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Indian people have strange and unique customs

By MARIA WAWER

This summer, Maria Wawer, a UNEB student, went on a World University Service of Canada International Seminar in India. This is the seventh part of her travel story.

After Orissa, we headed to Gauhati and Ghillong, in Assam. This is a chunk of land between Bangladesh and Burma, and is joined to the main part of the Indian subcontinent by a narrow sliver of land.

For the first time since coming to India we didn't travel by train, but flew. This gave us a bird's eye view of Bangladesh as we went over it. Flooding had been reported in this area, and I believe it - the whole country appeared to be one big, brown mud pack, with water covering all the winding roads we could see from the air. I would have liked to take pictures, but for security reasons, no one may take photos aboard Indian airlines aircraft.

Shillong turned out to be a surprise. High up in a hill district, it was cool and very beautiful. Jagged hills, wreathed with mist surrounded the city. Flowers, from dahlias to orchids, grew in

profusion. An incredible variety of plants grew in the region - pine trees, some palms, teak, everything very green and lush.

The people in this area, the Khasis, are very different, culturally, linguistically, physically, from any others I met during my trip. Little is known about how the Khasi tribe came to live in this part of the world. Their language has been identified as belonging to the Mon-Khmer group and they are the only people remaining in India who still speak it. Other branches of this language are still used by the Khmers of Cambodia and by some inhabitants of the Malay peninsula.

Many of their customs are unique to this part of the country. For example, as one travels to the countryside, one sees strange, gaunt monolithic slabs of stone standing in a circle, or in rows. Some are 15 feet tall. These, since time immemorial have served as burial markers for the dead. Many are thousands of years old. The look eerie, arranged around an altar slab, under the trees.

To my novice eye, some of these folks looked very Mongolian. Here and there, one would see a small gnarled, mustachioed, fierce looking

gentleman who looked like Genghis Khan's father-in-law.

Due possibly to the better climate and good diet provided by the fertile land, the Khasis appeared to be much more energetic than any other group I met in (the countryside) of India (with the possible exception of Sikks.) Due to the abundance of lumber, Khasi homes even in smaller villages are usually made of wood, and often covered with corrugated steel. Crops in the area include corn, as well as rice. Few Khasis belong to the Hindu religion, so cows are also raised for meat.

Shillong, a city of 100,000 people has an almost exclusive Khasi population. Strictly speaking, the Khasi hills were joined with regions inhabited by two other tribes (the Jaintas and Garos) to form a new state, Meghalaya, of which Shillong is the capital. The rich part of the city looks a bit like Shangri-La, with its small, ornamental lake in the centre, gardens everywhere, surrounded by high waterfalls hurling into deep, green ravines.

The city also has narrow torturous alleys, and a large rambling open air market on the

side of a hill. In the rainy season, this becomes a river of mud.

It was enjoyable shopping here when it was dry. The Khasis prefer to do business much more along North-American lines. They do not try to urge, beg or coerce

you into visiting their shops. Everything has a fixed price. Although I had enjoyed bargaining in other parts of India, in a way it was a relief to get away from this for awhile

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the Villager

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Stanley Judd is missing

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loved (outside of my family) was my grade three teacher. She was as pretty as a rose and smelled like a lavender candle. And she was oh so pleasant! Her name was Miss Jones but, as she said to us boys when she kept us after class, "you can call me Jane". She kept us boys after class almost every day, wiping the blackboards, cleaning the desks, emptying the waste-paper baskets. But we didn't mind. We all loved her, I think. I always used to think how pleasant it would be to visit her home and share chocolate chip cookies and milk with her. And it would've been, but I was never allowed to go. My mother, you know. She was somewhat strict concerning the company I kept in those days. She never let me go anywhere without her and mothers were never invited to Miss Jones' place. Fathers sometimes were, but never with their sons. My father was invited, but my mother wouldn't let him go either. So we were both left in the cold. A true story this. I would never lie about someone as pleasant as Miss Jones. Believe me, Diary, it's true!

Other loves? Well, there have been

many. None have amounted to much. Girls these days just aren't interested in chocolate chip cookies and milk. Or dogs. Seems women are more interested in big cars than men are. Or else they go to university and learn too much to be happy with. I think the first word they learn in university is 'valid' and the second is 'rational'. Who ever heard of a valid, rational woman who loved a man? Love is a totally irrational thing. Love will never save the world! Infatuation is what is needed. Infatuation never lasts and neither do humans. Yet, I love my dog. Yet again, we have no intention of saving the world. We're only in it for the money.

Oh, oh, someone's at the door, Diary. Time to escape through the window. See you later. Come on dog! Let's get out of here!



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