

# **THE JAINTIA RESISTANCE OF 1860-1863**

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**THESIS  
SUBMITTED IN FULFILMENT  
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR  
THE DEGREE OF  
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY IN HISTORY**

TO  
**NORTH-EASTERN HILL UNIVERSITY  
SHILLONG**

**1999**

## CONCLUSION

The preceding five chapters have provided first an overview of resistance movements against the British, followed by a more detailed discussion on Jaintia resistance. It was necessary to go into some details of the pre-1860 situation in the hills which has been studied in Chapter II. The main body of the thesis is covered in Chapters III, IV and V. While the origins of the resistance is explained in Chapter III, the military operations and the Jaintia mode of resistance had been given attention in Chapter IV. Research on the Jaintia Resistance had hitherto had been largely concerned with the origins and something of the course of events. The two chapters which have dealt with these issues have gone into the details not previously examined by historians. Chapter V the aftermath of the resistance examines the outcome and the fallout of the resistance. This had not been studied in any large measure and as is apparent the Jaintia resistance had in its aftermath important implications not only for the Jaintias and their administration but its impact has been examined to have had its effect in the entire region. This chapter will in conclusion sum up the findings and situate the significance of the Jaintia resistance.

The research reveals that the fight that was carried out by the Jaintias was entirely a tribal movement and must not be misunderstood with the other agrarian or peasant movement that had taken place in other parts of India. The Jaintias did not revolt on agrarian issues nor did they fall under those exploited groups as the term 'peasant' would be understood in other societies. They did not fall under the control of any landlords or zamindars, nor was the fight directed against any feudal lords. It was a clear case of resistance that was carried out by all sections of people against British rule. It has been noted that though the war was spearheaded in some places by the traditional chiefs like the Dalois, the Pators and other officials, they were joined in the fight by others who belonged to other professions such as the artisans, traders, merchants, farmers and others.

The resistance broke out when certain administrative measures were introduced where it affected the religious sentiments and the economic life of the people. That it was a tribal resistance there is no doubt because the people resisted the different enactments and legislations that were carried out by the British authorities. It is also interesting to note that Kiang Nangbah a commander became a leader of the movement whereby the Dalois and

the other functionaries supported him. It may be pointed out that the general desire was to oust the British from Jaintia Hills and to revive back the legacy of the Jaintia Raj.

As seen from the preceding chapters, the resistance of the Jaintias under the leadership of U Kiang Nangbah, though initially it created problems for the British; was suppressed. The task was made easier all the more when U Kiang Nangbah was captured and executed. Throughout the second phase of the movement the Jaintias showed great courage and determination in ousting the British rule from the hills. Their spirit of sacrifice was very evident. Instances can be cited when the womenfolk accompanied by children would move with the leaders of the resistance from place to place and live in the jungles for months together or in places which they had stockaded. It was because of this reason that in some cases women were also killed in the encounter.<sup>1</sup> Under the leadership of U Kiang Nangbah and his trusted general U Chey Rangbah, the Jaintias showed remarkable organisational strategies. Guerrilla form of warfare was

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1. Selections of Records of the Government of Bengal, No. 7(c), 4 February 1863; J. C. Haughton to the Secretary, Government of Bengal.

resorted to and in most cases the advancing British columns were taken by surprise. The solidarity that was shown during that period of hardship was a clear indication that the Jaintias wanted to overthrow the foreign rule, though, this was to remain only as a hope. The Jaintias were badly equipped both in terms of arms, ammunition and important food supplies. Those who took part in the thick of the struggle had no proper means of communication with their fellowmen who were attacking from different flanks. On the other hand, the story in the British camp was just the opposite. The British officials and military generals made use of the telegraph services and were able to sent messages about the movement of the Jaintias. In this manner troops, guns and important provisions were moved in advance. In order to speed up the surrender of the Jaintias, B. W. D. Morton the Deputy Commissioner of Khasi and Jaintia Hills, resorted to economic blockade in order to starve those who were at war. In this connection intimation and steps were taken to close the hats at Nowgong and also including the hats in the territory of the Nongkrem and Khyriem Raja respectively.<sup>2</sup> A body of police was also

