ENDLE SIDNEY

THE KACHÁRIS

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Endle S.

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INTRODUCTION

It is with some diffidence that I comply with Colonel Gurdon's request that I should add a few words of preface and explanation to the last literary work of an old friend and pastor, whose loss will long be lamented in the Assam Valley, where he laboured as a missionary and planter's chaplain for upwards of forty years. Mr. Endle's interest in his Kachári flock was that of an evangelist rather than that of a linguist or ethnologist, and this preoccupation has coloured his style and affected the matter of his book in a way that, however pleasant and natural it may seem to those who had the privilege of his acquaintance, may perhaps require a few words of explanation for the benefit of those who look for anthropology only, or linguistics, in his pages.

My first duty, then, is to say a few words about the author's life and character. Sidney Endle was born about 1840 at Totnes in Devon, of sturdy yeoman parentage. His grandfather was, it seems, proud of being an armiger, and it is a family tradition that many Endles figured in the ranks of the Catholic clergy of the West country. Mr. Endle was educated at Totnes Grammar School, under the Rev. James Powney, and early conceived a wish to enter the ministry of the Church of England, and serve abroad as a missionary. With this view he entered St. Augustine's College at Canterbury. Unfortunately the College seems to have kept no written record of the dates at which one of the most distinguished and devoted of its pupils entered and left its roof. It was in February, 1864, however, that he was sent by the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel to Tezpur, in Assam, to be the assistant of Mr. Hesselmyer, then in charge of the Kachári mission at that place. In 1865 he was ordained deacon by the Bishop of Calcutta, and in the following year he was admitted to priest's orders. Soon after he was transferred to the independent charge of the S.P.G. mission among the tea-garden coolies at Dibrugarh in Upper Assam. In 1869, on Mr. Hesselmyer's death, Mr. Endle was made chaplain of the important tea-planting district of Darrang, with the charge of the Kachári mission in that district, having his head-quarters at Tezpur. His pastoral duties were thus two-fold. On the one hand, he became the pastor of an European community scattered over an area some 100 miles in length by 30 or 40 in breadth. It was his duty to gather his flock round him at some convenient tea-garden, or at the pretty little rustic church at Tezpur itself, where his congregation included the small band of officials. He was everywhere welcome, and it was not long before he was as popular as he was respected. One of the most unworldly and simple of men, almost an ascetic in his personal tastes and habits, he could sympathise with and understand men whose training and ideas were different from his. He had a native shrewdness and quiet sense of humour which stood him in good stead in his dealings with men probably as varied in their origins and temperament as are to be found in any collection of Englishmen beyond the seas. His sermons – and he could preach with equal ease and eloquence in English, Assamese, and Kachári – were ever those of a man who to shrewd observation of the various life about him, native and European, added an unwavering devotion to the responsibilities of his calling. Authoritative, and even stern, he could be when he thought it needful to assert his responsibility as a priest. But, somehow, the occasion rarely occurred, since his was not the disposition that demands impossible perfection of ordinary human nature. There was no touch of intolerance in his gentle and (there is no other word to describe him) saintly nature. I think he would have liked to have it said of him that, like Chaucer's Parson,

He was a shepherd and no mercenerie,
And though he holy were and vertuous,

He was to simple men not dispitous,
Ne of his speech dangerous ne digne,
But in his teaching discrete and benigne.

Innumerable were the marriages and christenings he celebrated in all parts of Assam, and it was characteristic of the man that he regarded it as a duty to keep himself informed of the welfare, spiritual and physical, of the children he held at the font. During his rare visits to England he endeavoured when he was not busy preaching for his mission, to visit those whom in their infancy he had admitted to his Church. Few chaplains in India can have been so universally popular and respected as he was, and this without in any way relaxing from the dignity which, in his case, belonged rather to his sacred office than to any consideration for his own person.

But he made no secret of the fact that his heart was chiefly in his missionary work among his beloved Kacháris. The Bodos of the Kachári *dwars* (the *dwars* or "doors" of the Kachári plains are the passes that lead into the rough mountains of independent Bhutan) are, like most of the aboriginal races of Assam, cheery, good-natured, semi-savage folk; candid, simple, trustful, but incorrigibly disrespectful according to Indian notions of good manners. To a casual observer, they may well have seemed incapable of comprehending the gentle reserve and unaffected unselfishness of their pastor's nature. Among them, however, it was his delight to unbend, and give way to the almost boyish simplicity and sense of fun which to the last were among his most engaging traits. When Mr. Endle approached a Kachári village during one of the prolonged preaching tours which were to him at once a duty and the keenest of pleasures, he was always greeted with a joyous and often noisy welcome. He travelled on foot, and the villagers would turn out to see the *gāmi-nī-brai*, the "old man of the village," as they affectionately called him. He was often cordially invited to share in the village festivities, and it was an interesting sight to watch him seated in the midst of rough semi-savage folk, listening to the tale of their simple joys and sorrows, enjoying their primitive jokes, and, when occasion served, talking to them, as probably no one else will ever be able to talk to them again, of the matters nearest to the missionary's heart.

In all parts of the Kachári country, Mr. Endle established many village schools, served by trusty converts. But his chief pride was in the church he built at Bengbari, which, to his great joy, was consecrated by Bishop Milman in person. Under its thatched roof has now been placed a tablet to the memory of its founder.

No account of Mr. Endle's life, however brief, would be complete without a mention of the fact that in 1875 he married Miss Sarah Ewbank Chambers, who for twenty years shared his pastoral anxieties. Mrs. Endle was much respected by the European community throughout Assam, and her sudden death in Calcutta in 1895 was universally regretted. How sorely her husband felt her loss, not even those who knew him best were allowed to guess, but it was plain that, from this time onwards, much of his old elasticity of mind and body deserted him, and though he continued his work with unabated industry the effects of age began for the first time to be apparent to his friends. In 1884 Mr. Endle compiled his well-known manual of the Kachári language, published by the Assam Secretariat Press. From time to time he contributed papers on the subject of the Bodo people to the *Transactions* of the Asiatic Society of Bengal. In 1891 he was elected an Honorary Fellow of St. Augustine's College, in recognition of his linguistic studies and of his eminence as a worker in the mission field. In 1906 he was offered a canonry by the Bishop of Calcutta, but characteristically refused a dignity which might have involved absences from his missionary duties.

Such, briefly told, are the few outstanding events in a life wholly devoted to pastoral work, of which little was known outside his native flock. It was Mr. Endle's repeatedly expressed wish that he might end his life and be laid to rest among his Kacháris. This wish was not fulfilled. Towards the end of 1905 it was evident that his persistent disregard of his personal comfort in an enervating climate had taxed a naturally robust constitution. He was induced with some difficulty to pay a brief

visit to England for rest and change. He spent this holiday chiefly in preaching for his mission and visiting old friends. He was soon, perhaps too soon, back at his work. It could no longer be hidden from himself or others that he had overtaxed his strength. This, however, caused him no disquietude. He had done his day's work, and was cheerfully ready to take his departure. In July 1907, he could struggle no longer against growing weakness, and was placed on one of the little mail steamers that ply up and down the Brahmaputra, in the hope that river breezes, rest, and change of scene might bring about some restoration to health. He himself, however, knew that his end was near, and he passed away, painlessly and peacefully, on the river bank at Dibrugarh, close to the scene of his first independent missionary charge, entrusted to him more than forty years before.

