NSOU-OPEN JOURNAL **ISSN: 2581-5415**
Vol.9 No.1 (January 2026)
A Multidisciplinary Online Journal of Netaji Subhas Open University, INDIA

Reconsidering 'Civilisation': T.H. Lewin and the Indigenous Communities of the Chittagong Hill Tracts

Krishnokoli Hazra
Assistant Professor, Department of History, Loreto College
Email: krishnokolihazra31@gmail.com, ORCID ID: https://orcid.org/0009-0005-4335-7768

Abstract
Colonial perceptions of the indigenous communities in India have often had the 'savage/civilised' binary as its fulcrum. The idea of the 'white man's burden' cast its long shadow over most official colonial accounts where the value of 'civilising' the 'tribal' populations was never in doubt.However, not all colonial administrators conformed to this mould. Thomas Herbert Lewin (1839–1916). Deputy Commissioner and Political Agent of the Chittagong Hill Tracts (1866-1875) stands out for his unique experiences among the 'tribes' of the CHT in the 1860s. Lewin's travel notes through the remote parts of the region were later published as 'Wild Races of South-Eastern India'. The text provides compelling insights and raises several questions- how far were Lewin's opinion of the indigenous communities of CHT congruent with the dominant official colonial approaches? To what extent did he deviate from them? What was his view of 'Civilization', particularly in relation to the hill communities? How did this impact his understanding of the communities themselves? This papers endeavours to probe the text to find some of the answers. It also examines Lewin's observations through the dual prisms of contemprary scholarly ethnological frameworks and the prevailing attitudes of other colonial officers.
Keywords: *Chittagong Hill Tracts, civilization, colonialism, T.H. Lewin, savage, tribal communities.*

Introduction

The idea of 'civilization' and its implication of the cultural contrast between those who were 'civilized' and those who were not, stretched back in Europe to the ancient Greeks (Stocking, 1987).The concept was shaped by many events (e.g. the Industrial Revolution and the French Revolution) but the distinction between the 'civilised' and the 'savage' remained at its core. For the British, white-skinned Britons represented the zenith of civilisation, uniquely equipped to 'uplift' others. The acquisition of its colonial empire with non-white populations, in general and 'tribal' indigenous communities in particular, provided the field for the application of such ideas (Stocking, 1987).

The views of the British officers towards the 'tribal' groups in late 19th century Bengal, provide clear examples of this. The predominant attitude that the indigenous communities were 'primitive' and 'savage', was based on a host of attributes (usually framed as a litany of 'lacks'— of 'adequate' clothing, literacy, mastery over the environment, hierarchical government and organised religion) which placed them at the opposite end of the spectrum from 'civilised' white-skinned Europeans.[1]The natural corollary to this was the conviction that it was the 'duty' of the latter to 'uplift' the former. However, it is important to register that not every administrator fitted into this mould and that there *did* exist those who questioned it. Thomas Herbert Lewin (1839–1916), Deputy Commissioner and Political Agent of the Hill Tracts of Chittagong (1866-1875) was one such officer who raised fundamental questions about the nature and value of the project to 'civilise' the indigenous communities.

The hilly and forested tracts to the east of the Chittagong district were formed into a separate Non-Regulation district (Hill Tracts of Chittagong, hereafter CHT) by Act XXII of 1860 and placed under the control of a Superintendent of the Hill Tribes (Hutchinson, 1909). This was the first time that the area had been incorporated into a state (Van Schendel, 1992). Meanwhile, Lewin had already arrived in India late in 1857, when north India was aflame with the Great Revolt. He joined Her Majesty's 34th Regiment and was soon sent to the front.[2] In 1866 he became the Superintendent of the Hill Tribes in the CHT. This position was made permanent when he was formally appointed as the Deputy Commissioner and Political Agent of the CHT. In the winter of 1865, as District Superintendent of the CHT, Lewin spent four months travelling through the hills inhabited by Burmese-speaking tribes, an area where no European had gone before. His travel notes were published in 1869 as *The Hill Tracts of Chittagong and the Dwellers Therein: With Comparative Vocabularies of the Hill Dialects*. A re-edited version was published in England the following year with the title *Wild Races of South-Eastern India.* The book, which was based largely on his personal observations during his three-year sojourn in the hills (Lalruatkima,2016), provides a fascinating insight into Lewin's unconventional views on 'civilisation' and on the question of 'civilising' the 'tribal' communities in CHT.

