

The Concept of Ka Ri Khadar Dolois (Jaintia Hills) :

A Critical Assessment

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In Chapter II under the heading “*Ka Ri Khadar Dolois, Ka Ri Laiphew Syiem*”, the Report of the Land Reforms Commission for Khasi Hills (hereafter Report) started by posing a question ‘whether the words : “*Ka Ri Khadar Dolois, Ka Ri Laiphew Syiem*” mean that this land of ours known from the British time as “Khasi and Jaintia Hills” was ruled by 12 *Dolois* and 30 *Syiems*”? The Report further stated that “various interpretations have been given. We have no records of the number of *Dolois* and *Syiems* before the advent of the British. It was after the British had established their power and consolidated their position that we found that they had set up and recognised 20 *Dolois* in Jaintia Hills ; 16 *Syiems*-ships, 3 *Lyngdohships*, 5 *Sirdarships* and 1 *Wahadadarship* known as Khasi States, and 31 *Sirdarships* known as British Villages in Khasi Hills”.¹

While trying to define the term ‘*Ka Ri Laiphew Syiem*’, the Report noted that it ‘means that there were very many *Syiems* for the word “*La.phew*” (thirty) is generally used to connote many’². This explains about the Khasi Hills scenario. But what about Jaintia Hills - which is referred to as ‘*Ka Ri Khadar Dolois*’? Unlike the case of Khasi Hills, ‘the word “*Khadar*”, (twelve) does not connote many. It means that particular number only. Originally it is believed that there were only 12 *Dolois* in the land now known as Jaintia Hills. The 12 *Dolois*, like the 12 representatives of 12 clans who elected *Syiem* of Cherra, elected the *Syiem* of Sutnga...’³ It is true as stated by the Report that there was no proper records of the number of *Doloiships* in Jaintia Hills before the advent of the British.

If we carefully study the records of the number of *Doloiships* as reported from time to time by different British Government officials serving in Khasi and Jaintia Hills, we would find that the number of *Doloiships* mentioned by them differed from one another. The case is almost the same with the other sources too. There must be some reasons behind these differences while giving reports about the same area. Referring back to the Report, it further mentioned that ‘after the British had established their power and consolidated their position, they recognised 20 *Dolois* in Jaintia Hills’.⁴ It is to be clarified here that all these 20 *Doloiships*, mentioned by the

Report, are not full-fledged Doloiships. To put the record in a more precise way, it is to be noted that out of these 20 Doloiships, 18 of them are of course full-fledged Doloiships, whereas one is known as Sirdarship and the other one as Patorship. The Report hurriedly came to the conclusion stating that 'originally it is believed that there were only 12 *Dolois* in the land now known as Jaintia Hills.' Somehow, some other writers on Jaintia Hills agreed with this statement, but still some others were of different opinions. This is actually the crux of the issue. On the basis of the different opinion thrown to us, few questions arise, like (1) Can one accept the statement to be true for all time that Jaintia Hills was administered by these 12 *Dolois* only? (2) Were there really only 12 *Dolois/Elakas* in Jaintia Hills throughout its history? (3) If not, what were the reasons that led to the creation of new *Elakas*? It is, therefore, the purpose of this paper to make a humble attempt to study the issue critically on the basis of the records available and other authoritative sources of information. While going through these numerous sources of data and information available at our disposal, we come across different views and opinions as to the actual number of Doloiships, Sirdarships and Patorships throughout the long period of the history of Jaintia Hills.

