THE

ORIGIN AND EARLY HISTORY

OF THE KHASI-SYNTENG PEOPLE

by

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Thesis submitted for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
to the
University of Lendon

1969



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# ABSTRACT

This work consists of a survey of the evidence on the origin of the Khasi-Synteng people and a review of their history, as far as it can be reconstructed, down to the latter part of the eighteenth century. This is followed by a review of their traditional culture, as it was before the opening up of the Khasi and Jaintia Hills. The work is thus divided into two main parts, preceded by an introduction discussing geography, sources and previous work on the subject, and ending with a conclusion, summarizing the contents of the thesis and briefly surveying the later history of the Khasi-Syntengs down to the present day.

In the first part, Chapter II reviews the ethnology of the Khasi-Syntengs, and considers their connections with other ethnic groups in India and South-east Asia. This chapter also considers the evidence of the few neolithic artifacts found in the region. The third chapter deals with the evidence of the megalithic structures in the Khasi and Jaintia Hills, and discusses possible relationships with other megalithic cultures. In the fourth chapter linguistic evidence is considered, from various points of view, and it is suggested from the evidence of loan-words that the earliest contact of the Khasis with Indo-Aryan speakers may have been later than previously supposed. The following three chapters cover the history of the Jaintia kingdom, much of which can be traced in considerable detail from the early sixteenth century onwards, chiefly through the Assamese chronicles. The accounts of these are often conflicting in points of detail, and the thesis attempts to solve these conflicts of evidence wherever possible, and to present the most probable interpretation of the data. Little can be discovered about the history of the hill Khasis, but certain documents of the East India Company throw some light on their relations with the plains at the end of

our period. These are considered in the eighth chapter.

The second part of the thesis begins with a review of the system of government of the Khasi-Syntengs (Chapter IX). In the following chapter (X) the social institutions of the Khasi-Synteng tribes are dealt with, including the matrilineal (but not matriarchal) family system, the tribal and clan structure, and the system of inheritance. Chapter XI, on religion, commences with a consideration of the Khasi high god, and it is shown that he is not bisexual, as believed by some anthropologists. The chapter goes on to review the belief in lesser gods and demons, sacrificial rites, ideas of the after-life and the practice of ancestor worship, and the rituals of marriage, birth and death, including the complex megalithic rites in honour of the ancestors of the clan. In the twelfth chapter aspects of the trade, industry and agriculture of the Khasis are discussed. The thirteenth chapter, entitled 'Everyday Life', reviews various aspects of the life of the Khasi-Syntengs, such as houses and furniture, food and drink, dress, literature and music, games and sports, astronomy and medicine.

The thesis concludes with appendices on the Jaintia king-list and the Assamese months.

# PREFACE

Inis thesis is intended as a contribution to historical knowledge. It is in no sense an anthropological study and is not meant
to be such a study. It is the result of two years' work under formal supervision at the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, followed by part-time study and research in India, Australia and America. Thus the thesis can at least claim the
distinction of having been produced in four of the five continents.
During much of the latter period many of the textbooks and periodicals which I needed have not been easily available for checking
and this has delayed the completion of the work, but I trust that
I have been able to utilize all the significant sources for my subject.

The sources fall naturally into two categories. The first consists mainly of archaeological and anthropological reports, chiefly in English, which throw light on the prehistory and early social history of the Khasis and Syntengs. The second class of sources comprises chronicles, mostly in Assamese, which are practically the only records of their political history. In using these the question of transliteration has given me some thought. In general I have given the modern spelling of well known place names, such as Camhati, Shillong, etc., wherever this is standardized. Proper names and other Assamese words are transliterated mechanically from the Assamese, according to the standard system used for Indian scripts, irrespective of the Assamese promunciation, which has very individual features, notably the pronunciation of the letter generally transliterated c as 5 and of j as z; thus the Muslim title sultants is transliterated in Assamese as cultant and the name Zāhir as Jā-

hir. Exceptions have been made in the case of certain romanizations generally accepted in modern Assam. Thus Jayantiya regularly appears as 'Jaintia', Dimaruva as 'Dimaruva' and Kharam as 'Khyrim', while the titles Baruva and Gohaffi normally appear in their modern Assamese romanized forms 'Barua' and 'Gohafn'.

During most of the time when this thesis was being written I did not have access to the calendrical tables which are necessary to reduce Hindu dates to their exact western equivalents. If it had been possible to do this it might have added precision to the thesis, but in no case would it have made any essential difference to our knowledge. I have therefore been content to give approximate dates only.

I am deeply indebted to my former supervisor, my husband Professor A. L. Basham, for his unfailing help and encouragement, and also for the strong pressure which he has brought upon me to finish this thesis. Without the latter it would probably never have been completed. In this he was ably supported by my son Ashok. I have also received much help from numerous other people, chief of whom are Mr A. Christie (S. O. A. S., London), Mr J. Chyne (my maternal grandfather, of Shillong, India, who gave me much information from personal knowledge), Mr C. Court (formerly of the Department of Linguistics, Australian National University, Canberra), Professor Eugénie Henderson (S. O. A. S.), Dr H. H. E. Loofs (A. N. U.) and Mr H. R. Shorto (S. O. A. S.). In the course of my work I have made use of numerous libraries, whose staffs have been invariably very helpful, and to whom I express my thanks. These include: in London, the libraries of the School of Oriental and African Studies, the India Office, the Baptist Mission, the Royal Anthropological Institute and the Royal Asiatic Society; in Shillong, India, the Library of the Historical Research Department, N. E. F. A., the Assam State Library, and the All India Radio Library; in Canberra, the Library

of the Australian National University and the National Library; and in the U. S. A., the Library of the University of Pennsylvania, Columbia University Library, Harvard University Library, New York Public Library and the Library of Congress. Last, but not least, I owe my gratitude to my mother and my late father, who enabled me to go to England to work for a higher degree.

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## ABBREVIATIONS

AB ed. Huyan, S. K., Asam Burafiji (1945).

ADG Assam, Government of, Assam District Gazetteers (1906).

As. Res. Asiatic Researches, Calcutta.

BEFEO Bulletin de l'École française de l'extrème Orient, Haned, Saigon.

BSPC Bengal Secret Political Consultations, India Office Library, London.

DB ed. Huyan, S.K., Deodhāī Asam Buranjī (1932).

DRV ed. Coswami, H. C., Darrang Raj Vamsavalī (1917).

ERE ed. Hastings, J., Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics.

HCA Choudhury, P. C., History of the Civilization of the People of Assam (1959).

JAI Journal of the Anthropological Institute, London (later JRAI).

JARS Journal of the Assam Research Society, Gauhati.

JASB Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal, Calcutta (also JRASB).

JB ed. Bhuyan, S.K., Jayantiya Buranji (1964).

JDL Journal of the Department of Letters, Calcutta University.

JRAI Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute, London (at first JAI).

JRAS Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society, London.

JRASB Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Bengal, Calcutta (also JASB).

KE ed. Bhuyan, S. K., Kachari Buranji (1936).

MCLRMI Monthly Circular Letters Relative to the Missionary in India, Serampore.

MI Man in India, Ranchi.

SAB ed. Bhuyan, S. K., Satsari Asam Buranji (1964).

SDR ed. Firminger, W., Sylhet District Records.

TB ed. Bhayan, S. K., Tunkhungiya Buranii (1933).

#### Chapter I

## INTRODUCTION

#### Preliminary

This thesis is an attempt to throw light on the origin and early history of the Khasis and Syntengs, from prehistoric times to the latter half of the 18th century. Outside their own region the Khasis and Syntengs or Jaintias, together with other kindred tribes such as the Wars, are known by the common mame of Khasi.

Assam is a multilingual state where there are to be found different types of people speaking their own languages and following their own cultures. One of these is the Khasi-Syntengs, who now inhabit a mountainous region in the central portion of Assam. The present day Khasi-Syntengs appear to be of a very mixed type, but

l. The word Khasi has in the past been spelt in various ways. In the last century it was familiar in forms such as Cossyah, Khassyah, Khassia, etc. How the Khasis got their name is impossible to tell, and no satisfactory explanation of the term has yet been discovered. Some traditions derive it from the name of a woman Si, preceded by the feminime particle ka. Ka Si is said to be the eponymous ancestress of the Khasi people, in which case the 'h' should be dropped and the name spelt Kasi. Others derive it from kha, a verb meaning 'to give birth', and the name Si, the term Khasi thus signifying the descendants of Si (Robinson, Calcutta Review, xxvii, 1856, p.82). These etymologies are obviously fanciful, and have no more validity than the scurrilous Assamese tradition linking the word with the Arabic thasi, meaning 'eunuch' (below, p.94).

The form Khasia, widespread in the last century, seems due to the influence of the Bengali and Assamese ending -1yā, as in Asamīyā, Jayantīyā, etc. In the Khasi language it is never used, and Khasis always refer to themselves as such, even when speaking other languages.

originally they were predominantly Mongoloid. Rather strong Mongoloid features are still the be seen among the inhabitants of the uplands. They speak a Mon-Khmer language, which, in spite of its numerous loan-words from Indo-Ruropean languages, has retained the chief Mon-Khmer characteristics. Most of the borrowed words are from Bengali and Assamese. Many of these are of Perso-Arabic origin, which indicates that they were imported in comparatively recent centuries.

#### Geography

The plateau known officially as the United Khasi and Jaintia Hills rises in the south abruptly from the plains of Sylhet. now in East Pakistan, and more gradually in the north from the plains of Kamrup (Assam). The latitude is approximately 25° to 26° N and the longitude between 91° and 93° E. The plateau is bounded on the north by the districts of Kamrup and Mowgong, on the east by the Kapili river. North Kachar and the Naga Hills, on the south by Sylhet, and on the west by the Garo Hills. The tableland is about 4,000 ft above sea level and contains 23 prominent peaks, the highest being the Shillong Peak. which rises to 6,433 ft a few miles from the city centre of Shillong. Soh-pet-bneng, 'The Navel of the Sky', to the east of the Shillong-Gauhati road, was supposed by the Khasis to be the centre of the earth and the connecting link between the abode of the gods and the world of men. when there was free communication between the two regions. Most of the peaks are conical in shape, and are capped by sacred groves, the only exception being the Soh-pet-bneng, which is bare of trees.

Shillong, the capital of Assam, is about 5,000 ft above sea level. The higher ranges have been denuded of trees, and are covered with grass. For centuries the trees were cut down for household fuel and for feeding the tron-smelters' furnaces. But there are still numerous sacred groves throughout the land. One such grove is in the area surrounding the Shillong Peak, which is believed to have been the home of the god Shillong, after whom the town was renamed by the British. These groves

<sup>1.</sup> Its older name seems to have been Yewduh, pronounced by the British Yedu. Possibly this name was discarded because of confusion with Yedo, now Tokyo.

still have very fine timber trees, rhododendrons, rare orchids, wild cinnamon, and various flowering shrubs. Lavender and ferms grow in profusion, together with medicinal and edible herbs. There are many wild fruits, such as strawberries, blackberries and raspberries, and a profusion of edible mushrooms, which are much relished by the people. Pine trees and stunted oak, as well as certain other trees, grow on the higher levels. On the warmer lower slopes black pepper grows wild abundantly and is of great commercial value to the people, together with texpat or bay-leaf. These two products are exported in large quantities to the plains, and are favourite spices of the Khasis, Syntengs, Wars and other kindred tribes.

The hills are composed chiefly of granite rock with strata of sandstone and limestone. Shale and coal beds exist here and there, chiefly in the Cherra region. There are places like Lyngkyrdem, not far from Pymursla, towards Dawki, where coal is found on the surface. People still use in their fireplaces coal which has been collected or dug in their own gardens. There is good reason to believe that the use of coal was known locally to the early Khasis, since they have their own word for it, dew-iong ('black earth'), unlike most Indian languages, which use adapted forms of the English word. The surface soil is generally red in the higher regions, but in the lower slopes and especially in the valleys it is very often black.

There are no navigable rivers, though small boats can ply on a few streams in the lower slopes. Same of the main streams flow south to join the Surma while others flow north into the Brahmaputra. As they approach the plains they form very beautiful rapids and deep gorges, obstructed by large boulders. Most of these rivers swarm with fish of various kinds with expuisite flavour and taste, particularly those in the colder streams.

Rainfall is heavy throughout the area and falls most during

<sup>1.</sup> Hunter, Statistical Account of Assam, vol. ii, pp. 208, 210.

and in

the monsoons from May until the middle of August, although a certain amount falls in winter also. Cherrapunji and its neighbourhood receive the heaviest rainfall in the world, with an average of 500 inches per annum. Winters are severe in the uplands, with heavy frosts and occasional snow and sleet. But the cold season is generally bright and sunny. Summers are mild in the higher regions, with an average temperature of 65° F, and sometimes there can be fairly cold days even in summer. Very heavy mists and fogs are frequent in the mountains, particularly in the Cherra area. These obstruct the voew even of fairly close objects, but the Khasis believe that they are good for health. In general the lower slopes enjoy a much milder climate, suitable for the growth of various sub-tropical plants.

#### Sources

The race inhabiting these hills is supposed to be the only remnant of the earliest Mongoloid migration into the bounds of India. For a detailed study of its origin and early history not much authentic material is available. The Khasis have left no written records of their migrations and early history, as they were an illiterate people. For our knowledge of their past we must rely on oral tradition, on the Assamses <u>Burañjis</u>, on the accounts left by eighteenth and nineteenth century British civil servants, foreign missionaries and visitors, on linguistic evidence, and on the stone monuments which lie scattered throughout the region.

The <u>Burafijis</u> were written in Ahom and Assamese by court historians and private individuals connected with the royal families of the region. Of these the most important for our purpose is the <u>Jayantiyā</u>

<u>Burafiji</u>, describing the relations of the Ahom kings with the Hindu kingdom of Jaintiapur, which was ruled by kings of Synteng origin.

The text in its published form is in fact a conflation made by Professor S. K. Bhuyan from two main manuscripts, both apparently frag-

mentary, to which he added certain further material from published and unpublished manuscripts; the most important of the latter is a fragmentary document to which, following Ehuyan's list, we refer as 'Source 9', and which seems to be based on the two main documents, summarizing parts of them and adding important variations and new passages here and there.

Other Assamese chronicles important for our purpose are the Kachari Burafiji, describing the relations of the Ahom kings with the kingdom of Kachar. the eastern neighbour of Jaintia, the Darrangraj-vamsavali, giving the history of the Koch kings, and the Decdhal Burafil. chronicling the history of the Ahom kings down to A.D. 1648; the last named work includes some material of value to us, in particular a brief account of the relations of the Ahom kingdom with the frontier tribes in the reigns of Rudrasimha and Jayadhvaj. The Tunkhungiya Buranji is important for the light it throws on the end of our periods it gives a detailed account of the history of the Ahoms from 1751 to 1806, with a symopsis of their earlier history, and its author. Srinath Barbaruva, was a minister of the Ahom kingdom and an eye-witness of many of the events which he chronicled. 4 Other Burafijis also contain references of significance, and one work of classical Assamese literature. Safikaradeva's paraphrase of the Phagavata Purana, contains the earliest known occurrence of the word Khasi.5

Few references to the Khasis are to be found in Persian sources, though the chronicles dealing with the history of Bengal tell us a little about the Jaintia kingdom. We can gather much, however, about the customs and way of life of the Khasis at the end of our period

<sup>1.</sup> Introduction to JB, ed. Bhuyan, 2nd ed., p. vi.

<sup>2.</sup> Officially spelt Cachar. We regularly employ the initial K- for the sake of consistency with the recognized system of transliteration and to avoid misunderstanding as to its pronunciation.

<sup>3.</sup> DB, paras. 221-57.

<sup>4.</sup> Hhuyan, TB or a History of Assam, p. xxxii; TB, pp. xiii-xvi.

<sup>5.</sup> See below, p. 92 .

from the accounts of early travellers and reports submitted to the East India Company. The first European to write on the Khasis, Robert Lindsay, was collector of Sylhet, and his reports and correspondence throw much light on the relations of the Khasi hillmen with the plains of Bengal. Hamilton's lengthy Description of Hindoostan, published in 1820, is also valuable, as is the account by Walters of his journey across the hills, published in Asiatic Researches in 1832. Early issues of the Journal of the Asiatic Society of Calcutta and the Calcutta Review yield several important articles.

Sources for the study of the language of the Khasis from the historical point of view are few. The Khasis have no written records much more than a hundred years old, and until recently linguists have not paid them the attention they deserve. The standard grammars and dictionaries are practical compilations for utilitarian purposes. and though the Khasis have their fair share of space in Grierson's monumental Linguistic Survey of India they are a small people, and thus only a brief summary of their language is given. Recently special studies of Khasi have been made by Dr Lili Rabel and Professor Eugénie Henderson. But in general the language has only interested those scholars who need it for comparison with other South-east Asian languages, and it has received little scientific attention in its own right. A special study of the several dialects and of the vocabularies of the remoter villages might yield important data for the historian. Meanwhile we have used for historical purposes whatever material we have been able to obtain, supplemented by personal knowledge of the language.

The archaeology of the Khasi-Jaintia Hills is to all intents and purposes non-existent, and consists mainly of descriptions of megaliths and other stone monuments, some of the most detailed and valua-

<sup>1.</sup> Ed. Firminger, Sylhet District Records, 4 vols., Shillong, 1913-19. See below, pp. 185-90.

ble being more than a hundred years old. Similar descriptions of the more developed architecture of the Jaintias are also to be found. We have not heard of any archaeological excavations in the hills or of any experiments in carbon-14 dating. We have, however, made what use we could of the material available.

Folklore and tradition throw valuable light on the past, but in the case of the Khasis little has been done by way of the systematic collection and scientific study of traditional lore. The very valuable work of Colonel Gurdon tells us something about this, and a small collection of Khasi folk-tales was produced by Mrs U.K.Rafy in 1920. A number of brief accounts exist in Khasi publications, chiefly in the form of articles by such pioneers as Dr H.Lyngdoh. Here again much work remains to be done, in collecting and scientifically recording material of this kind.

#### Earlier Work on the Subject

The most comprehensive anthropological study of these people is that of J. H. Gurdon, whose book, The Khasis, gives an account of Khasi social structure based chiefly on first hand information and personal contact. But Gurdon's work is not intended as a history, and this aspect of the subject is hardly touched on. He does not tell much about the Syntengs, for the simple reason that he was not a trained anthropologist (a profession scarcely in existence in the days when he wrote) and he came more in contact with the upland Khasis, in whom he was most interested. The same is true of the study of Khasi matriliny made more recently by Baron U. R. von Ehrenfels and the descriptions of Khasi customs by David Roy. The latest study of the Khasis from this point of view appeared in 1967 from the pen of a Japanese lady anthropologist, Dr Chie Nakane; Though Dr Nakane's methods may be modern, her book contains numerous factual errors.

<sup>1.</sup> For example her statements that the motor road from Gauhati to Shillong was opened only after independence, and that it was only at this time that Shallong became the seat of the Assam government (Garo and Khasi, p. 99); that the pine tree was introduced by the British (ibid., p. 99); and that ka para-kur means mother's sister's daughter when in fact it means any female clanswoman (ibid., p. 117).

The earliest history of Assam, excluding the <u>Burafijis</u>, is
the <u>Account of Assam</u> by J. P. Wade, a surgeon of the East India Company who visited the country with Welsh's expedition and studied its history with the aid of pandits. Wade gives a clear account of Assamese history, taken from the <u>Burafijis</u>, but the Khasis are almost ignored, though the outlines of the history of Jaintia are included in his work, which was largely superseded by that of Gait. As the name of the book indicates, Sir Edward Gait's <u>History of Assam</u> covers the whole state, and gives a brief chapter on the diplomatic history of the Jaintias, with a slight reference to the Khasis.

The late Dr H. Lyngdoh published a number of books on the Khasis, mostly written in the Khasi language; these are still used as textbooks in Khasi colleges. His works are based mainly on personal knowledge and first-hand information. He was one of the first Khasis to undertake the task of finding out more about his own people. Like Gurdon and Gait, Lyngdoh was neither a professional historian nor an anthropologist and thus, like them again, he deserves special credit for his pioneering work. He served with the Indian Army Medical Corps during the First World War and then became civil surgeon at the Civil Hospital in Shillong. He is still remembered with great affection and respect by his fellow Khasis.

Dr Hamlet Bareh, another Khasi, has also written on his people.

His brief books, Khasi Democracy and History of Khasi Literature contain much useful information, but unfortunately their value to the serious student is impaired because their author, writing for a wide public, fails to mention his sources, though he is a trained historian, having received a doctorate from Gauhati University. His thesis, published very recently under the title The History and Culture of the Khasi People, is most valuable in its treatment of the nineteenth

<sup>1.</sup> For a detailed study of Wade and his work see Bhuyan, Anglo-Assamese Relations, pp. 398-423.

and twentieth centuries. He has little new to say about the earlier period, and he repeats many traditional accounts which have little or no historical value. He relies too much on the evidence of fanciful etymologies which are quite untrustworthy from a linguistic point of view.

Syed Murtaza Ali, now a Pakistani, has written a brief history of the Jaintias, which, although it contains much useful information, suffers from similar shortcomings. His work is the outcome of personal interest in the history of the Jaintia kings, which was apparently stimulated by personal acquaintance with their later descendants. He records interesting, if not wholly reliable, traditions preserved by the Muslim community of Jaintiapur.

Many studies of Assamese history contain short chapters or briefer sections of chapters on the Khasis and Jaintias. Among these we should mention the works of Professor P.C. Chaudhuri and Dr N. N. Acharyya. Their references are scholarly and valuable, as far as they go in illuminating our theme, but this is only peripheral to the studies of these two scholars, whose works end at periods before their sources throw much light on it. Certain other works, published in Assam and claiming to reveal the ancient history of almost every tribe and people within the boundaries of that state, it is kindest to ignore.

l. For example: 'Madur Maskut does not seem to be a term of Khasi origin. In its Sanskritised form, Madhur-Masvut, it means strong and beautiful' (op. cit., p. 42). It appears that the author is thinking of the Sanskrit madhura ('sweet', 'pleasant') and the Perso-Arabic mazbūt ('firm', 'strong'). The reference is to a fortress of a legendary ruler of Malngiang who, Dr Bareh believes, repelled a Muslim invasion in about A.D.1200!

# PART ONE

# THE KHASI PAST

#### Chapter II

# ETHNOLOGY AND PREHISTORY

#### Indian Racial Types

It would indeed be very difficult to make any conclusive tatement on the question of the origin of man in India, since the Sub-continent seems to have absorbed mearly all the different racial types of the world into her population from time immemorial. If one watches a growd in any India city one cannot fail to notice the differences among the various inhabitants. Though there is some difference in terminology, it is generally agreed that the main ethnic types of the Indian sub-continent are three, nowadays generally called Proto-Australoid, Mediterranean and Indo-Aryan, but often referred to by other names. As well as these there are other elements which are less strongly in evidence, notably Mongoloid and Alpine-Armenoid. These types are rarely to be found in a pure state, though one or another may tend to predominate in different classes and different regions.

The late Professor D. N. Majumdar held that the Proto-Australolds were the earliest inhabitants of India, and disagreed with J. H.
Hutton, who thought that possibly a Negrito race, traces of which are
nearly extinct, was the earliest. These people were supposed by Hutton to have been followed by the Proto-Australoids, whose racial origin is obscure, and whose ancestors Hutton traced to Palestine. These

<sup>1.</sup> Majumdar, Races and Cultures of India (4th ed.), p. 54. Here we make no attempt to treat the topic of Indian and South-east Asian ethnology in detail, and confine ourselves to some of the main theories. See also Von Eickstedt, Rassendynamik von Ostasien, pp. 593 ff.; Sarkar, The Aboriginal Races of India, chs. iii - v, etc.

2 Majumdar, op. cit., p. 49.

in turn were followed by a people of Mediterranean type. A later wave of Mediterraneans brought the knowledge of metals, and these were followed by brachycephalic Armenoids, who perhaps spoke an Indo-European language. The dolichocephalic Indo-Aryans followed them about 1500 B.C.

While these races were entering India from the west, Mongoloid elements came in from the north and north-east. The Mongoloid population of India is of two main types. One of these, more highly specialized, is represented by the people of Hhutan and those living along the foothills of the Himalayas from Assam to Kashmir. The Angami Magas represent the second type, which is coarser featured and is nowadays often referred to as Palaco-Mongoloid or Proto-Mongoloid. The first type has a rounder head and a broader, coarser nose than the second.

It is generally believed that these Mongoloid peoples are identical with those referred to in Sanskrit texts as <u>Kirātas</u>. These seem to have been wild non-Aryan tribal peoples of the mountains and are distinguished from other tribes of Proto-Australoid type, who are referred to as <u>Nisādas</u>, <u>Sabaras</u>, <u>Pulindas</u>, <u>Ehillas</u> and <u>Kālas</u>. The presence of Mongoloid features in many Bengalis, and to a lesser extent in the plainsmen of Bihar and Uttar Pradesh, suggests that formerly this element was more widespread in India than it later became. There is some reason to believe that there was a small Proto-Mongoloid element in the prehistoric Indus cities. It is possible that, when the Aryans began their slow eastward expension across India, they conquered many tribes of Mongoloid type in the course of their advance, driving others into the hills whence they

<sup>1.</sup> Majumdar, op. cit., p. 50.

Chatterji, <u>Kirāta-jana-krti</u>, p.17.

<sup>3.</sup> Piggott, Prehistoric India, p. 147

had originally come. In their early agricultural stage it is likely that these people were semi-nomadic, moving over the land in hordes and maintaining themselves by slash-and-burn cultivation and by hunting.

The early Mediterranean element in the Indian population is now represented in its purest form by the higher castes among the Dravidian speakers of South India, but it is to be found to some extent in all parts of the Sub-continent. Small pockets of Dravidian languages are to be found from Baluchistan (Brahui) to the borders of Bengal (Malto), and it is commonly suggested that before the coming of the Aryans the Dravidians spread throughout the Sub-continent. However, the term Dravidian is nowadays used rather in a linguistic sense than in an ethnological one, and the Mediterranean racial type was certainly not universal at any time in any part of India. In Assam this type is comparatively weakly represented, and mainly by elements which entered the region in historical times.

The Indo-Europeans or Aryans, who penetrated into India from the North-west in the second millennium B.C., advanced comparatively slowly over the Sub-continent, and probably even at the beginning of the Christian Era their influence was little if at all felt in Assam. In their advance they intermarried with the peoples whom they conquered, and thus fairly pure Aryan types become progressively rarer as one travels eastwards across the Sub-continent. In Bengal and Assam they are quite uncommon.

## Early Migrations in Assam

Assam contains representatives of numerous racial elements, being situated on one of the great migration routes of mankind. The tracks along which races moved through or to Assam served also as trade routes, through which much of the early trade between India and China was carried on . In the north, routes led through Tibet, Nepal and Bhutan; in the north-east an important route led to China over the Patkoi Range and through the Hukawang Valley; while in the South there were tracks through Munipur and Kachar. Racial elements from South India and South-east Asia may have come to Bengal or Burma respectively along the coast, and thence found their way to Assam by the last route. Contact with the west came through the Brahmaputra Valley.

It is possible, as P. C. Choudhury believes, that these north and north-east routes are mentioned in the <u>Periplus</u> and in Ptolemy's <u>Geography</u>, and that the contact of Assam with the rest of the Sub-continent is also mentioned in other classical sources; but the data are confused and of uncertain interpretation, and we cannot be confident on this point. The <u>Seres</u> referred to in classical texts are generally taken to be the Chinese, and we need not investigate the question very deeply for the purpose of our study, since even if the term Seres sometimes refers to the people of Assam the references give us no significant information about the Khasis.

From a Chinese statement relating to 129 B.C. it has been suggested that the trade route between India and China by way of Assam was open at the time. The envoy Chang K'ien reported that Chinese silk was to be seen in Bactria, and that this had been imported not direct from China, but from India. As far as is known the sea route from China to India was not in use at that early time, and thus it appears that the silk was brought to India by way of Assam and thence re-exported to Bactria. This is the obvious conclusion if we are to believe Chang K'ien, but we must always allow for the possibility that he was mistaken in thinking

<sup>1.</sup> Hutton, MI, iv, pp. 1-13; ibid., xii, pp. 1-18; Choudhury, HCA, p. 83.

<sup>2.</sup> HCA, p. 30. 3. Pelliot, BEFEO, iv, p.143.

that the silk which he saw was Chinese. Wild silk was known in India centuries before this date, and it is possible that by this time cultivate silk was also known, since it is apparently referred to in the Arthasastra, the material of which seems to look back to the Mauryan period, though the date of the compilation of the text was certainly later.

In any case there is evidence of indirect contact between India and China by way of Assam at a much earlier period, in the form of rice and the domesticated fowl, both of which, it is generally agreed, originated in India, and both of which appeared in China for the first time in the late Shang period. The appearance of these features of Chinese life is surely evidence of cultural diffusion from Bengal across the Assam Hills. It is hardly likely that they were carried by migrants, for the flow of migration appears to have been rather in the direction of the south. But the fowl and rice cultivation in China give existence of some indirect contact at least as early as 1000 B. C.

#### The Khasi-Syntenes

Broadly speaking this community can be divided into three groups, the Khasis, the Syntengs and the Wars. The Khasis live in the highest parts of the mountains, in the Khasi Hills around Shillong. The Syntengs live on the eastern side of the United Khasi and Jaintia Hills, and the Wars on the southern slopes of the Khasi Hills, to the west of Cherrapunji between Laitkynsew and the plains of Sylhet. There are several sub-groups of the people, who speak the same language with dialectical differences only.

Outside the United Khasi and Jaintia Hills the term 'Khasi' is applied to both Khasis and Syntengs, but within that area each of the branches distinguishes itself from the other. The clans,

<sup>1.</sup> Arthasastra, ii, 9.

<sup>2.</sup> Creel, Studies in Early Chinese Culture, p. 175; The Birth of China, pp. 85 -86. The fowl appears to have been a recent acquisition in Shang times (Birth of China, p. 76).

however, have been mobile within the whole area, and Khasi groups may be found living in Synteng districts, and vice versa. Intermarriage has always been permitted, though in the past it was somewhat disapproved of, and the progeny of a mixed marriage was looked on as belonging to the mother's branch.

In appearance the majority of the Khasis and Syntengs are Mongoloid. The Mongolian features of the Khasis and Syntengs are most noticeable among the uplanders of the Khasi Hills; these have apparently retained more of their racial purity than have the Hinduized Syntengs or Jaintias and the Wars of the lower slopes, who have long intermarried with the plainsfolk. Many people now accepted as Khasi-Syntengs have little or no Khasi-Synteng blood and there are several recorded cases of plainspeople being ritually inducted into Khasi-Synteng clans, while in the past it was not uncommon for women of the plains to be forcibly carried off to the hills and married to Khasi-Synteng men.

In anthropological terms the Khasis have been described as mesocephalic, mesoprosopic, mesorrhine and pro-opic. They are short in stature, with high vaulted heads and straight black hair. They have scanty eyebrows and horizontal eyes which are generally light brown. The cheekbones are high, the noses flat and the nostrils open. The beard is thin. The legs of the typical Khasi are short in proportion to the total height, and are remarkably well developed, 'with enormous calves and knees'. The latter feature, recorded in the last century by Hooker, is not particularly noticeable among modern Khasis, but Hunter, writing a little later, states that over-developed calves were 'considered an element of beauty, more especially in women who, on the average, are fairer

<sup>1.</sup> Raychoudhury, JDL, xxvi, 1935, p. 2.
2. Hooker, Himalayan Journals, vol. ii, pp. 223-24; c.f. ERE, vii, p. 690, ADG, x, p.62.

and handsomer than the men'. The latter observer adds that the carriage of the Khasis was 'ungraceful'. The complexion is tawny or yellowish.

It has long been noticed that the above description closesly resembles that of certain other peoples of the Assam Hills and of South-east Asia, notably the Khmers and the Palaungs, both of whom, like the Khasis, speak languages of the Mon-Khmer group. While the normal Khasi type is Mongoloid, the eyes do not possess the 'typical Mongoloid fold' of the eyelid, and this fact suggests as well as others, that, while their ancestry contains a strong Mongoloid element, it also contains much other blood.

As far as we can gather, very few blood samples of the Khasis have been analysed. Even if more work should be done in this field, one could not satisfactorily make any definite conclusion as to their affiliations from this evidence alone, because for generations they have interbred with other Indians and with foreigners. According to one of their own traditions, the Khasis came from the north and north-east, from the districts of Nowgong, Lumding and Haflong, on the borders of their present habitat. Linguistic and other evidence, however, points to the east rather than to the north as the route of their migration. 4 Nevertheless, the Khasis belong to the same blood-group as do the mixed Bhotias, that is to say the Bhotias who have interbred with the Lepchas. Like the Bhotias, the Khasis have a larger percentage of groups B and AB than do the Eushais and Angemi Nagas of eastern Assem. But this gives little evidence as to their origin, for it appears that the blood-group distribution among the Mongoloid peoples stretching from western China through Tibet to the Himalayan states and central Assam is much the same

2. Gurdon, JRAS, 1907, p. 744; Khasis, p. 200.

4. See below, pp. 68-69.

<sup>1.</sup> Hunter, Statistical Account of Assem, vol. ii, p. 216.

<sup>5.</sup> Lyngdoh, Ka Niam Khasi, p. ii. Lyngdoh gives no details of this tradition (ling-is-thuh-khana-pateng), which is said to have been current among both Khasis and Jaintias.

except for differences in proportion due to racial admixture. 1
The evidence of blood, such as it is, thus tends to link the Khasis rather with Tibet and China than with South-east Asia, with which linguistic and other evidence connects them.

We have seen that the Khasis are by no means pure Mongoloids, and hence at some early period their ancestors must have intermarried with another racial element, which appears to have been akin to the Proto-Australoid. Aryan and Mediterranean characteristics are virtually absent in persons of pure Khasis blood, and such features. when they do appear, may be accounted for by intermarriage in recent centuries. The same admixture with the Proto-Australoid type may be found in many other peoples of Assam and South-east Asia, and from this we may infer that at some prehistoric period Mongoloid peoples. pushing down into South-east Asia from the north, intermarried with indigenous South-east Asia tribes. In the case of the ancestors of the Khasis, the influence of the indigenous element was strong enough to impose its language upon the invaders. The same appears to have been the case with the other peoples of the Mon-Khmer linguatic family, who are to be found in South-east Asia and all of whom have Mongoloid features. The ethnological evidence, like that of the megaliths which will be discussed later, is quite consistent with prehistoric movements of Mongoloid peoples from the north into South-east Asia, where they combined with peoples of a primitive Proto-Australoid race extending in its various branches from India to Australia. In some cases the waves of Mongoloid migrants retained their languages, while is others the indigenous element remained linguistically dominant.

The fact that the ancestors of the Khasis fall into the lat-

Macfarlane, <u>JRASB</u> (<u>Science</u>), 3rd series, vii, pp. 2-3.
 Chatterji, <u>Kirāte-jana-krti</u>, p. 17.

ter category does not in itself permit us to make any definite historical inferences. The only sound historical inference that we can make from the data is that in the distant past some mixture of at least two peoples, one Mongoloid and one Proto-Australoid, must have occurred to form the Khasi-Syntengs. It is not always the case the in the mixing of two peoples, whether peacefully or by conquest, the group which is dominant, mamerically, politically or culturally, succeeds in imposing its speech upon the other, and we can find numerous cases, such as that of the Basques of France and Spain and that of the Dravidian-speaking Brahuis of Baluchistan, where the language of a prehistoric racial element has survived successive invasions, even when almost all traces of the culture and racial type of the original speakers have disappeared.

On the strength of this evidence alone it is not possible to decide whether the Khasis are the result of the intrusion of a wave of Mongoloids into the Khasi Hills, where they intermarried with settled groups of Monschmer speaking Proto-Australoids, or whether this process took place elsewhere in South-east Asia, or even in India, after which the ancestors of the modern Khasis, already having approximately the same language and racial characteristics as at present, migrated to their present home. Their own traditions, however, favour the latter alternative, and this is also supported, as we shall see, by linguistic, archaeological and other evidence.

## Prehistoric Remains in the Khasi Hills

In the next chapter we deal with the Khasi-Synteng megaliths, which, though some are reputed by the local inhabitants to be very ancient, were still being erected at the end of the last century, and thus can scarcely be considered prehistoric. In fact recorded

remains of a truly prehistoric character are very few in the Khasi Hills.

In eastern India palaeolithic tools are only found in the Chota Nagpur plateau, and none are attested anywhere in Assam. Neolithic tools, however, have been found in most districts of the state. The figures of discoveries in the various regions of Assam are instructive. Apparently no specimens are attested from the Sylhot area, or indeed from the whole of East Bengal, which is hardly mentioned in Dani's study of the lithic industries of the region.

Of the six areas into which Dani divides Assam for his archaeological purposes that of the Khasi Hills has, after the Brahmaputra Valley, been during the last hundred years the most frequented by Buropeans and educated Indians. Shillong still serves as a holiday resort and convalescent centre and, more than in any other district of Assem, it might be expected that in this area people with leisure and education would have noticed and preserved prehisteric relics, if these were to be found. Yet in comparison with other districts the Khasi Hills have produced only an insignificant number of stone tools. The most obvious inference from this fact is that in neolithic times the Khasi-Synteng area was very sparsely populated, as compared with the Naga and Garo Hills, where by far the largest concentrations of neolithic implements have been found. The distribution of the various types of neolithic implement over the various archaeological regions of Assam, as given by Dani, which we show in tabular form on the following page, is also very significant, and from it we may draw conclusions which, though admittedly tentative, are none the less interesting and significant.

<sup>1.</sup> Dani, Prehistory and Protohistory of Eastern India, p. 18.
2. Ibid. p. 79.

REGION	A .	В.	c .		A E	S :	6	H.	x	TOTAL
Kachar Hills	6.	3,	7.	1,	13.	0	. 0.	0.	1.	31
Sadiya Frontier Zone	6.	9.	0.	0.	0.	0	. 0.	0.	2,	17
Naga Hills	40.	8.	2.	0.	12.	58	119.	Q.	6.	245
Khasi Hills	1,	0,	2.	0.	1.	0	. 0.	0.	0.	4
Gero Hills	45.	21,	26.	2,	16.	0	0.	0.	10.	120
Brahmaputra Valley	0,	6.	2.	0.	1.	0	. 1.	6.	142.	158
Total	98.	47.	39.	3.	43.	58	120.	6.	161.	575

#### Classes

As 'Facetted tool', 'quadrangular adze'.

B: Rounded-butt axe'.

C: 'Axe with broad cutting edge'.

D: 'Splayed axe'.

E: 'Shouldered tool', 'hache à tenon', 'spade-shaped celt'.

F: 'Tanged axe'.

G: 'Wedge-blade'.

H: 'Grooved hammerstone'.

X: Miscellaneous.

Certain features of this chart need further explanation. The apparently high concentration in the Brahmaputra Valley is almost entirely due to the discovery at Bishnath in Tespur District of a single hoard, which consisted mostly of pebbles used as tools, but also contained a few artifacts. The tools found in the Naga Hills include large numbers of Classes F and G('tanged axe'and'wedged blade') which do not occur elsewhere in Asiam. The Garo Hills have produced 29 irregular specimens of Class A (called by Dani 'facetted

<sup>1.</sup> Ibid., p. 71.

tool', the 'quadrangular adze' of earlier archaeologists), while in the Naga Hills only regular, better finished examples of this type of tool have been found. Class E (Dani's 'shouldered tool', often referred to by others as 'shouldered adze') appears in regular form only in the Naga and Kachar Hills: in the Garo Hills only irregular specimens have been found. In fact there is a considerable difference between the implements found in the two major areas of neolithic culture in Assam, of which the tools from the Naga Hills are on the whole the more highly developed.

This may perhaps be accounted for on the hypothesis that the Naga Hills were influenced by later neolithic technological trends, coming from the east; and the tools of classes F and G, typical of the Naga Hills, are connected by Dani with similar artifacts found in Burma and Yunnan, but not in India or in South-east Asia beyond Burma. The artifacts of Dani's class G, numerous in the Garo Hills bot not elsewhere, can hardly be parallelled in South-east Asia, but resemble similar tools from eastern India. There are, however, as will be seen from the chart, types common to both regions, and this suggests some contact between the two. We may suggest, however, that the striking differences between the neoliths of the two areas is due to the fact that the Naga Hills received a wave of cultural influence from the South-east, while another penetrated from eastern India to the Garo Hills by way of Bengal.

It appears from these data that the Caro and the Naga Hills formed two distinct centres of neolithic culture, divided by the Khasi Hills, which were very thinly inhabited at the time. The reasons for such a sparse population are not far to seek. The table-land of the Khasi Hills, extremely rainy, cold in winter, and very difficult of access, was unattractive to the neolithic folk, whose

<sup>1.</sup> Ibid., p. 54.

artifacts link them rather with South-east Asia than with India. It seems that in general they avoided both the highest altitudes and the sub-tropical swampy jungles of the Brahmaputra Valley and East Bengal, which would have presented great difficulties to men equipped with only stone tools. Their main routes of migration and centres of population were in the lower hills, and in neolithic times the Khasi and Jaintia Hills may have been something of a lonely backwater with very sparse settlements. Indeed these hills may have been almost completely uninhabited, crossed only from time to time by small groups of tribesmen driven away by their fellows as a result of tribal warfare and searching for new lands to settle.

The dating of these tools is extremely uncertain. Most of them appear to have been surface finds, made long before the technique of radiocarbon dating was devised. A firm chronology can only be established when specimens of these implements are unearthed in the context of datable material, whether coins, pottery or organic matter susceptible to the C14 test. The fact that they are made of stone is no guarantee of their great antiquity. Stone hoes were used by the Kukis of North Kachar and by the peasants in parts of Manipur even as late as the middle of the last century. Some of the neolithic artifacts found in Assam seem to have been fashioned with the aid of metal tools: this is the case with the regular shouldered celts of Dani's class E, 2 though these are comparatively rare in Assam and none have been found in the Khasi Hills. Other neolithic tools were apparently copied from metal prototypes. Dani (without giving a reference for his statement) points out that tools of his class A, the 'quadrangular adge', have been 'found in

3. Ibid., p. 51.

<sup>1.</sup> Godwin-Austen, PASB, 1875, p. 158; Dani, op. cit., p. 53; Coedes, Les États hindouisés, p. 20.

<sup>2.</sup> Op. cit. p. 48; c.f. ibid., p. 225.

large numbers in Chinese graves of the 1st millennium B.C.\*, and uses this evidence to support his theory that the neoliths of Assam are of late origin.

Heine-Geldern, on the other hand, suggested a date between 2500 and 1500 for the arrival in South-east Asia of the men of the 'quadrangular Adze Culture', who migrated thither from the north, bringing with them the practice of erecting megaliths and early forms of the Malayo-Polynesian group of languages. This hypothesis is considered further below, in connection with the Khasi megaliths. While Heine-Geldern's theory may be breadly correct, we cannot ignore the possibility that his dating is too early, in view of the strongly expressed opinions of other scholars and the tenuousness of the evidence. The chronology of South-east Asian prehistory is still extremely obscure, and that of the prehistory of the Assam hills is particularly so, in the absence of any radiocarbon or contextual dates for the area.

Whatever our conclusions as to chronology, it seems probable that both the Quadrangular and the Shouldered Adze Cultures continued for may centuries. Both had their settlements in what is now Assam. But the evidence leads us to infer that in neolithic times the Khasi and Jaintia Hills were very sparsely populated, if they were regularly inhabited at all. The abundant megaliths which now cover the area are not likely to be connected with the four neolithic tools which are all that have hitherto been recovered from it. The great megalithic complexes in the Khasi Hills appear to be the work of another, later race, which knew the use of metal before it arrived on the scene.

<sup>1.</sup> Ibid., p.77.

<sup>2.</sup> Anthropos, xxiii, chs. ii-vi.

See below, pp. 60, ff
 See below, p. 74

The general opinion of modern scholarship is that the Mongolian element in the South-east Asian population is comparatively recent, and the Khasi ethnic type is predominantly Mongoloid. The mingling of the newly arrived Mongoloids and the elder Prote-Australoids had probably taken place before the Khasis arrival in their present homeland. Some earlier scholars believed and many modern educated Khasis still maintain that they are the most ancient inhabitants of Assam, surviving as a small island in a sea of later cultures. Rather the evidence points to the Khasis arriving in their present habitat at a comparatively late date. It is known that some South-east Asian peoples (notably the Ahoms and the Thais) have migrated over long distances in quite recent periods, largely as a result of the pressure of more developed peoples; there seems no valid reason why the ancestors of the Khasis should not have been among them.

<sup>1.</sup> Coedes, Les États hindouisés, p. 19 (très récente).

#### Chapter III

## MEGALITHS

## Khasi-Synteng Megalithic Memorials

Large monumental stones of various types are scattered widely in groups throughout the United Khasi and Jaintia Hills, particularly by the wayside, along the routes linking the villages. Even in the capital city, Shillong, large numbers of such stones are to be seen in the Bara Bazar, the chief market place. The finest megaliths are to be found in the centre of the Khasi and Jaintia Hills, close to towns and villages such as Cherrapunji, Jowai, Nartiang and Laitlyngkot.

The monuments are of three kinds, called by archaeologists membirs, or vertical stones, dolmens, or table-stones, and stone cists, or box-shaped containers for bones. The most common are the upright pillars, often flattened, rather in the shape of elongated gravestones, varying in height from two or three feet to twelve or fourteen. Some examples are quite unhewn, while others are more carefully equared. The cists are in the form of square sarcophagi composed of four large stones resting on their edges and well fitted together, roofed in by a fifth placed horizontally. The sarcophagus may also take the form of a circular stone resting on several small rough stone pillars planted together. Sometimes the cist is oblong in shape. In these monuments one may find little earthen pots containing the ashes of a family. Where such pots are depos-

2. Godwin-Austen, JAI, i, p. 128; ADG, x, p. 54.

3. Gurdon, Khasis, 2nd ed., p. 146.

4. Yule, loc. cit.

<sup>1.</sup> Yule, JASB, xiii, p. 618; Walhouse, JAI, vii, p. 25; Lyngdoh, Ka Niam Khasi, pp. xvii, 244.

ited the monuments are known as <u>mawkynroh</u>. These cineraria are very often of considerable size. The stone cist is opened by removing one of the heavy slabs in front. Usually these structures are to be found near menhirs and table stones, because of their close connection with the latter, which are memorial stones to deceased ancestors, erected after the ceremony of depositing the bones. 2

The upright pillars may be classified into two types, which differ in their functions. The mawnam is erected in memory of the father and the mawbynna in that of the mother. The mawnam normally consists of three upright stones and one flat table-stone in front. The large central stone is called u mawthawlang or 'the stone of the father', and those on either side represent the forefathers, brothers or nephews. The flat table-stone represents the grandmother of the father. The stones are thus set up in henour of members of the family of both sexes, and not, as Professor Fürer-Haimendorf believes, only for the ancestors on the maternal side.

The upright stone called <u>mawbynna</u> (<u>bynna</u>: 'to make known, to proclaim') is also known as <u>mawsbynrang</u>, or 'male stone', while the slab in front is called <u>mawkynthei</u> or 'female stone', the pair representing procreation. The table-stones or dolmens, which

<sup>1.</sup> Gurdon, Khasis, p.152.

<sup>2.</sup> Ibid., p. 147. Gurdon notes that, unlike the cists of France and other parts of Europe, the Khasi type has no window or 'soul-hole'; he suggests that this is due to a belief in the need to confine the soul to the tombo and prevent it from haunting the living. We believe, however, that the presence of a 'soul-hole' in a cist indicates that its makers believed that the stone structure was still in some sense the home of the soul, which had been rendered innocuous and might even benefit the surviving relatives by visiting them. The Khasis, on the other hand, believe that the soul of a dead person who has been properly cremated and interred does not remain in the tomb, but dwells with the ancestors in heaven. The absence of a 'soul-hole' in the mawkynroh is probably due to the fact that the idea never occurred to the ancient Khasis, or if it did they saw no need for it.

3. Gurdon, Khasis, p. 153.

Gurdon, <u>Khasis</u>, p. 153.
 JASB (Letters), ix, p. 174.

<sup>5.</sup> Godwin-Austen, JAI, 1, 1871-72, p. 126.

are supported by short rough pillars, form roadside resting places for travellers. Quite often one finds two flat table-stones, parallel to one another, in front of upright stones, instead of only one. The stone on the left represents the first ancestress (ka iawbei tynrai) and that on the right the ancestress of the branch of the clan (ka iawbei longkpoh) to which the memorials belong.

The term <u>mawbynna</u> has been too loosely used, because all the monoliths are more or less alike. In the opinion of U Mohan Kharkongor, the final stones are called <u>mawksing</u> ('drum-stone') when <u>mawlynti</u> ('stones of the road') have been erected; emly when <u>mawlynti</u> have not been erected are the final stones called <u>mawbynna</u>. He was not certain if there was any difference between the <u>mawksing</u> and the <u>mawbynna</u>. It thus seems that there was some variation in the terminology of these stones.

Mawksing, mawkhait or mawja are the names of the five stones which were erected at a suitable place near a road by the clan members a year or two after the bones had been buried in the mawniam or mawbah, the ceremonial stone cist, and after the performance of the feeding of the dead, or the ai-bam ceremony. The stone in the centre is called mawkfii ('maternal uncle stone'), and the two on each side, which represent the younger brothers or nephews, are called mawbud ('accompanying stones').

According to David Roy the last erection of a megalithic monument took place in 1890 in memory of Ka Stem Mawri, a lady of

<sup>1.</sup> Yule, JASB, xii, p. 618; Lyngdoh, Ka Niam Khasi, p. 242.

<sup>2.</sup> Gurdon, Khasis, p. 152.

<sup>3.</sup> Roy, Anthropos, lviii, p. 521. U Mohan was an elderly Khasi of Laitkor who much helped David Roy in his study of Khasi funeral rites. For further discussion of the ceremonies connected with these stones, see below, pp. 248 - 63.

<sup>4.</sup> Roy, op. cit., p. 548.

<sup>5.</sup> Ibid., p. 547.

Laitkor, a village near Shillong. Stegmiller, however, suggests that megalithic interments were still taking place about 1919,2 and any Khasi-Synteng family is still entitled to erect a megalithic monument.

No monument contains less than three upright stones, and occasionally one finds as many as thirteen. The largest known megalithic monument, originally numbering 30 stones, is to be found near Sutnga in the Jaintia Hills. It is exceptional in that no table-stone is included in the group. According to local legend these stones were erected in memory of a woman who married 30 husbands. She is not supposed to have been polyandrous, but to have divorced one husband after another, and as she established a record for divorce her descendants comme morated the fact by setting up the 30 stones.4 This story, of course, has no reliable evidence to back it, and, while the account is theoretically possible, it is more likely that the 30 stones commemorate an exceptionally large family. Divorce, though permitted by Khasi custom, is looked on with disapproval, and the remarriage of divorced women or widows is not favoured.

These stones are rarely erected in even numbers, since even numbers are considered imperfect. The highest pillar is always in the middle, and the pillars diminish gradually in size on either side. The pillar in the centre may sometimes be surmounted by a circular capstone, in the middle of which a hole has been made so that it may fit the pillar (plate V). At Nongkrem, a few miles from Shillong, there is a centre stone with a neatly covered top

Anthropos, xvi-vii, pp. 435-41. 2.

Yule, JASB, xiii, p. 619; Lyngdoh, Ka Niam Khasi, p. 243.

Ibid., p. 521. C.f. Godwin-Austen, JAI, iv, pp. 144-47. 1.

Oldham, CR, xxvii, 1856, p. 84. 4. Gurdon, Khasis, p. 154. Godwin-Austen, JAI, i, p. 127. Dr H. H. E. Loofs informs me 3. 5. that the same belief is widespread in Vietnam, Cambodia and Thailand. As examples of megaliths erected exceptionally in even numbers we may mention a group about three miles from Shillong along the Cherrapunji road; this had eight upright stones and two dolmens.

which probably represents the head of a man. About two miles from Cherrapunji there were two rows of five monoliths each, all but one of which collapsed in the great earthquake of 1897. The centre stone of one of these rows was capped by a stone in the shape of a crown with indented edges; this feature is very rare. This group of stones, including the dolmens, was of neatly hewn granite.

Some clans furnerly erected menhirs called mawlynti ('stone of the way') and mawkjat ('stone of the foot' or 'limb') at every point where they stopped for the night on their way to deposit the bones of deceased maternal relations in the sepulchre or mawbah. It was believed that the spirits of the departed rested their limbs on the flat stones in front of the pillars on their way to the tomb of the clan, when their remains were carried to the stone cist by their relations. These menhirs were also believed to point the way for the spirits to follow the bones. Unlike the mawbynna, which represent deceased maternal male relations and are named after them, the mawbynti or mawkjat stones are not given individual names.

The tallest recorded example of these megalithic pillars is one of a claster in the market place of Nartiang in the Jaintia Hills (plate III b). It measures 27 ft in height above the ground and is  $2\frac{1}{2}$  feet thick. The largest collection of cists and upright stones seen anywhere in the hills is at Laitlyngkot. These megaliths are of great size, the largest upright pillar being 18ft 9 ins high and the largest horizontal stone weighing 20 tons 18 cwt. Of the eleven stones of this group three are made of the granite found nearby and the remaining eight of the quartzitic sandstone which forms the hill on which they stand. This monument was probably a meeting place of chiefs and elders, since the arrangement of these stones is different from that of the other groups.

<sup>1.</sup> Gurdon, Khasis, p. 146.

<sup>2.</sup> Ibid., p.147.

<sup>3.</sup> Ibid., p. 152.

<sup>4.</sup> Fürer-Haimendorf , JASB (Letters), ix, p. 174.
5. Gurdon, Khasis, p. 146.

Gurdon, Khasis, p. 146.
 Godwin-Austen, JAI, i, p. 129.

In general the Jaintia monuments are much neater that the Khasi ones. They are worked in a form approved by long standing convention. Jaintia or Synteng craftsmen came under the influence of the Bengali workmen brought to the Hills by the Jaintia rajas, who controlled the eastern part of the plateau region, and also the area of Jaintiapur in the plains of Sylhet. The Bengalis' tools were better for working the hard local granite, whether for monuments or for bridges. But probably the best worked megaliths of all are to be seen in the Cherrapunji area. By the roadside from Shillong, a few miles from Cherrapunji, are to be seen a set of megalits which, unlike most other examples, are not rough-hewn, but made of well finished, smoothed stone (plate IV b). These comprise three uprights and a dolmen made of two flat stones supported by three well made pillars. The central upright is about 10 ft high and the two outer ones 6 ft. The dolmen measures 62 ft by 2 ft 8 ins. As in some other examples, there are traces of an enclosure surrounding this megalithic complex.

The monuments do not face any particular direction; if erected on a hilltop they face southwards as a rule, however. There is nothing to show that they were ever erected to face the sunrise or a particular planet. But in their orientation the site and its surroundings are taken into account. They were generally erected alongside roads or close to well-known routes, so as to attract the attention of passers by.

Many villages have derived their names from these erections, as for instance Mawsmai, 'The Stone of the Oath', and Mawphlang, 'The Stone of the Grass', situated a few miles from Shillong in a

<sup>2.</sup> Clark, JAI, iii, p. 489.

<sup>2.</sup> Godwin-Austen, JAI, 1, p. 129.

<sup>3.</sup> Yule, JASB, xiii, p. 619.

stretch of green rolling hills with hardly any trees. The name Mawsmai suggests that the pillars were erected in memory of certain important compacts. According to local tradition there was a war between Cherra and a settlement on the site of the present Mawsmai. When peace was concluded oaths were taken to uphold the peace and a stone was erected to commemorate the treaty.

These upright monoliths or <u>mawbymna</u> were erected for various reasons, but they have no direct connection with the funeral rites of the Khasis, as was formerly suggested. The ashes of the dead are never found buried under the dolmens which are always placed in front of the menhirs. The confusion as to the purpose of these structures arose from the fact that separate stone receptacles to hold the charred bones of the dead are very often found near the monoliths. Often these monoliths are memorial stones erected in memory of deceased relatives who are supposed to have blessed the surviving members of the family by bringing good fortune and prosperity.

Monuments were also erected when a sick person recovered from a serious illness. He would make a solemn promise to one of his ancestors, who was believed to watch over him, to erect a monument if he recovered, but the promise was only made after every other kind of propitiation and exercism, such as breaking eggs, sacrificing fowls or pigs, etc. had failed. A monument might also be put up to point the way for the spirits of dead relatives when their bones were transferred over considerable distances to new resting places. Other megaliths seem to have been erected as a form of public me-

<sup>1.</sup> Yule, <u>JASB</u>, xiii, p. 619. See also Heine-Geldern ('Das Megalithproblem', p. 175) for the use of megaliths to commemorate oaths and treaties among other tribes of this region and elsewhere.

2. Godwin-Austen, <u>JAI</u>, i, p.130.

<sup>3.</sup> Heine-Geldern ('Das Megalithproblem', p. 167) points out that in other megalithic cultures graves and dolmens are rarely associated.

<sup>4.</sup> Godwin-Austen, op. cit., p. 126; Lyngdoh, Ka Niam Khasi, p. 249. Godwin-Austen, op. cit., p. 127.

<sup>6.</sup> Gurdon, Khasis, p. 152; Fürer-Haimendorf, JASB (Letters), ix, p.174.

morial. We have seen that the megaliths of Mawsmai, according to tradition, were put up to commemorate a treaty between two villages. Similarly local tradition has it that the great megalithic complex at Nartiang (plate III) was erected by a local Jaintia king to commemorate the establishment of a market there; the names of the officers who supervised the setting up of the megaliths, Lah Laskor and Mar Phalyngki, are also remembered locally.

The size of a megalith was not dependent on the financial position of the person commemorated, but on that of the person erecting the memorial. The sponsor of such a monument would be a member of the family who believed that he had benefitted from the post-humous blessings of the deceased, for according to Khasi-Synteng belief the dead from the other world may bless their surviving relations with riches, health and ample progeny or curse them with poverty, disease and death. Thus, though the megalith is not directly connected with the funeral rites, it is usually closely connected with the cult of the departed spirits.

The actual repositories of the bones are the structures generally referred to as stone cists. These are enclosed box-like stone ossuaries which have sometimes been confused with the dolmens because they are similar in shape and because both types of structure are connected with the dead.

After cremation the bones are kept in a small cist near the dead persons house. This is usually called mawkynroh (kynroh: wall') or mawshieng (shieng: bone'). According to David Roy some people prefer to call it mawphew instead of mawkynroh so as not to confuse

Lyngdoh, <u>Ka Niam Khasi</u>, p. 253.
 Godwin-Austen, <u>op</u>. <u>cit</u>., p. 126.

<sup>3.</sup> Fürer-Haimendorf, op. cit., pp. 176-77; Heine-Geldern, op. cit., pp. 166-67.

<sup>4.</sup> Gurdon, Khasis, p. 147.

it with the bigger bone receptacle also known by that name. Thus the terminology of the Khasis is as follows:

- i. The small cist in which the bones of an individual are deposited: mawshieng, mawkynroh, mawphew.
- ii. The ossuary in which the bones of a family are deposited: mawkynroh.
- iii. The clan ossuary: mawniam, mawbah.

At the next stage the bones are collected from all the individual cists to be assembled in the much larger stone cist called mawkynroh. In the case of a small clan the mawkynroh may be used to hold the bones of the whole clan. But in general the mawniam or 'ceremonial stone' is the final resting place of the bones of all the clansmen.<sup>2</sup>

When a day has been agreed on by all the senior members of the clan the bones are taken out of the various ossuaries and are transferred to the great stone cist or mawbah. These ceremonies are still performed, and each stage of the three is accompanied by religious performances and dances. It is possible to dispense with the earlier stages, and the bones of a dead person may be taken directly to be buried in the mawbah or grand ossuary, provided that all the ceremonies accompanying the different stages are performed simultaneously.

Khasi ceremonies involve great expenditure, and this is particularly true of the funeral rites, but their strict observance is

4. Roy, op. cit., p. 552.

<sup>1.</sup> Roy, Anthropos, lviii, p. 552. Gurdon uses the term mawphew for the larger stone ossuary which Roy calls mawkynroh. Gurdon calls the first repository mawshieng, which in fact means 'bone-cist' or receptacle and may be used as a general term for all three types (Khasis, p. 141). Roy wrongly refers to the small cist as a 'cairn'; probably this is simply due to inadequate knowledge of English, but the cist may be surrounded by stones or occasionally covered with stones to form a small cairn (plate VIII), though this is by no means usual.

<sup>2.</sup> Roy, op. cit., p. 552.

<sup>3.</sup> Gurdon, Khasis, p. 141; see below, pp. 250,ff.

believed to be essential for the peace and happiness of both the dead and the living. The Khasis believed, and still believe, that if the dead are neglected through the non-performance of the necessary sacrifices they will never go to the abode of the dead with God, but their spirits in the form of demons will roam about restlessly and lorment their living relations, first by making them sick and poom, and finally by causing their death. On the other hand, if the living enjoy wealth and prosperity their welfare is attributed to the Hessings conferred upon them by their dead relations who are well pleased with them.

In setting up the megaliths all clan members were obliged to render voluntary help. They received no pay, but were given food and liquor in the evenings. Skilled workers were, however, employed to cut and shape the stones, and were paid for their services. All the workers were entertained by musicians, and the continual beating of small drums while the work was in progress.

#### Other Khasi Megalithic Structures

The memorials which we have described are not the only megalithic structures of the Khasis. They were proficient in quarrying the local stone, which was split from the rock by fire and manoeuvred by large gangs of tribesmen, sometimes consisting of as many as five hundred at a time. With these large slabs and blocks they constructed stone circles, cremation platforms, bridges, paved paths, steps and cairns.

