

Anglo-Maram War

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Abstract:

The term 'Maharam' is a Hebrew (מַהְרָם) name that means "wise man" or "sage." It also signifies wisdom, knowledge, and intelligence. In Jewish tradition, the term also refers to the source, where wise men were sought out for their knowledge and advice. This term remains today as a symbol of wisdom and intelligenceⁱ. This term has both positive and negative significance; positive means 'daring and resourceful' and negative means 'less empathy for others and situations. If the term Maharam comes from Bengali language it means "god is great"ⁱⁱ. The terms 'Maram' and 'Maharam' are common use in the Middle East (Palestine and Israel). The reason why the British give this term to an independent people of West Khasi Hills is most probably because of their 'strong mental and physical character'; it was the last group of people in Khasi-Jaintia Hills to surrender to the colonial power. Rev. Dr. Sylvanus Sngi Lyngdoh on January 15, 2015, describes the character of the Maram as "Ki Maram ki long ki briew ba trei shitom bad ba satar shisha" (the Maram are hardworking and very tough people).

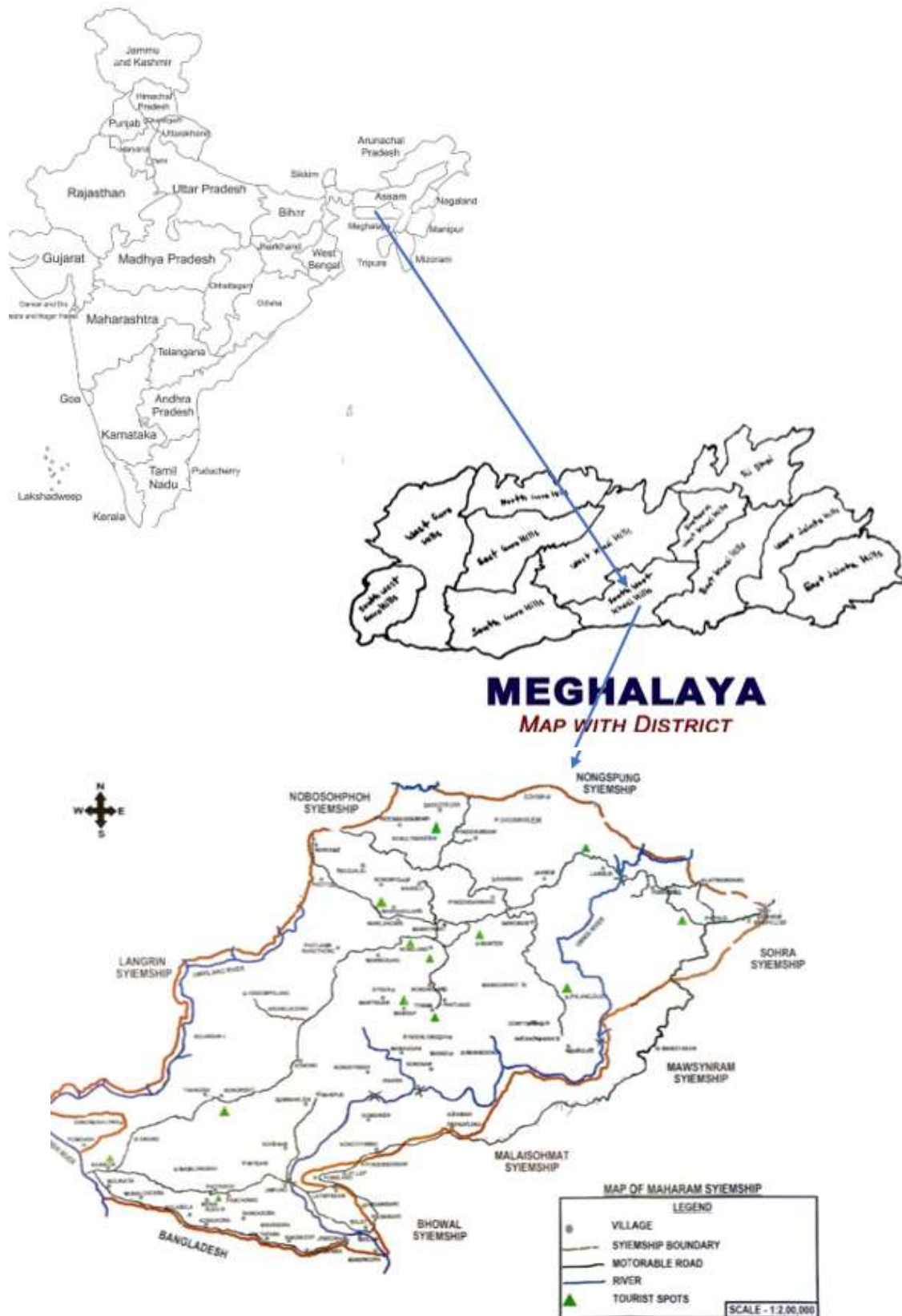
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1. Maharam Kingdom/Hima Maharam

