History Under Ruins

From Our Special Representative

SILLONG.—The Khaspur rule under the lee of Hshine hills in Gohar district on the way to Kumblaghat airport recall the dying chapter in the history of the Dimasa Kachari kings. No researcher has thought fit to uncover the ruins to find the mising links in the region.

It may be worthwhile to discover the links, if not between the ruins Dimasa Badar and the neighboring hill tribes like the Lakhal, the Kuki and the Hmar particularly when there is a distinct sign of a hill personality emerging in the region. But there has been no effort to do so. But even the metal plates on the monuments affixed in British days have rusted. The area where the Dimasas once ruled within their walled city is now a mosaic of jungles intermingled with tea gardens and impoverished villages, with a sericulture farm in one corner.

Unlike the Bodo Kacharis of the plains, not much is known of or written about the Dimasa or hill Kacharis. Among published works are Somaram Dasen's book Asomar Janjati, a monograph by H.N. Bardoloi and reference to the Abom Buranjiris or chronicles. The Bodo prefix "di" is, however, a clue to the riverine traditions of the Dimasa.

At the beginning of the 12th Century the Kachari kingdom was believed to have extended along the south bank of the Brahmaputra from the Dikhow to the Kolong and beyond, including the Dhansiri valley and what now constitutes North Cachar Hills district.

Their first capital was Dimapur from where the climb to Kohima begins. The ruins at Dimapur are better preserved than the similars in their second capital on the bank of the Mahr, and Khaspur their third and last capital in the Cachar plains. The Dimapur ruins are of brick and mortar whereas the Aboms who pushed the Kacharis to the west bank of the Dhansiri (eventually to Malbong and Khaspur) were primitive by contrast, building with timber and bamboo with mud-plastered walls. The Dimapur architecture was apparently imported and very little light has been shed on the curious V-shaped stone pillars or memorial stones varying from 13 to 18 ft in height and 2 to 23 ft in circumference. About 50 km from Dimapur are similar ruins at Kohomari in the Doyang reserve—possibly the hunting ground of the Kachari kings or even a sub-capital. Dimapur reflects the remnant of Kachari rule.

Malbong must be associated with the reign of Indra Narayan who took the title of 'Setrudaman' after defeating a Mising force. It is not clear as to whether it refers to an expedition by Mir Jumla or an earlier Mising invasion. Indra Narayan added two more titles, that of 'Asimadur' and 'Pralap' with victories over the Jaintia king and an Abom army. In that sense, Malbong marked the zenith of Kachari power; the decline set in thereafter and the Kachari kings had to move eventually to Khaspur under Jaintia pressure.

One of the gaps in the history of the region is the restoration of the brine of Khaspur. One version has it that unfavourably the Kachari king, had to flee from the Aboms and pitched his camp at Khaspur which became the new capital.

Both the historians, E. W. Gust, and tradition favour the view that present-day Cachar, including Khaspur, was given as dowry by the king of Tipperah to a Kachari prince. C. A. Savatilli disagreed with this view.

Another view is that the Kachari kings exercised jurisdiction over Cachar. The riddle as to whether Khaspur evolved into a capital or was built as such to be settled. And there is little time to do it; 30 years hence the existing ruins may have fallen to the ground.

The Suwan Mandir or the royal bath at Khaspur was once on the bank of the Madura which, having changed course, is about a kilometre away now. The king's bath can be seen but the structure is filling. The three temples of Ramchandari or Kali are in better shape but one has to thread through under-ground to see them. The royal palace has to be imagined. The main standing ruins but the surrounding constructions have collapsed.

One of the Siva temples had an inscription which made it clear that it was built by the queen of Hari Chandra Narayan in 1720. The inscription was found but the temple itself was destroyed in the great earthquake of 1897.

A remarkable aspect about Khaspur is the absence of the V-shaped monoliths. Of interest is the inscription at the temple of Siva, in Assamese.

Acceptance of the Bengali script should be considered—perhaps a bhuyan and later Khaspur development. It underlines the gradual assimilation of the Kacharis with the more dominant Bhuyan group in Cachar.