The number of Doloiships in Jaintia Hills in the earlier period was not constant due to some reasons. Pakem is of the opinion that at the beginning there were originally only three Doloiships. Subsequently, the number increased to seven with the creation of another four *Elakas*. It was also during this period of time when the Jaintia Hills was administered by these seven *Dolois* that the people from the hills invaded the plains of Sylhet and conquered it. With the conquest of this southern plains, the territories of the *Dolois* obviously expanded. With this new expansion of the territories, the administrative duties and responsibilities of the *Dolois* also increased tremendously. Perhaps, after having realised the difficulties to meet the various requirements of the ever increasing administration, both in the hills and the plains, that an urgent need was felt necessary to create more *Elakas* (Provinces) to be administered by the *Dolois* themselves. In this way another five *Elakas* were created; thus altogether we had twelve *Elakas*, each under the administration and supervision of a *Doloi*. Moreover, these 12 (twelve) Doloiships seemed to remain constant for a long period of time or until the British came and annexed the area. Perhaps on the basis of these number of Doloiships that Jaintia Hills was called by its people as the 'Land of the Twelve *Dolois*' and came

to be known as such by its neighbours. ⁵ After the annexation of Jaintia Hills by the British in 1835 A.D., the number of *Elakas* was further increased by them by further breaking the existing *Doloiships* into smaller units. This division of the *Doloiships* continued throughout the British rule over the area, that at a certain period of time there were as many as 25 (twenty-five) *Doloiships* during the British period.

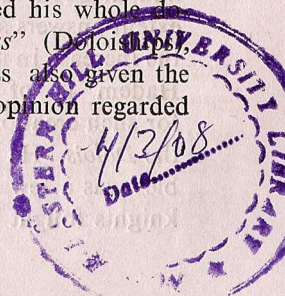
Bareh is of the opinion that 'at first there were five *Dolois*, next they increased to seven, and on the eve of the British annexation (of Jaintia Hills) they gave (?) increase to twelve' ⁶ However, Bareh did not explain anything in clear terms as to why the number of *Doloiships* had increased from what he said the original five to twelve. But he made an interesting observation which few others did not specify in their writings, that is, according to him, it was only on the eve of the British annexation of Jaintia Hills that the number of *Doloiships* were found to be 12 (twelve) in number. However, Pakem provides a different view altogether in this respect. He writes, 'in fact, the Jaintia *Elakas* increased from 3 to 7 and from 7 to 12 before they (the Jaintias) formed a State (*Hima*). After the formation of the State, the *Elakas* further increased with further expansion or division until there were 25 (twenty-five) *Elakas* during the British period.' ⁷ The two views given by Bareh and Pakem are quite different from each other and as far as the period is concerned, there is a wide gap between the two opinions. According to Pakem, the number of *Doloiships* reached to twelve in number, before the Jaintias formed a State (*Hima*), or in other sense the period may be traced as far back as pre-State formation in Jaintia Hills. Unlike Pakem, Bareh opined that the period is not that of the distant past but it took place only on the eve of the British annexation of Jaintia Hills, that is, around the 1830s.

Humphrey Hadem ⁸ in his 'Suggestions and Objections to the proposed Delimitation of the 7 Legislative Assambly Constituencies for Jaintia Hills District', submitted to the Secretary Delimitation Commission of India dated the 3rd December 1974, mentioned that the Jaintia King (which King?) divided his whole dominion into 12 Administrative Units called "*Elakas*" (*Doloiships*), under an administrator called a "*Dolloi*". He has also given the list of names of the 12 *Doloiships* which in his opinion regarded them to be the original ones.

These are :

1. Jowai
2. Raliang

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3. Shangpung
4. Nongjngi
5. Nartiang
6. Rymbai
7. Sutnga
8. Nongbah
9. Nongtalang
10. Satpator (?)
11. Maskut
12. Nongphyllut

On the basis of these 'Twelve Administrative Units' Hadem was of the opinion that Jaintia Hills was termed as "*Ka Ri Khad-ar Dolois*". On further scrutiny of the above list of Doloiships as provided by Hadem it is to be noted that one Doloiship which is considered to be an original one is curiously missing from his list, that is, Amwi Doloiship, which lies in between the upland part of Jaintia Hills and the War area. Moreover, it is rather surprising to see the name of Satpator as one of the original Doloiships. There is no denying the fact that Amwi should find its due place in the list as one of the original Doloiships due to the fact of history and the important role it played in the ancient Jaintia kingdom and its history. Satpator *Elaka*, by all counts was created much later by one of the Jaintia Kings whose name and the years of his rule could not be ascertained. It has also its own history of its creation when its people were first granted the permission by the King to have a new *Elaka* for themselves. This issue is being discussed in the subsequent part of the paper.

