

THE
PEOPLE OF MEGHALAYA

BY - CAPT.
E. S. RANA



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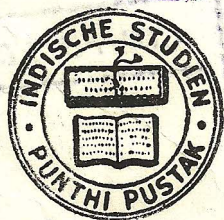
Published by :
Sankar Bhattacharyya
PUNTHI PUSTAK
136/4B, Bidhan Sarani
Calcutta-700041

THE PEOPLE OF MEGHALAYA

—*Study on the People and their Religio-Cultural Life*

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First published July 1989
Captain B. S. Rana



Price Rs. 270/-
ISBN : 81-85094-54-1

PUNTHI PUSTAK

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To
My Wife
&
Children

FOREWORD

This book is intended for the layman but it would be informative also to the professional. Capt. B. S. Rana, in his attempt, brings out the main features of the Khasis, the Jaintias and the Garos. This tribal group in the extreme North-East of the Indian Sub-Continent had very little contact with the rest of the country till the nineteenth century when their territories were annexed to the British Indian Empire. The wave of Aryan migration and Muslim invasion did not have much impact in this region. In pre-British period the only contact with the plains were more or less for petty trades. The Khasis only, perhaps, had extensive trades with the plain district of Sylhet, now in Bangladesh. The table of exports from Khasi Hills mentioned by Pemberton, as quoted by A. Mackenzie in the 'History of the relationship of the Government with the Hill Tribes of the North-East Frontier of Bengal', when the British first came into contact with them were Limestone (17,00,000 maunds), Coal (45,000 maunds), Smelted Iron (45,000 maunds), besides huge quantities of oranges, betal nut, betel leaves and other items. A people with this capacity and who have acquired the art of smelting iron cannot be considered as a backward community. They, however, remained a people apart. They had a well organised administrative and social system and with a clear concept of 'Man' and 'God'. Their religion namely the 'Khasi' religion is the first tribal religion in the world to get international recognition with the entry of their Socio, Religio and Cultural organisation, the Seng Khasi, as a member of the International Association for Religious Freedom. The Garos, who though they have been put together in the same state of Meghalaya, have nothing in

common with the Khasis or the Jaintias. The Khasis and Jaintias are the same tribe and have much in common with a common written language.

The author made no claim that all statements in this book are 'proved'. He has in his close contact with the people and their land for five years has put into print what he had gathered laboriously, and in a way what he wrote was what he saw and think aloud. The writings were what he personally experienced and appreciated in the peoples in whose country he had served and defended for five years. He had not entered into the qualifications and reservations required in a technical studies, which to a layman would be lost in terminology. He was not influenced by what others have written, and without preconception and prejudice.

To those accustomed to read about peoples and their lands through the pen of a Social Scientist, the language of a military officer may not be so appealing. The value of the book is in what we see in the discovery of a man not tied down by the nicety of foreign language.

—U HIPSHON ROY

General Secretary

The Seng Khasi

Shillong

PREFACE

Nowadays, time is a great factor of life and ain short supply especially for the readers. The glory of the brave people of Meghalaya Hills, was the subject of the bas-reliefs. It depicted the people's character, determination, selflessness, sense of duty, love for their mother land and country and their readiness to protect this love.

The splendour of the high peaks, the torrential streams, the deep fertile valleys and the dense lush green forests, really make the shape of Meghalaya magnificently resplendent.

There is a genuine tribute to the talent, honesty and sound social system of the Khasis, the Jaintias and the Garos. Efforts and attempts have been made to bring out a brief and systematic account of these tribes who had continuously fought in order to protect their religions and cultural heritage in the past. The most vulnerable people of India led a secluded life in the coldest valleys, torturous rocky terrain and deep impenetrable forests for many years and made themselves comfortable in spite of all hazardous conditions. But from the days of the British rulers till today, the tribals of these Hills have seen tremendous changes in all spheres of life. Some traditional norms and patterns have been adversely affected by the waves of changes and the fierce winds of foreign civilization especially Missionaries from the West in regards to conversion of the tribal people into Christianity. But still they have been able to retain their traditional customs, social norms, manners, cultural heritage and religion due to untiring efforts of the Seng Khasi, established in 1899, with particular reference to the Khasis. Till now, the Seng Khasi has been a hard marching and struggle to

achieve the goal in order to protect the Khasis from its race-ex-communication. Since the Khasis love themselves—their traditional way of life, religion, culture and their beautiful Hills and affectionately respect other religion, cultures, customs and races, the Khasi will remain as a proud race in this corner of this great country with a rich and varied heritage.

