CHAPTER II

History (Khási Hills)

The almost total absence of written records prior to the coming of the British leaves the past history of the Khási people unrecorded. Brief references are to be found in the chronicles of the Koches and the Ahoms, and these only relate to very infrequent temporary contacts.

Of the Khási chieftainships within the area covered by the present Gazetteer, the most prominent was the Kingdom of Shillong, comprising Mylliem and Khyrim (referred to as Khairam in the chronicles of the Koches). A king of Khyrim is mentioned in these chronicles as having made a submission to Sukladhvaj, nicknamed Chilarai, during the reign of the Koch King Nár Naráyan about the middle of the 16th Century. The Khyrim chiefs probably had more frequent contacts with the Jaintia kingdom, their closest neighbour on the east, contacts which were alternately friendly and hostile, till the very advent of the British. About 1708 A.D., during one of the few periods of peace, they apparently went to the aid of the Jaintias against the Ahoms who had taken the Jaintia king captive.

For the past history of the Khásis we are obliged to be content with legends (obviously a most uncertain source) and circumstantial evidence. We cannot even hazard a guess as to the length of time the Khásis have been in the Khási and Jaintia Hills. Gait suggests that the preponderance of obviously Khási names for rivers, hills and villages point to a considerably long period of association. The paucity of traditions about migration may suggest that the Khásis are autochthons or that, if their ancestors did come from some other place, the movement of the tribe into these hills took place in the very distant past, very likely anticipating the Tibeto-Burman migrations which themselves must have taken place very long ago. The kinship between the Khási language and other language forms in South-East Asia has been well established. There is a vague tradition among the Khásis of a migration from the east and it is a point of interest that one of the passes through the Patkai Range mentioned by Pemberton[1] bears the name "Khassie nullah". Most authorities believe that the ancient Khásis were isolated in the hills which now bear their name in the wake of the Tibeto-Burman influx into this region and here they have successfully preserved their language from being submerged. That their sway once extended over extensive tracts in the plains of Assam is borne out by tradition supported by the evidence of megalithic remains.

1. Pemberton, R. B. : The Eastern Frontier of India (Reprint. Delhi, 1979) P. 65

Although political contacts between the Khásis and their neighbours in the plains surrounding them were limited, contacts of another sort have left their mark on present-day Khási society. The very great number of clans with the name **dkhar**, (i.e. plains people) or in its short form **'khar**, usually prefixed, estimated at a tenth of the 3,363 or so Khási clans[2] would suggest that the male ancestors of these clans were in the habit of making raids into the plains and bringing back with them women who were then inducted into Khási Society to become the ancestresses of new clans; clanhood could not otherwise have been transmitted in the matrilineal Khási Society. It is not unlikely that all these 'mixed' clans owed their origin to a period of marauding raids which must have been going on for centuries, coming to an end with the British occupation of these hills. A census of individual clans may reveal to an approximate degree the probable length of time they have been in existence.

We are on more certain ground with the commencement of the British period. Contacts between the British and the Khásis started towards the close of the 18th Century after the British East India Company had obtained the **Diwani** of Bengal from the Mughals and begun to establish themselves in the plains of Sylhet just south of the Khási country. Trade in limestone in which the southern belt of the Khási and Jaintia Hills is abundantly rich must have begun quite early. Towards the close of the 18th Century, these trade contacts were frequently disturbed by acts of violence largely due to the rapacity of the Europeans. Lindsay who was Collector in Sylhet about 1776 soon obtained virtual monopoly of the trade and for the next few decades the cutthroat competition of the sort that had been such a disagreeable feature of earlier trade contacts disappeared. Trade by itself, though obviously lucrative, might not have led to the extension of British rule to the Khási Hills, were it not for certain events which were even then taking place in the north-eastern region and which, first bringing Assam under British rule, by an almost inevitable process step ultimately engulfed the Khási Hills as well.

