CHAPTER-II

NORTH CACHAR HILLS: THE LAND AND THE PEOPLE

A. THE LAND

The North Cachar Hills district is mainly hilly ranges with different ecological settings with grassland to high altitude vegetation and colourful ethnic people and life with charismatic scenic beauty. The region is also endowed with abundant forest resources with many ethnic products, which are unique to the region. The region is well known for luxuriant evergreen and deciduous forest area with varied flora and fauna. The forest products mainly comprises of timber, fuel wood, bamboo, stone, thatch, cane, sand minerals, water and land resources, etc. Forests of the region also occupy a place of pride in the wildlife map of the country for rich, varied and rare wildlife species like Elephant, Buffaloes, Tigers, Hog deers, wild pigs etc. The world famous “Bird’s mystery” place Jatinga for migratory birds is situated in the heart of Barail Range of the district. During the first part of the year 2010 the name of the North Cachar Hills district has been changed to Dima Hasao district and now known by the later one.

I. Location, Boundaries and Area:

On 2nd February 1970 North Cachar Hills district was constituted in Assam which enjoys the status of Autonomous District under the provision of the sixth schedule of the constitution of India. The hills district is located in the southern part of the state of Assam between 25°58’N and 25°47’N latitudes as well as 92°27’E and 93°43’E longitudes.

**Boundaries:** The district is bounded by Nagaon and Hamren Sub-Division of Karbi Anglong district of Assam on the north, Cachar district of Assam on the south, in the east by Nagaland and Manipur states and in the west Khasi and Jaintia Hills of Meghalaya state. The river Kapili separates North Cachar Hills from the state of Meghalaya.

**Area:** The total geographical area of North Cachar Hills district of state of Assam is 4,888 sq. km. (4.88 Lac hectares), occupying 6.23% out of the total area of the state.

II. Physiography and Drainage:

The area represents undulating geographical features of moderate to medium and high hills with altitude varying from 100m to 1800m above MSL. Eastern part of the Jaintia Hills ranging from an elevation of 600 to 900 m above the mean sea level and the Northern part of Barail Range with an elevation between 1000 to 1800 m above MSL. The highest point is ‘Thumjeng’ peak which is 1866 m and another prominent peak is ‘Hempaupaf’ with an elevation of 1571 m above MSL.
NORTH CACHAR HILLS DISTRICT, ASSAM (DIMA HASAO)

Map: 1: Showing the location of the district for present study.

The Borail Range extending from Patkai range and terminating in Shillong Plateau of Meghalaya and from its sprang up other ranges viz, Karthong range from Dittokcherra to Umragso; Mahur, Gunjung and Dehangi range; and Guilong, Hajong and Langting range.

The Hills starts from the plains of Cachar district at Marua on the bank of Jatinga river. Then it abruptly raises and at Dolia, it becomes one of the highest peaks of Barail Ranges. Dolia is at the Southern District boundary of North Cachar Hills bordering Cachar district of Assam. The Eastern part of the Barail Range is known by different names in different places viz. Daukhreng, Shrubbuinam, etc. in N.C.Hills and Thingtubum in Nagaland and Manipur.

Topographically, the North Cachar Hills areas can be mainly divided into three portions-

I. The low lying areas in the valley of the rivers- Diyung, Langting, Mahur, Jatinga and foot hills along Nagaon & Karbianglong district.
II. The high hills of Borail Range covering the eastern and southern portions, and
III. The plateau of Gunjung, Khorongma and Garampani.
Map: 2: The localities visited for sample collection for the present study.
Altitude: The altitude of the district ranges from 100 to 1866m above MSL. In the North West region and South East region the altitude ranges from 600-900 and 1000-1866 meters above MSL respectively. The highest Peak of Borail Range is the Thumjang peak with the height of 1866 meters and the second highest peak is Hempeupet with the height of 1748 meters above MSL.

Rivers: Numerous streams and rivers draining the area release their discharge either to Barak River in the South or to the Brahmaputra River in the North of the District. The principal rivers and their tributaries are:

I. Kopili river: Has its source in Maghalaya and runs along the Western boundary of the district. River Diyung is its main tributary. Kopili River drains out all the water of the western terrain and finally joins Brahmaputra river.

II. Diyung River: Having its source at Northern part of Barail Range near Longkhai village and runs from East to West which meets Kopili river at Diyungmukh covering a distance of about 170 km. Its main tributaries are Mupa, Dolong, Langlai, Langting, Mahur and Lumding all of which originated from the northern fringe of Barail.

