





INTRODUCTION

Meghalaya, a small hill state in the North-Eastern part of India is the abode of the three matrilineal tribes, namely the Khasis, Jaintias and Garos. About 81% of the population of the state consists of the tribals.

The British annexed Khasi Hills in 1833. The Christian missionaries arrived in 1841. These events opened up the region to the outside world. Non-tribals came to work in different capacities. The modern system of administration along with its legal framework came into the midst of the tribals. Women have a dominant role in the matrilineal society of Meghalaya. The youngest daughter of the family, the Ka Khatduh, inherits all ancestral property. After marriage, husbands live in the mother-in-law's home. The mother's surname is taken by children. This originated from the original system where the uncle is the chief earner and worker.



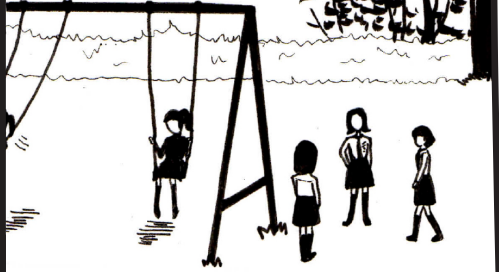
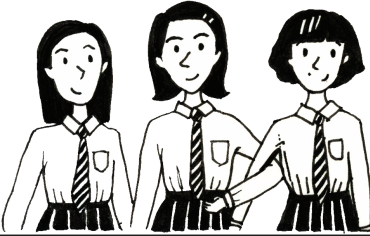
CHAPTER 1

The Surname

THE SURNAME

SHILLONG, MARCH '01

we were waiting for our turn at the swing during recess

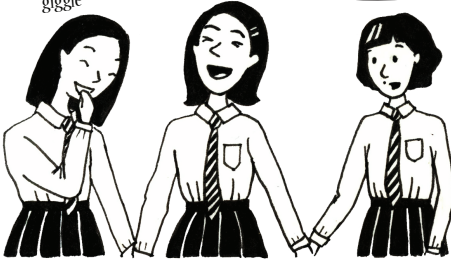


That's me on the right. I was in the 6th standard. That's Mallika, my best friend and the new girl on the left, Abha.

giggle
giggle

chuckles

what are you laughing about?



Abha and I met at the movies yesterday. I ate all the popcorn! She went with her family and I went with mine



which movie was it?

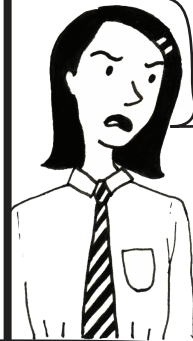
It's a bollywood movie, I'm sure you dont know it.



That's okay, I don't relate to bollywood movies anyway!



Go watch Khasi* movies then if they are so great!



*The Khasi people are an indigenous tribe, the majority of whom live in the State of Meghalaya which is in the north eastern part of India

Looks like Abha is her new best friend now....



in the classroom..

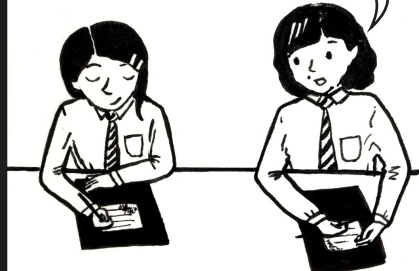
Mom got me labels with flowers from Iewduh* for my books. Mallika's had animated characters on them.

Mallika and I sit together in class. We began filling in the labels.



Nautiyal. I've never heard of your surname...

It's the beginning of the school-year freshly wrapped books on the table. New grade, new books, they get heavier every year!



My dad's surname is Nautiyal, he's from Uttaranchal... close by to Abha's home, Delhi...

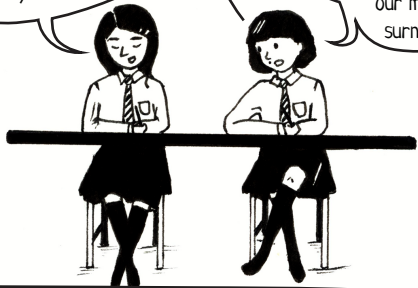
Langstieh. But mine is Manners, just like my mom's.



What's your dad's surname?