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2. Home Public Proceedings, No. 51(B), 24 July 1862; Morton to the Secretary, Government of Bengal; The Friend of India, 15 May 1862, 3 July 1862.

placed at Puriang to prevent the Jaintias from getting supplies from the Khyriem territory.<sup>3</sup>

From the incidences and the statistics that were made available, it appears that the Jaintias were carrying out the fight with their traditional weapons like bows and arrows, spears and swords. This was one reason for the failure of the movement. The Jaintias were said to have manufactured their own weapons and among these guns and cannons were also made but they were not as effective as those of the British. It was only when they were successful in their attacks that the English guns and mortars were procured by them. These again would be effective so long their ammunition would remain. It was not long, before they have to resort back to their home made cannons, spears, arrows and swords. The British columns that poured into the hills such as the 28th Regiment Punjab Infantry, the 44th Native Regiment Infantry, the Gurkha Regiment, the Jorhat Militia and others were well equipped with the latest rifles and mortars which was to have a significant result in the

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3. Assam Secretariat Records, Commissioner's Papers, File No. 408 of 1862; also in Home Public Proceedings, No. 56-57(b), 19 June 1862, Morton to the Secretary, Government of Bengal.

outcome of the war.

It may be recalled that during the course of the war there was much talk and apprehension in the British camp that the Jaintias were seeking help from Burma and Russia<sup>4</sup> but apparently nothing seemed to have brought foreign help. The Jaintia carried out their struggle without any aid from outside. Adding to their discomfort, it appears that there were a good number of people who were working against the Jaintias as guides,<sup>5</sup> spies<sup>6</sup> and showing their loyalty towards the British Government.<sup>7</sup> The Khasi chiefs, especially the Raja of Khyriem, Rabon Sing acted in concert with the British to suppress the uprising.<sup>8</sup> The

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4. Selections of Records of the Government of Bengal, No. 17(C), 12 November 1862; J. C. Haughton to the Officiating Secretary to the Government of Bengal.

5. Selections of Records of the Government of Bengal, No. 10, 29 January 1862; Lt. Col. Richardson to Assistant Adjutant General.

6. Home Public Proceedings, Nos. 100-101(B), 12 April 1862; Dunsford to Assistant Adjutant General.

7. Selections of Records of the Government of Bengal, 28 October 1862; B.W.D. Morton to the Officiating Secretary to the Government of Bengal.

8. Selections of Records of the Government of Bengal, 21 November 1863; Morton to Haughton.

others were Ram Sing the Raja of Cherra and Hajun Manick.<sup>9</sup> It was no surprise therefore, that those who were involved in providing information to the British and assisting them were tracked down and killed.

Apart from the above problems the major weakness of the uprising came from the lack of proper understanding about the entire concept of resisting the British rule. There is no denying the fact, the Jaintias world view at that period was very limited. They did not have a clear knowledge about the strength of the British forces nor were they aware about the very basis on which British imperialism was based. The reduction of the strength of the British army after the events of 1857-1858, following the recommendation of the Peel Commission, had been taken by the Jaintias as a sign of weakness on the part of the British and therefore they first revolted in 1860. The first phase of the movement was suppressed easily and this led to the further reduction of the troops. It was on the light of these reductions in the strength of the forces that the Jaintias started to think otherwise and revolted again in 1862, but this again was sternly

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9. Ibid.; No. 32, October 1862; Memorandum from J. C. Haughton.

suppressed. Furthermore the Jaintias did not have an alternative. They therefore fought within the framework of the old social order. Difficulty also arose when religion started to come in the way. A good number of Jaintias, namely the converts and the literates kept themselves away from the resistance movement and remained loyal to the British authorities. This would explain why their settlements were attacked and burnt with the outbreak of the resistance. Since the number of converts was comparatively small, they were removed to Cherrapunji. There were instances where the Dalois would be assisting the British in procuring coolies in order to carry important supplies for the Government troops. This again was a common feature in the history of India's struggle for independence; where the religious question would be handled shrewdly by the divisive forces of imperialism to frustrate the nationalistic cause. In the case of the Jaintias though it was not that apparent, yet it cannot be ruled out that it did not exist.