Himaⁱⁱⁱ Maharam is situated in the west of Khasi Hills district in Meghalaya, India. The district is divided into two hilly regions, South West Khasi Hills and East Khasi Hills^{iv}. Maharam is relatively large in area; it extended towards the southern part of North East India. Half of the Kingdom covers the fertile land of Bangladesh, which (now Choomtola) was then called Maharam as Choomtola. This part of the fertile land was used for cultivation which was taken away by the British in the year 1832. The total territory area today is only 2560 sq.km, and Mawkyrwat is designated the headquarter of Hima Maharam.

Under the Hima Maharam, currently there are 172 villages, including 30 villages along the border of Bangladesh, where the Garos and other tribes reside (Lyngdoh, 2016)^v. The common division of Hima Maharam are; the Hilly land (Ri lum), Slope land (Ri war), and Low land (Ri thor). The soil of the Ri Lum area is less fertile. Most parts are rocky and dry sand in texture, and forest vegetation is covered with pine trees and bushes. The Ri Thor has a very fertile land, with a hot weather during the summer season. The Khasis in general are short in stature, with well-built body and incredibly muscular. The physical appearance of the Maram differs slightly from those of other Khasi-Jaintia hills residing people. Majority of the people have a fair and medium skin complexion. In general, men are basically light brown, whereas women have yellowish-brown in colour. The people residing in border or war region are slightly shorter, however, they a well-built physical structure. Due to the weather conditions and more specially their working habits, men are short, muscular, and incredibly strong (Kharjahrin, 2022)^{vi}. Their facial appearances are mostly round, with broader forehead, hands are very rough, and wider foot structure. The eyes are of medium size and brown or black in colour and the ladies worn a long straight black hair,

whereas men keep short hair which is mostly black in colour. The Maram men and women are physically strong and, can carry a heavy load for a long distance.



2. Anglo-Maram War

It was in the year 1826, when the treaty of Yandaboo which ended the Anglo-Burmese war signed that the Brahmaputra Valley came under the control of the British. This paved the way for the British to take control of other north eastern frontiers areas, including Hima Maharam. It was on 1st November 1826 that David Scott entered the Khasi Hills, from Guwahati to Nongkhlaw. The main cause of the Anglo-Maram war was the levying of taxes by the British government on the Maram inhabitants at Sunamganj. The Maram warriors waged wars to keep the society free from the social evils which permeated with the coming of British administration^{vii}. With the coming of the foreign power the Maram had foreseen the evil impact on the community life, and economic undertaking.

Hamlet Bareh mentions about an incident that occurred in 1836, and called it the standard rebellion that was raised by Sngap Syiem of Maharam. The chief warrior of Sngap Syiem was U Phan Maram, who was captured and shot due to treachery. Other Maram warriors were U Tep Shiak and U Moit Kliaw, who fought side by side with U Phan Maram but fell victim to deceit. Sngapsing Syiem continued to defend the land against the British invasion, and it is said that the Maram prolonged the war to ten years till 1839. The warriors of Maram were renowned and frequently raided the plain of Sylhet with annexations. Maharam together with Mawiang, Mawsynram and other petty units joined Tirot Singh to rebel against the British invasion^{viii}.

It was the Major Lister the commander who gave order to the Sylhet light Infantry to break through to Khasi Jaintia Hills through Maharam Syiemship. The Gurkhas formed the major part of the British infantry who attacked the Maram. For almost a year, they made a remarkable advance towards Nongnah. The Gurkhas were able to enter into Maharam because they disguised themselves as Khasis. The Maram warrior camped at Nongnah, guarding the main village of Nongkdait, Mawtaiang, and Thip Bamon, while the traitor leads the British from the Sylhet plain through Balat, Bhowal and Iawpaw led to the suppression of Maharam Syiemship^{ix}.