By the end of the 18th Century, the powerful Ahom kingdom had declined in power. To internal dissensions were added external threats posed by the Burmese king who claimed overlordship over the Ahom kings by virtue of their origin in the Shan country of Burma, even though that event had taken place over 500 years earlier. Unsettled conditions so close to their frontier could not be viewed with complacency by the British. During the Governor-Generalship of Lord Cornwallis, the British had been drawn into intervention in the affairs

2. Kharakor, U Spiton : *Ki Khun Ki Ksiew U Hynniew Trep* (Shillong, 1981)

of the Ahom Kingdom and this in time led to open conflict with the Burmese. Two wars were fought, at the close of which the British found themselves in possession of the Ahom kingdom, first Lower Assam, and later the rest.

Between their old possessions in Sylhet and their newly acquired possessions in Lower Assam intervened the Khási Hills. If a road were to be laid through these hills to connect Guwáháti with Sylhet, weeks of travel over difficult and malarious country could be saved. Moreover, the new route would lie through a country with a salubrious climate and comparatively easy terrain. David Scott, the shrewd Agent to the Governor-General for the northern territory, wasted no time in exploring this possibility. Hearing that U Tirot Sing, Syiem of Nongkhláw, was interested in regaining possession of portions of the **duars** which he had held before the British advent, David Scott let it be known that U Tirot Sing could have these back in return for certain concessions to the British. David Scott probably did not know that U Tirot Sing, like any other Khási king, had no absolute power to decide matters by himself. Unlike other Indian native chiefs, a Khási King was only a constitutional head sharing corporate authority with his Council, generally representatives of leading clans within his territory. U Tirot Sing thus had to convene a gathering of the leaders of his chieftainship — a "Meeting of the Parliament" in the words of Major White who accompanied Scott on that historic and fateful visit to Nongkhláw on 1st November, 1826. The debate was long, an indication of the division of opinion among the people, but ultimately on the second day of the durbar the assembly decided to grant David Scott's request. Although neither party realized it at the time, on that day was sown the seed of the upheavals that would soon bring to an end the independence of the Nongkhláw Syiemship and other chieftainships as well. It is not unlikely that the interpreters on both sides had given versions of the negotiations in terms calculated to please their respective principals, and when U Tirot Sing append'd his mark to the final agreement he probably felt that he had much to gain.

For a time, everything seemed to go well : work on the road was started, buildings and farms came up at Nongkhláw and the relations between the resident British Officers at Nongkhláw—Lieutenants Bedingfield and Burlton—apparently could not have been better. Disillusionment on the part of U Tirot Sing was not long in coming. His principal rival in the plains—Balaram Singh, Raja of the place called Ranee—disputed his claims to part of the **duars** and in December 1828, confident that under the terms of the treaty which had been signed at Nongkhláw, the British would support him, U Tirot Sing went with a party of armed men to establish his claim but found himself

confronted instead by a party of the Company's sepoys who blocked his passage. It might have been at this moment that he came to think that while the treaty he had signed conferred every benefit on the British it offered no compensatory gains for him. The deposition of an Assamese official, Mahodar Barooah, before the Court of Inquiry set up in the wake of the massacre at Nongkhlaw makes pathetic reading : "Barooah," U Tirot Sing is stated to have said to him, "Mr Scott formerly made friendship with me, saying, 'your enemy is the Company's enemy' and that he would relinquish the Burduar Revenue both in money and pykes. He has not done it and he has a wish to give troops to my enemy the Ranee Rajah to assist him against me". His feelings of grievance were also aggravated as time went on by what he considered to be the arrogant behaviour of the Company's servants. Whatever the immediate provocation, the incident at Nongkhláw on the 4th of April 1829 was a tragic miscalculation. Unable to lay hands on David Scott, U Tirot Sing's men killed the two British officers, one of them with about 60 men on their retreat to Guwahati, and in doing so unleashed the fury of British retaliation. Military operations were immediately started, particularly against U Tirot Sing, and such of the other Khási chiefs as were believed to have thrown in their lot with him with the sole objective of driving out the strangers in their midst from the hills.

