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# The NEHU Journal

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# *The NEHU Journal*

Vol. III, No. 1, January 2005

**NEHU**

## EDITORIAL

As you might perhaps have noticed, *The NEHU Journal* has started coming out regularly and with the current issue it celebrates its third birthday. I would also like to inform you that the journal is now refereed internationally the joy and pain of which I have put in my editorial of volume 2, number 2. I am positive that the journal will receive quality submissions in future not only from humanities and social sciences but also from the life and physical sciences that have so far remained outside the purview of the journal, not the least due to any policy but perhaps due to the hangover of its earlier *avatar* as the *North-Eastern Hill University Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities*, which the present journal continues to be called.

We at the editorial office of the journal are grateful that many of our colleagues have enrolled themselves as subscribers, but the number of subscribers it has today is still not enough to make it self-sustaining. This situation is certainly not desirable.

I therefore take this opportunity to request you all to send in your subscription amount at least for three years and those of you who are subscribers continue to support the journal till it becomes self-sustaining. On our part, I shall continue to try and improve the quality and reach of the journal with each issue.

**T. B. Subba**

**Editor**

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in Meghalaya

L. CAJEE, H. J. STIERLICH &

UBAHUNLANG LYNGDOH THAR\*

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## Plurality of Cultures and Interculturality

BASIL POHLONG

Reason is the most sublime and unique faculties of humans. It is considered to be the agency and guarantor for bringing about unity of humankind. Despite this, surprisingly all over the world different cultures, ethnic groups, religions and lifestyles prevail insisting on their right to live and understand themselves in a way they think to be true and right for themselves. Even though people live in particular cultural frameworks, no specific meaning can be given to the word 'culture'.

Without entering into the complexity of meanings attached to culture, the point of departure can be our immediate understanding of culture as the specific inter-subjective fact of human existence. It is the nature of man to be with others, especially with those of his own group. And it is also his nature to strive for achieving some goals or ends in life whether individually or collectively. Therefore, what we discover as cultural phenomena like customs and rules of certain community, the underlying beliefs and values of its interaction with the world, expressing itself in art and religion, judicial and political institutions, refer to the inter-subjective dimension of human beings.

As man is invariably born within a particular cultural milieu, he grows breathing the air saturated with a particular culture and its *weltanschauung*, learns to speak its language and gets rooted in it. In this way culture is pre-given to man, unintentionally shaping his explicit intentional relations with the world in general. Culture thus becomes a condition for the possibility of existing in a common world; it becomes part of man's being-in-the-world. But on the other side, culture can itself be the intentional object of acting and thinking.

In pleading for the plurality of culture, Mrinal Miri<sup>1</sup> points out the possibility of individuating culture, and thenceforth for distinguishing one culture from another. This amounts to the individuality and uniqueness of culture which can be treated as forms of life. But individuating culture is not an easy task. It involves proper understanding of the culture in question. Can history give us complete knowledge about culture? The answer is 'No'. The

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first rule for understanding any bit of culture is that it must be seen in its fullest possible context in relation to all other simultaneously present, relevant factors. This, of course, demands time and intellectual effort. Each culture must be known in its own terms; it is best mastered by living in it, which means moving among the people and sharing their lives as much as possible.

Today we talk about the possibility of dialogue between different cultures or different religions. This might be possible when one culture or religion tries to understand the other. Every culture has probably developed typical ways of philosophizing in the sense that explanations were given about the world, about what man is, and about the right relationship between human beings, and between humans beings and nature.

But if culture is a unique whole in itself, there is on the face of it the possibility of questioning the possibility of its being comparable or understandable to others belonging to a totally different culture. Each culture claims uniqueness and particularity which marks it off from the others. But we are not imprisoned in our uniqueness. Dialogue and uniqueness, far from being opposites, really go together. D. Z. Phillips, while retaining the uniqueness of religious beliefs expressed through religious language, does not accept any incomprehensibility in religious beliefs. This same argument can be applied to culture as well, for no amount of talk of incomprehensibility can alter the fact of constant interaction, dialogue and communicability between different cultures.

