

HILL SOCIETIES



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M.S. SANGMA

Dr. Milton S. Sangma is a new generation of scholars, a product of spirit of renaissance sweeping across the hills. Although by training and profession, he belongs to the discipline of history, a Professor of History, North Eastern Hill University, but his interest and commitment are not solely confined to the narrow boundaries of traditional history. He studied in depths the religion, language and culture of the Garos in their changing society. He imbibed the spirit of cosmopolitan plurality in his undergraduate and post-graduate life in Calcutta. His *History of American Baptist Mission in North-East India* (1987), *History of Garo Literature*, *History of Education in Garo Hills* transcends the parameter of traditional history and records the dynamic changes in *social history of the people of the Garo Hills* as an impact of the slow changes in the technology in hill economy of the people. His is closely associated with North-East India Council for Social Science Research, North-East, India History Association and Indian Council of Historical Research.

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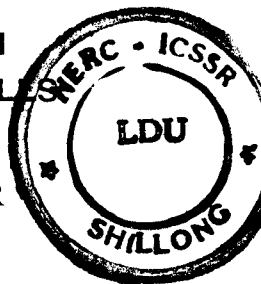
The institutions of hill societies have evolved to their present stage over a period of centuries. Since independence of India, hill societies have been exposed to radical ideas; the process started with the coming of English medium education, with opening of schools and slow emergence of Christianity in the hills. The spirit of renaissance was released in the hill societies as an impact of outside contact with their rich cultural heritage. The dynamics of social changes in hill societies with special reference to Garo Hills in north-east India have been portrayed in this volume by social scientist of north-east as a lasting tribute to Dr. D.N. Majumdar, one of the most resourceful anthropologists in field research. The volume is an examination of the process of structure changes from the self contained stage of precapitalist social formulations in the hills which have interacted with the wider political economy and outside world.

HILL SOCIETIES

Their Modernisation

A STUDY OF NORTH EAST WITH
SPECIAL REFERENCE TO GARO HILLS

A Tribute to Dr. D.N. MAJUMDAR



Edited by

MILTON S. SANGMA

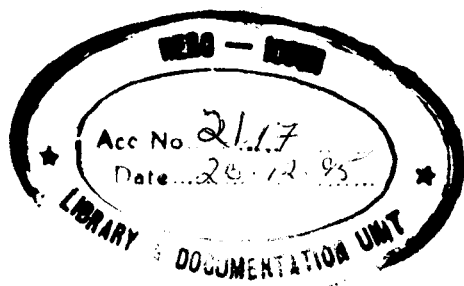


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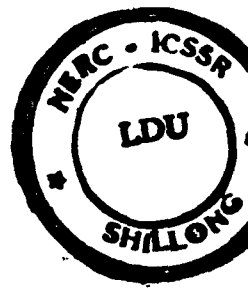
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INTRODUCTION

This volume is a collection of papers presented in a Seminar organised by the North-East India Council for Social Science Research, Shillong on December 14-15, 1990, as the most fitting tribute to Dr. D.N. Majumdar, one of the outstanding anthropologists of North-East India and one of the founders of the North-East India Council for Social Science Research at Shillong, who left for his heavenly home on July 25, 1990. His academic friends and members of this Council soon met at a Condolence meeting under the auspices of the NEICSSR at Shillong and decided to hold a Seminar to commemorate his sudden and premature death, on the theme "Continuity and Change in the Hills of North-East India with special reference to Garo Hills". A good number of scholars and academicians were invited to present their learned papers in this Seminar and the present volume is a product of that academic exercise.

Dr. D.N. Majumdar was one of the most resourceful anthropologists in field research in North-East India. Though he can not be clubbed together with the Theoretician group as he did not profound any theory or advocated any principle, yet he was one of the foremost field workers of his times in North-East India. He put his whole life, mind and heart to the field researches, teachings and seminars at regional, National and International levels and was able to expose North-East India as still a viable field for anthropological research.

