

# **KHASI CULTURAL RESISTANCE TO COLONIALISM**

**SHARMILA DAS TALUKDAR**

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पूर्वोत्तर पर्वतीय विश्वविद्यालय

मयूरभंज परिसर, शिलांग-७६३०१४ (मेघालय)

Phone 1  
Grams : NEHU

# North-Eastern Hill University

Mayurbhanj Complex, Nongthymmai, Shillong - 793014 ( Meghalaya )

## C E R T I F I C A T E

Certified that the thesis entitled "The Khasi Cultural Resistance to Colonialism" is the record of original work done by Ms. Sharmila Das Talukdar, that the contents of the thesis did not form a basis of the reward of any previous degree to her, or to the least of our knowledge to anybody else and that the thesis has not been submitted by her for any research degree in any other university.

In habit and character Ms. Sharmila Das Talukdar is a fit and proper person for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

*Sujata Miri*  
Prof (Mrs.) Sujata Miri  
Joint Supervisor.

11.12.98

*A. K. Ghosh*  
Prof. A. K. Ghosh  
Supervisor.

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Department of Anthropology  
North-Eastern Hill University  
Shillong

  
(SHARMILA DAS TALUKDAR)

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## INTRODUCTION

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The Khasis are a group living in the Khasi Hills of Meghalaya who came into contact with the British administration directly in 1853, when the entire Khasi and Jaintia hills was placed under a political agent with headquarters in Cherra. Contemporary to the British administration came the missionaries, the 'specialists' and 'sacred intelligentsia'<sup>1</sup> who served as carrier of the Christian faith. The missionaries served the British administration in furthering the administrators interest who 'felt that the best way to tame the primitive Khasis was through love which the missionaries alone could give.'<sup>2</sup> The missionaries came as the messengers of Christianity and in the process inflicted a super-imposition of foreign religio-cultural ethos which served as an external force, shaking the existing cultural ethos of the Khasis. The spiritual and temporal arms of the Christian missionary contributed to the imposition of the attitudes, norms, values and world view of the British, who being the political heads could emphasize this domination.

To explain the domination of an alien power which had arrived in their midst, namely the British, I have used the

much used term colonialism which is 'domination of an alien minority asserting racial and cultural superiority over a materially inferior native majority, contact between machine oriented civilization with Christian origin.'<sup>3</sup> The fact that the political and economic hegemony, the establishment of which was the most pertinent point for the British was reiterated through social means. "The reactionary character of British imperialism was more manifest in the social sphere'<sup>4</sup> and the British hegemony penetrated the masses through various socio-cultural channels. The concept, therefore, denotes not only extra territorial expansion of a political and economic nature which is generally taken to be connoted by this term, but also constitutes a system of controls and subjugation meant to facilitate the exploitation of the colonized people. This purpose of subjugation and control was facilitated by two dissimilar groups of people, they being the merchants and the missionaries. Between the two the latter upheld the self-imposed obligation of the more advanced British power to spread civilization and uplift the 'pagans' or 'barbarians' as they perceived the conquered people to be. However, this process of spreading civilization and uplifting the 'barbarians' was not viewed in the same light as the British by the colonized group. It was not long before the community was compelled for different reasons which I have discussed in chapters II and III to offer

resistance to this kind of domination. The term resistance is taken as an 'intention to preserve community life as it existed before the colonizers intervened'<sup>5</sup>, and also as the 'inter play between ideologies of domination and subordination.'<sup>6</sup>

The perceived threat to the ways of life of the Khasis led Khasi elders to formulate certain methods, adopt certain measures and in some cases to launch resistance movements.

Culture as we know includes avenues of religion, politics, morality, value system, in fact a total way of life. It is, therefore, an invisible medium of perceiving, retaining and enacting meaning and values, which are the essentials of a particular society. The essential core of culture consists of traditions (i.e. historically derived and selected) ideas and especially their attached values. Thus culture can be considered as products of action on one hand and conditioning elements of further action, on the other. Accordingly, I have first discussed Khasi culture as an 'ordered system of meanings and symbols'<sup>7</sup> They, i.e. the Khasis asserted their individuality like other groups through their culture. The cultural ethos of every group is a universal phenomena even though it may only be brought into focus when an external influence touches a group to undermine it. The second chapter discusses the historical process of the entry of the British along with the missionaries into the

Khasi hills. The missionaries of various origins commenced their proselytization activities with clear rules laying "the standard of church membership on the mission field .... high and clear from the beginning. It was enjoined that every candidate for conversion should not only have renounced all heathen practices and lead a moral life ....".<sup>8</sup> The religious rituals and festivals were seen as 'excesses' which were 'pagan' attendance to which were causes of disciplinary action by the Church. In addition, the Khasi religion and their value system was classed as 'vague belief in God'<sup>9</sup> by the early writers.

Social change implies a "significant alteration of social structure, i.e. patterns of social action and interaction including consequences and manifestations of such structure embodied in norms (rules of conduct) values, and cultural product and symbols."<sup>10</sup> Such a type of change was brought about very perceptibly in the Khasi context through the process of British colonialism in the Khasi hills. The colonialist ideological foundation was that 'they were part of the civilized world as they were Christians and others beyond the pale of Christianity were a amorphous mass whose common characteristics was their heathendom'<sup>11</sup> and thus noticeably inferior to the colonizers' unquestionable superiority. On the basis of their supposed ideological superiority, the Missionaries as the ideological arm for

colonization were means of domination and depreciation of the ideology of the Khasis. Thus the Christian ideology became an exploitative value system.

The Khasi society which had a definite ideology as 'closely related beliefs or ideas or even attitudes that characterize a group or community'<sup>12</sup> perceived the threat system and perpetrated different forms of manifest and latent opposition to the Missionary and British suppression.

The Seng Khasi started as an organisation in 1899 with aims to 'revive the true faith of their forefathers' and 'foster a sense of brotherhood' among the Khasis who still retain their socio-cultural and religious heritage, among other aims. The temporal activity of the missionaries like education, medical facilities etc, was seen as a means to undermine tradition and proselytize the Khasis. The spiritual activities of the church on the other hand, was seen as the means of projecting the Christian values and to prove the inefficacy of the traditional system in terms of health and well-being. The traditional healing system was put down as simply superstitious and primitive.

The present working of the Seng Khasi is based entirely on the need to strengthen the Khasi cultural identity through knowledge of their own culture. In Chapter-III I have shown how this organisation has been the means of retaining awareness regarding the Khasi distinctiveness. By entering

the fields of education and social welfare they have attempted to break the power-wielding grip of the missionaries. Again by reassuring the people of the relevance and greatness of their own culture the Seng Khasi has made an organised effort at establishing a distinct identity among the Khasis. Many of the cultural elements of the Khasis has been imbibed into the Christian Khasis who have included certain cultural activities in order to counter the threat of the Seng Khasi organisation, which they felt was taking away many Christians. The *Seng Khyllang* (United Endeavour Society) along with the Indian Tribal Cultural Forum have established a platform for enhancing the understanding of the traditional cultural activities of the Khasis. The various clan organisations too have come up to highlight the traditional basis of the society. Another branch namely the *Seng Kyrsew* organises talks about Khasi religion and culture in the interior areas of Khasi and Jaintia Hills in order to expose the people to their traditional culture. The *Seng Pyni* yet another unit of the *Seng Khasi* holds talks and group discussions about Khasi religion and culture on every Sunday to motivate the people to retain their culture and resist outside influence. The *Seng Khasi* has also been attempting to associate itself with other organisations like the International Association for Religious Freedom (IARF), and

maintain its distinctive identity by highlighting their differences with Christian khasis.

The Christian khasis on the other hand have in their own way offered cultural resistance by attempting to throw away the yoke of the west by promoting certain elements in the culture which would help them to retain their Khasi identity. Slight tremors of dissent against the missionary ways are being manifest in covert ways (refer Chapter V). Though this assertion in an organised way are few, for it is seen more on an individual level yet this is fairly well manifest. There is also a noticeable attempt at modifying certain elements which were blatantly colonial.

In comparison with the Seng khasi who believed that without religion the strings that bind the khasi society will be broken and would gradually disappear, the Christian Khasi equally worried about khasi identity yet prefer it to be limited to culture. The young khasis who are born Christians would like to preserve their new religion while at the same time keeping their pride in khasi heritage intact.

I have tried to show that the response to the challenges of subjugation is not found limited to the organised effort of the Seng khasi. There is mushrooming of resistance groups within the society.

The present day resistance is mainly in form of associations promoting different aspects of tradition like

names, dress, music, literature, theatre and dance. These are, however, projection of culture in a piecemeal fashion, more like cultural showpieces. This piecemeal manifestation of culture cannot really wipe out the effects of colonialism. This is also the reason why the two major groups among the Khasis could not launch a powerful social movement against cultural subjugation. There is, of course, the pragmatic attempt to keep the religious group, i.e. Seng Khasi alive in order to ensure the continuity of the tradition. In the present day, we can also see in the symbolism of the colonised group (the Christian Khasis) a conscious attempt at integrating their traditional attitudes with their new religion. This is symbolized vividly in the work of Christian leaders like Rev. Fr. Sngi, Rev. Kharkongor and others.

Here I sense a dilemma, on the one hand you have members of a group negating a large chunk of their tradition (viz. religion) as superstition, in favour of a new religious ideology, which they feel is more modern and in tune with the times. On the other hand, the same members of the group wish for a balance between their tradition and the newly acquired modernity. Except for group dances and group songs and artifacts like 'baskets', 'daos' etc. displayed in market places there does not appear any clear cultural thrust which could be uniquely Khasi. The ethnic identity seems to be the only hallmark for being a Khasi. The cultural identity is

being slowly pushed to the background. Today you can be Khasi if you have a Scheduled Tribe certificate, no matter where you live, no matter what is your religion and even if you think like an Anglo-Indian.

### **Methodology**

The present study entitled *Khasi Resistance to Colonialism* is an attempt to find out the forces of resistance to domination and deprecation of their culture operative among the indigenous Khasi population. The attempt is to study how different cultural elements of the past, consciously or unconsciously are still followed by the converts to Christianity and the followers of the traditional religion among this population.

In order to find out pertinent data in respect to the various cultural practices it was felt necessary that an appropriate research design be developed to give a proper scientific base. The present study, therefore, had been planned as a descriptive study which incorporated the various parameters of scientific applications, taking into account the sampling procedure, suitable research, methods, technique, tools, etc.

## **Sampling**

Since the present study does not incorporate any survey data and as it was felt that there is need for me to give an equal choice to all the respondent for their inclusion in the sample, I planned a non-probability sampling design which is suitable for basically exploratory studies like the present one. The non-probability sampling design is a valid sampling construction of a data base which is used widely in various social science researches and presents a fairly good result in case of analytical studies based on a characteristic design of the sample. Further, since I have generated a logical sampling frame by means of employment of key-informants, it follows that the non-probability sampling procedure will only be fitting into the research design. For my present requirement, it was, therefore, decided that purposive or judgemental sampling technique would be applied to develop a suitable and manageable group of informants for collection of data. With the belief that with the exercise of good judgement and appropriate strategy the right informants in the sample could be handpicked, an attempt had been made to develop a strategy whereby it would be possible to identify typical cases who were evaluated on the basis of their capacity to provide the required data as planned by me. After a careful evaluation of the suitability of various socio-anthropological methods, it was decided that three

methods, viz., historical method, interview method and observation method would be most suitable for the present study for the purpose of collection of primary as well as secondary data. The decision on these methods was taken to satisfy the requirements of qualitative data, time factor, available resources as well as the historicity of the subject under consideration.

Since one of my main purpose was to intermittently compare the various aspects of the past of the Khasi society with that of the present, I found the application of historical methodology as most valuable. Data was collected extensively through the oral tradition. This has helped to a satisfactory level in reconstructing the sociological past as was existing in its most manifest form. The group with strong traditions may have naturally readjusted themselves to the newly emerging socio-economic milieu and may not be able to maintain a strict socio-cultural boundary. In order to find out the social changes occurring in the two groups existing before me in the field viz, the group following traditional system and the group which do not follow tradition or follow them just as a matter of habit, the Durkhemian Methodology<sup>13</sup> of studying social facts was kept in view. The social facts, normal as well as pathological, were studied to find out their levels of existence, values and roles recommended by Emile Durkheim has also been kept in mind while investigating

social facts pertaining to the three different sociological formations.

Historical data from secondary sources like records, journals, newspapers, private papers, and artifacts etc. have also been taken into account.

As it was also felt that the various socio-cultural manifestations in the life of the people required to be studied as closely as possible, use was made of unstructured and participatory method while conducting the research. This has particularly helped in discovering the underlying dynamics and contradictions as well as subtleties of the people involved. This was in conformity with the decision of furthering qualitative data. For the traditional group social activities like *Seng Pyns*, *Seng Kyrsew* and *Seng khyllang*, *Shad Sirk Mynsiem*, *Seng kut Snem* besides actual everyday affairs were observed. For the non-traditional group actual everyday affairs, family situations, marriage ceremonies, naming ceremonies and the activities of the cultural organisations were observed. Through these observations, valid conclusions were drawn.

Focussed interview method was a natural choice for collecting additional information from the field. This method focussed on the subjective experiences/attitudes and emotional responses regarding particular concrete situation was thought most relevant as it is also helpful in research

situation which has already been analysed prior to the interview. This method could also be utilised in a situation where persons are known to be involved in a particular concrete situation or have participated in an observed social situation. Since the above criteria exist in relation to the present study, hence the focussed interview was extensively used.

keeping in view the ethnographic method of anthropology and as it was particularly felt that 'key informant' technique be employed to generate information this technique has been used to gather information pertaining to the study.

Keeping the sampling logic in mind the maximum amount of time was spent in the field on developing the 'good judgement' and 'rapport' and gathering oral tradition. It was after this that a tentative interview guide with unstructured entries was prepared and pre-tested in the field. The next phase was the collection of secondary historical information. The next phase of six months was spent interviewing the people belonging to the Christian section of the population and the next eight months the thesis belonging to the traditional faith and those who were members of the *Seng Khasi*. The next one year was spent on studying the various cultural organisations, their working as well as interviewing the members. Lastly, after working with the written texts and

going back to the field for recent information, the work of classification and analysis and finally writing commenced.

Through the pursuance of the written material and interviewing the authors and the important personalities of the society of both the traditional and Christian group a judgemental sampling frame was developed. This included 150 Christian Khasi informants and 150 informants affiliated to the traditional religion. This sampling frame included the office bearers and members of the Christian Khasi cultural organisations and the *Seng Khasi* organisations and branches therein. The interview of these informants was carried out by using an interview guide with unstructured entries, which helped in varying the questions in accordance to the demands of the situation. Further, the various cultural activities of the Khasis were investigated with the use of the focussed interview method.

### **Objective of the Study**

The following formed the objective of the study:

1) To discover the signs of cultural resistance to the colonisation of cultural traits amongst both Christian and non-Christian Khasis.

2) To find out the traditional religious structure and to explore the reasons for the birth of the *Seng Khasi*

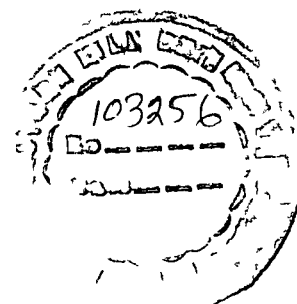
and other Christian khasi organisations and their continuing existence.

3) To identify the elements of interaction and communication between the two resisting groups.

4) To evaluate the contribution of the Christian khasis and the traditional khasis in matters of retention of culture.

### **Limitation and Scope**

For the purpose of convenience, practicality and operational purposes, the khasi residents of Shillong have been included. Shillong here includes the Shillong urban agglomerate, comprising of the Shillong Municipality, Shillong Cantonment, Nongthymmai, Mawlai, and Pynthorukhrah. As it was felt that most of the requirement in terms of data could be had from the capital of Meghalaya where most of the cultural activities, awareness programmes, organisational activities are concentrated, Shillong was the natural choice. Both males and females have been included as it was felt necessary that these two gender groups would yield different categories of data. In terms of religious affinity both the non-traditional khasi group and the Christians have been included as they are at present the mainstream of the khasi society and substantial social force. Other religious groups among khasis, such as Muslims, Buddhists, Hindus, Bohais, etc.



do exist but as they do not constitute a substantial grouping, they have not been included in the study. In terms of age structure and grouping the present study has included respondents belonging to the age groups 15 to 60 but the concentration has been within the age of 25 to 60. Children and adolescents have been excluded from the study as it was felt that they would not be able to sufficiently reflect upon the study and as their behaviour pattern would be influenced by modernity.

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## Chapter-I

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### THE KHASIS - TRADITION AND CHANGE

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The term 'Khasi', it is said, was given to the people living in Meghalaya by the people of the Sylhet district of Bangladesh with whom they had trade links. Their land was referred to by these people as 'khasia Pahar' or *khasi Pahar*.<sup>1</sup> Khasi myths on the other hand referred to these people as the *Hynriem Trep* people. These people lived in their respective areas and referred to themselves either by their clan names or at the most when they ventured into the territory of another chief, by their area name. Therefore instead of correcting the people of Sylhet during their short contact, they answered to the name given by the Sylheties. The name *khasi* was firmly established by the British administrators who called them the 'Cossyaahs' and 'Jynteahs' (later 'Khasi' and 'Jaintia') in pen and paper.

Khasi today is a generic name for the Khyriam, Pnar, Bhoi, War and the Lynggam. The Khyriam Khasis are those inhabiting the central portion of Meghalaya. To the east are the Pnars who are also known as Jaintias, to the north the Bhois and the southern slope is occupied by the War Khasis.

A word about their origin and migration. R.C. Allen<sup>2</sup> is of the opinion that the khasis are Indo-Chinese people, speaking the Mon Khmer language which is spoken by various tribes in Anam and Cambodia. He also believes that the khasis were one of the earliest band of immigrants from North West China and while the rest of the horde pressed onwards towards the sea, the khasis remained behind. Driven by the Tibeto Burmans on the East, the Dravidians from the West, they came to the North Eastern Hills and settled there.

Hamlet Bareh,<sup>3</sup> P.R.T. Gurdon,<sup>4</sup> and J.N. Choudhury<sup>5</sup> have speculated that the khasis are racially and linguistically the off-shoot of the Monkhmer branch of the Austro Asiatic stock and are held to be the remnant of the first Monglial overflow into India.

In view of the anthropological and linguistic proofs, the most accepted theory supported, is that the khasis belong to the old Austric Mon-khmer tribe in Burma of which a group moved westward and came to Assam. According to Bareh, they are culturally and linguistically related to the Palaung-Riang Walemet-Mon-Bahnar alliance which form a group of the most original and oldest people among the Austrics. S.k. Chatterjee<sup>6</sup> on the other hand opines that a series of racial contacts between the earlier Austrics and the Mongoloid family, resulted in the formation of various sections of the Mon-khmer speaking people like the Rmen or Rman or Mon of

Central and Southern Burma, Paluangs of Upper Burma and the Khmers and other Austric speaking people of Siam and Indo-China.

Hutton<sup>7</sup> pointed out the similarities among the Khasis and the Mon-Khmers of the East and thus supported the view that the Khasis migrated from the east. Hornwell Lyngdoh<sup>8</sup> is of the view that the original place of the Khasis was somewhere in Western Cambodia, Burma and other regions in the East and the Khasis migrated through Nowgong, Lunding and Haflong across the Kupli river to their present place.

Tracing the origin and relevance of the term Khasi is another difficulty. Some like Hamlet Berek suggests that *kha* means 'born of' and 'si' refers to 'an ancient mother'. Thus Khasi means born of the Mother. Another opinion is that it is derived from 'khas' which in Sanskrit means 'power to understand'. Again the word Khasi may have originated from 'Cassia' a particular bay leaf found in these hills or even from 'ghas' meaning grass or from 'kash' a special grass found in these areas used for ritual purposes by the Hindus. Another explanation is that *khas* stands for exclusive private land of the owner for which no land revenue is to be paid and as the Khasi land is of the above type the neighbouring people referred to them as *khas-i*, one with exclusive land rights<sup>9</sup>. Opinions differ as to the origin of the term 'Khasi'. However, today Khasi is the name for the people of

Khasi and Jaintia Hill district of Meghalaya who have common ethnicity, common mythology, a common language and a common way of life. The Khasis are flanked by the Brahmaputra Valley in the North, United Mikir and North Cachar hills in the east, Sylhet district of Bangladesh in the south and the Garo hills in the west.

The Khasi and Jaintia plateau lies at an altitude ranging from 1220 mts. to 1830 mts. above sea level. Hill ranges run from the east to the west and the highest peak is the Shillong peak which lies at an altitude of 6445 ft. above sea level. The rivers flow either to the North to the Brahmaputra or to the south, to the Surma. The rivers flowing to the North are Umkhen, Umtru, Umiam and the ones flowing to the south are Umngot and Myntdu. The rugged mountainous terrain gives rise to a number of picturesque waterfalls.

The climate of the central plateau is cool and salubrious whereas the northern and southern slopes have climate similar to the plains. The southern slopes receive high rainfall. In fact the Cherrapunjee-Mawsynram belt of these slopes have the distinction of receiving the highest rainfall in the world. The hills are rich in numerous flora and fauna, temperate flora is found in the central region while tropical forests abound the northern slopes.

Traditionally land was of two types among the Khasis, the *Ri Saad* or public lands and *Ri kynti* or private lands.<sup>10</sup>

The former category includes lands allotted to the chiefs, the priests, clans and those kept aside for the use for religious and welfare purposes. In this category there is no absolute ownership or heritable transferable rights. The other class of lands known as *Ri kynta* lands are those to which the owners have absolute ownership which is heritable, alienable and transferable. The underlying principle behind the division of land is that of welfare for the community as a whole without any preferential treatment for any person.

The main occupations of the khasis were agriculture and horticulture. They practised jhuming or slash and burn cultivation and the main crop cultivated was rice. Forest products like timber, lac were also found in plenty.

Trading was an important occupation of the khasis. They were known as traders in the neighbouring lands, especially of Bangladesh with whom they traded oranges, bay leaves, arecanut and pan leaves in return for rice and salt.

The khasi hills also had mineral resources like iron, limestone and coal. The surplus products were brought into the markets which were centres of communication. There were big markets held in different villages on a weekly basis. These big markets were the centres of activity and interaction. The traditional khasi days of the week were named after the big markets held in the different villages.

Cowrie was generally used as a medium of exchange, besides the barter trade that went on.

Rice forms an important part of their diet which is used not only as a basic everyday food but is also converted into rice cakes *U kpu* and beer known as *ka kiad Um*. The last is an important item not only as everyday drink but is also used for ritual purposes. The khasis also eat millet, jobs-tears and maize. They are fond of meat like pork, beef, chicken, venison and also fish, fresh and dried. Besides the khasis are also fond of the 'betel nut' and leaf (*Awai*) which is not only taken everyday but forms part of ritual food.

A word about the way of dressing amongst the khasis before the advent of western influences, the khasi traditional dress for the women consisted of *ka Jympien* or *Jainpien* worn next to the skin. This was tied round the waist, coming down to the knee. Over this was worn the *jainsem* which consists of two pieces crossed and tied on each shoulder. Still over it is worn the *ka tapmohihieh* which covers the head and shoulders and lastly comes the *ka Jainkup* worn over the shoulders like a cloak.

Traditionally, the men wear a sleeveless coat called *ka jymphong* over their upper torso and a cloth round their waist reaching over the knees known as *ka shympiar*. Elderly men wore a turban known as *jainspong* of white colour and a dhoti

known as *jaanboh*. They also wore a shawl known as *ryndia tlem*.

Besides the above mentioned specific characteristics of the Khasis, in order to provide a complete picture of the people, it is important to provide the background of the traditional political and social system.

The basic unit of political organisation is the clan council called *Durbar Kur*, with the *Rangbah Kur* or clan headman at the apex. The next is the *Durbar Shnong* or the elected representatives of a village with the village headman at the top. The next unit was the *Durbar Raid* or the elected representatives of the commune or *Raid*. The leaders of the village and communes were known as *Basan*, *Bathraw*, *Lyngskor* and *Lyngdohs*<sup>11</sup> in different areas. The *Lyngdohs*, however, had an added sacerdotal function besides the administrative ones as differing from the *Basan*, *Bathraw* and *Lyngskor*.

The Khasi state was usually formed through the voluntary association of villages and communes (a combination of a number of villages). It was administered by a chief called *U Syiem* who was aided in his work by a Durbar known as the *Durbar Hima* an assembly or elected representative of the people also known as the *As Myntra* or ministers. The Durbar thus consisted of *Lyngdohs*, *Basans*, *Bathraw* and *Lyngskors*.

The Syiemship was reserved for the ruling clan of that particular area or *Hima*. This ruling clan was known as *Jait*

Syiem and only the senior most male members of that particular clan was eligible for the *Syiemship*. The eligibility was determined by the candidates matrilineality.<sup>12</sup>

The *Syiem* is generally elected by an electoral college consisting of *Lyngdohs*, *Myntries*, *Rasan*, *Sirdars* and headman of leading clans of the Hima and is chosen from among the eligible candidates. The *syiemship* is an important institution among the *khasis*, with the *Syiem* being allotted four main important duties of that of a 'chief priest, judge, executioner and general'.<sup>13</sup> In the political arena, the *khasis* are thus seen to have developed a system of checks and balances to guard against any usurpation of power. The democratic outlook of the *khasis* is reflected in their social, political and religious aspects. A noticeable point is that the political authorities were vested not only with political powers but also sacerdotal powers as they were supposed to bring about welfare of their respective domains. Administration of justice was the task of the respective authorities in their respective domains, though no arbitrary decisions could be taken as the *Durbars* had to be consulted and decisions rendered together. The *khasi* *Durbar's* role in administrative and judicial matters was, therefore, important. The sources of law were taboos, ancient moral

codes and precepts and *dirbar* precedents, ancient covenants and agreements.

The first division in the social structure of the Khasis is that of the clan (*kur*) or consanguinal kin group, each *kur* tracing back their origin to the grandmother of the root, i.e. *ka Iawbei Tynrai*. The term *jait* is used alternately with *kur* in general usage, however, *Jait* mainly refers to the members of a *kur* who migrated to a new area and adopted new name. Each *Jait* is further sub-divided into *Kpoh* which consists of a group of matrilineal kin confined to one domestic family or groups of households linked by direct extensis of the main household.<sup>14</sup> The *kpohs* are further sub-divided into individual families known as *Iing*.

The *Iing* is made up of a grandmother, her daughters and her daughters' children. In this case the grandmother who is the head of the *Iing* is known as the *ka Iawbei khynraw*. The basic unit of the Khasi society is the *Iing*, and all *Iings* can be said to be overgrown clans. The clan which is one of the most integral feature of the Khasi society is strictly exogamous. The exogamic principle is applicable to the subdivisions of the clans too. Though every clan has a myth of origin, in the present day one comes across a fair number of newly formed clans which came about due to adoption of outsiders into the Khasi society. The clan members were bound

together by religious ties of ancestor worship and a common clan cromlech.

As is well known, the Khasis believe that from the women sprang the clan. Lineage and descent is traced through the mother's clan, all children thus take the mother's clan name. The descent rule is that of affiliation of the person with a group of kinsmen who are related through females only. The matrilineal principle is applicable in matters of inheritance too. Ancestral property is passed on from the mother to the youngest daughter called *ka Khadduh*. The *khadduh* is the custodian of the family property and is responsible for the general well being of her immediate family. She is also the keeper of religion (*la hat is la niam*). The *khadduh* is aided in all her duties by her mother's brother *U Añi*. The *Añi* is the person who holds a pivotal role in decision making regarding ancestral family matters. The status of the youngest daughter is of special importance to the Khasi concept of family. Her house known as *ka Iing khadduh* or the youngest daughters house, this institution is of special importance as not only are all family gatherings conducted here but it is also the place which shelters the indigent, the unmarried daughters and sons and their monetary contribution goes to the common fund. It is in this house that family rites and rituals are carried out and it is the duty of the *khadduh* to organise the same

and also to bear the major burden of the expenses. The *U* *la* or maternal uncle, wields great influence and is afforded a lot of prestige in the Khasi family. However, the father and his kinsmen are in no way subservient. This is elucidated by the saying goes '*U* *ka* *ut* *lah* *ba* *ia*', meaning it is the father who provides for the family and the paternal kin are the giver of life and stature (*ka* *long**ka*, *ka* *nong**ai* *ia* *ka* *long**ryng**ie**ng*).<sup>15</sup> The father, his mother *Mei**ka* and sisters *ka* are afforded lot of respect and are always included respectfully in any family rites and gatherings.