Although some of the old records speak of a 'confederacy of Khási states', in cold statistics this could not have amounted to much. It should not also be forgotten that only a small number of the 25 chieftainships were in the struggle from start to finish. Principal among them were Nongkhláw, Myriáw, Rambrái, Máwsmái, Máwmluh (itself a tributary village of the Nongkhláw Syiemship) and Maharám, though the brunt of the conflict would appear to have been borne by Nongkhláw and Rambrái, actively assisted by U Bor Manik, the Chief of the Shillong Kingdom. Two of the more important chiefs mentioned in British records, U Sing Manik of Khyrim (actually still a part of the Kingdom of Shillong), and U Dewan Sing of Cherra had no part in the hostilities. U Sing Manik independently undertook the role of mediator between U Tirot Sing and the British in the closing stages of the conflict, while the Syiem of Cherra apparently gave active help to the British as did some of the minor chieftains. Even if we include all the seven named as belligerents, their total population inclusive of old and young could hardly have been more than 20,000. In 1853, some 24 years later, the population was about 24,005 out of the total Khási population of 82,400 approximately. According to A. J. Moffatt Mills the combined population of the Khyrim 'province' and Cherra alone was much more (32,635 in 1853)[3].

3. Moffat Mills, A.J. : Report on Assam (1853)

Another factor that doomed the stand against the British from the start was the total lack of firearms, and so the Khásis went to war armed only with swords and shields, bows and arrows. (One Dr. Beadon was actually mortally wounded by an arrow during a clash at the initial stage between a party of soldiers and the Khásis). The Khásis were, moreover, untrained in the type of warfare in which they soon found themselves engaged. They quickly found out that it was impossible to engage in open battle a determined enemy who could kill from a distance and accordingly they resorted to guerrilla activity which dragged on for about four years. Mabarám itself surrendered only in 1839.

The campaigns of 1829 and 1830 were inconclusive. 1830 came to a close with no sign of the Khásis coming to terms. On 1st December, 1830, David Scott wrote to the Chief Secretary, Mr Swinton : "I regret to state that the Cossyahs in the Nongkhlaw district still remain in a very unquiet state, inhabitants of the chief villages having left their houses and taken to the woods at the instigation, as they state, of Manbhot, Munsing and the other outlaws who have intimidated them into the adoption of this measure by burning their houses and putting to death some persons who wished to continue in submission to our authority"[4]. He felt that it would not be wise to force the villages to act against the rebels and so draw upon themselves the vengeance of the hostiles but suggested that it would be a good plan to leave the inhabitants to discover for themselves "the inutility of attempts to relieve themselves from the consequences of their past misdeeds". He suggested the following terms : "I considered it expedient to require of the Cossyas....that they should either defend themselves from the outlaws and give information in regard to the place of their resort, or that, if they professed to be unable to do so, they should deliver up their arms and receive into their village a small party of military for their defence. To these terms the inhabitants of some villages readily acceded while others absconded and now continue out in the woods". He thought that this was probably due to fear, "our parties, as they truly state, being unable to defend them from assassination by the outlaws on the highroad although they may protect their villages from any open attack".

Unable to pin down the raiders to one decisive engagement the British authorities tried out several measures to force them to submit. The unorthodox tactics of Ensign Brodie for a time seemed to pay dividends. Employing irregulars, mostly Man and Manipuri mercenaries, during the spring of 1831 he descended upon villages in the north without warning. Hapless

4. Political Proceedings (Foreign Deptt.) Nos 29 & 30 dt. 31.121830

villages through which Khási raiding parties had passed were often treated as hostile and attacked. Several were burnt down together with granaries. Stockpiles of food in the suspected areas were methodically destroyed. Some of the sufferers inevitably were people who were innocent. Some Chiefs found it impossible to carry on. In October 1829, U Jubor Sing (Zubber Singh) Chief of Rámbrái, decided to tender his submission to the British Government. Some of the leading men of the State, notably Nychun Koonwar and Lall Sing (probably the same men remembered by the Khásis as U Khein Kongor and U Lorshon) considered his act one of betrayal and a few months later U Jubor Sing was killed by his own people. These same men were suspected of having led subsequent raids into the Duars and attacked police and revenue outposts at Pantan, Bongaon and other places on the night of 5th January 1831, killing several police and revenue officials and taking away four captives, after setting fire to a number of houses.