The stone circle does not play as large a part in Khasi megalithic culture as in some other cultures of this type, but the kpep, a circle of stones, was an important element in Khasi funeral ritual. Such circles were often made of rough unhawn stones

3. See below, p. 259.

Godwin-Austen, JAI, 1, pp. 127-28.

<sup>2.</sup> Walters, As. Res., xvii, p. 504.

of fairly small size, but they might be large and artificially shaped (plate II).

The platforms on which the dead were cremated are not referred to in detail by David Roy, and apparently in his day they were not significant. Gurdon, whose evidence is earlier, refers to the dead being cremated on stone platforms. Godwin-Austen, writing nearly a hundred years ago, speaks of the body being cremated on a platform erected during the time of mourning; this structure was an expensive one, made of stone, and the body was preserved in honey until it was complete. This practice can only have been followed by the richer Khasis, since not only the cost of the platform but also that of the honey for preserving the corpse would have been prohibitive to all but the wealthy.

Cremation platforms built of brick or stone are nowhere to be seen nowadays except in the neighbourhood of Cherrapunji. The remains of several such platforms are still to be found there (plate IX a). They are quadrangular structures from four to six feet high, often on stepped plinths. They do not give an impression of great age and they appear to be the work of more highly skilled craftsmen than those who shaped most of the megaliths. They may well have been constructed as late as the last century, after the opening up of the hills. The ceremonies which accompanied cremations on such platforms were performed with great pomp and splendour and cost large sums of money; hence only the syiems and very rich people could afford them. Just before the great earthquake of 1897 a rich businessman of Cherrapunji, named U Sorki Diengdoh, who did not even belong to the syiem clan, was cremated on a well made platform with little pillars and turrets. His brother, U Sorkha, was also

<sup>1.</sup> Anthropos, lviii, p. 522.

<sup>2.</sup> Gurdon, Khasis, p. 132.

<sup>3.</sup> JAI, 1, p. 133.

cremated in the same way on the same platform. This beautiful platform was destroyed by the earthquake.

Stone platforms were still in use for cremation in Gurdon's time, and one of these is illustrated in his book, but they were presumably used for the burning of many corpses. Godwin-Austen describes platforms with sides of rough stone near Cherrapunji, and these may well be the cremation platforms which he refers to elsewhere. Nowadays cremations take place on wooden platforms which are burnt with the corpse, and the same practice was no doubt followed at all times by the poorer people.

It was , and still is, the custom for a collection to be made to defray the cost of cremation. This was done irrespective of sex, clan or income, and even on the death of a syiem his subjects were asked to contribute to the cost of the funeral.

In earlier times the Khasis constructed impressive stone bridges (plate X). One, made by the Jaintia syiems, at Maput, near Jarain, has six spans and measures 96 feet from end to end. Its piers are constructed of well finished rectangular slabs. Another, of uncertain origin, crosses the Um-Kyakaneh river between Jarain and Syndai. This is even finer than the Maput bridge, and its piers are carved with rosettes and a conventional lion, the significance of which is not clear, but which recalls similar leonine figures carved on monoliths at Kasomari and Kohima, far outside our area. The decorations are possibly due to Hindu influence.

Another bridge of this type, of twenty spans, is to be found near Kamalpur, but it is not in the Khasi country and was probably erected by plainsmen. It is not certain whether these bridges are truly

<sup>1.</sup> Gurdon, Khasis, opp. p. 134.

<sup>2.</sup> See Hutton, JASB, N.S., xxii, pp. 337-38.

<sup>3.</sup> See below, p. 248 .

<sup>4.</sup> Hutton, op. cit., p. 340.

<sup>5.</sup> Ibid., p. 340.

<sup>6.</sup> Hannay, JASB, xx, 1951, pp.291-94.

megalithic, in the anthropological sense, since we have no evidence that they were erected as memorials.

Stone paths, made by the Jaintia syiems and others, are also attested (plate IX b). Such paths and stairs are to be found widely in Assam, and may be seen even in the heart of Kāmarūpa, on the route to the famous Kāmākhyā Temple near Gauhati, which is said by unreliable tradition to have been founded by the Khasis.

Perhaps the most ancient Khasi stone structures are the cairns, found chiefly on the northern side of the plateau, in specially large numbers in the vicinity of Mair ang and Nongstoin. These were not noticed by Gurdon, but Godwin-Austen, writing before 1876, made mention of them. He believed that they were very ancient, since the local inhabitants could give no account of their origin or purpose. He found no cairns in other parts of the Assam hills until North Manipur, where near the head of the Imphal River were ' four fine cairns, all faced with large boulders', of the same type. He was told by the local Nagas that these had been made by another tribe which had gone north long before. But in fact a largish cairn, much overgrown by weed and giving an impression of considerable antiquity, is still to be seen beside the road near Shampung market in the Jaintia Hills (plate VII) The cairn still plays a part in Khasi funeral ritual, since the small stone cists in which the bones are interred after cremation are often covered with stones to make a cairn; but this is by no means regular, and the cairn is quite small in size.

In his description of the cairns in the Khasi Hills Godwin-Austen takes it for granted that they were erected by the Khasis themselves, but this is not absolutely necessary. It is quite possible that they found the cairns already there when they arrived at

<sup>1.</sup> Hutton, op. cit, p. 339.

<sup>2.</sup> For a comparative study of stone paths see Kauffmann, Geographia Helvetica, viii, pp. 189-93; Colani, 'Emploi de la pierre en les temps reculés', Bulletin des amis du vieux Hué, xxvii; Loofs, Asian Studies, Manila, iii, pp. 396-97. Colani finds striking resemblances between the stone paths of Assam and those of South-east Asia.

<sup>3.</sup> JAI, v, p. 39.

their present habitat, and only archaeological investigations may throw further light on the question. But the link with Manipur strongly suggests that they were erected by people coming from the east, and other evidence also indicates that the Khasis entered the region from this direction. 1 We may therefore assume that the cairns are the work of early Khasis, though without further evidence this remains a hypothesis.

An important megalithic complex of certain Khasi origin is to be found near Jaintiapur, but this may well have been erected during the time of the Jaintia kingdom, when many hill Khasis and Syntengs must have migrated to the region. Megalithic structures of Khasi type were seen by Godwin-Austen in the North Kachar hills, on the road from Nanglo to Nangun, in an area which had formerly been occupied by Kacharis and at the time of writing (1872) was inhabited by Nagas. These structures consisted of large slabs. nearly level with the ground; one of these, covering some sort of receptacle' measured ten feet by six. Near these slabs was a platform with sides of rough stone, resembling those seen by Godwin-Austen in the vicinity of Cherrapunji. These stones bore no resemblance to the megaliths of the Nagas or any other nearby peoples, and Godwin-Austen reasonably suggested that they were the remains of an early settlement of the Khasis, occupied before they moved to their present habitat. 3 It is evident that before any precise inferences can be made on their basis careful examination and excavation are necessary. Meanwhile the evidence of the cairns of north Manipur and the megaliths of north Kachar suggests that at some earlier time the Khasis were living to the east of their present homeland, and indicates the possible route of their migration.

The Khasi megaliths cannot be dated on the basis of the evidence at present available. Godwin-Austen inferred from the fact

<sup>1.</sup> See above, p. 30.

Op't Land, Journal of the Asiatic Society of Pakistan, v, pp. 191-201.

JAI, i, pp. 128-29. 3.

that the history of most of them 'is quite lost' that they are very ancient, but this is hardly a sound argument from the historian's point of view. Chronological evidence might be obtained by the radio-carbon process, but to the best of our knowledge this method has not yet been employed on any material from the Khasi and Jaintia Hills. In any case, as even a cursory inspection will show, few of the stones bear signs of serious weathering, despite torrential rain and winter frost; this and other evidence leads us to feel that most of the Khasi megaliths are not very ancient.

## Khasi Megaliths and Other Megalithic Cultures

Megalithic structures are to be found in many parts of the world, and megalithic cultures, one of which is that of the Khasis, have survived until recent times in the Pacific islands and in outlying parts of Asia. We might indeed suggest that the greater part of the world still betrays the vestiges of a megalithic culture in the form of the Christian and Muslim tombstone, which, like the Khasi megalith, is normally a large flat slab and is connected with the cult of the dead.

The widespread occurrence of megaliths, whether recent or prehistoric, has led to numerous theories as to their origin. It is impossible to consider many of these in a study of this character, and we can only briefly survey some of the most important.

Most of the theories of megalithic culture are diffusionist in character. However, there is no special reason why megaliths should not have appeared independently in more than one centre. In this connection we may quote the pertinent words of Max Müller, who long ago wrote:

Children all over the world, if building houses with cards, will build cromlechs; and people all over the world, if the neighbourhood supplies large slabs of stone, will put three stones together to keep out the sun or the wind, and

put a fourth stone on top to keep cut the rain. 1

We cannot therefore accept any diffusionist hypothesis as a finalty, since in no case do we have a positive historical record of one people adopting a megalithic culture from another one. Nevertheless, megalithic monuments are so widely dispersed all over the world that it is equally unlikely that every people devised them independently. In prehistoric times there must have been much diffusion of megalithic practices, whether from one centre or from many centres.

It is possible that numerous features of later more civilized cultures all over the world were derived from neolithic megalith builders. Megalithic cultures can be traced from Britain to France, the Mediterranean coast, Palestine, Arabia, the Caucasus, Persia, the North-west part of the Indian sub-continent (where the non-Muslim Kafirs until recently had a megalithic culture), central and southern India, Assam, mainland South-east Asia, Indonesia, the Philippine Islands, and right across the Pacific to Easter Island. Large stone figures of megalithic type may even be found in the remains of the civilizations of pre-Columbian America. The megalithic structures of Britain were erected three millennia ago, and megalithic elements have been traced in the culture of Jericho of the 7th millennium B.C. 2. but there is no very definite evidence of a steady eastward drift of megalithic culture. Heine-Geldern has found survivals of megalithic culture in the Greek agora, 4 where dead heroes were buried as in the Angami Naga tehuba or sacred enclosure, and he looks on the Greek theatre asderived from the stone circles of the megalith builders. He has even suggested that the

2. Heine-Geldern, Anthropos, xxiii, p. 302.

5. Ibid., pp. 310-11.

<sup>1.</sup> Quoted by Walhouse, JAI, vii, p. 26.

<sup>3.</sup> Schuster, Paideuma, vii, pp.133-41. For further general discussion of the spread of megalithic cultures see Varagnac, L'Homme avant l'Écriture, pp. 392-98.

<sup>4.</sup> Op. cit., pp. 306-07.

Egyptian pyramids may be in some way connected, and it is in any case evident that megalithic cultures existed in the Middle East many centuries before the first pyramids were built. This, however, is no preof of the theory propounded by Perry and Elliot Smith that megalithic culture spread from Egypt throughout the world as part of a prehistoric cult of the sun, since there is no definite evidence that the megaliths were ever widely connected with sun-worship. 2

Widespread, however, is the connection of megaliths with sacrifice. It is possible that the megalith has some relationship with the wooden sacrificial post, still used by some of the hill peoples of India for fastening animal victims. The existence of such posts in India over a thousand years before Christ is proved by the Rg Veda, where much symbolism surrounds the sacrificial yupa. 4 This was normally of wood, but stone yupas are attested both in India and in Hinduized Borneo. Wooden memorials of a type similar to megaliths are erected by the Ao Nagas, upright ones representing males and forked ones females. The Angami Magas, among whom great 'feasts of merit' are given by wealthy tribesmen for the sake of prestige and prosperity, erect wooden memorials of such feasts of the sixth grade, reserving more permanent megalithic memorials for feasts of the seventh and highest grade. Similar wooden posts are erected by the Kuki-Chin of Burma and the Sadang Toraja of Sulawesi (Celebes, Indonesia). The latter use both stone and wooden posts for their sacrifices. Evidence such as this suggests that in some prehistoric megalithic cultures stone was replaced by wood; this hypothesis

<sup>1.</sup> Ibid, p. 302.

<sup>2.</sup> Ibid., p. 314.

<sup>3.</sup> Ibid., p. 314; Hutton, JRAI, lvi, pp. 71-82.

Macdonall and Keith, Vedic Index, s.v. Yupa. 4.

<sup>5.</sup> Sircar, Select Inscriptions, pp. 92-93.

Ibid., pp. 466-67.

Heine-Geldern, op. cit., p. 282. 7.

Ibid., p. 283.

would account for the absence of megaliths in many parts of Asia. Thus no megaliths are to be found in the plain of the Ganga, though they occur to the east and south of it; this may be explained by suggesting that the prehistoric inhabitants of the area, where stone can only be obtained from considerable distances, erected memorials which have long since perished.

The upright stone or menhir is the simplest and most persistent form of megalithic structure. Less widespread is the 'dissolith', a term coined by Perry for a flat dolmen with a menhir behind it, 2 the type of the Khasi mawlynti ('stone of the way'). Such structures are generally erected as ghost seats', where men may sit and associate with the spirits of their ancestors, obtaining help and advice from those who have lived before them. They serve as seats for both the dead and the living, and they may be repositories for the bones of the dead, or actual graves. Elsewhere in India they are at-

This suggestion was probably first made by Heine-Geldern (op. cit., p. 282). Apparently the idea arose from a statement of Hutton JRAI, 111, 1922, p. 55) that the Lhota Nagas erect either a menhir or a wooden post, according to whether a suitable stone is available or not. Later Heine-Geldern developed this view. pointing to anthropomorphic and other menhirs in South Nias which appeared to be stone reproductions of wooden prototypes (in ed. Loeb, Sumatra, p. 310). This idea of the interchangeability of wood and stone in megalithic cultures was much developed by Röder (Pfahl und Menhir, passim), and in a later study ('Das Megalithproblem', p. 180) Heine-Geldern even suggests that this is a feature of all megalithic cultures. This view is also supported by Schuster (Paideuma, vii, 1960, pp.140-41). who brings to bear Australian evidence collected by Odermann (Paideuma, vii, pp. 99-114), which suggests that megalithic elements occur even in the hunting stage of human culture, and that the use of wood for memorials of this kind preceded that of stone. ( I am grateful to Dr H.H.E. Loofs for these references. Megalithic Cultures of Indonesia, p. 16.

Jalton, JASB, xlii, p. 117; Heine-Geldern, Anthropos, xxiii, p. 290; Ruben, Eisenschmiede, p. 156.

tested among the Kols and Mundas, and among the Nagas. They are also found in South-east Asia and Indonesia. Here, however, they are not generally tombs, but memorials erected in honour of both the living and the dead, though it seems that in nearly every case they are in some way connected with the cult of the dead.

In fact most megalithic customs are in some way related to the dead. The stones quarried and erected with such effort link the dead and the living, though different peoples lay varying emphasis on the mysterious power of megaliths to attract and absorb the spiritual virtue of men. Thus the Khasi megalithic ritual, like that of certain other megalithic peoples, lays emphasis on the departed, though it is also believed to benefit the living. The Nagas, on the other hand, look on megaliths 'as seats and magnets for spirits and their fertility-promoting virtue', but they also consider their erection to be a means of gaining personal social merit. Most of the Maga menhirs were set up at 'feasts of merit' to increase the prosperity and prestige of the patron or donor of the feast. The mighty stone is an emblem of strength and contains the special magical force or mana appropriate to the warrior. Thus the Lushais erect platforms as memorials, with a central upright stone carved with the figure of the dead; and childless persons may erect such memorials for themselves in their own lifetime. In the case of ordinary chiefs they are of wood, but for warriors they are of stone. As the stone endures through the centuries so will the soul of the dead endure in the afterlife; as the stone remains upright and can scarcely be cut or pierced, so will the warrior remain upright in battle. Such concepts, linking the individual, living or dead, with the megalith, must lie at the back of megalithic practices, whether connected with the head or the living. And the

1. Hodson, Naga Tribes, p. 40.

4. <u>Ibid.</u>, p. 174.

<sup>2.</sup> Mitra, Prehistoric India, p. 344; Ruben, op. cit., p. 156.

<sup>3.</sup> Fürer-Haimendorf, JASB, Letters, ix, p. 176.

<sup>5.</sup> Heine-Geldern , op. cit., p. 287.

phallic suggestiveness of the megalith, as well as its association with the dead, connects it with the fertility of the crops, herds and tribesmen.

Even among the Nagas, whose megaliths do not seem very closely connected with the cult of the deads thought of the afterlife is not completely absent. The ceremonial feasts of the Angamis are of seven grades, according to their cost, size and duration. Feasts of the sixth grade are commemorated only by wooden monuments, while monoliths are erected as memorials to those of the seventh. Heine-Geldern points out that according to the Angamis a man dies seven times, each time falling to a deeper underworld, 2 and he apparently thinks that these feasts are linked with this belief. Possibly one purpose of the feasts of merit, even if implicit only, is to help the soul of the donor in his successive afterlives. The stone memorial would be particularly appropriate to the seventh grade, if this is connected with the seventh death, for thus the soul, like the stone, would long endure in the underworld, and postpone final annihilation indefinitely. The idea of the stone monument helping the soul in the other world is probably also implicit in the stone benches and seats set up be the Angami Nagas and named after individual tribesmen, whether living or dead. This function is apparently explicit among the Empeo Nagas and the Kabuis of Manipur, who also erect stone seats. The Tangkhul Nagas commemorate their dead by raising a mound with a slab on top, surrounded by stone seats. The slab is in fact a resting place for the soul when it returns to visit the land of the living. and the stone seats are presumably occupied by the kinsmen of the dead man when they commune with him.

<sup>1.</sup> Hutton, JRAI, iii, p. 184.

<sup>2.</sup> Anthropos, xxiii, p. 281.

<sup>3.</sup> Ibid., p. 286.

On the island of Nias we find striking parallels with Angami megalithic customs, and less striking ones with the customs of the Khasis. The inhabitants of this small Indonesian island have a higher culture than the Nagas and their megalithic structures are better finished. They have similar graded festivals at which they erect memorial stones, upright and flat for males and females respectively, and they employ megaliths for other structures, such as walls and steps. They set us stone seats, some of them carved and some of them simple, in front of their houses. These serve both as thrones for the village chiefs and as seats for the souls of the dead. In front of the houses of the chiefs of the Konyak Nagas are found similar stone seats, in the form of benches without backs, but with a menhir on either side. Sometimes such Konyak seats are carved with the prints of a man's feet, 4 a custom which reminds us of one of the most important Buddhist symbols, also found in Hinduism and widespread throughout India and Ceylon. The same carving may be found on some of the stone seats of Nias. In northern Nias such footprints are believed to be connected with childless wives, but there is no logical link in this connection. Heine-Geldern reasonably suggests that they were originally thought of as footholds for the soles of the feet of the dead. It is to be noted that in general South-east Asian megalithic peoples do not burn their dead. This differentiates them from the Khasis and Mundas of India and the Chins of Burma, whose megaliths are all connected with cremation.

Stone circles appear to be a feature of many megalithic cultures. Among Empeo and Sema Nagas they serve as memorials for rich

Heine-Geldern, op. cit., p. 288. Schröder, Nias, i, pp. 81-83, 100-01, 275; Heine-Geldern, op. cit. 1.

p. 288. Hutton, JRAI, lvi, p. 74; c.f. ibid. pl. iii, fig. i.

<sup>3·</sup> 4· Mills, JRAI, lvi, p. 32.

Heine-Geldern, op. cit., p. 289; Ruben, Eisenschmiede, p. 157.

Heine-Geldern, op. cit., pp. 313-14.

tribesmen. The Marring villages have as their sacred enclosures circles of stone with a stone in the middle. 2 Elsewhere we have record of a Naga circle of 32 large stones in conjunction with a row of fourteen menhirs, within which ritual dances are held at an annual feast in commemoration of the dead. Circles of stone benches. used for Naga tribal meetings and suggesting the classical Greek theatre, are likewise connected with the cult of the dead. A Such circles, however, are not to be found in the Khasi Hills, where the larger megaliths are invariably erected in rows; but circular enclosures, usually made of comparatively small stones, play a significand part in the Khasi ritual. The stone step pyramids. in which the Angami Nagas inter the remains of their dead, though they provide a link with the Pacific islands and can be compared with those of ancient Egypt, can scarcely be parallelled in the Khasi Hills or elsewhere in India. The nearest we can find to them is the pyramidal structure in the ruins of the palace complex at Jaintiapur, which is topped by an altar once protected by a thatched shrineroom. But this suggests the Babylonian ziggurat. the pyramidal temple of Java. and the Mexican teocalli, rather than the sepulchral pyramid of Naga type.

The megalithic culture of the Nagas indeed bears closer resamblance in many respects to that of Polynesia than it does to that of the Khasis, 8 for stone seats and stone pyramidal structures are to be found on many Polynesian islands. Here we find stone sacred enclosures used for both ritual and the dispensation of jus-

1. Hutton, JRAI, 1111, p. 155; lvi, p. 76.

<sup>2.</sup> Hodson, Naga Tribes, pp. 112, 186-89.

Ibid., pp. 186-89; Shakespear, Upper Assam, pp. 88-90; Hut-3. JRAI, lvi, p. 82. ton,

Heine-Geldern, Anthropos, xxiii, pp. 291-94. 4.

See above, p. 46 .

<sup>5.</sup> Hutton, JRAI, lvi, pp. 74-75.

Hutton, JASB, xxii, pp. 343-44. 7.

Heine-Geldern, op. cie., pp. 294-95. 8.

tice. These contain stone seats, belonging by hereditary right to noble families. Here again there are connections with the dead and the cult of the departed, and the bodies of chiefs are buried in the enclosures. Even the names of such enclosures are similar. The Angamis call the stone circles dahu and the sepulchral pyramid tehuba; corresponding Polynesian words with the same meanings are ahu and tohua. Other survivals may be traced in the Philippine Islands and in Java, where the great terraced temples may be interpreted as derivatives of a megalithic culture raising pyramids of this type. The Polynesian structures in general seem to represent a later more developed phase of megalithic culture than do those of the tribes of Assam, with the culture of Nias forming an intermediate stage. This evidence would suggest that in neolithic times an important centre of the diffusion of megalithic culture was to be found in Assam or Burma.

Another feature of megalithic culture which is not clearly to be found among the Khasis is the connection of the menhir with animal sacrifices. As we have seen, Heine-Geldern finds some resemblances between the menhir and the ritual post used in such sacrifices. But we have no definite evidence that the Khasis ever used their menhirs to tether sacrificial animals. In the Khasis' sacrificial ritual the animal is first let loose and then beaten to death. This custom suggests a ritualized hunt, a ceremony originally devised by a people in the stage of hunting and foodgathering, in order to ensure success in the chase. But there are vague suggestions of the sacrificial post in the custom of tying part of the victim's head to a post erected behind the menhir at

<sup>1.</sup> Heine-Geldern, Anthropos, xxiii, pp.296-98.

<sup>2.</sup> Ibid., p. 301.

<sup>3.</sup> Ibid., pp. 298-300.

<sup>4.</sup> See below, pp. 251-52.

the ritual feast after the megalithic ceremonies. David Roy menonly the tying of the jaw and horns to the menhir. His account, however, refers to the latest phase of Khasi megalithic culture, shortly before it was given up towards the end of the last century. It is noteworthy that in the account of Walters, one of the earliest records of Khasi custom, written before 1832, we are told that the whole head was tied to the menhir. This would suggest the gradual transition of the upright megalith from being an essential element of the sacrifice to a feature of the ritual only indirectly connected with it, but we cannot be definite on this point. The Khasi method of despatching the victim suggests an early stage of cultural evolution, before the development of the usual ritual of the blood sacrifice, when the wictim is tied to a post and killed by cutting the throat. It may well go back to prehistoric times before agriculture and the use of metal, for it is hardly likely that the Khasis would give up a more advanced practice for a more primitive one.

## Origin and Spread of Megalithic Culture

The many theories as to the origin of megalithic cultures are none of them conclusive. The resemblance between megaliths from places as far apart as Easter Island and Britain is so close that it can hardly be explained as at least partly the result of diffusion. The custom of raising megaliths has been attested among peoples of many different racial types, and it is so widespread that it must normally have been passed from one people to another, rather than have been carried by a single people or group of peoples.

The evidence on our previous pages shows that nearly all mega-

2. As. Res., xvii, p. 504.

<sup>1.</sup> Roy, Authoropou, Lvisi, pp. 537, 547-48, 550.

liths are in some way connected with the cult of the dead. The megalith perpetuates the greatness of the dead man whom it commemorates; at the same time it helps him in the afterlife and allows the surviving members of his family to participate in his greatness and strength. The stane circle, where it occurs, is believed to bring the living into intimate contact with the ancestors.

I n South-east Asia megaliths are commonly connected with the cult of dead ancestors, and among the rituals centring round them the sacrifice of cattle or buffalos is very widespread, with the frequent use of forked sacrificial posts. Heine-Geldern, in noting these common features, has suggested that megalithic culture spread at the same time as cattle-breeding in the area. The sacrifice of cattle was thought not only to promote the happiness of the dead man in the afterlife, but also to help the fertility of the herds and crops. Chronological evidence as to the antiquity of the cult is very vague. We can gather from the context of iron that many south Indian megaliths are later than those of prehistoric Europe. but in South-east Asia, where several peoples have continued to erect megaliths down to very recent times, definite evidence of the antiquity of the practice is lacking. We may tentatively accept Heine-Geldern's suggestion that the erection of megaliths was part of a great primitive religious movement, which was sometimes undoubtedly carried by migrants, but was often passed from one tribe to another. His suggestion that megalithic culture was backed by 'a sort of prehistoric missionary activity. 4 is perhaps a little too imaginative. It is not easy to visualize an inter-tribal priestly society in neolithic times, sending out its intrepid members to teach the mysteries of a new

<sup>1.</sup> Heine-Geldern, Anthropos, lviii, p. 314.

<sup>2.</sup> Ibid., pp.. 284, 314.

<sup>3. &</sup>lt;u>Ibid.</u>, p. 313. 4. <u>Ibid.</u>, p. 315.

cult to tribes which had not yet accepted it. Rather we suggest that the cult spread largely by a process of imitation. If members of a semi-nomadic tribe came upon a people who raised imposing megaliths believed to possess megical power, they might well decide to copy them.

Some differences may be traced between the megaliths of Assam, Chota Nagpur and South-east Asia on the one hand and those of south India on the other. The latter are linked by certain features, notably the soul-hole in the dolmen, with those of the Near East, and it is possible that the eastern and southern Indian megalithic cultures had separate origins, entering India at different times from different directions. The megalithic cultures of Assam and the Munda speaking peoples seem to have been brought from South-east Asia, with which region they show close links; this may also be the centre from which Polynesian megalithic culture originated. Heine-Geldern points out that in Assam both circular and quadrangular stone enclosures are attested, while Chota Nagpur has only circular and the Polynesian islands only square ones. 2 This evidence suggests that both Chota Nagpur and Polynesia derived their megalithic cultures from different waves of influence emanating from Assam, though it is open to other interpretations.

On the basis of this and other evidence Heine-Geldern attributes the introduction of megaliths into eastern India to the Austroasiatic element of the Munda people. He believes that these must have entered India in waves sometime before the Aryans occupied the valley of the Ganga, perhaps between 2500 and 1200 B.C., coming up against a pre-Aryan copper-using culture which diverted them to their present habitat in the hills south of the Ganga plain. This migration, it is suggested, was also associa-

2. Ibid., p. 305.

<sup>1.</sup> Heine-Geldern, Anthropos, lviii, p. 313.

ted with the diffusion of the neolithic shouldered adze. 1

This hypothesis involves other evidence, which is considered elsewhere. 2 It is partly based on the fact that some archaeologists claim to have found evidence of at least two neolithic cultures in the South-east Asian region and eastern India. One of these, the 'Quadrangular Adze Culture' is believed to have entered from the north between 2500 and 1500 B.C. Like most race movements it came in waves. It was associated with people speaking early forms of Malayo-Polynesian languages. These pushed through to Indonesia and beyond, taking with them the cult of megaliths. In their progress they met and mixed with people of another culture of mainland South-east Asia, known as the 'Shouldered Adze Culture' and believed to be associated with people speaking languages of a Mon-Khmer type. 4 These people may have learnt the use of megaliths from the people of the 'Quadrangular Adze Culture'. Possibly some of them migrated to India, taking their megalithic culture with them, and became one of the ancestors of the Munda-speaking tribes of more recent times. This hypothesis presupposes a relationship between the Mon-Khmer and Munda languages, which at best is not very close, though it is nowadays generally admitted. If accepted it implies that when the ancestors of the Khasis came to Assam they were already erecting megaliths, and that other megalithic peoples were already established in the area.

It must be recognised that the theory outlined above has encountered criticism, especially from Professor A.H.Dani, who maintains that Heine-Geldern's theory of two distinct cultures associated with the 'quadrangular adze' and the 'shouldered

<sup>1.</sup> Heine-Geldern, Anthropos, lviii, p. 313; Ibid., xxvii, p. 599; Festschrift Schmidt, pp. 815-17: c.f. Ruben, Eisenschmiede. . . , p. 157. 2. See below, pp. 68-69.

<sup>3.</sup> Heine-Geldern, Anthropos, xxiii, chs. 2-6.

<sup>4.</sup> Quaritch Wales, <u>Prehistory and Religion</u>, pp. 21-23; 6.2. Fürer-Haimendorf, <u>JASB</u> Letters, ix, p. 177.

adze" respectively is not justified by the evidence. His lengthy analysis of neolithic implements from South-east Asia shows in his opinion that 'the archaeological evidence is clear on the point that these . . . types of tools belong to one and the same cultural grouping. 2 Moreover the contexts of some of the tools discovered in various archaeological sites indicates that both types of tool were in use at very late periods, both in India? and in South-east Asia. 4 He even believes that 'the neolithic association of the megalithic culture of both regions remains to be proved". In fact Dani rejects the whole of Heine-Geldern's grandiose theory, though he offers little or nothing in its place. Much of his criticism seems very cogent, and we agree that the early dating proposed by Heine-Geldern has little to support it. The association of neolithic cultures with megaliths, and the presence of at least two neolithic cultures in the region, however, must at least remain as valid possibilities.

Even if we accept Heine-Geldern's theories fully, however, they tell us little about the early history of the Khasis. Even if, three or four thousand years ago, waves of early Mon-Khmer speakers passed through the region of Assam, bearing megalithic culture with them, it is not certain that the Khasis are the remnants of one such wave, left behind when their fellows moved on into the Ganga valley. Such a theory has the advantage of simplicity, but it must be checked against other evidence. The megaliths of Khasi type found in north Kachar, however, give some strength to the view that the Khasis were rearing such monuments before their arrival in their present home; but on the evidence of megaliths alone we cannot be sure that they did not arrive at a later date,

<sup>1.</sup> Prehistory and Protohistory of Eastern India, ch. vi.

<sup>2.</sup> Ibid., p. 101.

<sup>3.</sup> Ibid., p. 102.

<sup>4. &</sup>lt;u>Ibid.</u>, p.211.

 <sup>&</sup>lt;u>Ibid.</u>, p. 102.
 See above, p. 34.

after the first hypothetical waves had passed. Linguistic evidence indicates that they knew the use of iron when they arrived in the Khasi Hills.

Moreover the theory of the Mon-Khmer migration does not give very precise evidence of the original home of the Khasis. It must, however, have been somewhere in the vicinity of South-east Asia, and it is not intrinsically impossible that it was somewhere in Assam itself. Thus the megaliths of north Kachar might be ascribed to a period when Mon-Khmer speakers covered a much wider area of the hills of south Assam than they do at present, when their range has been limited by the arrival of new elements, mostly speaking Tibeto-Burman languages. The historical evidence offered by the megaliths is, in fact, inconclusive, and will probably remain so until they are studied much more intensively, with all the techniques of modern archaeology.

<sup>1.</sup> See below, pp. 74 -75.

#### Chapter IV

# THE EVIDENCE OF LANGUAGE

## The Language of the Khasi-Syntengs

Linguistically speaking, the Khasis stand out as an island amidst a sea of alien peoples whose languages belong chiefly to the Tibeto-Burman or Indo-Aryan groups. On the other hand, the language spoken by the people inhabiting the United Khasi and Jaintia Hills belongs to the Mon-Khmer group, which, according to the generally accepted terminology invented by Father W. Schmidt, is a branch of the Austro-Asiatic family, which is in turn a branch of the world's most widely spoken group of languages, the Austric. 2

The area in which the present day Austric languages are spoken stretches from the Himalayas to Easter Island and from Madagascar to Hawaii. The languages of the family fall into two main divisions, the Austro-Asiatic and the Austronesian. The former division is spoken in and around South-east Asia and includes the Munda languages of India, chief of which are Mundari, Santali, Ho, Kurku, Sabara and Gadaba; and the Mon-Khmer group, which, as well as the two languages which give it its mame, the Mon of south Burma and south Thailand and the Khmer of Cambodia, includes Khasi, Nicobarese, Palaung and Wa, spoken in Burma, and Sakai and Semang, tibal languages of Malaya, as well as several lesser languages spoken by comparatively insignificant tribal peoples. 4

<sup>1.</sup> Grierson, Linguistic Survey of India, vol. ii, p. 1.
2. Gait, History of Assam, 3rd ed., p. 5.

<sup>3.</sup> Hall, History of South-East Asia, p. 9.

<sup>4.</sup> For full lists of languages of all these groups see Salzner, Sprachenatlas, pp. 1-30.

S.K.Chatterji believes that the original home of the Austric speech was India, from which it spread in prehistoric times. The numerous families of the Austric group, however, are very different one from the other, and are so widely dispersed that superficially they show little in common. The study of the languages as a whole cannot therefore help us much in our investigations, since the various families must have broken apart in very remote times, and the speakers of different families have in most cases little or no ethnic similarity.

Among the languages of the Mon-Khmer group, Khasi does not so closely resemble the Munda languages as do certain others such as Nicobarese. Indeed the structure of Khasi is very different from that of the Munda languages, the former being essentially monosyllabic and the latter polysyllabic. The phonetics of the two are not strikingly similar. The sentence structure is also different: in Munda the usual order is subject, object and verb, while in Khasi and Mon it is subject, verb and object. The common substratum of Munda and Khasi consists almost entirely of resemblances of individual words, but it seems that these cannot be accounted for by borrowing and must therefore indicate a common origin at some remote period. 4

The Khasi language appears to be in the course of evolution from a monosyllabic to a polysyllabic inflected stage. The numerous apparently polysyllabic words are in fact in most cases compounds of easily recomizable monosyllabic root words, the only exceptions being a few syllables which are rarely if ever used except as prefixes modifying the meaning of other syllables; among these are

<sup>1.</sup> Kirāta-jana-krti, p. 1.

<sup>2.</sup> For comparisons see maps in Henderson, Lingua, xv, 1965, pp. 400-34.

<sup>3.</sup> Grierson, Linguistic Survey of India, ii, pp.1-2.

<sup>4.</sup> Pinnow, Versuch einer historischen Lautlehre der Kharia-Sprache, pp. 1, 7-8.

the generic prefixes u and ka, the plural prefix ki, and the nominal prefix jing. Another interesting feature of Khasi is the formation of secondary words by consonantal infixes, for example shong 'sit', 'dwell', shnong 'settlement', 'town', as compared with jing-shong 'seat', 'bottom'. It is to be noted that Khasi shows no inclination to develop suffixes.

in spite of striking differences, the numer-As we have seen. ous resemblances between the Munda and Mon-Khmer groups of languages can hardly be accounted for by coincidence, and it is quite possible that at some remote time in the past the ancestors of the speakers of these two groups were related. As they appear at present, however, the similarities between the two linguistic groups are not parallelled by the racial types of their speakers. The Munda speakers are virtually without exception classified as Proto-Australoid, and the Mon-Khmer speakers as Mongoloid. But we have already seen that the Khasi type contains certain Proto-Australoid features. The remote relationship of the two groups of languages might be accounted for by the hypothesis which we have already met in our study of Khasi megaliths, that the original Proto-Australoid peoples of South-east Asia interbred with Mongoloid immigrants from south China, the first waves of whom, however, spoke a non-Mongoloid language. The newcomers were successful in imposing their own racial type as the dominant one of the region, but the aboriginals were able to leave very strong traces in the languages which grew up out of the fusion of the two races.2

1. Pinnow, Indo-Iranian Journal, iv, 1960, pp. 81-103; and in ed. Shorto, Linguistic Comparison in South East Asia and the Pacific, pp. 140-52; Maspero in ed. Meillet, Les Langues du Monde, 2nd ed., 1956, pp. 609-22.

See above, p.29. This theory runs counter to the view of Gait (History of Assam, 3rd ed., p. 6) that the 'earlier Mongoloid invaders genetrated as far as Chota Nagpur and (apparently) the Punjab'. In fact Mongoloid features are rare in the racial types of Chota Nagpur and the Punjab, and it appears that Gait's theory was devised merely to account for the apparent resemblances between Khasi and the Munda languages. These can be better explained on the hypothesis that the similarities are the result of a common inheritance from primitive Proto-Australoid aboriginals, a theory which would prehaps find support from some anthropologists. (C.f. Luce, Journal of To Siam Society, 1965, Pp. 139-52.)

called Garos, call themselves Khasis, and observe certain Khasi customs.

Gurdon believed that of all the Khasi dialects those of the War, Amwi and Lakdong districts on the southern slopes of the Jaintia Hills bear more resemblance to the original Mon-Khmer than does 'standard' Khasi. The Jirang dialect spoken on the northern side of these hills is also closer to the Mon-Khmer languages of South-east Asia than is the standard Khasi of Cherrapunii.

#### Glottochronology

A study of the Khasi language according to the technique of glottochronological analysis, which has recently aroused much controversy among linguists, gives interesting if inconclusive data. Certain preliminary investigations in this field were made at London University by Professor Eugenie Henderson and Mr H.L. Shorto in 1965. The former scholar obtained the following percentages of cognate words for languages of the Mon-Khmer group, including Vietnamese, which shows some affinity to it:4

Mon and Khmer	36%
Mon and Vietnamese	35%
Khmer and Vietnamese Mon and Khasi	31% 27%
Vietnamese and Khasi	27%

The above results are somewhat optimistic, being based quite

2. Oldham, CR, xxvii, 1856, p. 58.

vol. i, 1966, p. 139.

<sup>1.</sup> Gurdon, Khasis, p. 192.

For explanations, analyses and criticisms of this subject see Swadesh, 'Lexicostatistical dating of prehistoric ethnic contacts', Proc. Amer. Philos. Soc., xcvi, 1952, pp. 452-63; Hymes, 'Lexicostatistics so far', Current Anthropology, 1960, pp. 3-44; Bergaland and Vogt, 'On the validity of glottochronology', ibid., 1962, pp. 115-53; and bibliographies in the two last mentioned articles. Henderson, 'Khasi and the 1-clusters in seventeenth century Tonkinese', Artibus Asiae, separatum, Essays offered to G. H. Luce,

deliberately on the inclusion of words which are not certainly cognate. Mr Shorto, accepting only cognates of which he was certain, obtained the following results:

Khasi and Mon 15% Vietnamese and Mon 14% Khmer and Mon 27%

For comparison we may note that, using the same list, the percentage of cognates in English and German is 71% and in English and French 13%, if we exclude words known to have been borrowed after the two languages had separated. If we accept the postulates on which glottochronology is based this implies that Khasi must have separated from its kindred languages long before Old English separated from the parent tongue which it held in common with Old High German. The latter event must obviously have taken place well before A. D. 450.

Worked out according to the formulae used by Swadesh and others, the data of Professor Henderson would suggest that a common language, the ancestor of Khasi, Mon, Khmer and Vietnamese, was spoken until about 2400 B.C.; Khasi developed as a separate language at about that time, while Vietnamese broke away some 500 years later, and Mon and Khmer were not differentiated until about 1500 B.C. The data obtained by Mr Shorto, however, would reveal a much remoter period for the evolution of these languages, Vietnamese appearing in about 4500, Khasi in 4300 and Mon and Khmer breaking apart about 2400 B.C. 2

If we accept the hypothesis of the glottochronologists that,

See above, p. 70, n. 3.

<sup>2.</sup> The data on this and the preceding page were communicated to us in note form by Professor Henderson and Mr Shorto, and are at present unpublished. Neither scholar, apparently, has much faith in them. In a subsequent letter, dated 12 July, 1967, Professor Henderson writes: '. . . Neither Shorto nor myself are at all convinced about the "dating" aspect! . . . I think . . . that you should make clear that this was an informal and rather light-hearted attempt, and that while it appeared to confirm the view that Mon-Khmer and Khasi are distantly related, it does not provide any conclusive evidence on dating.

other things being equal, the deviation of one language from another proceeds at a uniform rate, we may postulate that the Khasi language originated at some time between 4300 and 2400 B.C. Of the dates of Mr Shorto and Professor Henderson, the former is based on a minimal and the latter on a maximal admission of cognates, and the true date may lie somewhere between these extremes. It is to be noted, however, that Professor Henderson's data suggest that Khasi is as close to Vietnamese as it is to its known relatives, Mon and Khmer, and that the two latter languages are closer to Vietnamese than they are to Khasi. Linguists are now inclined to relate Vietnamese to the Mon-Khmer group. We therefore prefer the chronology of Mr Shorto to that of Professor Henderson, and would be inclined to place the origin of Khasi nearer to the earlier than to the later date.

It must be admitted that the basis on which such analyses are made is very tenuous and uncertain; but the analysis shows us, if nothing else, that lexically Khasi is not very closely related even to Mon and Khmer. Its affinity to these is not comparable to that between two languages of the Indo-Aryan group, such as Bengali and Gujarati for instance, bot rather to that between two languages of different groups of the Indo-European family, for instance English and Hindi. Irrespective of glottochronology, this indicates that Khasi appeared as a separate language in the remote past, no doubt long before the Christian era. It does not, however, necessarily imply that the Khasis arrived in their present home at such an early time, for they may have already been speaking Khasi for millennia when they came there.

## Loan-words

A careful examination of some of the most common Khasi words

<sup>1.</sup> Haudricourt, 'La place du Vietnamien dans les langues austroasiatiques', <u>Bulletin de la Société de Linguistique de Paris</u>, xlix, 1953, pp. 122-28.

may be useful in throwing some light on the evolution and the early culture of these people, about the history of whose language in fact very little is known, since their ancestors have left us nothing in writing.

The Khasi language contains numerous Indo-Aryan loan-words, as well as many words adopted from English in the 19th century. A few words may have been borrowed from other tribal languages, mostly of the Tibeto-Burman family. It may be taken as probable that the referends of indigenous words were known to the Khasis before they came into close contact with Indo-Aryan speakers, while those regularly referred to by loan-words were perhaps adopted from the latter. This rule is not, however, of universal application, and has many exceptions. If it were a regular feature of language that loanwords were only adopted for objects and concepts not previously known we should be forced to conclude that before the Norman conquest the English, though they bred oxen, sheep and swine, were vegetarians who ate no beef, mutton or pork. Many factors lead to the borrowing of words from other languages, often to drive perfectly good indigenous words into oblivion; and where there is no written record of the earlier phases of the language such words are usually lost beyond recovery.

We must add a further note of caution in pointing out that our analysis is based almost entirely on the 'standard' Khasi language of Shillong and Cherrapunji, and on dictionary Bengali and Assamese. To achieve greater precision a thorough linguistic survey of all Khasi dialects, especially those of the remoter villages, would be necessary, and such a survey is yet to be carried out.

Of the words for metals those for iron (nar), brass (ryn-nong) and gold (ksiar) are indigenous. Those for copper (tama)

and silver (rupa) are Indo-Aryan. Of the three former words, nar shows no relationship to any words for metal in any other language, whether of the Mon-Khmer family or of a different one. Metal seems hardly to have been known in South-east Asia until the arrival of the Dong-Son culture in the fourth or third century B.C. and probably iron was not widely used until early in the Christian era. The word nar, probably etymologically connected with snar, meaning 'wedge', 'hard and seasoned timber'. 'the heart of a tree'. 2 suggests that the Khasis already knew iron when they came to their present habitat, and thus their migration could hardly have taken place much before the time of Christ. But this argument is not conclusive, since the word nar is sometimes used in the sense of any metal, and may have originally meant bronze or copper, on the analogy of Sanskrit ayas, which originally meant bronze and later came to mean iron. This would account for the fact that a loan-word is now used in Khasi for the former metall.

If the Khasis knew iron before their arrival, it is unlikely that they did not also know bronze, which was widely used in Southeast Asia at a date several centuries before the Christian era, if not earlier. But in this connection the Indo-Aryan loan-words tama and rupa are interesting, since they point to influence coming from Bengal, where these words are still current, rather than from Assam, where they take the forms tam and rup. As with most other Indo-Aryan

Wales admits (ibid., n. 1) that Heine-Geldern places the arrival of the Dong-Son culture in the ninth or eighth century B.C., and in his later works he appears to accept a somewhat earlier date (Making of Greater India, p. 81; Prehistory and Religion in South-East Asia, p. 48).

<sup>2.</sup> Singh, Khasi-English Dictionary, p. 206.
3. We understand that carbon dating of material recently found by Professor Solheim in Thailand indicates that bronze was known there far back in the third millennium B.C. We reserve judgement until a full report is available, and until other bronze articles of comparable date are found in the region. Even if this very early date for the introduction of metal into South-east Asia is finally accepted, it will not affect any of our major theories significantly.

loan-words in Khasi, the form of tama suggests a comparatively late borrowing, since there is no trace of a second consonant before the final vowel, such as occurs in Sanskrit and Middle Indo-Aryan forms (tamra, tamba). Thus if tama replaced nar, which originally meant bronze, it must have done so at a comparatively late date, some time after the formation of the Bengali language, say 1200 or later. At such a date it is hardly likely that iron was unknown to the Khasis or had any novelty about it, and thus the theory is not a strong one. Probably tama took the place of some other Khasi word, which may yet survive in some remote village dialect. Problems such as this emphasize the need for further study of Khasi dialects, and the vocabulary of older generations of Khasis.

The words for the simpler tools and weapons are mostly indigenous -- tyrnem ('hammer'), mohkiew ('hoe'), wait ('dao', a large slashing knife), sum ('spear'), ryntieh ('bow'), khnam ('arrow'). It is surprising that the common word for knife, tari, is borrowed from Bengali katari ( with the first syllable omitted through confusion with the Khasi prefixed feminine particle, ka), rather than from the more usual Bengali word churt, which is also sometimes used in Khasi. Katari is itself a loan-word from Persian, and the date of its arrival in the Khasi language must therefore be very late. The usual Khasi word for 'gun'- suloi -- is evidently connected with the Hindi salai, not generally used in this sense, but with the meaning of 'match'. This word is not normally used in Bengali with the meaning of 'gun', though it does occur in Assamese in this sense, but in its local form, hilai. The borrowing was probably made from Bengal, since the Khasi word has the initial s, but the word was no doubt taken over when the word salai had the meaning of 'gun' in Rengali. It retained this meaning in both Khasi and Assamese, while losing it in

Bengali. The Khasi word for 'gunpowder', bakhor, is not obviously connected with any Indo-Aryan word, though it does not appear to be indigenous. It may be linked with the widespread Indo-Aryan word khār (Sanskrit kṣāra), meaning 'alkali', 'potash', which in qualified form may mean 'gunpowder' in Assamese (hilair khār). Here again we may have the survival of an extinct Bengali usas. The initial ba- of this word may be due to the contagion of bardd, the common Indo-Persian word for 'gunpowder'. The word for 'saw', kurat, is a Bengali loan-word (Bengali karāt, pronounced korat), and though, as we have seen, the word for 'hammer' is indigenous, that for 'nail', prek, is not, being derived from the Bengali parek, itself a loan-word from Portuguese.

The above group of words indicates that the Khasis had most of the weapons of other ancient and medieval peoples before they came in contact with Inde-Aryan speakers, but that they learnt the use of firearms from Bengal. If they knew swords and arrows they must obviously have known knives also, and we may attribute the disappearance of the indigenous word for knife to the influence of the Bengali craftsmen employed by the Jaintia kings and other Khasi speaking chieftains; from the same source the Khasis may have learnt the words for 'saw' and 'nail'.

Most words connected with buildings are indigenous, for instance those for 'house' (ing), 'door' (jingkhang), 'roof' (jingsop, tnum). The traditional Khasi house normally had no windows, and the commonest way of expressing 'window' is by the periphrasis jingkhang It, meaning 'glass door'. Khasi villagers, however, prefer to use the Indo-Aryan loan-word khalki, derived from the Indo-Aryan khirki, common to most north Indian languages. In Assamese this word has retained the meaning of 'window', while in Bengali it has acquired that of 'back door', being replaced in its usual sense by jānālā. The words for 'plank' (lyntang) and 'glass' (it)

are indigenous, but maw-it, meaning 'brick', is compounded of Khasi maw, 'stone', and Bengeli-Assamese It, 'brick', while the word for 'mertar', sorki, is derived from Assamese curki rather than Bengali cur. The most interesting loan-words in this group are atoskhana, meaning 'chimney' and kamre, 'room'. These two words are not standy ard in either Bengali or Assamese, but are commonly used in the languages spoken further west, the former being a loan-word from Persian (ātishkhāna) and the latter from Portuguese. Perhaps both words were taken from East Bengal, where the Muslim population uses many more words of this type than occur in the 'chaste' Bengali which has now become standard. In any case, the evidence of these words suggests that before contact with Indo-Aryan speakers the Khasis did not build in brick and their houses, which normally had no chimneys, were not divided into rooms. 2 Fires are needed in the cold winters of the Khasi hills, and the lack of an indigenous word for chimney suggests that the Khasis migrated from a considerably warmer climate, unless, as in certain other cases, they dropped the use of an indigenous word and adopted a loan-word.

Indigenous names of cultivated plants include those for 'rice' (ja, cooked; khaw, uncooked), 'millet' (krai), 'bean' (ri, rymbai), 'yam' (shriew)and pumpkin' (pathaw), together with several herbs and spices. The word for 'wheat' (kew)is probably derived from the Hindi gehu, which appears in Assamese as ghehu, and can hardly be linked with the very degenerated modern Bengali form gam. Plat, meaning 'onion', is evidently a loan-word (Bengali pēyāj, Assamese piyāj, both from Persian piyāz). Rynsun, 'garlic', has counterparts in Indo-

<sup>1.</sup> Mr H.L.Shorto writes: 'Old Mon la'at, l't, early middle Mon l'it, l'uit, "brick, (laterite) block" places some doubt on the Indo-Aryan origin of various words in Mon-Khmer languages, including Khasi-it.' (Unpublished personal communication, 15 May, 1967.) As even in the early nineteenth century the Khasis did not build in brick, however, we prefer to look on this as a loan-word. (See n.2, below.)

2. That this was normally the case even in the nineteenth century is confirmed by Yule (JASB, xiii, 1844, p. 624).

Aryan languages, but may be an indigenous Austric word, cognates of which were borrowed at an early period by Indo-Aryan speakers. Though the bean is designated by an indigenous word (ri), the pea is invariably a Bengali loan-word, motor, and lentils are dai, the Bengali and Hindi dal. 'Pepper', mrit, is evidently the Bengali maric (Hindi, mirc), and is usually preceded by the classifier soh, 'fruit'. This word appears in most Indo-Aryan languages including Sanskrit, but it is not Indo-European in origin, being an early borrowing from Austric. Of the plants known to have been introduced since the discovery of America, the chilli (mynkon) and the potato (phan) have been given indigenous names, as is the case in most Indo-Aryan languages. 'Maize' is riewhadem, obviously an indigenous compound of uncertain elements. Among fruits with indigenous names are the mango (soh-pieng), the pineapple (soh-trun), the lemon (soh-jew, 'sour fruit') and the coconut (snepkor). The second syllable of the last word may be due to the influence of the last syllable of the Bengali marikel, with the same meaning, but this can hardly account for the first syllable of snepkor, which means 'skin'. The word for 'areca nat', kwai, is probably connected with the Bengali gubāk, which appears in colloquial Assamese as gua, and is a word of Austric crigin. The orange, commonly grown in the Khasi hills nowadays, is known by a loan-word, soh-niamtra; this is from the Hindi santara, which appears in Assamese as sumthira but is not used in standard Bengali.

The above evidence suggests that when the Khasis came in contact with Indo-Aryan speakers they were familiar with rice and millet and with various fruits and vegetables widely eaten by them nowadays. Of the words we have discussed the only one which may have some historical interest is that for cocmut, snepkor. The natural habitat of the coconut palm is low lying, tropical or sub-tropical littorals, though it has been introduced into riverine plains such as that of the Brahmaputra. It will not grow in the Khasi hills, though the mut

is familiar to the Khasis, being imported from Gauhati. That the Khasis have their own name for it suggests that they migrated at a not very remote time from some warmer area near the sea. That their earlier home was warmer than their present one is also indicated by the absence of an indigenous word for chimney, which one would expect if they had been living for a long time in the hills before meeting speakers of Indo-Aryan languages.

Among wild animals and birds the tiger (khla), the wolf (suri), the fox (myrsiang), the peacock (klew), the partridge (iyar khiar) and many others have indigenous names. The elephant, on the other hand, is known by a loan-word, hati, borrowed from Bengali. Since the elephant was fairly widespread all over South-east Asia and even in south China until comparatively recent times it is very surprising that the Khasis have not preserved their own word for it, especially as the wild elephant is still occasionally to be found in the remoter parts of the hills. It is hardly likely that they migrated from some region where elephants were unknown and we suggest that the Indo-Aryan hati ousted a lost indigenous word for elephant as a result of Aryan influence on the rulers of Jaintia and other Khasi chiefs, who came to look upon elephants as royal beasts, and enhanced their prestige by referring to them by their Indo-Aryan name. Alternatively it might be suggested that the original Khasi word for the elephant, which on the analogy of other Mon-Khmer languages may have been sang or sing, disappeared owing to its homophony with such words as myrsiang, 'fox', or sang, 'taboo'. An interesting word in this group is kynda, 'rhinoceros'. This may be indigenous, but it appears to be connected with Assamese ganda (Hindi, gend), meaning the same animal. Though at a very remote period rhinocerontes roamed widely over Asia, in recent geological time they are known only in eastern India and Indonesia, though their appearance on the seals of the Harappa Cul-

<sup>1.</sup> The suggestion of Mr H.L. Shorto (unpublished personal communication, 15 May, 1967).

shows that they were more widespread in ancient times. If we accept kynda as a loan-word, it suggests that the Khasi language developed in a region where these animals were unknown, outside Assam where they are still to be found and were once quite common, and that Khasi speakers only came in contact with them at a much later time.

Domestic animals with indigenous names include the ex and the cow (u masidab, u dab; ka masi), the buffalo (muid), the goat (blang), the pig (sniang), the dog (ksew) and the fowl (sylar); the sheep is referred to as langbrot, a compound of which the first member is equivalent to blang, 'goat', and the second is of uncertain meaning. The word for 'horse', kulai, is derived from the Indo-Aryan ghora, used in Assamese and colloquial Bengali. While the word for the domestic fowl is indigenous that for 'duck', han, is apparently Indo-Aryan (Sanskrit and Bengali hamsa, 'goose'). But the word han also occurs with this meaning in Mon and Palaung, and may be indigenous, the similarity of the Indo-European and Mon-Khmer words being due to a remote common origin. This evidence suggests that before coming into contact with Indo-Aryan speakers the Khasis had domesticated most of the animals normally domesticated in South and South-east Asia, with the exception of the horse, which was not known in the latter region until comparatively late times. The fact that the sheep was confused with the goat, and not recognized as a distinct species, suggests that the Khasis were at first unfamiliar with it. In this connection it is to be noted that the indigenous word for milk buin, is only used in reference to the suckling of infants; cow's milk as an article of food is invariably dud, which is clearly Indo-Aryan Hindi and colloquial Bengali dudh). Hence we infer that, like most other peoples of South-east and East Asia, the Khasis did not nor-

<sup>1.</sup> The suggestion of Mr H. L. Shorto (unpublished personal communication, 15 May, 1967).

mally drink milk until they learnt the practice from Indo-Aryan speakers. Even near the middle of the last century they were unused to it. 1

Many agricultural terms are indigenous; among these are the words for 'basket' (shang), 'winnowing tray' (pdung), 'sieve' (krish kynruh), 'granary' (thiar) and seed' (symbai). The word for the digging-hoe or mattock -- mohkhiew -- has no resemblance to the Bengali kodal or the Assamese kor, but is connected with other South-east Asian words for the same implement, such as the Burmese mo-gyo. Lyngkor, the Khasi word for 'plough', on the other hand, certainly resembles the word langal, used with the same meaning in the neighbouring Indo-Aryan languages. But it also resembles many words with similar meaning in South-east Asian languages, and the Indo-Aryan word, though attested in Sanskrit (längula), is not Indo-European, and may be descended from the same Austro-Asiatic ancestor as lyngkor. An indigenous word for 'manure', sboh, covers both cow-dung and ashes. All the words for agricultural processes are indigenous. 2 The linguistic evidence suggests that the Khasis before contact with Indo-Aryan speakers had a developed agriculture, knowing at least hoe-cultivation and probably also the plough.

Most words connected with food and cooking are indigenous. The Khasis have distinct words for 'cooked rice' (ja) and 'rice cake' or 'rice bread' (kpu). It is significant that the word generally used for the cooking place or stove (Hindi, cilä) is dpei, of which the original meaning is 'ashes'. This suggests that the early Khasis cooked on open fires and had no special fireplace or stove.

<sup>1. &#</sup>x27;They use milk in no shape.' Yule, JASB, xiii, 1844, p. 624.

2. E. g. puh, tih, 'dig'; lur, 'plough'; bet, 'sow'; thung, 'plant'; ot, 'reap'; shoh, 'thresh'; peh, tai, 'winnow'.

E. g. khiew, cooking or other vessel, compounded with another word according to size and type; doh, 'meat'; dohkha, 'fish': shet, 'cook'; sdieh, 'fry'.

Among words for textiles and their processing the general word for 'cloth' -- jain -- is indigenous, but the only specific fabric which is known by a word native to the Khasi language is cotton (kyn-phad, spur); rusom, 'silk', and wul, 'wool' are both lean-words, the former from Persian (refint), no doubt via Bengali (refam), and the latter obviously from English. The fact that the word wul is clearly a very late borrowing, combined with the fact that the word for 'sheep' is a derivative of that for 'goat', strengthens the supposition that the original home of the Khasis was considerably warmer than their present one, and does not give support to the dubious evidence linking the Khasis with the Himalayan peoples, who have known sheep and woollen eleth since very early times. The fundamental words for the processes of spinning, weaving and sewing are indigenous, so we may suggest that they know these crafts before they came in contact with Indo-Aryan speakers, though their only fabric was cotton.

The Khasi word for 'wheel', shalyntem, appears to be an indigenous compound, of uncertain components. It is definitely not connected with any derivative of the Sanskrit cakes, and this fact suggests that the early Khasis knew wheeled vehicles, though the first
European accounts state that they had none; therefore this inference
can only be very tentative, especially as there is no general MonKhmer word for 'wheel'. The same word is also used nowadays for the
potter's wheel.

The word for 'boat' is also indigenous (lieng), as are those for 'river' (wah). 'Our' in Khasi is an Indo-Aryan loan-word, boiths (Bengali baiths, Assamese baths). The word for 'sail' also means 'flag'; this is lema, apparently derived from the Perso-Arabic 'Slam, which has the latter meaning, and which, though not commonly used in Assamese or 'chaste' Bengali, occurs in many Indo-Aryan

<sup>1.</sup> See above, p. 80.

<sup>2.</sup> See above, p. 28.
3. E. g. ksai, 'thread'; thir, 'spin'; thain, 'weave'; jain, 'cloth'; thyrnia, 'needle'; suh, 'sew'; sopti, 'garment'.

languages. This evidence suggests that the early Khasis had only very crude means of transport by water, perhaps because their habitat did not lead itself to rowing or sailing. The Khasi word for 'sea', duriaw, is also a loan-word, looking back to the Persian darya, which may mean a large expanse of water, whether a sea or a lake, and in India commonly means 'river', in which sense it is used in Assamese and Bengali. It may be inferred from these data that the Khasis in their earlier home did not live near the sea or the broader reaches of a large river such as the Irawadi or the Mekong, though this is not wholly borne out by the fact that there is an indigenous word for the coconut, which flourishes only near the sea or in flat riverine plains.

Many terms connected with trade are indigenous. These include the words for 'to buy' (thied), 'to sell' (die), 'market' (iew) and 'loan' (kylliang). While the word for loan is native to Khasi, that for debt appears to be Indo-Aryan (ram, Sanskrit rna, Bengali rin). Terms for money are all borrowed, for example tyngka, 'rupee', which suggests the Hindi tanks rather than the Bengali taks or the Assamese taks. Tyngka may mean money in general, as may the obviously borrowed peisa. But the cowrie, used until recently by villagers for making small purchases, has an indigenous name, sbai. This suggests that the Khasis before contact with Indo-Aryan speakers did not know the use of coinage, but employed the cowrie as a means of exchange, as did most early peoples of India and South-east Asia. They probably had already developed an idea of property and knew something of trade, no doubt of a simple kind.

