‘MEM MEM’ a graphic narrative on
MATRILINY IN TRANSITION

VISUAL COMMUNICATION PROJECT II
VCPR-388

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Guide
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INDUSTRIAL DESIGN CENTRE
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PROJECT II - REPORT

'MEM MEM' based on MATRILINY IN TRANSITION
by KIMBERLY C. MANNERS
is a COMMUNICATION DESIGN PROJECT
IDC, IIT-B 2016

GUIDED BY PROF. MANDAR RANE

DECLARATION

I Kimberly Charlotte Manners hereby declare that the written submission represents my ideas and have adequately cited and referenced the original sources wherever they have been used. I have not fabricated or falsified any data or sources in my submission. I understand that any violaton of the above will be the cause for a disciplinary action by the Institute and can also evoke penal action from the sources which have thus not been properly cited or from whom proper permissions have not been taken when needed. My project report entitled blaaa is an original and honest work done by me for Projects 3 at IDC, IIT Bombay 2017.

Signature: 

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Roll no: 156250016

Date: 30-06-17

APPROVAL SHEET

The Project 3 entitled "Fulfillment in the 21st Century" by Kimberly Charlotte Manners is approved in partial fulfillment of the Master's Degree in Communication Design.

Signature:

Date: 17 · 04 · 17 ·

Guide: 28/6/17

Internal Examiner:

External Examiner:

Chairman:

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Kimberly Charlotte Manners
Communication Design, IDC-IIT Bombay

ABSTRACT

The purpose of my project is to study the Meghalaya Matrilineal society in depth, ie; the system practiced in the state by 80% of the population (tribals) that gives it's women lineage importance and inheritance rights and has had a great impact as a boon on the situation of women in the state as compared to the women in the rest of the country but also a grievance to men. The study as well as my personal experiences will be directed towards the compilation of a graphic novel that will subtly focus talking about the features of the society and address a debate of whether it should undergo a transition or not.

Story telling and writing has been one of my strengths and my inclination towards visuals and graphics inspire me to do a graphic novel. Although information about the Matrilineal culture is accessible, a compelling narrative and visuals would be more engaging to the reader and leave a lasting impression. The novel will be targeted to readers; ages 12 and above of Meghalaya, also relatable to others.

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INTRODUCTION

India is veritably a unity in diversity, made up of an overwhelming range of different ethnic, linguistic and religious groups with varied sub cultural systems. Marriage and family practices exhibit a wide vriety of patterns. Matriliny has existed in South as well as North East India. Though it has almost disappeared from the Hindu community of Nairs in Kerala, it is still cherished and followed among the Muslim Islanders of Lakshwadeep and among the tribal, both Christian and non-Christian inhabitants of the hill state of Meghalaya.

Matrilineality is the tracing of descent through the female line. It may also correlate with a societal system in which each person is identified with their matriline – their mother's lineage – and which can involve the inheritance of property and/or titles. In a matrilineal descent system, an individual is considered to belong to the same descent group as her or his mother. This matrilineal descent pattern is in contrast to the more common pattern of patrilineal descent from which a family name is usually derived.

Matriliny Worldwide

Matrilineality is the tracing of descent through the female line. It may also correlate with a societal system in which each person is identified with their matriline – their mother's lineage – and which can involve the inheritance of property and/or titles. A matriline is a line of descent from a female ancestor to a descendant (of either sex) in which the individuals in all intervening generations are mothers – in other words, a "mother line". In a matrilineal descent system, an individual is considered to belong to the same descent group as her or his mother. This matrilineal descent pattern is in contrast to the more common pattern of patrilineal descent from which a family name is usually derived. The matriline of historical nobility was also called her or his enatic or uterine ancestry, corresponding to the patrilineal or "agnatic" ancestry.

In some traditional societies and cultures, membership in their groups was – and, in the following list, still is if shown in italics – inherited matrilineally. Examples include the Cherokee, Choctaw, Gitksan, Haida, Hopi, Iroquois, Lenape, Navajo and Tlingit of North America; the Minangkabau people of West Sumatra, Indonesia and Negeri Sembilan, Malaysia; the Nairs of Kerala and the Bunts and Billava of Karnataka in south India; the Khasi, Jaintia and Garo of Meghalaya in northeast India; Muslims and the Tamils in eastern Sri Lanka; the Mosuo of China; the Basques of Spain and France; the Akan including the Ashanti of west Africa; virtually all groups across the so-called "matrilineal belt" of Central Africa; the Tuareg of west and north Africa; the Kuna people of Panama; the Serer of Senegal, The Gambia and Mauritania; and most Jewish communities.

