CHAPTER I

PROLOGUE

The state of Meghalaya created on 21\textsuperscript{st} January 1972 was the outcome of a struggle by the indigenous people of Khasi, Jaintia and Garo hills. Prior to this, the Khasi-Jaintia Hills District and the Garo Hills District formed part of the state of Assam. At the time of India's Independence, the Khasis, Jaintias and Garos visualized a separate hill state for the hill districts as their geographical, political, social, linguistic and cultural systems were different from the people of the plains. However, it remained a vision only at the time, as the Government of India retained them as part and parcel of the state of Assam. Though they wanted a separate hill state, the Khasis, Jaintias and Garos did not press their demand even at the time when the North East Frontier Agency (now called Arunachal Pradesh) was created and its administrative set-up was separated from Assam. The appointment of the States Reorganisation Commission in 1953 raised the hopes and aspirations of the people in these hills. When the Commission visited Shillong in 1954, the leaders of the hill districts placed before it their demand for the creation of a separate hill state on the eastern frontier. Nevertheless, the Commission did not favour the move for bifurcation of the state of Assam within a decade of India's Independence.\textsuperscript{1} Frustrated and disappointed, the educated Khasis, Jaintias and Garos kindled the flame of separate statehood in the hearts of the people and accordingly, the Eastern India Tribal Union was formed to voice aspirations of the tribal people. Interestingly, though named Tribal Union, a few non-tribals who shared the same vision became members of the Union. But again, people's hopes were dampened when the Eastern India Tribal Union allied and joined the Chaliha Congress Government in 1957.

Convinced by Pandit G B Pant, Capt. W A Sangma, one of the front leaders of the Union, joined the Assam Cabinet as Minister of the Tribal Areas Department, a portfolio and department created consequence to the alliance of Eastern India Tribal Union with the Congress.2

Within a short period of being in the ministry, Capt. Sangma was conscious that his colleagues were indifferent to the newly created department which he headed. Situation worsened in 1960 when the Assam Government took steps to promulgate the use of Assamese language as the sole official language of the state, despite stiff opposition from the hill districts. This caused apprehension among the hillmen, who feared that this might be the first step towards imposition of Assamese culture on the hill tribes within the state. In protest against the language policy of the State Government, Capt. Sangma and his associates resigned from the ministry. A general meeting of the hill leaders was held in 1960 to urge upon the Government of Assam to drop the proposed Language Bill in the interest of the non-Assamese people. At the meeting, the All Party Hill Leaders Conference (APHLC) was formed as a united front to fight for separate statehood.3 With the formation of APHLC the struggle for statehood by the hill tribes gained momentum. Since then, the Government of India appointed a series of commissions which put up proposals, such as the Scottish Pattern of Administration in 1960, the Nehru Plan in 1964 and the Federal Structure Plan in 1967, to the hill leaders. But the leaders would accept nothing short of statehood. Realizing the strong determination of the people, the Government of India in May 1968 announced the Autonomous State Plan, a Plan intended to grant autonomous status to the hill districts of Assam. Having studied the Plan minutely and after ascertaining the views of the people, the APHLC accepted this Autonomous State Plan on a 'trial basis' despite opposition from the Assam

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2 R S Lyngdoh. op cit., p 324-325.
3 Ibid., p 339-340.
Legislative Assembly, which claimed that such a Plan would adversely affect the security and integrity of Assam.4

The acceptance of the Autonomous State Plan led to the introduction of the Assam Reorganization (Meghalaya) Bill during the Winter Session of the Parliament in 1969. The Bill was passed by both Houses of the Parliament on 24th December 1969 and the same became the Assam Reorganization (Meghalaya) Act on 29th December 1969, the day it was given assent by the President of India.5 Thus this Act led to the creation of the Autonomous State of Meghalaya. The All Party Hill Leaders Conference welcomed the Act and in its 21st session held at Shillong from 25th to 27th January 1970, resolved to work for the all-round development of the state and its people. The Autonomous State of Meghalaya comprising the two hill districts of the United Khasi-Jaintia Hills District and the Garo Hills District, was inaugurated by the then Prime Minister, Mrs. Indira Gandhi, on the 2nd April 1970 at the Garrison Ground, Shillong.6 The APHLC categorically asserted that the Autonomous State status was not their ultimate goal and would endeavour to urge upon the Government of India to grant the hill districts a full-fledged statehood. Having assured the Government of India their cooperation, the APHLC had to wait for an opportunity to stake its claim to separate statehood. Opportunity came in 1970 when Manipur and Tripura were raised to the status of full-fledged states by the Government of India. The leaders of the APHLC implored upon Mrs. Gandhi the need to make Meghalaya a full-fledged state. Concurring with them, Mrs. Gandhi announced on the floor of the Lok Sabha on 10th November 1970, that, the Government of India had decided to accept in principle Meghalaya’s demand for statehood and hoped that this decision would be welcomed by the Members of the House. The same announcement was also made by K. C Pant, then Minister of State for Home Affairs, on the same day in the Rajya Sabha. These announcements were welcomed jubilantly by the Khasis, Jaintias and Garos. Even the Government of Assam, which had initially opposed the creation of an Autonomous state and the elevation of Meghalaya to

