as may like to take part in the hearing. In matters involving females, elderly women also participate at the *bichar* (trial). Complicated cases are decided by representatives from several *mauzas* participating. The old Kachari mode of imposing punishment for sexual offences is interesting. For instance, when adultery was proved, the adulterer and the adulteress were led to the market place and after their offence had been proclaimed there, they were taken round the place three times and then let off. No fine or other punishment was inflicted. The same punishment was awarded in other cases of similar nature, such as sexual intercourse between persons with close ties of consanguinity. The common form of oath is similar to that of the Garos, the Mikirs and the Nagas :

"A sword, a piece of earth from a land-slip, a grain of rice, a leaf of stinging-nettle, a piece of indigo and a tiger's tooth are placed on a cleared space just outside the village in the early morning before food has been taken. The parties to be sworn are then assembled, and as each steps out, he looks up to the sky and then, pointing to the articles before him, says, 'if I now speak false, may I be struck by lightning; may I meet my death by a sword similar to the one before me, may my body be washed away by the rain, as this earth has been and will be; may my identity be lost as completely as this grain of *dhan* (paddy), which once planted is forgotten in the blade that springs from it; may my body be subjected continually to the tortures this nettle is capable of inflicting; may I become in colour like unto indigo; and may a tiger, equal in ferocity to the one this tooth belonged to, devour me.'"

RELIGIOUS BELIEFS

The Kachari beliefs regarding creation, the earth, heaven, hell etc. are more or less identical with those of the Garos, which goes to corroborate Majors Playfair's conjecture that they were originally one and the same people. There are ten gods in the Kachari pantheon, number one being Alow Raja. The priest is called *jontaizao* In the past there was at least one human sacrifice in a year.

Every clan has its own deity and so has every village. Religious rites are performed by the *hojais*, who constitute the priestly class. Births and deaths are attended with religious ceremonies. It is customary to sacrifice buffalo calves at death ceremonies. Every village annually propitiates the ruling spirit of the village with a *puja*. *Pujas* are also resorted to for curing the sick and for warding off calamities.

CUSTOMS

Bride-price is called amongst the Dimasas *kalti* which may vary from Rs. 50 to a couple of hundred rupees according to the means of the bridegroom. A person contracting a marriage alliance with the member of another tribe is generally excommunicated. Child marriage, in spite of Hinduization, is non-existent and girls are given complete freedom in the choice of a partner.

From twenty days before the birth of a child the mother is isolated, neither her husband nor any one else being allowed to go near her. A week after the birth of a child, a feast is held and on this occasion a name is also given to it by the old women of the village. Married people who have children are addressed as so and so 's father or mother. This is also the practice amongst the Assamese of the older generation. Persons having no children are addressed as *Sagrifa* or *Sagrima* meaning father or mother of no child. Divorce, which involved loss of or repayment of marriage price is not difficult to obtain. Divorces often take place by mutual consent. When a husband maltreats his wife and the latter is not in a position to return the *kalti* she can appeal to the *Kunang* and the village elders who may order dissolution of the marriage without the husband receiving back any part of the *kalti*.

A younger brother can marry his elder brother's widow but not *vica versa*. Similarly, a man may marry his wife's younger sister but not an elder one.

The Dimasas have forty male clans (*sengphongs*) and forty-two female clans (*jocluk*). No one can marry in his father's or mother's clan; but a father can have a daughter-in-law from his mother's clan. The rule is strictly enforced and can be violated only on pain of excommunication. As two females of different clans cannot share even the same clothes or cosmetics, not to speak of the same bed, polygamy is naturally rare. In spite of what has been said above about bride-price, the actual position at present obtaining is that the prospects of finding a suitable bridegroom depends on the size of the dowry that can be given.

As in the past, the Dimasas are still the dominating tribe in North Cachar and it can be safely assumed that they will not only continue to play this role for years to come but will also make their existence felt in the affairs of the State, because, they are a vigorous, adaptable and forward-looking people.

2. THE KUKIS

'*Kuki*' is a vague term applied by the people of the plains not only to the tribes of the Chin-Lushai-Kuki group but to hill-men generally who cannot be distinctly labelled as a Khasi or a Garo or a Mikir etc. The tribe never calls itself by that name which they regard as one contemptuously used by plains-men

Kuki is a generic term covering a number of tribes, sub-tribes and clans with varying customs and manners, with certain common characteristics which mark them off from other tribes of the region such as the Nagas. From the similarities in language, customs and social organization, there can be little doubt that the Kukis, Lushais and Chins originally lived in the same land (Chin-hills of Burma) and are related to one another. Out of a hundred words picked up at random about fifty would be found to be identical in the three tongues. Physically, the Kukis are smaller in stature and frailer in constitution than the Lushais and the Chins, their style of doing the hair particularly with a bun at the nape

giving them an effeminate appearance. Women tie the hair into a knot above the forehead like Pawi men.

The Kuki population in North Cachar Hills is about eight thousand of which half are Hmars, a Kuki tribe, who are now claiming to be a separate, independent race embracing most of the Kuki clans. From linguistic and other similarities there can be no question, however, that the Hmars are a sub-tribe of the Kuki-Chin-Lushai group. In fact the Hmars living in the Mizo district have now become completely assimilated to the Lushais or Mizos. This fact would become clearer from the brief history of the Kukis given below:

According to their legends the Kukis originally belonged to a place called Sinlung in south western China. Some natural calamity compelled them to migrate to the Shan country to the north-east of Assam from where the Ahoms had also come After they had lived happily in that country for many generations, a great famine forced them to go in search of new land down the Chindwin Valley to the China Hills. An old folk-song still sung corroborates the legend :

"My chin land of old,
My grandfather's land Himalei (the Himalayas).
My grandfather's way excels,
Chinlung's (chin rock) way excels."

They called their new habitat Chinlung after their original home Sinlung. This is a common practice among the Chin, Lushai and Kuki tribes (who are, or at least were till recently, nomads) to call their new settlements by the name of their former ones with the result that in North Cachar Hills many villages have the same names as villages in the Lushai Hills such as Biate, Thiak, Khawbung, Zote, Darngawn etc.

From Chin Hills, the Kukis moved in search of more fertile lands into the Lushai Hills. When the more vigorous Lushai tribes started making the same movement from Burma into Assam, the Kukis were gradually driven towards the lower and hotter northern region of the present Mizo District and came to be known as Hmars (Hmar = North). Towards the end of the eighteenth century, the Hmars, consisting of two tribes, namely, the Rangkhols and the

Plate I Gare Abeng Man Ready for Dance

Plate IV—A Mizo

Bietes, either under pressure from two other Kuki tribes, namely, the Jansens (more correctly Changsens) and the Thadous, or perhaps because their nomadic impulse had not spent itself, moved across the plains of Cachar and settled down in the North Cachar Hills and came to be known there as the 'Old Kukis'. Later on the Jansens and Thadous were similarly compelled by the Lushais to follow the Ranghols and Bietes to seek shelter in the North Cachar Hills, where they came to be known as the 'New Kukis' This second migration took place in 1851-52. The Hmars claim to be a separate tribe independent of the Kuki tribes, but those of them left behind in the Lushai Hills, have become more or less completely assimilated with the Lushais, *Lushai* being the general name covering all the tribes living in the Mizo District except the Lakhers and the Pawis who are also undergoing slowly the process of assimilation. The term Lushai is derived from Lusei, the tribe which under the Thangnur and the Sailo chiefs became the most powerful of all the tribes and held sway all over the Mizo District—an example of a part representing the whole.

The Kukis are a populous tribe numbering about one hundred thousand, scattered over Chin Hills, Lushai Hills, Tripura, Cachar, Manipur, Nagaland, Khasi and Jaintia Hills and the North Cachar Hills Although the four Kuki tribes inhabiting the North Cachar Hills mentioned above are included in the generic term Kuki, there are marked differences between the Rangkhols and the Jansens The former have democratic traditions Their villages are administered by a group of village officials, the *kalim* or headman, the *kabur* or assistant headman and their subordinates *chapia-kalim* and *chapia kabur*. These offices are not hereditary and an aspirant for the headmanship has to start at the bottom of the official hierarchy. The Jansens, on the other hand, are ruled by hereditary chiefs, whose authority, like that of the Lushai chiefs, was almost unlimited before the British occupation.

The classification given above of the 'Old Kukis' and the 'New Kukis' may not be the last word on the subject. I have met Jansen Kukis who are definite about belonging to the Old Kuki and *not* the New Kuki group. In the Mizo district, the Rangkhols (called there Hrangchals) and the Bietes are two of many

clans collectively called Hmars, i.e. north from the position of their villages with reference to those of the Lushais. Amongst themselves these two sub-tribes are called Khawchak and Khawthang i.e. Eastern and Western.

The principal Kuki clans are Biete, Changsen (Jansen), Thadous. Khelma, Hrangkhol, Sakachep, Vaipheii, Linthang, Thangin, Lurhim and lastly the Hmars. As customs, manners, religious practices etc vary from sub-tribe to sub-tribe and clan to clan, it is difficult to give a composite picture of the Kukis as a single people.

3. THE ZEMI NAGAS

The small Zemi Naga community consisting of some seven thousand souls is scattered over the three areas of North Cachar Hills, Nagaland and Manipur. Those living in Nagaland call themselves *Zeliang*. They are a sub-tribe of the Kachha Naga tribe and those of them who have settled down in N.C Hills migrated there in the eighteenth century. The word Zemi is derived from *Nzieme*, meaning those who live in hot regions, N.C. Hills having a comparatively hotter climate than their original abode. In some of their folk-tales there are references to *Nchinme*, i.e. China. It is possible, therefore, that they came in one of the waves of Mongolian communities who had moved into Assam centuries ago from the north-east.

Compared to the Angami Naga, the short-statured Zemi might appear drab and shabby but yet of all the tribes described in this volume they are the most colourful and interesting. Interesting, firstly because there has been no mass conversion yet and this has helped them to retain their natural charm; and secondly, because, despite administration they have preserved their tribal polity more or less in its original form. This latter feature of Zemi life can be traced to their history. When bands of them started migrating from the Naga Hills, each band had a leader and a second-in-command When they fixed a new site for settlement the leader and his lieutenant became the owners of all the land in the new settlement. The former became the headman, called the *kadepeo*, which means 'a man of the land'. These headmen were given

official recognition by the Government with a present of a red blanket, which is the insignia of office.

Each village or community is virtually ruled over by the *kadepeo* with the help of a village council. The man next in power on the council is the priest or the *gekungme*. Although the council is supposed to dispose of minor disputes only, in actual fact it administers the village practically, independently and completely. Inter-village disputes only go to the magistrates' courts There was till recently no appeal from the decisions of the village council. Parties had either to accept its decision or leave the village. The normal punishment for serious crimes was banishment. Although he is no dictator and can be over-ruled by the council if it is strongly supported by public opinion, the *kadepeo* wields considerable authority and this is what has really helped the Zemi to preserve their tribal polity, laws and customs more or less unaffected by exotic influences.

In appearance the Zemi, although of shorter stature generally than the Angami Naga, is, with the golden tan of his complexion, small oblique eyes, oval face, dark, straight hair and sturdy constitution, an attractive specimen of manhood. Their women, however, are rather inferior, from the point of feminine attractiveness, to their sisters in the Khasi and other hill areas of Assam.

MORUNGS

Of all the features of the Zemi social structure the most striking is the *morung* (domitory or club). Every village has at least two (some more) *morungs* (1) the *hangseuki* or 'young men's fort', (2) *lenseuki* or 'ladies fort'. The members of the club are collectively called *kienga* and a Zemi, whether a boy or a girl, becomes a member of a *kienga* the day he is born. As soon as a boy or a girl is seven or eight years old he goes to sleep at night in the *morung*. It is considered indecent for young people of above that age to sleep in their parents' house. Girls work in the house during day time and spend the nights only in the *morung* where they learn to sing, dance, spin, weave and embroider under the guidance of the landlady or the hostess, the front part of whose house is used as the *morung*. This lady also is their matron and leader.

The boys on the other hand spend all their time in the *morung* coming home only for meals or during sickness. No wonder, therefore, that the *morung* exerts a strong influence on their character. The leader or the manager of the boys' club is called *kazeipeu*, who is also their monitor and commander, whose commands they are to obey unquestioningly. It is in the *morung* that the boys prepare themselves for the battle of life, learning under the *kazeipeu*'s guidance wrestling, dancing, singing, making baskets and other crafts. Boys' *morungs* are also generally housed in the front part of the *kazeipeu*'s house.

As already mentioned elsewhere the system produces excellent results instilling into young people from an early age a sense of responsibility, discipline, a spirit of give and take and of service to persons older than oneself, because the smaller boys have to fag for the older ones, keep the *morung* clean, wash clothes, carry firewood and run errands and do all sorts of odd jobs. All the members of a *morung* in a body are required to render social service and offer help to the needy with manual labour. In fine, the *morung* is a Zemi boy's first home and the parent's house a second. Connection with the *morung* ceases only with marriage. It is in these *morungs* again that courtships start leading eventually to wedlock. A young man from the boys' *morung* would go stealthily at night to the girls' and lay himself down by the side of his sweetheart finding her out in the dark perhaps by the odour of her body. Unless there are strong objections from the parents the nocturnal courtship would in due course end in matrimony. Normally, parents do not interfere with their daughter's choice of a partner.

As has already been indicated in the introductory chapter a Zemi youth's life, as compared to that of a girl's, is an enviable one. With hardly anything to do during the day except drink beer, gossip, make baskets, play music and array himself in beads, horn-bill feathers and clothes of variegated colours in order to make of himself an object of admiration to the girls; and permitted at night to indulge in courtship, his life till marriage is a perpetual holiday. With their innate love of pleasure, dance and music, colour and pageantry, the Zemis allow their young men to have as much of a good time as they can as much and as their means would permit.

In return for their pleasures the young men are required to perform, besides others, the most important duty of providing the village-guard. This is of course a hang over from their head-hunting days but even now, in spite of administration, they feel insecure without a guard to keep vigil at night against intruders. The Angami raids are perhaps still fresh in their memory.

As compared with the young man's, the Zemi girl's life is hard. She has to fetch firewood and water, sow, weed and reap paddy, pound rice and cook it, spin, weave, dye and sew clothes, look after the little ones and manage the house. She is thus an economic asset to the parents and it is no wonder, therefore, that her father expects reasonable compensation in the shape of a marriage price from the young man who wants to take her away.

Although from this economic point of view a woman has a status superior to that of a man, she has practically no place in society or public life At the festivals and dance parties, their duty is merely to serve beer to the men and cater to their other needs. Women do not appear in court in person and cannot take part in the trial of disputes. A man would not touch meat of an animal killed by a woman: that would be *infra-dig*. But yet, the women exert a strong influence on Zemi life from behind the scenes. When necessary mothers and wives go out with clubs and sticks to break up brawls and drag their sons and husbands home. A Zemi, generally, has great respect for his wife's opinions

Outrage on the modesty of women is very rare. Rape, especially of a married woman, is regarded as one of the most heinous of crimes, and the male relatives of the outraged woman consider themselves entitled to spear the raptor to death. Urusula Graham Bower in her book *The Naga Path* gives an interesting account of such a situation in which the culprit was saved by the timely intervention of the *kadepeo* and the village council, who banished the offender for two years. Once judgment was delivered no one could, however, harm the guilty person and he would be escorted safely out of the village by the guard of the *morung*. This again shows the authority which the *kadepeo* and his council still wields in village administration.

The most favourite pastime of the Zemis is dancing, because

they have a genius for celebration A Zemi dance at a festival held at night with torches burning, is a fascinating sight About a hundred young men and girls would turn up inside the circle of spectators The dance would start with a slow, lilting, leisurely movement to the accompaniment of music produced by drums and cymbals, gradually it would grow faster and faster, the men leaping high into the air and dropping down again on the ground, keeping perfect rhythm, and then about the time the climax is reached, with the horn-bill feathers on their head and in their hands looking like a forest in fast movement, their colourful attire glinting in the dim light the ensemble presents the spectacle of an orgy of colour sound and movement

Dancing is an art with the Zemis as with most tribals Each village has its stars Touring companies of young men and girls go from village to village giving performances for beer and a free meal at the houses of well-to-do villagers where the whole village is entertained

Being vigorous and manly, the Zemis take part in a variety of indigenous out-door sports and games of which the most noteworthy is the *mithun* chase which is a stern test of nerve and stamina *Mithuns* are semi-wild cattle of the size of large buffaloes As a precaution against injuries and fatalities in the chase the horns of the animals are padded with creepers and tied with barks As the latter is cut and the animal is about to be let loose the village priest gives a heavy blow on its rump with a stout stick, as a result of which the brute charges at everything in his way in mad fury The young man who has the guts to stop the animal with his bare hands while it is dashing headlong in some direction and hold it down to the ground by the horns wins the competition A number of young men take part in the chase The winner however is not rewarded with any prize On the contrary, he is stripped of his kilt finery and cash and is sometimes made to entertain his friends by killing a pig or a cow, the Zemi idea being that any one gifted with such strength and courage is expected to share his natural gifts with those not so richly endowed by Nature

Another favourite sport is the phython hunt All the Naga tribes regard the python with superstitions awe It is believed

to be endowed with the power of dragging men down by magic into water and there drown them. The celebrated Rani Gaidelu's supernatural powers were supposed to be hidden in the huge python which she kept and which was worshipped by all who followed her cult. The snake was eventually shot by a British Political Agent of Manipur because no one else would dare perpetrate such a sacrilege. When the presence of a python in the vicinity of a village is scented, a batch of young men from the *morung* would go out to capture it and bring it to the village. One would jump on the head of the huge reptile and hold it down by thrusting a stick into its neck. Another would step on to the tail. One or two more would take charge of the middle portion i.e. the main body. The creature would then be brought to the boys' *morung* where the priest would make divinations by looking at the markings on it. Eventually, it would be killed and the flesh eaten by the old folk only, because it is taboo to young people.

RELIGIOUS BELIEFS AND PRACTICES, ETC.

Like the other hill-tribes of the region, the Zemis are animists. Conversion to Christianity has not yet made much headway, which explains why the Zemis have been able to preserve the tribal structure of their society, tribal customs and manners more than other tribes like the Kukis who live scattered in their midst. There is a fair amount of rivalry and even some hostility between Christian and non-Christian villages where they are situated side by side, and the contrast between the two is also striking. The Christian villages are disappointing and depressing. The people have lost their character; the *morungs* are in a state of decay. The colourful vitality of Zemi life has disappeared. Dance and music have yielded place to hymns in praise of the glory of the Lord. On the other hand the 'pagan' villages have still some throbbing left of primitive *joie de vivre*. The pagan Zemis believe in a Supreme God, *Tingwang*, who controls other gods and spirits. They also believe in a world of spirits to which a good man, who follows the religious tenets, goes after death. In the beginning of every year, ten hens are sacrificed (*nruikeren*) by each village to propitiate the God of Health. There are numerous other sacri-

fices ordained after divination by the priest or *gekungme*, who is believed to be endowed with superhuman powers—sacrifices for recovery from sickness, at the time of epidemics of cholera, smallpox etc. These never-ending series of sacrifices of pigs, fowl, goats etc. are a heavy economic drain on the slender means of the Zemi people, which, perhaps, explains the reform movement which has started even amongst the non-Christians aiming at the discontinuance of religious ceremonies involving heavy expenditure.