Culture, as I understand, can be approached in two different senses – the understanding from within, i.e., an *emic* view, and the understanding from outside, i.e., an *etic* view. The latter is possible when there is the possibility of common participation or empathy. It can be best understood, I suppose, by living in it or sharing the lives of those who live in a culture which is not my own as much as possible. It, of course, demands time and intellectual effort. To empathize with others is like taking the other's place which is not an easy task. This implies *a priori* understanding of others. One of the dilemmas that we would face here is that we cannot understand without having certain pre-judgment, and that we fail to really understand if we make these pre-judgements as the paradigm for all understanding. Therefore, the way out here seems to lie in the interculturally oriented conviction that the general concepts like truth, knowledge, being, meaning, value, practices etc. depict some sameness or, can we say, different cultures are different manifestations of the same truth.

Miri, too, in order to substantiate this kind of claim argues that human beings with their incredible diversity constitute one world and one humankind because of their 'naturalness.' Mankind has a natural history, just as animals do. "People and animals do such things as doubting, becoming certain, getting puzzled, looking for something, questioning, wondering and expecting. Each of them has to do with man's natural desire to know or simply –as somebody puts it– with his 'curiosity' which he shares with the cat and no doubt, with other animals."<sup>2</sup> But he does not, of course, mean to say that there is no difference between man and animals. Man, as all would agree, is a rational and conscious being. Man, I would say, is a human natural being, that is to say, he is a being for himself, where he can create his own world and his own picture. Man therefore does things only against the background of what is right and wrong, and what is proper and what is improper. Man therefore is capable of thinking, doing, wishing, puzzling, doubting, becoming certain etc. Man is capable of philosophizing. In this way no culture can be claimed to be devoid of all these whether in a rudimentary form or profound one. Each culture, therefore, has certain, I would say, good things in it, and cannot be considered as meaningless or valueless. Each culture is true in itself, therefore it ought to be accepted and respected. This is what happens even in the West today. In *Rationality and Tribal Thought*<sup>3</sup> an attempt has been made to show that tribal thought (of the tribal cultures) does not lack rationality as claimed by many Western social scientists. "One could accept in principle that no culture, however 'primitive' it may be, can be found without some good elements in it. Similarly, even in a most advanced culture there can be some imperfect elements."<sup>4</sup> This would follow from the fact that man always had and will have the characteristic to develop a picture of himself.

As I have said earlier, one way we can understand the other is through empathy. But this position may lead to other serious consequences. To empathize with others is something like putting oneself in the place of the other which might lead to something like this: you have to be one to know one, when it comes to the understanding of other cultures. "One can have an empathic understanding of the 'inner' life of another culture."<sup>5</sup> This, of course, will ultimately lead to a kind of cultural solipsism.

Further, the transferability of information becomes a real challenge when we move from one situation to another (e.g., from the classroom to the real life situation). Pederson and Howel (1986) point out: "Unless persons recognize their own culture-based values, feelings and attitudes, are able to

