

Market System Of The Khasi-Jaintias In The Late Eighteenth And Early Nineteenth Centuries With Special Emphasis In Iron And Lime Industry

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ABSTRACT:

Markets play a crucial role in the social and economic function of mankind. In the Khasi and Jaintia hills the markets significantly contribute to the economic and social life of the people. Generally, markets serve as platforms for communication and forming connections amongst people from different villages, and also as crediting centre for the farmers. Like any tribal community in India, the economic activities of the Khasi and Jaintia hills are mainly agrarian in nature. This paper emerged from a PhD research that focuses on the iron industry and limestone trade in the Khasi and Jaintia hills. It attempts to trace these economic activities by focusing mainly on the markets. Although there is a scarcity of available resources to show the activities of the markets in these hills, it can be observed that the existence of a market calendar, which is unique to the community, testifies to the existence of a thriving business market economy since the late eighteenth century. Moreover, this paper attempts to highlight some of the products in the markets with specific focus in Iron and Lime industry then and now.

Keywords: Khasi, JaintiaHills, Ironand Limestone, Markets

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I. INTRODUCTION

Meghalaya is situated in the North eastern part of India, and it is well known as the 'Scotland of the East'. It is also famous for Cherrapunjee and Mawsynram having the highest rainfall in the world. The major tribes inhabiting Meghalaya are the *Khasis*, *Jaintias* and the *Garos*. Linguistically, *Khasis* and *Jaintias* speak an Austro-Asiatic language known as '*Khasi*' (*Pnars* a dialect of *Khasi* spoken by the *Jaintias*), whereas the language of the *Garos* belong to the Tibeto-Burman family.

The term market refers to a place where things were bought and sold. The markets might be situated in a village or urban centre; it may be a weekly market or a day to day affair. Markets in our Indian agrarian rural society are usually held according to the specific day of a week while the urban markets happen throughout the week. In the broader context, market may be defined as the economic activities of a society, but markets of the Indian societies are also social institutions that transform the entire society. In Indian markets, caste, class, tribes and other social norms play a dominant role in the sphere of commercial activities.¹

Economically speaking, markets deal with traders, merchants or capitalist; they explain the rise and fall of the prices and the factors that influence buyers and sellers to save and spend. However, the meaning of markets must be judged and analysed in depth from the social aspect as well. Adam Smith in his book the 'Wealth of Nations' states that market is not only a place where buyers and sellers meet but it is also a place where a large number of individuals meet for exchange as well as transaction of goods which in turn creates a functioning and a systematic order in the market. So, even though each individual merchant guards and protects his products and commodities for his own selfish interest or profit, this quest for personal benefits by all the traders result in the benefit of all who had contributed to the overall development of the society. Thus, this unseen force which contributes to the betterment of individuals is beneficial to all members of the society. This unseen force was termed by Adam Smith as the 'invisible hand²'.

Thus, the term markets can be understood as a place where the consumer and the trader negotiate decisions that serve their interest and as Adam Smith had mentioned that it was the 'invisible hand' that brought benefits not only to individual traders, but gave confidence to all the merchants to create more wealth thereby

¹. NCERT, Indian Society Class-XII. NCERT Publication New-Delhi, December 2007, 62.

²Ibid, p63

developing the economy of the society at large. This economic attitude was known as *laissez-faire* which means 'leave it alone' or 'let it be', whereby markets are free from the rules or regulations of any authority. Thus, the market is studied from a narrow angle for an economist and whereas a sociologist would define markets from a wider sense based on socio-cultural perspectives.³

Indian markets as well as those in the world peasants' societies are often controlled by particular groups of people or by a certain class of people whose connections and activities centre around social and economic administration of the society. In fact, markets act as the meeting places of the inhabitants of a surrounding village where local traders and outside traders from nearby villages display their goods for sale. Consequently, the local markets came into contact with their regional markets and it linked them with urban markets and ultimately the local economy came into contact with the national economy and world economy. Indian markets have certain features present in most of them where there is the presence of a class of money lenders, a host of specialist traders, entertainers, skilled artisans who deal with different wares and household articles and also people who offer themselves for different kinds of services.⁴