Be that as it may, generally speaking, neither Christianity nor civilization (as we understand it) has yet had any conspicuous impact on Zemi life. Most of their customs have remained unchanged. They do not know much of the outside world. Their world is their own surrounding land. They still sing their old folksongs, dance their quaint, old fashioned dances, wear the same dress, eat the same food and drink the same drink (perhaps in smaller quantities) as did their forefathers generations ago. It is this old-world atmosphere that makes Zemi life so picturesque and attractive to an outsider.

CHAPTER VII

THE MIZOS

THE MIZOS were, till recently, known to the outsiders as the Lushais and they were little known outside Assam. They have come into prominence recently not only in India but also outside on account of the uprising in the Mizo Hills in March 1966. The term 'Lushai' is derived from the word Lushei or Lusei, the name of one of the Mizo sub-tribes which was the principal ruling clan among the Mizos, when their land was annexed by the British in the latter part of the nineteenth century. In a general sense, the term 'Mizo' means a hill-man (*Mi*-man, *Zo*-hill or high altitude), but all hill-people were not called Mizos by them. They used this term with reference to certain tribes living in the hills of Manipur, Tripura, Cachar, and the Chin Hills of Burma, who were akin to them in language, customs and mode of living.

The Mizos inhabit what is now called the Mizo Hills district which forms the southern extremity of Assam. It is bounded in the north by the Cachar district and Manipur, in the east and south by Burma and in the west by East Pakistan and Tripura. As the largest district in Assam, it occupies an a area of 8,149 sq. miles. Its boundary with Burma extends over 270 miles and with Pakistan over 158 miles. It is thus an area of strategic importance.

The Mizo district runs lengthwise from north to south, the length being about twice the breadth, and all the hills which are generally small and steep and separated from one another by small valleys, also range from north to south. The general height of the hills varies from 300 ft. to 5000 ft. above mean level, although there are peaks here and there which are above 6000 ft. The highest peak in the district, called the Blue Mountain, and known to the local people by the name of Phawngpuii, is 7100 ft. The district as a whole enjoys a very pleasant climate throughout the year. In summer, the temperature at Aijal, the district headquarters, varies from 20.30° to 29.8°C and in winter from 11.8° to 21.3°C.

The Tropic of Cancer runs across the district in the middle. The district is, therefore, neither very hot in summer nor very cold in winter.

As the Mizos were known till recently by outsiders as the Lushais, the district predominantly inhabited by them was officially called the 'Lushai Hills'. This name was changed to 'Mizo District' by an act of Parliament in April 1954. The district has always been referred to by the Mizos as *Mizo-Ram*, which means the 'land of the Mizos'.

Although the early history of the Mizos, who are racially Mongolian, relating to the period prior to their migration to their present habitat, is not known with certainty, it is widely held by various authorities that their ancestors were migrants from the Chin Hills of Burma. The migration of the Mizos was forced on them by the stronger clans of Burma. Dislodged from the Chin Hills they established themselves in the Mizo district in the latter part of the 18th century. These Mizos, under their overlords, in their turn, consolidated their hold in the region by driving out other kindred tribes like the Hrangkhols, Biates and Thadous to the north and occupied practically the whole of the present Mizo district excluding the Pawi-Lakher region.

There is a popular legend among the tribe that their ancestors emerged from *Chhinlung*, a hole in the earth. According to the legend, once upon a time a great darkness descended on the earth followed by a catastrophe. In the midst of the darkness, all men were transformed into animals and beasts of various kinds and human life on earth came to an end. Repeopling of the earth commenced once more when men began to emerge from *Chhinlung*. When the process was still continuing and after all the clans had come out two persons of the Ralte clan came out together and began to chatter. This made God think that too many men had come out and so closed the hole with a slab of stone.

Mizo is a generic term which includes several sub-tribes. The more prominent among them are the Lusei, the Ralte, the Hmar and the Pawi (Poi). Each sub-tribe has a different dialect with close affinity to one another. There is another major tribe called the Lakhers (who call themselves Mara) inhabiting the southern-

most part of the district. Their dialect is altogether different from those of the other sub-tribes. The *lingua franca* of the Mizos which has become popularly known as the Mizo language or *Dulhian*, is the dialect of the Lusei clan. It has, however, undergone much modification by absorbing many words from the other dialects. There is a good deal of similarity between the Mizo and the Manipuri languages. The Mizo language is written in the Roman script introduced by the Christian missionaries in the latter part of the 19th century, and is now a recognized language for the degree examinations as well as for the Civil Services examinations in the State.

RELIGION

Before Christianity came to them, the Mizos, like other primitive peoples, were animists. They believed in spirits, good and evil, supposed to be living in the trees, mountains, rocks, streams and caves. The supreme spirit was called *Pathian* (god), the Creator of everything and a benevolent being. But he had little to do with human affairs. Far more important to the average man and woman were the *Huais* (the demons or the evil spirits) who caused harm to mankind. It was to appease these evil spirits that offerings and sacrifices were frequently made whenever someone fell ill or was visited by misfortune. The priest or the sorcerer was supposed to know which spirit was responsible for a particular illness and how to appease him. Offerings and sacrifices to be made were prescribed and also performed by the priest, the form varying according to the type of illness. In one case the sacrifice might be a pig, in another a hen or a cock or some other domestic animal. One very well known spirit is called *Khawhring* which sometimes possessed certain persons, generally women. The belief was that the *Khawhring* lived in certain women and from there it went forth and took possession of other women. The woman possessed falls into a trance, and speaks with the voice of the original hostess of the *Khawhring* making all sorts of demands or revealing some unpleasant secrets. Women who happen to be possessed by a *Khawhring* are shunned in society. No one wants to marry such persons and they often got killed too. One possessed

by the *Khawhring* could be cured only by exorcism, accompanied by shouting, drum-beating and gun-firing.

The Mizos believed in the existence of other worlds wherein the spirits of the dead lived. One of them is called the *Pialral* (paradise) which was situated beyond the Pial river (*Ral* means beyond or the other side; hence *Pialral* meaning 'beyond the Pial'). Those who are admitted into the *Pialral* are supposed to live in perpetual bliss and are freely fed with husked and cleaned rice. The other spirit world is known as the *Mitthi Khua* (dead mens' village or the Hades). This is a much inferior world where life is more troublesome and difficult than in the world of the living.

According to Mizo belief, when a man dies his spirit leaves the body through the crown of his head and then proceeds towards the Rih Lake, a small lake in the Chin Hills of Burma, three miles from the boundary of Mizo land. The spirit, however, soon returns and thereafter stays near his original home or village for about three months. It is, therefore, customary, when the bereaved family sits for a meal, to keep one seat vacant or to set apart a little cooked rice and curry and put them near the main door of the house for the spirit of the departed one. On the expiry of three months the bereaved family performs the *thitin* rite (i.e. sending off the dead) to bid farewell to the spirit of the deceased. Until this is done, no member of the family would be invited to any function by their neighbours. After the *thitin* rite has been performed the spirit, acknowledging that he is no longer wanted by the bereaved family, would go his own way weeping towards *Mithikhua*. On the way there is *Hringlang Tlang*, that is a hill from which he could get a good view of the land of the living. As he looks back from there with a great longing his pace slows down. That is why he is made to wear behind his ears the *hawilo* (no-looking back) flowers which make him unable to turn back, however much he might wish to do so. Finally, he reaches the *Lunglo* (heartless, feelingless) river, the water of which is clear and transparent. He drinks from it with great reluctance and much weeping in order to forget all about the world of the living.

The journey, however, does not end there. He still has to face

one more inescapable, dreadful experience. In the *Zingvawan* village there lives an immortal Pawla on the entrance of whose house all the paths to the world of the dead converge. There stands Pawla holding his big and powerful bow with pellets as big as eggs and he shoots at all the spirits that come that way. His bow is strong and the pellets so deadly that it causes painful tumours which take at least three years to cure. Those whom Pawla shoots at with his bow cannot enter *Pialral* (the abode of bliss) but are destined to dwell in *Mithikhua*. A shot from the bow, however, transforms the dead into real spirits and thereafter all human traces in them vanish.

There are certain persons on whom Pawla cannot shoot at. These are the spirits of the *Thangchhuah* and the *Hlamguihs*, who are entitled to enter *Pialral* straightaway. The *Thangchhuahs* are those honoured persons who have given five prescribed major feasts and also have killed in the chase certain animals such as an elephant, a bear, a sambhur, a wild mithun, a wild bear, a barking deer, a flying fox, an eagle or a king cobra. The *Hlamguihs* are those who die in infancy and are generally buried under the house without any ceremony along with an egg, and it is the egg which, rolling on, leads the spirit to *Pialral*.

About 90 per cent of the Mizos have now embraced the Christian faith and the primitive beliefs described above have become more or less things of the past.

Dress

The typical dress of the Mizos in former days was very simple. Men's attire consisted of a single plain cloth about 7 ft. long and 5 ft. wide which was wrapped round the body with the upper edge running from one shoulder across the back and under the armpit of the other shoulder and then on to the first shoulder. In cold weather a second cloth was added. When the sun is strong he would use another cloth, if available, as a turban. When the weather is cold or while working in the *jhum* amidst mosquitoes, he would put on a white-sleeved cotton coat open at the front and fastened to the neck. The coats were usually ornamented on the sleeves. All the cotton garments worn by men as well as

women were, till recent times, made by the womenfolk from cotton locally grown by them.

The women's dress consisted, in the main, of a cloth similar in size to the men's but of a finer texture wrapped round the body in the same fashion; a petticoat which covered the parts from the waist to about the knees, kept in position by a cotton cord or a brass girdle worn round the waist, and a blouse open at the front. Although the men were not particular about ornaments on their garments, the cloths and the blouses of the girls were decorated with attractive designs of many colours. It may not be far from the truth to say that the Mizo women excelled all the other hill-tribes of Assam in weaving, despite their primitive methods and the outmoded fashion of the looms to which they adhere till today. The typical Mizo cloth called *punachei* and the blouse called *kawrchei* are much sought after by outsiders.

As the man's coat had no pockets, a Mizo man would carry, wherever he went, a cotton bag, some with beautiful patterns in different colours, slung over the shoulder by means of a strap of the same material. Inside it, he kept his smoking tobacco in a metal container, his flint and steel in a neatly made box of wood or hide and also his pipe when it was not in his mouth If he had to go out on a long journey or for work for the whole day, the bag became a receptacle for a bundle of cooked rice together with some salt and a piece or two of roasted meat for his lunch and also a *dao* or a big knife with or without a sheath He was also likely to carry a small gourd which contained nicotine water from the pipe of his wife or sweetheart. He would take a little of this in his mouth and having kept it there for a few minutes would spit it out. This was a substitute for smoking.

The Mizos use hats as a protection against sun and rain. The hats are made of finely split strips of bamboo with linings of smoked leaves and in shape they are a good imitation of solar hats. While working in the *jhum*, they, especially the women, use as a rain-proof a large shallow basket-work tray, shaped like an oyster-shell and made waterproof by being lined with smoked leaves. The narrow end rests on the wearer's head while the broad end reaches down well below the waist, so that while bending

down to work in the *jhum*, the head and the body are not drenched. These rainproofs are also made of fine strips of bamboo or cane. They are, however, disappearing gradually.

Ornaments

With the exception of their ear-rings, Mizo men and women wear almost the same ornaments. Both the sexes had the lobes of their ears pierced, but a man would wear only a small wooden stud or a bead of amber suspended by a string drawn through the hole in the ear. Even this, they would not continue to use till old age. A woman has her ears pierced while still a young child and small pieces of wooden plugs are inserted therein. These are later replaced with slightly bigger ones which, in their turn, give place to still bigger ones made of clay and so on till a ring of ivory disc about an inch or one and a half inch in diameter, with or without a hole in the centre, could be inserted. Women who had given up thoughts of remarriage after widowhood remove their ear-rings and slit the lobe of their ears into two. Bracelets are not much worn by women, and if worn at all, thay are of simple design. The most popular and valued ornaments are amber and cornelian necklaces. The amber beads came from Burma and used to be worn by men as well.

Tattooing of the body was not practised; small circles were sometimes impressed on the forearm and the breast of men by piercing the skin with the spikes of certain plants and smeared over with soot.

Long hair in women was greatly admired and it was not an uncommon sight to see young women with hair reaching down to the knees. Pig's fat is used in lieu of oil in dressing the hair.

Smoking

Smoking is practised by men, women and children alike. A man's pipe consists of a bowl made out of a hard kind of bamboo for holding the tabacco and a long stalk of the same material is joined to the base to serve as the holder. The women's pipe consists of a clay bowl at the top where the tobacco is put and is joined to a water-container made of bamboo by a reed-like stem of bam-

boo. To this contraption is attached a small metal piece from which is hung a piece of pointed iron for use as a poker. A lid to cover the clay bowl with is also provided. The whole contraption looks like a miniature *hookah*.

Social Life and Customs

As already mentioned, the Mizos are divided into several sub-tribes, the more prominent among them being the Lusei, the Ralte and the Hmar. These are again sub-divided into lineages and branches. Thus we find, for instance within the Lushai, the Rokhum, the Sailo, the Hauhnar clans and similarly within the Ralte, the Kawlni, the Lelhchhun, the Siakeng clans. Though these sub-tribes might have, in the past, different customs and manners, these differences do not exist now to any noticeable degree, having been ironed out as a result of the sub-tribes living together, mixing amongst themselves in the same villages under the same rulers or chiefs. A stranger might live for a long time in a Mizo village without even knowing that such divisions ever existed amongst them.

The Mizos are a patriarchal people and descent is in the male or the father's line. Thus, the children of a father who is a Ralte by clan become Raltes even though their mother belongs to a different clan. There is no bar to a man marrying within his own clan, nor is he restricted by custom to taking one wife only. If a Mizo takes more than one wife, generally, the first one becomes the principal wife and the others secondary wives. This is not, however, the case with the chiefs who can take concubines even before they marry their real wife.

Divorce

Divorce is common and easily affected. A man can legally divorce his wife by saying, "I divorce you". Divorce often takes place at the instance of members of the husband's family, if they are not pleased with the bride. Although it may be initiated by either party, divorce usually takes place at the instance of the husband. The status enjoyed by men in this respect can be easily appreciated from the old saying that "A wife and a bad fencing

can be changed at any time". Divorce can also be affected by the wife by refunding the marriage price. This is resorted to only when the wife finds her situation intolerable. If the wife leaves her husband in this manner, it lowers the prestige not only of the unwanted husband but also of the husband's family.

Before a divorce or separation is considered final, due allowance is made for the frailities of human nature and time is allowed for the husband to repent and call back his wife. Several broken marriages are mended in this manner. In some cases, the relatives of the wife make some demands of the husband who wishes to recall the wife as evidence of good faith and a guarantee of good behaviour in future.

MARRIAGE

Marriages among Mizo young men and women are usually love-marriages. If after paying court to the girl of his choice, the young man wants to marry her, he conveys his desire to his parents through a friend. The parents then send their relatives or trusted friends as intermediaries to the parents of the girl to ask for her hands. If the girl indicates her willingness and the parents approve of the young man, negotiations as to the amount to be paid as the marriage price ensue. The negotiations involve lengthy discussions and arguments, the suitor's side trying to beat down to as low an amount as possible and the girl's side taking the opposite posture. It is customary and considered to be of good omen not to come to an agreement quickly. Either of the parties would, therefore, raise new points for argument every now and then, such as whether the marriage price should be paid in full or in part, how much would be paid as the first instalment etc , thereby causing the intermediaries to visit the two families several times. After all the preliminaries are satisfactorily settled and the wedding day fixed, the marriage is celebrated with feasting, singing and drinking On the night of the wedding day, the bride, escorted by her friends, is taken to the bridegroom's house. On the way they are pelted by young folks with all sorts of dirt; but on arrival, she is received with an ovation by the crowd which pack the groom's house to capacity. Here the bride and the groom

are made to sit together to enjoy the jokes and entertainment provided by friends. The bride returns to her house after the welcome. She is taken again the following night to the groom's house and left there to live with him for good. The first visit to the groom's house is at present usually done at noon on the wedding day so that consummation of marriage may take place on the wedding night itself. The practice of throwing dirt at the bride and her party has practically disappeared.

It may be mentioned here that the marriage price given for the bride constitutes the security or reciprocal price rather than a sale price. The price consists of the principal price and the subsidiary prices. The whole price is not appropriated by the father of the girl. The subsidiary prices are distributed, according to customary practice among relatives and this consolidates the family ties and also makes the relatives concerned conscious of their obligation to help the girl whenever necessity arises.

The girl may or may not remain in her husband's house after his death. It is customary to remain there for at least three months, after which she is free to leave, after having performed a ceremony called the *thlahual*. So long as the widow lives in her husband's house, whether it is within the three month period or thereafter, she is regarded and treated as the wife and is, therefore, expected to remain faithful. If she has sexual intercourse with anyone during that period, she is considered as having committed adultery exactly in the same manner as if her husband were alive, and is liable to the full penalty imposed on an unfaithful wife.

Law of Inheritance

As the Mizos are patriarchal their law of inheritance is based on descent through the father's clan. According to the customary law the youngest son inherits the property and a legitimate son has priority over the son of a secondary wife or of a concubine who in his turn ranks above an illegitimate son. In the absence of a male issue, the nearest male relation of the deceased, such as his father or brother inherits but in no circumstances are females entitled to do so. In order to remove this disability the District Council enacted a law in 1956 permitting and recognizing the will

of a deceased person. The logic of the youngest son inheriting the father's property is that he is considered to be the fittest person to look after his parents in their old age when his elder brothers would be fully grown up and able to stand on their own legs. This custom does not apply to a chief (who is succeeded by the eldest son), the reason being that he is expected normally to be more mature and experienced than his younger brothers in matters concerning administration and also in his judgment.

In spite of the above-mentioned law, a man during his lifetime may dispose of his property. He may even disinherit his son on valid grounds, e.g. if the son unduly neglects to look after him or runs away from him

Economic Life

As in the case of the other hill-tribes of Assam, agriculture is the mainstay of the Mizos. They have practised from time immemorial the destructive system of shifting *jhum* cultivation by cutting down the forests on the hill-sides and burning them after drying them in the sun As their land is extensive and is covered almost completely by forests and the population sparse, the Mizos till recent times, were self-sufficient in rice except when there was a famine (called *tam*) As a result of the yearly destruction of the virgin forests for *jhuming* and the rapid increase of population and the fact that a comparatively smaller number of people take to rice-cultivation, the out-turn has decreased so much that they are no longer self-supporting in rice and have to import a large quantity from outside. It is, therefore, necessary to replace this primitive method of shifting cultivation and their primitive tools with more permanent and productive methods as early as possible before these lands become unfit for human habitation

So far as animal food is concerned, the Mizos' favourites are pigs, fowl and the cow. They eat with relish smoked elephant's meat. Although many of them eat dogs, they do not eat cats, snakes and bats which are consumed with relish by some other hill-tribes. White-bellied rats are a delicacy. Neither their customs nor religion prohibit the eating of any kind of animal, wild or domestic. Fish, which is scarce, is caught with nets and also by

poisoning.

