CHAPTER XII

CONCLUSION

We have so far dealt with all important aspects of the Pnars of Meghalaya. All the conclusions arrived in different chapters are brought together and presented as clearly as possible and as objectively as I am capable of.

The Pnars reside in the Jaintia Hills with their headquarter at Jowai. The Pnar Hills are thinly populated. The sex ratio of males is higher than that of females. The total literacy rate is 33.32 percent only. Jowai is situated on a plateau at an elevation of 4560 ft. above the sea level. The Pnar Hills are watered by the rivers Lubha, Kopili, Myntdu, Myntang and Umiew. However the most important one is Kopili river. It demarcates Pnar Hills from North Cachar. Recently a major hydro electric project called Kopili river valley project is under construction on this river.

Even though some say that the Pnars should be called Khasi-Pnars, just to make the people believe that they are
the same as the Khasis. However Barrister Pakem, Deb Roy and many others including the present author are of the opinion that the Pnars are different from the Khasis. Pnars are Pnars, not Khasi-Pnars.

The Pnars and the Khasis have common origin namely Mon-Khmer. However the influence of Hinduism, from the neighbouring plains, especially from Bengal, influenced certain changes in the way of living, thinking and religious habits. It may be recalled that the Pnars have essentially very much in common with the Khasis. Nevertheless we cannot deny the fact that there are differences between the two.

The origin of the Pnars is shrouded in mystery. The inscriptions on coins, copper plates and records indicate that Parbat Ray was the first king who extended the sway of the Jaintia kings over the plains. They were powerful and maintained diplomatic relations with the Ahom and the Kachari kings of Assam. They rules over the kingdom of Jaintiapur upto 15th March 1335 when the last of the Jaintia Rajas, Rajendra Singh was deposed by the British.
The Pnars resemble Monkhmer people of Indo-China in some respects such as festivities and erection of stone monoliths etc. Legends and monoliths suggest that the Pnars entered the area south of the Kopili river and crossed over to the east Jaintia Hills and to the West Khasi Hills. According to tradition Jutunga chiefship was the oldest in the Khasi and Jaintia Hills. Therefore the Pnars were the first inhabitants of these hills.

The Pnars probably were numerically small. It was perhaps a journey for food and security that made them scatter all over the hills. The matrilineal system also influenced the physical and spiritual evolution of the Pnar society. The ancient Pnars centered around Shillong, Mynso, Sutnga, Martiang and Jowai. This is especially because of the marketing facilities found in these regions.

Shifting cultivation demanded more labouring hands and co-operation of all. People found that they could survive only collectively. They had a racialistic approach to problems. For this purpose they started the village councils. The Pnars were never self sufficient.
They depended on the plains people for the necessities of life such as rice, salt and cloth.

The Pnars did not pay taxes except a goat annually to the king at Jaintiapur. Therefore when the English tried to impose house tax and interfered with the customs and religion of the people, the Pnars under the leadership of U. Kiang Nongbah rose in revolt (1860 - 1863 A.D.) and paid a heavy price for it. U. Kiang Nongbah was hanged and others died in fighting or in custody. But the heroic sentiments of the people still remain.

It should also be said that economic factor was also responsible for the establishment of new colonies. The Pnars like the hills, they had trade relations with the plains but never liked to live in the plains. They even abhor the very idea of living in the plains.

**APPEARANCE OF THE PNARS**

The physical features of the people, their character, their dress and ornaments are the main criteria by which a tribe can be identified.
In general, the Pnars are short in stature, brown in colour and having extremely muscular and developed limbs. They are similar to Khasis, resembling the Mon-Khmer people of Indo-China. The colour may be described as being usually brown, varying from dark to a light yellowish brown. They are a little darker than the Khasis and fairer than the Garos.