Matriliny in India



The Nairs of Kerala and the Bunts and Billava of Karnataka in south India; the Khasi, Jaintia and Garo of Meghalaya in northeast India.

Matriliny in India





Top: The Nairs of Kerala.
Bottom: The Khasis of Meghalaya.
picture credits: www.indiatoday.com

Matriliny in Meghalaya

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 it's 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 Khadduh, inherits all ancestral property. After marriage, husbands live in the mother-in-law's home.

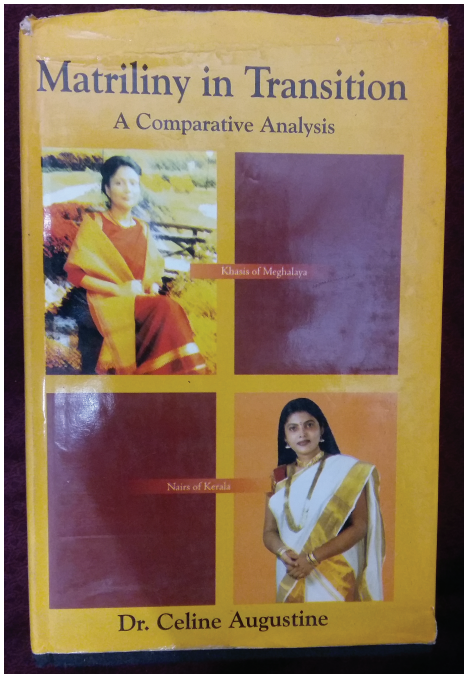
The mother's surname is taken by children.
This originated from the original system where the uncle is the chief earner and worker. In contrast, the father is an outsider who has no authority, no say and no control over the lives of his wife and children. He is only esteemed, respected and tolerated and the procreator. He is an outsider in his wife's house but he is the centre of authority in his own sister's house. There was a harmony in roles played by both male and female members. The 'khatduh' (youngest daughter) was the sole guardian of ancestral property. This practice made sure that there were no indigent persons and everyone was well provided with a decent life of dignity and honor.

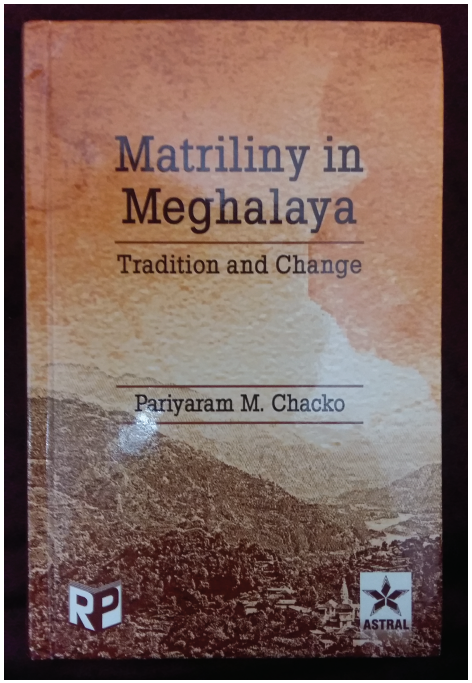
Meghalaya's Transition

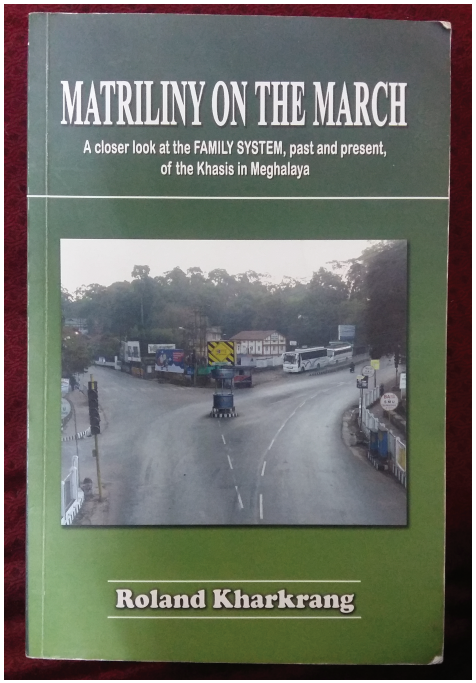
The Khasi Matrilineal System seems to have lost a good part of it's strong foundation. The system in it's original form still exists in many places where in the family, the uncle is the chief earner and worker. In contrast, the father is an outsider who has no authority, no say and no control over the lives of his wife and children.
With the arrival of modernization, the original system began to disappear. The father began to stay with his wife and children, but still not the centre of authority. The situation became worse with the British conquest of India. The rulers did not understand the original system because it had already undergone changes. They interpreted that the 'khatduh' is the sole heir (not guardian) of the ancestral property. They also abolished the uncle's role as the administrator of the property. He also lost his position as the centre of authority in the house.

