CHAPTER II

Process of Migration to Barak Valley and its Neighbourhood

Migration is as old as mankind. Great tracts of land would now be desolate had it not been for the old instinct of man to move out of his place of settlement to new and greener pastures. The term migration is derived from the Latin word “migrate” meaning-change of one’s residence and, has been defined differently by different experts. Whatever the definition, one may conclude, with Beajeau Garnier in his Geography of Population,¹ as follows:

Man is a mobile creature capable of enquiring, susceptible to suggestion and endowed with imagination and initiative. This explains why, having conceived with the notion that his wants might be satisfied elsewhere, he may decide not merely on going there but also on the means by which his project can be achieved.

Human migration started from the early phase of prehistory down to the phase of civilization in different parts of the world. In the history of migration, it has been observed that there are different reasons for a change of settlement. According to Ravenstein,² who remained the pioneer and one of the pre-eminent migration theorists, migrants may be pushed by circumstances, in the region of origin or may be pulled by better prospects, in another. He highlighted that push factors usually operate in areas of out-migration compelling people to move to other areas while

pull factors, operate in areas of in-migration that attract people to those areas.\textsuperscript{3} However, he also mentioned that it is not necessary that in an area, only the push or the pull factors should operate, in fact, both push and pull factors could operate simultaneously in the same area.\textsuperscript{4} This seems to speak true of the Pnar found scattered all over the three districts of Barak Valley (Cachar, Hailakandi and Karimganj) with Pan Cultivation as their only means of livelihood. Pushed and pulled by circumstances, the Pnar moved from their original home to a geographical location known as Barak Valley in South Assam. This chapter attempts to uncover the origin, dispersal and the process of migration of the Pnar to Barak Valley.

\textit{Brief Profile of the Pnar}

Pnar denotes a group of people inhabiting the Jaintia Hills district of Meghalaya in Northeast India, bounded on the north by Mikir Hills (now Karbi Anglong district of Assam), on the south by Bangladesh and the Cachar district of Assam and, on the east, by North Cachar Hills district (now Dima Hasao) of Assam.\textsuperscript{5} The Pnar are known as Synteng to the Khasi who dwell in the upland of the central part of the Khasi Hills and, when they conquered the Jaintia Kingdom of Sylhet, the Pnar adopted for themselves another nomenclature- the Jaintia by which they were known to many.\textsuperscript{6} Significantly, they preferred to call themselves Pnar (by the original name) in keeping with the place of origin. Many scholars seemed to agree that they are an off-shoot of the Mon-Khmer race of South East Asia and had

\textsuperscript{3}Ibid., p.44.  
\textsuperscript{4}Ibid., p.44.  
\textsuperscript{5}S.K. Chattopadhayaya, \textit{The Jaintias(Socio-Political Institutions of Jaintia Hills)}, Cosmo Publications, New Delhi, 1988, pp.7-8.  
\textsuperscript{6}P.N. Dutta, \textit{Impact of the West on the Khasis and Jaintias; A Survey of Political Economic and Social Change}, Cosmo Publications, New Delhi, 1982, p.3.
ascended the hills through the South Assam Valley.\textsuperscript{7} They are the racial and linguistic kindred of the Khasi. Although, there are some slight variations in culture between them and had never been brought under a single political authority before the British occupation, they both belong to the same racial stock.\textsuperscript{8} However, both Khasi and Pnar were known by the single name of Khasi\textsuperscript{9} under the British rule, often referred to as Khasia\textsuperscript{10} by the people of the plains.

The Pnar entered the present hills in batches and were known by different names such as Amwi, Changpung, Jowai, Nartiang, Raliang, Sutnga and many others.\textsuperscript{11} Each of the batches was under the governance of a priest (lyngdoh), the mediator between people and their God.\textsuperscript{12} In course of time, when the number of batches increased considerably, there was a general desire among them to form a political union. According to tradition, the union was accomplished with the miraculous birth of the mermaid-(kalidakha).\textsuperscript{13} The legend suggested the emergence of the Syiem in the land of “Khatar Dolo”. On the advice of the Daloi-in-chief (of Nartiang), the first son of U Loh Ryndi and Ka Li Dakha (believed to be a fish) was appointed the first syiem. The stories with regard to U Loh Ryndi and Ka Li Dakha might differ in detail but they all suggest that the children of U Loh Ryndi and Ka Li Dakha turned out to be the forerunners of a new dynasty and their children’s children their royal progeny. As the miracle occurred in one of the units called Sutnga, the royal dynasty was then called the SutangaDynasty (kiSyiemSutnga),

\textsuperscript{7} Ibid., p.2.  
\textsuperscript{10} E.T. Dalton, Descriptive Ethnology of Bengal, Cosmo Publications, Calcutta, 1975, p.54.  
\textsuperscript{12} Ibid.,p.14.  
which brought all the Pnar under one central authority.\(^\text{14}\) Since then, the Pnar were ruled by their *syiem*(king)- the *SyiemSutnga*. The Pnar subjects were subdivided into the highland and the lowland groups. The former reside in the hilly regions while the latter, in the lowland tropical forests spreading from the southern slopes of the Jaintia Hills to the present Bangladesh border\(^\text{15}\) calling themselves as War Jaintia or simply War.\(^\text{16}\) Due to the influence of the plains,\(^\text{17}\) most of the Pnar in the Hills practised wet rice cultivation while the War section in the southern slopes practise wet rice besides *pan* leaf cultivation.\(^\text{18}\) In the past, from the 16th century to 1835- eve of the annexation of the Jaintia hills to the Khasi Hills under the British administration, the people of the Jaintia hills formed part of the Hindu Jaintia Kingdom, with headquarters at Jaintiapur on the border of the present Bangladesh and Jaintia Hills which, consequently, chartered the course in the history of migration of the Pnar to the plains.

**Topography**

It is worth mentioning, that both the Khasi and the Pnar, inhabiting the southern slopes of the Khasi and Jaintia Hills, geographically regarded as the War-Khasi and the War Jaintia, had a long history of an earlier intimate contact with the people on the other side of the border especially those on the plains of Sylhet District. Geographically, the region, where the war areas in the southern part of the Khasi and Jaintia Hills Districts end, immediately meets the plains of Sylhet.


\(^{17}\)P.N. Dutta, Impact of the West on the Khasis and Jaintias, op cit., p.11.

\(^{18}\) Chie Nakane, op cit., p.97.
According to P.N.Dutta, “from Cachar in the extreme east to the tri-junction of Sylhet, Garo Hills and Laur or the NongstoinLangrin area of the Khasi Hills in the extreme west, there is a hundred miles of common frontier, the Khasi Hills alone account for sixty, and the rest is shared by the Jaintia Hills and the Sylhet plains.”

The Khasi and Jaintia Hills, from their steep ridges, sent out low hills or tillas and forest right up to the river Surma which runs through Sylhet. The stretch of the plains from the foot of the Hills to Surma in the south whose average ranges from thirty to only ten miles at places was covered with dense forest and low lying tillas which were more prolongation of the jungles and spurs of these hills.