Other rivers viz. Jatinga, Jiri and Jenam are also originated from the Southern part of Barail Range. The longest river Diyung (170 km) and the river Jatinga originates in the northern and southern side of Borail range respectively are the main rivers flowing in the district. Other important rivers of the district are Langting, Mahur and Lungding. All these rivers form the lifeline of the people of the district.

III. Climate:

Rainfall: The district can be divided into three distinct zones from South to North. The Southern face of Barail Range receives considerable high precipitation. The Northern face falls in the rain shadow of the Range and consequently precipitation is much lower. The Northern part of the district around Langting is one of the driest and hottest parts of the district. The central part of the district has a cool and equable climate. Thunderstorm is quite frequent during summer months. Mist and fog occur in the winter months. Frost is unknown, even in depression. Light to moderate winds blow from North or northeast, except during monsoon when the wind blows from southwest.

The typical sub-tropical monsoon climate prevalent in Barail Range is characterized by the excessive moisture content of air throughout the year. The area receive pre monsoon shower during April, which is accompanied by thunder storms and hail force winds. This spell of pre monsoon shower is followed by a brief dry day and
monsoon starts from the end of May or beginning of June. The amount of rainfall is highest in the month of July and August. Southernmost part of the district i.e. Barail Range gets the highest rainfall in the district. Rainfall and the number of rainy days decrease from South to North of the District.

The average annual rainfall of the district is between 2200mm to 4,767mm, characterized by typical sub-tropical monsoon climate and the excessive moisture content throughout the year. The rainfall pattern in N.C.Hills is as follows-

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Mean annual Rainfall(mm)</th>
<th>Average number of rainy days</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jatinga valley</td>
<td>4,767</td>
<td>149</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harangajao</td>
<td>3,787</td>
<td>135</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Haflong</td>
<td>2,278</td>
<td>118</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maibong</td>
<td>1,454</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Humidity:** The area is characterized by Sub-tropical humid condition and the relative humidity is quite high throughout the year. During monsoon, the relative humidity is about 80% and above and between February and April, in the afternoon is about 60%. Thus showing the average relative humidity ranges between 73%-84%.

The atmosphere is highly humid throughout the year except in winter. The average relative humidity ranges from 45% to 60% at morning hours during winter, while in the months of April to September ranges from 65% to 90% at morning hrs. In high altitude areas fog appears frequently during monsoon. (Anonymous 2002)

**Temperature:** The temperature of the district varies according to altitudinal gradient. As the area is being moist and tropical summer that starts from the April onwards and the average maximum mean temperature during summer ranges between 33°C to 24°C. The winter starts from the middle of November and being January is the coolest month and the average minimum mean temperature during winter ranges between 14°C to 10°C. The lowest temperature recorded at Haflong is 5.4°C and highest recorded 34.0°C in the month of August.

**IV. Soil, Geology and Rock:**

Soil in general is lateritic having an admixture of sandy loam towards the northern (in low altitude areas) part. The upper slopes have coarse and gritty soil, which is shallow in depth. Middle and lower slopes have alluvial soil. The red forest soils are deep and fertile and slightly acidic with PH ranging between 4.1-6.2. Generally, the soil contains...
high Organic Carbon, medium to poor Phosphorus and medium to high Potash. Though the main features of soil have been described, there are local variations depending on micro climatic factors.

Some of the geological facts of the district are-

i. The **Tertiary Hills** of **Sedimentary rocks** are confined to the N.C.Hills.

ii. **Tertiary rocks** are encountered in Karbi-anglong and N.C.Hills.

iii. The area is underlined by **Archean** and **Quaternery** period sedimentary rocks.

iv. Good exposures of **Prang Limestone** are found around Kopili Hydel Project in North Cachar and Silbhetta, Kaliapahar, Sainalangso in Karbi-Anglong.

v. In Surma valley and Jaintia Hills the **Borail group** is divided into Laisong, Jenum and Renji.

vi. The age of the Borail group is **Oligocene**.

vii. The geological formation is metamorphic rocks with a fringe of cretaceous and tertiary deposits. The metamorphic rocks are mostly gneiss, schist, quartzite and occasional instruction of granite.

**Minerals**: The District is rich in Minerals like Lime stone that are found in Umrangso area and the Coal found in the areas like Umrangso, Langlai and neighborhood of Garampani and Arda area of the district. Carbonaceous salt is available at Bagha area.