5 R S Lyngdoh. op cit., p 426.
6 Ibid., p 427.
full-fledged statehood, accepted the decision. Eventually, the Government of India enacted the North Eastern Areas (Reorganisation) Act, 1971 in December 1971 which conferred upon Meghalaya the status of a full-fledged state, comprising the United Khasi-Jaintia Hills District and the Garo Hills District. At last, on 21st January 1972, then Prime Minister, Mrs Indira Gandhi, inaugurated the state of Meghalaya at a befitting function at Polo Ground, Shillong.

This newly created state of Meghalaya, lying between 25°5’N and 26°10’N Latitudes and 89°47’E and 92°47’W Longitudes, covers an area of 22,489 sq.km. According to the Census of 1991, the state has a population of about 17.75 lakhs with an average density of 79 persons per square kilometer. The state is bounded by Bangladesh on the South and West, by the Brahmaputra valley of Assam on the North and by North Cachar and Mikir Hills on the East. With the exception of the narrow belt in the north and the west, the whole of Meghalaya is a plateau known as Meghalaya Plateau. This plateau, which ranges from 150m to 1961m above sea level, is an irregular topography, in the north and the west but steep and regular in the south. This region comprises of undulating hills, crystal rivers with cascading waterfalls and thick virgin forests with sacred groves. The northern and western lowlands include the fertile low lying areas that slopes towards the Brahmaputra plains. Meghalaya is directly influenced by the South West Monsoon that blows from the Bay of Bengal. The state is subjected to the vagaries of the Monsoon and the climate itself varies with altitude. The climate of Khasi-Jaintia Hills is uniquely pleasant, neither too warm in summer nor too cold in winter. However, the plains in the Garo Hills experience a warm and humid climate except in winter. The Monsoon season begins from May onwards till September. The southern region is the rainiest area on earth, with Mawsynram experiencing the heaviest rainfall on an average of 959 mm or 377 inches. Winter sets in mid-November and lasts till February. The rest of the year is almost dry but quite pleasant, particularly during Spring and Autumn. The state seldom remains free of clouds - the very reason the name 'Meghalayo' which means the Abode of Clouds is given by S P Chatterjee, a geographer of the Calcutta University.
The Khasis, Jaintias and (iaros for countless generations have retained their ancestral matrilineal system. The survival of this original system till today, makes one thinks, that, the people have successfully resisted social changes in keeping with their time honoured customs, and institutions. The daughters of the family are generally the heireesses of ancestral and family inheritance with the youngest daughter getting the lion's share. Among the Garos. the parents have the option to select any one of the daughters as the heiress or Sokna. * This system is a living and active institution influencing greatly the social and political life of the people. The Khasi and Jaintia societies comprise of the clans called Kurs which are actually the outgrowth of many families descending from a common ancestress Ka law bei and her husband L~ Thawlang.* The Kur is the first social and political entity of the Khasis and Jaintias. When a Kur settles in one particular place, a village is formed. Here the eldest male member of the Kur exercises influence in the village. A village grows and develops when other Kurs came to settle or when a male member brings his wife to his village and set up home there. It. however, should be noted that the husband has no right to participate in his wife's Kur as he himself belongs to another Kur. Marriage within the same Kur is taboo. Among non-christians, marriage is performed in the house of the bride's mother where the groom accompanied by his male relatives and friends, is handed over to the bride's maternal uncle by the Ksiang. that is. the one representing the groom's side. But among the Christians, marriage is performed in accordance with the Christian Marriage Act. Divorce is recognized among the Khasis and Jaintias. Usualh. divorce is resorted to. when one partner commits adultery or in case of incompatibility, or infertility.