Therefore, writes P.N.Dutta, the formation of the Hills' border with Sylhet plains up to the Surma was such that in view of the extension of the jungles and forests to the latter portion, they might have looked as one country in ancient times. The high mountains were barriers to progress from the hills to the plains, but there are occasional breaks and openings in them where the ranges abruptly decline. These points and places such as Amwi in the Jaintia Hills, Shella, DuaraNongtynnem (now East Khasi Hills) and southern ranges of Nongstoin-Langrin or Laur Hills (West Khasi Hills), served as duars or passes. In addition to these passes, rivers too, served as outlets from the hills to the plains in the south. Almost all the principal rivers of the Hills, the Myntdu, the Lukha, the Umiam or Bogapani, the Kynchiang or Jadukata and the Punatit flow down to the Surma. Though the rivers are not navigable in the hills, they can be navigated near the plains. Canoes and small boats were used for transporting goods from the hills to the plains, and the valleys formed

19P.N. Dutta, “Relation of the Khasi- Jaintia With Their Southern Neighbours”, op cit., p.69.
20Ibid., p.69.
22P.N. Dutta, op cit., p.71.
23Ibid., p.71.
24Ibid., p.71.
on either side of the river banks were utilised for habitation in hamlets.\textsuperscript{25} Hence, the
geography and the nature of the terrain favoured movement from north to the south
resulting in the migration and settlement of considerable number of the Khasi-Pnar,
particularly the War, to the adjoining plains in the south.

\textit{Quest of Migration}

In the plains of Sylhet, there existed independent principalities such as Laur,
Jaintiapur Raj and Gaur in Sylhet proper.\textsuperscript{26} The region where Laur and Jaintiapur
stood had vast stretches of virgin vacant lands to where the Khasi and the Pnar had
emigrated in the past.\textsuperscript{27} The Khasi, according to tradition had once migrated to Laur
which runs: “the north (i.e. Assam plains) was the direction from which they
migrated and Sylhet was the terminus of their wandering from which they were
driven back after more or less peaceful occupation of the district.”\textsuperscript{28} The period of
the setting up of the Khasi settlement in Laur may be taken with the Turko-Afghan
conquest of Sylhet as there is a reference of Khasi raid in Sylhet and their repulsion
from there.\textsuperscript{29} The Mughal ascendency in Sylhet again, saw a large scale migration of
the Khasi to the plains. The Mughals encouraged the migration in an attempt to bring
the jungle clad lands under cultivation.\textsuperscript{30} The “Khasia” according to David Ludden,
one occupied many places in the Ganga basin, where they engaged in shifting rice
cultivation.\textsuperscript{31} Besides jungle clearing and land cultivation, the Khasi were also asked

\textsuperscript{25}Ibid., p.72.
\textsuperscript{26}For details see, J.B.Bhattacharjee, “ The Pre Colonial Political Structure of Barak Valley” in
\textsuperscript{27}P.N.Dutta, \textit{op cit.}, p. 71.
\textsuperscript{28}P.R.T. Gurdon, \textit{op cit.}, p.10.
\textsuperscript{30} P.N. Dutta, \textit{op cit.}, p.74, Also, A. Firminger, \textit{Sylhet District Records}, Vol III Willes to Cornwallis,
25\textsuperscript{th} December, 1788, No.3.
\textsuperscript{31}David Ludden, “The First Boundary of Bangladesh on Sylhet’s Northern Frontiers” in \textit{Journal of
to defend the frontier and protect the tract from raids by their own people through rent free military fiefs granted to the Khasihill chiefs. Yet, according to P.N. Dutta, the Mughals realised, possibly later, that the grant of lands to the hill chiefs might be detrimental to the integrity of the state, hence resulted in the growth of conflicts between the Khasi chiefs and the Mughals. Places such as Khasi Mara or the place where the Khasi have been killed still bear evidence to the growth of conflicts between the two. Nonetheless, though conflicts arose between the hill chiefs and the Mughals, the cultivators were less affected and an account shows that as many as one hundred and thirty seven villages were established by the Khasiin Lur by the end of the eighteenth century. In course of time, a large section of this community probably merged with the broad Bengali population of Sylhet resulting in the growth of the so called “BengaleeCosseahs”.

The migration of the Pnarto the adjacent plain tracts of Sylhet was also due to the same factors. The Pnar immigrated to those areas to cultivate and were even more encouraged by the Mughals to do so. Emigration to this land was easier because the natural obstruction here is not formidable. Tradition says that in ancient period, the Malngiangsa Khasiclan pioneered settlement in the tract. According to H.Lyngdoh and S.C.Roy they established settlements at Kuain or Gwainghat and Mulagul in Jaintia plains. The Pnar, attracted by the fertile lands of the plains, followed them. The Pnar, particularly the War inhabiting the area along the route

---

34 *Ibid.*, p.74 Also, A. Firminger, *op cit.*, Wiles to Cornwallis, 18th June, 1789, No.149.
35 *Ibid.*, p.74, Also A. Firminger, *op cit.*, Wiles to Cornwallis, 18th June, 1789, No.149.


(loosely translated as follows:

From Jowai to Jarain (towards Dawki in War Jaintia) lies a lessfertile land as in other parts of Ri Synteng (or Jaintia Hills) and not many paddy fields are seen. The people inhabiting this belt belong to the war group who were poor and transporting goods from Jaintiapur to Jowai had been their only means of livelihood. From Jarain to Muktapur (Indo-Bangladesh border), these are dense forest. About twenty two miles from Jowai atop Syndai village, there is a dak bungalow near the forest area. The sight of the plain lands from here presents a beautiful sight. Tiny bheels (water bodies) spread along the vast stretch of fields from Cachar to Rupatalli, reflecting the bright sunlight. The rivers like snakes make their winding ways along the fields from one end to the other.

The Sutngasyiem, too, hearing about the riches of the plain areas, greatly desired to extend and establish his kingdom in the plains. Tradition has it that the
Sutngasyiem along with his officer, ulynskor, Mar Kuhain left for Jaintiapur. According to the tradition, "on reaching the low lying lands, the syiem got hold of an interpreter who would understand their language and would help him in striking a deal with the nawab ruling in the plains. The nawab knowing that the king wanted to purchase the land told him that for every piece of land the size of the shield, the king will have to pay one shield of currency. The king returned home, and called for a dorbar. Many were aghast by the strange demands of the nawab and the money for the same was collected in a huge shield. Mar Kuhain left for the plains again, ready to meet and confront the nawab with his own wit and intelligence. Mar Kuhain requested a cobbler to cut thin strips of the shield made out of leather without disturbing the shape of the shield who, on the other hand, did a fine job. He then asked his men and that of the nawab's to stand around and to pull the same towards themselves. While the men were pulling the sides of the shield, the same expanded without distorting the circumference and very much within the agreement. Outwitting the nawab, the Pnar succeeded in acquiring the plains for the syiem of Sutnga."  

There are also other traditions about the plain areas being brought under the control of the Pnar and the annexation of the plain areas by the king who had his capital at Jaintiapur. Whatever be the tradition, the historical fact holds true that the Pnar had better success in the plains below Jaintia Hills than the Khasi who could not annex Laur plains because of Mughal intervention.

Gradually, the Pnar succeeded in expanding the Jaintia Kingdom by extending the dominions of the syiem of Sutnga to the plains. An account has been mentioned by J.P. Wade, about the raid of a Pnar chief on the Muslim territory of S. Lamare, Jaintia Oral Narratives, Regency Publications, 2016, pp.29-35; Also, H.Elias, Ki Khanatang Uba Rim, Don Bosco Book Publications, Shillong, Reprint 2008, p.189.  

