CHAPTER IX

TRIBAL ORGANIZATION

Many of the clans trace their descent to a common ancestress (Kiaw). Grandmothers are styled Ki Iawbei - Tynrai i.e. grandmothers of the root. In other words the root of the tree of the clan. The descendants of one ancestress of the clan, Ka Iawbei Tynrai are called shikur or one clan. When we come to the divisions of the Kpoh or sub-clan, all the descendants of one great grandmother (Ka Iawbei Tymmen) are styled shi kphoh. The next division is the iing or family. It is common that the grandmother, her daughters and their children live together under one roof. The grandmother during her life-time is the head of the house. The grandmother is styled Ka Iawbei Khynraw or the young grandmother to distinguish her from the other two grandmothers Iawbei Tynrai and Ka Iawbei Tymmen.

The young grandmother, her daughters and their children are said to belong to shi iing, one house, one family.

1. Interview with Dr. Ngenmon Sutuga M.B.B.S. age 30 Jowai.
2. Ibid.
We shall see how the clan (kur) grew out of the family (iing). The diengdoh clan has descended from a maid. The first ancestress or kiaw came from the country beyond the Kopili river to the Pnar Hills, where she found a husband. Legend relates that it was one of the peculiarities of this women that she was able to accommodate herself in an earthen jar or lalu. This fact gave rise to the name lalu by which she and her children were called by the Pnars.

The family prospered during the time when a powerful chief of the Malngiang clan held sway in the Jaintia Hills. On the death of this king a civil war broke out and the Lalu family, together with many others retreated across the Kopili river.

Here they lived in prosperity for some generations until plague broke out and carried off the whole family except one female called ka Iaw-iaw, who became the sole owner of the family wealth. Many desired to marry her for her possessions. To ease the importunities of her lovers for her possessions, she fled to Jowai and sought shelter in the house of a Lyngdoh (Priest)\(^3\)

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3. Ibid.
The Lyngdoh at the instance of his wife, tried to sell Ka Iaw-iaw as a slave, but no one would offer enough money for her. Therefore the Lyngdoh decided to keep her. Out of gratitude for this kindness Ka Iaw-Iaw brought her wealth from beyond the Kopili river to the Lyngdoh's house. The son of the Lyngdoh married her. The couple lived happily for some time, when some adventurers from beyond the Kopili came to Jowai with the intention of carrying off this rich lady. The Lyngdoh however having received warning of their intention arranged for the escape of Ka Iaw-Iaw. She fled to Sohphohkynrum, a place near Nongkrem in the Khasi Hills where she established a village. Here Ka Iaw Iaw was called Ka Iaw shibdi because she paid every man who was engaged by her, in making a market there, 20 cowries (shi bdi) per day for their labours. Here also she is credited with having first introduced the art of smelting iron, and various iron implements which she exported to the plains. She maintained a huge herd of pigs which she fed in a large hallowed part of a diengdoh tree. It is to this fact that the piengdoh comes owes its name. After Ka Iaw-shibdi and her children had lived for some years in prosperity at Sohphokynrun, they were attacked by the swarga Raja (The Ahom King) U Long Raja probably was the Raja of Jaintia.

4. Narrated by the people of Jowai.
They fled to a place called Lyndiang Umthli, near Lyngkyrdem. Finding this place unsuitable as a home, the family split up into four groups. One group returned to Jowai where it increased and multiplied and afterwards grew into the Lalu clan. Another went to Nongkhlaw and became the Diengdoh Kylla clan. Another went to Mawiang and formed what is known as the Pariong clan. The fourth, after some vicissitudes of fortune went to Rangjyrteh and Cherra, at which place it established the powerful Diengdohbah clan, and became afterwards one of the chief mantri or minister clans.

This is how the Pnars believe about the history of the origin of the Diengdoh clan at some length to show what I consider to be an example of how the clan was formed i.e. from a common ancestress. All of the clans have traditions more or less of descent from some particular kiau or ancestress.

The clans of the present day are nothing more or less than overgrown families. They are found together by the religious tie of ancestor worship in common, and of a

5. Interview with Bah Sullai - Jowai
6. Ibid.
common tribal graves except in cases of clans which have, owing to their size, split up into several subclans.  

Each of these clans is strictly exogamous. A Pnar can commit no greater sin than to marry within the tribe. Some of the clans are prohibited from intermarriage with other clans, because of such clans being of common descent. If the titles of each family are carefully examined, we shall see that some of them bear the names of animals such as the Shrieh (Monkey) clan, the Thom (crab) clan or the Diengdoh (tree) clan.

