

# The NEHU Journal

---

R KHONGSDIER  
B T LANGSTIEH &  
B M REDDY  
K S NAGARAJA  
KETSHUKIETUO  
DZÜVICHÜ  
ISABELLA LALL  
S N SINGH  
SUKALPA  
BHATTACHARJEE

Vol II No 1  
January, 2004

# *The NEHU Journal*

*Editor : T B Subba*

*Associate Editor : Kynpham Sing Nongkynrih*

*Assistant Editor : Bedarius Shylla*

*Production Assistants : Surajit Dutta & Binod Rynjah*

*Layout and Design : Shongdor Diengdoh*

*The NEHU Journal* is published bi-annually (January-July) by the North-Eastern Hill University Publications, Shillong. The focus of the journal is on India's Northeast and countries bordering it. Articles on other areas are also welcome. Contributors are advised to consult notes at the back.

The NEHU Publications reserves the copyright to all articles, communications and book reviews published and no article/communication/review or a part thereof may be reprinted without written permission from the Editor.

## *Subscriptions*

Single issue	- Rs 100.00 / \$ 4
Single year	- Rs 200.00 / \$ 8
Two years	- Rs 350.00 / \$ 12
Three years	- Rs 500.00 / \$ 16

Payment may be made by cheque/draft payable to "NEHU Publications" and be sent to the Deputy Director, NEHU Publications, Bijni Complex, Laitumkhrah, Shillong-793003. Outstation cheques/drafts may kindly add Rs. 10/- or \$ 1 towards bank service charges.

All correspondence related to the journal may be addressed to the Editor, NEHU Publications, Bijni Complex, Shillong-793003 at [tbsubba@sancharnet.in](mailto:tbsubba@sancharnet.in).

ISSN. 0972-8406

## Editorial

With January 2004 issue *The NEHU Journal* enters the second year of its publication. During 2003, the year of its birth, we at the editorial office were successful in obtaining the ISSN for the journal, getting the editorial board approved by the Governing Body of the University Publications, and starting the process of

# *The NEHU Journal*

Vol. II, No. 1, January 2004

every issue. In the first issue, one of the referees, who was the first referee had not been fair to an author, but from the next issue we intend to have at least two referees. Honestly, this might not always be possible, for we still need to solicit articles from friends and acquaintances, but we shall at least try and get back to the contributors for various clarifications, if and when necessary.

We begin this year with a regret about not being able to utilise the services of our very able copy editor, but are happy to announce that we have now an assistant editor who is on a full-time job related to the journal. With his editorial assistance, Kynpham Sing Nongkynrih, the Associate Editor, and I, hope to be able to pay some attention to the promotion of the journal both within and outside North-East India, which we realise is as important as raising its standard.

As we wish you all a very happy 2004, we would like to request you to kindly send your valuable articles, review essays, book reviews and academic papers for possible publication in the journal. We would also like to inform you that though we have revised our subscription rates, they are still much lower than the actual expenses involved in the publication. We shall be ever grateful if you consider patronising the journal not only by contributing to it academically but also financially by subscribing to it.

**NEHU**

T B Subba  
Editor

## Editorial

With January 2004 issue *The NEHU Journal* enters the second year of its publication. During 2003, the year of its birth, we at the editorial office were successful in obtaining the ISSN for the journal, getting the editorial board approved by the Governing Body of the University Publications, and starting the process of vetting every manuscript at least by one outstation referee. We sent a manuscript to a second referee only when we thought that the first referee had not been fair to an author, but from the next issue we intend to send the manuscript, including book reviews, to at least two referees. Honestly, this might not always be possible, for we still need to solicit articles from friends and acquaintances, but we shall at least try and get back to the contributors for various clarifications, if and when necessary.

We begin this year with a regret about not being able to utilise the services of our very able copy editor, but are happy to announce that we have now an assistant editor who is on a full-time job related to the journal. With his editorial assistance, Kynpham Sing Nongkynrih, the Associate Editor, and I, hope to be able to pay some attention to the promotion of the journal both within and outside North-East India, which we realise is as important as raising its standard.

As we wish you all a very happy 2004, we would like to request you to kindly send your valuable articles, review essays, book reviews and academic reports for possible publication in the journal. We would also like to inform you that though we have revised our subscription rates, they are still much lower than the actual expenses involved in the publication. We shall be ever grateful if you consider patronising the journal not only by contributing to it academically but also financially by subscribing to it.

**T B Subba**  
Editor

## CONTENTS

### EDITORIAL BOARD MEMBERS

1. Mr. Jayanta Mahapatra, Editor, *Chandrabhaga*, Cuttack.
2. Prof. K. Satchidanandan, Secretary, Sahitya Academy, New Delhi.
3. Dr. Sreenivasan, Editor, *Journal of Literature and Aesthetics*, Kollam.
4. Prof. A.C. Bhagabati, Guwahati.
5. Prof. Sanjib Baruah, Bard College, New York.
6. Dr. Anindita Dasgupta, Managing Editor, *Journal of Peace and Democracy in South Asia*, Kualalumpur.
7. Dr. Phillipe Ramirez, National Centre for Scientific Research, Paris.
8. Dr. Stuart Blackburn, School of Oriental and African Studies, London.
9. Prof. Mahadev Chakravorty, Tripura University, Agartala.
10. Prof. Virginius Xaxa, Delhi University, Delhi.