Apart from U Tirot Sing, there were three natural leaders among the Khásis who appeared to have given more than ordinary trouble to the British. Besides the two named above, there was another man, U Monbhut, whom even David Scott referred to as "the Cossiah Hero". The decision of this former blacksmith to fight was probably fortuitous. He had had no hand in the Nongkhláw incident and would probably have continued to live the ordinary life of a Khasi villager but for the raid on his village and the burning down of his house. "Mun Bhot (sic) is highly spoken of", says an official report. "He was not concerned in the murder of Lieutenants Bedingfield and Burlton ; but in the operations against Teerut Sing on the occasion, his village was burned and he of course joined the insurgents. He has been concerned in the various plundering excursions into the plains attended with bloodshed and murder but he has never been guilty of coldblooded murder of individuals who have fallen into their hands, like Mookhin Sing the Chief of Mosmye (Máwsmái) who spares none — Mun Bhot only puts the soldiers to death as he considers them as those who seek to destroy him."

David Scott thoroughly approved of the tactics adopted by Brodie but also proposed other measures which had been tried out successfully elsewhere, namely closing the markets in the plains to the mountaineers as a final resort. These measures we to be adopted if all else failed, as closing the markets would harm the interests not only of the people of the hills but also those of the plains.

As the conflict dragged on, David Scott began to think of a plan of establishing a small cantonment for European troops in the hills. To start with, he proposed that 40 to 50 invalids might be sent up to Cherra-

punji to recover their health. In his communication to the Government of India he recommended that "should the experiment prove favourable, many excellent sites for the Cantonment of troops are at the disposal of Government or may be obtained further in advance of Churra, at a greater elevation and in a drier climate." The cost of transporting a month's rations for the troops, he calculated, would not be above one rupee per month per man. To supplement these rations, he thought that cattle could be purchased sufficient for 300 men to be allowed free range in the hills where good pasturage was available, adding the remark that these cattle would also provide manure for vegetables for the use of the troops[5]. The more he thought of the idea, the more it attracted him and by August he had raised his estimate and proposed the purchase of 20,000 head of black cattle, sufficient for 2,000 troops. "The Neilgherry hills and the Cossya mountains", he wrote, "appear to me to be situations in each of which from *five to ten thousand men might* be located" (italics are the Editor's). He expressed his conviction that such colonists would be better and more reliable in any confrontation with foreign powers, particularly Russia, over the steadily growing Indian Empire. "I would propose that these Colonies should be of a purely military character and that ordinary settlers should not be admitted unless they became subject to martial law.....The sole object in view is to provide at a small expense a large body of European troops for the defence of our Indian Empire and no inferior considerations should be allowed to interfere in any way with its accomplishment in the most certain and perfect manner".[6]

To prepare the ground for his plan, he deputed a military expert, Lieutenant. Thomas Fisher, on a reconnaissance tour of the Khási highlands, although he himself favoured Mylliem, because of its climate as well as easy terrain. In suggesting Mylliem, Scott might also have been influenced by political considerations : with a colony of Europeans at this place, U Bor Manik Syiem, who was also his implacable foe, would be kept under firm control.

Fisher recommended two places—both of which were close to Mylliem—the first between 'Chillingdeo' (perhaps the Shillong Peak) and Nongkrem embracing an area of 6.5 to 8 sq. kms or 4 to 5 square miles "unbroken by any undulation which could not be easily rendered practicable for wheel'd carriages" and the second to the south of Mylliem, a plain south of Nogundee (probably Nongkynrih) and located around Laitlyngkot. Fisher himself preferred this as, in his words, it "possesses all the advan-

5. Pol. Proceedings (For.) : No 44 dt 25.6.1830
6. Pol. Proceedings (For.) : No 57 dt. 30-7-1830.

tages of the before-mentioned but is probably a little lower though not so much so as to be perceptibly warmer, and as the access from Pundua to this spot is easier than to the first, I incline to give it a decided preference".

As it happened, the Council in Calcutta appeared to have regarded this proposal to establish a colony in the hills with some reservation, the primary consideration being the remoteness of the area. The death of David Scott on 20th August, 1831 virtually killed the whole scheme although T. C. Robertson who succeeded him, reiterated the soundness of the idea as a means of pacification of the Khásis. "If the expediency of having a European force in this quarter be admitted", he wrote to the Government of India in July, 1832, "....where is a position to be found so adaptable in every respect for a European Cantonment as these hills afford! Here, in a climate as congenial to their constitution as that of their native land, might a Regiment be stationed, bearing on its left upon Assam, on its right upon Cachar and Munnypore, and when a road across the hills shall be made, able to move down upon either point at a few days' warning"[7]. He added that with such a European force in addition to the Sylhet and Assam Light Infantry and Goalpara **sebundies**, the services of the regular **sipahis** would not be needed.