Abha and I took our own dad's surname. Why not you?

I don't know why but we Khasis take our mom's surname.



* Iewduh or Bara Bazar is the oldest and the largest wholesale market in Shillong



MARBANIANG MARAK SUTING
LYNGDOH SANGMA SURONG
KHARKONGOR MOMIN KHONGLAH
SYIEM TIMREY PYRTUH
KHARMALKI RIKRE SHULLAI

I remember asking my mother about it..

Mei, why do we not take papa's surname?

That's because we are Khasis.....

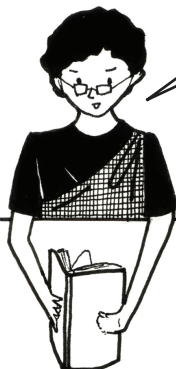


We take our mother's surname, it's called matriilineal

Matri-what??



Your children are going to take yours. We are different from dakhar*. It is something unique and special.



special??

yes, special, even Mizos and Nagas** are not like us. Now stop drawing on that page, I haven't read it yet.



*Dakhar is used to refer to 'non-tribal mainland Indians'.

**'Mizos and Nagas' collectively refers to the North-East Indian tribes from Mizoram and Nagaland. As a matter of speaking locally (politically incorrect) the term, at times tends to all the north eastern tribes.

*** A list of common surnames of Khasis, Garos and Jaintias.



*Khun Khatduh refers to the youngest daughter of the household. The sole heir of ancestral property.

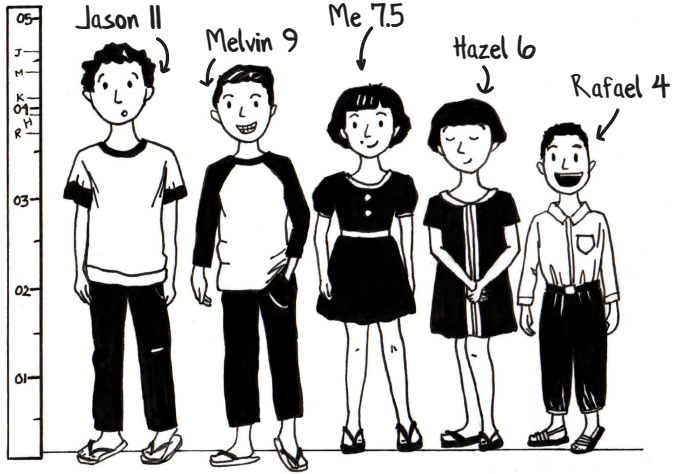


CHAPTER 2

The Dishes

THE DISHES

We are a big family. I have four siblings, all of the same age group, more or less. Sometimes I wonder how my mother was able to raise us and go to work, while dad preferred to take it easy most of the time.



playing marbles was our favourite game



suddenly, mom calls

MEM!!

COME HERE!!

OYE! I'm playing!

Your'e grown enough now to help me with the dishes. The maid didnt come today. Wash as much as you can. I'll do the rest.

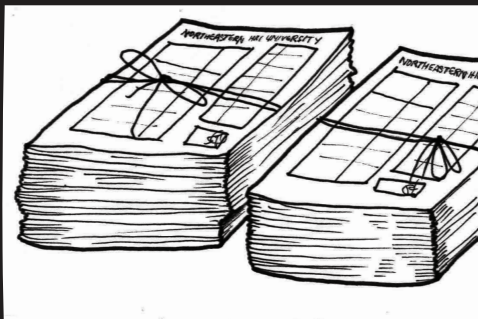
But.. okay



MEM is what i was called at home. It is a very common nick name in the Khasi community.



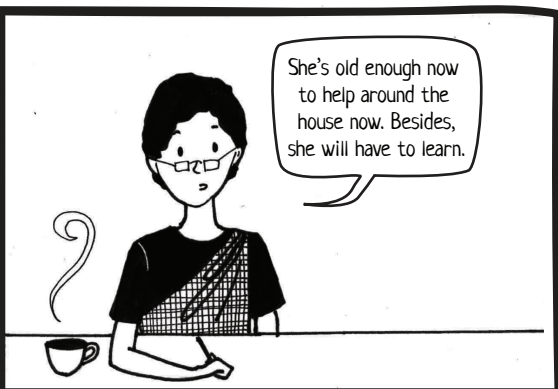
My mother is a lecturer. From as early as I could remember, she always had piles of examination papers to correct.