ISABELLA LAL

The Brontë Sisters as Poets of Faith

S N SINGH

Dialogic Space in Art : A Reading of Goutam Biswas'

Art as Dialogue : Essays in Phenomenology of Aesthetic Experience\*

SUKALPA BHATTACHARJEE

BOOK REVIEW

# The Lyngngams as a Hybrid and Evolving Population

## CONTENTS

- The Lyngngams as a Hybrid and Evolving Population 1  
*R KHONGSDIER*
- Ethno-historic and Linguistic Background of Lyngngams and their Demographic Structure 15  
*B T LANGSTIEH & B M REDDY*
- A Lexico-statistic Study of Khyrnriam and Lyngngam Dialects of the Khasi Language 43  
*K S NAGARAJA*
- Health Problems of the Aged among the Angami Nagas 57  
*KETSHUKIETUO DZÜVICHÜ*
- Need for Counselling : A Study on Degree Students of Shillong 75  
*ISABELLA LALL*
- The Brontë Sisters as Poets of Faith 91  
*S N SINGH*
- Dialogic Space in Art : A Reading of Goutam Biswas' Art as Dialogue : Essays in Phenomenology of Aesthetic Experience\* 117  
*SUKALPA BHATTACHARJEE*
- BOOK REVIEW 127

## The Lyngngams as a Hybrid and Evolving Population

R KHONGSDIER

One of the fascinating facts regarding modern human species, or *Homo sapiens*, is its variability characterized by innumerable characteristics, which can be looked from different angles depending upon the interest of the researchers or observers. Physical anthropologists and other human biologists may be interested in those genetic or biological characteristics of the human species. On the other hand, social anthropologists and other social scientists may be interested in behavioural, psychological, economic, political, social and other cultural aspects. Thus the beauty of the human species consists in its variation. Such a variation is useful in some cases, harmful in others and neutral in some others. From the evolutionary point of view, human variation is the result of evolution, although we have learned little about just how it has happened.

This article is concerned with genetic variation with reference to the Lyngngams as one of the examples of evolutionary trend in human population. The discussion is solely based on secondary sources, which are quite limited, especially in respect of genetic data. The main purpose of this article is to help the interested students get more insight into the evolutionary mechanisms that are operating in Khasi population.

### The Lyngngams

The Lyngngams are a group of people living in the geographical space between areas occupied by Khasis on the east and Garos on the west. The Garos call them Megams, and they are claimed to be a sub-group of the Garos.<sup>1</sup> According to Gurdon,<sup>2</sup> although

the Lyngngams speak a Khasi dialect and observe certain Khasi customs, they “differ so very greatly from the Khasis in their manner of life.” Gurdon suspected that the Lyngngams were an offshoot of the Garos, but he also believed that they were a “hybrid race”, despite the absence of frequent intermarriages with the Khasis during the period of his survey. Of course, many scholars appear to have a general agreement that the contemporary Lyngngams are a hybrid group that has come into being due to intermixture between Khasis and Garos,<sup>3</sup> although some others believe them to be a distinct group of their own origin.<sup>4</sup> Thus the question relating to the founding ancestor/ancestress of the Lyngngams has been still shrouded in mystery. But this is a common problem when one deals with the ethnic origin of many human populations including the Khasi population. In the present discussion, we may consider the contemporary Lyngngams as a sub-group of the Khasis, mainly on the basis of intermixture, linguistic and political affiliation. Besides, some Lyngngams claim that they are one of the Khasi sub-groups, and they dislike to be regarded as an offshoot of the Garos.

### **Lyngngam as a Hybrid Population**

The intermixture between two populations of separate gene pools, through marriage, is important in bringing about changes in the genetic make-up of a hybrid group. It takes place generally due to migration. Thus the terms “migration” and “gene flow” are synonymously used in population genetics, although genes may flow into a population from outside without migration of individuals (especially males). However, such a casual gene flow is considered to be less important in changing the genetic composition of the population.<sup>5</sup> The importance of gene flow can be observed when there are frequent intermarriages between members of a particular population and the neighbouring populations. Secondly, if genetic data are available, one can estimate the rate of gene flow into the study population from the neighbouring populations. In this connection, it may be appropriate to take the Lyngngam population

into consideration. The previous genetic study conducted by the Department of Anthropology, North-Eastern Hill University, has indicated that the Lyngngams are not related to either the Khasis or the Garos especially in respect of the ABO blood group system.<sup>6</sup> One of the possible explanations for such deviation of the Lyngngam population from the neighboring populations, i.e., Khasis and Garos, may be due to a different recombination of genotypes as a result of intermixture. With this end in view, let us take into consideration the genetic contribution of the Khasi and Garo populations to the gene pool of the contemporary Lyngngam population in respect of few traditional genetic markers by applying the Bernstein model<sup>7</sup> of gene flow, which is modified as follows:

$$M = (L - G)/(D1 + D2)$$

Where M = estimated gene flow in the hybrid population, i.e., Lyngngam

L = observed allele frequency in the Lyngngam population

G = observed allele frequency in the Garo population

K = observed allele frequency in the Khasi population

D1 = (L - K), or (K - L) depending upon whether K or L is greater in frequency of the given allele.

D2 = (L - G), or (G - L) depending upon whether G or L is greater in frequency of the given allele.

The M value in the above equation describes the proportion of the total gene pool of Lyngngam population, which is derived from the Khasi population, irrespective of the number of generations. The equation makes no assumption whether the hybridity is a result of a single instance of intermarriage, or a consequence of gene flow in different proportions from both the parental populations. Thus it is simply a description of the sum total of gene flow from the parental populations (Khasis and Garos).

**Table 1. Estimate of the Khasi contribution to the gene pool of contemporary Lyngngams<sup>8</sup>**

Allele	Lyngngams (L)	Khasis (K)	Garos (G)	D1 + D2	M
p (ABO)	0.307	0.220	0.207	0.187	0.535
q (ABO)	0.233	0.138	0.277	0.139	0.317
r (ABO)	0.460	0.642	0.516	0.238	0.235
t (PTC)	0.548	0.397	0.465	0.234	0.355
Average genetic contribution of the Khasi population					0.361

Applying the above equation, the genetic contribution of the Khasi population to the gene pool of the Lyngngam population is given in Table 1. It is found that, on the basis of the ABO blood groups and PTC sensitivity, the average genetic contribution of the Khasi population to the Lyngngam population is only about 36%. In other words, the contemporary Lyngngams derive approximately 36% of their genes from the Khasis, and about 64% from the Garos, thereby indicating a higher degree of Garo ancestry. Recently, it is reported that the Garo ancestry is also stronger among the contemporary Lyngngams in respect of molecular genetic markers such as Y-chromosomal STRs and autosomal STRs, although there is a higher degree of Khasi ancestry in respect of mtDNA - HVR I & II (B. Langstieh, personal communication). However, this does not mean that the Lyngngams were originally the Garos. It can only tell to a certain extent the nature of contribution from male and female lines, i.e., it indicates that the intermarriage mostly took place between Khasi females (on the basis of mtDNA - HVR I & II) and Garo males (on the basis of Y-chromosomal STRs).