The Mizos are expert in handicrafts although professional craftsmen are few. They manufacture for their personal use fine baskets, by plaiting finely split bamboo into various objects, each form being adapted to some particular use like carrying goods, keeping their valuables or storing grains. The women make different kinds of earthern pots, moulding them by hand, for cooking and also for brewing rice-beer. Ironwares are generally made by the village blacksmith who also makes tools for *jhum* cultivation, hunting and domestic purposes.

As regards drinks, their tastes are simple. With their meals they drink the water in which they boil the vegetables or meat. Intoxicating drinks are made from rice, and is called *zu*. Before the advent of Christianity *zu* played an important role in the Mizo's life, it being required for due observance of almost every ceremony and for entertainment of friends and visitors.

House

The Mizos are very particular about the location of their houses. They choose the hilltops for village sites after ensuring that a good supply of water would be available. Houses are built close to one another in an orderly manner, arranged in pairs of rows, the front of each pair facing each other. The two rows are separated by the village street. The steepness of the hillside is hardly a problem as they seldom level the building site. That is why the floor of one house is frequently higher than the roof of the house next below it

The houses are strongly built so as to withstand the seasonal cyclonic storms which could create havoc even to stone buildings of the plains. The framework is of rough-hewn timber uprights which give adequate support to the strongly woven bamboo walls and the roof which is thatched with *sunn* grass or strong leaves. The floor is made of split bamboo strongly woven, resting on timber uprights. Of late, it has become a fashion to have dressed timber floors. Almost every house has a kitchen garden.

A typical Mizo house is very simple in design, always rectangular in shape with the floor raised high enough as to allow the domestic animals to live under it. Every house has a verandah where fowl

in their bamboo coops, the stock of firewood, mortar and other implements are kept. There also would be seen the skulls of wild animals and other trophies of the hunt. The hearth is placed in the middle of the house. Between the hearth and the verandah is the children's bed and the parents' bed is placed on the other side of the hearth. There is no partition except for the verandah. Only those who have performed the *khuangchawi* ceremony, which is beyond the means of capacity of the common people, are entitled to have windows in their houses. Ill luck is supposed to befall transgressors of this rule. The fear of ill luck was, however, dispelled by Christianity and windows are now provided in almost every house.

The children's bed, the hearth and the parent's bed called *khumpui* (big bed) are placed in the same line occupying about half the breadth of the house. The other vacant half usually serves as a place for chit-chat. Over the hearth are placed two shelves one above the other. The lower one is used for drying paddy to be husked for daily use and the upper one for keeping smoked edible herbs, smoking tobacco, well wrapped up, and other things which have to be preserved or cured.

Division of Works

Although there is now no clear-cut division of work between men and women prescribed by customary law, the more strenuous tasks are done by the men. Clearing of the forests for *jhuming*, collection of heavy materials for construction of the house, building of the same and of the *jhum*-house, making of household furniture, tools and implements and also of the village water-holes are mens' tasks. Collection of wood, drawing of water, making of garments, from ginning to weaving and sewing together, pounding and shifting of rice and cooking are the functions of women. If a woman has, of necessity, to engage the services of the village blacksmith, the latter is bound by custom to give priority to her. Likewise, a man is entitled to priority in the village water-holes even during the period of water scarcity when it takes hours to fill a bucket. Most other tasks such as, sowing, weeding and harvesting in the *jhum* fields and also carrying the paddy to the house are done by men and women jointly.

MAUTAM

The term *Mautam* (*Mau* = bamboo, *Tam* = to die down) literally means the dying down of bamboos; but it is not so much the withering of the bamboos that affects the life of the people as the dire famine that invariably follows. The *Mautam* is said to visit Mizoland at regular intervals of 50 years. The last one occurred in the year 1959 and the preceding one in 1911 and the next previous one in 1862. The next *Mautam* is, therefore, anticipated about the year 2007.

In the year a *Mautam* occurs, two particular species of bamboo, namely the *Mautak* (*Melocanna Bambusides*) and the *Phuhua*. (*Bamboosa hamiltonil*) flower and then bear fruit and die down shortly afterwards simultaneously throughout the land This is invariably followed by a rapid increase of the rodent population which devours almost the entire rice crop of the year and thereby causes famine

When rats attack a rice-field during the *Mautam* they come in thousands and spread themselves to cover so wide an area that they eat up the entire paddy of a *jhum* overnight When a *Mautam* year approaches, the cultivators take every possible preventive measure in their own simple way by setting up traps around their *jhums* and keeping watch at night to frighten away or kill rats But these efforts are not sufficient for saving the crop. During such a famine the people have to depend for their sustenance and survival on wild roots, jungle fruit and anything that is edible. As a result of under-nourishment, various epidemics break out causing heavy loss of life. Although there are no authentic records of the *Mautam* famine of 1862, it is said that owing to the extremely backward, difficult and primitive state of life in those days, made more difficult by isolation, the famine that year was of a very severe nature. Even those who were lucky enough to survive are said to have become lean and thin beyond description.

The *Mautam* of 1959 was the first to occur after India had achieved independence. Since there was no doubt in the minds of the Mizos that the periodical *Mautam* would take place in 1959 with its attending famine, an anti-famine campaign was actively organised and launched from years before in the towns as well as in

the rural areas on a wide scale to prepare the people for the anticipated calamity by encouraging them to grow more grain, tapioca and other edible plants so that even in the case of the rice-crop failing they would not starve. The local leaders also sounded warnings to the Government so that it might not fail them when the famine actually came. The Government and the public leaders outside, however, did not take notice of the warnings, dismissing the whole matter as mere superstition. The year 1959 came, the bamboos started flowering and then bearing fruit The rat population increased rapidly everywhere and they began to play havoc on the rice crop, leaving no doubt that a famine was now staring the entire population hard in the face. The Government fortunately did not simply sit and watch. But for the all out effort made by it to save the situation a great tragedy would have been enacted involving heavy loss of life

Administration

The Mizo district is one of the autonomous districts in the State of Assam and is governed, in the main, under the provisions of the Sixth Schedule to the Constitution. There are thus two tiers of administration, viz., the District Council with powers to make laws in matters relating to tribal customs and practices, and the Government of Assam, which deals with the subjects which fall outside the purview of the District Council Each village is now administered by a Village Council elected on the basis of adult franchise. These Councils are responsible to the District Council which regulates by legislation their functions and powers.

Prior to the formation of the District Council on whose recommendation the institution of Chiefs was abolished by an Act of the State Government, known as the Lushai Hills (Acquisition of Chiefs Rights) Act of 1955, each village was practically a separate State ruled by a *Lal* or Chief. Although chieftainship was hereditary, the Government of Assam acting through the Deputy Commissioner had the power to dismiss a Chief and appoint a substitute. This power was, however, rarely exercised. The Chiefs were drawn principally from amongst the members of the Sailo family of the Lusei clan. If there were more than one

village under a Chief, the village wherein the Chief himself resided was called the *khawpui* or the principal village and the other villages were called *khawapers* or sub-villages. The sub-villages were generally placed by the Chief under the charge of his sons. Sometimes the Chief gave away a village to a son for ruling over it as an independent Chief without paying any tribute to him. This practice was responsible for the disintegration of the Chiefs' domains, the weakening of their authority and a lowering of their prestige.

In the administration of a village, the Chief was assisted by a council of village-elders, called *Upas*, who were appointed by him. This council discussed all matters affecting the village and also decided all disputes. In addition to the penalty imposed in a dispute, a customary fine of Rs. 5/- was payable by the losing party. The Chief presided over the meetings of the Council which were generally held in the Chief's house in the evenings with rice-beer or wine served to the Chief and the elders.

In addition to other privileges enjoyed, the *Upas* were entitled to priority in the choice of land for *jhum* cultivation and were also exempted from impressment for labour to which the Mizos were liable during the British regime.

Besides the *Upas*, the Chief generally appointed the following village officials:

(a) The *Tlangau* (the village crier) who announced the orders of the Chief in a loud voice in the morning or in the evening when everybody was indoors. He received as his remuneration a basket (*kho*) of paddy from each house every year.

(b) The *Thirdeng* (village blacksmith) whose duty was to make and repair tools, such as hoes, *daos*, axes, and sickles and he received three kerosene tinfuls of paddy from each household. Every household had to pay this fee whether the blacksmith was engaged or not.

(c) The *puithiam* (the village priest) also received a basketful of paddy from each household for whom he performed the sacrifices. The Chief had a separate personal priest known as *Sadawt*.

(d) After the annexation of the land by the British a *Khawch-*

hiar (village writer) was appointed to deal with Government papers on behalf of the Chief. He also maintained revenue records, vital statistics and records of other important matters.

(e) The *Ramhuals*, though not officials, were important people in a village who were allowed the first choice of *jhum* land for a year on payment of a comparatively larger quantity of paddy as tribute to the Chief than the quantity fixed by custom for the rest. In the past the Chiefs appointed *Zalens* who were also entitled to the choice of *jhum* land even in preference to the *Ramhuals*. The *Zalens* were usually near relatives of the Chief and they were not required to pay any paddy contribution to the Chief, but in times of need, the Chief had free access to their granaries. The *Ramhuals* and *Zalens* who did not discharge any particular duty to the village population were a source of annoyance to the commoners. They were very unpopular and became the target of public criticism when political consciousness was awakened among the Mizos.

The village Chief was by custom and tradition entitled to *buhchhun*, that is, a paddy contribution from each household of approximately one maund, free construction of his house which was generally much bigger than the house of the commoners and the right fore-leg of every wild animal shot by any of his villagers which was called *sachhiah*.

A Chief could turn out from his village anyone who incurred his displeasure or whomsoever he considered undesirable. A villager also had the right to migrate to another village if the Chief of the latter village agreed. A strong Chief who was sensible enough to govern his subjects in accordance with the customary laws could get away with almost anything without losing any of his villagers, but a weak Chief who tried petty tyranny on his subjects soon found himself a king without any subjects.

Uprising of 1966

The uprising which took place in March 1966 under the leadership of the Mizo National Front (MNF) was flashed in newspaper headlines throughout the world. The rebellion took the form of an open armed revolt against the Government.

Various causes have been ascribed to the Mizo uprising. The

main and immediate factor which brought about the rebellion was the absence of emotional integration of the Mizos with the rest of the country due to their having been kept separate from the main currents of Indian life and culture throughout the long period of British rule. Until the attainment of freedom by India, the Mizos, like the Nagas, were kept under the direct administrative responsibility of the Viceroy through the Governor of Assam. They were not represented on the State legislatures. A curtain, what was called "The Inner Line", had been drawn across the area, prohibiting entry, without permission, of any outsider into their midst. They were thus kept long confined within their own narrow shell, ruled and administered by British officers and Christian missionaries. Because of this isolation they naturally became suspicious of and sensitive to outside influences when India became free. Although the Mizos generally acknowledge that their land was a part and parcel of India and co-operated with the Government to the extent of sending elected representatives to the State legislature, they hardly ever had the feeling that they were Indians. These factors contributed a great deal in influencing the emotions of the younger generation when the leaders of the M.N.F. freely preached that the Mizos should secede from India because they were not Indians and that they had no affinity with Indians culturally, ethnically or linguistically.

Besides, the Mizos felt they were being neglected in matters relating to the development of their land economically and were deliberately being kept backward in comparison with the rest of the country They also entertained the apprehension that their culture, their language and their customs were gradually being wiped out and that the more advanced neighbouring communities would ultimately swamp them and make them lose their distinctive characteristics and separate identity. These fears were based on suspicions rather than facts as would be evident from the fact that sufficient safeguards were provided in the Constitution in these matters. Be that as it may, the Mizo uprising is a pointer to the fact that the backward, sensitive tribes, which form a substantial part of the Indian population, need careful and imaginative handling.

CHAPTER VIII

THE LESSER KNOWN TRIBES OF SOUTH LUSHAI HILLS

1. THE LAKHERS

THE MARAS or the Lakhers, as the Lushais call them, inhabit the southern tip of the Lungleh Subdivision of the Lushai Hills, now known as the Mizo district. Most of the Lakher villages are enclosed by the bend of the Kolodyne river which debouches from the hills near Haka in Chin Hills and flowing in a southerly direction, passes through the southern tip of the Lungleh Subdivision and flows down to the Bay of Bengal near Akyab. The Lakhers are interspersed both in the Lungleh Subdivision as well as in the Haka Subdivision of Burma.

"The Lakhers," says Dr. Hutton, "must be classed, at any rate in so far as their language and material culture are concerned, with the Kuki tribes who migrated in historic times down the valley of the Chindwin from its sources to the Bay of Bengal, continuously throwing off branches of their race westward into the hills, while the vanguard, having turned north again up the same range, are still involved in a slow drift back like their own fabled river, which runs down to a rock in the ocean and thence flows upwards to its source. The Lakhers include in their composition, more than their immediate neighbours, of the races that preceded them, of which the Indonesian race, everywhere submerged by the Mongolian flood, appears to have been one, while Bodo, Mon-Khmer and Melanesian elements seem to be definitely traceable." He goes on to say, "There is much, however, to suggest that underneath his externally Kuki culture, the Lakher is something of a Naga at heart. His attachment to his village site and to the graves of his ancestors is essentially Naga, as distinct from the migratory habits of Kuki tribes. His want of discipline, as contrasted with the Lushai, is again Naga, as contrasted with

Kuki, ... Place-names, as by the Naga generally (the Sema largely excepted), are taken by the Lakher from natural features, instead of from the traditional sites of former villages. The *Bongchhi*, the sacred ficus, is obviously closely associated with the external souls of the village and affords a close parallel to the Lotha *mingethung* ... The absence of any institution corresponding to the Lushei *tuai*-men who wear women's clothes and follow women's pursuits—also suggests that the Malay element present in the Lushai may be weaker in the Lakher, while the use of conch-shell ornaments with patterns of circles and dots in black is clearly a link with the Angami and with other Nagas, Konyak in particular. One may note in passing that just such conch-shell ornaments identical with Naga types have been found in early Iron Age graves in Arcot in South India, and have also been excavated at Mohenjo Daro, where pottery imitations of conch-shell ornaments have also been found, suggesting the baked-clay ornaments imitating conch-shell which the Nagas of Laruri make, or used to make, for their dead."

Hutton, however, mentions certain features of Lakher culture which are neither Kuki nor Naga but are in contrast to both. First of all, the Lakher practice of reaping paddy by pulling up rice by the roots is peculiar. The Lakhers also exclude women from taking part in sacrifices on account of the possibility of their menstrual uncleanliness.

For many years the Lakhers were thorns on the side of the British authorities in Chittagong Hill Tracts and Arakan and were considered to be a powerful and warlike nation. At that time they were called Shendus which covered the Lakhers both on the Lushai and Burma sides. Mackenzie in his *History of the Relations of Government with the Hill Tribes of the North-East Frontier of Bengal* (1884) writes: "The Shendus are a formidable nation living to the north-east and east of the Blue Mountain. All the country south of the Karnafuli has for many years been exposed to their ravages. Of their position and internal relations we know much less than we do of the Lushais. The whole aim of our frontier policy has of late years been the protection of the other tribes already maimed from the raids of the Chittagong Lush-

ais and Shendus. The whole history of this frontier is, indeed, the story of their outrages and of the efforts to prevent, repel or avenge these."

The Lakhers at that time were the redoubtable harriers of the countryside in the area adjacent to the Chittagong Hill Tracts. From 1847 onwards, Lakher raids on the Chittagong Hill Tracts were more or less a constant occurrence. In about 1866, Lewin, who laid the foundation of British rule in the Lushai Hills, established intimate relations with the hill-tribes in that area and particularly with the Lakhers. In 1888 a raiding party of Lakhers under Hausata murdered Lt. John Stewart who was engaged in survey work with a small escort of some Gurkhas. The atrocity was perhaps wrongly attributed to the Lakhers; nevertheless, this was the immediate cause of the Chin-Lushai Expedition of 1888-89 which resulted in the occupation of the Chin and the Lushai Hills including the land of the Lakhers. It was as a result of this expedition that some of the Lakher villages were first brought under British rule. In 1891 Capt. Shakespear further extended British rule and included Saiko (Serkawr), Siaha (Saiha) and other villages within the South Lushai Hills. A tract of country between the Lushai Hills and the Chin Hills containing a few villages still remained unadministered. In 1917-18 there was a Haka rebellion which was the result of the uncertainties created by the first world war. It was only in 1924 that the boundaries between the Chin Hills and the Lushai Hills were clearly demarcated and the Lakhers living within South Lushai Hills came fully under British rule.

The benefits obtained by the Lakhers from British rule were: (1) they could sleep at night without sentries, (2) they could travel wherever they liked without obstruction and without fear of an ambush; and (3) they could have beer-parties without posting sentries and without the fear of raids at the back of their minds. There was manumission of the *bawis*, the slaves who were living with the Chiefs. The Lakhers now could also earn some cash by selling their surplus rice to the guards posted at Tuipang. As Parry has pointed out, British rule inevitably led to the diminution of the importance of the Chiefs and to the desire on the part of

the common people to acquire wealth. As it may easily be discerned, the Lakhers, like many other tribal peoples of Assam, were not brought under British rule in their own interest but for the purpose of ensuring peace of the settled plains areas adjoining these primitive tribes.

The British left the tribal administration prevailing amongst these people more or less intact. Nevertheless, acculturation and diffusion of cultures could not be avoided. There is no doubt that the administrators, like Lewin, were inspired by high principles and one is tempted to quote what Lewin had written in the 60's of the last century—"With education open to them and yet moving under their own laws and customs, they will turn out, not debased and miniature epitomes of Englishmen, but a new and noble type of God's creatures."

Two specimens of songs usually sung at beer-parties are quoted below. Both young men and girls sing such songs as they go to the fields and also when they work in their *jhums*. These specimens indicate the early attitude of the Lakhers immediately after they had been brought within the ambit of the British Empire.

"Government has now hemmed us in, on the north,
on the south, on the east, on the west. Henceforth
none of our young warriors will drink of the waters
of the Salu river, where we always used to raid "

"We have to pay two rupees house-tax, and, not content
with that, they now tell us to send fowl for sale
Would that we were not part of the Lushai Hills."

In physical characteristics, the Lakher men are well-built and have good physique. The women are taller than the Lushai and Kuki women and rather slender. They have a light brown complexion and are darker than the Lushais. They have a broad nose, high cheek-bones and mongoloid eyes. Like several other hill-tribes, they age prematurely and women, particularly after marriage, become rather sloppy in their looks.

Unlike many other hill-tribes of Assam, men always wear *puggrees*. The Lakhers are very proud of their hair and most of

them tie it up in a knot on the top of the head. A boy's hair is normally cut at the age of nine and afterwards it is not allowed to be cut at all. The *puggrees* are wrapped on the head more or less in the Sikh style and usually a hairpin is run through the hair-knot. Women wear far more clothes than men. They cover their lower limbs with a dark blue petticoat, the lower part of which is embroidered with silk. On top of this, they wear a skirt which is shorter than the petticoat and displays the embroidered end of the petticoat. Women are fond of using *cowries* as well as conch-shell ornaments. They also wear metal belts around the waist and over the buttocks. The quality of the belts indicates the wealth of the wearer. They also wear a sleeveless jacket and a silk top garment to cover the body. In fine, Lakher women are very fond of garments and use various kinds of beads to embellish their figure. Many, if not most, of the habits are, however, disappearing under the impact of Western influence.

