

Political Concept and Organisation of the North-Eastern Tribes:

This geographical zone consists of Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya, Nagaland, Mizoram, Manipur and Tripura. The Khasi, Garo, Lushai, Jaintia, Miso, Apatani and a variety of Naga tribes are the prominent tribal groups inhabiting this highly picturesque region of India.²⁵

The tribes of Assam maintain a democratic political organization. Most of these tribes recognize collective ownership of land giving scant respect to individual rights over land. People of one village are free to do cultivation anywhere they like. Though economic status of different families in a village varies, yet this variation could not develop social stratification on any sharp lines.²⁶

While most of the tribes are divided exogamous clans, others live in village communities without clan system, each under its ruler independent of the rest of the villages. Among the Khasis, the dignity of a chief is inherited by the eldest son of the eldest sister, after his death by his eldest brother or by the maternal grand nephew. If male heirs are absent, the eldest sister or eldest sister's daughter has the right to succession.²⁷ politically, the Khasis, in the past, divided into twenty-five Khasi states which were independent. Though headed by a chief known as Siem, administration was on democratic lines. A Khasi chief had no power over land or forest. He could not impose taxes or promulgate new laws or any policy independently.²⁸

Similarly, though chieftain of Lushai tribe commands more dominance than the Khasi Siem, yet it is similarly difficult for him to ignore the

opinion or advice of the seniors of the village. Though these offices are hereditary, the administration is run on thoroughly democratic lines.²⁹ Among the tribes of North Cachar district, the principle of heredity and election go side by side. Tribal issues are resolved in the presence of all males of the village in an open court. Any decision taken with regard to an offender is deemed to be a collective decision of all the villagers.³⁰

The political organisation of the Garo tribe is also run on democratic lines. In fact, the Garos have no chiefs. A headman is only a nominal head while the important affairs are decided by village councils consisting of elders or heads of families.³¹ Stephen Fuchs (1973) describes the political organization of the Mikirs as having a three-fold village administration, the lowest office of which is filled by the Achom Asar, usually an old, influential man well versed in Mikir customs. He is appointed by a Habe, the next higher authority, the headman of a village whose jurisdiction does not go beyond the limits of the village.³² The political organisation of the Naga tribes is marked by great diversity. Some of the Naga tribes subject of chiefs who rule almost autocratically while other tribes form democratic village communities in which the headman has only a normal authority. Most of the Naga tribes have labelled as blood thirsty, savage and war loving but no sweeping generalization is fair to describe the situation. Though it is correct that most of the Naga tribes have always been at war with each other and vendetta is the rule but this should be viewed in the socio-historical perspective. But even within these limitations and under such conditions political organization of flexible type has always existed.³³

The political organisation of the Naga tribes has always been in need of security protection against supernatural and natural hazards. Haimendorf (1976) opines that the institution of the sacred chiefs who were believed to have leased in support of the supernatural through their birth in the right families and who could mobilize the coercive and productive powers of the society, was an insurance against the hazards.³⁴

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