CHAPTER - II

SOCIAL AND CULTURAL INTEGRATION PRIOR TO

POLITICAL INTEGRATION

Cultural integration is one of the preludes to political integration. Political integration is never complete without a firm foundation of common cultural heritage drawn from the mainstream. In the words of K. M. Munshi "Culture has been the greatest integrating force in men". Yet the definition of culture is controversial since ages. Similar is the neo-political term "integration".

Political integration of north-east region into Indian Union has been a controversial issue in the years before and after independence specially after Chinese attack in 1962. There are some political writers who assert that the north-east region is one which has mostly remained outside the pale of Indian culture and history. Some political leaders of this region assert that it has its own distinctiveness which is quite different from Indian mainstream culture.

1 Munshi K. M., Foundation of Indian Culture 1962, p.3.
It is true that politically north-east region had remained inaccessible for a long time. No one cared to go to interior of such impassable areas with dangers of physical risk of life. Though north-east region was politically inaccessible, culturally it was accessible. However, cultural integration and political integration was of varying degrees at different places due to varying circumstances. First, let us deal with culture of each nationality inhabiting the region.

**CULTURE OF NORTH-EAST REGION**

1. **General Characteristics:**

The Khasis are found in the Khasi and Jaintia Hills. The Khasis living in hills have a lighter complexion than those of the plains and those dwelling in villages of Cherrapunji are particularly fair. In the words of H. W. Hunter, colour is tawny or yellow, though a darker one is not entirely unknown; nose somewhat depressed, with a peculiar conformation towards the forehead at the glabellum, which is very flat and broad; flat and squarish, with high and rounded cheekbones; eyes middle sized and black, with a yellow tinge in the eyeball; eyelids obliquely set, mouth large, with prominent though not very thick lips; hair black, thick, and worn long, the
orthodox style being to tie it up in a knot at the back, beard remarkably sparse, but the moustache more abundant than the beard. The Khias are short in stature with muscular bodies. Women are hardy and they are in general industrious race, capable of hard labour. They are very fond of betel nuts and hard drinks.

The origin of the Khias is very uncertain. According to one view, they are connected with the Astro-Mongoloid linguistically. They came to Assam from Burma via the Patkoi Range. This theory seems most probable that they moved into Assam from the east. The actual fact is yet to be ascertained.

The Khias laid great stress on potency of egg. They used it for divination and religious sacrifices. The dress of the Khias is colourful and picturesque. Women look overdressed because of over garments and jewellery. Male Khias carry swords, spears, bows and arrows as weapons and shields for defences.

The Garos—The Garos are the inhabitants of Garo Hills. They are darker than their neighbours. The Garos

have Mongolian features. Their faces are round and short. The Garos are robust, active and generally speaking very strong and muscular. They have prominent cheekbones, a large proportion of nose as compared with the head, eyes usually hazel in colour, large ears, thick lips, little beard and of a dark brown swarthy colour. They are friendly, pleasant, straightforward, honest and tactful.

Their dress is very scanty. The principal garment of men is a strip of woven cloth about 6 inches wide and about 6 feet long. Both men and women wear turbans. On important occasions, the chiefs wear a turban of red Assamese silk with an ornamented fringe. The dress of women is equally scanty. It consists of a piece of cloth about 18 inches long and about 14 inches broad. It is tied at the waist and they allow it remain open on the thigh. They put a shawl of blue or white cotton. The Garos are fond of ornaments. Both men and women wear a number of ornaments. The chief weapons used by the Garos

3 Hunter W.W., A Statistical Account of Assam, p.147.
4 Sangha Milton, History and Culture of the Garos, p.136.
are sword, spear, bow, shields, bamboo spear etc. Besides they have their own local made weapon called Miloam. It is a two-edged sword and made of one piece of iron.

The Nagas: Under the generic name of Nagas are included a large number of tribes, who are virtually independent, extending from North Cachar as far as the Dihing river in the extreme eastern point of Assam. They are of different groups but having common characteristics. Nagas of north eastern hills, Cachar, Manipur and those of Arunachal Pradesh have many common characteristics.

The origin of the word 'Naga' is interpreted in different ways. One belief is that the word is derived from the Assamese word 'naga' meaning 'naked' for the reason that the Nagas are comparatively scantily dressed. Another belief is the word derives from the Sanskrit word, naga 'snake'. It can also be from vernacular 'nag' which means mountain. The prominent tribes among the Nagas are Ao, Angami, Rengma, Kache Naga etc.

The Naga have brown complexion, flat noses, high cheek-bones\(^8\) and are brave warriors. The Angamis are legendary head-hunters and also brilliant terrace cultivators. Cotton is widely cultivated and they weave their distinctive colourful clothes. There are many varieties of dresses, predominant pattern being black with red and yellow stripes down the two sides\(^9\). Various coloured beads are used as jewellery. A warrior wears a collar round his neck made of goat’s hair-dyed red, intermixed with long flowing locks of hair of persons whom he has killed and ornamented with cowrie shells\(^{10}\). Men of Angami, Chakhsang, Rengmas, etc. used arulet of ivory on both arms. Two pieces of colourful and well decorated narrow sheaves are on the breast crosswise. On the head they used headgear filled with feathers of hornbill\(^{11}\). Women use various types of ornaments, brass, bangles, earrings, arulets and necklaces etc. Women wear necklaces of the polished hexagonal cornelian beads and

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8 Hodson T.C., The Naga Tribes of Manipur, 1984, Reprint, p.5.
10 Hunter W.W., Ihid, p.
brass armlets. In olden days, the menfolk used to crop their hair in a round or circular way. The Konyak men used to keep long hair and tie it in a knot at the back of the head. Women of all tribes keep long hair and tie it in a knot at the back. Tattooing was a form of decoration in the past. Men and women of Konyak used to dye their teeth black. The tools of the Nagas are usually hoe, dao, spear, bow and arrow. They are expert hunters.