For details, see, S. Lamare, Ibid., pp. 29-35.
Sylhet. Beaconed by the fertile lands in the plains and wanting to be rich and powerful like all the other rulers in the plains, the Sutnga syiem raided the plains, conquered and made the people in the plains his conquered subjects. According to R.T Rymbai, it was in the 14th century or so that the Sutnga syiem overran tracts of the plain areas in the south forming part of what are known now as the Districts of Sylhet (in Bangladesh) and Cachar (South Assam) and occupied the portions known as the Jaintia pargannas. They also conquered Gobha in the north which formed part of the district now known as Nowgong (Assam). The southward expansion of the Pnar ended with the annexation of Jaintiapur itself. E.A.Gait mentioned that the Pnarrannexed Jaintiapur in about 1500 AD where they settled in considerable number and adopted the name Jaintia. Since then the Jaintia raja held the loyalty of diverse Pnar group in the northern high mountains, adjacent uplands and the plains below. For administrative purpose, the hilly portion was divided into twelve divisions or elakas namely Sutnga, Nartiang, Jowai, Nongjingi, Shangpung, Raliang, Mynso, Nongtalang, Rymbai, Lakadong, Nongbareh and Narpuh. In the plains on the other hand, the kingdom consisted of ten sub-divisions known as pargannas namely, JaintiaPuriraj, Charikatha, Jaflong, Phaljur, Dhargam, Pachbhag, Araikha, Kharil and Chaura. The first four Raje were known as Khel and the remaining as Hazarki. With extension of cultivation, eight other pargannas were formed; these were Baurbhag, Piyaingool, Barnafaud, Satbak, Mulagool, Bajeraj, Bardes and

---

41 J.P. Wade, An Account of Assam, (ed.) Benudhar Sarma, Sibsagar, 1927,p.44.
43 Hamlet Bareh, History and Culture of the Khasi People, Spectrum Publications, Reprint 1997, New Delhi, p. 56.
44 E.A. Gait, op cit., p.313.
45 After occupying the vast low and fertile land in the plains, the Sutnga Syiems assumed the title Raja.
46 David Ludden, op cit., p.25.
48 Ibid., p.2.
Paschimbhag. The Jaintia raja became an absolute dictator over his personal domain in the plain areas and a titular head for the Hill areas. He was assisted by a raj dorbar and a council of ministers (mynris), and other officials like the priest (lyngdoh), bahardays (uborkyndat), choudhuries (collectors), zamindars (landowners), mars (noblemen), ambassadors and others. In the Hill section, the administration was left entirely to the dolois of the elakas and their dorbars in their respective territories. The Sutnga syiem shifted the capital to Jaintiapur, which became the principal seat of the Jaintia Kingdom, falling in the present day Sylhet district of Bangladesh. The exact location of the capital is about 15kms south east of Dawki/ Tamabil and 43 kms from Sylhet city. The ruins of the capital of Jaintiapur are still visible even today, though none of the sites covering the remains of the old capital of the Pnar king at Jaintiapur, is being utilised by the present day Pnar for any kind of festivity. Even the remains, seen today, are fast disappearing. We hardly find any trace of the King’s palace and backyard - instead we find a hospital which was inaugurated by Imran Khan (MP) of the Bangladesh Sangsad on March 10, 2013 and a Madrasa standing within the limits of the palace at the backyard.

In the plains region of the Jaintia Kingdom, the bulk of the population consisted of the Hindus, among whom, the Bengalis dominate while in the hills, the people were all hill men. The two sections of the raja’s subjects met and mingled, ultimately facilitating migration of the Pnar to the valley. Not very long after their abode in Jaintiapur, the Royal Household came under the influence of the Brahmins and, embraced Hinduism. Soon, the kinsmen of the syiem of Jaintia followed him and

---

49 Ibid., p.2.
50 S.K. Chattopadhayaya, op cit., p.103.
51 Ibid., p.103.
they formed a distinct community of Hindus in the capital called *SutngaSamaj*\(^{52}\) since they originally went from Sutnga, in Jaintia Hills. In course of time, a large section of this community like those of the Khasi probably merged with the majority Bengali population of Sylhet.\(^{53}\) In case of the “Pnar family”, David Scott observed that the descendents of the reigning *rajas* appear to gain admission, in course of time, into the *Kayr* and *Bayd* caste through intermarriages with individuals of those tribes, and they follow in every aspect, the customs of the Hindus of the plains.\(^{54}\) Persons of this origin are settled in considerable numbers around the capital and usually enjoy offices of state.\(^{55}\)

The possession of land adjacent to the town of Sylhet by the Jaintia *rajas* later became a cause of worry to the Sylhet collectors in the Northern Frontier. The granting of theDiwani of Bengal by the Mughal Emperor Shah Alam II in 1765 to the East India Company had helped the Company’s servants to penetrate into the interior parts of Bengal, thereby coming up to Sylhet. Consequently, the acquisition increased the interest of the Company in Sylhet as they succeeded to Mughal Government’s rights to the district’s land revenue as well.\(^{56}\) To increase revenue, the company sought to erase and subordinate claims by all the *rajas* to land in company territory.\(^{57}\) Musket-wielding Company troops pushed the Jaintia *raja* back into a reduced Jaintia territory, though “Jaintia Khasias” (Pnar) still settled in what Sylhet Collectors considered Company territory causing numerous disputes over revenue.

\(^{53}\)P.N. Dutta, “Relations of the Khasi-Jaintia With Their Southern Neighbours till The British Intervention” *op cit.*, p.28.
\(^{55}\)Ibid., p. 224.
\(^{56}\)P.N. Dutta, *Impact of the West on the Khasis and Jaintias*,*op cit.*, p. 28.
\(^{57}\)David Ludden, *op cit.*, p.25.
payments time and again.\textsuperscript{58} The raja returned to transactional routine appropriate for an independent but subordinate ruler.\textsuperscript{59}

The Jaintia raja fell under the displeasure of the Government of the Company in consequence of the immolation of three British subjects by a dependent chieftain (Raja of Gobha) of Jaintia at the shrine of Kali, within Gobha territory\textsuperscript{60} and his refusal to give up the murderers. Shortly afterwards, in May 1835, Col Lister was directed to annex to the Company’s dominion, the plains of Jaintia as a measure of “retributive justice” for the “barbarities” that had been committed.\textsuperscript{61} The raja on the other hand, when shorn of the valuable possession of his territory, declined to retain possession of the hill tract which was thus annexed under Colonel Lister.\textsuperscript{62} The Jaintia pargannas were transferred to the Sylhet District and Gobha area to Nowgong after the annexation in 1835.\textsuperscript{63} What is important to note is that the twenty four Jaintia pargannas in the Southern Hills that were incorporated in the Sylhet District contained a good many Khasi (Pnar)population. W.W. Hunter accounted that though a section of them in all probability migrated to the Jaintia Hills due to political change a number of 2755 Khasi (Pnar) are found in Sylhet and the number increased to 3083 during the census of 1901. About them, Hunter says, “Many of these have adopted Hinduism and obtained admission among the sudra castes.”\textsuperscript{64} The

\textsuperscript{58}Ibid.,p.25; In 1789, Willes estimated the revenue of land taken by Jaintia, Tipperah and Khasias, from 1130-1195 (1729-1784) at 95,735 Kahans, of which 69,904 Kahans went to the Jaintias in 30 named areas (SDR298.52: 12\textsuperscript{th} Jan 89). He also requested force to settle Jaintia boundary because Jaintia people on Company land consider it Jaintia land where they extend authority and claim a liberty of encountering one another” in battle.(SDR289.50: 12\textsuperscript{th} Jan89). See also SDR289.11:27 Dec 89.
\textsuperscript{59}David Ludden,p.36, also A Firminger, \textit{op cit.}, 98.172;1 Sept,89.
\textsuperscript{62}Ibid.,p.2.
\textsuperscript{63}Ibid., p.2.
existence of the Pnar in the Jaintia pargannas had far reaching consequences. The two sections of the Jaintia raja’s subjects came into contact with each other enabling them to maintain a close relation in diverse ways including trade.