Similarly the lovable people—The Jaintias of the Jaintia Hills have been retaining some of their fore-father's socio-cultural traits. They strictly observe the rules, customs, cultural traits, worship to ancestors, visiting marriage and so on. They remained peacefully under the Jaintia Kingdom from 1500 A.D. to 1835 A.D. Their last brave King named Rajendra Singha (1832 to 1835) who fought well and revolted against the British policies, was lastly imprisoned and killed in the prison Cell. Western Missionaries also played an active role and influenced the people with their own (Western) culture and civilization. The Jaintias had undergone the influence of Hinduism also during the Jaintia Kingdom.

The talent, honesty and social system of the Garos is especially an interesting because it provide an insight into their own ways and style of life, sufferings and exploitation at the hands of foreigners and invaders from time to time. Despite being handicapped by the problems posed by unknown languages and variations in accounts/records, collected from different sources during East India Company days, a cohesent picture of various aspects of this community's life from the early nineteenth century to date has been put-forth and the readers will find it most interesting because of its valid historical material. The Garos had also been influenced by the Foreign Missionaries in addition to the fighting against the Britishers.

This book comprises a comprehensive account of socio-cultural study of inhabitants of Meghalaya Hills. In addition

to the history and view, tribal men, on their day-to-day life activities, is also includes their traditional way of life, their origin, fascinating tales of their own creation, manners and customs, festivals and ceremonies, music and myth, marriages and divorces, birth and death ceremonies, occupation and professions, love and affection, literature and language, art and architecture and so on, which was hardly available in one capsule. It may be remarked that the subject of the three brave tribal-communities of Meghalaya is in reality, a large one on which a great deal could be written, but owing to the considerations of short supply of time for the dear readers, a comprehensive account was considered essential.

My findings are mostly based on frequent visits to the interior parts of the hills and personal liaison with the heads and personal interviews with my tribal friends. My stay at Shillong for about five years has given me an immense pleasure to peep into the real life of these people from their fore-father to the present.

Although an adequate care has been exercised to compile and complete this book in the form of a shell, yet if any observation appears remotely unpalatable to any amount of the sentiments of the tribe or a tribalman, it may be an accidental and not deliberately.

I, gladly take an opportunity to record the general life activities of these people of India while serving at Shillong and have a proud to mention and acknowledge the sincere help extended to me by my friends to accomplish my mission. I also take an apology and due permission from various writers and authors who have written about the life of tribal communities of India, of whom work has served as reference material and source of verification of the certain facts. I give due regarde to the State Central Library Staff, at Shillong who have entertained my requests for reference copy books.

I am extremely grateful to Mr. Hipshon Roy, General Secretary of the Seng Khasi at Shillong, who in fact, spent his precious time to go through the whole manuscript and has given a foreword to this book.

To Dr. G. D. Sharma, Research Department, NEHU, Meghalaya, the greatest debt is always owed for more improving the complete manuscript.

To friends, Mr. R. K. Sharma B.A., B.Ed. and honourable Sheelu my thanks for their efforts above and beyond the call of duty in typing, and retyping this manuscript.

My profound regards and honours to Brig. M. M. Sharma, FRGS, who in reality, encouraged me in the field of writing this book, will ever remain green.

I express my love to my son Deep Rana, for his assistance in sketching and manuscript arrangement assistance. The greatest share of contribution towards this book goes to my wife 'Bimla', who spared me from routine household responsibilities.

My thanks are ever due to Sri Sankar Bhattacharya, proprietor of Punthi Pastak for accepting the manuscript in full for publication.

Happy Valley
Shillong-793007

Capt. B. S. Rana

Dated 2, Jan. 1987

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