The Mikir—The Mikirs are found mostly in the Mikir Hills. Their complexion is light yellow, brown and they are tall and muscular. They can carry heavy burden. The Mikir men wear dhoti of cotton or if wealthy, of silk. They use sleeveless coat. A thick wrapper is worn in cold weather. Women wear a petticoat of white cloth with red stripes secured round the waist by an ornamental girdle. The upper garment is a wrapper tied under arms. The Mikirs used many ornaments, necklaces of gold, silver or coral beads are worn and on festivals.

12 Ibid, p.33.
14 Hodson T.C., Ibid, p.56.
they use feathers on the turban. Their main weapons are knife, spear, bow and arrow.

The Cacharins: The Cacharins are widely spread in Assam. They fought against Ahoms who drove them to Naga Hills. The Cacharins used two pieces of cloth as dress, one used as upper garments and the other as lower garments. They are of short stature but of stout limb and muscle, peaceful and industrious. The Cacharins are free from caste prejudices. Their main weapons are sword, spear, knife etc.

The Assamese: The Assamese settled mostly in Assam valley. The dress of Assamese women comprised of mekhas, riha and celeng. The mekha is worn round the waist and the riha is a kind of ornamented scarf wrapped round the waist. A kind of shawl is placed over the riha known as celeng. The Ahom kings and dignitaries wore headgear. Assamese use ornaments made of gold, silver and metal. Men use the common Indian dress choti, kurta and cheddar. The Assamese wear many jewellery. Women use Kundals for ears and ankles. A forehead ornament is placed below the parting of hair on the top of the forehead. The use of ornaments however depend upon individuals and the
poor can hardly afford to wear precious ornaments. The main weapons of war are sword, spear, axe, mace, dagger, bow and arrow. Later on, the Ahoms used firearms.

The Meiteis: The Meiteis are residents of the valley of Manipur. The Meiteis are divided into seven clans i.e. Ningthouja, Angom, Luwang, Khuman, Moirang, Chenglei and Khabangamba. These seven clans are united under the leadership of Ningthouja. The Meiteis gradually emerged powerful in the valley as compared with other rough highlanders. They developed their primitive way of life, society, government, economics, religion and culture to a higher level.

Women put on distinctive garments according to their social rank. In general, they use two garments upper and lower. They wear a piece of cloth called 'Phanek' covering lower part of the body and a 'Chadder' is worn over the upper part of the body called 'Inaphi'. They dress very picturesquely in bright coloured striped petticoats fastened under their arms and reaching to their ankles. Over this a small green velvet jacket

15 Phashadur K.P., Caste, Tribes and Culture of India, p.19.
is worn, and when they go out they wear a very fine
muslin shawl over their shoulders, and gold necklaces
and bracelets by way of ornaments. It is the dress
of Meitei princesses and daughters of noblemen. Men use
usual Indian dress viz chhoti, kurta and cheddar. The
Meiteis used dau, the dart catsapult, shield and they
knew use of gunpowder.

DOMESTIC LIFE OF THE PEOPLE OF NORTH EAST REGION

Most people of north east region are agriculturists
and there is little industry worth the name except
primitive cottage industry. The chief industry of the
Cacharis, Manipuris and Assamese is rearing of silkworm
and weaving.

Rice is the staple food of North East people and
its cultivation is the mainstay of the whole of north
east region. In the hill, there are two kinds of cultivation,
jhum and terraced. Jhuming means clearing land for
growing crop on it for two years successively, after
which it is allowed to remain fallow for some years.
Terraced cultivation is by digging and making terraces

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16 Grimwood, E. St. Clair, My Three Years in Manipur,
1975, p.58.
on hill sides. The terraces get water either from above it for which the flow is regulated or by tapping some streams.

The staple crops of this region are rice, potato, yams, maize, millet, turmeric, ginger, sesame, sugarcane, pumpkin, gourd, chilly etc. Fruit trees like orange, lime, pineapple etc are cultivated. Tobacco, indigo, mustard, opium, pulses, peas, cabbages, carrots, turnip etc are also grown abundantly in this region.

Earthen pots are used for household use. Baskets, shield-making, woodwork, wood-carving, doll-making and musical instruments like trumpets, flutes for which wood and bamboo are used are main handicrafts. Salt-making is another small industry of the people.

Blacksmiths make dao and many varieties of knives, needles, fishing hooks etc. Gold and silver ornaments are made by goldsmiths. The chief cottage industry of the people of this region are weaving with looms. Cotton is plentifully grown. Almost every housewife used to weave the entire requirements of cloths of the family.

RECREATION AND AMUSEMENT

Hunting and fishing are favourite diversions of this region. The Meiteis and Angamis are very good
marksman. It was recorded in the history of Manipur that Raja Paikhomba could transfixed a fish under water with an arrow from his bow. Among the Asamese, catching of wild elephants is also a dangerous but exciting sport. Asamese elephant drivers are such great experts in catching these animals that Mirjumal tried very hard to take some of them with him to Delhi but failed. The Deodheri Asam Buranji presents an interesting account of various pastimes of Ahom monarchs such as hawk-fights, elephant fights, buffalo fights, tiger-bear contest etc. Dice is a popular indoor game of the Asamese.

Regarding games there are high-jump and long-jump etc. Outdoor games predominated among tribals, which is expected in the environment in which they lived but other indoor games are also popular.

Nagas and Meiteis play wrestlings, jumping etc. The main sport of Khasis is archery. Archery was also a national game of ancient Manipuris. The Meiteis are greatly devoted to outdoor games. Polo originated here. Javeline throwing, spear play and boat-race are also popular. Another typical indoor sport of the Meiteis is 'Kang':

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Kang is a traditional, cultural game played by Manipuris irrespective of their age and sex from times immemorial - Mani, N., Kanglon (Rules of Kang Play), 1964, p.3.
The Garos have different kinds of games. Some of which are wrestling, cockfighting, high and long jump, climbing of hanging rope, tug of war, wapang kala etc. Wapang kala is a game in which two persons place a strong bamboo on a big stone and try to lift each other.\textsuperscript{18}

An important feature of North East is folk dances which are most colourful, vigorous and spectacular with a natural rhythm unique of its own. It is generally accompanied with folk songs sung in chorus. It forms an important part of festivities and religious ceremonies of the people. Both boys and girls take part in dancing. Sometimes, men and women dance together, sometimes women alone dance to the accompaniment of buffalo horns, bamboo flutes and drums. Among the Mikirs, there are dances at harvesting and funeral. Dancing and singing are popular amusements of the Assamese and forming a part of festivities and religious ceremonies. Men, women, boys and girls dance together in Bihu festivals. The Tangkhuls are expert buglers and use a simple piece of bamboo with a vibrating reed.\textsuperscript{19}

\textsuperscript{18} Sangme Milton, Ibid, p.137.