Although it is obvious that the contemporary Lyngngams derive most of their genes from the Garos, one should be cautious while interpreting such a trend. In this estimate, we have assumed

the contemporary Lyngngam population as a hybrid group due to intermixture between the Khasis and Garos, i.e., without taking into consideration the intermarriages between the Lyngngams and other communities. If intermarriage with other communities had taken place frequently, our interpretation of the genetic contribution of Khasis and Garos to the Lyngngam population would be different, or even more complicated. Secondly, our assumption that the Lyngngams are an offshoot of Khasis or Garos would be totally wrong if the Lyngngams belonged to a different racial stock or origin. Recently it is reported that, according to one tradition, the Lyngngams migrated to their present homeland from Mymensingh in Bangladesh.<sup>9</sup> If that is true, then the contemporary Lyngngam population is not a hybrid but a polyhybrid group. Thirdly, the gene frequencies of the Lyngngam population in the present discussion were based on the data collected from Nongdaju village.<sup>6</sup> Whether the genetic data collected from Nongdaju could be considered as representative of the Lyngngam population is another issue, which is beyond the scope of the present article to discuss. But the point is that one should take into account problems of sampling techniques before arriving at a conclusion on the genetic relationship between populations. Moreover, genetic markers such as the ABO blood groups and PTC taste sensitivity are nowadays considered to be weak genetic markers in establishing the population relationship. The problem is more complicated when a hybrid population derives its genes from populations living in different environmental conditions, because the selective pressure acting on genes tends to vary between populations of different environments.<sup>10</sup>

### **Lyngngam as an Evolving Population**

Although the first inhabitants of Lyngngam area cannot be ascertained on the basis of limited genetic traits in the present analysis, it is likely that the Lyngngam population has emerged as a distinct group with a separate genetic entity. When we say that a population has emerged as a separate genetic entity, it implies that the population has its own gene pool that is different from other

populations. The Lyngngam population appears to fall in that category because it is significantly different from both Khasi and Garo populations in respect of certain genetic traits.<sup>6</sup> The results of the present analysis also suggest that the Lyngngam population is a hybrid group with a higher degree of Garo ancestry, i.e., assuming that intermarriages are mostly between Khasis and Garos, and that the role of mutation and selection may be less important when compared with that of intermixture. Of course, this observation is also consistent with the earlier observations on linguistic and socio-cultural traits.<sup>2,9</sup> On the basis of such assumptions, it is obvious that the nearest ancestors of the Lyngngams, as a hybrid group, are Khasis and Garos, although we are not sure about the first inhabitants or founders of the Lyngngam population. Thus the Lyngngam population is very interesting from the evolutionary point of view for it has many implications. Some such implications may be briefly presented below.

First, as a hybrid group, the Lyngngam population diverges itself from Khasi and Garo populations. This divergence from its parental populations is an example of how intermixture brings about genetic variation between human populations, thereby indicating the change or evolutionary trend of the study population. Intermixture or hybridization does not by itself produce new genes in the population as does mutation, but it brings about different combinations of genes from two or more populations. This is the case in the Lyngngam population, which deviates itself from its parental populations. Many other populations in the world have also followed such a trend. For example, the African-Whites in America is often cited in the literature as a result of intermixture between Blacks of African ancestry and Whites of European ancestry. In Meghalaya, we have a number of such hybrid groups such as the Muslim Khasis and the Marngars of Ri-bhoi district.

Second, along with other evolutionary forces such as mutation, natural selection and genetic drift, intermixture has been recognized as a very important evolutionary mechanism in bringing

about genetic diversity. By increasing genetic diversity, there is greater likelihood of intermixture enhancing the long-term survival of the population in coping with the changing environment. On the other hand, if environmental quality remains constant, there is greater likelihood that intermixture may be disadvantageous for the population that is optimally adapted to such constant environment. For example, the high frequencies of sickling gene in areas of West Africa is due to the selective advantage of sickling-gene carriers in those areas where malaria is endemic.<sup>11</sup> Admixture with non-sickling peoples would result in decreased average fitness of the hybrids in such areas where malaria is constantly endemic. However, if malaria is controlled or eradicated, the situation will be different in which the hybrids with lower incidence of sickling gene are likely to show their increased fitness as compared to the original population. Although we have not come across any data on indicators of fitness among the Lyngngams, our recent study on the growth and nutritional status of Muslim Khasi children, whose fathers were migrant Muslim males, seems to support such a contention. It was found that the growth and nutritional status of Muslim Khasi children (i.e., who were the offspring of the Muslim men and Khasi women) was much better than that of the Khasi children whose parents were both Khasis.<sup>12</sup> On the other hand, Muslim Khasi children were less disadvantageous when compared with Muslim children. Thus future studies on the Lyngngams are expected to throw more light on the role of intermixture in bringing about decreased and increased fitness of the population in terms of the genetic component of phenotypic variation such as diseases and anthropometric traits. As for growth and nutritional status, it is possible that the Lyngngam children would be superior in fitness to both Khasi and Garo children. One of the reasons for this is the smaller range of difference in anthropometric traits between Khasis and Garos as compared with the difference between the Khasis and Muslim groups of North-East India. To make it clear, both Khasis and Garos belong to the same racial stock, while the Muslims belong to a different racial stock. Nevertheless, this contention

can be refuted or verified by future studies. The point here is that genetic diversity or heterogeneity may be beneficial for the long-term survival of any human species including the Lyngngams. More the genetic diversity higher would be the long-term survival of species due to the fact that environment keeps on changing, and humans are themselves great agents in changing the environmental quality.

