

**AN HISTORICAL ANALYSIS OF THE POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT
IN JAINTIA HILLS (1835-1972)**



BY
Mr. W. R. Kharlukhi

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ABSTRACT

This study is an attempt to give an account of the political developments in Jaintia Hills from 1835 to 1972. The theory of the origin of Syiemship and the part played by the Jaintia people against British domination will be assessed. At the same time we will try to find out the impact of the new system of administration on the traditional political institutions. We will also try to study the role of the Jaintia Durbar which as a social organisation had played a very important part during the British period and we would probe deeper into the political movement of the reformists and anti-reformists during the proposed constitutional reforms of 1935. The attitude of the Jaintias to the scheme of autonomy under the Sixth Schedule and the demand for more autonomy during the Hill State movement will also be examined.

The first chapter contains the Introduction describing the land, the people with the social and political institutions including the origin of Jaintia Syiemship (Kingship). The smallest unit of the Jaintia social organisation was the family. The next higher group of the social

organisation was the sub-clan. All the members of the sub-clan belonged to the same clan, so above the sub-clan was the clan. A number of clans ranging from 2 to 14 joined together to form a super-clan. These different clans and super-clans joined together to form a village and similarly the numbers of different villages formed a sub-tribe. Finally a number of sub-tribes joined together to form a tribe with a state of their own. This is how the Jaintia Kingdom came into existence. With regard to the origin of Syiemship (Kingship) just like in any other civilization of the world the origin of the Jaintia Syiemship (Kingship) was said to be of divine origin).

Syiem (King) The second chapter deals with the political conditions in the Syiemship (Kingship) since 1774 and the circumstances leading to the annexation of the Syiemship (Kingship) in 1835. During the unsettled conditions which prevailed for sometime after the Burmese War, the Syiem (King) of Jaintia encroached considerably on the southern border of Nowgong district, and between 1830 and 1832 he was repeatedly called upon to remove an outpost which he had established without authority at Chapparmukh, at the confluence of the Kopili and Doyang rivers. He evaded compliance, but before any coercive measures had been taken a fresh cause of dispute arose. In 1832, the Raja of Gobha,

in the west of Nowgong, one of the petty Chieftains dependent on Jaintia, acting under the orders of his suzerain, seized four British subjects, three of whom were afterwards immolated at the shrine of the goddess Kali. The fourth escaped and gave information of the occurrence. At this juncture Raja Ram Sing II died, and was succeeded by his nephew, Rajendra Singh. For two years the Government endeavoured to induce him to give up the perpetrators of the outrage and reminded him of the consequences of refusal, and of the solemn warnings which had been given on previous occasions when similar attempts had been made on the lives of British subject in the district of Sylhet. The young Syiem (King) however was obdurate, and at last failing to obtain satisfaction, it was resolved to dispossess him of his territory in the plains. On 15th March 1835, Capt. Lister took formal possession of Jaintiapur and issued a proclamation announcing the annexation of the Jaintia Parganas to British territory. This limited the authority of the Syiem (King) in Jaintia system.

The third chapter, highlights the Jaintia struggle against British political domination from 1835 to 1863. The hill people were deeply hurt and shocked when they realised that their Syiemship (Kingship), the institution of which they were so proud of was about to be terminated

or ended. The people were determined to resist the annexation. The Dalois (governors) and members of the royal family instigated the people of Jaintia Hills to rise against the action of the British. However the people, even though they had the best opportunity to take action, were not well organized and the British rushed with full force to subdue or suppress the movement. For twenty-five years (1835-60) after the annexation and the sublime wave of patriotism submerged beneath the surface, the people were left to themselves. The only connection they had with the British was the payment of an annual tribute of a he-goat which was previously paid to the Syiem (King). So in the eyes of the people, paying tribute to the British officers at Sohra, was just like paying it to their Syiem (King) at Jaintiapur. But the moment the British tried to impose their decisions of taxing the people in 1860, rather than the decisions coming from the people, they rose against the British. As a tribute system between the Syiem (King) and his people was based on common consent so they strongly protested against the principle of taxation without representation. After the Anglo-Jaintia War of 1860-63 the British retained the indigenous devices of traditional democracy. At the same time the power of the Dalois (governors) was curtailed. Now they became only the Commission agents of the British, while retaining a semblance of civil

and criminal jurisdiction over petty matters. But this reduction of power was only between the Dalois (governors) and the British authorities. Ironically, the Dalois became more powerful over their people.

