

A COMMON PERSPECTIVE  
FOR  
NORTH-EAST INDIA



Speeches and Papers of National Seminar  
on Hill People of North-Eastern India, held  
in Calcutta from December 3 to 6, 1966

*with general introduction by*

**Shri Pannalal Das Gupta**

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## PREFACE

The National Seminar on Hill people of North Eastern India was held in Calcutta from 3rd to 6th December, 1966. More than 100 eminent representatives of the hill people and a much larger contingent of social workers, scholars, administrators and intellectuals of the plains attended the Seminar.

A number of illuminating and interesting speeches and papers presented in the Seminar during its sessions held on the first two days in the Centenary Hall the Calcutta University highlighted different social, cultural, economic and political problems affecting the hill people of North Eastern India. There is little surprise in the fact that the news of the Seminar hit the front page headlines of many national newspapers all over India but what is more important is that the Seminar succeeded in pointing to the need for vigorous, unbiased, national thinking on these problems. It brought home to responsible Indian citizens the truth that narrow, limited, administrative approach would be a poor, insufficient and ineffective substitute for such thinking in attempts to find answers to these intriguing problems.

Cultural performances at Rabindra Sadan on the last two days with which the Seminar concluded were no less exciting. Hill artists from Mizo Hills, Nagaland, NEFA, Khasi Hills, Manipur etc., participated in the cultural programme along with some artists of the plains of Bengal and Assam. It was a rare occasion for an audience of the plains to have a direct acquaintance with the rich, colourful and diverse cultural streams of the hill peoples and also glimpses of a common cultural heritage preserved through centuries. An exhibition was also sponsored as a part of the Seminar with the co-operation of the governments of Assam, Manipur Nagaland and NEFA. It drew large crowds everyday and earned admiration of citizens of all shades of opinion.

Divergent, often conflicting, opinions naturally found expression in the Seminar. Nevertheless the speeches and papers produced more light than heat. The Seminar, for the first time in the history of India, provided a sort of national platform on which the representatives of the hill people of North Eastern India could speak out their minds and the intellectuals of the plains could also express and exchange their viewpoints. Person-to-person and group discussions that took place from morning to late hours at night outside the Centenary Hall of the Calcutta University perhaps proved more useful in clearing much confusion and coming closer to each other. Whether at the Mayor's reception to the visiting delegates or at the Chief Minister's tea-party in Assembly House, at the dinner at the Calcutta University Rowing Club beside Rabindra Sarobar or at the dinner by the Metropolitan of India, Burma, Pakistan and Ceylon in St. Pauls Chathedral compound, one could always hear invigorating, friendly discussions and see warm handshakes and smiles forging links of friendship.

The Seminar did not aim at arriving at a conclusion. It only marked a

beginning—a very significant beginning—by bringing to the surface all sorts of opinions in a national context on the varied problems affecting the hill people who live in the “sensitive” areas of North-East India surrounded by foreign territories. It will legitimately claim for itself a place in the pages of future history of this country.

Most of the speeches and papers presented in the Seminar have been compiled in this volume. For the reader's convenience papers have been classified under different sections, such as, Cultural History, Anthropology, Social Studies, Political Evaluation, Economic Development, Christianity, Education, Law etc.

These papers, it is believed, will provide valuable material for scholars, research workers and also serve as an intelligent lay reader's guide to this highly sensitive area where diverse forces are at work. Any reader going through these papers will be able to judge the problems in a broad social, economic, cultural and historical background often minimized and lost in the midst of the heat of political arguments and disputes.

The problems discussed in the papers included in this volume essentially reflect the birth-pangs of a modern, unified and progressive nation emerging out of the multilingual, multi-racial and multi-religious Indian society which still has all over it innumerable scars and wounds left behind by centuries of backwardness and uneven development.

A thorough and proper understanding of these problems and a conscious and radical approach for their solution will also bring out the inherent possibilities of democratic methods in meeting the challenge of such hitherto unknown problems of vast magnitude. In finding answers to these problems, India will certainly discover new, unexplored and exciting dimensions of democracy. It is needless to say that the world outside will also keenly watch and await such answers.

It is sincerely regretted that some contributions to the Seminar had to be left out in the present volume owing to unavoidable reasons. To mention only a few—the speeches and papers by Swami Ranganathananda, Prof. Barun Dey, Shri Ashok Mitra, Shri H. K. Bawichhuaka of the Mizo National Union, Shri Akum Imlong, Rani Gaidiliu, Dr. M. Aram of Peace Centre, Kohima, and the leaders of the All Parties Hill Leaders' Conference, Capt. Williamson Sangma and Shri Stanley Nichols-Roy, both of whom very forcefully placed arguments in favour of forming a separate State for the hill people of Assam as an essential condition for solution of the problems related to the region of North East India.

Tremendous effort and inexhaustible goodwill on the part of many alone could ultimately succeed in ensuring publication of this book. Nevertheless, the reader may find many lapses in this compilation but he is expected to bear in mind that it was brought out in the face of severe handicaps and obstacles.

RATHIN MITTRA  
BARUN DAS GUPTA  
*Jt. Editors*

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**“LET US DISCOVER A UNIFYING FORCE....”**

No. CMS/GEN/17/66.

NAGALAND

*Chief Minister*

Kohima, the 18th Nov. '66

My dear Pannalal Das Guptaji,

I am happy to see that scholars and intellectuals of our country have come together to consider, analyse and assess the problems of the hill people of the North Eastern India. The co-operation which the National Seminar has received from the Eastern States in itself is an indication of our interest in the deliberations of our leaders of thought and writers of repute.

Political anthropologists, curious story hunters and persons interested in 'out of the ordinary life' have had their fill. Now it is the time for clear thinking, rational attitude and for sympathetic study of the tribal behaviour and frontier spirit. We, the people on these Eastern hills, are equally concerned in the welfare of our country. In a way, the brunt of defending the country from the onslaught of our rapacious neighbours falls on our shoulders. The country will be strong if the people on the frontiers are strong, well-fed well-looked after and happy. They have to be given a due place in the scheme of the Union. The life-giving water has been rolling down from our hills from the day life sprang on the surface of this earth. We have been the custodians of the pristine culture, manliness, simplicity and nobility. Let this be accepted and let now the stream of our cultural heritage flow from the plains to the hills. Let us discover a unifying force and let us emphasise the similarities instead of underlining the divisions and differences. As your circular says, India is a multiracial, multi-lingual country where all the religions of the world have prospered without engulfing small communities and small groups having their own beliefs; we have shown tolerance, but at times this tolerance has made us unmindful of our other brethren. Let us try to discover why all of a sudden an unrest has erupted on the peaceful hills reputedly the abode of saints and thinkers.

I am sure your deliberations will be able to clear mists and doubts surrounding several issues facing the people on our hills. I assure you the hill people will be watching your deliberations with keen interest and your findings will go a long way to mould the public opinion in the country. I warn you against facile solutions and summary dismissal of issues which the people of the hills deem cardinal and basic.

I wish the deliberations of the Seminar a complete success.

Yours sincerely,  
Sd/- T. N. Angami





Hon'ble Mr. D. N. Sinha, the Chief Justice of Calcutta High Court is addressing the seminar. Next to him sitting Mr. Ikom Imlong, Nagaland Minister, Swami Ranganathananda, Rev. Dr. H. L. J. De Mel, the Metropolitan of India, Burma, Pakistan and Ceylon, Rani Guidalo and her two secretaries.



Some of the Delegates of the National Seminar on Hill People of North-East India.



# MEASURE HEARTS, NOT HEADS

Rev. Dr. H. L. J. DE MEL

Metropolitan of India, Burma, Pakistan and Ceylon

The world has now shrunk into a neighbourhood in which no part is farther from the other than twenty flying hours in a jet plane. We can no longer keep apart whatever the divisive factors of history and geography may have been in past centuries. We can no longer tolerate the misunderstanding and aloofness which have led tragically to strife and bloodshed in human affairs. For myself I am not directly concerned with the political aspects of the situation. This Seminar has been convened by professors and social workers (counting myself with the latter) concerned about the basic need for all human beings to know each other and to develop that degree of understanding and cooperation and fellowship which lead to the development of human personality in fellowship. Such development to my mind is true progress, as it places the emphasis on the dignity of man. Just as every human being has his own personality, so have certain groups. To eliminate this would be a loss. Neat modern international patterns would lose much if the decoration provided by a variety of cultures were to be done away by the relentless march of a kind of neutral culture which some seem to imagine would be the future of the world. Anything that turns men into obedient robots or colourless children of regimentation, degrades human nature and its true development. I maintain that real progress is the development of the human personality in fellowship. We have to steer clear of fanatical ideologies or political ambitions which trample on the idea of dignified diversity as a constituent part of any true human unity. A much fuller exploration will be made by many wise speakers who will explain to us the immense fields of social, anthropological and cultural studies with which we must enrich our minds so that after this Seminar we may be able to project a better spirit into human affairs in our corner of the modern world. We meet together not merely to make vague utterances about modern civilization. We are here as responsible people who are all of us in love with our own inheritance and who want to learn how to enrich it further by fruitful contact with other inheritances, so that a better future awaits all of us. This will not come except through effort and the maintenance of a high morale, which is able to encounter and overcome many mischievous and selfish tendencies which find influential utterance in some quarters. With this in view I would just wish to indicate the spirit in which our Seminar should be conducted :

1. In the neighbourhood which concerns all of us who are here today there is a great variety of creed, culture and conduct. In which attitude are we to face this diversity ? I feel certain that everyone here today will underline the need for tolerance, but I want to ask for something warmer than tolerance. We must have sympathy and from sympathy we must go on to appreciation. This is the atmosphere in which we can advance to a better state

of affairs. We shall not create the suspicion of domination by a majority or the fear of extermination in the heart of minorities. We shall have instead the exhilaration of belonging together, in an association which treasures all that is best in every culture. What a liberating happiness it will be when our defence mechanisms are thrust aside before the growing warmth of mutual appreciation and sincere respect one for the other. Once we are caught up in a spirit such as this we can communicate it to many who are not here, and when any sizeable part of the world busies itself in this sane operation there will be a corresponding result in all the world. There are world organisations fortunately which tend in this direction but there must be the spirit which upholds and makes these institutions fruitful. Human institutions unless uplifted by the right spirit can be both lifeless and ineffective.

2. Without any particular knowledge of the subject I would like to plead with all who enter into our discussions, for great care in the language we use. So often speech divides us through careless expressions or unintentionally offensive terms which have continued to exist long after they have been appropriate. It is sometimes possible so to offend the susceptibilities of other people by some outdated expressions that relationships are ruined. May I give an example which might stimulate thought in this gathering. I myself increasingly dislike the term "tribal". There is something in it that does not seem to fit the happy peoples whose sense of community, whose dance, song and art and firm adherence to certain religious principles, commands the admiration of those whose ignorance has been corrected by modern studies. Can one of the fruits of this Seminar be some better word which we might coin for the benefit of all concerned? In the meantime I am perfectly certain that no one here is likely to take offence if something is accidentally expressed in a less than ideal way in our exchange of views in these two days.

3. We need all the knowledge and even more, the wisdom we can muster for the benefit of mankind in our own neighbourhood and indeed in the whole world. We have had men who have inspired us and to whose memories our souls pay a tribute as we sit here today. We are also fortunate to have in our midst some who are influential in the tumultuous days in which we live, and have served by giving counsels of moderation and peace when others through lack of understanding or love of power have sought to deride, oppress or ignore. Let all the good examples we can muster lead us on to make our contribution in the Seminar. Nor can I end without holding before you the memory of a well beloved man known to so many of us, whose sympathy and wisdom are an example to us all. Verrier Elwin, had he lived would, I feel, have repeated to us the remark that was made to him by a Cambridge anthropologist over twenty-five years ago who said to him "Don't try to measure heads, measure hearts; it is much more fun."

# ONE STATE OR MANY STATES ?

NIRMAL KUMAR BOSE

As one tries to gather the important points raised by different speakers, one is struck by the emphasis which has been laid by many upon the need of 'self determination' of the tribal communities, who live in the eastern and north-eastern portions of India. The view has, again and again, been expressed that the culture of these communities would be in danger if they are tied up with an alien group like the Assamese people, for instance. The latter speak a different language, profess another culture ; and, at the same time, are large in numbers when compared to the indigenous communities. Under these circumstances, there is every danger that through their numerical superiority in a common State, they would pull all the benefits of economic development in their own direction. This is, at least, the view expressed either openly or in a veiled manner by many of the speakers who have addressed the House this morning. The remedy, according to them, is that the areas with a tribal majority should be separated into a new State. This will help to preserve their cultural identity, keep them satisfied, and also promote economic development.

There can or should be no difference of opinion about the desire of tribal communities to be able to regulate their social life through shared political power. But whether this can be best attained by participating in the governance of a State along with others, or without them, is the question which has to be examined a little more carefully.

When the tribal communities of Assam say that the Assamese will do nothing but exploit them (it has even been alleged that they have always done so in the past), it is implied that no man, or no section of a community can rise above its very narrow sectional interests. Personally, I believe, this in itself is a wrong view. For, in the present world, do we not see that those who have been trying to promote the interests of the working classes do not often belong to those classes ? If it is possible for some, at least, to rise above their class interest, why cannot that particular trend be made stronger ? Would not such an effort automatically weaken those who can never see beyond their petty sectional interests, even if they happen to be larger in number at a particular point of time ?

The question thus is : Is it inevitable that that section of the Assamese people who stand by the rights of the tribal people shall always remain weak ? And therefore the tribal people want to have no truck with the Assamese, whether they are selfish or unselfish, whether they work for a broader nationalism rather than for a narrow provincialism ? If this were the only argument, namely, the impossibility of strengthening the progressive forces among the Assamese, then the demand for a separate State is perfectly in order. But is it really so ?

Personally, I believe, the situation is not as hopeless as that. But supposing it were so, let us pursue the argument to its logical extremity.

Supposing the tribal people set up a State of their own, does it mean that such a State will *necessarily* promote the interests of the weakest and the poorest, and not, either directly or indirectly, give priority to the interests of those tribes or sections who are already comparatively more advanced? There is sufficient reason to believe that just as there are 'exploiters' and 'exploited' among the people of the plains, there are also nearly similar class-divisions among the hill-people too. There is no doubt that there is a difference in the degree of polarization of class differences; but this is a difference in quantity, not in kind.

If political power descends from above, then it is likely to be dried up before it sinks down to the lowest layers. And this is the reason why, Gandhiji always tried to fashion an instrument of 'non-violent' organization in *peace* and *war*, so that power would descend 'unto the last', when they would feel the glow of freedom.

The fact that many educated persons belonging to the tribal people think that they can only be saved if they have a separate State of their own, need not blind us to a parallel case which led ultimately to the division of India. Pakistan was formed, ostensibly because the Moslems felt that, in India, Islam would be in danger. But after the formation of Pakistan, it has perhaps now been realized that power has come to the aristocracy, and a little to the middle-classes there, just as in India it has descended principally to the middle-classes, while the 'working classes' or 'masses' of Gandhi have yet failed in both States to attain Swaraj in Gandhi's sense of the term.

The substance of what I have tried to say is that the formation of a State with a majority of tribal population does not *necessarily* mean that we are any nearer the socialistic society which we have decided to build up in India. If there have been lapses in the past, if we have faltered in our steps, that is no reason why the present trend should be continued instead of being reversed.

What else do our tribal friends indirectly say when they do not want to associate with us in the endeavour to build up a socialistic society? Do they think that they will be able to build up one equalitarian society by unifying all the tribal folk into one 'nation', and allow the plains people of Assam and the rest of India to go their own 'damned' way?

To my mind, it is undoubtedly important to bring together the tribal communities into a unified whole. But personally I believe it would be far more worthwhile to unify people in the same economic class together so that exploitation can be ended, not for one depressed class like the tribal communities, but for all, whether they live in the hills or the plains.

My tribal friends would perhaps at once say that this is beyond their capacity to achieve. Moreover, if the plainsmen and hillmen, are welded together into a common brotherhood, what would happen to the language and culture of the tribes? They are small in number, and under the project outlined above, the culture of the tribal communities is likely to be swept away, by the numerically dominant non-tribal people.

My feeling is that a mistaken view is thus being taken of common *political* endeavour. In India, we live today under *one* political system, as we had

never done in the past. We have, moreover, a common *economic* aim, in which a certain amount of freedom is enjoyed by local regional units. But the limitation is that such freedom must never come in the way of the effective execution of plans which are of benefit to the whole of India.

All States of India are thus tied to one another, or integrated with one another, in so far as political and economic life are concerned. The deeper we promote cooperation at these levels, the nearer we approach the aim which we have collectively set before the nation.

But this integration at the political and economic level can be achieved without any strain upon our cultural freedom. Let every State pursue its right to worship, to promote its language and literature, arts and crafts in its own way. Let all these elements of culture enrich the life of the 'masses' or the 'working classes' to the utmost extent possible. In a vast country like India, with more than twice the population of the U.S.A. or the U.S.S.R., and with what is nearly equal to the population of Europe minus Russia, where is the harm if we have many languages, many religions, many kind of arts and crafts in order to beautify our lives? Provided, of course, that we march hand in hand, and with an increasing degree of involvement in building up and sharing in a common political system and economic order, whose aim is to end all exploitation, and enrich human life; and all that through the organized non-violent strength of the masses, both in peace and in war, both in the task of rebuilding our lives by common labour and also in resisting authority when abused. For that was the definition which Gandhi gave of the meaning and content of Freedom.

If such an aim is emphasized again and again, and *if we work together for its attainment*, then many of the divisions which have arisen to the surface in Indian life today will wither away like leaves in winter and be replaced by the green shoots of life which will appear once more when spring comes.

## APPENDIX

### *Gandhiji's Concept of Swaraj*

1. By Swaraj I mean the government of India by the consent of the people as ascertained by the largest number of the adult population, male or female, native born or domiciled, who have contributed by manual labour to the service of the State and who have taken the trouble of having their names registered as voters. I hope to demonstrate that real Swaraj will come not by the acquisition of authority by a few but by the acquisition of the capacity by all to resist authority when abused. In other words, Swaraj is to be attained by educating the masses to a sense of their capacity to regulate and control authority.

—*Young India*, 29th January, 1925, pp. 40-41.

2. The Swaraj of my dream is the poor man's Swaraj. The necessities of life should be enjoyed by you in common with those enjoyed by the princes and the monied men. But that does not mean that you should have palaces like theirs. They are not necessary for happiness. You or I would be lost in them. But, you ought to get all the ordinary amenities of life that a rich man enjoys. I have not the slightest doubt that Swaraj is not **Purna** Swaraj until these amenities are guaranteed to you under it.

—*Young India*, 26th March, 1931, p. 46.

## **SOCIAL INTEGRATION OF THE HILL TRIBES AND THE PLAINSMEN**

Dr. SURAJIT SINHA

The violent political activities launched by the Naga National Council since 1956 and the more recent disturbances in the Mizo Hills have made a section of non-tribal Indians suddenly aware that there are areas of social tensions in the frontier Hill areas of Assam the nature of which is not quite clear to them. It became apparent that the intelligent public in the rest of India had very little knowledge about the pattern of living in the frontier tribal areas.

In the background of such paucity of information some scholars see the root of these tensions in the confrontation of unique and incompatible sets of values of the egalitarian, animistic tribals and those of the caste-bound, puritanical Hindu peasantry. Such apprehensions of some scholars have, however, not been explained on the basis of detailed factual enquiry.

### *Who are the Tribals?*

Anyone who has gone through the reports of the various Census Commissioners since 1872 and of those of the different Commissioners for Scheduled Tribes and Scheduled Castes will realize that administrators as well as the advising anthropologists had a lot of difficulties in deciding where the 'tribe' ends and 'caste' begins. In most parts of Central India and the Chotanagpur plateau one may indeed think of a regular continuum between nearly isolated and unstratified 'tribes' and the so-called tribal groups like the Raj Gond or the Bhumij who have been thoroughly integrated with the social structure of the Hindu peasantry. It is only when one travels to the Andaman Islands that one comes across fully 'autonomous' tribes. Even in the Assam Hills many of the groups labelled as Schedules Tribes are in varying degree of articulation with the Hindu peasantry of the Plains or of the foothills. One may, for example, find a continuum between the interior Hills Garos upto the Hinduized Koch, Hajang or Rajbanshi of the foothills and the plains. The cases of the



Kochari and the Ahom are earlier examples of wholesale integration of the former autonomous tribal groups in the Hindu socio-economic order.

It appears that wherever the so-called tribal groups, regardless of the specific patterns of their culture, have been exposed to the encroaching Hindu Society, they have been gradually integrated with the former. In the state of Manipur, for example, it is well known that tribal groups belonging to the Naga-Kuki ethnic stocks settled down in the fertile valley and evolved a more complex level of civilization around an indigenous kingship and transformed themselves as Hinduized (Vaishnavite) Meitei peasants.

It may be assumed that in pre-British period the tribals of the foothills and the plains areas were becoming gradually integrated with the Hindu peasantry as caste groups.

The relatively inaccessible jungle-clad hills remained relatively isolated like nearly autonomous tribal communities. Some of these tribal chiefs, however, had accepted the formal suzerainty of the Hinduized Ahom or Manipur Kings and they had also some feeble trade links with the markets of the plains. There are also records of periodic lootings and raids in the plains villages by some of the Hill Tribes and an image of mutual estrangement grew up between the tribals and the peasantry of the plains in some areas.

In the light of the above review it appears that much more than any quaintness of their social customs or religious beliefs it is the lack of physical communication and economic interdependence that kept these Hill people so insulated from Hindu influence in the pre-British period.

#### *British Policy of Consolidation, Isolation and Restricted Modernization*

Soon after the annexation of Assam in 1827 British Government became interested in the special problems of the Hill tribes. In the light of their earlier experience in the rest of India they decided to isolate the hill tribals from spontaneous and increasing contact with the plainsmen. Besides creating the Inner Line Regulations for the North East Frontier areas they also set up "Excluded Areas" where certain degree of political autonomy was granted to the various tribal groups. Movement of the plains people into these areas was severely restricted. The British also interfered with the internecine warfare among the tribes and established large administrative units like the Garo Hills District which brought together hitherto disconnected segments of the tribe. The British also encouraged the coming of the Christian missionaries into these secluded areas to preach the Gospels and spread literacy. The British regime thus brought about a certain degree of unity between the various isolated tribal groups and created a small cadre of educated persons who became interested in raising their standard of living after the model of the British officers and the Christian missionaries. The British regime tended to insulate the aspirations of the tribals from sharing a common destiny with the plainsmen.

#### *Since Independence*

When India attained Independence in 1947, the Hill Tribes of Assam became a part of independent India without self-consciously involving themselves in the

experience of struggle for independence. The national Government of India, as also the State Government of Assam, who were no longer committed to the perpetual segregation of the Hill peoples from sharing common experience with the plainsmen, were not very clear as to the phases through which a fruitful integration could be brought about with the spontaneous approval of the tribals. It must be admitted here that except on romantic and crudely pragmatic levels, the problem was not often thought through in depth.

One of the assumptions of some of the leaders of India was that adult franchise would be an effective means for integrating the aspirations of the tribals with that of the other people of India. However, with the acceptance of separate tribal constituencies, it became apparent that the new democratic elections were, to a large extent, consolidating isolationist interest and not generating mutual understanding between the tribals and the non-tribals. Experiences have been similar in the Chotanagpur Plateau in connection with the *Jharkhand* movement.

### *Summing up*

It appears in the light of the past experience that political process of adult franchise has a tendency to consolidate viable primordial units at the cost of large co-operative associations. Also, these parochial consolidation movements may be controlled by an emerging middle or upper class literate elite, who were not as much interested in economic development of their region as in the preservation of their political control based on sectarian loyalties. Unless the expansion of franchise is effectively coupled with the problems of development of a vital economic region, which includes tribals as well as non-tribal peasantry, political particularism cannot be effectively neutralised. It also appears that without creating an economic base for inter-group integration mere interaction on the level of symbolic understanding will not set up a stable relationship. Any sentimental programme for the artificial preservation of the quaint customs of either the Hill people or those of the plainsmen as fragile hot-house plants will not serve the purpose. However, self-conscious exercise of the typical Indian tradition of inter-cultural tolerance, will greatly aid the process of socio-economic integration.

## **General Introduction**

### **A COMMON PERSPECTIVE FOR NORTH-EAST INDIA**

My association with this region—north-east India—is quite long, for over three decades, although intermittently and with one long break. The attraction for the East was irresistible with me, not only for its verdant beauty—it being the most beautiful region of India, rich in every material and natural wealth—but also for its very vivacious and colourful people as well.

In those earlier days of my contact, this region was more or less known by one denomination—Assam. It then consisted of other areas, too, which are now in Pakistan. But today it is not just Assam, it is Assam, Manipur, Nagaland, NEFA and Tripura and the process of diversification does not appear to be complete and the creation of more states is in the offing. The political conception of Assam then had only one political meaning in the face of the domination of British Raj and mostly British capital deeply entrenched in the tea gardens, mines, oil, timber, railways and steam navigation. Due to a superimposed development from above and from abroad, this region needed and invited Babus and coolies in lakhs from outside—from the great plains of India, as the locality lacked that kind of human material from the “sons and daughters of the soil itself.” The vast tracts of fertile but uncultivated land and jungles invited peasants in lakhs from East Bengal to develop its agriculture and meet the requirements of industrial growth and in this process a class of merchants also flocked in from as far as Rajasthan. In those days Assam was a host country. Today the picture is very very different. Meanwhile, local intelligentsia, local middle-class, local mobile labour and local ardent peasants are developing by leaps and bounds and the claims of the sons of the soil are the dominant political and cultural overtones of the contemporary age. Hence a reverse process has set in, creating an atmosphere of unwantedness for the people from the plains. The reverse process has become all the more intensive even among the people of this region. Even the people of the Brahmaputra Valley—the Assamese—are also not wanted in the hills and as such there is a growing demand for more and more separation from what has been left off of old Assam. The demand for separation from Assam sometimes gathers such an intensity that unless it is conceded, it tends to develop a desperateness to get out of India itself. This craze for separation which first started between the people of the plains of India and those of the plains of Assam, has now extended between those of the plains of Assam and the hills of Assam and it may, in future, develop between the hill people themselves, as different groups of hill people begin to feel that they can manage their own respective affairs.

This conflict of feeling and the atmosphere of crisis appear to be due to growth and not due to decay—a new development from the bottom, from the soil, from

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the locality, taking the shape of sub-nationalism. And yet, this growth is not free, it is a stunted growth due to many difficulties involved in the process of development. A real growth has the inexhaustible capacity to absorb people and ideas from outside, as we saw in the growth of America where people from all corners of the world with various colours, creeds and languages flocked but got themselves immediately absorbed into more or less one American personality, excluding, of course, the Negroes, who have yet to get themselves integrated into the main stream of American civilization. Thus, if the real growth-process had been released in Eastern India, if there were a real economic upsurge, Assam and the hills would still remain host countries, inviting people from all corners of India, and not resenting their presence or developing an infiltration-phobia. Yes, the present crisis is due to growth, not real growth, accelerated growth being halted at every step. But the urge for growth is felt everywhere and is spreading like a wildfire even to the distant hills of Mizoland. The psychological or subjective urge to become modern lacks miserably the material base to sustain it, so that people here rather hang on the hooks of modernism than stand on their own legs. How can we be really as modern as the Europeans and the Americans without a corresponding material and industrial base as in Europe and America? We can possibly borrow certain habits and manners and live a life on loan, creating all sorts of psychological complexes based on an all-round dependence on borrowed things and ideas. Europe and America do not simply present themselves with their consumption goods and manners and mannerisms typical of a certain high standard of living, but also vibrate with a giant productive force. But, India, particularly the backward regions of it in the East, suffer terribly from lack of growth in productive forces. And, therefore, the fundamental problem here, as elsewhere in India, is the problem of development, how to release the creative and productive forces of the people, an awakened people. As it is, the picture looks like too many people chasing after too few jobs and opportunities and a suffocating middle-class atmosphere, accentuated by corruption, nepotism and other concomitant ills of present-day India.

And yet, we can see, how very rich is this region—rich in minerals, oil and a fertile soil producing plenty of rice, jute and tea, immense forests, giving us valuable timber, beautiful wild animals and many other things of which the enemies of India are so envious. This is one of the richest—if not the richest—regions of India and perhaps one of the richest regions of the world, too. It is not an exhausted or barren land and indeed the Brahmaputra Valley is much more rich than the Gangetic Valley and it is not difficult to make this region not only a self-sufficient food-producing zone but a surplus area as well, if only a drive for total mobilization can be arranged with full participation of the people, both of the plains and of the hills. The hydro-electric power potential from its many surging rivers and falls is immense and can easily meet not only all the requirements of its own industrialization but also of the needs of further west. Had all these potentials been seriously tapped and released, the people of the region would have found out the common grounds at once, and instead of fighting one another for petty little things,

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a bold, youthful, integrated personality would begin emerging, assimilating all modern ideas and maintaining its continuity with their rich and colourful heritage, synthesizing into a real renaissance. This would introduce a youthful vigour and drive into the senile leadership of the rest of India. Thus, a rejuvenating process could begin for India from the East.

The objective potentiality of the material and natural wealth of this region is not its only attraction but its human wealth is particularly significant. Here innumerable tribal people who were content to live in their hibernation in tribal life for millenia and never liked to be disturbed by any extraneous forces, suddenly woke up and are rushing forward to join the front-rank of the humainty in the march. The impact of the last great war, the emergence of a mighty revolution demanding ideological and spatial expansion in China, division of the country and the emergence of Pakistan with all its hostile moods, have all made this rear land a veritable fighting and live front of India. The continuing revolution in Burma presents another challenge to this region, too. The total impact of this external challenge and the internal emergence of an awakening tribal people at the Himalayan belt have made this region most significant—at once highly encouraging and dangerous. The challenge of China and Pakistan is not merely territorial. It is essentially ideological, social and political. The essential challenge of China to India in general and to this region in particular, is whether or not we are a really socialist union and better equipped to help the tribal people to liberate themselves from their age-old backwardnes. The challenge of Pakistan is essentially a test whether India is a nation with all her nationalities, with all her various languages, dialects, religions and ethnological diversities and whether India has the capacity to assimilate various contradictory trends, accumulated from her hoary past and not resolving them, into one harmonious unity of 'Manab Tirtha', by one single mighty stroke of a revolution. India is, indeed, in the throes of a revolution—but perhaps a protracted one, gropingly hitting here and there for its clear emergence and sometimes, if not very often, hitting wrong ends with bitter results and frustrations.

The meaning of these challenges from without and within is not clear to the votaries of revolution in India today, whether they are for violent means or democratic peaceful means, whether they belong to the plains or to the hills. Our intellectual grasp of the situation miserably lags behind our emotional urges, we have failed or are failing to give meaningful content to the all-round and ever-growing expectations and therefore all struggles appear to be blind and unable to forge out the common path and destiny for all.

The Assamese-speaking people of the Brahmaputra Valley feel particularly frustrated at this moment to see the ever-growing grouse of the hill people and other communities entering Assam once as invited guests against the supposed chauvinism of the Assamese. But the Assamese people are a nice people, full of

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youth, characteristic of a new people and they are completely "Indian" in culture and outlook. They claim, and rightly so, that they are the immediate medium of the message of India, the united India of "Manab Tirtha", to the hill tribes who were kept isolated by the British Raj from the direct touch of Indian plains and who kept themselves aloof in their tribal exclusiveness for centuries, creating physical and psychological obstructions in the way of their natural absorption into the main stream of Indian civilization. An Assamese asks: How can you help these un-Indian, half-Indian and non-Indian tribal masses to become complete Indians without our help, who are their natural neighbours, influencing them and getting influenced by them? Hindi or Bengali or English is not the hill people's nearest language to understand India—it is Assamese. Do not all tribes of Assam, Nagaland, NEFA etc. know a smattering of Assamese even to communicate between themselves? And whatever the natural, mineral, hydro-electric and defence potentials of the hills and their present and future role, you cannot mobilize or utilize them without the Brahmaputra Valley—however narrow that land may be. Assam, even if reduced to that Valley only, is still the backbone of this region. Assam is and will ever remain the connecting link between all these hills, the base of all development and defence. If today, the Assamese seem to warn us all Indians, the tribal people want to separate from Assam, they do thereby fight not Assam only, but India mainly. Fighting against Assam is the first step to getting out of India herself and, therefore, they plead, when the Assamese fight back for unity, they actually do so for India's integration. Assam being at the fighting front in this defence for India, she (Assam) becomes the immediate object of grouch for all disintegrating un-Indian forces, often helped and instigated by the enemies of India around. So, please, cry the Assamese, do not make us the whipping boy for all the ills of the hills. Don't you see the uphill tasks of ours in defending the cause of India in the most dangerous front, the North-East Frontier region, which is precariously linked up with the main land of India by a narrow strip of land easily vulnerable to being completely cut off by the designing enemies of India from north and south? Do you forget, they remind us, that the main historical problem for all ages in the past and for today and tomorrow is the problem of integration? Is it not on this rock of fissiparous tendencies that India foundered again and again? So, beware of the disintegrating forces, by whatever name, creed, religion and ideology they appear, the Assamese urge, and therefore do not belittle our role in the East. Assam is not just one of the States in this region along with other States. She is the backbone of all the other States here.

The counter-argument seems to contradict the above claims not on theoretical grounds as such, as on the practical behaviour of the Assamese. They charge that the Assamese leadership, by its practical chauvinism has more alienated the cause of India and more tarnished her image than helped to bring these people closer to her or has made the image of India more attractive in any way. The undue haste to 'Assamize' the entire region by the Assamese language, even though it is the language of the minority in the entire region, and by behaving like a

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majority community with big-brotherly bossism and ostentation, the Assamese have overplayed their game and harmed the cause of India, etc., etc.

Hence a process has set in in the hill people and other people's mind, which is full of apprehension and they seem not to see reason unless they are given Swaraj to look after themselves. In a milieu of claims and counter-claims, what is determining the basic ideological stand for the political parties, both of the plains and the hills, is this psychology of universal distrust at the one end and canvass votes by instigating all sorts of hullabaloo in a competitive fashion, at the other. The basic truths of the life of the people are not studied and even the all-India leadership now know very little of the tribes, nor have they any base in the hills anywhere. And yet, in a country where the great Tilak propounded the idea of Swaraj and Mahatma Gandhi assured and tried to build up Swaraj from the bottom and Swaraj for everybody in the comity of an independent, united India, why this cry for Swaraj in their own home by the hill people frightens the Congressmen even, who swear by Gandhi every now and then? And why the all-India Left parties, in spite of swearing by Lenin with his doctrine of self-determination, should be found so chary of the hill people's demand of it even in a very moderate dose? A school of them even supported this claim in the case of the Muslims for Pakistan, not for any Leninist loyalty, but for practical exigencies, with the result that they got a rude shock at the end, so much so that all claims for Swaraj simply frightens them. Besides, the democratic politics in our country has been reduced to the game of purchasing votes at any cost without concern for principles. Gandhism, Marxism, etc., when tagged to petty party and group interest, gradually lost their enlightening role and all the visions due to affiliated interests that made our task difficult, so that they ceased to function as guides to action but rather helped to create confusion. This was the reason why the all-India parties failed to make any base in the hills and the hill people are found to resist ideas of socialism, communism, Nehruism etc.

And the hill men, in spite of their very dynamic outlook, seem to suffer from two contradictory trends. At one end they are seeking a larger identity breaking out of their age-old tribal insularity and at the other end they seek to realize that identity in their very little locality—in their local nationalism or sub-nationalism. What that larger identity should be, they have not been able to locate as yet. Some of them seem to jump over to a kind of Western-world identity, ignoring the very presence of Assam or India at their door. In an effort to make a gigantic leap like that, some are eager to forget their own language, culture and heritage completely. But then, after all, one can never be a European or American or Russian thereby and that is an impossible feat, which cannot but create a psychological vacuum at the bottom. This angry attitude to their past will not last, and this indifference to Assam or India will also be less once the causes of their irritation with Assam and India are removed. Since the emergence of Nagaland as a separate State outside Assam, most of the grouse against Assam and the

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Assamese language has almost evaporated and they have begun to look upon Assam as a helpful neighbour and Assamese as a useful language, too, to carry on ordinary business of life for the common Nagas—even for communication between themselves. The process may be hastened if the basic needs of the Brahmaputra Valley and contact-needs with the rest of the country and the world are better fulfilled more through the Assamese language than either through Hindi or English, at the common plane of the common man.

Once they are satisfied that they have got their Swaraj to develop themselves and raise themselves to the fullest vision of their own larger identity, they will at once see the requirement of the need for defending that Swaraj, which cannot but be a joint and cooperative effort of all their immediate neighbours. For larger developments they will feel the need to utilize their local wealth and to forge a common link with the entire common men of the North-East region and the rest of India. And then, perhaps, their vision of the larger identity will be clear to them and not remain as vague and as contradictory as at present. And in order to realize that personal fulfilment for each one of their rising intelligentsia—men and women—they will have to be closer with their own folk than what they are actually today. Simple anti-Indian feeling will not count and, as Prof. Nirmal Kumar Bose has said in his concluding speech, the leadership of Indian politics cannot satisfy the Indian masses now by their old anti-British talk. Then perhaps the full meaning of their renaissance will be clear to them and the way to identify with the larger world through a proper understanding of the modern men and women of the world and they shall sit down to understand the books and the works of research left by the great thinkers of the world. After all, how modern is a modernist hill intellectual today? Has not their modernism got feet of clay, inasmuch as they have so far made no contribution to it or had a creative understanding of it? This may be true for the intelligentsia and the modernists of India as a whole, but more is expected from these youthful intelligentsia of the hills who might have some justified contempt for the senile and decadent intelligentsia and leadership of old India.

It is true that India in her depth is a sick country, which projects a poor image to attract the awakening people of the North-Eastern Indian hill men. But which historian can claim that India has been built from Delhi always? Why not a vital and vigorous east-wind take the country's leadership by a sweep? Thus I asked this question again and again to the youth of the North-East. Why are you afraid of India? Is it the fear that the Benagalis, Oriyas, Hindi-wallahs can ever dare to suppress you physically or otherwise? You are perhaps afraid of the rot that has set in the image of India, you are perhaps afraid to link up your fate with the ailing India. But in that case you are not courageous enough, bold enough, revolutionary enough. You are perhaps not aware of the reality as to what is meant by complete separation from India, because in that event you will have to raise yourselves by the strap of your own boots. In case of separation,



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you perhaps get yourselves independent of your immediate neighbour, but you bank more on Central help and subsidy. In that case your Swaraj will make you more dependent on the Central Government or on foreign governments in case of complete separation, as independent India is today appearing to be more and more dependent on foreign help and losing her real independence. Hence the fundamental weakness of the Indian people is more or less the same with us as with you. We perhaps suffer equally from schizophrenia and a split-personality, suffering quite contradictory urges at the same time and in the same breath, giving us no real inspiration in our work but creating all the while more heat and no light, more smoke and no fire.

Once I, too, had my political affiliation. But gradually I felt these affiliation-interests were making me more helpless and isolated. I, therefore, ceased to think in the old way and approached this jungle of problems in a different way. Instead of talking to them, I thought, why not allow them all to talk and speak for themselves? Let me sit and observe how they themselves formulate their policies, analyse their problems. I felt both we and they perhaps talk the same thing more or less, but in such languages that are not audible or meaningful to one another. Hence this idea came to me, let us have a seminar, a get-together of some sort at a place which is more or less neutral—away from their immediate fighting grounds, where people will find the necessary congenial atmosphere to be a bit more objective, analytical and less fanatical, where all schools of thought and scholars and human-geographers can sit together and discuss the problems of the hill men.

Hence this Calcutta seminar, which was held from December 3 to 6, 1966. It was a fair success, as admitted by all, plains and hill people alike. The plainsman looks at himself in the mirror of his brother of the hills and vice versa. Hill people's problems, as posed and understood today, are not so much their own problems with themselves as their problems with the plains people. It is more or less a question of mutual relationship at the outset. But at the bottom of all the relationship problems, the fundamental problems of the common men of both hills and plains remain and their solution will depend upon the recognition of equality for all and even that is not all. What is more important is the unity of all common men everywhere—in plains and in hills. United we stand, divided we fall—remains an eternal truth. The get-together created the required psychological atmosphere to realize that truth. So our non-party, non-partisan objective approach was amply rewarded. All schools of thought,—conservatives and radicals—could meet and talk together and argue dispassionately. More than fifty papers came for discussion. All could not be discussed. They are being published now in a book form. That will be a valuable document, not because of their erudition and scholarship, but because they are mostly works of those who are in the battle for ideas in the region and who wrote it for themselves.

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The next Seminar, if and when it takes place, will find a record of what was the picture at the first Seminar. In the meantime, things will further change. The decision to usher in another Hill State in link with Assam Valley State, has perhaps broken a political stalemate and brought a new light—the light of a composite personality of the entire North-East India, beckoning all the people of that area to forge out a common goal for all, based on equality and unity. But this step, if accepted by all the contending parties in right earnest and goodwill, is not by itself enough. More and more steps should be followed and one step at the right direction will reveal more and better space for the next steps.

A summary of what happened in the Seminar and what was spoken and read is given in this book. Meanwhile, the hill-politics has begun to move, in which not only the people of Assam along with the hills are deeply interested, but people of NEFA, Manipur, Tripura, Nagaland, etc. must be feeling keenly interested. What is happening now in Assam hills may, if handled with enlightenment and explained and analysed by the intelligentsia who participated in the Seminar, help the building up of a really conscious, appreciative and healthy public opinion and that, we hope, will lead to the thawing of the ice in the entire Himalayan belt.

Let me acknowledge here our deep gratitude to all who cooperated with us to make this Seminar a success, a Seminar which for the first time created such a good impact upon the Calcutta citizens as well as upon the visiting delegates from North-East India. Indeed, cooperation from most quarters was overwhelming and unstinted.

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PANNALAL DAS GUPTA

# ASSAMESE CULTURE AND THE HILL PEOPLE OF NORTH-EASTERN INDIA

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Assamese culture is a distinct type of Indian culture. It is of composite and hybrid nature. No doubt, Assamese culture is Indian or Aryan and an integral part of the common Indian heritage in its main features, which it has received from north-western part of India ; but at the same time it has incorporated within its fold ideas, beliefs and institutions of the surrounding Mongoloid populations. In this respect north-eastern part of India provides a place of classic example, where fusion of different cultures has taken place, the blending and assimilation of cultural traits being harmonious and spontaneous.

From very ancient time, Assam, which provides a ground for formulating and testing validity of principles of science of man and culture, because of its geographical position, has become almost like a highway through which passed from India on one hand and south-east Asia on the other, people of diverse racial origin in successive waves. They had not only laid their cultural substrata on the land, but also contributed ethnic elements, the remnants of which are noticed in different parts and among different populations of the State. These racial and cultural traits interacted in such a manner so as to evolve a complex but composite culture, a parallel of which is hardly to be found in other parts of India. Racial harmony is a characteristic feature of the cultural system of Assam.

Of the various populations who took active part in building up an Assamese culture, mention may be made of the speakers of the Austric language, at present represented by the Khasi and the Pnar inhabiting the Khasi and Jaintia hills of Assam. The numerically dominant group is formed by the people who speak Tibeto-Burman languages. This family is divided and subdivided into a number of branches and sub-branches. One of the most important group of tribes of the Tibeto-Burmans is Bodo, which includes the Kachari, the Rabha, the Koch, the Lalung, the Dimasa, the Garo, the Chutiya, the Maran, etc. The Nagas also speak some branch of the Tibeto-Burman language. The Kuki and the Mizo also speak a language which form a section of the Kuki-Chin sub-branch of the Assam-Burmese branch of the Tibeto-Burman. The Adi, the Dafla, the Miri, the Mishimi, etc. of the north-eastern frontier, are also included under North-Assam branch of the Tibeto-Burman family.

In historical time came the Ahom, a section of the Tai or Shan, who in the 13th century overran and conquered Assam and established their kingdom. Other

members of the Tai, namely, the Khamyang, the Khampti, the Phakial, the Aiton, the Turung, also followed the Ahom.

It is not perfectly known at what time the Caucasoid Aryan entered into the valleys of the Brahmaputra. But there is no doubt that they came at a fairly early period, as suggested by the references in the Ramayan and the Mahabharat. The conflict between Lord Krishna and the great kings of Assam, like Narakasur, Banasur and Rukmi, son of Bhismak, and also between the Pandavas and Babruvahan and Hirimba, give clear indications of early contact of Assam with Aryan India. Traces of Kalita settlements in the Sadiya tract of eastern Assam is also suggestive of early Aryan contact with the Mongolid settlers of Assam.

As regards the ethnic make-up of Assam, very broadly it may be said that the caste populations, who mainly occupy the valley of the Brahmaputra, are Caucasian in origin and that they came from the west. In physical features and scopic characters they are comparable to those Caucasian people of some part of northern India. On the other hand the most predominating constituent ethnic element of the tribal population is Mongoloid. The Mongoloid people entered Assam from the north and the east and to some extent from the south, by various routes of migration. An old Veddid strain is also noticed in the basic substratum of some of these populations. There is no doubt that a considerable amount of admixture between these two major ethnic groups, namely, the Caucasoid and the Mongoloid took place. The Mongoloid infiltration becomes more and more marked as one goes up the valley towards the north-east.

Assamese culture, as we know today, is a blend of ideas and beliefs, elements of cultural pattern, social institutions, etc., of the Caucasoid Aryan on one hand and the Mongoloid people of the hills and the plains on the other, who are living side by side in quite harmony from time immemorial. Therefore, there is no wonder that the Assamese culture evolved in the plains of Assam shall penetrate into the hills and likewise, cultural elements of the hill people shall find their way into the plains. It is more or less like a two-way traffic.

Language is an ingredient of culture. It is, however, not the sole determinant of culture. As has already been mentioned, the people of Assam present a mixture of different ethnic groups speaking various languages, of which Austric or Mon-Khmer, Sino-Tibetan and Tai are noteworthy. Under such circumstances, it is quite natural that the phonological and morphological characteristics of Assamese language would greatly be influenced by these languages. And as a matter of fact, these languages, more particularly the Austric and the Tibeto-Burman have made remarkable contribution towards the growth and development of Assamese language, which form a branch of the Indo-Aryan. While contributing towards the development of Assamese language and culture in the natural course, some of the non-Aryan speaking people, gradually lost grip over their original language.

They became bilingual at the first stage, and then finally became speakers of Assamese. This phenomenon occurred in case of the Rabha, the Kachari, the Koch, the Mikir, etc. The Buddhist tribes, like the Phakial, the Khamyang, the Turung, the Aiton provide another set of example of this process. The Ahom had their own language. But gradually it became obsolete as a spoken language. The rulers preferred to use Assamese as a medium for daily intercourse. The Ahom language was used only on ceremonial occasions.

This is true not only in case of the plains, but also in the hills. Linguistic interaction has led to the development of a new speech, popularly known as Naga-Assamese or Nagamese, which forms a common *lingua franca* among the various Naga populations. It has also been the medium of communication between the people of Naga hills and the people of the plains.

Most of the hill people of NEFA living in the adjoining territory of the political boundary of Assam, also keep contact, do their daily transaction of business with the plains people through the medium of Assamese language. Some section of the British rulers could realize the importance of a common language in such a linguistic set-up, and therefore, as early as 1844, Capt. Jenkins, the Agent to the Governor-General of India on the North-East Frontier, brought to the notice of the proper authority the necessity of establishing a school at Saikhowa, where youths of all the tribes will be brought together to learn a common language. And that common language was Assamese. Jenkins thought in that direction because he knew that Assamese was successfully used as a medium of communication in the Naga hills. His idea was, however, not materialized, as it was not befitting the policy of the British administrators.

Language is not only an important facet of culture, but also undoubtedly a good vehicle for transporting social and cultural habits, beliefs and ideas, rites and ceremonies from one population to another. Language is also one of the most potent unifying forces. And therefore, spread of Assamese language and its interaction with the others in the manner described above, to a great extent, resulted in a slow but harmonious ethnic and cultural fusion.

Most of the hill people in varying degrees had to depend on their trade with the Assamese. They carried barter with the peoples of the plains of the Brahmaputra valley. This led them to learn Assamese and thereby the two populations came closer to one another. In 1841 W. Robinson observed that "the dependence of the Nagas on the Assam market for exchange of grain and other articles for salt had contributed to a mutual good understanding between the two people. The Naga hills have, in consequence, been accessible to the people of the plains, whilst the Nagas have on their part been permitted access to the markets of the frontier." The Lhota and the Ao "frequent the markets of Jorhat, Kacharihat and the hats of Dhansiri."

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Writing in 1935, W. C. Smith mentioned about the free use of Assamese language among the Lhota Nagas, and this, according to him was due to the fact that they raise cotton, which is sold to traders in the Assam valley. As a result of this sort of trade-relationship "Assamese terms were creeping into their language on account of the new material elements which they have adopted."

Interdependence of the hill people and the plains Assamese in economic sphere is a commonplace event throughout the whole region, as a result of which not only linguistic traits but also other cultural elements have entered into the hills. This process is not a dead one, but a live process, and thereby exchange of cultural and material elements has become a regular feature. This is taking place in its natural course spontaneously, though the two parties may not be quite conscious of what is happening.

Religion is one of the most important aspects of culture. A common religious faith always brings the various people together and facilitates flow of other cultural traits from one people to another. There is, therefore, no doubt that along with the gradual spread of Hinduism, many other associated cultural traits also made their way into those regions. There are several instances of non-Aryan Mongoloid people of plains who have embraced Hinduism. A good section of the Bodo tribes is Hindu. The Ahom also embraced Hinduism towards the end of the seventeenth century.

Hinduism spread to the hill regions also. It has a considerable foothold in the Jaintia hills among the Pnars. It has penetrated into the Mikir hills and Cachar hills as well. It is interesting to note that the Hinduized Mikir, Kachari, etc., have accepted many of the gods and goddesses as their own, giving some name in their respective languages. The rites and ceremonies associated with these, distinctly reveal blending of cultural patterns. They tell the stories of the Ramayan and Mahabharat with some modifications giving their own colour.

In this context, we must gratefully remember the name of Srimanta Sankardev, the great Assamese Vaisnav saint and social reformer of 15th-16th century. He aspired and worked to achieve the very same goal which we are at present trying to attain, namely, a harmonious integrated society composed of all sections of people irrespective of caste, creed and culture. His Satra organization made notable social contribution by rendering services among some of the tribes of Assam. Non-Aryan people like the Koch, the Chutiya, the Maran, the Kachari, the Ahom, on their own accord, came under the fold of Vaisnavism. Vaisnavite missionary activities were also conducted amongst the people like the Naga, the Miri, the Nokte, the Aiton, etc. Many of the hill people were attracted by his ideals and were initiated into his faith. Some of his disciples among the hill people held distinguished position of Ata, i.e., venerable preacher. His Naga disciple Norottama Ata following his ideals, established a Satra in upper Assam.

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Similarly, the Garo disciple Govinda Ata and the Mikir disciple Bolai Ata organized Sankarian activities in their respective places.

Culture does not merely mean language, trade or commerce or religion ; it is the total way of life of a people. Looked at in this manner, we should also consider the material traits and activities of the Assamese people and the people of the hills as manifestation of their respective culture.

The hill people of north-eastern India get their food by practising agriculture and also to some extent by collection from natural sources. Most of them practise shifting cultivation, and in this respect the method of cultivation is distinctly different from plough cultivation practised by the people of the plains. Some section of the hill people who have migrated into the plains (for example the Plains Garo) have taken to plough cultivation. This method has fruitfully been utilised by the Garo, the Mikir, the Bhoi, etc., in the plain tracts of the hilly areas. Besides that, the food habit of many of the hill people has undergone significant changes. They have included in their dietary some new items of food borrowed from the Assamese. In their day-to-day life one might also notice the use of large numbers of material goods and equipments which formed a part of the traditional Assamese culture.

Assamese female dress has also been familiar in some parts of the hill for a long time. Assamese mode of female hair-do has enthusiastically been adopted by many hill women. The Galong female very often use Assamese dresses. The Nokte girls also like to wear riha, mekhala and chadar especially while coming to school, market and also on festive occasions. Assamese dress has also found a distinctive position among the Mikir, the Garo, the Dimasa, etc.

The Bihu, an Assamese national festival, is considered by some authority to be a contribution of the tribal folk. Now the Assamese form of Bihu festival has become a common feature of many of the tribes, both in the hills and in the plains. One can hear the familiar Assamese songs and tunes of the plains echoed in the distant hills.

In this fashion, one can cite numerous examples of give and take in the cultures of the hills and the plains, that may be in the realm of agriculture and food habit, dress and apparel, the arts of spinning and weaving and other domestic industries, or in the realm of social habits and customs, beliefs and ideas, rites and ceremonies and dance and music.

Some of the Tibeto-Burman tribes, namely the Kachari and the Coch established their own kingdoms in Assam. They formed very powerful groups. The Ahom ruled Assam for about six hundred years. The Ahom king Rudra Singha had conquered Cachar and Jaintia, and thereby, he not only extended his territory but also brought the different populations under one fold. With the support

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from both the hills and the plains, he planned to bring the ancient territory of Kamrupa under his rule. The Jaintia, the Coch and other tribal chiefs helped him to raise the army for that purpose.

The Ahom tried to maintain a peaceful relationship with all the neighbouring hill people. They realized the efficiency of material alliances for better understanding and intimate contact. There are instances of Ahom princes marrying daughters of tribal chiefs of the hills, who on the other hand accepted girls from Ahom families and other plains people as their wives. They admitted many tribal people into their ethnic fold. The new entrants enjoyed all the privileges of the older members. One Naga was given a very high position of Barphookan. The other ruling families, namely, the Koch, the Chutiya and the Jaintia also followed a similar principle. Thus the Ahom and other rulers besides consolidating their military power also gave cohesion to the social organization and cultural integration. The process of gradual evolution of a composite culture out of heterogeneous elements was intensified by the cooperative efforts of the divers populations. This process was, however, slow, but harmonious and spontaneous.

This condition prevailed upto the time of coming of the British. The reciprocal cultural relations between the hills and the plains underwent distinct changes with the introduction of Western influence, including religion and administration, in north-eastern India.



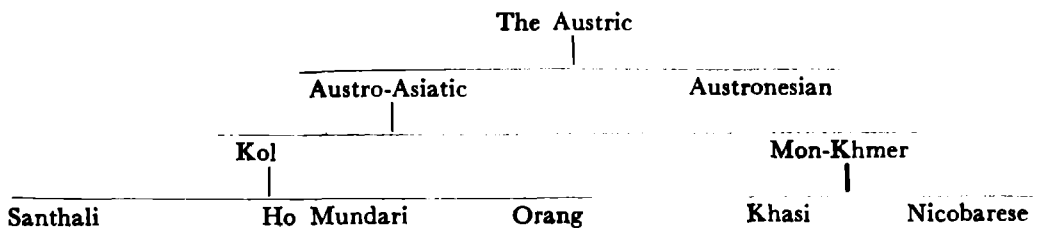
# THE LANGUAGES OF TRIPURA

C. R. GOSWAMI

(The present study has been based on some field work, and on a number of relevant publications. The figures are based on 1961 Census Report, but later movements in population have not been left out of account.)

Tripura is a colourful State. Her physical appearance is made of hills and plains, plateaus and valleys, barren hillocks and rich verdure. All the ethnic groups are represented by her meagre population of hardly 12 lakhs. Religions—higher and lower and of all denominations—thrive here side by side. But as regards language, the variety one comes across is simply unsurpassing.

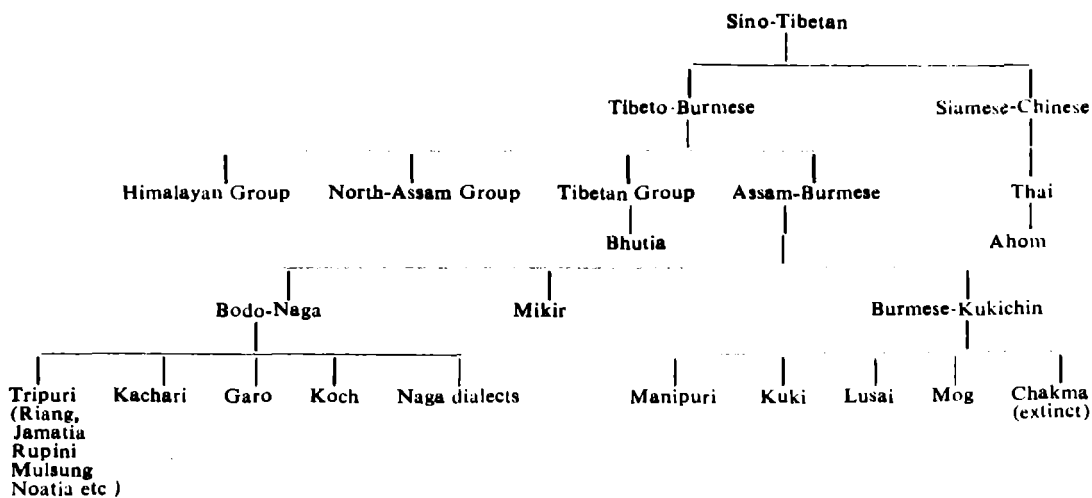
Of the four groups of languages prevalent in India the Austric is the oldest. But the sway of the Austric language has been usurped by later arrivals—the Sino-Tibetan, Dravidian and Aryan languages. Consequently Austric languages are at present traced only in remote hilly regions and among backward tribes. In this old State of hill Tripura, Austric languages are spoken by a small number (350) of 'Khasi' people and by a larger number of immigrants—Santhals (about 1600), Orangs (about 2,800) and Mundas (about 4,400). Khasi, though an Austric language, is not, however, very closely related with the languages of the immigrants, most of whom are tea-plantation labourers coming from Bihar. Khasi is more akin to a different branch of the Austric family of languages, namely, Mon and Khmer of Burma, Siam and Indo-China. The position may be shown in the following manner :



The other tribal inhabitants of Tripura (the total tribal population of Tripura divides itself into no less than 15 different groups, namely, Chakma, Garo, Halam, Jamatia, Khasi, Kuki, Lusai, Mog, Munda, Noatia, Orang, Rieng, Santhal, Tripuri, Uchoi etc.) speak mostly some dialect of the Sino-Tibetan, with the exception of the Chakmas who speak an Aryan language—Bengali, though, of course, the Chakmas have retained a number of words (about 20) of Tibeto-Burmese origin in their parlance. The position of Sino-Tibetan languages in India is no better than

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that of the Austric group of languages. Rather, they are found, unlike the Austrics, only in the Northern and Eastern outskirts of the country, and they do not have, like the Austrics, any noteworthy contribution of words and phrases to Aryan and Dravidian languages of the North and the South respectively. "It will be seen that the Sino-Tibetan languages in all their complex ramifications do not have much numerical importance or cultural significance in India . . ." writes Dr. S. K. Chatterjee. However, the geneology of the Sino-Tibetan languages—rather dialects, since most of them fall far short of the norms of a language—spoken by numerous tribes of Tripura may be shown thus :



The number of speeches current in this small territory is imposing, but the number of people using them is negligible. All the tribes together form but 28 per cent of the population of Tripura. As for the standard of these speeches, the position is still more deplorable.

Santhali and Khasi have a small literature. They have been given recognition by the University of Calcutta, 'the former as a mother tongue which can be offered at the School Final Examination, and the latter upto the B.A. stage.' Santhali is written in Nagri script and Khasi in the Roman. But the Santhals of Tripura have no connection, illiterate that they are, with the written form of Santhali and its literature. Booklets on the Bible and Christianity written in Khasi language are imported in a small quantity from Assam for circulation among the converted Khasis (the total number of Khasis in Tripura is 350).

Of the Tibeto-Burmese group of languages in India the most important is Manipuri and Newari (spoken in South Nepal and in a small area of North India). Both of them have a considerable literature. Manipuri is written in Bengali script. The Manipuri community of Tripura (27,940) is not counted as a tribe. One section of this community known as Bisnupuri speaks a dialect very remote

from standard Manipuri (that of Imphal) ; the other section maintains a connection with Imphal, but since they, too, have been having their education in Bengali, the cultivation of Manipuri among them does not go very far.

There is no Newari-speaking people in Tripura. Other speeches of Tibeto-Burmese origin in Tripura had no written form till recently. The Baptist Mission of New-Zealand has brought out lately a few booklets in Tripuri and Lusai for the purpose of proselytization. Pamphlets in Lusai are imported from Assam by the Catholic Mission for the same purpose.

Some pioneering work was undertaken for the development of Tripuri by a number of educated Tripuris (dubbed as 'Thakurlok' who have, however, ceased to use the language at home, they speak the local dialect of Bengali like their Bengalee neighbours). Late Radha Mohan Debbarman, ex-Commander, Tripura army, and ex-District and Sessions Judge, Tripura, published in 1902 a Tripuri dictionary and a book of grammar and translation in Bengali script. Having based on these pioneering ventures, the Social Education Deptt., Govt. of Tripura has carried on some work in the field and brought out a number of books in Tripuri (in Bengali script) for the edification of the adult.

Tripuri is the most important tribal language of Tripura. It is spoken by the largest number of tribals (about 190,000) and is understood by many other co-tribes like Riang, Jamatia, Rupini, Noatia, Mulsung etc. Although education is imparted to tribal children through the medium of Bengali, the necessity of the knowledge of Tripuri on the part of the teacher is felt keenly for effective communication. Tripuri has, therefore, been made a compulsory subject of study for every trainee in the Basic Training Colleges of Tripura. Tripuri has a store of love and heroic stories some of which have appeared recently in Bengali version in a local weekly—'Samhati' (now extinct).

The future of the tribal languages of Tripura does not seem to be bright. Even the most important of the Austric (Santhali, Khasi, Mundari) and Tibeto-Burmese (Newari, Manipuri) languages of India do not have a hopeful prospect due to the tremendous force of the Aryan languages with cultural and economic advantages going with them.

From the earliest days of its growth, Bengali has found a place of honour in the royal Court of Tripura. Till the integration of Tripura with independent India, Bengali had functioned as the official language of the State. All the odd jobs of the state excepting foreign affairs have been conducted through Bengali. In her attempt at employing Bengali in official matters, West Bengal may well learn a good deal from Tripura ; she will find many useful words and terms well-established here. The present popular Government has again declared Bengali as the official language of the state ; during the intervening period of about 16 years English was the official language.

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About 65 per cent of the population of Tripura is Bengalee speaking—Hindus and Muslims. Over and above them a large number of Tripuris, Chakmas and Manipuris speak Bengali in their daily life. The rest of the population, too, is having its education right from the elementary level in Bengali. The royal Court's judicious support to the cause of Bengali is wellknown. Rajavali (12th century ?), the oldest Bengali book on the history of Tripura, happens to be the earliest specimen of Bengali prose. Princess Anangamohini Devi (d. 1918) is notable poetess in Bengali. The kings of Tripura particularly the later ones had been actively connected with the thought movements in Bengal carried on mainly through Bengali. All these have given Bengali an unshakable place of importance in Tripura.

So we fear that with the march of time, advancement of learning and modernization of social life, Tripura may not perhaps have any other language as its own than Bengali in which of course stamps of tribal association will be discernible for some time more to come.

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# **LANGUAGE & LITERACY IN THE NORTH-EASTERN REGIONS**

**DR. SUHAS CHATTERJEE**

The Constitution of India affords linguistic safeguards to minorities, under Article 29(1), which states that "any section of the citizens residing in India or any part thereof having a distinct language, script or culture of its own shall have the right to conserve the same." There is an added safeguard in Article 350A, which calls upon every state and local authority to provide facilities for instruction in the mother tongue. But how far have these promises been fulfilled with respect to the North-Eastern Hill region? It is with this question that the present paper is concerned. It discusses the problems associated with the question and offers certain solutions.

The people inhabiting the vast areas of North-Eastern India mostly speak languages belonging to what is called the Tibeto-Burman family of languages; of course, with the exception of Khasi, which is of Austro-Asiatic affiliation.

So far as the governmental deal with these languages is concerned, it can be said without any reservation that those in authority have not shown any marked desire to take the Constitutional commitments seriously. The gap between promises and performance is very wide.

Before I could delineate on the different aspects of the problem, let me discuss the theoretical assumptions relevant to the problem. It is unanimously accepted that a child should start his schooling in his mother tongue, because thus he will have fewer adjustment problems in beginning school, because it is psychologically easier for him, and because he learns more rapidly, and operates more quickly and efficiently in his mother tongue. Adult literacy courses also should use the mother tongue, because through the use of the mother tongue unwilling adults can be easily persuaded to accept literacy and education. The assumption of operational ease and principle of quicker learning through the use of the mother tongue applies equally to adults and children alike.

It might be pertinent to note in this connection that in 1951 UNESCO convened a meeting of specialists to consider the different issues concerning the use of vernacular languages in education. These specialists, along with their recommendations that every child of school age should attend school and that every illiterate should be made literate, also unanimously prescribed that the best medium of teaching both for an adult and a child is the mother tongue of the pupil.