The members of these clans do not apparently regard the animals or natural objects, from which they derive their names as sacred; in as much as they do not abstain from killing, eating or utilizing them. The names of these objects are connected generally with some story concerning the history of the clan, but there is no evidence to show that the clans-folk ever regarded the above animals or objects as sacred.

If the lists of the Khyrim and Cherra clans are examined it will be seen that a large number of them bear the name of Dhkar or its abbreviation Khar.

7. Ibid.
The word Dkhar is that applied by the Pnar to an inhabitant of the plains.

**STATE ORGANISATION**

The states were formed by the voluntary association of villages or groups of villages. The head of a Pnar state is always a Doloi or chief. A Pnar state is a limited monarchy. The doloi's powers are much circumscribed. According to custom he can perform no act of any importance without consulting and obtaining the approval of his durbar where the state mantries play an active part. It is an executive council over which the Doloi presides. It also possesses judicial powers.

Some Doloi family have been allowed a considerable share of the state management. This is a departure from the ordinary rule and regarded as unconstitutional. In some states there are village headmen, styled sirdars. The sirdars are subordinate to the Dolois. The sirdars settle cases, collect labour and assess the value. They receive for the Doloi the pynsuk which may be literally translated as gratification. The land to a great extent,

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8. Narrated by the people of Kuth.
is the property of the different clans and villages. In some places there are estates owned by private persons or institutions. The Doloi is entitled to receive the income that arises from what are known as the raj or state lano's only. All that the Doloi usually receives from his people in the way of direct revenue is the state subscription or pynsuk mentioned above\textsuperscript{10}.

This tax is nominally collected to meet the expenses of the state ceremonies. The contribution varies in amount according to the means of the villagers. The Doloi's principal source of income however in all the Pnar states is the toll (Khrang) which he takes from those who sell at the markets in his territory.

The Doloi raises no excise over the manufacture of both fermented and distilled liquor. Judicial fines are divided between the chief and the members of the durbar\textsuperscript{11}.

\textbf{THE ELECTION OF THE DOLOI}

The Dolois are elected from the Doloi family\textsuperscript{12}. Originally the election was controlled by a small electoral body consisting of the heads of certain priestly clans,

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{10} Ibid
  \item \textsuperscript{11} Ibid
  \item \textsuperscript{12} Interview with Bah Chism the headman of Pokseh age 64.
\end{itemize}
who it is presumed, exercised their authority to reject candidates, when necessary, mainly on religious grounds. This has undergone a change. There is the broadening of the elective basis.

The electoral body has been increased by the inclusion of headmen of certain clans (mantris) village headmen (sirdars) and the chief superintendents (Basans) of the village markets. Now there is also popular election at which all the adult males vote. This is due to the influence of coloned Bivor, the Deputy Commissioner of the Khasi and Jaintia Hills from 1865 to 1877.

However in many cases the voters have done no more than confirming the selection of a special electoral body. The dolois are recognised as the Ki Doloi U Blei or Doloi of God. In most states the Doloi is the religious as well as the secular head. He performs religious ceremonies at certain functions. It is the custom for the Doloi to consult the auspices with the soothsayers for the good of the state.

The Doloi in judicial matters acts as a judge, while the whole body of the durbar being the jury. In olden days the Doloi marched to war at the head of his army. 13.

13. Ibid.
LAW OF ADOPTION

The Pnars have a custom known as 'rap iing' which means to help in the house. This is practically adoption. In a family if all the female members died, the male members of the family are allowed by custom to call a girl from other family, to act as Ka 'rap iing, and to perform the family religious ceremonies and therefore to inherit the family ancestral property.14

The female so introduced into the family takes her place as ka khun khadduh or youngest daughter, and becomes the head of the house (ka trai iing). The adoption of a female obviates the family from dying out (iapduh) which is to the Pnar a very serious problem, in as much as there well then be no one qualified to place the bones of its members in the family tomb (ka ba thep shieng manbah) and to perform the requisite funeral ceremonies.

Some of the Pnars observe a religious ceremony which is feast to the clans-folk, at which liquor, rice, dried fish and ginger are served.15 Before the feast commences each clansman is provided with a small gourd (u klang)

14. Narrated by the people of Namdong.
filled with liquor, a little of which is thrown on the
ground from the gourd and the following words are uttered:-
Oh God! Oh Lord, now the pynrapung ceremony is about to
be performed, let the ceremony be propitious, and let
males and females of the clan increase in numbers, so that
the clan may become great and respected and that intelligent
male members may spring up. No such ceremony is observed
in the Nartiang and Raliang Doloiships 16.

