CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSION
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Before the coming of the British, the Jaintias had a three-tier system of Government. At the top, there was a Syiem. Syiemship was hereditary and it passed from the uncle to the nephew. This principle was strictly followed to the extent of keeping the royal blood pure. His personal rule prevailed only over the conquered territory of the plain areas. In the hill section, the administration was left entirely to the Daloi. The only symbol of their allegiance to the Syiem was an annual tribute of one he-goat from each and every village under their administration. But this was rather ceremonial than political, though technically, a tribute system is symbolic of a basic power system. The Syiem was no more than a symbol of unity of the people; and if his activities threatened that unity, the latter would strongly oppose him.¹

The Dalois were not autocratic rulers either. Their Elaka were really republic though very tiny indeed. The

Daloi were elected directly by the people within their respective Elaka from among the candidates who should belong to certain Kurs. This privilege was granted to certain Kurs simply because they were regarded as the original settlers of the Elaka concerned. Like the Syiem, the Daloi also had to rule according to the popular opinion of the Elaka. This was clear from the fact that all the acts of the Daloi would have to be approved by all the citizens of the Elaka through the Durbar Elaka.  

At the lowest rung of the ladder, the people had a Waheh-Chnong in each village. There was a Durbar Chnong too in which all the villagers were expected to attend. Like his senior partners in the administration, he could never go against the popular opinion of his village.

The Langdoh played a very important role in guiding the political destiny of Jaintia Hills. In practice, no category of rulers in Jaintia Hills be he a Syiem, Daloi or Waheh-Chnong could become oppressive beyond a certain limit for fear of being removed from their post by the people. If they misbehaved towards their people, the people may appeal to their Langdoh and if they were found guilty

2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.
they might be removed accordingly. The people could not take the law into their own hands since they should have the recommendation of the Langdoh for removing any of their rulers. The last example of ragicide in Jaintia Hills was that of Ban Singh Syiem (1660-65) who was put to death on the recommendation of the Langdoh was on the complaint against Ban Singh Syiem's tyrannical acts were made. Hence the Langdoh appeared to be the ultimate reservoir of power in Jaintia Hills. However, the Langdoh could not simply submit to any popular demand unless it was sanctioned by apparent divine authority as interpreted by him.

Election as part of democratic practices was very old in the Jaintia Hills. The Daloi and Waheh-Chnong were elected and not appointed. Except for the Waheh-Chnong, the Syiem, the Daloi, Langdoh etc. required certain qualifications. The candidates must be members of the original Kurs. The Kur was counted from the mother's side. When the election was conducted, a date was appointed and the news was conveyed to all citizens of the Elaka. A Sangot


5. Bareh, H. The History and Culture of the Khasi People, (Published by H. Bareh, Shillong, 1964), p. 76.

(a village crier) summoned all adult males at a place fixed (usually a large field). When the electors arrived, a line or imaginary line was drawn in the field. The electors were directed to gather together in places where the candidates they supported stood or sat whatever the case may be. When the electors gathered together in two or three places as there were candidates, the number was counted.  

This is in brief an account of the old time election in Jaintia Hills. But since the time of the British Rule, the Government supervised the election of the Daloi. When the District Council came to stay in 1952, the appointment of the Daloi and their election were conducted by the Council. Soon thereafter head counting or hand counting would form only a small part of the history of the District.

Thus power during the pre-British belonged not only to the Syiem but was also shared by the Daloi and their people. The people appointed their rulers only to supervise their activities.

8. Ibid.
This process would have continued had it not been for the impact of British colonialism in the area. British administration had definitely upset the above system operating in Jaintia Hills. Under the British, the first institution to go was that of Syiemship in 1835. After replacing the Syiem, the other rulers like the Dalois and others had to be under the British rule. Actually the Dalois had then to bring their usual annual tribute of he-goats to the British authorities at Sohra instead of taking them as usual to Jaintiapur.  