So much by way of biographical introduction seemed necessary, not only as an inadequate and too brief memorial of a singularly unselfish and blameless career, but also as an explanation of some features in Mr. Endle's book not usually found in anthropological manuals. Of the subject of the book itself I may now be allowed to say a few words, if only to show that it has an interest and importance, from an ethnological point of view, which are perhaps disguised by the author's characteristically modest estimate of his task and of his power of dealing with it. The book is, primarily, a monograph treating of that branch of the Kachári race which lives in scattered hamlets along the foot-hills of the Himalayas in Northern Bengal and Assam, intermixed now with Hindu people who have intruded into what was once their undisputed home. In Assam proper the Hindus call them Kacháris; in Bengal they are known as Meches.[1] Their own name for their race is Boṛo or Boḍo (the o has the sound of the English o in "hot"). Among this northern branch of the race is embedded the tribe of the Koch, whose name is pronounced locally as if it were Koss, (to rhyme with our English "boss"). (Kachári, I may mention in passing, is also pronounced as Koss-āri.) The Koch have gradually become a semi-Hindu caste, most of whose members now talk the Indian Bengali or Assamese. It also contains the surviving remnants of the royal family of the great and powerful Koch empire, which, roughly, covered the same area as the present province of Eastern Bengal and Assam. It can be proved that the aboriginal members of the Koch caste within quite recent times spoke the Boṛo language. In the East of the Assam Valley was another powerful kingdom, that of the Chutiyas, whose language was another branch of the speech described in this book. The river names of the whole Brahmaputra Valley are Boḍo names, and it is demonstrable that the Boḍos were the aborigines of the Valley. In the great mass of hills, an outlying spur of the mountains of Upper Burma, which divide the Brahmaputra Valley from that of the river Surma which runs parallel to it from east to west are two more Boḍo groups. The most eastern of these comprises the Di-mā-sā, Great-River-Folk (di- means "river" or "water,") people who were driven out of the valley of the great river Brahmaputra in historical times, and finally became rulers of what is now the great tea-planting district of Cachar or Kāchār. They either gave its name to or perhaps derived their Hindu soubriquet of Kachāri from this district. Of this branch of the race an interesting description will be found in the supplement to this book. At the western extremity of the range of hills is another group, the Garos, of whom an excellent account has lately been published by Major A. Playfair, I.A. (London, David Nutt, 1909). The Garos are of peculiar interest as members of the Boḍo family, because they were head-hunters within the memory of men still living.

Finally in the range of hills in the south of the Surma Valley, there are the Tipperahs whose language is obviously a branch of the ancient Boḍo speech; quiet inoffensive people, ruled over by a semi-independent Raja who is also a great land-owner in the British districts of Tipperah and Sylhet.

Now, the anthropologists rightly caution us against rashly concluding that a common speech, where races are in contact, implies a common origin, since everywhere, and especially among people who use an unwritten language, nothing is more common than the borrowing of a neighbouring tongue. But where, as here, we have five absolutely separate communities of semi-savage people, who

[1] Mech, sc. Mleccha, barbarian, one who is ignorant of civilised speech.

nowadays are not so much as aware of one another's existence, and yet speak what is to all purposes the same language, it is plain that they must have been united at no very distant date by some common social bond. The date cannot have been very distant, because in the unwritten speech of semi-savage people phonetic decay acts very rapidly, and a very few years may serve to disguise the relationships of adjacent and cognate tongues. No one who has heard members of the five branches of the Boḍo race speak their respective languages can fail to recognise that they belong to the same linguistic group. Moreover, this common Boḍo speech was, till within a few years ago, the language of the Koches, the dominant and ruling tribe in the great Koch kingdom, which survived, with something of its ancient prestige and power, long enough to be visited by an Englishman, Ralph Fitch, in Queen Elizabeth's time. It would seem, then, that the language spoken in the ancient Koch kingdom, which extended from the Himalayas to the Bay of Bengal, was the Koch or Boḍo language, and the mass of the people must have been of Boḍo origin. In the Brahmaputra valley these Boḍos have survived in the midst of Hindu and Shan invaders and settlers, of whom those who are interested in the subject may read in Mr. E. A. Gait's admirable *History of Assam*, (Calcutta, Thacker, Spink and Co., 1906). Here the anthropologist may come to the rescue of the historian. The Boḍo type of face and physical construction is, as Mr. Endle says, of an Indo-Chinese kind, easily distinguishable from the Arya-Dravidian type common in adjacent Bengal, and careful measurements in the Brahmaputra and Surma Valleys ought to show how far the old Koch element still persists, how far it has been obliterated by inter-marriage with Indian immigrants.

It may, however, be assumed that the population of the Koch kingdom, and therefore of its predecessor, the famous classical empire of Kāma-rūpa, of which Sanskrit scholars may read in the Mahābhārata (perhaps in a late interpolation in the epic) was chiefly Boḍo, of the same type as the humble folk who are the subject of Mr. Endle's book. Kāma-rūpa was visited in the first half of the seventh century of our era by the famous Chinese traveller Hiuen Tsiang, whose interesting account of the land and people may be found at page 22 of Mr. Gait's *History*. "They adore and sacrifice," says the Chinese explorer, "to the Devas and have no faith in Buddha."

It was apparently in the kingdom of Kāma-rūpa that there came into being that form of Hinduism whose scriptures are the later Purāṇas and the Tantras, the worship of Śiva and his Sakti, that form of the Hindu cult which, to this day and even in the temple of Kāli-ghāṭ in Calcutta itself, is distinguished by sacrifice by decapitation. In the earlier times of British rule, as readers of Mr. Gait's book may find for themselves, the Hindus of Assam were much addicted to human sacrifice by beheading, and, to this day, the appropriate method of propitiating the terrible goddess Kāli, the "dark one" (who is also Dur-gā, "hard of approach"), is by bloody sacrifices. The Śaiva or Śāktā form of Hinduism would therefore seem to be due to an engrafting of Koch superstitions on the purer and humaner religious ideas imported into India by the Aryan settlers to whom we owe the Vedas and the religious literature based on those early pastoral hymns. From this point of view, it is important to bear in mind that the Garos were till lately headhunters, and that the Chutiyas were conspicuous, even in North-Eastern India, for their addiction to human sacrifices.

How does it happen then, it may be asked, that the Boḍos described in this book are among the most innocent and kindly of semi-savage people? The answer seems to be that the bulk of the inhabitants of North-Eastern India were always simple inoffensive folk, and that it was only the ruling tribes and families that were addicted to war, rapine, torture, cruelty, and the religious developments that go with these. If Assam is undoubtedly still the home of the Tantrik beliefs which have their centre at the famous shrine of Kāmākṣā at the old capital of the Koch monarchs (now known as Guā-hāṭi or Gauhati), Assam is also the home of the Viṣṇu-ite reform, an attractive and learned account of which will be found in a paper by Sir Charles N. E. Eliot, published in the "Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society" for October, 1910. The common people in Assam, the rustic Hindus of the Brahmaputra Valley, are in temperament and habits very like the cheerful and smiling Boḍo folk among whom Mr. Endle laboured, and of whom he writes with such frank regard and appreciation.

The climate of the valley is enervating and soft, and any traveller in Assam can see for himself how the once fierce and warlike Ahom invaders, who gave its name to the country of Assam, have become as soft and kindly in disposition as the Kacháris themselves. No more remarkable instance of the effect of environment on national temperament could be found anywhere, and the anthropological theories of Dr. Ridgeway could hardly have a more remarkable support than he might find by contrasting the semi-savage inhabitants of the Brahmaputra Valley with the bloodthirsty and warlike tribes in the surrounding mountains, their neighbours and relatives.