In the case of a family being iap duh (extinct) the
family property, according to the Pnar custom, passes to
the Doloi. Therefore, it is to the interest of the members
of families to adopt a female when such necessity arises.
The Pnar custom of rap ung may have been borrowed from the
Hindus, when the Rajas of Jaintia became convert to that
religion.

**ORDEALS**

Ordeals were resorted, if conclusive evidence was not
forthcoming. There are various kinds of ordeals. One
may resort to not to one ordeal but several one after another.
Law did not recognise them. The first kind of ordeal was
water ordeal.

16. Ibid.
There were two kinds of water ordeals. The first called ka ngam ksih was as follows:— The two parties in dispute would each of them fix a spear under water in some deep pool. They would then dive and catch hold of the spear. The man who remained longer under water without returning to the surface was judged by the Doloi and the durbar to have won the case. Sometimes the supporters of the contending parties used to compel the divers to remain under water by holding them down with their spears or bamboo.

Another form of trial was to place two pots, each of them containing a piece of gold and a piece of silver wrapped up in cloths in shallow water. The two contending parties were then directed to plunge their hands into the water and take up, each of them, one of the packets. The party who brought up a piece of gold was judged the victor. If both parties brought up either gold or silver, then the case was amicably settled by the durbar, and if it was land case, the land was equally divided between the parties. No instance of trial of cases by such ordeals have come to notice of late years.  

18. Ibid.
Of all the ordeals the most dreaded and feared by the Pnars are the ordeals of U Kland or U Klang U Khnam. They believe that if a person swears falsely by U Klang or U Klang U Khnam, he will die or if he represents his family, i.e. wife and children or his clan then his family or his clan will die out. Dolois do not order this ordeal fearing to incur blame for choosing it, owing to possible evil consequence thereafter to the parties.

In this case, one of the parties must propose and the other must accept the ordeal of their own accord and in open court or durbar\(^9\).

The person who wishes to take the oath brings a gourd of fermented rice beer or a gourd with an arrow stuck in it, as the case may be. And he then makes it over to the judge or a deputy appointed by the judge for this duty.

\(^{19}\) Ibid.
The latter invokes the goddess as follows:

Come down and bear witness thou goddess who reignest above and below, who createst man, who placest him (on earth) who judgest the right and the wrong, who givest him being and stature life. Thou goddess of the state, then goddess of the place, who preservest the village and the state, come down and judge. If this man's cause be unrighteous then he shall lose his wife and children; only the posts of his house shall remain, only the small posts and the stones of the fireplace shall remain, he shall be afflicted with sickness, he shall be racked with excruciating pains, he shall fall on the piercing arrow, he shall fall on the lacerating arrow, his dead body shall be carried off by kites, it shall be carried off by the crows, his family and his clan shall not find it, he shall become a dog he shall become a cat, he shall creep in dung, he shall creep in urine and he shall receive punishment at thy hands, oh, goddess and at the hands of man.

If on the other hand his cause be righteous (lada u kren hok) he shall be well, he shall be prosperous, he shall live long, he shall live to be an elder, he shall rise to be a defender and preserver of his clan, he shall be a master of tens and a master of hundreds (immensely rich) and all the world shall see it. Hear oh, goddess, thou who judgest.

20. Ibid.
U Klang is invoked as follows:— Thou U Klang, with whose assistance according to our religion and our custom, a man when he is born into the world is named—hear and judge. If he speaks falsely (his cause be false) his name shall be cut off (by thee) and he shall surely die.

The fermented rice is then invoked as follows:— Thou, yeast, thou charcoal, thou rice of the plough, thou rice of the yoke, thou, too hear and judge. If he speaks falsely, cut off his tongue eat away his mouth. The arrow is lastly invoked as follows:— "Thou piercing and lacerating arrow, as thou hast been ordained by the goddess, who creates man, who appoints man to occupy a pre-eminent place in war and in controversy do thou hear and judge. If he (the man taking the oath) speaks falsely, let him fall upon three, let him be cut and be torn and let him be afflicted with shooting and pricking pains". The man then takes U Klang or U khnam and holds it on his head and while in that posture utters the same invocation. U Klang is then made over to the judge (the Doloi or the sirdar as the case may be).

The person who undergoes the above ordeal wins the case, the production of evidence being unnecessary.  