Research Books

- Matriliny in Meghalaya
  Pariyaram M Chacko
- Matriliny in Transition: A Comparative
  Analysis. Dr Celine Augustine
- Matriliny on the March
  Roland Kharkrang







Pros and Cons

Contrary to the rest of the country, the birth of a girl is celebrated. There is no social stigma attributed to a woman remarrying or giving birth out of wedlock as the "Khasi Social Custom of Lineage Act" gives security to them. The women who enjoy all the rights live an independent life, dress well, attend church, and many prefer not to get married. They enjoy total security, unlike in the rest of the country. A successful career women of the Khasi society feels that "their societal anomaly" has enabled her to be successful in every way. Most small businesses are managed by women.

On the other hand, Illegitimacy, irresponsibility of the Khasi men to take their duties seriously and their careless life in general are casued by the system.

People's Opinions

Various books and articles have voiced people's opinions over the years.

Some with headings such as;
- **Meghalaya: Where women call the shots**
Many Indian women cry out for equality, but a matrilineal culture thrives with little parallel in the northeast. (via www.aljazeera.com)
- **Where women of India rule the roost and men demand gender equality**
The Khasi people of north-eastern India are a matrilineal society and some men aren't happy. (via www.theguardi-na.com)

Other mediums:
Films- In his latest 60-minute documentary, 'Are They Better Off', screened recently at the National Centre for the Performing Arts (NCPA) in Mumbai, multiple award-winning director, Aditya Seth has highlighted these amazing "Meghalayan values," even as he tries to explore the slowly diminishing Khasi culture, and the challenges the tribe faces today.

IDEATION

The Khasis as a race sincerely and dispassionately ask these questions "What shall we do then? Shall we change or shall we not?"
At the moment three answers have been given. Some say "We must not change. We must keep our matrilineal system as it is our uniquely distinguishing mark". And they proudly expatiate on the beauty and grandeur of the system. Others such as members of the SRT (Syngkong Rympei Thymmai) as of the opinion that the Khasis must change towards a patrilineal set up, in imitation of the Nairs of Kerala.
Born and brought up in Shillong, the capital of Meghalaya, I grew up disliking the system, because i felt different from my non-Khasi friends and the people I see on TV. I felt left behind, even though there were many like me, khasis who follow the same system. I've always been affected by gender roles and moral policing, so I never understood what it meant my mother would say that the system is good for women. It wasn't till I stepped out of the state for my higher studies in Bombay that I understood how good I had it s compared to the new girls and women I met. My views on the system expanded and it left me with bitter-sweet thoughts. Sweet because it is a blessing to women, but bitter because men tend to suffer directly or indirectly because of the system. They feel inadequate when compared with men other than Khasis. Another major problem that persists is that while in the 80's there have been multiple steps to discuss about the future of the system, they have all been in vain. People have stopped talking about it. Educational Institutions dont stress on the topic and neither do questions in competitive examinations arise about it. It's like the calm before the storm. The idea is to bring into light both grievances and glory of the system in a new medium.

Medium: Graphic Novel

- format of story telling
    - superhero story
    - manga
    - perzines

Vast documentation on the topic has been done, a new media ie; telling a story visually in the form of a graphic novel would be compelling and could target a wide range of audience besides the target audience.
The book is intended to reach out to ages 12 to 25, relatable to those in Matrilineal communities as well as others.

The choice of medium is also based on my strengths of sketching and narrative writing and my pleasure in reading graphic novels.