Administrative and legal terms are nearly all borrowed. The sylem, the king or tribal chief, has an indigenous name, but his

<sup>1.</sup> This word is connected etymologically with <u>rymbai</u>, 'bean'. Certain species of bean were widely used in South-east Asia as units of weight, like the Indian <u>rātī</u>, and the word for bean came to be used in various South-east Asian countries for a small unit of currency, for instance Mon, <u>boa</u>, <u>Burmese</u>, <u>pé</u>. (Mr H. L. Shorto, unpublished personal communication, 15 May, 1967.)

queen is known as mahadei, obviously borrowed from an Indo-Aryan language. A queen ruling in her own right, however, shares the title syiem, qualified by the feminine generic prefix ka in place of the masculine u. Most governmental terms are Islamic in origin -- for instance aif, 'law' (Perso-Arabic a'In); mokotduma, 'lawsuit' (Perso-Arabic mugaddama), and khajna, 'tax' (Persian khazāna, 'treasury', 'revenue'). Bishar, 'judge', is evidently borrowed from the Bengali bicarak. But as well as these terms certain others, used in connection with the syiems rather than with the central government, suggest that the early Khasis had some rudimentary administrative system. For instance as well as the normal word for 'tax' another, bai-khrong . was used for the petty market taxes levied by the syiems in former times; this word is a compound of sbai, 'cowrie', and khrong, 'beg', and perhaps the use of the latter word indicates that the rule of the Khasi chiefs was comparatively mild, and that the sterner means of coercion were comparatively sparingly used. The ceremonial seat on which the syiem sat was known as khet, an indigenous word. The normal word for 'administrative council' or 'parliament' at any level is dorbar. a loan-word, but jingialang is also used. A man of high position is known as bakhraw, which seems to indicate the existence of a class of petty nobles in the ancient Khasi tribal structure.

Family names and terms of relationship are nearly all indigenous, and the Khasis have shown no inclination to adopt Indo-Aryan terms in this connection. The word lok, meaning 'husband' or 'wife' according to prefix, appears to be Indo-Aryan, derived from Bengali lok, a person'; but this must be taken as a modern colloquial usage, and the word has by no means replaced the indigenous taga, which has the same meaning. Words for 'to marry' (shong kurim) and 'to divorce' (san shyieng) are indigenous, and the ceremonies connected with these

<sup>1.</sup> Henderson, Lingua, xiv, 1965, p. 461.

acts are known by derivative words. It may be significant that words exist for 'master' (kynrad) and 'slave' (mraw), but a hired servant is known as shakri, apparently a loan-word from the Bengali cākri, feminine of cākar, 'a servant', but used in Khasi for both sexes.

Though Khasi Hindus, Christians and Muslims to some extent use words borrowed from the languages of their respective faiths, the vocabulary of the traditional Khasi religion is almost entirely indigenous, for instance blei, 'a god'; lyngdoh, 'priest'; knia, 'sacrifice', and ksuid, 'devil', 'ghost'. Indigenous words can be found for 'virtue' (dor, jingkhuid) and 'faith' (jingngeit). Heaven' is bneng, but the word for 'hell', strangely enough, is borrowed from Islam (dujok, from Persian duzakh), no doubt through Bengali and Assamese Muslims, It is noteworthy that, though the Khasi vocabulary contains words for badness in the general sense (e. g. sniew), sin in the religious sense is expressed by pop, borrowed from Bengali (pap, Sanskrit papa), Thus we may infer that the ancient Khasi religion had no conception of postmortem punishment for sin, or of sin itself, in the moral sense, The term sang, approximately equivalent to 'tabeo', conveys, however, the idea of guilt in the context of such serious infringements of social custom as incest and adultery.

The word for 'to write' is thoh, which also means 'to scratch', the original meaning of the Indo-Aryan root likh, which in all Indo-Aryan languages now has the primary sense of 'to write'. It is thus possible that the Khasis had some form of script before their contact with the Aryans, but it seems more likely, in view of other evidence, that this word came to mean 'to write' only after contact with Indo-

2. See below, pp. 87f.

<sup>1.</sup> C.f. Lish, Calcutta Christian Observer, 1838, p. 139; Bertrand, Secret Lands where Women Reign, p. 129.

Aryan speakers.1

The numerals up to one hundred are of Mon-Khmer origin. Spah, meaning 'a hundred', however, has no Mon-Khmer cognates, and may be a Tibeto-Burman loan-word. Numerals for one thousand (hajar) and beyond are borrowed from Indo-Aryan languages.

One loan-word of some interest is that for 'the earth', pyrthei. At first sight this suggests the Sanskrit prthvi or prthivi, with the same meaning, no doubt borrowed through Bengali, in which language the word is commonly used. The initial syllable suggests the influence of the old Sanskrit pronunciation of the vocalic r rather than the common Bengali pronunciation as prithivi or pithivi. But the vocalic r was lost in common speech well before the beginning of the Christian era, as is attested by the Asokan inscriptions and much other evidence, and it is hardly credible that the Khasis came in close contact with Indo-Aryan speakers at such an early period, when there is no evidence of Aryan penetration in either Sylhet or Assam. We have been able to find no other words which indicate borrowing direct from Sanskrit. In fact in the eastern languages of India words derived from prthivi appear to be late revivals. A root \* ti' or \*tih, meaning 'earth', is almost universal in the Austro-Asiatic languahes, and forms with a p- suffix are also attested. Hence it appears that this word is also indigenous, despite its striking resemblance to Indo-Aryan.4

Little can be gathered from the names by which the speakers of the various Khasi dialects are known. No reasonable etymology of the

<sup>1. &#</sup>x27;Many words meaning "to write" in Mon-Khmer languages are extensions of words originally referring to incised decorations on artefacts of bamboo etc. These decorations were certainly in some cases pictographic or at least had memoric reference to myths.' (Mr H. L. Shorto, personal communication, 15 May, 1967.)

The suggestion of Professor Eugénie Henderson.

<sup>3.</sup> Turner, <u>Dictionary of Indo-Aryan Languages</u>, s. v. 4. The conclusion of Mr H. L. Shorto. (Unpublished personal communication, 15 May, 1967.)

word Khasi has yet been suggested. The word Synteng is equally obscure. It is chiefly used by the highland Khasis, since modern Syntengs generally prefer to call themselves Pnar, which has no other obvious meaning, but may have some etymological connection with nar, 'iron', and have a lost connotation of hardness. The popular etymology of Synteng is from sah-teng, meaning 'left behind', and this is believed to refer to the fact that the Syntengs are those left behind in the earlier home of the Khasis by pioneers who settled in the higher region of the hills at an early but unspecified period. This etymology has no sound basis linguistically, and can be ignored. Professor S.K. Chatterji has suggested that the word Synteng is in fact etymologically connected with Jaintia, the name by which the Syntengs are most widely known outside their own territory. The modern Synteng tends to pronounce this word as Santein, especially if he is uneducated. The sibilant pronounced rather as sh in Synteng is pronounced as s in Khasi and as z in War. In Assamese and various eastern dialects of Bengali j is pronounced as z. Thus a word such as Zanteiff might easily be Sanskritized as Jayanti, the legendary queen of Jayantipura, the capital of the Hinduized Syntengs.

### The Written Language

Our ignorance as to the historical development of the Khasi language is largely due to the fact that it had no script of its own, and written Khasi is little more than a hundred years old. According to their own tradition, the Khasis once had a script, but they lost it as a result of a great flood which brought to an end their once flourishing civilization. The story goes that there were only two survivors of this flood, one a <u>Dkhar</u>, or plainsman, and the other a Khasi. Both escaped by swimming a great river, and both had with them their traditional books of knowledge. The <u>Dkhar</u> saved his book of knowledge by tying it to his hair, but the Khasi held his book in his mouth, and swallowed it while swimming. From this time the plainsmen have been

<sup>1.</sup> Kirāta-jana-krti, p. 85.

literate, while the Khasis have had no script or written literature. I We have no evidence until the nineteenth century of any attempt to commit the Khasi language to writing. The Synteng rājās transacted their state business in Bengali, since their subjects in the plains around Jaintiapur were Bengalis and they employed Bengali clerks. It appears that even the hill rājās or syiems employed Bengalis for administrative purposes as clerks and scribes at the end of the period of their freedom. The Assamese <u>Burañjīs</u> contain numerous transcripts, purporting to be verbatim copies of the official letters sent by the Jaintia rājās to the Ahom kings; these are all in fairly heavily Sanskritized Assamese, little different from the Bengali of the time, and there is no reference to their having been translated from any other language.

The first translation of the Bible into Khasi was begun in 1813 and completed in 1824 by one Krishna Chandra Pal, who was among the first converts of the famous missionary William Carey, of the Serampur Baptist Mission. Pal was a Bengali who had lived in the region, and the dialect used was that of Shella or the War country. This translation used the Bengali script.<sup>2</sup>

It was not until the advent of the Welsh Presbyterian Mission that the Cherrapunji form of Khasi was adopted as the standard literary language. Cherrapunji had in the meantime become the civil and military headquarters of the East India Company in these parts. In 1841 the Roman script replaced the Bengali script for writing Khasi, as the missionaries found that it met the simple phonetic requirements of Khasi better than the Bengali, which was designed for the Indo-Aryan phonetic system.

The work of the missionaries, though it helped the spread of

<sup>1.</sup> Rafy, Folktales of the Khasis, pp. 137-39; Bareh, Short History of Khasi Literature, pp. 10-11.

2. Bareh, op. cit., p. 21; Pryse, Khasia Language, p. 125; Hooper, Bible Translation, p. 154.

education, has done much to standardize the language and thus to destroy many of the idiomatic phrases and day-to-day words of earlier Khasi speech, in simplifying and regularizing Khasi for practical purposes. One still hears the old colloquial words and phrases in incantations and poems recited by the members of older generations, but all modern books are written in a simpler style of standard Khasi. Moreover the missionaries themselves, though they were not Indians, tried to force Khasi into the grammatical framework of the Indo-Aryan languages. Children are still taught with standard grammars in which the noun is given eight cases like those of Sanskrit, when in fact it is uninflected, and governed by appropriate particles indicating relation to other nouns and number.

#### Conclusions from the Linguistic Evidence

The data that we have discussed above suggest that, before close contact with Indo-Aryan speakers, the Khasis were by no means barbarous, but had developed a fairly advanced material culture. They were still living as tribes, without a developed system of government, without coinage, and apparently without a system of writing. But they knew the crafts of agriculture, metal working, weaving and pottery, and had most of the usual domestic animals of South-east Asia, with the exception of the horse.

As well as throwing light on their early material culture, this evidence may also be used to suggest the approximate time of the first close contact of the Khasis with speakers of Indo-Aryan languages. From the fact that the Khasis have their own word for iron we may suggest that the earliest possible date is a little before the Christian era, though, as we have seen, the evidence is not conclusive.

All the other evidence is more compatible with a much later

<sup>1.</sup> See above, p. 74 .

date. No word in Khasi, to the best of our knowledge, is directly derived from Sanskrit, or even from a Middle Indo-Aryan Prakrit. On the other hand many very common words are ultimately derived from Arabic and Persian, and we cannot attribute their entry into Khasi to a date earlier than about A.D. 1300, when the last Sena kings were extirpated from East Bengal by the Muslim invaders. In respect of loan-words. Khasi contrasts strikingly with certain other non-Indo-Aryan languages of India, such as Tamil, which contains numerous common words evidently borrowed at a very early period from Sanskrit or Prakrit and subjected to the same phonetic development as the words of the indigenous language. Unlike Tamil, Khasi does not possess a written literature going back two thousand years, but if such words existed in Khasi their early acquisition could be shown by linguistic analysis. If the Khasis had been living in their present homeland in earlier times one would expect some traces of this in their language, in the form of Indo-Aryan loan-words of earlier origin.

Ignoring all legend and tradition, which would place the advent of Aryan civilization much earlier, the evidence of inscriptions proves that the kingdom of Kāmarūpa, with its headquarters near the present Gauhati, was using Sanskrit as its official language in the fourth century A. D. Sanskrit inscriptions appear in East Bengal from the fifth century onwards. By this time the Khasi and Jaintia Hills were bordered on both sides by Indo-Aryan Hinduized kingdoms. The fact that these kingdoms left no clear traces on the language of the Khasis suggests that the latter were not living in their present home at the time. We must of course recognize that the Khasi and Jaintia Hills are rather difficult of access, and it might be possible for a primitive

l. E.g. Tamil avai (Sanskrit sabhē, 'assembly'), aiyyar (Sanskrit arya), irasu (Sanskrit rājā); Malayalam tāmutirī (Sanskrit sāmudrin, the ruler of Calicut), etc.

Chaudhuri, <u>HCA</u>, pp. 21, 147.
 Sirear, <u>Select Inscriptions</u>, pp. 331-35 (Tippera, A.D. 507);
 pp. 342-45 (Bogra district, A.D. 448); pp. 346-49 (Rajshahi district, A.D. 479).

people living in this area deliberately to avoid all close contact with other peoples for centuries. But there is no reason to believe that the Khasis, who in the eighteenth century regularly raided the plains for slaves and cattle, and whose merchants traded with both Assam and Bengal, were ever cut off from the more civilized peoples to the north and south of them.

As far as the Indo-Aryan loan-words are concerned, it seems that more are derived from Bengali than from Assamese. This may be explained by the fact that, though the Khasis and Jaintias were politically influenced more strongly by the Kochs and Ahoms, and were often tributary to them, they had closer cultural contacts with the Bengalis of Sylhet, with whom they traded freely and whom their chiefs employed as craftsmen and scribes.

<sup>1.</sup> The suggestion of Dr Lili Rabel that Assamese loan-words in Khasi are 'extremely rare' (Khasi, a Language of Assam, p. 39) is certainly not true. The reason given for this, that it is 'undoubtedly a consequence of the Khasis' low estimation of Assamese culture and language', is equally untrue to the best of our knowledge. We suspect that Dr Rabel generalized from the inaccurate statements of her informants. She states that dkhar, meaning 'plainsman' is 'an extremely derogative (sic) term' (ibid., p. 182, n. 15). This is also untrue in our experience. Dr Rabel's treatment of loan-words is in fact very inaccurate, since her knowledge of Indo-Aryan languages was evidently rather inadequate for her task.

### Chapter V

# HISTORY OF THE JAINTIA KINGS -- I

#### Origins

Is various Sanskrit sources, notably the chronicle of Kashmir, Kalhana's <u>Rājataranginī</u>, reference is made to a hill people called <u>Khaśa</u>. These dwelt chiefly in the mountains of southern Kashmir, where their descendants are to be found to this day. Though they have Mongoloid blood, these people are very different in race, language and custom from the Khasis of Assam, and the resemblance in the names must be coincidental, though some efforts have been made to connect them.

The earliest datable literary reference to the Khasis is to be found in Sankaradeva's Assamese paraphrase of the Bhagavata Purana, composed about A.D. 1500. Sankaradeva replaces a list of tribal peoples given in the original Sanskrit text with other names better known to his Assamese audience. Here the Khasis are mentioned with the Kacharis, the Garos, the Miris, the Ahoms (Asama) and several other peoples as wicked folk, who by devotion to Krana may yet be saved from rebirth and find the joys of heaven.

Kirāta-Hūn-Andhra-Pulinda-Pukkasā Abhīra-Kankā-Yavanah Khas-Adayah, ye 'nye ca papā yad-apāsray-Asrayah Sudhyanti; tasmai prabhavisnave namah.

(Ehāgavata Purāna, ii, iv, 18, ed. Burnouf, vol.i, p. 103.)

Note that the word Khasa occurs in the latter list. No doubt Sankaradeva interpreted it to mean the Khasis, who must have been well known to him.

We owe this quotation to Dr S. Rajaguru, who notes it, without giving full reference, on p. 118 of his unpublished thesis, <u>Medieval Assamese Society . . . 1228-1826</u> (Gauhati University, 1966).

<sup>1.</sup> Ruben, Eisenschmiede. . , p. 299.
2. Kirāta, Kachārī, Khācī, Gāro, Mirī, Yavana, Kańka, Govāla, Asama, Maluka, Dhuva ye, Turuka, Kuvaca, Mleccha, Candāla; Ano pāpī nara, Krana-sevakara-sangata, pabitra haya; bhakati labhiyā, samsāra tariyī, Baikunthe sukhe calaya.
(Sankaradeva Srīmad Bhāgavata, ii, 474-75, ed. Dattabaruvā, p. 38.)
The original Sanskrit is as follows:

The traditions of the Khasi-Syntengs, however, look back to a much remoter antiquity. Like many other peoples who came in contact with Hinduism, the Khasis liked to link their history with the legends of the Mahābhārata. There is a story still current among them that they acquired their great skill in archery from the hero Arjuna himself, who is said not only to have taught the people how to use the bow and arrow, but also to have taken a wife from among them. In this study we ignore for lack of space some of the more fantastic theories, based partly on such untrustworthy legends and traditions, and partly on superficial linguistic resemblances and imaginary nineteenth century ethnological ideas. These have no solid basis, though they are widely believed even by educated Khasis, and to some extent at least have influenced the few Khasis who have tried to write in a scholarly manner about their own history.

In fact we have very few reliable references to the history of the hill Khasis before the nineteenth century, but the Jaintia kingdom is better served, and the history of its Hinduized kings can in part be traced, mainly from records preserved in the <u>Buranjis</u> of Assam.

## The Jaintia Kingdom

According to tradition, in the days of Yudhisthira, the victor of the Mahabharata war, the Jaintia territory was ruled by a brahman king named Indrasena, and many brahmans came from all over India to dwell in his kingdom. Unfortunately Indrasena offended Bhima, the brother of Yudhisthira, when he refused to visit him and do homage to the Papdavas. As a punishment Bhima attacked Indrasena's kingdom, captured him, and had him castrated. Hence the Jaintia king was cal-

l. We have no literary reference for this tradition, which is from personal knowledge.

<sup>2.</sup> Typical examples may be found in the works of D. Neog, mentioned the bibliography, and of R.M. Nath (especially The Back-ground (sic) of Assamese Gulture, ch.xvi).

led Khasi, or 'castrated', and hence Jaintia is still known as Khaspur.

This tradition needs little attention, as it is typical of the legendary etymologies which are given in Indian texts to the mames of many peoples and families. This particular example must have arisen at a comparatively late period, since the word <u>thast</u>, in the sense of 'eumuch' is of Arabic origin and could not have been known until some time after the Muslim conquest of Bengal in the early thirteenth century. The same etymology occurs elsewhere in the <u>Burafist</u> tradition, and only suggests that the Khasis were looked on with a certain amount of scorn by the Assamese chroniclers.

Despite the unfortunate fate of Indrasena it was believed that the line of brahman kings continued, and the names of five of them, Kedäreśvar, Dhaneśvar, Kapdapa, Māṇik and Jayanta, are given. While we can find no confirmation of the existence of these kings, the tradition suggests that the region had come under the influence of orthodoxy before the setting up of the Jaintia kingdom, and the list may represent a series of small Hindu chieftains who ruled there under the suzerainty of the Senas during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, before eastern Bengal came under Muslim domination. There are, moreover, a few passing and not very informative references to the land of Jayanta in Sanskrit literature, and these also suggest that it was already partially Hinduized at an early period. 4

Jayanta, according to legend, was followed by his daughter Jayantidevi, and at this point the tradition becomes more detailed, with an interesting story which occurs in various versions.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> JB, 1, p. 1.

<sup>2.</sup> See below, p. 109.

<sup>3.</sup> JB, 2, p. 1.

<sup>4.</sup> Ali, History of Jaintia, p. 6.

<sup>5.</sup> The earliest record of this tradition is that of Wade (Account of Assam, ed. Sharma, pp. 36-45). This account differs in certain details from those of the Buraniis, but not in any important points.

### The Legend of Jayantidevi and Bargohain

According to the first of the <u>Burafiji</u> stories Jayanta had no son to succeed him. He prayed to the goddess Gauri, who revealed herself to him in a dream. She foretold that he would become the father of a daughter who would be a partial incarnation of the goddess, who was to be named Jayanti, and who would rule as queen in her own right. A girl was born, and was named Jayanti. When she was of marriageable age the king tried to find her a suitable husband, but he failed. At last he married her to one Landhäbär, the son of a court priest. After this he consecrated Jayanti as queen under the throne-name of Rapisimha, and then he committed ritual suicide in honour of the goddess.

One day, while Landhabar was performing a <u>vrata</u> before the image of the goddess, he became enamoured of her, and tried to embrace her. For this sacrilege the goddess cursed him that his knowledge of the <u>Satras</u> would be forgotten, and that he would become a <u>mleccha</u> or barbarian. Later Landhabar had intercourse with Jayanti during her menstrual period. His action so annoyed her that she told him that he was not to see her again. After this incident Landhabar broke all caste rules and became completely dissolute. He ran away and took refuge in the home of a Garo named Suttanga, who had no family of his own. Jayanti soon repented of expelling her husband, and felt that she had not been a good wife to him. She prayed to the goddess, who promised

<sup>1.</sup> JB, 2, p. 1.

<sup>2.</sup> Ibid., 3, p. 2.

<sup>3. &</sup>lt;u>Ibid.</u>, 4, p. 2. 4. <u>Ibid.</u>, 5, p. 2.

<sup>5.</sup> Ibid., 6, pp. 2-3. The reference to Suttanga as a Garo has confused S.K. Bhuyan (Introduction to Deodhal Asam Buranii translation, p. 26), rather surprisingly. The term appears in the Buraniis, as in Bengali works and early English accounts such as that of Hamilton (Account of Assam, pp. 84-86) in contexts which show that it meant any inhabitant of the mountains between Assam and Bengal. Since Professor Bhuyan edited the work of Hamilton it is particularly surprising that he goes to pains to explain why a member of the people nowadays called Garo should be associated with the legend of the origin of the Syntengs.

to see that Landhaber was happy. The goddess also told her that, when Langhabar went fishing in a stream near Suttenga's house, he would catch a fish and out of its belly would come a girl called Matsyedari, who would become his wife and bear him a son. This happened as foretold. The boy was called Bargohain, and as he grew up the family prospered. When Mehamad Cultan, the local chief of Cultanpur, died, Landhabar took the throne with the support of the populace, assuming the title of Culjan. His son Bergohain became chief after him.

The second version of the legend tells us of the birth of Bergohāin without introducing Landhābār. One day a Garo widower from the village of Narttanga went out fishing and caught a fish. He took it home, but he decided not to eat it immediately, but to let it rot and then fry the maggets produced in it. A few days later, when he came home he found that all his housework had been done for him by a divine maiden (devakanyā), who was born from the fish. He asked her who she was and she said that she was a divine maiden who would bear him a son who would become a great king. It came to pass as she had said and a son was born to the couple who grew up to become a brave young chief, one day while he was out hunting one of his dogs ran away and was caught by Jayantidevi. Her capture of his hunting dog was challenged by the youth, who attacked her kingdom. When Jayantidevi saw him she said, 'he is the son of my younger sister', and gave him her kingdom. He then took the name of Bergohain.

A third version of the story of the birth of Bargohāin is given in the Jayantiya Burafiji, immediately after that summarized above. It

JB. 7. p. 3. Ibid. 8-10, pp. 3-4.

Ibid., 10, pp. 4-5. Note that the letter 5 in Assamese, here transliterated as o, is regularly pronounced as s or ts.

Ibid., 20, p. 8. 4. Ibid., 21, p.8.

<sup>5.</sup> Ihid., 22, p. 9.

Ibid., 24, P. 9.

commences with the words: Om namo Ganesaya. Jayantar jammar katha, 'Reverence to Ganesa. The account of the genealogy of Jayanta.' This insertion in the main text indicates that the chronicler took it from a separate source, of which he even transcribed the opening words. According to Professor Bhuyan's list of the manuscripts from which he compiled the published Jayantiva Burafili, the passage occurs only in the second chief manuscript of the collection made by him, and follows immediately after the first version of the legend, as given in that source (referred to by Bhuyan as 'Source No. 2'). The transcription of the introductory mantra and the title, together with the fact that the name of one of the characters of the story, Landhabar, is here changed to Landabar, shows clearly that this version of the story is from a completely different source.

According to this version there was a Garo named Sutaigā who once went out fishing and caught a big barālī fish in his trap. When he cut it up a divine maiden came out if its belly. He called her his daughter and brought her up. She became the wife of Lantābār, who is here referred to simply as a Garo. Later she gave birth to a boy who was named Bargohāīn. When Bargohāīn grew up he was made general by the local chief, and thus he bacame a very important man. Bargohāīn was sent as an envoy to Jayantīdevī, who was an apsaras, a sort of fairy or demigoddess, and who worshipped an image of Bhavānī. When she saw Bargohāīn, she said, as in the second version of the legend, 'He is my sister's son', but she made no reference to Lautābār, who according to the other versions was her rejected husband. Jayantīdevī gave Bargohāīn a ten-armed image of the goddess, and put him in charge of her kingdom. 'In this kingdom', she said, the king's son

<sup>1.</sup> JB, 26, p. 10.

<sup>2.</sup> Ibid., introduction, p. vi.

<sup>3. &</sup>lt;u>Ibid.</u>, 26, p. 10. 4. <u>Ibid.</u>, 27, p. 10.

shall not become king; the younger sister's son shall become king. The same custom, according to the text, prevailed in the Jaintia king-dom at the time of writing.

A fourth version of the legend tells that Bergohain was the son of Matsyodari by Jayantidevi's rejected husband, who had become the ruler of a small kingdom. One day while Bargohain was out hunting he saw a beautiful dog which he tried to catch. It fled and he chased it to Jaintia, where he met the queen Ranisimha. who invited him to her court. She treated him as her son. While he was at her court he defeated a king called Jahirbbeg Cultan. 4 She learnt from Bargohain that he was the son of her husband by Matsycdari, who had been createn in her likeness through her prayers. Matayodari was invited to live at her court and Jayantidevi made Bargohain king, after which she vanished to the lower regions. Bargohain tried to dig her up, but he could not find her. He saw her in a dream, and she told him to make a copper image of her and wormin it. He did so. The place where she vanished was called Muktipur. Later Jayantidevi appeared again to Bargohain in a dream and told him that her image was to be worshipped always, and if it was neglected or damaged the kingdom would perish.

A version of this story current among the hill Syntengs was collected by Hutton some forty years ago from a resident of Jowai. The same story is given in greater detail by Lyngdoh. It contains several interesting folklore elements, but it seems to have even less historical content, if this is possible, than the Jaintia traditions preserved in the <u>Javantivā Buraāji</u> sources. According to this version a certain Loh Ryndi, who appears to be the same as Landhābār, caught a fish which turned into a girl who bore him two daughters, Ka

<sup>1.</sup> JB, 27, p. 10.

<sup>2.</sup> Ibid., 11, p. 5.

<sup>3.</sup> Ibid., 12, p. 5.

<sup>4.</sup> Ibid., 13, pp. 5-6.

<sup>5.</sup> Ibid., 14, p. 6.

<sup>6. &</sup>lt;u>Ibid.</u>, 16, p. 6. 7. <u>Ibid.</u>, 16, pp. 6-7.

<sup>8.</sup> Ibid., 17, p. 7.

<sup>9.</sup> JASB, xxii, 1929, pp. 533-34. 10. Ki Sylem Khasi bad Synteng, pp. 8-13.

Raputing and Ka Rapunga, from whom the ruling families of Nartiang and Jaintia respectively were descended. Some Synteng clans to this day taboo the eating of certain types of fish, and believe themselves to be descended from fish, a possible survival of totemism.

The legends connecting Bargohāin with Jayantīdevī seem to have been developed in order to give legitimacy to a new line of rulers who came down from the hills to govern Jayantīpur. Their leader is probably historical, though the name Bargohāin is evidently a title which he assumed on gaining power, and we do not know his real name. The queen Jayantīdevī, of divine origin, seems to be wholly fictitious, a personification of the local tutelary mother goddess.

The first version of the story links Bargohāin by blood with the plainsmen and with the previous dynasty, making him the son of the rejected husband of Jayantīdevī. This seems more sophisticated than the second and third versions, which are less definite in connecting Bargohāīn with the queen. We therefore suggest that these are earlier versions. Both make much of the girl born from the fish, Matsyodarī, but her connection with the semi-divine queen is not very clear, being mentioned almost as an afterthought. In the second version the Garo Sutangā and not Landhābār is made the father of Bargohāīn, while in the third Landhābār is referred to merely as a Garo, and in no way connected with Jayantīdevī. Possibly this part of the story is based on an early Synteng tradition of a charismatic leader born of a fish, which was brought by the conquerors to Jaintia and adapted as a means of legitimizing the royal family.

The name Sutanga suggests Sutnga, a village in the Jaintia Hills, in the region of Nartiang, to which the 'Garo Sutanga' is said to have belonged. The district around Nartiang was evidently an important centre of early Synteng culture, and it contains many large megalithic structures. Sutnga is still said by the local inhabitants

to be the original capital of the Jaintia kings. The story of the fish-maiden as the ancestress of the rulers of Jaintia is still known in the popular folklore of Nartiang, and the local Syntengs remember those kings as syiem Nartiang, since this was their summer capital.

The name of Bargohain's father in most versions of the legend is Landhabar, and in the Buranjis the rulers of Jayanta are often referred to, especially in their correspondence with the Ahom kings, as Landha Cultan (a rare example of a non-Muslim dynasty taking this title) or Landha Raja, which was apperently one of the regular royal titles of the Jaintia kings. We suggest that the word Landha is in fact the Khasi word Lyngdoh, meaning 'a priest'. In several clans the tribal priest was at the same time the secular chief. Landhabar is said in the first version of the legend to have been the son of the purchita of the old Jaintia line , and was therefore thought of as a brahman who had lost his purity. This feature of the story also links him with the priesthood. If, as S. K. Chatterji has suggested, the modern Khasi half-vowel now written y was originally pronounced as a short a, this would account for the difference in the first vowel. The h in lyngdoh, representing in this case a glottal stop, would not be pronounced by Bengali or Assamese speakers. The Khasi o is generally pronounced as a back vowel () and this is easily confused with an a sound by Bengalis and Assamese. Since neither Bengali nor Assamese possesses a v or w sound, and the Sanskrit v is regularly pronounced as b, the final syllable of Landhabar's name may represent the Khasi War, a term specifically used for the inhabitants of the south-western slopes of the Khasi and Jaintia Hills, but also loosely applied to the Syntengs living at lower altitudes in the south-eastern part of the hills. The first element of Loh Ryndi, the

<sup>1.</sup> Bhuyan, introduction to English translation of Deodhai Buranji, p. 25.

<sup>2.</sup> See below, p.194.

<sup>3.</sup> See above, p. 87.

name of the ancestor of the Jaintia ruling family in the Synteng legend, may also be a form of <u>lyngdoh</u>, since in colloquial village Khasi syllables are often run together in this way.

The legend of Jayantidevi and Bargohāin served not only to legitimize the Synteng conquerors of Jaintiapur, but also to establish a precedent for their matrilinear succession, which was ordained by the divine queen before she disappeared. This part of the story suggests that the previous rulers had followed a normal patrilinear system of succession. We believe that the story in its various versions is a reflection of the occupation of the plains around Jaintiapur by Synteng tribesmen, who replaced the local rulers, whether Muslim or Hindu, and took over the local Hindu goddess as their patron deity. They were led by a chief who was the son of a tribal priest and who took the title Bargohāin. His original name is not known, and even the oral legends preserve this Assamese title as his proper name.

The tradition gives no dates for Bargohāin, though the association of Muslims with the story suggests that his conquest was never thought of as having taken place at a very early period. Of the two Muslim names in the various versions of the story that of Mahamad Cultān' is useless, since so many chiefs and rulers in Bengal have had the name Muhammad that this one cannot be identified. The only historical counterpart that we have been able to find for the name Jāhirbbeg Cultān in the fourth version of the legend is Zāhid Khān or Zāhid Beg Bukharī, the subshdār of Koch during the campaign in the east in the reign of Shāh Jahān. This Muslim chief may be the prototype of the Jāhirbbeg mentioned in the story, but if this is so the reference is quite unhistorical, since it is certain that the

<sup>1.</sup> Mirza Nathan, Bahāristān, tr. Borah, pp. 712 ff.

the Jaintia kings were well established by this time. The name of Muhammad Sultan of Sultanpur may have been introduced as an imaginative explanation of the fact that the Jaintia kings were known by the title of Landha Cultan, a phrase which often occurs in the Burafils but is nowhere explained. Sultanpur, the headquarters of 'Mahamad Cultan' in the story, is a small town on the edge of the plain about twenty miles to the west of Jaintiapur. The introduction of this Muslim ruler into the story may indicate that before the establishment of the Synteng kingdom at Jaintiapur the district had been controlled by Muslim chiefs ruling from this town.

Some idea of the date of the Synteng conquest of Jaintiapur may be gathered from the lists of the successors of Bargohāīn, given in the various <u>Burañjī</u> manuscripts collected by Professor Bhuyan, though these lists are not wholly consistent. The following names are given in the various documents from which the <u>Jayantīyā Burañjī</u> was compiled:

- (A) i. Barparbbatrāl; ii. Bijaymāņik; iii. Rāmdharmāņik; iv. Dharmāņik.
- (B) i. Bijaymānik; ii. Parbbatrāl; iii. Dhanmānik.
- (C) i. Bijaymānik; ii. Parbbatrāī; iii. Dhammānik.
- (D) i. Barparbbatrāī; ii. Bijaymānik; iii. Rāmdharmānik; iv. Dhanmānik.

Gait produced a longer list of seven names between Parbbatrāi and Dhanmānik, whose date can be fixed fairly accurately, and, by a process of counting sixteen years per reign, he placed Parbbatrāi in A.D. 1516. He looked on this ruler as the conqueror of the plains. In fact the <u>Buranjī</u> material tells us little about this king, while

<sup>1.</sup> JB, 18, p. 7.

<sup>2.</sup> Ibid., 25, p. 9.

<sup>3.</sup> Ibid., 28, p. 10.

<sup>4.</sup> Ibid., 331, p. 168.

<sup>5.</sup> History of Assam, 3rd ed., p. 313.

the whole weight of the tradition favours the ruler referred to as Bargohāin as the conqueror. We believe that Gait's method is erroneous. Dhanmānik, who died in A.D. 1605, is known to have fought with Yaśmārāyan king of Kachar, who issued a coin with a date equivalent to A.D. 1583. At least two and probably three kings intervened between Bargohāin and Dhanmānik. Thus it appears that Bargohāin's conquest of Jaintia took place fairly early in the sixteenth century. Beyond that we cannot be more precise.

#### The Successors of Bargohain

The <u>Jayantiva Burafiji</u>, as edited by Professor Bhuyan, gives four separate lists of the kings who succeeded Bargohāins

i. JB, 18, p.7. 11. JB, 25, p. 9. 111. JB, 28, p. 10. iv. JB, 333, p. 168.

Barparbatrāt	Bijaymānik	Bijaymānik	Barparbatray
Bijaymānik	Parbatrai	Parbatray	Bijaymanik
Rämdharmanik	Dhanmanik	Dhanmanik	Ramdharmanik
Dhanmanik	Yasmānik	Randharmanik	Dhanmanik
Yasmānik	Sundarrai	Yasmānik	Yasmanik
Sondarrāi	Yasmatrai	Sondarray	Sondarray
Saruparbatrāi	Ranisimha	Barparbatray	Saruparbatray
Yasmatrai	Laksmīsimha	Yasmatsimha	Yasmatsimha
(killed by)	"不知道"的"自己"。 第15章		
Mänsimha	Pratapsimha	Mānsimha	Mansimha
(killed by)		<b>第二十二十二十二十二十二十二十二十二十二十二十二十二十二十二十二十二十二十二十</b>	
Pratapsimha	Rāmsimha	Pratapsinha	Pratapsimha
(killed by)			
Laksmīsimha	Sarukomvar	Laksmīsimha	Lakemisimha
(killed by)		The second second	
Rāmsimha	是一个"是"	Ramainha	Rāmsimha

Gait gives a longer list of rulers before Dhanmanik, which, he says, 'the inhabitants of the Jaintia parganas preserve in their tra-

3. Botham, JASB, 1912, p. 556.

5. This list was the one known to Wade (Account of Assam, ed. Sharma,

p. 46), who gives it in crudely phonetic spelling.

JB, 36, p. 13.
 See below, p.107.

<sup>4.</sup> Bareh (History and Culture of the Khasi People, p. 64) places 'Burro Gohain, the first Jaintia Syiem . . . around 1250 A.D.' He gives no reasons for this date, which is quite impossible if there is any truth whatever in the <u>Buranji</u> genealogies. His chronological scheme is apparently based on oral traditions recorded comparatively recently and officially supported by the Synteng <u>dorbar</u> or tribal council. It is quite impossible in the light of the recorded evidence.

ditions'. This reads:

Parbat Rāy Majhā Gosāīn Burhā Parbat Rāy Bar Gosāīn Bijay Māņik Pratāp Rāy Dhan Māṇik

This list is very different from those given in the <u>Burafijis</u>. It is repeated by Bareh, and is apparently accepted by modern Jaintias, but we can find no reliable source for it and it is evidently corrupt.

We omit it from our considerations.

Ali gives the name of the predecessor of Dhanmanik as Pratap Narayan, but we can find no other source for this statement.

Of the four lists given in the Burafils, i and iv are virtually the same, except that in iv Yasmatsimha replaces Yasmatrai and i gives certain details about the last four kings, which iv does not. The former tells us that Mansimha, Pratapsimha, Laksmisimha and Ramsimha each murdered his predecessor. It seems either that the author of iv copied from i and made a variation in the name of Yasmatrai or that both copied from the same source. Thus list iv may be ignored. The author of ii not only mistakenly writes Ranisimha for Mānsimha but forgets altogether to include Rāmdharmānik, who is mentioned in the other three lists, although not in the same order. Rapisimha is not mentioned in any of the other lists, and is in fact the throne name of the legendary Jayantidevi, no doubt included through careless copying. List ii may also be discarded in the face of these obvious mistakes. The author of list iii carelessly places Ramdharmanik out of order, since it is known from the Buranii narrative that Yasmanik, a nephew of Dhanmanik, succeeded the latter.

4. See below, p.117.

<sup>1.</sup> History of Assam, 3rd ed., p. 313. Gait appears to have known nothing about the legends of Jayantidevi and Bargohain, and believed that Parbatrai was the founder of the Jaintia kingdom.

<sup>2.</sup> History and Culture of the Khasi People, pp. 68-69.

<sup>3.</sup> History of Jaintis, p. 13.

His placing Barparbatray later than Parbatray, who must be the same as the Saruparbatrai of lists 1 and iv, seems less probable than the order given in list i, since these are obviously two kings of the same name, the former being more illustrious than the latter (who bears the epithet saru, 'miner', in contrast to bar, 'great'). It would be expected that the lesser king would take his name from the greater, and if the first Parbatray had been comparatively insignificant no later ruler would have adopted such a name.

List i thus seems intrinsically more likely to be correct than the others. Moreover its author gives brief notes about some of the kings, which suggests that at least he is not repeating names mechanically.

## The Koch Conquest of Jaintia

3.

The earliest definitely datable event in the history of the Jaintia kingdom is its conquest by the Kochs in the reign of the great Koch king Naranārāyan (1540-86). The kingdom of Jaintla was attacked and its king was killed by Chilarai, the brother of Naranarayan and a brilliant general. The dead King's son was installed on the Jaintia throne as a tributary chief of the Kochs, with an annual tribute of 100 horses, 10,000 rupees, 1,000 gold coins and 100 swords. The Jaintis king was also forbidden to mint coins in his own name. 2 Until 1731 no king of Jaintia put his name on coins, which were only inscribed : 'Ruler of Jaintia'. This practice may be due to the memory of Koch suzerainty, but it is equally possible that the whole account of the ban on minting coins is based on this very fact, and

This according to the Koch chronicler, who seems to have been mistaken, not being fully aware of the Jaintia system of succession through the sister's son, which is certainly attested in the early seventeenth century. (See below, p. 117.)

<sup>2.</sup> Darrang Raj Vandavali, pp. 81-92. C. f. AB, 71, p. 40; Acharyya, History of Medieval Assam, p. 200. Ali (History of Jaintia, p. 12) gives the date of the battle as 1564, which is reasonable, though he does not mention his source. His list of the annual tribute peid to the Koch king differs considerably from that given above. We suspect that he used another edition or a manuscript version of the Koch chronicle. Gait (JASB, Lxiv, pp. 242-43) suggests that this account shows that even at this early date the Jaintias had a mint, and issued coins of their own. If this is the case it is surprising that no Jaintia coins earlier than 1669 have survived. Gait, History of Assam, 3rd ed., p. 54.

is an attempt on the part of the author of the Koch chronicle to explain why no royal names were inscribed on the Jaintia coinage. Chiliaral later attacked and conquered Sylhet.

The name of the Jaintia king who was defeated and killed is not mentioned, but it must have been either Bijaymānik or Rāmdharmānik. It could not have been Dharmānik since the date of his death was 1605, and Narnārāyan ruled from 1540 to 1586. Chilārāi predeceased his brother, dying about 1576, while campaigning against the Bengalis, and thus his campaign against the Jaintias must have taken place some time before this. Hence it is probable that the king killed by Chilārāī was Bijaymānik.

In the <u>Tripura Raimala</u> it is said that the Tripura king Braj Manikya invaded Jaintia at about the same time as the Koch. 4 Gait rejects this and Acharyya seems to agree with him. The story is one which does not invite credence, owing to the geographical factors involved and the lack of confirmatory evidence, but S. M. Ali accepts it.

## Dhanmanik (died c. 1605)

Among the conquests of the Kochs was the town and district of Dimarua, which was ruled by a vassal (prantesvar) who paid an annual tribute. According to the Asam Buranii the Koch control of Dimarua continued through the reign of Naranarayan's successor Raghunarayan or Raghudeb (1581-1603), but the next Koch king, Pari-

<sup>1.</sup> DRV, p. 87; Acharyya, op. cit., p. 202.

<sup>2.</sup> Gait, op. cit., p.56.

<sup>3.</sup> Ali (History of Jaintia, p. 11) mentions that Bijaymānik added the districts of Charikata Faliur ('sic), Jaflong and Dhargam to his kingdom, but does not state his source, which we have been unable to trace.

<sup>4.</sup> Acharyya, op. cit., p. 228.

<sup>5.</sup> Gait, op. cit., p. 314.

<sup>6.</sup> History of Jaintia, p. 12.

<sup>7.</sup> DRV, pp.86-99; AB, 103, p. 55.

keit (1603-13), was defeated by the Mughals, and this gave Dharmanik of Jaintia an opportunity to throw off his allegiance. He proceeded to attack Dimarua, and he captured the local Koch vassal, Prabhākar. If this account is correct the events must have taken place between 1603, the first year of Parikgit's reign, and 1605, the year of Dhanmanik's death. The Asam Buranji states that the Kachari king Yasnarayan claimed that Prabhakar was his own vassal, and asked that he be handed over to him. 2 Another account says that the Kachari king intervened when Prabhakar appealed for help to him. The refusal of the Jaintia king to return Prabhakar is said to have been the cause of the ensuing war between the Jaintias and the Kacharis. The Kacharis ris attacked Jaintia and defeated Dharmanik, who had to flee to the mountains. The Jaintia king, finding himself unable to regain his kingdom on the plains, which was occupied by the Kacharis, sued for terms. The Kachari king agreed to withdraw on condition that 'a sister of Yasmanik, Amarsonaray and Muktarani were given to him! . 4 This was done, whereupon he returned to his own kingdom. The Kachari king, having emerged victorious from the war, assumed the title Arimarddan, or 'Smiter of Foes'. He also changed the name of his city to Khaspur, because he had defeated the king of the Khasis.

A brief reference in the kinglist of the <u>Jayantiyā Burafiji</u> tells us that the Kachari king Yaśnārāyap attacked Jaintiapur and killed Muktārāpī, the sister of Dhanmāpik, and Amarsen, who was presumably her husband, and their son Yaśmāpik was taken to Kachar as a hostage. When Yaśnārāyap heard that Dhanmāpik was dead, he sent Yaśmāpik back to Jaintiapur as king. Thus Kachari suzerainty was temporarily imposed on Jaintia. This account, which is given as a passing com-

1. AB, 103, p. 55.

3. KB, p. 21.

6. JB, 18, p. 7.

<sup>2.</sup> Ibid. 90, pp. 49-49.

<sup>4.</sup> Yasmānikar bhaginī ek, Amarsonā rāī ek, Muktārānī ek. This clearly implies three persons.

<sup>5.</sup> AB, 90, pp. 48-49. The detail of the change of the name of the Kachari capital is evidently based on a false popular etymology. The same account is repeated in <u>KB</u>, (p. 21) where the title is given as Asimarddan. 'Smiter with his Sword'.

ment in the first list of kings given above, does not mention the dispute over Dimarua, which the <u>Asam Burafil</u> gives as the cause of the conflict between the two kingdoms.

The Jayantiya Buranii later gives another longer account in which a different cause of the conflict is described. It is said that the Kacharis used to act as middlemen in the trade between the Jaintias and the Bengalis, and would buy rice and other commodities from the Jaintias and sell them to the Bengalis at Mulagul. Since the Kacharis had to cross Jaintia country in the course of their trade, the Jaintias decided that they had the right to tax them. The Kacharis refused to pay the tax. A fight took place, in which the Jaintias captured four loads of rice from the Kacharis. This was reported to the Kachari king, who attacked the Jaintia kingdom. A very fierce battle was fought, which the Kacharis lost, but in a subsequent battle the Jaintias were defeated. The Jaintia king was captured, and it is said that he was castrated and called a Khasi, and was then released. From then on Mulagul became the boundary between the two countries. From then on Mulagul became the boundary between the two countries.

S. K. Bhuyan's source no. 9, which is given as an appendix to the main narrative of the <u>Javantiya Burafii</u>, gives yet another story. Apparently it commences in the midst of the war. A Jaintia chief, Lukurā Pātra, with a force of 'Narthangiyā Gāros' (i.e. hill Syntengs), attacked and destroyed eight villages of Kachar, killing three hundred persons. A Kachari chief, Tukuriyā, went to the Jaintia king and persuaded him to come to terms with Kachar. The Jaintia king, not suspecting any foul play, relaxed his precautions, and in the middle of the night the Kacharis attacked the Jaintias, killing 1,000

<sup>1.</sup> JB, 29, p. 11.

<sup>2. &</sup>lt;u>Ibid.</u>, 30, p. 11. 3. <u>Ibid.</u>, 316, p. 163.

<sup>4.</sup> Ibid., 317, p. 163.

men. The Jaintia king fled but he was overtaken by the Kacharis and 200 more of the Jaintias were slaughtered. He was humiliated, castrated and called a Khasi, and from that time the Kachari city of Brahmapur was called Khāspur. 2

The correct interpretation of these accounts is full of difficulties, especially in view of what appears to be a second war with the Kacharis, also attributed to the reign of Dharmanik. The chronological problems are considerable. According to the Asam Burafiji, as we have seen, Dhanmanik did not interfere in the affairs of Dimarus until Pariksit the king of the Kochs was attacked by the Bengalis, that is to say the Mughals. It was only in 1612 that serious hostilities between Pariksit and the Mughals began. Yet in 1606 the successor of Dhanmanik, Yasmanik, sent his daughter to the Ahom court. 4 We suggest that the statement of the Asam Burafiji linking the Jaintia conquest of Dimarua with the defeat of Pariksit must be ignored. In fact the Koch kingdom began to weaken with the death of Naranārāyan's brother Chilarai, and was later divided into two portions. The succeeding king of the eastern part of the kingdom, Raghudeb, suffered badly at the hands of the Afghan chief Isa Khan. Pariksit, the next king, was early involved in war with his uncle, Laksmi Nārāyan, the ruler of the western half of the former Koch kingdom, and it was in support of the latter that the nawab Islam Khan attacked Pariksit. We suggest that the Jaintia occupation of Dimarua took place at some time well before the accession of the Koch king Parikeit. Possibly the chronicler confused the defeat of Pariksit by Islam Khan with that of Raghudeb by Isa Khan nearly thirty years earlier. Such confusion would be

<sup>1.</sup> JB, 318, p. 163. 2. Ibid., 319, p. 164.

<sup>3.</sup> Gait, History of Assam, 3rd ed., p. 66.

<sup>4.</sup> JB. 46, p. 17. Gait (cp.cit., p. 315) gives the date as 1616, without mentioning his source, though he places Dhanmanik's death and Yasmanik's accession in 1605. We suspect an uncorrected misprint.

<sup>5.</sup> Gait, op. cit., p. 57.

<sup>6. &</sup>lt;u>Ibid.</u>, p. 63. 7. <u>Ibid.</u>, p. 66.

encouraged by the similarity of the names of the two Muslim leaders. The theory that the war was actually much earlier than at first appears is strengthened by the fact that the only known date of Yas-nārāyap, the Kachari king concerned, is 1583, while his successor Pratāp Nārāyap was ruling in 1606.

It would appear that some years before 1605 Dhanmanik, profiting by the weakness of its Koch suzerains, attacked Dimarua and captured the local chief Prabhakar. The latter, despairing of help from his overlord, may have appealed to the Kachari king Yasnarayan. The account in the Jayantiya Burafiji describing the interference of the Jaintias in the trading activities of the Kacharis may also contain some truth. These considerations may have encouraged Yasnarayan to attack Jaintia, which was soundly defeated. It seems probable that Dhanmanik was not captured on this occasion, but came to terms with his enemy. The question of these terms is not an easy one to settle. The otherwise very reasonable account of the Asam Burafiji refers to three ladies who were given to the Kachari king: these were an unnamed sister of Yasmanik, a certain Amarsona, who is strangely referred to by the masculine title rat , and a certain Muktarani. The first kinglist in the Jayantiya Buranji states briefly that in the reign of Dhansapik Yasnarayan killed Dhansapik's sister Muktarani, together with Amarsen, who was presumably her husband, and carried Yasmanik, who was presumably their son and thus would be Dhanmanik's nephew and the heir to the throne, back to his kingdom, releasing him only when he heard that Dhanmanik was dead. A third reference containing these names occurs later in the Javantiya Bu-

<sup>1.</sup> Gait, History of Assam, 3rd ed., p. 419.

See above, p.107and n. 4
 JB, 18, p. 7; see above, p.107.

rafif. In connection with the further Kachari campaign against the Jaintias which we consider below: this is to the effect that Ehimbal, the prince of Kachar, captured Channapik's elder sisters (bai) muktarani and Amarsena, together with Muktarani's son Yasmanik.

of these three statements the first, in the Asam Burafiji, is evidently corrupt, while the casual reference in the kinglist of the Jayantīyā Burafijī carries conviction by its very casualness. The gender of Amarsen or Amarsenā is unclear. It is possible that this character is in fact a male, the husband of Dhanmānik's sister Muktārānī, as the kinglist suggests. For a queen to be killed with her husband is not unknown in Indian history, but it goes against all the traditions of martial morality, and perhaps Muktārānī and her son Yaśmānik were taken to Kachar, while her husband Amarsen was killed. It is indeed possible that Dhanmānik was himself captured and released, though we need not believe the story of his castration, which seems to be borrowed from the derogatory account of the castration of Indrasena by Ehima. The Kachārī Burafijī confirms that Yaśmānik, the nephew and heir of Dhanmānik, became a hostage of the Kachari king.

The Asam Buranji states that Dhanmanik sent two envoys with presents to the court of the Ahom king Pratapsinha (1603-41), offering him a Jaintia princess in marriage. The king was pleased and sent valuable presents in return. No account of this embassy occurs in the Jayantiya Buranji, where one would expect it, but in the latter text a similar embassy is ascribed to Dhanmanik's successor Yasmanik. Nevertheless, we are inclined to accept the account in the Asam Buranji. It would be natural for Dhanmanik, hoaring of the accession of

<sup>1.</sup> JB, 37, p. 13.

<sup>2.</sup> See above, p. 93.

<sup>3.</sup> KB, p. 21.

<sup>4.</sup> AB, 91, p. 49.

a new Ahom ruler, to send envoys with presents, especially as he was in dire need of support against the Kacharis. His own death must have occurred soon after the return of the messengers, and thus the negotiations for a time came to nothing. It is nevertheless surprising that the <u>Buranji</u> which specially records the diplomatic relations of the Jaintias and the Ahoms completely ignores this event.

### Parther strife with the Kacharis

The Jayantiva Buranii contains two further accounts of war between the Jaintias and the Kacharis around the time of Dhanmanik. The accounts are discrepant, and are difficult to harmonize with the known facts or to place in a sound chronological framework. Hence we suspect that they are seriously corrupt.

The main account first tells that while holding a festival on the banks of the Kapili river several Garos (i. e. Syntengs) were attacked and murdered by the Kacharis. This appears to have added to the already existing bitterness between the two peoples. It also appears that the Jaintia king was not able to retaliate against the Kacharis, for fear of further alienating them. In the meantime the Jaintias were left without further chastisement by their foes because the Kachari kingdom was in its turn invaded by the 'Bengalis', that is to say the Mughals, under a 'navāb' who is referred to as Jamāl Khān. It is said that this general was instructed by Shah Jahān to destroy the Kacharis because they sent only very weak elephants in tribute.

The Kachari king Yasharayan, finding himself unable to cope with the troubled situation in his own kingdom, sent prince Ehimbal<sup>3</sup> with

<sup>1.</sup> JB, 31, p. 12.

<sup>2.</sup> Ibid., 32, p. 12.

<sup>3.</sup> Ibid., 33, p. 12.

a very large army to drive the invaders from the fort of Khaspur, where they were entrenched, and from where they controlled eighteen districts. The fort was besieged by the Kacharis. The struggle lasted for two months, after which all the Bengalis were killed, the eighteen districts were recovered, and the country was freed of its enemies. After defeating the Bengalis, the victorious prince Bhimbal turned his attention to Jaintia. He marched against that kingdom, defeated the Jaintias, and captured Dhammanik, who was made a prisoner for five years. One day the Kachari king, in a fit of drunken generosity, broke Dhammanik's fetters, and he escaped to Jaintiapur, being miraculously protected by a tiger sent by the goddess Jayantiedevi.

Prince Ehimbalthen again attacked Jaintia and captured Dhanmanik's daughter Sandhyāvalī, with other booty which was sent back to Yaś-nārāyan. Jaintia was again subordinated to Kachar, but apparently Dhanmanik was allowed to remain on the throne. Soon after this Dhanmanik died, and Yaśnārāyan appointed his nephew Yaśmānik as king. The author of this part of the <u>Ruranil</u> was apparently aware of a conflict of evidence, for immediately after the account outlined above he writes 'Another version of this story is **told'** (ei kathāke āru ek prakāre kay), and tells how Bhīmbal waptured Dhanmānik's elder sisters Muktārāni and Amarsenā, and how Yaśmānik, the son of the former, was sent back by Yaśnārāyan to govern Jaintia after Dhanmānik's death. We have already dealt with this passage in considering the account of the earlier war.

A second account, that of Professor Bhuyan's Source 9 of the Jayantiva Buranii, gives a somewhat different version of the story of the strife between the Jaintias and the Kacharis. This source re-

<sup>1.</sup> JB, 33, p. 12.

<sup>2.</sup> Ibid., 34, pp. 12-13.

<sup>3.</sup> Ibid., 36, p. 13.

<sup>4.</sup> Ibid., 36, p. 13.

<sup>5.</sup> Ibid., 37, p. 13.

<sup>6.</sup> See above, pp. 107-11.

peats the account of the slaughter of the Jaintias by the Kacharis on the banks of the river Kapili. The war between the Kacharis and the 'Bengalis' is mentioned, as are the treacherous methods apployed by the Kacharis against their foes. In this version Yasharayan is said to have stayed the advance of the Bengalis under Jamal Khan, with a promise to pay him tribute. The Bengalis must then have relaxed their vigilance, because a sudden attack by the Kacharis came as a complete surprise to them. Many were slain, and those who escaped the sword and fled were soon overtaken and were killed or captured. The Kachari prince seized seven years' tribute from the Bengalis. Among those captured was the Jaintia king Yasmanik, who had apparently been aiding the Muslims and who was taken to Kachar and imprisoned for five years, after which he escaped while his guards were drunk and was protected in his flight by a tiger. On getting back to Jaintiapur he offered the Kachari king his younger sister in order to placate him. 4

The two accounts differ witally on the question of the name of the Jaintia king who was captured. The first one makes Dhanmanik the captured king, while the second plainly says that he was Yasmanik, who had previously been held as a hostage by the Kacharis. The second version seems more credible, if we are to believe that Dhanmanik died in 1605.

The Javantiva Buranii distinctly states that in Sak 1528 or

A. D. 1606 the daughter of Yasmanik, already king of Jaintia, was
sent in marriage to the Ahom king Pratap Simha. 5 Huyan's 'Source 9'
in the same document states that the Ahom king came to terms with

<sup>1.</sup> JB, 320, p. 164.

<sup>2.</sup> Ibid., 322, pp.164-65.

<sup>3.</sup> Ibid., 323, p. 165. 4. Ibid., 324, p. 166.

<sup>5.</sup> Ibid., 46, p. 17. Gait (History of Assam, 3rd ed., p. 315) states that the ensuing war took place in 1618, but he gives no reference, and we have no reason to believe this date to be correct.

the Kacharis in A.D. 1609, after the war which followed the incident of the Jaintia princess. The main <u>Jayantīyā Buranjī</u> account of the second war states that the Jaintia king at the time was Dhanmānik. This leads us to suppose that all the events mentioned took place some time before 1605.

It is evident, however, that if the account is to be believed the war mentioned must have taken place later than this, for the references to the Bengalis or Mughals can be checked from Muslim sources. An attack on the kingdom of Kachar was made towards the end of the viceroyalty of Islām Khān (1608-13), who sent one of his officers, Shaikh Kamāl, to conquer the land. He marched on Pratāpgarh, which he captured with great difficulty after a month, and then he attacked and captured another fort, Asurātekar (now called Haritikar) on the banks of the Barāk river. The Kachari king Pratāp Nārāyan, who, from the evidence of coins, was on the throne at least as early as 1606, offered to come to terms, and a temporary peace was agreed on. The agreement, however, was rejected by the emperor Jahāngir, and the campaign was renewed under Mubāriz Khān, who soon compelled Pratāp Nārāyan to submit unconditionally and to pay tribute. This happened about the end of May, 1612.

Two years later, about November, 1614, a further campaign took place against Kachar, which had probably reasserted itself after the death of Islām Khān in 1613. The new nawāb, Qāsim Khān, again sent an expedition under Mubāriz Khān, which was strongly resisted, but succeeded in capturing Pratāpgarh, and then besieged Asurātekar. Pratāp Nārāyan sued for peace, offering much tribute, and the nawāb accepted his submission. But meanwhile Mubāriz Khān suddenly died, and his second-in-command Mirāk Bahādur lost heart and evacuated the country. Thus the Kacharis regained their independence, and were not again troubled by the Mughals for a considerable time. 4

2. Gait, History of Assam, (3rd ed.) p. 419.

4. Sarkar, op. cit., pp. 290-91; Miran Nathan, op. cit., pp. 324-27.

<sup>1.</sup> JB, 327, p. 166.

<sup>3.</sup> Sarkar, History of Bengal, vol. ii, pp. 281-83, based chiefly on Mirza Nathan, Baharistan, pp. 208, 213-21.

The accounts of the war between the Kacharis and the Bengalis in the Jayantiyā Burañji can only refer to the campaigns mentioned above. Evidently the mistake in the name of the Mughal general — Jamāl Khān for Shaikh Kamāl — is due to confusion with a general bearing the former name who led a campaign against the Koch king Pariksit at about the same time and was later killed while fighting the Ahoms. Of course he was never a nawāb. The Burañji's reference to Jamāl Khān's reporting to Shāh Jahān about the indifferent quality of the elephants given in tribute seems to be a muddled recollection of Jahāngīr's rejection of the compromise peace between Shaikh Kamāl and Fratāp Nārāyan.

Thus either the first Jayantiya Buranji account is guilty of a serious chronological error, or there has been a conflation of two records, one, concerning the war of the Kacharis with the Jaintias, wrongly linked with the other, dealing with the formers war with the Mughals. Since both sources in the Jayantiya Buranji agree that the two wars were connected, and this is a point on thich confusion would not be likely to occur, we provisionally accept the former hypothesis. The war described in the passages of the Buranji summarized above was probably fought between Fratap Narayan of Kachar and Yasmanik of Jaintia in 1615, soon after the retreat of the Mughals.

Yasmanik, as soon as he had ascended the throne with the consent of the Kachari king, decided to strengthen his position by making friends with the Ahoms, as we shall see in the next chapter, and he may well have helped the Mughals in their attack on his suzerain. The confused sources seem to refer to events in Yasmanik's reign, which we next consider.

<sup>1.</sup> Sarkar, History of Bengal, vol. ii, p. 287.

3

# HISTORY OF THE JAINTIA KINGS - II

### Yasmanik (c. 1605 - at least 1620)

Yasmanik, according to the <u>Buranii</u> tradition, was sent by the Kachari king Yasmanayan to take over the kingdom on his uncle's death, as a vassal of Kachar. No doubt he resented Kachari dominance and it was for this reason that he renewed his uncle's overtures to the Ahoms. Very soon after his accession, or perhaps even before it, his uncle's old enemy Yasmanayan of Kachar died, and was replaced by Pratap Narayan or Satrudaman, of whom coins are attested dated in A. D. 1606. This may have given Yasmanik further encouragement to make friends with the new Ahom king Pratap Simha (also known as Susengpha and Bürha Raja, 1603-41). Yasmanik's messengers, Rüpabar and Rüprai, returned to the Ahom court and renewed the offer of a princess in marriage. Pratap Simha consulted with his ministers and accepted the offer. After this the <u>Buranii</u> accounts vary consideranly.

According to the main <u>Jayantiyā Buranii</u> story, Yasmānik, in order to embroil the Ahoms with the Kacharis, arranged that the troops sent to escort the Jaintia princess to the Ahom court should trespass into Kachari territory. When the Kachari king Yasmārāyan (apparently an error for Pratāp Nārāyan) heard of this he sent prince Ehīmbal with troops to intercept them. A fight ensued, and Sondar Gohāin, the leader of the Ahom escort, was killed. This greatly perturbed the Kachari king, who feared reprisals from the Ahoms. He ordered the execution of the soldier who had killed the Gohāin, and despatched two messengers to the Ahoms, offering to send the head

2. Ibid., 38, p. 14.

<sup>1.</sup> JB, 18, p.7.

