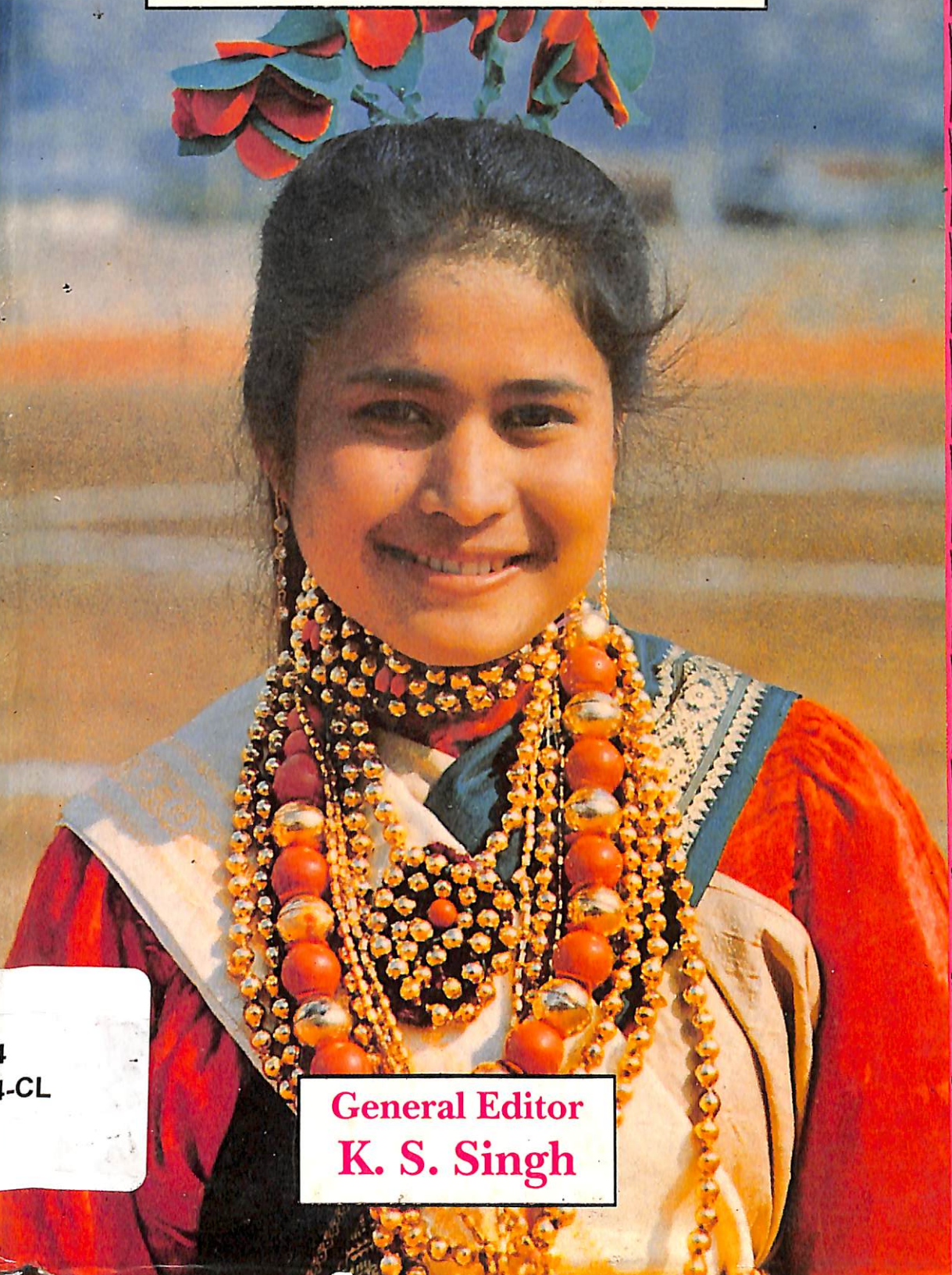


PEOPLE OF INDIA
MEGHALAYA

VOLUME XXXII



General Editor
K. S. Singh

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PEOPLE OF INDIA

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PEOPLE OF INDIA

MEGHALAYA

Volume XXXII

General Editor
K S SINGH

Editors
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A NOTE ON THE SERIES

There exists an information gap on a very large number of communities in India, and whatever information exists on them is scanty or needs to be updated. The Anthropological Survey of India (ASI) launched a project on the People of India on 2 October 1985. The objective of the project was to generate a brief, descriptive anthropological profile of all the communities of India, the impact on them of change and development processes and the links that bring them together. This was in accordance with the objectives of the ASI., established forty-five years ago in December 1945. The ASI has been pursuing bio-cultural research among different population groups from its eight regional centres. Its objectives have been redefined in the policy resolution, adopted in 1985, which commits this organization to a survey of the human surface of India.

The identification of the communities and their listing began at an early period of our history, with Manu. Regional lists of communities figured in Sanskrit works. Medieval chronicles contained a description of communities located in various parts of the country. Listings in the colonial period were undertaken on an extensive scale, after 1806. The process gathered momentum in course of the censuses from 1881 to 1941. In our compilation of the lists of the communities of India under the People of India project, we drew upon ethnographic surveys, the lists of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes drawn up by the Government of India, the lists of backward classes prepared by Backward Classes Commissions set up by various state governments, and the list that exists in the Mandal Commission Report. We were able to put together about 6748 communities at the start. This list was taken to the field, tested and checked, and finally 4635 communities were identified and studied.

Unlike surveys in the colonial period, which covered British India and a few princely states, our project covers the whole country, bringing within its ambit also those parts that had not been ethno-

graphically surveyed earlier or where the survey had been done in a perfunctory way. Each state and union territory was treated as a unit of study. It was decided to start with the investigation of the least-known communities, and then move on to a field study of the lesser-known and better-known ones. Investigators for the survey were identified for each area on the basis of their experience and expertise. Teams of investigators of the Survey, as well as local scholars, were set up for each state and union territory to plan the surveys, seek the co-operation of local scholars, generate and evaluate findings, etc., etc. Later, editorial boards consisting of local scholars — one or more of these were nominated as co-editor/s for each local volume — were set up for each state and union territory. We sought the co-operation of the state governments in implementing the project, and this we received in ample measure, particularly from the welfare and backward classes departments of the state governments, local officers of the Census of India, tribal research institutes, university departments of anthropology, other departments of local universities, etc. Local scholars participated enthusiastically in our project as well as in the seminars held by us.

The progress in the investigation and coverage of communities from 2 October 1985 to 31 March 1992 was steady and impressive. We were able to identify, locate and study 4635 communities in all the states and union territories of India, out of the 6748 listed initially. As many as 600 scholars participated in this project, including 197 from 26 institutions. About 100 workshops and rounds of discussions were held in all the states and union territories, and in these about 3000 scholars participated. The investigators spent 26,510 days in the field, which works out to 5.5 days per community studied in the various states and union territories of India. Our scholars interviewed a large number of people, out of whom we have recorded only the key informants, i.e. 24,951. This works out to about 5 'informed' informants per community. Of the informants, 4981 were women. Our instruction to the investigators was to study a community at two or three places, and in at least two or three cultural regions into which the larger states of India are divided. Interviews were conducted in connection with the study of the communities in 3581 villages, mostly multi-community villages, and in 1011 towns and cities spread over almost all the districts of India, i.e. 421 districts and 91 cultural regions. We were able, thus, to study on an average a community at about two places. It should be noted that most of the smaller communities could

be studied at only one place since they are not located in more than one area.