Trade

In due course, the migration and settlement of the Pnar in the plains was occasioned not only by the quest for fertile lands but also for facilities of trade. The Pnar, particularly the War section, maintained close trading relations with the people on the other side of the border especially those on the plains of Sylhet. In fact A.R. Choudhury has mentioned that, “from the time Sylhet emerged out of the blue waters of what is now known as the Bay of Bengal, the people of the Khasi and Jaintia Hills must have been the first to put their feet on it and, as the things started to grow there, they must have been the first customers of all the products of the vast plains that is known as Sylhet...and with the background of necessities, trade grew up between the hills and the plains and continued till modern times”.65 The demand of the hill people was for salt and rice, procurable from neighbouring Sylhet, while the hills could supply the plains with its abundant produces: the pan, betel nuts, tejpats and fruits which grow almost spontaneously on the detritus soil of the slopes and deep valleys of the foothills in the southern part of the Jaintia hills district. Such trading activity thrived during the time of the Mughal Rule over Sylhet and during the British Rule when the latter stepped into the former’s shoes.66 Though occasional raids and skirmishes in the frontier took place between the fierce tribes of the hills and the plainsmen, commercial transactions between them

66L.S. Gassah, Ibid., p.295.
Pemberton reported, “A considerable trade in cotton, iron ore, wax, ivory, pan leaf and clothes, is carried on between the plains and the hills, and Jaintiapur is the great entrepot in which all commercial dealings are transacted between the inhabitants of the plains and the hills.” Consequently, to market the abundant hill produce which had little demand in the hills, whereas limitless demand in the plains, markets were established for storing and distribution of goods. Hamlet Bareh, mentioned, in his *History and Culture of the Khasi People*, that according to the local tradition, one minister (*mantri*), UIuma Laskor, opened four markets in the hills and five in the plains. Markets in the hills were Nartiang, Raliang, Sutnga and Shangpung while those in the plains were at Borkhat, Kulakhat, Iaplem, Mulakor (Mulagul) and Jaintiapur. Of the five markets in the plains, the last three were frequently visited by the Pnar particularly the War. They go to these markets on market days to sell the goods mostly betel leaves, betel nuts and oranges and bring back from these markets commodities like fish, dry fish, eggs etc for sale in the border markets especially at Dawki and Mukhtapur.

With the extension of the Jaintia Kingdom to the plains, trade flourished significantly. The Jaintia Kingdom served as a link between the Brahmaputra and Surma Valleys. The westward expansion of the Ahom Kingdom by pushing back the Kachari from the plains of the Brahmaputra valley to the southern hills (now Dima Hasao and Cachar Districts) brought the Ahomin contact with the Jaintia-the western neighbour of the Kachari, in the beginning of the 17th century. History has it

---

71Ibid., p.64.
that the Jaintia king, Jasamanik, to punish his neighbours, the Kachari, cultivated friendship with the Ahom king Pratap Sinha (1603-1614) through matrimonial alliances with him. Subsequently, taking advantage of the friendship with the Ahom, he obtained the legal permission of the Ahom Government to establish markets in the plains of the Ahom Kingdom for the Jaintia (Pnar) traders. This was a great gain for the Jaintia, who would supply wood for fuel, fish and deer meat as these must have been items valued by the Ahom. In return, the Ahom used to bring to these markets, along with other goods such as rice, food grains, salt, etc., gold and silver taken to the Sylhet markets by the Jaintia (Pnar) traders. The trading activity between the Ahom and the Jaintia (Pnar) in turn, brought the Pnar into close trading relations with the Kachari as well. In Cachar, trade was carried out at bazaars or permanent markets like Barkhola, Udharband, and Lakshmipur among the hills on the southern frontier to which the hills bring their products to barter for salt and iron tools. It is interesting to note that Cachar however, depended on the Jaintia for the supply of iron. The Cachar Records show that on the 16th May, 1841, in response to an enquiry made to the Coal Committee, Calcutta, on mineral resources, E.R. Lyons, Superintendent, Cachar had categorically stated that “all the iron used in Cachar is

---

72 Dhan Manik, the Jaintia Raja, towards the close of the 16th century refused passage to the Kachari traders who since long used to trade with Bengalees in Sylhet Sarkar of Bengal Suba through Mulagul in Jaintia territory. Under his instigations the Jaintias plundered the commodities on the bank of the river Kopili. The strained relation between Kachar and the Jaintia Raja resulted in a war in which the latter was defeated. Mulagul was fixed as the boundary between the two states. Meanwhile, Prabhakar the chief of Dimarua, who was a vassal to the Kachari Raja and had been seized by Dhan Manik before long appealed to his overlord for rescue. The demand being ignored, led the Raja of Kachar to fight against the Jaintia who was ultimately defeated. The latter acknowledge Kachar suzerainty and undertook to pay tribute. He also offered two princes to the Kachari Raja and made his nephew and heir apparent, Jasamanik kept as a hostage at Brahmapur who on the other hand eagerly waited for a time to punish and revenge the Kachari Raja.

74 Ibid., p.134.
75 Ibid., p.135.
77 Ibid., pp.428-429.
brought from Jaintia”. With the passage of time as observed by Willes, these Jaintia traders who brought articles of sale to the lowlands were encouraged to settle in the plains. He writes, “They were oppressed by every independent chief of a little hill and they, on the other hand, were anxious to live on good terms with the British Government.” Whether or not the Pnar established settlements in the Sylhet-Cahar region for the cultivation of _pan_ during this period, is not known. Yet these early instances of migration and settlement could have provided a base congenial for the subsequent migration of the Pnar to the plains with _pan_ cultivation as a factor.

**Process of Migration of the Pnar Pan Cultivators**

It is difficult to give a precise period for the migration of the Pnar cultivating _pan_ in the Valley. However, field study, records and documents collected in the course of the study bear evidence that the second half of the nineteenth century may be taken as a period that saw a wave of such migration. As already mentioned, it is not known, whether this section of the Pnar cultivated _pan_ in the plains prior to this period. P.N.Dutta in his writing, made no mention of the initial period of the occupancy of these Pnar over the forest lands in the plains. He only indicated that, “according to the tradition of the plains, the Khasi introduced the cultivation of _pan_ leaves in Sylhet.” He continues to write: “while all the plains or _pynthor_ Khasi, as they are called by their brethren in the hills, were assimilated in the plains, they are still found in the plains and hills of Sylhet and beyond as cultivators of _pan_ creepers which was their chief occupation.” Therefore, it can be presumed, that the Pnar,

---

79 A. Firminger, *op cit.*, Ross to Willes, 14th June 1789, No 147.
80 P.N. Dutta, “Relations of the Khasis and Jaintias With Their Southern Neighbours Till the British Intervention”, *op cit.* p.78.
prior to the period under review, could have entered the plains in small proportions to cultivate pan on trees in the forest areas. It may be not out of place to also mention that pan from the southern slopes of the Khasi and Jaintia Hills had a considerable demand in the plains. According to W.J. Allen, pawn (pan) leaves are highly esteemed by the natives of the plains. 82 The average quantity of pawn (pan) sent down into Sylhet is said to be about 1,000 lakhs and are sold at about 2 annas per thousand. 83 This could have prompted the Pnar to move spontaneously to the plains of Sylhet where they had already had frequent and direct contact with, to meet the increasing demand. In this context, the Pnar could have established settlements, which Rev Suchiang in his writing, referred to as “temporary.” 84 He stated that the “the Pnardescended down to the plains to grow pan and supply the plain people, its leaves”. 85 Having their work done, towards the end of the year, they would return home with their savings. Hence, the migration might have been initiated long before the actual migration took place, even if the historical facts connected with these Pnar, are still in obscurity.

