

**AN HISTORICAL ANALYSIS OF THE POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT
IN JAINTIA HILLS (1835-1972)**

ABSTRACT

BY

Mr. W. R. Kharlukhi



**A THESIS
SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE
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DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY**

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ABSTRACT

This study is an attempt to give an account of the political developments in Jaintia Hills from 1835 to 1972. The theory of the origin of Syiemship and the part played by the Jaintia people against British domination will be assessed. At the same time we will try to find out the impact of the new system of administration on the traditional political institutions. We will also try to study the role of the Jaintia Durbar which as a social organisation had played a very important part during the British period and we would probe deeper into the political movement of the reformists and anti-reformists during the proposed constitutional reforms of 1935. The attitude of the Jaintias to the scheme of autonomy under the Sixth Schedule and the demand for more autonomy during the Hill State movement will also be examined.

The first chapter contains the Introduction describing the land, the people with the social and political institutions including the origin of Jaintia Syiemship (Kingship). The smallest unit of the Jaintia social organisation was the family. The next higher group of the social

organisation was the sub-clan. All the members of the sub-clan belonged to the same clan, so above the sub-clan was the clan. A number of clans ranging from 2 to 14 joined together to form a super-clan. These different clans and super-clans joined together to form a village and similarly the numbers of different villages formed a sub-tribe. Finally a number of sub-tribes joined together to form a tribe with a state of their own. This is how the Jaintia Kingdom came into existence. With regard to the origin of Syiemship (Kingship) just like in any other civilization of the world the origin of the Jaintia Syiemship (Kingship) was said to be of divine origin).

The second chapter deals with the political conditions in the Syiemship (Kingship) since 1774 and the circumstances leading to the annexation of the Syiemship (Kingship) in 1835. During the unsettled conditions which prevailed for sometime after the Burmese War, the Syiem (King) of Jaintia encroached considerably on the southern border of Nowgong district, and between 1830 and 1832 he was repeatedly called upon to remove an outpost which he had established without authority at Chapparmukh, at the confluence of the Kopili and Doyang rivers. He evaded compliance, but before any coercive measures had been taken a fresh cause of dispute arose. In 1832, the Raja of Gobha,

in the west of Nowgong, one of the petty Chieftains dependent on Jaintia, acting under the orders of his suzerain, seized four British subjects, three of whom were afterwards immolated at the shrine of the goddess Kali. The fourth escaped and gave information of the occurrence. At this juncture Raja Ram Sing II died, and was succeeded by his nephew, Rajendra Singh. For two years the Government endeavoured to induce him to give up the perpetrators of the outrage and reminded him of the consequences of refusal, and of the solemn warnings which had been given on previous occasions when similar attempts had been made on the lives of British subject in the district of Sylhet. The young Syiem (King) however was obdurate, and at last failing to obtain satisfaction, it was resolved to dispossess him of his territory in the plains. On 15th March 1835, Capt. Lister took formal possession of Jaintiapur and issued a proclamation announcing the annexation of the Jaintia Parganas to British territory. This limited the authority of the Syiem (King) in Jaintia system.

The third chapter, highlights the Jaintia struggle against British political domination from 1835 to 1863. The hill people were deeply hurt and shocked when they realised that their Syiemship (Kingship), the institution of which they were so proud of was about to be terminated

or ended. The people were determined to resist the annexation. The Dalois (governors) and members of the royal family instigated the people of Jaintia Hills to rise against the action of the British. However the people, even though they had the best opportunity to take action, were not well organized and the British rushed with full force to subdue or suppress the movement. For twenty-five years (1835-60) after the annexation and the sublime wave of patriotism submerged beneath the surface, the people were left to themselves. The only connection they had with the British was the payment of an annual tribute of a he-goat which was previously paid to the Syiem (King). So in the eyes of the people, paying tribute to the British officers at Sohra, was just like paying it to their Syiem (King) at Jaintiapur. But the moment the British tried to impose their decisions of taxing the people in 1860, rather than the decisions coming from the people, they rose against the British. As a tribute system between the Syiem (King) and his people was based on common consent so they strongly protested against the principle of taxation without representation. After the Anglo-Jaintia War of 1860-63 the British retained the indigenous devices of traditional democracy. At the same time the power of the Dalois (governors) was curtailed. Now they became only the Commission agents of the British, while retaining a semblance of civil

and criminal jurisdiction over petty matters. But this reduction of power was only between the Dalois (governors) and the British authorities. Ironically, the Dalois became more powerful over their people.

The fourth chapter gives a history of the Jaintia durbar, its formations as a result of social disorganisation (1863-1900) and to see whether it had played any role in Jaintia politics vis-a-vis the political developments from 1900 to 1960. The other important institution in Jaintia Hills was the Jaintia Durbar which was established in 1900. As the traditional institutions were reduced in importance, there was a feeling that such a durbar should be set up, through which the grievances of the people could be ventilated to the British authorities. The durbar was composed of the representatives of the Durbar Raids (provincial Durbars) which were known as sub-durbars for the purpose. The representatives would present their requirements to the Jaintia Durbar which in turn, forwarded the scheme to the government. The scheme worked very well and the people were very much benefited by its existence. In 1937, a new political development began under the Government of India Act 1935. Before 1937 the Jaintia Hills together with the Khasi Hills were declared as a 'Backward Area' and therefore not represented in the Assam Legislative

Council. Rev. L. Gatphoh from Jaintia Hills and his counterpart Rev. J.J.M. Nichols-Roy from Khasi Hills expressed themselves categorically in favour of political advancement for their hills and their inclusion in the proposed reforms. The main purpose of the reform starting from 1937 was to give more voice and power to the people. The Jaintia people then accordingly made a demand for a separate constituency and at the same time made it clear that they were against the idea of converting the Khasi-Jaintia race into a frontier tribe and such a policy would be opposed by the people. So under this Act the Jaintia Hills together with the Khasi Hills were declared as partially Excluded Areas and were therefore duly represented in the Assam Legislative Assembly. It was through the Jaintia Durbar that the Jaintia leaders mobilised public support in favour of their demands and ultimately succeeded in achieving their goal.

The fifth chapter consists an account about the establishment of the District Council in the Khasi and Jaintia Hills together with the demand for a separate District Council by the people of Jaintia Hills which resulted in the creation of a separate District Council for the Jowai Sub-division in 1964 which became functional in 1967. After Independence and with the commencement of the Constitution, the Jaintia Hills like other hill areas of Assam fell under the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution with

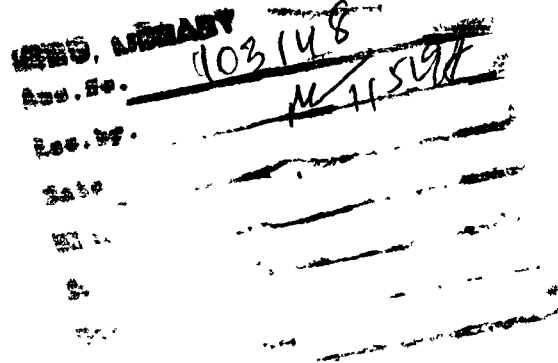
a partial autonomy and these hill districts had been styled as Autonomous Districts. In accordance with the provision of the Sixth Schedule, five District Councils – one each for the North Cachar Hills, the Mikir Hills, the Garo Hills, the Mizo Hills and the United Khasi-Jaintia Hills District were set up in 1952. As early as in 1947, S. Bareh of Jowai and others pleaded before the Bordoloi Committee, for a separate District Council for the Jaintias, but Rev. Nichols Roy with certain promises of equal treatment pressurized them to drop the idea. Further, in the Constituent Assembly, Rev. Nichols-Roy, from the Khasi Hills was the spokesman for the areas. As such the Jaintias could not do much in expressing their opinion for separation. Again in 1957 when Pandit Govind Ballabh Pant the Union Home Minister of India visited Shillong, H. Hadem (E.M. of United Khasi and Jaintia Hills District Council) and some members of the District Council and others representing the people of Jaintia Hills submitted a memorandum to him demanding a separate District Council for the Jowai Sub-division. It was only in 1964 that a separate District Council was created for the Jowai Sub-division of the United Khasi-Jaintia Hills District inhabited mainly by the Jaintias. This new District Council came into being in 1967.

The sixth chapter is a study about the emergence of the Hill State movement and Jaintia Hills (1952-72).

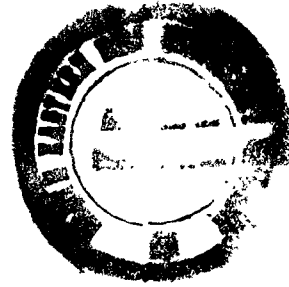
In the working of the provisions of the Sixth Schedule the people of the hill areas of Assam, felt that this autonomy was defective and not satisfactory. They found many loopholes by which their future destiny would be endangered gradually by the mixture in the administration in Assam with people whose language and culture were quite different from their own. The result of this was that the hill people felt that it was better for them to have a Hill State of their own. Thus, from 1954 we see the emergence of the Hill State movement in the hill areas. The people of Jaintia Hills also joined hands with the other hill tribes of Assam in this movement demanding for a separate Hill State.

The last chapter gives a summary of findings and conclusion. From the foregoing analysis it becomes clear that the period under study was a transitional phase in Jaintia politics. The system of the traditional political institution of the Jaintias was destabilised by the British. Since the British intention was not for the welfare of the Jaintias but they only wanted to strengthen their base in North-East India, therefore they went on experimenting with these institutions. Syiemship (kingship) was liquidated and with that the Langdoh (Priest) lost his power over the people. Moreover the people were overburdened by an oppressive tax system without taking into consideration their primitive technology and the backward nature of their

economy. However, the only alternative for the Jaintias was to protest against such measures but that did not help in restoring back the autonomy to their system. On the other hand, it resulted in making them a part of the bigger whole by making Jaintia Hills together with the Khasi Hills a part of Assam. It was only after a long struggle that a certain amount of autonomy was restored through the creation of a separate District Council in 1964 and the formation of the State of Meghalaya in 1972.



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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that Mr W.R. Kharlukhi, Lecturer, Department of History, Synod College, Shillong, has carried out his research on "AN HISTORICAL ANALYSIS OF THE POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT IN JAINTIA HILLS (1835-1972)" under my supervision. He has fulfilled all the requirements laid down in the regulations relating to Ph.D. Degree of the North-Eastern Hill University.

The dissertation is the result of his own effort and neither the dissertation as a whole nor any part of it has been submitted to any University for any research degree.

I wish him success.

SHILLONG

THE 7th July, 1994


(B. Pakem)
Professor & Supervisor

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PREFACE

The present inquiry will be an attempt to indicate the various political developments in Jaintia Hills and also to evaluate the nature of changing political structure from 1835-1972. It is interesting to note that while working on the political development in Jaintia Hills it is found that the people's aspiration for political changes has always been for preserving the rights and safeguarding these by the Government. It is also found that most of the Acts passed by the Government were accepted by the people mainly on the basis of safeguarding and protecting the Jaintia people. Even an organisation like the Jaintia Durbar is constituted on this basis. Though the study is a political one yet the influence from the social side cannot be overlooked.

Since the present work is an attempt to deal with the political development in Jaintia Hills, memoranda submitted either by the people or political organisations form part of our information. We have also consulted some published and unpublished records. Government and non-Government reports were also consulted. Our findings are also based on personal investigations and books.

(ii)

The starting point of the study has been with the Annexation of the Jaintia Kingdom in 1835. But attempt was also been made to discuss the earlier social and political institutions including the origin of the Jaintia Syiemship. Beside the political developments that took place after the annexation a discussion on the Jaintia Durbar has also made as it was the only organisation which right from its inception in 1900 to 1960 played a very important role in guiding the political destiny of Jaintia Hills. We also tried to discuss the political developments that took place after Independence. A study of the transitional nature of Jaintia politics was also made.

In the preparation of this study, I particularly wish to acknowledge my deep sense of gratitude to my research guide, Professor B. Pakem for his help and kind encouragement, which has enabled me to complete the work.

I am also thankful to Professor M.S. Sangma of History and Dr. L.S. Gassah of Political Science, who had extended their help while preparing my work. I am also grateful to Dr. R. L. Hangloo of Hyderabad Central University who had contributed a lot to my work.

My sincere thanks go to Mr. C. Khonglah, Librarian of the District Library, Jaintia Hills and his staff for allowing me to consult books in their library.

(iii)

I shall not forget the kind help extended to me by late Mr. L. Khyriem, Ex. Deputy Minister of Assam and late Rev. Lowell Gatphoh's family.

My thanks to Mr. Joseph F. Khongbuh for his kind assistance in typing the manuscripts without whose help this would not have taken its present form.

Last but not the least, I am grateful to Professor A.K. Baruah and the Department as a whole for giving me valuable assistance during the preparation of my thesis.

SHILLONG

THE 7th July 1994

W. Kharlukhi
(W. KHARLUKHI)

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

INTRODUCTION

The Jaintia Hills District forms the eastern land-mass of Meghalaya. It is bounded on the north by Nowgong and Karbi Anglong district, on the east by North Cachar and Karbi Anglong, on the south by the Bangladesh and Cachar and on the west by Khasi Hills. It is situated at an altitude of about 4,500 feet above sea level and covers an area of 3,255.5 square kilometres with a population of 2,19,186 according to 1991 census. The people inhabiting this district are known as the Jaintias. The Jaintia tribe consists of three communities – the War living on the southern part, the Pnar on the central part and the Bhoi on the northern part of Jaintia Hills.

The Syntengs, as they are called represent the remnants of the first Mongolian migration into India.¹ According to S.K. Chatterji,² the word 'Jaintia' (Zantain

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1. Gait, E.A. A History of Assam, (Thacker Spink, Calcutta, 1967, Reprint), p. 311.
 2. Chatterji, S.K. Kirata-Jana-Krti, (The Asiatic Society, Calcutta, 1974, Second edition), p. 166.

or Zonten) is derived from the word 'Synteng'. But according to B. Pakem,³ the word 'Synteng' is derived from the word 'Sutnga' which has been corrupted to 'Sutunga' the ruling dynasty of the Jaintias. It may also be derived from the word 'Sohmynting' (Smynting or Synting), a village through which the Khynriam (Khasis) came to Jaintia Hills. The word 'Synteng' is thoroughly despised by the Jaintias as the Khynriam (Khasis) associated it with the word 'Sahteng' which means either the people who were 'left behind' in their westward migration, or simply a 'backward community'.

The Jaintias are a group of people known as such since the twelfth century A.D. Before that time they were known by various terms as the Amwis, Changpungs, Jowais, Nartiangs, Rymbais, Sutngas, etc. It was by the twelfth century A.D. that they were brought under one central administration and called themselves Jaintias. All the different sub-groups in Jaintia Hills may be known differently by their group names but they all call themselves Jaintias.⁴

In the latter part of the fifties and the earlier sixties the protagonist for a separate District Council

3. Pakem, B. "The Socio-Political System of the Jaintia Tribes of Assam: An Analysis of Continuity and Change" in Singh, K.S. (ed.) Tribal Situation in India, (Simla, 1972), Vol. 13, p. 362.

4. Pakem, B. "Sources of the History of the Jaintias", in Sen, S.P. (ed.), Sources of History of India, (Institute of Historical Studies, Calcutta, 1979), Vol. II, p. 179.

for the Jowai sub-division said, "Though the Khasis and Pnars are both Mon-Khmer in origin, the Pnars and Khasis are two different tribes of the Mon-Khmer group."⁵ J.B. Shadwell in his note dated 1871 on the inhabitants of the Khasi and Jaintia Hills states, "the races occupying the Khasi and Jaintia Hills respectively are called Khasias and Syntengs."⁶ The implication here is that they are two separate 'races'. Again, Sir W.E. Ward in his Introduction to the Assam Land and Revenue Regulation, 1886 states, "the bulk of the inhabitants of the Khasi Hills are Khasis and of the Jaintia Hills, Syntengs. Both tribes cultivate with the hoe."⁷ W.W. Hunter in his Statistical Account of Assam states, "The population consists almost exclusively of aboriginal tribes and races, viz. Khasis and Syntengs (who form the bulk of the inhabitants of the Khasi and Jaintia Hills respectively), Mikirs, Garos and Kukis."⁸

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5. Report of the United Khasi-Jaintia Autonomous District Commission in the matter of creation of a New Autonomous District for the Jowai Sub-Division, (Government of Assam, Shillong, 1964), p. 9.
 6. Shadwell, J.B. Note on the Inhabitants of the Khasi and Jaintia Hills, 1871, Conynham Francis, Assam Secretariat Printing Office, Shillong, 1871, p. 1.
 7. Ward, W.E. Introduction to the Assam Land Revenue Regulation, 1886, (Shillong, 1931), p. 157.
 8. Hunter, W.W. Statistical of Assam, Vol. II, (Trubner and Company, London, 1879), p. 157.

On the other hand, Gait states:

The dominions of the Rajas of Jaintia include two entirely different tracts of country, namely, the Jaintia Hills, which are inhabited by a Khasi tribe called Synteng. There is practically no difference between the inhabitants of the Khasi Hills and those of the Jaintia Hills. They are both of the same physical type, and they speak the same language - Khasi - which is remarkable as being the only surviving dialect in India, excluding Burma, of the Mon Khmer language. 9

Gurdon also begins by saying, "the Khasis reside in the Khasi and Jaintia Hills District of Assam."¹⁰ But in giving the break-up of the population, however, he uses the word 'Khasi' and 'Synteng' separately. He also states, "the Khasis inhabit the Khasi Hills proper and the Syntengs or Pnars, the Jaintia Hills."¹¹ Later on defining the physical and general characteristics of these people he includes the Pnars in the word 'Khasis'.¹² In fact, the history of the origin of the Khasis is shrouded in mystery. They are said to be descended from some of the earliest Mongoloid immigrants into India who changed their language through contact with Austric speakers, either in Burma or on the

9. Gait, E.A. Op.cit., p. 311.

10. Gurdon, P.R.T. The Khasis, (Cosmo Publications, Delhi, 1975, Reprinted), p. 1.

11. Ibid.

12. Ibid., pp. 3-6.

soil of India, in the pre-historic times. It is likely that they were spread over a much wider tract probably over parts at least of the plain-lands of Sylhet and Kamrup, before they became finally confined to the Khasi and Jaintia Hills.¹³

Thus it seems that the Khasis and Jaintias have a common origin, as most historical works agree that the Khasis and Jaintias are both Mon-Khmer in origin although they are sometimes represented as being the same tribe and at other times as separate tribes.¹⁴

Culturally, the Jaintias are stone-memorial builders. A number of megalithic remains have been found in different parts of Jaintia Hills. This megalithic culture is becoming lesser as we approach the Khasi Hills, though from aesthetic point of view, the Khasi megalithic culture is more artistic than that of the Jaintias. These megaliths are believed to be cenotaphs rather than place of burial. As a matter of fact, the Jaintias did not bury their dead, they cremated them to ashes. All the uncalcined bones and ashes after cremation are laid in the stone sepulchre.

13. Chatterji, S.K. Kirata-Jana-Krti, (The Asiatic Society, Calcutta, 1974, Second edition), p. 166.

14. Report of the United Khasi-Jaintia Autonomous District Commission in the matter of creation of a New Autonomous District for the Jowai Sub-division, (Government of Assam, Shillong, 1964), p. 38.

The Jaintias are not only stone-memorial builders, but also builders of stone-bridges as well as stone sculptures.¹⁵

The tallest recorded example of a megalithic pillar in these hills is one of a cluster in the market place of Nartiang. This measures over eight metres above the ground and is 78 centimetres thick.¹⁶ In earlier times impressive stone bridges were also constructed. One made by the Jaintia Syiem, between Mupyut and Iarain known as the Thlu Muwi bridge, has six spans and measures 29.3 metres from end to end. Its piers are constructed of well finished rectangular slabs. Another, of uncertain origin, crosses the Umiaknieh river between Iarain and Syndai. This is even finer than the Thlu Muwi bridge. Stone paths in Nartiang and other places are made by the Jaintia Syiem.¹⁷

Regarding the dress of the Khasi and Jaintia there is no difference among the men, but the dress of the Synteng women is a little different. With them the jain khyrwang (a striped cloth worn by Jaintia women) takes the place

15. Pakem, B. The Jaintia Tribe of Meghalaya, (A seminar paper given in Shillong, 1977), p. 3.

16. Shadap Sen, N.C. The Origin and Early History of the Khasi-Synteng People, (Firma, Calcutta, 1981), p.28.

17. Ibid., p. 35.

of the Khasi jainsem (outer garment worn by the Khasi women), and is worn by them in the following manner – one of the two ends is passed under one armpit and its two corners are knotted on the opposite shoulder. The other end is then wound round the body and fastened at the waist, from which it hangs half way down the calf. Over this they wear a sort of apron generally of muga silk. They have the cloak and wrapper just the same as the Khasi women.¹⁸

On the other hand, Humphrey Hadem (Executive Member of the United K & J Hills District Council 1954-57) while presenting his memorandum in support of a separate District council for the Jowai Sub-Division states:

The dress of the Jaintia women can be distinguished from that of the Khasi women. Further, the Nongkrem dance where young men and girls take part clearly shows the difference from the Jaintia Pastieh (warrior dance) which is a warrior dance and only the men take part. Further, the renowned Behdein Khlam (plague driving festival) dance is a different type of culture which never exists in any part of the Shillong Sub-division.¹⁹

The Jaintia were a permanent group of people or tribe living together and sharing a common way of life,

18. Gurdon, P.R.T. Op.cit., pp. 19-20.

19. Report of the United Khasi-Jaintia Autonomous District Commission in the matter of creation of a New Autonomous District for the Jowai Sub-Division, (Government of Assam, Shillong, 1964), p. 10.

attitudes and beliefs. As a tribe which had lived in comparative isolation for hundreds of years, their culture may still be seen in an unadulterated form. However, with the present day social and technological changes around the world there are visible cultural changes although traditional attitudes tend to persist. Apart from natural heredity the culture of the people of Jaintia Hills seems to have been largely influenced by the configuration of the land they live in. The land is mostly rural and pastoral in character, where agriculture is the main occupation. Jaintia Hills has an abundant wealth of folk songs, folklores on stories, tales of heroic deeds, chivalry and folk dances such as Laho dance, Pastieh dance and Behdeinkhlam dance.²⁰ Each village has its own folk songs, breathing local characteristics and tradition. Hilly and uneven tracts give birth to folk songs which reflect a hard toiling life and to songs on hunting and love affairs. Not only topical matters find their way into folk songs and tales but their very lives and struggles are clearly reflected through songs and music.

20. Laho dance - It is a Jaintia dance in which a woman dances with two men, one on her left and one on her right, crossing hand over the shoulders of the woman.

Pastieh dance - Men came out to dance as warriors coming back from a raid.

Behdeinkhlam - It is a religio-cultural festival celebrated in some parts of Jaintia Hills. It is a Plague Driving Festival.

In regard to culture, so far as dress is concerned, the differences that exist do not indicate any difference of culture. So far as dances are concerned, although there are certain variations, these differences do not connote very much as similar differences are to be found even in other areas of the Khasi Hills.²¹

The language spoken by the people inhabiting the Khasi Hills 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 world's most widely spoken group of languages, the Austric.²²

Hamlet Bareh states,

Although there are phonetical differences, the structure of the language spoken by the Jaintias and the language spoken by the Khasis is the same particularly as it applies to the grammar form, lexical, morphological and monosyllabic and other language considerations. Not to speak of Khasi Hills, difference of pronunciation prevails in the Jaintia Hills. For instance, a man of Jowai does not know how to speak the 'Amwi' language unless he has got acquainted with it and vice-versa.²³

21. Ibid., p. 39.

22. Shadap Sen, N.C. Op.cit., p. 51.

23. Report of the United Khasi - Jaintia Autonomous District Commission in the matter of creation of a New Autonomous District for the Jowai Sub-Division, (Government of Assam, Shillong, 1964), pp. 11-12.

The President and Secretary of one faction of the divided Jaintia Durbar opposed to bifurcation have stated in their memorandum to the Commission that,

By 'Khasi' language we mean all dialects spoken by the people of Khasi - Jaintia Hills. The 'Pnar' group of dialects is more akin to the Sohra group than with the east War group, and the 'Manar' group (spoken in the Jirang Syiemship of Khasi Hills) is more intimately connected with the east War group than with the Sohra group. 24

Mr. Allen in his report on the Administration of the Cossyiah and Jaintia Hills territory of 1858 referred to the language problem of the Khasi and Jaintia Hills as follows:

There are certainly good obstacles and objections to impart instruction in the Cossyiah language and to the use of the Roman character in writing. To instruct with efficiency in the Khasi language, a teacher must be familiar with at least three different dialects, each of which is so dissimilar to the others that it may also be called a distinct language. The Cherra Cossyiah cannot understand the people of 'Jowaie' and the school books prepared in the Cherra dialect which have been adopted by the missionaries, would be unintelligible to the inhabitants of Maflong, Myrung, Nongkhlow (in the Khasi state) and almost all the villages in the Jaintia Hills. 25

24. Ibid.

25. Ibid.

Pakem is of the opinion that linguistically, the Jaintias have close affinities with the Khasis. These two linguistic groups belong to the Austric group of languages, especially the Mon-Khmer group. The Jaintia language has, however, not been put into writing until recently. It will, therefore, require further study and analysis before we come to a final conclusion that the two languages are the same. After all, an ordinary villager from Khasi Hills and an ordinary villagers from Jaintia Hills will not be able to understand each other properly, let alone understanding the languages of Palaung, Wa, Mon, Khmer, and other languages which belong to the same language group known as Austro-Asiatics.²⁶

There might be dialectic variations but however, all the dialects spoken in the Khasi and Jaintia Hills belong to the Mon-Khmer group of languages. These differences in dialects were noticed by the British writers, who studied the language and customs of the Khasis and Jaintias. Grierson in his Linguistic Survey of India has dealt with four dialects, namely, the standard literary form founded on the language of Cherrapunji (Sohra), the 'Pnar' or 'Synteng' of Jowai, the 'War' spoken in the valleys on

26. Pakem, B. Op.cit., p. 3.

the southern face of the hills and the 'Lyngam' spoken in the tract adjacent to the Garos in the West. It may, however, be noted that the standard Khasi language was introduced for administrative convenience by the British who adopted the Cherra (Sohra) dialect for the purpose.²⁷

On religion, western scholars have described the religious experience of the Khasis including Syntengs as animism or spirit worship, or rather the propitiation of spirits both good and evil on certain occasions principally in times of trouble. Of course, it is admitted that they have a belief in a supreme God, the Creator, 'U Blai'. They also believe in the transmigration of souls.²⁸

Humphrey Hadem again in his memorandum has stated that, before the British came the Pnars of Jaintias had only one religion resembling Hinduism in which the cow was highly esteemed. But this is contrary to the Khasi belief where cows or bullocks are used as sacrificial animals and also as food. Among the Pnars, beef-eating is prohibited by religion. "From this point of difference

27. Report of the United Khasi-Jaintia Autonomous District Commission in the matter of Creation of a New Autonomous District for the Jowai Sub-Division, (Government of Assam, Shillong, 1964), pp. 11-13.

28. Ibid.

of animal sacrifice it is clear that their religious beliefs are different."²⁹ Hadem further stated:

The Khasis worshipped their God of wealth called 'Thlen' to whom human blood was sacrificed, while the Pnars or Syntengs worshipped 'Taro' which is believed to protect their wealth. The Khasis believe that if human blood can be sacrificed to 'U Thlen' their god would enrich them and make their business prosper, while the Pnars in their ordinary sacrifice of pigs and rams of 'Taro' believe that their goddess would make them rich and protect their wealth and cultivation from thieves. Thieves would be tortured by 'Taro' and would be punished in the form of typhoid unless the stolen property is returned with interest. So here also a difference exists. ³⁰

As against this, the following quotation from Hamlet Bareth is quite interesting.

The Jaintias do not have a distinct different religion from the Khasis. Their name for God is U Blai (Khasi U Blei); goddess is Ka Blai (Khasi Ka Blei). Their ancestral mother is Niawbai (Khasi Iawbei) and their paternal deity is Tholang (Khasi Thawlang). Their marriage and funeral ceremonies are the same with those of the Khasis. The most important resemblance is the use of cromlechs for keeping the ashes of their dead is also the same both among the Syntengs and Khasis. The shape and form of megaliths and Cromlech is also the same, the people of Jowai may think that they possess a different religion because they

29. Ibid., pp. 12-14.

30. Ibid.

observe Behdeinkhlam ceremony. But there are also many differences in the way of the observance of religious festivals from one Daloiship to another. For instance, people in the Shangpung Daloiship observe the Knia Lephaw Marang as the main festival, those in Sutnga observe the Pam Iaw, Ka Pyrda, etc. 31

It is a historical fact that the Jaintia ruler came under Hindu influence and he and his nobles adopted Hinduism. As a result of this, Hindu influence also spread among the people of the Jaintia Hills and to this date the goddess Durga is worshipped at Nartiang. It is also a fact that the Jaintias generally abstained from beef-eating which is probably due to the influence of Hinduism. P.R.T. Gurdon in his book, The Khasis, has mentioned a few more traces of Hinduism among the people of Jaintia Hills. For example, the Jaintias worshipped the goddess of smallpox and Gurdon thinks that these Syntengs, who were for some time under Hindu influence, might have in their ignorance adopted this form of worship of the Hindu goddess Sitala Devi. Gurdon also refers to some household gods of the Syntengs as distinct from those of the Khasis.³²

In spite of these differences it appears that there is a common underlying principle of animism in the religious

31. Ibid.

32. Gurdon, P.R.T. The Khasis, (Cosmo Publications, Delhi, 1975, Reprinted), pp. 107-108.

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practices of the Khasis and Syntengs as pointed out by Western scholars.³³

Socially, the Jaintias are not purely matriachal as they, together with the Khasis, used to have been regarded in the sense that womenfolk have the upper hand over men. It is men who manage and control the affairs of their respective clans and who can participate in public and social affairs – womenfolk have no say. In so far as inheritance is concerned it may, however, be said that the Jaintias are following a matrilineal system. Even in this respect, it may be said without fear of contradiction that the Jaintia people had no such law of inheritance in former times. The youngest daughter in a clan (Kur) was merely the custodian of the ancestral property of that clan along with its family religious rights. But in course of time this custom developed into a law, making the youngest daughter as the only lawful inheritor of the ancestral properties.³⁴

33. Report of the United Khasi-Jaintia Autonomous District Commission in the matter of Creation of a New Autonomous District for the Jowai Sub-Division, (Government of Assam, Shillong, 1964), p. 14.

34. Interview with Dr. P.M. Passah (Lecturer in Economics, Department of Economics, North-Eastern Hill University) on 27.7.91.

When the family successors are extinct (Duh-Jait) the system of adoption (Rap-Yung), is resorted to. The girl so adopted will act as the youngest daughter of that family and succeeds to the ancestral properties. When neither the successors nor the adopted successors are available the family becomes totally extinct and the ancestral property becomes the property of the Syiem. But such cases are very rare indeed. This is so due to the fact that the extinction of the family (Duh-Jait) is a very serious matter for the Jaintias. All of them will try to prove that a successor is available somewhere.³⁵

Thus inheritance is generally on the female side, except in the case of the Jaintia bhois. But as seen above, sometimes the youngest son also may inherit ancestral property. However, a Jaintia man cannot be said to be a man without property. Though he has no right over ancestral property yet he can have self acquired property (Yutran). If he dies his property will pass on to his mother, or in her absence to his sister starting from the youngest one. And, if he has no female relatives, his property will pass on to his youngest daughter, or to anybody whom he

35. Pakem, B. "Social and Political Institutions of the Jaintias of Meghalaya" in Datta Ray, B. and Sarkar Jayanta (Ed.), Social and Political Institutions of the Hill People of North-East India, (Calcutta, 1990), p. 82.

has so willed (Pynkam) before or at the time of his death. But if his wife undertakes not to remarry she will get half of the Yutran. The Yutran thus acquired will become in the next generation an ancestral property of either the mother's or the wife's family.³⁶

Gordon Pde who is an advocate (Chief Executive Member of Jaintia Hills 1979-83) while presenting his memorandum to the Jarman Commission in 1964, supporting the bifurcation of the Jowai division states:

There are marked differences between the Jaintias and the Khasis just as there are dissimilarities among the hill tribes of Assam. In marriage, the celebration and ceremonial performances are quite different. The man does not live with his wife but remains in his mother's house, whereas in the case of a Khasi the man goes to his wife's home and lives with her. In case of taboo, the Jaintias by social influences and religious observances banished the wrongdoers outside the Jaintia Hills and usually the place was Puriang in Khasi Hills. This indicates that the people in Puriang village belong to Khasi and the wrongdoers were never allowed to mix with their Jaintia fellow men. 37

36. Ibid., pp. 82-83.

37. Report of the United Khasi-Jaintia Autonomous Commission in the matter of creation of a New Autonomous District for the Jowai Sub-Division, (Government of Assam, Shillong, 1964), p. 15.

Humphrey Hadem states that the Pnar or Syntengs of Jowai Sub-Division have their own social life. According to him:

They are called by the Khasis as 'Ki Synteng Kamai Iingkur'. This refers to the history before Christianity came to these hills. The husband was only a father and had nothing to do with management or otherwise of his wife's family. He was to live and work with his mother and his clan and his right of ownership whatsoever existed only in his mother's line (matrilineal side). He could only live with his wife after due public and religious declaration under rites and ceremonies, while among the Khasis the husband was to remain with his wife, work with her and die with her. But his bones must be handed over to his clan. 38

But B.M. Shullai, the President of the undivided Jaintia Durbar and S. Gatphoh of Jowai had a different opinion from Gordon Pde and Humphrey Hadem. According to S. Gatphoh, "The people of Khasi and Jaintia Hills have the same customs and rights in respect of inheritance, marriage, birth and burial ceremonies, ancestral religious manners and moral customs, etc." According to B. M. Shullai:

The inheritance of property among the Khasis is confined mainly among the daughters. In no system of inheritance followed among the Khasis have the daughters been left out in the division of property. Even among some of the War people of Khasi Hills, where the sons also receive a share of

38. Ibid., p. 14.

their parents' property, the youngest daughter invariably inherits the major along with the ancestral house. The reason why the ancestral property or the major share of it vests in the youngest daughter is that she is the custodian of the 'Niang' (family religious rites). 39

So far as the ceremonies relating to marriage are concerned, there is no substantial difference between the Khasis and Pnars or Syntengs. But by Synteng custom the husband does not go to live in the house of his wife. He remains in the house of his mother or family Kurs (clan) and only visits his wife. His connection with his clan is, therefore, more intimate than that amongst the Khasis. This difference in mode of life has resulted in the differences of customs of inheritance to the self-acquired property of the male. Among the Khasis, a man begins to earn for himself and his wife. He leaves his mother's house as soon as he marries. Therefore, the Khasi allows much greater claim to his wife and children to the property of a male. But among the Syntengs as the son usually stays in the house of his mother or clan, Synteng families make a strong claim to the earnings and property of the son. Among the Syntengs, if a wife wishes to keep any of the property of her husband, she must make a solemn promise to remain unmarried after the death of her husband. If

39. Ibid., pp. 15-16.

she violates this she must return all the property. Khasis, however, return or give along with the bones of the man as much as they can or ought to return. The clan of the man ought never to demand more than children can pay without inconvenience. Apart from this difference, the custom of inheritance regarding ancestral property is the same among the Khasis and Syntengs. The same underlying principle of the matrilineal system is prevalent among both groups.⁴⁰

Coming to the state formation among the Jaintias, the first stage in its development was naturally the family. The family belonged to a certain clan. Members of the same clan tended to flock together on the migratory route from central Asia through various areas until they reached their present homeland.⁴¹

It was the family which formed the smallest unit of the Jaintia social organization. A Jaintia family consists of the grandmother, mother, sisters, brothers, maternal uncles, aunts, nephews and nieces. Sometimes the grandfather or the father may reside in his wife's family res-

40. Ibid.

41. Pakem, B. "State Formation in Pre-Colonial Jaintia" in Sinha, S. (ed.), Tribal Polities and State Systems in Pre-Colonial Eastern and North Eastern India, (Calcutta, 1987), p. 244.

pectively.⁴²

The next higher group of the social organization is the Chi-kpoh (sub-clan) belonging to the same great grandmother. All the members of the chi-kpoh belong to the Chi-Kur (same clan). Above the Chi-Kpoh is the Chi-Kur. A number of Kur (clan) ranging from two to fourteen join together to form a Yatoh-Kur (super-clan) which is again sub-divided into two main types – the Kur-Ksiar (close relatives) and the Kur-Lakynrum (distant relatives). All the members of the Kur-Ksiar belong to the same Beitymmen (ancestress) and thereby belonging to the same Kur whereas the members of Kur-Lakynrum belong to different ancestresses and thereby belonging to different Kurs. But for certain incidents in the evolution of this different Kurs it made them establish kin relationship among themselves.⁴³

These different Kurs and Yatoh-Kur join together and form a village where everybody feels that all of them are chi-chnong (co-villagers). Similarly, the members of different villages form a chi-raid (sub-tribe) inhabiting a particular territorial jurisdiction (Elaka or Raid).