**V. Forest cover and Vegetation types:**

**Forest cover:**

The forest cover of N.C.Hills is 88.71% out of the total geographical area of 4,888sq.km. But out of the 88.71% forest cover, only 187 sq. km. (4.31%) of the forest area is under very dense forest and open forest occupies 61% of the total forest area. A brief outline of the forest area cover of the district can be shown as-

**Table: 2:**

i. **State ReserveForest**: 711.80 sq. km.

   **Reserve Forest** | **Area in Sq.km.**
   -----------------|------------------
   Langting mupa Reserve Forest | 497.55
   Krungming Reserve Forest | 124.42
   Barail Reserve Forest | 89.83

ii. **Proposed Reserved Forest**: 64.36 sq. km.

   **Proposed Reserve Forest** | **Area in Sq.km.**
   -----------------------------|------------------
   Hatikhali-Manderdisa PRForest | 18.66
   Panimur PRForest | 28.70
iii. Unclassified State Forest/ Jhumland: 3559.84 sq. km.

Out of the total area under USF, about 2,923.10 sq. km. (59.76%) of the area is used for jhum cultivation. *(Integrated Jhumia Development Programme report, 2002-03 and FSI, 2003 Report)*

iv. Proposed Reserved Forests:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Proposed Reserved Forests</th>
<th>Area in Sq.km.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Borail (Biosphere Reserve) 1\textsuperscript{st} addition (Surveyed)</td>
<td>48.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Borail (Biosphere Reserve) 2\textsuperscript{nd} addition (Surveyed)</td>
<td>59.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Longren</td>
<td>91.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Langlai Valley (Sangbor)</td>
<td>201.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Balambakship</td>
<td>400.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Vegetation type:

The vegetation types of N.C.Hills district can be classified broadly into the following:

i. Tropical evergreen forests:

These types of forests are confined to the middle to high elevation of Barail ranges and experienced with high rainfall. It exhibits clear storied nature with dense and impenetrable herbaceous outgrowth. The top canopy of the forest is dominated by *Terminalia citrina, Terminalia ballirica, Terminalia chebula, Mesua ferrea, Castanopsis indica, Pterospermum acerifolium, Artocarpus chama, Artocarpus chaplasha* etc. These tall trees are bestowed with innumerable climbers and lianas; chief among them are *Thunbergia grandiflora, Combretum roxburghii, Hodgsonia macrocarpa*, etc. The branches of these trees are heavily plastered with dense growth of epiphytic orchids, ferns and aroids. The second stratum of canopy is represented by small trees and shrubs like *Syzygium operculatum, Garcinia pedunculata, Stercularia roxburghii, Mangifera sylvatica, Turpina pomifera*, etc. The third stratum of canopy cover consists of undershrubs and herbs like *Sarchochlamys pulcherrima, Ixora subsessilis, Thevesia palmata, Aralia armata, Macropanax dispermus, Macaranga denticulate*, etc.

The forest floor which is heavily covered with humus and litter is usually matted with gregarious herbaceous layer of terrestrial grasses etc. *(Ph: 1)*
ii. Tropical semi-evergreen forests:

These forests are occurring in the northeastern and northern slopes of Barail range. The numbers of plant species are less than evergreen forest and at the same time stratification is not pronounced. However, top canopy includes *Dillenia indica*, *D. pentagyna*, *Elaeocarpus floribundas*, etc. While the second stratum of canopy cover consists of *Symplocos paniculata*, *Rhus acuminata*, *Ficus hirta*, *Bridelia retusa*, etc. The shrub layer is also poor and comprises of *Costus speciosus*, *Boehmeria sidaefolia*, *Clerodendrum bractum*, *Hedyotis sp.* etc. (Ph: 2)

iii. Tropical moist and dry deciduous forests:

Deciduous forests are much more extensive in their distribution toward the lower side of Barail Range that includes economically important trees like *Schima wallichii*, *Albizia lebbeck*, *Morus laevigata*, *Gmelina arborea*, *Melia composita*, etc.

Sometimes a second stratum of canopy is also observed in these forests in some areas which are usually composed of *Croton joufra*, *Grewia microcos*, *Bridelia retusa*, *Cordia dichotoma*, etc. The shrubby layer is often gregarious and forms impenetrable thicker with species like *Costus speciosus*, *Phlogocanthus thyrsiflorus*, *Acacia pinnata*, etc.