A wave of migration of the Pnar, in the second half of the nineteenth century was effected by a family or by an individual, driven by a purpose for livelihood, but never by a group of clan members. Though Pnarmigrants happened to have the same clan name, their story of migration and their descent grouping are often different. Nevertheless, beyond the anecdotes of their own, the Pnar migrants seemed to have been stirred by a single source of causes and circumstances that inspired their

---

83 Ibid., p.55.
85 Ibid., p.21.
migration process into the valley. This section of Pnar migrants was predominantly from the southern slopes of the Jaintia Hills district, stretching along the international border with Bangladesh. Seeking for better prospects, the Pnar readily abandoned their homes to occupy large tracts of rich forest in the valley for the cultivation of pan, their only means of livelihood. Like any other migration, the migration of the Pnar, therefore, is not a result of any sudden incident, but of a long and gradual process.

**Route**

As could be gathered, passes and river valleys served as outlets for the Pnar to move from their homeland to the plains in the south. Furthermore, two market places namely Jaintiapur and Mulagul acted as a springboard, for numerous Pnar migrants from the same community on their onward journey to the Valley. This is corroborated by the fact that a number of their ancestors had come from Jaintiapur and Mulagul, the two important market areas in Sylhet, which the Pnar had often attended. In these market areas, the Pnar inhabitants met and mingled with their neighbouring plain inhabitants helping them to pick up the foreign language which ultimately smoothened the process of migration to Barak Valley. The Pnar utilised the plains and hills of Sylhet as habitation. As of today, according to the survey of the Society for Environment and Human Development, there are about 85 Pnar Punjis with a population of approximately 60,000 in present-day Bangladesh in the four districts of Sylhet, Maulvi Bazar, Habiganj and Sunamganj.\(^6\) Over the years, Pnar migrants from the southern slopes of Jaintia Hills, seemed to have fixed the Cachar plains (Barak Valley) as their destination to where they shifted. A section

---

of Pnar migrants from Sylhet also moved eastwards and got themselves dispersed along the forest lands of the three districts of the present day Barak Valley.

The number of Pnar migrants grew gradually, and according to Rev S. Suchiang, the Pnar begin to enter Barak Valley at two entry points. Initially, the Pnar entered from Karimganj (latu) now Karimganj District. They journeyed to Karimganj and Latu by boat (crossing the main rivers of Surma and Kushiara in now Bangladesh) and carried along with them stalks used as seedlings called “tangwah”, to plant at the base of a tree within the forest. After two or three years, the Pnar could gather considerable produce. This incited other Pnar people to move out of their original abode to a place more fertile, favourable to *pan* cultivation, for better sustenance. By and by, the number of Pnar migrants to the forest lands of Barak Valley increased gradually. As time went by, they followed another route along the foothills from Borcherra, Lahalein, Jallapurto Kalaincherra in Cachar district.\(^\text{87}\) The Bengalee merchants who carried on trading activities with the Pnar and who travelled up to Borghat and areas of Borcherra and Lahalein, (now Jaintia Hills), informed the Pnar about the areas in the Valley as fit for the cultivation of *pan*.\(^\text{88}\) Acting on the information, the Pnar left their homes along with the Bengalee merchants to explore the forest lands which eventually led to the establishment of settlements in the Valley for the cultivation of *pan*.

**Causes and circumstances**

\(^{87}\text{Ibid., p.21.}\)

\(^{88}\text{S. Suchiang, op cit., p.21.}\)
Letters and documents bear evidence to the migration of the Pnar to Barak Valley. From information, as available in the official records, the Pnar who originally lived in Bataw, Trangblang and Lakadong, within the “Jurisdiction of Jowai” (what we know now as the War Jaintia areas of both the east and west Jaintia Hills Districts) as observed by the Deputy Commissioner, Cachar, in his letter to the then honourable Chief Commissioner of Assam, Shillong 1902, migrated to the valley for the sustenance of their livelihood.\(^8^9\) Failing to earn their livelihood in their original home, writes the Deputy Commissioner, the Pnar moved to the present place of habitation.\(^9^0\) Many poor households migrate as a family or send household members away, in the light of the then deplorable condition at home. Availability of forest tracts in the valley favourable for pan cultivation attracted the Pnar who were inherent in the skill to grow pan on trees in the forest areas.\(^9^1\) The Pnar took this as an opportunity to escape hardship in their original land and crave for means to sustain their livelihood in the new areas. One group of migrants was followed by another in their movement to the plains to sustain their tree-based betel leaf cultivation. They migrate from one place to the other in search of forest land to farm. It is to be noted that certain tree species, with thick and soft barks are most suitable. Tree species such as Jarul are considered as the most suitable tree species for betel leaf farming and are grown in large number in the Cachar plains. W.W.Hunter writes, “The whole of Cachar may be called a forest district, cultivated only on the bank of rivers, and here and there on the low hills (tillas). The most valuable timber tree found in the District is the Jarul – a light, salmon- coloured

\(^8^9\) Assam Secretariat Records, Revenue Proceedings B, July, 1904, Nos 311-312.
\(^9^0\) Ibid.,
\(^9^1\) Assam Secretariat Records, Financial Proceedings, Forest A, File no IIIF- 14F,1922.
wood with a coarse and uneven grain. W.W.Hunter, op cit., p.370.

92 The southern slopes of Borail Range (bordering North Cachar Hills), South Barak and Bhuban Pahar forest areas are covered by such species.

In addition to this, the Pnar were pushed by other factors prevailing at their original home. For instance, destruction of crops by wild animals particularly wild elephants from nearby Narpuh forest areas of War Jaintia also led to migration of the Pnar to neighbouring areas. The headman of the Niralā Khasia Punji, in Bangladesh opined that constant destruction of crops (which may include the betel vine) by wild animals, particularly the elephants, had made the Pnar of the low lying areas of south Jaintia Hills to leave their homesteads in search for greener pastures in the plains. Interview with Lt. Jhinu Lamin, headman of Nirala Khasia Punji on 12th March, 2013.