42. Pakem, B. "Social and Political Institutions of the Jaintias of Meghalaya" in Datta Ray, B. and Sarkar Jayanta (ed.), Social and Political Institutions of the Hill People of North-East India, (Calcutta, 1990), p. 82.

43. Ibid., pp. 87-88.

Finally, a number of sub-tribes join together to form Ka Jaitbru (tribe) with a Hima (state) of their own.⁴⁴

Before the evolution of the institution of Syiemship (Kingship) or monarchy in Jaintia Hills, there were a number of independent villages each under the control of the Langdoh (priest) who wielded power over the people. The Langdoh exercised, besides his religious functions, civil and criminal functions as well. The Langdoh was at one time both the sacred and secular chief of the Jaintias. With the increase in population and size of the territory (Raids or Elaka) consisting of a group of villages, secular functions also increased. This necessitated the bifurcation of sacred and secular functions. While the sacred function was retained by the Langdoh, that of secular function was then entrusted to an official U Daloi. Again when the number of Daloiship increased there was a feeling among the Jaintias to establish unity among themselves. This gave way to the growth of the institution of Syiemship in Jaintia Hills.⁴⁵

The origin of the Jaintia royal family is derived from a mythical source of information; the origin centres

44. Ibid., p. 88.

45. Ibid., p. 80.

round Ka Li Dakha, the mother ancestress, whose ancestry is marvellously reflected in one well-known story of fish incarnation. U Shyngkhlein Am, a son born to Ka Li Dakha and U Loh Ryndi is supposed to have been the first Syiem (King) of the Jaintias. Hence Ka Li Dakha became the Mother ancestress of the Jaintia Syiems.⁴⁶ Rajendra Singh the Syiem of Jaintia at the time when Jaintia was annexed by the British was called Mar Gohain by his people which is the name of the miraculous fish from which the family is fabled to have sprang.⁴⁷

Some people in the Jaintia Hills have different version about the story. U Loh Ryndi was a very rich and noble merchant and was respected by all people. He had a flourishing trade connection with the plain people in the south. The origin of the royal family is derived from a mythical story created by U Loh Ryndi himself. Ashamed of being publicly known that he had got married to a non-tribal maiden whom he secretly brought home from the plains, he started making out a story to conceal this secret. He spread out a story that a maiden came out of a fish that he caught from the river, Thlu Muwi. He actually caught

46. Bareh, H. The History and Culture of the Khasi People, (Published by H. Bareh, Shillong, 1964), pp. 55-57.

47. P.C. 1833, December 12, Nos. 70-72.

hold of her and made her his wife. The Jaintia people who were then very superstitious and attached much importance to fairy tales readily believed Loh Ryndi's story and began to anoint his wife as their queen. Thus she became the Mother ancestress of the Jaintia Syiems. This pretended story of U Loh Ryndi is corroborated by the fact that even today it has been treated an unusual thing for a Jaintia to get married to a non-tribal woman, though it is not uncommon for a Jaintia woman to marry a non-tribal person.

However, not only in Jaintia Hills but the same is broadly true of all civilizations and can be observed in China, Egypt, Babylonia, Assyria, Persia, etc. in which the rulers is normally the representatives of his people to the gods or spirits and is indeed often himself regarded as divine.⁴⁸

There were many legends in connection with the origin of the Jaintia Syiemship but whatever might be the legends, yet originally the Jaintia Syiems had their headquarters at Sutnga and they were known as the Syiem Sutnga. Sutnga thus became the first centre of political activities. At a latter stage when their Kingdom stretched to

48. Encyclopaedia Britannica, Vol. 4, (William Benton Publishers, London, 1943-73), p. 590.

the plains both in the south and in the north, and the Jaintia Syiems finding the Jaintia Parganas (the southern plains of their Kingdom) was so rich and fertile, they moved their capital to Jaintiapur.

The country of Jaintia embraces an area of about 3,850 square miles which, like that of Cachar, consists of three principal divisions: the first, comprising a very fertile and well cultivated tract of level country, extending from the foot of the hills to the north bank of the Surma river, and a small portion on the southern bank, known as the seven reaches, which are supposed to contain about 4,500 kolbas ⁴⁹ of the best description of land: the central division includes all the hills bounded by Cachar on the east, and the districts of various Khasi tribes on the west: the northern portion stretches from the foot of the interior heights, to the south bank of the Kullung river, and is a tract of tolerably open level country, little if at all inferior in fertility to the southern plains, which form by far the most valuable portion of the principality. ⁵⁰

49. According to H.K. Barpujari in Assam in the days of the Company, page 75, 1 Kolba = 4.82 Acres, so 4,500 Kolbas = 21,690 Acres.

50. Pemberton, R.B. Report on the Eastern Frontier of India, (Mittal Publications, Delhi, 1979, Reprinted), p. 214.

The boundaries of the State of Jaintia are formed, on the east, by the Keerowah and Kupli rivers, which separates it from Cachar; the former flowing from the southern face of the mountain chain into the Surma; and the Kupli, on the north, into the Kullung, which latter river separates Jaintia from Assam, on the north: on the west, it is bounded principally by the hill district of the Syiem of Khyrim, from whence the line runs south along the Piannullah, and on reaching the plains, is deflected in a south-easterly direction, crossing and skirting several other streams, until it reaches the Surma, which river, with the exception already mentioned, forms the southern boundary of the whole district.⁵¹

With the institutions of Kingship, a three-tier system of administration was established in the Jaintia Kingdom. The first tier was that of the King (U Syiem to his hill people and a Raja to his subjects in the plains); the second tier were the Raids or Elakas (provinces) each under the provincial governor (U Daloi); and the third tier was the village administration each under the village headman (U Waheh Chnong). Occasionally, an extra-tier between the provinces and the villages was instituted whenever the province was too large. Such an extra-tier was

51. Ibid., pp. 214-215.

the equivalent of an administrative division. Each division was usually placed in charge of a Lieutenant Governor (U Pator). In addition to the four-tier system mentioned above, the institution of Priesthood continued to exercise certain amount of political power and control over every tier of administration.⁵²

Traditional leaders in Jaintia Hills are those of the Syiem, Daloi, Pator and Waheh-Chnong (Village Headman), who looked after and maintained the administration of the Syiemship, Elakas and villages respectively. Before the coming of the British into these hills, the whole of Jaintia Hills formed a single Syiemship.⁵³

Traditional leadership functions at the village level through the institution of the Waheh-Chnong (Village Headman) elected by the adult male members of the village, a village headman, unlike that of the Daloi need not necessarily belong to the original or founding clans only. All clans in the village have equal right and privilege to set up a candidate for the office. However, since the original clans are always in a majority, the villagers often favour the candidate who belongs to such clans. Democratic

52. Pakem, B. "Social and Political Institutions of the Jaintias of Meghalaya", in Datta Ray, B. and Sarkar Jayanta (ed.), Social and Political Institutions of the Hill People of the North-East India, (Calcutta, 1990), p. 81.

53. Ibid.

process is found to be structurally and operationally working at the village level in the Jaintia society. But, even here women are excluded from taking part in the election and decision making process. A village headman cannot decide things concerning the village affairs all by himself. A village durbar or Council assists him in running the administration. Both the headman and the durbar, therefore, play an important role in village administration and leadership.⁵⁴

Above the village, other political institutions also existed at the Elaka or Raid level, each under the administration of a Daloi. A Daloi was and is still the Chief or the Elaka, which was formed by combining a group of villages or Raids. A Daloi is usually elected from among the adult male members of the original clans of the Elaka. Further, even among these clans, the candidates for the elective post of a Daloi were recruited mostly on ascriptive criteria rather than on grounds of achievements.⁵⁵

Traditionally, only the original clans within their respective Raids or Elakas could produce leaders and whose

54. Gassah, L.S. "A Study of the Emerging Political System and its Effect on Traditional Leadership in Jaintia Hills of Meghalaya", (Ph.D. Thesis unpublished), p. 5.

55. Pakem, B. "The Changing Political and Power Structure in Jaintia Hills", in The Journal of the North East India for Social Science Research, Vol. I, No. I, (Shillong, 1977), p. 2.

members could aspire for any political office of significance. However, a recent phenomenon has developed among the Jaintias, though in a very mild form where the demand was made by some non-original clans in few Elakas for granting equal right and opportunity in the case of setting up of candidates to the office of Daloi and Pator. They wanted to bring in the modern concept of democratisation of election where all clans should have the right to set up candidates to these offices. There were cases no doubt where members among these clans were elected either as Daloi or Pator. But it was only a temporary arrangement. In most cases such attempts proved to be a failure as they have no sanction of the traditional custom and usages of the land. The procedure always reverted back to the traditional system of election. The legitimization of political power and authority being limited and concentrated only to the members of the original clans, gave rise to the question as to how democratic is a traditional system.⁵⁶

Once a Daloi is elected he normally holds the office for life, unless he is asked to resign due to misbehaviour or should he arouse sufficient hostility to the people of the Elaka. This power remained with the people for some time even after the British Political Agent was appointed

56. Gassah, L.S. Op.cit., p. 6.

in Jaintia Hills. Like the headman, the Daloi's action has also to be approved by the Elaka Durbar. In the Pre-British period, power belonged not only to the Daloi's but also shared by the citizens of the Elaka. A Daloi, therefore, provides leadership at the next higher hierarchy of the structural traditional political system in Jaintia Hills. In order to enable him to perform and provide such leadership role, he has been empowered with executive, political, judicial and religious functions; in the past he also enjoyed military leadership. The Dalois wielded much power over their respective Elakas. The administration of the hills section of the Jaintia Kingdom was left entirely in their hands. They could allow the Syiem to handle only matters of common interests. They were the de-facto heads of the hills administration of the Jaintia Kingdom.⁵⁷

Though the office of Syiem came into existence at the last stage of state formation in ancient Jaintia, but it occupies the apex position in the administrative and leadership hierarchy. Moreover, with regards to internal

57. Ibid.

organisation, the Syiemship was split into twelve units.⁵⁸ Each of these units was known as daloiship and this holds good even today. Succession to the office was based on a hereditary basis. The Jaintia society being a matrilineal one, hereditary passed from the uncle to the nephew. In case of succession to the office of the Syiem, if it happens that the Syiem had no more relatives then succession should be decided by means of divination. The principle of divination was actually resorted to in the case of U Syiem Ram Singh II (1790-1832) with the help of a local little bird called Pdia (sparrow) or parrot giving the divine oracle.⁵⁹

Every administrative head in Jaintia Hills has his own council of Durbars. The Syiem was assisted by Ka Dorbar Hima or Raj Durbar (National Assembly) and a Council

58. For purposes of administration, the Jaintia Hills was then divided into 12 (twelve) Daloiships under the suzerainty of the Syiem (Raja) of Jaintia. As seen from Hunter, Statistical Account of Assam their members were increased to 25 (twenty five) during the British period. After independence and with the demarcation of boundary 6 (six) of the Elakas became part of the Mikir Hills and North Cachar Hills District and only 19 (nineteen) remained in Jaintia Hills.

59. Pakem, B. "Social and Political Institutions of the Jaintias of Meghalaya", in Datta Ray, B. and Sarkar Jayanta (ed.), Social and Political Institutions of the Hill People of North East India, (Calcutta, 1990), p. 81.

of Ministers (Ki Myntri) headed by a Laskor (Prime Minister). The bureaucracy included officials like the Langdoh (Priest), Barkandazes (Ki Borkyndat), Collectors (Choudhuries), Land-owners (Zamindars), Noble Men (Ki Mar), Ambassadors and others.⁶⁰

The provincial Dalois of the hill areas had their own Provincial Councils (Ki Dorbar Raid or Ki Dorbar Elaka) consisting of the Daloi, the Pator, the Wasan (Magistrate and Police), the Dan (Collector), the Duhalia (musician), the Sangot (Public City Officer), the Majis (messenger) and others. Similarly, the Pator in a Patorship had his own divisional council bearing the same indigenous name of the provincial councils consisting of similar officials as in the provincial councils. Finally, the Waheh-Chnong (village headman) had his own village council (Ka Dorbar Chnong) consisting of the village headman and all the adult male members of the village concerned.⁶¹

However, because of the influence of neighbouring Hindu polities in the plains of Sylhet, some of the Hindu ideas of state formation had crept into the political thinking of the Jaintias. A group of elakas came together to form a loose confederation of elakas for the purpose of

60. Ibid.

61. Ibid., p. 82.

inter-elaka relations, defence and foreign affairs. But the question arose about who would be the leader of the Confederation. In the deliberations that followed, the Sutnga elaka being the youngest and the least powerful among the then seven Elakas was entrusted with the functions of leading the Confederation. Then the difficult question was shifted to that elaka to shoulder the responsibility of finding out who would be the leader of the Confederation. It was here that the Hindu concept of a raja or U Syiem in local usage played the uppermost in the political thinking of the Sutnga elaka. But unlike the Hindus, no one from the elaka would like to shoulder the responsibility of becoming a raja. In pre-colonial Jaintia, the role of a raja was much despised in the eyes of the people. The office of the raja was viewed with much disdain as a lowly office which no respectable person would occupy. Hence, the choice was between either forcing a potential leader to take up the job or to create a miraculous origin myth to convince people that the divine had also a hand in the selection of U Syiem. Such rulers were known as Ki Syiem Blai, the divine kings. The Jaintias chose the latter course of action as the idea of forcing somebody to become the ruler would have adversely affected the discipline in the society as the Syiem would then have appeared merely as a petty servant of the state. In such a situation, the

ruler were referred to as Ki Syiem broo, the slave kings.⁶²

There were two versions of the miraculous origin myth of Ki Syiem Sutnga, the Sutnga kings, for the two wings of the Jaintia state, the tribal and non-tribal. One version was meant for the purpose of the Confederating tribal state of the independent Jaintia elakas in the hills, and the subsequent version was meant for the purpose of the unitary non-tribal state of the Jaintia – conquered subjects in the plains which included the 18 mahals of Jaintia purganas in the south and the petty principalities of Dimurua, Gobha, Khola, Topakuchi, Baropujia, Sahori and Phulagari in the north.⁶³ With regard to the tribal version it was already referred earlier while discussing the origin of Syiemship in the Jaintia Hills.

The non-tribal version, however, simply indicated the Brahminical influence in Jaintia State. It referred to a mythical fish legend where Thakur Rani was involved. According to this version, a certain Garo Tribal Landahvar

62. Paken, B. "State Formation in Pre-Colonial Jaintia" in Sinha, S. (ed.), Tribal Politics and State Systems in Pre-Colonial Eastern and North Eastern India, (K.P. Bagchi and Co. for Centre for Studies in Social Sciences, Calcutta, 1978), p. 252.

63. Ibid., pp. 252-253.

by name, married a Sutnga mermaid princess called Mutchod-duree. Their son, Burra Gahain or U Bor (or Mar) Kuhain in local usage was the first ruler of Jaintia state. But U Bor (or Mar) Kuhain ruled Jaintia state in A.D. 1250 whereas J Chungklei-Am ruled Jaintia state in the Third Century B.C. In any case, the two versions confirmed the divine theory of Syiemship in Jaintia State though, in fact, it was invented only to cover up the choice of the Sutnga people for a couple whose offspring could take up the much despised office of Syiemship.⁶⁴

The position of u Syiem in the hills was only that of a nominal ruler over the Jaintia elakas. The dalois wielded much power over their respective elakas. On many occasions the dalois openly disagreed with the Syiem over certain matters relating to the policy of the State. For example, there was an open rebellion on the part of the Daloi of Nartiang against Raja Rajendra Singh immediately before the British annexation of Jaintia State, where Lieutenant Inglis, an Englishman, intervened. The only semblance of power which the raja had enjoyed over his dalois was the tax of one he-goat a year from each of the dalois of the hills. But this was more religious than secular since

64. Ibid., p. 253.

the he-goats were used for religious sacrifices at Jaintiapur, the winter capital of Jaintia State. True, in the plains, the Syiem was acting as a Hindu raja. He treated his people in the plains similar to the way a Zamindar treated his ryots. In the plains all power belonged to the raja. No doubt he was advised by a state council called the raj durbar where the dalois from the hills, the Brahmins and the Maulvis from the plains and other nobles of the State were represented.⁶⁵

State formation in pre-colonial Jaintia clearly points out the following features. First, the formation of state among the Jaintias, as elsewhere, was an evolutionary process - from a crude beginning of the formation of families, clans and villages where it is difficult to distinguish political affairs from domestic affairs into an elaborate political structure where clan clusters, a sub-tribe, and finally a tribe were the participating units. The concept of a tribal model may be applied at this stage. With the annexation of more conquered plain territories and the assumption of the title of raja by their rulers the old Jaintia state was not so much dissimilar from the old neighbouring States of the Ahoms, the Kacharis, the Kochs and the Mughals. The concept of a state or rajya

65. Ibid., p. 254.

as understood by the neighbouring States was quite clear to the rulers of Jaintia State, particularly when it came to the question of inter-state relations. Here is a stage with a combination of Rajput/Kshatriya and Southeast Asian models.⁶⁶

There was an extent of Brahminical influence in Jaintia State by the end of the 14th Century through the Jaintia rulers who bore Hindu names since the 13th Century. It took about 200 years after the annexation of Jaintia plains in A.D. 1250 for Brahminism to have finally found its place among the family members of the raja and the nobles. Thus when the Syiem Sutnga became the raja of Jaintia, he was found to be a patron of Brahminism of the Sakta sect. The raja was surrounded by the upper caste Hindus such as the Brahmins, the Kshatriyas and the Kayasthas. They acted as his advisers not only in religious matters, but also in secular matters. Unlike Christianity and Islam because of the caste structure of Hinduism, the Brahmins of the day could not place the raja in any proper caste hierarchy except to regard him as an orthodox Sudra. Gradually, the influence of Brahminism, though faintly, reached places as far as Nartiang, Sutnga and Yale falls and thrust

66. Ibid., p. 256.

very deep into the interior of Jaintia Hills. However, the raja of Jaintia plains acting as the Syiem of Jaintia Hills, still maintained his loyalty to the tribal gods and goddesses including the deities of the sacred groves, the spirits of the hills, rivers and forests and ancestral spirits. That was why the principle of succession to the throne of Jaintia State was strictly followed through the nephew and not the son. Even if there were no more nephews and relatives the next raja would be a hill man through the process of tribal divination. This pattern was the product of acculturation, if not Hinduization and Sanskritization.⁶⁷

Thus we have seen that the Jaintia Kingdom comprises of the hill areas from where it originated and the plain areas which became a part of the Kingdom by conquest. The people of the Jaintia Hills are highlanders like that of the Khasi Hills and the society was a matrilineal one. By the time the British appeared in the scene the Jaintia had already reached the apex of State formation.

67. Ibid., pp. 256-257.

CHAPTER II

BRITISH ANNEXATION

BRITISH ANNEXATION

In 1774, the Jaintias, under Syiem Chatra Singh (the Syiem who ruled in 1774), for the first time came into contact with the British. It was at this time when Capt. Oligar in command of the military force took possession of the kingdom. The occupation was, however, of not long duration. In the same year, the British withdrew as before. Since this time the raj of Jaintiapur acknowledged the supremacy of the British authority and continued under its shelter and protection without the payment of tribute of any kind.¹

Then again during the Anglo-Burmese war the Jaintia kingdom came in conflict with the British for the second time. On February 2, 1824, a letter was addressed by Mr. David Scott, Agent to the Governor General, to the Commander of the Burmese force in Cachar, prohibiting his entering the Jaintia territory on the ground that the Syiem's ancestor

1. P.C. 18-35, August 1, Nos. 110-111. According to some source the name of Oligar is Henniker or Erriker.

had received that country as a gift after conquest from the honourable Company: that he had himself sought British protection; and that the Burmese having openly threatened war, they could be permitted to occupy that, or any other favourable position, for starting hostilities. Notwithstanding these representations, a letter was addressed by the Burmese commander to the Syiem of Jaintia, requesting his presence in the Burmese camp, on the affirmed ground of his known Vasalage to the prince of Assam. Furthermore, Burma claimed that Assam had become a tributary state to Ava. Accordingly, a party of the Burmese appeared shortly afterwards near the Jaintia frontier. But, a detachment of 150 men, under the British officer was sent to reinforce the Syiem's troops, on which the Burmese force withdrew.²

In the course of the following month of March, the Syiem of Jaintia entered into a treaty with Mr. Scott. In the treaty, the Syiem formally acknowledged his dependence on the British government, pledged himself to abstain from all independent negotiations with any foreign powers and to aid the British with a military contingent in any war waged east of the Brahmaputra.³

2. Pemberton, R.B. Report on the Eastern Frontier of India, (Mittal Publications, Delhi, 1979, Reprinted), pp.211-212.

3. Ibid., p. 212.

RAM SINGH SYIEM II (1789-1832)

At the time of the conclusion of the treaty with the British, Ram Singh II was the Syiem of the Jaintias. During the unsettled state in which Assam continued for some time after the Burmese War, the Syiem of Jaintia said to have appropriated considerable tract of land, which properly belonged to the former province; and in 1830, he was repeatedly but fruitlessly, ordered by Mr. Scott to remove a chauki, which he had established without authority at Chaparnukh, at the confluence of the Kupli and Dimla rivers; and the remonstrance of Mr. F.C. Robertson, Agent to the Governor General, at a subsequent period, on the same subject were treated with similar indifference.⁴

Jaintia at this time was exposed to the aggression of the Burmese, the Manipuris or even a mere military adventure. It seemed that there is no other way left for the Syiem but to enter into a treaty with the British and to fall under its protection. The British under the impression that the people of Jaintia were martial and that their land were all held by military tenure and thus in place of a tribute the Syiem was asked to assist the British with his force in fighting the Burmese to the east of Brahmaputra. During the Burmese war the Syiem gave no assistance

4. Ibid., pp. 212-213.

to the British and when the Burmese advanced to its frontier he offered no effectual resistance and the kingdom was saved only by the arrival of the British detachment. During the second Burmese invasion of Cachar, the Syiem allowed a party of the Burmese to remain at Nartiang, which was in the heart of his country. Later on it came to the knowledge of the British that the people were by no means warlike and their lands held by conditions very different from those of military service.⁵

RAJENDRA SINGH SYIEM (1832-1835)

Ram Singh Syiem died in 1832 leaving no male heir. As it was according to the law and usages of the raj, Rajendra Singh who was the nearest male collateral heir succeeded him. His succession was not liked by some of the neighbouring chiefs like the Raja of Poonjee (Syiem of Sohra). They entered into a league to depose him and to take possession of the territory. They used every exertion to obtain the sanction of the British Government.⁶

In conducting the affairs of Government, the Syiem of Jaintia were under the necessity of consulting on all important occasions the queen mother, and the Dalois of the district, and officers of the state; and although the appointment and removal

5. P.C. 1833, January 7, No. 82.

6. P.C. 1836, August 1, Nos. 110-111.

of both the latter description of persons rest with the Syiem himself, they are nevertheless enabled to exercise a considerable degree of control over him, as he is obliged, in confirming such appointments, to consult the wishes of the Daloi people in the interiors, who seem to be of a very independent and rather turbulent character. 7

Of the Dalois who acknowledged the supremacy of the Syiem of Jaintia, the Daloi of Nartiang appeared to be the principal; and so powerful was the influence he exercised, that the Syiem was unable to dispose any other offending head of the tribe, without the concurrence of this formidable vassal.⁸ In Jaintia Hills the Daloi of Nartiang is called the Kong Wasan by the other Dalois. At that time a feud existed between the Syiem Rajendra Singh and the eleven Dalois headed by the Daloi of Nartiang.⁹

While he was in Jaintia for settling the dispute between the eleven Dalois and the Syiem, Lietutenant Harry Inglis did all in his power to persuade the Syiem to pay tribute. The Syiem did not consent to it as he feared that if he did, a rebellion would be the immediate consequence. Even if the British assisted him to suppress it, he would not be in a position to do so as his subjects would oppose him, since such a thing as tribute was never demanded from

7. Pemberton, R.B. Report on the Eastern Frontier of India, (Mittal Publications, Delhi, 1979, Reprinted), p. 220.

8. Ibid.

9. P.C. 1834, April 10, Nos. 135-138.

them. Whatever he realized from his country was in kind and the whole went towards the support of his establishment.¹⁰

It seems that the British having failed to persuade the Syiem to pay tribute decided to annex the country.. The Syiem at last apprehended the offenders in the affairs of Gobha (Gobha was a vassal of the Jaintia kingdom) and delivered them to the British authorities. But on March 1835, the Syiem received a letter from the Government that the whole of his ancestral possession in the plains had been confiscated. The ground assigned for this summary act was the non-delivery of the offenders in the atrocity of Gobha, the occurrence of a similar cause of offence in the year 1821 and the Syiem's participation either in the outrage or in the protection of the perpetrators. The Syiem felt that this ground was not only insufficient but was wholly untrue. Francis Jenkins, Agent to the Governor General, acknowledged the surrender of the culprits but he neither commented nor made any further demands which he could have done between September 1834 and March 1835. The Syiem imputed to nothing else but the secret malevolence of his enemies. The outrage of Gobha was only a pretext,

10. P.C. 1834, May 8, Nos. 61-62.

but the real cause was his failure to meet with the demand of a tribute.¹¹

It appears that the first motive of the British was to depose Rajendra Singh but as there was no legal heir according to the custom of the country they had no other course to adopt but to annex the Kingdom of Jaintia. The Syiem was offered to retain his hill possession which he declined. Due to his unpopularity with the hill people, the British believed that he could not keep them in subjection when deprived of his resources in the plains. Finally, the whole territories of Jaintia were added to the British dominion.¹²

After discussion the annexation now we will examine the role of the Agent to the Governor General on the demand of the tribute, kidnapping incident, settling of disputes between the Syiem and the Daloi of Nartiang, land disputes and annexation so that we could have a clear understanding of how the kingdom was annexed.

ROLE OF THE AGENT TO THE GOVERNOR-GENERAL IN RELATION TO JAINTIA: ROBERTSON DEMANDING TRIBUTE FROM JAINTIA

While informing the Supreme Government about the accession of Rajendra Singh to the throne, Robertson, Agent

11. P.C. 1836, August 1, Nos. 110-111.

12. Letter from Court of Directors, No.11 of 1836.

to the Governor General drew the attention of the Supreme Government to the treaty concluded with the late Ram Singh II. According to him, the treaty was most unfavourable to the interest of the British Government. The possession of the Syiem in the plain yielded an annual revenue of about one lakh and a half rupees. These advantages were secured to the late Syiem by a treaty imposing upon him no heavier conditions. Robertson felt that if the demise of the late Syiem could be held to justify a revision of the treaty, he recommended that an annual tribute of about ten thousand rupees be demanded from the Syiem.¹³

Fort William considered the treaty with the late Syiem as personal and as such they were able to impose such conditions on his successors in return for their protection.¹⁴ On receiving the letter from Fort William, Robertson met the Syiem of Jaintia with a view of persuading him to conclude a treaty with the British Government on the term of paying an annual tribute of ten thousand rupees for their protection. He pointed out to the Syiem and his ministers how entirely dependent they were on the British Government and it was unfair on their part to expect to obtain such invaluable protection for nothing. He also

13. P.C. 1832, November 5, No. 56.

14. P.C. 1832, November 5, No. 58.

showed them that such a contribution required of them towards the general defence of the Frontier was paid by the Raja of Cooch Bihar and the Raja of Cachar. Robertson also apprised the Syiem that until the treaty was signed he would be recognised only as a relation of the late Syiem in temporary charge of the country of Jaintia.¹⁵

The Syiem felt that this was a departure from the established customs, Robertson told them how circumstances had subsequently changed the situation of their country. Formerly there were no enemies at their Frontier but at that time it was only with British intervention that saved their Kingdom from falling under the Burmese. He was also of the opinion that the British by becoming the Lords of Assam which had in former time stood in the relation of the patron and paramount State to Jaintia, acquired an additional title to demand tribute. He also showed them that article 4 of the treaty admitted the principle of a return being fairly demanded for protection rendered as stated in the treaty, namely military aid, which according to him had proved throughout the Burmese war nugatory, because the Syiem's kingdom was rescued from the Burmese, solely by the advance of a British detachment.¹⁶

15. P.C. 1833, June 13, Nos. 83-84.

16. P.C. 1833, June 13, Nos. 83-84.

The Syiem was however persuaded by his advisers to address a letter of remonstrance on the subject to the Right Hon'ble Governor-General. However, this came to the notice of Robertson who sent a letter to the Supreme Government informing them about the prevailing condition in the Jaintia Hills, that since the Syiem had incurred the displeasure of his subjects in the hills because of his perfidious conduct towards some of their Dalois and at this juncture the formal recognition of his title was more important to him, so that he would surely concede if his recognition was withheld.¹⁷

In order to find out the capacity of the Syiem to pay a tribute of rupees ten thousand, an assessment of the land revenue in Jaintia had to be made.

ROBERTSON'S ASSESSMENT OF JAINTIA REVENUE

Land tax was the principal source of revenue but it was not levied by any fixed rate. It was taken in kind at the pleasure of the Syiem and in such proportion as may appear expedient to him without regard to the extent or productiveness of estates. The rents taken from the ryots in the southern parts were the same with those in Sylhet. The land revenue of the southern Jaintia was

17. P.C. 1833, June 13, Nos. 83-84.

estimated at forty five thousand rupees and that of northern Jaintia at thirty thousand rupees. On the whole the revenue of the State was estimated at one lakh rupees.¹⁸

According to inquiries made by Robertson through Captain Fisher and Lieutenant Inglis, the revenue paid to the Syiem in cash did not exceed thirty thousand rupees but that received by him in kind if converted into money was estimated at the sum of fifty thousand rupees annually.¹⁹ Lieutenant Harry Inglis said that from what he knew about the resources of the country from his commercial dealings with old Ram Singh II it was without doubt that it would be able to pay a few heavier tribute than what was proposed to exact from it. A treasure amounting to nearly twenty lakhs of rupees had been accumulated at Jaintia. The Syiem of Jaintia held extensive tracts in the plains of Sylhet, Cachar and Assam and that his possessions were not as described by him as confined to the mountains and jungles. The tribute on Jaintia was fixed by Robertson on the basis of the information received from Captain Fisher and Lieutenant Inglis.²⁰

18. P.C. 1833, January 7, No. 82.

19. P.C. 1833, June 13, Nos. 83-84.

20. P.C. 1834, March 25, No. 40.

KIDNAPPING INCIDENT

Another role of the Agent to the Governor-General of India in the process of annexation of the Jaintia state was in matter connected with the kidnapping of four British subjects for the purpose of human sacrifice.

