CHAPTER VII

BACKWARD TRACTS TO PARTIAL EXCLUSION
The Chief Commissionership of Assam comprised three distinct ethnic divisions, the Brahmaputra valley was predominantly Assamese with pockets of plains tribals; the three districts of Cachar, Goalpara and Sylhet which were incorporated into the new administration was predominantly Bengali and the hill districts were peopled mainly to the Indo-Nongoloid tribals, although the provincial-cum-district head-quarters at Shillong and district head-quarters elsewhere had some non-tribal elements connected mainly with administration and trade which did not in any way affect the racial composition of the areas. The Government policy was not to equate all the subjects. The plainsmen were subject to all the rules and regulations in force in British India. The hill districts, on the other hand, enjoyed a distinct status in the pattern of Indian administration. Their traditional institutions were not radically disturbed, the people were allowed to feel that they were being governed by their own chiefs and village headmen. To these local functionaries was added the new officials created by the British Government to augment those already existing. The hill districts were non-regulated or de-regulationized. They were exempted from the operation of the general regulations and acts and were
subject to such enactments only as were specially declared to be in force. The Calcutta High Court had no jurisdiction over the tracts. The highest court of appeal was that of the Chief Commissioner though most of the judicial work was done by the Commissioners and Deputy Commissioners, and by the village durbars and panchayats whose decisions were often unrecorded. The codes of civil and criminal procedure were not in force in these areas though the spirit of these codes was to guide judicial administration. Revenue administration was similarly simple covering house tax, income tax, land revenue on settled lands in the plains and some excise on liquor. For all purposes the hill areas were segregated because of their backwardness to preserve the identity of these tribals.

Education and Middle Class

Nevertheless, the progress of education and the work of the missionaries created conditions for the material and intellectual advancement of the tribals, particularly those inhabiting the area under study. In the Khasi and Jaintia Hills the work of the Welsh Mission was augmented by that of the German Salvatocians who first opened a Roman Catholic Mission at Shillong in 1890. The running of schools and dispensaries apart from their main concern of spreading the Gospel kept their mission of education no higher than what could enable their students to read and write. Government therefore set up the

1, C. Becker, History of the Catholic Missions in Northeast India, pp.156-158.
Shillong Government High School in 1878 after Jeebon Roy, a retired Khasi civilian had deposited a sum of Rs.900 as security. This was followed by the Welsh Mission opening a second high school at Shillong in early 1891 which was amalgamated that same year with Government High School, the Mission retaining the right of nominating the head-master while Government bore the financial burden.

An important step in the education of the Khasis was the decision of the Syndicate of Calcutta University in 1902 that Khasi should be included in the use of subjects for the Entrance Examination. Prior to this concession the Khasis were expected to acquire a modicum of Latin. Though the credit for educating the Khasi-Oaintias must be given to the Welsh Mission, the Roman Catholics, a relatively late comer started the first technical institution at Shillong where the Don Bosco Technical School was established in 1922. Three different Catholic orders set up degree colleges, St. Edmund's was started in 1922, St. Anthony's in 1935, and St. Mary's in 1937 besides two schools preparing students for the Senior Cambridge School Examination, namely Loreto Convent and St. Edmund's School.

The American Baptist Mission was the only missionary organization working among the Garos till the Roman Catholic

4. Assam Administration Report 1902-1903, p.44.
Salesians entered that field in 1933. By 1886 the American Baptist Mission was running thirty-six schools in the Garo Hills with Government grants meeting three-fourths of the expense. This arrangement continued till 1905 when Government began to give a subsidy on a per pupil basis. Much of the non-Government contribution came from Garo Christians, Garos were encouraged to continue their education in schools outside their district by scholarships given by the Mission and Government, for it was only in 1934 that a High School was set up at Tura.

Response to education was impressive enough. Of the hill tribes in north-east India the Khasi-Daintias were the first to receive and benefit from education. Solomon Blah and Dohory Ropmay were the first Khasi graduates of Calcutta University having taken their degree in 1898. Earlier, Sib Charan Roy (the first Khasi matriculate of the Government High School, Shillong, passing in 1880), and his younger brother Chandranath Roy, sons of Oeebon Roy, had both gone to Calcutta to continue their studies. Both returned without degrees but exposed to a wider culture to take up business and journalism.

From Sheila came two brothers, the elder Soly Mohon Roy (later calling himself Dames Doy Mohan Nichols-Roy), and Roy Rouland Thomas. Both completed their studies at Calcutta. 3.3. M. NLchols-Roy followed this with preparing himself to be a Church Minister.

5. F.S. Doums, Christianity in North East India, p.275.
R. R. Thomas continued his studies to become a college and university teacher of repute. In recognition of his research his University conferred him the coveted Prém Chand Roy Chand award in 1920. Homiuell Lyngdoh was the first Khasi medical doctor passing his Licentiate in Medicine and Surgery from Calcutta University in 1903. If this is an indication to the efforts of the Khasis to take to new professions hitherto closed to them, the list may be completed with mentioning the names of B. M. Pugh the first Khasi graduate in agriculture and Flavis Dunn Lyngdoh the first Khasi lady law graduate. The selection of these persons has been intentional as reference will be made to some of them later in this work.

The liberal scholarships that was given to the Garos enabled some among that tribe to pursue studies at Calcutta, Serampore, Shillong, Gauhati, Goalpara and Dibrugarh. Some Garo boys even had the chance to attend school and college in the U.S.A. Many of these Garos returned to assist the missionaries. Of those Garos who would have some impact one was 3obang D. Plarak.