\textsuperscript{19} Hodgson T.C., Ibid, p.67.
FOOD AND DRINK

Basically, the people of north east region are rice-eaters and relish meat. The Nagas eat meat of all kinds - flesh of elephants, dogs, cows, buffaloes and even pythons, locusts etc. The flesh of dog is considered a delicacy. Chillies and bamboo shoots are favourites of the Nagas. Rice beer is the most popular drink. Each family makes its own rice beer because of its enormous consumption. Usually, Naga people eat three times a day - morning, noon and evening.

The Khasis are also fond of rice and meat, especially pork and beef. They eat flesh of almost all wild animals and also drink rice beer. They are fond of betel and betel-nuts.

The Garos eat all kinds of meat. They are very liberal in their food habits and they eat goats, pigs, fowls, ducks, dogs, cats, cows, buffaloes etc. Fried fish and beef are considered very delicious. Among

20 Yonou Aosuo, p.8.
21 Yonou Aosuo, p.8.
vegetables, bamboo shoots is the favourite which is
grown wild in plenty. They used a kind of potash in
curries which they obtained by burning dry pieces of
plaintain stems of young bamboo. After they are burnt,
ashes are collected and dipped in water and are strained
in conical shaped bamboo stainer. Their favourite drink
is liquor prepared from rice.

The Mikirs are also rice-eaters. The flesh of goats,
pigs, fowls are eaten but beef is prohibited. Their
favourite drink is home-made rice beer. The Mikirs also
use opium and chew tobacco and betel-nuts.

The Cacharis eat all kinds of meat except beef.
Dried fish is popular. Their favourite drink is home-made
rice beer.

The Assamese chiefly eat rice, pulses, vegetables,
meat and fish. The serpent shaped and scaleless fishes
are generally forbidden for upper castes. The Assamese
are very fond of chewing betel-nuts and pan and they also
use tobacco. With the young banana plant and green bamboo

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shoots were made relishing popular preparations known respectively as Pecals and Kharics. The Khelis eat the flesh of every animal, but as Buddhists, they do not like to kill an animal with their own hands.

The staple food of the Meiteis are rice and fish. In olden times, they ate meat and used alcohol. But after they embraced Hinduism their food habit has changed, majority of the Meiteis abstained from alcohol and meat even in festivals.

The Akes eat flesh of mithuns and common cows and have large herds, but they do not touch milk.

HOME-LIFE

The domestic life of the north east people is very simple but in complete harmony with natural elements which environ them.

Villages of Nagas are strongly fortified with stockades, deep-ditches and solid wooden gateways on the main approach road to the village, which could be

26 Ibid, p.137.
27 Johri Sitaran, Where India, China and Burma Meet 1962 Calcutta, p.130.
28 Dalton C.T., Tribal History of Eastern India, Reprint 1978, New Delhi, p.36.
fastened and barricaded. There are also deep-pitfalls containing sharp pointed bamboo stakes and covered with light earth, so that the unwary trespasser would drop inside and get wounded.

The Angami village is invariably built either on the summit of a hill, on a high saddle, or perhaps more frequently on the ridge of some spur running down from a high range. The houses of Angamis are built in irregular lines facing inwards, with the caves almost touching the ground. The pattern of the house varies from tribe to tribe, but generally it consists of three to five rooms under one long roof. Naga's family system is unitary in contradiction of joint family system of the rest of India. When a son marries, he lives in a separate house. So, every house shelters only one family and not more.

The villages of the Kukis are generally situated at great heights and in dense forest. The houses are built wholly of bamboos with large posts and thatched grass. The chief's residence is larger than that of the common people.

30 Ghosh S.B., History of Nagaland, p.197.
The Khasis' village is normally built a little below the top of the hill and not on the summit. Houses are grouped close together. Houses of the well-to-do are generally constructed of masonry, with thatched roof and plank floor, divided into two or three rooms. The ordinary people constructs hut of mud or plan walls with a thatched or camed roof.

The Garos construct their villages in valleys close to running water. In the middle of the village, there is an open space in which religious ceremonies are conducted. Houses are of considerable size. Building materials are bamboo and thatched grass and a house is divided into several rooms. A Garo family consists of husband, wife and their children. But the composition of the family changes with the cycle of family life. They have very limited furniture at home.

The house of the Mikirs has a front veranda and also another one at the back. There are four main divisions consisting of two main rooms. Their houses are made of bamboo and roof thatched with grass. They use little furniture. Houses of Cacharins are made of split bamboo and thatched roofs secured by cane. Usually, there are
two rooms, one for dining and another for sleeping. The houses of the rich are constructed of wood. They also use simple furniture. Usually, all dwelling houses face eastward in which direction they have a large verandah.

The dwellings in which the hill people of Arunachal Pradesh choose to live vary according to the nature of the environment and the available building material no less than according to the social units individual houses are meant to accommodate. The people live in cozy houses, often double storied and strongly constructed of stone or wood with plank floors. The houses are built usually on raised platform, often with carved doors and windows.

A Lushai village is generally situated on or near the top of a high hill or ridge. The houses are constructed on one uniform plan. They are all raised some three or four feet from the ground. The houses are made of timber and roof thatched with grass. These are


usually about sixteen feet long by twelve feet wide and in front is a large verandah, filled with hollow basins scooped out of tree trunks, in which rice is husked with long wooden pestles. At the back of the house is another small enclosed verandah, which serves as a sort of store room. The Chief's house is of similar construction but it is much larger than others.