communicate them to others, and experientially learn the logic of other culture systems, practical information about another culture will be of little use.”<sup>6</sup> Since no culture is like a closed monad, there is a possibility of comprehensibility and interaction with each other. Understanding my own cultural values etc., no doubt, provides me also with the possibility of understanding other’s values, but of course from within that context or framework of that culture only. This can be done through the medium of language (any form of language applicable). We can always express our thoughts, beliefs, reasoning etc. through language. Each culture expresses itself into an outer manifestation, though it is not sufficient. The inner is in need of the outer. Language straddles the ‘inner’ and the ‘outer’ – makes the inner available communally and uses the outer in giving shape to the ‘inner,’ but to a certain degree only. In this regard I subscribe to the view that the most authentic access to the inner life of another’s culture is through his/her language. And the only way I can find my way about in an alien culture is through its translations into my language, at least in the beginning stage. There are problems relating to translation, which I choose to avoid here. What I admit here is that understanding of another language is a gradual and growing process, for language itself, as Wittgenstein holds, is a ‘form of life’ and not just an uttered sound or involuntary gesture. It involves something more. Besides, this we can assume that a measure of cultural understanding comes through behavioural interpretations of a group of symbols of a particular culture. I can always understand other’s culture to a certain degree provided that (a) I have a will to do so, (ii) I look at others as others without bias and prejudice, and (iii) I have an attitude to participate and interact. Fred L. Casmir<sup>7</sup> offers some methods in cross-cultural understanding. Some of these are intercultural contact, negotiation, accessibility, openness and proper opportunities for learning. This will be possible when language plays its role. Here the point is that one can understand other’s culture whether in a rudimentary or profound manner. It is always possible for a British administrator to understand Indian culture, if he so desires.

If what I have said is true, there is a possibility of intercultural dialogue and interculturality. Though philosophers very seldom use the term ‘interculturality’, it would not be out of place to incorporate it in this context. My argument in this regard is that in the process of the development of language we face the necessity not only of repeating the existing words but also of creating new vocabulary, because if terms are meant to express

thoughts, new thoughts demand new words. When the new thoughts are expressed in old terms, the newness of the thoughts may not find a proper place or may be lost altogether.

The concept of interculturality stands for an attitude, for philosophical conviction that there is not just one culture for the whole humanity... The intercultural philosophical conviction is the insight that the one *philosophia perennis* is the exclusive possession of no one particular culture.<sup>8</sup>

Such an understanding does not, of course, attempt to de-construct philosophy, culture or religion. What it nevertheless does is the deconstruction of an extreme relativistic, contextualistic and absolutistic use made of them in the past and even in the present in the name of the singularity of truth in culture, philosophy and religion. We may say that no culture is perfect and fully integrated and that all cultures need to be purified and perfected through a process of renewal and encounters with other cultures, accepting the good elements in them and also by sharing with them the values of one's own culture. Moreover, there are many elements of culture which are shared cross-culturally, as Miri points out. Some of these elements like knowledge, belief, values, science and many others are not shared by one culture only. One culture therefore can incorporate elements from other cultures without losing its uniqueness. A very crude example, as some thinkers admit, is that the West can learn and borrow some of the spiritual characteristics of the Eastern cultures and the East can learn something from the West in terms of science and technology. But what has happened in the West in some periods of history is that the Europeans did not consider the non-European 'other' as having culture and did not deserve to be called human beings. In the context of philosophy, mainstream Western philosophy denied non-Western philosophies the right to be philosophies. Philosophy is just Greek and only of Greek origin.

When it comes to culture again, each culture constitutes elements which may find better manifestations in other cultures. As a result there is a process of taking and giving amongst cultures, where a culture for the sake of purification and perfection borrows new ideas or elements from other cultures. Human cultures change along with the perpetual flow of life. They change but never in an absolute and radical manner. In ancient times, most of the societies evolved their culture in relative isolation from and independent of one another. This was due to several factors. But one should not forget that traditions are neither absolute nor complete as they are continuous

accumulations and creations of endeavours of the human beings who are finite, limited in their cognitive and active skills. As a matter of fact, there has been a considerable exchange and interaction among various cultural communities to such an extent that it would be impossible to visualize how any culture would have developed in total isolation from the other. In this way interculturality approves of pluralism as a value without undermining one's own commitment to one's own position.