I have only to say, finally, that I have added, as an Appendix to my old friend's book, a literal interlinear translation of three stories from my little Collection of Kachári Folk-tales. In adding these I have followed the example set by Sir Charles Lyall in his monograph on the Mikirs. By means of this interlinear and word-for-word translation, the comparative linguist may see for himself how far Kachári is still a monosyllabic agglutinative language, and how far it has borrowed the inflectional mechanism of Assamese and Bengali. There has, of course, been mutual borrowing, and I, for one, do not doubt that the syntactical peculiarities of Assamese are largely due to the fact that it is a speech with an Aryan vocabulary spoken by a people who are largely non-Aryan. Any careful reader of the stories in this book can see for himself that the Boḍo spoken in the Kachári *dwars* is the language of a biglot people. Their picturesque agglutinative verb is plainly a survival of days when the language was as monosyllabic as Chinese. But the general structure of the language is now governed by inflections obviously borrowed from Bengali and Assamese.

J. D. Anderson.
Cambridge,
December, 1910.

SECTION I
Characteristics, Physical and Moral; Origin, Distribution and Historic Summary, etc

Characteristics. I. 1. The people generally known to us as "Kacháris" differ in some material ways from their Hindu and Musulmán neighbours alike in things material and moral. They are certainly not a tall or handsome race, and in general appearance bear some resemblance to the Nepáli, being as a rule shorter and stouter than the people of North-west India, though well fitted to bear up against physical fatigue and hardship. PhysicalIn face and figure they show a distinct approximation to what is known as the Mongolian type, *i. e.*, they have square set faces, projecting cheek-bones, with almond-shaped eyes, and scanty beard and moustache, the last-mentioned being often wanting altogether. In this way they are well fitted for all forms of outdoor (field and factory) labour that require strength rather than skill, and may very reasonably be regarded as the "navvies" of Assam.

Mental. 2. In mental and intellectual power they are undoubtedly far below their Hindu neighbours; for they possess neither the quickness of apprehension, nor the astonishing power of memory, &c., characteristic of the higher castes among the Hindus. On the other hand, what they do succeed in mastering, often with much toil and painful effort, they digest and retain with much tenacity. Among other social and mental features of character there are two which are seldom wanting to the "Kachári": (1) he is an intensely clannish being. A fine imposed on one member of a village community is sometimes paid by the whole body of villagers together. When employed in any considerable numbers on a tea factory, the Kachári labourers so employed, resenting some real or fancied wrong done to *one* of their number, will often leave the garden in a body, even though there may be a month's pay due to every one of them. Again they have (2) no small share of that quality so powerful for good or evil, according as it is guided into right or wrong channels, *i. e.*, a certain strength of will, "what their friends might call firmness, and their enemies might term obstinacy." If they once make up their minds, and they are abundantly capable of doing this, to act in a certain way, it is mere waste of time to attempt to reason them out of their resolution, for nothing short of absolute and overpowering physical force is of any avail to turn them from the course they have once for all resolved to adopt and act upon.

Moral. 3. As regards the moral character of the Kachári race, those who know them best will be the first to speak favourably of them. Like many of the Sub-Himalayan hill tribes, they undoubtedly have a certain weakness for what may be looked upon as their national beverage (*Madh*, *zu*), a form of rice-beer. Of this, in itself a comparatively harmless liquor when taken in moderation, they at times consume very large quantities, especially at weddings, funerals, and at the January and April *Bihu* festivals; and more particularly at what is known as the "first eating of the new rice" (*Nowán bhát khoa*; *Mikham gădàn zánai*), which usually takes place about the middle of December or a little earlier. At this last-mentioned gathering the writer has sometimes seen well-nigh the entire population of a Kachári village *hors de combat* from the effect of over-indulgence in the national beverage. But they are certainly not habitual drunkards, and in this matter Kacháris as a rule would compare not unfavourably with the working man in more civilised lands; *e. g.*, in England. But apart from this particular failing, one almost universal among hill tribes on this frontier, it is pleasing to be able to say that among them are to be found many simple virtues of great price, *i. e.*, honesty, truthfulness, straightforwardness and a general trustworthiness deserving of all honour. In illustration of their simple truthfulness, even when involving serious consequences to themselves, the writer recalls a story told him some years ago by an officer in charge of the subdivision of Mangaldai, the late A. J. Primrose, I.C.S. A Kachári of Sekhár Mauza was brought before this magistrate on a charge (manslaughter) involving a very heavy penalty, when he without hesitation admitted his guilt, though

the evidence against him was of the slightest, or at least utterly insufficient to secure a conviction. The relations of the sexes too are on the whole of a very sound and wholesome character, far more so probably than in many countries boasting of a higher civilisation. Infant marriage is as yet unknown among them, and so far as the present writer has been able to ascertain during the past forty years, the young people are as a rule chaste before marriage and true to their marriage vows in after-life. But it must be clearly understood that all this holds good of the Kachári in his simple, patriarchal, village life, and there only. His innocence is the innocence of ignorance, not the innocence of experience: and he is as a rule free from certain forms of evil because in his village life he has never come under any temptation to indulge in them. When contaminated by civilization, *e. g.*, when brought into contact with our civil and criminal courts, much of this innocence must inevitably disappear; and of this sad deterioration of character any man who has been long in the country, and learnt to know the people well, must have experienced many melancholy and painful illustrations.

Origin, &c. II. The origin of the Kachári race is still very largely a matter of conjecture and inference, in the absence of anything entitled to be regarded as authentic history. As remarked above, in feature and general appearance they approximate very closely to the Mongolian type; and this would seem to point to Tibet and China as the original home of the race. The Garos, a race obviously near of kin to the Kacháris, have a tradition that in the dim and distant past their forefathers, *i. e.*, nine headmen, the offspring of a Hindu *fakir* and a Tibetan woman, came down from the northern mountains, and, after a halt at Koch-Behar, made their way to Jogighopa, and thence across the Brahmaputra to Dalgoma, and so finally into the Garo Hills. It is not easy to say what degree of value is to be attached to this tradition, but it does at least suggest a line of inquiry that might well be followed up with advantage.[2]

It is possible that there were at least two great immigrations from the north and north-east into the rich valley of the Brahmaputra, *i. e.*, one entering North-east Bengal and Western Assam through the valley of the Tista, Dharla, Sankosh, &c., and founding there what was formerly the powerful kingdom of Kāmārūpa; and the other making its way through the Subansiri, Dibong and Dihong valleys into Eastern Assam, where a branch of the widespread Kachári race, known as Chutiyás, undoubtedly held sway for a lengthened period. The capital quarters of this last-mentioned people (the Chutiyás) was at or near the modern Sadiya, not far from which certain ruins of much interest, including a copper-roofed temple (*Támár ghar*), are still to be seen. It is indeed not at all unlikely that the people known to us as Kacháris and to themselves as Baḍa (Bara), were in earlier days the dominant race in Assam; and as such they would seem to have left traces of this domination in the nomenclature of some of the physical features of the country, *e. g.*, the Kachári word for water (*di*; *dŏi*) apparently forms the first syllable of the names of many of the chief rivers of the province, such as Diputá, Dihong, Dibong, Dibru, Dihing, Dimu, Desáng, Diku (*cf.* khu Tista), &c., and to these may be added Dikrang, Diphu, Digáru, &c., all near Sadiya, the earliest known centre of Chutiyá (Kachári) power and civilisation.