The unit of administration in Lakher society was the village. The village community consisted of the Chief, the patricians and the commoners, the village elders and the village officials. In matters of marriage, birth, death, and certain sacrifices of private nature, clan relationship took a predominant place. In Lakher society chieftain families and patricians had certain privileges which were not enjoyed by the common run of people.

The elders, or the *Machas*, were selected by the Chief to administer his village. Normally, they belonged to the clans of the nobles, but plebeians of outstanding ability were also often chosen as elders. The elders received a share of any animal killed (known as *sachhuah* in Lushai) and a share of money paid by a loser in a case. They were also exempted from doing certain duties which the common run of people in the village were obliged to do

The Chief had full control over his village and any disobedience was punished by expulsion from the village. The villagers were obliged to perform certain duties for the Chief personally and the entire village generally. In Lakher society, the unit of the village was the household and not the individual. The normal obligation to the Chief were the repair of his house, carrying his load while going on a journey, and a share of the crop harvested by each

family. He was also entitled to get meat-dues and other dues which were enjoined by custom.

The Chief dispensed justice with the help of his court of elders. His decision was final. There were very few cases where the decision of the Chief and his elders was not obeyed implicitly.

The Lakhers used to, and do now, live mainly by agriculture. The only implements they use for the purpose are a dao and an axe. All crops are grown in *jhum*. Their agricultural year previously used to begin in December when the Chief and the elders decided which particular sites would be selected for the purpose of *jhum*. Thereafter, the lots were divided amongst the people who cultivated the plots according to the distribution made by the Chief. The main crops are rice, millet, maize, tobacco, ginger, beans and arum (*kochu*) The Lakher method of harvesting paddy is rather peculiar. The paddy is pulled up by the roots and not cut by a sickle and the plants are tied up in bundles and left for a few days to dry Thereafter, the usual process of beating follows The paddy is stored in a granary and remains there to be collected according to need from time to time.

The Lakhers used to get their fish from the Kolodyne river and rivulets flowing into the Kolodyne They trapped animals for meat Being quite a self-sufficient community, they devote a lot of time to making baskets with bamboo-cane and in this art they have acquired considerable proficiency Surprisingly enough, wickerwork was taken up by men rather than women. On the other hand, weaving and dyeing are done entirely by women. They consume a lot of tobacco, practically all Lakhers, both men and women, being heavy smokers.

Lakher women enjoy absolute freedom and have equality of status with men It is indeed a tribute to Lakher society that prostitution has never existed amongst them. There were occasional aberrations but the Lakher, in his own subtle way, had an answer to this problem. Unlike the Lushais, the Lakher did not have any *zawlbuk*, or the bachelors' house, where the young men of marriageable age used to sleep. A teenager did not sleep in his parents' house but in the house of the girl whom he happened to be courting at the moment, pre-marital relationship between young boys

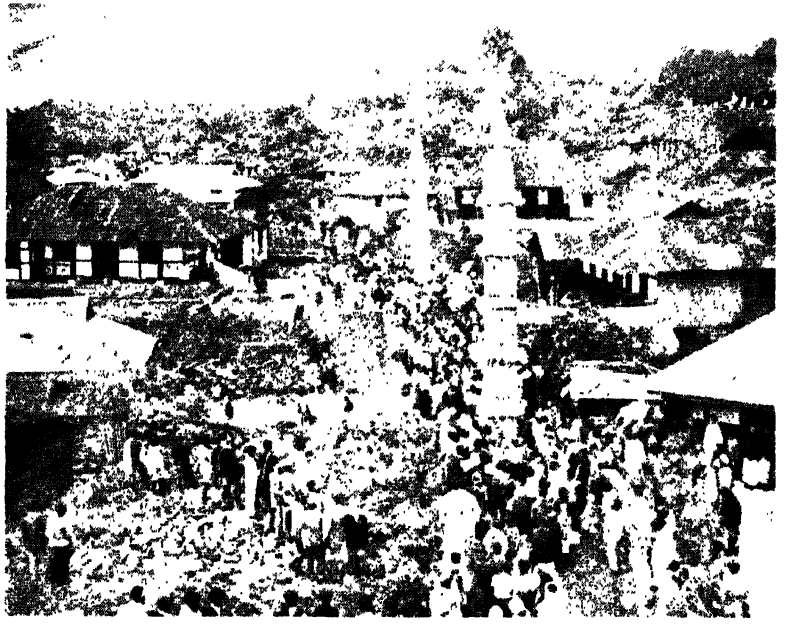

Plate 6—"Beh-Dieu-khlam" Festival (gowai), Jaintia

Plate 7—Maidens of Hill Tribes (Mikirs)

Plate 8—Dimasa Kachari

Plate 9—Zemi Nagas

Plate 10—An Old Mizo Woman

and girls not being discouraged.

The following Lakher song expresses the attitude of a Lakher teenager to his exploits :

"On each side of me you two lovely sisters are sitting.
I love you both, but if I tell you not to get married, but to wait for me,
I shall be laughed at."

Marriage price amongst the Lakhers is quite high and this works as a deterrent to easy divorce and fortifies the position of the wife. Marriages used to be arranged by choice or by arrangement between two families. Bride-price was shared by a long line of relations and even aunts. Sharing of bride-price is so complicated that litigations regarding such claims continue more or less endlessly and are never finally settled. Adultery is rare and so are bastards.

Inheritance amongst the Lakhers is patrilineal. The eldest son takes all the property and also takes the responsibility for his father's debts and death ceremony. Women cannot inherit, and if a man dies without a son, his brother inherits his property Remarriage of widows is quite common if the woman is young. After remarriage, a widow lives with the husband but the children have a choice to live either with her or with their paternal uncle.

Amongst the Lakhers there was a custom of child-marriage which was entirely unknown amongst the Lushais There were cases where the parents of two children married them at an early age before they attained puberty. There were also cases where a young man of marriageable age married a girl child, or a girl who had attained puberty married a boy much younger than herself and who had not attained puberty. There had been cases where a child, after attainment of puberty, had taken dislike to his or her spouse and in such cases separation was allowed on return of the bride-price.

Although after the establishment of the Lakher Mission at Serkawr, many Lakhers were converted to Christianity, the impact of the new religion on the Lakher society is not great. Even as far back as 1947, most of the Lakhers followed their old religion. They recognised *Khazangpa* as the creator of the world and pro-

tector and preserver of the Lakhers. They also believed in the spirits of the mountains and the hills and the woods. The method of propitiation of *Khazangpa* and these spirits was through sacrifices. The most important sacrifice was the propitiation of *Khazangpa* who, according to them, possessed human attributes inasmuch as he had a wife, a child and partook of food and beer like human beings. The belief was that *Khazangpa* dealt with an individual according to the work he had done and the manner in which he had behaved with his other fellow beings. The Lakhers also believe in a soul who, according to them, is invisible but resembled his body and size. Illness and bad luck are explained as wrought by *Khazangpa* or the spirits, and sacrifices are prescribed as remedies. Religious and social behaviour is modelled by *ana*, i.e., 'what is forbidden'. This was the key-word in the life and behaviour of the Lakhers and as Parry has mentioned, "The *anas* are really the Lakher equivalent to the Ten Commandments, and though to the Western minds many of the prohibitions may appear absurd, some of them are of undoubted social value, and are no more illogical than most of our superstitions Thus it is *ana* to shift the boundary of another man's field, it is *ana* to throw weeds into another's field, it is *ana* to steel eggs, it is *ana* for a woman to give birth to a child in another person's house, and all these prohibitions and many others are sound, as they prevent people from causing inconvenience to others." There is a belief in the existence of a paradise, but according to them, a soul has to stay in a no-man's land called *Athiki* for a long time before he goes to paradise. There is also a belief in another land and they call it *sawvawkhi*. There is a strong belief amongst the Lakhers that the spirits of children are reborn to the same parents.

The Lakhers had thus a rational system of religious and social organisation to suit their needs. After 1947, there were tremendous changes in the political set-up in the Lakher region. Along with the establishment of the District Council for the Lushai Hills, there was a demand for a Regional Council for the Pawi-Lakher Region. The Region is now administered by the Regional Council on similar lines as the District Council. At present the Lakher Region sends four members to the Regional Council and one

member to the District Council. Chieftainship has been abolished and education on modern lines is being imparted in the schools. Gradually the Lakhers are coming into the stream of Indian nationhood and with their cultural background of hardship and community life, they are likely to play a significant role in Indian polity.

2. THE PAWIS

The Lushai Hills District in Assam covers an area of about 8,000 sq. miles. It is the home of several peoples with distinctive cultural heritage, most of them being Mongoloid and speak languages that belong to the Tibeto-Burman family.

The Pawis occupy an area of about one thousand square miles within the South Lushai Hills Sub-division of the Lushai Hills district. The mighty Kolodyne river flowing from the east to west separates the Pawis from the Lushais There are the Chin Hills to the south and east, and the Lakher-land to the west. Although most of the Pawi villages are within this area, there are villages predominantly inhabited by Pawis under Lushai or Fanai chiefs outside this area. The present population of Pawis is about 15,000.

Although the Lushais and the Pawis are neighbours, they speak two different tongues. Lushai, however, is widely known and serves as the *lingua franca*. The womenfolk, with their innate conservatism, call it *mipatawng* or language of the menfolk.

The Pawis and the Chins are the same people, and in the stream of migrations that flowed through Burma the Pawis got deflected towards the Lushai Hills. The legends and folklore indicate that in the past the relationship between the Pawis and the Lushais was far from being cordial The Lushai used to call the Pawi country *ral ram* or enemy country and the folklore speaks of Lushai damsels being carried off by the Pawis. The Fanais, who live between the Pawi and the Lushai country earned their reputation as diplomats as they were often asked to negotiate settlements between the Pawis and the Lushais.

On the other hand, the Pawis and the Lakhers got on very well together and intermarriage, though not common, has been quite

frequent. This was mainly because the Pawis and Lakhers used to join hands in their expeditions in the South Lushai Hills. In fact, indications are not wanting to show that the Pawis and the Lakhers came from the same stem, although they broke off and formed themselves into distinct tribes. There are tribes which are half-way between the Pawis and Lakhers, some more Pawi, others more Lakher.

The first Lushai expedition was launched in 1869 and in 1871 the Lushai country was penetrated from Cachar and Chittagong. These expeditions did not touch the country beyond the Kolodyne. The Shendus continued their raids, particularly in the Chittagong Hill Tracts, in the countryside near Demagiri Matters came to a head in 1888 when Lieut John Stewart, who was engaged in survey, was killed by Hausata who was a Chin This led to the Chin-Lushai expedition of 1888-89, as a result of which the Chin and the Lushai Hills came gradually under the sway of the British By 1890 Capt Shakespear, who is mainly responsible for furnishing accurate information about these peoples, had established himself at Lungleh in the South Lushai Hills

In 1891, the Pawi Chief, Zakhapa, made an attempt on the life of Mr Murray, the Political Officer at Lungleh, and a punitive expedition was sent to deal with him. Gradually, the Pawi and the Lakher country came within the orbit of British administration. To deal with the Pawis, the British established military outposts at Lungleh, the sub-divisional headquarters, Darzo and later at Tuipang

Thereafter, acculturation proceeded and the main instruments in this process were the Lushai interpreters who brought in the Lushai language and even contributed to the adaptation of some of the Pawi customs on Lushai lines. Nevertheless, the Pawis continued to have social relationship with the Chins of Burma. For the purpose of smoothing out occasional maladjustments, annual joint border meetings of the district officers of the two contiguous districts in Burma and India used to be held.

The pivot of their social organisation is the village. The chief with the elders has been maintaining law and order and dispensing justice according to custom. The principal occupation is agri-

culture by shifting cultivation. As they prefer maize and millet, the Pawis do not grow much rice. For their wearing apparel, they still depend on their own type of handloom. On festive occasions they wear silk, which is hand-woven from the yarn obtained from Burma. The loin cloth and wrapper are still commonly used by men, and they still wear long hair in a bun above the forehead. The Lushais call the Chins *Pawis* for this particular hair style. It is interesting to note that the Lushais call the Sikhs, with their long hair, *Vai-Pawis* or foreign Pawis.

The dress of the womenfolk is beautiful. Normally a woman wears two pieces of cloth, one around her like a skirt, and the other on the top of it, which comes down up to the knees. Often they wear a *choli* type of blouse and in addition a *chaddar* which gets more elaborate and expensive according to social status. The womenfolk still wear a lot of bead-ornaments around their neck, arms, ears and ankles. A Pawi woman still wears a metal girdle on her hips, which produces a sound when the wearer walks. The length of hair-pins often indicates the social status of a woman, and coiffure is more elaborate than that of the Lushais. They are still picturesque and, living as they still do in their mountain fastnesses, they have avoided the Procrustean influence of the West. In short, they are not as sophisticated as their neighbours in the North.

Amongst the Pawis the eldest son inherits the paternal property, and this rule is applicable in the case of succession to chieftainship as well. Pawi young men were not subjected to the discipline of the young man's house, which was the rule amongst the Lushais. The standard of 'Good Form' imposed by the Lushai code of chivalry has been absent amongst the Pawis. The hold of the Chief has been rather weak. The people had a tendency to be litigious and rake up old feuds.

The Pawis trace their origin to a mythical tiger. The dance associated with the head of a tiger is really picturesque and a lot of religious significance is attached to it. The Pawis are great dancers and unlike the Lushais both men and women take part in some dances, the most notable being *khelkhawn*.

When they took over the administration of that country, the

British brought peace to the area. Apart from interference dictated by administrative exigency, the Chief and his elders were left to themselves to govern the village according to custom and tradition. Education in the meantime had spread rather slowly amongst the Pawis: but there was a popular demand for association in the administration of the village. This has found fitting recognition in the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution The Regional Council, a self-governing organisation which gives them a considerable amount of autonomy in the sphere of village administration in all its aspects, was inaugurated in 1953. This Council is composed of twelve members from amongst the Pawis, Lakhers, and a few other tribes, and comprises of the areas inhabited by them in the South Lushai Hills There are now five Pawi members on that body.

Skirting round the Blue Mountain, with an elevation of about 7,000 ft., which is the highest in the District, Pawi-land is salubrious in winter and inaccessible in the rains. The Blue Mountain still nurtures wild goats and has the loveliest collection of wild orchids. Pawi-land is indeed a fine country for a fine people.

CHAPTER IX

FOLK-LORE

1. GARO

Raja Abong Noga and his Queen

RAJA Abong Noga was once the king of all the interior hills in Achikland now inhabited by the Abengs, Matchis, Kotchus, Awes, Duals, Chisaks, Atongs, Megams and Gara Ganchings He was also known as Nokma Abong Chirepa. His wife was of Chambugong clan.

There came a time when the fair verdant land of Achik Asong was smitten with a grievous drought and famine and Simsang river shrank to a mere trickle at Mrig Wari; the Ahnang Wari of the Ildek River became only knee-deep; and the plains and hills of Achik Asong became arid deserts incapable of supporting life. The drought lasted for seven long years.

Raja Abong Noga enforced assigned labour on his subjects when they were all hard up for food and drink. He built a huge long machan house on a ridge of the Mongre Hill, overlooking the Mrig Wari, a deep pool in the Simsang River.

Thus, the people of village Rongbinggiri were alloted the task of fishing out "era" fish from the clear stony pools; the people of Rewak and Siju were told to catch crap and murrel fish for his kitchen: the people of Emangiri, to hew wooden troughs for his cattle to drink from; the people of Rongmagre and Dapsigre to make earthen pots and dishes out of the good clay found locally. The earthenware was tested by tapping the finished product along the side with the finger tips

Other villages were also ordered to perform specific tasks. the Chisaks, to raise millet and do dairy work; the people of Badri.

**Tribal Folk-tales of Assam (Hills)*, compiled by S Barkataki and published by Assam Publication Board, contains one hundred twenty five such tales

to catch crabs and store crab-eggs in huge earthen containers; the people of Simsanggre, to feed his swine; the people of Matchi, to cultivate maize, Job's tears and rear parrots for him; the Abengs, to grow and pick cotton for him; the people of Daranggre, to collect the fruit of the sokmil cane; the Gara Ganchings, to carve pig-troughs and stools; the Kotchus, to smoke fish over fire to dry; the Ahwes, to collect edible bamboo shoots; and the people of Rongrong Dangkhong, to feed his cattle at Sambol Ahding, that is, the Hillock of Sambol, and so on.

At the end of the terrible drought, the subjects of Raja Abong Noga revolted against him; for they could no longer remain in the galling subjection in which they were placed in the fair land of Achik Aseng. They first killed his second eldest daughter, Mene, by heaping baskets of paddy grains on her and thus suffocating her secretly. His third daughter, Meje, was killed by heaping up cotton-wool on her and thus burying her alive underneath a huge pile of cotton-wool. They made a raft of wild plantain-trees and on it sent his fourth daughter, Chini, adrift on the Simsang river They attacked his guard and tried to capture the king and his queen themselves. But Raja Abong Noga and his Queen, Silme Dokka, escaped, fled to the top of Nokrek Hill in the Durga range and settled there for the remainder of their days.

Now this Queen knew little about manual work She did not even know how to cook rice and curry. As for raising rice, corn, millet and other grains and cereals, it was completely beyond her ken She had a few servants; but these had accompanied the fugitive Queen more out of curiosity than loyalty. They wanted to enjoy themselves at her bewilderment in domestic affairs. So they adroitly teased her in every way, and would do nothing to alleviate her sufferings.

One day, the wretched Queen, out of sheer necessity, begged the servants to instruct her in the art of sowing paddy, millet and corn. They told her that she must partially boil the grains so as to aid them in speedy germination and place them precisely in the earth by means of a wooden dibble. The Queen gullibly followed their advice to the very letter and she was completely puzzled when she discovered later that her carefully sown seeds did not germinate.

Left thus unsuccoured, the Queen, Silme Dokka, one day asked the servants how to split firewood; her servants answered:

"We are accustomed to split it over our knees"

The Queen naively followed this treacherous advice and died from the deep wounds she received on her knees while performing the task.

Raja Abong Noga's third daughter, Meje Rani, had an infant girl. This baby was in the arms of one of Meje Rani's women servants at the moment when Meje Rani was murdered by her subjects in the way narrated above. The murderers wanted to kill Meje Rani's daughter; but the kind-hearted woman servant named Nogang said to them, "No, no, this is my own daughter, not Meje Rani's. You cannot kill her." The woman servant thus told lies to the murderous subjects as she passionately desired to preserve the precious royal seed. The woman servant carefully nursed and brought up the royal baby, who, in the course of time, grew into a beautiful girl. This daughter of Meje Rani was called Keme. Keme was ultimately married to Ushung Raja, who was one of the sons of Gobela Magenpa. Gobela Magenpa, who belonged to Nongbreh clan, was a strong independent Achik Chieftain at Binderguru. Nogang clarified the true history of Keme before Gobela Magenpa and his son Ushung.