Though it must be admitted that the missionary control over education gave them a considerable instrument of influence, and that the primary objective of the missions was to make good preachers of their brighter converts, one cannot...
really accept the contention that "the hills people got only half-an-education." The school curriculum may have been heavily biased towards learning the Bible and catechism up to the middle school but the standard was by no means low for the high school course that laid down by Calcutta University. A study of the Census of India, 1891 really justify this argument but reference may be made to it to indicate the progress of education in these areas. Among the hill tribes in Assam those in the Khasi and Daintia Hills ranked first in education with 38 literate males to every 1000 of the population, the Mago Hills with 14 and the Garo Hills a close third with 11. More impressive was that the Khasi and Daintia Hills District had the highest percentage in the province of school going girls. The same improvement for by 1921 literacy in the Khasi and Daintia Hills was 7.64 per cent, of the population, second only to Kamrup District with 7.71 per cent. Female education remained the highest in this district at 2.52 per cent, with Kamrup District lagging behind at .57 per cent.

Revivalist Movement

The last decade of the nineteenth century and the first decade of the present century was a remarkable period for the Khasi-Daintias for it marked the beginning of the

12. S.Chaube, Hill Politics in North-East India, p.43.
development of Khasi literature and religious and social revivalism. The missionaries had prepared the way for this with their efforts to educate and provide a script for the tribe but practically nothing was done by them to study Khasi culture, religion and society. From the society, therefore, emerged writers and poets and "leaders who began what we may call religious and literary revival. Prominent among them was Jeebon Roy who used his proficiency in Sanskrit, Bengali, English and Khasi to bring out translations in Khasi of the **Ramayana, Chaitanya, Charitamrita, Buddhadev Charitra** and **Hitopadesa**.

To Rabon Singh's **Ka Miam Khein ki Khasi** which started the revival movement, Deebon Roy added **Ka Niam Jong ki Khasi** and other small tracts expounding that the Khasi religion is basically a **Monotheism**, a belief in one God, **U Blei Nongthau**. In 1896 he set up the Ri Khasi Press from which came out his publications and a monthly paper **L) Khasi Flynta**, the first copy of which appeared in August that year. His son Sib Charan Roy brought out translations in Khasi of the **Bhaqavad Gita**, **Chanakya Niti Darpan** and a monthly, **U Mongphira** started in 1903, followed when the paper was banned by Government by the bilingual **U Nongpynim**. These writings finally established the Khas'i alphabet of twenty two letters. Another Khasi who worked on the same lines was Radhon Singh Berry, originally a 15. 3.B.Bhattacharjee, 'The Messenger of Khasi Heritage,' *Khasi Heritage*, p.6.
Christian who reverted to the Khasi religion for which he wrote *Ka Niam Uei Blei*.

Of the Khasi Christians mention must be made of the works of Homiwell Lyngdoh and Soso Tham, both of whom were devout Christians yet interested in reviving the cultural past of the tribe. Without entering any theological discussion Homiwell Lyngdoh could dispassionately bring out works which even today are considered by all Khasis as books worth reading. In 1928 he brought out *Ka Pomblanfô Bad Thang Syiem Sohra*, which was a detailed study of the ceremonies at Smit (where the Syiem of Khyrim resides) and the cremation rites of the Cherra Syiems. *His Short Account of Cherrapunji* was written for the purpose of presentation to Lord Uellingdon when he visited Cherrapunji in 1933. This was followed in 1937 by *Ka Niam Khasi* and in the following year by his monumental work *Ki Syiem Khasi Bad Synteng*. Soso Tham, the Khasi poet laureate wrote so many poems that it would be difficult to mention them all. Suffice to say that his poems such as *U Lum Shillonq* and *Ki Sftqî Barim U Hynniew Trep* have made an indelible mark on the Khasis.

Side by side with this literary growth was one of religious and cultural revival. U Khasi Mynta championed the cause of traditional Khasi culture. Its editor never imitated the western culture that was beginning to change the life-style of the Khasis. He never for once discarded his turban, *dhoti* and shawl. Tearing that Khasi culture and tradition would suffer
loss if nothing was done to preserve their cultural identity, 3eebon Roy and others started the Seng Khasi, a socio-religious-cultural organization in November 1899. Its object was to foster "brotherhood among the Khasi who still retain their socio-cultural and religious heritage," to encourage sports, dances and festivals, the advancement of education and the preservation of Khasi religion. In 1900 was started at 3ouai the Daintia Union, among other, by Hamilton Gatphoh, Reverend Siang Blah, Samuel Shallam, sOK-C'Ialoo and Reverend L'.Gatphoh. The Union met periodically when needs arose for discussion and debate. It became the Daintia Durbar in 1931 when its purpose tended more to becoming a pressure group to get concessions for the people of the sub-division.

Disgruntled Presbyterians set up the Unitarian Church at 3ouai in 1886. Radhon Singh Berry and Hajom Kissor Singh had come into contact with the Brahmos (who had a significant following in Shillong) and American Unitarians and under these influences had set up this sect. Its teachings was a synthesis of Khasi and Christian beliefs. It was egalitarian and tolerant in outlook. With Berry's death in 1904 and Hajom's death in 1923 the Church was all but lost till the arrival of the English Unitarian Margaret Barr in 1936, to continue their work at Kharang village on the Shillong-3ouai road. This church continues to exist but with a very small following.
The foregoing account indicates that the revival came largely from within the Khasi-Oaintia society. Christian Khasis and Bton-Christian Khasis had together brought a literary revival but they parted company in matters relating to their faiths. Interestingly, both groups came together to discuss and participate in politics as will be seen towards the end of this chapter. These developments had one other effect and that was the leadership in the society shifted to a great extent to intellectuals. The Khasi and Daintia chiefs and village elders somehow would not move with the times. Only when their position was at stake did they come together to safeguard their interests.