With regard to the Garos, the society comprises of three major clans called 'Katchis'. These are Marak, Sangma and Momin.† Besides these three Katchis. there are sub-clans as well. These sub-clans actually branched off from the original clan and in course of time developed into independent clans. Again, each Katchi is subdivided into a number of lineages called Machongs.

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* M S Sangma. History MJ Culture of the Chiros. p 214
* H Barch. His ton and Culture of the Khosi People, p 322
† S Barkataki. Tribes of i'um p 23.
The Machongs are the basic units of the Garo social structure. From among the dominant Machong of a village, a male member is selected to be the headman of the village, and is titled the Nokma. In the Garo language, 'nok' means 'house' and 'ma' means 'mother'. The term 'ma' also means 'big'. Though the headman is a male, he is called Nokma because the Garos attach great importance to the mother or the woman. Like the Khasis and the Jaintias, the Garos too cannot marry within the same clan. A marriage is usually performed after the parents have given their consent. In most cases, love marriage is the order of the day. The Garos recognize two types of marriages - Nokna marriage and the Agnate marriage. In a Nokna marriage, the husband of the Nokna invariably belongs to the Machong of her father and often, her father's nephew is the chosen one. This means that usually, the marriage of the Nokna, who is the heiress to the family inheritance is an arranged one on her mother's side, her mother's machong is to ensure the continuity of lineage while on her father's side, his machong is responsible for providing a husband to the heiress. After the marriage is performed, the two machongs are then called Akim. In the Agnate marriage, the other elder sisters can marry into any machong, except her own. In most cases after marriage, the husband stays in the house of his wife alongwith his mother-in-law and he then becomes the "Nokrom". that is, the representative of his father-in-law. Like the Khasis, divorce is allowed among the Garos and is easily obtainable when there is mutual consent. In such cases, the parties merely have to pay a penalty to the community. However, if divorce is sought on grounds of adultery and infertility, mutual consent is hardly required. No doubt, among the Christians. Garo marriages are performed according to the Christian norms.

In all the three communities, death of a person is mourned by the entire clan and the community. Among the non-christians, the dead body is cremated alongwith the performance of elaborate rituals and ceremonies, whilst among the Christians, the dead body is interred in the presence of relatives and friends.

Social life of the Khasis. Jaintias and Garos is pureh corporate, instances of which can be found today in the rural areas. Construction of houses, harvesting of paddy, construction of wells and regulation of water supply, construction of roads and bridges.
demarcation of land, these and other works of utility are performed jointly by the inhabitants. The Khasis, Jaintias and Garos are culturally rich. Religious and cultural festivals are celebrated with pomp and grandeur even till today. The Khasis celebrate Shad Suk Mynsiem and Nongkrem Dance. Shad Suk Mynsiem also known as Shad Weiking symbolizes love, peace and friendship and is held at the Weiking Ground in Shillong under the auspices of the Seng Khasi. This festival is observed before the sowing season in March or April annually. A notable feature of this dance is that, only virgin girls can participate while for men, both married or unmarried can. The other festival, the Nongkrem Dance known as Pomblang Nongkrem, is associated with the ritual of goat sacrifice. This festival is observed after the harvesting season and is held at Nongkrem, thereby, the term Shad Nongkrem or Nongkrem Dance. Compared with Shad Weiking. Shad Nongkrem comprises of a number of rites and rituals. Prayers are offered to Ka Pah Syntiew, the founder of the royal dynasty}. Here too, only virgin girls can join in the dance along with the young men and boys. During the dance, one can easily identify the girls of the royal family by the umbrellas held over their heads. Recently, the khasis have started to commemorate the myth of Sohpetbneng, a mythology that u Sohpetbneng was the golden ladder that connects Heaven and Earth.

