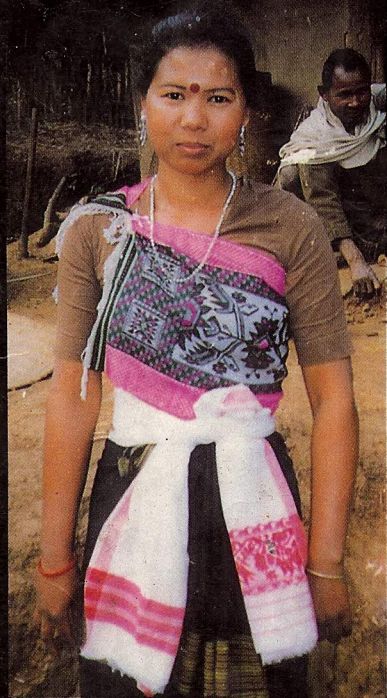


THE HILL LALUNGS



Birendra Kumar Gohain



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ANUNDORAM BOROAH INSTITUTE OF
LANGUAGE, ART & CULTURE, ASSAM

1993

THE AUTHOR

Dr. Birendra Kumar Gohain, an officer of the Indian Administrative Service, is the author of books like 'The Hill Karbis', 'Tai Ramayana' and 'Sri Sri Aniruddha Deva' and has also compiled the Karbi version of the Ramayana popularly known as Sabin Alun.

The present work has grown out of his doctoral dissertation on the theme of continuity and change amongst the Hill Lalungs, a section of the Tiwa community living in the Karbi Anglong district of Assam. As a Civil Servant who has served and lived amongst the people under study, Dr. Gohain has an intimate knowledge of their life and culture as is evident from this work.

THE HILL LALUNGS

Handwritten notes and signatures, including "PP/1125 MA".

Birendra Kumar Gohain



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**ANUNDORAM BOROOAH INSTITUTE OF
LANGUAGE, ART & CULTURE, ASSAM**

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THE HILL LALUNGS, a monograph on the Hill Lalung community of Karbi Anglong district of Assam, written by Dr. Birendra Kumar Gohain of the Indian Administrative Service and published by Shri T.R. Taid, Director, Anundoram Borooah Institute of Language, Art & Culture, Assam, Tarun Nagar, Guwahati - 781 005, India. Rs. 65/- only.

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PUBLISHER'S NOTE

Soon after the Anundoram Borooah Institute of Language, Art and Culture (ABILAC) started functioning in 1990, Dr. Dharendra Narayan Majumdar, Reader in Anthropology, Gauhati University and Dr. Birendra Kumar Gohain of the Indian Administrative Service were requested by the Institute to jointly write a monograph on the Hill Lalungs of Assam. But Dr. Majumdar passed away all of a sudden on 25th July, 1990, leaving us, his admirers, rudely shocked. It was later gathered from Dr. Gohain that Dr. Majumdar could not make time to write any portion of the book and that before his expiry he could just go through its first draft and write a foreword (included in the present volume). We in this Institute had looked forward to Dr. D.N. Majumdar's association with our academic projects on social anthropology, but destiny had it otherwise !

We are glad that Dr. Gohain managed to accomplish alone the task of writing the monograph against all the odds of administrative preoccupations. Dr. Gohain's work assumes significance as a pioneering attempt at studying a small ethnic group caught between the forces of tradition and change.

As publishers, we would, however, like to place it on record that the views on the functioning of some local political institutions contained in the book are exclusively that of the author.

Chapter V of the book presents some linguistic material on the Lalung (Tiwa), Bodo, Dimasa and Garo languages. In order to ensure the validity of the linguistic forms, we got the data checked (with tacit approval from the author) by some educated native speakers, viz., Mr. Len Kholar, M.A. of Chikdamakha for Lalung (Tiwa), Mrs. Priyadani Brahma, M.A., Research Fellow, ABILAC, for Bodo, Mr. J.S. Marak, Assistant Librarian, Guwahati High Court for Garo and Mr. S.R. Thaosen, ex-Minister, Assam, Haflong and Mrs. M. Hagjer Burman, A.C.S., Dispur for Dimasa. We are grateful to all

of them for their kind co-operation in this regard.