Through these works, Lewin aimed to introduce to English readers, races of people of whom they knew little. Though his own interest in the CHT 'tribes' had been aroused only gradually; but on becoming better acquainted with their language, customs and social life, he found much to admire. His avowed purpose therefore was to provide his readers with a glimpse of the *private* life of the hill communities; to enable them to 'partake...of the wild hospitality…of the children of Nature' (Lewin, 2004 [1870]).

Secondly, he wished to highlight what he considered was a glaring lacuna in the administrative system— an almost complete want of accurate, detailed knowledge of the people it was supposed to govern. Though it was the policy of the British colonial state to collect exhaustive information about the colonised population (Metcalf, 1995), the difficult terrain of the CHT meant that it was largely unknown even in the 1860s. Lewin criticised the general tendency among colonial officers to 'know, or care to know, nothing' of the hill communities despite being in contact with them for more than eighty years, ending with the grim warning this would lead to the ruin of the government. As proof he stated that though Chittagong had come under colonial rule many decades ago, no systematic account of the hill communities of the region as a whole had been attempted before him (Lewin, 2004). Thus, political considerations also motivated him.

The influence of Ethnology

Lewin's book opens with a geographical description of the Chittagong Hill Tracts including a survey of its natural resources followed by a brief history of Mughal and British presence there. The bulk of the work however, comprised an ethnographic account of the various aboriginal groups of the region. Mid-19th century British views of non-white peoples, particularly 'dark-skinned savages', was deeply influenced by the newly emerged 'science' of Ethnology.[3] Lewin's writing does reveal the influence of established modes of ethnological enquiry. He cited the absence of an established religion and a written language (therefore a "reliable" history) to pronounce the Toungthas 'more purely savage' (Lewin, 2004). He believed that linguistic study could reveal vital clues to the origins of the hill communities —for example the study of those words used by the Chakmas which could not be traced to Arakanese or Bengali roots. Arguing that 'tribal' vocabulary indicated their degree of 'civilization', he described the Toungtha languages as being 'simple' as they expressed merely the 'wants and sensations of uncivilized life'. As the Toungthas lacked words for the salutation of chiefs and elders, he inferred that respect or reverence were emotions that were 'unknown' to them. Lewin also believed that prolonged environmental influences shaped human social and cultural qualities which separated the 'civilized' from the 'barbaric'(Lewin,2004). This was in keeping with prevailing ethnological principles which decreed that 'primitive groups' were almost completely governed by climate and terrain (Stocking,1987).

However Lewin deviated from ethnological criteria on several important points. On the critical issue of classification, Lewin used neither the physical nor linguistic parameters so favoured by ethnologists. His primary categorisation was geographical. He divided the indigenous groups of the region into —a) The Khyoungtha, or Children of the River (which included those of Aracanese origin as well as the Chakma); b) the Toungtha, or Children of the Hills (which included the Tippera, Lushai or Kukis with their offshoots). He added a secondary categorisation on an even more unusual basis— that of the degree to which they were subject to British colonial control/influence . The Toungtha were further subdivided into groups : A- Those who were tributary to and entirely subject to British control (Tipperahs/Mroongs,Kumi/Kweymee, Mroos, Khyens); B- those who paid no revenue but were subject to British influence (Bungees and Punkhos); C- Those who were entirely independent (Lushai/Kuki, Shendoos/Lakhers) (Lewin,2004). Thus, despite being the dominant contemporary European theoretical framework for the study of 'primitive' communities, the principles and methods of ethnology played only a limited role in Lewin's writing.

The issue becomes clearer when his work is contrasted with that of a contemporary colonial adminitrator William Wilson Hunter, who deployed ethnological methods in his study of the Santhals of the district of Birbhum in western Bengal.[4] Hunter attempted to reconstruct the history of the Santhals through an analysis of their language and religion. The racial basis of the differences between the Santhals and the mainstream population of Bengal (especially Hindus) was one of his primary concerns.[5] His entire account was framed within the context of proving the existence of distinct aboriginal element in the population of South-western Bengal and of the political-administrative imperative to acquire and harness this knowledge. Lewin too, clearly saw the Chittagong hill-dwellers and the Bengali plainsmen as discrete groups, but he explained the distinction in terms of modes of livelihood and 'character' rather than that of race and ethnicity. This has an important bearing on Lewin's broad approach where he viewed the indigenous communities as part of a single human family and not as an 'inferior race'. Rather than distinctions of race, his focus was on the fact that they were not equally equipped to negotiate successfully the new systems introduced by the colonial government in Chittagong and that this was to the disadvantage of the hill communities. It was this approach which made him question the 'need' to 'civilise' the latter.