<sup>3.</sup> Gait, History of Assam, 3rd ed., p. 419.

<sup>4.</sup> JB, 39, pp. 14-15. 5. Ibid., 40, p.15.

<sup>6.</sup> Ibid., 42-43, pp. 15-16.

of the dead general to be used in his funeral rites. The news sails dened and angered the Ahom king, but he was involved with the 'Bengalis' or Mughals at the time, and so he decided to accept the Kachari apology. In spite of this unpleasant incident the princess was in the end safely conveyed to the Ahom court, and from that time onwards there was friendship between Jaintia and the Ahoms. The date of the princess's arrival is given as Sak 1528, or A. D. 1606.

The latter part of the published version of the Jayantiya Buranji, Bhuyan's Source 9, gives a fragmentary account of these events. It tells of Yasmanik's embassy to the Ahoms, but breaks off before any mention of the proposed marriage. 4 There follows a lacuna. and the story is resumed in the midst of the war between the Ahoms and the Kacharis, in which the Kachari prince Bhimbal is gaining the upper hand. An attack on the Ahoms by a certain Caid Babakar' is said to have resulted in the Ahom king deciding to come to terms with the Kacharis, which he did in Sak 1531, or A. D. 1609. This is explicitly said to be six years after the fighting in which Sondar Gohain was killed. The gift of the Jaintia princess is later mentioned as having taken place previously.

A third account is given in the Asam Burefiji. According to this text Yasmanik sent his envoy Sonabar to the Ahom court announcing Dhanmanik's death and renewing the offer of a princess, but saying that for fear of the Bengalis she would have to be sent by way of Satgaon, by a route which led through Kachari territory. The Ahoms asked permission for the cortege to proceed by this route, but the

<sup>1.</sup> JB, 40, p. 15 .

Ibid., 45, p. 17.

<sup>3.</sup> Ibid., 46, p. 17. Gait (op. cit., p. 315) gives the date as 1618, but we can find no justification for this. In his chronological table (p. 419) he gives 1606 as a known date of Yasmanik. apparently on the evidence of the Burafiji.

<sup>4.</sup> JB, 324-25, pp. 165-66. 5. <u>Ibid.</u>, 326-27, p. 166. 6. <u>Ibid.</u>, 328, p. 166.

<sup>7.</sup> Note that the JB versions give the name as Rupabar. Here there has probably been some confusion on the part of a copyist between rupa, 'silver', and sona, 'gold'.

Kachari king refused. There was some fighting, but the Ahom forces cleared the princess's path and Sondar Gohain brought her safely to the court without his being killed. Two other Jaintia princesses entered the Ahom royal harem later in Yasmanik's reign. It was in Sak 1537, or A. D. 1615, in a subsequent war between the Ahoms and the Kacharis, that Sondar Gohain was killed, and from that time the Kacharis became completely independent.

A further brief version of the story occurs in the first of the seven Burafijis collected by Professor Hauyan under the title Satsari Asam Burafiji. Here we are told that the Jaintia king declared that he could only send the princess if she went by way of Satgaon, through Kachari territory, since the alternative route via Gobha was endangered by Bengali attacks. The princess's convoy suffered a night attack from the Kacharis in which many Ahom troops were killed, but nothing is said about the death of Sondar Cohain. 4 These events were followed by war between the Bengalis and the Ahoms. Another version. in the third Burafiji of the seven, purports to describe the debate between the Ahom king and his three chief nobles in discussing the projected route of the princess's cortege. They decided in the end to accept the Jaintia proposal, since it might be taken as amounting to a challenge, which would bring great discredit on them if it were refused. 6 In this source Sondar Gohain is killed in the fighting. 7

The Ahom Buranii8 gives a detailed account of the strife. According to this source the Ahoms were led by a chief called Salei Gohain, who seems to be the same as the Sondar Cohain of the Buranijis

AB, 92, pp. 49-50.

Ibid., 93, p. 50. Ibid., 96-97, p. 52.

SAB, 77, p. 27.

<sup>5. &</sup>lt;u>Ibid.</u>, 78, p. 28. 6. <u>Ibid.</u>, 166, p. 79.

Ibid., 167, pp. 79-80.

Ed. Barua, 85-86, pp. 95-97.

written in Assamese. The Ahom troops proceeded up the Kapili river and captured the chief of Lakat, who was subordinate to the Kacharis. They devastated the district of Satgaon and besieged the Kachari capital. While a column of troops led the princess to the plains the ciege continued. The Ahoms, however, were surprised by the Kacharis in a night attack and Salal Gohain and many other important officers were killed. The siege was then raised and the Ahom troops returned to their own land.

The chronological datum which may help us to interpret these confused accounts is the war between the Ahoms and the Maghals, which is mentioned in most of them. This clearly refers to the invasion of Sayyid Abā Bagr, the general of the Mughal nawab Qasim Khan, which began in November, 1615 and ended with the complete defeat of the Mughals and the death of their commander in mid-January, 1616. This date corresponds well with that given in the Asam Buranji for the death of Sondar Gohain, and it soems that the two incidents of the interference of the Kacharis with the princess's progress to the Ahom court and the killing of the Ahom commander have been wrongly associated in the main Javantiva Buranji and in several other accounts. The second, fragmentary account in the Jayantiya Burafiji may correctly record a temporary agreement between the Ahoms and the Kacharis in A. D. 1609, which would thus be six years before, not after, the death of Sondar Gohain. There is no evidence of trouble between the Ahoms and the Mughals in this year, however, when the nawab Islam Khan was still consolidating his position in Bengal.

Our interpretation of these confused accounts is that soon after his accession Yasmapik made a matrimonial alliance with the Ahom king Pratap Simha. The Kacharis may have tried to capture the princess of Jaintia as she was being escorted to the Ahom court, but

<sup>1.</sup> Sarkar, History of Bengal, vol. ii, p. 296.

their attack was foiled and she joined Pratap Simha's harem in A. D. 1606.

Yasmanik is said to have sent two other princesses to the Ahom king, and we apparently have the account of one of these further royal marriages. The princess was brought to the Ahom king in a litter, and was accompanied by jewellery, of which a list is given. Among her ornaments four gold bangles are mentioned. In exchange gifts were sent to Yasmanik, and these included four elephants, two horses, and various other things, among which were four silver bangles for his chief queen. Yasmanik was so annoyed that gold had been given and silver returned that he sent back all the Ahom king's presents. The date of this marriage is given as Sak 1529, or A. D. 1607, both in the main Jayantiya Buranji and in Bhuyan's Source 9, which tells the story in similar terms. But in the main account it is stated that the Abom king was Bhaga Raja, the son of Fratap Simha. It is hardly likely that it could have been he, because it goes against all tradition for a lindu to marry his aunt, as the sister of one of his father's wives would be considered, even if not related to him by blood. Moreover Haga Raja ruled from 1641 to 1644, 4 and thus if the king's name is correct the date must surely be wrong. We conclude that the princess became the wife of Pratap Simha, especially as it is stated explicitly in the Assm Burafiji that Yasmanik sent no less than three princesses to the Ahom court.

Despite Yasmanik's annoyance at the slight to his chief queen, friendly relations developed between the Jaintias and the Ahoms. As we shall see later, this friendship led the Jaintias to look to the

<sup>1.</sup> AB, 93, p. 50.

<sup>2.</sup> JB, 49, pp. 18-19.

<sup>3.</sup> Ibid., 330, p. 167.

<sup>4.</sup> Gait, History of Assam, 3rd ed., p. 124. 5. See above, p. 119

Ahom for trade rather than to the Bengalis, as they had done hither-

Gait refers to the marriage of Yasharayan with a daughter of the Koch king Lakent Narayan. She is said to have brought with her an image of Jayantesvarī which became much revered in Jaintiapur. Gait does not give any literary source for his information about this marriage, but mentions it as a prevalent tradition among the Jaintias. Ali also gives a similar story. He adds that after Yasmanik's marriage to the Koch princess the Jaintia kings began to practise the brahmanical faith rather than their traditional religion. This tradition would ascribe the wonderful image which meant so much to the Jaintia kings to an outside source. Whatever its origin, so much Jaintia national feeling centred round this image that we find it hard to believe that it came to the Jaintias when the kingdom had long been firmly established, as a result of a royal marriage. Rather we believe that the legend of its discovery by Bargohain indicates that it was part of the treasure of the earliest kings of the line, and we reject Ali's tradition, for which he gives no source and which is flatly contradicted by the Buranijis.

The references to Pratap Simha's breaking off his war with the Kacharis in order to resist the Mughal attack may be linked with the account of a Jaintia-Kachari war, variously ascribed to Dhanmanik and Yasmanik, which we have considered above. The second Mughal campaign against Kachar ended in failure early in 1616. It is quite likely that both the Jaintias and the Ahoms, who were now to all intents and purposes their overlords, tried to take advantage of the troubled conditions in Kachar, and invaded the country. The death

<sup>1.</sup> Op. cit., p. 315.

<sup>2.</sup> History of Jaintia, p. 14.

<sup>3.</sup> See above, Pp.112ff.

<sup>4.</sup> See above, p. 120 .

of the Ahom general Sondar Gohāin and the threat of a Mughal attack would be sufficient to induce the Ahom king to come to terms, as he appears to have done, leaving his subordinate ally Yaśmānik at the mercy of the Kachari king, whose confidence was greatly strengthened after repelling foes on both his northern and his southern borders. The story of Yaśmānik's capture by the Kacharis and his marvellous escape after five years of captivity seems to be based on a folklore tradition, and is hard to believe. But as a minimum it appears that the Kachari Pratāp Nārāyan chastized his rebellious neighbour, who had shifted his allegiance to the Ahoms and had then been left in the lurch by them.

Though the Kacharis retained their independence, they gave little further serious trouble to the Jaintias, as far as our records tell. The growing power of the Ahoms served as a stablilizing factor in the rivalry of the two hill states, both of which had a wholesome respect for their more powerful northern neighbour, and were loosely subordinate to it. Dimgrua, which for thirty years had been a bone of contention, being held in turn by Kochs, Jaintias, Kacharis and Mughals, fell to the Ahoms after the defeat of Sayyid Abā Baqr, and remained in their hands. A later passage in the chronicle indicates that the next Jaintia king, Yaématrāl, in offering daughters in marriage to the Ahom king, had hopes of recovering it, but the Ahoms firmly held control of this important town.

After the friendly relations of the Jaintias and the Ahoms had been put on a firm basis, Yaémānik asked permission from the Ahoms to establish a market at Phülguri, near the left bank of the Kalang river, the boundary between the two countries. After consulting with his ministers, the Ahom king agreed to this, and so re-

<sup>1.</sup> See above, p. 118.

<sup>2.</sup> JB, 84, p. 42; DB, 184, p. 106.

<sup>3.</sup> JB, 47, pp. 17-18; 328, pp. 166-67.

gular trade was established. For the right to trade the Jaintia merchants paid a toll in the form of dried fish. It would seem that for a time the frontier was an open one and there was such a sense of friendliness and security in the relations of the two kingdoms that the three hill chieftains (raja) of Gobha, Nell and Khala, who were subordinate to the Jaintia king, came down from their headquarters in the hills and established houses, presumably as winter residences, in the plains. Contacts such as these must have had a considerable effect on the cultural development of the hill Syntengs.

This happy state of affairs, however, was not untarnished by troublesome incidents which resulted from disputes between traders of both countries. On one occasion some unscrupulous Jaintias set fire to a fort which had been built on the opposite bank of the river during the Bengali- Ahom war of 1615-16. It was guarded by day, but surprisingly enough it was left unguarded by night, during which time the arson was committed. The officer in charge of the stronghold at the time of this incident was a certain Sandikai Barphukan, who, because of the friendly relations between the two kingdoms, let off the Jaintia culprits without inflicting any corporal punishment upon them, though he ordered them to rebuild the fort, which they did. The motives for this act of arson, and for the impressive clemency of the officer, and nowhere made clear. However, in spite of occasional difficulties such as this, close and friendly relations were generally maintained. As a token of his great friendship Pratap Simha, the Ahom king, made a present to Yasmanik, the Jaintia king, of an elephant, two horses and a set of ornaments.

We do not really know when Yasmanik died or how he died, but a tradition recorded by S. M. Ali has it that he was such an oppressive king that his subjects captured him and killed him by smother-

<sup>1.</sup> JB, 48, p. 18; 329, p. 167. 2. Thid., 49, p. 18.

ing him under a stone. The same author gives the date of his death as 1641. We can find no justification for this date, but it appears to be based on the <u>Burafiji's</u> account of Yashanik's giving a daughter in marriage to the Ahom king Bhagā Rājā in a year corresponding to A. D. 1607. We have shown that something must be wrong here, since Bhagā Rājā did not succeed Pratāp Simha until 1641. If the name of the king is correct but the date false, Yashanik must have been still ruling in 1641, though he cannot possibly have ruled for much longer. Ali appears to accept the name of the Ahom king, but to reject or ignore the date given in the <u>Jayantiyā Burafiji</u>. But we have shown reason to believe that the date may be correct, but that the name of the Ahom king is false.

The <u>Burafils</u> give no evidence that Yasmanik's reign was in any way oppressive, or that he was overthrown by his subjects. There is no clear evidence of the duration of his reign. From the data analysed above it is certain that he ruled for some time after the Ahom-Mughal war of 1615-16, and his reign may well have been as long as S. M. Ali believes.

## Yasnatrāi (before 1648 - 1668)

After Yasmanik there ruled two kings, Sundarral and Cheta Parbatral (also known as Saruparbatral), about whose reigns nothing is known. Chota Parbatral was followed by Yasmatral. We are not certain about the exact date of Yasmatral's accession to the throne, but we have evidence that he was reigning in 1648.

During this year relations with the Ahoms were somewhat strained because of the capture by the Jaintias of a merchant named Jayhari, who was a subject of the Ahom king. The exact details are rather ob-

2. See above, p. 121.

<sup>1.</sup> History of Jaintia, pp. 16-17.

scure, but it appears that he was returning to his house by way of Khyrim with gifts for his king, Jayadhvaj Simha, who had just ascended the throne. After his capture by the Jaintia guards Jayhari was taken to the palace of the Jaintia king, who interrogated him. He was put in prison on the ground that he had no official document to prove his identity as a merchant, and his goods were confiscated.

On hearing the news Jayadhvaj Simha sent two messengers to the Jaintia court, demanding the release of the merchant and the return of his property and the presents for the Ahom king. The Jaintia king released the merchant, but he refused to surrender the confiscated articles. Thus the Ahom efforts to recover the presents peacefully ended in failure.

On hearing from Jayhari of the bad treatment accorded to him by the Jaintias and the seigure of the presents, Jayadhvaj Sipha was so angered that as a reprisal he immediately ordered the Barberua Cetiya Gohain to close down the shops of the Jaintia traders in Sonapur and to arrest them. This order was apparently carried out.

It seems that no further action was taken by either side, and that for some time there was little or no trade or other forms of contact between Ahoms and Jaintias. We have no record of hostilities, however. A few years after the incident of Jayhari, in A. D. 1655, Yasmatrai took the initiative to break the deadlock, by sending emissaries to the Ahom court to open negotiations for the resumption of friendly relations. In the end his repeated attempts

<sup>1.</sup> JB, 50, p. 18; AB, 169, p. 85; Wade (Account of Assam, pp. 46-48) gives further interesting details and variations of the story of 'Zoiharee'. We ignore these, however, since they have little relevance and are not to be found in any chronicle known to us. They may well be based on the glosses of the pandits who helped Wade, or even on his own imagination.

<sup>2.</sup> JB, 51, pp. 19-20; Thid., 159, p. 85. 3. Ibid., 52, p. 20; AB, 170, p. 86.

at restoring friendship were successful, and enveys were once more regularly exchanged by the two kingdoms.

In 1660 Yasmanik's grandson, Pramatha Rai, quarrelled with him. The prince revolted and tried to persuade the chief of Gobha to join him. When the latter refused to leave his territory, Pramatha raided four Gobha villages. The Gobha chief, who had hitherto been more or less tributary to Jaintia, decided to seek a new protector and, after flirting with the Kochs, he offered homage to the Ahom king, who reestablished him in his territory at a place called Khagarijan. As we have seen the ruler of Gobha, together with other hill chiefs, had taken advantage of the improved relations between Jaintia and the Ahoms to build himself a winter residence in Ahom territory, and he now seems to have become the direct tributary of the Ahoms. One Burafiji, referring to this period, states that the market of Gobha produced an annual revenue of 2,035 rupees, which was sent to the city, presumably the Ahom capital. This gives clear evidence of

<sup>1.</sup> JB, p. 21; AB, 171, p. 86. Ali (History of Jaintia, p. 18) mentions an earlier embassy in 1652, in which Yasmatrai sent valuable gifts to Jayadhvaj Simha, the Ahom king, and asked for the return of Dimarua and other places which had been held by the Ahoms since their expulsion of the Mughals. This statement appears to be based on the Ahom Burafiji (ed. Berua, 136, p. 146), which mentions a meeting between the Ahom king and Jaintia envoys on the Dikham river, in the month Sravan of the lakni year Kapchen, or A. D. 1651. The envoys are said to have brought very expensive gifts ('many large boats, eight gold seats, and 140 umbrellas!) and to have pressed for the return of the lost provinces, but to have been refused and sent away with gifts of gold. The Ahom Burafiji, despite its apparent circumstantial detail, is often unreliable, and we believe this account to be due to confusion with a later embassy, since both the Jayantiya Buranji and the Asam Buranji are agreed that there was no diplomatic contact between the two kingdoms between 1648 and 1655. The magnificent gifts mentioned are hardly credible in the light of the modest lists of presents attributed to the Jaintia embassies in the Jayantiya Buranif.

<sup>2.</sup> Gait (History of Assam, 3rd ed., p. 315) gives the date as 1658, without reference. 1660 is definitely given as the date in the Ahom Buranjī.

<sup>3.</sup> Ahom Buranji, ed. Barus, 145-46, pp. 156-57.

<sup>4.</sup> See above, p. 124. 5. <u>DB</u>, 255, pp. 132-33.

Ahom control.

Evidently frontier attacks by the hillien were frequent at this time, for we are told that Jayadhvaj Simha established frontier posts at Rāhā and Jāgī, to protect the plains against Kachari and other marauders.

Later, ineither 1661 or 1662, the Jaintia king sent an envoy with a letter to the Ahom court, but the Ahom king had fled from the advancing Mughals under Mir Jumla. The messenger with the letter fell into the hands of the Bengalis. A servant of this Jaintia officer escaped to the Ahom king and gave an account of the occurrence. The king wrote to Yasmatrai expressing great regret over the incident, which was beyond his control owing to his misfortunes. His letter was sent to the Jaintia king through the same servant, and a few presents were also sent. Jayadhvaj Simha also sent a letter giving the news to Mānik Simha, the king of Nartiang, who was the chief tributary ruler of the Jaintia kingdom. The difficulties which beset the Ahom king no doubt encouraged him to cultivate good relations with the hill states.

Yasmatrāi sent back a letter to the Ahom king, expressing much sympathy and sorraw at the attack of Mir Jumla, but he made no positive promise of help. This letter was dated Sak 1585 (A. D. 1663), on an unspecified day in the month of Jeth (May-June). The Ahom king replied to the Jaintia king, on the tenth day of the same month, thanking him for the letter. Yasmatrāi seems to have genuinely sympathized with the Ahom king, since he had a serious grievance against the Mughals for annexing Dimarua, which he wanted for himself. The

<sup>1</sup> DB, 226, pp. 120-21.

<sup>2.</sup> JB, 56, p. 22. 3. Ibid., 57, p. 22.

<sup>4.</sup> Ibid., 58, p. 24. Wade (Account of Assam, ed. Sharma, pp. 49 ff.) gives a fairly detailed account of this and the succeeding correspondence, with additional information and several variations. For reacons given above (p. 126, n. 1) we have not made use of this evidence, which does not affect the overall picture of events.

<sup>5.</sup> JB, 59, p. 24. 6. Bhuyan, Atan Burhagohain and his Times, p. 39.

very quick reply of Jayadhvaj to Yasmatrai's letter is indicative of his need of allies, though by this time the Muchal attack was over and the redoubtable Mir Jumla was dead (31 March, 1663).

Marik Simha, the king of Nartieng, also wrote a long letter to the king of the Ahoms, expressing his sympathy over the devastations of the Mughals and congratulating Jayadhvaj Simha on restoring peace and order in his kingdom. He declared that he much regretted that he had been unable to send men to help the Ahoms against the Mughals.

Soon after this exchange of letters Jayadhvaj Simha died, and was succeeded by his son Cakradhvaj Simha. In 1664, after his accession to the throne, Cakradhvaj sent a letter to Yasmatrāi which was worded affectionately but hinted at trouble. The tone suggests that the Ahoms had regained much of their former self-confidence, and were determined to ensure the loyalty of the hill chiefs: 'If the former agreement (dhāran) no longer stands, how may affection (priti) remain . . ? You have seen what we did time and again to the Bengalis, even if on one occasion fate was against us. Cakradhvaj told Yasmatral to take such steps as would increase mutual affection. The letter was accompanied by presents, as was usual, but these were of comparatively little value. A similar but briefer letter was sent to the king of Nartiang also, and was accompanied by even less expensive presents. 4 It seems from the tone of these letters that the Ahom king was afraid that the kings of Jaintia and Martiang were planning to connive with the Mughals against him, or thought that they had already begun to do so. His fears were not unfounded. During the regime of Mir Jumla an attack by the Jaintias on Sylhet is

<sup>1.</sup> Sarkar, History of Bengal, vol. ii, p. 350.

<sup>2.</sup> JB, 60, pp. 25-26.

<sup>3.</sup> Ibid., 64, pp. 27-28.

<sup>4.</sup> Ibid., 65, p. 28.

reported in Muslim sources, but by 1664 Yasmatrai's attitude towards the Mughals had altered considerably. When he heard that Shaista Khan, the new nawab, had arrived in Bengal he hautened to offer his submission to the Mughals by sending them the best elephants he had, through the <u>faujdar</u> of Sylhet.

Ten days after the Ahom king's letter, Mahāpātra Rukma, the Bargohāin or chief minister, and two other leading Ahom officials sent similar letters to Yasmatrāi, and somewhat later to the king of Nartiang. All these letters were sent in the month of Baisakh, but the Jaintia king chose not to reply until Ahir, five months afterwards. This long delay suggests that he was in no great fear of the Ahoms, but his reply was cautious and obedient, and he emphasized the fact that Bengal was the common enemy of both (Bangal tomar amage Satru). It was accompanied by a present which included 60 pieces of iron, presumably smelted by the Khasis. A few days later similar letters were sent by the king of Nartiang, probably acting on his overlord's instructions.

About three years later there was another exchange of diplomatic correspondence. The initiative was taken by Yasmatrai, but his letter only succeeded in annoying Cakradhvaj, who was seriously angered because of the Jaintia king's discourtesy in deviating from well established protocol and not addressing him by his full titles at the head of the comment. Possibly his armoyance was increased by the suspicion that Yasmatrai was again flirting with the Mughals. According to the Jayantiya Buranii, Yasmatrai placated Cakradhvaj with a letter written in the month of Karttik in Sak 1589

<sup>1.</sup> Sarkar, History of Bengal, vol. ii, p. 377.

<sup>2.</sup> JB, 67, pp. 29-30. 3. Ibid., 69, p. 31.

<sup>4.</sup> Ibid., 75, pp. 35-36; AB, 213, pp. 106-07; Ali, History of Jaintia, p. 19.

(A. D. 1667) offering a maiden of the royal family in marriage to the Ahom king and stating that he was ready to send troops to Dimarua to help fight the Mughals. This refers to the campaign of the Ahoms, led by Larhit Barphukan, which began in August, 1667, and resulted in the capture of Gauhati and Pandu by the Ahoms. It was not until the 4th day of Paus in Sak 1590 (late December, A. D. 1667) that Cakradhvaj replied, asking for 20,000 or 30,000 troops. The long delay of over a year in sending the reply indicates both the Ahom king's displeasure and his confidence in his own strength. Possibly he decided to reply at last only because fresh frontier fighting took place against the Mughals in that year, and he feared a stronger attack, which was soon to follow.

The messengers bearing the letter of Cakradhvaj to Jaintia, accompanied by a similar letter from the senior minister Rukma, returned to the Ahom court with the news that Yasmatrāi was dead, and thus there was, as far as we know, no royal marriage, and no Jaintia trosps were sent to aid the Ahoms against the Mughals. Yasmatrāi was succeeded by his grandson Mānsimha, who in the kinglist at the beginning of the Javantiyā Buranii is said to have come from Bengal and to have killed Yasmatrāi. We may suspect that he had been associated with the other rebel grandson, Pramathā Rāi, whose fate after his unsuccessful revolt is not known. Alternatively the two may be identical, as Ali seems to believe. Perhaps Mānsimha took refuge with the Mughals, and returned to Jaintia with Mughal support in order to forestall Yasmatrāi's plan to send help to the Ahoms. But all these ideas are mere speculation, and we have no

<sup>1.</sup> JB, 76, p. 36.

<sup>2.</sup> Gait, History of Assam, 3rd ed., pp. 157-58,

<sup>3.</sup> JB, 78, pp. 37-38.

<sup>4.</sup> Gait, op. cit., p. 519.

JB, 80, pp. 39-40.
 See above, p. 103.

<sup>7.</sup> History of Jaintia, p. 20.

positive evidence for any of them.

The reign of Yasmatral seems to have seen a great revival of Ahom-Jaintia diplomatic activity, involving also the Ahom Bargo-hain and other Ahom dignitaries, and the king of Nartiang, who seems to have held the status of Junior Augustus in the Jaintia kingdom. By this time the style of correspondence had become extremely formal and florid, and the <u>Burafiji</u> quotes verbatim numerous documents which are almost word for word the same, except for variations in the proper names and in the brief messages which comments are worded in the most amicable terms, even when it is clear that their intentions are by no means friendly: 'The sun will rise in the west, the Brahmaputra will flow to the east, the black crow will become white and the heron black, yet our affection will not be broken.' Gargãon and Jayanti are not two.'

### Mansimha and Pratapsimha (1668-69)

The death of Yasmatrai was followed by the brief reigns of Mansimha and Pratapsimha. According to one of the genealogical lists
given in the <u>Jayantiya Burafiji</u> Yasmatrai was killed by Mansimha,
who in turn was killed by Pratapsimha. But Gait writes that Yasmatrai was succeeded by his son Ban Singh in 1660. He further maintains that Ban Singh was driven from the throne by a relative named
Pratap Singh, who came from Bengal, where he had been living in ex-

<sup>1.</sup> Sūryya pašcime uday haiba, Lohita pūrbbadišak bahiba, kālā kāk šukla haiba, bak kranabarna haiba, tathāpi tomār āmār prītigot khalit nā haiba. JB, 104, p. 56, etc.

<sup>2.</sup> Cargão Jayants dui nahay. Ibid., 103, p. 55, etc.

<sup>3.</sup> Ibid., 18, p. 7.

<sup>4.</sup> History of Assam, 3rd ed., p. 316. The same statement is made by Barch (History and Culture of the Khasi People, pp. 68, 73) on the basis of Jaintia tradition.

ile. We have found no evidence whatever for the date 1660, which seems definitely wrong. Gait's Ban Singh should presumably be identified with the Mānsimha of the <u>Buranjis</u>, which state, however, that he was not the son, but the grandson of Yasmatrāi. It seems that Gait's informant, no doubt some pandit of Jaintigur whose knowledge was chiefly based on local tradition, was rather confused on this point. Mānsimha is identified by Ali<sup>2</sup>with Pramathā Rāi, the grandson of Yasmatrāi, who revolted against the latter. We are given no source for this statement, and the identification may be based solely on Ali's own thought on the subject; but at least it forms a feasible hypothesis.

The published Jayantiyā Buranji, as compiled by Professor Empyan, is internally self-contradictory, in respect of the name of the prince who came from Bengal, murdered the Jaintia king, and seized the throne. One of the kinglists at the beginning of the text states that Mānsimha came from Bengal and killed Yasmatrāi. On the other hand the main text of the Buranji says nothing about the murder of Yasmatrāi, but merely states that the Ahom messengers returned to the royal court with the news that Yasmatrāi was dead and had been succeeded by his grandson Mānsimha. We are next told that in the year Sak 1581 (A. D. 1669) the Ahom king Cakradhvaj died and was succeeded by Udayāditya. Six months later Pratāpsimha came from Bengal, killed Mānsimha, and became king. From the circumstantial detail of this account, it seems probably correct; we suspect that the reference to the rebel who came from Bengal and killed the king of Jaintia has been wrongly placed against Mānsimha's name in the kinglist.

Pratapsimha's first action was to send a message to Udayactiva, through Ahom messengers who had come to report the accession of their

<sup>1.</sup> Tar nati Mansimha raja hala. (JB, 80, p. 40.) This appears to be an infringement of the regular matrilinear succession in the Jaintia kingdom, and might be taken as strengthening the statement in the kinglist that Mansimha murdered Yasmatral. Or is it possible that the Ahom chronicler mistook the relationship and Mansimha was in fact Yasmatral's mephew?

<sup>2.</sup> History of Jaintia, p. 19.

<sup>3.</sup> JB, 18, p. 7.

<sup>4. &</sup>lt;u>Ibid.</u>, 80, p. 40. 5. <u>Ibid.</u>, 81, p. 40.

new king. He told the messengers to tell Udayaditya that he wished him to return Dimarua, which was rightfully a Jaintia possession, in order to maintain the traditional friendship between the two kingdoms. The messengers refused to deligne such a message, which contained a veiled threat of hostile action. So Pratapsipha had his message written down as a formal letter, and the messengers returned with it to the show court. Before they had reached their destination, however, Pratapsimha was murdered in his turn by his son-inlaw, Laksmisimha. News of the death of the Jaintia king reached the Ahom court ahead of the delivery of his letter, so that when the messengers arrived and presented it the king and his ministers refused to read it, because they thought that to read the letter of a dead king would be insuspicious. 2 Udayaditya sent back another messenger to the Jaintia court, demanding a letter of homage (dharanpatra) from the new king. It is quite evident from this that the Ahoms looked on Jaintia as a subject kingdom.

The letter of homage was duly written and sent to the Ahom court. The date given in the Burafiji is Sak 1590, or A. D. 1668, but the king to whom it was addressed is said to have been Udayaditya, whose date of accession to the Ahom throne is given in the previous paragraph as Sak 1591. A Latter Laksmisimha's letter of homage is mentioned as bearing the date Sak 1591, 10 Asar. This discrepancy in the date can only be explained as due to serious inaccuracies in the transmission of the text. It seems that the first date, Sak 1590, is wrong, for the accepted date of Udayaditya's accession, based on numerous sources, is A.D. 1669. The date of the letter of homage would fall in the summer of 1669, and the date of Mansimha's acces-

<sup>1.</sup> JB, 81, B. 40.

<sup>2.</sup> Ibid., 82, pp. 40-41.

<sup>3.</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4.</sup> JB, 81, p. 40.

<sup>5.</sup> Ibid., 83, pp. 41-42.

<sup>6.</sup> Gait, History of Assam, 3rd ed., p. 160.

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sion would thus be probably towards the end of 16.8, since he appears to have ruled for little over six months. It appears that Pratapsimha hardly reigned at all before he was assassinated by Laksmisimha, who thus probably began to rule in A. D. 1669.

#### Laksmisimha (1669- c. 1700)

Laksmisimha had a fairly long reign of some twenty years after a period of usurpations. His reign was marked by vigorous diplomatic activity, especially in his relations with the Ahoms, and he did much to strengthen his position vis a vis his northern neighbours. His success appears to have brought prosperity to his little kingdom, and he is remembered in folk tradition. He is said to have been the son-in-law of the previous ruler, Pratapsimha, though this is not explicitly stated in the Jayantiya Buranii. A folk ballad in Sylheti Bengali tells of the love of a Jaintia princess for a young hill Khasi whom she saw from her palace window. Ultimately the two were married, the husband having been more or less 'Sanskritized' and having taken the name Laksmisimha. The romantic features of the story may well be fictional, but it is unlikely that the tradition of Laksmisimha's being a hill Khasi would have grown up if he had not been one in fact.

On Laksmisimha's accession the letter of homege was duly written and sent by a messenger named Rāmāi. This messenger had also been instructed to renew Jaintia claims to Dimarua. While delivering the letter to the Ahom king Udayāditya Rāmāi reminded him that Yasmatrāi had offered a daughter to the Ahom king, and had at the same time asked for the return of Dimarua, which had always been a possession of Jaintia. This angered the king and his dignitaries.

<sup>1.</sup> Chatterji, Kirāto-jana-kuti, p. 86.

The chief minister (burhagohain) Rukma replied that Dimarua had always been subordinate to the Ahoms until the Mughals took it. The Ahoms had defeated the 'Bengalis' and recaptured it, and from now on it would always remain theirs. With this the messenger was dismissed from the court. We are told that the king 'permitted him to leave the assembly but we may assume that he was unceremoniously ordered to leave. A few days later, before he could return to Jaintiapur, Rāmāi the messenger died. The chroniclers do not tell us the cause of his death, and this arouses suspicion as to whether it was natural. Possibly his forthright speech so offended that Ahoms that he was assassinated. However, the Ahoms seem to have had no intention of breaking off diplomatic relations with the Jaintias, for we learn that Rukma advised Udayaditya to renew the marriage negotiations with the Jaintias and also to send back the body of Ramai. acting on the minister's advice, a letter was written, but in a rather cold and terse style. It contained a complaint against the somewhat discourteous manner in which the Jaintia king had written his letter, and it pointed out that 'when etiquette becomes weak, affection grows weak'. This letter was accompanied by the usual presents, and was dated in Sak 1594 (A. D. 1672). Gifts of clothing and jewellery were sent for the prospective bride.

During these transactions between the two kingdoms we cannot fail to notice a change of manner on the part of the Ahoms towards the Jaintias. The Ahom king assumed a more exalted position than hitherto, and diplomatic business was now conducted at second hand, through the minister. The king did not speak to the messenger in his presence, but only addressed the <u>burhāgohāin</u>, who formally repeated the king's words to the envoy. Evidently the Ahoms' successes against

2. Ibid., 85, p. 42.

<sup>1.</sup> Ei buli raj samajer para nib dile. JB, 84, p. 42.

<sup>3.</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4.</sup> Dhārān . . . ye kāle hrās hay sakāle prīti hrās.JB, 86, p. 43.

the Mughals had given them confidence. They no longer felt it neccessary to cultivate the friendship of the hill tribes as they had previously done, and as they would be compelled to do again in the following century. Moreover the Ahom king, who had long been known to his courtiers by the exalted title 'God of Heaven' (Svargadeo), perhaps now began really to look on himself as a very important monarch, the equal of the Mughal padahah, and the Ahom court had already began the almost Byzantine system of formality, protocol and etiquette which was noticed by the early European visitors in the period of its decline and fall.

When the messengers reached Jaintia with the presents, they announced that the Alom king asked for the hand of a maintan from the Jaintia royal house. When no mention was made of Dimarua Laksmisipha grew angry and asked, 'What about my request for the return of Dimarua?' The messengers replied that Udayāditya had told them that his answer to this request was written in the letter. Apparently they were too frightened to tell the king to his face, for it seems to have been the custom for confidential messengers to know the contents of the letters which they were carrying.

In the meanwhile, as the messengers had been on their way to Jaintia, Udayāditya the Ahom king had died (Sak 1595, A. D. 1673), and had been succeeded by his younger brother, Rāmdhvaj Simha. The angry Jaintia king ordered the messengers to return the jewels to the Ahom king, and sent with them another letter, again requesting the return of Dimarua. This letter was dated in Sak 1595, or A.D. 1673.

With the flat refusal of the Ahoms to restore Dimarua, tension

<sup>1.</sup> JB, 89, p. 44.

<sup>2.</sup> Ibid., 90, p. 44.

<sup>3.</sup> Ibid., 90, pp. 44-45.

grew between the Jaintias and the Ahoms. Rāmdhvaj received five letters from Jaintia, each requesting the return of Dimarua, and all delievered at the same time. They were all returned, on the ground that he found them impolite. A sixth letter was sent by Laksmīsimha in 1675, this being addressed to Rukma the burhāgo-hātn. In it Laksmīsimha expressed his feelings with unusual force: There used to be inseparable friendship between Garhgaon and Jaintia; now that there are disagreements, how can the friendship remain? . . At all times Dimarua was our favourite place; it is not right for you to keep it. . . . . A verbal reply was given to the Jaintia messengers: The Ahom king again refused to give up Dimarua, which had always in the past belonged to the Ahoms, though it had been temporarily lost to the Mughals.

In Sak 1597 (A. D. 1675) Rukma sent a letter to Laksmisimha, again reminding him of his promise to give a daughter in marriage to the Ahom king. Regarding Dimarua, he expressed himself in the same manner as before, but even more forcefully. There was no point, he said, in arguing about ancient history. Dimarua had always belonged to the Ahoms. It had been recaptured from the Mughals, together with Darang and Beltala. They had taken Dimarua from their enemies and they intended to keep it according to the rules of war. Writing as Laksmisimha had done was improper. Rukma told Laksmisimha to return a courteous letter promptly if he wished to remain friendly with the Ahoms. Despite its stern tone, the usual presents accompanied the letter.

In reply Laksmisimha sent back a letter complaining of the

<sup>1.</sup> JB, 91, p. 45. Unlike the previously mentioned documents, the rejected letters are not quoted, which fact indicates that the chronicler was working from the Ahom archives, which would not possess the letters, since they were returned to Jaintia. This encourages our belief in the authenticity of the letters actually quoted. The rejected letters are also mentioned in 'Source 9' (op. cit., 335, p. 169), where the date of all five is given as Sak 1596 (A. D. 1674). This date appears to be wrong.

2. JB, 92, pp. 45-46.

<sup>3.</sup> Ibid., 93, p. 46. 4. Ibid., 95, p. 47.

Ahoms' breach of formalities. When he had sent letters to the Ahom king his messenger had been detained much longer than was necessary, and had not been sent back with a reply or with messengers of the Ahom king to escort him, as had been the case formerly. His tone was on the whole conciliatory, however. He tried to explain away his return of the jewels sent for his daughter, and he was less insistent than hitherto on the subject of Dimarua. It seems that he dared not risk a total breach of the Jaintia-Ahom relationship, on account of the greater strength of the Ahoms.

The Burhagohain sent back a letter of acknowledgement in terms which, though still very formal, were more friendly than in his earlier letters. He pointed out very reasonably that, if the Ahoms and the Jaintias were one family, as Laksmisimha and earlier kings had said, it made no difference who held Dimarus. as long as it was not in the hands of the 'Bengalis'. This letter is dated 4 Aghan, Sak 1599, or towards the end of November. in the reign of the Ahom king Sudaipha Parbatiya Raja, who came to the throne after the assassination of the previous king Sujimphā in July of that year. 4 Exactly a year later, on 4 Achan, Sak 1600 (A. D. 1678), Sudaiphā himself sent a letter to Laksmisimha, accompanied by one from the Burhagohain. This is the first occasion for a long time on which a Jaintia king received a letter in the name of the Ahom king himself, and it seems to indicate some attempt at healing the breach between the two kingdoms. The letters of both the king and the minister were conciliatory in tone, though they complained of the detention of a messenger, a

<sup>1.</sup> JB, 97, pp. 48-49.

<sup>2.</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3.</sup> Ibid., 98, pp. 50-51.

<sup>4.</sup> Gait, History of Assem, 3rd ed., p. 167.

<sup>5.</sup> JB, 99-100, pp. 51-53.

common cause of complaint on both sides. Possibly these letters were sent partly with a view to strengthening the position of Sudaiphā, who was a pawn in the hands of Bukma the <u>Burhāgohātn</u> and was opposed by a considerable faction of the Ahom nobles. He was overthrown and killed as a result of an armed revolt in 1679, and was succeeded by Sulikphā Larā Rājā.

The Ahom Buranji mentions in passing that in the month of Jaistha (May-June) of A. D. 1680 'the Jayanta raja and his son came to Kaliabar'. No further details are given, and the narrative continues with an eccount of the preparations for an attack on the Mughals. This appears to refer to some acto of homage on the part of the Jaintia king, and it is strange that no more detailed reference to it occurs elsewhere. The very brevity and insignificance of the statement give reason to believe it, and it is possible that Laksmisimha thought it advisable to cultivate the friendship of the new Ahom ruler in the hope of improving his chances of regaining Dimarua. His visit may have been connected with the Ahoms' plans against the Mughals, and he may have considered that by offering his help he might strengthen his claim. This was a period of great unrest in the Ahom kingdom, and possibly the visit of Laksmisimha had some connection with the intrigues already a foot to overthrow Lara Raja. But in any case it is strange that no reference to this event occurs in the Jayantiya Buranji, which is specially devoted to recording Ahom-Jaintia relations.

There was further correspondence after the accession of Gadā-dharzimha to the Ahom throne in 1681. On 14 Phāgun, Sak 1605 (March, A.D. 1683) Laksmīsimha sent a letter in conciliatory terms to Sandikai, the Dihinglyā Phukan, one of the great nobles of the

<sup>1.</sup> Gait, History of Assam, 3rd ed., pp. 168-69.

<sup>2.</sup> Ahom Burafif, ed. Barua, 239, p. 261. 3. Gait, op. cit., pp. 170-71.

Ahom court. Ine letter was probably prompted by the news that the Ahom king was rapidly consolidating his power, and the conviction that the period of weak rule and anarchy in the Ahom state was over.

But the Ahom king probably felt powerful enough to ignore the letter, for no reply to it was received. Laksmisimha despatched another letter, in which he excused himself for treating an Ahom prince without respect, saying that he had not believed in the authenticity of his credentials. No explanation of this letter is given in the Jayantiya Burafij, and the transcript is undated. Probably the chronicler had found this letter apart from the other correspondence connected with it, and did not himself know its background. Apparently no reply was received, and there is no record of further correspondence until A.D. 1688.

There were further disputes between the Jaintias and the Ahoms. In 1688 Lakemisimhs sent a letter to Sandikai, now the Barphukan, one of the three senior ministers of the Ahom court, protesting friendship, while mildly complaining about the Ahoms posting guards at the mouth of the river Kalang, apparently to restrict the passage of Jaintia subjects into Ahom territory. To this letter Gadadharsimha soon replied, acknowledging also the two previous letters which he had received a few years earlier. He explained that the guards had been posted to catch fugitives and would soon be removed. The transcript of this letter is not dated and there is no record of its being accompanied by presents, as was usual with such diplomatic correspondence.

It appears that by this time Laksmisimha had become militant, for we have record of a Jaintia raid on Sylhet in November, 1682.

<sup>1</sup> JB, 102, p. 54.

<sup>2.</sup> Ibid., 103, pp. 55-56.

<sup>3.</sup> Ibid., 104, pp. 56-57.

<sup>4.</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5.</sup> Ibid., 105, pp. 57-58.

<sup>6.</sup> Sarkar, History of Bengal, vol. ii, p. 377.

Frobably the Ahoms had in fact posted the guards in order to pretent attacks on their own territory. Friendship was, however, restored between the two countries and, in reply to the conciliatory letter received from Laksmisimha, Sandikai the Barphukan sent
back a letter implying full reconciliation, accompanied by more
mumerous presents than usual. This letter was dated in A.D. 1689.
After that letters of friendship in very affectionate terms and
accompanied by presents were exchanged between the two kings, although diplomatic contact might sometimes cease for as long as
four years.

Rudrasimha had in the meantime succeeded Gadadharsimha as Ahom king in A. D. 1696, and another letter of friendship was sent
two years later from Duvara the Barphukan to king Laksmisimha.

This amicable relationship was soon to be disrupted, however.

A further embassy bearing a letter to the Jaintia king was sent by the Ahoms in A.D. 1697, and some consternation was caused by the fact that after three years the messengers had not yet returned. They arrived only in 1701, bringing a letter worded in the usual terms. They were received with some displeasure, but one of them was soon sent back to Jaintia with another letter containing the normal expressions of friendship.

The probable reason for the detention of the Ahom envoys, though this is not explicitly stated, was the affair of Bairagi Komvar, which did much to worsen Jaintia-Ahom relations. Bairagi Komvar appears to have been a tributary chief of the king of Dimarua

<sup>1.</sup> JB, 106, p. 59.

<sup>2.</sup> Ibid., 107, p. 60.

<sup>3.</sup> Ibid., 108-12, pp. 61-64; 339, p. 171 ('Source o').

<sup>4.</sup> Gait, History of Assem, 3rd ed., p. 175.

<sup>5.</sup> JB, 113, pp. 65-66; 1bid., 341, p. 172 ('Source 9').

<sup>6.</sup> Ibid., 114-19, pp. 66-71.

and to have been a supporter of the king of Jaintia, though, since Dimarua had long been firmly in Ahom hands, the king of Dimarua must have been tributary to the Ahoms. Bairagi Komvar was appointed by the king of Jaintia as ruler of Bangaon. Probably because of his allegiance to the Jaintia king, who claimed suzerainty over Dimarua, he was captured by the Ahoms. He was sent to Gauhati, which was not then the Ahom capital but was the headquarters of the Barphukan Duvara, on the orders of the latter, 'to serve the Barphukari. Afterwards he was sent to the Ahom capital Garhgaon, and he was then exiled to Namrup, the eastern part of the Ahom territory. This incident took place at the time of the disappearance of the Ahom messengers , in A.D. 1697. One year later the kings of Gobha, Neli and Khala sent a joint message to the Dihingiya Barphukan requesting the release of Bairagi Komvar. The frontier officer (cakiyāl barphukan) who received this message refused to transmit it to the court. With this refusal the three chiefs started collecting troops to go and seek for Bairagi Komvar in Ahom territory. This was reported to the Ahom king. They made a further attempt to send a message to him, requesting that Bairagi be freed, but the request was again refused, and they were told that they had no right to intervene in regions which were under the jurisdiction of the Ahoms. 4 The three chiefs again collected their troops. 5 They

<sup>1.</sup> According to the standard accounts of Ahom administration there was only one Barphukan, who was a member of the Royal Council of five. His headquarters at this period were at Gauhati, and he was particularly responsible for relations with Bengal and with the frontier chiefs. (Gait, op. cit., p. 246) It is possible that Duvarā is a proper name, and that this official was the Barphukan par excellence. But the Burañjis mention many Barphukans by titles (e.g. Bihin-siyā Barphukan, Cakiyāl Barphukan), and it seems that the Burañji employs the title loosely for any phukan. This was a title of rank above that of baruvā.

<sup>2.</sup> JB, 120, pp.71-72.

<sup>3.</sup> Ibid., 121, p. 72.

<sup>4.</sup> Ibid., 122, pp. 72-73.

<sup>5.</sup> The phrase laskar etare seems to imply a tribal gathering rather than the mustering of a regular army. It is still the practice of the Khasi tribes to meet together to discuss important matters.

were much encouraged when they heard that the Jaintia king had declared that he would help to get Bairāgī Komvār back, even at the risk of a quarrel with the Ahoms. They decided to ask help from Jaintia, since they had on previous occasions been helped by the Jaintias against the Bengalis. When the Barphukan heard this he immediately consulted with the Ahom king. Probably the Ahoms were alarmed at the news, for their officers were now instructed to receive courteously any Jaintia envoy who presented his credentials in a proper manner.

The next move of the Jaintia king was to try to assert his authority over the much coveted Dimarua by demanding supplies of geese, goats, pigeons and gold-embroidered cloth by way of tribute. He threatened the king of Dimarua with serious trouble if he failed to comply with this request. The latter stalled while he sought instructions from the Ahom court, which ordered him to refuse the Jaintia demands, which he did.<sup>2</sup>

In the midst of all these activities Laksmisimha died and was succeeded by Rāmsimha. Gait gives the date of Laksmisimha's death as 1697, but it appears to have been somewhat later than this, since Laksmisimha was alive when the Ahom embassy of 1697 was sent to him. The first record of Rāmsimha's reign refers to events which occurred in 1701-02. Therefore we suggest that Laksmisimha died about 1700. The first king-list in the Jayantiyā Buranjī states that he was assassinated by Rāmsimha. We have no details or confirmatory evidence of this, but in view of the frequency of regicide in this period the statement is not intrinsically improbable. However, according to the king-list Rāmsimha was the fourth regicide in succession, and with his name the king-list ends. Thus the statement is probably untrue.

<sup>1.</sup> JB, 123, p. 73.

<sup>2.</sup> Ibid., 124, p. 73.

<sup>3.</sup> History of Assem, 3rd ed., p. 316.

<sup>4.</sup> See below, p. 146.

<sup>5.</sup> JB, 18, p. 7.

The reign of Laksmisimha is connected in Jaintia folk tradition with the exploits of U Sajer Nangli, a minor chieftain who conspired against the king and was exiled with a band of followers. He is said to have roamed widely with his men over the Kachar hills, and to have performed wonderful exploits of bravery and prowess. Some traditions tell of his journeying as far afield as Burma. Sajer Nangli appears to be a sort of Synteng Robin Hood, and the tales told about him embody many widespread folklore themes. If there is any small basis of historical truth in these stories it is impossible the sift it from the fictional accretions, and even if the here did exist, he was not important enough to be recorded in the Burafijis or in any other source. Some general evidence of disturbances and raids from the hill peoples upon the plains of Assam and Sylhet is however to be gathered from the material discussed in the last few pages, and thus there may be some truth in the stories of U Sajer Namgli.

Laksmisimha considerably strengthened the Jaintia kingdom and he expressed his growing power by building a splendid new palace at Jaintiapur. The ruins of this are still to be seen, and they bear an inscription with a date first read by Gait as Sak 1632, equivalent to A. D. 1710, intimating that Laksmisimha was still alive at that time. Later Gait realized that this date was impossible in view of the Buranii evidence, and revised his reading to Sak 1602, or A. D. 1680. The earliest known Jaintia coin bears a date equivalent to A. D. 1669. On this, as on most other Jaintia coins, the name of the ruler is not given, but it was minied in the year of Laksmisimha's accession, and it is thus possible that he inaugurated the series of Jaintia coins, though there is some evidence that they may have been occasionally minted earlier.

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<sup>1.</sup> For details see Barch, History and Culture of the Khasi People, pp. 74-76.

<sup>2.</sup> JASB, lxiv, 1895, p. 247.

<sup>3.</sup> History of Assam, 3rd ed., p. 316.

<sup>4.</sup> Gait, JASB, lxiv, 1895, p. 243.

<sup>5.</sup> See above, p. 105.

# HISTORY OF THE JAINTIA KINGS -- III

## Rameimha I (c. 1700 - 1708)

The Jayantiya Burafiji tells us that the Ahom king Rudresimha sent emissaries to the Jaintia court, apparently to Ramsimha, and that in Sak 1624 or A. D. 1702 the returning envoys were detained at Gobha for four months. They were released only after the Ahoms had sent boats to fetch them. They at last arrived at Gauhati with the accompanying Jaintia envoy Rijayram on 13 Mach. And they were received with honour. Soon after this, news reached the Ahoms that bubonic plague had broken out in Jaintia, and that it had carried away many people, including the chief of Gobha. For this reason the Ahom envoys and the Jaintia messenger Rijayram were kept in isolation for six weeks. They were held at Gauhati, which, after its conquest from the Mughals in 1663, had become the second capital of the Ahoms and the headquarters of the Barphukan.

After this period of isolation Bijayram was received with honour by the Barphukan. He delivered a letter from the Jaintia king, together with a verbal message of friendship. The Barphukan then

<sup>1.</sup> JB, 126, p. 74.

<sup>2.</sup> Ali (History of Jaintia, pp. 22-25) mentions the first embassy of Rāmsimha to the Ahoms as taking place in Sak 1625 or A. D. 1703-04. This does not agree with the JB, which definitely gives the date as Sak 1624, and we have no reason to believe the Burañjī to be incorrect in this particular. All does not tell us the source of his statement. As the envoys were received on 13 Magh, Sak 1624, which would fall very early in A. D. 1703, Ali may have been confused and placed the Sak date one year in advance.

<sup>3.</sup> JB, 127, p. 74. 4. <u>Ibid.</u>, 128, p. 74.

<sup>5.</sup> Ibid., 129, p. 75.

<sup>6.</sup> Ibid., 132, p. 76.

<sup>7.</sup> Gait, History of Assam, 3rd ed., p. 158.

sent Bijayram to the Ahom king at the capital, Garhanon, but he was not allowed to see the king in person. Although relations between the two kingdoms were now quite friendly, it is evident that the Ahoms were assuming a more and more exalted position towards the envoys of the Jaintia court. At this time diplomatic messages were exchanged only with the chief ministers of the Ahom kings, whereas in earlier periods the Jaintia messengers were received by the Ahom kings themselves. This indicates not only the increasing protocol and formality of the Ahom court but also the fact that the Ahoms looked on the Jaintias as subordinates rather then as equal allies.

When Bijayram was refused an audience with the Ahom king he returned to Gauhati, where he was again received by the Barphukan, who sent him back to Jaintia with a letter of friendship dated 25 Phagun, Sak 1626 (March, A.D. 1705). Bijayram must have stopped for over two years at the Ahom court before he returned. This does not seem very unusual, for it appears that these senior messengers or katakis were rather in the nature of ambassadors, who kept in touch with their own courts by means of lower grade messengers, called by the Ahoms bairagis.

As was customary for a diplomat of that time and region, Bijay-rām went back to Jaintia accompanied by Ahom emissaries. These envoys failed to return to the Ahom court at the expected time, and so several other messengers (bairāgī) were sent for them. These in their turn did not return. At last the king became very angry and sent katakis or higher grade diplomats in search of them, while at the same time the Barphukan sent warnings to the chiefs of Gobhā, Nelī and Khalā. These small chiefs, who were immediately subordin-

<sup>1.</sup> JB, 133-35, pp. 77-78.

<sup>2.</sup> Ibid., 133, p. 77.

<sup>3.</sup> Ibid., 136, p. 79.

ats to the Jaintia king and indirectly to the Ahon, at times seem to have acted independently of both overlords. Some three years earlier they had detained both Ahom and Jaintia everlords for four months. They were warned that if they did not release the Ahom envoys all trade with them would be stopped. The comparative mildness of the threat indicates that they were difficult to deal with, and that the Ahoms, like the Jaintias, held them in considerable respect, no doubt because of the mountain fastnesses which formed a safe retreat from which they could not be evicted, but from which they could easily harrass their enemies on the plains. It seems probable that their act of defiance was linked up with the growing tension between the Ahoms and the Kacharis, which was soon to involve the Jaintias also.

The Jayantiya Buranji gives no account of the outbreak of the war between the Ahoms and the Kacharis. The latter had been subordinate to the Ahoms, but they had become increasingly self-reliant with the weakening of Ahom power through Mughal attacks and successive usurpations of the throne. In December, 1707, the Ahom king Rudrasimha sent 70,000 men against the Kachari king Tāmradhvaj Nārāyan, who was forced to retreat to Khāspur, in the plains of Kachar. In the meantime the Ahom army was afflicted with an epidemic of dysentery, and had to return to its base, after destroying Maibong, the Kachari hill capital.

The <u>Jayantiyā Burafiji</u> takes up the story at this point. The Ahom king was preparing for a further attack on Kachar from his base at Rangpur when he learnt that the Jaintia king had sent an envoy offering help to Tamradhvaj. Tamradhvaj gladly accepted the offer, but, when the Jaintia messenger returned, king Rāmsimha

<sup>1.</sup> Gait, History of Assem, 3rd ed., p. 307.

thought, 'Since the Svargarājā (the Ahom king's title) has attacked him it is not good that we help him'. So instead of sending help he attacked Khaspur with a thousand men, capturing Tāmradhvaj and his family and taking then to Jaintiapur.

Gait appears to have gathered his information from local traditional sources, and his account differs from the above. He states that the initiative for a Jaintia-Kachari alliance came from Tāmra-dhwaj, not from Rāmsimha. After the retreat of the Ahoms Tāmradhwaj sent a message that Rāmsimha's help was no longer needed, and later Rāmsimha seized Tāmradhwaj by a stratagem'. Elsewhere in the same volume Gait states that the Kabhari king fled to Bikrampur and sent his appeal to Rāmsimha from that place. Rāmsimha marched to Mulāgul and, under the pretext of a friendly meeting with Tāmradhwaj, seized him at Balesvar.

The Tunkhungiya Buranji gives yet a third story. According to this there was no question of double dealing on the part of Ramsimha. Tamradhvaj, after being defeated by the Ahoms, fled to Jaintia and threw himself on Ramsimha's mercy. Later, when the Ahoms asked Ramsimha to hand him over, the Jaintia king refused to do so on the principle that he could not betray one who sought refuge with him. The Ahom Buranji surprisingly makes no reference at all to this incident or to the war that resplited from it.

We cannot be certain which of these accounts is closest to the facts. Perhaps it is intrinsically more likely that, when in serious difficulties, the Kachari king appealed to his neighbour, rather than that the Jaintia king voluntarily offered help. On the other hand Gait does not give sources for most of his statements, and

<sup>1.</sup> JB, 137-38, p. 80.

<sup>2.</sup> History of Assam, 3rd ed., p. 307. The same account is given, also thout references, by Barch (History and Culture of the Khasi People, p. 77).

<sup>3.</sup> Op. cit., p. 179. 4. TB, 60, p. 32.

Since we cannot trace them we prefer the account of the <u>Jayantiyā</u> <u>Burafiji</u>, which is here consistent and clear. The <u>Tunkhungiyā Burafiji</u>, completely reversing the whole picture, seems to be based on textbook political morality and is inconsistent with all the other evidence. In any case we may believe that, as a by-product of the Ahon attack on Kachar, Rāmsimha managed to capture Tāmradhvaj.

After capturing the Kachari king, Rāmsimha boasted to an Ahom messenger (bairāgī) that he had accomplished what the Svargadeo and the Barphukan could not do. While the envoy was still at the Jaintia court, the captive king managed to send him a message for the Ahom king, humbly asking forgiveness and begging the Ahoms to rescue him. On hearing this the Ahom king called a ccuncil of the three chief ministers (dāngarīyās) and other officials to decide how they were to deal with the Jaintia king. The council decided to take action.

The war which followed was directed against both the Kacharis and the Jaintias, since both had proved disloyal to the Ahoms. The two campaigns were led by the <u>Barbarua</u> and the <u>Barphukan</u>; the former was entrusted with the Kachari campaign and the latter with the Jaintia one. While the <u>Barbarua</u> was attacking the Kachari kingdom the <u>Barphukan</u> succeeded in getting the submission of the chiefs of Gobhā, Khalā and Naganā, while the chief of Nellifled. The submission of these untrustworthy border chieftains cleared the way for an advance into Jaintia.

In the meanwhile, the army under the Barbarua had reached Campane. On the way several important Kachari chieftains had submit-

<sup>1.</sup> JB, 139, p. 81.

<sup>2.</sup> Ibid., 140, p. 81.

<sup>3.</sup> Ibid., 143, p. 82.

<sup>4.</sup> Ibid., 144, p.82.

<sup>5.</sup> Ibid., 146, pp. 82-83.

ted. When they reached Bikrampur, the general sent messages about to Khāspur, promising protection to all who submitted, and he also forbade his army to loot and destroy property. Thus the Kacharis were treated very leniently by the Ahoms and the usual destruction of war did not follow in the wake of the advancing army. From Khāspur the army marched to Balesvar and Mulāgul. From Mulāgul the Barbaruā sent a message to the Jaintia king saying that if he released and handed over the king of Kachar the Ahoms would not advance any further.

During the operations against the two hill peoples the Ahom king was assured by the Mughal governor of Sylhet that no help would be given to the Kacharis. The letter of the Sylhet governor is mentioned in the main Jayantiyā Burafijî and is given in full in 'Source 9'. It is dated 15 Māch, Sak 1629 (A. D. 1707), and was thus written fourteen days after the Jaintia king had sent a letter to the Ahoms refusing to release Tāmradhvaj. Evidently the letter of the Sylhet governor was written in reply to one sent by the Ahom king asking for Mughal support against Jaintia. The Sylhet official, referred to as Thāmādār, expressed regret at the delay in replying and stated that he had sent troops to the Jaintia frontier. A friendly letter from the Ahoms was sent back to Sylhet soon after.

It is quite evident that this attitude of good will towards the Ahoms on the part of the governor of Sylhet was prompted not so much by sympathy and genuine friendly feelings as by fear, because at this time, the year in which Aurangzeb died, the Mughal power was weakening and the centre had little control over the outlying provinces, which were left more or less to fend for themselves. Probably the governor of Sylhet anticipated civil war, which would in-

<sup>1.</sup> JB, 147, p. 83.

<sup>2.</sup> Ibid., 148, pp. 83-84.

<sup>3.</sup> Ibid., 149, p. 34.

<sup>4.</sup> Ibid., 150, p.84.

<sup>5.</sup> Ibid., 348, pp. 173-74.

<sup>6.</sup> Ibid., 154, p. 86.

<sup>7.</sup> Ibid., 346, p. 174.

volve most of the forces of the Bengal sübah. Murshid Qulf Khān, the forceful nawāb of Bengal, was temporarily replaced, and the situation seemed very uncertain. In such circumstances trouble from the hillmen of the Khasi and Jaintia hills was to be expected, and the city of Sylhet had been raided by the Jaintias only a little more than twenty years previously. The Mughal governor must have been relieved that the attention of the turbulent hillmen was being diverted from the plains to the south of them by their powerful enemy to the north.