It was Ushung who originally founded the akhingland (hereditarily-held land) of Chuchong, the present Shusung in the District of Mymensingh in East Bengal. Shusung was also called Durgapur after the name of Durga Chambugong, the eldest son of Ushung. Ushung belonged to Sinthang Manda clan. In the course of time, (*i.e.* in 1280 A.D.) a religious mendicant, named Somesware Pathak or Somesware Thakur, dispossessed Boisa Raja, one of the reigning grandsons at Chuchong, through foul play and usurped possession of the akhingland of Chuchong.

2. KHASI

U Manik Raitong

U Manik was the lone survivor of the clan which had died out; hence the people nick-named him "U Raitong" (an orphan). U

Raitong was full of sorrow and tears came easily to him. He derived some consolation from his flute on which he used to play the whole night through. At day time, he would go out and work, wearing worn-out clothes and covering himself with ashes At night, he would bathe himself, don his best dress and play on his flute In course of time, U Raitong acquired appreciable proficiency in playing doleful tunes on his flute. One night, the wife of the king heard U Raitong playing on his flute and she was enamoured of the performance The king was at that time away from home The queen became restless, left her home and proceeded towards the source of that heart-rending music She was astonished to find that so beautiful a performance sprang, as it were, from the home of U Raitong. There was a slit on the wall, and through this the queen saw U Raitong. He looked handsome in his fine dress, while the sweetness of his music seemed to invest him with irresistible charm She fell in love with him She asked him to open the door but he paid no heed. He kept on playing, marking the rhythm with the movement of his head The queen forced herself in through the door and his music stopped dead The queen then made love to him "No, you should not speak like that You the worthy consort of the king, the master." But the queen was determined on her course of action. U Raitong finally succumbed In course of time she gave birth to a male child

Time passed on and the baby became a child eight or nine months old. The work of the king having been finished he returned home and was surprised to find his wife with her new-born babe He made an enquiry into this new and fantastic development but nothing came out of it. Thereupon, he summoned a general assembly in which all male members of his kingdom were to present themselves. He also issued a writ that each of the male members must bring along with him a piece of banana. The king was confident that this would unravel the mystery By offering the banana to the baby, the identity of his father would be detected at once Many came, and each one of them tried. None succeeded in evoking any response from the baby The king then enquired whether there was any other male left out. "Yes, U Raitong. But that poor fellow need not be embarassed." "No, let him come, after all he is a male," he rep-

lied. So they went and brought him to the assembly U Raitong was spared the banana-trial, for at his sight the baby gave a smile of recognition

The assembly was therefore unanimous in its verdict

U Raitong had committed adultery with the wife of the king. The king passed sentence that U Raitong must be punished with death by beating. U Raitong, however, prayed that he be granted one last wish, and that was "a funeral pyre wherein I would immolate myself." His wish was granted After the pyre was built, U Raitong was asked to do his part He, after a good bath, put on his best dress and walked backward to the pyre (his face away from it), all the time playing on his flute. The people were taken aback by the sight of U Raitong who never appeared that way before but the greatest surprise came when the queen too, dressed in her best apparel, followed him to the pyre On reaching the pyre, U Raitong walked around it thrice, planted his flute on the ground bottom up and plunged unto his death The queen followed suit The pyre became a pond from which grew the bamboos with their joints inverted. These still exist today

3. JAINTIA

Kariat Iam Sier

(The precipice where one wailed over a deer shot dead)

Once there lived a man at Latuber, a village twelve miles to the east of Jowai His name was U Shitang and he was very strong and muscular His profession was blacksmithy. He was so sturdy and athletic that he challenged every strong man to a duel. Once he challenged the authority exercised by U Borkosain, a vizier in the court of the King of Jaintia who was incharge of trade and commerce, on the question of establishing a market-place in the village of Borkhat. The King himself had to intervene and put U Shitang straight.

Shitang was surnamed "U Kup Dhup" because of a ponderous rug (dhup) which he used to wrap (kup) himself in, day in and day out During both summer and winter he used to carry it over him-

self and warmed himself with it at night when going to bed; he required neither a bedsheet nor a quilt. His rug was about a maund in weight and it served him as a money-bag too. He kept all his money inside it and whenever he was required to pay for anything, he would scratch out a hole in some part of it and then draw his money out of the hole. Persons who did not know him well used to take him for a fool

U Shitang was very diligent and hard-working He could manufacture adequate quantities of tools and implements for meeting all the demands of the surrounding regions

U Shitang had two younger sisters for whom he had great love and affection. Their parents died when they were still in their teens. Thus U Shitang had to take great responsibilities for the welfare and livelihood of his sisters But U Shitang had a good sense of responsibility and by dint of his labour he could ensure a happy and prosperous life for his sisters When he became grown up and his wealth too increased out of bounds, the people of his locality began to respect him and they regarded him as their leader and spokesman in all important social and political affairs No two opinions would ever arise when he spoke. He thus became a very influential personality.

Once he arranged a party to go on a hunting expedition in the thick forests nearby and this expedition was to be entirely at his own expense He invited all the strong and athletic persons to the expedition. They were in the woods for many days but none of the quardrupeds worth shooting came out Finally they saw a gigantic deer whose horns had branched out several times. When the deer became aware of the presence of the hunters, she tried to dodge them, but the hunters closely followed her On reaching a precipice she found that she could neither proceed nor turn back. With the precipice in the front and the hunters on her rear and the sides the deer found herself at bay. Finding no other alternative she was determined to break through one side. She did it and found herself at the mercy of U Shitang who hurled his spear which pierced her heart and the deer fell dead on the spot. Now U Shitang had always had a desire to test the love of his two sisters for him; and he wanted to know which of them loved him the best. He thought it was quite

opportune then to apply the test. Accordingly he sent messengers to tell them that their brother, having erroneously shot at a breeding bull had been arrested and was put in fetters. He also told the messengers to ask for money from his sisters which was immediately required for his release.

The messengers went first to the house of the younger sister and said, "Hallo, Kongdiah (The Jaintia affectionate form of address for a younger sister)—Your brother, U Shitang has been arrested and bound because he has shot a farmer's bull through mistake. If you cannot go and make atonement for him, then he will be taken into custody."

"Fie!" exclaimed Ka Kongdiah. "I don't care a straw even if they would pronounce a life sentence on him. You go to Ka Kongmai (an affectionate way of calling an elder sister) and ask her. I cannot spare a single pie for his life."

So saying she went inside and the messenger left for Ka Kongmai's. On meeting Ka Kongmai they told her the same things as they had to Ka Kongdiah. On hearing the news she fell flat on the ground and begen to cry. She collected whatever money she had and proceeded in tears with the messengers to the place of occurrence.

When she saw a collection of people with her brother in their midst, waiting at the feet of the precipice, she screamed, "My beloved brother, the sustainer and the comforter of my life, what a shameful misfortune besets you! Oh my masters! Set him free and let me die in his behalf. Take me and these silver coins for my brother's release."

Well a day! On reaching the crowd she saw the dead body of a deer lying outside. She was very much surprised to have confused it for her brother. She stopped crying and U Shitang asked that the deer be carried to the house of his elder sister (Kongmai's) where a bonfire and merry-making were to be held. When she learned of the feasting and merry-making his younger sister (Kongdiah), became furious because such things, as a rule, ought to have been held at the younger sister's residence. Since then the precipice at the feet of which the dead body of the deer lay and U Shitang and his friends were waiting for his sister, is known

as "Kariat Iam Sier." (the precipice where one wailed over a deer).

Ka Du, Ka Tang, Bad Ka Rem

(The short forms of the rivers Myntdu, Myntang and Umiurem)

One day three lady strangers came to Mulang, a village about seven miles away from Jowai. They called at the hut of a poor widow. They looked graceful and adorable and the angelic smiles radiating from their lovely faces transformed the widow's hut into a palatial mansion One of them who was affectionately called 'Du' hailed the widow and said, "Hallo, Ma'am Won't you welcome us in? We want to stay and dine with you tonight." The poor woman bowed her head towards them and stammered, "My young princesses, how would people like you stay in my dirty hut which is no better than a stable or a cowshed. Come in and see for yourselves. It's so filthy It would soil your clothes "

"Well," said Tang (one of the Ladies), "We mind nothing if you only extend to us your hospitality and welcome us to stay with you "

On such persuasion, the old woman could not but warmly welcome the three charming ladies as her guests. Many days passed by and the ladies kept on staying with the woman After two or three months had passed, the woman did not feel herself a stranger to them any longer Instead she entreated them to remain with her for all time and then subsequently adopted them as her children. She loved them best and liked their winning manners very much. Ever since they came to her hut, she was never allowed to work and labour for her livelihood They too loved her most affectionately and wanted that everybody should think she was their mother. Everyone who met them was mystified by their charming personality and many a son of rich merchants and of aristocratic nobility wanted to marry them. But alas! not a single suitor found any favour with them

At last they decided to disclose to the woman the errand on which they had set out. One night they sat around the old woman and Rem (the third lady who was known by that pet-name) said,

"Well, mother, we want you to know that we are the three sister goddesses. We are the children of God. Our father is called 'The Thunder' and our mother is known as 'Lightning'. We have been sent here on a specific mission, namely, to live among mankind in this fine and wholesome part of your earth and to bring gifts to you. We would do much to serve you and your people. Our services will be everlasting and concerned with the happiness and prosperity of mankind in this land."

So saying the three divine beings vanished and in their place three wonderful springs sprouted out; which turned into three big rivers, the Myntdu, the Myntang and the Umiurem. These three important rivers of Jaintia Hills have their sources in the vicinity of Mulang. The river Myntdu surrounds the town of Jowai and fertilises the two tiny valleys and runs fast to the south in order to reach its destination earlier than her opponent, the river Myngngot. The second river Myntang chooses her direction towards the north and passes by the villages of Nongbah, Mukhla, Wahiajor, Nartiang and Nongjngi. The Umiurem river took the eastern direction and after nearly surrounding the village of Shangpung, challenges the strength of the river Myntang. The three rivers are the wealth of the regions through which they pass.

Ka Syiem Jalapang

(Queen Jalapang)

Long long ago a village by the name of Manar existed in Jaintia Hills. Its situation has been located at a place two or three miles away from the village of Shangpung. Shangpung still exists today although Manar has gone out of existence long since. These two villages were keeping up a feud between themselves even over petty and trifling matters; and there never was peace between them.

Each village had its royal head to look after the administration of justice, law and order. Shangpung commanded superiority in size, population and armed strength. Manar, though smaller in size and weaker in strength, had one very important advantage and that was its strategic position. Shangpung could not subdue the people of Manar due to that and the natural fortifications that it

had. Once during the reign of Queen Jalapang of Manar, a full scale conflict flared up between the two villages when Shangpung mobilised all her resources to defeat Manar, but as usual Shangpung met with failure. Thus, seeing that Manar could not be subjugated by means of war, the people of Shangpung started a peaceful offensive proposing unilaterally a cease-fire, and offered to sign a peace treaty. The people of Manar welcomed the proposal and agreed to meet the people of Shangpung on a fixed day and time at a place called Thangskai--which was midway between the two villages--where they would sign the treaty. Both parties also agreed that the armistice be celebrated in a fitting manner and that each party bring to the place many white and unspotted goats for making sacrifices as a mark of their gratitude to the gods who had brought about an end to their long-drawn feuds.

The appointed day came and the people of Manar went to Thangskai taking with them many white and unspotted goats. They arrived at Thangskai much earlier and waited there several hours for the arrival of the people of Shangpung. But the latter did not come as expected. Meantime the people of Manar decided to start sports and festivities specially arranged for the day, despite the absence of the people of Shangpung.

Just in the afternoon, the people of Shangpung arrived with numerous white goats before them and the people of Manar welcomed them heartily. Alack-a-day! The goats were no other than the warriors and stalwart soldiers of the armed forces of Shangpung who were covered with white woollen cloth and made to crawl like goats. On coming near the people of Manar, they stood up and killed the people of Manar to the last man.

At the outset of the massacre one man of Manar who escaped, ran as swiftly as his legs could carry him to Queen Jalapang to inform her about the treacherous and perfidious act of the people of Shangpung. The news came to the Queen as a bolt from the blue, and she listened anxiously to the messenger. Understanding that she could no longer save her village and her people from the enemy's hands, the Queen decided to abdicate her throne and she fled from her village towards the Tiniang Hill. She took with herself her bow and an arrow and climbed the hill with a heavy heart and great

Plate 11—A Mizo Belle

Plate 12—The Pauri Girls

sorrow. (The Tiniang Hill, near the village of Mawkaiew and to the north of Raliang, is one of the important peaks in Jaintia Hills. From its top a view of the Shillong Peak and the Rapbleng peak in Khasi Hills and the Bahbe-Bahkong Hill in Jaintia Hills can be had distinctly and in fair weather a part of the North Cachar Hills and the Himalayas can also be seen.)

On reaching the top of the Tiniang Hill, Queen Jalapang, filled with great woe, began to walk about and wail over the tragic misfortune that had befallen her people and her village on account of the enemy's perfidy. When she grew tired she stooped to the ground and prayed the goddess to show her mercy by sending strong winds that could carry her arrow to a great distance and to bless the place where the arrow would strike. She pulled her bow and unsheathed the arrow and before letting it off said, "I shall watch thy direction Wherever thou strike, there will I go and establish my abode wherein my people will bless me long after my death " She then shot the arrow which struck a tremendous rock and rent it into four parts. As resolved she went and lived there for the rest of her life. She had a friend in a poor widow who used to pay her a visit off and on The queen was very beautiful and rich Her wealth consisted of a large amount of gold and silver and extensive farms which gave bumper harvests every year. She would never allow her friend to take leave of her without having had her fill from the best of her dainties

About six furlongs away from her hut stretched a fertile paddy field called the Latubah Valley that belonged to U Miet Larunsut. U Miet Larunsut was a strong and diligent farmer. He was also very handsome and good-looking. Queen Jalapang fell in love with him and had a secret look on him through slits on the walls of her hut every morning when he drove his oxen by her hut. She was so impressed by his appearance and movement that she was determined to invent a way by which she could win his love She called her beloved friend the widow and invited her to go for fishing. She said, "Come on, my love, let's go fishing If I were able to get this day what I wish, I promise that you will equally share my joy, happiness and wealth." So they set forth on their fishing trip. The place was in the vicinity of the Latubah Valley where U Miet

Larunsut was busy ploughing his fields all day. Just at noon, Queen Jalapang pretended to fall sick, crying like a child falling upon the ground. She called her friend and said, "Please run to that man in the field and request him to come and take me to my hut; I am nearing my end. Please do call him quickly; I'm dying." Her friend ran quickly to the man and beseeched him to come to the dying Queen. The man responded to the widow and ran to the dying Queen leaving his oxen with a yoke thinking that he would return soon to his field.

With modesty of heart, U Miet Larunsut obeyed the Queen and carried her back to her hut taking her fishing net in one of his hands On reaching her hut the Queen persuaded him to stay for sometime till she was dead. But she did not die. After sometime she was successful in importuning U Miet to stay on and would not allow him even to go out of her hut thereafter, not even to go and loosen his oxen off their yoke The Queen's dream came true and the oxen with the yoke on turned to stone. They are still to be seen today in the Latubah Valley. The village of Manar had gone out of existence but the relics of its natural fortifications remain till today. The people of Shangpung and of the surrounding areas still bless the place where the hut of Queen Jalapang is believed to have stood once

4. MIKIR

Korhon Jungrecho

Once upon a time a King and Queen lived happily together and their union was blessed with a son and a daughter. To the King's great sorrow, he lost his Queen not long afterwards and then passed a lonely existence for a considerable time. As both the children were at a tender age and he found it increasingly difficult to care for them properly, he came to the conclusion that it needed a woman's hand to look after the little Prince and Princess: so he made up his mind to marry again.

He accordingly did so at the first opportunity but unfortunately for the King, the woman he married proved a cruel stepmother indeed, and treated the boy and girl very harshly. She gave them

such a small quantity of food to eat at each meal that they were becoming extremely thin and the King at last noticing their weak condition, instructed that they be given their meals along with him instead of them being served separately. Even this did not stop the vicious woman from illtreating them, as the King was soon to find out. While he was himself served with choice foods in abundance, he saw that they were only given small helpings of inferior rice mixed with pebbles, and never were they allowed any flesh or fish for their meals.

All these cruel acts profoundly distressed the King and he at last decided that any other fate would be better for them than the protracted misery they were suffering at the cruel hands of their inhuman stepmother. To add to these misfortunes, the king too had got himself entangled to such an extent in the baleful toils of this awful termagant that he found it beyond his power to get rid of her, try as he might. The only other course was to somehow get them away from her heartless clutches and remove them wherever else he could, and the king finally resolved that this should be done forthwith.

Early the next morning he took them out with him on the pretext of visiting a neighbouring town. They kept on walking steadily until, tired and hungry, they came to a large flat rock in the evening, where they rested. After the children had refreshed themselves with some food, the king told them to go to sleep, which they immediately did, so exhausted were they. When he observed they were both in deep slumber, the king shed silent tears and with a fervent prayer to the Almighty to take over charge and look after the children, he stealthily left the place with a sorrowful and heavy heart.

On the children awaking the following morning they were astonished and frightened to find that their father was not present; and although they called out and searched a long time, they were unable to see him. They saw a narrow path which they followed, but as the day wore on they both became very hot and thirsty and were wondering what to do, the boy Korhon suddenly espied water gushing from a spring on the hill-side some distance away. A little further on, the sister picked up a length of bamboo from the ground

to use as a water-container, which she gave to her brother. Korhon then ran to the spring and returned with it full of water which he gave to his sister so that she could quench her thirst first, and after she had finished, he ran back to the spring and drank his share of water When Korhon gave her the water, however, she was so famished by thirst that in her eagerness to drink, the unlucky girl did not see two small snakes' eggs inside the container and these were swallowed by her, which resulted in dreadful consequences and caused both of them terrible hardships and troubles later on, as will be related in due course.

They continued on for the rest of the day in wandering through the forest until at length they chanced upon a small and seemingly deserted hut, which they entered. To their great relief, they found it well stocked with food which they cooked up and ate They were just preparing to sleep when footsteps were heard rapidly approaching the hut and they barely had the time to hide themselves quickly under the bed before a huge male monkey stepped inside Fortunately for them, the monkey too must have been very tired, because he immediately tumbled into bed without taking any food, and was soon snoring aloud and discordantly in his sleep. Nevertheless, they remained in trepidation hiding under the bed throughout the night until the monkey went out again the next morning, without having noticed their presence

They thus continued living in the hut for quite a long time, by hiding whenever the monkey returned home in the evenings, and they became so adept at this that the monkey never got to know they were sharing the hut with him. The large stocks of food the monkey had, meanwhile kept gradually getting less and less, due to their helping themselves during his absence. This later became so pronounced that the monkey himself eventually noticed his food supplies mysteriously diminishing, the cause of which sorely puzzled him and left him wondering what to do about the matter.