The women possess a pretty gipsy complexion that is seen in Europe. They have somewhat depressed nose, the nostrils being often large and prominent. The forehead is broad. They are similar to the Dravidians than the Aryans. Japanese resemble the Pnars. The eyes are of medium size, black or brown in colour. Jaws frequently are big, mouth large, with sometimes rather thick lips. Hair is black and straight. It is quite an exception to see a beard, although the moustache is frequently worn. Moustache is a sign of maturity and as such an admit card to the Darbar of the elderly and the wise.

The males are extremely muscular. This may be due to the walk up and down the hills. The women when young are comely, like men with highly developed calves, the latter always being considered a beauty.
Men and women carry heavy burdens on their backs, the load being fixed by means of a cane band which is worn across the forehead.

Chewing betel-nuts is a regular habit of life. Long distances are calculated by counting the number of betel-nuts eaten. They have a belief that in the next life, time will be spent by eating betel-nuts.

The people are cheerful, light hearted and good tempered by nature. The Pnars are fond of singing. They are fond of nature and enjoy a day out in the woods shooting and fishing.

The Pnars are not afraid of manual labour. I find even the high ranked officers in their free time, working in their gardens or at home. Males are good drivers, motor mechanics, stone masons and carpenters.

After the annexation of the Jaintia Hills by the English, dhoti, the traditional dress has been replaced by pants and shirts. However the Dolois wear turban always. When they go for social and cultural festivals the dolois always wear the traditional dress.
The Pnar females wear sari but in a different fashion. It is similar to Khasi dress. The women wear beads of necklace, made of brass or gold. They use ear-rings like the Khasis and the Garos. At times women use silver collar. Silver chains and gold chains are worn by men and women.

The weapons of the Pnar are swords, spears, arrows and a circular shield for attack as well as defense. All these are locally made. Often the feathers of birds are used for arrows.

The Pnars are good craftsmen. Black earth is used for making vessels. They decorate them with signs and patterns.

I was told that increase in population and pressure on land induced some to migrate to other places in search of land. They formed small colonies. Each colony assumed a name to distinguish it from other. Thus came into existence clans. It is believed that all the members of the clan descended from a common ancestor. According to social attitude the mother is the procreator, owner of food and the agent of its production. Therefore it was
convenient to identify individuals from the mother's side. Therefore came about the matrilineal line of generations. The position of a ancestral grandmother is very great in the Pnar life. The matrilineal system played an important role in preserving the ancient culture and alignments of the Pnars.

The Christian Missionaries fought against superstitions and evil traditions. They spread enlightenment among the Pnars. They liberated the people from poverty and ignorance to some extent.

FAMILY

The Pnars of Meghalaya have a matrilineal society. The Pnar husband is only a father and has nothing to do with the management of his wife's family. He must live and work with his mother and his clan and his right of ownership whatsoever exists only in his mother's line. According to the Pnar custom the husband does not live in the house of his wife. He remains in the house of his mother or female kur and only visits his wife in the night. At present especially due to education this custom
is changing fast. When the father is away the mother finds it difficult to control children. In fact in the southern border areas of Jowai district, most of the people follow the Khasi system i.e. the groom migrates to the wife's house and lives with his wife and children.

A Pnar family is an Iung Bei i.e. mother's house. It consists of the mother and her children, her offspring both minor and major, married and unmarried. The father has no place in the family as father but as the son in his mother's abode. After his death his dead body should go to his mother's house because he belongs to her. A puja must be offered, if the son dies in his wife's house. His bones should be preserved along with his mother.

The mother is the custodian of the property. She is the head and author of the family. Therefore not only the household but the other related matters are controlled by her. The Pnar family is known by the name of the mother. The aim of every family is to survive and multiply. The extinction of a family is considered to be the result of some sins committed by some members of the family. The girls wish to have as many children as possible.
Marriage for a Pnar girl creates a number of problems such as need for privacy, to be able to manage and decide about her economic needs, consumption and production and especially the education and bringing up her children.

In a Pnar system a father has no identity except the son of so and so. He has only two roles to play - Firstly a biological role of procreation to his wife, secondly an economic role to his mother.