The Garos did not go through such a process of change as experienced by the Khasi-Oaintias. They were not exposed to the same influences and the proportion of educated elite was comparatively smaller there. Neither had the Garos, bar for a few, moved outside their hills. Those who had, had done so with missionary assistance and that predominating influence blocked their wider outlook.

Whereas the missionaries were in a way one with the people of these hills the bureaucracy were not so. "Until shortly before Independence, Shillong bore the resemblance of a small, somewhat exclusive English country town. The upper hierarchy of the administration was British and there was not a dark face to be seen in the Station Club." The author of

19. N.Rustomji, Imperilled Frontiers, p.76. The Shillong Club was established in 1878.
these words gives a picture of the life of European in Shillong in the first half of the twentieth century where they lived virtually excluded from the people they administered. Apart from the bureaucrat there were tea planters from Assam and businessmen from Calcutta who escaped from the heat of the plains to the refreshing coolness of Shillong. At Shillong was also the head-quarters of the Indian Tea Association, "a powerful and prestigious organization" set up to oversee the interests of the tea industry in the Assam region. The Khasis and other Indian communities lived beyond "European Ward" which was the exclusive area of residence of the Europeans, though some of that community had set themselves up in farms and cottages that dotted Upper Shillong and Happy Valley. The Anglicised Indian, certain officers of the Indian Civil Service and native princes residing in Shillong could perhaps associate themselves with the British. The Europeans in other smaller towns must have lived in even greater isolation.

**Political Reforms**

Even as the First World War raged Britain's attitude to India stirred and its Government began to consider a declaration of post-war policy. The Secretary of State for India, Edwin Montagu made a declaration to the House of Commons on 20 August 1917 and which contained these words:

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21 The native princes and Zamindars who had 'palaces* in Shillong were those of Sidli, BTjni, Manipur, Tripura Mayurbhanj and Charkari.
Government of India are in complete accord, is that of the increasing association of Indians in every branch of the administration, and the gradual development of self-governing institutions, with a view to the progressive realization of responsible government in India as an integral part of the Empire.22

This was followed by his visit to India in the winter of 1917-1918 and with the Viceroy, Lord Chelmsford they produced a Report on Indian Constitutional Reforms. Important as the Report was for the constitutional development of India at large, it had a significant impact on the hill areas of northeast India. The authors recommended that Assam should become one of the full fledged Governor's provinces. Regarding the typically backward tracts in British India "where the people are primitive and there is as yet no material on which to found political institutions," the Report suggested that they be excluded from the jurisdiction of the reformed provincial Governments and administered by the executive head of the province. The Montford Report saw no difficulty in demarcating the areas as they were generally the tracts mentioned in the schedules and appendices to the Schedule Districts Act of 1874. This exclusion meant that a backward tract should be wholly excluded from the working of the constitution and that no legislation should be enacted and that no resolution concerning these areas should be moved in the Legislature. Legislation for such areas should be effected entirely by means.

of regulations made by the Governor-General-in-Council under section 71 of the Government of India Act, 1915.

The Montford Report was referred to the Assam Government. Its Chief Commissioner, Sir Archdale Earl had assumed in discussion on the announcement of 1917 that all hill districts, where the ordinary law was not in force, would be excluded from the scheme, as before. Two senior officers, William Reid and Barnes, were strongly in favour of the exclusion of the frontier tracts, Reid thought, however, that the Garo, Mikir and North Cachar Hills might be tagged on to reformed Assam but it was later observed that the financial proposals on which the reform scheme was to be based, did not make it clear whether excluded areas were to be financed by the Central authority or the Provincial Government. Archdale Earle's successor, Sir Nicholas Beatson Bell expressed similar opinions. The Southborough Committee reviewing these views then considered that the backward tracts should be excluded. The Government of India, however, recommended the complete exclusion of certain areas, while they considered that other areas which were more developed, being represented on the Legislative Council and administered on much the same lines as other parts of the province though qualifying this with giving the Governor-in-Council a greater discretion than elsewhere to

override his ministers as to how far legislation should apply to them. Beatson Bell and Reid agreed that this suggestion might meet the case of the Khasi and Daintia Hills. When it was decided to give Assam the same constitution as other provinces the Chief Commissioner adhered finally to the conclusion that there should be no half-way house and that the treatment proposed would be suitable for all the backward areas in the province. 26

The Government of India Act was passed by Parliament on 23 November 1919. The Act provided that the Governor-General-in-Council could declare any territory in British India to be a backward tract and could by notification with the sanction of His Majesty, previously signified by the Secretary of State, direct that the Act apply to backward tracts subject to such exceptions and modifications as prescribed in the notification. By the same or subsequent notification he could direct that any Act of the Indian Legislature shall not apply to the tracts in question of any part thereof. 27 On 3 January 1921 the Governor-General exercised his powers and declared that among others the British portions of the Khasi and Daintia Hills other than the Shillong Municipality and Cantonment, the Garo Hills and other hill districts in north-east India to be backward tracts. The laws of the Indian and Assam Legislatures would apply to these areas

26. Ibid., pp. 79-80.
27. Government of India Act 1919, Section 52A.
only as directed by the Governor-General-in-Council or the Governor-in-Council.

Electoral Politics

The Shillong-Karimganj constituency sent one representative to the Assam Legislative Council. O.3.M. Nichols-Roy was elected to the body in 1920 and which was to be the start of an uninterrupted political career till 1959. The only representative of the backward tracts in the Council was a single non-official nominated member. Three persons filled this seat in the period 1920-1936. Dangin Sangma a Laskar of the Garo Hills, D.C.Evans, the Welsh Mission head-master of the Shillong Government High School and Sardar Bahadur Dangbir Lama a retired Indian official resident in Shillong. They knew nothing of the detailed needs of the area they represented, their attendance was often irregular and they did not appear ever to have spoken. Safely able, therefore, as far as criticism in the Legislature was concerned to neglect the backward tracts, the Assam ministers naturally concentrated their attention on areas of greater political importance - the two valleys of Assam.