Distribution. III. But however this may be, there would seem to be good reason for believing that the Kachári (Baḍa) race is a much more widely distributed one than it was at one time supposed to be. They are undoubtedly found well outside the limits of modern (political) Assam, *i. e.*, in North-east Bengal Koch-Behar, &c., and also in Hill Tippera, where the language of the people gives decisive evidence that they are of the Baḍa stock. But apart from these outlying members of the race, there are within the limits of Assam itself at least 1,000,000 souls, probably many more, who belong to the Kachári race; though many of the number have of late years become more or less Hinduised, and have lost the use of their mother tongue. These may perhaps be conveniently divided into a (1) Northern and (2) a Southern group, the Brahmaputra being taken roughly as the dividing line, thus: —

[2] Some interesting remarks on this subject will be found in the Garo monograph. – [Ed.]

Name.	Approximate numbers.	Chief habitat.
	I. Northern Group.	
1. Bårå (Kachári)	272,500	Western Darrang, Kachári Duars, and in North Kamrup.
2. Rábhá (Totalá)	31,370	Golpara.
3. Mech (Mes)	93,900	Do.
4. Dhimal	(See Bryan Hodgson)	North-east Bengal.
5. Koch	10,300	On Northern Frontier from Jalpaiguri to North-west Darrang.
6. Solanimiyas	15–18 families only	Only in Mangaldai Subdivision.
7. Mahaliyas, Phulgariyas, Saraniyas		Western Darrang. All slightly Hinduised Kacháris.
	II. Southern Group.	
1. Di-má-sá "big-water-folk"	15,931	North Cachar Hills.
2. Hojáis	2,750	Do. and Nowgong.
3. Lálungs	40,160	South-west Nowgong and adjoining districts.
4. Garos	150,000	On Garo Hills and at foot of same.
5. Haijongs	8,766	On plains adjoining southern slope of the Garo Hills.
6. Hill Tippera (Tripura) people	105,850	Hill Tippera, &c.

To these may be added one or two smaller communities, *e. g.*, the Moráns and the Chutiyás in Upper Assam, whose language, not altogether extinct as yet though apparently dying out rapidly, would seem to prove them to be closely akin to the Kachári (Baḍa) race.

Historic Sketch. IV. The only branch of this widely spread race that may be said to have anything like an authentic history is that settled in what is known as the once powerful kingdom of Kāmārūpa (Koch), the reigning family of which is now represented by the Rajas of Koch-Behar, Bijni, Darrang (Mangaldai) and Beltola. But on the history of this (the Western) section of the Kachári race there is no need to dwell, as it was very effectively dealt with some few years ago.[3] But the earliest historical notices of the Eastern branch of the race show that under the name of Chutiyás they had established a powerful kingdom in the Eastern corner of the Province, the seat of Government being at or near the modern Sadiya. How long this kingdom existed it is now impossible to say; but what is known with some degree of certainty is, that they were engaged in a prolonged struggle with the Ahoms, a section of the great Shan (Tai) race, who crossed the Pátkoi Hills from the South and East about A.D. 1228, and at once subdued the Moráns, Boráhis, and other Kachári tribes living near the Northern slope of these hills. With the Chutiyás the strife would seem to have been a long and bitter one, lasting for some 150 or 200 years. But in the end the victory remained with the Ahoms, who drove their opponents to take refuge in or about Dimápur on the Dhansiri at the foot of the Naga Hills. There for a time the fugitives were in comparative security and they appear to have attained to a certain measure of material civilisation, a state of things to which some interesting remains of buildings (never as yet properly explored) seem to bear direct and lasting witness. Eventually, however, their ancient foes followed them up to their new capital, and about the middle of the sixteenth century the Ahoms succeeded in capturing and sacking Dimápur itself. The Kachári Raja thereupon removed his court to Máibong ("much paddy"), where the dynasty would seem to have maintained itself for some two centuries. Finally, however, under pressure of an attack by the Jaintia Raja the Kachári sovereign withdrew from Máibong to Kháspur in Kachar (*circa* 1750 A.D.). There they seem to have come more and more under Hindu influence, until about 1790 the Raja of that period, Krishna Chandra, and his brother Govinda Chandra made a public profession of Brahminism. They were both placed for a time inside the body of a large copper image of a cow, and on emerging thence were declared by the Brahmins to be Hindus of the Kshatriya caste, Bhīma of Mahābhārat fame being assigned to them

[3] See "Koch Kings of Kamrup," by E. A. Gait, Esq., I.C.S., Assam Secretariat Press P.O., 1895.

as a mythological ancestor. Hence to this day the Darrang Kacháris sometimes speak of themselves as "Bhīm-nī-fsā," *i. e.* children of Bhīm, though as a rule they seem to attach little or no value to this highly imaginative ancestry.

The reign of the last Kachári king, Govind Chandra, was little better than one continuous flight from place to place through the constant attacks of the Burmese, who finally compelled the unhappy monarch to take refuge in the adjoining British district of Sylhet. He was, indeed, reinstated in power by the aid of the East India Company's troops in 1826, but was murdered some four years later, when his kingdom became part of the British dominions. His commander-in-chief, one Tulá Rám, was allowed to remain in possession of a portion of the subdivision now known as North Cachar, a region shown in old maps of Assam as "Tula Ram Senapati's country." But on the death of this chieftain in 1854, this remaining portion of the old Kachári Raj was formally annexed to the district of Nowgong.

As regards this last-mentioned migration, *i. e.*, from Maibong to Kháspur about A.D. 1750, and the conversion to Hinduism which soon followed it, it would seem that the movement was only a very limited and restricted one, confined indeed very largely to the Raja and the members of his court. The great majority of his people remained in the hill country, where to this day they retain their language, religion, customs, &c., to a great extent intact. It is not improbable, indeed, that this statement may hold good of the earlier migrations also, *i. e.*, those that resulted from the prolonged struggle between the Ahoms and the Chutiyás. When as a result of that struggle the defeated race withdrew first to Dimápur and afterwards to Máibong, it is not unlikely that the great body of the Chutiyás (Kacháris) which remained in the rich valley of Assam came to terms with their conquerors (the Ahoms) and gradually became amalgamated with them, much as Saxons, Danes, Normans, &c., slowly but surely became fused into one nationality in the centuries following the battle of Hastings. In this way it may well be that the Kachári race were the original autochthones of Assam, and that even now, though largely Hinduised, they still form a large, perhaps the main, constituent element in the permanent population of the Province. To this day one often comes across villages bearing the name of "Kachárigaon," the inhabitants of which are completely Hinduised, though for some considerable time they would seem to have retained their Kachári customs, &c., unimpaired. It may be that, whilst the great body of the Chutiyá (Kachári) race submitted to their Ahom conquerors, the stronger and more patriotic spirits among them, influenced perhaps by that intense clannishness which is so marked a feature in the Kachári character, withdrew to less favoured parts of the Province, where their conquerors did not care at once to follow them up; *i. e.*, the Southern section of the race may have made its way into the districts known as the Garo Hills and North Cachar; whilst the Northern section perhaps took up its abode in a broad belt of country at the foot of the Bhutan Hills, still known as the "Kachári Duars," a region which, being virtually "Terai" land, had in earlier days a very unenviable reputation on the score of its recognised unhealthiness. And if this view of the matter be at all a sound one, what is known to have happened in our own island may perhaps furnish a somewhat interesting "historic parallel." When about the middle of the fifth century the Romans finally withdrew from Britain, we know that successive swarms of invaders, Jutes, Danes, Saxons, Angles, &c., from the countries adjoining the North and Baltic seas, gradually overran and occupied the richer lowland of what is now England, driving all who remained alive of the aboriginal Britons to take refuge in the less favoured parts of the country, *i. e.*, the mountains of Wales and the highlands of Scotland, where many of the people of this day retain their ancient mother speech: very much as the Kacháris of Assam still cling to their national customs, speech, religion, &c., in those outlying parts of the Province known in modern times as the Garo Hills, North Cachar and the Kachári Duars of North-west Assam.