The good effects of matriarchate are its woman-liberty and respect for mothers. Also the retention of some ancient cultural and customary traits. But there is a danger that this system is inclined to make males indifferent to family and a good number of them turn out to be drunkards. They argue saying the mother brought the child to the earth after much pangs and reared one up. Therefore it is the duty of the son to love his mother first. It does not mean that the wife and children should be neglected. Therefore let the son serve his parents wife and children, giving each one due respect, love and dedication.
As a whole the Pnars are industrious cultivators although they are rather primitive in their method of cultivation.

In dealing with agriculture the land of the Pnars may be divided into the following classes:
(a) Forest land (b) wet paddy land (c) high grass land and (d) homestead land.

In wet paddy land paddy is grown, generally the paddy-fields are not manured. Weeding is done several times. They reap the grain by pulling the ear with the hand. It was considered to be a sang to use the sickle. Now this custom is fading away. The grain is collected and placed in large receptacles.

The cultivation of oranges and potatoes are also important. They are more common in the warm slopes of the hills. Even the English had praise for these oranges. Betelnuts and betel leaves are also widely grown. However today young people are more interested in white collar jobs than agriculture. They prefer the city life to the village life.
There is no doubt the Khasis grow more potatoes than the Pnars. I was told that the Pnars are fond of growing sweet potatoes, maize and different kinds of vegetables. Lime is also found here and there. A considerable amount of pineapples, turmeric, ginger, pumpkins, gourds, the egg plant, chillies, sesame and little sugar-cane are grown.

The Pnars utilise their free time well. They are fond of hiking, angling and hunting. Only very few have guns. Therefore most of these hunttings are done by spearmen and archers. Mainly bows and arrows are used for this purpose. They ascertain their success or direction by egg breaking which does not always give the true indication.

The Pnars fish with rod and also poison the streams. Usually they do not fish with nets and bamboo work devices as the Assamese and Bengalis do. They also use nets.

The Pnar women are very much interested in cotton and silk industry. They can weave their own clothes.
They make considerable profit in this manner. Cotton is grown. It is for home purpose as well as export. The Pnars are experts in dying different colours.

The Larnai potters make earthen pots of various sizes. These are used even for manufacturing liquor, carrying water, cooking and preserving etc.

From ancient times onwards, the Pnars were famous for their iron industry. They make swords, knives, hatchets, axes and arrows etc. Unfortunately this industry did not develop much nor was it encouraged. Once home made iron implements were even exported to other regions. It is a pity that only little is known about ancient Pnar iron industry.

**FOOD**

Every society simple or complex, urban or rural, industrially advanced or backward, has food habits of its own. The availability of different food items depends to a large extent on the surrounding economy, people depend on what they produce from nature for their survival. This is the very case with the Pnar people.
The Pnars ordinarily take two meals a day, one in the early morning and the other in the evening, but labourers and others who have to work hard in the open take a mid-day meal as well, consisting of cold boiled rice wrapped in a leaf some dry fish or some curry with it or just a small piece of meat. They are fond of all kinds of meat. Before fowls or animals are killed prayers are offered.

The staple food is rice. They also eat boiled potatoes, phan garo, field rats, black monkey, tadpoles, frogs and caterpillars etc. Tea is taken often. It is a custom to offer the guests tea. The Pnars divide the vessels into male and female. They have different cakes such as putharo, pujer, pusuyp, pudoh, pumaloi etc. made out of rice.

The infants are fattened by giving banana mixed with hot water and starch from boiled rice.

During pregnancy and after delivery no special restriction on food was imposed on the woman. They eat near the fire place. A special dish known as Jadoh is served on some special occasions. Another speciality is
Donkhleh prepared from pig's brain. A condiment named Turmumbai is prepared from the seeds of the beam. Every Pnar likes Tupthap. We cannot deny the fact that the Pnars have made changes in their food habits because of their education, contact with people especially foreign missionaries.

The Pnars are in the habit of regularly drinking considerable quantities either spirit, distilled from rice or millet or of rice-bear. At present large amount of spirit is manufactured and consumed in the district. Experts say that the Pnar spirit contains 60 to 90 per cent proof spirit. Drunkenness prevails on every market day. Therefore the government of Meghalaya has taken strong measures to regulate the sale and consumption of liquor.