A word about the name 'Hill Lalungs'. There is now an increasing tendency amongst various ethnic groups of Assam to prefer autononyms to exonyms. However, the use of the name 'Lalung' rather than 'Tiwa' in the title of this book has been justified in the foreword (vide *infra*) written by the late D.N. Majumdar.

Funds permitting, we in ABILAC have plans for extensive ethnographic studies of various communities in Assam and corresponding publications. We hope such studies and publications will follow in due course.

T.R. Taid
Director, ABILAC

28 December, 1992

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The project of writing a book on the Hill Lalungs was offered jointly to Dr. D.N. Majumdar of Gauhati University and me by the Anundoram Borooah Institute of Language, Art & Culture (ABILAC), but the sudden demise of Dr. Majumdar left me to handle the subject alone at the final stage. Dr. Majumdar went through the first draft of the manuscript and gave his opinion, which has been included in the book. The manuscript was later enlarged to include a somewhat detailed study of the various aspects of the culture of the Hill Lalung tribe.

In this connection, I would like to express my deep sense of gratitude to Shri T.R. Taid, Director, ABILAC, for providing me with the impetus to complete the task after the setback caused by Dr. Majumdar's death.

I gratefully acknowledge the help of my friend, Mr. N. Majumdar, posted as Assitant Executive Engineer, Public Works Department, Umpanai, at the time of writing this book and the villagers of Bormarjong, Umpanai, Amswai, Chikdamakha, Khawra-krai, Borgaon, etc. of Karbi Anglong district of Assam, whose active cooperation made this work possible. I am also grateful to Shri Indrasingh Deuri, former President of Lalung Darbar for his valuable suggestions and to Shri Rupsingh Deuri of Bormarjong village for going through the manuscript.

I am also thankful to Shri Juga Phukan of Tinsukia and Shri J. Roychoudhuri of the office of the Inspector General of Prisons, Khanapara, Guwahati for the pains they took in typing out the manuscript.

Last, but not the least, I convey my heartiest gratitude to my wife, Arunima, without whose encouragement and cooperation this work would have remained incomplete.

Tinsukia

Birendra Kumar Gohain

FOREWORD

There are very few people in the world who follow the female line in descent, succession and inheritance and follow the matrilineal rule of residence after marriage, at least in a significant number of cases. Such people, whom we may call matrilineal, are sparsely spread in the world — in the American continents, in Africa, in Oceania and also in India. The Nayars of Kerala and a number of tribes in North East India, particularly in Meghalaya and in some areas adjacent to it, are examples of such ethnic groups in India. The Hill Lalungs of Assam are one of these groups, an ethnographic account of whom has been given in this volume by Dr. B.K. Gohain.

The Lalungs are one of the most numerous tribes in the Brahmaputra valley, and, Gohain has lucidly described the part they played in the history of Assam. Throughout the historical period they were known as Lalung or Datiyal Kachari. During the British rule the name Lalung continued (Grierson has also referred to their language as Lalung). After Independence a tendency developed among many a tribe to change the tribal names — from Abor to Adi, from Mikir to Karbi, from Miri to Mising and so on. This tendency developed among a section of the Lalungs of the Brahmaputra valley and they started to dislike the term Lalung because many Assamese people had started to use this term in a somewhat derogatory sense, and ultimately this tendency succeeded in overthrowing the term Lalung and replacing it by the term Tiwa, at least in the official sphere. This change of name has considerable significance in the sphere of identity. As Gohain has described in the book, the Lalungs were under the political power of the Jaintias, and, probably, the Lalungs habitat extended far inside the Jaintia territory. On the other hand, the Lalungs spread widely in the plains of the Brahmaputra valley, particularly in areas now coming under the jurisdiction of the Nagaon and Morigaon districts. It is interesting to note that this area happens to be the focal

