

# WILD RACES OF THE EASTERN FRONTIER OF INDIA

T. H. LEWIN



The wild tribes and races inhabiting the North-East and North-West of India have been a subject of perennial interest to historians, anthropologists, social scientists and to beaurocrats responsible for their administration. Some of them have left behind copious record of their social life, customs, habits and cultures. The present volume is a unique example of this *genre*.

Written more than hundred years ago, it stands unrivalled in the literature on wild races of South-Eastern India. Its pages (to quote the author) were written 'day by day among the people of whom they treat, during a three years' sojourn among them'. Its authenticity is vouchsafed by the fact that the author made a minute study of the kind of life of these wild races by living and moving in their midst, conversing with them in their language, exchanging views with them and thereby gaining first hand knowledge of their social and economic life.

The book has been divided into three parts. Part I deals with the Chittagong Hill Tracts inhabited by independent tribes known by the generic name of Kookies and Chakmas who invited trouble for themselves only when they committed murderous outrages on British subjects of the adjacent district of Tipperah now known as Tripura. Their economic life is marked by what is called 'joom cultivation' which means that the site of the village is changed as often as the spots fit for cultivation in the vicinity of their village are exhausted. Land once 'joomed' cannot be recultivated.

Bamboo is literally the staff of their life and occupies central place in the domestic economy of these tribes. It grows in abundance throughout the hills. It is used not only for making ropes and weaving baskets but also in building houses and fertilizing the fields.

Part II of the book divides hill tribes into two types—the Khyoungtha (sons of the River) who are of pure Arracanese origin and Toungtha (children of the Hills) who are of mixed origin. The former, like the Burmese, are Buddhists and believe in the transmigration of soul. There is no such thing as caste among them. The Toungthas are not the aboriginal inhabitants of the country and are more purely savages than the Khyoungthas.

(Contd.)

Part III deals with hill tribes known as sons of the rivers. These are the Lhoosai or Kookies and the Shendoos or Lakheyr. 'These are in every respect wilder than the Khyoungtha: they are more purely savages and un-amenable to the lures of civilisation ...they are independent of all external assistance, the earth supplying them with every necessity of their life.' It is while journeying in their country that the author encountered grim situations and grave perils, sometimes having a hair breadth's escape from the jaws of instantanous death.

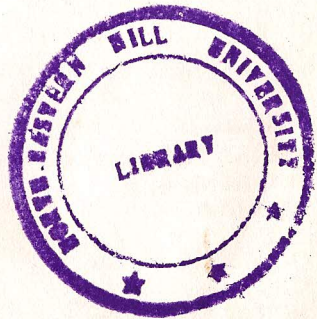
Describing their marital life, the author says, 'the crime of infidelity amongst wives is almost unknown, so also harlots and courtesans are held in abhorrence amongst them and rendered unnecessary moreover by the freedom of sexual intercourse indulged in and allowed to both sexes before marriage.

All the three Parts quote copiously from the ancient authorities who extensively toured these regions and gained first hand knowledge of their social life. It is from all accounts a unique book which stands unrivalled on the subject. It is packed with immense amount of information and exciting accounts of the kind of life lived by the wild races inhabiting the land, wooded hills, mountain tops, and banks of rivers in the South East of India. A valuable mine of information, it must be the proud possession of all libraries & people who are in search of knowledge of these races.

Rs. 180

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The Eastern Frontier of  
India**

**T.H. LEWIN**



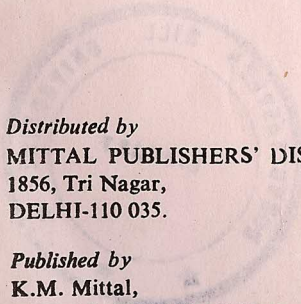
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## CONTENTS.