Born on 3rd January, 1929 in Nagaon in Assam, Dharendra Narayan Majumdar was the fourth son of Late Kalpa Narayan Majumdar of Rehabari, Guwahati, the then Additional Director of Land Records and had three elder brothers and one younger brother and two younger sisters. He had his early education at Cotton

Collegiate school, Guwahati and passed Matriculation Examination in 1946 in First Division with Distinction in Persian. He passed his Intermediate Arts from Cotton College, Guwahati in 1948 in 1st Division with Distinction in Persian and Logic and I.Sc. in Anthropology from Calcutta University in 1950 in 1st Division. He also secured 1st Class Honours in Anthropology from Calcutta University and obtained Second Class first in M.A. in Anthropology from Lucknow University in 1953. He obtained his Ph.D degree from Gauhati University in 1968 on "A Study of Culture Change in two Garo Villages" under the supervision of Prof. M.C. Goswami.

Dr. D.N. Majumdar began his career as a Social Worker in Garo Hills in 1953 under the auspices of Assam Seva Samity and served in that capacity till 1956. While he was thus serving in the Mangsang area bordering Khasi Hills, he met his wife Smt. Clarish G. Momin and married her in 1954, risking condemnation and ostracism by his own orthodox aristocratic Hindu family and community. They were blessed with one daughter and three sons.

In 1957 he entered into the Assam Government Service as Asstt. Project Development Officer of Baghmara Development Block in Garo Hills and remained there till 1959 after which, he was transferred to Selsella Block where he worked till 1964. He was thereafter transferred to Dhubri as Sub-Divisional Planning Officer where he served till 1966 and then relinquished his job to join the Gauhati University as a Lecturer in Anthropology in 1968. In 1977 he joined the Dibrugarh University as a Reader in the Department of Sociology and returned to Gauhati University in 1978 and remained in the same position till he was promoted to Readership in 1985, in which position he retired in May, 1990.

In between his University services, he undertook various other assignments offered by many organisations. Thus he was a Guest Lecturer in Assam Administrative Staff College, Guwahati, and a Regional Director for North-East India and Upper Burma, South-east Asia Study Project, National Museum of Ethnology, Japan during 1985-86 and from 1988 till his death. He visited Japan in April, 1990 for a series of lectures at the invitation of Ethnological Museum at Osaka. He also presented a Paper on Jhum Cultivation in North-East India in the XIIth International Congress of Anthropological and Ethnological Sciences held at

Zagreb, Yugoslavia in July, 1988. He also worked as Director of several Projects under various organisations and Central and State Governments. Therefore, taking stock of his total contributions — publication of books, articles in learned journals and magazines, Seminar papers and his participations, Class teachings, Research guidance and Research Project Reports, it can be safely said that he was second to none in the field of Anthropological research in North-East India and can be placed in history by the side of J.H. Hutton, J.P. Mills, Verrier Elwin and J.K. Bose.

When he came to Garo Hills in 1953, he discovered that except a Monograph and a few articles in Indian and American Antiquary, Man In India, JRASB and the Reports and Gazetteers of British Officers, there was practically no proper Anthropological study on the Garos. He therefore lost no time in grabbing this opportunity of studying and writing about them. Thus making Garo Hills and the Garos as a base for his research, came out pages after pages from his pen which have been published in different journals and magazines. Then his field of research was extended to other indigeneous tribes of Garo Hills like the Koches, Hajongs, Dalus, Rabhas and Bodos. Then his field of study was widened so as to cover all parts of North-East India as Projects were sponsored and Seminars held by different organisations and State and Central Governments on different themes and aspects of North-East India. While studying about these tribal groups, he had no air himself. In fact, in his book 'The Garos' published in 1956 and 1966, he said that "there is no actual basis for dividing humanity into tribes and non-tribes," and "Whatever may be the present scope of Anthropology, it is my personal opinion that 'people' is a better term to denote smaller as well as larger groups." Most of his publications and his unpublished Papers were on Garo Hills and the Garo tribe and a few were on other tribal groups and some on problems of North-East India as a whole. Therefore, it is in the fitness of things that the theme of this Seminar is entitled "*Continuity and Change in North-East India with special reference to Garo Hills*".