Markets in the hills and in the tribal region not only act as the major institutions for the exchange of goods but also as the centres of social interaction and communication of the various social groups. The tribal traders come to the market to sell products and to barter rare goods like salt, dry fish, jewelleryes and other essential commodities. Interestingly, a tribal market also acts as a meeting place for their own kith and kin to discuss marriages, employment opportunities, exchange gossip and other activities.⁵

By the late eighteenth century along with the dawn of colonialism, the market organization in India and especially the tribal markets endured tremendous changes. With the establishment of the British Empire, markets in the entire Indian sub-continent became better connected with newer means of transport and communication and some of them emerged as centres of production of certain crops. On the other hand, tribal markets lacked this technology and were gradually assimilated into the wider regional market which subsequently became linked with the national market and the world economy. The tribal economy expanded in the hands of the colonial masters as industrialisation in Europe, especially in England, warranted the exploitation of minerals resources for their economy. Thus, the simple tribal market lost its original feature, characterized by an influx of non-tribal moneylenders. They played a major role as intermediaries between the Khasis and the British and they further intensified their position by exploiting the prices of goods, hoarding and using other illegal means in the markets for their own benefit and this resulted in the weakening and deprivation of the tribal trader.⁶

Alfred Gell, an anthropologist, visited north India and noticed that most of the markets in the Indian sub-continent were dominated by caste and other social groups and that the markets were structured on the foundation of social hierarchy. For instance, Gell pointed out the case of a market which is located in a village at *Dhoria* in the north *Bastar* district of the state of *Chhattisgarh* in which the gathering of all the merchants and small time traders were arranged according to their caste hierarchy. The wealthy high caste *Rajput* jewellers, other high caste traders and the upper middle caste merchants sat in the central zone of the market while the outer circle of the market was occupied by other lower middle caste traders, the tribals and other low caste sellers who usually sell vegetables and some local tools and wares. He also noticed the presence of caste and social distinctions among the buyers and sellers from the way they bought and sold their products and the arrogant attitude of the non-tribal towards the tribal.⁷

It is difficult to trace the genesis of the markets centres in the Khasi and Jaintia hills. But, like any tribal community, the economic activities of the Khasis and Jaintias largely depend on agriculture. Besides this, trade and manufacturing was also practiced by them in order to sustain the society. On the other hand their neighbours in the plains of Surma and Brahmaputra valley were also able to produce surplus production, thus enabling them to come into contact with the Khasis for trade. As the Khasi and Jaintia hills cannot produce surplus agriculture production, they went down to the plains and bartered those goods which they cannot produce in the hills like rice, dried fish, oil, cotton cloth, etc. with the products from the hills such as the limestone, iron, oranges, bay leaf, coarse cinnamon and other forest products (Allen, 1858). Therefore, like any hill tribes of the North East India, the Khasi-Jaintia hills was also responsive and conscious to trading activities. Firstly, this paper gives a brief account of the market system in Khasi and Jaintia hills and tries to trace the common activities that were usually practiced and how the market economy was established in several places. Secondly, it provides a description of the development of the iron industry and the lack of investment by Europeans in the iron industry as compared to lime trade.

³ Ibid,p.63

⁴ Ibid,p63

⁵ Ibid,pp.63-64

⁶ Ibid.p 64.

⁷ Ibid, pp.64-65.

II. MARKET FORMATION

In the Khasi-Jaintia hills, large deposits of valuable mineral resources can be found due to the geographical location of the hills and the favourable climate conditions. The ability to grow different kinds of vegetation gave the inhabitants of the hills an advantage to trade with and engage in other commercial activities with the people from the plains. It can be assumed here that the earliest market in the Khasi and Jaintia Hills began at the foothills of the north and southern regions rather than the hills. The Sylhet District Records (1770-1791) compiled by W. K. Firminger in four volumes mentions that the fertility of the soil in the Surma valley is responsible for the large surplus production, and this was the major reason that raised the level of the subsistence economy to a new stage. Consequently, the markets took a new trait transforming the entire structure of the economy. Thus, the markets are places where people pursuing diverse economic activities meet for business transaction and other commercial activities. Later on, the tribal market economy expanded and came into contact with the merchants from outside and as a result, the Chiefs or Kings started to create rules and regulations such as, the imposition of toll tax for entering the markets in the hills, fees for using the river for transportation of goods as well as fees for maintenance the markets and for setting up a shop, so as to protect the tribals from exploitation in any economic dealings. Therefore, it can be seen, that the Khasis' early trade relations with the people in the southern region was possible due to the emergence of a new class of specialist traders who ventured out to carry on their trade with the people from the plains in the southern foothills as the topography possessed a better means of riverine transportation and foot tracts.