### PART I.

#### THE HILL TRACTS.

	PAGE
The Country—Its Boundaries—Rivers—Scenery— Soil—Climate—Roads—Produce—Forests—Cul- tivation—Fauna . . . . .	7
The Rise and Progress of British Power in the Hill Tracts—Old Records—Portuguese Influence —Character of the Revenue System—Relations of the Hill Chiefs to the British Authorities— Present System of Administration—Its Nature and Weaknesses . . . . .	46

### PART II.

#### THE HILL TRIBES (SONS OF THE RIVER).

Introduction—The Hill Tribes—Classification— Our Relations with Burmah affected by them —Customs common to all Hill Tribes—Slavery, &c. . . . .	72
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	PAGE
The Khyoungtha (Tributaries)—Their Clans—Religion—Festivals—Dress—Social Habits—Songs—Proverbs—Marriages—Funeral Ceremonies—Legends—Drama . . . . .	93
The Chukmas (Tributaries) — Their Origin — Chronological List of Chiefs—Language—Clans—Festivals—Religion — Love-making — Marriages — Funerals — Criminal Punishments — Songs—Music . . . . .	157

## PART III.

THE HILL TRIBES (SONS OF THE RIVER)  
*Continued.*

The Tipperah and Mrúng Tribes (Tributaries); with their Modes of Life and Habits . . . . .	190
The Kúmi, Mrú, Khyeng, Bungjogee, and Pankho Tribes (Tributaries), and their Customs . . . . .	220
✓ The Kookies or Lhoosai and the Shendoos (Independent Tribes)—Their Customs now and a Century ago . . . . .	246
Conclusion . . . . .	341

## INTRODUCTION.

NOVELTY is as attractive now as ever it was, even in the days when the Athenians went about hearing or telling of some new thing. I think, therefore, that no apology is needed in introducing to English readers races of people of whom but little is known, and whose habits and customs have never before been described.

The mighty empire of Hindostan is now bound up by a hundred ties of interest with the present and future of England. Many are the hearths by which is kept sacred the empty place of some dear member of the family circle, who is absent in those torrid

climes; and books relating any thing new of this far-off but no longer strange land of the East, are studied by all classes of English people with sentiments of growing attention and admiration for the great but unfinished work we are carrying on there.

These pages were written day by day among the people of whom they treat, during a three years' sojourn among them. Sometimes under the shelter of a straw-thatched bungalow on a remote hill top, with the pathless jungle undulating in vast sweeps of hill and dale beneath the gaze; at other times in boats, poling along the hill streams, or by the firesides of the people in their bamboo-houses, perched securely in some hillside nook. The work was commenced at first with no fixed plan as to a detailed account of these races of men; indeed, as one of their many proverbs says, "Unlaid eggs cannot

be counted;" but I simply noted down as I heard them any tales, traditions, or striking customs that fell under my observation in the course of my wanderings among them. Little by little, however, my interest was awakened and my affections drawn to them: I found them a people worthy of esteem, worthy of note. It is unfortunately too often the custom among English people, as a body, to condemn and despise all races speaking an alien tongue; among the commonalty at the present time even, the French are regarded as an outlandish and ignorant people; while as for people like these hill races, whose skin is dark and breech bare, out and alack! they are savages and barbarians forsooth, very little better, indeed, than the apes among whom they reside. I have, nevertheless, found among all wild and so-called barbarous races, that when one grows acquainted with their

language, and they, becoming habituated to you, allow a knowledge of their social life and habits, they are very much the same as other people; there is not much difference, indeed, between human nature all the world over,—they love and hate, eat and drink, live and die, in much the same, and often in a far more natural and sensible manner than we of the civilized races, who hold ourselves so loftily aloof in our fancied intellectual and moral superiority. It would seem almost a solecism to announce this fact as if it were some novel discovery; but any one who has lived in the East and seen our Englishmen, whether Government officials, merchants, or planters, will, with some rare exceptions, find that they know, and care to know, nothing of the people they are thrown among—they are with them but not of them—hardly troubling themselves, indeed, to become acquainted with

the language of the people among whom they live, and never admitting them, or seeking themselves any admission into social intimacy or friendship. Broad and umbrageous as is the tree of our Eastern Government at present, this is the canker that will eventually eat it through at the root, until it fall with a crash, in ruin.

This very book is a proof of my assertion. We have been living at the door of these hill races, and in close contact with them for more than eighty years, and yet no Englishmen (Government officials or otherwise) that I ever met, knew any thing of them in any way, save that perhaps they were dully conscious of the proximity of certain hill tribes, who, as was stated in an official document quoted in the body of this work, “go unclothed, and know not the use of fire-arms.”

It is, then, into the private life of these

simple and primitive races that I venture to introduce my readers; to make them, if so it may be, partakers of wild hospitality, and intimate with the domestic society of men and women—children of Nature.

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