The beginning of Khasi religion can be traced to the origin myth of the Khasis. They believe in the initial creation of sixteen families in heaven from which seven families severed connection and came to live on earth. On severing the physical connection through a golden ladder God send down three commandments to the people of the seven huts or seven families (*ka* *Hyn**ai**ew* *Trep*, *Hyn**ai**ew* *slum*), saying that if they followed those three commandments they would go to heaven to join the nine above (*ka* *Hyn**ai**ew* *ha**jr**ong*) on death. These three commandments served as the basis of religion and social life. The commandments were (a) *ka* *me**ai* *ia* *ka* *Hok* - to earn righteousness; (b) *Tap* *Bri**ew* *Tap* *Blei* - to know man and to know God; (c) *Tap* *kur* *Tap* *ka* - which means to know ones maternal kin and paternal kin. Man is, therefore, required to lead a righteous life by being righteous, earning his bread

through righteousness and also earn righteousness, thus honouring his reason for living and assuring his ascent to heaven. Man does not come into the world as a single unattached unit, he has his *kur* or clan to whom he belongs, therefore, he is required to know and respect these relations or else the ever vigilant God will chastise, correct or punish him and his clan. A good, righteous life is the highest offering that man can offer his Creator as his gratefulness for all the things that God has given for his fruitful use. As the also believe that 'everything is of God and so also the different religions are His gift and their development are through his divine inspiration' and thus they must respect all belief systems.<sup>16</sup> As God is everywhere and in everything, it is considered a sacrilege to symbolise God or picture him in any shape or form.

The belief among the *khasis* is that they come into the world for a cause, through a great plan and decree of God (*ngi wan sha lane la pyrthei da la Hukum*).<sup>17</sup> The moral fibre of society though permeating every aspect is particularly localised in the religion of the *khasi* which they call *la Niam Khasi* (which conceives God as almighty, all powerful, omniscient and omnipresent). God is also considered above gender and above number but different names are given to him according to the different spheres of life and varying aspects of his creation. Not only is God not symbolised in

any form but there are no fixed days of congregational worship as the Khasi believe all his honest activities are forms of worship.

There is a personal religious relationship between *U Blei* (God) and the family in the form of *ka Niam Iing*. Here God is the guardian spirit of the family. There is also God of the clan '*U Leilongkur U Leilongjait*', God of the state '*U Leihima*', God of the village '*U Leihyrdop*' and God of the raid known as *U Leimuluk U Leijala*<sup>18</sup>.

The interaction between man and God is in form of worship. Worship again is of different types, state worship, worship by *elala* and *raid*, village worship and worship to God inside the house. Worship is made for different purposes like economic welfare, to convey thankfulness in everyday life situations and to seek solace during crisis.

The belief in reason and cause in everything requires the Khasi to find out the same through divination where they read the signs. This is done in times of calamity, disease and other misfortunes. After the cause is found, prayers and sacrifices are offered to do away with the evil and seek blessings. Reverence of ancestors and dead persons are important forms of worship as it is believed that by offering respect and food to the ancestors, the living will be protected from evil spirits and they will obtain material prosperity.

The *kur-lha* relationship is an all pervasive concept in the society and in combination with the matrilineal concept is relevant in marriage, birth, death, politics, property, inter-personal relationship, etc. The festivals of the Khasis emanate from religion and from socio-economic life in general. Festivals are a symbol of identity and are very important to the Khasis as it brings the people closer together. Marriage is both a religious and social function and can only be solemnised if the match involves no *sang* (taboo) as no man can take a wife from his own clan. The *sang* is the greatest prohibition which is considered unforgivable even by God. *Sang* in marriage means the 'incest taboo'. Monogamy is the chief rule of marriage and though adultery is viewed seriously, remarriage and divorce are allowed. The matrilineal system where the male comes and stays in his wife's place was the traditional practice.

Customary laws have defined the roles of men and women. The women are the mothers, house keepers, custodians of family property and helpers in the fields and groves. She is considered the *la Bja: Iing* (goddess of the house). The men on the other hand are the warriors, protectors, tillers, hunters, administrators priest, etc. Their roles and duties being in the domains outside the house.

The Khasis have a strong belief that they join the nine above '*khynda: ha:rong*' after death and that the dead get

love and respect in the house of God which they refer to as 'hem kwa: ha: ang U Blex'. They cremate the dead and preserve the bones in 'Mawshyieng' (small stone cist) of the family from where they are finally taken to the 'Mawbah' (the clan cromlech). All this require elaborate rituals.

In the past, the Khasis erected monumental stones called 'Mawshynrang' (male stone) and 'Mawlynthei' (female stone) in memory of the dead. Megalithic like 'Mawlyntia' and 'Mawnam', proclamatory or memorial stones too were erected. The megalith culture was strong among these people and this involved united efforts of the people.

The most important feature and the crux of the Khasi society is the matrilineal social structure. The clan is the primary social unit which begins with the triad of Ia Iawbei Tynra: the grandmother of the root, the /I Thawlang the ancestral father, the progenitor and the U Suidna: the maternal uncle. This triad embodies the kur (maternal kin) and the kha (paternal kin), which are the foundation of the Khasi society. The Iawbei who is variously known as the Iawbei Tymmen the grandmother of the subclan or /poh and Iawbei Khyntaw or the ancestress of the family, is the keeper of the clan, sub-clan and family respectively. She is looking after the family welfare, relationships of kur and kha, being the instructress of social codes and also being responsible

for the religious rituals and communication with God, conveys these duties to the respective *khadduhs* of the family.

The *U Thawlang* as the ancestral father is the embodiment of the role of the father as the executive head responsible for welfare of the family, adding to its wealth, banding the clan together and preserving peace and harmony in the family.

The next pillar of society is the *U Suidnia* who is the de-jure head of the family the protector, caretaker, defender, priest and legal head of the clan, sub-clan and family. He aids his sister, the *Tawber* in taking decisions regarding her respective unit.

The three personalities were respected by all the clan members referred to in times of celebration and grievances. The tenet of *tip kur, tip kha* worked to establish the social organisation of the *khasis* and the *khasi Niam* (religion) re-established the social organisation. As pointed out earlier the concept of matrilineality permeates through the basic unit of social organisation, to the sub-clan then to the clan and lastly into the political organisation and the political leadership. The clans were born during the different processes of migration and their origins are shrouded in legends.

Being matrilineal the children adopted the mother's clan name. Kinship was strictly exogamous, intermarriage between clan members being treated as a mortal sin.

However, the *Lyngdoh* clan or the priestly clan were not all descended from a common ancestress and, therefore, members of two *Lyngdoh* clan could intermarry. Again clans with the prefix *khar* which is an abbreviation of *Dkhar* meaning non-Khasi, could intermarry if not descended from the same ancestress.

In the present day the concepts of *U Blei*, the *Iawbei* the *Thawlang* and *Suidnia* are more or less forgotten especially by the Christian Khasis for whom Jesus and the Christian Saints have taken over these functions. Besides in town areas the people have ceased to have or to participate in the economic and social ceremonies which had included the reverence to the *U Blei*, *Iawbei*, *thawlang* and *Suidnia*. These ritual ceremonies which caused a gathering, bringing all relatives together and served to re-assert their socio-religious beliefs are no longer attended by people in the towns due to lack of time and convenience. Though the Khasis still go by matrilineality in kinship and inheritance pattern, the linkage and bond between the kin members have considerably loosened, thanks to the western influence. The means of maintaining these ties was through gift exchange especially of food and the harvest. For example when a member

of the family visited their kith and kin they always took a gift of food. Again when there was a marriage the wife took gifts of food and visited her husband's family. Besides the fruits of the first harvest was to be given to the *Mesha's* house (father's mother's house) by the male cultivators of the family who also got gifts of cloths as a sign of blessings from the father's family (*Kāśā Kha*). Further, in order to acquire prestige, gifts were made to the persons whom the cultivators recognised as their relatives. This system has practically died out with the coming of the money economy, and also because of geographical distances and general lack of interest. In terms of immediate kin there is still some amount of contact but the distant kin are more or less forgotten. With the lessening of social interaction the kinship ties have suffered considerably. Another feature which is noticeable is that the people when jealous or envious, use the concepts of the evil spirits like *U Thien*, saying that prosperous people have been keeping these evil spirits and thereby becoming prosperous.<sup>19</sup> This feeling of resentment and jealousy is alien to the people who respected everyone.

Another aspect in the kin relationship is that of respect and regard which has deteriorated much. This is mainly because of the diffusion of roles leading to the lowering of status. The elders who were looked up to for

their knowledge and experience is sidelined by formal education. For example, the *U Kñi* was looked up to for his role as a medium for communication with God was sidelined, because the communicating medium became the elders, pastors and clergies of the church and the father becoming the head of the neolocal residence which he sets up with his wife. This change in role, noticeable in all ceremonies and in everyday life, has affected the important position of the *U Kñi*. The *Mekha* (father's mothers) too is no longer sought during the ceremonies to fulfill her ritual status thus bringing about a lowering in her status.

The growth of urban centres and its attraction for job opportunities and the money economy is definitely contributing to the loosening of ties due to non-availability of time to keep the ties. However, the most important factor is the change in the attitude of the people which was initiated by the missionaries. It was this group of people with their view that tradition is 'pagan' and 'uncivilized' inculcated new value systems through formal sectarian education that caused a major change in the traditional Khasi system.

In recent times, there is a noticeable move in the Khasi society towards patrilineal descent as some people are of the opinion that matrilineal society is backward and it would be in the interest and convenience of the nation to

have a universal descent rule. A number of Khasis who move out of the state have expressed that they use their father's clan name for convenience. Even within the society where there has been intermarriage between a Khasi man and non-Khasi woman the clan name of the father has been adopted. Earlier in such cases of intermarriages the lady had been adopted into the Khasi society by being bestowed a new clan name through the observance of certain rituals. This is done even today in some cases. Today, however, there is an organised effort towards patrilineal descent in form of *Syngkhong Rympei Thymmai* (Association of the New Hearth), which shows a good following. The system of tracing descent through the mother's clan is not always adhered to in the present day conditions as the candidature and the election of Stanley Nichols Roy from a constituency reserved for Scheduled tribes illustrates. Roy was born of an American mother and a Khasi father. The Khasi intellectuals advocated the view that a person who claims affiliation to the Khasi can be accepted as one. The courts of law gave full weight to this and laid down that if a person of prominent position claims readiness to participate in the Khasi life and community he may be allowed to be called one. The Khasi society has upheld this view.

As mentioned earlier, the Khasis followed the matrilineal ultimogeniture system of inheritance of property

and the youngest daughter inherits the ancestral property as a custodian, while the other daughters get whatever is left over. The *khadduh*, however, had a number of duties associated with her position. She was the family treasurer, expected to meet the family expenditures for rites and ceremonies, besides having to look after the family members who do not have sufficient means. A *khadduh* could only lose her position in case of illegal or unauthorized marriage or change of religion. Besides, the *khadduh* who is an institution by herself, women in other roles are also highly respected. A woman was particularly respected as the *Iawbei* (ancestral mother), *Mei-Kha* (paternal grandmother), *Mei-Rad* (Maternal grandmother), *Kong* (elder sister) and younger sister too is given a name of respect - *hep*. As the woman was also considered *Ka Biei Ling* (goddess of the house), *Ka Lukhmas* (the guardian spirit of the house, she was responsible for the prestige, growth and development of the family and in turn the whole clan. But the domain of the woman is her house and family and her functions include keeping the unity and well-being of the members, teaching moral and social virtues, keeping religion and ancestral property. Among her duties are included procreation as she is expected to help the clan grow. The woman was expected to be virtuous and pure which is emphasized by the fact that only virgins can participate in dances and ceremonial rituals.

Despite her important role and status a woman in Khasi society was debarred by tradition to participate in politics as this was considered the man's domain. The saying *mwaw la kynsh la Iar kynthes, la pyrthes la la wai, lane la jot la aing* - if the hen crows the world will come to an end - illustrates the point that women's domain is in the home and hearth and the men's outside the home.

In the present day, the woman is no longer merely the guardian of the family. In a society where women are debarred from having a leading voice in the councils the woman has crossed a few bridges and has started making her own niche in politics and other aspects of life. Another change which is perceptible is in the role of the *khadduh* while in traditional society she was the mere guardian of the property and was responsible for the well-being of her clan members, today there is a trend of *khadduh* claiming to be the sole heir of the property with heritable, transferable rights besides disclaiming her duties towards her clan members. Due to geographical distances accentuated by economic considerations, the kin group attachment, feelings of trust and devotion has dissipated and along with this the responsibilities of the *khadduh*. In fact, the very authority of the clan is gradually decreasing and along with it the well-being of the members in general.

As shown above, the position of men in the Khasi society, was never inconsequential. He was revered as the *U Thawlang* (the ancestral father), *U Suidnia* (the ancestral maternal uncle) and in both these roles a man wielded great authority in the family and clan. It is said among the Khasis that *U kpa uba lah uba lai, u kha uba tip ha ka rap ha ka im* (the father provides for the family and as an uncle he knows matters of life and death). The male is the protector and warrior as he is stronger (*U khadar bor U khengwait U bah ryntieh*). Besides these functions in the sphere of political activities of attending the councils and *darbar* he was unchallenged. In the succession to *syiems* (chiefs of the state) it is the son of the eldest sister who became the *Syiem*. The *syiem*, therefore, is generally always a male. The change in the position of women has to a great extent changed the status and role of men. The role of the maternal kin which was of vital importance in the traditional societies has diminished due to physical and mental distances. Again, the neolocal and nuclear families have enhanced the role of man as the husband and father on one hand but lessened that of the uncle and brother on the other. (However, this is a mere tip of the iceberg as the changing roles and status is proving extremely confusing). The respect due to both the sexes and their respective role are accentuated by the institution of marriage which as per Khasi tradition was said

to be a sacred tie to fulfill the purpose of procreation which is a sacred duty of all persons. Marriage was a means of securing a relationship of well-being between two clans and even though by retaining their own respective clan names there occurs no merger as such, a relationship of respect and reciprocal duties arose. If a couple lived together as man and wife without the knowledge and approval of their respective families, society shunned them till they have a child. However, despite this, if the man's family does not recognise the marriage the woman and her children would not be able to participate in any of the religious or funeral rites conducted in the man's house. Chastity was considered a very important virtue and adultery was considered a serious crime against the clan which brought about serious religious sanctions. Monogamous marriages through courtship was the rule, though arranged marriage were also present. Residence after marriage was in their respective houses, till the birth of one or two children, after which, they could set up a neolocal residence. However, in the case of a *khadduh* the husband generally lived with her in her house. As a husband, a man was to add to the family wealth, as a father he is supposed to look after the family. If a man dishonours any of these duties or he womanises, he is said to dishonour not just himself but also the name of his clan and will not find any favour before man or God. Marriage was considered to be a

sacred contract between two clans and, therefore, remarriage of widows or widowers was not to be considered, before all the rites and rituals relating to the dead spouse was complete as the concept of 'ka klim' (stigma of adultery) extended beyond this life. Divorce was accepted on grounds of barrenness and adultery but it required the understanding of both the clans involved.

The ties of marriage have undergone radical changes in the present day. Even though the exogamous principle is still adhered to, the sanctity of the tie has become loose, leading to an increase of desertions, extra-marital affairs, licentiousness and divorces. The marriage rituals are no longer as elaborate involving the divinations, sacrifices and prayers or mixing of the liquor's, all of which, signified seeking of divine grace for a unity of two clans. This, besides the lack of respect, caused the loosening of social sanctions. Besides this, the marriages outside the community leading to giving up Khasi clan names is on the rise.

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## Chapter—II

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### THE ADVENT OF THE BRITISH AND THE MISSIONARY

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The Burmese War of 1824 afforded the first occasion to the British to enter Khasi areas. This contact occurred in course of the march led by David Scott, the then Governor General's agent, from Sylhet to the Assam Plains. In 1826, the treaty of Yandaboo marked the end of the Burmese war. By then, however, the need to connect Sylhet and Assam was felt and Khasi Hills was seen as the best connecting zone. David Scott negotiated a treaty for building a road between Sylhet and Gauhati with the Syiem of Nongkhlaw. However, David Scott's effort encountered severe obstacles with the attack on the British survey party by the people of Nongkhlaw in 1829. This led to a war between the Khasis and the British which ultimately culminated in the British annexation of the Khasi Hills in 1833. After the surrender of the Syiem of Nongkhlaw, U Tiroi Singh in 1833, most chiefs made their feudal submission to the East India Company by means of treaties and engagements submitted to the British authority. The British avoided territorial annexation and instead of directly ruling the Khasi hills which had by now largely accepted British supremacy decided to create a special agency

for the purpose. Capt. Lister who was appointed as the agent of the Governor General under the direct supervision of the Government of Bengal, followed a discreet policy of leaving the Khasi and Jaintia chiefs to their own work. In 1854, the special agency was abolished and the Khasi and Jaintia Hill territories were merged with the administration of Assam under the charge of a Principal Assistant Commissioner. As mentioned earlier, the colonial administration in order to establish and maintain the hegemony, enlisted Christian missionary as the main agent to their particular cause of subjugating the indigenous people. The missionaries have used the means of medicine and education with the hope of spreading Christianity and fostering an attachment to British rule.

The colonized were perceived as pagans or barbarians and the colonizing power saw themselves as civilized, with an obligation to spread Christianity and civilization. The under current of western Christian tradition has flowed steadily below the surface throughout the various phases of colonial relations, which came about mainly because of self-imposed obligation of the colonialists to spread civilization.

The British entered India as colonizers and gradually the implication of Colonialism as the 'domination of an alien minority asserting social and cultural superiority ....', manifests itself. Though the primary objective of the British

was to extract greatest economic advantage from the colonized territory, in the process of economic domination the extension of territory and political domination has been innately interlinked. Besides, to the basic economic motive, however, were added other power, pride and prestige. For instance the East India Company justified its rule on the ground that its mission was to civilize and uplift the barbarians of India. The British believed and propagated theories of racial superiority and thereby justified the domination of the White or Western or nordic races over the darker races of the globe whom poet Kipling described as 'half devil half-child'.<sup>1</sup> Therefore, through the connection of economic motive with politics and the socio-cultural sphere, colonisation was manifest into the khasi way of life.

The social political and economic system of the colonized race had to be sufficiently subjugated for which the merchants and the missionaries were enlisted in the course of commerce. The British rulers looked upon the missionaries to justify their activities on moral grounds and colour them with the warm glow of humanitarianism and this aspect of colonialism held good in the Khasi and Jaintia Hills. The missionary activities were so successful here that B.C. Allen pointed out 'by the beginning of the century it appeared as the most correct thing to become a convert to Christianity (among the Khasi).'<sup>2</sup>

The gradual intrusion of the British into the cultural ethos of the Khasi was extremely insidious, pervading and continuous. In fact even after the departure of the British in 1947, the colonist continues to dominate precisely because of the cultural domination of the various Christian denominations of which there are numerous in the Khasi and Jaintia Hills.

The manifestation of colonialism in the Khasis and Jaintia Hills started with the political and administrative changes. This I will try to show in the following paragraphs.

The first interaction of the people of the Khasi and Jaintia Hills with the British was through the treaty of friendship made with Ram Singh, the Raja of Jaintia, entailing military support to the East India Company who were apprehending Burmese attack. This was early part of 1824.<sup>3</sup> The Magistrate of Rangpur, David Scott who was instrumental in making the first connection with the Khasis through the Nongkhlaw road was also instrumental in enacting the above treaty. While the road was in progress the Khasis apprehensive of the growing interest of the British in the Khasi Hills massacred few British lieutenants and soldiers in Nongkhlaw. This happened on the 4th April 1829 and became the spearhead causing most Khasi states to take up arms in a concerted attempt to drive out the British from the hills. However, the British forces from Rangpur were sent to

reinforce the forces in the hills. By 1830 large areas were subdued and two of the three leaders of the insurgents entered into treaties with the British. The third leader U Tirot Singh, the chief of Nongthlaw, was made of stronger mettle but on realising that he could not fight the British forces alone he was forced to surrender on 13th January 1833 on the single condition that his life be spared. He was placed under house arrest in Dacca where he passed away on 17th July, 1835.

In the meanwhile David Scott got an opportunity to stay in the hills and being delighted with the climate, proposed Cherrapunjee for building sanatory stations for Europeans, as the place was at a convenient distance from the plains for bringing in provisions besides having abundant supplies of limestone, timber and sand stones for building purposes. The company acquired the required land for the purpose of building the sanatorium. Scott was keen for inclusion of the Khasi hills for the establishment of a site, which was to serve the purpose of making colonies, where a race of hardy European soldiers might be reared capable of defending the British interest and territories in India.<sup>4</sup> As the arrangements for the settling in, of the British were being made, arrangements for making the area conducive for British settlement was also being made. Scott prepared to bring in better, breed of cattle and introduced new British fruit

trees and plants into the area. The discovery of coal in Cherrapunjee further strengthened that place for a settlement for Europeans. However, Scott's death on 20th August 1831 and the unsettled states in the Khasi Hills during 1830-31 caused a set back to the European settlement in Cherrapunjee.

In 1832 T.C. Robertson was made the Governor General's Agent for the North East Frontier. It was, however, felt by the British that a Superintending Officer who besides his military functions would have certain political, fiscal and judicial authority would be appointed to relieve the Governor General's Agent. Therefore, till permanent arrangements were made in September 1834 the Khasi states were placed under the judicial supervision of the Agent to the Governor General, Lieutenant Townshend.

The February 11, 1835, Captain Lister was appointed political Agent in the Khasi Hills with headquarters in Cherrapunjee and he was vested with powers of a Magistrate, enabling him to try cases and inflict punishments.

The British administration initially took up the policy of indirect rule in Khasi Hills. The purpose of this indirect rule was to have the local chiefs and princes act as the British Government wanted, in harmony with their wishes without the government actually having to assume the entire responsibility of administration. No Khasi state were annexed by British administration, however, wherever there were

strong chiefs they were replaced and chiefs who were more amiable were installed. In Nongkhlaw after Tiro Singh's arrest Rajjan Singh was made the Syiem and he entered into an agreement with the British pledging himself under the control and authority of the British agent. Again in Khyrim the old Syiem Bor Manik was removed and two of his nephews were placed as chiefs over Khyrim and Mylliem, the two divisions of the state of Khyrim. These two chiefs also signed the agreement. A new class of chiefs known as sirdars appeared who were put in charge of three villages of Mawsmaj, Mawmluh and Sohbar which were acquired by the British and made into their territories.

While these administrative and political developments were taking place many economic changes also came into the picture. Besides the introduction of new fruits, vegetables and cereals, the avarice of the British was accentuated by the availability of limestone and iron in this area. Limestone was considered of better commercial value by the British and the quarries were, therefore, declared to be the property of the British with them holding monopoly in this trade. On the other hand as coal, which brought in no revenue to the government, was quarried only for the use of the government and Jowai's European community. The iron trade was entirely in the hands of the Khasis but the easy availability of cheaper English iron nearly finished the Khasi iron

industry by 1870's. The new prospering economy was further accentuated by the extensive network of road communication set up by the British.

The most important changes that occurred in the Khasi society, however, was the coming of the Christian missionaries. It is said that 'the Bible followed the ledger book both of which come into these hills before the Flag.'<sup>5</sup> The Charter of October 1813, allowed the Protestant missionaries to preach the Gospel in India and the Baptist Missionaries of Serampore were the first to extend their activities to the North-Eastern Region. The first missionary of this Church was Krishna Chandra Pal who established a Mission Center in Cherrapunjee in 1810. Realising that the Khasis had no script of their own, he chose the script of the Bengalis, their nearest neighbours as a medium of instruction. In 1813 with the help of a Khasi Gentleman who could read and write Bengali, Rev. Pal engaged in the translation of the scripture into Khasi using the Bengali Script. In 1817 and 1827, respectively, the book of St. Mathews and the Khashee New Testament were brought out by Rev. Pal. He was also responsible for Book I and Book II of elementary education. Rev. Krishna Chandra Pal stayed in Pandua for a eight month period, under the protection of the military at Cherrapunjee. He succeeded in connecting to Christianity four sepoys', two native Khasis's and one

individual from Assam. It is said that after the first baptismal ceremony a military official fired three cannon shots in the direction of the Khasi Hills, signifying the victory of Christ among the Khasi, so great was the joy of the British at the advent of Christianity in the hills.

In 1829 James Roe was sent to this region from the Serampore Baptist Mission. However, the proselytization work of Rev. Pal and James Roe were short-lived and did not make much headway.

In 1832, the Serampore, Baptist Mission sent Alexander B. Lish to work among the Khasis in Cherrapunjee. He opened three schools at Cherrapunjee, Mawmai and Mawmluh. He also prepared reading lesson for in English and Khasi and revised most of the Gospel of St. Mathew and Dr. Walts Catechism. He too used the Bengali script for Khasi translations. But his efforts to educate and evangelize the Khasi failed and he explained this by saying that the people were so steeped in ignorance as to make it almost impossible to convey any religious ideas to their minds. He said, "the only religion understood by them consisted in endeavouring to appease the demons with sacrifices of goats, fowls, sheep and pigs."<sup>6</sup>

In 1841 the charge of education and evangelization was turned over to the newly formed Welsh Calvinistic Methodist Mission at the initiative and financial support of the British government.

The co-operation between the British administration and Christian Missions began during the time of British Commissioners to the Khasi Hills David Scott and Francis Jenkins. David Scott who was an evangelical Christian was deeply influenced by the Serampore Baptists especially William Carey under whom he had studied. He on his own initiative invited the Serampore Mission to start work at Guwahati. Francis Jenkins who followed Scott as the commissioner promoted the interest of the American Baptist Missionaries. David Scott and Jenkins both felt that the Government need not worry about adverse reaction to Christianity as the people like the Garos and Khasis did not have any established religion and, therefore, would not react to Christian work in a negative way as the plains people often reacted.

The first head of the Welsh Mission in Khasi hills was Rev. and Mrs. Thomas Jones who arrived at Cherrapunjee on the 22nd June 1841. Rev. Thomas Jones made radical modification, in way of the introduction of 27 Roman letter of the English alphabet instead of the Bengali alphabet that was being used by Rev. Pal and Lish. He enlisted the help of Lish's pupils U Duwan Rai and U Junkha for the purpose of replacing the Bengali Script with the Roman script in the translations.

Thomas Jones felt that the people needed to be educated and then only, could the process of evangelization start, as

the people were living under the influence of fear, superstition ignorance and sluggishness. The natives who had become used to the British battalion in Cherrapunjee were happy seeing another 'Saheb' in their midst. In order to feel the pulse Thomas Jones, accompanied by Lieutenant Lewin and Yule, visited a market place in Jaintia hills and found the people profoundly moved by the assurance of a free and full pardon for their sins and attainment of salvation through the belief in Jesus Christ.

Reverend and Mrs. Lewis undertook a few translations which were to serve as texts for the schools. The first was the La Lot Pule Banyngkong (first Khasi Reader), the Rhodd Man (mother's gift) which is a Welsh booklet on religious instruction and the La Lot Nongialam Kot-Tikar (book of Christian Catechism). He then began to work on the New Testament.

Eighteen months after the arrival of the Jones they were joined by Reverend and Mrs. William Lewis and Dr. Owen Richards. William Lewis undertook the translations of the four gospels and the book of Acts, the Pilgrims' Progress and the New Testament. In 1842, three schools were established in Cherra and by 1846 they had 3 ordained minister, two devoted sisters and a few other who voiced their desire to become Christian. Mr. and Mrs. Lewis, however, found the task of teaching the Khasi children almost hopeless, after the first

flush of interest. The missionaries then resorted to prize giving for the children who completed their lessons. They also undertook to support and look after twelve boys within the Mission compound in which endeavour Lt. Lewin put in financial support. Rev. William Jones set down certain rules which Christians had to follow. They were:

"1) they should completely disclaim all traditional religious practices and rituals.

2) they should faithfully observe Sundays (Sabbath) i.e. by attending church and not doing any work.

3) they should have knowledge of the fundamental principles of Christianity.

4) they should live in a manner befitting the Gospel."<sup>7</sup>

Rev. Lewis had set the standard of the Church high and clear from the beginning by emphasising quality and placing the candidates for conversion on probation. They were judged on their observance of the above rules and abstaining from intoxicants.

The first converts of the Welsh Calvinist Mission in Khasi and Jaintia Hills were U Amos and U Rujon who were baptised in 1846. By then, the Christian truth had obtained a strong hold in this area and there was no longer any necessity of offering enticements for attendance in the schools as the students were found to have been influenced by

the missionary teachings and in some instances were refusing to join in family sacrifices and despite severe persecution and attempts of the families to dissuade them the young people were not deterred in their desire to become Christians.