Though no reference is available that can provide information about any organized market in the hills during the pre-colonial period, through oral narratives, traditions and customs that are practiced till date, it can be observed that the markets have existed way before and even beyond reckoning. For instance, the Khasis have a unique system in which they calculate the yearly calendar and time in such a manner that enables them to fix the weekly market calendar. The Khasis divided the number of days in a week and the principal markets in the entire Khasi and Jaintia Hills in the following manner as shown in *Table II.1*:

Week	Location of the markets in Khasi Hills	Location of the markets in Jaintia Hills
1	Lynkah (Barpani or Khawang)	K Kyllao (sutnga)
2	Nongkrem	P Pynsing
3	Um-long (Maolong the hat at Laban)	M Maolong. (Nartiang)
4	Ranghep. (Big Market at Cherrapunjee)	M Maosiang. (Jowai)
5	Shillong.	M Maoshai
6	Pomtih or Pomtiah.(Small Market)	P Pynkhat. (Mynso)
7	Umnih	T Tym-Blien
8	Iew-duh.(Mawkhar, large Market) Currently Bara Bazar	K ka-Hat. (Jaintiapur)

Table II.1

Yule⁸ (1844) also provides an account of the markets as the main source of income and livelihood and further describes that a week consisted of eight days, and that the main markets were held on the eighth day at the same location. For example, if a market is held on a Monday at *Lynkah* (the first location as shown in the table above) the next market will be held on Tuesday at the same place. As the Khasi and Jaintia Hills developed simultaneously, better markets also developed which were more feasible, conducive and accessible by all the traders. This led to a further development of permanent marketplaces in the entire Khasi and Jaintia Hills as shown in *Table II.1*. At this point, it is important to note that most of the villages and settlements in the hills were located largely in the *Khyntiam* region and the southern foothills. It may also be assumed that apart from other reasons, the close proximity of the villages to the trading centres in the south was a motivating factor for the location of the villages.

Across the plateau and probably the frontier markets, trade was largely in the hands of the hill people who proudly asserted their claim and control of the markets. There are numerous references in *Bengali* and *Ahom* literature of the markets and trade conducted in the foothills of the then Khasi-Jaintia hills. There are several descriptions of the Khasi markets and trade in the early British accounts. Alexander Lish, a missionary of the English Baptist Mission of *Serampore* who resides in *Cherrapunjee* from 1832 to 1836, wrote a comprehensive account in which he enquires as to how the people lived. He points out that the:

“Khasis use to barter their goods which they continuously supply to the plains throughout the year; these items of production from the hills were oranges, honey, iron, bee’s wax, ivory, Indian rubber in exchange for rice, fish, salt, but more frequently for spices. Fruits and grains of different kinds, with potatoes grown in the

⁸Excerpts from Lt. Henry Yule, Bengal Engineers, 1844 by Rev. Fr. Christopher Becker, SDS , page147-151

hills are brought by the inhabitants to the principal markets in the hills and were also taken to the plains” (Lish, 1838. page 138)⁹

Besides the articles of export mentioned above, potato, which was introduced by David Scott (a British agent station at Khasi hills in 1830), was also widely cultivated by the inhabitants. It was one of the new products that was supplied throughout the internal markets as well as exported in large quantities even to Calcutta. However, small supplies were also sent to *Sylhet*, *Mymensing*, and *Dacca* and to the different parts of Bengal¹⁰. Lish, in 1838, further narrated, that the Khasis also had longstanding trade interactions with the Assamese who supplied the Khasis with different kinds of garments and fabric such as ‘*muga*’ and silk.¹¹ Till date this particular trade interaction is still in practice, where the traditional dress such as the ‘*Jainsem*’ and ‘*Dhara*’ are made from these fabrics.