Final Separation of Northern and Southern V. It may perhaps be asked how a people so clannish and united as the Kacháris are well known to be, should ever become so widely separated as the Western (Bara) and Southern (Dimásá) sections now undoubtedly are. The separation would seem to be almost final and complete. The writer, *e. g.*, has often tried Sections of the race. to ascertain if

the Kacháris of the Northern Duars retained any tradition of ever having been subject to the Raja of Dimápur; but up to the present time no trace of any such tradition has come to light. Intermarriage between the two sections of the race is apparently quite unknown; indeed, the barrier of language would of itself probably go far to prevent such intermarriage: for although the two languages have much in common, yet in their modern form they differ from each other nearly as much as Italian does from Spanish; and members of the two sections of the race meeting each other for the first time would almost certainly fail to understand each other's speech. Perhaps the following tradition,[4] which apparently describes one of the closing scenes in the prolonged struggle between the Chutiyá Kacháris and the Ahoms, may go some way to account for the wide separation between the Northern and Southern sections of the race. The story is as follows: – Long, long ago the Dimásá fought against a very powerful tribe (the Ahoms), and being beaten in a great pitched battle, the king with all his forces retreated. But presently further retreat was barred by a wide and deep river, which could in no way be crossed. The Raja, being thus stopped by a river in front and an enemy behind, resolved to fight once more the next day, unless the problem of crossing the river could be solved. With this determination he went to sleep and had a dream in which a god appeared to him and promised to help him. The god said that early next morning the king with all his people must boldly enter the river at a spot where he would see a heron standing in the water, and walk straight across the river, but no one must look back. Next morning a heron was found, sure enough, standing in the water near the bank; and the king, remembering his dream, led his people to the spot and went into the water, which they found had shoaled enough to form a ford and allow them to wade across. In this way he crossed with a great part of his people. But still all had not crossed. There were some on the other bank and some in the middle of the river, when a man among the latter wondering whether his son was following him, looked back, with the result that the water at once got deep and every one had to save himself as best he could; while the men on the other bank, having no chance of crossing, dispersed. They who were caught in the middle of the river had to swim for their lives, and were washed down to different places. Some saved themselves by catching hold of *Khágris* (rushes) growing on the bank, and are to this day called *Khágrábária*. Others caught hold of *nals* (or reeds) and are thus called Nalbárias. The Dimásá are the people who crossed in safety.

It is fairly obvious that the Oriental love for the grotesquely marvellous has had no small share in the development of this tradition; but whilst making all due allowance for this, the writer ventures to think that the tradition itself is not altogether without a certain historic value. It probably represents the closing scenes in the protracted struggle for supremacy between the Ahoms and the Chutiyás (Kacháris) when the latter, finally beaten, endeavoured to escape their foes by crossing the Brahmaputra to the South bank, using for that purpose whatever material was at hand, *e. g.*, rude dug-out boats (*khel náu*), extemporised rafts (*bhel*), &c. The student of Assam history will remember that a like mishap befell Mir Jumla's expedition for the conquest of Assam; Rangpur, Ghergaon, &c., when a violent storm or sudden rise in the river carried away or sunk the boats containing his ammunition and other stores, and he was compelled to come to terms with the Ahom rulers. A sudden storm or rapid rise in the river may have prevented many of the fugitives from crossing, and these would perforce have fallen into the hands of the Ahoms. The latter, acting on the principle "Divide et impera," may have forced their captives to take up their abode in the unhealthy (Terai) country now known as the "Kachári Duárs," and further may have prohibited any communication between the two severed fragments of the conquered race, which would thenceforth naturally drift further asunder, until the separation became as complete as it remains to this day.

[4] Extracted from a most interesting and valuable letter from Mr. Dundas, kindly forwarded for perusal to the writer by B. C. Allen, Esq., I.C.S.

SECTION II
Social and Domestic Life

Dwellings, houses, &c. In their domestic life, the Kacháris of this district (Darrang) do not differ very materially from their Hindu neighbours, to the subordinate castes of whom they are no doubt very closely allied. The houses are of the usual type, one-storied only, the walls being of *ekrá* reed or of split bamboo, and the roof of thatch fastened by cane. Each hut commonly contains two rooms, one for eating, &c., and the other for sleeping. There is no trace here of the practice which prevails among some tribes of the Province who are undoubtedly very nearly related to the Kacháris, *i. e.*, the provision of bachelor-barracks (*Dekáchángs*), where all the young unmarried men of the village have to sleep apart from the dwellings of settled householders. It is probable, indeed, that this custom formerly obtained here, but all trace of it seems to have passed away long since.

Villages. A Kachári village is as a rule much more compact than a Hindu one, the houses being built more closely together. Usually, too, there is comparatively little foliage in the way of trees, &c.; and occasionally even something like a street separates the two or more lines of houses which compose a village. One prominent feature in the typical Kachári village cannot fail to strike the attention of any casual visitor at first sight. Each house, with its granary and other outbuildings, is surrounded by a ditch and fence, the latter usually made of *ekrá* reeds, jungle grass or split bamboo, &c. The ditch, some three or four feet in depth, surrounds the whole homestead, the earth taken from it being thrown up on the inner side, *i. e.*, that nearest to the dwelling-house; and on the earthworks, some two or three feet in height, so thrown up are firmly inserted the reeds or split-bamboo work forming the fence itself, this latter often inclining outwards at a very obtuse angle; so that the ditch and fence are not easily surmounted from the outside by would-be intruders. A Kachári village usually abounds in domestic live-stock of various kinds, *e. g.*, ducks, fowls, goats, pigs, cattle, &c.; and it can hardly be doubted that the fence and ditch above spoken of are largely intended to prevent the cattle, pigs, &c., from getting into the rice-fields at night, and so doing serious damage to the paddy and other crops. With the abundance of live-stock, especially hogs, reared and kept by the Kacháris, it need hardly be said that the villages can scarcely be described as being cleanly; though as a rule they do not differ so much as might be supposed in this respect from their Hindu neighbours, separate buildings being provided for the pigs, goats, &c., at an appreciable distance from the family dwelling-house.

Furniture, Implements and Utensils

Little need be said under this head, as the equipment of the Kachári householder for dealing with domestic or field work is almost identical with that of his Hindu neighbours. But it may be stated that in a Kachári house there will usually be found an exceptionally large number of earthenware vessels (pottery, &c.) which are used freely and frequently in the preparation and distribution of the much-prized rice-beer (*Zu*).

