

Sorting betel leaves in Ishachora Punjee.

gender and number. God was known too as the designer-creator *U Blei Nongthaw Nogbuh*, before Christianity. He still is in parts of Meghalaya and by a few Khasis in Bangladesh who follow the old religion.

There's a myth of how Khasis came to the world. It was a time when the Earth was verdant and splendid – but empty. The Earth petitioned the creator to send a custodian. A heavenly assembly was called and it was decided that of the *Khyndai-trep*, the sixteen "huts" residing in heaven, seven should be sent to remain on Earth as guardians. That must've been the time when those hills first filled with that cheerful greeting "Khublei!" still to be encountered in abundance.



Tea and biscuits at the Dulukchura home – Rosebell Khasi (L) with Henry Talang (R).

The Khasis call themselves *Ki Hynñiew trep*: the seven huts. In Moulvibazar they also call themselves the Khasi – not Khasia as many Bengalis prefer.

Those first days were of peace and prosperity – God promised to stay with the seven huts; and he planted a giant tree to act as ladder between heaven and Earth. As long as this tree remained the people of the seven huts could go up and down as they pleased; but if it was felled sin and suffering would emerge. God gave three commandments: earn righteousness through labour, know mankind to know God, and know your maternal and paternal kin. While Khasi society has no caste, according to the last of these Khasi may not marry from the same clan.

Unfortunately the evil one persuaded brothers *U Sormok* and *U Sorphim* to cut down the giant tree –