Since culture is a way of being-in-the-world, and to be in the world is to come across many factors, we can therefore see interculturality in various perspectives like philosophical, theological, political and pedagogical ones. Under philosophical perspective, it may be asserted that one philosophy is nobody's possession alone. Under theological perspective it is claimed that no one particular religion is to be the only and exclusive true religion for the whole community. The political perspective of interculturality stands for the pluralistic, democratic conviction that the political truth does not belong to one party, group, class, ideology or country. Pedagogical perspective is in a very important sense responsible for the practical implementation of the spirit of interculturality. Interculturality is, therefore, an insight that truth can be established by taking into account the different truths or rather truth-claims of various cultures together. It is not just a particular branch of philosophy like epistemology, ethics, metaphysics or logic for all these disciplines may be viewed from an intercultural perspective. Really speaking, intercultural philosophy is a fundamental philosophical orientation basic to all branches of philosophy. Interculturality therefore stresses for the need to abstain from defining truth or values, meanings and knowledge in terms of one's own tradition only. It is through understanding, interaction and sharing that we come to know each other's 'inner' life. This, I think, is possible with the help of education, for education like a liberating force helps in breaking the barriers of ignorance, hatred, hostility, discrimination, prejudice, narrow-mindedness and helps one to perceive the world in a different way. Maurice Friedman in some of his writings says that the aim of education is to be able to confirm and discover the other man.

I conclude by saying that interculturality as an attitude of the mind, a philosophical conviction to accept otherness, is the need of the hour. It is like a kind of theory which revolutionizes our way of looking at the world by establishing a kind of transcendental framework where different cultures or philosophies or religions can be communicated and understood interculturality. It is an attempt at regulating the ideal truth under different

names with overlapping structures. It is here that we strive at making mutual understanding in the midst of differences. Interculturality can be seen as a third way between absolutism and relativism which clears the way for a creative dialogue.

### NOTES AND REFERENCES

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- 5 Mrinal Miri, *op. cit.*, p.84.
- 6 P. Pedersen and W. Howel, "Pros and Cons of Using Structured Exercise in Intercultural Groups," in W. H. Week, P. Pedersen and R. W. Brislin eds., *A Manual of Structured Experience for Cross-cultural Learning*, Yarmouth: M.E. Intercultural, 1986, pp. iix-xvi.
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## Book Reviews

*Agrarian Structures and Land Reforms in Assam* by M. N. Karna, North-Eastern Hill University Publications, Shillong and Regency Publications, New Delhi, 2004, 103p, Rs. 250/-.

A brief review of peasant movements in India from 1860 to 1950 clearly reflects the changing trend of agrarian structures and land tenure/land reforms in the country. It identifies the changing features of Indian agrarian societies, which show more of discontinuity than continuity.

Initially, the East India Company's trade with India was insignificant. The decisive moment came in 1765, when the financial sovereignty over Bengal, Orissa, and Bihar went to the hands of the Company with the concession for levying taxes in exchange for a sum of Rs. 2.6 million per annum. In 1793, Cornwallis' Permanent Settlement brought a final regulation on the procedure for levying taxes, which led to decisive changes in land tenure. The British did all this as if the land belonged to the state and was thus at their disposal.

The objective of the British was to establish their commercial interests firmly in India. Since the textile industry played an important role in the beginning of industrialization in England, very large amounts of cheap products manufactured by mechanical looms were exported to India and this soon led to a collapse of her home textile industry. A large number of weavers became unemployed. In order to secure a basis for existence, they migrated to rural areas and tried to lease land for cultivation. The monopoly over the means of livelihood soon shifted to the hands of *zamindars* who were able to extort more and more taxes as the demand for land increased. This led to peasant indebtedness and even loss of their occupancy and usufructory rights. This was compounded by rise in prices of agricultural produce between 1860 and 1950. The landlords asserted their proprietary rights by evicting tenants while the latter claimed, and were occasionally granted occupancy rights. Over the century, the peasants' ability to resist landlords increased and landlordism stood considerably weakened by the end of British rule.