A major achievement of this project was the preparation of cartographic maps showing the distribution of the communities and the location where they were studied. About 4000 maps were prepared. Yet another achievement was the visual documentation of the people of India as part of the field operations. About 21,362 photographs were generated, most of them in black and white, and a substantial number in colour, by amateur photographers.

At an early stage of our project in March 1985 we decided to transfer the data to a computer. We were subsequently able to develop probably the first software in the country — and one of the first in the world — in ethnography, in close collaboration with the National Informatics Centre. From 28 May 1988 we started transferring the quantitative data collected in computer format to floppies. Simultaneously, the transfer of descriptive data (abstracts etc.) on to the computer also started at almost all the regional centres. We succeeded in computerizing an enormous mass of data, and also in producing the first results of univariate analysis, by March 1990.

The descriptive material, running into 120 manuscript volumes, and the quantitative data contained in 257 diskettes, were released on 1 October 1990 by Sri Chimanbhai Mehta, Minister of State for Human Resource Development, in the presence of a distinguished audience in Delhi, for use by scholars at the Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, and at eight regional centres of the ASI.

The phase of more elaborate analysis started in July 1991, in collaboration with the Centre for Ecological Sciences, Indian Institute of Science, Bangalore. This resulted in a voluminous output of analysed data, which have been presented in a comprehensive matrix consisting of the four categories of populations, the constitutional, religious, occupational and locational. These sets of data, together with a map, were released by Shri Arjun Singh, Minister of Human Resource Development, on 24 December 1991. The last workshop on the People of India project was held at the Indian Institute of Social and Economic Change in Bangalore, where the preliminary results of the analysis presented by the ASI were discussed by distinguished scholars.

It should be noted that the study of the communities has been conducted in 3581 villages and 1011 towns situated in 421 districts of the States and Union Territories of India. The information was

collected from about 25,000 of the 'learned' informants by our scholars, 500 of them, over the period 1985 to 1992. Therefore, the observations relate to this limited time frame and to the universe of the ethnographic project titled People of India. The percentages relate strictly to the responses made by the informants to the questionnaire contained in the schedule guideline and computer format, and to the queries made by the investigators at the places of investigation. The responses have been supplemented with the observations of the investigators, the secondary material from the census, ethnographic records etc. The material has been checked and cross-checked by scholars, particularly local scholars, at many levels with other sources of information.

We are presenting the material assembled under the People of India project in two parts which are interrelated. The first consists of the ten-volume national series, five of which contain an abstract on all communities across the length and breadth of the country. The data generated in this respect has been supported with the addition of information from census and other secondary sources. These volumes include two on the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, prepared as part of the celebration of Dr B R Ambedkar's birth centenary; three on all the communities of India, and two containing data on the languages and biological structures of Indian population. The remaining volumes contain description of the quantitative profile, an annotated list of communities and their segments, community-specific languages and the biological structure of Indian populations.

The second part comprises the state/union territory volumes, with detailed descriptive accounts of each community of India. The contributors to the national volumes on the SC, ST and all communities are listed in the last volume, Volume 6. The Glossary given in Volume 6 is common to all the national volumes. At the end of each account we have given references to the texts from which we have quoted, or references for further reading. This is only illustrative. An exhaustive bibliography appears at the end of the national volumes, in Volume 6.

A consortium of publishers has been set up to publish the material on states and union territories. Seven volumes each for the northern states, southern states and the islands, the central and western states will be published respectively by M/s Manohar Publishers and Distributors (New Delhi), M/s Affiliated East-West Press Private Limited (Madras) and M/s Popular Prakashan Pvt. Ltd. (Bombay). The eleven volumes on the north-eastern and eastern states will be published by

M/s Seagull Books Private Limited (Calcutta), which has already published the introductory national volume, which in its turn will be followed by the other national volumes to be published by the Oxford University Press.

I trust this series on the People of India, which is based on a comprehensive anthropological survey of the country, will be found useful by all sections of our people, including students, researchers, teachers, social activists, administrators and political leaders. I hope we have laid the groundwork for a comprehensive ethnography of the people of India which needs to be continually updated and built upon by successive generations of researchers and scholars.

K S SINGH

FOREWORD

Meghalaya, the abode of the clouds, attracted the notice of the anthropologists for its institution of tribal matriliney. Extensive work has also been done on many tribal communities of Meghalaya and on many facets of its culture. However, it was only under the People of India project that the first comprehensive ethnographic survey of all communities was undertaken in all its aspects, cultural, linguistic and biological. The last aspect was covered through the extension of the All India Anthropometric Survey, the data of which supplemented by secondary material are still being analysed.

Out of 25 communities covered by this Survey, 15 are the scheduled tribes. These include smaller tribes (14), who are mostly migrants from the neighbouring states. There are non-tribal communities (12) who have migrated to Meghalaya to perform a number of roles as traders, businessmen, shopkeepers, labourers etc.

Almost all the communities recall having migrated to this region. Twentyone communities migrated to this region from the north; three communities have migrated in recent years. Most of the communities identify themselves at the local and regional level, while three communities do so at the national level and two others at the transnational level, their kinsmen spread across the international borders. Detailed ethnographic accounts written during pre and post Independent era are available for 15 communities; there are 3 communities which have been referred to in jati-purana. Each of the communities has its distinctive dress form. Ornaments are also a distinctive marker including use of gold by the Khasis.

Most of the communities are non-vegetarian (22) who take beef and pork alongside of mutton, except the Marwari who are pure vegetarian. Vegetables are moderately consumed by the communities (11). Rice is the staple food. They also take wheat (9) and maize (8). The pulses consumed are gram (17), tur (10), urad (10), moong (21) and masur (25). Roots and tubers are consumed by all. The medium of cooking is mustard oil and animal fat. The alcoholic drinks are consumed by most of the communities which are either homemade or are procured from the market. The consumption of milk and milk

products is slowly becoming a part of dietary. All the communities take betel nut and betel leaf. The exchange of these items represents acceptance and extension of hospitality.

Social divisions exist in 21 communities in the form of lineage or clan (20) which regulate marriage and indicate status. Most of them claim to follow the norm of community endogamy. Clan exogamy is observed by 20 communities. Inter-community marriage are also reported in 19 communities. Consanguineous marriage in form of cross cousin marriage MBD is practised in 12 and FBD in 3 communities. Monogamy and adult marriage is the rule. The common form of acquiring a mate is by negotiation (27), mutual consent (21), courtship (15) and elopement (9). Five communities practise polygyny which is either sororal or non-sororal.