93 This could hold true as one of the factors for migration to Barak Valley in India, as well. L.Dkhar in his book on the other hand, accounts for the increase of man eating tigers as reasons for the migration of the Pnar, from their original home which may not, however, hold much water thereby, requiring further probe.

part of the nineteenth century which grew incredibly during the last quarter of the
nineteenth century with the introduction of easy government leases. The importance
of starting Tea Industry was felt after the Charter Act of 1833, when the English
East India Company’s high profitable trade on tea ended with China.\textsuperscript{95} With good
prospects, of flourishing plantation and trade, wide publicity was given, to inviting
people to come to Cachar for undertaking the work of tea cultivation by receiving
grants of lands from the government on easy terms and conditions. Tea Cultivation
in the valley started in the northern portion of Silchar town (District headquarters of
Cachar), across the river Barak in Dudhpatil area, the then administrative
headquarters of Cachar under the British regime.\textsuperscript{96} Tea cultivation then extended to
Dorbintilla, (Northern Cachar) Moolidar and Kanaikoorie adjacently, under a
business organisation named as Dudhputtle Tea Comapny headed by Lord
Inchcape, the then Mayor of London. Subsequently, more tea estates and
organisations were opened even in the far interior areas so much so that by the
beginning of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century, maximum area of land in Cachar, Karimganj and
Hailakandi, then greater Cachar District, flourished with Tea Cultivation. The
migration of the Pnar population to the plains synchronised with the coming of Tea
Plantation to the Valley. It is interesting to note that the Pnar Punjis are situated
alongside the tea gardens – a trend still continuing. In fact most of the Punjis are
within the tea gardens – in the outer fringes except for a few. The presence and
location of the Punjis in the garden areas is suggestive of the mutual benefit and
advantage derived by the gardens and the Pnar in the Punjis. While the Pnargot
areas favourable to pan cultivation on easy terms, they serve as sentinels and

\textsuperscript{96}Basudev Gupta, “History of Cachar Tea Industry – As I Know”, in \textit{Tea Industry, Past, Present and
caretakers of the gardens much to the advantage of the owners. The Pnareasily occupied lands on the outskirts of the tea gardens under the permission granted to them by the tea managers. Anthony Khonglah of Doologram Khasia Punji (present Cachar District) stated that his ancestors were encouraged to reside in the tea garden areas to keep the gardens protected from the wild animals, such as tigers, elephants, bison, hogs and many that were found aplenty in the jungles of the Valley. A reference was also made of Long Pajat, by Kelious Pohthmi of Marua Cherra Khasia Punji (Cachar District) who served as a sordar of the tea garden under the Ballicherra Tea Estate (foot of Borail hill range). The Pnawe were also regarded as peace loving by the British and were encouraged by the tea managers to settle in the garden areas in order to protect the garden areas and the British officials who often fall under the threat of the Lushai and the Kuki. Verner indicated that constant attack was made in the valley by the “Kooki”, who resided in the southern jungles, and the “Loochye”, who resided south of Tipperah Raja’s territories. The fact that the Pnar could acquire lands within the tea gardens on easy terms and conditions, played an important role in encouraging the migration process. Moreover, presence of markets, noticed in the gardens, served as an added attraction to the Pnar for staying in the garden areas through established villages. In many of the tea gardens, weekly bazaars or hats were held for the benefit of the imported labour employees. The Pnar could have seen in the hats, an easy way to market out their produce in those days when means of transport and communication

---

97 Interview with Anthony Khonglah, Cathecist, Doloogram Khasia Punji on 3rd May 2016.
98 Interview with Kelious Pohthmi, Cathecist, Maruacherra Khasia Punji on 20th March, 2010.
99 Interview with Basudev Gupta, Tea Planter on 28th March, 2015.
101 Ibid., p.255.
102 W.W. Hunter, op cit., p.429.
were absent. *Pan* is a perishable crop which should reach its destination within a few days. Thus selling out *Pan* in the markets could have eased the Pnar of the problem of marketing their product beyond the garden areas. The Pnar continue to pursue *pan* cultivation in the neighbourhood of the tea gardens till date. The table below would highlight a few of the Pnar *Pan Punjis*, visited in the course of our field work, alongside the gardens they were attached to:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of the Punjis</th>
<th>Name of the Tea Estates/Gardens</th>
<th>District</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lokhicherra Khasia Punji</td>
<td>Kallinecherra T.E.</td>
<td>Cachar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Darolcherra Khasia Punji</td>
<td>Naraincherra T.E.</td>
<td>Cachar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maruacherra Khasia Punji</td>
<td>Ballacherra T.E.</td>
<td>Cachar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kunapara Khasia Punji</td>
<td>Ballacherra T.E.</td>
<td>Cachar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subongcherra Khasia Punji</td>
<td>Subong T.E.</td>
<td>Cachar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Choto and Boro Damcherra Khasia Punji</td>
<td>Jatinga Valley T.E.</td>
<td>Cachar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guabari Khasia Punji</td>
<td>Pathemara T.E.</td>
<td>Cachar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nagadum Khasia Punji</td>
<td>Pathemara T.E.</td>
<td>Cachar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indranagar Khasia Punji</td>
<td>Amranagar T.E.</td>
<td>Cachar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lailongcherra Khasia Punji</td>
<td>Coombegram T.E.</td>
<td>Cachar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doloogram Khasia Punji</td>
<td>Doloogram T.E.</td>
<td>Cachar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nareinji Khasia Punji</td>
<td>Alni T.E.</td>
<td>Cachar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motthurapur Khasia Punji</td>
<td>Burbandar T.E.</td>
<td>Cachar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baganthol Khasia Punji</td>
<td>Chincoorie T.E.</td>
<td>Cachar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Choto and Boro Solganga Khasia Punji</td>
<td>Poloi T.E.</td>
<td>Cachar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Majkhal Khasia Punji</td>
<td>Binnakandy T.E.</td>
<td>Cachar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Panichowki Khasia Punji</td>
<td>Dirdankhus T.E.</td>
<td>Cachar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baghpahar Khasia Punji</td>
<td>Dwarband T.E.</td>
<td>Cachar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mohan Lamare Khasia Punji</td>
<td>Rottanpur T.E.</td>
<td>Cachar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jalenga Khasia Punji</td>
<td>West Jalenga T.E.</td>
<td>Cachar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Petlad Khasia Punji</td>
<td>Chandipore T.E.</td>
<td>Hailakandi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bandukmara Khasia Punji</td>
<td>Bandukmara T.E.</td>
<td>Hailakandi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lathirghat Khasia Punji</td>
<td>Madanpur T.E.</td>
<td>Karimganj</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paglacherra Khasia Punji</td>
<td>Dullabcherra T.E</td>
<td>Karimganj</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sonaicherra Khasia Punji</td>
<td>Sonaicherra T.E.</td>
<td>Karimganj</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the meantime, transport and communication progressively improved in the Valley. The advent of the railways in Barak Valley towards the end of the nineteenth century might have all the more favoured the migration process of the Pnar. A railway line connects Barak Valley with Kamarupa (Brahmaputra Valley) from
Karimganj (now Karimganj District) running through Badarpur (Karimganj District) and Cachar District (foothills of the Borail Range), alongside the Jatinga river till it touches Bandarkhal station bordering North Cachar Hills (now Dima Hasao District). The Pnar of the Punjis located on both sides of the railway line might have seen in the railway stations like Vyara, Chandranathpur, Damcherra and Bandarkhal as convenient outlets to market their produce. W.W. Hunter also reported that by the 1870’s Cachar was well supplied with roads\(^\text{103}\) to benefit the tea planters whose interest was focused on having good means of communication between their gardens and the Barak River, by which tea could be despatched and all their supplies received. The development of roads proved to be of great advantage to the Pnar too as it enabled them to bring their produce to the markets without much difficulty. Improved means of transport and communication might have motivated and encouraged further migration of the Pnar to the Valley.