The second institution to go was that of the Langdoh. The British had deprived him of his political role in presiding over the destiny of Jaintia rulers. His role was then confined purely to religious matters. Whatever secular functions that had been enjoyed by the Langdoh had been completely taken over by the British. For example, the British authority alone could approve the election of a Daloi, and the Daloi might be removed in case of proved misbehaviour either to the people or to the British authorities. With the elimination of these two Jaintia political institutions the democratic process that existed in Jaintia

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Hills in whatever dimension began to erode. Now the British authorities had become the absolute masters in Jaintia Hills, with no other authority to limit their power over the Jaintia.\textsuperscript{11}

The only indigenous devices kept by the British were those of the institutions of a Daloi, a Pator and a Waheh-Chnong. But even here the British had drastically reduced their traditional powers. For example, the Daloi had practically become merely Commission Agents of the British. This curtailment of their power was, however, only between them and the British. On the contrary the Daloi had gained more control over their people with the backing of the British authorities.\textsuperscript{12}

The British had intentionally used these traditional leaders to help them in ruling the turbulent people of the hills with the least expenditure. The people then respected the Daloi not because he was their traditional ruler but because of the fear of his authority which he had derived from the British. By enjoying more powers over petty civil and criminal matters, as well as over the new system of 'coolie labour' introduced by the British the

\textsuperscript{11} Ibid., pp. 2-3.
\textsuperscript{12} Ibid.
Dalois had sometimes misused their power to suppress their people. This was the position of the Daloi in Jaintia Hills until India's Independence.\textsuperscript{13}

We have seen that before the coming of the British the Jaintias had their own traditional institutions. With the coming of the British these institutions were reduced in importance and there was a feeling that some sort of organisation should be set up so that through it the people could ventilate their grievances to the British authorities.\textsuperscript{14} Thus the Jaintia Durbar was established in 1900 and it was known as the Jaintia National Union. It was only in 1931 at the meeting held in Jowai that the Jaintia National Union was renamed the Jaintia Durbar.\textsuperscript{15}

The main intention in forming the Jaintia Durbar was to unite the whole of Jaintia Hills under one organisation for the purpose of safeguarding, retaining and improving upon the customs and usages of the land. Secondly, it intended to develop the people economically, socially and educationally. Thirdly, it also served as a liaison between the Government and the people of Jaintia Hills.

\textsuperscript{13} Ibid.
Fourthly, it was an instrument to work towards understanding with the different political parties in India and it would also serve as an organ or spokesman of the people of Jaintia Hills.  

The Jaintia Durbar was nothing but a union of the representatives from every sub-durbar in Jaintia Hills. With the passing of the Government of India Act 1935 and with the holding of election in 1937 the people witnessed a complete change in the political sphere. In 1937 the Jaintia Durbar though simply a social organisation recommended all candidates in the provincial elections. During this time there were no party politics in Jaintia Hills and hence the Jaintia Durbar had no alternative but to send its representatives to represent the Jaintia people. It was for this reason that candidates contested the election as independent candidates. All candidates were members of the Jaintia Durbar and either they won or lost the election they still remained as members. From 1937 to 1952 the Jaintia Durbar still functioned as a non-political


body but in the general elections of 1957 the Jaintia Durbar had an understanding with the Eastern India Tribal Union which was spearheading the Hill State movement. The result was that after 1957 the Jaintia Durbar lost the confidence of the people and then gradually became defunct in the early sixties. 19

Before 1937, the Jaintia Hills together with the Khasi Hills were declared as a backward area and therefore not represented in the Assam Legislative Council. Under the Government of India Act, 1935, the Jaintia Hills together with the Khasi Hills were declared as Partially Excluded areas and therefore represented in the Assam Legislative Assembly. The Jaintia Hills was then allotted one seat, that is, the Jowai seat. 20

Thus with the coming of the British, most of the early institutions were either abolished or reduced in importance and the people were exposed to new ideas and experiments in politics. Accordingly, the people had to adjust themselves to these new political situation and

19. Ibid.
ideas. A sudden change from an old political system to a new one seemed to have a great impact on the people of those days. The leaders of those days seemed to be more concerned about the unity of the tribes and for this reason all candidates were recommended in the election. They seemed to realise that these new ideas and experiments in politics would bring confusion to the minds of the people and it seemed for this reason that the Jaintia Durbar the only organisation of Jaintia Hills functioned as a non-political body. For many years the Jaintia Durbar as a social organisation controlled the representatives from Jaintia Hills and led the people to their political destiny.

Since Independence the powers of the Daloi had been threatened by the new set up. The District Council under the Sixth Schedule to the Indian Constitution had replaced the British administrative system over tribal affairs in Jaintia Hills. Earlier we have seen that the British had replaced the Syiem and now the District Council had replaced the British. But the stepping of the District Council into the shoes of either the Jaintia Syiem or the British did not bring any improvement in the power and position of the Daloi. On the contrary, the new power structure had radically reduced the powers of the Daloi.  