Among the Jaintias, Behdienkhlam is celebrated during the rainy season in the month of July. The term Behdienkhlam literally means driving away the evil spirit, that is, plague. Prior to the dance on the last day, the Dollois, Basans, Lyngdohs and elders have to perform a number of rituals and sacrifices. It is the descendants of the four legendary sisters called Sookpoh who perform the main rituals. Only menfolk participate in the dance. However, the womenfolk, in their respective homes offered sacrificial food to the spirits of their ancestors with prayers for blessings and prosperity. Among the Garos, the Wangala Dance or the Hundred Drums festival is observed after the harvesting season in the month of November. This dance signifies the gratitude of the people to the god of fertility called Misi-A-Gilpa-Saljong-Galapa. Everybody young and old, male and

10 H tt Sten. op cit. p 25
11 Ibid. p "U. P R T Gurdon. The Khasis. p 154
12 ibid. op cit. p34-3*
female, join in the festivities. A marked difference among these dances are flat, while the Khasi dance is slow with easy rhythm, the dance of the Garos is more vigorous and virile.

The Khasis, Jaintias and Garos of Meghalaya were predominantly agriculturists. They adopted the jhuming method of cultivation. Rice is the chief crop grown both in the wet valleys and the terraced highlands. The latter is well irrigated by the indigenous system of irrigation, that is, channeling the water from longer distances to these fields. Other crops grown in these districts are millets, maize, potato, ginger and chillies. However, there are certain crops that are confined to the respective districts, such as cotton and cashewnut cultivated in the Garo Hills, while areca-nut and betel leaves are mostly grown in the Khasi and Jaintia Hills.13

Prior to the coming of the British, these tribes were rich and prosperous as they could sell their products at the flourishing border markets. The Jaintia in particular, extended their authority up to the plains of Sylhet, now in Bangladesh. Besides agriculture, the other sources of livelihood of the people are drawn from the mineral resources present in these lands, of which, the most important are coal, limestone and iron-ore. During British rule, Mr. Har Inglis of Inglis and Co. mined the limestone quarries present in the Khasi Hills and earned substantial profits. Cher and above these, there are also other numerous items of trade such as wax, ivory, and honey. The hilly terrain especially on the southern slopes, have different kinds of fruit trees thriving on them. Of these, the most popular are oranges and pineapples, which are exported to other neighbouring states and even across to Bangladesh. Banana, lemon, a variety of berries and nuts are found in abundance throughout the state. The people in the hills depended on neighbouring states for salt, tobacco, cotton and woollen clothes and household items. Nowadays, these are brought mainly by the Marwars, a trading community who monopolized the trading business in the state, both in the import and export of the goods. The post-independence period saw the state emerging as one with the highest Hydro-electricity potential in the North East, second only to Arunachal Pradesh. Being hardworking, the people had started developing their own cottage industries.

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industries which includes weaving, carpentry, pottery, basketry and goldsmithy as well as forest-based industries.

During the pre-British period, these three districts were independent of each other. In the Khasi Hills District, there were the Syiems (chiefs) who ruled over their respective siyemships. There were thirty siyemships during this period, independent of each other. The Syiems exercised their duties alongwith the advices of their Durbars. The Durbar is an organization of elders including the Myntris, Basans and Lyngdohs within the siyemship. It was the Durbar which exercised a great influence on the king and also sanctioned the right to declare war or sign treaty with other independent states. However, should the Syiem be of a strong and authoritative nature he could easily influence his Durbar to carry out his wishes. In the Jaintia Hills, there were the Syiems as well as the Dollois. These too, were independent of each other. Both among the Khasis and the Jaintias, succession to the office of the siyemship was determined by the matrilineal set up of the society. The deceased ruler would be succeeded by the eldest son of his eldest sister. If she had no son, then to the eldest sons of his other sisters. In case none available, then the crown would go to the nearest maternal cousin brother. Among the Garos, the only political system that existed during the pre-British period was the office of the Nokma and the village council. Differing from his Khasi and Jaintia counterparts, the Nokma did not exercise political authority. In fact, he was rather a social and economic representative of the village whose activities centred on social and cultural functions rather than on political administration. However, in course of time, the Nokma's duties started increasing. He had to dispense justice, maintain law and order, regulate jhum cultivation and even checked as well as looked after the foreigners within his jurisdiction. As the Nokma assumed office by virtue of his marriage to the girl of the seniormost house in the village, therefore, his successor, commonly, was his own son-in-law. The Khasis, Jaintias and Garos continued with their respective forms of administration till the advent of the English.