In Jaintia hills, the famous market known as ‘*Iew Moalong*’ (currently known as *Iew Mawlong*) which is located at ‘*Nartiang*’ is quite popular even today and has become a tourist attraction. William Griffith, in 1835, noticed the importance of this village which is the second largest next to *Jowai*. The weekly market was held outside the village and it was attended by a hundred to two hundred people. In these markets, all indigenous products and luxurious items were available. The items which were commonly available were dry fish, millet and inferior grains. Khasi fabrics which were manufactured by the Jaintias, pottery, agricultural tools and other implements such as iron bars, spade, nails, etc, were also available.¹²

A unique feature of the marketplaces in the hills was the active participation of the women in several business transactions. The reason for this was that Khasi society is a matrilineal society, free from caste and class distinctions and women have equal rights with men. Surprisingly, even though the markets were crowded they were not as noisy as the plains; both men and women dressed nicely and they maintained their dignity, integrity and honesty, following strict adherence to truth.¹³ As British imperialism expanded and took firm control of the hills, especially after the Khasi Resistance in 1829-1833 and with the annexation of Jaintia hills and Paraganas in 1835, the boundaries were further redefined which affected the pattern of trade and changed the nature of markets.¹⁴

Markets played a vital role in the development and growth of the Khasi-Jaintia economy. Apart from the economic function, markets played a significant role in the lives of the people and had a major impact culturally and linguistically. It may be of interest to mention that the Khasi *hats* were the centres where the Khasis conducted the coronation of their *Syiems* (kings) and where religious rites were also performed. One such market which still performs religious rites till date is the *Iewduh* market in Shillong and the *Nartiang* market in Jaintia Hills.

The opening of more markets, along with advanced means of communication affected the tribal society and their economy profoundly. The introduction of money as the medium of exchange enabled the Chiefs or Kings (the *Syiem*) to collect tolls (*Khrong khajana*) and tax from all the goods that entered the markets falling under their jurisdiction and this led to the development of several social differentiations. Ultimately, the tribal markets, which were once a closed economy, were eventually absorbed by the world economy. The tribal economy was eventually unable to control the surplus produce since by then their produce was extracted at various stages in various forms by various groups of traders (Bhattacharjee, 1994)¹⁵

III. MARKETS IN THE FOOTHILLS:

The predominant markets at the foot of the hills on the southern region and in the district of Sylhet were *Bholagunj*, *Chattack*, *Lakhat*, *Jaintiapur*, *Jaflong*, *Pharal Bazar*, *Maodong*, *Ponaitit*, *Molagul*, and *Lengjut*, situated along the boundary of Sylhet district. The markets were held at regular intervals of eight days to enable the hill men to visit the different *hats* in rotation. At these markets the *Syiem* levied market dues.¹⁶ The trade in these border *hats* was largely in the hands of the Khasi-Jaintias and a few Bengali traders. Interestingly, some

⁹Alexander Lish “A brief Account of the Khasees”, Printed .Bishop College Press *Calcutta Christian Observer*. 1838. P 138

¹⁰ W. J. Allen. *Report on the Administration of the Cossyah and Jynteah Hill Territory Bengal Hukaru Press, Calcutta, 1858. P 49*

¹¹ Ibid, A. Lish, pp. 138-139.

¹² William Griffith. ‘ Postumous Papers Bequeathed to The Honorable The East India Company: Journals of Travels In Assam, Burma, Afghanistan and the Neighbouring Countries’. Calcutta. Printed Bishop’s College Press. 1847.p169.

¹³*Gleaning in Science*. Excursion to the *Chirrapunji Hills*. Vol- III, June 30th 1831.pp-172-174.

¹⁴ R.H. Phillimore. (comp), *Historical Records of the Survey of India, 1815-1830, Vol. II, Survey of India, Dehra Dun*, pp 49-52.

¹⁵J.B. Bhattachajee. ‘*Studies In The Economic History Of North East India*’. Har-Anand Publication. New Delhi 1994,pp.164-167.