While this proposal met with no favourable response, Robertson's subsidiary proposal to settle the Mon and Manipuri mercenaries at Mairang and Nongkhláw was more favourable received. Ultimately, neither plan was implemented.

By 1832, reports of the purchase of firearms from Dacca (Dhaka) and Mymensingh began to reach the British Government and Robertson reported the matter to the Governor-General. In June 1832, an armed party under Lieutenant H. Rutherford was ambushed near the Umiam-Máwphlang (Bogapani) by a party of Khásis who killed the leading sepoy. Lieutenant Rutherford reported some "novel features" which had been absent in his previous encounters with the Khásis in 1830—the capture of the dead soldier's musket, the attempt to cut off his head "almost in the face of myself and four other sepoys" (a reckless act which cost the would-be headsman his own life), skill in the choice of a place of concealment behind stones to neutralize the effects of retaliating fire and the superior condition and equipment of the leading men "eight of whom we saw armed with musquets and clothed in red cloth jackets". Rutherford commented on the admirable site chosen for the ambuscade and "its being I believe the first time they have ventured to

7. Pol. Proceedings (For.) No. 72 of 13.8.1830

attack a party on the Cherra side of Moflong (Máwphlang). They must have had full time to make up their minds", he went on, "as the hill at the foot of which they were lying in wait is 1500 foot high and a party visible from nearly the top to the bottom, and I do not hesitate to say that had it not been for the highly creditable conduct of the naick and eight sepoys of the Sylhet Light Infantry who accompanied me, they might have had some chance of success."[8]

Rutherford concluded : "This together with the late attack on Mr Assistant Surgeon Morton on the Nungkhlaw (Nongkhláw) side whom they plundered and obliged to return to Gewhatty (Guwáháti) evince little inclination on the part of Tirot Sing's party to come to an amicable settlement as the Cossyah who was killed was indentified as one of his **gholosims** named Ootar (U Tar)".

The troubled conditions persisted through 1832. Writing to Bengal in July 1832, Robertson stated that "while Teerut Sing lives and retains his freedom, a feeling of loyalty towards him and a general wish to promote his success, or at least to save him from destruction, will ever operate to keep alive the spirit of resistance among all who are hostile and ensure his receiving supplies and underhand assistance even from those who are most friendly to us". Seeing how much misery was being inflicted on the common people, some Khási chiefs, including U Sing Manik, offered to mediate between the British and U Tirot Sing. Months of protracted negotiations went on without producing the desired results. Robertson decided in November 1832 to instruct Captain Lister to resume military operations. It stands to Robertson's credit that his instruction included a stipulation that Lister should refrain from burning any village. It has been mentioned that even David Scott appeared to have accepted the burning of many villages by Ensign Brodie in the previous year as a necessary evil. Robertson thought differently. He emphasised that the plan thitherto pursued "of setting fire to all villages of which the inhabitants manifested a hostile disposition appears objectionable on the score of policy as well as of humanity and never to have produced any good effect whatsoever". In case Lister should find himself compelled to resort to measures of extreme severity affecting not merely individuals but the entire community, Robertson required that he should furnish immediately "a particular report of all circumstances of the case".[9]

8. Pol Proceedings (For.) : No 89 dt. 9.7.1832.
9. Instructions dt. 9.11.1832.

With the resumption of full-scale operations, resistance could not last much longer. With dwindling resources on which they could depend for the supply of food and arms, and with no fixed base of operations, the Khási guerrillas knew that they could no longer hope to carry on for long with this unequal struggle. Contacts were made with U Tirot Sing by the Khási mediators. The condition that U Tirot Sing's life would be guaranteed at last began to produce results, although to the last U Tirot Sing insisted that the British should withdraw from his territory. The final surrender of this Chieftain on the 13th January, 1833 marked the end of all organized resistance. U Tirot Sing was eventually tried at Guwáháti and then sent to Dhaka to serve his sentence as a State prisoner for life. Broken in health and spirit he died in Dhaka shortly afterwards on 17th July 1835[10].