**RELIGION**

The Pnars believe that originally they were celestial inhabitants. They lived together with God. There were sixteen huts in the celestial domain. They were as good and pure as saints. Even on earth their place of cultivation was as beautiful and green as the garden of Eden.
The evil spirit tempted man. One day when the seven huts were on earth, one man destroyed the golden ladder linking earth with heaven. Thus they lost contact with the original domain.

But God had pity on mankind. He gave them his commandments: (a) be honest in deeds, thoughts and wishes. (b) To know God is to know his fellow men. (c) Know your kur and kha (relations). God could be approached in prayer and He would answer them in signs. However the evil influence and environment became greater and greater.

To find the signs different methods were used i.e. (a) intestines of a cock or a hen (b) by the position of the fragments of shells of a broken egg. Omens are observed. They feel their place after death is in the garden of God. The Pnar religion in both theistic and animistic though in the beginning it was apparently monotheistic. At first U Blei Mongthaw alone was worshipped. Later on it was polluted with animistic beliefs such as the cult of fertility, worship of mountain and river spirits, divination glorification of the ancestors and other allied elements.
Human sacrifices were offered for propitiating the Kupli goddess but these were suppressed by the British.

The thlem is a serpent spirit kept by certain houses which must be appeased by the human blood. Its keepers therefore in appeasing it, have to collect blood by murdering any victim that possibly might be found. The snake is reared only for material happiness and prosperity. This is not a universal belief among the Pnars.

Natural phenomena exercised tremendous influence upon primitive minds. Sacred groves preserved all over the country indicate that deities were worshipped in the form of the mountain and river spirits.

The gods are supposed to possess according to the Pnar belief power over life and death of every living persons here on earth. Thus illness is believed to be caused by some gods due to the act or omission of people. Therefore the Pnars even today think that if due propitiations are made to the offended gods health can be restored. In order to find out the offended spirit divinations were discovered by the Pnars.
Again one of the particular aspect of the Pnar religion is the glorification of the dead. Ancestor worship consists of the appeasement of the deceased ancestors with offerings of food and other material presents. It is closely associated with the funeral ceremonies and the megalithic erections.

According to the Pnar custom a person belongs to his or her mother, in life and also after death. They believe it is a sin to die in one's own wife's house. Therefore when a person is seriously sick he is taken to his mother's house. Suppose one dies in one's wife's house then all the rites must be offered in his mother's house. The diseased person's wife may put a betelnut in her husband's mouth as a last sign of love.

There is a traditional belief that U Synriang accompanied his mother to heaven after her death. On his return his mother gave him a parcel to be opened only after reaching the earth. There he found ashes, bones and char-coal etc. the remains of his mother's cremation. He was told to preserve those in a container. This is the basis of the Pnar bone ceremony.
In the Pnar Hills one may come across many memorial stones. These are erected in memory of the dead. There are also stones erected to serve as seats for the spirits of the departed. Some are to commemorate an occasion. Others serve as seats for the weary travellers. Some table-stones are used as alters for the sacrifices.

FESTIVITIES

The birth of a child is always a happy occasion. But the dread of disease and misfortune haunts the people. For this all precautions are taken. In order to avoid pain at delivery, to guard off evil influences, miscarriage or abortion a sacrifice of fowl of animal is offered.

There is a traditional belief that a expectant mother should be given all what she desires especially food lest her desire may pass on to the unborn child.

The Pnars say that if a male child shows fondness to the expectant mother then the new baby will be a male. If two pregnant ladies sit together the babies in the womb will speak with one another.
The birth of a child is celebrated by eating dry-fish cut into pieces, mixed with ginger and salt. It is distributed to all present. The use of ginger may be traced back to the story of the cock and the sun. It has a sacred significance.