The fourth chapter gives a history of the Jaintia durbar, its formations as a result of social disorganisation (1863-1900) and to see whether it had played any role in Jaintia politics vis-a-vis the political developments from 1900 to 1960. The other important institution in Jaintia Hills was the Jaintia Durbar which was established in 1900. As the traditional institutions were reduced in importance, there was a feeling that such a durbar should be set up, through which the grievances of the people could be ventilated to the British authorities. The durbar was composed of the representatives of the Durbar Raids (provincial Durbars) which were known as sub-durbars for the purpose. The representatives would present their requirements to the Jaintia Durbar which in turn, forwarded the scheme to the government. The scheme worked very well and the people were very much benefited by its existence. In 1937, a new political development began under the Government of India Act 1935. Before 1937 the Jaintia Hills together with the Khasi Hills were declared as a 'Backward Area' and therefore not represented in the Assam Legislative

Council. Rev. L. Gatphoh from Jaintia Hills and his counterpart Rev. J.J.M. Nichols-Roy from Khasi Hills expressed themselves categorically in favour of political advancement for their hills and their inclusion in the proposed reforms. The main purpose of the reform starting from 1937 was to give more voice and power to the people. The Jaintia people then accordingly made a demand for a separate constituency and at the same time made it clear that they were against the idea of converting the Khasi-Jaintia race into a frontier tribe and such a policy would be opposed by the people. So under this Act the Jaintia Hills together with the Khasi Hills were declared as partially Excluded Areas and were therefore duly represented in the Assam Legislative Assembly. It was through the Jaintia Durbar that the Jaintia leaders mobilised public support in favour of their demands and ultimately succeeded in achieving their goal.

The fifth chapter consists an account about the establishment of the District Council in the Khasi and Jaintia Hills together with the demand for a separate District Council by the people of Jaintia Hills which resulted in the creation of a separate District Council for the Jowai Sub-division in 1964 which became functional in 1967. After Independence and with the commencement of the Constitution, the Jaintia Hills like other hill areas of Assam fell under the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution with

a partial autonomy and these hill districts had been styled as Autonomous Districts. In accordance with the provision of the Sixth Schedule, five District Councils – one each for the North Cachar Hills, the Mikir Hills, the Garo Hills, the Mizo Hills and the United Khasi-Jaintia Hills District were set up in 1952. As early as in 1947, S. Barih of Jowai and others pleaded before the Bordoloi Committee, for a separate District Council for the Jaintias, but Rev. Nichols Roy with certain promises of equal treatment pressurized them to drop the idea. Further, in the Constituent Assembly, Rev. Nichols-Roy, from the Khasi Hills was the spokesman for the areas. As such the Jaintias could not do much in expressing their opinion for separation. Again in 1957 when Pandit Govind Ballabh Pant the Union Home Minister of India visited Shillong, H. Hadem (E.M. of United Khasi and Jaintia Hills District Council) and some members of the District Council and others representing the people of Jaintia Hills submitted a memorandum to him demanding a separate District Council for the Jowai Sub-division. It was only in 1964 that a separate District Council was created for the Jowai Sub-division of the United Khasi-Jaintia Hills District inhabited mainly by the Jaintias. This new District Council came into being in 1967.

The sixth chapter is a study about the emergence of the Hill State movement and Jaintia Hills (1952-72).

In the working of the provisions of the Sixth Schedule the people of the hill areas of Assam, felt that this autonomy was defective and not satisfactory. They found many loopholes by which their future destiny would be endangered gradually by the mixture in the administration in Assam with people whose language and culture were quite different from their own. The result of this was that the hill people felt that it was better for them to have a Hill State of their own. Thus, from 1954 we see the emergence of the Hill State movement in the hill areas. The people of Jaintia Hills also joined hands with the other hill tribes of Assam in this movement demanding for a separate Hill State.

The last chapter gives a summary of findings and conclusion. From the foregoing analysis it becomes clear that the period under study was a transitional phase in Jaintia politics. The system of the traditional political institution of the Jaintias was destabilised by the British. Since the British intention was not for the welfare of the Jaintias but they only wanted to strengthen their base in North-East India, therefore they went on experimenting with these institutions. Syiemship (kingship) was liquidated and with that the Langdoh (Priest) lost his power over the people. Moreover the people were overburdened by an oppressive tax system without taking into consideration their primitive technology and the backward nature of their

economy. However, the only alternative for the Jaintias was to protest against such measures but that did not help in restoring back the autonomy to their system. On the other hand, it resulted in making them a part of the bigger whole by making Jaintia Hills together with the Khasi Hills a part of Assam. It was only after a long struggle that a certain amount of autonomy was restored through the creation of a separate District Council in 1964 and the formation of the State of Meghalaya in 1972.

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