This volume altogether contains 26 Papers which have been grouped under different Sections according to their themes. In the FIRST SECTION under 'Concepts', there are two Papers. The Paper by A.K. Ray "Pre-Capitalist to Capitalist Transformation",

an overview survey of the North-east, is an examination of the Political Structural changes and the process of this structure becoming subordinate to the Colonial powers in different parts of North-East India from Marxian point of view. The second Paper in this Section is by Kishore Bhattacharjee, "Peasantization and Re-Crystallisation of Cultural Identities in the Hills of North-East India", which attempted to examine as to how the tribal societies in the hills of North-East India have crossed the self-contained stage of the pre-capitalist social formations and have interacted with wider political economy.

The SECOND SECTION of this volume "Demography and Culture" contains four Papers. The Paper by M.C. Pandey "Demographic Profile of Garo Hills" deals in trends in demographic growth in Garo Hills on the basis of the Census of India Reports. He also worked out on Population density, Sex ratio, Religion-wise population growth, literacy rate and Land capacity to fast growing population pressure and concluded that if this demographic growth continues, the pressure on land will become very heavy. In his Paper "The Garo : the Name, Meanings and its Origin", Mihir N. Sangma examined all the theories already advanced by other scholars on the subject and came to the conclusion that 'Garo' word has been given to the Garos by others as the Garos call themselves 'A'chik' (hillman) or 'Mande' (man). The meanings of A'chik and Mande have also been explained. In his other Paper "Garo Culture : Songs, Dances, Music, Traditional and Emerging", Mihir N. Sangma described the Garo culture, their songs, music and dances and described how these traditional culture is on the road to extinction due to the cross-current of western culture brought about by Christianity, Education and other modern amenities. B. Kar in his Paper "Changing A'chik-Mande" calls for further research in order to know definitely as to why such a traditional society like the Garo society is subjected to ever-changing processes by the surrounding social and political forces.

In the THIRD SECTION "Traditional Customary Laws and Institutions", there are three Papers. Julius L.R. Marak in his Paper "The Garo Customary Laws and Application of General Laws in Garo Hills" made a brief survey of the Garo procedure of disposing of both Criminal and Civil Cases during Pre-British,

British and Post-British periods and described how some changes have taken place in the procedures during the course of these centuries. In her Paper "Concept of Maintenance in Garo Customary Law", M. Pathak made a comparative study of the concept of Maintenance between the Hindu and Garo concepts and stated that while in a Hindu Society, the husband is obliged to maintain all the members of the family and the dependents, it is not so in the Garo Custom after the divorce. After the divorce, children stay with their mother, belong to her clan and not their father's clan. S.B. Chakrabarti and G. Baruah in their Paper "The Institution of Nokmaship in Garo Hills" made some observations on the various kinds of Nokmas and the changing status of the A'king Nokma throughout the century.

