

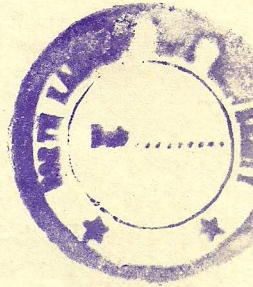
**THE
LALUNG SOCIETY**

**K. SYAMCHAUDHURI
M. M. DAS**

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THE LALUNG SOCIETY

A THEME FOR ANALYTICAL ETHNOGRAPHY



N. K. SYAMCHAUDHURI
&
M. M. DAS

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ACKNOWLEDGMENT

In preparing this book for publication encouragement and help have been received from many quarters which are appreciated with a deep sense of gratitude.

The previous Director of the Anthropological Survey of India, late Dr. D. K. Sen took special interest in this and visited one of the fields of research in March, 1966. In course of writing Dr. S. C. Sinha, the present Director of this Survey, took the trouble of going through some of the chapters and spoke encouragingly.

To Shri Ful Singh Lalung of Nellie and Shri Bhujendra Singh Deka-raja of Baropujia, thanks are due for bringing into notice historical background of the Lalungs.

Various aspects of the Khasi and the Garo societies were explained to the senior author by Shri B. E. Nongrum and Shri S. A. Marak respectively. Shri S. K. Biswas, formerly of this Survey, supplemented certain quantitative information on the Lalung of Amswoi. Thanks to them for all these helps. To Shri B. Das Shastri, an erudite scholar and Indologist, indebtedness is expressed for his critical and evaluating remarks on the subject-matter of this book as it was being written. Shri P. K. Mitra did a good job on the photographs that appear in this book.

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FOREWORD

In 1955-56 a series of ethnographic studies on little known tribal groups were taken up by the Anthropological Survey of India. One of the major emphasis of these studies was that data should be collected on the basis of intensive functional study of a village community dominated by the ethnic group under observation. Shri M. M. Das, Senior Technical Assistant of the Survey, attached to the Northeast India Station, collected detailed data on the Lalung from the village of Nambor under the guidance of Shri N. K. Syamchaudhuri. In developing the analytical frame for writing the report Shri Syamchaudhuri has brought in a wide ethnographic canvas which include comparative information on the Khasi and the Garo. It is hoped that this analytical ethnography on a little known community of Assam will be of interest both for theoretical social anthropologists as well as for the planners and administrators.

Surajit Sinha

INTRODUCTION

Assam has been fortunate in having a number of ethnographers and anthropologists such as Mills, Hutton, Gurdon, Endle, Shakespear, Haimendorf, Das and Burling, to name a few, to take interest in and write monographs on its different communities.

The present is an attempt at continuing the chain, though from a different angle.

For three years from 1959 the official duty of the senior author took him to the various parts of Assam. It was in the course of those tours that he came to know about the Lalungs and it was then that the idea was conceived of writing about them.

The framework of the book is ethnographic, but the theme has been handled from an angle different from the monographs written so far.

The structure of the Lalung society has been described in detail, comparing it with those of the Khasis on the one hand and of the Garos on the other. In the analysis of the materials, the roles and functions of the important kins and the philosophy that lies behind the social structure have been discussed.

The economic and the religious aspects of the Lalung culture for instance have been described from the point of social involvement that is these have been viewed as parts of a whole social organization. In short, the ethnographic data have been analysed through the mode of participation by the human elements constituting the society.

No society is static. It is natural that the original culture of the Lalungs has undergone changes in the course of its evolution. To give an idea of this dynamism their culture has been placed against the historical background of Assam. The changes that have taken place and are taking place have also been discussed.

This book is thus an analytical approach to the study of Lalung life and culture, through a method in which the social aspects of human participation have been emphasised. In this

sense it is holistic. But this holism has been viewed in terms of relation of the human participants to the society, culture and environment.

At the same time the study is not merely an appraisal of problem and method of presentation, but has a theoretical construct behind it. The Lalung society has its own structure and in-group consciousness or corporateness. * It will be noticed that the Lalungs have always maintained a distinct existence as a distinct society through all the varied historical situations which were enough for their disintegration had not a strong feeling of cohesion held them together. Not only they withstood these disruptive forces but even inducted people from outside into their own society. This cohesion has developed into a philosophy of continuity of life which is reflected in their social structure and village organization.

Change has in the modern times started knocking at their doors with a greater force than ever before. But the integrity and internal economic bonds still resist these influences and hold the society together.

The view taken here is that all the phases of Lalung life, social organization, economy and religion, constitute a systematic whole of human relationships which may be called in-group consciousness or social corporateness. This basic theoretical construct lies behind the problem of inter-structural link up of social structure, economy, religion and method of its treatment.'

Though the main purpose of this book is one of method and analysis of ethnographic data, the experts interested in the problems of applied anthropology would, it is hoped, find in the treatment of the Lalung economy and village administration certain emerging problems of development and leadership to be reckoned with today.

Efforts have been made throughout to write both for the social scientists and those who are interested in the history and culture of north-east India. It brings to the latter in a general way information on a society till now but little known. If however the scientists discover in the presentation and analysis something of interest the labour put in this monograph would be more than amply rewarded.