Indian Constitution also recognizes the importance of the mother tongue in primary education, and I have shown earlier that in Article 350A it recommends that the authorities should do everything in their power to create the conditions which will make for an ever-increasing extension of schooling in the mother tongue. But the actual situation in the North-Eastern regions presents a dismal contrast to all these. Only a very few of these languages are used as media of instruction, and in most of those that are so used there are no text books adequate for elementary classes and adult literacy courses. It has been alleged that in many places Bengali or Assamese books are used. There have also been attempts, it has been reported, to impose Hindi in some places. Such attempts are, to a great extent, responsible for the general allegation that instead of giving these people their legitimate linguistic rights what is being currently attempted here is the imposition of some sort of an intellectual domination. It might not be wrong to suppose that the violent political turmoils in these regions that have been threatening to shake the very root of Indian democracy are at least partly, motivated by the desire to free the people from this cultural tyranny.

Let me allude here to a typical case which reflects the general attitude towards these languages. Recently, a group of people from one of these regions met a linguist having international fame, and solicited his advice as to how their language could be used for primary education and literacy courses. The linguist sensed a camouflaged political motive behind this urge of the tribals and reprimanded them for having such narrow parochialism. According to him their language is doomed to extinction, and so they should learn the neighbouring Aryan language, and the sooner it is done the better for them. It is easily conceivable what the repercussions of the tribals were!

Most of the officers in charge of the different educational enterprises in these areas not only do not care to learn these languages, but also bluntly refuse to be aware of how best these languages can be put to use. Among them there is a general belief that through the collection of folk tales and folk songs etc. they have been doing linguistic justice to these people. I had an opportunity to meet one of these officers whom I asked what his administration was doing to introduce the local tribal language for elementary and adult literacy courses. He readily admitted that the medium of instruction should have been the mother tongue of the pupil, but he added, "You see, unfortunately here they do not have a language, what they speak is an illiterate dialect, lacking grammar and orthography". His utterances are typical, not exceptional.

Now, every speech, no matter whether one calls it a dialect or language, has sets of patterned rules, following which sentences are formed. Communication between individuals presupposes structured patterns, randomness does not make communication feasible. These patterned structural rules are called the grammar. These rules can be worked out and codified if and when there is a need for them.

Also, a structurally suitable orthography and an adequate system of spelling can be devised in order to reduce the speech to writing if such demands are there. Besides, there is nothing in the structure of a language which makes it unsuitable for becoming the vehicle of modern civilization, and no language is inadequate to fulfil the needs of elementary education. Therefore, in matters of providing an elementary education in Tibeto-Burman speech-communities, the claim for using the mother tongue of the pupil, which is psychologically and pedagogically the ideal choice, cannot be disowned on the false pretext of structural inadequacy, lack of grammar and absence of orthography. These problems, therefore, are not genuine. Let us see if there are other problems.

No one knows, except very vaguely, how many Tibeto-Burman languages are there. However, it seems that the number is alarmingly large. Some people, with the best of motives, want to play down the diversity factor. They, anxious to help towards the cultural unification of India, abhor the very idea of giving any recognition to these languages. They feel that it will divide India further and further. Therefore, their recommendation is : suppress the fact that they exist, or ignore them as if they do not exist. This naive good intention aggravates the the ailment instead of curing it.

Some might argue that though it is psychologically and pedagogically most advantageous to begin schooling through the mother tongue, it might not be the best choice for those who want to go beyond the elementary stage, because they would anyhow need to know other languages. If the contention of this argument is that the tribal languages are not adequate for becoming the medium of higher learning, I would like to say that I beg to differ. Any language is theoretically capable of becoming the medium of instruction for every stage of learning from the lowest grade to the highest. What stands in the way of realizing this proposition is that it is not compatible with the exigencies of a State. It is generally accepted that getting oneself educated is a personal matter while providing a modern education is a State enterprise. The State through its collective efforts provides the individual with the facilities of education which he cannot individually attain. To provide education in all levels of learning through a particular language involves huge expenditure. Thus, planning to give all kinds of education to linguistic minorities through a host of minor languages means undertaking a giant enterprise demanding vast outlays from the collective treasury of the State, which perhaps no modern State can bear. Therefore, let us be content with the humble aspirations of finding the means to support the programmes of providing elementary education through the different minor languages.

The fact that a few who would go for advanced studies would need to know other languages, should not be the excuse for starting elementary and adult literacy courses through a language which is not the mother tongue of the pupil. Considerations for a few should not deter us in undertaking programmes affecting mil-

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lions. The elimination of illiteracy should be our prime concern and it should form our main point of departure in planning educational programmes.

Some might feel that I am advocating the perpetuation of hundreds of minor languages. I, however, hold that recognizing these languages—whatever might be their number—for elementary and adult literacy courses might ultimately contribute to the gradual reduction of their number, provided other conditions are met. Let me explain what are the reasons of my expectation.

An analysis of the evolutionary history of any standard written language, which has its sway upon wide areas covering many speech-communities, reveals that the emergence of such a language depends upon the development of inter-dialectal or interlingual communication based upon the mutual or uni-directional intelligibility between the speakers of these dialects or languages. Such communication, in its turn, depends upon the development of favourable inter-ethnic or or intercultural attitudes and relationships. Rise and growth of prestige centres help forming such an intercultural link, viz. a common written language. With it there comes into picture all kinds of standard language attitudes affecting its properties and functions. Thus, sets of doctrines of correctness with their panoply of rationalizations and justifications come into operation and thereby some kind of stability is achieved.

In eminently pre-literate societies, like those in the North-Eastern regions, favourable intercultural attitudes and relationships do not develop. In such a situation there being no prerogative for interlingual communication, the members of different speech-communities characteristically develop linguistic isolation. These are negative conditions for the formation of written standard languages having jurisdiction over many speech-communities.

It follows from the foregoing discussion that the prerequisite for the formation of written standard languages in North-Eastern regions is to plan to provide for universal literacy, which will help towards the growth of intercultural attitudes and relationships, and also interlingual communication.

In order to provide for universal literacy immediate steps should be taken to devise orthographics for as many languages as are required. Adequate lesson materials should also be set up for adults and children.

A second programme should concern itself with the aim of planning a gradual reduction in the number of languages. Obviously, it must have a very long-range perspective. In the realm of conscious planning, it should try, by programming, to duplicate within a reasonably short period, say a few decades, the actual evolutionary process through which known standard languages have come into being during thousands of years, or so. The programme, it should be emphasized, by



necessity must be phased over years. Similar conscious planning, it might be pointed out in passing, has shown considerable results in other parts of the world, notably in Africa. The programme should carry out its work according to the accepted principles of language standardization. The workers must try to profit from the experience of workers who have acquired similar experience elsewhere in the world. The programme, to be successful, should try to determine from time to time whether or not, in a given area, there are positive signs of having the vital need for the various functions of a standard language, and if so, to what extent? For this purpose it will be required to carry out from time to time intensive researches into the nature of inter-cultural attitudes and relationships, and interlingual intelligibility between structurally related languages. The non-linguistic factors mentioned above should receive due attention. In the past, in many areas of the world there were attempts to fuse languages having structural similarities. These projects failed, because these did not take due care of the fact that linguistic proximity alone is not the decisive factor in interlingual communication; intercultural attitudes and relationships also play significant roles in this regard.

I strongly believe that the steps that I have suggested here are not only immediately best, but also in the long perspective of history are the best, both for these people and for the whole of India. I believe that these steps will lead to planned homogeneity amidst heterogeneity, and in course of time there would emerge a handful of standard Tibeto-Burman written languages, created by the genius of the local people. Neither Bengali nor Assamese, nor any other Aryan language, can fulfil the function that these future languages will do.

# ROLE OF SUPERSTITIONS AND BELIEFS AMONG INDIAN TRIBES

P. C. RAY

## Introduction

An attempt has been made in this paper to deal with some of the psycho-socio-cultural factors which have got tremendous bearing not only on the personality make-up of the tribes such as the Baiga, Lodha, Santal, Maria, Abor and the Gallong, but on their way of life as well, in so far as their transformation is concerned.

## THE STATUS PERSONALITIES IN THE LIFE OF THE TRIBES

### The Baiga

In the year 1956, the author conducted a psycho-cultural survey among the Bhumia Baiga inhabiting the hills and forests of Dindari Tehsil in the District of Mandla in M.P.<sup>1</sup> The problem was culture-contact and personality change. Three areas, namely, Somnapur, Jaldabona and Baigachak were investigated. Somnapur might be considered as the most-contact area. The Baiga of this region had no **beware**, because the Forest Department abolished this practice. The Baiga of Jaldabona who appeared to be less affected, had also no **beware**, and so, they also took to ploughing. However, whenever they would get any opportunity, they did not hesitate to fall back on their old practice by adopting illegal means. Baigachak was the least affected area. The people of this region could not think of their existence without **beware**, which was considered by almost all of them as part and parcel of their lives. While the author was investigating in that area, the Divisional Forest Officer visited the place. He persuaded and even threatened the Baiga to give up **beware** in favour of plough cultivation. They resisted stubbornly and ultimately declined the offer, and told the officer that they would rather die than give up the practice.

The important point that deserves special mention in this connection, is that the attachment of these people to cultivation does not involve only the economic consideration. It can be reasonably assumed that their 'do or die' attitude towards **beware** cultivation appears to be rooted in the deeper aspect of their personality structure. To make it more clear, it may be said that the underlying causes behind this practice appear to lie in their emotional involvement and religious attitude towards it. The life history data collected at Baigachak revealed that they were

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unable to give up this habit, because, according to their belief, **beware** had been granted to them by **Bhagawan**, Who taught their ancestors how to sow seeds and cut **beware**. Moreover, ploughing, according to them, was to commit a mortal sin by tearing the body of the mother-earth. They considered the earth as a mother-surrogate, and so, it was not possible for them to tear it off; rather, they should die.

So it may be concluded in view of the above that unlike the changes pertaining to material culture, as for example, substituting bows and arrows for guns, which do not affect the core of personality, any change in their attitude towards **beware** having religious involvement, and replacement of the same by ploughing, is likely to affect the deeper aspect of personality structure, and hence, due cognizance should be taken of these factors which influence tribal transformation.

Another instance may be cited with regard to their belief underlying bathing and using water after defecation. Dr. Elwin<sup>2</sup> mentioned in the year 1939 that "what they believe is that if they wash themselves with water after defecation, they may be eaten by a tiger." With regard to bathing, the author collected some information for a very old magician of Dhaba. According to his account, the Baiga did not take bath, because they believed that if they took bath after defecation, then, all their sins would have been washed away, and subsequently, these would inevitably fall on earth which was considered by them as mother-surrogate.

So it appears in view of the above observation that the causes underlying their attitudes towards bathing and using water after defecation, lie in their deep-rooted prejudices and religious beliefs.

It may be said with regard to their belief in witch-craft that according to Elwin's account<sup>2</sup>. "The Baiga think themselves most powerful magicians on earth. If he cannot always raise the dead, he can at least ward off the demons of disease." While investigating at Baigachak, the author observed that they would seek the help of **Gunia** (magician) in order to cure diseases, which were generally believed to be the result of witch-craft. While investigating at Dhaba, the author was informed that a **Sudhe** (witch) was living there. They also expressed that anyone of them might fall ill and die due to witch-craft and that they were passing their days in great anxiety and insecurity. They even applied to the Government for the removal of the witch from their village.

So it may be pointed out here that witch-craft may be considered as another potent factor, dominating their mental life to a great extent. It is plausible to assume that their psychological state roughly corresponds to that of a people who are passing through a crisis.

### **The Lodha**

During the author's investigation among the Lodha<sup>3</sup> in the year 1960, he observed that if an air fish or a tortoise was caught by a Lodha in a pond belonging to another man, then it was taken away without informing the owner. On enquiry, the author came to know that they acted according to their belief. The air fish or the tortoise must be taken away at any cost, without bothering about the legality or illegality of the action. On the contrary, if they would fail to do so, then any member of the family of the man concerned might die.

In the past, the spirit-possessed men among the Lodha wielded great power, so much so that these people would not hesitate to act according to their prediction. Still now, these status personalities have got considerable influence over them.

### **The Santal**

In May, 1966, the author had been to the Santal Parganas. He had the opportunity to work among the least affected Santals. They inhabit a region, near about Bokrabandh in Godda subdivision. It was observed that during market days, adolescent boys and girls visited the market. The boys generally offered betel and nut to the girls with whom they were more or less intimate. After that, the boys and girls would retire to the nearby **jungle** in pairs, in order to perform coitus. On enquiry, the author came to know that these activities were socially acknowledged by the Santals. It may be mentioned that when viewed from our socio-cultural standard, these are no doubt punishable offences.

### **The Maria**

An interesting case of murder committed by a Maria due to his strict adherence to a tribal practice has been cited by Elwin in his book, "Maria Murder and Suicide"<sup>4</sup>. Among the Maria tribe, a murder was once committed by the deceased husband's younger brother. On the day of the tragedy, he went to the house of his deceased brother's wife and asked for tobacco. She refused and he murdered her.

To us, it appears to be a cold-blooded murder. But actually, this is not the case. According to tribal practice and belief, prevalent among this tribe, a younger brother has a right over the person as well as on the property of his dead brother's younger wife. Asking for tobacco in this case meant symbolizing form of inviting for intercourse. So he demanded his right which was not granted.

### The Abor and the Gallong

The author conducted a survey on culture and personality among the Abor and the Gallong in the year 1952-53. He also collected some accounts pertaining to their superstitions, beliefs and prestige of the status-personalities.

They believe in spirits; almost all of them are considered as malevolent. The causes of any calamity and disease are attributed to their evil design, and so, they are propitiated by the sacrifice of animals. They also believe that certain persons can create bad weather and also do harm to people. In order to counteract all these, they seek the help of the magician (**Miru**).

They look on the medicine-man as a person having special status. The reason being that he is not only considered as their benefactor but they are also afraid of him, as these people do believe that the medicine-man can even kill a man if he so desires.

The suspected thief is required to take out an egg from a bamboo tube filled with boiling water. If he does not receive any injury, then he is considered to be an honest man.

So it appears that beliefs and superstitions are treated by them as established truth and actions are taken accordingly. It must be remembered that what is regarded as 'normal' by these people might be judged as 'abnormal' by the plains people, and so, the method of 'approach' to these people should give due cognizance of their mores.

The tribals are haunted by these beliefs not only in this country but in other countries as well. Linton as cited by Kardiner<sup>5</sup>, observed that in Marquesan culture, revenge was considered as a sacred duty according to local customs. The male relatives of the killed shaved one half of their heads till their kinsman was avenged. Another belief among these people, which led to murder even, was that **fanaua** was considered as a supernatural being. They were the spirits of the dead men, who became the familiars of women, helping them in injuring other women at their bidding. Occasionally, women who had a **fanaua** were killed by the irate relatives of women whom their spirits had attacked.

It may be said in view of the above that these performances are no doubt criminal activities when judged from our socio-cultural standard. On the other hand, in so far as these people are concerned, they have only performed their natural obligation as demanded by their socio-cultural set-up.

In order to draw an over-all picture of what has been said, it may be pointed out that superstitions, beliefs, local customs and activities of the status-personalities

exert great influence on the lives of the aboriginals. It is also evident that these people act in accordance with their cultural norms. They think and feel that they are discharging their obligations, imposed on them by the society. On the contrary, if they do not act according to their social standard, they might be ostracized from the society.

### Conclusion

It may be concluded in view of the above considerations that a proper appraisal of the psycho-socio-cultural set-up of the tribal population should be made when dealing with special problems in tribal transformation. What appears to be abnormal from the point of view of our cultural standard may be quite normal from their socio-cultural standard.

It appears that superstitions, beliefs, local customs and the activities of the status-personalities, such as spirit-possessed men, witches etc. exert tremendous influence on the activities of the tribes, so much so that not only are crimes often committed but they may stick to their own beliefs till their last breath.

So it may be suggested that a thorough understanding of their beliefs, superstitions etc. is essential not only for finding out the root-causes underlying the activities under discussion but also for developing friendly relation with them. It should be remembered that the tribal people act in accordance with their socio-cultural norms. In other words, they think that they are discharging their obligations to the society. These considerations, the author thinks, should form the cardinal structure on which a scientific investigation dealing with psycho-cultural problems during tribal transformation, should be based.

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Memba Dancer, Siang



# MUSIC OF THE HILL PEOPLE OF NORTH-EASTERN INDIA

SUKUMAR RAY

## MUSICAL COMMUNICATION

The attitude of the connoisseurs of North-Indian music towards the music of the people of the North-Eastern frontiers of India should now be directed to find out the actual common ground wherein both meet. Unless this is done, all our attempts to understand each other will be futile. On this point of our approach, there may be possibility of being prejudiced by our ideas of traditional Indian music. On the other hand, there is a lack of materials on the basic music of the hill people and proper knowledge of their racial character of music, which explains the normal and psychological inclinations. Examination of bare facts and apparent features of their music cannot explain their inherent tendencies. We know, people of Assam and Bengal have significant relationship with the people of north-east India, which an anthropologist can better explain. But it should be admitted that excepting the people of Assam, most of the Indians did hardly know them just one and a half decades earlier. We may today study the treatises on the life and tradition of those people easily and know much about their cultural and social life, since villages in India are not remaining at a distance, segregated as they were before.

To start talking on music, it is easy to treat on the points of non-conformity, but difficult to decipher the things common, because, diversity of languages kept each one far from the other in the past. The ideas of mutual understanding were never thought of, for obvious reasons. But it is a fact that for centuries they lived close to each other and indirect psychological and racial impacts acted upon them. For ages past, broken-Assamese was the lingua-franca of communication of the people of the north, east and central hill areas of Assam and broken Bengali dialect near Kachhar and Tripura areas. Hill people kept contact with the plains by annual assemblage at various areas in Assam. There is hardly any record to prove as to whether music and dance were presented in those fairs, as the villagers do in Bengal. But it seems quite clear that Assamese Bihu and East Bengal folk songs made a natural point of musical communication in certain areas.

In a broad sense, we have to point out that we have some folk music of Assam and Bengal in common with the music of Nagas, other hill people of Manipur, Tipperah, Assam and NEFA. It means so far as the theme and subject matter are concerned, we are very close to each other. But from the music point of view, our approach should be directed to the inmost recesses of the musical heart for appropriate knowledge. Otherwise the nature of the song,

which is generally audible and which forms the raw material for present-day music, may confuse us very much. Normally a music critic in India does not bother about treating on the popular music like simple monotonous folk songs which have rare variations. It seems a musicologist has very little to speak on this matter, because, for him music with adequate creative work only makes an interesting study. After all, one ceases to be a musicologist when he studies folk or tribal music as a literary critic, an anthropologist or at best a philosopher. Because music, in a formative state, where monotony in combination of notes not more than two to three together make out a complete item, cannot generally be an interesting study of a musicologist unless he is motivated to do so. And here, again, one of our questions is : "where lies the common ground?" In this connection, it may be pointed out that our present-day popular music is a guide to a region where the very form of tribal music many find its way easily.

The theory of classical *Raga* melody cannot be a bar to such aims and objects, because the principles of classical music differ from the principles of popular music in many respects. Apparently there is dismal prospect of bringing popular music of Bengal and Assam on a level with that of the hill peoples' music for comparison. Folk music and modern songs of these two states are gradually undergoing a process of development or change, whereas music of the tribals is saturated in a calm reservoir. As a result you may come across the same type of literature on different aspects of this life but hardly anything on music itself. Music gets expression in their calmness and in a state of tranquility, happiness, joy and victory. Emotional expressions remain dormant or secretly expressed in solitude beside the hilly stream, inside the bush or in the lonely corner of the valley. Music, we know, like other forms of art, originates from the doings of an individual mind. It is the individual capacity that introduces the form. In most of the people of the eastern hill areas of India you will find the songs to be utilised by the community. We, the plains people, are ignorant about the fact that for ages they were gravely concerned with their community and the group and not the individual. Because the urge for survival in the forest areas, jungles and hills, imposed on them the sense of the community more than the people of the plains and valleys. The nature of their life made them conscious of the community rather than individual. Therefore, individual compositions were represented in group songs and hardly in solo. The old musical forms of the individuals were scarcely enquired into with interest and are almost lost in many tribes. Unless the peculiarities of the inherent tendencies are discovered in solo music, the musical character cannot be understood properly. It may also be observed that music of the groups diverted them more towards dance at different places differently. Thus, drumming and accompaniment of indigenous musical instruments were devised, system of foot-steps were developed, rhythmic body movements were expounded, and socio-artistic traditions were created for festive occasions. They had their community music normally.

DANCE

So far as the tribal music is concerned, dance and vocal music are correlated with each other and they go hand in hand. Since development of music needs long intellectual and cultural training, progress in music cannot be expected at any stage of the growth of tribal or folk cult. Spontaneity in musical compositions is a normal feature at this stage. It may depend on the individual knack. But at a primary stage, dance and music stand side by side contributing to each other. In old Indian musicology, treatment on dance and music go hand in hand. We find in Bengal music hardly helped the development of dance in its various early phases, but this feature is distinctive in Assam. Dance had its various expressions in different peoples of the plains and hills. There are expressions of Assemese cultural life in Bihu dance, which is today undergoing moderation along with time. The tribals retain their original form of dance normally. In Nagaland and NEFA, dance is presented as the main community-performance of the individual or group emotions. Dance has a sort of academic growth in the groups of Adis in NEFA, especially much has already been said on Padam-Minyong culture. (Since I had only two occasions to record Padam's music and observe their dance at Gauhati in 1958-59, I cannot profitably remark on their musical peculiarities here. But it appeared that high-pitched musical expressions on various subjects like agriculture, rain, valour, love and ballads on their own historical theme did not create as much variation in tune as in dance. This singular instance proves that a few races in NEFA preserve their racial character of the art of music and also the fact that they dance with vigour and rigidity. The quick and measured footsteps of the party members moving in a circular way with the pitched vocal recitation of the leader standing at the centre of the group and singing at the top of the voice—somewhat shrill and exulted—created an atmosphere of joy and vigour by chanting. The arrangement of musical notes in songs did not appear to have any definite musical shape).

Let us mention here what the great friend and philosopher of the Tribals, Dr. Elwin says, "The great dancers of the NEFA are the Adis of Siang and North Western Lohit. The Ponung, as it is called, is justly famous and has a large variety of steps and movements; it has its ceremonial aspects, for at certain festivals the leader chants the traditional epics of the tribe, but it is also enthusiastically performed on all possible occasions simply for recreation." This proves that these tribes never lost their creativeness, rather they have had their dance developed in the best form and it was the dance of this group which has given us scope for connecting the world with them. While mentioning the others of the NEFA another short picture may be given from Dr Elwin: "Along the northern frontier, the Mompas and Sherdukpens, the Membas and Khambas have a large repertory of ceremonial pantomimes, which the Mummurs perform in gorgeous dresses and finely carved and painted

masks, during the chief festivals of the Buddhist year. They are accompanied by a band of drummers, trumpeters and Lamas clashing great cymbals, and are done in front of the local Gompa or temple. They generally tell a story or point a moral, but there are clowns to provide refreshing humorous interludes. But they are too elaborate, too expensive to be performed often, and for recreation boys and girls have simpler dances for every-day use."

"The Akas, Buguns and Majis have charming dances, performed mostly by girls. The Daflas and Bangnis are more vigorous than artistic, and so are the Apa-Tanis, though some of their performances, which may be classified as either games or dances, such as snake-games or dance of the short-tailed bird are expertly done and are a delight to watch. Dances of the others are also to be mentioned in this connection. Mishmis restrict their dance to their festivals, Noctes and Wanchos of Tirap are reviving their war dance with their music instruments. Big ceremonial drums are beaten, Jews-harp is a common instrument, but flute is not very common with them. . . . In the main dances and songs are accompanied."

While speaking on the tribes of NEFA, Dr. Elwin has given some constructive suggestions and encouraged introduction of dancing in the school curriculum though there are some handicaps for such act. It is difficult to choose and select dances of general character for performance of all concerned. Some items may not be suitable for the others and further implementation of all such work need an elaborate arrangement and training facilities. Different hill people inside Assam are now-a-days consciously reviving and presenting their dances to the public. Dress, movements—speedy or slow—theme etc. are creating ideas of variety in different sections of spectators. The spectacular dance items of the Kabui Nagas need mention in this regard. They have had a reciprocal inspiration from the plains people of Manipur, who have developed dancing as pure art having systematic intellectual and emotional background. Kabuis have peculiarities in their dance and they impress upon their spectators their tradition in their art. A foreign observer's remark on Naga dance runs thus: "Both sexes join in slow figure dances—commemorative of love episodes. Onlookers sing bars before and clap hands after each figure. Women dance, themselves a lively quick step." All these dances at every stage are still maintained almost in original form and most of the tribes keep to their tradition.

As for ourselves, we who are almost in the dark about the various sections of people of NEFA, artistic slow movement of the Jayantias, folk dances of the Lushais, the delicate break of the body of the Bodo-Kachharis, the war and other dances of the Nagas, the variety of the Kabui dances with their luxurious white-feathered head-dresses and also innumerable other dances of the like in other tribes, would come forward to accept and imbibe them as

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much as possible in our own. We could introduce these items in our own institutions today, saying "We participate in your expressions of joys and vigour of life". Dr Elwin has suggested ways and means to introduce the original dances in the tribals academically. We also need at least an attempt like that of late Gurusaday Datta of Bengal. Popularization of the tribal dances in the purest form in Bengal and Assam schools may open the way to a greater understanding in life.

I have mentioned the dances first, because this form of art has become comprehensible to us through the pictures and the annual social performances arranged by the Government of India each year in Delhi. We have brought them forward within us of course. And since there is no confusion about the art of dances and also the subject matter being quite understandable, we find them very near to us. If dance is taken as the representative feature of music of the hill people, we would face no confusion in mutual exchange. It would not be out of place to mention that in north-east India, it is the Manipuris who have taken the advantage of introducing the tribal dance in their own drama and stage. It may be observed in Manipur state, that the relationship of the Manipur king with the Nagas established this contact earlier and the Manipuri playwrights have successfully implemented this in their own. Manipuris have done a spade-work for us. I believe this should be the mode of approach. We should look into this matter in the same manner. We have to get their stories told in our languages, dramatically implementing some of the original dances and present these to them again to create an atmosphere of a greater mutual understanding. Actually, it may also be observed that Manipuri stages have by dint of their racial predilection for histrionic art, assimilated the forms of the dance of the Kabuis and Angamis and have introduced them in the plays in their own language.

### PROBLEMS OF VOCAL MUSIC

In vocal music, the ways are not as clear as in dances. Dancing in the most hill tribes retained their original character and once the theme is known it is easier for us to know and appreciate. Further the ideas are not too many and forms of expressions do not vary in opposite directions as in vocal music. Thirdly, external influences could not deform their original character in dances, though some have undergone changes along with time and these changes are more or less acceptable to spectators of every type. You observe the dances, you know the traditions they have developed along with their inclinations and thoughts.

So far as vocal music is concerned, there are diverse trends like the diversity of dialects and languages in the entire region. The basic character of musical expressions are lost in some places. And the musical repertoire of

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today can hardly give you the exact tendency of the people. The study needs a psychological approach in the original racial character of musical forms—the spontaneous expression of music. So far as the different tribal groups inside Assam, Naga Hills, Manipur and Tripura are concerned, we may find various features of original and extravagant nature of musical forms of dissimilar type. Diversity in the nature of musical trends, conflicting with each other, cannot help the discovery of the fundamentals clearly; but these are essential for the progress of the musical talents. The problems are :

1. In some of the tribes, chanting of chours music, as they learnt in the Churches from the Christian Missionaries, predominate as the form of group-music and they do not lay importance on the basic solo performance which they had originated earlier.

2. In some there is natural inclination towards imitating the light Western music in their own way, as in Khasis and Mizos. Trace of local influences can also be marked in Khasi folk music if very closely observed.

3. Garos have developed in their songs a predominating feature of Bengali folk music (of Mymensing and Sylhet) and Assam, though there are mixed expressions of Western forms also. Jayantias retain their original music to a large extent which are akin to Assamese Bongeet.

4. The tribes like Hmar, Thado, Pyte, Gangte, Kuki etc. of Manipur border are influenced by the Christian Missionaries and hardly encourage their own indigenous forms, which remain still undiscovered.

5. Tripuris, who belong to the Kuki group (spread over Tripura and some parts of Lushai hills), maintain their peculiar tradition of solo music of melody pattern.

6. Some other tribes of Tripura like Riangs have the original musical forms characterized like folk songs of the borders of Bengal and Assam.

7. Assamese Bongeet is a type of folk music having diverse characters, which may have originated from the tribal musical forms and has influenced a few tribal musical forms in reciprocal manner.

8. The representative tunes, though grew up spontaneously like orchids, were never encouraged and retained but the types of original phrases are still existent in the talents which are characteristically shy in open performance.

9. There is no indication of the use of any standard musical instrument

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which actually delineates the character of musical phrases and preserves it for future growth.

10. The characters of NEFA-tunes have been described by Dr. Elwin : "The songs of NEFA are often inspired with poetic imagination and many of the tunes are beautiful. But they are not very easy to hear. People are not accustomed to sing to order and, in some places, there are taboos on women singing in the presence of their menfolk or children in front of their parents. But when you do hear it, the reward is great. To hear NEFA-singing at its best you have to travel far patiently. I shall never forget listening at night to girls in a lonely village on the Patkoi singing exquisitely as they pounded grain in a great mortar, or to Kaman Mishmi girls high up in Khamlang Valley engaged in the same task. I have heard beautiful Ashing singing in villages on the right bank of the upper Siang as the girls went to fetch water amid the stupendous scenery of the snow-clad mountains. Aka boys and girls travelling through the forests break out into spontaneous bursts of song that stir the heart. Songs sung during dance have vigorous rhythm and may be very pretty.

In other places, however, the singing tends to be rather uninspired and to have little variety, while everywhere there is not enough of it."

These are some valuable information about the musical forms of NEFA which also apply to the other regions equally. While recording Naga songs at Kohima in 1958, I could know one of the basic songs sung by a Naga Party as "so-hi-mo-zo-so-no-di-yo-le" monosyllabic expressions presented in monosyllabic musical notes in chorus. Later I found that the same song was recorded by Gramophone Company. The same song was recorded in solo and in group at Kohima by other parties like southern-Angamis. The musical notes were monotonously juxtaposed in different groups. This proved the origin of the musical worded expression in basic solo form though the performance of the same in solo and chorus sounded differently. If available, the original nature of the music may be analysed from this type of original song. Though solo music is almost neglected in some areas, the Nagas (Angami, Ao, Sema, Lotha) have their folk-lore and folk-tales which are presumed to have been recited in solo when they were composed.

I had occasions to arrange for recording a few solo *Tanti Songs* (as they are called) after a great endeavour. The songs were sung by two Southern Angami young men. The instrument is of *Ektara* type (A drone-instrument of one string). In it a few love songs were sung by a male voice and the other in a type of female tone by another male voice. After listening to the recording of the music, the artists became conscious of the magic of the solo tuneful performance for the first time in their life. A similar type of melody was

recorded by me two years later in the Garji forest of Tripura, sung by a Riang young man, who did it with the accompaniment of a "Champreng" (*Dotara*) played in *Ektara* manner.

Tuneful performances are not sometimes brought to the fore-front in the Naga society since the selection and encouragement to all depend on the leaders of the parties or the Gaon-Budas, whether they have musical ears or not. In some group-songs, therefore, one may find lack of musical element presented in chorus; they are not able to understand the music of the voice, far from understanding the harmony of notes. But they have been habituated to chant in the same manner before the Church and they also sing in the same way when they are made to order.

In 1887, David Pain observed on the musical gift of the Angami Nagas, saying, "They have considerable capacity for music with a good idea of time. Among themselves many musical calls "Hollas" are in use, and bugle calls are readily and correctly initiated by whistling." This proves the musical quality of the Angami Nagas and similar other tribes which is also a predominant character.

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### FOREIGN INFLUENCE

The sonorous musical effects in chorus songs have been developed by Southern-Angamis, Chakhesangs, Rengmas and Jeliang Nagas. It will be found that the sense of the arrangement of one or two notes in harmony is musically maintained in rhythm of their own. In this connection I also remember the chanting in harmonious notes with appropriate timing played on big drums by Kabui Nagas. Tankhul Nagas are satisfied with their publication of psalms by Missionaries and they also perform in the same manner. To find out a solo musical voice devoid of shyness in performance is a problem in most of the Nagas. The Ao-Nagas also have imbibed the same type of songs like chanting, but they have their folk-lore intact. There are interesting stories for performance—sometimes improvised during musical recitations. Khasis and Mizos and also a group of Garos generally try blunt imitation of light-Western music of cheap type. Most of the performers of original music of the other tribes are shy and they confine their range of musical notes to one or two only. So far as the solo music is concerned, Mongoloid Pentatonic character can hardly be detected. This proves that they are different from the particular stock of music. The northern borders of NEFA retain Buddhistic influence and the musical expressions carry the stamp of a cult in the background. There, most of the tribes are free from foreign-influence.

Almost every attempt of the cultured young people in most Nagas, Khasis and Mizos, is normally diverted to a sort of Western way of music, on which





A Lushai Girl

Vitality of the Hill People is a National asset



Dr. Elwin's indignant remark is to be quoted: "It may well be that in the long run all the tribes will lose their distinctions and sink into a drab uniformity, possibly dominated by the overpowering American civilisation that is so rapidly spreading across the world. It is true that many of the more sophisticated tribes have lost nearly all their culture and individuality, but there are others which have retained a great deal that is good."

So far as imitative music is concerned, the situation is more complex. Imitation is in sway at many places. Western film music and cheap tunes are also imitated in some cheap types of songs in Bengali, Hindi and other languages. But, we are sure, it will have its proper consequence, because, side by side, classical and popular traditional forms are there to maintain balance in the original character of music. As for the tribes, who have lost their basic musical character and have discouraged the fundamentals arising out of their spontaneous voices of the past, they may remain stagnated to a phase where individual freedom of creation will never be attained to. It will not be possible for anyone to assimilate the process of Western music in the racial habit since it does not surely confine to sense of mere harmonization of a few notes or imitation of a few songs only. It needs adequate intellectual process to be applied to the inherent musical sense for a long period. During these days, when originality is placed above all, the intellectuals of the hill people may think of the mode of revival of the forms lost. Mere imitation cannot help any one in any way.

It is on this point that Nehru stressed, "I am anxious that they should advance, but I am even more anxious that they should not lose their artistry and joy of life and the culture that distinguishes them in many ways." The impact of modern Westernization had first made its way in music, if I may say so. By neglecting the original forms of music some have reached the limit of destroying creative impulse, as held by one of the greatest friends of these hill-people. But certainly there is a ray of hope to point out there are certain tribes who have their distinctiveness of individual tradition in music and have woven a pattern of their own. I would not hold quoting Dr. Elwin's remark of comparison again: "Khasi and even mere Lushai music is now largely assimilated to the hymn or the cinema-hit and may make them lazy, so that they will prefer to listen rather than sing themselves. Later, when NEFA song and music is established, and the people are proud of it, it will be a different matter." The remark refers to "originality in music" of course.

### COMMON FEATURES

A man from the plains with some experience of Indian music will certainly shudder at the sharp yelling of the Naga participants performing in a group. Yelling is a common practice with them. Most of the hill people have their

music in community assemblage. Yelling is produced normally in music by Angamis, Kachcha Nagas, Ao, Lotha, Sema, Kabui, Kuki and other tribes of Manipur in their community songs. I was told that Tripuris also had yelling earlier. This expression is one of the clues of connecting some Bengali and Assamese folk songs. The use of a sort of yelling in north-Bengal folk-music is a peculiar feature. Bengali folk music must have borrowed it from the Eastern tribal people and have normally neutralised and converted it to their own in Sari songs of East Bengal—the Boatman's song. North-Bengal folk music utilises the expression "HO" and "HE" predominantly. We are not to confuse it with the Naga war-cry "Huh" "Huh"—because this differs in articulation. Yelling in a shrill voice is used by most tribes as a break in music. This masculine natural element is one of the clues to connect us with them with our folk music and proves affinity. The expression of Ho-Ho, He-He may be hilarious joy, and sense of victory which is a normal feature in all. I again quote David Pain's remark of 1887 on Angamis: "When climbing hills, when marching with loads, they emit a clear flute like note which appear to relieve their distress, if considerable party be at work this is done in unison, producing far-reaching sound which has a pleasing effect."

The role of nature in the original songs of the tribes connect them with us mainly. This is also a predominant factor in the folk music of Bengal and Assam i.e., sounds received from nature combine with spontaneous musical patterns. But to establish natural link of affinity, we are to face difficulty for missing nature's treasure from some of the hill people's life. The Missionaries introduced Roman script in them and published books of hymns and psalms in their language. This gave them psychological habitation. They were also taught how to recite in monotonous harmony of single or couple of notes that sounded to them as a satisfactory medium, of course. This is an instance of perfect service no doubt. But there was another part of it. To quote from Dr. Elwin: "Certain types of Missionaries also have forbidden their converts to dance or to sing the old songs, permitting them only to sing hymns—or American ragtime." Recital of hymns and psalms have good effect no doubt, but distinction of original music destroys creative impulse in humanity and brings for the breakdown to creative emotions making people third-rate in culture. The trend of thought that developed in them, created a segregation from their traditional natural music and has put stone-block before normal progress. The racial character of vocal music, with normal articulation of the local language should have the facilities of development, like that of folk and popular music which have had their present form in Assamese and Bengali in the contiguous regions. It should be mentioned that various forms of original folk tunes are now-a-days encouraged all over the world and much of exchange in thoughts are being attempted. Folk artists of various parts of India are invited outside. The importance of local music in original colour (non-imitative) should be appreciated thus by the local intelligentsia of the hills. Tuneful

talents are required to be found out in each sector. As mentioned earlier, the Nagas had a lingua-franca which was a sort of broken Assamese language. We get Naga-Assamese hybrid language in this manner. AIR, Kohima, recently broadcast some sort of Naga-Assamese songs to construct a natural musical bridge. But that also needs a very careful composition of a few straightforward tunes of their own. There is also a possibility of the growth of hybrid music (Local-cum-Western) if handled by trained talents.

The following measures, suggested to be effective in the present circumstances, may help us to find a way to integration of the local music, even though some of the intellectuals of the hill people may also go in for learning Western music with all seriousness :

1. To encourage composition of simple songs in actual local tunes, which Assamese and Bengali songs may borrow effectively. It should be borne in mind that original tunes may be mono-tonic, or at best tri-tonic or tetratonic of a very simple nature. Be it scanty, but adequate performance may prove it to be an effective melody.

2. To introduce prevalent stories of hill people in musical dramas and features and filmize them with actual local colour.

3. To introduce musical instruments in hill people for preservation and development of original local tunes.

Dr. Elwin has suggested the introduction of flute. Natural inclination towards bow-instrument (indigenous violin) was marked by William Carlson Smith in Ao-Nagas. There is a growing popularity of guitar in sophisticated young folk; it is now-a-days used for accompanying with modern Bengali and Assamese songs. I have marked the use of *Dotara* and *Sarinda* in certain tribes of Tripura. A Manipuri folk song utilises an indigenous bow instrument called *Pena*. Thus the mode of introduction of simple bow instrument may also be considered by the people themselves. Drumming is inherent in most of the hill people of different areas. A Manipuri folk ballad *Khangjam Parva* has imbibed *Dholak* effectively. Since some of the characters of foot-steps and movements in dances are coherent with the technique of Indian folk music, percussion instruments of some of these folk types may be effectively introduced to certain dances. In this connection, application of *Dhol* in Bihu festival is the most interesting feature in Assam.

Finally, it may be pointed out that a close examination of the whole situation may easily indicate that we, in north-Indian popular music (light), cannot remain segregated from the music of the hill people in any way. Normally, our popular music also undergoes external influences. The principles

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of popular music move to opposite direction from the classical forms. We accept freely the tunes, rhymes and rhythm, even composition of notes from various external sources. Actually this nature is often charged as ineffective by the purists, the critics of classical music. We are, however, motivated to do it for ourselves, because it is normally demanded by the present day programme of integration. The days are not very far when we shall be able to receive the cream of the original musical forms of Nagas, people of NEFA and other hill people and reproduce them in our music of our languages effectively and present them musically again for their listening. At least folk and popular modern songs of Bengal and Assam are able to do it in their own forms even Bengali and Assamese modern songs can reproduce the articulations of their music, I believe. Working of an eager mind with a careful approach and appropriate attention to the subject matter can do the job. Understanding of the original musical forms is essential. As Nehru suggested, "Our mentors who go to them frown at their ways and tell them to desist from them in the name of reform. A musician's attitude is different. His religion is not confined to Hinduism, Mahomedanism or Christianity. His religion teaches him to train up the ear, grow taste and he lives in the inherent character of his own tune. He also borrows and assimilates. Let his materials be very thin and a few only.

As for ourselves, plains people of Assam and Bengal, let us have time to borrow from these a little in our music first and then show them the miracle. And this may also create a common ground for us.

# **SOCIAL AND CULTURAL CHANGES IN THE HILL AREAS OF NORTH-EAST INDIA**

B. M. PUGH

Prior to independence, the social and cultural changes in the hill areas of North-east India were greatly influenced by their coming under the jurisdiction of the British rulers. These changes were most marked wherever the impact of British rule was more intense. The location of the headquarters of the British administration in Assam in Shillong, in the Khasi Hills District, brought about more extensive social and cultural changes in this district than in the more outlying hill districts of Assam.

In fact, it may be said that the changes which later took place in the Mizo and Garo Hills districts and to some extent in the North Cachar Hills district also were due to the glamorous changes which had taken place in the Khasi Hills district where the headquarters of the Imperial British administration in Assam were located. The changes from the old customs and traditions of the primitive societies to those of the West was, therefore, fairly rapid, although the change was very superficial. Sophistication or lack of depth was the outcome of this change. In other words, the hill people who were most influenced by this change had a thin veneer of Westernism which made them turn their backs on things indigenous and which in turn was looked down upon with secret contempt, pity and occasionally with sympathy by the Westerners themselves. This process of change was going on in all the hill districts of Assam, and was slowly permeating the rural areas as well. The villages in the more inaccessible areas of the Hills, however, were the least affected.

These social and cultural changes were, therefore, most noticeable in the matters of dress, of religious persuasions or beliefs, forms of worship, sports and recreation, home life, social customs, in their attitude towards different forms of labour and to life in general. There was no doubt at all in the minds of the hill people of these regions that innovations from the West were all good. British imperialism left them in no doubt about this. This was part of British strategy in their desire to continue with world domination. The aspirations of the hill people, therefore, were to become the image if not the substance of the people of the West. Beauty, especially in women, was inextricably linked up with the whitishness or colourlessness of the skin of the individual. In men, superior intelligence was considered to be closely associated with the whitishness of the skin colour. The knowledge of the English language was looked upon as the hall-mark of a civilized person, so much so that no educated man could converse in chaste Khasi or any of the tribal languages without

bringing in a string of English words. The European I.C.S. officer was looked upon as the acme of perfection, so that even his mistakes or bad habits were copied without any discrimination. In this period of change the indigenous political systems also went through a gradual process of transformation. The native chiefs took on the form of a British monarch and the elected *myntris* or ministers of *elakas* became a council of ministers more or less after the British fashion.

With the advent of a new era of independence, the hill people were suddenly caught unprepared with the change-over. Many of them being perplexed, tried in various ways to resist the change. From the adoration of the ways of an Englishman to adopting the much despised Indian ways of life was too revolutionary for the hillman. Swadeshi was a very much despised doctrine throughout the long period of the Indian struggle for independence. The image of Gandhiji held up before the eyes of the hill people was one usually painted by an Englishman in their midst, the image of a poor helpless *faqir* struggling against the might of the all-powerful British Empire. Few hillmen even as late as 1946 ever thought that the mighty British Empire would ever leave the shores of India, the brightest jewel of the British crown, a phrase dinned to the ears of every educated hillman.

But the change has come ever since this country achieved independence. The hillman is now beginning to realize that the wind of change has come and that the change is unrelenting and inexorable. Before independence, the number of British rulers was a negligible quantity. Today our I.A.S. and other officers of Government are penetrating every nook and corner of these hills. Their impact on the urban and rural societies, therefore, has been more extensive and intensive than in the days of British rule. The figure of a white ruler has disappeared from the Indian scene. In his place the hill people see their own brown men and women occupying positions of authority. The age of a necktie as a symbol of a higher culture is gradually disappearing. At any rate, the necktie has lost its importance and so has Western culture in general. With the change that has inevitably come to this country as the result of independence the hill people have become more discriminating and more conscious of the values of their indigenous customs, practices, usages and modes of life. This new consciousness is, at the same time, having to contend with other outside influences from the rest of the country (India) as well as from the West. New factors such as the spread of education, the speed of transport and communications, the radio, cinema, newspapers and magazines, freedom of expression, and the impetus given to democratic institutions are opening up new vistas, new horizons and new outlook in life that it will be difficult to predict how these forces will mould the character and personality of a hillman. The writer was so surprised to see the other day a bevy of Naga ladies in elegant sarees strolling about the streets of Jorhat. It simply shows very clearly that the process of acculturation has been at work



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even in Nagaland, which should make the heart of every Indian glad, especially as the Nagas, of all the tribes in this north-eastern region, are loudest in their protestations that they are not Indians. The change is bound to be more and more rapid as the races which inhabit this sub-continent mingle with each other in various walks of life. The life of freedom which hill people have enjoyed in their long period of history will be a contributory factor towards this rapid change, whatever that change may be. It is this quality of the hill people, namely, a lack of that attitude of conservatism which is so common in Indian society, which is at once an asset and a disadvantage to the hill people. The leaders of this country, therefore, will do well to make a special effort to see that these changes will not be to the detriment of the hill people themselves or go against the interests of India as a whole.

# KHASI LITERATURE

A Brief Survey of Its Century of Growth, 1841-1940.

Dr. HAMLET BAREH

## *The Beginnings — 1841-1895*

Khasi literature was born in 1841 when Khasi was put down in the Roman alphabet by the Welsh Calvinistic (Presbyterian) Mission. On their arrival at Sohra (Cherrapunji) in 1841, Thomas Jones and his wife took upon themselves the study of Khasi, and for the benefit of children reading in Mission schools, wrote a *First Khasi Primer*. Jones also wrote a few other booklets which, despite their small size, laid down the foundation of Khasi literature. They became widely used in the schools and, as time passed by, reading and writing in Khasi became regularized.

Great attempts were made both by the Missionaries and their Khasi associates during the last century to compile books in prose. The Mission's greatest achievement was the translation of the Bible which was accomplished in 1891. The translators were Thomas Jones I, William Lewis, John Hughes, Dr. Griffiths, Robert Evans, Hugh Roberts and Dr John Roberts, while Khasi joint translators were U Khnong, U Ksanbin, U Sympot, and others.

By the middle of the last century, a few grammar books had been written by the Missionaries. The first was W. Pryse's *Introduction to Khasi Language* (1855) and the next was Hugh Roberts' Grammar which was not published until 1891. It treats of Khasi under three main heads—(1) orthography, (2) etymology and (3) syntax.

The Missionaries and Khasi writers also translated a large number of hymns which brought the readers in touch with the prosodic rules of English poetry.

But the most creative writer in the last century was John Roberts who lived in these hills from 1870 till his death in 1908. The three Readers written by him were regarded as the basic books, and among them, the *Fourth Reader* was his greatest contribution (in respect of his secular work); it is a collection of short and simple stories, essays, moral lessons, adventures and thrilling descriptives. He also endorsed in it a number of Khasi *phawars* (oral and traditional verses) chanted on occasions of sports, festivals and hunting, which originally were couplets in eight accents and rhymes and were original creations of Khasi musicians and composers handed down from generation to generation. They are ethical though humorous. In that book, he also included imitatives, adverbial phrases, wise sayings and dialogues. Thus his life-long service was dedicated to

promoting the academic interests and building up this literature. One of his last works was the translation of *the Pilgrim's Progress* which he left unfinished, but was completed by Mrs. Roberts and M. Bareh, one of his pupils. He had already completed the translation of the Bible and rendered into Khasi hundreds of hymns. He ranked mainly as the architect of Khasi literature during the last century.

But Khasi literature in the 19th century was primarily Christian. There had been a demand for a literature which would represent and revive Khasi ideals and thought in their indigenous form. It was after fifty years of its growth that Khasi writers started to take interest in developing their language into a great literature. And the beginning of the 20th century saw the growth of the cultural reorientation which has not yet exhausted itself till this day.

#### *The Next Phase — 1895-1919*

Cultural awakening started in 1895. The pioneers in this field were U Hormu Rai Diengdoh and U Jeebon Roy. A great expounder of Khasi thought, Roy made an invaluable contribution in his book *Ka Niam Jong ki Khasi* (1895) towards preserving culture and perpetuating Khasi traditions, beliefs, proverbs and moral ideas. His other book that followed, *Ka Kitab shaphang Uwei U Blei*, 1900 is a powerful exposition of Khasi monotheism.

Another contemporary writer was U Rabon Singh who combined in himself the gift of a poet, novelist, humorist and rhetorician. An indigenous story teller, Rabon preserved some interesting animal fables in his *Kitab Jingphawar* and a number of legendary stories in his *Kot Puriskam*. As a rhetorician, he perpetuated idiomatic expressions and maxims of the classical Cherra language; as a prosodist, he collected old *phawars* (verses) throwing light on the way in which they were composed and the way in which the Khasis used to cite proverbs and parables on important occasions. He laid emphasis in his works on the religious belief and practice of the people. The sense of his humour added something new to Khasi literature.

Next we come to Sib Charan Roy. A great interpreter of religious beliefs, Sib wrote a number of books. His *Niam Tip Blei Tipbriew* (the religion that knows God and man) carries a great concept of moral and spiritual values and contains a philosophic doctrine and an ethical course. He treated monotheistic beliefs in greater detail.

Journalism played its role in this cultural awakening. The first monthly magazine was *U Khasi Mynta* (Khasi Today) started in 1895 by Hormu R. Diengdoh. The next was *U Nongphira* (The Watchman) edited by Jeebon which was to go into circulation for 15 years. Both journals were popular; the sponsors

insisted on keeping intact this heritage and of saving their culture from ruin and extinction in the face of so many adversities. Another monthly, *U Lurshai* (Morning Star), was started in 1903 by S. Tham and went in circulation for almost fifty years. It gave expression to the political feelings of the Khasis and sought to create better civic conditions. It was edited by S. Tham, W. Reade and D. N. S. Wahlang successively.

Khasi polity has not yet received attention. B. K. Sarma Roy's *History Jong ka Ri Khasi* (1914) is historical and gives a faint clue to a few political institutions, laws and traditions of the people.

There were also miscellaneous works. Books on arithmetic, geography and health were written by various writers. Studies on language were in progress, for in 1895 an *English-Khasi Dictionary, A Guide to Write Khasi Language* by Job Solomon, the first Khasi writer on the subject came out. In 1905 Nissor Singh published a *Khasi-English Dictionary*.

Yet Rabon Singh's *Ka Niam Khein* is another powerful narrative of religious usage. His main attitude was to perpetuate forms of worship and observance, to preserve the religion and to commemorate some vanishing traditions.

Radhon Singh, another renowned author, ranked as the first poet. His work *Ki Jingsneng* (I and II) which came out in 1902 and 1903 consists of Khasi *phawars* (traditional verses) put into couplets. They stress the need of retaining Khasi moral ideas, of promoting them and of carrying them into practice.

Works on drama were scarce. Roberts included in the *Fourth Reader* a translation of Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* but it is an excerpt only. The only one original drama *U Tipsngi* was produced by Dino Nath with four main characters. The work is a satire and raises a voice of protest against the degenerating spiritual and moral life in the society.

True, the above writers wrote in the old fashioned style. Their care was preserving of culture; their paramount objective was to protecting it from adversities; they aimed at the rediscovery, regeneration, reawakening and resurgence of their tribe. Their concern was to make it a great community intellectually and spiritually. Almost all the writers of this school belonged to Cherrapunji, the place where literature was born and a place believed to be an abode of enlightened culture.

#### *The Third Phase — 1919-1940*

This period marks another transition. Attempts to improve the general works were made. During the First World War, Soso Tham (then Editor, *U Lurshai*)

produced *Ka Phawar U Aesop*, an adaptation to the Aesop's Fables which is considered to be a standard work. In it the author has not only been successful in giving Khasi colouring to the underlying thought but also in creating typical expressions. All humours, irony, satires and idioms carry a Khasi mode of expression.

A few scholars evolved a simplified form of Khasi by creating good grammars and dictionaries. The most exemplary among them is Nissor Singh's *Hints on the Study of Khasi* but the *English-Khasi Dictionary* printed about 1919-20 is his greater contribution. Khasi is a living language and has got inexhaustible resources—its dialectal variation is immense and yet more has to be done to assimilate words, technical terms, idioms etc. from the other dialects into the Cherra form of speech—a common language. The Missionaries and educationists did good work in making the Cherra dialect a medium of instruction. It is a rich, resourceful and effective dialect and has power of modification and assimilation.

This period shows a growing journalism in size and number of magazines. Thus in 1915-16, *Ka Seng Presbyterian*, a social quarterly was edited by M. Bareh while *U Lurshai* and *U Nongphira* were in circulation, the latter was however banned by Government in 1917-18. There were over ten leading but short-lived monthlies over a span of 10 years' time edited by various social leaders and educationists. To quote a few, they were *Ka Jingshisha* (Truth), *U Paitbah* (Public) *U Woh* (A Jaintia) and others which grew between 1920 and 1930. An educational monthly magazine *Ka Jingshai Jong Ka Ri Khasi* was edited in 1930-31 by M. Bareh. An important cultural journal sponsored by a group of scholars entitled *Ka Syngkhong Jingtíp* was edited in 1937 but stopped circulation after a couple of years.

Khasi culture had its later protatoginists in Dr H. Lyngdoh and Soso Tham. Dr Lyngdoh's monumental work was *Ka Niam Khasi* which came out in 1937 and U Soso Tham's was *Ka Sngi Barim U Hynniew Trep* (which may be called the *Illiad* of the Khasis) which also came out in the same year.

J. Bachiarello's small book *Ki Dienjat U Longshwa* (Footprints of our Predecessors) in 1931 gave a pen-picture of investiture ceremonies of chiefs, the origin of the *Syiems* (chiefs) and political institutions. He also mentions other religious beliefs. But a more monographic account is G. Costa's *Ka Riti Jong Ka Ri Laaphew Syiem* (Land of Thirty Syiems) which appeared in 1936-37, a treatise on Khasi culture and polity. Costa added more details and his work is a substantial contribution to the subject. Both Costa and Bachiarello are Catholic. Salesian Missionaries have had their part also in the cultural reorientation.

But it is Dr Lyngdoh who did far more to present culture in a modern coherent form. Not to speak of his style and originality, his logical approach in

the very Khasi manner added new flowers in the field of literature. His book *Ka Niam* is a classic in prose which covers a wide range and contains fascinating descriptions of important ceremonies.

In 1938 Lyngdoh brought out his history *Ki Syiem* in which he sought to preserve the antiquities, throwing some light on the growth of polity. But he treats the subject-matter in outline only which was mainly based on the old Government reports of D. Herbert, P. R. T. Gurdon and other administrators.

Folk-tales were also growing side by side. Fascinating and lively stories were gathered from P. Gatphoh's *Ki Khanatang* (1938). Folk-tales are inexhaustible and modern writers have been trying to create epics and drama from them.

### POETRY

U Rabon and U Radhon were the first poets. They made use of Khasi *phawars* in their work which also are of considerable ethical value. Dr Roberts wrote some verses, some of which were translated from English. But it was with the appearance of U Soso Tham's *Ki Poetry Khasi* later renamed *Duitara Ksiar* (A Golden Harp) that a new life in Khasi poetry was infused and felt. Tham departed from the style of Radhon and adopted the rules of Western prosody, which demonstrates his wide range of humanistic feelings, his deep attachment to nature, his profound love of village life, his sympathy with the poor and depressed and his romanticism. The silent hills and streams, the isolated woodlands and quiet fields were to him as to Wordsworth, spiritual beings. The peasant women were to him (as to Robert Burns) fair damsels, their smoke-stained huts were to him royal palaces, and in the simplicity of things, he stored the true abundance of life. His parabolical expressions are very truly Khasi after the fashion of the old Khasi minstrels and poets. In nature he found a way to eternal bliss —

Oh spring time, Oh spring time,  
Thou harbinger of joy  
Safe to thy tranquil shade  
For shelter I'll retreat ;  
In the realm of nature  
Poesy unfolds,  
On thy wings will I soar  
Then to eternity.

But Tham's crowning work is *Ki Sngi Barim U Hynniew Trep* (Light of the Seven Huts), a master-piece. While *Ka Duitara* reflects him as a romanticist, *Ki Sngi Barim* ranks as a classical work. Khasi ideas, the originality of Khasi thought and search after the ultimate truth are the leading themes. The Khasi conception of heaven and hell are clearly portrayed, based as it were, on his com-

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prehension of moral ideas. The magnitude and richness of vision and fancy, and the nobility of conception lead to readers to another scene of a Utopia.

The poet took pride in the celestial beginning of his race which sprang up from the seven huts —

God coming down is revealed  
On earth to walk with men  
In the garden of flowers.

He was praying for a light to lead him into the past —

As much diamond as thou couldst gather,  
Oh diamond, Oh pen of gold,  
Awake them into the glare  
Of thy shining light.

He worked for the rediscovery of his tribe, which he was proud of.

The feeling of oneness which fostered a creative sense of nationality in the past is interpreted—

In time they grew into a populous race  
With one but polished language.  
The same religion though offerings differ  
One uniformity of dress in dancing grounds.  
In time they made a constitution  
That united the country into one.

Feelings of remorse consumed him day and night for the moral degradation of his kinsmen, for their departure from the established rules of God and for their spiritual degeneration. Disaster, disorder and confusion in intellectual and social life became intensified and hope was gone for man's gaining of salvation. People became servile to evil influences, but God produced a saviour (the cock) who repaired the lost communion of men with God.

Yet the poet still had a spark of hope for the spiritual resurgence of his community. He is dedicated to the creation of a conscientious, healthy and strong community.

The work provides an ideal picture of Khasi thought and ways of life with fine metaphors, similes and idiomatic expressions. He plays a great role of a satirist. Tham's efforts in preserving culture will go a long way to develop this infant literature.

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Soso Tham has found a place in the masses of his readers. His songs and verses are on their lips, his sentiments find room in their hearts.

Other notable works in poetry (during 1936-37) include B. Thangkhiew's *Ki Tienrwai* and P. Gatphoh's *U Sier Lapalang*. *Tienrwai* is a collection of lyric verses; nature in its radiance is eulogised, flowers and all beautiful things are adored by the poet. He uses parabolical terms in protest against the modern modes and artificiality and the degenerating code of conduct in society. Gatphoh's is an epic of the wanderings, adventures and experiences of a stag (*lapalang*) who met its tragic end at the hand of bowmen and archers in the heart of the Khasi land. He came up the hills from his plains. The poetry is a dirge of his mother.

Another eminent work is H. Elias' *Ka Pansgniat Ksiar* on Khasi scenes and ways of life. Special emphasis was laid on the old political glories of the Khasis, the Khasi royalty evolving in the face of many problems, the eminent *syiems* assuming care and protection of their children urging them to be capable, industrious, responsible and creative citizens. He also depicts the modern social conditions in the society in his work. Many nursery rhymes were also in the making.

Thus is told the story of Khasi literature upto 1940 which is now flourishing with many more contributions of the young writers in prose, drama and poetry.



## THE NAGA SEARCH FOR SELF-IDENTITY

P. MOASOSANG

- (a) *A Brief Statement of the Effects of Acculturation on Naga Outlook, Particularly in Reference to the British Administration and the Work of the American Baptist Mission.*

The policy of the British Government towards the Nagas was aimed at protecting the people from exploitation by outsiders, interfere as little as possible and prevent sudden disruption of Naga culture. Obviously, the official policy was one of caution and preservation of tribal culture, and to this end, a policy of isolation was preferred to protect the Nagas 'from a civilization which will destroy them'.

This policy has saved the Nagas from the unfortunate situation suffered by many tribals elsewhere in India. In this connection, Fuhrer Von Haimendorf writes: "With their land closed to traders, moneylenders and land hungry settlers from the plains, the Nagas have been saved from exploitation which has caused the ruin of many aboriginal tribes in other parts of India.... The Naga has been given security, cheap and effective justice with the spirit of tribal law".<sup>1</sup>

However, not without justification, the official policy of the British Government has been criticized by many as keeping the Nagas and other tribals of North-East India as "museum specimens". In their eagerness to preserve the culture and avoid sudden disruption of social organizations, little importance was given to the development of tribal areas, particularly, in the field of education, communication and natural resources. The idea of protection was beneficial to the Nagas in many ways, but this policy suffered from the error of placing culture above everything else, even above the basic need for human progress.

We learn from the Social Sciences that isolation of any cultural group means stagnation and even decay; no single cultural group can progress, left to itself, or maintain its dynamism. Ralph Linton writes: "If every human group had been left to climb upward by its unaided efforts, progress would have been so slow that it is doubtful whether any society by now would have advanced beyond the level of the stone age".<sup>2</sup>

Moreover, the British administration in the name of preserving tribal culture, pursued an extremely isolationist policy, and in this process, the Nagas along

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with many other tribals of North-East India were alienated from the mainstream of Indian national life.

With the departure of the British, the Nagas were confused regarding their self-image with no clear conception of national identity. They were left adrift. They were not involved in the Independence Movement launched by the Indian National Congress, for, the then Naga Hills was administered as an "Excluded Area".

The new political awareness of the dangers involved in the departure of the British dawned on the Nagas. The fear of being placed under the domination of India, motivated by dislike of the lowlanders and the fear that land, natural resources, customary laws and religion would be exploited, became strongly intensified. The dislike of the lowlanders was largely due to discourtesy and prejudice shown to the Nagas by people in the plains; the difference in religious beliefs was another major reason.

Mingled with these fears and suspicion was the dawning awareness of their uniqueness and apartness in terms of language, customs and physical appearance from the lowlanders. It was marked by a growing appreciation of indigenous culture and even taking pride in it. It was more or less, a search for roots in the past and their search for self-identity. Coupled with the re-discovery of indigenous culture, was the emergence of a strong determination to safeguard their way of life. The Naga nationalism with certain nativistic tendencies, has gripped the outlook of most Nagas today.

Of the various steady and massive influx of modernizing influences into the Naga life, the work of the American Baptist Mission stands out clearly, particularly in the area of education, sanitation, literature and the introduction of a religion of universal brotherhood. The enlightenment has opened the minds of the Nagas to a wider world. Head-hunting has been replaced by a keen desire for education, and earn one's status in this new way. The contribution made by the Baptist Mission for the good of the Nagas is significant in many ways.

Many accusations have been made against the Baptist Mission in Nagaland as instigating the Naga political movement. But these accusations appear to be baseless, more or less based on suspicion, for a careful checking of all records, and interviews with various Naga Church leaders and Christians who have worked closely with the Missionaries have failed to yield any evidence of political instigation by the Baptist Missionaries.

No doubt, the Baptist Mission worked closely with the British administration in certain areas of Assam, where the Mission entered new territories occupied by the British forces. In this connection, Dr. Victor Sword, a Baptist Missionary

in Assam wrote : "Paradoxically, as it may seem, Christianity has often invaded new territory hand in hand with military forces. This was the case in Assam".<sup>3</sup>

Certain unavoidable historical forces might have been responsible for this happening, and naturally, to the thinking of many, the Christian missionaries from the West were closely associated with British imperialism. But to be perpetually obsessed with suspicion that any foreign missionary from the West is engaged in anti-national activities is an unfortunate prejudice entertained by many in this country. This attitude can only provoke further suspicion and fear in the minds of the tribal Christians, fearing that their religious freedom will be destroyed one day.

Of the various effects of the Baptist Mission upon the Nagas, I would like to point out one aspect of their teaching which may have some indirect bearing on Naga attitude towards the world around them. As a mark of conversion, the new converts were required to abandon many indigenous customs and practices which the Mission thought were not consistent with their theology. This view seems to reflect more or less, their assumption that the values they treasured in their culture had universal validity.

The loyalty of the converts was directed towards their own group, and the non-converted ones (this may include people belonging to other religions as well) were regarded as 'sinners' more or less reminiscent of the medieval rejection of the world as evil. A clear line of separation was drawn between the converts and the pagans. What I would like to point out if I may, is that, the idea of 'groupness' is germane to the type of teaching presented to the Nagas.

From this analogy, we cannot jump to the conclusion that, the Baptist Missionaries were deliberately teaching a theology to alienate the converts from others. Far from it, for, the study of any movement in history shows that its purpose and goals are, to a large extent, the outcome of the historical and philosophical forces at work at a particular period of time. Apparently, the missionaries were simply 'carriers' of a theological school of thought prevalent at a particular time.

The missionaries' deep sense of dedication to their task, and the love and concern shown to the simple tribals through word and deed, coupled with the non-interference of the British in tribal affairs and the protection they provided, created a tremendous reservoir of goodwill towards Europeans. Probably, for these reasons, the Nagas and other tribals of North-East India entertain an attitude of confidence and goodwill towards Western people till today, a lesson which the Indian brethren may do well to learn.