Occupation, crops, &c. Agriculture is still the great industry of the Kacháris of this district, both the hot weather (*áus*) and the cold season (*sáli*) varieties of rice being largely cultivated, especially the latter. In carrying out this work the people show both application and skill, so much so, that, failing some very overwhelming convulsion of Nature, it would seem to be hardly possible that a famine could take place in the Kachári Duars. This part of the district is abundantly supplied with water by the numerous streams issuing from the lower spurs of the Bhutan Hills, streams which for the most part flow in very shallow beds, and therefore admit of being easily used for irrigation purposes, whenever the seasonal rainfall may be at all scanty. Moreover, the people are especially skilful in the construction of irrigation canals and earthwork embankments for diverting water from river-beds

into their rice-fields: and their efforts in this direction are very largely aided by their closely clannish organisation. Whenever the rainfall threatens to be below the average, the village headman with his associated elders fixes on the spot whence water is to brought from the nearest river to the rice-fields. At this spot very rude and primitive shelters of jungle grass, &c., are put up: and here all the manhood strength of the village, each man armed with hoe, dao, &c., are compelled to take up their abode until the necessary work has been fully carried out. In this way it will be obvious that the Kacháris have a highly efficient and very inexpensive "Public Works Department" of their own; and vigorous efforts of self-help of this character would seem to be worthy of high commendation and hearty support.

But it is not only in constructing embankments and irrigation canals, &c., that the people work together in this way. Very much the same plan is adopted in carrying out other enterprises in the success of which all are alike interested, *e. g.*, in harvesting the great cold weather rice-crop in December and January each year. When this important work is in full swing, it is but rarely that the owner of a rice-field is found cutting his paddy alone and single-handed. He summons his neighbours to come and help him in this work – a summons which usually meets with a ready and cheerful response. It is quite common to see in December and January organised bodies of labourers, varying in number from ten to fifty or more, all in line and busy with the sickle in one man's field at the same time. Every man as a rule works for the time being at high pressure, his toil being lightened by much merry talk and laughter, and many jests and jokes – these last, it must be admitted, not always of a highly refined character. There is a pleasing absence of the mercenary element in the whole transaction; for as a rule no money payments whatever are made to the workers. On the other hand, the wife of the proprietor of the rice-field is almost always present in person, and busies herself in keeping ever ready an abundant supply of wholesome and highly appetising cooked food, to be eaten on the spot, the nearest grove of plantain trees providing ready-made plates and dishes. Her post is no sinecure, as the hungry reapers make very frequent raids on the good things she provides; and she has above all to be careful to see that the much prized rice-beer (*Zu*) shall be at all times forthcoming in unstinted quantity. Her lord and master is usually content to wield a sickle with the reapers, like Boaz of old; and, of course, he holds himself ready to lend a hand in the same unpaid fashion in carrying out his neighbours' harvesting operations, whenever his services in this direction may be called for. This whole system of mutual help in time of pressure is a marked feature of Kachári social and domestic life, and tends in no small degree to develop and strengthen that clannish temperament of which it may be considered to be in some sense the natural outcome.

Crops, &c. Rice, roughly classified as the larger and the smaller grains (*maimá* and *maisá*), is here, as elsewhere, the chief object of the peasant's skill and labour; but other crops are not wanting, *e. g.*, pulse, gathered in December, cotton, sugar-cane in limited quantities, tobacco, &c. Of this last-mentioned article there are two distinct varieties commonly grown, *i. e.*, country tobacco and Burmese[5] (*Mán*) tobacco, the latter commanding the higher price in the market. All surplus produce finds a ready sale among the ever-growing numbers of imported labourers on tea estates, many of whom are consumers of Kachári rice-beer or less harmless liquors, and who in consequence fraternise readily with their Kachári neighbours. In this way the average Bodo peasant is a very well-to-do person in worldly things, the more so because the Kachári labourer is in great demand as a factory worker. Where there are three or four brothers in a family in Western Assam, it is quite usual for one, perhaps two, of the number to remain at home to cultivate the paternal acres, whilst the other brothers make their way to tea estates in Upper Assam for the manufacturing season, often doing double tasks day after day, and returning to the family fold in the autumn with a large and liberal supply of lightly earned rupees at each man's disposal.

Food, &c. As regards his food, the Kachári is as a rule by no means limited and restricted, like his Hindu and Musulmán neighbours. On the contrary, he enjoys and practises a freedom in this

[5] The Assamese habitually speak of the Burmese people as *Mán*.

respect which no doubt goes far to account for his often magnificent physique. With the exception of beef he denies himself almost nothing. His great delicacy is pork; and a Kachári village usually swarms with pigs in almost every possible stage of growth. These animals are often exposed for sale at fairs and markets in the Kachári country. There is, however, one common article of food, which no orthodox old-fashioned Kachári will ever touch, *i. e.*, milk. When questioned as to the ground of his objection to milk as an article of food, he usually says that he is unwilling to deprive the calf of its natural support, though the real reason is probably of another character.[6] This prejudice against the use of milk would now, however, seem to be passing away; and some of the Kachári lads attending the writer's Training Class at Tezpur now partake freely of this natural and sustaining food.

Among other delicacies of the Kachári is what is known as dried fish (*nā grān*),[7] *i. e.*, the very small fish left on the surface of inundated land after the water has subsided. This is collected in large quantities near the banks of the Brahmaputra, and carried northwards to the Kachári Duars, where it is exchanged for rice and silk (*eri*), &c. This small fish is not cured or prepared in any way, but simply dried in the sun; and is very far from being attractive to the eye or the nose, especially to the latter. Nevertheless, it is greatly prized by the Kachári peasant as a welcome and savoury addition to his somewhat monotonous daily fare; nor does the free use of this hardly inviting article of food seem to be attended by any very injurious results to the physical well-being of those who largely and liberally use it.

Hunting, fishing. The Kachári often varies his diet by adding to it the proceeds of the chase and by fishing in the numerous shallow hill-streams in which his country abounds. Deer and wild pigs are frequently caught, sometimes by the use of large nets, enclosing a considerable extent of grass land in which some keen eye has detected the presence of the much-prized game. The net is gradually contracted until the prey comes within the reach of some stout Kachári arm, when blows from club or *dao* speedily bring its career to a close. In this, as in almost all else, the Kachári is clannish and gregarious in what he does; and regular hunting parties are duly organised to carry out the work in hand. Much the same system is observed in conducting fishing operations, though here the leading part is commonly taken by the women. On certain prearranged dates, the women of a village, sometimes of a group of villages, will fish a certain stream, or a number of streams, for a distance extending over several miles. The fishing implements used are of a very simple character, and are commonly prepared from materials found in almost every village. Nets are but rarely employed, as the water in these hill-streams is in the cold weather, *i. e.*, the fishing season, usually very shallow, rarely exceeding two or three feet in depth. The implements commonly used are mainly two, *i. e.*, (1) the *zakhái*[8] and (2) the *pālhā*, the former being employed chiefly, but not exclusively, by women; and the latter by men. Both implements are made of split bamboo work fastened together with cane. The *zakhái* is a triangular basket, open at one end, the three triangular sides closing to a point at the other. The whole is attached to a bamboo handle some three or four feet in length. Grasping this handle firmly, the holder enters the river, usually only two or three feet deep, and lowers the basket to the bottom, keeping the open end in front of her person; and then making a splashing with her feet, she endeavours to drive her prey into the open mouth of the basket, which is then quickly lifted and its contents rapidly transferred to the fish-basket. The system seems to be a very simple and even a clumsy one, but is far from being wholly ineffective. Armed with this *zakhái*, a number of women, sufficient to extend across the entire width of the stream, enter the river together, whilst another party commence operations fifty or a hundred yards away. The two parties work steadily towards each other, so that such fish as are not caught *en route* are gradually driven into an ever-narrowing stretch of water: and as a rule not many fish would seem to escape. The whole scene is a

[6] This prejudice is shared by the Garos and by many other members of the Mongolian race. – [Ed.]