Consequences of the changes in the land tenure brought about by the Permanent Settlement undermined the rural stability. More and more cultivators became indebted, lost their occupancy rights, and dropped in status

to tenants-at-will or agricultural labourers. On the other hand, the wealth of *zamindars* increased on account of the income they earned from the difference between the amount of taxes and the rentals, increase in cultivated areas, money lending, and expropriation of debtors. In the course of time, the *zamindari* areas were characterized by marked difference in wealth, power, and prospects in life between the two distinct rural classes.

More liberal *ryotwari* system was introduced in Madras, Bombay, and Assam. Under this system, the government claimed property rights to all of the land and allotted the same to cultivators with the proviso that they paid taxes. They could use, sell, mortgage, bequeath, and lease the land as long as they paid taxes. Otherwise, they were evicted. This direct tax relation between the government and the cultivators was meant to prevent sub tax collectors. It sought to increase purchasing power, and, widen the market for British products in rural India. Taxes were pre-determined and fixed in a temporary settlement for a period of thirty years. It was revised and the tenure was extended.

Communal rights to land were common in North and North-West India. This system ideally fitted with the *Mahalwari* system. Tax was imposed on the village community, which distributed the same among the cultivators. Everyone was liable for the others' arrears. A village inhabitant - the *lambardar* - collected the tax and remitted it to the state. Tax assessment was also revised at intervals.

Over a period of time the *ryotwari* region was no longer a self-cultivator area. More than one third of the land was leased and in many districts more than two thirds. Indeed, it was not possible to transfer land to the people who were not from the locality, but the result was that landed property became concentrated in the hands of a few wealthy people, whereas the others lost their rights. A constantly increasing number of people became landless. While in the middle of the nineteenth century there were no landless persons, in 1931 and 1945, respectively 33 and 70 million landless labourers were registered. Others succeeded in renting some land, but on less favourable terms. Share tenancy increased greatly.

After Independence, economic situation in rural India changed very differently. A large part of the population remained poor and landless. A complicated relationship between landlords, cultivators, and landless emerged based on mutual rights and obligations.

Assam is a miniature replica of the Indian subcontinent. It has noticeable

diversities and variations in demographic and economic characteristics. It has a wide range of human responses to natural-ecological settings and historical compulsions. Within the confines of this region, a variety of people with diverse ethnic origins, representing different racial strands, speaking different languages and professing diverse religions have migrated and settled. The modes of living of the people, their lifestyles, and material basis of culture and consumption behaviours are diverse.

There are communities in the valleys whose agricultural calendar keeps them busy most of the year while those in the hills and mountains raise a single *jhum* crop. Then there are communities who are partly agrarian and partly dependent on forest produce. In the river valleys of the region, particularly the Brahmaputra and Barak valleys, the peasant communities live in a state of dynamic equilibrium with nature and are surrounded on all sides by tribal groups. The varied ecological-environmental settings in the region encourage a variety of agricultural practices and cropping patterns to emerge. The natural factors also influence the human choices in two crucial areas—land and its quality and water and its availability. These greatly influenced their responses and settlements.

A littoral and East Indian model of the Asiatic monsoon regime with dominant wet conditions prevail over a longer duration in the year, and demand prolonged spell of work in the fields in North-East India. In this wet region paddy has emerged as the most dominant crop. The diversities in the crop ecology and the resultant cropping pattern engendered differences in the social division of labour, the absorption of women in the agricultural labour force, in the quantum of agricultural work and leisure available to the agrarian communities. Female labour force participation rates varied strikingly between the hill-mountain and plains-valley communities.

In an area like Assam, with a variegated politico-administrative set-up, there are significant inter-regional differences in the landownership patterns and tenurial relations. In fact, the British policy, like in the rest of the country, was so designed as to accommodate multiple forms of landownership in the hills, mountains and plains regions, depending on agro-climatology, social custom and local tradition. These types of landownership evolved in the course of social history of the various peoples within the niches provided by their respective ecology.