Third, the Lyngngam population is just an example of the biological (genetic) sub-division of human population due to intermixture, or other evolutionary mechanisms. Both Khasi and Garo populations are highly heterogeneous from the evolutionary and genetic points of view. Earlier studies have revealed that the four social sub-groups (namely, Khyntiam, Pnar, Bhoi and War) of the Khasi population are different from one another in respect of anthropometric and genetic traits.<sup>13</sup> Das has suggested the importance of both intermixture and geographical isolation in bringing about the differences between the Khasi sub-groups. He observed that the Bhois showed the greatest deviation from the other Khasi sub-groups. Since the Bhois inhabit a lower altitude area in the northern part of Meghalaya towards Assam, there are infrequent intermarriages with the other sub-groups such as the Khyntiams who are living in higher altitude. Instead, there is a possibility of gene flow to the Bhois from other neighbouring populations in Assam. Our bio-demographic study among the War-Khasis has also revealed that the Khasi population as a whole is not just divided into four or five sub-groups. Each sub-group, like the War-Khasis, is again subdivided into several endogamous units comprising a village, or a group of few villages.<sup>14</sup> It is observed that among the War-Khasis there is a very high tendency towards village endogamy with low admixture rate. Accordingly, it is suggested that each village, or a number of few villages, is likely to form a separate *deme*, which is different from one another in respect of anthropometric and genetic traits. The findings on anthropometric characters seem to confirm such a hypothesis.<sup>15</sup>

Fourth, the Lyngngam population is very important for future studies concerning the “fission-fusion process” in which a local group split, or migrated, and formed a new group or fused with another existing group.<sup>16</sup> There is a possibility that the “fission-fusion process” may also take place among the Lyngngams, which may be associated with the practice of shifting cultivation as the mainstay of the people in that area. Moreover, it is likely that the Lyngngams who are nearer to Khasis would be more similar to Khasis, while those living closer to the Garo Hills would be more similar to Garos due to frequent intermarriages. This is because the breeding size of the population is often restricted within a certain boundary due to geographical and socio-cultural factors as has been observed among the War-Khasis.<sup>14</sup>

### **Concluding Remarks**

The treatment of Lyngngam population as a hybrid group in this article should be treated as a classificatory device to understand the genetic structure of the Khasi population. It has little to do with the controversy relating to linguistic and socio-cultural identities of the Lyngngam population as one of the sub-groups of Khasis or Garos. Many of the earlier scholars were of the opinion that the Khasis might be one of the earliest inhabitants of this part of the country.<sup>13</sup> It is believed that the founding ancestors of the Khasis were the Proto-Australoids of Austric speakers (Mon-Khmer) who changed their genetic make up and physical features due to intermixture with the Mongoloid populations. Therefore, from this point of view, the present-day Khasis are themselves a result of intermixture and other evolutionary forces, and some of their sub-groups are hybrids of hybrids. In this connection, if one looks at the evolutionary history of the other Khasi sub-groups such as the Bhois, Marngars, War-Jaintias and War-Shellas, etc., one should acknowledge the fact that intermixture plays a very important role in patterning their genetic composition and physical characteristics. Of course, earlier studies have revealed that the Khasi population as a whole is highly heterogeneous in genetic make up, which may

be regarded as a result of evolutionary mechanisms that may be essential for its long-term survival in relation to the changing environment. Understanding of such genetic variation within the Khasi population is very important for understanding a variety of ways that are beneficial to the society. For example, understanding of health and diseases in a population always needs our knowledge of the genetic variation within such a population.

The classification of population into different sub-groups is inevitable for many scientific studies especially for analytical and comparative purposes. However, such a classification is sometimes misused despite its practical value relating to biological facts of a population. The Hitlerian prostitution of the race concept, or racism, is one good example of the misuse of population classification. Anthropologists have been exhorted not even to use the term "race" after what the Nazis did to the Jews. But they cannot deny the biological concept of race and/or sub-races, although they substitute it with words like meta-populations, populations, sub-populations and *demes* - the smallest breeding units after family. Race or population differences within the human species are facts of nature and to say that there are no biological differences between races is like denying the genetic divergence of the Lyngngam population from the Garo and Khasi populations in the present context. Of course, genetic variation between races is smaller (about 6.3 percent) than that between populations within races (about 8.3 percent), and the genetic differences between individuals within populations of races account the highest proportion (about 85 percent) of the total diversity of the human species.<sup>17</sup> Thus the subdivision of human species ranging from races (meta-populations) to *demes* is ubiquitous and there should be no surprise with regard to the classification of Lyngngam population as a hybrid group. However, such a classification is less meaningful if anthropologists just simply account for similarities and differences without any reference to the well being and benefit of the society. What is the health condition of the Lyngngam population? Are there any advantages or disadvantages for the Lyngngams in relation to

Khasis and Garos especially with respect to health and diseases? What is the progress of sustainable development and welfare among the Lyngngams? How to improve the well being of the Lyngngams? Besides academic interests, these are few questions that anthropologists and other scientists of today are expected to deal with in the interest of the societies they study.

Population geneticists and anthropologists are concerned with such sub-divisions of human species that are based on certain concentration of genetic traits, and nowadays with special emphasis on neutral molecular traits with a view to understanding the phylogenetic relationship between human populations. At the same time, they must also acknowledge human capacity for developing and learning culture as a universal phenomenon that has a considerable bearing on human evolution or genetic variation. Human capacity for culture is the function of the brain that is genetically determined, but it is wrong to say that culture is genetically determined. For example, humans learn language from their parents and other human beings, or resources, because they have that capacity to speak a language or languages. This capacity to learn language or other behaviour is genetically determined, but heredity or genetic factors have nothing to do with what type of language or behaviour that a person should learn. The type of language learned by a person depends to a great extent on the type of communication followed or shared by other members of the society where he or she lives. Similarly, the human desire for food is triggered by physiological characteristics, which are determined by heredity, but heredity does not determine which type of food to be taken by an individual. The type of food and drink wanted by an individual depends largely on the food habits of the society in which he or she lives. On the other hand, the food habits or type of language, in this instance, are parts of the shared tradition and custom of a given society, or group of individuals. The same is true of the Lyngngam population. Being sandwiched between the Khasi and Garo societies, we should not be surprised to find that the Lyngngams who are closer to the Garos have learnt a dialect