The officers of the ruler of Jaintia seized four British subjects, three of the subjects were sacrificed but one managed to escape. On the receipt of the report of the occurrence Mr. Robertson addressed a letter to the Syiem of Jaintia Ram Singh II for a report on the incident. A reply from the Syiem arrived very soon assuring that an inquiry was about to be instituted with the result of which Mr. Robertson would be informed in due time. Ram Singh II died in November 1832 while the matter was under correspondence.²¹

On the death of Ram Singh II, Rajendra Singh succeeded him. Robertson then addressed a letter to the new Syiem reminding him of the promise made by his predecessor. To this letter, Robertson felt that he received a very evasive answer from the Syiem who promised him to send an officer to enquire into the particulars of the transaction.²²

21. P.C. 1833, December 12, Nos. 70-72.

22. P.C. 1833, December 12, Nos. 70-72.

Robertson on receiving a report from the Magistrate of Lower Assam that none of the three missing persons had reappeared again addressed a letter to the Syiem of Jaintia calling upon Rajendra Singh to return an explicit answer to his first communication on the subject, within the space of a week. About ten days after the despatch of the letter to which no reply had yet been returned, several inhabitants of Nartiang, a large village, the headmen of which called the eleven Dalois who were said to exercise a considerable sway in the internal administration of Jaintia, and who were at variance with the Syiem presented a petition intimating that they had something to communicate. According to the Nartiang people it was the Raja of Gobha who was a vassal of the Jaintia Syiem who performed the duty of sacrificing human beings and by the order of Rajendra Singh an heir to Jaintia state, he had seized four British subjects. The Syiem would not give him up as he was afraid that the Raja of Gobha would reveal the orders he received from Rajendra Singh. At the order of Ram Singh II the Raja of Gobha was seized by the Nartiang people and brought to Jaintiapur. On their arrival at Jaintiapur they found that Ram Singh II was seriously ill and after a few days he died. They then lodged the Raja of Gobha with Rajendra Singh, the new Syiem and returned back to the hills.²³

23. P.C. 1833, December 12, Nos. 70-72.

Formerly the people of Nartiang had a fight with the people of Jowai. On the death of Ram Singh II, the new Syiem Rajendra Singh sided with the Jowai people who renewed hostilities towards the Nartiang people. After the death of Ram Singh II, the eleven Dalois went to Jaintiapur to place Rajendra Singh on the throne. When they were on their way Rajendra Singh sent out the Daloi of Jowai with armed men to attack them. When they saw the reception they were likely to meet with, they all fled back to their village except two of the Dalois who were unable to escape, and were seized by Rajendra Singh. Six weeks later the Nartiang people went and released the two Dalois. Rajendra Singh then deprived the eleven Dalois of the privilege they used to enjoy during the life time of the former Syiem and these were transferred to the Jowai people. The real object of the Nartiang people in visiting Robertson was to inform him that Rajendra Singh was not a faithful ally of the British and that they wanted him dethroned unless he restored their rights.²⁴

Another event took place in Jaintia and that was the supersession of Sutter Singh the Raja of Gobha. Sutter Singh had a quarrel with his brother Sobha Singh. Sobha Singh complained about Sutter Singh to Ram Singh II. Sutter

24. P.C. 1833, December 12, Nos. 70-72.

Singh the Raja of Gobha, was removed and he was replaced by his brother Sobha Singh. About this time Lieutenant Vetch in the prosecution of enquiries instituted by Robertson, apprehended Sutter Singh the ex-Raja of Gobha, whose various examinations with those of a servant of his farm appeared quite evident that the then Raja of Gobha, Sobha Singh was actively concerned in seizing the three missing individuals. According to Sutter Singh, it was Rajendra Singh who released the culprit Sobha Singh.²⁵

Robertson then wrote to Rajendra Singh asking him to apprehend within twenty days Sobha Singh along with certain other individuals implicated in the transaction. As no reply was received Robertson concluded that Sobha Singh the Raja of Gobha was under the protection of the ruler of Jaintia so as to prevent him from being seized by the people of Nartiang. Robertson then requested the Supreme Government to punish Rajendra Singh for the non-delivery of Sobha Singh. He cited, as a precedent, the warning given by the Government on a former occasion when an attempt was made to seize a subject of the British Government. The Syien, by non-compliance with the demand for the surrender of such individuals would be held guilty

25. P.C., 1833, December 12, Nos. 70-72.

of the crime. Mr. Robertson further reported that Rajendra Singh even during the life time of his predecessors had been a promoter of the horrible rite of human sacrifice and his participation in the case was proved by the best evidence. Robertson therefore recommended that the ruler of Jaintia be solemnly called upon in the name of the Government to give up the Raja of Gobha and in the event of his non-compliance, he would be immediately removed from the Raj and that in his place, U Kiang Bhandari, who was said to be the nearest heir be placed on the throne.²⁶

JENKIN: SETTLING THE DISPUTE BETWEEN THE SYIEM AND THE DALOI OF NARTIANG

Jenkin took over as Agent to the Governor General on March 1834 and immediately he was met by a deputation sent by the Syiem of Jaintia which consisted of his Mooktear, Moonsiff and his Vakeels to Sohra to meet Mr. Jenkin who was the new Agent to the Governor General and they also presented him with a letter from the Syiem. The Mooktear informed Jenkin that the Syiem was willing to apprehend the persons involved in kidnapping and sacrificing certain British subjects, but he was unable to do so because of the resistance of the Daloi of Nartiang to his authority. The Mooktear stated that the inability was the result of

26. P.C., 1833, December 12, Nos. 70-72.

the British Policy towards the Syiem. The British by withholding the recognition of his title had encouraged the Dalois to defy his authority and this produced anarchy throughout the country.²⁷

The Mooktear requested that the Syiem be allowed to avail himself of the arbitration of Lieutenant Inglis to effect a reconciliation between the Syiem and the Daloi of Nartiang. The Daloi of Nartiang, however, was also present at Sohra. He was deputed by the other Dalois. He met Jenkin and submitted an application to him asking for the friendly intercession of Lieutenant Inglis.²⁸

The dispute between the Syiem and the Daloi of Nartiang had led to a series of aggression between the people of Nartiang and the people of Jowai. The Daloi of the latter district appeared to have been unduly favoured by the Syiem in regard to certain immunities. Several murders and atrocities were committed by the conflicting parties. The Government, however, was anxious to put an end to it at any rate because if allowed to continue it could affect the Khasi States which were under the British protection. A Khasi chief had already sought the permission of Jenkin to go in aid of the Daloi of Nartiang. Under

27. P.C., 1834 April 10, Nos. 135-138.

28. P.C., 1834 April 10, Nos. 135-138.

the circumstances Jenkin felt it necessary to depute Lieutenant Inglis to settle the feud that existed in Jaintia. The Mooktears and the Vakeels on the part of the Syiem and the Daloi of Nartiang pledged to abide by Lieutenant Inglis arbitration.²⁹

The dispute between the Jowai people and the eleven Dalois originated from the great influence which the former had on the Syiem and the rights of the latter made over to them since the death of Ram Singh II. Singh Manik a Khasi border chief did all he could to frustrate the settlement. Some of his people had already joined the Jowai people.³⁰ Lieutenant Inglis, however, succeeded in settling the disputes.³¹

According to Jenkin his main reason in deputing Inglis was to put an end to the disturbances as it was feared this might affect the tranquility of the Khasi States which were under British protection.³² Secondly, with the internal commotion being terminated and the authority of the Syiem resumed, the surrender of the murderers in the sacrificial case would immediately follow.³³ The last reason was that the restoration of the Jaintia Syiem and his Dalois

29. P.C., 1834 April 10, Nos. 135-138.

30. P.C., 1834 May 8, Nos. 61-62.

31. P.C. 1834 May 15, No. 77.

32. P.C. 1834 Mat 15, No. 77.

33. P.C. 1834 April 10, Nos. 135-138.

to a mutual good understanding was the necessary prelude towards the accomplishment of a new treaty with the State. The title Rajah which was conferred upon him by the British was unknown to the Dalois in the hills. To them the Syiem was merely the head of a confederacy of republics or democracies and he was not able to entertain any negotiations without being approved by the heads of the hill States. Jenkin felt that if necessary he would support him with troops in order to overthrow the old system of Government and to make the Syiem an absolute sovereign. The British were very much aware about the limited power of the Syiem.³⁴

JENKIN ON THE TRIBUTE AND KIDNAPPING CASE

Mr. Jenkin's stand on Jaintia affair was reasonable and quite different from his predecessors. According to him, since Rajendra Singh had been recognised by the Dalois of the country, the claim of the Syiem ought to have been acknowledged by the Government. With regards to the treaty, he considered it unusual, to have deemed it a personal one liable to be annulled by the death of the Sovereign with whom it was made. He felt that the terms of the treaty were unfavourable to the British, but the treaty was concluded at the time of great emergency. At the terms of the treaty had not been violated, he suggested that a proper

34. P.C., May 15, No. 77.

course was to persuade the Syiem to a voluntary commutation of a money tribute for service he was bound to yield by the terms of the former treaty. With the internal commotion being terminated and the authority of the Syiem restored, Jenkin was without doubt that the surrender of the murderers in the sacrificial case would immediately follow which to him was a necessary prelude to any further negotiations. The offence was committed during the life time of the late Ram Singh II and as such the punishment for non-compliance with the demand should not fall entirely on Rajendra Singh. He, however, recommended that the surrenders of the murderers by the Syiem as a condition for the recognition of the Syiem by the usual title and finally he advised the Supreme Government to suspend the conclusion of a new treaty with the Syiem until he consented to pay a yearly tribute as a fair alteration for the military service demanded under the former treaty.³⁵

As mentioned earlier four British subjects were seized by the ruler of Jaintia, three of which had been murdered. With regard to this case, Jenkin was of the view that, as the power of the Syiem was very limited he considered it more appropriate not to be too severe in dealing with the Syiem. The Raja of Gobha, the person who was

35. P.C. 1834 April 10, Nos. 135-138.

involved with the crime sided with the Nartiang people who at that time was at variance with the Syiem and in such a political condition it was certain that the Syiem would not be able to enforce his power. The course recommended by Jenkin was that the real offender should be punished and after a warning was given the British would attack Gobha in order to secure the murderers.³⁶

On May 28, 1834, Mr. Jenkin, the Political Agent renewed the demand of tribute and repeated the requisition for delivery of the offenders. As for delivering the offenders the Syiam succeeded in apprehending four of the offenders which he delivered to the authorities. But for the payment of tribute the Syiem withheld his assent as before trusting to the liberality of the British Government and begged it not to insist upon a demand to which he was unable to offer resistance other than by remonstrance and representation.³⁷

LAND DISPUTES

Another reason given by the Agent for the annexation of Jaintia was the dispute over the territory in Chaparmukh in Nowgong district and Dimuruah. Rent was demanded by the British from the Jaintia Syiem for certain land in

36. P.C. 1834, April 10, Nos. 135-138.

37. P.C., 1836, August 1, Nos. 110-111.

the parganas of Dimurua in lower Assam. The Mooktear of the Syiem while meeting Jenkin informed him that such land was in the possession of the Syiem since the time of David Scott. It was David Scott, according to the letter produced by the Mooktear, who had allowed the Syiem to hold land in Assam.³⁸ As mentioned earlier, there was already a dispute over the establishment of an outpost by the Syiem of Jaintia at Chaparmukh. According to Gait, "Before any coercive measure could be taken, a fresh cause of dispute arose."³⁹ But according to Lahiri, "the sole concern of Mr. Jenkin and his predecessors was moved to protect the interest of trade than to establish a right of ownership of which they themselves were not very sure."⁴⁰

In June 1834, the Syiem wrote to the British Government reminding them of their promises as embodied in the treaty with his uncle the late Ram Singh II. According to the treaty it was promised that a grant of some portion of territory would be given as a reward to Ram Singh II. Rajendra Singh recalled the service rendered by his uncle in helping the British during the Burmese war, and in

38. P.C., 1834 April 10, Nos. 135-138.

39. Gait, E.A. A History of Assam, (Thatcher Spink, Calcutta, 1967, Reprinted), p. 358.

40. Lahiri, R.M. The Annexation of Assam, (Calcutta, 1975), p. 135.

quelling the Khasi disturbances. On the basis of this the Syiem demanded some territories in Assam.⁴¹ According to Lahiri, "This move on the part of the young Syiem at this stage was inopportune and undiplomatic, it rather stiffened the attitude of the British Government towards him, and as a result of this, the relations between Jaintia and the East India Company further deteriorated."⁴²

ANNEXATION

But the real reason for annexation was proved beyond any shadow of doubt that the Agent would like to expand British influence in Jaintia.

By delivering the culprit, it seemed that the Syiem had complied with the demand of the British Government and a settlement was expected to follow soon. But something unexpected happened, that is on March 1835, the Syiem received a letter from the Government informing him that the whole of his ancestral possession in the plain had been confiscated. The ground assigned for the act was the non-delivery of the offenders in the atrocities of Gobha, the occurrence of a similar cause of offence in the year 1821 and the Syiem's participation in those ghastly crimes.⁴³ However, the Supreme Government and the Court

41. P.C. 1834 June 19, Nos. 96-98.

42. Lahiri, R.M. Op.cit., p. 156.

43. P.C., 1836 August 1, Nos. 110-111.

of Directors, in the initial stage were not convinced about the annexation.

THE SUPREME GOVERNMENT AND THE COURT OF DIRECTORS ON THE AFFAIRS OF JAINTIA

THE SUPREME GOVERNMENT

The Deputy Secretary to the Government in a letter to Robertson made it clear that the Syiem of Jaintia was entitled to the dignity of Rajah and the question pending with the Jaintia State related only to the formation of a new treaty and if it desired the protection of the British Government it must consent to pay a moderate tribute in return. The title by which the Syiem should be addressed was a separate question and it should depend upon his rank and former usage.⁴⁴

The Supreme Government in replying to Robertson about the manner to be adopted in the events of the failure of the Syiem to apprehend the culprits involved in the murder of certain British subjects, instructed him to repeat his demand and to warn the Syiem that in the event of his withholding his active cooperation in apprehending the perpetrators of the four offences which appeared to have been committed in his territory would be visited by the severe displeasure of the British Government.⁴⁵

44. P.C., 1834 March 25, No. 41.

45. P.C. 1833 December 12, Nos. 70-72.

On the settlement of the dispute that existed in Jaintia, the Supreme Government seemed to have different reasons and was not satisfied with the way its Agent was handling the matter. It questioned Jenkin for deputing Inglis to settle the dispute. According to the Supreme Government, this was an act of interference in the internal affairs of a sovereign state. It also informed Jenkin that, "the assistance had been given at a period when the terms of our future connection with Jaintia were under discussion."⁴⁶

It was mentioned earlier that Jenkin had proposed to the Supreme Government, that since the Rajah of Gobha was involved in sacrificing three British subjects, the Government instead of punishing the Syiem, after a warning then they should attack the principality of Gobha in order to secure the murderers. The Supreme Government's opinion differed from that of its Agent. It felt that as the Syiem of Jaintia was the Sovereign of Gobha, he must be held responsible for the offence committed by Rajah of Gobha. It further instructed Jenkin to inform the Syiem that should he fail to punish his vassal, the Government would consider Gobha as severed from his dominion and it would take its own steps to apprehend the culprit.⁴⁷

46. P.C. 1834 May 15, Nos. 77-78.

47. P.C. 1834 May 15, No. 78.

THE COURT OF DIRECTORS

Before studying the views of the Court of Directors on the affairs of Jaintia, it is to be noted that the information received by the Government was that Jaintia was taken under the British protection after the commencement of the Burmese war without any stipulation for the payment of tribute and the only requirement from the Syiem was his co-operation in any engagement with the Burmese to the east of the Brahmaputra.⁴⁸

While concluding a treaty with Jaintia, no mention was made of the Syiem's successors as in the treaty with Cachar. It seemed for this reason that Robertson considered the treaty with Jaintia as personal to the Syiem with whom it was concluded and no longer binding upon the British in consequence of his death. In the treaty with Cachar, the British Government in return for the tribute of ten thousand rupees annually consented to provide for the maintenance of the Manipurean chief, then occupying Cachar. It was this condition which seemed to explain why a tribute was imposed upon Cachar and not on Jaintia. The British on their part had no documents to show that the Jaintia treaty was at the time meant as a personal engagement which could be revised on the death of the Syiem and as such

48. Letter from Court of Directors, No. 14 of 1834.

the court saw no reason to assume that they were at liberty to consider it annulled by that event.⁴⁹

As for considering the treaty with Jaintia, the Court was of the opinion that, on the treaty being expired, the Syiem was in the same position as before the conclusion of the treaty and hence the Government's right extended no further than to discontinue him the benefit of protection, until and unless he consented to pay the tribute. On its part the Court was not very anxious for the concluding of such an engagement. Jenkin was instructed to take a more just view than his predecessor in case the Syiem refused to pay the tribute.⁵⁰

As for confiscation of the Syiem's territory the Court felt that it was a very summary measure and one of a very doubtful propriety. The confiscation of the territory of a native prince was an act, even when just an unvoidable, involving serious consequence. To prevent the recurrence of such an act in future they warned the authorities "not to have recourse to so extreme a measure without previous reference to their authority."⁵¹ In the meantime they suggested a temporary arrangement for the country until a final decision is given.⁵²

49. Letter from the Court of Directors No. 14 of 1834.

50. Letter from the Court of Directors, No. 44 of 1835.

51. Letter from Court of Directors, No. 18 of 1838.

52. Ibid.

The foregoing discussion has clearly manifested that the process of annexation of the Jaintia Kingdom by the British was entirely unjustified. It has also brought to light that the Jaintia Syiem was made a scape goat of the ghastly crimes committed in the Gobha atrocities. We have seen that there existed a treaty signed between the British and the Jaintia Syiem for mutual help in the Burmese war and the treaty did not contain any condition at all that a tribute was to be paid to the British by the Jaintia Syiem. However, this condition was tried to be incorporated by Robertson who was the then Agent to the Governor General. The Syiem of Jaintia did not agree to that proposal.

It has already been mentioned that the kidnapping incident was the ground assigned for the annexation of the Kingdom. Jenkin for this case held the Rajah of Gobha and not the Jaintia Syiem solely responsible for the crime. He even suggested to the Government at Calcutta to attack the Rajah of Gobha instead of punishing the Jaintia Syiem. Surprisingly enough he even acknowledged the surrender of the offenders in the atrocities of Gobha and as far as what happened in 1821 he was of the opinion that since the crime was committed in the life time of the late Ram Singh II, the blame should not fall entirely on Rajendra Singh.

The ground on which the Kingdom was annexed was doubted by the Court of Directors itself. As for the kidnapping case the Syiem did succeed in delivering the offenders to the British authorities but what he failed to do was to meet the British demand of a tribute. So this proves that the annexation of the Jaintia Kingdom was not on the ground of the kidnapping case as commonly believed but due to the failure of the Syiem to meet the British demand for a tribute.

IMMEDIATE REACTION TO THE ANNEXATION

The sudden lapse of Syiemship left a deep pang on the national sentiments of the hill people. The greater part of the population were shocked by the suddenness of things and abrupt termination of Syiemship of which the natives were proud of. Many more could not believe in the turn of events. A wave of bewilderment swept the country. Yet the hill people never remained dumb. The battle for freedom commenced, in another form tending to be a serious movement. In a tumult they took up arms and refused to accept the annexation. The Dalois and members of the royal family instigated the nation to rise against the intruders. It was an opportune occasion. The organisation had not been very strong and orderly. Captain F.G. Lister and Lieutenant Inglis with a strong regiment hurried to the interiors

to quell the movement. In some places such as Sutnga, Nongkhlieh, Rymbai and Jowai, it took a long time to raise the siege because the Pnars barricaded themselves inside the fortresses and deep caves. The soldiers found no trace and it took a long time to discover the path to such concealed stockades and underground caves. The way was not discovered without difficulties and the soldiers were unaccustomed to fight in such a difficult terrain. But Lieutenant Inglis or Hari Saheb as he was called by the hills people, was eventually successful.⁵³

The famous siege of Sutiang fortress in the Nongkhlieh Daloiship is still remembered. The Government regiment operated from the valley against a stockade in the opposite Sutiang ravine where the Pnar warriors were stationed. The regiment employed a number of cannon carried on elephants from Jaintiapur via Sutnga. The Pnar camp was composed of volunteers from Changpung, Rymbai, Nongkhlieh, Sutnga and the neighbouring Daloiships. The Pnars withstood the siege for a very long time. The battle had its incursions as far as Lum Iakor Sing. The Pnars from their stockade used their arrows with lightning speed and many soldiers perished in the battle. The soldiers

53. Bareh, H. History and Culture of the Khasi People, (Shillong, 1964), pp. 170-171.

could not trace the direction from which the arrows came and were confused. We are told that it was due to the treachery of a resident of Rymbai that the troops at length found the way into the stockade. When they arrived at the place they were able to trace the arrows to a bamboo grove and they opened fire. As a consequence, u Manick,⁵⁴ the Daloi of Sutnga who was working with bows and arrows was hit and fell dead. U Ksan Daloi of Nongkhlieh and other ring leaders however escaped. Jowai, where another battle took place, is said to have fallen a year earlier. Slowly did Inglis enforce his consolidation of the annexation, the whole nation was overwhelmed by the Government forces. But a sublimed wave of patriotism submerged beneath the surface to rise again with a heavy explosion in the movements that took place in the years to come.⁵⁵

It will also be remembered that when the Syiem of Jaintia was deprived of his possessions in the Plains, he preferred to give up entirely the tract in the hills which was nominally subject to him, and to become a pensioner of British Government. The only tribute derived

54. This is so far as records are concerned. But from local information the name of the Daloi was Sawar not Manick and this took place not on the first but on the third Anglo-Jaintia War. (Published materials also available now).

55. Ibid., pp. 171-172.

by the Jaintia Syiem from hills was one he-goat from each village.⁵⁶ No tribute or tax was paid to the Syiem. He received certain dues, and each village had in turn to cultivate the lands of the Syiem and to supply attendants and servants. This formed his revenue from his hill territories. The Syiem was a nominal chief of the Dalois. These officers were at the head of the civil, criminal, and police establishments of their districts. The village officers were under them, and with such powers, they were generally the real Heads of the Government.⁵⁷ Thus a he-goat was represented as a symbol of allegiance to their Syiem.

After these hills came under the administration of British officers the villages were continued under the charge of the Dalois, who were nominated or elected by the inhabitants of their respected villages, and were confirmed by the Principal Assistant Commissioner. These Dalois held office for a period of three years or for life, after the expiration of which another general election or rather nomination of Dalois took place; the electors were allowed entire freedom of choice and their nominees were never

56. Mackenzie, A. The North East Frontier of India, (Mittal Publications, Delhi, 1979, Reprinted), p. 239.

57. Selection from the Records of the Government of Bengal, No. 39, Part I, (Published by Authority, 1863), p. 163.

rejected by the Government unless they were in some manner disqualified for the office. No taxation had yet been imposed upon the inhabitants of Jaintia Hills, but the Dalois and Sirdars⁵⁸ of each village presented annually to the Government, according to ancient custom, a he-goat in token of their submission.⁵⁹

58. The four Sirdarships according to Hunter, Statistical Account of Assam are Chap-duk, Mynriang, Mul-Shoi and Saipung. This was an information based on Hunter, W.W. Statistical Account of Assam, (Trubner & Company, London, 1879), p. 204.

59. Allen, W.J. Report on the Administration of Cossyah and Jyntiah Hills, (Calcutta, 1858), p. 30.

CHAPTER III

FREEDOM STRUGGLE

FREEDOM STRUGGLE

For long twentyfive years from 1835 to 1860, the people were left to themselves. The only connection they had with the British was the payment of an annual attribute of a he-goat which was previously paid to the Syiem. So, in the eyes of the people, paying tribute to the British Officers at Sohra, was just like paying it to their Syiem at Jaintiapur.¹

The tribute of a he-goat continued to be annually paid, and in 1853 credit was given to the officers at Sohra, for effecting a slightly more favourable sale of these offerings than had been usual there-to-fore. In that year Mr. A.J.M. Mills, a Judge of the Sudder Court, who had been deputed to enquire into certain abuses in the Khasi Hills, judicial administration drew attention to the State of the Jaintia Hills. He pointed out that in 1849 Colonel Lister had suggested the imposition of a house-tax "in

1. Pakem, B. "The Socio-Political System of the Jaintia Tribes of Assam: An Analysis of Continuity and Change" in Singh, K.S. (ed.) Tribal Situation in India, (Simla, 1972), Vol. 13, p. 354.

consequence of the disposition evinced by some of the people to assert their independence."² This had, however, been negated by the Government. Mr. Mills strongly urged that the error should be repaired, and a more intimate knowledge of the people acquired by the English officers. He also advocated the establishment of a Police Thannah to check the lawless proceedings of the Dalois. Lord Dalhousie concurred with these views. In neighbouring hill tracts, the house-tax was paid, but Jaintia Hills was being exempted. The Agent was directed to proceed into the Jaintia Hills and prepare a full report on revenue, civil and criminal justice, and all other matters connected with the Jaintia territory. On receipt of these orders, a Thannah was established at Jowai, but not much else was actually done at this time to give effect to them.³ In 1858, Mr. W.J. Allen, another high official from the Presidency deputed to enquire into local matters, submitted another elaborate report upon the Khasi and Jaintia Hills. After the fullest consideration, he came to the conclusion that the Jaintias should

2. Mackenzie, A. The North East Frontier of India, (Mittal Publications, Delhi, 1979), p. 240.

3. Ibid.

be required to contribute something in acknowledgement of the supremacy of the Government.⁴ He said:

I am of the opinion that a light and judicious taxation would contribute to the preservation of tranquility and good order in the Jaintia Hills. A moderate taxation had a very beneficial effect upon the savagery of the Lurka Coles of the Singhbhoom district of the South West Frontier Agency. It was found to make them less turbulent and aggressive and more thrifty, deligent and submissive to the authorities, and I am disposed to think that a very moderate taxation, fixed for a term of years, would improve the condition and strengthen the peaceful and industrious inclinations of these wild mountaineers also. 5

He accordingly proposed a moderate house-tax, to be collected through the village authorities. An enquiry into the condition of the Raj lands was suggested and the allotment of waste lands to European settlers was also discussed. But what Mr. Allen insisted upon strongly was on the necessity of stationing a European Civil Officer in the centre of the tract to administer justice to the people, and be to them a visible representative of that Government of which they knew almost nothing.⁶

4. Ibid., p. 240.

5. Allen, W.J. Report on the Administration of Cossayah and Jynteah Hills, (Calcutta, 1858), p. 71.

6. Mackenzie, A. Op.cit., p. 241.

The Government however agreed to the recommendation of Mr. Allen for the importance of the house-tax but negatived the appointment of the European Officer. In 1860, the house-tax was imposed and within a few months of the imposition of the house-tax, the people were in open rebellion. Fortunately for the British, a large force of troops was closed at hand, and before the revolt could make any headway, it was stamped out and the villages were brought into submission. It was supposed at the time that the Syiem (Rajah) had been in some way taking part in the movement.⁷

On the suppression of this movement measures were taken for the improvement of the administration. While the Civil Officer at Sohra was empowered to remove the Dalois for misconduct, at the same time, the powers of those functionaries were increased. All crimes were to be reported by them to the police who were not, however, to interfere vexatiously in village affairs.⁸

After the 1860 Movement, the people of Jaintia Hills did not show any sign of discontent or disaffection.

7. Ibid, see also Selection from the Records of Government of Bengal, No. 39, Part I, (Published by authority, Calcutta, 1863), p. 89, and Home Department Letter No. 737, 22nd March 1862.

8. Mackenzie, A. Op.cit., p. 241.

But it is without doubt if anyone tried to incite them they would surely oppose the enforcement of taxation or the imposition of any new taxes.⁹ Unfortunately, at this juncture, it was decided that the Jaintia Hills were to be treated in the same way as other parts of British India in respect of the new income-tax, and 310 persons, including all the leaders of the people, were assessed with an aggregate tax of Rs. 1,259/-.¹⁰ The result of this was a fresh outburst in 1862.

CAUSES OF THE 1862 MOVEMENT

INCOME TAX

It seemed probable that very few of the people inhabiting the Jaintia Hills could have been liable to income tax. It was generally reported that the imposition of the income tax was the chief cause of the movement.¹¹ The Bengalee traders who were carrying on trades in Jaintia Hills had unanimously attributed the Jaintia Movement of 1862 to the system of taxing the hill people. According to them, the weight of the taxes was felt more oppressive as being a money assessment, in a country where trade was, to a great extent, conducted by barter.¹²

9. Selection from the Records of the Government of Bengal No. 39 Part I, (Published by authority, Calcutta, 1863), pp. 1-2.

10. Gait, E.A. A History of Assam, (Thatcher Spink & Co., Calcutta, 1967, Reprinted), p. 381.

11. Bengal Records, op.cit., p. 88.

12. Ibid., p. 12.

Major Hopkinson, the Agent to the Governor General North East Frontier, while sending information about the causes of the outbreak to the Government of Bengal stated that he would not have introduced such a tax as the income tax among the Jaintia people since the result of the house tax was the Jaintia Movement of 1860 and although the Jaintia people had shown that they would submit to even nominal taxation only at the point of the bayonet, the income tax was introduced among them in 1861.¹³ He also pointed out that no member of the Government would have approved the introduction of the income tax into Jaintia Hills if the point could have been directly passed under his attention.¹⁴ Major Hopkinson himself was in favour of suspending the operation of the income tax. Instead he recommended the very simple system of assessment which was in force in British Burma, and particularly in its adoption by the 'Tavoy Karens', a people whose circumstances, position and social conditions were very much what those of the Jaintia people were. The poll tax and a land tax were the essential or substantive features of the Burmese system.¹⁵

13. Ibid., pp. 91-92.

14. Ibid., p. 94.

15. Ibid., p. 96.

A number of the tax payers belonged to Jowai, the place at which the Movement of 1860-62 commenced. The Elaka of Jowai and Nartiang right from the time of the Syiem played a very important role in the politics of Jaintia. These two Elakas had always led many public opinion in Jaintia.¹⁶ Most of the tax payers were the principal men of the country. What are the processes of the popular demonstrations, revolts and rebellions? Almost always we find that they are originated by a minority which, in most communities, leads and the masses follow. It has also the skill to persuade the latter about the oppressive measures of the British. But those measures, in fact, could affect only the former. Even in England at that time where the people were so intelligent and education and political knowledge so diffused, if there arose disturbances about the payment of church rates, it was found that a large number of the peace breakers were persons who never paid any rates at all. Thus in Jaintia Hills it seems that the Dalois, Pators, who had held almost uncontrolled sway over Jaintia for so long, and had been accustomed only to levy contributions, not to pay them, were against the imposition of the income tax and had succeeded in enlisting the sympathies of the people.¹⁷

16. Ibid., p. 98.

17. Ibid., pp. 99-100.

The people were generally apprehensive of the introduction of further taxation in the shape of a tax on crafts, trades and dealings and on pan and tobacco. The possible introduction of these taxes formed the subject of frequent conversations among the people in general. The people of the Jaintia Hills who frequently visited Sohra, must have heard that such a scheme was in contemplation. The leaders of the movement had induced many to join them by representing that taxation of their land would be enforced and all of them ruined if they did not succeed in driving the British out of their country.¹⁸

As mentioned earlier the movement of 1860 was suppressed, the tax collected and the ring leaders were punished by imprisonment and fine. But during the remaining part of that year and in the early part of 1861, some of the people were known to have said that, although they would not oppose the collection of the house tax, they would resist any further imposition of new taxes. In 1860, the income tax was also passed and had to be enforced in Jaintia Hills.¹⁹ The income tax was introduced so that the Government, under the operation of the Income Tax Act, could derive a fair revenue from the people of the Jaintia Hills.²⁰

18. Ibid., p. 103.

19. Ibid., p. 104.

20. Ibid., p. 108.

The tax for 1860-61 was paid up without complaint and it might from this be supposed that the income tax was not really the main cause of the movement. The fact, however, remains that taxation was never resisted by the people before it was introduced, but did so immediately on the income tax being imposed in 1860. It seems that the leaders at this time were unprepared and they had to postpone the attempt till 1861-62 in order to obtain time to mature their plans.²¹ There must, have been, therefore some other reasons for the 1862 movement.

RELIGIOUS

The British had not only introduced a new pattern of administration in Jaintia Hills but also modern education. It was the Christian missionaries who brought with them not only Western ideas of religion but also modern education. In 1854, at the instance of the then Governor General of India, Lord Dalhousie, the Government extended some financial help to the Welsh Presbyterian Mission to execute successfully the schemes of spreading elementary education in Jaintia Hills. With this help, the Mission could start a school at Jowai, the principal village of Jaintia Hills in 1854.²² In 1856, U Larsingh Khongwir,

21. Ibid., p. 109.

22. Jones, G.A. Ka History Jong Ka Balang, (Synod Church House, Shillong, 1966), pp. 40-41.

a teacher and evangelist who was admitted to the church in 1849, was sent from Sohra to Jowai to take charge of the management of the School there from U Luh. Attempts were made by the people of Jowai to destroy the school buildings, converts and sympathisers were driven out of the village and others despoiled of their lands and fruits. The evangelists also when preaching in the markets were mocked and their voices drowned by unearthly yells.²³ Thus, from the very beginning we find that the people were against Christianity. Moreover, u Solomon who was a Christian and a member of the Sohra Church was being appointed as Collector of the new tax.²⁴

It is worth mentioning here that the British policy in India was basically determined by political, financial and administrative expediency. However, the British official realised that as they were foreigners in India, their rule would be unstable unless they acquired local supporters who would act as the buffer between them and the people. Therefore, the need was to create political allies, though the policy differed from place to place. The Permanent Settlement recognised the Zamindars as the proprietors

23. Rodborne, T. U Larsingh Khongwir, (Shillong, 1981), p. 16.

24. Morris, J.H. The History of the Welsh Calvinistic Methodist Foreign Mission, (Liverpool, 1910), p. 147.

of land. It brought into existence a wealthy and privileged class which owed its existence to the British rule and which would, therefore, be compelled by its own basic interest to support it. This expectation was in fact, fully justified later when the Zamindars as a class supported the foreign government in opposition to the rising movement for freedom.²⁵ The spread of Christianity in the hill areas was encouraged by the Government for the sake of political convenience. It was clearly proved by the Jaintia resistance movements that not a single Pnar Christian and adherent joined the movements. This so impressed Colonel Haughton, the officiating Agent to the Governor General that in his report, he strongly urged that an increased grant should be given to the Mission, it being evident that education imparted by its agents was not only "effective in civilising the natives but in making them peaceful and loyal subjects."²⁶

During the movement a part of Jowai inhabited by the Native Christians was burnt down.²⁷ It was said that the people of Jowai were very much against the removal

25. Chandra, B. Modern India, (New Delhi, 1982), pp. 103-104.

26. Morris, J.H. Op.cit., p. 147.

27. Bengal Records, op.cit., p. 105.

of the military guard from Amwai to their village. They said that no sooner did the Guard come than a school was established, and the missionaries began making converts and that their former worship and decried. It was said that some of the Christians had been in the habit of taunting the rest, saying that they all would soon have to give up their old pujahs and become Christians. It was also said that a parcel of land, which belonged to Ka Langdoh (Priestess) of Jowai had been cultivated by the Christians, which ought not to have been done.²⁸

There were other occurrences that took place which had aggravated the feelings of the people. The people were offended at being prevented from burning their dead.²⁹ To the people this was an act of sacrilege as burning of their dead was a part of their religious practices. Not only this but shields used for religious purposes were removed from the people. In the Jaintia society there was a chivalry of feeling which led them to attach importance to their arms and implements of war. Among them shields and swords would be considered a special value. The people were offended at having them taken away; and this act was rendered more offensive for the shields having been burnt

28. Ibid., pp. 106-107.

29. Ibid., p. 91.

before their eyes. Another important happening was that what had happened took place at a certain season in which a religious festival was celebrated. In the religious dance that followed the use of swords and shields was part of the ceremony. At Ialong village while the dance was being performed, the Darogah of Jowai went and interfered with the ceremony.³⁰

This was the signal for the movement. The freedom fighters, rushing to Jowai, burned to the ground the Police station, Mission house, school room and other buildings. The Police and the Christians who had fled to them for refuge were besieged for eleven days in a small building too narrow for any of the company to lie down day or night and the watchful freedom fighters ceaselessly flitting to and fro, endeavouring to set the building on fire.³¹ The movement attained such proportions – it was estimated that at least ten thousand had joined it.³²

OTHER CAUSES

As mentioned earlier the Syiem's authority over the people was merely nominal, he received from them no

30. Ibid., p. 118.

31. Morris, J.H. Op.cit., pp. 146-147.

32. Ibid., p. 147.

revenue but only certain dues which were of little value. The Dalois exercised their power over their own and subordinate village independently of the Syiem. They had never been reconciled to the transfer of their territory to the British Government and they objected to being placed under the jurisdiction of a foreign power without their own consent and without being consulted. So long as their old customs and administration were maintained they submitted but when the direct taxation was enforced in the district the relative rights of the Government and the people were brought into direct contact. It was the independent spirit of the people that led them to resist the authority assumed by the British.³³ According to Pakem,

Traditional democracy has become a part of the Jaintia culture. Traditional democracy is for decentralization. Even under the concept of a welfare state, centralization is unavoidable. And there is nothing more abominable to a Jaintia than a far away centralized authority. That is why they rose against the British and recently separated themselves from the Khasis. Now when they have their own District Council, they pay their taxes. So, it is not so much their hatred against taxes as to the imposition of taxes by a far away centralized authority. They want to decide for themselves and not by an outside authority. 34

33. Bengal Records, op.cit., p. 117.

34. Pakem, B. "The Socio-Political System of the Jaintia Tribes of Assam: An Analysis of Continuity and Change", in Singh, K.S. (ed.) Tribal Situation in India, (Simla, 1972), Vol. 13, p. 360.