The Anglo-Maram War which was also the second Maram rebellion against the British ended on 13th February 1839 with the treaty made between the British and U Sngap Syiem of Maharam state. This treaty forced the Maram to lay down arms under their possession. The spirit of nationalism and the right to sovereignty of the people were severely curbed. According to this treaty, the Syiem promised to accommodate and grant the right of passage for the company's troops through the land, and in return he would receive compensation. The Maram bandit and insurgents were to be handed over to the British. Maharam Syiem had to pay an indemnity of Rs. 200^x.

3. The Storming of Nongnah

Hamlet Bareh, in his book Khasi Fables and Folk-tales, described Nongnah village as one of the loveliest sites in the enchanting Khasi land. It is situated in the heart of Maram Syiemship; exquisite scenes and the profuse vegetation clothe its neighbourhood, the fringe of the Sylhet plains on the south rolling before the eyes, the chirping of minas and parrots filling the air on the nearby woodlands while on the oblong precipices, the base of which abruptly merging the plains, and the fruit plantations lay scattered. Nongnah is also famous for its verities of creepers and flowering plants.

The description of Nongnah village with its natural richness was very popular, but the historical event which took place in the year 1839, the storming of the Nongnah by the British, was the most memorable event in the history of Khasi-Jaintia Hills. It was the Maram warriors who put up a strong final resistance to the entry of the British during the Anglo-Khasi wars. Sngap Syiem was then the chief of Maharam. He

was the most capable ally of Tirot Singh, the chief of Nongkhlaw. The British East India Company took extra years to annex the Maharam kingdom due to the ablest Maram leadership and skilful warriors. The valiant bowmen, archers, and musketeers, with their whirlwind speed ambushed killed the British soldiers. U Moit Kliaw was the main commander of the Maram warriors at Nongnah, physically robust and giant, and as fast as an eagle. Nongnah is the main trade route for the Maram that connected to the main Ranikor market. The British were in no way able to subdue the Maram. They weakened them indirectly by closing the market in the plain, burned some aggressive villages and destroyed the granaries. The last solution to invade the Maram was by offering bribes to a local person. This Maram traitor passed on information to the British regarding all the strong and weak positions of the Maram warriors. This traitor leads the British soldiers stealthily and marching in the night through the unguarded villages of Balat to Rangthong until Nongnah. This led to the end of the Maram rebellion against the British; Maram warriors were met with surprise, some were caught, and others were killed, U Moit Kliaw was put to death. In 1839, Sngap Syiem was compelled to surrender and accept the treaty with the British^{xi}.

ⁱ <https://hebrewnamer.com/names/maharam>

ⁱⁱ Ramsiej S. (2023). *Ka Mynnor bad ka Mynta, jong ka shnong Sakwang*. Sngap Syiem College, Mawkyrwat. p.17.

ⁱⁱⁱ The term *Hima* mean a centralised politics of a particular group of people, it is like a kingdom. All along paper the term *Hima* will be used instead of kingdom, and the chieftainship of this area is called *U Syiem*.

^{iv} Lyngdoh, D. (2016). *Ka Jingrakhe dap 25 snem jong u Niandro Syiemiong kum u syiem jong ka hima Maharam 1991-2016*.16-17.

^v Lyngdoh, R. (2016). Ki Nongmaram shwa ka jinglailtuid. *Ka Jingrakhe dap 25 snem jong u Niandro Syiemiong kum u syiem jong ka hima Maharam 1991-2016*.1-6.

^{vi} Kharjahrin, O. (2022). *Ka Shnong Sakwang*. Mawkyrwat, Kharjahrin, 5-12.

^{vii} Bareh, H. (1997). *The History and Culture of the Khasi People*, Guwahati, Spectrum Publications. pp. 142-143.

^{viii} Bareh, H. (1964). *The History and Culture of the Khasi people*. Calcutta, Naba Mudran Private Limited. p. 147.

^{ix} Bareh, H. (1964).163-164.

^x Bareh, H. (1964). p. 194.

^{xi} Bareh, H. (1971). *Khasi Fables and Folk tales*. Calcutta, Firma K.L. Mukhopadhyay. pp. 56-58.