Houses of rich Meitesis of Manipur are constructed of posts and beams of wood. The poor use bamboo and grass. Walls are usually of reed plastered over with mud and cowdung. All dwelling houses face eastward in which direction they have a large verandah. The head of the family has a honoured place on the right side of the house, a mat is always spread for his comfort. Cooking is done inside on the extreme rear of a house.

Houses of Assamese are usually constructed of posts and beams of wood. The poor people use bamboo and grass. During the Ahom days, only the king was allowed to build a house of brick and mortar. Walter Hamilton in 1820 reported that the sovereign and nobility of Assam lived

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33 Ibid, p.83.
34 Bum W., Gazetteer of Manipur, 1975, p.17.
in thatched huts, with walls of bamboo mat, supported by reed posts and built in the fashion of Bengal with arched ridges and mud floors, each apartment being separate hut.

LAWS AND CUSTOMS

Village is an important unit of administration among Khasi tribes. They are sub-divided into many clans. A clan consists of a number of families, of which each has a chief. The head of the family has to perform religious duties and to carry out worship of the clan deity. Each village has well defined boundaries with a head-man to administer.

The Khasi clan traced their descent from matrilineal ancestors. Villages are combined together and the head of such a group of villages is called the Syiem or Chief. He is the religious as well as the secular head and used to lead the army in times of war.

The Garo tribes have two distinct main divisions - those who inhabit the Garo Hills and those living in the plains. The former has twelve sub-tribes and the latter, six.

35 Extracted from Assam and Neighbouring States Historical Documents by N.N. Acharyya.
The Meiteis are divided into seven clans (selsi) - Wingthouja, Khumai, Luwang, Angom, Moirang, Khéba-ngamsa and Chenglei. Each of these clans consists of sub-groups called yek which is further divided into Yommaks or Sagai. The head of the Sagai is called 'Piba'. The Meiteis have their own customary laws of life, property inheritance, adoption, marriage and divorce.

**MARRIAGE**

The marriage customs of Nagas are simple. A bachelor who lives in the Morung will select a girl living in the female quarter. Some Nagas live separately immediately after marriage, while some others set up a house with the birth of the first child. Most Tangkhul marriages are love marriages. Young boys and girls choose their partners and these marriage negotiations are conducted through an elderly lady. Among Tangkhuls, marriage within the clan is forbidden. It is a serious crime and if such a marriage take place, the village exiles the couple according to decisions of the village court. Child or infant marriage is very rare. Marriage is simple. A few animals, such as buffaloes, cows, dogs, cats or fowls are

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killed and the whole village participate in the marriage ceremony. Divorce is rare among Tangkhuls. Tangkhul customary laws permit only males to inherit property. Females have no right to property.37

Marriage is regarded by the Khasis as a religious rite and was solemnised by a complicated procedure at which the High God, the Goddess of the Earth and ancestor and ancestress of the clan are involved.38

The Khasis have peculiar marriage custom. The bridegroom with a number of friends go to the house of the bride, where all are feasted and lodged for the night, then the bride with the bridegroom go to the house of the bridegroom. After staying some days, the newly-married couple returned to the bride's house, which would be their future home. Polygamy is not sanctioned by Khasi custom. Adultery is looked upon as a serious crime.39

Among the Garos, marriage ceremony is simple, and most marriages are arranged by parents. The marriage

ceremony of the Garos has little religious significance. There are usual feasting and merry-making on the occasion, but they are very particular about omens before finalising a marriage. The bridegroom live in the house of the bride as the Khasis. Garo marriage is regulated by two important laws - Exogamy and A'Kim. According to Exogamy a girl cannot marry to the same clan boy. According to A'Kim a man or a woman who has once contracted marriage will never be free to remarry person of another clan, even after the death of his wife. They have a custom of supplying another wife from the same clan, in case consort is dead. Divorce is permitted.

Among the Assamese, the marriage ceremony lasts for three or four days. The bridegroom should come to the bride's house on the marriage day in an auspicious hour in the evening. Then marriage takes place. There was no practice of child marriage except among the Brahmins and Kayasthas who practise it even today. It was rare among other classes.

41 Ibid.
42 Ibid.
The Milët marriage ceremony is simple. They marry outside their yak (clan) but generally within the tribe. The marriage ceremony lasts for only one day. Most marriages are arranged by parents. Marriage by agreement among the guardians is socially the most respectable form of marriage. But marriage by love, and often in the teeth of opposition from the parents is equally common. The bridegroom’s party go to the bride’s house on an auspicious day. After performing marriage ceremony the bridegroom with the bride returns to the house of bridegroom. Child or infant marriage does not exist.

Polygamy is allowed but it is the exception rather than the rule.

In Arunachal Pradesh there is no limit to the number of wives a Nishi or Hill Miri might marry. Polygamy is allowed among the Nishi or Hill Miri society. Among the Apa Tanis Polygamy is not common. But, for the Nishis, it is a matter of prestige to add as many women as possible to their household. Among the Nishis and Hill Miris, bride price is demanded at the time of marriage. Among

44 Haimundorf Christoff Von Furer, Highlanders of Arunachal Pradesh, 1982, Delhi, pp.70-74.
the Riangs of Tribure marriage is settled by negotiations of parents. In rare cases, love marriage is permitted. Infant marriage is rare.

**PROPERTY**

It is a general rule among the Nagas that property cannot be inherited by one outside the clan. Only male can inherit and property is shared equally between sons and first cousins. Among the Tangkhul Nagas of Manipur, on the death of the father, the eldest son gets a double share and the others single one. Among the Jasamis, the youngest son gets the house and the most valuable part of the property and other sons get equal shares. The rule of primogeniture is the most widely accepted rule of succession in village offices. But there is great variety in the usages regulating succession to land and other property. Women do not succeed to immovable property, immovable property is distributed among the sons and movable property among the women.

46 Hudson T.G., p. 103.
47 Ibid.
The Tangkhul customary law permits only male to inherit property. Females have no right to inherit property. 48

The Xhasia does not have any separate law of property. Regarding inheritance, when a man dies, his property is inherited by his wife, but the ornaments and clothing worn by him during his lifetime go to brothers, sisters, and other relatives of the deceased. If the deceased is a widower, the property go to his children. If the deceased has no children, property is inherited by the sisters of his wife or by her nearest relatives if there is no sisters. When there are no relative of the deceased then the property devolves to the ruler of the country.