The great earthquake that shook the Khasi and Jauntya hills on 12\(^{th}\) June 1897, have been an added factor necessitating further migration of the Pnar from their original home to the Valley. This earthquake holds a prominent place among the great earthquakes of the world because of its intensity and magnitude causing damage, landslides and liquefaction – a phenomena in which the strength and stiffness of the soil is reduced.\(^\text{104}\) The earthquake had a tremendous impact on the Khasi and Jaintia hills causing tremendous destruction in the Khasi and Jaintia Hills, Garo Hills and the neighbouring plains locating at the foot of the Khasi and Jaintia Hills such as Sylhet, (in the south) and Goalpara and Kamrup (in the north). It was however, most severe in the southern slopes of the Khasi and Jaintia Hills - known

\(^\text{103}\)For details see, W.W. Hunter, *op cit.*, pp.425-426.
geographically as the Khasi War and the Jaintia War. *Ki Dienjat U Longshuwa* provided a glimpse of the destruction caused in the war areas:  

\[
\text{Ha ki phang ri war lei lei don ki thain ha kiba lah duh lut}
\]
\[
\text{bad jot ki thiaw ki bri bad jingrep bad la dap sa tang da}
\]
\[
\text{ki lyngrum lyngram ba wan tyllep ki jingtwa na ki lum}
\]
\[
\text{ki riat.}
\]

(loosely translated as follows:

Particularly, in the Ri War (southern slopes), there are areas which were completely affected bringing about destruction to agricultural production and immense damage to groves and yards due to collapse and erosion of landmass.

The headman of Panisagar, (Tripura) was very assertive in stating that her ancestors had left their original home, after the earthquake, and proceeded towards Dawki area from where they entered the plains of Sylhet. As being told by her ancestors, they moved from Ragna Border (Tripura bordering Bangladesh) to Dumphirbon where they had established their settlement for a while. They, then moved to Khudrakandi and finally established themselves at their present place of habitation known as Chamtilla where they reached from south Deocherra (Tripura).  

Also, the headman of Paglacherra Khasia Punji(Karimganj District) made mention of the earthquake factor that led his ancestors to move out of their original home. They moved south to inhabit the forest tracts of the valley by boat via Dullavcherra (Karimganj District) for *pan* cultivation. In addition, as could be

---

106 Interview with BissillaSwer, Panisagar, on 15\(^{th}\), January, 2013.
107 Interview with Sewell Suchiang, Mantri of Paglacherra Khasia Punji, on 18\(^{th}\) January, 2013.
gathered from the diaries of U Lakhon Bang Suchiang, the earthquake added misery to the people of Bataw (Jaintia Hills). He, as an orphan, who had a little sister by the name Lapatho Suchiang, moved out from Bataw with one of his relatives. He was made to become a sordar of the pan Groves (ki bri tympew) in areas where the Pnar had already settled with pan cultivation in places including Nissimpur and Lahalein now located in the bordering areas. After a few years, he moved out from Lahalein and went to a Pnar Punji known as Kalaincherra or Kalain (Cachar District). Being informed by the Pnar already settled in the Punji, about the forest lands in the Valley, Lakhon gradually stimulated a number of people from Bataw to move out to places like Lahalein, Nissimpur, Kalaincherra, Kunapara and Maruacherra, where the Pnarhad already made their presence and undertaking pan cultivation An adventurous man that U Lakhon Bang was, he continued to explore new forest tracts conducive for Pan Cultivation further encouraging the Pnar of the southern slopes to migrate to and settle in the Valley.

The population of the Pnar in the Valley continued to increase. Pan leaf production brought economic prosperity to the Pnar in the Punjis of Barak Valley. Wealthy Pnar villagers employed temporary labourers from their original home in the Hills. These labourers either came individually or with their families and, in the course of their visits to the Valley, tend to stay permanently in the Punjis. Hence, there are also descendants of such labourers among the present Pnar inhabitants in Barak Valley.

---

109Ibid., p.13.
111Ibid., p.81.
Through interaction with the village elders, in the course of tours undertaken to Barak Valley and Bangladesh, an interesting feature in the migration process emerged in the form of subsequent migrations, from the initial place of stay, to different locations in Barak Valley and Bangladesh, in the aftermath of the initial migration from the hills. There are a number of cases testifying such migrations, bearing a nomadic character. Degrading forest cover, local problems and knowledge of more fertile lands elsewhere are some of the factors leading to such migration from the initial settlements. The following table provides a glimpse of a few villages that sprang up from the already existing ones as a result of such subsequent migrations within Barak Valley:-

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sl. No.</th>
<th>Name of the Punjis</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>District</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>BanglatillaKhasia Punji</td>
<td>1956</td>
<td>From Doloogram</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(Khashpur)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Cachar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>BaikanKhasia Punji</td>
<td>1953-54</td>
<td>From Lokhicherra</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Cachar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>JaroltalaKhasia Punji</td>
<td>1932</td>
<td>From Mothurapur</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Cachar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>BaigazineKhasia Punji</td>
<td>1959</td>
<td>From Durganagar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Cachar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>LathirghatKhasia Punji</td>
<td>1926</td>
<td>From Rampur</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Karimganj</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>MukamtilaKhasia Punji</td>
<td>1984</td>
<td>From DhubriKhasia Punji</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Karimganj</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>CheragiKhasinathpur</td>
<td>1972</td>
<td>Mostly from Putucherra, also from Dosdwa and Saidwa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Karimganj</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>PuthicherraKhasia Punji</td>
<td>1950’s</td>
<td>From Bandukmara</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Hailakandi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>ChoraihariKhasia Punji</td>
<td>1971</td>
<td>Mostly from Sagolmar, Patiala and Batsiatilla</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Karimganj</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>ChotosalgangaKhasia Punji</td>
<td>1940’s</td>
<td>From Santakona and Rampur</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Cachar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>JamirkhalKhasia Punji</td>
<td>1966</td>
<td>From Paglanalla</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Cachar</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Migration to the Neighbourhood

During the initial groundwork of our study, another important related area emerged - that of the presence of the Pnar Punjis in the adjoining areas bordering
Barak Valley. *Punjis* are found in the North Cachar Hills (now Dima Hasao) District (in Assam); and the neighbouring states of Manipur, Tripura and Mizoram. In the North Cachar Hills, the most important village is Jatinga founded in 1905 by U Lakhon Bang Suchiang. As has already stated, Lakhon Bang Suchiang was an adventurous man who kept on exploring forest tracts for the cultivation of *pan*. In such a search for a suitable forest, he discovered the forest tracts of the North Cachar Hills most favourable. With the help of a missionary, by the name of J.G. Williams, he was granted permission to establish a settlement on 15th November, 1905. Immediately he founded a village and named it Jatinga after the river. He became a prominent village headman who commanded love, respect and obedience not only from his fellow villagers but also from the neighbouring tribes such as the Zeme Nagas, Dimasa, Kuki, etc. In fact, at the entry point to the village, one is graciously greeted and welcomed by the commemorotive bust of U Lakhon Bang Suchiang.