Thus taxation was in effect the cause of the movement. But it was the other occurrences that had taken place which had further aggravated the feelings of the people and roused them to a more determined resistance.³⁵

COURSE OF THE WAR

Before the movement started the resistance leaders had made preparation before hand, stores of grains and food had been cautiously kept. Certain villages were also used by them as harbours of refuge in the event of discomfiture which were to remain friendly to the Government. The part that these friendly villages had played in the movement were later noticed by the Britishers. While building up supports for the movement, the leaders propagated that should the people give in to the British, the males will be doomed to perpetual slavery, and the women consigned to the tender mercies of the native soldiers.³⁶

The Jaintia, on their part, at the outset of the war attempted an economic blockade of the district and all communications were cut off. The British Officer commanding the stockade at Jowai reported to Lieutenant Colonel W. Richardson that on January 18, 1862 about six hundred

35. Bengal Records, op.cit., p. 118.

36. Ibid., pp. 216-217.

armed men assembled on the neighbouring hills and prevented the people from holding their weekly market so that the garrison at Jowai would suffer from shortage of food.³⁷ The dak road from Jowai to Sohra was closed and the dak runner was intercepted and the dak was taken from him.³⁸

In military warfare the resistance adopted the hit and run tactics. The British, though they were successful could not inflict much loss on the resistance. The result was that the resistance, taking advantage of the British failure, applied the politics of propaganda in the country and were able to retain their influence. Many of the villagers believed that the resistance had destroyed the regiment, officers and men and that no more troops were forthcoming.³⁹

The British's first reaction on receiving the news about the outbreak was to direct the officer commanding Sylhet to hold his men in readiness to proceed to Jaintiapur at the call of the Magistrate so as to prevent the hill tribes from descending into the plains. They further anticipated that the hill station of Sohra would be attacked.⁴⁰

37. Ibid., pp. 16-17.

38. Ibid., pp. 6-7.

39. Ibid., pp. 34-35.

40. Ibid., pp. 16-17.

The first village attacked by the British was Ialong. The main objective in attacking Ialong was that it would have a psychological effect on the people. Ialong was the stronghold of the resistance and once the British were successful it would deter the others from joining the resistance.⁴¹

The Government adopted a strong armed policy in order to suppress the movement. All men found in arms and who were hostile to the British Government were treated with severity. No terms were granted to the Dalois of villages who were known to have been the principal instigators of the movement. They were confined and made over to the Civil Officers who accompanied the detachment. All stockades and fortified posts were levelled to the ground. Villages who supported the movement were attacked and taken. But the villagers were given an option to return to their villages but if they refused to return within a period of time, the whole village was burnt. Those who returned had to give up their arms and hostages were taken from such village so as to ensure their good conduct.⁴²

Major Henry Hopkinson, Agent to the Governor General North East Frontier in his letter to the Secretary to the

41. Ibid., p. 20.

42. Ibid., pp. 42-43.

Government of Bengal proposed that the provisions of the Act, No. XI of 1857 should be enforced. This Act was for the prevention, trial and punishment of offences against the State. He also urged the Government to proclaim the Jaintia territory to be in a state of rebellion and thereupon issued under Clause 1, Section III of the Act, for the trials of all persons who should be charged with the commission of any crimes mentioned in the said Act. He also recommended that Major E.A. Rowlatt, Deputy Commissioner of the Khasi and Jaintia Hills and Lieutenant Colonel William Richardson commanding the 44th Regiment Bengal Native Infantry be commissioners authorised by the Commission. He also recommended his own name in which if it would be desirable he would exercise the authority contemplated by the Act. He also recommended the immediate declaration, by proclamation, against those possessing or carrying arms in the terms of Section VII of the Act, since they were more comprehensive than the corresponding provisions of Act XXXI of 1860, which did not include the most dangerous weapons of the Khasis. He would have proposed the establishment of Martial Law, under the Regulation X of 1804 in the Jaintia territory but he felt that the provisions of Act No. XI of 1857 would be more suitable to meet the threat from the present movement.⁴³

43. Ibid., pp. 43-44.

The proclamation was made on March 26, 1862:

Whereas the Lieutenant Governor of Bengal deems it necessary for the public safety that no person shall be allowed to carry, or have in his possessions any arms or instrument used for warlike purposes in the Jaintia territory, it is hereby declared under Section VII, Act XI of 1857, that, from and after the 1st April next, it shall not be lawful for any person to carry or have in his possession, any arms or instruments used for warlike purposes within the aforesaid Jaintia territory, except the civil and military officers of Government and other persons specially exempted by the Commissioner or Deputy Commissioner of the District. 44

The Governor-General on hearing about the happening in Jaintia assured his fullest support and assistance to the Lieutenant Governor in his dealing with the movement. The Governor-General suggested that if the Lieutenant Governor seemed expedient to place at his disposal the services of Brigadier-General G.P. Showers who was recently on a special inspection tour to the North-Eastern Frontier.⁴⁵

Thus the entire Civil control of the Khasi and Jaintia Hills was placed under Brigadier-General G. D Showers and while holding these powers he was designated as the Commissioner of the Khasi and Jaintia Hills. Under this arrangement the authority of the Commissioner of Assam

44. Ibid., p. 48.

45. Ibid., pp. 50-51.

in Khasi and Jaintia Hills was superseded and the District Officers continued to conduct their duties under the orders of Brigadier-General Showers. The jurisdiction of the Board of Revenue was also suspended and he was to take his orders directly from the Lieutenant Governor. Besides his duty to punish all open resistance and to secure the early submission of the movement leaders, his object also was to inform and report to the Government about the causes of the movement. Moreover, he had to publicise or make known to all the people of Jaintia Hills that if they had any grievances to complain they should represent it in a proper manner and such grievances would be duly considered by the Government.⁴⁶

Side by side with the proclamation made by the Government the British adopted another policy and that was to put economic pressure on the people or villages who opposed them. The British realised that economy was the one which sustained the Jaintia resistance movement, so in the course of the war, the British adopted a strong policy towards those villages who opposed them. Stockaded villages were destroyed by the British forces. The main objective was that to prove to the resistance leaders that carrying out fights against the British were hopeless.

46. Ibid., pp. 51-52.

The resistance loss of life might not have been considerable but for many, they would feel the loss of property that the movement had cost them. The British, however, followed a lenient policy to those villages who did not oppose them though the villages might be unfriendly, yet they were spared.⁴⁷ For capturing of the ring leaders of the movement, rewards were offered by the British and this proved to be a success when the topmost leader of the movement U Kiang Nangbah was betrayed by two of his own trusted men.⁴⁸

In comparison to the tactics adopted by both the parties, the British economic tactic seemed to be yielding results and this was a pressure which divided the resistance in a conference that was held near Shangpung. The people at that time were suffering from dearth of food and there were little prospects for crops and so some of the leaders especially those belonging to Jowai were in favour of an immediate surrender but others were for making the last effort attack on the outpost at Mynso.⁴⁹ On this issue the people of Jaintia seemed then to be divided.

The Daloi of Raliang did all he could in his power to prevent the people from joining the movement. But U

47. Ibid., pp. 57-58.

48. Ibid., p. 69.

49. Ibid., pp. 73-74.

Bukhiar and U Kat Pator extended their influence and induced the people to build stockades and prevented them from submitting to the British. The people of Shangpung wanted to elect a Daloi, so that they could take in their submission, but they were prevented by some of the principal men of Jowai and Ialong who threatened to kill those who gave themselves up. The Daloi of Nartiang who was considered to be the chief of the Dalois was also anxious to restore peace and order in the district and had exerted himself to induce those who were inclined to offer their submission.⁵⁰ Some families belonging to Jowai, Mynso and Ialong and Tuber communicated a message to the British through the Daloi of Nangbah that they would tender their submission.⁵¹

As mentioned earlier that after the annexation of the Jaintia Kingdom in 1835, the British for twentyfive years, left the people of the hills to themselves. It was only in 1860 that the British authorities decided to introduce the house tax in Jaintia Hills which was immediately followed by the income tax. By introducing this new system of taxation, the British not only provoked the hill people but also altered the existing traditional system of

50. Ibid., pp. 123-124.

51. Ibid., p. 126.

collection which was inoperative in the Jaintia Kingdom. Again after the freedom struggle a new pattern of administration was introduced which not only changed the power equation in Jaintia Hills but it also had a great impact on the traditional political institutions. Thus in the following paragraphs an attempt is made to trace down the new administrative system introduced by the British before and after the freedom struggle.

ADMINISTRATION UNDER THE BRITISH

We have seen that the Jaintia Hills originally formed part of the territories of the Syiem of Jaintia, whose territories extended up to the plains, known as the Jaintia Parganas of Sylhet district, presently in Bangladesh and northern plains. For administrative purposes, the hill areas was then divided into 12 (twelve) Doloiship under the suzerainty of the Rajah of Jaintiapur. The Dalois were elected by the people of the villages under their jurisdiction and they exercised both civil and criminal powers and to help them in their works, they had subordinate officers known as Pators and Langdohs.⁵²

52. Report; of the United Khasi & Jaintia Hills Autonomous District Commission in the matter of creation of a new Autonomous District for Jaintia Sub-division, (Government of Assam, Shillong, 1964), p. 4.

The Jaintia Syiem felt under the displeasure of the British in consequence with the immolation of three British subjects by a dependent chieftain of Jaintia at the shrine of Kali. In March 1835, Colonel Lister was ordered to hold and annex to the British dominion the plains of Jaintia as a measure of retributive justice. The Syiem when shorn of his valuable territories in the plains, declined to retain possession of the hill tracts, whereupon the entire Jaintia kingdom was annexed by the British, and Jaintia Hills was placed under the administration of the Political Agent at Sohra. At first the British made no change in the indigenous revenue system under which each village had to pay annually a he-goat to the former Syiem.⁵³

As discussed earlier, in 1859, on the recommendation of Mr Allen, who was a member of the Board of Revenue, a survey of Raj lands was started. But though the lands were measured, no attempt was made by the Government to tax them. Subsequently in 1860, a house tax was imposed whereupon the people openly resisted it. The resistance was promptly put down, but in 1862, the people again resisted the imposition of income tax. This resistance was not completely put down till March 1863. Shortly, after this,

53. Ibid., p. 5.

the Jaintia Hills was formed into a separate Sub-division with headquarters at Jowai and made part of the Khasi and Jaintia Hills district.⁵⁴

The Khasi Hills and the Jaintia Hills formed separate administrative units before the advent of the British and even during the British rule, the Jaintia Hills with the British villages in the Khasi Hills were administered directly by the British Government, while the Khasi States were allowed internal autonomy subject to general control of the British Government.⁵⁵ When the country first came under the control of the Political Agent, he permitted the Dalois and Sirdars to investigate and decide all civil suits without limitations, and all criminal cases not of a heinous nature. But in time when it became apparent that the people were not satisfied with the proceedings of their chiefs, the Political Agent considered it necessary to place further restrictions on their civil and criminal powers, and accordingly, in the year 1841, he limited their jurisdiction in civil suits to the value of 50 rupees and prohibited them from trying all criminal cases in which they, their relatives and dependents and other chiefs were in any way concerned. Appeals from all orders and decision

54. Ibid., p. 5.

55. Ibid., pp. 16-17.

of the Dalois and Sirdars in civil and criminal cases, were received and determined by the Political Agent and parties who chose to prefer their complaints, civil or criminal, direct to the Political Agent, were permitted to do so.⁵⁶ The Dalois were like mouzadars in the plains district so far as the collection of land revenue was concerned and they were like village headmen with limited judicial powers.⁵⁷

The Dalois of the Elakas had always been elected and removed by the people. For sometime after the British Government came into possession of the country, the Political Agent permitted the people to elect, retain and remove their Dalois after their own fashion. The result was that there was a perpetual struggle between the influential inhabitants of many of the Elakas to procure the dismissal of the Daloi in office and to replace him by some other candidate of an opposite faction. These frequent power struggles kept the country in a constant turmoil and produced much bad blood among the different classes of the people. In order to put an end to this, the Political Agent in November 1850 passed an order that for the future,

56. Allen, W.J. Op.cit., p. 66.

57. Report of the United Khasi-Jaintia Autonomous District Commission in the matter of creation of a new Autonomous District for the Jowai Sub-division, (Government of Assam, Shillong, 1964), pp. 16-17.

persons elected and appointed Dalois were to hold their offices for three years, provided they conducted their duties efficiently. At the end of three years, a new election was to take place but the former Daloi might be re-elected as often as the people choose to elect him.⁵⁸ The British introduced another new system in which for the election of Daloi certain qualification was necessary. A person who was a candidate for the post of Daloi and Sirdars should be able to read and write both Bengali and Khasi languages for without this qualification his candidature will not be considered by the Government.⁵⁹

In some of the Daloiship, which were extensive and containing several villages there were two or three Pators and the Langdohs vary in number from one to ten. In the Elakas of Lakadong and Amwai there was no Pator. The Dalois of these Elakas transacted all the business themselves. In villages at a distance from the place of residence of the Daloi, almost all preliminary inquiries were made and all petty civil and criminal cases were first heard and frequently settled by the Langdoh in durbar. If the decision of the Langdoh did not give satisfaction, the case was brought before the Daloi or if he happened

58. Allen, W.J. Op.cit., p. 66.

59. Ibid., p. 73.

to be absent the case was brought before his deputy the Pator. If the Pator decided the case, either party could have it re-heard by the Daloi on his return to the village and a third decision was then made by the Daloi in Durbar. If the Daloi judgement did not satisfy any of the party the case was then carried before the Principal Assistant Commissioner at Sohra. In the four Elakas which were under the charge of Sirdars⁶⁰ there were no Pators or Langdohs and all the village duties were performed by the Sirdars. The Sirdars were not elected by the people but claimed to hold their office by hereditary right.⁶¹

Although the responsibility to the Government for carrying on the public business of these fifteen Elakas rest entirely with the Dalois, yet a great part of the work was ordinarily done by village officers of an inferior grade, called Pators and Langdohs. The former were deputies or assistants to the Dalois but can only hear cases in Durbar and acted on behalf of the Daloi during illness or absence from his jurisdiction. The latter were the Langdoh who acted also as assistants to the Daloi.⁶²

60. The four Sirdarships according to Hunter, Statistical Account of Assam are Chap-duk, Mynriang, Mul-Shoi and Saipung. This was an information based on Hunter, W.W. Statistical Account of Assam, (Trubner & Company, London, 1879), p. 204.

61. Ibid., pp. 66-67.

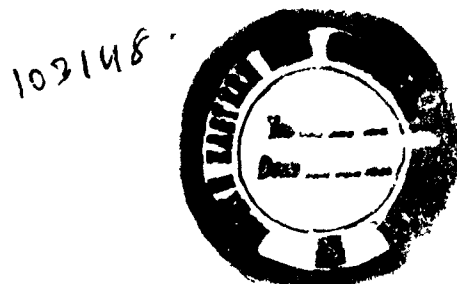
62. Ibid., p. 66.

Mr W.J. Allen on his Report on the Administration of the Khasi and Jaintia Hills suggested that the first step towards a reform in the administration of public affairs in the fifteen Daloiship was that to abolish the office of Pator and to prohibit the Langdoh from interfering in judicial matters. He said that in former times the Dalois were to remain in attendance, for about six months in a year on the Syiem of Jaintia at Jaintiapur so the Pators were appointed to act as their deputies during their absence. But now since there was no necessity of the Dalois to absent themselves, so he favoured abolition of the post of Pator and to curtail the power of the Langdoh.⁶³

The Syiem of Jaintia did not derive much revenue from his territory in the hills. This territory was left entirely in the hands of the Dalois. The only tribute which he received from each village was a he-goat, a few seer of parched rice and a few bundles of firewood which were used at the time of Pujas at Jaintiapur. Together with these every village had to supply the Syiem with coolies and servants for cultivating the raj lands. In the hills, there were some raj lands which were cultivated for the Syiem himself.⁶⁴

63. Ibid., pp. 67-68.

64. Ibid., p. 72.



Once the Jaintia Hills was annexed, the British Government claimed rights to the raj lands as a successor to the Jaintia Syiem. In Jaintia Hills lands were classified as follows: The lands were first divided into: (i) hali lands or irrigated paddy lands, and (ii) highlands. Hali lands were again sub-divided as follows: (1) Raj lands - These used to be the property of the Syiem of Jaintia. As we have said earlier with the deposition of the Syiem of Jaintia, these became the property of the British Government and were assessed to land revenue. (2) Service lands - were allotted free of rent to Dalois and Pators, who carried on the administration. (3) Village Puja lands - the occupants of these lands used to pay rent to the Dalois or Langdohs which were set apart in each village for the purpose of worship. These lands were not assessed to revenue. (4) Private lands - held by individuals. These had been transferred from time to time by mortgage, sale or otherwise at the will of the owner. These lands were known as Bunij hali lands which were not assessed to revenue.⁶⁵

As regard highlands, these were sub-divided into (1) Private lands having the same sort of tenure as hali private lands. (2) Unclaimed lands or Government waste

65. Report of the United Khasi-Jaintia Autonomous District Commission in the matter of creation of new Autonomous District for the Jowai Sub-division, (Government of Assam, Shillong, 1964), pp. 18-19.

land. Raj hali lands in the Jaintia Hills had been surveyed and maps had been prepared. On such land, revenue was assessed at a uniform rate of 10 (ten) annas a bigha and periodic leases were issued to the landholders.⁶⁶

No land tax was to be paid on highlands where jhumming took place. The Government, however, decided that the people resorting to shifting cultivation would not be permitted any permanent occupation of highlands. The form of direct taxation approved by the British Government in the Jaintia Hills was a house tax and a person paying that tax was charged nothing more for cultivating his own lands. But any one who permanently occupied Government land must pay a rent in recognition of Government rights. No private rights in respect of highlands were recognised by Government and were not also required to pay any compensation if such lands were taken over by the Government for any purpose.⁶⁷

In regard to service lands the Government decided that the service lands of those officials appointed or recognised by Government, that is, the Dalois, Pators should be retained and it also included those service lands occupied by Langdohs, Puja officials and the Syiem servants

66. Ibid., p. 19.

67. Ibid., p. 20.

but the occupants of all other Raj hali lands were required to pay revenue. The settlement of these Raj hali lands were afterwards ordered to take effect from January 1, 1887, and a simple set of settlement rules and forms of registers were sanctioned by the Chief Commissioner in 1888. In 1889, the settlement of the Raj hali lands having hitherto been annual, it was decided to introduce decennial settlement into six circles, where experience showed that the occupants were not inclined to relinquish the lands. In 1893, issue of periodic leases in six more circles was sanctioned. In 10 (ten) Daloiships, decennial leases of Raj hali lands were introduced and in 4 (four) the annual settlements were continued. In the remaining six Daloiships and in three Sirdar circles no Raj hali lands were reported at that time of that settlement.⁶⁸ The position in regard to land revenue in the two Sub-divisions of Khasi and Jaintia Hills was summarised in the following words by Sir W. Ward in his introduction to the Assam Land and Revenue Manual 1896: "In Jaintia Hills, all Raj hali lands pay land tax and in regard to other lands, no land tax is assessed, the people are being allowed to cultivate and jhum as much land as they please or payment of a house tax."⁶⁹ this was the position up to 1896. The land system

68. Ibid., p. 20.

69. Ward, W.E. Introduction to the Assam Land Revenue Regulation 1886; (Shillong, 1931), p. 159.

in Jaintia Hills, had undergone a considerable change, though it had by no means been finalised. A much larger area had come under hali cultivation and had been assessed to land revenue.⁷⁰

The result of the freedom struggle was that it seems that the Jaintia people's power of resistance was broken by the British who were now determined to establish their supremacy over the hills. The British in order to achieve their aims adopted certain administrative policy which had a great impact on the traditional institutions. This social disorganisation which was a result of British policy gave birth to a new organisation called the Jaintia Durbar which later on played a very important role in Jaintia politics.

70. Report of the United Khasi-Jaintia Autonomous District Commission in the matter of Creation of New Autonomous District for the Jowai Sub-division, (Government of Assam, Shillong, 1964), p. 20.

CHAPTER IV

JAINTIA DURBAR

JAINTIA DURBAR

With the annexation of these hills, the people lost not only their ancient freedom but also unfortunately their fine traditional and noble institutions. We have seen earlier that shortly after this upsurge had passed away, Jaintia Hills was consolidated into a Sub-Division under the charge of a Sub-Divisional Officer and the allegiance of the Dalois was directed to him. He was responsible to the Deputy Commissioner stationed at Shillong for all his actions. Appeals from him lay with the Deputy Commissioner. A more definite pattern of administrative control was emphasised and the house tax and land revenue imposed were paid punctually, whereas other conciliatory steps were adopted.¹

After the Anglo-Jaintia War of 1860-63, the British retained the indigenous devices of traditional democracy. At the same time the power of the Dalois was curtailed. They were regarded merely as commission agents of the

1. Barih, H. Meghalaya, (North-Eastern India News and Feature Service, Shillong, 1974), p. 154.

British, while retaining a semblance of civil and criminal jurisdiction over petty matters. But this reduction of power was only between the Dalois and the British authorities. The fact that the Deputy Commissioner of the District had the power to approve the election of the Dalois also makes it clear that the power over the Dalois had passed to the British administration. The people then respected the Dalois, not so much because they agreed that he should be the Daloi, but because of the fear of the authority which he derived from the British. So between the Dalois and the people, the former enjoyed more power than ever before, though that power was simply the radiation of the British power. In fact, in matters of precedence, the Dalois were raised from the third to the first rank. The Dalois were quite satisfied with the new power they received from the British and the people could not, under such circumstances, start any movement against the strong police system of the British.²

The British not only imposed a new pattern of administration in Jaintia Hills, but modern education was introduced. It was the Christian Missionaries who brought with

2. Pakem, B. "The Socio-Political System of the Jaintia Tribe of Assam: An Analysis of Continuity and Change" in Singh, K.S. (ed.), Tribal Situation in India, (Simla, 1972), Vol. 13, p. 355.

them not only Western ideas of religion but also modern education. In 1854 at the instance of the then Governor-General of India, Lord Dalhousie, the Government extended some financial help to the Welsh Presbyterian Mission to enable them to execute successfully their schemes of spreading elementary education in Jaintia Hills. With this help, the Mission could start a School at Jowai, the principal village of Jaintia Hills in 1854. The establishment of this School marked the beginning of education in Jaintia Hills.³

The Missionaries provided theological education and training to local people so that they could assume leadership. A highly democratic organisation was also built up for the governance of the Church with the Assembly at the apex and the Synod for each area including one for Khasi and Jaintia Hills. There were various church Committees and Assemblies⁴ which met once a year. Elections were also held for various Committees at various levels every

3. Jones, G.A. Ka History Jong Ka Balang, (Synod Church House, Shillong, 1966), pp. 40-41.

4. Before 1950 the Synod was the apex body which covers the whole of North East and then we have the Assembly for the Khasi and Jaintia Hills but after 1950 the Assembly was the apex body and it met once in two years while the meeting of the Synod was held every year in the Khasi and Jaintia Hills.

year. Such kind of organisational structure encouraged a sense of leadership.⁵ Because of the education imparted by the Western Missionaries, local leadership of high calibre began to emerge. Against this new background, the awareness of political rights began.

The result was that the year 1900 saw the formation of the Jaintia National Union in Jaintia Hills which was later known as the Jaintia Durbar. The first pioneers of this Union were Mr. Hamilton Gatphoh, Rev. Siang Blah, Rev. Samuel Shallam, Rev. Shai Rabooh Manner, Messrs Jones Passah, Kiang Gatphoh, Kiri Dkhar and Singkdung Laloo.⁶ Most of these leaders were Christians (Jaintia) intellectuals being educated in theology and trained in the procedures of the Church. This Union used to meet very often to discuss affairs which affected the whole Jowai Sub-Division. The resolutions of this Union were sent by memorandum to the Government.⁷

STRUCTURE OF THE JAINTIA DURBAR

According to the Constitution of the Jaintia Durbar, the following should be the office bearers of the Durbar

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5. Natarajan, N. The Missionary Among the Khasis, (Sterling, Delhi, 1977), p. 71.
 6. Constitution of the Jaintia Durbar, (Jowai, 1954, 3rd edition), p. 1.
 7. Ibid.

who were either duly elected or nominated – President, Vice-President, Secretary, Assistant Secretary, Treasurer and two Auditors.⁸

The President should hold office for a period of two years and after the expiry of his term, his place would be taken over by the Vice-President. For the post of Vice-President a new one would be elected after every two years. The Secretary shall be in office for a period of one year only then the Assistant Secretary would take over from him. Election would be held every year for the post of Assistant Secretary. The Treasurer should hold office for a period of two years after which a new one would be elected. The Auditors should remain as auditors for two years.⁹

POWERS AND FUNCTIONS

President

- i) All meetings of the Jaintia Durbar should be opened by the President at stated time and places, by delivering the introductory speech. He should also have the power to prorogue the meeting.
- ii) He has the power to maintain the decorum of the Durbar and to disallow any discussion falling outside the agenda.

8. Ibid., p. 4.

9. Ibid., pp. 7-8.

- iii) He has the power to give his casting vote in case of a tie.
- iv) He has the power to give his ruling whenever necessary.
- v) He should instruct the Secretary to convene any meeting or committee of the Durbar if the situation so demanded.
- vi) The President is to preside over all meetings or committees of the Jaintia Durbar.¹⁰

Vice-President

He should assist or take over all the functions of the President when he is absent or needs his assistance. If both of them are absent due to unavoidable reasons the members attending the meeting of the Durbar should elect the pro tempore Chairman who would preside over the meeting.¹¹

Secretary

- i) The Secretary shall record all the minutes of discussion in the proceedings of the meeting of the Durbar or its Committees.
- ii) He should read the minutes of the previous Durbar or Committee at every meeting of the Durbar or its Committee.

10. Ibid., pp. 4-5.

11. Ibid.

- iii) He should read all the important works that should be made known to the Durbar or its Committee.
- iv) He should write correspondence to important leaders or Government Officers informing them about the resolution of the Durbar or its Committee whenever necessary.
- v) He should circulate the notices throughout Jaintia Hills by sending them to the Sub-Durbars or through public announcement.
- vi) He should convene a meeting or committee at any time as instructed by the President.
- vii) He should keep all the records and documents of the Durbar.
- viii) He should prepare the agenda for transaction in any committee meeting of the Durbar.¹²

Assistant Secretary

The Assistant Secretary should whenever required assist or take over the functions of the Secretary.¹³

Treasurer

He should maintain all the funds of the Durbar and keep detailed records of the accounts of the Durbar

12. Ibid., pp. 6-7.

13. Ibid.

and keep the Durbar informed about the accounts whenever it meets. In case he cannot present the report of the account personally, he should send such report through the Secretary.¹⁴

Auditors

They should check or examine the accounts kept by the Treasurer and give their report to the Annual Meeting of the Durbar.¹⁵

Committees

The Jaintia Durbar according to Article X of its Constitution should have two Committees: (i) The Working Committee, and (2) The Emergent Committee.

Working Committee

The Committee consists of all the office bearers of the Durbar and thirty eight other members who would be nominated by the Durbar in the following manner – Two members from each Elaka plus four others from among the regular members of the Durbar. The quorum of the Working Committee should be nine. The Secretaries of the Sub-Durbars should be ex-officio members of the Working Committee.

14. Ibid.

15. Ibid.

The Emergent Committee

Its function is to transact all business on behalf of the Durbar in time of exigencies if the Working Committee cannot be convened immediately. At any rate there should be three members besides the President and the Secretary of the Jaintia Durbar in an Emergent Committee. The Secretary should try to inform as many members of the Working Committee as possible to be in the Emergent Committee.¹⁶

Sub-Durbar

Besides the two Committees there are a number of Sub-Durbars in Jaintia Hills. A Sub-Durbar is a village Durbar or an association of a few villages within an Elaka in Jaintia Hills or in any places outside Jaintia Hills inhabited by the Jaintias. The aims and objectives of such Sub-Durbar are to have an understanding with the Jaintia Durbar in any matters relating to an Elaka or villages within an Elaka.¹⁷

General Meeting

The General Meeting of the Jaintia Durbar was held annually at places and time fixed by the President, but if he felt necessary he could convene the General Meeting many times.¹⁸

16. Ibid., p. 9.

17. Ibid., p. 12.

18. Ibid., p. 10.

ORGANISATION OF THE JAINTIA DURBAR

Membership

Any Jaintia is eligible to be a member of the Jaintia Durbar provided he attains the age of eighteen years and is ready to abide by the rules and regulations of the Durbar and has to pay a subscription fee of not less than two annas per annum. A member of the Jaintia Durbar cannot be a member of any political party whether a regional or national party.¹⁹ Those who were members of any political party cannot be members of the Jaintia Durbar until and unless they resign from the party. Any Scheduled Tribe who is residing within the boundaries of Jaintia Hills for not less than three years is eligible to be a member of the Jaintia Durbar. A member loses his membership if he fails to pay his subscription at the end of the year after being reminded by the Secretary; if he opposes or violates the decision of the Durbar or if he does not abide by the Constitution of the Durbar. Any member who wishes to resign his membership from the Durbar can do so by informing in writing either to the President or Secretary fifteen days before the General Meeting was held. The

19. Ibid., p. 2. A member of Jaintia Durbar ... national party is in reference to the post independence period when political party came into existence in the Jaintia Hills.

members of the Durbar remain as members unless they resigned or are expelled. Those who resigned or those who were expelled should be eligible for being re-admitted if the Working Committee gives its consent.²⁰

Election

All the office bearers of the Jaintia Durbar should be elected in the Working Committee of the Durbar from among its own members. The Working Committee then reports the results of the election to the General Body Meeting of the Jaintia Durbar for its approval. An office bearer could be re-elected even after the expiry of his term and no office bearer should quit office without informing the Durbar. If an office bearer leaves his office post without the knowledge of the Durbar, the Durbar could punish or take disciplinary action against such office bearer. If the term of the office bearers or members of a Committee expires before any election is held, they would have to continue till the meeting of the Durbar is held.²¹

Working Committee

The place and time for the meeting of the Working Committee was decided by the Secretary. A member of the Working Committee who failed to attend three consecutive

20. Ibid., pp. 2-4.

21. Ibid., pp. 7-8.

meetings or who expired while in office, should be replaced by another who would remain in office till the end of the tenure of the Working Committee. The Working Committee would consider the proposal received from the Sub-Durbar or from any quarter and forward them to the General Meeting of the Durbar if necessary. It would also prepare agenda for the General Meeting of the Durbar and it also had the power to look into the activities of any delinquent member and its decision should be final. It had the power to make rules for the affairs of the Durbar and to appoint Sub-Committees whenever necessary.²²

General Meeting

The General Meeting of the Durbar should be convened by the President and it would meet at least once a year. The General Meeting would not admit any proposal except those being sent from recognised Sub-Durbars. If a member of the Durbar felt necessary that the Working Committee should meet for some important reason, like the welfare of Jaintia Hills, could do so by informing the President in writing, giving his reason as to why such meeting should be held, but he must also get at least two or more members of the Working Committee supporting his views. This should be brought to the notice of the President much earlier.²³

22. Ibid., pp. 9-11.

23. Ibid.

Fund

The Jaintia Durbar should have its own fund for all its expenditures. The Working Committee should find ways and means in raising funds and utilisation of the funds should be with the approval of the Durbar.²⁴

Sub-Durbar

Those who wished to establish new Sub-Durbars could do so by informing the President of the Jaintia Durbar in writing, together with the names of their office bearers. The President would put forward their applications to the Working Committee who would decide whether to accept them or not. Each Sub-Durbar would have a register of its own in which all the names of their members were recorded. The meeting of all the sub-durbars should always be held before the General Meeting of the Jaintia Durbar. Anyone who was not a member of the Jaintia Durbar could not be a member of any sub-durbar.²⁵

Constitution

The Constitution of the Jaintia Durbar was subject to amendment but this could be done only with the approval of the Durbar.²⁶

24. Ibid.

25. Ibid., p. 13.

26. Ibid.

Composition and Role of the Jaintia Durbar

The Jaintia Durbar was composed of the representatives of the Provincial Durbars (Durbar Raid) which were known as Sub-Durbars for the purpose. The representatives would present their requirements to the Jaintia Durbar, which in turn, forwarded the scheme to the Government. The scheme worked very well and the people were very much benefited. In the beginning the Jaintia Durbar was simply a socio-economic organisation, and at times acting as a pressure group. Though it recommended all candidates in the 1937 and 1946 elections, it was not a political party, as it did not set up its own candidate. Only after independence it developed itself into a political party when it set up its own candidate in the 1957 general elections.²⁷

In 1931 at a meeting held at Lulong Club Jowai the Jaintia National Union was renamed as the Jaintia Durbar. It was in this meeting that it was decided that the Durbar should meet two or three times annually to draft the Constitution and at the same time to collect funds in order to construct a Hall for the Durbar in which members from different parts of Jaintia Hills could meet.²⁸

27. Pakem, B. "The Socio-Political System of the Jaintia Tribe of Assam: An Analysis of Continuity and Change" in Singh, K.K. (ed.), Tribal Situation in India, (Simla, 1972), Vol. 13, p. 358.

28. Constitution of the Jaintia Durbar, op.cit., p. ii.

In 1934 a resolution passed by the Durbar of 1931 was implemented and the Durbar began to function in accordance with the provisions of the Constitution as drafted in that year.²⁹

Before 1937, the Jaintia Hills together with the Khasi Hills was declared as a backward area and therefore not represented in the Assam Legislative Council.³⁰ Rev. Lowell Gatphoh and several others from Khasi and Jaintia Hills submitted a memorandum to the Government of Assam that the Khasi and Jaintia Hills should not be classed any longer as backward District because from the point of literacy it occupied the second position in the whole of Assam, from the point of female education it stood first, from the point of political system it was first because democratic institutions functioned in it from time immemorial. Even the Daloi, the Waheh-Chnong in the villages were elected. The people understood the element of democracy. Therefore, Gatphoh demanded that two seats should be allotted, one for the Khasi Hills and another for the Jaintia Hills in the Assam Legislative Council.³¹

29. Ibid.

30. Ibid., p. 12.

31. Rao, V.V. A Century of Tribal Politics in N.E. India 1874-1974, (Delhi: S.Chand and Company, 1976, 1st edition), p. 477.

When Sir Egbert Laurie Lucas Hammond the then Governor of Assam made an official visit to Jowai in 1928, a memorandum was submitted to him by the people of the Jowai Sub-Division. It was pointed in the memorandum that the Jaintias were a peculiar race and the peculiarity marked them different from the powerful and civilised races in India and also from other hill tribes in the Province of Assam. The system of "matriachism" prevailed among them and as such their political institutions, social and moral customs, were influenced by the system. Having fully realised this fact, they took a definite step to submit a memorandum to the Royal Commission with the knowledge of the Governor praying for the inclusion of the British portion of the Khasi and Jaintia Hills District, the whole of Jaintia Hills being a British territory in the Governor Council under the Reform Act.³²

The Jaintias were always under the impression that His Majesty's Government were quite sincere in holding out to all races and classes of people in India the goal of self government and at the same time they did not consider that the principles of self-government implied a uniformity in political organisation and institutions of

32. Memorandum submitted to His Excellency Sir Egbert Laurie Lucas Hammond, (Jowai, 1928), p. 1.

the different races in India. They believed that during the era of the British Government which was far less than a hundred years, they had gone through such changes in their life namely economics, educational, social and religious, as would seem to threaten to alter the basis of their social life. But they were grateful that the political organisation representing the old system of administration which prevailed in Jaintia Hills in its independent State, had been kept intact by the British Government and thereby preserved their racial, consciousness and inspired in the Jaintia people a faith in the peculiar mission entrusted to the British people to develop all subjects along their traditional political lines towards the goal of self-government.³³

The geographical situation of the sub-division in the Province combined with the advantage of its being in the district in which was the seat of the Assam Government had promoted the evolution of political ideas among the Jaintia people. Political awakening had taken place due to the real and solid work that had been done by the British Government in building up the political unit in Jaintia Hills.³⁴

33. Ibid., pp. 1-2.

34. Ibid.

It was the great desire of the Jaintia people to avail of the offer by the Government the extension to the people of the power which would ultimately lead to self-government. They appeared now to have been prepared to give up their earlier demand for re-instating the Jaintia Syiem and restoring his lost Kingdom, although such demand was in consonant with the principles of self-government and they were ready to follow the lines of political development laid down by the Government. This they did, because of their great desire to maintain a permanent and direct connection with the British. They had accordingly demanded for a separate constituency which in fact Government itself, had in mind at the preparatory stage of the Reform Act. The Jaintia people were against the idea of converting the Khasi-Jaintia into a frontier tribe and such a policy would be opposed by them.³⁵

There was a protest in Jowai and a campaign was conducted vigorously by some Jaintia leaders against the inclusion of the Jaintia Hills in the Reforms. They even formed an Association known as the Anti-Reforms Movement with Mr B.M. Shullai and Mr Tamon Roy Passah as the President and Secretary. According to them, many in Jaintia Hills did not understand the advantages or disadvantages

35. Ibid.

or being included in the Reforms since the majority of the people could not even read so it was very difficult for them to decide whether the Reforms were good or bad for the Jaintia Hills. The Anti-Reforms leaders felt that these Reforms were meant only for those people or race which were more advanced but not for the Jaintia Hills since the people were still backward and poor. They feared that the Jaintia people would be swamped by the people or race who were far more superior than them. In supporting their stand the Anti-Reforms leaders pointed out that they did not want the Jaintias to be reduced to a minority in their homeland as what happened to the Ahoms in Assam. They were also afraid that by being included in the Reforms the Government would have every right to increase the tax on them. The Jaintia Durbar had already supported the Reforms but the Anti-Reforms felt that Jaintia Hills could be safeguarded or given special protection only by being out of the Reforms. Finally, the Anti-Reformists had to give up as they could not get sufficient number of people to support them.³⁶ As a reaction against the Anti-Reforms

36. Nichols Roy, J.J.M. Khasi and Jaintia Hills Inside and Outside the Reform, (Published by J.J.M. Nichols Roy, Shillong, 1936), p. 38; Appeal from the President and Secretary of the Anti-Reforms Movement dated Jowai the 15 August 1932.

