

**LANDMARKS
IN INDIAN
ANTHROPOLOGY**

F 232
176

LAND MARKS IN INDIAN ANTHROPOLOGY

THE JAINTIAS

(SOCIO-POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS OF
JAINTIA HILLS)



By

SAMAR KANTI CHATTOPADHYAY,
M. A., Ph. D.

Vol. 59



COSMO PUBLICATIONS

NEW DELHI

INDIA

1988

Author

NE
301.4510954164
CHA:3

First Published 1977
This series 1987

Published by
RANI KAPOOR (Mrs)
COSMO PUBLICATIONS
24-B, Ansari Road, Darya Ganj,
New Delhi-110002 (India)

NEHU LIBRARY
Acc. No. 136028
Acc. by *ms 6/5/91*
Date
Class by
Sub Heading by
Enter by
Transcribed by

DEDICATED TO
The affectionate memory of
my late father
Sri Devi Prasanna Chattopadhyay
who was a constant source
of academic inspiration to me.

FOREWORD

The evolution of the socio-political institutions among the tribal communities has of late caught the imagination of the Social Scientists all over the world. A few excellent studies are by now available, particularly on the Indian and African situations, some of which have probed into the origin and development of these institutions in the larger context of state and polity formation processes underlining the role of property and ideology in stratification and legitimation of the heirarchical social orders. The politics of most of the tribal communities in the hill areas of North East India have also been studied by scholars, but baring an extremely limited number of scholarly papers published in learned journals we do not come across a single work on the socio-political institutions of the Jaintias of Meghalaya.

Dr Samar Kanti Chattopadhyay's Socio-Political Institutions of the Jaintias deals with one of the most fascinating but hitherto unresearched groups which holds out to be unique in the state and polity formation processes in the region from the indigenous tribal base. This segment of the Mon Khmer race that had carried with itself the elements of the Southeast Asian traditions underwent the process of adjustment and change effected by distinct environmental factors in course of early village formations within the Jaintia Hills, gradually developed a multi-tier socio-political structure of chieftaincy type with the Syiem of Sutnga at the apex of the system, and ultimately enccompassed vast chunks of non-Jaintia inhibited areas in the Assam and Bengal plains on two sides of the hills by way of conquest and expansion when the capital of the state was shifted in the 15th century AD to Jaintiapur in Bengal plains. Although this Jaintia Kingdom was in effect a monarchical state founded on the pan-Indian Brahmanical Hindu model and, resultantly, the priestly class and the Bengalee aristocracy exerted considerable influence in the court, the elements of continuity persisted in the basic political structure in the context of the Jaintia Hills emerging out of its own indigenous tribal

base and each region and ethnic group enjoyed uninterrupted autonomy at the local levels. Nevertheless, in the long run these autonomous institutions proved to be mutually complimentary, spontaneously reinforcing and revitalising each other, and the integrity of the state never faced a serious challenge. The colonial restructurisation of administration ever since British annexation in the 19th century too could not succeed in eliminating the elements of tradition that had survived the stress and strain of changing time and circumstances by dint of their own utility to the situation, despite the changes inducted from time to time. The autonomy of such tribal institutions that have direct bearing on the traditional way of life stand guaranteed in post-independence period and the District Council introduced under Sixth Schedule of the Constitution has been assigned the crucial role of coordination and supervision. These developments have made the study of the Jaintia institutions all the more fascinating. Even otherwise, the change and continuity which can be explained only with reference to the institutions over a fairly long period of time is a major theme before the Social Scientists and Dr. Chattopadhyaya's work is a significant addition to the existing literature on the theme that can be used by the researchers all over as model of a tribe that occupied a distinct position in the state and polity formation processes.

The book is a critical study of the socio-political institutions of the Jaintias that the author has observed from a close angle and interpreted the empirical data in light of studies done by others on tribes in similar situations. In his political analysis the historical and anthropological approaches and tools have freely mixed and mingled to add to the merit of this interdisciplinary exercise.

N.E.H.U.