(b) *Co-Existence of Cultures: Unity not through Uniformity.*

The composite culture of contemporary India is a heritage of the past. Various dynamic strands have gone to the making of contemporary India. It is difficult to claim one culture as the Indian culture. Any attempt to impose one culture upon others or any threat to level down all others to one monotonous pattern will certainly lead to national disintegration. The words of the late Jawaharlal Nehru are appropriate here: "I am alarmed, when I see—not only in this country but in other great countries too—how anxious people are to shape others according to their own image or likeness, and to impose on them their particular way of living. We are welcome to your way of living, but why impose it on others?"

"I am not at all sure which is the better way of living, the tribal or our own. In some respects I am quite certain theirs is better. Therefore, it is grossly presumptuous on our part to approach them with an air of superiority, to tell them how to behave or what to do and what not to do. There is no point in trying to make of them a second-rate copy of ourselves".<sup>4</sup>

Human beings all over the world learn to behave in an extremely large number of patterned and different ways. Each society teaches its individuals the 'proper' ways to think, feel and react to their environment. Thus they develop a particular organized way of viewing themselves and their environment. It is from this 'frame of reference' that the individuals in a society re-act to any given situation. Once a pattern is formed, the group will defend it and resist any attempt to change it. To cite one example, the idea of blood-revenge is deeply embedded in Naga culture. Writing about this, Colonel Woodthorpe, one of the early British administrators in the Naga Hills, wrote: "With them (Nagas) it is an article of faith that blood once shed can never be expiated except by the death of the murderer or some of his near relatives and though years may pass away vengeance will assuredly be taken one day".<sup>5</sup> Among the Nagas blood relationship is vital. The strong kinship obligations bind all its members closely, so that any harm to one of its members affects the whole group and redress must be made. The fear of retaliation from relatives of a victim serves as a strong deterrent against crimes.

To outsiders, the practice of blood-revenge may appear barbarous, but underlying it are factors affecting the Naga culture complex, involving the tribes' need for security, group-life and its perpetuation. Therefore, this practice persists among the Nagas. Tradition is defended because it is more meaningful and relevant to the group. The Nagas, as any other group, perceive reality from their 'frame of reference' moulded by previous cultural conditioning.

When a group and tradition-oriented society like that of the Nagas is

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thrown into a new situation, they will re-act favourably if they feel it re-inforces their present phenomenal world and negatively, if they see it as a threat to their present beliefs, understandings, customs and goals. As a result of any situation threatening to them, they will either mobilize their defences saying, 'our way is best' or retreat from the threatening situation. Therefore, to impose one's way of life upon others or to shape others according to one's image is not right, and is fraught with serious consequences.

Today, in India nationhood is still in process of becoming. Many talk about incorporating or assimilating the minorities into the larger society under the concept of equal citizenship. Many talk about enabling the minority groups to enter the major currents of national life and participate in the benefits that modern science can bring.

India is declared to be a Secular State, but there is the danger or visible signs of the nation becoming a monolithic society where the majority may define the limits of national society, and where the majority are often confused with the national society. The 'ethos' and values of the majority may be imposed upon the minority groups. The real danger to the structure and unity of India lies in the danger of relapse into traditional ways donning the raiments of progress and diverting the direction of growth. This trend, if not checked in time, will be one sure cause leading to the disintegration of the nation.

Today, certain amount of national concern is shown to the tribal people and their welfare. But could it be that this present concern is for externals only, not for the core-elements of tribal culture and its people, which may be reflected in the concentration of attention on the exotic, such as tribal dances, songs, colourful costumes and their pretty women? It is a pity, if the distinctive contributions of the tribals are recalled only on national occasions such as August 15 and January 26, when they are invited to New Delhi to appear in colourful costumes. In brief, the relevance of tribal cultures to national social goals and purposes is still narrowly conceived by the majority.

The national society can achieve its goals only through the differential participation of diverse elements, each contributing to the achievement of the goal in its own unique manner, a contribution that is nevertheless essential. It is important that each diverse element in a nation should have that consciousness of identification with the national life and its goals. The cultivation of this sense of identity and of belonging to the national life is a serious and crucial problem, particularly, for the tribals of North-East India today.

Understanding and communication begin when two peoples are aware of the similarities and differences of each other's values, goals, interests and motivations for behaviour. The urge to make others conform to our ways is rooted in

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weakness and the inability to permit alternative solutions to problems. A climate of peace and understanding results when all groups feel secure from any threat to their way of life, and when groups desist from imposing their ways on others and avoid attempts to change the behaviour patterns of others.

The composite nature of the Indian culture makes it difficult to adopt and enforce the same pattern of administration for the whole country. This calls for wisdom and farsight to permit alternative solution to problems. In the area of development, the techniques applied in Uttar Pradesh or in West Bengal may not suit the tribal areas. Often from the official viewpoint, the progress of development of tribal areas is measured in terms of money spent yearly. Important and impressive as these statistics are, and yet, the investment in man which concerns the proper development of the human mind and spirit, should be the scale by which to measure progress.

Many think that the tribal problem is largely a problem of peace and order and needs military solutions. But it will be a grievous error to follow this policy.

I would like to cite one example from the Nagas to support this statement. The Nagas are a freedom-loving people and a proud race. Formerly, their society was geared for warfare, and for them bravery is a sure asset to status. Their cultural conditioning motivated all males to fight and die like 'men'. Even today they cannot be intimidated by threats or the use of force, for the idea of surrender to force is repugnant to Naga psychology.

The whole region of North-East India is of tremendous strategic importance for India, and the surest defence against this vulnerability lies in her ability to win over the confidence of the indigenous people of this region through the arts of peace and love. Any ethnocentric and dogmatic approach to these people will help only in deepening the gulf and widening the social and cultural barriers.

This Seminar is timely, for the problems of North-East India are complex and intriguing, and yet, an honest search must be made to understand the people and their values, and this possibility is greater through a Seminar like this where there is academic freedom. The problem of search for the right answers must be pursued even after this Seminar is over.

The ultimate question posed before the nation today concerns how to create an atmosphere conducive to tolerant creative nationalism, and how to make all the diverse groups conscious of their sense of belonging and of identity with the national values and goals. Is it only a dream or a possibility? This Seminar will have achieved its purpose at least partially, if some clues to this puzzle could be found in the context of what I have stated above.

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<sup>1</sup> Fuhrer Von Haimendorf, *The Naked Nagas*, London, Methuen & Co. 1939, p. 56.

<sup>2</sup> Ralph Linton, *The Study of Man*, New York. 1936, p. 324.

<sup>3</sup> Victor Sword, *Baptists in Assam, A Century of Missionary Service. 1836-1936*. Chicago Missionary Press. p. 41.

<sup>4</sup> As quoted by Elwin at the beginning of his book *A Philosophy For NEFA*. Shillong. 1957.

<sup>5</sup> R. G. Woodthorpe, *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*. Vol. II, p. 67.

# ANTHROPOLOGY AND THE TRIBES OF ASSAM

N. K. SYAMCHOU DHURI

## *Past Perspective*

The practice of collecting ethnographic information on various ethnic groups was a generally accepted pre-occupation of the British officers, who stayed and toured in this country during the early years of their Raj; and obviously Assam was not an exception to this predilection. As early as 1787, the Honourable East India Company appointed Captain Baillie "to report on the resources of Assam, and the customs of the inhabitants". As a result of such efforts, two valuable books recording the historical and ethnographic information of the country available before its eventual annexation in 1827 were written, one by Wade and the other by Hamilton. In later years, the need for enlarging the scope of such inquiries was felt chiefly for consolidating the trade and facilitating the administration, and the line of this approach was set forth by Robinson in his book published in 1841. In view of the increasing importance of Assam and the developing commercial interest of the administration, the author worked on a wide range, covering its climate, geography, natural life, history, political and social conditions and in short compass, the ethnographic characteristics of the tribes living in and around the Brahmaputra valley. About this time Colonel Pemberton also supplied important ethnographic information on the lower Assam and the northern hill areas to the East India Company in course of his political mission to Bhutan.

Though in the initial period of its activities in Assam the Company's inquiries were motivated by its interest for expansion of trade, a twofold change was gradually developed with subsequent consolidation of administration since the last half of the 19th century. One of these shifts arose from the need to extend administration to the tribal areas in the hills and the mountainous regions on the frontiers of Assam. In course of military expeditions and pacifying missionary approaches, a great mass of ethnographic information was collected. An idea of the administrative policy vis-a-vis the ethnographic scope of work involved in this process will be found in the publications of McCulloch, Mackenzie, Reid and Elwin.

Notwithstanding this type of approach, studies of academic and scientific purport on the tribes in Assam became a well-felt concern among many British officers interested in anthropology. The first publication in this line, on administrative sponsoring, was made by Dalton.

Apart from the mere ethnographic importance, that such studies could offer



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data for understanding problems of cultural origins, was pointed out by Waddell in 1900. He noted that changes were coming over in the life and customs of the tribal peoples following disarmament, military occupation, building of roads and railways, and urged the Government to take immediate steps for recording them because it owed a duty to science and to posterity as the agent bringing about such transformations.

Having this awareness, a general policy of writing a series of monographs on the very important tribes and castes of Assam, was sanctioned by the Government of India in 1903 at the instance of Shri Bampfylde Fuller, then Chief Commissioner of Assam. A uniform scheme of writing, dealing with such topics as general information, domestic life, laws and customs, religion and language was laid down under the editorship of Major Gordon in his capacity as the Superintendent of Ethnography in Assam. As a result of this effort, authentic ethnographic monographs on tribes like the Khasi, Garo, Mikir, Kachari and Lushai, were published before the first World War.

### *Present Trends*

A new realisation in the scope of anthropological work on the tribes in Assam was introduced by Hutton through his intimate and intensive field-work in the Naga Hills since the nineteen twenties. He not only elaborated the general scope of work standardized previously, but within a commendable compass brought out the dynamic realities of tribal life centering around the individual, the family and the community as a whole. Thus, an understanding came about that "a just and enlightened administration of native affairs cannot be established and pursued without an intimate knowledge of and sympathetic interest in the natives themselves, their customs and their point of view". Since the publication of monographs on the Naga tribes by Hutton and Mills, ethnographically holistic studies on the ethnic groups of Assam have been very few. But today this paucity in the knowledge of tribal peoples in Assam cannot be made up by simple ethnographic field-work, without taking into account the impact of economic, cultural and ecological changes that have come on them over the past years.

Since Waddell's emphasis on the study of tribal customs because they were gradually vanishing, significant conceptual assessments have been made by social scientists on the process of change involving simple cultures. But no serious study has been made till today on the problems of culture-change beyond the sporadic but important writings of Mills and Hutton.

### *Concept and Scope*

A field-worker can proceed with his studies on a pre-conceived hypothesis

and test it for academic reasons. But it would be a pertinent point to ponder how far conceptual and academic approaches could be of any greater utility in planning field-work among the Assam tribes than the analytical study of problems of change in their cultures. The question is no doubt a theoretical one. Nonetheless, it is necessary for the anthropologist to start his work with a hypothesis or a framework of method. He may not concern himself immediately with its future potentialities or may be obliged to drop and change his working postulate in the light of materials collected. Two examples from the ethnographic studies done in Assam can be cited to stress the importance of this contention. T. C. Das's ethnographic monograph on the Purum written mainly as an illustration of application of the genealogical method developed by Dr. Rivers, has in recent years, come to be regarded as an important contribution by scholars studying and analysing kinship and social structure. This was not envisaged by the author when he wrote his dissertation. Besides showing the utility of particular scientific methods, he supplied materials and made some suggestions for the improvement of the tribe. Then on the other way round, there is Burling's study on Rengsanggri, a Garo village. Aiming to study the operation of a special form of cross-cousin marriage in a matrilineal society, the author found it necessary to change his plan in the light of field data. But his detailed analysis of kinship system and social structure, showing on the whole how the Garo individual is bound up within his cultural limits, will rank his monograph as a valuable contribution over the one written by Playfair fiftyfour years ago.

The approach for studies to be embarked upon would thus be more or less a matter of choice. But this should not be an obsession for it is a truism and accepted view that, since anthropology has an applied side, anthropologists should also devote their specialized knowledge to the study of practical problems in particular societies. On this count there exists a vast scope of research on the situations of contact, change and development among the tribal peoples of Assam.

The scope of research on these aspects of tribal life would depend on the nature and kind of impact on the groups concerned. This can better be comprehended by drawing attention to some prevailing phenomena.

It is noticed that for about the last ten years there has been a general awakening of in-group consciousness among the tribes of Assam. Political assertion, desire for preservation of cultural entity and of resurgence of old values are some common forms of this expression. It should be the tasks of the social scientists to enquire into the processes involved in such changes and how far their aims and motivations are commensurable with social organization, economy and even distribution of cash money and power-structure. The importance of cautious approach on these lines could not be emphasized better than remarks made by Hutton in the following lines :

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“The point I wish to lay emphasis on is that the events of the past few years have not only very greatly extended the area and accelerated the rate of change, but have also laid upon the protecting power a heavy obligation to see that the changes which are taking place shall be beneficial rather than detrimental and shall benefit the many rather than the few, and in particular that whatsoever form the greatly desired education may take, it shall be of real benefit to the people themselves in advancing their moral and material welfare, and shall not create a superfluity of would-be lawyers who need to foment the internal discords of their fellow-villagers in order to create employment and an income for themselves. The danger is a very real one, for the general trend of the changes taking place is likely to involve a shift of influence from the traditional village authorities to new men; it is likely to involve a shift of values from those of an economy almost moneyless to those bound up with the introduction of a currency in cash.”

Apart from these complex webs of changes, there are also other facets of tribal transformation that can be studied both from the applied and academic standpoints. Let this be illustrated from the material level of culture. Any ethnographer will readily recognise that in many Khasi villages dwelling houses are not made in the traditional type—a single oblong gable with low roof, constructed on stilted or plain plinth. The modern houses are built, as a rule, on stone stilts, with separate apartments for living and cooking. Apparently this change could be explained away as a manifestation of Christian influence. But it would not give the picture of the whole complex. This new innovation no doubt was adopted through the gradual spread of skill in carpentry and the Christian way of life. But at the same time, it should not be lost sight of that this acceptance has been made easy and possible because of the availability of pine-wood, the raw material extensively used in building houses over an elevation as high as 4000 feet in the Khasi and Jaintia Hills. Given the knowledge and skill it is not that the development remained limited to the change in house-type; in addition, a new production complex combining indigenous labour and such natural resources, as mortar, stone and wood have grown in the Khasi economy. In and around Shillong, Cherrapunji and Jowai, construction of houses using local materials has become a specialised trade with many a Khasi to live upon. Implications of the growth of a similar economic complex, effected through the introduction of potato in the 'thirties of the last century by David Scott, in the Khasi hills, have been discussed by Mills in his article published in the book, “Essays in Anthropology” edited by Mills *et al.*

Essentially, these changes illustrate how introduced knowledge are ecoculturally adjusted according to tribal genius, generating economic viability and progress; and to the anthropologist thus arises the need to study the inter-relations between man and his natural environment in the hills of Assam.

The significance of the study of culture change on material level is not the end of anthropologists' concern. On the abstract level, total effects of contact on society can be conceptually classified into a network of inter-related processes and studied accordingly with required emphasis. Such investigations could not be mere academic and intellectual exercises. Let this point be elucidated from one form of communication, language. Here again, the position of the Khasi can be pointed out as an example. Since the writing of Khasi in the first quarter of the last century in Bengali alphabet by a Khasi gentleman converted into Christianity, there has been phenomenal growth in this language. There now exists a developed literature in Khasi. Quite a number of books dealing with different topics have been written in it. The dynamic nature of the language can be assessed from the writings in papers and periodicals published regularly by Khasis themselves. The fundamental question, which engages the attention of anthropologists in this respect are :—(1) What are the influences and forces that set in motion the urge for developing the language at its initial stage; (2) what are the processes involved in this change; and finally, (3) how in the cognitive range of the Khasi vocabulary, its writers expand and express their thinking and abstract ideas about their society and culture. The entire span of development in Khasi language can be studied as a cultural process on historical basis and results obtained in this way would help us to understand similar situations that may arise in future in other tribal languages of Assam. It is evident that under the impact of modern technology and secularism, language will play its part in bringing cohesion and change in tribal life. This role of language as a cultural process among the tribes of Assam should not remain out of the sphere of anthropological work.

The study of changes in a given culture cannot be properly handled without a historical guide-line. So far as the tribes in Assam are concerned, a depth of about one hundred years can be explored with a fair degree of certainty. Collections and collation of historical materials from the past writings, as has been done by Elwin, would undoubtedly be of immense help for gaining historical perspectives to the problem of change.

In probing historical time-scale, the fieldworker could come up to some limitations. He may not be able to trace sequential change in certain aspects of his investigations. As for example, if a question is mooted as to what has been the Khasi concept towards life since the time they came in contact with British Administration, the investigator would not find much historical materials to build up the theme. But he will not face this difficulty in studying the economic complex involved in the manufacture and distribution of the Khasi tanged and shouldered hoe over a length of time. Such limitations are not sought here to stress the differences between the abstract and the concrete on historical level of inquiry. That there exists scope for fruitful inquiry on abstract aspects in terms of depth in time has already been borne out by showing the importance

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of language in tribal cultures of Assam. To cite but another case in this respect, there is the account on the nature and character of Padam village council, called the Kebang, left by Krick and others. The present working of the village council of this NEFA tribe can be comparatively studied on the basis of earlier reports.

Indeed, no anthropologist or sociologist will find any historical scheme, to his entire satisfaction, existing in the information record in the past on the Assam tribes. This is quite natural, for the previous writers had not had the slightest indication what the modern social scientists would seek in their accounts decades after. The best way, therefore, would be to have a scheme or a plan and to find out by fieldwork how far past records help us in interpreting aspects of tribal life in the contemporary level of time.

In recent years, social scientists have endeavoured to investigate the compass, characteristics and diversities of communities in different parts of India. In eastern India, Assam occupies a significant position ethnologically and historically but researches in these spheres have been meagre. We are yet to realise that in eastern India many cultural traits which are basically tribal have transcended their limits and spread over in other societies. Weaving, irrigation, state-formation, to mention only a few, are tribal contribution to Assamese culture. It is time that we appreciate the extent to which Indian culture is indebted to its tribal population in Assam for better understanding of their problems.

# SOCIAL ORGANIZATION OF THE KOCH OF GARO HILLS, ASSAM

D. N. MAJUMDAR

In this dissertation I shall describe the social organization of the Koch of Garo Hills, Assam, with special reference to their gradual merging in the Hindu society. In the beginning it is necessary to dispel some confusion about the term 'Koch'. Hutton<sup>1</sup> states about the Koch as follows :

“A tribe of Assam and northern Bengal; in latter area generally Hinduized as the caste of Rajbangsi, but in Assam 'Kochh' is used as a caste label for several tribes when Hinduized, particularly Kacharis, Lalungs and Mikirs”.

Thus the term 'Koch' includes various cultural or ethnic groups of Assam which are related to each other only by the criterion of Hinduization. The various groups denoted by the term do not feel oneness amongst themselves and commensality and inter-marriages are limited to smaller local groups only. A Koch of the Kamrup district does not regard a Koch or Rajbangsi of the Goalpara district as an equal and vice versa. Playfair<sup>2</sup> quotes the following remark about the Koch by Grierson :

“The very name Koch has lost its original meaning, and has now become to signify a Bodo who has become so far Hinduized that he has abandoned his proper tongue and is particular what he eats”.

In the whole of the Brahmaputra valley the Koch are regarded as a Hindu caste and occupy a position in the hierarchy not far below the Kalita, who are regarded as a high caste. But the Koch of Garo Hills cannot be regarded on the same level. They represent a tribe with various degrees of Sanskritization. Playfair<sup>3</sup> also distinguishes between the Bor Koch, who represent a caste and the Horu Koch, who are descendants of an animistic stock, and are almost an exterior caste. Unfortunately the Koch of Garo Hills are indicated by this confusing term, and they have no other name for the group as a whole, though their smaller groups have different names. The Garo of the neighbouring areas call them Kochu, and it is interesting to note that the same term is used by the Garo of eastern Garo Hills to denote the Atong sub-tribe of the Garo who inhabit the Someswari valley. Hamilton<sup>4</sup> mentions a tribe by the name Kochunasindiya, whose habitat has been described as north-western Garo Hills. He mentions about a tribe called Kochu inhabiting the south-western portion of Garo Hills. These areas correspond to the present habitat of the Koch. In this dissertation I do not want to dwell upon the question whether the Koch of Garo Hills are the same with the caste of the same name found in the

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Brahmaputra valley. Here, this term will be used to denote the Koch of Garo Hills and of the areas adjacent to it, whom the Koch of Garo Hills regard as belonging to their own group.

In Garo Hills the Koch are found in the western and south-western borders of the district, where wet paddy lands are available. Their habitat extends to the adjacent areas under the Goalpara district, and under the Mymensing district of East Pakistan. The Koch of this area have a sense of unity among themselves though among them the following groups are found :

- (1) Wanang
- (2) Song or Harigaiya
- (3) Satbari
- (4) Chapra
- (5) Tintekiya

There is no spatial division of the area between these groups. All the groups are found juxtaposed with one another and with some non-Koch groups, such as Hajong, Dalu, Garo etc. in the same area. These groups can be regarded as different cultural groups with the following characteristics :

(1) Each group has its own dialect, except Satbari and Chapra groups, which use the Jharua dialect of Assamese. However, all the Koch dialects are closely related and mutually understandable.<sup>5</sup>

(2) Each group has its own set of clans. However, the Satbari (who are also known as Pani Koch) and the Song groups have a common set of clans.

(3) Though the groups follow common rules regarding descent, inheritance, marriage, etc., still each considers itself as a closed group, and as such intermarriage and commensality are limited within one's own group only. However, the rule has been relaxed to a great extent in the present time amongst the Koch in general.

The Koch believe that they are the offspring of Shiva. According to their belief the original home of the Koch was in a place called "Rasan Mukparktari" (literally meaning, the hill of the rising sun). Thence they migrated to Kamrup and settled for some time at a place called Hajo. From Hajo, in the fear of Parasuram, they fled to Sonapur and thence migrated to a place called "Titli Hacheng" (literally, sand grains as big as the seeds of tamarind fruit). They had a severe encounter with the Garo at "Titli Hacheng" and after overcoming the Garo there they proceeded to Kusumbala, a place in eastern Garo Hills. From there moving south-westward they followed the course of a very big river, (probably Someswari) but at the time of crossing that river 12 households could

not cross along with the others. These 12 households now represent the Atong, a sub-tribe of the Garo. The others, who could cross the river, reached the south-western border of Garo Hills whence they spread in different groups all along the western border. They were independent till the occupation of their territory by the British in 1834. During the time of British occupation their king was Raja Mahendranarayan. In the early days of their occupation the Koch were known to the British as Dasani Garo—Dasani being the term to indicate that particular area because the Zemindar of the adjacent area claimed 10/16th of the revenue.

The Koch all over the area described above are permanent cultivators. They are in possession of very fertile paddy lands. But even in the memory of the present generation, they practised shifting cultivation side by side with permanent cultivation. Among some of the Koch groups (such as the Wanang) shifting cultivation is still in practice as a subsidiary occupation, though no major crops are cultivated in their shifting plots. They prefer sites for their villages near their paddy fields and each village consists of a large number of families all huddled together in houses made of bamboo and thatch and having an earthen plinth.

The Census of 1961 gives the total population of speakers of Koch language in Garo Hills as 4,560 which is only 1.9% of the total population of Garo Hills. However, this figure excludes those among the Koch who do not use any of the Koch dialects.

### *The Structure of Society*

Among all the groups of the Koch there are matrilineal clans, which among all the groups are known as 'nikini'. Clans of different Koch groups are shown below :

#### Wanang clans

- |            |           |               |
|------------|-----------|---------------|
| 1. Kara    | 7. Mastok | 13. Panchibok |
| 2. Wanang  | 8. Daheng | 14. Bola      |
| 3. Bordak  | 9. Kama   | 15. Longkre   |
| 4. Ronja   | 10. Charu | 16. Dolpa     |
| 5. Hemcher | 11. Peri  |               |
| 6. Maji    | 12. Chole |               |

#### Song clans

- |           |             |            |
|-----------|-------------|------------|
| 1. Hakra  | 3. Dongsang | 5. Hari    |
| 2. Ditila | 4. Kangkala | 6. Songsam |



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- |                  |              |               |
|------------------|--------------|---------------|
| 7. Dingdur       | 13. Turni    | 19. Nakola    |
| 8. Longkam       | 14. Langsa   | 20. Tokbok    |
| 9. Kendagayaa    | 15. Kantrang | 21. Chandigya |
| 10. Harchungpara | 16. Pakrek   | 22. Tangwa    |
| 11. Katrak       | 17. Barma    | 23. Masanti   |
| 12. Banai        | 18. Waibara  | 24. Majikotha |

### Chapra clans

- |           |                 |                  |
|-----------|-----------------|------------------|
| 1. Nala   | 5. Dasu         | 9. Longkam Banai |
| 2. Pira   | 6. Dusa         | 10. Siku         |
| 3. Dakhin | 7. Dewa Banai   | 11. Kama         |
| 4. Lamok  | 8. Khakra Banai | 12. Dulunga      |

### Tintekiya clans

- |          |           |            |
|----------|-----------|------------|
| 1. Jiri  | 5. Telang | 9. Hachuk  |
| 2. Domba | 6. Pajo   | 10. Dorong |
| 3. Hakok | 7. Tikhao | 11. Wanang |
| 4. Kama  | 8. Barum  | 12. Ma-ka  |

Some clans of one group are equated with clans of some other group, though such equation of clans has nothing to do with marriage regulation, because the groups are ideally endogamous. Some clans of each group are even equated with Garo clans, though the Koch strictly forbid intermarriage with the Garo. Marriage regulation is the most important function of Koch clans. Rather, it can be said that at present regulation of marriage is the only function of Koch clans. Intra-clan marriages are greatly disfavoured by the Koch, and the culprits are usually excommunicated. Some clans claim a common ancestry, and marriage between members of these clans is also prohibited, though now-a-days this rule has been relaxed to a great extent. It is said that formerly Koch clans jointly owned particular plots as is done in the present day by Garo clans. However, at the present time the Koch occupy permanent lands which have been properly surveyed and revenue assessed for each individual plot, so plots are individually owned.

The Koch household consists of the parents, unmarried children, a married son or a married daughter, or both with his or her spouse and children. The household is regarded as one economic unit and land and other property are held jointly by the household. Those sons or daughters of a household who neither go to reside in the household of their spouses nor continue to stay in their parental households, establish new households. Males residing in the village of their parents after marriage are more common in comparison to females bringing their husbands to their parental villages. Boys and girls

usually marry at the age when they consider themselves fit to manage an independent household. Child marriage is not prevalent. For all purposes the male is regarded as the head of the household and he controls the activities of his wife, children and sons or daughters-in-law. However, when the male dies leaving behind a grown up son, he becomes the head of the household. However, a son-in-law who resides in the household may also succeed as the head of the household. Occasionally, one will come across a widow's household without any male member. Such households come into existence when the widow is without issue and she does not remarry (widow-marriage is prevalent among all the groups of the Koch). Divorce is very rare, and so there is no hard and fast rule about the division of the household at the time of divorce. Polygyny is allowed but the second wife should not necessarily be a member of the clan of the first wife.<sup>9</sup>

The interesting feature of Koch social structure is that it represents a stage of transition from the norms of a matrilineally-biased society to those of a partilineally-biased society. This may be due to two reasons: (1) Their attempt to elevate themselves in the social ladder by gradual adoption of Hindu practices. (2) Due to their shift from a jhum economy, where there is no private ownership of land, to permanent agriculture. The former appears to me to be the more plausible reason, because we find its effect on religion also. Had it been due to the shift from jhum-economy to permanent agricultural economy, we could have noticed similar changes among the Garo of the neighbouring areas who have also changed over to permanent agriculture, probably at the same time as the Koch. The Koch village predominantly consists of a core of related males, the females mostly belonging to other villages and other clans. This is certainly not the picture of a matrilineally-biased society. For instance, in a Garo village the core is a group of closely related females, their husbands coming from other villages. However, most of the males in a Garo village may belong to a single clan, as in small homogeneous 'songsarek'<sup>7</sup> villages only two dominant clans are to be found and those two clans intermarry among themselves. It may also be stated here that in each Garo village a number of males belonging to the clan of the female core and bringing their wives from outside (or from the village itself, if the village contains two dominant inter-marrying clans) are always to be found. Still, in a Garo village most of the males are bound together by their marriage with the women of the village. But unlike that, a Koch village has a firm basis of related males. Cases of grown up male children staying with their parents after marriage are very common. Such sons are given share of the property also. Many Koch households have a son-in-law and a married son—all forming a joint family. The transition from matriliney to patriliney is also reflected in their kinship terminology. To examine this, it is necessary to compare Koch kinship terminology with that of the Garo, which has all the distinctive characteristics of a matrilineally oriented kinship terminology. In Garo kinship terminology, a male never uses the sibling term to the children of his

mother's brother. But in Koch kinship terminology mother's brother's children are termed siblings and behaved as such. On the other hand, the most suitable mate of a Garo male who wants to become the head of an already existing household, is the male's own mother's brother's daughter. The Garo term for mother's brother's daughter is equivalent to the term for 'lover'. In Koch kinship terminology they use the same term for sister's children and the children of wife's brother, which is never done by a Garo, who would use the term for own children's spouse for the children of wife's brother. In Koch kinship terminology the only term showing affinity with Garo kinship terminology and divergence from Indo-Aryan kinship terminology is the term for sister's children (female speaking), which is the same term she uses for her own children. The Chapra Koch have entirely abandoned the Koch language, and they have fully adopted the Indo-Aryan Assamese kinship terms.

A typical feature of Koch social organization is their prohibition of marriage with a member of the father's clan. This appears to be a recent intrusion, and represents another facet of Hindu influence.

*Position of the Koch of Garo Hills in Hindu Caste Hierarchy and an Incipient Caste Organization among different Groups of the Koch.*

My contention in this section will be to show that though the position of the Koch in Hindu caste hierarchy is still undetermined, amongst themselves (amongst different groups of the Koch), they have formed an organization in imitation of Hindu caste organization.

Various attempts have been made to frame an all-embracing definition of caste. But the institution shows great variety in different parts of India and so an all-embracing definition will never be possible. Hutton<sup>8</sup> after discussing different definitions of caste, specially those of Risley and Kethar, has accepted the description of caste given by N. K. Dutta, which runs as follows :

“Members of a caste cannot marry outside it; there are similar but less rigid restrictions on eating and drinking with a member of another caste; there are fixed occupations for many castes; there is some hierarchial gradation of castes, the best recognized position being that of the Brahmans at the top; birth determines a man's caste for life unless he be expelled for violation of its rules; otherwise transition from one caste to another is not possible; the whole system turns on the prestige of the Brahman”.

The above description suits the Koch groups as incipient castes. All the Koch groups are ideally endogamous, though there is relaxation of this rule between some groups. When a Koch belonging to a particular group marries in another group and brings the spouse to the village, the spouse belonging to the outside group is naturalized only after a ceremonial feast. I have seen this

process of naturalization applied to a number of Garos who married Koch girls in a Wanang village. However, cases of inter-group marriage among the Koch and marriage of a Koch with a Garo are very rare, and such marriages are not looked with much favour. Commensality is limited within the group only, and a man does not openly take food in a house belonging to a man of another group, though this rule has been relaxed to a great extent now-a-days. Still on social occasions (such as marriage and death feasts) the rule of commensality is strictly observed. Among the groups a hierarchial gradation is gradually developing. A higher degree of Sanskritization places a group in a higher position. Thus the Chapra who utilize the services of the Brahmin priest on all occasions and who have totally abandoned their original gods, consider themselves to be better than others, while the Wanang who do not utilize the services of the Brahmin priest on any occasion, and who preserve a number of their own spirits are considered to be the most inferior. Despite the facts stated above, the Koch in general feel a sense of unity by some common elements of Sanskritization which make them feel different from the Garo who are non-Hinduized. The *hookah* can be used in common among all the groups of the Koch but a Garo is never allowed to use the *hookah* in a Koch house; he is given the earthenware receptacle with charcoal and tobacco only. A Koch informant told me that they do this due to their abhorrence to beef which the Garo eat. Thus the Koch draw a sharp line between their own groups and between themselves and non-Hindus. Burling<sup>9</sup> in his study of different tribes inhabiting the western borders of the district remarks that the inter-relationship between different tribal groups has given rise to some features which he compares with a caste organization, of which the beef-eating Garo is at the bottom. He, however, does not say anything about the caste-like organization among the Koch groups.

The position of the Koch in Hindu caste hierarchy is very uncertain. In his discussion about exterior castes, Hutton<sup>10</sup> has suggested a few tests to determine whether a caste should be included under that category or not. However, he states that these tests cannot be taken as holding good for all parts of India. He quotes the Census Superintendent of Assam in connection with defining the exterior castes of Assam, and the following remark of the Census Superintendent quoted by him is relevant :

“.....the only castes in Assam Valley which can be called exterior are castes which are either traditionally associated with some degrading occupation (such as selling fish) or whose traditional origin is associated with a bar sinister”.

The Koch regard themselves as Hindus and as I have already shown, they draw a sharp line of division between themselves and non-Hindus. Whatever may be their origin, at present they have adopted such an amount of Sanskritization that they have definitely come under the fold of Hinduism. Gradually they are adopting more and more elements of Sanskritization—

because, adoption of Hindu elements is considered by them to be the sole criterion to ascend the ladder of caste hierarchy.<sup>11</sup> They are gradually becoming particular about food—and with that domestic animals also, because pigs and fowl have come to be regarded as unclean animals. A large number of deities from Hindu pantheon have been adopted and those are now becoming dominant deities who are pushing aside the tribal spirits. They are becoming particular about ceremonial uncleanness at the time of death, birth etc. The professional Brahman priest has also appeared in the picture. However, the Brahman priest whose services are utilized by the Koch is not regarded as a clean Brahman by other 'interior castes'. Thus it can be said that though the Koch of Garo Hills are Hindus, they have yet to enter the inner circle of Hindu castes.

### *Acknowledgements*

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### *Notes and References*

<sup>1</sup> Hutton, J. H., 'Caste in India—Its Nature, Function and Origins' (Bombay) 1963, Glossary.

<sup>2</sup> Playfair, Major A., 'The Garos', London (1909), p. 19.

<sup>3</sup> Playfair, Major A., *Ibid.*, p. 22.

<sup>4</sup> Hamilton, Francis, 'An Account of Assam' (First compiled in 1807-1814), (Gauhati, Assam), pp. 89-90.

<sup>5</sup> The information given by Dr. Grierson, as quoted by Playfair (*Ibid.*, pp. 19-20) that except Tintekiya others have entirely abandoned their language is not correct.

<sup>6</sup> Among the Garo this rule is very strictly observed. Because the property of the household is considered to be property of the clan of the female, and if the male takes a second wife from some other clan, then members of the clan of his first wife will never allow any part of the property to pass to the second wife, or her children.

<sup>7</sup> This term is used to indicate non-Christian Garos who are following their traditional way of life in all aspects.

<sup>8</sup> Hutton, *Ibid.*, p. 49.

<sup>9</sup> Burling, Robbins, 'An Incipient Caste Organization in the Garo Hills', *Man in India*, Vol. 40, No. 4, pp. 283-299.

<sup>10</sup> Hutton, *Ibid.*, p. 195.

<sup>11</sup> Srinivas, M. N., 'Religion and Society among the Coorgs of South India', Oxford (1952), p. 30. He remarks that the rising of a low caste to a higher position by adopting vegetarianism and teetotalism and by Sanskritizing its ritual and pantheon is a characteristic of caste all over India.

# TRIBE-PEASANT RELATIONSHIP IN ASSAM

M. C. GOSWAMI

In this brief discussion I have high-lighted attention on the following points :

1. The popular concept of a tribe is a misnomer and at times psychologically injurious to all concerned.

2. From the view point of historical anthropology a tribe or a tribal culture connotes a self-sufficient, self-contained ingroup—a primary stage in the evolution of human society. From a Functionalist point of view, a tribe is a well-defined social and cultural entity which differentiates itself from other similarly composed units.

3. We Indians, too, had to struggle through a tribal stage to reach the degree of progress we now enjoy; whereas certain geographically isolated groups among us are just straggling behind the toddling mass of our population.

4. Assam's culture is a successful synthesis of Mongoloid cultures veneered by the Ganges Valley Civilization, which, by and large, is the strongest link between this part and the rest of India.

5. Ethnically, Assam is the hinterland of the South-East Asiatic population; but culturally it is an epitome of a peaceful assimilation of the diverse ethnic groups into its body politic, a process initiated by the Kirata chieftains and streamlined by the Ahom rulers.

6. An Ahom policy of incorporating the local tribal chiefs and nobles in their community by free association and unreserved social intercourse laid a solid foundation for a still wider assimilation in the process of which the Tai group of incoming population lost its identity like many others who either preceded or succeeded the Ahom by voluntarily accepting the indigenous Assamese tongue which subsequently became the lingua franca of all groups that constituted the Ahom kingdom.

## *Concept of a Tribe: an Appraisal*

In the context of a National Seminar on Hill people of North-Eastern India it is pertinent to start with my conception of a tribe in as much as the gamut of our discussion will veer round this very basic concept. Dictionary meaning of a tribe is: "an aggregate of stocks—a stock being an aggregate of persons considered to be kindred—or an aggregate of families, forming a community

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usually under the govt. of a chief". (*Chambers Twentieth Century Dictionary.*) A central and determinative point concealed in this meaning is that it is nearly an absolute group—an isolated one which is a self-contained unit acting severally or collectively for such purposes as economic pursuits, maintenance of law and order, defence and offence. In such a society there is no room for extreme specialization. Each viable unit is self-sufficient and such units are both producers and consumers. Only on rare occasions do they depend on a neighbouring group for such rare but essential commodities as salt. Kerosene is added as one of the necessities for import now-a-days. If some one produces a certain commodity, it is consumed by the producer, maximally limiting its distribution of surplus among the kin-group. Likewise, if some one is keen to enjoy or to have the luxury of a certain thing, he or she or that unit is to produce it.

The concept of a tribe ought to be limited by definition to a stage of evolution of the human society from the simpler types of organization to a more and more complex one involving relations with a number of gradually multiplying sets of human organization until it involves mankind as a whole. In my view, the term tribe, which has come to stay, has to be understood on a perspective of the *homo sapiens'* progressively developing social, cultural, economic, religious and aesthetic life from natural and simple to a more and more artificial and complex one.

### *Urgency for Developing the Economically Backward*

As a matter of fact, in a national state like ours there is hardly any room for individual identity although our Constitution has codified the names of some such groups. This was done presumably and ostensibly to accelerate the removal of conditions which stood in the way of their merging freely with the stream of Indian national life. Is there any one among us in India, whose ancestors—recent or remote—did not struggle through a stage which is popularly termed tribal? It is worth mentioning that in the recent past tribes and castes were used as near synonyms.

### *Migration from the Hills to the Plains: A Dynamic Process*

The entire region of North-Eastern India, now known under different geographical or territorial names such as N.E.F.A., Nagaland, Manipur, Assam, was and still is predominantly a land of tribesmen and women. The only difference is this: some of them still occupy their hilly habitat, others inhabit the low foothill regions and still others occupy the river valleys better known as the plains areas. Most of the people comprising the stream of human race found in the North-Eastern region were veritable highlanders who subsequently climbed down from their mountain habitat to coexist with a very small stream of migrants from the Gangetic Valley. But these migrants seem to have gone

there what with the initial patronage of the indigenous rulers themselves and what with an intention of occupying a more fertile valley land. Here in the North-Eastern region wherever there is a cultivable virgin land there is an ever-growing migration from the hills to the valley region. The reverse process has never taken place. A few families may go back temporarily from the plains region to their high-land habitation; but this is only a temporary phase. They again come back to the plains along with a more congenial batch of migrants to a more productive and fertile land. Thus, movement towards the plains from the hills is a progressively increasing dynamic process.

### *Hunger for Land Generators of Group Rivalry*

This search for habitable fertile lands in the sylvan regions of Assam is a continuous and observable process. This situation is created by a growing pressure of population in the hilly areas and a limited nature of the land for slash-and-burn method of agriculture. Along with a decreasing fertility of the soil caused by heavy erosion and denudation of the hilly forests, the jhumming cycle has come down to two or three years from twelve to thirteen during the last twenty years. An ever-growing realization on the part of the highlanders that the wet cultivation is much more paying economically and still more conducive for a settled life in a permanent site, has dawned upon them—though a bit belatedly. Concomitantly, such settled life, besides accelerating the accumulation of wealth, encourages children's education and provides facilities for better means of communication and medical aids. Further, a freer association with people bearing higher contents of culture, revitalizes them to remould their way of life without virtually effecting their ethos and values of life. A baneful effect of this hunger for fresh and fertile cultivable land, however, is that it imperceptibly generates rivalry—occasionally leading to not too friendly relations with those who were already occupying its surroundings.

I have observed that a concealed jealousy verging on animosity born out of frustration or failure to get a lease of cultivable land has consequently led to undesirable relations among the neighbours originating from the same ethnic stock. It appears that it is not as much the ethnic affiliation and fellow-feeling which can wipe off the ill-will under such situation as fresh settlement of a virgin area made available for the contending group. It is again an observed fact that the earlier settlers (*thalua*) in a plains region command much more respect and wealth than that set of settlers who followed them much later. This second group again prospers materially far surpassing their compeers who opted to stay back. An observable difference between and among such materially differing groups originating from the same ethnic stock is associated with a psychological phenomenon which is occasionally revealed in a disguised form—a feeling of superiority and inferiority. The less fortunate foothill dwellers (*tarua*) pity the highlanders (*paharua*) whereas they themselves are pitied by the more



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prosperous plains-dwellers. It is obviously a struggle between the same set of brothers, who, however, enjoy different levels of economic progress and material advancement.

Although an overwhelmingly major portion of the hill dwellers are still groping for fresh light in the fields of education, industry and commerce, a small section among them harbours sky-high aspirations for raising their standard of life and of fully enjoying the fruits of modern industrial civilization. The social milieu in which they find themselves does not ordinarily offer such facilities as would make them content and happy, commensurate with their aspirations. Occasional frustrations under such circumstances are symptoms of the growing manhood. "Rightly or wrongly, however, the same set of people are likely to be on the look-out for an imaginary set of enemies who are vicariously held responsible for all the evils which bedevil their society. Unless and until the big hiatus between the enlightened and the ignorant sections is largely eliminated, the bogey of domination by their more fortunate neighbours shall always remain a live issue". Is there any wonder if such situations proliferate mounting problems?

### *Common Descent and Heritage: Unfathomable Ties of Fraternity*

The pivotal point involved in the ever-present migration to the plains and a subsequent relation existing between various streams of migration, give rise to consequential economic disparity irrespective of a common ethnic affiliation. Under the impact of foreign domination and because of a vitality among the contending groups, the basic economic disparity assumes an exaggerated look resulting in a separatist psychology. But the fact of the matter is that most of the groups of inhabitants migrated at different points of prehistoric and historical times. An overwhelming majority of Assam's inhabitants are ethnically Mongoloid in origin. The gulf of difference between the plains and the hills people ostentatiously demonstrated by interested parties obviously exposes but a scientific truth—a common ethnic origin. The plains people are by and large the accultured direct descendants of the same set of Mongoloids whose forbears are the progenitors of the modern high-landers of Assam.

Besides a common ethnic origin, the great epic stories of the Mahabharata and the Ramayana, which serve as a solacing source of ancestral origin of the diverse groups, act as an unseen force for unifying the divergent groups into one Indian family. The sacred places of pilgrimage originally sanctified and maintained by the indigenous inhabitants and subsequently glorified and supported by the tribal overlords, still attract a good many of the aboriginal inhabitants. A common sharing of the same geographical region and a common experience of being governed by the same sovereign power, generate a sense of common heritage. It is reinforced by the compulsive forces for barter and trade through

a mutually intelligible dialect which is, strictly speaking, neither standard Assamese nor non-Assamese. Currently it is called Nagamese.

*Assam's Cultural Milieu: A Synthesis*

It is needless to say that the tribal cultures constitute an integral part of the cultural milieu of Assam. It will not be out of place if I quote from my sectional presidential address of the Gauhati session of the A.I.O.C., 1965: "Tribal or non-tribal societies are invariably set in the fields of cultural influence as much as they are set in the field of natural influence. Both these natural and cultural influences mould or modify each society and its culture. A cultural milieu is the product of the combined and co-operative efforts of the people and their environment—physical and cultural. The tribal cultures of Assam, NEFA, Nagaland and Manipur are living and growing entities within the cultural milieu of the people of Assam, who constitute an assortment of diverse ethnic strains speaking divergent dialects or languages. The compulsive forces of geographical unity, reinforced by the age-old ties of trade between the hills and the plains people of this north-eastern region of India, produces a mosaic of culture-pattern, whose beauty is manifest in a diversity of language and traditions of diverse origin".

The story of the first socio-cultural contact of the Ahom royalty with the neighbouring tribal people as recorded in the chronicles, is very illuminating and instructive. Some of the nobles of the Ahom rulers observed burning fires on the adjacent hill tops. Suspecting human habitation they directed certain officials to visit the hills with a view to ascertaining if there were human habitations. It took the party 20 days to reach the tribal villages on the hills. On seeing the advancing party the able-bodied adults of the bordering hillmen (*datiyal*) fled away from their home to conceal in the jungles, leaving the old and the infirm behind them. The members of the searching party helped themselves with the food prepared by the fleeing tribesmen. The old people reassured the fleeing persons through emissaries who conveyed a message purporting that the intruders were none but their own people in-as-much as they ate the food materials prepared by themselves....."

This fraternal feeling based on identity of the ways of life pervades through the anecdotes which have been recorded in the chronicle entitled *Datiyal Buranji*.

The above mentioned Assamese chronicle on the relations of the Ahom rulers with the neighbouring tribes, vividly describes the then administrative relations with the kings of Cachar and Jayantia and the chieftains of Gobha, Neli, Sora, Khahigaria, Topakuchia, Barepujia, Dandua and the Mikir. Jayadwaj Sinha established several outposts for controlling the relations with the neighbouring principalities. Ahom rulers' contact with the adjacent tribal chiefs was

beset with hurdles which were removed tactfully. Anecdotes of peace and war are marked by an unmitigated desire for permanent peaceful relations, which obviously demand unrestricted contact, easy flow of goods from the plains to the hills and vice versa. To achieve this end, a common medium of expression for barter and trade had to be evolved as the highlanders spoke mutually unintelligible dialects. Compelling circumstances led to a gradual development of a distinct brogue. A rigid structure and phonology of Assamese language had to be modified to suit the ears and understanding of the frontier tribesmen and women.

The Ahom rulers, besides maintaining border outposts at important points of contact manned by able administrators (*datiyal phukan*), adopted a very inoffensive and peaceful means of maintaining contact with the hills people through weekly markets and accessible roads to the hilly tracts. These sites for weekly markets are conveniently located at bordering villages which can easily be frequented by the highlanders, particularly during the dry season. It is very interesting to note that a prayer for opening a market in the border regions was forwarded by the Jayantiya monarch, Saru Konwar. Similar requests for establishing weekly markets at Gobha, Neli, Khala, Phularguri, Raha, Jagi, Namsang, Beltala, Daranga, Odalguri, Subankhata etc. were readily complied with inasmuch as these markets were mutually advantageous for all concerned. The *duars* or passages such as Bhutiaduar, Charduar or Nagaduar served not only as highways for internal and external trade but also these *duars* stood as open gates for wider cultural and social contacts.

#### *Seasonal Migration as Wage-Earners*

November to February is the time which witnesses a stream of adventurous hillmen of the bordering areas seeking gainful employment as wage-earners in the households of the plains areas. As indicated earlier, this is the slack season for the hill dwellers, whereas it is the peak season for harvests in the plains. The hill-men come down even today to earn some cash by service in harvesting crops, hewing fuel wood, clearing jungles, collecting wild canes etc. for their customers in the rural areas. The cash so earned is utilised for purchasing commodities which they need badly. Quite often they are observed purchasing woven fabrics, dried fish, salt, beads etc. which they carry either for self-consumption or for barter-trade among hillmen, only a fraction of which takes the risk of climbing down to the plains.

It is worth mentioning in this context that prior to the establishment of peaceful administration by the Britishers, the highlanders used to come for depredations among the plains cultivators under the cover of darkness. During such nightly predatory expeditions they used to collect rice, endi cloth and other valuables. Even when peaceful conditions prevailed, they used to come

to the Charduar area for collection of booties. Hence the institution of paying black-mail by the Britishers. Peaceful or hostile contacts led to an emergence of a class of Assamese inhabitants who are known as *duania*, literally, speakers of tribal dialects, most of whom were captives made during depredatory expeditions. The needy but adventurous chiefs and the wealthy hillmen used to have a number of slaves captured from the bordering villages. In support of this point I mention only an outstanding instance. The Singpho villages located on the Buri Dihing and on the Tengapani, east of Sadiya, were full of Assamese slaves when the Britishers took over the administration. No less than 6,000 Assamese slaves were released by Capt. Neufville. These slaves married women of the captors. Consequently miscegenation became an observable phenomenon. This in its turn gave rise to a mutually intelligible pidgin-Assamese spoken by their progeny. It is this broken Assamese which in due course became the *lingua franca* among the hills and the plains dwellers.

The relations existing between the Ahom rulers and the kings of Manipur were occasionally strained no doubt; but neighbourly feelings and contiguity of the kingdoms compelled either party to keep the other in good humour. This was made possible by exchange of ambassadors and mutual acceptance of princesses in matrimonial alliance. Besides such measures, regular presents of rare products were reciprocated. It is needless to add here that Moglu princesses were favourite queens of the Ahom rulers. It may be noted in this connection that the Manipuri rulers evinced the same acumen in peacefully absorbing the various minor groups of hillmen in the body politic of Manipur as did the Ahom rulers achieve the same end by freely absorbing the different tribal groups. Ultimately, however, Ahom rulers and the Manipur kings got themselves assimilated along with their subjects in the ever receptive and tolerant civilization of the Gangetic Valley.

A remarkable feature of Assam's peasantry is that they are juxtaposed with the tribal inhabitants with whom they share ancestry. The rulers of Assam were outstanding peasant leaders of uncommon abilities. Their affines and kinsmen who constituted the nobility were at heart peasants, too. Peasants they were and peasants they became when the lustre of royalty was lost. Almost all the tribal groups of Assam had their principalities. In fact, Assam's fateful history is a tale of rise and fall of tribal families who ultimately merged and got themselves assimilated completely with the common folk. Royal palaces and an aristocracy surviving the princely patrons are conspicuous by their absence in Assam. Another outstanding feature of the Ahom rulers was that they have left behind them a very rich harvest of chronicles recording mines of information about their relations with the neighbouring tribal groups, their mode of administration and their statecraft.

As briefly shown above, the one-time jhumers gradually adopted methods

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of wet cultivation. Consequent on their migration to the valleys they partially modified their ways of life to fit into the changed social and cultural milieu. Being engulfed by tillers of the soil who had already been assimilated and Sanskritized by the greater Indian tradition, the carriers of little tradition slowly but willingly got themselves likewise assimilated and accultured. Their traditional values of life faced hardly any opposition or any fear of extinction. They freely continued to live side by side with the groups of tillers of the soil belonging to different levels of cultural attainments but nonetheless covered by the greater Indian traditions of the great epics. The rigour of caste hierarchy and social stratification observed in the rest of India are noticeably without a traditional edge in Assam. In short, a purposive and successful tribe-peasant relationship in Assam is as old as the story of the growth and development of the culture and civilization of Assam.

# THE SOCIETY IN TRANSITION IN THE MIZO DISTRICT

AMIT KUMAR NAG

## *Population Distribution*

The sudden outburst of organized violence and armed uprising in the 8,134 square mile Mizo District of Assam has attracted attention since March 1, 1966. Hundreds of armed insurgents of the Mizo National Front rose in open revolt; they temporarily occupied most of the areas till the security forces went into action. The situation in the District is far from normal with the one thousand and odd villages and hamlets scattered over the large and not-easily-accessible tract remaining still at the mercy of the armed rebels.\* Geography affords numerous advantages to the armed insurgents.

The population (2,70,000), by and large, consists of related tribes and sub-tribes of the Kuki-Chin ethnic family. The principal groups among them are: the Lushai, Ralte, Hmar, Pawi, Paihte, Reang, Mara (Lakher), Chakma, Phanek, Bong, Pang, Tipra etc. The Buddhist Chakmas who came from the neighbouring Chittagong Hill Tract (now in Pakistan) in waves of immigration, and Tipras, to some extent, preserve their separate entity, while all others with the exception of the Maras prefer to be described as the "Mizo" (or highlanders).

The immigration of the Mizo tribes to their present habitat started in the mid-seventeenth century. They came from the adjoining territories of Burma.

From stories and traditions it appears that the immigrants at first established small communities without any power of cohesion. In the fierce struggle for survival, some groups pushed out weaker rivals and established their control. Before a number of successful chieftains had established their authority, there were many consanguinous communities scattered over the present Mizo hills, living under headmen of their own and each using a dialect of its own. Some of these communities appear to have had separate corporate existence for long periods and in consequence to have been sub-divided into many families and branches, while others were quickly being absorbed.

The British Indian authorities wrongly christened the district as the Lushai Hills after the name of the then dominant tribe, the Lushai, although 'Lushai' was not the name originally used by these people for their common identity. It is traditionally believed that the term 'Mizo' linked the tribes and sub-tribes together.

\* This was written in December, 1966.

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When the Constitution of India came into force and the area got an autonomous District Council under the provisions of the Sixth Schedule to the Constitution, the people under the leadership of the principal political party, Mizo Union, decided to rename their territory as the 'Mizo District' and the name was changed with effect from September 1, 1954, through a legislation enacted by the Indian Parliament.

The census of 1961 revealed the total population of the Mizo District as 2,66,063 of which only 5,009 were non-tribals. In 1901 the total population was only 82,434.

The census corroborated the integration process under the common denomination—Mizo. The Lushais, Raltes, Paihtes, Phaneks etc. returned themselves as Mizos. Most of the Hmars also did so while 10,154 out of 14,741 Pawis described themselves as Mizo (Pawi). Only 4,587 Pawis and 3,118 Hmars returned themselves as Pawis and Hmars respectively.

The break-up of the tribal population in the 1961 census was: Mizo—2,13,061; Chakma—19,337; Lakher (Mara)—8,790; Pawi (Lai)—4,587; and Hmar—3,118.

It may be recalled that the Pawi-Lakher Regional Council challenged the accuracy of these figures before the H. V. Pataskar Commission. On seeking a clarification, they were informed by the Census Superintendent, Assam, that besides 4,587 Pawis, another 10,154 persons had described themselves as Mizo (Pawi) or Mizo-Pawi at the time of census. According to the well-recognized practice of enumeration, they were included in the Mizo tribe.

All these show that powerful forces are at work in the Mizo District now for facilitating a proto-national integration.

### *Impact of British Rule*

Along with the rest of the country the Mizos also came under Western influence with the establishment of British rule—at a slow pace. The story of the early British relations with them is one of occasional conflicts followed by periods of peace. The early British administrators pursued a practical policy which was embodied in the ever-reiterated command to frontier officers: "Conciliate these savages if you can. Be persistent in demanding surrender of murderers, but endeavour so to approach the tribes, that a basis may be opened for friendly intercourse in the future." (Quoted from Mackenzie's NORTH-EAST FRONTIER OF BENGAL.)

The Mizos had to undergo changes as a result of the British occupation.

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At first contact with the British, the Mizos were highly impressed by his material equipment, but this contact also led to many other changes concerning their habits of life and traditional culture. Such changes are inevitable when a primitive people come under settled rule.

The factors and agencies that fostered cultural transformation were numerous and varied. But the principal among them were the Government and the Christian Missions.

The role of Government as an agency of transformation can never be over-stressed. The Mizos underwent a change of qualitative character by coming under settled rule. Mr. N. E. Parry, I.C.S., a former Superintendent of the Lushai Hills, quotes a Mara (Lakher) Chief (of Savang) in his illuminating book on "The Lakhers", to refer to the "three benefits" of settled rule. According to this testimony, "they can sleep at night without sentries and without fear of a raid, they can travel wherever they like without let or hindrance and without fear of an ambush, and they can have beer-parties without posting sentries and without the fear at the back of their minds that they may be raided and cut up while intoxicated."

When the British established their authority over the Mizo Hills, each village was a separate state ruled over by its own "Lal" or Chief. Each son of a Chief, as he attained a marriageable age, was provided with a wife at his father's expense, and given a certain number of households from his father's village and sent forth to a village of his own. The youngest son of the Chief, however, remained in his father's village to succeed him. There was no demarcation of land for jhum.

The British authorities made some sort of demarcation of jhum lands for each village and recognized the Chief as the owner of such lands. Although the shifting jhum cultivation was not disturbed, the British rulers wanted to make available certain benefits of settled rule by resorting to this system of land tenure. A beginning was made in 1891-92 for collection of some sort of revenue or tribute either in cash or in kind with the establishment of political control over the people for gradual submission. As stated earlier, land settlement was introduced in 1898 by which the demarcation of land to each Chief was effected within which he and his people could jhum according to their convenience. The Chiefship was made hereditary, subject to good behaviour, and physical and mental normality. With a view to ensuring better local administration at the village level, special scholarships were offered to the eldest son of each Chief who was made heir to the Chiefship by changing the prevailing custom.

The Government also indirectly affected the ways of life of the Mizos in



numerous other ways. Most of these aspects deserve closer analysis as independent factors of change.

### *Land Ownership*

From times immemorial, the system of communal ownership of land has prevailed in the Mizo Hills. Prior to British occupation, the Mizo peasant jhummed a plot of land by right of original settlement in the area and also by right of first clearance of forest. The British distributed land to Chiefs as circumstances suited but were guided generally by existing occupation. Proprietary rights over lands were reserved by the Government. Control of jhumming vis-a-vis selection of a plot of land for jhumming in the particular year was left with the Chief. Each family cultivated its own field. After the harvest each year, the Chief had to decide which particular area was to be cultivated. After an announcement made by the village crier, "Tlangau", as to the date of selection of jhum, a representative of each family went out in search of a suitable plot. As land was in abundance, there was seldom any trouble over the selection. Proper control over jhum land with respect to accidental fire and wilful negligence in the spreading of fire was in the firm hands of the Chief.

With the abolition of the Chiefship following the ushering in of the Mizo District Council (1952) and the Pawi-Lakher Regional Council (1953), the ownership of land has been vested with the District Council and the Regional Council. In accordance with the Constitution, regulation of jhumming, control and allotment of land for other agricultural purposes remain under their purview within their respective jurisdictions. Each Council delegated control over jhumming to the Village Councils constituted by them. But, for all practical purposes, the land tenure system remains the same. The major change which has since taken place is only in the method of distribution of jhum-land—which is done by secret ballot now. Factually, devastation of jhum-land by fire is on the increase at present.

Rapid increase in population and consequent reduction of cycle of jhumming and the peculiar topography pose problems of magnitude before the Mizos. The abolition of Chiefship has not resulted in the feeling of attachment to ownership over land.

On the other hand, the abolition of the Chiefship removed the traditional elite without creating a new elite competent enough to provide the alternative leadership in the rural areas. The Village Council which was made the functional substitute could hardly be expected to play the role carved out for the Chiefs through customs and traditions. Moreover, the resentment of the former Chiefs gave rise to chronic differences between the old order and the new arrangement. This antipathy provided the breeding ground for newer conflicts.

*A Sample Survey*

Jhumming or shifting cultivation of the slash-and-burn method, yields livelihood to about 86 per cent of the population. The backwardness of the Mizo District is due to this increasingly unproductive and primitive practice—a legacy of the past. Food scarcity was rare in the past and the fertility of the soil was high as the cycle of jhumming varied between twenty and thirty years. The pressure of rapidly growing population has reduced the jhumming cycle to four to seven years now. Consequently the soil gets no chance of restoring its fertility. As such it is natural that the Mizo District continues to be backward. The economic condition is far from satisfactory.

An economic survey carried out in 1956 in two villages—Sihphir and Muallunthu—situated on the roadside within a radius of 14 miles from Aijal, the District headquarters, revealed unenviable data, although these roadside villages so near the main township cannot represent the District's typical village situated in not-easily-accessible interior.

The sources of income in these two villages according to the survey were : Land—63 per cent; Cattle and other animals—16 per cent; Spinning, Weaving, and other crafts—13 per cent; Labour (both skilled and unskilled)—6 per cent; and, Subsidiary occupation—2 per cent.

The heads of expenditure, on the other hand, were : Food—74 per cent; Clothing & Footwear—14 per cent; Tools and other instruments—4 per cent; Medical—3 per cent; Education—3 per cent; Transport, House-Tax, Religious purposes etc.—2 per cent.

Other interesting data are : per capita income—Rs. 225/-; per capita expenditure—Rs. 177/-; Families free from debt—76 per cent; Indebted families—24 per cent; average debt per family—Rs. 26/-; average debt per indebted family—Rs. 109/- and per capita debt—Rs. 4/-.

The principal causes of debt were : (i) Debt incurred due to shortage of food; (ii) marriage expenses including bride price; (iii) expenses on illness; and (iv) borrowing of agricultural seeds.

It was found that the major portion of debts were incurred for meeting consumption expenditure and not for capital investment.

*Role of Christian Missions*

Now coming again to factors of change, the Christian Missions proved to be the more active instrument of change than the Government.

When Mission work was first initiated among the Mizos, it was carried on largely by the light of nature, without training and without knowledge of the customs of the people. This led to the condemnation as heathen and useless of some most excellent customs, which no one who had studied them could have failed to wish to preserve. No use was made of the "zawlbuk" or bachelor's house, nor of the custom of "Tlawngaihna"—an untranslatable term, meaning the obligation on every one to be unselfish and to help others.

Christianity—as preached by the Western Missionaries—weakened their taboos and their system of social control. This was obvious. When one particular group in the tribe secures exemption from certain requirements, others tend to become less scrupulous about fulfilling the customary obligations.

Thus, many a good custom of the Hill people was suppressed by the Missionaries in the name of spreading the Gospel and with the vain satisfaction of saving the souls of the damned.

At the initial stages of conversion, the Missions became de-nationalizing agencies. This fact was referred to by Mr. N. E. Parry I.C.S., (in *THE LAKHERS*) who asked: "It is difficult to understand why Christianity should involve de-nationalization. . . . When a primitive people have beautiful things, they should be encouraged to wear them; far from inducing them to adopt a debased form of Western dress, we should endeavour to preserve all that is beautiful in their costume. By so doing we shall increase their self-respect and encourage them to develop their own art on their own lines. . . . It is unfortunately so much easier to destroy customs wholesale than to preserve and improve them, and among the Lushais destruction, admittedly with the best intentions, has worked havoc. . . . Through lack of knowledge, excellent customs were left unused, and actually discouraged. Mission influence, therefore, has been largely destructive, good customs having been destroyed and not replaced."

"An incident that occurred . . . when I was in the Garo Hills, where there is an American Mission", wrote Mr. Parry, "is a good example of the lengths to which denationalization may go if the Missionaries neglect the study and teaching of tribal customs. I was inspecting a mission school and asking the small boys various questions. Now there is a very well-known tradition among the Garos that formerly they came from Tibet, and they can tell you the route by which they came. I therefore asked one of the small boys, 'Where did the Garos originally come from?' The answer came out pat, 'We came from America'."

These negative features should not, however, blur the positive contribution of the Western Missionaries. Backwardness of centuries and backlog of decades fast yielded grounds to modernisation and modernism which the Missionaries

ushered in. Although the Missionaries gave the Roman script (with modifications to express the Hill dialects) to Duhlien and other dialects of the Mizos to facilitate preaching of Christian gospel, this was a revolution in itself—followed by setting up of Mission schools. These schools became a potent factor in producing changes. They were opening up a larger world to the pupils and new ideas were creeping in.

Learning to write was a noteworthy accomplishment which flowered into a further expansion of the tribal personality. The reduction of tribal dialects to writing proved to be a unifying factor.

Certain forces of disintegration were at work at that time. In addition to bringing about the expansion of personality through the opening up of newer horizons, the schools were a factor in undermining traditions and customs and in producing disorganization in the accustomed habits of life. Consequently, much of their traditional festivities and merry-makings were given up.

But the trend is being reversed to some extent during the recent years. The younger generation has been increasingly giving proofs of its desire for a cultural revival. Folk dances and music are in their initial stages of resurgence. The psychological complex which loomed large mainly among the first generation of educated Mizos is becoming a thing of the past. Younger generations are learning to value and love their pre-literate culture, traditions and customs. The three principal festivals—'Pawl Kut' or harvest festival held in December, 'Mim Kut' or the festival in honour of the dead in which the first crops of maize and vegetables are presented in September, and 'Chap-char Kut' or the spring festival held in March between the cutting of the forest and the burning of the jhum—are gradually being revived and are on the holiday list of the autonomous District Council alongside the Christian festivals like the Christmas and the New Year. The Church has lately taken a liberal outlook of toleration of the resurgence of traditional songs, dances, arts and crafts, and festivals of the Mizos. 'Tlawmngaihna' is also re-asserting itself side by side with Christian ethics.