In spite of the above adversities, the people at first under the leadership of U Kiang Nangbah raised clear demands that they should be exempted from any kind of taxation and there should be no interference with their traditional rites. This was a clear indication that

the people at one stage stood up together to defend their rights. This took the form of a mass movement. Later, the people in the course of the struggle demanded for nothing less than the withdrawal of the British from Jaintia Hills and the reinstatement of their Raja.<sup>10</sup> In other words, they were demanding complete independence and a return to their pre-colonial past.<sup>11</sup>

Even with so much constraints the Jaintias fought bravely under the leadership of U Kiang and his lieutenants from 1862 onwards. Serious encounter broke out in places like Yalong,<sup>12</sup> 'Latoobur',<sup>13</sup> Shangpung,<sup>14</sup> Mynsow,<sup>15</sup> Nongtalang<sup>16</sup> and Nongbarai.<sup>17</sup> Interestingly, the

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10. Ibid.; 4 January 1863; Haughton to the Secretary to the Government of Bengal; also in J. B. Bhattacharjee "The Jaintia Rebellion" in Challenge, edited by N.R. Ray, p. 178.
  11. Bengal Judicial Proceedings, No. 67, October 1862; also in H. K. Barpujari (ed.) Political History of Assam, Vol. I, p. 86.
  12. Selections of Records of the Government of Bengal, No. 9, 26 January 1862; Richardson to Deputy Adjutant General.
  13. Ibid., No. 10, 29 January 1862.
  14. Ibid., No. 12, 9 February 1862.
  15. Op.cit., and No. 16, 18 February 1862.
  16. Selections of Records of the Government of Bengal, 14 March 1862; Robinson to Dunsford.
  17. Ibid., No. 30, 14 March 1862; Richardson to Assistant Adjutant General.

area around Nongbarai was very well stockaded and consisted of a wall of stones about five feet high and five feet thick which runs all around the sides of the village.<sup>18</sup> The people of Rallieng were also known to have defended themselves 'obstinately'<sup>19</sup> and it was only after the 28th Punjab Regiment Infantry and the 44th Regiment Native Infantry were pressed into action that their defence was broken up and the people of Rallieng made good their escape into the deep and precipitous ravines.<sup>20</sup> In order to create confusion in the minds of the British, places in the neighbouring plains in North Cachar, Sylhet<sup>21</sup> and Nowgong<sup>22</sup> were threatened and sometimes attacked. The different sides of Jaintia was under the charge of Kiang's most trusted generals. The south western side was under the command of U Long Padu, the eastern side under U Swar Sutnga and U Mon Rymbai, and

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18. Ibid.

19. Home Public Proceedings, Nos. 100-101 (B), 12 April 1862; Selections of Records of the Government of Bengal, 23 March 1862, Dunsford to Assistant Adjutant General.

20. Selections of Records of the Government of Bengal, op.cit.

21. Ibid., No. 18, 25 March 1862; Hopkinson to Showers.

22. Ibid., No. 32, 22 March 1862, Hopkinson to Lushington.

the north was under U Bang, U Bukher (Ralliang), U Mulon Mynsow, U Kiang Sule, U Kat Changpung and U Woh Riang.

The British first moved their troops from Sylhet into the Jaintia territory. By the summer of 1862, the southern region of Jaintia Hills was under the control of Captain Robinson. Captain Morton was in command of the north and camped at Nartiang. He was also assisted by Captain Andrew who was posted at Nangjngi. From the number of battles that were fought, the siege of Surtiang at Nongkhlieh near Sutnga was considered to be one of the most intense which at the same time reflects a lot on the courage, strategy and determination of the Jaintias.<sup>23</sup> The oral tradition narrates that it was a decisive battle which changed the course of the resistance. Strange enough, in the British Military records, there was hardly anything mentioned about this battle. The Jaintias who were defending the fort composed of armed Jaintias, coming from places such as Shangpung, Rymbai, Sutnga, *from Nongkhlieh itself* and some from the neighbouring Daloiships. The British troops operated from a valley of

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23. Interview with Nichal Sutnga on 13.6.94 at Sutnga; discussion with B. Pakem, Vice-Chancellor of North Eastern Hill University on 15.3.99 at Shillong.