In 1847, 1000 copies of the Gospel of Mathew was placed before the Khasi public and by then, more people were coming forward to be baptised despite familial opposition and persecution. In 1848 Ka Nabon from Mawmluh who was kept under close guard by her relatives, was released from house imprisonment with the help of the British officials after she sought the help of the missionaries. Ka Nabon then became the first women convert among the Khasis. In 1849, three persons who were helping the missionaries with their translating works as they had the knowledge of the English language and Khasi, were baptised. They were Ka Jarpha, Ka Phuh and Ka Bir.

In 1850 the first Christian marriage between U Luh and Ka Phuh was solemnised. In 1852, the first Khasi child baptised, Ka Salome, and a trend for Biblical names was set. Burials instead of observance of traditional rites were inculcated despite strong opposition. By now a nucleus of khasi converts was formed in the Khasi society, these converts adhered to the Christian way of life as laid down by the missionaries.

As the church was making headway into the Khasi society new rules and regulations of the Christian way of life were being drawn up. Alongside new schools were being opened and inroads were also being made into War Khasi territories by the Missionaries. In 1853, a church was established at Shella and in 1854, a school in Jowai and by 1856 Christianity acquired a foot hold in other areas of Jaintia hills. Churches were established in West Khasi hills in 1860-61 and by 1875 the Bhoi area also saw the advent of Christian missionaries.

Establishment of schools were facilitated by the order of the then Governor General of India Lord Dalhousie, who had instructed his Government to extend help to the Missionaries in 1854. He instructed that an amount of Rs.50/- monthly was to be sanctioned as grants in aid to the missionaries for the promotion of secular instruction in the hills. This grant was a result of the appeal of A.J.M. Mills who came to Cherra as the Commissioner in 1853. Mills felt that the Mission had made commendable efforts to enlighten the tribe, who probably had no religion and recommended that all future appointment to the police should be made from the educated and a public school should be established by the Government to give impulse to the exertions of the Missionaries.<sup>8</sup> The Government agreed to Mills recommendations about appointments of the educated in the police but the recommendation for a

public school was not accepted. In a resolution adopted by the Governor General in Council, it was felt that the spread of education among the Khasis and other hill tribes could be effectively secured by extending help to the Missionary institutions, and thus the grant-in-aid was made. Mills had made his recommendations because when in 1853, Mills arrived at Cherra he was informed that the people were apathetic to education and the chiefs were actively opposed to it. As regards evangelisation too there were only about twenty four converts in and around Cherra. Mills was apprised of the situation by Hudson, the principal Assistant Commissioner and Robinson, Inspector of Schools who said that use of Roman character in the institution was not popular amongst the Khasis and, therefore, the low attendance in schools.

In 1854, schools and churches were established in Jaintia Hills and in 1856. For the first time a local by the name of U Larsing Khongwir, who was one of the first Khasi converts to Christianity, was sent to Jowai and later to Shangpung, Nongbah, Sutnga and Laman, by the mission to preach the Gospel. He not only built churches but also repaired the mission premises. He also managed to make some conversions, remarkable among them being U Hat, a traditional priest from Jowai, and his wife Ka Synshar Shallam. As the Christians among the Jaintias were being greatly harassed by their irate kith and kin and missionaries made arrangements

for them to live within an area called 'Lum Chyrmang' which helped setting up their own society peacefully.

Around 1856, more publications like the four Gospels, Books of Acts, Pilgrim's Progress and portions of the New Testament were made available to the Khasi readers. These were produced by Mr. and Mrs. Lewis. Besides the above works Reverend Newman Hall also made available the work Come to Jesus.

In 1857 the Sepoy mutiny broke out but the Khasi and Jaintia Hills was hardly affected by it. However, it is said that three hundred native soldiers of Cherra who were Hindus were urged to join the revolt and planned to attack the Europeans in Sylhet station. Major Byng who was in command of the troops at Cherra hastened to curb the rebellion, inflicting crushing defeat on the rebels but at the cost of his life. Soon after came the Jaintia rebellions which disturbed the missionary activities from 1860 to 1862. The rebellion exploded mainly because of the interference of the British officer in the religious ceremonies of the Pnars. The rebellion was suppressed in 1863 when the leader Kiang Nongbah was captured and hanged. Colonel Haughton was extremely impressed by the fact that Christian Pnars did not join the rebels. In his report he urged that the grant to the Mission should be increased. By the end of 1862, the Grants in Aid was raised to 500/-.

In 1866, three more Missionaries and their wives arrived at Cherra. The Mission realised the need for its own printing press, two of which, were set up in Cherra under Griffith Hughes one of the missionaries. The first products of this press were a small pamphlet by Thomas Jones called The Complaint and the Cure and The Rules of Discipline.

Till the end of 1866, there were 10 churches, 65 day-schools and 307 Christians in the Khasi and Jaintia Hills and it was from this year that the Mission saw momentous growth. In 1867, the first Presbytery was held at Nongsawlia.

By now the Mission was functioning as a self-propagating one and by 1871, the students passed out from the Mission and were absorbed as teachers into the Mission. According to Morris it was from this time when competent Christian teachers from among the Khasis themselves were obtained that the beginning of the great progress of the Mission could be dated.

In 1862, Griffith Jones moved to Shillong and the British Government bought large tracts of land from the Syiem of Mylliem and in May 1864 the district headquarters were transferred from Cherra to Shillong. When Thomas Jones came and held three services in Shillong even though there were no Christians there, the people attended in large numbers and listened to his message quietly. From then onwards a new

Christian set up was on the way of being established in Shillong. The first school was set up here in 1870.

However, the Mission did not forsake work in other areas, in 1868, the Sirdar of Mawdem who was greatly influenced by the Christian teachings laid the foundation for Christianity there. In 1877, the Syiem of Mawnai became Christian as did the Syiem of Khadsawphra. The traditional political system of the Khasis required religious duties from the Syiem. Therefore, when U Borsing the heir to the Rajah of Cherra was converted, he had to relinquish his aspiration for Syiemship.

By this time the Mission had started concentrating on the Bhoi area with Jerman Jones as the Missionary with the proper zeal for Christianizing the people.

Initially, the people took a lot of umbrage at the idea of educating the girls but Mrs. Lewis gradually pushed reading materials like *Mother's Gift* towards the girls during their sewing and knitting classes and inspired them to take up education. This process started in 1853. By 1874, the opposition to education to both males and females had all but disappeared. It seems that around this time a much larger proportion of the Khasis knew a little of reading, writing and arithmetic than in a case of any other district of either Assam or Bengal. By the end of the century, there were

schools and churches in almost all the twenty nine khasis states.

The work of the Welsh Presbyterian Mission received encouragement from administrative quarters through many direct and indirect courses.

The Government and Christian missionaries worked together in the sphere of education as the officials of the British administration were convinced that education would be effective in civilizing the natives and thereby making them peaceful and loyal subjects.

The pioneer Missionaries of the Welsh Presbyterian Church were warmly received by the British official at Cherrapunjee and in the initial stages of activities were afforded protection. Besides protection, the missionaries were given help in their endeavours by extending monetary help in educating the natives as the previously mentioned cases of Lt. Lewin who supported the education of twelve Children in the mission compound and of Nabon the first women convert who was brought out of her family's control with the help of the British authorities to the Mission illustrates.

In the meanwhile, the government too, encouraged the policies of the mission by giving grants in aid to the mission for education even "when the officers were fully aware of the fact that the mission schools were closely

connected with the church, the school often preceded the church."<sup>9</sup>

Though the British did not overtly promote Christianization, the covert encouragement was never lacking. One overt statement, however, can be called to memory here, the Prime Minister of Britain, Lord Palmerstone in 1854 said that 'it is not only our duty but it is our interest to promote the diffusion of Christianity as far as possible throughout the length and breadth of India'.<sup>10</sup> The British administrators and missionaries made no difference between education and evangelisation realising that one was handmaid to the other. As Thomas Jones once said, "the only plan which appears to me likely to answer a good purpose is to establish schools in the various villages, to teach the Khasis children and adults to read their own language and to instruct them in the principles of the Christian religion . . . . In this way we shall not only bring up the young people in the knowledge of the Gospel doctrine but we shall also teach them to read and when we shall have translated and printed the Holy scriptures into their language, we shall have some, at least in every family, able to read them and I may add, able to understand them also, and I would regard this as an important step towards their evangelisation."<sup>11</sup> Again after the quelling of the Jaintia rebellion the officiating agent to the Governor General in

that region. Colonel Haughten, mentioned in his report that it was evident that the education imparted by its agents was not only "effective in civilizing the native, but in making them peaceful and loyal subjects."<sup>12</sup> Thus the purpose of the missionaries could be said to be fully realised.

Another statement made by G.A. Jones goes to prove the point that evangelisation was as much if not more encouraged by the British. He said "In a country it is impossible to lay the foundation of a strong moral and spiritual conscious people if the word of God is not made available to the people and in a language they understand."<sup>13</sup> The Education Report of the province of Assam in 1881 laid down that "It is difficult to convince a Garo or a Khasia of advantage of learning. The only lever that has been found effective is that of religion."<sup>14</sup>

It can, therefore, be held that the British policy of civilizing the group to be ruled was realised effectively by the Missionaries who were encouraged in their efforts by the administrators. Education became an effective means of 'civilizing the heathens' who was thought to be without any moral and cultural values. The point of view that the people were uncouth and devoid of values were promoted by the missionaries so that the people felt themselves lacking value which only conversion to Christianity could give them. Examples, like U Borsing's statement when asked to give up

Christianity in favour of his Syiemship "I can throw off my cloak and my turban, but the covenant I have made with God I can in no way cast away", and when told that he would not get the Syiemship he said, "I have Lord Jesus Christ as my portion"<sup>15</sup> serves to elucidate the point. Another example of the loss of respect for their tradition is the statement made by the Syiem of Mawnai, "the man who followed Christ became sober and honest and truthful and this religion is the hope of our country".<sup>16</sup> All things traditional were thought to be foolish and irrelevant. U Tirahsing of the Malngiang (royal clan) on becoming Christian, once remarked at the objection of his clan members "I was as foolish myself once as they are".<sup>17</sup>

The Missionaries encouraged the people to think that their own tradition was wrong and bad, which should necessarily be over ruled and set aside. Rev. Jerman Jones once said that the converts 'must never forget that they were freed from the powers of darkness, so that they will have compassion for those who have not found the light.'<sup>18</sup> The Khasi Christian converts gathered fellow villagers to speak to them of the 'right way' and in these talks they were told of their heathen ways which would prove ineffective in life. The missionaries performed acts to prove the ineffectiveness of the traditional beliefs as was the case of John Roberts by

the church who in 1897, secured a land next to a sacred grove and made a house discounting the belief in evil spirits.

The policies of the missionaries were well contrived to encourage the embracement of Christianity, for this they took to making church leaders among the Ihasi Christians, giving them good posts as deacons, teachers and control of their own churches. Besides which, the first factor which influenced the growth of the church was not so much the establishment of schools as the manning of these schools by dedicated people whose vocation was to evangelize and preach. They were known as 'teacher-evangelists' and were the greatest asset to the church.<sup>19</sup> Besides which, the policies of the Mission centering around the three principles of (1) self-support, (2) self-control and (3) self-propagation saw to the advancement of Christianity. These principles were laid down in 1849. The first principles looked after the maintenance of the church from the contribution of its members for which a register was maintained. The next principle called for appointments of office bearers in various fields like spiritual level, extension work, welfare, progress etc. The last principle was meant to encourage this indigenous church to spread the Christian message and act to bring about the growth of Christian families. Courts were also set up within this network to see to the proper organisation and administration of the Church. The purpose of the Mission was

to develop indigenous leadership thereby creating a wholly autonomous church which would incorporate converts well grounded in the essential truths of the Gospel as laid down by William Lewis. These leaders were so well injected with zeal that they were totally prepared to face any difficulties.

Another missionary group made its appearance in the Khasi Hills around 1870. This was the Roman Catholic Mission which initially started work at Laitlynsew and Shella and in Shillong where it established a health resort and a small church. Shillong gradually became the base for the Catholic Church, from where the other areas of Khasi Hills were permeated. 'The society of the Divine Saviour' or the 'Salvatorians' was established in 1881 but it was only in 1890 under the leadership of Father Otto Hopfenmueller that first move of learning the Khasi language and translating Catholic religious writings and establishment of a printing press was made. By 1891 after the death of Fr. Hopfenmueller, more missionaries and three sisters were sent here and by the end of the same year they had already made one convent, some schools and several more centres.

The late entry of another mission was on account of the British policy of not allowing two missions working in the same place. But their late entry served a good purpose as they had time to observe, being present in nearby Assam from

1850, the working of the other missionaries and could do away with the initial teething problems. They realised that the best way to make the first approach to the people was through services, that is, by establishing hospitals, schools, colleges, technical schools, press, orphanages, creches and such like.

The First World War of 1914 set back the work of the Catholic Mission considerably as the German Salvatorians were considered enemy aliens. However, within this time they had already organised a Catholic church and founded a Catholic community consisting of 813 members. Besides, they had translated portions of the scripture, a catechism, a song and prayer book, set up a periodical named *U Nongialam Katholik* (a Catholic leader - later named *Ka Iang Kristan* - a Christian home). All this had set the way for spreading Catholic teaching and perspectives among the people not forgetting the educational and welfare institutions.

By 1921, the Salesians of Don Bosco, another Catholic group re-entered the Jhansi and Jaintia Hills. They now concentrated in the villages and the areas not well penetrated by the Welsh Mission and continued their educational work and other services. The Catholic missionaries sought conversions through humanitarian services, besides they went closer to the people and adapted to their ways with greater tolerance, thereby getting

converts with more ease. By 1931, they had around 15,056 converts.

The Catholic ecclesiastical structure too incorporated local people. The Catholic Church had access to more funds from many foreign countries beside their own initiatives at organising fetes to raise funds.

In 1874 another mission by the name of Anglican Church had started functioning in the Khasi and Jaintia Hills. In 1876, its Church by the name All Saints' Church, was established. This Church had the support of the government as it was set up initially to administer to the spiritual needs of the Europeans. Its evangelical work among the local population was extremely limited and, therefore, they did not gather a large following. This Mission took a more strict view towards Khasi custom and because of this disregard for traditional customs and it being a chaplaincy church, there was only a small number of adherents to this Church.

The Seventh Day Adventist Mission started working in the North-Eastern region of the country as late as 1933. Its parent body was in Washington D.C. They were more liberal in their attitudes, allowing argument, reasoning and choice in the practice of Christianity. This Mission too was a self-supporting one, raising funds through contributions, individual donations, fetes, taxes and tithes.

Other smaller churches include All-in-One Christ, Church of Christ, Pentecostal Church, Jehovah's witness the last of which is now defunct.

Digressing from the workings of the various churches, a word about the historical background of the role of the government machinery during the British rule seems necessary.

The administrative policy of the British was that of non-interference in the hills, in the initial phase, however, for the purpose of maintaining their economic interest in trade, certain administrative changes were made and the Regulation-1 of 1797 was enacted with the intention to curb the monopoly of trade. This regulation did not prove very effective and in context of the Burmese threat and David Scott's 'forward policy', he was appointed as the Agent to the Governor General to the North East Frontier of Bengal. This was in 1824. Scott enacted a system of revenue from the chiefs and curtailed their judicial authority. Rebellions of the chiefs were encountered and curtailed by 1833 and the government made the chiefs sign agreements saying they were under the control and authority of the Political Officer at Cherrapunjee. The Khasi Hills was placed under the political agency separate from the North East Frontier of Bengal with the Political Officer or Agent in control vested with wide powers. In 1854, the category of Principle Assistant to Commissioner was established with civil powers, placed under

the supervision of the Political Agent and the Commissioner of Assam. However, the earlier system was reverted to soon. The authority over Khasi and Jaintia Hills was kept with the Political Agent, also known as Principal Assistant to the Commissioner who had dual functions of a Civil Magistrate and the Political Agent. After the Second Jaintia rebellion, around 1862, a Deputy Commissioner with powers of a Civil and Session Judge came up and as the civil jurisdiction of the Judicial Commissioner of Assam was no longer applicable, the Deputy Commissioner became the pivot of district administration. The Deputy Commissioner had under him his assistants called Sirdars, Dolois, Patons, and Lyngdohs. In 1864, the headquarter of Assam was shifted from Gauhati to Shillong. In 1875, the Scheduled District Regulation was enacted which was made applicable from 1884. This Regulation laid down that 'operation of the enactments relating to civil and criminal procedure, court fees, stamps, transfer of property and registration was barred'.<sup>20</sup> After the First World War, the British administrators made reforms in their administrative policies and the North Eastern Region came under the excluded area policy in which legislation could be effected only as directed by the Governor General in Council or Governor-in-Council, thus placing this region under the backward tracts policy. From 1920 is noticed a new awareness regarding politics among the Khasi when they forged a Khasi-

Jaintia United Guild which became the Khasi National Durbar in 1923 and also formed the Federation of Khasi States in 1934. The main intention of these Associations was to consider political question, represent their demands and ask for their share in politics and judicial affairs. By 1933, after constitutional discussions, it was decided to place Khasi, Jaintia, Garo Hills and Mikir Hills Districts in the category of partially excluded area with ministerial control but with overriding control of the Governor. Two Khasi representatives Mavis Dunn Lyngdoh and J.J.M. Nichols-Roy eventually became ministers.

The whole purpose of the above administrative operations was to keep the North Eastern Region, as separate from the Indian 'nation', as the British felt that the people of this area were different from the others. The British policies in this region was to prevent the participation of the people in the National Movement for freedom and keeping it as a British Crown Colony.

The situation was considerably rectified after the country attained independence. The resistance offered to the British by khasi leaders like U Tirot Sing and others finally bore fruit. The Government of India initially faced considerable problems in getting the Khasi state to sign the instrument of accession. The matter was to be decided by the khasi constitution making Durbar constituted in 1949. This

Durbar included all the chiefs of the Khasi states and leaders like Nichols-Roy. On September 1949, it was decided that the United Khasi-Jaintia Hills District would operate as a single administrative unit. In the meanwhile the Sixth Schedule applicable to this area was adopted in the Constitution on the initiative of Nichols-Roy. In 1950 with the adoption of the Constitution, 'the Khasi states (Administration of Justice) Order 1950' came into force with the Deputy Commissioner entrusted with the civil and criminal jurisdiction to be assisted by Assistants and the courts of the Syiems, Sirdars, Lyngdohs and Wahadadars.

The Constitution of India accorded statutory recognition to the principles of non-interference of the customary ways of the people which got a further boost with the Sixth Schedule and the formation of the District Councils. The Khasi Hills Autonomous District Council was inaugurated on 27th June, 1952. The District Council was formed in response to the demands of the tribal people for autonomy for preservation of their ethnic identity, rights over lands, natural resources, customary laws and traditions. However, the District Councils funds were limited to that which was allotted to them by the State Government and the royalties from leases and licences over their land. Besides the laws of the District Councils were subordinate to the legislations of the State government. Under these conditions,

the councils have not given the traditional institutions like the Chiefs and Durbars any statutory authority or even credible recognition, thereby assuming a complete control over the traditional institutions. Under these circumstances, the traditional institutions which was being gradually undermined since the British colonial period has turned a full circle and is being totally subsumed.

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## Chapter—III

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### SUBJUGATION AND RESISTANCE

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In the context of the situation of intrusion of an alien society and domination over a period of time, a situation arose when an intention to preserve community life as it existed before the colonizers intervened came up. Resistance, therefore, is preservation and covert defense of a way of life that was learnt over a period of time through experience and worked fairly well for the society to give it a distinctive identity. It was not long before the Khasi community started to feel oppressed with the changes introduced in their midst by the alien power. Thus the marks of resistance to the domination and subjugation by the foreign ruler started to be become visible.

The concept of colonialism as 'domination' denotes not only extra-territorial expansion of a political and economic nature which is generally taken to be connoted by this term, but also constitutes a system of controls and subjugation meant to facilitate the exploitation of the colonized people. The facilitation to this purpose was particularly the work of the merchants and the missionaries. However, the process of

spreading civilization and upliftment were not viewed in the same light as the British by the colonized group. Therefore, to better understand the phenomenon of cultural domination, I would like to give as illustration (a) the role of the Syiem and the Durbars in Khasi traditional society and (b) the greatly damaged status of the same after the advent of the British in the same community.

As I have tried to state earlier, the political culture of the Khasis emerged from within its social structure. Lack of security of life and property compelled the people to live in large villages. However, they had a tendency of splitting up into numerous petty groups, each under its own head. The groups formed states which had a democratic form of government. The elements within these politics were (i) the chief variously known as the *Syiem*, *Lyngdoh*, *Wahdadar*, *Dolloi* and *Pator*; (ii) *La Balthraw* or the founding clans; (iii) the State Durbar; (iv) the Durbar Saad; (v) the Village Durbar and the (v) Clan Durbar.<sup>1</sup>

The Chief (*Syiem*) was the executive head of the State. The office was reserved for the ruling clan of the particular area (*La Hima*). The ruling clan (*Jait Syiem*) was made up of different sub-clans (*Kpoh*) and families (*La ang*). Only the male members of the designated sub-clan of the *Jait Syiem* were eligible to become the chief. Eligibility was determined

by the principles of matriliney. The son of the eldest sister became the heir and was then eligible to become the Syiem.

The institution of syiemship was as old as the community itself and its origin was believed to be divine and totemic. Some syiems, however, traced their ancestry to the plains. According to tradition, the first Khasi Syiems were *Ki Syiem - Madur Mashut, Ki Syiem Synteng and Ki Syiem Shillong*. The other royal clans came afterwards and were descendants of other Khasi clans or Dikhar clans.

The Syiem was entitled to an income which consists mainly of a toll levied on those who sold goods at markets in his territory and also from the state lands. There was no land revenue system among the Khasis. The Syiem also received a state subscription known as '*pyntshok*' which was voluntary and meant for the expenses of the state ceremonies. Judicial fines were another source of the Syiem's income but this was shared with the members of the Durbar.

The chief played an important role in the social, religious, political, economic and festive aspects of the state. His varying role was signified by the use of different referents to the syiem which are as follows:

- 1) '*Ki Syiem Ki Bler*' - which means the chief the God; connoting the divine origin theory. This was applicable in some states like Khyriem where the chief was seen as an agent of justice with strong religious sanction.

The concept of *Ka Sad ka Sunon* further elucidates the concept of *ka Syiem ka Blei*. According to R.S. Lyngdoh, "the institution of (*Ka Sad ka Sunon*) stands both in its impersonal and material form. As an impersonal institution, it stands, as a symbol of sovereignty; secondly, it stands as a symbol of unity of the state. Thirdly, it symbolizes justice with impartiality. Fourthly, it symbolizes peace, harmony and prosperity. Lastly, it symbolizes the highest ideal of Khasi religion."<sup>2</sup>

ii) *U Syiem U kmie* - the chief, the mother; highlighting the matrilineal ideology. The chief was said to be like the mother to care, feed, protect, teach the subjects to be part of the society. This aspect of the chief's function had found much ground in the state of Cherrapunji.

iii) *U Syiem U Mraw* - the chief, the slave. This concept seemed to put forth in the Mawiang state where the chief was seen as a lowly person, a scapegoat for all wrongs or a person who was responsible in every aspect. This aspect of chieftainship had found ground in Mawiang state where none of the clans accepted this position and therefore a non-Khasi was appointed to the office.

The chief had both secular and religious duties, but in whatever aspect of this duty his was an extremely responsible position. He was the guardian of Khasi law, authority on moral code, protector, welfare officer and military head. He

was highly respected by his subjects, i.e. the people of his Hima.

iv) *Ki Balhraw* : This means the founding clans which were believed to be the original settlers of the state. Each clan had its own *darbar* known as *Darbar Kur* and a senior member was designated as the headman (*Rangbah Kur*) who was a representative at the State *Darbar*. The *Rangbah Kur* functioned as the advisor to the Chief in carrying out the affairs of the State.

v) The *Darbar Hima* also known as the State *Darbar* was the supreme authority of the state. This *darbar* included the chief who was a President, the *Ki Balhraw*, and representatives of the *raio* and village councils.

The *Darbar Hima* was the highest legislative, judicial and executive body. It was also the keeper of customary laws, law and order and the moral behaviour of the people. The *Darbar Hima* acted as the Supreme Court of the land in settling disputes and it undertook the responsibility for executing its decisions.

vi) The *Raio Darbar* - This *darbar* covered a number of villages which together were known as the *Raio*. All the village headmen were the members of this *Darbar* and among them a headman was elected known as the *Rangbah Raio*. In some cases additional representatives were elected. The main function of the *Darbar Raio* was the maintenance and

allocation of the raid lands. The Durbar Raid looked after forests and settled boundary disputes between the villages.

vii) The Village Durbar - The village in the Khasi-Jaintia hills was an organized political unit with its own council known as *La Durbar Shnong*. An elected headman (*U Rangbah Shnong*) presided over the Durbar. Membership of this Durbar consisted of a male representative of each family. The Durbar Shnong was responsible for the welfare of the village, it saw to the maintenance of law and order, village ponds, bridle paths, bridges and forests. The village durbar had judicial functions too in way of resolving conflicts within the village and trying cases of minor and major crimes.

viii) The Clan Durbar - The clan being the nucleus of the Khasi Jaintia Society, had its own durbar known as *La Durbar Kur*. This durbar was made up of the male member representatives of each family and sometime sub-clans (*Ipoh*). The eldest member was appointed as the clan headman known as *U Rangbah Kur* also referred to as *U Nā Rangbah* - 'the head uncle'. He was the executive head of the Durbar and his duties included looking after clan property, settlement of disputes between clan members and also trying cases of theft, adultery, trespass, damage to property etc. committed by the clan members. He was to look after the general welfare of the clan members which included performing clan rituals and acting as the clan priest and in this duty he was assisted by

his brothers and nephews. The meetings of the clan Durbar were held in the original house of the clan. The clan headmen generally became the member of the village *darbar*.

The Khasi judiciary consisted of the elders and the heads of the state. In the village, it was often the village headman who settled disputes with the help of the village elders. Major disputes which could not be settled were taken over to the *Syiem* and his council of ministers. Such cases were usually decided by the *Ka Durbar ka Hima Pyllun*, (full state *darbar*) consisting of elders, village headmen, the ministers and the *Syiem*.<sup>3</sup> This *Durbar* acted as the jury with the *Syiem* as the judge. They tried both criminal and civil cases. The *Syiem* and *Durbar* combined in themselves both administrative and judicial powers.

Taboos, ancient moral codes and precepts, fables, *darbar's* resolutions and antecedent, concepts and instructions laid down in the ancient covenants and agreements were the various sources from which Khasi law had been derived.<sup>4</sup> Crimes were rare but whenever they occurred were dealt with, with fines, and sometimes life imprisonment and also death sentences. Land disputes were common and when became unsurmountable, were solved by the water ordeal. In this ordeal the accused and the defendant were immersed in water and whosoever could stay longer were adjudged the winner. Sometime they were asked to get into the water and

recover a pot of gold which was hidden inside previously, whoever got it was adjudged the winner. Other punishments like expatriation and keeping in stock 'pyidait diengsong' were practised. Murderers were often given life imprisonment or the death sentence.

In the political and judicial spheres as in the other spheres of life the Khasi world has undergone radical changes. In these spheres the changes were more manifest as it came along with the policies of colonialism. The authorities of the *Syiem* gave way to that of the Commissioners. The process of change commenced with the post-1830's phenomena of putting down the rebellion against the British. The government concluded a series of treaties, engagements and recognizance with the chiefs of the various states with the understanding from the '*Syiems*' that they held their office under the British Government and was liable to be removed on various charges. The British left the '*Syiems*' to their own devices after imposing a fine on them and keeping them under the British political authority, besides, a new class of chiefs called '*Sirdars*' came up. This process of settlement of the dispute divested the *Syiems* and the *Durbars* of a lot of their powers. The succession of the *syiems* had to receive the recognition and confirmation of the British authorities through issuance of '*Sanads*' of appointment. Even the system of election of the '*Syiem*'

underwent a change as popular election instead of election by the Durbars became more common. The Durbars which were made up of the elders and leading persons of the village, clan and society was more or less placed under the Syiem who then elected his loyalists as Durbar members, thus reducing the purpose and the authority of this institution. The sanctity of this institution as the guiding authority was thus made irrelevant. The Syiems on the other hand not only had to seek 'ekrarnamahs' and 'Sanads' for this appointment from the British but also had to submit his powers and authority to a hierarchy of British authorities. With the coming of the British the Khasi and Jaintia Hills territory was placed under a political agent or the principal assistant to the Commissioner who was to function as the civil magistrate and political agent. The next authority was the Deputy Commissioner who had the powers of administration of civil and criminal justice and who could empower other village authorities to dispose of petty cases for him. After Independence the Sixth Schedule and the District Council was incorporated. The Syiem now functioned under the District Council's authority. Under this new political system the Syiem and his Durbar became more or less titular authorities with the status of officers of the government working under the District Council's supervision. The Syiems had been given powers of Additional Magistrate within their respective

Syiemship and were thus empowered to try civil and criminal cases, except murders. However, the exercise of these powers and also the appointments of the *Syiems* is at the discretion of the District Council. The District Council regulates appointments of *Syiems* by the United Khasi-Jaintia Hills Autonomous District (Appointment and Succession of Chiefs and Headmen) Act 1957. Besides they also issue 'Sanads' as did the British. The traditional system of elections of chiefs have thus been taken over by the District Council in the present day. The divine sanction of the *Syiems* and Durbars and their interdependence and authority in maintaining the society has become irrelevant today.