### *Beginning of Missionary Activities*

The first Christian Missionary, the Reverend William Williams of the Welsh Calvinistic Church, visited the Mizo Hills in 1891 and returned immediately to the Khasi & Jaintia Hills after reaching Changsil only. In 1894, the Reverend F. W. Savidge and the Reverend J. H. Lorrain—both of the Pioneer Mission—entered the area and stayed there till 1897. Their pioneering work was taken over by the Welsh Calvinistic Missionary, the Reverend D. E. Jones. Both the pioneer Missionaries returned to the Mizo Hills in 1903 to operate in the Southern Sub-Division of Lungleh on behalf of the London Baptist Mission.

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The contributions of the Christian Missions in the spheres of education and medical assistance are often described as signal achievements. The very high literacy rate of the Mizo District—namely 44 per cent—against 27 per cent for Assam State and 24 per cent for India as a whole in the 1961 census, indicates the success of the pioneering efforts of the Christian Missionaries. The District headquarters, Aijal, has a literacy percentage of 66 as against 63 for New Delhi, 60 for Madras City and 59 each for Calcutta and Bombay.

Rapid proselytisation marks the other prominent feature of the Missionary activities. While in the census of 1901 there were only twenty-six Christians in the Mizo hills, the 1921 census recorded one-fourth of the entire population as Christian. The Christian population increased by 83 per cent during 1941-'51.

Christianity in the Mizo hills had to experience a peculiar “miracle” phenomenon or its variations during the last six decades. This phenomenon contributed to the growth of the influence of the Church in the area, although such phenomena were often considered to be deviationist in character.

The “miracle” phenomenon, known as “revival”, took place several times, but only four of these are regarded as noteworthy.

The first Revival occurred in 1906. In March that year nine Mizo Christians, on their return from the Welsh Presbyterian Assembly held at Mairang in the Khasi & Jaintia Hills, spread the movement, the central theme of which was the conviction of sins and their public confessions. The movement actually started in the area from the morning of April 9, 1906, about one year after the Welsh Revival in the United Kingdom.

The second Revival (of 1913) was of the nature of a flashback current. Starting from the eastern villages near the Burma border, this wave thrust itself back towards west and south. The theological emphasis of this Revival was “His second coming” and great excitement found expression in dancing.

The third Revival of 1919 was in a sense the greatest one. It took place on the same date (July 26, 1919) at three different places—Zotlang and Thingsai in the south and Nisapui in the north. This movement of an ecstatic and compulsive kind was a contagious, nerve-racking and quaking of the whole body of the individuals affected...which could be brought under control only by dancing. The central theme was the “Cross of Christ”. The Revival developed from dancing and weeping to trembling and falling into trance. This Revival caused a great deal of trouble and dissension in the Church.

The last principal Revival also started from the eastern side of the District in 1935. Its emphasis was on “spiritual gifts and mystical experience”. The

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recipients claimed to have direct revelation from God. The movement ultimately developed into varied forms of more striking charismatic gifts. Trances and visions, prophetic utterances, speaking in unknown tongues and symbolic actions are some of the salient features. It also caused great dissension in the Church and resulted in the birth of several deviationist bodies like Tlira Pawl, Khuangtuaha Pawl, Pa Pawl etc.

The deviationist movements which were born mainly from the 1935 Revival have not died out till today. Permitting the drinking of Zu (rice beer) and singing and dancing of indigenous songs and dances for the praise of God, they are frequently heard all over the district—despite the growth of the organized Church.

### *Recruitment to Army*

The recruitment to the armed forces served as another instrument of change in the Mizo society.

The policy of the British Indian authorities to recruit Mizo young men in the police, the Assam Rifles and the army had made its impact in a gradual but effective way. This, apart from ensuring employment opportunities, facilitated rapid increase in the influence of the Government.

During the First World War, about two thousand one hundred Mizo young men joined the 27th Indian Labour Corps and were sent to France. They had had experiences they never could have dreamed of. These ex-servicemen later exercised on the entire community some influence in favour of social change.

The Second World War proved far more effective a factor in disturbing the traditional tribal pattern in the Mizo Hills. The Lushai Scouts and the Pasaltha Pawl recruited from amongst them rendered good service to the forces of the Allies. Their fighting calibre was shown by the Assam Rifles and the Assam Regiment—in both of which the Mizo Jawans constituted a substantial percentage.

A number of Mizo girls joined the nursing services and gained new experiences in distant battlefields as well.

The Second World War also contributed to the increase of money-mindedness and money-consciousness in certain sections of the Mizo society. While the Mizo Hills were not directly affected by ravages of war, the flow of easy money and newly introduced consumer goods dazzled a section of them.

Discipline and army-type organization—legacies of army life—became the

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pattern before the new generation of the Mizos. Because most of the educated and half-educated Mizos returned to their homes after serving for a period in the armed forces during the war.

It was, as such, natural that the first political organization of the Mizo Hills, the Mizo Union, which was formed on April 9, 1946, described its head office as the "G. H. Q." of the Mizo Union. Leadership in all spheres were mainly provided by ex-servicemen.

Among other factors affecting the Mizo society were the spread of medical facilities, the presence of a battalion of the Assam Rifles and the growth of commerce.

Civilization, in its impact upon the traditional societies, has resulted in a cleavage between different fluid layers of the community or communities. In the process, a section of them has become more dissatisfied with their status than any section ever was under traditional circumstances.

According to Prof. Arnold J. Toynbee's diagnosis of maladies elsewhere, "the consciousness of being disinherited from one's ancestral place in society" is one of the principal causes of such resentment.

Furthermore, the crisis has been seemingly deepened: the old balance between the tribal reality culture and the value culture stands disturbed.

Hitherto the tribal had sunk his personality and individual rights for the good of his community; to set himself in opposition to, or in competition with, his fellows was in his eyes a great offence. From the "civilized" man he learned the explosive idea that the individual had inalienable 'rights'. And he also learns to put himself before the community.

Modern ideas have been increasingly permeating the educated and advanced sections of the tribal societies. Flood-gates of new ideas have been opened before them. Proto-nationalistic integration in the area despite opposite pulls of tribal identities has strengthened their aspiration for an ethnic autonomy. Their fears and apprehensions about their future survival and progress have been intensified owing to the monstrous growth of religio-linguistic revivalism in the mainstream of Indian polity. They feel genuinely concerned. The revivalist agitation for banning cow slaughter throughout India has, for instance, further eroded their confidence.

Against this backdrop the younger generation of educated Mizos grope for surer grounds. The erosion of confidence and the corrosion of the old equilibrium explain the objective condition in which the extremist slogan of

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secession could rally enough "tlangvals" or teen-agers and other youngsters for launching an armed struggle.

There is, however, one great handicap. The majority of the disgruntled try to avoid the compulsions of the primitive economy. But there is hardly any escape from these compulsions. It is not possible to build a modern society on a primitive and backward economy. The Mizo society can only be modernized if the wasteful and progressively less rewarding shifting cultivation is replaced by scientific permanent farming as a basis for a modern social order.



## A POINT OF VIEW ON THE GAROS IN TRANSITION

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### *A Matrilineal Society*

The Garos constitute a matrilineal society living predominantly in the Garo Hills district of Assam. Most of the hill-tribes of Assam display in general 'a relatively unstratified social organization with a notably independent status of women'. The Garos—like their easterly neighbour of the Shillong plateau, Khasis,—are organised on the basis of matrilineal descent groups. The entire society consists of five exogamous divisions—Sangma, Marak, Momin, Areng and Shira—each Garo considering himself or herself as member of any of the above 'matrilineal descent groups' called Ma'chong (clan). There are subclans of each clan, known by the term 'chatchi' which may include persons spreading over the district. Members of the same sub-clan are 'Maharis', i.e., relatives by motherhood. Mother stands as the sole repository of the proprietary rights over all movable and immovable properties of the family. One of the daughters, generally the youngest, to be called 'Nokna' (heiress), will be chosen by the parents with general approval of the mother's *mahari* to inherit the properties. Sons gradually get married and come to stay with the family of their respective wives, and other non-heiress daughters leave the parental house after marriage and separately stay with their husbands. The husband of the inheritress is selected and brought from the clan of her father, generally, a nephew of the father who must be a descendant from his own sisters' or cousin sister's line so that marriage becomes a bond between the two *maharis* (clans of mother and of the father), and the properties are not fragmented and lost. So the society is based on matrilineal cross-cousin marriage.

The smallest kinship group among the Garos is the family. Each village consists of as many households as the member of families of more than one *mahari* origin with, at least, one man as the *Nokma*, loosely translated as *headman*. This headmanship adheres more closely to a household than to any person and is upheld by the husband of the heiress of earlier *Nokma*. It has been characterized predominantly by the possession of titles to land and the areas of land to which he holds a title is called *A'king*. *Nokma* representing a *mahari*, himself is the first citizen of the *Nokma-Aking*, and acts as a village head as well as spiritual head of the village.

In a society such as that of the Garos, where specialised political or economic institutions are yet to blossom, family groups based on matrilineal kinship have

to take over many of the functions of production, distribution, and control of family and national wealth. Naturally, kinship bulks so large in the life of the Garos. The socio-economic organization of the Garos before the advent of British rule and Christianity had a closely-knit democratic set-up and was characterized by the absence of the institution of private property, existence of mutuality in exchange of labour in a village for the growth and maintenance of household properties and agrarian pursuits; an in-born respect for the dignity of labour, agriculture as the avenue of employment, yearly allotment of Aking land of different households by the Nokma as the custodian of socially-owned land, slash-and-burn technique of cultivation with regular cycle of social ceremonies and festivals, absence of any individually-performed sacrifices or worshipping, absence of township in the Garo areas, and above all, by the inheritance from the mother to the chosen daughter. Mahari controls the life of the *ma'chong* and the Nokma in his *a'king* regulates the village life. The social polity flourished in an atmosphere of cordiality and co-operation in a village or Aking.

#### *The Entry of British Power*

But this tradition-bound static society has to face the onslaught of certain internal and external forces that have rudely shaken its whole structure and contents. When, how, and why the Garos entered the hills in largest number is a story still left unfathomed by the researchers. But their complete isolation in the hills had been to some extent broken by their habit of marketing and market-visits in the foothills and plains around the hills, and by their endemic hostility, head-hunting, looting and arsoning activities against the zamindars' continual attempts at exploiting and dominating the Garos in their own areas. At that time British authority intervened, imposed moderate controls on activities of the Garo chiefs as well as zamindars of the areas surrounding the hills. But the chronic hostility gave the occasion for the British to enter and occupy the hills and establish an administrative headquarters at Tura in 1866.

The entry and spread of this external political control set in motion the first series of disintegrating forces in the society. Nokma as the repository of social authority settles the disputes, as the village and ritual head, along with headmen of important families. Inter-clan or inter-village feuds are settled by the concerned Nokmas and other old headmen. But disagreement among them generally invites violence to follow. Inter-clan disputes, boundary disputes of Aking lands and organization of head-hunting could hardly be settled always by the Jingma Changga (assembly in crowd) before the advent of the British who imposed for the first time on the Nokmas and for that matter on all Garos a common unifying political supervision. Independence of the Garos as a whole shrank to a subsidiary status with the subjugation of Garo chiefs. British authority was stabilized with the institution of a low-grade magisterial authority

in 'Lasker' for adjudication of disputes by local trials and for collection of a nominal house-tax. Generally, an influential Garo, well-conversant with all the customary laws and laws of inheritance, faithful to the cause of the British power, used to be appointed as 'Lasker' whose authority extends over more than one Nokma Aking. Lasker's authority as a British agency, therefore, flourished at the cost of Nokmas'. The district was later on surveyed, boundaries of Nokma Akings were settled throughout the district, thereby proving the supremacy of the British power.

### *The Invasion of Western Culture*

When the political domination held its sway over the Garos who, for obvious reasons, were steeped into primitive ignorance, the British power wanted to complete the subjugation by bringing about slow and steady cultural changes best suited to their own purpose. So, foreign Missionaries were invited, the first initiative being taken by Mr. Scott, and the American Baptist Missionaries appeared in the field in 1866. They learnt the Garo dialect which is akin to that of the Bodos, started schools and medical centres and thus achieved extensive evangelization, so much so that the Garo converts increased from 670 in 1871 to 5,430 in 1911. This body of new Christian literates, spread over the hills, had been the active agency of establishing 'composite institution' containing within them 'a primary school, a church and medical facilities', all centring round the converted Garo teachers. Missionaries developed the dialect into a written language, first in Bengali script and then in Roman script, translated the Bible and elementary Christian teachings, wrote text books for schools, started Garo journals, and till independence remained as the pioneering source of Garos' educational and cultural improvement. Education and Christianity developed as twin sisters which helped Missionary influence to permeate through the very social fabric of the Garos.

A cultural change in a great measure is visible in the Christian section of the Garo society. All aspects of the old culture that are related to the traditional religion, music, dancing, wood-carving, festivals, functions, and sacrifices for supplication of spirits and natural forces, are abandoned by the Christian Garos. Christianity converted their animism to modernism. Music is replaced by Christian hymns, folk community dances by Western dances, sacrifice as a means of curing diseases by modern medicines. Long hair kept by non-Christian males, turbans and the *pagries* used by them, traditional brass-earrings, jewelery, bronze or brass hops used by the Nokmas of certain areas—all had to bid good-bye to the Christian Garos immediately after conversion. Wealthier sections wear Western dress and the poorer, shorts and shirts, specially, in the highland regions, and in the plains they use dhoties, saris, Dakmandas, and the young girls favour skirts, frocks, ear-rings and metal bangles and bracelets.

*The Garos from Mymensingh*

The post-independence influx of the Christian Garos from the Mymensingh plains numbering about 40,000 brought in the local Garo society many of the tenets of Bengali culture. Their dresses, intelligence and education, sophisticated ways of living, shrewd transaction motives, thorough knowledge of wet cultivation and kitchen gardening, technique of house building, basketry, arts, music and dances—all are largely influenced by and patterned after the East Bengal culture. The refugee Garos are educated in Bengali.

Their Christian hymns, and other religious songs, are sung in predominantly indigenous tunes. 'JISU GITS', composed in Bengali, are sung in *kirtan* tune with the accompaniment of traditional musical instruments of Bengal Vaisnavas. Bengali as well as Garo folk songs and dances, Jatras, theatres, use of usual musical instruments—are all naturalised in that Garo society after Bengali pattern. Their dialect also embraced numerous words of Mymensinghia dialect. The early Bengali evangelists, however, tried to domicile Christianity among these Garos as a religion in indigenous form with content of Christianity. With no hostility and mutual misturst among Bengalees and Garos, the Gospel of Christianity spreads and is taken to be a part of local culture.

The total number of Christians in Garo Hills was 86,542 in 1961 and to them are now added about 40,000 refugee Garo Christians—the majority of whom are Catholics. With their rehabilitation in the valleys and hills of low elevation, all the above cultural tenets will be domiciled and will modify the local Garo society. Their newly settled crowded villages will definitely contribute to the development of pro-plains culture inherited from around Garo Hills. Half of the areas of their settlement in different parts of the district are being allotted to the local Garos, *songsarek* or Christians, after the lands are reclaimed. The greater strength therein of the refugee Garos, the unity as arising out of refugee status and helplessness as common bonds to face competitive forces in a new environment, and a different pattern of life led by them earlier, will help to form a compact group and will certainly influence the neighbouring local Garos. Moreover, the Catholics, numerically less powerful and comparatively of recent growth, have been establishing schools, convents, vocational centres and Mission branches in different areas and in refugee colonies. The Baptist Mission left the sphere of education—their original medium of expansion—offering a wide scope to the Catholic mission for their expansion in a freer atmosphere of less Baptist competition. Progress is slow but assertive. Because the Catholic traditions are now strengthened by the influx of refugee Garos, their Catholic expansion will be undoubtedly expedited with the rehabilitation of refugees. At a later stage, members of the same clan may be found to be partly Baptists, partly Catholics and the rest *songsareks*. A clash of thoughts and practices may not, therefore, be a matter of presumption in course of time.

### *Marriage System*

Baptist Missionaries did not attempt to reverse the matriarchal structure of society in order to avoid tension and repercussion in the early stages of their expansion, rather they allowed the Christian Garos to retain the basic tenets of matriarchy though conflicting with the *songsarek* attitude towards polygamy, marriage procedures, divorce, funeral functions, adultery, tribal worship, and village organisation etc. The laws of inheritance are inextricably bound up with exogamous uxorilocal and avunculocal marriages in Garo society. Among the non-Christians, proposal comes from the bride or her family and the bridegroom—the fancied boy—is captured, brought and kept with the bride and, in the event of the boy's acceptance of the bride, marriage is finalized and concluded. This 'Bridegroom Capture' is a significant event in Garo life and exemplifies the feminine predominance in the society. But this crude practice is absent among the Christian sections where exogamous marriage is the only form adhered to. Besides, the prevailing custom of the mother-in-law being invested with the preferential right of being the first wife of her domestic son-in-law, that is, husband of the heiress-daughter, in the event of death of the former's husband, disappeared in the new exogamous society. Noknas (chosen heiress) in Christian society are found married to any promising boy of a *mahari* origin, different from her own, sometimes preceded by a pre-marital love affair. Even cases are not rare where Christian parents distribute some of their properties to their non-*nokna* daughters, though not equally, as the marriage always unsettles the lives of non-heiress daughters.

### *Change in Village Set-Up*

Remarkable changes are visible in the village set-up. A non-Christian village is the seat of one *mahari* or more but not of many, and a *nokpanthe* (Bachelors' House) is found in every village where all adolescent bachelors stay, sleep and participate in corporate life, this also being associated with all religious festivals and socio-political activities. Christian villages or the Christian sections in *songsarek* areas, on the other hand, discard this custom altogether, allow their bachelor sons to stay in family houses and have replaced *nokpanthe* by School-cum-Church institutions, and the teacher's houses have been transformed into the centres of their religio-cultural and socio-political activities. Naturally, the authority of *nokma* is completely usurped by the pastors as religious leaders, and eroded to a great extent by the convert teachers as cultural leaders. This complex of teacher-pastor has brought in a new force of disintegration in the social fabric of the Garos, and the conflict will expand with the expansion of Christianity. Besides, unlike the *songsareks*, most of the Christian villages are cosmopolitan in character, as the Christian families of different *mahari* origin live together. This is evident in all new settlements as well as in town areas.

### *Contact with Bengali Culture*

In spite of the British-made barriers for isolation of the Garos, Bengali culture could still penetrate into the hill society due to frequent mutual contacts. Regular marketing between the Garos and the Bengalis, schooling of most of the elderly Garos in different institutions in Bengal and Assam, use of the Bengali script in the early years of Mission activities and employment of the Bengalees in the Government services under British rule in Garo Hills, imported a great influence in the Garo Society. The Garo language contains hundreds of Bengali words. Since independence, Garo life has come to be widely influenced both by Bengali and Assamese traits and culture. Most of the educated Garos now understand or know Hindi, Bengali or Assamese. But the change-over of script from Bengali to Roman in 1902 by the Missionaries, closed, for a practical purpose, the gateway to the wealth of the Bengali literature produced before, during and after the days of great Bengal turmoil and consequently to the natural inflow of her national and revolutionary ideas, because the Missionaries felt, *inter alia*, that "By using the Roman, the danger of absorbing much evil would be avoided". The Bengali and the Assamese minds would have come much nearer to the Garos' but for this retrogressive change of script.

The Garos are proverbially poor and depend on shifting cultivation on hill slopes. A plot is cultivated on slash-and-burn technique for two years and abandoned for a fresh one. They adopt mixed cropping, harvest different crops at different seasons, and avoid the risk of failure of any crop.

Population of the district, predominantly Garos, increased from 2,42,075 in 1951 to 3,07,288 in 1961 of which 2,39,747 were Garos. The rates of growth of population decadewise were 6.57% in 1931, 17.11% in 1941, 8.28% in 1951 and 26.91% in 1961. To this growth may be added nearly 40,000 Garo refugees from East Pakistan. 93.73% of the people are engaged in agriculture over a cultivable area of 7,49,372 Bighas. The average family holding and the per capita holding stand at 12.41 Bighas and 2.51 Bighas respectively. But in the interior places where mostly Garos live and thrive, the per capita landholding will be still less. That is why Garos are today under-employed though not landless. But, with the continuous coverage of hill after hill for shifting cultivation and the steady growth of population, per capita cultivable land will be diminishing and a section of the Garos will be almost landless.

Jhumming diminishes forest wealth, fertility, rainfall and soiltops of the hills and thus mixed cropping is rendered uneconomic and impossible. Moreover, holdings are scattered over different hills. The shifting of agricultural sites shifts the households and thus settled villages are unsettled at a recurring interval of two or three crop seasons. This shifting landcentric activities of the people who are yet but agricultural nomads, have rendered all possibilities

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of material development and progress impossible. Of course, it is a good sign that many of the Garos mostly Christians are now resorting to wet cultivation in the wet valleys and Plain areas. Terrace cultivation now-a-days is also not rare but this method of cultivation particularly involves a change of season for sowing, transplanting, harvesting and winnowing, and the technique contrasts directly with jhumming which is tied up closely with the tribal ways of life. Acceptance of this method thus ultimately gets the Garos accustomed to a system different from the traditional one and it changes surreptitiously the tribal attitudes and ways of life. Seasons of cyclic festivals correspond to those of Jhum cultivation and activities. But acceptance of the new method thus denies those festivals even to the non-Christians adopting wet cultivation. At least the force is feeble and tribalism is less.

These changes in technique at the first stage of transition have, however, carried with them, changes in the rights of individuals to land and in the socio-economic relation among the Garos, in all the areas switching over to wet cultivation. To the Garos, wet cultivation appeared so difficult of execution and incompatible with their ways of life—that, in majority of the cases, only far-sighted Christians are found moving to the wet valleys and plain areas to adopt this cultivation. This change has resulted in the steady growth of settled and cosmopolitan villages of diverse *mahari* origins having no traditional clan-bonds amongst the inhabitants and thus helped develop a broader outlook and wider perspective of rapidly changing order of things.

Most of the wealthier Garos living in an urban area have lands for permanent wet cultivation. This permanent occupation establishes permanent titles to land which is originally allotted by the *nokma* on the basis of the custom of holding lands for social uses only and not for individual household ownership. It therefore replaces social ownership of land by individual household ownership.

Due to the widening of marketing facilities, both the Christian and non-Christian Garos are developing extensive orchards of oranges, pineapples, areca palm, cashewnuts and bananas which necessitates permanent use of land for the respective purposes. Ownership of land thus gets concentrated through permanent use. In some areas Garos own lands more than they can cultivate, specially in the wet cultivation areas. They, therefore, hire labourers or let their lands out on shares to others—which when accentuated will pave the way of absentee ownership. The ownership pattern does nothing to break up these lands holdings. They stay intact, bring about concentration of ownership, wealth, inequality of income and a class division into the poor and the rich though not the exploiter and the exploited.

In the traditional society, the construction of any house and cultivation of plots of different families in a village used to be completed on the basis of mutual

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exchange of labour (BARA), on the principle of mutual help and *mahari* relation. Help and protection to a distressed person was the recognised responsibility of his mahari. All festivals being done with public participation, surplus wealth, if any, of individual household used to be spent away over all village members in merriment. Distribution of income thus is not unequal and the institution of labour purchase not in vogue. But the wet cultivation, mixed peopled villages, orchard development, economic depression and abject poverty have augmented concentration of land to individual household ownership, depreciated Mahari bond in mixed habitation, lessened mutuality in exchange of labour, increased transactions on labour, and developed deviations from traditional customs and practices. All these symptoms are visible more in the Christian sections of the Garo Society.

Changes in technique and occupation pattern are prompted earlier by Christianity and education, and reinforced by Government developmental expenditure later. The old basketry and pottery, belt looms, *machang* houses built of bamboos and woods bound with thin bamboo-strips without metal nails or wooden pegs, labour-intensive cultivation almost without money capital—are all being replaced by modern utensils not manufactured by the Garos, handlooms, Assam type buildings and Bengal type huts, plough and bullock cultivation with use of manures, and these are initiated mostly by the Christian Garos.

Shortage of Jhum land and increase in underemployment compelled the Garos to take up alternative or supplementary occupations like butchery, brewery, fuelwood selling, daily wage earning etc. The wholly agricultural families, the partly agricultural families and the families independent of agriculture in the district constitute respectively 78.58%, 7.08%, and 14.34% of the total families in the district according to an earlier estimate. Percentage of non-agricultural occupation holders increased from 4.9% in 1951 to 6.3% of the total population in 1961. Garos of Garo Hills love markets but not the business. Jute, cotton, ginger, chillies and other vegetables are sold, and essential and unavoidable things like salt, kerosene, dried fish are purchased. Transactions are more between Garos and non-Garos than among Garos themselves. But now refugee Garos introduced themselves as skilful businessmen and put themselves up as competitors of the neighbouring Muslim traders and the retailers. Literate Garos love to be office assistants or secure government employees. Many Garos are now acting as assistants and partners of a class of non-Garo contractors, shopkeepers, and sometimes act as middle-men or petty contractors in miscellaneous works. Beekeeping, fishery, horticulture, poultry-farming, sericulture, co-operative organisation and cottage industries have been duly introduced and encouraged as ancillary means of employment under B.D.O.s' supervision. But these could not thrive as a means of employment, because the Block Development Project, being too much multipurpose to serve any purpose, with the project officers as jacks of all trades to serve too many masters at a time, could do



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very little towards the right development of the farming. On the other hand, all these state-initiated projects made the people partly subsidy-minded and dependent on external factors. Keenly observed, the prospects of all these activities have rather been bleak since they fluctuate concomitantly with the amount of Government grants and subsidies given for the purpose. From all these activities, it is evident that the new forces released by the changing order of things and values have created a driving necessity even for these people to take to various avocations and professions of modern life to face the challenge of struggle for existence. This is but one side of the picture while the other side presents a grimmer view. A great majority of the vast illiterate mass who have so long been employed in agriculture in one or other form are gradually reduced to the status of landless daily wage earners due to steadily reducing fertility and consequential falling productivity as an evil of primitive jhumming. To augment the process is added the growth of population to a magnitude which the total area of cultivable land can hardly accommodate. As a result people are crowding increasingly to sell their labour in Block Development Areas, P. W. D. work-sites, and in town areas where it is possible. Expansion of educational facilities is nonetheless a potential factor which is also contributing to the gravity of the problem of unemployment which is clear and evident from the overwhelming number of job-seekers in different departments of government.

In the seventies of the 19th century Garos lost their sovereignty to the British who kept them in a closely guarded territorial isolation and the Garos tasted only illiteracy, economic depression and domination. Missionaries came and could train only a minor section of Garo minds, gave them a written language and a religion to lift them up from the traditional society. Independence of the country freed the Garos from isolation and foreign domination without their struggle for freedom, and gave them dual governments with divided and overlapping responsibilities. Songsarek Garos do not understand all these trends well, much less realise the implication of these changes.

The Christian Garos contribute to the present leadership in the district partly made of retired teachers and partly of the recently grown landed interests, both sustained by *mahari* sympathies and primary teachers' co-operation. All political parties including the Garo National Council, the strongest of all, are developed since independence. In case of not a few of the leaders, allegiance to a party is decided more by crisis of personal ambition or personal rivalry among emerging leaders or scope of rise than by any distinct political principles as we find in the case of the Congress, Communist or other political parties in India. No non-Christian has ever emerged as a leader so far. No political party ever cared to draw healthier elements from the more literate younger generation.

Till 1940 no club, no social organisation or association worth the name existed in Garo Hills. Now there exist a plethora of associations in Tura itself

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frequently with common members and over-lapping objects and interests. Garos are democratic but not always co-operative among themselves in the literate section of their society. The young Garos hardly remain united for long unless leadership is given to most of them.

Conversion to Christianity necessitates the denial of most of the crude customs and traditions of the old society—a change so sudden and sweeping that even the Christian section possibly could not adapt itself to the changed order of things perfectly and is found to bear all pangs of transition. Christianity wants to accept the new and leave the past, a past so deep-rooted in the Garos. But, though now in a state of thaw, they yet are not fully and perfectly prepared to accept Christian principle and tradition nor ready to discard old habits and practices. That is why drinking is wide spread in Christian society. Christian parents like the Songsareks neither support nor curse the occasional pre-marital pregnancy of girls but simply accept it as a matter of fact though it is contrary to the principles of Christianity.

Boys are more dependent in Christian society than in the old as the former is more authoritarian and hardly gives any avenue for individual initiative and investment whereas, songsarek bachelor-sons are given patches of land for individual cultivation and partly for personal use. On the other hand promiscuous mixing of boys and girls is more frequent, extensive and deeper among the Christian than the songsarek. The young Christians are more indifferent to studies and personal career than to individual freedom and a false standard of living unlike their counterpart in the plains. The primitive pattern of their society is said to be responsible for such pitiable indifference in them. On the other hand the Christian society in the making is developing symptoms of masculine predominance. With the gradual diminution of Jhum land and its productivity, the families of the non-heiress come to depend more on men-folk to build up their new respective households in their post-marriage dislocation from parents' families. Growing employment of the educated in non-agricultural sectors and in different government departments caused the families of the concerned employees to be away from their land and traditional bonds, and thus weaken the feminine predominance in the new society as men-folk are found more fit and predominant in the growing non-agricultural sectors of employment. Christianity, relatively more education of men-folk, evergrowing contact with the patriarchal people, the relative necessity of men-folk to face competition in a complex economy and other allied factors may be considered as preparing the grounds for the break-up.

The age-old seclusion of the Garos, dissimilar ethnic origin and social system, a century-old Christianity in the fabric of a tribal society, a pseudo-free environment under the indifferent British interests and allies, suddenly faced since independence the expansion of the governmental machineries which was

tasted by the Garos for the first time as the most authoritative, comprehensive and pervasive interference. The Garos also first came in contact with the non-Garos, mostly unaccustomed to moving with the totally different matriarchal people with pro-Western tradition of Christianity, acting as the agents of government, traders and as participants in all pursuits in Garo Hills. The Garos found themselves out of isolation all on a sudden and got a situation full of conflicting trends and tensions. Being backward they started suffering from a sense of being encircled by non-Garos and ruled by the non-Christian Plains people. Non-Garos speak with distaste of the proselytisation of the Garos to an alien religion preached by the Westerners in their own country. But Christianity is as much a result of imperialist policy and national apathy as it is a partial cause of differences and suspicion between the Garos and the Non-Garos. The Garos view the non-Garos as the overwhelming forces of governance, while the latter look upon the former as the dejectedly backward, away from Indian tradition and ethnic origin. In the context of this mutual mistrust Christianity is sometimes taken to be a defence and a deliverer of light and cause of unity among the enlightened. At least such is the trend of preaching among the converted Garos. So, a struggle for the greater scope of self determination started when Indian Constitution gave them autonomous District Council which could readily become the symbol of Garo aspiration, initiative and Garo nationalism which can rightly be called a misnomer for separatism, much at the expense of other tribal minorities. It is interesting to note that the forces of young generation and the dissident leaders do not endorse any joint venture for self determination with the Khasis, again for fear of future domination, though they are also Christian and matriarchal in faith and social pattern, respectively. The secluded backwardness of the Garos on the one hand, and incorrect and unintimate appraisal of the tribal problem by national leaders, their inappropriate attention, half-hearted sympathy and inaction on the other hand, were the causes of the mutual mistrust. Christianity should not be blamed solely as a denationalising agency. It arose out of historical reason when it had followed the British political forces as a supplementary process and as a force to complete the subjugation of the turbulent Garos. Its challenges and deficiencies, if any, are not made by any indigenous agency for developing and enlightening the Garos. In the midst of all these complexes and controversies, the great mass of non-convert Garos, it is interesting to note, are found to have been hardly noticed by any, just as they were kept hidden from the world in the pre-independence days. When and how the tribals can be uplifted and their causes promoted as a part of Indian body politic is a matter of guess and outside the scope of this article. We are however led to this presumption looking at the poor performance of the District Council and other existing political organisations in the field of *social reform*. The District Council, according to the idea of our Constitution-makers, perhaps, was ushered in in order to provide the tribal people a comparatively free scope to develop and progress according to their own genius without much outside interference and to attain a similar status as that of

their brethren in the vast plain. But the performance and achievement of this autonomous body lamentably lags behind the goal set for the purpose. It could not show that much of ingenuity and determination as was required to work out the process for elevating the status of the people. The first and foremost concern of the District Council should have been the social reforms for which the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution provided them the fullest scope but the Council leadership could not show that amount of boldness and courage which should be displayed by any social reformer. They on the contrary shrewdly avoided this essential and important field of reform for fear of losing popularity as well as of facing the crushing forces that were likely to be released at the initial stages. Consequently, the society is still there where it had been. Whether the internal and the external socio-economic and political forces by themselves will lift the entire Garo society from the morass of backwardness, traditionalism and pseudo-modernism is yet a matter of thorough research. But the considerable tension as arising out of disintegrating trends and crises in their society demands a prudently intensive attention and immediate redress of the same by the national leaders. Else the society may still suffer from wider cracks and develop the same in the national body-politic, ultimately deferring the progress, peace and stability of the Garo society in the making.

## **AN OUTLOOK FOR A BETTER UNDERSTANDING OF THE TRIBAL PEOPLE**

HRILROKHUM THIEK

### *Methods of Approach*

The fact that there has been endless trouble in the north-eastern part of our country is a matter of grave concern for every thinker. I feel sure that this is high time for the leaders from all walks of life to pay better attention to the developments which have threatened the integrity of the country and have, indeed, disturbed the peace of a land which won its independence by peaceful means. It is a paradox that after our fathers redeemed our nation by non-violence, we have now to take up arms to rule over it. Is it because every section of the people or individuals of the nation do not realize that they are the children of the soil and that they are independent? Is it because we fail to realize our responsibilities? Or, is it because of our failure to make them responsible? It is indeed high time to think more deeply about the critical situation in which we are placed. The root cause of our irresponsible behaviour and action needs to be found out.

Today, everybody is aware of the condition in which we have been placed but may not realize the fact behind the scene. We may easily talk about a bright future which is not so easy to achieve. Our experience has been such that in spite of the various promises and plans of development, the problem the nation is facing becomes more and more complicated. Even the seemingly small problems cannot be solved so easily. Stern actions are not necessarily the best means to peace and concord. If better weapons need to be manufactured for the present day's fighting, greater skill and improved methods of approach to practical problems must be employed in the social and political set-up of the country. Especially, when we approach the hills people we must abandon our presumptions, assumptions and apprehensions. Above all, love and a real concern can never be surpassed by arms or anything else in the consolidation of a nation. If we have committed any mistake we must admit it first. If there is misunderstanding we ought to clarify sincerely and patiently.

### *Limited Knowledge*

I feel sure that an assembly of this nature (the Seminar) is very important

at this juncture. It is true that our knowledge of the different communities is limited to books written by foreigners. Practical knowledge of the prevailing situation is necessary. The knowledge of the history of the tribal people will not be sufficient today. The social life and culture of the tribal people is rapidly changing. The most important thing to know is their sentiments. Unless you know the sentiments of the present generation you cannot deal with them. Your historical knowledge or even anthropological knowledge of the people will not be of much help in dealing with their social and political issues. Our country is unique in that it embraces so many races, tribes, languages and dialects and religions. And it is for this reason that greater energy and effort have to be spent for the consolidation of our nation. But if we fail to harmonize all these, the turmoil will be immeasurable. Unless you master the chord you cannot harmonize the music.

Mutual understanding is undoubtedly the urgent and impending necessity for us all. Moreover, the country needs to remain secular in the true sense and implication of the term. Otherwise, minorities will naturally feel like strangers. When minorities are not happy, the whole country cannot be happy just as the whole body suffers when a part of the body is wounded. It is unfortunate that the minds of many hills people have been injured. What the nation has failed to do is to promote mutual understanding and personal contacts between different communities. We speak of brotherhood and love but we live like strangers with some reservations in our minds. You cannot win people until you remove your misconceptions and suspicion. So long as a man has a bad impression about you and until you win his confidence there is no hope of your winning him. Unless and until you can have an intimate personal contact with the man you may not expect to establish a permanent brotherhood. Your friendliness is very shallow and has no root. Until and unless you develop a good understanding of one's peculiar ways of life and thinking which are natural to him and be able to accommodate them, you cannot live with him peacefully. When you win the heart of a man you win his person. In view of all these considerations, I would like to put forward the following facts for your information. I am glad that we have this opportunity to reason together.

### 1. *Religion*

As a religious man and as one of the Church leaders in Assam I would like to say something about religion. It is needless to lay much stress on the fact that the history of mankind begins with religion. There is no nation or tribe in the human society without a religion of some form or another. Even the savage tribes, whether they be cave-dwellers or bushmen representing a very primitive form of existent human life, cherish some religious aspirations, beliefs and practices. Even before Christianity came into the hill areas, the

tribal people were very religious. I need not discuss the form of religion they cherished.

Religion often plays a very important role in the social and political life of a nation. Or, at least, it cannot be neglected. As such, religious issues must be handled carefully and sincerely. I have heard many people say that India is the land of the Hindus. It is true that the great majority of the Indians are Hindus. But to say that Hindusthan is the land of the Hindus and the Hindu concept and practices should be nationalized or imposed on the people whether they are Christians or Muslims, is a very wrong proposition. You may say that those who say like this are foolish or ignorant. Well, it is the foolish or ignorant people who often disturb peace. We must admit that such propaganda, though not official, has injured the minds of many of our hill brethren.

If the Hindus, just because of their great majority, try to make India their own, what will others think about themselves? They will naturally feel like strangers and being discriminated against. I have heard many people say that Christianity is a foreign religion, the religion of the Western people. If you cannot separate a man from his religion and culture, you just make him a foreigner. If any religious person wants to spread and propagate his faith let him do it freely in good faith but not on the ground of its (religion's) being indigenous or exotic. Such intricate issues cannot be ignored in a secular independent State like India where there are so many peoples having different social, cultural and religious background. No section or tribe should be allowed to feel that it is being discriminated against or dominated.

## 2. *Culture*

As regards the culture of the tribal communities in North East India, I would like to talk about a group of people who are often called Tibeto-Burmans of the Kuki-Chin group by anthropologists. I am not quite sure about this nomenclature. Undoubtedly, most of the hill tribes bear some Mongolian traits. This can be noticed even by ordinary people. However, ethnology or terminology is not my interest here. My interest will be confined to the changes that have taken place in the tribal culture and usage and to the understanding of their neighbouring non-tribals concerning this fact. The main reason for such changes is that a few decades ago the tribal people were very backward.

Culture devoid of the essential elements of civilization was often subjected to external forces. Moreover, they were very receptive and at the same time, adaptive. Most of the customs were never codified. As such, there have been slight changes in the customs and practices with the passing of time. However, the distinctive customs and usages are preserved. We are not sorry for the in-

evitable changes because some of the bad practices had to be abolished and the culture of the uncultured people needed to be reformed or modified. Many social workers and public leaders are conscious of the need of preserving their customs and are now trying to promote their culture.

Such changes, I am afraid, may be easily misunderstood and have led many writers to distort the true picture of many tribal communities. Someone may think that such changes were brought about due to the influence of the foreign Missionaries. Such an impression or assumption is not completely wrong. The changes are quite obvious. But one should not have the impression that such influences or changes have destroyed the tribal culture. It is rather an admirable fact that a real life has been imparted to the social structure of many tribal people. The marvellous work done by the Missionaries cannot be ignored, though one or two among hundreds might be involved in political affairs. They were the people who delivered many tribal people from barbarism.

Before the Gospel was preached and before their areas were finally conquered by the British, they led a very primitive form of life. They were constantly warring against one another. So, they were often called 'head-hunters' because they were actually hunting human heads. In such a society culture was really absent. Without education and literature there could be no culture. As modern civilization began to dawn, the evil practices of the people began to disappear. And now, many of our hill brothers want to improve their culture and cultivate better ways of life.

### *3. Literature and Education*

Literature and education came to be known among the hills people in north-east India during the closing decades of the nineteenth century. My own people, the Hmars, remained in the dark till the beginning of the second decade of the twentieth century. No one had the slightest idea of literature and education. Literature was introduced with the Roman script by the pioneer Missionaries. Everybody will be happy to know that literacy among the tribal people now is considerably high. But it was not possible for the Missions to impart higher education to the people. The tribal literature needs to be improved. The standard of education needs to be raised.

Most of the children even now are brought up in Mission or Church schools in which vernaculars are used as the medium of instruction at the primary stage. Many other children who are in Government institutions have to adopt English and other Indian languages which are as foreign as English to them. We have been requesting the State Governments of Assam and Manipur for about ten years to approve the school text books written by our educated



people. But so far we have been disappointed and many writers have been rather discouraged.

You can imagine the standard of education of many tribal boys and girls who have their primary education in English or other languages which are foreign to them. Many children resort to memorizing everything including mathematics. I am telling you this from my own experience both as a student brought up in a Manipuri school and as a Headmaster now in a Christian High School. As for me, I am one of the few blessed ones. Without literature we cannot uplift people. The Government has done very little to promote the literature of the tribal people. On the contrary, many have been led to feel they are being neglected or ignored as far as literature is concerned.

The State Governments sometimes encouraged some writers and translators by giving them subsidies. But unless the books they have produced can be approved for use, so much expense of money, time and energy becomes a mere waste. As regards higher education, it is needless to say that Government has been very kind to help the tribal students in the form of stipends and scholarships. This is not forgotten. It is hoped that something will be done to reassure the hills people of the Government's interest in tribal welfare.

#### *4. Material Culture and Tribal Economy*

The tribal people are economically very backward. Majority of them are engaged in agriculture and most of them practise shifting method of cultivation or jhuming which is very primitive and unscientific. Only a few of the hills people practise wet paddy cultivation. In the past, the tribal people produced enough food stuff and were self-sufficient. But as there is no improvement in the method of cultivation in many areas, the food problem has become very precarious. The total produce can no longer meet the need of the growing population. Famine has been prevailing in many hill areas for a number of years. Very little has yet been done to improve the tribal economy. For lack of proper communications the various development schemes have not been materialised in many areas. As a matter of fact, many are left at the mercy of nature. In some areas terrace cultivation can be practised on a large scale. Especially in the districts of Cachar and the United Mikir and North Cachar Hills there are still many places where wet or terrace cultivation can be introduced. The people need to be encouraged and properly instructed. The development works done in these areas are very unsatisfactory.

Gardening comes next to agriculture. Orange and pineapple are produced in large quantities in some areas. Besides these, sesame, yam (or kachu), ginger, cotton, chilly, etc. are also grown. But as the small markets in the areas cannot

absorb all the produce, the economic condition is very unstable. Before independence, most of the produce were exported to East Bengal but now the fruits are sold only in the local markets. In some areas, many fruits are left to be rotten or eaten by animals due to lack of marketing facilities.

I am expressing my personal observation of things. I am not a politician, but a religious person and a lover of peace and concord. Many people today seem to forget that they have been freed from foreign domination. They fail to acknowledge their freedom and thus continue to fight for freedom and independence. Many others seem to misunderstand their freedom and want to do whatever they like and thus wrongly apply their right of duty. They know their liberty but not their responsibility as a free people. Such groups of people can never meet together without the spirit of love and self-sacrifice. Many others are now on the cross-roads. The nation is, as it were, facing two frontiers within her own country.

In my opinion, the political troubles and discontentment of many hills people have been deeply rooted in the social structure of these people. Religious aspirations and apprehensions also have some place in the political development. It will be more and more difficult to meet and solve problems unless we have a thorough knowledge of our people. Our knowledge should not be limited to the tribal arts, customs and practices. We ought to know the line of thought they have taken, or how they have trained their minds. We must understand their mental development and their innate ideas and sentiments. Most of the tribal people are, by nature, sentimental and sensitive. They are simple and very straightforward. The method of approach employed to meet people and their problems should always be practical as well as practicable.

In this respect, I am afraid, mistakes have sometimes been committed. Instead of healing, the wounds are often hit. The vulnerability of the feeling of the tribal people should never be forgotten. Our information must be first-hand and genuine so that our understanding of things may be genuine. It is high time for us all to perceive what forces are actually working in the minds of the different communities of the nation. Are we now ready, as a matter of fact, to recognize the barriers which separate the people of the plains and the hills? Can we now honestly say that we are ready to pull down such barriers? If so, we have to educate the general public in all walks of life and in different ranks. The good spirit and sincerity of the individual leaders will not suffice for the need of the nation.

As for the leaders of the nation, love and patience become the indispensable means of approach to the immense task which has befallen them. Peace cannot be achieved without the spirit of love and self-sacrifice. It is always easier to hit the wound than to heal it. It is not difficult to soil clear water but to get it pure

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again you have to wait patiently until the sediments have settled again. So is the nature of human existence. Our leaders need to acquire a true understanding of things and their development. Then and then only, can they rightly and tully deal with the people concerned. The politically immature people will come forward when we are able to live peacefully and keep pace with every class of our society in the path of progress.

I am thankful to the sponsors of the Seminar for offering me an opportunity to talk so much about the tribal people. I hope our efforts will not be in vain.

# PROBLEMS OF INTEGRATION AND ADMINISTRATION

P. N. LUTHRA

Adviser to the Governor of Assam

## *An Isolated People*

When inaugurating the Hills and Plains Festival at Shillong over 12 years ago, a distinguished Governor had observed: "Every flower has the right to grow according to its own laws of growth; has the right to enrich and develop its own colour and form and to spread its own fragrance to make up the cumulative beauty and splendour of the garden. I would not like to change my roses into lilies nor my lilies into roses. Nor do I want to sacrifice my lovely orchids and rhododendrons of the hills."

A similar sentiment was expressed by the present Prime Minister, Shrimati Indira Gandhi, when she visited Nagaland 8 years ago. She was addressing a gathering of Nagas at Kohima when she noticed the rich tapestry of shawls worn by the audience. She picked on the simile of shawl and said that just as its woven designs comprised various colours and geometrical shapes, similarly the people in India offered a variety of diverse cultures which unitedly, built the rich tapestry of India.

The late Prime Minister, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru in his book "Unity of India", laid stress on the geographical entity of our motherland. According to him, India was a single country because of her political relief and geography. Although her people professed scores of languages, dialects, religions or cultures, yet they were one people in a common home. While in the rest of the world, nations had been carved on linguistic or cultural basis, India from time immemorial retained her unitary character as a nation. At various periods of history, people from far-off lands came to India either by choice or under pressure and merged into the main stream of Indian life. Such waves of migrations helped to enrich the variety of India. For scores of centuries, this ancient land had spread the gospel of love and brotherhood and it is this tradition which had rendered strangers into comrades.

At this Seminar on Hills and Plains we are immediately concerned with a migration of people which took place a few centuries ago. These people now inhabit the hilly terrain of Assam region. They are called tribal people whose entry into this part of India, in the context of history, is very recent. These people, on entry, must have found the hills devoid of habitation; they must have found the hill terrain physically isolated from the populated valleys further down. These hill people came to form forest colonies in whose vegetative luxuri-

ance they remained screened from the rest of the country. Outlets from these forest colonies must have been negligible even in terms of foot-tracks with the result that these people remained isolated. They had their own language, their own religious faith and customary law to regulate their life. Their virtues and human values grew through a process of empirical evolution. Nevertheless, they lived in the geographical wholeness of India although they may not have known what this great country comprised or stood for.

### *Under British Rule*

Historical records show that the Ahom rulers of the Assam valley came into frequent contact with these hill tribes and there were examples of cordial relations between the two. The decaying power of the Ahoms was succeeded by the British at the turn of the 19th century. The British, a vigorous race, who had come from thousands of miles to India had not yet lost their quest for more land. Thus practically the entire 19th century is replete with accounts of expeditions of exploration into these hill areas to contact these people and to bring them under their sway. This process of exploration and extension of administration continued practically throughout the 19th century and the first two decades of the 20th century. Gradually, administrative units were carved out of these hill areas and the normal district pattern of administration under the Political Officers was installed. However, during the British regime, it was only the British officer of the Civil and Army services who had the privilege to serve in these areas. Contact of these people with the rest of the Indian people remained negligible except for commercial relations. The venue for barter transactions between the hill people and those in the plains was generally that fringe of territory which separates the two. The hill people had no opportunity to penetrate further deep into the plains and the same could be said of the plainsmen who had no occasion to adventure into the interior of the hills on any appreciable scale. Thus the picture at the time when India gained independence in 1947 was that these hill areas had little or no consciousness of what India stood for or her diverse people or their independence movement which the leaders of the nation had launched against the British rulers.

### *Nehru on the Tribals*

The early years after 1947 were those of stock-taking and the delineation of policy as to how these people may be brought into the main stream of Indian life and how their under-developed condition may be ameliorated towards social and economic advance. The late Prime Minister, Pandit Nehru, gave considerable thought to this vital policy. The essence of his policy which was later translated into action was that whereas every effort should be made to extend

social services such as hospitals, schools and the like to these people, under no circumstances should the workers go to these people with an air of superiority or the ardour of reformers. He wanted the Government staff to go with affection and respect in their hearts for the entire phenomena of tribal life. He wanted us to look upon them as another mode of living just as there existed so many other modes in other parts of our country. He emphasized the many virtues of tribal life such as the excellence of their cottage industries, their code of mutual behaviour and their zest for a life free from care and anxiety. It was carefully laid down that there should not be even a suggestion of imposing anything on these people and that no change in their pattern of life should be brought about by outside endeavour. The pace of work of the social services should be in tune with the capacity of people to absorb or accept it. And above all, the then Prime Minister emphasized that we should not enter these areas with any doctrinaire approach.

### *Bureaucratic Attitude*

On the administration of tribal areas, a good deal has been written and this subject has raised many impassioned controversies. The anthropologists with their scientific and sociological theories have striven to say that the tribal folk are a distinct and separate section of humanity. Their approach no doubt flows from an understanding of and sympathy with these people but in between the lines can be read a certain romanticization of subjects of their study. The administrators on the other hand, and particularly of the standard type who think of populations as raw material for the application of rules and regulations, have contended that the tribal people did not call for any special treatment. To them, these people were like anyone else living in different environment but under the same Constitution of the country and wedded to the destiny of that country. They advocated that it was the people who must change to fall in line with the normal pattern so that their economic progress and the right of citizenship may be protected under the usual rules. There was an element of coercion in this administrative approach wherein the emphasis was on change amongst the tribal people with laws remaining the same. The administrators of such stereotyped attitude had a coldness and rigidity of outlook and also total absence of imagination towards a people whose values were on a different plane.

### *The Missionaries*

We then had another category of the so-called social workers and particularly those from religious institutions. They were motivated by an acute religious fervour. Branding these people as pagans, the religious missions felt uneasy to see that there should be a colony of humanity who did not subscribe to the

organized faiths. To them, the tribal people appeared as lost souls ; lost in every way, lost in spirit and lost in the sense that they had lagged behind the common man who enjoyed the benefits of modern technology. They looked upon tribal dress, tribal mode of living and eating habits as insanitary and primitive. So these religious missions took it upon themselves to uplift these people not only materially but also to work for their spiritual salvation and launched into the tribal areas a twin programme of material aid through medical treatment and educational schools on the one hand and of conversion to their own religious faiths on the other.

### *Misplaced Premise*

The three categories mentioned above had one thing in common among them in that all of them held extremist views according to their own lights. The thinking of each one of them stemmed from a misplaced premise. The administrator and the social worker considered the tribal folk as strange phenomena of quaint customs, astonishing rituals and grotesque sense of dress and custom. At the basis of such an approach lay an element of intolerance in their minds. This intolerance prevented them from appreciating that there could yet be another pattern of living to enrich the prevailing variety. They had one thing in common in that each of them strove to change the tribal people in their own image. This theory has grave defects and can be condemned for more than one reason. First, it inhibits the right of tribal people to grow according to their own genius. Secondly, it treats them as if they are an inert mass or some kind of an ore full of imperfections that has to be purified and treated chemically like organic matter in a laboratory. Finally, it can be denounced on the ground of intolerance itself which could not permit another social pattern or cultural group to sustain itself as a part of God's infinite riches in His kingdom of life.

And yet, for the advancement of tribal people and to bring them out of their forest habitat into the bigger world of our country, we need all the three categories. We need the anthropologists who have a major role to play in the study of indigenous social patterns and to interpret them objectively. We need the administrators because in the social welfare State of India, the benefits of economy must travel to every man in the sense that it is not the people who should go to the Planning Commission but that organs of the Planning Commission should reach every homestead. And finally, we must have the social workers who like the administrators are concerned with economic development and the extension of welfare services with the difference that the social worker has the advantage of carrying something more than mere medicines or school books ; he carries with him human love and compassion and companionship whereby man approaches another in kindred spirit.

*The Correct Approach*

The essence of our attitude towards these people lies in the fact that we should regard them as another cultural group. This should not be a negative trend of mind but should be fired with enthusiasm ; enthusiasm in the sense that we should rejoice that another variety of people have been discovered. The enthusiasm should be of the same magnitude as of a mountaineer who suddenly discovers that there are other mountain peaks to climb. The difference, however, should be that the enthusiasm should not mean that there is a mission of some conquest like that mountaineer but to see another component of human culture which has hitherto remained undiscovered. The enthusiasm should be motivated for a new way of living. They should go to such areas with humility to learn more about human beings ; they should go with respect for another mode of living. They must not go there to change what exists or to impose another system but to extend to the people the accepted benefits of science which in common parlance are known as welfare services, so that these people may have better nourishment, better sanitation and renewed opportunity to see a bigger world through the development of communications or through the written word. We must go to these people with a flexibility of mind and be prepared to change our rules of behaviour and laws of conduct and so flex and adapt them that these may fit in comfortably with the local usages.

*A New Synthesis*

We should not strive towards any deliberate change of these people. They will change in their own way for, indeed, there is a change taking place in each one of us every day. The important thing, however, is that we must guide the change along healthy and productive lines. We must, therefore, strive to preserve the basic spiritual qualities of these people which are reflected in their joy of life, in their utter truthfulness, in their love for music and in their capacity to breathe free air. They are free from boredom, from neurosis and from competition whereby man comes into conflict with another. Such virtues must be preserved as indeed their aesthetic sense symbolized in the rich harmony of their designs and colour in their home-spun textiles or in the exquisite figurines of their wood carvings or in the artistic architectural designs of their living abodes. Without any effort we will see a phenomenon of synthesis being touched off when the two sets of human beings meet each other. We have to make sure that this synthesis has all the vigour and nobility of human attributes. The entire social history of India is a synthesis between the peoples who lived in this land with the many who came from outside. True to tradition, we should look forward to another pattern of synthesis with the tribal folk to enrich the variety of our country.



The grave mistake which all of us might make out of misplaced enthusiasm would be to continue to look upon these people as different. As said earlier, there is no doubt that these people have a different mode of living and need special treatment. But we must not persist with the words 'different' and 'special' interminably. Ultimately, our mind must be flexible enough to treat them as another community which in gradual stages will find a synthesis with the main stream of human life.

It is for this reason that I would humbly request the organizers of this admirable Seminar not to lay too much stress on the phrase 'Hills and Plains' as if we have created a meeting place for two antipodes. In fact this Seminar should strive towards the elimination of such words which broaden the cleavage and intensify the consciousness that those different today will remain as such in future.

A few practical points as might help the integration of hill people are suggested below :

*Suggestions for Integration*

1. The various State Governments may offer scholarships to the tribal people for education in leading institutions in the State. For example, Shantiniketan might award a few scholarships to the boys and girls of NEFA as such education will help them to absorb the great spirit of the founder, Rabindranath Tagore.

2. The experiment of inter-State living should be extended to all States. The scheme should permit boys and girls of NEFA to live with the families in West Bengal. The NEFA people in return may invite West Bengal boys and girls to live in the villages of NEFA.

3. Social workers from the advanced areas may be carefully selected to proceed to NEFA where they may extend social welfare services in various ways such as running dispensaries or schools or teach dance and music or extend the message of oneness of man and oneness of God.

4. Facilities may be extended by the advanced States in the way of rest-houses etc. where the visiting NEFA people may be able to stay.

5. Eminent medical surgeons or specialists from the advanced States may tour NEFA during their holidays or leisure to treat serious cases. Such visiting doctors may provide eye treatment, dental treatment or surgical operations, in fact, treatment which the NEFA administration cannot provide from its own resources.

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6. Inter-State sports tournaments should be organised as a regular feature in which tribal people should be invited to take regular part every year.

7. Exchange of cultural troupe between States and the tribal areas.

8. Special coaching facilities to be provided by the advanced States, for example, West Bengal may select a promising football player from NEFA for training in West Bengal.

9. The people of advanced States may accept boys and girls from NEFA for teaching them new techniques. For example, the villages in West Bengal have fish ponds ; could a few NEFA villagers not be accepted in West Bengal villages where they could learn the technique of fish culture? Such exchange of knowledge would be between people and people and not a Government programme. For emotional integration, we should keep the Government out as much as possible and let the contacts grow between the people on two sides.

10. Extension of facilities by the advanced States for craft training for which the NEFA people have aptitude.

11. Provision of fellowship in States so that scholars may go to the tribal areas and vice versa to study each other's sociology, economics and culture. At present, many scholars come from the United States of America to India for such studies. Surely we can have such programme amongst our own people so that the various constituents of India may get to know each other more and more. It is strange, on many occasions, when trying to discover written material on various parts of India, we have to seek the material produced by foreign writers or consult foreign authorities.

# HILLMEN OF NORTH-EAST INDIA AND TENSIONS OF SOCIO-ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

B. K. RAY BURMAN

Under the hill areas of North-East India are included the Darjeeling district of West Bengal, the Autonomous Hill Districts of Assam (consisting of Garo, United Khasi and Jaintia hills, United Mikir and North Cachar hills, and Mizo hills); North Eastern Frontier Agency (consisting of Kameng Frontier Division, Subansiri Frontier Division, Siang Frontier Division, Lohit Frontier Division and Tirap Frontier Division); Nagaland (consisting of Tuensang district, Mokokchung district and Kohima district); hill areas of Manipur covering about 90% of the total area of the Union Territory of Manipur and hill areas of Tripura covering about 60% of the Union Territory of Tripura. Except in Darjeeling district, Manipur and Tripura, the people belonging to scheduled tribes, constitute 75% to 98% of the entire population. In Manipur and Tripura also, if the hill areas are separately considered, persons belonging to the scheduled tribes, constitute practically the whole of the population in those areas. In Darjeeling district the people belonging to the scheduled tribes constitute 15.44% of the total population. The bulk of the population in the hill areas of Darjeeling are Nepalese. There are, however, a number of communities, which are included in the Nepalese ethnic constellation, but which have tribal characteristics.

In the post-independence period, a massive programme of development of the hill areas has been undertaken, both under the general sector as well as the special sector of tribal welfare. The following data will give an idea of the types and extent of such developmental activities.

## *Communication*

In the hill areas of Assam whereas in 1950-51 there were 2,400 kms of village roads, in 1962-63 there were 11,700 kms of village roads; therefore, there has been an expansion of about 488 per cent. The significance of this will be obvious if compared with the expansion of the village roads in the plains of Assam. In 1950-51 there were 12,200 kms of village roads in the plains of Assam. In 1962-63 it was 25,800 kms. The expansion was therefore, slightly more than 100%.

In NEFA in 1947 there were only 3 main jeepable roads, viz., Pasighat to Kobo (22 miles), Sadiya-Tezu-Denning (48 miles), Still Well Road (25 miles). After independence, highest priority has been given to expansion of communica-

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tion. Now the headquarters of all the frontier divisions have been connected by jeepable roads. Altogether 730 miles of roads, 400 miles of mule paths and 2,130 miles of porter tracks have been constructed during 1951-52 to 1963-64. Besides, 14 airfields/light plane strips were in commission in 1962-63.

In Nagaland, in August 1957, there were altogether 220 miles of three-tonner road, 15-Cwt. and jeepable roads. Against these, in March 1960 there were 222 miles of three-tonner road, 351 miles of 15-Cwt. road and 416 miles of jeepable road. Besides there were 308 miles of mule paths.

In the hill areas of Manipur and Tripura also there have been phenomenal expansion of road construction work.

### *Medical and Public Health*

In the matter of provision of medical and health facilities very good progress has been made in most of the hill areas. In Assam, in 1950-51, per lakh of population there were 4.21 hospitals in the hills and 4.69 hospitals in the plains. Thus, the position was slightly better in the plains at the time. But in 1963-64 per lakh of population there were 11.51 hospitals in the hills and 5.93 hospitals in the plains. Thus progress in the hills was much greater than in the plains.

In Nagaland diseases such as malaria are fairly wide spread. Leprosy is found in certain areas. T.B. seems to be on the increase especially in the neighbourhood of the town areas. V.D. is found but sparingly and that too only in the urban areas and in certain localities in the interior. Dispensaries and hospitals have been established in the more important administrative centres from where modern method of treatment is extended to neighbouring areas as far as practicable. It has been found that in spite of the political trouble in the Naga Hills, the doctors and other medical workers could freely move about among the people and do their work.

In NEFA there were only 13 health units in 1947. In 1963-64 there were 90 hospitals, dispensaries, or health units, 55 DDT spraying teams and 3 leprosy colonies.

In Manipur the number of dispensaries have increased from 2 in 1949-50 to 30 in 1959-60. There is, however, acute shortage of doctors and many hospitals are without doctors.

In Tripura there is some incidence of leprosy and V.D. Medical facilities are being extended progressively in the tribal areas also.

### *Drinking Water*

There is great demand for drinking water facilities among the people of all the hill areas. In Assam during the third plan Rs. 19 lakhs was allotted for the provision of drinking water facilities. But as a result of the pressing demands of the hillmen Rs. 14.09 lakhs were spent.

In Tripura whereas Rs. 0.9 lakhs were allotted in the third plan, the actual expenditure was 1.50 lakhs.

In Nagaland, it appears that much progress could not be made because of paucity of fund.

In Manipur water supply to important hill stations like Churachandpur, Tadubi and Tamenglong has been improved. In 1960 work for the improvement of 123 water points had been taken up.

### *Education*

In the field of education a most spectacular progress has been made in most of the hill areas. In 1950-51, there were 1,115 primary schools in the hill districts. In 1963-64 the number was 3,363. Thus, the expansion was 210.6%. This can be compared with the expansion in the plains where the corresponding figures are 10,113 and 16,091. Hence the expansion is 59.1%. In the secondary stage also there has been more rapid expansion of school facilities in the hill areas of Assam compared to plain areas. But percentage of enrolment in secondary stage is relatively better in the plain areas than in the hill areas. In 1963-64, 64.4% and 55.4% of the children of school-going age in the hills and plains respectively were enrolled in the primary stage. But in the secondary stage the corresponding figures were 13.7% and 17.4% respectively.

In NEFA there were only 2 lower primary schools in 1947. In 1964 there were 7 high schools, 25 middle schools, 175 lower primary schools, 1 basic school and 4 nursery schools.

### *Agriculture*

In the field of agriculture also a programme of rapid development has been taken up in all the hill areas. The main problem of agriculture in all the hill areas except in Darjeeling district centres round shifting cultivation. The bulk of the population in all these areas depend mainly on this method of cultivation. It is considered uneconomic ; an estimate made by the agricultural officers in

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Mizo hills shows that whereas in wet cultivation 20 mds. of paddy can be grown per acre, in shifting cultivation only 15 mds. can be grown. Besides the low yield, shifting cultivation poses another very important problem, viz., that of soil erosion. Various steps have been taken in the different hill areas for regulation of shifting cultivation, encouragement of settled cultivation and soil conservation. Among these, particular mention is to be made of terracing of hill slopes, horticulture and resettlement of shifting cultivators in areas where facilities of wet cultivation are readily available. Though the impact of these programmes is not always very encouraging, it appears that there is a general awareness among the hillmen that shifting cultivation is ultimately wasteful.

### *Income Level*

Recently an assesment of the impact of the various development programmes for one of the hill areas viz., the hill areas of Assam, has been made by a Commission appointed by the Government of India. According to it, the total allocation of national income in 1950-51 was Rs. 18.78 crores in the hill areas and Rs. 235.66 crores in the plains of Assam. The corresponding figures for 1961-63 were Rs. 40.67 crores and 361.80 crores respectively. Though similar estimates are not readily available in respect of the other hill areas, there is no doubt that in the other hill areas also the result of the developmental activities must have been reflected in the level of income.

### *Dissatisfaction Persists*

In the context of the above factors one would expect that there would be a great sense of satisfaction among the hill people about the improvements that have been brought about in their conditions of life. But it appears that the actual position is not exactly so. There is a good number of people in all the hill areas who did not make any secret of their discontent about the developments in the hill areas and it appears that such persons have considerable influence over the hill people. In Garo hills and Khasia and Jayantia hills an influential section of the local population under the guidance of All Parties Hill Leaders' Conference are demanding that the hill areas of Assam should be taken out to constitute a separate Hill State within the Indian Union. In Naga hills for a long time a section of the Nagas was carrying on violent hostile activities for attaining a sovereign Naga State outside the Indian Union. In Mizo Hills recently, violent hostile activities have started with the same aim. In the hill areas of Manipur a section of the tribal population is demanding that a separate sovereign State called Chinland should be constituted by taking out contiguous territories from Burma, Pakistan and India. In NEFA, sections of the local people are demanding that they should be more associated with

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the local administration and that Part 'A' of the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution should be applied to NEFA. In Tripura, sometime back some sections of the tribals under the leadership of the Eastern India Tribal Union demanded some sort of autonomy for the hill areas. In Darjeeling also there is a section of people who would like the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution to be applied there.