All the segments of the three major tribes, the Garo, Khasi and Jaintia have been identified and described at length. These tribes share a matrilineal tradition, under which descent is reckoned in the female line and the child belongs to the clan of the mother. But it is important to mention that matriliney among the Garo does not imply female domination in any sphere of life. The Garo women in some aspects are dominated by the males. In fact, matriliney is only a mode of transmission through which property is inherited from one generation to another. On the other hand, Khasis and Jaintias have a matrilineal system in a more meaningful way where women enjoy a better social status and position than the Garo women. The Rabha and the Koch have retained matrilineal descent, but they have abandoned matrilineal inheritance rule. The residence after marriage is neolocal in 18 communities, patrilocal in 17 communities and matrilocal in 8 communities. Though extended family exists in 5 families, the nuclear family is on the increase in 25 communities.

In recent years tribal matriliney has been under stress mainly as a result of growing male dominance and the insistence of the male members of the family particularly those who are earning on exercising a more effective role in family affairs. The Khasi man are disenchanted with the existing affairs. When a Khasi woman marries a non-Khasi man, this is seen as posing a threat to Khasi identity, which is defining itself continually in relation to non-Khasis. There is a demand for suspension of matrilineal inheritance laws in all such cases where gender is counterpoised to ethnicity. However, there are other dimensions to the issue as well, the threat to the rights and status of women in general. Therefore, in many cases tribal women resist such efforts

at erosion of their rights, as they see inmatriliny many positive elements to safeguard their interests.

Women play an important role in agriculture, animal husbandry, fishing, the economic, religious, and in political spheres. Their status is considered equal in 11 communities, high in 4 communities and low in 10 communities.

Land is the main resource for 23 communities followed by forest (9). Among 19 communities land is controlled by individual proprietors. The communities depend on settled cultivation (17), terrace cultivation (7), and shifting cultivation (8) along with hunting and gathering (6), fishing (11) and horticulture (14). Weaving is another vocation practised by them (7). They have direct access to the market through daily market (20) and weekly market (19). Barter system exists in 2 communities. Traditional village councils exist in 16 communities, looking after the welfare and social affairs of the community. Chieftainship exists in 5 communities.

Most of the communities follow Christianity (15). The other religions professed in the state are Hinduism (16), Islam (6), Sikhism (1), Jainism (1) and Buddhism (2) along with tribal religion. The state has vibrant oral traditions including folklore, folksongs and folktales.

Basketry (11) remains the most popular form of crafts as the area abounds in various species of bamboo. Weaving is very popular. Ironsmithy is still one of the traditional occupation; goldsmiths do lucrative business. Indigenous instruments are still popular, the most significant development is the adoption of western musical instruments and western mode of singing. Both men and women participate in dancing.

Traditional village councils exist among fourteen communities and election to such bodies are by voice vote in eight communities and by secret ballot in five communities. While formal statutory bodies have been introduced in eleven communities, the traditional village councils settle the minor conflicts and disputes. The criminal offences are referred to the formal government body. However, village authorities help the government in implementing welfare and developmental activities.

Christianity is widely practised alongside of tribal religion and Buddhism. Hinduism (1), Sikhism (1), Jainism (1), Islam (1) are other religions followed by the communities of Meghalaya. Three communities have followers of Hinduism, Christianity and tribal religion. Family (12) deities and village (10) deities are worshipped in

most of the communities. Sacred specialists are mostly from the same communities (13). Ten communities have adopted other religions (10). While Christianity and Hinduism are the two movements which have altered the world view of the tribals, there are also movements specifically demanding restoration of the traditional mode of worship.

Among the Nepali, Marwari and Bihari traces of notion of ritual purity and commensality exist. Maximum number of communities are in business followed by administrative work. Leaders have also emerged from Garo and Khasi communities at the national level.

Formal education is encouraged for boys who take up higher studies. Indigenous medicine is very popular (14) though the modern system of medicare is also gaining ground. The attitude to family planning is positive (12) yet, it is not much favoured because they fear being overrun by the people from the plains. Natural springs (17) are the main source of drinking water. Media of communication such as newspaper, radio (22) and television (16) are popular. Firewood is the main resource for fuel (19) and agriculturists are still dependent (14) on rain water for irrigation. However, fair price shops for procuring ration exist for almost all communities. Land and gold are the two things in which they invest their savings.

The rise of Shillong, as a tribal metropolis has been documented elsewhere. Suffice it to say that a large number of tribals not only from Meghalaya but also from other parts of the northeast have been urbanised. An educated, progressive tribal elite has emerged over years, which is playing a critical role in politics, administration and cultural affairs. Shillong is also the headquarters not only of the Christian missions but also of the Seng Khasi which upholds the traditional tribal values of the Khasis.

The All India Anthropometric Survey was extended to Meghalaya, but the data are still being analysed as mentioned above. However, most of the secondary bio-anthropological information that is available is only for the scheduled tribes. The bio-anthropological information is available for eight tribes. The serological aspects, stature and cephalic index are found to be more significant. The Garos stand out distinctly with high frequency of B and A blood group while the Khasi and Jaintia have high frequency of A and B. From somatometric point of view, the Garos exhibit medium stature, while Khasi and Jaintia fall under short stature group. The cephalic index however brings all the three groups under one category of Mesocephalic. Tribes in Meghalaya are short statured, have long to round head, medium nose and broad

face. Dermatoglyphic studies indicate high incidence of loops (42.80-63.05%) than whorls (34.51-55.90%). Arches have very low frequency (0.30-2.39%). Colour blindness has been reported in 3.80% of individuals studied. Hb.E shows extremely high frequency in Tibeto-Burman speaking tribes (44.70%) than Austro-Asiatic speakers (Khasi) (3.42-22.52%). Khasi group show 7.00% incidence of G6PD. Gene A preponderates (10.60-25.60%) over B gene (7.11-21.10%) in Khasi tribes. Haplotype r is not reported from any population. The frequencies of biochemical genetic traits are Pc (RCAP) (4.50%), PGM¹ (61.70%), Ak¹ (95.40%), PGD^a (6-PGD) (95.34%), and ADA¹ (94.20%).

Meghalaya is linguistically heterogenous. For all of its 27 communities, it has fifteen languages. The Khasi which belongs to the Austro-Asiatic family of languages is the language spoken by the largest number of communities, seven in number. Seven languages (Assamese, Bengali, Marwari, Nepali, Punjabi and Urdu) belong to the Indo-Aryan family of languages. The Muslim community consists both of Bengali and Urdu speakers. All the Tibeto-Burman languages are tribal languages. According to 1981 Census the Khasi language is spoken by 625,424 persons. The other tribal languages spoken are : Bodo/Boro (1,812 persons), Garo (406,145), Koch (15,902), Lushai/Mizo (3,339), Mikir (9,964) and Rabha (14,503). Non-tribal languages spoken in the state of Meghalaya are : Assamese (25,755), Bengali (118,874) and Hindi (29,323). There are 62,827 persons who speak Gorkhali/Nepali languages and 1,506 persons who speak Manipuri/Meitei language.

The Khasi speakers are bilingual in English (42,890), Hindi (10,811), Bengali (1,687), Assamese (1,250) and Garo (1,289); the Garo in English (17,267), Bengali (14,857), Hindi (9,953) and Assamese (4,827); the Koch in Bengali (3,128), Assamese (942) and Garo (761); the Lushai/Mizo speakers in English (1,251) and Hindi (453); the Rabha in Assamese (3,622), Garo (737), Bengali (730) and English (148); and the Mikir in Khasi (991), Assamese (362), Hindi (233) and Bengali (115).