Domination and subjugation in the system of beliefs, ideas, customs, laws arts and morals which were accentuated by the political domination of the imperialists. The domination in the former spheres was definitely caused by the introduction of a new ideology propagated by the Christian missionaries who saw to the realization of the imperialist's 'civilizing responsibility'. The missionaries, therefore, became the agent of successful colonization providing the colonizers with the ideological justification for their rule.

Before we step into the world of ideological domination, it would be convenient to delve more elaborately into the political and economic domination of the British

imperialist among the Khasis, a resultant condition of the previously mentioned changes and missiological developments.

The changes mentioned earlier effected drastically many spheres of the Khasi life. The land system which has been referred to briefly (page 21-22) requires a little more elaboration. As discussed earlier there were two classes of land, the *Ri Raid* and *Ri Lynti* land. These, together formed '*Ka It la Hima*' which means 'a state within its border and extent.'<sup>5</sup>

The *Ri Raid* or public lands were to be used by the community and any individual could be allotted the right to use and occupy the land but had no heritable or transferable rights. If, however, a person who has been allotted the *Ri Raid* land failed to use or occupy the land for a consecutive period of three years, the land reverted back to the community. The *Ri Raid* lands were divided into various categories. One being the '*Ri Bam Syiem*' or '*Raid Hima*' which were allotted to the *Syiem*, this can be called Crown lands as they were meant for the support of the *Syiem*'s family. These lands could not, however, be alienated. A land tax was levied by the *Syiem* on such lands on the person who cultivated such land. Another class of *Ri Raid* land was the '*Ri Lyngdoh*' which was meant for the use and support of the *Lyngdoh* or the priests of the state. Another category was the *Ri Shnang* (village lands), which were the property of the village meant

to provide the village with supply of firewood, thatching grass, etc. for the use of the village.

The *Ri Khain* lands were defined as the portion of land owned and cultivated by members of a clan. An important category of *Ri Raid* lands were the sacred groves called '*Law Kyntang*'. These cluster of trees were held as sacred and protected. No person was allowed to cut timber, disobedience was considered an offence. The only use the timber and products were put into were for religious purposes. The category of *Ri Raid* land '*Law Niam*' and '*Law Adong*' were kept aside for use for religious purposes and crematory purposes, respectively.

There was no concept of imposition of land revenue, land being the property of the clans, villages and community as a whole. Individual absolute ownership, however, was not totally unknown.

The lands to which owners had absolute possession and ownership were known as *Ri Kynti* lands. *Ri Kynti* lands were of two types, *Ri Kur* and *Ri Thurid*. *Ri Kur* was the land which belonged to a particular clan, while land which was bought by an individual, was known as '*Ri Thurid*'. Another category of ancestral land were known as *Ri Nongtymmen* (land which was owned by a family which had become extinct and lapsed to the state or chief).

With the inception of the British political authority the ownership and divisions of land became irrelevant. The British had acquired a lot of land of their own and could do as they pleased with it. The new system of laws too allowed wills and land could thus be taken off from the usual system of inheritance. The khasis started using the land as their own and not for public purposes as was required in the class of Ri Raid land. In the first place, the borders of the states were relocated by the British authorities and whichever authority was recognised as the ruler made themselves the owners of the land allocated to them. In the private level too, lands allocated to different members became converted to private ownership, this was accentuated by the need of lands for cultivating new crops and thus bringing in more money, besides there being the increasing pressure on land. In Shella the persons who cultivated oranges called themselves *Jamindars*. Besides these changes towards private ownership, the Government too had a hand in the changing land rights system by taking leases of waste lands and forests. All these changes along with the people's own attitude towards "sacred forests and religious lands by terming the earlier sanctity attributed to them as superstitions contributed to the change in the land divisions and ownership patterns.

The coming of the British as colonialist necessarily had the economic advantage criteria intertwined in their policies. Of course, certain measures introduced by the British worked for the advantage of the khasis.

In the sphere of agriculture and horticulture, for instance, new crops like potato and European fruits and the value thus realised introduced the people to a cash economy with its associated advantages.

Again in the sphere of trade especially in lime, coal and iron the British authorities took over entirely by taking leases from the chiefs, thus not only giving the chiefs a monetary advantage through royalty but also acknowledging the mines as the chiefs property while in fact, it was the state or clan property.

In the sphere of land and economy thus, the economic and political colonialism took shape bringing with it the inevitable social consequences.

In the present day though the traditional political system is all but eroded, the people have not allowed the traditional political institutions to be totally obliterated. The Government of India was persuaded to incorporate the sixth schedule and within it the District Councils in order to retain the traditional institutions of the khasis. The District Councils were entitled to pass laws, rules, regulations, Acts, etc. relating to issues like land, forest,

primary school education, planning processes, markets, trade, development activities according to the needs of the people.

However, one of the traditional political institution which still functions at a limited scale is the 'Darbar Shnong' (Village Council). This Council works at the village level and in the townships at the locality level. The members are elected through voting by males who have reached the age of eighteen. The persons chosen as Darbar members are generally active males with experience. The young males functions as 'Ki Nongpyrta Shnong' (announcer) to announce the meetings and activities which is done by moving around the entire 'shnong' area beating drums. Today the same procedure is followed and announcements are made using a megaphone while drums are still beaten to alert the people. The 'Darbar Shnong' now-a-days, work with the Government agencies and functionaries and NGOs to promote developmental activities like maintenance of drinking water supply, electricity, roads, schools. People of the locality owning houses pay a tax to these Durbars. The Durbars also have authority to chastise anti-social elements. The people still respect the Durbar members especially the 'Rangbah Shnong' (the head of the Council) and refer to him in cases of locality problems.

Another traditional socio-political organisation which is retained to some extent are the 'Darbar Kur'. Many kurs

especially in the urban areas have got together at different points of time, for example the *Seng Kur Rlah* was formed in 1926 and functioned with renewed vigour from 1965. The Welfare Society of the *Kharlongor Balhraw* clan was formed in 1967 and also registered as a society in the same year. These clan societies were formed with the objective of promoting the welfare, unity, upkeep of clan and sub-clan affiliations, maintaining clan lands, solving problems of the clan members and maintaining order among them and also to protect and preserve traditional Khasi culture.

I have shown so far how a traditional oral culture was subjected to an alien administration, alien culture and ideology which naturally brought about changes in that society. Having already discussed the administrative policies and the resultant changes in the society, I would like to point out that the cultural influence emanating from political and economic changes are only minimal compared to the changes brought about by the Christian missionaries and Christianity of the different factions of the churches.

The Christian missionaries were seen as 'white' and superior as it was the 'white men' who ruled. The local people were unable to distinguish between 'white men who ruled' and the 'white men who preached' - they both had the same lifestyles and as the rulers they were looked up to, naturally the 'white men who preached' were no different.

These white men between themselves, not through any evil intentions but were human instincts, tried to make each others existence comfortable. Therefore, they preferred to build up an environment as similar as their own homes. It was basically this psychological oneness which brought about a collaboration. The missionary as messengers of the Gospel with their bounden duty to spread the 'Kingdom of God' tended to become a willing partner when colonial expansion promised propagation of Christian faith. On the other hand the political conditions, improvement of transportation and economic development fostered conditions wherein Christian faith could take deeper roots. 'Christian imperialism' therefore, worked well primarily under the colonial administration and the colonialists idea that it was their responsibility to spread civilization was realised credibly through the missionaries.

In the Khasi situation this kind of colonialism was noticed from statements like "Hitherto the Khasis has known no way of securing a plank but by hacking a tree with their hatchets, but when the Saheb by means of his saw, obtained several smooth planks from one tree, their admiration was unbounded. Crowds of sightseers often numbering as many as fifty or a hundred would come from distant villages to see 'the man who could do everything and who could tell them about God.'"<sup>6</sup> The 'Saheb' referred to here is Thomas Jones one

of the first missionaries in the Khasi Hills. The missionaries though not deliberately, were successful in creating an awe amongst the simple tribals, who saw them as being able to do everything and as better in every sphere.

The colonial administrators on the other hand encouraged the missionaries not only to spread for the purpose of 'civilizing' but also to enable themselves to overcome the fear that the colonisers would not be able to consolidate their authority over the subject unless they became Christians and only the missionaries would be able to penetrate more deeply into the people's lives.

The missionaries went on to penetrate into the people's lives by using various means. The first was in way of subverting the existing belief system. The traditional belief system amongst the Khasis provided them with the guarantee of security and the totality of the 'cause' of their existence. This system was termed as 'superstitious', 'pagan', 'irrational fears', 'devil worship' and that Christianity was the only way to see them through life. The traditional rituals and ceremonies were shown as having no direct link with God and even their sacred places (e.g. sacred groves) were shown as not necessarily sacred and so disrespect to these elements were allowed. The missionaries began the process by separating the religious from the non religious elements, as they said only the latter gave the people their

distinctive identity. The latter elements was shown as relevant but the former as unnecessary and oppressive social customs and practices, desirably be done away with. The cultural elements that the Welsh missionaries did away with included, belief in spirits, sacrifices, dances, cremation of the dead, totemism and ancestor worship, many of which were related directly to state, village and family groups, besides giving meaning to the culture.

In a society where traditions and religion support each other to provide the values and sanctions and generally working the whole social system, the distinction and putting down one served to break the balance. Religion was divested of the supernatural sanction causing the people to revise their moral values and social codes. The example of John Roberts a missionary of the Presbyterian Church who in 1897 secured a land next to a sacred grove and build a house there, is remarkable. The sacred groves 'Law Lyntang' were believed to be inhabited by spirits 'Li ksuid li khrei' who harmed people if they entered without religious sanction. By building the house the missionaries discounted the belief in evil spirits and turned the people's mind from superstitions and so-called irrational fears.

The process of denigrating and superseding the traditional belief system and creating a new cultural ethos was further accentuated by the introduction of humanitarian

works like education and medical services. Education was mainly, Christian education, as the purpose was mainly to evangelise. The literature that was introduced to the schools consisted mainly of books like 'Ka Kot Tikar' (Christian Catechism), 'Ka Kitab Ba Nynglong' (the khasi Primer) which consisted mainly of stories from the Bible, 'Ka Gospel U Mathias' (The Gospel of St. Mathew), 'Ka Rhoddman' (Mother's Gift). The whole gamut of literature introduced among the unlettered khasi people was mainly Christian works. Another way of superseding was by alienating the people from their neighbours by introducing the Roman alphabet despite the demands of the people for use of the Bengali script which they felt would keep them in better touch and help in their trade and interaction with the Bengalis, their immediate neighbours.<sup>7</sup>

The missionaries were encouraged in their education schemes by the government through grants-in-aid when they knew that basically education was used as means of proselytization. Education was the main factor influencing the growth of the Church but as mentioned earlier, it was not only the establishment of schools that was the purpose of the missionaries but to evangelise through the dedicated teachers (page 67). The establishment of schools and introduction of literature was seen as the only plan to answer to the good purpose of evangelisation.

The type of literature in the school was means to encourage evangelisation. In the words of Curville 'the translation of the Bible marks a very important missiological event in the life of the Church. In the years before 1891, almost all converts were school pupils. After 1891, the lives of those who lived outside the schools were affected and they became Christians'.<sup>8</sup>

Alongside education was medical work which was undertaken with the purpose of 'conquering souls' by showing the magnanimity of Christian doctrines. During the outbreak of epidemics the khasis besides the usual prayers and sacrifices were willing to receive inoculations from their Bengali neighbours but were opposed to 'foreign medicines' and vaccinations from the British. The government in order to encourage the missionaries discouraged the visits of the Bengalis to the hills. The Welsh Mission introduced two medical missionaries by way of Jerman Jones and Dr. Griffiths during a severe epidemic period. 'Evidently it was during the epidemic outbreaks, the mission gain a great deal of popularity and conversions became easier.'<sup>9</sup> In the process of the introduction of western medical system the traditional beliefs of the khasis with regard to misfortunes and illness and 'cause' (refer p.30 ) were denigrated by means of western medicine and the new cause-effect relation.

The Church also brought about a new cultural ethos through the ecclesiastical organisation. The associations, Sunday schools, presbyteries, synods, councils, conventions, assemblies and dioceses served as means of strengthening the Christian culture. In these organisational structures the incorporation of local people was encouraged for management of Church affairs. The local Christians were firstly made well versed in the Christian ways. "It was imperative for those who want to be Christians that more than a change of religion, there must be a complete change in their lives and character".<sup>10</sup> As a second step they were told that they would have to face difficulties in order to serve the Lord.

The converts were encouraged to spread the Gospel even with their own funds. Advances of the Church could be attributed to the extensive employment of their-Priar helpers which was encouraged by the Church of Wales as they felt that only along this line alone could a strong and healthy development bringing about a Christian world be reasonably expected.

Within the Church the means of effecting a distinct world was through establishing a distinct Christian standard of renouncing all heathen practices, possessing an intelligent knowledge of Christian principle, observing a Sabbath, live and walk according to the Gospel and to lead a moral life. Here a group of people who believed in truth and

righteousness in all their activities not merely on a Sunday but everyday, were told that their system of communicating with God was immoral (e.g. their dances) and were taught Christian morals. The various cultural elements that were opposed were substituted by Christian ways of 'sacraments, congregational life, prayers, songs, burial of the dead, the Bible as the source of life, liturgy, hope and courage, ordained priests and a new form of religious life.'

Besides these conscious means of superseding the culture of the Khasis were the tertiary changes in form of adaptation of western clothes styles, western music, and names. This was mainly because of the perpetuation of the image of superiority of the 'white' people, and not merely the result of Christian ideas.

The realisation that many of their cultural elements were being lost much to the detriment of their identity, slowly asserted itself on the Khasis. Modernisation and exposure have contributed to the idea of ethnic identity, and the need to assert the same for maintaining a distinctiveness, was felt. Here the growth of tribal elites was a contributory factor. The Khasis started using their traditional dresses in ceremonies, even Christian brides were noticed wearing the traditional festive dress 'dhara', albeit in white.

The attendance in traditional festivals like 'A Pombiang Nongkrem' (which incidentally is known as 'the Nongkrem dance' may be to divest it of the religious element). The 'Behdieng'ham' of Christian Khasis-Frars are noticeable. The missionary views have been criticised, as is seen in the writing of Downe when he says 'sometimes the missionaries seemed to oppose traditional activities simply because they did not fit in with their own rather solemn evangelical notions of Christian propriety. Thus Welsh Missionaries opposed the Christian celebration of the traditional Jaintia harvest festival simply because there was a certain amount of levity involved."<sup>11</sup>

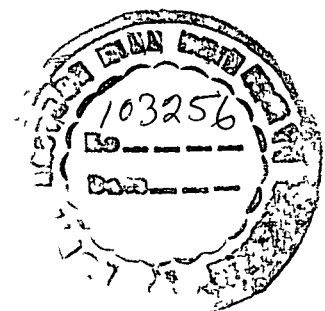
Another noticeable change among the Khasis is in naming the children. Earlier, the use of Christian Biblical names was common. In the present day the use of traditional names like 'Phioshuwa', 'Deimaphishisha', are fairly common.

Again the use of traditional Khasi herbal medicines and medicinal practices is noticeable amongst the people, including the Christian Khasis among whom, however, it is divested of the ritual aspects.

The traditional ethnic identity of Hynñiew Trep is commonly used today, though mainly as a distinctive, Khasi name rather than as an ethnic perception of themselves.

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## Chapter IV

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### THE SENG KHASI

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The religion of the Khasis was the basic guideline, the nerve centre of the Khasi society. The missionaries through undermining religion have caused a lot of confusion in the Khasi society as a whole. Religion serves the purpose of sanction and provides the guidelines. Therefore, without religion, society becomes directionless and it facilitates imposition of alien rules and causes a confusion of identity. In order to understand the role of the missionaries in cultural change it is essential to get an overview of the culture as it was and the system of interlinkages within the various components of the culture especially those like religion, politics, property and rules of property, family and rules thereof as experience has shown that even a minor change in these elements have a tendency of backfiring even if after a time.

The Khasis commonly call their religion the 'Niam Khasi'. The word *Niam* is a combination of two words 'Nia' which means reason, and 'im' which means 'living'. Thus etymologically, the word *Niam* means the 'living reason'<sup>1</sup>. The Khasi *Niam* can be divided into two parts: (1) *Ka Niam Tip*

Blei - knowledge of God, and (2) *Ka Niam Tip Briew, Tip Kur-Tip Kha* - knowledge of one's fellowmen and acceptance of the Khasi matrilineal system. In connection with his religion a Khasi also calls it *Ka Nia ka Jutang* which implies 'Reason' (*Nia*) and covenant (*Jutang*). The connotation of the concept *Ka Nia ka Jutang*<sup>2</sup> is that man through 'Reason' which has been bestowed upon him by God - the cause, builds a 'covenant' which covers the whole system of his transaction with God. A Khasi believes that only if man keeps his 'Reason', then God is with him. Keeping his 'Reason' involves being a whole human being. Religion in the conception is that "it should be the truth of our whole being as man and the consciousness of our personal relationship with our fellowmen as well as the consciousness of our personal relationship with God, our maker and creator who has created us for something."<sup>3</sup>

As mentioned earlier, the name given to God by the Khasis is *U Blei* who is the creator and sustainer of the universe, the almighty all-powerful, omniscient and omnipresent being. He is above gender, therefore, referred to as *U Blei* or *Ka Blei* ('*U*' denotes male and '*Ka*' female) he is also above number. He is formless but is given different names according to different spheres in life and different aspects of creation. Accordingly, he is denoted as *U Blei Trsi Kynrad* - God the Lord and Master of the Universe; *U Blei Nongthaw Nongbuh* - God the creator and the cosmic force; *U*

*Blei Najrong Natbian* - God all encompassing filling the Heaven and Earth; *U Blei U Nongsei ia ka rynieng ka rta* - God the giver and the determiner of life; *U Blei U Nongsambynta-Nongbuhbynta* - God the Dispenser.<sup>4</sup> He is the God of the house - *Ka Blei ka iing*, and of the *kur* and *jait* is *U Leilong kur u Leilong jait*, a God of the village is *Leilongspah Leilongsem*, and *Leilong Hima* - the God of the state.<sup>5</sup> These being some of the names given to the Absolute God.

God is seen as the cause of everything in time and space and out of this cause Man comes into this world to play a destined part (*Ngi wan sha kane ka pyrthei da ka daw*). Man is a creature above all creatures and he comes out of God's righteousness (*U Wan da ka Hok Blei*) and, therefore, it is man's duty to walk, act, live righteously and earn righteousness (*U dei ban leh hok, im hok, laid hok bad kamai ia ka hok*) so that he go to heaven or the house of God (*Ka iing U Blei*) on completion of his life journey. Again Man comes into the world through and with a divine decree or *Ka Hukum* (*Ngi wan sha kane ka Pyrthei da ka Hukum*) which is a previously ordained eternal purpose embodied in prescribed conduct for man. 'Man has pledged himself to a covenant with God to bow down and worship Him and Him alone and if Man deviates or substitutes Him for another, God would forsake him.'<sup>6</sup>

Man as God's special creation has a special relation with God, to him God is kind, generous and full of love, and mercy. God is ever ready to show man the path leading to him. This aspect of Khasi religion is highlighted in the parable of *Sohpetbneng* (refer p. ).

The parable of *Sohpetbneng* is interpreted in the context of providing the people with the guiding principles of life. The parable of *U Lum Diengei* which tells of a big tree growing in *U Diengei Peak* which had become so huge that its overspreading leaves and branches obstructed sunlight and plunged the earth into darkness which the people of the 'Hynñiew Trep' finally fells. This story brings out the points of Man's spiritual crisis due to loss of values (darkness) which man through experience relearns, establishing his connection with God and the relevance of his values, i.e. the reason of/for living (*Niam*)".

In the parable of *Ka Krem Lamet ka Krem Latang* we see the reconciliation of Man with God and the medium's of this reconciliation. This is a story of a dance festival where every living creature participates and rejoices until the Sun (the sister) and Moon (the brother) comes and dances. This, all creatures find incestuous and jeer at them which angers the Sun who hides in a cave - *Ka Krem Lamet ka Krem Latang* (the leaves of the Oak tree), plunging the earth into darkness again. Man then looks for a medium to bring her out

and that objective is successfully carried out by the Cock, after unsuccessful attempts by the hornbill, elephant, etc. The Hynñiew Trep people prepare an altar with the leaves of the Oak tree on which he places the cock as the medium to converse with God which man deciphers through the signs and prognosis. At the altar man apologises for his failures and shortcomings and asks God for his forgiveness. He also pledges to be human again and keeps to the covenant given to him by God (*Ka ieng Rangbah u Briew, Ap Jutang U Blei*). He then waits for an answer from God to be communicated through the entrails of the Cock, which declares God's words."

Khasi religion, therefore, depicts a forgiving God to whom one must appeal with humility and repentance. An important aspect being of retaining his humanhood, growing in his humanhood and retaining his invisible power which makes him human. Finally, what is of greatest importance is to respect and keep his covenant with God. The *Niam* also envisages certain rituals which help the persons to communicate with God.

As the Khasi conceives God as being formless they regard it a sin to depict Him in form. They give Him different names according to His attributes. There is no particular days of worship as a Khasi is expected to base the conduct of his life on God's three fold commandments and the tenets evolved thereof everyday. There is no particular place

of worship and no particular individual monopolises religious ceremonies. There is no organised priesthood amongst the Khasis. It is generally the heads of the families and clans and the older knowledgeable members who perform the sacrifices and communicate with God. In the level of the state (Hima), the Lyngdohs and sometimes the 'the Soh-blei' or 'Soh la' can be said to be the priest for state rituals and sacrifices."

In matter of worship the Khasi religion realises God in three aspects:, viz.

- 1) God universal
- 2) God localised
- 3) God at home.<sup>7</sup>

1) The god universal is the creator and sustainer of life in this universe. He makes himself known to man in different parts of the earth and it is upto their spiritual capacity as to how they evolve their religion and forms of worship towards Him. There is no intolerance to any religion among the Khasis.

2) The God localised is the God universal who is the God of the Khasi land and people. It is the Khasi rational response to the Absolute and Supreme reality. As the Khasi land is divided into states, *elakas*, *raids* and villages, he is *U Leihima U Leijaka* for the state, to the village he is *U Leikhyrdop U Leikharai* to the *elaka*, to the raid he is *U*

*Leimuluk U Leijaka*. In this context of Godhood he is the guardian of the people in all spheres of their lives, i.e. social, economic, political, etc.

3) Lastly, the God universal and localised becomes the God of the Khasi clan - *Ka Leilongkur ka Leilongjait* and *Ka Blei ka Iing*, the god of the family.

Worship is also afforded to God for special reasons and to specific aspects of Godhood. Worship to God is made by the State, *elakas* and *raids*. The state which has its own form of worship as prayer to be with the state and of thanksgiving to Him for all the blessings throughout the year. An example of this type of worship is the *Ka Pomblang Nongkrem* which is the state religious festival of the Khyrim Syiemship. This festival includes sacrifices to which the *raids* under the Khyrim Syiemship contribute to show their respect and political unity. This festival was previously held in the months of May to July, but is now held in the months of October or November. The festival is held to honour the ancestors of the state and to invoke the blessings of God for a bountiful harvest and general well-being and prosperity of the *syiems'* family and all the people of the state.

The *raids* and *elakas* and village worship the guardian and protectors of their area in way of thanksgiving for past blessings and pray for blessings and guidance. This type of worship includes the festivals of *Ka rongkhli* of the

Nongtalang village of War Jaintia, generally held in the months of January, February or March after the harvesting is over. There is the *Ka Behdeinkhlam* celebrated by the Jaintias to free themselves from various diseases and evils that plague human life and also to seek blessings for a bountiful harvest and pray for the well-being of the people. The *Behdeinkhlam* is celebrated in the month of July.

In the raids and *elakas* festivals like the *Ka Phur Nongjri*, *Ka Phur Sohbar*, *Ka Niam Mawja*, *Ka Niam Mawlam*, *Ka Niam Tynrai*, *Ka Niam Wankhen* are forms of worship which include sacrifices and dances which are held to invoke God's blessings in different areas.

The families have their own personal relationship with God of the house (*Ka Biei ka Iing*) who looks after the family. If the family has done something to displease or offend the *Ka Biei ka Iing*, they have to find out the cause and propitiate the God and pray for forgiveness. They also ask for blessings for the upkeep of the respective 'Divine Cause'. If a family suffers economic misfortune they give special worship ('*phan*') to the God of economic welfare '*U Leilongspah Leilongphew*'. Each clan also has their sacred sites, even the trees of that plot, are held sacred.

The following three tenets or commandments given to man served as the basis of societal organisation. The commandments were:

- 1) *Tip Briew Tip Blei.*
- 2) *Tip Kur Tip Kha.*
- 3) *Kamai ia ka hok.*

The first tenet lays down the rules of relationship between God and Man, can be roughly taken to be the rules of religion. *Tip* means 'to know', *Briew* means man and *Blei* means God. Thus suggesting that religion does not merely mean knowledge of God but also of man. The essence of this tenet being that man can know God only when he knows his fellowmen and knowing his fellow men involves doing one's duty towards them by being fair, good, kind and helpful to all and not causing any harm to anyone. Man is taken to be created by God directly who endowed him with a body (*Ka met*) and a soul (*Ka mynsiem*). Man as a special power of being human, rational and understanding his humanhood, this concept is known as *Ka Rngiew*. The Khasi belief is that the *Ka Rngiew* gives him the ability to be human, do good to his fellow beings and thereby know God because if he loses his *Ka Rngiew* he lowers himself to the status of simple creatures.

The second tenet *Tip Kur Tip Kha* means to know one's maternal relations (*Kur*) and one's paternal relations (*Kha*). This can be taken to be the base of the societal structure. The Khasis have a matrilineal form of society taking their descent from the female line and inheritance too goes from mother to daughter. However, this does not mean that the

paternal relations are ignored, in fact the patrilineal kinship is afforded a lot of respect and is an important part of Khasi life and culture. From this tenets emanate the rule of family organisation, marriage, descent, inheritance and roles and status of the members of the community.

The third tenet is 'Kamai ia ka Hok' which etymologically can be taken to mean earn righteousness by one's own labour. *Kamai* means to earn by one's own efforts and labour, *ia* is a preposition following a transitive verb and governing an object noun; *ka lok* means righteousness. So *Kamai ia ka hok* literally means earn righteousness. The tenet can be taken to mean interaction of man and the guidelines to economic activity of men especially as this tenet can be taken not only to earn righteousness but also to earn through righteousness.

What seems clear from the three tenets is that they provide the guidelines of interaction between one another and also between Man and God. A feature which underlies all the three commandments is that of humanity and conformity to societal values and mores and thereby denotes the culture of the society.

The Khasi *Niam* envisages rituals for birth, death and marriage which help him retain his covenant with God and pay his respects to God and his ancestors. At the birth of a child, the placenta is cut with a sharp bamboo edge and then

placed in an earthen pot in the house. The baby is then washed with hot water from a red earthen pot.

The next day the naming ceremony is held. For this some rice flour is placed in a *U Prah* (winnowing) fermented rice is placed in a gourd and some turmeric powder and five pieces of dried fish is kept in a plantain leaf. In case of a male child a bow and arrow and for a female child a *daw* or a *khoh* (carrying basket and a *star* (strap for carrying the basket) is placed in a white cloth. The *kaba ger khun* (performer of the ritual) pours out rice beer from a gourd in the name of God into a plantain leaf and a name is chosen by dropping rice beer drops from a gourd and when a drop sticks longer unto the gourd that name of the many suggested is kept. The performer then invokes God to grant good luck to the child. After this is over the father takes the pot containing the placenta, into which rice flour and rice beer has been added, waves it three times over the child and then goes and hangs the pot in a tree outside the village. On coming home he is ritually purified with water and turmeric and rice flour mixture. The latter is applied on the right foot of the father and also the mother and child, the audience too is anointed with the mixture. Rice flour is then distributed amongst all the audience and the males are offered rice beer.