[7] *Cf.* the Burmese *ngā-pi*. Query, is the name a corruption of *nā-ghrān*, in allusion to the powerful odour of fish thus dried? – [Ed.]

[8] Assamese, *jakái*. – [Ed.]

very merry one, accompanied with much laughter and pleasing excitement; and more particularly, as the two parties of fish-catchers approach each other, and the fish make frantic efforts to escape their doom, the fun becomes fast and furious. A fish-catching expedition of this kind is invariably looked upon as a village holiday, the entire population not infrequently taking an active part in it.

A second popular method of catching fish is the use of the *pālhā*, which is not very unlike an ordinary circular hen-coop. It is made of split bamboo fastened together by cane-work, and is about 4 or 4–1/2 feet in height and about 3 feet in diameter at the base. The upper portion is drawn somewhat closely together, leaving an open space at the top sufficient to allow the admission of a man's hand, the whole structure being quite light and easily manipulated by one hand. Armed with this, the fisherman quietly enters the shallow water at any likely spot, and whenever his quick eye detects the presence of prey, the *pālhā* is at once placed over it, the lower surface of the basket-work closely clutching the ground, and the fish so enclosed are then withdrawn by the hand through the opening in the upper part of the instrument. This too, like the *zakhái*, seems a very primitive, unsuitable contrivance, but in the hands of men trained to its use from earliest childhood it is quite capable of being made to bring about very useful results.

A third instrument used by Kacháris in fish-catching is a small, pointed, metallic spearhead attached to a light bamboo. This is thrust rapidly and firmly into soft mud or other like places where eels, &c., are supposed to be concealed; and the fisherman occasionally succeeds in transfixing and drawing out one or more of these, which form a welcome addition to his daily diet.

Rice-beer (*Zu*), its preparation, &c. In common with many other non-Aryan tribes on this frontier, *e. g.*, the Nágás, &c., the Kacháris of Darrang habitually consume large quantities of what is usually known as rice-beer (*Zu*, *Záu*). It can hardly be said to be a beverage in daily use, for it is only prepared when specially wanted for immediate consumption. An essential ingredient in the preparation of this most popular form of refreshment is the condiment known as *emáo*[9] which is usually composed of at least three, and sometimes four, distinct elements. To a definite proportion of husked rice is added (1) the jack-tree leaf and (2) that of the jungle plant known as *bhetai*, and in some cases the poison-fern, though this last-mentioned does not seem to be really necessary. All these ingredients are vigorously pounded together into a powder, which is then passed through a very fine sieve, at least once and sometimes twice. The powder so prepared is then mixed with water so as to make a more or less tenacious paste, and this again is divided into portions sufficient to form solid discs, about three inches in diameter, and one inch thick in the centre, with thin edges. These discs are sprinkled freely with powder from similar discs of some weeks standing, and are for a short time kept covered up in rice-straw. They are then placed on a bamboo platform inside the house for some four days, and are afterwards exposed freely to the hot sun for another four or five days, so as to become thoroughly dry. Finally they find their way into an earthenware water-vessel, which is kept suspended at a distance of several feet over the fireplace though they would seem to need no direct exposure to the action of fire-heat; and here they remain until required for use.

As mentioned above, rice-beer is not used as a daily beverage, but is prepared as required, especially for use at marriages, funerals, harvest homes and other occasions that break the monotony of village life. A common method of preparation is as follows: – A quantity of selected rice, about 3 or 4 seers, is carefully boiled in an iron or brass cooking vessel, the contents of which are then spread out on a bamboo mat and allowed to become cold. Two cakes of the *emáo* described above are then broken up into powder, which is carefully mixed with the boiled rice; and the whole is then stored in a thoroughly dry earthenware vessel (*kalas*). This vessel with its contents is then placed upon a platform some five feet high over a slow fire, in which position it is allowed to remain for some three or four days, the mouth of the vessel remaining open for the first day or two, though it is afterwards covered. It only then remains to add water *ad libitum*, and to pour out the beer, after well shaking the

[9] This is what Bengali distillers call *bākhar*. It is usually purchased by them from hill-men. – [Ed.]

vessel, through a rude straining apparatus composed of rice-straw. It is said that the direct action of fire is not really needed in the preparation of this beer and that exposure to the sun is sufficient for the purpose, though the application of fire undoubtedly quickens the process. Rice prepared in this way may be kept in the earthenware vessel for six or twelve months, a fresh supply of boiled rice and condiment (*emáo*) being added to the old from time to time; but the beer is rarely kept in this way for any very prolonged period, though its quality is said to be improved by such keeping.

It may perhaps be added that the beverage so prepared would seem to be a thoroughly wholesome or at least a comparatively harmless one. Very large quantities are, to the writer's knowledge, sometimes consumed at a sitting, the consumer's brain apparently remaining wholly unaffected thereby. There is, however, a far less innocent beverage, commonly known as *phatiká*, prepared from this rice-beer by a process of distillation. This is a raw fiery spirit, somewhat resembling in taste the crudest possible whisky; and its use might very fittingly be put under severe restrictions by taxation[10] or otherwise, with results most beneficial to the physical, mental and moral well-being of this very interesting race.

Eri silk culture. One of the chief industries, a very profitable one among the Kacháris, is that of the culture of the silk-worm known as *eri*, and the manufacture of the *eri* cloth. The *eri* cocoons, which are about 2½ or 3 inches in length, may often be seen suspended, a few feet from the ground, in long festoons, a thin cord being passed through the base of the cocoons for this purpose. In this condition the cocoons remain for some fifteen days, at the end of which period the insects make their appearance in the butterfly stage. Before they are able to fly away, they are collected with care and placed in a suitable receptacle; and at the end of three or four days eggs resembling sago-grains make their appearance in great numbers. It is said that one insect can on an average produce from eighty to one hundred such eggs, or even more. In a further period of fifteen days the eggs are duly hatched, the new-born insect being at first almost black, from which colour it passes to brown, and finally to white, at intervals of three or four days; and at each change of colour the worm is said to cast its skin in snake-like fashion. Some four days after the last stage is reached, *i. e.*, about fifteen days after being hatched, the insect may be expected to set about the formation of its cocoon. To assist it in this work, small bundles of plantain or mango leaves are loosely tied together and placed within broad baskets or on bamboo platforms, and the insects are then carefully placed within these bundles; and under favourable conditions the cocoon should be fully formed in about twenty-four hours. The actual formation of the cocoon is preceded by certain signs, very significant to the Kachári, *i. e.*, the insect itself refuses food for a short time beforehand and becomes of a light, brilliant colour; and on handling it gently, a soft, rustling sound, proceeding from the insect itself, can be distinctly heard. After being carefully cleaned in water and dried in the sun, the cocoons are stowed away, usually in an earthenware vessel, until a fitting time, generally in the dry, cold season, appears for reeling them off, a work carried out by women and girls. It is said that a Kachári, working steadily at this occupation, can on an average reel off some 150 or 200 cocoons in a day. During the fifteen days preceding the formation of the cocoon, the insects' quarters must be kept scrupulously clean, and food carefully and regularly provided. Its favourite viand is the *eri* (castor oil) plant,[11] which gives its name alike to the insect itself as well as to the silk prepared from its cocoons. But it also feeds freely on the leaves of certain trees known in Assamese as *Kurungá*, *Gámári* and *Sangla*, especially the first named of the three.