The FOURTH SECTION of the volume is a collection of Papers on certain economic issues. S. Khan in her Paper "Identifying Constraints on Economic Development in a Tribal Society" enumerated a number of factors barring economic development in Garo Hills, such as, low rate Land utilisation, Land holding pattern, absence of irrigation, Shifting Cultivation, Poverty, Transport and Communication, lack of marketing facilities, literacy, etc., whereas, land was suitable for horticulture and agriculture and offered some suggestions to overcome these hurdles. A.G. Momin in his Paper "East and West Garo Hills : Some Economic Perspectives" presented some basic economic data on Garo Hills and offered some valuable suggestions for improvement of economy in Garo Hills. In the "Traditional Jhum-based Economy of the Garos and its Changing Pattern", K.C. Momin gave us a picture of the traditional way of life of the Garos and showed us how these traditional based economy had become unsuited due to the infiltration of modernity brought about by Christianity, Trade relations with the surrounding plains people and new Administrative mechanism. He pleaded for more Jhum control measures for economic upliftment of the people. K. Alam in his Paper "Markets of Garo Hills" made an assessment of the socio-economic implications of these markets and narrated how these Frontier markets have been a pivotal role in the changing socio-economic scenario of the Garos. In his Paper "Textile Weaving in the North-East India" N.C. Das described weaving as a traditional and a continual art among the people of North-East India and gives an account of an indigeneous method of dyeing

and the myths associated with this art of weaving among different sections of the people. Martin R. Sangma in his Paper "Handicrafts and Textiles" described this art as a common Industry among the Garos since time immemorial and showed how this industry is acquiring bigger dimension through Governmental promotional schemes. Milton S. Sangma in his Paper "Land Tenure System in Garo Hills" traced the origin and development of the land tenure system in Garo Hills throughout the ages till 1977. "Development through Cooperatives : A Case Study of East Garo Hills District", a Paper by P.C. Barua makes a survey of the mineral resources and agricultural scenario of East Garo Hills and gave reasons for prospects and problems of development of cooperatives in East Garo Hills District.

The FIFTH SECTION deals with Art and Architecture of the Garos in which a Paper by L.R. Marak "Art, Architecture and Wood Carving" gives us a glimpse of the Garo traditional House structural designs such as the Main House, Bachelors Dormitory, Granary, Jhum Field House, Rest House, etc., and proved that they are all indigeneous and original in its designs and conceptions.

In the SIXTH SECTION, Language and Literature, B.K. Sangma in her Paper "Development and Formation of Vocabulary in Garo" dwelt on the development and formation of Vocabulary in Garo. After making a brief survey of different Garo dialects and the compilation of Garo Vocabulary, she explains about certain devices that are employed by the Garos to form words. V.S.B. Sangma in her Paper "Garo Folk Literature" divided the Garo Folk Literature into Prose, Poetry and other Verbal arts and explains the various subject matters included in each of these categories of Garo Folk literature. P. Goswami in his Paper "A Garo Tale and its Analogues", tells us about a Garo tale in which a Garo knowing the language of the animals has learnt some lessons and tells us also as to how this kind of tale is common in India and abroad. Caroline. R. Marak in her "Garo Poetry" deals with Traditional Garo Poetry, its different forms and variety of topics they deal with. Lindrid D. Shira in his Paper "Renaissance in Garo Literature" highlighted the role of Howard Dension Momin and the first secular Garo Magazine called 'A'chik Ku'rang' (the Voice of the Garos) first published in 1938 as instrumental in inaugurating the spirit of Renaissance in the field of Garo Literature.

The SEVENTH SECTION deals with Education in which M. George in his Paper "Development of Education in Meghalaya: Continuity and Change" gave us a glimpse of the origin and development of Education in Meghalaya.

The EIGHTH SECTION deals with Religion in which M.C. Thomas made a comprehensive study of the Garo traditional religion and beliefs in his Paper "Religious Beliefs and Customs among the Garos". J.J. Roy Burman in his Paper "Christianity and Development among the Garos" narrated a brief history of the coming of the American Baptist Mission to Garo Hills through the adventurous works of two Garos — Omed and Ramke under the patronage of the British Government and described how it had its impact on the social, political and economic life of the Garos.

The APPENDICES contain the publications of D.N. Majumdar and the Tribute by B. Kakoti.

I take this opportunity to thank Dr. B. Datta Ray for giving me the privilege to write an Introduction to this volume and thereby enabling me to pay my last respect and tribute to one of the most resourceful and leading Anthropologists of North-East India of our time.

MILTON S. SANGMA