Movement the representatives and people of Jaintia Hills in 1935 submitted a memorandum to the Governor of Assam. They pointed out that as there were few people who attempted in 1932 to have the Jowai Sub-Division excluded from the coming Reforms and again in 1935 they were moving the Government to exclude the Sub-Division from the Reforms, so they again reiterated their stand that the people from the Sub-Division were thoroughly satisfied with the action of the Government in including the Jowai Sub-Division in the Reforms. According to them, it would be a terrible misfortune for any Government to pay any heed to the petition for the exclusion of the Sub-Division from the Reforms. The Anti-Reformists who were making this attempt probably based their hopes on the fact that Schedule Sixth of the Government of India Act was temporarily withdrawn by Parliament for further consideration. The Reformists believed that the Assam Government would not in any way cherish any doubt that it was the choice of the Jaintia people. Hence they asked the Governor to see that the District of Khasi and Jaintia Hills remained inside the Reforms with the seats as recommended by the Assam Government.³⁷

37. Memorandum submitted to the Governor of Assam by the Representatives and People of Jaintia Hills, (Jowai, 1935), pp. 1-2.

OFFICIAL VIEWS

The future of the Khasi and Jaintia Hills received careful consideration from the Government of Assam. The Government of Assam was then of the opinion that with the exception of the Shillong Municipality, the Khasi and Jaintia Hills should be excluded from the Province of Assam in the new Constitution because it was felt that these areas had nothing in common with the rest of the Province. It was also not reasonable to allow the Khasi and Jaintia Hills to elect its representatives and at the same time protect it against the legislation of the Assembly. Again, since the district was a deficit district the rest of the Province would generally resent the burden which the administration of these areas placed on the Provincial revenues, and they were afraid that their own political growth and material development were impeded or may be impeded by their being yoked to the district. Further, it was felt that the existing restrictions on the power of the Legislative Council to legislate for the backward tracts were necessary because the Khasi and Jaintia Hills must be allowed to develop on their own lines and be protected against exploitation and the subversion of their rules and customs by a different civilization. For these reasons it seemed that the Government of Assam was convinced that in the interest of the Khasi and Jaintia Hills and of the

rest of the Province, the Khasi and Jaintia Hills should be excluded from the Province of Assam. Thus, the Government of Assam recommended the total exclusion of the Khasi and Jaintia Hills from the Legislative control of Assam.³⁸ But in their supplementary memorandum to the Simon Commission, the Government of Assam, however, changed its mind and recommended the inclusion of the Khasi and Jaintia Hills in the Reformed Council.³⁹

Hutton, one of the British Officials in the Hill areas was of the opinion that the Jaintia Hills might be included in the Reformed Province of Assam. He based his suggestion on certain reasons, first the people of Jaintia Hills were familiar in some way with the principle of election as the Dalois or Headmen employed in the administration of that area were chosen by limited election, from certain families. Secondly, in the administration of the area there was somewhat nearer approach in some respects to the plains system, as land revenue or a similar tax was realized on certain lands, and Civil Police have been more frequently employed than in other hill districts. Thirdly, the people

38. Memoranda of the Government of Assam on the Working of the Reformed Government together with the Recommendations of the Local Government prepared for the Indian Statutory Commission, July 1928, (Calcutta, 1930), pp. 99-101.

39. Rao, V.V. Op.cit., p. 59.

generally were much richer, better educated and had a higher standard of comfort than in other hill districts and several of the inhabitants paid income tax.⁴⁰

In the month of November 1928, while Sir Egbert Laurie Lucas Hammond was on tour in the Khasi and Jaintia Hills District he met Rev. J. Ceredig Evans and had consulted him about the idea of including the Khasi and Jaintia Hills in the Reforms. Rev. J. Ceredic Evans who had been in the Hills among the tribes for 41 years was of the opinion that the Khasi and Jaintia Hills should be left as they were, because he was of the idea that this would be to the satisfaction of a great number of people. In spite of different opinions expressed by Officers and others it seemed that the Governor after touring the area was fully convinced to include the Khasi and Jaintia Hills inside the Reforms but at the same time protect or safeguard them against exploitation.⁴¹

The Deputy Commissioner, Khasi and jaintia Hills wrote that matters had gone too far and that it would not be possible to exclude them from the operation of reforms.

40. Memoranda of the Government of Assam on the Working of the Reformed Government together with the Recommendations of the Local Government prepared for the Indian Statutory Commission, July 1928, (Calcutta, 1930), p. 117.

41. Ibid., pp. 565-566.

He said that the matter was not referred to him. It was decided by the Government itself. A deputation approached Sir Laurie Hammond when he visited Jowai. He decided in favour of inclusion under reforms. It was true that political opinion was confined to few educated men but they were vocal and influential. As pointed out, earlier, the Deputy Commissioner also pointed out that there was a campaign in Jowai against the inclusion but they had to give up as they did not get sufficient support. Thus, since total exclusion would give rise to vehement protests, the Deputy Commissioner recommended partial exclusion.⁴²

The Commissioner of Surma Valley recommended the exclusion of the British portion of the Khasi and Jaintia Hills excluding the Municipal and the Cantonment areas of Shillong. The Commissioner thought that the argument of Rev. Nichols-Roy that the percentage of literacy was higher in the Khasi Hills was ridiculous. The number of Khasis who had been to School was no doubt relatively large but the standard of literacy attained by most of them was below the lower Primary. "The vast majority of the Khasis would like to stick to their ancestral customs and it will be a great injury to them to imperil these because of the

42. Rao, V.V. Op.cit., pp. 89-90.

vocal few who would betray their race for their own glorification or gain."⁴³

The Government of Assam considered the views expressed by its officers and also of Hutton. It agreed with its Deputy Commissioner of Khasi and Jaintia Hills. The Government said that any proposal to exclude the Khasi and Jaintia Hills from the new constitution would arouse the most intense public opposition from the leading Khasis. Therefore, it recommended that the British portion of the Khasi and Jaintia Hills District, other than the British portion of the Shillong Municipal and Cantonment areas should be a partially excluded area.⁴⁴

Rev. L. Gatphoh from Jaintia Hills Sub-Division and his counterpart Rev. Nichols-Roy from the Khasi Hills expressed themselves categorically in favour of political advancement of their hills and their inclusion in the proposed reforms.⁴⁵ We may now note the opinion of Rev. Nichols-Roy (supporting his stand for the inclusion of the Khasi and Jaintia Hills in the reform) supporting the coming reform starting from 1937.

43. Ibid., pp. 93-94.

44. Ibid.

45. Interview with L. Khyriem on 31st August 1982.

According to Rev. Nichols-Roy, the word 'Reform' is a term used for the new kind of Government which has come to India. There were Reforms of new kind of Government in India, two important ones before and now the third. The first one was called the Minto Reforms, the next one was called the Montford Reforms and the new one which would start functioning from April 1937 was simply called Reforms. The main purpose of the Montford Reform and the one starting from 1937 was to give more voice and power to the people.⁴⁶

The Reform beginning from 1st April 1937

According to the Government of India Act 1935, the administration was as follows:

1. The Governor administered along with the Minister who advised him.
2. There were no more members appointed by the Emperor in the administration starting from 1937 – there were only Ministers.
3. The Ministers were appointed by the Governor but only from the parties within the Council. The leader of the majority party was the Chief Minister.
4. There were two houses of Legislature. One was called the Legislative Council with only twenty-one or twenty-two members and the other was known as the

46. Nichols-Roy, J.J.M. Op.cit., p. 2.

Legislative Assembly which had one hundred and eight members elected by the people of Assam and there were no more members nominated by the Governor as in the case under the Montford Reforms.

5. All the subjects under the administration were looked after by the Ministers, there were no more Reserved subjects.
6. The Governor had the power to look into and give his decisions at critical moments; and he got the responsibility to look after the rights of the people of the native States and of those areas called partially excluded areas, in times of trouble he had the power to enact laws; and if the Legislative and Ministers could not run the administration he had the power to do it himself.⁴⁷
7. The administration in the hill areas under the Reforms was as follows:

i) Hills areas under the Reform

The Hill areas which fell under this administration were only the following:

- a) Government areas within Khasi and Jaintia Hills and Urban Shillong.

47. Ibid., pp. 7-8.

- b) Garo Hills.
- c) Mikir Hills.⁴⁸

ii) Areas outside the Reform

All other hill areas mentioned before were outside the jurisdiction of the Legislative Assembly and were placed under the jurisdiction of the Governor himself and that administrative by the Political Officer.⁴⁹

iii) Names given to the two types of administration

The above three hill areas under the new administration were called partially excluded areas, which meant areas partly outside and partly inside the administration known as the Reform. The other areas excluded from the Reform were known as Excluded Areas - areas separated from the Reform.⁵⁰

iv) Administrative within the Partially Excluded Areas - like in the Khasi and Jaintia Hills

- i) Where the same administration prevailed as was then. In these areas called Partially Excluded Areas, the administration was the same as it was under the Montford Reform. This applied to the Khasi and Jaintia Hills also.

48. Ibid., p. 8.

49. Ibid.

50. Ibid.

- ii) Local Government and Systems of appointing Dalois, Sirdars, remained the same. The procedures adopted for local administration and the Systems of appointing Dalois and Sirdars remained the same.
- iii) The systems of house taxation remained the same. In Jaintia Hills, collection of revenue from the paddy field remained the same. This was under the power of the Governor.
- iv) In the Legislature known as the Legislative Assembly which included two represented members from Government areas and Urban Shillong, incidents happening within the areas could be discussed.
- v) The manner of the working of Government Officers could also be discussed in the Assembly. In the Legislative Assembly questions could be put and discussed on the behaviour of the Government servants. This was the same as then.
- vi) As was prevalent then the laws enacted by the Legislative Assembly did not affect those areas unless the Governor introduced them by giving notice. This was under Section 92 of the Government of India Act which said: "No Act of ... the Provincial Legislature shall apply to an excluded area unless the Governor by public notification so direct...."

vii) What was different then was that – the people were then entitled to elect their representative to the Legislative Assembly. People were not allowed to elect representative in the Montford Reform, in the coming Reform operating from 1937 the people could elect their own representatives to represent them in the Legislature.

From Jaintia Hills there was one representative and from Urban Shillong and the Government Areas in the Khasi Hills, there was one representative; from Urban Shillong there was one lady who represented Shillong on behalf of the women. From Garo Hills there were two representatives and from Mikir Hills there was one.⁵¹

5. Administration for the Areas outside the Reform, that is the Excluded Areas

Areas outside the Reform were: (1) Lushai Hills, (2) Naga Hills, (3) Balipara Frontier Tract, (4) Sadiya Frontier Tract, (5) Lakhimpur Frontier Tract, (6) North Cachar Hills.

These areas were administered by the Political Officer and all of them were under the jurisdiction of the Governor. The Legislature had no jurisdiction over

51. Ibid., pp. 8-11.

them. Whatever the Political Officer did, it could not be raised in the Legislature. All the administration was according to what the Political Officer thought fit and he was the head of the District.⁵²

Safeguards by the Governor

- 1) All the laws enacted by the Legislative Assembly did not apply to the Government areas unless introduced by the Governor. In relation to these laws the Governor had the same power over the land within the Reform or outside it. This was according to Section 92.⁵³
- 2) The Legislative Assembly could not change the system of administration prevalent in villages and raj as in the appointment of Daloi and Sirdar. This depended solely on the Governor.⁵⁴
- 3) The Legislative Assembly could not change the system of taxation by any means or decisions in the Assembly. Everything depended on the Governor. The Governor listens to or considers the report of the Political Officer but the Legislative Assembly would

52. Ibid.

53. Ibid., pp. 25-26.

54. Ibid.

have no power to change the prevalent system in the matter of revenue. The whole power rested with the Governor.⁵⁵

- 4) There were special responsibilities of the Governor for the Partially Excluded Areas, that is, those areas which were partly within and partly within and partly without the Reform. Section 52(1)(a) says – "In the exercise of his function the Governor shall have the following responsibilities, that is to say:

- e) The securing of the peace and good Government of areas which by or under the provisions of this Act are declared to be partially excluded areas."

Section 52(3) again says, "If and in so far as any special responsibility of the Governor is involved, he shall, in the exercise of his functions, exercise his individual judgement as to the action to be taken."

These words clearly showed that the Governor alone had the power to especially look into the areas known as Partially Excluded Areas. The Legislative

55. Ibid.

had no power over these areas (as in the Khasi and Jaintia Hills) to make any change in the administration or system of custom relating to these areas. This was according to Section 92(2) which says: "The Governor may make resolutions for the peace and good Government of any area in the Province which is for the time being an excluded area or a partially excluded area, and any regulation so made may repeal or amend any Act of the provincial Legislature or any existing Indian Law which is for the time being applicable to the area in question."

In the subsequent part of the section, it was said that these rules were to be sent immediately to the Governor General and unless agreed by him, these rules were in effective. Besides, if the Emperor did not agree or give his consent to these rules, they could not be made effective. This was the safeguard which was clearly pointed out in Section 92 of the Government of India Act, 1935.⁵⁶

Advantages

The advantages arising from the Reform Act were:

- 1) The public had the opportunity to publicly place their demands and ventilate their grievances and needs.

56. Ibid., pp. 26-28.

- 2) The people could choose their own candidates considered fit and proper to be their representatives and whom they could approach and ventilate their needs so that these could be placed before the Legislative Assembly and to fulfil the wishes of the people.
- 3) The people could demand for reservation of jobs from the Government and they would no longer be like foreigners who had no right to have a share.
- 4) The public could hold meetings and openly speak against any misdeed committed by an Officer if his doing deprived the public of their rights and advantage.
- 5) Freedom of speech and expression in the newspaper to be maintained, regarding mal-administration by any ruler – only that it should be done with decorum.
- 6) Although there may still be a Political Officer who would administer, as in the Excluded Areas which were outside the Reform, still his power would be very much curtailed on account of the Reform allowing the Legislative Assembly to act against any of his aggressive acts. If he wanted to raise house tax and impose land revenue in place of house tax, he should not do it in haste or by force.

He should carefully consider because his actions could be criticised in the Local Durbars, published in newspaper or brought before the Legislative Assembly. And if these actions could be openly publicised, he would always be careful. People could also rise up and make demands. He could not frighten or threaten the people lest he should be condemned in the Legislative Assembly. And it was for such public criticisms that these administrators had to take note.

- 7) The right exist to demand reservation in Government service and in allotment for Contracts, in Schools and Colleges and others. Outside the Reform these rights would not exist.
- 8) Any offer to give land to foreign Companies could be opposed in several ways and protest letters could be sent to the Governor, to whom the members could also approach to present their views and to request him not to give away the land.
- 9) It is the Governor who could safeguard the people from the laws enacted in the Legislative Assembly so that it would not effect the land unless the Governor decides to introduce. The members could point out to the Governor the advantages and the disadvantages to bring into effect the law in the land.

10) In the Legislative Assembly there would be safeguard in the following manner:

If the Political Officer contemplates to give land to a foreign Company he could bring it to the Legislative Assembly, unless disallowed by the Governor. Then, the Assembly which consisted mostly of members from Assam and Sylhet no doubt would be against giving land to the foreign Companies and that they had to safeguard any part of Assam for the people of Assam. These would vote against the action of the Political Officer and so the land might not be jeopardised.

There was not much foundation in the fears of the Khasis and the Jaintias, from the people of Assam and Surma Valley. The people of Assam Valley had plenty of land and they would not try to secure land from the reserved areas of Khasi and Jaintia Hills. The people from Sylhet visited Shillong only and they could not pull or like the nature of work prevalent in Jaintia Hills and in the Government areas of Khasi Hills. Khasis also had land in Assam Valley, Cachar and Sylhet. These people came to seek land only in Shillong, and this also, only in the Syiem areas. This has nothing to do

with the Reform. The Syiem has his own responsibility. He and his durbar can do whatever they feel like for the State. No one can force them in respect of their land. The relation between this land and the Reform will not effect the power of the Syiem and his Durbar in so far as land is concerned.

- 11) The great advantage deriving from the Reform was the feeling of equality with other communities in Assam.⁵⁷ Rev. Nichols-Roy organised public meetings throughout the District and in these meetings he not only gave his lecture to the public but he also got them printed and widely circulated in the Khasi and Jaintia Hills. By doing this he succeeded in mobilising public support in favour of inclusion in the Reform.

Disadvantages

It seems that not all agreed to the idea of Rev. J.J.M. Nichols-Roy especially the Anti-Reformists. They said that the meeting of the Jaintia Durbar held on July 6th, 1932, and the decision taken in favour of inclusion in the Reform was a hasty one made by a few members who attended the meeting without taking the whole of Jaintia

57. Ibid., pp. 22-25.

Hills into consideration on such an important matter. They also put forward the following points which they feel that the Reform was not to the advantage of the people of Jaintia Hills.

- 1) By entering into the Reform it would reduce the Jaintias to a minority in their own land.
- 2) The Governor had said clearly that tax would increase under the Reform because the hill areas would be considered as at par with the plain areas.
- 3) The Governor said that the Government would not alter anything even if they did not enter the Reform. On the contrary, the Governor said that the upliftment of the area may be a slow process but it would be better for the Jaintia Hills to enter the Reform only at a later stage when they were in a position to protect themselves which means when they were equal in all respects with the people of the plains.
- 4) Since the annexation of Jaintia Hills the whole area was placed under the charge of the Political Agent and no complain was made against the prevailing administration. By entering into the Reform, they felt that it would reduce the power of the Political Agent who had played a very important

role in safeguarding the Jaintia Hills from being exploited by outsiders.

- 5) In the Reform there would be free inter-marriage. Out of these marriages there may be only one out of hundred who would have a proper marriage and the result was that it would have degraded the tribe as a whole. It would also affect the wealth and land of the people.
- 6) The advantages in the reform were only for those few educated people who would become council members or ministers with a salary of Rs. 5,500.00 a month. The people would gain nothing but instead they would have to spend more on taxes.
- 7) The Reform would also affect the functioning of the Dalois. It would be very difficult for the Dalois to uphold justice, since most of them were illiterate, so it would be very difficult for them to dispense justice, since they would have no knowledge of the laws which they have to follow strictly as a result of the area falling under the Reform. Moreover, the power of the Dalois would be reduced to mere tax collectors and recruiting coolies.

All the powers would have been in the hands of the Sub-Deputy Collectors.⁵⁸

With the passing of the Government of India Act, 1935, and the holding of Election in 1937 the people witnessed a complete change in the political sphere. As mentioned earlier the Jaintia Durbar recommended all the candidates in the election.⁵⁹ During that time there were no party politics in Jaintia Hills and hence the Jaintia Durbar had no alternative but to send its representatives to represent the Jaintia people. It was for this reason that candidates for the Jowai seat contested the election as Independent candidates. Those candidates who either won or lost still remained members of the Durbar.⁶⁰ It is interesting to note that the Jaintia Durbar, though simply an organisation not only recommended all candidates in the election but also controlled the representatives from Jaintia Hills. The representatives from Jaintia Hills either to the State Legislature or the District Council, who were members of the Jaintia Durbar, may affiliate themselves with any political party if they considered that such affiliation

58. Appeal from the President and Secretary of the Anti-Reform Movement dated Jowai, the 15th August 1932, pp. 1-4.

59. Rao, V.V. Op.cit., p. 477.

60. Interview with L. Khyriem on August 31, 1982.

could serve the interest of Jaintia Hills, but they should do so on prior consultation with the Jaintia Durbar.⁶¹

Thus, under the Government of India Act, 1935, the Jaintia Hills together with the Khasi Hills were declared as Partially Excluded Areas and therefore, represented in the Assam Legislative Assembly. The Jaintia Hills were allotted the seat that is the Jowai seat. Election for this seat was held in 1937, there were three candidates, Rev. L. Gatphoh, Larsingh Khyriem and Sorendro Bareh. The total numbers of electors was 10,707, of them 55.78 per cent exercised their franchise. Gatphoh polled 75 per cent of the votes polled, Larsingh Khyriem 926, and Sorendro Bareh 720. Gatphoh was elected.⁶² Rev. L. Gatphoh was the first leader of the people of Jaintia Hills who represented them in the Assam Legislative Assembly under the Government of India Act, 1935. Thus, he became one of the first members of the Assam Legislative Assembly in 1937 and continued as such upto 1946. Rev. L. Gatphoh also worked together with such stalwarts of the Jaintia Durbar like Rev. Shai Rabooh Manner, Mr. Jones Passah, Mr. Mondon Bareh, Mr. Jeebon Roy, Mr. Sorendro Bareh and other leaders.⁶³

61. Constitution of the Jaintia Durbar, (Jowai, 1954, 3rd Edition), p. 11.

62. Rao, V.V. Op.cit., p. 477.

63. U Salonsar (Local Newspaper of Jaintia Hills), December 31, 1980, p. 3.

At the annual meeting of the Durbar held in September 1940, it was realised that the Constitution should be revised and to make ways for framing the Constitution for the Sub-Durbars which was already formed in 1934-40 and also for new durbars to be established in years to come. The Durbar empowered few leaders like Messrs Iang Pariat, L. Khyriem (MLA, 1946-52, 1957-62), W.S. Shullai, M.A., B.L., Dr. R. K. Tariang (MDC 1952-57) to revise the constitution. The revised constitution was passed by the Durbar meeting held on December 12, 1940.⁶⁴

In 1951, another meeting of the Jaintia Durbar was held. The meeting which was held on August 1, 1951, felt necessary that the Constitution needed to be amended so that the Durbar could function in accordance with the changing times. The Durbar then chose few leaders like Messrs L. Khyriem (MLA, 1946-52, 1957-62, MDC, 1983-88), S. Bareh, J. Roy, B.M. Shullai, N. Rymbai, B.L. Katsing Shallam, B.A., Kistobin Rymbai (MLA, 1952-57), T. Roy Passah, Sahon Roy Lanong, U Span Suchiang, U Jata Dkhar and Godwen Harries to look into the matter. These leaders met on February 28, 1952, and after two or three sittings they could accomplish the task given to them. The General Meeting

64. Constitution of the Jaintia Durbar, (Jowai, 1954), pp. ii-iv.

of the Jaintia Durbar which met on January 27, 1953, approved the revised Constitution. The Durbar then decided to work according to the Constitution that had been adopted.⁶⁵

In October 1957, when Pandit G.B. Pant, Union Home Minister of India, visited Shillong, the Jaintia Durbar submitted a memorandum to him. According to this Memorandum, the representatives of the Jowai Division demanded for a separate District Council for Jaintia Hills and also reservation of two seats in the State Legislative Assembly for the people of the Sub-Division. They also pointed out that if it was not proper to grant them a separate District Council, they would prefer to be severed from the District and even centrally administered as they were afraid that they might be dominated by the majority which constituted the United Khasi and Jaintia Hills District Council.⁶⁶

The Jaintia Durbar in 1960 was affiliated with the All Party Hill Leaders' Conference which was spearheading the Hills State Movement among the Hill tribes of Assam.⁶⁷ Towards the end of 1960, the Government of

65. Ibid.

66. Memorandum to Pandit G.B. Pant by the Representatives of the District Council and others from Jowai Division, (Jowai, 1957), p. 6.

67. Sten, H.W. Meghalaya Year Book, (Published by H.W. Sten, Shillong, 1977), p. 100.

India came forward with the first offer to the hill leaders. The offer is popularly known as the Scottish pattern of administration.⁶⁸ The President and the Assistant Secretary of the Jaintia Durbar with their followers decided to continue the fight for the Hill State but on the other hand the Vice-President, the General Secretary and their followers were for accepting the Scottish Pattern.⁶⁹ The outcome of this struggle between the two opposite camps was that this organisation which has done much for the people of Jaintia Hills became defunct over the issue of the Scottish pattern of administration. The Scottish pattern of administration was an outcome of the Hill State Movement which was to be discussed later on in Chapter Six. As a result of the split of the Jaintia Durbar, a section of members of the Durbar under the leadership of the General Secretary supported the demand for a separate District Council which was to be discussed in the next chapter.

68. Bareh, H. Meghalaya, (North Eastern India News and Feature Service, Shillong, 1974), p. 162.

69. Kharmih, J. A Brief Introduction about the Jaintia Durbar, (Published by J. Kharmih, General Secretary, Jaintia Durbar Revival Committee, Jowai, 1978), p. 3.

CHAPTER V

MOVEMENT FOR A SEPARATE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MOVEMENT FOR A SEPARATE DISTRICT COUNCIL

It was only after 1947, following the attainment of Independence, that the hill district came to be fully under the purview of the Assam state administration. Previous to the advent of the British the hill people lived free and independent in numerous democratic republics characterised by freedom, equality of sexes and a total absence of caste, class or vested interests. Whatever contact they had with the surrounding plains areas was in the role of conquerors, rulers, or traders. During the British regime, owing to the marked difference of their socio-political set up from that of the surrounding plain areas and because of the fear that in the changing social and political patterns they might not be able to hold their own against an overwhelming majority from outside, they were either totally or partially excluded from the normal provincial administration. Although they were not subjected to any political domination other than that of the British, the same cannot be said about other spheres. Consequence upon the British rule, a large number of plains people were

allowed to enter and settle down in some hill districts. This sudden and imposed contact, especially in the economic field, inevitably resulted in the economic displacement of the hill people in the hands of the non-tribal people living in their midst. This fact, coupled with the atmosphere of political emancipation pervading the national scene on the eve of Independence, led a section of the hill people to demand, in 1945, the creation of a hill province. A memorandum known as 'A case of the Hill Tribes of the North East Frontier of India' which was submitted to the British Administration says,

A unified combination of these Tribes will surely so strengthen them as to be masters in their own homes, when they will be in a position to prevent their exploitations, and, at the same time command respect from their neighbours outside, which will eventually bring about a more healthy atmosphere than exists at present. 1

During the British rule the balance of political power in Assam was held between the people of the Surma Valley (the Sylhet District and the Cachar District) and the people of the Assam valley, but with the going of Sylhet to East Pakistan following the partition the pendulum of political power swung completely to the Assam valley. The

1. Memorandum to the Commission for the Hill Areas of Assam submitted by the APHLC, (Shillong, 1965), p. 2.

hill people who had so long led a sheltered and protected life found themselves suddenly exposed to the full blast of political changes. They, however, accepted the situation and although some of them belonged to the princely States, they agreed to link up their future with the rest of India, and subsequently these states were merged with the rest of the hill areas in Assam.²

In 1947, soon after India attained its independence, Gopinath Bordoloi, the then Premier of Assam declared "the new accepted policy of his Government was Assam for the Assamese."³ In the same year, he once again asserted: "undoubtedly, Assam is for the Assamese, by Assam is meant the entire territory within the geographical limit of the State of Assam and by Assamese is meant only those whose mother tongue is Assamese."⁴ Nilamani Phookan went a step further when he expressed his view on the floor of the State Assembly thus:

Regarding our language, Assamese must be the State language. There can be no gain saying of it even if the Government stand or fall by it. All the languages of the different communities and their culture

2. Ibid.

3. Lyngdoh, R.S. "Evolution of Meghalaya" (A seminar paper given in the North-Eastern Hill University, Shillong, 1976), p. 1.

4. Ibid.

will be absorbed in Assamese culture. This State cannot nourish any other language in this province. 5

Again, when the Sixth Schedule was taken up at the Second Reading in the Constituent Assembly on September 5, 1949, Kuladhar Chaliha said thus:

If you see the background of the Schedule you will find that the British mind is still there. There is the old separatist tendency and you want to keep them away from us. You will thus be creating a Tribalstan just as you have created a Pakistan. There is no need to keep any Tribalstan away from us. 6

Rohini Kumar Choudhury wanted complete assimilation of the tribal people into the Assamese community when he said, "we want to assimilate the Tribal people, we were not given that opportunity so far."⁷ From these statements it is evident that the leading leaders of Assam valley wanted to assimilate the tribal people. It is for this reason that the hill people feel that the only way to preserve their identity and to develop their culture and way of life is only by getting a State of their own. In one of the meetings of hill leaders held in Shillong on June 16-17, 1954, Captain Sangma cited the speech of Nilamani Phookan

5. Ibid.

6. Ibid.

7. Ibid.

and observed that this Conference should be aware that the people speaking Assamese language are determined to do away with languages and culture belonging to those who do not belong to the Assamese speaking community. He therefore maintained that if this be the attitude of the Assam people who are behind the policy-makers of the State Government of Assam, the future of the hill people is really at stake. If this attitude of the Assamese brethren continues, there will be no alternative for the hill people but to go all out for a separate Hill State which will enable them to preserve their racial, identity, language and culture.⁸

The Interim Government of India, in 1947, realized the critical situation and the political aspirations of the people of the Hill Areas in Assam, in the background of the assurances said to have been given by the outgoing British rulers. It immediately appointed a sub-committee of the constituent Assembly, with the late Gopinath Bordoloi, then chief of Assam, as its chairman. This Committee, the Bordoloi Committee, was entrusted to make an on-the-spot study of the hopes and aspirations of the hill people,

8. Memorandum submitted to the State Re-organisation Commission by the Hills people of the Autonomous Districts in Assam, (Shillong, 1954), pp. 17-18.

and submit its recommendations. These recommendations were later on incorporated into the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution and provided for regional autonomy for the tribal people living in the Hill Districts; in matters affecting their custom, laws of inheritance, administration of justice, land, forest etc. The idea behind the scheme was to devolve certain legislative, administrative and judicial powers to the people, and which would help to safeguard their traditional customs and ways of life, and ensure them 'maximum autonomy' in the management of their characteristically traditional affairs.⁹

RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE BORDOLOI COMMITTEE

Thus we have seen that the Constituent Assembly appointed a Sub-Committee on the North-East Frontier (Assam) Tribal and Excluded Areas with Shri Gopinath Bordoloi as Chairman, to advise it on future administrative set up in those areas. The Committee recommended the creation of six autonomous districts including the District of Khasi and Jaintia Hills. Each of these districts was to have a District Council with not less than twenty and not more than forty members of whom not less than three-fourths shall be elected by adult franchise. The District Councils

9. Sinha, A.P. "Politics and Economic Development in the Hill Districts of Assam" in Singh, K.S. (ed.), Tribal Situation in India, (Simla, 1972), Vol. 13, p. 340.

were to have powers to make laws for the areas under their respective jurisdiction regarding:

- a) Allotment, occupation or use for agricultural, residential or other non-agricultural purposes, or setting apart for grazing, cultivation, residential or other purposes ancillary to the life of the village or town or land other than land classed as reserved forest under the Assam Forest Regulation, 1891, or other law on the subject applicable to the district:

Provided that land required by the Government of Assam for public purposes shall be allotted free of cost if vacant or if occupied on payment of due compensation in accordance with the law relating to the acquisition of the land.

- b) The management of any forest which is not a reserved forest.
- c) The use of canal or water-courses for the purpose of agriculture.
- d) Controlling, prohibiting or permitting the practice of jhum or other forms of shifting cultivation.
- e) The establishment of village or town committees and councils and their powers.

- f) All other matters relating to the village or town management, sanitation, watch and ward.¹⁰

The District Council was also recommended to have powers to make laws regarding:

- i) The appointment or succession of chiefs or headmen.
- ii) Inheritance of property.
- iii) Marriage or all other social customs.¹¹

Other powers proposed for the District Council were as follows:

- a) All the powers of a final court of appeal in respect of cases and suits between parties all of whom belong to hill tribes in its jurisdiction.
- b) The District Council may set up village councils or courts for the hearing or disposal of disputes in certain cases.
- c) The District Council shall have powers to establish or manage primary schools, dispensaries, markets, cattle pounds, ferries, fisheries, roads and

10. Report of the United Khasi-Jaintia Autonomous District Commission in the matter of creation of a New Autonomous District for the Jowai Sub-division, (Government of Assam, Shillong, 1964), p. 6.

11. Ibid., p. 7.

waterways and in particular may prescribe the language and manner in which primary education shall be imparted.

- d) For the trial of offences punishable with imprisonment of five years or more or with death or transportation for life under the Indian Penal Code or other law applicable to the district or of suits arising out of special laws or in which one or more of the parties are non-tribals, the Government of Assam may confer such powers under the Criminal Procedure Code or Civil Procedure code as the case may be on the District Council or Courts constituted by them or an officer appointed by the Government of Assam.¹²

The District Council was proposed to be given the following powers of taxation:

- a) Land revenue;
- b) Poll tax or House tax;
- c) A tax on Professions, Trades or Callings;
- d) A tax on animals, vehicles;
- e) Toll tax;

12. Ibid., p. 7.

- f) Market dues;
- g) Ferry dues;
- h) Cesses for the maintenance of its schools, dispensaries, roads.

On the basis of the above recommendations of the Bordoloi Committee, the Drafting Committee of the Constituent Assembly prepared the Sixth Schedule to the Constitution.¹³

On September 5, 1949, the draft of the Sixth Schedule was brought before the Constituent Assembly by Dr. B. R. Ambedkar. Many important leaders from Assam like Shri Gopinath Bordoloi, Shri Kuladhar Chaliha, Shri Rohini Kumar Choudhury, Shri J.J.M. Nichols-Roy along with other leaders from different provinces of India took part in the debate and with some amendment the whole Schedule was put before the Constituent Assembly which was finally adopted on September 7, 1949.¹⁴

THE SIXTH SCHEDULE

The Sixth Schedule provides for each hill district an autonomous District Council of not more than twenty four members of whom not less than three-fourths are to

13. Ibid., pp.7-8.

14. Constituent Assembly of India Debates, Vol. IX, (Delhi: Lok Sabha Secretariat, 1949), pp. 1001-1082.

be elected on the basis of adult suffrage. The Governor of Assam is required to make rules for the first Constitution of the District Council and for the holding of elections, the procedures and conduct of their business and related matters. A council is however empowered after its election to make its own rules governing these matters.

District Council had been invested with legislative powers to make laws for the administration of land, for the management of all forests other than reserved ones, to regulate jhum cultivation, regarding the appointment or succession of chiefs, headmen, etc. and relating to matters having a bearing on personal and social aspects of tribal life.

Although, unlike the position under the Government of India Act, 1935, the jurisdiction of the State Legislature covers the hill districts, its Acts on the subject do not apply to autonomous districts. They may be extended with such exceptions and modifications as are considered necessary by the District Council concerned.

District Councils possess authority for the administration of justice and are empowered to set up various types of courts including appellate ones, for the trial of suits between the tribal parties. In the administrative

sphere they could establish, construct or manage primary schools, dispensaries, roads, etc. and "prescribe the language and the manner in which primary education shall be imparted in the primary school in the districts. They enjoy the power to assess and collect land revenue on the same principles as are followed in the State of Assam generally and to levy and collect certain taxes for which they could frame regulations. They are also competent to control money-lending and trading by non-tribal persons. They get an opportunity to discuss the estimates of revenue and expenditure of state budget relating to the district before its presentation to the Assembly. There are no powers of supersession of District Council for reasons other than those attracting "the safety of India" vested in the State Government.