She sat on the kitchen table while I was doing the dishes



*jain-kyrshah is a checked polyester piece of cloth used to be worn as an apron while cleaning and cooking.
**BAMIA is a word in the War dialect, which means 'elder sister,' which is also my mother's nick name.



JASON IS
OLDER THAN ME
MELVIN IS
OLDER THAN ME



SO GIRLS
WORK AND
BOYS PLAY

And as young as 7, I understood that the rule is-household work is not for boys. I was bitter about it. One would think gender roles were not as distinct in my culture and one would be wrong.*

yea right! Two girls so that she can make us work!



Bamia, your'e very lucky to have two girls.



*Matriliny is very much a part of the patriarchial system that rules the world. Matrilineal is to Patrilineal just as Matriarchy is to Patriarchy.



CHAPTER 3

Chicken-pox

CHICKEN POX

How's school?



mmm
day
after

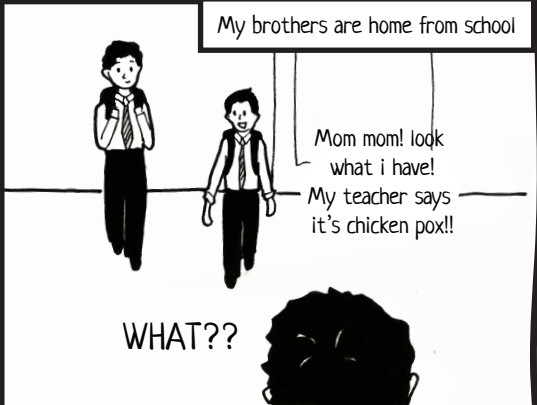


Isn't your
2nd term
exam coming?



What subject are
you having first?
Show me what
you have
to study.

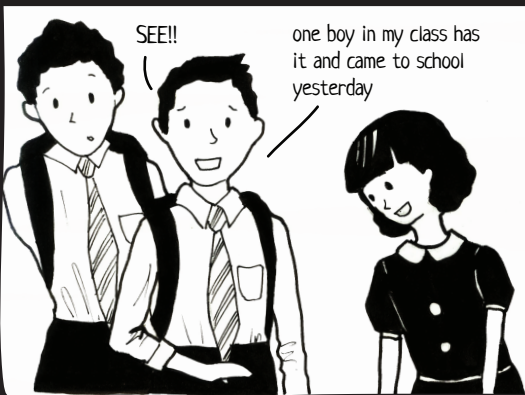
Oh look, Mel
and Jason
are back!



My brothers are home from school

Mom mom! look
what i have!
My teacher says
it's chicken pox!!

WHAT??



SEE!!

one boy in my class has
it and came to school
yesterday



Come here, show
it to me!
Oh no, it does
look like it



Mel and I have least age difference amongst our siblings. We've always been inseperable. We're usually in the same pictures in our old family albums.



*Dam site - an Umiam Lake reservoir located in the hills 15 km to the North of Shillong.

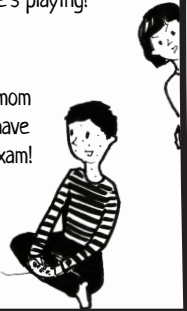
getting ready for school the next day



I wanted to stay home and play videogames too

arrrrghh MOM!! Mel isn't going to school! He's playing!

Haha, my teacher told mom I don't even have to take my exam!

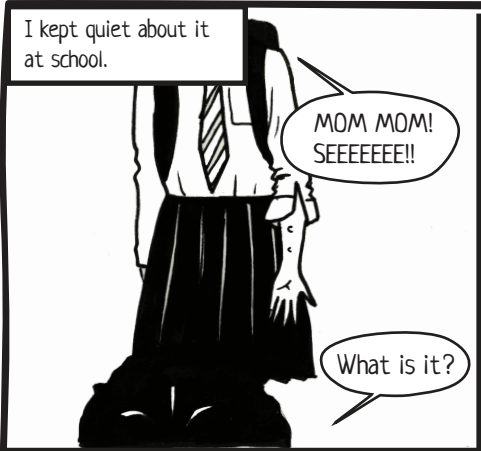


Dad drops us to school. We go very early everyday, he says we should learn punctuality but I know he just wanted to avoid traffic.