The funeral rituals are meant to facilitate the way of the dead to his ancestors and God. The *Niam Khasi* followers

cremate the dead on a pyre on which the Coffin (*ka Shyngoid*) is placed. The dead is firstly bathed and dressed. A cock is then sacrificed which is to scratch the way to the next world (*U 'Iar Irad Iynti*). A dish containing eatables, betel-nut and a jar of water is placed near the head of the corpse and every morning and evening food is offered to the corpse till the time it is kept in the house which is usually three nights. The coffin is carried on a bamboo bier (*Ka Krong*) and on the head side money is placed to enable the spirit to buy food on the way to the next world. Silk or cotton cloth are tied over the bier. A number of sacrifices of pigs, goats, buffalo, cows are performed at different stages of the funeral. The coffin is carried in a procession and on reaching the funeral ground the body is exposed and laid on the pyre with the head to the west and the feet to the east. Logs of wood are placed around the body and an egg is broken and thrown towards the legs of the corpse. Fire is then applied to the pyre first by the members of the *kur* (clan), then by the children of the deceased, if any. A fowl is then sacrificed and blood from it is applied round the pyre and across the body three times. Three arrows (*Ka Nam tympem*) are then shot in the direction of north, south and east. Before leaving the relatives and friends of the deceased place betel nuts on the pyre and bid farewell by saying 'good bye, go and eat betel-nut in the house of God' (*khubier, khie ient ham*

*kwai sha Iing u Biei ho*). When the body is thoroughly burnt, water is sprinkled and the bones are collected by the relatives in three trips. Here they check for messages among the ashes. The bones are carefully wrapped in a piece of white cloth by the female relatives and an old member of the family throws some powdered rice from a leaf to the ground asking the spirit of the deceased not to trouble the *kur* (clan) or the family. The bones are then placed in the *MawshÄieng* (bone repository). After three nights from the funeral three eggs are broken to ascertain the cause of death and the taboo (*sang*) is broken, the family, after washing and cleansing themselves and the house can go out to work.

Believing in the immortality of the soul, the Khasis expect a man to do good deeds in this life, so that his soul after death can rest in peace. Man alone is responsible for his actions, hence during funeral rites addresses are made to the dead person alone and not to God.

To continue marriage involves an elaborate religious ceremony where God the Creator of the human world (*U 'Iei Synshar*) and the ancestors of the clan (*ka Iawbei Tymmen, U Thawlang*) are invoked for their blessing. The first step to solemnising a marriage is to consult the omens to find out whether any taboos or blood relations block the proposed union. There are three types of marriage ceremonies, the (*Pynhiar synjat*) exchange of ring ceremony which is

complicated and involves sacrifices of pigs, the (*Lamdoh*) taking meat bought from the market involves no sacrifices or exchange of rings and the (*Iadah kiad* or *Iasuit*) system which is simplest involving recitation of marriage formula and ceremonial drinking of spirits. The marriage is performed in the bride's house to which the groom comes with his relatives and friends and go-between. They are met halfway by the bride's party. The (*Ksiang*) - go-between which is generally the *U Añi* of the groom's party enter the bride's house first and hands over the bridegroom to the *Ksiang* of the bride who is also generally the *Añi* of the bride. The groom on his entry is anointed on the head by his mother-in-law to be, this being a way to give blessings. The bride and bridegroom exchange betel nut bags and then the *Ksiangs* recite the marriage contract and marriage norms of the society. The *Ksiangs* then turn over their respective gourds containing liquor to the priest who places three dried fish on the ground and then pours out libations from the two gourds all this while invoking the Gods and ancestors to witness and bless the couple. Three pieces of dried fish are then placed on a rack above the fireplace amidst incantations, which is taken down only after the birth of two or three children. After all this is over the people partake in a feast consisting of pounded rice and other delicacies. Part of the expenses of the feast is borne by the groom's side. Before

the feast sacrifice of fowls or pigs are common through which they two parties seek to find out the will of God and whether the match will be a successful one or not. After the birth of one or two children when the pieces of dried fish are taken down two pigs one each for the bride and bride-groom are sacrificed and the taboo regarding living together is checked until which time, according to tradition, the bride and groom do not stay together and the groom only visits. Three days after the marriage ceremony, however, the bride visits the bridegroom's house taking gifts of food for her in-laws where she pays her respect to them.

Marriage according to the khasis is a sacred tie to fulfill the purpose of procreating and expanding the clan. However, divorce is allowed in cases of adultery, barrenness and incompatibility of tempers. The link of marriage is generally severed by the go-between (Asiang) of the two parties and does not involve very elaborate rituals. Remarriage of widows, widowers and divorcees are allowed with certain stipulated of time.

The khasis believe that illnesses, misfortunes arise out of transgression of man's duties which cause a divide between God and Man. The khasis, therefore, find out the cause through divination by means of cowries, breaking eggs and examining entrails of birds and animals. These transgressions are remedied through sacrifice, rituals and

seeking forgiveness and promising to respect the covenant. Transgressions are mainly of two types, incest (*Ka Shang Sang*), thereby laying down the prohibitions of clan intermarriage and *ymbit* or minor prohibition like fetching firewood from sacred forests, using nails for houses, etc. The violation of the first type of prohibition is unforgivable and the violators are banished from the community and is believed to be severely punished by God. Violation of the second type of prohibitions can be remedied by performing certain rituals and asking forgiveness from God. The *khasis* also believe that only transgressions and crimes adversely affect the whole family, leaving a taint (*Ka byrsieh*). Serious crimes include disrespect shown to the father and his clan, to the female members of the clan committing adultery (*klim*). Stealing, false claims, doing things behind others' back, corruption, greed, quarreling, creating enemies are also prohibited.

There are certain precepts which are transmitted from generation to generation through word of mouth and they can be treated as guidelines of human conduct and behaviour. They are as follows:

"1) those who are guilty of intra-clan sexual relationship, those who commit suicides, those who commit murder in their own clan, those who commit abortion, and male-female twins are never cremated by their relatives or

clans, no funeral rites are performed and no bones are gathered.

2) Do not commit murder

3) Do not steal

4) Love and respect your mother and father. We cannot see god but they represent Him on earth.

5) Respect your uncles, who are your mother's brothers and cousins, the clan relatives of your father, and all elderly people.

6) Live a clean and moral life.

7) Money gained other than by one's own just effort is unclean. Stolen money, bribe and gambling money bring misfortune, misery and poverty to the house.

8) All men are born equal before God. Richness or poverty are outcomes of one's ability diligence and conduct. Do not envy others because of their wealth, their homes, their riches else God will strike you blind.

9) If misfortunes and misery comes to you do not blame God, blame yourself. If blessings are showered upon you give thanks to God.

10) Do not do any act which would bring shame and sorrow to another man's home. The same misfortune will follow you back.

11) No matter how rich, no matter how superior, no matter how powerful, do not be proud and arrogant. But rather be rich in humility.

12) Do not acquire what is not rightly yours, be it a cowrie or gold. The sin is the same.

13) Do not laugh at ugly people or deformed people. They are created by God.

14) The end in life is to do good. To work honestly to gain riches for bringing comfort is not a sin. But to make the accumulation of wealth by fair means or foul an end in itself is a sin."<sup>8</sup>

Christianity had made its initial dent in the society through the Roman alphabet which formed the basis of education. Education in turn was based on the translations made by the Christian missionaries of the various Christian and western texts. Education was the means of entering the people's mind and influencing it. The influence was, therefore, that of the texts that were used for education and, therefore, the Khasi mind was gradually instilled with Christian and western literature which being something new was of greater interest to the people. Traditionally, the Khasis taught their children by word of mouth. But this type of transmission of knowledge cannot bear the onslaught of organised written education as experience of the ancient Hindu 'Gurukul' system of education shows. Besides, the

organised political and economic colonial onslaught was already at play and the unlettered Khasi living in a comparatively closed world was a natural subject to total subversion. A person in the form of Babu Jeebon Roy who had the exposure to the outside world and the British, saw the ominous end towards which the Khasi society with all its individuality was moving.

U Jeebon Roy was born in Saitsohpen or Cherra Station in 1838. His father U Ram Singh Rani was a business man and was called 'korkata' because of his proficiency of the Bengali language. U Jeebon Roy received no formal education but was considered educated enough to join the services of the East India Company as a writer and interpreter to General Showers the Special Commissioner then. He rose through the ranks to become Second Class Magistrate and retired in 1894 as Senior Extra Assistant Commissioner. While he was in service as the Superintendent of Shillong Jail (1890) he experimented with various methods of potato cultivation introducing the methods and also propagated cultivation of pear, coffee, other fruits and vegetables first introduced by the British. He introduced bullock carts to facilitate carrying of goods and passengers and also handloom to teach the art of weaving and encourage industry. Another pathbreaking venture of U Jeebon Roy was in the field of limestone trade which he took up after his retirement much

against the British who had till now monopolised the trade. With his entry into this trade, gradually this business became a booming trade among local inhabitant of the southern slopes. He was also a pioneer in encouraging women to learn trade and as an example, put one of his daughters to work in the printing press. He had seen and experienced a lot through his work with the British and was keen that the Khasi should also see the world, and the world too should see them to which purpose he led a group to the Calcutta exhibition in 1884, where he displayed many Khasi articles of everyday life in the ethnological department of the Calcutta exhibition.

This multi-faceted person through his experience realised the need for asserting the Khasi culture, not in isolation with others while maintaining a cultural identity within a larger cultural ethos, so that the Britishers could not totally subvert and undermine their culture. Also to check the insidious idea that Khasi culture was lower and inadequate in comparison to that of the British. In his life and activities one sees the pioneering attempts at resisting the alien culture and asserting the Khasi culture.

U Jeebon Roy initiated this resistance more concretely by means of textualising oral religious and cultural tradition of the Khasis. This process was given impetus by the establishment of the first press of their own, known as the Ri Khasi Press at Mawthar, Shillong in 1896. Prior to

this U Jeebon Roy had established a High School in 1876 in Shillong, as he felt that the people need, not merely primary education but also higher education and of a secular type. For the purpose of establishing the school he had approached the missionaries who told him that they had come there for religion and not education and that 'the Khasis did not have the brains for higher education.'<sup>9</sup> He also approached the British Government for grants-in-aid which was given only after Jeebon Roy himself put in Rs.900/- of his own. The Shillong High School was finally amalgamated to the normal School run by the missionaries, at the initiative of the missionaries as they felt that the school was doing too well. Jeebon Roy also started another High School in Shella in 1897. Besides he also started a Minor School in Mawkhar, Shillong, in 1899 keeping Bengali in the curriculum because he was of the opinion that Bengali would open the door to the rich national classics and also help the Khasis know their neighbour the Bengalees with whom they had greatest contacts and dealings, with.

His first attempt at textualising the traditional norms was in way of writing a book called 'Ka Niam ki Khasi' (The Khasi Niam) in 1897. This book contained information about the Khasi religion, rituals and customs of the Khasis. In the preface of the book he made an appeal for the preservation of the Khasi traditions, which he said "I also see our land on

the edge of a terrible precipice. If we, who are only a handful do not wake up in time, the flood will overtake us and we shall be, like the Gideons of old, only the hewers of wood and drawers of water for others".<sup>10</sup> At the same time he wrote Khasi and Bengali Primers for the schools inserting Khasi tales and fables within the text. In his next book *Ka Kitab Shaphang U Biei* (The book about one God), in 1900 he crystallised some of the important ethos in Khasi religious philosophy, clarified that the Khasis have belief in one God and not multitudes of gods as suggested by the British writers besides making the appeal to understand and feel for their own culture and religion. Besides these he also wrote the history of India (*ka History Jong ka Ri India*) keeping the history of the Khasis in focus. An interesting feature in the above named book and book like '*Ka Ramayan*' '*Ka kitap Chaitanya*', '*Buddhadev Charitra*' and '*Hitopadesa*', was that he attempted to bring the culture of larger India into the perspective of the Khasis. He also founded a monthly called '*Nongphira*' (The Watchman) in 1903, the purpose of which, was to highlight tradition.

Besides U Jeebon Roy's discrete attempt at resistance there were others like U Rabon Singh, U Hormurai Diengdoh, U Sibcharan Roy, U Radhon Singh to name a few, who made a dent in the process of textualising and portraying the Khasi culture to Khasi readers. U Rabon Singh was a convert but the

denigration of his traditions by the missionaries turned him 'back to the traditional religion. He wrote three books 'Ka Kitab Jingphawar' (1898), 'Ka Kitab Niam Khun ki Khasi' (1911) and 'ka Jingiathuh khana Puriskam' (1900) to elucidate the short stories, fables, religious practices and rituals of the Khasis. Besides he also wrote articles on Khasi rituals and taboos in 1892 and 1893, in the newspapers.

U Hormurai Diengdoh who was a Christian too reverted back to the traditional religion and was instrumental in bringing out the first Khasi monthly in 1895 called 'U Khasi Nynta' (The Khasi Today) in which he published articles on religion and traditions of the Khasi and also pointed out the elements of Christianity which did not suit the Khasi tradition.

U Sib Charan Roy, the son of U Jeebon Roy took up the cudgels against colonialism from his father in becoming the editor of 'U Nongphara' and also setting up a new newspaper by the name of 'U Nongpynim' (the Deliverer) in 1930 and publishing materials of Khasi tradition. He wrote four books, 'ka Jingia kyrsiew' in 1903 drawing relations between Khasi religion and Hindu Shastras, 'ka Jingpyni Ka Kmie bad ki khun' in 1911 bringing out the truth of the Khasi religion through a conversation of a mother and child, 'Ka Kot Tahkit Tir Tir' in 1920 continuing an interpretation and analysis of Khasi religious thoughts and practices and 'Ka Niam ki

Khasi', 'Ka Niam Tip-Biei Tip-Briem' in 1911 on the religious traditions of the Khasis. U Sibcharan Roy also made translations of Hindu literature like the Bhagavad Gita, Chankya Niti Darpan besides which he also wrote a guide to Khasi Sanskrit-Hindi - Bengali called 'ka Jingsakyrsem' and also 'ka Khanatang' a collection of short-stories. In U Sibcharan Roy's works one sees the similar attitude like his father whereby they seek to bring about a link of understanding between the Hindu and the Khasi traditions besides the attempt at elucidating Khasi cultural traditions and their relevance.

Another author by the name of U Radon Singh Berry who was re-converted to the Khasi religion deserves mention because of his contribution through books like 'ka Jingsneng Tymmen' on Khasi moral code and 'Ka Niam Wei Biei' (the Khasi religion of one God). The latter became the basic scripture of Khasi Unitarians with which group he was closely affiliated.

Other books like 'Ka Savitri' by Hari Charan Roy, 'Damayati bad u Noi' by Rash Mohan Roy, 'Ka Pomblang bad Thang Syiem' by Homiwell Lyngdoh, 'U Tip Sngi' by Dinonath Roy deserve mention for bringing the Hindu world to the Khasi and also for keeping their own festivals and codes in a written form.

The first organised resistance, however, was in form of an Association formed by sixteen Khasi youngmen in response to Babu Jeebon Roy's call. Roy was the founder patron and a guide and mentor to this Association formed on 23rd November 1899. This Association was named 'Ka Seng Samia Khasi' (the Khasi Youngmen's Association) and was made with the purpose of developing the fellow Khasis in mind, body and spirit. To achieve this aim it was intended that all Khasis interested in welfare should join and thus no religious overtones were noticed. The working principles of this Association was:

"a) to foster the mental and physical development through regular lectures;

b) building a strong, active and healthy bodies by various physical activities and sports;

c) building up a library and upkeep of the same;

d) building up a collection of traditional musical instruments."<sup>11</sup>

The initial thrust of the Association was, therefore, to bring about a healthy and culturally vigilant and conscious group of people. The lectures were on topics like happiness, friendship, patience, idleness, evils of drunkenness and other vices. Theatrical plays with moral messages were also staged.

In 1901, the Seng Samia Khasi came simply to be known as Seng Khasi (The Khasis Association). At this point the

organisation attempted to cover all the lacunae of the previous organisation and thus the guiding principles were broadened. The aims of this organisation was to:

1) "cultivate a sense of togetherness among the khasis who retained the traditional socio-cultural and religious heritage.

2) create consciousness of God as the sovereign Lord, Almighty Creator, the omnipotent and omniscient and in no way lacking from the Christian Godhead.

3) earning righteousness through service and respecting one's fellowmen with the consciousness of humanity and divinity.

4) foster mental and physical development of all fellow khasis and regulate their way of living, moral and social conduct on traditional values.

5) bring about educational advancement among the khasis.

6) promote and foster traditional sports, art forms and all traditional socio-cultural or religious festivals.

7) undertake welfare activities, like maintenance of cremation grounds, etc. for the general advancement of the khasis according to their tradition and religion."<sup>12</sup>

In 1907, the Association turned its attention to development of indigenous music and collected musical instruments for the purpose. 1909 saw the association

focussing its attention to the revival of the true faith of the forefathers, 'to understand the true meaning of conscience and truth as handed down by them which were being neglected, misled and blinded by the teachings of foreigners.' In 1922, the Seng Khasi redefined its fundamental concepts as:

"1) An association of Khasis who follow the *Mur-Kha* kinship system as handed down by their ancestors.

2) The purpose of life on earth to propagate truth.

3) Adherence to the *Mur-Kha* relationship in the social structure, love and understanding of one's fellowmen and understanding of one's relation to God.

4) God, the Lord and Master, the Creator and Dispenser, the All Powerful."<sup>13</sup>

In the meanwhile the activities for the purpose of highlighting khasi culture included holding an archery competition in 1905 at the Polo Grounds in order to revive the traditional sport which was condemned by the missionaries as 'degrading and demoralizing sport of the heathens'. In 1911 the 'Seng Khasi' held a dance called '*Shad Suk Mynsiew*' (Thanksgiving dance) at Weiking field at Jaiaw inspite of Christian opposition. The purpose of this dance was "to advance the culture of the Khasi race; to reveal our gratitude and joy to God, the Creator, that He had protected and taken care of us during the year and that He has provided

us sufficiently to all our needs."<sup>14</sup> In 1921 a Seng Khasi School was started and because of their refusal to include Christian religious books in their curriculum they were not given Grants-in-aid by the Government then. From 1911, the Seng Khasi organised lectures on Khasi religion and gradually as a reaction to the attacks from Christian 'the religious discourses were interspersed with frontal attacks on Christian dogmas and doctrines'. The Seng Khasi was further strengthened by the coming up of the 'Ka Seng Samia', the youth wing in 1922.

A constitution was adopted on the day of formation of the organisation and was published in 1913. It had at the apex a managing committee called 'Jingpyrkhat Kam' with office bearers who were elected annually. The office bearers were Secretary, Assistant Secretary, Caretaker and Treasurer. The first Secretary was Chandra Nath Roy the son of Babu Jeebon Roy. Initially the organisation had an emblem of a red flag of perpendicular material with the words *Seng Khasi 1899* on it. In 1961, however, U Hipshon Roy, a member of the Association, submitted a new design for the flag. The design submitted was the same red background with a crowing cock in a white circle in the centre. This design was formally accepted and ratified in November 1961. The meaning of this enigma is "the red background signifies courage. The circle in white represent the world. White stands for the

fundamental belief of the Khasi and his faith that he comes to the world to propagate and earn truth. The cock (crowing) symbolises the ancient culture and tradition of the Khasis - that when sins darken man's path, he crows for to bring out the sun that gives the light - that man proceeds along the path of purity, humanity and divinity".<sup>15</sup>

After Independence, the Seng Khasi started functioning with renewed vigour towards establishing the khasi identity. This was done by working on an organised level on every sphere of culture. The aim from then onwards was not to ward off threats but to make aware and bring back to the khasi fold the people who had felt their own roots becoming shaky as they felt that the missionaries had sought to make the khasi people insecure of their own identity.

In 1959, with the financial assistance of the Government, a hall called the 'Seng Khasi Hall' was built and this became the centre of the Association's activities. This hall now functions as a lecture hall, library, organising centre, office, music hall and a museum of traditional articles.

Thus the Seng Khasi since its inception attempted to resist the inferior psychology injected into the people by the missionaries by making a strong push through lectures, traditional performances, festivals, and written materials. In the present day, the media too is being used for

projecting its activities and programmes. However, a major problem faced by the Association from its inception to the present day is the lack of funds as funds come only through voluntary contributions, fetes and books and magazines. Due to the lack of fixed funds and the opposition of Christians, the response to the programmes varies and cannot reach out or involve a large cross section of the society.

In order to strengthen and convey its own convictions the Association has started a college in 1973 which is open to all members of the society interested in secular education. Besides, new branches like the Seng Pyni which functions like a 'Sunday School' has been started in 1976 during the presidency of U Hipshon Roy. This unit came up because of the need for children to fraternize with those of their own tradition. The purpose of the Association, therefore, moved from emphasis on societal traits to religion and is now on the socio-religious aspect of establishing a distinct socio-religious identity among the Khasis.

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## Chapter V

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### RESISTANCE - CHRISTIAN AND NON-CHRISTIAN

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Prior to the coming of the British, the Khasis had no differentiation within their group structures. With the arrival of the British, the Khasis were slowly divided into different groups. One important distinction was the original Khasi and the converted Christian Khasi. Today, after about 150 years from the beginning of concerted proselytization, the Khasi hills show 2,48,540 Christians in a population of 6,57,160 (1981). After the coming of Krishna Chandra Pal in 1800, seven Khasis embraced Christianity. By 1920, 30 percent of the Khasi population had become Christians. In 1965, the figure rose to 47 per cent of the population of the district and today the figure is 60 per cent approximately.

Confident that theirs was the only true faith, the Christian missionary offered the converts assurance both of eternal life after death and present peace of mind amid everyday troubles. He further told them that their sincere acceptance of Christ and abiding by the precepts of the Church would envelope them forever in heavenly love and they would have no further cause for future worry. This promise of

full security landed many Khasis straight into the laps of different Christian missionaries. As the arrival of the British provided a new dilemma for which they could not find the right answers in their own religion and the Christian missionaries not only made their ideological alternative more attractive but attempted to establish new Christian communities with its own set of values, codes and sanctions, the Khasis ceased to attend ritual ceremonies, started treating their respected seniors with disrespect and allowed their sacred places to be denigrated. The old ideology which had earlier guaranteed security was dismissed as superstition and was shorn of its supernatural sanction, the Khasis, therefore, were even obliged to revise many of their moral values. They also learned to condemn norms they had till now encouraged and encouraged those that were earlier condemned. One of the reasons why the Khasis eagerly accepted this new belief system instead of rejecting it, was the emphasis of missionaries on the common features of the traditional religion with *Niam*. The early converts probably treated the Christian God as more or less equivalent to their 'U Blei', again the Cock, which was an important symbol among the traditional Khasis as a mediator was equated to 'Jesus' the mediator between Man and God. They may also have become disgruntled because their prayers to their own God had not resulted in prosperity or because their blameless conduct had

not saved them from disaster. Given the scope they started experimenting to see whether the Christian God exercised greater powers and would afford them a better deal in life.

The missionaries had an added advantage of belonging to a politically and economically superior group for which advantage they inevitably acquired a higher status. Their position was further accentuated by the fact that they appeared rich, owned many possessions and obviously knew so much as the other whitemen (~~refer page~~). Besides this, they were in a better position to win more personal respect and love as they alone among the other foreign residents in the colony followed a calling that compelled them to live side by side with the Khasis and learn their vernacular tongue. They also visited the afflicted, tended the sick, took interest in the villagers and made efforts to work for their well-being. In conversation, they discussed matters besides religion and some of their statements could be put to test and proved right. In making the transfer the converts were convinced that they would become like the missionaries and since some of their statements proved right all else would be so. As every society aspires towards upgradation and the Khasis saw the means to this through imitating the missionaries and imbibing their values.

Their aspiration for economic equality with the whites was a natural corollary and in education they recognised the

necessary preliminary. The fact that the village schools were controlled and staffed by the churches precluded the fact that the Christian Khasis would get the opportunity to learn reading and writing. Therefore, to get this advantage the abandonment of Khasi ways was not considered too big a price to pay.

Again, the policy of induction of indigenous people into some levels within the ecclesiastical structure afforded a means to the Khasis of satisfying their ambition. Church elders, preachers and teachers all exerted some influence in the village, and thus these offices were thought by some as highly desirable. "Tangible rewards had earlier contributed much to the conversion of the tribals. The missionaries in the first half of the 19th Century were often prepared to distribute arms, thus enabling the Khasis to carry on their old feuds under the guise of a crusade against the heathen. Negative rewards can have almost as strong an appeal. Many religious observances were burdensome and a declaration by the missionaries, that those rooted in Khasi beliefs were unnecessary sometimes served as an excuse for neglecting them."<sup>1</sup>

The indigenisation of the Christian churches, a process going on steadily in the Khasi and Jaintia hills is witness to a form of resistance to the earlier neglect.

A new Church by the name of Church of God came up in 1902 as a result of differences of opinion between the Presbyterian Missionaries and some Khasi converts on matters of salvation, baptism and the practice of foot-washing. This church movement was started by U Donrai Diengdoh and his son Wolley Mohan Roy Laitphiang and it was with the association of U Jobin Roy Khain that the latter established the church.<sup>2</sup> The Church believed that though human beings were sinners they could achieve salvation through God's grace and that baptism is antecedent to faith, therefore, they baptise only after a person asserts his faith in Christ.

The church ecclesiastical structure was similar to that of the Presbyterians with a local church committee, a wide and a ministerial Business Council. It also had a Bible institute of its own. The church publishes religious books and hymn books like *Ki Jingrwai Shem Mynsiem*. The emphasis of this church was on healing through prayers.

This church underwent problems in around late 1920's when J.M. Roy entered politics and his wife Miss Nichols, one of the faith missionaries of the American, Anderson Church of God, introduced the 'tongue'<sup>3</sup> movement.

A new church was separated from the parent body in 1940, under the name of *Ka Turai Gospel* (Gospel Trumpet), now known as Church of God-Ecclesia. The factors for dissension was the introduction of speaking in tongues by Mrs. Nichols

Roy, handling of church affairs by the Nichols-Roy family and the entry of Rev. Nichols Roy into politics. The spiritual and material support of the church remained the same as the parent church, but there was more participation of the people in church affairs unlike the parent body. These new church movements, however, had the common belief that while human beings are sinful, the statement issued by the Welsh Mission 'I am a sinner, He is a sinner. You are sinner, They are sinners' is incompatible with understanding that though sinners, it could be overcome by God's grace',<sup>4</sup> The 'tongue' movement has all but disappeared among the parent church but the separation still holds true.

A Church by the name of Christ National Church, a splinter group from the Welsh Presbyterian Church, came up in 1924. This church was established by Rev. Mon Lyndoh of Laitumkhran an ordained priest of the Presbyterian Church and Rev. Jones Passah of Jowai. The dissent with the original church was because of its policies on adultery where it laid down that those who committed adultery should be suspended for a period of two years after which they could again become members of the church and even remarry. Rev. Mon Lyndoh saw this as a way leading to more divorces and people taking marriage lightly. He also took the view that the missionaries should either be given subordinate responsibilities or be sent away from the hills as their attitude was dictatorial.<sup>5</sup>

Another Church by the name of Assembly Church of Jesus Christ (full Gospel) was established in January 1932 which was also a splinter group of the Welsh Presbyterian Mission. The reasons for the splintering was that Rev. Joseph Dkhar, the perpetrator of this new Church felt that there was "a sharp decline in Christian life among the leaders and its members; an inconsistency of the Constitution and the Gospel of Christ and the governing of the Church by it; the imposition of the Marriage Act upon the Church members as a way of salvation."<sup>6</sup> This church emphasised on evangelistic activity, visitation and faith healing. The church established schools orphanages, Bible correspondence courses, Bible institute and also public school, published the New Testament, magazines, books and songs. Association with groups like World Vision, Samaritan's Purse of India, Maranatha Crusade, and U.S. organisations like Christ for the Nations and the Christian activity centre, helped the church in its Missionary activity and helped get a large following.

Another church by the name of All-One-In-Christ Church fellowship was established in Shillong by Rev. K.K. Biswas. This church did not take up social activities instead concentrated on preaching and direct evangelising.

A Khasi by the name of Hajom Kishore Singh questioned the rigid and sectarian teachings of the Welsh Calvinist Missions started a new liberal movement called 'Ka Niam Wei

Blei' (The Religion which worships one God).<sup>7</sup> Through the contact with the Brahmo Samaj he established a liberal church which stood for freedom of belief and free expression of ideas and convictions and the establishment of a world community founded on the ideals of brotherhood, justice and peace. This church established at Jowai in 1887 was known as the Unitarian Church. He established this church with an intention of getting rid of the Welsh Christian legacy and also to purify Khasi religion which he believed stood very close to the Unitarian teachings of the worship in one God and universal humanitarian ideals.