The females and males assemble in two different rooms. Then fish, ginger and country liquor are served separately. The name is chosen by means of auguries and divinations. However, education is causing rapid changes in all these customs.

Behdienhlam which means driving away evil spirits is a festival observed annually in the month of June-July. At this time crops are likely to be destroyed by insects and people suffer from many infections diseases like diarrhoea, blood dysentery etc. They decide the date of the festival in the village durbar. This festival is as old as the people.

Behdienkhlam is a feast of ancestor and spirit worship to drive away evil spirits of plague and fertility rites.
In the southern border area of the Pnar Hills, the biggest community festival is a bit different from the central or northern part of the district. The original belief of the festival has passed into oblivion. What they tell is that whenever a tiger is killed, none should ignore worshipping the deity otherwise, one or one's clan folk might suffer from blindness or from any other afflictions like epidemic, starvation and bad luck. Even to meet a tiger in the jungle is a bad omen and one is reminded of the worship of the Pnar deity.

The Pnars have the idea that the mother is the owner of everything. The business of males is procreation. Therefore the males always have an inferiority complex. They are foreigners in their own family. For a Pnar marriage means cohabitation and procreation.

On the marriage day, there is an exchange of some quantity of cooked food between the grooms family and that of the bride. Relatives, friends and guests all assemble together in the houses of the bride and of the groom and entertained by their respective families with feasts. They continue upto sunset.
Divorce among the Pnars is common. It is so common that it passes unnoticed sometimes even by the local people. Divorce does not affect the woman. She gets her children and property. Besides remarriage is easy.

The reasons for divorce seem to be:

(a) Barrenness on the part of wife.
(b) Defects like impotency on the part of the husband.
(c) Intemperance and rude behaviour on the part of both the parties.
(d) The most important cause is infidelity.

PROPERTY

The Pnar society is matrilineal. Descent is reckoned from the mother alone. Children belong to the clan of the mother, not to the father. The inheritance is always given to the iing-khadduh.

A female before marriage nearly always reside in the house of her mother or female kurs. Her earnings are considered as part of the family earning. While before marriage self-acquired property of a man who dies goes to his mother or the kurs.
There is no right to make will. A desire exists especially among the educated males, for a change in the customary law.

Gifts of ancestral property cannot be made without the consent of the heirs. Gifts of self-acquired property can be made by the acquirer in his or her life-time without the consent of the heirs. However it is said that an unmarried man cannot make a gift of property acquired by him while living with his mother.

A person loses the right of inheritance if she or he commits any of the following offences:

1. Marriage within the kur or within the prohibited degree of kindrad.
2. Commission of incest with kur or within the prohibited degree of kindrad.
3. Commission of adultery, murder or theft.
4. Living an immoral life causing disgrace to the family.
5. Going to litigation against ka iing, kpoh or kur.
6. Marriage against parental consent.
7. Disobedience to parents or misconduct disapproved by parents.
8. A widow marrying or living with another man within a year of the husband's death, in that case the property of the husband inherited by her goes to her children only.

9. Non-payment or non-contribution of a share of the expenses of religious ceremonies among those who still perform such ceremonies as a clan or kpan.

FOLKLORES OF THE PNARS

Folklore and tradition have tremendous influence on people. Unfortunately some of the very typical folklores and traditions have been forgotten due to social changes. The Pnar folklores provide interesting glimpses of the past in which we find immense wealth. They preserve the moral fibre of the race and give solution to social problems.

These tales are handed down from generation to generation with emphasis on moral and ethical behaviour. It is regrettable that time had erased some of these pure and indigenous tales from memory.
The life of U Manik Raitong is a beautiful example of honesty, uprightness. Honesty is truth. Every man feels sad. From U Raitong's time it has become a practice to play the flute at funerals as a sign of mourning for the departed.

Ka Du, Ka Tang and Ka Rem give us an example of how hospitality and kindness never go wasted.

God's creation is beautifully described in the narration of creation. In the conflict between God and Jom the evil one gives us a picture of the working of the devil among the people of God. The seven families originally belong to the nine families in heaven. It was the jealousy of the evil one that brought about une on them. At first God conversed with man and man could directly speak to God.