Overview

The Graphic Novel will have short chapters that show snippets into the life of Mem mem a young girl growing up in a Matrilineal culture. It will be based on personal experiences in understanding the system and what it shows at every age.

The current project will feature 3 chapters that will respectively focus on
- Existence of the current system
- Still strongly patriarchal (gender roles are the same as in any other)
- Female preference and education

- Book title: MEM MEM
- Mem is a common nickname among Khasi girls.

Story: Chapter 1

THE SURNAME

It's lunch time, Mallika and Karishma talked about a Bollywood movie they saw during the weekend, I was out of the conversation and I mentioned that I hardly watched Bollywood movies because I hardly connect with them. They took offence. Mallika said "go watch Khasi movies, if they're so great". "I don't like khasi movies either" I said.
I often felt left out when my best friend Mallika starts talking to Karishma about things that they have in common. The topic of taking surnames came up one day when we were writing down our names on new text books.
Me: I've never heard of Nautilyal before.
Ma: Ya my dad's surname is Nautiyal, from Dehradun. What's your dad's surname?
Me: Langstieh, but my surname is Manners just like my mom's.
Ma: Why?
Me: I don't know, Khasi people take their mom's surname.

Story: Chapter 2

THE DISHES

I'm the middle child, I have two elder brothers and two younger siblings, a sister and another brother. It's a big family. I'm the eldest girl and at a young age of 7 I remember helping my mother with household work. Whenever our maid did not come, I'd be scrubbing as many dishes as I could.
There was a time that a tear or two rolled down my eyes when I heard the neighbourhood kids playing outside and I was sitting in front of never ending pots and pans. I would hear my mother say to her friends "atleast she is old enough to help around the house", and I thought "old enough? Jason and Melvin are older than me, why is mee-mei not making them work?"
People would often call my mother lucky, even when my aunties came to visit they always exclaimed how lucky my mom is to have two girls in the family to carry on the family name. I would angrily think "yea right! Two girls so that she can make us work".
And as young as 7, I understood that the rule is-house-

Story: Chapter 3

CHICKEN POX

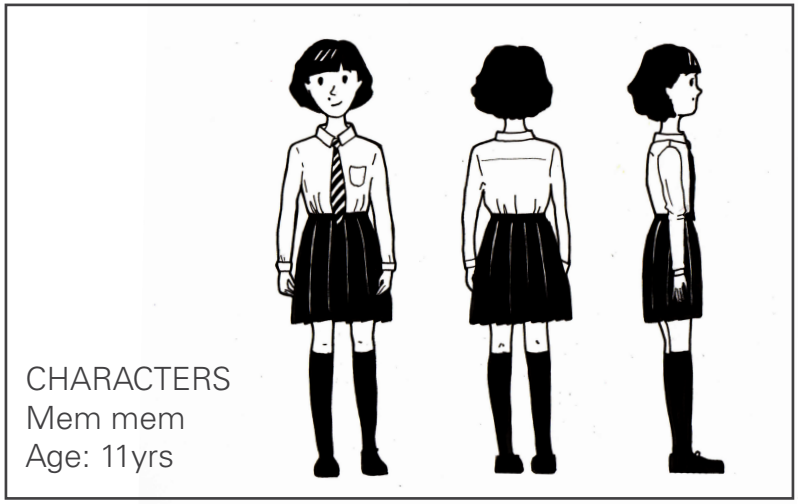
Sincerity was my only friend. My sister and I would finish all our homework before we even change out of our school uniforms! My mother admired this trait very much. At a very young age we felt pressure to do exceptionally well in everything and the need to be the best. At age 7, I contracted chicken pox from my brother right around the time of my 1st term Examination. We had a gala time staying at home and playing all day. Medicine time wasn't great, but everything else was a ball because we didn't have to go to school. My class was composed of students from all over North East India, there were more school boarders than day scholars. My competitors were two girls, with three terms in a year I would always try to top at-least in one term. This time the chicken pox did not let me do so. By the time I got back to School, I had to write my exam that I missed in front of the class teacher during classes in a matter of two days.
I remember doing everything as fast as I could.