A new awareness emerged among the Khasi-Jaintias in the wake of the implementation of the Act of 1919. Hitherto there had been little interest in politics other

29. R.Reid Collection, MSS Eur E/278/4(c), Note on the Excluded Areas of Assam, pp.2-3.
than what transpired between the Government and the Khasi-
states...This awareness crystallised in the establishment of
the Khasi National Durbar in 1923, the precursor of which was
the Khasi-Saintia United Guild. Its members came from the
Khasi states and the British portions of the hills. Its first
President was Olim Singh, Syiem of Khyrim. M.Nichols-Roy
was its founder Secretary till 1927 when Soab Solomon took
charge. On the advise of the Viceroy, Lord Linlithgow,
that the Khasi chiefs should have their own federation, was
established the Federation of Khasi States in 1934. Its aims
and objects were to discuss and consider political questions,
to represent their legitimate desires, to take a share in the
control of matters of common concern and to put forward their
claims for a higher status and greater judicial power. These
were the landmarks of the growing political awareness among
chief and people.

Leadership: Old and New

Full scale political activity started in the Khasi
and Saintia Hills in 1928 following the announcements in the
British Parliament in November and December 1927 that an Indian
Statutory Commission and an Indian States Committee would
review and make recommendations for changes in the administration
of British India and the Indian States. Sir John Simon and the

30. B.Bhattacharjee, op.cit., p.26; P.N.Dutta, 'Role of the
Middle Class in Khasi-Saintia Hills,' B.Datta Ray (ed),
The Emergence and Role of Middle Class in North-Cast
India, p.140.
members of his Commission were boycotted elsewhere, they were welcomed when they arrived in Shillong on 2 January 1929 as it was learned by those who wished to discuss matters concerning the future of the hills that the Indian States Committee would not visit the district in the course of its enquiry. Attention was directed to make the most of the Simon Commission's visit.

The first cleavage between the Khasi chiefs and the middle class leaders appeared in the last month of 1928 on the issue of submitting a memorandum to the India Statutory Commission. Doab Solomon "and Hormu Roy Diengdoh and others in a memorandum submitted to the Commission complained against the system of issuing sanads which put the chiefs under the complete subjection to the Deputy Commissioner's authority*,. The sanads they said were arbitrarily imposed on the chiefs, it conditions enabled the Government to take control of waste land and which allowed the chiefs to have a share in the profits of minerals in the states which by customary law they were not entitled to. The memorandum demanded that the clauses added in the sanads after 1858 should be rescinded and that the ancient rights restored and that a central durbar should be established as a federation of all the states for which was also submitted a draft constitution for the durbar. Finally it suggested that the Khasi National Durbar "which is now in its

formative stage" may be legalized and made representative. Some very pertinent points were raised but the manner by which the memorandum had been submitted and its contents were questioned at a meeting in the Seng Khasi Hall on 22 December sponsored by the Khasi-Jaintia Young Men's Association. A powerful group led by Nollen Roy, Sib Charan Roy and Macdonald Kongor called Soab Solomon and Hormu Roy Diengdoh to support their statements. After a heated exchange of words the two defendants faced a resolution that their memorandum was unauthorized as it had not been submitted with the approval of the Khasi National Durbar. Another resolution turned down the demand for a central durbar for the states as "it is only the duly convened Durbars in which every adult male attending thereat is an eligible member, that have authority and whose decision or resolution is binding." The meeting also demanded that the Calcutta High Court should have jurisdiction over the district. It also expressed in clear terms its resentment of the existing judicial administration and the powers of the Deputy Commissioner. It was futile to argue, they said, that by leaving these courts outside the control of the High Court that people in both state and British areas could be more considerately dealt with, "for it was more of a rule than an exception that sentences passed upon convicting persons here exceeded in severity those passed by other Courts" having the

High Court jurisdiction in similar circumstances. It was shown at that meeting that during a comparatively short period sentences of death were passed upon several persons who were all acquitted by the Governor or a retrial was ordered. 35

As to the question of the inclusion or exclusion of the district into the reformed constitution two types of views were expressed. 3.3. N. Nichols-Roy resented the exclusion of the backward tracts from the reforms. Qtile thought that "if they are left with the Reforms in course of time a political consciousness will be aroused among those who are actually backward and they will take their place alongside then fellow citizens in the plains districts." Speaking for the Khasi and Saindia Hills Nichols-Roy argued that the district was in no way backward, education was higher there than many plains districts and the people of the hills had close ties in trade with those in the plains. He discounted arguments that the district was a deficit one as Souai sub-division gave an annual revenue of over one lakh rupees to an expenditure of Rs.50,000. Shillong division of the district did not have much expenditure other than what was spent for the capital being located at Shillong. He pointed out that Sylhet was a deficit district yet it was to feature in the reforms. Nichols-Roy

35. Ibid., pp.14-20. The demand that the Calcutta High Court have jurisdiction over the district was also expressed by the Khasi Sirdars and people of the Saindia Hills. Jl Nongpynim, January 1929, pp.22-25.
asked for two constituencies for the district, one for the Khasi Hills and another for the Saindia Hills, though it would be left to the people to choose between being fully within the reforms and be made a regulated district and being classed a backward tract and excluded from the reforms and administered by a Political Officer. Two other memorials submitted by L.Gatphoh and S.G.Nalle and others had earlier pressed for a consideration to remove the Khasi and Daintia Hills from the backward tracts category.\footnote{36. Memorandum of the Assam Government. Indian Statutory Commission, Vol.XIV, pp.122-126.}