or culture trait similar to that of Garos, while those closer to the Khasis have learnt from them. Although Lyngngams may be genetically different from Garos and Khasis, they have the same capacity for developing and learning culture. And the culture developed and learned by them depends largely on the society and the environment in which they live. Thus different questions may arise regarding their habitat or environment. How are the Lyngngams coping with the variation in their environment? How is their culture influenced by their biology and vice versa? Anthropologists and other scientists need to explore more on this area. From the modern anthropological point of view, a study of genetic variation between and within populations would not become meaningful if the variation in environmental conditions (including socio-cultural conditions) is not taken into consideration. Population sub-divisions may be considered as the product of the interplay between genetic and environmental factors, and culture should be considered the principal means of human adaptation to environment, thereby influencing human biological evolution. In fact, an attempt to understand the human biological evolution will not be meaningful without taking into consideration the nature of cultural evolution.

### NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. M. S. Sangma, *History and Culture of the Garo*, New Delhi: Books Today, 1981.
2. P.R.T. Gurdon, *The Khasis*, London: Macmillan & Co., 1907, p. 190.
3. For details, see Major A. Playfair, *The Garos*, Reprinted 1975, Guwahati: United Publishers, 1909; U. R. Ehrenfels, Three matrilineal groups in Assam: A study in similarities and differences. *Amer. Anthropol.*, 57: 306-321, 1955; H. Bareh, *The History and Culture of the Khasi People*, Calcutta: Nava Mudran Pvt. Ltd., 1967.
4. For details, see P.R.G. Mathur, *The Khasis of Meghalaya: Study in*

- Tribalism and Religion*, New Delhi: Cosmo Publications, 1979; S. Karotemprel, *Albizuri among the Lyngngams. A brief History of the Catholic Mission among the Lyngngams of Northeast India*, Shillong: Vandrame Missiological Institute, 1985.
5. J. N. Spuhler, Anthropological genetics: an overview. In *Methods and Theories of Anthropological Genetics*, edited by M.H. Crawford and P.L. Workman, p. 439, Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1973.
  6. T.J. Ahmed, Sarthak Sengupta & A K. Ghosh, A genetic study on the Lyngngam of Meghalaya. *J. Hum. Ecol.*, 8: 473-475, New Delhi, 1997.
  7. F. Bernstein, 1931, as cited in P. L. Workman, Genetic analyses of hybrid populations. In *Methods and Theories of Anthropological Genetics*, edited by M.H. Crawford and P.L. Workman, p.117-150, Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1973.
  8. Data on the ABO blood groups and taste sensitivity to Phynylthiocarbamide (PTC) were based on those reported by Macfarlane (1941), Majumdar (1950), Miki *et al.* (1960), Flatz *et al.* (1972), Das (1969), Deka (1978), and Jaiswal (1981) as cited in Ahmed *et al.*, op cit.
  9. V. Pakyntein, Identity of the Lyngngam in comparison with the Khasi and Garo in Meghalaya. In *Contemporary Research in Anthropology*, edited by R. Khongsdier, p.128, New Delhi: Commonwealth Publishers, 2000.
  10. P. L. Workman, op cit.
  11. A. C. Allison, Polymorphisms and natural selection in human populations. *ColdSpr. Harb. Symp. Quant. Biol.*, 29: 137-149, 1964.
  12. R. Khongsdier and N. Mukherjee, Growth and nutritional status of the Khasi boys in Northeast India relating to exogamous marriages and socioeconomic classes. *Amer. J. Phys. Anthropol.*, 122: 162-170, 2003a; Effects of heterosis on growth in height and its segments: a cross-sectional study of the Khasi girls in Northeast India. *Ann. Hum. Biol.*, 30: 605-621, 2003b.
  13. For details, see B.M. Das, *Variation in Physical Characteristics in*

*the Khasi Population of North East India*, Guwahati: Dutta Barua & Co., 1978.

14. For details, see R. Khongsdier and A. K. Ghosh, Bio-demographic study among the War Khasi of Meghalaya, *J. Ind. Anthropol. Soc.*, 29: 195-202, 1994; Relevance of population study in physical anthropology. In *Communities of North-East India*, edited by F.A. Das and I. Barua, p.64-74, Mittal Publications, New Delhi, 1996; R. Khongsdier, A note on micro-social variation in the War Khasi with special reference to inheritance of property. *J. North-East Ind. Coun. Soc. Sci. Res.*, 20: 46-50, Shillong, 1996.
15. R. Khongsdier, The War Khasi of Meghalaya: Implications of variation in adult body dimensions. In *People of the Himalayas: Culture, Development and Change*, edited by K. C. Mahanta, p. 299-305, New Delhi: Kamla-Raj Enterprises, 1997.
16. J. V. Neel and F. M. Salzano, Further studies on the Xavante Indians. X. Some hypotheses-generalizations resulting from these studies. *Amer. J. Hum. Genet.*, 19:554-574, 1967.
17. R. C. Lowinton, The apportionment of human diversity. *Evol. Biol.*, 6:381-398, 1972.

## Book Review

Elizabeth Dell (ed), *Burma: Frontier Photographs: 1918-1935*, James Henry Green Collection, Merrel Publishers Ltd, London, 2000.

The British presence in the Brahmaputra valley loomed large from 1825. This thinly populated, little exposed, and highly forested region was destined to be the pioneer tea plantation of the empire. The tea industry attracted numerous fortune seekers, influential industrialists and even some British bureaucrats preferred planting tea bushes to serving the empire. These potential tea-growing areas were also the play fields for the various tribes in search of slaves and trophies of human skulls. These tribal raids in the later British tea growing territories led to numerous pacification expeditions to the hills resulting in carving out of the various hill districts as loosely administered 'excluded areas'. That is how Garo Hills, Mikir Hills, Naga Hills and Lushai Hills districts were created in the province of Assam by the turn of the nineteenth century. Through the same process the northern triangle of Upper Burma, soon to be known as Kachin Hills, were carved out as a distinct administrative arrangement in 1895 in the northernmost part of the British Indian Empire. The book under review refers to the region, its resident Singphos of classical British ethnography (now Jingphaw) and their past heritage.