In view of the fact that a good deal of developmental activities have been undertaken in the hill areas, though much still remains to be done, many in the country are painfully surprised at these expressions of unhappiness on the part of their brethren in the hill areas. There is a tendency among some to brush away these postures of dissensions as being manoeuvred by power-loving unscrupulous individuals or by persons who are under foreign influence. Again there is a tendency among some to over-simplify the situation by stating that the ignorant hillmen are being misguided by a rising class of ambitious capitalists among the tribals. It is, however, felt that this sort of catchy explanation, though superficially attractive, does not provide any information about what is really happening in the hill areas. There are a number of complex factors which are responsible for the expressions of discontent by some sections of hillmen in North East India. It is not proposed here to make an exhaustive list of the same. Some of the more important factors are however indicated below :—

1. Strain of integration,
2. Consolidation of international border,
3. Partition and consequent dislocations,
4. Strain of economic development,
5. Externalization of internal conflicts, and
6. Other factors.

The above factors are briefly amplified below :—

### 1. *Strain of Integration*

It is to be appreciated that in the past, the people in most of the hill areas remained practically aloof from the main current of the national life. Their contacts with the people of the plains were mainly for purposes of trade and commerce. There were, of course, political and social contacts during different periods. But, just when the process of stabilization of such contacts started, this region came under the control of the British, who pursued a policy of closing the hill areas completely or partially to the rest of the nation. With independence the barriers of contact have disappeared. But because of the fact that the hill areas and the plains developed differently mainly during the British period, the problem of adjustment has come in.

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The Constitution of India by making special provisions for protection of rights of the people with diverse traditions has undoubtedly facilitated the process of adjustment. But it is to be appreciated that the meaning of the Constitution grows through how it is put into practice. Sometimes the hill people appear to entertain some misgivings. They point out that though India is committed to the creation of a secular democracy, sometimes the image of secularism is blurred in actual practice. In support, they point out that symbols of Hinduism are not infrequently associated with the State functions. Recently one tribal leader was pointing out that when Sadhus in Delhi could make use of certain provisions of the Constitution to rouse the Hindu sentiment to bring pressure on the Government to consider seriously whether there should be complete ban against cow-slaughter, it is difficult for them (the tribals) to feel assured that in spite of formal commitment to secularism, there will not be any imposition on their culture and tradition.

### *Missionaries' Role*

Against expressions of such misgivings by certain sections of the hillmen it is pointed out by many in the country, some of whom are not Hindus, that the misgivings are not genuine and that these are engineered by foreign Missionaries.

It is not unnatural for the Indians to entertain suspicion about the roles of the foreign Missionaries in the hill areas. It is to be remembered that when entry in the hill areas was restricted for the people of the plains, the foreign Missionaries were allowed to function in those areas. Their association with the foreign Government was too close to be ignored.

But it would be wrong to consider that the people of the hills are merely tools in the hands of the foreign Missionaries. Sociological studies in some of the hill areas show that even though the hillmen have adopted Christianity, there is a continuous interaction between the tenets of Church and the local traditions. In an Ao village, in Nagaland, a Christian missionary was made to pay a fine of Rs. 50/- for publicly disparaging the Ao tradition of origin from six stones.

It would be better if it is understood by the rest of the country that Christianity in the hills has struck its root in the soil and that the hillmen have minds of their own.

### *Infra-Nationalism*

Many of the hill communities are today in the stage of casting away their



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tribal past and are groping for greater traditions. This phase may be described as the phase of infra-nationalism, a phase of search for new symbols which would bind the community on the one hand and bring the community on the other in consonance with the values of modern science, technology and humanism. This phase is to be differentiated from sub-nationalism in which there is general awareness and acceptance of the symbols of the nation, though at the same time the parochial symbols and interests also persist.

There is no reason why a community in the phase of infra-nationalism would not adopt the larger symbols of the nation. It all depends on how and in what way the symbols of the nation are presented to the community concerned. In other words it depends on the quality of the national life itself. The fundamental fact about the quality of national life is that in the post-independence period attempts are being made to build up the nation on principles of a democratic socialistic pattern of society. There are two ways in which the democratic stance can express itself in the national life. Firstly, democracy would mean respect for the views of the majority. Secondly, it would mean respect for the ethos of humanism based on respect for the personality of human individuals. The tradition of healthy democratic life can be built up only when these two aspects are blended together. Sometimes there is a tendency to isolate these two aspects of democracy. If there is over-emphasis on majority-rule it leads to suppression of the minority. If on the other hand there is over-emphasis on certain basic values, oligarchy or elitist rule may come to stay. It appears that India is still to find a happy balance of these two aspects of democracy.

### *Causes of Fear*

Certain developments are not unlikely to cause a misunderstanding among the hillmen that their needs would be ignored under the principle of the rule of the majority. For instance, they point out to the adoption of the Language Act in Assam whereby Assamese has been declared as the State language in spite of strong opposition from the linguistic minorities. There are other instances of the majority forcing its views on the minority, in other parts of India also. In the context of these facts, the feeling of uneasiness of the hillmen are to be sympathetically understood.

As regards the basic ethos there is one problem of hillmen of some areas which deserves particular mention. In the plains it is possible, especially for the elite, to seriously believe that a new society can be built up, on the basis of secular principles of humanism. Growth of such belief requires attainment of certain maturity of the society and its culture. It requires a capacity to look upon the past of the community with certain amount of detachment, as

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well as respect and draw from it the essence of the universal qualities of humanism. But, for some of the hill communities which are trying to shake off their primitive past, it is difficult to look upon the same with detachment. Recently an educated Kabui Naga young man was saying that his people would rather try to forget that till recently they were carrying on head-hunting or some such practices. So overwhelming is their feeling about these one or two erratic practices, that it becomes difficult for them to see beyond these and appreciate that there are basic values of humanism even in their own past. They tend to feel that they were wallowing in the mire of shame and that they were redeemed by the foreign Missionaries. Thus, it is a necessity for them to have a particularistic attachment, whereas secularism which the rest of India is trying to attain, requires universalistic detachment. There is thus a difference of levels and this difference is to be bridged through understanding and sympathy and also respect. This is a challenge to the capacity of the nation to rise to a new height,—a height having both intellectual and moral dimensions. If the nation can rise to this height, the communities in the stage of infra-nationalism can certainly find their succour in the bosom of the nation. If the nation fails, the strain will continue.

### *2. Consolidation of International Border*

Many of the communities in the hill areas have their agnates across the border, in Tibet, Burma and Pakistan. They had, therefore, social, cultural and economic ties across the borders. With consolidation of international borders such ties have been snapped to a very considerable extent, with consequent inconvenience to the communities concerned.

### *3. Partition and Consequent Dislocations*

Partition of Indo-Pakistan sub-continent has adversely affected the economy of the population living in the borders of Garo hills, Khasi hills, Mizo hills and Tripura. Prior to partition, the Khasi and the Jaintia carried on flourishing trades in orange, betel leaf, limestone and other commodities in the areas which are now in Pakistan. Similarly, forest produce of Garo hills, Mizo hills and Chittagong used to find their market mainly in East Bengal. With the creation of Pakistan this market has been closed and it has not been possible to develop alternative markets due to communication difficulties. The Government has adopted several schemes for reorganising the economic life of the people living in the border areas. But the impact of the same does not appear to be much. There is another way in which partition has adversely affected the hillmen. In Tripura after partition there has been an influx of refugees on a very large scale. As a result, the hillmen of Tripura feel cornered. Till 1941 they constituted

the majority of the population, but in 1961 they were slightly over 30% of the population. Some of the leaders of the hillmen do not have any inhibition to point out the political implication of this change in the composition of the population.

#### 4. *Strain of Economic Development*

It is to be appreciated that economic development everywhere entails some sacrifice and some strain. In Western countries in the initial stages of economic development there were no adult franchise and mass literacy. Hence the pressure of the expectation of people was not also very strong on those who promoted economic growth. Slums and cities, plenty and poverty could exist side by side. In India economic development is taking place in an altogether different context. On the other hand, economic development is a must for the survival of the nation, in the context of the fact that, annually the population is increasing by more than 2%.

The logic of economic development would require maximum of input for growth. But the logic of social services expected by the people would require distribution of benefits and amenities. Thus, there is a dilemma involved in the situation. In this dilemma even the people, who have been well-integrated in the national life for generations, have not always agreed to accept the logic of economic development. For instance, at present, a movement is being carried on in Andhra Pradesh to pressurize the Central Government to decide the location of the steel plant in that State, irrespective of the economic merit of the matter. About 10 years ago, there was a movement in Assam, for establishing the Oil Refinery there. The 'demonstration effect' of these sort of movements among the people of the plains cannot be lost on the hillmen. Hence, when they are told that it would be uneconomic to establish technical institutions in the hill areas or expand communication facilities and other facilities very rapidly, they do not feel convinced.

There is another aspect of economic development which is also causing some strain. In the hill areas the main economic resources are the forests and lands. They have different types of rights on their forests. Some of these rights are communal in nature. It appears that the Government policy is not always very clear on the question of recognition of the rights of the hillmen. In the autonomous districts of Assam the unclassified forests have been placed at the disposal of the District Councils. In many of the other areas jurisdiction of recognized tribal authorities is not always respected. As a result, law and order problems crop up in different areas, depending on the level of organisation of the tribal communities concerned. To reduce the strain it is desirable that the whole question should be thoroughly examined. It appears that while as a

matter of formality the rights of the tribals on their lands are recognized, in actual implementation there are many deviations from these principles.

In the matter of economic development there is another question which deserves some consideration. Being committed to building up a socialistic pattern of society, there is a natural tendency in the country to reduce the role of the private sector. In the matter of development of forest wealth emphasis is given on bringing more and more forest areas under the category of reserved forest and extend State control in consonance with the general policy stated above. But socialistic pattern of society should not only mean State control, but also involvement of the society in the management of the resources. In the hill areas, reservation of forest, however, always results in dissociating hill communities from the management and development of the forests, where they have been born and where they have grown up. Attempts have been made in some areas to find a remedy through organising forest cooperatives. But as among the local people, there is hardly any experience of entrepreneurship, the leadership of forest co-operatives almost always rests with outsiders who are either trading agents or members of Government bureaucracy. It is to be considered whether in the transitional phase, as a matter of strategy, encouragement should be given to develop the entrepreneurial class among the tribals. As in the plains, growth of such a class has not been stopped, but is rather encouraged in certain sectors. Failure to give opportunities to tribals, to come up, would naturally cause frustration and discontent among the tribals and hillmen. This will also limit the level of participation in the national economic life.

### 5. *Externalization of Internal Conflicts*

In most of the hill areas the hillmen do not constitute homogeneous communities. In Mizo hills along with the Mizos live the Pois and Lakhers. There is an allegation from among the Pois and Lakhers that the Mizos try to dominate over them and suppress them culturally and otherwise. Similarly, in Garo hills, the Hazongs who constitute the minority population, have grievances against the Garos. In Khasi and Jaintia Hills, a section of Jaintias clamoured that their needs received inadequate consideration from the District Council. Recently the District Council has been bifurcated.

In addition to inter-ethnic conflicts, there are conflicts among different religious groups. In almost all the hill areas, the non-Christians complain that the Christians monopolize the benefits extended to those areas.

There is also a different type of conflict of interest. For instance, among the Lushais and Kukis, the chiefs had virtually proprietary rights over the lands

under the jurisdiction of the respective villages. In Mizo Hills the District Council has by legislation abolished this right. This cannot but create some tension. Outside Mizo Hills, such rights in modified manners still persist, which again would cause tension of a different order.

When among the hillmen communities, there are different types of tensions as indicated above, which may disrupt social cohesion of the communities concerned, there is a very real need to make this internal tension out of focus. The best means to achieve this is to externalize the tension. There is thus a vested interest to intensify tension between people of the hills and the people of the plains. This is both a matter of dismay and hope. It is a matter of dismay because the factors are so many; it is a matter of hope because it gives scope for strategic handling of different factors. It is a question of skill in social engineering and in India there is no dearth of persons who can provide the necessary expertise.

### 6. *Other Factors*

The other factors are of two categories, structural and operational. Among the structural factors, perhaps the most important is the existence of tea plantations in the region. These capitalist enterprises have limited influence on the transformation of the regional economy. At the outset, local tribal labourers were drawn to this industry, but since the middle of the last century, due to economic and political reasons, employment of local labourers was eschewed. The industries flourished with indentured labourers. Even though, now, if any recruitment is made, it is made through open recruitment—the old tradition continues. There is no feed-back of the capital generated through the industry, for the growth and development of the local economy in diverse sectors; there is also not much incentive for growth of intermediate scale industry for catering to the needs of the plantation labourers. With the tradition of indentured labour behind, the tea plantation labourers more frequently look upon themselves only as sojourners, even though they might have lived in the region for generations. Their existence has, therefore, failed to stabilize new consumption pattern to a significant extent. On the other hand, availability of ex-tea garden labourers to cultivate surplus land has served as disincentive against technological improvement. It appears that virtual insular existence of tea plantations has paralysed the economic growth of the region. Unless a way out is found to change this insular existence, the stagnation is likely to continue and provide an outdated and undesirable model of relation between the industrial sector and the local community. In Assam, the concept of 'sons of the soil,' is vigorously fostered even by the enlightened section of the population. Perhaps the root of this is to be traced in the undesirable structural setting of the plantation industry. But so long as the concept of 'sons of the soil' persists among the

elites of the plains of Assam, as a value, it will undoubtedly have its demonstration effect on the hillmen also. The latter would insist that the fruits of development in the hill areas should go to them only, regardless of the limitations of the situation.

The limitations are indeed quite serious. It has been pointed out earlier that primary education is spreading more rapidly than secondary and technical education in the hill areas. A young scholar of Delhi, Mrs. Chakraborty, pointed out that this would imply, that there would be dearth of qualified persons among the hillmen to avail of the employment opportunities created by development. This is exactly what is happening in the hill areas. This has really created a piquant situation. Rapid spread of primary education has raised the level of expectation of the people, but has not qualified them for the satisfaction of the same. Much of the tension in the hill areas is traceable to this.

Another structural factor that deserves mention is the shift in social relations in the post-independence period. For instance, in Tripura some of the tribal communities were in a privileged position and had special ties with the rulers. In the new dispensation, as is inevitable, these privileges have been done away with. The consequent adverse reaction among some section of the hillmen can be looked upon as a transitional phenomenon.

Among the operational factors, mention may be made of the measures taken in NEFA for the abolition of slavery. It must be admitted that in this matter the administration has proceeded with great tact and understanding; but some adverse reaction for certain section is inevitable. This however, is a healthy strain of democratization and no society can progress without such strain.

It is to be appreciated that simply by accelerating the economic development measures, the strains in the hill areas cannot be reduced. The social pads for absorbing the shock of take-off must also be provided. These can be provided only if we have proper respect for the personality of our hillmen. There is no reason to think that they do not understand the logic of geopolitics. There is also no reason why they will remain insensate to the attraction of good society.

It is for the Indians,—belonging to the plains and the hills, to build the good society.

# THE HILL PEOPLE OF MANIPUR

ACHAW SINGH, M.L.A.

We know so very little about each other. India is such a big country that many people in the big cities have little idea where Manipur is situated. I have come across people in many parts of India who have no idea or knowledge about the people of Manipur, specially about the hill people of Manipur. The hill people of Manipur are like any other hill people inhabiting Assam, Tripura, Nagaland, NEFA and the adjoining districts of Burma. The hill tribes of Manipur fall into two main ethnic groups, the Kukis and the Nagas and they occupy definite areas in the hills. Kuki is a generic name applied to tribes whose home is in the mountainous tract lying between Burma, Manipur, Cachar and Arakan. While the Kuki-Chin group live in the Tengnoupal and the Chudachandpur sub-divisions of Manipur, the Nagas live in compact villages in the sub-divisions of Tamenglong, Mao, and Ukhrul. It will be interesting to study the cultural and social background of both the groups. Each group has a number of sub-groups. The Kuki-Chin group now likes to be identified by their clan rather than as Kuki.

## *Kuki-Chin Group*

The whole of the Hill tribes who dwell in the mountain district contained between Bengal and Burma, Cachar and Manipur and Arakan, have received this designation. The various clans of the Kuki-Chin group are scattered over a wide area. A number of Kuki races of Manipur and Cachar once occupied the hills immediately to the south which are now held by the Lushais, who originally pushed forward from the south-east. The Kuki race later on moved northward between 1830-1850. The people on the spot used to classify themselves as Old Kuki and the New Kuki. The 1957 Census listed 16 tribes which can be classed under the Kuki-Chin group.

- |                           |             |              |
|---------------------------|-------------|--------------|
| 1. Aimol                  | 8. Paite    | 16. Chiru    |
| 2. Anal, Meyon,<br>Monsan | 9. Biete    | 17. Chothe   |
| 3. Gangte                 | 10. Simte   | 18. Purum    |
| 4. Haokip                 | 11. Thadous | 19. Lushai   |
| 5. Hmar                   | 12. Vaiphei | 20. Changsen |
| 6. Kom                    | 13. Ratte   | 21. Shingson |
| 7. Kuki                   | 14. Sokte   | 22. Mantak.  |
|                           | 15. Lamgang |              |

The Old Kuki Clans are :

(1) Kom, (2) Anal, (3) Hmar, (4) Koireng, (5) Chothe, (6) Purum, (7) Mantak, (8) Gangte, (9) Vaiphei and (10) Hiroi as Langang.

The New Kuki clans are :

(1) Thadou, (2) Shingsol, (3) Chungloe (4) Hankib (5) Simte, (6) Vungson, (7) Changut and (8) Mangvung.

The new arrivals are given the name of Kongjai by the Manipuris.

In general the Kukis are shorter than the Nagas. They have comparatively long arms. The oblique eye is the most important characteristic amongst them showing their probable Mongolian origin. They are keen hunters. They pay their chief a religious devotion and are delighted at any opportunity of a fight. The migratory condition of some of the new Kuki clans particularly the Thadous can be ascribed to their inability to find vacant land on which to settle as proprietors. In Kuki villages the entire land is owned by the chief who lets it out to different families on a rental basis. Sometimes some families hard pressed by large demands of the chief leave the villages. According to common practice, the family leaving the village has to surrender all its belonging and is left penniless.

Like the Lushais, every Kongjai carries a netted bag containing flint and steel, pipe and tobacco and various odds and ends. Pipes are smoked by both men and women.

The village Chiefship is hereditary. In return for ruling, the Chief is supported by his subjects. They till his fields, give him a certain portion of their produce, game and labour, and he receives presents at the time of all domestic occurrences. A younger son usually succeeds in outstripping his elder brother in importance as a Chief, as the eldest son stays at home with his father, while the younger is assigned a certain following and he is sent off to make his own way in the world. Village factions often result in splitting up of the main village and formation of small hamlets. The Manipur Administration is trying to induce these people to take up terrace cultivation instead of their migratory cultivation of 'Jhuming' (slashing and burning). The attachment to land is very great and their immigratory inclinations are now over.

Inheritance follows the male line and no female has any right to claim property. There are village ceremonies performed when an epidemic threatens the village. The entire village is 'Genna' for 15 days and no one is allowed to enter or leave the village.



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They usually choose their partner, but a girl of ancient lineage is sought for by the parents. Usually a marriage price is offered and it varies according to status. Among the Thadous if a man drives away his wife without sufficient cause he forfeits the marriage price paid to him and in addition has to pay a fine. If the woman deserts her husband without reason then the marriage price is returnable to the husband.

There is a great diversity of customs and precedents amongst the various Kuki groups. The large majority of blood feuds and raids can be traced to the non-observance of civil customs rather than criminal offences. Private wrong, unless an affair of public interest, had to be settled by the aggrieved person with the wrong-doer and often by force or retaliation.

At one time the Kukis used to place great reliance on oaths. Divine oaths were very common though these traditional oaths have lost much of their value. It is an interesting practice. Both parties to the dispute repeat their claim standing in water about breast deep. On a signal being given, the disputants sink simultaneously. The first man coming up lose. Even if the smallest portion of a contestant, such as hair or foot breaks the surface of the water, that contestant loses.

The Kuki houses are small, with two gable ends, walls of bamboo matting and raised floors of bamboo or wood for the more affluent. In their occupation, household furniture, manufacture, hunting and fishing, food and drink, there is nothing much different from the Nagas.

Their songs are mournful but harmonious chants, sung in parts, sometime by as many as a hundred men together. Only the lowest bass notes are employed and these are prolonged and long drawn-out. The effect is most weird and impressive.

The dancing of the Kuki tribes presents a sharp contrast to that of the Naga tribes. The dance of the Naga is vigorous and consists of well defined steps and leaps ; with the Kuki the motion is slow and apparently with little variation. A well known Kuki dance is the Bamboo dance, which requires considerable strength. In the criss-cross pattern of the four bamboos, the dancer hops on one foot, either inside the cross or outside it. Often two or more persons dance together within the bamboo poles.

Shifting cultivation is practised both by the Nagas and the Kukis. The Kukis take to it as a way of life due to their migratory habits. The Nagas resort to Jhuming to supplement their income from settled cultivation. The chief cause of backwardness and migratory habits of the Kukis is their system of land ownership. The institution of the 'Chief' amongst the Kukis is akin to

the Zamindari system. The chiefs as well as the educated public are against abolition of their proprietary and customary rights. The State Assembly has now passed a legislation for the abolition of the 'Chiefship' with a provision for payment of compensation of the Chiefs.

### *The Nagas*

The Nagas are scattered over the hill districts of Manipur, but chiefly to the west, north and north-east. The derivation of the name 'Naga' is doubtful. It may have been derived from 'Nanga', 'Naked' but the name is used in the Mahabharat, and they are described as beautiful dragon-like beings against whom the hero Arjun fought. The materials available to the pioneers in studies on linguistic and ethnological affinities show that the languages of the sub-Himalayan tribes possess affinities of structure and vocabulary with the dialects of this area. According to Hodson's 'Naga Tribes of Manipur', the Abors, Mishmis, Singphos and a number of tribes of the North-East Frontier Agency have customs amongst themselves, which closely resemble those of the Nagas. There are many points of resemblance both in regard to custom, to religion and to organization amongst the tribes in the southern hill, specially amongst the Chirus and the Marings.

The Nagas residing in Manipur are (1) Tangkhul, (2) Mao, (3) Maram, (4) Kabui, (5) Katcha, (6) Thangal, (7) Koirang and (8) Maring.

There is hardly any difference in the colour of the skin of the Naga tribes. They are all brown in complexion. The social characteristics vary from the almost purely Mongolian castes to ones closely approaching the Aryan type. The feature of the Marings are like those of the Burmese.

Both men and women carry heavy loads which are fastened by means of a bowband made of plaited cane tied to the basket.

Hostility was common among these tribes many years ago. They lived in a constant state of feud, village with village, clan with clan. They display skill in minor manufactures with their primitive tools. Tribal weaving has now acquired a high reputation all over the country.

The Tangkhuls are not particularly athletic or muscular and not in the least warlike. They usually build their villages in the highest hilltops. Unlike most of the hill tribes, the sites of their villages are permanent. The houses are of the usual Naga pattern with roofs nearly reaching down to the ground. The southern Tangkhuls jhum the hills round their villages; in the north terrace cultivation is universal.

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The Maos, Marams and the Thangals have a common feature. They are slightly small of limb and stature but are very much active. Their villages are usually placed on a commanding point on a ridge.

They have terraced fields of great extent round their villages in which they cultivate paddy.

The Kabuis, a tribe of the Nagas, are located in the hills between Cachar and Manipur. Their villages are permanent and not stockaded, but are usually placed on the top of the steep peak. Their houses are large and comfortable. They adopt the jhum type of cultivation and never terrace their fields. They are subdivided into Rongmeiso, Zemi and Liangmeis.

The Marings live in the south-east together with the Kukis. As a tribe, the men are short and of a muscular development, nearly equal to that of the Khongjai. They are distinguished from others by wearing their hair long and being confined in a bunch, like a horn rising from the front of the head. They build permanent villages but do not stockade them. They are excellent cultivators and place their fields on the hill-sides without terraces but drain them very ingeniously. Their great industry is the manufacture of baskets.

The birth of a child always necessitates a domestic *genna*, the ritual of which varies from tribe to tribe. Among the Marings there is a custom of calling the eldest male child Moba, the second, Koba, the third Mayba, the fourth Ungba, the fifth Kumba and all subsequent male children Kumbee.

*Genna* is a mass of prohibition. Hodson has collected detailed account of these *gennas*. All the rites and festivals observed by the social units among these tribes are characterized by a prohibition of the normal relations with other social units. There are the tribal *gennas*, village *gennas*, crop *gennas*, clan *gennas*, household *gennas*, individual *gennas* and food *gennas*.

Divorce is allowed but seldom resorted to, on account of the great expenses. The expenses were probably incurred in providing the village elders with food and drink to aid their deliberation. The principle of primo-geniture is the most widely accepted rule of succession to village office. There is a great variety in the usages regulating succession to land and to the property. Among the Tangkhuls, in cases where the father dies before the marriage of the eldest son, the general rule is that the eldest son gets a double share of the immovable property while the other sons get a single share each.

The traditional laws of crime of the tribal society and their methods of punishment have been replaced by codified laws.

Tribal handloom products are colourful and original in design. The high

quality of the weave makes the cloth durable and attractive. The village blacksmith was once an institution throughout. Perhaps the most distinguishing feature of tribal culture is that it leads to a way of life which practically makes the people rejoice in songs and dances. Each tribe has its special dances. The Spear Dance and the War Dance are the most common. It is unfortunate that certain Missions have forbidden their converts to dance and sing the old songs. If people lose their spirit of the song and dance, there will be nothing left to distinguish their way of life.

### *Economic Development of the Hill People*

The tribal population are poor, backward, ignorant and bereft of natural resources near home. The Nagas are hard-working and virile and are educationally and economically better off than their Kuki neighbours. The Nagas are emotionally attached to their land and the tribal love of land is the most dominant factor of disturbances.

The British policy of isolation has resulted in exploitation. The technique was simple. Landlords, money-lenders and contractors exploited the tribal to the maximum. These contacts with non-tribals were not welcome by the tribals ; they added to the strain of fighting a lonesome battle against ruthless nature, soil-erosion, denudation of hills and erratic rivers.

The programme of conservation and preservation of forests and the coming in of the contractor, who carried away the profits of forest produce, eventually led to dislocation of the tribal economy and consequent frustration in the tribal mind. All students of tribal economy agree that the two things of greatest significance to the tribal are land and forest. So the class development in the hill people has been marked by the appearance of a small section of the tribals who have learnt the ways of the contractors and the moneylenders. There is a gulf of difference between the educated and Christianized section and the uneducated and village folk. A new vested interest is being created by a small section of the educated hill people who are out to exploit the ignorance and poverty of the unsophisticated hill people.

Jhuming is the most wasteful method of agriculture in the hill areas of Manipur. Tribal agriculture is still primitive. There are wide differences in the level of development in the different sub-divisions. The Tangkhul area in Ukhrul sub-division is well developed. The inhabitants have taken to permanent cultivation by terracing the hill slopes. Apart from paddy, cultivators grow cash crops like potatoes, cotton, maize, mustard, wheat etc. In the sub-divisions of Tengnoupal, Churachandpur and Tamenglong, on the other hand, agriculture is primitive and jhuming is widely prevalent. Some correlation appears to exist

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between the accessibility of the areas and the stage of agricultural development and the resulting prosperity. Means of communication influence the crop pattern, the better connected areas growing a little of cash crops also.

The development of field crops in the hills is naturally handicapped. In spite of the low density of population and universality of paddy cultivation, the areas are deficit in food which is met by costly supplies from the valley. Transport difficulties add to the cost of foodgrains. Shifting cultivation widely practised by tribesmen is uneconomic and a menace to forest wealth. Shortage of commodities such as salt, mustard oil, sugar etc. makes a dent in tribal self-sufficiency. And, recently, thousands of demobilized war personnel have been responsible for creating a demand for all sorts of consumer goods among those living in the interior.

The destructive impact of jhuming on the forest wealth can be restricted by a combined practice of agri-silviculture. According to this practice, the hill tops may be left covered with forest growth, and belts of forests, 10 feet to 50 feet wide across the contours, at intervals of 100 feet to 500 feet according to the gradient of the slopes, similarly be left uncultivated on the slopes. In between these belts jhuming can be allowed, interspersed with more forest trees of economic value. Such a practice would have many beneficial effects. The protection of forests, as suggested above, will regulate the flow of water down the slopes and to that extent might help to reduce soil erosion. However, more effective steps like contour bunding, fencing and drainage should also be taken. Growing of permanent crops like fruits and economic forests is another way of better utilization of jhum lands. Gradual steps should be taken to provide incentive for constructing terraces where the improved techniques and agricultural practices on scientific lines are possible. The economic side of the solution lies in helping to improve their material position as cultivators. This can be effected by financial assistance, supply of seeds, ploughs and other implements and by encouraging the tribesmen to exchange their output for a better price or for a different commodity.

Although "Chiefship" has been abolished, there has been no survey on settlement of the land and no records are available to establish ownership of lands cultivated. Difficulties will, therefore, arise in recognizing individual rights and ownership over such lands. There is immediate need for survey and preparation of records of rights.

There is great scope for weaving, carpentry, bamboo and cane-work, basket-making, mat-making and wood-work in hill areas. The tribals need no training in weaving. Regular supply of raw materials and proper marketing facilities for the finished products are to be ensured. Intensified efforts should be made to grow local varieties of long-staple cotton.

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Dimapur in Nagaland is an important marketing centre and the nearest railhead for exporting produce grown in Manipur. The business at Dimapur is in the hands of, and is being controlled by, merchants from outside who obviously exploit the growers and producers of Manipur. The most essential thing is that a marketing corporation should be organised for sale and purchase of vegetables and fruits.

### *The Recent Trend*

The Manipur Valley is sandwiched by the two hill tribal belts of the Nagas in the north and the Kukis in the South. The Manipur Valley is inhabited by the Meiteis of the Tibeto-Burman group. The British policy of isolation of these tribes from the main trend of development in the plains and the influence of certain Missionaries have engendered a spirit of defiance and a spirit of challenge to the established order. By fostering an alien culture amongst these tribes and isolating them from the main stream of the national life and culture the British made attempts to denationalize them. Once the ball starts rolling, it is a stupendous task to set it at rest. Several factors have contributed to the recent uprisings in the Naga Hills and Mizo Hills. The latter are closely linked with the Kukis and belong to the Kuki-Chin or Lushai-Chin group. They have started a movement for independence and they are ready to make any sacrifice to achieve their aim. In fact these people have awakened from a long slumber. They have become disillusioned. They have lost their moorings. They are seething with discontent. The whole tribal belt in the North-East India has been infected with the Naga spirit. The Naga independence movement has paid dividend. For more than ten years the fight had been going on. Though there has been a cease-fire from September 1964, the prospect of a permanent settlement is not yet in sight.

The Government of India is still groping in the dark about the solution of the Naga problem. It is still thinking of bringing about some constitutional changes in order to accommodate the demands, wishes and aspirations of the Naga people. There is nothing wrong in that. But the GOI should think twice before any such decision is taken. Because that step may start a series of chain reactions. For example, the Mizos will also demand a status similar to or equivalent with the Nagas and the demand will become irresistible. Again Manipur is so situated that the Nagas and the Kukis living on the hills would again seek to join Nagaland and Mizoram. The Valley portion inhabited by the Manipuris or the Meiteis will be truncated. That will be no solution. The Manipuris or the Meiteis are part and parcel of the Hill people of Manipur, because they belong to the same racial stock. There is no reason why they should be so separated in an artificial fashion. If the Government of India wants to raise the status of Nagaland, it should also consider the question of

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integrating Nagaland, Manipur and Mizo District in one administrative unit. That will meet the demands and aspirations of the Hill people of these areas. Long years of neglect and isolation of the Hill people of these areas both under the British and the Congress Government have led them to frustration and despair. A political settlement with them is the only solution to end the present stalemate.

## VI. Political Evaluation

### **A BRIEF SCHEME FOR FORMATION OF HILLS STATES**

S. M. DAS

As a result of the formation of States in India on linguistic basis, a strong feeling gained ground, as a natural corollary, among the hillmen of different ethnic groups, living within the present geographical boundary of Assam, having different languages and cultures, to have their own States, on linguistic principles. Of late, it has assumed a very significant movement threatening the political stability and integrity of this strategic region, nay, of the whole country.

Viewed dispassionately, the demand for Hill States on linguistic, psychological and other considerations peculiar to the hillmen of this region cannot be said to be quite unreasonable and unrealistic. A settlement for removing the long-standing misunderstanding misapprehension and resultant ill-feeling is called for without any further loss of time.

The area and population of the present State of Assam are as below:

Area—47,091 sqr. miles:	Plains	...	...	24,558	sqr. miles
	Hills	...	...	22,732	" "
Population—	Plains Division	...	...	10,557,603	
	Hills Division	...	...	1,315,169	
			Total	...	11,872,772 *

The only consideration is how to give it a practical shape, without in any way weakening the defence and development needs of this strategic region which is very much interdependent on plains and hills. The pace of development of defence and development efforts must be accelerated, in view of the precarious link of this region with the rest of India, threatened by foreign Powers who are not friendly with India. From Chumbi Valley in the north to East Pakistan in the south the slender link may be easily cut off, thus throwing this region completely at the mercy of the designing foreign Powers. This region—Assam, NEFA, Nagaland, Manipur, Tripura—is dependent on supplies of foodstuff and other consumer goods from the rest of India. On an average at present about one thousand tonnes of foodstuff move to this region through this slender link. Exportable goods of this region like tea, jute, potatoes etc. cannot move outside, thus throwing the economy of the region out of gear. Similarly, the army cannot move in, in a big way, in the event of an aggression when the slender link is threatened.

\* Sources: 1961 Census.



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The only way we can meet this situation is by :—

(i) ensuring political stability by generating a sense of political contentment among the different ethnic groups, particularly among the hillmen, by having Hill States, primarily on linguistic and ethnic basis, to meet the aspirations of the majority of hill men and removing a sense of political frustration amongst them. The States may coincide with the present boundaries of the existing hill districts of Assam; and

(ii) making this region self-sufficient in foodstuff and consumer goods and in production of small arms and equipments suitable for self-defence. Over-running and subjugation of this predominantly hilly region may be rendered impossible if the people are imbued with a sense of patriotism by removing political frustration amongst them.

Now, in order to ensure the sense of belonging, implementation of the security and development plans, this region, comprising of (1) 6 plains districts of the Brahmaputra Valley (area approx. 20,000 sqr. miles and population about 90 lakhs) (2) 4 Hill districts viz : (i) Garo Hills (area about 3,500 sqr. miles—population about 3 lakhs) (ii) United Khasi and Jaintia Hills (area about 6,000 sqr. miles—population about 4 lakhs), (iii) United Mikir and North Cachar Hills (area about 8,000 sqr. miles—population about 3 lakhs), (iv) Mizo Hills (area about 7,000 sqr. miles—population about 3 lakhs), (3) NEFA (area about 30,000 sqr. miles—population about 3 lakhs), (4) Nagaland (area about 7,000 sqr. miles—population about 4 lakhs), (5) Manipur (area about 8,500 sqr. miles—population about 8 lakhs), (6) Tripura (area about 6,000 sqr. miles—population about 11 lakhs) and (7) Cachar (area about 3,000 sqr. miles—population about 14 lakhs), should have their own State, Legislature and Ministry each on the line of Tripura, Nagaland and Manipur. Thus we shall have the following States:

1) Assam State with five or six districts; (2) Garo Hills State; (3) United Khasi and Jaintia Hills State; (4) United Mikir and N. C. Hills State; (5) NEFA State; (6) Nagaland State; (7) Manipur State; (8) Cachar State; (9) Tripura State (Cachar and Tripura being contiguous and on ethnic and linguistic considerations may form one State, if the people concerned so desire).

These 8 or 9 States will have a co-ordinating body called the North-Eastern Regional Council which will exercise the executive powers in all State subjects common to any two or more of these States. An inhabitant of the region shall enjoy all the rights, privileges and immunities in the title of a citizen of India.

The N.E.R.C. will be formed with equal number of representatives elected from each State indicated above. This envisages a three-tier election viz: (i) at the State level for the State Legislatures; (ii) for Lok Sabha and (iii) for the

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N.E.R.C. for which the Members of the State Legislature and the Members of Parliament of the State concerned will form the Electoral College.

The Headquarters of the N.E.R.C. will be at Shillong.

The name of the N.E.R.C. may be—"The North Eastern Region". It will have (a) one common Governor, (b) one common Public Service Commission and (c) one common High Court.

The N.E.R.C. will ensure (i) co-operation and co-ordination in development matters; (ii) security; (iii) fostering a spirit of friendship by appreciating and helping to develop the language and culture of each group according to its own genius. As a matter of fact, some of the hill leaders have already expressed the desirability of such co-operation.

The area and population of the North Eastern Region will be as below:

Area—approx. 1,00,000 sqr. miles (one lakh sqr. miles).

Population—approx. 1,50,00,000 (one and a half crores).

This region has all the land, mineral, forest and other resources, which, if properly tapped, can make this region prosperous and strong from the defence point of view. The only prerequisite is the understanding and mutual good-will among all the linguistic and other groups inhabiting this region. In order to remove the feeling of domination or discrimination, the N. E. Regional Council with equal number of members from each State is suggested.

This, in brief, is the outline of the scheme for the formation of the Hill States which will be worked out in greater detail when the scheme is accepted by all concerned. Different Commissions may go into the technical questions of formation of the Hill States, N. E. Regional Council, distribution of the existing service personnel, assets and liabilities, rules and procedures for the working of the Council, etc.

Solution of a problem cannot be obtained by ignoring it. We welcome suggestions from all concerned and request all interested in the well-being of the country to give a dispassionate consideration so that the plan is implemented with further improvements, if any, before it is too late.

# POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS IN TRIBAL BIHAR

DR. (MRS.) JYOTI SEN

A review of the last three decades shows that there has been a growing tendency towards ethnocentrism in different parts of our country. This has sometimes crystallized around the issues of language, caste or race leading towards disintegration, hindering our way to national unity. This tendency seems to have become stronger after independence.

From the historical perspective one can say that with the exception of a religio-cultural unity, there never was political unity in India right from the days of the Hindu kings to the last days of the Moghul emperors. For the first time the British brought the whole of India under a common rule and an efficient system of administration. In their own interest, they developed roads, railways and the postal system. They also built up a system of English education so that they might get employees from among the local natives. All this helped people of different parts of the country, and speaking different languages in coming together into one bond of citizenship. The growth of nationalism in the nineteenth century, which was followed by a common struggle for freedom, further strengthened the feeling of national unity. The leaders and thinkers of the past century thought in terms of India, and India alone, and not from the point of view of race, religion or province.

Once we gained our freedom and the democratic form of government based on universal adult franchise was established, new tendencies towards group solidarity came into being. It became necessary to gain the maximum number of votes to secure political power. For this reason endeavours were made to strengthen the loose bonds of affiliations on the lines of language, caste or race.

## *Linguistic Discrimination*

Shortly after Independence, the Telengana movement was organized in South India which gathered important motive force for the assertion of linguistic, and regional solidarity. There arose a demand for the division of the multilingual state of Madras into Telugu-speaking Andhra and Tamil-speaking Madras, threatened by fasting of leaders, mob fury and violence. This ultimately led to the formation of a separate Andhra Pradesh in 1953. Similar happenings in Bombay resulted in the formation of Maharashtra and Gujarat States in 1961 on the basis of language. The re-organization of the Punjab is the most recent example of another such linguistic division.

Another kind of communalism has also cropped up in some states where the leaders have tried to ensure special facilities for employment and education

to the "sons of the soil" in preference to other residents of the state. For example, on 14th April, 1938, a non-official resolution was introduced in the Bihar Legislative Assembly which was vigorously supported by the members, that Government should take steps to secure employment of at least 80% of Biharis in all classes of employment in industrial concerns aided by the Government. Circulars had been issued by the local Government, the object of which was to remove disparity in numbers of Biharis and Bengalis in Government service. The case of Biharis and the Government was that the Bengalis were over-represented in the services whereas the Biharis had not received their due share in them. Accordingly, the Bihar Government made it a rule for the people not born in Bihar, or not having the provincial language as their mother tongue, that they should obtain a domicile certificate in order to qualify for business contract, education or employment by Government or local bodies.<sup>1</sup> This system of domicile certificate was abolished later on; but applicants still have to prove that they are residents of the State by the length of their residence (at least ten consecutive years), ownership of property in the State, etc. This communal discrimination within the State led to tensions between Bengalis and Biharis in the past.

The same separatist tendency that had been manifested with regard to language or community in Andhra and Assam is expressing itself among the hill people of North-Eastern India today. Nagaland has already been separated. The others that remain have a feeling that they are a people separate from the plains people, and accordingly their demand is for a separate homeland free from the 'domination' of the plains people. This growth of sub-nationalism is not particular to the Eastern Himalayan region alone, it extends to the Bihar plateau as well as among its Adivasi population. I shall try to give a brief sketch of its development among the two major tribes of Chotanagpur, namely, the Munda and the Oraon.

### *Distinguishing Features*

The Bihar plateau lies in the southern portion of the State. It is a continuation of the Vindhya range and extends up to Orissa in the south and Bengal in the east. Chotanagpur Division is situated on this undulating forest land covering 25,196.6 square miles. It has afforded a home to many tribal communities whose total number has been recorded as 2,914,987 according to the 1961 Census of India. The Mundas and Oraons are two of the major tribal people who together constitute 45% of the total tribal population of the area. They are chiefly inhabitants of the Ranchi district which consists of two plateaux; the higher one is the northern side while the lower one is on the extreme eastern border. The Mundas are concentrated in the eastern part while the Oraons occupy mainly the western and northern regions.

<sup>1</sup>Nirmal Kumar Bose: *Studies in Gandhism*, pp. 211-12.

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The features that distinguish these two tribes from the local Hindu castes consist of their ownership rights on land, their culture and language which do not belong to the Indo-Aryan family. In this comparatively inaccessible and secluded region they followed their simple means of livelihood and lived according to their own social and political systems in the past.

As suitable farming land became scarce in the adjacent districts, the Hindu farming castes infiltrated into the tribal areas and the pressure on land went on increasing. This brought the tribes into closer contact with the technologically superior Brahmanical society. Attracted by the comparative affluence of the Brahmanical society the tribes adopted the arts and crafts of the former, but along with it they also accepted their hierarchy based on occupation which interlocks with one another by traditional service relations. A gradual process of Hinduization continued among the tribes. The Hindu influence varied from place to place.

The contact was further intensified about the 18th century A.D., when the introduction of Jagirdari system in Chotanagpur had given rise to a new class of non-tribal zamindars who had converted the tribes into tenants. These non-tribal landlords and their employees mercilessly tyrannized over their tribal tenants in many ways. They understood neither tribal language nor their customs and looked down upon them as 'un-civilized' creatures.

### *Arrival of Missionaries*

The first Christian missionaries arrived in Chotanagpur in 1845. They were followed by the S.P.G. Mission in 1869, and the Roman Catholic Mission in 1873. The Christian missionary movement gathered momentum about 1881. With their sympathetic understanding of the material problems of the tribes the missionaries extended a helping hand in order to extricate them from the oppression of the tyrannical landlords, usurious and unscrupulous moneylenders, and persecution at the hands of their own fellowmen in cases of suspected witchcraft. This help was readily accepted and the tribes in villages or groups of villages entered the Christian fold. The Missions gave them legal assistance in their agrarian court cases. They also spread education and a knowledge of better living conditions among their tribal converts and enabled them to avail themselves of better economic opportunities.

Before independence the tribes were thus drifting towards either Hinduism or Christianity till the late thirties of the present century. But the direction of change took a different turn after the enactment of the Government of India Act of 1935. Then began a growth of tribalism.

*Birth of the Adivasi Sabha*

In 1936 Provincial Autonomy was granted by the British Parliament and it was enforced in eleven Provinces of India. Orissa became a Province separate from Bihar. All this had its repercussion on the minds of the educated Adivasis. It dawned on them that the way to political power lay in the formation of a separate Adivasi Province. This change is reflected in one of the institutions which had been organized for the uplift of the Adivasis by some Adivasi Christians who were graduates. The Chotanagpur Improvement Society had already been established in 1911-12 by some Munda and Oraon converts. This became the Unnati Samaj in 1928 and was renamed as the Chotanagpur Adivasi Sabha in 1938. The same year in the annual conference organized under the chairmanship of Mr Peter Hurad, it was unanimously decided by the participant leaders of the different tribal groups, both Christian and non-Christian, that the Chotanagpur Adivasi Sabha would serve as the only political party to represent tribal interests in Chotanagpur. This was reported in a Hindi periodical of the G.E.L. Mission named "Gharbandhu." It gave details regarding the aims and objectives of the Adivasi Sabha. An English translation of the article reads as follows:—

"In spite of our having a culture and civilization we are losing our identity because the primary education is imparted through the medium of Hindi and not in our own language.

"The physical type, mental make-up, manners, customs, nature, basic values, occupation etc. of the Adivasis are different from that of all the other peoples. The country, the climate, the environment, food, drinks, the colour of the soil and vegetation are distinctive from the other parts of the country.

"According to the existing law, if a people inhabit an area for a long time, it becomes their motherland and if a people inhabiting an area form a majority community then that community is entitled to form the Government of that Province.

"According to history and science it is essential for a nation to have three factors;—

- (i) Common physical characters,
- (ii) Common language,
- (iii) Cultural traditions.

"All three are present among the Adivasis.

"We have a language through which ideas regarding history, science, logic, law, politics, art etc. can be expressed and there are corresponding terms also.

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“From the days of the Hindu kings and all through the Muslim rule attempts have been made to destroy our identity and assimilate us with other nations. The same policy is being followed by the Western Powers to-day. But the Adivasis have not lost their identity nor they ever will. It is rare in the history of the world that a nation has withstood centuries of oppression like the Adivasis.

“We have a cultural heritage of our own. We never had to depend on any other nation in the past for our existence nor shall we have to do so in future. The present Provincial administration and the system of education is harmful to our culture.

“The proportion of welfare work for the Adivasis is negligible compared to the income from mineral wealth and forest produce in our area.

“In relation to the population of Bihar, we Adivasis are a minority community and therefore it is detrimental to our interest to remain within Bihar.

“Considering us a dead nation, we have been deprived of Regional (Provincial) Autonomy by the Government in the new Constitution. Democracy is going to be established soon when the Adivasis will be doomed. We shall be put aside as a Backward Race under the new constitution.

“No Adivasi heart will be at rest till the weight of oppression, which has been there for centuries, is lifted. It is contrary to the canons of humanity and religion to weigh down the unwilling hearts of a people with burdensome laws. Our conscience is being suppressed continuously.

“If the Santhal Parganas is merged with Chotanagpur, we will not be deficit either in area, population or education for the formation of a separate Province. It is with these weapons that Orissa has won victory.”

In 1946 the Adivasi Sabha changed its name to Jharkhand Party. Under the Presidentship of Mr Jaipal Singh it became a full-fledged political party and carried on the Jharkhand movement which gained in tempo after 1947.

### *After Independence*

Before Independence the tribal communities were divided on the basis of religion into Christians and non-Christians with very little communication between the two groups. The Christian section was better educated, better organized and had better opportunities for economic progress in comparison to their non-Christian counter-parts. Although there were divisions based on the different Churches, the Christian Adivasis identified themselves with the larger group of Indian

Christians and were entered as such in the official reports.

After Independence the Government have adopted several measures for the development of tribal areas and tribal welfare. The Scheduled Tribes are entitled to special benefits like scholarships, hostel grants, reservation in services and legislatures etc. This has made the tribal people more conscious of their separate tribal entity which cuts across religion. Instead of moving towards Hinduism or Christianity, the trend is now towards tribalism. One can see the growth of a sub-nationalism within the Indian nation which finds expression in different spheres of life. Education has helped this growth.

After Independence there has been a steep rise in the spread of education accompanied by an increased demand for governmental and office employment. Along with the diversification of occupation there has grown up new stratifications along lines of economic class. The elite are not merely politically conscious but also very proud of their cultural heritage. From 1950 onwards there have been various attempts to revive traditional culture by starting journals in the Mundari and Oraon languages, opening institutions for tribal music and dance and so on and thus build up a "National Solidarity" among the tribes of Chotanagpur. Side by side, one also notices a growing antipathy towards the non-tribal residents of Chotanagpur. The same idea that had led to the introduction of the system of domicile certificates in Bihar on the ground that Bihar soil belonged to the Biharis while others are outsiders or foreigners, is finding expression among the Adivasis in a different form. Chotanagpur belongs to the Adivasis and all non-Adivasis are "Dikkus" or foreigners. All "Dikkus," whether rightly or wrongly, are looked upon as exploiters and intruders. It may be mentioned here that there has been little or no attempt on the part of the officials working in Chotanagpur to gain the confidence or friendship of their tribal neighbours by establishing a friendly relation based on mutual understanding or as equals. This has given additional cause for the rift between tribals and non-tribals.

### *Inter-Tribe Rivalry*

But it has also been noted that with this growth of sub-nationalism all tribes like the Munda, Ho, Oraon or Kharia have not been able to take advantage of the new political opportunities to the same extent and this has given rise to a competition for power between tribe and tribe or between one person and another even within the same tribe, often leading to conflicts.

Happily, there are leaders who are wisely trying to prevent these local conflicts. After the Ecumenical Council of 1963 the different Churches are also trying to join hands in many of the secular activities, particularly among the youth and the industrial labour. The Jharkhand Party, the membership of which



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has hitherto been limited to the Adivasi population, has recently admitted non-tribal members, some of whom hold quite important positions like the General Secretary. If this trend continues there is every hope that the exploited people of Chotanagpur will come together irrespective of race, religion or caste for the promotion of the interests of the Party or the people. On the other hand if the separatist tendencies keep on growing, it may lead to disharmony and hamper the process of national integration.

# A SCHEME FOR A ZONAL GOVERNMENT IN THE EASTERN REGION

PROF. JATIN DEY

The political map of the eastern region was somewhat different at the time of the commencement of the Constitution. Tripura and Manipur were part 'C' states which category no longer exists. The present state of Nagaland was in Assam. Tripura and Manipur are now centrally administered areas. Each has a miniature legislature and a ministry responsible to the legislature. Their administrative set-up is more or less the same as that of any other State in India. In the face of a persistent indulgence to violence on the part of the Nagas, Nagaland was separated from the Assam administration and was made a centrally administered area. It has been made the 16th State of India in June 1961 and is now a full-fledged State like any other State of India. The North-East-Frontier-Agency (NEFA) still now forms part of Assam, but is being administered as a Union Territory under article 240 of the constitution.

The entire region is surrounded by foreign lands—China to the north, Burma to the east, Pakistan to the west and south, being adjoined with the mainland of India by a narrow strip of land through North Bengal.

The total area of this region is 97,758 sq. miles and the population of the area is 1,45,00,572. The population break-up of the different areas of this region is as follows :

	Area in Sqr. mile	Population
1. Tripura	4,036	11,42,005
2. Manipur	8,628	7,80,037
3. Nagaland	6,366	3,69,200
4. N.E.F.A.	31,438	3,36,558
5. Assam	47,290	1,18,72,772
(a) Brahmaputra valley	21,870	91,79,127
(b) Proposed Hill State	22,732	13,15,169
(c) Cachar	2,688	13,78,476

The entire region is geographically and economically linked up. There was also an administrative link between Assam, Nagaland and the NEFA areas till recently. At the moment the hill people of Assam are demanding separation from Assam and the creation of a Hill State. The demand for Hill State has posed a great problem for the statesmen and the administration. The Mizo National Front (a section of the Mizo people) resorted to a violent uprising. Their demand is complete cessation from India. The Khasi District Congress Committee has demanded a separate State for the Khasi people. The All

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Parties Hill Leaders Conference (APHLC), since 1961, has been persistently demanding a separate Hill State with all the paraphernalia of a State.

### *The Hill State*

The demand for a Hill State is a logical consequence of the fissiparous tendencies in the whole country noticeable since the time of the setting up of the States Reorganization Commission in 1956. The hill people of Assam are different from the plains people ethnically, linguistically and even from the point of view of religion. The life they lead is both primitive and isolated. This way of life was encouraged by the Britishers and the same policy was pursued by the Congress Government since independence following the principle enunciated by Verrier Elwin, the noted anthropologist, for preservation and protection of their primitive culture. The large section of people who have embraced Christianity have been brought under the sway of the foreign Missionaries. The direct influence of Christianity on them is the adoption of the Western way of life which is none the more helpful for integration in the national life of India.

The Constituent Assembly of India set up a Committee named North-East-Frontier Tribal and Excluded Areas Sub-Committee (Bordoloi Committee).

On the recommendations of this Committee, an administrative scheme of District Council has been provided for in the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution. The scheme intended to build up autonomous administration in the different hill areas so that they may preserve and protect their own culture.

From 1961, in the wake of the passing of the Assam Language Act, the Hill people have been demanding a separate Hill State. The Patasker Commission was set up to recommend a detailed scheme for reorganization of the administrative set-up of the Hill areas with objective conferring full autonomy on the Hill areas, preserving the unity of Assam and maintaining a common legislature and cabinet functioning on the basis of collective and joint responsibility.

The Commission gave its recommendations. But these could not satisfy the Hill people. The main point of disagreement is that the Hill people want a Hill cabinet minister within the Assam Cabinet, who will be primarily responsible to the Hill MLAs, besides sharing the collective responsibility with other ministers to the whole Assembly. But in the terms of reference of the Commission it was made clear that the collective responsibility was to be maintained. Before the recommendations of the commission were out, the MNF had started a violent cessationist movement. The APHLC, the main organization of the Hill

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people, issued an ultimatum of launching a movement from December, 1966, if the demand for creation of a Hill State was not consented to.

The Commission observed: "Although the main purpose of the Sixth Schedule was to bring these areas closer to the rest of the State of Assam, the separatist trends are still much in evidence. The creation of the separate State of Nagaland, the grant of near statehood status to Manipur and Tripura, the misunderstanding arising out of the Assam Official Language Act etc have, from time to time, provided encouragement to such trends."

The irresistible conclusion on that can be drawn from these separatist tendencies noticeable in the Hill people in particular and in the people of the country in general, is that a Hill state has to be formed. If the Hill areas are separated from Assam, then the district of Cachar has to be tagged with Tripura as both the areas are inhabited by the same linguistic group i.e. Bengalees. In the face of the creation of the Hill State, can we not think over an administrative link with all the areas of the eastern region ?

### *The Necessity For Such a Link*

The entire eastern region is surrounded by foreign lands. From the defence point of view there should be an administrative link amongst all these areas at the apex. The system of communication is very much undeveloped in this region. This needs rapid development despite the natural barriers. The geographical situation of the different areas are such that without a common system of communication one part of an area cannot be accessible to another part without passing through another area. For example, one cannot travel from the Khasi Hills to Mizo Hills without going through Cachar. The easy communication from one part to another of the NEFA is through the plains district of Brahmaputra Valley.

The economy of the entire region is also integrated. The Hill areas are deficit in food and depend on the plains for food supply. Fruits and vegetables produced in the Hills find their markets in the plains. Oranges and Gingers of the Mizo Hills find market in Cachar and are transported to other parts of the country through Cachar. Forest resources of the Hill areas are utilized by the people of the plains. Besides, there are some power projects situated in the Hill areas which supply power to the plains. The Umtru and the Umium hydroelectric projects are in the Khasi Hills; whereas, the former supplies electricity to Gauhati town, the latter, a bigger one, not only supplies electricity to Cachar, but there is a proposal to extend its supply even to Tripura. The position of the proposed Kapili Project which is in the North Cachar and Mikir Hills area, also will be the same.

Unless soil erosion is contained in the hills, floods in the plains cannot be effectively controlled. Dams and barrages are to be constructed at the upper edges of the rivers in the hills to check floods in the plains. The Pataskar Commission observed : "The Hill districts are a series of economic islands" (p 31). The economy of the entire region will be disturbed and dislocated very much if these areas are completely separated. The economy of the entire region should form one unit. This can be provided by an administrative link at the apex. Further, it will afford an opportunity to the different people of the region to mix together and to discuss matters of common concern which certainly will help integration.

### *The Scheme*

These different areas of the Eastern Zone viz. (1) Assam, (2) Nagaland, (3) The proposed Hill State, (4) Manipur, (5) Tripura along with the district of Cachar, and (6) NEFA, shall constitute a Council named Eastern Zonal Council. There shall be one Governor at the apex for all the areas. The administrative arrangements of the different areas shall continue to be as at present excepting the proposed Hill State. Its position might be determined by the President under Article 240 of the Constitution. By and by all these areas will be raised to the status of full-fledged States with a legislature and a responsible ministry. They shall have full powers of legislation and execution on matters in the State List. But regarding the following concurrent subjects, viz. economic planning (entry 20 g, list III), commercial and industrial monopolies (entry 21 g, list III), trade and commerce and supply and distribution of food stuff (entry 33 g, list III), the Eastern Government shall have powers of legislation and execution. The Council Government shall have a legislature and a responsible ministry.

All these matters mentioned above relate to Concurrent List and the operation of the Zonal Government shall not impair the provision of the Constitution for State autonomy. The idea behind is that on these subjects, there shall be commissions or corporations, viz. (1) Planning Commission, (2) Transport Corporation, (3) Food Corporation (4) Electricity Corporation, etc. for the whole region. Each one shall be under one minister. These ministers shall be responsible to a legislature elected by the members of the legislatures of the different areas or in the manner as the President will determine from time to time. Each area shall be represented equally in the Zonal Legislature so that equality of status of all these areas is maintained. The basic relationship between the Zonal Government and the Area Government shall be like that of the Union Government and the State Governments so far as the above-mentioned matters are concerned. The Council of Ministers and the Legislature shall function as a State Council of Ministers and State Legislature.

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There is a great necessity for an administrative link of some form with all these areas both from economic as well as strategic point of view. Ethnically and linguistically, the people of this region are quite different. Despite the fact that ethnic and linguistic differences exist amongst the people of different areas, there was administrative links in the remote as well as in the recent past. The geographical and topographical situation of these areas, the economic interdependence of the different areas and their strategic importance demand that there should be an administrative link.

Furthermore, it is desirable that we should try for an emotional integration of the different people of this region. For that matter, when representatives of the different Area Governments shall meet together and when at least for limited purposes they shall be under a common Government it will help integration and certainly it will be better than complete separation. The creation of the Zonal Government shall not in any way impair the autonomy of the States, because the subjects of administration entrusted to the Zonal Government are concurrent subjects. A law of the Parliament of concurrent subjects prevails upon a State law on that subject. In our scheme, a law of the Zonal Legislature shall prevail upon a law of the Area Government on that matter. The difference is that only in regard to the matters mentioned above, the laws and decrees of the Zonal Government shall prevail upon the laws and decrees of the Area Government.

The implementation of the scheme shall not require much amendments of the Constitution. Only notable amendments to Articles 263 and 240 and some other minor amendments will do. The scheme will ensure a full measure of autonomy to the different States and at the same time shall provide for an administrative link at the apex. The establishment of a Zonal Council under Article 263 of the constitution as provided for in the States Reorganization Act, 1956, shall not serve the purpose, because these Councils are advisory in nature without any administrative authority and as such have not been able to make much headway. The proposed Zonal Government shall have full administrative authority though over a limited sphere.

# TROUBLED FRONTIER

HARISH CHANDOLA

We are becoming aware of the north-eastern frontier nineteen years after we had inherited it. Why? Because of political struggles growing within the area and not because of the spectacular culture of its people, or their quaint socio-economic relations or their bravery. These were there always. Our awareness is also not so much because of the external threat. That too was always there, since we became independent. Which frontiers in Asia and Africa, established through colonial conquests, are not affected by forces from across, and are peaceful?

The factors which brought political awakening in India were quite different from those that created political awakening in this frontier, specially in the area south of the Lohit frontier district of NEFA, the centre of which is Nagaland.

One difference was that the British rule came to this frontier nearly over a century after it had subjugated the rest of India. And it did not come to this area for the same reasons, of exploiting the local resources and making England rich. It was extended to protect the British tea gardens in the Assam valley from the raids of these hill people. The British ruled over this area nominally and not in the same manner as they did in Bengal or U.P. Therefore, there was no large-scale organized resistance against the British here, though individual tribesmen did avenge individual or village insults by cutting off the heads of a few White men in Tea gardens or shooting an officer or two.

## *Christianity and Tribal Unity*

Unity among the various peoples, scattered on these hills, living in tribes and clans, isolated from each other, was first brought by Christianity. It brought the message of one God and of universal brotherhood of man. Before that, a tribe treated only its members as human and, to it, others were either sub-human or super-human. This narrowmindedness of the tribal mind was broken by Christianity, which first said, "All men are brothers and equal."

The breaking of this narrowmindedness produced great energy, like the energy produced by the breaking of an atom, or, more to the point, like the energy produced amongst the tribesmen of Arabia when to them came the message of Islam, in the 7th century A.D. We all know how the Arabian tribesmen, engaged until then in mutually destructive warfare, got united and then swept all over West Asia, North Africa and even Europe, conquering with their swords and spreading the message of Islam.

Likewise, Christianity broke the isolation of the innumerable tribal commu-

nities, now called Nagas, in these hills and united them.

Then came political awakening. The Second World War brought it. The Japanese and the British armies, which fought here, brought it. In the East, Kohima was the turning point of this war.

After the Second World War, the whole of South-East Asia became alive. It did not want to remain a colony of either Britain, France or Japan. Struggles began everywhere; armed struggles, from Indonesia and Indo-China to Burma. Nagaland, standing next door, could not remain unaffected.

So, unity was brought by Christianity and political awakening by South-East Asia after the war. It was not brought by the Indian struggle for Independence or by Satyagraha or by any political party in India.

Had the British stayed on, perhaps the Naga struggle and the larger Indian struggle would have got co-ordinated and ultimately united. But no sooner had the sense of unity and political awakening come to Nagaland, than Britain transferred power to India and left. Next door to the Nagas the whole of South-East Asia was alive with national struggles. The question before the Nagas, therefore, was what was their position between India, which had just become independent and the South-East Asia which had just begun violent struggles for national independence?

Not only did waves of political unrest come from South-East Asia to this area, but the people here themselves had come to these hills from that part of Asia. These were very recent migrations, compared with other communities in India.

What I want to say is: First, looking at the situation objectively, it would be incorrect to hold missionaries, whatever their own designs might have been, responsible for the political unrest in Nagaland. They brought Christianity to a world of strife and darkness; and I have seen its better face in the often burnt and devastated village of Khonoma. There, poverty-stricken Pastor Kru had died of cancer on a murky and dismal day of last year's (1965) winter. We had gone to bury him near his thatched hut. Afterwards, in the gloom of the evening, when the people who had come to bury him began leaving, the poor, miserable widow looked forlorn and forsaken with her brood of little children. And then a small group appeared from nowhere. It opened its hymn books and began singing and stayed with them the night. And I thought, had Christ not come to Nagaland, the Kru family would have been lonely and abandoned on that terrible night.

Secondly, the present Nagaland and the area around it lies at crossroads,



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both historically and geographically. Why also would the Japanese have chosen this area as the path of their attack on India in 1944? Why else would the British have taken a position here, which they never did in Burma, and fought so desperately? Neither fought here because the Naga tribes lived in this area. It was just in their way.

### *The Political Frontier*

If one goes further back in time, one finds that the Ahoms, who ruled the Brahmaputra valley, and the Burmese rulers had frequently fought with each other over these very hills. And the Nagas had taken part in those wars. In Ao Naga villages one still comes across old people bearing names meaning "killer of the Burmese."

And so, when the East Wind blows, it blows through these mountains and over these people before entering the valleys of India. This is the corridor between us and the eastern world. It would be wrong to treat it as a backyard, as it has been treated so far.

Partition brought political consciousness among the hill people living south of the Brahmaputra valley, on the borders of East Pakistan, and our continued conflict with China is bringing a new awareness to the people of NEFA. How this awareness will be channelled, nobody can yet say.

A point I want to make is that a country, these days, has two kinds of frontiers; its geographical frontier and its political frontier. Political frontiers expand and shrink much more than the geographical ones. Once India's political frontiers stretched from Africa to East Asia. But where do they stand today? I am sorry to say that other countries have driven their political frontiers inside our geographical frontiers. Why else should our railway lines on Pakistan border be sabotaged? Why should batches of hill people south of the Brahmaputra valley cross over into East Pakistan? At the time of partition, these people had stood with us for our secularism, as against the communalism of our neighbour. We should have since expanded the frontiers of our secularism. But that did not happen. Instead, the communalism of our neighbour has expanded its frontiers.