the opposite side of the Surtiang fort. The fort was attacked but the Jaintias fought back gallantly, and this continued for a stretched of six months. Seeing the seriousness of the resistance a larger number of British soldiers were pressed into action. In the initial stages of the siege the British soldiers suffered reverse and the Jaintias made use of the deep ravines, which surrounded the fort to their advantage. It was not until one cloth merchant from Rymbai,<sup>24</sup> after being paid a large amount of money went and gave information to the British troops about the secret path that would lead to the fort. Here again, treason played its own role. The soldiers reached the stockade and it was just a matter of time that the strategies of the Jaintias were known and were defeated. Manik Daloi of Sutnga who was operating the cane brake<sup>25</sup> from where arrows were fired, died fighting against the British.

The steps taken by U Kiang Nangbah to move from one place to another, gave encouragement to the people to carry on with the struggle but this was destined, as

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24. H. Bareh, History and Culture of the Khasi People, p. 172.

25. Ibid.

stated earlier to remain in the hopes of the people only. The elements who were working against the entire resistance process were able to defeat the cause of the movement. This had a very strong impact on the course of the struggle especially after the summer of 1862. The military operations were intensified after the monsoon rains and vigorous measures like burning of villages and destroying the food grains were resorted to. Economic blockade was also carried out, as an attempt to starve the people.

Events took a different turn when U Kiang Nangbah fell ill and retired to Umkara. He was captured through wilful betrayal and was surrendered to the Military Tribunal, who found him guilty and passed the death sentence, the details of which have already been discussed. After he was declared dead by hanging, his body was handed over to Ka Hat Lyngdoh<sup>26</sup> and tradition has it that he was buried near a hillock called U Lum Ryngkaw, a place which is towards the south of the Tpep Pale locality in Jowai. The grave was dug by the army sepoys. The news of his capture and execution spread fast. His relatives who were all the time moving in the

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26. Q. Sumer, U Kiang Nangbah, p. 23.

jungles and hiding, on knowing about the fate of U Kiang Nangbah came overground to carry out the rites meant for the departed soul. Later the body of U Kiang Nangbah was dug out and was cremated according to the traditional practices in the very place where he was buried. His bones were later taken and placed in another hillock called U Lum Mooliksoo.<sup>27</sup> This was in accordance with the Jaintia practice of placing human remains in a bone repository.

The death of U Kiang did not mean that the resistance was finally suppressed. In fact, places in the south such as Padu, Nongbarai, Umkiang and others saw serious fights and a large concentration of troops. It may be pointed out here that though the people were still carrying out the resistance, they were no longer organised. By the early part of 1863 most of the other leaders were either killed in encounter or surrendered and taken as prisoners. Some of these prominent leaders were: U Swar Sutnga, who died fighting till the last; U Long Padu who died of sickness; U Mon Rymbai who was killed by the people near Nongbah and U Chey Rangbah, the

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27. Ibid.

trusted lieutenant of U Kiang who died in action. There were also others who surrendered after praying that their lives would be spared. They were U Bang Ralliang, U Bukher Pator Ralliang, U Woh Riang, U Mulon Mynso, U Kiang Sule and U Kat changpung.<sup>28</sup> The surrender and capture of the leaders was followed by a series of trials during the early part of 1863.<sup>29</sup> Except for one 'Ossa Maratteang' who was hanged<sup>30</sup> the others were either transported for life or sentenced for few years of imprisonment with labour in irons.<sup>31</sup>

The underlining meaning of the entire episode of the resistance movement was the political awakening that had come about amongst the people in their fight against British imperialism. According to J. B. Bhattacharjee, the movement was "a tremendous upheaval that had literally rocked the Jaintia Hills and shaken the citadel of colonial power in the north eastern hills".<sup>32</sup> Kiang

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28. Ibid.

29. Bengal Judicial Proceedings, No. 351, Trials by the Special Commissioner under Act XI of 1857 held in the Cossyah and Jynteah Hills.

30. Ibid.

31. Ibid.

32. J. B. Bhattacharjee, op.cit., p. 184.

Nangbah with his strong leadership qualities aroused the national sense by talking to the people in plain terms about their historic past. This had a binding force on the people in the formative stages of their resistance movement.