The Assamese speakers are bilingual in English (4,332), Hindi (3,700), and Bengali (1,524); the Bengali speakers in English (16,907), Hindi (12,849), Assamese (4,696) and Khasi (611); and the Hindi speakers are bilingual in English (4,801), Bengali (913). The Roman and Devanagari scripts are in use in the state of Meghalaya.

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We have received ample cooperation from the local authorities of the state. The material generated by the project was discussed at a number of seminars held at the North-Eastern Regional Centre, Shillong. The seminars were attended by a large number of scholars, some belonging to the Survey and some from outside. Among scholars from the Anthropological Survey of India, mention may be made of Dr. A. Basu, Superintending Anthropologist (physical), Dr. Shibani Roy, Anthropologist (cultural), Smt. Bandana Das, Senior, Technical Assistant (physical), Dr.S.S. DattaChaudhuri, Research Associate (physical), Smt. S. Bhattacharyya, Research Associate (physical), Shri S.K. Chaudhuri, Senior Technical Assistant (cultural), Dr.S.S. Mishra, Research Associate, and Dr. N. Saha, Research Associate (cultural).

INTRODUCTION

The state of Meghalaya was described as the 'Scotland of the East' by the first British colonial who gained entry into this enchanted land of lush green mountains and meandering rivers. This place was first referred to as Meghalaya by S.P. Chatterjee (1936). This name was officially adopted when it attained statehood in 1971. It is situated between latitudes 25 degree 02' and 26 degree 06' North and longitudes 89 degree 50' and 92 degree 50' East. The state has a total geographical area of 22.5 thousand square kilometres. Its boundaries are demarcated by the Goalpara and the Kamrup districts of Assam in the north, the south-western part of the district of Goalpara and a part of Rangpur district (Bangladesh) in the west, the Mymensingh and Sylhet districts of Bangladesh in the south and the north Cachar and the Karbi Anglong districts of Assam in the east.

The state of Meghalaya has five administrative districts, namely, West Garo Hills, East Garo Hills, West Khasi Hills, East Khasi Hills and Jaintia Hills. It receives heavy rainfall during summer months and has the distinction of including the area with the highest rainfall in the world. The average altitude of Meghalaya varies from 1500 metres to 1800 metres above sea level. The forest covers are mainly tropical wet evergreen, semi evergreen, moist deciduous and sub-tropical pine forest. The soil of Meghalaya is primarily acidic in nature with a high concentration of iron. The average annual temperature is 17.5 degree C.

The climate of the Garo Hills is comparatively warmer than that of the Khasi Hills, with fairly high summer and moderate winter temperatures. The climate of eastern Meghalaya is bracing due to high altitude and consequent moderate temperatures. The central upland zone is freezing in winter but without snow. The northern and the southern hills have a sub-tropical climate. The central and the southern hilly areas are rich in coal, iron, limestone, salamint and clay.

The state of Meghalaya is sparsely populated due to its rugged terrain and inhospitable environs. It has a population of about 1.33 million, with a density as low as 59 people per sq. km. (1981) in contrast to only 45 persons per sq. km. earlier (1971). The Myllem community development block of East Khasi Hills district has the highest density

of population (1069 persons per sq. km. according to the 1981 census), while in the Mawshynrut development block of West Khasi Hills district it is 20 persons per sq. km., which is the lowest among all the blocks in Meghalaya. The decennial population growth of Meghalaya is 32.04 per cent, which is higher than that of the past few decades. The sex ratio of Meghalaya (1981 Census) is 956 females per 1000 males, the national ratio being 935. The percentage distribution of other communities is as follows: the percentage distribution of Assamese population in the Khasi and the Jaintia Hills is 2.22%, while that of the Bangalis is 6.86%, Hindi (probably Hindi speaking) 1.51%, Khasi 75.58%, Rajasthani 0.04% and Nepali 6.38% (1961 Census Saha, K.D. 1979 p. 16).

Meghalaya is predominantly inhabited by three tribes, the Garo, the Khasi and the Jaintia. There is no definitive historical account of the origin of the people of the region, since it is occupied by tribal groups, who till recently lived in physical isolation and had no script of their own. However, there is some reference to them in *Buranjis* of the Ahoms.

The pre-historic evidence found in Meghalaya, has contributed significantly towards establishing the fact that paleolithic man lived here. Till 1960, there was an abundance of neolithic surface finds in the Garo Hills. However, the later expeditions in Rongram, Selbalgiri, Mishimagiri and Thebranggiri established the fact that the lower paleolithic, the middle paleolithic and the upper paleolithic sites were not merely conjecture but that paleolithic man had once lived here. Pebble, core and flake tools are its evidence, though no human fossils have been found so far.

Khasi and Jaintia folklore and oral traditions tell of supernatural origins, saying that these people descended from heaven. The migrant Bodos, who were divided into a number of small linguistic groups, such as the Garo, Kachari, Mech, Dimasa, Lalung, Rabha and Chutiya (Barkataki 1969), settled in the plains of the Garo Hills. Playfair (1909) opines that the Garos and the Kacharis were originally of one tribe which subsequently separated into two. Practically nothing is known regarding the history of the Garos. According to their own tradition, the Garo were not autochthons of the Garo Hills.

The important immigrant communities of this region are the Bangali, the Muslim, the Nepali, the Bihari, the Marwari and the Mazhabi Sikhs. They came to this area mainly for economic reasons. There are a large number of these immigrant communities particu-

larly in Shillong and its neighbourhood. There are historical reasons for the concentration of non-tribals in Shillong. The city was the capital of Assam and Bengal, during colonial days and continued to be so till the state of Meghalaya was created. Long before the advent of the British, the Garo Hills and the Jaintia Hills districts attracted non-tribal communities, particularly the Bangalis, because of trade. In western Meghalaya, the most important population group is the Garo which is numerically dominant. Besides, the Garo, the other communities who inhabit the area are the Rabha, Hajong, Koch, Man, Dalu and Banai. Amongst them the Man is a small tribe considered to be of the Burmese origin and the Buddhist by religion. The Banai and the Dalu are two least known communities of the Meghalaya. Eastern Meghalaya is the domain of the Khasis and the Jaintias. The broad term Khasi includes the Bhoi, War, Khyntiaum and Lyngam. The Bhoi inhabit the north-western part of the Khasi Hills, the War inhabit the southern part of the east Khasi Hills, the Khyntiaum occupy the central and highest peaks of the Meghalaya plateau, and the Lyngam inhabit the western border of the east Khasi Hills, near the Garo Hills. All these groups of the Khasi share basically the same language and social structure, but each group tends to be endogamous. Their culture, dialects, economy, social usage and political organisation vary due to ecological and politico-historical reasons. In the present study, these four divisions of the Khasi community have been treated as distinct population groups. At the same time, to view the Khasi community as a whole, a separate report entitled 'The Khasi' is included in the present volume. During the field work in the district of the Jaintia Hills, a small population group belonging to the Kukichin category, referred to as the Biate, were found. Dr. B. Pakem (1984) had mentioned them in one of his articles. Besides, C.A. Soppitt (1887) had mentioned them under the Kuki-Lushai group. They are recorded as a scheduled category in the 1971 census, with a population of 2,549. The villages with the Biate households are situated near the Assam border of Meghalaya and are not approachable for several months in a year, since there are no road connections. The Kuki-Chin groups have been intensively studied in Mizoram and Manipur, hence any detailed information on this small scattered population in Meghalaya has not been obtained.