A growing country lives on its frontiers and a shrinking one at its centre. I am afraid all these years we have lived at the centre and not on our frontiers.

On our borders lived politically uncommitted people. To draw them into the mainstream of the nation's political life, we should have organized them politically. But we did not do so. To administer them, we recruited men from the army, on the basis of their physical fitness, perhaps because the British used

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to do the same when they needed administrators for the borders. But the British did not face hostile neighbours. Pakistan was not there then and China was under Western domination. But can we afford to do the same and send people to the borders on the basis of their physical fitness only?

### *Apathetic Officialdom*

What did our physically fit officers do in NEFA? They read tour diaries of the former British officers and nearly all of them wrote similar tour diaries, mostly saying that they and their wives were the first people from civilization to reach such and such an area. One officer's wife wrote an article in "The Times of India" in 1956, saying that the people she visited had never seen a woman from outside their village, and, on one occasion, when she slipped and fell, a villager took hold of her shod foot, thinking it to be her hand, and tried to help her get up! Can you imagine human beings, however backward, who would not be able to distinguish a human hand from foot?

These officers distributed rum and red blankets to villagers and told them to build a school here and a road there. Some of them, to relieve their boredom, established Churches and worked as Sunday pastors, and baptised tribesmen who did not know what was being done to them and who thought they were merely following the orders of officers. And they tried to maintain the area as an exclusive preserve of theirs.

I remember the conference of senior Indian Frontier Administrative Service officers held in Shillong in 1961, if I am right. In August, 1959, the Chinese had attacked and taken Longju and as a result, the army had been sent to NEFA. And, in 1961, the senior officers had said that the army firing range should be shifted outside NEFA because the villagers' ears were not accustomed to the Harsh sound of exploding bullets! A year later, in 1962, the Chinese came in massively and crashingly through the homes of the same villagers, and, if I may add, with the ease of tourists, while our own officers, as per their tour diaries, had such difficulties in reaching the same areas.

These officers had no real contact with the society they administered. How else can one explain why, after 15 years of our rule in Kameng division of NEFA, when the Chinese invaded it in 1962 and made a by-pass to encircle our positions on the Se-la pass, not a single villager of that division came to our Political Officer or his assistants to inform them of the outflanking move of the Chinese? The villagers must have seen the Chinese make that move, which took them days. But it seems the villagers simply watched, uninvolved!

What are our objectives with regard to our frontiers? Build roads and

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open schools? And of course, for officers to create a false aura of their own individual popularity?

This game of becoming popular with the local people is being played by individual officers, for the sake of their promotions, to the detriment of the national interest. The slogan is that they must become popular, whether it is by dancing all day and night with the tribesmen and their women, or consuming larger quantities of the local brew than the tribesmen themselves, or by distributing rum nad gifts more generously or just by running down individual Congress leaders.

I know an officer sent to a high post in Sikkim. He tries to be more Sikkimese than the Sikkimese themselves and thus be popular with the Maharaja, whose own popularity with his people is so much in doubt. In doing so, he is apologetic about everything Indian, including his own country's policy towards Sikkim.

Every time an M.P. visits NEFA, there are most malicious stories told about his Dhoti and demand for Dahi and vegetables and fear of cold by officers to their colleagues and the local people. The ridicule is not on the individual but on the nation as a whole.

And efforts are made to hide everything from the country. Why did the school boys of Pasighat fight with men of the Assam Rifles? Why was Assam Rifles sent to do police duties in Anini area? Why did the Daflas of Subansiri district murder our officers on tour? Nothing about these things is told to the world outside NEFA. Because, if it is told, the people outside would know how the border people are systematically being alienated from the masses of the Indian people.

### *Double Standards*

India has chosen a democratic form of Government. The whole country enjoys it, except NEFA. Why should autocratic officers keep ruling NEFA? Why can't the people there elect their own representatives to govern themselves?

The stock answer is that the tribesmen are not yet ready for a democratic form of government. What a strange answer! These people have always governed themselves in a democratic manner, through village councils. But the bureaucrat there, who is the sole master now, does not want the checks the elected representatives might put on him and keeps on saying that the people are not ready for elections.

And what checks can the nation put on these autocrats today? The head-

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quarters of NEFA are 300 to 500 miles away from its borders in comfortable and salubrious Shillong. It is like ruling Bengal from Hyderabad. In fact, if one takes the difficulties of communication in NEFA, one would think San Francisco was much nearer Shillong than Shillong from NEFA outposts. It is a mystery why NEFA headquarters are not in NEFA. And yet, to those who had the good chance of observing NEFA officers in Shillong, it is not such a mystery.

It is necessary to draw the peoples' attention to the darkness prevailing over NEFA. Has anybody ever heard a single complaint from a NEFA villager against the administration? Never has there been one known outside. In democratic USA and even in totalitarian China there are complaints against the administration by the people, but none in NEFA!

How can we have two standards of administration in one country viz: one for the NEFA people and another for the rest of the country? One for the tribesmen of Madhya Pradesh and Nagaland and another for NEFA? Democratic form of government is a principle. Are we sacrificing that principle for the sake of expediency? And whose expediency?

A question I should have asked earlier is, what is meant by the phrase "unity of the country."? To me it means political and economic unity of its people. A nation expresses itself through its political organizations. And yet, the entry of all Indian political parties is banned in NEFA and some other areas. Why? Are they anti-national organizations? Or are we afraid that once these people attain political consciousness and form political organizations, they might express themselves differently? In that case, can we stop them from becoming politically conscious; a people living between China and the mainland of India? Today, when the whole of the country is so agitated politically, how is it that NEFA is so politically dead? Or is it that we do not know what is happening inside it?

### *Elwin's Legacy*

I can understand that Dr Verrier Elwin did not want political parties to function there or even the army to enter it because he wanted his work to be the law for NEFA. He did not want the NEFA and the Naga people to come closer to the masses of the Indian people. But he is dead now. Who is now obstructing the process of our coming closer to them politically and economically? Is it the administrative progeny of Dr Elwin? Are these the people who are continuously working to maintain the British-imposed Inner Line, dividing the tribal people from the masses of the Indian people, specially the Assamese and the Bengalis living next door? Are they doing so in order to protect their

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allowance for working inside the so-called Inner Line which is 33 and  $\frac{1}{3}$  per cent of their salaries? Or are there some other reasons?

Why is the Inner Line there today? It is to prevent me and a professor from the next-door Gauhati from going into NEFA. I am afraid it is there to prevent thinking people from going in. Otherwise, I have known most objectionable characters being taken in by some officers who consider themselves owners of this frontier.

I had heard Dr Elwin say that the Inner Line prevents Marwaris from going in and exploiting the tribal people. But I have known Biharis and Punjabis who have been given permits to do similar exploitation.

Let us not delude ourselves. If we prevent political consciousness from reaching the tribesmen, it might come to them from some other source, to our peril. Sandwiched between conflicting political thoughts, these people cannot remain politically ignorant for long. Some day or other they will have to take sides. So long as there is time, let them know us and stand with us.

I for one would say that it is always better to have with you conscious, thinking people, instead of dull and dumb people. The conscious people would know where the enemy lies and what threat it poses and how to counter it. The dumb would not care.

It is for this reason that I feel thankful to the Naga National Council; which has brought great political awakening to Nagaland. And the day the Naga National Council will stand with us, we will know that the Naga people stand with us consciously, resolutely and committedly, and we will stop worrying about unfriendly nations sabotaging our frontiers in that area.

# A POSSIBLE AVENUE OF APPROACH TO THE NAGAS AND OTHER TRIBALS

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It will not be an exaggeration if I say that some 20 years ago, many people outside Assam had never heard of the Nagas. Of late, however, the Naga people have begun to feature in the daily talks of the average man on the street. Who are these people? These Nagas? they ask. An assortment of answers follows: "Oh! just another tribal group!" Or, "a fine people those". Or else, "fierce head—hunters!" Then again mostly Christians or, more commonly, "they are gifted with splendid dances and love-music—we saw a group on the Republic Day."

Most of the above observations are no doubt true but they tend to dwell on the obvious. They smack of a partial or sketchy knowledge of the people in question.

## *Way of Life*

Nagas comprise of about 27 major tribes, living in and outside the State of Nagaland. Each tribe has its own language and some tribes—for example, mine-speak well over a 100 dialects, each village having its own dialect. As may happen in a hill country, due to bad communications the Naga tribes have tended to become cut off from each other. But they do have a common culture with slight difference.

Their most common appellation has been "head-hunters", though of course the term is widely misused. Warlikeness, valour and love of hunting being manly attractions, fighting was frequent with the neighbouring tribes. It was then that heads were taken. The heads collected were kept as examples of village or individual prowess. Nevertheless, there was an elaborate code of war. There were the tribal tribunals, respected by all and sundry. Failure to respect them or abide by their decisions meant punishment.

The early history of mankind shows that head-hunting was practised by many primitive peoples of the world, though in different forms. As late as last year (1965) some good people I met surprised me by attributing head-hunting to the present generation of Nagas. As a result of this belief, Nagas are branded as a cruel, ferocious and merciless people. This feeling has influenced the treatment of many an outsider towards the Nagas, resulting in wounding their feelings.

The Nagas, like all emergent people of the world, are highly sensitive. As

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a race, they are a proud people—with proud stories of the valour of their fore-fathers handed down to them in the form of oral literature, song and dance. They live in a beautiful country which yields its wealth to them. They are attached to the soil and have never known the earth to fail them. They do not know what it is to be inert and idle. They feel very strongly about their tribes, their land and consequently they are quick, rightly or wrongly, to demand their right in society.

### *The Naga Mind*

Coming from a classless society, they do not care for, or even acknowledge, the existence of a social hierarchy. In their own villages they respect the honest worker and give stress on individual worth and merit. Even their women enjoyed and still enjoy equality of status with men from time immemorial. It is for this reason, perhaps, that the tiers or classes in our present-day society first puzzle then exasperate them. I am not implying that they do not respect authority because they do. The authority of an elder may be a myth in the rest of the world but not among the Nagas. But when they are looked down upon, termed savages, treated as second-rate, dismissed as primitive or dealt with in a condescending or patronizing manner, they are at first puzzled, then just plain angry and lastly rebellious. However, insignificant the cause may appear to the rest of the world, they are still rebels with a cause. In this connection, I would say that the earlier conduct of both petty and highly placed Government officials left much to be desired and did much disservice to the cause of fostering good-relationship between the Nagas and the rest of the Indians.

Most of our people are simple-folks, not educated in the technical sense of term, above either treachery or dishonesty. But when they were treated with dishonesty, (be it lying or taking bribes) and with discourtesy, what were they expected to think? Would you expect them to wait for the next batch of 'strangers' to see if they were different? And what if the second batch outdid the first? Every one forms impression of people he comes in contact with and judges them or reacts to them accordingly. The people in many Naga villages did just that. They formed impressions, unfortunately bad ones and never had the chance to alter or correct these and many are still living with these impressions.

That they are inferior to others they do not for a moment think. The very idea is preposterous to a people whom even the powerful Ahom Kings set out to subjugate but ended up by treating them as equals, giving their daughters in marriage to the village chief's sons. History tells us of their peaceful co-existence for hundreds of years after that.

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The British, too, set out to speak in the language of brute-force, of guns and military conquest. The Nagas, when roused, were a match for them too. The dirty, half-naked Nagas stood up to the White man's challenge.

### *Nature of the Problem*

It was then that the Missionaries came, armed with "love" and trust and concern for the souls of the hitherto neglected tribes. Hostility was soon replaced by the love for that greatest lover of mankind—Jesus Christ. Conversions to Christianity became a regular feature. Spirits were curbed with the adoption of the new faith. Wanton killing was realized as sin in the light of the gospels of Christ. If the Nagas today are found to be pro missionary. One has to try to understand it from their point of view. They could recognise goodness when they saw it. The missionary was the first friend a Naga had. A Naga has known the love and care in the schools, the doctor's healing hands that go with missionary zeal. But the Naga is not unresponsive to love from other quarters. Give him his place in society, show him understanding and he will be your friend.

No, he is not unresponsive to affection. What he is quick to do is to resent bad or indifferent treatment.

I have discussed freely both with the Nagas, other tribal people and persons from the plains. We all seemed to agree on one point that the problem of the hill-tribes of Assam was more of a socio-psychological nature rather than political and hence it must be approached and solved socially and psychologically. Politically too-yes-but psychologically first. The educationists, the students, the journalists...in short, men from every walk of life, should address themselves to the task.

Officers of law, I.A.S. officers, teachers etc., must have integrity and sociability no matter where they work but those dealing with the hill-people must be doubly cautious and tactful.

Whatever the nature of their work, they must, along with that, offer their friendship. "Friendship is a disinterested commerce between equals". People in executive posts should never forget that if severity breeds fear, roughness breeds hatred. My advice to them is: Criticize them if you must—but constructively, warmly. Honour their women, they are somebody's wives, mothers and sisters. Their eating habits are not to your taste! Do not deprecate them—for it is a delicate matter. Make allowances for those who do not live, eat, dress and behave as you do. Don't extol your own merits and in the same breath condemn their tradition.



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“The problem of the tribal areas”, said Jawaharlal Nehru, “is to make the people feel that they have perfect freedom to live their own lives and to develop according to their wishes and genius. India to them should signify not only a protecting force but a liberating one. Any conception that India is ruling them and that they are the ruled, or that customs and habits with which they are unfamiliar are going to be imposed on them, will alienate them”.

“It is a fundamental law of life that if you give friendship, you get friendship in return. It is easy enough for friends to approach each other in a friendly way—it does not require any effort to do so. If an attempt is made the problems are not necessarily solved but the problems become easier of solution, and this frightful suspicion of each other, fear of each other, distrust of each other, lessens”.

# NEFA: ITS HISTORY OF ADMINISTRATION AND THE PROBLEM OF INTEGRATION

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The North-East Frontier Agency (NEFA), politically and geographically was a part of the ancient kingdom of Kamarupa. At present it is constitutionally an integral part of the Assam State. NEFA was a receptacle of the tribal emigrants from all directions. The mountain tracks and jungles of Burma, the high mountain passes from Tibet and Bhutan, led emigrants of different shades, races and culture from different areas. At present we find different tribal groups with different cultures, habits and dialects. Without extensive research it is absolutely difficult to say specifically who were the original inhabitants of the mountainous tracts of NEFA.<sup>1</sup> It is possible that they are still there or they have been absorbed with the rest of the emigrants, who came in wave after wave either from Burma or through Burma<sup>2</sup> The dominant race of NEFA is of Indo-mongoloid stock of the Tibeto-Burma race.<sup>3</sup> All the major dialects of NEFA except the dialects of the northern Tibetan groups, basically belong to the Tibeto-Burman family with some local variations.

In the following pages I have tried to show (1) how the geographical boundaries of NEFA helped people to migrate to NEFA from east, north and west and made them isolated from each other by natural barriers; (2) the different tribal groups who actually migrated from Burma or through Burma; (3) what contact they had with the rest of India in the pre-Ahom, Ahom and the British period along with history of administration; and lastly (4) the present position of NEFA and the problem of integration.

## 1. *Geography of NEFA*

To understand why the people of NEFA developed different cultural patterns, dialects and habits, the geographical condition of the area should be considered, which are so varied and difficult. The high mountain ranges, difficult terrains, unfordable streams and thick forest and jungles always discouraged people to move freely. This geographical isolation made them indifferent to their neighbours some of whom actually belonged to the same parental stock. Some groups were even hostile, to one another as they considered the other group as foreigner to their own. The mountain passes and the river courses played a great role of migration routes in one way, and at the same time the very same mountain ranges and the difficult streams discouraged people to have contacts with one other. Lastly Brahmaputra river formed a 'cultural watershed' by barring people of NEFA from having contact with the people of Assam.

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NEFA covers some 35,000 square miles of area bounded by Burma in the east, Tibet in the north, Assam in the south and Bhutan in the west. The rest of the Great Himalayan Range forms the northern and north-eastern boundary with Tibet and the altitude sometimes rises as high as 21,000 feet and sometimes as low as 9,000 feet. Towards the Burma border it gradually descends and in the Patkoi Hills the average altitude is about 6,000 feet.

The entire area of NEFA with the exception of the foot-hills strip is constituted by the mountainous belt comprising the spurs radiating southwards from the Himalayan Crest Line. The pattern is a little varied in the western NEFA where ridges like the Thag La,<sup>4</sup> Se La, Bomdi La, etc., run parallel to the Great Himalayan Range.

The major important rivers of NEFA are the Tirap, Lohit, Dihang or Siang, Subansiri and Kameng. The five frontier divisions<sup>5</sup> are all named after the major rivers flowing through the respective divisions. The Lohit river which rises in the Zayul area of Tibet, cuts across the Himalayan Crest Line near Rima.<sup>6</sup> The Dihang river is the southward continuation of the Tsangpo which enters into Indian territory near Gelling (in the Siang Frontier Division) and is known as Siang in the lower hills. The Subansiri rises in Tibet and after crossing the Himalayan Crest Line it travels through the division and ultimately joins with the Brahmaputra river. The Kameng river runs generally from the north to south and after number of sharp right-angle turns in its lower reaches descends to join the Brahmaputra in the Assam plains.

All the southern tribal groups of NEFA who migrated from Burma through the Patkoi hills moved between the northern snowy ranges and the Brahmaputra river. They could not migrate farther up due to different climatic condition and moreover, those places were inhabited by the Tibetan emigrants. They also could not come down to the Assam plains due to the Brahmaputra river. Some of the groups migrated farther west up to Sikkim which is evidenced from the presence of the groups Koch, Mech and Mru in Bhutan-India border and the Lepchas in Sikkim. All of them ethnically, linguistically and culturally resemble very much the Burmese and other south-east Asian tribal groups. Though the northern Himalayan ranges were difficult to cross, still there were many gaps through which Lohit, Siang, Subansiri and Kameng Divisions were connected with Tibet. All these were well-established trade routes to Tibet. The NEFA tribes used to act as trade agents between the Tibetans and the plains people of Assam.<sup>7</sup> The most important route was through Tawang (K.F.D.) which was connected with Tsona (south-east Tibet) and the bulk of Bhutan-Tibet and Assam-Tibet trade was channelled through this route. The Tibetan groups migrated to NEFA through these existing trade routes.

## 2. *The Ethnic Groups and their Migration*

The major tribal groups of NEFA have been studied from the cultural point of view by sociologists and social anthropologists, but physical anthropologists have not done much work. From general observations, it has been universally agreed that their physical appearances very much resemble the Tibeto-Burman family. The Tibetan groups, Zakhring, Lama, Memba, or Monba and the Monpas who are distributed in the extreme north and the Sharduks (concentrated in south of Bomdi La, in the K.F.D.) have, in general, fair complexion, well-built body, tall stature (except womenfolk), sharp nose and prominent chin. The Khamptis, Singphos, Miris, Mishmis (Idus, Digarus and Mijus), Adis (Padam, Minyong, Gallong, etc.), Apa Tanis, Daflas (also called Bangnis), Akas (as they paint their faces), Mijis, Buguns, etc., who are all distributed in the central and southern regions are usually short in stature. Their complexion varies from dark brown to fair. They have well developed cheekbones, less developed chin and epicanthic folds in their eyes.

The Zakhring group migrated from the Zaiyul district in southern Tibet over the pass at the head-water of the Dri River and settled on the northern villages of the Mishmi country.<sup>8</sup> Though they had trade contacts with the Mishmis since long, their relation was never good. The Monpas have migrated from the Monyul district near the head-water of the Tawang Chu river, east of Bhutan. They believe that they have migrated from the place according to the prophecy of searching the 'promised land'.<sup>9</sup> The Khampti people have migrated from the hilly region between the north-eastern extremity of Assam and the Irrawady valley, called *Hkhampti Long* by the Burmese, towards the end of the eighteenth century and belong to the same stock, wherefrom the Ahoms of Assam have descended.<sup>10</sup> The Singpho people started migrating from the eastern branch of the Irrawady river. On the break of the northern Shans they spread in the neighbouring areas, during the rebellion of the Mattack tribe against Raja Gourinath Singh, about 1790 A.D.<sup>11</sup> The Mishmi people also probably migrated from Burma as Mishmi settlements have been found as far as the Nemlang river.

Regarding the migration of the Adis, Miris, Apa Tanis, Daflas and others, there is no recorded history but as they are concentrated in farther west it seems that they migrated earlier. The Adis and Miris themselves believe that they have common origin and the Miris are a sub-section of the Adis. Culturally also, they resemble each other very closely. Though the legends and folk-tales of the Adi people point to their arrival from the Tibetan side, only from few Tibetan place names referred to by their 'history men', it cannot be said specifically that they migrated from Tibet. Probably, it was the influence of the Tibetan culture as the Tibetan groups were very close to them. Cultural traits and religious beliefs resemble more with the Mishmis and other neighbours than

with the Tibetan groups. The Apa Tani and Dafla groups closely resemble each other, except for a few habits, probably due to local conditions and geographical isolation. Regarding cultural pattern and social behaviour, the Daflas and the Apa Tanis in general have many common links with the Adis and the Mishmis in the east. The Aka, Miji and the Bugun groups ethnically, culturally and in religious behaviour have much similarities with the Bangnis, Sulungs, Daflas (also called Bangnis) and the Apa Tanis. Whatever differences they have, they are all due to local condition. The Sherdukpens differ from the rest of the southern groups as they have been much influenced by the Monpas of Dirang Zong, who live very close to them. Except religion, there is not much Tibetan influence and even in the case of religion, we find there are some animistic beliefs which they have still preserved. In some ceremonies they still sacrifice animals. Regarding linguistic uniformity, cultural similarities and physical affinities, all the non-tibetan groups closely resemble each other.

### 3. *History of Administration*

In early days, the ancient rulers of Assam had a loose political control over NEFA, the northern mountainous border area of Assam. The tribal chiefs had been authorized by the pre-Ahom rulers to levy certain dues on the foothill villages in their proximity, in return for which the former paid tribute to the latter. Successors of Sukapha from the Shan State of Maulung, conquered upper Assam and founded the Ahom dynasty in 1228 A.D. Expansion of Ahom kingdom and establishment of a strong central government deprived the tribal people of their traditional privileges in exacting manual labour and taxes from the adjacent foot-hill villages and they were also deprived of essential commodities and foodgrains for which they were dependent on the foot-hill villages. There are innumerable instances of Bhotiya, Aka, Miri, Adi and Mishmi raids upon the foot-hill villages.<sup>12</sup>

The Ahoms after a few losses in terms of army, weapons and prestige realized that it was unwise to be aggressive and then they restricted themselves to the policy of reconciliation. Almost each of the menacing tribes was assigned a certain number of *paiks* or tax-paying households and given the right of realizing a certain amount of cereals, cloth, salt, iron, etc., called *posa* and manual labour from the restricted areas. Except the Tibetan groups, the rest of the tribal groups of NEFA accepted the sovereignty of the Raja of Assam. The Monpa tribe with its nucleus at Tawang was controlled by the chief abbot of the Tawang monastery and the Sherdukpens were independent of both the Tawang monastery and the Ahoms.<sup>13</sup>

In 1819, Assam was invaded by Ava (Burma). The British Government which had already intervened in Assamese affairs earlier in 1792, expelled the

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Burmese from the Brahmaputra valley in February, 1826. By the treaty Yanda Bou signed on February 24, 1826, the whole of Assam came under British authority, but in 1839 only, complete annexation of Assam was done. From their earlier experiences they decided to follow two major policies :

- (1) As their knowledge about the area and the tribes was poor, they decided not to give any military thrust.
- (2) The tribes should not be challenged for their existing privileges and rights over the foot-hill villages.

Moreover, to establish a friendly relation with the tribes of NEFA they established two trade marts, one at Sadiya to attract the Mishmis and the other at Udalguri, near the Kariapar Duar to attract the Tibetan, Bhotiya groups of the Kameng Frontier Division.

Complications arose as a result of the free entry allowed to the tribes into the plains. The British subjects and the frontier officers were not secure. Between 1826 and 1873 there were many hostile events. There was a pressure on the Government of Bengal and Government of India to take military action, but a policy of patience was advocated. Some administrative reforms were effected in the next few years, such as (1) Demarcation of the southern limits of the Tibetan/Bhotiya groups, Akas and Daflas in 1872-73, which led to the formation of an Inner Line in 1873 denoting the northern extent of the areas under effective control of the Government and regulating intercourse between the plains and the hill-folks. (2) In view of the peculiar circumstances of the tribal border lands, the Dibrugarh Frontier Tract was formed under the provisions of the *Frontier Tract Regulation of 1880*. The purpose of this regulation was to exclude the frontier areas from the jurisdiction of the general executive and judicial administration applicable to Assam. Instead, a system in conformity with the rules formed under the Scheduled District Act was enforced in the area.<sup>14</sup>

Following some outrages by the Adis and Mishmis in 1906-7, local officers called for a vigorous application of the 'big stick' policy which was rejected first due to the Government of India's pre-occupation with the Tibet issue. Ultimately, the British Government had to change its action for two major reasons : (1) murder of Noel Williamson, and (2) threat posed by the Chinese incursions at some points of the frontier.<sup>15</sup> Some missions were sent in the frontier region to survey the entire area.<sup>16</sup>

The most important outcome of these operations completed between 1911 and 1913 was defining the boundary line with Tibet known as McMahon Line running roughly along the Himalayan watershed from the north-east of Bhutan to Isu Razi Pass in the north of Burma.

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Uptil 1947, there was no major change of policy towards this frontier. But since India achieved her independence the new leaders of free India realized the vital potentialities of the tribal population of the frontier, both for its backwardness and strategic importance. NEFA was given a special status in the Indian Constitution. Major changes took place from time to time. In 1954 the administration was re-organized on the single-line administration pattern. Various developmental activities have been carried out in the area with every care and sympathy. The major achievements are : spread of education, better communication and economic stability.

### *4. The Problem of Integration*

Though in India we have many peoples who are racially, culturally and linguistically different, there is a culture and social similarity by which a person can be identified as an Indian. Whatever differences we have, are due to local conditions and geographical isolation. It is true that the people of NEFA, Nagaland, Mizo Hills and other mountainous tracts of Assam are somewhat different, from the people of Central, Western and Southern India, but that does not mean that one is Indian and the other is non-Indian. The people of Northern India differ much from the people of Southern India. The people of NEFA, Nagaland and Mizo Hills ethnically, culturally and linguistically have no difference with the plains people of Assam. Most of the groups migrated from Burma and other neighbouring areas. India gave them refuge and did not interfere in their cultural life, as a result of which they maintained their own ideas and traditions.

The concept of a nation with one culture in a same geographical boundary, is not practicable in modern days. If the United States of America with its two States (Hawaii and Alaska) or Pakistan (East and West, being not confined in a same geographical boundary and having quite different races and culture) can be called a nation, India with its solid geographical unity and common understanding with various shades and cultures, is a full-fledged ideal nation. Moreover, it represents a culture which is typically Indian.

Whatever misunderstanding we have about the different North and North-eastern Hill peoples of India is due to the British policy, which continued for two hundred years. Britishers were never interested in the integration of the people of Northern Frontier. It was only to serve commercial interests, i.e., to establish trade centres in Tibet, that they sent several missions, explorers, and administrators to explore valuable resources, if any, and to find out the shorter routes to Tibet. The result was annexation of Darjeeling, Uttarakhand (Uttar Pradesh), Spiti (Greater Himachal) and Ladak (Jammu and Kashmir). The Britishers preferred to keep the frontiers isolated and backward as

(1) for so long these tribal peoples remained isolated they would not allow any foreign invasion of their country, (2) to develop these difficult hilly areas was an expensive affair without any return, except worries and new problems.

After independence, however, special attention has been paid to bring the border tribes in the mainstream of the nation's life by introducing special administrative system and implementing economic, educational and cultural development schemes. Constitutional safeguards have been adequately provided by declaring the frontier tribes as scheduled tribes and the areas as scheduled areas. Unless one visits different places of NEFA and other hills of Assam, it is difficult to realize what tremendous developments they have achieved. There is hardly any village where there is no school, and which is not connected with a road. Agricultural centres, hospitals, post-offices, training-cum-production centres, co-operative societies, etc., have been set up in the important villages and administrative centres. But, it is a pity that nothing has been done for true integration; emotional integration is not there. Besides all these developments, they are still where they were in the past. Emotionally and culturally, they are still beyond Brahmaputra, and the high hills.

Due to the recent developments, the economy of the whole Northern and North-eastern region of Assam has changed. The traditional marriage systems and forms are changing, joint-living is breaking up, the concept of individual earning and individual ownership is becoming strong, traditional inheritance rules are decaying. The traditional institutions like the dormitory, institution of slavery and monastic institutions are either absent or in the last stage of decay. The people, who were involved in these institutions and enjoyed power and privilege, do not know their future now. A new school is evolving with its new ideas, thoughts and visions. This transition period is dangerous.

### *5. Reasons for Disintegration*

The problem of disintegration is not so acute in NEFA as in Nagaland and Mizo Hills. But if we continue our policy along the present line, probably within the next five years NEFA people will follow the other two groups, and the leadership will come from the Siang Frontier Division. If we analyse the recent happenings in Nagaland and the Mizo Hills, probably we will see that the general mass is not in the picture. Still now different groups are not friendly with each other; even among sub-sections of different groups there are disparities. Only a section of Western educated political leaders are continuing the hostile activities.



6. *How to Stop Disintegration*

Personally, I believe that free entry should be allowed to the plains people in all the hill areas of North and North-eastern India,<sup>17</sup> and the tribals of these regions should be encouraged to come down. In case of free intercourse between the hill people and the plains people, there are possibilities of exploitation by the later. It may be mentioned that the tribal groups of Chotanagpur and Madhya Pradesh had free intercourse with the non-tribals. There was a transition period when they suffered a little, but now they are economically and culturally well advanced and have been integrated with the rest of the population.

The hill people who are in the Government services and other allied services should be stationed in the plains and the plains people should be posted in the hills, and also should be encouraged to take their families there.

Exchanges of cultural troupes, in regular manner, would be helpful as both of them can understand common heritages and links, and develop regard and sympathy for each other's culture.

The tribal hostels should be immediately closed and the tribal students should be allowed to stay in different non-tribal hostels. Now even in the formative period, the tribal students who will represent their own community, state and country as a whole, are allowed to think that they are tribals and they have a different culture and traditions. They do not get time to share the feelings, culture and sympathy of the youths of other states and India as a whole.

An extensive sociological study should be carried on in the entire northern and north-eastern hill areas of India to know the actual socio-economic condition of the people and to understand the root of all the social and political misunderstandings.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

<sup>1</sup> In the Neolithic period, NEFA was inhabited by a group of people, which can be sustained from the finding of a Neolithic adze in a Padam Village (S.F.D.). Proper and extensive exploration in the area is very much needed. Other Neolithic tools found in Assam and Naga Hills are very close in type with the tools found in Burma, Malaya and other South-East Assam countries. *Records of the Geological Survey of India*, XVII, p. 244.

<sup>2</sup> The groups Khampti, Singpho, Mishmi, Ahom, etc., originally belonged to the western group of the Tai family, who migrated to the Shan States, Upper Burma, Assam and other places. Seidenfaden, Erik, *The Thai Peoples* (Bangkok, 1958), p. 9. The tradition of the Ahoms regarding the origin of their kings resemble closely with the tradition preserved by the Shans call themselves Tai (meaning 'celestial origin'). Gait, E., *History of Assam* (Calcutta, 1905, revised edition 1963) p. 78.

<sup>3</sup> Tibeto-Burman is a linguistic classification. Since, there is no suitable racial term it has been used as a racial classification.

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<sup>4</sup> In Tibetan 'La' means, 'pass'. Previously the Tibetans used to come down to the Indian side to exchange salt, wool, gold dust, etc. for foodgrains. They gave their own names to all these passes on the Indian side.

<sup>5</sup> In this paper I shall not discuss the Tirap Frontier Division as I have not adequately studied the materials of that division.

<sup>6</sup> Rima is on the well-known India-Tibet trade route on the northern Mishmi Hills, near the Tibetan border in the Siang Frontier Division.

<sup>7</sup> The details about the India-Tibet trade contact and the role played by the NEFA people have been discussed elaborately in a paper by Sen, Biswajit, 'The Himalayans and their Occupation Patterns'. *Proc. of the Indian Science Congress Association*, 53rd Session, 1966.

<sup>8</sup> Baily, F. M., *No Passport to Tibet* (London, 1957) pp. 73-4.

<sup>9</sup> (i) *Ibid.*, pp. 74-4 and 244-6.

(ii) Duff-Sutherland Dunbar, "Abors and Galongs," *Memoris of the Asiatic Society of Bengal* (Calcutta, 1916), Part IX, pp. 102-4 and (iii) Sen Biswajit. "The Monpas of Tawang." *Vanyajati* (New Delhi), 13 (January 1965), No. I, p. 23.

<sup>10</sup> (i) Sen, Biswajit, "The Khamptis: An Outline of Their Culture". *Man in India* (Ranchi), 45 (July-Sept. 1965) No. 3, pp. 237-42, and (ii) Mackenzie, A., *History of the Relations of the Government with the Hill Tribes of the North-East Frontier of Bengal* (Calcutta, 1884), pp. 57-9.

<sup>11</sup> Dalton, E. T., *Descriptive Ethnology of Bengal* (Calcutta, 1872), pp. 12-6.

<sup>12</sup> Gait, E. A., *A History of Assam* (Calcutta, 1926, 2nd ed.), chapter VI-VIII.

<sup>13</sup> Aitchison C. U., *Treaties, Engagements and Sanads relating to India and Neighbouring Countries* (Calcutta, 1929), XII, pp. 100-1.

<sup>14</sup> Baden-Powell, B. H., *Land System in British India* (Oxford, 1892), III, pp. 452-3.

<sup>15</sup> Between 1909 and 1911 the Chinese, whose suzerainty over Tibet had been virtually recognized by the Anglo-Chinese and the Anglo-Russian convention of 1906 and 1907 respectively, were sighted on the Mishmi and Adi border villages near the Indian frontier, (i) *Official Account of the Abor Expedition, 1911-12* (Simla, 1913), pp. 2-3, and (ii) Baily, F. M., *China, Tibet, Assam* (London, 1945), p. 141.

<sup>16</sup> The Abor Expedition (1911-12) under Major General Hamilton Blower, was one of the missions which was despatched to obtain redress for Williamson's murder and exploration of the frontier.

<sup>17</sup> There is a danger in allowing free entry into these sensitive areas, due to strategic importance. Some unwanted persons may also enter and do mischief. But that can be checked by the security and intelligence people.

# POLITICS IN THE HILL AREAS OF NORTH EAST INDIA

B. M. PUGH

## *Attitude to Indians*

The hill areas of Northeast India were very little affected by the freedom struggle which convulsed our great sub-continent. Several reasons may be given to explain this state of affairs. In the first place, the hillman had a complete faith in the justice of the Englishman. Even today the hillman speaks admiringly of the justness and righteousness of the Englishman but contemptuously of the corrupt and depraved character of Indians. Most hillman think that Indians are beyond the pale of redemption and that this country can never be set right. So hillmen could never foster any move to oust the Englishman. Secondly, a hillman has always believed in the superior intelligence and efficiency of an Englishman and could never believe that Indians could run their own show. In a way the British rulers saw to it that their subject peoples should always believe in this doctrine. To bring a less intelligent and less efficient ruler in place of the British rulers seemed to most hillmen a complete anachronism. Thirdly, the hill areas were too far removed from the rest of India. Hill people in a way were kept isolated from the rest of the people of India.

These and many other factors had kept the hill people aloof from the mainstream of Indian politics. But when rumours began to spread late in 1946 that Britishers might really quit India, the hill people began to do some quick thinking about their future relationship with the rest of the people of India. For some years before independence there had been a movement for the separation of the hill districts of Assam from those in the plains. The feeling of affinity amongst the various hill tribes which helped them to get together arose out of their antagonism against the people of the plains and their culture, and was strengthened by their having one common religion—Christianity—which was rapidly spreading amongst the tribes. On the eve of independence, however, the various tribes had had no time to evolve a common platform for the separation of the hills from the plains. Each tribe was engaged in trying to evolve a formula for extricating itself from the oncoming avalanche which would lump all the peoples of India together. In the Khasi and Jaintia Hills District the position was somewhat complicated by the fact that the Jaintia Hills subdivision was directly under British rule, and by the existence, in pockets, of the so-called British areas in the Khasi Hills portion of the district. The Khasi leaders themselves began to split on the stand to be taken with regard to these areas as distinct from those under the native chiefs. The proposed political solutions of the problem depended greatly on how the protagonists of the different view-points would find a niche for themselves in the new set-up

When the Khasi States Federation came into being at this time, its leader-

ship was challenged by a new party which called itself the Khasi Federated States Party, names which only confused the issue and deceived the public. Sardar Vallabhai Patel, the first Home Minister of independent India, in the midst of these confusing ideas put his strong foot down and in fact obliterated the problem of native states in North-east India as he did in the rest of the country. Subsequently, however, the Union Government in its dealings with the native chiefs in these regions seems to have soft-paddled its tread so that even today the position of the native chiefs in the Khasi Hills District has not yet been clearly defined and has continued to remain a thorn in the smooth administration of the District Council in the Khasi and Jaintia Hills District or vice versa.

### *The Naga outlook*

These wranglings in the Khasi and Jaintia Hills District and the absence of a strong and dependable leadership in the over-all situation of the tribes in North-East India made the Nagas look for their own solution of the problem. The Naga National Council in one of its plenary sessions adopted a resolution which every Naga who, according to traditions, is expected to hold fast to his pledged word, now thinks is irrevocable. That decision was for an independent sovereign Nagaland. That is why the underground Nagas today appear to us Indians as recalcitrant and obstinate. But the die has been cast and the Naga will die in his attempt to achieve that object.

The failure of the Indian Government to quell the open revolt of the Nagas, the creation of linguistic States in the country at the conclusion of the labours of the States Reorganisation Commission, the constant yielding of Government to political agitations for creation of more and more linguistic States, and the not unhealthy encouragement which Government is giving to all local self-governments, have in various degrees helped the fissiparous tendencies among all the races, communities castes and tribes in the country. Local patriotism or chauvinism became the people's choice at the expense of national patriotism. A person with a national outlook is hooted down everywhere, while a parochialist is considered a hundred per cent patriot by people of his race, community, caste or tribe.

The outlook among the different tribes of North-east India has given rise to the demand in the Mizo Hills District for a Mizo State and in the Khasi and Jaintia Hills District for a Khasi-Jaintia State. So while two decades ago the hill people considered themselves as one group, today, rivalry, an instinct of self-preservation, and mistrust, are making it more and more difficult for the tribes to get together or to look forward to living together in peace and harmony.

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### *The solution*

A Hills State with NEFA and Nagaland might have been the correct solution of the political aspirations of the hill people which might have been acceded to by the States Reorganization Commission. It would have brought about a smooth and gradual process of emotional integration of all the tribes with the rest of the people of India. The lurking fear in the minds of the members of the States Reorganization Commission that the State would become a Christian State which might have extra-territorial loyalties was, in my opinion, unfounded. With the formation of Nagaland into a separate State this process of national integration has received a set-back in Nagaland itself and has encouraged fissiparous and disintegrating forces among the rest of the tribes. NEFA started thinking of its own separate existence apart from the other hill areas, thus reducing the area of the proposed Hills State to the four autonomous hill districts of Assam, namely, the Garo Hills, the United Khasi and Jaintia Hills, the United Mikir and North Cachar Hills, and the Mizo Hills. Meanwhile the Mikir Hills District has already indicated its desire to keep out of any Hill State to be composed of those four districts, and the Mizos have also made up their minds that they are different from other tribes, namely, the Garos and the Khasis, and would prefer not to associate themselves in any set-up in which three or four hill districts of Assam may be grouped together. They are now asking for a separate Mizo State to compose of the present Mizo Hills District, the Mizo-inhabited areas in Manipur, Cachar District, Tripura and even those in Burma and Pakistan.

The only solution which appears to me feasible and which, I believe, will be in the interest of the country, is to create a frontier state which will be strong and viable and which will consist of NEFA, Manipur, Tripura, the Assam plains districts, the Assam autonomous hill districts and Nagaland, all having equal status in the new set-up. The APHLC leaders seem to be agreeable to some such arrangement. Tripura has been included in this new set-up as it seems to me only logical that it should come under this arrangement as by itself it will not be able to guard its long international boundary which almost encircles it.

Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru said to the hill leaders of North-east India on one occasion, "A big State makes big people, a small State makes small people." This is a sound advice which we should do well to remember.

# WHY THE HILLS AND PLAINS DO NOT UNITE ?

S. R. THAOSEN

## *Origin of the problem*

Why the hill tribes of eastern India are not uniting with their neighbour—the plains people? What are the causes? Who and what stand in the way of their being united? Who are these tribals and what do they want? The answers to these questions are yet to be found. Rather, scarcely has any attempt been made to find these answers.

The origin of this so-called tribal problem is contemporaneous to India gaining independence. The trouble was started in two districts by some political parties. The majority of the tribal people did not support the movement. It is but known to all that prior to giving India her independence, the British Government had a plan of getting a 'Crown colony' formed comprising all the Excluded Areas and Partially Excluded Areas, the Chittagong Hill tracts and the NEFA. The then Interim Government realized this critical situation and handled the problem through the Constituent Assembly. A Sub-committee of the Constituent Assembly was formed with the late Gopinath Bordoloi, then Premier of Assam, as Chairman to make an on-the-spot study of the hopes and aspirations of the hill people. The report of the Bordoloi Sub-committee which included the representations made from the different tribes of different districts was accepted in its entirety as a result of which the Autonomous District Councils were created. These District Councils started to function in the five hill districts of Assam except the Naga Hills. Our present problem concerns not Nagaland alone, it concerns also those places where the District Councils exist.

Having seen the career of the movement in the long 15/16 years, the leaders and the administrators of our country might be thinking that these are all but political games of some over-ambitious politicians. The late Prime Minister Nehru said more than once—"It is a political movement; yet there exists no political problem. Their problem is economic and when the economic problem is solved, the solution of their problem will be easy."

In a way, Nehru's diagnosis is, no doubt, correct. But the trouble is that the malady is not just one, nor the patient a single person. A number of physicians are required to come to a correct diagnosis. And thereafter different remedies must be applied for different complaints, then only will the chronic disease be cured.

To speak the truth, up to this date, no endeavour worth the name has so far been made for achieving a sound and proper solution of the tribal problem.

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### *Nature of the problem*

To begin with, the problems of the hills are not just one and the same. In the hills of the eastern India, the problems vary from place to place as well as from tribe to tribe. Mainly, however, they are of two sets, viz. social and political. Which of the two is bigger and which one lesser, and which concerns what tribes and by what means they will be solved—are but the questions which the learned, the thinkers and the statesmen of the country should consider.

In my opinion, the main barrier in the uniting of the Hills and Plains is the misunderstanding on the part of both sides in the matter of reciprocating of social, cultural and ethical ideas.

“One’s meat is another’s poison,” so goes the saying, and it is indeed very hard for any one to accept another’s poison as meat. Same is the case with social customs. ‘Give and take’ is easier said than done but the thing requires a long practice. On the other hand if one were to give or take out of necessity alone, such acts only arouse suspicion in the mind of the other party. I have no hesitation in admitting that many such cases do happen nowadays. Some of our leaders and officers who once in a while on festive occasions don a tribal costume and dance with the tribals in their unaccustomed feet have not turned tribals merely because they did so. A tribal heart is seldom won by such stage performances.

### *The Hills under the British*

The educated plainsmen know better about the conditions in which the hillmen of the eastern India were before the advent of the British people. For the British or Indian administrators of those days wrote volumes of factual histories out of their personal experiences. We, the hill people, know more only about our legends, folk lores and folk songs which have been traditionally inherited and preserved. But the accounts of the evolution of a nation or mankind as a whole rest with the historians or the archaeologists. It is, therefore, needless for me to dwell on the conditions in which the hill people lived during the pre-British days.

But we must acknowledge the fact that to-day we have to bear the burnt of the British administration itself. The poison-tree that they planted and left behind has now spread out extensively and started bearing fruits.

To be frank, the present problem is not the tribal versus non-tribal problem. Nor of the Aryan versus Mongloid groups. The problem is of the plains people

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versus the hill people, and that also not wholly. For, the Dimasas, the Mikirs, the Rangkhols, the Zemi Nagas, the Khelmas, the Tripuris and the Chakmas are exceptions to it. And for that matter even the Aos of Nagaland (which is a neighbour to the Plains districts) may also be counted as an exception to a certain extent. They, of course, have made a problem for themselves by launching the movement, but the problem is of a different kind.

The main problem is this: on the one side there are the bearers and advocates of the Indian culture and traditions, and on the other there is the educated section of the hill people who have no acquaintance with these. Those who had the taste of independence and of Indian culture before the British conquest, maintain till now a different set of ideas and ideals, while those, who did not have such realization, though belonging to the same country, think on a different line on the question of self-existence. The English-educated youngmen by eating the forbidden fruit, as it were, got themselves a new path, a path which was neither their own nor that of India.

Though as a result of the hundred and fifty years of British administration the English-educated hill people were drawn to the European culture and society, but they could have neither emulated nor assimilated them, they merely copied them. They discarded their own traditions and culture and simply imported the European culture from without. Even today, they are yet to realize themselves as Indians. They have been lost to themselves. They have failed to realise the philosophy of the Poet—

“হেথায় আৰ্য্য, হেথা অনাৰ্য্য, হেথায় ড্ৰাবিড়, চীন,  
শকহুণ দল, পাঠান মোগল, এক দেহে হোল লৌন।”

“Here mingled in one body the Aryans, the Non-Aryans, the Dravidians, the Chinese, the Sakas, the Hunas, the Pathans, the Moghuls.”

Needless to say that those hill people who are confronted by this problem never had the chance to know what Indian culture and tradition was. On the other hand, their own countrymen have maintained self-consciousness in spite of all the rigours of the British administration for one hundred and fifty years.

We find, therefore, that the hill tribal people of eastern India are today divided into two groups depending on two different circumstances. So also is the case with their problems. In the first group, they think that they have been turned into second class citizens and therefore want a separate homeland. They do not feel safe in the secular state of India. Thus their slogan is, “Better be a king in the hell, than lead a dependent’s life in heaven,” though actually they may not sincerely believe in such a thing.



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The other group of the hill people want to grow up in the Indian soil itself. They may not give away all that they have, but they want to prosper by mutual give and take. They have realized the meaning of what the Poet has to say in these lines—

“দিবে আৰ নিবে, মিলাবে মিলিবে, যাবে না কিরে  
এই ভাৰতৰ মহামানবৰ সাগৰ’তীৰে।”

“In the shore of this great human sea that is India, all will be given and taken, mixed and assimilated and nothing will go back hence.”

### *Government efforts*

The Central and the State Governments may have a thought for the solution of the hill problems, but I am afraid, there is not much sincerity in their thoughts. It has also been seen that there are faults, too, in determining the means of solution.

In the first place, as a rule the Government collects the facts relating to the problems through various Government officials. The weight and truth of these reports is usually determined by some top official who, more often than not, may hardly have even a first-hand knowledge of the problem. There are many ridiculous instances of the efficiency of the Government intelligence.

### *A Gentleman's agreement*

I think, a gentleman's agreement may prove useful in solving the problem of the hill people. The minority tribes do not consider the Constitutional safeguards always safe, for the same is under the control of the majority. The Government and the hill people should try to find out the basis and terms of the agreement. It is here that we essentially require the valuable counsel and guidance from the eminent anthropologists, historians, philosophers and psychologists etc. of our country

# INTEGRATED STUDY OF THE HILLMEN OF ASSAM

SITA RAM JOHRI

When India was celebrating her independence, the Nagas did not feel that independence had come to the Naga Hills. This is true of the entire hilly tract bordering Assam in the north, east and south. Reasons can be found to explain the neglect. However Assam—in those days Naga Hills district was a part of this State—tried to rectify the mistake. Probably the Central Government also tried to pacify the influential section of the Nagas. But it was too late. Both the governments continued to appease the Nagas.

There was another reason of the origin of the Naga ebullience. In 1947 there was a widespread feeling that the Nagas were racially and culturally different from the rest of the Indians. Some agencies were propagating this notion among the Naga masses. India did not take any step to neutralize the effects of this propaganda. She played for time. Time did not heal the wound. In fact it aggravated the disease. The separatist tendency of the Nagas developed into hatred for the rest of the Indian people.

## *Policy-maker's ignorance*

What was the reason of this rupture? The framers of policy were either ignorant or they were advised by people who deliberately invited the tragedy. These latter people either unconsciously followed those who had the experience of solving the problems of tribes like the Red Indians of America and the aborigines of Australia, or they deliberately wanted to bring the Nagas and the NEFA people into their religious fold. In fact they relied on both. The pity is that their experience in treating the delicate problem of the hillmen of Assam was limited. They had not studied the people of the rest of the Himalayas and their difficulties. They harped on the treatment meted out to the Bhils and Santhals by the Hindu society; a fling against the majority in the country. Probably they thought that by warning the hillmen against the consequences of the unjustifiable or unsocial treatment towards the under-privileged they would be able to let the existing spiritual vacuum among the hillmen continue to be filled by Christianity. To strengthen this belief further, they isolated the hillmen from the Assamese. They were wrong in their wishful thinking.

## *Wrong application*

There was a time when the European population was expanding. During this period the White man reached America, Australia and elsewhere. He found the indigenous population hostile to his interests. He, on account of colour

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prejudices, could not assimilate the natives of the country of his migration. Further, the communism of the locals interfered with his scientific industrial development. He started to exterminate the natives. A point reached when the Western intellectuals to appease world conscience shed crocodile tears and called a halt to this process of extermination. At last a few pockets of victims were saved and preserved as museum pieces. Evidently museum pieces everywhere receive preferential treatment, so did these pockets. There was nothing special in this process. They applied this wrongly begun process on the hillmen of Assam for their amelioration. The hillmen of Assam are a different people. They are a branch of the people who are inhabiting the Himalayas in the east of the Gandaki river.

### *In the Pre-Vedic era*

When the Aryans or the Khasas (a branch of the Aryans who had settled in the interior Himalayan regions during the pre-Vedic era) penetrated into the Himalayas they encountered two peoples—the Kiratas and the Nagas. The former were the inhabitants of the hilly regions and the latter ruled supreme amidst the foot-hills and the forests of the Terai. The Aryans entered the Himalayan tract from the west and pushed the Kiratas and the Nagas to the east.<sup>1</sup> The latter penetrated into the eastern Himalayas and the foot-hills. The NEFA people are thus the descendants of the Kiratas and the Nagas depending upon the heights they inhabit, the Kiratas living on the heights and the Nagas in the plains; there is an admixture of blood in the foot-hills. Later, the plainsmen overflowed into the southern hills of Assam. The Abors, the Hill Miris and the Mishmis definitely resemble the Kiratas; and the Akas, the Daflas, the Plain Miris, the Mikirs, the Garos, the Khasis and the Jaintias have traces of Bodo or Naga origin and the Nagalanders display Kirata-Bodo characteristics. The Mizos cannot be treated as entirely separate from the Kirata-Naga migration.

In due course the Aryans migrated to eastern India and penetrated into the hills along the river valleys of north-eastern Assam. This migration resulted in admixture of blood. The physical features of the Abors and the Mishmis were thus changed. They were recognized as 'almost Aryans'. Regarding the rest of the people of NEFA and Nagaland, western scientists declare that the NEFA people and the Nagas are from the Indo-Tibetan stock. What is this Indo-Tibetan stock? What are the Tibetans?

### *The Indo-Tibetan stock*

At a later stage of their development, near about 600 B.C., Aryan princes and soldiers migrated from the Indo-Gangetic plain into Tibet and founded

independent kingdoms.<sup>2</sup> There was no sign of the Chinese (in Tibet) then.<sup>3</sup> The princes with the help of their soldiers ruled Tibet for more than thirteen centuries. They continued to have social and political contacts with their parent country, India. In the long run the descendants of these princes and soldiers multiplied and spread throughout Tibet. Therefore, no matter howsoever far we stretch our imagination into antiquity, we cannot distinctly separate the descendants of the Aryans from the indigenous elements. The admixture of blood has gone so far that it is safe to conclude that the so-called Indo-Tibetan stock is more or less a variety of the Indian stock. The NEFA people, if they are not Kiratas and Nagas with a tinge of Aryan descent, are nevertheless of Indian stock which the foreign anthropologists call the Indo-Tibetan stock. Later, through prolonged social and political dealings with the plainsmen, their history and culture merged with the history and culture of the Assamese. Thus the history and culture of Assam became the history and culture of the NEFA people or Nefaites. The same is true of the Garos, the Khasis and the Jaintias. The historical and cultural influence of the Nagalanders, instead of Assam, had Manipur as their cultural and temporal guide. The same was true of the Mizos. Political convulsions in Arakan, Burma and Cachar threw the Mizos into the region which had been politically dominated by the people of Indian origin. Thus the Mizos, like the Pathans, the Persians and the Afghans in the west, became a part and parcel of the Indian people.

In the Aryan-Kirata-Naga migration there is an exception. The Khamptis and the Singphos of Tirap and Lohit Frontier Divisions migrated into India recently (up to 1850 A.D.) from the upper Chindwin valley and northern Burma. The Tangsas (of Tirap) may also be taken as the descendants of the Burmese Kachins. But the Khamptis, the Singphos and the Tangsas form a very small minority of the hillmen of Assam and their small number does not materially change the thesis that the hillmen of Assam are the descendants of the Kiratas, the Nagas and the Aryans who migrated into the Assam hills long before Christ. If the Assamese hillmen, who have been inhabiting the valleys, slopes, crests and forests of the Himalayas for several thousand years, are not true Assamese, then certainly the Ahoms who are comparatively new-comers (the first batch of the Ahoms entered Assam in 1225 A.D.) have no claim at all to call themselves 'Assamese'.

### *The Common traits*

There is no doubt that the natural barriers which abound in eastern India, isolated one group of people from the other. Thus the Kukis of the Mizo tract split up into 27 groups, the Nagas into 17, the Mishmis into 3, the Abors into 3, the Miris into 2, the Daflas into 3; and sub-sub-divisions of the sub-divisions are almost countless. The advocates of the policy of segregation/

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isolation who are popular in the administration of the Assam hills may argue that the problems of each group differ from those of others. It may be true. In India no two communities are identical in their culture and religious outlook, and these differences multiply manifold when we consider the innumerable communities in the country. If we dwell long on these differences we can never frame a unified policy for the betterment of the eastern hillmen of India. Further, has any race or nation written its history on the dissimilarities of its members? It is observed and commonsense shows that human groups are framed and kingdoms organized on common traits and interests nascent in various people. Appreciation of this basic fact is very essential for integrating or assimilating the hillmen of Assam with the Assamese and hence with the rest of the Indians. The hillmen of Assam are the nationals of India. As such, common traits must be explored between them and the rest of the people of the Himalayas in order to understand them and their problems.

### *Social habits and customs*

To an outsider, marital relations between communities belonging to different denominations in Ladakh, Spiti and Kinnaur appear possible and practical. The observer may notice the same among the Daflas, the Hill Miris and others. Polygamy is prevalent from the western to the eastern end of the Himalayas. Polyandry is still popular among the Buddhists of the Himalayas and the Jaunsaris (inhabitants of the Chakrata district). We cannot raise a finger if the Daflas, the Monpas, the Monbas and the Khambas are charmed by this custom. The youth clubs or Morangs were and probably still are the places where boys and girls of the Nagas, the Abors and of a few other groups choose their future life-partners.

Parallel to these and having the same role were the Rangbhang Kuris which were popular in Darma, Vyas and Garbhyang pattis (sub-sub-divisions of a district). Among the Buddhists of the Himalayas the folk-dance accompanied with music is uniformly performed—there are no variations whatsoever in the music and dance of one group from others. Similarly, among the non-Buddhists the drum is the popular and the only musical instrument. Perfection in solo dance or music is unknown in the entire Himalayan society. Alcoholic drinks—the distilled one or the so-called Ara and the fermented liquid the 'rice beer'—are popular in all the hill districts and states of the Himalayas. Opium was and is consumed by the Thakurs of the western and central Himalayas; the Tangsas grow the opium plant for the Noctes to consume.

Among the Himalayan Hindus the caste system prevails. In the Assam hills this system has been adopted on a different footing—masters and slaves—but it is there. Each Himalayan social group lives for the family and its own

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small community. Naturally, hillmen respect their dead. The Himalayan Hindus, a socially developed community, perform the *Shradh* ceremony annually in remembrance of their dead while in the eastern hills some groups bury the bones of their dead underneath their pile-dwellings to keep the memory of the deceased alive.

The most talked about social customs are human sacrifice and head-hunting. The former was prevalent in Kinnaur and Nepal. Even today one hears in the Bhawani temples of Sarhan (Himachal Pradesh) and Kathmandu how human sacrifice used to be performed there. After hearing the details of human sacrifice as practised in these parts one would not blame the Noctes who sacrificed two of their prisoners at the altar of their goddess in 1915. Regarding head-hunting the less said the better. Every oriental conqueror liked to be presented with the head/heads of his adversary or adversaries. History offers innumerable examples of this phenomenon. It is height of ignorance to single out the Nagas for this custom which has long been given up by them.

### *Material prosperity*

The mainstay of the hillmen of the Himalayas including the Garos, the Khasis, the Jaintias and the Mizos has been agriculture. The common practice to grow crops was the shifting cultivation, locally called the *jhum*. Even today some people in the Milam and Darma valleys (Kumaon) practise it. This practice is also not unknown in Nepal, Sikkim or Bhutan. During the early part of the 19th century the Garhwalis practised it; so did the Kumaonis. It is a primitive method of raising crops. Modern methods of irrigation and afforestation have thrown it into disuse.

### *Cultural life*

No human group in the Himalayas originally had a script of its own. The hillmen of Assam are no exception to the rule. The Tibetans and the Hindus of the Sindhu-Ganga-Brahmaputra plains gave them their script. Later on the Himalayan Buddhists, Kinnauris, Dogras, Garhwalis, Kumaonis and Nepalīs developed art and culture partly on the basis of what they had learnt from the plains. The same thing happened with the Monpas, Khambas, Monbas and the Khamptis. The first three groups adopted the Tibetan script while the Khamptis adopted a script from the Shans of Burma. The Assamese script was penetrating into the surrounding hills when the British arrived and stopped its introduction into the hilly tracts of the Assam Valley. In spite of this arbitrary action, the Assamese script even today is preferred to the Hindi script in the hills. Even today Assamese remains as the link language between two groups of

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people for communication in the hills of Assam.

### *Religion*

After language, the importance of religion cannot be ignored. In fact in India, whether in the plains or in the Himalayan tracts, religion is the main vehicle through which art and culture developed and life progressed. Nepal is a kingdom of the Himalayas where one finds groups of people in every stage of development. Here the Ban Rawats or the Rajis and the Kusundas still do not build houses for residence. They roam in forests and love outdoor life. There are the people of the Kathmandu Valley who proceed to Europe for pleasure. Here religion is developed in three forms (a practical aspect of religion i.e. worshipping of a deity is discussed).

In Nepal there are three types of gods and goddesses. The first is the local god. Invariably such a god is the deceased founder of the village. In western Nepal I saw the local people sacrificing buffaloes in the temple of the founder of the village of Patan. Such sacrifices are performed seasonally, but the doors of the temple are kept open for daily worship.

The god of a higher order is the regional god. The Hindus of Nepal are **Saktas**, worshippers of Power. Therefore, generally such gods and goddesses are the Devis or Mahadeva who are appeased by sacrifice—these days by buffalo or goat sacrifice. The temples of Devis almost always are located in fertile valleys or at some other pleasant spots, but the temples of Mahadeva are always located where access is arduous.

The third god or goddess is the universal deity. This honour is given to Sita and Rama, Radha and Krishna, Mahadeva (Pashupatinath) and Parvati and Durga etc.

From ancient times the Brahmins have been carrying the message of Hinduism to these hills. They never forced their views on the Nepali masses and they never tried to force the development of religion. If one showed his or her preference to the worship of a local god the Brahmins never objected to it. The development of religion in Nepal was evolutionary and the Brahmin teachings were also of similar nature. Therefore, instead of condemning the local or regional worship they encouraged such practices.

Gradually the Nepalis, as had happened earlier with the Dogras, the Kinnauris, the Garhwalis and the Kumaonis, were assimilated into Hinduism. This process was also in evidence among the people of the eastern hills of Assam. Their faith in local gods or goddesses was in the process of developing into a wider faith embracing the regional or the universal deity. In other words,

they were being assimilated into Hinduism. This development was not conversion from one faith to the other ; it was the natural development of one faith into a bigger one ; there was no breaking off from the past.'

The Brahmins did not force Hinduism on the hillmen of Assam. It was the evolutionary process inherent in the religion of the local people. Their mental outlook developed and they started worshipping regional or universal gods and goddesses ; in other words they became full-fledged Hindus. After all there is a very thin line between Hinduism and animism : in fact, the undeveloped form of Hinduism is animism. Had the hillmen of Assam been left on their own they would have automatically been absorbed into the Hindu fold. But the British stopped this natural process of development of the local religion. This process must be revived. Vaishnavism of Swami Shankar Dev suits the genius of the people ; it allows them enough freedom to consume meat, fish and drink. Experience in the Himalayas shows that wherever Hinduism is practised there is peace. The people are confident of themselves and they furnish proof of loyalty to the country. They do not entertain hatred towards their countrymen. They become and remain true citizens of India.

### *The Process of assimilation*

Keeping in view the example of the people of Lahaul, Spiti, Rampur Bushahr, Garhwal and Kumaon we should expect the development of the hillmen of Assam on similar lines and in fact we should strive towards that goal—assimilation into the Hindu fold—without encouraging hatred against any other religion.

The first step which we must take is to remove the feeling from the minds of the eastern hillmen that they are different from the rest of the Indians by erasing the Inner Line and its Regulations introduced in 1873 with dubious motives. Let these people feel that they are an important section of the bigger society that is India. Lame excuses that the plainsmen will exploit the hillmen or dispossess them of their land should no more misguide the country. Probably opposition to this act of reformation would come from vested interests. This is not too difficult to overcome. After all, national interests outweigh individual or sectional interests. This measure might also invite opposition, though indirectly, from foreign missionaries. Michael Scott has always been against moves which would go far in softening the feelings of the hillmen towards the rest of the Indians. Such people should under no circumstances be allowed to enter the hilly tracts of Assam. The foreign missionaries have already done great harm in eastern India and they must not be allowed to cause more damage to our national interest. If India wishes to avoid bloodshed as witnessed in South Vietnam, she must not allow foreign missionaries access into NEFA or any other district of Assam hills.



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will they develop loyalty to their own country. In a nutshell the White man, in an official or a conciliatory capacity, must not be imported into the hills of Assam. Apart from this step we must study the process which we are applying for educating the hill masses of Assam.

The Government of India encourages annual tours of the hillmen. These tours are arranged so that the visitors show their art and dances to the Indian public on the Republic Day. Either before or after the great day they are taken around important places of interest in the country. That is how the Chinese patronized their tribals. We could do more. We can take them to the developing Himalayan districts so that they may see and compare for themselves what the Government of the country is doing for them. When they see that Garhwal or any other Himalayan district is faced with the same problems as they are, and even then the expenditure being incurred in the development of these districts is much less than that spent on the development of the hilly districts of Assam, they would be impressed with the sincerity of the nation ; they would form the right perspective to appreciate the future developmental activities in their districts. By showing them the grandeur of the country we definitely create a curiosity among them to see more and more of the world. We must not forget that in this intriguing world there are others also who would like to satisfy this craving of the hillmen. Probably those countries of strangers have more wonderful things to display.

If we succeed in creating a right perspective in the minds of the eastern hillmen, we have won the battle of assimilation. Like the Garwalis and the Kumaonis, they will better appreciate the national efforts for their welfare. To inculcate this habit of understanding the difficulties of the country, they must be integrated into a whole among themselves. This needs teaching them a regional language so that when they form a federation they are well equipped to communicate their ideas to one another without difficulty.

For example, take the case of Nagaland. The Nagaland Government earns an annual revenue of five and a half lakh rupees through house tax and other taxes ; while it spends, apart from the expenditure on construction and maintenance of roads which is a Defence responsibility, more than four crore rupees annually on internal administration and development. There is very little hope of increasing the state revenue in the near future or in fact ever. Therefore, circumstances would force the State to join a federation of States of eastern India. If the argument is logical what would be the common language intelligible to the members of the federation ? Nagaland is the next-door neighbour of Manipur and Assam States whose script is Assamese (similar to the Bengalee script), while the Naga children are taught the local language in the Roman script. What is the meeting ground between the Nagalanders on one side and the Manipuris or the Assamese on the other ? Further, Tuensang, a district of

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Nagaland, will never agree to the introduction of the Roman script in its schools; it would prefer the introduction of the Assamese script. Under the circumstances, therefore, the children of hillmen should be taught the regional language so that the local administration may remain dynamic for all time to come.