The loom employed for weaving the *eri* silk is of very simple construction, and most, if not all, the material needed for the purpose can be provided by the villagers themselves from local resources.

The market value of a loom of this character is said to be about five rupees. It is usually set up on a shady side of the dwelling-house, or, where this is impracticable, a rude structure of thatch

[10] Possession, manufacture, and sale of *phatiká* is prohibited by law. – [Ed.]

[11] *Eranda*; Ricinus communis. – [Ed.]

and bamboo work is provided to shield the weaver from the sun. The actual work is always carried out either by the lady of the house, or by one of her grown-up daughters; and it is in every way suitable to women workers, as it requires very little exertion of physical strength, but only a certain quickness and readiness of eye and hand. The conditions under which the industry is carried on are in all respects pleasing and satisfactory. Indeed, a Kachári woman working placidly and contentedly at the *eri* loom, singing quietly to herself in sheer happiness of heart, offers perhaps one of the most complete illustrations of the benevolent influence of the Pax Britannica to be found in the wide realm of India, especially when it is borne in mind that less than seventy years ago these Kachári Duars were subject to the Bhutan Rajas, who seem to have harried and plundered the people in the most cruel and lawless way. Soon after the master of the house, with one or more grown-up sons, has betaken himself to the rice-fields, and this he does almost at sunrise, his goodwife seats herself at the loom, and works away steadily until about 8 or 9 a.m., when she may be seen carrying a well-cooked and appetising meal, carefully shielded from rain and sun by plantain leaves, to her goodman, who from an early hour has been toiling in the fields for the good of the family. This duty discharged, she resumes her position at the loom for the greater part of what may remain of daylight. Immediately in front of the loom there are probably two or three small children (the Kachári race is a wholesomely prolific one) gambolling and tumbling over each other in high delight. To these the mother now and then devotes a word or two of remonstrance, whenever their gambols seem to threaten an infantile breach of the peace; and she may occasionally rise from her seat to administer some little corporal chastisement, though always "more in sorrow than in anger"; but otherwise she devotes herself steadily and assiduously to the work in hand. It is said that a Kachári woman, if not greatly or frequently interrupted in her work, can weave about half a yard each day; and, as this *eri* cloth, woven in long strips about two yards wide, can always command a ready sale at about Rs. 2/– per yard, it will be at once evident that a good worker can in this way, without neglecting other urgent domestic duties, easily make a substantial addition to the family income.

The fabric itself (*eri* cloth), so produced, is one of great value, especially for use in the cold season, being at once soft and warm as well as remarkably strong and durable. Of its very great merit in this last-mentioned respect (durability) the writer has good reason to hold a very high opinion. Some twelve or fifteen years ago he was presented with a piece of *eri* cloth by one Leah Khángkhuáh, a good Kachári churchwoman, living not far from St. Paul's Mission Church, at Bengbari, whose payment of her "Church dues" (tithe) took this very pleasing and highly practical form. The quantity of cloth given (the donor declined all money payment) was sufficient to make two ample bed-sheets, and in this character they have been in use now for at least a dozen years past. During that period they have of course been subjected to many and frequent barbarous washings; but even the rough treatment they have so often received at the hands of the Assamese *dhobi* has as yet failed to make any impression for injury on the warp and woof of this sound material; so substantial and conscientious is the work done by this good Kachári churchwoman and gentlewoman.

Position, social and domestic, of women. Among the Kacháris women do not perhaps occupy quite the same influential position as seems to be enjoyed by their sisters in the Khasi Hills, where something like a matriarchate apparently holds the field of social and domestic life. Still, with this interesting race the position of the wife and mother is far from being a degraded one. The Kachári husband and householder has neither sympathy with, nor tolerance for, that degrading and demoralising creed "which says that woman is but dust, a soul-less toy for tyrant's lust." On the contrary, he usually treats his wife with distinct respect, and regards her as an equal and a companion to an extent which can hardly be said to be the rule among many of the Indian peoples. Kachári women, both in early life and as matrons, enjoy a large measure of freedom, a freedom which is very rarely abused for evil purposes. On being spoken to on the wayside, the Kachári woman will generally reply at once with absolute frankness, looking the questioner straight in the face and yet with the most perfect modesty. It has often happened to the writer during the last forty years to

enter a Kachári village for preaching purposes, or with a view to opening a school. On asking for the village headman, that personage is usually not slow in making his appearance; and after a few friendly words he will, quite as a matter of course, introduce his wife, and that with no small pride and pleasure. In discharging this social duty, he will very commonly use much the same language as may be heard among the working classes in England. The phrase most common is "Be áng-ni burui," literally "This (is) my old woman." The words are not used jeeringly at all, but with much real respect and affection; and are obviously so regarded by the speaker's life-partner, whose face and features, somewhat homely in themselves, may often be seen to light up at once with a very pleased and pleasing smile on hearing herself thus referred to by the sharer of her life's joys and sorrows. There is, too, another consideration, not perhaps altogether unknown in other parts of the world, which has great weight with the Kachári paterfamilias, viz., that his goodwife for the most part does not a little to provide for the family needs in the matter of food and raiment. Her prowess at the loom has been mentioned before; and besides this, the actual planting out of the young rice-seedlings is for the most part carried through by the women. And all this is habitually done without in any way neglecting or slurring over the usual duties more strictly appropriate to the goodwife and mother.

On the whole it may perhaps be safely said that the social and domestic life of the Kachári is not without its pleasing and satisfactory features. It is probably for the most part far sounder and more wholesome than the life of great cities, whether in Asia or Europe; and it is with no little dismay and sorrow that the writer would see any hasty ill-considered attempts made to supplant or override this simple, primitive, patriarchal life through the introduction of a one-sided, materialistic civilisation.

SECTION III
Laws and Customs

Internal Organisation. From such information as is available at the present day it a seems fairly clear that the internal and tribal organisation of the Kachári (Bara) race rested in early days, very largely at least, on a totemistic basis, although it is only here and there that any real regard for the totems can still be said to survive. In primitive days these subdivisions, all at one time strictly endogamous,[12]

[12] On this point Col. Gurdon, Hon. Director of Ethnography, Assam, writes as follows: – "I entertain grave doubts as to the correctness of the author's remark that the Kachári totemistic clans were originally endogamous. If it had not been for the most unfortunate death of the author before this work went to press, we might have hoped to have had some light on this obscure point. Amongst the Mech, who are the first cousins of the Kacháris, and who live alongside of them, marriage is exogamous, vide page 124 of the Monograph, so also amongst the Garos, who may be described as second cousins of the Kacháris. Mr. Friel, Sub-Divisional Officer of Mangaldai, which division of the Darrang district contains a large number of Kacháris, met an old Kachári who stated quite positively that 'before the Dewangari war, Kacháris were not allowed to marry within their own sub-tribe.' It is true that Mr. Friel's informant afterwards contradicted himself, but I think it is quite possible his first statement was the correct one. On the other hand, it should be stated in favour of Mr. Endle's theory that three men were found in Sekhar mauza of Mangaldai who stated that in former days 'a penance had to be performed if one married outside one's own *kur*.' My own view, however, is that stated above, and I do not think the statement that the Kachári totemistic clans were endogamous should be accepted without further investigation."

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.