In 1874, Assam was carved out of the Bengal on the basis of its cultural homogeneity. Shillong was named its capital. Hence, British officials and clergymen made their home in this town. These people

not only gave a Western ambience to the town but more significantly, they settled a large number of plainsmen in this area. The Bangalis came as clerks, the Nepalese as personnel of the Assam Rifles and the Assamese as bureaucrats. Thus it is evident that the once difficult terrain, which invaders could not penetrate, was made accessible to the plainspeople by the intervention of the British, with the result that the Khasi Hills became the nerve centre of administration and political power for the entire northeast.

The coming of the British resulted in many political and administrative changes in the hilly regions of the Khasi and the Jaintia Hills. In 1824, the first Anglo-Jaintia Treaty was signed, while in 1826, U-Tirot Singh agreed to abide by the treaty signed before David Scott. After a couple of years, U-Tirot Singh realised the consequences of the treaty and organised other *Syiems* to wage war against the British. The fighting lasted for four years at the end of which U-Tirot Singh was taken prisoner. It is important to note here that this guerrilla warfare was not confined to the Khasi Hills alone but spread to the entire region. The Garos, the Syntengs, the War, the Bhoi were all involved in it, and this gradually resulted in the annexation of the hill areas by the British, one after the other. The conflict with the British revealed the militant qualities of the people the Khasi and the Syntengs were good archers, while the Garos were excellent swordsmen.

During this period, Cherrapunjee was established as the headquarters, and the political agent was stationed here. However, till 1849, outbursts of rebellion from different parts of the hill areas kept disturbing the British contingent in their political endeavours. Studying the political organisation of this area, we learn the following facts. The Jaintia Hills are also referred to as the land of twelve *Doloi*. Traditionally, the mechanism of social control was based on *syiemship* i.e. patterned on the monarchy. However, during 1835, the entire area was annexed and only the office of the *Doloi* was retained by the British. Consequently, each *doloi* ruled over an *elaka*. However, the chief was allowed by the British to use the title of *Rajah*. Nevertheless, a few attempts at kidnapping British subjects led to the annexation of the Jaintia Hills by the British in 1835. The annexation was not taken in good spirit by the locals and impetus for fresh rebellion against the British was built up. Only at the end of 1863 was the Jaintia rebellion suppressed completely.

The neighbouring district of Khasi Hills was divided into sixteen territories (*Hima*) each ruled by a *Syiem*. The *Himas* were the Khyrim,

Cherra, Nogstoin, Nongsung, Malei Sohnet, Mykliem, Rambrai, Nobosohphoh, Mawsynram, Langrin, Nongkhlaw, Mynsaw, Mawiang, Maharam, Bhowol and Jirang. These organised states functioned on the pattern of monarchy. This was followed by Lyngdohships, which were semi-independent units and were three in number, the Mawphlang, Sohiong and Syniang. This was followed by five Sirdarships and the Shella was governed by a Wahawadarship. After the annexation of these areas, the *Syiem* and the other traditional office bearers were subject to the British political agent and other administrators appointed by the British.

On the other hand, the traditional pattern of social control in the Garo Hills was based on the *nokma* and his council of elders. After annexation the *nokmas* retained their authority over the *akin* land but the post of *laskar* was created by the British. The entire Garo Hills was divided into approximately sixty clusters of villages under the leadership of the *laskar*. His sole duty was the collection of taxes through the *nokma* and the settlement of disputes in accordance with the customary laws of the Garo. The *laskar* was aided by the *sirdrar* in his work. This system was semi-authoritative in style.

All the three districts mentioned above vehemently resisted British entry into their secluded land as well as in their personal and public affairs. The sepoy's installed in each of these areas were recruited from among the plainsmen, who, on coming in contact with the hill people for the first time, treated them as aliens. Their attempts to impose imperial rule evoked a lot of anger among the hill people, who did not have a hierarchic pattern of social organisation and treated everyone as equal. Besides, the natural resources and the protected areas, especially the sacred forests, were fully utilised by the British colonials for establishing their headquarters. Also, the people resented the move of the traditional chiefs who, trying to come to a compromise with the invading British, handed over extensive areas of their land, which was not the exclusive property of the head but belonged to the people as a whole. Lastly, British possession of the state treasury and the state treasures greatly affected the belief system of the people. In order to bring back normalcy into their social pattern the people tried every strategy to wipe out the British colonists but they failed, since these segmented areas had never earlier been faced with a common enemy and so had never felt the need to organise themselves on a mass scale. The few chiefs who rose against the British fought valiantly as individual forces, but failed to unite all the segmented areas and their

people.

Thus, the British political agent through his administrative powers, tried to lure the local populace, punishing the rebellious *Syiems* through fines and handing over their land to the other *Syiems* and treating them leniently. In 1853, the military departments were separated from the civil and an Assistant Commissioner was installed instead of the political agent. However, the humid climate of Cherrapunjee did not suit the British residents and they shifted the headquarters to Shillong in 1864. In 1874, it was made the capital of the Assam Province. In 1905, Shillong was made the summer headquarters of the United Province of East Bengal and Assam. Earlier this place was known as Iewduh and it came under the *syiemship* of Myllem. The *Syiem* donated a large section of the communal wasteland to the British and they purchased the rest from the *Syiem* or from private owners.

In 1910, the Municipal Act was introduced in the European ward and the Myllem state areas, through which was created the office of the Junior Assistant Commissioner or Deputy Commissioner. His major task was the enforcement of the imperial rule in the country, which varied in actual detail from the payment of tax, the ownership of mines, the selection of *Syiems* to deciding cases of theft and murder. On reviewing the formation and importance of the political association in this region, one finds that the Khasi National Durbar was the most important party and played an important role in the politics of this region. This was constituted by all the chieftains of the states and British areas. Its first session was held in 1923. The chief aim of this *darbar* was to work towards the codification of the customary laws in which, however, they failed. Their next attempt was to retain the position of the Khasi states according to the settlement made by David Scott. As late as 1928, they protested against the government's proposal to exclude the British areas from the province. In 1919 the Khasis sent a representative member, Rev. J.J.M. Nicholas to the Governors Council. Later, he was selected as a minister by the Governor of Assam.

Here it is worth mentioning that certain political leaders, through their writings and speeches, attempt to differentiate between the Khasi and the Jaintias and say that these two communities were divided during the formation of the District Council at Shillong, the United Mikir and North Hills District and the Regional Council of the Pawi-Lakher area of the Mizo district. They claim that these Jaintias lost some of their land to these district councils. Besides, they were kept

under a single administration with the Khasi areas. Rev. J.J.M. Nicholas Roy was made the spokesman for all of them jointly. Though the Jaintias had wanted to build up a separate state for themselves, they failed to generate any momentum in this regard since by that time (1946) the separation of the hills from the plains had started and they had to join with the Khasis in the formation of the state. However, these political afterthoughts are merely confined to academic debate, since socially and culturally these people had a long-standing relationship which is still maintained. They retain their individuality with respect to mores and customs, with an almost conflict free coexistence even in case of mixed marriages. This is possible because the basic substratum of these two cultures is common, the differences having been acquired over long years of undisturbed existence.