Lastly, the most important item is religion. In a developing society there is a danger that the people might leave their moorings and stray into the wilderness. To give them stability, their spiritual yearnings must be allowed to develop in a channel suiting their gēnius. As stated above, the natural religion for the people of eastern hills is the Vaishnavism of Swami Shankar Dev. Already, some social organisations have opened **ashrams** in the more distant areas of NEFA. No doubt they are doing useful work for the upliftment of the masses. If these bodies co-operate with the Vaishnavas of Assam, the country would be benefited. At the same time, the spiritual needs of the Kacha Nagas and the people of Tuensang district of Nagaland must not be overlooked. Secularism should not starve a people spiritually. Vaishnav preachers of a high calibre should be encouraged to visit these areas. If the spiritual needs of the local people are not adequately met there is a danger that the developed individual will seek solace in communism or dictatorship of a low order. It may also be added here that for peace in the country, the Burman Christians *en masse* reverted to their age-old religion i.e. Buddhism.

The hillmen will understand such reforms when they are allowed to mix with the rest of the people without any reservation. To achieve this mixing of the people without suspicion democratic reforms should be introduced in the local administration. The administrators should preferably be those who are interested in men and worldly life and who are not snobs; who work for work's sake and not to please their bosses (this attitude may be preferred where the society is disciplined and well-organized). Experience tells us that regimental officers who have had the experience of commanding troops are liable to prove good administrators in backward areas. To a regimental officer any man—raw or civilized—is a man who intrinsically possesses self-respect and that the officer is used to maintain.

Administration of undeveloped areas is a vast subject and cannot be dealt with fully in this short paper. Here only a few essentials which need immediate introduction have been discussed.

### *Hillmen's Task*

This must be made clear to the hillmen that in the modern world, for a new group to spring and develop independently it is wellnigh impossible. One big power or another will swallow up the small developing nation. Therefore, they

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must learn to co-operate with the country. It is all right for them to think that America or some other Power will subsidize them if they are free from 'Indian bondage.' But to what end? Did not the U.S.A. give economic aid to South Korea or South Vietnam? Certainly a big country like India will not even think of voluntarily inviting trouble on her borders. After all is the Government of India trying to raise the standard of living of the hillmen, specially of those inhabiting the hilly tracts of Assam? Those who visited these areas in 1959 and then again in 1966 know the development that has taken place during the last seven years; its measure is wonderful.

When the country is spending huge sums of money on the development of the hillmen, it behoves the people benefited by such measures to reciprocate the help and extend their co-operation to the Government. To ask for any kind of help from foreign countries against their own is definitely going to harm the hillmen in general. Indian borders have been recognized by the international assemblies and none can, now, play with the integrity of the country unless that individual or nation is prepared to invite international wrath. India knows the implications of such acts; that is why she did not plan to let her army occupy Lahore in the Indo-Pak conflict of 1965. The Government and other private social agencies must try to hammer this fact into the minds of the local people. Those who have realized this are co-operating with the Government. These are the people who have been the means of introducing peace and prosperity in their areas. Let others also take a hand in this process.

Further, the hillmen must appreciate that when their areas were lying neglected for centuries they cannot be brought economically in line with the rest of the country in a few years. The hillmen can themselves see what the state of their district was when the British left India and later within a short period of 19 years what amount of developmental work has been done there. This realization will improve matters. After all, development of areas such as those of NEFA, Nagaland and Jaintia hills is not so easy. It is bound to take time. Let us consider one example. Dr. Verrier Elwin followed in the footsteps of administrators like Helm C. G., I.C.S. and vehemently opposed the building of roads in the jealously-guarded areas. The Government of India acted on his advice. The 1962 debacle in the Kameng Frontier Division was the result. It was not the local people only who suffered from this neglect, but the entire country was humiliated by the reverse. Now Indian Army detachments have gone into NEFA to defend the sensitive areas. It is surmised that the local people will also benefit in the same way as the Kashmiris after the introduction of the Indian Army there.

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### *Conclusions*

In the end it is emphasized that the problems of hillmen of the east cannot and should not be tackled in isolation from the rest of the people of the Himalayas. This was done once and the country suffered. This mistake must not be repeated. Secondly **integration** of hillmen is a weak policy. Instead of **integration** the slogan of the nation should be **assimilation**. After all, doubtful experiments should not be tried on our borders specially when our enemies have concentrated their armies with hostile intention.

### REFERENCES:

<sup>1</sup> Atkinson—Himalayan Districts of the North-West Provinces of India, Vol. II, pp 263 and 374.

<sup>2</sup> Atkinson, op. cit., Vol II, p. 369.

<sup>3</sup> Up to 639 A.D. Chinese travellers entered India either from north-west via Central Asia or by the sea route. Tibet was a country of Kyang tribe for Chinese. Tibet was unknown to them.

## VII Economic Development

### **ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT OF TRIBAL AREAS**

Dr. J. B. GANGULY

Regional differences in the level of economic development is quite well-marked in the country. Yet economic backwardness of the hill areas is something qualitatively altogether different. In most of such areas the age-old stagnation has been broken, it is true, but the rate of growth is failing, in many cases, to keep pace with the local people's aspirations. The whole issue, however, has to be judged in its historical perspective.

For a long time these areas and people thereof were kept rigidly isolated from the rest of the country by the British Raj. It blocked not only any contact between them and their fellow countrymen but, what is more important, resulted in the neglect of the development of these areas. This was sought to be justified on the ground that their contact with the plainsmen will lead to 'detrribalization' and will bring in its wake innumerable discomforts to them.

Since independence the Government has been participating in all-round development of such areas. Under the Five Year Plans development programmes of tribal areas are given special attention. The accepted main objectives of development programmes for such areas are :—

- (i) Achieving higher and better standard of living through the building of social overheads and modernizing their economy without radically altering their traditional ways.
- (ii) Bridging the gap prevailing in the level of economic development between the tribal areas and the rest of the country as early as possible.

Economic development involves institutional changes. The change in customs, habits, attitudes, etc. is not bad in itself ; if it is well-directed, purposive and growth-oriented, it is to be welcome. "Many are the cases we know of tribes whom contacts and changes ruined but the circumstances of each case would show that it was not change as such that created disorganization but the failure to re-organise." (A. Aiyappan, "Development of Tribal Areas", Economic Weekly, June 2, 1965).

Removal of illiteracy and the spread of education are essential to bring about such changes. Education liberates the mind of man and enables him to give up prejudices and to accept modernization. It, however, needs mention here that the stereotyped pattern of school and college education will not help.

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The spread of such education is capable of only swelling the number of the unemployed. Stress is to be put on work-oriented and professional courses. Industrial and craft training centres alone cannot cope with the need. If this aspect is not properly taken into account a serious problem of white-collar unemployment is sure to emerge. To work out a proper programme in this respect some sort of manpower budgeting for such areas has to be undertaken.

In the initial stages, large-scale investments have to be made on social overheads like the setting up of a good, efficient and growth-minded administrative machinery, opening of transport and communications lines, provision of medical facilities, extension of educational facilities, provision of electric-supply, water-supply, etc. etc. Such investments and creation of facilities pave the way for development. But the actual progress of development is to be judged by the extent of participation of the local people in such activities and actual benefits enjoyed by them.

Agriculture and collection of forest products including games are the predominant means of livelihood of the tribal people. In Eastern India many of the tribal peoples still practise shifting cultivation, which is backward, uneconomic and insufficient. The policy of the Government has been to gradually wean them away from such practice and to settle them in plains land and permanent form of cultivation. This is sure to be a long-drawn process.

The shifting cultivators, who have taken to plainsland cultivation, are doing quite well as I have seen in Tripura. In some parts of NEFA also local people are successfully raising various agricultural crops on their permanent farms. With better and more effective agricultural extension work they will prove to be as good, if not better, farmers as in the plains.

To augment the income of the people, agro-industries can be fruitfully organized. Fruit-canning industries have very good prospects. Fruits like orange, pine-apple, banana, plum, jack-fruit, etc. are produced in plenty in such areas.

Proper utilization and maintenance of forests, well-planned afforestation programme and organizing forestry-based industries form important parts of development plans for such areas.

Starting of large-scale manufacturing industries may not be immediately feasible in most of these areas but medium-sized manufacturing units in industries like spinning, weaving, paper, sugar, etc. may be started depending on the availability of raw materials and power. There must not be any doubt about the capacity of the local people to man such industries. Being more energetic they will prove, if proper training is imparted, rather better workers than their counterparts in the plains.

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In some areas tea, coffee or cashew plantations may be started. The Andhra Pradesh Government has taken up the plan for a coffee plantation in the Aruku Valley involving a total investment of Rs. 10 crores.

For the all-round development of selected areas Multi-Purpose Tribal Development Blocks have been set up. The Elwin Committee has elaborately examined the progress of such Blocks and found it not very encouraging.

This cannot be viewed in isolation. In fact, the overall speed of economic growth has not quite satisfied the aspirations of the people. With the spread of education an articulate middle-class has been emerging. Their aspirations are high, which is to be expected ; they are very keen on bridging the gap already mentioned.

No area can be properly developed by outside agencies alone. Local inhabitants must achieve it themselves with, of course, the help of others. In other words, the Government is to help the people to help themselves. This will be possible if there is spread of education and enough skill-formation among the people. A sense of participation in the minds of them has to be generated. This depends to a great extent on ensuring their rights on land, forests and other natural resources. The Dhebar Commission has, in its Report, stated very appropriately that the right in land is valued highly by the tribal people and they intensely resent any attempt to take it away from them.

The best form of business organization for such areas is obviously co-operative ownership and management of industries, plantations, transport and big mechanized farms, where possible. A few cooperative saw-mills, oil and rice-mills and bus services are running quite efficiently in some of these areas.

# A NOTE ON THE AGRICULTURAL BACKGROUND OF THE ASSAM HILLS

J. K. BARTHAKUR

## *Pre-British period*

In the hills of NEFA, Nagaland, Manipur, Tripura and the hills districts of Assam, which may be called the Assam Hills in short, the problems of agriculture are peculiar. These hills are inhabited by a number of different tribes with distinct cultural and racial identity, who lived in more or less isolation, because of geographical reasons during the pre-British period and of administrative necessity, during the British period.

In the pre-British period the tribes had limited contact with the plains. However limited it might be, the contact was healthy. There were instances of marital relationship, political asylum and administrative alliance between the plains kings and the hills chieftains. There was, however, an acute form of racial and clan jealousies amongst the tribes. The constant warfare and illness, unaided by medical care, kept the hill population under severe control.

Practically all the hills tribes were hostile to the British in the initial stage. The British were quick to avenge the hostility and follow the hill-paths to discover the beautiful homelands of the tribes where the climate was temperate, people essentially hospitable and the vegetation luxuriant. Except in NEFA, the entire sides of the Assam Hills became spotted with administrative outposts. The Christian missionaries followed, who established Churches, schools and hospitals. The population grew steadily as the tribal warfares got reduced and the medical aid became available. In order to save the hill-men from the political and religious influences of the plains, the contact between the hills and the plains was reduced to the minimum. In their preoccupation with the religious and political game the British paid very little attention to the problems of the growing hill population and their agriculture.

## *After Independence*

When the British left, the hill-men were mostly Christian with a tendency to discard most of the Indian heritage including their own traditional songs and dances. Christianity had already filled in a void in their minds; sometimes very beneficially. The political effect of this was the springing up of hills leadership that advocated isolation from the plains in some form or other. One political crisis followed another. The strong political current did many good to



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the upper-class of the hill people ; their social and cultural attainments superseded those in all the previous eras and placed them culturally as one of the foremost sections of the Indian community. The man in the hills had his share of political and religious awakening, but he was tied to his hills, with all the problems of the hills standing on his way in attaining the standard of living and mannerism of the upper-class of the hill population.

The ordinary hill peasant, with his single-barrel muzzle loading gun as the principal status symbol, faces today three basic economic problems, namely, insufficient production in the field, less wild animals to hunt about and less fish in the rivers. To counteract this partially, he has more domestic animals than before. His dress has improved, confidence has increased but on the average his visible income has fallen or remained steady. His main economic stay is the 'jhum' or the shifting cultivation.

### *Crops Grown*

Ordinarily, a hill village has a well-demarcated boundary which has stayed constant although the population has increased manifold. Every year a portion within the village boundary is cleared of the jungle by cutting and burning and a mixed crop is grown. This is called jhuming. Depending upon the fertility, the patch cleared is cultivated for three (like in Garo hills), two (like in some parts of NEFA) or one year (like in most other places) during the rainy season. After that the patch is abandoned for a number of years and the jungle is allowed to grow thereon, to allow mother earth to recoup her fertility in the natural process. Paddy, other cereals, cereal substitutes, vegetables, cotton, oil seeds and everything else possible are grown in the jhum. Traditionally, the jhum cultivation provides the major portion of the eatables the hill-man needs, to be supplemented during the lean months of June, July and August by various jungle products like roots, jungle sago (Dafla—*Tasse, Tachi*), hunting and fishing, till the first maize crop ripens. Ripening of the maize crop lessens the hardship of the hill-man, to be followed by the ripening of white millet (Dafla—*Taya*) and finally, early and late paddy. But the hill-man relishes nothing better than a plate of rice.

To eat a plate of rice everyday and roots, millet and maize as side dishes, it has become necessary to clear a proportionately larger area for jhuming per capita per annum. Gradually increasing population, unchecked any more by war, disease and other natural calamities, necessitates clearing of ever greater area for jhuming every year. But the village area is limited. The result is that the jhum 'cycle' or the number of years a jhummed patch is allowed to grow jungle to recoup soil fertility by natural processes, which is ideally ten years (as in NEFA), has become shorter and shorter every year. In Manipur,

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and in some other places, the jhum cycle has come down to four years. The situation is already producing bad effects. Many hill villagers are watching with awe the quickly advancing 'thatch' to his old good jhum sites. The associated effect of this problem is the progressive denudation of the hill sides, making them incapable of holding the rain waters and thereby causing great floods in the plains every year, in an ever increasing intensity. The floods, in the plains of today are the result of the progressive denudation of hill sides by the hill people of the past decades. The result of what is happening in the hills to-day will be felt by the people of the plains in the next decade.

### *Curse of Jhum*

Though the area under jhum is increasing tremendously every year, the per acre productivity of the jhum field has decreased. One reason is the progressive abandonment of the mixed cropping pattern. Some people have started growing, wholly or largely, only paddy in the jhum fields and thereby have disturbed the balance of fertility of the land. They are having poor yield now and most likely they will have poorer yield in the next jhum cycle. The other reason is that the children, very young or in their teens, who used to play a very important part in weeding the jhum plots and killing pests like rats, rabbits, birds, other animals and insects, are no longer available to work in the fields. In Manipur, Nagaland and Mizo Hills, thanks to the Missionaries, practically every village has a school. The children have to attend schools. The school-going children have very correctly become as much a status symbol for a family as the gun. But their absence from the jhum field tells upon the agricultural productivity; because jhumming is a type of agricultural practice where the manual labour is incapable of being replaced by any other technical means; at least the scientists have not shown that this can be done.

The flowering of bamboos is considered very ominous by the hills people. They associate it with the unnatural growth of the rat population which destroy the crop on a large scale. In fact some NEFA tribes abandon cultivation for two years following the year the bamboos flower. Flowering of bamboos takes place normally once in fifty years and affects cultivation for five years. Different types of bamboos flower at different times, sometimes in a continuous sequence, bringing great misery to the people. In the old days the people sometimes used to migrate wholesale from such areas. Productivity being normally less than marginal, a jhum-based agricultural community fails to absorb the imbalance caused by continued abnormal shortage over a number of years.

Many tribes have distinct areas to hunt and fish. The denudation of the forests, increase in the human population, continuous use of guns for hunting

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and sometimes explosives for fishing, have made hunting and fishing lately less rewarding, specially when traditional means are used.

### *Search for solution*

However, it must not be assumed that the problems of agriculture have gone out of hand in the Assam Hills; they have not. The hill-men are still a happy, contented and proud people. But the trend of the coming shortage is visible and must be arrested. Two things are certain. Firstly, the jhum cultivation will not be able to support the coming generations. In fact it never supported a rice-for-every-meal community. Secondly, the progressive denudation of the hill sides must stop.

The solution bases upon the criterion that the old orthodox notion of complete physical self-sufficiency of the hills must be abandoned. We cannot conceive of a self-sufficient hill society of the future generations, depending upon the mixed crops in the jhum field and living in political and economic isolation. Jhum fields will not simply support the population.

### *Land-ownership*

The system of ownership of land provided little incentive to the people to take seriously to the permanent cultivation, even though good lands are available for reclamation at low cost to grow wet-rice crop. In most places the land is owned by the tribal chiefs or the community as a whole. The people have only the right to cultivate the surface. Once a reclaimed or developed plot of land is abandoned for one season, any one can walk in and take over possession. So, naturally, development and reclamation of any plot of land is a risky affair. Suitable legislation may change this position and thereby provide a direct incentive for permanent cultivation. Many hill-men have expressed that they may try to develop wet-rice fields if the ownership of land is assured to them. If such legislative measures are taken, then the people may be induced to take to low cost reclamation of flat lands and terracing the gentle slopes, for paddy cultivation.

The achievements of some of the Naga tribes provide a pointer in this direction. Some Naga tribes have private ownership of land in addition to (and sometimes in place of) common ownership of village land as well as exclusive rights of ownership by the chiefs. The result is rapid development of terraces and reclamation of land for permanent cultivation which have bestowed greater prosperity upon these Naga tribes when compared to their less fortunate brethren. Once a similar pattern is achieved in other places, the hill men of a few coming

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generations will be assured of their plates of rice. The problems of irrigation are not so difficult as they appear at the out-set. The ample monsoon creates many seasonal streamlets that may be conveniently trained to water the terraces and the reclaimed flats. The higher slopes should also be progressively terraced or contour-bunded for plantation of fruit trees and trees of valuable timber.

Statistics show that valuable timber and fruit orchards are more remunerative in the long run than the agricultural crop. The chief difficulty will be the transportation of fruits and forest products for which the hills must be criss-crossed with good roads. Establishment of fruit preservation centres and forest industries may further enrich the hill-man.

The picture drawn in the foregoing paragraph is a bold one and expensive one. But this appears to be the only one to be drawn. Jhumming must go for the benefit of the hill-man. The extent of damage done by the floods in the plains and that progressive shortage of food in the hills justify all the expenses of road making and terracing. Any deficit in cereals must be met from the surplus production of the plains. Even on abandoning the jhumming, the per capita income in the hills is likely to be greater than that in the plains, if the hill population increases on the basis of natural growth, because the per capita land-holding in the hills is much higher than that of the plains.

### *A long process*

But this cannot be done in a day. The replacement of jhumming by permanent cultivation and fruit and valuable timber trees, is bound to be a long and continuous process. In fact even with all the good-will and efforts of the world, it may not be possible to stop jhumming entirely. Moreover, the immediate problem of food shortage remains. For that, it is necessary that jhumming itself is made more productive as a short time measure. Little has been done in this direction from the technical point of view. No published technical literature is available on the subject of jhumming. Some of the villagers have taken certain measures out of their own wisdom. One of such measures is controlling the fire during burning of a jhum field. Many allow the jhum fire spread over to the uncut forest. The fire destroys the under-bush, the fallen dry and semi-rotten leaves, and retards the rate of natural recoument of fertility of the soil. Wise villagers draw a fire-line around the cut fire jhum land and protect the uncut forests from burning and thereby preserve the richness of soil. Such measures are effective but cannot meet the whole need. More scientific and rewarding measures must be invented and adopted on a large scale to increase the productivity of the jhum fields.

The problems of agriculture in the Assam Hills are difficult. A solution

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appears to be still more difficult. It is worthwhile discussing the subject. Unfortunately, both the hill-men and the others are far too much engrossed in the hill politics to pay due attention to the basic problem that confronts the hills. The entire political superstructure in the hills should be conceived, planned and built upon the base of the correct diagnosis of the economic problems. Are we sure that the hill population and agricultural production have not been taken for granted and subordinated to the racial and personal glorification?

# DEVELOPMENT OF TRIBAL ECONOMIES IN THE HILL AREAS

TARLOK SINGH  
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The Seminar on Hill People of North Eastern India brings into a larger focus certain aspects of development which are of unique importance for the country as a whole as well as for different cultural groups who belong to the region. These problems are best considered in the wide perspective of economic, social and political progress. History records many instances when, through understanding, constructive leadership and timely action, great difficulties were turned into great opportunities. To-day, we are upon such a moment in India. We are also upon such a moment in the region to which the Seminar is devoting its labours.

The problems of the North-East region of India and of the cultural groups which compose it are now being understood more fully than a few years ago. During his lifetime, Jawaharlal Nehru strove continuously for that greater unity of hearts and minds which would, at the same time, strengthen vitality, self-expression and the creative spirit in the inter-dependent parts of the nation as in the nation as a whole. His vision of India and its diverse cultures was a force for building the future. It is now up to us to complete the mansion of which he laid the foundations.

## *A perspective view*

The course of history, specially since the partition of the sub-continent and even more during the past four years, has given to the North-East region and its people a crucial role in the well-being and progress of India. The region may be said to include Assam, including both the hill districts and the plains, Nagaland, Manipur, Tripura, NEFA and the districts of Darjeeling, Jalpaiguri and Cooch Behar in West Bengal. The region has a population of 17.5 million or about 4 per cent of the population of India. Its total area is about 265,000 square kilometres or about 8 per cent of the total area of the country. The challenging problems and the opportunities which the region presents are far greater than these statistics may suggest. It is easiest to visualise the character of the region as a whole in terms of transport and communications, and in a few months the Planning Commission, in cooperation with the Ministries of Railways and Transport and the various administrations expects to present a long-term integrated plan for the development of transport and communications in the North-East region as well as for certain other key regions in the country.

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Perhaps the most fascinating feature of the region is the setting in which nature has endowed it with hills and plains, the relationship between these in physical and ecological terms, the vast natural resources waiting to be developed and the cultural richness and diversity of the people inhabiting the plains and the hills. Yet, where there is much to unite, there is also much to distinguish.

Within the North-East region, the hill areas account in all for 59 per cent of the total area and for 26 per cent of the population. The great size of the territory comprised in the hill areas of this region stands out even in comparison with the hill areas of other parts of India. These latter may be taken to consist of Jammu and Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh, six districts in Uttar Pradesh and the Nilgiris in Madras. Together they account for an area of 125,000 square miles and for a population of about 9 million. Thus, out of a total area of about 281,000 square kilometres and a population of nearly 13.5 million for the hill areas of India as a whole, those in the North-East region account for about 56 per cent of the area, but only 34 per cent of the population.

### *Socio-economic problems*

The problems of economic and social development and, in consequence, of political adjustment which have to be resolved in the North-East region, are products equally of the facts of geography as of history and culture. Fortunately because of the moral and social principles on which India's policy is based, and the Constitution in which they are embodied, it is possible to achieve a great measure of success in bringing the economic and cultural needs and aspirations of the hill people and the tribal people of India, and more specially, of the North-East region, into complete harmony with the needs and aspirations of the country as a whole. The broad answer lies in an integrated approach to the economic and developmental problems of the North-East region, accompanied by the maximum opportunity in political terms to the people to grow to the full measure of their capacity. Whatever may have been the difficulties and frustrations encountered, enlightened opinion throughout India is well-seized of the special needs of the hill people and the tribal people and will support every effort to accelerate the pace of development, enlarge economic and social opportunities, and create a real sense of partnership in building a new India.

It must be admitted that during the first two Plans, these processes proceeded too slowly both from inadequate appreciation of problems and the great lags in the development of India as a whole. In the course of the Third Plan the pace has quickened and some impact has been made. During the Third Plan, leaving aside works undertaken by the Central Government and some not specific to the hill areas, an outlay of about Rs. 7 crores was incurred on the development

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plans of Nagaland, Manipur, Tripura, NEFA and the hill districts of Assam. The effort in the Fourth Plan will be far bigger and much more thorough and will mark a big advance. It is the common endeavour of the Central Government and the Planning Commission and the administrations concerned that the Fourth Plan should see a break-through in relation to the tribal people throughout India. It is from this aspect that special attention is being given to the needs of the hill people and the tribal people of the North-East region. A technical team sponsored by the Planning Commission and the Central Ministries has recently drawn up a long-term and short-term plan for Nagaland. A Joint Centre-State Study Team, with which I had the privilege to be associated, visited the hill districts of Assam during the early part of this year and, on the basis of their recommendations, development plans for the hill areas of Assam have been formulated and approved and a high-level Planning Board has been put in charge of them. The problems of Manipur, Tripura and NEFA have been studied by special teams as well as by the National Council of Applied Economic Research and programmes for the Fourth Plan are to be shortly considered by the Planning Commission. Every effort is being made to ensure that the plans are well-conceived and adequate and are supported by administrative and other measures for securing effective implementation.

### *Five major factors*

The various hill areas in the North-East region have both their special problems as well as problems which admit of common approach. Development plans have to be adapted to the needs of each area, taking into account five major factors. These are, first, geography, that is to say, the terrain and the topography and the land, forests, rivers and other resources which nature provides; secondly, the people, each group with its own cultural heritage and distinctive features; thirdly, transport and communications; fourthly, markets and outlets for produce; and finally, requirements of food and other essential supplies which have to be obtained from other areas. Sparsely populated though many of the areas are, for the most part they are dependent on a single crop, and several months in the year are months without work. As population has grown, the traditional economy has become much less able to supply the essential needs of the people. Therefore, the reconstruction and development of the tribal economy and the economy of the hill areas have to be attempted in a more fundamental sense than visualised in the past.

How should these tasks be approached?

Where there is so much to be done, there is need for selection and priorities and for greater emphasis on certain aspects of development than on others, at any rate, in the first phase. From recent work five major lines of advance have



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emerged. Other aspects of development are no less vital, but they can be conveniently undertaken in pursuit of and in association with them.

In any scheme of economic and social development, the people and their institutions should come first. The tribal communities of the North-East region possess vigour and eagerness, have a keen sense of community and are free from inhibitions. These are assets of incalculable value. The scheme of community development blocks and tribal blocks, suitably reorganised, provides an essential means through which, to a considerable degree, the people of each area, at the level of the village and the block, can assume responsibility for their own development. An important departure has been recently made in the hill areas of Assam. Hitherto resources for community development and tribal development were made available in two stages, more in the first and less in the second. The result was that just as a block was getting ready to use resources, the amounts available began to diminish. From now on, each block will be able to count upon pre-determined resources continuously for the next ten years. Each community development block will receive a total allotment of Rs. 17.6 lakhs for the Fourth Plan period, Rs. 10 lakhs under the scheme of Tribal Development Blocks and 7.6 lakhs under Community Development. These allocations will form the nucleus to be further supported by resources provided in different sectors. Each block will also have resources for the rural works programme with a view to providing work at the village level for the long slack seasons. Projects for the development of rural and progressing industries are also to be initiated in all the districts, so that over a period a more balanced and diversified rural economy can be developed. In view of the large areas of several development blocks, the number of blocks is being increased from 42 to 55. District Councils are being made fully responsible for development in their respective areas, including implementation of the community development and tribal development programmes. At the block level also it is hoped to establish responsible non-official agencies to work with the District Councils.

### *Units of development*

Where large hilly tracts are involved, a district is too large a unit for development, even as a block is by itself too small a unit for development. Therefore, as the second major line of advance, it is necessary to envisage the problems of a district in terms of a limited number of Development Areas. Even apart from long distances, reorganisation of the existing pattern of the agricultural and forest economy calls for different methods according to the needs and conditions of each area. This area-approach in development of tribal economies is now being worked out carefully for each of the predominantly tribal areas in different parts of India and forms an important aspect of the Fourth Five Year Plan. The average tribal block has a population of about 25,000 and is much too small

for providing several of the services which are needed. Programmes like communications, irrigation, forestry, processing industries and vocational and secondary education can gain much from being planned in terms of somewhat larger areas. Therefore, on a study of physical features, communications, social structure and economic needs, for each area, a systematic plan of development is to be worked out. Besides local institutions and local leaders, experts and voluntary workers are proposed to be associated with the preparation and execution of area development programmes. To illustrate the point, it may be mentioned that development plans for the hill district of Assam are being worked out in detail, tentatively, in terms of 13 development areas. Of these, three are in Garo Hills, two in Mikir Hills, four in Khasi and Jaintia Hills and four in the Mizo Hills. Each of the districts will have a Development Institute of its own, one of the Institutes giving attention also to selection problems of the hill region as a whole. Each Institute will have a small team of experts, including Agriculture, Animal Husbandry, Forestry, Co-operation, Education and Social Institution and Culture. These specialists will work with the local institutions and the administration in identifying problems peculiar to each area and finding appropriate solutions for them. It has to be remembered that in dealing with tribal problems there are no ready-made solutions. In many areas the first effort must be to put our finger on the key problems and work out appropriate methods and strategy for dealing with them adequately and with the fullest co-operation of the people at each level.

### *Communications*

The third major line of advance must necessarily be the opening up of communications. Without them, no other aspect of development can be undertaken successfully. Roads are both costly and difficult to build. In many hill areas, even with the best of efforts possible, it will take ten years or more to provide even the essential communications needed. A carefully worked out road development plan to be executed over a period of ten years is an essential step in each area. This should include roads to be constructed by the Public Works Departments as well as roads to be constructed and maintained by local authorities, but according to specifications and alignments approved by the Public Works Department. Within this framework, specially during the slack agricultural seasons, there have to be programmes for constructing village roads with the manpower available locally. On these lines, a detailed road development plan has been drawn up for the hill areas of Assam, and no doubt similar work has to be done in the other hill areas in the region. In the hill areas, road, development of road transport facilities and development of forest resources and the reorganisation of the agricultural economy have to be thought of as parts of a single well-knit programme, each part being executed in terms of a joint plan of operations covering these sectors.

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Along with communications, in each area there has to be scheme for combined operation pertaining to forests, soil conservation and agriculture. This approach should be developed over siz-able areas, specially where jhuming cultivation prevails, so that the productivity of land can be increased and isolated hamlets brought together into villages with a fair number of households. The strategy of land development has to be worked out separately in accordance with the conditions in each area. The essential elements are—

- (a) survey of land use in selected areas and marking out of lands suitable for forestry, jhum, pasture, settled agriculture and horticultural crops;
- (b) scientific management of State reserved forests;
- (c) declaring substantial areas of unclassed forests now under local management as protected forests and ensuring their systematic management and development;
- (d) improving the existing system of jhuming by minimising the soil run-off from steep slopes and undertaking the necessary prophylactic and preventive measures;
- (e) development of settled cultivation; and
- (f) promotion of cash crops specially of non-perishable varieties.

In the hill areas, animal husbandry, including poultry and piggery should also be developed as an essential part of the reorganisation of the agricultural and forest economy.

### *Education*

The fifth major line of advance is in the field of education. In any community, education best fulfills its purpose if it is closely linked to the requirements of economic and social development. In predominantly tribal areas, from the beginning, there is a chance of developing a system of education which would be in accord with the economic and social requirements of the people. In this way education and development can proceed together, each supporting and stimulating the other. On the success attained in devising such a system will depend how two essential needs are met. These are, firstly, availability of trained manpower in the numbers needed for undertaking development and, secondly, growth of leadership among tribal communities which will command influence and respect, will secure the increasing participation of the people, and will also take them progressively towards a larger unity and a larger area of integration.

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Different tribal communities are at varying stages of economic and cultural development. There is much difference in the skills they have attained and in the technology they employ. Therefore, each group and the area in which it lives should be studied closely, and appropriate patterns of development should be worked out in close cooperation with the people. It is in terms of such a design of development that educational programmes, institutions and priorities, should be worked out. In the past, this has not been the approach. Therefore, such facilities as have been made available for education, have inevitably produced mixed results.

Certain aspects of the approach to education, observed specially in the hill areas of Assam, may be briefly mentioned. In many tribal areas and hill areas, the population lives in scattered hamlets. Progressively, as settled cultivation develops, villages with somewhat larger numbers of families, say, 30 to 50 or more, could be developed. Meanwhile, efforts should be made to provide facilities for primary education as near the home as may be possible. At the middle and secondary level, however, the necessary facilities have to be provided at centrally situated schools which are equipped with hostel accommodation. In many tribal areas, there is now a great deal of enthusiasm for education and efforts are being made by the people to start schools at their own initiative. Invariably, these schools are ill-equipped, do not have trained teachers and can only provide education of an indifferent type. Almost entirely, such schools are lacking in facilities for the teaching of science, and the teaching of mathematics is also poor. Products of these schools will frequently face not only problems of unemployment, but also maladjustment within the society to which they belong. Besides providing much more extensively for the training of teachers, for hostel facilities, improved teaching of mathematics and introduction of science courses, it is also essential that suitable text books and teaching materials should be prepared and made available. Vocational courses should be specially emphasised, so that school-leavers can fit into the agricultural and other programmes of development which will provide the bulk of employment in the hill areas. From secondary schools, boys and girls could be picked out for training in vocations which require long periods of training, and additional coaching facilities could be provided for them. To carry out these programmes, educational administration in the tribal areas has also to be greatly strengthened.

The major lines of advance discussed above do not by any means exhaust the field of development. However, given systematic efforts to deal with these aspects of development, other aspects can be attended to more effectively and at lesser cost, for instance, development of marketing facilities, measures for improving health and carrying medical facilities into the interior, provision of water supply, extension of electricity to small towns and key villages, opening up of postal, telephone and other communication facilities, and the extension of rural and processing industries.

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### *Personnel*

In the last analysis, the pace of development turns not only on the resources available but on the quality of personnel, on their competence in carrying out the tasks assigned to them and on their motivation and sense of identification with the tribal communities among whom they work. Hill areas and tribal areas are invariably short of personnel. Since tribal communities frequently live in remote and inaccessible areas, working conditions are difficult and, besides a high proportion of unfilled positions, the staff turn-over is heavy and transfers are frequent. It is of the highest importance that administrative and technical officials at all levels should not only know their jobs well and have the capacity to improvise, but should be in close sympathy with the aspirations and desires of tribal communities. In some areas, it may be necessary to put the main stress on systematic training. In other areas, special cadres may also have to be built up. In all areas, the difficult conditions under which personnel have to work need to be recognised and appropriate compensatory allowances permitted.

### *Resources*

Those living in the North-East region of India, as in many other regions, may sometimes feel that their relative backwardness is due to neglect. This is an important aspect to be kept in mind in all future planning, but there are some inherent difficulties which too should be noted. In all development, a choice has to be made between the use of resources where they will generate further resources and their use in directions in which, at least in the first phase, while disparities may be slightly reduced, new resources may not be generated. This choice is specially difficult when the total resources are strictly limited. The margin for laying out resources where one may will is quite small. In our scheme of planning, programmes for accelerating development in the more under-developed regions are a fully accepted commitment. But this object can be attained only over a period and through sustained and uninterrupted effort. Even in the more advanced countries, it is only in recent years that national economies have gained to the level of prosperity at which they are able to divert substantial resources towards their poorer and more under-developed regions. Correction of regional imbalances is now being given marked emphasis in countries like France, Japan and Yugoslavia. Only recently has the United States taken upon itself to pursue an intensive anti-poverty programme. But, even in the advanced countries, because some areas can attract greater investment than others, disparities still exist. As the national economy grows, it becomes possible to make more concentrated attacks on the problems of the markedly less-developed regions. As these efforts continue and are expanded, specially within the North-East region, levels of living will go up and disparities will become less marked. Thus, national and regional prosperity and regional and local prosperity are inter-dependent. There is no

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real conflict between them. The national economy, the regional economy and the local economy have all to go forward together, each strengthening the other.

Against the background of strategies for economic and social advance, specially in the hill areas and tribal areas, which have been briefly outlined above, three aspects should be specially stressed by way of conclusions. The first is that rapid and purposeful development is essential not only to the solution of economic and social problems but also to the evaluation of equitable and satisfying political relationships. Secondly, the tasks to be undertaken are so large in scope, so taxing that, without a great deal of help from other areas in trained personnel, no hill area or tribal area in the North-East region, or, indeed, elsewhere, could carry out the tasks of development which the Fourth Five Year Plan definitely provides for. From this aspect, the Fourth Plan is a great challenge at every point of implementation. Finally, from the point of view of young men and women who are now coming out of schools and colleges, and the leadership, in each hill areas in the North-East region, opportunities for gainful employment, for constructive and creative work and for solving the problems of the people will now open up on a scale which could not have been visualised a few years ago. To the extent these opportunities are seized and all concerned work together, within the space of two to three Five Year Plans, the economy of the North-East region and, more specially, of the hill areas, will be radically transformed and significantly higher levels of well-being established among the people as a whole.

# COMMUNICATION BETWEEN THE HILLS AND THE PLAINS

C. LAL REMA

India is fortunate in having diverse communities living within its boundary. From Kanya Kumari to Ladakh, and from the Rann of Kutch to the confines of Mizo Hills, there are a hundred and one communities belonging to diverse ethnic groups and speaking many languages and dialects. Indeed it can be said that India is a land of many nationalities who are now bound together by a common bond of one nationality.

In North-East India we have a large area which is populated by a group of people who are predominantly of Mongolian stock. Most of these people are known as "tribals" which is a term not altogether free from contempt.

If we are fortunate in having so many different types of people living within the territorial limits of India we are equally unfortunate in the fact that there had been no effective communication between these different peoples. I am particularly referring to the absence of communication between the "tribal" and "non-tribal" communities which we must admit is true if we have the courage to face facts. To my mind it does nobody any good to pretend that there had been sufficient communication between the "Tribes" and the "Non-Tribals" and that all is well so long as we can have a "peaceful co-existence". It is also no use talking of national integration so long as we make no conscious attempt at establishing effective communication between the "Tribes" and the "Non-tribe" population, for I believe, that it is communication alone which will bring different peoples nearer together that will ultimately result in national integration.

## *Aspects of non-communication*

The reason for the absence of communication may be :—Political, economical, social, religious, cultural, linguistic and psychological. While we shall leave the political and economic aspects to the professionals, we shall briefly consider the other aspects with a view to arriving at some conclusions as to how best we can promote better communication between the so-called "tribals" and "non-tribals".

A "tribal" society is a homogeneous society in which most or all the people participate in the common life in more or less the same way. There is hardly any class difference and distinction of leadership and positions of authority. The society is an integrated whole sharing much the same system of values. The non-tribal society, on the other hand, is divided into a number of classes and

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castes which again are sub-divided into a number of sub-classes and sub-castes. These class and caste distinctions are again based on family connections, money, education, religions sanctions, etc. all of which appear to be strange and foreign to a tribal.

It has been found from experience that people communicate more with people of their own class, that is, inter-personal communications of a reciprocal nature is essentially horizontal. There is also another type of communication which we may call prestigious or vertical communication as it descends from the upper classes to the lower classes and their vertical communication is primarily in one direction and tends to be principally between adjacent groups. For communication to be effective there must be reciprocity in it.

In a democratic state, communication is institutionally developed as a reciprocal interchange on both horizontal and vertical axes. Such a system of communication requires a more equalitarian structure, not necessarily in terms of social status, but in terms of rights and privileges. The democratic leadership must be more responsive to the communication emanating from the people, for the people have an effective means of expressing opinion. Moreover, since the structure is numerically weighed in their favour, they can control the leadership if they are well organised. When the control is taken over under irresponsible leadership, as we have seen it happens sometimes, the result is often chaotic. Therefore, in order to establish and promote effective communication we must always address ourselves to the largest segment of the society and try to build up a sense of dignity and "belongingness" in the community which is highly interdependent and mutually helpful, by providing more educational opportunities and better medical facilities for them. However, in the ultimate analysis, it is only by a true identification with people and by communicating with them on an essentially horizontal plane can one effect a real integration of the society and of the nation as a whole.

### *Identification*

Identification is a very complex concept as it involves the totality of inter-human relationships. True identification means, not being some one else, but being more than oneself, and the essential difficulty with the false identification found in imitation is that it creates contempt, the most important barrier to human understanding. It must be remembered also that mere physical association is no guarantee of psychological identification.

Many non-tribals have lived with the "tribals" in different capacities, e.g. Govt. servants, teachers, social workers, businessmen, etc. Although such people live physically very close to the people and sometimes even adopt their customs,



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there is little or no identification on the level of social or religious and cultural plane. These people never have guests in their homes and are almost never invited to the home of the "tribals". They are completely unaware of the social structure of the villages in which some of them have lived for several years, and they still do not understand the network of communication that reflects this structure. To them, the religious beliefs and social customs of the tribals are simply "superstitions" and silly customs. Besides, they have not learned what are the things that really matter to the tribal society, what is it that drives it, what are their goals and objectives, what is the purpose of the people, etc. They may be living like the tribals, but they cannot think like them; and until they do so, there is no real communication.

### *Limitations*

In order to achieve real identification one must be aware of the people's ideas, understand their view points, and be genuinely sympathetic with their struggle for self-expression, even though we may not agree with its forms. We may not for instance, approve of their standard of morality but we must recognise the fundamental values in life which give rise to such standard and at the same time realise that the "tribal" people may have almost equal cause for misjudging us.

When we talk of the need for real identification we must recognise also the inherent limitations towards complete identification, for in the ultimate analysis our identification can only be partial. We must remember, however, that if our communication is to be effective, our identification should be as extensive as possible. Our interest in identification must not be some subtle projection of our unsatisfied desire to dominate, nor must it represent any unconscious attempt to escape from our own cultural values.

The other requirement for identification is to know others. We can never expect to communicate with a person unless we know something about how he looks upon the world and how he responds to it as he does. Identification means also participation in the lives of people, not as benefactors but as collaborators. This participation must not be forced nor rigged, but be a genuine inter-personal experience. Another requirement for identification is that we should be exposing ourselves to being known by others. We must recognise that the real answer to inter-social (tribal *versus* non-tribals) communication is for each group to have something relevant to say to the other. Such a condition will come only as a result of effective identification.

Last but not least, the indispensable ingredient in identification is a genuine love for people. This love must not be a sentimental romanticism, but a

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profound appreciation of certain individuals in particular. We must genuinely enjoy their presence and experience a growing sense of mutual indispensability. Only in this way can we really identify and make our communication meaningful, for we become like those whom we love. St. Paul gave this injunction to the Church at Korinth in his letter to them: "Let whatever you do be done in love"; and we may apply this injunction in the context of our circumstances today. Let us also remember that failure to establish effective communication between people of different social, cultural and religious background may well spell disaster for the different communities and indeed for the entire nation.

# THE ECONOMY OF THE DIMASA KACHARI OF UNITED MIKIR AND NORTH CACHAR HILLS

DIPALI GHOSH

(Anthropological Survey of India, Indian Museum, Calcutta)

Linguistically the Dimasa Kachari belong to the Boro Group and culturally are a subtribe of the Kachari tribe.

The Dimasa Kachari are mainly concentrated in United Mikir and North Cachar Hills. This district covers an area of 5891.7 square miles and has a population (1951) of 1,65,444 in which the Dimasa number 14,714. It is larger than any other autonomous hill district of Assam and it shows the lowest density barring the NEFA region, being only 28 per square mile. The decennial figures of the Dimasa population in the district are shown below.

1931 —	14,680
1941 —	15,971
1951 —	14,714

The total number of the Dimasa in Assam, according to the census of 1961, is 68,718.

The Dimasa are surrounded by some Naga and Kuki tribes and the Synteng Khasi. Almost all the tribes of this region practise shifting cultivation.

## *The villages*

The villages of the Dimasa are situated half-way up the hill slopes, while the topmost level is preferred by the Naga. Unlike the Naga, they always prefer to establish their villages in the vicinity of water resources. The Dimasa are a water loving people. The villages are not large in size. On an average a village consists of 20 households. For subsistence, the Dimasa mainly depend on shifting cultivation for which plenty of land, fit for that type of cultivation is an indispensable prerequisite. As the density of population is very low, such land is available in abundance around every one of their present settlements.

The boundaries of villages are demarcated by the District Council. The agricultural fields are situated within the boundary. The land is not cultivated systematically, but in scattered plots spread over a wide area. This is entirely determined by the need and choice of every separate household in the village.

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Instead of trying to bring dense forests, containing big trees, under cultivation they clear the unclassed state forests—the big trees of which have already been cut down by the Forest Dept. of the Government of Assam.

The Autonomous Hill Districts of Assam have no special land revenue system for the tribals. In respect of land tenure they are guided by the Land and Revenue Act of Assam. Under this system permanent settlement is not permissible. Land may, however, be had for cultivation in an annual or periodical lease upto the maximum for 30 years. Under such annual lease, one can only have usufructuary right over the land; one cannot sell or transfer it nor acquires the rights allowed by the Tenancy Act.

The land of the Dimasa village may be divided into two categories—jhum-land and land used for permanent cultivation. Both the dry and wet land may be used continuously. In this hilly region the new field is cultivated for one year only. Dry land is used for mustard cultivation for several years and the ownership may also be regarded as permanent. Wet land is cultivated on annual lease and it is taxable. The other types of land are all tax-free. Some jhum-fields become fit for recultivation only after 10 or 12 years. The fields which are left fallow for regeneration are used afterwards for special types of crops.

### *Cultivation*

Cultivation is mostly for the production of paddy, cotton, mustard and sesamum seeds. It is important to note that in Mikir Hills sub-division vegetables are also raised along with paddy. This fetches a good income of cash.

The method of cultivation employed by the Dimasa is very crude. Suitable land is searched during the winter season in deep jungles and then lands are made ready by cutting and burning wild maiden forests during summer. This lengthy operation necessarily calls for intensive labour utilization, but lack of knowledge of economic utilization of labour results in unavoidable wastage.

Self-sufficiency in labour supply is a characteristic feature of every Dimasa village. Since the family is the singular productive unit, it is the sole source of labour. Members of the family, both men and women, have to execute all the agricultural operations themselves. Of course there are also customary arrangements within the village for mutual labour-aid, informal and formal cooperation, etc. Despite these, every individual family is more inclined to follow the traditional principle of isolation and dependence on the family members only. Dignity of labour is highly esteemed. Begging or receiving any help, gratis, from others, even from primary relatives, is considered derogatory to one's

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self-respect and honour. Inactive and indolent persons are a problem to society. They are somehow tolerated for the sake of group and social solidarity, but are looked upon with pity and contempt.

Cultivation of paddy forms the mainspring of Dimasa agricultural work. Rice, however, cannot meet their requirement round the year because of the low return. But in the North Cachar Hills sub-division, rainfall is heavier than in the Mikir Hills sub-division. This helps very much in the growth of paddy. In Mikir Hills, I have worked in Hajadisa village with 30 house-holds having a population of 110. This village enjoys the facility of the Lumding market which is 8 k.m. away. In this village, as the land is suitable for the cultivation of cotton, mustard and sesamum, the villagers produce these cash crops in order to supplement the deficit of paddy. Though the cultivation of cash crops is more profitable, their tendency is to cultivate paddy in which more land and labour are employed in spite of the low yield. They try to be self-sufficient in food.

The amount of total land in Hajadisa village is 8326.2 acres and that of cultivable land is 1956 acres. Of these only 157.50 acres (approximately 10% of the land) was cultivated during 1963-64. In Hajadisa the aggregate production of both **Aus** and **Amon** crops can hardly meet seven months' requirement of their annual demand of 1068 maunds (@ 12 mds. per unit). This creates an extreme shortage for five months. However, this is made up by the purchase of food grains from the Lumding market by selling commercial crops to wholesale dealers immediately after harvest. Very few can hold on the stock for lucrative prices in future.

Besides these cash crops, vegetables find a good return in the Lumding market. It is observed that an individual farmer cultivates one to four acres of land for both summer (*Kharif*) and winter crop (*Rabi*), but the maximum acreage is used for paddy. In Hajadisa, the average land cultivated by each family in 1963-64 was 5.25 acre, the per head acreage of cultivation being 1.43.

Apart from agriculture, secondary income is secured through honey collection and selling meat. Taking all the vocations together it is observed that the total income and expenditure of Hajadisa are approximately Rs. 32,351 and Rs. 18,502 respectively. The surplus money is not hoarded but spent lavishly in marriages or funerary ceremonies. Hajadisa is unexceptionally well-to-do village in comparison with neighbouring villages which always run deficit. In the Mikir Hills the productivity of land varies quite notably from one village to another. The cause of this is wide diversity in the geographical resources of the villages.

*Economic condition*

The economic condition of the villages of North Cachar Hills sub-division is a little different. The village of Barawaphu (37 families) was studied in North Cachar sub-division. This village produces paddy only, though wet land is not sufficient. Due to greater rainfall, the yield per acre is greater than in the Mikir Hills. In the Mikir Hills, per acre paddy production is 10/11 maunds, while in North Cachar in *jhum* field it rises upto 22 maunds and 30 maunds in wet-fields. In Barawaphu, only 17 households have wet land. From agriculture they somehow manage to get their food for the year, though not very adequately. The people do not venture to grow vegetables, fruits etc. as there is no suitable market for selling the produce. Market facility is very much limited here. The Dimasa people in general have ambition limited to the satisfaction of the immediate needs. When these are served and the transactions with the monylenders are over, the people of North Cachar Hills indulge in spending a large share of their produce in the annual festival of Bihu.

A careful review of the economic condition of the Dimasa shows that the problem does not lie in the shortage of land. In fact, pressure on land is rather absent there. The chief cause of their poverty lies in their agricultural practice and their special liking for paddy cultivation. Their honest and sincere labour is undone by the severe scarcity of water. In contrast, they have little interest, if at all, in exploiting the soil for crops for which it is more suitable. There is of course, another consideration. What opening can they have to dispose of the fruits and vegetables that they may thus produce? As they are essentially a rice-eating people, they do not grow other crops like maize or millet which may be grown here. It is, therefore, apparent that measures for increasing the production of paddy would be highly welcome to them. They should be taught terraced cultivation, which they do not practise. But provision for water supply and arrangement for required irrigation are immediate and absolute necessities.

On testing the soil and studying the ecological opportunities, experts can teach them what agriculture would be worthwhile for them and they can be encouraged effectively to adopt them. For example, the Coffee Board opined that coffee production has good prospect and possibility in North Cachar Hills. Fruits like orange, pineapple and potato etc. may have easy and greater accession in the fields of this area. To serve this possible hinterland marketing opportunity have to be accelerated. Multi-ethnic habitation has appreciably narrowed down the scope. Markets of Upper Assam are within the control of the Manipuris and the Nagas. Thus, the Dimasa at best can have opening in between Lunding and Gauhati. But pitifully in the whole of North Cachar there are only seven weekly markets for 200 villages. Obviously, markets are few and far between and are at long distances from different villages. Nonetheless, for procuring

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everyday necessities like salt, kerosene, thread, narcotics etc. they have to maintain a close relation with the markets. This compels them to traverse one or two days' path despite deplorable condition of inaccessible hilly passages, particularly during the rainy season.

Let us take the case of the village of Semkhor which is 20 k.m. away from the nearest market of Maibong. Generally, the women go there for marketing. Besides painful physical exertion, a day's labour is also wasted. In return for what? If one brings one maund of vegetables, an amount of Rs. 10 can be had by which rice is purchased. Further, for en route provision, food and tea also require to be carried. With the costs of these and one day's labour what becomes the value of the goods purchased? This is a vital point to be thought over deeply.

Hence, it follows that the primary problem is that of communication and marketing facilities. They should reach market easily and develop intercourse with different ethnic groups. The Government can undertake many relief measures. Under a cooperative system all of their produce may be procured and distributed by and through the Blocks. This will attain the twin effects of saving the trouble and increasing production—assurance of fair price and stable economic parity. A fruit preservation centre may also be set up which will encourage them in producing various fruits. All these, indisputably, centre round the vital question of finance. The Government may extend agricultural loans to provide financial assistance and also to rescue them from the clasp of unscrupulous moneylenders.

The basic attitude of the Dimasa towards agriculture also requires to be reformed. Their family-oriented cultivation should be replaced by village-wise cultivation system. Scope for cooperative farming may be looked into to save labour wastage and unnecessary small plot-wise cultivation. Shifting cultivation should be changed by rigorous introduction of terrace and wet cultivation. They have a great desire to adopt wet cultivation, yet they are helpless on account of absence of irrigation facilities.

To subsidize their economic deficiency, poultry rearing can be encouraged. Their existing poultry is poor. The Blocks are trying to improve it, but absence of roads poses a great table obstacle for the officials. The Dimasa handicraft, specially weaving, is not inferior to that of the Manipuris. If adequate assistance and encouragement are extended, this may become a good source to argument their income.

In conclusion, it can be said that the Dimasa directly have no land problem—the Achilles' heel is that of development and finding opportunities of credit and of marketing.

# ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT IN THE HILL AREAS IN THE PERSPECTIVE OF THE 5-YEAR PLAN

B. M. PUGH

When India attained its independence in 1947, the hill areas of our north-eastern frontiers were amongst the most economically and socially backward in the whole country. The Khasi and Jaintia Hills in which the headquarters (Shillong) of the State of Assam is situated, was somewhat better than the other hill territories in other portions of the north-eastern region. The main reason for this backwardness is lack of communication of this area with the rest of the country. The inaccessibility of this region almost completely isolated these people who led an unruffled and peaceful life like the gods of Olympus, and were unaffected by the toil and moil of the world beneath them. The occasional raids by these hill tribes on the people of the Surma and Brahmaputra Valleys had long ceased with the establishment of Pax Britannica within the borders of the great Indian Empire. The hill people had got so used to this stable and peaceful atmosphere which had come to them that the urge for change or economic growth and development was almost absent in their minds. Their ambition did not go beyond a desire for higher education for which the missionaries from the West were responsible. Some of these foreign Christian Missions adopted a policy of providing only elementary education for the people of these areas.

With the attainment of independence our national leaders seriously took up the task of economic development which has given new aspirations and new visions to all peoples and tribes living in this great sub-continent. The avowed policy of our Government for an egalitarian society in which all races and tribes will equally share the fruits of independence and in which there will be parity in the development of all parts of our country has aroused in the hill people of these regions also a longing for a better life and for an equal status with the rest of the people of India. The hill people in general have full faith in the Government of India in its desire for the removal of their backwardness; but they are very doubtful if State Governments are sincere in their desire to help them. The slowness in the implementation of all development programmes in the hill areas and the discriminatory treatments which they receive in the hands of State officers of the majority community in the State seem to belie all their oft-repeated assertions of sympathy for the people of the hills of these north-eastern regions.

## *Dislocation of trade*

The partition of the country which came in the wake of our independence brought a great deal of suffering to the hill people of at least three of the present



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autonomous hill districts of Assam. The people of West Bengal will remember that most of the trade of those areas, which came as far as the Calcutta market, passed through those districts of Assam and Bengal now known as Eastern Pakistan. The famous Sylhet oranges and Sylhet lime and other commodities such as pan leaf, betel nut, tezpat (bay-leaf), black pepper etc., were all products of these hill districts which came through Sylhet and Mymensingh districts to the markets of Bengal and other parts of India. In return, the hill areas also received rice and fish and many necessities of life such as salt, mustard oil, pulses, kerosene and other articles of trade from the rest of this country. With the partition of India, this once flourishing trade vanished, bringing untold miseries and sufferings to the people of these regions. Many of the people living in these border areas were uprooted from their homes and sought refuge elsewhere. Others who remained either died of starvation or continued a lean existence by maintaining themselves and their families on the products of the forests.

This roaring trade between the hill areas and the rest of the country had been made possible not only because of the flourishing markets in the undivided Bengal, but more especially because of the natural waterways which linked up these areas with Bengal and particularly with the Calcutta market. The greatest need of this area after independence, therefore, was to find alternative routes to link up this area with the rest of India. The three Five Year Plans have even today not been able to solve this problem satisfactorily. The border people even today depend for their welfare and their day-to-day needs on the goodwill of the Pakistanis across the border. The people of those border areas do not ask for charity; they ask for a restoration of their economic condition which existed in pre-independence days. They ask for markets for their produce, as in that way alone will their orange orchards and other cultivations be regenerated. So what was immediately needed was road communication or cheap methods of transport for their agricultural produce. That these were and have remained slow in coming was one of the reasons for a great deal of discontent in the hill areas. Road communication even today constitutes the greatest drawback to any economic development in these areas. With the opening up of these inaccessible areas with a net-work of roads, other amenities of life will follow as a matter of course; and a happy and contented people will be the result. The hill people believe that only an independent road-building department for the hill areas, responsible to a Hill Minister, will be able to speed up road construction as envisaged in the succeeding Five Year Plans in the country.

### *Agricultural development*

The loss of communication with the areas now in Eastern Pakistan has also made it necessary for the hill people to attempt to make themselves self-sufficient in foodgrains. Agricultural development, therefore, has become more urgent in

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these areas if they are to make up for the loss of supply of goodgrains from those areas now in Pakistan. The opening up of the areas to the rest of India has also greatly increased the population in the hill districts. A primitive or static agriculture is, therefore, no longer able to maintain an ever-growing population with a developing economy. Jhuming or shifting cultivation, sometimes known as the slash-and-burn method of cultivation, so prevalent in the hill areas, must give place to permanent and terrace cultivation. A national programme of terrace cultivation which by now should have been evolved in all the hill areas of this country must be followed in these hill areas as well. Our national government should come forward with liberal financial help for terracing all suitable hill slopes, thereby increasing the area for permanent cultivation of foodgrains. Terracing and harnessing the hill streams for wet rice cultivation is a heavy but necessary investment if we are to wean the tribes away from their primitive methods of cultivation. Government has become more conscious of this need and has done something in this direction, but much more has still to be done. Our Community Development Blocks on whom this work has been entrusted by the Government have not done as well as they should have, perhaps due to lack of technical know-how and close supervision of such projects.

In matters of agricultural development also, the hill people believe that more progress can be made if a separate department of agriculture is created for the hill areas only, which will also be responsible to a Hill Minister chosen preferably from amongst the hill leaders themselves. The agricultural staff should be familiar with the special problems of hill agriculture which are often very different from those in the plains. In fact the agricultural problems in the hill areas are much more varied than those in the plains. These are due to variations of climate, elevation, and stages of agricultural development among the different tribes. Climate and elevation, topography and nature of the terrain are factors which determine the kind of crops to be raised and the type of agriculture to be followed in the area; whereas the stages of agricultural development among the tribes determine the kinds of tools that may be used or the food crops to be cultivated.

An agricultural institute of the college grade should have been one of the projects in the Five Year Plans of the hill areas and agricultural high schools should have been established in every hill district or territory for the much needed agricultural development of the hill areas. The hill areas of Assam are also suitable for cultivation of temperate and sub-tropical fruits, but which for lack of technical know-how is now deteriorating. These areas are also suitable for dairy farming and dairy industries, a field which still remains untouched and is awaiting future development. The hill areas will witness much greater progress and development in the cultivation of potato if and when the farmers learn how to control the present potato diseases prevailing in the area: they will witness greater development in the cultivation of maize with the use of hybrids.

Much agricultural development can also take place with the adoption of

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modern techniques in agriculture which can only be learnt practically in an agricultural institute which is designed primarily to serve the cultivators of the hill areas. The Tarlok Singh Committee which has recently made a study of the economic conditions in the hill areas has made a recommendation for the establishment of a Central Development Institute and of local development institutes in all the districts in the north-eastern regions of India. While the hill people believe that such a programme will help speed up agricultural and other economic developments in the area, they are very sceptical that such a measure will be taken up soon. They believe that the Government does not carry out any development programme of its own volition but usually out of its reaction to political agitation in the areas concerned.

Another most important problem which affects the economic development of the hill areas is deforestation. The last two decades have witnessed not only the most rapid exploitation of the forest resources of these areas, but also the most destructive. The timber and fuel resources have been removed much faster than our forests can replace them. At the same time there has been much callous burning of the rejuvenating forests and most of the grass lands which, if left to themselves, would become after a few years' rest suitable for cultivation of crops. These fires, unless controlled in time, will gradually render these hill areas uninhabitable. So far, however, neither the State Forest Department nor the District Councils have been able to prevent these fires or to have recourse to re-forestation of the denuded hillsides. The effect of deforestation will eventually change the climate of the region, affect its water resources, reduce fertility because of soil erosion and destruction of humus or organic matter, and even render the present hydro-electric projects in the area unserviceable in the course of twenty to twenty-five years. My own view of the matter is that Government should legislate and adopt stringent measures to prevent this calamity which now threatens the coming generations.

### *Industrial development*

But if the hill people should not remain forever the people of the forest, comprehensive programme of industrial development must be planned for them as well. The abundance of water resources should make possible the establishment of various kinds of factories in the area. Fruit canning industry which was promised a long time ago by our first and distinguished Prime Minister, Shri Jawaharlal Nehru, has not yet materialized. The lac factory which was started a few years ago near the Mikir Hills District in order to benefit the most backward people of that area has gone out of commission. A cement factory has now been started at Cherrapunji but with doubtful benefits to the tribal people themselves. The District Council at one time agreed to let the Assam State Electricity Board develop the present Umiam Hydel Project because our the

then Prime Minister made a solemn promise that the greatest benefit from that project would come to the tribal people themselves. That, however, has not happened. Whatever economic or industrial development has taken place in the State of Assam on account of this project, has not benefited the local tribal people.

The tribal people for that reason are no longer anxious to see any industrial development in the area unless their interests are properly safeguarded. They now do not wish any more hydel projects as they are convinced that those would not benefit them, but on the other hand, might bring about their ultimate displacement or exploitation by their more advanced and more populous countrymen. In fact the first industrial establishment ever set up in Shillong as the result of the Umiam Hydel Project is the Metre Factory in my own neighbourhood. But that also has proved to be of little benefit to the local people themselves. That seems to be true even of a technological institute recently started in Shillong. It would be interesting to find out how many tribal students are being benefited by this institution and by any industrial enterprises which have come into being in the hill areas of Assam.

### *Education*

In matters of education also the tribal people feel that Government is not quite alive to their needs and aspirations. Shillong, the capital of Assam, has not been blessed by any Government-sponsored college whether of science or of liberal arts, or any of the technical arts such as medicine or engineering. While Government has decided to start a university for the hill areas, the tardy methods adopted for implementing the scheme has made the hill people very sceptical of the sincerity of Government in this matter. They believe that only a university which is alive to the educational and economic needs of the hill people will bring peace, contentment and progress in these north-eastern regions of India. The hill people do not like to be left behind but are keenly anxious to grow to the same level as the rest of the country.

# **PATTERNS OF ECONOMIC ENTERPRISES IN THE HILL AREAS OF NORTH-EAST INDIA**

**Dr. HAMLET BAREH**

(Editor, NEFA District Gazetteer)

**Agriculture :** As elsewhere, the largest proportion of the people are engaged in agriculture. Jhum or cultivation by slash-and-burn is extant over the entire hill region. A few tribes who practise terrace cultivation are the Khamptis, Singhphos, Apatanis, Sherdukpens, Monpas and Tibetans of NEFA, the Garos and Khasis of Assam, the Angamis of Nagaland and the Chakmas of Tripura. Yet, other tribes in the dwars have adopted wet-rice terrace cultivation. They are the Bodos, Mikirs and Kacharis of the Brahmaputra valley, the Nagas and Kukis of Manipur plains-belt, and Chakmas and Riangs of the Tripura valley. The methods of cultivation, both jhum and terrace, however, differ from tribe to tribe. Khasi terraces are mostly confined to the river valleys and low level grounds while the Angamis terraces are cut along the hill slopes and the lower ridges. Almost all the terraces in NEFA (except the low lying areas) are raised on precipitous slopes.

Paddy is the chief cereal crop grown all over the hills, Manipur, owing to favourable climate and soil, has emerged as the largest rice producer. The low lying areas situated between the NEFA foot-hills and the Brahmaputra, (comprising the river valleys of Dihing, Lohit Dibang and Dihang) are also surplus areas owing to the alluvial soil deposits. The upper terrain of NEFA produces very sparsely, the main reasons being the rugged formation of topography, the primitive and unimproved state of agriculture and the backward means of farming system. NEFA is sparsely populated, the density rate in Lohit District being only 4 per sq. mile. The masses of cultivators take no initiative to increase their agricultural output and remain usually content with the bare produce of the soil, while during food deficit seasons, they subsist on food gathered from the jungles which comprise edible roots and plants. Owing to the food-production drive which has been recently launched by the administration, the people have made attempts to cultivate their crops on more intensive scale so that some signs of an apparent transformation have been perceptible in their society.

The other main crops grown in NEFA are maize, millet, barley, potato, tobacco, pulses, peas, cotton, wheat and job's tears, all of which render a negligible output. The value of cash crops has not been appreciated very widely. The people work in their fields with a set of improvised and antiquated tools.

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In Nagaland, slash-and-burn method of cultivation also prevails. The Angamis and their allied tribes on the other hand have developed hill terraces to an appreciable extent. Generally, the cultivators are more hard-working and their agricultural implements are much more developed. The principal crops cultivated are paddy, maize, job's tears, oil seeds, dyes, cotton and pulses. The minor crops are tobacco, sugarcane, arum, beans, and vegetable crops which comprise mustard, pumpkin, cucumber, giner, gourds and yam. Water scarcity in dry areas and pests, however, cause a serious setback to agricultural progress. The main crops that have commercial value are cotton, ginger and pepper interchanged with other commodities from the plains.