This Church engaged in welfare activities in the form of medical services, schools, printing and publications. Though the church is not a proselytizing one it has a large following of people who believe in the Church's ideals. The Unitarian Church in the Khasi Hills got a boost by the work of Miss Margaret Barr of England who believed in service of the people and established schools, medical centres, orphanages and agricultural farms in villages.

The Unitarian solidarity was established by the close association with the Unitarian Union in North East India and the General Assembly of the Unitarian Association in England.

Close association with England not withstanding, Mr. Hajom Kishore Singh's attempt at indigenisation of the Christian doctrine has its counterpart in another strong move

to make Christianity more tuned with the Khasi and Jaintia people. The above mentioned new churches clearly show that the Khasis had absorbed Christianity but they also asserted their traditional belief within the faith. This can be seen in the coming up of concepts like 'faith in one God', 'salvation through God's grace', 'participation of all in a society and the importance of giving up adultery, all part of Khasi tradition.

The Catholic Church have also taken to the incorporation of traditional rituals into the church practices after the Vatican-II held in 1968 which encouraged 'enculturation' with tradition. The leader of a movement in the Khasi Hills is Rev. Fr. S. Sngi Lyngdoh who is a Catholic priest and is on the staff of the Sacred Heart theological College. He was born in Ri Bhoi an area falling within the Khyrim Syiemship, he adopted for himself the traditional title of the priests of Nongkrem Syiemship, Lyngdoh Sohblei, Father Sngi believes that Christianity should incorporate certain elements of the traditional religion, to this purpose he is lending ground by translating the Bible from the view of Khasi tradition. This is his latest venture adding to his contribution in way of books and a newspaper *Ka Sur Shipara* all of which, encouraged intermingling of traditional culture and Christianity.

In his reference to the fellow Khasis he always says *Ki Khun Khasi Khara* (Children of the Khasi), *Para Khasi Khara* (fellow Khasis), *Paradah Para Snam* (of the same flesh and blood) and in reference to family he says *Ki Hynñiewtrep* (the seven huts). Father Sngi, therefore, projects a belief in the Khasi culture in its totality. He is of the opinion that the Khasi religion was a 'waiting religion' (*Ka Niam kaba ap Jingang*)<sup>B</sup> and Christianity has brought the completion. Fr. Sngi called his type of Catholicism *Ka Niam-Khasi-Pura ba Ia Khie La San*, i.e. pure Khasi religion but in full growth. His was one of the manifest pioneering efforts at indigenising Christianity. He uses Niam Khasi terms like 'Ka jer ka thoh' or 'ka suit ka shor' for baptisms, 'ka phur ka siang' for burial and other concepts like *Iingsad'* for the Catholic Church, 'Sohblei' to address Catholic priests, 'Ki khun u hynñiew trep' for the people in general. During rituals and sacraments he uses rice powder (*u pujer*), gourd (*u klong u skaw*) to keep water for sacramental use, and also makes use of the winnowing basket (*prah*) for ritual activities. He uses a kind of sacred grass *u laisier* in rituals, which generally is used by Niam Khasi followers for chasing out demons when a person meets with an unnatural death or in cases of death by accident. Besides, he uses the traditional Khasi concept of *leit bam kwai ha tyngkong u Blei* (taking betel nut in the house of God) instead of going to heaven which in

Christianity is the concept used for a place for persons after death. He even provided a goat for the ritual of *Ka Pomblang Nongkrem* for which people from different areas under Myllem Syiemship offers a goat for sacrifice to their Syiem as a sign of allegiance and respect.

The marriage of V. Shadap was conducted by Father Sngi and two other priests. Father Sngi was asked to deliver the talk on the relevance and importance of marriage. He gave his speech in Khasi and the whole process sounded like the *Niam Khasi* prayers. He talked of the *Hynñiew Trep* people and their definition of marriage, it being a sacramental tie for the purpose of procreation and increasing the kin group. He also emphasized the importance of understanding the *kur* and *Kha*. He further prayed for blessings from *U Blei* to be bestowed before the couple and their families. He sprayed holy water from the *klong* (gourd), the rest of the ceremony was, however, conducted in a typically Christian way through exchange of rings and reading marriage vows.

Since Vatican Council-II, the Catholic Church has incorporated traditional concepts like *U Blei* and *Trai* for God and Lord and *Sngap Ko Blei Najrong Natbian* for seeking blessings of God who is omnipresent. They have also started using traditional Khasi concepts in their songs, hymns, liturgy and prayers.

Certain section of Christian Khasis are consciously wanting to uphold the Khasi identity along with Khasi culture but without Khasi religion (this is in sharp contrast to the *Seng Khasi*).

The Hynñiewtrep Endeavour Society (Annexure I) was established in 1989 deriving the inspiration from L.G. Shullai's personal Records Collection Centre, which consisted of a collection of written material related to the Khasis. The Hynñiew Trep Endeavour Society was made up of a number of Khasi individuals from various walks of life who felt the need to understand the Khasi culture and retain information about it. The main objectives of this society was to preserve old documents, records and books and other written material pertaining to the Khasis, helping and encouraging writings in history and other subjects relating to the social, cultural and political life of the society and undertake activities which would promote an understanding and dispersion of Khasi culture. Talking to the members of this society one was given to understand that they felt that the changes in the society to be given a proper perspective required intellectual debates and discussions for which they were providing a platform.

Another society by the name of Hynñiewtrep Cultural Welfare Forum (annexure II) was established by Mr. J.S. Shangpliang and others in 1978 in order to retain traditional

culture through organising competitions on folk songs and rendering on traditional musical instruments and also shows of traditional dances. The present President is Mr. John Kharshiang and Mr. R. Marwein is the General Secretary. The organisation still holds yearly competitions on folk songs and folk music (both stringed or wind) of the Khasis from all parts of the land. On 24th of October, 1998, they held a competition on Khasi folk song and win instruments like the 'besli and tangmuri. The advisor of this organisation Mr. J. Khashiang said that though they are interested in other cultural elements like dance, they could not implement their ideas as yet. However, one aspect they insist on is the wearing of traditional dresses by the participants in the shows.

Other organisations like the Khasi Authors' Society *Seng Biria U Khasi* (Humour Association of the Khasis), *Rympei Theatrical Centre* (Annexure ~~III~~) work towards projecting different aspects of culture. The last was established in 1973 by Mr. Kenny Shympa with the objectives to 'preserve the rich cultural heritage of Meghalaya and that of the Khasis in particular; educate the people through the media of stage acting and inculcate upon them the importance of dramatic arts; organise social, cultural and recreational activities".<sup>9</sup> At present besides staging plays in auditoriums they are using the mass media like television to project

traditional Khasi plays. In July they staged a play on television which was known as *Ka Pla I Nah* (Aunty's Bag) which emphasised on social values like non pursuance of mere riches, cohesiveness and care of the aged. The two former organisations used the platform of writing, publication and meetings to convey and retain culture. While Khasi Authors' Society tries to work for the welfare of all the Khasi authors and also collect the Khasi written materials, the *Seng Biria U Khasi* attempts to use the medium of humour to convey ideas of traditional Khasi culture.

An organisation by the name of *Bri Hynñiew Trep* (Annexure IV) came up on the 6th November, 1996 under the leadership of Dr. Hamlet Bareh, a noted writer on Khasi culture. The objective of the organisation was to awaken the Khasi people and to bring about the realisation of oneness. For this the use of the concept of *Hynñiew Trep* instead of 'Khasi' as they say the former connotes all the people distributed in the Khasi and Jaintia Hills; whereas the latter excludes the Jaintias. They use the forum of the press, hold meetings for motivating the people towards the realisation of their unified rich culture.

The 'Shillong Trendy Society' (~~Annexure VIII~~) which functions in the modern world of fashion was established in 1985 with the motto of 'preserving tradition in today's fusion'<sup>10</sup> and, therefore, they encourage understanding of

their own cultural elements of dress and ornaments as oriented to their total culture through fashion shows.

Another organisation by the name of Khasi Cultural Organisation under the presidentship of a noted author of Khasi society, Dr. Hamlet Bareh' has also been organising seminars and discussions of traditional Khasi culture. The need for an organised effort to state culture was felt by the above named gentleman on seeing the erosion of culture among the people.

Besides a number of women's organisation like the Ka Synjuk Kynthei (established in 1947), Ka Synjuk ki Kynthei Riewlum (established in 1979) also known as Tribal Womens' Welfare and Development Association of Meghalaya (TWWADAM) now as 'Khasi Womens' Welfare and Development Association of Meghalaya' (KWWADAM) have the objective of 'promoting cultural activities and to publish journals and magazines' and 'to inculcate better understanding and to preserve culture and tradition of the people'<sup>11</sup>. In 1991, a central body of all the womens' organisations known as the Ka Lympung ki Seng Kynthei (Annexure IV) was formed to take up the common issues of the various womens' organisations and of the society in general. Talking to the leaders and members of the various organisations, the point that came through was they advocated social welfare through understanding and disseminating culture besides attempting to solve problems of

the Khasis by holding meetings, seminars and symposiums. In 1994, *Ka Lympung ki Seng Kynthei* held a seminar on 'family and family related issues' and in 1997 together with *Hynñiew Trep Endeavour Society* another seminar on 'lineage bill'. These subjects, they felt, were the burning issues of the society. The members of these associations have been writing regularly on academic and non academic journals and also publishing books on the various aspects of culture of the Khasis.

A notable feature of all these organisations, besides the separation from so-called traditional religious traits, is that only educated elites took part in them.

In the sphere of political and constitutional development too, the assertion of Khasi identity emphasising on the uniqueness of their traditional culture and values have found expression. The organisations like the Khasi-Jaintia National Guild (1919), the Khasi-National Durbar (1923), the Khasi Constitutional Durbar (1949) were made with the intention of protecting and preserving the traditions customs and conventions of the Khasis besides their political and economic development.<sup>12</sup>

Other political organisations with strong cultural preservation overtones, came up among the students. The Khasi students' Association was formed in 1955 mainly for the educational, social and cultural development of the people

in the Khasi hills. The formation of the Khasi Jaintia Students' Union (1968), Meghalaya Students' Union (1970) and the Khasi Students' Union (1978) (Annexure VI~~2~~) all point to the consciousness of a distinctive cultural identity and the need to retain the same. The need to project and promote the distinctive identity is noticed among the students in general and is promoted through the means of debates, cultural programmes, discussion, seminars on Khasi culture. For this purpose, they have the posts of Cultural Secretary and Assistant Cultural Secretary. In 1982, under the auspices of the Institute of Art and Culture, Government of Meghalaya, the Khasi Students Union organised a 'Cultural Blow-up' projecting their traditions and culture. All these efforts can be seen as means of upholding the Khasi identity. In recent times the Khasi Students' Union has participated in the Cultural Festival of the North East held at Itanagar in 1997, organised a Traditional Fashion Show on the 13th of July 1998 and also brought out a cassette of Khasi songs, all for the purpose of projecting Khasi culture. The members told me that preservation of Khasi culture was a vital feature of their organisation and they were keen that through their humble endeavours they can try to preserve culture.

Besides the efforts of different organisations to promote and sustain traditional culture an effort towards the same objective is being promoted through the use of

indigenous concepts in the writings of Khasi authors. Around 1925-26 U Ondromuni Ngapkynta wrote a book called 'Ka Geography Khasi (Khasi Geography). In the mention of the various hills he mentioned the hill Sohpetbneng and as a footnote to this hill he elaborated on the concept of 'Hynñiewtrep' the first instance of the written mention of this endo-ethno name in the context of matters other than religion. This concept was further reinforced by U Soso Tham, an author with Christian theological training, who is now accepted as the greatest poet and writer among the Khasis. His poem *Ki Sngi Barim U Hynñiew Trep* (The Seven Huts of the Ancient Days) not only popularised the *purinam* (myth) of *Hynñiew Trep* but also elucidated and brought to the people the Khasi tradition. A couplet he wrote in the Preface of his poem is remarkable since it illustrates the concern for the traditional custom, the lines say that 'we try to find enlightenment in all corners of the world but we do not know this enlightenment that is in our own system' (*Jingshai Ngi wad Sawdong Pyrthei; Jingshai ka Ri Ngim Tip Ei Ei*).

Since the works of U Jeebon Roy in 1890's many Khasi authors of both traditional faith and Christian have been writing on different aspects of society, extolling on the traditions and customs of the Khasis. Books of traditional music, drama, poetry, myths have ace traditional concepts like 'Hynñiew Trep', 'Tip Kur Tip Kha' causing the people to

feel proud in tradition and preserve tradition rather than discard it as not fashionable.

In recent times Khasis culture as a subject of study is being re-introduced in the educational institutions. Books like Ki Saw Aiom (The Four Seasons), an edited book of Khasi Culture, U Soso Tham's Duitara Ksiar (Khasi poetry on traditional culture), S.J. Duncan's Phuit ka Sabuit (Khasi drama), Ka Jingsneng Tymmen by Radhon Singh Berry on Khasi morals, Diengkiat ki Longshuwa (Footsteps of the Forefathers), Kitab Jing Phawar (Khasi Lyrical Poetry) have found their way into the schools and college curriculum. Many of these books have been authored by Christian Khasis projecting the fact that traditional culture is a matter of interest among all Khasis today. An interesting feature which came up during my conversation with certain Christian Khasi is that they feel the book on traditional Khasi morals (Ka Jingsneng Tymmen) should be introduced in the school curriculum instead of college as it is easy to comprehend having been written in simple language and the knowledge would help them be better equipped in the modern world.

Institutions and various organisations, besides the academic interest in projecting tradition, have been seen promoting traditional plays, music, dances. In 1985, the Khasi Jaintia Presbyterian Girls High School which in 1926, had vehemently opposed to the attendance of traditional

dance, presented a Khasi Play on the mythical theme of the origin of Shillong *Ka Pah Syntiew* as an item in the school concert held at the State Central Library. Again wearing of traditional dresses is no longer looked down upon and even small children are seen donning their traditional clothes for school functions whereas in the 1970's wearing western outfits were more fashionable and accepted. Today there is a noticeable shift in brides wearing white 'dharas' instead of the western gown.

In the present day journalists and the press has been taking keen interest in projecting Khasi traditions, thereby bringing awareness of tradition to the level of the common people. Since the start of the monthly *U Khasi Mynta* (The Khasi Today) in 1896 by Hormu Rai Diengdoh and *U Nongphira* by Sib Charan Roy in 1903, where the articles emphasised on cultural reawakening, many journals have been launched emphasising on similar issues. For example, journals like *Ka Sngi* (The Sunshine) edited by A.C. Macdonald was launched in 1925, in the same year *Ka Jinqshisha* (truth) edited by L. Gatphoh was launched. *U Lurshai* edited by U Soso Tham, W. Reade and D.N.S. Wahlang successively. Of these all the journals *Ka Svnqkhong Jinqtip* launched in 1937 by A.S. Khongphai and D.R. Pohshna which focussed on literature, ethnology and cultural heritage deserves special mention. Books by Mr. L.H. Pde like 'Ka Naoyong' (Black Gold), 'Ynmab'

(whether to forgive or not) try to project the cultural problems of the society and how best to deal with them so that their cultural identity remains intact. He has also translated the 'Ramayan', 'Mahabharat', 'Upanishads' and 'Bhagwad Gita' to promote interest in rich culture of neighbours. He said he has tried to open a window to these cultures because till now the Khasi people had been exposed only to the western culture.

Today local newspapers like the The Shillong Times, The Apphira, etc. also publish materials on cultural activities and events attempting to create interest and imparting information among common people.

Besides the efforts of Rev. Fr. Sngi, which has been discussed earlier, the Catholic Church has been attempting to make the Khasi people feel for their culture. The books by Rev. Fr. Elias Hopewell Sohia Ki Khanatang U Barim and Ka Pangsnqiat Ksiar Ki Saw Aiom (1937) extolls the Khasi culture and oral traditions. Rev. Fr. G. Costa's Ka Riti Jong ki Laiphew Syiem (1936-37) (The customs and usages of the thirty chiefs) and Ki Dienjat Jong Ki Longshua (1931) (footprints of our predecessors) by Rev. J. Bacchiarello are examples of the efforts of this Church. The Sacred Heart Mission is at present also attempting to set up a Central Institute for Indigenous People in Shillong which will include a museum, writers, materials on the Khasis and a research wing for the

purpose of establishing the distinct identity. The objective of the 'Catholic Writers' Guild' formed in 1985 also functions within the scope of 'enculturation' laid down in the Vatican Council II. To this purpose of enculturation the Khasi traditional dances are performed during 'Easter' at the rural area of Pynursla and Marbisu. This performance which includes traditional dances from all over the Khasi land is known as *Ka Shad Paskha*.

The Presbyterian Church in the present times too has been taking keen interest in the traditional culture. The writings of Rev. I. Kharkongor highlighting the points of similarity between the traditional religion and Christianity. His book, *The Preparation for the Gospel in Traditional Khasi Belief* is an example in the process of re-assertion of traditional culture within the Christian ideology.

Until now I was highlighting the organised and semi-organised efforts at cultural resistance. However, on the individual level too there has been resistance and re-assertion. In the sphere of Christian marriage rituals, for example, certain traditional customs have re-surfaced. In the following chart I have tried to bring them out:

Christian (Presbyterian/  
Catholic

Marriage is a Sacrament  
Rules determined by  
Christian Marriage Act.

Khasi - Traditional

Sacred tie to fulfill the  
purpose of multiplying  
and expanding the clan,  
requiring elaborate reli-  
gious ceremony where God,

Only one type of marriage.

Once a girl and boy make their choice, the male members (*U K̄si*, father and brothers) of the girl's family go over to the boy's house to ascertain whether there are any objections or any blood relationship and fix the day of the engagement (some of my Presbyterian informants told me that the father never goes for these negotiations).

On the day of the engagement the boy's party made up of his *U K̄si* and other male relatives goes over to the girl's house where a priest is called who says prayers, the rings are exchanged and the day of marriage fixed.

and the ancestors of the clan is invoked.

Three types of marriage. (refer p. )

Once a choice is made, either by the couple or fixed by the parents, the *U K̄si* accompanied by the other male members of the girl's family goes to the boy's house to ascertain whether there is any 'sang' or any objections to the marriage. The *U K̄si* who is the main mediator then fixes the day of the wedding.

On the day settled the male members of both the house gather at the girl's house where the two *U K̄si* talks of two families and their willingness to unite the two families. Both the sides prays and consult auguries to ascertain whether the match is good for both the families. If good, the male members of the two families, excluding boy, meet at the girl's house and talk about their respective families. They make a promise on behalf of the bride and groom to honour their word and settle the day of the marriage. (Here the promise is made generally by the respective *K̄sis*).

On the day of the marriage the bride's side send a pot of rice and curry to the groom's house for the groom's consumption. At the appointed time the male side reaches the church first and awaits the bride who is brought in by her father or in his absence the *U Kāi*. The bride's party is met at the door by the male relatives of the groom (among some Christians the side entering the Church plants a white flag on which is written 'Happy Wedding', the bride's party then plants their flag forming a X. The marriage rites are done in accordance to the Church rules  
◦ by the Church priest. He reads prayers and vows, hymns are sung and the bride and groom exchange rings.

On the day of the marriages the bride's family consults auguries to see if the omens are good and ascertain the purity of the girl, and if not they abandon the wedding plans. If the wedding plans go through the bride's family sends a pot of rice and curry to the groom's side for the groom to partake. The groom accompanied by his male relatives come to the bride's house and they are met half way by the bride's side where *Kwai* is exchanged. The groom's *U Kāi* acts as his *Ksiang* (go between). On entering the bride's house, the mother of the bride anoints his head with oil and blesses him. On entering the house his *Ksiang* hands the groom over to the *Ksiang* (*U Kāi*) of the bride who introduces him to the bride and the groom exchange bags of *Kwai* and the two *Ksiangs* hand over their gourds containing liquor to the priest<sup>1</sup> who mixes the contents amidst invocation to 'goddess' *Synshar* and the primordial ancestor and ancestors of both the families for their blessings on the couple and their families. In 'Pynhiarsynjat' type of marriage, there is an exchange of rings which is placed on the bride and groom's fingers by the opposite *Kni*'s.

The groom and his relatives go to the bride's house. Then the groom's head is annointed with oil and he is blessed, by the bride's mother or other female relatives before he enters the house. The wedding feast is then held and the expenses are shared by both the parties. The bridal couple cut a wedding cake.

The bride goes over to pay her respect to her in-laws after the wedding and in most cases it is on the third day from the wedding. She generally stays there for a night or for some days.

When the bride enters, she generally uses a broom inside the house symbolising participation.

During the wedding the groom wears a suit and the bride a white gown. However, the bride's gown has been replaced to a large extent by the 'white dhara'. The bride also wears a veil on her head.

A feast is held at the bride's house on completion of the above rites and the expenses are shared by both the parties.

The bride goes over to the groom's house to pay her respects to the family on the third day of the wedding and stays for at least a night there.

Same is the case here.

The groom's generally wears a suit and the bride a white, pink or light blue 'dhara' (I have only come across the use of a white dhara). The bride does not cover her head.

These marriage patterns are followed among only the strictest of families in both the divisions of the population

as a simple system of marriage where the bride and groom simply stays together and later present themselves as husband and wife to their respective families, is more prevalent. Among the *Niam* followers this union is, however, taken as a transgression of God's covenant for which, the couple will be punished in this life. Among the Christians if the couple present themselves before the Church and seek forgiveness their names are again registered in the Church records.

At the time of birth of a child and the naming ceremony there are still some carry over from the traditional system among the Christians. When a child is born the 'mother-in-law' has to be informed and she brings with her a bathing pot, bananas and 'jain-it' (cloth for carrying the baby) with her. This system holds good for both the Presbyterians and Catholics, but some of my informants of both the sects have said that the bride takes the child to visit the 'Mei-Kha' (father's mother) and it is then that she gives all the three gifts. The *Meikha* does not come to visit. All this does not involve any rituals whereas among the traditional *Khasis* the *Meikha* also gifts some powdered rice besides the other three gifts and a number of rituals invoking the ancestors and gods for blessings, take place.

In the traditional system, a number of names are given by the *Meikha* of which, one is chosen through the ritual mentioned earlier. Among the Christians though the naming is

done by the *Meikha* or the father's family especially for the first child in both the sects, there are variations to the rule when the parents or the mother's family too name the child.

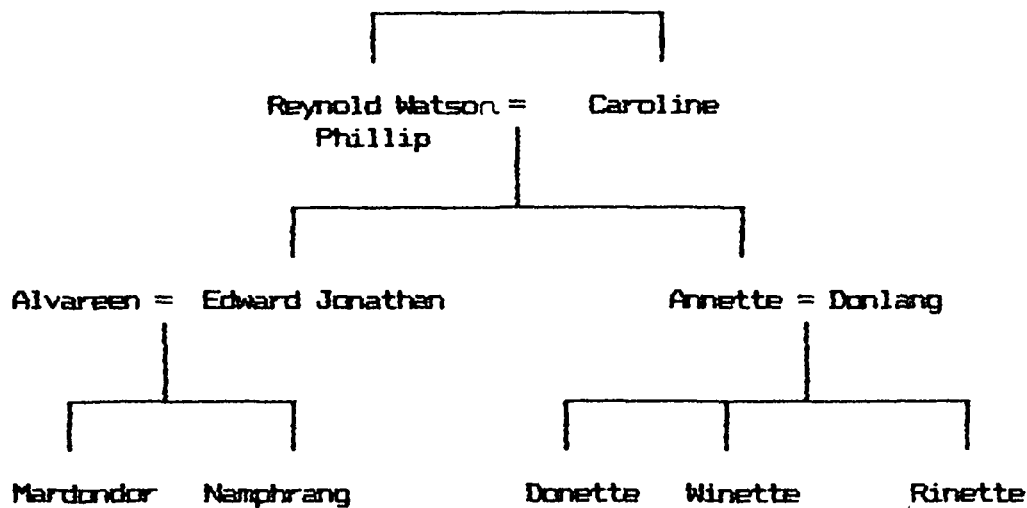
Again in death ceremonies, there is a noticeable retention of traditional beliefs in that they serve food to the dead even taking cooked food and *kwai* for the dead to the grave on yearly anniversaries. This is true especially amongst the Presbyterian Christians. The body is kept for three days in the house during which time, food is given to the dead at all meals by the *Niam* followers, but this is not so among the Christians. Among the *Niam* followers in case of unnatural death the body is kept outside the house for fear of the evil causing the death entering the house but this belief is no longer existing among the Christians.

Interestingly, also the customary taboos of the Khasi society are still adhered to by the Christian Khasis. For instance a Christian Khasi pregnant woman refrains from stitching, cutting fish or cutting her hair during the pregnancy term and her husband refrains from going fishing or hunting. Again some Presbyterian-Christian Khasis told me that when a death has occurred in a house they refrain from eating meat for a period of three days this seems to be carry over from a Hindu influence as there is no bar as to the kind

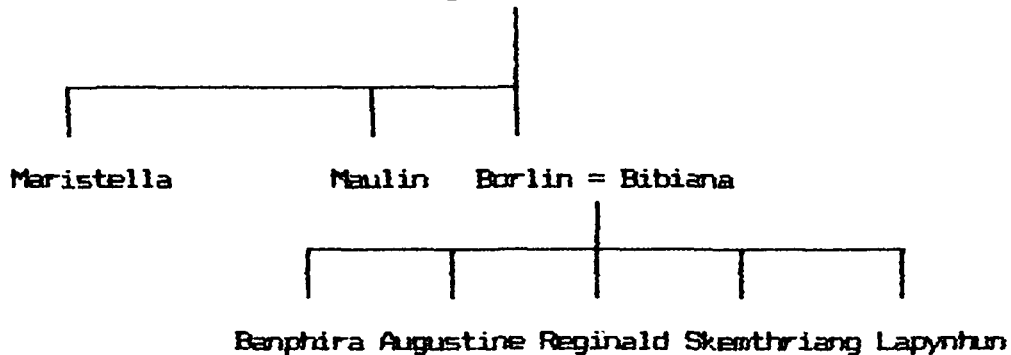
of food eating during the time when the body is in the house among the traditional Khasis.

The phenomena of reassertion of cultural identity, I find illustrated further in the selection of names for Christian (both Catholic and Presbyterian) Khasi children. The following charts are put up as examples:

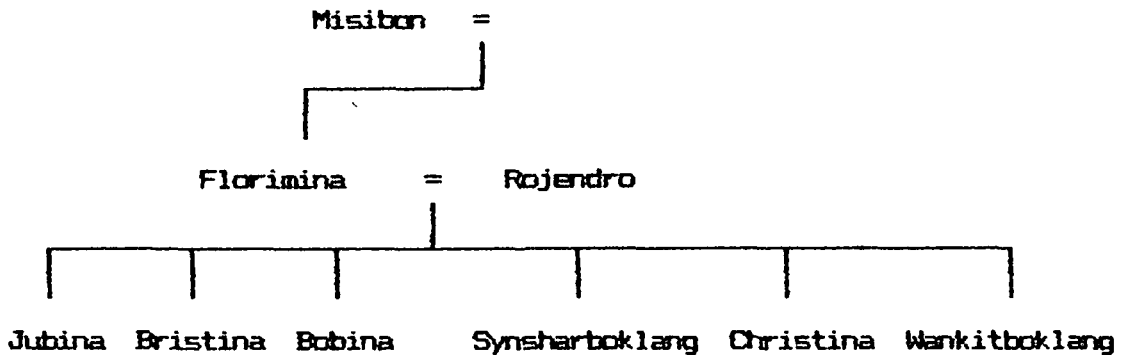
1. **PRESBYTERIAN**



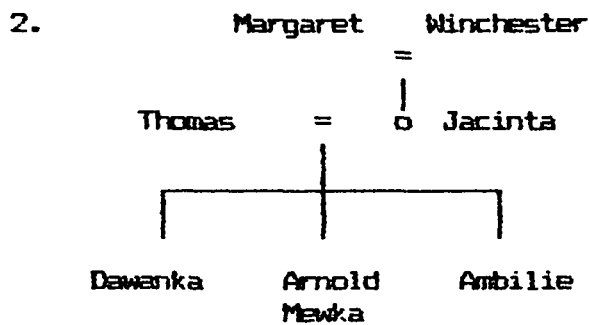
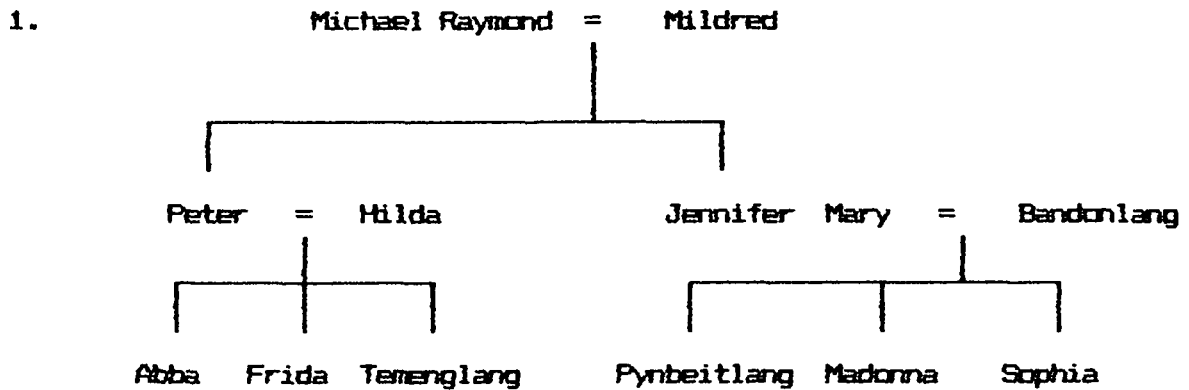
2. Shnga = Long



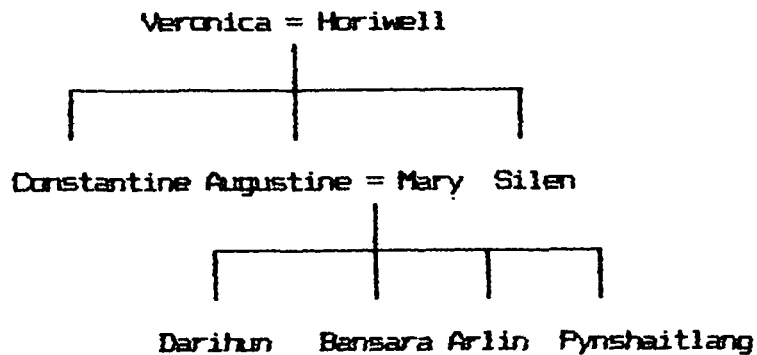
3. PRESBYTERIAN (CHURCH OF GOD)



Among the Catholics though there is a precedent of using a name of a saint as a protector, I have tried to bring out the fact that today they also use Khasi names by which they are addressed:



3.