Another movement which was greatly instrumental in furthering the political consciousness of the people was the formation of the Khasi State Federation. In 1933, this body had made an appeal to the Governor General for recognition at the Chamber of Princes and Indian Legislature. It had forwarded several points for enhancing the future of the state and was constituted by all the leading chieftains i.e. *Syiems, Lyngdohs, Sirdars* and *Wahadadars* of the state. However, their request was turned down and the attempt died a premature death. In 1945-46, the leaders of the Khasi state met and created a Khasi State Federation and wanted to be empowered to rule the state during the interim period (1947-1950). The Governor of Assam allowed the federation to function with certain restraints. Thus began adult suffrage for electing a member of the federation from each state. Rev. J.J.M. Nicholas Roy was against the formation of this federation and he formed another party called Khasi-Jaintia Federated States National Conference which advocated a District Council. Thus these two parties differed over recommending the type of administration required for this area. Ultimately, Roy worked out the details of the proposal for the formation of a District Council which was approved and sanctioned by the Indian constitution and started functioning from 1952. Three-fourths of its members were to be selected by adult suffrage. Along with this, the Sixth Schedule in the Indian constitution was introduced.

Thus from the time of David Scott, when the British arrived and gained ascendancy over the Hill State, to the independence of India which brought forth people from the plains as the new administrators, the predominance of the plainmen in the administration of both

land and people built up a slow and steady resentment amongst the hill people. The situation was aggravated by continual conflict and clash between the political leaders, administrators and the traditional heads of the state. This set off a wave of revivalism amongst the people. This phase can be marked as beginning from 1963 when *Syiem* Franciswell challenged the authority of the District Council. The people of this state realised the strategic importance and the position of their state along the international border during the Chinese aggression of 1962. This wave of revivalism picked up momentum due to the active participation of the Khasi leaders who vowed to retain the tribal identity of the hill people. The Naga and Mizo separated themselves from this party making their individual demand for statehood. Hence All People Hill Leaders Conference (APHLC) emerged as a party, and won a majority in the 1977 elections. Emphasis was placed on individual tribal identity mainly to escape the dominance of the Assamese political leadership. These people were not particularly averse to the one nation formula of India. When APHLC accepted the proposal for autonomous statehood, extremists broke away and formed the Hill States Peoples Democratic Party (HSPDP) and forced a demand for a separate state, which they obtained in 1971. However, under the Sixth Schedule they still maintain the three district councils. The state of Meghalaya has a 60 member legislature. The state is represented in the National Parliament by one member in the Rajya Sabha and two members in the Lok Sabha. Though APHLC dominated the political scene. The Congress, emerging from the shadows of Assam, gained a new footing in Meghalaya. Besides, the Garos proved to be able statesmen and emerged as a dominant group with a lot of political acumen and tenacity.

The state capital Shillong which for so long had maintained its exclusiveness as the administrative centre of the northeast, acquired a new status and was greatly developed, as is normal in the case of any state capital. However, the frequent traffic of plainsmen to the state capital gave rise to a floating population derived from the plains. They were mostly administrators, scientists and teachers. However, this aspect of gradual cosmopolitanisation of the state capital and district headquarters created a sense of unease, being interpreted as the dominance of the plains people. Thus the integration of the hill people in the mainstream of India became an issue for the administrators and politicians who fully utilised this unease for their benefit. This fact has been validated by the frequent ethnic outbursts in all the three

districts.

From the beginning, Shillong had been an educational centre. In the entire North Eastern belt this was the only town which catered to the educational needs of the nouveau riche tribal cadre and the elite plainsmen. As a result the student situation remained very peaceful except on the eve of the inauguration of the District Council by the Governor of Assam in 1952. The Khasi students demonstrated against the nomination of six members. Ultimately, the police had to take charge of the violent situation. Again in 1966 the students demonstrated in front of the Assam Legislative Assembly against the food movement. They were fired upon and ultimately the agitation was abandoned. In 1987 again the student agitation erupted with greater force. It continued for almost a year and spread even to the remote block and district headquarters. However, the students were most vociferous in the state capital. For a whole year classes in schools, colleges and University remained suspended. The main issue for their agitation was 'the predominance of the plainsmen.' This took on xenophobic overtones and all the plainsmen were subjected to the wrath of the local youths. The administration was unable to control the situation. With elections, the agitation died out. This agitation was based on the model of the movement spearheaded by the Assam Gano Parishad in neighbouring Assam and may be revitalised in the future at the slightest provocation.

The majority of the population groups in Meghalaya belong to the 'Indo-Chinese Linguistic Family' of which two important sub-families are the Mon-Khmer and Tibeto-Burman. The Mon-Khmer family includes the Khasis and the Jaintias, while the Bodo group of Tibeto-Burman sub-family dominates the plains of the Garo Hills. Linguistically, the Garo belong to the Bodo speech family of the Tibeto-Burman linguistic group. All the languages of the Hinduised communities of Meghalaya, such as Rabha, Hajong, Koch and Banai come under the Bodo group of the Assamese-Burman family. Though widely dispersed, these languages are mutually intelligible. The Khasi the Jaintia and the Garo use the Roman script. The Roman script was first introduced in this region in 1842 by Thomas Jones, a Calvinist Missionary.

The total area of the state is 22,500 square kilometres. The Khasi hills occupy 10,500 square kilometers, Garo Hills 1,00 square kilometres and Jaintia hills 3,900 kilometres. The major resources of the state which can be exploited for industrial and economic development are

mineral resources, forest resources, agricultural and horticultural resources as well as livestock and sericulture.

The settlement pattern in Meghalaya reflects the weather conditions prevailing in this ecozone which is characterised by heavy rainfall and strong winds blown over the foot hills. A typical village in Meghalaya is a conglomeration of houses constructed on slopes of hills and hillocks. The houses are generally constructed on a raised platform supported by big logs of wood. The wooden floor is covered with bamboo mats. Walls are generally made of wooden squares filled with cane and plastered with fine grains of earth mixed with mud, cement or lime depending upon their availability in the vicinity of the settlement. The rooms are always provided with a couple of windows which not only serve the purpose of ventilation but also provide sunlight. The roofs which are rectangular in shape are made of galvanised sheets. These sheets are arranged in such a way that the rainwater falling on them is collected through a couple of aqueducts made of tin or big bamboos. The walls of rooms converge with a hollow area which helps in keeping the rooms warm during winter. The size of rooms and kitchen depend upon the purse of the owner. Due to paucity of building material such as wood, cane and bamboo, hollow bricks are used in certain urban centres, a technology transferred by a certain Christian missionary to build churches in Cherrapunjee and Shillong. This technology was suited to combat earthquakes which often occur in this part of the country. The hollow bricks made of mortar, cement or clay became popular only in urban centres since this technology remained confined to cities. The rich borrowed house-types from neighbouring cosmopolitan centres such as Calcutta by importing architects, masons and labour.