PROCESS

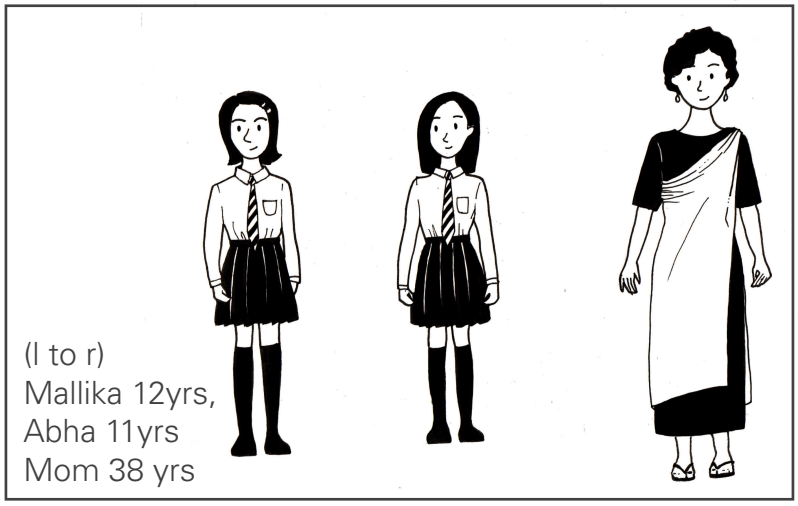
India is veritably a unity in diversity, made up of an overwhelming range of different ethnic, linguistic and religious groups with varied sub cultural systems. Marriage and family practices exhibit a wide vriety of patterns. Matriliny has existed in South as well as North East India. Though it has almost disappeared from the Hindu community of Nairs in Kerala, it is still cherished and followed among the Muslim Islanders of Lakshwadeep and among the tribal, both Christian and non-Christian inhabitants of the hill state of Meghalaya.