Meanwhile, his nephew, U Rajan Sing, was put in his place as the Syiem of Nongkhláw. He entered into an engagement with the British Government whereby he agreed to fulfil all conditions imposed upon him and his Council to allow the British Government to construct roads, bridges, buildings ; to furnish men and materials for the same, the material to be paid for ; to allow grazing land for any number of cattle as might be sent by Government and to be responsible for their proper care ; to deliver up people wanted by the British for any offence committed by them, and in return, for a period of one year, he was to be paid Rs. 30/- per month. This then was the price paid by the Nongkhláw Syiemship for the attempt to re-assert its independence four years earlier.

The sentence passed on U Tirot Sing was the severest on any of the several chiefs who had risen against the British. The other chiefs in fact had their territories restored to them, having only to pay punitive fines for the trouble they had caused. Most of the friendly chiefs subsequently submitted themselves to the authority of the British. Apart from the difference in regard to penalties imposed, all Khasi chieftainships, irrespective of whether they had been hostile or not, were treated equally. They were allowed full freedom in the exercise of their customary authority, a limit only being placed on their power to try offences, including capital offence, and cases involving non-Khásis or Khásis of states other than their own. On their part, the British did not interfere with the management of local affairs and never sought to assess any revenue from Khási states. Only a small house tax was imposed upon the villages that they had taken over directly under their control, most of which were in South Khási Hills.

On the whole, then, the British displayed uncommon wisdom, imposing unexpectedly lenient terms from a position of strength and thus ensured an

10. Authority Dr David R. Syiemlieh of the North. Eastern Hill University.

era of peace which was never to be disturbed again. The Khási Hills with the Jaintia Hills were constituted into an Agency in 1835 following the occupation of the latter area and Captain Lister who had taken a leading part in the operations against the Khásis was the first Political Agent, with his headquarters at Cherrapunji. The station was at a place leased to the Government in exchange for an area of land in the plains of Sylhet. Peace and prosperity unfortunately led also to the gradual loss of the native spirit of selfreliance and industry and the official report for 1853 stated that the simple character of the Khásis had to some extent been "corrupted by civilization and increased wealth".

The next important event following the end of the conflict in the hills was the beginning of modern education with the coming of the Christian Missions, more particularly the Welsh Presbyterian Mission, established in 1841, which started schools in various parts of the hills. After the initial suspicion had been overcome, the people took to education avidly and for a long time the Khásis, in proportion to their population, led in literacy as well as in English literacy in the whole of Assam. In female literacy, the Khási Hills stood first among 11 districts in Assam till well into the thirties of this Century.

Another event was the shifting of the capital from Cherrapunji to Shillong in 1864, the District Officer's offices being the first to be transferred thereto. In 1874, when Assam was constituted into a separate province, Shillong became the administrative capital of the new province. Factors that led to the decision included the ideal climate and the comparatively light rainfall (80" or 2032 mm on the average against Cherrapunji's 360" or 9000 mm), as also the location of the station approximately half-way between Sylhet and Guwahati, the only places in the plains then connected by road with Shillong.

The majority of the people of the districts were hardly affected by political changes that took place with the country in the early years of the present century. The introduction of limited representative government following the enactment of the Government of India Act, 1919, virtually left the entire Khási Hills outside the station of Shillong unaffected. Shillong alone was declared a General Urban Constituency but, as it happened, the representative of this constituency on the Governor's Legislative Council was a Khási. However, the seeds of political consciousness may be said to have been sown then, particularly among the urban population, though it would be many years before aspirations for full political involvement would become manifest. Even with the coming into force of the Goverment of India Act, 1935, only Shillong continued as an electoral constituency. The British portions of the erstwhile Shillong Sub-division were in effect represented by Rev.