Professor S. K. Bhuyan was of the opinion that the Ahom king Rudrasimha's motive in trying to subjugate both Kachar and Jaintia was to enable him to next turn his attention to the Mughals in Sylhet and extend his dominions at their expense. He too must have had news of the disturbed state of the Mughal empire around the time of the death of Aurangzeb, and this may have been his long-term aim. But from the point of view of Sylhet the Jaintias rather than the Ahoms were the immediate memace.

The Barphukan continued to march with his army from Gobia until he reached Barapani, meeting with little opposition on the way. At Barapani he made a halt and despatched a letter to the Jaintia king, still using friendly formulae and sending presents, calling for the immediate release of the king of Kachar. A similar letter in a less formal style was sent to the Jaintia Barkonar, or heir apparent, but with a present of only two knives. The Jaintia king's reply was sent direct to the Ahom king, and not to the Barphukan. The letter contained the traditional phrases of friendship, but it again expressed a refusal to release the Kachari king, and it accused the Ahoma of breaking the long-standing friendship between the two kingdoms by thus meddling with the internal affairs of the

<sup>1.</sup> Sarkar, History of Bengal, vol. ii, p. 405.

<sup>2.</sup> Introduction to Tripura Buranji, 2nd ed., p. 12.

<sup>3.</sup> JB, 151-52, pp. 84-85.

<sup>4.</sup> Ibid., 153, p. 85.

<sup>5.</sup> Ibid., 154, p. 86.

Jaintia kingdom.

The Barphukan refused to accept the letter, apparently because it was addressed to the Ahom king and not to himself, in disregard of precedent. He sent back the massenger from Barapāni with the verbal instructions that Tāmradhvaj should be released at once, or he would advance and destroy Rāmsimha. Since no reply to this message was received the march continued. In general the Ahom forces seem to have encountered fairly light opposition. At Hātibandha 'Gāro' archers attacked the Ahoms, and killed several of them before they were driven off. These irregulars appear to have been Khasi hillmen, whose skill in archery is well known. Later the Ahoms were attacked by 300 'Gāros', who killed several men and elephants before they were repulsed, taking with them two Ahom heads as trophies.

At another place called Barapani, obviously not that mentioned above and probably referring to the river of that name, an engagement with the Jaintias took place, and resulted in a victory for the Ahoms. The Ahom army continued its advance through Nartiang, until it came to a place called Pamnai, not far from Jaintiapur. 4

News of these victories of the Ahoms soon reached Rāmsimha, the Jaintia king, who consulted with his <u>Barkofiār</u> or chief prince about what course of action should be taken in the face of such grave danger. The decision taken was to send the Kachari king to the Ahoms. Rāmsimha sent a messenger to the <u>Barbaruā</u> at Mulāgul, asking him not to advance any further, as he would surrender the Kachari king, which he did.

Although Ramsimha had surrendered Tamradhvaj to the Ahoms, he

<sup>1.</sup> JB, 155, p. 86; 342-43, pp. 172-73.

<sup>2.</sup> Ibid., 156, p. 87.

<sup>3.</sup> Ibid., 157, p. 87.

<sup>4.</sup> Ibid., 158, p. 88.

<sup>5.</sup> Ibid., 160, pp. .88-89.

<sup>6.</sup> Ibid., 161, p. 89.

decided to resist them should they attack Jairtiapur, and accordingly he prepared the defences of the town. But when the Ahoms did make an attack on Jaintiapur, his chiefs and nobles showed no inclination to fight them, and so Rämsimha was forced to surrender, with thirty elephants. The Ahom soldiers were strictly forbidden by the Barbaruā to plunder the Jaintia villages. After the defeat of Rämsimha, the Ahom king celebrated the victory, and rewarded both the Barbaruā and the Barphukan, who had conducted the war so successfully.

The governor of Sylhet, on hearing of the defeat of the Jaintia king, immediately sent the Ahom king a letter of congratulation on his victory. This letter was accompanied by a verbal message stating that the Jaintias had been a source of great trouble to him and that he was glad of their defeat. In reply a letter was sent to the governor, saying that the Ahom king had annexed both Jaintia and Kachar to his own kingdom. It added that the Ahoms wished to encourage trade and good relations between their kingdom and Sylhet, and they would not transgress their frontier. The governor was asked to see to it that his troops did likewise.

The Ahoms gained considerable treasure and military supplies from the stores of the two defeated kings. It was calculated that they got 10,000 rupees in gold and silver, 2,000 guns and 500 swords, together with other supplies. Among their captives were the Kachari prince Bhimbal, two granddaughters of the former Jaintia king Yaénānik, and 1,500 men.

2. Ibid., 163, p. 90.

<sup>1.</sup> JB, 162, p. 89.

<sup>3.</sup> Ibid. This is the statement of the <u>Barafiji</u>, and we have only the anonymous Assamese chronicler's word for its accuracy. However, we are not aware of the source of Bareh's statement that 'atrocities against Jaintia subjects were committed, combined with looting and arson' (<u>History and Culture of the Khasi People</u>, p. 78).

<sup>4.</sup> JB, 165, p. 91, c.f. 35, 60, p. 33.

<sup>5.</sup> JB, 168, pp. 92-93. 6. Ibid., 169, p. 93.

<sup>7.</sup> Ibid., 171, p. 94.

<sup>8. &</sup>lt;u>Ibid.</u>, 172, p. 94. As Yaémānik died soon after A. D. 1620 his granddaughters must have been very old ladies at the time. Probably direct descendants of a later generation are meant; or perhaps this name is a scribal error for Yaématrai.

The Ahom king sent orders that both the captive kings were to be brought down to his court. During the night after the message was received Rāmsimha had a violent attack of vomiting, and next morning he sent word to the <u>Barphukan</u> that he was too ill to travel. He was finally persuaded to go willingly, on the understanding that the Ahom king's intentions were friendly and that he would soon be allowed to return to his own country.

This is the account of the <u>Jayantiyā Burafiji</u>. The <u>Tuńkhuńgiyā</u>
<u>Burafiji</u> tells a slightly different story. The two Ahom generals
might have allowed Rāmsimha to remain, but they were persuaded by
the Kachari king Tāmradhvaj that if they left him in Jaintia he would
soon be rescued by the <u>Sarukoffār</u> or junior prince, who was still at
large in the hills. Rāmsimha was, according to this source, brought
down to the plains by force, as a prisoner.

It is hardly likely that the Ahom generals would have permitted the king to remain behind, even under guard, in the face of the explicit orders of their own king; and it is in keeping with what we know of the Ahom kingdom to expect that the two kings who were so soundly beaten should be brought to the Ahom capital for a triumph. The traditions of Hindu kingship were fully in accordance with such practices, provided that the conquered king was treated respectfully by his captor and was later allowed to return to his kingdom and rule there as a vassal.

Along with the Jaintia king had been surrendered the national treasures of Jaintia -- the famous image of Jarantidevi, an auspicious right-whorled conch, and a <u>Salagram</u> (a fossil ammonite, sacred to the god Visnu). While the king was being taken to Gobhā a person referred to as the <u>Gāro Sarukonār Bardalāi</u> decided to rescue

<sup>1.</sup> JB, 174-75, pp. 95-96.

<sup>2.</sup> TB, 60, p. 33.

him, not so much for his own sake as for the sake of the three treesures, possession of which would give him great political power. For this purpose he formed an alliance with the chiefs of Nartiang and Khyrim, and their united forces attacked the eighteen Jaintia forts which had been occupied by the Ahoms. They rescued the image of the goddess and attempted to occupy the towns of Dimarua, Maidani, Andhrani and Duvärgäri, while at the same time they made contact with the Bengalis of Sylhet.

The news of this uprising greatly angered the Ahom king and he quickly sent a strong force under the <u>Burhāgshāin</u> and other important officers to deal with the insurgents. This force advanced from Jāgi and killed many of the hillmen. The three frontier chiefs of Gobhā, Neli and Khalā, who had evidently been aiding the rebels, were captured and sent to the Ahom king. The town of Nartiang was attacked and recaptured. The main force, meeting strong resistance, took up a fortified position on Mount Rūpešvar, and the governor of Sylhet sent troops to support the Ahom forces on receiving a request for help from them.

The exact status of the <u>Sarukonār</u>, or Junior Prince, who appears to have carried on the resistance after Rāmsimha's defeat, is somewhat in doubt. In the <u>Jayantīyā Buranjī</u> he is referred to as a 'Garo', in this context a hillman of any description, and not as a member of the royal family of Jaintia. The <u>Tunkhungīyā Buranjī</u>, however, gives a somewhat different account. Here the <u>Sarukonār</u> is explicitly said to be a prince of Jaintia, who rescued the three treasures while they were being taken to Ahom territory by a body of troops different from that which escorted the captive king. 4 The

<sup>1.</sup> JB, 176, p. 96.

<sup>2. &</sup>lt;u>Ibid.</u>, 177, pp. 96-97. 3. <u>Ibid.</u>, 179, pp. 97-98.

<sup>4.</sup> TB, 60, p. 33. The late and unreliable Asamār Padya Burañjī (vv. 280-81) mentions the two sons of Rāmsimha (dui putra Rāma ye Simhār) as leading the resistance jointly. This is unlikely, and the poet Dutirām was evidently confusing the Jaintia matrilineal succession with the system most familiar to him. The two sons mentioned may be in fact the Barkoñār and the Sarukoñār, the king's nephews, whose relationship to him was misunderstood.

latter account seems intrinsically more probable, since it is unlikely that the younger son or nephew of a small Khasi or Syntens hill chief would be referred to as Sarukoñār, the Junior Prince. We suggest that he was a nephew of Rāmsimha, whose desire to rescue the treasures rather than his uncle was prompted by the knowledge that he was not the direct heir to the throne, but that with the treasures in his possession he might well succeed in making himself the king, if he could expel the Ahoms.

The Kachari king was sent to Bijaypur, where he was given a liberal allowance of food and other necessities. A great darbar was then held at Bisvanath, on the first day of Baisag (April, 1708),2 and the two captives had to make formal submission to the Ahom king. The Kachari Tamradhvaj was first to submit, and he did so completely, without any reservations. He was dismissed from the darbar with numerous and valuable gifts. 4 Thus he was accorded guite honourable treatment at the hands of the Ahoms. The Jaintia king, on the other hand, does not seem to have fared so well, because he was prouder than the Kachari and refused to submit completely. In the end he made a half-hearted formal submission, after which he was told by Rudrasimha the Ahom king that he would be allowed to return provided that the chiefs who were still free would cease their molestations and submit to Ahom authority. Messengers were then sent to all the shiefs concerned asking their submission, and while they were hesitating about it Rāmsimha died, on 20 Śrāvan, Śak 1630 (early August, A. D. 1708). His funeral was paid for by Rudrasimha and was conducted with great pomp and show.

According to the Deodhai Buranji, which gives a rather fantastic

<sup>1.</sup> JB, 181, pp. 98-99.

<sup>2.</sup> Ibid., 183, p. 99.

<sup>3.</sup> Ibid., 184, p. 100.

<sup>4.</sup> Ibid., 186-88, pp. 101-02.

<sup>5.</sup> Ibid., 190, pp. 103-04.

<sup>6.</sup> Ibid., 190, p. 104.

account of the great <u>darbar</u>, Rāmsimha contracted smallpox after the ceremony, and while ill was poisoned on the Ahom king's instructions. This account is explicitly stated to be taken from another source, the <u>Dāmtiyālīyā Burañjī</u>, which seems to be lost. The date of the king's death falls in the time of year when smallpox is most prevalent. The accusation that he was poisoned suggests the bazaar gossip which still is heard in India on the unexpected death of an important personage; on the other hand the Ahom king had good reason to wish Rāmsimha dead, and poisoning in those days was common enough. We cannot attach much importance to this story, though it is not intrinsically improbable.

The Ahoms also captured two daughters of Ramsimha, and the Berkoffar or Grown Prince of Jaintia, who was brought to Gauhati on 5 Rhadra, or in late August. He had an interview with the great Ahom ministers and discussed with them the possibility of his release and return to Jaintia.

The remains of the dead king were in the meantime deposited at the sacred shat of Asvakranta near Gauhati, on the north bank of the Brahmaputra. Large gifts were bestowed on the brahmans. After the fraddha ceremony, which the prince must have performed, he was taken to the fort of Jagi, where he was placed in custody. Messengers were sent to Jaintia, and they returned with the news that the people were clamouring for the release of their prince. Various important chiefs of Jaintia tried to get in touch with the prince at Jagi. On

<sup>1.</sup> DB, 243-45, pp. 128-29.

<sup>2.</sup> Gait (History of Assam, 3rd ed., p. 318) states that these princesses were given in marriage by the crown prince to the Ahom king, but this is not explicitly stated in the JB. These two princesses remind us of the two granddaughters of Yasmanik referred to earlier in the chronicle as having been captured by the Ahoms, and it is possible that they are the same.

<sup>3.</sup> JB, 191-92, pp. 164-06.

<sup>4.</sup> Ibid., 193, p. 106.

<sup>5.</sup> Ibid., 195, p. 106.

hearing this the Ahom king ordered that he te brought to Gauhati. 1

The imprisonment of the crown prince by the Ahoms led to great unrest in Jaintia, both in the hills and in the plains. The people assembled at the fort of Bokā and demanded his release. The Ahom king was very angry at this, and sent a messenger to the Kachari king Tāmradhvaj, whom he had released, asking for support in suppressing the rising. The prince of Jaintia was removed with his companions to a safer place of captivity at Bardovā, near the king's headquarters.

In order to suppress the uprising of the Jaintias the Ahom king sent an army of 20,244 men under the <u>Pāṇiphukan</u> (an important officer, subordinate to the <u>Barphukan</u>); this advanced by way of Gobhā. Another force proceeded by way of the Kapili river, via Dimarua. The first column made contact with the <u>Burhāgohāin</u> at Gobhā. In their advance the Ahoms left garrisons to safeguard the route, and they destroyed two villages where they had met with opposition. There were several engagements with the Jaintias, but these always employed guerilla tactics and never fought an open battle, in order to exhaust the superior might of the enemy.

The army at Gobhā was instructed by the king to remain stationed there for some time. It then advanced to Nartiang, where the troops strengthened and enlarged the fortifications so that they could contain over 36,000 men to keep the Jaintias in check. The army then moved on, destroying villages as it went. The troops had great difficulty in putting down the hillmen, who are referred to in the <u>Buranjī</u> as Garos, but who were obviously Khasis and hill Syntengs. Many Ahom soldiers were killed. The second column advan-

<sup>1.</sup> JB, 197, pp. 107-08.

<sup>2.</sup> Ibid., 200, p. 108.

<sup>3.</sup> Ibid., 201, pp. 109-10.

<sup>4.</sup> Ibid., 202, p. 110.

<sup>5.</sup> Ibid., 203, p. 110.

<sup>6.</sup> Ibid., 207, pp. 111-12.

cing by way of the Kapili river marched through several villages, which they destroyed, and reached Nartiang where they joined forces with the other contingent. A list of their booty is given, which seems to be very small and thus indicates that the villagers fled from the advancing troops, taking their property with them.

In the meantime the hillmen had net together, and they decided to try to bring the prince to the hills and make him their king. 2 But the people of Jaintia, by which the plainsfolk are evidently meant, though they wanted the prince back, were unwilling to break out into open rebellion against the occupying forces, partly for fear of greater reprisals, but also for fear of the 'Garos', the wilder hill people whose depredations they had probably feared from time immemorial.

The king sent orders to the forces at Nartiang to advance, and the bulk of them went further into the hill country. 4 Meanwhile three <a href="hazārikās">hazārikās</a> (captains theoretically commanding a thousand troops), and some of the remaining forces guarding the fort of Nartiang, left the defences in order to look for elephant fodder. On the way they were attacked by "Jaros" and 40 Ahom soldiers were killed. One of the <a href="hazārikās">hazārikās</a> was wounded by an arrow, but he managed to reach safety on horseback. The next day a convoy of munitions was similarly attacked, while off guard. When the king Rudrasimha heard of the cowardice and negligence displayed by his men he had them punished by mutilation and beating. 5 Another force, apparently sent from Bardovā as reinforcements to strengthen the army of occupation, was also attacked, this time by 'Nagas', who fled when

<sup>1.</sup> JB, 208, p. 112.

<sup>2.</sup> Ibid., 209, pp. 112-13.

<sup>3.</sup> Ibid., 210-11, p. 113.

<sup>4.</sup> Ibid., 212, pp. 113-14.

<sup>5.</sup> Ibid., 213, p. 114.

resisted. Some were captured, but later these escaped. These 'Nagas' were probably the wilder hillmen from further east, who took advantage of the troubled conditions in the Jaintia kingdom to loot and rayage.

Next we are told that the Assemese king had the Jaintia prince moved from Bardova, the campaign headquarters, downstream to Shahburj. This suggests that the king was by no means confident of the security of his own territory. Meanwhile the news reached Jaintia that the Barphukan was urging the king to return the prince to his own country because of the general desire to have him back. It seems that in fact the difficulties of suppressing the hillmen, whose guerilla tactics had caused considerable casualties, were so great that the general felt that it was advisable to give up the attempt to subjugate them. Envoys from Jaintia went to the Ahom court to plead with the king. 2 After some persuasion, the king agreed to release the prince, and he was sent back to his homeland accompanied by valuable presents. He left the Ahom territory full of praise for king Rudrasimha. He was met at Gobhā by four hundred Jaintias, who escorted him for the rest of his journey. The date given for his departure is 10 Caitra (late March or early April, 1709)? After this good relations were restored between the two countries, and markets were reestablished on the frontiers.

We learn from the <u>Tunkhungiyā Buranjī</u> that two years after the death of Rāmsimha, that is in A. D. 1710, the <u>Svargadeo</u> went down to Sāriahtolā to crown the <u>Barkonār</u> as king of Jaintia. The whereabouts of the <u>Sarukonār</u> had still not been traced by the Ahoms,

<sup>1.</sup> JB, 215, p. 115.

<sup>2.</sup> I bid., 216-17, pp. 115-16.

<sup>3.</sup> Mbid., 216, pp. 116-17.

<sup>4.</sup> Ibid., 219, p. 117.

<sup>5.</sup> Ibid., 221, p. 118.

<sup>6.</sup> I bid., 222, pp. 118-19.

<sup>7.</sup> Ibid., 223, p. 119.

<sup>8.</sup> Ibid., 226, p. 120.

and so he escaped arrest. It is possible that he made peace with his brother, since in the following reign we read of a <u>Barukoñār</u>, while the <u>Barkoñār</u>, now the tributary king of Jaintia, is still referred to by the same title. We cannot be sure, however, that the <u>Sarukoñār</u> mentioned here is not some other prince on whom the title was conferred. The three sacred treasures of Jaintia are also unaccounted for.

After the description of these events a lacuna of seven pages occurs in the Jayantiya Burafiji manuscript.

#### Jaynarayan (1706-1751)

The Barkoffär ascended the Jaintia throne under the name of Jaynäräyan. Despite his subordination to the Ahoms, he issued coins to commemorate his accession, and, as we have seen, he was honoured by a visit from his overlord, who ceremonially crowned him in A. D. 1710. The missing pages of the Jayantiya Buraffji manuscript probably cover the period in which the Ahom king imdrasiphe and was succeeded by Sibsipha. This took place in A. D. 1714.

The <u>Buranjil</u> resumes its account in the middle of a passage recording the death of a Jaintia ambassador (<u>kataki</u>) named Binanda, after a stay of eight days at the Ahom court, apparently at a time when the three frontier chiefs of Gobhā, Neli and Khalā were causing trouble by interfering with the free passage of travellers between the Ahom kingdom and Jaintia, between which mutual relations were now, it seems, good. It appears that the envoy was detained by the three turbulent chiefs, who were in theory subordinate to Jaintia, and was not allowed to pass through their lands to the Ahom country until

2. Gait, JASE, lxiv, 1895, p. 243.

<sup>1.</sup> TB, 61, pp. 33-34; c.f. SAB, 243, p. 122.

<sup>3.</sup> Barch (History and Culture of the Khasi People, p. 79) mentions this ceremony and then states that 'nothing more is known except that Narayan Rajah (sic) observed the above terms'. This remark is particularly strange as he lists the Jayantiya Buranji in his bibliography.

4. JB, 228, p.121.

the Ahom frontier commanders made a strong protest. Later another envoy came to the Ahom court with a request that trading facilities between the two kingdoms should be restored. He declared that the Sarukoffar who had sent him wanted to restore the prosperity of both kingdoms and also wished for closer friendship with the Ahoms than ever before. The ambassador was given audience by the Ahom king himself, who thus indicated his goodwill.4

The king agreed to the ambassador's request and gave orders for the reestablishment of the market at Phulguri, which had no doubt been closed for several years during the reign of Ramsipha. He renewed his recognition of Jaynarayan as tributary king, paying an annual tribute of two elephants, together with a few rhinoceros horns in respect of the Philguri market. The text mentions at this place the boundaries of the Jaintia kingdom: to the east, the Kapili river; to the west, the Brahmaputra; to the north, Gobha and Sonapur; and to the south, the Barak river. The western boundary is surprising, and seems to indicate that the Jaintia king claimed to be master of The Garc Hills as well as of the Khasi Hills. We assume that this boundary was merely theoretical, since the territory was never under the controlleither of the Jaintias or of the Ahoms. In any case the kataki, whose name was Raghunath, was sent back with valuable presents on 10 Mach, Sak 1640 ( January or February, A. D. 1719 ).7

In Sak 1645 (A.D. 1723) another messenger brought a present of three elephants and two horses to the Ahom king, and reported to him about the great prosperity of Jaintia. The Ahoms were displeased

JB, 229, p. 122.

<sup>2.</sup> Ibid., 230, p. 122.

Ibid., 231, p. 123. 3.

Ibid., 234, p. 123.

<sup>5.</sup> I bid., 237, pp. 124-25.

<sup>7.</sup> Ibid., 238, p. 125.

Ibid., 240-41, pp. 125-26.

with this embassy because the messenger was not of high rank and also because the promised tribute had not been received in earlier years, and so a message to this effect was sent back to Jaintia. Apparently the market at Phülguri had again been closed, for the Jaintia messenger pressed for its reopening so that 'Garos and Mikirs' could trade there. The Ahoms were angered at him, and he was imprisoned for a year at Shāhburj. Then he fell ill and was released, but he died at Gobhā on the way back to Jaintia.

The Ahom king then decided to attack the chiefs of Gobha, Ne-11 and Khala, who were tributary to Jaintia and who were frequently a source of trouble to him, as a punishment to the Jaintia king for his failure to pay tribute. 4 On the other hand he bestowed favours and honours on the tributary king of Dimarua to ensure his loyalty to him. A punitive expedition was equipped, which included the king of Dimarua and 700 troops which arrived on Gobha soil after three days' march. The date of its departure is given as 10 Puh ( late December, A.D. 1723 ). On the morning of its arrival at Gobhā the army was reinforced by a fresh contingent, which reported raids from the 'Gares'. The phukan in charge of the expedition established a fortified position at Kulingakokh. Meanwhile two Gobha princes, named Dhanceng and Nagana, came to the king of Dimarua and offered their submission. On hearing the news the Barphukan sent instructions that the princes were to be well cared for and that if the three chiefs submitted likewise all would be well. The Ahoms waited for several days but the three chiefs would not submit, so they decided to send the two princes to Gauhati as prisoners, and the Ahom troops began to destroy villages and cultivated land, and to seize cattle.

<sup>1.</sup> JB, 242, p. 126.

<sup>2.</sup> Ibid., 243, pp. 126-27.

<sup>3.</sup> Ibid., 244, p. 127.

<sup>4.</sup> Ibid., 245, p. 128.

<sup>5.</sup> Ibid., 246, p. 1128.

<sup>6.</sup> Ibid., 247, pp. 128-29.

<sup>7.</sup> Ibid., 248, pp. 129-30.

<sup>8.</sup> Ibid., 250, pp. 130-31.

Later the Ahoms received information from a wandering entertainer (dom) that the three frontier chiefs had taken up positions in the hills with their own troops and a large force of 'Garos', presumably Khasi tribesmen. The man had apparently been sent by them to get into the fort and burn it, but he had decided to betray his employers. Traitors were found in the Ahom camp as well, for at his own request the king of Dimarua took charge of the two princes who were to be sent to Gauhati, and they escaped with his connivance.

In the meanwhile the attack on the territory of the three chiefs continued, and the Ahom troops plundered their villages. Their loot, however, did not amount to much, and this would suggest that the villagers had fled to the higher hills taking most of their property with them. Then the Jaintias took a hand in the fighting, attacking the village of Baophar in the territory of Dimarua, and killing two men and one woman. After this five bodies of troops were stationed in the district by the Ahoms. Later that year news of further Jaintia raids on Dimarua was received, and 7,000 troops were sent from Jagi. The punitive expedition returned after seven days with 700 cattle, having destroyed many villages.

There is no report of further fighting, but the Ahom forces still remained in the refractory districts. Some months later envoys came to the Ahoms, saying that the Jaintia king and the three chiefs wished for a resumption of diplomatic relations. These envoys were received by the Ahom king in Sravan, Sak 1651 (A. D. 1729). They

<sup>1.</sup> JB, 252, pp. 131-32.

<sup>2.</sup> Ibid., 255, p. 133.

<sup>5.</sup> Ibid., 257, p. 134.

<sup>4.</sup> The printed text has sat rajar manuhe, but we suspect a misprint or a scribal error for sat hajar manuhe, since it is by no means clear who were the seven kings who, according to the printed reading, sent troops. 2,000 of these troops are said to have been sent from the fort of Gobha to Jagi. The frequent occurrence of multiples of seven in this account makes us suspect the accuracy of the figures.

<sup>5.</sup> JB, 258, p. 134.

<sup>6.</sup> Ibid., 259, pp. 134-35.

<sup>7. &</sup>lt;u>Ibid.</u>, 260, p. 135.

brought gifts of various kinds, including elephant tusks and eight pairs of horns. The Ahom king agreed to the resumption of diplomatic relations and of trade.

#### Bargohāin II (c. 1731-70)

Gait, 2 basing his view on the evidence of an early revenue report, gives A. D. 1729 as the date of Bargohāīn's accession. A deted quarter rupee, one of the few Jaintia coins to bear the royal name, shows that he was ruling in 1731. His predecessor minted coins in the year of his accession, and it may be that Bargohāīn did the same. Since the record used by Gait was certainly mistaken in the date of Bargohāīn's abdication, we are inclined to support 1730 or 1731 as the date of his accession. We have no information as to how his predecessor Jaynārāyan died.

According to one local tradition Bargohāin was not by blood a member of the royal family, but was a Muslim stranger who was adopted by the ruling clan. This seems unlikely, as the inscriptions show that he was a pious Hindu and he is known to have ended his days as a Hindu ascetic. The tradition may be based on the fact that Islām gained ground in Jaintia in his days, as is shown by the tradition of Fatah Khān, which we discuss below.

Early in Bargohāin's reign an embasay from him was sent to the Ahom court, requesting the reopening of the market at Phülguri, which had apparently remained closed since the frontier troubles of the previous reign. A second embassy came soom afterwards, asking for freedom of traffic by way of Gobhā. This time the envoy complained about the poverty of the Jaintia land owing to the looting

<sup>1.</sup> JB, 261, pp. 135-36.

<sup>2.</sup> History of Assam, 3rd ed., p. 318, n. 1.

<sup>3.</sup> Gait, JABB, lxiv, 1895, p. 243.

<sup>4.</sup> Barch, History and Culture of the Khasi People, p. 80.

<sup>5.</sup> JB, 263, p. 137. 6. Ibid., 266, p. 138.

carried out by the Ahoms, and he said that the agreed tribute could not be given. At about the same time the chief of Khalā asked also for the resumption of friendly relations. The reply was given that before normal conditions could be restored the three frontier chieftains should come in person to make the request. In <u>Sak</u> 1685 (A. D. 1736) the three chiefs came to the Ahom court, and friendly relations were resumed. At this point the main source used by Professor Bhuyan in compiling the <u>Jayantīyā Buranījī</u> ends abruptly, and there is another break in the narrative.

The Tunkhunglya Buranji tells us that at the coronation of the Ahom king Pramatta Sinha in A. D. 1744 the new ruler desired to invite the kings of Jaintia and Kachar. He consulted with his three chief ministers on this matter, and two of them agreed with the king's wishes. But the Burhagohain declared that while the Kachari king had kept the terms of the agreement made with king Rudrasimha, the Jaintia king had not done so, and therefore he ought not to be present at the celebrations. Nevertheless Pramatta Simha did invite a Jaintia kataki, though apparently not the Jaintia king himself. This seems to indicate some improvement in the relations between the two kingdoms.

The Muslims of Jaintia have a tradition that Bargohāin's nephew and heir to the throne was a Muslim, being the son of the <u>nawāb</u> of Dacca, at that time Aliwardī Khān, to whom Bargohāin was forced to

<sup>1.</sup> JB, 266, p. 138.

<sup>2.</sup> Ibid., 267, p. 138.
3. The printed text gives Sak 1638, which is obviously wrong.

<sup>4. &</sup>lt;u>TB</u> 268, p. 138.

<sup>5.</sup> In the speech attributed to the <u>Burhāgohāin</u> that minister is said to have declared that as a result of his recalcitrance the Jaintia king had been imprisoned for fourteen years. This strange statement is not borns out by any other source, and could not possibly apply to Rāmsimha, Jaynārāyan or Bargohāin. We conclude either that the chronicler's imagination ran away with him or that this is a scribal error for fourteen months, referring to Jaynārāyan's captivity when he was Barkohār.

<sup>6.</sup> TB, 79, p. 43. In his Anglo-Assamese Relations (p. 12) Professor Bhuyan states that the Jaintia king in question was Chatra Singh, who in fact succeeded Bargohain in 1770 -- a strange lapse for such a well known scholar.

give his sister in marriage, as a result of an attack by the Mughels in retribution for Jaintia encreachments on the plains of Sylhet. The young man came to his uncle's court as heir apparent, but he was a Muslim, and had the name Fatah Khān. He was responsible for introducing many useful innovations in the Jaintia kingdom, and this made him very popular. He also built a mosque, and this so aroused the wrath of the Hindu nobles that they conspired against him and in the end persuaded the king, whose devotion to Hinduism is well attested, to put him to death, despite his populatity with the masses. He was sacrificed to the country's tutelary goddess.

Later Bargohāin is said to have been captured with his sister Gaurī by the syiem of Khyrim, who invaded Jaintia as a punishment for the killing of Fatah Khān, of whom he was very fond and whom he and his wife treated like a son. The chief of Khyrim had the evil intention of killing both Bargohāin and his sister, and he would have done so but for the intervention of the chief of Mawsmai (Cherrapunji) who sent a strong force in Bargohāin's support. As a reward Bargohāin gave the chief of Cherrapunji two villages, which he held tent free.

Other traditions speak of Muslim attacks on the Jaintias at this time. These, it is said, were foiled through the heroism of a Synteng hill chief, Ran Niangti, about whose great exploits legends are told to this day. There appears to be no reliable confirmation of these stories in Muslim or other sources, and the Muslims of Bengal at that time were hardly in a position to mount large scale attacks on the hills.

We can rely but little on these stories, which are based on oral tradition and are certainly false in detail. But they do not refer

<sup>1.</sup> Ali, History of Jaintia, pp. 39-41.

<sup>2.</sup> Ibid.; c. f. Gait, History of Assam, 3rd ed., p. 319; JASB, lxiv, 1895, p. 247...

<sup>3.</sup> Barch, History and Cilture of the Khasi People, p. 81.

Islām was becoming more popular in Jaintia. It is quite possible that some member of Bargohāin's family did become a Muslim, and thus incurred the anger of the orthodox king, who had him put to death. It is equally possible that the chief of Khyrim attacked Bargohāin, who was helped by the chief of Cherrapunji, since the latter hill state was generally at enmity with Khyrim. We cannot confidently say more than this.

We have reference to further troubles between Bargohain and the Ahoms towards the end of his reign. He is said to have occupied a number of Kachari villages in 1768, and thus incurred the wrath of the Ahoms, whose king, Rajesvar Simha, sent a punitive expedition against him. On hearing of its approach he withdrew his troops from Gobhā, and the Ahom army did not pursue him further owing to the illness of their king. According to the Ahom Burafiji Bargohāin prepared in the same year to invade Ahom territory, but withdrew his troops on hearing that the Ahom garrison of the fort of Raha had been strengthened. At this time serious Moemaria risings broke out In Assam and caused much trouble to the Ahoms, but it seems hardly likely on the face of it that the elderly Bargohain should have thought of challenging his much more powerful neighbours. However, he is known to have given up the throne soon after this, and it seems that he embarked on some abortive expedition against the Ahoms, but realized that the odds were too strong against him and gave it up. No doubt these events encouraged him to devote the rest of his life to religion.

A copper plate dated Saka 1692 ( A. D. 1770 )) records that Bara-

3. Ibid., pp. 293-317.

<sup>1.</sup> Enuyen, Anglo-Assamese Relations, p. 113. The author does not mention his source.

<sup>2.</sup> Ahom Burafiji, ed. Barua, 272, p. 291.

gusāī Simha, having become a sannyāsī, granted land to a certain Līlāpurī Svāmī, who had initiated him in asceticism, with the consent of various relatives including his nephew and successor Chātrasimha, and in the presence of his prime minister U Mawpnar Lasker and of his commander in chief Mānikya Rāy.

This document is significant because it shows that the system of matrilinear succession through the sister's son was still being followed. Two of the names mentioned, that of Urakhadā, the husband of Bargohāin's sister and the father of the heir to the throne Chātrasimha, that of U Mawpnar the chief minister, seem to be Khasi-Synteng, and we may assume that these people were little affected by Hinduism, otherwise they would have adopted Sanskritic names, at least for official purposes.

It would appear that, owing to the system of succession through the sister's son, in general Jaintia kings did not have legitimate wives. The only records that we have of their marriages are those of Yashanik, who married a daughter of the Koch king Laksminërayan. and Bargohāin II. The widow of the latter, Kāsāsatī, is recorded in several copper plates as making various religious donations. According to tradition she was the daughter of a brahman of Pañcakandā.

### The and of the Jaintia Kingdom

We end our review of the history of the Jaintia kings with the abdication of Bargohāin II, since in the next reign, that of Chātrasimha (1770-81) the Jaintias first came into conflict with the forces of the East India Company and the process of their subjugation began. We cannot consider this as Part to the early history of the

<sup>1.</sup> Gait, JASB, lxiv, 1895, p. 246, n. 2; Gupta, JASB (NS), xix, pp. 331-35.

<sup>2.</sup> See above, p. 122.

<sup>3.</sup> Gait, op. cit., p. 245.

<sup>4.</sup> Ali, History of Jaintia, pp. 64-65.

Khasi-Synteng people.

Chātrasimha was followed in quick succession by Jātra Nārāyan (1781-86), Bijay Nārāyan (1786-89), and Rāmsimha II (1789-1832). Rāmsimha was in turn succeeded by Rājendrasimha, who was captured and imprisoned by the British in 1835, from which date Jaintia became British territory. His direct descendants were still welliknown in the Jaintia and Khasi lands as late as 1838, as pensioners of the government. and the family of the Jaintia kings no doubt survives to this day.

<sup>1.</sup> Gait, History of Assam, 3rd ed., p. 320.

<sup>2.</sup> Ali, History of Jaintia, pp. 64-65.

#### Chapter VIII

THE FRAGMENTARY HISTORY OF THE KILL

KHASIS

#### Chieftains of Khyrim

We have hardly any reliable scurces for the history of the numerous Khasi chieftainships of the uplands before their occupation by the East India Company. A few local traditions concerning this period have been collected and are recorded in the works of Dr H. Lyngdoh and Dr H. Bareh. A partial exception is formed by the largest chieftainship, that of Khyrim or Nongkrem, generally referred to in the Buranjis as Kharam. But even in this case our information is in no sense satisfactory. It is very fragmentary and vague, much more so than that about the kingdom of Jaintia, which was placed in a more fortunate position in this respect because its boundaries extended to the plains of Assam, where the Jaintias came in contact with the officers of the Ahom kings, whose court chroniclers mentioned the various diplomatic contacts in their records. The Jaintia kingdom was important enough to merit fairly close diplomatic relations with the Ahoms, while Khyrim was little noticed by them, since, though its hillmen might cause trouble on the edge of the plains, they were never strong enough to be a real menace to the security of the shom state.

S. K. Dutta tells us that the Khyrim king is mentioned in 'some very ancient documents' as having lived at 'Nokshee' in a palace on

<sup>1.</sup> Especially Fi Sylem Khasi bed Syntens, 2nd ed., Shillong, 1952. Bareh (History and Culture of the Khasi People; pp. 87, ff.) largely follows Lyngdoh, but contains some additional matter.

a hill around which the river Barapani flowed. He gives no indication of the nature of these documents, and so, though the statement occurs in a scholarly work, we can pay little attention to it. 'Nokshee' is evidently the barbarous anglicized spelling often used in the nineteenth century for Mongkseh, not far from Shillong and traditionally the first capital of the Khyrim rulers.<sup>2</sup>

The traditions of the hill Khasis maintain that once the area in their control was much wider than it later became and that they dwelt in the plains both north and south of the hills. Thus it is commonly believed by modern Khasis that the famous temple of the Mother Goddess at Kāmākhyā, near Gauhati, was founded by Khasis in the distant past when they controlled that area, and that this Sanskritic name is in fact a corruption of the Khasi Ka mei-kha, meaning 'the paternal grandmother'. Similarly the Khasis of Cherrapunji, on the southern border of the hills, claim that they once inhabited the plains around Sylhet, and were driven back to the mountains not by an invasion, but by a great flocd. We need not pay much attention to these traditions, which may be of comparatively late origin, and which one would naturally expect to find among hill peoples who periodically raided the plains.

The Khyrim rulers look back to a mythical ancestress called Pah Syntiew, the daughter of the god of Shillong peak. They have a traditional genealogy giving seven generations of kings after Pah Syntiew and before Bormanik, who is known from Assamese sources to have died in 1704. This would suggest that the line of Khyrim chiefs

<sup>1.</sup> Introduction to the <u>Jayantiya Burafiji</u>, 2nd ed., p. 14. Barch (op. cit., p. 95) falsely attributes this statement to Professor S. K. Bhuyan.

<sup>2.</sup> Bareh, op.cit., p. 91.

<sup>3.</sup> Roberts, Grammar of the Khassi (sic) Language, p. xvi.

<sup>4.</sup> Lyngdon, op. cit., pp. 81-87; See below, p. 203.

<sup>5.</sup> Lyngdoh, op. cit., chart opp. p.102; Barch, op. cit., p. 90.

gained controllof the area around the beginning of the 16th century, at about the same time as the Jaintia kingdom was founded. The names of the rulers after Pah Syntiew are given as: 1. Narain, 2. Sangmein, 3. Santab, 4. Ksan Sing, 5. Mied, 6. Piar, 7. Shon Manik, 8. Bor Manik. Of these names all but the second, fifth and sixth appear to be Indo-Aryan, and if any faith is to be placed in the list it indicates that by the sixteenth century the Khasis had become to some extent influenced by Aryan culture.

During the sixteenth century, in the reign of the Koch king Narnārāyan, the Khyrim chief, when he saw how victorious the Kochs were, offered submission and tribute. When the Koch army passed through his country after defeating the Kacharis and the Jaintias, he is said to have told Narnārāyan that trade was most important for the welfare of his kingdom, and he therefore asked permission to strike coins, presumably in the Koch king's name. We are told that the latter agreed, on the understanding that the sign of a mace was to be the emblem to distinguish his coins from those of the Kochs. After this the Khyrim king set up a mint. 2 Koch coins are known, but no coins answering to the description of the Khyrim issues are now to be found. From the term used in the Burafiji to describe them, mohor, they appear to have been gold coins; if there is anything in the statement they must have been minted in very small quantities and later to have been melted down for other purposes. The Darrang Raj Vamsavali, the chronicle of the Koch kings, confirms this Statement of the Asam Buranji in respect of the submission of the Khyrim king, whose name is given as Viryavanta or Cunilanta. It also tells us that a tribute of 60 horses, 40 elephants, 40,000 rupees and 1,000

<sup>1.</sup> Barch's statement that 'the Sylenship began between 1400 and 1450 A. D.' is quite inconsistent with this kinglist, unless we concede incredibly long reigns to the rulers. Perhaps it is a misprint for '1500 and 1550 A. D.'.

<sup>2.</sup> AB, 71, p. 40. 3. Gait, History of Assam, 3rd ed., pp. 54-55.

gold coins was offered in the first instance and an annual tribute of 15,000 rupees, 50 horses and 30 elephants was promised. If we allow 25 years per reign it seems probable that the king referred to here as Viryavanta was the syiem called Santab in the Khasi traditional kinglist. 2

The victory over the Jaintias is said to have been gained not by Narnārāyan, but by his brother Chilārāf. It is possible that the two brothers campaigned together and that Narnārāyan received submission from the Khyrim king while Chilārāf was consolidating his position in Jaintia. This seems to be the interpretation of Wade, the earliest student of the chronicles. But we cannot resist the suspicion that the victor was actually Chilārāf, since Narnārāyan was a retiring unmilitary ruler.

A possible reference to strife between the Ahoms and the Khasis occurs in the Ahom Burafiji, where it is stated that king Chaephā Sukham (Khorā Rājā) in A. D. 1573 chastized the rebellious Nagas and occupied Kherām. The term Naga implies almost any hillman. It is strange, however, if this refers to a campaign against Khyrim, that it is not mentioned in other sources. If the account has a basis of truth, the ruler of Khyrim at the time was probably the same Santab as suffered defeat at the hands of the Korhs.

In 1612 we briefly meet the Khasis again, when they come in conflict with the forces of the Mughals. Islām Khān, the Mughal governor, in that year sent an army against Kachar, under the leadership of Shaikh Kamāl and Mubāriz Khān. On the way, according to Mirza Nathan's Bahāristān-i-Chaibī, the Mughal army came in conflict with people called Khasta, which is evidently a scribal error for

<sup>1.</sup> DRV, pp. 84-86; Acharyya, History of Medieval Assam, p. 207.

<sup>2.</sup> Bareh, History and Culture of the Khasi People, p. 90.

<sup>3.</sup> See above, p. 105.

<sup>4.</sup> Account of Assam, ed. Sharma, p. 201.

<sup>5.</sup> Gait, op. cit., p. 58. 6. Ed. Barua, 79, p. 92.

<sup>7.</sup> C. f. Wade, Account of Assam, ed. Sharma, p. 47, 'Koiramee Naga'.

<sup>8.</sup> Tr. Borah, vol. i, pp. 324-25.

Khasia, and must mean the Khasis. They are strangely described as living near another people who calked themselves 'Mughals', that is to say Mongols, and who claimed that they were descendants of troops left behind by Timur in the fifteenth century, though of course his army never reached that region. We can find no other evidence of the existence of these people, who may have been Khasis who had come under Islamic influence and who tried to exploit their Mongolian appearance by claiming kinship with the Mughal rulers. The description which follows apparently applies to these Mughals', but it seems to fit the Khasis in general. They are said to have been fair skinned and they wore big turbans and large', heavy earrings of brass; they had no food taboos, but ate any kind of meat and vegetable.

Mubariz Khan conquered part of their territory with great difficulty. Some of his captives, 'of dreadful appearance', were sent back to Casim Khan, the brother of Islam Khan the nawab, who sent them to the capital, where they were presented to emperor Jahangtr. An officer named Mirak Behadur Jala'ir with a body of troops was deputed to keep the conquered territory in order, but it appears that his force was soon withdrawn, for we read no more about it. Mirak took part in the Kachar campaign, and was later appointed governor of Sylhet. 2 The geographical aspect of this account is difficult to explain, since in a campaign from Sylhet against Kachar one would not expect the Khasi Hills to be involved, as they lie due north of Sylhet, while the army would take a route through the plains to the East. Probably the text refers to a small expedition undertaken as a preliminary to the Kachar campaign, to ensure that the lines of communication between Sylhet and Kachar should remain uninterrupted by raiders from the hills.

<sup>1.</sup> Mirza Nathan, op. cit., vol. i., pp. 326-27.

<sup>2.</sup> Ibid., p. 343.

Another event of about this time, recorded only in tradition, was a revolt in the reign of Pyar, who must have ruled about the middle of the seventeenth century. This was led by a coalition of three basans or village chiefs. The rebellion was put down and attempts were made to consolidate the power of the syiem once more, but this period seems to have been one of tension and strife among the Khasi tribes, leading to the many small independent chieftainships which existed when the East India Company occupied the territory. The syiems of several of these trace their genealogies to about this time.

Wade's Account of Assam<sup>2</sup> contains what appears to be an account of a punitive expedition of the Ahoms against the Khasis in the reign of Jayadhvaj Simha (1648-65). The text states that the 'Khamdunghea Gohaign', perhaps a hill chief subordinate to the Ahoms, complained of the attacks of 'Naga' mountaineers. An army led by the Burhāgohāin himself advanced to 'Khairamut'. This seems to be Khyrim, the headquarters of the most powerful of the Khasi syians. Here a certain 'Towrow', whose status is not explained, interceded for the Khasis, and they submitted. The army remained in the hills, apparently fraternizing with the hillmen. When the naws reached the Ahom king he recalled the commander, who was imprisoned in the royal elephant stables. The Ahom army then attacked the hillmen, who took to the higher mountains.

As Wade elsewhere refers to the inhabitants of Khyrim as Nagas, and as the Ahom Buranji does the same, it is clear that the Khasis are mesat here. But we can find no confirmation of this campaign in any source known to us, though the Ahom Buranji mentions much trouble from the hillmen at about this time. It seems that Wade had access

<sup>1.</sup> Lyngdoh, Ki Syiem Khasi bad Synteng, p. 92; Bareh, History and Culture of the Khasi People, pp. 92-93.

Ed. Sharma, pp. 291-92.
 See above, p. 175.

<sup>4.</sup> Ed. Barua, 126-28, pp. 134-39; 135, pp. 145-46.

to <u>Burañjis</u> that are not available mowadays, and so we may put qualified faith in his statement, especially as the <u>Burañjis</u> are by no means comprehensive, and many of them completely ignore important events of proved historicity.

Wa hear of Khyrim again during the early eighteenth century, in connection with a Bengali by the name of Santosh. This man came from Pandua, at the foot of the hills in the territory of Sylhet. apparently as a fugitive. He appeared in Dimarua, stating that he wished to go to Khyrim for trading purposes. He was allowed to proceed, and came under the patronage of the Kina Barua of Khyrim. He began trading and soon he became so prosperous that his patron coveted his wealth. The Kina Barua intended to send him to the Khyrim syiem and have him arrested under some pretext, in order to get possession of his property, but Santosh heard of this plot in time and escaped to Dimarua, where he put himself under the protection of the local king. His flight was soon discovered, and the enraged Kinā Baruā and his followers came down to Dimaruā and demanded to see the king in order to ask for the return of Santosh. They threatened that if this was not done they would boycott the market, and thus the trade on which Dimarua depended for its prosperity would come to a standstill. It appears that this demand was refused and Santosh continued to receive protection, because from the month of Arman of Sak 1625 until Caites ( November; A. D. 1703 to March, 1704 ) armed Khasis appeared in the market of Dimarua and threatened all those who tried to do trade there, so that business was almost at a standstill.2

2. JB, 269-70, p. 139.

l. The status of the Kinā Baruā is not explained in the Burañjī. Kinā probably represents the Khasi khynnah, which in this context would mean 'younger'. Thus the Kinā Baruā may have been a younger member of the syiem's family, in charge of certain tracts of territory.

The news of these developments reached the Ahom court, and a duvariya or frontier officer was sent to try to appease the Khasis, but they still insisted on seeing the king of Dimarua, who still flatly refused to give them audience. Some days later a Khyrim elder came to the huvariya and asked him to arrange for an interview with the Barphukan, so that the latter might persuade his king to receive a Khyrim envoy. It appears that in the past diplomatic relations had existed between the Khyrim and Ahom courts. The Svargadec was informed of the proposal, and a messenger by the name of Haridhan was sent to Khyrim. The Kina Barua received the messenger, 4 from which fact we infer that he was an important figure in the Khyrim state. Eight days later three Khyrim envoys came to the Buvariya and in return two Ahom envoys were sent to Khyrim. These declared that the Ahoms wished to establish good relations between the two kingdoms. The Khyrim chief, however, declared that if the Ahoms really wanted good relations the Duvariya himself should come to see him, rather than the minor officials. On hearing news of this interview the Barphukan declared that envoys from Khyrim should come to him personally at Gauhati to request the sending of the Duvariya to the Khyrim king. The envoys refused to go to Gauhati, on the pretext that they would not be able to find their way there unaccompanied, and they asked the Duvariya to escort them. He would not comply with their request, whereupon the envoys again refused to proceed to Gauhati without an escort.

In order to prevail on the Khyrim messengers to go to Gauhati, the <u>Duvārīyā</u> instructed the king of Dimaruā to confer on Santosh,

<sup>1.</sup> JB, 271, pp. 139-40.

<sup>2.</sup> Bacan, evidently the Khasi title basan, a minor chief or village headman.

<sup>3.</sup> JD, 272, p. 140.

<sup>4.</sup> Ibid., 273, p. 140.

<sup>5.</sup> Ibid., 274, p. 141.

<sup>6.</sup> Ibid., p. 142.

<sup>7.</sup> Ibid., pp. 141-42.

who had been the cause of the dispute, the rank of baruā. It seems that this mark of favour was intended so to exasperate the envoys that they would decide to go to Gauhati to seek redress. The strategem was successful, for when he heard the news the Khasi Kinā Baruā ordered the envoys to go to Gauhati to meet the Barphukan. So the four ambassadors set out for the Ahom court, together with six guards. They were courteously received and were accommodated near the house of the Jaintia ambassador at Latāsil.

The account of this incident given in 'Source 9' differs somewhat from that outlined above, and is very fragmentary. This states that the envoys were accompanied by the Ahom <u>Duvārīyā</u> and at their interview with the <u>Barphukan</u> they are said to have mentioned a former Khyrim embassy to the Ahom court, the members of which were the same dress and ornaments as they were. Here the narrative breaks off abruptly.

The main source gives a list of the presents brought to the Barphukan by the Khyrim embassy. These included a coral necklace, some cloth, and various spices, all together valued at 39 rupees. The gifts were received courteously by the Barphukan. In their formal speech the envoys referred to a restoration of earlier friendship, as though it had only recently been broken, saying: 'Formerly in the days of Khetri the <u>Duvāriyā</u> our people came here. . . . Why should not friendship be restored?' The gifts were of comparatively little value even at eighteenth century prices, and the fact that they were gladly accepted by the <u>Barphukan</u> shows how insignificant Khyrim was at the time, even in comparison with small kingdoms like Jaintia and Kachar, which from time to time sent gifts of much grea-

<sup>1.</sup> JB, 275, pp. 143-44.

<sup>2.</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3.</sup> Ibid., 276, p. 144.

<sup>4.</sup> Ibid., 348, p. 175.

<sup>5.</sup> Ibid., 277, pp. 144-45.

ter value.

While the Khyrim envoys were still at Gauhati, in A. D. 1704, news reached them that the Khyrim king Barmānik had died. When the ahom king heard of this he decided not to recognize the treaty between the two kingdoms until it had been ascertained that the new Khyrim king wished to continue the policy of friendship, and he sent another embassy to Khyrim with a message to this effect. The Khasi envoys were sent back with this message, and were accompanied by Ahom envoys, as was the custom. They left Gauhati on 21 Asar (early July) and they returned on 18 Srāvan, nearly a month later, with the message that the new king wished to confirm the treaty. They were honourably received by the Barphukan.

The treaty was concluded, and the Ahom king sent presents to the ruler of Khyrim to mark the occasion. These included silk, gilded knives, and 20 seers of chillis (jhāluk), together with other articles of various kinds. The total value of the gifts mentioned is 66 rupees, though the value of some of the items is not given. The envoys received personal gifts of clothing and turbans. The gifts of the Ahom king were appropriately more costly than the comparatively humble presents received from the hill chief, but their value is much lower than that of the gifts given to the Jaintia kings on similar occasions, and this perhaps gives some indication of the relative importance of the two states in Ahom politics. On their return the Khasi envoys were accompanied by the <u>Duvārīyā</u>, who was received by the chief of Khyrim, and thus the treaty was concluded.

We have seen that, later in the eighteenth century, the king of Khyrim is said to have been strong enough to capture the king of

<sup>1.</sup> JB, 279, p. 146.

<sup>2.</sup> Ibid., 280, p. 146.

<sup>3.</sup> Ibid., 281, p. 146.

<sup>4.</sup> Ibid., 282, pp. 146-47.

<sup>5.</sup> Ibid., 283, p. 147.

Jaintia and his sister. The story may be traditional, and may even be wholly untrue, but it supports a fact which may be inferred from other evidence, that Khyrim gained in power as the Ahoms grew weaker through internal strife.

The growing power of Khyrim is indicated by the last reference to the Khyrim kingdom that we have been able to find in the Ahom chronicles. This tells of events in the year A.D. 1786, when there was a serious revolt of the Modmarids, who had gained control of much of the Ahom kingdom north of the Brahmaputra. These rebels, originating as a Vaispava religious movement which opposed the official Tantrism of the Ahom kings, drew many dissident elements to their support, and seriously weakened the state, being one of the main factors contributing to its ultimate downfall. King Gaurinatha, a weak ruler, sought the help of the hill kingdoms against them, for many Modmarid dissidents had fled to the mountains, which they used as bases for their raids. Hence the envoys of the ruler of Khyrim were received with great honour, in striking contrast to their treatment eighty years earlier, when they were long kept waiting and were fobbed off with trivial presents.

Professor Enzyan adds as an appendix to his edition of the Jayantiya Burafiji a remarkable description, taken from another document, of a splendid tamasha organized on 17 April, 1786 outside Gauhati, in order to celebrate the reception of a further embassy to the Ahom court from Khyrim. It was attended by all the phukans, baruas and dalais of the Ahom official hierarchy. Singers sang and music played, cannons and muskets were fired, in celebration of the glad occasion. Elephants and horses lined the processional route to the pavilion in which the Barphukan was to give audience to the men from the hills.

<sup>1.</sup> See above, p. 168.

<sup>2.</sup> Gait, History of Assam, 3rd ed., p. 201.

Merchants from far and wide had pitched their booths in the vicinity, and they smoked their huggas as they waited for customers, who came from all over the provinces of KEmrüp and Darrang, and who were entertained by bands of hillmen (garo) performing their war-dances to amuse the throng.

In the afternoon the Barphukan inspected the military array and the fair. Then, in fine ceremonial dress, he entered the pavilion. ordered flowers and sandal paste to be given to the guests, and commanded that the envoys be brought in. There were five men from Khyrim, led by a chief or prince called Khar Koffar, and they were accompanied by six frontier chiefs ( damtir baruva ) and three Ahom katakis. They brought with them a box containing presents of fine cloth, spices, swords and other things. They reported on the health of 'Khairam Sahab', who, they said, wished to put himself under the protection of the 'Heavenly God' (Svargadeo), that is to say the Ahom king. Apparently the Barphukan could not converse with them in person, because he could not speak their language and they could not speak his, but he instructed that they should be told that as long as their raja was loyal to the Ahoms he would always be successful in his enterprises. Thus the audience ended.

The lengthy account of this event reflects more than anything else the decline of the Ahom kingdom, which was forced to seek for allies against its internal foes wherever it could find them, and was compelled to flatter even the smallest of its friends. The Ahom court was becoming increasingly extravagant and formal as the real strength of the kingdom grew less. But the account at least shows that the friendship of the Khasis was being cultivated by their northern neighbours at this time. It is noteworthy that when David

<sup>1.</sup> JB, 285-88, pp. 147-49. 2. Ibid., 289-91, pp. 149-51.

Scott negotiated with the hill rājās in 1828 the chief of Khyrim put forward an 'antiquated claim' to all the lowlands of Assam as far as the Kalang river and Dimaruā. In earlier times the Jaintia kings had made the same claim, which had invariably been rejected by the Ahoms in the days of their strength. This suggests that the Khyrim rājā was growing stronger as the power of the Ahom kingdom diminished.

#### Other Hill States

The Khyrim sylem seems to have been the suzerain of most of the upland territory until the seventeenth century, for the traditions of most of the petty chieftainships other than Khyrim, as recorded by Lyngdoh, go back no further than this period, if as far. Moreover the Khyrim tradition claims that the founders of several of the other chieftainships were refugees from Khyrim or dissident members of the Khyrim royal family.

Among the oldest traditions of the hill syiems, other than those of Khyrim, are those of Nongichlaw, to the west of Shillong, which has a genealogy of eight generations before the last independent ruler, Tirot Singh, who led the revolt of the Khasis against the East India Company and has now become the national hero of the Khasi people. Tirot Singh is known to have commenced his rule in 1814, and thus, allowing 25 years per generation, we may date the foundation of the Nongkhlaw ruling femily in the easily seventeenth century.

2. See above, pp. 123,128,134,135,137-39,144.
3. Barch, History and Culture of the Khasi People, pr

<sup>1.</sup> Scott to Swinton, BSPC, vol. 352, 5.ix.28, no 11.

<sup>3.</sup> Barch, History and Culture of the Khasi People, pp. 93-94.

4. Barch (op. cit., p. 101) confidently gives 'between 1500 and 1600' for the date of Shajer, the first recorded Nongkhlaw gyiem. Lyngdoh (Ki Syiem Khasi, chart after p. 162) gives Shajer's dates as precisely 1524-54 and also gives the dates of his successors, making them a veritable race of Methuselahs! Neither scholar gives any source on which they base their belief in the exceptional longevity of these rulers.

According to the tradition the chieftainship of Sohra or Cherrapunji was set up by members of the Khyrim ruling family who fled as
a result of civil strife. The official genealogy does not go back
beyond the eighteenth century. The Nongspung chiefs have a genealogy of nine generations of rulers before syiem Fhanblang, who died
in 1872. This would place the foundation of their line approximately in the first half of the seventeenth century. The line of the rulers of Maram could not have been established before the eighteenth
century. In fact none of the syiemships appear to have claimed any
great antiquity for their lines, and most of them are said to be
branches of the Khyrim or Shillong line.

#### Khasi Relations with Sylhet

At about the time when the Ahom kings were trying to establish friendly relations with the Khasis, they were also coming increasingly under the attention of another, stronger power. The Sylhet District Records for the last two decades of the eighteenth century contain many interesting references to the 'Cossiahs', whose trading and raiding alike are reported in some detail in the despatches of the district collectors of the East India Company stationed at Sylhet. The overall picture given by these documents is particularly significant, because it is probably equally valid for all those periods in the history of medieval India when the power controlling the region of Sylhet was not sufficiently powerful to post a large garrison there.

The Records contain numerous interesting references to the relations of the 'Cossiahs' and the plainsfolk in the correspondence

<sup>1.</sup> Lyngdoh, op. cit., chart opposite p. 146. Barch (op. cit., p. 108) places the foundation of the sylemship under Buh Sing about the close of the sixteenth century. He does not give the source of this date, which may be based on a Khyrim tradition.

Lyngdoh, op. cit., chart after p. 165.
 Ibid., chart opposite p. 169.

of two collectors of Sylhet, Robert Lindsay and John Willes, who controlled the district in the 1780's and '90's. The Khasis had no doubt been raiding the plains ever since they had settled in the hills, and 'under the Mogul government the Jaintah (si2) people made constant inroads and conquered the country down as far as Arzmarygunge'. The Jaintias had been quiet since a small punitive expedition had been sent in 1774 at the instigntion of Lindsay's predecessor as collector of Sylhet, W. M. Thackeray, but the Khasis continued to give trouble.

A particularly serious raid, led by a certain Radharam of Partabgarh, 'joined with a large party of mountaineers', was reported in November, 1786. He burned villages and put to death many of their inhabitants, while the hillmen harvested the rice and carried it off to the mountains. In the following year heavy rains and floods led to serious famine, and the collector Lindsay reported that six parganas had been 'totally laid waste' by 'the Cusseahs of the lower mountains, joined by the inhabitants of the contiguous lands under the hills'. He estimated that 300 people had been killed in this raid. 4 It was impossible to repress these raiders completely, since they could take refuge in the hills, which were then outside the Company's territory and the geography of which was not well known at the time. The small force of troops at the disposal of the Sylhet collector was quite incapable of containing raids on this scale. Reinforcements might be sent from Dacca, but, in those days of slow communications, by the time they reached the scene of the trouble the damage would be done.

In October, 1787 Lindsay, about to relinquish his collectorship, drafted at the request of the Board of Revenue in Calcutta

2. Ehuyan, Anglo-Assamese Relations, pp. 113-16.

3. SDR, vol. ii, p. 71.

<sup>1.</sup> Willes to Cornwallis, 15, ix, 89; SDR, iii, p. 162. Willes refers to Ajmiriganj, about 40 miles south-west of Sylhet.

<sup>4.</sup> Ibid., vol. ii, p. 184-85.

a report on the Khasis which contains several interesting passages. The true Khasis are described as a proud independent people among whom 'every chief of a village styles himself rajah'. They frequently visited Sylhet district for purposes of trade, and Lindsey found them on the whole peaceable, though the men carried arms. 'During the eleven years I have resided in Sylhet. he wrote. they never entered the district but twice in arms and both times it was occasioned by a supposed indulgence to one of their tribe'. 'Upon the whole, he went on, they are a good set of people, with principles far superior to the inhabitants upon the low lands. The real trouble dame from the people of the foothills. from the Surma river back to the mountains. This area was inhabited by a mixture of Bengalis and 'Cosseahs' who were 'a most degenerate people with the views of both united, and their territory formed a refuge for 'thieves dekoyts (sic) and bad men of every description . These people were the cause of most of the trouble, plundering the boats sailing between Sylhet and Dacca along the Surma and generally making life difficult for the law-abiding peasants. Lindsay recommended punitive measures against these miscreants. 'such as the Mughula (sic) had never done', but he advised that the true Khasis of the hills be left alone. This report was accepted by the Council. and it formed the basis of the Company's policy towards the Khasis for the next thirty years.