In Manipur, the Thaddau-Kukis and their neighbours handle jhum cultivation also proficiently and more extensively and so do the Naga Ukhruls, Kabuis and Tangkhuls. Principal crops are paddy, millet, maize, job's tears, mustard leaf, cotton, turmeric, onion, gourds dyes and chillies. The soil is rich, the yield per acre is gratifying and wet-rice cultivation is practised along the narrow strip of a tribal plains-belt.

In Tripura, cultivation by slash-and-burn among the tribes is also prevalent. The main crops are rice and jute in addition to certain vegetable crops. In the valleys, terrace cultivation has been resumed by the Chakmas.

The conditions in Mizo Hills are far more deplorable because of the barrenness of the soil, the rugged nature of topography, the absence of transport facilities and other factors. The yield per acre is not satisfactory inspite of intensive efforts made on the part of the local people to increase the agricultural output. Jhum is adopted extensively as terrace cultivation is rendered difficult as in upper NEFA due to a deficiency of table lands. The main crops are paddy, cotton, sugarcane, maize and tobacco. Vegetables in a meagre output are ginger, chilly, soya beans, mustard leaf and potato. Fruits in negligible output are orange, lemon and pine-apple.

In Garo Hills, the people cultivate enough for their own consumption. Extensive terraces stretch along the foothills which adjoin the Goalpara plains but in the uplands, jhum persists all the year round, as elsewhere, paddy, maize, millet and vegetables are grown admixed in the field.

In the Khasia-Jaintia Hills, paddy is grown after both the terracing and shifting methods. Terrace cultivation is confined to Jaintia Hills and the northern areas. Other supplementary crops are potato, maize and millet. The Khasis also cultivate areca-nuts, betel vines and tez pat on an intensive scale confined to the southern slopes which have favourable soil and climate conditions. The district is famous for its fruits in a large variety comprising orange, lime and lemon, citron, pine-apple, jack fruit, papaya and others. These fruits grow well

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in the south though some of them also grow in the middle uplands and the north. Cultivation of fruits in the south is combined with cultivation of other cash crops. A bulk of them with areca-nuts, betels, tez pat are daily sent outside. Cotton, lac, pepper, ground-nut, turmeric and soya bean are now grown in smaller quantities though once they had remarkable exports, while ginger, mustard and chilly are produced from the north and the adjoined middle uplands. Vegetables are grown both in homestead gardens and farms.

Some foothill areas are orange-producing—the fruit crop which is largely distributed into the plains.

The main disadvantage of jhum is that it has deleterious effects on soil fertility, so that its productivity is ever hardly replenished. It is important to note that while the population is increasing the food production-rate has decreased considerably.

The annual rice deficit is accounted for by the fact that a great portion of the foodgrains is brewed. Drunkenness has increased alarmingly in the North Cachar, Khasi and Mizo highlands.

The tribes on the eastern zone of NEFA comprising the Singphos, Khamptis and Mishmis who have become opium-addicts are fast degenerating. The Singphos, for instance, a virile and highly cultured race which had profoundly impressed the first British officials with their traditions and qualities—have been greatly reduced, and so are the Khamtis with their strong Buddhist background and a literature of their own, representing the finest traditions of Burma.

**Weaving and Dyeing :** A bulk of the tribal population still depend on weaving for their own dress. Weaving in the hands of the tribals has reached a great landmark of advancement. Some of the woven goods and costumes exhibit themselves as valuable art-treasures which display in respect of designing and processing, a rare accomplishment and workmanship of a very high order. In the towns and urban areas, weaving has declined greatly owing to a change in the pattern of dress by males who have adopted western form of dress while women have supplemented parts of their garments with mill-made materials, but in the rural and interior areas, where a greater proportion of population is distributed, weaving still survives, the entire work of which devolves on women, who besides shouldering the heavy domestic responsibilities are also called to this vocation as well as cultivation in the field and tending of cattle. The tradition of weaving are handed down from mother to daughter. Weaving as a regular vocation is more confined to the northern, north-eastern and eastern zone of India's North-East.

The Mishmis and the Nagas who are adept weavers have displayed their

genius in this art by making rare arrow-proof coats and rain coats. Other manufactures, comprising blankets, shawls and wrappers, headdress, kilt, waist-cloths girdles, jackets, scarfs, turbans, skirts, bodies, waist-bands and other parts of resplendent costumes and dress, representing fine texture along with their multifarious shades and designs, embroideries, and patterns reflect the exquisite artistic expressions in a great measure.

The cause for the decline of weaving is attributed to the non-availability of raw materials locally for which a few tribes have to depend on supply of dye, cotton and yarn from distant places, while in other areas, cotton is grown sufficiently, leaving some surplus. Another reason is the failure of the local industries to stand competition with the influx of cheaper mill-made goods so that a bulk of locally made costumes and apparels have remained as art-treasures which have ceremonial rather than market value. Irrespective of these difficulties, the tribes still handle a considerable portion of their weaving, exerting pressure to popularize the use of their shawls and bags among their neighbours. They have also taken upon themselves the manufacture of modern carpets, door-screens, neck-ties, bed covers, table cloths, curtains etc. in their handloom which they manage to sell among their country men and the plains people. But on the whole the weaving work caters mainly to the home consumption on a small scale.

All the tribes have got a great taste in colour combination which differs from place to place. For making a lasting colour, a piece of cloth is boiled with a dye material. They use dyed goat's and yak's hair and even fibres of trees and grasses for decorating their ceremonial weapons and arms, caps, hemlets and waist-bands, belts and other parts of their dress.

**Ornamentation :** Dress without ornamentation is incomplete. Metals such as gold, silver, brass, copper, iron and lead are forged into ornaments, worn in a great profusion. The designs vary according to the localities. Decorations comprising ivory armlets are worn by rich persons in Nagaland and Tirap. They make their ornaments also out of cane slips coloured in numerous hues. Sometimes ornaments made of silver and other metals are used for decorating women's hairs. Many other ornaments are made of coral beads also, and sometimes of bone. All these ornaments are made on home scale only.

**Cane and Bamboo Crafts :** Handmade crafts turned out of bamboo are impressive. Baskets (cylindrical shaped, open-hexagonal and others) are assigned to different domestic, market and agricultural uses. A bamboo tube is mainly used as container of household goods and food-stuffs. Other cane hand-made craft comprising haversacks, cane stools, straining baskets, fishing traps, cane bottles, cane mugs, bowls cups, dishes and drinking vessels also display a splendid workmanship. The manufactures being confined to home scale, the production, is quite meagre.



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**Work in Timber :** Forests graded as Government reserves in the hills, mainly in NEFA and Nagaland, constitute the major source of income to the Administration. The bulk of the revenue is returned from the forests. Revenue receipts from levy on transport, and the other incomes, returned by trade licenses, judicial fines, stamp duties and others are trivial. The forests in the hills exhibit varied species ranging from evergreen to deciduous, from sub-tropical to temperate and even alpine type is displayed near the snow-clad mountain tops on the north. Timber exploited on Government level from NEFA is partly supplied to the adjacent railway workshop, whilst a portion is absorbed in building works by CPWD but a great portion is also sent to the ship-building yards in the Indian peninsula. With a view to protecting the tribal forests from exploitation, Government enunciated its policy thus: "It must be conditioned by the direct interests of the people and not by our desire to increase revenue by launching upon a policy of exploitation of forests identical with that in other parts of India." Technical personnel concerned in the scientific tapping of the agricultural, forest and mineral resources are conspicuously lacking from among the tribal societies so that vigorous efforts are necessitated for furthering the training amongst them in these lines to cope with the work. Much more remains to be done for the promotion of technological and engineering works in the tribal for which the children of the soil should train themselves.

One of the greatest handicaps to wild life preservation in the hills is the persistent and extensive practice of the cultivation by slash-and-burn, which has rendered the finest forests into treeless wastes. A venture for the tapping of forest resources on the part of the local people in modern, scientific ways is conspicuous by its absence and only but few saw-mills and ply-wood factories have locally been set up by the enterprising tribals while among the larger masses, forests form the main source of their fuel, as also of edible and medicinal plants, utilised in primitive manner.

**Wood Carving :** It survives as an art, not as a trade. The Nagas and Wanchos have developed this art by which they make sculptural designs such as statues, animal figures, smoking pipes and toys. Other tribes also prepare architectural designs for house decoration by this art.

**Smithy :** Black-smithies on primitive patterns still survive, although their number has been dwindling recently. The NEFA and Naga tribes manufacture in their forges not only iron implements such as daos, spearheads, axes, sickles, knives but also brass implements. The Mizos and Kukis on the southern zone make similar implements. The Khasis produce various digging, carpentry and agricultural tools almost sufficiently for their own use. The output has registered a marked decrease since the last century because iron had to be imported from outside although in the past the Khasis, Khamptis and Singphos smelted iron locally renowned for its quality. The tribes made their own guns and fire-arms at their smithies. They even produced gun powder.

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**Domestication of Cattle :** The hills afford good pasture grounds. In NEFA cattle are very much neglected as the cattle are generally led in jungles or a fenced pasture grounds at the most. No regular cowsheds and piggeries are raised. Tibetans, as an exception, are good herdsmen who give special care to their cattle. In other hill areas, cattle are treated with more care with special fodder and shelter. The Khamptis, and to a lesser degree the Indus and the Garos, are adept in elephant catching and taming and have made considerable income because elephant is a valuable asset for carrying timber transport especially in the Khampti area. The hill areas are seldom self-sufficient in cattle as large herds of the cattle, pigs and poultry are daily brought up the hills from the plains. In NEFA and parts of Nagaland a *mithun* is a valuable animal.

In remote places, a person's wealth is assessed on the number of his cattle; judicial fines and marriage prices being determined largely on their number.

A great number of cattle are butchered annually during the sacrificial feasts which include the best herds in the stock with the result that the animal loses its economic importance.

**Pottery :** This survives in a very small scale among the Nagas and Noctes who make clay pots and flower vases with artistic symbols.

**Salt Manufacture :** Brine springs are situated in the south-eastern part of Nagaland and the Borduria and Namsang areas in Tirap district. From the water, salt is manufactured locally. Some salt is supplied to some of the tribes on the frontier. But the output has now dwindled considerably.

Almost all the crafts and woven goods have more meseological than trade value partly because they are confined to a limited domestic market and partly because they cannot compete with cheaper mill-made goods. West of the tribal crafts are undertaken in artistic pursuits. Vigorous efforts are yet to be made to revitalize the existing small-scale industries by finding out more markets for their products and by protecting them from competition. If neglected, they are doomed to extinction. The Government have set up cottage training cum production centres in the hill districts with the main objects of boosting their production rate, of ameliorating their conditions and of popularizing the crafts and goods prepared on domestic level by the tribals. But more remains to be done so that the implementation of such schemes is crowned with success, to the advantage of the larger masses of weavers.

**Conditions of Trade :** The economy ranges from barter to industrial. A petty barter still survives but on decreasing scale among the NEFA tribes. This is due to the opening of new lines of communications and expansion of transport facilities, the establishment of new official headquarters and new trade centres

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and other developments which have followed the institution of administration in this hitherto neglected part during the long decades of the British rule. In other tribal areas, cash had displaced the barter system long ago.

Trade with Burma and Tibet has also been diminishing since the inception of NEFA. Prior to Independence, the Mishmis during the cold weather attended to markets in Tibet on a caravans where they disposed of their goods which comprised teeta (a valuable medicinal herb that grows wild in the Lohit and Dibang valleys), musk-pods, yarns and beads (brought from the Assam plains) and brought home wool and woollen goods, yaks, cattle, salt and swords. The eastern Mishmis monopolized a bulk of trade between Upper Assam and Tibet which they transacted on monetary terms. The eastern tribes mainly the Singphos, Khamptis and Mishmis also went every year on a long trail to maintain trade connections with their ancient home in Burma in Khampti Long and Hukong valley which took more than 15 days. They got from Burma their agricultural implements and weapons. The great earthquake of 1950 obliterated most of the ancient tracks and passes so that the volume of trade has become more and more enhanced with the foothills. The opening of industrial units, cooperatives and the resumption of other developmental projects have considerably enhanced the trade potentialities in NEFA, have given the people training in modern commercial professions, have become money-conscious and have transformed the domestic trade into trans-district trade. Tezu has emerged a new trade centre in the foothills, taking the place of Sadiya, when the latter, a renowned tribal trade centre during the pre-independence days, was washed away by the Lohit river in 1951.

The gradual spread of the administration and other developments that have followed have laid down new patterns of economic consciousness so that new trades, vocations and undertakings have been handled by the local business men although on small scale.

The last World War opened a new landmark of economic transformation in the hills. It caused a resumption of new road constructions along the border viz. the Stilwell Road from Margherita to Yunnan, Dimapur-Imphal road, Silchar-Aijal road, Imphal Palel road and the minor road accesses. The Lohit Valley Road from Sadiya to the Tibetan border built by the Government in 1912-13 was difficult to maintain because parts of it with ferry installations and bridges were again and again washed away by the swollen rivers during the rainy season. But its advantage was nevertheless utilized by the Mijus and Digarus for trade purpose. The road was completely obliterated during the earthquake of 1950. It has to be admitted that the roads were the harbingers of economic integration in the country.

Those districts outside the Inner Line have certain disadvantages. Cities with mixed population have caused an influx of trades, business concerns and professionals from outside which have had adverse effect upon the local industries

and other economic activities. In Shillong and certain places in Garo, North Cachar and Mikir Hills, a monopoly of certain cash crops has been retained by the outside merchant classes for more than fifty years now. This influx has other adverse results in that it has killed the incentives of the tribals, brought demoralization into their character and degraded their moral standards. In Shillong, a good deal of lands and forests had to be parted away to the Government for raising official headquarters. Efforts are to be made that the moral qualities of the tribals are retained, that their mines, forests and markets are protected and their cultural traditions and traits are preserved.

**Other Transitional Factors :** Other transitional phased caused by factors such as the spread of education and political changes have also to be emphasised.

**Education :** The Christian missionaries were the harbingers of Western education. When their efforts had borne fruits, they were emulated by the Government which started to open schools and educational institutions. The missionaries also gave an alphabet so that today many tribal literatures are developing. The tribals have utilized the advantage of education. Schools and colleges have recently been started in the hill areas on the self-help efforts and initiative of the tribals themselves. A great portion of the qualified men have been absorbed in Government service, a good number have joined the Church in its various fields of social service and a small number have entered service in private firms and institutions. A few have also set up private business enterprises of their own leaving a meagre number of enlightened persons to do constructive nation-building works. It is very essential that facilities are laid open in order that education may serve as nucleus for nation-building work by shaping leadership, and for tapping business potentialities.

Education in NEFA was boosted only after independence. The pattern of basic education adopted for the NEFA primary schools is very successful which lays special emphasis on the agricultural economy.

**Independence :** It is a well known fact that border trade came to an abrupt close after the partition when the local industries, agricultural produce and markets near East Pakistan were hard hit involving the loss of a volume of trade costing lakhs of rupees. It became an irreparable loss when until today, a satisfactory device for alternative market arrangements was not found out to save the border produce and markets. Thousands of people left their fields and orchards which gave them prosperous means of livelihood in the past.

To NEFA, on the other hand, independence has meant an enormous gain especially when the various forms of economic assistance have been appreciated and utilized by its tribes. Much has been done for improving the local conditions of farming through the NES blocks and other works of educational propaganda.

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The different grades of cooperatives and other welfare associations have become a valuable asset in carrying out the welfare and economic regeneration schemes for improving the living conditions of the aboriginal inhabitants.

### *Patterns of economic consciousness*

New social concepts have become formidable, exemplified by the laying down of the new patterns of business such as mining of coal, work in the lime-stone quarries, opening of factories such as bone meal, saw-mills and fruit canning and the enhancement of the traffic business. Control of transport in National Highways in Garo Hills and Nagaland has been assumed by the locally constituted bodies while in the Khasi Hills, bus syndicates have been constituted to take over the management of transport on the trans-district level. New co-operatives set up in the hills have laid a new model of business planning on a cooperative scale. Efforts have also been made to take over the entire control of trade and markets into their own hands by the tribals.

But economic consciousness on the whole is emerging slowly. Vigorous efforts have not been made to accumulate capital for investment in setting up of large-scale industries on people's initiative. No capital has been invested for the nourishment of those industries which would best thrive on the soil. People with dynamic have not appeared to boost up such schemes. For so long the people have been neglected by both social leaders and chieftains who have made no efforts on large scale to affect an economic regeneration in the interest of the larger masses ; efforts were lacking on their part to create new patterns of economic consciousness to improve their people's lot. Stories were told in the past that chieftains were instrumental not only in infusing a sense of duty—military, civic or economic, but also in introducing new enterprises which equally helped to build up the material prosperity of their people.

Following the conditions prevalent all over the country, illicit trade, smuggling, hoarding and other corrupt practices have sporadically been detected in these confines also, which badly reflect the moral degradation of the tribals. Social leaders who have assumed public responsibilities have a great task in counteracting such mal-practices while contemplating in their plan to lay down ideal patterns of business and economic consciousness and in exploiting the mineral, forest and natural resources that the Eternal Providence has been so kind as to confer by bring these treasures in the bosom of their land.

The whole of India along with its north-eastern hills is now hard pressed with economic regeneration. This calls into service men of vision and calibre, men of great hearts and mind and persons endowed with the essential qualities. The country needs them. Who shall respond to that call ?

## VIII Christianity

### THE HILL TRIBES OF ASSAM AND CHRISTIANITY

Dr. PRAFULLA DUTTA GOSWAMI

Progress and civilization break down old barriers and enlarge man's view of the world. We notice this phenomenon all around us. The hill tribes of Assam, on the other hand, seem to cling to an existence which is cut off from that of their neighbours. At one time anthropologists like Verrier Elwin were taken to task as prescribing a policy of isolation for the tribes, but now seems as if the tribes themselves seek an existence of isolation. They do not wish to think in terms of India or a large national existence. I am not sure if this state of affairs as a kind of conditioning resulting from the British policy of denying the hill tribes intercourse with plainsmen.

At one time old tribal myths and tales and beliefs were not altogether cut off from their pan-Indian pattern. To give an illustration, the Khasis believed in *Ka blei Synshar* or the Goddess of *Samsara* and in *Biskorma*, the god *Viswakarma*, and the Jaintias paid homage to the goddess *Shakti*. Indians themselves have absorbed many customs from these people. How is it then that these people look on their plainsmen neighbours as strangers? If the tribal thinks he is neglected, the average Indian peasant is no more fortunate than he is. The Bihari peasant's life is no more enviable than that of the Garo or Khasi.

Is the tribal exploited by the plainsman? Well, the plainsman has been made a scapegoat for many imaginary ills. The tribal himself is not above profiting from opportunities. I have heard Kachari friends observe that the non-Kachari Mandal and Kanungo are more dependable than the Mandal and Kanungo from their own community. The educated tribal is often seem to acquire a philosophy of success at the expense of older community values and the general well-being of the entire community. MacCall in *Lushai Chrysalis* observes that the educated Lushai who has managed to secure a clerkship in a government office tends to slight the village headman's authority and upset the traditional values of his community. Some sort of exploitation is always there, whether among tribes or among plainsmen. Nobody denies the fact that the poor Indian peasant often gets a bad deal. It is obvious that some of the tribals need some sort of help and protection for some time to come. They do need educational and economic assistance to get adjusted to the ways of a larger national existence.

While we speak of exploitation, we may as well bring up the charge made against the Assamese language. Some of the tribal leaders talk as if Assamese is being imposed upon the hill tribes. This misinterpretation of facts is often circulated, among others, by a section of Indians who at one time wanted to choke off the languages of Orissa, Assam and Manipur.<sup>1</sup> It is not only in Assam

but everywhere in the world that small groups have to lean to a certain extent upon the language of the largest group contiguous to them. An exigency like this need not be made a political capital. On the other hand, educated Assamese, as represented in the Assam Sahitya Sabha and the Assam Academy for Cultural Relations hold a liberal view towards the tribal languages. The Sahitya Sabha has printed books to help one to learn several tribal languages. It has spent money on the publication of tribal tales and on a handbook on the tribes. The Assam Academy has held seminars on the literatures of the tribes and even published Tagore's life and writings in languages like Khasi and Lushai. It is also printing a large Garo dictionary. The department of Tribal Culture and Folklore Research of the University of Gauhati, with which I am closely connected, has published books on Bodo, Garo and Khasi folk culture.

The tribal situation seems to be vitiated by a factor of considerable significance, that is, Christianity. I have nothing against Christianity as such, though we have to recall that this religion has often been a handmaiden of colonialism. This religion creates certain problems so far as the well-being of India is concerned. I do not deny the welfare activities that it carries on, but while it gives with one hand, it takes away with the other more than its due. Through service and material amenities that it has been able to offer, it has won over the tribal. It had perhaps dangled before the tribal the bait of a status symbol possessed by India's rulers—India's one-time rulers. It has, however, sapped the tribal's traditional culture, thus loosening the convert's mental and social roots. The tribal convert has lost what he had and on the other hand is not mentally assured. Professor Nirmal Kumar Bose had stated about a decade ago. "What is a cause for sorrow is that the converted tribal people often become so completely cut off from the rest of their own people, that they exist in a kind of isolation which is healthy neither for themselves nor for their neighbours."<sup>2</sup>

I have heard sensitive tribals observe that most of their people have lost their traditional songs and tales and sayings. Let me quote a learned Garo who has devoted his entire life to the recording of his community's songs and tales. Dewan Singh Rongmuthu observes. "What little education they (Garos) have been getting, being Christian predominated, makes them lose sight of their true human heritage."<sup>3</sup> Missionaries, who are backed by a world organization, are not interested in local cultures, except sometimes as academic pursuits; they are hardly interested in the well-being of India, except as a field for the spread of the gospels. Missionaries failed to get converts in the plains of India to any considerable extent, but where they found the local cultural pull weak, or where they found a vacuum created by the indifference of Indian religions, as in the hills, they stepped in, backed by a Christian government and supported by the entire Christian organization.

I have spoken about Christianity in some detail, for its political effects

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have not been very beneficial to India. This religion is, however, not entirely responsible for the tribal problem. Our government too is to blame. After we attained freedom the old policy of isolation continued. No attempt was made to bring the tribes into the pan-Indian pattern. We lost valuable time.

These are unpleasant facts and we can hardly undo what has already been done. I am not competent to offer you any solution to the problem. I can only recall what Maharaj Rudra Sinha had declared to a section of the Assam tribes at one time: "If I raise ramparts of wood they will rot, if I raise ramparts of earth they will crumble; I have raised the ramparts of my word: it will last till eternity."<sup>4</sup> We have to convince the tribals of our goodwill to them, we have to persuade them that we are all fellow-adventurers in a great experiment, the experiment of democratic living in this ancient land of Bharat Varsha.

### REFERENCES:

<sup>1</sup> In a seminar organized by the Assam Academy for Cultural Relations on May 29, 1961, Sri L. Iboongohal Singh, retired District Judge, referred to the time when books written in Manipuri were ordered to be burnt and Bengali used in its place. *The Assam Quarterly*, I, 3, 1961, p. 105.

<sup>2</sup> *The Adivasis*, 1955, p. 120.

<sup>3</sup> *The Assam Quarterly*, II, 3, 1962, p. 19.

<sup>4</sup> S. K. Bhuyan (ed.), *Deodhai Osam Buranji*, 1932, pp. 120-121.



# CHRISTIANITY AND THE TRIBAL PROBLEM

Bishop of Chhotanagpur

It has become commonplace among social workers in India to consider the "adivasis" as a problem. Just as we have a food problem, our educational problems, so we have an "adivasi" problem. What should India do about this phenomenon called the "adivasis" found in the country?

We have to begin by asking ourselves in what way are these "adivasis" a problem to the country? The answer to this question would involve us in trying to find a definition of what the "adivasis" are and then a description of their state of life and mode of living and also our own conception of what we want them to become accordingly to some accepted ultimate values. Thus our problem would be how to help them to become what they are destined to become.

So, our task at the present moment is to consider briefly whether and in what ways Christianity offers a suitable solution to this problem. Will the "adivasis" become what they are destined to become by becoming true followers of Jesus Christ who said: "I have come that they might have life and have it abundantly"?

This is a pertinent question because whether we now like it or not, a very large number of "adivasis" have become Christians. It is estimated that 10% to 15% of the total Christian population in India are from among the "adivasis." Churches in "adivasi" areas, specially in the north-eastern hill regions, are flourishing vigorously. Three relevant topics can be taken up here for discussion.

## *The Message*

What, after all, is this Christianity which has attracted the "adivasis" in such large numbers? Of course, this is a vast question, but I maintain that if one is interested in the "adivasis" then for their sake one has to know what this Christianity is. The stirrings of the heart-strings of the "adivasis" in the very depths of their being would not have been much different from the witness of Mirabai about man's deepest longings for God. Listen to the song of our beloved poetess :

"As a temple without light so is the Godless man,  
Bereft as a woman without husband,  
Joyless as a mother without child,  
Ungoverned as a house without a master,  
    This is the life of the man without God.  
"He walks in darkness as on a moonless night,  
Senseless his life as food without salt,  
And arid waste his soul like a lake dried up,  
    So is the man without God—shepherdless."

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It is this God Whom the seeking heart of the "adivasi" finds in Jesus Christ... God-made man—and he is filled with joy and peace.

Or take the soul-stirring song of the world famous son of Bengal, our national poet, Rabindranath Tagore. You sing it to your dying day but it will not grow old. One should drink in the depth of the meaning of each word :

"That I want Thee, only Thee, let my heart repeat without end,  
All desires that distract me, day and night are false and empty to the core.  
As the night keeps hidden in its gloom the petition for light,  
Even thus in the depth of my consciousness rings the cry:

'I want Thee, I only Thee.'

As the storm still seeks its end in peace when it strikes against peace  
with all its might,

Even then rebellion strikes against Thy love and still its cry is

'I want Thee, only Thee.'

It is this deep, deep longing for God which the simple "adivasi" has in his heart which finds fulfilment in his knowledge of Jesus Christ. I was asked how is it that Christianity brings about such a wonderful change in the "adivasi." So, here is the answer: his deepest longings are satisfied and he finds peace. St Augustine said: "It is for Thee that we have been created and our hearts are restless till we find our rest in Thee."

Illingworth said: "The pre-Christian religions were the age-long prayer: the Incarnation was the answer." (The Incarnation of God in Jesus Christ.) I like to maintain that this is true even of the old traditional religion of the "adivasi." The aspirations and hopes of the "adivasis" expressed in their religion find fulfilment in Jesus Christ.

The greatest and the most powerful enemy of man is Death. The simple "adivasi" tried to solve the mystery of death in his own way using the witness of nature which God had given him. The most ancient and therefore the most important religions festival of the Mundas of Chhotanagpur is the Ba-parab or the Flower Festival which is celebrated when the forest is ablaze with the flame of the flowers and fragrant with the blossom of the 'sal' (the Indian teak). Now the chief ritual at the festival is the commemoration of all the ancestors as far as they can be remembered.

The idea that fellowship with the deceased does not come to an end at death but continues beyond, must have come to the "adivasi" mind as he watched trees shedding their leaves and then from apparently dead trees, new leaves and beautiful flowers come out—life from death.

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So, when they heard that Jesus Christ rose from among the dead, they readily believed in the resurrection of the dead and in life everlasting. Thus, overcoming the fear of death, their greatest enemy, they also obtained freedom from the nagging fear of the Evil Spirits (which all, by the way, in Munda thought, are female ones).

Thus, celebrating the great festival of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, the "adivasi" poet could not help bursting out in his jubilant song of triumph and of worship:

"Priti sam Gomke vam Johari me mone  
Gonoe vae gonol vam lasur giri keda  
Kal patal nashan tal kasur giri keda  
Thapara jam apara jam sirma sene hora  
Sikiri jam bakiri jam nash priti sora."

Their lives get geared to this living hope of eternal life, so they sing:

"O sirma disuna jerusalem Sugara  
Chimvaing nel mea O vaing Dulara."

This, then, is the Gospel, the good news that came to the "adivasis."

### *The Preachers*

Secondly, what were the kind of people who brought this good news to them? It is also important to examine their aims and motives. Alexander MacCaughton (Jamshedpur) said:

"The aim of Christian missions, then, is not to 'civilize' aboriginals in the sense of imposing on them a Western way of life or any other way of life that is alien to them. It is rather to draw out the distinctive qualities within them and help these to grow and flower. . . . In other words, they are concerned with the whole man and development of the whole man towards the fullest maturity he is capable of attaining. They believe that the three processes of healing the body, educating the mind and awakening the spirit to consciousness of God, though in a sense distinctive activities, are really three inseparable processes belonging to a greater purpose. The purpose is to make men whole and Christians are convinced that the only way which can lead men to that wholeness is the way of Jesus Christ."

St John Evans said: "... our purpose is to present Christianity to the native races, not in antagonism to, but in fulfilment of permanent value in their traditional culture and to adapt as much as possible of their beliefs and practices to the presentation of the Christian Faith. This is not to paganize Christianity but to transform paganism. It is not an easy task. But it is the only way to

build up a living community and provide an atmosphere in which a real reintegration of native society may be achieved.”

Although the “adivasi” is sometimes accused of being too gullible and thus being a victim of the preachers; yet we have to give him credit for some intelligence and a capacity to respond to love and friendship and genuine sympathy.

### *The Response*

Thirdly, how did the “adivasi” accept the message? I want to present a spectrum of motivations for the conversion of the “adivasis” to Christianity:

- (i) The “adivasi” saw that Christianity would give them relief from economic and social oppression and a new security;
- (ii) They feel that by becoming Christians they would be able to better their lives and dignity as human beings;
- (iii) In the Christian mission they experienced a loving concern and care which they had not experienced from others;
- (iv) They were delivered from the fear of evil spirits;
- (v) They were saved from heavy expenses on sacrifices and feasts;
- (vi) They felt they had no alternative if they wanted to improve themselves under the existing circumstances;
- (vii) In the fullness of Thine Providence He extended His hand to deliver the poor and the oppressed.

The “adivasi” had been singing

“Where does the wind come from  
Over the hills and along the valleys

That the leaves of trees and branches are trembling?”

And he heard St John saying: “The wind bloweth where it listeth. . .”

It is God Himself Who in His infinite Goodness, Compassion and Wisdom chose to bring the Gospel of His Son Jesus Christ to the “adivasis” of India. So, please do not blame them for having become Christians.

The economic development of the “adivasis,” as of all men, depends upon their spiritual well being. It is like this: When the servant brought a seer of tomatoes to his rich Brahmin master from a local woman shopkeeper who had given him four extra ones for love as a gift, the miser wanted the seer of tomatoes returned and money refunded, only the gift to be retained.

God wants us to seek first His Kingdom and His righteousness and then all other things will be added to us. We have to enter into a spiritual bargain with our Father and material benefits will follow automatically. Do not our

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economic development projects often fail because of so much unrighteousness among us, dishonesty, selfishness, corruption, no love for fellowmen at all?

When some one said something deprecatingly about Christianity to Rabindranath Tagore in reference to the English people, the poet said, "Don't you see, my friend, what the condition of these savage English people would have been but for Christianity?"

This same Christianity is bound to do something good to the backward "adivasis," too. The anthropologist calls the "adivasis" a people of a simple culture, just simple people. I come from among them, I am one of them. Jesus Christ does not merely give us commandments but most important of all, He gives us Grace and Power to carry them out. With Him, obeying commandments becomes easy. He says: "Come unto me all ye that are weary and heavy-laden and I will give you rest." All those who want to obey the commandments and cannot and are mortal, weary of making constant efforts, should come to Jesus for rest.

# CHRISTIANITY AND THE TRIBES OF NORTH-EAST INDIA

B. M. PUGH

Christianity first came to the hills of North-East India almost a century and a half ago. The first Christian ever to come to these hills was one Krishna Chandra Pal who was an early convert of William Carey, the founder of Serampore College. The centre of Krishna Chandra Pal's labours was at Pandua, a village on the border of Khasi Hills and the Sylhet District. As a result of his preaching, seven persons, two of whom were Khasis, accepted the new religion. After working for about eight months in this area, Krishna Chandra Pal came back in Calcutta and never returned. William Carey, however, continued to take interest in the evangelization of the tribes, and with the help of a Bengalee from Sylhet took up the task of translating the Bible into Khasi using the Bengalee alphabet, as up to that time none of the tribes had any script of their own. It was not until 1832, about 12 years after Krishna Chandra Pal went back to Calcutta, that William Carey sent a young devoted Christian, Alexander B. Lish, to Cherrapunji in the Khasi Hills. He very soon started village schools in the area, but his attempts did not prove very successful. After six years, this Englishman left Cherrapunji and Carey discontinued his Mission to the Khasi Hills. A few years later one Rev. Jacob Tomlin, a man of means, who had worked as a missionary in Malacca, decided to go to China by way of Assam. He landed in Cherrapunji, but after staying there for about nine months, he returned to England.

A sustained missionary enterprise began in 1841 when one Thomas Jones of the Welsh Presbyterian Mission arrived in these hills. He was the first to advocate the use of Roman characters for the script of tribal languages. As a result of his labours, the Khasi people slowly began to accept this new faith which later spread all over Khasi and Jaintia Hills. The Mission then extended its activities to the Mizo Hills, the North Cachar Hills, and also the Sylhet District.

The success of the Mission became more spectacular when the work of evangelization was entrusted to the native preachers themselves. A great proponent of this policy was one Dr. John Roberts who started a school for the training of preachers and evangelists. It was through them that they were able to carry the message of the new religion to the remotest villages in the hill districts. In their task of Christianization they advocated the spread of elementary education, but it was not long after, that they also saw the need for starting middle English and high schools in the area. Christianity soon spread among the tribes as educational, social and economic advancements came to the adherents of this new religion. As Christianity came to be associated in the minds

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of the tribal people with the conquering British rulers, the number of adherents to the new religion began to increase more rapidly. Social inhibitions which usually stand in the way of conversion among the people of the plains were also completely absent among the tribes.

### *American Baptists*

The beginning of the American Baptist Mission dates back in 1836 when they started their work at Sadiya. They very soon extended their work among the tribes in the Naga Hills, Garo Hills, Manipur, Cachar District, and in the Assam Valley of the Brahmaputra. They also have achieved a great deal of success in recent years particularly among the Naga tribes. American Baptists opened schools and dispensaries in these areas in order to meet the elementary needs of the people.

Among those who later entered the field of Foreign Mission were the Roman Catholics. These have achieved greater success in recent years than the Presbyterians and the Baptists because of their emphasis on education at all stages of development of the growing child. Roman Catholicism is also a world-wide religion with a broad outlook. The top hierarchy with headquarters in Rome has a long-term view of their religion. While they encourage their people to take part in politics, the Baptists and Presbyterians in Assam dissuade their church leaders from taking active part in politics. The Roman Catholics in some ways are also less puritanical and far more tolerant than the other two, such as in matters of drinking or sexual lapses of their adherents. These and many other such attitudes of Roman Catholicism have made it more attractive and perhaps easier for the tribes to join it in large numbers in recent years.

As a result of the work of these Christian Missions, and other smaller groups who have recently entered the field, Christianity has become the most dominant religion in practically all the hill areas except NEFA and perhaps the Mikir Hills. NEFA, of course, had been kept out of all contact with the world until this country achieved independence.

### *Christians and Nationalism*

The tribes of North-east India today feel greatly indebted to the missionaries from the West for their great work of uplifting them. They feel that they are what they are today because of the sacrifices which missionaries, especially of the early days, did for them. There is, therefore, that feeling of close relationship, if not loyalty, to the people who brought them the benefits of education and social and economic advancements. This feeling of affinity with the Western

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people has sometimes given rise to contempt of Indian social behaviour or culture. It is this attitude on the part of Indian Christians which made many Indians accuse the Indian Christians as having been denationalized. Today there are some, however, who, looking back, believe that the missionaries could have done more. They had not helped them, they say, in order that the indigenous churches may become independent, that is, self-supporting and self-propagating. So, quite early in the history of the Christian Missions there arose certain "national" churches, but which, for lack of resources, did not make much headway. But ever since this country has achieved independence, the churches in tribal areas have become more and more independent and less dependent on the West. National Christian leaders, therefore, give ready assent to the stated policy of the Government of India that the work of evangelisation or of propagating Christianity in this country should be left to the Indian Christians themselves, and that foreign missionaries may be allowed to come to this country for certain specialized work as in medicine, or in any of the sciences, or in technology. The tribes are of the opinion that this country would be greatly benefited with the services of dedicated experts, that is, of men and women with a missionary spirit from whichever country they may come—East or West.

The tribes also believe that Indian Christians will, for a long time, remain the best interpreters of the West. They further believe that Christianity has a lot to give to India and will contribute greatly to the enrichment of the composite Indian culture. Indian Christians, the tribes believe, have, speaking comparatively, keener social conscience than the rest of the people of India.

Tribal leaders, however, deplore the divisions which have been imported into this country from the West. The conflicting *mores* or modes of conduct have at times created unfortunate divisions among the tribes. Perhaps, even at this late stage, it may be desirable to limit foreign Christian Missions only to those which have been established in this region already.

That Christianity will continue to spread among the tribes, there is no doubt in my mind. As Christianity is gracefully accepted by the majority community as one of the religions of India, and as its adherents are given full protection to practise their own religion, the loyalty of the tribal Christians to the great Indian society will grow and national integration will grow apace, converting the north-eastern region of India into a strong bulwark against any inroads from external enemies.



# BEGINNING OF CHRISTIAN WORK IN THE HILL AREAS OF NORTH-EAST-INDIA REGION

Rev. AUSTEN JOHN

The East India Company started salt trade in Assam in 1783, and a superintendent was sent to Goalpara. But due to the unsettled political condition of Assam at that time, the trade was discontinued for some time. When it was resumed again British help was sought for by the Ahom king and this time the help was given and the East India Company and the Government at Fort William became involved in the political affairs of Assam.

## *Opposition to Christian Work*

In 1793, Dr. Carey came to India and because of the unsympathetic reception of the Government at Calcutta, after working for a few years, he moved to Serampore, which was under the Danish Flag at that period. It is of interest to note that at that period there was great opposition to Christian work in India in the British House of Commons. In 1792, Wilberforce introduced a resolution in the House of Commons which tried to change the East India Company Charter, so as to include some religious work in their areas. This resolution was very strongly opposed by the East India Company Directors and the Court of the Directors. The Opposition was so strong that the resolution was dropped before the third reading. One of the Board members of the East India Company at the time said, "I am fully convinced that suffering clergymen, under the name of missionaries, or any other name, to overrun India and penetrate into the interior part of it, would, in the first instance, be dangerous and prove utterly destructive of the Company's interest, if not wholly annihilate their power in Hindustan." That so far from wishing that they might make converts of 10,000, 50,000, 100,000 natives of any degree and character, he should lament such a circumstance as the most serious and fatal disaster that could happen."

Hence, in India, Dr. Carey and his colleagues faced constant opposition from the Company's officials and the Government. Dr. Carey lamented the behaviour and life of the British officials of that time, many of whom, it seems, lived an unchristian life. On the 20th October 1812, Dr. Carey writes about the ejection of the five American Baptist Missionaries, to another friend: "You, as well as myself, are acquainted with the circumstances of five brethren having been sent from America to found a Mission in the East. They have all safely arrived at this place. The Government, however, have absolutely refused to let them stay here, and have peremptorily ordered them to leave the place, and not to settle in any country belonging to Great Britain or her allies. We have tried our interest, but have succeeded no further than to gain permission for them to go to the Isle of France..." Thus was the attitude of the Government at

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Fort William as regards the Mission and Church work in India till about the eighteen twenties.

### *The American Baptists*

The work of Christian preaching was done primarily by the English Baptists and the missionary work in Assam in the beginning was carried on by Indian preachers, of whom at least one is known...Khrishna Chandra Pal, a Bengali who preached in the Khasi Hills in 1813 and made the first Khasi convert. It is believed that it was with the help and inspiration of Krishna Chandra Pal that Dr. Carey translated the New Testament in Khasi in the Bengali script. Through the Serampore Mission, some American Baptists Missionaries came to Assam and in 1837, the English Baptists withdrew from Assam and the Aracan region and it was left to the American Bptists. From 1838, the American Baptists took the field in Assam and the hill regions.

In the Hill areas, as far as could be found out, the Government, on the recommendation of the Commissioner of Assam Valley, gave a grant to the Baptist Mission to start schools for the Garos. This was done round about the year 1836-47. There was also a school started at Goalpara and another at Gauhati. Among the first pupils of the school were Ramkhe and Omed, two Garo youths, who later on became the first missionaries among the Garos.

Captain Jenkins, the Commissioner of Assam, was very keen that some schools were established among the tribes in Upper Assam and he repeatedly wrote for missionarie to work among the Khamptis and the Singpos. He even promised personal donation for the work. In the meantime, the American Baptist Mission was trying to start work among the Shans of Burma and from there to China and in this call of Mr. Jenkins, they found the opportunity to fulfil their plans. They intended to reach Burma from the Mishmi Hills and from there to China. Mr. Nathan Brown, who was formally a missionary in Burma, started for Sadiya on the 20th of November 1835 in four small boats from Calcutta and on the 18th January 1836, they reached Gauhati and the party arrived at Sadiya on the 23rd of March 1836. The journey was full of adventure and hardship. The second party of missionaries for Sadiya started the next year but a few days before reaching the destination, they were struck by a disaster. These accounts of the journeys and the various adventures which they had to experience, make a very thrilling reading.

### *Spread of work*

In the eighteen thirties, Mr. Bronson an American missionary preached

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the Gospel to some of the Naga tribes. He also taught them the art of cultivating tea. He stayed in one of the Naga Villages and started some schools. The Governor General's Agent saw the work of this missionary and repeatedly recommended Govt. financial assistance to these schools. The Govt., however, was not prepared to make any direct financial aid to this work, but Capt. Jenkins was permitted, within limits, to make small payments from his contingent bill. Mr. Bronson who had started the work independently, was not given co-operation from the local officers, who felt that this work would antagonise the tribals, leading to tribal warfare. Moreover, the Nagas, at that period, were very suspicious of the White man and it was considered dangerous for a White man to stay in the village.

Another Baptist missionary, Mr. Clarke, had settled in a Naga Village near Amguri and made many converts. He had also settled many blood feuds and some villages which came under Christian influence desired to live in peace with their neighbours. This raised a new problem, as these peace-loving villages became exposed to raids from other villages and they asked for British Govt. protection but they were told to depend on themselves. In 1851 the first Ao Naga was converted and thereafter the missionaries made frequent visits to these areas. These missionaries were *persona non grata*, in these area. In one of the missionary's letter it was written: "The entrance into Naga Hills was in many respects different from that of the Garos. The greatest difficulty which the missionaries had to face was perhaps over-cautiousness on the part of the Govt. officers, as they were opposed to the missionaries . . . . and the officers feared any intrusion of White people into the hills might cause disruption and tribal war." Mr. Clarke wrote: "If any thing serious should befall, occasion might be taken to forbid all missionaries going into the hills about Upper Assam".

Mr. Clarke was in the Naga Hills from 1876 onwards. He was interested in other Naga Tribes also and at his repeated request Mr. C. D. King was sent to the Naga Hills, by the mission. Mr. King chose Kohima as his base, and began his work among the Angami Nagas. The Angami were very hostile to the White man and the Kings led a very risky life in Kohima. They worked at their own risk and perhaps were considered a nuisance by the local officers. Dr. Rivenburg followed the Kings, and they also experienced the official opposition. They set up a number of schools and later in 1922 Dr. Rivenburg's work was appreciated by the Govt. and he was awarded the Kaiser-i-Hind award.

In the Lotha (Naga) area, Mr. W. Witter was sent. The local D.C. in this case was very helpful, but Mr. Witter had to leave the place because of ill health, his work was carried on by the local people and by periodic missionary visits. In the Sema (Naga) area, no missionary was sent and Christianity was spread, probably, by Naga preachers. The Konyak Nagas came under the

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Christian influence very recently, probably in the nineteen-forties. The Naga missionary who has done very wonderful work among this large group of Nagas is Rev. Longari Ao, who is still working among them.

The Thankul Nagas in Manipur came under Christian influence at the end of the 19th Century. The Missionaries from Burma had been trying to extend their work into Manipur since 1836, but they were not granted the permission. In 1894, Mr. Pettigrew came to Manipur, but was not allowed to work in Imphal. He was, however, given permission to go among the tribes, at his own risk. He chose Ukhrul, and started the work. It was a small village 50 miles from Imphal. From this base the work was extended into the Kuki area and other neighbouring tribes.

Christian preaching among the Mikirs, in the beginning, was not direct. A number of Mikirs who had come down to the plains, first came into contact with Christian preaching and were converted to Christianity. Later, some mission work was carried out in the Tika area, in the Mikir Hills. Turning to the Khasi Hills, we find that after the initial work of Krishna Chandra Pal, not much progress seems to have been made till the coming of the Welsh Missionaries in 1841, and now the Welsh Presbyterian Church is one of the big churches in the Khasi and Jaintia Hills.

The Mizo Hills was brought directly under the British administration about the year 1894-95. Along with this came the Missionary work in Aijal. Mr. Savidge and his friend first came across some Mizos in the Chitagong Hill Tract in 1892, and they were taken by them, so much so that they moved into Aijal in about 1894. In these hills also the tribals were hostile to the White man, and the missionaries for sometime had to live in the Aijal fort. Presumably, there was neither opposition nor help from the Govt. but in the subsequent years (in the beginning of the twentieth century), there was a controversy between the Govt. and the missionary. And the missionaries had to give an undertaking that they would neither interfere with the administrative arrangements of the Govt. nor would they disturb the social customs of the local people. (Bawi controversy). The present position in the Mizo Hills is that in the North Mizo area the Welsh Presbyterian Church is predominant, and in the South Mizo area (Lungleh) the London Baptist Church is the predominant Church.

The spread of Christianity among the other smaller tribes, in the Manipur area, is of recent origin, except in cases where the work was extended by the missionaries who were in Burma. Manipur, as pointed out earlier, was closed to Christian preaching till the close of the 19th century. But relaxation was made in the hill area of Manipur. Christian preaching was done in some cases by American missionaries, and in some cases by the local evangelists.

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In Tripura also the preaching of the Christian Message is quite recent, and the work is mainly confined to the tribal belt among the Mizos in the Jampui Range. The Mission which is working there is the New Zealand Baptist Mission.

Lastly in the NEFA area, the number of Christians is very small, and those who embraced Christianity are those who had come into contact with the mission work in the plains, and in the North Lakhimpur area, where they had come down and settled. The NEFA policy discourages and even prohibits any kind of Christian work among the tribals inside the 'administration'. Hence, though there are possibilities, no organised church could be established, by the small number of Christians (tribal) there.

### *British official policy*

I have tried to give very briefly an account of the advent of Christianity in the hill areas of North East India. It is to be noted that in some cases the British Government gave some small support to the mission work but in most of the other instances, they were either indifferent or were hostile to the work of the Church. The British Government's policy was contrary to the extension of Christian work in certain areas. The various missions did not get any financial help from the Government. The Governor General's Agent was keen on mission work mainly because he wanted them to start schools. Had it been the British policy, to make the tribals Christians, then the church which would have had the support would have been the Church of England. But this church has a very small following in the hills areas, as it started its work quite late in Assam hills.

These missions were the results of mission societies in Europe, America, New Zealand, Australia, etc. They were not financially supported by their Governments but run their mission work with the help of their collection-drives in their countries. These Church groups are independent organisations and formulate their own policy of work and evangelisation. They select their own areas of operation, and choose any opportunity they find and which is to their liking.

One begins to understand the tremendous work the various missions have done for the tribals, when one sees their condition before the advent of Christianity. They were so hostile to each other, that in many cases villages perched on neighbouring hilltops, never had good relation with each other. The hill sections in other words were divided and there were suspicion, hatred, blood feuds, head-hunting etc. But now one sees in them the signs of unity, understanding and education. In other words, the tribals have found their maturity through Christianity. And no wonder they are so indebted to this religion.

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In conclusion, I would like to add that Christianity is as much Indian as any other religion. It is primarily an Asian religion. The birth of Christ is in the East, and it is a misnomer to call it a Western religion. To India it came long before the beginning of Islam. Traditionally it is accepted that one of the disciples of Christ came to India, to preach to the Jewish settlement in the Malabar Coast. It is believed that the Syrian Orthodox Church began in about 52 A.D. in Malabar. There is some historical evidence which shows that there was Christianity in India by the fourth century. During Muhammad Bin-Tugluq's reign, Ibn-i-Batuta, refers to the church in the South of India. It is no doubt true that Christianity came to these hill sections through missionaries of the west. The religion itself in our country is as old as the Christian era.

## *IX Education*

### **SOME OBSERVATION ON THE HILL TRIBAL STUDENTS ON NORTH EASTERN REGION**

Rev. AUSTEN JOHN

(Vice-Principal, Barapani Union, Christian College)

I began working in the Khasi Hills in 1954. The Union Christian College is a small college. It is a residential institution and both the members of staff and the students live in the college campus. The College is situated six kilometres from the main road and is about seventeen kilometres from the nearest town. These conditions naturally have made it possible for the members of staff to come into very close contact with the student body. Once a week, all join in manual work of various descriptions and the distance between the teaching faculty and the students is reduced to a minimum and hence there grows mutual understanding and respect which becomes quite natural and is very healthy.

Over the past years, I have come to know many a tribal youth and student of these hill areas and in our college, I have come into very close relation with about 550 students including about 160 girls, all of whom are tribals of this region. They represent thirty-two different language groups, of which thirty groups come from Assam, Nagaland, Manipur, Tripura and a few from the NEFA area. These figures will show you that my personal experience with the tribal students of this region is not very wide and hence my observations will have many limitations. Moreover, these experiences are drawn mainly from the student body of the college, which from the beginning has tended to be predominantly tribal.

#### *Age differences*

One of the first things which strikes in the college is that the tribal students who come from the rural section are comparatively old in age, though their physique does not give away their age. This age difference, I think, is due to (a) children start their schooling late; (b) some stop their studies at Matric, earn money and then join college and (c) the lack of school facilities in the post-independence period. In 1947-48, the number of schools at various levels in the hill areas was as follows :—

	High Schools	Middle Schools	Primary Schools
Garo Hills	1	23	451
NEFA	Nil	Nil	2 or 3

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	High Schools	Middle Schools	Primary Schools
Khasi and Jaintia Hills	11	39	497
Mizo Hills	2	46	340
Mikir and North Cachar Hills	1	9	170
Nagaland	3	27	225

I do not have figures for Tripura and Manipur but I believe the pattern is about the same. For the first few years after independence, there was not much marked change in the number of schools in these areas and then there was a rapid increase in the number of schools. In Assam, by 1965, in the four hill districts, the number of High Schools increased to 115 (from 15), the M.E. Schools rose to 383 (from 117) and the Primary Schools went up to 3,399 (from 1458). In the NEFA area, by 1961-62, there were 5 High Schools, 16 M.E. Schools and 140 Primary Schools.

The figures above would show us that the pre-Matric and High School education on a wider scale in these areas is fairly recent (12 to 15 years) and this may have contributed to the age difference of tribal post-Matric students. This would also mean that in most cases the parents are uneducated and do not bother to send their children to colleges at an early age.

Moreover, it can be estimated easily that more than 90% of the population live in rural areas and depend upon agriculture. In Assam, the total tribal population is 20,64,816, of which 19,96,783 live in rural areas and only 68,033 live in urban areas. It is more true of the hill areas of this region. There are no cities in the hills, only a few towns and the rest are overgrown or out-grown villages. The rural economy is organised in a way, where each member of the family has to play a part, even children have to work during harvest and perform many other duties of rural life. Hence no one can be spared from their work. In villages, in order to suit the convenience of the domestic arrangement, the Primary Schools are run for short period each day and children can come in their spare time to school. This is not very satisfactory and takes longer for a child to cross the primary stage. This naturally leads to more age at the college level.

Another minor reason for this age difference could be that the parents could not keep or some do not know how to keep the exact age. In several cases, their age is given according to appearance in schools when they prepare to sit for their Matriculation Examination.

The families in the villages are self-sufficient in all their basic requirements and those who have more grains than their requirement are considered rich. But when they come into contact with modern way of living which depends on cash money, they are poor. I noticed in some schools children of well-to-do



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families, are not able to afford hostel fees. To overcome this problem, the school hostel in many villages is only a place to sleep in and the students go home periodically to bring their own rice to cook and eat in the hostel. Those who have no rice are allowed to pay cash for the amount of rice required.

In hill areas of Assam and Nagaland, the tribals are either Christians or non-Christians. Very few have embraced either Hindu or Muslim religion. The non-Christians are mostly animists. In Tripura and NEFA one comes across a number of Buddhists also. Literacy and education is found predominantly among the Christian tribals and therefore most of the tribal students, in colleges, who come from Assam, Nagaland and Manipur are Christians. These students take their religion very seriously and take a very active interest in all the church activities. They are fond of attending church services and sing hymns lustily. Their belief is simple and straightforward. In villages, student groups go out preaching the gospel to other villages. Generally, they know very little of other religions.

### *Script*

As far as I could make out, none of these tribes have their own scripts. There are various legends which give the story of how they lost their alphabets. In most of these areas Roman script is used which was introduced by early missionaries. In many instances, the sound of an alphabet is modified to suit the tribal word. It being so, one comes across varieties of pronunciations when they read or speak English. The two variations of the same alphabet makes it hard for a student to correct his pronunciation.

### *Arts verses science*

In post-Matric studies, the Arts subjects are more popular among the tribal students. This is because there is a dearth of science schools in the hill areas and till recently, barring Shillong, there were only a handful of schools teaching science in other areas. Moreover, like the rest of our country, the Arts are considered easy and hence more join it. But I would hasten to say that this is changing rapidly and all good students try to go for science at the collegiate stage and those who have gone for general science, medicine, agriculture or engineering have done quite well.

### *Family environment*

Except town students, those who come to college for the first time from rural

areas, generally are not A-class students. They are average and below average. It is not because they lack intelligence (for they are very ingenious in commonsense matters and are skilful with their hands) but I believe it is because of the environment and the family from which they come which often has no academic background or tradition. In many cases, the present college student is the first generation to reach the college stage. However, those who cross the graduate level and go on for post-graduate studies do as well as any other student. I am sure this early backwardness would disappear when the present educated class begins to settle down and lays the foundation for academic tradition.

### *Hard-working*

Hill students are physically strong and I think three factors are responsible— (1) The hilly terrain of the area calls for strong legs and a healthy body as one has to walk up and down the hills. The hills are sparsely populated and one has to walk long distances to reach the next village. This provides ample exercise for a young person. (2) The uncontaminated and fresh air, adds to the fitness, after hard exercise. (3) The Mongoloid race, to which most of them belong, is the possessor of dependable legs. Moreover physical strength is respected. A hill student is capable of enduring physical strain and has good stamina. They take to sports and games quite naturally. Unfortunately, because of the hilly characteristics of the region, large playing fields are not easily constructed and this lack of facility prevents many a promising sportsman from winning national laurels.

A tribal student is self-reliant and independent in outlook. He takes part in manual work with great enthusiasm and often one sees them in our college weekly **shramdan** working to the tune of a peculiar rhythm. In such hard work, girls also work shoulder to shoulder with men. Sometimes, they complain if they are assigned some soft jobs. Living close to nature has sharpened their commonsense and has taught them the value of manual work which is performed as naturally as anything else. They are skilful with their hands and the men can make wonderful traps, baskets etc. of ordinary materials like bamboo, cane and grass, with the help of a simple implement called Dao.

### *Dress*

Girls play an important part in the village community. Weaving is their special skill. Almost all girl students from the rural areas, except perhaps the Khasi Hills, know the art of weaving. They can weave intricate and delicate designs in their wearing apparel. The various tribes have their own particular

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arrangement and design and one can generally make out by their colour scheme the tribe to which she belongs. I have used the term 'she' because the women-folk use their own tribal dress and colours. The menfolk have taken to trousers and shirts. The tribal dress for men is rather primitive and hence trousers are accepted which suit them most. A tribal youth in college loves to dress well and look smart.

### *Self-confidence*

Our students are very cheerful and love jokes and laughter. Little provocation is necessary to start a roar of merriment. They suffer from few inhibitions. They are frank, bold and outspoken. They talk freely, without any embarrassment (in faulty English) with anybody. Sometimes, to my embarrassment, they have pointed out things which they do not like in me. These students are not nervous or bashful and can stand before an audience and give a speech or put up a skit without much preparation. It is a treat to see their cultural dances and songs. In the village society, there is no caste or social distinction. There is equality and there is a community feeling where work is shared by both young and old and this develops their self-confidence and self-respect.

Financially, their condition is not very sound and as indicated earlier, in the village, the family is self-sufficient but does not have cash. To overcome this difficulty, the Central Government, under Article 275, awards stipends to tribal college students through the State Education Department. This is certainly a great help which has enabled most of the tribal students to study in colleges. The stipendary amount varies from Rs. 500-700 annually. It is awarded to all tribal students irrespective of their grades or the financial condition of their parents.

### *Moral code*

Among the sexes, there is a great deal of healthy and free meeting between them. They find it irksome to follow hostel restrictions and rules, which regulate their conduct in this respect. As a matter of fact, in their own village society, boys and girls meet freely and independently. The girl has an important place in the community and plays a very important part in society. There are, however, several social taboos placed in the boy-girl relationship in a village and these taboos are very rarely broken. It is prudent, nevertheless, that once they are taken away from their own setting, other taboos are placed regulating that relationship. It is seen that once the utility of these rules are understood, the students seldom break them.

*Music*

In our College, one often hears tribal songs and music. The tribal indigenous music has its own parts and is quite different from the parts in Western music. These songs mostly are group songs and one does not hear, for example, of a Naga solo sung in the original tune. The songs are such that if one person sings them, they will have no tune at all. Tribal youth take to Western singing quite easily. The early missionaries have taught the tribals to read music which have been passed on to the subsequent generations. Hence they get attuned to listening and singing in parts from their childhood and find no difficulty in picking up Western tunes. With the advent of cinema houses in towns, one hears Indian songs these days but they are mostly modern hits and are very much Westernised. Students love singing and are good singers. Guitar is used for timing and accompaniment in most of their songs.

*Drinking*

A tribal student has an easy conscience about drinking liquor. This again has a background. Till the advent of Christianity, use of rice beer was essential in all their social ceremonies but the Church put restrictions on the use of liquor. Unfortunately, owing to the policy followed by British officials and adopted by our own Government officials, liquors like rum have been freely used in the village meetings and official visits. Moreover, the presence of our army in certain areas where rum is found in abundance has created a situation so as to encourage drinking in the tribal areas. Drinking is quite a problem these days in the hill areas.

*Superstition*

One often comes across many old beliefs which are accepted even by the educated. For example, belief in magic, in curse and in legendary beliefs like that of U Thlen in Khasi Hills, Ka Taro in Jaintia area, lucky stones among the Lothas, Chakema and Chorin among the Mikirs etc. There is a common belief among many that a man can change into an animal or, as the sophisticated would say, projection of one's soul into an animal. It is interesting to note that in spite of these beliefs, they are sincere Christians.

There is a general dread among the students of the heat of the plains. This, I believe, is more psychological than real for they are strong people having great stamina and I think they are capable of enduring any hardship, physical discomfort, including the heat. If they could overcome this fear, a greater number of students would go down for studies and bring back richer experience to their own areas.

*Tribe-mindedness*

The Tribal students are good mixers and make friends easily. But there is an underlying narrow-mindedness in them when it comes to things of their own tribe. They tend to move in their own groups which is quite natural. But this group feeling becomes very pronounced in times of quarrels. They band themselves tribewise and stand together. In their cultural dances also, one seldom comes across inter-tribal dancers. They prefer to dance their own particular tribe's dance. On special occasions, they are even reluctant to wear other people's tribal dress. But I hope that with the increase of inter-tribal traffic and communication, there will develop more co-operation and sharing in the cultural side of their activities.

The tribal students are not very careful with their money. They are extravagant in their habits and many spend more than they could afford. I would not be far wrong in saying that a great deal of Government stipend is spent on clothes and other things which have nothing to do with education. Once they like something, they would pay the maximum to get it and so they are charged higher rates by the shopkeepers. While appreciating the government generosity in awarding stipends to all post-Matric scheduled tribe students, I feel that the time has come to put some kind of minimum standard as qualifying mark for the award of these stipends. This would not only raise the values of the stipend but it would be an incentive to improve their standard.

Tribal community is known for its simplicity and honesty but these days one begins to notice many maladies of our so-called modern civilization. Dishonesty, deception and lowering of moral standards are on the increase in the towns and the areas where there is political turmoil. These vices are visible among the student community but fortunately, their deception is still of a simple and transparent nature which are easily detected. Once found, they are ready to confess their mistake and try to improve their conduct.

In conclusion, I would say that a tribal student is proud, independent, vigorous in habit, at times stubborn, affectionate and generally honest. They are capable of developing personal loyalties and respect. They are simple in their understanding and respond to love and affection. They need love and firmness. They appreciate firm dealing based on fairness and justice.

## **TRIBAL SOCIETY AND INDIAN LAW**

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North-eastern India comprises within its folds various heterogenous tribes having distinct customs, speaking different languages and dialects, who are at different stages of development. Most of these tribes are inhabiting the hill areas of Assam and North Bengal. They are shy or reserved in dealing with people who do not belong to their own tribe. As such it is difficult for one belonging to one tribe to know all the customs and manners of other tribes. From occasional contacts, however, one realises that there are some characteristics which are more or less common to most of the tribes. Their natural reserve; independence of thought and action; their love for the time-honoured customs; for the hills and dales, woods and trees, rivers and streams and such other surroundings under which they live and grow from childhood; are some of these characteristics which are common to them or at least to the majority of them.

In a tribal society, the unit is a family which is comprised of the parents, their children, uncles from either the father or the mother side. Culture, religion and administration begin in the family. A number of families constitute a village and a number of villages form an administrative unit under a chief or a headman who looks into the welfare of every one and commands the respect and obedience of all the inhabitants of the area which forms the administrative unit under him. Adjudication of civil disputes and administration of justice are carried out according to customs and usages which have descended from generation to generation by word of mouth from parents to children. These customs are so deep-rooted that a change of place or even a change of faith or religion could not affect them particularly in respect of those which are fundamental to them like the law of inheritance, marriage customs, kindredship and the like. Among the Khasis and possibly among the Garos who are also a matrilineal tribe, inheritance mainly goes to the females, and a marriage between descendants from a common ancestress, however distant their relationship may be, is an incest which cannot be accepted by the society.

Tribals have got their own laws, both civil and criminal which, emanating out of their customs and usages, have become unwritten laws with the passage of time and still have the force of law, in spite of the impact with the non-tribals, and it was on account of this that the framers of the Constitution have put the hills districts of Assam in the Sixth Schedule to the Constitution of India. The land tenure system and the law of inheritance vary from tribe to tribe and from area to area. Land in the tribal areas generally belongs to the people whether as a community or as a village. In some areas like the Khasi

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Hills a large proportion of it belongs either to the family or a clan which settled in an area before others came. These lands are absolute properties of the owners who can do whatever they like. They pay tax to no one and are answerable to nobody for their lands. For communal lands, distribution is made by the chiefs or headmen whether for temporary or for permanent cultivation. Land is, therefore, one of the subjects which have been entrusted to the tribal councils known as District and Regional Councils, to make laws under the VI Schedule to the Constitution. Other subjects which are given to these Councils to legislate are, management of any forest not being a reserved forest ; use of canal or water-course for the purpose of agriculture ; regulation of shifting cultivation ; the establishment of village or town committees and other matters relating to administration, police and public health ; appointment or succession of Chiefs or Headmen ; inheritance of properties ; marriage and social customs. The Sixth Schedule to the Constitution lays down that the Code of Civil Procedure shall not apply to the trial of any suits or cases arising in the areas.

Criminal laws of the tribals originated from the codes of conduct taught by parents to their children by word of mouth from generation to generation. They are mainly in the negative form of the "Golden Rule". Thus, the children are taught not to do any act which they would not like others do to them, they must not steal—theft being a taboo in the good old days. They must not trespass into the boundary of others and so on. In subjects where no convincing epithets could be given, the forbears attached to religious susceptibility so that the primitive community would not dare trifle, e.g., most of the sacred groves or priestly forests in the Khasi Hills are traceable to protection and preservation of water sources which could not have been protected without a strong administrative machinery. Similar instance must be in existence in other areas. Old criminal laws were rather severe and in some cases cruel. Trials by ordeal were adopted even for petty offences like pilfering and petty thefts. In cases of heinous crimes like murder, offenders were lynched or flogged to death ; for practising sorcery or witchcraft the sorcerer or his whole family was exterminated for good or even outlawed ; for committing adultery by a woman, the adulteress would have her nose chopped off and such other modes of punishment which were subsequently abolished or modified by the extension of the Indian Penal Code which is now in force. Although the Penal Code has been in force, the Code of Criminal Procedure has not yet been extended. The Sixth Schedule provides that only the spirit and not the letter of Criminal Procedure Code should be followed by Courts administering justice in the tribal areas of Assam.

It will yet take time before the tribal areas can be brought in line with the rest of the country both in social and legal or administrative integration. Mutual respect and understanding between tribal and non-tribal sections of the people are necessary, before either could accept social integration.