Other Khasi-Saindia had different views. Sirdars of the Khasi Hills made a representation to the Assam Governor on 31 December 1928 expressing that the memorandums did not represent their wishes and that they were the real representatives of the British portions of the district. The Sirdars preferred to be called backward and primitive than lose their rights. They feared the exploitation of their lands and therefore wished for a continuation of the existing safeguards against exploitation. They stated that if the only alternative for the inclusion of the British villages within the operation of the reforms was the surrender of these rights they would prefer complete exclusion to complete inclusion. But, they noted, if there was a way to retain these rights along with getting representation in the Council "we shall be\footnote{37. Ibid., pp.58-60; U Nongpynim. 3auary 1929, p.22."}
pleased to have them both." The Sainthias expressed similar sentiments.

Constitutional Question: The Great Debate

All officials thought that the hill areas in north-east India should be excluded from the proposed constitutional changes. One, such an administrator, an anthropologist in his own right was John H. Hutton, the Deputy Commissioner of the Naga Hills, who had an intimate knowledge of the region. In a note to the Assam Government, which was subsequently placed for the Simon Commission's consideration, he pointed out that on grounds of race, history, culture, language, politics, finance and education the hill districts of Assam should receive consideration for their exclusion. He showed that the interests of the hill districts would not be served by having them included in the reforms but that they would suffer very serious detriment by being tied up to the politically more advanced plains districts, while the latter were likely to suffer in the future if joined with people of an irreconcilable culture in an unnatural union which would ultimately only entail discomfort for both parties. He pointed out in caution: 'History is full of instances of the lamentable results of attempting to combine alien populations into political units.'

39. Ibid., pp. 24-25.
The danger can be avoided here at the outset." A note by N.E. Parry, C?EClZI3 » Lushai Hills, corroborated and supplemented Hutton's arguments. To take just a sample of his note: "it is surely better to let the people develop on their own lines instead of handing them over to a council on which they have no voice; let them slowly and under guidance work out their own salvation."

The Assam Government after a careful consideration on the future of the backward tracts was convinced that the areas should be excluded from the province and administered by the Governor-in-Council as agent of the Governor-General-in-Council and at the cost of the central revenues. To the general exclusion of the backward tracts an exception was to be made in the case of Shillong which was to continue to have representation in the Legislative Council. Government could not agree to the Khasi and Sainitia demands that special privileges be given to them for it would not be reasonable to allow the district to elect representatives to the Council to legislate for the rest of the country, while their own district was protected against legislation of the Council. If the district was to be included within the province it should


41. Ibid., pp.118-122.
be placed on exactly the same footing as the plains districts of the province. Though the Khasi and Jaintia Hills were in many ways more advanced than the people of other hill districts the considerations which had determined the Government's decision on the general question of exclusion also applied to them. 'It did admit that it might appear strange for the capital of the province to be isolated from the rest of the province and be situated in an area which would not be included in the province, but the Government believed that there would be practically no serious inconveniences.

The Governor of Assam, Sir Egbert Laurie Lucas Hammond had no doubt that the educated Khasis and Jaintias resented being classed as backward. He had made a tour of the Daintia Hills in November 1928 when the fear came to him that the existing system by which, as far as possible, the appointments in the hills were kept for the hillmen would not continue. When he explained this to a deputation of Daintias who had called on him they all assured him that they "would stand on their own legs," and they felt sure that they were as good as, and would get as many appointments as, the Bengalis, Sylhetis or the Assamese. The position as he saw it was that the educated people "with a happy self-confidence which is not justified by facts, are willing to run the risk of an entire change in the form of administration of the district for the benefits which they believe would accrue to them." The common, 42. Ibid., pp.101-103.
uneducated man, on the other hand was equally keen that the existing system should continue. The Governor's remarks to what he saw and what he wanted for the district was that, if it was impossible to have a form of administration half way between the complete severance proposed for the backward tracts or the complete inclusion under the reformed constitution, he would prefer the former alternative.\footnote{Ibid., pp.563-566.}

The Indian Statutory Commission in its Report to Parliament took up the question of the backward tracts. It found that certain backward tracts were so advanced that the special treatment of the areas need not be continued. Specific mention was made to the Khasi and Daintia Hills. Apart from these more advanced areas the Report had no doubt that there were other areas which should be excluded and that special provisions be made for their administration. The Commission suggested that they be known in future not as backward tracts but as excluded areas. However, it did not agree that these areas should be placed entirely outside the Governor's province for that would, involve unnecessary expense and would be attended by disadvantages. Though exclusion from the sphere of the provincial executive involved centralization - for the Governor-General-in-Council was the only alternative authority to which these areas could be entrusted - the Central Government, the Report added, could use the agency of the Governors for their administration, Where backward tracts were more
developed, though still unfit to take their full share in the constitutional advance different arrangements might have to be made.

While Parliament was debating on the Commission's Report there were debates within the Assam Government on what areas should be excluded and what areas should not. There was unanimity in proposing the exclusion of the Naga, Lushai, Worth Cachar and the Mikir Hills and the frontier tracts but a difference between the Governor and his Finance Minister, A.n.Botham on the one side and his other ministers Syed fluhammad Saadullah, Abdul Hamid and Kanak Lai Barua on the other. The two former desired to exclude the Khasi-Oaintia and the Garo Hills entirely from the scope of the reforms while the three latter wished to include these two districts. Neither opinion favoured the device of partial exclusion. 'Compromise over the issue was arrived at to include the two districts and the Mikir Hills provided the Governor were given certain powers of interference and restraint. It will be thus noticed that this proposal differed from those previously made.