It seems that Lindsay had a liking for the true Khasis of the hills, and wanted to do his best to exonerate them from blame for the disturbances. Following his lead, the Council advised Willes, the new collector of Sylhet, that he should cultivate the friendship of the Khasis chiefs, and authorized him to distribute gifts

<sup>1.</sup> Sic. Presumably 'injury' or 'insult' is meant.

<sup>2.</sup> SDR, vol. ii, pp. 205-06.

<sup>3.</sup> Ibid., p. 206.

to the value of no more than Rs 2,000 annually.1

At the end of 1788 Willes had another outrage of the 'Bengallee' Cosseahs' to report. This was a small uprising led by one of their number named Ganga Singh, who defied the local gamindar, took control of the village of Lour, and proceeded to murder a certain Bara Chaudhuri and his whole family in revenge for an old quarrel. Troops had to be sent to repress him, but he succeeded in escaping to the hills. Later he was captured by the hill Khasis who, far from making common cause with him, handed him over to the Company's troops at Pandua.

A further attack occurred later in the same year, when two 'Bengali Khasis', Abu Singh and Sübah Singh, attacked Pandua and killed the thānādār and twenty of his sepoys. Pandua was relieved by reinforcements sent from Sylhet, but even then Willes could only report that the whole country from Pandua to Lour was 'a continuous nest of thieves and dekoits (sic).' After these events, which took place in the summer months, the Calcutta authorities decided on somewhat firmer measures. On 12 November, 1789 Governor General Cornwellis ordered that the hill Khasis were still to have full rights to enter the Company's territory, but only if they conducted themselves peacefully. Three companies of sepoys were stationed in the area, but they were only permitted to enter the territory of the hill chiefs is absolutely necessary to chastize raiders. Thus the situation was brought under control.

In the reports of Willes a sinister character appears frequently, as the suspected fomentor of troubles. This is a certain M.

<sup>1.</sup> SDR, vol. iii, p. 39.

<sup>2.</sup> Ibid., p. 87.

<sup>3.</sup> Ibid., p. 141.

<sup>4.</sup> Ibid., p. 163.

<sup>5. &</sup>lt;u>Ibid.</u>, p. 211. 6. <u>Ibid.</u>, p. 137.

<sup>7.</sup> Ibid., p. 151.

<sup>8.</sup> Ibid., vol. iv, p. 103.

Champigny, a French merchant, resident in Sylhet, who had incurred the collector's displeasure because he objected to allowing his boats to be searched for contraband. This custom had been taken over from the Mughals, and was mainly intended to prevent arms from being smuggled to the hillmen and the anarchic inhabitants of the foothills. At various times in 1788 Willes sent reports to Calcutta incriminating Champigny. While the collector was only allowed to distribute Rg. 2,000 per year in the form of presents to the hill chiefs, and was not permitted to trade with the Khasis, the private merchant could gain far more influence over them. Willes feared a settlement of Frenchmen and Indians loyal to France might even be established in the Khasi hills.

Later Willes produced sworn statements by certain servants of Sübah Singh, one of the Bengali-Khasi chiefs who had caused much trouble, to the effect that agents of Champigny had visited their master and had declared that 'it would be a great advantage to him . . . if they would be under the French king and that he would furnish them with anything they might want such as . . . muskets etc. . The agents were given liberty to trade in the territory of Subah Singh, but they made bad use of their opportunities, for they agreed to buy a hill for the purpose of lime making, but they did not pay for it, and so the owner sold it to another speculator. It appears that the authorities in Calcutta took little note of these accusations, and they may have had no substance in them, but they are significant nevertheless as evidence of the continual preoccupations of whoever had the responsibility of governing Sylhet in earlier times. We can imagine a Mughal governor dreading lest the agents of some rebellious member of the royal family might arm the hillmen against him.

<sup>1.</sup> SDR, vol. dii, p. 62.

<sup>2.</sup> Ibid., p. 83.

In the following year another trouble maker appears on the scene in the form of a Mr Parthenio, a member of the small colony of Greek traders in Sylhet. This enterprising merchant was, according to Willes's repart, acting as agent for the Khasis in organizing the resettlement of the village of Tillu Hall, which had been abandaned by its former inhabitants as a result of Khasi raids. Willes urged strict measures to 'discontinue the emigrations of the ryotts of Sylhet to establish themselves as a Greek colony in the Cosseahs' country', and he reported that he had stationed guards in order to turn them back, as otherwise, 'all culprits debtors and others would fly thither from Sylhet'. Once again, the authorities seem to have taken very little notice of the collector's report, and probably he was unnecessarily nervous. But once more we have evidence of the continual anxiety of whoever was responsible for governing those areas of the plain in close proximity of the Khasi hills.

Events such as those described above must have been going on, mutatis mutandis, for centuries, whenever the rulers of Bengal had not sufficient power to send large budies of troops to the area. Similar raids on Dimaruā by the tribesaen of the syiem of Khyrim are reported by David Scott in the 1820's. These raiders levied contributions of grain from the villagers, forcibly carrying off to the hills those who opposed them. The Khasis were never powerful enough to seriously threaten the political integrity of either Bengal or Assem, but they were a frequent source of trouble to the rulers of both countries, and dissident factions from the plains might exploit the Khasis' raiding propensities to their own ends.

SDR, vol. iii, p. 95.
 Tbid., iii, pp. 96-97.

<sup>3.</sup> Scott to Swinton, BSPC, vol 352, 5, ix, 28, no. 11.

# PART TWO

# TRADITIONAL KHASI CULTURE

#### Chapter IX

# POLITICAL LIFE

## Early Western Contacts with the Khasis

We can obtain a fairly clear picture of the Khasis before their contact with the west from the accounts left us by early British travellers and officers. The state of the inhabitants of the hills during the early nineteenth century was noted, in certain cases with considerable precision and detail, not only as regards political affairs but also as regards the general social and cultural condition of both the Khasis and the Jaintias or Syntengs.

It seems that the first contact with Europeans was made in 1767. after the East India Company had acquired control of Bengal. The adjoining district of Sylhet was then included in the Bengal ATWANT. At first contacts with the Khasis were by no means direct or frequent, but were made only through trade and commerce, because the hill chiefs had never acknowledged the suzerainty of the nawabs of Bengal and so the transference of power did not bring them under the control of the Company.

It appears that part of Bengal had had contact with the hills from very early times, on account of the lime quarries there. Little or no lime was produced in Bengal, and thus in the plain there was a great demand for the chinam produced from limestone quarried in the Khasi hills. This was sent far and wide all over bengal and Bihar, and was used for hallding, for whitewashing, and in the pre-

2. Ibid., p. 205.

<sup>1.</sup> Hunter, Statistical Account of Assam, vol. ii, London, 1879, p. 205.

paration of pan. At first the Company took no great interest in the source of the lime imported into Bengal, but later it was compelled to do so for political reasons.

The first direct contact between the British and the inhabitants of the hills came about in the year 1775, when the king of Jaintia was held responsible for certain aggressive actions in Sylhet. The king was afterwards accused of having had two British subjects kidnapped for the purpose of sacrificing them to the local tutelary deity, Jayantidevi. A similar event was later to lead to the ameration of the kingdom of Jaintia in 1835, for it provided a pretext to the Company for extending its power in the eastern sector of India.

#### Tribal Government

Politically and socially the Khasi-Syntengs were divided into three groups: (a) the ruling class, which included syiems, wahadadars, sirdars and lyngdohs, (b) the aristocracy of the bakhraw, which was made up of mantris, basans, dolois and lyngskors, and (c) the subjects, or raid.

In 1867, when Khasi titles were first officially recognized by the Indian government, the political divisions in the Khasi hills, including the Jaintia hills, were classified under four categories in order of the importance and status of their rulers: syiems, wahadadars, sirdars and lyngdohs. These divisions were 25 in number. This state of affairs still exists, more or less, for the syiemships have not been abolished by the present government, though these of-

<sup>1.</sup> See above, p. 189 .

<sup>2.</sup> Oldham, CR, vol. xxvii, 1856, p. 58.

<sup>3.</sup> Mackenzie, Nerth-East Frontier of Bengal, p. 217.

<sup>4.</sup> Gait, History of Assam, 3rd ad., p. 358.

<sup>5.</sup> Roy, Folk-Lore, xlvi-vii, p. 377.

<sup>6.</sup> Mackenzie, op. cit., p. 237.

fices are now nominal and the post of the chief is like that of an official, the states still enjoy local autonomy.

In the last century there were fifteen syiems ruling at Byowal or Warbah; Sohra or Cherra; Khyrim or Hongkrem; Lyngkin or Longrin; Malai-soh-mat; Maharam; Mariaw; Mawiong; Mawsynrem; Myldiem; Nobosohphoh: Nongkhlaw; Nongspung; Nongstoin; and Rambrai. Shella was ruled by a confederacy of wahadadara; Dwara-Nongtyrnem, Jirang, Mawlong, Mawdon and Nonglong were governed by sirdars; while lyngdohs or heads of priestly clans had control of Lyniong, Mawphlang, Nonglywai and Sohiong. The two latter classes of rulers were elective and not hereditary.

This list applies to the situation after the British annexation. At that time more than a third of the territory, formerly held by chiefs who had resisted the British, was directly controlled, and thus in earlier times there were probably 40 or more Khasi states. Each of these had a ruling family from which the chief was nominated. In one state, that of Nobosohphoh, there were two ruling families, the 'Black' and the 'White', from either of which the syiem was chosen by the people through their council of electors.

The ruler of a Khasi state of the usual type was known as usylem, the king or chief. He was the head of a number of villages which had either been acquired by conquest or had voluntarily united to be ruled by one man. In general the office of the sylem was hereditary, but on rare occasions the head of the state was not the direct heir, and sometimes he was not even a member of the ruling family, and might rise from a quite humble status.

2. Hunter, cp.cit., loc. cit.

<sup>1.</sup> Mackenzie, North-East Frontier of Bengal, p. 238; Hunter, Statistical Account of Assam, vol, ii, p. 204.

<sup>3.</sup> Gurdon, Khasis, p. 74.

<sup>4.</sup> Ibid., p. 68.

<sup>5. &</sup>lt;u>Ibid.</u>, p. 70.

The law of succession was, and still is, matrilineal, although the ruler was always a male. The son of the next eldest sister normally became the heir, but in the absence of male heirs from the eldest sister the succession passed to the sons of the next eldest sister. Most of the states had the same laws of succession, but in certain states cousins enjoyed equal rights with brothers, or were preferred to grand-nephews. The state of Khyrim or Nongkrem had a rather unusual custom in that there was always a high priestess whose male relatives were the heirs to the throne. Dual monarchy was also known. In the state of Maharem there were two syiems, known respectively as the 'White' syiem and the Black' syiem, until the system was terminated in 1875.

In certain states the chief was indirectly elected by the male population through an electoral body composed of lyngions, mantrie, basans and dolois of certain chosen clans. The composition and size of the body differed from state to state. In the state of Nongkrem the electoral body was originally very small, being composed of six lyngdons or heads of certain priestly clans who could reject candidates for the throne on religious grounds. The size of this electorate was later greatly increased by the inclusion of the heads of 24 important non-priestly clans known as jait mantri. This electorate nominated not only the temporal head of the state or the syiem but also the spiritual head, the high priestess or syiem sad. The electorate in the hyllism state was composed of the heads of five mantri clans, eleven matabors or heads of clans, a few basans or village headmen, and one or two other heads of less important clans. A unanimous vote of the electors was not necessary in this state. A majority vote only was

<sup>1.</sup> Gurdon, op. cit., p. 68.

<sup>2.</sup> Ibid., p. 69.

<sup>3.</sup> Ibid., p. 73.

<sup>4.</sup> Ibid., p. 69; Roy, Filk-Lored London, xlvi-vii, p. 377.
5. Gurdon, op. cit., pp 68-70.

sufficient. In Nongstein state the electoral body was particularly large, consisting of two heads of two mantri clans, 31 lyngdohs,
or heads of priestly claus, 25 sirdars or village headmen, one lyngskor or superior of a number of village sirdars, and one basar or
village headman of minor importance.

In Nongkhlaw the electoral body was originally composed of the five heads of clans, three from the priestly clans and two from the non-priestly clans. 2 In the Cherra state all the male adults were represented by an electorate formed by the heads of the twelve aristocratic clans known as khadar-kur. These and a few other important members elected the chief, but they were expected to consult with their clansmen before the election, and act according to their wishes. In Maharan state the electoral body was originally made up of five lyngdohs, but it was gradually enlarged to an assembly of 72 members by the addition of mantris, sirdars and basans. The Mariaw electorate was similar. In the state of Rambrai the procedure was somewhat different in that two electorates were necessary for the election of the chief. In the initial stage three lyngdohs and two mantris formed a council to decide on the choice of a chief, after which the sirdars of the villages were summoned to give formal approval of their choice. Nongkhlaw state had originally an electorate of five lyngdohs. The syiem of Mawiong was formerly appointed by six basens subject to the approval of the people. In Bhawal state the heads of eight clans elected the chief provided there was a unanimous vote. In Malai-soh-mat a majority only of the electorate could decide on the nomination of the chief, but if any dispute arose the people were consulted and their choice was accepted. 4 Colo-

<sup>1.</sup> Gurden, Khasis, p. 71.

<sup>2.</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3.</sup> Ibid., pp. 71-72.

<sup>4.</sup> Ibre., pp. 73-75.

nel Bivar, who was deputy commissioner of the Khasi and Jaintia. Hills from 1865 to 1877, encouraged the clars to adopt adult male suffrage in the choice of their chiefs, but, as we have seen, the idea of popular election was not unknown to the Khasis at an earlier time. The public will on several occasions asserted itself in the choice of chiefs. An example of customary popular election is to be found in the state of Langrin, where the chief was elected by the whole male population. Another example is that of Nobosohphoh, but in the latter, as in Bhawal state, only when there was a dispute about the heir did the electorate appeal to the people. The same usage was also followed in Nongspung.

The office of the electors was hereditary. An eldest brother succeeded to the post of a dead elector. If there were no brothers the eldest son of his sister succeeded. This electoral body in its corporate capacity was regarded by the Khasis as having a divine origin, according to Gurdon. But he does not explain his statement, and we have not heard of any Khasi myth attributing the origin of the council to any of the divinities, though the sylem was considered to be in some sense divine, and probably his divinity was in some measure shared in the eyes of the earlier Khasis by the council on which his status depended.

The Khasi concept of monarchy centred round the belief in the divine origin of the syiems; hence they were termed ki syiem kf blei, or 'the divine syiems'. In most states the syiem was both the temporal and the spiritual head. In his religious capacity he had to be perfect in all his bodily functions, and an heir would be disqualified on account of physical disabilities, even such com-

<sup>1.</sup> Gurdon, Khasts, p. 69.

<sup>2.</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3.</sup> Ibid., p. 71.

<sup>4.</sup> Ibid., p. 69.

paratively minor ones as the lack of a moustache, and also if he changed his religion either to Christianity or to Muhammadanism. Although the syiem was held in very high esteem by his subjects. his powers were by no means autocratic; they were greatly limited by his council or dorbar, the composition of which was much the same as that of the electoral council, but which was looked on as a separate body. It was composed of the bakhraws or nobles, and the lyngdohs, or heads of priestly clans, and was presided over by the syiem. This was the highest administrative and judicial body in the state. It not only curbed the chief's power but also executed his will and acted on his behalf, and without it the state could not function. But, powerful as it might appear to be, there were certain functions which it could not perform, and these special duties were reserved to the chief alone. Broadly speaking the syiem had four duties, those of chief priest, judge, executioner and general.

As a religious head, the syiem consulted the auspices of the soothsayers for the welfare of the state. He also appointed a lyngdoh to aid him in the performance of religious rites. Not only did he perform state religious ceremonies but also he was responsible for those who died without any relative to take care of their bodies or claim them, and who were known as iap-duh-iap-tan. If such persons left any unclaimed property, whether movable or immovable, it was the duty of the chief to take charge of it. In a Khasi state the syiem stood in a parental relation to his fellow tribesmen, as their refuge in time of trouble and their source of help in difficulties.

In judicial matters the sylem acted as judge, the whole council serving as jury. Petitions of various kinds of disputes were

<sup>1.</sup> Gurdon, Khasis, p. 67; Roy, Folk-Lore, wlvi-vii, p. 377.

2. Gurdon, op. cit., p. 69; Roy, op. cit., p. 377; Lyngdoh, Ka
Niam Khasi, p. 167.

brought before the dorbar to be settled. The syiem normally led his army in times of war, and thus acted as general.

The Jaintia rājās, though they were to some extent Hinduized, atill retained many of the features of the Khasi syiems. As we have seen, they were matrilinear in their succession, the kingship passing to the sister's som. The king of Jaintia was not an arbitrary ruler, but consulted with his chief officers and subordinate chiefs on all important matters. The queen mother, the sister of the previous king, was also consulted. It would appear that ' the chief people in the interior' were always of 'a very independent and turbulent character', and were very influential in the kingdom. This is the impression gathered from the earliest British accounts, and it is confirmed by the Buranjīs. The ruler of Nartiang, normally a member of the Jaintia royal family, was a sort of Junior Augustus, and 'without the concurrence of this formidable vassal' the king had very little power.

The officers and troops of the syiem were not paid regular salaries, but received grants of land in service tenure, as was the case in most other parts of India. Wages in money were paid to non-Khasis who took short-term service with the syiems. We are told that few if any of the government servants were literate and they no doubt employed Bengali clerks, since Bengali appears to have been the language of administration.

#### Justice

A. B. Lish noted the rarity of crime among the Khasis. He reported that there were very few robberies, but that those which oc-

<sup>1.</sup> Gurdon, Khasis, p. 69.

<sup>2.</sup> Pemberton, Report on the Eastern Frontier . . . , p. 219.

Ibid., p. 220.
 Ibid., p. 217.

curred were accompanied by murders which were often not detected, so expert were the criminals in their work.

Different punishments were accorded for different types of crime. A murderer was clubbed to death, but those who killed one who offered human blood to propitiate the thlen or a robber were not considered murderers and were let off with a small fine. Adultery was punished by life imprisonment or by a very heavy fine. A husband catching his wife in the act of adultery could under the ancient law kill both his wife and the adulterer with impunity. The rape of a married woman was punishable by life imprisonment, and that of a spinster by a heavy fine of money and one pig. 2

Arson was punishable by life imprisonment or by a heavy fine. For witchcraft exile was the punishment; but if it was believed that the victim had died as a result of sorcery the sorcerer was hurled down a precipice. For thefts and robbery a person might be imprisoned in the stocks or made to sit on a bamboo platform under which chillies were burnt. For minor offences the culprits were merely fined lightly. Incest or sexual relations between co-members of a clan was punished either by exile or by a heavy fine. 4

Before a trial was held, a crier was sent to announce that the syiem would hold a dorbar the next day. On such a day all the villagers had to remain in the village and anybody who disobeyed was fined. All work was suspended and all the male inhabitants of the village gathered at the assembly grounds. The assembly was opened by a lengthy speech from one of the headmen, which was followed by speeches from other members of the gathering. No direct reference would be made to the dispute, but it would only be him-

<sup>1.</sup> Lini, Calcutta Christian Observer, 1838, p. 138.

<sup>2.</sup> Gurdon, Khasis, F. 93.

<sup>3.</sup> Ibid., pp. 93-94.

<sup>4.</sup> Ibid.; Lish, op. cit., p. 138. 5. Gurdon, op. cit., pp. 91-92.

ted at, until the discussion grew intense. The contestants would then throw on the ground in front of the sylem a turban, or a bag containing betel, pan and lime, as pledges. The two parties were each represented by pleaders known as 'riew said,' who addressed the gathering with lengthy speeches, while the sylem acted as chief judge and the whole dorbar as a magisterial bench. Witnesses were also called in. In former times these took either an oath on a pinch of salt placed on a sword or a more solemn oath on a gourd containing liquor. The trial sometimes lasted several days.

At the end of the trial judgement would be given by the syiem. If a money fine was imposed this was accompanied by the present of a pig to the Mother Goadess (Ka Blei Synshar). After the sacrifice the pig was eaten by the syiem and the members of the dorbar.

In cases of civil litigation decisions were often reached by ordeal or by lot. A water ordeal was preceded by ceremonies lasting the whole day. Two parties were formed of the friends of the respective contestants, who congregated in separate groups, offering sacrifices to their gods and goddesses and proying to them for help. After this richly dressed men performed a skilful sword and shield dance. The male dancers formed an outer circle within which women performed a slow dance, hopping gently and bending their fingers gracefully. 5

The dancing continued until the afternoon, when the two par-

<sup>1.</sup> The 'riew said were not, of course, solicitors or barristers in the modern sense, but ordinary villagers with a reputation for their knowledge of customary law and for their eloquence. We have no evidence that they were paid regular fees for their services. In this respect Khasi law differs from that of the Hindu tradition, which does not appear to have regularly allowed pleaders or proxies. 2. Gurdon, Khasis, p. 92. Pemberton (Report on the Eastern Frontier, p. 217) in 1835 reported that cases were decided by a 'mantri or other officer' who reported his judgement to the chief, who, if he agreed with it, pronounced sentence. We have no confirmation of this practice in any other source. The author did not have first hand knowledge of the Khasi hills, and it is possible that he was reporting the customs of some semi-Hinduized chief of the lower slopes. 3. Gurdon (loc. cit.) wrongly refers to this goddess, here and elsewhere as 'the goddess of the state'. She was in fact the goddess of nature. He was probably misled by wrongly interpreting her name, which means 'the ruling goddess'.

<sup>4.</sup> Gurdon, op cit., pp. 92-93.

<sup>5.</sup> Lish, Calcutta Christian Observer, vii, 1838, p. 135.

ties proceeded by different routes to the place of trial, which was beside a pond, water of which was already consecrated. Nobody could spit in this pond. The dancing and secrifices were renewed. The two parties sat on the bank, on wither side of the water. Two staves were placed in the water. Before the disputants underwent the ordeal they washed their mouths in the sacred water. Then they lay flat on their stomachs about a foot below the surface, each grasping a staff. The first to emerge lost the dispute. From the description of Lish it seems that both contending parties were often nearly drowned in attempting to establish their cases by this remarkable method, which must have favoured the younger contestant with the larger chest and the tougher physique. A form of mouth to mouth breathing appears to have been used to resuscitate the successful contestant in the water ordeal, if he lost consciousness.

Decisions were sometimes reached by lot according to a peculiar system. Two pots were placed in shallow water, each pot containing a piece of silver and a piece of gold wrapped separately in cloth. The contestant had to take out one piece from either of the pots. The man who took out a gold piece was the victor, but if each took out a piece of the same metal the disputed property was divided equally between them.

#### The Khasi Chiefs

Khasi-Synteng chiefs have always been looked upon by the people as divine, and so myths and legends grew up to account for their divine origin. In most cases, as in those of the chiefs of (khyrim) Nongkrem and Mylliem, the largest states in the Khasi and Jaintia Hills, their ancestresses were said to be goddesses. At one time

<sup>1.</sup> Lish, op. cit., p. 135.

<sup>2.</sup> Gurdon, Khasis, pp. 94-95.

these two families formed one, that of the griem of Shillong, the ruler of an even larger state, but owing to a quarrel between an uncle and a nephew this family split into that of Nongkrem and that of Mylliem. This tradition of the ruling family of Shillong is possibly founded on fact.

The goddess from which the family sprang was young and very beautiful, and was known as Ke Pah Synties, or 'She Who Was Lured by a Flower'. She was supposed to be a daughter of the god of the Shillong peak, which is still held sacred by many Khasis. 2 This goddess took the form of a young maiden and lived in a cave called Marai not far from the village of Pomlakrai near the city of Shillong. Many men tried to catch her, but none could do so, because the mouth of the cave was too narrow and she would neither speak nor move. So she remained for days, until one clever man, who belonged to the Mylliem Ngap clan and who criginally came from the Bhoi country, on the lower northern slopes of the hills, hit upon a plan to bring her out of the cave. He held out to her a flower called u 'tiew-ja-kynteng, and she immediately responded by stretching out her hands to take it. While she did so he slowly receded until she was well out of the narrow cave, and then he caught her. He took her home, brought her up carefully, and eventually married her. She bore him several sons and daughters who were well behaved, and very modest in their manners. One day she suddenly disappeared and returned to her cave, from which she refused to be coaxed back. Her children were much loved for their looks and their good manners, and people came to ose them from far and wide. They were later chosen by the people to rule over them, and as they were the children or a goddess they were thenceforth known as ki Syiem blei, ki Syiem Shillong, the

<sup>1.</sup> Gurdon, Khasis, p. 71.

<sup>2.</sup> Ibid., p. 70, pp. 166-68.

Divine Kings, the Kings of Shillong.

The ancestress Ka Pah Syntiew was looked upon as the first high priestess of the Nongkrem family. The presence of a high priestess as an important figure in the Nongkrem state is peculiar, for there is none in the other states. She was elected on the same basis as the gyiem, who was her son, her neghew, or her next nearest male relation. She was not only the spiritual head of the state, but also in theory the sugreme temporal head, as it was through her that powers were delegated to the syiem; in other words he received his power to rule from her. The syiem sad, as she was called, was succeeded by her eldest surviving daughter and failing daughters by her eldest daughter's daughter; failing direct descendents she was succeeded by her next eldest sister.

In the Nongkran state there were six divisions known as raj, in each of which there was a dorbar or council which had to decide on the elections of the heads of the mantri clans. The chief's approval was required at all such elections, and he could disqualify, in conjunction with the raj council concerned, any elector on grounds of bad conduct or of any physical disability similar to those on which a chief might be disqualified. Thus we find that in Nongkran state there were two types of ruling body, one at the centre and the other in the various divisions of the territory. These local governments had some degree of autonomy, and needed the approval of the syiam in dorbar only on matters pertaining to the general welfare. Thus the chief ruled his kingdom through the the local dorbars. This system of administration was not uniform throughout the Khasi-Syntens territory, however.

In the Nongstoin sylem-ship, whose rulers were said to be descended from a stag, the chief governed his territory through

3. Ibid., p. 71.

<sup>1.</sup> Gurdon, Khasis, p. 70, pp. 166-68; Rafy, Folk-Tales of the Khasis, pp. 18-23.

<sup>2.</sup> Gurdon, op. cit., p. 70.

sirdars in charge of various villages, which were also grouped together under a lyngskor. Thus in this state there were three governmental bodies: the dorbar of the chief, those of the sirdars,
and those of the lyngskors. Another large state, that of Cherra,
was divided for administrative purposes into eight villages, excluding the capital, Cherrapunji.

Like all the Khasi chiefs, the first duty of the ruler of Cherra was to cremate the body of his predecessor. Until this was done he could not be recognized as heir. But in the state of Cherra the cremation was always attended with such pomp and ceremony that the expenditure involved was considerable, and hence it quits often happened that the cremation had to be postponed until the heir could afford to perform the rite. The body of the dead chief was embalmed in honey and limejuice, and might be kept thus for years.

In many respects the system of administration was much the same in all the states, even in the very small ones. The government was a more or less democratic one. The governmental system was fairly well developed and orderly, and was of a flexible character. Changes were introduced quite frequently to meet the needs of the times, and did not usually meet with opposition. As an example of this we may cite the imposition of new taxes such as a small excise duty, which was introduced in the last century on the advice of the Indian government of the day, and the extension of the electorates at about the same time. Besically the form of rule, in spite of the adoption of Indo-Aryan political terms, such as raj, mantri etc., remained traditional. The political organization of the states was not a later development, but must have been some hundreds of years

<sup>1.</sup> Gurdon, Khasis, p. 72.

<sup>2.</sup> Ibid., p. 73.

<sup>3.</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4.</sup> Mackenzie, North-East Frontier of Bengal, p. 238; Lish, Calcutta Christian Observer, 1838, p. 138.

old when the Khasis first came in contact with Europeans. We have every reason to believe that the system reported by Gurdon, based on government records and the testimony of informants, was essentially that under which the Khasis had lived almost since their arrival in the hills.

The Khasi chiefs were never known to be wealthy, and in certain cases they might be in very straitened circumstances financially and be compelled to borrow large amounts from business people. The reason for their poverty was that they could not benefit from taxes on land or agricultural produce, in this being very different from the rulers of most other parts of India. The land in the Khasi hills was mainly held by the bakhraws or heads of leading families and by other private individuals, who had the scle right of proprietorship over their holdings, and as the syiem had no claim of ultimate ownership over the land he gid not tax it.2 The only taxable type of land was the raj or state lands, the income from which was enjoyed by the sylem. The sylem also received small subscriptions to the state or gratification money called pynsuk, which was collected for him by the sirdars and lyngskors. These sums were supposed to be voluntary subscriptions, and were absent in certain states. There were no hard and fast rules as to how punguk should be utilized. The ostensible purpose of its collection was to defray state expenditure, but actually it was used as the syiem wished. Another source of income was judicial fines. which were imposed upon culprits in the courts and were divided between the sylem and the mantris. His main source of income, however, was tolls (khrong) imposed on markets within his territory. and the income from these might be quite considerable, as the Kha-

<sup>1.</sup> Curdon, Khasis, p. 68.

<sup>2.</sup> Roy, Folk-Lore, :lvi-vii, p. 378.

<sup>5.</sup> Gurdon, op. cit., p. 67.

sis were great traders. But this income depended on the sige of the state and the number of markets held. Thus the taxation was very limited indeed. When the chief was in financial difficulties he had to take recourse to loans, just like an ordinary man. It would appear that no appeals were made to the people for special donations in such circumstances.

For this reason the syiems mode of living was simple and no pomp and splendour were attached to their courts. They lived like ordinary people, and pursued the same pleasures in life, such as hunting and fishing, when they were free from duty. But it was incumbent upon them to be both father and mother to their subjects. There were cases when a man would refuse to accept a syiemship because of the responsibilities attached to it. Particularly among priestly clans quite a few men have flatly refused to become chiefs when the post was offered to them, because thus they would be subservient to their subjects, both indirectly and directly, since the chief could be removed easily by the will of the people if he misbehaved, but it was considered to be a privilege to be a priest and to share in the choosing of a syiem.

After the coming of the British to the Khasi and Jaintia Hills the appointments of the chiefs and their officers were maject to the approval of the Indian government, and they could be removed for reasons such as unjust treatment of their subjects or general misbehaviour. The states were more or less dependent on the central government according to their attitudes. The more friendly ones, such as Cherra, Nongkrem, Nongstoin, Lyngkin and Nongspung, were originally classed as semi-independent, as they had never openly opposed the British government. In actual practice, however,

1. Gurdon, Knasis, p. 67.

<sup>2.</sup> Information supplied by my grandfather, sri Jismot Chyne (Khaiff).

they were on the same footing as the dependent states, and no real distinction was made between the two types. In 1861 the chief of Nongstoin asked to be treated as entirely subject to the British government, in exchange for the title of Rai Bahadur.

Up to the year 1858 only the succession in the state of Cherra had to be reported to the Indian government, but after that year those of the states of Mylliem, Maharam, Mariaw and Nongkhlaw were treated in the same manner. The Deputy Commissioner acted on behalf of the Indian government in relation to the different chiefs in cases of disputes between any two or more states. From 1878 it was decided by the Indian government that the ganads of succession should in all cases be granted by the Chief Commissioner of Assam. Thus the chiefs became only titular heads of their states and even the semi-independent ones lost all sovereign powers.

<sup>1.</sup> Mackenzie, North-East Frontier of Bengel, p. 238.

<sup>2.</sup> Political Proceedings (India), Feb., 1861, nos. 86-88; April, 1861, no. 13; May, 1861, nos. 28-30.

<sup>3.</sup> Mackenzie, loc. cit.

<sup>4.</sup> Ibid., pp. 238-39..

<sup>5.</sup> Political Proceedings (India), May, 1878, nos. 60-68; Aug., 1867, nos. 25-26.

#### Chapter X

# SOCIAL INSTITUTIONS

## Characteristics of the Khasis

When they were first encountered by Europeans, the Khasis appeared to be of mixed blood. Some resembled the Chinese, and some, with flat noses and thick lips, seemed almost African in appearance. While those who lived in the highest parts of the hills were very fair and handsome and resembled Europeans, those living at the foot of the hills looked like Bengalis and were very like them in character.

Accounts of the general disposition and character of the Khasis vary. According to Hooker<sup>2</sup> the first Europeans who came in contact with the Khasis found them very unpleasant as compared with the Lepchas. They were sulky, undisciplined, slow and wanting in frankness; they had no inclination to please and were most independent in manner. They fought bravely with their bows and arrows, and displayed to cruel and bloodthirsty disposition.

Lish, another early observer, gives a somewhat different picture of their character. They were fond of amusements and pleasures and were a gay and happy people. Their cheerful disposition was an attraction to strangers. When at work they were amiable and energetic, but they were otherwise lazy. In general they were 'a plain, open-hearted, honest people'. They were susceptible to ten-

<sup>1.</sup> MCLEMI, vi, 1813, p. 107.

<sup>2.</sup> Himatayan Journals, ii, pp. 272-74.

der feelings and capable of sincere gratitude and affection, while their sense of obligation was very strong. The bond of blood relationship was also very strong among them, but this was not always true of conjugal relationships. Among the bad qualities mentioned dissoluteness stands out prominently. Though polygamy did not exist in the strict sense of the term, a man did not think it wrong to have extra-marital relationships with two or more women becides his wife, provided he was in a position to support his legal wife in comfort.

Another account states that the Khasis possessed two outstanding virtues, truth and hongsty. The petty meannesses practised by the Bengalis were spurned by them. They were, however, revengeful, and they seldom forgot injuries. The writer was surprised at the decorum with which they conducted themselves during a baptism ceremony, which was then a strange and unusual practice. They could not read or write, but they possessed remarkable memories hard to find in many other peoples.

#### Matriliny and Matriarchy

The Khasi society was a semi-agricultural, matrilineal one. The people had plough cultivation, but they did not produce all their food requirements because many of them did not devote much time to agriculture. Many also occupied themselves in trade and commerce, bartering their goods for those of the plains. Pandua to the north of Sylhet was a great centre for such barter trade.

In highly developed agricultural societies where plough cultivation dominates, the matrilineal form of society is generally

2. MCLRMI, vi, p. 107.

4. Ibid., p. 107.

<sup>1.</sup> Lish, Calcutta Christian Observer, 1838, pp. 135-37.

<sup>3.</sup> Ibid., p. 106.

<sup>5.</sup> Hunter, Statistical Account of Assam, ii, p. 223.

absent. Where matrilineal culture is found among more developed communities they are usually located in highlands. Examples are to be found among the Khasis, Jaintias and Garos, and among a few other races in other parts of the world. The Nayars of Kerala are exceptional in having a matriarchall society in a highly developed literate civilization, chiefly located in the plains.

It is believed that matriarchy was quite widespread at one time in South-East Asia, where many of the people still speak Mon-Khmer languages. The former French Indo-China seems to have been a centre of matrilineal societies. Yet the Palaungs of Upper Burma, who are similar to the Khasis not only in language but also in dress, are no longer matrilineal. Palaung women magnit well be taken for Khasi women, and even their necklaces are identical, but their social organization differs considerably.

In considering this subject we must make a clear distinction between matriliny and matriarchy. While the former certainly prevailed among the Khasis, clear evidence of the latter in its strict sense is quite absent. Though descent passed through the female, the married woman was in most respects subordinate to her husband. The idea of 'Secret Lands where Women Reign' as a popular book dealing partly with the Khasi and Jaintia Hills was called, is a very false one, for the lands are by no means secret, and women do not reign there. Government was entirely a matter for the menfolk, and the dorbars were attended only by men. In religious ceremonies men played the major rôles, and the priests (lyngdoh) were generally male. Robert Lindsay, one of the earliest Europeans to report on

2. Ibid.

4. Ibid., p. 745.

5. Gurdon, Khasis, p. 15.

7. See above. p. 198.

<sup>1.</sup> Briffault, The Mothers, i, p. 667.

<sup>3.</sup> Gurdon, JRAS, 1907, p. 746; c. f. Khasis, p. 18.

<sup>6.</sup> By Cabrielle Bertrand, London, 1958.

the Khasis, noted that the traders coming to Sylhet made their wo-

#### Tribal Structure

The tribal organization of the present day Khasis and Syntengs certainly reflects a like organization in the past, because such a complicated and well developed social structure could not have arisen suddenly out of an altogether different one. The Khasis' ceremonies of birth and death especially would suggest that the complex performances of the present day belong to a people long established in their present culture, which must have taken many centuries to develop into its existing form. While many of the statements in this chapter refer to the Khasis of recent generations, we may be sure that our description is valid for the organization of Khasi society at the end of the period covered by this study, and indeed for many centuries before that time. Therefore we describe the society in the past tense, though many of its features have survived to the present day.

The Khasi-Synteng people were grouped into clans. Each clan (kur) claimed to have a primeval ancestress called Ka Iawbei Tynrai. The clan was subdivided into sub-clans, called kpoh ('womb').
Each sub-clan was made up of a mamber of families or ing ('house', 'home'), which formed the smallest unit in the tribal structure.
A family comprised the father, mother, brothers, sisters, and sometimes grandparents, normally living in the same house or in a group of houses within the same compound and often with a common kitchen.

Ka Tawbei Tynrai or 'the First Grandmother' was the ancestress

<sup>1.</sup> SDR, 11, p. 205.

of the whole clan; next in order was Ka Iawiei Tymen, 'the Old Grandwother', who was the founder of a sub-clan or kpoh; Ka Iaw-bei Khynraw, 'the Young Grandwother' was the ancestress of a family or ing. The brother of Ka Iawbei Tymrai was known as U Suidnia or U Khi Rangbah, 'the Eldest Maternal Uncle', and her husband was U Thawlang, literally 'the Collaborator', the First Grandfather. The most revered of these ancestors was Ka Iawbei Tynrai.

#### The Khasi Clans

The Khasi-Synteng clans were strictly exogenous. No greater sin could be committed than sexual relations within the clan, which was counted as incest. It used to be the custom that men guilty of this sin should have three stripes shaved bare in the hair of their heads and should then be exiled from their homes and villages. This was known as khi lai muid, or 'shaving in three parts'. Guilty women were treated in a similar manner having their hair cropped close. When such people died they were not given a proper burial and their bones were not collected in the family ossuary. It seems that the bodies of offenders against this taboo were not cremated, but were exposed to be devoured by beacts. Twins of opposite sex were regarded as cases of incest since birth, and their bones were treated in a similar manner. Twins in general, even of the same sex, were not much favoured, and twins of opposite sex were estracted by the community.

Clans which claimed descent from a common ancestress could not

1. Gurdon, Khasis, p. 63.

<sup>2.</sup> Ibid., p. 110; Bertrand, Secret Lands where Women Reign, p. 129.
3. The word Lawbei is made up of two words, iaw, short for kiaw or grandmother, and bei, meaning 'mother'. Bei is the usual vocative for 'mother' in Synteng, while the Khasi form is mei. This fact, with others, suggests that the Synteng or Jaintia dialect may retain earlier forms of the language than does the 'standard' Khasi based on the dialect of Cherrapunji. C. f. Gurdon, op. cit. p. 111.

<sup>4. &</sup>lt;u>Ibid.</u>, p. 65.

5. The information in this paragraph, as in many other passages in this chapter, is derived from personal knowledge and from information by my Khasi maternal relations, especially by my grandfather, Sri Jismot Chyne (Khaiñ).

intermarry. Thus a group of clans, believed to share at least one remote ancestress, would be completely forbidden from intermarriage. For example the Biengdoh, Lyngier, Mairang, Majaid, Manar and Masar came under this prohibition, and parents had to marry their children with the children of clans other than these six. Children of the Khar Umnuid clan might not marry with those of the Khar Bibkhiew clan. When a family adopted a girl from another clan, the children of this adopted daughter could never intermarry with members of the mother's original clan or with those of her adopted one.

in Khyrim or Mongkrem state. A clan might have members in more than one state, and we have no statistics for the other states, so we cannot estimate the full total of Khasi clans. There were several kindred clans which had different names acquired in the various regions in which they had lived or because of the occupation which their members chiefly followed. In such cases intermarriage between members of these clans was not permitted, and the clans shared common taboos and other customs.

Some of the clans traced their descent from a goddess, and such clans would invariably form the ruling families. Members of the lyngdoh or priestly clans had the right to perform sacrifices, but not all members of these clans followed the same occupation as priests. They might take uppany profession, sometimes acting as priests in their spare time. The lyngdoh clans were not all descended from a common ancestress and therefore in most cases members of two such clans might intermarry.

There were clans which bore the names of animals, such as Shrieh,

<sup>1.</sup> Gurdon, Khasis, p. 65.

<sup>2.</sup> Ibid., p. 224.

<sup>3.</sup> Ibid. pp. 221-22.

<sup>4.</sup> Ibid., pp. 223-26.

'monkey' and Tham, 'crab'. These names may be totemistic in grigin, but we have no evidence of totemistic practices among the clans which hore them. As far as we know, none of the clans with animal names had traditions of descent from the animal concerned, and they had no special taboos concerned with the killing and eating of that animal.

All the clans preserved legends of their origin from their first ancestress. One such clan was the Diengdoh ('Wooden Trough') clan of Cherra, whose ancestress was a water nymph. The members of this same Clan in the Jaintia Hills were known as the Lalu or 'Earthen Pot' clan. The first ancestress of this clan was supposed to have come from beyond the Kapili river in Assam to the Jaintia Hills, where she married a Jaintia ma n. She is said to have had the power of reducing her size to such an extent that she could get into an earthen jar at will, and so she and her children get the nickname of Lalu. In a time of civil war the family migrated across the Kapili. During a plague all the members of the family died except for one femals called Ka Iaw-Iaw, who inherited all the family property. Naturally she had many suitors, but she fled from them to Josef, where she took refuge in the house of a lyngdoh. Under pressure from his wife. who thought she was penniless, the lyngdoh tried to sell her as a slave. Nobody would offer more than 20 cowries for her, so the priest had to let her stay in his house. Out of gratitude for the shelter offered her she transferred all her wealth to his house. The lyngdoh's son eventually mauried her. Soon news reached the lyngdoh that some adventurers from beyond the Kapili river were making preparations to kidnap his rich daughter-in-law. He arranged for her escape to a place in the Khasi hills near Nongkrem, known as Sohphohkynrum. There she founded a business where she paid each labourer 20 cow-

<sup>1.</sup> Gurdon, Khasis, p. 65.

<sup>2.</sup> Ibid., p. 64.

A large number of Khasi clan names bear the prefix Khar, an abbreviated form of Dkhar, meaning a person from the plains or

Gurdon, Khasis, p. 65. See above, pp. 93-94. 1.

any non-khasi. Obviously such class had plainswomen for their ancestresses. The term Khar would be prefixed to a nickname given to the woman, for instance Khar Bamon, where Bamon is a corruption of the Indo-Aryan britman. In the clan name Khar Muid the latter component, meaning 'buffalo', probably implied that the ancestress belonged to a family of buffalo breeders. Khar Sati would imply that the ancestress wore an unusually large number of rings on her fingers. In the case of Khar Sowali the ancestress must have been Assamese, since the second word is obviously the Assamese coali, meaning 'girl'. The name of the Khar Mukhi clan appears to be derived from a common Bengali word often found compounded in proper names, such as Candra Mukhi, Sürya Mukhi. Several new Dichar clans have appeared within the last hundred years. These Dichar clans, like the Lyngdoh clans, were not debarred from intermarriage when they did not have a common ancestress.

## The Khasi-Synteng Family

Apart from the usual kindred terms for the immediate members of the family, the terms for the same relationship differed according to seniority. The younger brothers and sisters were usually addressed by their proper names or nicknames, but a common word, hep, was sometimes used for a younger brother or sister in the Khasi language. The Jaintia or Synteng dialect used a different terminology for many relationships.

'grandmother' and 'grandfather' respectively. These terms, which denote great respect, were also used for parents-in-law on both sides. Parad also implied 'grandfather', either maternal or paternal. Maternal uncles were called kill, with the suffixes of rangbah for the oldest, pdeng or deng for the middle, and rit for

<sup>1.</sup> Gurdon, Khasia, p. 66.

the youngest. The mother's sisters were also called mothers, with the same suffixes as those used for uncles. Though the children might call their mother's sisters 'mother', this did not imply that their father had any sexual rights over the sisters, though when his wife died he might marry one of her younger Sisters but not one of her elder ones. Similarly the husbands of the sisters had no rights over the wife, though they were known as kpa, or father, with the suffix san, 'older', or khynnah, 'younger', according to whether they were the husbands of the elder or younger sisters of the mother. The wives of the maternal uncles were called mia. The father's sisters were called knia-kha, literally 'sacrifice-birth'. The term knia was common to both the maternal uncle's wife and the father's sister, but the latter's relationship through the father was clearly indicated by the additional term kha, which refers to kinship through a male. The husbands of the paternal aunts were commonly called ma or mama; this word was also used for maternal uncle in the vocative, and is evidently an Indo-Aryan loan-word.

The children of the mother's sisters were called shipara ar kmei, literally 'children of the second mother', and these could never intermarry, being of the same clan. The children of the maternal uncles were called bakha, literally 'to give birth', and one could intermarry with them. The children of the paternal cunts were also bakha, while the children of the paternal uncles were parakha, and these, although in general of different clans, could not intermarry even in the second or third degree. The cousins of a parent were invariably referred to as 'uncles' or bunts' as the case might be, and one could not intermarry with them. The relationship changed in the third or fourth degree, varying according to whether it was from the father's or from the mother's side, or through marriage.

The husband was addressed by the wife as Kynrad, or 'lord'. The

parents-in-law were always addressed by the reverential terms kiaw and kthaw respectively, these terms being also used in addressing grandparents. The brothers-and sisters-in-law were never called by name, whether older or younger. The wife's brothers were kynum, whether older or younger, and they addressed their sister's husband as kynum also. The sisters-in-law were always known as kong, 'elder sister', and hep, 'younger sister'. The husband of an older sister was a kong also, while the husband of a younger sister was a hep. The husband's brothers and sisters were kong and hep according to whether they were younger or older than the husband, irrospective of the age of the wife.

A stepmother was always known as mei-nah, 'younger mother', while a stepfather was parkhynnah, or 'younger father'. Stepchildren were khun-ruid. The children of one sister were the khun-ruid of the other, but the children of a brother were called khun-kha by his sister, while he called her children pyrsa. Children of different fathers but of a common mother were considered to be full brothers and sisters, but those of different mothers but of a common father were known as shipara-kha, or half brothers and sisters. This term was also used for the children of a paternal uncle.

# Inheritance

Property descended through the youngest daughter, but the eldest brother or all the brothers jointly managed it. Among the ruling families, the thrones were inherited through the eldest daughter, the son of the eldest sister of the syiem succeeding him. In all cases the maternal uncle had great influence and prestige in the family, but even so the father of the family was in no way subservient to him. He enjoyed a very high status in both his own and

<sup>1.</sup> Lyngdoh, Ka Niam Khasi, p. 167; Singh, Rabon, Ka Kitab Niam-Khaiff ki Khasi, pp. 52-63.

his wife's family. He was nearer to his children and wife then was the maternal uncle. The Khasis still have a saying, u kps ubs lah ubs isi, u kni ubs tang ha ka iap ka im, which may be translated as 'The father bears the burden of the family while the uncle appears only when it is a matter of life and death'.

The father's important position in the family was shown by the setting up of megaliths by his children when he died and by various ceremonies accompanying this. The father's relatives also held a very high status, and special ceremonies were performed by a male member's children at funerals or when the bones of the dead members of the father's family were collected.

The relationship between the parents-in-law and the childrenin-law was one of politeness and formality. A daughter-in-law in
particular was expected to be always modest, meek and respectful to
her relatives-in-law. When a woman married she had to pay homage to
her mother-in-law, before the nother-in-law could visit the daughter-in-law in her home. But a son-in-law was also respectful to his
parents-in-law and other relatives of his wife, although he seems
to have occupied a much higher status in the family of his wife than
the wife in that of her husband.

# Class distinctions

There was no caste distinction among the Khasi-Synteng people, although there was a certain amount of class distinction. But class stratification was not very rigid and intermarriage between the different classes was of very frequent occurrence. The people were divided into three broad classes, though these were not formally recognized and had no special terms to indicate them. First came the

<sup>1.</sup> Gurdon, Khasis, p. 79.

aristocracy, consisting of the syiem, the bakhraws or nobles, and the lyngdohs or priests. Of these three groups the priests considered themselves the social superiors even of the chiefs, though this claim was not necessarily recognized in practice. They may have been influenced in their estimate of their own importance by what they had heard of the brahmans of Hindrism. Next in order were the rich traders and farmers and other influential people of the community, who ranked according to their wealth and merits and the amount of land they owned. Last came the small peasants, labourers and other humble people, most of whom worked for others and had very little property or none. Slaves must be included in this class.

Slavery was practised throughout the Khasi and Jaintia Hills. Slaves were acquired for labour either through debt or through war. In order to pay off his debts a man might be compelled to give free service to his creditor in exchange for food, clothes and shelter. He might also voluntarily offer such services, or those of his wife and children, in time of need. Slavery of this kind was usually temporary, but a man with heavy debts might be enslaved for life. Slaves were also acquired in time of war when prisoners were captured, or by kidnapping. In most cases slaves were treated with ... kindness and were regarded as members of the family. They were widely used for domestic work as well as for cultivation. 2

It would be wrong to classify soldiers as a separate class of people, as Gabrielle Bertrand has done. Going through all the early accounts, including the Assamete burafijis, we can find no evidence of a distinct martial class like the Hindu ksatriyas. Soldiers and warriors could belong to any class or clan; in fact the

Op. cit., r. 129.

Bertrand, Secret Lands where Women Reign, p. 129. 1.

Lish, Calcutta Christian Observer, vii, p. 139. 2.

accounts in the <u>burafijis</u> and the records of early travellers inlicate that all able bodied males were expected to take part in warfare.

In both the Khasi and the Jaintia hills the members of the original or oldest clans formed the most respectable classes of the community. Elder members of such clans assisted the syiem in administrative and other affairs of state.

#### Conclusion

The general impression we gather from early nineteenth century accounts of the Khasis is that their social structure (allowing for the abolition of slavery) was little different from what it was in recent years. It shows little evidence of influence from Aryan India, though the family formed the same close emotional and economic bond as on the plains. Its matrilineal structure was quite different from that of the Aryan family. The exogenous Khasi clan has some features in common with the brahmanic gotra, but there is no reason to suspect any influence, since exogenous tribal sub-groups are to be found in many parts of the world. And the Khasi class system, it appears, received no formal recognition or religious sanction, thus differing very sharply from the varna system of Hinduism. Only in the pretentious claims of the Khasi priesthood can we find possible Aryan influence.

<sup>1.</sup> Lish, Calcutta Christian Observer, vii, p. 139.

## Chapter XI

# KHASI RELIGION

## Preliminary

At the present day the majority of the Khasis profess themselves to be Christians; most of the rest follow the traditional Khasi religion, while a few are Muslims, and fewer still are
Hindus converted by the Ramakrishna Mission or the Arya Samaj.
Also a few women become Hindus through marriage with Hindu men.
Although nearly all the main religions are practised by the Khasis, all sects have to this day adhered to their traditional
customs and taboos to a greater or lesser extent, the most persistent of these being the exogamous clan system.

Before the coming of the Christian missionaries to these hills the people of Jaintia, because of the conversion of their rajas to Hinduism, were more under the influence of that religion than were the people of the Khasi uplands. Similarly the Wars, although not practising Hindus, were very like them in many of their habits and customs because of their contact with the people of Sylhet at the foot of the hills.

Though the Khasis had come into contact with both Hindus and Muslims long before the opening up of the hills, there is no clear evidence that any appreciable number of them, with the exception of the Jaintias and Wars already mentioned, had come under the influence of either religion. They appear to have practised the traditional Khasi religion in its original form. The religious beliefs of those modern Khasis who still claim to follow the ancient faith have been much influenced by other re-

ligions, especially Christianity, and the exponents of Khasi religion nowadays attempt to show that it is fundamentally monotheistic. In fact we can find no evidence of this in reliable Khasi tradition.

Khasi religious beliefs were of a very complex character. There was little direct approach to the High God, who was reached through various channels. Khasi religious practices were chiefly connected with the worship of various lesser deities and spirits both good and evil, a horde of household gods, and various manifestations of nature. Iconolatry was absent in their religion, and there is no evidence to indicate that it ever existed among them. Temples and shrines were also absent. Their religious beliefs were linked mainly with various sacrifices, with rites performed at birth, marriage and death, and with the megalithic rituals.

#### The High God

The belief of the Khasis in a High God was of a rather vague nature, and he played a smaller part in the religious life than did many lesser gods of more immediate importance. God, as the creator of life and of all beings, was known as U Blei Nongthaw, 'the God of Creation' and was closely associated with another divinity of feminine gender, called Ka Blei Synshar, 'the Ruling Goddess', the protector and preserver of life. Both of these were addressed as parents. Later observers make no reference to the relationship of this goddess with the creator god, but one of the earliest writers on Khasi religion states that she was supposed to be the wife of God. This seems to have been the original belief, which was forgotten by later literate Khasis who came under Christian influ-

2. Anon., CR, xxvii, 1856, p. 82.

<sup>1.</sup> Lish, Calcutta Christian Observer, vii, 1838, p. 146.

ence. She is simply called 'Mother' (Mei ) or 'Mother Nature' (Mei Ramew ). An agricultural prayer clearly brings out the character of the chief god and goddess of the Khasis.

Nga nguh ngom nga dem khrup
ha ki kjat ksiar kjat rupa jong phi,
Pa Blei, Nongthaw Nongbuh.
Myhta ngan ieng ka puh ka dain
ka trei ka ktah.
Phin map, phin sngew synei
ia ka lait ka let, ka tam ka duna
ka jong nga u khun bynriew.

Sngew sngap ko Mei Ramew ha jrong, ko Mei Ramew ha tbian. Mynta ba ngan ieng ka puh ka dain halor jong phi. Phin map, phin sngew synei maphi ia ka lait ka let, ka tar ka duna ka jong nga u symbai bynriew.

Ka ri ka bah ka thum

ka ai buifi ai talang hi ka jong phi.

Ban biang manga u symbai bynriew,

kumba la thaw la buh hok

u Pa Elei, ba u la pynshet pynshong

halor jong phi.

'I bow, I kneel
st your gold and silver feet.
Father God, Creator and Giver (of life).
Now I begin my digging and chopping (of undergrowth),
my work and labour.
You will forgive, you will have pity on me
for my error and mistake, for my sins of cormission and omission
that I, the child of man, have committed.

<sup>1.</sup> Ramew is impossible to translate accurately in English. It appears to combine the concepts of nature and earth.

2. This interesting and quite beautiful prayer is quoted by Ehrenfels (ed. Vidyarthi, Aspects of Religion in Indian Society, p. 271). He merely states that he 'came across' the prayer and gives no other source for it. The text contains several obvious misprints and makes use of capital letters quite capriciously. These errors are corrected in the version given above. Ehrenfels also gives a translation, made for him by Dr H. Lyngdoh. In places this is so literal as to be almost unintelligible to the non-Khasi speaker, but it is not wholly accurate.

Ka tam ka duna, literally 'the more and the less'.

'Listen and hear, O Mother Nature on high,
O Mother Nature on the ground.
Now I begin my digging and chopping,
through your will.
You will forgive, you will have pity, you yourself,
for my error and mistake, for my sins of commission and omission
that I, the seed of man, have comitted.

'It is you alone who rear, who carry (as a child on the back), who take on the lap, who give milk, give sweetness.

It is enough for me, the seed of man, as it was created and established by the Father God, who has placed the responsibility for it upon you.

Gurdon <sup>2</sup> observes: 'The Khasis have a vague belief in God the creator, <u>U Blei Nongthaw</u>, although this deity, owing no doubt to the influence of the matriarchate, is frequently given the attribut of the feminine gender, cf. <u>Ka 'Lei Synshar</u>.' He further remarks that the Khasis could not be said to worship a supreme god, although they called on such a being when in trouble.

Gurdon's views are more or less shared by the late David Roy, who refers to the dual nature of the Khasi deity. According to him the male aspect of this deity, U Blei Nongthaw, is the supreme lord who creates all things and gives all things, while the female aspect, Ka Blei Synshar, protects, preserves and controls all the gifts of God, the creator of man. Of the former the Khasi begs forgiveness for his sins and transgressions, while to the latter he makes offerings and performs ceremonies in order to be blessed and taken care of.

The same idea that the Khasis have a bi-sexual High God has been taken up by Ehrenfels, who quotes the prayer given above in

<sup>1.</sup> Literally 'over you', idiomatically with this meaning. Lyngdoh (Ehrenfels, loc. cit.) translates 'on thee'(i.e. on the earth), which is a possible meaning.

<sup>2.</sup> Khasio, p. 105.

<sup>3.</sup> Folk-Lore, xlvi-vii, pp. 307-89.

U Elei Ka Elei, calling on the divinity twice first with the masculing prefix and again with the feminine cas, in his support. It is to be noted that Ehrenfels' information, as probably that of Gurdon, was mainly obtained from Khasi Christians or from literate Khasis who had attended Christian schools. Dr Lyngdoh, who was well known throughout the Khasi and Jaintia Hills and who provided Ehrenfels with the translation of the prayer in question, was a Presbyterian. The late David Roy was also a Christian.

In our view the bisexual 'Two Persons in One Cod' postulated by these scholars has no basis in reliable Khasi tradition. It appears that the modern educated Khasis, much influenced by Christianity, have, no doubt with the best of intentions, interpreted their traditional faith in a more sophisticated manner than the evidence warrants, and the anthropologists have accepted their interpretation at its face value. In fact the divinities called on in the prayer are clearly two separate entities, their relationship similar to that of Siva and Parvati in Hindu mythology. Hindu theologians may interpret the one as the transcendent and the other as the immanent and active aspect of godhead, but to the ordinary worshipper they are distinct entities. Such is the case, we believe, with the High God and Earth Goddess of the Khasis, and we attribute their bi-sexual High God to near-contemporary theologizing, such as would hardly have been possible in earlier times. In the exclamation U Blei Ka Blei the Khasi calls for help on two divinities, not one. Blei, in fact, is not a divine proper name, like Siva or Jehovah, but a common noun referring to any god, down to a trivial tree-spirit.

It is said that the High God was remembered or called upon only in time of trouble such as sickness or death or other misfortune, after all sacrifices and prayers to other deities and

spirits had failed to restore things to normal. When some stroke of special good fortune occurred, thank offerings were made to him. In fact this is not the case, as the prayer quoted above proves. The High God played a significant part in the religious life of the Khasis of earlier times, and he was invoked at the beginning of important undertakings. He appears also to have been the focus of the moral sense of the Khasis, and we conclude that he was never an insignificant background figure, as some scholars seem to think.

Curdon and David Roy state that all the divinities to whom a Khasi offered sacrifice were believed to be under the ultimate control of God the creator. The lesser gods were merely agents of God commissioned by him either to bless or to punish people according to their merits or demerits. This view, we suggest, may be held by modern Khasis, but it does not seem wholly true of traditional Khasi religion. It seems that Gurdon was quoting the opinions of Christianized Khasis who wished to make the lesser blei appear as similar as possible to the angels of Christianity and Islam. In fact the blei, though created by the High God and less powerful than he, have much independence, and one of them at least, U Thlen, whom we discuss later, transgressed the High God's commands with impunity. In fact the traditional Khasi religion was thoroughly polytheistic.

According to comparatively recent observers, the practice of divination by egg-breaking is intended to discover the cause of the displeasure of the High God and the Goddess of Nature, in respect of an accident or misfortune. After this, sacrifices are

<sup>1.</sup> Gurdon, Khasis, p. 105; c.f. ADG, x, p. 65.

<sup>2.</sup> Curdon, op.cit., p. 105; key, cp. cit., loc. cit.; c.f. ADG, loc. cit.

<sup>3.</sup> Gurden, op. cit., p. 106; Roy, op. cit., p. 389; ADG , x, pp. 64-65.

Earlier observers, however, make no mention of the involvement of the High God or the Great Goddess in the egg-breaking ritual. It seems that this too is an example of recent theologizing. In fact if the lesser god were merely acting as an agent of an almighty High God his propitiation would be pointless. Whatever modern, more or less sophisticated Khasis may think, we believe that in earlier times the egg-breaking ceremony had little if any connection with the High God, and the divinity who was believed to have caused a misfortune was thought to have acted on his own initiative.

## Other Gods

The lesser Khasi gods were not vague spirits of nature, but thoroughly anthropomorphic beings, differing from men mainly in their superior power and longevity. The world of the gods was coterminous with that of human beings and was similar in nearly every respect. The gods lived in palaces, married and had families, and managed their affairs through dorbars. They hald periodic markets, quarrelled and even fought among themselves, and practised agriculture and presumably other crafts also. In legendary times they mixed freely with men, and men were permitted to attend the markets of the gods.

The chief gods, like earthly kirgs, lived in magnificent palaces up in the Blue Realm. One of these divinities was the kind and tender hearted goddess <u>Ka Sngi</u> or the Sun, who was originally a virgin goddess, but who later married <u>U Klew</u>, or the Peacock. Her son, who was young and handsome, also lived with her in her

<sup>1.</sup> Lish, Calcutte Christian Observer, 1838, pp. 140-41; Anon., Calcutta Review, xxvii, 1858, pp. 82-83.