James Henry Green (1893-1975) was a soldier of the British Indian Empire in its waning period. He joined the Burma Rifles as its recruitment officer and worked up to 1935 in the 'Excluded Areas' Kachin Hills, northern Burma. He left Rangoon (now Yangon) in 1937 for Singapore to take up the post of military intelligence officer. After the fall of Singapore in 1942 during the World War II, he returned to London, where he remained for the next ten years in the British Foreign Office. He was a photographer

par excellence, who used classical ethnographic technique as a tool for military intelligence and recruitment. In course of his nearly twenty years of stay in the Kachin Hills, he took numerous photographs, collected ethnographic exhibits, and wrote his tour diaries containing priceless data on the lives of the people and events of the region. The James Henry Charitable Trust placed 1600 photographs, 200 textile exhibits and diaries with the Royal Pavilion, Library and Museum, Brighton, England for up keep and research. *The Burma: Frontier Photographs: 1918-1935* is based on photographs and accompanying texts, spread in five chapters and contributed by four scholars. These chapters are lavishly illustrated with appropriate photographs from Green's collection. The book contains 230 photographs of different sizes, a priceless collection of photographic album running into 90 pages. Biographic note on J H Green, bibliography and index at the end enhance the utility of the book for the readers.

Elizabeth Dell in her 'Introduction' to the book, titled "Mapping Burma: the James Henry Green Collection of Photographs", found that the photographs formed a part of a particular unequal transaction between peoples, and stand as a record of those transactions and points of contacts. They also have a life and meaning beyond intentions, skill, luck and vision of the photographer and as archival evidence they are witness to an era, events and institutions long gone by (p.9). As a recruiting officer with the Burma Rifles he travelled to remote northern hills previously unmapped by Europeans. His fascination with the people of the region aroused a life long interest culminating in a fellowship of the Royal Anthropological Institute in 1928, and a diploma in Anthropology from Cambridge University in 1934 on "The Tribes of Upper Burma North of 24 degree N and Their Classification". He studied the nuances of the customs, beliefs, languages and physical attributes that distinguished neighbouring groups and recorded these according to the anthropological practices prevalent in those days.

On the basis of Green's archives of notes, diaries, speeches, publications and photographs, the volume under review records his role as military intelligence officer and an amateur anthropologist, his observations on peoples and collection of artifacts—specially textiles. Green's photographs should be seen in the line of photography as a tool of descriptive ethnography and as a part of the colonial anthropological heritage since 1860s, which began with E T Dalton's *Descriptive Ethnography of Bengal*. This ethnographic collection of strong visual record of Kachin State also highlights the tension between the past and present of Kachin people engaged in negotiating the place of these records within the contemporary construction of their national identity. Burma proper was administered as a province of India and frontier areas were identified as 'excluded areas'. Even in 1935 the residents of this region had not heard of Burma or Burmans, leave alone of India. Green was aware that many of the ethnological problems were baffling, but thought that "a study of physical anthropology, technology and mythology will solve a good many of them" (p.15). Physical attributes were clearly of importance in recruiting 'types' for military as well as for racial classification of the people, a pet project of the colonial days. He advocated a general knowledge of the culture of people to be of greater importance to the administrators than that of the language.

The strongest part of Green's photographic collection is the portraiture, though there is little in his diaries or route notes that refers directly to the process of capturing images of people. The images of people show Green's interest in physical types, their costumes and their evolution. He was clearly a product of his time and of beliefs and motivations of the empire. His Anthropology, like his photography, was in harness to his official role in military surveillance and control. However, the images collected in the book can point to an understanding of modern construction of identity, nationhood and unity as they are analysed, incorporated, rejected or used as evidence in contemporary Burma. After all, Green's is

part of a tradition of ethnographical documentation through photography, which stretches back to mid nineteenth century. That was the time bulky camera was considered indispensable documentary tool for the benefit of colonial ethnography and useful to the administration.

It goes without saying that publication of the *Peoples of India* between 1868 and 1875 containing 500 photographs of racial, ethnic and caste types was part of an ideology to tabulate, synthesize and ultimately control the culture of India in the aftermath of the mutiny of 1857-58. In spite of the individual photographers' skill to overcome the limitations imposed by the cumbersome camera, the photographs were invariably unsatisfactory: "the people always seemed nervous, their expressions were invariably stupid or stolid and they posed very unwillingly". By 1920s the camera was improved to the extent that its intimidating size was reduced; its portability was increased and its intrusive features were minimized. But by then science of ethnography itself had changed and thus postures and intimacy of camera began to be questioned.

David Odo notes that Green's images attest to the unprecedented access he had to his subjects. Perhaps he was the first European to encounter many of the people he had photographed and studied. Through out the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries photography was largely considered a simple recording, truth revealing, mechanism. Photography played a major role in Salvage Ethnography of the period and much of Green's work can be located within this tradition. Heavily influenced by existing anthropological paradigm of race and evolutionism many of his images are of the homogenizing and dehumanizing 'physical type'. "This is evident from large number of images in which body functions as an object of study. His photograph of two Naga men is one the more extreme examples of this position (No. 0625). Two men are posed in naked and are shown in full length... it nevertheless reduces its human subjects to mere physical specimen...the men's facial expressions attest to their distress at the time they were photographed. They

are pictured without clothing. The subjects are located in 'nature', employing none of the signs such as material artifacts or built environments, typically used to provide information about cultural context. Rather, it is absence of clothing that here serves as cultural marker, for Nagas were stereotyped as 'lazy', preferring to go naked than weave cloth... We learn virtually nothing of the conditions of their lives from this photograph, rather it is informative of the photographer's intentions and ideology and unequal power relation that enabled Green to create it" (pp. 43-45).