point of Assamese culture, particularly of the Assamese version of Vaishnavism. Thus, Assamese culture showed its impact very prominently among the Lalung population in the Brahmaputra valley. Nay, some of them got completely assimilated with the Assamese Hindu population — adopting all the Assamese customs in totality including the common Assamese Hindu surnames like, Saikia, Bordoloi, Das and so on. This is one of the reasons why we find a decline in the Lalung population between 1941 to 1951. But after Independence the Lalungs of the Brahmaputra valley, despite their progressive assimilation with the Assamese Hindu society, got for themselves the constitutional status of scheduled tribes of the plains, and they are now trying their best to retain their identity as a tribe, and, for them, in a sense, the rallying point of identity has become the term Tiwa — having already lost their matrilineal institutions, the old Tibeto-Burman language, the institution of bachelors' dormitory and all vestiges of shifting cultivation. But the Lalungs of the hills whom Gohain calls Hill Lalungs have a different story to tell. After the Jaintia kingdom fell apart with British ascendancy, the Lalungs inhabiting the hill areas of Karbi Anglong and Jaintia Hills got separated from the body of their kith and kin in the Brahmaputra valley. They did not register any impact of Assamese culture, nor of Assamese Vaishnavism. They faithfully retained all the elements of their traditional culture — their matriliney, their Tibeto-Burman language, the dormitory institution and shifting cultivation. But strangely enough, they were deprived of the constitutional status of a tribe, and with their educational backwardnesses, they had to fight a boring battle of existence with the Karbis, who are the dominant tribe of the district and who enjoy the constitutional status of a tribe. In Jaintia Hills also the Lalungs met with the same fate, because in Meghalaya also they were deprived of the status of a scheduled tribe, though their political allies, the Jaintias, a much advanced community since the historical times, got themselves recognised as a scheduled tribe. Under the pressure of these circumstances a separate Hill Lalungs identity is slowly but steadily emerging. Once I referred to the Hill Lalungs as Tiwa in a gathering of Hill Lalungs and they promptly corrected me and told me that they were Lalungs and not Tiwas. It is quite natural that the Lalungs of the Brahmaputra

valley do not like to be called Lalungs because of the use of the term Lalung by plainsmen in a derogatory sense. But the neighbours of the Hill Lalungs, the Jaintias, as also the Karbis, do not use the term with any derision. In fact, one of the Jaintia clans, the Laloo clan, is named after the Lalungs. Understandably enough, Gohain has used the term Lalung in the title of this book and has used the term Hill Lalungs all through the book.

The Lalungs of the hills have a common ethnic organisation with the Lalungs of the Brahmaputra valley, the Lalung Darbar of Assam and Meghalaya, the moving force behind which is Indrasingh Deuri, who belongs to the hills. They are demanding a Lalung district having the status of an autonomous district, comprising the Lalung majority areas in Karbi Anglong, Nowgong, Morigaon, and Kamrup districts of Assam and they also claim an area from the adjacent state of Meghalaya. They have further demanded the status of a Hill Tribe for the Lalungs of the Karbi Anglong district of Assam and those in Meghalaya.

The Lalungs have very often been confused with the Kacharis, and this was partially due to their name Datiyal Kachari ; or maybe the name itself is the result of that confusion. In the sphere of ethnography, Lalung data is very scanty. The accounts written by Sharma Thakur* are based on the Lalungs of the Brahmaputra valley and thus in those we miss the details of traditional Lalung social institutions. In the monograph on the Lalungs by Shyamchaudhury and Das, the Hill Lalungs have been touched only peripherally. From my discussion with M.M. Das, one of the authors of the monograph on the Lalungs referred to here, I came to know that at the time of their study, they could reach only the peripheral area of the Hill Lalung habitat, and so, though in their book we find an account of the Lalung dormitory organisation, we miss the details of their matrilineal institutions. Gohain's present work contains all these details, being entirely devoted to the Hill Lalungs.

Gohain has followed the tradition of some British Civil Servants writing monographs on tribal communities. But there

* See Bibliography

is a difference; while most of the British Civil Servants, who wrote monographs, included secondary data, Gohain's writings have grown out of his personal experience of the community : having lived among them, he knows them intimately.

Dr. D.N. Majumdar
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