Such safeguards as the Governor of Assam wanted were discussed in the Proposals for Indian Constitutional Reform, presented to Parliament in March 1933. Herein was the first

45. Linlithgow Collection, MSS Eur F 125/33 No.30, Reid to Linlfcthgou, 1 Nay 1940.
reference to areas to be categorised as partially excluded areas as distinct from excluded areas, the latter to be under the executive control of the Governor, the former subject to ministerial control but with an overriding power in the Governor. His Majesty was to have the power to direct by Order in Council that any area within a province should be an excluded area or a partially excluded area. No act of the proposed Federal Legislature or the Provincial Legislature should apply to such areas unless the Governor in his discretion so directed, and in giving such a direction the Governor would be empowered to direct that the act, in its application to these areas, or any part of the areas should have effect subject to such exceptions or modifications as he might think fit. The Governor was also empowered to make regulations for the two types of areas but such regulations were only to have effect with the Governor-General's assent, and such regulations were to have the same effect as an act of the Legislature.

These areas were inserted in the Sixth Schedule of the Bill. The Joint Committee on Indian Constitutional Reforms then expressed its approval of the principle of excluded areas as both necessary and reasonable. It thought, however, that a distinction might be drawn between excluded and partially excluded areas and that the application of acts to, or the framing of regulations for partially excluded areas was an executive act which might appropriately be performed by the

47. Proposals for Indian Constitutional Reforms, pp.55-56,66.
Governor on the advice of his ministers, the decisions taken in each case being, subject to the Governor's special responsibility for partially excluded areas, that is, being subject to his right to differ from the proposals of his ministers as he might think fit.48

While the passage of the Bill was delayed in order to allow for further considerations with the authorities in India, as late as June 1935 the Secretary of State addressed the Government of India to re-examine the whole matter on the subject of the excluded areas. The outcome of this, so far as the Garo Hills were concerned, was a letter from the Deputy Commissioner, U.Shaw, "which contained twenty two excellent reasons" against the inclusion or even partial exclusion of the Garo Hills except as regards three plains mauzas which contained few Garos. The Commissioner of the Division supported this opinion and referred to the likelihood that the Garos would be exploited by the Zamindars if the latter felt that "they could rely upon indifference or, possibly sympathy on the part of the administration."49 Before these points could be considered Parliament passed the Government of India Act, 1935 on, 2 August 1935 which was the sum total of the various discussions that had given thought to India's constitutional change.

49. Linlithgow Collection, MSS Eur F 125/33 No.30, Reid to Linlithgow 1 May 1940.
Under section 91 (1) of the Act an Order in Council was passed on 3 March 1936 whereby the British portions of the Khasi and Daintia Hills other than the Shillong Municipality and Cantonment, the Garo Hills, the Mikir Hills and the North Cachar Hills were made partially excluded areas. The remaining hill areas in north-east India became partially excluded areas. While there was no question to the Khasi and Jaintia Hills coming in this category doubt were raised of tagging the Garo and Mikir Hills as partially excluded areas. As late as October 1935 the Assam Government was of the opinion that "it is now too late to attempt to upset the whole balance of the scheme for the Reformed Provincial Legislature by transferring the Garo Hills and the Mikir Hills from the partially excluded list to the totally excluded list." The Government of India agreed with the local Government that the individual judgement of the Governor should be ample protection, "and that the creation of excluded enclaves within the heart of the province of Assam ... would be likely to create administrative embarrassments." They further made the case of the Garo Hills clearer by saying that the district's geographical position was the sole factor which distinguished it from other areas recommended for exclusion.

51. R.Reid Collection, MSS Eur E 278/4, A Note on the Future of the Present Excluded and Partially Excluded and Tribal Areas of Assam; Linlithgow Collection, MSS Eur F 125/33, No.30, Reid to Linlithgow, 1 May 1940.
As for the advantages of partial exclusion little need be said as representation in the Assam Legislative Assembly was an almost worthless privilege. The two Garo representatives, Dobang D. Marak and Benjamin C. H. Momin "enjoyed no authority in the house and commanded no respect" for reasons which need not be elaborated. The chief impression that Sir Robert Reid, Governor of Assam got from a fairly long, tour of the Garo Hills in January - February 1940 was astonishment that this district had been only partially excluded. He personally thought the district should have been wholly excluded as the Garos were certainly more backward than the Lushais. Writing in 1946, after he had retired as Governor, Reid said it was possible to argue in proof of their advancement that one of their representative had attained the rank of Parliamentary Secretary, but it was yet to be proved that the Garos had derived any outstanding benefit from being included, or that they had developed any political sense. For instance he noted, they could not claim that the time had come when the franchise should be extended beyond the individuals who exercised that privilege.

53. Linlithgow Collection, MSS Eur F 125/33 No.9, Reid to Linlithgow, 5 February 1940.
54. R. Reid Collection, NSS Eur E 278/19. As Sam and the North East Frontier of India (Typescript 1946), p.22; MSS Eur E 278/4, Note on the Excluded Areas of Assam, p.19. Franchise by the Act of 1935 was confined to the Nokmas of whom there were 685 in the Garo Hills North Constituency and 804 in the Garo Hills South Constituency. Of the total Garo population of 223, 569 in 1941, a great deal less than 1 per cent, enjoyed the vote.
Saintia Hills representative was an able man but a lone voice, who knew he could do little in that capacity for his people. The two Khasi representatives, Mavis Dunn Lyngdoh and 3.3.M. Nichols-Roy could compete on better terms for both eventually became ministers, the former being the first women in India to hold a post as cabinet minister.