Earlier literature on communities of Meghalaya dates back to the twenties of the present century. The books of Playfair and Gurdon need special mention. These studies were mostly impressionistic and based upon disinformation rather than on data collected by using the established tools of ethnography. Though these authors were not trained anthropologists, their keen observation and perceptiveness allowed them to describe the tribes such as Khasi and Garo in a lucid manner. They took the information supplied by their subordinate officials and interpreters at its face value. Their interpreters were mostly non-tribals who had an inherent and self imposed sense of superiority over the indigenous tribal people, and thus was written a body of literature which described the tribals of the Khasi hills, Jaintia

hills and Garo hills (the area collectively known as Meghalaya) as primitive, uncultured and savage. Their use of bow and arrow, their food habits, clothes and appearance were misinterpreted since the gap between observers and observed subjects remained wide. This continued until the advent of anthropologists on the scene, prominent among whom were Chie Nakane and Robins Burling.

Agriculture, which is one of the basic means of subsistence and an area where maximum development can take place, presents a bleak picture in Meghalaya. An area of approximately, 1,37,695 hectares is under cultivation, the major crops being rice, maize, cotton, jute, pulses, potatoes, oil seeds and tapioca. Appreciable quantities of ginger and areca nut, bay leaf and betel leaf are also grown. There is a ginning mill in Phulbari. Besides this, there is no other cotton processing plant in the state. *Jhum* is the main agricultural method while in a few places wet paddy cultivation is practised. Pineapples, oranges, pears, plums and bananas are also grown. An area of 20,000 hectares is covered by orchards. Production of pineapples is around 69,000 tonnes and oranges 77,000 tonnes, while 36,000 tonnes of bananas are also grown. Fruit preservation is practised on a relatively small scale. At present the aggregate livestock population is 0.72 million which includes cows, buffaloes, sheep, goat and pigs. Sericulture for commercial purposes is a traditional economic pursuit. The state has a suitable climate for growing mulberry and raising cocoons. Though this industry has a lot of potential, it is yet to develop fully.

Among the industrial units in the state is the cement factory at Cherrapunjee which produces 250 to 950 tonnes per day. Besides, a fair number of small industries like saw mills, automobile repair, milk chilling plant and milk supply schemes, bakeries, handicrafts, making of soap, candles, bonemeal, furniture and agricultural tools are also functioning. Meghalaya's mineral wealth is yet to be assessed. The estimated coal reserve is about 120 million tonnes. Limestone resources are around 2100 million tonnes and clay deposit 10 million tonnes. The mining industry needs stream lining and better managerial facilities.

Though it appears that the state has lot of potential, nothing spectacular has been achieved even after seventeen years of statehood. This is mainly due to the fact that transportation and road facilities are poor in the state. And repeated proposals for linking this area to the railway network has met with a lot of hostility and opposition from the local inhabitants. Since the early sixties Meghalaya has been con-

nected by air. Now Umroi air strip has regular Vayudoot flights. Recently helicopter services have been introduced and Tura the district headquarter is connected with Guwahati and Shillong. Thus the difficulty of gaining accessibility to the state, its relative geographical isolation and high expenditure incurred for transportation in this area are the biggest hurdles in its industrialisation. Besides there are almost no training facilities for local youths though this is a basic prerequisite for the development of this area. Lastly, banking is another aspect which is quickly gaining popularity with the local populace. Generally extra cash used to be turned into gold by the women who hold the purse strings, but now money transactions through banks are becoming popular and bank loans are a boon to men and women with enterprise.

Religion is one aspect which had been misinterpreted by the colonials in trying to achieve mass proselytization. The Khasi and the Jaintias worship a formless God and refer to their religion as Niamtre, while the Garos refer to their traditional religion as Sangsarek. Leaving aside the Buddhists, the rest follow a Hinduised version of the tribal religions. However, many local people have adopted Islam through marriage and at present there is a sizeable population of local converts to this religion. The three basic principles of Niamtre are *kamai ia ka hok*, *tip-briew*, *tip blei* and *tip kur*, *tipkha*. These precepts mean that one must earn by one's own effort and righteousness that man can only know God when he knows his fellowmen and that one must know one's paternal and maternal relations, implying thereby that marriage within the clan is strictly forbidden (Rymbai 1980, p.38). Besides, they believe that God is omnipotent, omnipresent and omniscient. Hence, they do not have any idols, temples or sacred places nor any saints or priests. Being basically monotheistic, they invoke God in different names according to the need. Though the Khasi religion is of a highly abstract order and few have attempted to understand it, yet, Khasi sorcery is very popular and greatly feared. It is related to the worship of *Uthlen* or snake god who is propitiated by individuals for attainment of material goods, for which human sacrifice has to be made to him. For this, human beings who are unaware of their selection are made victims, and their hair and blood are offered to him while the person dies a gradual death. Even now, adults and children remain cautious lest they become prey to such worshippers.

The Garo Sengsarek belief system is comparatively elaborate. Tatarahuga is the supreme being, the creator of the world and he

commands the lesser spirits. Besides there are innumerable benevolent and malevolent spirits called *mite*. These *mites* control the natural phenomena and determine the destiny of humans from birth to death. The mythology of the Garo is voluminous and is contained in the rich oral traditions of the tribe. The Garo religion, morality and customary sanctions are entwined within three factors *asimalja*, *dakmalja* and *nima*. These are the basic codes which include moral, civil, criminal and penal aspects. Sacrifice and oblations are an important part of the Garo religion.

The Hinduised tribes which inhabit the state are greatly influenced by the Bhakti Movement, though they continue to propitiate spirits and deities. The Ramkrishna Mission and Brahmo Samaj have established their missions in Meghalaya but their influence had been marginal. The first Presbyterian church was established in Cherrapunjee in 1841. And 1863 marked the conversion of the Garos to Christianity. Conversion in the state was made easier by the lure of free education which however was limited to the minimum required to read the Bible. Free food and lodging as well as gainful employment was sufficient to motivate the people to change their religion. In no time the Christian converts changed the social pattern of the community, forming an elite which was given leadership in politics and administration. Christianity also brought modern medical facilities to these hills.

Sein Raj was a Pnar-Khasi movement founded to re-establish their traditional religious and cultural rights. Its headquarters are at Jowai. This was aimed mainly against the British policy of stopping festivals like Behdiengkhlam and Shah weit. After independence several people joined together to form this association and started these festivals afresh. On the other hand, the *Seng Khasi* movement traces back its history to 1899. This was started to safeguard the doctrine of truth, which is the essence of the Khasi culture, religion and custom, from the onslaught of Christian influence. The most important festival adopted by this organisation was Shad Suk Mynsiem or the thanks-giving dance. Today the youth have realised what they have lost due to colonial influence and are keen and eager to retain their customs and traditions. Wangala the festival of hundred drums at Tura is one such post-harvest festival of the Garo Hills.