J.J.M. Nichols Roy, the member for Shillong, who had been representing the Shillong constituency since 1920. The Khási chieftainships remained excluded largely because both the rulers and the people at large felt that their interests would be better served by their being directly looked after by the Political Agent (also the Deputy Commissioner of the former Khási and Jaintia Hills District). The Khási National Durbar, including as members the more educated among the Khásis, was, however, beginning to realize that the old state of things could not continue for long. Already, they had begun to feel that certain terms of the Sanad conferred on certain Khási chiefs ran contrary to customary law, in that they failed to recognize the extremely circumscribed powers of a Khási chief or, on the other hand the extent of the rights of the individual. (Interested readers will profit by going through Part III of Cantlie's NOTES ON KHASI LAW.[11]) At the same time, it was realized that notwithstanding adjustment of existing laws the Khásis could not live in isolation from the rest of the country. Many would have preferred being treated on the same terms as other native states in India. The main obstacle to such recognition was their number ; the 25 Khasi States altogether had a population of just over 180,000 people at the 1931 Census, 85% of them Khásis. While individually they could not be members of the Chamber of Princes, collectively they could be represented on it. The then Viceroy recommended a Federation, a suggestion which was quickly taken up. There was much delay in creating the Federation, largely because of the existence of the so-called "British villages" which were directly under the provincial administration. It was not till 15th August, 1947 that the majority of Khási States signed the Instrument of Accession to the new Domininion which was accepted by the then Governor-General on 17 August, 1948 after the rest of the Khási States had also signed the Instrument.

While the Khási States Federation was initially concerned with the interests of the States, it envisaged a wider association in which the non-state areas would eventually be included. The aims of its political wing, the Khasi States People's Union, were not very different from those of the Khasi-Jaintia Federated States National Conference, a newly formed party that was equally vocal but perhaps more influential in the contemporary context since the leader was a minister of the Provincial Government. Their inability to make a common front was responsible for the division among the Khásis for a very long period. With a view to reconciling the two stands, however, it was proposed to convene a Khási States Constitution-making

11. Cantlie, Sir Keith : *Notes on Khasi Law* (Reprint, 1974).

Durbar and elections were held by open ballot throughout the State areas of the Khási Hills. The Durbar was inaugurated on 29th April 1949 and the business session started on the 11th July.

Certain developments were, however, already taking shape which changed the entire situation. The Cabinet Mission in 1946 had expressed its anxiety for the future of the minorities after the grant of Independence to India. Certain guidelines were suggested and a Minority Advisory Committee under the Chairmanship of Shri Gopinath Bordoloi, with Rev Nichols Roy as one of the members, was constituted. Among its recommendations which were submitted in 1947 was the creation of District Councils to look after the local affairs of the six principal hill areas of Assam, including the Khási & Jaintia Hills. Wide power of legislation on a number of matters including Land (a sensitive issue with the tribal population of Assam) were to be given to the District Councils. This arrangement, it was hoped, would satisfy the aspirations of the tribal population. The debates in the Khási States Constitution making Dorbar were accordingly largely devoted to the issue whether it would be better for the Khásis to be directly associated with the Indian Dominion in Delhi in terms of the Instrument of Accession already signed by the Khási States, or by their being under the Government of Assam under the provisions of the proposed Sixth Schedule of the Constitution. Before these differences could be resolved, the Constituent Assembly in November 1949 adopted the provisions of the Draft Sixth Schedule with, however, several modifications which, to the Khásis, gave them and other tribal people a form of autonomy which fell short of their expectations. An executive order of the Government of Assam brought the short life of the Khási States Federation to an abrupt end as from 25th January 1950, the eve of the first Republic Day. These sudden changes did not allow adequate time for the minds of the common people to be prepared for the District Council of the United Khási and Jaintia Hills when it was inaugurated in 1952. The average Khási who felt an overriding concern for his land feared that, whatever the claims of its advocates, the District Council might not be able to guarantee the preservation of his rights to it.

There were also fears that the powers given to the District Council to legislate in matters relating to Land and Forests, would not achieve their purpose since all legislation would have to be approved by the Governor who would in any case seek the advice of the State Council of Ministers. Moreover, its competence to legislate on certain matters was in doubt. A legislation on land transfer was actually quashed by the Supreme Court as infringing the provisions of the Constitution[13]. For such reasons, the hillman's

suspicions and fears that his claims, however genuine, might not be conceded by an "unsympathetic" State Government continued to disturb the political scene. These uncertainties in time led to agitations which did little good to relations between the Khási people and the Government of Assam. The first concerted demand for a separate Hills State by the East India Tribal Union, in which not only the Khásis but other hill tribes were united, was made at the time of the constitution in 1953 of the States Reorganization Commission under the Chairmanship of Shri Fazl Ali. The Commission on its visit to Assam in the following year interviewed different public bodies and individuals and in its Report in April 1954 rejected the idea of a Hill State as impracticable.