2. Rafy, Folk-Lore of the Khasis, pp. 6, 8-9, 52-53, 59, 61; Curdon, Khasis, pp. 170-71.

palace. <u>Ka Sngi</u> was the daughter of a shadowy Mother Goddess, not clearly identified, but possibly not the same as the great Mother, <u>Ka Mei Ramew</u>. This goddess had three other children, <u>Ka Um</u> (water), <u>Ka Ding</u> (fire) and <u>U Rnai</u> (the moon); the last named, as the prefix indicates, was a son, while the others were daughters. The father of these four is not mentioned.

The Blue Realm seems to have been at one time temporarily under the control of a malevolent spirit, U Hynroh, 'the Toad', who levied tribute from Ka Sagi and attacked her for refusing to pay it. This enemy of the heavenly gods still occasionally attacks the sum, and thus causes eclipses. He is a cowardly creature, however, easily frightened by loud noises, and men assist the Sun-Goddess in repelling his attacks by beating drums. Similar ideas about the cause and cure of eclipses are well attested in both China and India.

The family life of the gods was identical with that of human beings. Thus we find the mother of the four divinities mentioned above remonstrating with her rather wayward son U Bnai, or the Moon, for keeping out late at night and mixing with those beneath him in rank, such as the goblins of the nether world. This story is presumably an aetiological myth, explaining the temporary disappearance of the moon every month.

The gods experienced human emotions such as love. In another story a goddess, <u>Ka Kma Kharai</u>, the daughter of the local god of Mawlong, who was called simply <u>U Mawlong Syiem</u>, is said to have fallen in lowe with the local god of Umwai, a suitor of whom her father disapproved. He strongly forbade a marriage between them. The young goddess grew so angry with her father that she openly rebelled against him, and out of revenge encouraged the most unde-

<sup>1.</sup> Rafy, Folk-Lore of the Khasis, p. 89.

<sup>2.</sup> Ibid., pp. 2-6.

<sup>3.</sup> Ibid., p. 89.

sirable and strange suitors to woo her. The result was that she was soon with child by some monster, and ultimately gave birth to U Thlen, the malevolent serpent spirit.

The gods used to come down to earth, which was very beautiful at one time, in order to till the soil. They came by way of a tell tree which reached up to the sky. There were sixteen divine families whose members regularly cultivated the earth, which was not originally inhabited by men. Among these gods there was one who wanted to be as powerful as the High God, his creator. He was always on the look out for an opportunity to achieve his ambition and one day such a chance presented itself, when seven families came down to earth for their regular work in the fields. While his bretheren were busy he suddenly disappeared from their midst and cut down the tree which connected earth and heaven, so that the seven families could not return home. Since then they have had to live on earth, and all the nations of the world are descended from them.<sup>2</sup>

As well as the gods of the Blue Realm, other gods inhabited the earth, especially the hills. Each hill had its own divinity, and in the case of the gods of the larger hills and mountains they were thoroughly personified, by no means mere impersonal nature spirits. The god of Shillong Peak, to whom we have already referred, was particularly important. A famous legend tells of the great battle which once took place between the gods of Kyllang and Symper hills. U Kyllang is now a tall imposing hill through pride in his victory, while U Symper, low and rounded, sits meekly in the humiliation of his defeat. Large hollows in the sides of U Symper are the scars of the wounds which he sustained at the hands of U Kyllang.

The gods also traded like men. They held fairs and markets

<sup>1.</sup> Rafy, Folk-Lore of the Khasis, pp. 59-60.

<sup>2.</sup> Ibid., pp. 8-9.

<sup>3.</sup> Gurdon, Khasis, pp. 170-71.

to which men were formerly invited, since in the olden days there was free intercourse between them. Like men, the gods also held assemblies or dorbars to discuss important matters. 2

The younger gods appear to have been playful and energetic. The two beautiful twin daughters of the god of Shillong, Ka Ism and Ka Ngot, one day decided to run a race and see who could run the faster. They both transformed themselves into rivers. In the race Ka Ngot won and so to this day she is more reverenced than her sister Ka Iam.

The annual dance assembly and archery contest, a traditional feature of the life of the Khasi Hills, was first organized by U Pyrthat, the giant thunder-rod.4

U Biskurom is a culture hero with a Hindu name, though he was thoroughly assimilated into the Khasi mythological system. He was sent down to earth by the High God to teach man the use of metals and the making of tools. The story of U Biskurom presupposes some knowledge of writing and involves the theme of U Biskurom being blown back to heaven on a great kite, and thus it is comparatively recent in its present form. The hero is evidently the Mindu god Visyakarmen, the architect and craftsman of heaven, whose name in Bengali would be pronounced approximately as Bissokoromo. U Riskurom is said to have persuaded men to make a great kite, which would carry him back to heaven. He promised to write all his knowledge which he had not yet imparted to them upon the kite, which they could then pull back to earth. But he was incensed with men

<sup>1.</sup> Rafy, Folk-Lore of the Knasis, p. 61. The importance of the fair or market in the life of the Khasis is indicated by the fact that the animals, as well as men and gods, also held fairs. (Ibid., p. 68.)

<sup>2.</sup> Ibid., p. 61.

<sup>3.</sup> Ibid., pp. 52-54.

<sup>4.</sup> Ibid., P. 97. 5. Ibid. pp. 55-57. As well as U Biskurom, Lyngdoh (Ka Niam Khasi, p. 27) records the names of several other divinities which were evidently imported from Bengal, perhaps in comparatively recent times: Ka Ramshandi, U Syngkai Bamon (below, p. 225), Ka Parbati, Ka Lakshimi. U Thakur and U Mahadeb Khlo. These are chiefly worshipped by the Wars and Jaintias of the southern slopes and are hardly known in the hills.

for their unholy wish to learn the secret of imparting life to clay images, so he wrote instructions on the kits, but when it returned to earth the men found that they could not read what was written on it. This story, like another Khasi tradition, appears to reflect the Khasis' consciousness of the disadvantages of their own illiteracy, and perhaps also gives a reason for the absence of image worship among them. The legend is evidently of comparatively late development, arising after they had come closely in contact with the literate Bengalis. We cannot trace any elements in the story, except the name of the hero, to Hindu sources, however.

It seems that the Khasis believed that in general their gods were immortal, but we can find no reference to any special food or drink which made them so, as in Hindu and Greek mythology. The only exception is the nameless mother of the elemental goddesses already mentioned. According to one myth she died and was cremated by her daughter Ka Ding, fire, after the other sisters had failed to dispose of her dead body. If this mother goddess, as we suspect, is in fact the same as Ka Blei Synshar, it seems that she returned to life by some supernatural means, as did the snake-spirit, U Thlen.

The Jaintia gods were more numerous than those of the Khasis and included many Hindu divinities not worshipped by the Khasl uplanders. Their most famous and important divinity was Jayanti, a form of Durgā, who gave her name to the capital city and whose temple was one of the 51 pithas, or especially sacred shrines, of the Sākta cult. Pilgrims visited it from afar, and human sacrifices where often performed there in honour of the goddess. 4

<sup>1.</sup> Rafy, Folk-Lore of the Khasis, pp. 137-39; see above, pp.87-88.

<sup>2. &</sup>lt;u>Ibid.</u>, pp. 24-25. 3. <u>Ibid.</u>, p. 58.

<sup>4.</sup> Chatterji, Kirāta-jana-krti, p. 86.

The indigenous gods have strictly speaking no proper names, though they are strongly anthropomorphic, but this is not surprising, since the Khasis themselves have really no proper names, all apparent proper names being in fact common nouns. The gods include various functional divinities, such as the patron god of each state, the god of drinking water, the god of wealth and the tutelary god of each village. These gods along with various household gods were offered sacrifices once a year or more often. The evil: spirits such as those of cholera and malaria were appeared as often as they visited a home.

#### The Thlen -- Demonolatry

In connection with the household gods must be mentioned a snake-god still worshipped by some of the Khasis, irrespective of the faiths in which they were brought up. This god, though a giver of wealth, is distinct from the god of wealth, Blei Long-spah, mentioned above, who was worshipped by all the Khasis. The Thlen was not worshipped by the Jaintias and Wars, who had their own forms of this malignant spirit. Despite the spread of modern ideas, belief in the Thlen still survives in the Khasi Hills, and certain families are even now suspected of keeping a Thlen, who is sometimes thought of as a single spirit, but more often as a class of demons. The cult of this evil spirit may be the reason for occasional murders, apparently without motive, which still occur in the Khasi Hills.

This particular spirit was known as <u>U</u> Thlen, meaning 'the Snake', because of all the forms it took that of a python was most common. It could also appear as a smaller snake, or as a dog,

<sup>1.</sup> Gurdon, Khasis, pp. 106-07.

<sup>2.</sup> ADG, x, pp.65-66.

but once it transformed itself into a dog it could never assume its original identity. U Thlen's worshippers were believed to 'keep' him, as a kind of familiar spirit, in their homes. This might not have been serious if it had not been thought necessary to nourish the domestic Thlen on human blood, in return for the wealth and prosperity which he was believed to confer on his hosts or keepers. Hence those who were suspected of keeping a Thlen were shunned by all, and even their names were not mentioned. It was believed that in order to get rid of the Thlen all the wealth conferred by him on the family had to be thrown away, and no one dared to touch it for fear lest the Thlen might follow them. Only a syiem, being of divine origin, had the power to appropriate the discarded property without danger to himself, since the Thlen had not the strength to do him harm.

Serpent worship is attested in many ancient religions, and is practised in many parts of India and elsewhere in those parts of the world where snakes are dengerous. Most forms of snake-worship, however, though they may involve blood sacrifice, are open rites, performed with the knowledge of others in order to appease the snakes, or the god whom they are supposed to represent. It is possible that the Khasi Thlen cult, performed in secret, developed out of some forgotten tribal sacrifice in which a human victim was slain. As their culture advanced the ritual was given up by the tribesmen as a group, but was continued by a small minority in secret. This hypothesis is strengthened by the fact that the worship of a serpent deity was a feature of the ancient religion of the Mons of Burma and the Khmers of Cambodia.

The Syntengs worshipped a similar spirit in order to acquire

<sup>1.</sup> Barua, JARS, vi-vii, 1938-39, p. 8; Gurdon, Khasis, p. 98.

<sup>2.</sup> Gurdon, op. cit., p. 15.

wealth, but with them this spirit was female, Ka Taro. As among the Khasis, those who kept a Taro were avoided by other people. But unlike the victims of the Thlen those of the Taro were not generally killed, but merely suffered from delirium and fever. It was very seldom that they died of the illness.

## Human Sacrifice

Human sacrifice in the strict sense of the term was not practised by the Khasis of the uplands. The sacrifice to the Thlen should rather be considered as ritual murder, because the few who kept a Thlen killed stealthily and sacrifices were made to the Thien only at dead of night. No victim offered himself or herself voluntarily to the Thlen in order to acquire merit. The keepers of a Thlen, or those suspected of keeping one, were much dreaded, as they still are. Thus the Thlen cult was a very unpopular one among ordinary Khasis. There is no reference anywhere to suggest that the Khasis indulged in head-hunting merely for ritual purposes, though during war the head of an enemy might be carried away as a trophy. Gurdon thinks that the Wars of the southern slopes may have practised head-hunting to provide offerings to U Syngkai Bamon, who was one of their principal gods. Since the Wars came considerably under Bengali influence it is quite possible that there were some who offered themselves up to the god in order to gain merit, as among the Jaintias.

It was generally believed that the Syntengs took to the practice of human sacrifice only after the conversion of the Jaintia royal family and the principal noble families to Hinduism, but Gurdon stated that he had reason to believe that this practice

3. Op. cit., p. 103.

<sup>1.</sup> Gurdon, Khasis, p. 103; Quaritch Wales, Prehistory . . . , p. 46. Gurdon's spelling, Tarch, is incorrect.

<sup>2.</sup> Gurdon, op. cit., p. 103; ADG, x. p. 55.

was prevalent among them long before they were converted. The river goddess Kupli used to receive as offerings two persons every year, during the late autumn and early winter. The victims were provided by a particular clan of the Raliang village in the Jaintia Hills. Gurdon believed that the Hindu goddess Kalī replaced the river goddess on the conversion of the royal family. This statement seems rather douotful. The Jaintia royal family was never absolutely Hinduized and retained many of its original Synteng customs and beliefs to the last. But human sacrifice was regularly practised in many Sakta temples, including Kāmākhyā in Assam, until it was put down in the nineteenth century, and the custom need not have been brought to Jayantipur from the hills. In any case the victims of Jayantidevi were chiefly either condemned criminals or volunteers, but the Jaintias were known to carry off prisoners from the plains for this purpose, and this was the immediate cause of their downfall at the hands of the British.

It is well known that human sacrifice was practised all over India in the more degenerate branches of Hinduism, and it is also attested among numerous tribal peoples of the Sub-continent and South-east Asia; Indeed, occasionally or frequently, such sacrifices seem to have taken place in nearly all ancient and primitive religions. There seems no special reason why the Khasis should have been exceptional in this respect, but it is evident that if they did perform human sacrifices they were not very frequent or regular. We have suggested above, as a vague possibility, that the cult of the Thlen represents the degenerate survival of a tribal human sacrifice. But if this is the case, there is no legend among the Chasis comparable to that of Abraham and Isaac to explain why it was given up.

<sup>1.</sup> Chatterji, Kigata-jana-krti, p. 86; Barua, JARS, vi-vii, 1938-39, pp. 4-11,

#### Animal Sacrifice

Animals such as cattle, pigs, goats, fowls and sometimes pigeons were used as offerings to propitiate the various divinities, but the cock seems to have been the most important sacrificial victim. According to tradition, when man was first created there was no sin and he was very close to God and heaven, which he used to visit often. How he fell in disgrace with God is not made clear, but he committed sin in some way, and was no longer in close contact with divinity. This fact is always mentioned at the ceremony of egg-breaking. When man committed sin the world was at once plunged into darkness. To restore the light the cock came forward and offered to act as mediator with God by laying down his life for the sake of man. At sacrifices the cock is always referred to as the 'son of the goddess, who laid down his head for man'. He was thus a witness of the covenant between God and man, and acted as a substitute for man to appease God's wrath and enger whenever man trangressed his laws.

We are somewhat suspicious of this story, which seems to contain echoes of evangelical Christianity, and it is possible that it was invented in the nineteenth century either by Khasis who had been converted to Christianity and wished to show that their old faith was as close to their new one as possible, or by adherents of the old religion who tried to make it resemble Christianity.

# The After Life

The Khasis believed in the existence of a heaven and of a dark underworld inhabited by goblins and demons. 2 In their be-

<sup>1.</sup> Gurdon, Khasis, p. 117; Barch, Short History of Khasi Literature,

<sup>2.</sup> Rafy, Fork-Lore of the Khasis, p. 90.

lief in the afterlife no moral sanction was involved, since they conceived that the final abode of men after death was heaven, irrespective of their conduct on earth. It seems that the primeval sacrifice of the archetypal lock, and the regular repetition of such sacrifices, was sufficient to ensure that all Khasis found a place in heaven, provided that the surviving relatives scrupulously performed all the funeral rites. Their absence or inadequate performance resulted in the spirits of the dead roaming the earth as restless ghosts, termenting their living relations until they were appeared. Similar ideas are common in many other religions.

In all their religious beliefs and rites the Khasis' main object appears to have been to obtain material prosperity, progeny, health and longevity. Very many godlings were worshipped in thanks for special benefits received, to ward off misfortune, or to alleviate it when it befell, and spiritual enhancement is never mentioned. As with unsophisticated people everywhere, the future state was conceived of as similar to life on earth, but without its unpleasant aspects, and a dead person was suphemistically referred to as 'eating pan in the house of God' (ban kwai ha ing U Blei).

# Ancestor Worship

Among the most important spirits worshipped by the Khasis were those of the first ancestors of the clan, who could inflict much pain and sorrow upon the living if all the funeral and commemorative rites were not performed. Offerings were made to dead ancestors after an introductory prayer to Ka Blei Synsham; in order to protect the living from evil spirits and also to obtain material prosperity. These ancestors were U Suidnia, the first maternal un-

<sup>1.</sup> Gurden, Khasis, pp. 105-06.

<sup>2.</sup> Hunter, Statistical Account of Assam, ii, p. 218.

cle of a clan, <u>Ka Iawbei</u>, the first grandmother, and <u>U Thawlang</u>, her husband. The larger ancestral ceremonies of the clans were connected with the megalithic cult, and are described later.

Like the Japanese, the Khasis used to offer food to the deed on the flat table stones in front of the monoliths which were exected in honour of the dead, and like them they transferred this ritual to the homes of the dead. The custom of ancestor worship as practised by the Khasis resembles that of the Chinese and Japanese, and does not seem to have been practised by other tribes of Assam. It has probably no connection with the Hindu śrāddha, which has Indo-European roots.

#### Totemism

We have no very clear evidence of totemism in a developed form in the Khasi social and religious system. The food tateos and prohibition of the killing of certain animals by members of certain clans are possible totemic survivals, but they may also be due to other reasons. A more probable totemic survival is the tradition of the syiems of Mongstoin, who trace their ancestry back to a stag. Yet another may be contained in the Jaintia traditions concerning Matsyodari, the ancestress of the ruling family, who was a goddess who first took the form of a fish and then transformed herself into a woman.

Food taboos, where they existed, were not explained by totemic legands, but were usually ascribed to the fact that some
early member or members of the family had in the past fallen ill
through eating certain types of food, which was henceforth regarded as taboo by all members of the clan to which the affected

3. See above, pp. 96,ff.

<sup>1.</sup> Gurdon, Khanis, pp. 109-10; Roy, Folk Lore, xlvii, pp. 387-88;

<sup>2.</sup> Gurdon, op. cit., pp. 109-11.

family belonged. Another reason for the ban on the killing and exting of certain animals was the belief that the spirit of some dead ancestor was not resting in peace and had taken the form of an animal because of the inadequate performance of the funeral rites. In such a case the species of animal in question was taboc until the spirit was propitiated by offerings.

Unless we dogmatically believe that to temism is a necessary stage in human evolution through which all peoples must have passed, we can hardly assert that the above evidence is sufficient to prove that the Khasis ever passed through such a stage, in the sense that each tribe or clan was mysteriously linked with a certain species of animal, which was strictly taboo to the members of the group.

#### Marriage

Marriage was looked on by the Khasis as a religious rite and was solemnized by a complicated ceremonial at which the High God, the goddess of the earth and the ancestor and ancestress of the clan were invoked. The importance of marriage as the basis of all human relationships and the sacramental character of the Khasi wedding rites have been attested by early writers such as Lish, though some later observers seem to have underestimated their significance in the Khasi socio-religious system. Hooker, for instance, wrongly suggested that the marriage system of the Khasis was a loose one, and that hardly any ceremony attended it. He may have been led into thinking this from the facts that divorces were frequent and that only a very brief and simple ceremony took place at the weddings of the poorer people.

<sup>1.</sup> Roy, op. cit., pp. 386-87.

<sup>2.</sup> Gurdon, Khasis, p. 127; Roy, op. cit., p. 382; U Jeebon Roy, Ka Niam jong ki Khasi, pp. 6-10.

<sup>3.</sup> Calcutta Christian Observer, vii, 1838, p. 141. 4. Himalayan Journals, 1954, ii, p. 275.

According to David Roy, the same system of marriage had always existed among the Khasis, because of their belief in the tradition that the seven original families (Hynniew Trep or Hynniew
Skum) had received instructions on religious rites and ceremonies
from God the creator himself. The conclusion is not really necessary, and involves accepting the legend at its face value. Yet
there is little evidence of outside influence on Khasi marriage
customs, which may be very ancient.

The Khesi-Synteng people were not in the habit of marrying very young. The women were considered of marriageable age between thirteen and eighteen, while the men married between eighteen and twenty-five. The proposal of marriage was made by the man, through his parents or close friends who acted as go-betweens. Usually the parents' consent was required and sometimes marriages were arranged by the parents without consulting their children. Only after his proposal was accepted was the suitor allowed to visit the young woman. The approximate date of the wedding was decided by mutual consultation.

After the proposal was accepted, the parents of both parties made enquiries as to whether there was any taboo (sang) to prevent a union between the two families. The important question of clan relationship was also discussed, since the Khasi clans were strictly exogamous.

The precise day for the marriage ceremony was ascertained after consulting the auspices by breaking eggs and examining the entrails of fowls by the bride's family. If the indications were unfavourable the engagement was broken off, because it was believed

<sup>1.</sup> Folk Lore, xlvii, p. 384.

<sup>2.</sup> Lish, Calcutta Christian Observer, vii, 1838, p. 141; Anon., Calcutta Review, xxvii, 1856, p. 85; Gurdon, Khasis, p. 128.

that to marry under unfavourable suspices would lead to such misfortunes as childlessness, premature death and poverty.

Gurdon describes three types of marriage ceremony which took place in the bride's home. The two most esteemed and respectable types were known as Fynhiarsynjat and Lardon. The third ceremony, Ladih Kiad or Lasuit, was popular among the poorest in the community because it was the simplest and involved the least expense. I The three types of ceremony were equally religious in character, and ceremonial prayers were common to all three. In every care the same deities were called upon to witness the rites.

The first type of marriage, Pynhiarsynjat or 'The Bringing of Rings', got its name from the fact that both the bride and bride-groom exchanged rings as part of the ceremonial. This form of marriage was very complicated and elaborate and involved the sacrifice of pigs; hence it was popular only among the wealthiest Khasis. The second type of marriage, Lamdoh or 'Taking Meat', did not involve the exchange of rings, and there was no sacrifice, pork being bought in the market for the feast. The Ladih Kiad or 'Liquor Brinking' ceremony was the simplest form, consisting of the resitation of the marriage formula by a priest, as in the case of the other two forms, accompanied by the ceremonial drinking of spirits. Hooker can only have witnessed this form of marriage, which led him to think that there was hardly any marriage ceremonial among the Khasis.

There were two marriage parties, one consisting of the bridegroom, his go-between and his followers, who were dressed up for the occasion, wearing turbans of any colour except black, and the

<sup>1.</sup> Gurdon, Khasis, p. 128.

<sup>2.</sup> Ibid., p. 131.

<sup>3.</sup> Ibid., pp. 128-31.

<sup>4.</sup> Himalayan Journals, ii, p. 275.

other of the party of the bride in the bride's home, consisting of the bride, her female attendants, her mother, her sunts and her other close relatives, arrayed in their best clothes and ornaments. The arrangements for the marriage ceremony in the bride's home were made by a male go-between appointed by the bride's femily. A similar go-between was appointed by the father of the bridegroom. It was the custom for a small party of young men from the bride's side to go and meet the bridegroom's party on the way, to honour them and escort them to the house.

In the next stage a go-between handed the bridegroom over either to the bride's maternal uncle or to her father, who took him to a seat next to the bride, with a maternal uncle on either side of them. 2 who talked about the desirability to the respective families of uniting the young couple. The bride and bridegroom then exchanged bags of betel nut, or rings in the case of the Pynhiarsynjat ceremony. Rings were not exchanged in the two other types of ceremony. After the exchange of either the betel-nut bags or the rings the two maternal uncles recited very lengthy marraige formulae. Then two gourds containing fermented liquor were taken up by the two go-betweens and handed over to an old priest, who mixed the contents together and than pronounced the couple to be man and wife in a speech invoking the gods. Three pieces of dried fish were then placed on the floor, and an incantation was recited. after which they were put on a high rack above the fireplace. When this ritual was over a pig would be sacrificed in the case of the richer Khasis and a fowl in that of the poorer. A feast followed,

1. Gurdon, Khasis, pp. 128-29.

<sup>2.</sup> Anon. Calcutta Review, xxvii, 1856, p. 85; Gurdon, op. cit., p. 129.
3. According to Gurdon (op. cit., p. 129) the two ksiangs or gobetweens recited the formulae. The maternal uncle may often also be
a ksiang. We believe from personal knowledge that the maternal uncle was at all times the usual performer of this part of the ceremeny.

varying in size according to the financial circumstances of the bride's parents. The three pieces of dried fish were taken down from the rack above the fireplace after the birth of two or three children, and two pigs, one for the husband and one for the wife, were sacrificed. It was usually only after this ceremony that the wife lived with his husband in his home, if he could provide her with one.

while this was the custom among the Khasi uplanders, for the bridgebridge-com to remain in the bridge's home after the ceremony, and
for the couple to move to a home of their own only if the bridgegroom could afford to provide one and after they had produced children, the Syntengs are never known to have followed this custom.
Among them the bridgeroom never stayed in his mother-in-law's home
with his wife, but visited her only at night and left for his own
mother's home early the next morning, until he was able to provide
his wife with a house.

The frequent occurrence of divorce and the remarriage of women among the Khasis led Gait, 4 though he came in close contact with the people, to think that polyandry prevailed among them. This misconception was overlooked and left unrectified by the late B. K. Barua and H. V. S. Murthy, who were entrusted with the revision of his book in 1963. In fact there is no evidence of polyandry in the Khasi Hills. Any tendency to polyandry seems quite impossible, because after a woman was widowed she could not remarry within a year, and even after this period she could not do so without first returning the bones of her deceased husband to his clan if she had been permitted to keep them, and even if she had not kept them the price

1. Gurdor, Khasis, pp. 129-30.

5. Gurdon, op. cit., p. 77. 6. Ibid., p. 77; see below, p. 249.

<sup>2.</sup> Ibid., p. 76; Ancn., Calcutta Review, xxvii, 1856, p. 85; Lish, Calcutta Christian Observer, vii, 1838, p. 141.

<sup>3.</sup> Gurdon, op. cit., p. 76. 4. History of Assem (3rd ed.), p. 312.

of removing the taboo had to be paid to the husband's clan before a widow could remarry. On the other hand the rules were more lax for a man. Although monogamy was the prevailing form of marriage, a man might have extra-marital relationships with other women without much loss of respectability, provided he was in a position to support his lawful wife and children. His illegitimate children, however, would not enjoy equal rights with his children born within wedlock. In most cases, except among the Wars, these children would not have any rights to their father's property. If the wife disapproved of her husband's behaviour she could divorce him and remarry.

Divorce was not infrequent in cases of adultery, beremess or incompatibility of temper. Both parties had to agree mutually to the divorce, after which a formal ceremony was performed in the presence of relatives and friends from both sides. After the caremony a proclamation of the divorce was made in the village by a crier. A woman could not be divorced while she was pregnant. After the divorce proclamation both parties could remarry. Normally there could be no divorce if one party did not agree to it, but among the Wars a one-sided divorce was possible, though in this case the party which divorced the other had to pay compensation. Parties once divorced could not remarry one another, or even marry into the clan of their former partner.

## Birth Ceremonies

certain rituals connected with childbirth are of some interest. A child's umbilical cord was never cut with a knife, but with a piece of sharp bamboo. 4 This was an evident survival from the

<sup>1.</sup> Lish, op. cit., p. 137.

<sup>2.</sup> Gurdon, op. cit., p. 77.

<sup>3.</sup> Ibid., pp. 79-81; Lish, op. cit., pp. 141-42; Hunter, Statistical Account of Assam, ii, p. 217; ADG, x, p. 58.
4. Gurdon, op. cit., pp. 123-24.

days before the knowledge of metal, and may indicate that the Khasus learnt the use of iron at a comparatively late period. The placenta was carefully placed in a pot, which was waved over the child by the father on the following day, and then hung up in the branches of a tree outside the village, after rice flour and fermented rice had been placed in the pot with the placents. This ceremony was evidently connected with a belief in a sympathetic link between the placents and the child.

The name-giving ceremony was accompanied by libations of rice liquor poured from a gourd, and the auspicious name for the child was chosen from a number of alternatives by this method. The rite was accompanied by the dedication of certain ritual objects, a bow and three arrows for a boy and a dao or large slashing knife and a head strap for carrying loads in the case of a girl. These were placed near the child during the ceremony and were then carefully preserved under the thatch of the roof. The choice of objects is indicative of the most desirable characteristics of the two sexes in the minds of the early khasis - the ideal man was a warrior and hunter and the ideal woman a tough and industrious field-worker and housewife. The name-giving ceremony was a religious one, and involved the invocation of various deities. The Syntengs decided the name of a child by another method. Two sticks were dropped by an aunt of the child as a possible name was mentioned. If the stacks crossed when they fell the name was considered auspicious.4

A further ceremony was performed about a week from birth, when the child's umbilical cord fell off. This involved the offering of eggs to various minor divinities.

<sup>1.</sup> Gurdon, Khasis, p. 124.

<sup>2.</sup> Ibid., p. 125.

<sup>3.</sup> Ibid., p. 124.

<sup>4.</sup> Ibid., p. 125.

<sup>5.</sup> Ibid., p. 124.

#### Funerary Rituals

Khasi and Synteng megalithic ritual, which was extremely complicated, was invariably connected with the cult of the dead. The
funeral ceremonies clearly indicate the strong belief of the people in the connection between the living and the dead and the influence which the dead were supposed to exercise on the living members of the family.

The dead were cremated. As soon as a person died the body was washed by relatives or friends, normally of the same sex as the deceased, and was dressed in ordinary clothes, after which it was laid on a bed on which certain articles of food such as a raw egg in a dish, fruits, Job's tears or maize, and betel nut were placed. These same items were taken to the cremation ground, which was always near the village.

In earlier days, as we have seen, the rich were scenetimes cremated on stone platforms. The ordinary tribesmen were cremated in a less expensive manner, but with considerable care and expense. First of all the site chosen for the cremation was made even. Where there was a slope, turf was used to make a flat platform, on which the pyre was constructed of wood, in the same manner as the lower part of a chimney. The depth was less than the average height of a man and the width was about two feet. The coffin was placed within this structure and a fire was lighted beneath it. This kind of cremation was normal for all classes.

1. Fürer-Haimendorf, JASB, Letters, ix, 1943, p. 176.

3. This and the following pages are chiefly based on the detailed account by David Roy in Anthropos. lviii, 1963, especially pp. 522-51.

4. See above, pp. 47-48.

<sup>2.</sup> David Roy states that the body is washed by male relations. This is not the case. It is usual for women to wash a female corpse, but on occasions, when the women are unusually timid, the face, hands and feet are washed and water is poured ever the body, which is covered from the waist down, by the men of the family. (Information supplied by my grandfather, Sri Jismot Chyne.)

<sup>5.</sup> Information supplied by my maternal grandfather, Sri Jismot Chyne (Khaifi) of Shillong.

Normally a maternal relation performed the cremation ceremony, but in the case of a married man his children might perform it, or even his wife, provided that she did not contemplate remarriage. A young and childless widow did not in general cremate her husband. Though a wife and her children might cremate a man, the bones were always returned to his maternal relatives, either soon after cremation or when these relatives performed the second stage of the burial ceremony. In the meantime the wife and children might keep the bones in a stone cist. Should a widow change her mind about getting married, which could in no circumstances take place in less than a year, she returned the bones to her dead husband's relatives.

A woman was normally cremated by her children and clan mambers, though a man could cremate his wife if she was childless, in which case the bones were collected and taken away by her relatives after the cremation.

Bones were collected by a man and received by a woman, who held out a white cloth which should not touch the ground. When the body was burnt by the clansmen the bones were collected by a maternal uncle, a brother, or a sister's son and were received by a maternal sunt, a sister, or a sister's daughter. If a man was cremated by his children the bones were collected by his son, or, if he had no son, by his wife's brother or any of her male relations. The bones in this case were received by his widow, provided she did not intend remarrying. If she intended to do so, then her daughter or son received them.

Any male member, irrespective of his clan, could perform the sanctification ceremony, which was the same for either sex. He did this by making a paste of rice flour and water and placing it on the bones.

P reparations were then made for taking the bones to a stone

cist to be deposited. The cloth containing the bones was lifted from the heap of askes on which it was placed, then wrapped in another cloth which was tied to the back of a person of either sex, who had to be either a member of the clan or a descendant of a male member of it. The carrier might not look back until he or she reached the cist. A man of any class, who acted as pilot to the procession, led the way, scattering rice grains and leaves of a tree called dieng pyrshit. When a stream had to be crossed a thread was tied from one bank to another to help the spirit of the dead to find its way across.

At the time of the lighting of the funeral pyre the relatives started to collect stones together for the construction of the cist. A flat stone for the cover and other stones for the sides, as well as smaller stones to pile all round the cist, were put ready at hand. After the building of the cist was completed, the builders got from the dead person's house each three rice cakes, which had been baked as soon as the body left the house, water, rice, rice flour, rice beer in a gourd, fermented rice, half-cooked rice, a boiled egg, and the leaf of a lakhar tree on which the other articles were placed. All these were put near the newly constructed cist and a man of any clan recited certain appropriate incantations, after which the offerings could be either eaten by their recipients or thrown away.

When the procession arrived, the bundle was unfastened and the bones were taken out to be laid inside the cist by a man, never by a woman. During these proceedings nothing was said. The cist was closed by a stone door, and all the food items already mentioned were brought again from the house and the same ceremony followed, but with different incantations. Then the mourners dispersed. The bones remained in this cist (mawchew or mawkynroh) until the dead person's relatives could afford to perform other ceremonies.

A day was fixed for the performance of the second stage of the ceremony after the relatives had consulted together. Any relative,

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whether a parent, a clan member, or a descendant of male relatives (khun-kha) could collect the bones from the cist. The bones of the eldest member were collected first. The door of the cist could be opened by a male only, and he took out the bones and handed them to a female relative who received them in a white cloth. The bones were wrapped and tied carefully. After a sacrificer had offered a libation of rice beer from a gourd, the bones were carried to the house and put on a mat in the courtyard to wait for the bones of the younger members of the family from other cists. It was at this stage of the proceedings that the bones of the male dead cremated by their wives and children were handed over to the maternal relatives.

After all the bones had arrived and had been collected on a mat in the courtyard, a woman carried them to the house in a cloth and put them on a bed on which a reed (shlan) mat had been spread. A priest (lyngdoh) made a libation with rice beer near the hearth and poured this three times. During the ceremony only the name of the senior member of the group of dead clansmen was mentioned. This rite could be performed at any time of day, and even at night, but no other rite could be performed on the same day.

The next day a healthy bull or cow of any colour was sacrificed in the courtyand in front of the door by the male relatives. The animal was not tied, but was merely prevented from escaping, and was beaten to death. While the rituals were intended for the benefit of all the dead whose bones were to be reinterred, only the name of the senior among them was mentioned in the extensory.

Sacramental portions (ia shim dkhot) were removed from the animal. Two of these portions were from the liver, two from the heart, three from the spinal rectus muscle, two from the large intestines, two from the kidneys, two from the lungs, two from the small intestines, one from the stomach, one from the spleen, and

one from the meat of the neck, making eighteen pieces in all. Three groups were formed, of ten, five and three pieces each. Some clans, however, took as many as 24 pieces, while others took only eight. But the most essential parts, called dohiong and comprising portions of the liver, rectus muscle, heart, large intestines and kidneys, were always taken.

One portion from the neck, one from the small intestines and one from the lungs were called dohphas the other pieces, generally ten in number, were called khwang. It did not matter how they were grouped, but the utmost care had to be taken to see that the different items were placed separately. Along with these, pieces of the frontal bone and lower jaw were taken. These sacramental portions were carried inside the house. Five pieces of dohiong were roasted on spits. The dohpha was cooked, but the khwang was not. Each roasted dohiong was cut into three pieces, and these were made into three piles. The frontal bone, the lower jaw and the khwang were put near the door, incide the house; the priest sat near the door, facing outside, and asked for water. He received five pieces of one pile of dohiong in his left hand and water in the palm of his right, and then he recited certain incantations, after which he sprinkled water on the dohiong in his left hand. He then received in his right hand a gourd containing water and fermented rice. While still holding the dohiong in his left hand he went to the bed on which the bones were placed, recited an incantation, and poured liquor from the gourd on the dohiong. He then went in front of the hearth, picked up another group of dohions, repeated the formula, and put them on the floor. The remaining pieces were dealt with in the same manner. After this ritual the frontal bone and the lower jaw were taken from near the door and were put inside the house together with the dohpha.

On the day when the animal had been sacrificed a new cist (maw-

kynroh) had been constructed either in the garden or in an open space not far from the house. A female maternal relative carried the bones from the house to the cist and a male maternal relative deposited them inside it, after which he tore the cloth in which the bones had been wrapped into two pieces and put them on top of the cist. Along with the bones sacramental items consisting of the frontal bone with horns, the khwang, the dohpha, a gourd, a branch of a dieng pyrshit tree, a bamboo stem filled with water, and various foodstuffs were brought. First the cist was closed with a stone, against which three large stones were put. The officiant poured water over a hard boiled egg from the bamboo, took a small piece of each of three rice cakes, and a piece from each of the three portions of the dohpha, held them in his hand and recited a ritual formula; then he put them on a lakhar leaf near the gourd. He then repeated this ritual. Water was next sprinkled on the hard boiled egg, which was then shelled. A piece was sliced off the smaller end and the rest given to the people. The priest poured fermented rice mixed with water from the gourd over this piece of egg, which was then tossed on to the lakhar leaf. If it fell in such a way as to show both sides it was taken as a good omen, and the officiant declared that the auspices were favourable and then threw this slice of egg away. If it fell on one side, so that the other could not be seen, further ceremonies were performed until the omens were propitious.

For the last stage of the ceremony the clan members, and also the children of the male members, who were not counted as belonging to their father's but to their mother's clan, met together to fix a day for the performance of the Thep Mawbah or Mawriam ceremony, if they could afford one. There was no fixed time limit within which this Great Cist ceremony had to be performed. It might be done soon after the cremation in the case of those who

could afford to perform all the rites immediately, or it might be carried out several years later.

Stones were collected for a rectangular mound called kynton. This was named after the eldest member of the dead kinsmen whose bones were to be transferred from the mawkynroh to this mawniam. While the construction work was in progress, stones were collected in order to set up three uprights and a horizontal slab, the whole known as mawlynti or 'stone of the path'. The monoliths were called mawshynrang or 'male stones', the middle stone was the mawkfil, or 'maternal uncle stone' while the other two stones were not given any special names. The flat stone was known as maykynthei or 'female stone'.

The monoliths were set up on the day that the building of the kynton was completed. Most of the clan members helped with the work of construction, the men doing the heavy work and the women cooking and serving dishes of rice mixed with rape-seed, which were thought particularly appropriate for this occasion. After the stones had been set up, a meal of boiled Job's tears and sesame was eaten near the door of the house. After the meal all entered the house, where a boar was sacrificed. The officient asked for some rice and recited a formula. He dedicated the animal by throwing rice eleven times on its shoulders and back. The people then killed it by thrusting a wooden or bamboo pike behind its shoulder blade. The men then cut up the pig and removed sacramental portions from the kidneys, spinal rectus muscle, liver, heart and large intestines; the lower jaw was also taken. These dohiong were roasted until the meat was well done. Then they cut each piece into three, making three piles, each pile consisting of five pieces. These were put in a basin in front of the hearth near the door. The priest sat on the hearth facing the door, took one pile in his left hand and asked for water, which he received in his right hand. He recited a formula and then sprinkled water on the meat in his left hand. He next asked for a gourd of fermented rice and water, and recited again. Then he took the last heap from the basin and, holding it in his left hand, once more recited. He put the meat on the floor and poured a libation on it. Then he took the lower jaw and thrust it between the thatch and rafters above the doorway.

After the sacrifice of the sacramental boar (u niang kyntang), drums were beaten. As soon as the mound and monoliths were erected the children of the male members came to take banners brought by members of the sub-families of the clan, and, while the drums were beaten, the lineage members set out to take the bones from the mawkynroh. All bones, whether from the small cist or the large one, were brought together to the courtyard. Any woman from the clan who was not pregnant might receive the bones on a piece of cloth. They were then placed on a mat. Those who brought the bones also brought rice beer in gourds. The beer of those who brought the bones from the small cists was poured into the gourd of those who brought the bones from the big cists. This gourd was placed on the mat with the bones. The different white cloths in which the bones had been brought were then torn up. The bones were then brought inside the house, amid the wailing of the women. They were then all placed on a reed mat on a bed, or on any other suitable spot near the hearth. The officiant then offered a libation from the gourd which was brought from outside, and recited an incantation.

He repeated the libation, and then poured all the fermented rice mixed with water on to the hearth. Some Job's tears were burnt in the fire, and as they split and leapt out they were collected. Two bunches of unroasted Job's tears were tied by two threads. They were put on top of the bones, which were placed in a small coffin of split bamboo, very much like a basket. This basket was placed on a reed mat. Inside it were also put three japung reeds about the size of a

finger. The cakes made of rice flour or boiled Job's tears, a toiled ed egg and some half-cooked rice were then brought. The officiant took a lakhar leaf, fermented rice, rice flour, plain rice, and a dieng pyrshit leaf. He spread the lakhar leaf on the floor and put the gourd upon it. Then he took the other items brought in, and put them in a basin on the hearth. He then took a piece of each of the three cakes, recited a formula, and put them on the leaf. This ritual was repeated three times. The egg was dealt with in a manner similar to that already described. He then put everything on the lakhar leaf near the basin, poured out a libation on them, and then poured out all the rice beer from the gourd.

Drums were beaten, and the sacrificer asked for a cock and some rice. He then took three sticks the size of a finger and recited a formula. The cock was dedicated by throwing rice on it eleven times. It was not tied. The officient cut the neck of the bird and let the blood drop on the sticks. He cut one portion from the small intestines and one from the liver, repeating the process fifteen times, after which he put all the pieces in a basin, in three heaps. These pieces were called dohiong. Drums were beaten while the officiant singed the bird and cut off the wings, head and thighs. These portions were called dohpha, and were carefully set apart. The priest took one heap of the dohions in his left hand, while in his right hand he received water with which he sprinkled the dohiong. Then ha asked for a gourd, which he held in his right hand while reciting sacrificial formulae. The dohiong was then put on the ground, and he poured a libation over it from the gourd. The same procedure followed with the second heap of dohiong. With the last heap he collected all the dohiong together and poured out all the remaining contents of the gourd upon them.

After the sacrifice of the cock there followed the sacrifice of a cow and a bull, both of which had to be healthy animals. The two

victims were dedicated by the officiating priest, who threw rice over them both eleven times. They were not tied, but were prevented from escaping. Both were beaten to death with sticks, and the killing had to be so arranged that both died at the same time. When the sacramental portions from both animals were removed there took place a ceremony identical with that which accompanied the other sacrifices, except that the lower jaws and frontal bones were also used. The rituals being completed, two men danced with fly-flaps made of goat's hair, to the accompaniment of three or four flautists who performed on bamboo flutes with seven holes. This dance continued all night until dawn broke.

The next morning, before anything was done, the priest performed a dedication ceremony by first reciting a formula and them scattering rice both inside the house and in the courtyard, while standing in the doorway. After the rice had been scattered he again recited ritual formulae. About half a pound to one pound of rice was used in this ceremony. Next the men of the clan went to the mawlynti, taking with them the lower jaws, frontal bones and other sacramental portions of the animals sacrificed on the previous day. A ritual identical with the one described above was performed, and another dance, performed with waving fly-whisks, took place.

After the erection of the <u>mawlynti</u> three or more cattle of either sex were sacrificed by the clan members. The ritual was similar to that described above, except that there was less musical accompaniment, not more than two men playing the drum.

The father of the family or his relatives next came to perform the phur mastich, the ceremony of bringing to the house of the children a pig, a cow or a bull. This was done in procession with a banner flying, to the accompaniment of drums and dancing. The animal was then dedicated and killed. While the sacramental portions were being removed the officiant asked for a further pig, cow or bull

from the maternal uncles and brothers (khun-kha).

At this ceremony the portions of both the father and the khunkha were mixed together. Otherwise the ritual proceeded as on the earlier occasion described above. When the sacrifices were over drummers and dancers made their way towards the house. First two dancers from the father's side paid respect to the dead by bowing three times and pointing their fly-whicks and swords towards the ground in front of the bones, which were held above the ground by immates of the house. After this these dancers joined the others in a dance called shad mastich which was performed for a short time in the courtyard. Next the khun-kha came up and paid respect to the dead in the same manner.

A great sacrifice followed. This was offered by members of the maternal ancestral house of the dead person. The victim had to be a pure white he-goat with horns. This victim was beheaded after it had been dedicated. A further he-goat was then offered from the father's family. Lastly the children of the male clan members also sacrificed a goat.

Two bundles of fried Job's tears or maize were then placed in the basket containing the bones, along with three reeds the size of a finger and the reed mat on which the bones had been placed. The basket was covered with a striped cloth made of raw silk (endi). It was carried to the kynton or mound, on which a small wooden enclosure of about a foot square was made. Inside this a fire was lighted and in this fire the articles brought in the basket with the bones were burnt. The bones, tied in a cloth, were swung over the fire three times. When this was done they were consecrated with rice flour.

While these ceremonies were being performed a dance to the accompanisent of a drum and a flute took place, and at the mawlynti,
hear the kynton, a she-goat was sacrificed by the maternal rela-

tions. The sacrificer let a small quantity of blood drop on the mawshynrang and on the mawkynthei. At this point in the ceremony too a dance was performed, to the accompaniment of a drum and a flute. Flags representing the fathers of the clan and of the khumkha were all put near the mawlynti.

A small hollow (unkoi) was then dug, and water was poured into it. A set of three stones (maw-umkoi) about a foot in height was set up near the hollow, the tallest as usual being in the middle. The dolmen or mawkynthei, about six feet in diameter, was put in front of the upright stones. These stones were set up while the bones were being passed over the fire. A flag was raised and a dieng pyrshit branch was planted in the hollow. Offerings of rice preparations and spirits were made and a cock or hen was sacrificed by a priest. The fowl's neck was cut with a knife and its blood was made to drop on the stones and in the hollow.

A male relative then took the bones in a cloth to the mawniam. His companions took the usual sacrificial items from the maternal ancestral house together with cowrie shells and a dieng pyrshit branch. The carrier might never turn back once he had started on the journey. The man who led the way scattered dieng pyrshit leaves as he went. When a stream was crossed these leaves and rice were scattered on both banks of it. Sometimes, as in the procession from the funeral pyre, threads were tied across the stream to guide the spirits of the dead. In this way they reached the great stone cist, or mawniam. Near the mawniam was the kpep, a large circle of rough stones, sometimes only a foot high but in other cases as high as a man.

Three firebrands were laid ready in the kpep, and when the bearer of the bones and his companions arrived they took these in their hands. A lyngdoh performed a sacrifice, offering spirit, five cowrie shells and five betel ruts wrapped in betel leaves.

Three members of the company cried out from a distance of between fifty and sixty feet from the great cist, calling on the dead to accept the fire of the brands, which were waved in front of the bones. The purpose of this ritual was to purify them before placing them in the cist.

In complete silence the mawniam was opened and the bones placed inside. When the cist was again closed, a further sacrifice was performed in front of it. After this all returned home.

#### The Feeding of the Dead

Not less than a year after the thep mawbah ceremony, the rite of feeding the dead (ai-bam) was performed by members of the clan or by the children of the male members. A bull or a cow was sacrificed and there followed the usual rituals as previously described. This ceremony might be performed as often as it could be afforded.

This offering was made to individual members of the clan, and not to all the dead clansmen collectively. As a sacrifice for a male relative a bull was offered, and for a female a cow. No aibam ceremony was performed for the benefit of a paternal uncle or aunt. A day's feasting was arranged for those who had helped in the preparations for the ceremony.

The stones named <u>mawksing</u>, <u>mawkhait</u> or <u>mawjal</u> were erected a year or more later, after the <u>ai-bam</u> ceremony. A drum was beaten while these stones were being put up; there was dancing, and the drumming continued as the mourners went home. Each set of stones was erected for one person only, and only the name of the <u>mawkfii</u> was mentioned, and not those of the other relatives.

The ceremonies connected with the setting up of the mawbynna stones, described earlier, were more or less the same as those

<sup>1.</sup> See above, p. 39 .

carried out at the erection of these mawksing stones, according to David Roy's informant U Mohan Kharkongor. During the erection of these stones not more than one bull or cow was sacrificed every day, according to the ritual described above, and there was much feasting, together with sword dances by the man.

## Ceremonies Performed for a Husband or Father

When the widow or the children cremated a husband or father respectively the bones were put into a separate mawkynroh and were handed over to his maternal relatives during the thep-mawbah ceremony described above. The children took the bones out of the mawkynroh. If they so wished, the wife and children might return the bones even before the dead man's relatives had performed this thep-mawbah ceremony. In such a case the bones were not taken inside the house, but put directly in a mawkynroh, preferably one containing the remains of other clan members. The ceremony performed at this rite was the same as that after cremation.

# The Significance of the Megalithic Rituals

From the descriptions given above it is clear that the megalithic rituals were the centre of the whole religious life of the Khasi-Synteng people in earlier times. They were a small people, living in a upland country which was not very fertile; for the ordinary Khasi life must often have been hard. Yet the Khasi clans could organize these very expensive rites to commemorate their dead, and to benefit them in the other world, at the cost of what for them must have been immense labour, time and wealth. They evidently had somewhat the same significance as the similar but less elaborate ceremonies in the ancestor cults of the Hindus and the Chinese, especially the latter, where the small ancestral tablets

<sup>1.</sup> See above, p.39, n. 3.

seem to have somewhat the same import as the Khasi megaliths, and may indeed be miniature survivals of a long vanished megalithic cult. At these rites the Khasi expressed his clan solidarity and the close knit texture of his family system. The rituals linked the dead with the living, the past with the present, heaven with earth. Also they were evidently occasions of great solemnity. The penitential toil of the menfolk in raising the great monoliths was accompanied by the magic formulae of the priests, no doubt recited in the form of an awe-inspiring monotonous chant. The deaths of the animal victims, some of them dying slowly under the clubs of the mourners themselves, to the accompaniment of constant drumming, must have provided an outlet for much pent up bitterness and relieved the sadistic impulses of many men who, through such acts of ritual cruelty, were enabled to live normal lives in fellowship with their neighbours. The feasting which concluded the ceremonies was a token of the atonement, the pacification which they produced in the minds of those who took part in them. Perhaps, for the Khasis of older times, these tremendously costly rites were worth all the toil and treasure expended on them.

While some of these rituals are still performed in an abridged form by those Khasis who still claim to adhere to their ancestral religion, and the charred bones of the dead are still placed in small cists, often nowadays made of concrete, the greater megalithic ceremonies will probably never be performed again. The modern lyngdoh has no knowledge of them, and practically the only written account we have of them is that compiled about twenty years ago by the late David Roy from the testimony of very elderly informants. This account is defective in many particulars. In some places it is ambiguous, and in others almost unintelligible. The significance of many features of the ritual in the minds of those who tookpart

is scarcely considered. Further research on this subject may yet produce new evidence, and a comparison of these with similar sacrificial and commemorative rituals in India, China and Southeast Asia may explain many aspects of these rites which on the surface appear quite pointless. We can only hope that among the educated modern Khasis, who are often all too ready to pay lip service to their traditional culture as they imagine it to be, some will appear who will go to the trouble of recording what-

ever they can gather from old people in out of the way villages,

and will then present it to the world in scholarly and intelligible form. Only then shall we fully understand all the details of

traditional Khasi religion.

#### Chapter XII

### INDUSTRY AND TRADE

#### General Material Condition

In general the material condition of the Khasis and Syntengs seems to have been tolerably good. Hunter found that, by the standards of the time, the Khasi-Syntengs were well off. The wages earned by the ordinary labourer were equivalent to one shilling per day, which was considered quite high in the early nineteenth century, about the same as the earnings of a labourer in England. The women's wages equalled about eightpence per day. Indeed at this time the Khasi labourer may have been materially better of than the English, for he needed less for heating and warm clothing. The country, especially the uplands, is not particularly fertile, and factors other than a prosperous agriculture contributed to the modest comfort of the life of the ordinary Khasi. The area was no doubt enriched by its exports of iron and lime; the wealth of the area seems to have been rather more evenly distributed than in most parts of India, since there were few very rich men and the syiems lived comparatively simply, and made few demands on their subjects; the Khasi country was never, until the coming of the British, occupied by a foreign power, and though the sylens and the king of Jaintia paid occasional tribute to the Ahom king, this had little or no effect on the economy; rather many Khasis enriched themselves by periodic raids on the plains.

In a community where the agint family system, with its merits

<sup>1.</sup> Hunter, Statistical Account of Assam, ii, p. 220

and demerits, seems at first sight to have been absent, at least in the strict sense, although it was customary for each married couple to set up a separate home a few years of the marriage, there was always present a sense of mutual responsibility among the members of the family, so that none of them went without at least the barest necessities of life. The youngest daughter, who would appear to be the most fortunate member of all, since she was the direct heir of the family property, in fact had the responsibility for the welfare of her poorer relations. The ancestral property which she inherited could not be sold in any circumstances, and whatever acquired property she inherited could only be sold with the consent of all her brothers and sisters. The house which the youngest sister inherited was open to all those who had no house of their own, including the male members. If her sisters never built their own homes they would still have a right to live in the youngest sister's house, which might be enlarged according to need. or in other houses set up in the same compound; but all those with earnings were expected to make contributions towards their own maintenance as well as the upkeep of the house.

The peasant farmers appear to have normally been free from debt and to have been quite prosperous. They cultivated their hereditary holdings, but few of them depended wholly on the produce of their fields. They occupied themselves in trade as well as agriculture. Ordinarily a cultivator also reared animals such as cattle, goats and pigs, which were either eaten or sold. A Jaintia cultivator would not be respected by his community unless he possessed cattle. The proprietor of land would himself cultivate it, unless he was rich enough to employ paid labourers or slaves. These cultivators, in particular those of the Jaintia Hills, were called upon to pay a

1. Hunter, op. cit., p. 226.

<sup>2.</sup> Pemberton, Report on the Eastern Frontier, p. 216.

certain proportion of their produce to the syiem. This tax was collected in kind from all the villages. Unfortunately we have no record of the System of assessment or collection, but, as we have seen, this tax appears to have been fluid and irregularly assessed, and it often may have had the character of a voluntary contribution. The Jaintia kingdom, which was larger and more under direct Hinda influence than were most Khasi states, no doubt had a more developed taxation system. We have also references to small taxes levied by the syiem.

#### Trade

Both the Khasis and the Syntengs were great traders. The two entrepots for the Syntengs or Jaintias and the Khasis were Jaintiapur and Pandua respectively. Here the hillmen plied a brisk trade with the plains of Bengal. The Jaintias exchanged their cotton, iron, beeswax, ivory, pan leaves and clothes for salt, tobacco, rice and goats.

The principal goods sold by the Khasis consisted of honey, beeswax, ivory, lime, oranges, betel or pin leaves, betel nut, iron, and
coarse cotton. In return they received rice, dried fish, salt, spices, cotton and silks, and copper, from Assam and Bengal. They also acted as middlemen, selling silk from Assam in the plains of Sylhet. In the eighteenth century it appears that much of the trade of
Jaintia and Kachar was in the hands of Khasi merchants, who brought
goods from these kingdoms, as well as silk dhotis from Assam, to Sylhet. Willes, the collector of Sylhet in 1790, reported that these

<sup>1.</sup> See above, p. 206.

<sup>2.</sup> Pemberton, op. cit., p. 215.

<sup>3.</sup> MCLRMI, vi, 1313, p. 607.

<sup>4.</sup> Pemberton, op. cit., p. 215.

<sup>5.</sup> Lish, Calcutta Christian Observer, 1838, p. 138; Anon., Calcutta Review, xxvii, p. 87; Lindsey, Lives of the Lindsey, iii, p. 174.

<sup>7.</sup> Ibid., iii, p. 22; iv, p. 212.

Khasi merchants were 'quiet and inoffensive' and deserving of encouragement, for they were 'oppressed by every independent chief of a little hill' and wanted to keep on good terms with the East India Company. The reference to the hill chiefs' 'oppression' of the merchants reminds us of the account of Santosh the Bengali merchant, which we have discussed elsewhere, and which was probably far from unique.

The trade with Bengal in oranges was considerable, like that in lime. The whole of Bnegal was supplied with oranges from the hills. Other fruits which the Khasis cultivated for consumption as well as for trade were lemons, pineapples, jack fruit, plantains or bananas and mangos. Limestone was plentiful in the Khasi hills and was exported in large quantities to the plains, whence it was carried by boat as far as Dacca and Calcutta. Under the Mughals the purchase of stone for lime-making from the Khasis had been a government memopoly, but the regime of the East India Company had opened the hills to private traders. These bought up whole hills, which they quarried for limestone, which was apparently usually taken to the plains before being burnt. This gave the Khasis a chance to obtain arms, and Willes in 1790 advised the restoration of the Mughal monopoly. His advice, however, went unheeded, and private trade was permitted with the hills in all commodities except arms.

At the village of Umstew, near Cherrapunji, are the remains of several stone lime-kilns with houses nearby. The lime burnt in

2. See above, pp.178-80.

<sup>1.</sup> SEDR. iv. p. 312.

<sup>3.</sup> Hooker, Himalayan Journals, ii, p. 274.

<sup>4.</sup> Lish, op. cit., p. 138; Lindsey, op. cit., p. 179.

<sup>5.</sup> SDR, iv, p. 210.

<sup>6.</sup> Ibid., iv, p. 215; c. f. Ibid. iii, p. 83.

<sup>7.</sup> Ibid., iv, p. 215.

<sup>8.</sup> Ibid., iv, pp. 228-29.

<sup>9.</sup> See below, p. 280 .

these kilns was probably for local consumption. The chinem traditionally used in India for whitewashing is unslaked lime, which would be difficult to export from the rainy hills without getting damp. This may be the reason why the contractors from Lengal preferred to deal in the heavier limestone, rather than in lime already burnt.

The Assamese always supplied silk cloths of various kinds, which were much valued by the Khasis. It is commonly said among the Khasis and Assamese that the designs on the Khasi jainsems had been supplied by the Khasis and made to order by Assamese weavers from time immemorial. This may be the case, since Assamese weavers have long made cloth of special design and measurement for sale to the Khasis for making jainsems. It is not the usual length or breadth of cloth intended for dhotis or saris.

The Khasi traders apparently used the backs of their womenfolk to bring their goods down to the plains. They accompanied them armed, to defend them from insult'. The prosperity of the traders was dependent on peaceful conditions, for when the hillmen plundered the plains the markets were deserted.

The Khasis and Syntengs manufactured various articles for their own use as well as for export. Their baskets with head-straps for carrying goods were particularly neat, unlike those of the other Himalayan regions. They also made netted bags to hold clasp-knife, comb, flint, steel and betelnut box, and baskets of other types of various shapes and sizes. A certain amount of coarse cotton cloth was made by the wars from fibres grown on the lower slopes of the hills.

2. SDR, 11, p. 205.

3. Ibid., iii, pp. 22, 61.

<sup>1.</sup> Lish, Calcutta Christian Observer, 1838, p. 138.

<sup>4.</sup> Hooker, op. cit., p. 274; Lish, op. cit., p. 138; Hunter, Statistical Account of Assam, ii, pp. 235-36.

#### The Iron Industry

From their iron rescurces, which in relation to the demand of those days were very considerable, the Khasis made their own swords, knives, hatchets, axes and arrowheads. Their blacksmiths generally hired labour to help them with their work. The iron smalting industry of the Khasis and Syntengs died out towards the end of the mineteenth century, as a result of the introduction of cheap English iron into the market. But traces of this industry are still to be found throughout the Khasi and Jaintia Hills in the various iron ore excavations which were worked to a great depth over a large area. In places the hills have collapsed as a result of the iron workings at their bases, and have left nothing but piles of large naked bouldors (plate XI). These must at one time have been covered with earth which has been washed away by the heavy rains. Judging from the great depth of some of the excavations, nineteenth century observers believed that the industry may have begun 2,000 years ago.

To the best of our knowledge no scientific research had been carried out to ascertain the age of the industry or the technique of mining. There has been no attempt, as far as we know, to develop iron mining in the Khasi Hills by modern methods, and the old workings have long been abandoned. Possibly the amount of iron obtainable as not considered worth the cost of its production, for there is a considerable shortage of iron in India at the present time, and these deposits would certainly still be exploited if it were considered economically fessible.

According to Yule the mining took place only for a period of about twenty days in the year, in the height of the rains, when there

<sup>1.</sup> Hunter, Statistical Account of Assem, ii, pp. 210-11.

<sup>2.</sup> Watt, Dictionary of Economic Products of India, iv, p. 513.

<sup>5.</sup> Hunter, op. cit., ii, pp. 210-11.

<sup>4.</sup> Yule, JASB, xi, 1842, p. 853.

<sup>5.</sup> Yule, loc. cit.; Anon., Calcutta Review, xxvii, p. 87; Hunter,

op. cit., loc. cit.; Gurdon, Khasis, p. 57.

was enough water for the washing operations. The proprietor paid an annual rent of from four to ten rupees, and the miners received four annual per day. Thus the proprietor might make a profit of 45 rupees annually. The ore was sold to the amaters at the rate of one rupee for seven baskets, totalling three maunds or about 247 lbs.

The usual method of extracting iron was by waching iron-bearing sand, which was dug from the hills among masses of decomposed granite. The rock was placed in a narrow channel through which ren a fast current of water diverted from a stream. The heavy magnetite sand was caught by a small dam, while the lighter material was washed down the stream. The height of the dam was raised as the sand was accumulated. The iron sand was further washed in a trough of running water, being constantly stirred by the feet of women. This process might be repeated four times, after which the ore was smalted. Some ore, however, was in the form of powdered or coarsely pulverized rock fragments.

The smelting was performed in fires kindled with charcoal, probably of oak-wood, and blown by very large bellows, from which the air was conducted by clay pipes. The bellows seem to have been the most remarkable technical feature of the process. Each furnace was provided with two of these, made of cow-skin, and they were worked alternately in order to maintain a steady stream of air.