In November 1905, a few Pnar left Borkhola, where they first settled when they migrated from the Hills, acting on information gathered from Lakhon Bang and J.G. Williams. These were the first immigrants to Jatinga. Jatinga flourished tremendously so much so that before partition, it was regarded as one of the most modern and prosperous village in Assam. *Pan* stalks were brought from the different *Punjis* of Cachar District and were planted at the base of trees. *Pancultivation of the Pnar here, in no way, differed from those in the three districts of the Valley. *Pan jhums* are situated on shady slopes of hills and the labour required in clearing the jungles, pollarding the trees, planting the creepers and taking care of them until they mature, is about the same. Nevertheless, *pan* leaf thrives better here.

---

on the higher and cooler hill slopes of North Cachar Hills than on the low hills of Barak Valley.\textsuperscript{114} The cultivation of \textit{pan}, was therefore, very productive and the village, having the great advantage of being situated near the railway station, marketed \textit{pan} not only to Halflong town but also Cachar, Karinigannj, as far as to Sylhet and Chittagong\textsuperscript{115} (now in Bangladesh). Indeed, \textit{pan}, was among the first goods that was booked by the goods train when it started its maiden journey from Lumding to Badarpur on 14th January 1904.\textsuperscript{116} However, unlike the other Pnar inhabitants in the Valley, the Pnar of Jatinga did not remain confine to the cultivation of \textit{pan} alone but also introduced and undertook Orange Cultivation. In 1914, orange seeds were brought from Bataw village (Jaintia Hills) by Soin Pdiak and Pringtah Suchiang. Permission was sought and granted by Clifford, the then SDO of the Cachar Subdivision on 11th December, 1914 for the purpose of Orange cultivation. By 1917, there were about 46 houses that had orange orchards.\textsuperscript{117} Unimaginable wealth came to the Pnarin Jatinga. The success of both \textit{pan} and orange cultivation was more than what they could have expected, that, to the Pnar, writes Evelyntice Sajem,\textsuperscript{118} was the “prime and glory” of the Jatinga village.

Somebody during that period composed a song in Khasi:

\begin{quote}
\textit{Tympew baheh bad bajyngam} \\
\textit{Ki um bashngiam bad soh bathiang} \\
\textit{Kylleng pyrthei la bna ka nam} \\
\textit{Shnong Jatinga kum ksiar bla siang}.
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{114} Assam Secretariat Proceedings Rev Department A, December 1934, No. 86 dated the 29th March 1933.  
\textsuperscript{116} \textit{Ibid.}, p.15. 
\textsuperscript{117} \textit{Ibid} p.15. 
loosely translated as follows:

Pan wide and green, sweet water
and fruits, Lo and behold, Jatinga
as precious as gold.

In addition to Jatinga, a number of settlements sprang up in North Cachar Hills. Soon after the foundation of Jatinga village, U Lakhon Bang Suchiang, also founded the Boro Lekha village near Harangajao. Permission for pan cultivation was granted and they occupied the area above the Borolokha bridge at 280 mile of the railway. With the passage of time, a number of settlements emerged and presently, there are six Pnar Punjis in the North Cachar Hills (Dima Hasao District) with an overall population of approximately 1,000 to 1,200 people.

North Cachar Hills (now Dima Hasao):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of the Punji</th>
<th>Household</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Jatinga</td>
<td>400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Borolekha</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Dimbucherra</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Kaphucherra</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Chotomalkoi</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Jerikho</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: N. Synnah, Headman of Jerikho Khasia Punji

In Mizoram, the Pnar are found in a locality at Vairengte, a town in the Kolasib district of Mizoram. In an interview with Dengte Suchiang, he narrated that older generations of the Pnar from Bataw village came to settle at Bhaga in a Punji named Napit Khal Khasia Punji of Cachar District. The Mizo of Vairengte, who used to visit Bhaga market, became friendly with the Pnar. In course of time, the Mizo invited the Pnar to come and settle at Vairengte, an area marked by ranges of high hills and dense forest. Gradually, the Pnar after exploring the adjoining

---

119 Assam Secretariat Proceedings, Rev Department A No. 182 dated 25th March, 1934.
120 Interview with G. Suchiang, Vairengte Khasia Punji, 29th January, 2014.
forest areas, found them fit for cultivation, prompting them to settle at Vairengte. They were granted *panjhum* permission by the Government and had a *bri* (*pan* cultivating area) of their own where they were permitted to cultivate betel leaf and to establish a settlement of their own which they named as Hawa *Punji*. They pay house tax. However in the years 1966-67, because of the prevailing disturbances, the Mizo forcibly occupied the lands belonging to the Pnarin and around Vairengte. As of now, the Pnar continue to settle at Vairengte but grow betel leaves on government forest lands at least 10 to 15 kms away from the village. They pay taxes to the Forest Department. They attend the weekly market every Thursday at Vairengte and a market at Bhaga twice a week for the sale of the *pan* leaves. They either sell their *pan* leaves in the markets directly or through middlemen. At present, there are altogether three *pan* cultivating villages in Mizoram with a population of approximately 400 to 450 people.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of the <em>Punji</em></th>
<th>Household</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Vairengte</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Saiphum</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Phainum</td>
<td>07</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: D. Suchiang, Vairengte Khasia Punji

In Manipur, the inhabitants of the three Pnar *Pan Punjis* consists those who had initially settled at Robipur in Cachar. Salan Suchiang, headman of Uchchathal Khasia Punjistated:121 U Shylliangam originally from Bataw, left Robipur along with his relatives in search of forest lands to cultivate *pan*. They finally reached a place called Laiting (Manipur) in the 1930’s. Formerly, the entire area belonged to the Kuki who possessed a vast jungle area for *jhum* Cultivation. It seems, there was no objection to the Pnar occupying the spot. With an understanding between the headman of the Kuki and U Shylliangam, the Kuki lent their lands to the Pnar. In the

121 Interview with Salan Suchiang, Headman of Uchchathal Khasia Punji, on 12th, January, 2013.
meantime, U Shylliangam was granted permission from the Government to cultivate *pan* leaf. He founded a village named Uchchathal in 1943-44 where he finally settled himself, leaving Laiting to the care of his nephew. The following year, he founded another village Baibon and left it to the control and management of his brother. The three villages continue to exist with an approximate population of 300 people.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of the Punji</th>
<th>Household</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Uchathal</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Baibon</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Laiting</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Field trip: Salan Suchiang, headman of Kamrangkha (Uchchathal) Khasia Punji

In Tripura, there exists five *Punjis* in all. The Pnar *Pan Punjis* are found along the Kailasahabar Dharmanagar region (now North Tripura District). The Pnar initially established themselves in an area called Chamtila. Ram Swer, the granduncle of Bissila Swer (still residing) bought the entire area from the Tripura king VirVikram Manikya Bahadur in 1935. Permanent settlement was granted by the government in 1965. Initially, there were fifty six houses in Chamtila, out of which only one house is left presently. The other inhabitants of Chamtila got dispersed to the neighbouring *Punjis* in Tripura including Dartoi, Hillsara, Kollapur and Jolai.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of the Punji</th>
<th>Household</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Dartoi</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Hillsara</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Kolappur</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Jolai</td>
<td>02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Chamtila</td>
<td>01</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Pradeep Pajat, Choraibari Khasia Punji and Bissila Swer of Chamtila (Panisagar, North Tripura District).

122 Interview with Bissila Swer, Chamtila Khasia Punji, 15th January, 2013.