The Sixth Schedule provides for special arrangements for the smaller tribes. The Governor of Assam has been authorised to divide the area or areas inhabited by them into autonomous regions. Each such region can be given a separate regional council of its own in which its administration vests. A regional council has been conceived more or less on the same lines as a District Council. Both these Councils enjoy identical authority in respect of law-making, administration of justice, assessment and collection of

land revenue and taxes on lands and buildings and residential toll on persons. In administrative and certain financial matters, however, a regional council has not been invested with the powers given to a District Council.¹⁵

Though the recommendation made by the Bordoloi Committee was for the creation of six District Councils but in 1952, the District Councils were constituted in all the districts excepting Naga Hills district where the Naga National Council demanded complete independence and boycotted all elections.¹⁶

At the time the Bordoloi Committee was examining the future administrative set-up of the Tribal Areas of Assam there was a strong move for a separate District Council in Jowai Sub-Division led by Shri S. Bareh but with certain promises of equal treatment from Rev. Nichols-Roy the idea was dropped for the time being.¹⁷ Further, in the Constituent Assembly, Rev. Nichols-Roy, from the Khasi

15. Bhat, S. The Challenge of the North East, (Popular Prakashan, Bombay, 1975), pp. 6-8.

16. Rao, V.V. A Century of Tribal Politics in North-East India 1874-1974, (S. Chand and Company, New Delhi, 1976), pp. 195-196.

17. Report of the United Khasi-Jaintia Autonomous District Commission in the matter of creation of a New Autonomous District for the Jowai Sub-Division, (Government of Assam, Shillong, 1964), p. 22.

Hills was the spokesman for the areas. As such the Jaintias could not do much in expressing their opinion for separation.¹⁸

WORKING OF THE AUTONOMOUS DISTRICT COUNCIL

Thus the District Council according to the provisions of the Sixth Schedule came into existence in 1952. Under the Sixth Schedule, five hill districts, namely i) The United Khasi and Jaintia Hills, ii) The Garo Hills, iii) The Mikir Hills, iv) The North Cachar Hills, v) The Lushai Hills were given partial autonomy, and these Hill Districts have been styled as Autonomous Districts. The Sixth Schedule was formulated and given a place in the Constitution in order to protect the land, customs, practices and identities of the hill people.¹⁹ The District Council for each district consists of a specified number of members both elected and nominated. The United Khasi and Jaintia Hills District Council had a total number of twenty four members which consisted of eighteen elected members and six nominated members and of the elected members five are from the Jowai Sub-Division. The Governor was authorised

18. Pakem, B. "The Socio-Political System of the Jaintia Tribe of Assam: An Analysis of Continuity and Change", in Singh, K.S. (ed.), Tribal Situation in India, (Simla, 1972), Vol. 13, p. 363.

19. Memorandum to the Commission for the Hill Areas of Assam submitted by the APHLC, (Shillong, 1965), p.12.

to make rules for the first constitution of the Council and for the holding of election etc. and for the procedure and conduct of business of the Council when elected. The District Council was however, empowered after the election, to make its own rules governing the matters and also generally for the transaction of business pertaining to the administration of the district.²⁰

Membership

Members of the Autonomous District Council are representatives of the people in the same way as in the State Assembly and Parliament. All members shall hold office for a period of five years. A person shall not be qualified to be elected as a member unless,

- a) He is a citizen of India,
- b) He is not less than twenty five years of age,
- c) He is entitled to vote at the election of members of the District Council of that Autonomous District.²¹

Apart from these qualifications he must be a member of the Scheduled Tribe of the District. Unless a person satisfies these qualifications, he cannot become a member of the Autonomous District Council of his district.

20. Assam Autonomous Districts (Constitution of District Council Rules, 1951, Government Press, Shillong, 1951), pp. 1-3.

21. Ibid., p. 4.

No person shall be a member of the District Council of two or more districts. If a person is elected to more than one seat he has to resign all but one seat. In the event of any vacancy, the Returning Officer shall declare the candidate polling the next higher number of valid votes in that constituency as having been elected.²² If a member of the District Council resigns his seat by writing under his hand addressed to the Chairman, his seat shall become vacant. If for a period of thirty days a member is, without the permission of the Council, absent from all meetings, the Council may declare his seat vacant. When the seat is vacant the Governor shall by notification in the Gazette declare it to be vacant.

Further, the following persons are not entitled for membership of the District Council.

- a) Salaried servant of the Government of India or the Government of any state or an employee of the District Council or of a Regional Council;
- b) Person of unsound mind;
- c) An undischarged insolvent;
- d) Person who is not a citizen of India or has voluntarily acquired citizenship of a foreign State;

22. It seems that later this was ammended and this sentence was deleted because today in case of a vacancy a by-election is held.

- e) A person found to have been guilty of any offence or corrupt or illegal practices;
- f) A person convicted by a court in India of any offence;
- g) A person who has failed to lodge a return of election expenses.

These are the major disqualifications.²³

Chairman

At the beginning of the new District Council or owing to the vacancy in the office of the Chairman the election of a Chairman is necessary, the Governor shall fix a date for the holding of the election and the Deputy Commissioner or the Secretary of the District Council, as the case may be, shall send to every member notice of the date so fixed. Any member may nominate another member for election as Chairman. The nomination paper should be delivered at any time before noon at the date of election to the Deputy Commissioner or Secretary in person by the candidate himself, his seconder or proposer. The nomination paper should be signed by the proposer or seconder. The name of the member nominated should be clearly stated and the proposer should ascertain that such member is willing to serve as Chairman if elected.²⁴

23. Ibid., pp. 6-7.

24. Ibid., p. 12.

The Deputy Commissioner or any officer authorised by him on his behalf shall preside over the first meeting of the District Council. He shall preside over the first meeting of the District Council. He shall read out to the Council the names of the members who have been nominated for election as Chairman together with those of the proposer and seconder. If only one member has been nominated he shall declare that member to be elected. If more than one member has been nominated, the Council should proceed to elect a Chairman by ballot. When two or more candidates obtain an equal number of votes, the person presiding shall select the Chairman by drawing lots. The member who contested the election must first take oath and then contest the election. No member is allowed to contest without taking the prescribed oath.²⁵

The Chairman is to preside over the meeting of the Council. He shall summon the District Council to meet at such time and place he thinks fit. Not only he has the power to summon the Council but he may also prorogue it. Beside this he is specially endowed with certain powers. In case of an equality of votes he has a casting vote. He may direct a member to discontinue his speech. He may order the withdrawal of a member. He allots times for

25. Ibid., pp. 12-13.

official and non-official business. He decides all points of order and his decision is final. The Chairman also decides on the admissibility of motions.²⁶ The Chairman also has the power to regulate the conduct of business in the District Council in all matters not provided for in the Constitution or Rules.²⁷

A member holding office as Chairman of the District Council of an autonomous District shall vacate his office if he ceases to be a member of the Council. He may, at any time by writing address to the Deputy Chairman, resign his office. He may be removed from his office by a resolution of the District Council. At any sitting of the District Council, while any resolution for the removal of the Chairman from his office is under consideration, the Chairman, shall not, though he is present, preside over the meeting. He also has the right to speak in and to take part in the proceedings of the District Council while any resolution for his removal from office is under consideration. He would be entitled to vote only in the first instance on such resolution or on any other matter during such proceedings but not in the case of an equality of votes.²⁸

26. Ibid., pp. 13-15.

27. Ibid., p. 34.

28. Ibid., pp. 3-4.

Deputy Chairman

The procedure for the election of the Deputy Chairman is same as that for the election of the Chairman except that the meeting for the election of the Deputy Chairman shall be presided over by the Chairman.²⁹ While the office of the Chairman is vacant, the duties of the office shall be performed by the Deputy Chairman. The term of office of the Deputy Chairman is same as that of the Chairman.³⁰ The Deputy Chairman while presiding over the District Council shall have the same powers as the Chairman.³¹

Temporary Chairman

Beside the Chairman and the Deputy Chairman there is a temporary Chairman. At the commencement of every session the Chairman shall nominate from amongst the members of the District Council a panel of not more than two Chairmen, anyone of whom may, in the order in which he had been nominated, preside over the Council in the absence of the Chairman and the Deputy Chairman. If for any reason the Chairman is unable to carry out his duties and in the absence of the Chairman and the Deputy Chairman. If for any reason the Chairman is unable to carry out his duties and in the

29. Ibid., p. 13.

30. Ibid., p. 4.

31. Ibid., p. 13.

absence of the Deputy Chairman a member from among the panel of Chairmen nominated by the Chairman shall perform those duties for the period determined by the Chairman. When presiding over the District Council he shall have the same powers as the Chairman.³²

Executive Committee

According to the Rules framed under the Sixth Schedule there shall be an Executive Committee of the District Council, with the Chief Executive Member as the head and two other members to exercise the functions of the Committee. The Chief Executive Member shall be elected by the District Council and two other members shall be appointed by the Governor on the recommendation of the Chief Executive Member from amongst the members of the District Council. The Chairman and Deputy Chairman of the District Council are not eligible to hold the office of the Chief Executive Member or Executive Member. When the Chief Executive Member vacates or resigns his office, the other members of the Executive Committee also cease to hold office. The Executive Committee is collectively responsible to the District Council and may be removed on a vote of no-confidence passed by a majority of the members of the District Council. In case of removal of the Executive Committee, a Chief Executive

32. Ibid., p. 13.

Member for the new Executive Committee should be elected within forty eight hours by the District Council. If the District Council fails to elect the Chief Executive Member within the specified time, the Governor may appoint any member of the Council to be the Chief Executive Member and two other members of the Council as the members of the Executive Committee. The Executive Committee so constituted shall function until replaced by an Executive Committee elected by the District Council.³³

Conduct and Procedure of Business

Every member of the District Council shall, before taking his seat, make and subscribe before the Deputy Commissioner, or some person appointed on his behalf by the Governor, an oath or affirmation. All questions at any sitting of the District Council shall be determined by a majority of votes of the members present and voting. The Chairman or person, acting as such have only a casting vote in case of a tie. The quorum of a meeting of the District Council is one-thirds of the total number of members. If at any time there is no quorum, the Chairman shall adjourn or suspend the meeting until there is quorum.³⁴

33. Ibid., pp. 9-10.

34. Ibid., p. 11.

The Chairman or such other person authorised by the Governor shall summon the District Council to meet at such time and place as he thinks fit. He shall inform the District Council of the date, time and place of the meeting. The District Council shall meet four times in a year, and three months shall not elapse between its last sitting in one session and the date appointed for its first sitting in the next session.³⁵

Powers and Functions of the District Council

The powers and functions of the District Council are, broadly speaking, four – Legislative, Executive, Financial and Judicial.

Legislative Powers – The District Council has power to make laws on the allotment, occupation or use or the setting apart of land, other than reserved forests, for the purpose of agricultural or grazing or for residential or other non-agricultural purposes likely to promote the interests of the inhabitants of any village or town; the management of any forest not being a State reserved forest; the use of any canal or water course for agricultural purposes; the regulation of the practice of jhum or other forms of shifting cultivation; the establishment of town

35. Ibid., p. 15.

or village councils and the determination of their powers and functions; any other matter relating to village or town administration including town or village police, public health and sanitation, the appointment or succession of chief or headman, the inheritance of property, marriage and divorce, social customs, money-lending and trading by persons other than the scheduled tribes.

Executive Powers – As regards the executive powers, the District Council has the power to establish, construct or manage primary schools, dispensaries, markets, cattle pounds, ferries, fisheries, roads and waterways. It has also power to determine the language and the manner in which primary education should be imparted in the primary schools within its jurisdiction.

Taxation Powers – The District Councils have also powers of taxation. The District Council has power to assess and collect land revenue, levy a tax on lands and buildings, tolls on persons residing within the district, tax on professions, trades, callings and employment, tax on the entry of goods into the market for sale, tolls on passengers and goods carried in ferries, taxes for the maintenance of schools, dispensaries and roads, licences or leases for the purpose of prospecting or for extracting minerals.

The District Council has also the right for a share in the royalties derived by the State Government from licences or leases granted for the purpose of prospecting or for the extraction of minerals. The rate of sharing is determined by mutual agreement by the parties concerned.

Judicial Powers – The District Council has power to constitute village courts for the trial of suits and cases in which both of the parties are tribal persons. It may appoint suitable persons to be the members of the village courts. It may also appoint such officers as may be necessary for the execution of laws made by the District Council.

The District Council is a Court of Appeal in respect of all suits and cases triable by the Village Council. No other court except the High Court and the Supreme Court of India has jurisdiction over such suits and cases.³⁶

As mentioned earlier, the United Khasi and Jaintia Hills Autonomous District Council was established in 1952. After a few years the leaders of the Jaintia Hills felt that no progress was being made in the direction of a uniform administration throughout the District by the District Council. Accordingly, on 1st November 1957, a

36. Rao, V.V. op.cit., pp. 281-282.

memorandum was submitted to the then Union Home Minister, Sri Govind Ballabh Pant, during his visit to Shillong by the Jowai representatives of the District Council and others from the Jowai Sub-Division on various grounds asking for a separate District Council for Jowai Sub-Division and failing this, they expressed the desire for the Jowai Sub-Division to be centrally administered.³⁷ Thus after five years of the establishment of the District Council some leading representatives from Jowai submitted a memorandum to the Union Home Minister, stating among other things, that from what they experienced in the previous five years of the joint administration of the two Sub-Divisions, "each having a custom quite different from the other with regard to social, economic and political activities which play a very important part in the administration, a uniform administration was not possible." The District Council made some attempts to achieve uniformity in administration. The Council at its sitting on September 14, 1954, decided to introduce House Tax in the former Khasi States as in Jaintia Hills but the attempt proved abortive as the Khasi people refused to pay.³⁸

37. Report of the United Khasi-Jaintia Autonomous District Commission in the matter of creation of a New Autonomous District for the Jowai Sub-Division, (Government of Assam, Shillong, 1964), p. 41.

38. Ibid., p. 23.

During the British rule, the Syiems of the Khasi States were allowed to exercise higher powers in criminal justice than the Dalois of Jaintia hills. This was partly because the rulers of Khasi States were treated as semi-independent chiefs in Subsidiary Alliance with the British Government and were therefore exercising wider administrative powers than the Dalois of Jaintia Hills, who were converted into agents for the collection of revenue under the British with limited judicial powers. The same system had been allowed to continue by the District Council even after the District Council took over the administration. This fact had created dissatisfaction among the Jaintias, who felt that after the United Khasi-Jaintia Hills District Council began to function there ought to have been uniformity in administration and greater equality in the status of the Syiems and the Dalois.³⁹

The Representatives of the District Council and others from Jowai Sub-Divisions of the United Khasi and Jaintia Hills District Council submitted a memorandum to the Union Home Minister Sri G.B. Pant on November 1, 1957, and to the then Prime Minister of India, Shri Jawaharlal Nehru on December 30, 1957. The important points raised by the memorandum to the Union Home Minister are:

39. Ibid., p. 25.

1) The Jaintia Hills, also known as the Jowai Sub-Division, had since the British Regime been subjected to foreign rule and domination without affording proportionate opportunities for the upliftment, development and welfare of the people of the area. One such malady in the imposition of a dual taxation, that is, payment of Land Revenue and House Tax.

2) Their hopes for salvation and freedom from the British came on the eve of India's Independence and with the passing of the Constitution of India and the provision of the Sixth Schedule, they thought that their rights and privileges as sanctioned by the Constitution would be well assured.

3) Sometime in the year 1947, an Enquiry Committee was set up for the main purpose of constituting various District Councils. The evidence and statements given in the said committee on the basis of which the present United Khasi and Jaintia Hills District Council was constituted, assured of a uniform administration for the two Sub-Divisions, for example, the Shillong Sub-Division and the Jowai Sub-Division. The United Khasi and Jaintia Hills District Council for the two Sub-Divisions began functioning since the year 1952, that is, on June 27, 1952, with five members from the Jowai Sub-Division, thirteen from Shillong Sub-Division and six members nominated by the Governor.

4) During the last five years that the United Khasi and Jaintia Hills District Council was running the administration of the two Sub-Divisions, it is found that no serious attempts were made to bring about the uniformity of the administration in the two Sub-Divisions. The following main facts show the differences in administration in which there was no uniformity.

a) The people of Jaintia Hills had to pay both land revenue and house tax at the rate varying from Rs. 2 to Rs. 5 per house per year; whereas the people of the Shillong Sub-Division did not have to pay land revenue and were not willing to pay house tax even at the lowest and flat rate of Rs. 2 only per house per year as decided by the Council in its session of March 24, 1955.

b) Income from all fisheries in the Jowai Sub-Division was being credited to the District Council funds whereas no income was derived by the District Council on this head though there are many and larger fisheries in the latter Sub-division.

c) Income from Grazing Tax in the Jowai Sub-division was being credited to the District Council fund but no income was derived by the District Council on this head from Shillong Sub-division, in spite of the fact that the

number of professional graziers in the Shillong Sub-division were far greater than those of the Jowai Sub-division.

d) Most of the markets in the Jowai Sub-division were being directly managed by the District Council and also most of the income thereof was being credited to the fund of the District Council; whereas very negligible amount was derived from the Shillong Sub-division on this Head. Under the United Khasi and Jaintia Hills Autonomous District (Management and Control of Markets) Act, 1952 (Act 7, 1953), it is provided that half of the revenue from markets of the Syiemships, Daloiships, and Sirdarships shall be credited to the District Council fund. The provision of the Act was fully being carried out in the case of markets in the Jowai Sub-division, but due to the adamant attitude shown by the heads of the local administrative units known as "The Khasi States" and being supported by most of the members of the District Council representing the areas, who formed the majority of the members of the Council, implementation of the provisions of the above Act had not been possible with the result that the Council, by majority of vote, had to amend the Act deleting the provision in question.

5) That the provision of the Sixth Schedule to the Constitution of India was mainly for the purpose of enabling

the Scheduled Tribes to develop themselves in a way best suited to their own genius and culture considering the customary practice in vogue in different areas relating to their social, economic and political set up. From experience in the five years of a joint administration of the sub-divisions, each having a custom quite different from the other with regard to social, economic and political activities which play a very important part in the administration, they found the uniform administration is not feasible. The following are some such differences in the management and control of lands:

a) Land Tenure System – Almost all lands in the Jowai Sub-division are under the control and management of the District Council and this has made possible the settlement of land on the assessment of land revenue and also goes a long way towards successful working of road, communication and other schemes for the development of the area. Whereas in the Shillong Sub-division lands are either the private properties of the so-called "Ri Kynti" landowners or under the garb of the so-called customs, are held under the control of the Syiems and their Dorbar consisting of handful of men called Myntris most of whom are illiterate and representing certain fortunate clans only, which is more or less similar to a sort of a Feudal system.

b) The Jowai Sub-division consists of nineteen administrative units, each under a Daloi who is elected by the adult males of the unit. Shillong Sub-division consists of thirty one elakas previously known as the 'British villages' and twenty five others previously known as "The Khasi States". Each of these 25 units is under a Syiem or Lyngdoh or Sirdar as the case may be. A Syiem in most cases, is nominated by the Myntries who represent certain particular clans in the unit. The difference is therefore clear that whereas an "Administrative Unit" or a Daloiship in the Jowai Sub-division has a democratic form of Government, a Syiemship in the Shillong Sub-division does not have such form of Government.

c) All sources of income in the Jowai Sub-division are under the management and control of the District Council and thus it is possible for the authority to find out ways and means for tapping new sources of income and pool such income into the common fund of the District Council. This is not so in respect of income from the Shillong Sub-Division. The various local units of Syiemship, under the garb of customs, claim primary control over all the revenue resources of their respective areas and thus the bulk of the income from each source is distributed amongst the Syiems, the Myntries and various other customary frills and leaving a negligible amount only for the common fund

of the District Council. In this respect the District Council has made a decision by which it is laid down that 1/8 of the total income of each of the unit like Syiemship, Lyngdohship, etc. should be credited to the District Fund, but the decision could not be effectively and satisfactorily carried out on account of the insincerity and unwillingness on the part of the Syiems etc. and also due to indulgence on the part of the members of the District Council representing the units in question, who, as already stated, form a majority in the District Council.

d) Laws relating to Excise matters are enforced in the Jowai Sub-division but with the exception of the areas falling within the Shillong Municipality and those that are previously known as the British villages, the laws are not enforced, in the Shillong Sub-division. This lack of uniformity of administration is decidedly not conducive to the smooth running of the administration especially when, under the pretext of custom, the chiefs are very unwillingly to accept any healthy change in this respect.

e) In the Jowai Sub-division the system of joint family is being followed specially by the non-Christian community who still form the majority of the people of the Sub-division and are always prepared and ready to welcome healthy changes by way of evolution of any form that would

help towards a better form of government to suit with the present set-up. But from past experience it is regrettable to note that the case is quite different in the Shillong Sub-division where the people are so orthodox in their so-called custom that the said custom has become so water-tight that changes by way of evolution, are always looked upon with suspicion even if such changes are essentially necessary for bringing a democratic form of government to suit the present day set-up.

6) They feel that the present District Council of the United Khasi-Jaintia Hills Autonomous District could not make any progress in administering the affairs of the District as the other District Councils like the Garo Hills, the Lushai (Mizo) Hills and others have, the reasons that is apparently clear is the presence of diversity in social, economic and political position prevailing in the two Sub-divisions. The extent of such diversities could be brought to a bearable minimum if representatives from the Shillong Sub-divisions would be as the representatives from the Jowai Sub-division are, willing to effect such evolutionary changes that would bring workable uniformity of administration. But that has not been the case with the District Council during the past years.

7) In view of the facts and circumstances stated

above, the representatives of the Jowai Sub-division and others came to a conclusion that nothing short of a separate District Council would solve their problem and that such separate District Council is quite possible and feasible, considering the following amongst other points.

The following figures showing the area and population of the other District Councils by themselves speak of a feasibility of a separate District Council for the Jaintia Hills:

Name of the District Council	Area in Sq. miles	Population as per 1951 census figure
Mikir Hills	3,995	1,25,777
Jaintia Hills	2,106	67,631
North Cachar Hills	1,888	39,663

8) That the United Khasi and Jaintia Hills District Council of which the representatives from the Shillong Sub-division form a majority has not afforded fair and equitable opportunities to the people of the Jowai Sub-division in respect of appointment to posts of importance, allotment of grants sanctioned by Government under Article 275 of the Constitution of India, and with more powers to be vested on various District Councils as desired by the tribal people of Assam which they do hope, the authority

concerned is quite prepared to bestow, so they feel that they as the representatives of the minority party in the District Council have reasons to fear that they may have to face more and more mal-treatment from the majority party.

9) That along with granting them a separate District Council, they also pray for reservation of two seats in the State's Legislative Assembly for the people of the Sub-division.

10) Last but not the least they beg to express their feelings that in case the authority does not find it proper to grant them a separate district council of their own, they would prefer to be severed from the District and even centrally administered as otherwise there is genuine fear that their race as distinct people with old culture and custom would gradually disappear as a result of domination by the majority of the United Khasi and Jaintia Hills District Council as at present constituted.⁴⁰

The main signatories of the memorandum was Mr. Humphrey Hadem who was the then Executive Member of the United Khasi-Jaintia Hills District Council along with

40. Memorandum by the Representatives of the District Council and others from Jowai Sub-division of the United Khasi-Jaintia Hills District Council to Pandit Govind Ballabh Pant, Union Home Minister, on November 1, 1957.

two other members of the District Council from Jaintia Hills, Mr. K. Rymbai and H.E. Pohshna and together with some prominent persons from Jaintia Hills.⁴¹

This was followed by another memorandum submitted to the Prime Minister of India on the December 30, 1957, during his visit to Shillong by the same signatories and others and on the same lines taken in their memorandum to the Union Home Minister.⁴² In submitting the memorandum to the Prime Minister the Members of the District Council and others from Jaintia Hills pointed out the disadvantages of remaining in the United Khasi-Jaintia Hills District Council and the advantages of having a separate District Council for the Jowai Sub-division.

Disadvantage of remaining in the United Khasi-Jaintia Hills District Council

1) In the present United Khasi-Jaintia Hills District Council, only six members are allowed to represent the whole of the Jowai Sub-division whereas as many as eighteen members are from the Shillong Sub-division thus the interests and welfare of the people of the Jowai Sub-division are being placed at the mercy of the majority members of the Shillong Sub-division who are quite ignorant of the Sub-

41. Ibid.

42. Memorandum by the Members of the District Council and others from Jowai Sub-division of the United Khasi-Jaintia Hills District to Shri Jawaharlal Nehru, Prime Minister of India, on December 30, 1957.

division and disposition has created dis-uniformity in running the the affairs touching the common interest of the people in the following amongst other matters:

(a) **Land Tenure System** – Almost all lands in the Jowai Sub-division are assessed to revenue and pattas issued by the District Council whereas lands on the Shillong Sub-division are being held by certain clans and also by the Syiems, etc. and pattas are being issued by them.

(b) **Taxation** – Under the United Khasi-Jaintia Hills District (Revenue assessment) Regulation, 1953, the people of the Jowai Sub-division are paying House Tax at the rate varying between Rs. 6 and Rs. 2 per house, but the people of the Shillong Sub-division are not paying the Tax even at the lowest rate of Rs. 2 per house in spite of the passing of the regulation. Election propaganda was made during the last election, promising the people of Shillong Sub-division of free Tax.

(c) At present all Grants and aids made available by Government towards the development of the District are, as at present being distributed by the District Council on the basis of area-cum-population without considering the real need of the people of the Jaintia Hills besides the fact that they are the people mainly contributing towards

the cause of the administration in the shape of Land Revenue and House Tax besides others.

2) At present all the Dalois of the Jowai Sub-division are in the real sense of the terms subordinate officers of the District Council, but that is not the case with Syiems in the Shillong Sub-division. The Syiems in the Shillong Sub-division are allowed to collect and keep to themselves all the income in different areas and bring nothing practically to the fund of the District Council.

3) Under the United Khasi-Jaintia Hills Autonomous District (Administration of Justice) Rules, 1953, each of the 19 Elakas in the Jowai Sub-divisions is classed as mere village courts, whereas the 23 Elakas in the Shillong Sub-division who are similar to those of Jowai Sub-division both in size and other respects are made Additional Subordinate District Council Courts having the Magisterial powers varying from that of the first class to that of the third class Magistrates as defined in Chapter III of the Code of Criminal Procedure, 1898.

4) **Employment** - At present all officer's posts in the United Khasi-Jaintia Hills District Council are being held by people belonging to the Shillong Sub-division although there is no dearth of equality, if not more, qualified persons belonging to the Jowai Sub-division.

5) The people of the Shillong Sub-division are more or less communal minded and usually looked upon people of other communities with distrust and suspicion and this has greatly hampered the growth of the sense of unity and friendship amongst the citizens of India.⁴³

Advantages of having a separate District Council for the Jowai Sub-division

It will dispel the sense of slavery and inferiority complex that is still lingering in the hearts of the people of the Jowai Sub-division and which the United Khasi-Jaintia Hills District Council Administration has not, as it is, been making any attempt to remedy and remove.

In a separate District Council of their own, the people of the Jowai Sub-division will have the sense of having the right to govern themselves as the people of a democratic Government and will be infused with the spirit of freedom as enjoyed by others in India.

The people of the Jowai Sub-division by a separate District Council of their own will be enthusiastic in shouldering their responsibilities towards the administration more willingly than before and this will greatly help towards

43. Ibid.

the development of the Sub-division, socially, economically and in other spheres of life to keep pace with the present growth of civilization.

In a separate District Council of their own, they are sure to be able to concentrate their activities towards the various problems that the people of the Sub-division in different areas are facing and thus thwart away the feeling of dependency and helplessness.

In conclusion they further state, that a District Council such as the present one with so big an area, with so many problems administratively and economically and lack of communication is unwieldy to effectively bring about the good and efficient administration to the people. Thus by having a separate District Council for each Sub-division, the various diverse problems can be solved in the interest of the people.⁴⁴

Apart from the memoranda submitted to the Prime Minister, the Union Home Minister, the demand for a separate District Council was repeatedly pursued in the United Khasi-Jaintia Hills District Council by Sri H. Hadem, MDC, the Executive Member of the District Council. On August 7, 1958,

44. Ibid.

he moved a resolution for the formation of a separate District Council which was supported by five of the six MDC's from the Jowai Sub-division, namely Sri H. Hadem, Sri H.E. Pohshna, Sri K. Rymbai, Sri L. Bareh, and Sri E. Bareh. The other MDC is Sri O.W. Lyngdoh, who voted against the resolution. It may be mentioned here that following his election as MDC in 1957, Sri O.W. Lyngdoh was elected Deputy Chairman of the District Council and has continued as such up to the time when the resolution was moved. He had consistently opposed the idea of a separate District Council for the Jowai Sub-division. All the five MDC's voting in favour of the 1958 resolution were signatories to the Memorandum submitted to the Prime Minister of India on December 30, 1957, and Sri H. Hadem, Sri K. Rymbai and Sri H.E. Pohshna in addition, signed the memorandum addressed to the Union Home Minister on November 1, 1957.⁴⁵ In 1957 elections it seems an additional seat was allotted to the Jowai Sub-division and as a result it increases to six.

Subsequently, another resolution was brought by Sri H. Hadem in 1959 in the District Council reiterating

45. Report of the United Khasi-Jaintia Autonomous District Commission in the matter of creation of a New Autonomous District for the Jowai Sub-division, (Government of Assam, Shillong, 1964), pp. 42-43.

the demand for a separate District Council for the Jowai Sub-division. The proceedings of the session show that the same five MDCs voted for it. The other Jowai MDC, namely Sri O.W. Lyngdoh, apparently did not take any part in the voting as his name did not appear in the division list.⁴⁶

It appears from the memorandum submitted to the Prime Minister of India on December 3, 1957, that of the six MDCs, all, except Sri O.W. Lyngdoh signed the petition advocating a separate District Council for Jowai. Again in 1958 and 1959, the same five members supported a similar resolution in the District Council. It, therefore, appears that immediately after the election of members to the District Council in 1957 on the basis of adult franchise, the MDCs from Jowai Sub-division were overwhelmingly in favour of the demand. A perusal of the District Council proceedings in 1958 and 1959 shows that the agitation for a separate District Council was not restricted to House Tax alone as there was also mention of other disparities in administration in the speeches of the members supporting the resolution. But the resolution has, on each occasion been lost as the Khasi hills had a majority of 18 MDCs

46. Ibid.

against six MDCs from the Jowai Sub-division.⁴⁷ The stand of the Eastern India Tribal Union, was that the matter should be settled by a referendum.⁴⁸

In this movement for a separate District Council the Jaintia Durbar also played an important role in which during the Haflong conference both Sri B.M. Shullai and Dr. R. K. Tariang the President and the Secretary of the Jaintia Durbar in their official capacities were deputed to the conference of the APHLC to get support for the Jaintia Durbar demand for a separate District Council. They were deputed to the Haflong conference in pursuance of the decision taken by the Jaintia Durbar held on August 23, 1960 and September 30, 1960, to support the demand for a separate District Council for Jaintia Hills. But immediately after the Haflong conference the Jaintia Durbar split on a difference of opinion amongst the members of the Durbar with regard to the Scottish Pattern of Administration for the Hill areas as proposed by the Prime Minister.⁴⁹

Again on July 8, 1961, a memorandum was submitted to the Governor of Assam by Dr. R. K. Tariang who was the

47. Ibid., pp. 44-45.

48. Ibid., p. 54.

49. Ibid., pp. 41-42.

Secretary of one faction of the divided Jaintia Durbar. In his representation to the Governor he stated that the members of the District Council from the Jowai Sub-division since 1952 were continually urging for a uniform type of administration for the District, but the Khasi Members who constitute the majority in the United Khasi-Jaintia Hills District Council, gave a deaf ear to the request. According to him the main issue besides others, in the last District Council elections, was for the creation of a separate District Council for Jowai Sub-division, and all candidates who stood in this issue for the said elections from Jaintia Hills were returned.⁵⁰ There is no documentary evidence to show that the election of MDCs in 1957 was fought on the issue of a separate District Council, though as mentioned earlier, five of the six MDCs elected supported the demand for a separate District Council in their memorandum, dated December 30, 1957, submitted to the Prime Minister; and when a resolution for a similar demand was moved in the District Council in 1958, the same members again voted for it. These circumstances would appear to lend colour to the contention of Dr. Tariang, coming as they did almost immediately following the 1957 election

50. Memorandum to the Governor of Assam from Dr. R.K. Tariang (Secretary of one faction of the Jaintia Durbar, Jowai, 1961). In 1962 only two MDCs were elected on this issue.

for MDCs which was concluded in December 1957.⁵¹ The Eastern India Tribal Union fought the 1957 election on the issue of a separate State for the Hill Areas. Candidates were set both for the Legislative Assembly and the District Council. Sri Larsing Khyriem fought the election of 1957 to the State Assembly as a candidate of the Eastern India Tribal Union and was elected from the Jowai Constituency. But all the candidates of the Eastern India Tribal Union from the Jaintia Hills to the United Khasi-Jaintia Hills District Council were unsuccessful.⁵² During this time it appears that to the people of Jaintia Hills getting a separate District Council was as important as getting a separate Hill State.

During the early years of the movement for a separate hill state, the Assam Government was trying to meet the demands of the Jaintia people for a separate District Council. In order to meet the demand of the Jaintia people the Assam Government appointed a Commission to look into the matter.⁵³

51. Report of the United Khasi-Jaintia Autonomous District Commission in the matter of creation of a New Autonomous District for the Sub-division, (Government of Assam, Shillong, 1964), p. 45.

52. Election Appeal of the Khasi-Jaintia District Tribal Union, (Shillong, 1957), pp. 1-3.

53. Jyrwa, E. "Politics and Functioning of the Khasi Hills Autonomous District Council in Meghalaya 1978-1989", Vol. I, (Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis, 1991), p. 62.

Owing to repeated representations over a period of six or seven years submitted to the Prime Minister of India, the Union Home Minister and the State Government by certain leaders of the Jaintia Hills for the establishment of a separate District Council for the Jowai Sub-division, the Governor of Assam by his Notification No. TAD/Con/21/62/293 dated August 26, 1962, appointed a Commission under sub-paragraph (1) of paragraph 14 of the Sixth Schedule to the Constitution of India with the following terms of reference:

To examine and report in the matter of creation of a new autonomous district for the Jowai Sub-division of the United Khasi-Jaintia Hills Autonomous District by excluding the areas comprising of the said Sub-division from the United Khasi-Jaintia Hills Autonomous District. 54

The Commission besides circulating Press Note in English to the public through the Deputy Commissioner, United Khasi-Jaintia Hills District, the Sub-divisional Officer, Jowai Sub-division, the United Khasi-Jaintia Hills District Council and the State Publicity Department as well as through the Assam Gazette also distributed leaflets containing a translation of the Press Note, both in the

54. Report of the United Khasi-Jaintia Autonomous District Commission in the matter of creation of a New Autonomous District for the Sub-division, (Government of Assam, Shillong, 1964), p. 1.

Khasi and Jaintia languages with the purpose of giving wide publicity. In response to the Press Note, forty three memoranda were received by the Commission from various organisations, groups and individuals. From the forty three memoranda submitted two were found to be completely irrelevant to the issue under consideration and of the remaining forty one, three persons did not appear before the Commission. The remaining thirty eight appeared before the Commission and were duly examined on points arising out of their memoranda and of these thirty eight memoranda, twenty four were in favour of a separate District Council while fourteen opposed it.⁵⁵

The Commission commenced its sittings at Jowai on November 4, 1963, and continued till November 7, 1963, to afford facilities for those residing in and submitting memoranda from the Jowai Sub-division to come and depose before the Commission. The Commission sat at Shillong from November 11, 1963, to November 16, 1963, and again on November 21, 1963, to enable those submitting memoranda from Shillong Sub-division to appear and be examined by the Commission. The memoranda were duly examined by the Commission and oral evidence clarifying the points arising

55. Ibid., p. 2.

out of the memoranda was considered. Besides this, the Commission consulted various historical works and other references produced by different parties in support of their contention.⁵⁶ After completion of its work the Commission finally submitted its report on January 20, 1964, recommending the creation of a new Autonomous District Council for the Jowai Sub-division.⁵⁷ This new District Council came into being in 1967.