As mentioned earlier the number of Doloiships increased from three to five, from five to seven and from seven to twelve. A pertinent question arises as to why a need was felt necessary to increase the number from time to time? And secondly, what are the reasons responsible for the creation of more Doloiships in the areas? Hadem has thrown some interesting insights as to the creation and division of some Doloiships in Jaintia Hills. This to some extent answers some of our queries as to how and in what manner, the increase in number of Doloiships from time to time took place. Hadem is of the opinion that one of the reasons responsible for such creation of new *Elakas* was due to internal fighting among the *Dolois*. He writes thus: 'The outcome of these unceasing troubles was a reward of independence to those areas where from their knights fought bravely for the defence of their parent *Elaka*. For

example, Mynso area was granted a Doloiship by the *Doloi* of Shangpung ; Raliang Doloiship of course, by an accident, had to part with the area now called Shilliang-Myntang Doloiship due to the blunder committed by the then *Doloi* of Raliang (who married a woman from Thangrain, a village now situated within the Shilliang - Myntang Doloiship). The then *Doloi* of Raliang, for enjoyment's sake, carelessly put the 'Turban' (*Doloi's crown*) on the head of his son and the Elders (who were then present with him demanded that his son be declared a *Doloi* since he was allowed to put on the 'Doloi's turban'. The *Doloi* had to yield to their demand in accordance with the traditional custom, and part with the area of Shilliang-Myntang Doloiship. Some of the present Doloiships were split out of their parent Doloiships' area by the British for their administrative conveniences and according to their policy of 'Divide and Rule'.

It is also to be mentioned that some new *Elakas* were created with the permission of some of the Jaintia Kings out of love and affection for the people of a particular area because of their good deeds and the help they rendered to a particular king or his family members when they were facing a difficult situation in the hands of their enemies. The people of the area or the village on hearing the news that their King or his family members had fallen victim to their enemies, they immediately came to their rescue. One of the out-standing examples could be seen in the case of the creation of the Satpator Doloiship. It was a practice that each *Elaka* from the hills has to pay an annual tribute of one he-goat to the King at Jaintiapur, the capital of the kingdom. In one such occasion, the people of Satpator brought their tribute of a he-goat, excellently decorated the animal and covered its horns with decorative pieces of silver. This excellent artistic performance by the people of the area drew the immediate attention of the king and all the more he appreciated this kind gesture. In appreciation of this kind and good deed, the King honoured and rewarded the people by way of granting them permission to have their own separate *Elaka*. Thus a new *Elaka* was created with the actual name of "Sap-pitor" which literally means "silver clothe", originating from the silver covering the horns of the he-goat. The *Elaka* was later on wrongly called as 'Satpator' which name remains till today. Another example is the creation of a new Doloiship for the area now under the Nongtalang *Elaka*. It was mentioned that once the sister of Rajah Borkusain II (1731-1770), Kong Rimai or Korimai (Koari) was detained and kidnapped by the Khyrim Rajah. The people of Nongbareh