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Illustration Style

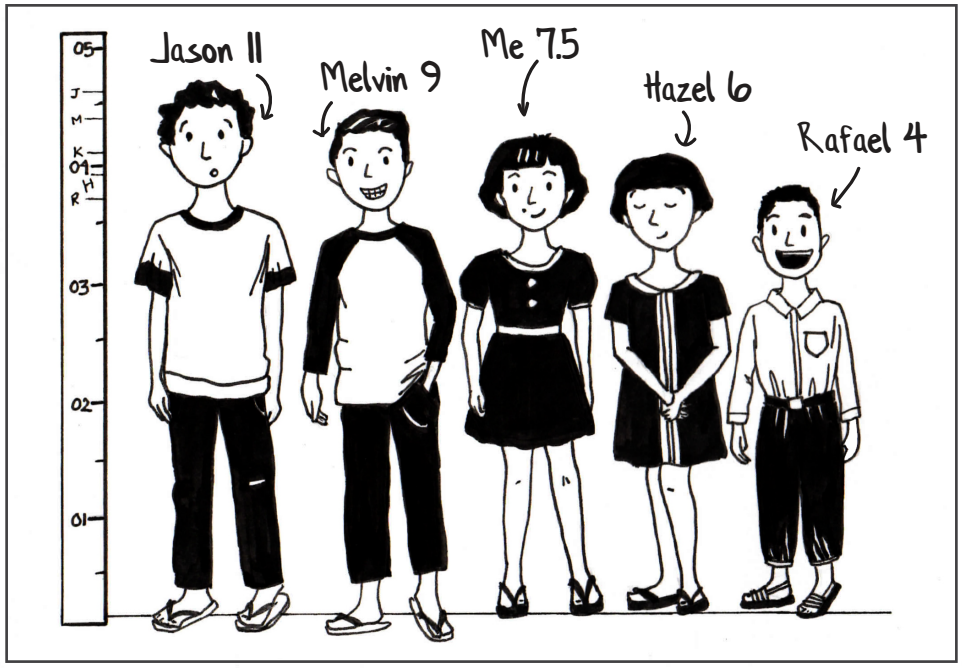


CHARACTERS
Mem mem
Age: 11yrs

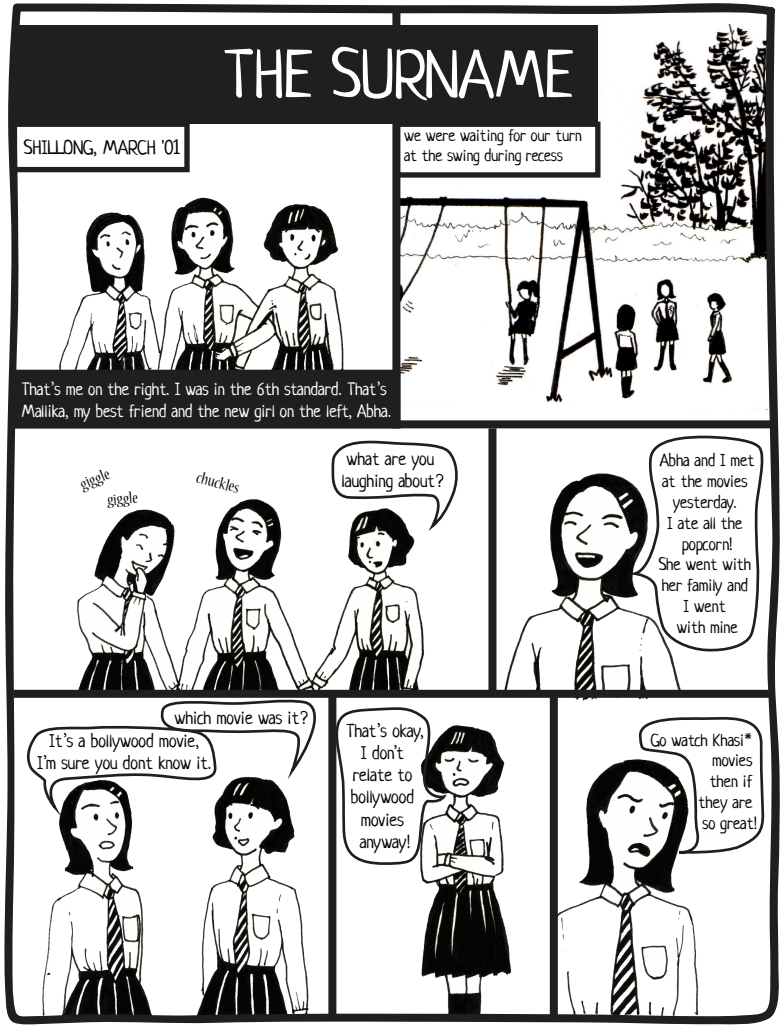


(l to r)
Mallika 12yrs,
Abha 11yrs
Mom 38 yrs

- duochrome: Black and white
- Hand Illustrations
- Brush pen and ink



Chapter 1



*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



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

Chapter 1

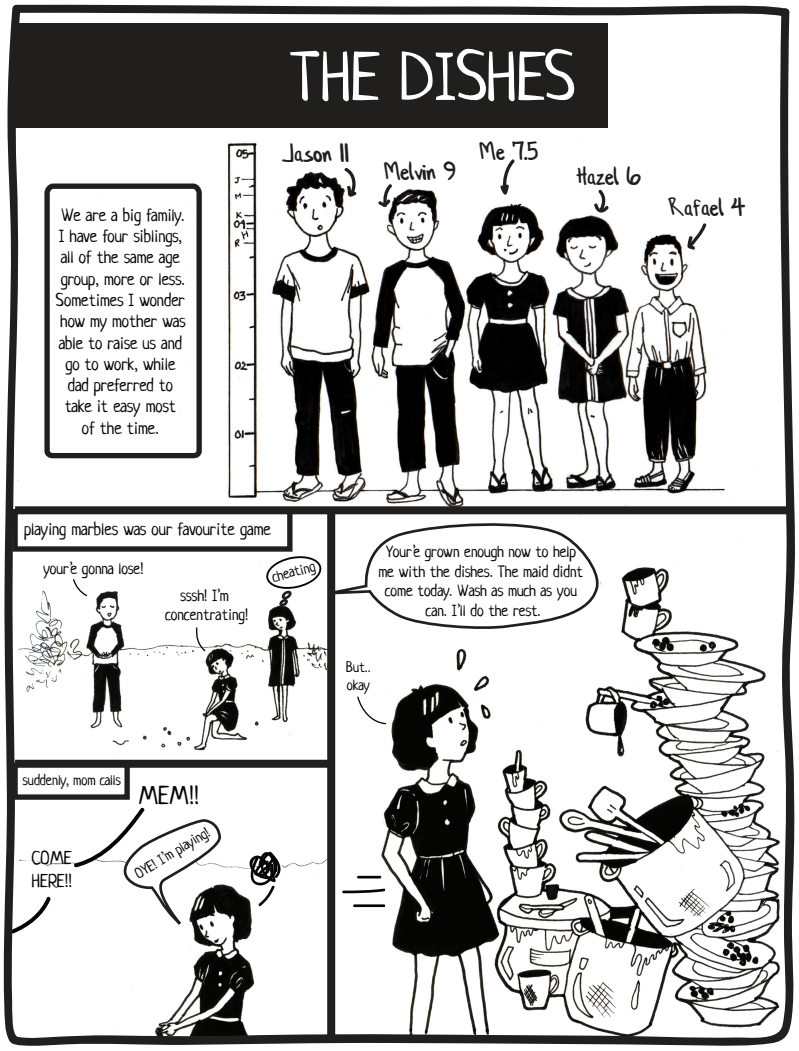


*Dakhar is a word that refers to 'non-tribal mainland Indians'.
**'Mizos and Nagas' collectively refers to the North-East Indian tribes from Mizoram and Nagaland. As a matter of speaking locally (politically incorrect) the term, at times tends to all the north eastern tribes.
*** A list of common surnames of Khasis, Garos and Jaintias.



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

Chapter 2



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



*BAMIA is a word in the War dialect, which means 'elder sister,' which is also my mother's nick name.

Chapter 2


Is little Mem-mem already doing the dishes?
She's old enough now to help around the house now. Besides, she will have to learn.
OLD ENOUGH??! MELVIN AND JASON ARE OLDER!
Mei, I can't was anymore, there are too many of them, even my hands are wrinkly.
Okay, come here and wipe your hands.


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.
Gender roles is always very distinct to serve the rules prescribed by patriarchy.*
yea right! Two girls so that she can make us work!
Bamia, your'e very lucky to have two girls.