Under paragraph 3 of the Sixth Schedule, the District Council can regulate the succession, appointment and even abolition of the institution of Daloi and Waheh-Chnong. The Daloi and Waheh-Chnong are now completely under the control of the District Council. On many occasions, there have been tussles between the traditional elite represented by the Daloi and Waheh-Chnong and the modern political elite of popular elected representatives. On one pretext or another, the Daloi or Waheh-Chnong might be suspended or even dismissed by the District Council on charges like insubordination or malpractices. The tussle is still a continuing affair and has reached such a stage where the District Council authorities might even be tempted to abolish these traditional political institutions.22

In accordance with the provision of the Sixth Schedule, five District Councils - one each for the North Cachar Hills, the Mikir Hills, the Garo Hills, the Mizo Hills and the United Khasi-Jaintia Hills District were set up in 1952. The creation of these District Councils for the hill areas actually did not seem to satisfy the Jaintias because in 1947 they did plead before the Bordoloi Committee, for a separate District Council, but Rev. Nichols-Roy with certain promises of equal treatment pressurized

22. Ibid.
them to drop the idea. Further, in the Constituent Assembly, Rev. Nichols-Roy, from the Khasi hills was the spokesman for the areas. As such the Jaintias could not do much in expressing their opinion for separation. Again in 1957 when Pandit Govind Ballabh Pant the Union Home Minister of India visited Shillong some members of the District Council and others representing the people of Jaintia Hills submitted a memorandum to him demanding a separate District Council for the Jowai Sub-Division. It was only in 1964 that a separate District Council was created for the Jowai Sub-division of the United Khasi-Jaintia Hills District inhabited mainly by the Jaintias. This new District Council came into being in 1967.  

In the working of the provision of the Sixth Schedule the people of the hill areas of Assam, felt that this autonomy was defective and not satisfactory. They found many loopholes by which their future would be endangered gradually by the mixture in the administration in Assam with people whose language and culture were quite different from their own. The result of this was that the hill people felt that it was better for them to have a Hill State of their own. Thus from 1954 we see the emergence of the Hill

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State movement in the hill areas. The people of Jaintia Hills also joined hands with the other hill tribes of Assam in this movement demanding for a separate Hill State. This led to the formation in 1960 of the All Party Hill Leaders' Conference which spearheaded the Hill State movement.24

Thus the power structure of the political institution in Jaintia Hills had undergone a number of changes. Before the British period the ultimate power was wielded by the Langdoh with supposed divine authority. The Syiem controlled only over the plain areas while in the hills he enjoyed simply a nominal authority. It was the Dalois who really wielded powers in the hills, and might be assisted by Pators if Elakas were large enough. At the village level, the Waheh-Chnong exercised the powers conferred on them by the Dalo or Pator. But all those officials were ultimately responsible to the Langdoh who was in turn responsible to divine guidance. So, the element of popular control cannot be said to have existed in Jaintia Hills, during pre-British period. Even where election prevailed, either franchise was limited to adult male members only or the candidates should come from a limited number of

Kurs. With the coming of the British, whatever amount of limited democracy that had existed in Jaintia Hills had been done away with. The two institutions of Langdoh and Syiem were abolished while the power structure in other political institutions though retained has been drastically changed. The Dalois, Pators or the Waheh-Chnongs became only instruments for wielding British power in Jaintia Hills. While their respective power relating to people had increased considerably, in fact, they had subordinated themselves to British power. Since independence, all these had been changed again. Though the two earlier institutions of Langdoh and Syiem had not been revived, the other institutions had not been given a new lease of life either. On the contrary the powers of the present Dalois and Waheh-Chnong have always been threatened by the District Council. But the introduction of this new system cannot be said to have actually transferred power from the hands of the Dalois and Waheh-Chnong to the people through their popular elected representatives in the District Council.\(^{25}\)

From the foregoing analysis it becomes clear that this phase was a transitional phase in Jaintia politics.

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The system of the traditional political institution of the Jaintias was destabilised by the British. Since the British intention was not for the welfare of the Jaintias but they only wanted to strengthen their base in North East India therefore they went on experimenting with these institutions. Syiemship was liquidated and with that the priest lost his power over the people. Moreover, the people were overburdened by an oppressive tax system without taking into consideration their primitive technology and the backward nature of their economy. However, the only alternative for the Jaintias was to protest against such measures but that did not help in restoring back the autonomy to their system. On the other hand, it resulted in making them a part of the bigger whole by making Jaintia Hills together with the Khasi Hills a part of Assam. It was only after a long struggle that a certain amount of autonomy was restored through the creation of a separate District Council in 1964 and the formation of the State of Meghalaya in 1972.