The three major tribes of Meghalaya, the Garo, the Khasi and the Jaintias share a common matrilineal tradition, under which descent is reckoned through the female line and the children belong to the clan

of the mother. The women have rights to property and can remarry after being widowed. However, the social structure of the Garos and the Khasis differs from each other to a great extent. Similarity can be seen only at the level of fulfilment of the minimal criteria of the matrilineal system, namely, the basic succession rule of mother to daughter, and the fact that the property is owned by the women. About their structural difference Chi Nakane (1967) observes: "Most outstanding structural differences between the two lies in the composition of property group. The property group of the Khasi is formed by a descent group at a shallow generation depth, while that of a Garo is maintained by the cooperation of two local lines, each of which represents a localised lineage group. Hence the descent group of the former tends to have stronger solidarity, whereas the later tends to weaken in its solidarity."

Cross-cousin marriage is an essential part of Garo social structure. Amongst the Khasi there is no preference for cross-cousin marriage. Among them, marriage with the mother's brother's daughter is not allowed during the life time of the maternal uncle. In the same way marriage with the father's sister's daughter is not allowed during the life-time of the father.

Among the Jaintia, the rule of inheritance is strictly guided by the matrilineal system. Property is of two kinds, inalienable and alienable. The first is ancestral property and the latter is personal. The inheritance of ancestral property passes from the mother to the youngest daughter. However, among the War section of the Khasi, the sons are also given a certain portion of arable land as inheritance.

It may be mentioned that matriliney among the Garo does not imply female domination in any sphere of life. Garo women are completely dominated by the men. They are, in fact, only a means of transmission through which property descends from one generation to another. On the other hand, the Khasis and the Jaintias represent matrilineal system of a more rigid kind and women of these tribes enjoy higher social status than the Garo women.

In the legal sphere, the customary practices of the region still prevail though the national judiciary is also available for redressal. The major area of conflict and confrontation enfolds the customary practices related to land where in certain instances the formal judiciary has attempted to impinge on the traditional rights of the tribal people. However, such cases involving conflicts of traditional land tenure and state laws are rare.

It is significant that among some smaller Hinduised communities of the Garo Hills, like Rabha and Koch too traces of matriliney are also found. Both Rabha and Koch have retained matrilineal descent, but they have abandoned matrilineal inheritance rule. Among them the patrilineal system of family is in vogue and inheritance is along the male line. Formerly, the Hajong also had exogamous matrilineal clans, similar to those of the Garo and Koch. Now family among the Hajong is patrilineal in descent and succession and there is no trace of matrilineal clan organisation in their society.

In conclusion, we may attempt to categorise the state of Meghalaya according to cultural region. Taking into consideration the cultural and physical aspects one can conveniently demarcate the two regions, the area of Garo Hills region and the Khasi-Pnar region of the Khasi and the Jaintia Hills. In the middle of this demarcating line is the area inhabited by the Megam or the Lyngams, who exhibit cultural aspects of both the Garo and the Khasi communities. On categorically elaborating each aspect, we first consider the physical aspects of the population taking into consideration the serological aspect, stature and cephalic index. The Garo stand out distinctly with high frequency of B and A blood group while the Khasi and the Jaintia have high frequency of A and B. This brings the Khasi and the Jaintia closer. From the somatometric point of view the Garos are of medium stature while the Khasi and Jaintia fall under short stature group. The cephalic index however brings all the three groups under one category of mesocephalic. Hence, as a conclusion to the selective study of certain important physical traits we can say that these three groups belong to a common ethnic stock.

Culturally in each case, matriarchy is the basic institution on which the entire social organisational pattern is based. Women are apparently given legal rights but in practice are subject to the whims and fancies of the men. Here the Khasi-Pnar women have a slightly better deal. On the religious front the Khasi-Pnar worship a formless God and do not have any sacred places or pilgrimages while Garos have Balphagram the abode of spirits, where every individual enters after the death. The Garos also have the unique belief in *matchamarus* and *matchadu*, the tiger demon and humans who have the power to convert themselves into tigers. This is attached to various beliefs and rituals connected with the tiger and the conversion of humans into tiger-form or lycanthropy. It is a unique feature found only amongst the Garos in this state. Like most people in the eastern region, rice is their

staple food. Another common feature found among all these tribal groups is that most of them chew betel nut and betel leaf with lime. Exchange of these items symbolically represents welcome, acceptance and extension of hospitality. With regard to material culture, women of tribes all the three tribes wear different kinds of clothes but all of these are mainly unstitched garments. Regarding the use of metal Khasi-Pnar stand out from the Garo in use of the precious metals gold and silver and they still have local goldsmiths. only The Khasi once excelled in blacksmithy while the Garo metal gongs were brought from the Assam plains. Weaving is another aspect in which the Garos excel and the women weave their own *dakmanda* or skirt. The Khasi-Pnar have almost lost this feature of their culture.

From the eight characteristics listed above, the presence of two cultural regions in this zone is validated. Further, the annual state festivities are also distinct and do not have any commonality except for the Hinduised tribes who follow the calendrical cycle of the Hindus.

SHIBANI ROY

THE COMMUNITIES

KHASI

The term Khasi is applied to the group of matrilineal and Mon-Khmer speaking people who presently inhabit the East and West Khasi Hills and the Jaintia Hills district of the Meghalaya state. Broadly, the term Khasi includes Amwis and the Lyngams. It also includes Bhois, Wars and Khyntriams, names which are primarily territorial though such groups have variations in their customs as shall be shown. The Bhois inhabit the north-central part of the hills the Wars inhabit the precipitous hill sides and valleys of the southern part of the hills the Khyntriams occupy the central and the highest parts of the Meghalaya plateau, whose culture has provided the mode for interpreting the variations found elsewhere. The Khasis call themselves *Ri Lum* or hillmen. Early British references to them were as *Khyees*, perhaps a reference to the hillmen who traded with the Sylhet people, who gave them the name they have accepted.

The history of the Khasi people before the advent of the British is not well-documented. Their folklore and oral traditions tell about their supernatural origins, giving a section of Khasi intellectual the belief that they are autochthons of the land. It is generally believed that the Khasis were one of the first tribal groups to have migrated from somewhere in the south-east, to the Brahmaputra valley where they resided before entering the hills. In course of their migration their language and customs changed through contact with the Austric speakers. Their traditions tell that they moved gradually from the east to the west, from the Jaintia Hills towards the Khasi Hills bordering the land of their Garo neighbours in the practice of shifting agriculture and search for iron ore. Unlike many other tribal groups in northeast India the Khasis are geographically not very dispersed. Small groups of Khasis may still be found in the Jaintia Hills of Meghalaya, Cachar, Nowgong, North Cachar Hills, Lakhimpur and Kamrup districts of Assam, in Tripura and in Sylhet district of Bangladesh.

Generally four or five Lalung clans are found in a single village. They believe that all their clans have descended from twelve sisters, who were born in a family that lived on a red hill. They grew up but did not find young men to marry. As time went by they became dejected and lost interest in life. One day as they were spinning, they thought that there was no point in living any longer, as their youth was passing and they went to a river to drown themselves. But the god of water took pity on them. He sent twelve young men who met the sisters as they came to the river and married them. The Lalung clans are the progeny of these twelve sisters.