For David Odo, Green's photography suffers from two qualities: dehumanising physical types and images of exceptional intimacy and sympathy. Through these photographs of physical typing not only could the subjects of dying races be studied, but they could also be preserved. For him authority also provided a way to salvage the subjects' culture, which was highly paternalistic. Green did not work within Malinowskian model: rather he favoured close-ups and portraits, posed his subjects and tended to eliminate context from his images. By 1920s, the view that photography afforded an objective window to reality that had largely been discredited. These changes contributed to a decline in the anthropological use of photography, as new anthropology was interested in culture, now constructed, and not as visible.

Mandy Sadan's two chapters on 'Contemporary Context' and 'Documentary Record of Contact' raise the issue of the relevance of colonial anthropology to ethnic groups and nationalities on the one hand, and negotiating a relationship with the animistic heritage by contemporary Christian nationalities such as Kachin, Naga and Mizo on the other. She began her research on a selection of Green's archives in Rangoon in 1996. Kachin State emerged as a political entity after the Burmese independence in 1948 and Kachin identity is itself largely political in origin. However, it was the British who initiated the process in 1895 through the Kachin Hill Regulation, an Act labeling hill tribal villages as 'Kachin' for the use of administration. It is also a fact that Kachin soldiers were mainly

drawn from Jingphaw (Singpho) community besides Lisus and others. In this way, the term 'Kachin' was artificially created, like the word 'Nagas' some two decades before that and an ethno-political composition of six parts such as Jingphaw, Lisu, Maru, Nung-Rawang, Zaiwa and Lacid was imposed on northern Burma.

The world of Green's photographs, taken 75 years back, is not only difficult, but also discomfiting and contemporary Christian Kachin nationalists would like to dissociate themselves from their animist past. For many Kachin Christians, their animist cultural context displayed through these photographs can be immensely disturbing. The Kachin theologians frequently cite the oppressive burden of animist rituals as the main reason for their rapid conversion to the Christianity. Against the Burmese attempt to make Buddhism the official State religion, Christianity was drafted as the symbol of Kachin nationalist resistance against the Rangoon regime. Kachin missionaries emphasised on the superiority of Christianity to animism. However, there is a deep-rooted insecurity about how the animist relates to the Christian present and whether such photographs should ever be considered more than simply a record of a degenerate culture. To advance the worth of Green's photographs exposes danger of undermining the foundations of unity expressed through the symbol of Christian faith. Modern Kachin nationalist discourse demands a level of 'standardization' of ethno-cultural uniformity and a level of quality in cultural practices and symbols free from potential ridicule from others. Odo rightly identifies ambivalent interpretations of Green's photographs of the animist past and its role for future (p. 61).

The commonest social and economic opportunities that existed for ambitious Kachin youth in recent years were to enter theological college to train as pastors or priests or to enter K (aching) I (ndependent) A (rmy) as officers. For these young and articulate leaders Kachin identity is a current obsession. In this context, Green's archive seems to offer little towards enabling evidence to them. There are very few Kachins who still believe in animism and

still fewer who practise it. Choosing this as an area of study is to illuminate a world that no longer exists, and few mourn its disappearance. It can also be a potential bone of contention between the past and the present. Green's collection presents a heritage, which is difficult to disown and embarrassing to own up by the contemporary Kachin people.

Green chose to remain a career soldier in preference to a career in anthropology. Green's work in Kachin hills was mainly oriented to military related survey or recruitment or to provide slave-release campaign of the civil administration. The British identified the pre-eminent Kachin socio-political structure as prop to their need in the form of Jingphaw hereditary chiefs - *Duwa*. However, it was not always clear whom to delegate local power as the *Duwa*, because of conflicting over-lap of institution of hereditary chiefs and hereditary headmen. The case of *Duwa Htingna Khuma* (p. 74) is an illustration. The British administration would opt for the enhancement of powers of those chiefs and headmen, who could demonstrate willingness to be co-operative. The District Commissioner would stand as *Duwa Kaba* (great /big chief) to the then Kachin power structure with Union Jack flying atop. Was it not reminiscent of the Red Indians terming the President of USA as the big father/ chief? Here also the administration gets embroiled in the chiefs' demands for communal dues from the Christian villages for animistic festivals as it happened in the Naga Hills District.

Impact of slave-release should have been one the most rewarding exercises for historians and anthropologists with a view to understand the modern Kachin social formations. But for obvious reasons, it is one of the most impenetrable areas of study (p.85) Green's photographs may be seen as one of the personal response to the British encounter to the Kachin primitive world. It was the pattern of Kachin relation building that enabled Green to be intimate and sympathetic to the people. As a result, he developed a uniquely rich heritage of records that is still relevant for a proper understanding

of the lives and vanishing world of the northern Burmese frontiers. A similar situation may be noted from Kachin's western neighbouring Naga Hills, where one finds M/S J H Hutton, J P Mills, Charles Pawse, and Furer Haimendorf empathising with the Naga cause. Green's collection presents a highly romanticising image of tribal life from a distant frontier in to a typical Kipilinsque style of paternalistic approach to simple societies. Inadvertently, the Empire through its omission and commission laid the foundation of nationality formation among the distinct ethnic groups such as Kachins, Nagas and Mizos. In the final analysis, Green clicked his camera for the cause of the Empire, but inadvertently, he contributed to the preservation of the Kachin heritage and priceless source of data for the 'science of man'.

Prof. A C Sinha,

Department of Sociology, North-Eastern Hill University, Shillong.

**Temsula Ao, *The Ao-Naga Oral Tradition*, Bhasha Publications, Baroda, 2003, 185 pp, Rs 125/-.**

Temsula Ao's study is an attempt to understand the culture of the Ao tribe of Nagaland in North-East India through their oral tradition. The book is divided into eight chapters. Chapter 1 introduces the Ao civilization as oral tradition, textiles and artefacts. Chapter 2 discusses the indigenous Ao society. In Chapter 3 the "authentic" Ao belief system is presented. Chapter 4 forms the main part of the book and presents some Ao myths and tales. In Chapter 5 a large number of tales are given under various headings such as "Transformation tales", "Some animal tales", "Some tales of the Supernatural", "Some other tales", and "Some heroine-oriented tales". Chapter 6 provides some linguistic details on the

Ao language and a few paragraphs on Ao time reckoning, numbers and weights and measures. In the concluding chapter (Chapter 7) a few words are devoted to changes in contemporary Ao society.