The most detailed description of the Khasi iron smelters' bellows is given by Hooker, who also illustrates them (plate XI). He states that they were worked by two persons, standing upon them and

<sup>1.</sup> Tule, Jamb, xi, 1842, pp. 855-56.

<sup>2.</sup> Ibid., p. 854.

Journals, ii, p. 510) describes what seems a slightly different method, in which water was conducted over beds of granite sand and, as the lighter particles were washed away, the remainder was removed to troughs where the separation of the ore was completed. It is possible that the method varied in different localities.

<sup>4.</sup> Watt, op. cit., p. 502.

<sup>5.</sup> Yule, op. cit., p. 854; Watt, op. cit., p. 502; Hooker (op. cit., p. 511) mentions bamboo tubes. Probably both were used.

raising the flaps with their hands and expanding them with their feet. It seems from this description and from Hooker's illustration that two hemispherical bellows were suspended by a rope from a beam in the roof of the workshop, and the two operators alternately inflated and deflated them by pulling on the rope and pressing with the left and right foot in turn. Some kind of valve mechanism must have existed, but this is not described or illustrated.

The nature of the furnice seems to have varied, since the descriptions do not syree. Hooker states that there was no furnace in the proper sense, but that the sir was conducted to the fire through a hole in the base of an upright stone, shaped rather like a gravestone, on the other side of which the fire was kindled. This seems to be the type of furnace illustrated by him (plate XI ). Yule refers to a furnace about twenty inches in diameter with a chimney five feet high made of clay bound with iron hoops. Watt, 4 on the other hand, writes of a conical clay furnace three or four feet high, with an orifice at the bottom through which the bloom was removed. As a period of some fifty years elapsed between the two reports it is of course possible that the technique improved as a result of external influence, perhaps that of some of the Welsh missionaries, who may have been conversant with the rudiments of westerm iron smelting technique. The system described by Hooker, according to which the iron was smelted in a fire open to the air, would require much more charcoal to obtain a small quantity of iron than that described by Watt. It may be that both methods were employed in different areas simultaneously, but this is not very likely, since a clay furnace of the kind described by Watt would not be

<sup>1.</sup> Hooker, Himalayan Journals, it, p. 310; c.f. Yule, op.cit, p. 854.
2. Hocker, op. cit., p. 311.

<sup>5.</sup> Yule JASB, xi. 1842, pp. 854-55. 4. Watt, Dictionary . . . iv, p. 502.

difficult to construct, and, even allowing for the traditional conservation of undeveloped peoples, we can hardly believe that the Khasis would have continued to use the less efficient technique had they known the better one. Moreover the illustration given by Hooker arouses suspicion. The fire appears to be rather a small one to raise sufficient heat for the smelting of iron ore, even if we allow for the effect of the draught caused by the bellows. The exact nature of the traditional Khasi iron furnace cannot be established on the basis of this brief description and illustration alone. The latter, no doubt engraved by an artist who had never seen the actual subject of his picture, may well be very inaccurate.

Yule refers to the iron-bearing sand being fed into the farnace gradually, in a damp state, adhering to a handful of fern leaves. He also mentions that in some places the ore was mixed with powdered charcoal and fed into the furnace with almost every puff of the bellows, a spoonful at a time. It appears that no flux or catalyst was used.

The bloom was hammered before hardening to remove the remains of the slag, and might be further refined by reheating and hammering. The iron was sold in lumps 'as large as two fiets with a rugged surface', and these were often split almost into two halves, in order that prospective purchasers might see the purity of the metal. The iron was sold at the price of one rupee or R. 1 as. 2 per score of lumps; but in the plains of Pandua it might fetch a higher price, as much as Rs. 1 as. 4 per maund (a little over 82 lbs.) of about a dozen lumps. A furnace might produce one lump of iron in an hour.

Though produced by such simple methods, Khasi iron was an imper-

<sup>1.</sup> Yule, JASB, =1, 1842, p. 855

<sup>2.</sup> Watt, op. cit., p. 502.

<sup>3.</sup> Hooker, op. cit., p. 311.

<sup>4.</sup> Yule, op. cit. p. 855.

<sup>5.</sup> Idid. p. 856.

Lindsay, who was probably the first European to visit the Khasi
Hills, and who was very interested for personal reasons in their
trade prospects, reported that the Khasis produced excellent malleable iron . . . superior to say made in Europe by charcost! Yule, on the other hand, compared it unfavourably with the iron produced
by the Magas.

From Watt's account4 it would appear that the iron industry had died out altogether by 1890, but Gurdon, writing a few years later, contradicts this by stating that the once important iron industry was in the process of dying out, but had not completely disappeared. In Gurdon's day the only places where smelting was still carried on were Noughrem and Nongspung. The few iron implements then mamufactured, such as hoes, were for local use only, and their export had nearly stopped because they could not compete on the market with goods made elsewhere. The only iron article to be sent beyond the hills was the agricultural hoe, which was sent for sale from Laitdon to Palasbari near Gauhati. According to Gurdon the high cost of Khasi iron was due to the defective method of extracting the metal, since very little at a time could be got from the ore. Though iron is no longer produced in the Khasi Hills, Khasi blacksmiths still make iron implements for local use from imported iron and scrap metal. Smithies are particularly numerous in and around Mawphlang.

It is unfortunate that so little is known about that Khasi iron industry, which even a hundred years ago was still in existence. Careful research might even yet reveal the remains of Khasi iron workings, furnaces and bellows, and might produce specimens of the

<sup>1.</sup> I contemplated with delight the wide field of commercial speculation opening before me; my pay as resident did not exceed 500 per amum so that fortune could only be acquired by my cwm industry. Lindsay, Idves of the Lindsays, iii, p. 274.

<sup>3.</sup> JASB, xi, 1842, p855.

<sup>4.</sup> Watt, Dictionary ..., iv, p. 512

<sup>5.</sup> Gurdon, Khasis, pp. 57-58.

lumps of iron smelted by them. Local entiquarians have hardly begun to appear among the Khasis and it is to be hoped that some attempt will soon be made to preserve the material remains of the Khasi past, before it is too late.

#### Weaving

It appears that the khasis proper generally made use of cloth woven elsewhere. The Jaintias manufactured cotton and silk cloth, but on a small scale. Cotton grown in the Jaintia Hills was made into loincloths and sleeveless coats worn by men, and these were dyed red and blue. The blue dye was obtained from a plant called u sybu (strobilanthus hoeditolius), which grew abundantly in the hills. The red dye was obtained from the bark of two shrubs, ka larndong (symplocus racemosa) and ka larnong (morinda tinctoria). It appears that the Khasis chiefly relied on cloth made by the Jaintias or imported from the plains of Assam. The Wars made a checked cloth dyed red and yellow.

It seems that the only silk made by the Jaintias was obtained from a worm which was reared in the villages of Nongspung and Khyrwang. The latter village gave its name to the striped silk cloth commonly worn in the Jaintia Hills by both men and women. It was dyed in stripes of red and white, manye and white, or chocolate and white. The Jaintias supplied the Khasis with this silk cloth.

### Pottery

Pottery was made at Larnia in the Jaintia Hills. It was of

<sup>1.</sup> In 1842 Yule sent a full series of specimens, from the original rock to the finished lump of metal, including slag and dross, to the Asiatic Society of Bengal at Calcutta, and the then curator of the Museum of Economic Geology at Calcutta commented on them. (Yule, JASB, xi, 1842, pp. 856-57.) We do not know what has become of these specimens.

<sup>2.</sup> Gurdon, Khasis, pp. 59-60.

<sup>3.</sup> Ibid., pp. 60-61.

two kinds of clay, one of a dark bluish and the other of a greyish colour. No potter's wheel was used. The clay was beaten flat on a piece of wood and shaped by women by hand into cooking vessels, flower pots and water pots, which were also used in the making of him quor. The pots were dried in the sun and then baked.

#### Agriculture

Although industrious, the Khasi cultivator, as we have seen, could not produce enough for the needs of all the population of the hills, and so the Khasis had to import food from the plains. This was partly due to the fact that although the Khasis knew the use of manure well, they did not use the plough (lyngkor) regularly throughout the hills. The other agricultural implements employed were a large hoe (mohkhiew heh), an axe (sdie) for cutting down trees, a large dae (wait lyngagum), two kinds of bill-hooks (wait pret and wait khunt) and a harrow (huh moi).

The Khasis divided their agricultural land into four classes, forest land cleared by burning, wet paddy land (pynthor), high grass land, and homestead land. In clearing cultivation, celled in Assem jhum, no manure was used. Faddy and millet were sown broadcast and seeds of root crops, maize and Job's tears were grown in the clearings and cultivated by means of small hoss. For this type of cultivation the pessants depended on the rain alone, and there was no irrigation or watering. It was popular among the people living on the eastern and southern slopes of the Jaintia Hills, and also among the Hols, Garos and other neighbouring tribes.

The paddy hands, usually on clayey soil, were treated in the same way as in the plains. In the Jaintia Hills the plough was used and the land was well irrigated by means of channels which led into

<sup>1.</sup> Gurdon, Khasis, pp. 60-61.

<sup>2.</sup> Ibid., pp. 39-41; ADC, x, pp. 80-81.

the small squares of land into which the whole field was divided. In the Khasi Hills no plough was used, but only a hoe. The mud was stirred up by means of cattle, which were driven several times over the fields until the soil acquired the right consistency. No marsery beds were used for the young rice plants, but the seed was sown directly over the fields. Then the plants were about four inches high water was allowed to flood the fields again. Weeding was carried out several times up to the time of harvest. No manure was used in the cultivation of paddy. The ears of rice were cut by the Jaintias with a sickle, but the Khasis and Bhois never used this implement, which was considered taboo, and the ears were pulled by hand. When the rice was dry it was threshed out on the spot, either by beating against a stone or by men and women treading on it until the grains were separated. The grain was stored in bemboo receptacles called thiar.

For the cultivation of high grass land clayey soils were selected wherever possible. In the early winter the earth was turned over and left for about two months until the sods were dry. These, with the dead vegetable matter which grew on them, were then piled in rows in the fields and ignited, when they burned slowly and thus fertilized the fields. Other manures were sometimes used, but not for paddy. Homestead lands which produced good crops were well manured and cultivated with the hoe.

Excellent oranges were cultivated on the warm southern slopes of the Khasi Hills at an elevation of about 1,000 to 1,500 feet, though they could also be grown at higher altitudes up to 3,000 feet. Gurdon thought that the orange might be indigenous to these hills. For

<sup>1.</sup> Gurdon, Khasis, pp. 39-40; ADG, x, pp. 70-72.
2. Op. cit., pp. 40-41. Birdwood (Introduction to The First Letter Book of the East India Company, p. 36) refers to the orange of Garhwal Sikkim and Khasi as having been introduced into Syria by Arab traders, after which 'the crusaders heloped to gradually propagate them throughout southern Europe'. On the other hand the Khasi word for orange is a borrowed one, and there is no clear evidence of oranges being known in India before the Muslim invasions.

the young plants special nurseries were prepared. The land was theroughly pulverized and seeds which had been previously dried in the
sun were sown in spring. A thin layer of earth was spread over them.
The ground was then watered regularly and was covered with leaves
in order to retain the moisture. The seedlings were transplanted to
a larger nursery when they were three or four inches high. The orange trees were planted in their final positions in the orchard in
rows from six to nine feet apart. While they were young larger trees
were planted to shelter them. After the orange trees had reached
maturity the branches of the larger trees which had been kept for
shelter were cut off to let in as much sunlight as possible. Twice
a year, once in spring and once in autum, the orchards were weeded.
They were not manured.

### Bee-keeping

Honey, one of the items which the Khasis exported to the plains, was obtained from two kinds of indigenous bees, the domesticated bee called u near and the wild be called u lwai.

Domestic bees were kept in a hive of special type, made of a hollow piece of wood about 2½ to 3 feet in length and 10 to 12 inches in diameter. At each end of the log there was a small door, one for the bees and the other for giving the bee-keeper access to the honey.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1.</sup> Gurdon, Khesis, pp. 41-42; ADG, x, pp. 74-76. 2. Gurdon, op. cit., pp. 28-29; ADG, x, pp. 81-82.

#### Chapter XIII

# EVERYDAY LIFE

#### Houses and Furniture

It would appear from various descriptions that the Khasi houses were not of uniform design. They were generally made of wood, reed and plaster, or of stone. The woodwork was fitted together without nails, because it was taboo to nail houses. Though the houses varied in size and elaboration, it is recorded that even the poorest cottage was generally clean.

Both Hooker and Gurdon mention the absence of chimneys, a fact which we have inferred from linguistic evidence. Though most modern houses have fireplaces and chimneys, in older times the Khasis' fire was made in an earthen or stone hearth in the centre of the floor, the smoke finding its way as best it could through the single window of the house or through chinks in the roof and walls. Hooker says that Khasis houses had no windows at all, but Gurdon definitely mentions them. The beams used for the houses were often neatly carved. The doors turned on good wooden pivots, but no details are given.

Gurdon describes Khasi houses as of two types, made of wooden planks or stone respectively. In Cherrapunji and in Mawkhar, a suburb of Shillong, the houses were generally of stone and were larger than in the other villages, but the largest house seen by Gurdon was in the Jaintia Hills at Sutnga, where the house of the chief (doloi) measured 74 feet in length. That of the syiem priestess at Smit in the Khasi Hills, was 61 ft.long by 30 ft. wide.

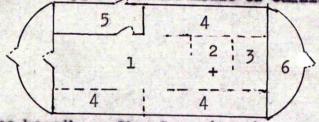
<sup>1.</sup> Hooker, Himalayan Journals, ii, p. 273; Gurdon, Khasis, p. 30.

<sup>2.</sup> Hooker, op. cit., p. 273; Gurdon, low. wit: ERE, vii, p. 690.

<sup>3.</sup> Hooker, loc. cit.

In front of a typical khasi house there was a small compound fenced on two sides, which opened on to the village street. In Jaintia houses the front wall was plastered with rod earth and cowdung. Pigsties and cowsheds, which looked like small houses, were built outside the main house. The latter was often raised on a plinth two or three feet from the ground to escape flooding from the heavy rains which fell in the region. According to Gurden the houses were very low and eval shaped, and consisted of 'a porch, a centre room, and a retiring room. This description, however, does not agree with our own information.

Traditional Khasi houses were not divided into rooms at all, but into sections (skut) which were separated by wooden partitions rising only two or three feet from the floor. The only permanent walls were those between the front porch and the living room and those which divided off a small room, in one corner of which water was stored and which was used for bathing. We give a diagrem of a typical Khasi house of earlier days.



+ The hearth or fireplace (dpei):

1. Sitting room (rympei);

2. Store for kitchen utensils etc. (nongpeh);
3. Store for boxes etc., and 'spare bedroom';

4. Sleeping places (yadir, skut thich);
5. Reservoir and bathroom (skut buh um);

6. Storeroom for grain etc.

A traditional Khasi house was in fact divided into only two pain

2. ERE, vii, p. 690. 3. Curdon, loc. cit.

<sup>1.</sup> Gurdon, Khasis, pp. 30-31.

<sup>4.</sup> This and the following paragraphs are from personal knowledge and observation, supplemented by information supplied by my grand-father, Srijismot Chyne.

portions only, the living quarters and the veranda (kyndur or shyngkub), where agricultural implements were stored. Larger houses might have a storeroom at the back of the house, where rice and other commodities were kept. The veranda and the storeroom in the rear gave the house a rounded cutline. This was thought advisable, since it was believed that houses with corners attracted lightning.

Remains of stone houses, probably of our period, are to be found beside the road from Shillong in the village of Umstew, a few miles from Cherrapunji. These are the ruins of about a dozen dwellings with lime kilns close by. Some of these ruins are little more than piles of stone, while others are fairly well preserved. They seem at first sight to be the remains of an old village or township, but some local inhabitants maintain that they were houses built solely for the owners of the kilns and their workmen, who made use of them while work was in progress and at other times lived elsewhere with their families. This tradition seems to be false. It is hardly likely that such solid buildings would be erected merely as temporary dwellings. Before the great earthquake of 1897 most of the houses of the Cherrapunji region were of stone, which was easily available, and thus we believe that these were dwelling houses ruined during the earthquake. Since that disaster the people of the district have taken to building their houses of light material such as wood.

These houses with their adjoining kilns evidently formed the homes of a whole colony of lime burners. The buildings are very solidly constructed of squared blocks of stone and have a rectangular plan, averaging about 26 feet by 15 feet. Some had one and others had two doors, and all had two or three windows. The walls were from 1½ to 2 feet thick. The floors were well paved with stone slabs. Even where the walls survive more or less in-

tact, there are no traces of rocfs, which were probably of thatch. No doubt the roof beams have long since been taken away by the local people for firewood or for other purposes. Similarly there are no traces of interior walls, and it thus seems that the houses were in the form of large single rooms with temporary partitions, like the typical Khasi houses described above. The circular kilns are tapering tower-like structures, from 10 to 12 feet broad at their bases, with an opening on ground level for firing the limestone. Most of these kilns are only a few feet from the houses to which they were attached. At present their interiors are filled with earth and rubble, and their excavation might yield interesting results. The competent technique employed in their construction and their good state of preservation do not suggest that they are of any

The Jaintias built houses with 'hog-back' roofs, with the door at one end, unlike similar traditional Bengali houses, which had the door at one side. The same hog-backed roof was used in the construction of the larger more sophisticated brick buildings of the palaces of Jaintiapur and Nartiang, which were unfortunately destroyed in the great earthquake of 1897.

The furniture and utensils of the ordinary people appear to have been very simple, according to the description given by Gurdon. The Khasis, unlike the Indian of the plains, normally sat on stools rather than on the ground or on mats or cushions, and so each home had a number of these. The well to do had wooden beds with mattresses, sheets and pillows, luxuries no doubt learnt from the plains; the peasants slept on plaited bamboo mats on the bare floor. Ordinarily utensils were of iron and earthenware, but in the homes of the rich brass eating and drinking vessels such as those of Manipur and

great antiquity.

<sup>1.</sup> Hutton, JASB, xxii, 1929, pp. 342-43.

Sylhet were to be found. The poorer peasants used water pots made from gourds, and drank out of bamboo cylinders. Utensils were placed on hanging shelves or brackets in a special compartment near the domestic hearth.

#### Sites of Villages

It was sang or taboo to build a house or a village on a hilltop. The explicit reason for this was that the top of a hill was sacred ground, in the possession of its tutelary god, but it was a sensible rule, for by building their settlements a little below the summit the Khasis protected them from lightning, wind and storm. The village normally had a single main street, facing which all the houses were built, not very close together. The Khasis were very attached to their villages, which were rarely permanently abandoned unless all the inhabitants were killed as a result of disease or warfare. When a village was destroyed either by warfare, like Jowai, or by earthquake, like Cherrapunji, it was soon rebuilt. The stone monuments found in almost every village in the higher part of the area testify to the affection which the Khasi had for his hearth and home, which was also the home of the bersvolent ancestors whom he commemorated with his megaliths. The Khasi village was not divided into quarters. All the inhabitants, including the chief and the nobles, lived together, whether rich or poor, and there was no reserved area for the tribal aristocracy.4

#### Food

The people had a varied taste in food. Pork was especially appreciated among all the Khasi tribes. Beef was also eaten every-

<sup>1.</sup> Gurdon, khasis, pp. 35-36.

<sup>2.</sup> Hooker, Himalayan Journals, ii, p. 273.

<sup>3.</sup> Gurdon, op. cit., p. 33.

<sup>4.</sup> Ibid., p. 31.

where, though it was less popular in the Jaintia Hills, where the people were much under the influence of Hinduism. Goats and fowls were also commonly eaten. The Khasis were also fond of other kinds of meat, such as venison and other wild gome, and their hunting expeditions were carried out chiefly in order to obtain food rather than for sport, though the latter motive was also present. Fish was eaten whenever available, and fishing formed another favourite occupation of the men. The people of the War area were fonder of fish than of meat, probably through the influence of their Bengali neighbours of Sylhet, whom they resembled even in looks and in dress. Unlike the Garos and Nagas, the Khasis never ate dog's flesh. The story is still current among the people of how the dog became the friend of man, and thus the idea of eating dog's meat is probably as repulsive to the typical Khasi as it is to the traditional Englishman. We do not, however, agree with Gurdon that the dog was in a sense sacred. It had no place in Khasi religion and it was looked on not only as the friend of man but also as a type of dirtiness and bed manners. Thus in their attitude towards the dog the Khasis differed considerably from their Tibeto-Durmon neighbours, but like them they did not use milk, butter or ghee for food. Of wild animals they ate monkey's flesh and that of a kind of large field rat. The Syntengs ate tadpoles, while the Khasis ate a type of large green frog, though the common frog was not enten. Certain Khasi tribes ate a kind of woolly caterpillar, and the Syntenes also are known to have eaten it.2

In spite of their varied tastes in food, certain class observed food taboos. For instance the Cherra sylem's family abstained from dried fish, which was quite a common article of food among the ordinary people. The ruling family of Myllian could not eat gourds.

<sup>1.</sup> Gurdon, Khasis, p. 51.

<sup>2.</sup> Ibid., pp. 51-52; Hooker, op. cit., 11, pp. 275-76.

The Sylem Lieh clan was forbidden to eat a kind of fish known as khalarni. The Wars could not eat preserved fish or certain other types of pickled foce. The Khar Ummuid clan of Nongkrem might not eat pork. Several other food taboos are still observed by certain Khasi clans or families. These family food taboos seem at first glance to be relies of totemism, but, as we have seen, there is little other evidence of totemic practices among the earlier Khasis.

From Gurdon it would appear that the Khasis, like the Jews and Muslims, looked on the killing of animals for food as a sacred act, even when the regular sacrifice was not involved. Before killing, the animal was dedicated by prayers and the sprinkling of rice. The have not heard of this practice being followed by non-Christian Khasis in more recent times, and no other observer mentions it, so it is possible that Gurdon generalized from inadequate information.

Ordinarily the Khasis ate two full meals a day, one in the morning before setting out for work and the other in the evening. Labourers had an extra light midday meal. The food of the well to do consisted of rice, fish, fowl, beef or pork, curried vegetables, oil, hog's lard and fermented liquor. The poor man's staple food was rice and dried fish, with some meat occasionally. Rich and poor at like were addicted to pan, which was chewed at all times.

### Drinks

From all accounts the Khasis have always been fond of alcoholic drinks. Various grains were used for distillation and brewing, but the most common was rice. Rice beer and rice spirit were consumed in very large quantities. The preparation of intoxicating drinks was and still is an occupation followed mainly by women, who carried on brewing on a small scale while their men worked in the fields, or pursued other avocations. The income derived from the making of spirits in the home was in most cases sufficient to support a fami-

<sup>1.</sup> Gurdon, Khasis, p. 52.

<sup>2.</sup> See above, p. 240.

<sup>3.</sup> Gurdon, op.cit., p. 51.

<sup>5.</sup> Hooker, op. cit. ii, p. 276; Lish, Calcutta Christian Observer, 1839, p. 136.

The Khasis had two kinds of beer, both of which might be made from either rice or millet, fermented with the root of a plant called khawiang, which acts as yeast. These two were known as ka kiad hiar and ka kiad um. The former was made by boiling the grain, which was then spread on a mat; when it was cool, the yeast or khawiang was sprinkled on it to produce fermentation. The rice was then collected and placed in baskets. Each basket was tightly covered with a cloth, and placed in a wooden bowl for about two days, until the beer had drained completely from the basket to the bowl. Ka kiad um was a second brawing made from the same grain as had been used for ka kiad hiar, and it was naturally much less potent. These drinks were used mostly by the people living in the western parts of the Khasi and Jaintia Hills. The Khasi uplanders and the Syntengs preferred distilled liquor, which was made from rice and was estimated to contain from 60 to 80 per cont of proof spirit.

The present day Khasi villages have regular drinking places, where the men gather in the evenings to buy and drink their beer and spirit. We have no reason to believe that such places did not exist in earlier times.

#### Dress

The dress of the Khasis and Syntengs has not altered much, at least in the villages, from what Gurdon describes as the 'ancient dress' of the Khasis. Even in the towns the chief features of the traditional women's dress are still retained, with the addition of sweaters and jumpers and western tyle coats in winter, together with high-heeled shoes and the Hollywood type of make-up now commonly used throughout the world by more sophisticated women. On

<sup>1.</sup> Lish, op. cit., p. 138.

<sup>2.</sup> Gurdon, Khasis, pp. 53-54.

to the western form of dress, with the exception of the necktie among the less fashionable. In the villages most men do not wear shoes except when the weather is very cold or on festive occasions, but coats and trousers are worn, often still with the traditional white turban. Some men, however, still prefer to wear the dhoti, particularly in War, Cherrapunji and Jowai. The traditional dance dress for both men and women is still worn at festivals.

The normal Khasi women's dress consisted of a garment next to the skin called ka jympien, which was tied round the waist and came down to the knee. This was worn as a working dress by the poorer women. Those who did not need to work, and the ordinary cultivators on special occasions, would wear over the jympion a long piece of material, often made of Assamese muga silk, called ka jainson, which hung loosely from the shoulder to the ankle. It was kept in position by knotting it at the shoulder. The jainsen might be looped up over the shoulder to form a capacious pocket under the arm. Over the jainson, in colder weather, was worn a head-scarf which was generally knotted at the neck, and over this was a long cloak (jainkup) hanging over the shoulders, its two ends knotted in front. The two latter garments were generally brightly coloured. It was considered improper for a married woman to appear in public without her head-scarf. In winter the women were a form of gaiters, like long stockings without feet; among the poor, pieces of cloth were bound round the legs and fastened with strings. Gurdon remarks that the Khasi women were if anything excessively clothed!

The Synteng women's dress differed a little from that of the Khasis. The place of the jainson was taken by the khyrwang, part of which was hung round the weist, and the end of which was passed

<sup>1.</sup> Gurdon, Khasis, p. 19.

under the arm and knotted on one shoulder. This garment came down below the calf. Over it a piece of mugh silk was fastened at the other end. The tap-moh-khlich or head-scarf and the jainkup or cape were common to both Khasis and Syntengs.

During festivals the women left their heads bare to display their jewellery and the flowers with which they adorned their hair. Otherwise married Khasi women generally covered their heads, though the War women ordinarily went uncovered. No woman would leave her house without a bag, which contained pin leaf, betel nut, a small knife and other odds and ends. Such bags were also often carried by the men. We have no evidence of the regular use of cosmetics, though the women rubbed their faces with chicken or beef fat, which was afterwards washed off, to improve the skin. The fruit of the banana was also used for this purpose.

The men wore a sleeveless coat with long fringes coming below the hem. Other items of male clothing were a cap with ear-flaps, and a loineloth tied with a long flap in front. The higher classes and wealthier men wore a cotton or silk turban which was rather large, but well tied. They wore a dhoti or loineloth made of fine silk, and a silken chadar or shawl thrown loosely across the shoulders. At dance festivals both men and women wore specially fine and bright dresses for the occasion. An early observer describes the dance dress of the Khasis at Mawphlang as 'most elegant and really splendid'. 4

The inhabitants of the Khasi and Jaintia Hills were very fond of jewellery made of gold and silver. They were also fond of beads, especially of coral, which, by the end of the period which we con-

<sup>1.</sup> Gurdon, Khasis, pp. 19-21.

<sup>2.</sup> Ibid., p. 18; Hunter, Statistical Account of Assam, ii, p. 216.

<sup>3.</sup> Hunter, op. cit., ii, pp. 216-17.
4. White, Memoir of David Scott, pp. 98-99.

sider, they obtained from Calcutta by way of Jaintiapur. These beads were made into necklaces, alternating with gold plated beads. Both men and women wore them. Earrings were also worn by both sexes, but they were of different patterns according to sex. Bracelets were worn by women only. A close fitting necklace called rupe-tylli was also worn only by women. Another item of jewellery was a tiara made of gold or silver, worn by women at festive dances. All these articles of jewellery are still worn in the Khasi Hills. It would appear that the Khasis never wore anklots or nose jewels. We have no record of the practice of tattooing among them.

#### Oral Literature and Music

There is no record of writing among the Khasis before the coming of the missioneries. The Khasis had many folk-tales, but there is little evidence of the existence of a vigorous formal oral literature among them, such as existed among some other illiterate peoples. There is a good deal of Khasi poetry, but nearly all has been composed within the last hundred years, and along western lines. The only traditional Khasi verse form known to us is the phaser. This is a couplet, each line containing four stresses, with a rhyme on each stress, in the form abod, abod. These verses are usually recited impromptu at festivals and social gatherings, and are more remarkable for their ingenuity than for the beauty of their thought, which is usually rather platitudinous.

Of the musical instruments of the Khasis mentioned by Gurdon, two are said to be indigenous, but the author does not state which and does not give the reasons which led him to this conclusion. It is probable that the bamboo flute, known as ka sharati or ka shyngwiang, played at cremation ceremonies, which had a legend regarding

<sup>1.</sup> Barch, Short History of Khasi Literature, pp. 16-17.

its origin, is one of them. The other musical instruments appear to have been borrowed from Assam.

The Khasis had many kinds of drums of various shapes and sizes with different names. These were made of either wood or earthenware, like those of Assam proper. Metal drums were never used. There were three types of stringed instrument. The most popular of these was ka duitara, which was borrowed with its name from the plains. It resembled a guitar, and was played with a small wooden plectrum. Another instrument, resembling the duitara, was played with a bow like a violin, while a third, which had only one string, was played with the finger. A harp called ka sing ding phong, was played by the Wars only, and was made of reed. The Khasis played a kind of Jew's harp made of bamboo, called ka mieng, and metal bells were also among their musical equipment. Besides the sharati, which was played only at funeral ceremonies, they had several other kinds of flute made of bamboo and a small wooden flageolet called tanguari.

All, or nearly all, of the instruments mentioned above may still be heard, though some of them are rarely played nowadays. The music of the Khasis is, however, new so influenced by that of other peoples that it is not possible for anyone but a professional musicologist after long study to trace the truly indigenous elements. But even an untrained ear can recognize in the so-called Khasi folk-songs of the present day ( usually sung, incidentally, to verses of which the structure of metre and rhyps is clearly that of English poetry ) the influence of Bengali and Assamese folk music, Indian film music and even the Rabindra alt on the one hand, and

<sup>1.</sup> This on the authority of Gurdor (Khasis, p. 39). We are at a loss to explain how a harp, with sound-box and numerous tensioned strings, could be made from so flexible a material as reed. Perhaps bamboo is meant.

<sup>2.</sup> Gurdon, op. cit., pp. 38-39.

that of protestant hymnody, Welsh folksons (learnt no doubt from the Baptist missionaries) and western popular and film music on the other. The guitar is rapidly replacing the duitara as the Khasi's national instrument. The usual style of singing is that of India; the singer makes little attempt to throw his voice forward in the European manner, and he embroiders his melody with quarter tones and grace notes. However, there is enough to show from the simple music performed at non-Christian funeral coremonics and on similar special occasions that the original music of the Khasis was based on a simple pentatonic system, probably not very different to that of most of the Far East and South-east Asia.

#### Art

There is scarcely anything worthy of being called a work of art made by the Khasis of earlier times, and we must regretfully record the fact that they are probably the most inartistic people known to us. Their megaliths are often of an imposing grandeur, but nearly all are completely unadomed and their builders had no artistic purpose in designing them — they are as severely functional in intention as a jet plane or a space rocket, and what beauty they possess is accidental. As far as we can gather the houses and tools of the Khasis were also quite undecorated, and their patterned textiles were imported from Ascam. Their jewellery also was made by craftemen from the plains. In fact the Khasis showed much less artistic feeling than many other peoples of the hills of Assam, such as the Nagas, whose material culture was at a considerably lower stage.

A small exception to the above generalization is to be found in the form of a rough carving in the form of the back and smout of a pig, which may be seen on an outcropping of natural rock at Jowai in the Jaintia Hills (plate riv). This is locked on as as-

cred by the local inhabitants, and sacrifices are still occasionally performed beside it. The villagers have no knowledge of its crigin, and if there are any local legends connected with it we have not been able to trace them. The figure has a weather-worn appearance, as though rain, wind and sum have effaced many of the details of the carving, but in the humid climate of the Khasi Hills stone wears away comparatively quickly, and this subjective impression of great antiquity may be a false one. Similar figures are said to exist in other outlying parts of the hills, but we have not been able to visit them, and they have never to our knowledge been studied from the point of view of the archaeologist or anthropologist. It is to be noted that the Khasis of recent times attach no senetity to the pig, and have no particularly memorable legends about it. We have elsewhere suggested that the date of the Khasis' arrival in their present homeland is considerably later than is generally believed. We hazard the guess that the 'stone pig' of Jowai, and its remoured counterparts elsewhere if they really exist, are the remains of a people who preceded the Khasis, and who had a cult of a sacred boar.

#### Sports and Pastimos

The most popular pastime of the Khasis was archery, which was practised as a sport in the cooler months, from about December until the end of May. Each village had its team of archers which competed with the teams from other villages at inter-village archery contests, which were frequently held. Such archery tournaments are still a very popular form of amusement, and attract many spectators who gamble enthusiastically on the results. The same was no doubt the case in earlier times. According to legend archery is as old as manking for the use of the bow and arrow was taught by the first mother of men to her sons, who were warned not to lose their

tempers in the game. This story shows that even in early days archery for the Khasis was not only a skill essential in war and in the chase, but also a great source of entertainment. The Aryan hero Arjuna is also said to have taught the Khasis the use of the bow, and the two legends are harmonized by the modification that Arjuna only taught them better methods than those which they had known before. The normal Khasi bow was a long bow of bamboo, and the arrows were of the same material.

Second only to archery among the pastimes of the menfolk were hunting, fishing and bird-catching. These sports were of practical utility, but the hours spent at them did not always produce comparable yields in the form of edible game or fish. Even today the Khasi man will spend whole days sitting on a rock with his bamboo rod beside a fast stream, or reaming the woods in search of deer, and his reward will hardly be proportionate to the time and effort expended. We may assume that the enthusiasm shown by the Khasi for hunting and fishing, attested by numerous early observers, was perhaps a survival from a stage of development when such activities were a major source of food supply, but that hunting and fishing also provided a release from the monotony of regular work, relief from care, and a promise of excitement.

Various forms of genbling were popular, as they still are, and there were a few sedentary or semi-sedentary games of a simple kind, as well as more active round games and singing games, still played by village children, little study has yet been made of these, which in other cultures often echo a distant past.

<sup>1.</sup> Gurdon, Khasis, pp. 54-55.

<sup>2.</sup> Lish, Calcutta Christian Observer, vii, 1838, pp. 137-38; Anon., Calcutta Review, xxvii, p. 86; Gurdon, loc. cit.

#### Astronomy and Calendar

The Khasis believed that the sun was female and that the moon was male. The changes in the moon throughout the month were accounted for by the story that the moon, who is a man, falls in love with his mother-in-law every month, and the affronted lady throws ashes in his face.

The Khasi calendar was originally a lumar one, and the month was called baai or 'moon'. It was roughly harmonized with the solar calendar by making thirteen months of 28 days each. There are, however, only twelve names of months, all relating to the weather, vegetation and agriculture, and in the old Khasi calendar the name of the coldest month, Kylla Lyngkot, now taken as corresponding to Jamuary, was duplicated as first and second baai Kylla Lyngkot. This system has some resemblance to the Hindu calendar, and influence is possible.

The fact that the Khasis have only twelve names of the months suggests that their enrliest system had in fact only these twelve months. The names have no relationship to any calendrical system known to us. There appear to have been no leap years or other methods to maintain the regularity of the calendar, and it seems probable that the system of the months did not play a big part in the lives of the ordinary Khasis in earlier times. Even today the Khasi peasant is more inclined to rely on such annual events as the appearance of the first leaves of the birch troos, the first night frost, or the general feeling of the atmosphere rather than on calendrical dates for the regulation of his agricultural programme. The old names of the months are still used in Khasi, but are applied to the months of the Gregorian calendar.

A smaller division of the calendar was the taiew, a period of

2. Information provided by the author's grandfather, Sri Jismot Chyne.

<sup>1.</sup> Hooker, Himalayan Journals, ii, pp. 276-77; for another legend explaining the same phenomenon see above, p. 230.

eight days, which was used for the regulation of markets and other frequently recurring events. This seems to have had no relation to the months, and we have no record of the names of the days of this eight-day week. The modern Khasis have their own names for the seven days of the week, but these may have been of comparatively recent invention.

The Khasis had no indigenous system of weights and measures, though they may have adopted those of Assam and Bengal to some extent even before the opening of the hills by the British. Normally short distances were reckoned by cubits and other roughly conventionalized measurements of parts of the body, and longer ones by such terms as a day's journey or an arrow shot.

## Medicine<sup>3</sup>

The Khasis' knowledge of medicines does not seem to have extended beyond salves to promote the healing of wounds, balms for relieving sprains, burns etc., and concections for minor stomach ailments.

Various herbs are still used for stopping bleeding and for treatment of minor wounds, and are usually quite effective. These herbs are crushed and made into a paste with a little quickline; this is applied to the affected part and left to dry on it. The dressing is changed only if the wound takes long to heal; otherwise one application is sufficient. Pan leaf is also commonly used for the same purpose. For burns the people used a minimum of mustard oil, salt and lime, applied as soon as possible. Pan leaf with oil was also applied to the affected part, and was believed to be particularly efficacious in the case of scalds.

For any kind of headache or stomach disorder, limejuice was

<sup>1.</sup> Gurdon, Khasis, pp. 190-91; Roy, Folk Lore, xlvi-vii, p. 377.
2. Roy, op. cit., p. 377.

<sup>3.</sup> Most of this section is compiled from personal knowledge and observation.

administered. Limejuice was also drunk as an antidate to mild alcoholic poisoning, which is still common enough among the Khasis. For the same complaints enother kind of citrous fruit, called soh phe might be eaten with salt. In cases of dysentery fresh mint juice might be added to the Mimejuice. A kind of wild pepper was eaten for stomach complaints, and also in order to destroy stomach parasites. To eliminate worms a solution of wood ashes was also drunk. The ashes were mixed with water and allowed to stand overnight; the ashes were then strained off, and the clear water was drunk first thing in the morning. This treatment was repeated until the worms disappeared. It is still believed in by the simpler Khasis, and is said to be very effective, though the solution can have no serious therapeutic effect. Commut milk was also drunk to expel round worms.

Sprains and dislocations were treated by massage and by the application of a mixture of tiger's fat with certain herbs. A grease purporting to be tiger's fat was also commonly used for rheumatic pains. The tiger is reacly if ever to be found in the Khasi and Jaintia Hills, and it is by no means common in the lower slopes. The fat was in fact usually provided by lesser wild felines, which are far more common and are hunted and trapped as pests. The fat from around the udder of the female was believed to be particularly efficacious.

These medicines are still used, as are the Khasi tonics, sold in considerable quantity by quack doctors. These are made from the juices of various plants and barks, and are generally mixed with rice spirit. It seems that most Khasi medicines contain some alcohol. When children are weared the mother's breasts are rubbed with rice spirit to stop the flow of milk.

These simple medicines are often effective, especially when administered to patients who have sincere faith in them. But

the Khasi herbalists made no exaggerated claims for their medicines. They had no cures for diseases such as cholera and malaria, which are caused by germs, and these were believed to be brought about by possession by evil spirits. These were responsible for all diseases and maladies which the quack dector's petiens could not cure, and exorcism and propitiation were the only remedy. The best chance of recovery was for a priest (lyngdoh) to perform suitable sacrifices to the spirits of disease.

Thus cholera and malarial fever were personified as two malevolent goddesses, Ka Khlen and Ka Rih, named after the diseases they controlled. No medicine could cure them, and only the magico-religious lore of the lyngdoh could be of help. There are still simple villagers who, while they accept modern medical aid for some kinds of illness, have recourse to exorcism and sacrifice for maladies such as these. Smallpox, as in many parts of India, was also thought to be caused by a tutelary deity. In India, however, the deity of smallpox is a goddess, while with the Thasis he is a god - U Svien Wiang Thylliew, 'the Chief of Smallpox'. He was not worshipped directly, but was appeased by offering a fowl or goat to two other spirits, Thynrei and Sapa, who personified different phases of the disease. Among the Syntengs, who came more under the influence of popular Hindrian, smallpox was looked upon as a blessing, and children were taken to an infected home in the hope that they might contract it. Such a house was temporarily sacred and all who entered it were expected to wash their feet. We even have record, in the nineteenth century. of women washing their hair in water used by a smallpox patient. Practices such as these are not known among the Khasis, and are undoubtedly due to the influence of Hindu Bengalis.2

2. Ibid., loc. cit.

<sup>1.</sup> Gurdon, Khasis, p. 108.

## CONCLUSION

#### Survey

In the previous pages we have examined all the material we have been able to gather that throws significant light on the past of the Khasi-Synteng people before their contacts with Europeans. In our study of their prehistory we have found little very definite evidence for the date of their arrival in the hills. It is possible that their original home was further to the north, and that they came from the mountains of South-west China at a very early period, but it is equally likely that before coming to their present habitat their ancestors spent many centuries in South-east Asia.

The evidence of the megaliths is equally uncertain. Here we find prehistoric links with South-east Asia and with the Mundas and other south Indian tribal peoples, but the relationship seems closest with the megalith builders of South-east Asia, and there are faint indications of a westward movement of the Khasis at some early period through the Kachar Hills.

In considering the linguistic evidence we have found firm links with South-east Asia. The closest relatives of the Khasi language are certain tribal languages of northern Burma, together with Mon and Khmer and other languages of this group. Our study of the loanwords in Khasi gives no evidence whatever of early contact with Indo-Aryan speakers.

We can thus find no significant evidence for the view, which by now has become almost traditional, that the Khasis are the remnants of a prehistoric people which was once very widespread throughout Assam and Bengal, and that their ancestors have lived in the Khasi and Jaintia Hills from time immemorial. On the other hand the comparative rarity of neolithic artifacts in the area and also the linguistic evidence would favour the view that the Khasis are comparatively late arrivals in their present homeland, and that in the days of the old Hindu kingdoms of Assam and Bengal they were dwelling much further away from regions inhabited by Indo-Aryan speakers. We might hazard the suggestion that their arrival in the Khasi and Jaintia Hills was in some way connected with the many movements of more powerful and civilized South-east Asian peoples from the eleventh century onwards. The expansion of the Burmese and Khmer empires, followed some time later by the southward movement of the Thais, must have led to considerable movements among the South-east Asian tribal peoples, who found it difficult to withstand their more powerful and better organized neighbours. Though this is not stated in their traditions, the entry of the Ahoms into the Brahmaputra Valley in A. D. 1228 may well have been brought about by these factors. In the present state of our knowledge we believe that the Khasis may have migrated at about the same time, or perhaps a century or two earlier.

It is quite possible that new evidence, especially carbon 14 dating of material from Khasi megalithic sites, may disprove this hypothesis. Meanwhile we propose it, as the most probable theory in the light of what evidence is available.

In our study of the historical material on the early Khasis and Syntengs most of our attention has been devoted to the Jaintia kingdom, which received much greater attention from the Assamese chroniclers than did the little chieftainships of the up-

lands. We have done our best to compare the fragmentary Assumese references, and thus to present a connected account of the Jaintia kingdom from its foundation in the sixteenth century by the hill Synteng chief who took the throne name of Bargohäin. We have also considered what evidence is available on the history of the Khasi chiefs, and thus have perhaps added a little to the stock of knowledge about them.

The second part of this work, dealing with the culture of the early Khasis, surveys their political and social institutions, their religion, their economic life, and their customs. In many sections of this part of our work we have been able to do little more than re-present the evidence of earlier writers, but in the handling of some of the material we have corrected a number of folso impressions. Khasi society, though matrilineal, was never matriarchal. The High God of the Khasis was not a strange bi-sexual being, but a male divinity closely associated with a female one who was presumably looked on as his wife. We have corrected several similar errors of this type in the course of our study and thus we may clain that our survey of Khasi life and custom is not wholly unoriginal.

## The Khasis in Recent Times

The period which follows our survey was a fateful one for the Khasis. In 1826 the troops of the East India Company began the construction of a road across the hills through Shillong and Cherrapunji. The immediate motive of this was the recent occupation of Assam by the Company as a result of the previous Burmese occupation, from which the hill people had been mercifully spared. After the brave but unsuccessful resistance of Tirot Singh the hill territory was subjugated and formally amexed by the British. The Jaintia kingdom suffered a similar fate in 1835, when it was in-

vaded and its king was deposed. The Jaintia kingdom was directly ammored to the Company's territories, while the Khasi Hills remained under the control of their old chiefs, who were now closely supervised by the British, and whose authority gradually diminished until it became almost non-existent.

However much we may deplore the Khasis' loss of independence on nationalistic or sentimental grounds. the British amexation had the effect of opening up the hills to the outside world as never before. The towns of Shillong and Cherrapunji became hill stations, and the British officials were soon followed by missionaries, chiefly Welsh Presbyterians and Roman Catholics. It is to the gredit of the former that the Khasi language was reduced to writing in 1840 and the first Khasi literature was written. It would seem that, unlike some other parts of India, the Khasi Hills benefitted economically from the new regime. Fresh crops and better agricultural methods were introduced, and the establishment of Shillong as the provincial capital of Assem resulted in the development of trade which benefitted the Khasis as a whole, and brought them closely in contact with the rest of India. On the other hand the propaganda of the missionaries, who in this respect were not generally supported by the government, had bad effects on traditional Khasi culture. The crection of megaliths became nore and more rare, until by the end of the nineteenth century it had apparently ceased altogether. Until fairly recent times the missionaries, particularly the Welsh Presbyterians, did not allow their converts to perform the traditional dences or to sing Khasi folksongs, and many customs and traditions must have been forgotten as a result of this. Nevertheless the Khasis have succeeded in preserving the main features of their cultural heritage, and nowedays many Christian Khasis are among the most enthusiastic defenders of their own traditions.

A hundred and fifty years ago the Khasis were en illiterate people on the fringes of Indian culture. They are now among the wealthiest and best educated communities of India. This is not so much the result of British administration and missionary activity, both of which were active throughout the whole of India with varying results, as it is evidence of the native ability of the Khasi people to profit by the opportunities offered by the concrete situation and to adapt themselves easily to new conditions. As citizens of free India they have made even more rapid progress, and Khasis now fill important posts in the government of the State of Assem and in the central Government of India.

## The Future of Khasi-Syntons Historical Studies

Despite their pride in their traditions and their determination to retain their cultural identity, the Khasis are doing little or nothing to investigate their own past. There is tremendous scope for further research in the Khasi and Jaintia Hills in the form of archaeological excavation, the intensive comparative study of dialects and basic vocabularies in outlying parts of the country, and the collection of folklore, preverbs and religious relies of the Khasi past and their comperative study. The government of India, through its archaeological and anthropological departments, is already doing much in this direction, but its archaeologists concentrate their attention chiefly upon the more important and ancient cultures of the plains, while its anthropologists seem mainly interested in the cultures of those tribal peoples who have come less directly in contact with modern civilization. Therefore it is up to the educated Khasi-Syntengs themselves to produce by voluntary field work and study the materials which will throw further light upon their own origins and early history.

## Appendix I

## DATES OF JAINTIA AND AHOM KINGS

Jaintia Kings 1		Ahom Kings 2	
Bargohāīn I	? c. 1500	Suhungmung (Dihingiya Raja)	1497
Barparbatrāi	? c. 1525	Suklermang(Garhgāyā Rājā)	1539
Bijaymānik	- c. 1560	Sukhāmphā (Khorā Rājā)	
Dharmānik	- c. 1605	( Land 2 Act ( 2)	1552
Yasmānik	c. 1605-1620+	Susengphā (Burhā Rājā, Pratap- simha)	1603
Sondarrai	3	Suramphā (Bhagā Rājā)	1641
Saruparbbatrāi	?	Sutyinphā (Narīyā Rājā) Sutyinphā II(Jayadhvaj Simha)	1644
Yaśmatrāi Mānsimha	before 1663 1668	Supungmung (Cakradhva, Simha)	1663
Pratapsimha Laksmīsimha	1669 1669	Sunyātphā(Udayāditya Simha) Suklāmphā (Rāmdhvaj Simha) Suhung, Gobar and Sujinphā Sudaiphā Sulikhphā (Larā Rājā)	1669 1673 1675 1677 1679
Rāmsiņha Jaynārāyan	c. 1700 1708	Supatphā (Gadādhar Simha) Sukhrungphā (Budrasimha)	1681
Bargohāin II	1731	Sutamphā (Sibsimha)	1714
Chātrasipha	1770	Sunenphā (Pramatā Simha) Suramphā (Raješvar Simha) Sunyeophā (Laksmīsimha)	1744
Jātra Nārāyan	1781		1769
Bijay Nārāyan	1786	Suhitpangpha (Caurinath Simha)	1780
Rāmsimha II	1789	Suklingphā(Kamalesvar Simha) Sudinphā(Candrekānta Simha) Purandar Simha Jogesvar Simha Burmese occupation	1795 1810 1818 1819 1819
Rājendra Nārāyan British occupatio	1832 m1835	British occupation	1824

2. Dates from Gait, History of Assam, 3rd ed., p. 417.

<sup>1.</sup> The dates are on the basis of those arrived at in chs.v -vii above.

#### Appendix II

# ASSAMESE MONTHS AND THEIR SANSKRIT

	Assemese	Sanskrit
April-May	Bahag	Vaisakha
Hay-June	Jeth	Jaisthe
June-July	Ähär	Āsādha.
July-August	Sãon	Śrāvene
August-September	Ihādā.	Bhādra (-pada)
September-October	Ähin	Asvina
October-November	Kāti	Kärtika
November-December	Aghon	M ärgasirga
December-January	Puh	Pausa.
January-February	MBeh	Magha
February-March	Fhagun	新學MA重導/系統/多數// 可能源。
Merch-April	Cat	Phālgupa Cai tra

Note: These are the most usual forms in modern Assamese. In the Burafijis various other forms appear, often approximating to the Sanskrit. The forms given in chapters v to vii above are as they appear in the relevant passage of the source. It should be remembered that the Assamese Sak year begins in the month of Bahag (Vaisakha) and not in Caitra as in most other calendrical systems of India. For the Ahom Lekli system of chronology used in the Ahom Burafiji and occasionally in other sources, see the appendix to Gait's History of Assam (3rd ed., pp. 420-21).

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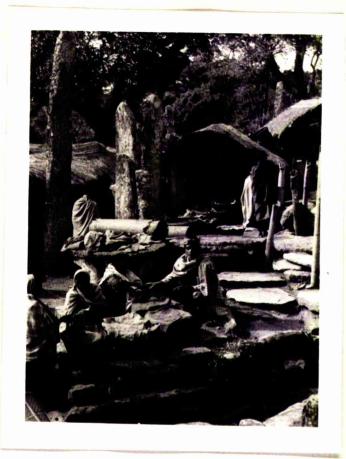
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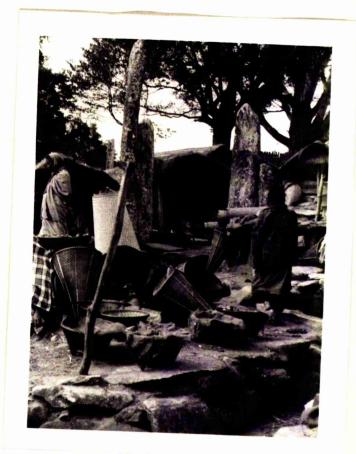
a.

Megaliths at Shangpung market place, Jaintia Hills.



b.

Megaliths at Shangpung market place, Jaintia Hills.



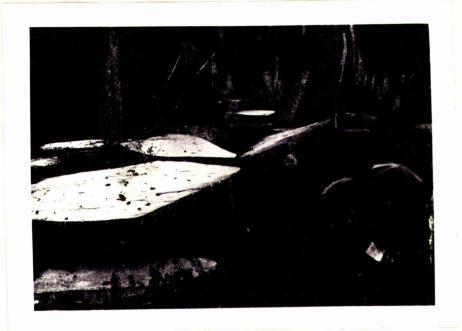


Mound, Shangpung market, showing part of a stone enclosure (kpep).

Large megalithic complex,

a.

Nartiang.



b.

The tallest megalith, Nartiang, over 27 ft. high.

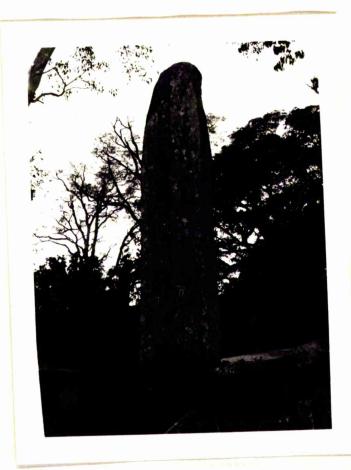
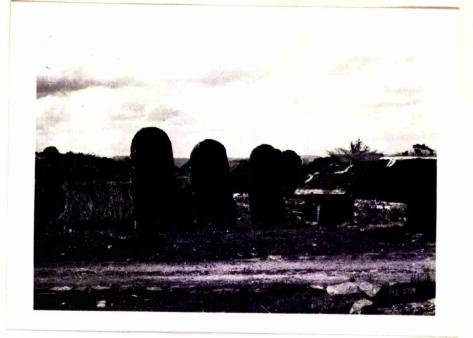


Plate IV

a.

Megaliths
at Lyngkyrdem, about
25 miles
south of
Shillong.



b.

Megaliths
near Cherrapunji, facing an old
road.



Megaliths
at Sohrarim, near
Cherrapunji,
showing
stones
overthrown
by the
earthquake
of 1897.

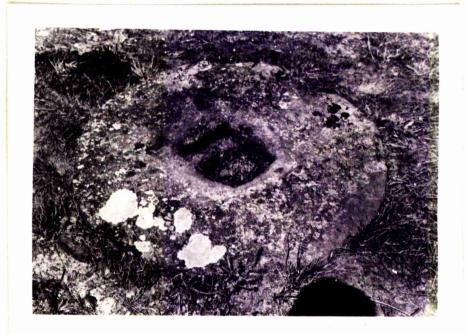


a.

Megaliths
at Mawsmai, near
Cherrapunji,
one with a
circular
capstone.



b.



Circular capstone from a megalith at Sohrarim, Cherrapunji, thrown off by the earthquake of 1897.

VI

Remains
of half
buried
cists,
Mawkyndur,
Khasi Hills.



b.



Stone cists, Lyngkyrdem. To the left a concrete cist erected in 1965.

a.

Ancient
cairn,
near
Shangpung,
from
below.



b.



Ancient cairn near Shangpung, from above.

 $a_{ullet}$ 

Cist and cairn, near Cherrapunji.



h.



Recent cairn, in the non-Christian cemetery, Jowai.

Plate IX

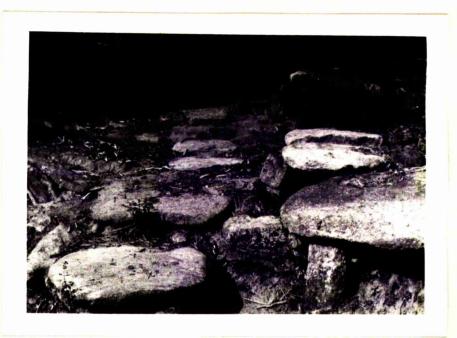
Cremation
platform
near
Cherrapunji.



Ancient stone path,



Steps leading to circular enclosure (Plate
II), Shangpung market.

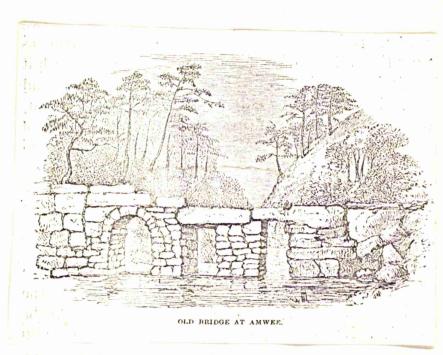


a.



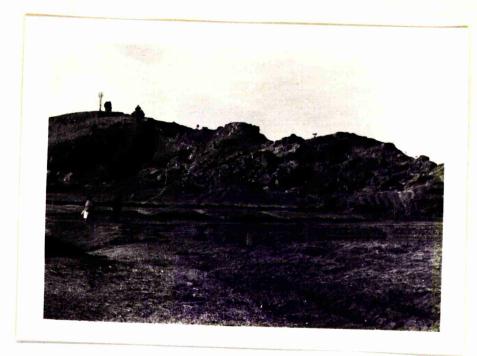
Stone bridge near Cherrapunji.

b.



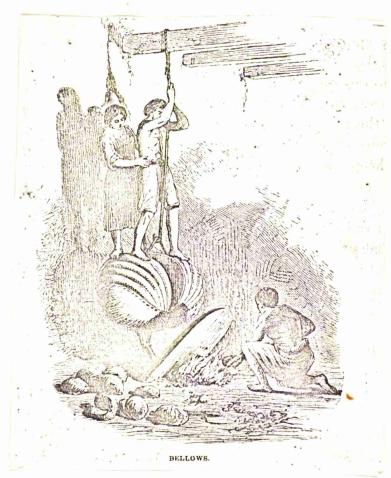
Stone bridge, Amwi. (Hooker, <u>Himalayan Journals</u>, ii, p. 315.)

a.



Hills denuded by old iron workings, Smit, near Nongkrem.



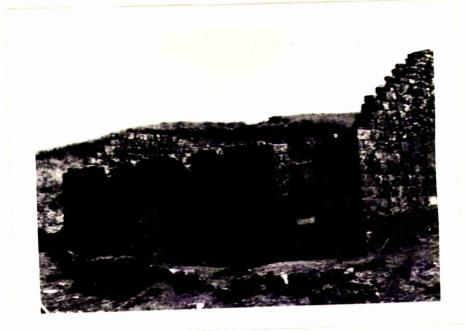


Khasi iron-smelters' furnace. (Hooker, Himalayan Journals, ii, p. 312.)

Lime-burner's
house, Sohrarim, Cherrapunji. Remains of a
kiln, overgrown with
weeds, on
the left.



b.

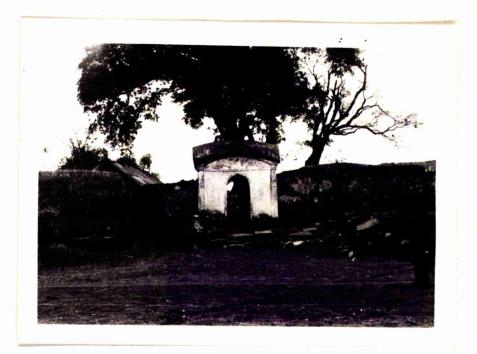


Lime-burner's house, Sohrarim.

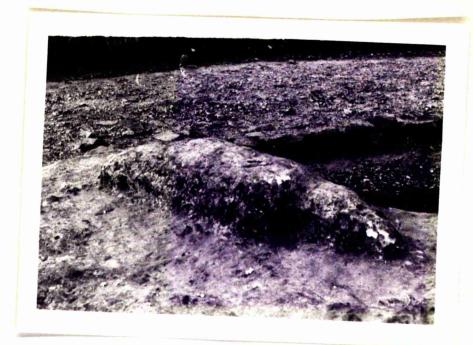
ceremonial
house
of the
Nongkrem
syiem,
Smit.



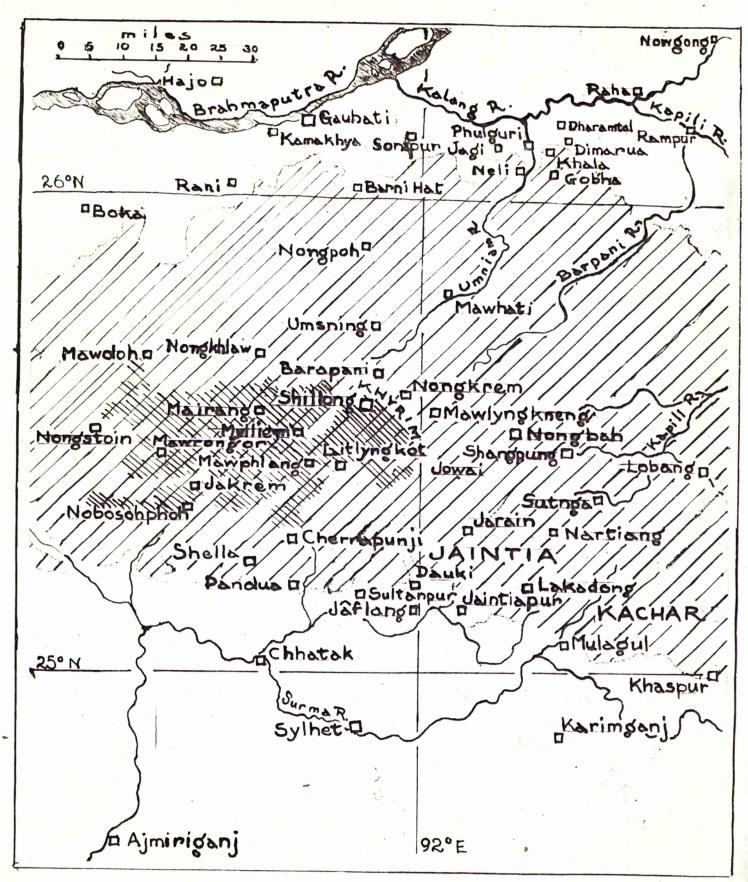
b.



Gateway to the ruined summer palace of the Jaintia kings, Nartiang.



Maw-sning. Figure of a pig, carved in natural rock, Jowai, Jaintia Hills.



Parts of Assam and East Bengal, showing

THE KHASI AND JAINTIA HILLS

Contours: Broad diagonal shading: over 450 ft above sea level (approx.)

Hatched area: over 4,500 ft above sea level (approx.)