There happened to be a Brahmin priest residing not far off; so the perplexed monkey besought his sage advice in his predicament Now there was actually little love lost between the pair of them, as the Brahmin had on more than one occasion previously been the butt of rude pranks played on him by the monkey. So when

he was told of the trouble, the Brahmin thought it would be a good chance to give tit for tat. He told the monkey he would cut off a small piece of his tail as this would solve the matter of his disappearing stores, and did so forthwith. The monkey gave a yelp of pain and went home smarting somewhat, yet satisfied that by this small sacrifice his pressing problem would now be unravelled Later on, however, he saw to his dismay that his problem still remained unsolved, as no sooner did he leave the hut when the children would help themselves and hide again at his approach during the evening.

In sheer desperation, he went to the Brahmin once more, and on this visit the priest was extremely provoked, as the monkey reached there just when he was on the point of performing an important *pujah* This untimely interruption so exasperated the Brahmin that he grabbed hold of the beast and shouting, "I must have taken off too little of your tail the last time," he chopped off the entire tail with one sweep of his *dao*. This drastic remedy proved too much for the poor monkey who died as a result of it. So from thence onwards the children took permanent possession of the hut and the adjacent field, which they tilled

They gradually grew up there and the brother used to go to attend the cultivation daily, leaving his sister to mind the household affairs. As the days went by, however, the girl found herself by degrees becoming thinner and weaker, besides also feeling sleepy and tired nearly all the time She often found too that on finishing her cooking, she would unconsciously doze off into a sleep and wake up to discover that all the cooked food had strangely vanished, which necessitated her having to cook all over again She related her singular experiences to Korhan who was deeply worried also.

One day, after saying he was going to the field, he hid himself in a corner and after his sister had cooked food and fallen into a doze, he was thunderstruck to see two long snakes emerge from her mouth and eat up the food. He immediately sprang up and promptly killed both the snakes which he cut up into pieces and buried in the compound, and in due course a tree sprouted up on that spot which bore beautiful white flowers

Korhon had in the meantime, told his sister never to touch any of those flowers, and so they continued to live quite unevent-

fully for some years. During Korhon's absence, on one fateful day, an old woman with a child in her arms (who was actually their wicked stepmother, though the sister did not recognise her) came to their place and engaged the young girl in conversation The old woman, who all along knew of the girl's identity, kept on slyly pinching the child in her lap and making her cry purposely and when the girl at last enquired the reason, the evil old dame pointed to the tree and replied, "The little child is crying for one of those pretty flowers on that tree." On hearing this, the unlucky girl quite forgot her brother Korhon's warning for the moment and went to pluck one of the flowers She had hardly touched the tree which contained the poison of the two snakes, when she gave a scream and fell senseless to the ground The wicked woman cackled with unholy glee on beholding the result of her fiendish designs and then hurried away before Korhon's return. When Korhon came home in the evening and saw his beloved sister lying stretched out motionless on the ground, he realised at once what had befallen her and began weeping unrestrainedly He was so overcome with grief that he lost his senses and fled away from the spot like a demented person, crying loudly all the time

The next morning some people passed by and saw the poor girl still lying in a lifeless condition outside the house On examining her and finding that she had been poisoned, they applied certain healing herbs which succeeded in reviving her after some length of time. Finding that the young maiden possessed such exquisite features, they made up their mind to take her with them and present her to their King, who it appeared was also in search of a suitable lady to make her his queen. When they duly arrived at their destination and presented her to the King, her surpassing beauty held him completely spellbound, and he was so enamoured of her that he, then and there, married her and made her his Queen

Her great beauty was further enhanced by her charming nature and kindliness and the King came to love her so greatly that he showered her with the most priceless jewelleries and costly raiments imaginable. In spite of all this and though she herself had come to love the king dearly too, it was noticed that the Queen was often sad and pensive in her demeanour. This worried the King and

one day he gently asked her the reason for her sadness. She replied that this was because she did not know what had happened to her beloved brother Korhon, and she could never be fully happy till she saw him again. There seemed very little hope of finding Korhon unfortunately, as his whereabouts were quite unknown, but at last the King thought of a clever plan. He had the foremost sculptor of the kingdom brought before him and ordered him to make an exact replica of the Queen. When this work was duly completed, the king had the statue erected in the centre of the main street where it could be seen and admired by all

Korhon, who was still practically bereft of his senses over the loss of his dearest sister and kept aimlessly wandering from place to place in deep despair, one day chanced to pass that way. When he came near the statue, he at once recognised his long-lost sister's features reflected in it, and started sobbing. This was seen by the sentries guarding the statue who took him before the King, where he was minutely questioned Korhon related his sorrowful experiences and the tragic loss of his dearest and only sister The King was very excited on hearing his story and hurriedly sent for the Queen As soon as she entered the room and her eyes fell on Korhon, they ran into each other's arms with cries of joy Thus the two met once more, which was wonderful to behold, after all the trials and tribulations they had undergone

All the people were glad over the brother and sister meeting once more, and the good King thereupon appointed Korhon a Minister of his Cabinet This duty Korhon fulfilled so successfully that in a short time he became the King's chief minister and adviser In fact, the king was so pleased with Korhon that he eventually gave his own sister in marriage to him. The Queen too came to love the King dearly and his happiness was then full to the brim

And so they all lived in the greatest happiness ever after, and so we also come to the end of this story with a happy ending

Tarkoping Recho

Once upon a time there was a King named Tarkoping Recho with a most beautiful daughter of whom he was very very fond. She was

an accomplished young maiden and one of her favourite pastimes was to go out riding through the countryside every morning.

On returning from her ride one morning, she suddenly fell ill and passed away before any help could be rendered to her. The King and Queen were so completely heartbroken and disconsolate at the tragic loss of their dearly beloved daughter that they decided to have the *sradh* ceremony for her performed immediately instead of waiting for a month, as was the usual custom.

For this purpose, the King specially ordered the *mynah* bird and the *dorik* pheasant to present themselves for the ceremony to lament the death of their departed Princess. He promised that whichever of them performed the best till the next morning would be rewarded with a beautiful pair of golden ear-rings.

The birds readily consented and in his eagerness to get the coveted prize, the *dorik* pheasant straightaway started gurgling away loudly with all his might So strenuously did he warble that his eyes and ears became blood-shot and he fell asleep through utter exhaustion after a couple of hours. The *mynah* bird however was extremely clever and instead of shrieking himself hoarse as the pheasant had done, just kept pouring forth snatches of melodious notes intermittently throughout the night until dawn. When the King awoke the next morning he was so solaced in mind to hear the *mynah* bird's tuneful bell-like notes coming over the air that he presented him with the pair of golden ear-rings without any hesitation whatsoever.

It was from that time that all *mynah* birds have been adorned with golden ear-rings and *dorik* pheasants with blood-shot eyes and ears.

5. DIMASA

The Story of Panthoraja

I

A widow had six sons, who were not only strong and vain, but dare-devils too.

One day their mother cooked parsley for their dinner, and as the curry tasted unusually good, they asked their mother why it was so

"Oh, Hasigring's urine spattered on the parsley," she explained. "Just because of his urine parsley tastes so good. Wonder, how his meat will be like! It must be ambrosia itself. And what stops us from getting it? Oh, we must get the meat," the six started excitedly all at once "My dear foolish sons," the widow hastened to say, "Hasigring is a snake-monster and does one ever eat a snake?" Then she added with a note of warning, "Do not so much as talk, for he is a devil and may hear you from afar and he will come and gobble you up." They laughed at their mother's fear. It behoved a woman to fear but they were men, young and strong and what Hasigring could do? "Just wait, mother, and before long we will bring you Hasigring's meat." And much as the widow tried to dissuade her sons from going on such a dangerous errand, all was in vain. Once they set their mind upon something, it was impossible to make them change their mind. Soon the six brothers set out to hunt Hasigring in the deep woods.

Hasigring was a big and mighty snake-monster. No one knew where he lived and every one considered him to be a demon possessing supernatural powers. For his enormous size and dark skin, people called him Hasigring - the Shadow of the Earth. The six brothers wandered in the woods all day, but they found no sign of him At last by nightfall they came by a small ramshackle hut. In the hut lived an old ugly witch whom the six brothers addressed: "Grandmother, won't you give us a night's shelter?" "With utmost pleasure, but tell me my golden grand-children, whither are you bound?" said the witch. And they told her the object of their journey.

Now the witch disliked Hasigring, for he was more powerful than her And she would be glad if he were killed. But killing him was easier said than done. She decided to test the power of the six brothers. For their supper she gave them iron rice, which they crunched and crunched on but could not eat "They are no match to Hasigring," said the witch to herself in disappointment. At dawn a cock crowed, "Defeat to the widow's sons, defeat to the widow's sons." As the morning came, the witch showed them the way to Hasigring's place, along which they resumed their journey.

Next evening they met another witch who gave them a night's

shelter in her hut. She too put them to a test and asked them to bring water in a basket full of holes. None of the brothers could make water hold in that basket At dawn the cock crowed. "Defeat to the widow's sons, defeat to the widow's sons "

From there they came to the place of the third witch. She took them near a thick bush of thorns and asked them to fetch a plantain leaf from the centre of the bush without tearing it None of the brothers could do it, and the cock crowed at dawn, "Defeat to the widow's sons, defeat to the widow's sons "

As the sun was going down, the six brothers came in sight of Hasigring, his big and black body carelessly rolling about beneath a large banyan tree. His gaping mouth was so wide that an elephant would easily pass through. Nothing daunted, the six brothers came near him and made a straight proposal, "We want to eat your flesh, Hasigring, and so we've come to kill you Come, fight us "

Hasigring was greatly amused He said lazily, "Eat my flesh, if you will children, though kill me you may not But if I were you, my tiny tots, I would run back as fast as my legs could carry."

But no joke with the determined six brothers Have they come thus far just for a joke? Swords drawn, they were ready to rush at the monster and strike. But of a sudden, they stood numb and powerless and at the next instant all the six were catapulated right into the monster's gaping jaw where they vanished Hasigring was far quicker than they and he had only to suck in his breath. "Eat my flesh from inside, as much as you can," he drawled lazily and soon began to snore

II

In the meanwhile, the lonely widow was lamenting her six sons, who did not return. One day, she went to the *jhum* to pluck brinjals While she was plucking brinjals a thorn pricked her finger Just then she heard a voice, "You will get a son." Soon the signs of pregnancy developed in her body and in course of time, truely, she begot a son. Conceived by a brinjal thorn, the son was named 'Panthoraja', the Brinjal King.

Panthoraja grew to be a fine boy with many heavenly qualities.

His mother told him how his six brothers had gone to hunt Hasigring and never returned. He was anxious to meet his brothers and he told her he would go and search for his brothers. But she would not let him go. Was not the loss of six sons enough for her? But Panthoraja tried to persuade her saying, "Don't you remember, I am heaven-born? So heavenly is my power that heaven will be my guide. If you only let me go, I will bring back my six brothers. If I meet Hasigring, I will beat him, for my power is greater than his."

Something in his voice convinced the mother that Panthoraja, though a mere boy, meant what he said. So she let him go. On his way Panthoraja met all the three witches and passed their tests and every time the cock crowed, "Victory to the widow's son, victory to the widow's son."

Hasigring received him as contemptuously as he had his six brothers. But his trick did not work this time and Panthoraja made a short work of him. With one stroke of his sword, he cut off the monster's head and with another he slashed open his bulging belly and what should he see there but his six brothers, cuddled together and fast asleep.

The six brothers woke up and rubbed their eyes. Yes, they had slept too long. Their mother must have been anxious. They must hurry home with Hasigring's flesh, the promised ambrosia. The fact is, they thought they had killed Hasigring, and in their hurry, they did not notice Panthoraja. They cut the carcass into pieces and divided the flesh among the six of themselves. Then they detected the presence of the seventh person. "And who is this brat hanging about here?" demanded they. "Elder brothers, I am your youngest, I delivered you from Hasigring's belly." Panthoraja tried to explain to them shyly and politely. "A stark lie, we had no seventh brother. This brat is trying to be clever. He is trying to steal from us the glory of killing the monster. Why does he not go and suck his mother's breast instead? And just for some meat? Youngest brother, Huh! deliverer indeed!" The thought enraged the six brothers and all but the eldest, savagely fell upon Panthoraja and showered blows and kicks on his tender body. The eldest brother rebuked them for being rough with him, for after all, was

he not a mere child?

The six brothers made their way homewards and Panthoraja silently followed in their wake. Seeing this, the youngest of the six tied him to a thorny tree by an elephant-track and left him there. But Panthoraja freed himself without difficulty and continued following them, henceforward unnoticed

III

The widow's happiness stopped short when she found that Panthoraja was not among her prodigals returned. "Oh! have you not met your youngest brother? He went to search for you," she anxiously asked her six sons.

The six brothers now realised what folly they had committed In shame and regret, they remained mute. Then they heard someone sobbing beneath the caves and thither the widow ran. Panthoraja sat there silently sobbing Sobbing Panthoraja told his mother everything. Sobbing, his mother heard everything. But the son had more to say. "Mother, give me a ball of thread," he said "Whatever for, my golden?" asked the mother in surprise "I am going back to heaven, mother I can no longer bear my existence on this earth. With the thread, I shall build a bridge to heaven "

The mother was greatly alarmed. "My golden, my jewel, you must not go anywhere. You must not part with me If you do, I shall die!" implored the mother.

"But, mother, I must go It is decided " She heard the soft but firm voice of his son which she knew well. "Then I go too " she said

"Be it so, then "

When the mother gave him a ball of thread Panthoraja, holding one end of the thread, threw up the ball heavenward Up and up the ball went unrolling the thread as it rose The other end reached the heaven. This was the path along which the twain would journey to heaven. As they were ready to depart, Panthoraja cautioned his mother, "Before you get to the top, whatever happens, do not look back."

Then he said : "Before I depart, I have a task to perform. My

brothers have been cruel to me. They are not fit to live human lives. I will punish them fittingly. The eldest brother has little kindness; I make him a house-lizard and he will live in a house The rest shall turn into geckos and shall live in no better place than treetrunks and I shall strike them with lightnings That will teach them for kicking and striking innocent ones." And scarcely had he concluded before the eldest brother turned into a house-lizard and the rest into five geckos.

Then the son and the mother clambered up the thread. When they were half-way to heaven, all the creatures of the earth caught sight of them. Men, women, old and young; animals, birds, wild and domestic, began to wail. It was so piteous and touching, the old woman could not resist herself looking at them And right there snapped the thread

The widow remained suspended where the thread snapped. She heard Panthoraja saying from above, "You forgot my caution, mother. Now you must stay here. There's no help. I have to proceed further. But I will watch you from above. Whenever you will look below, there will be a streak of light and by that light I will see you And by that light, I shall also strike my ingrate brothers, the geckos."

Eversince, when the widow looked towards the earth there was a long twisted streak of light in the sky. Being too old, she cannot look straight. And as he sees the light, Panthoraja shoots his thunder and a tree where a gecko lives is never missed

The Monkey and the Deer

Once upon a time the deer was the proud owner of a nice long tail, which was the envy of nearly all the other animals One day he happened to be searching for something succulent to eat in the jungles when he came across a monkey, who engaged him in conversation

Actually, the sly monkey, who had hardly any tail himself to brag about, very much coveted the deer's tail and so he schemed to gain possession of it by hook or crook. With this end in view, he kept up a light amiable chatter for a while and later suddenly turned to the

deer and exclaimed in tones of the greatest admiration, "My dear friend, what a really splendid caudal appendage you have!" "I don't know what you mean, friend Monkey," replied the deer in deep perplexity. Thereupon, the monkey gazed at him in feigned amazement and added, "Good gracious me, did't you know that only a very special and beautiful tail like yours can be termed a 'caudal appendage'? The others are just ordinary and are therefore called tails. Yours is most beautiful and I would dearly love to try it on for even one moment if you will allow me." The gullible deer was so completely charmed by the wily monkey's adulation and flattery that he readily agreed. "Certainly friend, you are welcome to try it on," he replied, and removing his beautiful long tail, he handed it over.

That was all the monkey needed and off he scooted away with the deer's tail, and though the poor deer wept copiously and begged of the monkey to bring his tail back, it was all in vain

Seeing the deer sobbing his heart out, God took pity on the sorrowing creature and made another tail for him, by cutting out a portion of his liver and fixing it on. There was not much liver to spare unfortunately, so the new tail had to be very short

This is the reason why the deer now has a very short tail and an extremely small liver for an animal of its size Strange to add in this respect, but it is a proven fact that the liver and the flesh from the tail of the deer both look and taste exactly the same

How the Goat Became Weak

In the olden days, the goat was the strongest of all animals, even the tiger dared not face him A sizeable mound used to quake when a goat ramped upon it

One day, a goat came to a stream for a drink and as he dipped his mouth in the water, a big crab edged up to him and closed its mighty pincers on his nozzle The goat did not know what it was and the suddenness of the onslaught on such a tender and vulnerable spot completely unnerved him. Thinking he was being fatally attacked, he surrendered and tremblingly waited for his end

A tiger who was nearby saw this and lost no time in pouncing

upon the doomed goat from the rear and killing it. Other goats nearby saw this and were so struck by mortal fear of the tiger that ever since then the goat has been an easy prey to the tiger.

6. ZEMI NAGA

Asa and Munserung

Once upon a time there lived two brothers named Asa and Munserung, of whom the former was the elder. Asa was very clever but Munserung was a fool. One day they discussed between themselves as to how they could become rich. They hit upon a plan and set up an inn by the road-side. They provided food and clothing to weary travellers and in turn they were paid some portion of whatever the travellers brought with them.

The inn was kept and attended to in turn by them. One day during Munserung's absence, Asa made quite a nice fortune by serving a group of weary travellers who brought with them gold and other useful ornaments with them. When Munserung returned he was pleased to find that his elder brother had made such a good profit for themselves. One day Asa was to be away fishing, and he now asked Munserung to look after the customers on this occasion. Rather than looking after their comforts, however, Munserung incurred their displeasure, as a result of which they, eventually, came to blows. The customers overpowered and carried him away as a captive. As he was led along the road through the jungles, he kept shouting for his brother, saying, "Brother Asa, save me, I am being carried away captive, no more to be with you again. O, brother Asa, come to my rescue ...." Asa heard his brother's cries while he was fishing. Taking a short route, he went far ahead of the captors and came across a banyan tree. He climbed the tree and saw his brother and his captors at a distance coming towards him. He then tied the fishes which he caught from the river to some of the twigs, came down and advancing some distance, met and requested the captors to release his brother on payment of gold and other useful ornaments, but the captors would not heed his request. At last when they came to the place where he had tied the fishes on the tree, he requested the angry travellers to rest for

a while there. They agreed and Asa said, "Friends, you may take my brother. But by the way, did you ever hear of a tree bearing fishes instead of fruits?"

Travellers (Including his brother, Munserung)—"He, he, he... what a heaven on earth!" Some of them then laughed but some indignantly said, "If you don't shut your mouth and continue talking such nonsense you may join your brother too."

Asa—"Well, I also did'nt fully believe it at first but while my grandfather was living he told me (Asa pointed to the banyan tree) that that tree used to bear fishes instead of its natural fruits."

Travellers– "Oh, spawn from a generation of heretics and liars. Come on with us, and we will make you the chief of story-tellers for the children of bastards in our land." At which there were great howls of raucous laughter and obscene asides.