The Garos are matrilineal. Descent is traced through mother. All property belongs to women and remains with her clan. Property is passed on from mother to daughter. Sons do not inherit any part of the property. On the day of his marriage, the man leaves his parent's house and goes to his wife's house. His children also take their mother's clan's name. 49 The daughter normally

inherits the property of her parents and after her, her
daughter. If there is no issue, another woman, appointed
by some of the clan members inherits.

The Mikira have different customs. Males inherit
all property. Sons have preferential claim to property.
If there is no son, brothers of the deceased and after
the brothers, the nearest relative inherits.

Among the Cacheris, sons inherit all property of
parents. There is occasional adoption of children among
the Cacheris. The adopted children are treated well with
due status.

Among the Meiweis, sons inherit all property of
the parents. There is no rule of primogeniture. Daughters
are excluded except gifts given at the time of marriage.

SETTLEMENT OF DISPUTES

Among the Nages, all disputes, differences, quarrels
etc. within the clan are settled by elders of the clan. In
case of failure, the matter is referred to the village
court, who would also consult the general public in the
matter. Thus, a fully democratic system of settlement of

disputes existed. Great reliance was placed on oaths. Land disputes are mostly settled by oaths. The oaths are taken at the scene of dispute usually by biting or eating a small piece of land under dispute.

Among the Khasis, the process of deliberation and decision of disputes is more elaborate. Complaint is first made to the chief and an attempt is made by the chief and his men to effect a compromise between the parties. Failing this, the Darber is summoned for deciding the issue. The darber is an assembly of all grown up males of the village. The complainants and defendants too, pledged themselves by throwing down before the darber a turban or a bag of betala and lime. After hearing both sides, the Chief pronounced a sentence which is usually a fine. Disputes are also decided by means of water ordeal – Ka ngam Um. Another form of trial is to place two pots each containing a piece of gold and silver in shallow water. The contending parties are directed to plunge their hands into the pots and pick up

51 Ibid, p.144.
53 Rao V.V., A Century of Tribal Politics, 1976, p.130.
a packet. The person who brought the packet containing gold is adjudged as innocent of the crime.\textsuperscript{54}

The Village Council of the Khas decide all disputes and quarrels. When there is insufficient evidence before the village council, a kind of trial by ordeal is resorted to.\textsuperscript{55}

Among the Mikirs too, disputes are decided by the Village Council, of which all male house-holders are members. The Village Council is presided over by an elected head.

The administration of justice of the Ahoms is very efficient, speedy and impartial. The King is the law enforcer and arbitrator of disputes of his subjects. In the administration of justice the King is assisted by high officials and assessors. For evidence, eye-witnesses are more important than informers. The criminal law is punitive and punishments awarded are very severe. The principle of 'eye for eye' and 'tooth for tooth' prevail.\textsuperscript{56} After the

\textsuperscript{54} Ibid, p.731.

\textsuperscript{55} Ibid, pp.128-130.

\textsuperscript{56} Acharyya N.H., The History of Medieval Assam, 1966, p.127.
Hinduisation of the Ahooms from about the beginning of the sixteenth century, Hindu law as expounded by the Brahmins seems to have been generally followed.\(^\text{57}\)

The Chief Court of the Meiteis is called Cheirap. There are also other courts - Paja, Shinglup and Garot. The number of members of the Cheirap varied from time to time. Usually, it consists of more than ten members. Garot decide cases where sepoys are concerned and Paja settle all cases of family disputes which concerned women. All members of these courts are appointed by the king and cases decided by any of the above court might be appealed to the king, who is the final judicial authority in the kingdom.

**RELIGION**

Religion or mode of worship in the north-east region has a peculiar blending of naturalism, animism and animatism. But the most striking feature of north-east region is each tribe has its own minor religion, faith or mode of worship which no major world religion would recognise. In the north-east, religion is interwoven with

\(^{57}\) Ibid, p.126.
one's entire life adopted to nature. So scholars like Durkheim said that primitive men had a philosophy and through that philosophy, he tried to understand the supernatural.

The basic form of religion of this region consists of belief in a hierarchy of supernatural body, and rituals and worship are performed towards the fulfilment of their wishes. Here, religious code, constitution, myths and ethical prescriptions are not kept in black and white. All these are transmitted from generation to generation through tradition and mythical stories.

The Nagas: The Nagas were animists before the introduction of Christianity in 1870\(^{58}\). The Nagas have some vague concept about divine power whom they considered the creator of the world and controller of events. They have no established form of worship nor temple nor priest for service to God. The Nagas have different gods for different social needs such as God for home, paddy fields, jungle fields, seas and river, rocks and mountains\(^ {59}\). The Angami Nagas believe that if they lead good and worthy lives in this world,

\(^{58}\) Gosh B.B., History of Naga People, p.217.

\(^{59}\) Shiaray R.R., Origin and Culture of Naga, 1966, Delhi, p.229.
their spirits would fly away and become stars. If they lead evil lives, their spirits would be transformed into bees. The Tangkhula and Kay Nagas believe that the earth is originally an expanse of water. The deity is imprisoned under it and made effort to escape, which resulted in hills. Another belief is that the sky is the male principal and the earth the female principal. There are worship of ancestor and nature. Among the Tangkhula we find that the deity Kayyou, the eldest son of the creator of all things is worshipped by men in trouble or sickness. There are birth ceremonies, naming ceremonies, marriage ceremonies and death ceremonies.

The Kabui believe that the spirits go to the nether world where their ancestors meet them and life there is a repetition of their lives on earth. If they are poor on earth, they remain poor there too and if rich they are rich. Belief in re-birth existed among the Naga.

The Khias believe in a supreme God, although their concept about him is vague. Their religious belief are

60 Haddon T.C., Ibid, p.127.
61 Ibid.
62 Ibid, p.139.
of a very complex character. W.W. Hunter describes Khasi religion as demon-worship. They also believe in a future life after death. The various ceremonies of birth, marriage and death are performed by priests. The Khasi religion may be briefly described as practice of forms to cure diseases, and avert misfortunes of all kinds, by means of ascertaining the name of demon who is the author of evil, and the kind of sacrifice necessary to appease it.