The question of 'civilising' the 'tribes'

As a member of the British colonial officialdom, it was natural that Lewin would be influenced by the dominant views in the administration. For example, he questioned neither the necessity of the steady extension of British administrative power in the Hills, nor its outcomes.[6] He described in detail the process by which the hill men fell into the debt-trap laid for them by the moneylenders from the plains, but did not link it to the administrative changes introduced by the British government which made the plainsman's presence possible in the first place. He outlined the gradual stages by which tribute paid (in kind, annually by the tribal chiefs) to the government was transformed (and increased) by the colonial administration into a fixed revenue payable in cash; but failed to connect this to the increased power of moneylenders in an economy previously monetised to a very limited degree. Similarly the introduction of alien system of litigation meant that the hill men, ignorant of the very language in which the court

proceedings were conducted, were at the mercy of the attorneys. Despite romantic descriptions of migratory life based on *jhum* (shifting) cultivation in the hills (Lewin,2004) in essence his attitude mirrored the official view, that this 'wasteful' method ought to be replaced by the plough (Mey, 2005). He knew that throughout the Hill Tracts no hill man used the plough; and that even when they found it difficult to access fresh *jhum* lands, they steadfastly held aloof from it (Lewin,2004) ; yet he supported the introduction of forest conservancy laws which would restrict tribal access to the forests and jeopardise their traditional modes of cultivation.

What distinguished him from other contemporary officers was his conviction that despite their obvious differences with Europeans, the hill men shared with them many traits common to the 'civilized' segment of humanity. He cautioned the reader that he would find much to 'astonish' and perhaps to 'revolt' him in the 'strange' customs, but argued that as in Noah's Ark (where the 'clean and the unclean beasts alike entered in'), to attain a true picture of the hill communities, the 'good must be taken with the bad',

Their *virtus*, courage or virtue together with the immorality, licence and intemperance, which form integral portions of all human natures, civilised or not (Lewin,2004).

At the root of this attitude lay a deep-seated respect for the tribesmen and their way of life.

My great and distinctive feeling with them has been that they were my fellow-creatures, men and women like myself…(Lewin,2004).

In his portrayal the communities of the Chittagong Hills emerge as 'simple and ignorant' but scrupulously honest, 'primitive' but merry, frank and free from crime. The taking over of India by the Crown post-1857 led to a gradual increase in serious efforts to identify and classify tribes. Biswamoy Pati has argued that in this process the early descriptive efforts gradually lost their fluidities and became polarised to incorporate typical stereotypes like the 'brutal' and 'wild tribals' (Pati, 2011). In Lewin's writing however, the older trend of viewing the tribes with a great deal of ambivalence seems to have remained in a high degree.[7] Other officers before him had also expressed paternalistic affection for the hill communities, but what set Lewin apart was that extensive interaction with them led him to the conclusion that they were *no different* as human beings,

Little by little…my interest was awakened and my affections drawn to them: I found them a people worthy of esteem, worthy of note…I have found…among all wild and so-called barbarous races, that when one grows acquainted with their language, and …their social life and habits, they are very much the same as other people; there is not much difference indeed between human nature all the world over…(Lewin,2004).

This affection showed itself in his somewhat unusual opinions about a host of issues such as slavery, 'promiscuity', 'indecency' among tribal women and conceptions of 'civilization'. The practice of keeping slaves prevailed throughout the Chittagong Hill Tract district. With reference to the custom of keeping debtor-slaves[8], he questioned whether they could be called slaves at all, in great contrast to the wholesale denunciation of the tradition common among British administrators. He argued that the slaves' condition hardly differed from that of the freemen and stressed that this was a deliberately adopted custom of the majority of the people and not a bondage imposed by force. He was critical of the government, arguing that the abrupt end to a 'universal custom', had destroyed the confidence between debtor and creditor. The hill men ceased to seek help from their chiefs or sought it in vain. The abrupt overturning of an old system which had enabled the hill people to borrow from each other in times of need, and its substitution by a law, 'unexplained and incomprehensible', only made them fall 'easy victims' to the *mahajans* (moneylenders). For these disastrous consequences he blamed the 'suddenness' with which the measures had been launched and contrasted it with the caution which been employed in a similar situation in the 'West Indian Colonies'.