One great difficulty in the way of the Governor's proper discharge of special responsibility to a partially excluded area was that he had really no regular and trustworthy means of ascertaining the needs of these areas. Their representatives were usually completely "detribalised" and inclined to look down upon and show scant sympathy towards their community. They would also hesitate to attempt to approach the Governor directly, even if they felt they had a real grievance to air, as they were naturally closely connected with, and often deeply beholden to the Ministry. No member of the Legislative Assembly from a partially excluded area, Reid recalled, ever approached him with a view of obtaining some benefit for their constituency.

Reid found no difficulty over the administration of the excluded areas. He was quite clear that they had benefited greatly from not being placed under the control of the ministry.

56. Shillong Centenary Celebration, p.73.
57. R. Reid, Collection, MSS Eur E 278/19, Assam and the North East Frontier of India (Typescript 1946), p.16.
and the legislature. The case of the partially excluded areas was not so simple. He was always careful to take the line drawn in the Joint Committee on Indian Constitutional Reforms that the primary responsibility of administration lay with the ministers, but tried to ensure that he was always kept aware of what was going on so as to be able to fulfil the special responsibility he was empowered. He tells of only one minister giving him trouble. That minister took the view that the Governor should not interfere with the ministry in any matter whatsoever, even where a special "responsibility was concerned, and he strongly resented anything which he considered remotely to savour of curtailing ministerial power. Other ministers never raised an objection to partially excluded cases being put to him as a matter of routine and Reid seldom had occasion to query a ministerial order.

The Governor's attention was also drawn towards clarifying the position of the Khasi chiefs and strengthening their position by tactful treatment. Reid wrote to the Viceroy, Lord Linlithgow that though the Calcutta High Court had ruled in 1884 that the Khasi chiefs were, ruling chiefs, recognized as such by Government, by some curious mischarge this ruling was lost sight of and in the absence of the guidance the chief were, till the discovery of the ruling in

59. R. Reid Collection, MSS Eur E 278/19, Assam and the North East Frontier of India (Typescript 1946), p.15.
1933, at various times treated with degrees of respect ranging from that due to a ruling chief to that which a village headman might expect. The position of the Deputy Commissioner of the Khasi and Oaintia Hills as Political Officer of the Khasi states was similarly obscured and he had tended to become immersed in his preoccupations as Deputy Commissioner of a British district, rather to the neglect of the duties of an officer who ought to be the trusted adviser of the chiefs. The latter in turn had to seek counsel from Bengali "hangers-on" of a rather "undesirable" type. A further and obvious complication was that the Deputy Commissioner was also under the control of the ministry.60

Reid saw no justification for a proposal to separate the posts of Political Officer and the Deputy Commissioner as the financial implications alone would have made it impossible to implement. He felt that at least something could be done by way of emphasising more decidedly the chief's rights and keeping clearly in mind the distinction between the Khasi states and British India as well as by selecting if it could be feasible, for the post of the officer a man who would regain the lost confidence of the chiefs.61

Colonialism: The Last Phase

British policy towards the hill tribes inhabiting north-east India became all the more clearer in their attempt

60. Linlithgow Collection, MSS Eur F 125/31, No.51, Reid to Linlithgow, 11 November 1933.
61. Ibid.
to carve out a Crown Colony covering the hill areas in north-east India and north-west Burma. Sir Robert Reid, perhaps the most vocal of Assam's Governors said of the tribes he administered: "They are not Indians in any sense of the word, neither in origin, nor in language, nor in appearance, nor in habits, nor in outlook and it is by historical accident that they have been tacked on to an Indian Province." On both sides of the so called watershed and frontier were to be found Kukis, Lakhers, Chins, Nagas, Khamtis and Kachins, having common customs, common languages and living under similar social conditions. These tribes common to both frontiers were divided between two administrations when the logical answer was to unite them into one administration. Reginald Coupland echoed Reid's views when he wrote "The inhabitants of both are alike in race and culture. They are not Indians or Burmans but of Mongol stock. In no sense do they belong to the Indian or Burman 'nation'." Convinced that these people were common in their difference from the more advanced neighbours plains, the British administrators saw that the best line for their development would be to bring them together into a separate administration.


The second suggestion that N.E. Parry put forward to Government for the future of the hill tribes was for a North-Eastern Frontier Province to comprise of as many of the backward tracts in Assam and Burma as would be conveniently included in it. Suitable for inclusion into such a province were the Garo Hills, Khasi and Daintia Hills, Wikir Hills, Lushai Hills, North Cachar Hills, Naga Hills, Sadiya and Balipara Frontier Tracts, Chittagong Frontier Tracts, Pokoku and other hill or backward tracts in Burma. Kohima could be a suitable headquarter as it was connected with both Assam and Burma. No better exposition that the hill districts on the India-Burma frontier should be united under one administration can be found than that contained in Hutton's plan. He suggested that sixteen districts in India-Burma be combined into an Agency or Commission. To Parry's plan Hutton added the Arakan Hill Tract, the Chin Hills, parts of the Upper Chindwin district the Hukong Valley and the Shan state of Thangdut of Burma, and Flanipur, Tripura and Lakhimpur Frontier Tract. Without giving reasons he wanted the Garo Hills, the Balipara Frontier Tract and Sadiya Frontier Tract should continue to remain under Assam. Such a province could support a cadre of its own without excessive difficulty for it would be extremely

65. R. Reid, 'nSS EUR E 278/19, Assam and the North East Frontier of India (Typescript 1946), pp.9-12. Hutton had made this plan in 1930. Collection
easy to recruit from Europe, which was not likely to be the case with any province in which service under a reformed local government was normal. The tribes would gain enormously by consolidated treatment and sentiment. It would provide an opportunity for political advance which could be transferred into a tribal consciousness covering a much wider area.