In some areas, these forests tend to become mixed deciduous forests due to the presence of evergreen species like *Toona ciliata*, *Castanopsis tribuloides*, etc. (Ph: 3)

iv. Sub-tropical forests:

Sub-tropical forests are confined to the higher altitude of Barail Range started from 900 m and above. These, essentially dense evergreen broadleaved forests, experienced moderate temperature. Generally there is no clear stratum-wise distribution of trees, the top canopy trees are *Castanopsis tribuloides*, *C. indica*, *Quercus serrata*, *Elaeocarpus robustus*, *E. floribundus*, etc. Sometimes *Schima wallichii*, *Myrica esculenta*, etc. can also be seen. Below the trees is a layer of shrubs, undershrubs and herbs showing the richest variation in species diversity in these forests. Along the edge of these forests and in fairly open places, *Solanum torvum*, *S. indicum*, etc. can be seen. The ground floor of the forest is densely covered with Fungi, Moss, *Selaginella* spp, *Lycopodium* spp, etc. (Ph: 4)

v. Secondary forests:

The factors like shifting cultivation, human settlements, urbanization, over exploitation of the forest resources etc. directly contribute towards the formation of secondary forest types. Once the forests are removed, various successional stages of vegetation take place. These may be scattered herbaceous growth of several weed species.
or homogenous grasslands or woody vegetations of shrubs, short trees or even quite tall trees belonging to several species. Such as the common of secondary forest like grasses are *Imperata cylindrica*, *Chrysopogon gryllus*, *Saccharum arundinaceum*, *Phragmitis karka*, etc. Herbaceous are *Mimosa pudica*, *Euphobia hirta*, *Synedrella nodiflora*, *Ploygonum spp.*. Shrubby elements are *Lantana camara*, *Calotropis gigantea*, *Flemingia stipulifera*, *Rubus rugosus*, *Eupatorium spp.*, *Artemisia parviflora* etc. Trees like *Alstonia scholaris*, *Trema orientalis*, *Phyllanthus emblica*, *Schima wallichii*, *Rhus semialata*, *Sterculia villosa* etc. (Ph: 5)

vi. Bamboo forests:

In various altitudes the bamboo forests are best developed in North Cachar Hills district, especially at lower altitudes. The common species are *Melocanna baccifera*, *Bambusa cacharensis*, *B. tulda*, *B. pallida*, *B. pseudopallida*, *Bambusa balcooa*, *Dendrocalamus hamiltonii*, *Oxytenanthera parvifolia Chimnobambusa callosa*, *Dinochloa macclellandii*, etc. (Ph: 6)

VI. Agriculture:

The majority of the tribal population (90%) resides in hilly areas in a scattered manner and the *Jhum* cultivation is the major agricultural practice and settled agricultural land is 63 sq. km. only i.e. only 1.29% of the total geographical area of the district. Total suitable land for cultivation is only 1.88 lakh hectares. The gross cropped area is 30,991 hectares of which, total area of 23,698 hectares covered by field crops and 7,293 hectares covered by horticultural crops. (Ph: 8, 9 & 10)

The major crops grown in the district mainly includes Landraces of Cereals (Viz. Rice, Maize, Foxtail millet, Finger millet etc.), Tubers (*Yam-Dioscorea spp.*, *Taro-Alocasia spp.*, *Colocasia spp.*, *Xanthosoma spp.* and Aroids-*Homalomena sp.*etc. and *Maranta*, *Ipomea* etc.), Legumes (*Dolichos lablab*, *Psophocarpus tetragonolobus*, *Parkia roxburghii*, *Canavelia ensiformis* etc.), Spices and Condiments (Ginger, Turmeric, Chilies, *Piper*, Garlic, *Xanthoxyllum*, *Basil*, *Perilla*, *Elsholzia*, *Alpinia* etc.) and different types of *Citrus* fruits. Again in *Jhum*, the local ethnic people cultivate different indigenous landraces of many fruit and vegetable crops like Cucurbits, Brinjals and leafy vegetables. So, the present study area is genetically very diverse in the context of crop landraces.

VII. Economy and Commerce:

The Economy of the N.C. Hills District is basically agrarian and self sustained. Hence the economic development of the district is highly dependent on agro-based activities and Bamboo resources. There is a huge gap on understanding its future use in
planning and development in NTFP's and its linking with livelihood support system which based on wild edibles and Medicinal and Aromatic Plants (MAP) resources etc. However, communication bottle neck, poor market structure and lack of infrastructure facilities are the main constraints of the district.

B. THE PEOPLE

The hills district is the homeland of thirteen different tribes belonging to Indo Mongoloid racial stock, having distinct language/dialects, culture and customs viz. Dimasa, Jeme Naga, Hmar, Karbi, Kuki, Biate, Hranghral, Vaipei, Khasi, Thadou, Jaintia(Pnar/Syntengs), Mizo/Lushai and Khelma. In addition to the local tribes a considerable percentage of the other population constituted by the non-tribal communities like Bengalis, Nepali, Assamese, Manipuri and people of other parts of India.