21. Ibid.  
22. Ibid.
WAR

In ancient times the Pnar worshipped U Syngkai Baman one of the principal gods of the war and also the goddess Ka Ram Shandi. They offer a cock. Before the sacrifice the warriors dance round an altar upon which are placed a group of cock's feathers (U thuia) a sword, a shield, a bow, an arrow, a quiver, pan leaves and flowers. After the cock has been sacrificed they fix its head on the point of a sword and shout three times. The fixing of the cock's head on the point of a sword is said to have been symbolical of the fixing of the human head of an enemy killed in battle on the top of the soh-long tree. They used to sacrifice to a number of gods for success in battle. The Dkhars (plain people) were also sacrificed. 23.

The respective armies used to challenge. When they arrived at a little distance from one another, they used to stop to hear each other shout the, tien Blei or challenge to the other side. They fought mainly with bows, arrows, and ambushes. During the Jaintia rebellion fire arms were used by the Pnars. They fought like other hill men even with men with superior weapons.

23. The Author was informed by the people of Nartiang.
The village has been a basic and important unit in the organisation of Indian social polity. According to the epics the village was the fundamental unit of administration; and had its head the gramini, who was its leader and chief spokesman. One of the major responsibilities of the headman was to protect the village and its boundaries. The case is the same in Pnar hills also. In the Pnar hills we have the administration by the state, by the district council and finally by the village. However the village administration is put at the lowest level. But the role it plays is very significant in the democratic polity of these areas.

The institution of village headmanship existed in the Pnar hills since time immemorial24. For every village there is a village headman who is responsible for the general administration of that village, including law, order and justice. Perhaps the oldest democracy existed in the villages of Pnar Hills.

In the beginning, the priest (U Lyngdoh) combined in himself both the religious and secular functions. But with

24. Interview with Rev. Albera age 71, worked for 20 years at Raliang.
the increase in area and population, the people felt it necessary to hand over the secular powers and functions to a separate secular chief. Thus the office of the Doloi came into existence. Village headmen were responsible to the Doloi. A village headman is given the administrative, executive and judicial powers and functions relating to his area (illaka).  

A village headman is both an administrator and the leader of the people, who is also responsible for the maintenance of the village in various spheres. He is the spokesman of the village to the outsiders. He represents the village for its external relationship with the other neighbouring villages and in the whole of the doloiship. He is responsible for the general well-being of the people in the village and it is his interest to keep them content and happy; as such he must hold periodic meetings for consultations with the other officials of each family or clan in the village. He also acts as a judge in any dispute that arise in the village. Thus the village headman is the central functionary in the village administration. He is also helped by a number of subordinate village officials such as the village secretary and the chairman.

25. Ibid  
The fact that there is a democratic tradition of decision making at the village level and the village leaders are structurally close to the general public. The role of the village leader is crucial. He must be aware of the village population. He must make the people known the values of education economic consciousness and political affairs of the district and the country as a whole.

The village headman represents the interest of the villages against other villages in case of disputes. He settles within the village or joins with the headman of some other village when two of their subjects are in dispute. If the case of dispute is a serious one which cannot be settled by him and the village durbar, the headman refers it to the Doloi of the Illaka to take necessary action.\textsuperscript{27}

The headman has to report suspicious deaths and illness to the authorities concerned. He has to see that the villagers keep the village clean. The place is hygienic in and around the village. At times he organises collective labour to maintain the cleanliness of the village (pynkhuid chnong). A village crier informs all the members of the village about the appointed day when such a

\textsuperscript{27} Ibid.
thing takes place in the village. Adult male members who try to avoid such labour without a reasonable excuse will have to pay fines fixed by the village durbar. No one escapes from it except those whose absence is due to serious illness or someone in their clan outside the village died and have to attend the funeral ceremonies. The village criers have the privilege of being absent from such work. They are also exempted from payment of fines.28

THE ELECTION OF THE VILLAGE HEADMAN

A village headman is selected by all the adult male members of the village from among the members of certain original clan or clans (kur). This privilege is given to such clans because they were the first settlers or their ancestors were the founders of the village. Therefore they get the privilege of occupying the offices of headmanship.

Besides the original clan, the other clans in the village also participate. Women have no part to play in this election.29

28. Ibid
29. Ibid.
The election of the headman takes place when the post is lying vacant due to the death or resignation or removal of the existing headman by the people.

A person to be selected as the headman must possess qualities of head and heart. He is to be the one who has a good and gentle nature.

He should be well acquainted with the traditional laws, customs and culture. He must be a dominating personality. Eloquence in speech is a prime requisite. He must lead in the promotion of welfare and well being of all the people of his village. In short the village headman is like a small king in his area.