Through information about the type of names given to the child, an attempt has been made to assess the interest in using Khasi names. While in the earlier generations, there were hardly any traditional names, in the third generation we notice a number of traditional names which, as the parents informed me were given because they felt that the Khasi names were beautiful and could really convey a satisfactory meaning. This statement is true for all the examples that have been taken. Another feature which comes through is that the parents seem to have given a lot of thought to the naming of the child which came through when they were asked the meanings of the name. In the first example, where two names are Khasi names, the parents who named the child explained that 'Mardondor' being the first child was named so, as it means 'valuable'. The next 'Namphrang' tentatively means 'moulded to the right direction like an arrow'.

In the second example, where the child in the third generation was named by a paternal aunt, *Banphira* means 'to take care', *Skhemtriang* means 'strong pillar' and *Lapynhun* means 'satisfied'. Here the last name is especially significant as the want for a daughter and the subsequent gratification and the birth of one is highlighted.

In the third example, the third and ego's generation has two Khasi names which were given by the parents the first *Kyrshanbokiang* means 'a support and one who brings luck' and *Wankitbokiang* means 'the one who carries luck'. The other children

In the fourth example, the names of the first child was given by the father's mother and the others by the maternal aunts and parents. The first Khasi name in the third generation *Tngeniang* who was the first male child after two females, means 'provider of shade and relief'. In the next family the name *Pynbaitiang* means 'to straighten' and *Lawandashisha* means 'be truly present'.

In the fifth example, the names in the third generation was given by the parents in consultation with their parents. The first name *Dawanka* means 'she has come', named so because they were hoping for a daughter and the suffix of the next name *Mewka* means 'God will look after him' named so because he was a sickly child.

In the sixth example, the names in the third generation was given by the fathers family in consultation with the parents. The first name 'Darihun' conveys the happiness of the people involved as it means 'we will look at her with satisfaction'. The second 'Bansara' means 'one who will increase the clan', the third who is the survivor of twin birth is named 'Arlyn' which means 'one of the two who has everything of two in her' and the fourth name 'Pynshaitlang' means 'one who will be healthy or a healer', this name was so given because the child was not very healthy at birth.

In all the examples taken above, the families have strong involvement with the Church, in fact in the case of the first the grandfather was a church elder. The families, however, felt that they are Khasis, therefore, they must give their children some Khasi names. In all the examples taken above all the children take the clan name of the mother. However, an exception is seen in the last case where the wife of the ego being a non-Khasi, was given a new Khasi clan name and the children take this new clan name.

An interesting feature that has emerged among the Catholics who feel the need to give a Christian name of a patron saint who would be the protector of the child, have started translating the Christian name to Khasi. For example, 'Orestes' which means 'hillman' has been translated to 'Riewlum', Martin which means 'Orator or Advocate' is termed

'Rangiasaid', 'Erasmus' which means the 'chosen one' is 'Balajied', 'Barbara' meaning 'not from the same village' is 'Palatshnong', 'Bibiana' meaning 'full of life' is 'Insimai', etc. These translations are provided in the Catholic yearly calendar which has facilitated the use of the names among the Catholics. Though this is true, the giving of a Christian patron saint name using the English one is still more common. Sometimes again, there are names which have an English meaning, and if spelt a little differently can have a Khasi meaning, e.g., 'Valarie' which in Khasi is spelt 'Balari' meaning 'one who is looked after, or 'Arlene' which in Khasis is spelt 'Ariyn' meaning 'one of the two'. There is a regular precedent of use of this kind of name among the Khasis.

One portion of the social structure withstood the massive Christianization, right from the beginning was in the kinship ties. The Catholic Church<sup>13</sup> and the Anglican Church<sup>14</sup>, had initially tried to do away with the matrilineal kinship structure but faced strong resistance due to which the kinship structure was let alone. We have seen that the youngest sister (*Khadduh*) is the custodian of the family property and wealth which she administers under the guidance of her maternal uncle (*U Kñi*). The *Khadduh* and *U Kñi* received their sanction from religion. With the coming of Christianity and modernization and resultant changes, the *Khadduh* has been deemed the owner of property and the *U Kñi* has lost his

authority. The realisation of this change which is shaking the matrilineal system have dawned on the Khasis so much so that regular seminars, papers and books are being put up on this issue. A section of the Christian Khasi informants have said that the change in the role of the 'Khadduh' and 'U K̄si' is a irreversible fact and, therefore, in view of the change and the wish to retain matrilineality they made an attempt at boosting the importance of the father so as not to leave him outside the family. One means adopted was by introducing his name to the name given to the children. For example, in the name L. Gilbert Shullai, the 'L' stands for the father's name. In P.R. Kyndiah, the 'P' stands for the father's name and in R.G. Lyngdoh, 'G' stands for Garnett, the father's name. This, I have been told, is being encouraged today in many families.

Another effort at resisting change and reinforcing certain elements in the matrilineal system was by means of an organisation called *Ka Seng Iktiar Longbriew Manbriew* set up in 1961<sup>15</sup> which sought changes in descent, inheritance and succession but within the matrilineal system. But this organisation fizzled out and later with the efforts of the United Khasi-Jaintia hills Autonomous District Council and the reports of the Law Commission, a bill was passed in the Meghalaya Legislative Assembly in 1984 called "The Meghalaya Succession to Self-acquired Property (Khasis and Jaintia

Special Provision) Act 1984" which enabled the Khasis and Jaintias to dispose of their self-acquired property as they deemed fit. Though this Act has not yet been brought into force, it is believed that it could have acted as a means to solve the disbalance in the inheritance pattern leading to the lowering in status of the Khasi male.

However, in matters of descent the Christian Church too has recognised the need for the rules regarding (Sang - Incest) could be prevented. The Welsh Mission has created a special vigilance committee comprising of members from the indigenous converts and missionaries, known as 'The Standing Incest Committee' (Ka Komiti Khein Sang) in 1931.<sup>16</sup> The Catholic Church, also takes precaution before a marriage is solemnised by making announcements on three consecutive Sundays before a packed audience asking to raise objections, if any, because of existence of close consanguinal kinship.

The Seng Khasi had been the sole socio-cultural platform for the Khasis since 1899, however, with the growth of many other cultural platforms, the Seng Khasi has activated its functioning through the formation of other branches and units. Besides these new branches the activities of the organisation still attempts at the assertion of cultural aspects of the traditional Khasis. These activities are published prominently through newspapers and mass media like television and radio.

The activities give us an insight into the form of cultural re-assertion; I, therefore, take upon myself to elaborate a few.

The 23rd November, the day *Seng Khasi* was established, is observed as *Seng Kutsnem* (refer Annexure VII) every year through a meeting at the Weiking ground, where stalwarts give lectures about the culture. The 23rd November, 1997, had Mr. Balajied Sing Syiem (the Syiem of Khyrim) as the Chief Guest. A large audience gathered at the *Seng Khasi Hall* where prayers were held and then a group of musicians accompanied the audience to the Weiking ground. The audience seated themselves and were given a programme and a song booklet by the youth.

Around 1.00 p.m. the Chief Guest was brought in to the accompaniment of music played on traditional instruments like the 'Ka Bom' (drum), 'Tangmuri' (wind pipe), 'Besli' (flute and chants of 'Hoi kiew'.

Next, the President of the *Seng Khasi* organisation gave a lecture on the essence of Khasi traditions and culture. He also sought the blessings of God for all people he had created, the Khasi land and people, the audience and the Chief Guest (*Ai Khublei Seng Kut Snem U Para Kur, Para Kha, Ai khublei U Balajied Syiem*).

A prayer in form of a 'phawar' (couplet) was then recited. The prayer says:

"As from the time of innocence; Almighty god had created the seven huts amongst the Khasis and as per tenet and commandment he placed his prayer for energising the spirit of earning righteousness for health prosperity and to know one's agnates and cognates and to worship only one Almighty God who had created the other human beings with their different forms of worship and different customs and traditions.

We pray too for the blessings on one's own earnings and to safe-guard all evil forces of temptations, envy and jealousy to safeguard the unity and integrity of the Khasis with their unique identity with good etiquette and behaviour. To Lord God who thousand pray to and worship (*U Blei Kynrad Shi hajar Nguh*)."<sup>17</sup>

Turning to their song booklet every one sang is a melodious number to the accompaniment of music provided by the musicians seated at the platform.

The General Secretary of the *Seng Khasi*, Mr. O.P. Swer talked of the traditions of the Khasi and also the

functioning of the different organs and the schools of the *Seng Khasi*. He also mentioned the fetes, subscriptions, books, magazines which brought in money for the functioning of the *Seng Khasi*.

The President then spoke introducing Mr. Balajied Syiem in his speech.

Again a song was sung after which the Chief guest Mr. Balajied Syiem spoke. He talked of the Khasis unique identity laid down in the tenets as the almighty destined, the music, dance, sports and the sense of honesty and the civic sense, all of which must be combined to bring about peace. He further talked of the moral degradation, degradation in speech, behaviour, and etiquette among the Khasis. Speaking about the evils of drugs and drinks he said the youth should exercise self-control and will power. He ended his speech saying that there was a strong necessity of understanding one's own faith.

Mr. Shylla, a society elder, spoke of the functioning of the *Seng Khasi*, the need for motivating people to return to their traditional religion, need for collecting more funds and the need for giving guidance by elders to the *Seng Samla* (youth wing). He also spoke of the need for enlivening the customs, traditions and cultural heritage of the Khasis to enable the *Seng Khasi* to be more effective, as the *Seng Khasi* was the new hope for the century.

The gathering dispersed after singing a song and seeking God's blessing. In the evening there was a music, dance and play programme in the *Seng Khasi* hall, Mawkhar.

Another importance event in the *Seng Khasi* calendar is the *Shad Suk Mynsiem* (Thanksgiving dance) which is held on 13th and 14th of April every year, in order to thank God for the year past, seek his blessings for the coming year and also to advance the culture of the Khasi race.

The dance is held for three days. On the first day, after the prayers at the *Seng Khasi* Hall a procession is led by the fully attired dancers, musicians, carrying the *Ka Som*, *Nakra*, *Nalai* (drums), *Cymbals (Chow Chow)*, *Besli* and *Tangmuri*, to the Weiking ground. Here the women dancers (requirement is that they have to be virgins) dance in the centre while the males dance around them brandishing a sword and waving Yak hair whisks, to the beat of the music. This dance and the worship was done all the three days with the dancers and musician returning to the *Seng Khasi* hall at night.

The dance now-a-days sees in the audience a number of Christians who when asked said that it was their tradition and they felt proud to see it staged, when asked whether the Church objected they said, that though earlier, the Church and their parents did object now-a-days they don't and this

generation would even allow their children to join in the dance, but they did not know the steps.

The Seng Khasi makes an attempt to acquaint the children with the traditional dances, and music, through the *Seng Pyni* (refer page 131). The *Seng Pyni* is held every Sunday at the Mawkhar Seng Khasi Hall, the branch work under the secretaryship of Mr. Phira Dkhar. Mr. Dkhar said that the children get acquainted to the music and dance. A month before the *Shad Suk Mynsiem*, the dancers start practising in the hall.

The *Seng Pyni* takes place at around 1.30 p.m. The morning session consists of the *Seng Khyannah* (children's section) where the book *Jingsneng Tymmen*, by Radhon Sing Berry, is read out and explained. The information in the book includes the origin, myths of the Khasis, their cultural practices, tenets and religious ideas.

In this gathering, I was told that sometimes dances too were performed. From one in the afternoon the *Seng Pyni* was held where again songs were sung and Mr. D.P. Lyttan gave a talk on the cultural and religious essence of the Khasis. He spoke of the need to create awareness among the people regarding their own culture and the fact that they should not imbibe foreign cultures. The *Seng Pyni* was held under the Chairmanship of Mr. Kersing Tariang.

The *Seng Pyni* (Annexure VIII) a wing of the *Seng Khasi* provides a programme for five months in advance, to all the Chairpersons and Speakers besides the persons interested. In the *Seng Pyni* that I attended five senior members of the *Seng Khasi* were present.

Mr. Dkhar informed me that from time to time a *Seng Pyni* is held at different localities and houses. the idea behind being the fact that it becomes inconvenient for people from distant localities to come and in some places there are elderly people who cannot venture out but want to keep in touch with the workings. On the 1st of November, 1998, it was held at the house of Ms. Sitimon Sawian which was attended by about two hundred people of Mawkhar, besides the family members. Mr. K. Singh Tariang spoke of Khasi traditions and religion.

The *Seng Samla* has an active participation in the *Seng Khyllang* which came up in 1973 with Mr. Hipshon Roy as the President. This group which is an offshoot of the *Seng Khasi* join hands with the Indian Tribal Cultural Forum. This Forum is a socio-religious-cultural voluntary welfare organisation set up for the advancement of tribals and their traditional belief, social organisation and education, which was established in 1980 at Guwahati. The aims and objectives of the Forum was to bring about a unity among the North-Eastern tribal groups, create awareness through seminars, discussion,

literature, education and projects of public utility; assist traditional institutions, undertake research on tribals in the area, open libraries, send delegates to seminars, conferences and training programmes, publish books and other literature, assist similar minded organisation, establish and assist in establishing schools, receive grants, create funds and acquire movable and immovable property for furtherance of the forum's work.<sup>18</sup>

Though the *Seng Khyllang* was formed with the objective of the advancement of cultural welfare, it does not have any Christian members. The *Seng Samla* (Youth Wing) of the *Seng Khasi* is actively associated with the *Seng Khyllang*. This organisation, at present is working under the presidentship of Mr. Robin Kurbah. Mr. Don Shabong an active member of the organisation told me that they had been going to Delhi to represent the Khasis in cultural meets. Besides which, they held a cultural programme at the *Seng Khasi* hall on the 18th of April, 1997. These meets on a large scale are held once a year but from time to time they have smaller meets where youths from all over the state present dances, songs and stage performances. Mr. Cres Nongkynrih another active member told me that not only did these meets bring about awareness of their own culture but that the lectures on subjects of culture by stalwarts inspire the youth to feel proud of their culture. Besides these meets act as the meeting ground for

Khasi youths. The *Seng Khyllang* functions entirely on the cultural level and no religious or ritualistic activities are included in its programme.

The *Seng Samla*, the youth wing of the *Seng Khasi*, besides having its members participating in the activities of the *Seng Khyllang*, also participates in the outdoor activities like publicising for *Seng Khasi* activities. At present the *Seng Samla* is involved with poster campaigns for the *Seng Kut Snem*, they also put up stalls of books and food during the big events, of the *Seng Khasi* giving around programmes during the events, making banners, organising making cassettes, etc. Besides, this particular wing of the *Seng Khasi* nearly every locality in Shillong has a *Seng Samla* made up of the youth of the locality (Christian and Non-Christian) who organise activities of the locality.

Another attempt by the *Seng Khasi* of resisting the missionary activity was through the *Seng Kyrseven* (Association to awaken people). The *Seng Kyrseven* is a mobile group of speakers who visit different areas of the Khasi and Jaintia hills to talk about the Khasi tradition religion and culture and initiate people to return to their tradition religion. This wing was created in 1979 and the first effort was at Pynursla. The latest *Seng Kyrseven* was held at Mawlaingut in the West Khasi Hills district in May 1998. Generally, requests for holding a *Seng Kyrseven* is made by traditional

Khasi people from different areas. The *Jing Pyrkhath Kam* (General body) of Seng Khasi files the requests and allots the speakers to go to the different areas. The speakers go and speak of the tradition, religion and culture of the Khasis and the need to retain these elements so as not to be overcome by foreign cultures who would destroy their own. At Mawlaingut three speakers went and there was a large gathering of people with Khasi songs and traditional music being staged. *Seng Kyrsew* are held within Shillong from time to time one was held at Nongthymmai and another at Malki in the beginning of this year.

Another means of conveying the traditional culture are through meets called *Seng Kynmaw Burom* which are held in different houses on death anniversaries of family members. This *seng* is held on the request of the respective families and talks about culture and religion and need to retain the tradition is given. The most recent one was at Nongthymmai on 14th October in the house of Mrs. K. Basaiawmoit which was attended by a large gathering. At this gathering they pay respect to family members. Both Christian and non-Christian relatives attend and listen to the talks.

The *Seng Kynthei* (women's wing) also had a role to play in the whole scheme as they advocated welfare programmes. They generally meet every second Sunday of the month and also organise lectures, fetes and gets together. They have

recently held a fete to create funds for the *Seng Kut Snem* and have applied to the government for a piece of land to make a hostel for students coming from the villages.

Besides the *Seng Khasi* another group came up which emphasised on the revival of religious rituals and rites of the traditional system. This group was known as the *Ka Seng ki Nongshat Nongkheih* (organisation of the Diviners of the Khasi Jaintia) established in 1983. It had as its emblem an axe. The axe is symbolic of the cutting edge.

The organisation has its own office bearers in form of the President, Vice-President, General Secretary, Joint Secretaries, Treasurer and Members spread over different geographical units.

The main objective of the organisation was to bring about the welfare of the community and the people through communication with God *U Blei* through signs and symbols and rituals as God had in the beginning promised to show his presence through *Ki Dak ki Shin*, *Ki Kem Ki Lar*, or symbols and signs in ritual performances.

The Khasi people had great faith in the signs and symbols and despite the fact that many have embraced Christianity, in times of trouble, they secretly go to the diviners. The Christian Khasis are of the opinion that as the Khasis who practice the *Niam* have retained their rituals and communication with God as their uncles and brothers still

participate in family and clan rituals they do not need the organisation to divine for them. They (the Christians), however, felt the need for this in times of trouble as their priests and clergies and *Kāis* do not know how to find out the reasons for the trouble and they make a move to the *Nongshat Nongkhein*.

The members of this organisation carry on their works from their individual houses. They also publish pamphlets in Khasi; creating awareness regarding the work of the organisation, some of their materials are *Ka Seng ki Nongshat Nongkhein Ri Khasi Pnar* (1983), *Ka Imlang Sahlang* (1984). In order to bring about greater awareness regarding the working, a unit under the leadership of En Nongrum (General Secretary) started *Seng Kyrseven* (Annexure IX) moving to different parts of the Khasi and Jaintia Hills. Through these *Seng Kyrsews* they have caused quite a number of Christian Khasis to revert back to their traditional religion.

The Christian Khasis view the ritualistic practices of the *Nongshat Nongkheif* as a form of medical science and not part of religion. During my field work, I came across a lady *Nongshat Nongkheif* who was a Catholic and who said that this method of curing was a God given talent which was to be used for helping people. She conducted the curing process in a manner similar to the other *Nongshat Nongkhein* by holding the fowl by the jugular vein. The fowl fluttered in a tin and

died and she said that it was because there was an evil spirit in the house which was causing the illness. Prior to this she had taken some cowrie shells and rice and determined whether there was an evil spirit or a curse. After the fowl died, she disemboweled it and taking out the intestines read the message and gave certain medicines and some water to be sprinkled in the house. The other *Nongshat Nongkhein* also follow the same procedure.

The *Seng Nongshat Nongkhein*, however, does not accept her as a member; firstly because in the traditional system this activity can only be taken up by a male and besides they also said that as a Christian, she did not realise the essence of the cause effect relationship between God and Man. Which has to be fulfilled by communication through certain prayers.

The Christian Khasis do feel for the retention of their culture which they say is an essential feature of their identity. Most Christians feel that the fact that they were Khasis by birth and blood and kept the *Kur-Kha* relationship, they were totally Khasis.

The information afforded to me through my field work was that the Christian Khasis as well as the Khasis belonging to the traditional faith (members of *Seng Khasi* or not) felt that the *Seng Khasi* organisation was important for the maintenance of Khasi identity. The traditional Khasis felt

that it was only by means of this organisation that the Khasis could retain their culture as the organisation promoted religion which is essential to the Khasi culture. On the other hand a large number of Christian Khasi informants said that though the organisation plays an important role in maintaining elements like traditional dances, music, *kur-kha* relationship, the aspect of promoting religion is not really necessary for the maintenance of culture and instead was causing divisiveness within the culture. This section of informants said that in today's context when Christianity had come to stay among the Khasis, the *Seng Khasi* should contain itself to promotion of traditional cultural elements other than religion as it is the latter feature which is alienating the Christian Khasis from their organisation. When asked if they felt religion was not part of culture, they said that being a Khasi does not mean following the Khasi religion, by a Khasi one means a person who is born a Khasi, belongs to the Khasi *Kur-Kha'*, speaks the Khasi language and thinks and dreams in Khasi.

Only a small number of Christian Khasi informants said that the religion was an important part of being a Khasi but as they themselves were Christians by birth they did not want to make a change and besides they already were Khasis by the adherence to the *Kur-Kha* relationship. They also said that they as Christians were following the essential features of

Khasi religion by believing in one God, and trying to be good and righteous human beings. The ritual aspects they felt are man-made and, therefore, not very important.

The non-Christian Khasis on the other hand said that their beliefs and rituals are the facts that would hold the society together as the sanctions of religion are important. Taking an example of the breaking matrilineality one of my informants said that among them the *U Kñi* had a ritual role which could not be done away with as no one but him was equipped to do those rituals thus the importance to males in form of the *U Kñi*, who had a sense of belonging, that could not be undermined. Another informant said that in the present day, there were many inter-marriages between Khasi males and non-Khasi females. Among the Christians most of the males lost their moorings to the culture as the children were brought up like non-Khasis. However, among the *Niam* followers there was the ritual practice of *Tang Jait* where a new Khasi clan could be formed and accepted by all in the traditional society, therefore, there was no feeling of insecurity, and the children were accepted as Khasis by all the members of the society. This naturally helped them being brought up as a Khasi. More so, with the reinforcement of Khasi culture through the *Seng Khasi*, this became doubly possible.

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4. Snaitang, O.L., *op. cit.*, p.87.
5. *Ibid.*
6. *Ibid.*, p.93.
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17. As translated for me during the function by Mrs. S. Rynjah.
18. Synrem, Kelian, *op. cit.*,

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## CONCLUSION

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It is mostly argued that culture embodies values which may be formulated overtly or may be felt implicitly by the society carrying the culture. In the preceding chapters, I have made a small attempt to characterise and define the changing scenario vis-a-vis the culture of the Khasi community in the North-East. In chapters I and III, I have explained how the main cultural traits among the ancient Khasis were transmitted and accumulated by the society. Culture was one with society in the sense we could use the words Khasi culture and Khasi society in the same breadth. The situation changed drastically with the coming of the colonial presence in their midst and there appears a division of culture between the social and the religious (refer chapter-III). The change in the religion factor in the ancient culture has undoubtedly greatly modified the social factor. Like the traditional Khasi religion the new religion too has succeeded in pervading all phases of the Khasi life. However, cultural resistance against subjugation has come from both groups of the Khasi community as they both feel the need for preserving Khasi identity. Also we must not forget they share a common history with common ethical and cultural mores which originated in the indigenous religion.

Cultural interaction is highly complex, indigenous and foreign cultures often intermingle and effect each other. The assimilation of elements of foreign culture with the indigenous involves a process of analysis, differentiation and absorption. But it is doubtful whether this threefold process was undertaken initially by the indigenous elite who opted for embracing the religion of the foreign elite. Colonialism all over the world has led to cultural liquidation of the conquered communities. With a view to facilitating their rule and the exploitation of the indigenous people, they successfully managed giving an inferiority complex to the conquered people with respect to their own culture. It is a historical fact that the colonial powers' interest in missionary work was not always from purely religious motives. They were perhaps convinced that the 'civilising', influence of missions advanced colonial plans directly or indirectly. Unlike the officers of the colonial administrations, the missionaries with their deep commitment and dedication had gained the trust and an intimacy with the people hence they were used as the most effective force of colonisation, simply because they penetrated more deeply into the life the people. Consequently, the missions helped the colonizers to consolidate their authority over the people as they hypocritically talked of the completion of the task of having

a 'colony of a Christian power'. Westernization through Christianity got equated with civilization while the indigenous faith was boldly labelled as barbarism. It cannot be doubted that for a long period of time a strong section of the Khasi elite advocated wholesale westernisation. After the acceptance of the western religion they came to regard the west as better in every respect. They tried to impose a culture which was derivative and imitative of the west.

"The introduction of a new administration has ushered a new era among the people. The entire area which was formerly independent and subjected to no outside empires, was now tagged on to the larger British map. The system of government that was imposed among the matrilineal culture has opened up a new world culture. The procedure of appointment was now done on the basis of qualification and not on muscle power. In the context of the matrilineal male dominated leadership, the introduction of the British administration has come as a good news to women. The freedom given to woman in the early period of British settlement was significant and served as a foundation for women leadership in the subsequent century and well into the present."<sup>1</sup>

The dominance of this was, of course, militated against even in the colonial times as I tried to show, by Khasi writers like U Soso Tham, U Jeebon Roy, U Radhon Singh Berry, etc. Though colonial ethos in some forms has persisted yet a

small change which is taking place which is evidence to the fact that there is a realisation that modernization (a process started by the British) in the specific context of the Khasis has to be different from not only its neighbouring groups, but also the West. My purpose in this thesis has not been to assess the impact of Christianity vis-a-vis social change in family, marriage, agriculture and other realms of life. I have accepted the fact that religious factor is the major factor in social change. In chapter-II, I have outlined a brief history of conversion to Christian faith. My purpose there has been simply to record the first exposure of the indigenous to the overpowering alien presence. With it a strong section of the community gave up their earlier stand of unquestioning acceptance of the moral order of their culture. Not only that, they started to criticise the ancient wisdom and became sceptical of their moral order. In such a situation cultural conflict was inevitable. One positive result of this conflict was the greater systematization of the ancient knowledge by the *Seng Khasi* (Chapter-IV).

A negative fall-out of Christianization has been that there could not be a strong, more organised and cohesive resistance to the onslaught of colonialism. Aware of the need to preserve custom such as matriliney and other customary laws relating to family and property, practicing Christians in spirit at least did not completely let go their traditional

beliefs and practice. Sometimes, the Christian Church appeared to be either unaware or turned a blind eye to these practices. The church was aware of its success in providing a focus in the shape of its religious experiences. It is an undeniable fact that the cultural focus of the dominant Christian group has been the religion factor and they accept the superiority of the faith introduced by the colonial power. It appears to me to explain the absence of a significant movement offering cultural resistance to colonialism. A strong movement could only result if the society was more homogeneous, keeping the so-called 'superstitious elements' out of culture undermined a notable portion of the cultural activities of the Khasis. There could not be an over-arching and unifying ideology against the forces of colonialism and beneath whatever unity appeared on the surface lay substantial differences based on differing perceptions of the role and character of cultural traits. In effect the kind of resistance they offer stands free of its own history and as separate from the one offered by the *Seng Khasi*. Against the powerful forces of modernism and westernization, both the offshoot of colonialism, these small attempts at resistance may lose their legitimation.