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15 D R Șviemlieh. British Administration in U'ghalā ʌ ami Pattern. p3
When the British had established their control over Bengal, Bihar and Orissa in the second half of the eighteenth century, it brought them into contact with the Garos of Goalpara. The intermittent fights between the Garos in the hills and the zamindars in the plains compelled the British Government to intervene. David Scott, the then Agent to the Governor General could settle the differences by segregating the Garo territories and the same were brought under direct British control after a series of expeditions till the whole Garo inhabited territories were annexed. When in the second decade of the nineteenth century, the Burmese tried to extend their sway by occupying the territories of the Ahoms, the former became a threat to the British in Bengal. This made the British to seek friendship of the Jaintia king and as a result. Raja Ram Singh, the ruler of the Jaintia Kingdom, and David Scott, the Agent to the Governor General, signed an agreement on 10th March 1824, by which Raja Ram Singh agreed to render military assistance should the East India Company be engaged in a war east of the Brahmaputra. In addition to this, David Scott promised the Raja a portion of Assam's territory if the latter would launch an attack on the Burmese in case of a war between the English and the Burmese. The First Anglo-Burmese War broke out and lasted from 1824-1826. The war ended with the victory of the English and the imposition of the Treaty of Yandaboo 1826 on the King of Ava. This victory led to the annexation of Assam by the British and at the same time it opened the door for British entry into these north eastern provinces. Furthermore, because the military help rendered by the Jaintia Rajah was found negligible, the British felt that, he was not entitled to a share of the promised territory won from the Burmese.

The annexation of Assam saw the necessity of opening a direct route linking Gauhati and Sylhet via the Khasi Hills. While construction of the roads was in progress in the Khasi Hills, a conflict arose between the Khasis and the British over the disrespectful attitude of the British soldiers and labourers towards the Khasis. This led to the outbreak of the Anglo-Khasi War (1829-1832) which ended in the victory of the

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English and subsequently the annexation of the whole Khasi Hills to the British dominions. The Jaintia Kingdom comprising the hill areas and the plain parganas was a wealthy kingdom. The British coveted it, but the alliance of 1824 tied their hands to undertake a forward policy against the Jaintia Raja. The death of Raja Ram Singh in 1832 gave them the opportunity to pick on the Raja. His successor, Rajendra Singh, was asked to revise the Treaty of 1824 with an additional provision requiring the Rajah to pay an annual tribute of Rs 10,000/- to the British. Unless agreed to, Rajendra Singh would not be recognized as the rightful Rajah by the British. Rajendra Singh though a youth of sixteen years onK. rejected the unjustified imposition of the tribute. Matters took a bad turn with the release of Chatter Singh, the Chief of Gobha, by Rajendra Singh. Chatter Singh was the prime suspect in the abduction of four British subjects in 1832, to be sacrificed to goddess Kali. By releasing Chatter Singh, the British suspected Rajendra Singh of being an accomplice of the perpetrators. Despite entertaining doubts of his complicity, the British ordered the confiscation of the Rajah's lowlands. Rajendra Singh protested against this unjustified annexation of the lowland parganas. Because the British would not repeal the order, the Jaintia Rajah forsake his hill territory too. Thus by 1835, the whole Jaintia Kingdom was annexed to the British territory.¹⁷

The Garos came into contact with the British much earlier than the Khasis and the Jaintias. Prior to the advent of the British, the Garo hillmen indulged in marauding the plains. With the grant of Diwani of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa, the British extended their sway upto the border of Garo territory. To protect the plainsmen and to check attacks of the hillmen. The East India Company through the efforts of David Scott, entered into engagements with the Garo chiefs of the hills. Despite the agreements, the Garo hillmen continued to raid the plains. Left with no alternative, the British led a series of military expeditions against the Garos till all the chiefs were subdued. And in 1869 Garo hills was constituted a separate district within the province of Assam.¹⁸

¹⁷ H K Barpujari, op cit, pp 235-237; D R Syiemlieh, op cit, pp 72.
¹⁸ J B Bhattachanee, op cit, pp 236-265
In course of their governance, the British found that none of the three tribes had a script of their own. Absence of a script naturally means absence of education. That is why, some British officials asserted that the Khasis, Jaintias and Garos were illiterate. This assertion is historically incorrect, as is evinced by the presence of some records. It is historically true that these indigenous tribes of Meghalaya had no script of their own and therefore, were compelled to adopt the scripts of their neighbouring states or of their literate subjects whom they governed. Because of this there are records in Bengali script or in Assamese script available in the office of the Deputy Commissioner and also in the Assam Civil Secretariat Record Room. These records go to prove that a few of the rulers were conversant with the Bengali script and therefore, could be termed as "literate".