The Jaintia Gods are more numerous than those of the Khasis. Their most famous and important divinity is Jayanti a form of Durga, who give her name to the capital city.

The Garos believe in the existence of Supreme being, a multitude of benevolent and malevolent spirits. The Garos believe that the world is created by a certain superior spirit. They worship a number of spirits as well as natural forces and believed that natural phenomenon

like thunder, lightning, rain, wind, earthquakes, tides, eclipses etc. are all governed by some spirits. Illness of body and mind is caused by demons. They offer sacrifices to spirits and demons in order to avert disaster. Sacrifices of animals and birds such as bull, goat, pig, fowl or duck are frequently made in the observance of religious ceremonies. The regular ceremonies of birth, marriage and death are observed by the Garos. The Garos believe in the transmigration of souls as a state of reward and punishment.

The Mikiris have no temple or image of God. They believe in evil spirits and amulets. These amulets are believed to bring good luck. Natural features like mountains, waterfalls, pools, streams, the sun, the moon etc are considered divine. The Mikiris believe that after death if funeral ceremonies are correctly performed the spirit goes directly to the kingdom of Yema. If death ceremonies are not performed, the spirit is not admitted into it.

67 Ibid, pp.140-141.
The Cacharias are not idol worshippers. However, they believe the earth, sky and air are pervaded by spirits. The Cacharias divided deities into two—household Gods and village Gods. The household Gods are worshipped in individual houses by the family, while the village Gods are worshipped outside at some central place in the village. There are ceremonies attending birth, naming of child, marriage and death.

There are four predominant communities in Tripura professing different religious beliefs—Hindu, Muslim, Buddhists and Christians. The Mogs and the Chakmas are Buddhists. The Lushais and some people of the Kuki and Garo communities embraced Christianity. Majority of the people are Hindus. Next to Hindus, Muslims occupy the second position in the state. Although some tribal people are converted to Hinduism, they continue to worship their traditional Gods and Goddesses. Human sacrifices also prevailed in Tripura in ancient times. It was Govinda Manikya who probably abolished it in the later half of the 17th century. Riangma of Tripura believe that good
and evil pervades the world and diseases are caused by some specified deities. Therefore sacrifices are offered to appease the deities. The Riangs, after their conversion to Hinduism, practise a religion which is a blend of their old animistic faith and Hindu beliefs and practices. A number of Shiva and Krishna Temples have been set up where worship is conducted by Riang priests. Most of the Riangs, except those who have embraced Christianity, now call themselves Hindus of the Sakti cult.

For ages, the Cheturdas Devta or the fourteen Gods has been the ruling deity of Tripura. The fourteen Gods of the kirat people have been identified with deities of Hindu pantheon, probably as early as the 13th century. Thus, in Tripura, Bodo culture and myths have been submerged by Hindu counterparts.

Religion in Arunachal Pradesh belongs to two basic orders - the Buddhist and the non-Buddhist. Buddhism in this part of tribal land is a crude translation of Buddhism of the Mahayana School.

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71 Saigal Omesh, Tripura, 1978, p.100.
72 Tripura District Gazettes Agartala, 1975, p.388.
73 Tripura District Gazettes Agartala, 1975, p.388.
The Monpas and Sherdukpons are following Buddhism in an institutional form. The monastery at Tawang is believed to be one of the largest and oldest monasteries of Buddhism in the world and is the largest in Asia. It is seat of initiation into Buddhism, learning and training.

The Akas, Aijas, Khousas are non-Buddhist tribes. They have remained completely un influenced by Buddhism.74 The present archaeological relics at Bhismaknagar in Lohit Division are believed to be the capital seat of king Bhismak, whose daughter Rukmani was carried away on the eve of her marriage by Lord Krishna himself.75 This cultural tradition in legend link the Akas with Hindu people of India. The Akas have a society and a religion which they believe to be their own. In the Akas society, there is a hierarchy of Gods and spirit who rule over mankind. Some are benevolent and some are malevolent in nature. These Gods have command over human beings. These Gods have to be kept appeased for a peaceful living. So, propitiations are made by way of rituals which are performed from time to time.

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74 Sinha Naghuwir, Religion and Culture of North Eastern India, p.132.

75 Ibid, p.33.
The Tangass also believe in a supreme being who is invisible but has created the world and looks after it. They call him Sike, Pra or Rang, Kem and Haus. He lives in the sky and bestows his blessings on mankind. The Tangass do not worship the Supreme being and they do not offer any sacrifices to him. Because, Sike never desires anything from men, he is above human desires and wants. It is the spirits who are greedy of sacrifices. They have to be appeased, lest they inflict their anger on men and trouble them unnecessarily.

The earliest inhabitants of Assam were Kirata and primitive tribes. According to N. N. Acharya, Indo-Mongoloid started to embrace Hinduism right from the later Vedic period. Bhagadatta with his kirata and Chinese followers had become an ally of the Kouravas and took part in the great Mahabharata battle - herein lies the significance of Bhagadatta who had been closely connected with the Aryanisation of Assam. Besides, Pragjyotissa was mentioned in Harivamasa, Ramavans, Vishnu and other Puranas.

76 Ibid, p.44.
77 Acharya N. N., Introduction to Assam and Neighbouring States, Historical Documents, 1983, Delhi, p.IX.
78 Ibid, p.IX.
Kalidasa mentioned Pragjyotis and Kamarupa as states conquered by Raghun. Huan Tsang, the Chinese pilgrim, who visited India during the reign of Harshavardhana mentioned that there were a hundred Deva temples in Kamarupa and its ruler Bhaaskar Verma was a Shiva worshipper. Thus by the early centuries of the Christian era Assam had become a part of India although a majority of its people still speaks the Bodo language 79.

Thus, when the Ahom entered Assam, there were many Hindu sects viz Brahmansim, Vishnuism, Saktism, Savism etc. Soon, the Ahom kings were attracted to Hinduism and Jayadhwaj Singh was the first Ahom king who embraced Hinduism. From the time of Jayadhwaj to Sulikpa or Lara Raja, the Ahom kings were Vaishava Hindus. But after Rudra Singh, Saktism, however, was the dominant religion.