The Report aroused much criticism from the public of the Khási, Jaintia and Gáro Hills. To alleviate the situation several measures were tried out by the Government of India. For a time, it succeeded in securing in effect a coalition Government in which M.L.A.s from the hill areas would be Ministers in charge of tribal affairs.

This arrangement seemed to have achieved its purpose because active opposition died down, but the passing of the Assam Language Bill in 1960 brought this to an unhappy end and the tribal ministers resigned.

All political parties in the hills united in forming a common forum on 6. 7. 1960 and the organization called the All-Party Hill Leaders' Conference came into being. This met with the sympathy of the Centre because of its uncompromising stand on the principle of a peaceful struggle for a Hill State within the Indian Union. The Prime Minister (Mr Nehru) then offered his plan of a new administration on the 'Scottish Pattern' which would offer a larger share of autonomy to the hill people. The A.P.H.L.C, excluding the Congress members, rejected the Plan, insisting that conferment of a Hill State would be the simplest and most acceptable plan. To prove that the vast majority of the hill people were behind them, they decided to fight the 1962 elections on this issue. As expected, they won almost all the seats and, having proved their point, the M.L.As resigned.

Strikes and other peaceful demonstrations were planned which were only suspended at the time of the Chinese incursion in 1962. The death of the Prime Minister in 1964 was a set-back as in 1963 he had suggested an even more liberal plan, the so-called Nehru Plan, to satisfy the hill people's aspirations.

13. AIR 1972, SC 787 V59 c 148) - Case : Miss Sitimon Sawian vs. The District Council, U. K. & J. Hills Civil Appeal 1546 and 1547 of 1968.

The Commission appointed under the Chairmanship of Shri Pataskar in 1965 offered toned - down recommendations. It would still not concede the demand for a separate Hill State and instead recommended the constitution of a Hill Areas Committee of the State Assembly whose function would be to examine and approve all proposals relating to legislation concerning the hill areas. Should a dispute arise between the State Government and this Committee on any matter, this would be submitted to the Governor whose certificate would be final. The Commission also recommended that all ministers for hill areas should be appointed in consultation with the Hill M.L.As and a separate Department for Hill Areas should be set up in the Assam Secretariat. The Commission, however, recommended restoration of the unpopular expedient of having nominated members in the District Council although this number was reduced to four. This was viewed with concern as there was fear that the effectiveness of the Council would be compromised.

Towards the close of 1966, the Conference decided to boycott the 1967 Elections and launch a Direct Action programme before the end of the year. The then Prime Minister, Shrimati Indira Gandhi, visited Shillong in December of that year and studied the situation. In January, 1967 the Home Ministry issued a statement accepting in principle the re-organisation of the State of Assam.

The Conference at its 18th Meeting in June 1968, adverting to the delay in implementing the decision of 13th January 1967, decided on non-violent Direct Action. The demonstrations continued till the 9th and 10th September, 1968. On the following day, the Government of India made its historic announcement regarding the proposed creation of an Autonomous Hill State within the State of Assam. The Conference met again on the 14th and 15th of October, 1968 and decided to give the plan a fair trial in deference to the sincerity of intentions of the Prime Minister and the Government of India. On the 15th December 1969, the Meghálaya Bill was introduced in the Lok Sabha. Such was the goodwill extended by the nation at large that passage of the Bill took only 9 days, from the date of the introduction of the Bill in the Lok Sabha to the date of its passing, i. e. the 24th December, by the Rajya Sabha. The Autonomous State of Meghálaya was inaugurated on the 2nd April, 1970 by the Prime Minister.

The new State was vested with full legislative powers in regard to all but a few subjects in the State List which continued to lie with the State of Assam. This was the cause of discontent during the ensuing months, not

only among the hill people but also among the people of the Assam Valley but all doubts, apprehensions and uncertainties were resolved when Parliament in 1971 passed a Bill conferring full statehood upon Meghálaya. It was inaugurated as such on the 21st January, 1972.

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