

THE KHASIS

UNDER BRITISH RULE

(1824-1947)



Helen Giri

Regional history has an important academic significance for a well balanced study to be made by a historian. This book forms an important segment of North East History and national history of the sub-continent during British rule. It has in it, Khasi Native States which had Shillong of the then Shyllong State as the administrative Centre of Assam in those days. The role played by native rulers, etc. has been highlighted. It also highlights the engagements made between the Khasi rulers and the British government, the policy adopted by the British Government and the subsequent political development which took place till 1947.

There is a demand for such a book written from a historical perspective, not only in colleges, universities but the reading public as well.

Helen Giri began her career as a teacher. She first taught History at the undergraduate colleges. She then joined the Post Graduate Department of History, North Eastern Hill University, Shillong as Lecturer and later as Reader. She has been supervising research scholars for M.Phil. and Ph.D. She has contributed a number of research papers, edited a number of books and presided over many seminars. Besides, she has been organising seminars, symposia and workshops from time to time.

She is a Top Grade Radio Artiste. She is well versed in cultural studies and folk music for which she has been selected many times to represent in State, National and International festivals. She is a life member of North East India History Association and other organisations. Presently she is Professor and Head of the Centre for Creative Arts, North Eastern Hill University, Shillong.

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PREFACE

The *Khasis Under British Rule (1824–1947)* was first published in 1990 by Akashi Book Depot, Shillong. The multiple printing errors of the book, for reasons beyond control have caused inconvenience to many readers. I deeply regret. In response to the vital responsibility I owe to research scholars and friends, the same book with modifications, additions, etc., is here again, I hope in proper shape. The book does not claim perfection. For all the shortcomings and mistakes which might have crept in, I crave the indulgence of my dear readers.

I acknowledge my indebtedness to all the authors whose works I have consulted. I take this opportunity to thank Dr. C.J. Thomas, Deputy Director, ICSSR North Eastern Regional Centre, Shillong for being so kind and helpful to see that the book is published. I am particularly grateful to Ms. Cerilla Khonglah for all the assistance rendered, without a murmur, in supervising the typing of the manuscript by Jean Mebari Blah, both from ICSSR North Eastern Regional Centre, Shillong. I sincerely thank Regency Publications, Delhi for the care and interest taken in the publication of the book.

North Eastern Hill University
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CONCLUSION

The English were fascinated and attracted to the hills for its rich natural beauty and bracing climate conducive for European invalids. They were content having found a sanatorium and a health resort. But they did not take time to realise the rich potentialities of the hills which could be comfortably tapped through political strategy and military manpower.

Ever since the days of the Ahoms, the Syiems of Shyllong and Sutnga native states were among the most daring. It may be recalled that some Khasi rulers lost their control over the Duars which they had enjoyed during the Ahom Government as a result of the Anglo-Burmese War. Others had been asked to pay fixed cash demands to the British which they could not. Consequent upon their inability to pay, the Duars were forcibly taken away by the British. This was done to squeeze the Khasis economically. Pol. Dev

Bor Manick, Syiem of Shyllong was the first Khasi ruler who had the courage to seize the collection made by the English revenue officers. This enraged the English and brought Bor Manick in direct confrontation with them. The Khasi native rulers rallied together to challenge the skillful military tactics of the English. The Resistance Movement gained momentum but the Khasis were at last overpowered by the superior war equipments of the English. The Khasi states were then brought under the subsidiary alliance, some became semi-independent, some minor or dependent states, others were converted into British areas. With economic interest ensured, trade facilities accelerated, education and

envangelisation facilitated, political domination exercised, the English left no stone unturned to achieve their objective.

It sounds paradoxical that some Khasi rulers had gone against the common interest of the Resistance Movement. Consciously or unconsciously the English intervened in the local issues of native states shall we say, to fasten the fabric of political control? Yet, it may not be out of place to say that it might have also been the vision, and understanding of those Khasi States, in their own capacity of course, how the impending situation should be tackled. Again, there might have been times when the political turn of events has been overlooked or even misjudged. It may be in the fitness of things to say that Khasi challenge against British brutality has been a struggle comparable in complexity to any other movement in India.

It is unfortunate that it should go in the pages of history that the period has tarnished and distorted the traditional image of the society, with a 'scar' which time alone can erase. It has divided the sentiment of the race, it has geographically divided the hills with new nomenclatures tagged to them, unwanted and uncalled for, it has brought in change in the fundamental land system of the people. In short, it has created certain problems, vexed and perplexed, which demands social and political adjustment. The administrative machinery adopted by the English for the colonial convenience became a deceptive facade; it complicated the social identity of the hills when it collided with that of the plains.

Yet notwithstanding, the positive contribution made by the English, nay the legacy bequeathed to the Khasis should not be ignored. Speaking of the political developments which subsequently took place in the hills and the untiring efforts of some British administrators, prepared a congenial atmosphere for more political awareness for the Khasi native states. The latter were motivated to strongly commit themselves for the cause of Khasi unity among states and non-states in that hour of crisis for national solidarity. When the English left, the whole Khasi race was brought under one administration. We remind ourselves through the words of Sardar Patel, who remarked on the 5th July 1947:

“The country with its institution is a proud heritage of the people who inhabit it. It is an accident that some live in states and some in British India, all alike partake of its culture and character. We are all knit together by bonds of self interest. None can segregate us into segments, no impassable barriers can be set up between us.”

✓ British rule covering a period of a little more than a hundred years provides ample room for the reconstruction of the history of India. Every geographical region with its regional variations and ingredients in the historical perspective may widen the horizon for the historian.

✓

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