It is interesting to note that the Khasi Syiem whose syiemships were located in the border areas, such as that of Bhowal and Sheila, owned territories extending over the plain regions of undivided Bengal. This meant that they had Bengali speaking states as their neighbouring states and subsequently, they entered into trade relations with the latter. Under such circumstances, the Syiem the Myntris and to some extent the merchants of these states would try to acquire some rudimentary form of education to enable them to be conversant with the plain people. Of course, having no script of their own, they adopted the Bengali script to read and write the Khasi language. Moreover, these Syiem appointed Bengali Muktiars as Record-keepers in their royal courts to ensure that all affairs of the state were documented and properly maintained. Also knowledge of the Bengali script helped in maintaining contacts and communications with their neighbouring states in the plains through their emissaries. Above all, these Syiem appointed Bengali tutors to teach the children of the royal families. H Bareh authenticated these assertions when he wrote, "In 1817 we learn from a record that an ambassador, u Phan Bosen. deputed by the Syiem of Nongstoin, brought down and delivered a letter to Geo Inglis, a lime merchant in Sylhet district. It must have been written in Bengali. The Syiem employed tutors to read and write in Bengali and"

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4 M Kareh. op cit. p . W. H Bareh. "Sources of the HiMon, of the khasis and Jaintias". in Soiul or the Illston of hhitu \ vol II. p201
Assamese. In 1834, Rijon Singh, a lad of 14 years, installed in Nongkhlaw to succeed L" Tirot Singh, according to the Government record, knew how to read and write in Bengali. He was taught Bengali by the Bengali mukhteers." When the Syiem's had Bengali Muktis in his court and Bengali tutors in his palace, it naturally follows that his myntris too would follow suit. To keep himself abreast of the state affairs, these myntris would try to acquire some rudimentary form of education and the same would also be extended to their offsprings. Merchants and the wealth) class too, particularly, those who had trade relations with the plainsmen would try to learn to read and write for their own benefit and likewise would send their children to acquire the basic knowledge of reading and writing. Their interest in acquiring education must have made the Wahadadars to set up a Primary school in Sheila as early as 1823, prior to the coming of Alexander B Lish. This school was similar to the Brahmanic school of Bengal, because of the close proximity of Sheila to Bengal and moreover, some of the Shellites had received some rudimentary education in the Brahmanic schools of Bengal. EW Dkhar claimed that this assertion was "an authoritative one and has been affirmed by persons of the past generation who were actively involved in setting it". Because there were no qualified persons to teach in this school, the Wahadadars recruited the services of two educated persons of Bengal. Shri. Thakurdhon Mukherjee and Shri. Tarini Ghosh, to teach in this school. Shri. Thakurdhon Mukherjee was paid 25 silver coins and Shri. Tarini Ghosh was paid 20 silver coins per annum. Sometimes, they received presents and gifts from the people in recognition of their educational services."\(^1\) Having Bengali teachers to impart education to people who did not own a written language, they adopted the Bengali medium alongside Sanskrit and English, giving the pupils the options to choose the language they desired to learn. Though this school was not set up on western lines, without a doubt it proved that the Khasis were not illiterate as claimed by some British officials.

\(^{10}\) H Bureh. "Sources of the History of the Khasis and Jamfi, in Sources of the History of India. I & II pp 201-202
\(^{11}\) L. Dkhar. Prinmm Education in the klhesi ind.hv."i... ii.\(\) vp41
With regard to the Jaintias, it is extremely necessary to note that the Jaintia Kingdom as a whole covered both the hills and the plain territories of Sylhet and Mymensingh districts in present Bangladesh. When the Jaintia parganas in the plains were annexed to the Hill domain, the Jaintia Rajah made Jaintiapur the headquarter of the Jaintia Kingdom, and Nartiang in the midst of the hills, was made his summer capital. With Jaintiapur as the capital, the Jaintia Rajahs naturally came into contact with the literate and educated Bengalis. By virtue of governing the Bengali subjects, the rulers too, had to learn to read and write their own language using the Bengali script. Thus the Rajahs of the Jaintia kingdom were literate. Moreover, unlike the Khasi Syiemls who used thumb impressions to sign treaties and agreements, the Jaintia Rajahs, being literate, personal signed the treaties and agreements either with the other Indian states or with the British in later days. On man occasions, these Rajahs surrounded themselves with scholars and men of letters. They had Bengali Muktias as Record-keepers of the Royal Coun. They were the ones who recorded all state affairs and also maintained records relating to land revenue. These records were written in Jaintia language adopting the Bengali script.