56. Ibid., pp. 2-3.

57. Ibid., p. 56.

CHAPTER VI

HILL STATE MOVEMENT AND JAINTIA HILLS

HILL STATE MOVEMENT AND JAINTIA HILLS

The District Council as we have seen earlier according to the provisions of the Sixth Schedule came into existence in 1952. Soon it was discovered from practical experience that the Sixth Schedule suffered from shortcomings and loopholes which stood in the way of a better and more effective functioning of these Councils and prevented them from participating more fully in the affairs affecting the people of their areas. The result was that the question of amending the provisions of the Sixth Schedule, therefore, came up. On July 13, 1954, acting on a popular demand, Srimati Bonily Khongmen, the then member of the Lok Sabha representing the Assam Autonomous Districts, gave a notice of a Bill to amend certain provisions of the Sixth Schedule. This Bill came up for discussion before the Lok Sabha on August 24, 1956, but was withdrawn on the assurance given by the Prime Minister that the matter was receiving the attention of the Government and that he had no doubt in his mind that the Schedule had got to be amended.¹

1. Memorandum to the Commission for the Hill Areas of Assam submitted by the APHLC, (Shillong, 1965), p. 12.

No responsibility and powers were given to the District Councils, to be established under the provisions of the Sixth Schedule, for development, planning and administration of their area but it was more a measure to provide protection.² But what the people desired besides protecting and safeguarding their identities, was that the hill people should afford the full opportunity to grow, develop and progress through an active participation in various economic, social and political efforts to uplift the country.³ B.M. Roy who was the Chief Executive Member of the United Khasi and Jaintia Hills Autonomous District Council in a meeting of the members of the Executive Committees of all the Autonomous District Council of the hill areas on June 16 and 17, 1954, pointed out that the Sixth Schedule did not fully satisfy the hill people because it confers no real autonomy as expected and aspired by the people. Supporting the views of B.M. Roy, Captain Sangma the Chief Executive Member from the Garo Hills Autonomous District Council stated that by experience the Tribal leaders had found that the provisions of the Sixth Schedule

2. Sinha, A.P. "Politics and Economics Development in the Hill Districts of Assam" in Singh, K.S. (ed.), Tribal Situation in India, (Simla, 1972), Vol. 13, pp. 340-341.

3. Memorandum to the Commission for the Hill Areas of Assam submitted by the APHLC, (Shillong, 1965), p. 12.

did not give the Hills adequate power to safeguard their interests – social, economic and political and that on the contrary there were ample loopholes for interference from outside in matters relating to day-to-day administration of their Districts.⁴ The provisions made under the Sixth Schedule, and the autonomy given to the Hill Districts of Assam for self-administration did not keep the local people satisfied for long. The various political parties in the Hill Districts (with the exception of the Nagas who took the path of armed struggle and Mikir Hills, as it had yet to be formed, and passing through its infancy) continued their agitation, first for enlarged power for the District Council, and then for Statehood.⁵

The Khasi National Durbar was the first organisation which submitted a memorandum to the States Reorganisation Commission, demanding the creation of a separate Hill State. The Memorandum which was submitted on April 18, 1954, was duly signed by Wilson Reade and Hoover Hynniewta as President and Secretary respectively. Captain W.A. Sangma then sent an express wire to the States Reorganisation Commission

4. Memorandum submitted to the State Reorganisation Commission by the Hills People of the Autonomous Districts in Assam, (Shillong, 1954), p. 17.

5. Sinha, A.P. Op.cit., p. 341.

on April 19, 1954, expressing the Garos' support for the demand of the Khasi National Durbar for the formation of a separate Hill State.⁶

Two months after, that is, on June 16 and 17, 1954, the members of the Executive Committees of the United Khasi and Jaintia Hills, Garo Hills, Lushai Hills and North-Cachar Hills Autonomous District Councils met in Shillong to discuss things of mutual interest. The meeting unanimously decided to demand the constitution of a separate State for all the Hill areas of Assam which might include also any other areas, geographically contiguous to the Autonomous District, inhabited by the tribal people.⁷ At this time from Jaintia Hills Mr. Humphrey Hadem was a member of the Executive Committee under B.M. Roy.⁸

Bishnu Ram Medhi, the Chief Minister of Assam informed the Prime Minister of the decision of this meeting and Pandit Nehru replied thus:

6. Lyngdoh, R.S. "Evolution of Meghalaya", (A Seminar paper given in NEHU, Shillong, 1976), p. 3.

7. Ibid.

8. Rao, V.V. A Century of Tribal Politics in North-East India 1874-1974, (S. Chand and Company, Delhi, 1976), p. 278.

Broadly speaking I think our approach (to the tribal areas) should be toward somewhat greater autonomy of this District within the State of Assam. They have a very definite individuality of their own and they should be allowed to feel that they are looking after themselves. That was the sole object of having these autonomous Districts. If we go a little further in that direction, it will help in solving the problems and making them contented members of the State of Assam. 9

In his reply to the Prime Minister, B.R. Medhi stated that it was his considered view as well as of his colleagues that the time was not opportune enough to think in terms of greater autonomy to the District Councils because that might strengthen the disintegrating forces.¹⁰

On the eve of the visit of the Members of the States Reorganisation Commission to Shillong, the leaders of the hill areas once again met at Tura from October 6 to 8, 1954, Rev. J.J.M. Nichols-Roy who was then Minister for Excise, Jails etc., in the Medhi Cabinet also attended the Conference. The Conference drafted a memorandum which was signed by Captain Sangma and B.M. Roy as Co-Presidents. The memorandum strongly urged for the creation of a separate Hill State by pointing out a number of advantages if such a State was created. It also urged upon the Commission to recommend for the amendment of the Sixth Schedule.¹¹

9. Lyngdoh, R.S. Op.cit., p. 3.

10. Ibid.

11. Ibid.

This memorandum was known as the Tura Conference Memorandum. The memorandum claimed that hill people of all the autonomous districts were one and fundamentally different from the people of the plains. The memorandum also said that the autonomy given to the District Councils under the Sixth Schedule was not real and substantial.

Further it added that historically speaking there had been no political, social, cultural or emotional ties between the people of the plains and of the hills. The major hill tribes lived politically independent of each other. Their administrative set up was democratic, whereas the people of the plains lived under an autocratic set up. Socially the people of the plains observed the caste system while those of the hills lived in a free and equal society, where there were no differences of caste or creed. The memorandum also said that the attitude of the plains people towards the people of the hills was one of superiority. The very word 'tribe' or 'tribal' created a feeling of superiority in the people of the plains.

The memorandum also said that the Assamese were making every effort to impose their language and culture on the Hill people. Apart from this fact the Assamese were trying to dominate the Hill people. In support of their contention they pointed out that the Assamese who constituted

only fifty per cent of the total population, controlled seventy five per cent of the seats in the Legislature and monopolised ninety per cent of the seats in the Cabinet and seventy per cent in Public Services. In preparation and implementation of the plans, the hills were given scanty treatment. Practically all the major development works and all the major technical and non-technical institutions were located in the Brahmaputra valley. The essential roads for the economic development of the hills were not constructed. Fourthly the memorandum also said that the Hill Districts constituted the frontier areas. The people living in these areas must be contented and patriotic. If the hill people are to be contented their political aspirations must be satisfied.

The memorandum listed a number of advantages in having a Hill State. It said that the Hill State would create a sense of responsibility in the Members to the Legislative Assembly; that it would enable the hill people to breathe free air and feel that they were not subject to any race; that it would generate tremendous enthusiasm to work for the progress of the country; that it would generate a feeling of equality; that it would bring out real leaders of the people; that a common language could be used for the transaction of official and non-official

business; that there could be effective planning for the development of the area and for the utilization of the grant-in-aid under Article 275; that Hindi could easily become the language of the region and that the interests of the people particularly in landed property would be effectively protected.

The memorandum stressed that the sentiment of the people should not be brushed aside. Violence to the sentiment of the people was responsible for unrest and even revolutionary conditions. The sentiment of the people in the hill areas was not in favour of one State both for the hills and the plains.

Finally, the memorandum also sketched briefly the structure of the Hill State. It would have a legislative assembly of twenty five members, a council of ministers in which all the autonomous districts would be represented. It would have its own Governor who might be incharge of North Eastern Frontier Agency so that North Eastern Frontier Agency might become a part of the Hill State in future. But certain services would be common for the whole of Assam and the Hill State, such as Public Service Commission, University, High Court, and the Accountant General.

As regards the capital, Assam must have its own

capital but until the construction of a capital it might remain in Shillong. The District Councils in the Autonomous Districts should not be abolished. The memorialists, however, admitted that financially the State would not be viable. But since the area was strategically important, any expenditure on this area would be profitable investment.¹²

The Government of Assam denied all these charges. They said that they were not trying to impose their language and culture on non-Assamese and that English was permitted to be used by the tribal people for all time to come. But the tribal leaders pointed out that tribal employees recruited for Government service were compelled to learn Assamese. Not only the tribal people but also other non-tribal people who sought employment in Assam must learn Assamese.¹³

Besides the Khasi National Durbar and the Tura Conference, there were other organisations which submitted memorandum to the Commission demanding for a Hill State. These organisations were the Highlanders Union, the Hill

12. Rao, V.V. A Century of Tribal Politics in North East India 1874-1974, (S. Chand and Company, Delhi, 1976), pp. 337-341.

13. Rao, V.V., Pakem, B. and Hazarika, N. A Century of Government and Politics in North East India, Vol. II, Meghalaya 1874-1983, (S. Chand and Company, Delhi, 1984), p. 37.

Union, the Garo National Council and the United Mizo Freedom Organisation. The Mikir Hills Autonomous District Council and the North Cachar Autonomous District Council simply demanded greater autonomy and more financial assistance to the Autonomous District Councils.¹⁴

The Government of Assam, on the other hand, in its memorandum pleaded for the creation of greater Assam which might include the whole of Assam, Manipur, Tripura, Sikkim, North Eastern Frontier Agency, the District of Darjeeling, Jalpaiguri and Cooch Behar in West Bengal. The Government of Assam gave many reasons against the creation of a separate Hill State. Rev. J.J.M. Nichols-Roy claimed that the memorandum submitted by the Government of Assam was not shown to him. Therefore, he submitted his own secret memorandum to the Commission. From the arguments advanced forward by Rev. Nichols-Roy in favour of a Hill State and the regulations made by him against the reasons given by the Government of Assam clearly indicated that Rev. Nichols-Roy might have seen the said memorandum. Rev. Nichols-Roy was in full agreement with the Tura Conference.¹⁵

14. Lyngdoh, R.S. Op.cit., p. 4.

15. Ibid.

The State Reorganisation Commission seems to have approached the problem of the Hill State with a prejudiced mind. It said that the demand for a separate Hill State emanated from the extremists with separatist tendency. This was not a fact. The demand for a Hill State was made it appears, for the first time by Wilson Reade, the Chairman of the Khasi National Durbar. He was the most non-controversial figure. Captain Sangma who later on took a leading part in the demand for a separate Hill State, though classed as belonging to the left was essentially a compromiser and moderator. By temperament, training and conviction he was a constitutionalist.¹⁶ This seems to be quite true because in later years during the struggle for the Hill State even under most provocative circumstances the leaders never demanded for secession.

Further, the Commission thought that the Inner Line policy followed by the Government of India was also responsible for the separatist tendency. Again, the Commission said that the Hill State would not be economically viable. Lastly, the Commission said that the security of the frontier would be jeopardised with the creation of a Hill State. Hence the Commission rejected the demand for the creation of a separate Hill State. On November 17,

16. Ibid., pp. 4-5.

1955, there was an interesting debate in the Assam Legislative Assembly, although several members from the Hill areas supported the demand for the Hill State, some members did not support the proposal. Although the State Reorganisation Commission did not recommend the creation of a separate Hill State, the Hill leaders were not cowed down. Under the banner of the Eastern India Tribal Union, the Garo National Council and the United Mizo Freedom Organisation, the Hill State Movement spread like wild fire. A clear indication of this is that in the 1957 General Elections, these three parties captured absolute majority in all the three District Councils, they captured ten seats out of fifteen seats to the Assam Legislative Assembly, and the Eastern India Tribal Union candidates captured an absolute majority from the Autonomous District Parliamentary constituency.¹⁷ For the Jowai seat the Eastern India Tribal Union set up Larsingh Khyriem as its candidate while the sitting MLA Kistobin Rymbai contested as a Congress candidate, Larsingh Khyriem was elected.¹⁸ Now we will study the role of the Eastern India Tribal Union and its branch in the Khasi-Jaintia Hills.

17. Ibid.

18. Rao, V.V. A Century of Tribal Politics in North East India 1874-1974, (S. Chand and Company, Delhi, 1976, 1st edition), p. 480.

EASTERN INDIA TRIBAL UNION

The rules framed under the Sixth Schedule authorised the Government to nominate certain number of Members to the Autonomous District Councils. In exercise of this power, the Government nominated non-tribal members to some of the Autonomous District Councils on the ground that the interest of minorities should be protected. The tribal people did not relish the presence of non-tribal members in the Autonomous District Councils. Therefore, Captain Sangma, the Chief Executive Member of the Garo Hills Autonomous District Council, convened a meeting of the representatives of the tribal areas to discuss matters connected with the promotion of tribal welfare. The meeting was held in Tura in December 1952. It resolved to form the Tribal Union.¹⁹ The Jaintia Durbar from Jaintia Hills became a branch of the Tribal Union.²⁰

The programme of the Tribal Union was the formation of a North-East Tribal State which would include the whole of Manipur, the present Nagaland, all the tribal areas of Assam and the tribal belt of Tripura. The Tribal Union

19. Ibid., p. 516.

20. Report of the United Khasi-Jaintia Autonomous District Commission in the matter of creation of a New Autonomous District for the Jowai Sub-division, (Government of Assam, Shillong, 1964), p. 41.

did not wish to include the whole of Tripura because it was afraid of Bengali domination.

The main programme of the Eastern India Tribal Union was the formation of the Hill State for all tribal areas of Assam, the whole of Manipur, the whole of present Nagaland, the tribal parts of Tripura and not the whole of Tripura. It did not include the whole of Tripura because it was afraid of the domination of Bengalis. B.M. Roy was the first President of the Eastern India Tribal Union and B.B. Lyngdoh was its first General Secretary. B.M. Roy was succeeded by B.M. Pugh. It contested the general elections to the Legislative Assembly and Parliamentary elections. It won the Lok Sabha seat reserved for the scheduled tribes in the Autonomous Hill Districts, three Assembly seats and an absolute majority of the seats in the United Khasi and Jaintia Hills District Council. The United Mizo Freedom Organisation in the Mizo Hills which won two seats in the Legislative Assembly merged itself with the Eastern India Tribal Union. In 1957, the Garo National Council which swept the polls in the Garo Hills also joined the Eastern India Tribal Union. The Eastern India Tribal Union established a branch in the North Cachar Hills. It attempted the formation of an all India Tribal Union but did not succeed. Sensing the increasing popularity of the Eastern

India Tribal Union, Nehru persuaded it to participate in decision making with the Indian National Congress. The Eastern India Tribal Union accepted the invitation of the Prime Minister and joined the Chaliha Cabinet. Sangma was appointed a Minister of Cabinet rank and Lalmauia and Larsingh Khyriem as Minister of State, and Deputy Minister respectively. In 1960, they resigned enbloc from the Chaliha Ministry on the language issue and joined the All Party Hill Leaders Conference.²¹

KHASI-JAINTIA HILLS TRIBAL UNION

The Khasi-Jaintia Hills Tribal Union which was a branch of the Eastern Inda Tribal Union, owed its origin to the popular demand of the Hill people of the Autonomous District of Assam for the creation of a Hill State in the Eastern Region of India. That demand had increased in tempo with the decision of the State Reorganisation Commission as the Hill people saw more clearly than ever that their viewpoints, their interest and their aspiration could not be represented to the Government of India as long as they remained a part of the then set up in the State of Assam. The main plank of the Khasi-Jaintia Hills Tribal Union therefore was to continue its struggle, together with the

21. Rao, V.V., Pakem, B. and Hazarika, N. A Century of Government and Politics in North East India, Vol. II, Meghalaya 1874-1983, (New Delhi, 1984), pp. 190-191.

other Autonomous District, for the formation of a separate Administrative Unit, the Hill State.²²

According to its manifesto the Tribal Union believed that only a Hill State could give them scope of freedom of expression, and for rapid development of these very backward region of India. The Tribal Union had lost all faith in the Administration of the Tribal Areas by the Assamese group. It should also strive at all times to stand for justice, righteousness and an abundant life for all the people, irrespective of caste, colour or creed, living within its border. For these reasons the Tribal Union condemned the then Government which seemed to lay its foundation on favouritism, nepotism, corruption and injustice. Such a policy, the Tribal Union's belief was bound to create discontent and conflict resulting in lack of progress in all phases of life of the people of these areas. The Tribal Union took note of the fact that in order to maintain its imperialistic ambition that is its desire to rule over the backward people and the minority groups such as the Bengalees, Nepalese and the Hindi speaking people from other parts of India, the then Government of Assam was following the policy of 'Divide and Rule' in the affairs

22. Manifesto of the Khasi-Jaintia Hills Tribal Union, (Shillong, 1956), p. 1.

of the said State, and was resorting to all kinds of machinations and manipulations in its strenuous efforts to counteract its unpopularity with the people it was destined to rule.²³

The Tribal Union would show due respect and also make every endeavour to maintain the rights and privileges, the culture, customs, manners, tribal lands and democratic institution of all the people living within its borders. It would make every effort to raise the standard of living of the people in the area, paying special attention to the less privileged and economically disinherited. It did not believe in the exploitation of one group by another, or in the exploitation of any citizen of the State. It, however, believed in the scientific exploitation of all the resources in the area for the benefit of every citizen in the State. It did not believe in the propagation of the Assamese language in the Hill Areas of Assam, but would do all it could in its power to develop the language of each Autonomous District and to introduce the teaching of Hindi (and not Assamese) in all the schools of the hill areas of the Autonomous Districts. The Tribal Union would also make every effort to resist every attempt on the part

23. Ibid.

of the Assamese group to "assamise" the people living in the Autonomous Districts, as this was bound to retard progress by not allowing them to march shoulder to shoulder with the rest of the people of India. It believed that the Hill State was the only solution to the Naga problem. It believed that this alone could stop the slaughter and misery in Nagaland. It further believed that for the good reputation of India that problem must be solved immediately. It also believed that the reorganisation of States was not an end in itself, but a means to an end, and that whenever there was any element of weakness which stood in the way to peaceful prosperity of any part of this great country, that should be immediately removed. Lastly, the Tribal Union was not behind any group or community in India in its love for, or loyalty to the Motherland, and believed that those approaches to the political problem in this part of the country were the best means of maintaining peace and progress in the Eastern Frontiers of India.²⁴

But, immediately after the general elections, the Hill State movement suffered two shocks. First, Rev. Nichols-Roy who was elected in the 1957 elections on the issue of the Hill State changed his mind. He proposed a plan for a Hill Ministry. Secondly, the Eastern India Tribal

24. Ibid., pp. 1-2.

Union leaders were persuaded by Pandit Pant and Pandit Nehru to join the Chaliha Ministry. Captain Sangma was appointed as Minister for Tribal affairs, Lalmawia as Minister of State and Larsingh Khyriem the representative from Jaintia Hills as Deputy Minister. The effect of the association of the Eastern India Tribal Union with the Congress Legislature party was the resentment of the people. This resentment was clearly demonstrated in the three bye-elections in which the Eastern India Tribal Union candidates were defeated. During that period the relations between the Eastern India Tribal Union and the Congress Legislature party seemed to be most cordial. For a time, it was evident that the Eastern India Tribal Union had given up the idea of the formation of a separate Hill State, though they were in favour of greater autonomy to the District Councils. When the Government of India decided to create Nagaland as a separate State, Captain Sangma wrote to Chaliha thus:

The recent decision of the Government of India to create a new state for Nagaland is bound to lead to far reaching repercussions in the other hill districts unless the amendment of the Sixth Schedule, as recommended by the advisory Committee can be taken up at a very early date.

Thus, had it not been for the language policy of the Government of Assam, it would be difficult to say when the Hill State movement would raise its head again. But something

happened in 1960 which accelerated the movement for a separate Hill State. It was the language policy of the Government which shortened the honeymoon between the Eastern India Tribal Union and the Congress Legislature party.²⁵

The decision to declare Assamese as the official language was preceded by outbreaks of violence in the plain areas against the non-Assamese speaking minorities the like of which had never occurred before in Assam. The hill people looked upon this as an open attempt by the Assamese speaking majority not only to conserve, consolidate and perpetuate the spoils of political power for themselves, but also to 'assamise' the non-Assamese speaking minorities in the State by force, if found necessary. The hill people, therefore, rose up against it as one man; even the District Committees of the Assam Pradesh Congress in the hills joined in the protest.²⁶

On July 6 and 7, 1960, leaders of all the various political organisations in the hills met together in a meeting under the Chairmanship of Shri B.M. Pugh who was then the President of the Eastern India Tribal Union. The

25. Lyngdoh, R.S. "Evolution of Meghalaya", (A Seminar paper given in NEHU, Shillong, 1976), p. 5.

26. Memorandum to the Commission for the Hill Areas of Assam submitted by the APHLC, (Shillong, 1965), pp. 3-4.

meeting resolved to fight against the imposition of Assamese as the official language and other attempts of the Assamese speaking majority to dominate over them, and towards this end they constituted themselves into a broad based organisation called the All Party Hill Leaders' Conference.²⁷

When the All Party Hill Leaders' Conference was formed in 1960 the Jaintia Durbar in conjunction with other branches of the Eastern India Tribal Union and other political parties became a unit of the All Party Hill Leaders' Conference. During this time Shri B.M. Shullai and Dr. R.K. Tariang, were the President and Secretary of the Jaintia Durbar.²⁸

The first session of the All Party Hill Leaders' Conference appointed a Council of Action to implement the decision of the Conference and representatives of this Council met the Prime Minister and representatives of the State Government to urge that the proposed Assamese Language Bill be dropped. Despite this unanimous protest from the people; the State Government was determined to go ahead with the introduction of the Bill. Realising this determined

27. Ibid.

28. Report of the United Khasi-Jaintia Autonomous District Commission in the matter of creation of a New Autonomous District for the Jowai Sub-Division, (Government of Assam, Shillong, 1964), p. 41.

attitude of the State Government, the All Party Hill Leaders' Conference met in its second session on August 22 and 23, 1960, under the Chairmanship of Shri Emon Singh Sangma, the then President of the Garo Hills District Congress Committee and a Minister in the Assam Government. This second conference formally approved a memorandum, submitted to the President of India, reiterating its opposition to the declaration of Assamese as the official language of the State, and concluding that separation of the Hill Districts from Assam as the only alternative to acceptance of Assamese as the official language. The Conference further authorised the Council of Action, to prepare a plan or pattern of separation, to submit the same to all political parties and District Councils in the autonomous Hill District of Assam, and finally to present it before the third All Party Hill Leaders' Conference for final approval.²⁹

On October 24, 1960, a mass demonstration which Shillong and Assam had never witnessed before moved through the streets of Shillong to protest against the imposition of Assamese. Similar demonstrations were held in other Hill Districts Headquarters. All the Hill MLA's excepting

29. Memorandum to the Commission for the Hill Areas of Assam submitted by the APHLC, (Shillong, 1965), pp. 3-4.

two, boycotted the Assembly on that day. But ignoring it all, the State Assembly on that very night adopted the Bill declaring Assamese as the official language.³⁰

The All Party Hill Leaders' Conference answered this by meeting in the Third Session on November 16, 17 and 18, 1960, in Haflong, North Cachar Hills, under the Chairmanship of Shri J.B. Hagjer MLA, then Congress Member of Parliament, and by resolving that from then on a separate State was "the only solution that can be safeguard the interests and satisfy the legitimate aspirations of the Hill people."³¹ The Conference also adopted the plan and pattern of a separate State prepared by the Council of Action, as per resolution of the second conference, and appointed a delegation to meet the Prime Minister to place before him the demand for the formation of a separate State according to the plan adopted by the Conference.³²

From Jaintia Hills Shri B.M. Shullai and Dr. R.K. Tariang as officials of the Jaintia Durbar were deputed to the Haflong Conference of the All Party Hill Leaders' Conference. Besides attending the Conference as representatives of the Jaintia Durbar which was a unit of the All

30. Ibid., p. 4.

31. Ibid.

32. Ibid.

Party Hill Leaders' Conference their other objective was to get support for the Jaintia Durbar's demand for a separate Autonomous District Council for the Jowai Sub-division. Until the split of the Jaintia Durbar which occurred later the Durbar was always unanimous in its demand for a separate Autonomous District Council.³³

The demand for a separate Autonomous District Council for the Jowai Sub-division was not a new one but as mentioned earlier it had started right from the year 1947 and this demand was repeatedly pursued in the United Khasi-Jaintia Hills Autonomous District Council by Shri H. Hadem, MDC, then Executive Member of the District Council. On August 7, 1958, he moved a resolution for the formation of a separate Autonomous District Council which was supported by five of the six MDCs from the Jowai Sub-division and again in 1959 the same resolution was brought by Shri H. Hadem and the proceedings of the session showed that the same five MDCs voted for it. Besides the resolution that was moved by Shri H. Hadem even memoranda were submitted to the Prime Minister, the Union Home Minister and

33. Report of the United Khasi-Jaintia Autonomous District Commission in the matter of creation of a New Autonomous District for the Jowai Sub-division, (Government of Assam, Shillong, 1964), pp. 41-42.

the Governor of Assam demanding for the creation of a separate Autonomous District Council for the Jowai Sub-division.³⁴

Between November 1960 and the general elections of 1962 the All Party Hill Leaders' Conference delegations had three meetings with the Prime Minister, Shri Jawaharlal Nehru, on November 24, 1960, November 26, 1960 and May 17, 1961, and also meetings with the Home Ministers, Pandit Govind Ballabh Pant and later Shri Lal Bahadur Shastri. In these meetings the Prime Minister expressed his full appreciation of the difficulties, grievances and feelings of the hill people but asserted that a completely separate State would not be the best solution. As an alternative he offered a new pattern of administration on the lines of the administration of Scotland in relation to the rest of the United Kingdom, which became popularly known as the Scottish Pattern of administration.³⁵

The above offer of the Prime Minister was first considered by the Fourth Session of the All Party Hill

34. Ibid., pp. 42-43.

35. Memorandum to the Commission for the Hill Areas of Assam submitted by the APHLC, (Shillong, 1965), p. 4.

Leaders' Conference which met in Shillong on April 5, 6 and 7, 1961, at which it was resolved as follows:

Since the Prime Minister's proposals do not solve the basic problems necessitating the demand for a separate state and do not remove the domination over the hill people by the Assamese with the accompanying possibilities of friction and clashes between these two people in the proposed administrative re-arrangement, this conference therefore regrets that it cannot accept the Prime Minister's proposals and reiterates its demand for the creation of a separate state for the hill areas. 36

By another resolution the Conference called upon the hill people to boycott the impending elections in 1962 to demonstrate their determination to separate from Assam.³⁷

Following this Session the All Party Hill Leaders' Conference had another meeting with the Prime Minister on May 17, 1961, and in order to further consider his offer in the light of the elucidation and clarification received from him in this meeting it called for its Fifth Session in Tura, Garo Hills, on June 29, 30 and July 1, 1961. This Session saw no reason to change the decisions of the Fourth Session but adopted a fairly elaborate resolution detailing the reasons for its inability to accept the Prime Minister's offer. In order to intensify its movement for

36. Ibid.

37. Ibid.

separation from Assam the Conference resolved to call on the hill people to prepare for launching a non-violent non-cooperation movement and as a preliminary step in this direction it called on all the hill members of Assam State Legislature, of the various Boards and Committees constituted by the Government of Assam, and of the Parliament of India to resign their membership with effect from October 24, 1961. The Hill Congress Committees did not attend the Fifth Session of the All Party Hill Leaders' Conference at Tura but instead resolved unilaterally and separately to accept the Prime Minister's offer of the Scottish Pattern of administration. Subsequently they met by themselves in Shillong under the name and style of Assam Hill Peoples' Convention to endorse the acceptance of the Scottish Pattern proposals and then went on a delegation to Delhi to convey their decision to the Prime Minister. But there was no change in the situation. The people were irked by this action of the Congress Committees which they looked upon as an act of betrayal not only to the All Party Hill Leaders' Conference of which they were component units but of the unity of the hill people. The Government of India too appeared to have known that these Congress Committees did not have much popular backing and so did not pay much attention to their resolution.³⁸

38. Ibid., pp. 4-5.

The Prime Minister's offer of the Scottish Pattern of administration had an impact on Jaintia politics. The Jaintia Durbar which was a unit of the All Party Hill Leaders' Conference split on a difference of opinion amongst the members of the Durbars with regard to the Scottish Pattern of administration for the hill areas as proposed by the Prime Minister.³⁹ One section of the members under the leadership of Shri B.M. Shullai the President was for the continuation of the fight for the Hill State while the other group under Dr. R.K. Tariang the General Secretary was for accepting the Scottish Pattern of Administration.⁴⁰

Until the split, the Jaintia Durbar was unanimous in its demand for a separate Autonomous District Council for the Jowai Sub-division. As a result of the split the six MDCs from Jowai were equally divided on the issue. When the resolution for the formation of a separate District Council again came up in the District Council session in 1961, Shri H. Hadem, Shri K. Rymbai and Shri L. Bareh, voted for the demand for a separate District Council, whereas Shri H.E. Pohshna, Shri E. Bareh and Shri O.W. Lyngdoh opposed it. Shri H.E. Pohshna considered that "this

39. Report of the United Khasi-Jaintia Autonomous District Commission in the matter of creation of a New Autonomous District for the Jowai Sub-division, (Government of Assam, Shillong, 1964), p. 41.

40. Kharmih, J. A Brief Introduction about the Jaintia Durbar, (Published by J. Kharmih, General Secretary, Jaintia Durbar Revival Committee, Jowai, 1978), p.3.

resolution should not be pressed especially at this juncture when a greater issue lay before them" and accordingly opposed the resolution. At that time he was a member of the All Party Hill Leaders' Conference which was agitating for a separate Hill State. Later, in 1962, Shri Pohshna was elected MLA for Jowai Sub-division on the All Party Hill Leaders' Conference ticket. He accepted the nomination under a pledge to resign forthwith, if elected, from the Assam Legislative Assembly, whenever called upon to do so by the Council of Action. He failed to resign when called upon to do so by the Council of Action and was expelled from the All Party Hill Leaders' Conference. Later on after his expulsion he again supported the separate Autonomous District Council movement and became one of its leaders. It is also significant to note that Shri E. Bareh MDC, who repeatedly supported the demand for a separate District Council for Jowai Sub-division till 1959 opposed the resolution in 1961 after his election as Executive Member of the Autonomous District Council in 1960 and continued as such till he became the Chief Executive Member of the Autonomous District Council early in 1963.⁴¹

41. Report of the United Khasi-Jaintia Autonomous District Commission in the matter of creation of a New Autonomous District for the Jowai Sub-division, (Government of Assam, Shillong, 1964), pp. 42-44.