I. Demography:

Population: There are total 539 revenue villages in the district and still most of the them lack the basic amenities like healthcare, supply of safe drinking water, electricity, transport and communication and other infrastructure like proper school, community hall, irrigation facilities etc. The population in N.C.Hills district can be shown as following (2001 census)-

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Details</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Population</td>
<td>1, 86,189</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>98,899</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>87,290</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urban population</td>
<td>128,110</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural population</td>
<td>58,079</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male-Female ratio</td>
<td>1000-883</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Population density</td>
<td>38 per sq. km.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literacy percentage</td>
<td>68.59% out of which 64.70% male &amp; 45.47% female.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

More than 70% of the tribal population of the district mainly consists of-

i. Dimasa (49,667)
ii. Jeme Naga (11,469)
iii. Hmar (10,882)
iv. Karbi (6,517)
v. Kuki (5,896)
vi. Biate (4,445)
vi. Hrangkhol (2,720)
viii. Vaipei (1,317),
ix. Khasi (1,313)
THE DIMASAS

The Dimasas also known as Dimasa Kacharies constitute the largest ethnic group in N.C.Hills district. Linguistically, the Dimasas belong to the Tibeto-Burmese group. The term ‘Dimasa’ literally means the son of a big river; *Di* means water, *Ma* means big and *Sa* means son (Bordoloi 1984). They constitute 32.78% of total population of the district. (Anonymous 2002).

Social life:

Dwelling

The houses have timber superstructure, bamboo walls and thatched roofs that built on ground. The houses are artistically designed and are built on two rows facing each other and leaving sufficient space in between. (Ph: 11)

Village system

*Nablai*, which means a cluster of houses forms the village with its population, is called *Raji*. Dimasa village is found to be situated on the hill slope with a river or a stream nearby.

Family structure/Clans

The Dimasas follow the patriarchal system of family. Characteristically they have 40 (forty) male clans and 42 (forty two) female clans, called *Sengphong* and *Zaluk* respectively.

Customary law of inheritance

The paternal property is inherited by sons only after the death of the father. The maternal property which consists of jewelry, clothes and looms with their accessories are inherited by the daughters only.

Nodrang (Bachelors’ dormitory)

The Dimasa bachelors’ dormitory for unmarried young boys and is called *Nodrang*.

Religious life:

There are six ancestral gods viz. *Sibrai, Alu raja Raja, Naikhu Raja, Wa Raja, Ganiyang- Braiyung* and *Hamiadao* who are called *Madai* and the whole Dimasa land is under their jurisdiction. In earlier times the whole Dimasa land was divided into twelve
religious Dikhos. These Dikhos are very important as the forest patches are conserved through the community participation for ethical aspects. Till today there are a total of 12 Dikhos (Sacred Groves) maintained by the Dimasa community.

**Cultural life:**

**Music and Dance:**

They have only four indigenous musical instruments, namely Khram (wooden drum), Muri (a long pipe consisting of three wooden pipes), Muri Wathisa (Bamboo flute), Khram-Dubung (a kind reed instrument) and Suphin (small bamboo flute). (Ph: 19)

**Festivals and religious ceremony:**

Among the important festivals celebrated by the Dimasas mention may be made of Bushu (harvesting festival), Rajni Garba and Harni Garba.

**Dresses and ornaments**

For day to day use a Dimasa man uses Risa which is a deep green coloured cloth. A Dimasa woman puts on a white or coloured skirt called Rigu. Among the important ornaments they use Poal (silver necklace), Rongborsa (Necklace made of silver coins), Khadu (Heavy silver bracelet) etc are the main.

**Food and Drinks**

Rice is the staple food of the Dimasas. Rice from the Maiju paddy (a kind of sticky rice) is used as fast food. The Khari, a kind of alkaline solution is prepared by burning of plant parts and is used for preparation of curries of different types.

A special kind of hookah made of bamboo, called Damakhoslim is used for smoking of tobacco.

Eri pupae are one of the most delicious food items for them. Individual and community fishing in the rivers and streams by various trapping devices as well as by fish stupefying herbs/barks of the tree are most common practices of the community.

The traditional beverage rice bear of the Dimasas is called Ju or Judima.