village, whose village falls within the jurisdiction of the Jaintia kingdom and which is also situated on the border of the area under the Khyrim Syiemship, came to help and managed to rescue the King's sister. They took her to their village. The royal lady after her rescue had to climb a difficult steep to reach Nongbareh village. When she reached there, she asked for a glass of water to drench her thirst. It so happened that the family from whom she received a glass of water belonged to the Lamin clan. The lady in the house, Ka Rontia Lamin, knowing that Kong Rimai or Korimai belonged to the royal family and she is also the King's sister, wanted to offer her the best she could provide to drench the thirst. So instead of offering a glass of water, she rather offered Korimai a glass of pure honey. The royal lady was so glad to receive the honey and drank it all with full content. Because of this kind deed, Korimai then and there proclaimed to all that a new *Elaka* covering the area now under the jurisdiction of the present Nongtalang Doloiship be created. Moreover, she also granted the sole right that only the male members from the clan of Ka Rontia Lamin will hold the office of the *Doloi* of Nongtalang. This right and privilege continues even today. This is also how the new *Elaka* of Nongtalang came into existence. All these incidents mentioned above throw light on how new Doloiships were created and why the number of such Doloiships in Jaintia Hills increased from time to time even before the coming of the British. Still, some new *Elakas* were created 'because of non-fulfilment of and/or inability to fulfil certain religious obligations. A clear example on this basis is that of Nongkhlieh *Elaka* when it was carved out of the Sutnga *Elaka*'.¹⁰

On closer perusal of the different sources relating to Jaintia history, we get the impression that these sources can safely be divided into two broad categories - namely, those that informed us of the existence of only 12 (twelve) *Elakas* or Doloiships and the other which clearly mentioned that there were more than 12 *Elakas* throughout Jaintia Hills.

One of the sources of information which mentioned that Jaintia Hills consisted of only 12 divisions or units or Doloiships, was that of Syed Murtaza Ali as it appeared in his book 'The History of Jaintia'.¹¹ The names of the twelve divisions or Doloiships in the hilly portion of Jaintia Hills as provided in the book are, namely :- (Correct spelling of names is shown in brackets).

1. Suhtnga (Sutnga)
2. Nartiang

3. Jawai (Jowai)
4. Nongjhini (Nongjingi)
5. Shangpung
6. Raliang
7. Mynso
8. Natelang (Nongtalang)
9. Rambhai (Rymbai)
10. Lakhdong (Lakadong)
11. Nongbare (Nongbareh).
12. Non-pu (Narpuh)

It is interesting to note that while giving the list of names of 'the twelve divisions', Ali was very particular to mention that these divisions were only those of 'the hilly portion of Jaintia Hills'. This is because of the reason that the same author has also provided the names of the other three Doloiships that existed in the plains area of Jaintiapur during the reign of Ram Singh I (1701-1708). These three Doloiships were Mulagool, Jaflong and Charikhata.¹² If we consider this account given by Ali, we may say that during a particular period of time, there were altogether 15 (fifteen) Doloiships in the whole of the Jaintia kingdom; 12 Doloiships in the hills and 3 other in the plains. Curiously, Ali was silent about the type of administration that prevailed in those 3 Doloiships that existed in the plains. One wonders whether the same type of administration that prevailed in the hills was applied to them or it might be totally different. This needs further probing.

J. B. Shadwell was also of the opinion that 'the Jaintia Hills was divided into twelve separate communities, and under an officer called a *doloi*'¹³ It appears in his 'Note on the Khasis and Jaintias' did not explain as to why he preferred to use the term 'separate communities' than any other. The list of names of the twelve communities or Doloiships was however not mentioned by him.

Whether Jaintia Hills was administered by the 12 *Dolois* before it formed a State (Hima) or the same took place only after the King himself divided his territory into 12 units or Doloiships, or it took place on the eve of its annexation by the British, but the number of Doloiships did not remain the same throughout the history of the area. A. J. M. Mills, the officiating Judge, Sudder Court, in his *Report on the Khasi and Jaintia Hills*, 1853, mentioned that there were altogether 23 *Dolois* and *Sirdars* in the Jaintia Hills.¹⁴ But he did not provide the list of names of these Doloiships and Sirdarships. Another British official, W. J. Allen, in his *Report on*

the Administration of the Cossyah and Jynteah Hill Territory, 1858, has this to say :

“The Jynteah (Jaintia) Hill Territory.... is divided into nineteen (19) Separate *Elakas* or districts, fifteen (15) of which are *Doloiships* (Doloiships) ; to each of these districts there is one *Doloi* (Doloi), who is the chief village authority. The remaining four *Elakas* are under the charge of 13 headmen called *Sirdars*.”¹⁵ Allen has also provided the list of names of these 15 Doloiships and 4 Sirdarships though he did not specifically mention against the names which one is Doloiship and which one is Sirdarship, but it can be easily differentiated by those who are aware of the status and position of these administrative units.