It is very true that God can be approached through prayer and sacrifices. God is always a loving father, ready to help his people who turn to him in humble petition.
We get a clear idea why the Pnars have a great consideration for the cock. It is considered to be a religious and sacred bird used for sacrifices and divinations.

The origin and early history of U Synriang The Reformer is clearly described. He is one of the Pnar heroes.

The Pnars used different forms of recitals for their audience to emphasise the moral of the tale. Folklores also inculcate the spirit of adventure and provide incentives of social reconstruction within the community.

TRIBAL ORGANIZATION

Many of the clans trace their descent to a common ancestress (Kiaw). Grandmothers are styled Ki Iawbei. The descendants of one ancestress of the clan, Ka Iawbei Tynrai are called shikur or one clan. All the descendants of one great grandmother (Ka IawbeiTynmmen) are styled shi kphoh or sub-clan. It is common that the grandmother, her daughters and their children live together under one roof called iing or family.
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 common tribal graves except in cases of clans which have, owing to their size, split up into several sub-clans.

Each of these clans is strictly exogamous. A Pnar can commit no greater sin than to marry within the clan. Some of the clans are prohibited from inter-marriage with other clans, because of common descent.

The state was 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.

Tax is collected to meet the expenses of the state ceremonies. The tax 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 leaves no excise duty on the manufacture of both fermented and distilled liquor. Judicial fines are divided between the chief and the members of the durbar. The dolois are elected from the doloi family.

The dolois, 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.

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. In the case of a family being iap duh (extinct) the family property, according to the Pnar custom, passes to the doloi.
**ORDEALS**

Ordeals were resorted, if conclusive evidence was not forthcoming. There are various kinds of ordeals. One may resort to one to one ordeal but several one after another. Law did not recognise them. The first kind of ordeal was water ordeal. Of all the ordeals the most dreaded and feared by the Pnars are the ordeal of U Klang 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.

**THE VILLAGE HEADMAN**

The institution of village headmanship existed in the Pnar hills since time immemorial. 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 the Pnar Hills.
We can divide the administration of justice in the Pnar Hills into two sections namely traditional and modern. The traditional system of administration of justice is based on the patterns devised by the traditional rulers in the past. It was continued by the British with slight modifications. The sovereign Democratic Republic of India inherited the system laid down by the forefathers and continued by the British.

The code of criminal procedure and the code of civil procedure have not been extended to the Pnar Hills. Even the Indian Penal code has a partial application only. In a word, the idea of judicial autonomy has been running through the British and post-British administration in the Pnar Areas. Judicial autonomy is no doubt very necessary, but this autonomy has often been abused either unknowingly due to the intricacies of introducing modern elements of non-tribal legal system or intentionally by taking advantage of the ignorance of law by the simple folk of the tribal village in the region. Money economy has further aggravated the deteriorating condition of the importance and utility of the Pnar system of justice.
Even the interpretation of the tribal customary laws cannot be wholly depended upon as there are a number of variations in interpreting the same. Simplicity, inexpensiveness and justice have been the basis of traditional judicial administration in the hill areas of Pnar Hills.

THE Pnar LITERATURE

A study of the Pnar language shows how a dialect can be rich and vibrant even though it had no script in the past. One cannot but admire the way in which Pnar people preserved and enriched their language inspite of it not having adopted a script till recently.

The other striking factor about the Pnar language is the way in which it has preserved its intrinsic quality and character in spite of being subject to other powerful language influence. Any language is enriched by borrowing but not at the cost of losing its own identity. The Pnar has managed to remain intact as a language with great potentialities for further growth.
What the Pnar hills seems to have is an inborn love of nature. The hills and dales, the rivers and streams, the blue skies, the whispering pines and the rains have evoked a sense of aesthetic appreciation for the Trinity of God, Man and nature.

The Pnars of Meghalaya is a God-fearing community. They serve God in Man. May God bless every Pnar family.