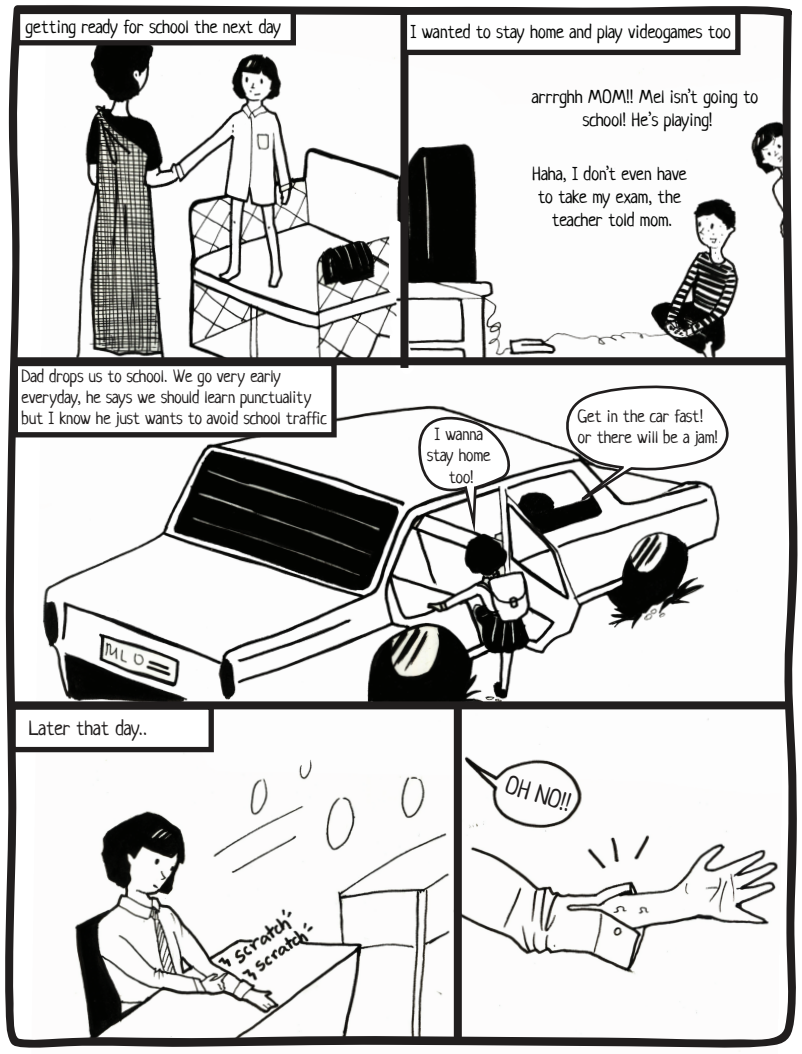
Chapter 3





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

Chapter 3



*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



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

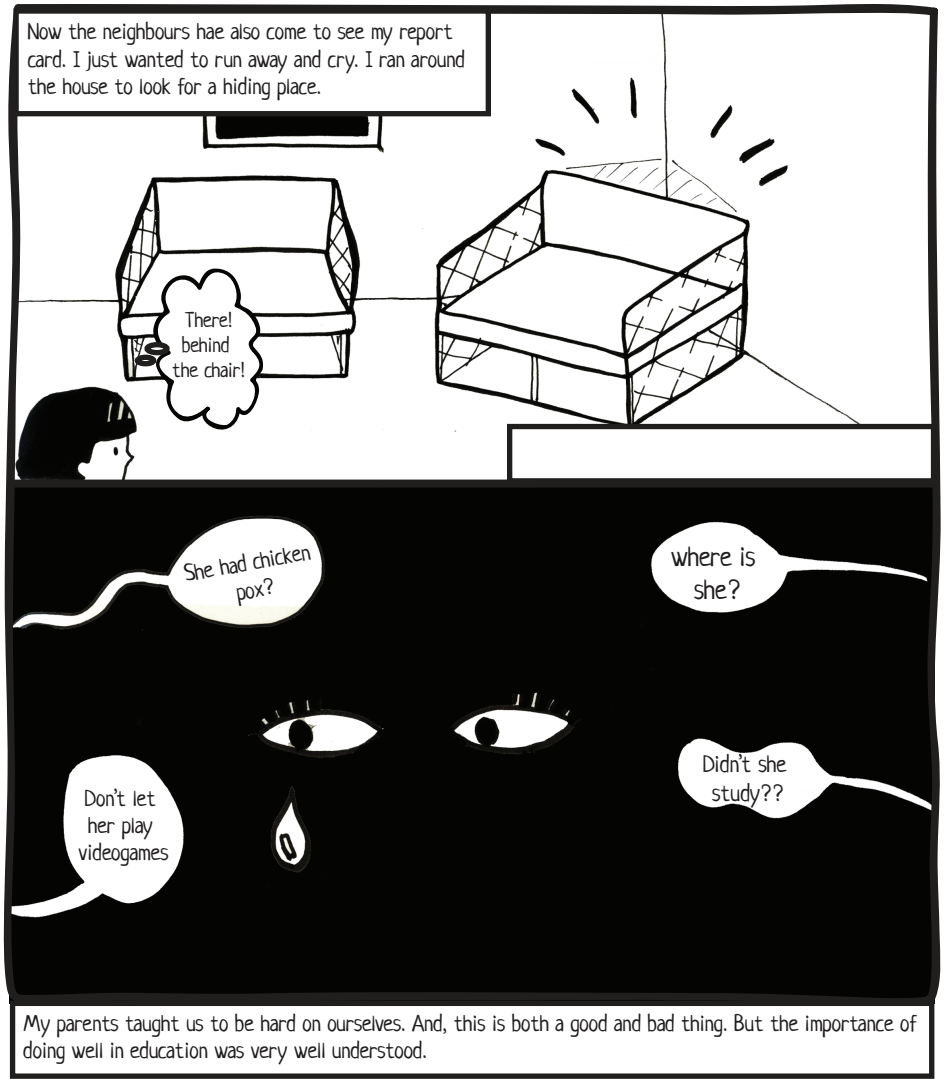
Chapter 3



*Kongrit: nickname of the house helper.



Chapter 3


Now the neighbours hae also come to see my report card. I just wanted to run away and cry. I ran around the house to look for a hiding place.
There! behind the chair!
She had chicken pox?
where is she?
Don't let her play videogames
Didn't she study??
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.

Compiling

Size: A5 as per standard novel size and easier handling
Font: Neucha Regular

Print colors: Black and white
For economic reasons and ease in distribution

What will follow?

Completion of the book post ‘Project-2’ will contain 15 chapters that will take the reader through a brief and simple understanding of the system and it’s transition.
Mem mem based on real life incidents, is not an autobiography. It’s a collection of non-chronological incidents in mem mem’s journey.
Distribution of the book to local girls and boys with the anticipation of pushing discussions about the system into homes and circles.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

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