The position of women in hill society was much appreciated by Lewin. To him, the relation that 'should' exist between the sexes was 'one of the most important problems of the day' and he was keen to note their social practices.[9] He believed that they had a purely 'functional' view of marriage; and that as women were non-combatants, contempt for them and their weakness marked 'all savages'. Even so, he contrasted this favourably with the 'degraded' position occupied by the 'females of Hindostan',

Here there is no mock modesty, but nature, pure and simple; the custom of concealing their women and hiding their faces, conveying as it does how much mistrust of man to man, exists only among the more effeminate races of Asia (Lewin,2004).

While similar comparisons had been made by other officers earlier, Lewin stood apart in his consciousness that standards of morality varied between societies and that what would be considered strange in one would not be so in another. As examples he cited the freedom of intercourse permitted to both sexes before marriage and scanty apparel of the hill women-

These things [free interaction between the sexes before marriage] are doubtless strange to us; their very dress, or perhaps I should say undress, might almost be called indecent; but it is not really so. Habit and temperature make usual and proper among them what we should consider the reverse. We cannot then condemn them on the score of indecency for to the pure all things are pure. Our present notions of sexual decorum are highly artificial. The question of more or less clothes is one purely of custom and climate…True modesty lies in the entire absence of thought upon the subject (Lewin,2004).

The majority of the administrators condemned outright the modes of celebration usual among the indigenous communities— a typical example was E.T. Dalton's use of terms like 'saturnale', 'debauchery' and 'pandean orgy' for the *Magh Parab,* a major festival of the Hos of Singbhum (Dalton, 1973 [1872]). Lewin on the other hand, refused to label the hill communities as 'immoral' because they themselves were unconscious of any 'sin' or 'wrong-doing'.

Lewin's view on the colonial 'civilizing mission'

With regard to the benefits of British rule, Lewin was ambivalent. He acknowledged the necessity of altering some of their practices such as slavery and shifting cultivation; and was appreciative of the role of the government in subduing the independent groups (Lewin,2004) and bringing 'peace' to the frontier. Yet Lewin did not regard 'Civilization' as an unmixed blessing. A core feature of civilization was higher levels of production through improved use of resources which made possible a higher standard of living, at least for some. He referred to an authority of the day, John Laing who, in his book *The Theory of Business* noted that there was an increase of national wealth, and that although there was now, as always, a large class on the verge on starvation, this was not incompatible with a state of great prosperity.Lewin remarked with some asperity,

'I can imagine a hill man saying, "From such prosperity the Lord deliver me!"'

Laing's acceptance that great inequality of wealth in a commercial and industrial society was inevitable was linked to the ideas of Thomas Malthus[10] who argued that poverty was caused by the dissonance between population and resources. The poor, in this analysis, possessed a morally 'deficient' character which made them unable to subordinate their sexual impulse to the 'restraint' required by both utilitarian economics and Victorian morality (Stocking,1987). In the context of the Chittagong Hill Tracts the English poor would be replaced by the tribal groups who would survive on the fringes of the newly imposed, market-driven economy. Lewin saw clearly why they would hardly find this acceptable.

He also quoted the views of Sir Samuel Baker, a well-known English explorer whom he called 'the latest authority' on the subject of the value of civilization. Baker had stated that the primary object of geographical exploration was to discover and 'render serviceable' to the humanity unknown parts of the earth's surface (Baker,1888).[11] This 'great work' was to be accomplished by the colonist who would bring about the 'civilization of the world'. However, large swathes of the earth, especially the resource-rich tropical areas were peopled by 'savage hordes' who, in Bakers' view neither understood the economic value of the resources, nor were ready to labour to use them "fruitfully". He argued that there was only one way to lift them out of this apathy,

'[The colonists] will expend their noble energies in vain in struggling against the obtuseness of the savage hordes until the first steps towards their gradual enlightenment shall have been made by commerce. The savage must learn to *want*…to covet more than the mere animal necessities of food and drink. This can alone be taught by a communication with civilized beings…..'(Baker,1888).