¹⁶ W.W. Hunter. “ A statistical Account of Assam In two Volumes”. Delhi Reprinted 1975. P241.

of the hats also acted as collection centres for produce from various parts of the hills before they were exported to the plains. Afterwards the markets in the uplands of north Khasi Hills expanded and a few Bengali merchants, also known as the *boxwallahs*,¹⁷ were amongst the first traders of the plains to set up shops in the hills after the British colonial state exerted its political control over the several Khasi *himas* (*states*) and the Jaintia *Raj*. One important feature in the development of the Khasi and Jaintias markets was the absence of a class of enterprising business classes- the *Jain* (cloth) merchants or the *Marwari* which were present everywhere in the Brahmaputra valley.¹⁸ In fact, the markets from the pre-colonial era till the early phase of colonial era were under the control of the natives who enjoyed and benefitted the most from the profits.

On the other hand, the markets in the northern region locally known as Ri Bhoi had sprung up and been flourishing since time immemorial. The entrepots towards the northern foothills in *Gobha*, *Rahar*, *Sonapur*, *Rani*, *Bardwar* and *Boko*, are situated at the *duars* or the opening into *Kamrup* and *Nowgong* district of Assam. A large number of merchants participated in the trade in the northern part of the Khasi hills and the southern region.¹⁹ This compelled the state officials from the hills and the plains to look into the smooth functioning of business transactions in order to maintain a balanced economy.

IV. MANAGEMENT OF MARKETS

The Khasi Chiefs were at the helm of the Khasi state and they were assisted by a council of ministers. No taxes could be imposed by the Chiefs without the acknowledgement of the *darbar*. But as the King has to maintain himself and his troops, certain taxes were allowed to be collected as a source of income. Further, as the chiefs have to look into maintenance of the states and the day today affairs, the *darbar* granted them permission to collect certain taxes from the internal markets and from the border *hats*. Besides these taxes, tolls were levied for using the roads and bridges, and taxes for having a store house in markets were also levied to all merchants. According to customs and practices the subjects who were engaged in trade activities were subjected to pay excise duties known as *Khrong Khajna*, *Bai-nguh* a token of acknowledgement, and *Pynshok* which is a protection fee.²⁰ A. J. M. Mills in 1853 reported that the amount of tolls paid by the traders was according to the situation of the village.²¹ Other important sources of revenue which the Chiefs and the Jaintia Rajas received prior to the annexation of the British were the limestone quarries which were given on lease to the Europeans and Indian traders and this was shared with the *Mintries* (ministers) of the *Durbar*.

From the above description it appears that the hill people exported much more than what was imported since the produce of the hills were in great demand by the people from the plains. From the profits of the export trade the Khasis were able to procure the requirements of commodities such as rice, salt, fish, etc which their hills did not provide. The Khasi economy being market oriented, the operation of the markets must have commenced since time immemorial, but there are no detailed accounts on the markets available. The trading activities of the Khasis have enabled some villages and communities to depend only on their trading and marketing skills as it is well-known that the Khasis from the southern hills are famous for their mercantile acumen. Thus, the economy of the Khasis in the pre-colonial times can be said to have been a thriving economy.

V. PROMINENT PRODUCTS OF THE MARKETS

This section discusses some of the important products that played a major role in the development of the markets in Khasi and Jaintia hills. Prior to the annexation of Bengal by the British, all the markets, in whatever jurisdiction they may fall— either under the Khasis Chiefs, Jaintia Rajas, the Ahom monarch or under the Muslim authorities—there was little trouble and instability. Among the items of high economic value that the Khasis traded with the people from the plains, were iron and lime.

With the onset of British rule in Bengal, the markets in the frontier province were frequently disturbed with the intrusion of the native highlanders who entered the plains of Sylhet and took away the produce of the plains.²² The Jaintia Raja and the Khasis Chiefs did not recognise the dominance of the British. Therefore, the British Collectors like William Makepeace Thackeray, Robert Lindsay, John Willies and others of Sylhet found it difficult to collect the revenue since most of the boats that carry the goods and articles to the markets in the

¹⁷J.H. Thornton. "Memories of Seven Campaigns, Westminster, 1895, p 108.