(J. B. Bhattacharjee)

PREFACE

My stay in the Jaintia Hills for about a decade and my discussions with many Jaintias about their polity enabled me to understand their social and political systems. The investigation was commenced in 1975 at the suggestion of my most revered teacher Dr. Venkata Rao, Professor Emeritus of the Gauhati University. There are some good works on the Khasis by Lt. Colonel Gurdon, U Hamlet Bareh and J.N. Chowdhury. They have discussed various aspects of the life of the Jaintias but there is no work exclusively on the Jaintias except some Papers by Dr. Barister Pakem. No one has analysed the political and social structure of the Jaintias. Colonel Gurdon's monumental work, *The Khasis*, contains a full record of their public and private life, but its aim was not to deal with socio-political institutions. Hamlet Bareh's *History and Culture of the Khasis* and his *Khasi Democracy* are not free from bias. There is some amount of exaggeration in dealing with the nature and characteristics of the Khasi political institutions. Dr. Pakem did not deal with the institutions elaborately. He dealt only with the political institution in brief. J.N. Chowdhury in his *Khasi Canvas* has also discussed very little about Jaintia political institutions.

An attempt has been made in this volume to give a systematic account of the Jaintia social institutions, customs, origin, ethnological affinities, religion, marriage, inheritance, economy and their (Jaintia) role in forming a society as an integrated whole and their role in bringing cohesion and solidarity in the society. The evolution of the political institutions, analysis of these institutions received attention. I have also discussed the relation between the social and political institution. There is however very scanty material relating to the early period of the Jaintias. Therefore, there are different views regarding the origin of people and also different interpretations regarding the nature of their political institutions. The political terminology, like oligarchy, autocracy, democracy, republican are used to suit the guess of the writer. According to my findings, democracy in the accepted sense of the term, did not exist in the Jaintia polity. The term "Republic" is used in the context of the

Jaintia Political Institutions and not in literary sense. And, again, the political terminology oligarchic and autocratic are used by some writers which remains to be defined clearly. I have discussed the system to analyse the political institutions and to find out their characteristics without any prejudice.

In the preparation of this volume I received immense help from several persons.

I express my heartfelt gratitude to Dr.V.Venkata Rao, Professor Emeritus, Gauhati University, whose constant supervision and inspiring guidance have enabled me to complete this work.

My thanks are also due to Shri K. Rymbai, Ex.M.L.A., Sri W.Gayang, Sri D.Challam, M.D.C., and Shri Charley Domes and host of my Jaintia friends for their unfailing co-operation.

I owe a great deal to Sri N.K.Das, Research Officer, Anthropological Survey of India for his valuable suggestions, to Sri S.K.Mukherjee, Research Officer, Smt. Sipra Sen, Librarian, for permitting me the use of library of the Anthropological Survey of India, Shillong.

I thank my former colleague Dr.L.C.Goswami, Dr.H.L. Deb Roy and Dr.J.B.Bhattacharjee for their valuable suggestions and encouragement. Dr.M. Kar of S.K. Edmund's College, Shillong, did me a great favour by going through the draft and suggesting improvements.

I shall be failing in my duty if I do not acknowledge the help rendered by my wife Smt. Deepali Chattopadhyay, Lecturer in Philosophy, Shillong College, in the preparation of this volume. I also offer my thanks to Sri Nishi K.P.Choudhury who has carefully typed the manuscript.

S. K. CHATTOPADHYAY

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

A.R.	_____	Administrative Report
C.C.P.	_____	Chief Commissioners Proceedings
F.P.	_____	Foreign Proceedings
H.P.	_____	Home Proceedings
J.P.	_____	Judicial Proceedings
J.G.C.M.	_____	Jowai Government College Magazine
NEIC SSR	_____	The Journal of the North East of India Council

CONTENTS

<i>Foreword</i>	(vii)
<i>Preface</i>	(ix)
<i>List of Abbreviations</i>	(xi)
INTRODUCTION	(xv)
CHAPTER - I AN ETHNO—HISTORICAL NOTE ON THE JAINTIAS	..... 1
CHAPTER - II SOCIAL STRUCTURE	..... 11
Kinship in Political Organisation	..... 15
Family - Lineage	..... 16
Clan (Kur)	..... 19
Sub-clan	..... 21
Marriage, Social Criteria	..... 24
Position of Men and Women in the back ground of marriage system	..... 27
Matrilineal System, Dogma of Descent	..... 31
Inheritance	..... 37
CHAPTER-III RELIGION	..... 39
Functional Aspects of Jaintia Religion	..... 47
CHAPTER-IV ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL ORDER	55
CHAPTER-V POLITICAL STRUCTURE	..... 67
Polity Formation	..... 69
Evolution of Political Institutions	..... 74
Syiemship	..... 77
The Principality of Jaintia Sutnga	..... 79
The royal house	..... 80