By 1864 everything was quiet in the hills. The Jaintias had by then been defeated. The suppression of the movement led to the other developments for which the resistance was fought. Taxes were levied and the house tax was to become the chief source of revenue. The income tax was withdrawn but there were some other sources from which the British Government was able to collect revenue such as, excise, forest produce, elephant catching, fisheries and stamp duty. The comparative calm in the previously disturbed area encouraged the government of Bengal to renew its attempt to increase their revenue from the hills. It was for this reason that in 1865 and 1866 the Commissioner of Assam was asked to enquire into the possibilities of assessing the cultivated lands. The Commissioner opposed the proposal and argued that the tax on the Jaintias would not only be unproductive but it would also disturb the mind of the Jaintias and would therefore doubt the intentions of the Government. It was also argued that the events of 1860 and 1862 were too

immediate to be forgotten and the imposition of additional tax would upset the entire attempts of 'confidence building measures'.<sup>33</sup> On the light of the above discussion it may be mentioned that the apprehension of future disturbances, compelled the government to abandon the proposal of a land tax and to stick to the indirect taxation as referred earlier.

The pacification of the hills led to a series of developments during the following years. Apart from the administrative measures that had been already been discussed, there were other areas where the society went for a change. The British rule brought about changes in the economy of the Jaintias. New crops, vegetables and fruits were introduced. They were cultivated extensively both for local consumption and for export. Potatoes, for instance, because of the enormous demand in Calcutta had led to an extensive form of cultivation in the Jaintia Hills. It may be mentioned that the Tuber was first introduced by the English in 1830 in the Khasi Hills. Trade and commerce started to pick up once again and Jaintiapur continued to be an important mercantile

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33. Selections of Records of the Government of Bengal, 8 June 1862, Showers to Secretary to the Government of Bengal.

centre. With time the local economy was integrated into the colonial economy through the weekly markets which were held on successive days of the eight day week.<sup>34</sup> Despite a closer administrative link with Assam, the greater portion of the trade was carried on with Sylhet. This was mainly because the trade with assam was comparatively insignificant being principally a barter trade.<sup>35</sup> On the whole the trade with Sylhet was about equally balanced. Though the region has a vast deposits of coal in areas like Amwi, Lakadong, Narpuh, Sutnga and Chermang which was estimated to yield about 1,100,000 tons,<sup>36</sup> it was not explored. Perhaps the expense of carriage had prevented it from being of much commercial importance. No revenue was derived from these coal beds that were mentioned above. During the year 1877-1878, 5000 maunds of coal were quarried by the Executive Engineer of Sylhet for Government purposes. A small

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34. D. R. Syiemlieh, British Administration in Meghalaya Policy and Pattern, p. 101; L. S. Gassah, Trade Routes and trade Relations Between Jaintia Hills and Sylhet District in the Pre-Independence Period in North East India History Association, 9th Session, 1988.

35. D. R. Syiemlieh, op.cit., p. 99.

36. W.F. Trotter, Report on the Administration of Jowai for the Year Ending 31st March, 1878, p. 18.

quantity was taken from Amwi by the European residents of Jowai for private consumption.<sup>37</sup> Iron ore from Jaintia Hills was also of an excellent quality. It was preferred to English iron by the Bengali blacksmith as a result of its malleability and being more easily worked. The peace that followed also led to the growth of a fair trade in iron articles such as daos, hoes, spears, arrowheads etc. manufactured by the Jaintia blacksmith.<sup>38</sup>

The other significant development was in the field of language and other practices. After the suppression of the uprising, the missionaries resumed their works. In the schools the Jaintias were taught in the Khasi vernacular but in the Roman alphabet, though Bengali and English were also retained in the curriculum. Since most of the Jaintia literates and elite groups were either pro-British or converts to Christianity, they never questioned the authorities against such forms of imposition, nor did they take steps to develop their own language by themselves. Here it would not be wrong if stated that there was no initiative taken by the church

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37. Ibid.