¹⁸Ibid, W.W. Hunter, *A statistical Account of Assam In two Volumes B.R.Publishing Corporation. Delhi Reprinted 1975 p.241.*

¹⁹ H.Bareh.. "The History And Culture Of The Khasi People". Third Revision.Gawahti 1997. P 436.

²⁰ Joyce Lyngdoh. *Trade and Markets Centres in the foothills of the Khasi and Jaintia hills in the eighteen and ninetieth centuries M.Phil, dissertation. NEHU. Shillong, November,1990. 56*

²¹A.J.M. "Mills Report on The Khasi and Jaintia Hills 1853".Printed New Delhi.1985.p. 36.

²² W.K. Firminger. 'Sylhet District Records' Vol-IV 1789-91, No 228, p213.

plains were not allowed to advance towards the upper part of the river Surma by the Jaintia Rajas. Moreover, they failed to pay tolls for using the river.²³

Coal

Coal was another mineral that had commercial value but surprisingly the Khasis did not use coal as a fuel for smelting the iron-ore. The presence of coal seams in the Khasi hills have been brought to the notice of the East India Company in 1815 by Mr Stark.²⁴ The two principal coal mines in the Khasi and Jaintia Hills are those at *CherraPoonjee* and Lakadong, both of which belong to the Government, and held under leases, revocable any time at the pleasure of the Government by *Messrs W. Moran and Company* of Calcutta and later on the company became known as the *Sylhet Coal Company*. The coal finds a ready sale at Dacca and adjoining places at 8 Annas per maunds, and the average quantity exported into Bengal is about 25,000 maunds.²⁵

Oranges

Oranges have been one of the famous commercial crops of the hills. The orange groves were mostly situated in the slopes of the southern region of the hills. The Shella region alone produces about two-thirds of the entire produce from these hills. The oranges from Shella which fall under the control of Mr. H Inglis were mainly supplied to the markets at *Chuttack* and Calcutta. But, besides the Shella groves, oranges also come from *BorPoonjee*, *Bur Poonjee*, *Byrungpoonjee*, *Mullung*, *Ootma*, *Oomwe*, *Abrahare* and were also exported to Clacutta and Chattack by the Khasis. With the advent of Mr.H. Inglis in the orange trade, the turn-out production of orange for the season of 1857-58 amounted was Rupees. 452/- Lakhs. ²⁶ Thus, the participation of the native Khasi merchants in orange trade has contributed to the rise of a class of entrepreneurs.

Lime

It is also important to mention that during the Mughul period, lime business was solely the monopoly of the state. The stones were sent down to the plains of Sylhet and from there, they were then carried as far back as Dacca and Calcutta. However, when Bengal came under the control of the British East India Company, the lime trade was open to all merchants as it brought huge revenue to the company. Consequently the lime business expanded and contributed to the revenue of the company. Thus, new quarries came out in the southern region of the Khasi hills.²⁷

Towards the end of the eighteenth century many new merchants moved towards the frontier of Sylhet to invest in the lime business. The most prominent trader in lime was Mr. George Inglis who arrived in Sylhet in 1794 as an authorised trader and resided in the district till his death in 1850. He along with Henry Thomas Raitt launched a joint stock company known as the *Raitt-Inglis and Company* presumably in 1794. By 1819, Raitt passed away and George Inglis became the sole proprietor of the company.²⁸

As there was little demand in the hills for lime, the limestone from the hills were then sent to the plains where there was a great demand. As early as 1804, the *Raitt- Inglis and Company* was able to get a lease of the limestone tracts that were situated eastward of *Shella*. By 1823, George Inglis was also able to acquire a lease of some of the quarries from the Laur hills. Between 1823 and 1826, the total production of lime from the quarries of the Khasi hills increased from fourteen lakh maunds to sixteen lakh maunds annually.²⁹ With the appointment of Henry Inglis as the Assistant Political Agent in the Khasi Hills and with the help of his father-in-law Captain F .G. Lister, who was the Political Agent of the British government, the lime trade came under the monopoly of *Inglis and Company* for more than four decades from the 1830's to the 1870's.³⁰

Despite, the pressure put by other lime traders to check on the monopoly of this firm, the Government failed to check the dominance of *Inglis and Company* on the lime trade. But in 1897, the lime trade suffered a major blow. There was a high demand of lime but the supply line was completely destroyed by the Great Earthquake that took place in that year. The Khasi lime that once dominated the market at Sylhet and Calcutta was replaced by the lime supply from of the Indian sub-continent, for example, *Kunte* lime which was supplied at a cheaper rate to Calcutta by train for the construction of buildings. The monopoly of the Khasi-Jaintia Hills

²³P.N. Dutta. 'Impact of the West on the Khasis and Jaintias'. New Delhi. 1982.p29.