Asa–"Don't be very hard on me, or the bones of your grandfathers may peep out of their graves and say, 'My children, do not use such filthy language to Asa'."

Travellers –"Oh, leave the poor man alone He is mad. Come, let us proceed on with our journey."

Asa–"Friends, let us try at least to see if the words of the old dead are true or not. The world is changing these days in many ways."

Travellers– "By heavens, we promise you that if you can prove them to be true, we will give you anything under the heavens."

Asa– "No, not all of it, but all your bags and your captive"

The travellers agreed. Asa then climbed up the tree and dropped down the fishes, one after another, to the utter amazement of them all Climbing down he said, "This year the tree bears a small number of fishes." The travellers duly kept their promise. In the cool evening, as the birds were singing, Asa and Munserung returned home with many valuables left by the travellers.

7. LUSHAI

Daddy Bear and Master Monkey

Once upon a time there was a mischievous young monkey who lived in the forest enjoying life to the full. He had made a swing

for himself and nothing delighted him more than to sit on it and swing to and fro to his heart's content the whole day long.

One day Daddy Bear came along and seeing him swaying back and forth, said, "Well now, Master Monkey, please let me use your swing for a little while too." "Oh! dear," replied the monkey, "I am afraid it will never be strong enough to stand the weight of such a large and heavy gentleman as you in its present condition. Anyway, let me first climb up to strengthen and fasten the ropes more securely to the tree so that it will be able to take your weight." The monkey then quickly climbed up the tree and slyly bit the rope of the tree until it was almost severed, and on scaling down, he invited Daddy Bear to "have a go" on the swing. When Daddy Bear got on the swing, the monkey went off to prepare his food, craftily thinking to himself the while, 'It won't be long before stupid Daddy Bear topples down from the swing and gets killed. I had better bring some nuts and rice from my store to eat with his flesh and then I shall have a really tasty repast.' Whilst he was engaged in these rosy dreams he heard the sound of a resounding crash, and hurriedly scampered back to the swing, the one thought in his greedy mind being of the enormous feast he was about to have at the expense of Daddy Bear. When he got there he saw to his utter amazement that Daddy Bear was very much alive as the fall from the swing had hardly left a scratch on him. Not only did this mean 'good bye' to the feast he had been so avidly expecting but Master Monkey was frightened out of his wits to notice that Daddy Bear was in a towering rage, because though he was bodily unharmed, his dignity was exceedingly ruffled by the toss he had just had. He tried his best to hide his fright and confusion by saying in a cajoling tone, "Oh! Daddy Bear, I ran back as fast as possible to help as soon as I heard you fall from the swing and I am so glad you have not been hurt in any way. I also brought some food for you to eat as it will help you to recover your poise."

Unfortunately for him, Daddy Bear was not half as foolish as Master Monkey imagined and he had seen through his trickery. "You wicked young monkey," he retorted angrily, "do not make matters worse by lying to me. You climbed the tree not to strengthen the swing as you pretended but to weaken it by craftily biting

the rope to make me fall. I shall now give you a sound thrashing and teach you never to attempt these knavish pranks again." He then rushed towards the already terrified monkey who straight away took to his heels and swiftly climbed up to the topmost branches of the tallest tree in the forest to escape from the wrath of Daddy Bear. The lesson was made all the more bitter for Master Monkey as he later sat cowering on the branches of the tree and helplessly watched Daddy Bear thoroughly enjoying himself eating up all the tid-bits he had so carefully prepared for himself.

Sazalte Pa and Bakvawmte Pu

Once upon a time all the animals assembled together in a conference to decide and make a highway through the forest and Sazalte Pa who was very covetous, was among one of those who attended. They resolved that the highway was to be kept spotlessly clean and that whoever was caught dirtying it would be killed and eaten.

After the road had been completed and cleaned, Sazalte Pa went along for a walk and espied a fat civet cat approaching from the opposite direction Sazalte Pa determined to make a meal of him but as he could not kill him without proper cause, some pretext would have to be found and it was not long before his cunning mind found a means of doing so He quickly excreted on the highway himself and accusing the poor civet cat of doing the dirty deed, he immediately pounced on him and devoured him. Some other beasts happened to pass by a little later and seeing the excrement on the road, they taxed him for it saying, "Sazalte Pa, you have filthied the road and now we are going to kill and gobble you up." "It was not me at all but the civet cat," replied Sazalte Pa, "and I have just finished eating him." They did not believe a word of this as he was known all over as an inveterate liar, so he had perforce to flee as fast as he could from their fury until at last he met Bakvawmte Pu who was somewhat of a simpleton. "Oh Sir, please protect me from my enemies who want to kill me," he begged of him. "I shall only do if you will agree to stay and look after my small son." replied Bakvawmte Pu, to which Sazalte

Pa readily assented. He was then given shelter and when Bakvawmte Pu went to work on his *jhum* cultivation every day Sazalte Pa would look after the child. One day he ate up a fowl which came close to him and when Bakvawmte Pu returned from work he said, "Sir, the child was crying for the fowl so I killed it and gave it to him to eat," to which Bakvawmte Pu replied, "You did quite right, as the little boy was hungry." This emboldened him to eat a pig the next day and give Bakvawmte Pu the same excuse when he returned. "Never mind, since the child demanded it," said the father. The wicked Sazalte Pa killed and ate the boy the very next gave it to him to eat," to which Bakvawmte Pu replied, "You did quite right, as the little boy was hungry." This emboldened him to eat a pig the next day and give Bakvawmte Pu the same excuse when he returned. "Never mind, since the child demanded it," said the father. The wicked Sazalte Pa killed and are the boy the very next day and ran away before Bakvawmte Pu came back. He was so enraged when he returned in the evening and discovered the foul deed that he swore to have his revenge and search Sazalte Pa out at any cost

By and by he came to learn that Sazalte Pa was staying at a place not distant from where he used to go out and attend to his *jhum* daily, and Bakvawmte Pu determined to seek him out. The wily Sazalte Pa also knew of Bakvawmte Pu's intentions towards him and had likewise taken necessary precautions to safeguard himself.

When he thought the time was ripe, he went one day and lay in wait expectantly in Sazalte Pa's *jhum* house. On returning from work in the evening and while some distance away, the wily Sazalte Pa first called out, "If anyone replies to me from my *jhum* house it will mean the house is empty." As he approached nearer he shouted out more lustily, "Is my *jhum* house empty?" The foolish Bakvawmte Pu immediately responded, "Yes, it is empty," whereupon Sazalte Pa went away.

On approaching the *jhum* house on the following evening, he shouted, "If there is no reply from my *jhum* house when I call, it will be a sign that there is someone in it." And when there was again the same old foolish reply he knew Bakvawmte Pu there; so he went

away once more.

When Bakvawmte Pu found his stupidity had gained him nothing, he transformed himself into a large rat and made a hole for himself near Sazalte Pa's *jhum* house. The next day Sazalte Pa straightaway saw the rat-hole on his return and being such a covetous creature, at once began digging furiously in keen anticipation of having a hearty meal of the rat. He then put his hands deep down into the hole to pull out the rat but was bitten so severely by Bakvawmte Pu that he died not long after, cheated ultimately through his covetousness and cupidity.

Runginu and Thialtea

One day a man named Thialtea asked Runginu, a girl from the same village, to accompany him in plucking fruits. "Runginu, I have seen a lot of lovely fruits which are ripe for plucking in the forest nearby; so let us both go and collect them," he said. "But I cannot climb trees Thialtea, so what is the use of my going with you?", replied Ranginu. Thialtea promised that he would climb the trees and pick out the choicest fruits for her if she would go along with him. On her then agreeing, they set off together and found the trees abounding with fruit. Thilatea thereupon climbed up the tree and started eating all the ripe fruits himself, throwing down only the bare peels to the girl. Runginu was considerably upset by this selfish behaviour and she called up to him, "What are you up to, Thialtea? You have only been throwing down the peels to me. Please give me some of the ripe fruit too." Thialtea however, remained deaf to her requests and callously continued eating away himself without bothering about giving her any, which eventually made the poor girl weep in frustration.

A stag happened to pass by a little later and enquired of Runginu why she was in tears. "Because Thialtea promised to pick ripe fruits for me from the tree but is eating them all himself and giving me the peels only," she tearfully replied. "Why don't you rebuke him," advised the stag. "He is sure to beat me if I do," said Runginu. "Have no fear, I will protect you," answered the stag. Runginu then mocked Thialtea thus :

"Oh ! Thiala, Thiala, Thialtea,
How horrible is your ugly skin,
I hope you get trapped in Sahdal (ia),
You monkey with a hideous grin."

Thialtea became furious on hearing this and quickly climbing down the tree, he caught hold of Ranginu and beat her severely. The cowardly stag whereupon took to his heels as fast as he could and Runginu was left crying bitterly whilst Thialtea reclimbed the tree and started eating away once more.

A bear then passed and asked Runginu why she was crying to which she gave the identical reply as she had given to the stag. He tendered her the same advice and promised protection but later ran away, which resulted in Runginu being soundly thrashed by Thialtea again Several other denizens of the forest came that way and told her the same thing but none of them ventured to remain and protect her from the wrath of Thialtea later.

At last a tiger came along and he too offered her the usual advice and protection. By this time however, the helpless Runginu's body was black and blue from the numerous beatings she had received from the cruel Thialtea; so she sorrowfully said, "A great many animals also advised me likewise but then took to their heels when I got beaten and I dare not rebuke Thialtea and be beaten any more." The tiger then sternly replied, "Oh! Runginu, I am the Lord of the Jungles and not at all like the other craven beasts. Rebuke him, I repeat, as I shall surely protect you." Runginu plucked up her courage on getting this assurance from the tiger and mocked him in a braver tone .

"Oh ! Thiala, Thiala, Thialtea,
How horrible is your ugly skin,
I hope you get trapped in Sahdal (ia),
You monkey with a hideous grin."

On hearing her Thialtea quickly clambered down the tree as he had been doing all along, but this time he met his match as the tiger immediately pounced on him and devoured him. That was the end of Thialtea as a punishment for his greed and cruelty and after thanking the tiger, Runginu went safely back to her home in the village.

The Bear, The Tiger and The Monkey

A bear one day came across a pool of clear water. He was so pleased with it that he determined to preserve it for himself and he set a monkey in charge of it to warn everyone else away. The bear then went off to the jungle in search for food. While he was away a deer came along and said to the monkey, "Please may I drink of this pool of water ?" The monkey replied, "It is Daddy Bear's pool. If you are daring enough to drink what belongs to him you may do so." When the deer heard these words he was very frightened and raced swiftly away. Soon after, a bear came and asked permission to drink, but when he heard the monkey's reply, he too went off without further parley. At last a tiger came and asked if he might drink the water. The monkey replied to him as he had done to the others, but the tiger was not afraid as they had been and he began to drink the water. Just then Daddy Bear came back with the food he had found and was very angry indeed when he saw the tiger drinking his precious water He set upon the tiger to punish him and they had a battle royal They fought fiercely, neither being able to kill the other. After fighting for a long time they got near the edge of a very high precipice over which they both rolled down. They were instantly killed and by their fighting lost everything, while the monkey satisfied himself with the water and the food which the bear had thought of enjoying.

8. LAKHER

Unaw Pano Mochapa Phopa

(The two blind brothers)

Once upon a time there were two blind brothers who lived quite a pleasant and industrious, though simple life, in spite of their great handicap.

After a hard day's toil in their *jhum* cultivation they were trudging homewards one evening in gay spirits when a passerby saw them and enquired as to the cause of their joy. On being told, this was because of their just having brought a honey-comb filled with honey, the passerby expressed a desire to see it. The brothers were so proud

of their recent purchase that they eagerly took the honey-comb out from the bag it had been kept in and showed it to him after unwrapping the banana-leaf covering. When the strange passerby saw it, he exclaimed, "Oh! what a juicy honey-comb. You really have something to be happy about." They were pleased yet further and even allowed him to handle it. This the stranger proceeded to do with alacrity and taking full advantage of their blindness and simplicity, he slyly removed the honey-comb and replaced it with a lump of cowdung Totally unaware of what the rascal had done, the brothers continued on their way for some time and then decided to rest awhile and enjoy the honey. On unwrapping the honey-comb their noses were assailed by the foul smell of cowdung "We must have stopped close to a lot of cowdung," remarked one, to which the other replied, "I think so too, let us go somewhere else." So saying, they moved on to several other spots but they always got the same disagreeable results. They eventually decided there was nothing else to do but make the best of things and start on the honey despite (so the simpletons thought!) the all-pervading malodorous nature of their surroundings They then unwrapped the packet and helped themselves to a large mouthful each but instantly began spitting it all out again, with their faces expressing utter disgust as they realised that it was indeed filthy cowdung they had just tasted instead of their juicy honey Great was their rage at the wicked stranger for taking such mean advantage over their blindness and depriving them of their honey by this cruel and heartless ruse After discussing the matter thoroughly between themselves, they opined he would surely be returning the same way and as both were strongly resolved to repay him in right earnest for the gross indignities they had suffered at his hands, they decided to lie in wait for him on either side of the path and so attack him from both directions. About half an hour later, one of them heard a rustle in the bushes near by; so, with an exultant shout of "We've got you now, you blackguard," he charged furiously towards the spot "I shall carve your heart out with my knife, you misbegotten son of an unwed mother," roared the other brother as he too sprang out from the opposite side to enter into the fray. Actually, the sound was caused by a cow innocently grazing among the bushes

but the brothers were blissfully ignorant of this fact and in their righteous fury to get to grips with the villain of the piece, they crashed headlong into each other. As each imagined he had grabbed hold of the culprit, they sailed unto each other using their fists and knives to pummel and slash out with all their might. It was just as well for them in this respect that they were blind which accounted for most of their knife thrusts missing their marks and their escaping serious injury thereby. Nonetheless, they kept on belabouring each other until they both fell completely exhausted down to the ground.

On recovering their breath and recounting the affray, they were rather upset when they discovered that their victim had managed to get out of their clutches. They felt relieved somewhat in the knowledge, however, that the sorry stranger could never forget the rough manhandling he had received at their hands. "I have not been so badly hurt," remarked the first brother, "except that the swine managed to cut off one of my ears, but I cut off one of his ears too; so we are quits. How about you?", he enquired of the second. "What a strange thing?", his brother replied and added "He got one of my ears but I got one of his too." They were both struck dumb with amazement over this singular coincidence for the moment but their spirits revived when the first brother explained with an air of profundity as to the probable outcome of the affair thus. "Well anyway, we are much better off than he will ever be as we will only have to let our hair grow longer on one side of our head and this will easily hide our defects. As that son of a pig has lost both his ears, there will be no such remedy for him. He will surely be known as the 'Earless one' when he returns back to his village to be mocked and made fun of by all and spend the rest of his life in misery. A fitting punishment for his cruel deception to us."

The rendition of this choice morsel of philosophic erudition evoked hearty guffaws of laughter from them both. In their firm belief indeed, the two brothers were so elated at the thought of their combined success and the acute discomfiture of the rightly served stranger, that they continued on their way in the most ebullient spirits, one or the other gleefully repeating "Oh! Earless One, Ha, ha, ha!" every off and on. And so it was that they happily proceeded homewards.

Lyno Phopa

(The story of Lyno, a clan of the Mara people)

In days gone by, there was once a family consisting of five brothers and one sister, belonging to the Lyno clan, who lived together in happiness and contentment except for one important necessity which the brothers thought was lacking. All five of them so fondly loved their sister, a young maiden of exquisite beauty and of the most affectionate nature, that they determined to present her with the most valuable gift they were able to obtain. With this in view, they sent agents out to search far and wide but they were still unable to find anything befitting enough to give her throughout all this world In this predicament, the brothers came to the conclusion that as there was nothing precious enough for their sister on the earth, they would perforce have to look towards the stars. After deep deliberation, they eventually decided that the Moon itself in all its shining glory, would make the most ideal gift and bring their sister the greatest joy and delight. They, thereupon, made plans to climb up and bring the Moon down for her, and to achieve this they had all the *Sokhaos* (Sokhao = a mortar for pounding rice) throughout the land collected at one spot. These were then placed one upon the other and the eldest brother climbed on ahead followed by the others, with the youngest brother on the ground passing up the *sokhaos* As they climbed higher to a tremendous height and were quite invisible to the people below, the eldest brother became very thirsty. He called out to his second brother to have some water sent up to him but as their voices were hardly audible from such a great height, the message was so distorted by the time it was relayed down to the youngest brother on the ground that he took it to mean that the *sokhaos* were to be removed. He accordingly started pulling away the *sokhaos* from the bottom as fast as he could, with the catastrophic result that the entire lot of them came tumbling down in all directions with such thunderous reports and reverberations that people everywhere fled helter-skelter in panic and utter confusion all over the place. The four elder brothers had already reached so high up in the sky that when they fell down they landed in distant and different parts of the country The eldest

brother came down to earth in far off Mathura land and the younger brother in the adjacent lands.

That is why there are still large numbers of the Lyno clan living in Mathura land to this very day. It is believed they are all the descendants of the four brothers who fell from the clouds in different parts of the country on that never-to-be-forgotten day.

Bawanta Sw Phopa

(The story of a father and son)

There was once a father who lived alone with his young son as his wife had died when the boy was very small. They both continued living happily for some years until the father decided to ease his loneliness by marrying again. Unfortunately, the woman he married took an insane hatred to the young boy and not only did she make his life a misery by her ill-treatment but she also persistently urged her husband to get rid of the child. The father refused to listen to her for as long as he could, but her vituperative tongue and constant threats to leave him wore his patience down and he at last consented to do her evil bidding.

Early next morning he asked his son to accompany him to the village of a friend of his and they set off together. As they continued on their way, the father often kept making furtive glances towards his son which gradually unnerved the lad who began to think that something ominous was about to occur. The father too simply could not bear the thought of killing his own son, so he eventually decided to leave him somewhere on the way with the fervent hope that some kind-hearted person would find and give him shelter. He then told his son to wait for him while he went to fetch some water from an adjacent stream but the poor child was very suspicious and pleaded, "Oh, Father, please don't leave me all alone here." The father promised to come back and after assuring the boy, he hurried away. He had not gone very far when he espied a lizard sitting on a rock so he instructed it to reply on his behalf whenever his son called to him. After he had been away for a considerable time the boy got anxious and called out and the lizard responded. His calls were repeated and replied to from time to time but without

his father appearing, and as nightfall was now fast approaching, the boy ventured to go near the spot from where the sounds were coming. On calling once more and getting near to the rock he was amazed to see the lizard instantly replying to him instead of his father. The deception was such a tremendous shock to the forsaken child that he burst into tears and cried until he fell asleep through sheer exhaustion. He had a dream in his sleep in which he was told to have no fear as it would not be very long before his troubles ended. He awoke the next morning rather lighter at heart and after roaming several days through the forests, he came upon a small unoccupied hut where he took shelter and lived on stray mango fruits which had fallen off the trees.