The study is based on the author's personal knowledge and experience as an Ao, her frequent field trips to the Ao area and a writing-up phase at the University of Minnesota. It is a thorough and serious study of oral tradition of a small scale but dynamic culture. The book has an important documentary value as it gives a large number of Ao narratives. Being an Ao herself and a Professor of English at NEHU, the author deserves all praise for her sincere effort to gain insight into her own culture. Not being trained as an anthropologist the result of her work is a well-written historical document for which the Aos have to be grateful. It will be of interest to all those interested in Ao culture as well as to linguists and anthropologists.

My perspective in reviewing this work is that of an anthropologist. For me the importance of this work lies in bringing together cultural data and narratives of the Ao tribe by a native speaker. The collection of texts shows a high degree of variation, often subtle, which makes oral tradition so rich, so beautiful, and so relevant for both modern Aos with an interest in their own culture and contemporary anthropologists. The study is a rich source of data, but its analytical framework is weak. For example, the data on society, civilisation and belief system are presented without a connection with those of the stories. The structure of the book, by and large, follows that of the early scholar-administrators such as Hutton and Mills. A truly integrated analysis would have helped in mapping out the original Ao mentality.

In her attempt to grasp the totality of the Ao culture and to make it understandable to contemporary readership, the author imposes two sets of classifications on the data that seems to me arbitrary. The oral tradition is divided into Primary, Secondary and Tertiary. This division presented in the first chapter does not serve

any purpose, not even in the rest of this book. Another division relates to worship and sacrifice. These are classified as “regular” and “irregular”. This division also does not add to our understanding. The intention might have been to demonstrate historical developments or the dynamics of the Ao culture. On page 29 Ao society is called ‘loosely’ democratic in its structure. This is, however, contradicted by the description of the Village Council (*Putu Menden*) as being a legislative, executive and judiciary power all in one institution (p.34) as well as by the existence of patrons and slaves (p.59). The “highly egalitarian society” (p.29) is thus not so egalitarian having slaves and a strict hierarchy of three high and many lower ranking clans.

While a beginning of an integrated approach to culture and narratives is made on page 15ff about names and narratives, such an approach is missing in the presentation of all other myths, legends and tales. In most cases the author’s comments do not go beyond a kind of functionalistic comment: the myth is told to justify a particular practice or custom (for example on pages 54 and 56). This is rather surprising for the Select Bibliography mentions the works of Claude Levi-Strauss, Brenda Beck, Stuart Blackburn and A.K. Ramanujan who all have analysed oral traditions with a structural rather than a functional approach.

This is a pity for the author shows great sensitivity while commenting on some myths. Commenting on the belief system, for example, she remarks, “their belief about tiger-souls is more akin to the concept of a person having more than one soul” (p.66). Indeed, the Ao concept of personhood needs to be studied on the basis of their narratives. The Ao view on another important cultural aspect – mortality – lies between the lines of the narratives entitled “A girl who was Loved by a Tree-Spirit” (p.122) and “Revenge for a Father’s Death”(p.135).

This book lies at the junction of two traditions. The old tradition of scholar-administrators is followed in its structure and

descriptive nature. At the same time it falls under a recent tradition of anthropological activities by other than anthropologists. The author frankly states in the Acknowledgement (p.iii) that she is "yet only a tentative amateur". As such she displays an emotional involvement. Striving for objectivity she leans on her training and experience in literary criticism. The lack of anthropological knowledge, for instance, appears in the use of the term patriarchal instead of patrilineal; distinguishing clans as major and minor is not incorrect, but it is a more common anthropological convention to describe their ranking in terms of high/low social and/or ritual status; the observation that the family is the first social unit in any culture (p.43); the absence of information on dates and methods of data collection and the years in which the field trips were undertaken.

Notwithstanding these critical comments, I wish to recommend this book to all anthropologists. I sincerely hope that Professor Temsula Ao will continue her journeys into Ao culture while making them anthropologically stronger so that her desire to "understand the intricate interweaving of the oral tradition with the culture" can be truly fulfilled.

Dr. S.N. Singh is Reader, Department of English, NEHU, Shillong.

Prof. Jan Brouwer,  
Department of Anthropology, NEHU, Shillong

Dr.B. M. Reddy is Professor, Anthropology & Human Genetics  
Unit, Indian Statistical Institute, Kolkata.

## Contributors

Dr. Romendro Khongsdier is Reader, Department of Anthropology, NEHU, Shillong.

Mrs. Banrida Langstieh is Lecturer, Department of Anthropology, NEHU, Shillong.

Dr. K.S.Nagaraja is Reader, Department of Linguistics, Deccan College, Pune.

Ketshukietuo Dzuvichu is a research student at the Department of Anthropology, NEHU, Shillong.

Mrs. Isabella Lall is Selection Grade Lecturer at the Centre for Supporting Learning Systems, NEHU, Shillong.

Dr. S.N. Singh is Reader, Department of English, NEHU, Shillong.

Dr. Sukalpa Bhattacharjee is Lecturer, Department of English, NEHU, Shillong.

Dr.B. M. Reddy is Professor, Anthropology & Human Genetics Unit, Indian Statistical Institute, Kolkata.

## DECLARATION

### Form IV Rule 8

1. Place of Publication : Bijni Complex, Shillong-793003
2. Periodicity : Biannual
3. Printer's Name : Deputy Director, NEHU Publications  
Address : Bijni Complex, Shillong-793003
4. Publisher's Name : Deputy Director, NEHU Publications  
Nationality : Indian  
Address : Bijni Complex, Shillong 793003
5. Editor's name : T. B. Subba  
Nationality : Indian  
Address : NEHU Publications, Bijni Complex,  
Shillong 793003
6. Name and Address of individuals : North-Eastern Hill University,  
who own the journal and partners Permanent Campus, Umshing,  
or share-holders holding more than Shillong-793022  
one percent of the total capital

I, T. B. Subba, hereby declare that the particulars given above are true to the best of my knowledge and belief.

**T. B. Subba**