²⁴ T. Oldham *Geology, Meteorology & Ethnology of Meghalaya Mittal Publication Delhi. .1984. 57 P,57.*

²⁵ Ibid, W.J. Allen, p.52.

²⁶Ibid. W. J. Allen,p.53.

²⁷N.C.Shap.Sen. 'The Origin and the Early History of the Khasi-Synteng people'. Firma. KLM Pvt Ltd. Clacutta 1981pp.244-245.

²⁸ Rita Dkhar. 'The Inglis Company And The Limestone Trade'. unpublished PhD dissertation, NEHU, Shillong

²⁹ Bengal Judicial Criminal Proceedings, 24th May. 1824. No. 60.

³⁰ Foreign Political Proceedings, 9-23 January 1830.No90.

over the supply of lime to Sylhet and Calcutta suffered a blow due to the coming up of a new lime company known as *Messrs Burn and Company*. This company supplied the lime at very reasonable prices to the markets in Calcutta and *Raneegunj* from their quarries situated at *Kunkur*. In addition to this, there were several small private traders which supplied lime to Calcutta and other parts of Bengal. Moreover, with the fall of *Inglis and Company* the market at Sylhet and Bengal was open to all merchants with no monopolist resulting in the major fall in the supply of lime from the Khasi-Jaintia Hills.³¹

Iron

If the working and capital investment in limestone and coal was largely from the Europeans, the iron industry was entirely in the hands of the Khasis. The principal sites for mining operations were in *Mylliem*, *Nongkrem*, *Laitlyngkot*, *Nongundee* and the region around *Sohra*. The iron which was produced by the Khasis was carried to markets in the southern foothills, not very different than what Robert Lindsay, the Superintendent of Sylhet, had described in the late eighteenth century. At Pandua, iron was sold in lumps called *Biri* (name given to a lump of iron) at Rupee 1 and 5 annas, per maund,³² while in the internal markets like *Nongkrem*, *Nongkynrih*, *Mylliem*, *Nongkhlaw* and other places, iron was sold at Rupee 1 and 2 annas a score (about a dozen pieces went to the maunds). At *Pandua* it was sold by weight, not in lumps or score, at the rate of Rupee 1 and 4 annas per maund.³³

At this point, it can be highlighted that the iron which was exported to the plains were of two types—the first is known as *Biri* (pig iron) which is in the form of lumps. This iron and its impurities had a market in the foothills particularly at *Pandua* and at *Chattack* where it was fused again to make it better. At *Chattack* it was sold from Rupee 1.4 to Rupee 1.6 per maund. The second, which is the best iron, is beaten into bars called *Peti*, sold for Rupee 1.10 to Rupee 1.12 per maund. The *Peti* iron was preferable to the English iron due to its malleability and it is mostly used for fastening timber while making boats. In 1858, the estimated average quantity of exported iron was about 50,000 maunds. The cost of transporting the iron from the hills to the plains is about 6 annas per maund and the average profit the traders (the Khasis themselves) was about 2 annas per maund. In 1876-77 no amount of maunds was mentioned but the value of the exported iron worth was about Rupees 7000.³⁴ In 1856, Allen³⁵ reported that the average quantity of iron exported every year from the hills to both the plains of Surma and Brahmaputra valley was 50,000 maunds.