38. Ibid.

to develop the indigenous vernacular language.<sup>39</sup> The missionaries also played an important role in strengthening the policies of the British Raj. In order to make the people submissive, the missionaries took certain measures to prevent the converts from attending and participating in their traditional festivals and rituals. The traditional practices were considered to go against the basic teachings of Christianity and therefore unlogical and in their view must be disbanded. This was a deliberate attempt on the part of the missionaries and with time it was noticed that the arms and weapons that were used in the traditional dance and other purposes, did not find their way into those houses which showed their loyalty and allegiance to the Church or the Government.<sup>40</sup> The backbone of the resistance was now crushed for ever once the rift amongst the Jaintias had taken roots. It would moreover be an effective measure that no resistance would recur.

Another important change that came about following the outbreak was the construction of roads. This gained

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39. S. N. Lamare, *The Cultural Transition of the Pnars*, (Unpublished M. Phil Dissertation), NEHU, 1994, P. 130.

40. Ibid.

importance all the more when the proposal was approved to make Shillong into a new civil and military headquarters.<sup>41</sup> The urgency of the same was realised when the headquarters of the district was shifted from Cherra to Shillong. In this context roads in Jaintia Hills and those between Jowai and other important areas like Mukhtapur, Jaintiapur, Sylhet, Nartiang and extending to the district of Nowgong in the Brahmaputra valley were worked out.<sup>42</sup> It was estimated that these constructions had resulted in the developments of the best system of roads among the hill districts of the North East Frontier.<sup>43</sup> The importance of Jowai was seen all the more when Jowai was made into a sub-division in 1869 with an Assistant Deputy Commissioner stationed there.<sup>44</sup> The important town of the district such as Shillong, Jowai and Cherra were also connected by a telegraph communication system. Later the hills were integrated with the plain districts of Assam and the Surma valley

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41. P. N. Dutta, op.cit., p. 117.

42. W. W. Hunter, A Statistical Account of Assam, p. 232.

43. P. N. Dutta, op.cit., p. 117.

44. W. W. Hunter, op.cit., p. 243.

when the headquarters of the former was transferred to Shillong on 20 March 1874. One significant development in these forms of integration was that the system of administration remained undisturbed. The Khasi and Jaintia Hills were declared as 'Scheduled District' and were administered under the simple system of government established there before.<sup>45</sup>

Thus going by the above discussion it appears that the Jaintia resistance of 1860-1863 had brought about momentous changes in Jaintia Hills. U Kiang Nangbah's role in the entire phase of the second outbreak is still remembered and cherished by all Jaintias as a struggle of patriotism and for national liberation. Kiang Nangbah had figured not only as a freedom fighter but also as a prophet. Before he was hanged he proclaimed to the people that if his face turns east on the noose when he dies, then the country would be free within one hundred years from British rule.<sup>46</sup> True to his words the country was free from the foreign yoke in 1947. U Kiang like any

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45. P. N. Dutta, op.cit., p. 117.

46. J. B. Bhattacharjee, 'The Jaintia Rebellion' in N. R. Ray (ed.) Challenge, p. 161; Hamlet Bareh, U Tirot Singh, p. 161; and also 'U Kiang Nangbah' in S. P. Sen's Dictionary of National Biography, Vol. 2, p. 23.



**The Monument of U Kiang Nangbah  
on the river Syntu Ksiar.**



The Monument of U Kiang Nangbah  
on the river Syntu Ksiar.

other leader during the national movement, established the base for nationalism among the Jaintias.

U Kiang Nangbah still lives in the hearts and minds of the Jaintias and inspires the people to accomplish the task which he cannot do in nation building. A monument for him was built in 1969 by the Kiang Nangbah Memorial Fund which stands proudly today in the same place, 'Madiah Kmai Blai', where he was chosen by the Dalois and the Jaintia ryots to lead the people in their fight against the British imperialism. At present there is an emerging appreciation on the role of U Kiang Nagbah and is being highlighted in many popular writings. The step that was being taken by the State Government of Meghalaya to declare 30 December every year as a State holiday, in order to show reverence on the death centenary of the Jaintia leader is clearly an indication in that respect. Every year a number of functions and ceremonies are being held both in Jowai and in the State capital Shillong, to mark the occasion and to pay tributes to the leader of the Jaintia resistance.

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