In 1860, twenty five years after the British annexation of Jaintia Hills, Capt. E. A. Rowlatt, then principal Assistant Commissioner in charge of Khasi and Jaintia Hills, while submitting his memorandum of Demands, Collections and Balance of House Tax in Jaintia Hills to Colonel Jenkins, had shown the total number of *Elakas* as many as 21 where the demand for collection of the tax was made. W. F. Trotter, in his Report on the Administration of Jowai for the year ending 31st March 1878, wrote :

“The Jaintia Hills Territory..... is divided into 24 separate *Elakas* or circles, 19 of which are presided over by *Dollois* and the remaining 5 are under the charge of headmen called *Sirdars*”¹⁶.

Of all British officials and administrators who had given their reports on the administration of Jaintia Hills, W. W. Hunter, in his *Statistical Account of Assam, Vol. II*, has provided the most exhaustive list of names of Doloiships and Sirdarships in Jaintia Hills. His list consisted of 25 units of what he called “fiscal divisions”¹⁷. Trotter had included 24 such units,¹⁸ but Hunter added another one which was a Sirdarship in his list. Thus Hunter's list proved to be the most detailed one. In 1884, Mr. Heath, the Sub-Divisional Officer, Jaintia Hills, while submitting his report on the land tenure in Jaintia Hills, mentioned the existence of 19 Doloiships and 4 Sirdarships.¹⁹ P. R. T. Gurdon too, in 1907, mentioned the existence of 20 Doloiships and 3 Sirdarships.²⁰ The Census of 1911 gave the list of 20 Doloiships in the whole of Jaintia Hills.²¹ C. U. Aitchison, in 1929, reported that Jaintia Hills after its annexation in 1835 ‘was divided into 23 petty districts, 20 of which are in charge of elected headman, called *Dollois* ; while the remaining three (reduced in 1910 to two, by the amalgamation of two districts) are under hereditary *Sardars*.’²²

Coming to the period after Independence, the information contained in the U. K.-J. Hills Autonomous District Act, 1953, mentioned that there were 18 Doloiships and only 1 (one) Sirdarship. The same number of Doloiships and Sirdarship was shown by the U. K.-J. Hills Act, 1959. Curiously, one Patorship, that of Sumer Patorship was missing in the list. But in the present list available with the Jaintia Hills Autonomous District Council, there are 18 Doloiships, 1 (one) Sirdarship and 1 (one) Patorship.

If the different writers agreed that Jaintia Hills had during a certain period of time only 12 (twelve) *Dolois* and on that basis the present Jaintia Hills was called the Land of the twelve *Dolois*, it can therefore be concluded that this concept is applicable for that particular period only. But still it is academically interesting to note that opinions differ as to the period of time when this number of twelve *Dolois/Elakas* remained constant. One of the opinions is that it took place before the pre-State formation in Jaintia Hills, another opined that one of the Jaintia Kings divided his territory into twelve administrative units, but still the other opinion state that this state of affair took place before the annexation of the area by the British. We are still to find out which is the correct period when Jaintia Hills was actually administered by the twelve *Dolois*, without considering for the time being, the other offices too like that of *Sardar* and *Pator*. This concept according to one opinion may not have to do much with the twelve administrative units or Doloiships/*Elakas* that prevailed in Jaintia Hills, but 'sometimes the Jaintia people affectionately call their country by this name in commemoration of the twelve children of *Ka Li Dakha* and *U Luh Ryndi*.'²³ But the question of the actual number of the children of *Ka Li Dakha* is still debatable. Considering the fluctuation in the number of Doloiships /*Elakas* in the present Jaintia Hills, it may be pointed out that the concept is a misnomer as of today's situation.

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