The angle of approach to this question had however to be changed as a result of the constitutional developments between 1930 and 1935. fill 1930 the two plans were to place these tribal areas under an Indian administration. A new phase developed after 1935 which aimed at divorcing the areas from India and Burma and to establish a Crown Colony directly administered under Britain. The most out-spoken champion for this was Robert Reid. Realizing that the constitutional safeguards did not still give the tribals the best chances of development, Reid supported Hutton's idea of a province or agency "put perhaps under some appropriate department ay Whitehall." The form of polity he visualised for the agency was to be on self-governing lines. Finance would be a problem as all the tribal areas were deficit areas except the Saintia Hills. Given their severance from India and the ending of the existing system whereby they derived such finance as they got from a ministry which had no responsibility for, and, therefore, no interest in their welfare, the only resort was finance from

66. Ibid.
Imperial sources. Precedent for this could be found in the Crown Colonies of Basutoland and Swaziland in South Africa. Reid also believed that a strong case could be put for contributions both from the Government of India and from the local Governments whose territories the agency would abound, as a matter of frontier insurance. As to how such a province should be manned he suggested that the Burma Frontier Service could form the nucleus for the cadre under a Chief Commissioner. Reid was convinced that the political advance in India would perhaps not give sufficient protection to the hill areas. Consequently he, as other before him urged that the British Government had a responsibility for the future welfare of "a set of very loyal, primitive people who are habituated to look to us for protection." He continued:

It is up to us to see that they are given under our protection a period of respite within which they will develop on their own lines and without outside influence, but if the present opportunity to give them that chance is let slip, the danger isthat it will never occur.68

The Secretary of State for India, L.S. Amery apparently favoured Reid's proposals. When he was approached by Reginald Coupland for ideas on the backward tracts to be used for his third and final volume on the constitutional problem in India, Amery gave the Professor a copy of Reid's note saying I do this on a confidential basis on the

67. Ibid., pp.19-20.
understanding that they will not be quoted and do not represent the official view of the Government concerned of this Office. It would, however, do no harm I think if the broad idea suggested by Reid were publicly ventilated if you feel it is attractive. 69

Coupland did just this, suggesting the amalgamation of the India and Burma tribal areas and (Separate in some way from the Governments of India and Burma. 70

Impressed with Reid's views Amery borrowed them to make some special arrangements for other backward areas in India at large. He suggested to the Viceroy, Lord Uavell that some extra-constitutional arrangements for the protection of other backward tribes should be agreed and included in a treaty between the 'new India' and the British Government, that except for the Assam-Burma tracts, for which other arrangements might he made, supervision over relations with the backward tribes might be vested in a British High Commissioner. He also thought that it just might be possible that the reconstituted League of Nations might be induced to undertake certain responsibilities as regard these backward areas on the lines of the Mandates Commission.

Reid's successor as Governor of Assam, Andrew Clou...
he did prepare in October 1945 a Memorandum on the Future of Government of the Assam Tribal People. Put briefly his conclusions were that the transfer of responsibility to an external authority should be ruled out. Possible alternatives were a choice between linking the hills with the rest of Assam but subject to some separate provisions in respect of both legislature and executive functions, and a separate hill province sharing some of the administrative machinery including a common Governor and capital with Assam. Clou favoured the former alternative as it was not generally realized that the tribals were the more numerous and that in the long run there was no future for the Assam hill tribes in separation from the plains. Unil's recognizing the great contribution of anthropologists towards the hill people, he was not in sympathy with their outlook which to him appeared essentially negative, one of preservation and exclusion. Had these advocates of preservation encouraged methods of progress suited to tribal needs, Clou said, if they had developed the tribal system of government the case would have been different. There had been, Clou said in difference to Reidj no attempt, to bring the tribes up to a level of to equip them to meet the changing world.

Accounts "generally somewhat imaginative" continued to circulate in early 1945 that Government was holding on to a plan to create the Croyun Colony. In one such report, emanating from Uavell. 23 October 1945. 73. Ibid.
from Calcutta, Uavell uas credited uith taking home a plan for a province to be solely ruled by Britain. 74

It also appears that the Indian Cental Assembly discussed these plans and that an official answered that there uas no truth in certain allegations that schèmes were under consideration for a Crown Colony and that no such scheme uas being considered prior to the convening of the Constituent Assembly. 75

That there is little toQshou that the hill tribes in north-east India had any interest in these schemes does not indicate that they were not auare of uhat uas transpiring between the British. The Garos vieued the Erown Colony plans uith dismay, the Nagas asked to remain under the British Crown uith their own legislature while prominent men in Shil'long opposed emphatically their inclusion in either Pakistan or India. 76 They were taking advantage of British obligations towards them to shou their distinctness from India. Their attention uas drawn to the reality of the time for India's Constituent Assembly had been convened in 1946 and eyes uere turned to Delhi more than London's Utopian plan.

On 6 Clay 1946, the Secretary of State for India,

Colville, 19 April 1945.
76. N.Mansergh (ed.), op.cit.
Pethick Laurence recorded in a minute:

"At the present stage of proceedings agreement has been reached by the Secretary of State and the Viceroy of the impracticability of transferring responsibility for the Backward Tracts from the provinces to any outside authority whether that should be a British High Commissioner or a United Nation's Mandate."

This minute sealed the fate of not only the Crown Colony for north-east India but the special arrangements that were on the anvil for other backward areas. The scheme failed due to the peculiar political and constitutional situation which had developed by then. Apart from being ill timed the motives underlying it would have been grossly suspected by the new Indian leadership.

77. L/P&3/7/6787, Minute on Backward Tracts, 6 May 1946.