Vaishnavism was preached in Assam in the 16th century by Senkar Dev, a Kayastha of Babadrobe in Nowgong 80. After his death Vaishnavites in Assam formed themselves into different sects under different leaders. One of these

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79 Ibid.
80 Banerjee A.C., The Eastern Frontier of British India, 1964, p.18.
sects - the Moamens revolted against Sakti in the 18th century. The influence of Hinduism was so great in the region that in 1861 the Census Report of Assam noted that all plain areas adopted Hinduism.

Prior to Hinduisation, the Meiteis had many indigenous deities i.e. Lameli (the deities of countryside), Umangleli (the forest deities) and Imangleli (the household deity). Beside these, a number of other deities like Senamahi, Laimalen, Thangjing, Marjing, Wangbren, Koubru, Nongpok Ningthou, Panthoibi etc. are also worshipped.

The early Meitei came into contact with Hinduism through her neighbouring Hindu states such as Tripura, Cachar and Assam. During inter-tribal warfare and struggle for throne, Meitei princes took shelter in her neighbouring states. Through these contacts, Hinduism slowly penetrated to Manipur. Early Hindu influence might be made through contact which early Meiteis had with her neighbouring Hindu peoples.

According to 'Bawon Khunthok', earliest Brahmins' settlements were during the reign of Kysamsa in the

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15th century. On the basis of "Chingureabi Khonlup", R.K. Jhaljit Singh has argued that cultural contact was established between Manipur and India at an earlier date and Vaishnavite influence on Meiteis started from the 7th century. But the present scholar is reluctant to agree with this statement as it lacks historical evidence.

But, it is agreed by all elites of Manipur that there was some Hindu influence in Manipur before the reign of Chesaizongba. The ascendency of Chesaizongba to the throne of Manipur is a turning point in the religious history of Manipur. With the patronage of the reigning Raja, Hinduism became the dominant religion of Manipur. Chesaizongba did not attempt to establish Hinduism as state religion, as he could feel the pulse of his subjects and he also worshipped all Meitei deities. Garibaneuz, the son of Chesaizongba ascended the throne of Manipur in 1709 A.D. Under his rule Hinduism was established as state religion and strong measures were taken against those who violated its rules. He banished and destroyed traditional deities. In 1717 A.D. (1939 Saka) the king took Upanayana from Guru Gopal Das. 82

82 Chetharol Kumbaba, p. 66.
Thus, there was forcible Hinduisation and certain Hindu customs and rules began to be enforced inspite of dissent. Bhagyaachandra confirmed Chaitanyaite Vaishnavism as state religion. At the same time, indigenous Gods and Goddesses were not neglected. Sanaasamhi continues to be worshipped as household deity till today. All traditional deities were identified with Hindu Gods and Goddesses i.e., Penthoibi was identified with Durga, Nongpok Ningthou as Shiva etc. It (Hinduism) exists side by side with the earlier faith, to which in the hour to trial and trouble, be they Raja or ryot, they turn unhesitatingly.

**SOCIAL POSITION OF WOMEN**

Unlike women of other Indian states, women of north-east region enjoy a higher social status and independence.

One distinct characteristic of the Manipur Society is that women are forward, very hard working and real mistresses of their homes. The Meiteis do not confine their women in the kitchen alone as in most parts of India. Most works except the heaviest are performed by

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them and they are consequently the mainstay of the family circle. All marketing is done by women, and their spare time is devoted to weaving and spinning. Every Meitei woman, irrespective of caste or religion is supposed to know weaving. A woman or a girl, who does not know how to weave is considered as a disqualification. So, E.W. Dun wrote that it would be difficult to find a more industrious woman in India than the Manipuris.

In matriarchal system of the Garos, the social position of women is naturally very high. She is the head of the family and through her all family properties devolve.

The Naga women are also very industrious. They carry out almost all works of the field, rearing all children, weeding and marketing, weaving and spinning etc. They share greater portion of the burden of life. When they are not employed in household duties or in the cultivation of their fields, they work at their looms weaving clothes for the family while men sit basking

84 Dun E.W., Gazetteer of Manipur, p.17.
In the sun, Naga women enjoy considerable freedom. She participates freely in singing and dancing during festivals and entertains guests. The position of women in Naga society is not inferior. She is never made to feel that she belongs to the weaker sex.

Like Garo women, the social position of Khasi women is very high. She is the head of her family. All property devolves through women.

In Assamese social life, women are placed in high position. They are refined, cultured, pious and enlightened. They are active and versatile in their accomplishments. Some gallant Ahom women did actual fighting in the battlefield. Besides, Assamese women are expert dancers and expert weavers. Every Assamese, irrespective of caste or religion, is supposed to know weaving. If a girl does not know how to weave it is a disqualification for a girl in getting married. Traditionally every woman gives at least a hand-woven

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85 Hunter W.W., Statistical Account of Assam, 1962, p.188.
87 Ibid, p.61.
'gamosa' towel to her husband and children on New Year's day. The purdah system is obviously unknown. It appears that many women specially of Brahman casts are not only educated, but skilled in the arts of poetry and rhetoric.

The position of women is less important in a Mizo family than that of men. Widow remarriage is not prohibited. A daughter has no share in the property of her father. There is no purdah system. Like Naga and Meitei women, they are very industrious and carry out almost all works of fields, rearing all children, selling and marketing, weaving and spinning etc.

CONCLUSION

The social and cultural life of the North East people prior to political integration with India in 1949 have been discussed. There are many similarities regarding general physical characteristics of the people of this region. Generally, the people are short of stature with muscular bodies. The people are hardy and industrious.

88 Duttcherjai K.K., North-East India a Study, 1963, p.23.

89 Barua B.K., A Cultural History of India, 1969, p.135.

Both men and women are capable of hard labour. Food habits of the people are almost the same. They are all rice-eaters and fond of betel leaves and betel-nuts and local made alcohol. Bamboo shoot is their favourite dish. They lay great stress on eggs. Women of this region keep long hair and tie it in a knot at the back. The people are very fond of decoration and ornaments. Ceremonial dress of every tribe is a very complicated one having so many things to put on different parts of the body — each peculiar to its tribe.