Towards the end of the nineteenth century the Khasis' iron trade collapsed. By 1876-77 the statistical accounts showed no export to the plains. It only showed the amount of Rupees 7000 collected from the exporting of iron implements.³⁶ The reason was that the British authority did not give any support to this indigenous industry. The markets in the plains were then supplied by English iron which is more durable and cheaper than Khasi iron. However, the iron trade continued but was limited only to the markets of the hills. The loss in the iron trade was compensated by the arrival of new commercial crop, potato, introduced by the British and widely cultivated in those former places where iron-ore was extracted.³⁷

Prokop and Suliga (2013) states that "because of heavy rainfall, settlement development, road construction, most of the original deposit remnants of former iron smelting have been destroyed or re-deposited. Therefore only a few sites located in areas with less rainfall, mainly between Shillong and Nongkrem, are valuable for continuous reconstruction of iron metallurgy development in the Khasi hills³⁸" (p.763)

Prokop and Suliga (2013) also wrote that despite Meghalaya being located geographically in a plateau, yet there were trade interactions with the areas located in the foothills. However, there are no available evidences that the process of iron smelting was influenced by their interaction with the Europeans. However, in spite of the geographical conditions, the indigenous knowledge and practice of iron smelting seems to have existed since ancient times and this is evident from the metallurgical slag.

³¹Foreign Revenue Department-A. 1884. No-1-11,p.2

³²Lt Jones, ' some particular regarding the mineral productions of Bengal'. *Gleaning in Science*, Vol-1 1829.p 284

³³Lieutenant. Yule. '*Notes on the Iron of the Kasia Hills for the Museum of Economic Geology*' *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*. 1842. Vol-XI. p 856.

³⁴. *Ibid*, Hunter, pp.235-236. Also in W.J.Allen, p.48.

³⁵ Allen, W. J., Report on the Administration of the Cossyah and Jynteah Hill Territory, Calcutta, 1858, p. 51.

³⁶*Ibid*, Hunter,p.235.

³⁷*Op.cit*, H.Bareh. pp. 440-441.

³⁸PawelProkop and IreneuszSuliga, Two thousand years of iron smelting in the Khasi Hills, Meghalaya, North East India In. *Current Science*, vol. 104, no. 6, 25 March 2013 p761-768.

VI. Conclusion.

Besides, the above mentioned items that the hill people used to export to the plains of the Surma and the Brahmaputra valley, we notice that the Khasis exchanged these goods with items that the hills could not produce such as rice, salt, dry fish, cotton, cattle, pigs, poultry, oil, flour, earthenware, etc. They also exported in small amounts items like black pepper, bay leaf, betel nuts and leaf, honey, wax, and other forest products.

Reviewing the economic activities of the markets in the Khasi-Jaintia hills, it can be observed that the commodities which the tribes trade with in the markets can be categorised as follows:

- (i) **produce from the forest** for example, ivory, lac, hive which they obtain by means of hunting and gathering
- (ii) **commercial crops** such as, cotton from Jaintia hills and from Garo Hills, potatoes, cabbage, pears, etc, which was introduced with the arrival of the British in the hills and
- (iii) **minerals** like limestone, coal and iron products like hoe, nails, machete, swords, arrowheads, which were either used for agricultural purposes or for defence.

Despite the profitable trade in the early phase of the colonial era, the trade in the foothills show signs of decline by the late nineteenth century. However, one of the principal obstructions for the expansion of trade and commerce was the inability of the European merchants to invest their capital in the semi-independent Khasi states. Similarly, T.C. Watson also felt the same – had the resources of the hills, especially iron-ore and coal, been properly invested by the merchants and the British government, an iron industry could have been established in the hills.³⁹But, it can be observed from the brief discussion above that the Europeans merchants invested their capital only on limestone, oranges and potatoes. This once flourishing trade came to an end with the partition of India in 1947. In today's post-colonial era, trade in the *hats* continues but this is only with government permission. The inhabitants of the southern region have shifted their economic activities towards the foothills of the northern region near Assam. Consequently, the economy of the northern region, locally known as *Bhoi*, has changed drastically. Compared to coal mining, the condition of the Iron industry and its market activities continues to dwindle as the smelting of iron is limited to the manufacturing of simple tools and implements which rarely have any increase in demand.

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³⁹T.C. Watson. 'Journals of the Asiatic Society Of Bengal'. *ChirraPunji and a detail of some of the favourable circumstances which render it an advantageous site for the erection of an Iron and Steel Manufactory on an extensive scale*, pp.25-33.