It is in this background that the book under review assumes significance. This book is an outcome of a series of three lectures by Professor Karna

delivered as Professor H.K. Barpujari Endowment Lectures at Dibrugarh University, Assam. It is an attempt to study agrarian structure and land reforms on all India level. Karna raises the issues of peasant mobilisation, policy decisions and their implementation in a broad temporal framework. He has also traced the peasant uprisings such as Phulaguri uprising and No-Rent agitation. He has been successful in providing wider canvas on which land reforms in India can be better understood.

He provides a broad assessment of the land reforms adopted since Independence. With the abolition of intermediary interests the ownership of land is broader based and the erstwhile superior tenants acquired a higher social status.

Karna argues that while abolition of intermediaries brought about a measure of uniformity in the agrarian system of Assam, tenancy reforms provided a new confidence to the disgruntled tenants. He states that a preponderance of tenants with virtually no ownership rights on land characterises the Assamese agrarian structure. He adds that this has been further complicated by the religio-feudal establishments like *Satras* and *Maths*.

Under the prevailing socio-economic condition in the country no tangible progress can be expected in the field of land reforms. Wherever effective mobilisation of beneficiaries has taken place the result has been positive. The beneficiaries of land reforms, especially sharecroppers and landless labourers, are crippled by social and economic disadvantages. By tradition they are inarticulate, passive and unorganised. They do not constitute a homogenous social and economic category. Hence, a deliberate attempt at mobilisation is needed to generate an appropriate political and administrative climate for implementation of land reform measures. Such a change leads to better implementation of agrarian laws.

Those who believe in a liberal market-oriented path of development may come to accept the necessity of enforcing any package of land reform measures to foster sustainable agricultural growth, a pre-condition for rapid industrialisation and steady economic development. Undoubtedly an outmoded agrarian structure characterised by absentee ownership, widespread tenancies, persisting religio-feudal land control, and scattered holdings is a grave impediment to the optimum utilisation of land and water and to the adoption of improved technology and modern farming practices in the otherwise agriculturally well-endowed plains districts of Assam. Thus, the

need of the hour is to complete the unfinished task of reforms, which should include abolition of absentee landownership, identification and protection of *adhiars* (sharecroppers) effective and efficient enforcement of ceiling laws, speedy distribution of acquired surplus land, and consolidation of holdings and provision of supporting facilities to enforce minimum standards of cultivation. If these steps are integrated with development programmes related to surface irrigation and ground water, soil conservation, social forestry and such other activities, Assam should be able to come out of the vicious cycle of poverty and backwardness.

*R. Gopalakrishnan, Professor,  
Department of Geography, NEHU, Shillong.*

***The Great Earthquake of 1897 in the Khasi-Jaintia Hills translated by Basil Moris***, North-Eastern Hill University Publications, Shillong, 2003, pp.40 + xiii, Price : Rs. 95.00 (SB), US\$3.

Like any other eyewitness account of an event of importance, this one by the Reverend Robert Evans, who was a missionary to the Mission Field in the Khasi and Jaintia Hills between 1878 and 1901, makes interesting and fascinating reading, as indeed anything about the Great Earthquake of 1897 is. With the epicentre in the Shillong Plateau, and with a magnitude of 8.5, a report of the Meteorological Department says: "It is one of the major earthquakes in the seismic history of the world. Lasted about 2.5 minutes and completely ruined an area of 150,000 square miles and was felt over an area of one and three quarter of a million square miles. Caused landslides, fissures, vents and disrupted normal communication line. It was followed by a large number of after-shocks. The epicentre tract was within a cot-shaped area covering the entire Shillong Plateau". The severest shock might not have lasted for less than one minute but the devastation was complete.