Baker's opinions reflected the widely-held conviction that European scientific knowledge and praxes were the only means by which (hitherto) less-used or wastefully used natural resources could be optimally harnessed to benefit man (Kumar et.al., 2011). The European would gain access to these only after the 'savage hordes' had developed a demand for European goods and were willing to be integrated into the exploitative web of commercial production and trade. The 'uncivilized' native population of the colonized areas were to be gradually remade to fulfil the dual need for a malleable labour force and eager consumers. In this transformation alone lay their "salvation". Lewin's contemporaries in the colonial administration concurred with this—W.W. Hunter argued that in Bengal, the prospects for future commercial gain for the colonial administration would be determined largely by the 'civilizing capacity' of the indigenous communities (in this case the Santhals of Birbhum) (Hunter,1996 [1868]).

Lewin deviated significantly from the above sentiments. He pointed out that when speaking of the benefits of the above process for the human race, Baker had in mind only the 'civilized' portion of it. Thus Lewin was aware that what men like Baker claimed to be beneficial for humanity at large was really advantageous to Europeans alone. Not only did it *not* benefit the others, it could even ruin them. Without mincing words Lewin stated that in many parts of the world the introduction of civilization by means of European energy had resulted in 'a crowd of evils' both mental and physical and yet,

'…everywhere throughout the world we force upon all the non-progressive races our intercourse, and finally our laws, with one grand object—Civilization.' (Lewin,2004).

Lewin's use of the term 'force' is significant as it indicates his recognition of the coercion implicit in such endeavours. Lewin's writing also reveals that he was conscious that the 'benefits' of civilization would reach only a few and that on that ground the colonized peoples may justifiably be opposed to its imposition upon them. Lewin questioned the very core of Baker's argument—that the demand for goods they had never needed before had to be created among the colonized in order to spread civilization. On the contrary he appreciated the fact that though their socio-economic system precluded any great increase in wealth, it had successfully achieved two goals which 'civilized' society was yet to attain–social equality and protection of all members from starvation,

'…The motive power of civilization is the desire for wealth, - … [for the] luxuries of life…Among a simple people like our hill men there is no such desire; their nomadic life precludes any great accumulation of wealth, and they enjoy a

perfect social equality. There is certainly no starvation among them; … *Civilization brought into contact with these simple aboriginal races would not improve but exterminate them.'* (Lewin,2004, Emphasis added).

His divergence from Baker's views reveals that ideas about the nature and extent of the civilizing mission of empire were both contested and multifaceted (Lalrautkima,2016). In this ambivalence can be seen the influence of eighteenth-century Scottish and French attitudes regarding 'progress'. Many worried lest the manly virtues be sacrificed to the development of commercial and industrial society (Stocking, 1987). Lewin argued that the English colonists, by bringing 'civilization', had caused this to occur in two ways-they dispossessed the natives of their lands and imposed alien laws upon them as in America and New Zealand (Lewin,2004). In India the British had good intentions but were 'powerless' when the interests of trade were supposedly endangered. Lewin pointed out that while India was a 'monument' to 'English greatness and philanthropy' it was also the outlet for the piece-goods of Manchester and the hardware of Birmingham and that in the case of a conflict between the two sets of interests, the second, inevitably, won. Thus, he was conscious of the ways in which the Western 'civilizing instinct' caused destruction in traditional societies and of the exploitative role of the British in India. Lewin was a rarity among administrators in acknowledging this openly.

Conclusion

Lewin's views about civilization were complex. He did not doubt that Europeans alone represented the acme of 'civilized' behaviour and practice. They were at the top of the evolutionary ladder while the indigenous groups of the Chittagong Hill Tracts occupied far lower ranks. Certain norms and practices therefore were only to be expected of them as they were so 'backward'. Hence, he defended their practice of slavery on the ground that it was a feature common to all 'primitive' societies and had existed in a 'modified form' in England itself 'centuries ago'. This was a necessary stage through which a community had to pass if they were to 'rise in the scale of races'. England, at the apex of the scale, was uniquely equipped to facilitate the process of 'civilization' among those who lagged behind (Lewin,2004). This evolutionism was essentially social and not biological. It was the progress of civilization itself and the gradual process of refining which divided barbarians from civilized man, rather than any difference in *inherent* mental faculties (i.e. race) (Stocking,1987).