**Economic life:**

**Agriculture**

Agriculture is the main source of livelihood of the Dimasas. The Dimasas living in the North Cahar Hills practice shifting cultivation, commonly known as Jhum or Hagong. Wet paddy cultivation or Haddi is mostly practiced within the area of the Diyung and Jatinga river valley. (Ph: 13)

**Livestock**

25
The Dimasas are habituated with rearing buffaloes, pigs, goats, fowls and ducks. (Ph: 12)

Cottage industries

Weaving is an important cottage industry among Dimasas. Even colours used by them for dyeing yarns are prepared from wild herbs.

Practicing of Sericulture is an age old tradition of Dimasas. Eri silk is spun and Eri clothes are woven at home.

Handicrafts of bamboo and cane articles are also one of the major cottage industries of the Dimasas.

THE ZEME NAGAS

The Zeme Nagas are commonly known as Zemes. In the 18th Century they migrated to the North Cachar Hills via Manipur and settled down in the Southern part of North Cachar Hills. At the time of their migration the entire North Cachar Hills region was within the Dimasa Kachari Kingdom. Zeme Naga villages situated on border of the then Naga Hills and Manipur migrated towards west and settled in the hills beyond the Diyung valley upto the banks of the Kapili river (Bordoloi 1984). The Zemes in the North Cachar Hills District occupies 7.57% of total population of the district (Anonymous 2002).

Social life:

Dwelling

The Zeme Naga houses are made of bamboo and thatched roof built on the ground. A Zeme house is sufficiently high at front but gradually its height goes down towards the rear. Inside there is a hearth in the middle and about a meter above it, a bamboo Machang (hanging rack) is made.

Family structure and Clan

The Zemes of North Cachar Hills follow the patriarchal system of family structure. The Zemes have six clans of equal status. They are Npame, Nkuame, Heneume, Nriame, Sogame and Panme.

Marriage

Marriage by negotiation is the prevailing practice among the Zeme Nagas. Payment of bride price is paid either in cash or in kind and the bride price is called Hemipaibe.

Customary law of inheritance
As the Zeme Nagas have the patriarchal system of family structure, only the eldest son can inherit the father’s property and in return he has to look after his younger bothers and sisters till they get themselves married.

The Village system and Village Leadership

The Zeme Naga villages are found to be located on the breezy hill tops. In each Zeme village there is a village council headed by Matai which is entrusted with various important works like the maintenance of law and order, trial and settlement of cases, disputes, observance of community and village festivals, selection of Jhum sites and their distribution thereof and so on. (Ph: 23)

Morungs (Dormitories for boys and girls)

The Morung is a common term used by all the Naga group of the tribes to denote the traditional youth clubs for unmarried boys and girls. In Zeme dialect the boys’ dormitory is called Hangseuki and the girls’ dormitory is called Leoseuki. (Ph: 22)

Religious life:

The Zeme Nagas are animists. They believe in one supreme God whom they call Tingwang. A section of the Zeme Nagas of the North Cachar Hills has already embraced Christianity.

Cultural life:

The Zeme Nagas of the North Cachar Hills have been maintaining their ethnic identity through their distinctive cultural life.

Festivals

Two of the most important community festivals celebrated are:

Heleibambe: is celebrated by each Zeme village prior to the starting of Jhum cultivation sometime in mid April.

Siami: is the harvesting festival continues for four days.

Folk Songs

The Zeme Nagas of the North Cachar Hills have a good number of folk songs and these have been handed over by one generation to another orally.

Dance

Their dances mainly depict hunting of wild animals and of war.

Musical instruments

The Zeme Naga’s drum called Som. They have two kinds of wind instruments, the flute called Metiam and the flute made from buffalo horn, called Buike. They also use a pair of heavily weighted brass metal discs (gong) called Towai.
Dresses and Ornaments

The unmarried Zeme bucks use a very nicely designed scarf called Nyokpai while married men generally use an artistically designed scarf called Paitek. The women use two types of Chadar called Nphaitik and Impha'i.

One of the costliest ornaments worn by men is Teuba and by women is the Luiteo - a necklace made of costly beads and sea-shells. Each Zeme woman also puts on two pairs of heavy bracelets called Ghita. (Ph: 24)

Food and Drinks

The staple food is rice and the rice beer called Induijang is the favourite drink for them. Food items produced from fresh as well as fermented tender bamboo shoots are very popular among them.

Economic life:

Agriculture

The main source of livelihood of the Zeme Nagas of the North Cachar Hills is agriculture based on shifting cultivation or Jhuming (Helu).

Livestock

The Zemes rear buffalos, cows, pigs, goats and fowls.