To the Welsh Presbyterian Mission, originally named the Welsh Calvinistic Methodist Mission, the event was of particular significance as the areas most severely affected were those within the Sohra (Cherrapunji) area, where the Mission had established the first church and schools. One may understand the concern that the 'Mother Church' must have felt when news of the devastation reached England. The Reverend Dr. John Roberts,

whose name will always be linked with the development of Khasi literature, was in his country at that time. He had, in fact, just been nominated Moderator of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Mission of Wales. The scene of devastation that they saw on their return, with most familiar landmarks beyond recognition, and roads and paths on which they had often travelled drastically altered, was almost beyond belief. The Deputy Commissioner of the Khasi and Jaintia Hills at that time, Mr. J. C. Arbuthnot, whose report to the Government of India was perhaps the most detailed and graphic of the reports submitted, bears out the fact that no comparable natural disaster has ever taken place, perhaps for centuries! This is what he had to say: "In my tour of the district, I have been much struck by the way in which the ancient Khasi monoliths, often of immense size, the antiquity of which unknown, have been levelled with the ground and in many cases snapped off two, three and four feet from the base."

Eyewitness accounts agree that during the two minutes or so when the full force of the earthquake was felt it was impossible for anyone to remain standing. It was said that two women cyclists who were riding past the old All Saint's Cathedral fell down and from where they lay, they saw the church building collapse. The Chief Commissioner of Assam and his wife, who were preparing to go for a ride, had a narrow escape when their residence, the Government House, met a similar fate within minutes of their leaving the porch!

Although Shillong was well within the area most affected, it got off comparatively lightly, with only 23 deaths including Mr. McCabe, the Inspector General of Police, who was buried under the debris of his bungalow on the near side of the Umkhrah River opposite the Polo Ground. It is worth mentioning that the memorial that was erected on the spot has unfortunately been built over by unauthorised constructions during the past few years, which is a stark reminder to the state government to take more interest in what happens in the city than what it has been doing, in order that historical sites are not obliterated as has been done in this and other cases.

By contrast, it was the area closer to Sohra that was more grievously affected, the reason being in the nature of the topography, with steep slopes and cliffs everywhere. The village of Laitiam in the deep valley below the Mawsmat falls accounted for 86 deaths, all lost when the overhanging cliff broke off to overwhelm the habitations below. With these casualties, the Sohra Syiemship lost a total of 237 lives. The Khyrim Syiemship lost 146 lives mainly in the villages on its southern slopes.

Literally, earth shaking events such as this one do arouse strong reaction, and impressions upon those who experienced them. All of them suggest that the earthquake was a form of devil. Retribution for the wickedness of men, which at this point of time may conflict with the belief held by many, in a merciful, forgiving God. Who would extend His compassion not only to His noblest creation, Man, but even to animals, as may be seen in the Book of the Prophet Jonah (Ch.4:13).

Over the next few decades, however, there would be many eyewitness accounts left to various people in the form of newspaper articles, or even in poems published by individual authors, as by the Reverend Morkha Joseph, many of which bring to mind the destruction that overwhelmed places like Shella, the wealthiest village in the Khasi Hills at the time, but today reduced to a shadow of its original self. The once prosperous village of Shella Circle lost a total of 217 lives of which 117 were from the Shella village itself. This village, which was perhaps the most prosperous in the district at that time, with a population in 3658 in the Census of 1891 never recovered from this disaster having been reduced within minutes to a shadow of its former condition.

As one goes through Reverend Evans' account, one will appreciate that primarily, Robert Evans prepared this account for the Mission Board which would want to know how the earthquake affected the new church in the Khasi and Jaintia Hills, and more especially upon the believers. This account would appear to have been a vindication of the faith that God would not abandon His own in times of crises, but give them strength and ever greater faith, as one can see from the short personal experiences of local pastors and their flocks. What will impress the reader even more is the effect upon the young, who never lost their faith but carried on in the belief that was the time when they would declare how their faith had sustained them even at the worst moments of their young lives.

The account left by the Reverend Robert Evans will therefore be better appreciated if also read against the background as provided by official records.

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**DECLARATION**

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I, T. B. Subba, hereby declare that the particulars given above are true to the best of my knowledge and belief.

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