

### 3 Meghalaya, India: Where women rule

- A. Read the text and turn to **Worksheet n°19** for help.
- B. Contrast the situation in Meghalaya with the situation in the rest of India.
- C. Go further. Is gender inequality a matter of perception of a particular gender by the other, or is it a matter of a dominating gender wanting to keep the power at whatever cost?



*In the small hilly Indian state of Meghalaya, a matrilineal system operates with property names and wealth passing from mother to daughter rather than father to son — but some men are campaigning for change. [...]*

I am sitting across a table from Keith Pariat, President of Syngkhong-Rympei-Thymmai, Meghalaya's very own men's rights movement. He is quick to assure me that he and his colleagues "do not want to bring women down," as he puts it.

5 "We just want to bring the men up to where the women are."

Mr Pariat, who ignored age-old customs by taking his father's surname, is adamant that matriliney is breeding generations of Khasi men who fall short of their inherent potential, citing alcoholism and drug abuse among its negative side-effects.

10 "If you want to know how much the Khasis favour women, just take a trip to the labour ward at the hospital," he says. "If it's a girl, there will be great cheers from the family outside. If it's a boy, you will hear them mutter politely that, 'Whatever God gives us is quite all right.'"

15 Mr Pariat cites numerous examples of how his fellow brethren are being demoralised. These include a fascinating theory involving the way that gender in the local Khasi language reflects these basic cultural assumptions.

20 "A tree is masculine, but when it is turned into wood, it becomes feminine," he begins. "The same is true of many of the nouns in our language. When something becomes useful, its gender becomes female. Matriliney breeds a culture of men who feel useless." [...]

I decide to see for myself in a remote village in the East Khasi Hills. After two hours walking through thick jungle I meet 25 42-year-old Mary. She is a "Ka Khadduh", the youngest daughter in her family and consequently, the one destined to live with her parents until she inherits the family house. Her husband, 36-year-old Alfred, lives with them. When I talk to her inside 30 their home, Mary tells me that women do not trust men to look



after their money so they take control of it themselves. I glance at Alfred for a response but he musters only a smile.

Mary goes on: "Most men in our village leave school early to help their fathers in the fields. This is a great detriment to their 35 education."

I turn to Alfred once more. He responds with another shy smile. Mary admits she has never heard of the men's rights movement, but thinks the system will never change. Alfred maintains his Mona Lisa smile. [...] Forty minutes later however I have yet to 40 get a comment from Mary's husband and all too soon it is time to leave.

I feel that the last word should come from Alfred so I ask my translator to target a simple question directly at him.

"What does he think of the matrilineal system?"

45 There is a long and considered pause. After what seems like an eternity the silence is finally broken.

"He like," pipes up Mary, and it is time to go.

Timothy Allen, **BBC Magazine**, 19 January 2012