The Basans	.....	81
Election system	.....	84
Durbar	.....	97
Administration	.....	98
The functionaries	.....	99
Raja	.....	103
Headman	.....	104
Lyngdoh (Priest)	.....	105
Other Officials	.....	106
Source of revenue	.....	107
Durbar	.....	111
Durbar of the Doloiship	.....	114
Durbar of whole Rajship (Durbar Hima)	.....	115
Administration of Justice	.....	117
Judicial Administration	.....	121
Judicial Jurisdiction	.....	127
Composition of Courts	.....	128
Post-Independent Changes	.....	135
Functions of District Councils	.....	137
CHAPTER-VI JAINTIA'S CONCEPTION OF REPUBLIC AND DEMOCRACY		145
Garó-Jaintia Political System: A Comparative Study	.....	149
CHAPTER-VII CONCLUSION	.....	155
APPENDICES		
APPENDIX - I	.....	171
APPENDIX - II	.....	173
APPENDIX - III	.....	176
APPENDIX - IV	.....	178
BIBLIOGRAPHY	.....	183
GLOSSARY	.....	194

INTRODUCTION

The people who inhabit the Jaintia Hills, District, are known as Syntengs by the people who dwell in the uplands of the central part of Khasi Hills. The people of the deep valleys and hillsides in the southern parts of the Jaintia Hills and east Khasi Hills district are called Wars. The Syntengs call themselves Pnars and speak of the Khasis as the Khyrniam.)

The term 'Khasi' is a generic name including all the three groups of the people when speaking of the entire race. These groups treat one another as akin while every one else is a foreigner or alien to another in territorial context.)

Many traditions and historical facts found in the country serve to prove that the Synteng, the War, and the Bhois are all Khasis. They are the descendants of the original folk who came somewhere from the east and found a home in the beautiful hills between the Kopili and Rangdi rivers in the mountain ranges between the Assam valley and Sylhet.¹

The societies of two types may resemble each other in one aspect of the total social system and differ in another.² Similarly one type of people may differ in some particular aspect or part of the whole social system, for example, the political system on the Kinship system.

Again, Khasis and Jaintias are one type of people and belong to one cultural unit but may have separate administrative patterns. (Moreover, nobody has tried to define clearly what constitutes an ethno-cultural unit, whether Apatanis and the Daffla's of the Subansiri district of Arunachal comprise a single ethno-cultural unit? Whether Khasis and the Jaintias

1. David Roy, in Sir Keith Cantlie's 'Notes on Khasi Law' Shillong, 1974, pp. 84-85.
2. M. Fortes and E.E. Evans-Pritchard, 'African Political Systems', Oxford 1970, p.3.

are two ethno-cultural units or one?') Again Yaudheyas, the Malavas and Arjuyanas, though they belong to different ethnic groups, may had similarity so far as the political system was concerned. Similarly, though the Garos belong to Tebeto-Burmese stock, they have matrilineal social system as the Khasis of the Mon Khmer stock. Therefore, though the Khasis and Jaintias belong to one class of people, I have taken to study the socio-political institutions of the Jaintias. This has been done keeping in view that I have made an attempt at making a comparative study of the institutions of the Jaintias.

In order to study the political institutions of the Jaintias also as "Social system the Political Institutions, the economic institutions, the Kinship organisation and ritual life are intimately related and inter-dependent."⁴

Further, in studying the political organisation, I must also deal with the maintenance of social order, within a territorial frame work. Every human society has some sort of territorial structure which provides the frame work, not only political organisation, whatever it may be, but for other forms of social organisation also,⁵ hence these aspects are also taken into consideration.

-
3. D.N.Majumdar, 'Tribal movements of North East India- A Sociological Assessment'. A Common Perspective of North East India 1967, p.105.
 4. A.R.Radcliffe-Brown in 'African Political System' Oxford, 1970,p.xii.
 5. Ibid, p.XIV.