The domestic life of the people of this region is very simple. Their houses are made of bamboo and roof thatched with grass. The houses of the well-off are constructed of wood. They use simple furniture. Usually, all dwelling houses face eastward, in which direction they have large verandahs and open porch.

Marriage ceremony of the people of this region are generally simple. Virtually, there is no dowry system since times immemorial. Throughout the history of this region, there has been no instance of 'Sati' (custom of widow burning herself on the funeral pyre of her dead husband).
It is very amazing that in contrast to the rest of India, there were no serious religious and caste conflicts in this region up to India's independence. The position of women in this region is very high. The women share equally with men the burden of life. Every woman of this region, irrespective of caste or religion is supposed to know weaving.

North East region is a cultural bridge where the Aryans and Mongolians meet. One great integrating force of the people of this region with Indian people is religion. Here, all major religions of the world co-exist freely with even unrecognised beliefs of the sub-national minorities of North East. The Aryan adventures has come to this region to settle and preach new ideas of philosophy and religion on a people practising animism. This intellectual and religious wave is particularly stronger when Muslim rulers in Delhi theocratized their Indian Hindu domain. Thus, began a slow Hindu refugee penetration in this region and left its influence on the simple tribal culture.

In North East region there are many archaeological evidence to show the presence of Buddhism, Brahmanism,
Saktism, Shivaism and various indigenous tribal religions at one time or other in its history. The immigration of the Gangetic people brought about Brahmanism and some of its diverse sectarian beliefs and practices in Tripura. Thus, Tripura, the ancient home of the Bodos is Hinduised and began to be considered as the chosen abode of Lord Shiva. A popular myth depicts Shiva slaying the demon Tripura, a symbolic representation of the grand assimilation of the aboriginal religion with Shivaism. Another legend makes Tripura a holy place where the right leg of Sati fell. Thus, Hinduism was a great success in Tripura and the 1901 census recorded the strength of the Hindus 69%, Muslims 26%, Buddhists 3% and animists 2% of the population.\(^91\)

The Khasi and Jaintia Hills are not spared of Hindu influence. The Brahamo Samaj came to Shillong in 1870\(^92\). In the summer of 1901 Swami Vivekananda came to Khasi Hills.\(^93\) In 1921, Ramkrishna Mission opened a centre

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\(^91\) Imperial Gazetteer of India Vol.XIII, 1907, p.119.
\(^92\) Choudhry, S., Hill Politics in North East India, p.37.
\(^93\) Ibid.
near Cherrapunji and later in Shillong. The Hindunised Khasis assumed surnames of Singh and Roy. In 1879, the classification of inhabitants according to religion shows - 141, 283 aboriginals, 365 Hindus, 62 Muslims and 128 Christians, including 35 Europeans, 8 Eurasians and 85 natives. Christianity came to Khasi Hills, Jaintia Hills and Garo Hills. Its spread in Mizo and Naga Hills has been much more spectacular than in Khasi and Garo Hills. The possible reason is that Khasi Hill, Garo Hills, Mikir and North Cachar Hills have been more intensely exposed to Hindu influence than Mizo and Naga Hills.

The Nagas were first converted to Christianity by the Baptist missionaries and under its influence all Nagas began to abandon their rude primitive animistic ways of life giving them political consciousness. It must be noted that when Buddhism spread over outlying areas of north-east region such as China, Tibet, Burma etc. and Hinduism got implanted itself in Cachar, Tripura, Manipur and even Khasi and Jaintia Hills, the Nagas

94 Ibid.
remained untouched completely. It may be because of earlier hostility and geographical inaccessibility of hilly abodes of Nagas, whereas the inhabitants of Khasi and Jaintia Hills, Garo Hills, Mikir Hills and North Cachar Hills had been in close contact with the Hinduised people of the Brahmaputra.

Assam was already Kirata Hinduised kingdom long before the advent of the Ahoms, who had their own religion, language and social customs. But later on, the Ahom kings were converted to Hinduism. Perhaps, they realised that it was politically expedient to adhere to a religion which was practised by a majority of people.

In the remote areas of Arunachal Pradesh, Tibetan Buddhism remains a predominant religion. Here, a Hindu legend was woven of the marriage of a local princess Rukmini with Lord Krishna.

Similarly, Cacharins claimed to be Hindus due to marriage of Mirambi with Bhir, the second Pandava. Manipuris also claimed to be Hindu due to marriage of a Manipuri princess Chitrangada with Arjuna, the third Pandava. It is yet to be seen how long these myths will bind the North East people to the secular Indian nation.
The Manipur valley presents a peculiar cultural oasis wherein there is a fusion of Indian Hinduism and the indigenous cultural pattern of national minorities. Synthesis of this fusion is the beautiful culture of the Meiteis which is known over the world in spite of economic and educational backwardness. The genius of the Meiteis lies in giving a new form to the great Hindu culture through its religious dances depicting the Hindu mythology of Vaishnava cult. A stranger may obviously take it as a replica of Hindu culture. Yet its peculiar grace and rhythmic beauty are drawn from dances of the indigenous religion which is still practised in 'Lei Herouba'. Even Radha is dressed as a beautiful Meitei princess with Kajenlei⁹⁶ and velvet jacket depicting the usual Indian sari. The Brahmans who preached and practised Hinduism also accepted Meitei religion and culture by worshipping Sanamahi, Leimerei and by suffixing Meitei clan to their names. The Meitei Raja heads both the Hindu and Meitei religious institutions. It is not imposition but a happy marriage of two cultures as equal partners. It is a phenomenon unseen in the

⁹⁶ It is a beautiful woman headgear and used specially in dance and marriage.
North East nor in South India when Aryan Hindu wave flowed downward in ancient past. Hindu culture has completely dissolved what was Tripura's earlier culture. Yet, the Meitei language and culture have proved too elastic and still retains its distinctive identity despite fusion.