While he was convinced of the 'superiority' of Western civilization, he wished to avoid the arrogant contempt towards non-European 'others' it usually engendered in officers, and reiterated that human being were the same all over the world (Lewin,2004). Lewin was one of the few administrators to raise doubts about the supposedly all–encompassing benefits of 'Civilization'; and who highlighted hill society as a just one, with equitable distribution of wealth. He was critical of administrative policies which placed British commercial interests above that of the hill communities. Lewin's firm faith in their essentially positive qualities is clear in his statement that a 'tithe' of the care expended upon the Hindu would make 'noble and enlightened' people of the hill men. He disclaimed any desire to leave them 'undisturbed' in their 'happy barbarism' but doubted whether the policies adopted by the colonial government were the best answer to the problem. In doing so, he raised a question which was as fundamental as it was rare among administrators-

'The question seems to me to be, what is the use of this God's earth? Is it not the happiness of the beings dwelling thereon? I doubt if civilization would render our hill men happier…'(Lewin,2004).

References

i. Baker, Samuel White.(1888). *The Albert N'Yanza, Great Basin of the Nile, and Explorations of the Nile Sources*. London: Macmillan and Co.

ii. Dalton, E.T.(1973[1872]) *Descriptive Ethnology of Bengal*, Second Reprint, Calcutta: Indian Studies: Past and Present, 1973, [1872],

iii. Eliot, John. (1796)"Observations on the Inhabitants of the Garrow Hills Made During a Public Deputation in the years 1788 and 1789". In *Dissertations and Miscellaneous Pieces Relating to the History and Antiquities and the Arts, Sciences and Literature of Asia*, *Asiatic Researches*, III, (pp. 21-45).

iv. Hunter, W.W.(1996 [1868]). *The Annals of Rural Bengal*. W.B. District Gazetteers. Calcutta.

v. Kumar, Deepak, Vinita Damodaran and Rohan D'Souza (eds.). (2011). *The British Empire and the Natural World: Environmental Encounters in South Asia*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.

vi. Kuper, Adam. (2010). "The Original Sin of Anthropology", *Paideum*a: *Mitteilungen zur Kulturkunde*, Bd.56, (pp.123-144). [Accessed https://www.jstor.org/stable/41410362 on 10 April 2025].

vii. Lalruatkima. (2016). "Frontiers of Imagination : Reading over Thomas Lewin's Shoulders", *Studies in History*, 32 (1), (pp. 21-38). [Accessed https://doi.org/10.1177/0257643015615998 on 13 June 2025]

viii. Latham, R.G. (1851). *The Ethnology of British Colonies and Dependencies*. London: John Van Voorst.

ix. Lewin, T.H. (2004[1870]). *Wild races of the Eastern Frontier of India*. Reprint- New Delhi: Mittal Publications.

x. Mey, Wolfgang. (2005). "Shifting Cultivation, Images and Development in the Chittagong Hill Tracts of Bangladesh". In *Ecological Nationalisms: Nature, Livelihoods and Identities in South Asia,* edited by Gunnel Cederlöf and K. Sivaramakrishan, 255-273. Delhi: Permanent Black.

xi. Neufville, John Bryan. (1828). "On the Population and Geography of Assam". *Asiatic Researches,* XVI, (pp. 331-352).

xii. Pati, Biswamoy (ed.) (2011).'Introduction', *Adivasis in Colonial India: Survival, Resistance and Negotiation*. New Delhi: Orient BlackSwan.

xiii. Hutchinson, R.H. Sneyd. (1909). *Eastern Bengal and Assam District Gazetteers; Chittagong Hill Tracts.* Allahabad: Pioneer Press.

xiv. Stocking, George W. (1987). *Victorian Anthropology.* New York: The Free Press.

xv. Watson, Archibald and Adam White. (1832). *Memoir of the Late David Scott, Esq., Agent to the Governor General, on the North-Eastern Frontier of Bengal and Commissioner of Revenue and Circuit in Assam*. London: Baptist Mission Press/ British Library.

---

[1] See William Adam, *Third Report on the State of Education in Bengal; including some account of the State of Education in Behar, and a consideration of the means adapted for the Improvement and Extension of Public Instruction in both Provinces*, Calcutta: G.H. Huttman, Bengal Military Orphan Press, 1838, 224; S.R. Tickell, 'Notes on the Bendkar, a people of Keonjur', *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, Vol. XI, 1842, 206; E.T. Dalton, 'Notes upon a Tour made in 1863-64 in the Tributary Mehals under the Commissioner of Chota Nagpore, Bonai, Gangpore, Odeypore and Sirgooja, *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal,* Vol. I, Part II, 1865, 15; W.W. Hunter, *Annals of Rural Bengal*, W.B. District Gazetteers, Calcutta: 1996, [London: Smith Elder& Co., 1868], 166.