What we are confronted with today is a culture which is unable to say either yes we should give up indigenisation or no we shall hold on to everything that is ours. This calls

to mind the ending of 'A Passage to India' in which the author confirms the history behind Britain's subjugation of India and "yet can neither recommend decolonisation nor continued colonisation."<sup>2</sup>

One can see the future Khasi society Christianized and modernised in many respects yet continuing to live with many traditional elements. This is not a 'strange phenomena, modern western (secular) societies too have the fanfare of traditional marriage rituals. So also the Khasi will continue to observe the ancient festivals such as the *Pomblang Nongkrem*, *Shad Sul Mynsiem*, etc. even when in theory he has rejected the sacred implications of them.

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CONSTITUTION  
OF  
HYNNIWETREP ENDEAVOUR SOCIETY

- Clause I : Name  
This Society will be known by the name of 'HYNNIWETREP ENDEAVOUR SOCIETY'.
- Clause II : Office  
Its Office will be situated in Lumsokra-Sebastian BIA ROAD, Laitumkhrah, Shillong-793003.
- Clause III : Aims and Objects  
The aims and objects of this Society are as follows:
1. For preservation of old documents, records, books, etc.
  2. To help and encourage the writings in history and other relevant subjects related to the social, cultural and political life of the Hynniewtrep.
  3. Any other activity which may help to promote and uplift the Society.
- Clause IV : Membership
- I. Full fledged member shall have the following privileges and rights subject to proper discipline and conduct as to which the sole judgement shall lie with the Executive Committee formed under this Constitution.
    - a) To enjoy equal benefits which are derived from various activities introduced and organised by this Society.
    - b) To have right non-transferable vote in all matters as required under this Constitution.
    - c) To avail equal participation in various activities of this Society without any extra/additional fees or charges except in special cases when prior notification is issued in authorised manner in that behalf.
    - d) To see accounts of this Society with prior permission of the office-bearers of this Society in whose custody the account will be held.

# C O N S T I T U T I O N

(NAME)

4 This Organisation shall be known by the name of  
U HYNNEW TREP CULTURAL AND WELFARE ORGANISA-  
TION.

Area of Operatio

-1. Its Jurisdiction shall extend to the whole of  
Ehasi, Jaitia and Ri-Rhoi District.

Aims and Objects

1. To organise and to develop artistic task of  
Group/Individual in matters concerning the  
upliftment/rivival of the cultural heritage  
of U Hynniew Trep through Cultural activities.
2. To organise recreational/Social & Welfare  
activities.
3. To organise activities which may help to  
promote the above aims and objects.

Character

- The Hynniew Trep Cultural and Welfare Organisa-  
tion shall be purely Voluntary Organisation.  
It shall be a Non-Political and Non-Religious  
Organisation.

1. An active member of any political Party/Organi-  
sation cannot be a member of U Hynniew Trep  
Cultural and Welfare Organisation.
2. A member of U Hynniew Trep Cultural and Welfare  
Organisation can also be a member of any reli-  
gious profession provided that he or she is a  
Hynniew Trep.
3. Any Member of this Organisation who wish to  
seek Election to any Political body should  
submit his resignation immediately to the Office  
concern or he shall automatically cease to  
be member of this Organisation.

Formation

- The Members of U Hynniew Trep Cultural and  
Welfare Organisation shall constitute the  
central Body and its central office shall be  
situated at Motphren C/o. Mahari and sons,  
Shillong - 743 002.

Its Nature

- The Central Body of the Hynniew Trep Cultural  
and Welfare Organisation shall have its own  
Executive Committee which shall be named the  
Central Executive Committee, which shall func-  
tion within the frameword of this constitution.

The Hynniew Trep Cultural and Welfare Organisa-  
tion shall have Branches at certain places when  
and where central body or Central Executive  
Committee who is the only authority to do so  
feels deem fit and proper.

The Central Executive committee consisting  
Office Bearers and Executive Members, shall be  
elected by Members of the Central Body of the  
Hynniew Trep Cultural and Welfare Organisation  
by not less than 1/3 (one-third) majority of  
Members present with the quorum of 1/3 (one-  
third) of the total Strength.

Each Branch of the Hynniew Trep Cultural and  
Welfare Organisation shall have their own member  
to constitute a General Body of a Particular  
Branch. All Branches shall have their own Exe-  
cutive Committee to function within the frame  
work of this constitution.

# Rympei Theatrical Centre

... a brief summary ..

It is a proud privilege for the Rympei Theatrical Centre to be able to complete its ninth year of existence.

RTC was founded by Mr. Kenny Shympa who was a gifted teacher of Anthony's High School, Shillong and now a senior staff of Mawkyndeng High School, Jaintia Hills. It was he who started a small coaching class in the winter of 1972 when he invited many young boys and girls to attend the training session, but only a few turned up. Not to be disheartened by the poor response, he went ahead with his plan. After many months of hard-works and sacrifices the plan began shaping well. When the time is ripe, he explained to them his plan and idea and together they formed a Theatrical Organisation christened "The Rympei Theatrical Centre" with the main aims and objectives to:

- \* preserve the rich cultural heritage of Meghalaya and that of the Khasis in particular,
- \* educate the people through the media of stage acting and inculcate upon them the importance of dramatic arts;
- \* organise social, cultural and recreational activities.

Its birth was formally inaugurated on the 15th June, 1973 by Mr. B. B. Lyngdoh, the then Finance Minister of Meghalaya. On that day, the Centre staged a play entitled "KA NGIEW" at the Don Bosco Hall, Laitumkhrah and later on at the State Central Library Auditorium, Shillong in aid of the Soso Tham Memorial Fund. The presentation of this play was such that news of the same was flashed in mostly all the local papers and even national dailies like Amrita Ba-

zar Patrika and The Assam Tribune. The present membership strength is 35.

Time and tide waits for no man, so also the past nine years seems but yesterdays. However, within this very short span of time we have been able to achieve and contribute something towards the promotion of drama. So far we have staged 22 plays (Short and full length) to the entire satisfaction of the general public. Over and above, we are proud to mention that the proceeds of most of our Shows were donated to various Social, Cultural and Charitable Institutions like the KJP Hospital, Nazareth Hospital, Seng Iarap Hospital, Indian Red-Cross, Chief Minister's Relief Fund, Soso Tham Memorial Fund, Scouts and Guides (Boscorec), Women & Ex-Servicemen Associations, Teachers' Welfare Fund, Malki Socio-Cultural and Literary Organisation. The L. P. School at Nongmynsong, Nongkre'n, Umpling, Nongthymmai and many other organisations at Cherra-punjee, Mawsynram, Mawngap, and Nongkrem. Besides, we also extend our helping hand in Government, Private, Military and Educational functions. In short, our activities and standard is well known throughout Khasi and Jaintia Hills.

In 1979 we started an *Inter School One-Act Play Competition* and in 1981 three more other competitions were started - viz - "*Individual Singing Competition*", "*Beat Contest*" and "*Short Play Writing Competition*". The result of the last competition mentioned above is yet to be announced. Taking all these into consideration, inspite of our drawbacks, pitfalls and shortcomings, we can safely raise our heads high with pride.

# **Ka Bri Hynniewtrep**

STATE MOVEMENT

HQ : Shillong

("Ieng Tylli Namar Ka Ri")

Dated, Shillong the.....

Ha

Ki Syiem bad Nongsynshar Barch,

U President & General Secretary

Rangbah badonburom,

Ha ka jingrai jong ka general meeting ba la pynlong ha ka 5/8/97 ka la rai ka BHSM ka dei ruh ban phah ki kyrwoh saindur sha ki seng bhalang bad seng mon-sngewbha ia ka jingialeh ban ioh la ka jong ka Jylla , na ka bynta u Hynniewtrep da u Hynniewtrep ia u Hynniewtrep. Ka la don ka jinghren khohnioh ia ka jingdon jing ki katto katne ki rangbah ha ka BHSM . Kaei ba ngi kwah ban pynshai ka long ba kane ka seng kam dei ka seng jong uwei u ar, Kiba iei ia ka jaitbynriew kim dei ban thud ia ka jingdon kum kita, namar ka BHSM ka kynthup ia baroh kito kiba trei na ka bynta ka jaitbynriew bad kiba ngi tip ki iohi jngai ia ka lawei.

Nyngkong eh ka BHSM ka kwah ban batai kaei kaba la pynlong ia kane ka seng ban ai ka kyrteing Hynniewtrep. Naduh mynshuwa la ju don kata ka polisi 'divide and rule', bad kaba kham shyrkhei imat ha kane ka jylla Meghalaya ruh la sdang ban don kajuh ka jingthum ban pynpait pynpra ia ka jaitbynriew Khasi-Pnar. Ka long kaba shisha ba bun hi kim sngew ia hap shuh ban kam ialade ba ki dei ki Khasi. Don hateng hateng ba ki jongngi ki la ia sngew pher jaitbynriew, kumta don kiba ong 'Ngi dei ki War; Ngi dei ki Pnar; Ngi dei ki Bhoi; bad ngi dei ki Lyngngam, ngim dei ki Khasi". Ka ktien kaba ngi iajuh iajan eh dei ka kyntien 'Hynniewtrep' Ki Naga, ki ju sngewtynnad ban ong 'Nga dei u Naga - u Ao Naga,' ne 'Nga dei u Mizo, u Biate Mizo. Wat ki Assamese ruh ki ong, Nga dei u Assamia u Ahom, ne Assamia na Goalpara, ne Jorhat ter ter. Hynrei shuh shuh to ngin iathir ia ki por u Longshuwa manshuwa kumne harum :

La tip ia kane ka Ri kum ka Ri 30 Syiem 12 Doloi, ka Ri Umsnam u Ni u Kong, hynrei ka kyrteing ka Jylla Meghalaya, ka la kah dum da u lyoh ia ka kyrteing u Pnar, u Bhoi, u War bad u Lyngngam bad kumjuh baroh kito kiba sah ha kane ka jylla kum ki Bengali, Assamia, Nepali, Behari, ki dei ki nong Meghalaya. Baroh kito kiba leit pule shabar, baroh kito ki pher-jait (ngin nym khot shuh khyllah jait) ki dei ki nong Meghalaya. Lada ka Nagaland, Mizoram, Manipur, Assam, Tamilnadu, Pynjabi, ki don ka jaitbynriew kaba hap kyrteing bad ka jylla, balei ym lah hangne ? Namar ba la ia khleh khaw-lang naduh ba ioh kane ka jylla, hap pdiang ia kane ka kyrteing nongwei.

La palat 25 snem ba ngi la ioh kane ka jylla, pynban u Assam u nang tur man ka sngi, bad ki nongialam kane ka jylla ki bthi ka jabieng pyrkhath . 25 snem tam, hynrei u Hynniewtrep u ioh synshar tang 8 snem, bad ruh shu jalla jalaid. Ka jingbym iatylli ki jongngi ka la pynlong kumne ia kane ka jylla. Kynnoh iano kynnoh ialade.

Kaba ktah eh ia ka jaitbynriew Hynniewtrep ka long ka jingbhah ai kam ai jam . U Hynniewtrep u don 3 pawa, u ioh 40% . U Garo u don shipawa ruh u ioh 40%. Haei ka man ka jingiatip lem? Ki jongngi kiba ioh 70% ki marks ki nang shem shitom ban ioh leit pule ha ki jingpule bapher. Ki lok Garo pat tang 36% ruh la biang. Sngew synei ia ki khun samla kiba mynta kim banse ban shim da ki suloi ban leh ki kam be-ain namar bym ioh kam. Hato kine ki khun samla kim dei ki khun ki ksiew jong ngi ? Sha ri Garo pat, ka bhah ia ki ka dei 100%.

Bishar kein ia ki kam pynroi. Ka South Garo Hills ka ioh ryngkat ka District bad ka Ri Bhoi. Hynrei ka Nongpoh kan nang sl'em ban ioh ka Radio Steshon TV centre. Yn nai ia kren shaphang ka West Khasi Hill kaba la ioh district naduh mynno. U dewiong u bun ha Ri Khasi Jaintia, hynrei ka Coal India ka don ha Tura. Ka rep. synsar ka jur bha shangi, hynrei ka Cash Crop Development Office ka don ha Tura. U Robar u bun bha ha ki thain ki Bhoi, hynrei ka Rubber board ka don ha Tura. La jan plie sa ka Agricultural College, lymda ka BHSM ka ujur ha ka 15.5.97. La katta ruh ioh pynban da ka Home Science College bad ia Institute of Culture ha Tura. Pyrkhath pat sa ka jingheh, Khasi Jaintia : 14262 sq km , Garo Hills 8167 sq km.

Ban nang pynkhlain ia ka jingtrei kam, ngi la pynkha ki tnad trei-kam ia mynta shipor. Kine ki tnad ki long.

1. Economic and Labour ka ban peit ia ka ioh ka kot bad ka hok u nongtrei bad ka sain dur ia ka lawei ha kine ki phang.
2. Civic, Socio, Cultural & Youth affairs-ka ban peit ia ka imlang sahang ka kolshor bad ka kam ki samla samhoi; yn saindur thymmei halor kitei ki phang baroh.
3. Political & Administration-kan saindur ia ki rukom trei-kam thymmai kum ha kaba pynim biang ia ka bor ka iktiar ki 30 Syiem, ki 12 Dolo! bad kiwei pat ki nongsynshar da kaba ai shuh shuh ka bor ka iktiar, bad ban wad ki lad ban shem ia ki daw tynrai ba la pynlong ia ki jaka ba bun ha ki khappud ban shah tur ha ka Assam.
4. Publicity & Media : Ka tnad pynmih ki kot, ki kyrwoh khubor ter ter.

Ha kaba iadei bad ki kam babun, ka Economic & Labour, Publicity & Media bad kumjuh ka Political & Adminsitration ki la leh la ki kam bad thoh sha ki bor sorkar India ne Jylla bad la leit ia kynduh markhmat ia kiwei pat.

Kitei ki tnad ki la trei kam bha, hynrei kaba kham ktah eh ia ka jaitbynriew dei ka kam ba ka Political & Administration ia kaba ki nongialam jongngi kim shym iohi jngai. Pyrkhath seh phi ki Nongsynshar, ki Nongialam ki Seng Bhalang, ka Para 12A Ka Sixth Scheduled ka Constitution kaba la wanrah ha ka por ba ioh

A BRIEF REPORT OF KA LYMPUNG KI SENG KYNTHEI

It was on the 23rd October, 1991, that the representatives of the various women organisations of Shillong and its suburbs met His Excellency, the Governor of Meghalaya, Shri Madhukar Dighe at Raj Bhavan to submit a memorandum on the abnormal hike in prices of essential and other commodities in the State, the mal-functioning of the Public Distribution System, particularly the non supply of their quota of rice and sugar etc. for nearly three months. The Governor gave a patient hearing and was surprised to know about the delay and non-availability of rice etc. He assured the delegation that the people would get their quota within two days at the rate of 4 kgs. per head, and this was done. After meeting the Governor, the representatives met again in front of the State Central Library, Shillong, for further discussions. The members felt that there was an urgent need to form a Central body/ coordination body of the women organisations. Although the idea of forming such an organisation was mooted out for quite a long time, it was on the 12th of December, 1992, that the representatives of 20 (Twenty) Women Organisations of Shillong and its suburbs met at the Laban Sports Club, Laban, Shillong, where they decided to form a coordination body of the women organisations to be known as Ka Lympung Ki Seng Kynthel. The constitution was drafted and accepted on the 19th December 1992. The organisation has been registered under Act 7 of 1990. No. SR/KLKS-38/93 of 1993.

The main aims and objectives of the organisation are -

1. To bring the various women organisations closer together.
2. To foster the spirit of love, unity, cooperation and mutual understanding among the women folk.
3. To work for the socio-economic and cultural upliftment of women in particular and the youth and society in general.
4. The organisation is a secular and non political one.
5. Under this organisation, the women shall work together irrespective of caste, educational or social status for the general welfare and interest.
6. The organisation will cooperate with any social organisation having common aims and objectives for the welfare of all.

**Art. 2 - Ki Jingtham Bad Jingangud**

1. Ban kynthew ia ka pule-puthi bad jingnang jingstad ki khynnah bad ki samla Khasi lyngba ki lad ki lynt bapher-bapher
2. Ban dawa na ki bod sorkar ia ki lad kiban long ki mawngongrum (infrastructural facilities) na ka bynta ka jungkiew irat ka jingnang jingstad ba kat-kum ka juk da kaba ki seng kolej sorkar, kolej doktor, barikor (Engineering) bad kolej rep, ka jungpynheh ia ki scholarship bad stipend, bad kum kuta.
3. Ban takhun pyrshah ia ka jungbymooh kam ioh jam, khamtam jong ki samla ba la nang la stad, bad ban pynshur ia ki ban seng la ka khatu-pateng bad ka kam-ka jam.
4. Ban dawa na ka por sha ka por na ki bor sorkar ba kin bat ia ka junglong trai Ri u Khasi dakaba sada ia ki lyngba ki ain-ki kanun khnang ba ia ka ioh-ka kot, ka synshar-khadar, ka khyndew-ka shynap yn bat lakam da ki Trai Ri.
5. Ban pynkyndit bynnew ia ki paran ban niew kor la ka ktien-ka thylliej, ka kolshor, ki mb-dustur, bad baroh kaba dei bok ka nongkynti jong ka Jait-bynnew.
6. Ban tei thymmai ia ka imlang-sahlang u Khasi da-kaba pynshur ia ka jingtrei shutom, ka jingadkar, ka jingrynth, ka jingiej Ri, ka jingiatylyi bad ka burom akor.

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7. Ban wanrah ia ka jingsngew shupara hapdeng ki khun ka Ri baroh khlem da khein ia ki jungapheri ka thain ne ka niam.
8. Ban rat dyngkhong ia ki jingmlen basniew bad ki jingleh bym dei kum ka jungkynti koad ne droks, ka shongkha khleh bad ki khyllahjait, ka kham benami, bad kiwei.
9. Ban takhun pyrshah ia ka jingtur kyrthep ki bar-jylla bad ki mynder n kaba ktah ia ka jungbun paid (population structure) ka Jaitbynnew.
10. Ban pynioh ia ka kyrdan bashonghok ka Ri Khasi hapoh ka Ri synshar India kumba long ka jylla Jammu & Kashmir.

**Art. 3 - Ka Jingkular :**

1. U/Ka nongkitkam jong ka Union, ha ka CEC ne unit, kin shum lang, ne marwei, ia kane ka jungkular (Pledge) harum hadien ka jungjed ia ki sha ka kam:  
NGI KI SAMLA KA RI, DA KA MYNSIEM KIT-KHIA BAD TIPBRIEW-TIPBLEI, NGI KULAR SKHEM BA NGIN SHAKRI HOK, MET BAD MYNSIEM, IA KA KHASI STUDENTS' UNION, BAD, LYNGBA JONG KA, IA KA RI BAD KA JAITBYNRIEW KHASI LYNGBA KI JINGEH BAD KI JINGTYNJUH BAROH.
2. U/Ka dkhot kin pyndonkam da kikynten "NGA U/ Ka....." bad ia ka kynten "NGA" ha ka jaka "NGI" kat, haba iahab, haba ki shum smai marwei.

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kum u Acting Publicity Secy. ne Publicity Secy katba ka sngew dei.

**11. Educational Secretary :**

- (a) Un kutkhieh ban pynbeit ia ki programme ka Union kiba iadei bed ka jingnang jingstad kum ka vocational guidance, literacy campaign, bad kiwei.
- (b) Un peit ia ka jingtrei ka Union ha ka jingjadi bad ki samlo pule kum. ka admussion scholarship bad kiwei.

**12. Assistant Educational Secretary :**

Un iarap ia u Educational Secretary ha ka jingtrei kam jong u, bad shim ia ka bynta utei kum u Acting Educational Secy, ha ka jungbymdon/jungshah weng/jungweng lade utei, haduh ba ka CEC kan da pynbeit da kumwei.

**13. Cultural Secretary :**

- (a) Un pynbeit, pyniad bad pynrynth ia ka jingtrei kam ka seng ha kaba pynsan bad kynthew ia ka kolshot Khasi da kaba pynlong ia ka Jaitbynnew ban niew kor la ka kolshor.
- (b) Un pynbeit ia ki programme ba iadei bad ka kolshor kum ka shad Khasi, ki jingwai jungput tynrai, bad kiwei de ki bynta ba iasnoh bad ka kolshor.

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**14. Assistant Cultural Secretary :**

Un iarap ia u cultural secretary ha ka jingtrei kam jong u Cultural Secy bad un shum ia ka bynta jong u ha ka jungbymdon/jungshah weng/jungiehnok kam u cultural secy., haduh ban da pynbeit thymmai da ka CEC.

**15. Sports Secretary :**

- (a) Un peit ia ka jingsan ka sports hapdeng ki samla, khamtam ha ka liang ki sports nylla (traditional sports).
- (b) Un pyniad ia ka Mait Shaphrang Sports Club, kaba jong shubynta jong ka KSU

**16. Assistant Sports Secretary :**

Un iarap ia u Sports Secretary, ha ki jingtrei kam jong u, bad shum ia ka bynta jong u haba utei um don/iehnok kam/shah weng, haduh ba ka CEC kan da pynbeit da kumwei.

**17. Disciplinary Secretary :**

- (a) Un peit ba ki dkhot kin bat ia ka discipline bad ka akor burom ha baroh ki liang bad un pynrip sha ka CEC halor ki jingpynkhein ha kane ka bynta.

**18. Assistant Disciplinary Secretary :**

Un iarap ia u Disciplinary Secy. ha ki jingtrei kam.

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## Programme Seng Kut Snem—1997

23. 11. 97

23. tarik mynstep (Mawkhar) — 8 baje

1. Ka Ksing Lumpaid.
2. Kyntiew Lama ka Seng Khasi—da U Rangbah Hipshon Roy Kharshiing
3. Ka Jingialang ki parariewseng
4. Ka Jingrwai—da ki Seng Khynnah.
5. Ka pule Sneng Tymmen—da ki Seng Khynnah
6. Ka Jingduwai phirat—Rangbah M.F. Blah, Vice-President
7. Iaiaid paidbah na Mawkhar sha Lympung—11. 30 mynsngi.

Ha Lympung Weiking :- 12 baje mynsngi

8. Lamphang :- Rangbah Kyrshan Singh Sawkmie, President
9. Ka Jingduwai phirat
10. Jingrwai 'Iarob Seng Kut Snem'—da ki paidbah
11. Ka Jingai Report na U General Secretary.
12. Ka Jingrwai 'Sngi Kyn-maw' da ki paidbah
13. Ka Jingkren — Da U Dr. Balajied Singh Syiem, Syiem ka Hima Khyrim.
14. Ka Jingpule Sneng Tymmen—da ki khynnah Seng Khasi.
15. Ka Jingrwai 'Ka Jingpynshai ka Seng Khasi'—da ki paidbah.
16. Ka Prokram jingrwai ki samla na ki Tnat ka Seng Khasi.
17. Ka Jingkren Pynwai — Rangbah J.K. Tariang, Vice-President
18. Ka Jingrwai 'Ai Khublei' — da ki paidbah.

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1. Ka Prokram ki Samla ha Mawkhar (Iing Seng)—5 baje janmiet.

SENG KHASI (SENG KMIE)  
SHILLONG : MAWKHAR  
1997

Ha

I Rangbah \_\_\_\_\_

Rangbah Bidonburon,

Khong ba kan laid beit laid nyntih ka Seng bad ba ka longdien jong ngi, kin kham tip kham bha ia laka jong ka niam ka rukom bad ki riti raba u Ni u kong u la pynkhamti ha ngi naduh hyndai hynthai kulong bad ba U Elei U Trai Kynrad U Nongbuh Nongthaw U la ai ia laka niam ba paka, kumta la kyrpad rit ia phi baroh ba ohin engewbha ban pashat lem ia ki symboh jingmut jingpynkhat jongphi da kaba ai ia ki jingtren ba kordor jongphi hapoh ing Seng Khasi. Mawkhar haka por 1:30 noh phaisngi.

la ka pokram jong ki nongtren la pynbeit kumne harum :

Tarih	Lamphang	Nongtren
03-08-97	Rgh. Kyrshan Sing	Rgh. M.F. Blah
10-08-97	Rgh. D.P. Swer	Rgh. Chanlok Dkhar
17-08-97	Rgh. Phod Khongphai	Rgh. R.M. Mawkhlieng
24-08-97	Rgh. R.M. Mawkhlieng	Rgh. Robin Kurbah
31-08-97	Rgh. M.F. Blah	Rgh. S. Kharaktor
07-09-97	Rgh. Welsing Tariang	Rgh. D.P. Swer
14-09-97	Rgh. Kersing Tariang	Rgh. Asvolous Mawlong
21-09-97	Rgh. J.K. Mawlong	Rgh. Kworshon Marbaniang
28-09-97	Rgh. J.S. Khongphai	Rgh. Phrikshon (L. Nongkrem)
05-10-97	Rgh. Kyrshan Sing	Rgh. Aiban Swer
12-10-97	Rgh. D.P. Swer	Rgh. Eathol Marbaniang
19-10-97	Rgh. M.F. Blah	Rgh. Kyrshan Sing
26-10-97	Rgh. Phod Khongphai	Rgh. Synrop Kharshing
02-11-97	Rgh. R.M. Mawkhlieng	Rgh. W.H.D. Syngkon
09-11-97	Rgh. Kersing Tariang	Rgh. D.P. Lyttan
16-11-97	Rgh. Kyrshan Sing	Rgh. Kersing Tariang
23-11-97	SENG KUT	SNEM
30-11-97	Rgh. J.K. Mawlong	Rgh. Mestin Tymthai
07-12-97	Rgh. J.S. Khongphai	Rgh. D.C. Dkhar
14-12-97	Rgh. Welsing Tariang	Rgh. S.S. Sawian
21-12-97	Rgh. R.M. Mawkhlieng	Rgh. P.S. Dkhar
28-12-97	Rgh. D.P. Swer	Rgh. J.K. Mawlong
04-01-98	Rgh. M.F. Blah	Rgh. Foreman Nongbri
11-01-98	Rgh. Kyrshan Sing	Rgh. Dantellang Rumnong
18-01-98	Rgh. Phod Khongphai	Rgh. D.O. <del>Atan</del> R. Syiem Kib
25-01-98	Rgh. Kersing Tariang	Rgh. Joit Diengdoh

Uba buron

*Phira Sing Dkhar*

Rgh. Phira Sing Dkhar  
Secy. Seng Pyni, Asst. Gen. Secy  
Seng khasi Mawkhar, Shillong.



Ka Sengbah Ki Nongshat Nongkhein  
Hynniew Skum Hynniew Trep  
MADANRITING SHILLONG-793021

M  
22/11/78

Ref  
Khyrdot : ~~SEKIBAH~~/NN/HSHT/93

Date 27-10-98

Ha,

~~Rangbah/Kong~~

U president/secretary Seng Khasi Mawkhar,  
Mawkhar, Shillong.

Rangbah/Kong Badon Buron,

Ka Sengbah Ki Nongshat Nongkhein Hynniew Skum Hynniew Trep, H.Q. Shillong, ka pyntip ha ka buron jong phi, ba ka Nguh Blei Dem Blei ha shnong Mawroh Hima Mawlang kan long ha ka 06 Tarik, Nohprah, 1998 (06-12-98) ha ka por 10.30 (Shiphew shiteng) baje mynstepkan don ruh ka jingpynshai paidbah bad ka shad ka mastieh hadien ka jing'eh Niam.

Kumta, la kyrpad ia phi ki Rangbah na ki Seng bad ki Shnong jong phi ban ia kit khia kum la ka jong ka kam na ka bynta ban tei ia ka Imlang sahlang jong ka jait bynriew : Hynniew Skum Hynniew Trep. Iawer ia khot lang ia ki para kur para kha ban ia poi ban ia sakhi lang ha katei ka sngi Nguh Blei Dem Blei, bad ruh ban ia shim bynta ruh ha ka Shad ka Mastieh hadien ba la dep ka Kam Niam.

Ia ka jingpynbna paidbah lasuh lang hangne.

Secy (Seng Pynna)  
Seng Pynna  
ia Kame

KHUBLEI

Jaka : Shillong.

Tarik : 27-10-98.

M  
22/11

Uba iatrei lang bad phi,

U. B. ... Phang

Ka Sengbah Ki Nongshat Nongkhein  
Hynniew Skum Hynniew Trep  
(Madanriting, Shillong-793021)

Annexure - IX