Later that day..





One week of no exams, no school. We played 'kotdur-wrestling'* and I reached the highest level in Mario** than my siblings. Mom took a few days off from work.



*'kotdur-wrestling': cards with images of famous WWF wrestlers (now WWE). Usually collected, exchanged or played.

DAY 4: report card day.

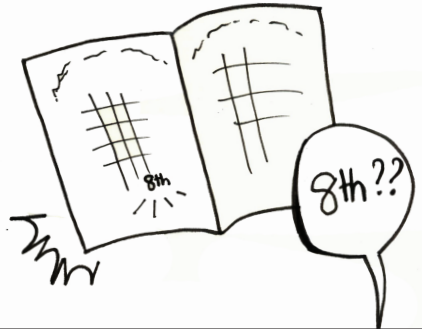
$2 \times 1 = 2$
 $2 \times 2 = 4$
 $2 \times 3 = 6$
 $2 \times 4 = 8$
 $2 \times 5 = 10$
.....

Children, you all did very well. Lets just wait for your parents to come.

The 1st term I was ranked 2nd in class, and I was expecting to be in the top three this time too.



chitter chatter
chitter chatter



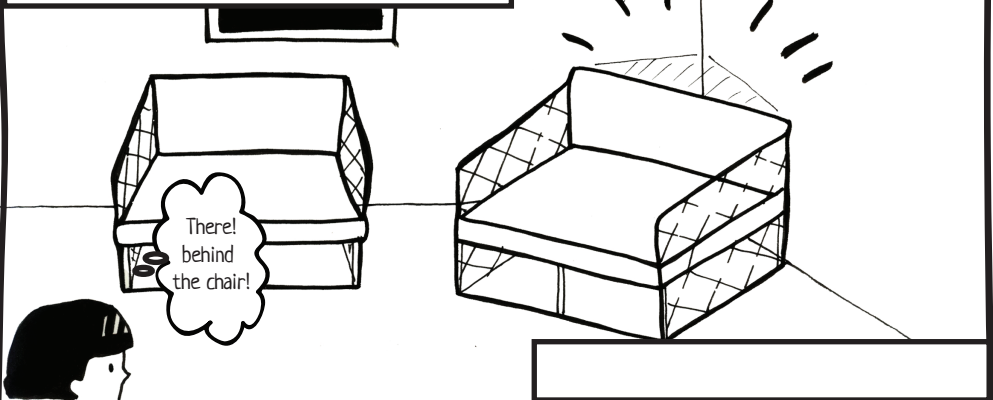
My brothers always gave me a hard time



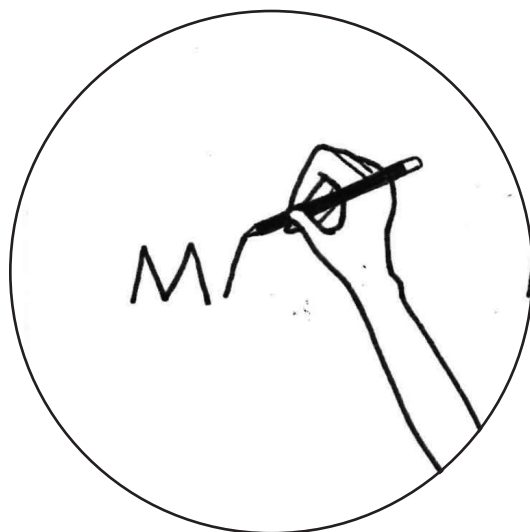
My mom didn't seem too happy about it.



Now the neighbours have also come to see my report card. I just wanted to hide. I ran around the house to look for a hiding place.



My parents taught us to be hard on ourselves. And, this is both a good and bad thing. But the importance of doing well in education was very well understood, a little too pressured.



CHAPTER 4
Movers & Packers

COMING SOON!!

CREDITS

References

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Special thanks to

- My mother
- Friends