[2] Thomas Herbert Lewin (1839 -1916) trained at Addiscombe Military College, the East India Company's military seminary. He was, in turn, Superintendent of Hazaribagh, Noakhali and Chittagong before becoming the Superintendent of the Chittagong Hill Tracts in 1865. Lewin interacted closely with indigenous communities there, learning their language and adopting some of their ways of life. Though convinced of the necessity of British colonial rule in India, Lewin believed that a direct and personal form of government was better suited to the 'tribes' than the rigid hierarchical administration of the Regulation districts. Since CHT was a Non-Regulation District Lewin was able to implement to some extent his idea that sustained and personal interaction with tribal chiefs to earn their trust would be far more effective to protect the eastern frontier than the then official policy of setting up military outposts. Lewin retired as Deputy Commissioner of Darjeeling in 1879 and returned to England.

[3] The aim of the discipline was twofold— to trace the history of the races of men back to their common origin and to unearth the connections between them so as to demonstrate the unity of the human species, and to account for the observed differences between the races and their present distribution. The methodology was to trace the links between them on the basis of similarities of physical type, religion, political institutions, customs and language. The study of language in particular was believed to reveal both the historical path traversed by mankind as well as the progress achieved by a specific linguistic group along it. Stocking, *Victorian Anthropology*, 48-51.

[4] W.W. Hunter, *The Annals of Rural Bengal*, W.B. District Gazetteers, Calcutta: 1996 (First Published 1868). Hunter was a member of the Indian Civil Service. His best known works include the multi-volume *The Imperial Gazetteer of India, and The Statistical Accounts of Bengal.*

[5] Differentiating between agrarian 'settled' populations and aboriginal groups was common in ethnological writing. When writing of Chittagong, Robert Gordon Latham, a leading ethnologist, made a clear distinction between Hindus and Muslims on the one hand and the aboriginal hill tribes on the other. R.G. Latham*, The Ethnology of British Colonies and Dependencies*, London: John Van Voorst, 1851, 104.

[6] This included the introduction of measures ranging from the administrative (introduction of law courts, payment of fixed revenue in cash, appointment of a Hill Superintendent to supervise the independent tribes) to the explicitly military (positioning a fully equipped force in the area and sending expeditions to prevent tribal 'raids').

[7] Late 18th and early 19th century official accounts tended to view the tribes as 'primitive' but 'improveable' through good governance. See for example John Eliot, 'Observations on the Inhabitants of the Garrow Hills Made During a Public Deputation in the years 1788 and 1789', in Dissertations and Miscellaneous Pieces Relating to the History and Antiquities and the Arts ,Sciences and Literature of Asia, *Asiatic Researches*, Vol. III, 1796, 21-22; John Bryan Neufville, 'On the Population and Geography of Assam', *Asiatic Researches,* Vol. XVI, 1828, 344; Archibald Watson and Adam White, *Memoir of the Late David Scott, Esq., Agent to the Governor General, on the North-Eastern Frontier of Bengal and Commissioner of Revenue and Circuit in Assam*, London: Baptist Mission Press/ British Library, 1832, 274.

[8] These were persons who borrowed money from their chief or some well-to-do individual, and gave one of their children or a female relative to serve as a menial servant until the debt was paid or cancelled. Lewin, *Wild races,* 87-90.

[9] Matters connected to the relation between the sexes, kinship and marriage were of great interest to Victorian scholars writing about 'primitive' societies as they assumed that the earliest societies were kinship groups. These included Henry Maine, John McLennan and E.B. Tylor among others. (Adam Kuper, 2010, 130-131) [Accessed https://www.jstor.org/stable/41410362 on 10 April 2025].

[10] Thomas R. Malthus (1766-1834) was an English cleric and scholar. In his influential book *An Essay on the Principle of Population* (1798), he argued that mankind tended to utilize higher productivity levels for population growth which soon lowered the per capita wealth again. This view came to be known as the 'Maltusian Trap'.

[11] Sir Samuel White Baker (1821-1893) was a British officer primarily remembered as the explorer of the Nile and the interior of Central Africa.