Handloom

Weaving in loin looms with yarns spun from cotton they grow is a very important cottage industry among the Zeme Nagas. Their beautiful cloths are full of intricate designs. (Ph: 25 & 26)

THE HMARS

The Hmars, refer to those people who live in the North of the Mizo hills, the present Mizoram. In their traditional songs and folklores reference has been made to the Sinlung Civilization of the Hmar people. It can, therefore, be inferred that the original home of the Hmars was Sinlung, somewhere in Central Asia. The Hmars is the third largest ethnic group in the North Cachar Hills district (Bordoloi 1984). The Hmars have their own language called Hmar and they used Roman script. They occupy 7.18% of total population of the district (Census 2001).

Social life:

Dwelling

The Hmar houses are built on wooden structures raising the wooden floors up to one meter above the ground. The house consists mainly of four parts. The open porch
called Sawngka. The second part or the enclosed verandah of the house is called Sumphuk. The third part of the house is the main room which has two doors—one at the front and another at the back. In the middle of the room there is a hearth called Tap. A specially designed wooden rack called Rap constructed hanging above the Tap. The fourth and last part of the house is the back porch which is called Namthlak. (Ph: 29)

Village

A Hmar village is generally built on a hill top which is surrounded by a bamboo fencing all around.

Family

The Hmars have the joint family system. They follow the patriarchal system of family structure.

Clans

The Hmars of the North Cachar Hills are divided into following twelve clans viz. Pagamte, Rengsate, Pazamate, Phenate, Khawbung, Lungthraule, Lungtau, Leiri, Zote, Ngurte, Khelte, and Khawlhring.

Marriage

A man can marry a girl belonging to his clan although such marriage is not usually encouraged.

Birth

The most important ceremony connected with the birth of a child is the name giving ceremony.

Death

Death ceremony is performed according to Christian rituals.

Religious life:

The Hmars of the North Cachar Hills district are Christian.

Cultural life:

Music and Dance

Dances are performed by the young boys and girls in their leisure time and at the time of celebration of community festivals. Khong (dram), Jamlung (gong made of brass-metal), Tingtang (a kind of Veena), ect. are musical instrument of Hmar. (Ph: 32)

Festivals

Sikpuirui, the local traditional harvesting festival of the Hmar is observed with grand feast and dances by them in the month of November.

Dresses and Ornaments
During festivals and at the time of performing dance, they wear traditional dresses.

**Food and drinks**

The staple food of the Hmar is rice. Smoking of tobacco with pipe made from bamboo knots called *Tuibur* is very popular (Ph: 31). The *Tuibur*tu is a kind of intoxicating liquid prepared from tobacco leaves is extensively used by the Hmars.

**Economic life:**

Like other hill tribes they also practice *Jhum* cultivation. The village council ensures that each family is allotted with sufficient land for *Jhum* cultivation.

Weaving is an important household occupation in every Hmar woman. Blanket made of raw cotton fiber is a very precious and having much traditional importance as these are gifted from the bride’s family to newly married couple.

Besides weaving, cane and bamboo basketry and also other household items for domestic use are also made by themselves.

**THE KUKIS**

Towards end of the eighteenth century, two Kuki tribes, namely, the *Hrangkhols* and the *Biates*, either under the pressure from two other Kuki tribes, viz. *Jansens* and the *Thadous*, or because of their nomadic habits, perhaps, moved across the plains of Cachar and settled in the North Cachar Hills and known there as the Old-Kukis. Later on the *Jansens* and the *Thadous* were also compelled by the more vigorous *Lusais* to leave the Mizo Hills and to seek shelter in the North Cachar Hills. This migration took place in the middle of the nineteenth century. In the North Cachar Hills, the *Jansens* and the *Thadous* who came later are known as the New-Kukis (Bordoloi 1984).

They constitute 3.89% of total population of the district.

**Social life:**

**Dwelling**

The Kukis also like to live on hill tops. A Kuki village present the view of a cluster of houses which are closely constructed. The houses are built on wooden platform. Each family has a single roomed house without any partition inside. At the middle of the room there is an earthen hearth. There are raised wooden planks by the side of walls which are used as beds at night by the family members. (Ph: 34)

**Family structure**

The Kukis follow the patrilineal system of family structure. As such the line of descent is traced through male members only.
Clan and marriage
The Kuki tribe has a number of clans. The marriage between the members of the same clan is discouraged, but not prohibited.

Birth
The birth of a child is an occasion for rejoice for the family as well as the whole village.

Death
Death ceremony is performed according to Christian rites and rituals.

Religious life:
In spite of their acceptance of Christianity they have not completely given up their traditional religious practices.