He had also seen an imposing golden building in the course of his wanderings but on discovering that it was the residence of a devil, he beat a hasty retreat. Unfortunately for him, however, the devil had caught sight of him and whenever he happened to pick up a mango after this, the devil would appear and threaten him, "Shall I eat you or the mango?" which so frightened the poor boy that he instantly handed over the fruit to the devil. This continued for some days with the greedy devil snatching all his fruit, until there was only one mango left and this too was grabbed from him, leaving the hapless boy weak and shivering with hunger. Just then Pachhapa (God, in the Lakher dialect) looked down on the earth and seeing the boy's pitiable and wretched plight, appeared before him and said, "Do not be afraid any more, my son, but take this pointed stone and slay the devil with it. You can then go and live in his house and take possession of all his property." Saying this, Pachhapa gave him the stone and ascended up to heaven again.

The boy did as Pachhapa had bidden him and the devil was killed instantaneously when he was struck by the stone. He then took up his abode in the devil's big golden building which was filled with gold and silver coins and precious jewels so that he became very wealthy. On reaching manhood he was appointed Chief of the kingdom by all the people as his manners and kindness made him greatly liked by the people. The king from a neighbouring country gave him his daughter in marriage and he eventually became the most powerful of all the chiefs, and lived happily ever after.

Azy Phopa

(The man and the monkeys)

A certain man once went to the riverside to catch some crabs but in spite of all his efforts, he managed to get only a very few of them. As he had been sitting there for nearly the whole day, he became so tired and exhausted that he fell into a deep sleep. A group of monkeys happened to pass by the sleeping man and they felt rather sorry for him when they saw his meagre catch after all his long and strenuous endeavours They then searched for and caught a plentitude of crabs with which they stealthily filled his basket without disturbing him. As the man, however, still continued on sleeping soundly without making any motion, the kind-hearted monkeys came to the conclusion that he was dead and they decided it would be fitting to carry him towards his home. Though the path led through some rocky hills and precipices, the helpful monkeys safely carried and left him gently on the ground at the outskirts of his village.

When the man at last awoke from his heavy slumber and found to his utter amazement that he had been carried back to the village whilst asleep with his basket loaded with crabs, he was very happy indeed.

Naturally, the news of such a fortunate and singular experience was the main topic of the village for days on end, so much so that a friend of his decided to try his luck and attempt the same thing. With this end in view, he also proceeded to the very rock by the riverside and after catching a few crabs, feigned to fall asleep. When the group of monkeys came that way and found him apparently sleeping with a few small crabs inside the basket lying beside him, they straightaway caught a huge number of crabs and filled up his basket. As he kept on with his feigned sleep all the more, the monkeys thought that he too was dead. They, thereupon, carried him up with the intention of taking him to his village. Just when they were carrying him over a dangerous and slippery part near a precipice, however, the man became extremely nervous and so far forgot his feigned sleep that he called out "Oh! oh! do be careful." The astounded monkeys were so frightened on hearing the dead

man suddenly speak out that they immediately dropped their burden and scampered off in terror as fast as they could. The unfortunate man crashed down on the sharp rocks below the precipice and was instantly killed.

Lyu Areipenaw Phopa

(The tale of the cultivators)

In the days of yore when animals were gifted with the power of speech, a small group of them once gathered together in friendship and they all agreed to work collectively in weeding their respective *jhum* fields in rotation, beginning with the one who was the seniormost. The coterie of friends included a tiger, a boar, an otter, a jungle-cock and a monkey. They decided to commence work the following morning on the field of the tiger, as he was the oldest of the lot.

They duly started on their tasks in right earnest early the next day. Just before the lunch interval, the tiger told them to carry on while he would go and prepare their food After the rice had been cooked, the tiger was pondering what to make the curry with when suddenly a deer came tripping by which he immediately killed and cooked up. He then called his friends from their labours and they all sat down and enjoyed a hearty meal of rice and delicious vension-curry.

They next went to work on the boar's field and when the latter went to get lunch ready, he was unable to find anything suitable to eat with the rice After giving the matter his deepest thought, he eventually decided to slice off some pieces of his own fat from his left and right sides. He then cooked them up and served his companions a tasty meal of rice and rich pork-curry

The otter's field was done on the third day and when the time came he found no difficulty in arranging their repast. There was a stream flowing nearby and after cooking the rice, he dived into the river and caught an abundance of fish and his friends were regaled with a most satisfying fish-curry and rice

The jungle-cock had his field attended to on the following day and he had prepared for all contingencies in advance. He flew off

to his home roost before lunch and made the hens of his seraglio collect a basketful of fresh eggs. This enabled him to feed the group with an appetizing egg-curry and rice.

As he was the youngest of the bunch, it now fell to the monkey to serve them food when they had weeded his field. He managed to cook the rice without any trouble but did not know what to do about the curry. In his predicament, he sought the advice of the tiger, who told him, "Go into the jungle and kill a deer like I did and you will have sufficient meat for all." The monkey took the advice and on seeing a deer he jumped on its back but it immediately threw him off and kicked him severely in the process. Limping with pain, the monkey now approached the boar who said, "Well, I sliced off the fat from both my haunches to cook and feed you with curry; so why don't you do likewise?" The monkey made an attempt at it but on getting burnt in singeing his hairs, he cried out in pain, "Oh! my God. I shall surely die," and jumped up from the fire. As he could get nothing else, he collected all his singed hairs in a heap and threw them into the pot. Such an obnoxious and piercing stink arose from it that it even reached his *jhum* field where it caused his friends to mutter in alarm. "Oogh! oogh!! what an awful smelling curry the monkey seems to be making for us!" On hearing them, the monkey tried to sample a little himself of the curry but found the taste so horried that he emptied out the whole pot then and there. In increasing consternation, he asked the otter for his advice and was told to dive into the river and catch some fish. On attempting to do this, the hapless creature only succeeded in nearly drowning himself and barely managed to crawl up the banks of the river, looking woe-begone and more dead than alive! And instead of any fish, all he got for his pains was a stomachful of water which he had swallowed.

In his last resort he went to the jungle-cock, whose answer was, "All I did, my Monkey friend, was to collect a basketful of eggs from the hens in my harem; so you had better ask your young ladies to lay some eggs for you also. Or you can lay some yourself and make an egg-curry." Unfortunately for him, he could find no monkey girls in the vicinity to oblige him. In sheer desperation, he at last got down on his hind legs and after straining with all his might in his

effort to lay eggs, eventually managed to pass out a mass of monkey turds instead. The poor beast was aghast at the result of his manifold endeavours but as he was quite exhausted by this time, he dropped the turds into the cooking pot and made monkey-stool curry. When his friends came for their lunch and were assailed by the foul smell emanating from the horrible concoction, they held their noses in disgust and refused point-blank to eat the stuff.

They were extremely wrath at the monkey for what they considered as scurvy treatment, and resolved to pay him back somehow. It so happened that there was a not very deep pit dug alongside their cooking place, and the boar suddenly said in a guileless manner, "Dear me, my weeding hoe has fallen into the pit. You are the most agile of us all, so, do please jump down and get it for me, friend Monkey." "Certainly, my dear Mr. Boar," replied the monkey and jumped into the pit. After fumbling about for some time, he looked up with a puzzled frown and exclaimed, "But the weeding hoe is not here." He had hardly completed the sentence when the boar threw the boiling contents of his own stool curry over the face of the monkey. With a cry of "Mother! oh mother! save me," the unlucky fellow ran with pain and fright into the forest, the smelly mess sticking to his face. On reaching the forest, he blindly snatched at some leaves and rubbed his face vigorously. To his further misfortune, however, these happened to be stinging-nettle leaves which made matters worse as they not only caused more intense burning sensations, but scraped off the skin from his face where they had been rubbed. He came to a banana tree at long last which he tore off and applied to his afflicted parts, and it was only then that he was eased and got relief from his pains. He was so relieved by the cooling effects of the banana leaf after all the agonies he had suffered that he cried out in relief, "The smooth face of the monkey is as smooth as the banana leaf except where it has been spoilt by the rough edges of the stinging nettle."

It is said that to this day the smooth red face of the monkey still has marks of the rough nettle leaf with which he first rubbed his face on that fateful day.

9. PAWI

The Girl Who Turned Into a Tiger

Once upon a time a noted young hunter fell deeply in love with a comely maiden living in the same village. As the marriage date had already been fixed by their respective parents who had approved of their courtship, they invariably used to go and help each other in attending to their *jhum* cultivation, which was a fair distance away from the village.

It happened to be extremely hot one fateful afternoon and as the girl felt very thirsty after working in the sun for some hours, she said she would run quickly to the nearest spring to quench her thirst On hearing this, her fiance severely cautioned her against this, as dreadful results followed on drinking its water, and advised her instead to take the water from the next spring, a little further on. The girl then hurried away but as she could not contain her excessive thirst when approaching the first spring, she drank of the water from the forbidden spring and rushed back to the cultivation

Shortly after her return, the young man noticed her behaving rather strangely and perceived to his utter horror that she was gradually assuming the form of a tigress; which made him realise to his grave distress that the unfortunate girl had drunk from the fatal spring. This awful transformation made it fully apparent to the unlucky girl too that it would now be quite impossible for her to remain and live among human beings. Taking a last mournful look at her lover, she then slowly went off towards the nearest jungle.

The grief-stricken hunter immediately returned to the village where he sadly related of the terrible misfortune that had befallen his sweetheart, to the members of both families; and they thenceforward kept her supplied with meat After all their own cattle had been consumed however the young tigress began to prey on the other villagers' cattle because her transformation had given her a ravenous appetite withal. As was only to be expected, it was not long before the inhabitants of the village became thoroughly alarmed at the loss of such large numbers of their cattle owing to her daily depredations; so, they decided that something had to be done

about the matter.

A meeting was held in the evening in which the village Chief declared that unless the tigress was killed at once they would very soon not have any more cattle left at all; and then the beast would commence to kill and devour the villagers themselves, the consequences of which were too frightening to contemplate upon.

This terrible warning resulted in the outraged villagers organizing a mass hunting expedition the very next morning to exterminate the tigress; and a situation of the utmost poignancy was created here when the hapless lover himself was specially chosen by the villagers as their leader The already sorely grieving young man burst into tears when he heard this dreaded ultimatum, and piteously begged of them to spare him of so terrifying an ordeal, but it was all in vain. They remained adamant in their stern resolve and insisted that he was the only *shikari* in the whole village and without his skill and experience to guide them, they would be absolutely helpless in coping with the ferocious tigress.

And thus was it tragically ordained that this heart-broken young lover was compelled to end the unhappy life of his own greatly beloved sweetheart in these painful and pathetic circumstances.

APPENDIX

VIGNETTES FROM NEIGHBOURING LANDS

THE NORTH-EAST FRONTIER AGENCY

The North-East Frontier directly under the administration of the Central Government covers an area of about 34,960 sq. miles composed of the Kameng Shubansiri, Siang, Lohit and Tirap Frontier Divisions. The North-East Frontier Agency is a mountainous country bounded on the north by Tibet, and on the south by the Brahmaputra Valley, on the east by Burma and Tibet and on the west by Bhutan. About 50 rivers, big and small, apart from streams and waterfalls, meander through this territory inhabited by at least 25 distinct tribes in different stages of civilisation and having widely divergent customs i.e., rituals, dress and languages. The Mompa, Dafla, Tagin, Galong, Sherdukpen, Apatani, Akam, Padam, Khampti, Singpho, Tangsa, Mishmi, Wancho, Naga and Abor are only some of the tribes inhabiting NEFA territory.

The main occupation of the people of NEFA is agriculture. Education has made some headway. Quite a number of tribes are adept in weaving and in bamboo, cane and wood work. Mishmi, Naga and Abor textiles are colourful and have beautiful indigenous designs. Carpentry, pottery and sericulture are being gradually introduced as cottage industries.

Constitutionally, the North-East Frontier Agency is a part of Assam. It is administered by the Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, with the Governor of Assam acting as an Agent to the President of India. Prior permission is necessary for entering the NEFA area.

F. Rahman

THE LAND OF THE NAGAS

Dimapur or Manipur Road is a station on the main line of the North Eastern Railway. The latter name is aptly used as it is the

place from where the road to Manipur leads across the Naga Hills. Dimapur is also reached by road from Golaghat, 45 miles distant, through the great Nambor forest where by the road-side is a hot spring called Garampani. Any wild animal, including wild elephants, may be met with if this journey is done by night.

Dimapur was the capital of the ancient Kachari kingdom. The ruins of Dimapur are still in existence. These consist of an enclosure in which are ruins of temples and a double row of carved pillars of sandstone There are also several tanks two of which are fairly large in size.

The road to Kohima from Manipur Road, a distance of 46 miles, makes a two-hour drive up the steep slopes of the Naga Hills notorious for frequent landslips. On the way one hill is popularly named Pagla Pahar, meaning "mad mountain", because of the boulders that suddenly roll down its slopes upon the road for no apparent reason. At places, the hill-sides are cleared of forest growths by the Nagas for growing crops or vegetables. Higher up the hills are to be seen terraced cultivations with a very ingenious watering system where spring water is made to flow down the valley over the terraced paddy beds. Some of these terraced cultivations look like vast natural amphitheatres.

Kohima, a picturesque little town, is the capital of Nagaland State. The village of Kohima, one of the largest of Naga villages is nearby. There are several clans among Nagas, such as the Lhota, the Kacha, the Sema and the Angami. The Nagas of Kohima are mostly Angamis.

At Kohima was halted the Japanese advance into Indian territory during World War II. War scars on lamp posts and houses can still be seen. There is a large war cemetry where lie the remains of those who fell in the Battle of Kohima. Over the mass of graves a stone epitaph reads :

"When you go home, tell them of us, and say,
For their tomorrow we gave our today."

F. Rahman

MANIPUR

Until recently, before the introduction of responsible popular

Government through an elected legislature, Manipur was a part of Assam with an area of 8,630 sq. miles and population of six lakhs.

The excellence of Manipuri music and dancing is well known throughout Assam and in other parts of India. The dances are graceful and original in character and depiction. The *Raslila* dance as performed by the Manipuris is particularly noteworthy. The Manipuris have also their folk-dances which are performed on festive occasions, such as during the *Holi* and *Jhulan* festivals.

Manipuri women weave cloth in various designs Some of these are very artistically embroidered. Manipuri cloth and nets are popular in Assam and have a ready market anywhere in the State. Cane and bamboo articles of use and ornaments are also made by the Manipuris. Women sell their wares at the Imphal market Imphal is the seat of Government and is connected by air with Gauhati via Silchar A beautiful road leads to it from Dimapur through the Naga Hills, the total distance being 132 miles.

F Rahman

TRIPURA

Covered by picturesque hills and dales, dense forests and green fields, Tripura is situated in the south-western part of Assam. The present Union Territory of Tripura was a princely State. A State of great antiquity, Tripura claims to be the most ancient of all the former princely States in India Its recorded history goes back to the days of *Mahabharata* This is also borne out by references in the *Mahabharata*, the *Puranas* and the Asoka Pillars where Tripura has been mentioned as a 'frontier kingdom'. It was ruled by the Maharajas for an unbroken period of thirteen hundred years before it acceded to the Indian Union on October 15, 1949 and became a part "C" State under the Indian Constitution.

The rulers of Tripura claim descent from King Druhya of the lunar race. Druhya was succeeded by his son Bavru. As the legend has it, the sage Kapila conferred the title of 'King' on Bavru with due ceremony and "ever since this proud title has been assumed by the successive rulers".

It was king Ditya's successor Tripur who gave the territory the name it still bears. Previous to that this territory was known as 'Kiratadesha' (the land of the Kiratas). King Tripura was a contemporary of Emperor Yudisthira and mention has been made in the *Mahabharata* that his son Trilochana was present at the royal sacrifice *Rajasuya Yajna* performed by the Emperor

There were frequent Mughal invasions of Tripura which were seldom successful. The Mohammedan rulers of Gour also attacked Tripura several times. Tripura met these foreign aggressions with determination and retained her independance

The State of Tripura used to comprise fluctuating area won by conquest in the plains as well as in the hill-tracts. At times its armies enlarged the dominion from the Sundarbans in the west to Burma in the east and south and Kamrup in the north. With the advent of British rule attempts were made to annex the territory of the Tripura State to British India by some over-zealous officials These attempts failed and Tripura continued to maintain its separate entity as a princely State

The last ruling prince of Tripura was Maharaja Bir Bikram Kishore Manikya. He ascended the throne in 1923 at the age of 14 only He was a very popular ruler and a versatile person. He had great foresight and was a good planner. This benevolent ruler passed away on May 17, 1967 The ruler who ceded his rights to the Indian Union was H.H Maharaja Manikya Kirit Bikram Kishore Dev Barman Bahadur, a minor at the time and the 179th ruler in direct descent of the line from Druhya (as the legend goes).

The Tripura Merger Agreement was signed on September 9, 1949 in New Delhi and it was on October 15 of the same year that the Tripura State became a part "C" State under the Indian Constitution. It was governed by a Chief Commissioner with the help of three Advisers selected from the representatives of the people. With the reorganisation of the States which came into force on November 1, 1956, Tripura became a Union Territory. On August 15th, 1957, was set up the Tripura Territorial Council consisting of 30 elected and two nominated members. The Council was associated with the administration of certain social services (education and public health), public works such as local roads and agricultural

activities like animal husbandry.

With the introduction of the Government of Union Territories Act, the Tripura Territorial Council and the Tripura Administration merged into the Government of Tripura when the first popular Ministry of Tripura headed by Shri Sachindra Lal Singh assumed office on July 1, 1963. Thus the first day of July is a red-letter day in the history of Tripura.

According to the census of 1961 the population of Tripura was 11,42,005. But the present population would be round about 15 lakhs. It is interesting to note here that the population of the territory was 5,13,010 in 1941 and 6,45,707 in 1951 The abnormal increase was not due to natural growth of population but to heavy influx of refugees from East Pakistan which surrounds Tripura on three sides.

Amidst the picturesque hills and forests of Tripura live about 4 lakhs of tribal people who have a rich culture of their own and are proud of their heritage Belonging to 19 various tribes, such as the Tripuri, Chakma, Reang, Halam, Jamatia, Meg, Noatia, Garo, Lushai, these tribes had hardly any contact with the outside world a few decades back. With the integration of the Territory with India, the position changed and a new era commenced in Tripura with numerous development and welfare activities which included a vigorous programme for tribal welfare to meet the needs of the Adivasi people and to bring them up educationally and economically to a level with the general population of the country as speedily as possible.

Due to their traditional habits, the tribal people live by *jhum*, an extravagant practice detrimental to forest wealth, causing soil erosion and impoverishing the soil. In the old days when the land and forests were in abundance and the people were small in number there was ample scope for *jhuming*. But with the increase of population the area available for *jhum* cultivation has naturally shrunk considerably. That is why schemes have been taken up to wean the people away from the practice of *jhum* cultivation and rehabilitate them in well-planned colonies in the plains and induce them to take to settled methods of cultivation.

To promote the cultural activities of the tribes several cultural

centres have been set up. An Inter State competition of folk dance is arranged every year and prizes are awarded to the best teams.

Besides, for the economic, educational and cultural upliftment of the tribal population, the Tribal Welfare Department of the Government of Tripura has been conducting researches into the customs, manners, culture etc. of the tribal people. A Tribal Advisory Committee has been set up to advise the Government on matters pertaining to the Welfare and advancement of the Scheduled Tribes in the territory

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