It appears from the memorandum submitted to the Prime Minister of India on December 30, 1957, that of the six MDCs all, except Shri O.W. Lyngdoh, signed the petition advocating a separate Autonomous District Council for Jowai. Again in 1958 and 1959, the same five members supported a similar resolution in the Autonomous District Council. It, therefore, appears that immediately after the election of members to the Autonomous District Council in 1957 on the basis of adult franchise, the MDCs from Jowai Sub-division were overwhelmingly in favour of the demand. Subsequently, there were changes of attitude on the part of some MDCs in which in 1961 on the same issue we find them equally divided. The change of attitude of Shri Pohshna and Shri E. Bareh on this occasion was attributed to the fact that Shri Pohshna was then a member of the All Party Hill Leaders' Conference and was being considered as a candidate on the All Party Hill Leaders' Conference ticket for election to the Assam Legislative Assembly in 1962 which he successfully contested and won on the same ticket and that Shri E. Bareh was by then a member of the Executive Committee of the District Council which he remained as such till he became Chief Executive Member in 1963. The All Party Hill Leaders' Conference stood for a separate Hill State and was opposed to the idea of a separate Autonomous District Council for Jowai Sub-division.⁴² The stand of the Eastern

42. Ibid., pp. 44-45.

India Tribal Union, which was a component of the all Party Hill Leaders' Conference, was that the matter should be settled by a referendum but since there was no provision in the Constitution for a referendum so it could not be done.⁴³

In 1962, the general elections were held. In that election the Congress Committees made it clear that they would make their acceptance of the Prime Minister's offer of the Scottish Pattern of administration their election issue as against the All Party Hill Leaders' Conference stand for a separate State. This compelled the All Party Hill Leaders' Conference to revise its decision to boycott the general elections and in its Sixth Session held in Aijal on September 14, 15 and 16, 1961, it resolved to modify 'certain methods of approach and techniques' and to achieve this it authorised its Council of Action to take a final decision in the matter. In pursuant to this resolution the Council of Action which met in Shillong on October 6, 7 and 9, 1961, resolved to contest "the elections in the autonomous hills districts wherever necessary" but reiterated the principle of boycotting the Assam Legislature by laying down that "all successful candidates set

43. Ibid., p. 54.

up by the Council of Action shall resign forthwith from membership of the Assam State Legislative Assembly with effect from such date as shall be determined by the All Party Hill Leaders' Conference."⁴⁴ The result of the elections demonstrated that the All Party Hill Leaders' Conference was the only organisation that could speak on behalf of the overwhelming majority of the hill people. Of the fifteen Assembly seats in the hill areas the All Party Hill Leaders' Conference won eleven and the Congress only four. The only seat to the Lok Sabha was also won by the All Party Hill Leaders' Conference in a straight contest with the Congress, securing sixty two per cent of the votes.⁴⁵

The people of Jaintia Hills like the Khasis and Garos are very much involved in the movement for a separate Hill State. Though there was no agitation in the Jaintia Hills yet the involvement of the people could be seen through the electoral process. The result of the election to the Legislative Assembly and later to the Autonomous District Council is a clear indication of support given

44. Memorandum to the Commission for the Hill Areas of Assam submitted by the APHLC, (Shillong, 1965), p. 5.

45. Ibid.

to the All Party Hill Leaders' Conference by the people of Jaintia Hills. In the 1962 election to the lone Assembly seat from Jaintia Hills the All Party Hill Leaders' Conference candidate Mr. H.E. Pohshna was elected. Election to the Autonomous District Council in the same year was not held since there was a movement for a separate District Council in Jaintia Hills. As a result of the movement a separate Autonomous District Council was given to Jaintia Hills. Between 1962 and till the election to the Jowai Autonomous District Council was held in 1967 an Advisory Council which functioned as a District Council was appointed.⁴⁶

After the elections the Conference met in its Seventh Session from March 20 to 24, 1962 and passed a resolution urging on the Prime Minister for the early creation of a separate Hill State. It also directed its eleven MLAs to abstain from participation in the Assam Legislature and authorised the Council of Action to fix the dates of resignation from the Assembly. The Conference submitted a representation on April 4, 1962, to the Prime Minister showing, by an analysis of the election results, that the overwhelming majority of the hill people had supported

46. Interview with Shri J.D. Pohrmen, Dy. Chief Minister of Meghalaya and Ex. CEM of the Jowai Autonomous District Council on March 19, 1992.

the demand for a separate Hill State and therefore urging that the Government of India should agree to meet the demands of the hill people.⁴⁷

The Prime Minister replied on May 3, 1962, that he could not change his decision in regard to the creation of the separate State in spite of the election results. However, these election results had their impact on the Prime Minister who on May 4, 1962, stated on the floor of the Lok Sabha, in his replies to questions, as follows:

I discussed with them (representatives of the APHLC) on three occasions previously at length and I am prepared to discuss it with them again if they wish. We recognised their grievances; they were legitimate; and we tried in our proposals to suggest something which would lead to the removal of those grievances. We gave them the fullest autonomy in that area. So far as the language which was the chief question was concerned, they can decide on their own language, English or Hindi or any of their own languages. In effect we gave them; if I may say so, ninety per cent of what they wanted. In regard to any legislation applying to them, we suggested what is called the Scottish Pattern that only if the members of the hill states agreed then would it be passed. 48

Prime Minister Nehru's statement above was an important policy statement to which the Government of India

47. Memorandum to the Commission for the Hill Areas of Assam submitted by the APHLC, (Shillong, 1965), p. 5.

48. Ibid., pp. 5-6.

was committed. Nevertheless the All Party Hill Leaders' Conference meeting from August 23 to 25, 1962, in its Eight Session reiterated its determination to separate from Assam and decided to resort to a non-violent direct action, the method and time of such action being left to the Council of Action to decide. It was decided that the dates for resignation from the Assembly would be October 24, 1962, and the non-violent direct action was fixed to start not later than March 31, 1963. In accordance with the direction of the All Party Hills Leaders' Conference seven of the eleven MLAs of the All Party Hill Leaders' Conference resigned on October 24, 1962. The four MLAs who did not resign were expelled from the All Party Hill Leaders' Conference were Shri Enowell Pohshna of the Jaintia Hills, Shri Emerson Momin of the Garo Hills who later joined the Congress Party, Shri Nalindra Sangma of the Garo Hills, and Shri R. Thanlira of the Mizo Hills who later was made a member of the State Public Service Commission.⁴⁹

The resignations of the All Party Hill Leaders' Conference MLAs coincided with the Chinese aggression. As in other parts of the country this grave event overshadowed and suspended all political controversy, it also brought about a change in the attitude of the hill people

49. Ibid., p. 6.

towards the technique for achieving their political objective. Conscious of its responsibility during the grave threat to the country, the executive of the All Party Hill Leaders' Conference, the Council of Action, met on October 30, 1962, and resolved to keep the implementation of its resolution for direct action in abeyance and to participate in the defence efforts. The All Party Hill Leaders' Conference mobilised volunteers, raised funds and contributed to the National Defence Fund. This situation continued till May 1963, when following the withdrawal of the Chinese and the recession of the immediate danger, the Election Commission called for bye-elections to fill the seven seats in the State Assembly vacated by the All Party Hill Leaders' Conference MLAs. Faced by the changed conditions in the wake of the Chinese aggression caused by the continuance of the national emergency the All Party Hill Leaders' Conference was compelled to modify its approach. It resolved to contest the bye-elections and put up its candidates in all the seven constituencies. It won five of those seats and increased its percentage of the votes cast in all the five constituencies, but in two constituencies in the Mizo Hills it had to concede defeat to a new extremist political organisation, the Mizo National Front, which made secession from India and the creation of an independent Mizo Republic its election issue. The emergence of such an organisation

could be attributed to the negative attitude of the Government of India to the demand of the All Party Hill Leaders' Conference for a separate State for all the hill areas, for it gave the extremist elements an upper hand and later compelled even moderate groups, such as the Mizo Union, a component of the All Party Hill Leaders' Conference to adopt a more extreme posture by withdrawing from the All Party Hill Leaders' Conference, declaring themselves for a separate Mizoram State for the Mizos alone, in order to counteract the growing influence of the Mizo National Front.⁵⁰

It was under these circumstances that the Prime Minister, Shri Jawaharlal Nehru, again agreed to meet a delegation of the All Party Hill Leaders' Conference. On June 4, 5 and 6, 1963, the Tenth Session of the All Party Hill Leaders' Conference was held, and it decided to submit a memorandum to the Prime Minister on the demand for a separate State, during his visit to Assam and the North-East Frontier Agency. On June 10, 1963, the All Party Hill Leaders' Conference delegation met the Prime Minister at the Gauhati Airport. In this meeting the Prime Minister expanded his earlier proposals and for the first time

50. Ibid., pp. 6-7.

broached the idea of "full autonomy."⁵¹ But the discussions were inconclusive owing to the shortness of time. They were continued in the meeting in Delhi on October 4 and 5, 1963. In this meeting the Prime Minister assured the delegation of one hundred per cent autonomy and at the same time spelled out the outline of this autonomy. This was incorporated in a plan which the Prime Minister discussed with the All Party Hill Leaders' Conference on the second day, October 5, 1963, and approved of it after some changes. At the end of the discussion the Prime Minister enquired if he could go ahead with the appointment of the Commission to work out the details, to which the delegation replied that they must first place the plan together with other assurances of the Prime Minister before a full meeting of the All Party Hill Leaders' Conference.⁵²

The All Party Hill Leaders' Conference first considered the Prime Minister's proposed plan together with his other assurances in its Eleventh Session, held in Shillong on October 30 and November 1, 1963. The Conference appreciated that the Prime Minister's Plan of full autonomy together with his other assurances constituted a big improvement on the Scottish Pattern offer but it wanted

51. Ibid., p. 7.

52. Ibid.

further discussions with the Prime Minister before taking a final decision. It adopted a resolution and suggested certain amendments. The Prime Minister was requested to grant the All Party Hill Leaders' Conference delegation another interview with him. However, no such further meeting could take place as the Prime Minister fell ill soon after. The final meeting that he had on the question was with the All Party Hill Leaders' Conference Member of Parliament, Shri G. G. Swell, in Delhi, on April 4, 1964. In this meeting the Prime Minister reacted favourably to the following points - (1) the full implementation of his plan and assurances both in letter and spirit, (2) the transfer of maximum number of subjects to the hill administration, and (3) the increased representation for the hill areas both in the State Legislature and Parliament. In his letter dated April 15, 1964, to the All Party Hill Leaders' Conference General Secretary, which proved to be his last letter on the subject, the Prime Minister said: "what I had suggested in my talks to you and your colleagues would guide the Commission."⁵³

In view of the Prime Minister's illness, the All Party Hill Leaders' Conference again considered his plan

53. Ibid.

and assurances in its Twelfth Session in Tura, Garo Hills, on April 17 and 18, 1964. Although the All Party Hill Leaders' Conference contended that the creation of a separate Hill State would be the simplest, best and final solution to the problems of the hill people, yet having regard to the sincere efforts of the Prime Minister, it agreed in 1964, to give a fair trial to the Nehru Plan. A Commission was constituted to go into the details. However, with the passing away of the Prime Minister Shri Jawaharlal Nehru and the opposition of the plan by Assam, the Nehru Plan was side-tracked by the Pataskar Commission appointed by Prime Minister Lal Bahadur Shastri for the purpose. The report of the Commission was therefore rejected by the All Party Hill Leaders' Conference.⁵⁴

Shri H.E. Pohshna MLA, Shri H. Hadem MDC and Shri T.R. Passah leaders from Jaintia Hills met the Commission for oral discussion. Apart from these leaders two groups of the Jaintia Durbar in which one known as the All Party Hill Leaders' Conference group and the other known as the Non-All Party Hill Leaders' Conference group also met the Commission.⁵⁵ Beside meeting the Commission Mr. H.E. Pohshna

54. Kyndiah, P.R. (ed), APHLC 1960-1974 Souvenir, (Shillong, 1974), p. 3.

55. Report of the Commission on the Hill Areas of Assam, (Government of India, Ministry of Home Affairs, Delhi, 1965), p. 141.

MLA also presented a personal memorandum before the Commission. According to him he felt that the idea of full autonomy within the same State was not practical so therefore he suggested that if the Government of India was determined to give full autonomy to the hill people it should create a separate State for the hill people.⁵⁶

The year 1966 was a year of intense political activity of the hill people. The All Party Hill Leaders' Conference met the central leaders and pressed the need to quickly solve the problem before it took the turn for the worse. The Government of India ultimately appointed a special Committee of the Cabinet headed by the then Union Home Minister, Shri Gulzarilal Nanda, to go into the whole question in depth and evolve a solution acceptable to all concerned. The outcome was a new offer of a sort of a sub-State under which the hill areas would have a separate Legislature and a Council of Ministers, but would continue to be subordinate to Assam Legislature and Government. The All Party Hill Leaders' Conference rejected the idea and also decided to boycott the 1967 General Elections

56. Pohshna, H. E. Memorandum to the Commission for Hill Areas of Assam, (Jowai, 1965), pp. 1-6.

and prepared to launch its programme of non-violent direct action by the end of 1966.⁵⁷

It was at this stage in December 1966, Tarlok Singh a member of the Planning Commission visited Assam and studied the political situation in the Hill Areas. He thought that the situation was grave and that something must be done immediately to save the situation. He advised the Government of India to take immediate action otherwise the extremists would take control of the situation. Tarlok Singh wrote:

The present leaders of the All Party Hill Leaders' Conference whatever their limitations, however, hard their attitude might have been, are persons with education and experience and considerable past contacts with the leaders of the plains. If these people are thrown out, leadership would pass into the hands of those, not known to the outside world and who are likely to be a much rougher brand, more fanatical and narrower in outlook and much less concerned about the consequences of their action for the country and for North-East India. If the situation of North-East Hill Areas is not resolved for any length of time, two rival schools may come into existence, one favouring the formation of a State within India, and the other committing itself to secession from the Indian Union. There are precedents for such a development

57. Kyndiah, P.R. (ed.), op.cit., p. 3.

in Nagaland and Mizoram and the contingency should not be ignored. In the interest of the country and North-East India, in particular, the existing estrangement between the Plains and the Hills should be brought to an end. 58

Tarlok Sing's assessment of the situation prevailing in the Hill areas of North-East India appears to have induced the Government of India to move quickly. On December 27, 1966, Prime Minister Mrs. Indira Gandhi visited Shillong. The All Party Hill Leaders' Conference presented a memorandum demanding a separate Hill State at a mammoth meeting, the Prime Minister said North-East India should be re-organised giving dignity and status to the hill people. This would be done as early as possible. The broad objective would be to give the Hill people fullest scope and freedom to promote their own welfare. At the same time there should be some links between the units. The Prime Minister invited the All Party Hill Leaders' Conference, the Chief Minister of Assam and some others to Delhi for discussion on January 11, 1967.⁵⁹

Immediately responding to the new situation, the All Party Hill Leaders' Conference decided to suspend the

58. Rao, V.V., Pakem, B. and Hazarika, N. A Century of Government and Politics in North East India, Vol. II, Meghalaya 1874-1983, (New Delhi, 1984), p. 55.

59. Ibid.

launching of the non-violent direct action and awaited the political discussion between the leaders and the Prime Minister and her colleagues in the early part of January 1967. Then on January 13, 1967, a historic announcement was made by the Government of India to reorganise the State of Assam in appreciation of the demand of the people of the hill areas. The statement included also a proposal for having a federal structure composed of federating units having equal status. The All Party Hill Leaders' Conference welcomed the announcement of the Government of India as it felt that the substance of its demand of a separate State had been conceded. The General Elections to the Parliament and Assembly followed immediately afterwards.. The All Party Hill Leaders' Conference decided to contest the elections and set up its candidates excepting in Mizo Hills where the situation was not politically stable. Besides, the Mizo Union which used to be a constituent part of the All Party Hill Leaders' Conference had now parted company and wanted a separate State for the Mizo Hills. The All Party Hill Leaders' Conference won all the seats in the Garo, Khasi and Jaintia Hills by a thumping majority. But its candidates in North Cachar Hills and Mikir Hills were defeated.⁶⁰

60. Kyndiah, P.R. (ed), APHLC 1960-1974 Souvenir, (Shillong, 1974), p. 4.

The first election to the Jowai Autonomous District Council was held in March 1967. The All Party Hill Leaders' Conference which made the demand for a separate Hill State its election issue, won an absolute majority in the Autonomous District Council by capturing ten out of twelve seats. An analysis of this election showed that the people of Jaintia Hills overwhelmingly supported the demand for a separate State. As a result of this election the All Party Hill Leaders' Conference then formed the Executive Committee in the Jowai Autonomous District Council. Edwingson Bareh was elected Chief Executive Member by a unanimous vote. Bareh took S.K. Shilla and John Deng Pohrmen as members of the Executive Committee. In this same year election to the Assam Legislative Assembly was held and for the Jowai seat the All Party Hill Leaders' Conference set up Edwingson Bareh. H.E. Pohshna who was the All Party Hill Leaders' Conference candidate in 1962, was not renominated because he did not resign when called upon to do so in 1962. Edwingson Bareh was elected from the Jowai seat.⁶¹

The politicians of the plains campaigned vehemently against the reorganisation plan of the Government of India. They felt that the creation of a federal structure would

61. Interview with Shri J.D. Pohrmen, Deputy Chief Minister of Meghalaya and Ex. C.E.M., Jaintia Hills Autonomous District Council on March 19, 1992.

the federal plan and decided to try it without prejudice to its Statehood demand. It nevertheless, reiterated that the best and simplest solution would be the creation of a full-fledged State. The scheme of the autonomous State included the constitution of a separate Legislative Assembly and a Council of Ministers. It also had full autonomy in sixty one subjects given to it.⁶³

The acceptance of the Autonomous State Plan by the All Party Hill Leaders' Conference brought about a split in the party in which, Mr. Hopingstone Lyngdoh, who was opposed to the Autonomous State Plan was expelled from the All Party Hill Leaders' Conference. After the expulsion of Mr. H.S. Lyngdoh a meeting of the breakaway group was held at Mawlai under the leadership of Mr. Meshak Kharkongor. The meeting was attended by Mr. H. Britainwar Dan and Mr. Bnai Sutnga from Jaintia Hills. When Mrs. Gandhi came to inaugurate the Autonomous State there was a black flag demonstration organised by the breakaway group. From Jaintia Hills there were thirty to forty youths who under the leadership of Mr. H.B. Dan, Bnai Sutnga, Pinbok Passah, Rophel Dkhar and Bnein Bareh came to take part in the demonstration. It was after this that a branch of the Hill State People's Democratic Party was formed in Jaintia Hills with

63. Ibid., pp. 4-5.

Mr. Roibok Bareh as President and Mr. H.B. Dan as General Secretary. This group did create an impact in Jaintia political scene when in 1972 they managed to win one seat in comparison to two seats won by the All Party Hill Leaders' Conference.⁶⁴

In 1970, the Autonomous State of Meghalaya was formed with a legislature of its own. The election to the Provincial Legislative Assembly of Meghalaya was indirect. The existing Autonomous District Councils were constituted as electoral colleges and they elected members to the Meghalaya Autonomous State Legislative Assembly.⁶⁵ It is interesting to note that in the Khasi and Garo Hills candidates were elected unopposed but in Jaintia Hills for the four elective seats there were five contestants. One of the contestants was Mrs. R. Lamar who stood as an independent and she secured two votes. Mrs. Lamar lost the election.⁶⁶ Shri S.K. Shilla who was one of the Executive Members aspired for the membership of the Meghalaya Legislative Assembly. Therefore he resigned as Executive Member. In his place B.B. Shallam was elected as Executive Member. When the

64. Interview with Shri H.B. Dan, Minister of Meghalaya and Ex. CEM of Jaintia Hills Autonomous District Council on May 19, 1992.

65. Rao, V.V. A Century of Tribal Politics in North East India 1874-1974, (S. Chand & Co., Delhi, 1976), p. 483.

66. Interview with Shri H.B. Dan, Minister of Meghalaya and Ex. CEM of Jaintia Hills Autonomous District Council on May 19, 1992.

Autonomous State of Meghalaya was formed E. Bareh himself resigned to join the Sangma Cabinet. In his place John Deng Pohrmen the Executive Member was selected by a unanimous vote as Chief Executive Member. John Deng Pohrmen retained B.B. Shallam and took Corinth Swer as Executive Member.⁶⁷

To counteract the influence of the Hill State People's Democratic Party, the All Party Hill Leaders' Conference requested the Prime Minister on September 3, 1970, to declare Meghalaya as a State, 15 days after the inauguration of the Autonomous State, on the ground that Manipur and Tripura would be granted full fledged States. On September 14, 1970, K.C. Pant the Union Minister of State for Home Affairs visited Shillong. The All Party Hill Leaders' Conference requested him to declare Meghalaya as a full-fledged State. On September 19, 1970, the All Party Hill Leaders' Conference requested the Government of India to take immediate steps to declare the Autonomous State as a State. On September 30, 1970, the Meghalaya Legislative Assembly passed a resolution by a unanimous vote requesting the Government of India to convert the Autonomous State into a full-fledged State. On October 2, 1970, the Meghalaya Cabinet met the Prime Minister at

67. Rao, V.V. Op.cit., p. 483.

Gauhati and again on October 28, 1970, and urged her to declare Meghalaya as a State. On November 10, 1970, the Prime Minister informed the Lok Sabha that the Government had decided to accept in principle the demand for a separate State. On January 21, 1972, the Prime Minister inaugurated the State of Meghalaya.⁶⁸

In 1972, the State of Meghalaya was formed. In this same year when the General Elections were held, the Jaintia Hills was allotted six seats. Out of these six seats the All Party Hill Leaders' Conference did very badly by winning only two seats, one seat went in favour of the Hill State People's Democratic Party and the rest to Independent candidates. It was in this year that the Jowai Sub-division was upgraded into a district. The election to the Jowai Autonomous District Council which was due in 1972 was extended by a year.⁶⁹ Thus the political development that took place indicated that the people of Jaintia Hills overwhelmingly supported the movement though of course looking at the election result of 1972 it seems that they were dissatisfied with the leaders for accepting the Sub-State.

68. Rao, V.V., Pakem, B. and Hazarika, N. A Century of Government and Politics in North East India, Vol. II, Meghalaya 1874-1983, (S. Chand and Company, Delhi, 1984), p. 70.

69. Interview with Shri J.D. Pohrmen, Deputy Chief Minister of Meghalaya and Ex. CEM of Jowai Autonomous District Council on March 19, 1992.

CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSION

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Before the coming of the British, the Jaintias had a three-tier system of Government. At the top, there was a Syiem. Syienship was hereditary and it passed from the uncle to the nephew. This principle was strictly followed to the extent of keeping the royal blood pure. His personal rule prevailed only over the conquered territory of the plain areas. In the hill section, the administration was left entirely to the Daloi. The only symbol of their allegiance to the Syiem was an annual tribute of one he-goat from each and every village under their administration. But this was rather ceremonial than political, though technically, a tribute system is symbolic of a basic power system. The Syiem was no more than a symbol of unity of the people; and if his activities threatened that unity, the latter would strongly oppose him.¹

The Dalois were not autocratic rulers either. Their Elaka were really republic though very tiny indeed. The

1. Paken, B. "The Socio-Political System of the Jaintia Tribe of Assam: An Analysis of Continuity and Change" in Singh, K.S. (ed.), Tribal Situation in India, (Simla, 1972), Vol. 13, p. 353.

Dalois were elected directly by the people within their respective Elaka from among the candidates who should belong to certain Kurs. This privilege was granted to certain Kurs simply because they were regarded as the original settlers of the Elaka concerned. Like the Syiem, the Daloi also had to rule according to the popular opinion of the Elaka. This was clear from the fact that all the acts of the Daloi would have to be approved by all the citizens of the Elaka through the Durbar Elaka.²

At the lowest rung of the ladder, the people had a Waheh-Chnong in each village. There was a Durbar Chnong too in which all the villagers were expected to attend. Like his senior partners in the administration, he could never go against the popular opinion of his village.³

The Langdoh played a very important role in guiding the political destiny of Jaintia Hills. In practice, no category of rulers in Jaintia Hills be he a Syiem, Daloi or Waheh-Chnong could become oppressive beyond a certain limit for fear of being removed from their post by the people. If they misbehaved towards their people, the people may appeal to their Langdoh and if they were found guilty

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid.

they might be removed accordingly. The people could not take the law into their own hands since they should have the recommendation of the Langdoh for removing any of their rulers.⁴ The last example of regicide in Jaintia Hills was that of Ban Singh Syiem (1660-65) who was put to death on the recommendation of the Langdoh was on the complaint against Ban Singh Syiem's tyrannical acts were made.⁵ Hence the Langdoh appeared to be the ultimate reservoir of power in Jaintia Hills. However, the Langdoh could not simply submit to any popular demand unless it was sanctioned by apparent divine authority as interpreted by him.⁶

Election as part of democratic practices was very old in the Jaintia Hills. The Daloi and Waheh-Chnong were elected and not appointed. Except for the Waheh-Chnong, the Syiem, the Daloi, Langdoh etc. required certain qualifications. The candidates must be members of the original Kurs. The Kur was counted from the mother's side. When the election was conducted, a date was appointed and the news was conveyed to all citizens of the Elaka. A Sangot

4. Pakem, B. "The Changing Political and Power Structure in Jaintia Hills", The Journal of the North East India Council for Social Science Research, (Shillong, 1977), p. 2.

5. Bareh, H. The History and Culture of the Khasi People, (Published by H. Bareh, Shillong, 1964), p. 76.

6. Pakem, B. "The Changing Political and Power Structure in Jaintia Hills", The Journal of the North East India Council for Social Science Research, (Shillong, 1977), p. 2.

(a village crier) summoned all adult males at a place fixed (usually a large field). When the electors arrived, a line or imaginary line was drawn in the field. The electors were directed to gather together in places where the candidates they supported stood or sat whatever the case may be. When the electors gathered together in two or three places as there were candidates, the number was counted.⁷

This is in brief an account of the old time election in Jaintia Hills. But since the time of the British Rule, the Government supervised the election of the Daloi. When the District Council came to stay in 1952, the appointment of the Daloi and their election were conducted by the Council. Soon thereafter head counting or hand counting would form only a small part of the history of the District.⁸

Thus power during the pre-British belonged not only to the Syiem but was also shared by the Daloi and their people. The people appointed their rulers only to supervise their activities.⁹

7. Sten, H.W. Meghalaya Year Book, (Published by H.W. Sten, Shillong, 1977), pp. 45-46.

8. Ibid.

9. Pakem, B. "The Socio-Political System of the Jaintia Tribe of Assam: An Analysis of Continuity and Change" in Singh, K.S. (ed), Tribal Situation in India, (Simla, 1972), Vol. 13, p. 353.

This process would have continued had it not been for the impact of British colonialism in the area. British administration had definitely upset the above system operating in Jaintia Hills. Under the British, the first institution to go was that of Syiemship in 1835. After replacing the Syiem, the other rulers like the Dalois and others had to be under the British rule. Actually the Dalois had then to bring their usual annual tribute of he-goats to the British authorities at Sohra instead of taking them as usual to Jaintiapur.¹⁰

The second institution to go was that of the Langdoh. The British had deprived him of his political role in presiding over the destiny of Jaintia rulers. His role was then confined purely to religious matters. whatever secular functions that had been enjoyed by the Langdoh had been completely taken over by the British. For example, the British authority alone could approve the election of a Daloi, and the Daloi might be removed in case of proved misbehaviour either to the people or to the British authorities. With the elimination of these two Jaintia political institutions the democratic process that existed in Jaintia

10. Pakem, B. "The Changing Political and Power Structure in Jaintia Hills", The Journal of the North East India Council for Social Science Research, (Shillong, 1977), p. 2.

Hills in whatever dimension began to erode. Now the British authorities had become the absolute masters in Jaintia Hills, with no other authority to limit their power over the Jaintia.¹¹

The only indigenous devices kept by the British were those of the institutions of a Daloi, a Pator and a Waheh-Chnong. But even here the British had drastically reduced their traditional powers. For example, the Dalois had practically become merely Commission Agents of the British. This curtailment of their power was, however, only between them and the British. On the contrary the Daloi had gained more control over their people with the backing of the British authorities.¹²

The British had intentionally used these traditional leaders to help them in ruling the turbulent people of the hills with the least expenditure. The people then respected the Daloi not because he was their traditional ruler but because of the fear of his authority which he had derived from the British. By enjoying more powers over petty civil and criminal matters, as well as over the new system of 'coolie labour' introduced by the British the

11. Ibid., pp. 2-3.

12. Ibid.

Dalois had sometimes misused their power to suppress their people. This was the position of the Daloi in Jaintia Hills until India's Independence.¹³

We have seen that before the coming of the British the Jaintias had their own traditional institutions. With the coming of the British these institutions were reduced in importance and there was a feeling that some sort of organisation should be set up so that through it the people could ventilate their grievances to the British authorities.¹⁴ Thus the Jaintia Durbar was established in 1900 and it was known as the Jaintia National Union. It was only in 1931 at the meeting held in Jowai that the Jaintia National Union was renamed the Jaintia Durbar.¹⁵

The main intention in forming the Jaintia Durbar was to unite the whole of Jaintia Hills under one organisation for the purpose of safeguarding, retaining and improving upon the customs and usages of the land. Secondly, it intended to develop the people economically, socially and educationally. Thirdly, it also served as a liaison between the Government and the people of Jaintia Hills.

13. Ibid.

14. Pakem, B. "The Socio-Political System of the Jaintia Tribe of Assam: An Analysis of Continuity and Change" in Singh K.S. (ed), Tribal Situation in India, (Simla, 1972), Vol. 13, p. 358.

15. Constitution of the Jaintia Durbar, (Jowai, 1954), 3rd edn., pp. i-ii.

Fourthly, it was an instrument to work towards understanding with the different political parties in India and it would also serve as an organ or spokesman of the people of Jaintia Hills.¹⁶

The Jaintia Durbar was nothing but a union of the representatives from every sub-durbar in Jaintia Hills.¹⁷ With the passing of the Government of India Act 1935 and with the holding of election in 1937 the people witnessed a complete change in the political sphere. In 1937 the Jaintia Durbar though simply a social organisation recommended all candidates in the provincial elections. During this time there were no party politics in Jaintia Hills and hence the Jaintia Durbar had no alternative but to send its representatives to represent the Jaintia people. It was for this reason that candidates contested the election as independent candidates. All candidates were members of the Jaintia Durbar and either they won or lost the election they still remained as members.¹⁸ From 1937 to 1952 the Jaintia Durbar still functioned as a non-political

16. Ibid., p. 1.

17. Pakem, B. "The Socio-Political System of the Jaintia Tribe of Assam: An Analysis of Continuity and Change" in Singh, K.S. (ed.), Tribal Situation in India, (Simla, 1972), Vol. 13, p. 358.

18. Interview with (Late) L. Khyriem (MLA - 1947-52, 1957-62) on August 31, 1982.

body but in the general elections of 1957 the Jaintia Durbar had an understanding with the Eastern India Tribal Union which was spearheading the Hill State movement. The result was that after 1957 the Jaintia Durbar lost the confidence of the people and then gradually became defunct in the early sixties.¹⁹

Before 1937, the Jaintia Hills together with the Khasi Hills were declared as a backward area and therefore not represented in the Assam Legislative Council. Under the Government of India Act, 1935, the Jaintia Hills together with the Khasi Hills were declared as Partially Excluded areas and therefore represented in the Assam Legislative Assembly. The Jaintia Hills was then allotted one seat, that is, the Jowai seat.²⁰

Thus with the coming of the British, most of the early institutions were either abolished or reduced in importance and the people were exposed to new ideas and experiments in politics. Accordingly, the people had to adjust themselves to these new political situation and

19. Ibid.

20. Rao, V.V. A Century of Tribal Politics in North East India 1874-1974, (S. Chand and Company, Delhi, 1976), pp. 476-477.

ideas. A sudden change from an old political system to a new one seemed to have a great impact on the people of those days. The leaders of those days seemed to be more concerned about the unity of the tribes and for this reason all candidates were recommended in the election. They seemed to realise that these new ideas and experiments in politics would bring confusion to the minds of the people and it seemed for this reason that the Jaintia Durbar the only organisation of Jaintia Hills functioned as a non-political body. For many years the Jaintia Durbar as a social organisation controlled the representatives from Jaintia Hills and led the people to their political destiny.

Since Independence the powers of the Daloi had been threatened by the new set up. The District Council under the Sixth Schedule to the Indian Constitution had replaced the British administrative system over tribal affairs in Jaintia Hills. Earlier we have seen that the British had replaced the Syiem and now the District Council had replaced the British. But the stepping of the District Council into the shoes of either the Jaintia Syiem or the British did not bring any improvement in the power and position of the Daloi. On the contrary, the new power structure had radically reduced the powers of the Daloi.²¹

21. Pakem, B. "The Changing Political and Power Structure in Jaintia Hills", The Journal of the North East India Council for Social Science Research, (Shillong, 1977), p. 3.

Under paragraph 3 of the Sixth Schedule, the District Council can regulate the succession, appointment and even abolition of the institution of Daloi and Waheh-Chnong. The Daloi and Waheh-Chnong are now completely under the control of the District Council. On many occasions, there have been tussles between the traditional elite represented by the Daloi and Waheh-Chnong and the modern political elite of popular elected representatives. On one pretext or another, the Daloi or Waheh-Chnong might be suspended or even dismissed by the District Council on charges like insubordination or malpractices. The tussle is still a continuing affair and has reached such a stage where the District Council authorities might even be tempted to abolish these traditional political institutions.²²

In accordance with the provision of the Sixth Schedule, five District Councils - one each for the North Cachar Hills, the Mikir Hills, the Garo Hills, the Mizo Hills and the United Khasi-Jaintia Hills District were set up in 1952. The creation of these District Councils for the hill areas actually did not seem to satisfy the Jaintias because in 1947 they did plead before the Bordoloi Committee, for a separate District Council, but Rev. Nichols-Roy with certain promises of equal treatment pressurized

22. Ibid.

them to drop the idea. Further, in the Constituent Assembly, Rev. Nichols-Roy, from the Khasi hills was the spokesman for the areas. As such the Jaintias could not do much in expressing their opinion for separation. Again in 1957 when Pandit Govind Ballabh Pant the Union Home Minister of India visited Shillong some members of the District Council and others representing the people of Jaintia Hills submitted a memorandum to him demanding a separate District Council for the Jowai Sub-Division. It was only in 1964 that a separate District Council was created for the Jowai Sub-division of the United Khasi-Jaintia Hills District inhabited mainly by the Jaintias. This new District Council came into being in 1967.²³

In the working of the provision of the Sixth Schedule the people of the hill areas of Assam, felt that this autonomy was defective and not satisfactory. They found many loopholes by which their future would be endangered gradually by the mixture in the administration in Assam with people whose language and culture were quite different from their own. The result of this was that the hill people felt that it was better for them to have a Hill State of their own. Thus from 1954 we see the emergence of the Hill

23. Report of the United Khasi-Jaintia Autonomous District Commission in the matter of creation of a New Autonomous District for the Jowai Sub-division, (Government of Assam, Shillong, 1954), p. 22.

State movement in the hill areas. The people of Jaintia Hills also joined hands with the other hill tribes of Assam in this movement demanding for a separate Hill State. This led to the formation in 1960 of the All Party Hill Leaders' Conference which spearheaded the Hill State movement.²⁴

Thus the power structure of the political institution in Jaintia Hills had undergone a number of changes. Before the British period the ultimate power was wielded by the Langdoh with supposed divine authority. The Syiem controlled only over the plain areas while in the hills he enjoyed simply a nominal authority. It was the Dalois who really wielded powers in the hills, and might be assisted by Pators if Elakas were large enough. At the village level, the Waheh-Chnong exercised the powers conferred on them by the Daloi or Pator. But all those officials were ultimately responsible to the Langdoh who was in turn responsible to divine guidance. So, the element of popular control cannot be said to have existed in Jaintia Hills, during pre-British period. Even where election prevailed, either franchise was limited to adult male members only or the candidates should come from a limited number of

24. Memorandum submitted to the State Re-organisation Commission by the Hills People of the Autonomous Districts in Assam, (Shillong, 1954), p. 1.

Kurs. With the coming of the British, whatever amount of limited democracy that had existed in Jaintia Hills had been done away with. The two institutions of Langdoh and Syiem were abolished while the power structure in other political institutions though retained has been drastically changed. The Dalois, Pators or the Waheh-Chnongs became only instruments for wielding British power in Jaintia Hills. While their respective power relating to people had increased considerably, in fact, they had subordinated themselves to British power. Since independence, all these had been changed again. Though the two earlier institutions of Langdoh and Syiem had not been revived, the other institutions had not been given a new lease of life either. On the contrary the powers of the present Dalois and Waheh-Chnong have always been threatened by the District Council. But the introduction of this new system cannot be said to have actually transferred power from the hands of the Daloi and Waheh-Chnong to the people through their popular elected representatives in the District Council.²⁵

From the foregoing analysis it becomes clear that this phase was a transitional phase in Jaintia politics.

25. Pakem, B. "The Changing Political and Power Structure in Jaintia Hills", The Journal of the North East India Council for Social Science Research, (Shillong, 1977), p. 3.

The system of the traditional political institution of the Jaintias was destabilised by the British. Since the British intention was not for the welfare of the Jaintias but they only wanted to strengthen their base in North East India therefore they went on experimenting with these institutions. Syiemship was liquidated and with that the priest lost his power over the people. Moreover, the people were overburdened by an oppressive tax system without taking into consideration their primitive technology and the backward nature of their economy. However, the only alternative for the Jaintias was to protest against such measures but that did not help in restoring back the autonomy to their system. On the other hand, it resulted in making them a part of the bigger whole by making Jaintia Hills together with the Khasi Hills a part of Assam. It was only after a long struggle that a certain amount of autonomy was restored through the creation of a separate District Council in 1964 and the formation of the State of Meghalaya in 1972.

GLOSSARY

GLOSSARY

Behdein Khlam	- It is a religio-cultural festival celebrated in some part of Jaintia Hills. It is a Plague Driving Festival.
U Blai	- God
Ka Blai	- Goddess
Bei Tymmen	- Ancestress
Ki Borkyndat	- Barkandazes
Chi-Kpoh	- Sub-clan
Chi-Kur	- Same clan
Chi-Chnong	- Co-villagers
Chi-raid	- Sub-tribe
Choudhuries	- Collectors
Daloi	- Provincial governor
Daloiship	- Province under the Daloi
Durbar chnong	- Village durbar
Durbar Elaka	- Provincial Durbar
Durbar Hima	- National Assembly
Dan	- Collector
Duhalia	- Musician

- Duh jait - Extinction of the family.
- Elaka - Province
- Hima - State
- Jain khyrwang - A striped cloth worn by the Jaintia women.
- Jainsem - The outer garment worn by Khasi women with loose ends knotted crosswise over the shoulder.
- Jait bru - Tribe
- Knia Lephaw Marang - A religious festival observed by the people in the Shangpung daloiship.
- Kur - Clan
- Kur Ksiar - Close relatives
- Kur Lakynrum - Distant relatives
- Laho - It is a dance in which a woman dances with two men, one on her left and one on her right, crossing hand over the shoulders of the woman.
- Langdoh - Priest
- Ka langdoh - Priestess
- Laskor - Prime Minister
- Lum - Hill
- Muga - Assam silk

- Ki Myntri - Council of Ministers under the Syiem.
- Ki Mar - Noble men
- Majis - Messenger
- Niawbei - Ancestral Mother
- Niang - Family religious rights.
- Pastieh - Men came out to dance as warriors coming back from a raid.
- Pam Iaw ka Pyrda - A religious festival observed by the people in the Sutnga Daloi-ship.
- Pynkam - Willed
- Pator - Lieutenant Governor
- Rap yung - System of adoption.
- Raid - Commune
- Syiem - Literally meaning king or ruler. To his hill people he is known as their Syiem but he is called Raja by his subjects in the plains.
- Syiemship - State ruled by a Syiem.
- Ki Syiem Blai - Divine kings.
- Ki Syiem broo - Slave kings.
- Sirdar - In non-daloiship for instance there are Sirdars. They are being elected by the people.

- Sangot - Village crier.
- Synteng kamai lingkur - Literally it means to earn in the mother's clan. Traditionally among the Jaintias the husband visits his wife only after dark. Early in the morning he returns to his mother's house for eating and working purposes. The husband lives and works with his mother and his clan and his right of ownership whatsoever exists only in mother's line.
- Tholang - Paternal deity.
- Taro - Goddess of wealth in Jaintia Hills.
- Thlen - God of wealth in Khasi Hills.
- Waheh-Chnong - Village headman.
- Wasan - Magistrate and Police.
- Yutran - Self-acquired property.
- Yatoh kur - Super clan.
- Zamindars - Land owners.
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