Cultural life:
Dress and ornaments
During traditional festivals and at the time of performing dances, traditional dresses have always been used with great dignity. (Ph: 37)

Festivals and religious ceremony
The local traditional harvesting festival is known as Chabangkut, which is observed in the month of December with great enthusiasm.

Food and Drinks
The food habit of the Kukis is almost similar with the Hmars.

Economic life:
Agriculture is the main occupation like the other hill tribes and practices Jhum.

The Kukis have very good carpenters and blacksmiths among them for crafting of wood and making aluminum utensils respectively. Bamboo and cane products are manufactured mostly for domestic use (Ph: 38). The people rear cattle, pigs and poultry etc.

THE HRANGKHOLS
The Hrangkhol community is a small community in North Cachar Hills district and the Dimasa people call them as ‘Dakhinsa’. It is believed that the Hrangkhols, Biates, Sakacheps (Khelma) and Langrongs migrated to N.C. Hills batch by batch from the Tripura hills and southern Mizoram during the time of Maibang Raja or before that time. These tribes bore close affinity in speech and custom to one another among them than any other tribes in the district.
Social life:

Administration

In every village, the village Kalim and Kabur run the administration. Apart from the Ochai (Priest) the ritual priesthood, the Kalim and Kabur are also sometimes regarded as priest in various respects in the village.

Dwelling

The houses are built on wooden platform. For super structure timber is used. Each family has a single roomed house without any partition inside. At the middle of the room there is an earthen hearth. There are raised wooden planks by the side of walls which are used as beds at night by the family members. (Ph: 39)

Family structure

The Hrangkhol follows the patrilineal system of family structure.

Religious life:

The main traditional deities are - Lamtak, Kalakhi-Sangkuru, Khianghrolpuhai, Khobon Raja (Tarpa) and Fapite etc.

The traditional priest is known as Ochai. On the other hand Kalim is regarded as the highest traditional chief. The present Hrangkhol Halam-Kalim (Chief) lives in Lungkhok village and their highest priest or Ochai lives in Robipui village.

In the present days majority of the Hrangkhol community has embraced Christianity.

Cultural life:

Festivals and religious ceremony

The most important festivals are—

Ruolsafak- It is the harvesting festival celebrated during the last part of the month of the January and first part of the February.

Chemchoina- This festival is jhum cultivation related and celebrated just before the jhumming season.

Parngot- This festival is celebrated bi or tri-annually, meant for young boys and girls for merry making and rejoicing as it is known as Khonhoi, means Carnival-enjoyment.

Bahmar-insuk- This festival is observed for one day just before paddy is sown to seek for a good harvest.

Fahlamkai- This ritual ceremony is observed during the ripening season of paddy. This is done for offering thanks giving to the Fapite (deity of the paddy).
Chilpui - The Chilpui means the final threshing day of the paddy is observed after collection of crops and corns in the jhum hut. (Ph: 43)

Musical instruments

The main musical instruments of the Hrangkhol community are- Khuang (Drum), Serenda (kind of Violin), Theile (Bamboo flute), Darkhuong (Cymbal and gongs) etc.

Food and Drinks

The food habit of the Hrangkhols is almost similar with the Dimasas.

Economic life:

Agriculture

They practice shafting cultivation, commonly known as Jhum.

Livestock

They rear buffaloes, pigs, goats and fowls.

Cottage Industries

Weaving is an important cottage industry among Hrangkhols. Even colours used by them for dyeing yarns are prepared from wild herbs.

Handicrafts of bamboo and cane articles are also one of the major cottage industries of the Hrangkhols.

THE JAINTIAS (PNARS)

The Pnars or Jaintia tribe of N.C. Hills, popularly known as Khasis mainly inhabits the valley of the river Jatinga.

Social life

Language

The Pnars belong to the linguistic stock the Mon Khamer family, which is derived from the Mons of south Burma and south west of Thailand and the Khamer of Cambodia.

Family structure and Clan

Like the Khasis and Garos, the Pnars follow the matrilineal system thus on the family’s name after the mother’s surname.

Tamul-Pan occupies an important place in most of the traditional ritual ceremony.

Cultural life

Dress and ornaments

Musical instruments

Jatinga village

The Pnar inhabiting Jatinga village is located at a stone’s throw of the Barail Hill, founded by U. Lakhon Bang Suchiang in 1905. The village is famous for the migratory mostly water birds mistry suicidal point as they are attracted by the light.

Economic life

The Pnars of the district are mostly agriculturists. They prefer most of the horticultural crops like Orange, Betel nut, pineapple and other vegetables.