Being literate and educated, the Rajahs of Jaintia had poets and scholars adorning their courts, many of whom were Bengalees. Mention may be made of Ka%iraja a Sanskritist who composed the celebrated Sanskrit work Raghaw Panda\i\a was patronized by Kamade\a, the Jaintia Rajah who ruled from 1090-1119 A.D. Besides being patrons of scholars and poets, the Rajahs appointed Bengali tutors to teach the children of the royal family. Though these children did not received any kind of formal education imparted through formal schools, they could not be termed as illiterate, for they could read and write the Jaintia language written in Bengali script. Likewise, the nobles of the royal courts too, made efforts to learn the art of reading and writing so that they could pursue the matters in their official capacities and also to enable them to communicate with the subjects in the plains. Besides, the Rajah, the royal famil> and the...

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3* J B Bruttachanee. "Social and Religious Retorn Wolement.s m the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries" in MUI NVIDIOMS Reforms \l\o\em\t.\ in ttn Vntlvw\l and Twentieth Centurie\*. p44[3]
nobility, a certain section of the people who were traders and merchants sent their children to the schools in neighbouring states to ensure they acquired a self-nurtured education so they could read and write their language using the Bengali script.  

Unlike the Khasis and Jaintias who were hillmen, the Garos comprised of Garo hillmen and Garo plainsmen. Of the two, the former were in a pre-literate stage before the coming of the British, while the latter had access to elementary education through the Bengali medium. A close contact with the people from the plains introduced the Garo plainsmen to rudimentary education, acquired through Bengali medium. Quite strong was the bond with Bengali language, that the latter continued to be used as the medium of instruction till the end of the nineteenth century, despite Roman character had been ushered in by the Baptist missionaries.

The Khasis, Jaintias and Garos during the pre-British period, were not privileged to have access to formal education of the western model. Among the three tribes, the Garos were the first to be introduced to formal education as early as 1826, a momentous year in the history of North East India. The defeat of the Burmese in 1826 in the hands of the British, resulted in the annexation of Assam by the Treaty of Yandaboo.1826. This treaty was a landmark in the history of British relations with Northeast India. The Treaty of Yandaboo opened the gateway for British occupation of the states in the North eastern region. The King of Ava, upon whom the Treaty was imposed, guaranteed to withdraw and abstain from all future interferences with the principality of Assam and its dependencies, and also with the contiguous petty states of Cachar and Jyntea. In deference to the agreement between the British and the Rajah of Jaintia Kingdom, the latter was promised a portion of the Ahom territory at the successful termination of the war. But as the help rendered by the Jaintia King was found negligible, the British felt that he, therefore was not entitled to a share of the promised territory won from the Burmese. The annexation of Assam saw the necessity of opening a direct route linking Gauhati and Sylhet via the Khasi Hills. This brought the English into direct

\[ ^{23} \text{J B Bhattacharjee, "Sources of the History of the Khasis and Jaintias" in Sources of the History of North East India, Vol II, pp214-215.} \]

\[ ^{44} \text{H K Barpujari, op cit., pp88-89. J N Choudhury, The Kh.: CMIYHS, p205} \]
contact with the Khasis. In course of time, the tribal chiefs of these three hill districts were overpowered and their territories annexed to British dominions.

The establishment of British rule over the Garo Hills, Khasi Hills and Jaintia Hills paved the way for the coming of the foreign Christian missions, who learnt that the soil in this region would be very fruitful for evangelization as the people here followed their own indigenous religions. When the British first come into contact with the Khasis, the Jaintias and the Garos, they described them as 'barbarians and uncivilized people'. To the British, Christianity was the mean to civilize the 'heathens' as they were sometimes referred to. And to Christianize these tribes, education was a must. Therefore, the British Government encouraged educational efforts of its officials and the missionaries. This being the case, education can be defined as the tool to civilization and Christianization. The coming of the foreign Christian missionaries led to the beginning of education among the inhabitants of these hilly regions. Protected and financially aided by the British Government, the efforts of the missionaries to impart education to the people «as a success, particularly when measured in terms of evangelization, the primary objective of the British.